



Curriculum Connections

A free online publication for K-12 educators provided by ADL's A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute.

www.adl.org/lesson-plans

COMMEMORATING THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CIVIL LIBERTIES ACT

SUMMER 2013

Voices of Japanese-American Internees

ADL®

In This Issue

On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, ADL brings together classroom resources for this special issue of *Curriculum Connections* to reinforce the significance of this act, signed by President Ronald Reagan on August 10, 1988. This law issued a formal apology and gave reparations to the 60,000 surviving Japanese Americans who were a part of the 120,000 Japanese Americans imprisoned for three years due to Executive Order 9066 in 1942 during World War II.

Using video histories of Japanese-American internees during World War II, this special edition of *Curriculum Connections* provides an opportunity for high school students to use this dark period in U.S. history to reflect on the dangers of stereotyping, prejudice and racial and ethnic discrimination, so as not to repeat history.

Students not only build their understanding about the discrimination that Japanese Americans faced before and after their internment, they also are introduced to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988.

Contents

Correlation of Lessons to Common Core Standards..... 3

Lesson

High School Lesson 4

Resources

Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White..... 16

Resources about the Japanese-American Internment..... 18

Understanding the Civil Liberties Act of 1988

Japanese-American Historic Overview

Correlation of Lessons to Common Core Standards

Content Area/Standard
Reading
R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Writing
W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Speaking and Listening
SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
SL.2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
SL.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
SL.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
Language
L.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
L.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
L.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
L.6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

High School Lesson

Voices of Japanese-American Internees

Rationale

Using video histories of Japanese-American internees during World War II, this lesson engages students in understanding the discrimination that Japanese Americans faced before and after their internment. In addition, students will be introduced to the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, and discuss whether or not it made up for the discrimination that Japanese Americans received from the U.S. government.

Objectives

- Students will learn about the concept of the “perpetual foreigner syndrome” and understand how it contributes to past and present discrimination against Asian Americans and, specifically, Japanese Americans.
- Students will learn about the escalation of hate if left unchecked.
- Students will identify examples of different types of hate in the 20th century faced by Japanese Americans.
- Students will discuss two different perspectives from former Japanese-American internees about the redress made by the U.S. government.

Age Range

Grades 9–12

Time

2–3 class periods

Requirements

Handouts and Resources:

- [We Are Americans](#) (PowerPoint slide)
- (Optional) [Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White](#) (one copy per student)
- [Brief Background of Japanese-American Internment Talking Points](#) (one copy)
- [Definitions of Basic Terms](#) (one copy per student)
- [Pyramid of Hate](#) (one copy)
- [Behaviors and Their Impact](#) (one copy per group per assigned video clip, double-sided)
- [Short List of Definitions for Oral Histories](#) (one copy per student)
- [Japanese-American Internee’s Thoughts about Redress: Ruby Inouye](#) (one copy per student)
- [Japanese-American Internee’s Thoughts about Redress: Tsuguo “Ike” Ikeda](#) (one copy per student)
- (Optional) [Understanding the Civil Liberties Act of 1988](#) (one copy per student)
- (Optional) [Historical Overview](#) (one copy per student)

Other Material:

- video clips (see step #11), chart paper, markers
- laptop/projector/screen, or overhead projector and transparency sheet
- computers with Internet connection

Advanced Preparation

- Reproduce handouts as directed above.
- Prepare the appropriate projector for viewing the PowerPoint slide [We Are Americans](#) on a large screen.
- Draw the [Pyramid of Hate](#) diagram on chart paper or the board.

Key Words

Asian Americans
Bias
Citizen
Civil Liberties Act of 1988
Discrimination
Internee
Internment
Japanese Americans
Perpetual foreigner syndrome
Prejudice
Redress
Legal resident
Stereotype

- Review [Brief Background of the Japanese-American Internment Talking Points](#).
- Review the 13 video clips listed in step #11 and group the video clips so that 2–4 clips are assigned to each of the 4–5 groups of students (size of group to be determined based on classroom size). Set up computers in classroom, computer lab or library to appropriate video links. Alternatively, identify 4–6 clips and prepare the laptop/projector for viewing them on a large screen.

