

From: William Slaughter

Sent: Monday, December 21, 2020 5:46 PM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] It's never been clearer how important Ethnic Studies is

Dear Ethnic Studies Open Comment,

Dear Drs Thurmond and Datling-Hammond,

I am in my 60's now, 4 decades in to overlapping healthcare and US-Middle East cross-cultural wellness work. My start was in Middle East Studies at Portland (OR) State U, with a grounding in Arabic language, Judaic and regional courses. That was foundational for working on critical health and social disparities in US Muslim and across Jewish-Arab lines in several countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Israel-Palestine.

*We need much much more knowledge of people's globally at this time of intensifying division and hatred, *not less.** *This is particularly true regarding MEast studies, focused on that central global nexus.*

I am are outraged that elected officials ignored tens of thousands of public comments and instead relegated Arab American lessons to an appendix of the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC), included extremely problematic "perspectives" on racism, and refused to consult Ethnic Studies experts on revisions to the curriculum.

Arab American studies must be returned to its rightful place in Asian American studies. Following a decades-long tradition in higher education, the original ESMC included Arab American studies within Asian American studies. Leading ethnic studies scholars, including Angela Davis, Robin D.G. Kelley, and the National Association of Asian American studies, have issued statements defending the inclusion of Arab American studies in the ESMC.

The CA Department of Education (CDE) is not living up to its mandate to create a Model Ethnic Studies Curriculum as outlined by AB2016. Since the CDE disbanded the original, highly qualified advisory committee, the ESMC has become a problematic "All Lives Matter" curriculum. It now bears no relationship to the values and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Essential Ethnic Studies terminology, including the definition of race, has been eliminated or moved to footnotes. There are now several definitions of race, including one giving credence to race as based on biology rather than social construction. The decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory focus of Ethnic Studies has been buried in an avalanche of language about inclusion, and the experiences of Arab Americans have been erased from the curriculum.

According to TURATH (Teaching Understanding and Representing Arabs Throughout History) a 2020 report by teenage members of the Arab Resource and Organizing Center, only 2.3% of student surveyed learned about Arabs and/or Muslims at school. 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.

If the biggest education system in the United States decides Arab-American Studies and authentic Ethnic Studies are “problems,” we face a dire precedent.

In these times of change and possibility, please reject the inaccurate and offensive revisions made to this curriculum, restore Arab-American Studies to its rightful place, and re-empower the Ethnic Studies experts who have shaped this powerful and critical area of study for our students.

Thank you,
Bill Slaughter MD
Cambridge, MA

Sincerely,
William Slaughter