Asian American Studies

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ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

WRITTEN BY ANNIE HO, VICKY LIU, BENJAMIN STEPHEN

ETHN250
INTRODUCTION

Asian Americans have faced a long heritage of exclusion and injustice in relation to race, class, gender, sexuality, colonialism, immigration, labor, and a myriad of other problems throughout their history, particularly during times of shifting demographics, economic crisis, or war. In today’s society, these inequities go largely unnoticed and are not addressed as often as they should be. This zine is meant to bring those inequities to light and discuss the history of Asians in America. We cover a wide range of topics, from the Vietnam War, to Japanese concentration camps, to the “model minority” myth.

Understanding the history of Asian Americans is crucial to understanding the history of the United States as a whole. The United States is a land of immigrants and people of diverse backgrounds and identities. The United States is also a land with deep roots in inequality, prejudice, and violence towards minorities, including Asians. Many of the inequities that Asian Americans had to face years ago are still not solved. For example, in our zine we included some brief discussion about COVID-19 and how its existence has, unfortunately, perpetuated stereotypes about Asians that have existed since the 1850s.

As students, we read and analyzed the material we wrote about in our zine, all while drawing parallels from history to modern day life. It opened our eyes to the history of Asian Americans and why their stories are critical to understanding not just the history of the United States, but as well as the present-day United States. We encourage you, as the reader, to do the same and draw parallels from Asian American history to the present day as you read our zine. Thank you.


Americans encouraged Filipinos to throw off the yoke of Spanish imperialism, then sarcastically advises them to shoot the “brown man” if he dares to question U.S. military rule. On the one hand, University of Chicago professor Harry Pratt Judson wrote in favor of colonizing the Philippines as an “annexed territory” without extending citizenship or constitutional rights to “inferior races.” “fluttered folk and wild” as “sullen peoples, half devil and half child.”

Americans wanted to adapt the idea of “American protectorate” that they were pushing Filipinos by physically and politically oppressing them. Editorialists and reporters in these newspapers took a strongly anti-imperialist position, emphasizing “the interconnection between the government’s domestic and foreign policy in dealing with dark-skinned people”; their editorials contended writes Marks, that the United States “was not wise, just and democratic enough to govern people of a darker hue in the Philippines or anywhere. 1899 described the Philippine-American War not as the “war for humanity” depicted in the mainstream papers but as a “slaughter” and a war of greed.

I think this text has significance because of its vivid, and often graphic, depiction of imperialism and racism. The treatment of Filipinos during the late 19th century is just a small example of how imperialism is a product of white saviorism and white supremacy and can lead to extreme violence due to a need to conquer and assimilate people of other cultures/races.

The phrase of No Filipinos are Allowed demonstrates that Filipinos in the US have been excluded economically, politically, and culturally from the nation. Unreasonable naturalization and immigration laws, unequal and discriminated housing rules, unfair employment practices, violent physical encounters, and racist have pushed Filipinos outside of the nation and keep them homeless for those who could not go back. I think a key point that the author made in this text was in regard to imperialism and how that ideology can be harmful to different peoples. As an example, Filipinos were subject to American imperialism and had to suffer the consequences of it during the Philippine-American War in the late 19th century. Filipinos were depicted as being “savages” and “beastly” in American society. Many of them were brutally slaughtered during the war, but this was justified by Americans who thought they were uncivilized, in other words “lesser than”. The author also ties in how the treatment of Filipinos mirrored the treatment of African-Americans back then.

The author points out how the histories of the Filipino community and the black community in the US are intertwined and share common threads in their continued struggle for freedom, dignity, and equality. During the Philippine-American War, many black Americans became disillusioned with the US occupation of the Philippines, especially after realizing that the Filipinos were being treated the same way that Black people were being treated in America. Filipinos were brutally beaten, lynched, and killed during the war, which is reminiscent of America’s history of prejudice to black people. This racial injustice of non-people of color being treated as savages and inferior to white people still continues to this day. We can look to earlier in this year with the death of George Floyd, a black American who was murdered because of his skin color.
While re-paraphrasing the texts of Black radicalism in Japanese, it pushed them to develop a new way of inventing the new discourse. In the new way of explanation, it animated diverse constituents of radical social movements to pursue the promise of transpacific strivings and powered the idea of shifting racism from a social perspective to political perspective that was able to transform the community’s idea.

