

From: Dr. Sandra So Hee Chi Kim

Sent: Thursday, September 17, 2020 7:57 PM

To: Ethnic Studies <EthnicStudies@cde.ca.gov>

Subject: [EXTERNAL] Inclusion of Korean American history in Ethnic Studies curriculum

California Department of Education,

I write to you as a race and ethnic studies instructor, a researcher in Asian American studies, the founder of a community racial justice organization, and the parent of two children in a Los Angeles County school system. I was excited to see that the ethnic studies requirements are moving forward; I firmly believe that integrating ethnic studies at all levels of the education system is an important part in addressing systemic racism and paving a pathway toward a more just future for all.

As an Asian American studies scholar and a Korean American, I want to emphasize the importance of including Korean American history into the module on "Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies". There are several reasons to include Korean American studies into the curriculum: the Korean War is particularly significant for understanding American history in that it cemented U.S. power in the Trans-Pacific region, initiating what would become what scholar Chalmers Johnson calls an "empire of military bases" abroad. That war is also important for understanding how Korean Americans came to migrate to the United States, in large part due to postwar conditions of devastation, including families displaced and divided by the postwar peninsular partition. They came in waves, first as war brides and transnational adoptees, and then due to the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965, which reopened immigration to people from Asian countries after decades of increasingly draconian restrictions since the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This history of Asian exclusions and the demographics of migration waves from Korea are important for understanding anti-Asian racism in America. The Immigration Act of 1965 was itself made possible by the Black-led civil rights movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This history is important when studying, for example, the Los Angeles Uprising of 1992 (also known as the "L.A. Riots"), and how the mass media seized upon the narrative that "Koreans are racist against Blacks" as the dominant narrative of the unrest, instead of turning attention to the white-dominant, violent infrastructures that led to two pivotal events that sparked the uprisings: 1) the pattern of anti-Black police brutality captured in Rodney King's beating by LAPD and 2) the pervasive national culture of anti-Blackness that led Korean merchant Soon Ja Du to shoot and kill Latasha Harlins over a bottle of orange juice.

This is just one aspect of Korean American history as it relates to American history and the history of race in the United States. There is so much to explore also through the lens of personal stories of resilience, courage, and impactful contributions among Korean Americans as well. Please, don't forget about us and how important our history is to this country. I hope my children will see themselves reflected in their education in a way that I never experienced as someone born and raised in Los Angeles.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Sandra Kim