



Statement Submitted by

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for The Hearing of SB 462

Public Schools - Expanded American History - Development of Content Standards and Implementation

Maryland Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

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The APA Justice Task Force¹ submits this statement in strong support of Maryland Senate Bill 462 to develop and implement an expanded American history curriculum in public schools. Formed in the Fall of 2015, APA Justice is a non-partisan platform to build a sustainable ecosystem to address racial profiling issues and to facilitate, inform, and advocate on selected issues related to justice and fairness for the Asian American community.

We firmly believe studying history allows us to learn from the past and understand the present, from which we can strive to build a better future. Other than Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders, we are a nation of immigrants. We came and continue to come from all corners of the world with different cultures and backgrounds. Some came earlier than others, and some came more willing than others. While some may seek to divide us, we must understand that our diversity is our strength, not our weakness. In fact, unique among the world's nations, America's strength comes from our diversity. While other countries are bound by ethnicity, Americans are bound together by a shared set of principles and ideals. In each of our own ways, we have contributed to the creation and the growth of this nation, fresh with purpose and ideals, as well as with fear and sacrifice. In order to empower our young people to be leaders in tomorrow's world, they must understand the history of all Americans.

¹ For more information about APA Justice, see: <https://www.apajustice.org/>. Mailing address: P.O. Box 257 McLean, VA 22101-0257. Email: contact@apajustice.org

Since the arrival of first the Chinese, then the Japanese, and then others from Asia in the nineteenth century, Asian Americans built the Transcontinental Railroad, fought in the Civil War and World War II, advanced the civil rights movement, and made contributions to every segment of the American society including government, the arts, sciences, health care, economics, and politics.² And yet, their achievements and sacrifices are frequently missing in American history.

Unfortunately, America has a long and complex history with race, and this includes racial discrimination and profiling people of Asian ethnicity. For more than a century, Asian Americans have been portrayed and attacked as “perpetual foreigners,” no matter how many generations they have made this nation their home.³ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 expressly restricted Chinese people from entering for more than 60 years. During World War II, about 120,000 persons of Japanese descent, two-thirds of them U.S. citizens, were incarcerated solely based on their ethnicity due to fears about their loyalties.⁴ It is important to note that such draconian measures did not advance American interests; according to the National Park Service, “no person of Japanese ancestry living in the United States was ever convicted of any serious act of espionage or sabotage during the war.”⁵

From the “Red Scare” after World War II to the modern-day U.S. Department of Justice “China Initiative,” Chinese American scientists, scholars, and students pose “whole-of-society”⁶ threats to fellow Americans. In the hysteria of McCarthyism, Dr. Qian Xuesen,⁷ an ethnically Chinese rocket scientist and a founder of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, was collateral damage. He was accused without any evidence of being a Communist, and U.S. government officials acknowledged the mistake.⁸ Then, in the late 1990’s, Dr. Wen Ho Lee, a Chinese American physicist, was wrongfully accused of being a spy. A federal judge later apologized, and

² For more information about the contributions of Chinese Americans, see: “From Foundations to Frontiers: Chinese American Contributions to the Fabric of America,” *The Economist*, <https://contributingacrossamerica.economist.com/>

³ Laura Mariko Cheifetz, “Opinion: Being Asian American Means Living in a Country That Treats You as a Perpetual Foreigner. That Has to Change,” *CNN*, March 20, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/20/opinions/asian-american-racism-violence-wellness/index.html>

⁴ “Japanese American Incarceration,” *National World War II Museum New Orleans*, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/japanese-american-incarceration>

⁵ “A Brief History of Japanese American Relocation During World War II,” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/historyinternment.htm>

⁶ Elizabeth Redden, “The Chinese Student Threat?” *Inside Higher Ed*, February 15, 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/15/fbi-director-testifies-chinese-students-and-intelligence-threats>

⁷ “Qian Xuesen: The man the US deported - who then helped China into space,” *BBC*, October 27, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-54695598>

