

Anti-Asian Racism and Racial Justice in the Classroom

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Abstract

This article discusses the urgent issues and concerns about anti-Asian racism in our society and provides several pedagogical strategies to counter anti-Asian racism. We begin by discussing the history and context of anti-Asian racism in the US, from which we trace the historical origins and contexts of anti-Asian racism, violence, and stereotypes in popular culture and media. After that, we share several anti-Asian racism teaching strategies and practices, drawn from and influenced by the creative artworks of Asian contemporary artists such as Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, and Monyee Chau, who demonstrate subverting racism against Asians during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Finally, after engaging our students in anti-Asian racism lessons, we share their art projects and written testimonials about anti-Asian racism. As a result, we strongly encourage educators to use, in their art curriculum, both history and contemporary artworks by artists to address anti-Asian racism and social justice.

As Asian-American art educators, we have paid close attention to the recent violence and hate crimes against Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). According to a Stop AAPI Hate national report (Jeung et al., 2021), Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders were targeted in 3,292 hate crimes in the year 2020 due to the COVID-19 global crisis. The Stop AAPI Hate National Report addressed hate crimes and harassment concerns about AAPI and stated that 1,800 racist incidents against Asian Americans took place between March of 2020 and May of 2020 (Jeung et al., 2021). In an analysis by researchers at California State University San Bernardino, overall hate crimes in the United States were found to have decreased by 6 percent between 2019 and 2020, while those targeting Asian people rose by nearly 150 percent (Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, 2021). In this article, considering these urgent issues and concerns about AAPI in our society, we provide anti-Asian racism strategies and art pedagogies that art educators and students can address in the classroom.

In addressing anti-Asian racism in the classroom, we begin by discussing the history and context of anti-Asian racism in the US, from which we trace the historical origins of anti-Asian racism, violence, and stereotypes inundated in US popular culture and media (Nakanishi & Nishida, 1995). After that, we share several anti-Asian racism teaching strategies, in hopes that others resonate with our teaching approaches. These strategies were developed from our anti-racism pedagogical practices, drawn from and influenced by the creative artworks of Asian contemporary artists such as Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, and Monyee Chau who demonstrate subverting and challenging the prejudice and racism against Asians during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Later, after engaging our students in anti-Asian racism

lessons, we collected and analyzed their artworks, sharing some examples and their written testimonials about anti-Asian racism. Lastly, after reflecting on our anti-Asian teaching practices, we strongly encourage educators to use, in their art curriculum, both history and contemporary artworks by artists concerned about discrimination, racism, harassment, xenophobia, nativism, or misogyny (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2021).

Before sharing our anti-Asian racism classroom projects and teaching strategies, we also disclose our positionalities as Asian American art educators. As Korean American immigrant art educators we felt an urgent need to respond to the Atlanta area spa incident and other recent anti-Asian hate crimes, for K-12 classroom and education communities (Jyung, 2021). Our views relate to news media as well as direct and indirect experiences contributed to this writing, and we offer our approaches as counter-stories of Asian educators to address, challenge, and redress anti-Asian social climates through art and education (Shin et al., in press). We believe that this timely teaching approach for anti-Asian racism facilitates further discussions and develops educational discourses for equitable and just-based learning in the classroom.

History Repeats! Anti-Asian Racism and Violence

As art educators who have taught the influence and impact of visual and popular culture, we understand how it is an important part of students' life and seeing the world. Popular and visual culture reflects social and political climates of any historical time and era, so we review the history of anti-Asian racism aligned with ways people created, stereotyped, and sustained how a certain group of people claim their political and social interests and gains (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2021). Historically, Asian and Pacific Islanders have been featured in a typical stereotypical way in popular media (Besana et al., 2019). As many African Americans stress the

