

Changes to California Public Education Under AB 1821

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The Gold Rush In California

- Between the beginning and end of the Gold Rush, the estimated Indigenous population in California fell from 300,000 to 30,000.
- The Gold Rush brought with it disease, food shortages, starvation, displacement, enslavement, sex trafficking, rape, kidnapping, and massacres.
- In the 1850s, California's government began offering rewards for the scalps of Native peoples.
- Miners often used several thousand tons of mercury during this period, severely polluting water systems relied upon by Native peoples.



Illustration of Gold Rush settlers shooting at Indigenous individuals as they flee. This picture is titled "Protecting the Settlers" and was sketched by John Ross Browne. Browne was a reporter for the California Constitutional Convention.

JR Browne, "Protecting the Settlers" 1864. Public Domain. [Wikipedia Commons](#).

Assembly Bill 1821

- Approved in September, 2024.
- Introduced by representatives Eduardo Garcia, Devon Mathis, and James Ramos (the first California Indigenous person elected to the state legislature).
- Amends Sections 51210, 51220, 51226.3 of the CA Education Code, adding state-mandated local programs.
- State-mandated curriculum for grades 1-12 will now require the inclusion of "the treatment and perspectives of Native Americans during [Spanish colonization and Gold Rush] periods," including the missions.
 - Previously, the curriculum did not require the presence of Indigenous narratives in Spanish Colonization and Gold Rush history.
- Grades 7-12 already required learning about genocide (specifically the Armenian Genocide), slavery, and the Holocaust, but barely mentioned the history of Native peoples in California.

Previous Bill AB 1703

- AB 1703 (2022: California Indian Education Act; California Indian Education Task Forces
 - Also introduced by James Ramos.
 - Encourages schools and tribes to form "California Indian Education Task Forces." All incurred costs are reimbursed by the state.

Benefits of the Bill

- This bill will encourage schools to join California Indian Education Task Forces (AB 1703).
 - Students will learn about the history specific to the tribes in their area with curricula tailored to their region.
- Students will mature with a comprehensive understanding of how Indigenous nations were, and continue to be, impacted by events like the Gold Rush.
- Students will learn to be critical readers of historical narratives.
- Students will be better-equipped to understand contemporary issues regarding land rights.

Issues with the Bill

- There are over 100 federally recognized tribes in California. This bill refers to all Native peoples, which may result in vague equations of different tribes.
- Focuses only on the tragedies of Indigenous history.
- The bill's language around funding and reimbursement is vague, which is troubling given recent legislative cuts due to state debt. It is unclear whether the bill includes funding to change the curriculum accordingly. If funding is not included, the bill will expect educators and local knowledge-keepers to dedicate personal resources to this bill.

Works Cited

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"A map of California tribal areas and languages at the time of European contact" by Concerto, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons