

Born to Japanese immigrants in 1921 Yuri Kochiyama was a civil rights & anti-war activist. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, she and her family were forced into Japanese internment camps by the U.S. government. In the 1960s Kochiyama became involved in Congress of Racial Equality and befriended Malcolm X. She protested the imperialist war in Vietnam while pushing for reparations for victims of Japanese internment camps. In 1988, when internment survivors were awarded compensation, she used the victory to push for reparations for African Americans. Kochiyama held weekly open houses for activists in the family's apartment, where she taped newspaper clippings to the walls and kept piles of leaflets on the kitchen table. "Our house felt like it was the movement 24/7," said her eldest daughter, Audee Kochiyama-Holman. Her brief but formative friendship with Malcolm X, whom she first met in 1963, helped radicalize her activism. Kochiyama began focusing her work on Black nationalism. In the 1980s, she and her husband pushed for reparations and a formal government apology for Japanese-American internees through the Civil Liberties Act, which President Ronald Reagan signed into law in 1988. Her continued dedication to social causes inspired younger generations of activists, especially within the Asian-American community. "She was definitely ahead of her time, and we caught up with her," said Tim Toyama, Kochiyama's second cousin. She had revolutionary aspirations, railing against all the systems and behaviors that oppress people. In her open-minded and pursuit of equality for all people, she had a life fighting for justice.



César Chávez was a folk hero and symbol of hope to millions of Americans. An ardent advocate of nonviolence, Chávez was one of the most inspirational labor leaders of the 20th century, with an influence that stretched far beyond the California fields. Mexican American Cesar Chavez (1927-1993) was a prominent union leader and labor organizer. Hardened by his early experience as a manual laborer, Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association in 1962. Nearly everyone told them it was impossible. But for a time they succeeded beyond anyone's wildest imaginings. His union joined with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee in its first strike against grape growers in California, and the two organizations later merged to become the United Farm Workers. Stressing nonviolent methods, Chavez drew attention for his causes via boycotts, marches and hunger strikes. Despite conflicts with the Teamsters union and barriers, he was able to secure raises and improve conditions for farm workers in California.



It's a striking photograph: six young black women with a spectrum of complexions, faces paused in mid-exclamation, fists raised in simultaneous solidarity at a Black Panther rally. Even their afros are emphatic and resolute as they stand in tandem in Oakland's DeFremery Park, then and now a popular gathering place for the community's African-Americans. There, a grove of trees honors Bobby Hutton who, at just 16, had been the Panthers' first enlisted member and at 17, died after police shot him—purportedly, as he tried to surrender. On this day, supporters assembled to demand the immediate release of Huey Newton, co-founder of the party and its national minister of defense, who was being held for assault, kidnapping and first-degree murder charges in the October 1967 death of police officer John Frey. Newton's fate was to be decided at the superior court in overwhelmingly white Alameda County, where it seemed unlikely that a black revolutionary could get a fair trial. Of the 152 potential jurors who were interviewed, only 21 were black. All but one was systematically excluded from the selection process. The Rank and File Women of the Black Panther Party and Their Powerful Influence. A portrait taken at a "Free Huey" rally defines the female force that both supported and propelled the movement Black Panther women. A photo taken at a Free Huey Newton Rally in 1968 with five of the six women identifiable—Dolores Henderson, Joyce Lee, Mary Ann Carlton, Joyce Means and Paula Hill—provides testament to those who actualized the daily operations of the Black Panther Party. The photography and



art of black women in the 1960s and 1970s created a new space of recognition. These images of black women presented an opportunity to both celebrate and immortalize their contributions while making clear the necessity of black women's voices to movements for equality. Women's participation in the Black Panther Party (link is external) represents one example of this era's political participation. Women were "tough revolutionaries," who, by the 1970s, made up nearly two-thirds of the Black Panther Party's membership. The Black Panther Party embraced gender equality in its organization, but there were still issues with "Panther male chauvinism (link is external)." However, many women involved in politics during this era demonstrated the growing realization that women's voices were integral to sociopolitical progress in the continuing campaign for equal rights. The dissemination of this image, and ones like it, created a new cultural memory. Politics and activism, are intergal.



Sitting Bull was a Teton Dakota Native American chief who united the Sioux tribes of the American Great Plains against the white settlers taking their tribal land. Indigenous struggles in Canada and the USA—the northern bloc of settler colonialism—have long been characterized by tactical occupations. Many concerns of Indigenous peoples remain unaddressed; legacies of historical colonization and the dynamics of contemporary settler colonialism are powerfully entrenched. Indigenous occupations, by contrast, seek to reclaim and reassert relationships to land and place submerged beneath the settler colonial world. These occupations question the validity of settler colonial nation states. Settler colonialism provides a lens through which to examine Settler—Indigenous dynamics.

