



VOICES OF JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNEES

*Students Handouts and
Supporting Materials for Teachers*

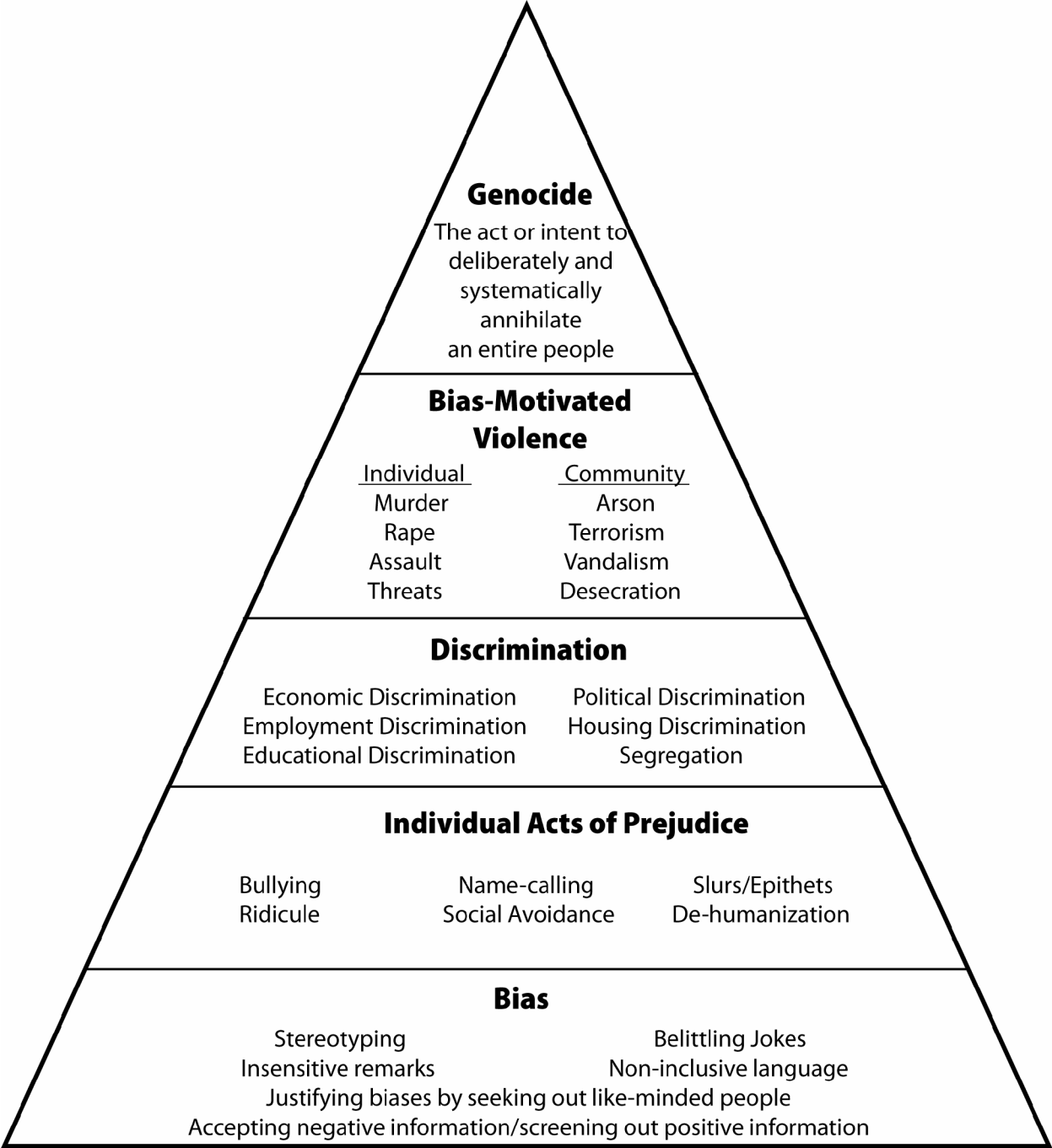
(Grade 9-12)

