

From: Philip Deslippe
Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2020 10:58 PM
To: Ethnic Studies
Subject: Sikh inclusion in CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

Dear Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee,

I am writing today to request the meaningful inclusion of Sikhism and Sikh Americans in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for entry into the public record.

My name is Philip Deslippe and I have been a resident of California since 2012. I live in Goleta and work at the University of California, Santa Barbara as a teaching associate in the Department of Asian American Studies and a PhD candidate in the Department of Religious Studies.

I have served well over 1,000 students at UC Santa Barbara as a teaching assistant and as a teacher of my own courses. I have published original research on Sikhs in the United States in two academic journals and various popular venues, I have spoken on Sikhs in the United States at numerous academic conferences, and I have worked to preserve and share the history of Sikhs in the United States through my involvement with the South Asian American Digital Archive, an open-access online resource for historical documents.

While I am not a K-12 educator, my role in the UC system with its focus on providing higher education for California residents, has given me a unique understanding on the lack of representation of both the Sikh community and Sikh tradition in California public schools. Nearly all of my students who are not from Sikh backgrounds have arrived in my classroom unaware of who Sikhs are and their history in this country.

Sikhs in the United States are often held up as targets of xenophobia during the turn-of-the-century or Islamophobia after 9-11, but there are numerous historical examples of Sikhs in California that would be educational and inspirational for students in state schools. There is the story of Dalip Singh Saund, the first Asian American member of Congress who won his seat with little resources and facing long odds and discrimination. There is Rishi Singh Grewal, one of the first yoga teachers in the United States who personally lobbied members of the Senate to gain citizenship and advocated for Gandhi and an independent India for decades. There are also the communities of Sikhs in the state that would provide rich, valuable, and insightful lessons for students such as the early Punjabi migrants who married into Mexican families, the farmers in the Central Valley, and the truck drivers going back and forth on the I-5 and 99.

Sikh American history is American history, and when students learn about Sikhs in California, they gain not only an insight into the larger contours of their own history but also an insight into nearly a quarter-million of their fellow Californians.

One of the most rewarding moments in my time at UC Santa Barbara came one afternoon after giving a lecture on the Gurdwara, or Sikh site of worship, in Stockton and its rich history those fostered an early immigrant community and effort to free India from British colonial rule. My student, who was neither Punjabi or Sikh, came up to me and told me that she was from Stockton. "I have seen Sikhs around me my whole life, but I never knew who they were or how important my city was to them." She then continued, "I will never see them the same way again."

It is my hope that the curriculum for Ethnic Studies will include the Sikh American Community and their rich history.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Deslippe

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