

# Introduction

## Virginia Loh-Hagan, Stewart Kwoh, and Pat Kwoh

The histories of Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) communities in the United States are an integral part of American history.<sup>1</sup> APIDA people have contributed to and shaped this country. Yet, in most school districts across the United States, APIDA history is almost invisible. The contributions of APIDA communities have been ignored, marginalized, and diminished in a myriad of ways. The history of challenging discrimination and the history of contribution to the vitality of the United States in the sectors of services, health, technology, culture, law, education, and public service are mostly absent from schools. To be APIDA in this country means to reckon with a history and culture of exclusion and exploitation. At various points in history, we have been seen as the enemy, positioned as “perpetual foreigners” (e.g., Chinese Exclusion laws, Japanese Incarceration); at other times, we have been seen as the hard-working “model minority” and used for our labor (e.g., the Transcontinental Railroad) and/or as a racial wedge to diminish other communities of color.

To complicate matters, there is marginalization within the APIDA identity as well. It is important to note that the APIDA community consists of numerous ethnic populations with roots in various countries in the Asia Pacific; despite this, we are seen as a monolithic category in the United States. This leaves out many histories and narratives, especially those of Southeast Asians, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders. While the APIDA category is useful as a political strategy, it does not accurately or fully capture all the communities it purports to represent. We must remember that communities and individuals count. That stated, various APIDA subgroups and communities have a shared history of oppression. Thus, identifying as APIDA provides strength and solidarity against systemic racism.

Our teaching and curriculum are one of the major ways we have underserved APIDA communities. There are about 22 million APIDA people living in the United States; they are the fastest growing racial or ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> Yet, their stories are rarely taught in the classrooms; if they are taught, they are taught superficially (i.e., “holidays and heroes”) and/or through the Westernized lens of whiteness.

On the teaching of Black history, LaGarrett J. King asserts, “...we have mostly only taught *about* Black history and not *through* Black history.” He promotes a notion of teaching “multiple histories” in order to develop a “historical consciousness.”<sup>3</sup> As co-executive directors of The Asian American Education Project, we seek to develop an APIDA historical consciousness, one that honors and values the APIDA community’s multiple voices and perspectives. To do so means we have to actively pursue the process of unlearning and relearning what we believe is “American history.” We must consider race and resistance, as well as xenophobia. We also must be willing to see examples of how the United States has acted as an active perpetrator of white supremacy—which is rooted in a desire to uphold its power and privilege. In its worst form, this desire has manifested itself into hate and violence against communities of color. We contend that we can love the United States and also be critical of it; through this critical process, we can become better.

The Asian American Education Project strives to help educators by providing free K-12 curricula and professional development focused on APIDA communities. The lessons are categorized into themes such as immigration, citizenship, racism, civil rights, and identity. By showcasing the struggles and triumphs of APIDA communities, our lesson plans amplify the voices of this growing, integral segment of the U.S. population in

building the country into what it is today and can become tomorrow.<sup>4</sup>

The Asian American Education Project is committed to responding to escalating anti-Asian hate and preventing such hate from taking root in current and future generations. These past years have been tough for APIDA communities. First, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected us; for example, many APIDA people have given their lives as first responders and health workers to fight the pandemic. Second, APIDA communities have and continue to face discrimination. There has been a sharp increase in hate crime and violence toward APIDA communities.<sup>5</sup> These acts, especially the March 2021 shooting that resulted in the murder of six women of Asian ancestry, were horrific. However, such hate did not start with the pandemic. Rather, the current trend of hate incidents has simply brought anti-Asian hate into the national spotlight. Anti-Asian hate began the very moment Asian immigrants stepped foot on American soil. Anti-Asian hate is not new; it's an American tradition and can be found in exclusive and racist laws and policies. Animosities against the APIDA community have long been either kept out of the public focus or normalized in our society. They are a result of the "Perpetual Foreigner" stereotype, which makes the APIDA community an easy target for scapegoating because we look "different" or "foreign."

