| *From Subjects to Citizens*  **A Revolution of Words: The 250th Birthday of the Declaration of Independence and Its Impact on the Nation** |
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| **Asian Americans: The Declaration’s 212th Birthday in 1988** |

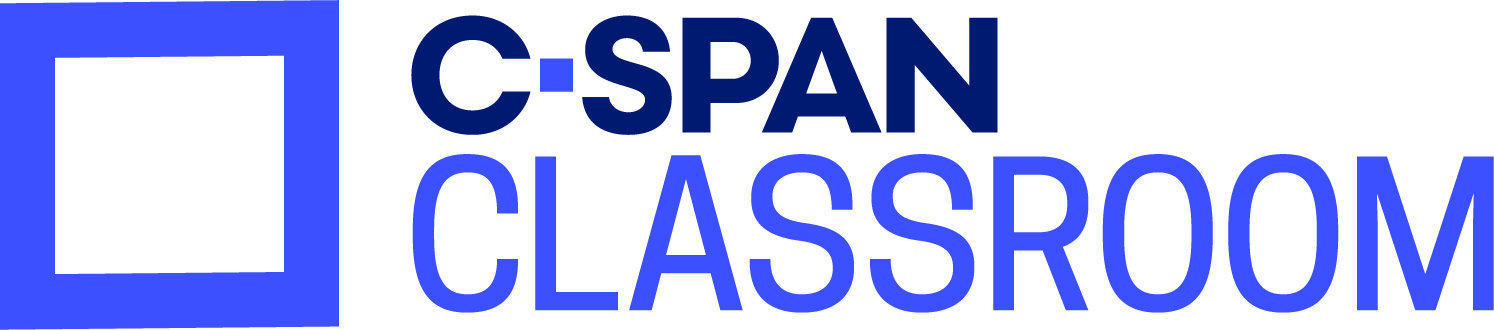
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## **LESSON OVERVIEW**

| **DESCRIPTION** |
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| In this lesson, students will examine the Declaration of Independence in its 212th year. The focus will be on the promises outlined in the Declaration and their connection to Asian Americans during World War II and beyond. |
| **ESSENTIAL QUESTION** |
| How did the promises of the Declaration of Independence serve as an inspiration to Asian Americans in its 212th year? |
| **KEY PROMISES** |
| * Equality * Unalienable Rights * Consent of the Governed * Right to Revolution |
| **MATERIALS** |
| * Promises of the Declaration of Independence Handout * C-SPAN “Korematsu v. U.S. and Executive Order 9066” Video (external link) * Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides * Key Court Cases Slides * Supreme Court Cases Analysis Worksheet * National Archives “President Reagan’s Speech at the Japanese-American Internment Compensation Bill Signing” Video (external link) |

## **TEACHER CONTENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

*[Not intended for student use]*

**1. Key Promises in the Declaration of Independence**

1. **Equality**

The Declaration of Independence states that “all men are created equal”. This concept of equality focuses on equality as opportunity, where “all men” are created equal, although being created equal does not guarantee equal experiences. Enlightenment philosophers supported the concept of [individualism](https://centerforindividualism.org/individualism-founding-fathers-part-1-liberty-limited-government/). Individualism suggests that each person possesses an inherent worth that supports freedom, self-reliance, and individual skills, talents, and interests. Equal opportunity in the context of individualism means that being born equal does not lead to equal results or equal outcomes.

1. **Unalienable Rights**

According to the Declaration, unalienable rights (“natural rights”) are those rights with which people are born (given “by their Creator”). They include the unalienable rights of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. These rights cannot be taken away by the government, and the government is also obligated to protect unalienable rights. These rights are associated with 17th to early 19th century European Enlightenment philosophers who supported unalienable rights as the means to challenge traditional authority that existed under monarchies.

1. **Consent of the Governed**

Consent of the governed includes that “governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” as written in the Declaration. This promise focuses on self-government. The people rule themselves through governments that they establish. Because the people establish those governments and are not ruled by a government imposed on them (such as a monarchy), the people give their consent to how they are governed. Thus, self-rule is experienced when the people establish their own government to which the people give their consent.

1. **Right to Revolution**

The right to revolution recognizes that there may be times when the government abuses its power. The Founders wrote, “[T]hat whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government...” This phrase suggests that when the people have determined that the government is not protecting their unalienable rights, they may change (“alter”) or replace (“abolish”) their government. The Declaration of Independence justified the colonists’ decision to separate from the British king. Since then, Americans have exercised their “right to revolution” by altering the government when the government has failed to live up to its promises through elections, interest groups, social movements, and political parties. Some of these changes have included broadening political power (who has it, what form it takes), defining citizenship, how the people experience self-government, and protecting individual rights.

