

Sample Lesson 35: Xenophobic Racism Against South Asians and Muslims, Sikhs, South Asians and Arab Americans: Past & Present

Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies

Time: 60 minutes

Essential Question:

How can examining historical manifestations of xenophobia and racism help us understand present forms of bias-based bullying?

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to...):

- examine historical roots of xenophobia against South Asians and Muslims, Sikhs, South Asians and Arab Americans in America; and
- compare past occurrences with modern day forms of bias-based bullying.

Materials Needed:

1. Background Information handout
2. Past & Present sets
3. Graphic Organizer

Performance Tasks: Connecting the past to the present

Before beginning the lesson, the teacher should warn students that this lesson describes acts of violence that led to death. Time for process and reflection should be given to students because each of the sets can be traumatic for some students.

Activity: (5 min)

Connect students to the previous lesson in which they developed an understanding that the Oak Creek tragedy was not a new phenomenon. Rather hate crimes against ~~South Asians and~~ Muslims, Sikhs, South Asians and Arab Americans have significantly increased after the attacks on the World Trade Center. Tell students that today, they will further historicize this and understand how xenophobia is most often linked to what is happening in the political landscape.

Quick Write (5 mins)

- Ask students to recall when the earliest South Asians came to the United States. Draw upon the timeline.
- *Prompts:* What you think early arrivers might have experienced? What leads you to make these inferences?

Part I: Background Information (10 min)

Instructions for Facilitator/Teacher:

For the main activity for this lesson, students will be working in groups in order to compare the harassment of ~~South Asians and~~ Muslims, Sikhs, South Asians and Arab Americans in the past and present. In the next 10 minutes, you will provide students with background knowledge to set them up effectively for their independent work. As a class you can read through **Handout 1** which provides a brief synopsis of each historical occurrence that students will examine. You may want to include visual media that can be accessed below:

1907 Bellingham Riots:

http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/bham_intro.htm;

http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/bham_film.htm

The Persian Gulf War: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/>

Dotbusters: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1tG6mwjOtM> (begin at 0:42)

Part II: Small Group Work (25 min)

Break students into three larger groups and then create sub-groups of 3–4 students.

Before you break students into groups, discuss terms:

Microaggressions: contemporary form of racism—invisible, unintentional, and subtle in nature; usually outside the level of conscious awareness but which cumulatively and over time creates a uncomfortable or hostile environment for the victim

Bullying: verbal, physical, or psychological acts of intimidation where there is an imbalance of power

Harassment: systemic and/or continued unwanted actions, including threats and demands, often based upon race, sex, religion, gender, etc.

Hate crimes: acts of violence against individuals, groups, places of worship, etc., typically motivated by some form of prejudice.

Ask students to independently read their set of events (**Handout 2**). Thereafter, they should work together to complete the graphic organizer (**Handout 3**) (this could be completed using chart paper as well). Students will summarize each event and identify whether the occurrence is an example of microaggression, bullying, or hate crime. Next, they will analyze the language used to describe [South Asians and Muslims](#), [Sikhs](#), [South Asians and Arab Americans](#) either by perpetrators or by media sources in each excerpt. Finally, they will use guiding questions to synthesize the exercise and compare and contrast the xenophobic and racist treatment of the past and present. Students should prepare a quick three-minute presentation for the class on their event set.

Note: You may want to model or use guided practice for the first set to give students an example of the type of thinking they will need to do.

Part III: Whole Class Share (15 min)

After each group shares, debrief the comparison of the past/present and discuss why the analysis of historical forms of xenophobic/racist phenomena is significant.

- Guiding Questions:

- What did you realize as you read about the Bellingham Riots, the hate crimes that occurred during the Persian Gulf War, and the Dotbusters?
- Why do you think the events of the past occurred? What was happening between the United States and other countries during this time that influenced those events?
- What about present day occurrences?
- What was similar to the present day forms of harassment? What was different?
- What can be done?

South Asians Past & Present—Background Information 1907

Bellingham Riots

“Located in the northwest corner of Washington State, just shy of the Canadian border, Bellingham boomed in the early 20th century as a center of extractive industries like mining, fishing and timber. Workers from all over the world arrived in Bellingham looking for jobs, including a sizable number from Asia.

