Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers (ASSERT)

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

Sohyun An[1] and Ritu Radhakrishnan[2]

[1]Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia, USA
[2]SUNY Oswego, Oswego, New York, USA

## 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



**Pages:** 1-4



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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.

Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers (ASSERT)

# Why and How Should We Teach Asian American History? An Interview with Dr. Erika Lee

Sohyun An[1] and Ritu Radhakrishnan[2]

[1]Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia, USA
[2]SUNY Oswego, Oswego, New York, USA

## 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.

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**Pages:** 5-9



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## INTRODUCTION

Dr. Erika Lee is a Professor of History and Asian American Studies and Director of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota. Currently serving as President-Elect of the Organization of American Historians, she recently testified before Congress in its historic hearings on anti-Asian discrimination and violence. She is the author of award-winning books including At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943 (2003), Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America (2010), and The Making of Asian America: A History (2015). She recently published America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States (2019).

Dr. Lee is an active public scholar. She launched and oversees the National Endowment for the Humanities-funded Immigrant Stories Project; this project works with recent immigrants and refugees to collect, preserve, and share their experiences with a new multilingual digital story-telling website (immigrantstories.umn.edu). She also founded and directs the Immigrants in COVID America project, documenting the impact of the pandemic on immigrants and refugees (https://immigrantcovid.umn.edu/) and founded and co-organized the #ImmigrationSyllabus project (www.immigrationsyllabus.umn.edu), a digital educational resource offering historical perspectives to contemporary immigration debates.

We, Sohyun An and Ritu Radhakrishnan, interviewed Dr. Erika Lee to gain insight regarding researching and teaching about Asian American history. The interview was conducted on February 11, 2021. Here, we summarize the interview with four themes emerged from our conversation.

## RESEARCHING ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY

For me, the study of history is a means to better understand not just how we got here but also what we can do. It is a form of advocacy, antiracism, and activism. For example, my research on Angel Island [the immigration station that processed 1 million immigrants entering the U.S. through San Francisco from 1910 to 1940,] started as part family history and part of my trying to rectify the absence and the invisibility of Asian Americans, like my family members, in the larger narrative of American history.

I had grown up in the Bay area but did not know anything about Angel Island. Driving past it every time we would go into San Francisco Chinatown, I wondered "What is that big island out there?" How many history classes have I taken? Yet I didn't learn anything about Angel Island in school. Also, as a family, we weren't supposed to talk about it because we had been conditioned to understand that experience as (a) not important or (b) shameful.

So, one of the motivations around researching and writing about Angel Island was to change that for future generations. I was just joining with many other historians, commu-

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nity scholars and activists who had been doing this for decades, so I was not doing anything new. But what was new was that I was able to access newly-released government files relating to Angel Island which helped me tell a new story. This was not just about Chinese immigrants who were unjustly detained at the immigration station. When I was going through these records, I would come across not a Chinese name, but someone from the Philippines, someone from India, someone from Mexico, so I knew that there was this much greater story out there. And the motivation was to continue to uplift and amplify these community histories as well.

## RESEARCHING HISTORY OF XENOPHOBIA IN THE UNITED STATES

Xenophobia is very American. It is also very human. My new book, America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States, is about these very dark chapters in American history. Yet I wrote this book with a belief that if we know this history and if we do the work needed to not just understand it but understand how the root causes continue to shape our society today, then we can conquer it.

With this book, I had trouble figuring out how to end. While identifying the continuation of root causes and legacies of xenophobia is important, I also wanted to identify hope. I was witnessing, for example, a really important development that happened during the Trump years. That was in my view the expansion of interfaith, cross-racial, interracial — all sorts of coalitions. When I participated in Stop the Muslim Ban protests, for example, I could see a huge range of people. Similarly, in the protests against family separation, the Muslim ban people were there, as well as many others. And I think that has been incredibly important. I don't think that there'd be all of these changes that we're seeing with the Biden administration without that activism. So, there is hope!

But then again, after Biden was elected, there was the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Biden has proposed many policy changes, but the magnitude of what's in place is much greater than even those of us who were keeping track of all of this ever knew. Even though Trump is not president anymore, Trumpism — which is white supremacist and racist and xenophobic—is alive and well. It is spreading across to non-whites, and it is very, very vibrant amongst the younger generation. Unfortunately, it is not going to "die out."

I remember historian and author Ibram X. Kendi once described how racism and anti-racism are happening on parallel tracks. I think the same thing is true with xenophobia. That is, the nation-of-immigrants' ideals coexist with nativist, xenophobic ideals of how immigrants are a threat and we need to stop them.

## ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Biden explicitly condemned anti-Asian xenophobia and racism. It's quite historic because there has not been any other president who has so explicitly condemned anti-Asian xenophobia at a time when it was ongoing. Of course, President Reagan and Clinton were

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involved in the [Japanese. American] Redress Movement, signing official proclamations that apologized for Japanese American incarceration.[1] But that was after several decades of anti-Asian violence. President George W. Bush had his famous "Islam is Peace" speech where he condemned anti-Muslim hatred.[2] But his government's policies put in place a whole slew of surveillance and arrests. So, it's quite a new and positive change.

Yet even though President Trump has gone, the anti-Asian and, specifically, anti-Chinese racism that he and his conservative allies and his followers promoted in the wake of pandemic, are not going to go away anytime soon. It is because they predated him. So now, we need to see if the administration can and will do anything other than the statement.

## TEACHING AGAINST XENOPHOBIA INCLUDING ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

K-12 teachers are at the front lines of doing so much, too much, that society is asking them to do. So, I feel very torn talking about what teachers "should" do. What I want to underscore though is that we can't understand American history without "other" histories. Absolutely African American history and slavery, American Indian history, also the stories of workers, women, migration, and the LGBTQ+ community. Obviously, we can't teach all of different groups and experiences for every time period. But we can make choices to include BIPOC histories whenever and wherever possible, integrate them into the core subjects rather than treating them as something "extra." If at all possible, we'd better teach history from and rooting it in ethnic studies, instead of the presidents.

## LESSONS WE LEARNED

After our discussion with Dr. Lee, we realized the lack of experiences and perspectives of people with Asian descent in the social studies curriculum is not only a pervasive and continued issue but has present day consequences. Anti-Asian rhetoric did not begin with COVID-19; it just highlighted it. Recent attention to the works of Dr. Suess depicting Asians through negative and offensive stereotypes has finally received a public condemnation. Initiated by the Dr. Suess Enterprise, six books depicting offensive stereotypes to Africans and Asians will no longer be published. Dr. Lee's words suggest that current and future social studies teachers need more background and support regarding Asian ethnic studies in our nation's history. K-16 social studies curriculum needs to be continually re-envisioned. We've witnessed the token monthly acknowledgement of marginalized groups; February is Black History Month; May is Asian Heritage Month. These monthly recognitions are tacit agreements to remove histories of BIPOC from "U.S. History" or "Canadian history." Asian American history is U.S. History. Asian Canadian history is Canadian history. Social Studies is Ethnic Studies; we should acknowledge this as we look to the future of Social Studies Education.

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## NOTES

1. The Redress Movement refers to efforts to obtain the restitution of civil rights, an apology, and/or monetary compensation from the U.S. government during the six decades that followed the World War II mass removal and confinement of Japanese Americans. Early campaigns emphasized the violation of constitutional rights, lost property, and the repeal of anti-Japanese legislation. 1960s activists linked the wartime detention camps to contemporary racist and colonial policies. In the late 1970s three organizations pursued redress in court and in Congress, culminating in the passage of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, providing a national apology and individual payments of $20,000 to surviving detainees.

2. On September 17, 2001, less than a week following the September 11th terrorist attacks, then-President George W. Bush gave a speech at the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C. addressing the treatment of Muslims in the United States. There he stated, "Islam is Peace."

Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers (ASSERT)

# Disrupting Deficit Discourses about Hmong Culture: Perspectives of Hmong Americans on Gender and Sexuality

Bic Ngo

University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Bic Ngo**

I am a Professor of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities where I hold the Rodney S. Wallace Professorship for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. My ultimate goal is to shed light on the complex meanings of culture and identity among immigrant youth and communities, the persistence and perniciousness of subtractive schooling, and insights for advancing social justice in education. I am interested in immigrant identity, culturally relevant pedagogy and anti-oppressive education. Most recently, my scholarly inquiry has explored the ways in which community-based arts programs serving immigrant youth may innovate culturally relevant pedagogy. Outside of my professional pursuits, my world is animated by my partner and two little ones who share with me the joys of dance parties, daily walks, and Taco Tuesdays.



**Pages:** 10-18



## INTRODUCTION

Over forty-five years ago, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the first group of Hmong refugees were resettled to the United States (K. Yang, 2013). Although research has advanced knowledge of the cultural transitions of Hmong children and families, dominant discourses persistently portray Hmong Americans as stuck in time, tied to traditions and generally "held hostage to a refugee representation" (Chiu, 2013, p. xi). Examples of deficit discourses circulated by the popular press emphasize the irreconcilable differences between "traditional" Hmong culture and hegemonic, white, middle-class U.S. culture; where the

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problems faced by young Hmong Americans are attributed to Hmong culture (see, e.g., Ellis, 2002; Louwagie & Browning, 2005a; 2005b).

The construction of Hmong culture as a social problem (Spector & Kitsuse, 2000) are part and parcel of White supremacy's "unnamed political system" (Mills, 1997) that seeks to maintain a system of White racial domination (Allen, 2005). Instead of analyses that tease out the complexities of ethnicity and acculturation, the discourses of White supremacy represent the Hmong family as a site of the oppression of Hmong youth based on gender, nonconforming gender identity and sexuality (Jesilow & Xiong, 2007; Ngo, 2002; Ngo & Leet-Otley, 2011).

## THE RESEARCH

In this article, I focus on studies that bring attention to the perspectives of female Hmong American college students on teenage marriage (Ngo, 2002), Hmong American community leaders on Hmong gender (Ngo & Leet-Otley, 2011) and gay and transgender Hmong American young adults (Ngo, 2012; Ngo & Kwon, 2015). I approached the qualitative case studies from the standpoint that "the opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (Stake, 1995, p. 6). Data collection involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the Hmong American participants. The interviews with first-generation Hmong college students explored their experiences navigating the pursuit of college with family expectations. The interviews with Hmong community leaders focused on their perspectives on (1) the relationships between the Hmong and non-Hmong communities; (2) the relationships between Hmong youth and adults; and (3) the negotiations of culture and identity by Hmong youth and adults. The interviews with LGBT Hmong young adults focused on their experiences as queer Hmong Americans, including their negotiations of sexuality with peers and family.

## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study on the "early" marriage practices of Hmong female college students (Ngo, 2002) offered an alternative explanation for understanding young women's decisions to marry that moved beyond the cultural difference model. It suggested Hmong female students engaged in marriage as a response to unhappy experiences with the social institutions of school and family. On college campuses, the students were faced with isolation and alienation due to hostile campus environments that required them to monitor their dress and behavior and confine themselves to "safe" spaces. They reported marriage enabled them to gain freedom from the oppression of predominantly white institutions. Within their families, young Hmong women were constrained by parents' exacting restrictions on their social behaviors and movements due to concerns about Americanization and female propriety and views about female household duties. The students shared marriage enabled them to gain freedom from parental restrictions. The Hmong American women thus appropriated the practice of teenage marriage available within Hmong tradition for their own purposes rather than an

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obedience to Hmong traditions suggested by dominant discourses.

The study with three Hmong American community leaders (Ngo & Leet-Otley, 2011) explicated their recognition of the dominant discourse of an oppressive, patriarchal Hmong culture. Hmong leader Mai Xiong reiterated dominant culture's explanation of a Hmong culture opposed to gender equity, pointing to forced teenage marriage, expectations for grandchildren, and lack of support for women's education. By contrast, Hmong leaders Kou Vang and Dia Lee challenged the simplistic tendency to blame Hmong culture for the struggles of Hmong girls and women. Kou Vang emphasized the parental support for the education of Hmong daughters, and argued for an understanding of Hmong teenage marriage as an issue about teenage pregnancy rather than an issue about Hmong culture. Dia Lee particularly refuted the prevailing discourse of an all-encompassing oppressive Hmong culture for girls and women that demanded assimilation and the annihilation of Hmong culture. Instead, the Hmong leader pointed to Hmong social relations that supports gender equity and nurtures strong, educated Hmong women.

The study which explored the "going home" (Chou, 2000; Tan, 2011) experiences of Teng, a Hmong transgender youth challenged dominant "coming out" discourses of individualism and family rejection (Ngo & Kwon, 2015). Teng nurtured support for his queer identity through an intentionally casual process where he introduced his mother and family to his love interest, disclosed his female-to-male transgender identity, and shared plans for marriage. By "going home," he avoided threatening family relationships and gradually gained acceptance (Tan, 2011). Teng's experiences navigating queer identity and family was less about an outward journey of leaving the family in pursuit of self-fulfillment, and more about maintaining close relationships with blood family.

Likewise, the study featuring Fong, a gay Hmong American, showed coming out discourses do not adequately account for the importance of the family and family reputation (i.e., "saving face") in the Hmong community (Ngo, 2012). Because Fong's identity was interconnected with the group identity of his family and clan, disclosure of his gay identity had ramifications for members of his immediate family and extended family (P. K. Yang, 2008). Fong disrupted binary discourses of individualism versus collectivism by maintaining family relationships and integrating his responsibilities to his family with his gay identity. This included agreeing to marry a Hmong woman for the sake of the family reputation, while persistently communicating with his wife and family about his gay identity and commitments to his same-sex partner and the LGBT community.

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS

The experiences and perspectives of the Hmong American youth in my research provide us with alternative discourses for understanding their social identities and familial experiences that refute pervasive representations that impugn Hmong culture and families. Discourses about the oppressive patriarchy and traditions of Hmong culture, the assumption that queer Hmong children need to leave the Hmong family, and Hmong parents who do not care about the education of female children are mechanisms of White supremacy that seek to

ASSERT
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negate, debase and destroy Hmong culture. Social studies teachers are uniquely positioned to engage curriculum and pedagogy to counteract dominant discourses that instantiate the values, worldviews, culture and structures of White supremacy.

Teachers may explore with students the ways in which dominant discourses are instrumental in the enactment of anti-Asian policies and practices. Abundant examples of anti-Asian institutional racism in U.S. history stemmed from the concept of the "yellow peril" that first appeared in the late $19^{th}$-century (Kawai, 2005; R. G. Lee, 1999). For instance, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited Chinese labor immigration; the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement Act was an agreement between the U.S. and Japanese governments to limit immigration from Japan to the U.S. where the U.S. protected the rights of Japanese immigrants in the U.S in exchange for Japan's restriction of passports to the U.S. for Japanese laborers; and Executive Order 9066 of 1942 authorized the incarceration or internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. More recently, anti-Asian discourses focus on threats to the U.S. from Asian capitalism (Chen & Yeats, 2014), radicalization of Muslim Americans (El-Haj, 2015), and infection from COVID-19—coined as the "Chinse virus" or "kung flu" by Donald Trump during his presidency amidst the pandemic (Chun, 2020).

Further, there exists a need to explicate the complexities of immigrant acculturation and White supremacy's demand for assimilation. Hmong American adults see Americanization and the divestment of Hmong language and culture as the primary threat to their children, families, and community (E. Lee, 2005; Ngo, 2013, 2017). Their response to assimilationist mandates that may manifest as strict rules for daughters cannot be adequately explained by the cultural difference model's emphasis on the domination of women at the hands of Hmong culture in contrast to the autonomy granted by "American" culture (Vang & Nibbs, 2016). Additionally, the ideology of American individualism requires teachers to interrogate and counter the racist discourse of individualism that underscores merit in achievement (Augoustinos et al., 2005), ignores structural racism (Augoustinos et al., 2005; Diangelo, 2010) and excludes a view of education and success that embraces a collective vision of family and community (Fishman, 1991; Ngo, 2013, 2017; Valenzuela, 1999).

Lastly, there is a need to examine social institutions (e.g., family, school, criminal justice system) to elucidate the complex ways they open up or foreclose possibilities to support the interests and lives of Hmong American, Asian American and other minoritized communities. The shooting death of Fong Lee and murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police in my hometown provide examples for an analysis of a racist criminal justice system. The privileging of Whiteness in school that strip Hmong students of their heritage language and culture (Ngo, 2013, 2017), and undergirds racist practices (E. Lee, 2005; Ngo, 2002) is a starting point to dismantle the notion that school is a meritocratic institution and move towards an understanding of school's critical role in the reproduction of racial inequality, increasingly through the school-to-prison pipeline (Meiners & Winn, 2010).


# Q & A WITH BIC NGO

## Question #1

### *Teacher's Question:*

Can you suggest good resources (websites, nonfiction books, YA literature, or other resources) for teachers to gain a broader understanding of Hmong history, current issues, and diverse experiences between Hmong populations around the world, both at the elementary and secondary levels?

### *Bic Ngo's Response:*

**Children's Books:**

- Map into the World by Kao Kalia Yang
- The Most Beautiful Thing by Kao Kalia Yang
- The Yang Warriors (forthcoming) by Kao Kalia Yang
- Jouanah: A Hmong Cinderella by Jewell Reinhard Coburn and Tzexa Cherta Lee

**Non-Fiction Books:**

- People's History of the Hmong by Paul Hillmer
- Diversity in Diaspora: Hmong Americans in the Twenty-First Century, edited by: Mark Pfeifer, Monica Chiu and Kou Yang
- Up Against Whiteness by Stacey J. Lee
- Longing for Culture (forthcoming) by Bic Ngo
- The Latehomecomer (memoir) by Kao Kalia Yang
- The Song Poet (memoir) by Kao Kalia Yang
- Staring Down the Tiger edited by Pa Der Vang

**Websites:**

- https://www.hmongcc.org/
- https://www.hmonglanguageresourcehub.org/

## Question #2

### *Teacher's Question:*

You argue that teachers need to "interrogate and counter the racist discourse of individualism that underscores merit in achievement". For someone who is just beginning, how would you explain what this means in practical terms, including how their view on teaching might change as a result?

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### *Bic Ngo's Response:*

U.S. institutions are grounded in white supremacy, articulated by Frances Lee Ansley (1988) as "a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings" (p. 1024, endnote). As such, institutions such as school are designed to privilege and instill white cultural values such as individualism and "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" meritocracy.

For teachers to "interrogate and counter the racist discourse of individualism that underscores merit in achievement" mean questioning their views of teaching and learning that favor and support individual accomplishment and competition over communal achievement and cooperative learning. Because white supremacy imbues institutions such as school, we must question the predominant, "common sense" ways in which they operate.

## Question #3

### *Teacher's Question:*

There are likely a lot of social studies teachers who struggle with accepting cultural norms that run counter to White American norms. I am thinking particularly about the status or perceived status of women. How would you suggest a teacher accept or embrace cultural expectations of women that run contrary to their own?

### *Bic Ngo's Response:*

When considering cultural norms, including gender role expectations, I suggest avoiding binary oppositions that position White American norms as the benchmark for good/appropriate behavior and those of Hmong American and other groups as bad/inappropriate. There are abundant examples of White American practices that perpetuate the oppression of women and girls (since patriarchy is a pillar of white supremacy) including workplace gender inequality, prevalence of rape culture, and the influence of sexism during the 2016 election. As educators consider gender and culture, I suggest paying attention to questions such as: How can we talk about Hmong parents valuing education as well as family for their daughters? How can we understand teen marriage without reducing it to a problem of Hmong culture? How can we broaden concepts about gender equity in immigrant communities in ways that move beyond a sole focus on culture?

## Question #4

### *Teacher's Question:*

Can you share state or district level educational efforts to bring more accurate, inclusive, culturally sustaining curriculum?

ASSERT
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### *Bic Ngo's Response:*

The Hmong Language Resource Hub (https://www.hmonglanguageresourcehub.org/) is the result of an effort by The Lub Zeg Zog (National Educators Coalition) Project, a partnership between Hmong language, literacy and culture teachers from K-16 settings across Minnesota, Wisconsin, and California, in cooperation with the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater's College of Education and Professional Studies. The Project involved educators working with Hmong elders, youth, artists, community members and organizations to collect, create, and share culturally sustaining curriculum materials.

## Question #5

### *Teacher's Question:*

The majority of the Hmong population outside of Vietnam and Laos is concentrated in just a few concentrated areas in the world, including Wisconsin and Minnesota in the U.S., Southern Ontario in Canada, France, French Guiana and Argentina. What insights for the classroom can all social studies teachers—even those without Hmong students—draw from the educational experiences of the Hmong youth and families?

### *Bic Ngo's Response:*

The experiences of Hmong youth and families provide at least two significant insights for teaching about immigrant (and other ethnic and racial minority) groups in the U.S. First, teachers should examine dominant discourses about immigration and immigrants. For example, discourses of the U.S. as a "melting pot" promotes a view of assimilation that purports the cultures of ethnic groups merge into one singular pot. This narrative denies the nation's persistent racial hierarchy, privileging of dominant White culture that divests minoritized groups of their languages and cultures; and enduring systems of segregation such as education and housing. Second, the experiences of Hmong youth and families bring attention to what scholars have called the "new racism" where minoritized groups are denigrated without reference to race. Instead, the values, traditions and customs of groups (such as the Hmong) become proxies for "race." Cultural practices (e.g., teenage marriage) are thus racialized in ways that devalue the groups and mark them as different and Other.

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ASSERT
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Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers (ASSERT)

# Perspectives of Queer Hmong Youth

J.B. Mayo, Jr.

University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**J.B. Mayo, Jr.**

I am Associate Professor of Social Studies Education and coordinator of the Teacher-Scholars of Color Program at the University of Minnesota. My teaching career began in 1995 in a small town thirty miles north of Charlottesville, Virginia, where I taught geography and economics to 8th graders before teaching United States History to 7th graders in Charlottesville. My professional goal is to increase the inclusion of LGBTQ+ and queer histories within the larger social studies curriculum. To that end, I have written about Two Spirit indigenous people, the queering of media images in the social studies, and the queer legacy of Mark Bingham following September 11. One of my biggest opportunities for growth during my career has centered on my nuanced understanding of gender identity and expression, including the various role(s) they play in students' lived/learning experiences at school. Though I have thought deeply about sexual orientation and identify as a gay man, I have had to grapple with the privileges I enjoy as a cis-gender person. In my spare time I enjoy exercising – whether on long walks, short jogs, or hours-long bike rides, I consider myself a fitness enthusiast who really enjoys spending as much time as possible outside.



**Pages:** 19-26



## INTRODUCTION

When I arrived in Minnesota in August 2005, I had never heard of the Hmong people, their rich cultural heritage, or their struggle over many years to find a geographic home. Even their significant contributions to the United States armed forces as part of the Secret Army during the Vietnam War was unknown to me. After living in the Twin Cities area for just over a year, I met and befriended a young Hmong man who, like me, had moved here from the South. I had moved here to teach at the local university, and Thomas[1] had

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moved here because he desired to live in a Hmong community where his gay identity would be recognized and validated. Shades of Yellow (SOY) had been recently founded by another gay male member of the Hmong community, to support lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) Hmong people living in this area. Loosely organized, information about SOY was spread mainly by word of mouth and discreet community networking. The challenges/triumphs of SOY members, in combination with the history of Hmong people, inform social studies teachers who wish to present powerful lessons on significant social studies themes like culture, diversity, social justice, and citizenship. This article provides a brief history of the Hmong people and the challenges faced by LGBTQ Hmong youth.

## THE RESEARCH

The Hmong are an ethnic minority group that migrated over time into Laos, Northern Vietnam, and Thailand after living in the Yellow River region of China for centuries. In the mid-$20^{th}$ century, Vang Pao emerged as a prominent Hmong leader and subsequently joined U.S. armed forces in the Secret War against the Viet Minh, a common enemy, from 1963-1975. In the aftermath of the fall of Saigon, Vang Pao and thousands of Hmong people began a steady exodus from Southeast Asia (Yang, 2008). The latest census data (2010) indicate that just over 260,000 Hmong people reside in the United States (Yang, 2008) with the vast majority of them living in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

Like many before him, Thomas found his way to Minnesota, and it is within this larger context that I met and befriended him. He was eager to reach out to groups and individuals who were allies, and I was equally interested in learning more about his story. Thomas invited me to a SOY meeting so that I could meet other members of the group. I was humbled by this gesture of friendship and willingly accepted the invitation. Though I shared Thomas's queer identity, it was a privilege to receive this invitation given my status as an outsider. Not only was I being introduced to a culture heretofore unknown to me, but I was also becoming an ally to SOY, the only LGBTQ support group of its kind for Hmong people. Through a process Miles and Huberman (1994) described as "network-sampling, I met many members of SOY over the next several months. These individuals were friends of Thomas, and because of my growing friendship with him, a level of trust existed from the very beginning. Over time, I became close to two individuals in particular – Kaim and Teeb[2] – and they agreed to be interviewed for this study. Their insights alongside those Thomas provided contributed significantly to what I learned.

## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS:

Given the absence of LGBTQ people in Hmong history and in the Hmong language, combined with the patriarchal cultural norms of many Hmong communities, it would be easy to support a narrative that describes Hmong culture as traditional, and queer Hmong as "victims" who must overcome a plethora of hardships to survive. In their study of queer transnational migrants, Mattheis and Figueroa (2012 ) found that many of their partici-

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pants described their home communities as unsupportive or hostile to LGBTQ identities. Surely there are hardships that individuals must endure, and one cannot negate those very real experiences where people literally live fearing bodily harm or death if it becomes known that they are gay. Kaim and Teeb both indicated that they knew fellow gay Hmong youth who had gone to great lengths to cover or hide their gay identity in order to spare the family shame or dishonor, including going forward with marriage to a woman. Queer Hmong youth have been physically threatened in person and online, and some fear being abandoned by loved ones. But this is not the whole story. This often-told narrative must be carefully re-examined so that a more complete telling of the story moves forward.