**2. Connecting the Promises to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders**

1. **Equality**

Persons of Asian descent include, but are not limited to, those who originated from Asian nations such as China, India, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Pacific Islanders include persons born or originating from Hawaii, Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands, among others. While the Declaration of Independence asserts that “all men are created equal”, discrimination and inequality based on race, ethnicity, and national origin have been directed against Asian and Pacific Islanders.

For example, quality has been denied to Asian and Pacific Islanders on immigration issues. In 1882, President Chester Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act. It was the first federal law that restricted immigration in the United States. It was also the first federal law that denied immigration to a specific ethnic group based on the stereotype that Chinese people posed a threat to the nation. The Chinese Exclusion Act was written to deny equality to persons who would otherwise be eligible for immigration to the United States, and it was Asian persons who were targeted by this discrimination.

1. **Unalienable Rights**

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been denied their unalienable rights throughout American history. Among the most notable is President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066. This executive order emerged from the United States' declaration of war against Japan on December 8, 1941, the day after what is now known as the attack on Pearl Harbor. On December 7, 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked the United States Naval Base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This action resulted in the deaths of thousands of U.S. service members and other casualties and property damage. President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which allowed the U.S. military to “prescribe military areas” over which the U.S. military could control. The enforcement of Executive Order 9066 allowed the U.S. military to deny U.S. citizens of Japanese descent their unalienable rights. Soon after this executive order was signed, Japanese citizens were deported. And U.S. citizens of Japanese descent were forcibly relocated to internment camps, while the U.S. citizens of Japanese descent were forced to abide by curfews. Both of these practices were upheld by the United States Supreme Court in *Hirabayashi v. United State*s in 1943 (curfews) and forced internment in *Korematsu v. United States* in 1944 (forced internment). These decisions limited the unalienable rights of U.S. citizens of Japanese descent.

**3. Brief Timeline of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders**

**In 1790,** the Naturalization Act of 1790 limited naturalization to immigrants who were free, white persons of good character (in effect, excluding Asians from citizenship).

**In 1875,** the Page Act prohibited the recruitment of laborers from “China, Japan, or any Oriental country.” The target was largely focused on Chinese women who may have been brought for “lewd and immoral purposes.” This later led to the Chinese Exclusion Act.

**In 1882,** the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first law enacted that focused on a specific ethnic group instead of providing blanket changes to immigration policy, as prior laws had done. This law banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years. It was later extended and made permanent until it was repealed in 1943.

**In 1898,** *Wong Kim Ark v. U.S.* was a Supreme Court decision that established the parameters of jus soli – or citizenship of children born in the U.S. to non-citizens.

**In 1910,** Angel Island opened in San Francisco Bay and was often called the “Ellis Island of the West.” This island served as an immigration processing center for many Asian immigrants. However, those who entered faced prolonged detention times as well as harsh conditions.

**In 1917,** the Immigration Act or **“**Asiatic Barred Zone,” barred 500 million Asian and Indian laborers from entering the U.S.

**In 1924,** the Johnson-Reed Act restricted immigration from Asia by establishing national origin quotas based on the 1890 census. This limited the number of immigrants from countries outside of Latin America.

**In 1942**, Executive Order 9066 forced the removal of all persons deemed a threat to national security from the West Coast to relocation centers further inland. This targeted all those of Japanese descent after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

**In 1957,** Dalip Saund (D-CA) was elected as a U.S. Representative and became the first Asian-American, first Indian American, and first Sikh to serve in Congress.

**In 1959,** Hiram L. Fong (R-HA) became Hawaii’s first U.S. Senator and the first Asian American to serve in the Senate.

**In 1965,** Patsy T. Mink (D-HA) was elected as a U.S. Representative and became the first Asian American female and the first woman of color to serve in Congress.

**In 1965,** Larry Itliong, a Filipino-American, joined many Filipino farm workers with Cesar Chavez in the five-year-long Delano Grape strike.

**In 1965,** President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which put an end to immigration policies based on ethnicity and racial quota systems.

**In 1979**, Congress proclaimed the first ten days in May would be known as Pacific Asian American Heritage Week. This was extended to a full month in 1992.

**In 1988,** President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, which served as a formal apology for the WWII internment and provided reparations to surviving Japanese Americans and their descendants. It also established funds to educate the public about Japanese internment camps.

