On June 19, 1982, Vincent Jen Chin and a few close friends were out on a warm summer evening in Detroit, Michigan, to celebrate his upcoming wedding with an all-American bachelor party.

The early 1980s were a time of deep economic depression, when a massive oil crisis made it difficult for people to drive big Detroit-made gas guzzling automobiles. Instead, Americans were buying smaller and fuel-efficient Japanese cars — and hundreds of thousands of autoworkers in Detroit were unemployed, losing their jobs and their homes.

Many business and political leaders pointed their fingers toward the Pacific and blamed Japan, inciting racial-hatred against anyone who looked Japanese, rather than taking responsibility for their own failed policies.

At the bar where Vincent and his friends went to celebrate, two Anglo autoworkers blamed the Chinese American for Detroit’s difficulties. They called Chin racial slurs. He fought back and they chased him through the streets of Detroit. When the night was over, the two Anglo men Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, beat Vincent Chin to death by swinging a baseball bat to his head several times. His 400 wedding guests went to his funeral instead.

Several months later, the two men were in criminal court, waiting to receive their punishment after they were found guilty of Vincent Chin’s slaying. The shocking sentence: probation and roughly $3,000 in fines for brutally beating another human being to death. The two Anglo men didn’t spend a single day in jail for their violent and deadly crime.

People everywhere were outraged that these killers got away with murder. Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans were especially angry that the court would allow a hate crime against an Asian person go unpunished. For many Chinese Americans, it was just like the frontier “justice” of the 1800s, when a white man could kill an Asian person with impunity.
Lily Chin, the mother of Vincent, was devastated and grief-stricken after the brutal killing of her only child. When she learned that Vincent’s killers would go free with only probation and fines, her heart broke. Because of this injustice, Lily, along with many people in the Asian American community of southeastern Michigan, organized a national civil rights movement to reach out to people all across America. Their goal was simple: that people of Asian descent in America should be treated as full human beings, with equal justice, fairness and dignity.

Despite her sorrow, Lily Chin found the strength to speak to thousands of people at community gatherings, rallies and demonstrations across the country, and even to appear on television. Often speaking through tears, Lily Chin would say, in halting English, that she didn’t want any other mother to lose their child as she did. As a result, Lily Chin became the moral conscience of this national campaign.

These and many other examples of Lily Chin’s bravery inspired Asian Americans of all ages and backgrounds to speak up against hate crimes in their own communities. Numerous Asian American groups all over the country organized for equal justice and against hate violence because of Lily Chin’s willingness to raise her voice.

Sadly, Lily Chin died after a long illness in 2002, twenty years after her son was killed. She did not live to see justice done for her son, but she had the love and support of the many people whose lives were touched by her.

**Full text available online:**
http://advancingjustice-la.org/sites/default/files/UCRS%205_Vincent_Chin_Lily_Chin_story_r2.pdf