⁸ Evan Osnos, “The Two Lives of Qian Xuesen,” *The New Yorker*, November 3, 2009, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/evan-osnos/the-two-lives-of-qian-xuesen>

President Bill Clinton found Lee's case "disturbing."⁹ In 2016, the FBI raided Professor Xiaoxing Xi's house and pointed guns at his wife and two young daughters.¹⁰ Within months, the government dropped all charges after they realized the technology they accused him of stealing and sending to partners in China was actually easily accessible on the internet. Today, the "China Initiative" has racially targeted Chinese Americans in overzealous prosecutions which have resulted in numerous dismissals.¹¹ This history is important not only to law enforcement but for young future leaders of America that Maryland educates. Without an understanding of the history and contributions of groups such as Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, our country is bound to make the same mistakes that have roots in racial discrimination.

In the last two years, there has been a dramatic and alarming spike in anti-Asian hate crimes and violence exacerbated by the coronavirus. Each time former President Trump and other U.S. officials referred to the coronavirus as the "Chinese virus," "Kung Flu," and other hateful ways, it correlated with an increase in harassment and hateful speech against Asian Americans online.¹² Inevitably this has led to physical hate crimes attacks against Asian Americans as well. The FBI reported that such anti-Asian hate crimes rose 73% in 2020. This is five-fold higher than the general increase in hate crimes (13%).¹³ Words matter. How people see others matters. Thus far, our society has failed to adequately support marginalized communities like the Asian American community.

This racial profiling and targeting of Asian Americans stems in part from fear and ignorance of people who look "different." A way to address this fear is through education. Educating tomorrow's leaders about the history and contributions of marginalized groups is a belated and necessary first step toward creating long-term change.

While the United States is not a perfect nation, through our representative government we have the capacity to learn and improve from successes and mistakes. Our continuing success starts by educating our young people. We must ensure that like our government and our society,

⁹ Michael Kirkland, "Clinton calls U.S. handling of Lee case 'disturbing,'" *United Press International*, September 14, 2000, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/2000/09/14/Clinton-calls-US-handling-of-Lee-case-disturbing/1325968904000/>

¹⁰ "ACLU Joins Professor's Lawsuit Against FBI For Baseless Arrest And Illegal Spying," *American Civil Liberties Union*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-joins-professors-lawsuit-against-fbi-baseless-arrest-and-illegal-spying>

¹¹ For more information about the Department of Justice's "China Initiative" see: "End the China Initiative," *APA Justice*, <https://www.apajustice.org/end-the-china-initiative.html>

¹² Kevin Shalvey, "A new study has linked the rise in anti-Asian online hate speech with President Donald Trump's COVID-19 rhetoric," *Business Insider*, March 27, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/anti-defamation-league-study-donald-trump-anti-asian-hate-speech-2021-3>

¹³ Sakshi Venkatraman, "Anti-Asian hate crimes rose 73% last year, updated FBI data says," *NBC News*, October 25, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/anti-asian-hate-crimes-rose-73-last-year-updated-fbi-data-says-rcna3741>

our history books are representative. They should represent the rich experiences of all Americans. We hope that as students learn this history, they create a kinder and more understanding classroom. We hope they see just how special it is that their classmates look different and have different backgrounds and are able to put this into historical context.

This is where our better future lies.

We hope that this bill receives bipartisan support. President Ronald Reagan understood the importance of this vital American quality when he said,

“You can go to live in France, but you cannot become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Turkey or Japan, but you cannot become a German, a Turk, or a Japanese. But anyone, from any corner of the Earth, can come to live in America and become an American.” – President Ronald Reagan¹⁴

Let us go forth and teach the history of all Americans and understand the richness of all of our American histories.

¹⁴ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the Presidential Medal of Freedom,” *The White House*, Washington D.C., January 19, 1989, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-presentation-ceremony-presidential-medal-freedom-5>