negative stereotypes of Black people in media and popular culture (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021), Asian Americans also see how they have impacted our lives beyond mere jokes or entertainment. We are surprised to learn that many negative images and social vile of Asian Americans reappeared recently due to the pandemic and COVID-19 (Hussain, 2020). As the statistics in the introduction section indicated, many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are targeted or blamed for COVID-19. Media and politics targeted China as the source of the virus (Chakraborty, 2020). Most Asians were considered and seen as Chinese and blamed for this, even though there are so many different ethnicities and countries represented beyond China, such as Japanese, Taiwan, Korean, Filipino, Mongolian, Malaysian, Indonesian, Tibetan, Vietnamese, to name a few. As the artist, Lisa Woo-Rim Sjöblom warns that violence starts with racial imagery, and the next step from that is actual violence (Garcia, 2020). The virus should not be the reason to justify attacking or discriminating against Asian immigrants and Asian Americans. Worse than statistics is that Asian women are three times more likely harassed than Asian males (Lu, 2020).

A horrifying term that plagued the Asian community was *the yellow peril*, which originated in the late 19th century, widespread in America and New Zealand. Immigrant Chinese were seen threatening job security as they were willing to work for cheap labor, even though many were forced to work in harsh labor in workplaces (McClain, 1994). The term expanded to Japanese during the mid-20th century, as White were afraid of Asians increased in number and interracial marriage between an Asian man and white women. As a response to this social and political rhetoric of the yellow peril, in 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, in which Chinese works are prohibited from coming to the US, excluding them being US citizens (Railton, 2013). The Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed a couple of times, and later it was expanded as

the Asian Exclusion Act (AEA) in 1924. Interestingly, even though the AEA was repealed in 1943, the Magnuson Act replaced it to keep the number of Asian immigrants in number, introducing quotas for immigrants from around the world (Misiuna, 2018). Eventually, the Immigration Act passed the House in 1965, which abolished quota regulation for immigrants based on national origin. However, many immigrants were regulated by the quota number, so many immigrant workers struggle to attain legal permits to work in this country due to the limited number of the quota each year. Under this political climate, Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants were forced to be excluded from society to incarceration camps after the bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II (Conrat & Conrat, 1992). As minority groups and low classes in the society, Asian Americans were victimized socially and politically by discriminative policies, which were facilitated and impacted by popular media and culture (Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

Starting with yellow peril, evil Asian stereotypes appear in popular media such as cartoons, comic strips, movies, and children's books (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2021; Rodríguez & Kim, 2018). Yellow peril provided an environment of the big success of Fu Manchu on screens in the 1920s and 30s. The novel first was written by Sax Rohmer (1883-1959), printed in 1912 and twentieth printed in 1955, and recently printed in 2002 in the title, *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu* (Rohmer, 2002). The sinister, evil, misogynistic and violent image of Asians was created and reinforced by popular culture and media. The limited role of Asians in popular movies such as Fu Manchu continues to be reinforced through limited criminal and demeaning minor roles. In popular culture history, Asian men on screen have been portrayed as "small, sneaky, and threatening- or spineless, emasculated wimps, or incompetents who may well be technically proficient in martial art, but impotent when faced with white man's superior strength or

firepower" (Prasso, 2005, p. 403).

The sneaky and deriving stereotype of East Asians was repeated in Disney animation character, Si and Am, in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), as well as Mr. Yunioshi in *Breakfast at Tiffany* (1961), which shows racist, anti-Asian stereotypes towards Japanese people (Nicolaou, 2017). Both show buck teeth, thick accents, and slanted eyes. The stereotypical depiction of Asians being poke fun of physical appearances, accents, clumsy or wicked characters, were seen as inferior and outsiders. Long Duk Dong, a Japanese foreign exchange student in *Sixteen Candles* (1984), is a similar version of Mr. Yunioshi stereotype.

On the other hand, the popular media and culture developed a stereotype for East Asian and South Asian women as dragon lady who is strong, domineering, and deceitful—coined after a journalist reporting the Chinese Empress Dowager Tzu-hsi, who ruled China from 1898 to 1908, as the wicked and sly empress of the East (Prasso, 2005). According to New York Times, she was described as "A reptilian dragon lady who had arranged to the poisoning, strangling, beheading, or forced suicide of anyone who had ever challenged her autocratic rule" (as cited in Shah, 1997, p. xiii). In popular culture, the Dragon Lady first appeared, in December 1934, in the comic strip of *Terry and the Pirates* (1934). She was presented as a beautiful but seductive and evil woman, and the character grew more complex as she appeared on radio, films, and tv series. A typical example is Anna May Wong (1905-1961) in films, which shows scheming, poisonous, and treacherous dragon lady defeating her enemies in a sly and malicious manner. She was forced to play either this stereotypical role or 'Madam Butterfly,' a submissive and idealized Asian woman. Madam Butterfly is typically one of the stereotypical versions of Asian women, such as China Doll or Geisha Girl. Recently, the European musical *Miss Saigon*

