

ASIAN AMERICANS IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Created by Noreen Naseem Rodriguez, Fall 2014

The Civil Rights Movement is often considered to be the time period from the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination in Memphis in 1968. It is typically taught in schools as a black/white narrative about the attainment of civil rights by African Americans with some Caucasian alliances. In elementary schools, instruction about the Civil Rights Movement often focuses heavily on Dr. King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and perhaps Ruby Bridges.

This time period gave birth to several other social movements for civil rights, including the American Indian Movement, the Chicano Movement, and the Asian American Movement. Yet the fights against injustice and inequality by various ethnic groups began long before the late 1950s and 1960s. Some refer to these early, lesser-known efforts as the Long Civil Rights Movement, acknowledging that struggles occurred throughout American history. This series of lesson plans was designed to be taught within a larger unit on the Civil Rights Movement to provide students with information about the Asian American Movement and the alliances that some Asian Americans had with African Americans and others in the fight for civil rights.

Two of the figures described in these lessons, Richard Aoki and Yuri Kochiyama, were closely involved with the Black Power movement and the Black Panther Party (BPP). Civil Rights Teaching has [multiple handouts](#) that allow teachers to present a great deal of information about the BPP. The Zinn Education project has resources for teaching students about the [BPP's Ten Point Program](#) and [Voices of Democracy has several classroom activities](#) related to Stokely Carmichael's Black Power speeches.

Aoki and Kochiyama were young (Aoki was a toddler, Kochiyama 20 years old) when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 4, 1941. As a result of Executive Order 9066, all Japanese and Japanese Americans on the West Coast were forced to leave their homes - first they were moved to relocation centers then eventually to internment camps. Aoki's family was placed in Topaz, Utah while Kochiyama's family was interned in Jerome, Arkansas, where both families lived for about three years. The [Smithsonian](#) has some resources about Japanese internment and an assortment of children's literature about internment is recommended under Additional Resources.

UNIT OVERVIEW

This instructional unit about Asian Americans in the Civil Rights Movement is designed for 1st through 8th grades. It integrates social studies content with language arts skills such as reading for comprehension, summarizing, comparing and contrasting, and drawing conclusions. Additional resources are provided to supplement the existing lessons for students/teachers interested in further research. The lessons, organized by grade, are as follows:

Grades 1-3: Snapshots of School Segregation

Students will discuss segregation and examine three snapshots of young girls who received national attention when they tried to enroll in all-White schools. After learning about the experiences of Ruby Bridges, Sylvia Mendez, and Mamie Tape, students make comparisons and contrasts and draw conclusions about segregation and equality in schools. A timeline of key events related to school segregation is provided along with worksheets to scaffold student comprehension through note-taking and graphic organizers. Additional text and video resources are provided for further student research.

Grades 4-6: Faces of the Asian American Civil Rights Movement

Students will learn about interracial alliances created by three well-known figures of the Asian American movement: Richard Aoki, Yuri Kochiyama, and Grace Lee Boggs. A reading comprehension check, critical thinking questions, and additional text and video resources are provided for further student research.

Grades 5-8: The Asian American Movement

Students will be introduced to the Long Civil Rights Movement and will use historical thinking and primary sources to analyze three key moments in contemporary Asian American history: the Third World Liberation Front, the International Hotel, and the murder of Vincent Chin. Students will examine the Model Minority stereotype and discuss ways that it is perpetuated in the media and how it is problematic.

These lessons are in alignment with Dimension 2, Perspectives and Historical Sources and Evidence, of the National Council for the Social Studies' College, Career, and Civil Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards (2013).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching, edited by Deborah Menkart, Alana D. Murray, and Jenice L. View

[Civil Rights History Project](#) by the Library of Congress

[Civil Rights Done Right](#) by Teaching Tolerance

Related Tradebooks

Picture Books about Japanese Internment

A Place Where Sunflowers Grow by Amy Lee-Tai

The Bracelet by Yoshiko Uchida

Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki

So Far From the Sea by Eve Bunting

Novels/Chapter Books about Japanese Internment

The Moon Bridge by Marcia Savin

Sylvia and Aki by Winifred Conkling

The Invisible Thread by Yoshiko Uchida

Farewell to Manzanar by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston

The Journal of Ben Uchida by Barry Denenberg

Journey to Topaz by Yoshiko Uchida

Weedflower by Cynthia Kadohata

Novels/Chapter Books about the Black Power Movement

The Rock and the River by Kekla Magoon

Fire in the Streets by Kekla Magoon

One Crazy Summer by Rita Williams-Garcia

Graphic Novels about the Civil Rights Movement (7th grade+)

Still I Rise by Roland Laird with Taneshia Nash Laird

March by John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell

The Silence of Our Friends by Mark Long, Jim Demonakos, and Nate Powell

Asian American History Timelines

<http://www.cetel.org/timeline.html>

<http://www.angelatsai.com/aaldef/site/timeline.html#>

http://www.advancingjustice-chicago.org/sites/chicago/files/compas_aahistoricaltimeline_1.pdf