

**From:** Saidah Traish  
**Sent:** Thursday, August 13, 2020 10:27 AM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Arab American Ethnic Studies

Hello,

I am not going to go into the vital role Arab American Ethnic Studies will have on a huge and growing demographic sector of the American population. It is undebatable the value of having narratives reinforce identity during a crucial stage of intellectual development and self-growth. Dispelling stereotypes, understanding the complex histories of a region in order to avoid militarized options first and talk later such as in the Iraqi war, and analyzing how colonial and imperial legacies impact current realities are evident. Ethnic studies moves beyond the four basic ethnic groups to challenge the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and racial structuralism and the impact it has on the lived experiences of more than half of the student population in American educational systems.

My concern however emerges from a different perspective. The perspective of the dominant narrative and how it feeds into a cycle of the banality of evil. I have two lived experiences I would like to tell that will make it more clear on why Arab American Ethnic Studies is vital in our current times. First, I had a well-educated and respected physician after surgical procedure announce how he made sure I will be able to contribute to increasing the numbers of my people. I am 50 years old. This was an extreme example of how this educated person saw me during that very stressful time period in my life and my race as a number. I am more than a census number but a human with complex histories and with complex feelings. This physician's exposure to Arab American Ethnic Studies in his early years of education could have shaped a better human and citizen who knows how to operate and communicate within a community of equals. Arab American Ethnic Studies would have laid the foundation of how Arabs are people and deserve to be treated with any preconceived and faulty understandings.

Second, during work I noticed a student wore a necklace with a cross on it even though I knew he was Jewish. I was perplexed. The learner during the entire class spent the time harassing me and expressing severe hostility toward me. After the encounter finished I noticed the student hand over a necklace with a cross on it to his Latinx "friend" and then give me a glaring stare as he left the class. I felt scared but at the same time sorry for the young man. Sorry for how the educational system is failing him and how it is failing to teach him the complexities of life as he begins to move out of his bubble and navigate a more diverse population of dissimilar humans. The student was Jewish and within his own mind frame he actually believed that harassing me behind a cloak of Christianity would be enough to justify his attack. I am not even going to go through how the adult educators and administrators are handling having a Palestinian among them. As educators, this incident needs to be viewed as how the elimination of Arab American Ethnic Studies not only will hurt upcoming Arab American generations but also how the lack of Arab American Ethnic Studies will reinforce the superiority complex of younger Jewish generations. The lack of Arab American Ethnic Studies will set up future Jewish-American generations to a traumatic experience when they enter higher educational institutions or search for truths on their own via alternative media outlets. Their first question to reflect upon is how their own personal growth and self-reflections because of the lack of complexity and narratives in the curriculum. A curriculum that only seeks to appease the status quo. Please during this time make the time to converse with Jewish citizens who have found their voices in studying Palestinian narratives and lived experiences.

Thank you for your time,  
Saidah Traish