

**From:** DENA SUE POTESIO

**Sent:** Tuesday, September 29, 2020 1:28 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Please heed the voices of and protect the Jewish minority in America!

Dear Members of the California Department of Education Instructional Quality Commission and State Board of Education:

I urge you to heed the calls of American Jewish groups who are observing anti-Semitic language and anti-Semitic materials - and/or anti-Jewish language and anti-Jewish materials - included in the most recent draft of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

I'm a 2018 and 2019 graduate of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, where I also took classes at the nearby Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

I witnessed firsthand the insidious nature of anti-Semitism from the left, while at the same time observing it flagrantly from the right (when a Jewish professor's office at Columbia University was spray-painted with a swastika).

I spoke up in a class at Union Theological Seminary when my professor included a book for discussion that was anti-Jewish, if not anti-Semitic, but failed to articulate its nature to the class.

I was the lone voice in the classroom because the momentum and fervor within it was anti-Israel.

The experience shook me to my core.

At an event about combatting anti-Semitism in America at the Jewish Theological Seminary around that same time in December 2018, a member of the audience asked the presenters if they were concerned about anti-Semitism coming from the left--from the Academy itself.

The speaker from JTS who is now the seminary's chancellor, Dr. Shuly Rubin Schwartz, commented that she was indeed concerned.

Quoting her:

"Yes, one of the things that is so challenging about the contemporary manifestations of anti-Semitism is that you have them both on the right as well as on the left. And you are describing a kind of anti-Semitism on the left that is, in a way, it's my understanding, simply the latest manifestation of anti-Semitism. Yes, it is now respectable to say, 'I'm not anti-Semitic. I'm anti-Israel.'" But, look, you think about racial theories that were anti-Semitic in the late 19th century, they had the imprimatur of the latest scientific theory. So, the tendency - the impulse - to attach one's bigotry to "science" or to "objective truth," we understand, sadly, that only too well -- that "truth" sadly becomes a relative term.

It is, however, dangerous, pernicious; it has all of the hallmarks of anti-Semitism and I think that it is a willful elision of those terms in order to perpetrate rabid anti-Semitism, in my opinion. That is not to say that there isn't legitimate criticism of what's going on in the State of Israel's political policies, and Jews are hardy critics--some Jews are hardy critics of government actions. But that's very different from what you're describing which is, in my opinion, anti-Semitism pure and simple."

Here's the link to the video where Dr. Schwartz made these remarks. Please see the question and quote above at 1:16:23, and a question by a Jewish student about anti-Semitic harassment on the Columbia campus at 1:11:42.

<http://www.jtsa.edu/anti-semitism-in-america-how-did-we-get-here>

Therefore, please, I beg you, as a matter of understanding history and of having intellectual integrity, heed the voices of this small minority of Americans who are telling you that language and/or materials in the existing curriculum are anti-Jewish and/or anti-Semitic.

They would surely know.

As a recent student myself, as I mentioned above, I've personally experienced the backlash and harm of a misinformed classroom and of a professor who was too quick to use a bigoted and anti-Jewish, if not an outrightly anti-Semitic, author's work as part of the curriculum.

I spoke up - was the sole voice to do so - and was lambasted by the class.

But I would do it again, despite the anguish it caused me.

Please heed the voices of and protect the Jewish minority in America!

Sincerely,

Dena Potestio

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