

CA ETHNIC STUDIES MODEL CURRICULUM
From Outrage to Organizing: The Vincent Chin Case – Hate Crime
Against Asian Americans

Lesson Plan: From Outrage to Organizing: the Vincent Chin Case - Hate Crime Against Asian Americans

Themes:

Unit 7: Asian American Social Movements (ES)

Disciplinary Area: Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Pan-Asian Category

Ethnic Studies Values and Principles Alignment: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7

Standards Alignment:

CA HSS Analysis Skills (9–12): Historical Research Evidence and Point of View 1–3

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1, 2, 3, 7, 8; W.1, 4, 8; SL.1, 2. L.1.

CA CCSS for ELA/Literacy: RI.9-10.1, 2, 3, 7, 8; W.9-10.1, 1.b, 4, 8; SL.9-10.1, 1.d, 2; L.9-10.1; RI.11-12.1, 2, 3, 7, 8; W.11-12.1, 1.b, 4, 8; SL.11-12.1, 1.d, 2; L.11-12.1.

9-12.IV.C.4.1; 9-12 V.C.2; 9-12 V.E.2.2,.3, 3.4, 5.

U.S. History Grades 5-12 4.2C.3; 9.4A.6; 10.2B.1; 10.2E, 4.

Lesson Overview:

This lesson will explore how the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin galvanized the Asian American community, resulting in increased visibility for Asian Americans, an organized response to racism and xenophobia, and the birth of a new generation of activists. In addition, the lesson will explore the legal impact of Vincent Chin’s murder and how it has shaped how we view and define hate crimes today.

Lesson Objectives (Students will learn to...):

- How xenophobia created by fear, anxiety, and discrimination has resulted in a history of anti-Asian sentiment including, but not limited to, Vincent Chin’s murder and how to apply these concepts to contemporary examples.
- How Vincent Chin’s case was instrumental in further defining what a hate crime is and who could be considered victims of a hate crime.
- How Vincent Chin’s murder led to the creation of a pan-ethnic, multi-generational activist movement motivated to end the pervasive racism experienced by Asian Americans across the country.

Essential Questions:

- How did the socioeconomic conditions of the United States in 1982 create an environment for anti-Asian violence?
- What is a hate crime and how does it differ from other types of crimes? Should we treat it more seriously than other crimes not rooted in bigotry or prejudice? Why or why not?
- In what ways can an act of violence or hate be a catalyst for positive change? How did activists use Vincent Chin’s death to create a national Asian American movement for change?
- How do stereotypes about Asian Americans, such as being foreign even if they were born in the U.S., fuel xenophobia? What are the impacts on Asian Americans with being seen as “perpetual foreigners” in this country? What are the consequences of xenophobic rhetoric?

From Outrage to Organizing: The Vincent Chin Case Essay:

The 1982 murder of Vincent Chin represents a pivotal moment in both Asian American and civil rights history. The legacy of his death continues to reverberate today, and remains a rallying cry for Asian American solidarity and those seeking justice for hate crimes.

In the early 1980s due to increased gas prices, American consumers began gravitating towards more fuel-efficient Japanese cars. The economic decline of the U.S. auto industry and the trade war between Japan and the United States gave rise to increased anti-Asian sentiment.

Within this hostile climate, 27-year-old Vincent Chin was beaten to death on June 19, 1982 in Detroit, Michigan, a week before his wedding. While at a bar for his bachelor party, two white men, Ronald Ebens and his stepson Michael Nitz, began to hurl racial insults at Vincent and his friend, saying, “It’s because of you [profanity] that we are out of work!” A fight began but was quickly broken up, and both parties left. Twenty-minutes later, Ebens and Nitz searched for Vincent and beat him with a baseball bat until his head cracked open. Vincent’s final words were “It isn’t fair.” He died four days later while in a coma.