Music has become an indispensable part in this part of history. Musical power from “racial groove” has demonstrated the transpacific formations of the culture of liberation and sprouted collective consciousness that gave this culture necessary categorical unity to make the social and political struggles a new way of thinking.
Diane Fujino’s book reveals the lives and struggles in Japanese American Concentration Camps through the lenses of then young Yuri Kochiyama. Guided by Yuri’s own narratives and diaries, Fujino showcases major events that impacted the lives of Japanese Americans living in the camps and the strained relationship between Japanese Americans and the rest of the country. Fujino elaborates on the positivity – showing American loyalty as a coping mechanism – expressed by the internees despite living behind wires. This mismatch of American patriotism and the loss of liberty intensified the struggle for Japanese Americans to locate their identities in a country that did not welcome them. Additionally, Fujino documents two events critical to Yuri’s changing perspective on race and prejudice: the 1942 police raid and an encounter with a woman rejected by all schools based on her race. All events described by Fujino forced Yuri to shift her color-blind worldview and uncover the powerless situations in which the internees were placed. Yuri’s story holds significant political and social implications as they are fundamental to understanding racism and racial aggressions today.

The internees were resilient, hardworking, and positive while living in the concentration camps. These cheerful spirits of Japanese Americans during harsh times embody the central value of the Asian American culture.

Yuri’s narratives hold social significance in that her views, particularly her color-blind worldview, resonate with many Asian Americans. The text also describes traditional Asian American traits – hardworking, humble, and gentle – that echo Asian American values. Additionally, the text can be crucial to explaining Asian American’s less-than-outspoken stance in racially discriminating encounters. The United States’ past treatment on Japanese Americans matters because it exposes American society’s failure to accept and embrace differences among races with an open mind.

The text helps readers picture a political system designed to oppress racial minorities and create an unfair racial hierarchy. Yuri’s story reveals that racial discriminations and prejudices are a systemic issue. Yet Asian Americans are too oppressed to fight the system. The American government, as depicted in Fujino’s book, rips families apart while recruiting Japanese American men to fight in the war. This hypocrisy toward Japanese Americans and the lack of concern for families lay the foundation of political practices inconsistent with the “all men created equal” as stated in the Constitution. Therefore, this piece is politically significant in the sense that it exposes inconsistency and hypocrisy in American politics on the treatment of racial minorities.

The concentration camps holding Japanese Americans existed almost 100 years ago. But modern America has a more malicious alternative: ICE detention centers. The text provides a historical context of agencies like ICE and its practices. Practices within the ICE detention centers have sparked outrage since 2016. Instead of trying to work on reasonable adjustments in the detention centers without compromising national security, ICE exacerbates its brutal practices on detainees. Like the internees in the concentration camp, ICE detainees are powerless as they are fighting a losing battle. In the biased immigration court system, ICE detainees have little to no hopes of reuniting with their families. Additionally, ICE detainees are held indefinitely as private corporations profit off the rapidly expanding detention centers.
Shim tells us that she became an activist because of violence in her family and that her mother's fear for her activism due to tension caused by a divided Korea. Shim continues to elaborate her view on a divided Korea, where the divide is exacerbated by the U.S. media's and government's involvement. Confused by what she saw in the media, Shim thought a war was coming but realized a different reality when she visited South Korea. She then recalls that for seven decades, North and South Koreans have demonized each other under American influence. With a heartfelt story about her activism and that of her mom's, Shim paints an image of a divided Korea and its root causes that can be an epitome of a divided society. She concludes her article with her definition of peace: an era free from wars and discriminations.