Dolores Huerta is one of the most influential labor activists of the 20th century and a leader of the Chicano movement. Her mother's activism for workers greatly influenced her daughter. Discrimination also helped shape Huerta. In 1955 Huerta began her career as an activist when she co-founded the Stockton chapter of the Community Service

Organization (CSO), which led voter registration drives and fought for economic improvements for Hispanics. She also founded the Agricultural Workers Association. Through a CSO associate, Huerta met activist César Chávez, with whom she shared an interest in organizing farm workers. In 1962, Huerta and Chávez founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), the predecessor of the United Farm Workers' Union



(UFW). Throughout her work with the UFW, Huerta organized workers, advocated for safer work conditions including the elimination of harmful pesticides. She also fought for unemployment and healthcare for agricultural workers. Huerta was the driving force behind the nationwide table grape boycotts in the late 1960s that led to a successful union contract by 1970. During the 1990s and 2000s, she worked to elect more Latinos and women.

ETHNIC STUDIES IN CALIFORNIA'S HIGH SCHOOLS

NICK GONZALEZ

Born in 1924, James Baldwin was an American essayist, novelist, playwright and social critic. He became an important voice through writing passionately about racial discrimination, spirituality and humanity. Baldwin's writings approach social issues and the psychological pressure affecting African Americans and individuals with different sexual orientations, a then-taboo subject. His fame as a social observer grew in tandem with the civil rights movement as he mirrored African American aspirations, disappointments and coping strategies in a hostile society. Baldwin's essays explored racial tension with honesty. By describing life as he knew it, Baldwin created relevant, penetrating literature and readers responded. An advocate for equity and acceptance, Baldwin died in



December 1987 in France. Today he continues to inspire social justice through his writings. One of Baldwin's words were "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."



Sylvia Rivera would always be quick to redress those who thought she threw the first Molotov cocktail at the historic Stonewall riot on June 28, 1969. "I have been given the credit for throwing the first Molotov cocktail by many historians, but I always like to correct it," she said in 2001. "I threw the second one. I did not throw the first one!" Today, Rivera is revered as a legendary transgender activist. She vehemently fought for early legislation banning gender discrimination; sought to create safe spaces for queer homeless youth; and spoke loudly and powerfully that her community of transgender individuals, homeless and incarcerated among them, be fought for in the move toward equality. At the time, though, many gay rights activists regarded her as a mere troublemaker. "The movement had put me on the shelf, but they took me down and dusted me off," she said in 1995. "Still, it was beautiful. I walked down 58th Street and the young ones were calling from the sidewalk, 'Sylvia, Sylvia, thank you, we know what you did.' After that I went back on the shelf. It would be wonderful if the movement took care of its own." The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) was founded.

Bayard Rustin was an American leader in social movements for civil rights, socialism, pacifism and non-violence, and gay rights. He was born and raised in Pennsylvania where his family was involved in civil rights work. In 1936, he moved to Harlem, New York City and earned a living as a nightclub and stage singer, and continued activism for civil rights. He recognized Martin Luther King, Jr.'s leadership, and helped to organize the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to strengthen King's leadership; Rustin promoted the philosophy of nonviolence and the practices of nonviolent resistance, which he had observed while working with Gandhi's movement in India. Rustin became a leading strategist of the civil rights movement from 1955 to 1968. He was the chief organizer of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, which was headed by A. Philip Randolph, the leading African-American labour-union president and socialist. Rustin also influenced young activists, such as Tom Kahn and Stokely Carmichael, in organizations like the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). After the passage of the civil-rights legislation of 1964-65, Rustin focused attention on the economic problems of working-class and unemployed African Americans, suggesting that the civil-rights movement had left its period of "protest" and had entered an era of "politics", in which the Black community had to ally with the labour movement. Rustin became the head of the AFL-CIO's A. Philip Randolph Institute, which promoted the integration of formerly all-white unions and promoted the unionization of African Americans. Rustin was a gay man who had been arrested for a homosexual act in 1953. Homosexuality was criminalized in parts of the United States until 2003. In the 1970s, he became a public advocate on behalf of gay and lesbian causes.



