# ***Racism Thematic Unit***

**The Asian American Education Project**

# For educators who wish to teach with a thematic approach when using The Asian American Education Project curricular resources**,** the following are suggestions on how to utilize the different lesson plans with the time teachers can allot to the theme.

***Theme – Racism:***

In this thematic unit, students explore issues pertaining to racism through the lens of the Asian American experience in the United States.

***Organizing Questions*:**

* Over the course of U.S. history, in what ways have Asian Americans been targets of hate crimes and discrimination?
* How do discrimination and microaggressions affect minority groups in society?
* What can be done to prevent further discrimination and hate crimes in our society?

***Teacher Procedures*:**

1. Inform students that they will be learning about racism through the lens of the Asian American experience.
2. Outline expectations for discussions on this topic. Emphasize that they must be respectful when acknowledging classmates’ comments, as well as exhibit sensitivity toward cultures and ideas different from their own.
3. Follow the guidelines outlined below, depending on how much time you have available to teach this unit.
4. Please note that instructions for group work are based on a class size of 30. Adjust accordingly for different class sizes.

**PREPARATION PRIOR TO DAY ONE:**

***Summary:***

Inform students they will be learning about two men: Vincent Chin and Joseph Ileto, who were killed because of their race.

***Activity:***

1. Depending on students’ reading levels choose one of the following two options to assign as homework:
* From Lesson 5.1.2 *—Hate Crimes, Microaggressions*, distribute one copy of the handout, *Asian American Hate Crimes: The Lives and Legacies of Vincent Chin and Joseph Ileto*, and one copy of the handout, *Academic Vocabulary Hate Crimes Microaggressions*, to each student.
* For students in advanced grades or with higher-level reading skills, assign the full articles, [Vincent Chin’s Story / Lily Chin: The Courage to Speak Out](https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/UCRS%205_Vincent_Chin_Lily_Chin_story%20r2.pdf), and [A Family Educates to Prevent Hate Crimes: The Case of Joseph Ileto](https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/UCRS%206_Joseph_Ileto_story%20r2.pdf).
1. Direct students to read the handouts as homework, to complete the following tasks on a separate sheet of paper, and to be prepared to discuss them at the beginning of the next class.
* Create a T-chart like the one below:

Quotations Analysis (Why I find the quote interesting/important)

* Choose **five** quotations from each text as well as descriptions as to why you found them interesting/important. Be prepared to share your charts in your next class.

**DAY ONE:**

***Summary:***

Students learn about the Vincent Chin killing, what constitutes a hate crime, and compare and contrast the situation in the United States at the time of Chin’s murder to more recent racially motivated incidents.

Students examine the Students discuss their homework, explore more instances of racism against the Asian American community, and conclude with a class discussion.

***Activity 1:***

1. Inform students that they will spend the class exploring issues of racism against Asian Americans.
2. Begin class with a quickwrite (excerpted from Lesson 5.1.2 *—Hate Crimes, Microaggressions*) to connect to students’ prior knowledge and to introduce some of the themes of the unit. Instruct students to write for 5–7 minutes on the topic below:

*Think of a recent story or current event where someone was unfairly discriminated against, due to their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, or disability. What caused the incident and how did people respond?*

1. When students have finished, group them into partner pairs and direct them to share their quickwrites with each other. Select 3–4 student volunteers to share what they had written with the entire class.

***Activity 2:***

1. Divide the class into five groups of six students each. Instruct students to share the quotes and analyses that they completed as homework.
2. Once group members have shared the above information with each other, direct the students to complete the following tasks as a group:
* Choose one quotation or paraphrase from one of the texts that stands out to the group as a whole.
* Write at least one question your group has about one of the texts or the history of discrimination in the United States.
* Write at least one connection your group sees between the text, other historical events, and current instances of racism.
* Inform the groups that they should be ready to share this information with the entire class.
1. Reconvene the class and ask each group to share their quotations, questions, and connections.
2. Facilitate a class discussion based on each group’s questions.

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| **One Day to Teach Lesson:** |
| If you have only one day to teach about racism, conclude your lesson here. If you have additional days, proceed with the following directions. |

***Homework Prior to Day Two:***

Divide the class into seven new groups of 4–5 students each, assign each group to lessons of a time period.

***Note****: If students do not have access to a computer with Internet, you will need to allot time in class for students to view the videos and read the essays from lessons of their time period.*

***Group 1:***

Students in this group focus on the Igorot people from the Philippines, and how anthropology played a role in the creation of racial hierarchies in the United States.