Yang (2008) reported that despite the apparent non-existence of gay Hmong before they immigrated to the United States, there are anecdotal stories about Hmong individuals in Laos who were perceived as different, and who were possibly gay or lesbian. The term gay was not used, but she recounts one family's experience with a woman who "behaved like a man" (p. 3). Though this coded language could be interpreted as a difference in gender expression only, Yang perceived this as a possible indication of the individual's sexual orientation. There are also stories about Hmong men and women who never married, indicating another possibility of same-sex attraction. Thomas reported that he always knew he was different. He was a flamboyant child who wore a tiara and his sister's shoes and enjoyed the role of mom when playing house. Likewise, Ngo (2012a) reported that the mother of one of her male participants did not see him as a boy, but rather as a girl in some sense. She never understood the word gay and therefore could only speak in terms of the gender expression her son portrayed. These behaviors, while not the norm in these Hmong families, are not unique. They indicate a continuum of behaviors reported anecdotally from Hmong individuals in the past.

Another part of the story that must be problematized is the coming out narrative. For many Americans, coming out represents an individual's acknowledgment of their queer identity and the desire to stop hiding an important part of what makes that individual whole. Though individuals who come out may endure negative consequences, the coming out process is most-often viewed as a liberating experience. But as Ngo (2012b) explained, "researchers of Asian and Asian American LGBT experiences find that the focus of coming out discourses on individual identity and development fails to take into account the central importance of family social relations and expectations" (p. 124). Further, Aoki, Ngin, Mo, and Ja (1989) reveal that in many Asian and Asian American communities, a person is not simply viewed as an individual, but as a representative of the family and must maintain a public reputation that is positive. Coming out as LGBTQ has serious repercussions not only for the individual, but for the entire family as well. Therefore, it is significant to note that despite the many pressures to remain closeted, some queer Hmong youth are coming out and finding support among family members.

For Thomas, his mother has shown support for him and the entire Hmong LGBTQ community by participating in Pride parades and attending SOY New Year celebrations. Similarly, Kaim reported having support from an older sister, while both he and Teeb suggested, "many family members know about us (gay Hmong youth) participating in Hmong New

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Year even if they don't say anything out loud." These examples of support are particularly significant given the traditional and conservative reputation of the Hmong American community. It indicates that older Hmong adults are capable of shifting their stance on complex issues from harsh critics to supportive allies (Kumashiro, 1999; Ngo, 2012a). Changes in individual attitudes highlight Hmong Americans' beliefs about queer youth among them are not monolithic.

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS:

This study raises questions about the multiple identities our students carry with them each day, at home and at school. Though its focus is on challenges and triumphs experienced by one specific part of the larger LGBTQ and immigrant communities, this study reveals the complexity that accompanies many queer students' lives. Issues of race, gender, and socio-economic and immigrant status collide in various ways and play out differently for each of the individuals involved. Teachers need to constantly remind themselves about the complex lives their students live so that they can provide the resources and support these students need. Social studies teachers in particular can serve as leaders in this effort by creating and implementing curriculum that includes diverse histories and perspectives, so that all students see themselves in the lessons being taught.

Specific to the inclusion of Hmong culture – and the recognition of queer Hmong youth in particular – two areas of possibility stand out. In Teaching History with Film, Marcus et al. (2010) discussed a teacher who used various films in a history and anthropology unit to introduce an ethno-history of the Hmong. The authors concluded that "among the most important [objectives] is humanizing an often marginalized and misunderstood people and doing so by using assignments that ask students to adopt a Hmong perspective" (p. 46). The various films used include Between Two Worlds: The Hmong Shaman in America (1984), The Killing Fields (1984), and The Split Horn: Life of a Hmong Shaman in America (2001). They helped students to learn more about the Hmong and their culture, which helped students develop respect, tolerance, and eventually care about/for Hmong people. With similar curricular goals in mind, more modern films/documentaries could be utilized as well. Some of the documentaries might include Home at Last: Hmong People in the Ozarks (2011), Stories in Thread: A Tapestry of Hmong Identity (2016), and America's Secret War (2017). Examples of feature films that center Hmong culture include: Nyab Siab Zoo (The Good-Hearted Daughter) (2009), Journey to the Fallen Skies (2011), Paj Ntaub - The Rose Cloth (2015), and 1985 (2016).

Mccall (1997, 1999) also turned to a form of the arts to demonstrate and teach about Hmong culture. Through a study of Hmong paj ntaub, artistic creations that express Hmong culture through stories and designs on clothing and everyday items, and the women skilled in these arts, McCall called attention to the scant use of the visual arts in comparison to the emphasis on integrating literature into the social studies curriculum (p. 138). McCall concluded that for young children, the visual images of Hmong everyday life in Laos depicted on story cloth, a type of paj ntaub, provided background knowledge in a more memorable man-

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ner than verbal explanations did alone. The use of textile arts also demonstrates McCall's commitment to including women's voices in the social studies curriculum because [textile arts] "are typically viewed as a craft and less valuable than male-dominated painting and sculpture" (p. 141). Later, McCall revealed how story cloths became a means for recording aspects of Hmong history and culture that was comprehensible to a wider audience. Among other historic and/or cultural scenes, they showed the agricultural lifestyle among the Hmong while living in Laos, and they showed the disruption of Hmong lives caused by the Vietnam War, the turmoil endured during the escape from Laos to Thailand, and images of life in the refugee camps. Given the stories shared by queer Hmong youth like Thomas, Kaim and Teeb, images depicting SOY New Year and Hmong participation in Pride celebrations might be included on individual story cloths, making the intersections between traditional Hmong culture and the modern-day lives of queer Hmong youth more visible.

## NOTES

[1]This name and others used to present the views of the members of Shades of Yellow are all pseudonyms. "Thomas" was used because at the time of our interaction, he referred to himself using a name commonly heard in the United States. Since 2015, however, he has used a more traditional Hmong name.

[2]The other two participants were given Hmong pseudonyms out of respect for their given Hmong names.

## Q & A WITH J.B. MAYO

### Question #1

#### *Teacher's Question:*

I am wondering what the goal of the groups like SOY and other Hmong organizations that support queer community members, as well as the individuals interviewed for the study are? I mean this as more specific outcomes rather than a generalized understanding of goals such as acceptance, support, visibility.

#### *J.B. Mayo's Response:*

When I think about SOY, the term that comes to mind is affinity space. An affinity space is one where people come together based upon a shared identity (race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) where they can discuss topics or issues that are specific to their shared identity and lived experience. Of great importance in affinity spaces is each individual's ability to speak freely and openly about any concerns that may be weighing on their hearts and minds. Similarly, affinity spaces offer folks an opportunity to share joy, hopes, and dreams in ways that just are not possible in mixed crowds. Sharing in this way leads to a deeply shared sense of community, where people can be vulnerable (or brave) in ways that are just not possible in other spaces. When one considers that the word gay doesn't even exist

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in the Hmong language, one can understand the great importance of building community within SOY. For many of the young people I met in SOY, this was a group that became family, which I have stressed is such an important social construct within Hmong culture. I will also add that affinity spaces are not necessarily rigid in terms of who is allowed to enter. As an African American who was quite a bit older than most of the SOY participants I met, I was still invited in based upon my queer identity and my previous relationship with Thomas.

For the individuals that agreed to be interviewed for my study, Kaim, Teeb, and Thomas, I strongly believe that each of them valued the opportunity to share parts of their personal journeys as each grappled with being queer and Hmong in their own ways. Telling one's personal story is often a form of validating one's existence – a way of saying to the world, "I am here, and I matter!" – and especially for those of us who walk and live in spaces that may be considered outside of the norm in our given communities. Validation holds a great deal of importance for young people, and perhaps even more for young people who identify as LGBTQ and who are members of marginalized and/or minoritized groups.

## Question #2

### *Teacher's Question:*

You suggest valuable resources teachers can use; how might you suggest teachers could best make use of these resources in their teaching practice?

### *J.B. Mayo's Response:*

Allow me to answer this question by first sharing one of my strong, fundamental beliefs about teachers: They are highly professional individuals with expert knowledge who care deeply for the students and the communities they serve. Further, no outsider – like me – can ever know a teacher's context like they do, therefore, any suggestion here can only be broadly communicated, which then allows individual teachers to engage their expertise and knowledge within their local contexts. With that said, I believe that the updated (and more recent) films and documentaries found in the main text of this article will provide teachers a broad view of Hmong culture. None of them depict queerness explicitly, but overall knowledge about Hmong people and their history is important. Further, I agree with the following broad themes when teaching with film as outlined in William Russell's (2012) article called The Art of Teaching Social Studies with Film. In this article he discusses five classroom-tested methods for teaching with film: (1) film as a visual textbook, (2) film as a depicter of atmosphere, (3) film as analogy, (4) film as historiography, and (5) film as a springboard. The citation for this practice-based article is found in the reference section of this article. Finally, I will reiterate here that the use of textile arts and story cloth depicting modern-day LGBTQ themes like Pride and SOY New Year could serve as powerful, culturally responsive examples of inclusion for queer Hmong youth.

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## Question #3

### *Teacher's Question:*

You mentioned that building empathy with the Hmong people is an important step in this process. What kind of tasks and assignments do you recommend to teachers to effectively assess whether this process is occurring?

### *J.B. Mayo's Response:*

I believe that building empathy is a process that comes with understanding a particular culture (including both historical and modern-day knowledge) and by creating opportunities in the classroom such that students see similarities between themselves and the group/culture about which they are learning. Because the Hmong are (perhaps) still the lesser known community within the larger scope of Asians and Asian Americans living in the United States, a first step is to highlight their presence within these larger communities so that students are better able to distinguish them. The recent national spotlight enjoyed by Olympic gymnast Sunisa (Suni) Lee has certainly helped in this important step. A local community-based organization here in St. Paul, Minnesota, the Hmong American Partnership, states that part of its overall mission is to "promote the rich heritage of our ethnic communities." This quote reminds me that teachers have the power (and responsibility) to promote all the various communities represented in their classrooms. When this becomes regular classroom practice, empathy will grow. Again, please refer back to my fundamental belief about teachers stated in Question #2.

## Question #4

### *Teacher's Question:*

Can you elaborate on how the family and community dimensions are unique, and what implications that has for how teachers might need to support Hmong youth coming out that might differ from how they would typically support LGBTQ youth?

### *J.B. Mayo's Response:*

Families are important to many cultures. For young people who may not find support for their questioning of their sexual orientation/identity, friends and mentors at school can provide a vital space where they can ask questions, seek resources, and (hopefully) feel safe while engaged in this quest for better understanding of self. Having gone through a similar process along my own journey of self-discovery in the 1980s, I can recall the incredibly important role friends and resources at school played in my overall sense of self. That said, the recognition of queer identities within the curriculum and language use that signifies the normalcy of same-sex attraction would have been welcomed. From this perspective, I'm not calling for or suggesting that teachers' support for LGBTQ Hmong youth would necessarily look all that different, but rather I am saying that within Hmong culture, it may be extremely challenging for queer youth to openly express their needs. Therefore, teach-

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ers must be acutely aware of the possibilities for queerness that exist just below the surface, which heightens the importance of queer-inclusive curriculum, language, and everyday school practices so that the young person who needs to see it (and feel it) actually can.

What may be different among some queer Hmong youth, however, is the process by which their self-recognition of queerness is acknowledged or "celebrated." As I mentioned in the body of my article, the coming out process may simultaneously be joyful and shame-inducing, given the strong family connections that exist within Hmong culture. Therefore, the expectation that a queer Hmong youth will openly attend meetings of a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), for example, may be inappropriate. It will be incumbent for teachers to find more discreet, subtle forms of supporting Hmong youth who identity as LGBTQ.

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# Representation and the Need for Asian American Graphic Novels in Today's Classrooms

Jung Kim

Lewis University, Romeoville, Illinois, USA

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jung Kim**

I am Associate Professor of Literacy and Program Director of Literacy, ESL, and Instructional Technology at Lewis University outside of Chicago, IL. Fueled by my interests in issues of equity, race, and literacy—and the intersections of these three areas—my ultimate goal is to help prepare literacy educators that are reflective of/work to act upon issues of equity and justice in their classrooms. A former high school English teacher and literacy coach in Chicago Public Schools, I also currently serve as the president of my local school board. When not bingeing YA literature or Korean dramas, I am also a spouse who avoids cooking (thankfully married to an engineer who does like cooking), an ultrarunner, and mother to two children that have taken to trolling her regularly (the long distance running and trolling children may be related…maybe). A 1.5 generation Korean American, she also happens to share the same name as the leader of North Korea so gets to hear her name regularly mispronounced on national media.

**Pages: 27-34**



## INTRODUCTION

The 2020-2021 year has brought forth the #StopAsianHate movement as people of Asian descent have been taunted, ridiculed, and even assaulted—with over 9000 incidents reported (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021). While some will point to the racially-charged comments of the $45^{th}$ President of the United States as the catalyst, these sentiments and feelings have been just under the surface of our society for a long time. It is a culmination of decades of the erasure of Asian Americans from our history books and classrooms, as well

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as the prolonged stereotyping of Asian Americans as "model minorities" and "perpetual foreigners"; in other words, it has been easy to see Asian Americans as less than human and as open for critique or even assault because we are not "real." Because the impact of American empire and colonialism, the transnational forces that have shaped and continue to shape Asian immigration, and the long history of Asians on this continent—and their many contributions—have been erased, it is easier to see Asian Americans as foreigners, invaders, and unwanted.

## THE RESEARCH

This article brings together two seemingly divergent areas of my work: 1) my forthcoming book with Dr. Betina Hsieh (Kim and Hsieh, in press), on the experiences of Asian American teachers in the classroom and 2) my previous books on teaching with graphic novels (Boerman-Cornell & Kim, 2020; Boerman-Cornell et al., 2017). In this article I argue for the incorporation of Asian American graphic novels into social studies classrooms to address the erasure and marginalization of Asian Americans in the curriculum and bring their stories, struggles, and contributions into classrooms.

