

From: Chaya Gordon

Sent: Friday, July 31, 2020 4:07 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Save Ethnic Studies! Tell Arab American Stories.

Dear Ethnic Studies Open Comment,

I am the granddaughter of Jewish immigrants who came to the US in the 1880s seeking freedom from repression and a better life. Living in NYC their paths often crossed with immigrants from other backgrounds and ethnicities. They learned about other cultures and gave respect for other people's lives—in effect, the streets of NYC were their classroom. This was passed down to me by my grandparents and parents. We must learn from each other to promote understanding.

Today, we can bring this ethnic studies “curriculum” to the classroom and provide a foundation for a positive exchange for all students. This is why I urge you to support the inclusion of Arab American studies in the Asian American studies curriculum.

The racial disparities in the impact of Covid-19, the xenophobic targeting of Asian Americans as “vectors” of disease, and the national uprising in response to the murder of George Floyd point to the need for anti-racist education: All students need comprehensive Ethnic Studies in their K-12 curriculum to build empathy, unity and solidarity with each other, strengthening our movements for justice.

The ESMC is structured around the core pillars developed by the founders of Ethnic Studies in 1969: American Indian studies, Africana/Black studies, Chicanx/Latinx studies, and Asian American studies. Following a decades-long tradition in higher education, the ESMC includes Arab American studies within Asian American studies.

Leading Asian American scholars, including the National Association of Asian American studies, have issued statements defending the inclusion of Arab American studies in the CA ESMC.

Ethnic Studies has been linked to increases in positive personal, academic, and social outcomes for students.

In the post-9/11 era, exacerbated by Trump's Muslim ban, Arab American students are desperately in need of curriculum that reflects their histories and current realities.

TURATH (Teaching Understanding and Representing Arabs Throughout History) is a 2020 report researched and written by the teenage members of Arab Youth Organizing (AYO). According to AYO's findings, more than 66% of the students surveyed said they received most of their information on Arabs and/or Muslims from the internet or television; only 2.3% learned about Arabs and/or Muslims at school.

As John Lewis said in his final statement, “Millions of people motivated simply by human compassion laid down the burdens of division. Around the country and the world you set aside race, class, age, language and nationality to demand respect for human dignity.”

Surely we can do the same here and be inclusive of Arab-American experiences in students’ education in California.

Sincerely,
Chaya Gordon