1. Watch the video for Lesson 1.1 – *1904 World’s Fair – Exhibition of Igorot People*.
2. Read the *Essay* from Lesson 1.1.
3. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and prepare to share during the following class:
* What was the video and essay about? Write a 2–3 sentence summary.
* What role did anthropology play in the creation of racial hierarchies in the United States?
* Is the U.S. hierarchy still organized by race or is there another classification system currently in place? Explain.
* Have you ever been treated differently due to your race or physical appearance? What might be the dangers of treating people differently based on their physical features or perceived race?

***Group 2:***

Students in this group focus on Chinese immigration to the United States in the 1800s, and the significance of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

1. Watch the video for Lesson 1.3 – *Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians*.
2. Read the *Essay* from Lesson 1.3*.*
3. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and prepare to share during the following class:
* What are the video and essay about? Write a 2–3 sentence summary.
* What conditions, foreign and domestic, led to the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act?
* How was the Chinese Exclusion Act an example of xenophobia in the late 19th century?
* What were the consequences of the Chinese Exclusion Act? How did it impact immigration of other Asians subsequently?

***Group 3:***

Students in this group focus on early South Asian immigrants to the United States and issues pertaining to race that they faced.

1. Watch the video for Lesson 1.6 – *Early South Asian Immigration*.
2. Read the *Essay* from Lesson 1.6 *.*
3. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and prepare to share during the following class:
* What was video and essay about? Write a 2–3 sentence summary.
* What does the story of Moksad and Ella tell us about race in the United States?
* Why do you think the Black community was one of the few that would welcome South Asian immigrants?
* In the clip, Sharmila Sen discussed how the United States runs on a system of racial hierarchy. What does Sen mean by the phrase “racial hierarchy”? Is this phrase still relevant today?

***Group 4:***

Students in this group focus on the role racism played in the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

1. Watch the video for Lesson 6.2 – *Japanese American Incarceration During World War II*.
2. Read the *Essay* from Lesson 6.2*.*
3. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and prepare to share during the following class:
* What was the video and essay about? Write a 2–3 sentence summary.
* What are the causes or the U.S. government’s reasons for the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II? Do you agree or disagree with these causes/reasons?
* What role did anti-Japanese prejudice and anti-Japanese propaganda play in this?
* What might be some of the reasons that few people tried to defend Japanese Americans at this time?

***Group 5:***

Students in this group focus on McCarthyism and the racial profiling many Chinese people faced during that time.

1. Watch the video for Lesson 3.2 – *McCarthyism and Profiling*
2. Read the *Essay* from Lesson 3.2*.*
3. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and prepare to share during the following class:
* What was the video and essay about? Write a 2–3 sentence summary.
* According to Senator McCarthy, why were communists a threat to the United States?
* What part of Chinese American lives were affected by McCarthy-era profiling? Why did the U.S. government target the China Daily News?
* What does McCarthyism tell us about how those in power use profiling to target its own American people in the name of national security?

***Group 6:***

Students in this group focus on the role racism played in the 1992 civil unrest in Los Angeles.

1. Watch the video for Lesson 5.2 – *The 1992 L. A. Civil Unrest*.
2. Read the *Essay* from Lesson 5.2*.*
3. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and prepare to share during the following class:
* What was the video and essay? Write a 2–3 sentence summary.
* What are some causes of civil unrest? What causes contributed to the 1992 L.A. Civil Unrest?
* How did mainstream media play a role in increasing tensions between Korean and Black Americans?
* What similarities do recent instances of civil unrest have with the 1992 L.A Civil Unrest?

***Group 7:***

Students in this group focus on the September 11, 2011 attacks and the increased racism many South Asian Americans faced afterward.

1. Watch the video for Lesson 5.6 – *“Victimized Twice”: 9/11, South Asian Americans, & Islamophobia*.
2. Read the *Essay* from Lesson 5.6*.*
3. Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper and prepare to share during the following class:
* What was the video and essay about? Write a 2–3 sentence summary.
* What does Hari Kondabolu mean when he says that South Asian Americans were “victimized twice”?
* In the video, Ansar Mahmood speaks positively about the United States and Americans despite being a victim of racial profiling. What is racial profiling, and do you think what happened to Ansar Mahmood is a case of racial profiling?
* What were ways in which some South Asian Americans countered these perceptions?

**DAY TWO:**

***Summary:***

Students engage in a jigsaw activity in which they become “experts” on the topic they were assigned for homework and learn from their classmates about the topics those students studied.