In the early 1900s, Asian immigrants numbered in the hundreds and were a substantial presence in Bellingham, sustaining small communities with their own restaurants, pool halls and barbershops. Yet, due to sustained campaigns of racism and exclusion, little to nothing of these communities remains in the city today. By 1950, city census numbers reported a mere eight individuals of Asian ancestry.

The most visible manifestation of these campaigns was the riot of 1907. A group of South Asian migrant workers, [mostly Sikhs](#), arrived in Bellingham in 1906, employed mostly in the city's lumber mills.

Immediately, white labor leaders demanded the South Asian workers be expelled from the city, claiming the newcomers took jobs away from white workers and drove down wages.”

Information excerpted from http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/bham_intro.htm

Dotbusters: Anti-Indian Hate Group in New Jersey

In the fall of 1987, an anti-Indian hate group formed in New York and New Jersey that committed their crimes in Jersey City. Hate crimes included burglary, vandalism, and assault to murder. While the violence seemed to be aimed at the Hindu community, where the wearing of the bindi is most common, it is believed that the Dotbusters actions were based on racial grounds, aimed at South Asian immigrants.

See <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/10/12/nyregion/in-jersey-city-indians-protest-violence.html>

Hate Crimes During the Persian Gulf War

The Persian Gulf War against Iraq was led by the United States, backed by a UN Coalition of 34 nations, and followed Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. This conflict led to an

eruption of hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims, and other ethnic communities perceived to be Middle Eastern in the United States.

Information excerpted from: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/> and <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/usa1102.pdf>

Xenophobic Racism Against ~~South Asians and~~ Muslims, Sikhs, South Asians and Arab Americans in the United States: Past and Present

Set #1

Event #1: 1907

Description:

On September 4, 1907, 500 white working class men in Bellingham, Washington attacked South Asian millworkers and their families. Within ten days the entire South Asian population departed town. It should be noted that the use of the term 'Hindu' in this article is inaccurate and actually refers to Sikhs. 'Hindu' or 'Hindoo' was a common label in Canada and the U.S. for all South Asians, though most early 20th century immigrants from India were Sikhs from the Punjab region. (See <https://www.bellinghamherald.com/news/local/article22195713.html>)

The Sikh Coalition's teacher resources about the Bellingham Riots provide greater detail about the Sikh community specifically being targeted, and can supplement this source. (<https://www.sikhcoalition.org/get-involved/resources-for-educators/middle-high-school-resources/bellingham-riots-resources/>).

Morning Reveille September 6, 1907, p. 4 (Editorial)

The Hindus Have Left Us.

While any good citizen must be unalterably opposed to the means employed, the result of the crusade against the Hindus cannot but cause a general and intense satisfaction. The school kids, who made up the greater portion of the mob that put the heathen out of business, should, of course, be spanked and sent to bed and the hoodlums should go to jail, but the fact that the fear instilled into the hearts of the Hindus induced them to return to the land which owes them protection [note: reference here is to Canada] is a cause for rejoicing. Two wrongs never make a right, it is true, and such riotous demonstrations are to be discouraged and prevented, but the departure of the Hindus will leave no regret.

From every standpoint it is most undesirable that these Asians should be permitted to remain in the United States. They are repulsive in appearance and disgusting in their manners. They are said to be without shame and, while no charges of immorality are brought against them, their actions and customs are so different from ours that there can never be tolerance of them. They contribute nothing to the growth and up-building of the city as the result of their labors. They work for small wages and do not put their money into circulation. They build no homes and while they numerically swell the population, it is of a class that we may well spare. ... They have been working here because of the labor shortage, but now that they have decamped their places will be filled by white men. ... There can be no two sides to such a question. The Hindu is a detriment to the town, while the white man is a distinct advantage.

