



March 5, 2020

Jesse Arreguin
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2180 Milvia Street
Berkeley, CA 94704

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APIAHIP
2279 Glendale Blvd., #3
Los Angeles, CA 90039
www.apiahip.org

Dear Honorable Arreguin:

On behalf of the board of directors of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation, I am writing this letter in support “Kala Bagai Way” for a new 2-block street in Berkeley.

The mission statement of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Historic Preservation is protect historic places and cultural resources significant to Asian and Pacific Islander Americans through historic preservation and heritage conservation.

With over 20% of Berkeley’s population being Asian American and Pacific Islander with notable historical figures including the first Asian American in Congress Dalip Singh Saund, aviator and scientist Maggie Gee, anti-imperial freedom fighters like Kartar Singh Sarabha, Japanese communities who survived internment, Third World Liberation Front movement elders, Newbery Award winner Dhan Gopal Mukerji, yet there are little to no landmarks, monuments, or markers recognizing the historical and cultural contributions of Asian Americans or Pacific Islanders. Furthermore, there are no listings on the National Register of Historic Places or National Historical Landmarks associated with South Asian Americans.

In naming “Kala Bagai Way,” this recognition would recognize the importance of Kala Bagai, who was born in colonized India, immigrated to the Bay Area, survived anti-immigrant attacks in Berkeley, and then went on to build, in Southern California, one of the earliest South Asian communities in the United States. Nicknamed “Mother India,” she worked tirelessly to build bridges through arts and community until her death in 1983. Her story is an opportunity to share with our children a powerful example of resilience and community in the face of oppression.

Bagai represents critical segments of our community who have been deeply unrepresented in civic naming as an Asian American, an immigrant, a woman of color, and a member of a minority faith. As a survivor of local racism and federal anti-immigrant policies, honoring Bagai is a tribute to her resistance in the face of adversity, and part of our reckoning with a difficult past. Honoring Bagai can help inform our society, provide opportunities for dialogue and engagement, and welcome immigrants.

Kala Bagai’s contributions in Berkeley through the naming of this street is one step forward to recognized our diverse histories in California and as a nation. I strongly support the efforts by Berkeley’s community members for “Kala Bagai Way.”

Sincerely,

Michelle G. Magalong, PhD