

From: Steven Cohen
Sent: Monday, August 10, 2020 1:59 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Cc: [email redacted]; steven Cohen
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Ethnic Studies Curriculum

Dear Kind People.

Thank you, the California Department of Education for working so hard to improve the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

I am a California resident having lived here since 1970 and enjoyed the wonderful kaleidoscope of ethnic groups that share this special place. I am Jewish, and have parents and other family that have experienced directly the oppression of antisemitism and the oppression and worse that it has brought. My maternal grandfather was killed in the Ukraine by nationalist zealots that did not view Jews as part of the wider Ukrainian community even though Jews lived among Ukrainians for nearly 1000 years. This lack of acceptance and rejection of the "other" clearly came of ignorance and lack of understanding.

While the Jews of California are now mostly accepted and treated as part of the wider community, it is sometimes missed that antisemitism has been rising right here, and is at its highest level in years as borne out by statistics. This same ignorance and treatment of Jews as an "other" who is to be blamed for whatever evil happens to be current, is now on the rise right here in my home State.

Including specifically, the various forms of Jewish life in California would be an important step in reversing the dark ignorance that is infecting too many of our families and children. For instance, over 500,000 Jews come from the Middle East and North Africa. These Sephardic Jews deserve mention as many came directly from places that expelled them, took all of their property, and at times, committed acts of violence on them. They should be included for mention of the Middle Eastern cultures that exist right here in California. They are vibrant, distinct, and active, and for most Californians, invisible.

Secondly, the Jewish communities around our State include many people, such as myself, who have families that have suffered great discrimination overseas, and now are facing increasing tides of discrimination here. The sense that Jews "have it too good" or control "too much" are throwbacks to periods in US history that led to acts of exclusion (restrictive deeds) and violence. I am sure you are aware of the statistics of violent antisemitic acts for this year and the past two that indicate alarming increases right in our backyard. Having the Jewish experience clearly described as an ethnic group that, while contributing greatly to our State, still requires that the general education include them as a key minority group that needs to be understood far greater than is the case today. Antisemitic tropes, attitudes and actions are rising. It is too easy to look at the success of this group as a reason not to regard them as truly a minority in some jeopardy as they are. If history is an example, Germany was a successful educated culture that allowed Jews to succeed, until the virus of antisemitism allowed the ordinary people, children included, to view this successful group of people as a "cancer" that must be removed.

I write to you in the knowledge of your very good intentions, and make this request to more clearly include Jews as a minority group in the light of current events, and importantly in the light of a number of historical occurrences of antisemitism. We can and will do better in our time.

With much appreciation

Steven Cohen
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