Techniques and Skills

analyzing speeches, brainstorming, connecting past to present, cooperative group work, critical thinking, debate, forming opinions, historical understanding, large and small group discussion, reading skills

Procedures

Part I: Perpetual Foreigner Syndrome and Japanese-American Internment (20 minutes)

1. Brainstorm a list of what a “typical” American looks like. Ask students not to think too hard, but just to suggest the first thing that comes to mind. Record 3–5 responses on chart paper or on the board.
2. Display the PowerPoint slide [We Are Americans](#). Share that this photo depicts a group of people who are American citizens and legal residents. Ask if this photo matches the descriptors listed on the board. (Typically, the descriptors of the photo are different from those on the list.)
3. Explain the following to students: Americans whose ancestors came from Asia or who themselves immigrated from Asia are referred to as Asian Americans. Some have lived here for generations, as far back as the early 1800s. Some have recently moved to the United States. Some can speak an Asian language; some cannot. However, many people in the U.S. tend to assume that Asian Americans are not from the U.S., no matter how long their ancestors have lived in this country. They are seen as the “perpetual foreigners”—people who are assumed not to be Americans, who are assumed to be visiting the U.S. or to have only recently moved to the U.S. Their loyalty and patriotism to the U.S. are also questioned, regardless of how long they have lived here.

Optional: Ask students to either read [Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White](#), excerpted from the book by Frank Wu, which describes how he experiences the perpetual foreigner syndrome, or to view the humorous YouTube video, [Perpetual Foreigner](#) by Phillip Cha. Following, elicit from students specific examples of Wu’s (handout) or the Asian-American character’s (video) experience with the perpetual foreigner syndrome.

4. Share with students that the perpetual foreigner syndrome is nothing new, that this syndrome has been used to discriminate against Asian Americans for a long time. Explain that one of the most terrible episodes in U.S. history involved Japanese Americans who—simply because of their Japanese heritage—were incarcerated in camps during WWII.

NOTE: If students are familiar with the Japanese-American internment, skip to step #6.

5. Share points raised in [Brief Background of Japanese-American Internment Talking Points](#), as well as other information related to the Japanese-American internment.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE: Ask students to read “Background” section of [Understanding the Civil Liberties Act of 1988](#) or portions of “[Historical Overview](#)” by the [Japanese American Citizens League](#) to provide a general overview of the Japanese-American experience during WWII.

Part II: Pyramid of Hate (70 minutes)

6. Share that, unfortunately, the U.S. government wasn’t the only source of discrimination, and the end of the internment didn’t end the discrimination. Explain that individuals also harbored bias and prejudice against Japanese Americans and discriminated against them, before, during and after the internment.
7. Distribute the [Definition of Basic Terms](#) handout to each student and review the terms that will be used in the next part of the lesson. Ask students to provide an example for each term.

Optional: These terms can be written on the board in lieu of distributing the handout.

8. Post the [Pyramid of Hate](#) prepared earlier. Briefly review the different levels of bias in this diagram and share the following information with participants:

The pyramid shows biased behaviors, growing in complexity from the bottom to the top. Although the behaviors at each level negatively impact individuals and groups, as one moves up the pyramid, the behaviors have more life-threatening consequences. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or “normal,” it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted. In response to the questions of the world community about where genocide comes from, the pyramid demonstrates that this level of hate was built from acceptance of behaviors associated with the other levels of hate.