***Activity 1:***

1. Inform students that they will participate in a jigsaw activity in which they will become “experts” on a certain topic in order to share the information they learned with other members of the class (who will, in turn, share the information that they are experts on). In preparation for this activity, direct the class to assemble in the groups (1–7) they were assigned for homework. Allow students time to discuss the topic they were assigned for homework within their group.
2. Inform students that they will now form different groups to learn about other aspects of the Asian American immigration experience. Divide the class into four groups (A–D), so that at least one student from each group (1–7) is represented.
3. Instruct students to share information from their lesson videos they viewed, its accompanying *Essay*, and the questions that they answered for their homework. Group members should proceed in numerical order (with the representative from Group 1 going first), with each person sharing for 2–3 minutes.
4. Once all students have shared, direct the groups to work together to put together a timeline with the following information. Instruct them to include information from all seven groups, as well as information about Vincent Chin (from the previous day’s lesson):

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| Asian American Group | Issues | Time period |

1. Once they have completed the timeline, direct students to reconvene as a whole group.

***Activity 2:***

1. Facilitate a class discussion, using the questions below as a guide.
* What is your earliest memory of experiencing or learning about race? Has your understanding of race evolved since that moment, and how? How do you know what race is?
* Based in the information presented in your groups, do you believe the U.S. hierarchy is still organized by race or is there another classification system currently in place? Explain.
* What were some of the similarities in experiences of the groups represented in your homework?
* What do we know about multiracial coalitions in U.S. history? Why are these narratives often absent from our history classes?
* How can biases or prejudices affect who is in power and what those in power do? How does this affect society? Is it more or less (or equally) important for people to strive to be unprejudiced when they are in positions of power?
* How do stereotypes about Asian Americans, such as being foreign even if they were born in the United States, fuel xenophobia? What are the impacts on Asian Americans with being seen as “perpetual foreigners” in this country? What are the consequences of xenophobic rhetoric?
* What parallels do you see between recent anti-Asian sentiment (e.g., pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic) and any of the incidents (including attacks) on your timeline?

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| **Two Days to Teach Lesson:** |
| If you only have two days to teach about racism through the Asian American experience, stop here. However, if you have additional time, proceed to the following day’s instructions. |

**DAY THREE:**

***Summary:***

Students examine legal cases through which Asian Americans have sought to combat racism.

***Activity 1:***

1. Inform students that while racism has existed throughout the history of the United States, many Asian Americans have sought to combat it through the legal system.
2. Divide the class into eight groups of 3–4 students and assign each group a case to research.
* *Ansar Mahmood and Sadek Awaed v. United States*
* *Bhagat Singh Thind v. United States*
* *Korematsu v. United States*
* *Takao Ozawa v. United States*
* *Tape v. Hurley*
* *United States v. Ebens*
* *Wong Kim Ark v. United States*
* *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*
1. Inform students that after they research the case, they will need to present the following information to the class.
* When the case took place
* The background of incidents leading up to the case
* The outcome of the case
* Repercussions/consequences pertaining to the outcome of the case
1. Facilitate group presentations of the cases.

***Activity 2:***

1. After all groups have presented, debrief the day’s lesson with a brief class discussion. Sample questions are included below:
* Why did Asian Americans challenge racist laws and policies through the courts?
* What effects does limiting citizenship to certain races have? What was the impact of the *Wong Kim Ark* and *Yick Wo* cases on U.S. citizenship?
* What do the *Thind* and *Ozawa* cases tell you about how race is defined? Why do you think the Supreme Court changed its reasoning about who is white?
* What role do the courts play in U.S. government? What are other ways to resist racist laws when even the top court of the land affirms these laws?
* What is discrimination? How can laws be discriminatory? Can you think of laws today that are discriminatory?

**DAY FOUR:**

***Summary:***

Students choose from an extension activity to deepen their learning and understanding about issues pertaining to racism.

1. Direct students to choose one of the five extension activities from below.
* **Document Based Inquiry (Historical Narrative)**(Excerpted from 1.6 – *Early South Asian Immigration*)

Locate and research sources regarding segregation in New Orleans from 1890 through the 1960s. Through newspaper articles and images, memoirs, and interviews from a variety of sources, explore topics of South Asian Muslim peddlers and seamen, interracial marriage, and beyond. Ideally, find 8–12 primary resources. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

Suggestions for additional sources:

* <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=UBnQDr5gPskC&dat=19250801&printsec=frontpage&hl=en> (Page 8)
* <https://nolahistoryguy.com/2016/02/proteus-monday/>
* **McCarthyism Today** (Excerpted from Lesson 3.2 – *McCarthyism and Profiling*).