My forthcoming book on Asian American teachers is based on a qualitative study that draws upon several dozen interviews with Asian American teachers across the country about their experiences in pK-12 classrooms, both as teachers and students. We draw upon the seven tenets of an AsianCrit framework as defined by Iftikar and Museus (2018)—Asianization; transnational contexts; (re)constructive history; strategic (anti)essentialism; intersectionality; commitment to social justice; and story, theory, and praxis—to analyze and understand how teachers' Asian American identities have shaped and continue to shape their experiences both in and out of the classroom.

## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the strongest themes that emerged from this work was how deeply many Asian American teachers felt impacted by not seeing themselves in classrooms, not in front of the classroom nor in the curriculum they studied. There is not only a disproportionate scarcity of Asian American teachers in this country, but their absence from history textbooks further obscures the many ways Asian Americans have been part of the fabric of this country for centuries. This kind of erasure allows the stereotypical media images that are perpetuated in our society to continue unchecked. The inclusion of more Asian American history would begin the process of breaking down this cycle.

One notable exception to this general exclusion of Asian Americans is their growing appearance in children's and young adult literature, especially graphic novels. While not Graphic novels are book-length works of fiction or non-fiction that use the conventions of a comic book to tell a story or convey information. They harness the multimodal power and synergy of words and pictures combined to create enhanced meaning for readers. There has been a virtual explosion of graphic novels in the last two decades and an accompanying

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respect for their power. As a result, they are finally becoming more accepted in mainstream classrooms and curriculum as teachers recognize the power they have for their students—not just for struggling readers and English language learners as sometimes assumed, but for all readers.

My two books on teaching with graphic novels addresses the power of graphic novels to teach for disciplinary literacy and for English Language Arts. Most germane to the readers of this journal is the power of graphic novels to expand upon and develop historical literacy practices including contextualization, corroboration, sourcing, and historical agency. Disciplinary literacy is built upon the idea that students can begin acquiring the ways of knowing, habits of mind, and habits of practice of various disciplines. A few scholars (Boerman-Cornell, 2015; Park, 2016) have even investigated how this emerges in research with graphic novels and student learning in social studies. To further assist educators in incorporating graphic novel teaching, we formulated a framework (GRAPHIC) for teaching disciplinary literacy with graphic novels:

**G**oals that graphic novels can help readers meet.

**R**esources that can help meet those goals.

**A**pproaches that can focus learning (for example: disciplinary thinking and practices, inquiry strategies, and so on).

**P**icture/text Hybridity: ways that images and text intersect and inform each other.

**I**nquiry: tasks and strategies that support student inquiry, comprehension, and understanding.

**C**ritical Response: What are the opportunities students have to critically interrogate the text and its ideas?

The GRAPHIC Framework is a recursive process rather than a linear set of steps to follow in order. Graphic Novels in High School and Middle School Classrooms: A Disciplinary Literacies Approach is built, chapter by chapter, around each aspect of this framework with examples and resources throughout.

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS

While Using Graphic Novels in the English Language Arts Classroom is geared for English Language Arts teachers, we do address—in both books—examples of Asian American graphic novels that could be used to teach a variety of concepts, from characterization to contextualization. Some of the featured texts are The Best We Could Do (Bui, 2017), American Born Chinese (Yang, 2006), and Boxers and Saints (Yang, 2013). Part memoir and part historical ethnography, Thi Bui's The Best We Could Do would be a challenging but powerful text for high school students. The book interweaves the personal story of Thi Bui over time, as well as her explorations into the experiences of her parents both in Vietnam before the war and in coming to America as refugees.

The Best We Could Do provides a context for the history of colonization and empire that existed in Vietnam, the actual individuals caught up in the conflicts in that country, and the very real long-term consequences this had for people. The text illustrates the trauma people

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endured through these times and humanizes a group that is sometimes seen as the nameless, faceless enemy or victim. Rather than provide a third-hand interpretation of events as we see in traditional textbooks, we see firsthand how this war impacted people's lives—from both a Vietnamese and American angle. One particularly poignant page shows Bui's father as an old man retelling his experiences in one panel and then in the next panel shows him in the same scene but as a child—alluding to that broken child in him. It connects how history continues to impact us long past the actual events.

Another graphic novel that draws on historic recurrence and connectivity is Displacement (Hughes, 2020). This is a newer graphic novel that could be used as part of a text set of graphic novels about Japanese incarceration, along with They Called Us Enemy and Citizen 13660. Japanese incarceration during WWII is one of the few Asian American historical events that may actually get taught in pK-12 schools, along with Chinese railroad workers (An, 2016; Rodríguez, 2018, 2019), but generally receives little attention.

Displacement riffs on a different book, Octavia Butler's Kindred, which follows the story of a young Black woman in the 1970s who find herself inexplicably pulled back in time to protect one of her ancestors during slavery in the American South. Displacement follows Kiku, a biracial Japanese-White American girl, who keeps getting pulled back or "displaced" in time to her grandmother's experiences in the 1940's and Japanese incarceration. Even while Kiku knew her grandmother had been in the camps, she felt disconnected from it and there were many silences around it. Her experiences, and the reader's vicarious experiences through the book, bring forward the very real people and experiences that populate our history texts. We also see the ways in which the "victims" of such experiences had agency and tried to advocate for themselves and were not just passive victims (An, 2017).

Furthermore, Displacement reinforces the cyclical nature of history. We hear, too often, the phrase "never again," while we see history repeat itself over and over. In the backdrop of the present-day scenes in the book, we see news reports about families being separated and detained at the U.S.'s southern border. The book is clearly drawing parallels between these different forms of governmental detention. Earlier in Trump's presidency, when he spoke about possibly detaining Muslim Americans in this country, survivors of Japanese incarceration spoke out against this idea and shared their own experiences in such camps. Texts like Displacement humanize and personalize history and the Asian Americans who were part of it, while drawing contemporary connections as well.

There is a growing list of graphic novels that address the Asian American experience, both historically and in contemporary times, that draw upon both the transnational and domestic experiences of their presence in the United States. Other titles to consider are:

Almost American Girl (Ha, 2020)
Green Lantern: Legacy (Lê, 2020)
The Magic Fish (Le Nguyen, 2020)
The Magical Life of Long Tack Sam (Fleming, 2007)
Pashmina (Chanani, 2017)
Stargazing (Wang, 2019)

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The inclusion of Asian Americans, and all minoritized groups, into U.S. classrooms and curriculum is an important first step towards an educational system that is more just and equitable, but also a society that recognize the histories and contributions of all its membership.

## Q & A WITH JUNG KIM

### Question #1

#### *Teacher's Question:*

How can teachers best help students tend carefully to the power of illustrations in graphic novels?

#### *Jung Kim's Response:*

One trap that teachers fall into sometimes is thinking that students automatically know how to read a graphic novel. Pictures are assumed to be self-explanatory and there is not a need to teach students how to "read" an illustration. However, many students tend to skim quickly through the pictures and miss many of the textured, multimodal layers that make graphic novels so powerful. It would be a great benefit for students if teachers helped show them how to slow down and really examine the choices authors and illustrators make in creating graphic novels. Why are certain color choices made? How are the frames laid out in the page? How does that impact how quickly or slowly you read the page? What are the characters feeling and how do you know? Tran LeNguyen's The Magic Fish has three interwoven storylines, which can be confusing for readers. However, if one looks closely, they will realize that those three stories are also told using three different colors. If a student didn't realize this, it may take them half the book—or perhaps never—to understand how these three distinct stories work together. And if they are frustrated enough, they may not finish the book. A great resource for teachers who are interested in learning more about how to read the comics format is Scott McCloud's Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art.

### Question #2

#### *Teacher's Question:*

What advice do you have for teachers on how to be successful in teaching with graphic novels? Are there any particular do's and don'ts?

#### *Jung Kim's Response:*

Good teachers think about what students need to succeed. As indicated in the answer to the previous question, sometimes teachers presume students know how to read graphic novels—and read them well. It is important to gauge how familiar and skilled students are with the format and then help prepare them as needed. Re-reading should also be highly

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encouraged as students can pick out and appreciate more nuanced understandings of the text with each reading.

People often presume that because there are pictures, that a graphic novel will automatically be "easier." In fact, the level of vocabulary in graphic novels can actually be higher than traditional grade level texts. This is because with the limited words that can be worked into a frame, authors must use the best word that fits, even if it is a more advanced word. Teachers should be aware of the kinds of vocabulary that are in the text or the background knowledge that is presumed.

Finally, one activity that seems particularly alluring for teachers is to assign students a culminating activity where they create their own graphic novel. Avoid jumping on this idea without deep planning and thought. This is akin to asking students to write sentences using a vocabulary word they just learned. There is not enough exposure and deep understanding. Graphic novel writing and illustrating are difficult tasks, and many graphic novels are produced by separate writers and illustrators (and even the illustrators are broken down to the main illustrator, inkers, and color!). It can be a frustrating task to ask students to complete a project that even professionals might struggle with. This is not to deter teachers from possibly considering such a project, but it should not be one taken lightly. With that said, there are various apps and platforms online with pre-produced figures and panels. It could be interesting to have students create a short comic strip or play with pieces of the graphic novel process, but assigning a full graphic novel project is probably too challenging for a regular classroom project.

## Question #3

### *Teacher's Question:*

What would you say is the biggest challenge/obstacle for teachers in using graphic novels in the social studies classroom? for students?

### *Jung Kim's Response:*

Depending on the district, I would think the biggest challenge is just getting graphic novels into the curriculum. This is because sometimes school get caught up in the "mile wide, inch deep" philosophy of teaching—where coverage or quantity trumps depth of understanding. This may be a result of standardized testing and the demands placed upon teachers to cover a certain amount of material. Making room for any trade book, graphic novel or not, can be a difficult negotiation in a jampacked curriculum. Because the inclusion of graphic novels in classrooms is a relatively new phenomenon, many schools may need to make a financial investment as well.

In addition, because many people, including teachers and administrators, may underestimate the power of graphic novels, there may be resistance from within the school and community as well. Teachers may need to "prove" that graphic novels are not watering down the curriculum but are actually powerful vehicles for teaching.

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As indicated earlier, students may also be under-prepared for reading graphic novels in deep and meaningful ways. Some students who are newer to graphic novels may struggle with the unfamiliar format and need additional assistance as well.

## Question #4

### *Teacher's Question:*

Do you have suggestions and/or resources for teachers to build our own content knowledge—since many of us have not been taught Asian American history?

### *Jung Kim's Response:*

There are some excellent resources for learning about Asian American history. The most recent and readily accessible one may be the recent PBS series Asian Americans. However, that only scratches the surface. There are fantastic historical compendiums, such as Erika Lee's The Making of Asian America: A History, Ronald Takaki's classic Strangers from a Different Shore, Lisa Lowe's Immigrant Acts, and Helen Zia's book Asian American Dreams.

## Question #5

### *Teacher's Question:*

How might a teacher explain to administration, parents, other teachers, or even to students the necessity of teaching hard history?

### *Jung Kim's Response:*

All history was hard for someone. It is only recently that we are grappling with this fact and acknowledging this complicated truth. The sanitized, diluted version of history we have been teaching in schools often fails to compel students who don't see themselves or their communities represented in history texts. History is a dead thing taught as rote facts and dates. The opportunity to present history as living, as something that was made through struggle and resistance and passion, can be empowering and enlightening for all students. Critical educator Paolo Freire talks about oppression as diminishing the humanity of both the oppressor and the oppressed. It does not take away from learning to deal with difficult topics, it adds to our increasing understanding and humanization.

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# Moving Asian American History from the Margins to the Middle in Elementary Social Studies Classrooms

Noreen Naseem Rodríguez

University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado, USA

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Noreen Naseem Rodríguez**

I am an Assistant Professor of Teacher Learning, Research, and Practice in the School of Education at the University of Colorado Boulder. My ultimate goal is to support pre- and in-service educators in teaching so-called difficult histories to young learners, particularly through engagement with diverse children's literature and primary sources. I am interested in the pedagogical practices of teachers of color, Asian American histories, and critical race frameworks. My own professional development efforts have been focused on how pre- and in-service teachers analyze the educational resources they find online and local Asian American histories. Outside of my professional pursuits, I love karaoke, decorating cakes and cookies, and spending time with family. Before becoming a teacher educator, I was a bilingual elementary teacher in Austin, Texas for nine years.

**Keywords** Asian American history, elementary social studies, teachers of color, Asian American teachers, cultural citizenship

**Pages: 35-42**



## INTRODUCTION

Although it is often widely used as a simple racial category, the term Asian American was created by college students Emma Gee and Yuji Ichioka to indicate an anti-racist and anti-imperialist sociopolitical identity (Maeda, 2012). The many histories and experiences that fall under the umbrella of Asian America are complex, diverse, and demand far more attention than they currently receive in schools. Unfortunately, Asian Americans are rarely included in K-12 textbooks and curriculum; when they are taught, their stories are often

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very limited in scope and told through superficial approaches that reinforce dominant narratives of American exceptionalism, progress, and meritocracy and ultimately situate them as outsiders rather than citizens (An, 2016; Rodríguez, 2018; Suh et al., 2015).