Ethnic Studies in California's High Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief describes the role of Ethnic Studies curriculum in high school settings, in light of legislative efforts through AB-331 to require Ethnic Studies as a statewide high school graduation requirement.¹ First, it provides a brief history of Ethnic Studies and its development since its birth in California during the 1960's civil rights movement. Second, it shows the need for Ethnic Studies as California's increasingly diverse student body –with almost 80 percent students of color– does not see itself reflected in the current predominantly Euro-centric curriculum. Last, it provides a summary of an extensive body of academic research that shows the benefits of Ethnic Studies courses on student academic achievement, multicultural awareness, and inter-racial relations.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic Studies (ES) is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on understanding the roles that minoritized racial and ethnic groups play in the construction of American history, culture, and society. ES recovers and reconstructs the histories of those Americans whom history has traditionally neglected.² Critics of Ethnic Studies argue that it weakens students' connection to their American identity.³ In reality, the racial and ethnic communities represented in Ethnic Studies curricula are ingrained into American history from the Indigenous peoples who lived on the land before the arrival of Europeans to African Americans brought over as slaves in the early days of colonization. Asian Americans have also been woven into the American fabric since their migration to the U.S. in great numbers beginning in the nineteenth century, alongside Latinos who lived in the Southwest U.S. long before the United States even earned independence. Despite these deep intersections of racial and ethnic groups and their contributions to American society, studies show that 79 percent of the individuals named in social science textbooks in California are white.⁴ For students from racially and ethnically diverse populations, Ethnic Studies coursework provides an avenue to recognize racially and ethnically diverse cultures and histories, helping them build a connection to American national identity.⁵

The movement for Ethnic Studies is rooted in California. It was spearheaded in 1968 by a generation of mostly African American college students inspired by the civil rights and anti-war movements who protested at university administrative offices at San Francisco State University and the Berkeley and Santa Barbara campuses of the University of California. They demanded multicultural reform in higher education through the creation of Ethnic Studies programs with coursework that would shift the focus of the dominant Eurocentric curriculum at colleges and universities across the country.⁶

The establishment of Ethnic Studies coursework in higher education came at a time when American society was making great progress towards racial justice. As non-white racial and ethnic groups began entering higher education at increasing rates in the 1960s, outdated coursework focused mostly on Protestant Anglo-Saxons failed to reflect their experiences and their histories. This generation took the actions that successfully led to the development of over 160 Ethnic Studies programs and departments at colleges and universities in the United States.⁷

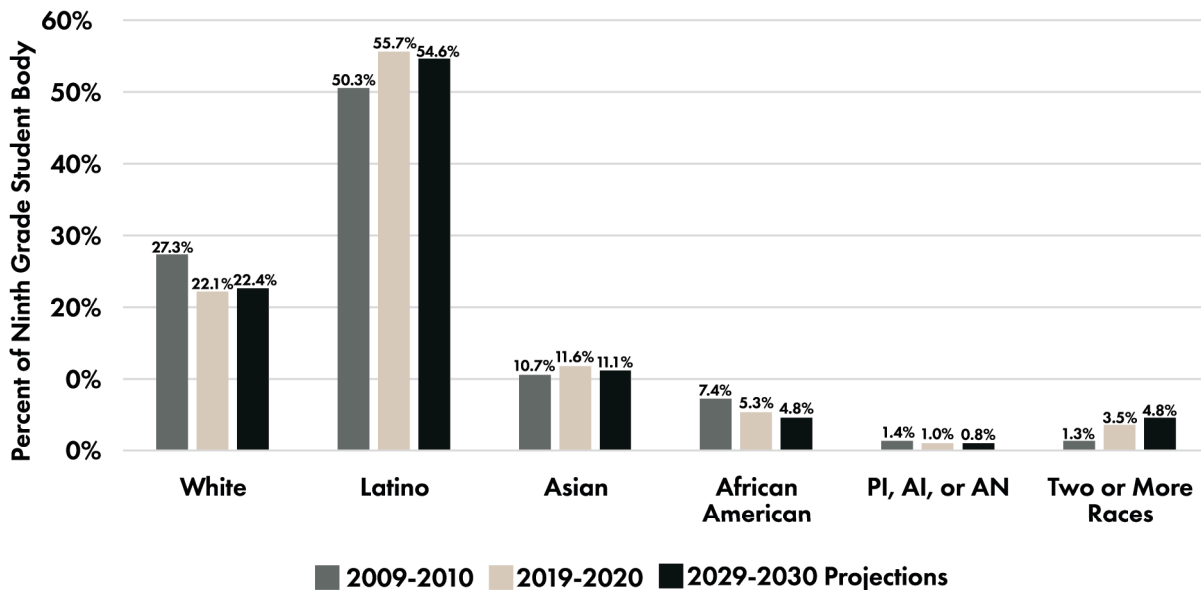
Over the course of the 21st century, the implementation of Ethnic Studies curricula in higher education has not trickled down to the K-12 context, including high school. Even though the movement for Ethnic Studies started in California, other states have pioneered the introduction of ES curriculum in K-12 education. In 2017, Oregon passed HB 2845 requiring the implementation of Ethnic Studies curriculum in grades K-12⁸. In 2019, Vermont passed similar legislation.⁹

