

From: Arjun Ahuja
Sent: Wednesday, April 1, 2020 4:38 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 Arjun Singh Ahuja and I was raised in Orange County, California. I attended public school from kindergarten through high school. I am currently in my final semester as a law student at the UC Berkeley School of Law.

As a turbaned Sikh American, I always stood out from the rest of my classmates. The tragic events of 9/11 occurred when I was in 2nd grade, and much confusion ensued in the aftermath about who Sikhs were, where we come from, and what we believe. This continued lack of understanding on a nation-wide scale is largely what contributed to the mass shooting almost 11 years later at a Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin on August 5, 2012.

I firmly believe that understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of people of all faith, gender, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds must begin at a young age. The public school system plays a vital role in shaping children's minds about the diversity that exists in our vibrant communities. Unfortunately, growing up, Sikhism was only mentioned in one sentence in one 9th grade history class that discussed eastern religions. No substantive discussion about the faith ever occurred, leaving me to have to explain what Sikhism is to my peers and classmates when asked. This is despite the fact that Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism all received significant amounts of attention.

I am extremely disappointed that it appears little has changed. The Sikh community, which has been an integral part of California's history and economy since the early 1900s, is still not represented in a meaningful way now in the initial Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum draft.

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,

Arjun Singh Ahuja

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Arjun Singh Ahuja
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