In the subsequent murder trial, Ebens and Nitz pled guilty to manslaughter and were sentenced to only three years’ probation and a \$3,000 fine. Given the severity of the crime, the light sentence served to galvanize the Asian American community across the country and set into motion a legal and political battle to confront this injustice. Activists pushed for federal hate crime charges—a statute of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 which came about after years of unjust crimes, including lynching, against African Americans. To be considered a hate crime, an injury within a public space due to racial motivation needs to be proven.

In 1984, a federal civil rights case found Ebens guilty and sentenced him to twenty-five years in prison. That decision was later overturned in a 1986 appeal. Nitz was acquitted in both trials. In 1987, Ebens was later cleared of all charges at a retrial. The juries found that there was no hate crime committed, with the defense claiming that the incident was nothing but a simple bar room brawl. Although neither men ever served a day in jail for Vincent Chin’s murder, the case was a seminal one as it served to further define what constitutes a hate crime.

Today Vincent’s legacy continues on. Inspired by his mother’s struggle for justice, a generation of Asian Americans became advocates and public servants—forming/leading legal organizations and civil rights groups by coming together for the first time to build solidarity both within ethnic groups and across racial lines.

Vocabulary:

- **Civil rights:** A set of fundamental rights for everyone, including equal treatment under the law, regardless of their ethnicity, race, gender, etc.
- **Hate crime:** A crime committed on the basis of hatred of someone else because of their race, gender, religion, or other special characteristic.
- **Solidarity:** Mutual support between different groups.
- **Xenophobia:** Fear of foreign things and/or people, leading to resentment and hatred.

Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection: Lesson Steps/Activities:

Activity #1:

“It’s Not Fair”—Making Sense of Vincent Chin’s Murder

Show the video clip (7min 7 sec) to students:

<https://advancingjustice-la.org/what-we-do/curriculum-lesson-plans/asian-americans-k-12-education-curriculum/episode-5-lesson-1>

Ask students to write about their own emotional responses to the clip, as well as documenting any connections or questions they may have.

1. Lead a class discussion on the following questions:
 - a. How did the economic, social, and political climate of the time contribute to Vincent Chin’s murder?
 - b. What relationship might there be between feelings of fear and anxiety, and acts of discrimination or racism?
 - c. In the words of Vincent Chin, what was “not fair”? Did Vincent cause the auto-workers to lose their jobs?
 - d. What other reasons were there for the attack on Vincent?
 - e. Ebens and Nitz were sentenced to three years’ probation and a \$3,000 fine for the murder of Vincent. Do you think it is fair? Why and why not?
 - f. How could America have responded differently to the U.S.-Japan trade war? Do you think a different response might have prevented Vincent’s murder? Why or why not?

Activity #2:

The Evolution of the Federal Hate Crime

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

Ask students to read the essay.

1. Ask students to work in pairs to write their own definition of the term ‘hate crime’. Give each pair the opportunity to share their definition with the class.
2. Ask students to familiarize themselves with the federal definition of a hate crime. The primary federal hate crimes statute was enacted in 1968 during the Civil Rights Movement and still stands today. It defines a hate crime as occurring when someone “by force or threat of force willfully injures, intimidates or interferes with, or attempts to injure, intimidate or interfere with . . . any person because of his race, color, religion or national origin” who is patronizing a location that can be regulated under federal law. (18 U.S. Code Section 245)

Ask students to discuss the following questions bearing in mind the legal definition of a hate crime:

- a. Does Vincent Chin’s murder appear to fit the federal definition of a hate crime?
- b. Why didn’t many people, including legal scholars, consider Vincent Chin’s murder to be a hate crime in 1982?
- c. Following from the above question, what can we infer about how people perceived Asian Americans at the time? Are there any parallels to how Asian Americans are perceived and treated today? In what ways?
- d. What is the significance of the federal hate crimes statute in the Civil Rights Act of 1968 when it was first established? Why was it important to consider Vincent Chin’s murder a hate crime?

In summary, ask students to share with the entire class a two-word response that captures either how they feel or a key takeaway from today's lesson.