(1989-2018), a modern adaption of *Madam Butterfly*, repeated and presented Asian women as subservient, weak, willowy, and often objectifying them as a sexual toy (Pham, 2021).

We still see these kinds of stereotypical depiction of Asian females in popular culture in contemporary films, including, but not limited to, *Kill Bill* (2003), *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), *Mean Girls* (2004), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), and the “Benihana Christmas” episode of *The Office* (2006). Many of these films and other popular culture projects have been consumed and repeatedly shown through online video streaming services, as well as viral Tiktok videos or other social media. They not only reinforce stereotypes but also provide spaces to express and spread racism videos. The consequences are unknown and discernable, but ferment someone to take action, as seen in the recent Atlanta spa shooting racialized *misogyny* and sex addiction (Chappell & Jones, 2021).

Asian American Artist’s Voices and Interventions against Anti-Asian Racism

Considering the harmful and devastating anti-Asian racism, many Asian American artists address this concern through their artworks, raising their voices through artistic forms and means. We introduce three artists who resonate with our teaching strategies, as they were introduced and discussed in our classroom. Most of their interventionist art approach towards social change also influenced our student works shared later in this article.

Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom. Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom is a Swedish-Korean international adoptee rights activist, book author, illustrator, cartoonist, and graphic designer living in Auckland, New Zealand with her White partner and two children. In Korean, her name, Wool-Rim, connotes the idea of echo or resonance. People have been moved by Sjöblom’s

illustrations and social media postings, which resonate deeply with them as Asian individuals living in the United States and European countries. With the recent escalation of hate crimes against Asians in Europe and North America, the authors have become even more interested in Sjöblom's artwork and social media. Being adopted by a white Swedish family when she was a toddler, she has long struggled with the purportedly color blind and whitewashed educational and social system in Sweden, where race-related commentary in the public sphere is taboo (L. W-R. Sjöblom., personal communication, April 30, 2021). The growth of Sweden's extreme right-wing party and the increasingly anti-immigration and xenophobia of the country, as in all of Europe, led the Sjöblom family to leave Sweden for Auckland, New Zealand in 2016. When Sjöblom heard about a Chinese-French man who was attacked by a French white mob when COVID-19 just began to spread across France (Garcia, 2020), she felt she had to respond to this racist incident. She began to create a series of illustrations published under the hashtag JeNeSuisPasUnVirus (I'm not a virus) on her instagram account.



Figure 1. Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, *I am not a virus*, 2020.

Figure 1, the first of the series, illustrates how many people in the West look at Asians as the originators and perpetrators of the COVID-19 virus. Because Sjöblom has created art that deals with human rights issues for people of color, and in particular, the human rights of international East Asian adoptees, it is quite natural that her artworks analyze, criticize, and address issues related to anti-Asian racism, whiteness, and White supremacy. In particular, her graphic novel, *Palimpsest: Documents from a Korean Adoption*, examines how White supremacy and racism shape the lives of people of color and transracial adoptees (Sjöblom, 2019).



Figure 2. Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom, *Untitled*, digital illustration 2020.

Figure 2 depicts an Asian boy trying to transform himself into a white boy. Showing the boy putting white powder on his face is an obvious physical expression of the child's desire to

appear white. This illustration is based on Sjöblom's firsthand experience with her son after an actual racist attack in London, United Kingdom. The family was visiting the family of her partner, who is White. They were sitting in a café, and the son noticed that all the people sitting around him were White. He realized that there were only three people in the café who looked different, and they were him, his sister, and his mother. The son told his mother that everyone there looked like his mother's White partner, and that he wished he could look like him (Garcia, 2020). This episode led to a deep reckoning by Sjöblom, who saw that her son's reaction was more than just skin color, but about racist systems of that privilege Whiteness (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021).

Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya. Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya was born in Atlanta, Georgia and her parents are from Thailand and Indonesia. Phingbodhipakkiya studied neuroscience at Columbia University and worked at an Alzheimer's research laboratory before becoming a full-time artist, educator, and STEM advocate based in Brooklyn, New York City (Phingbodhipakkiya, n.d.). Phingbodhipakkiya is a transdisciplinary artist and graphic designer.



Figure 3. Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya, “I Still Believe in Our City” was unveiled at Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn, New York City in October 2020. Credit: Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya.

Her recent public project, *I Still Believe in Our City* in New York City (2020) is a public art series created in partnership with the New York City Commission on Human Rights to address the anti-Asian bias and hate crimes that have been on the rise and as of late (NYC Commission on Human Rights, 2021). It was unveiled at Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn (Figure 3). The installation took over the sprawling transit hub — 45 posters and larger-scale banners, drenched in vibrant color, that both raised awareness and affirmed belonging. . Phingbodhipakkiya believes that the recent rise in anti-Asian crimes is a combination of the rhetoric coming out of the last president’s White House and the proliferation of hate against communities of color (United Nation, 2021). In her anti-Asian racism public project “I still believe in our city,” Phingbodhipakkiya met community members in order to hear their voice and experience on anti-Asian racism and Black Lives Matter movement (Kantawala, 2021).



Figure 4. These posters used different Asian languages including Filipino, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese (From left to right) and this slogan means, “We do not make you sick.”
Credit: Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya

Many quotes on her Asian women portrait poster series (Figure 4) came from the community members such as “I (We) do not make you sick,” “I am not your scapegoat,” “This is our home too,” “We belong here,” and “I still believe in our city.” At first, she wanted to use “I still believe in my city.” After the meeting with community members, she changed from “my city” to “our city” because the city entails people who are connected (Asian Women Giving Cycle [AWGC], 2021). Phingbodhipakkiya feels that many people in the US assume that most Asians came from China. Thus, she wanted to educate the people that there are many Asian immigrants who came from the South East Asian regions (AWGC, 2021). The South East Asian regions are well known for biodiversity and many flowers with many bright colors. Amanda used bright colors and flower motifs that were inspired from the mood orchard, rumdul, cassia fistula linn, and Jasmine in backgrounds.

Monyee Chau. Monyee Chau is a Seattle based multimedia artist, Taiwanese and Chinese descent, and queer. Her family owned a seafood restaurant at the Chinatown International District in Seattle. Chau has witnessed how COVID-19 impacts business in Chinatown, Seattle since many people indicate that Chinese are the main cause of Coronavirus and some people believe that Chinatowns in the US are dangerous areas to visit. Chau used the Chinese protective charm designs for this poster project. In many Chinese societies and other Asian countries, protective charms are still used by people because they bring good fortune and luck and even protect people from unpredictable events such as nature and man-made disasters.



Figure 5. Monyee Chau, *Chinatown Resiliency Poster*, digital illustration and printed, varied size, 2020. Courtesy of the artist

In Seattle, Chinatown International District had been the target of white nationalist stickers as a fear tactic to intimidate the neighborhood on April 12, 2020. This was intentional and racially charged. In response to the attack, Chau designed a contemporary version of a protective charm poster with a message for her neighbors in strong red letters (Figure 5): “Chinatown, Filipinotown, Japantown, Little Saigon were all built on resilience. We will survive this, too.” Traditionally, in protective charms, the color of yellow means light or sunshine that usually dispels devils and evil spirits, which is known as the emperor’s color. Chinese characters in red convey the intended messages such as longevity, prosperity, health, good nature, and good luck (Chung & Li, 2017). In this case, Chau’s poster plays a significant role in protecting Chinese and Asians businesses and people in the Chinatown International District from anti-Asian racism and White supremacist attacks and wishes to overcome the current difficulties for the future prosperity. The borrowing of the form of the protective charms can be specifically

intentional because the white nationalist stickers have been found on walls everywhere in the Chinatown International District. Metaphorically, the stickers signify anti-prosperity and man-made disaster. Therefore, Chau's protective charm posters serve as a perfect counterpart to eliminate the negative energy.