For example, the Chinese were the first and only group to be denied entry to the United States on the basis of race, yet little attention is paid to the particular ways that Asian Americans have been racialized throughout U.S. history. Popular tropes like the "Yellow Peril" and "Dusky Peril" about East Asian and South Asian immigrants respectively first emerged in the 1800s and early 1900s and can still be seen today in the form of violent attacks and murders against these groups due to their perceived racial differences. Furthermore, Asian immigrants were denied access to citizenship through naturalization until 1952 (Lee, 2015). These historical details are essential to understanding the Asian American experience but are rarely taught in school.

## THE RESEARCH

My research centers on the significance of race and racism to the Asian American experience and considers how these factors impact Asian American access to citizenship and education in the past and present. In this article, I describe how three Asian American elementary teachers in Texas reflected on the absence of Asian American histories in their own educational experiences, which later inspired them to teach Asian American histories in their classrooms. Because they were teaching content that was missing in the district-provided curriculum and that they had not learned in school themselves, they sometimes struggled with their content knowledge and pedagogical approaches. However, they also made powerful connections with students and felt a great sense of pride in being able to share stories from their own cultures and experiences.

The three teachers taught at different campuses in the same large, urban school district in Texas. Krishnan is an Indian American whose family immigrated to the United States from Kenya when he was a toddler. Elyse is a Vietnamese American whose refugee family immigrated to the United States from Germany when she was in kindergarten. Krishnan and Elyse are considered "1.5 generation" immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) as they arrived in the U.S. as children; they also illustrate the breadth of the Asian diaspora and the impact of imperialism and militarism, as their parents came to the U.S. from nations other than their homelands. Virginia is Chinese American and was born in Texas, which makes her part of the second immigrant generation. All three teachers were educated in the United States and had between six and ten years of teaching experience.

During the spring of 2016, these teachers invited me into their classrooms to observe their lessons on Asian American history and participated in multiple interviews and pre- and post-lesson debriefs. Given the lack of available curriculum, the teachers relied heavily on children's literature and primary sources to teach about Asian immigration and Japanese American incarceration during World War II.

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## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The teachers' lessons about Asian American history required them to first define the term Asian American with their students. Elyse, Krishnan, and Virginia found that their students commonly equated Asian with anything Chinese or Japanese and frequently had little understanding of other Asian nations or cultures. Consequently, they tried to define what it meant to be Asian American by using themselves as examples and finding opportunities to disrupt students' stereotypes and misconceptions.

For example, during one lesson I observed, Virginia explained to her students, "I am Chinese American. I was born in Houston, Texas… My parents are Chinese, my grandparents are Chinese, we are all Chinese. I'm also American. So I'm Chinese and American" (Rodriguez and Kim , 2018, p. 546). This was an ongoing clarification that Virginia regularly took the time to describe to ensure that her students clearly understood the distinction between Asian and Asian American. Virginia was the only Asian American teacher on her campus; as Asian American teachers only make up 2% of the public school teaching force (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020), it is quite likely that she and the other two teachers in this study will be the only Asian American educators that their students will have.

During the course of their work teaching Asian American histories, the teachers also redefined what it meant to be American. Krishnan and Elyse described feeling "in between" the Asian cultures of their families and the white cultural mainstream. In U.S. society, Americanness is often equated with whiteness (Morrison, 2007) and the hybridity experienced by Asian Americans is quite common. Regardless of how many generations their families have lived in the United States, Asian Americans are viewed as exotic, perpetual or forever foreigners who are incapable of assimilation (Chang, 1993; Tuan, 1998). Therefore, given these personal experiences, the teachers were mindful of the need to consistently remind students that the category of American (citizen) was not limited to whiteness.

All three teachers taught lessons about Japanese American incarceration during World War II. This history offered the educators an opportunity to explore the tremendous harm that can emerge from assumptions of foreignness. Virginia's second grade students were able to make connections to the marginalization of other racialized groups and Krishnan facilitated comparisons between the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II and Muslim youth post-9/11 (Rodríguez, 2017). For each of them, their own hybrid experiences were essential factors in their work to dismantle student assumptions that whiteness and citizenship were interchangeable.

Ultimately, the teachers promoted what scholars refer to as cultural citizenship, which is more inclusive and critical than traditional forms of citizenship that are defined by individual acts like voting and following rules. Cultural citizenship promotes difference as a resource; Virginia, Krishnan and Elyse included culture, ethnicity, religion, and language among the examples they regularly referenced. Cultural citizenship emphasizes the need to respect and humanize others, and therefore views citizenship as an ongoing process instead of a static state of being. It also includes the voices, experiences, and perspectives of People of Color; these two characteristics of cultural citizenship most often manifested in the

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teachers' selections of children's literature. Lastly, cultural citizenship emphasizes human rights and agency. In a final example, Virginia offered her students a range of examples of civic identity and agency over the course of the spring 2016 semester. At semester's end, her students recorded podcasts as a form of civic action to share their knowledge about injustice with others.

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS

A major component of the teachers' practice was centering Asian American perspectives and histories. In most classrooms, these stories are rarely presented, which is why the teachers saw few examples that mirrored their own experiences when they were growing up. Krishnan, Elyse and Virginia were determined to change this and drew from their own experiences to do so.

All three teachers used Asian American children's literature to disrupt exclusionary histories and notions of citizenship as equal to whiteness. They also engaged students with primary sources, which evoked rich conversations about the past and present, and shared stories about their families' experiences with immigration and racism. Most importantly, they made clear that no ethnic or racial group is a monolith: within any group, there is tremendous diversity of thought, culture, language, and experience. Often, educators of young children relegate stories about Latinx, Black, Indigenous, and Asian Americans to a single book or within the scope of a celebratory month. Such marginalization decontextualizes those experiences and histories and further distances them from the central narrative of what is considered important in U.S. history and society. Educators must recognize how exclusionary traditional social studies curriculum is and how this exclusion fails to prepare young learners for the pluralistic democracy in which they live, then take deliberate steps to educate themselves in order to improve their pedagogy.

Fortunately, there are more resources available now than there were for Elyse, Virginia and Krishnan five years ago. Two excellent starting points for developing your own content knowledge about Asian American history are historian Erika Lee's The Making of Asian America (2015) and the PBS documentary Asian Americans (2020). An abundance of Asian American children's literature has been published in the last two decades. Educators should be mindful to seek #OwnVoices and diverse books (Dahlen, 2020; Duyvis, 2015) since most texts center East Asian American stories and continue to marginalize Southeast and South Asian Americans (Rodriguez & Kim, 2018; Rodríguez & Kim, 2021). Steps like these can move Asian Americans from the margins to the middle and support better teaching about U.S. history and democracy.

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# Q & A WITH NOREEN RODRÍGUEZ

## Question #1

### *Teacher's Question:*

When we talk about Asian American, many people think of places like Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Filipinos, Malaysians, etc. White teachers often think only of the Pacific Rim. But Indians, Persians, Afghans, Arabs, Israelis, and Mongolians and many others are Asian. Where and how do scholars make distinctions about who is included under this umbrella?

### *Noreen Rodríguez's Response:*

Typically, the term Asian American only encompasses East Asian (of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, and Tibetan descent), Southeast Asian (of Bruneian, Burmese, Cambodian, Filipino, Hmong, Indonesian, Laotian, Malaysian, Mien, Singaporean, Timorese, Thai, and Vietnamese descent) and South Asian (Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Indian, Maldivians, Nepali, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan descent) Americans. This is the standard umbrella of nationalities/ethnicities included in Asian American Studies. While Central and West Asia are the geographic homes of many other peoples, they do not necessarily self-identify as Asian. West Asians are more popularly known as Middle Easterners, which in academia is its own field of study. However, it's important to recognize that the very term Middle East came from the British, not those who live in the region, who might better be described as the Arab World. See https://www.api-gbv.org/resources/census-data-api-identities/ for a detailed list of categories.

## Question #2

### *Teacher's Question:*

Teachers often feel like curricular change is above their pay grade. How can teachers like me advocate for curricular change to be made that reflect inclusive and diverse histories?

### *Noreen Rodríguez's Response:*

This is such a context-specific issue, but quite simply, one of the biggest jobs a teacher has is to deliver (and sometimes create) curriculum. For a wide range of reasons, some schools/districts allow teachers a larger hand in curricular design and development while others do not, so there is no one-size-fits-all solution. However, all teachers are expected to meet the needs of their students. If your students are disengaged or actively complain about not understanding the connection of the content to their lives and communities, that is one strong rationale for including more diverse narratives and histories into your curriculum. If your students are ethnoracially and/or socioeconomically homogenous, they need to be exposed to life experiences and histories other than their own in order to better understand the diverse democracies in which we live. For some educators, it may be relatively easy to replace a canonical text with a more recently published book or text by and about mem-

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bers of a marginalized group. For others, perhaps a problematic or dominant text must stay in place. In that case, consider what my friends in literacy describe as reading against the text. Can students identify which voices dominate the narrative? Which voices are missing? How particular individuals/groups are attached to the active voice in the text while others are described in the passive voice? Are primary sources available to supplement and add nuance to the text?

Above are classroom-level actions educators can take, but we need to also think about how to effect structural and systemic change. Are leaders, from principals to superintendents and members of boards of education, aware of the psychological damage that research has demonstrated results from exclusionary histories and the subsequent need for more inclusive histories? Will funds be allocated to diversify classroom libraries and to offer educators professional development to support curricular shifts? And at the local and state levels, educators can work with community members to ensure that ethnic studies courses are offered in schools and take inspiration from the U.S. state of Illinois which recently became the first state in the nation to mandate Asian American studies.

## Question #3

### *Teacher's Question:*

How can other Asian American teachers as well as non-Asian American teachers who share a similar educational experience as your study be better prepared to teach inclusive US history? Does it just take reading? Are there concerns of perpetuating stereotypes or not being able to recognize biases without training?

### *Noreen Rodríguez's Response:*

I first want to clarify that I'm urging teachers to teach US history more fully – not necessarily in the name of DEI, but because what is being taught is deeply flawed. Naming it "inclusive" softens the many problematics of the dominant narrative and erases the role of power. It's important that we recognize that most people, regardless of their ethnoracial identities, have been taught dominant narratives of history in school. There is a great deal of unlearning to do but this is not new – James Loewen famously wrote about the egregious errors in U.S. history textbooks in the 1990s in his book Lies My Teacher Told Me. Today we have more resources than ever before to learn diverse histories, and increasingly there are also young reader adaptations out there so that our students can learn with and alongside us. For books, check out the ReVisioning History for Young People series, A Different Mirror for Young People by Ronald Takaki adapted by Rebecca Stefoff, and One Person, No Vote: How Not All Voters Are Treated Equally by Carol Anderson with Tanya Bolden. Two of the most robust online resources are the Zinn Education Project and Teaching Hard History. And when people try to argue that such approaches are "too political," this set of resources from NCTE is helpful: https://ncte.org/blog/2017/08/there-is-no-apolitical-classroom-resources-for-teaching-in-these-times/

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## Question #4

### *Teacher's Question:*

I am wondering if there are connections you can make between other groups who may be seen as perpetual foreigners, like Arab Americans or Latinx Americans, and how teaching Asian American histories might be ground for building solidarity between these groups?

### *Noreen Rodríguez's Response:*

The notion of perpetual foreigners is the direct result of nativist racism and white supremacy – who is seen as belonging (usually white, U.S.-born, Christian, English monolingual) and who is not. The idea of who is "American"/citizen needs to be troubled by teachers beginning in the early grades, with a clear interrogation of who benefits when certain groups are othered and viewed as foreign. Once that's established, the need for solidarity becomes obvious. Young people, particularly Indigenous people and People of Color are often already aware of these ideas but are not offered opportunities to understand them in school spaces.

## Question #5

### *Teacher's Question:*

What role, if any, should there be for explicitly training teachers and students how certain behaviors further alienate Asian Americans? How do you help students deconstruct where this curiosity about the "other's identity" comes from?

### *Noreen Rodríguez's Response:*

Similar to the answer above, we simply have to have explicit conversations about who/what is normed in our society in order to then determine how we can disrupt those norms in our particular contexts. This needs to occur in teacher preparation and in classrooms. In the United States, 83% of K-12 teachers are white. Most of them are women. Most of them are Christian and English monolingual. If that's the norm, they need ongoing support to understand those who hold identities that they may not be familiar with or understand. Again, young people often already know and understand these things — they are not uncomfortable talking about it, but adults frequently are. If kids are singing songs or making hand motions that stereotype Chinese and Japanese people, adults need to intervene immediately. If kids use racial slurs on the playground, adults need to recognize they are probably echoing language they hear at home or elsewhere and make it clear that such dehumanizing words are not acceptable. It's when adults don't say or do anything that those stereotypes then become ingrained and viewed as "normal" rather than harmful and in need of interruption.

