

From: Meagan Brown

Sent: Monday, September 14, 2020 8:39 AM

To: Ethnic Studies

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Comment on ESMC

Dear CDE,

My name is Meagan Brown Varona, a special education coordinator, doctoral candidate, and a biracial Black and culturally Jewish woman. You will be receiving many letters from conservative Jewish parents and school staff. I have provided a copy of the letter below. I have written before expressing my concerns regarding their objections to the ethnic studies curriculum. I work in a conservative Jewish day school where even Jewish people of Persian and Black descent experience racist and exclusionary practices.

You can't imagine how this community feels about Muslims and people from Arab, Black, and Latino backgrounds. Here are a few examples. In a training on school safety, we were shown a powerpoint slide with a large picture of a Muslim man who was an "example" of a terrorist. The trainer reluctantly also covered white supremacies, briefly, as they are the population most associated with school shootings. Our school is located in a small neighborhood and near a number of industrial businesses so there are often people driving and walking by. In another incident, parents requested that our school call the police on a Black man who was walking by, because he was on his cell phone looking down. Luckily, this encounter did not result in injury or death to this Black pedestrian. In addition, one of the leaders of the school had a black face photo in his office for many years, as a joke. Only when a teacher threatened to quit unless it was taken down was it removed. Several people in the administration did not think the picture was a big deal and that black face is not racist. They still believe that this teacher was overreacting.

Please, I implore you, to take the requests from this community with a grain of salt. They stem from a place of fear, yes, but also hatred of an entire community they unilaterally view as terrorists. While much harm has come to the Jewish community, my community, there is much hatred and harm that they have caused due to their fear. The conservative Jewish community is relatively small in comparison to the majority of Jewish people. Over half of the people in Israel are atheist, and are concerned with their government's actions towards Palestinian people and the growing Jewish Ethiopian population who, like Black Americans, have experienced racism

and physical harm. The concerns written on behalf of Jewish people come from this small conservative, white, minority in the Jewish population and not from the majority of the Jewish people.

I hope you will have the courage to create curriculum that demonstrates the human rights atrocities that have been committed against Jewish AND Muslim peoples and celebrate BOTH cultures as worthy.

Thank you,

Meagan Brown Varona

Dear CDE,

I would like to thank you for listening to my community's concerns voiced last August and for considering the concerns we still have after the revisions.

While a lot of progress has been made, I am genuinely worried about the lack of transparency that has surrounded the addition of an Arab-American sample lesson, as this chapter was heavily flawed in the first draft. The BDS movement harms minority groups in American and advocates for a foreign conflict that falls outside the scope of high school ethnic studies courses in the U.S. If any reference at all, whether within the curriculum or citations, were to be made, the ESMC would ultimately be promoting hate and discrimination through the mention of this hateful movement.

Further, I ask that you please reconsider the chapter on Jewish Americans as it erases the discrimination experienced by Jews and replaces it with this notion of racial privilege, further fueling antisemitism.

With the power vested in the CDE I ask that you act on your responsibility to give an apolitical curriculum to our local school boards, and set this standard for the many states that will follow in California's footsteps.

Thank you