Since the end of McCarthyism, how has the U.S. government continued to wrongly accuse Chinese Americans of espionage and being disloyal? Examine contemporary accounts of government profiling of two Chinese American scientists, Wen Ho Lee and Sherry Chen.

*Wen Ho Lee*

In 1999, Wen Ho Lee, a Chinese American scientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory, was charged with stealing U.S. nuclear secrets for China, but was only found guilty of mishandling information and served nine months in solitary confinement. President Bill Clinton later apologized for the mistreatment he received while detained.

*Sherry Chen*

In 2014, Sherry Chen**,** a Chinese American hydrologist for the National Weather Service, was accused of spying. Charges against her were later dropped by the U.S. government.

Research the cases of Wen Ho Lee and Sherry Chen and answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

* What were the details surrounding each case?
* What was the outcome of each case?
* In the matter of Wen Ho Lee, why did President Clinton issue an apology?
* What happened to each of the scientists after?
* How do these cases compare to in the case of Hsue-Shen Tsien in the 1950s?
* Did race, nationality, or politics influence these cases? Why or why not?
* **My Lai Massacre** (Excerpted from Lesson 4.5 – *Asian American Veterans and the Anti-War Movement*)

Conduct research on the My Lai Massacre. On a separate sheet of paper, include information about what happened, why it happened, and how it affected the anti-war movement. Also include answers to the following questions, and be prepared to share your findings with the class:

* Why did American troops decide to kill Vietnamese civilians, even though there was no evidence of Viet Cong troops? Was it racially motivated?
* How did the U.S. government try to cover up the My Lai Massacre, and who eventually was blamed and punished for the incident?
* How did the My Lai Massacre affect the anti-war sentiment in the United States and the morale of troops stationed in Vietnam?
* **The Evolution of the Federal Hate Crime** (Excerpted from Lesson 5.1 – *From Outrage to Organizing: The Impact of the Vincent Chin Case*)

Black Americans have long been victims of hate crimes in the United States. In 1955 Mississippi, 14-year-old Emmett Till was brutally beaten, shot and lynched after he was accused of flirting with a white woman at her family’s grocery store. The two perpetrators, the woman’s family members, were acquitted of any wrongdoing. His murder, like Vincent Chin’s, galvanized the African American community during the growing Civil Rights Movement at the time. Six decades later, the accuser told a historian her claims were false.

The primary federal hate crimes statute was enacted in 1968 during the Civil Rights Movement and still stands today. It defines a hate crime as occurring when someone “by force or threat of force willfully injures, intimidates or interferes with, or attempts to injure, intimidate or interfere with . . . any person because of his race, color, religion or national origin” who is patronizing a location that can be regulated under federal law. (18 U.S. Code Section 245).

Keeping the federal definition of a hate crime in mind, write a short paper that addresses the following questions. Be prepared to share your paper with the class.

* + Does Vincent Chin’s murder appear to fit the federal definition of a hate crime?
	+ Why didn’t many people, including legal scholars, consider Vincent Chin’s murder to be a hate crime in 1982?
	+ Following from the above question, what can we infer about how people perceived Asian Americans at the time? Are there any parallels to how Asian Americans are perceived and treated today? In what ways?
	+ What is the significance of the federal hate crimes statute in the Civil Rights Act of 1968 when it was first established? Why was it important to consider Vincent Chin’s murder a hate crime?
* **Since the L.A. Civil Unrest** (Excerpted from Lesson 5.3 – *Building Community Consciousness and Coalitions*)

Research online two cases involving police brutality/misconduct and Black men. For each case, write about the following, and be prepared to share your findings with the rest of the class:

* Who is the victim? When and what happened?
* What was the community’s reaction?
* Was there any protest? What role can peaceful protest play?
* What was the outcome for the police officers involved?
* Were there any kinds of improvement made by the government to address what happened?
* Examine each of the root causes listed below, and discuss if they have gotten better or worse:
	+ History of police brutality, and discrimination against Black men.
	+ Failure of the criminal justice system. High incarceration rate of Black men in the U.S. prison system.
	+ Economic inequality:

High unemployment rate among Black people and Latinx people.

Denial of bank loans to Black borrowers to start their own businesses.

* + The history of racial segregation, including education and housing discrimination.
* Have these root causes gotten better? If not, what do you think will happen?
* If they have not gotten better, what do you think are some reasons? What should be done? Can you effect this change?
* **What does it mean to be “victimized twice”?** (Excerpted from Lesson 5.6 – *“Victimized Twice”: 9/11, South Asian Americans & Islamophobia*)

Hari Kondabolu is a comedian who initially pursued law as a career. He later became a comedian that addresses socio-political issues. Comedy can be an effective way to bridge audiences while sharing a specific point of view. Research Kondabolu’s sketches and routines, and pick a piece in which you feel he captures a part of the South Asian American experience, particularly as an immigrant.