Both of these texts hold social significance as they speak about the United States' involvement in Korea impacted the lives of civilians. Families got torn apart, and as Shim mentions, the fear of punishments from voicing any "pro-North" or "pro-communist" opinion haunted generations of Koreans. A prominent example of the article's social significance is the horror of Shim's mom when she discovered Shim's activism. This reaction signifies the impact of a divided country on ordinary people's lives. Baik's chapter also holds social significance as it mentions the influence of Americanization on migrated Korean families.

These texts help readers imagine the terrifying consequences of a political divide. Baik's book points out a change of political landscape - Koreans migrating to the United States - as a result of the Korean War. Shim's article demonstrates the political horror of the South Korean government depicting North Koreans as literal monsters. Both texts indicate crucial aspects of Korea's political landscape and provide insights into the relationship between modern South-North Korea.

The texts' intellectual value is found in the presence of authentic Korean values and/or cultures. Specifically, Shim quotes a poem that embodies the spirit of resilience and hope of Koreans. Additionally, the United States' occupation of Korea and the assimilation of Koreans serve the evidence of historical events shaping contemporary Korean American lives.

Baik takes an objective approach to document the migration of Koreans from the Korean war and onward. Baik argues that the Korean war, along with other immigration policies from surrounding periods, was another example of the United States' anti-communist attempt and an indication of assimilating Koreans with a humanitarian façade.

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In our lifetime” -Hyejin Shim

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Race and Empire in Hawai‘i’s Vietnam War

This article demonstrates Hawai‘i’s part within this wider Pacific history of empire and decolonization. The author begins his argument by explaining how territorial leaders in the 1950s manufactured Hawai‘i’s multiracial “paradise” and military “garrison” in tandem in the buildup toward statehood. Kara village was first used for soldiers who received their advanced infantry training before going to war. During this time, Hawai‘i’s business leaders jumped at the opportunity to promote the territory in the name of defense. The author has pictured this island with plains, mountains, jungles, beaches, etc. that transforms young men into exemplary soldiers and tourists at the same time. After setting up the statehood in Hawai‘i, the statehood transfers the Vietnamese on the island in a way that the soldiers of the Twenty-Fifth Division sought to overcome their racial difference with the Vietnamese by engaging in humanitarian projects, including building schools, roads, and clinics, and initiating training programs on public health and vocational skills. Such crucial transformations lead the villagers’ attitude towards the South Vietnamese government appeared to be worse than it was before. In this way, US has the control over the immigrants, and thus have higher chance to win the war. In the end, the establishment of race and empire in Hawai‘i reveals not only Hawai‘i’s obscured role in the Vietnam War but also the deep entanglements of racial liberalism and state violence in US imperial culture. Man argues that modern Hawai‘i is a settler society. A large population of Hawai‘i’s citizens have a history of migration to Hawai‘i while the indigenous people were always there. This ties back to Man’s discussion of how Hawai‘i is not the tourist paradise it’s often framed to be. Due to colonization and the militarization of the islands. Because of these circumstances, Man makes the key point that Native Hawaiians have become politically and culturally subordinated. The constant migrations to Hawaii and the settlement of non-indigenous people have uprooted the livelihoods and the land of the indigenous people there, and this can be traced back to the 1950s, during this time of war.

For year, Hawaiians have avoided talk of race and hate crimes. Few people outside Hawaii realize the island has racism issue, because this tourism-dependent state barely acknowledge hate crimes. However, it is still a problem in the island. Based on the statistics, there were hate crimes are related to the racism. Also, Native Hawaiians have one of the poorest health statuses compared to all ethnic groups in the State of Hawai‘i. A leading factor affecting these health disparities is the prevalence of being overweight or obese. Individuals born with social disadvantages (e.g., lower social ranking status based on gender, race, and socioeconomic status) tend to develop more health problems than those born with more cumulative social advantages such as higher education, higher income, and being a member of the majority racial group.

