

**From:** George Revutsky

**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2020 10:53 AM

**To:** Ethnic Studies; [emails redacted]

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Include Antisemitism and the Middle Eastern-American Experience

Hi - my name is George Revutsky and I'm a concerned parent who lives in CA.

I am also a Mizrahi Jew, born in the Republic of Georgia, and a 1st generation refugee along with my parents. During our time in the USSR, my father was fired from his job because we applied to leave the country due to antisemitism, and had to drive an illegal cab to make ends meet. As a result, we were a very food-insecure household for several years. When we arrived here, we literally had 2 suitcases and nothing else.

I appreciate the California Department of Education for working so hard to improve the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. However, the most recent draft of the Ethnic studies curriculum ignores the 500,000 Californians of Middle Eastern heritage who are not ethnically Arab (Kurds, Assyrians, Iranians, Copts, and Jews - esp. Mizrahi and Sephardi Jews).

Over one million Jews were ethnically cleansed or fled antisemitic persecution under apartheid Arab and Muslim countries between 1948-1970 (after 2500 years of living as dhimmi, official second class citizens). Most came to Israel, but many also came to California.

I am troubled to see their stories and the diversity and oppression of Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Easterner communities like Kurds omitted from this curriculum.

### **My Asks:**

As a Jewish person who has experienced violent Jew hatred first hand, I believe our students deserve to learn about both Islamophobia and Antisemitism in an ethnic studies framework.

When the primary reference of Jews in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum is in the context of our communities being the beneficiaries of white privilege – my Middle Eastern Jewish community, which is comprised of multiple immigrants and people of color, is completely erased.

I fear this unit will contribute to the dangerous antisemitic trope that “[Jews Have Too Much Power](#).” Furthermore, this reference ignores the experiences of European Jews

who continue to be personally impacted by violent white-supremacy, terrorism, and acts of antisemitism.

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2. The ESMC should make clear that under the “broadly defined umbrella of Asian
3. Studies” includes Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) groups (Assyrians, Kurds, Iranians, Copts) which represent ~60% of CA’s MENA population.
- 4.
- 2.
3. I would also like to see the next draft of the curriculum include the lesson
4. plan, “Antisemitism and Middle Eastern-American Jews” produced by the organization, JIMENA: Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, as it will provide students with high-quality instruction on contemporary issues of antisemitism, bigotry, and
5. the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience.
- 6.
- 3.
4. All references to Middle Eastern people in the curriculum should include, specifically
5. name, and teach on the diverse groups of Mizrahi Jews, Coptic Christians, Kurds, Iranians, Assyrians, and other minority groups from the region who together represent 60% of California’s Middle Eastern population and have asked for inclusion. In order for
6. the curriculum to avoid an essentialist understanding of Arabs and the Middle East, and in order to be well balanced, each group should be equally and equitably represented in the Ethnic Studies Curriculum.
- 7.

The California Department of Education’s Chapter 3 agrees: appropriate topics in the Asian section of Ethnic Studies courses are “the unique experiences of Arabs and other Middle Easterners.”

In keeping with AB 2016’s objective of “preparing pupils to be global citizens with an appreciation for the contributions of multiple cultures,” my community, and the more

than 60% of other Middle Eastern groups in California deserve equal representation and inclusion in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

### **Antisemitism Continues to be a Massive Problem in CA and the US as a Whole**

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- 2018 California Hate Crime Statistics noted that Anti-Jewish events increased by over twenty percent while Anti-Muslim bias events decreased by more than forty percent YoY.
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- Jews are, per capita, the number 1 victims of hate crimes in the US (annual FBI statistics for last 7 years in a row).
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- Jews are also the number 1, 2, or 3 ethnic group targeted in major cities like LA, Chicago and New York by \*gross\* incidents (not even per capita).
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At a time when there is great need to provide our students with high-quality educational content related to bigotry, it is essential to incorporate adequate instructional material on antisemitism – not just simplistic references to it.

sincerely,

George Revutsky