

**“Addressing Anti-Asian Racism Perpetuated by the Coronavirus Pandemic Through Children’s Literature Programming”**

**United States of America  
Connecticut College**

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*Overview*

My project is to integrate my self-published children’s book on anti-Asian racism into community-centric programming to facilitate conversations about racial and ethnic identity. The book explores oppressive experiences that Asian American youth commonly encounter in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic, which is imperative given heightened racial tension in the United States, specifically anti-Asian sentiments perpetuated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the rhetoric of national leaders. With the support of local librarians and community organizations, I will be immersed in further research, conceptualization, and creative processes that will culminate in the implementation of developmentally appropriate, youth-focused programming to combat anti-Asian bias. This work is grounded in theory and data from the fields of psychology, human development, critical race theory, and pedagogy. This project aligns with the fellowship’s mission of peace as it will promote dialogue and awareness about Asian American issues as a means to reduce conflict, promote social cohesion, and contribute to greater public health and wellbeing.

*Background/Demonstrated Need*

Alongside references to the Coronavirus as “Kung flu” and “the Chinese virus,” the surge in COVID-19 cases has inextricably contributed to the rise in anti-Asian sentiments and acts of hate committed against Asian Americans. According to STOP AAPI Hate, there were 2,583 anti-Asian incidents documented nationwide in a 15 week time span between March 19 and August 5, 2020. The New York Times reports that, “...recent cases compiled by the Anti-Defamation League chronicle ‘surging reports of xenophobic and racist incidents,’ including Asian-owned stores defaced with racist graffiti, video chats disrupted by anti-Asian comments and people being beaten or denied entry to businesses.” Such expressions of hate pervade everyday life, resulting in hostile, invalidating environments that exacerbate the polarization of society and harm mental and physiological health. Because racial trauma manifests in the body, failure<sup>1</sup> to address racism will continue to undermine health equity among communities. At this time, there are impactful and promising public service announcements and social media campaigns like #WashTheHate that have responded to pandemic-related racism. Although existing children’s books feature diverse characters and espouse egalitarian perspectives, there is a lack of narratives that discuss anti-Asian racism in relation to the pandemic; there is also under-representation of Asian American female protagonists who struggle with identity. This project addresses these needs by specifically offering a children’s book and accompanying programming to empower youth, providing them with the knowledge necessary to explore identity, combat prejudice and lead in an increasingly diverse world.

*Implementation Strategy*

This project has been ongoing since my independent study in Fall 2020 with John McKnight, former Dean of Institutional Equity and Inclusion at Connecticut College, which provided dedicated space to analyze academic literature and existing children’s books with a focus on Asian-Americans. I sought out mentors like Dr. Lindsay Kwok Hu, an educational consultant for the Los Angeles School District, and Ph.D. scholar Angel Trazo, illustrator and author of *We are Inspiring*, to strengthen and support the development of this proposal. The next steps of this project include further editing and finalizing the story and illustrations of my book in accordance with the research conducted and conversations had during my independent study. The book’s final iteration will be self-published through BookBaby, a print-on-demand service that distributes to a global network of booksellers, libraries, and online retailers. The book will be ready by early May and once it is in hand, I will begin to distribute it to the local libraries

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<sup>1</sup> Trent, Maria, et al. “The Impact of Racism on Child and Adolescent Health.” *Pediatrics of American Academy of Pediatrics*, vol. 144, no. 2, 29 July 2019, p. e20191765.

and bookstores in preparation for the summer workshops. After meeting with librarians and the bookstore owners in the month of June to prepare the workshop programs and logistics, I will commence the workshops in the first week of July. These will continue on a weekly basis through early August.

Immigrant History Initiative (IHI) is a nonprofit dedicated to fundamentally changing how our global society learns, discusses, and thinks about race, migration, and social justice. It provides organizations with comprehensive anti-racist resources and supports efforts to achieve equitable education. IHI founders Julia Chang Wang and Kathy Lu are Yale Law School graduates who developed curricula for the Southern Connecticut Chinese School in New Haven, which I have attended since primary school. Given their strong ties to Connecticut, IHI will serve as my community partner. We will collaborate in sharing my book on their platform as a means to complement and build upon their existing education initiatives. With their facilitation, I will tour schools, libraries, and bookstores, hosting reading circles, discussions, and workshops on history and racial justice. Such programming will be highly interactive through the provision and utilization of art and food related materials. For instance, one designed program will discuss the westernization of Chinese food as a means to dismantle racist food shaming, a common experience Asian American youth face. Given the current pandemic, this project is timely, feasible, and appropriate. It does not entail international travel and follows CDC restrictions to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus. My goal will be to conduct 5 separate 90 minute programs at local libraries and bookstores in New Haven and New London Counties over the course of the summer.

#### *Experiences and Qualifications*

This past summer I was hired by Connecticut College's Dean of First Years Office to conceptualize and spearhead programming related to the One Book, One Region novel *Interior Chinatown*. Such engagement connected me with author Charles Yu and an extensive network of Eastern Connecticut librarians and community leaders (i.e. New London City Council member Kevin Booker, Jr., Yukiyo Lida of Parent Community Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Group, and Anne Campbell of Groton Library). These interactions led to my involvement in numerous virtual discussions about the novel's themes of race and representation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iciJC8a7vVA>). Having grown up as a first-generation Malaysian-American raised in white suburbia, this project holds personal significance as my experiences with discrimination and cultural shame fuel my drive to shed light on this issue. These community representatives are supportive of my proposed project and will continue to provide opportunities for programming through their organizations.

#### *Assessment and Sustainability*

The book and IHI curriculum will memorialize the ideas behind this proposal. By helping to forge a relationship between IHI and the libraries of Eastern Connecticut through this project, I will sustain this proposal's dedication to community and peace-building. It is my goal that their partnership will lead to the continued provision of resources, support, and engagement after the project's completion. Furthermore, through a designed website and feedback forms, I will quantitatively and qualitatively measure interest in my project and reflect on areas for improvement. To ensure accessibility, the website will host an electronic file of the published book as well as related resources for all to view. After the project's completion, a portion of the book's proceeds will continually fund the lasting partnership between IHI and libraries of Connecticut. This project's goal is to contribute to a social learning environment in which children can foster positive racial identities and be armed with the knowledge necessary to be changemakers who disrupt the status quo, in order to progress towards a more peaceful and equitable society for all. As long as my book and programming are able to promote learning in this way, I know that this project will be successfully implemented.