

**From:** Sarah Levin

**Sent:** Thursday, January 21, 2021 5:38 PM

**To:** governor@governor.ca.gov; Superintendent; SBE; Ethnic Studies; Idh@stanford.edu; Stephanie Gregson

**Subject:** FINAL JIMENA review and request for California's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum - Lesson 40

To Governor Gavin Newsom, Superintendent Tony Thurmond, State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond, Members of the State Board of Education, and Deputy Superintendent Stephanie Gregson,

At last count, 15,000 members of the public have urged the State of California to include Middle Eastern Jewish Americans, also known as South Asian Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews, in the Asian Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC). On November 19, the Instructional Quality Commission accepted JIMENA's comprehensive lesson plan "[Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern Americans](#)" (correct link).

We would like to thank the California Department of Education and the Instructional Quality Commission (IQC) for progress that's been made to develop the curriculum. We offer our gratitude for all of your hard work and your willingness to work with multiple communities throughout the State of California, including Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews.

**Today, we write with three requests -- one to help ensure that there will be no bias in the ESMC and two to restore parts of JIMENA's lesson to its original form:**

1. Move the IQC-approved "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans" lesson to the Asian American Studies section to pair it with approved lessons addressing Islamophobia and xenophobia of South Asians, making the ESMC align thematically around "shared struggles,"
2. Restore links to primary sources, and
3. Restore the short United States Holocaust Memorial Museum video "Antisemitism Today."

More information about each is in our line-by-line submission below and attached.

The Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum recognizes in its guiding principles that addressing bigotry -- including antisemitism -- is foundational to Ethnic Studies (Chapter 1, page 13). Asian Americans include "Southwest Asians (Middle Eastern populations) such as ...Mizrahi Jews." (Chapter 3, page 23).

Yet, despite Judaism properly listed as a major South Asian religion in the current draft (Lesson 33), the Asian Studies section omits Jewish Americans and antisemitism -- reminiscent of the omissions that embroiled the ESMC's first draft in controversy.

California has at least 200,000 Mizrahi Jews, an indigenous South Asian (Middle Eastern) community who have experienced racialization, antisemitism, and marginalization in the United States. Many individuals within our communities have intersectional identities as a result of experiencing prejudice and discrimination as Jewish Americans, as Middle Eastern refugees and immigrants, and as people of color in California. (The Iranian Jewish community in Los Angeles is one of the largest Middle Eastern diasporic communities in North America.)

It is important that students learn about us and antisemitism which is why antisemitism is the focus of

our lesson. One of the oldest and most deadly forms of hate, antisemitism remains the third most prevalent ethnic-based and the most prevalent religious-based hate crime in the US and California (68% of California's total for 2% of its population), up 72% since 2016. Jewish Americans must be allowed to define antisemitism in a way that reflects our daily lived experiences. Moreover, *"antisemitism has become integral to the architecture of American racism.... which means the other channels of its hatred cannot be intercepted without directly taking on antisemitism"* according to Eric Ward, a prominent leader of color whose life work is studying, exposing, and countering organized hate groups.

It is JIMENA's hope that the State Board of Education will honor our three requests and ensure that the ESMC complies with the State Board of Education's (SBE) requirements that content portray peoples proportionately (SBE Social Content Standards, 2013) and is balanced (SBE ESMC Guidelines, 2017). California's Education Code prohibits discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, ethnicity, and religion.

Thank you,

Sarah Levin, Executive Director

Gina Bublil-Waldman, President

\* "Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa"

\*\* "Skin in the Game, How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism," Eric Ward (June 29, 2017)  
<https://www.politicalresearch.org/2017/06/29/skin-in-the-game-how-antisemitism-animates-white-nationalism>

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## **Proposed Changes to Lesson 40, "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern Americans"**

### **Appendix A**

1) Move the IQC-approved lesson on South Asian Americans and antisemitism (Lesson 40, "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern-Americans," Appendix A, lines 10214 – 10382) to the "Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies" section immediately after line 9091.

Reason: This will pair the lesson on South Asian Americans and antisemitism with the lessons on South Asian Americans and Islamophobia and xenophobia, consistent with the "thematic approach to ethnic studies," and reinforce the ESMC's emphasis on the "importance of identifying shared struggles." (ESMC Preface and Chapter 3)

It will also bring the ESMC into closer compliance with the State's requirements to treat peoples with proportionality and balance, and avoid bias and

discrimination, as California and Federal laws and the State Board of Education's Social Content Standards and ESMC Guidelines require.

The ESMC's three lessons on South Asian Americans list the most common ethnic groups and religions in the region which correctly include Judaism.

These three South Asian lessons mention Arab Middle Easterners. They do not offer content on non-Arab Middle Easterners such as Jews however; 60% of Californians from the Middle East are not Arab.

They contain content on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate throughout. These lessons do not mention antisemitism. A Californian Jew is 2.8 times more likely to be the target of an anti-Semitic hate act than Muslims, the second highest religious targets: 68% of California's religious-based hate crimes target the 2% Jewish population compared to 12% which target the 1% Muslim population per the CA Department of Justice's 2019 Hate Statistics report).

Thematically, the most appropriate placement of the lesson "Antisemitism and Jewish Middle Eastern Americans" is immediately after Lesson 35 "Xenophobic Racism against South Asians and Muslims: Past and Present" in the ESMC's Asian Studies section. Lesson 35 defines "hate crimes," (including against places of worship,) "harassment" (including based on religion), "bullying," and "microaggressions."

2) Restore the links in the original lesson JIMENA submitted to the California Department of Education on July 14, 2020:

- Add the following at the end of Appendix A, line 10372 (December 2020 draft): <https://www.adl.org/anti-semitism>
- Add the following at the end of Appendix A, line 10378 (December 2020 draft): <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>

Reason: The California State Board of Education's Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Guidelines require that the ESMC "include access to ...primary source documents." These links will ensure that teachers have ready access to the primary source.

3) Restore the five minute United States Holocaust Memorial Museum video "Antisemitism Today" and link which were in the original lesson JIMENA submitted to the California Department of Education on July 14, 2020:

- Add the following at the end of Appendix A, immediately after line 10342:

*United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Antisemitism Today, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buCHObBiTY4&t=11s>*

- Remove lines 10343 and 10347.

Reason: The video "Antisemitism Today" provides succinct and compelling information on contemporary antisemitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of bigotry from the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. chartered by a unanimous Act of Congress in 1980. This video's content on hatred and genocide will enrich and reinforce content in the ESMC's Asian Studies section.

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Sarah Levin

*Executive Director*

**JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa**