

**From:** Nitasha Sawhney  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 31, 2020 10:54 PM  
**To:** Ethnic Studies  
**Subject:** Please don't leave my community out...

Dear Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee,

My name is Nitasha Sawhney. I'm a California native, born and raised in Southern California and educated exclusively through California's public schools- from kinder through law school. :) I work as education law lawyer at Garcia, Hernandez, Sawhney LLP where I serve many school districts throughout the state. I'm also a mom of a 4 year old who is starting kindergarten in the fall.

I am beyond excited that we are on the eve of having a model ethnic studies curriculum for our State!! Thank you so much for all of your hard work.

I truly believe that Ethnic Studies is life changing and builds strong communities in a very real way and that is why I am compelled to submit this public comment to urge you to please include a section on Sikhism in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.

Growing up as the proud eldest daughter of Sikh immigrant parents in Orange County was at times an isolating experience. I learned quickly the need to try hide my rich heritage-- and thereby my foreignness-- to be able to try fit in. (It's really hard to hide your heritage when your proud dad comes to your school events in his brightest red turban 😊). When I graduated from Corona Del Mar HS in 1993 it was over 97% white and I was the only Sikh.

I can still remember the day I walked into my first Ethnic Studies class with Professor Ronald Takaki at Cal, my world was rocked. That semester was my best--- learning the history of immigrants and people of color and the role that race has played in our public policies and discourse-- suddenly helped me make sense of our world. I found my voice and for the first time ever I learned about immigration patterns, people and communities that I could relate to. I will never forget the day that I learned about the *Thind vs. the United States*--- what!?! The social construction of race is based on a lawsuit about a Sikh man! I am still in awe that one of the most important cases on race in our history is about a Sikh. I can't tell you how deeply I *needed* to know this history- to learn about myself, my neighbors, my world.

Including Sikhism in the model curriculum is about something much larger than the what it means to me and the young Sikhs who shouldn't have to wait until their junior year in college to have this experience. Sikhs are one of the most visible and vibrant communities in California- we are seen donning our bright turbans throughout the state

and are probably even over represented in areas like medicine, transportation (trucking and cabs), farming and technology. Yet, even 125 years into our California history, we are fighting daily to be recognized and to protect our children from bullying. When young kids and adults don't know anything about you-- that's when it's easy to bully you. As we learn in ethnic studies-- to make you the "other". While I know ethnic studies is not a panacea for racism, bullying and hate crimes by itself, I do believe that by including Sikhism in the model curriculum you will change the course of a community immediately. You will impact bullying and you help us see ourselves and be seen. You will help our community go from being the perpetual foreigner/stranger to opening conversations and learning opportunities that make us the neighbor, friend and community member we have always been.

I implore you to please meaningfully include Sikhism in the model ethnic studies curriculum.

Yours sincerely,

Nitasha