You can find clips of his routines on Netflix, YouTube, or his website, <http://www.harikondabolu.com/videos/>

Analyze a sketch/routine and the message behind it. Write an op-ed piece on the clip that explains the message he is trying to share, the analogy or joke he uses, and how it is or is not effective in getting his point across.

1. Allow students time to research their chosen topic during class, and complete the assignment as homework, if necessary.

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| **Four Days to Teach Lesson:** |
| If you have only four days to teach about this topic, collect students’ assignments the following day for assessment. If you have five days, follow instructions for Day Five. |

**DAY FIVE:**

***Summary:***

Students share their chosen extension activity with the class and conclude with a class discussion.

***Activity:***

1. Group students together according to which extension activity they chose. If there are students without a group, direct them to a group with fewer members, or allow them to choose a group whose topic they wish to learn more about.
2. Allow students time to share and discuss their research.
3. Direct students to choose a paper (or papers) that they would like to share with the class.
4. Select student volunteers to share their research.

**ADDITIONAL DAYS:**

If you have more than five days to teach about racism through the lens of the Asian American experience, consider spending one class per time period, and incorporating activities from the following lessons in particular:

***Breaking Ground, 1850s – 1920s***

* 1.1, *1904 World’s Fair—Exhibition of Igorot People*
* 1.3, *The Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians*
* 1.6, *Early South Asian Immigration*
* 1.7, *Racism Identity and American Citizenship in the Court*

***A Question of Loyalty, 1920s – 1940s***

* 2.3.1, *WWII, Japanese American Internment, Post 9/11*
* 6.2, *Constitutional Rights—Japanese American Incarceration*

***Good Americans, 1950s – 1960s***

* 3.2, *McCarthyism and Profiling*

***Generation Rising, 1960s – 1970s***

* 4.5, *Asian Americans and the Anti-War Movement*

***Breaking Through, 1980s – Present***

* 5.1, *From Outrage to Organizing: The Impact of the Vincent Chin Case*
* 5.1.1, *Powerful Individuals, Powerful Movements*
* 5.1.2, *Hate Crimes, Microaggressions*
* 5.2, *The 1992 L.A. Civil Unrest*
* 5.3, *Building Community Consciousness and Coalitions*
* 5.6, *“Victimized Twice”: 9/11, South Asian Americans & Islamophobia*
* 5.6.1, *Hate Crimes Analysis, Post-9/11*

If class time allows, consider including additional activities such as the following:

* (Excerpted from Lesson 3.2 – *McCarthyism and Profiling*)

Explore how other communities of color been targeted by the U.S. government through research on more current cases of surveillance of U.S. citizens by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or other state and local agencies. Include cases of surveillance of Muslim communities by the New York Police Department post-September 11, or of Black Lives Matter organizers since 2013.

In your research, answer the following questions and prepare to discuss your findings with the class.

* What are the circumstances surrounding the case you researched?
* How did race, nationality or politics influence the cases?
* How did these unfounded charges impact innocent people?
* What recourse did victims have?
* How can the United States safeguard people’s civil liberties while also protecting national security?
* (Excerpted from Lesson 5.1–*From Outrage to Organizing: The Impact of the Vincent Chin Case*)

Write an opinion article that counters the misinformation and racist language being used in the anti-Asian incidences you have researched during this thematic unit, while providing clear, factual information. Cite credible sources found during your research.

* (Excerpted from 5.1.2 – *Hate Crimes, Microaggressions*)

Read the article, “[A Guide to Responding to Microaggressions](https://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/ELAMICRO%20A_Guide_to_Responding_to_Microaggressions.pdf).”

Brainstorm a list of any microaggressions that you have committed, experienced, witnessed, or that friends and family have reported to you. Describe what form of microaggression occurred (e.g., microassault, microinsult, microinvalidation). Then, describe the effect the microaggression had, and how you or others responded to it. Finally, based on information presented in the article, determine if the response was appropriate and whether or not a different response would have been more appropriate.

Based on your findings, organize a class- or school-wide discussion on the topic. Make sure to arrange for a teacher or administrator to moderate the discussion.

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The thematic unit was created by Waka Takahashi Brown, Curriculum Specialist, Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), and the lesson plans were developed by Asian Americans Advancing Justice.