

# Chicanx-Palestine Solidarity: The Movement for Ethnic Studies in California

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## Abstract

Chicanx solidarity with the Palestinian liberation movement has a long history that is rooted in self-determination and resistance to settler colonialism and imperialism. The current backlash on the inclusion of Arab American Studies, and specifically the inclusion of Palestine in Ethnic Studies curriculum, has mobilized us to collectively organize in order to ensure the fidelity of the field of Ethnic Studies maintains its roots in decolonial and liberatory pedagogy. This article frames the current context in California, with regards to the attempted erasure of Palestine in Ethnic Studies, the historical roots of Chicanx solidarity with the Palestine liberation movement, and the reclaiming of liberatory Ethnic Studies. Collectively our organizations are training educators, teaching future teachers and impacting statewide policy to build power and scale up the movement for authentic, decolonial and liberatory Ethnic Studies that includes Palestine.

**Keywords:** Chicanx Studies, Palestine, Liberatory Ethnic Studies

## Introduction

Our goal in this paper is to bring awareness to, and take a stand against, the current wave of attacks on authentic, decolonial and liberatory Ethnic Studies. As Chicanx Studies scholars, we ground our opposition to these attacks, primarily for the inclusion of Palestine in Ethnic Studies curriculum, in the long history of Chicanx-Palestinian solidarity and the fight for self-determination. We are informed by our positionality as practitioners, activists, organizers, and educators who have, for over two decades, been implementing Ethnic Studies and Chicanx Studies in K12 and higher education in Arizona, where Mexican American Studies was outlawed (Arce, 2019; Fernández & Hammer, 2013), and California, where Ethnic Studies is currently facing severe opposition (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2022). Our community-based approach has allowed us to work with school districts to develop professional development and curriculum for teachers in K-12 classrooms, resulting in the adoption of curriculum, establishment of course syllabi, creation of sustainable programs in Ethnic Studies and Chicanx Studies, and ultimately supporting the integration of authentic and liberatory Ethnic Studies instruction. Most recently, several of our organizations have come together to form the Coalition for Liberated Ethnic Studies to build power and reclaim liberatory Ethnic Studies (Tintiangco-Cubales et al., 2022).

## Grounding Our Praxis

We situate our work, acknowledging first and foremost that our disciplines, Chicana Studies and Ethnic Studies, were developed to disrupt colonization, imperialism, racism, and injustice. In this light, we argue for Ethnic Studies rooted in self-determination, as called for by our predecessors in the Third World Liberation Front (Umamoto, 2000). When developing an Ethnic Studies curriculum or professional development programs, the right to self-determination means deference must be given to Ethnic Studies experts. Furthermore, Ethnic Studies encourages students to re-imagine a world filled with possibilities for transforming the lived realities of marginalized communities of color into humanizing, equitable, liberatory spaces. It is within the reconnection to Ethnic Studies that students and teachers are transformed and uplifted. The transformative power of Ethnic Studies is what we, as educators, seek to facilitate through curriculum and professional development. As Chicana educators, this requires us to engage in acts of solidarity against all forms of colonization and oppression. For us, this means active engagement in the movement for the liberation of Palestine. This act of solidarity and responsibility has been the lightning rod not only for the attacks on Ethnic Studies but for the suppression of student protests, university encampments, and any inclusion of the teaching of Palestine.

In our work with Ethnic Studies teachers, we have witnessed solidarity in efforts to create curriculum models aligned with decolonial, solidarity, and liberatory foundations of Ethnic Studies and how those efforts have come under attack. As Chicana educators, we aim to counter the pushback and negativity against current implementation efforts which will cause harm to the very students that Ethnic and Chicana Studies are intended to serve—more than 74% of the California student population is Native American, Black, Chicana-Latina, Asian American, Arab American, and Pacific Islander. According to the California Department of Education (2024) the demographics of K-12 public schools, Chicana-Latina students comprise the majority group, at 56.1% (3,275,030); whites comprise the second largest group at 20.3% (1,183,450); Asian American/Pacific Islander comprise the third largest group at 11.7% (730,319); African American/Black comprise the fourth largest group at 4.9% (287,380); two or more races comprise the fifth largest group at 4.6% (269,361); and American Indian/Native American comprise the sixth largest group at 0.4% (25,424). We cannot stress enough the importance of those leading the efforts having expertise in the subject matter and reflecting the student population's makeup. This is not just a matter of preference but a necessity for the success and effectiveness of Ethnic Studies in our education system.

