

Visibility Forward: Addressing Anti-AAPI Violence through Culturally Representative Education

United States

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<https://www.visibilityforward.org>

Background and Goals

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a surge in anti-Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) violence, with the FBI documenting a 73% increase in hate crimes in 2020 alone.¹ While the pandemic exacerbated outright acts of hate in the U.S., AAPIs have long been the target of damaging stereotypes and discrimination, ranging from the Model Minority myth and Yellow Peril to the murder of Vincent Chin. Furthermore, AAPIs are the fastest-growing racial group in the U.S. Recognition, understanding, and empathy for AAPIs, especially in the South, is long overdue.

Visibility Forward addresses the proliferation of anti-AAPI violence by increasing representative curriculum in North Carolina (NC) high schools. Currently, many history curricula nationwide ignore AAPIs entirely or reinforce offensive stereotypes of AAPIs as perpetual foreigners or as Orientals.² We will develop, compile, and promote educational resources that increase tolerance and understanding in classrooms—strategies proven to reduce crime, cultivate belonging, and empower the next generation of NC’s AAPI students.³ Effective peace-building practices include educating communities about bias-motivated violence, different cultures and ethnic groups, and teaching tolerance. Our approach is modeled after Arab American, African American, and Jewish educational campaigns that effectively prevented violence and fostered a culture of peace.⁴ For instance, educational peace-building efforts helped mitigate the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment resulting from the 9/11 attacks.⁵

Project Description

Visibility Forward’s history and cultural educational campaign will tell the stories of AAPI communities, combat violence by reducing bias, and promote a culture of peace through greater empathy.⁶ The project addresses the severe impacts that gaps in representation have on AAPI students, who don’t see themselves reflected in our nation’s history, and for non-AAPI students who aren’t taught to value diverse cultures and perspectives. Our project targets high schools, the highest and oftentimes most diverse level of standardized education students receive during their formative years. This proposal centers community input and feedback from AAPI leaders and teachers. As alumni of the NC public school system and undergraduates at UNC-CH, we are well-positioned to connect with past teachers, work with community organizations, and collaborate with professors to advocate for AAPI representation.

We will work alongside teachers, professors, and historians to develop high-quality lesson plans, culturally representative curricula, and an extensive online database with AAPI history resources for educators. Our curricula will highlight prominent historical figures like nuclear physicist Dr. Chien-Shiung Wu, Civil Rights Movement activist Yuri Kochiyama, and labor and workers’ rights champion Larry Itliong. Beyond the importance of ensuring that AAPI students feel seen and included, our project will also contribute to critical peace-building efforts in an increasingly divided world.

¹ Venkatraman, S. (2021, October 25). Anti-Asian hate crimes rose 73% last year, updated FBI data says. *NBC News*, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/anti-asian-hate-crimes-rose-73-last-year-updated-fbi-data-says-rcna3741>

² Hartlep, N. D. & Scott, D. (2016). *Asian/American Curricular Epistemicide: From Being Excluded to Becoming a Model Minority*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.

³ Crowley, R., Fountain, M. & Torres, R. (2012). Seeing in Color Three Reading Teachers Explore the Importance of Multicultural Children’s Literature. *Michigan Reading Journal*, 44(2): 27-35.

⁴ National Criminal Justice Association. (1999). Teaching Tolerance Reduces Crime and Violence. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/teaching-tolerance-reduces-crime-and-violence>

⁵ DeAngelis, T. (2001, November). Understanding and preventing hate crimes. *Monitor on Psychology*. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/nov01/hatecrimes>

⁶ Smitha, A & Thomas, M. V. (2019). Infusing Tolerance and Empathy Skills in Adolescents for Peaceful Co-Existence in 21st Century. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 6(2): 35-40.

To address the lack of AAPI diversity, notable figures, and significant events in schools, Visibility Forward will launch a comprehensive educational campaign that highlights AAPI contributions to the development of the American South. This is especially important given AAPIs' liminal position in the Black-White binary prevalent in the South. In addition to curriculum distribution, we will provide teachers with classroom kits containing representative classroom posters, informative handouts for students, books by diverse authors, and resources on AAPI history. These classroom teaching kits serve multiple purposes: promoting awareness of AAPI cultures, increasing students' excitement on the topic, and providing teachers with the resources necessary to seamlessly integrate AAPI history into classrooms.

Our work is grounded in community collaboration and engagement. We have built a coalition of community partners including NC Asian Americans Together, UNC-CH's Asian American Center, and the political advocacy nonprofit Make Us Visible. Further, our advisors include NC educators and members of the NC Board of Education. These organizations will provide Visibility Forward with outreach and community engagement support, knowledge and data on community needs, and advice on centering community voices in our work. Community partnerships will prove invaluable as we move forwards with educational standard reform on the county level. Our educational campaign will build momentum around the AAPI studies movement to set the foundation for long-term policy-side changes in school counties.

Implementation

SPRING 2022 - PREPARATION: Prior to the summer, we will work alongside UNC-CH and Duke professors to outline culturally representative resources that align with NC's educational standards.

MAY: We will travel to Washington DC to consult with AAPI advocacy organizations Asian Americans Advancing Justice, the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center, and our partner Make Us Visible, who will review our resources, provide feedback, and advise on best practices for classroom implementation. We will leverage their content expertise to develop five lesson plans on AAPI history in NC and the South. We will also meet with AAPI creatives, advocates, and leaders such as Lucy Yu and Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya to bring their representative and innovative work into classrooms.

JUNE - JULY: Leading up to the school year, we will market and launch our website, which will host a comprehensive database of AAPI educational resources that can be accessed by students and teachers. This platform will provide digital copies of our teaching resources (i.e. suggested readings and informative articles), classroom teaching kit request forms, as well as surveys to measure impact. Our website will clearly align AAPI historical events with NC educational standards to maximize utility and ease of usage for educators. We will also identify points of contact within the school system that are willing to facilitate implementation and provide continuous feedback.

AUGUST AND BEYOND: We will pilot our resources at the start of the school year with educators who have agreed to work with us in Wake and Orange County. We will assess the structure and content of our resources, continuously incorporate feedback from interviews and surveys, and refine our curricula. By our estimates, the Davis funding will enable Visibility Forward to significantly expand our impact, reaching approximately 8,250 students across 16 counties by the end of the summer. In the long run, we will branch into counties and communities spanning all of NC.

Expectations, Sustainability, and Growth Potential

Visibility Forward will assess the numbers of students, teachers, schools, and counties our curriculum has reached. Gauging the geographic distribution of our impact (i.e. rural and urban, rich and poor areas) will ensure equitable and fair progress. Qualitatively, we will incorporate survey-based feedback to determine the impact of our curriculum on students' personal lives and knowledge of AAPI history. These surveys will measure changes in AAPI students' feelings of safety in their classrooms or communities and assess all students' ability to explain the role of AAPIs in American history. The survey responses will allow our organization to measure the scope of our impact on students' levels of bias, AAPI students' wellbeing, and peace development broadly within communities.

The Davis Projects for Peace grant would enable Visibility Forward to scale our reach and increase the sustainability of our social impact long-term. This project combats the public safety issue of anti-AAPI violence at its roots. Visibility Forward will celebrate AAPI cultures, create a more inclusive society, and promote peace for years to come.