The militarization of land in Hawai‘i negatively impacts the cultural survival of Native Hawaiians. Militarism and colonialism are inseparable forces which have shaped modern Hawai‘i. Statistics illustrate the legacy of colonization: 40% of the homeless or houseless are Native Hawaiians; 31% of Kanaka Maoli receive annual incomes less than $4,000; 32% drop out of high school; only 5% have college degrees; and approximately a third of welfare recipients and persons in prison are Kanaka Maoli.
Yên Lê Espiritu inspects the role of the United States in “rescuing” Vietnamese refugees at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. She doubts the “rescue and liberation” narrative of what has been dubbed “the largest humanitarian airlift in history” by uncovering the militarized aspect of the U.S. refugee resettlement effort. U.S. evacuation efforts were not a slapdash response to an emergency situation that arose in Vietnam in 1975, but rather were part of militarized histories and circuits. Espiritu traces the most-traveled refugee route via military aircraft as a critical lens through which to map, both discursively and materially, the transPacific displacement brought about by the legacy of U.S. colonial and military expansion into the Asia Pacific region. She makes two related key points: the first about military colonialism, which contends that it is the region’s new idea of colonial dependence on the United States that turned the Philippines and Guam into the “ideal” receiving centers of U.S. rescuing project; and the second is about the militarized refuge, which emphasizes the mutually constitutive nature of the concepts “refugees” and “refuge” from both refugee rescue operation and Babylift mission, and shows how both emerge out of and in turn support U.S. militarism.

**Intellectual significance:**

From Yen’s observation, all islands were prominent parts of the US military base that the US established coal stations, communication lines, and naval harbors, wreaking havoc on the local population, economy, and ecology in progress. The Philippines, who were the key to US power projection capabilities in the Pacific Basin, were viewed as the first Vietnamese. With more documents were signed, the US military entrenched its control over the Philippines. Guam was transformed into pre-war situation with the expansion of colonialism and militarism and the refugee rescue operation decision made by the US government has also set a tone for the colonial subordination and militarism. It was the militarization of the colonized island and its indigenous inhabitants that turned Guam into an “ideal” dumping ground for the unwanted Vietnamese refugees, the discards of US war in Vietnam.

**Social significance:**

Because Guam was small with only 200 square miles, Guam has become the ideal place for refugee operation in the way of US militarism, rather than humanitarianism. What really pushed Guam to be a refugee place was that because of the small size of the land, the land cannot hold a huge amount of refugees, and thus additional refugees have to be transferred out. During the Babylift, children were forced to leave and adopted by new families. It sounds like the US was giving hope to new generations but in fact, the US used children to displace the war materials. This mission demonstrated the deceiving American notion of a bright future and the daunting reality of displacement. The innocent young faces behind the bars represent both the innocence of Operation Babylift children and the hope of refugees who desired to search for safety. The lively faces of the orphans are contrasted against a grim background to present an expectation versus reality conflict.

**Political significance:**

From Yen’s use of vocabulary, Vietnamese was first treated as goods, products that they are shipped in cargo. Another usage of vocab is militarized. By emphasizes the accent on militarized, it revealed the inner violence behind the humanitarian term of refuge. The hidden meaning was that the Vietnamese were forced to accepting what cannot be done on Philippines. This idea also challenged the great and powerful American Literature which left a good impression on the term refuge. The refugee crisis has raised due to the emphasis on the term “militarized”. It challenged some great American literature in a way that the term “militarized” was the sarcastic side of humanitarianism.

