

From: DJ B

Sent: Wednesday, September 23, 2020 11:00 PM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] On the Ethnic Studies curriculum

I am Dani Ishai Behan, a Jewish writer whose work can be found on Times of Israel. For the sake of brevity, I'm going to relay my message to JIMENA, about their own proposed lesson plan, over to you as I feel it best encapsulates my concerns and what needs to be done.

" Hi JIMENA,

Thank you for your advocacy.

I've expressed my concerns in the past about Ashkenazim representation which you may be familiar with, that we are Middle Eastern and non-white along with our diaspora relatives. I'd like to share some suggestions for what I think can be meaningful, albeit relatively minor, changes.

My suggestion would be to revise the language so that it does not (inadvertently or otherwise) lump Ashkenazim in with white-Europeans. White-Europeans are not our cousins, nor are we a part of their community. They are our colonial oppressors and captors. Other Middle Easterners, including Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews, are our cousins, and our community. It is essential (for a multitude of reasons) that is fully recognized within any curricula or lesson plan pertaining to us.

But at several points within JIMENA's proposed lesson plan, Ashkenazim are explicitly referred to as being "white" and of "European descent", and contrasted with "indigenous Jews" and with "Middle Eastern-Americans" more broadly. By extension, there does not appear to be any push to have Ashkenazim (or other diaspora Jewish communities) including under the Asian-American section, as is your plan for Mizrahim and Sephardim.

Allowing Ashkenazim to be left stranded under the "European-American" section (assuming there even is one at all) will gravely hurt us.

- * It erases our Middle Eastern roots and our long history within the land of Israel.

- * It erases our entire ethnic identity as Jews and mischaracterizes us as an "indigenous European" population.

- * It ignores our history of colonization, exile, and enslavement - the very circumstances that led to our presence in Europe in the first place - and the centuries of persecution we experienced there as a Middle Eastern people of color surrounded on all sides by hostile white-Europeans who were hellbent on wiping us out.

- * It erases our historical and ongoing experiences of racism under white supremacy. European-Americans, even non-WASP ones, do not share our history or our experiences.

- * It ignores the fact that we (just like other MENA-Americans, including Sephardim and Mizrahim) were originally classified as 'Asian' in this country and were nearly denaturalized for that reason; the only reason we are considered "white" now is because of a successful push to have Middle Easterners/North

Africans broadly included under "white". All ethnic Jews, including Ashkenazim, are still listed as Middle Eastern-Americans, not European-Americans. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Eastern_Americans

* It is also inconsistent with the way other ethnicities are classified. African immigrants from the UK are certainly classed under African, because it's understood that the African presence in Europe is entirely diasporic. Just as ours was, and is.

* It plainly feeds into the antisemitic narrative that Ashkenazim have no roots in the Middle East and that Zionism is therefore a "colonial" project.

* It will leave us with virtually no coverage within the curricula at all, since there doesn't even seem to be a "European-American" section. Instead, the curriculum will remain just as it is now, as far as it pertains to Ashkenazim. We will still be inaccurately listed as "non-WASP Europeans" and still inaccurately represented as a "European people" who were "once" oppressed", but are now "privileged whites".

For these reasons, Ashkenazim belong under Asian-American. Just like other Jews. The lesson plan should be edited to accommodate for this.

My second suggestion is to push for acknowledgement that, although we spent many centuries in other parts of the world, we are not indigenous to Berlin or Tehran or Baghdad. We are collectively indigenous to Israel.

I don't want to bother you with all of this, but these changes are of critical importance. If they are not implemented, Ashkenazim will be, effectively, screwed.

Thank you for your time,

Dani Ishai Behan"