

An Open Letter from Jewish Scholars to Governor Newsom About Ethnic Studies

September 21, 2023

Governor Gavin Newsom
Office of the Governor
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom,

In September 2023 a group purporting to represent the Jewish academic world wrote a Letter, "Sign on: Jewish scholars & educators on ethnic studies," addressed to you. We, the undersigned, are writing a corrective to that inflammatory Letter, which inaccurately frames criticism of a discriminatory version of Ethnic Studies as an attempt to "derail the entire field of ethnic studies."

To be clear, we welcome curricula that allow the diverse student body to see themselves and classmates reflected in their education. That "Sign On" Letter, however, is dangerously misleading: A significant majority of American Jews support a Jewish state. As Jewish scholars ourselves, central to our ethno-religious identity is Zionism, the right to self-determination in our ancient, indigenous homeland. Language reveals history: Jews are from Judea. However, the Letter presents "Israeli colonialism" as a settled fact, thereby declaring that Jewish people colonized their own homeland. Erasing our indigeneity is anti-Zionism, a contemporary expression of the world's oldest hatred.

Further, the Letter suggests that covering Jewish literature and state-mandated Holocaust education is sufficient, but including those topics does not ensure that the program abides by state requirements for Ethnic Studies. Brooks Allen, Executive Director, California Board of Education (August 23, 2023) reveals, "some vendors are offering materials that may not meet the requirements," particularly the guardrail ensuring that curricula "not reflect or promote, directly or indirectly, any bias, bigotry, or discrimination against any person or group of persons on the basis of any category protected by Education Code Section 220."

Finally, this Letter unsurprisingly exemplifies the bias and bigotry in the radicalized Ethnic Studies curriculum. For instance, the accusation that "groups such StandWithUs, Amcha Initiative, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the Anti-Defamation League have sought to derail the entire scholarly field of ethnic studies" upholds a false binary that one either supports the radical version of Ethnic Studies or opposes Ethnic Studies altogether. And the attempt to disparage unaligned viewpoints as "right-wing" (as the letter does on three occasions) does not reveal a good faith effort to include diverse perspectives. Those signatories of the "Sign On" Letter ironically do not seek, and are even antagonistic to, inclusion.

We believe that curricula should represent all communities in California's wonderfully diverse student body, and we support a highly inclusive Ethnic Studies program that respects the humanity of every student.

(Affiliations for identification purposes only.)

Sincerely,

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Scott Aaronson, Schlumberger Chair of Computer Science, University of Texas at Austin
Rachel H. Adler, Ph.D., University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio
Robert Adler, Professor of Pediatrics, Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California
Kenneth Alexander, Professor of Mathematics, University of Southern California
Mindy Aloff, Author, Freelance Editor
Tom Armbruster, Ph.D., Co-Chair Department of Mathematics, Emeritus, San Marino High School
Hadar Aviram, Thomas Miller Professor of Law, UC Law San Francisco
Itzhak Bars, Professor of Physics, University of Southern California
Fred Baumann, Professor of Political Science, Kenyon College
Jason Bedrick, Board Member, Education Freedom Institute
Michael Ben-Gad, Professor of Economics, City University of London
Jahan Dawlaty, Professor, University of Southern California
Eyal Ben-Isaac, M.D. University of Southern California, School of Medicine
Jack Berger, Professor Emeritus of Clinical Anesthesiology, University of Southern California
Yoav Bergner, Associate Professor, NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development
Stephen Berk, Professor of Holocaust and Jewish Studies, Union College
Russell Berman, Walter A. Haas Professor in the Humanities, Stanford University
Stephen Berman, Professor of Neurology, Emeritus, University of Central Florida College of Medicine
Israel B. Bitton, Author/Researcher
Corinne Blackmer, Professor, Southern Connecticut State University
Jane Bloomgarden, Ph.D., Westchester Center for the study of Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy
Diana Blum, MD, Neurologist
Mr. Robert Blumberg, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Allan Borowski, Professor Emeritus, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia
Richard Bronen, Professor, Yale University
Jake Burack, Professor, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University
Jonathan Burack, Curriculum Developer, Creator of the MindSparks Materials
Deirdre Butler, Associate Professor, Religion, Carleton University
Nadav Caine, Former Adjunct, Cal State University Hayward
Ellen Cannon, Professor of Political Science and Jewish Studies, Northeastern Illinois University
Jeffrey Carmel, M.D., Professor Emeritus, Stanford University School of Medicine
Julius Chapiro, Associate Professor, Yale University School of Medicine
Edith Chernoff, M.D. University of Chicago
Barry Chiswick, Professor of Economics and International Affairs, George Washington University
Jack Citrin, Professor of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley
Marc Cogen, Professor of Law, Free University of Brussels
Zvi Cohen, Ph.D., Educator, Independent Scholar
Jerry Coyne, Professor Emeritus, University of Chicago
Seth Cropsey, former Defense Department senior official
Dr. Mark Davidson, Law and Society Program, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada
Dr. Avram Davis, University of California, Santa Cruz
Earon Davis, Retired Adjunct Professor, Purdue University Global
Miriam L Diamond, Professor, University of Toronto
Shawna Dolansky, Associate Professor, Carleton University
Joanne Donsky, Associate Clinical Professor, Retired, Dept. of Family and Community Medicine, University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine
Alex Drukarev, PhD, Independent Scholar
Stanley Dubinsky, Professor of Linguistics, University of South Carolina
Arthur Edelman, Associate Professor, State University of New York at Buffalo
Carol Edelman, Emerita Professor and former Associate Dean of Behavioral and Social Sciences, California State University, Chico