Militarism and colonialism raised great influence in Guam. While what the US government has done in the past means bringing a bright future to refugees, the results were not only children start their orphanhood, but also that people who did not leave Guam left nothing present days. As a part of the U.S. territory, people who live in Guam aren’t represented in Congress and the federal government doesn’t count their votes in national elections. There are about 7,000 US troops on Guam with almost a third of the land controlled by the US military. Some locals remain skeptical of the military due to the fact that the U.S. military seized ancestral lands from Chamorros after World War II. However, many locals believe its presence has bolstered the economy, creating new jobs in construction, retail, and service industries. Guam has a high proportion of veterans in addition to the active-duty members on the military bases, and people from Guam enlist in the military at a higher rate per capita than in any U.S. state. People on Guam have a deep sense of patriotism that’s more palpable than in many places on the mainland. Some locals fear that if the military doesn’t feel wanted, it might pull out from the island, throwing its economy into turmoil. That complex feeling about the militarization of the United States stems from Guam’s colonial history.
The major themes of this novel are migration and trauma. Vuong symbolized the theme of migration through the imagery of monarch butterflies, and how they migrate to survive, much like how Little Dog and his family had to migrate to America to start anew and escape their life in Vietnam, which was engulfed in war. This ties into much of what we have talked about in class about migration, and how it is an inevitable and somewhat “natural” process of life. Not just Asians, but many people of different cultures and backgrounds migrate to America for a better life, but with this movement there are also hardships within the migration process (as we have seen) and difficulties that arise from immigrants trying to stimulate themselves into American culture, a task that Little Dog and his family had to do. Trauma is also discussed frequently in this novel and the effects of trauma from war can be seen in Little Dog’s mother, who has PTSD and is overly paranoid because of her experiences from the Vietnam War. This led her to act a certain way and to despise certain people/actions solely based on who/what they are associated with. This can be seen today with not just American immigrants but also non-immigrant Americans. For example, when 9/11 happened there was a mass hatred towards Middle-Easterners and Muslims, solely because they “looked” like the terrorists that caused that attack. These wrongful and misinformed associations are a result of trauma and paranoia that occurs from war.

Vuong throws another light on the political by the fearless display of his own social status. Race and racism is an everyday part of their lives. White is considered the default race in America, and this status is reflected in the color of the mannequins. Little Dog mentions that he has read an article in an El Paso newspaper from 1884. The news is about a white man who is accused of murdering a Chinese man. The case was dismissed because Chinese man was none of the official race according to the law, so his life is worthless and not even worth talking about. As an Asian boy himself, Little Dog lives in a society that has not always counted his race as human, reflecting the racism of American society.

The prevalence of Vietnamese women in the nail salon industry dates back to the Vietnam war, which saw large numbers of Vietnamese immigrants arriving in the United States. The little dog’s mother, Rose, is also working in a nail salon. Because her school was damaged during the war, she left school when she was only five. Just like Rose, many of the early immigrants of Vietnamese-American are barely literate and cannot speak English. Therefore, the major reason why many immigrants work in nail salons is because the training required for nail salon work is short and inexpensive, the work itself does not require high English proficiency, and the work hours tend to be flexible enough to allow immigrant mothers to attend to family obligations. As we can see nowadays, Vietnamese Americans have taken over the nail business in the U.S.

The author examines both English and Vietnamese in his novel, and he concludes that language is steeped in the culture that creates it. When little dog talks to his mother, they barely understand each other and that’s why they smile at each other blankly with no soul. Rose grew up in Vietnam, but Little Dog grew up in the US. Their cultural differences are reflected in their language. For example, according to Little Dog, the Vietnamese rarely say “I love you,” and when they do, they say it in English. Little Dog learns English through different stories he reads, and the importance of stories continues throughout his life. Little Dog learns about his Vietnamese identity through Lan’s stories, and this reflects the importance of storytelling. One time, Little Dog runs away from home when he is just a little boy, he doesn’t know where he should go, but with the books, Little Dog knows there is another world he can and will eventually get to.

