

Taking a Stand:

Korea During the March First Movement

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Individual Website

Process Paper

This year's History Fair theme, Taking a Stand, provided an opportunity to choose a topic that truly interested me. My fascination of Korean history, stemming partly from familial ties, had never been fully satisfied. Therefore, I decided this year to research a little known, yet immeasurable in its impact, portion of Korean history: the nationwide protests against the Japanese, collectively known as the March First Movement of 1919.

If little you know, towards the Internet you go. A wealth of secondary sources was presented to me as I began preliminary research, including a handy summary in the Non-Violent Database found online. Through trips to the library I found such gems as Bruce Cumming's *The Origin of the Korean War*, which proved to be a source I frequented due to its wealth of basic information and the occasional quote. For pictures, the USC Archives contained an unprecedented amount of first person accounts through the lens, considering the Movement's proximity to the advent of the picture camera. Also, The Library of Congress was a big provider of material, even if it took serious effort to dig through their archives. Research was difficult, but persistent determination yielded more-than-expected results.

My technological prowess had always outweighed artistic ability, and realizing this, I chose website over project board and the other categories. Past years making websites helped the process of transforming research into a project to be relatively simple. With general information posted, the challenge was integrating primary and interactive sources into my website. Smoothing out these kinks became a headache, but a worthwhile effort.

My topic, The March First Movement, relates directly to Taking a Stand as the protesters bravely advocated what they thought was right and what they desired, while facing the possibility of violent retaliation by the Japanese. The majority of Koreans believed the Japanese had unjustly taken their country from them when Korea was degraded as a Japanese territory in 1910, and dissent had been roiling around the nation for years. Policies targeted at Koreans and various measures designed to suppress Korean identity culminated into the death of a Korean King that was blamed on Japanese officials. Nationalists began planning an uprising, scheduled for March 1st, 1919. A declaration of independence was signed, asserting freedom from Japan. When read to growing crowds, citizens began to aim protests towards Japanese police and government-related posts. These protests were nonviolent, as the leaders requested it be so- but Japanese response to peaceful protests were decidedly not so. Police began firing into crowds, killing and injuring thousands. Others were arrested, held without trial, and tortured, including women and even children. Brutally quenched, the movement could easily have been labeled as a failure- but it was everything but. It sparked an extensive Independence movement, raised awareness of the Korean state, and would lead into the Korean liberation after WWII. The spirit of those protesters on March 1st served as an inspiration around the world and illustrates a perfect classical case of Taking a Stand in history.

Word Count: 500