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Annals of Social Studies Education Research for Teachers (ASSERT)

# Examining (Re)Constructive History through the Experiences of Asian American Teachers

Betina Hsieh

California State University, Long Beach, California, USA

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Betina Hsieh**

I am currently an associate professor of teacher education at California State University, Long Beach on the lands of the Tongva indigenous peoples in Southern California and formerly a middle school Social Studies, English and Math teacher in the SF Bay Area (on Ohlone tribal lands). At the heart of my work is the exploration of how who we are shapes what we do (and the choices we make) as teachers and teacher educators. I am deeply committed to creating more equitable spaces as a teacher educator that promote the success, sustenance and empowerment of teacher candidates from marginalized subgroups both through credential programs and as they enter classroom spaces. My professional development work focuses on supporting and sustaining teachers of color, with a particular focus on Asian American teachers. Outside of work, I am a wife and mother who loves delicious food and taking pictures of it. I'm actively involved in my faith community's social justice ministry and gospel choir, and recently, I've been trying to cultivate more rest and balance in my life.



**Pages:** 43-51



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## INTRODUCTION

Asian Americans are too often rendered invisible in mainstream American historical narratives or positioned in ways that reinforce racialized stereotypes of Asian Americans as oppressed others (e.g. Japanese internment; Chinese Exclusion Act); hard-working foreigners (e.g. Chinese transcontinental railroad workers), and model minorities (e.g. contemporary affirmative action debates). Traditional curricula essentializes and erases Asian

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American stories, and may directly harm Asian Americans through the perpetuation of discourses that have led to both historical and contemporary anti-Asian violence (Anti-Defamation League, 2020; An, 2020) Within Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), the tenet of (re)constructive history (Museus & Iftikar, 2013) addresses these damaging and exclusionary portrayals of Asian Americans in mainstream narratives, and pushes for critical representation of Asian American histories and perspectives. Through (re)constructive history, all people can develop an understanding of Asian Americans' contributions to the United States and the roles of Asian Americans in civil rights struggles and resistance. Asian Americans also have an opportunity to see themselves reflected in community-grounded struggles for progress, intra- and inter-racial solidarity, and coalition-based resistance. This article summarizes a case study of three Asian American teachers and their experiences in integrating Asian American perspectives into their social studies teaching. Through examining these teachers' experiences, the importance of teacher dispositions, teacher knowledge of Asian American histories, and access to ongoing professional learning opportunities that centered equity emerged as critical to integrating Asian American perspectives into the curriculum.

## THE RESEARCH

Study data were drawn from a larger collaborative qualitative research project (N=45) of Asian American educators. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the research team conducted a single 45-120 minute interview with each participant. Interviews were audio-transcribed and read by each researcher, with attention to the tenets of AsianCrit framework outlined by Museus and Iftikar (2013). After a process of initial theoretical memoing, case study participants were chosen to highlight specific tenets of AsianCrit.

This article focuses on the tenet of (re)constructive history, the work of Asian American teachers to incorporate the contributions, voices, and histories of Asian Americans into K-12 social studies curriculum (Iftikar & Museus, 2018). The three focal participants chosen for this qualitative case study shared critically reflexive stances and strong desires to include Asian American perspectives in the classroom, but enacted these commitments to varying degrees. Following the selection of the focal participants, the author reread each individual transcript and highlighted excerpts focused on Asian American curriculum in relation to teaching and/or leadership experiences, creating a chart to examine each participants' experiences over their educational careers. After highlighting salient findings in each individual's experiences, a cross-case analysis was done to consider contexts that supported or limited each participants' ability to enact Asian American (re)constructive histories. The table gives a summary of salient information about each focal participant:

## FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

With her Asian American studies background, Jeni seemed best positioned to integrate critical Asian American perspectives into her curriculum. However, despite her knowledge and

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**Table 1** Focal Teacher Information

| Pseudonym | Ethnicity | Region | K-12 Teaching | Additional Information |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bernadette | $2^{nd}$ generation Chinese American | CA | $5^{th}$ g. bilingual Chinese pathway Urban, multiracial, working-class public school district; site was 70-80% Chinese/Chinese American | Teacher education program explicitly focused on social/ racial justice. Teaching site w/ a large Asian demographic |
| Jeni | $2^{nd}$ generation biracial Japanese/ white American | CA | $7^{th}$-$9^{th}$ grade teacher/ Teacher Support Provider Urban, multiracial, working-class, diverse public school district (65% Latinx, 18% AAPI, 8% African American) | Asian American studies major/African American studies minor (undergraduate) |
| Tina | $2^{nd}$ generation Pilipina American | East Coast | K-12 teaching, administration, Elite, private schools, predominantly wealthy, conservative white & Asian American and Asian immigrant students; a few bussed in Black students | Site director of diversity. Doctoral work focused on Asian Americans |

commitments and a fairly large minority of diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander students in the district, Jeni struggled to integrate Asian American perspectives into her curriculum, partly because of her own sense of marginalization at her school site. As an alternatively certified teacher who had experienced racial marginalization in her district (which had gone from predominantly white to predominantly Latinx over 30 years) as both a student and a teacher, Jeni hesitated, when she was in the classroom, to deviate from curriculum she was given and from district pacing guides. While Jeni collaboratively designed and implemented a unit on immigration through Angel Island, she felt unable to fully bring her ethnic studies background into her curriculum during her time in the classroom because of fear of the reactions of students, colleagues and administration.

Similarly, Tina, while comfortable pushing discussions of race (generally) into curriculum and the classroom, also struggled to integrate Asian American perspectives in ways that reflected her commitments. Tina particularly struggled with her sites' undervaluing, underrecognition, and ignorance of Asian Americans in curriculum in ways that honored rich Asian American histories, spanning over two centuries in the United States. While there were a large number of Asian immigrant students, these families did not necessarily see their experiences represented in Asian American history, and the rest of the school, including administration, felt that token acknowledgments of Asian Americans during Asian American Heritage Month were sufficient. Both Jeni and Tina emphasized their presence as Asian American women who challenged racial stereotypes (e.g. visible displays of racial solidarity with Black communities and speaking against anti-Black affirmative action stances by

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other Asian Americans), and relationships they built with students as important ways their identities and community backgrounds impacted their students' understanding of Asian Americans.

Of the focal participants, Bernadette most explicitly integrated Asian American stories into the curriculum. For example, Bernadette brought Chinese American experiences into a Civil War unit, doing independent research to find this information. She noted the challenge and intentionality necessary in bringing in diverse perspectives when teaching social studies, particularly those which extend beyond a Black-white racial binary. Like Tina and Jeni, Bernadette saw her role as bridging her students' understandings of racial solidarity between Black and Asian communities in contemporary society and historically. In discussing her classroom's participation in Black Lives Matter at school week, Bernadette connected the rights, interests and solidarity of Black and Asian communities throughout US history. She did this by affirming the Black community's central role in the Civil Rights struggle without erasing Asian Americans' presence alongside Black Americans. Bernadette included and unpacked Asian American voices in her classroom and through her curriculum in contexts of larger equity work. In doing so, she created inclusive spaces for Asian American students and exposed non-Asian American students to Asian American histories and counterstories. Bernadette positioned a central part of her role as understanding diverse Asian American histories and perspectives in order to challenge the "white narrative" of history. In many ways, Bernadette was able to enact the commitments that all three focal teachers shared, a commitment to developing spaces of (re)constructive history.

All three focal teachers had strong equity stances and described how they built relationships with students that helped foster cross-racial solidarity and understanding. The focal teachers shared knowledge (and a desire to build knowledge) of diverse Asian American experiences. They also all worked explicitly to develop their own racial and ethnic identities, and to recognize and discuss their positioning in relation to other racial groups in society. However, (re)constructive history work through infusing critical Asian American perspectives in curriculum was much more challenging. Although each saw the importance of integrating Asian American voices in the curriculum, they struggled to find models, and design or implement curriculum to do so, resulting in only Bernadette being able to integrate Asian American perspectives on an ongoing basis. Bernadette was able integrate resources she found into her curriculum given layered supportive contexts. She, uniquely among the focal teachers, had both teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning opportunities focused on and supporting critical, race and justice-centered teaching.

## PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS

These teachers' stories indicate a need for supportive site environments and teacher professional learning focused on supporting educators to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate diverse Asian American experiences into social studies curriculum. Educational and curricular leaders must learn about and create conditions to foster the successful integration of not only Asian American histories into the curriculum, but those of

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other underrepresented minoritized groups. When structural conditions that support curricular (re)construction do not exist, more widely available (often white-centered) histories will predominate. While the presence of racially conscious Asian American teachers is an important factor in challenging some students' stereotypes about Asian American communities, it does not negate the importance of curriculum that highlights Asian Americans' presence, experiences and resistance throughout a larger American historical narrative and environment which empower the teachers to bring their knowledge into the curriculum. For teachers to integrate Asian American (re)constructive histories in their classroom, motivation and knowledge of these histories themselves are prerequisites but not sufficient. Educators must also have access to curricular resources, site environments and professional learning that support integrating Asian American voices into curriculum.

While this study focused on Asian American teachers' experiences, the voices of Asian diasporic peoples in social studies curriculum should be an important focus for all social studies teachers, particularly in light of historical and contemporary anti-Asian racist and xenophobic acts of violence. Possible avenues for this type of professional learning could come through intra- and interracial Asian American curricular affinity spaces or working groups, where teachers committed to integrating Asian American perspectives into curriculum could come together to support one another in designing and implementing such curriculum. Virtual working groups could expand access to Asian American curriculum for educators who are in spaces where they may be the only advocate for developing such curricula. Curricular resources such as those created by critical Asian American educators and centering often silenced voices (Chen & Omatsu, 2006; Rodriguez, n.d.; Learning for Justice, 2013) can be explored and adapted together in such groups, and become the subject of lesson study and revision for teachers committed to (re)constructive Asian American narratives in K-12 classrooms. This professional learning model could further be implemented and extended to bring a variety of diverse voices to the center of a more authentic and representative social studies curriculum.

## Q & A WITH BETINA HSIEH

### Question #1

#### *Teacher's Question:*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has come under a lot of fire lately, which might make some teachers recoil from the approach you are advocating for. How would you explain CRT generally, and Asian CRT specifically, to a parent who might only know what network news has told them about it?

#### *Betina Hsieh's Response:*

While as a scholar, I know that these curricular revisions are connected to principles of CRT and Asian CRT, I wouldn't bring these terms up, as a teacher, in contextualizing my work. Instead, I would explain the curricular revisions under a larger umbrella of human-

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izing pedagogies. I would explain to parents that it's important for all students to see a full view of the histories of all people in the Americas, including both those that represent their own racial/ethnic histories and those of others. In order for us to recognize one another's humanity, we must be familiar with one another's struggles and histories. This is part of developing historical empathy and stronger civic engagement. And we must know the histories of these events from the perspectives of those who have lived them, meaning that it's important to bring in multiple voices, not just one perspective around key historical events. Finally, we have to understand the institutions, groups, laws, and policies that impact our histories so that we can better advocate for ourselves as citizens. I think it's much harder to get behind dehumanization and to critique civic engagement (at least explicitly) than it is to critique CRT based on a lack of understanding of the theory.

## Question #2

### *Teacher's Question:*

In your article you mentioned that one teacher struggled to integrate Asian American perspectives into their curriculum due to her sites' undervaluing of Asian Americans in curriculum. Given that under-recognition of Asian Americans in curriculum is prevalent in most of U.S. school contexts, what suggestions would you give to teachers who want to create curricular space for Asian Americans but do not know where to start?

### *Betina Hsieh's Response:*

The current moment is a time in which an argument can and is being made about the importance of connecting histories of foreignization, racism and xenophobia to the very public rise in Asian American hate crimes and violence, which unfortunately, allows for an opening to incorporate more perspectives on Asian Americans into curriculum. In Social Studies, I would start with some of the resources that I listed in the final paragraph of the article (Chen & Omatsu, 2006; Rodriguez, n.d.; Learning for Justice, 2013) as well as looking at some of the resources from Facing History and Ourselves around Asian American histories and SAADA (the South Asian American Digital Archive). Beyond this, I think that primary source documents, many of which are open access through universities that house Asian American studies programs, can support bringing in actual Asian American voices and perspectives into the classroom. There are so many resources out there on the internet now that I didn't realize I could access when I was teaching social studies myself 15 years ago.

## Question #3

### *Teacher's Question:*

You mentioned that all three teachers emphasized their efforts to build relationships with students that helped foster cross-racial solidarity. Could you elaborate how the teachers built these relationships and how their cross-racial relationships impacted their teaching?

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### *Betina Hsieh's Response:*

Yes, all three teachers gave specific examples of active advocacy and support, particularly of Black students and their families. Jeni, for example, spoke of the way her collaboration with a Black male student and his family helped to ameliorate a relationship he had with a white disabled female student. Jeni was aware of the various layers of complexity within the situation because of identity markers (race, gender, ability), but did not dismiss the student or his family's perspectives even after initially having challenges reaching the family. Once they were in contact, Jeni listened and responded to the family and the student and trusted the student to change his behavior (which he did) without referring the problem forward to administration. She noted that other teachers at her site would have likely jumped to assumptions about the student, and his family, or automatically escalated the situation without making an effort to understand it.

Tina's form of cross-racial solidarity came first in the form of active representation of solidarity (e.g. Black Lives Matter signs) and active efforts in working in solidarity with the Black community (particularly with Black faculty members) at her site, advocating for them, and using her position as a diversity, equity and inclusion administrator to push back against antiblackness in school contexts, including comments made by Asian and Asian American students who expressed disappointment that she was so focused on Black students. While Asian American parents were confused by some of Tina's actions, she used her Asian American identity to help families understand affirmative action and the importance of conversations about race.