Equally as important in the movement for liberatory Ethnic Studies, is the recognition of how our histories intersect and inform one another, in this case the histories of Chicana and Palestinian solidarity. Whether the fight for self-determination, the resistance to settler colonialism, or the overlapping military technologies being waged against both of our communities, solidarity between our people has been central to the Chicana movement and continues today with Chicana organizers and educators leading the push for and the protection of the inclusion of Palestine in an Ethnic Studies curriculum.

## History of Chicax-Palestine Solidarity

Solidarity with the Palestinian struggle is nothing new and did not simply emerge after October 7, 2023, when Israel renewed its settler-colonial and genocidal campaign against Palestine and her people. Chicax and Palestinians share a history of resistance to colonialism and imperialism and forced displacement from their homelands. Additionally, Chicax have correctly noted that the imperialist and colonial occupations of oppressed nations of the Third World often mirror their social, political, and economic reality within the United States (Acuña, 1972).

Chicax solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and the rationale behind that solidarity has a documented history that is decades old. A historical delineation and rationale for Chicax solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle is necessary, and a critical examination is in order for the four areas to include the *Chicano Movement Solidarity with Palestine*, *Chicax Student Solidarity with Palestine*, *Chicax Artists Solidarity with Palestine*, and *Chicax Studies Solidarity with Palestine*. Historical Chicax solidarity with Palestine has informed and inspired what is taking place today within the Ethnic Studies movement, specifically with Chicax Studies, in working in solidarity with the current Palestinian struggle.

### Chicano/Chicana/Chicax Movement Solidarity with the Palestine Liberation Struggle

Large segments of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s were “internationalist” in their political ideology and actions, drawing inspiration in Third World decolonial liberation movements that had recently taken place in Cuba and countries in Africa and Southeast Asia (Acuña, 2004).

At a speech given by Chicano Movement leader Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales to mostly Chicana and Chicano students at Arizona State University on October 14, 1970 (Esquibel, 2000), Gonzales reminded students on the importance of Chicax solidarity with the Palestinians. In this speech, Gonzales communicated to the students on an occasion where an individual had interrupted a speech he was giving in Colorado Springs in previous months, stating:

I asked him, “Well, what about Israel? Can you dig Israel?” He responded, “You’re damn well right, I can dig Israel.” I told him, “Well, but it belongs to the Arabs, the Palestinians.” He yelled, “The hell it does! History will prove it’s ours!” And I told him, “History will prove that Aztlán is ours!” (pp. 43–44)

Gonzales’ rebuttal to the individual that Israel “belongs to the Arabs, the Palestinians” is indicative of the political consciousness within the Chicano Movement and of their solidarity position regarding the question of Palestine.

La Raza Unida Party (LRUP), the political arm that emerged from the Chicano Movement, was part of “an eight-person RUP delegation from California that went to Lebanon that met with Yassir Arafat and other leaders of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The dialogue with Arafat focused on sharing information about each other’s movements” (Navarro, 2000, p. 256). While not a widely publicized gathering, nonetheless, this meeting demonstrated a growing internationalist political consciousness within the Chicano Movement and stressed the importance of Chicax solidarity with the Palestinian struggle for liberation.

## Chicanx Student Solidarity with Palestine

Chicanx student-activist organization *Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/Chicano/Chicanx de Aztlán* (M.E.Ch.A.) established in 1969, has played an integral role in internationalist, anti-imperialist, and anti-colonial solidarity struggles and causes for over five decades. On March 13, 2012, at the Annual M.E.Ch.A. National Conference, hosted at Arizona State University, 600 plus Chicanx student-activist delegates from across M.E.Ch.A chapters throughout the U.S. endorsed the “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions” of Israel “for its occupation and settlement in Palestine” (Maestas & Khalek, 2024). On November 9, 2023, after the University of Utah M.E.Ch.A. marched and protested in solidarity for the Palestinian liberation struggle and against the university for its investment in Israel, the University of Utah withdrew their sponsorship of M.E.Ch.A. for their pro-Palestine stance (Tanner, 2023). At their following action on May 18, 2024, the organization held a protest calling for the University of Utah’s divestment in Israel, where M.E.Ch.A. leader Gabriela Merida was quoted:

We understand that the student struggle is inseparable from the Palestinian struggle. M.E.Ch.A. was born out of a mass wave of student organizing similar to what we see today across the nation. Chicano and Latino students struggled for their liberation similar to how Palestinians are struggling for their own. The same system oppressing our Palestinian comrades are the same one oppressing us here. We must uphold M.E.Ch.A.’s legacy, our real legacy of struggle and organizing, not one of co-optation and institutionalization by the university. *¡Desde el río hasta el mar, Palestina va a ganar!* (mechadeuofu, 2024)

The Chicanx student struggle for self-determination is historically connected to the Palestinian struggle. Across this nation, M.E.Ch.A., born out of a mass wave of student organizing, continues to support justice for Palestine, understanding that the Chicanx struggle for their liberation is similar to the Palestinian liberation struggle. However, the situation for Palestinians is undeniably much, much more oppressive.

While previous generations of MEChistas were demonized and criminalized for their positions taken on the anti-Vietnam war movement, the U.S. intervention in Central America, the anti-apartheid movement for South Africa, and the support of the Ejército Liberación Zapatista Nacional (E.Z.L.N.), they were eventually seen as standing on the right side of history, for human rights and justice. For this generation of MEChistas working in solidarity with Palestine, while also being demonized and criminalized, history will absolve them for their standing on the right side of history on issues of human rights and justice.

## Chicanx Artists Solidarity with Palestine

Chicanx artists have played a crucial role in raising the critical consciousness within the Chicanx community on the importance of human rights struggles and solidarity movements with Palestine. Two contemporary Chicanx artists, Ernesto Yerena from Boyle Heights, California, and Jesus Barraza from the *Dignidad Rebeldes* collective in Oakland, California, have used art to express solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle.

For Yerena, his *Freedom Palestine* (2012), *La Raza for Gaza* (2023), *Free Palestine* (ernestoyerena, 2023), and *No Genocide in Gaza! Ceasefire Now!* (2023) have all been used as a medium to raise

consciousness on the importance of the Palestinian struggle both within and outside of the Chicanx community. On April 27, 2024, at one of the largest campus demonstrations for a free Palestine in the country at the University of Southern California, hundreds of Yereña's *Free Palestine* poster prints could be seen amongst the participants standing in solidarity with Palestine, wherein the artist states on his social media post, "I stand with the Student Movements in Support of a Free Palestine. End this Genocide Now! Photo taken at USC!" (ernestoyerena, 2024). Furthermore, in addition to these prints being used as a tool for Chicanx solidarity with Palestine and have been seen in protests throughout the U.S. and the world at solidarity with Palestine marches and protests.

For Barraza, his print of the late Palestinian American scholar and activist Edward Said, the Smithsonian Institute notes:

For some Chicano activists and artists, the struggles of Palestinians and Chicanos share important commonalities: a connection to ancestral homelands, contested borders, and the reclamation of land. To visualize these connections and express his solidarity with Palestinians, Barraza portrays scholar Edward Said alongside a map of Palestine. (Changemakers from ¡Printing the Revolution! The Rise and Impact of Chicano Graphics, 1965 to Now - Edward Said, n.d.)

Barraza's print communicates the importance of Said in raising the consciousness about the Palestinian struggle and its relevance to Chicanx. Moreover, Barraza's print of Said is another tool that has assisted in developing and strengthening further Chicanx solidarity with Palestine.

