

An open letter to the CA Department of Education, State Superintendent Tony Thurmond, State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond, and Secretary of State Shirley Weber:

The field of Ethnic Studies in the United States, like most interdisciplinary fields, comes out of the demand of oppressed communities to have our stories told, heard, and stripped of racist and demeaning frames. The current debate in the State of California is about whose story gets to be told.

The Black experience in this country is a unique and defining one in terms of the foundations of racism and white supremacy. Anti-Blackness was and is the archetype of white supremacy, and other forms of racialization, exclusion and oppression have been built around that binary. It is not a position we chose, but history forced it upon us. That said, Black people have never moved in the world as if our story was the only story that needed to be told as corrective, as catharsis, and as resistance. In fact, it is the parallels and interactions between our respective stories that comprise a grand narrative.

Inclusivity is important and so is context. In certain historical periods it is the silencing and vilification of particular groups that make the telling of their story a moral obligation. One story that is vitally important to tell today is that of the Palestinians, Arab Americans, and Muslims. Ever since the horrific terrorist attack on 9/11/01 by a group of violent and misguided individuals, Muslims and Arabs have suffered acute forms of racial profiling, discrimination and violence. This type of Islamophobia was most recently reflected in Donald Trump's transparently racist "Muslim ban" on immigration that caused so much pain and disruption to lives and families. It is for all these reasons that the inclusion of Arab cultures is so important to undo the damage sowed by public vilification and distortion. Within that, the story of the Palestinian people is one we have seen steadily erased and eroded in popular imagination, much like Palestine itself. Whenever there is an effort to invisibilize a people, those concerned with justice are obliged to speak out, which is the purpose of this letter.

As Black scholars and educators, we know all too well what it is like to have our students, and our own children, look at textbooks where the stories of their parents, grandparents and communities are reduced to racist caricatures, token snapshots, or are absent altogether. This should not happen to any group. We strongly encourage the California Assembly to reject the skewed revised curriculum, which replaces the more accurate and historically-sound version originally presented. It is disturbing that the committee of experts tasked with designing the new curriculum have criticized and withdrawn support for this most recently (and terribly problematic) iteration.

We agree with educators Aimee Riechel and Robert Roth that the absence of any mention of capitalism and its embedded racial structures combined with the minimizing of Arab Studies, render the revised and watered-down version of the curriculum as "clearly misaligned with the purpose and principles of the discipline. There have been disturbing changes made to important language, frameworks and concepts."

Many of us have long and distinguished careers teaching about Black and/or Ethnic Studies. While we are not all Californians, we all have a stake in the outcome of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition's campaign for the integrity of Ethnic Studies curriculum. We echo the calls urging the CA State Board of Education not to move forward with this Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Signed:

- Adom Getachew, *Assistant professor of Political Science, University of Chicago*
- Barbara Ransby, *Distinguished Professor and John D. MacArthur Chair, University of Illinois at Chicago*
- Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Founding director of the Women's Research and Resource Center (since 1981) and Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women's Studies at Spelman College*

- Cathy J. Cohen, *David and Mary Winton Green Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago*
- Cornel West, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Chair at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University*
- Donna Murch, *Assistant Professor of History at Rutgers, State University of New Jersey*
- Johanna Fernandez, *Associate Professor of History, Baruch College, City University of New York*
- Marc Lamont Hill, *Steve Charles Professor of Media, Cities, and Solutions at Temple University*
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