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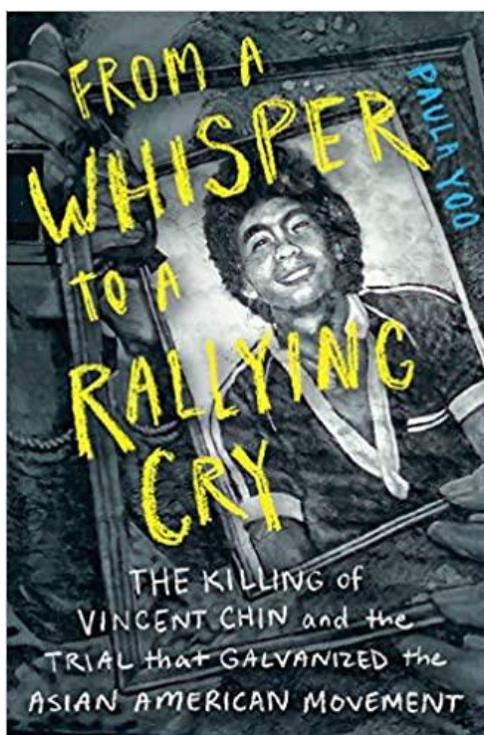
JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

## Review of *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement* Written by Paula Yoo

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Rosa Nam

Clark University, Worcester, MA

Child/Student Reviewer: John Lee, A High School Student in Houston, TX



Yoo, P. (2021). *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial that Galvanized the Asian American Movement*. Norton Young Readers.

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### Adult Review: Rosa Nam

Vincent Chin was only 27 when he was beaten to death with a baseball bat by two white men, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, on June 19, 1982, 9 days before his wedding. This was during the height of anti-Japanese sentiment due to increased layoffs at auto factories because of competition from Japanese import cars. The murder happened in Detroit, home of car manufacturers Ford, Chrysler, and GM. Ronald Ebens worked at Chrysler and his stepson, Michael Nitz, had been recently laid off. The men served no jail time and were given three years of probation with a \$3,000 fine as the judge felt that without any prior convictions, “These weren’t the kind of men you sent to jail.” The subsequent light sentencing of the men triggered national outrage and helped propel the Asian American Movement beginning with the formation of the American Citizens for Justice. Comprehensively researched and filled with rich primary sources like court transcripts, photos, and interviews with leading figures of the Asian American movement, *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry* reads more like suspenseful fiction as Yoo chronicles the pivotal moment in history that led to the first federal civil rights trial for an Asian American. The case changed the judicial system. Now, unlike what happened with Chin’s case, prosecutors must appear at all hearings. In addition, victims’ families are allowed to deliver impact statements to judges in court. Beyond the court changes, Vincent Chin’s case has been a focal point for inspiring activism for Asian Americans. With the resurgence of Anti-Asian violence during the pandemic, Chin’s case has been brought up once again for younger generations to learn about the history of racism against Asian Americans in this country and the ways Asian Americans and allies have rallied to fight it.

In a time of rampant Anti-Asian racism fueled by our highest leaders and the conservative media, *From a Whisper to a Rallying Cry* is a book our students and teachers need. It is a reminder that racism against Asian Americans is not new. It is also a reminder that by forming multiracial coalitions and advocating for justice, we can make progress for a more democratic society. This book is for teachers

and students who want to understand our history to create a better future. It can be paired with canonical texts such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* or in lieu of them to teach critical literacy skills like disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, and focusing on sociopolitical issues.

Before teaching the book with students, educators are encouraged to learn more about Asian American history. The Zinn Education Project is a valuable resource that provides historical context as well as free lesson plans on teaching Asian American history. Learning for Justice also provides lesson plans as well as tools for teachers in interrogating their biases about Asian Americans. Facing History and Ourselves offers classroom materials and informative blog posts in supporting Asian American students in classrooms. Finally, Stop AAPI Hate provides free resources and links to support the Asian American community like an educator guide to discussing Anti-Asian racism as well as updated reports on Anti-Asian incidents across the country.

### Student Review: John Lee

The book, *A Whisper to a Rallying Cry*, shows us the outcome of a single racial slur used against an Asian person that later led to his death. I would recommend this book because of the action and the truthfulness that happens within the book. This book has action which is the slow progress of the trial of Vincent Chin which keeps readers on edge and the fact that the author was unbiased and told both sides of the story with complete truthfulness was quite shocking because the author herself is Asian. I expected her to support Chin more than Nitz and Ebens. It’s also a form of historical nonfiction that portrays real world problems. I liked that it was my first time hearing about racism against Asian Americans in a book. At first, I was amazed but then started to get angrier the further I went into the story. Not only was the court corrupt and biased because Nitz and Ebens were white, but Nitz and Ebens also ended up getting away with the murder of Chin. They ended up walking away with a small fine that they have still not paid to this day. Many people believe that the reason they got away

with the murder was due to the fact that both Ebens and Nitz were white.

The racism that happens in this book still happens to this day. For example, Asian Americans in the U.S. have experienced violence because COVID-19 originated from China. People have killed, beat up, and spit on Asian Americans. Most of the Asian

Americans that were attacked were old or could not defend themselves. All teachers could possibly like this book because it is a good way to teach students about racism and the problems that the country has with corrupt government and people getting away with murder. This book can help students learn about racism and help fight it.