

From: nonielandau
Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 11:34 PM
To: Ethnic Studies; Superintendent
Subject: [EXTERNAL] [Public Comment] Arab American Studies is Ethnic Studies

Hello,

My name is Savannah and I am emailing as a concerned community member on the matter of Arab American Studies and the status it holds as a legitimate scholarly practice under the umbrella of Ethnic Studies.

These last four years have shown how critical and meaningful the need for ethnic studies is for students on all levels of education. This last year alone has shown the urgent necessity for people to become educated in ethnic studies. With increasing numbers of hate crimes, white nationalism, and a polarized political climate that has no end in sight, California has left children, teenagers, and young adults no path to learn of other world views, cultures, and even their own history.

As a Central American, I was never exposed to my own history until I reached college. I lived two decades of my life not knowing anything of my family's past; something, that for them, is too painful and traumatic to discuss with the generation born in the United States. If it had not been for the Ethnic Studies department at my school, I would have never fully understood my family nor myself. And, I would have never been able to find a Central American community around me.

And, as an Ashkenazi Jewish woman, I would have never felt encouraged to study my lineage nor my culture had it not been for Arab American Studies. There, I learned about the beautiful, heartbreaking, and enlightening history of their diaspora and culture. I also have witnessed the rise of Islamophobia targeted towards this scholarly practice from Pro-Israel interest groups who claim to be protecting people like myself from anti-semitism, but are instead silencing the voices that have a right to be heard.

Truth be told, I have felt safer and more welcomed by the Ethnic Studies department and the Arab American teachers and students. Even though I have only been primarily informed of Middle Eastern culture through racist stereotypes and fear-mongering stories, the teachers and students in the Arab American curriculum never made me feel like an outsider. If anything, they made me feel proud to be Central American and Jewish.

So please, re-insert Arab American studies in its rightful place--within Asian American studies and include the Arab American lesson plan submitted to the California Department of Education by members of the original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) advisory committee. Thank you and I look forward to your decision next week.

Savannah Landau