Samuel Edelman, Emeritus Professor, California State University, Chico; former Dean, American Jewish University in Los Angeles; Academic Fellow, Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies University of Miami; and Florida Democratic Party Jewish Caucus Vice President for Issues

Susan Edelman, Head of Strategy, Edelman Family Foundation

Mark Eisenberg, Professor of Medicine, McGill University

Gabriel Elkaim, Professor, Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of California, Santa Cruz

Dr. Miriam Elman, courtesy appointment, former tenured Associate Professor, Syracuse University

Jessica Emami, Ph.D., American University

Brian Englander, Robert E. Campbell Professor of Clinical Radiology, Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania

Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, Professor Emerita of Biblical Literature and History, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

Dr. David Erschler, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

Malcolm Feeley, Professor Emeritus, University of California at Berkeley

Jack Feldman, Professor Emeritus, Georgia Institute of Technology

Luis Fleischman, Ph.D., Palm Beach State College

Louis Florence, Associate Professor, Teaching, University of Toronto, Mississauga

Seth Forman, Professor of Political Science, Suffolk County Community College

Rosa Freedman, Professor, Law School, University of Reading (UK)

Lilli Friedland, Ph.D., A.B.P.P., Executive Advisors Inc.

Naomi Friedman, Humanities Instructor, University of North Carolina, Asheville

Gershon Frisch, Assistant Professor of Medicine, McGill University

Cheryl Fulton, Associate Professor, Texas State University

Michael Glogauer, Professor, University of Toronto

Rafael Goldchain, Professor, Sheridan College

Marcy Braverman Goldstein, Ph.D. Director of Academic Affairs, Jewish Institute for Liberal Values

Elaine Goodfriend, Lecturer, Religious and Jewish Studies, Cal State University Northridge

Irving Yitz Greenberg, Retired. City University of New York (CUNY) and Yeshiva University

Dr. Sergio Grinstein, University of Toronto

Robin Gurien, Adjunct Professor, California State University, Fullerton

Ellen Gutiontov, Executive Director, Center for Intellectual Property Law & Information Technology (CIPLIT), Adjunct Professor of Law, DePaul University

Dr. Yael Halevi-Wise, McGill University

Ron Hassner, Chancellor's Professor of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley

Arnold Herskovic, M.D., Professor Emeritus at Rush Medical Center and University

Dr. Bette Hirsch, Emerita Dean of Instruction and French Instructor, Cabrillo College

Robert Hirsch, Executive Director, Light Research

Stuart Hoffman, Adjunct Volunteer Professor, Division of Orthodontics, Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry, University of Southern California

Rabbi Dr. Daniel Horwitz, Congregation Beth Yeshurun

Aimee Israel-Pelletier, Professor of French and Global Studies, University of Texas at Arlington

Naomi Jackson, Professor, Arizona State University

Timothy Jackson, Distinguished Research Professor and Full Professor of Music Theory, University of North Texas

Svetlana Jitomirskaya, Richard & Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Chair, University of California, Berkeley

Alon Kahana, Professor, Oakland University

Gabriel Kahn, Professor of Professional Practice, University of Southern California Annenberg School of Journalism

