

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 10, 2021

Lonnie G. Bunch, III  
Secretary  
Smithsonian Institution  
1000 Jefferson Drive SW  
Washington, DC 20560-0016

Lisa Sasaki  
Director  
Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center  
PO Box 37012, MRC516  
Washington, DC 20013-7012

Dear Secretary Bunch and Director Sasaki,

We write to request the works of the late legendary photojournalist and political activist Corky Lee be exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution.

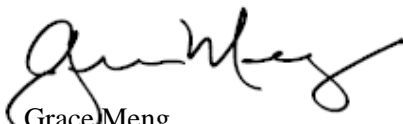
Corky's contributions to the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community are unmeasurable. Over his 50-year career, he documented the life of AAPIs through the photographs he took, many of which sought to combat injustices that impacted AAPIs. From historic moments of social and political upheaval, his photos covered anti-Vietnam War protests, fair housing issues, the gentrification of New York City's Chinatown, anti-Muslim hate post-9/11, the 1975 protests against police brutality, demonstrations following the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, and many more.<sup>1</sup> Corky was like a walking museum, capturing the battles AAPIs fought, including that of anti-Asian hate during COVID-19.

Known as the unofficial Asian American Photographer Laureate, Corky started his career in 1965 while studying American history at Queens College, when he saw an official photo of the Transcontinental Railroad at Promontory Summit, Utah. Though largely completed by Chinese workers, the photo of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad known as the "Golden Spike," showed none of them.<sup>2</sup> From that moment, Corky committed himself to righting the wrong and undoing the part of American history that has excluded AAPIs.

Secretary Bunch, we wholeheartedly agree with you when you said in your testimony to the House Administration Committee on February 5, 2020, "the experiences of any community offer a lens to better understand our collective national identity," and that "its stories are stories for everyone." Indeed, Corky's work documented the good and bad of AAPI life in the United States. He documented the part of American history that is not taught in schools or reflected in school textbooks, but nevertheless, remains a part of our collective national identity.

We urge you to include Corky's work at the Smithsonian, as it would ultimately inspire our nation's diversity. Just as Corky made visible the AAPI community, we urge you to make visible his extraordinary and revolutionary work that chronicled AAPIs and brought to light the untold American stories.

Sincerely,

  
Grace Meng  
Member of Congress

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<sup>1</sup> Jessica Yeung, "Corky Lee, legendary Asian American photographer, dies at 73," CNN, January 28, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/corky-lee-photographer-obit-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> Richard Chang, "Corky Lee, 'unofficial Asian American photographer laureate,' dies from COVID-19," Reuters, January 27, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-people-corky-lee/corky-lee-unofficial-asian-american-photographer-laureate-dies-from-covid-19-idUSKBN29X025>

/s/ Juan Vargas  
Member of Congress

/s/ Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress

/s/ Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

/s/ Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

/s/ Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

/s/ Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

/s/ Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress

/s/ Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez  
Member of Congress

/s/ Judy Chu  
Member of Congress

CC: Representative Doris Matsui, Member of the Smithsonian Institution's Board of Regents