Information sourced from:

Image: " The Reveille (September 5, 1907) (Accessed July 18, 2011). Courtesy of the Asian American Curriculum and Research Project

Article: "The Reveille" The Hindus Have Left Us (September 6, 1907), Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project: http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/bham_news.htm

Event #2: 2005

“In the fall of 2005, seventh-grader Mandeep Singh’s daily routine included fighting off classmates who pulled and yanked at his *jurdha* (the topknot worn by Sikh men) while calling him “Bin Laden” and “meatball head.” Though Mandeep and the Sikh Coalition repeatedly complained to his school’s administration, nothing was done to stem the harassment for almost two years. In February 2005 students hit the seventh-grader twice on his head, leading to contusions and a severe injury that left Mandeep confined to bed rest for weeks. Unconvinced that the school could do anything to ensure their son’s safety, Mandeep’s parents sent him back to his native England to finish his schooling.”

Information sourced from The Sikh Coalition Website. <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Hatred-In-The-Hallways.pdf>

Set #2

Scenario #1: 1987

In 1987, a 30-year old immigrant from India who worked in a bank, Navroze Mody, was brutally beaten to death by a group of teenagers who called themselves “Dotbusters.” This group was active in New Jersey, where a large South Asian immigrant community is concentrated, and they had been harassing immigrants from South Asia for months. A month before Mody’s killing, Dotbusters (referring to the *bindi* that Hindu women wear on their foreheads for religious purposes), sent a letter to a local newspaper.

Part of their letter read:

"I'm writing about your article during July about the abuse of Indian People. Well I'm here to state the other side. I hate them; if you had to live near them you would also. We are an organization called dot busters. We have been around for 2 years. We will go to any extreme to get Indians to move out of Jersey City. If I'm walking down the

street and I see a Hindu and the setting is right, I will hit him or her. We plan some of our most extreme attacks such as breaking windows, breaking car windows, and crashing family parties. ... They are a weak race physically and mentally. We are going to continue our way. We will never be stopped."

In Jersey City, not long after Mody's death, another person of South Asian origin was assaulted by three men with baseball bats. Incidents still continue even though laws against hate crimes have been instituted in New Jersey.

Scenario #2: 2003

"On November 27, 2003 *Metro West* reported that an Ashland, Massachusetts teenager defaced a Hindu temple in Ashland on Halloween. Anthony Picciolo, 17, was convicted of spray-painting hate messages. Police said Piccioli spray painted 'Sand NRRRRRRR beware,' and 'head,' on a rock near the Hindu temple. Police said 'head' was short for 'towel head.' On June 25, 2003 in Boston, an Indian graduate student named Saurabh Bhalerao, who was working part time as a pizza deliveryman, was the target of deplorable abuse. He was robbed, beaten, burned with cigarettes, stuffed in a trunk and stabbed twice before finally being dumped along a road. Police suspect that the attackers mistook the Hindu man for a Muslim. As they were beating him, the attackers supposedly taunted, 'go back to Iraq.'"

Information sourced from https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J500v04n01_08 and <https://archive.is/20130123221104/http://www.fstdt.com/fundies/comments.aspx?q=48054>

Set #3

Event #1: 1991

Suspicious Fires Probed for Ties to Gulf Tension: Crime: An arson unit studies a West Los Angeles market blaze and police label the torching of a Sherman Oaks store a likely hate crime. Owners of both businesses are of Mideast descent

“...The Los Angeles Fire Department, meanwhile, opened an arson investigation into the other blaze that seriously damaged the Elat Market on West Pico Boulevard and destroyed an adjoining stationery store and storage area. The fire, which occurred about 11 p.m. Tuesday, caused an estimated \$325,000 damage.

“Because of the situation in the Middle East, we called for an arson unit right away,” said Assistant Fire Chief Ed Allen. “The market is owned by a gentleman from Iran.”

“The fire had a very good start,” Allen added. “There was a lot of heavy smoke when the first companies arrived. It very quickly broke through the roof. When that happens, you take a hard look at it.”

Although the owner, Ray Golbari, said repeatedly he thought the fire was “just an accident,” some neighbors said it was possible someone had started the fire in the mistaken belief that Golbari is of Arab, rather than Jewish, descent.

The Elat Market has signs in both Hebrew and Persian script on the front, but Golbari said the Persian script is sometimes misread as Arabic.