Activity #3:

Fighting Discrimination, Past & Present

1. Ask students to consider Viet Thanh Nguyen's statement: "I think the Vincent Chin murder was shocking to a lot of Asian Americans. Not because it represented something new, but that it actually represented something old. It reminded Asian Americans that progress hadn't really been made."
2. Lead a preliminary discussion on the following:
 - a. What does Viet Thanh Nguyen mean by, "It represented something old"? How does Vincent Chin's murder reflect other times in history for Asian Americans?
 - b. Introduce the concept of "perpetual foreigner," the idea that Asian Americans are always seen as foreign no matter how long they have lived in the United States, or if they were born here. How does this stereotype encourage people to identify Asian Americans with foreign countries like Japan or China? What consequences might it have?
 - c. How did Vincent Chin's death become a turning point for Asian Americans?
 - d. How did the movement to seek justice for Vincent Chin solidify the identity of Asian Americans?
 - e. How has the Justice for Vincent Chin Movement impacted the treatment of Asian Americans today, if at all? Do you think it has led to more equality and justice? Why or why not?
3. Building on the discussion above, students will consider more current examples of anti-Asian discrimination.
 - a. What parallels do you see between recent anti-Asian sentiment/attacks and Vincent Chin's murder?
 - b. In the Vincent Chin case, Japan was accused of hurting the U.S. auto industry. For the recent incidents you researched on, how did domestic/international events affect Asian Americans? Why?
 - c. What ways can people combat racially targeted sentiments/attacks? How can students make a difference in creating change and understanding?
4. Assign students the task of writing an opinion article that counters the misinformation and racist language being used in the anti-Asian incidences they researched, while providing clear, factual information. Students should cite credible sources found during their research.

Materials and Resources:

- Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los Angeles – From Outrage to Organizing: The Impact of the Vincent Chin Case Lesson Resources:
<https://advancingjustice-la.org/what-we-do/curriculum-lesson-plans/asian-americans-k-12-education-curriculum/episode-5-lesson-1>
- Choy, Christine, director. "Who Killed Vincent Chin?" (Filmmakers Library, 1990)
- "Coronavirus Resources" Asian American / Asian Research Institute – The City University of New York. <https://aaari.info/cuny-forum-8-resources/>
- Dejesus, Jaime. "Asian-Americans want justice for elderly woman set on fire." Brooklyn Reporter, 12 Aug. 2020. Accessed 29 Sept, 2020.
- Lam, Tony, director. "Vincent Who?" (Tony Lam Productions, 2009)

- “Learn About Hate Crimes.” *U.S. Department of Justice*.
<https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes/learn-about-hate-crimes/chart>.
- Mathews, Jay. “Economic Invasion by Japan Revives Worry About Racism.” *The Washington Post*, May 4, 1982. Accessed 29 Sept, 2020,
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1982/05/14/economic-invasion-by-japan-revives-worry-about-racism/d2b921df-556b-4652-a20b-9f3f6761e339/>
- Parks, Mary. “*For Emmett Till*”. *Daily Worker*, 13 Oct.1955. Accessed 29 Sept. 2020,
https://books.google.com/books?id=-MK-0PRXO2YC&pg=PA301&lpg=PA301&dq=For+Emmett+Till+By+Mary+Parks,+Daily+Worker+on+13+October+1955&source=bl&ots=XUi4xOdGgF&sig=ACfU3U1XN66_jpYUjixCBggIfUSpXAY1Mw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiPyOHVoY_sAhXJHjQIHWdhAq4Q6AEwCXoECAsQAQ#v=onepage&q=For%20Emmett%20Till%20By%20Mary%20Parks%2C%20Daily%20Worker%20on%2013%20October%201955&f=false
- Tavernise, Sabrina, Richard A. Oppel Jr. “Spit On, Yelled At, Attacked: Chinese Americans Fear for Their Safety.” *New York Times*, 23 Mar. 2020, Accessed 29 Sept, 2020,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/us/chinese-coronavirus-racist-attacks.html>