Figure 6. Monyee Chau, "Yellow Peril Supports Black Power", digital illustration, 2020.

Chau borrowed the title of this illustration (See Figure 6) from a historical event in the 1960. "Yellow Peril Supports Black Power" was a slogan used by Asian Americans who demonstrated for the release of Huey Newton, co-founder and Minister of Defense of the Black Panther Party, who was held on murder charges in Oakland, California in 1969 (Ramirez, 2020).

In the days after the murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, Chau channeled their grief into a poster inspired by Asian supporters of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, with the slogan “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power” with a powerful graphic of a crouching tiger and black panther circumscribed within a yellow and black yin-yang symbol. The phrase appeared on placards at protests during the 1960s, when Asian Americans tried to reclaim the racist “yellow” term and their histories. Chau posted the design on her Instagram account, where it garnered more than 50,000 likes; Her artwork is available to download so anyone could use it on posters and signs.

Pedagogical Strategies against Anti-Asian Racism

In this section, we share our approaches to confront and challenge anti-Asian racism and violence, rejecting the stereotypes of Asians in popular media and culture (Besana et al, 2019). Even though our strategies and instructional methods can apply to anti-racism broadly against other race and ethnic groups, we focus on anti-Asian racism because this topic has not been extensively explored or discussed. We believe that these strategies below can empower students by engaging them with art-focused interventions. Below we also share the reflections, responses, and visual expressions of the students as future artists, art teachers, and elementary teachers.

In our classrooms, we designed and implemented a series of educational activities that examined anti-Asian racism in our society through reading, writing, listening, discussing, art making, and sharing. First, the students read several articles about how visual and popular culture have created and developed stereotyped Asian American images in North America and discussed them with specific popular culture examples shared in the historical review section.

The popular and visual culture images helped students understand and discuss historical information and discourses, showing how various images from popular culture and media have contained biased and distorted images against Asian Americans. Second, we discussed ways to address anti-Asian or other racism in the art classroom, sharing three art-based anti-racism approaches: art interventions/subverting racism; anti-racial gazing; and anti-racist memes. Students carefully reviewed and examined artworks by the three contemporary artists, which were introduced in the previous section of this article. Third, the students crafted a short reflection paper to share what they learned from the class with the theme of 'confronting anti-Asian racism in art education.' The guiding questions included 1) What did you learn from this lecture? 2) What inspired you the most? 3) How can you connect this week's lecture content to what we have been learning through this art education method course? 4) How did this lecture help you better understand the meanings of social justice, anti-racism, and diversity? After that, the students posted their writing on online discussion board forum. The setting does not allow them to see other students' writings before uploading their own writing, and we intentionally used this structure to help them develop their own unique and authentic position statements. In addition, each student was invited to respond to at least two peer postings. With the use of this online activity, they encouraged one another with candid responses and reflections and eventually formed a community of learners to collaboratively explore this theme of fighting anti-Asian racism and developing racial justice in education. Finally, the students created an artwork to artistically address anti-Asian racism. Any art medium was welcomed. After uploading the image of their completed artwork and a 150-word writing about it on the course site, they were instructed to post their responses to and feedback

on classmates' artworks. These step-by-step instructions and strategies encouraged our students to reflect, explore, navigate, and expand the theme of anti-Asian racism and to explore pedagogical implications in personalized and artistic ways.

Art Interventions/Subverting Racism

We offer art intervention strategy as one of the most significant ways of both creating art against racism or subverting covert and overt racism in social and political spheres (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021). Overt racism is the intentional and/or obvious harmful attitudes or behaviors towards another minority individual or group because of their skin color, and covert racism is racial discrimination that is concealed or subtle rather than obvious or public (Kalwant, 2018).



Figure 7. A self-portrait drawing after looking at illustrations of Sjöblom, Phingbodhipakkiya, and Chau. Courtesy of the pre-service elementary teacher.