Education, not ignorance, will build our multiracial democracy; ignorance fosters and perpetuates violence. The rise of anti-Asian hate made it more apparent that our education system needs to be more inclusive and diverse. The Asian American Education Project seeks to provide resources to help teachers and youth understand the history, struggles, and accomplishments of APIDA communities. We need to correct the record and change the lens through which we view APIDA narratives. When APIDA people are viewed mainly through stereotypes, we become caricatures and are not seen as Americans. When APIDA histories are ignored and made invisible in schools, students are deprived of learning about the beauty and benefits of diversity.

We are thrilled to be given this opportunity to curate and edit this special edition of *Social Education*. Even though this issue is in honor of

APIDA Heritage Month in May, we hope that readers see teaching and learning about APIDA history as a year-long, everyday commitment. Such teaching should not just take place in May or on Asian-themed holidays. It is important to know that the history of APIDA Heritage Month is rooted in activism. May commemorates the arrival of the first Japanese immigrant to the United States on May 7, 1843, and the anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, which was mainly built by Chinese immigrants, on May 10, 1869. The idea for this month was inspired by Jeanie Jew, a congressional staffer. Her great-grandfather had helped build the railroad and, years later, was killed in an anti-Asian hate attack. Jeanie Jew wanted to honor him and other Asian Americans. She worked with political leaders to pass a bill in Congress for an Asian American week. Future bills extended the week to a month and to an annual recognition. We hope teachers continue this activism by making every day a celebration of APIDA history and heritage.

I hope that you join us in making visible the invisible histories and legacies of APIDA students, who deserve to be seen and heard. We encourage you to work hard to decolonize and politicize what you think you know about APIDA history. In your curriculum and teaching, teach about APIDA experiences from a critical lens. Choose to value people's stories and narratives, not just the ones that fit your way of thinking. Also, teach APIDA histories from a celebratory lens. Members of the APIDA community have used the freedoms and opportunities in the United States to forge new lives, get ahead economically and politically, and contribute to the vitality of our country. Teachers are the key to helping all students feel rooted in narratives of equity and not of whiteness. Yuri Kochiyama, a notable Asian American woman activist, said, "Our ultimate objective in learning about anything is to try to create and develop a more just society." Teaching is justice. 🗳️

## Notes

1. APIDA refers to people with the following ancestries: East Asian, Southeast Asian, Central Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Islander.
2. Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, "Key Facts About Asian Americans, A Diverse and Growing Population,"

Pew Research Center: [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans).

3. LaGarrett J. King, "Black History is Not American History: Toward a Framework of Black Historical Consciousness," *Social Education* 84, no. 6 (2020), 335–341.
4. Asian American Education Project website: <https://asianamericanedu.org>.
5. Stop AAPI Hate website: <https://stopaapihate.org>



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## National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (2010 edition)

NCSS announces the publication of the revised national curriculum standards for social studies: *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. The revised standards, like the earlier social studies standards published in 1994, continue to be structured around the ten themes of social studies. However, the revised standards offer a sharper focus on:

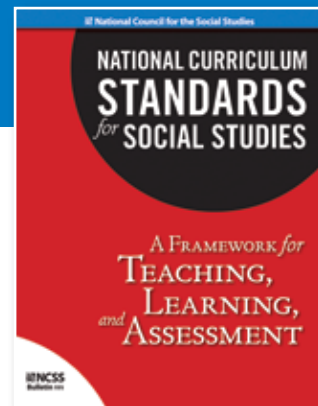
### Purposes

- Questions for Exploration
- Knowledge: what learners need to understand
- Processes: what learners will be capable of doing
- Products: how learners demonstrate understanding

### The revised standards also include:

- Enhancements in the descriptions of the ten themes and the associated learning expectations
- The addition of new descriptions of standards-based class practices to time-tested descriptions that were included in the original edition of the standards
- A stronger focus on student products and their assessment
- An updated list of essential social studies skills and strategies, including literacy strategies

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