

From: Harman Singh
Sent: Tuesday, March 31, 2020 8:58 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 in the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for entry into the public record.

My name is Harman Singh and I am from Fresno, California - home to many diverse communities, including a large and growing Sikh population. I am currently a senior at UCLA majoring in Political Science and African American studies. Having faced the Fresno K-12 public education system as a Sikh-American, I would like to share a few personal experiences and observations that present the consequences of an inadequate educational curriculum.

Sikh youth, especially those who wear religious attire such as the turban, are often "othered" by their peers. I recall as a first grader when students would innocently ask my peers and I, "what is the ball on your head?" However, as we aged, these questions quickly transformed from innocent and naive questions to mean and hurtful comments. Statements such as being called the nieces and nephews of terrorists were common insults, and sadly- we became used to them. I recall coming back to school each summer break to find that more and more of my Sikh peers had cut their hair and removed their turbans. The presence of an inclusive and community-endorsed educational curriculum has the ability to not only prevent bullying, but also to help Sikh youth feel connected to their identities outside of their household.

Not only are Sikh students more likely to be bullied, but we are also expected to step up and take the burden of educating our surrounding communities of our identity. I recall, in the 10th grade, when my AP World History class was reading our textbook aloud and a small paragraph had come up about Sikhism. Initially- I felt ecstatic to finally be recognized and be taught about my faith outside of my household, but that feeling was quickly taken over by disappointment. The only paragraph in my highschool career about Sikhism was in the context of another religion, and the information was written by someone who clearly did not have a good grasp on teachings and history of Sikhism. I recall looking up from my textbook and looking at the other Sikh student in the classroom, both of us shaking our head in disappointment. We did not plan on allowing our peers to be misinformed, and so we addressed the issues of the textbook and provided information to the class that would help them better understand us. While I am glad we took initiative in that moment, I believe that is something that no student should be required to do. The burden of educating our students is on the educational curriculum and the school, and students should not be expected to carry this burden.

While I would like to say that my experiences and observations are unique, I have spoken to my Sikh acquaintances from all over California who have had extremely similar experiences. Thus, there is an inherent flaw in the way in which we have conducted and organized our educational curriculum. As a California-native, I am so proud of my state for inclusivity and diversity it promotes. However, I am extremely disappointed that the Sikh community, which has been an integral part of California's history and economy since the early 1900s, is not represented in a meaningful way in the initial Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft. I know we can do better.

There are approximately 250,000 Sikhs in California. A report by the Sikh Coalition found that turbaned Sikhs are bullied at a rate double the national average. I wish to reiterate that the inclusion of Sikhism, the world's fifth largest religion, in the model curriculum in a meaningful way, is an essential step in overcoming ignorance and in reducing bullying and harassment.

Specifically, I request:

1. A detailed lesson plan about the Sikh American community to be inserted into the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
2. More specific examples throughout the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum that focus on the myriad of *positive* Sikh contributions made over 125 years in California, to balance the current language's focus on the hateful backlash against Sikhs in the context of post-9/11 Islamophobia.

The Sikh Coalition and the Jakara Movement will be in communication with you soon, specifying the details of these requests. I ask that the recommendations made in their forthcoming letter be incorporated into the final Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum on my behalf.

Yours sincerely,
Harman Singh