Finally, for Bernadette, I mentioned lessons for Black Lives Matter at school week curriculum, but she also spoke specifically about an incident in which two Chinese American girls from her class had a conflict with two Black girls from another class. In this incident, Bernadette drew connections between Chinese parents' fears about their children playing with Black students and similar ways in which Chinese and other Asian American students were discriminated against in predominantly white spaces. Here she confronted the anti-Blackness being expressed by some parents by helping them to understand similar experiences of discrimination that their children might face in situations where they were not the dominant racial group.

## Question #4

### *Teacher's Question:*

In your article the school contexts of three teachers seem different, especially in terms of the racial population of the student body. How do you think community backgrounds, students' racial backgrounds, and teacher's own backgrounds would or should impact teachers' approaches to teaching Asian American histories?

### *Betina Hsieh's Response:*

Interestingly, although all three teachers taught in very different environments, and were able to incorporate Asian American histories to different degrees, they all returned to

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schools near the area they grew up in, with Bernadette and Jeni teaching in the school districts they attended as students. I think that's important because local contexts are really important to consider when thinking about Asian American histories. Asian American histories look different regionally and depending on what the predominant Asian American ethnicities are in the local area. So knowing the community in which one teaches is definitely important in that respect.

But Asian American histories might also be discussed and explored differently based on whether Asian Americans are a majority in a school site (e.g. Bernadette's), a significant minority group in a school site (e.g. Jeni and Tina's sites) or whether there are few to no Asian Americans at a site. While it's always important for Asian Americans to be represented in the curriculum, in a majority Asian American site, particularly when considering local histories, oral history projects and drawing from students' families and communities can provide an additional layer of significance to Asian American histories. In multi-racial, multi-ethnic schools where there are significant Asian American subpopulations, it's really important for the history curriculum to reflect the diversity of the classroom and community as well as including perspectives with which students may not be familiar in the community. However, care must be taken to avoid essentialization of the Asian American experience (i.e. assigning the experiences of a particular historical or contemporary ethnic subgroup to all Asian Americans) and expecting Asian American students to automatically identify with Asian American histories. Connections should also be drawn to the experiences of other ethnic and racial groups as well as other non-dominant groups to help students see the interconnections between the experiences of Asian Americans and other Americans. Finally, in schools with very few to no Asian Americans, it's critical to avoid and/or unpack stereotypes of Asian Americans and/or foreignization (e.g. where Asian medieval histories of China and Japan or Asians as the "foreign enemy") of Asian Americans. I would say that it's almost more important in these settings that students are exposed to diverse Asian American histories since students are less likely to have connections with Asian Americans that can help them challenge problematic social discourses around Asians/Asian Americans.

## Question #5

### *Teacher's Question:*

You argued that the voices of Asian Americans should be an important focus not only for Asian American teachers but also for all social studies teachers, particularly in light of anti-Asian violence. How would teaching about Asian American histories contribute to reducing anti-Asian violence? What could and should social studies teachers do in their classroom to fight against anti-Asian violence prevailing these times?

### *Betina Hsieh's Response:*

I return here to the importance of histories as humanizing stories from the past that connect to the present. When we can understand the current waves of anti-Asian violence as part

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of a repeating cycle of xenophobic scapegoating, we can begin to see the injustices in this violence. When we see Asian American histories as connected to other American histories, we begin to relate to the humanity of Asian Americans and I hope that this recognition of humanity will lead to reducing anti-Asian violence.

To fight anti-Asian violence in these times, social studies teachers can play such a huge role. First, in teaching and centering the stories of Asian Americans, not just as victims but as contributors, resistors, allies and Americans. These counterstories challenge narratives of Asian Americans as trying to "steal" American jobs and wealth or those which cast them as harmful, diseased foreigners. But, more than this, social studies teachers can teach advocacy, protest, histories of solidarity and why it's important to advocate in support of Asian Americans, to stand against anti-Asian violence (as well as other forms of racialized violence), to intervene and to report or record when we see such violence happen. Finally, by unpacking the reasons for the rise in anti-Asian violence and situating it historically, social studies teachers can help fight anti-Asian violence and empower students to understand and challenge injustice in times of escalated violence and beyond.

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# The Prison Camp as Pedagogy of Place: A Research-Based Primer for Educators

Cathlin Goulding

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Cathlin Goulding**

Cathlin Goulding, Ed.D., is a curriculum specialist and education researcher. Her research focuses on place-based learning, public pedagogy, and the teaching of historical violence. She co-directs the YURI Education Project, which develops educational resources and experiences for cultural institutions and PK-12 students. She has written educational materials for the Fred T. Korematsu Institute, WNET Group, WETA, Third World Media, Mikva Challenge, and Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery. In addition to her work as a curriculum consultant, she teaches pre-service teachers at the City University of New York and San José State University.

**Keywords** Japanese American incarceration, place-based learning, social studies education, curriculum studies, public pedagogy



**Pages: 52-64**



## PLACE AS PEDAGOGY

Place-based education typically refers to curricular work in PK-12 settings that mobilizes local contexts to teach subject matter content (Smith, 2002). Science teachers bring their students to a local creek to collect water samples and investigate their neighboring ecosystems. Or social science teachers plan a field trip to a historic site to bolster a unit of study. Before visiting the site, students watch a documentary or do a short reading. During the visit, they take a guided tour and absorb key facts about buildings or key historic figures.

But place is not merely an instrument to transmit disciplinary content to students. The cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) explains places are not merely locations on a map or abstract space. Places are "endowed with value" (Tuan, 1977, p. 6) by individual subjectivi-

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ties. Place is a repository of our lived experience, one in which the mind and body are intertwined. Place-based learning involves the knowledge and affective attachments provisioned by architectural arrangements and designs. As educators, we might invite into our classrooms a curriculum of place that permits an intangible, not-easily-measured, ephemeral encounter.

Valuing place as a form of pedagogy in of itself slots such approaches in the category of out-of-school learning, what theorists call public pedagogy. Sandlin et al. (2011) assert that educators and researchers alike should study "specific spaces or forms of pedagogies and to more clearly articulate their 'informal pedagogical process'—that is, to examine what makes them pedagogical " (p. 359, original italics). My own research and teaching practice seeks follow this charge: I explicitly articulate the design aspects of places as pedagogical. In doing so, places of historical violence and atrocity can serve as a template for educational endeavors in and out of the classroom.

As an education researcher, I study the built-environments of historic sites and museums, documenting the pathways and provocations for the learner. At the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, where I served as a postdoctoral research fellow, I was captivated by the museum's ramps and stairwells. The museum is almost entirely subterranean: Museum visitors are led from ground level into an underground exhibition level. As visitors make their downward movements into ground level, they also are being led on a path not unlike one that many educators construct for their students.

Thoroughfares within the museum environment are often crafted with learners in mind—and these design moves are subtle and not readily discerned. The 9/11 Museum & Memorial's architects and exhibition designers planned pathways of descent, giving thorough attention to the fabrication, lighting, and the gradual revelation of information on these routes (2014). The first exhibition for visitors is an introductory, context-building section on the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11. Then, visitors move through a dark passage, walking by photographs and listening to the voices of first person witnesses to the attacks. The museum's design team marshaled theoretical concepts from John Dewey (Hennes, 2002), imagining the museum as constituted of learning pathways. Tom Hennes (2014), the museum's design head, described them as "myriad paths [taken] according to the interest, inclination, and depth which each person in the museum sought—or could tolerate" (para 1). The museum offers a slowly descending passageway to an underworld (Hillman, 1979), an experience that cultivates learners' receptivity to loss and death.

## PLACE-BASED PEDAGOGY AND THE PRISON

A fourth-generation, mixed-race Japanese American, I have long been transfixed by my mother and grandparents' experiences in World War II-era prison camps. In 1942, my grandparents—both born in the United States—were forcibly removed from their Los Angeles home under Executive Order 9066. For the duration of the war, they were incarcerated without due process at prisons in Jerome, Arkansas and Gila River, Arizona. Some of my

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knowledge of the camps comes from overhearing stories as a child and teenager. However, most of my understanding of their experiences was acquired after the death of my grandparents and mother. To acquire knowledge required a conjuring of the dead. It meant a reconstruction of the past through historical accounts, family lore, and precious photos. It is little surprise, then, that my research and practice on place-based pedagogy originates in swamplands and desert dioramas. Inquiry emerged from the story of a scorpion that intrigued my toddler mother in Gila River, for example, or a photo of my grandfather flatly smiling during a break from slicing potatoes for the mess hall at Jerome.

Grounded in my family's experience as Japanese Americans incarcerated in World War II-era prison camps, I study historic concentration camps and former prisons that are redesigned to engage contemporary audiences. Many of these historic prisons are places in which populations deemed security threats to the state were targeted, stripped of certain rights and obligations, forcibly removed, and sequestered.

Within political and legal theory, the kind of climate that gives rise to these prisons is called a "state of exception," a concept originally developed by Carl Schmitt (1922). In a state of exception, the normal legal order that, in liberal democracies, ensures certain rights and curbs executive authority, is suspended. Heightened security is no longer a temporary state of affairs—it has become integrated into daily life (Agamben, 2005). Within a state of exception, concentration camps and other buildings play a central role in the exclusion and containment of a targeted population.

In these places of exception, grids of barracks and cells ensure constant surveillance. Guard towers and centralized police forces intend prisoners to live in perpetual fear. Such places often are located in remote areas and are impenetrable to adjacent communities. In the years after the material structures are broken down and removed, the traces of the camps remain. Eventually, some of these former prisons are transformed for public visitation and learning. There is a vividly described body of research on prisons that become places of public learning (Ross, 2012; Walby & Piché, 2015; Welch, 2015; Wilson et al., 2017). The idea of an "exceptional" place" quickly resonates with educators. Many draw connections to places they have visited or historic sites they would like to more thoroughly interrogate with their students. They see connections in the plantation-turned-historic home, parallels with indigenous boarding schools and the recent uncovering of mass graves at these schools. They are interested in the histories of the dispossessed and how it came to be that these histories do not appear in the dominant historical narratives. Studying and immersing in a place is an inroad to rehabilitate these histories.

As a classroom teacher, I spent a summer on a professional learning trip to Cambodia through University of Hawaii's East West Center. One of our visits included the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, a Cambodian high school that was converted into an interrogation center from 1976-1979 during the Pol Pot regime. One of my co-authored articles (Goulding et al., 2013) analyzes prisons in Argentina, Cambodia, and Haiti that, at one time in their existence, operated as schools and museums. The article looks at these sites as "curricular palimpsests," or the overlapping and compatible tactics of prisons, schools, and museums as sites that shape learners through the representation of violence or the enactment of it. Later,

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I would return to Tuol Sleng and the broader efforts to publish the first national curriculum on the Khmer Rouge era as "pedagogies of haunting," or the educational interventions that mediate encounters with unresolved historical violence (Goulding, 2017).

Eventually, my research (Goulding, 2017) turned towards the pedagogical work of place-making (Relph, 1976) at the Tule Lake Unit, a former Japanese American prison camp now managed by the National Park Service. Through observing visitors and conducting long-form interviews, I studied the challenge of teaching visitors—who come from a range of social locations—a complicated history of wartime hysteria and the state-sponsored incarceration of a targeted racial group, a history to which most visitors might have had no previous exposure. I found that place-based pedagogy at Tule Lake involves preserving and teaching through the remnants of the camp. To teach through place requires cultivating an observational acuity among visitors—training them to see both presence and absence in the landscape, to awaken their curiosity, and stoke the desire to look and look closely.

While the examples so far have focused on prisons that can be visited in real-life, I also have been increasingly interested in documenting virtual prisons that live online, allowing avatars to traverse simulations of existing, still-operating prisons. A conference on virtual memory at the Yale Genocide Project solidified research (Goulding, 2020) on two digital Guantánamos: Gone GITMO and The Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History. The Guantánamo Bay Museum of Art and History is a fake museum website premised on an imagined closure of Guantánamo in 2010. Gone GITMO is a virtual re-creation of the Guantánamo on the e-simulated reality website Second Life. As avatars, visitors can experience the prison "first hand" and view lectures from scholars in a virtual classroom. Designers of these two digital Guantánamos experimented with the very notion of place, upending conceptions of place as concrete, material, or even bound to human memory and histories.

The visceral, felt encounter between the body and space is one of the key characteristics of place-based pedagogy. The cultural geographer Edward Casey (2009) notes, "My body continually takes me into place. It is at once agent and vehicle, articulator and witness of being-in-place" (p. 48). Through embodied, perceptual experience, places can lead us to uncover hidden memories and stage the telling of testimony. Bodily engagement in place and space shape the learner. Place-based pedagogy involves the structuring of these corporeal encounters.

## INCORPORATING RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

The research reviewed here so far sheds some light on the design processes of educators and others who are dealing with the problem of how to translate silenced, complex, and violent events into educational experiences. Because of the innovative design and multimodal approaches of the historic prisons and virtual simulations, studying such sites has the potential to support curriculum work in schools and imagine possibilities beyond using lecture and texts to engage young people in their nation's past.