### **Chicanx Studies Solidarity with Palestine**

An extensive body of literature within Chicanx Studies draws similarities between Chicanx liberation struggles and the Palestinian liberation struggle that demonstrates the critical need and rationale for Chicanx solidarity with the struggle for a liberated Palestine. For purposes of this paper, this section will focus on but a portion, yet significant body of literature with the focus on a special edition of the *American Quarterly* (Pulido & Lloyd, 2010), in which the articles in this volume are based on the discussions and papers presented at the *From La Frontera to Gaza: Chicano-Palestinian Connections Symposium* at the University of Southern California on March 30, 2009. In this journal volume, Chicanx Studies scholars Pulido and Lloyd (2010), Lloyd and Pulido (2010), Fusté (2010), Saldívar (2010), Criollo (2010) and Palestinian American scholar Sharif (2010) collectively present a compelling argument of a shared history for Chicanx and Palestinians as colonial subjects to the U.S. and Israel, as resisters to colonization, as subject to mass removal/deportations, as subject to continued dehumanizing, demonizing, and criminalizing discourses in the education and in the media, as subject to geo-political borders separating their families, and as subjects of historical and contemporary state sanctioned violence. Lloyd and Pulido (2010) properly note that while Chicanx constitute a colonized group, their complicated histories have shown them to be both "settlers of color" (who intentionally or unintentionally assisted in the removal of other Indigenous people in the Southwest region) and as Indigenous subjects of colonization depending upon their relations with other Indigenous groups during the onset of U.S. settler-colonization of the Southwest.

This call for the analysis on the complicated histories of Chicanx is to ensure that other Indigenous peoples' histories are not erased and are properly placed within their geographical and historical contexts. Moreover, Lloyd and Pulido (2010) maintain that the comparison of Chicanx and Palestinian, while extensive, must be nuanced and take into consideration measures of time, geography, socio-historical and political context. Lloyd and Pulido highlight that Chicanx in the U.S. and Palestinians in the occupied territories of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have a shared history and experience as subjects to "Israeli and U.S. colonialisms" (p. 795). Important to emphasize, and given the current controversy surrounding the concept, with regard to "settler colonialism," Lloyd and Pulido (2010) document "The War of 1848 was a classic instance of settler colonial expansion, in which a dominant power deliberately provoked a war in order to acquire vast amounts of land, including access to the Pacific Ocean" (p. 798) where Mexicans were killed and forcibly mass displaced from their homelands, whereas, in similar fashion Palestinians were displaced from their homelands by Israel in the 1948 *Nakba*. Both of these wars of aggression and consequent forced removals and displacements were driven by the pervasive ideologies of "Manifest Destiny" for Chicanx and "Zionism" for Palestinians (Lloyd & Pulido, 2010).

Regarding Chicanx Studies solidarity as an academic discipline with the Palestinian struggle, the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) released a statement in its most recent national gathering, noting:

The National Association for Chicana and Chicana Studies joins the world in resisting the genocidal attack on Palestinians in and outside of Gaza and Palestine. NACCS leads and supports scholarly and activist efforts that unsettle colonial logics, practices, and states...We wholeheartedly support Palestinian liberation and autonomy. (National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies, 2024)

In the first paragraph of the 2023 NACCS solidarity statement with Palestine, a necessary historicization of the U.S. colonization of Chicanx and its similarities to the Zionist colonization of Palestine is drawn.

As a discipline which includes the study of a war of aggression against Mexico by the United States in 1846, and as a community of descendants of many who resisted colonization and land takeover ever since, our sympathies lie in a history conditioned by injustice and inequality... Displacing long-term residents or dislocating them in settler-colonizer programs produces harmful after-effects that resonate over time, as was our own case in an historic and illegal 1930's massive repatriation and deportation of Mexican-descent people in the US. (National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, 2023)<sup>76</sup>

This historicization through Chicanx Studies provides possibilities for re-imagining Chicanx solidarity with Palestine, and ultimately, in realizing their inextricably bound liberation.

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<sup>76</sup> Also critical to highlight is that since 2015, NACCS has taken an affirmative stance as a discipline in solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle by endorsing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against the settler-colonial state of Israel (National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies, 2023).

## Tucson Raza Studies' Influence on the Movement for California Ethnic Studies

In Arizona, in the aftermath of the outlawing of Mexican American Studies (2012), XITO emerged as a strategy to ensure that decolonial professional development is offered to teachers nationally and that the model used in the Tucson program, which flipped the “achievement gap” for Chicanx youth, would continue its legacy. As a collective, XITO has been in solidarity with their Palestinian comrades for years by offering professional development, in partnership with the Teach Palestine Project of the Middle East Children’s Alliance, on how to include Palestine in K-12 teaching. This has included not only traditional workshops and institutes, but also on-the-ground field work along the US-Mexico border where educators have the opportunity to experience and witness how border imperialism functions, as well as the environmental impacts it generates, and make connections from Turtle Island to Palestine. Hearing from Tohono O’Odham organizers and community members most impacted by border militarization, teachers can then integrate their experience and new learning into a curriculum that includes Palestine within an Ethnic Studies framework. Critical Ethnic Studies concepts such as *settler colonialism*, *imperialism*, *self-determination* and *decolonization* take on a new dimension through this experiential field work.

