

April 26, 2021

## **In Their Own Words: Asian-American Students on Anti-Asian Racism and the Need for Asian-American History**

When I am in school, I am sometimes surprised by the lack of Asian American history. I see my African-American friends being relieved at the school's focus on the evils of slavery and Jim Crow, allowing for these practices to be cast into the limelight, and exposed for how deeply, and morally wrong they are. I see my European friends, finding solace in the fact that World War II was explained so in depth, going over the countries that they were native to, and how it performed in the war. But when I search for any mention of Asian Americans, I usually come up short. The most amount of Asian American history I have learned so far is through the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor. The one thing that we learn about Asian Americans in school, and it's about how Asians hate Americans. That is simply not true. This new generation, of those born in 2005 and later, are put into a world that is easy to accept people. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't stop trying. By implementing a curriculum that will cast Asian Americans into a more humanitarian light, such as their culture, and how they are similar to the general American populous, we can ensure that the new generation will be taught to accept everyone. Certainly for other minority groups, I strongly agree. But the lack of Asian representation in our history curriculum is having some very harsh effects. Attacks on Asians have been ramping up throughout the COVID pandemic. Many blame Asians as a whole, needing someone to scapegoat for this deadly disease. If their children, who went to school, learned that Asians aren't just a bunch of lazy, unethical people, but rather, a hard-working, caring, and patriotic ethnic group, they could tell their parents, and maybe, just maybe, change their opinions.

Daniel L. 12 years old

Currently, I feel as though the school system is lacking teaching in Asian American history. We learn about the "world" in history, but it doesn't seem that way. There isn't enough teaching about Asian American history. I barely know about the history of my own ethnic background, and it doesn't seem just to talk about history without talking about the history of Asia, Asians, and what Asians have done in America. As far as I know, during the history of Asians in America, the only things I've learned were the Chinese Exclusion Act. Adding in more about what Asians have done and the history of them is something needed in the curriculum..

Leo L. 14 years old

All throughout elementary and middle school, the history lessons I had were all pertaining to US history relating to non POC. I learnt the same exact topics throughout my years, there was just a repeat of information that could've been used to teach about other topics. Blacks were only mentioned for slavery and then POC faded from importance. Now that Asian hate is being brought into the light, we need to understand the history behind it. People don't understand how Asians or other POC have really contributed to our history because such topics just were never covered.

April L. 15 years old

The United States is a nation of and built by immigrants. Ironically, Asian American history is not a part of the history textbook that is being taught in detail in school. This fault in American education contributes to the act of Asian Americans being misunderstood and treated as outsiders. Thus, including Asian American history in school textbooks would inform students that Asian Americans are Americans and have been for a very long time.

Kalyn Y. 15 years old

As an Asian-American, I feel as though, in school, I have never been adequately educated about Asian-American history. Learning about Asian culture in school would make me feel more proud to be Asian-American. Asian-Americans have also contributed to the building of this great nation, and I hope non-Asian students can also recognize that. I wish that everyone can have a better understanding of Asian history so that we, as a group, can be identified as Americans, too.

Justin L. 13 years old

Ever since I was young, I've experienced multiple accounts of Asian American hate. I have attended a predominantly Caucasian school my whole life. In elementary school, my classmates told me that my food was disgusting and that it smelled terrible. I was so embarrassed to bring the delicious foods that my mom would make for me. Although we were all young, my classmates still treated me differently. Kids would run around screaming, "Chinese, Japanese, I like cheese," while pulling back their eyes on the playground. The behavior of these children is still ingrained in me, even after ten years. It is imperative that children learn more about Asian

American history. Stopping behavior, similar to that of what I experienced, starts with education at a young age. I've grown up with absolutely no Asian or Asian American role models, and as of now, I still do not know any. Instead of trying to stop the appropriation of and hate against Asian culture, let's seek to educate children so that it doesn't happen in the first place. We can start by celebrate Asian American heritage month, schools should present great Asian role models to students. Whether it be through signs and posters or reading a quote from a great Asian American leader during homeroom, these small gestures make Asian American students feel proud to be themselves. As we have learned in school, there are many great leaders, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, who we look up to. However, most students do not know of even a single Asian leader. Bringing pride to Asian American students would be a great way to celebrate Asian American heritage.

Katherine L. 15 years old

The school's definition of American History is not inclusive. I am not learning enough about how Asian Americans contribution to the building of this country. Throughout my elementary school and middle school years, I don't recall learning about Asian American leaders. I couldn't think about any inspiring Asian figures that impacted our history in America. The only famous Asian that I can think of is Bruce Lee. And even if the school teaches about Asian American history, we only touch the surface of the topic. I don't even get to understand my own ethnicity and I feel my identity is a blur.

