

**The California Department of Education received 70 submissions that contained the text below. Other identical comments may have been posted separately.**

**From:** HJ W

**Sent:** Thursday, September 10, 2020 2:10 PM

**To:** Ethnic Studies

**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] please add Korean American history.

Dear California Department of Education,

While it's exciting to see that the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum is moving forward and students will have the opportunity to learn about our diverse community, I'm deeply concerned that Korean American studies has been excluded.

The Korean American community has long helped shape the American landscape through its community activities, its contributions, and more. For example, we can't discuss the 1992 Los Angeles Civil Unrest without including Korean Americans and the ethnic conflicts that arose during that period and how this contributed to the violence and marginalization of Asian Americans. Korean Americans including Dr. Sammy Lee and Col. Young Oak Kim also helped form this country through their actions, valor, and character. Dr. Lee won Olympic gold for America in 1948 and 1952 and was the first Asian American man to do so. Col. Kim was a U.S. Army officer who became the first Asian American to lead a combat battalion on the field during the Korean War. He was also a World War II hero. His humanitarian efforts also molded the landscape of Los Angeles through the founding of several nonprofits and organizations that help the youth, battered women, and minorities.

Korean American history and identity should be taught as part of the curriculum because this community played a major role in California and the country. An important ethnic studies lesson includes the Korean American fight for independence and recognition in the United States as not Japanese subjects. In 1913, the Hemet Valley Incident sparked a debate about the place and identity of Korean Americans in the United States. At the time, Korean Americans were viewed as Japanese subjects, but the Hemet Valley Incident changed that designation.

The incident involved about 11-15 Korean American workers who were thrown out of Hemet by white crop workers; anti-Asian and racist sentiments were high. The Japanese consulate tried to intervene on the Koreans' behalf. However, David Lee of the Korean National Association wrote a letter to then Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan and indicated that Korean Americans were not Japanese subjects. The result was Secretary Bryan declaring, in a press release, that Korean Americans were not Japanese subjects and should be treated as such in the United States. This story demonstrates just how impactful and powerful the Korean American community's history and identity is. From an ethnic studies point of view, this story alone is an important case to study as it demonstrates the impact of imperialism/colonialism on diasporic communities and their host countries.

Korean Americans continued their struggle for independence and identity by establishing the Willows Korean Aviation School/Corps in Willows, CA in 1920. The Korean Air Force views the school as its origin. The school trained Korean Americans to be combat pilots and two of the

school's graduates became Korea's first aviation officers. To understand the Korean American community, its history and ethnic identity is to also understand the framework of our country and how this great nation is made up of minority histories.

Susan Ahn Cuddy is another major Korean American figure that demonstrates why Korean American studies should be included in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum. She broke gender and ethnic boundaries and became the first female United States Navy gunnery officer during World War II. She was a lieutenant and helped train pilots to shoot enemies during the war. Her brothers Philip Ahn and Ralph Ahn also joined the U.S. military during World War II. Philip Ahn was a well-known actor who starred in major films and television shows including as the monk in *Kung-Fu*. He later earned a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Ralph Ahn, the youngest of the five Ahn children, also became an actor and is a Korean American community activist. He is the only surviving child of the Ahn children.

Susan was the eldest daughter of Korean independence activist Dosan Ahn Chang Ho and Helen Ahn. In 1902, her parents were the first married Korean couple to emigrate to the United States. Ahn and her family are well known in the Korean and Korean American community for their independence activities. Dosan Ahn Chang Ho lived in California and founded the first organized-Korean American settlement in Riverside sometime in early 1905. The Ahn family house is also still standing and is located on the University of Southern California campus. Dosan Ahn Chang Ho and his family occupy a salient place in Korean American and American history and should not be left out of ethnic studies.

Community leaders and heroines like Violet Catherine Kim who lived and worked in Riverside, CA as well, should be included in the curriculum. She was a teacher and should be recognized, studied, and taught in classes. Kim also surmounted gender stereotypes and racial boundaries during the early 1900s when she worked at March Field Air Base as a general mechanic helper and junior mechanic in 1942/1943. She also became a teacher and befriended the Japanese American Inaba family. The friendship between the Kim and Inaba families demonstrated that the spirit of humanity and friendship surpasses color lines and historic ethnic divides. Kim's story is part of what makes up the fabric of California's/America's ethnic history.

Ellen Thun is also a major Korean American figure who should be taught about in ethnic studies. She worked for the *Times-Mirror Press* in Los Angeles and wrote a column about her memories of the early Korean American community in the *Korea Times* newspaper. Thun's writings helped shed light on the Korean American community's activities and lives during the early 1900s.

Korean Americans including Kyong Won "K.W." Lee - he is the first Asian American to be hired by mainstream American media - should also be taught about. He is considered the godfather of Asian American journalism. Lee spearheaded the investigation into the Chul Soo Lee case while he worked for the *Sacramento Union*. K.W. Lee wrote hundreds of articles on the wrongful conviction of Korean American Chul Soo Lee. The stories sparked the Free Chul Soo Lee Movement. The demonstrations and protests became the first Pan-Asian movement and resulted in Chul Soo Lee's acquittal. Such a historic case should not be ignored.

Angela Oh is another remarkable Korean American who should be taught about. She is an attorney who was appointed to President Bill Clinton's "One America Initiative in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The President's Initiative on Race" advisory board in 1998. The board was tasked with engaging the American people in dialogue on race relations. She also served as a spokesperson for the Korean American community during and after the 1992 Los Angeles Civil Unrest.

Also, California recognizes Korean Americans through two resolutions. Hangul Day was passed on October 19, 2019 and recognizes Korean Americans as “an integral part of mainstream American society and have made important contributions as Californians in the fields of finance, technology, law, medicine, education, sports, media, the arts, the military, and government, as well as in other areas.” California also recognized Korean American Day on January 13, 2020 by passing Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 142 citing that “with diligence, fortitude, and an enduring belief in the American dream, Korean immigrants have helped to turn emergent areas within the State of California into thriving and respectable communities, while raising their children to be productive Korean Americans.”

From the few examples listed above, it's clear that the Korean American community's presence, impact, and history are significant and an important part of ethnic studies education. To not include the Korean American community in the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum would be to ignore a major part of California's and America's heart and soul. Thus, I firmly believe that the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum should include Korean American studies in its Asian American studies section. To leave out Korean Americans is yet again another marginalization and discriminatory action. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Andy Won