

Connecting History to Contemporary Issues

2020-2021 ALPHA Education Webinar Speaker Series

Project Description

This webinar speaker series will feature authors, scholars as well as advocates who can speak about a topic of interest on WWII history in Asia, that touch on and overlap with themes which are relevant to ALPHA's Vision, Mission and Goals, specifically:

Humanity
Peace
Reconciliation and
Justice

Invited speakers will be asked to connect the discussion of their work to the theme and the webinar topics, as well as provide insights and reflections about the way the issues they discuss resonate in our current context.

Format

The webinar will be hosted on zoom, starting with 40 minutes talk and followed by 20-min Q &A open to the participants. The webinar will be moderated by ALPHA Education staff or a guest.

Project Outcomes

(1) Community Outreach & Raising Awareness. By partnering with network institutions and individuals to promote participation and viewership on these webinars, ALPHA Education can strengthen current programs and reach broader audiences for its core mission of raising awareness about World War II history in Asia.

(2) Resource Development/Collection. The recorded speaker series/Q&A can form part of the permanent collection of resources for ALPHA Education as well as complement the APPM resources. They can be used alongside of future programming in combination with an accompanying activity and/or exercise that we can conduct for our usual target audiences of educators and the youth.

Racism and Military Aggression: World War II and the Cold War
ALPHA Education Webinars 2020-21
Speaker Series, Part 1

Topic Description

This webinar speaker series will feature speakers whose works examine how racism figured in international relations, as well as shaped state and military policy during World War II.

Racism in its many forms, as a social problem, has complex histories. One of the most difficult challenges in combating racism is that most common understandings of racism typically locate the driving force in the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of biased and prejudiced individuals (Salter: 2018). The tendency to reduce racism to individual bad behaviour leads people to dismiss instances of systemic racism as the fault of “a few bad apples” and to insist that racism is a thing of the past.

Today, anti-racism movements’ ongoing battle against systemic racism is increasingly being confronted by a seemingly reinvigorated white-supremacist movement - one which whose unapologetically racist political rhetoric reflects a blatant or vulgar form of racism that people usually associate with the past. While it is tempting to imagine that the division between racist groups on one hand, and anti-racism groups on the other has always been (and continues to be) a bright line, political and cultural historians alike are taking a more complex view of how racist agendas and practices went hand in hand with anti-racist messaging, which became important for mobilizing the military and the public during wartime.

December 10, 2020, 1-2 PM EST, 9-10 AM PST, 6-7 PM GMT

Professor Takashi Fujitani’s work, *Race for Empire*, demonstrates how the disavowal of racism was politically (and materially) important for both the United States and Japan because of how colonial subjects and marginalized populations of people of colour were sorely needed in waging and winning the war. Prof. Fujitani writes against the grain of the dominant scholarship on World War II which tends to portray the United States and Japan as polar opposites -one liberal democratic and egalitarian, and the other fascist, totalitarian and ultranationalist. Prof. Fujitani will talk about how disavowals of racism were actually crucial to the war agenda of both states.

In *Orienteering Canada*, Professor John Price introduces a view that likewise veers away from traditional sketches of the diplomatic history of Canada by introducing of an anti-racist and transpacific perspective. Documenting Canada’s participation in World War II and in the succeeding Cold War, Price illustrates the rise of the race-based Anglo-American alliance and its reliance on Orientalism and white supremacy to fuel the always contested imperial hegemony. He also challenges dominant Canadian perceptions of Canada as “less racist” than the United States. Indeed, a recent study from a think tank in the United Kingdom revealed that Canadians figure quite prominently in online rightist and extremist sites. CBC reported that the study suggests that when the numbers were averaged out using each country’s “estimated internet-using population,” Canada was shown to be producing more content than other countries. (CBC: June 2020) These trends underline the urgency of re-reading history to learn about the impact of racism on Canadian foreign policy to help us make the important changes we need to build anti-racism in Canada and abroad.