



## Disrupting Racism: Essays by an Asian American Prodigy Professor

**Peter H. Huang**

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*Focusing on Asian American experiences, this accessible essay collection puts academic theories to use in the fight against racism.*

Peter H. Huang's essay collection *Disrupting Racism* makes scholarly arguments for positive social change.

The social importance of caring for individual human beings is the book's guiding ethic. Arguing that "racism is power plus prejudice," the book opens by advocating a two-pronged response to racism: changing existing power imbalances and reducing fear and ignorance. Its main objective is to encourage in-depth thinking about racism, with an emphasis on racism that targets Asians and Asian Americans. Three methods are used to achieve this objective: a brief memoir section covering Huang's experiences as a Taiwanese American, a summary of the history of racism against Asian Americans, and in-depth discussions of theories from multiple academic disciplines that may be employed to understand and overcome racism.

Written in precise language, *Disrupting Racism* uses concrete examples to illustrate its more abstract concepts, resulting in a coherent narrative. Huang notes that creating change requires deep understanding of a phenomenon, and his book's combination of theory and research from mathematics, economics, game theory, and law both defines and decimates racist beliefs. The book's discussions of these theories are accessible thanks to its thorough explanations of specialized terms, effective analogies, and figurative language.

The extensive research cited in support of the book's arguments is from notable scholars and is summarized and incorporated into the text with remarkable fluidity. From an economics perspective, for example, because racism is based on division and conflict, it leads to the destruction of wealth. And on the level of the individual, racism's destructive effects on its proponents are demonstrated through references to the medical costs of living in a combative mode under perceived threats by the "other."

Using data from research in psychology and economics, the book highlights the emotional commitment that people with racist beliefs make to those beliefs and to continuing to stay misinformed. It is ironic, then, that while acknowledging this emotional irrationality, many of the book's strategies for disrupting racism require people and their leaders to employ rational, fact-based logic. For example, one compelling suggestion for disrupting racism is mandating "positive racial education and mindfulness in K–12 classrooms"—a hopeful mandate that seems less likely to be implemented when, in fact, racist beliefs impair the thinking of the leaders and voters who would have to implement it. Further, some of its imperatives are undertested, as with its suggestions to establish antiracist norms for behavior; the example used is of President Joe Biden's still fresh public rejection of hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans in spurious connection to COVID-19, which has not yet had time to inform or become a social norm.

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MICHELE SHARPE (May 9, 2023)

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