

From: Webber, Sabra

Sent: Friday, November 13, 2020 11:29 AM

To: [emails redacted]; IQC; Larry Luckham; SBE

Cc: [emails redacted] Rabbi Alissa Wise **Subject:** Fw: Place at the table for Arab Americans in the new ESMC

Dear Linda Darling-Hammond, Tony Thurmond, members of the California Department of Education, and members of the Instructional Quality Commission:

I am writing to express my disappointment and feeling of betrayal at the treatment of Arab American studies in the CA ESMC. I have just discovered, thanks to an alert from Jewish Voice for Peace that in the latest revision of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, any mention of Arab Americans, those hailing from the many Arab League member states (TWENTY-TWO!) now are relegated to the appendix. One lesson for immigrants of 22 countries?

As a proud native Californian, I like to think that we could lead in terms of giving all Americans a place at the table—celebrating all heritages both of Native Americans who, I find in California today are sometimes taught to be ashamed of their heritage, and equally, celebrating the achievements of all in our nation of immigrants of diverse races, colors, creeds, and national origins. In the past we didn't do so well.

Having gone all the way through the California public school system over fifty years ago, I do not think I ever read one thing about Arabs or Arab Americans. At Occidental, our general education course at the time (now long changed) was two years of Western Civilization. Not much was said of the Arab world that had been carved up by the West following WWI. It was not until I was at Cal Berkeley after Peace Corps doing my MA that I got "woke" partly by two professors of my undergrad sister's as I got to know the work of their work through papers that she wrote for them.

Now, sixty years plus years later, it is amazing to me to discover how a whole state can still be silenced. As I understand it, more Arab-Americans reside in California than in any other state in the Republic. Where is the progress toward appreciating all fellow Californians? In public schools, this practice of "choose your own prejudice" cannot go unaddressed. In fact, why is it not contrary to the ideals of public education and one of the very reasons we need public schools? How much money has been dedicated toward forcing California planners to bow to pressure and erase the existence of Arab Americans as a group of fascinating, productive and diverse communities that offer much to this country's appeal? No other country, neither Russia nor Israel, should be allowed to manipulate America toward prejudice no matter how much we appreciate their cultures per se. This is what we are fighting against in this nation of immigrants.

Is Ohio doing better? I taught at Ohio State for over 30 years and faced discrimination myself for teaching about the Arab world. However, I have a course that I developed for Ohio State then adapted in 2006 to be a summer institute course for Ohio high school

teachers titled, "Arab American Family Immigration Sagas." The institute was supported by the Ohio Humanities Council and by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State. One of the institute's purposes, aside from offering a rich introduction to the diversity of Arab Americans through short stories, poetry and film featuring Arab Americans, as well as fieldtrips to a Toledo mosque, a Coptic church in Columbus and the Arab-American museum in Detroit was that teachers might use the family immigration sagas concept as a template for teaching the immigration stories of other immigrant groups. We considered with the teachers how the course could be adapted for age-appropriate, and integrated into subject appropriate, curricula.

In my Ohio State course, the main project (I am a cultural anthropologist specializing in folklore) was for each student to locate an Arab American in their community and ask them or someone in their family to tell their immigration story. Some students found Arab Americans whose families arrived two centuries ago, and some found a fellow student whose family had very recently immigrated. At Ohio State the course was classified as a second writing course, but the students also videoed their consultants' stories.

I will attach one version of that Ohio State course and add links to three short pieces (one still to appear next month) that I wrote regarding the family immigration saga of a former colleague and friend, a first-generation Syrian American. The blogs were written at the request of the director of the Khayrallah Archives at North Carolina State University. *I note that Syrians remain banned by the Trump administration from immigration to the USA.

One final note. Pinning the antisemitism label on those who object to the behavior of Israel (toward the Palestinians or in any other way) is laughable. There are unfortunately people in this world who are anti-Jewish, anti-Chinese, anti-Turk, or anti-Somali and demonstrate their antagonism to a particular ethnicity in America, including California, by discriminatory immigration laws and "othering" of people of color and newcomers and have over centuries. But it is very dangerous to our country to criminalize, to force silence, on those of us who object to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians or China's treatment of Tibetans and Uyghurs or Turkey's treatment of the Kurds. Will we next be legally anti-American if we speak up on issues, we find reprehensible in our own country? Surely this trend is dangerous for Jewish-Americans as well as non-Jewish Americans who are among American heroes fighting for social justice?

Sincerely,

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