



# Stops Along the Diaspora: Introduction to the ASSERT Special Issue

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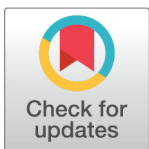
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Sohyun An

I serve as Professor of social studies education at Kennesaw State University. I originally came from South Korea and taught social studies in middle and high schools in Korea. In US, I have been teaching and researching in the field of social studies teacher education. My work is informed by scholarship on critical race theories, social justice education, and global citizenship. As a critical race scholar, social studies teacher educator, and immigrant mother of Asian American children, I study, teach, and parent with a hope for anti-racist, anti-oppressive school and society for all children. My current research project is a parentcrit/critical race parenting research in which I as a parent-researcher seek to learn from my child-participants regarding how children make sense of and respond to race/ism and white supremacy in school and society.

### Ritu Radhakrishnan

I serve as Associate Professor, SUNY Oswego, Oswego, NY. My ultimate goal is to foster activist teachers who seek to be agents of change and to expand K-12 social studies curricula to include representation, agency, and voice. This comes from teaching both 9-12 grade and 5-6th grade social studies/language arts. My own professional development efforts have been focused on expanding the social studies curricula to promote equity and justice. I examine how an intersection of aesthetics, art education, and children's and young adult literature connect to K-12 students' identities, and development of their agency and voice through various learning experiences. This includes after school/extracurricular programming. Outside of my professional pursuits, I enjoy all forms of dance and movement, art galleries and exhibits (especially



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upcoming artists), tennis, and being a Chicago Bulls and Bears fan.

*Brown like the color of my skin. I could not wipe it away. Early in my youth, my parents uprooted me from dusty Bihar only to stick me into an uninviting Forest Hills classroom in Queens, New York. Could I scrape off the color? Asked a classmate. No, it would not rub off. From where did I come? India. Why did I smell like this? I don't know. I did not know I was different...What was worse, being covered in coal-laced grime that killed everything or the desolation of an all-Caucasian school where nothing could survive as I knew it?*

*(Parmar, 2017, p. 167)*

Recent violence towards Asian Americans in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought anti-Asian violence to the forefront of the news cycle. However, for those of us who are part of the Asian diaspora, anti-Asian rhetoric is nothing new. We know that anti-Asian violence was first apparent as East Asian immigrants came to the United States in the 1850s. More than 100 years later, the aggressive violence lessened, but did not disappear. Growing up with immigrant parents, the goal was seamless assimilation- to not draw attention to ourselves. Immigrant parents did not want to make waves; they came to the United States looking for opportunities and success-not only for their families in America, but to continue the legacy of families in their home countries. In order to succeed, some of us believed that our culture should be hidden, and thus it was relegated to safe spaces (homes, churches, temples, mosques, and community centers). Our houses “smelled funny,” our accents (or our parents’ accents) were mocked, and our cultural clothes were ridiculed and, in some cases, regarded as costumes. We were “others.” And back then, we accepted it. After all, people were only joking, right?

This special issue centers the voices of people with Asian heritage among the Diaspora. Through this issue, we (Sohyun An and Ritu Radhakrishnan) honor the impact of Asian Americans in United States history. The articles included provide a portfolio of scholars in the field of Social Studies Education and Teacher Education who offer varying perspectives from Asian American experiences and the implications of these experiences for social studies education in the K-12 curriculum. The articles included in this issue highlight the experiences of K-12 students and Asian American teachers and offer pedagogical approaches. While the Asian diaspora is vast, there are often similar characteristics that tend to reflect Asian and immigrant communities. We acknowledge that it is not enough; we hope readers identify the narratives we included in this issue as seeds of the larger stories. We need more spaces to continue to nurture the initial seeds.

In order for us to identify the crux of the discussion, we began with A Conversation with Dr. Erika Lee. Dr. Lee’s award-winning work broadly introduced our histories to larger society. Lee’s groundbreaking work challenged the existing space, and highlighted the significant contributions of Asian Americans to United States history. The transcript of our conversation with Dr. Lee provides a framework for the remainder of the issue. We



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hope that this conversation offers understanding for the implications of Asian and Asian American histories in our K-12 curricula.

We begin the issue by highlighting student voices with two articles focusing on Hmong communities. The first Hmong refugees resettled in the United States after the Vietnam war, and the articles identify the nuances and changes within the Hmong community. In her article, *Disrupting Deficit Discourses about Hmong Culture: Perspectives of Hmong Americans on Gender and Sexuality*, Bic Ngo examines the “Deficit Discourse,” highlighting the tensions between white middle-class culture and “traditional” Hmong culture. Ngo’s article illustrates the perspectives of female Hmong American college students regarding gendered expectations.

In *Perspectives of Queer Hmong Youth*, J.B. Mayo highlights some of the tensions that exist for Hmong people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ). He highlights the importance of support groups, such as Shades of Yellow (SOY), by examining the life stories of three of its members. Mayo’s piece confronts stereotypical notions of “traditional” Asian culture and addresses notions of how individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ are finding spaces of support in traditional Hmong communities.

This issue also includes instructional approaches to Asian American inclusion in social studies curriculum. Authors consider the erasure of Asian American stories within the curriculum, the experiences of Asian American teachers, and the pedagogical tensions teachers encounter in integrating Asian American histories. In *Representation and the Need for Asian American Graphic Novels in Today’s Classrooms*, Jung Kim builds on her previous research collaborations to affirm the incorporation of Asian American graphic novels into social studies classrooms. Kim argues that the inclusion of such texts will address the erasure and marginalization of Asian Americans in the curriculum and bring their stories, struggles, and contributions into classrooms. Jung provides a framework (GRAPHIC) for practical applications in the classroom and includes specific ideas for teaching.

Noreen Naseem Rodríguez examines the significance of race and racism to the Asian American experience in *Moving Asian American History from the Margins to the Middle in Elementary Social Studies Classrooms*. Rodríguez considers how these factors impact Asian American access to citizenship and education in the past and present. By incorporating the histories of three Asian American elementary teachers, the article identifies how a lack of Asian American representation in the participants’ own educational experiences inspired them to teach Asian American histories in their classrooms. Similarly, Betina Hsieh’s article, *Examining (Re)Constructive History through the Experiences of Asian American Teachers*, summarizes a case study of three Asian American teachers and their experiences in integrating Asian American perspectives into their social studies teaching. Hsieh’s findings suggest that spaces need to be created to support the development of the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate diverse Asian American experiences into social studies curriculum.

Cathlin Goulding’s *The Prison Camp as Pedagogy of Place: A Research-Based Primer for Educators* uses place-based pedagogy to explore historic concentration camps, prisons, and other confinement spaces and considers how these sites educate contemporary audiences. Place-based pedagogy enables Goulding to highlight spaces haunted by the contin-

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ued erasure of Asian Americans and their experiences of being targeted and stripped of their rights. In her conclusion, Goulding suggests practical applications for the classroom.

The articles included in this issue represent only a small fraction of the diaspora. However, the amplification of Asian American voices provides a stark comparison to how these voices have been historically silenced and erased. While the crux of this issue underscores the need for the continued incorporation of more Asian American histories, it is crucial that we acknowledge that there are multiple voices along the diaspora and that these voices have shifted and transformed over generations. This issue represents a beginning, not an end.