We Are Americans.....	Page 2
Pyramid of Hate	Page 3
Talking Point: Brief Background of the Japanese-American Internment	Page 4
Definitions of Basic Terms.....	Page 5
Behaviors and Their Impact.....	Page 6
Short List of Definitions for Oral Histories.....	Page 8
Japanese-American Internee’s Thoughts about Redress: Ruby Inouye.....	Page 9
Japanese-American Internee’s Thoughts about Redress: Tsuguo “Ike” Ikeda.....	Page 11
Yellow: Race in American Beyond Black and White by Frank Wu.....	Page 12



We Are Americans

PYRAMID OF HATE



TALKING POINTS: BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT

The surprise attack by Japanese soldiers on the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941 prompted widespread fear and insecurity at home. President Franklin Roosevelt, reflecting the fear that Americans of Japanese ancestry might pose a threat to the U.S., signed [Executive Order 9066](#) on February 19, 1942. This Executive Order authorized the creation of military zones, from which the right of any person to enter, remain in or leave was subject to the discretion of the military commander.

While this Executive Order didn't specifically say who would be the target, it was clear by the actions of the military that the order was targeted specifically at Japanese Americans. The words of Lieutenant General John DeWitt, U.S. Commander of the Western Defense, who oversaw the mobilization of Japanese Americans to these internment camps, reveal the deep feelings of prejudice and discrimination toward these Americans: "A Jap's a Jap ... The Japanese race is an enemy race ... It makes no difference whether he is an American citizen, he is still a Japanese... we must worry about the Japanese all the time until he is wiped off the map."

NOTE:

The use of the word "Jap" is a derogatory, hostile term used to refer to Japanese and Japanese Americans, which was used often during WWII. The use of the word here is in a quote; its use is not to be encouraged outside of such context.

This authorization paved the way for the expulsion of 120,000 American citizens and legal residents of Japanese descent from their homes and businesses into U.S. internment camps (see below) throughout the western United States — without any factual basis of their alleged disloyalty towards America. Those forced into internment camps not only lost their homes, their jobs and their possessions, but their personal liberties and freedoms guaranteed by the United States Constitution for three years, from 1942 to 1945. In fact, not a single documented act of disloyalty or espionage by a person of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast occurred during World War II.

- For a more detailed description of the Japanese-American internment experience, go to <http://www.jacl.org/edu/JAHistory.pdf>.
- For a map of the U.S. internment camps, go to <http://www.jacl.org/edu/MapofConcentrationCamps.pdf>.

DEFINITIONS OF BASIC TERMS

Bias

An inclination or preference either for or against an individual or group that interferes with impartial/neutral judgment.

Stereotype (an idea)

An oversimplified idea about an entire group of people without regard for individual differences.

Prejudice (an attitude)

Making a decision about a person or group of people without enough knowledge. Prejudice is based on stereotypes.