In California, after passing AB-2016, the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Instruction have worked on crafting a model curriculum for Ethnic Studies at the high school level.¹⁰ On August 17, 2020, AB-1460 was signed by Governor Newsom to officially implement an Ethnic Studies requirement for all students in the California State University system.¹¹ Three days later on August 20, AB-331, which introduces a required semester-long course in Ethnic Studies at the high school level, was approved by the California State Senate Appropriations Committee.¹²

THE DIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA’S STUDENT BODY IS NOT REFLECTED IN THE CURRICULUM

California has an increasingly diverse high school student body which does not see itself represented in the curriculum. Between 2009 and 2019, the proportion of white students among California’s 9th graders dropped from 27.3 percent to 22.1 percent. Meanwhile, the share of Latino students increased from 50.3 percent to almost 56 percent and the share of Asian students increased from 10.7 percent to 11.6 percent in the same 10-year period. African American students represent 5.3 percent of all students who started high school in 2019, down from 7.4 percent in 2009. Pacific Islanders, American Indians, or Alaska Natives’ representation has remained at around 1 percent of the student population, and multiracial students –i.e. those who identified as part of two or more racial groups– increased from 1.3 percent in 2009 to 3.5 percent in 2019 (See **Figure 1**). Together, students of racial and ethnic groups that have been historically marginalized represent almost 80 percent of the student body in California.¹³

Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Demographics of California Ninth-Grade Student Populations, 2009-2010 vs. 2019-2020 and 2029-2030 Projections



Source: California Department of Education Data Reporting Office, [available online](#).

Notes: The Data Reporting Office at the California Department of Education separately reports Filipino and Asian American student enrollment data. For the purposes of this brief we combined Filipino with Asian American student enrollment data. The data reporting office also separately reports Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaska Native student enrollment data, but for the purposes of this brief, we combined Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaska Native student enrollment data.

Ethnic Studies in California's High Schools

Non-white racial and ethnic groups are expected to make up 77.6 percent of California ninth graders by the 2029-2030 academic year (See **Figure 1**). Even though the student body has and will continue to undergo substantial racial and ethnic transformations, minoritized groups are rarely reflected in school curricula which remain centered on the experiences of Protestant white Europeans.¹⁴ This lack of representation in the curriculum causes disengagement with school material, which explains some of the achievement gap between students of color and white students.¹⁵

Although all students in the California State University system will now be required to complete an Ethnic Studies requirement to graduate,¹⁶ research demonstrates that introducing this curriculum at an earlier age can improve academic outcomes. Education scholars have shown that students' levels of racial and ethnic identity exploration are particularly high in the ninth and tenth grades, making high school an ideal time to introduce students, especially students of color, to Ethnic Studies coursework.¹⁷

INCLUDING ETHNIC STUDIES IN HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM LEADS TO IMPROVED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND BETTER RACIAL RELATIONS

Rigorous scientific evaluations of Ethnic Studies programs show clear positive impacts on academic achievement for all students enrolled. Enrollment in Ethnic Studies classes is associated with a boost in classroom attendance, GPA's, and graduation rates for all students, but particularly for Latino and Asian American students across California. Students who previously felt marginalized by the traditional curriculum feel a deeper connection to their education, not only within their Ethnic Studies courses, but across all subjects.¹⁸

Two cases, out of the many school districts that have successfully introduced Ethnic Studies courses, stand out because of their promising results. A study in the San Francisco Unified School District shows that taking an Ethnic Studies course increased students' GPA by 1.4 grade points, attendance by 21 percentage points, and credits earned by 23 credits (roughly four courses).¹⁹ In Arizona, Mexican American Studies courses at the Tucson Unified School District helped students increase their likelihood of both graduating high school and passing the state of Arizona's standardized high school exams.²⁰

In addition to improving academic achievement, Ethnic Studies has proven to improve racial attitudes and interracial relations for all students, both white and non-white.²¹ Academic research shows evidence that increasing student exposure to courses about race, ethnicity, and diversity increases students' acceptance and tolerance towards people of other races,²² reduces racial bias,²³ and fosters a sense of connection and commonality with people from different backgrounds.²⁴

CONCLUSION

Academic scholarship on the effects of Ethnic Studies on college and high school students shows evidence that by taking Ethnic Studies courses, students from marginalized groups increase their academic achievement and all students improve their understanding of diversity.

Ethnic Studies in California's High Schools

Since students of minoritized groups represent almost 80 percent of the student body, just beginning high school, California's students would benefit from an educational curriculum that centers and focuses on the histories and experiences of all racial and ethnic groups who have played vital roles in constructing America's and California's culture and society. This can be accomplished through the implementation of Ethnic Studies as a high school graduation requirement across the state through AB-331. An Ethnic Studies curriculum at the high school level can provide our diverse youth with the recognition needed to see themselves as part of American history and provide all students with the tools they need to navigate and thrive in a multicultural democracy.

Ethnic Studies in California's High Schools

ENDNOTES

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