Asian Americans & Media

Asian American Studies (AAS) 55

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PROMPT: What is the importance of Asian American Studies (and ethnic studies, interdisciplinary studies, more broadly) on our campus?

What do you feel that you would be willing to fight for today?
Three major points for today’s lecture:

1. Understand the Asian American movement’s social/historical contexts & main political concerns.

2. Identify the role that documentary film & cultural production played.

3. Begin to identify affinity & affective politics within Asian American movement & community, both in the past and present moments.
Asian American: social/political identity formed in late 1960s/early 1970s. Asian American “reject(s) the concept of a dual heritage (i.e. beneficiaries of both American and Asian cultures, “the best of both worlds”) that artificially divided their identity into abstract Asian and American halves. Instead, they acknowledged a distinct Asian American identity that had evolved over the years, based on the experiences of Asians in America... Except for an emotional affinity, they were uncertain of its characteristics. Before they could define it with any precision, Asian Americans had to refute societal stereotypes that had degraded them; reclaim their history, which had been relegated to the periphery of American historiography; and reconstruct a culture that reflected their experiences.” (William Wei, 47)
Asian American Movement: Representation(s) & Culture
Asian American Movement: Representation(s) & Culture
Anti-War Movement

Draft Card Burning (above); May 1970 - Kent State massacre (upper right); “Four Dead in Ohio” (lower right)
Asian American Movement: Anti-War Movement

“The Girl in the Picture” - Kim Phuc, photographs by Nick Ut
Asian American Movement:
Civil Rights/Social Services

The 30th Anniversary of the Murders of Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes & the Tenants Union of Washington presents:

Film Forum & Community Dialog on Tenant Rights & Housing Justice

Wednesday
June 29th
6:30-8:30pm
Rainier Valley Cultural Center
3515 S. Alaska St.
Seattle WA 98118

Suggested Donation $15
(No one is turned away for lack of funds)
Books & DVD’s available for purchase

"The Fall of the I-Hotel" documentary brings to life the battle for housing in 1970’s San Francisco. The brutal eviction of the International Hotel’s tenants culminated a decade of spirited resistance to the raising of Manilatown.

Join The Tenants Union with special guest Dr. Estella Habal, one of the lead organizers of the movement and author of an important book documenting the struggle. Audience members can engage with Dr. Habal in a community
Civil Rights Movement
internal colonialism model:

social framework that viewed African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American and other people of color communities (urban ghettos, reservations, Chinatowns) as “internal colonies” that paralleled colonies as well as liberation movements in Asia, Africa, South America, and other regions of the “Third World.” “It placed racial conflicts within an international context. The concept synthesized the disparate elements of racism—economic exploitation, political powerlessness, geographic ghettoization, cultural contempt—into an intelligible system of oppression. Moreover, it implicitly called for internal resistance to that oppression.”

(William Wei, 41-42)
Civil Rights Movement: Precipitating Events

Addie Mae Collins
Carole Robertson
Cynthia Wesley
Denise McNair
PROMPT: Based on this week’s readings, do you see similarities between the events, politics, sentiments of the 1960s & 1970s and the events, politics, sentiments of today? Why or why not?
Asian American Movement:
Third World Liberation Front/Fight for Ethnic Studies
Asian American Movement: Yellow Power

Your Asian wasn’t quiet
She wasn’t a model minority. Wasn’t your Asian fantasy. Maybe chose a path other than motherhood. She speaks truth to power. This is what Asian America looks like. Get used to it.

Not created in your image

And she thinks critically about media propaganda.
**1965 Hart-Cellar Act**: pivotal immigration law—“new” Asian immigrants: professional and technical workers, political refugees and their families

“The geopolitics of Asian immigration to the United States is, therefore, responsible for the very notion that there is such a thing as ‘Asian American’ identity….While there are certainly cultural as well as environmental similarities among various Asian nations, lumping together the dozens of ethnicities of the huge continent can obscure much more than it explains. But as part of the compound ‘Asian American,’ ‘Asian’ gains relevance and specificity as a social or cultural identifier.” (Rachel Rubin, 4)
Documentary films & photographs:
a broad category of nonfictional motion pictures & photography intended to document some aspect of reality, primarily for the purposes of instruction or maintaining a historical record.

presenting “life as it is” and “life unawares” (Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov)
“Photographer Roy Stryker argued that ‘good documentary should tell not only what a place or a thing or person looks like, but it must also tell the audience what it would feel like to be an actual witness to the scene (William Stott, Documentary Expression and Thirties America, 1973, p. 29).”

a documentary is a “factual film that is dramatic” (U.S. film critic Pare Lorentz)
Documentary as subjective interpretation:
“(A) second definition of documentary is in many ways richer but less apparently clear-cut, and deals with the more social and personal aspects of the term—as when we speak of something being a ‘human document.’ Examples might include a
• journal or diary
• someone’s written account of their experiences
• a ‘documentary’ film about a person’s life, a picture story in a magazine.
In this context, the document’s informational value is mediated through the perspective of the person making it, and it is presented as a mixture of emotion and information.” (Peter Hamilton in Stuart Hall’s Representation: Cultural Representations & Signifying Practices, 83)
Asian American Movement: Affinity & Affective Politics

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Chris Iijima: “We were able to **construct** an APA (Asian Pacific American) identity precisely because our **shared experience** as Asians in America—always **cast as foreigners and marginalized as outsiders**—allowed us to bridge ethnic lines and allowed a platform and commonality to engage and understand other people and their struggles...You ask whether there is an ‘authentic’ Asian American sensibility. Asian American identity was **originally conceived to allow one to ‘identify’ with the experiences and struggles of other subordinated people**—not just with one’s own background. (Ling 320-321)"