After exploring the three contemporary Asian artists and their artworks, Megan, an elementary education major (K-8) at a midwestern university, created a self-portrait poster (Figure 7).

Megan borrowed their creative strategies and conceptual ideas. She intentionally employed hues of red and yellow after understanding the meanings of the two colors on Chau's protective charm-inspired poster. In addition, Megan strategically used purple for her background because purple is the official color of International Women's Day (March 8), founded more than a century ago after some 15,000 women marched in New York City to demand better working conditions and voting rights (International Women Day, 2021). The female face imagery with confidence in this poster was inspired by Phingbodhipakkiya's *"I still believe in our city"* project. Lastly, Megan created the mask with a written slogan, "i am no virus" that was found on one of Sjöblom's illustrations *"I am Not a Virus."*

Another student explained that their artworks helped him examine stereotypes towards and discriminations against Asian-Americans and reflected on how he could "get others to change their way of thinking in order to become a more accepting and understanding society" (personal communication, April 7, 2021). He also shared his belief about the power of art: "Art has the amazing ability to unite people and show them parts of cultures that they never even thought about" (personal communication, April 7, 2021).

There are some students who took on this project in creative ways, but still carry the anti-racism message. For example, Cathy created a painting depicting four female figures who represent all different ethnicities (see Figure 8). She decided to draw these women to support other cultures. Her classmate responded to this art piece by stating: "The way you did this piece helps to show the beauty, uniqueness and significance of people of all ethnicities" (personal

communication, April 20, 2021).



Figure 8. Student's Artwork *Four Females*, watercolor on canvas panel, 2021. Courtesy of the student artist.

Jennifer created an artwork titled *Hate Is a Virus Love Each Other* (Figure 9). She described what she wanted to show through this painting:

I wanted to create an artwork that depicted Asians as loving since there is such a long history of artwork demonizing them. Racism is hate, and hate is a virus itself. We should all work together to overcome the virus rather than attempting to blame it on others.

(personal communication, April 20, 2021)

Her peers noticed how carefully Jennifer placed the image and texts to deliver her message. For example, John responded: "Though the word 'virus' is cut off, I think the viewers all can infer the word. I think the word being cut off is actually a successful part of the composition as it adds spatial depth" (personal communication, April 20, 2021).



Figure 9. Student's Artwork *Hate Is a Virus Love Each Other*, watercolor on paper, 2021.
Courtesy of the student artist.

Anti-Racial Gazing

The students openly and honestly responded to the concept of anti-racial gazing regarding the racism against Asian Americans. Gaze is the relationship of power in which looking and being looked at takes place and this is a social understanding through which individuals' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors are filtered (Kraehe & Acuff, 2021). Focusing on cultural distortions found in media, an art education student Emily explained:

I found the most surprising to hear was that the character 'O-Ren Ishii' on *Kill Bill* was seen as offensive towards Asian cultures. I always loved this movie and thought it actually had anti-racism aspects. Moreover, hearing this made me realize I might have overlooked so many misrepresentations in Asian culture. (personal communication, April 7, 2021)

Like Emily, many students pointed out that they were not aware that many parts of the U.S. media's portrayal of Asians and Asian Americans are based on racist perspectives and cultural

misappropriation (Acuff, 2013; Kraehe et al., 2015).

Some students shared their own experiences with and observations on this topic. Highlighting her personal perspective formed through her social-media interactions, Jennifer shared her recent experiences closely related to anti-Asian gazing:

I've seen a 'beauty trend' recently going around called 'Fox's Eyes.' It's where women will purposely pull back their eyes and slant them to appear more 'exotic.' I've seen a lot of Asian people...are upset by this because for a long-time western culture has mocked them for their eye shape. It's things like this that seem harmless but are actually very damaging and racist. (personal communication, April 8, 2021)

Figure 10 presents an example of anti-racial gaze visual illustrations by one of the authors. This visualization of anti-Asian gazing exposes the racial stereotypes and discriminations against Asians in the movie, *Gran Torino* (2008). This movie illustrates Asians, particularly Hmong people, as powerless people who merely wait for White saviors. In the movie, Hmong people cannot solve their own community problems, being depicted as gang members or their cultures were viewed through the eyes of Western dominant culture. This example shows how popular culture is still saturated with bias and stereotypes, which can be analyzed by close and critical reading of popular culture, such as movies, novels, and television dramas.

