5.7 - Our History and Our Future

The Asian American Education Project

Grade Level(s)	5 - 12
Lesson Overview	The history of Asian American Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDA) in the United States is an integral part of American history. Since the day Asian immigrants arrived in America, they have contributed to and shaped the way the country is today. From labor activism to fighting for school integration and citizenship rights in the courts, APIDAs have faced adversity and opportunities to create roots in the U.S. Building coalitions together with other minority groups, APIDAs have been a part of historical achievements including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, and Title IX. Today, as one of the fastest-growing minority populations, APIDAs have a choice to make on how they will make positive and effective changes towards the future of the United States.
Lesson Objectives	Students will: ● Learn about how APIDAs are an integral part of America's history since their arrival to the United States as immigrant laborers in the 1800s. ● Learn about how APIDAs leveraged the legal system to fight against school segregation, citizenship rights, and forced incarceration during wartime. ● Learn about how American policies and legislation have affected the lives of APIDAs negatively and positively. ● Learn about how voting and building coalitions is important for APIDAs in gaining future political strength to yield positive changes and benefits. ● Research and discuss about the challenges and opportunities of other communities.

Our History and Our Future Essay:

The history of Asian American Pacific Islander Desi Americans (APIDA) in the United States is an integral part of American history. Since the day Asian immigrants arrived in America, they have contributed to and shaped the way the country is today. During the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad (1863-1869), Chinese laborers—paid less than Europeans—were labor rights pioneers in **collective bargaining** actions with the Central Pacific Railroad.

Utilizing the legal system, APIDAs fought for equality in the courts. In the matter of *Tape v. Hurley* (1885), the first case to deal with school **segregation**, the California State Supreme Court deemed the exclusion of Chinese students from public schools unlawful. *Wong Kim Ark v. United States* (1898) guaranteed citizenship to those born in America, regardless of race or their parents' national origin. And in *Korematsu v. United States* (1944), Japanese Americans fought against their forced incarceration during World War II in order to uphold their Constitutional rights.

Some policies worsened the lives of APIDAs, while some advanced their progress. The Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 specifically prohibited the immigration of Chinese, and then later all Asians, for sixty years. In 1942, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japan, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, forcefully removing almost the entire population of Japanese Americans—120,000 men, women and children—on the West Coast to be rounded up and sent to incarceration camps.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended **segregation** and banned employment discrimination based on race and color. It led to the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which replaced the quota immigration system with a preference system and those who had pre-existing family ties in the U.S.,

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leading to an increase in Asian immigration. Title IX was co-authored by Patsy Mink, the first woman of color elected to Congress, and provided equal opportunities for girls and women in federally funded educational programs or activities.

While laying roots in this country, APIDAs have also built coalitions with other minority groups. In the 1960s, Filipino and Mexican American grape farmworkers united in California to hold a five-year-long strike against labor **exploitation**. Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs fought alongside Black activists for civil rights. In 1969, Asian, Black, Latinx and Native American students fought to establish Ethnic Studies in universities. Post-1992 civil unrest, Korean and Black Americans worked together to rebuild Los Angeles. In 2001, Tereza Lee inspired the DREAM Act, legislation that affects millions of **undocumented** immigrants today.

In order for APIDAs to create future positive legislative changes and to have elected officials who represent them, they need to exercise their **civic duty** of voting—a right denied to them until 1952. As scholar/author Viet Thanh Nguyen states, "Asian Americans have choices to make. They can dwell on their own victimization…. Or they seek to transform the system into something more just, more equitable for everyone. That's the hope of activism, that's the hope of solidarity. That's the hope of alliance, that's the hope and the conviction from which something like the Asian American movement was born."

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Vocabulary:[1]

- **Collective Bargaining:** a negotiation between an employer and employees to come to an agreement over items including wages, benefits and working conditions
- **Segregation:** the separation of people or things from each other within a specific space or group
- **Exploitation:** taking advantage of someone or something in order to gain profits
- **Undocumented:** not having the required legal documents to reside in a country[2]
- **Civic Duty:** responsibility and obligation to society[3]

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[1]Definitions are adopted from Dictionary.com, unless stated otherwise.
[2]Definition is adopted from Cambridge Dictionary.
[3]Definition is adopted from Legal Dictionary.