9. Share with students that they will be using this diagram to understand the behaviors that led up to and followed the internment of Japanese Americans. To start, ask students where they think the forced removal of Japanese Americans into internment camp belongs on the pyramid (Discrimination: political discrimination, segregation). Acknowledge that for the purposes of this activity, “genocide” will not be used, as this does not apply to the Japanese-American experience.
10. Divide students into 4–5 small groups. Ask each group to identify a recorder. Distribute one copy of [Behaviors and Their Impact](#) for each video clip the group will be viewing and a copy of [Short List of Definitions for Oral Histories](#). Explain that each group will be assigned a set of video clips to watch that are oral histories of surviving Japanese-American internees, who talk about their experiences before and after the internment camp experience. Instruct students to do the following:
- During the viewing, take notes about what behaviors were directed at the interviewees because of their Japanese heritage, and how these behaviors impacted them. Refer to the [Short List of Definitions for Oral Histories](#) for words used in the videos that may be unfamiliar.
 - After viewing each clip, discuss what behaviors were directed toward the interviewee, where they would be classified on the pyramid and the impact of these behaviors. The group recorder should write out the group’s responses on the handout, one interviewee per handout.
 - Each video is supplied in two sizes, for High and Low bandwidth connections. Select the best match for the connection speed at your location.
11. Assign the following clips, listed in alphabetical order by first name, to each group. (Note: Transcripts of these clips can be found in the Archive section at [Densho](#). You will need to first search for the original clips, which are accompanied by transcripts. [Densho](#) requires a free registration process to access the Archives, which includes over 270 visual histories, photos, documents and newspaper articles.)
- Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga Interview ([High/Low](#))
 - Frank Kitamoto Interview ([High/Low](#))
 - Frank Yamasaki Interview #1 ([High/Low](#))
 - Frank Yamasaki Interview #2 ([High/Low](#))
 - George Fugami Interview ([High/Low](#))
 - Mako Nakagawa Interview ([High/Low](#))
 - May K. Sasaki Interview ([High/Low](#))
 - May Ota Higa Interview #1 ([High/Low](#))
 - May Ota Higa Interview #2 ([High/Low](#))
 - Ruby Inouye Interview ([High/Low](#))
 - Sue K. Embrey Interview #1 ([High/Low](#))
 - Sue K. Embrey Interview #2 ([High/Low](#))
 - Tom Akashi Interview ([High/Low](#))

Video materials provided by Densho: The Japanese American Legacy Project, www.densho.org.

ALTERNATIVE STEP #1: In lieu of steps #10–11, distribute the handouts and show the entire class one of the 4–6 clips identified earlier. After each clip, ask them to complete the handout either individually or in their small group. Show remainder of the clips in the same manner.

ALTERNATIVE STEP #2: Assign step #10–11 as homework, to be done individually. Be sure that students have access to the Internet in order to complete the project.

12. After students have completed the handouts, ask each group to present at least one of their interviewee’s experiences to the class, indicating where these behaviors fall on the [Pyramid of Hate](#). Indicate these behaviors on the pyramid posted earlier by using a check mark.
13. Lead a whole group discussion, using some or all of the questions below:
 - What obvious and subtle behaviors directed at the interviewees reflected the “perpetual foreigner syndrome”?
 - Some Japanese Americans shared their self-hatred of their identity. Why do you think they felt this way? Are there aspects of your identity with which you struggle? If so, which ones and why?
 - Do you think the behaviors you placed at the bottom of the pyramid were less painful emotionally than those higher up? Why or why not?
 - Did the end of the internment camps mean the end of discrimination against Japanese Americans? Why or why not? What does discrimination against Japanese Americans, and Asian Americans at large, look like today, e.g., hate crime against Vincent Chen in 1982 in Detroit, MI; racist T-shirts in response to Japanese baseball player Kosuke Fukudome joining the Chicago Cubs in 2008?
 - In reflecting on the escalation of hate, what would be the best time to challenge biased attitudes and behaviors? Why?

Part III: Reactions to Civil Liberties Act of 1988 and Redress (30 minutes)

14. Share the following:

Decades after World War II, as the result of much work by the Japanese-American community and its allies to seek reparations, the U.S. government formally recognized the grave injustices committed against Japanese-American citizens and residents during World War II with the passage of the Civil Liberties Act on August 10, 1988, which provided \$20,000 (\$32,000 in 2007 dollars) to each of the surviving 60,000 Japanese Americans (50% of the total interned) and created a public education fund to ensure that the period of Japanese-American internment would not be forgotten and repeated.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURE: Ask students to read “The Civil Liberties Act of 1988” section of [Understanding the Civil Liberties Act of 1988](#).

