

**From:** Tommy Chung  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 9, 2020 3:30 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Cc:** [email redacted]; Superintendent  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Save Arab American Studies

Hello Instructional Quality Commission,

My name is Tommy, a young Asian American student who is a Comparative Ethnic Studies major at UC Berkeley. In a discipline where students have constantly fought for their curriculum, and in an effort to continue that fight, I ask that you please keep the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) intact and specifically protect Arab American studies in the statewide rubric for Asian American studies.

There are right-wing Zionists that are trying to depict Arab American studies, particularly in regards to curriculum around Palestine, as anti-Semitic. I want to desperately convey that it is not anti-Semitic to shine a light on Palestine, the plight of the Palestinian people, and ongoing Palestinian activism. I ask that you please research the actual history of Zionist ideology and the Israeli government, with the hope that there is an understanding that Zionism is completely different from Judaism.

Here is a quick summary of something I wrote for a class about Palestine. All this information is verifiable and I can send sources if you wish:

“The founder of Zionism was a man named Theodor Herzl, a secular European Ashkenazi Jew who was tired of widespread anti-semitism. He figured that the solution to anti-semitism was to create an independent nation state where the biblical Kingdom of Israel was (then British-occupied Palestine). Before WWII, most Jews were not Zionists because it was popular belief that the biblical kingdom of Israel would arise and that Jews would return at the will of God, not out of the doings of mortals. It was seen as sacrilege to re-establish Israel at the wrong time. Before WW2, British politicians slowly opened up to the idea of supporting a Jewish ethnostate because they figured out it was a way to get Jews out of their country without actually addressing systemic anti-semitism in the country’s culture and governance. Once WW2 happened, British and American governments felt the need to prove themselves as “not antisemitic” to distinguish themselves from Nazi Germany and absolve themselves of systemic anti-semitism. The USA funded Zionism because they feel guilty for refusing to accept refugees from Nazi Germany during WWII and because they had imported Nazi scientists to beat the USSR in the Cold War (Operation Paperclip). Due to the Holocaust and historical anti-semitism, Jews were feeling precarity and danger and “Israel” was the easy answer. The thing was, the easy answer relied on settler-colonialism and the violent displacement of Palestinians, who were native to the land and whose land has been in families for centuries. This violent displacement included a minority of Palestinian Jews who were actually native to the land. Sephardi / Mizrahi Jews called Palestine home way before European Ashkenazi Jews did, and most were actually opposed to new settlement before WW2. Now there are no more

Palestinian Jews because all Jews in Palestine were given Israeli citizenship. Right now, Israeli propaganda machine pits Jews and Muslims against each other, making it a polarizing Muslim/Jewish conflict or a civilized/uncivilized conflict rather than an issue of Israeli settler-colonialism and Palestinian self-determination & sovereignty. Currently, the social hierarchy in Israeli occupied Palestine looks like 1) European Ashkenazi Jews 2) Mizrahi Jews 3) other Central Asian/Soviet descendant Jews 4) other non-Black Jews of color 5) Ethiopian Jews and other African / Black Jews 6) Palestinians (Christian, Muslim). Israel does not champion equality and is not the answer to global anti-Semitism, which roots lie in white supremacy.”

The answer to anti-Semitism is not to suppress the true history of Palestine, rather it is to include it Ethnic Studies curriculum and to have honest conversations about how to build solidarity in the fight against white supremacy. We can fight Islamophobia, xenophobia, Orientalism while fighting anti-Semitism. The way we do that is by including Arab American Studies in the ESMC.

Sincerely,  
Tommy

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Tommy Chung (*they/them*)  
Ethnic Studies  
University of California, Berkeley | Class of 2023