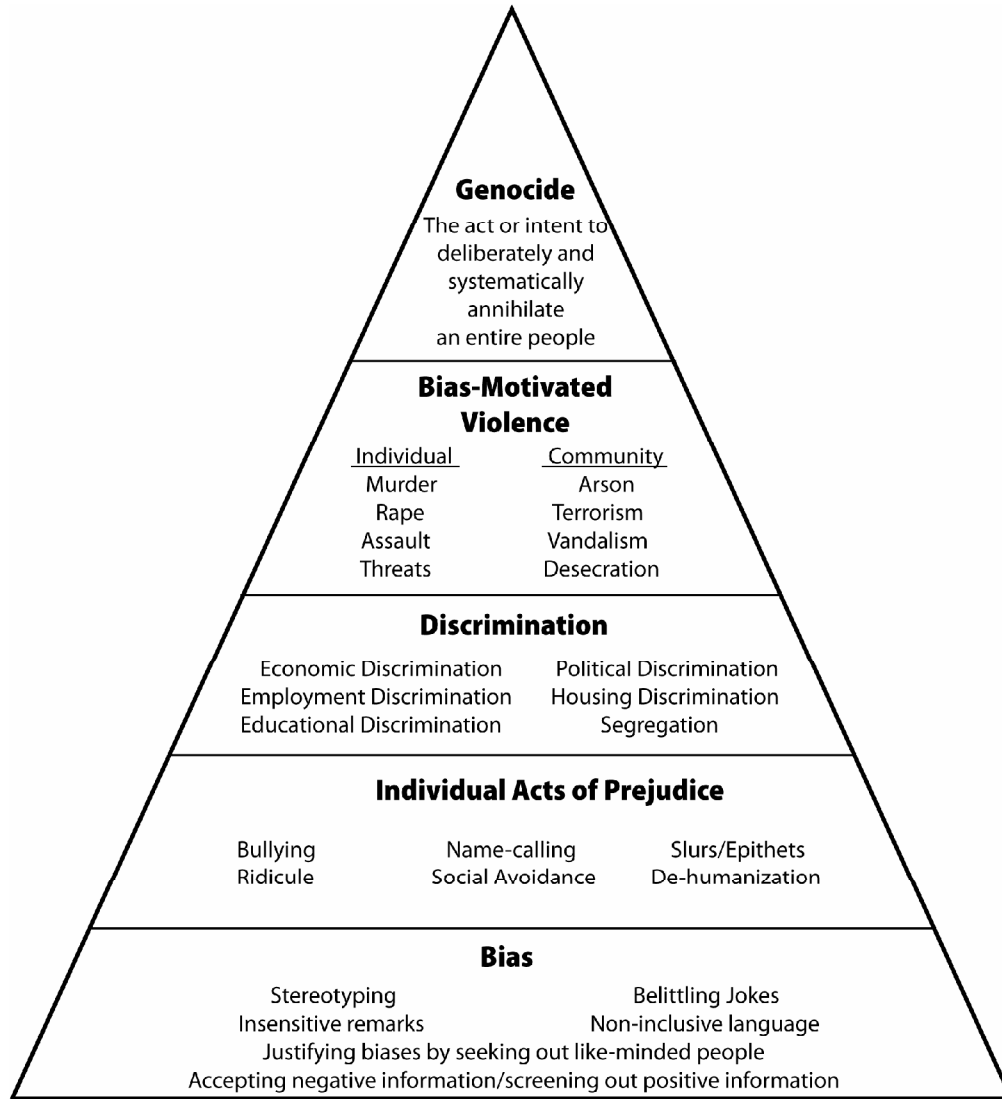
Discrimination (an action)

Actions that exclude people or treat them unfairly. Some forms of discrimination are illegal, such as refusing to rent an apartment to someone because of their race. Other forms try to unfairly exclude people.

BEHAVIORS AND THEIR IMPACT

Interviewee's Name: _____

What specific behaviors were directed at the person? Put a check mark by the level(s) of hate on the pyramid (below) associated with the behaviors.



(Continued)

What impact did these behaviors have on the person?

SHORT LIST OF DEFINITIONS FOR ORAL HISTORIES

Hakujin:

"White person" in Japanese; used to refer to a person of European descent

Issei(s)

First-generation Japanese immigrant in America

Jap

Derogatory, hostile term used to refer to Japanese and Japanese Americans

Japanese American

Two-thirds of those imprisoned during World War II were Nisei (born in the United States) and thus U.S. citizens. The proper term for them is "Japanese American," rather than "Japanese." Their parents, the Issei, were immigrants who were forbidden by law from becoming naturalized citizens. While they were technically "aliens," the Issei had lived in the U.S. for decades by the time of World War II and raised their children in this country. Many of them considered themselves to be culturally Japanese, but were committed to the United States as their home. Calling the Issei "Japanese American" as opposed to "Japanese" is a way to recognize that fact.

Nisei(s)

American-born children of Japanese immigrants; second-generation Japanese Americans

Oriental:

Offensive term used to describe people who are of Asian descent; present-day preferred term is Asian

Sansei(s):

American-born grandchildren of Japanese immigrants; third-generation Japanese Americans

Shikata ga nai:

"It can't be helped" or "There's nothing one can do" in Japanese

From Densho's Interview Glossaries that accompanied the interviews at www.densho.org and *Terminology and Glossary* at <http://www.densho.org/resources/default.asp>

JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNEE'S THOUGHTS ABOUT REDRESS: RUBY INOUE

Interviewer: And I wanted to ask you more about redress because from what I've heard from some people, and from what I've read, apparently some people thought that maybe the redress movement was not a very good idea in the beginning, that perhaps it was rocking the boat and perhaps might cause — if Japanese Americans asked for redress from the government — it might cause a backlash. And I was wondering, if you think back to those early times, I think it was the early '70s and mid-'70s or so, what, do you recall what you first thought about the idea?