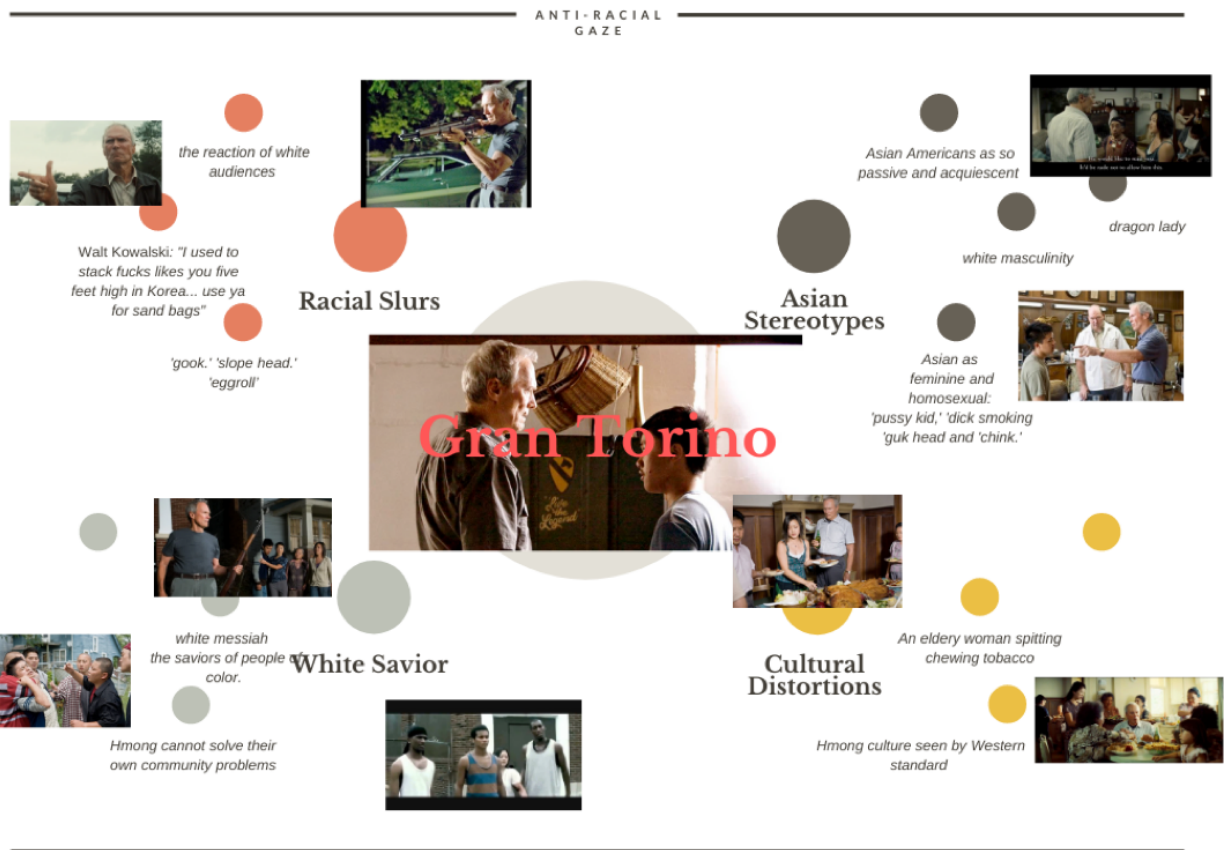


Figure 10. Anti-Racial Gazing Analysis Based on *Gran Torino* (2008).