While XITO grew and offered professional development nationwide, supporters of Mexican American Studies continued to wage a political and legal struggle to inform and inspire the Ethnic Studies Movement outside of Arizona. Eventually vindicated when victorious in *Arce v. Douglas*, a seven-year political and legal struggle, Arizona was found to violate equal protection of Chicanx/Latinx youth. Judge Tashima (2017) found that Arizona had demonstrated “Racial animus toward Mexican American students.” The case has also been used as precedent in SCOTUS to uphold DACA, and the MAS movement was the inspiration needed to reawaken the movement for Ethnic Studies in California.

## The Movement for Ethnic Studies in California and the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

The social movements of the 1960s–70s brought about the first Ethnic Studies Chicanx Studies programs in California’s Districts and Colleges. Unfortunately, many of these programs were often underfunded, lacked resources, and were unsupported by campus administration. As a result, they were later dismantled by forces deeply embedded in dominant cultural and political systems. Removing these popular programs and the absence of Ethnic Studies inspired college student activists in the 1990s and 2000s to push for the permanent inclusion of Chicanx Studies in K–12 and university education. In 2012, a group called Raza Studies Now, based in Southern California, began efforts to protect Tucson’s Mexican American Studies program. The Ethnic The Studies Now Coalition rejuvenated the movement for Ethnic Studies in California (Serna, 2013). This movement, primarily led by educators, grassroots organizers, and union activists, ultimately drove the movement, leading to the legislation that made Ethnic Studies a high school graduation requirement.

In 2019, Ethnic Studies practitioners and experts would be invited by the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) to be used by school districts to teach Ethnic Studies. The expert practitioners included a chapter on Arab-American Studies without a dissenting voice. The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee (ESMCAC) had coalesced to ensure that California’s students would have access to an authentic,

anti-racist, decolonial, and liberatory Ethnic Studies curriculum, including the stories of Palestinians. Rather than embrace and become responsive to the new curricular framework, power brokers perceived the new coalition as a demographic and ideological threat.

After the first iteration of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, right-wing media outlets and political lobbyists lambasted the document for critiquing capitalism (Evers, 2019). *The Wall Street Journal* (The Editorial Board, 2021), the Anti-Defamation League (2022), and California's *Edsource* (Fensterwald, 2021) wrote articles against the model curriculum framework. The California Legislative Jewish Caucus (LJC) joined the opposition, arguing against the deliberate inclusion of Palestinian voices and experiences. LJC legislators accused ESMAC members of antisemitism, pointing to a lesson on social movements that included the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and to the inclusion of Arab American leaders such as Edward Said, Rep. Rashida Tlaib and Rep. Ilhan Omar (Richman & Savage, 2019). Members of the California LJC lobbied and successfully obtained the inclusion of "guardrail language" into AB 331, Former California state assemblymember Jose Medina's Ethnic Studies bill. The language was accepted by Jose Medina and inserted less than a week before the state Senate voted it through. California's education code (section 220) stipulated that the Ethnic Studies curriculum adopted by school districts "shall not reflect or promote, directly or indirectly, any bias, bigotry or discrimination against any person or group of persons on the basis of any category protected by section 220."

Nevertheless, the governor justified his veto of AB 331 because "the initial draft of the model curriculum was insufficiently balanced and inclusive and needed to be substantially amended" (Fensterwald, 2020). However, the governor did praise the insertion of the guardrail language. Ethnic Studies advocates were deflated but vowed to push forward for a new bill. Furthermore, Ethnic Studies activists argued against adding additional "guardrails," citing previous efforts to attack the discipline, such as those in Arizona. No other curricular subject in California has been contingent on guardrail language, nor has the legislature invoked the California Penal Code. Singling out Ethnic Studies educators and curriculum, in our opinion, criminalizes Ethnic Studies.