Discussion Questions:

- How have APIDAs played an increasing role in American society? What are some historical and modern examples?
- How have various American policies and legislation affected the lives of APIDAs in the United States?
- How have various policies and legislation influenced by APIDAs affected the lives of Americans, especially other racial and ethnic minorities?
- How is voting and coalition building beneficial for APIDAs and their future?

Activity 1: **Challenges and Opportunities APIDAs Have**

A. Ask students to read the Our History and Our Future Essay as homework before the start of this lesson.

B. Ask students to either conduct research based on the following lesson topics, **or** view the following video clips (under 7 minutes each). Students should view at least one video from each group:
   - Group 1 videos (Challenges):
     1920s to 1940s – 2.5 - Protecting Our Democracy
     1950s to 1960s – 3.1 - The Model Minority Myth
     1950s to 1960s – 3.6 - Perpetual Foreigner - Systemic Racism
     1980s to 2019 – 5.1 - From Outrage to Organizing: The Impact of the Vincent Chin Case
     1980s to 2019 – 5.6 - "Victimized Twice": 9/11/2001, South Asian Americans & Islamophobia
   - Group 2 videos (Opportunities, Influences):
     1960s to 1970s – 4.1 - Filipino American Farmworkers
     1960s to 1970s – 4.3 - Ethnic Studies - The Fight to Teach Our Stories
     1960s to 1970s – 4.4 - Generation Rising, APIDAs Contribute
     1980s to 2019 – 5.4 - Silicon Valley, Wealth Divide
     1980s to 2019 – 5.5.1 - Tereza Lee and Undocumented Asian America

C. Socratic Seminar discussion points:
   1. Challenges that APIDAs face:
      - What unique challenges will APIDAs face in advancing forward in the United States?
        - For APIDAs, the unique challenges include being treated as perpetual foreigners, the ability to immigrate, and being viewed as the model minority.

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2. Opportunities and influences that APIDAs have:
   - Building stronger coalitions
   - Gaining more political power by getting out the vote

Activity 2: Challenges and Opportunities Your Community Has

A. Ask students to conduct research on the challenges and opportunities the community of their choice faces.
   - A community can be an ethnic community, racial community, gender community, LGBTQ community, disabled community, religious community, immigrant community, class community, etc.

B. Socratic Seminar discussion points:
   1. Challenges your community is facing:
      - What unique challenges does your community face in advancing forward in the United States?
   2. Opportunities and influences your community have:
      - What opportunities and influences does your community have in order to advance forward?

Activity 3: APIDA Electorate

APIDAs didn't gain the right to vote until 1952. Sixty-nine years later, in 2021, U.S. Senator Kamala Harris of California became the first Black and APIDA Vice President of the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, APIDAs are the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the U.S. electorate, with more than 11 million eligible voters in the 2020 elections.

1. Have students read the Pew Research Center's article (https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/05/07/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s-electorate/) and write a summary discussing why APIDAs are an important voter bloc.
2. Have students do research the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. How did these two pieces of legislation affect the right to vote for APIDAs and protect the rights of those with limited English proficiency?
3. Have students research the effect APIDA votes have in national and local elections.
   Resources:
   - Wang, Amy B. "Record Asian American turnout helped Biden win Georgia. Can it help flip the Senate?" *The Washington Post*. 28 Nov. 2020. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/asian-americans-georgia-senate/2020/11/28/28521068-2ad2-11eb-9b14-ad872157ebc9_story.html. Accessed 20 Jan., 2020.
   - Zhou, Marrian, Alex Fang. "Asian Americans hold outsize role in Georgia's Senate runoffs - Second-generation voters mobilize families with control of Senate at stake." Nikkei Inc. 5 Jan. 2021. https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Asian-Americans-hold-outsize-role-in-Georgia-s-Senate-runoffs. Accessed 20 Jan., 2020.
   - "Indian-Americans helped Democrats win Georgia Senate race, says Impact - Asian Americans second highest turnout in early votes among all non-white groups." *Gulf News*. 12 Jan. 2021. Indian-Americans helped Democrats win Georgia Senate race, says Impact (indiatimes.com). Accessed 20 Jan., 2020.
4. After students have completed their research, have a whole class discussion and what they learned.

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Further Information

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