Samantha T. 12 years old

I want to ask you to help Asian-American students and their classmates know what their history is. I rarely learn anything about how Asian American contributed to this great country nor do I know any famous Asian role models that I can look up to. We have been subjected to misunderstanding for too long. Knowing crucial information about what our ancestors went through would definitely help us to better understand ourselves. It would really make a huge difference in learning and I know many students would appreciate it.

Kaitlyn Y.12 years old

My name is Mikayla Lin and I am a student in New York City Public High School. I am in 9th grade already, I have yet to learn about Asian American history, at least not in depth. Japanese internment camps were only mentioned in a footnote or a brief sentence. The textbooks

neglected to write anything about the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The history of discrimination and hate against Asian-Americans has been hidden, under the guise that we are model minorities. And yet, I can't think of a single Asian-American role model written about in the textbooks. I guarantee you, most students have no idea who Richard Aoki was, an important activist in the Black Panther Party. Same with Philip Vera Cruz, a Filipino immigrant that founded the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee and fought for the rights of migrant workers. These are the people that need to be represented in our history books. Especially with Asian hate being so prevalent in today's society. People telling us to "Go back to our country," as if we are less American than them. But Asian Americans belong to the United States just as much as anyone else, and our history books need to reflect this.

Mikayla L. 14 years old

The lack of Asian American history and Asian American representation in the current school curriculum is not acceptable anymore. Throughout my entire schooling career, I have learned the bare minimum amount when it comes to Asian - American history and culture. The textbooks pertaining to how Asian Americans overcome racism in America is shockingly inadequate. Because of this, people are quick to assume that Asians are simply model minorities. However, the reality is that Asian American are continuing going through discrimination and it has been extremely prevalent now due to the pandemic. The recent hate crimes bring light to the abhorrence of Asian communities. Teaching children about the history of prevalent Asian Americans and Asian American history is taking a step in the right direction when it comes to relieving Asian hate. It is also important for people of other ethnicities to have a better understanding of Asian American because we are also a part of American History.

Aiden T. 14 years old

Racism and racial inequality in the United States has been an issue since the very beginning. In the recent decades, with the rise of both interconnectivity and diversity within communities and overall awareness, not excluding the many minorities in our society standing up to fight prejudice, the amount of racism has decreased. Despite this, in the past year, as Covid-19 hit the US, a spike in hate crimes hit simultaneously, especially towards Asian Americans. Elderly men and women have been beaten on subways. Children and adults in the Asian American community have been verbally and physically harassed on the street. According to the Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism, hate crimes towards the AAPI community rose by over 148% in 2020. In the modern era, where everyone is interconnected and a plethora of resources are available, such bigotry should not exist. However, it persists.

We can attribute this to the curriculum students are taught in schools. Without learning of the history of Asian-American history in schools, people in our society are simply unable to understand the perspective and culture of Asian Americans.

The history of Asian Americans is connected with that of our entire nation. American history cannot exist without the history of the minorities that have made significant contributions to the United States, and so if Asian American history isn't taught in schools, the objective history of our country can't be taught. From the abolition of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which paved the way for future immigration of other ethnic groups, to the labor rights movement led by Filipino workers, Asian Americans have made an massive impact on society today and have changed the way the United States operates. Not learning about this topic means that students are blind to the realities of the history of the United States.

This doesn't just impact their historical knowledge. Today, the culture of Asian Americans is suppressed throughout education in America. If the history and the culture of certain races, such as Asian Americans, is hidden from students, then they may grow up being more culturally insensitive because they aren't aware of both the struggles and hardships a certain group has gone through and certain parts of said group's culture. Literacy on Asian Americans and minorities as a whole is essential to start bridging the gap between different races in our society.

Brandon T, Katherine V., Annie L., Gauri G. 7th graders

In this country, there are a lot of great people who've contributed to the well-being of this country. However, one group is extremely under appreciated, Asian-Americans. In my personal experience, my father is a physician, saving lives on a daily basis, and there are thousands of others who are greatly contributing to our society. But they don't get the appreciation nor praise that others do. Even in schools, Asian-American History isn't very apparent. During the Industrial Revolution, Asians helped build the railroads, and even today, during these difficult times, we are still contributing greatly. Around 17% of the doctors within this country are Asian and are helping others every single second. Everyone should come to acknowledge our contribution and learn about it as much as any other ethnicity. Most people just think we are immigrants. This country was built off of immigration and is why it is so great. Thus, this is why I believe it is important for us to receive recognition, not as immigrants, but true Americans.

Thomas L, 8th grader