Ruby: Well, probably my impression was that all the evacuation is past history and we have to live with it... When redress came around, you know, I wasn't that interested in getting paid for something that happened, it just happened — not "just happened," but it happened and we have to accept it and live on. But, of course, when the redress actually came, then it came out that it was the *Sanseis* (third generation Japanese Americans) who were really incensed with how we were treated and so they wanted us to be paid for it. And when I received the money it was extra money. I wasn't going to use it for myself, that, you know, I'd sure like to pay back people who helped me...

...The good, good thing is that maybe it impressed on the rest of the American public that the Japanese people suffered a lot and deserved some, some redress. But I don't think money could pay for everything. And whether it's twenty thousand or fifty thousand, it's not the money, but that's all done with, so I think that the knowledge that it disbursed also was good. ...

I: What about your parents, getting theirs?

R: Well, my father died earlier, so he was not eligible. My mother... let's see, the redress, my mother died in '89 and the redress was after that, huh? ... I think she did receive the money. And what happened was that it was divided among the children. We must have got some money from her. But she wasn't living at the time. But I think she lived long enough. But my, of course my father died --

I: But how did you feel about her getting it?

R: Well, I said, I thought it was too late. And I thought my father deserved it, you know, when he, he lost his business and he lost his, all his funds, and he, then his coming back and worrying about how to support the family. I think they're the ones who really deserved it, but most of the ones who deserved it were gone. So, that's just personal. I don't know what the percentage of people who died before the redress was, but...it was very late.

I: Well, in addition to the check that, of redress, there was also an apology signed by the President, a letter of apology. And I was wondering what your reaction was when you saw that letter.

R: Well, I, I read the apology, but I wasn't impressed just because it was from the President. I just said, "Well, too late." But I wasn't that impressed. But it probably was, according to the public, it was probably a great big deal, huh? To have a president apologize to a group of people. It should've been by the person who first decreed it. [Laughs] But, anyway...

From "Ruby Inouye Interview: Segment 53." Densho Visual History Collection, Densho Digital Archive (2003). Densho. Recording Date: April 3 and 4, 2003.

JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNEE'S THOUGHTS ABOUT REDRESS: TSUGUO "IKE" IKEDA

Interviewer: When you actually received in the mail your letter of apology and your payment, what was your reaction?

Tsuguo: Oh, naturally I kept it and put it in my scrapbook. And then I wanted to use that money for something lasting, supposedly, and I bought a Honda. And I was shocked. It took —I only had about a hundred dollars left. [Laughs] And so I had a reliable Honda for many years, and then I gave it to my son-in-law. So it's still within the blood line as a continual reminder that I got this car as an apology from the government of the United States, the wrong that was done. And so I still experience it vicariously — once in a while I ride in it — the money that the government did pay me (makes me feel good).



I: And the apology, the letter of apology, when you saw that, what was your feeling?

T: Well, to have the President of the United States do that, was a miracle, in my mind. It really couldn't happen, but it did. Rarely does a president of the United States apologize for any wrongdoing in this country. And there've been many, especially Native Americans. And we still have a problem with that. Similarly with Australia just recently in the Olympics, it stirred it up again. A group (was) mistreated. Alienated, and as the Hawaiians in Hawaii also. So it's a long struggle internationally, let alone the United States.

I: When you, when you're thinking about all that has happened and all that has changed including the redress and the apology and the payment, now you must still get the question when you go out and do speaking engagements and talk to classes, do you get the question: "What do you think could happen now," or do you talk about this issue of whether a similar kind of injustice like the internment could happen again?

T: Right. Well, that's one, I'm not sure what I stated before, but while I was in Minidoka*, I sort of vowed to myself that I would...speak out and try to stop any kind of similar behaviors from any other group in the United States. And so that's still within me, that if there are opportunities to right wrongs, I will become involved in it.

*One of the U.S. internment camps, located in Idaho

From "Tsuguo 'Ike' Ikeda Interview III: Segment 8." Densho Digital Archive, Densho Visual History Collection (2000). Densho. Recording date October 20, 2000.