Anti-Racist Memes

Memes are defined as images that have been circulated countless times to comment on a variety of global and local events (McDonald, 2021). Students can create anti-racist memes as a critical and artistic response to racist memes circulating on social media that reinforce the stereotypes and derogatory images of a specific group or people. In our classes, a number of students created art pieces in response to their social-media activities and communications. They endeavored to visualize what they had explored about this topic of racism against Asians and Asian-Americans. For instance, John, a photography major student, was inspired by

Phingbodhipakkiya and Chau to make a poster in a vibrant design style focusing on the message of “Stop Asian Hate” (see Figure 11). He described his ideas behind and processes within the creation of this poster: “I wanted to incorporate “Hate Is A Virus” as it speaks volumes in the age of a pandemic, especially when some ignorant Americans have placed blame for the COVID-19 virus on Asian people as a whole” (personal communication, April 19, 2021).

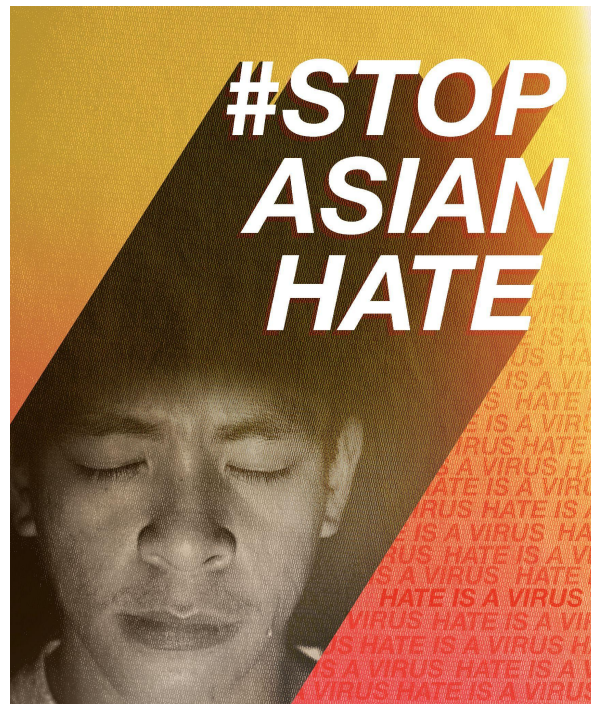


Figure 11. Student’s Artwork *#Stop Asian Hate*, digital print, 2021. Courtesy of the student artist.

Another student Anthony described his banner presented in Figure 12:

I found it deeply troubling that people were taking their hatred of the virus out on Asian immigrants. I created a simple slogan banner to use for my online accounts to spread the word about the increase of racism directed at Asian-Americans and Asian immigrants.

(personal communication, April 20, 2021)

As demonstrated by the artworks and narratives of John and Anthony, our students became

critical creators of culture, not mere consumers of culture (Goodman, 1996), by creating anti-racist memes and passing their reflective messages to other members of their community.



Figure 12. Student's Artwork *Fight the Virus Not Immigration*, digital print, 2021. Courtesy of the student artist.

Conclusion

This article summarizes our approach to engage students with meaningful art practices and classroom discussions that counter anti-Asian racism and shed a light on the destructive power of racist history and popular culture in the US. We discussed how anti-Asian racism has been deeply embedded in US history, popular culture, and mass media. Against this historical bias and stereotypes as well as current viral anti-Asian racism, we offered three pedagogical strategies, introducing three Asian contemporary artists who have actively responded to the current Asian racism violence through their creative endeavors. Engaging our students with three artists' creative interventions and endeavors in our classrooms, we emphasize that our students can create and share anti-racist art works challenging current racial concerns and issues. Many students realized the power of art towards social justice education, demonstrating that they can become agents of cultural change beyond the mere consumer of culture

(Goodman, 1996; Iftikar & Museus, 2018).

As seen in students' numerous comments and personal reflections, some of their important themes were self-transformation, empowerment, and caring for others. Their stories also confirm that rather than avoiding social issues in the classroom or sheltering students from these issues, they became capable learners and critical thinkers who use art in innovative ways. We also admit that it is the responsibility of educators to take this issue to the classroom, from which students and teachers can create a culture of change and transformation. It is our hope that this article can contribute to further pedagogical discourses and practices to address anti-Asian racism, White supremacy, and racial inequality in the United States, within and beyond the context of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

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