

From: Beshara Kehdi

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 11:57 AM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Arab American and Pacific Islander Studies in the ES Curriculum

Dear California Department of Education, Instructional Quality Committee, and Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum editors,

My name is Beshara Kehdi, and I am PhD student in Cultural Studies at the University of California, Davis, with a focus on Ethnic Studies education and Arab American Studies. This email is regarding the erasure of both Arab American and Pacific Islander Studies from the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. Agenda Item 2, subheading A.2. concerns staff proposed edits to the curriculum. I am appalled that the Department of Education feels compelled to overhaul a curriculum created and designed by Ethnic Studies educators and specialists in accordance with the essential principals and developments of the field, in order to appease members of the legislature and outside institutions who advance anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian policies and political positions (who dehumanize members of my community), and then also grant these same people special audiences with the Department of Education to monitor the curriculum revision process.

The revision process is not transparent, nor one founded on the tenets of Ethnic Studies which is community led and driven by elders in our field. Experts in the fields of Arab American or Pacific Islander studies, let alone Ethnic Studies are not involved, who are respected in our community. Ethnic Studies is a discipline rooted in social justice activism, anti-racism and anti-colonialism. It is not an appendage to the History-Social Science Framework. It is a corrective to its racism, whiteness, and Eurocentrism.

As it stands, the revised curriculum has gutted any substantial reference to Palestine, BDS, Arab American Studies, or Pacific Islander Studies, reinforcing imperialism within the curriculum.

The original Ethnic Studies writers and authors need to be reconvened. They are the ones to make edits to the curriculum, not well intentioned editors with no foundation in Ethnic Studies pedagogy, history, or traditions. The fact that BDS and Palestine, while only mentioned in name as a movement in the original curriculum with a definition, and as optional research topics, is also central to BIPOC liberation movements the last half century is a case in point to its importance. Arab American studies emerged in tandem with Asian American Studies, and as a subset of it, with the emergence of studies on Orientalism and critiques of State Department Area Studies programs that advance knowledge of Arabs and the Middle East and North African and their diasporas from the vantage point of US imperial interest and not the lived experiences of the people. The same for Pacific Islander Studies, that critique US imperialism in the Pacific and the effects of colonization to this day.

The original Ethnic Studies committee of authors should be reconvened. Arab American Studies, along with curricula that address Palestine, BDS, and Arab and SWANA (South West

Asian and North African) experiences in the US should be included, in addition to Pacific Islander Studies.

Ethnic Studies cannot, and should not be dictated to by people outside the field. The Department of Education should not allow this, for the integrity of the field and the Department of Education to remain.

All best,
-Beshara Kehdi

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Beshara Kehdi
Pronouns: he/him/his
PhD Student, Cultural Studies Graduate Group
University of California, Davis