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To: IQC

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Support Original Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Draft Proposal

To: IQC Members

How many of you know how, when and where the term and concept of “Asian American” came to be? This seminal event in the mass movement for freedom and equality is sadly little known, distorted and/or, even more insultingly, ignored. Such as when all the mainstream TV stations and newspapers deemed the 50th anniversary of the Asian American Movement in 2018 unworthy of coverage, despite notifications—including the Bay Area media with the notable exceptions of KQED and the Daily Cal. This shameful disrespect of the history and contributions of Asian Americans is perpetuated in our schools.

I was a cofounder of the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA)—the first Asian American organization that originated and popularized the term and concept of Asian American. Until that epic moment in a Berkeley, CA studio apartment in May 1968, Asians in the US were separate nationalities with separate groups, and if ever linked together, it was under a derogatory “Oriental” connotation. Proving how timely and relevant AAPA was, within a year our small grassroots community group of workers, students, and professionals blossomed into a powerhouse for Asian thought and action.

AAPA cofounded the Third World Liberation Front, the Asian Association, and the Asian Coalition. We allied with all Third World groups fighting for national liberation not only in the US but worldwide, including with the Black Panther Party fighting for serve the people programs, community control and against police brutality; organizing immigrants, workers, tenants in Asian communities; launching the national campaign to repeal the notorious McCarran Act that allowed for imprisoning Japanese Americans in concentration camps; supporting unionization efforts such as the farm workers strike and the grape boycott; the development of AAPA chapters or other Asian American groups nationwide, and the TWLF Strike for a Third World College.

AAPA also originated and popularized the term and concept of Asian Studies, as we were the first to propose it. (SF State’s TWLF strike at the time initially called for Pilipino, Japanese, Chinese, et al Studies since the term and concept of “Asian American” didn’t exist until AAPA was founded. They then amended their demands into an Asian American Studies component.) Note, too, that even though we called ourselves Asian American, we originally called our department “Asian Studies” to encompass the global sweep of colonialism, imperialism and revolution behind migration. and to better understand and change the world for the better. However, UC’s white power structure co-opted our “Asian” term and concept to rebrand its previous racist “Department of Oriental Languages” et al to the “Department of East Asian Languages,” and so on. They demoted our Third World College into an Ethnic Studies Department, with “subfields” of an Asian American Studies Division, etc.

But as our AAPA Perspectives noted, “AAPA is only a transition for developing our own social identity, a multiplication of efforts...It must constantly expand and grow, and reach out to other people and groups. In fact, AAPA itself is not the important link but the ideas generated into action from it—that we Asian Americans are no longer going to kowtow to white America in order to gain an ounce of respect; that we must begin to build our own society alongside our black, brown and red brothers as well as those whites willing to effect fundamental social, economic, and political changes.”

As a founder of Asian Studies/Asian American Studies, I can vouch that Arab American Studies/West Asian American Studies are an integral part of Asian American Studies, which has evolved as it should into deeper layers of roots and relevance. Just as America's population is not stagnant, our communities of color have radically transformed as well. West Asian American scholars are producing groundbreaking work in scholarship and community impact and our interconnections. I and other AAPA vets stand with the Palestinians and other Arab Americans as part of Asian American Studies, just as they always stood with us back in 1968 with AAPA's founding when it was extremely controversial and dangerous.

In many ways, Ethnic Studies, based on the true history of Third World people's valiant struggles against oppression abroad and in the US, can be our best weapon in teaching our children to understand and overcome injustice. The white Eurocentric academic system has had hundreds of years to show its alleged superiority in producing a tolerant, equal, peaceful, and just society. It has failed miserably. Ask George Floyd.

No more delays and stalling. As John Lewis noted, "gradual emancipation" only prolongs evil.

- Support the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Original Draft
- Maintain West Asian American Studies as an integral part of Asian American Studies
- Defend Arab American Studies and Palestine as part of Asian American Studies and Ethnic Studies

Power to the People!

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