

Civil Rights, Epidemics, & Asian Americans

GA Social Studies Standards

SSUSH11: d. Describe Ellis and Angel Islands, the change in immigrants' origins and their influence on the economy, politics, and culture of the United States.

SSCG7: a. Define civil liberties as protections against government actions.

SSCG7: b. Define civil rights as equal protections for all people.

SSCG15: e. Analyze the influence of media coverage, campaign advertising, and public opinion polls.

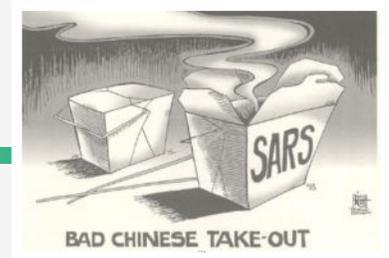
Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in January 2020, there was an upsurge of anti-Asian hate and violence across the nation. Wrongfully accused of being the cause of the pandemic, Asians Americans were yelled at, spat on, and bodily harmed across the country.

Disturbingly, this is not the first time Asian Americans have been scapegoated for a public health crisis. Here are a few episodes in history.



During the 1876 smallpox outbreak in California, health officials in San Francisco were quick to condemn Chinatown as a laboratory of infection and quarantined 30,000 Chinese residents and fumigated their homes.

During the 1900 bubonic plague outbreak in California, the city authorities were quick to define Chinese as the health threat, quarantined 14,000 Chinese residents in Chinatown, and ordered a mandatory vaccination with an experimental serum that was still in the testing stage.



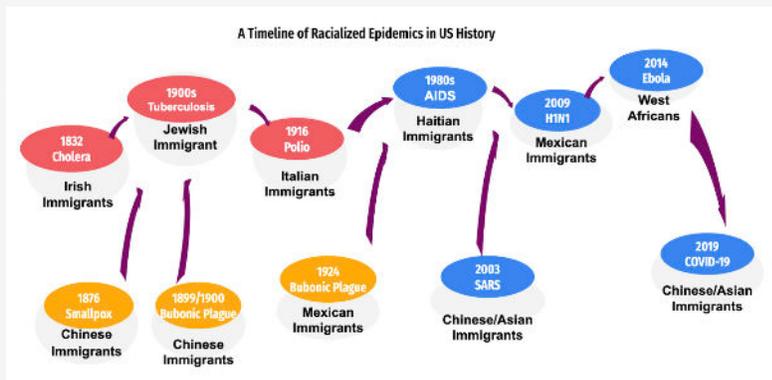
During the 2003 SARS, nobody in the US died of SARS. Yet anti-Asian rhetoric and racism ensued. An editorial cartoon in the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review featured a Chinese food takeout container with "SARS" written on it and a caption that read "Bad Chinese Take-Out."



During the 1899 bubonic plague outbreak in Hawaii, Hawaii's Board of Health announced that

the "plague lives and breeds in filth and . . . when it got to Chinatown, it found its natural habitat." The government quarantined Chinatown, ordered Chinese and other Asian residents to strip naked and take a fumigation shower in plain sight, and burned down buildings where someone had contracted the plague.





Asian Americans are not alone in this troubling history. Examples abound, which include scapegoating of Irish immigrants for the 1832 cholera epidemic, Jewish immigrants for tuberculosis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Italian immigrants for the 1926 polio epidemic, Haitian immigrants along with gay men for the 1980s AIDS epidemic, Mexican immigrants for the 2009 H1N1 infection, and West Africans for the 2014 Ebola outbreak, to name a few. To stop the repeating history, students should be supported to interrogate the troubling history.

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classroom?

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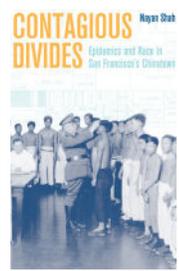
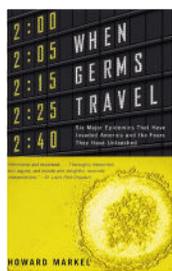


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Written by Sohyun An
Design by Justine Chung
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(Top to Bottom, Left to Right)

1. The Ohio State University, Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum
2. Hawaii State Archives Digital Collections.
3. Racist cartoon from the Pittsburgh Tribune depicting SARS as “Bad Chinese Take-Out.” April 26, 2003.
4. Image by Sohyun An
5. Markel, Howard. *When Germs Travel : Six Major Epidemics That Have Invaded America Since 1900 and the Fears They Have Unleashed*. 1st ed. Pantheon Books 2004.
6. Shah, Nayan. *Contagious Divides : Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*. University of California Press 2001.
7. Mohr, James C. *Plague and Fire : Battling Black Death and the 1900 Burning of Honolulu's Chinatown*. Oxford University Press 2006.
8. Molina, Natalia and Charles E Rosenberg. *Fit to Be Citizens? : Public Health and Race in Los Angeles 1879-1939*. University of California Press 2006.



Use QR code for the complete article, lesson plan, and primary sources!

Do you want to include more stories of Asian America into your lessons? Check out this fabulous book, *Teaching Asian America in Elementary Classrooms* by Noreen Naseem Rodríguez, Sohyun An, & Ester June Kim.

**Complete Article
and Lesson Plan**

