

**From:** Sara Maher Khalaf

**Sent:** Saturday, July 25, 2020 8:52 AM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Cc:** Superintendent; [emails redacted]

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] INCLUDE ARAB AMERICAN STUDIES IN CA ETHNIC STUDIES CURRICULUM!

My name is Sara Khalaf,

I want to voice out why I think it is crucial and important to ***INCLUDE ARAB AMERICAN STUDIES IN CA ETHNIC STUDIES CURRICULUM!***

I am a Palestinian who was raised in Jordan. I was always disappointed by the curriculum Jordan offered in high schools and colleges. Curriculums that lacked ethnic studies classes specifically targeted towards my own ethnicity to learn more about my ethnic background. Growing up the focus was living in a westernized society only caring to become a doctor, engineer, lawyer to make a living and build a capitalist system, like the one here in the states.

At the end of the day it is hard to reach your goals and ambitions without knowing your ethnic, routes and backgrounds, especially my Arabic ethnic Palestinian background tied to occupation.

I have always aspired to be an engineer, however there's a struggle to focus on your career, when the world is losing focus on ethnic minority classes.

Why is the world trying to erase who we are and where we came from?

Why are systems trying to avoid having classes tailored towards Arabic ethnic studies?

It's that simple, they want us to grow up focusing on our career, being ignorant and living western

After the occupation of Britain, I noticed the western culture adapted by Jordan in more privileged areas. I never got to learn about ethnicity in my classes or history. They always told me it wasn't important and to only focus on "your career", focus on math and science or business.

I got really depressed lately living in the United states realizing how corrupt the system is. How is the system expecting me to succeed in life and in my education, if it is not offering me the education I need to grow and learn more about myself? Why is the system trying to erase my roots? Is it because they want to label us and stereotype us as the general "middle east region" and focus on 9/11. This is all so disappointing and devastating. Don't expect us to serve and work in a country that has zero or no value to our ethnic heritage.

There's more important manners to focus on than making money, eating and living. Success is about helping people and building the community. It is not about serving towards capitalism, and money making. We live in a world where there are daily social injustices, hate crimes and attacks. I personally can't wake up ignoring all of that and going on to my daily routine of working and moving on. How can you sleep at night

knowing there are people who receive hate, attacks and grief. We are talking about the less privileged minorities affected by covid-19. Haven't we learned from covid-19 a valuable lesson? To stop worrying about ourselves and start worrying about important issues happening around the world. If anything covid is a wake up call to come together and help serve those in need of help just to survive, not grow in wealth. Didn't we learn enough from how xenophobes have been targeting Asian Americans as spreading diseases? That itself is racial injustice and deserves to be talked about as well as islamophobia and Palestinian rights.

The funny part is I grew up learning it all on my own, and as minorities, we will not be able to succeed and live normally how white or more privileged groups do, because I personally grew concerned wondering why the system is against it. I love my ethnic background and always get super excited to learn about it, and educate my friends back home. They tell me they wish they can come to the states to enroll in the ethnic classes we have. Ethnic studies brings me overall hope, satisfaction, power and gratitude. It makes me proud of where I am from, who I am and become, and where my ancestors are from. I still have a long way to learn from Arab ethnic study classes and me as a full Arab who grew up in an Arab country, I am still not there yet.

Having said all of that, I demand and insist that the history of Palestine and the struggles of Palestine is included. I demand that the history and successes of Islam to be included. As a Muslim Palestinian, I receive microaggressions on a daily from people around me and that's including my white passing privilege. I don't even know how it compared to my afro Palestinian or hijabi friends. These microaggressions I receive is due to me living in a system that supports the removal of Palestine from the map and occupation. If Palestine and Muslim culture is not discussed in Arab ethnic study classes and emphasized enough, especially in California, one of the states to be ranked the highest with Arab or Asian population, then what do you expect from us? To go back to our normal lives pretending Palestine was never occupied and is not important enough to talk about.

I want to be an engineer and help people, my sister wants to be a doctor and work in the United states and grow here. However erasing both of our ethnic routes and denying their importance in classes to be shared with people, denies us as people. It discourages us from obtaining our degrees, it breaks us mentally and emotionally.

I am disappointed with the education system that shows low interest in helping Arab American studies grow. I am disappointed and demand the revisions to be made with Arab American scholars and Ethnic Studies practitioners. It is definitely not anti-Semitic to defend human rights, to defend my own cousins who still live under occupation in Palestine and receive brutality on a daily basis. My grandparents have lost their homes that forced us to immigrate to Jordan and I decided to come here to make a better career for myself and my family. How am I supposed to grow as a US citizen knowing that the school systems are lacking the emphasize and willingness to focus on Palestinian history and the struggles of Palestinian in the education system. We are living in an Era of islamophobia, where Muslims are being killed in mosques, Muslims are being called names and randomly being attacked by hate groups. Innocent lives are being damaged and were going to pretend that all of this is okay and never happened?

That being said, it is important to include West Asian American experiences in the ESMC.

I really hope you take the time to read what I have written, the same way I have taken the time to write about my concerns that took time and energy.

Thank you,

Best,

Sara Khalaf