Jose Medina authored a new bill, AB101, and the California Department of Education, Instructional Quality Commission and the California School Board Association proceeded to whitewash the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and virtually erase the Chicana/Latina section, placing the chapter on Arab-American Studies into the "bridge" section. The "bridge section" was an additional chapter added to the model curriculum by State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond. The section was added as an interethnic bridge between Ethnic Studies and others not in the four core Ethnic Studies groups. The writers continued to argue that some of the groups, like Arab Americans, were actually in Ethnic Studies and should not be added to a separate bridge section. Yet, despite opposition from organizations like the Council on Arab-Islamic Relations, scholars like Cornel West, Marc Lamont Hill, Angela Davis, and the original members of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee (ESMAC), the California School Board of Education (SBE) caved to conservative and neoliberal pundits. They adopted a weakened version of both the curriculum and the bill. On the fateful adoption day, elected officials and a parade of carefully selected "leaders" applauded the curriculum. For example, Dolores Huerta was asked to support the curriculum, but she did not know that she had been removed from the list of notable historical figures to be studied. Karen Korematsu, daughter of Fred Korematsu, spoke in favor of the curriculum. Many simply wanted to get the curriculum approved without haste. In the meantime, Ethnic Studies advocates like Lara Kiswani, executive director of AROC (Arab Resource &



Organizing Center), admonished the California State Board of Education, “They have undermined and whitewashed Ethnic Studies” (Gardiner, 2021).

The guardrail language has emboldened white supremacists and others who wish to police or erase topics or concepts from the curriculum. One parent group successfully sued to remove the In Lak'Ech (Mayan affirmation) from the curriculum (Arce, Montañó, & Cardona, January 28, 2022). The establishment of the guardrails and the commitment on the part of Ethnic Studies practitioners to both the framework and the inclusion of Arab-American Studies subjected the writers to push back from their school districts, harassment from the press and threats to their personal safety.

As Chicax Studies pedagogues, we enter the space of Ethnic Studies, not only as curriculum developers but as organizers. As Chicax educators involved in the movement for Ethnic Studies, we recognize the battle for Ethnic Studies as part and parcel of the struggle that has historically forced Chicax scholars to prove the legitimacy of Chicax Studies in a system that prefers a hegemonic white supremacist version of the US and global narrative. Political assaults on those implementing K-12 Ethnic Studies may seem benign. However, they aim to keep systemic racism, stifle liberation movements, and drive a wedge between racialized communities, destroying solidarity movements and favoring those who currently have more resources, power, and opportunity.

### **Coalition for Liberated Ethnic Studies**

The joy and trauma of this movement, coupled with the increasing attacks on Ethnic Studies, prompted educators, organizers, and activists to form a national coalition to challenge the myriad of right-wing organizations, politicians, and parent groups intent on destroying Ethnic Studies. As we write this paper, school district administrators scrutinize teacher-developed curricula and ban selective groups of Ethnic Studies curriculum developers. Schools are removing references to Palestine and Critical Race Theory. They are removing queer and transgender stories. They are omitting Black history and any mention of anti-racist struggles from the curriculum. School Board members are calling for multiculturalist versions of Ethnic Studies, by insisting on the removal of settler colonialism, white supremacy, or institutional racism. The attacks have been framed with accusations of anti-semitism when there are discussions or inclusions of Palestine, attempting to employ a white supremacist tactic by calling Ethnic Studies a kind of reverse racism.

Educator activists who worked on the original draft of California’s framework are now constructing the “Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Coalition/Consortium” or LESMCC. It comprises over 40 active Ethnic Studies teachers, teacher union activists, and curriculum developers who have been part of the Ethnic Studies movement for many years. LESMCC members include specialists in the following disciplines: African American Studies, Asian American Studies (including Pacific Islander, Pilipino, and Arab American Studies), American Indian and Native Studies, Chicax/Latinx Studies, and Comparative Ethnic Studies. Upholding the principle of self-determination, each chapter or lesson plan developed is carefully monitored and constructed by curriculum specialists in the disciplines mentioned above. The movement to secure Ethnic Studies as a graduation requirement from kindergarten-university was spearheaded by some of the founders of LESMCC. While members of LESMCC are skilled in developing curricula and providing professional development, their primary focus is propelling the Ethnic Studies movement forward by utilizing a historical and critical perspective, which involves standing in solidarity with all

oppressed and colonized peoples, including the Palestinian community. This stance helped launch the Coalition for Liberated Ethnic Studies (CLES). The coalition comprises several organizations in solidarity with LESMCC, including the Xicanx Institute for Teaching & Organizing (XITO). Both LESMCC and XITO are led by Chicanx scholar educators and our organizations continue to support the work of the coalition moving forward on the organizing front.