**In 2000,** Norman Mineta was sworn in as the Secretary of Commerce, making him the first Asian American to serve in a presidential cabinet.

**In 2018,** the Supreme Court repudiated the Korematsu ruling in *Trump v. Hawaii.* (The decision has not been formally overturned in a direct manner as of 2025.)

**In 2019,** Kamala Harris,Tulsi Gabbard, and Andrew Yang became the first Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders to run for president on the Democratic ticket.

**In 2021,** Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA) was sworn in as the first Asian American vice president of the United States.

Sources:

Angel Island Immigration, <https://aiisf.org>

Asian American Timeline, <https://www.history.com/articles/asian-american-timeline>

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## **ACTIVITY SEQUENCE**

| **HOOK** | 1. Start today by opening the [Promises of the Declaration of Independence Handout](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aGbbnwggbiXqosjn4pdQXuz6dNVQka-C/view?usp=drive_link). 2. As a class, review these promises and take a few minutes to go over some of the examples covered in previous lessons. 3. Tell the class that today, we’re going to start by watching a video about World War II. 4. Show students the video from C-SPAN on [*Korematsu v. U.S.* and Executive Order 9066](https://www.c-span.org/classroom/document/?1433). 5. After watching the video, ask students: *What were some things that stood out in the video? How were the promises portrayed? Where did they fall short?* |
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| **FEATURED PRIMARY SOURCE UNWRAPPING** | 1. Explain to students that it is time to ‘unwrap’ this month’s primary source document.   **Teacher Note:** As the theme of these lesson plans is America’s birthday, each month, you and your students will digitally unwrap a new primary source. This is an opportunity to drum up excitement as we lead up to the 250th celebration and draw our focus to a time when individuals were fighting for those promises outlined. Because May is Asian American and Pacific Islanders Month, the focus for this lesson will be on Japanese Americans.   1. Use the [Primary Source Digital Unwrapping Slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1dwNuSpfco3UcUtJ23pvgj13RSQAHb1TlSL3cH0UhrqU/edit?usp=drive_link) and reveal the primary source inside. 2. Examine the document together and ask students if anyone can identify it.   **Teacher Note:** This month’s source is the 1988 Civil Liberties Act. Use the link provided in the Speaker Notes of the slide to go directly to the source, where you can find examination tools like a magnifier.   1. As a class, compile a summarized list of the seven main things this legislation was attempting to accomplish. 2. To understand why the 1988 Civil Liberties Act was so important, explain to students that they will learn more about important Supreme Court cases after Executive Order 9066 was implemented. |
| **LESSON ACTIVITY** | 1. Display the [Key Court Cases Slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1I9PCPFH6UJX-1_xWGRL-Jdc86L7WdA-lFgKCzA9bgrM/edit?usp=sharing) to the whole class. 2. Pass out a copy of the [Supreme Court Cases Analysis Worksheet](https://docs.google.com/document/d/15RPd5XRs7v3vKtKTdlKituf2yC-n4lz56WQ3sHPUggE/edit?usp=sharing). 3. Go over each of the four court cases and have students fill in notes on each case as they’re reviewed. 4. Display slide 6 to your students, featuring Justice Frank Murphy’s dissent. 5. Allow students time to use slide 6 to answer the question on their Analysis Worksheet. 6. Go back to the 1988 Civil Liberties Act. As a class, discuss why the U.S. felt compelled to pass this legislation roughly forty years after these cases and events surrounding them took place. |
| **CONCLUSION** | 1. Watch this video of [President Reagan’s Speech at the Japanese-American Internment Compensation Bill Signing](https://catalog.archives.gov/id/38995301) from the Reagan Presidential Library and the National Archives. 2. As a class, have a discussion about what promises outlined in the Declaration, President Ronald Reagan was trying to reinforce through his speech and the signing of this act. Understanding that injustices cannot be washed away or undone, how does the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 show that we are constantly checking back to the promises of the Declaration and striving to reach them? |

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## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SAMPLE ANSWERS**

| **SAMPLE ANSWERS** |
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| * N/A |

| **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES** |
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| [C-SPAN Classroom Asian American & Pacific Islander Featured Resources](https://sites.google.com/view/c-spanclassroom-featured/u-s-and-state-history/u-s-history#h.2nl5ymw2q2v7)  [Lou Frey Institute Educator Resources](http://floridacitizen.org)  [Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum](https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/remarks-signing-bill-providing-restitution-wartime-internment-japanese-american)  [National Archives Document Analysis Educator Resources](https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets) |