

Dear Superintendent Thurmond:

Dear Instructional Quality Commission of the California Board of Education,

Today is the saddest of Jewish holidays, Tisha B'Av, the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Av. It marks the destruction of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 567 BCE, when we were carried away as exiles to Babylon to be freed by King Cyrus of Persia. It also marks the destruction again of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE when we were once more carried away in exile to the Roman Empire, after Romans had crucified Jews by the thousands, 2,000 in just one year. It is also the day the of expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, from England in 1290, from France in 1306, from the Warsaw Ghetto to death camps. It marks the beginning of the First Crusade in which 10,000 Jews were killed by Crusaders in France and the Rhineland. Despite these historical facts, it appears, the ESMC does not mention antisemitism.

I am deeply disturbed by the suggested Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum which has ignored the Jewish people, as just that, a people that we now know are connected by DNA, and a people who have been relentlessly persecuted, yet who have continued to contribute to the world and to California, in particular. I support the idea of teaching an ethnic studies class, but I urge you to make major revisions or a significant rewrite of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, consistent with the recommendations from the California Legislative Jewish Caucus letter, Stand With Us, Jimena, Amcha and others.

Antisemitism is not abstract for me. My father wanted to buy a new home just after I was born, a larger and nicer home, in a nicer community. However, that community was restricted. The neighbors circulated a petition to keep a Jew from buying a home where they lived. My father then built a bigger and nicer home in our original town. The golf and swim club was a five-minute walk away from our new home, but it was restricted. We were not allowed to join. I did take my sled there in the winter to slide down the hills, but I was always looking over my shoulder, afraid someone would see me, and using a racial slur, would evict me. The Civil Rights Act was signed into law when I was a senior in high school, and the golf club had to accept all sorts of members, but my father refused to ever join out of pride; it was too late for me to ever have benefitted.

I knew that as I was applying to colleges, that colleges and private school also had quotas on Jews. Schools were allowed to ask for a picture and your religion. It was just a known and accepted fact that your being Jewish would be considered in your application. This was a fact of life of my growing up years, that schools, clubs, hotels, restaurants, had the right to refuse you. The film that won the Academy Award the year I was born, *A Gentleman's Agreement*, demonstrates how the world was for Jews then. I have another memory of that time as well. My friend's older sister wrote a patriotic essay for a contest sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution. When they discovered that their winner was a Jewish girl, they revoked the prize. I met one other person who had the identical experience in her community. The irony is that Jews not only fought in the Revolution, a Jewish man, Haym Solomon, financed the Revolution in general and the troops at Valley Forge in particular. He died penniless for supporting the Revolution. As he was gifted in languages and could understand the German Hessians, he was a spy for the Sons of Liberty who rescued him from hanging by the British.

But has it changed in 2019? Fifty-eight percent of religious hate crimes target Jews. This has personal meaning for me as I lost my first boyfriend, Daniel Stein, in the massacre at Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. Not long afterward, we had the killing at the synagogue in Poway right here in California. Life for us now, going to synagogue, going to the San Jose Jewish Film Festival, means going under armed guard. You can just drive into the parking lot at the YMCA in Palo Alto, but you cannot do the same to go to the Jewish Community Center in Palo Alto or in San Francisco. You must be interviewed by a guard first. There was a shooting at the JCC in Kansas and at a senior center, and in Los Angeles, and in Seattle. Jewish organizations receive bomb threats. When the Gulf War broke out and I went to pick up my children from Hebrew School at the synagogue, I was greeted by a fleet of Palo Alto police cars in the parking lot. All of the children had been herded out of classrooms and into the sanctuary because of a phoned-in bomb threat. Antisemitism is alive and well in this country.

In just the last two years, we have seen antisemitism brought out into the open, in broad daylight. With tiki torches, Nazi armbands, and raised fists, marchers in Charlottesville, shouted, "Jews will not replace us." In the recent

shootings of the last few weeks, we have learned that we are included along with African-Americans, immigrants, and Latinx, on white supremacy hit lists. I discovered by accident that my name and my son's name, Raphael Bivas, are included on a white supremacist list called "Shitler's List". This is a list of Jews whose names don't sound like Jewish names, but you should be alerted that people such as Natalie and Raphael Bivas are Jews. I reported this website to the Anti-Defamation League, but they were well aware of it, and have been unable to shut it down. Being on white supremacist hit lists is nothing new for Jews. We been a target of the Ku Klux Klan since its inception. We have also been lynched, the most famous and egregious lynching being that of Leo Frank.

Another very personal point that I would like to bring up is refugees, but not Arab ones or ones from south of our border. I pointed out that our name, Bivas, is not easily recognizable as a Jewish name. That is because Bivas (Viva!) is a Spanish name. It is a vestige of my husband's family's exile as refugees from Spain in 1492. The family migrated to Turkey, and then to Cairo, Egypt where they still spoke fifteenth century Spanish, along with Turkish, French, and Arabic. They were well integrated into Egypt for several generations until 1956. In 1956 because of the Suez Canal crisis, 80,000 Jews were forced out of Egypt. Many of those had lived in Egypt for more than 2000 years. My husband's family of seven were allowed to leave with one suitcase apiece and \$100 for the family. They were not allowed any Egyptian passports or papers. Instead, the papers they had were marked "Stateless". As refugees, they tried to find a home in Europe, and eventually were permitted citizenship in France. My father-in-law, who was in his late fifties and who had built and owned a factory that made bath towels from Egyptian cotton, had to start all over again. The Bivas family lost their homes and businesses, and scattered all over the world, to the U.S., Australia, France, Switzerland, and Israel. From 80,000 Jews in Egypt, the number of Jews there is now about three.

My husband's story was reenacted all over the Arab world. Approximately 800,000 Jews who had lived in North African and Middle Eastern Arab countries were exiled, and became refugees in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. Many of them were absorbed by Israel. The number of Jewish refugees from Arab countries is approximately the same number as Arab refugees who had once lived in the current state of Israel. However, the equally compelling story of this band of Jewish refugees, homeless and having lost all of their property, is almost unknown. No one argues for reparations or a return to their homes. Could anyone imagine that Iran, Iraq, Libya would ever accept their Jewish refugees with open arms? My husband is nostalgic for his home, and discovered by accident last year that it was part of a story in The New Yorker, "Morsi the Cat". There are two narratives in the conflict between Jews and Arabs, and there is too much to say for me to address that as well, except to say that the Jewish people were indigenous to Israel and have always lived on that land.

I have so much more that I could write concerning the unbalanced and poorly researched curriculum of the ESMC. I am a recently retired credentialed California teacher who taught in the Palo Alto Unified School District for more than twenty years, and the mother of two graduates of PAUSD. One of my children holds three degrees from UCLA, UCI, and UCSF. If either of them had come home with this curriculum, I would have probably withdrawn them from public education. I urge you to make major revisions or rewrite the curriculum entirely to address my concerns and the concerns of the Jewish community.

Sincerely,
Natalie Krauss Bivas