### **Liberatory Ethnic Studies & Current Attacks**

It is important to note that Chicanx Studies rose from community struggles by students and community members engaged in a battle for educational justice. Our predecessors demanded representation, self-determination, and reconstruction of a traditional curriculum that had neglected, misrepresented, or ignored their culture, denigrated their language, and subjected them to racialized and imperial trauma. Chicanx Studies/Raza Studies were among the four Ethnic Studies disciplines founded by the community-rooted Third World Liberation Front at San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley. The students were multi-racial and diverse, but all were committed to a discipline that would center the voices, experiences and resistance of People of Color. "Ethnic Studies" was (and still is) deployed as an umbrella term/field designed to include four core fields: African American Studies, Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies, Chicanx and Latinx Studies, and Native American Studies. While each core field addresses the specific legacies and social, cultural, economic, and political experiences of people from that group, they often overlap in their approach, the types of methods and theories engaged, and the discussion of shared/collective struggles.

Founded during civil unrest, Ethnic Studies activists were also actively involved in liberation movements worldwide. As such, solidarity with colonized people worldwide was central to the guiding principles of Ethnic Studies. From the beginning, connections were made to struggles in Africa, Palestine, and Latin America. It was clear that anti-racist, anti-colonial struggles at home (United States) were inextricably linked to the struggles of racialized people globally. Critical solidarities are imperative for Ethnic Studies. Out of these solidarities, the field emerged with the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), and these solidarities are growing nationally today.

Recently, the battle to implement a form of Ethnic Studies based on the original ideas of self-determination and solidarity has created the conditions for clarifying the concept of liberatory Ethnic Studies. For this reason, we present a few central principles and practices of liberatory Ethnic Studies. Liberatory Ethnic Studies:

- is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, situated in disciplines like the social sciences, the arts, history, and literature, but linked to the global reality of U.S. domination;
- uses community-based epistemology, content, and pedagogy to educate students to be socially, politically, environmentally, and economically conscious of their connections to local and (trans)national histories and herstories;
- is internationalist, evolving from liberation fronts of the Global South;
- is anti-racist, centering on the ancestral, historical, intellectual, cultural, and linguistic knowledge and experiences of racialized communities;
- is decolonial and, therefore, reveals the impact that colonialism, settler colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism have had on racialized communities in the U.S. and the global community and what they can do to negotiate the legacy of trauma and injustice;

- is culturally and community-responsive and encourages students to understand the dynamic nature of the discipline and to respect and integrate the lived realities of parents, community members, siblings, and social networks;
- teaches and supports the development of students’ critical consciousness, their love for themselves and their communities, and their engagement in creating a better society;
- works toward collective liberation.

As a counter-hegemonic, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist discipline, Ethnic Studies is often seen as a threat to dominant power structures. Because of the inclusion of Palestine in liberatory Ethnic Studies, the attacks have come from organizations that align themselves with imperialist ideologies and counter any critique of settler colonialism or colonization. Organizations such as the Association for Constructive Ethnic Studies, the Anti-Defamation League, Californian Equal Rights Foundation, the Deborah Project, and Stand With Us, have been at the forefront of defaming authentic and liberatory Ethnic Studies programs, educators, and professional development providers.

