

From: DJ B

Sent: Monday, November 16, 2020 10:39 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] On the California Ethnic Studies Curriculum (please read, it's important)

I am Dani Ishai Behan, a Jewish-American activist and writer whose work can be found on Times of Israel. I am concerned about the way the California Ethnic Studies curriculum is framed.

My proposed plan for fixing this would be to place all Jews, including Ashkenazi Jews (Jews whose families spent diaspora in Central/Eastern Europe), into the Asian-American curriculum. This proposal is based on a number of things.

1. Jews are an indigenous ethnic group of the Levant - specifically, the historic region of Israel/Judea. This is located in Asia. Ergo, there is no reason why American Jews should be categorized separately from Arab-Americans, Persian-Americans, etc.

2. Leaving us out of the Asian-American curriculum erases our Middle Eastern ethnic identity, origins, and 4,000 years of civilizational history within Israel. It whitewashes our ethnic identity as Jews and perpetuates the false (and antisemitic) view that we are indigenous to our recent diaspora countries, not to our actual land of ethnogenesis. It also ignores our history of colonization, exile, and enslavement - the very circumstances that led to our presence in Europe in the first place - and the centuries of persecution we experienced there as a Middle Eastern people of color.

3. Categorizing us as "European" erases our historical and ongoing experiences of racism under white supremacy. European-Americans, including non-WASP ones, do not share our history or our experiences.

By contrast, our experiences in this country, including our immigration history, align much more closely with that of other Middle Eastern ethnic groups. To wit, Ashkenazi Jews were originally classified as 'Asian' in this country and were nearly denaturalized for that reason; the only reason we are considered "white" now is because of a successful push to have Middle Easterners/North Africans broadly included under "white". All ethnic Jews, including Ashkenazim, are still listed as Middle Eastern-Americans, not European-Americans.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Eastern_Americans

4. Categorizing us as "European" is also inconsistent with the way other ethnicities are classified. African immigrants from the UK are certainly classed under African, because it's understood that the African presence in Europe is entirely diasporic. Just as ours was, and is. Per the Census, Middle Eastern-American includes only the original peoples of the Middle East, just as European-American includes only the original populations of Europe. Ashkenazi Jews, by this metric, are a Middle Eastern-American population.

5. Categorizing us as "European" plainly feeds into the antisemitic narrative that Ashkenazim have no roots in the Middle East and that Zionism is therefore a "colonial" project.

7. Lastly, categorizing us as "European" will leave us with virtually no coverage within the curricula at all, since there doesn't even seem to be a "European-American" section. Instead,

the curriculum will remain just as it is now, as far as it pertains to Ashkenazim. We will still be inaccurately listed as "non-WASP Europeans" and still inaccurately represented as a "European people" who were "once" oppressed", but are now "privileged whites".