The drug usage and addiction in the novel expose during his early years includes the overdoses and deaths of several of his friends reflect the tragedy of America’s drug pandemic. One of their young friend Trevor overdoses twice, and he died at his 22. Little Dog never fully recovers from heart-broken news. Ocean Vuong uses the symbol of buffalo to describe this phenomenon ironically. The buffalo are social animals and what they do is simply following what their family members do. Ocean Vuong connects the behavior of buffalo and the thousands of Americans who die each year from drug addiction and overdoses, in many cases after watching their friends and family members go out the same way as if buffalos would willingly go over the edge in the risk of their life.
The author Robert Lee makes a point that Asian Americans were “not black” from different aspects: Politically silent and Ethnically assimilable. The US takes advantage of the political conflicts in China to assimilate Chinese. Lee also points out the difference between Chinese and Japanese by citing the quote from Life article. In this way, Chinese were separated from Japanese and even from the ethnicity of Asian. In the U.S. News and World Report, there was an article titled Success Story of One Minority in the US instead of saying Chinese American directly. In this way, Chinese is no longer a separate category in the US. The Ford Compromise contributes to the US both internally and externally. Internally, it helps to create the Middle Class and the society get rid of the strike fever. Externally, it establishes Great America. Moving on to black menace, Lee points out that the four-stage ethnic relation cycles builds up the blueprint for ethnic assimilation.

History shows us that this nation’s anti-Asian bias spikes in times of internal or external economic or military crisis and fades when these pressures abate. Anti-Asian sentiment remained a reservoir of major feelings from which Americans could always draw in a time of crisis. Asian Americans still do not wield enough political power, or have enough cultural presence. But it also gives us ample evidence that anti-blackness is steady, unrelenting, and continuous. The unimportance and historical status as the perpetual foreigner in the U.S. is one reason the President and many others feel they can call COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” or the “kung flu.” In the horrific viral video of George Floyd’s killing, Derek Chauvin kneeled on Floyd’s neck until Floyd lost consciousness and life. Tou Thao, Chauvin’s Asian American fellow officer on the scene, stood by, hands in his pockets, even as onlookers pointed out that Floyd wasn’t moving, and didn’t seem to be breathing. Thao remained impassive, indifferent. Avoidant. Silence is the scar that forms over the small, persistent wounds of our lives as Asian Americans. Silence is what our immigrant forebears learned when they first arrived in this country, to hide the awkwardness of their second-language speech and to bite their tongues so as not to escalate major ones. Moreover, the negative stereotypes about the Model Minority Myth of Asian American are harmful. The model minority myth not only operates alongside the myth of Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners, but also is harmful to the struggle for racial justice. When paired with racist myths about other ethnic or racial groups, the model minority myth is used as evidence to deny or downplay the impact of racism and discrimination on people of color in the United States. Given the history of that impact on black Americans particularly, the myth is ultimately a means to perpetuate anti-blackness.

Social

Life’s article provided physical evidence and cultural differences for readers to know how the Chinese are similar to Americans and how the Japanese are different from Americans. All the usages of words in Life’s description shape the point that the Japanese was mistreated and the race is an unfair category for discrimination. Chinese, during that time, were improving without help from anyone, while African Americans were asking for equal economic opportunities. This encourages the idea that compared to African Americans, the Chinese could do everything that would not use any of the US resources, saving up for the US so that the US can use the resources to strengthen themselves.

Political

Asian Americans were “not black” in two significant ways: Politically silent and Ethnically assimilable. Because there was a dramatic struggle between nationalist and communist, the message the US sent to China was more about equal rights and liberty, while African Americans were told to work hard in the military to be rewarded for accommodation. During the Cold War, due to the US’s political interest in China’s struggles between nationalist and communist, the US approached China in a way that the US was expecting China to help with the problem with communism and race mixing, assimilating China to become a part of the US.

Intellectual

By applying Ford Compromise and under this new production-oriented union leadership, labor contracts developed a pattern of close collaboration between labor leadership and management on issues of supervision, productivity, and work rules. At this time, the Middle Class emerged. By applying Scientific Management in the war, the US was able to be in a supplant position in the world. Additionally, it also attracted Europeans and Asians whose economic and political interests were aligned with Americans.