**Table 1. Organizations Attacking Liberated Ethnic Studies**

Organization	Description of Organization
Association for Constructive Ethnic Studies	A non-profit 501(c)(3) with claims to liberal politics intent on removing “narrow ideological agendas” and “inspiring mutual respect, fighting racism, and celebrating ethnic accomplishments,” this group has actively worked to stifle Ethnic Studies implementation in selected school districts in California. They were reported for allegedly threatening school board candidates with endorsement forms meant to identify those aligned with their definition of Ethnic Studies.
California Equal Rights Foundation	This organization’s president was the state finance chair for the “No on 16” (Ban on Affirmative Action) campaign, and his advisors included Chris Rufo (Anti-CRT). They claim to “advance and educate the public on equal rights” but have actively challenged social and racial justice initiatives. This organization is responsible for the removal by the CDE of In Lak ‘Ech, Ashe, and Nahui Olin from the California Model Curriculum Framework.
Deborah Project	A pro-bono legal firm that provides legal assistance to those who claim discrimination because they are Jewish or pro-Israel. The Deborah Project has sued LESMCC, UTLA, and LAUSD for alleged anti-Semitism.
Anti-Defamation League	For years, an organization that has actively promoted “anti-bias” education. Today, the ADL has organized to remove sections in the model curriculum it claimed were anti-Semitic and placed a full-page ad in a local newspaper against LESMCC. ADL has also sued the Santa Ana Unified School District for material they deem anti-Semitic.
Stand with Us	An avowed pro-Israel organization that monitors the Ethnic Studies curriculum and encourages others to report anything that is anti-Israel, Anti-Zionist or antisemitic. It has launched a backlog of FOAs and PRAs for school districts monitoring libraries, lesson plans, and resource materials.

Some of these organizations have filed lawsuits against school districts and individuals while weaponizing the term “Liberated” as some catch-all phrase that school districts and parents should fear. “Liberated” Ethnic Studies has been misrepresented to be something that should be feared, avoided, and even litigated. This tactic, much like the weaponization of “Critical Race Theory” is a common right-wing strategy to engineer panic and attempt to generate support for organizations and political candidates who fear the changing demographics of the U.S. and are attempting to erase accurate histories and representation in schools.

### **Chicanx Practitioners in Solidarity with Palestine: La Lucha Sigue**

We share our stories as Chicanx Studies and Ethnic Studies educators and activists after years of professional and curriculum development while organizing for the movement for Ethnic Studies. We bear witness to events that are historically or personally important and significant. In this case, the oppressive environment is the political climate in the Ethnic Studies and the Palestinian solidarity movement. We also note the economic and demographic reality that as Chicanx people, California’s prosperity as the 5th largest economy in the world would not be possible without Raza labor. On a smaller but significant scale, Arizona has the fourth-largest share of Raza people when compared to the total state population (UnidosUS.org). Economics are a significant reason that power brokers within this state do not want authentic Ethnic Studies.

Consequently, as we witnessed with the watering down of the original California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and attempts to kill the solidarity movement of justice for Palestine, we witnessed the continuing of unequal relations of political and economic power within a public education system that reproduces inequality. On the other hand, we also see the hundreds of educators determined to implement authentic, liberatory Ethnic Studies. Students who matriculate through an authentic Ethnic Studies or Chicanx/Latinx Studies no longer will serve as an easily accessible and exploitable source of labor, we know this as we have experienced thousands of Raza youth come through our Chicanx Studies classes and leave forever transformed. Students of authentic Ethnic Studies-Chicanx/Latinx Studies are determined to make change in our communities. In contrast with the newly adopted California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, which reads like a poorly drafted multicultural education curriculum, an authentic Ethnic Studies model Curriculum, as we see in Liberated Ethnic Studies, is centered in a critical praxis: reflection and action, which facilitates social, political, and economic action and transformation.

Given this moment in history, it is important to document the perspective of those willing to raise their voices. We did not legislate Chicanx Studies fifty-something years ago, we fought for it, and it has been a battle ever since. We should reclaim our history of resistance and activism and unite with others until Ethnic Studies reflects self-determination, anti-racism, and liberation, which is the very thing our opposition most fear and reject. We cannot settle for less. Ethnic Studies needs an educational environment where educators can exercise their expertise to design a curriculum based on research and sound pedagogy, where controversial issues can be discussed. Ethnic Studies educators must have the liberty to implement Ethnic Studies without fear of retribution, censorship, vilification, or reprisal. We are winning the fight for liberatory Ethnic Studies as we can see by national and international liberation movements, mostly led by youth of color, leading the way for a future free of occupation and apartheid, free of injustice and free for all oppressed people.

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