**YELLOW:
RACE IN AMERICA BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE
BY FRANK WU**

"Where are you from?" is a question I like answering.

"Where are you really from?" is a question I really hate answering.

"Where are you from?" is a question we all routinely ask one another upon meeting a new person.

"Where are you really from?" is a question some of us tend to ask others of us very selectively.

For Asian Americans, the questions frequently come paired like that. Among ourselves, we can even joke nervously about how they just about define the Asian American experience. More than anything else that unifies us, everyone with an Asian face who lives in America is afflicted by the **perpetual foreigner syndrome**. We are figuratively and even literally returned to Asia and ejected from America.

Often the inquisitor reacts as if I am being silly if I reply, "I was born in Cleveland, and I grew up in Detroit," or bored by a detailed chronology of my many moves around the country: "Years ago, I went to college in Baltimore; I used to practice law in San Francisco; and now I live in Washington, DC."

Sometimes she reacts as if I am obstreperous if I return the question, "And where are you really from?"

People whose own American identity is assured are perplexed when they are snubbed in this manner. They deserve to know why "where are you really from?" is so upsetting. My white friends of whom I have asked the question are amused at best and befuddled at worst, even if one of their grandparents was an immigrant or all of them once were. They deserve to know why "where are you really from?" is so upsetting to Asian Americans even if it carries no offensive connotations to them.

Like many other people of color (or a few whites who have marked accents) who share memories of such encounters, I know what the question "where are you really from?" means, even if the person asking it is oblivious and regardless of whether they are aggressive about it. Once again, I have been mistaken for a foreigner or told I cannot be a real American.

The other questions that follow in the sequence make the subtext less subtle. Assuming that I must be "really from" someplace else and not here, even pausing for the preliminary "where are you really from?" some people proceed to ask me: "How long have you been in our country?" "Do you like it in our country?" "When are you going back?" and "Do you have the chance to go

home often?" I am asked these questions with decreasing frequency over time but still too often, and I am surprised at the contexts in which they continue to pop up.

When I give a speech, every now and then a nice person will wait to chat with me and with utter sincerity and no hint of irony, start off by saying, "My, you speak English so well." I am tempted to reply, "Why, thank you; so do you."

I don't suppose that such a response would make my point to anybody but myself. I am disappointed by these tiresome episodes because strangers have zeroed in on my race and seem to be aware of nothing else. Taken together, their questions are nothing more than a roundabout means of asking what they know could not be directly said, "What race are you?" Their comments imply that I am not one of "us" but one of "them." I do not belong as an equal. My heart must be somewhere else rather than here. I am a visitor at best, an intruder at worst. I must know my place, and it is not here. But I cannot even protest, because my complaint exposes me as an ingrate. I don't appreciate the opportunities I have been given. People who know nothing about me have an expectation of ethnicity, as if I will give up my life story as an example of exotica.

...

I have heard the point as a direct taunt. It comes as the heckler's jeer: "If you don't like it here, then go back where you came from." Or it comes as the snubbed host's uncomprehending whine: "Don't you like everything this country has given you?"

The perpetual foreigner syndrome also can be expressed as empathy. Now and again, people introduce themselves to me by speaking pidgin Chinese. Or they make an elaborate show of bowing that is so inept that it might as well be a parody. They don't realize that I speak English perfectly well and am accustomed to shaking hands.

...

Here at home, many Asian Americans are familiar with those awful moments when, in a dispute over who was in line first at the cash register, where dogs can be walked, who bumped into whom, or in declining to give money to a panhandler, and so forth, a person who is white or black suddenly shouts something about "go back to where you came from" or mutters an aside meant to be overheard about "all these damn foreigners." In these instances, Asian Americans must decide whether they can and should disregard the racial tone. I find that when I respond, even if I try to reason with someone, they sometimes become implacable and the effort to engage them is futile. They insist more hotly that they are right, not racist. They were merely claiming the parking space they saw first, and even if they said, "You know, this is the way we do it in America" or asked, "How long have you been in this country, anyway?" it wasn't a veiled racial reference and I shouldn't take it as such.

Excerpt from *Yellow: Race in American Beyond Black and White* (Basic Books, 2001) by Frank Wu. Wu is a law professor at Wayne State University's Law School.