As a teacher educator, I talk to preservice and in-service teachers about place-based pedagogies and the possibilities of integrating place in their curriculum. With students

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enrolled in a social studies methods course, we consider the teaching of historical violence through place. We read works like Saidiya Hartman's (2008) Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route. In Hartman's work, they read a first-person account of walking through a site of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. They investigate place-based learning through the Native Land mapping project and exhibitions at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. I review research methods in studying place, including using walking methodologies (Goulding, 2019; Springgay & Truman, 2017) and studying familial archives. I tell them walking places like the prison camp is to traverse boundaries and borders. It is notice the traces of prisoners on the walls. It means reading absences and presences. It means that we open ourselves up to ghosts (Gordon, 2008).

In constructing learning experiences around place, I balance concrete learning aims with murkier, less readily-measured effects. During an educator workshop on designing walking tours, for example, I ask teachers to start to consider what a simple walk might afford: What kind of walk do you want to do with students? An art walk? Historic walk? What stops do you want to make on your walk? What observational tools will you prepare? I give educators a template (see Appendix) to help them plan a structured walk—one that will also permit open-ended responses from learners and welcome possible digressions.

When learners study a place through the lens of haunting, or examining the social traces of violence in a place (Gordon, 2008), I lead them through a citizen design process (Cooper-Hewitt, 2016). I ask learners to select a place that they believe is haunted: places that disrupt linear temporalities, "feel" unsettled, or have figures yet to respond to the violence that has transpired there. At their selected place, they observe the unseen or lesser-known social forces at work (Hamilton, 2000). Ultimately, learners create a "haunting intervention" (see Appendix) to allow invisible, repressed histories to surface. Ultimately, I am less invested in the instrumentalization of place for learning purposes, such as extracting learning aims or naming criterion for assessment. Educators might instead focus on the interactive protocols and processes that can enhance learners immersion in and connection to a place.

In addition to these more pragmatic applications, place-based pedagogies can incite new inroads for conceiving curriculum and what we mean when we say "teaching" or "learning." Educators and educator researchers sometimes position learning as an intentional, structured interaction between a teacher and learner. In The Beautiful Risk of Education, Gert Biesta (2015) helps us consider the idea of a curriculum for which there are no guarantees. Places permit an open-endedness, a bodily experience for which there are no set aims and specific obtainments. The research sites here capture the "risky" (Biesta, 2015) education in places of learning: a patchwork of emotions, lessons and non-lessons, haphazard observations, and thoughtful analysis. Like any worthy learning venture, real or digitally rendered prison camps offer the learner an occasion to find new modes of thinking and feeling.

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# Q & A WITH CATHLIN GOULDING

## Question #1

### *Teacher's Question:*

What criteria should teachers keep in mind when fostering student connections between conceptual ideas and place-based learning? Is this a general criterion, or would it be division (i.e. Gr. 1-3 / 4-6 / 7-9 /10-12) specific?

### *Cathlin Goulding's Response:*

Teachers should emphasize that learning in place is an act of continuous discovery. It means entering familiar spaces and places and seeing them anew. Place-based learning embraces uncertainty and surprise, as the learner is never sure of what they might encounter on their thoroughfares. It means that we let go of preconceived outcomes. Learning in place often involves aimless "straying." The German philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote of the flâneur, or the walker who unhurriedly traversed the glass-roofed Paris Arcades. This walker took pleasure not in buying material goods but in the mere act of observing others. Knowledge comes from getting lost, from endless ambling in the peopled environment. I think teachers ought to be attentive the affective realm, too, and not just about extracting content knowledge from a site. Place-based curriculum engages through our senses. When we walk in a place, we are directly exposed to the conditions of the environment, which bolsters our observational capacity. In *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Rebecca Solnit (2001) tells us that walking through a place "is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned" (p.5). The best criteria for place-based learning is keeping all of these modes and ways of being activated.

## Question #2

### *Teacher's Question:*

How would this type of learning be applicable to the legacy of assimilation that occurred in Canada's residential schools or the U.S.'s Indian Boarding Schools in relation to Indigenous students?

### *Cathlin Goulding's Response:*

Giorgio Agamben's "state of exception" is a powerful conceptual tool for educators and learners. Exceptional places are sites where extra-legal abuses are possible. They are the places where there is little oversight, where most vulnerable become killable by the state. We can draw connections across these kinds of sites, from the residential schools in Canada and the U.S. to immigrant detention centers. Through witness testimony, investigative reporting, and forensic archeology, the broader public is only now learning the extent of the harms done to Native children. These places of exception, over time, become a critical part of the truth-telling process.

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## Question #3

### *Teacher's Question:*

If place-based learning were to be incorporated into state or provincial curricula, what concepts would you like to see specifically named and addressed in these curricula?

### *Cathlin Goulding's Response:*

Not surprisingly, I am less interested in instrumentalizing place-based learning or standardizing learning in or about place. Place-based learning is about the encounter between each person and the environment. This kind of pedagogy should be conceived by vested persons who want to explore a relationship to a place; therefore, the aims and conditions of learning are locally-derived. The learning is uniquely driven by these persons' needs and interests. It's tough, then, for me to draw out a standard set of concepts.

## Question #4

### *Teacher's Question:*

Can you provide an exemplar of what one of these activities might look like in practical terms, whether that is a handout or a detailed explanation?

### *Cathlin Goulding's Response:*

In this article, you can see a template I created on designing a walking tour for children and youth. The template is teacher-facing, so it is meant for educators to use as they plan a walking tour. However, teachers might want to use it with students to co-create a tour. You can also see a couple of protocols from a project that I've done on unveiling hauntings in places where historical violence has occurred. These are meant to be tools to kickstart thinking, investigation, and designing critical encounters with place.

There are many organizations that offer terrific activities for learners interacting with neighborhood locales. One of my favorites is from the Philadelphia-based organization, Monument Lab. Learners are asked to sketch a monument of their choice. They unmask the monument's history and the power relations that underlie it. The American Society of Landscape Architects offers excellent activities to observe and sketch the features of gardens, parks, and other outdoor environments.

## Question #5

### *Teacher's Question:*

Can you give me some illustrative examples from your own practice that might help clarify the pedagogical process and student learning that takes place during this type of educational experience?

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### *Cathlin Goulding's Response:*

I like to create design protocols and practical, ready-to-implement processes for educators and learners. In this article, you can see some tools that help educators construct place-based experiences for their students. In *My Walking Tour,* I offer a process to create a basic walking tour for learners. I ask teachers to establish a purpose for their walk. I give some common categories for walks—such as an art walk, historic walk, architecture walk—but I'm also confident teachers will think outside the box and tailor for their own contexts. I encourage teachers to take time to make a list of possible areas for walking tours. I emphasize that a place-based learning experience doesn't have to be complicated! It can be as simple (and as enriching) as observing a road or block around your school.

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## APPENDIX


**Figure 1**

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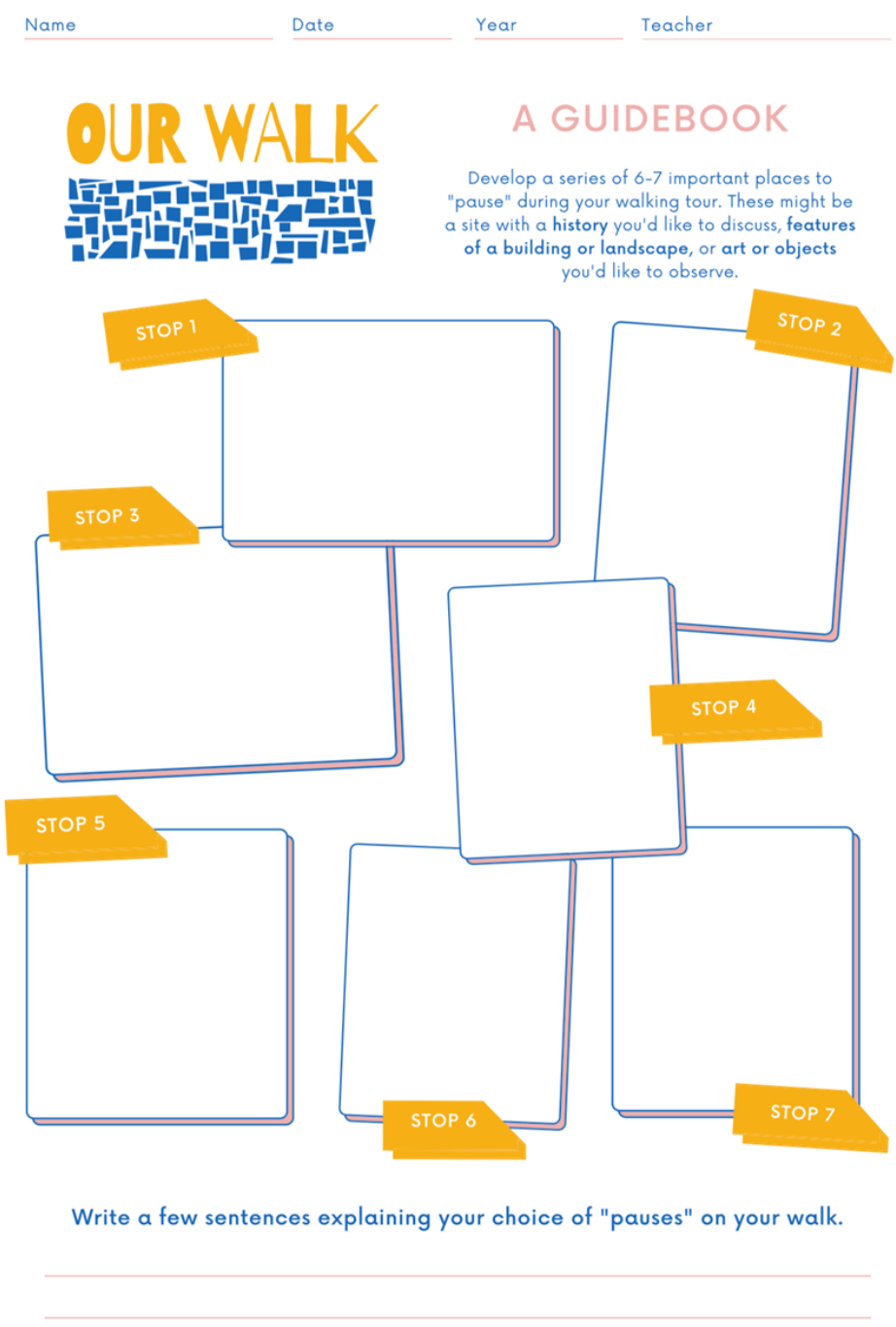


**Figure 2**

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## SPECTRAL ANALYSIS

Now, spend some time doing a spectral analysis of your site. Consider: What's visible or on the surface? Make lists of what is **empirically observable** at your site.

Next, get your hauntologist hat on! Look at the **invisible or less-visible** people, environments, objects, and uses. Looking at the invisible requires us to look at the social institutions, discourses, and historical forces that are shaping this site.

| Visible Elements | Non-Visible Elements |
|---|---|
| **Participants**<br>The people who can be seen to be interacting with the site | Who is not here who has **been influential** at this site? |
| **Setting**<br>The immediate physical circumstances | What **settings** from the past or in other contexts have influenced this site? |
| **Artifacts**<br>The materials, objects, and accessories within the site | What **artifacts, texts, objects** are not present but play a role at this site? |
| **Activities**<br>The actions performed by visitors at the site | Why does this activity seem natural? How did it **come to be natural**? Reveal some of the less-than-visible ways that the site came to be as it is today. |

**Figure 3**

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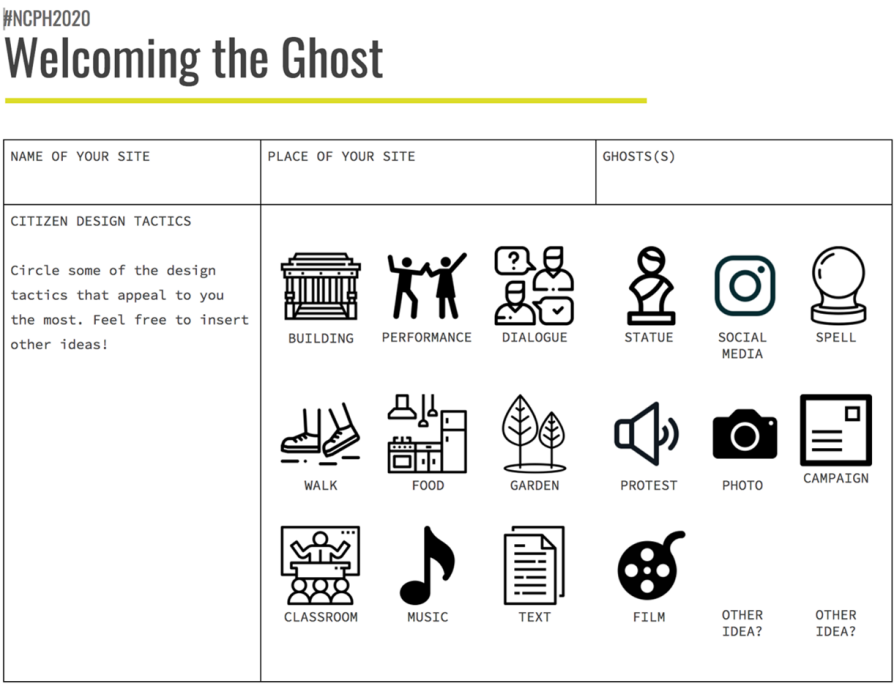


**Figure 4**