

Race Relations in America: An Examination of the Asian American Experience

My proposed research project seeks to observe and analyse race relations in America between the Asian Pacific American (APA) community and the community at large, through the medium of a documentary film.

The study of racism in America has often focused solely on the relations between the African American community and the white community; it is only in recent years, with growing rates of immigration and the presence of louder minority voices in politics, that attention has been paid to the Latino/Hispanic and APA communities. Even within Hopkins, while the Center of Africana Studies is organized around the sub-fields of African studies, African-American studies, and studies of the African Diaspora, the East Asian Studies department makes no such distinction, instead focusing solely on China, Korea, and Japan. My project aims to research the history of Asian Americans, beginning with an examination of major milestones in the history of racism against Asian Americans. I plan to use this historical context to analyse current trends in the APA community and how they might play out in the future.

The first portion of my research will examine major historical events throughout the history of Asian Pacific Americans. Beginning with the settlement of Filipino sailors into the Louisiana shrimping industry in the mid-18th century, and the forced importation of Chinese and Indian indentured "coolies", I will then study the treatment of Chinese workers on the Transcontinental Railroad, and the passage of the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This part of my project will also delve into slightly more recent parts of history such as the prolonged detention periods for Chinese immigrants at the Angel Island Immigration Center, various riots/massacres targeting Asians and Asian Americans, the Japanese-American internment during World War II, the usage of segregated schools, the murder of Vincent Chin, and the persecution of Wen Ho Lee. Specifically I plan to utilise court records, immigration records, archived news articles/broadcasts, various firsthand accounts, interviews, and visits to sites of historical import (Angel Island, the Rohwer Internment Camp, etc.) to give me a greater understanding of how APAs were treated during early American history, how they reacted to such treatment, how others perceived this treatment, and why Asians continued to immigrate to America in the face of such treatment.

In the second part of my research, I plan to study the burgeoning role of APAs in modern American society, analysing this within the context of the historical trends studied in part one of my research. Specifically I aim to research the cultural impact of Asian Americans, such as APA YouTubers (KevJumba, NigaHiga, Wong Fu Productions, etc.), the AngryAsianMan blog, and the growing number of Asian immigrant and second-generation APA communities, particularly the San Gabriel Valley in California, which in recent years has become a hotspot for Asian American culture and settlement. I will also examine the growing political voice of Asian Americans, particularly in the 2012 presidential elections, the growing size and power of the 18MillionRising organization (which seeks to encourage political action amongst Asian Americans), and the record number of APA Congress members in the 113th Congress. Finally, I will delve into the current status of race relations between APAs and the community at large, discussing the "Make Me Asian" app, the Alexandra Wallace "Asians in the Library" controversy, the Radiolab *Yellow Rain* controversy, and the aftermath of the *Red Dawn* and *Olympus Has Fallen* films.

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This topic has been one of my main academic and personal interests for several years. I have actively pursued greater knowledge in this field through research and readings in my spare time. In writing my high school U.S. history thesis paper, I chose to focus on racism against Asian Americans, specifically the model minority myth, and thus already am well-versed in the basic facts of the history of racism against Asian Americans. I also spent two years as a member of Project GAIA, a student leadership group in my hometown that promotes multiculturalism and acceptance to lower school students and the community at large. As part of this group, I had the opportunity to learn from various community leaders and students about the various factors that lead to prejudice and ignorance, experience that will prove helpful in my examination of the historical treatment of APAs. Project GAIA also allowed me to gain experience in discussing my own experience as an Asian American with a large audience. As a workshop facilitator in Project GAIA, I gained experience in listening to the stories of others' experiences with racism and prejudice, something that will prove valuable in the interviews I plan to conduct. I also feel qualified to pursue this project because as a writer, I am adept in creating cohesive narratives and telling a story with my work, as this research project seeks to do with the story of APAs. Though I lack experience with documentaries specifically, I have worked on several video projects before and am experienced in video editing and filming.

I also feel uniquely qualified in pursuing this research topic because of my personal background. As the daughter of first generation immigrants, I have seen firsthand the effects of immigration to America, and understand what might motivate one to immigrate to a country that at times has been entirely unwelcoming. I also have experienced personal brushes with racism and understand the at-times tenuous nature of race relations between APAs and others in America. As a member of the Intercollegiate Taiwanese American Students Association National Board, a member of the JHU Taiwanese American Students Association, and an intern for the Taiwanese American Citizens League, I have strong ties to the APA community and thus am well equipped to find help in pursuing my project and connecting with community leaders and others involved in the APA community in order to conduct interviews and learn more from first hand accounts of events such as the Vincent Chin murder or the Wen Ho Lee case.

By pursuing this research project I hope to gain a better understanding of the context of the modern Asian American experience and, further, to use this knowledge to analyse modern trends in the Asian American community and its role and perception in modern America. Why are APAs viewed as perpetual foreigners? What does the growing popularity of APA celebrities, filmmakers, writers, singers, etc. say about changing trends in America? What is the history of Asian Pacific Americans? Why have APA communities only started to appear across the nation in recent years? Where do race relations with APAs stand at present, in comparison to race relations with APAs in the past? How does the latter affect the former? These are the questions which I seek to answer in my research project.