

From: Galeit

Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 10:58 AM

To: Ethnic Studies; [email redacted]

Cc: [email redacted]

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

To the caring individuals who are managing the new Ethnic Studies Curriculum,

My name is Gal Desiderio and I would like to thank the California Department of Education for working so hard to improve the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

I am the descendant of the one million Jews who were ethnically cleansed and had to flee antisemitic persecution in the Middle East and North Africa. I am troubled to see their stories and the diversity and oppression of Mizrahi Jews and of other Middle Easterner communities omitted from this curriculum. I'm an Iraqi woman. My family are Arabic Jews who escaped persecution and near death in Iraq.

I am a Middle Eastern Jewish resident of Los Angeles County and identify as one of the [500,000 Californians of Middle Eastern heritage who was ignored](#) in the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum. My family comes from a region that is racially, ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse yet the revised Ethnic Studies curriculum fails to reflect Middle Eastern and Jewish demographics both here and abroad.

As a Middle Eastern American and as a Jewish person, I continue to face bigotry and discrimination in this country.

As a Mizrahi Iraqi Jew, I am both proudly Jewish and proudly Middle Eastern. My ancestors lived continuously in the Middle East for over 2,500 until they fled oppressive and systemic antisemitic persecution. 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.

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. As a Jewish person who has experienced/witnessed religiously motivated hate, 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, genocide, and acts of antisemitism.

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.**

I ask that this curriculum continue to be created responsibly:

- All references to Middle Eastern people in the curriculum should include, specifically 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 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.
- I would like to see the next draft of the curriculum include the lesson 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 the Middle Eastern-American Jewish experience.
- The ESMC should make clear that **under the "broadly defined umbrella of Asian Studies" are Mizrahi Jews and other Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) groups which represent ~60% of CA's MENA population.** 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."

Thank you for being generous with your time and for listening to all concerned voices!

Peace and love,

Gal Desiderio