There have been two other suspicious fires in the Pico-Robertson district in recent weeks. One occurred Dec. 27 at an insurance agency, and another on the night of Jan. 17 at a hot dog stand.

“This is the kind of violence that we have been warning the authorities that the Arab-American community would be subjected to,” said Nazih Bayda, regional director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

Information sourced from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-01-24-mn-1117-story.html>

Event #2: February 2009

“As an eighth-grade student at Beckendorf Junior High School in Katy, Texas--the same town where residents infamously held pig races to protest a proposed mosque in 2006 R R Abdul Hamed initially accepted a classmate's explanation that jibes like "terrorist" and "your family blows things up," were just jokes.

But the teasing continued almost daily, and soon escalated into shoving.

Abdul alerted his teachers, who separated the boys in class, but the bullying would continue in the hallways. In early February 2009, on the school's track field, Abdul shoved back.

According to Abdul, the boy left but returned several minutes later and sucker punched him, knocking him out and breaking his jaw. That was how Abdul's Palestinian parents first learned about the bullying.

Abdul said school officials made the boy go to anger management counseling. "For what I went through, that punishment wasn't even close," said Abdul, whose jaw was wired shut and missed several weeks of school.

Abdul, now a 15-year-old sophomore at Seven Lakes High School where his attacker also goes, said he's "moved on."

Information sourced from: <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-09/muslim-teens-push-back-against-911-bullying>

SUMMARIZE!

What's happening in each event? Which acts are microaggressions, which might be called bullying, and which are hate crimes?

Event #1

Event #2

ANALYZE!

What terms are used to describe ~~South Asians and/or~~ Muslims, Sikhs, South Asians and/or Arab Americans in each event?

Event #1

Event #2

SYNTHESIZE!

Why does this matter? What does this show us? How?

Event #1

Event #2

Additional Sample Topics

The following list of sample topics is intended to help ethnic studies teachers develop content for their courses. It is not intended to be exhaustive.

- Asian and Pacific Islander Immigration to the United States
- The History of Anti-Asian Immigration Policies (Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Gentleman's Agreement, etc.)
- Anti-Asian Violence (e.g., Chinese Massacre of 1871 in Los Angeles, Rock Springs Massacre, Tacoma Method of removing Chinese in 1885, Galveston Bay KKK attacks on Vietnamese Fishermen in the 1970s, Stockton school yard shooting in 1989, etc.)
- The Formation of US Asian Enclaves (i.e., Koreatowns, Chinatowns, Japantowns, Little Saigon, Cambodia Town, Pachappa camp, etc.)
- Coolie Labor and The Early Asian American and Pacific Islander Work Force
- Yellow Peril and Anti-Asian Sentiment (e.g., Dr. Seuss racist political cartoons during World War II, William Randolph Hearst's racist propaganda against Asian Americans, etc.)
- World War II and Japanese Incarceration
- The Model Minority Myth
- The Asian American and Pacific Islander Movement, Yellow Power, and Asian American and Pacific Islander Radicalism
- Deportations of Cambodian Americans
- The Vietnam War and the Southeast Asian Refugee Crisis and Resettlement in the United States
- Hurricane Katrina: Vietnamese and African Americans unite to get more resources
- Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Access to Higher Education
- Desi American Cultural Production
- Filipino/a/x Americans and the Farm Labor Movement
- Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California Politics

- The Hapa Movement
- Pacific Islander Cultures
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Feminism
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Foodways
- Contemporary Asian American and Pacific Islander Youth Movements
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Entrepreneurship and Co-operative Economics
- From K-Pop to Kawaii: Asian Popular Culture in the US
- Mixed Asian Identities and Colorism
- Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the Media Challenging Stereotypes (e.g., Margaret Cho, Awkwafina, Jacqueline Kim, Ken Jeong, Mindy Kaling, Hasan Minhaj, Ali Wong)
- Asian Law Caucus
- Asian Women United
- Center for Asian American Media (National Asian American Telecommunications Association)
- Gidra
- International Hotel Tenants Association
- KDP (Union of Democratic Filipinos) Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino
- Kearny Street Workshop
- Yellow Brotherhood