

From: ARNOLD FELSENFELD

Sent: Monday, August 10, 2020 1:09 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Commentary on Ethnic Studies draft curriculum

To the CDE,

I was pleased when it was decided that the original Ethnic Studies draft curriculum should be revised. While the revised curriculum does represent an improvement from the original, the revised draft still has many problems and falls short of achieving the proper balance. The current draft fails to achieve the values laid out in AB 2016 because it advocates a narrow political philosophy. One major concern includes that the current proposal fosters solidarity and linkages with Boycott, Divest, Sanction (BDS), contains anti-Israel narratives, and is harmful to Jewish students.

Because I am Jewish I am particularly concerned how Jews and Judaism are portrayed in the proposed curriculum. In the USA today, Jews are considered to be white and for the most part, are accepted in general society. But I must remind everyone that the history of anti-Semitism in the United States is extremely troubling. Through the first half of the 20th century, Jews were not allowed to live in certain residential areas, to join many country clubs, had restrictions on college admissions despite outstanding scholastic records, had limited admissions to medical schools, were not allowed to join certain prestigious law firms, and were subjected to vicious anti-Semitic slurs. Even today, anti-Semitic hate crimes rank very high in registries of hate crimes. Above I have listed only a brief summary of the history of anti-Semitism in the United States.

Worldwide the history of anti-Semitism is much worse with forced conversions (Spanish Inquisition), pogroms, and death camps (World War II). Even today, "death to the Jew" is a frequent refrain in Arab countries. Moreover, anti-Semitic tracts such as Mein Kampf and The Protocols of the Elders of Zion are still being published and widely read. Will these issues be adequately discussed in the curriculum?

Finally, it should be taught that Jews are not a homogenous group. In this country, the primary religious divisions are Reform (more secular), Conservative, and Orthodox (most observant). Also, after the forced expulsion of the Jews from Israel thousands of years ago, three separate and diverse Jewish groupings emerged – 1) Ashkenazi – origin from northern Europe; 2) Sephardi – dispersed from Spain after the Spanish Inquisition throughout the Mediterranean basin; and 3) Mizrahi – Jews from the Middle East and Arab lands. These three groups of Jews have different physical appearances, characteristics, and cultural traditions. But all three groups have endured terrible persecutions in their histories. All this must be taught in any curriculum.

Thank you for allowing my views to be heard.

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