Dr. Ted Kahn, DesignWorlds for College & Careers

Stuart Kamenetsky, Professor, University of Toronto Mississauga

Sergei Kan, Professor of Anthropology, Dartmouth College

Jonathan Katz, Professor of Physics, Washington University, St. Louis
Nathan Katz, Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies, Florida International University
Steven Katz, Slater Professor of Jewish & Holocaust Studies, Boston University
Charles Kaufman, Senior Lecturer, Texas State University
Eric Kaufmann, Professor, University of Buckingham
Sergiu Klainerman, Professor, Princeton University
David Kleinfeld, Distinguished Professor, University of California, San Diego
Amira Klip, Senior Scientist Emerita and Professor, University of Toronto
Cary Kogan, Ph.D., C.Psych. Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Ottawa
Aryeh Kontorovich, Professor, Ben-Gurion University
Gregory Kosinovsky, Ph.D., Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
Frederick Krantz, Director, Emeritus, Canadian Institute for Jewish Research,
Vitaly Kresin, Professor of Physics, University of Southern California
Anna Krylov, Professor of Chemistry, University of Southern California
Linda Landesman, DrPH, MSW, Independent scholar
Jonathan Leader, Research Associate Professor, University of South Carolina
David Lehman, Editor, *The Best American Poetry*
Laurie Leventhal-Belfer, Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University
Dr. Holli Levitsky, Loyola Marymount University
Morris Levy, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations, University of Southern California
Victor Lieberman, Distinguished University Professor of History, University of Michigan
Robert Lindzen, Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Mark Lipman, Associate Professor, McGill University
Adam Lovinger, Georgetown University
Richard Lubman, M.D., Associate Professor of Medicine, University of Southern California
Vladimir Mandelshtam, Professor of Chemistry, University of California, Irvine
Joseph Manson, Professor Emeritus, University of California, Los Angeles
Jonathan Marks, Professor, Ursinus College
Dr. Dyanne Martin, Wheaton College
Ken Michaels, LCSW, University of Michigan
Evan Morris, Professor, Yale University
Rabbi Dr. Meir Muller, University of South Carolina
David Narrett, Professor, University of Texas at Arlington
Gdalit Neuman, PhD candidate, York University
Manuela Neuman, Professor, University of Toronto
Alan Nussbaum, Professor, Cornell University
Dr. Leslie O'Connell
Janet Oldak, Professor of Biomedical Sciences, University of Southern California
Rabbi Daniel Olgin, Community Educator, Maimonides Society of Ohio
Josef Olmert, Adjunct Professor, University of South Carolina,
Monica Osborne, PhD, Independent Scholar
Daphna Oyserman, Dean's Professor of Psychology, University of Southern California
Judea Pearl, Chancellor Professor, University of California, Los Angeles
Andrew Pessin, Professor of Philosophy and Jewish Studies, Connecticut College
Juliana Geran Pilon, Senior Fellow, Alexander Hamilton Institute for the Study of Western Civilization
Steven Pinker, Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology, Harvard University
Daniel Pipes, President, Middle East Forum
Jeffrey Poelvoorde, Associate Professor Emeritus, Converse University
Annette Poizner, MSW, Ed.D., RSW

Robert Prince, Ph.D. New York University
Daniel Prober, Yale University
Richard Prystowsky, Former Professor and Provost (retired)
Michael Pustilnik, Associate Professor of Physics, Georgia Institute of Technology
Benjamin Raby, Professor of Pediatrics, Harvard Medical School
Steven Resnicoff, Professor, DePaul University College of Law
Alan Rifkin, Lecturer, California State University, Long Beach
Pierre Ritchie, Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa
Ira Robinson, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Concordia University
Rebecca Roiphe, Professor of Law, New York Law School
Thane Rosenbaum, Distinguished University Professor, Touro University
Alvin Rosenfeld, Professor of Jewish Studies, Indiana University
Mark Rosentraub, Professor, University of Michigan
Dr. Richard Ruderman, University of North Texas
Philip Carl Salzman, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology, McGill University
Jonathan Sarna, University Professor and Joseph H. & Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History, Brandeis University
Dr. Hyman Schipper, McGill University
Ivan Schuller, Distinguished Professor, University of California, San Diego
Joshua Schwartz, Professor Emeritus, Bar-Ilan University
Michael Sesnowitz, Professor of Economics Emeritus, Kent State University, Virginia Commonwealth University
Arthur Seltzer, M.D. Yale University
Ira Sheskin, Professor, University of Miami
Hugh Shewell, Professor Emeritus, Carleton University
Dr. Alexander Shilkrut, M.D., Touro College
William Shore, M.D., Professor Emeritus, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of California, San Francisco
Barry Shrage, Professor, Brandeis University
Dr. Brandy Shufutinsky, Director of Education and Community Engagement, Jewish Institute for Liberal Values
Matthew Shugart, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Political Science, University of California, Davis
Brian Silverman, Professor, University of Toronto (and UC Berkeley alumnus)
Jules Silverman, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, North Carolina State University
Barry Simon, IBM Professor of Mathematics and Theoretical Physics, Emeritus, California Institute of Technology
Melanie Soderstrom, Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba
Andria Spindel, Executive Director, Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation
David Steigmann, Professor, University of California, Berkeley
William Stohl, Professor of Medicine, University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine
Joshua Susskind, Adjunct Professor, Chapman University
Izabella Tabarovsky, Independent Scholar
Dr. Jarrod Tanny, UC Berkeley PhD in Russian Jewish History, 2008
Howard Tenenbaum, Professor, University of Toronto
Jeremiah Unterman, Resident Scholar, Hertzl Institute
Elina Veytsman, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of California, Los Angeles
Andrew Viterbi, Presidential Professor of Engineering, University of Southern California
Cheryl Wakslak, Associate Professor, University of Southern California
Dr. Edward Waldrep
Mila Wichter, Founder, Contra Costa Jewish Day School
Dr. Barry Wiener, Independent Scholar
David Weinberg, Ph.D., Independent Scholar

Mark Weinstein, Associate Professor Emeritus, Finance and Business Economics, Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California

Alice Werner, M.D. Eastern Virginia Medical School

Arthur Werschulz, Professor Emeritus, Fordham University

Sam Wineburg, Margaret Jacks Professor of Education, Stanford University

Daniel Wise, James McGill Professor, Department of Math & Statistics, McGill University

Lee Wolk, Ph.D.

Michael B. Zemel, Ph.D., University of Tennessee