15. Explain that these efforts by the government to right the wrongs against the Japanese-American community are referred to as “redress,” which means a way of seeking a remedy.
16. Distribute copies of *Japanese-American Internee’s Thoughts about Redress: Ruby Inouye and Tsugio “Ike” Ikeda*, one of each to each student. Ask students to read both of these handouts which explore Ruby Inouye’s and Tsugio “Ike” Ikeda’s perspectives on redress.

Optional: Show their interview at [Densho’s](#) Archives (Ruby Inouye Interview: Segment 53; Tsugio “Ike” Ikeda Interview III: Segment 8.)

17. Engage in a large group discussion using some or all of the questions below:
 - How do Inouye and Ikeda differ in their feelings about the government’s redress efforts?
 - How do they feel about the financial payment of \$20,000 (\$32,000 in 2007 dollars)? Do you think this is sufficient, given that they lost their home, their business or job, and their possessions? Why or why not? How much would you give if you could make the decision?
 - How do they feel about the president’s apology? Whose argument do you agree with more?
 - Ikeda shared, “Rarely does a president of the United States apologize for any wrongdoing in this country. And there’ve been many...” From your perspective, who are the “many” in this sentence? Do you think other groups deserve an apology? Do you think they deserve monetary payment for their pain, suffering and loss?

Pyramid of Hate



Brief Background of Japanese-American Internment

Talking Points

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."

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.

To see a sample of the instructions, based on the Executive Order that was given to Japanese Americans go to www.jacl.org/edu/ExclusionPoster.pdf.

For a more detailed description of the Japanese-American internment experience, go to www.adl.org/media/6729/download.

For a map of the U.S. internment camps, go to www.jacl.org/edu/MapofConcentrationCamps.pdf.

[JAP]

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.

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 (above) associated with the behaviors.



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

Source: “Densho’s Interview Glossaries” that accompanied the interviews at www.densho.org and “Terminology and Glossary” at www.densho.org/resources/default.asp.

Japanese-American Internee's Thoughts About Redress: Ruby Inouye



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....

Interviewer: What about your parents, getting theirs?

Ruby: 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—

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

Ruby: 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.

Interviewer: 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.

Ruby: 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...

Reprinted with permission from “Ruby Inouye Interview: Segment 53” (Seattle, WA: Densho Visual History Collection, Densho Digital Archive, 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).

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

Tsuguo: 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.

Interviewer: 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?

Tsuguo: 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*

Reprinted with permission from "Tsuguo 'Ike' Interview III: Segment 8" (Seattle, WA: Densho Visual History Collection, Densho Digital Archive, 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.

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

Resources about the Japanese-American Internment

The selective list offers additional information about the Japanese-American internment experience.

Densho

www.densho.org

Started in 1996, Densho is a nonprofit organization dedicated to documenting oral histories from Japanese Americans who were incarcerated during World War II and, more broadly, to educate, preserve, collaborate and inspire action for equity.

Japanese American Citizens League

www.jacl.org

Founded in 1929, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) is the oldest and largest Asian American civil rights organization in the United States. It offers curriculum and resources about the Japanese American internment experience, including *A Lesson in American History: The Japanese American Experience* and *Civil Liberties in Times of Crisis: The Japanese American Experience DVD*.

Japanese American National Museum

www.janm.org

The Japanese American National Museum's mission is to promote understanding and appreciation of America's ethnic and cultural diversity by sharing the Japanese American experience. It includes online curriculum and resources about the history of the Japanese American community.

A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/experience/index.html>

This online exhibit by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History explores the events prior, during and following the Japanese American internments when racial prejudice and fear upset the delicate balance between the rights of the citizen and the power of the state.

Personal Justice Denied

www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/personal_justice_denied/index.htm

Personal Justice Denied is a 493-page report written in 1982 by the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, a government body designed to investigate the impact of Executive Order 9066 and the internment camps on the citizens and permanent residents of Japanese ancestry. Also is available as a book for purchase.