

Weekly Journal Entry 2

Racial and ethnic identity will always be a challenging issue, especially in American society. I sometimes wonder while filling out forms which category best represents my own background- am I "Asian American" or "Asian Pacific Islander?" Sometimes I think that the best choice is "other" and a blank line that allows me to write specifically: "Chinese-Filipino American." I contemplate my identity as an Asian American to show the importance of racial identification and how racial discrimination is a such a huge barrier to living as equals in this country.

William Wei hones in on this issue in "The Asian American Movement." In his analysis of the Asian American Movement, William Wei puts to attention that Asian Americans are perceived with different images- from being seen as fresh off the boat foreigners whose issues and worries are thus not relevant to the rest of society, to being viewed as America's "model minority" (Wei, 4). He claims that the "concept of Asian American implies that there can be a communal consciousness and a unique culture that is neither Asian nor American, but Asian American...they bring together previously ineffective struggles against the oppression of Asian communities into a coherent pan-Asian movement for social change" (Wei, 1).

In accordance with that, it wasn't until the 1960s and 1970s that diverse communities with different histories began to consciously unite as "Asian Americans." The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s did a tremendous job in downright exposing the persistent problem of racism in American society and raised questions about exactly how democratic the nation's system really was. Brought up in lecture, the world witnessed the

emergence of unified coalitions as the Brown Berets leading the Chicano movement here in California and the Young Lords fighting for Puerto Rican liberties in New York. It was during this time of political upheaval that not only Asian ethnic groups, but members of many diversified ethnic groups, decided to strengthen their voices as a unit, band together and act politically.

The Asian American Movement along with the implementation of the 1965 Immigration Act helped the Asian community overcome such historical and political barriers to equal liberties. Covered in lecture, this movement was primarily the result of the mix of two historical events: the coming out of a generation of college-age Asian Americans and the public protests against the Vietnam War. What all this did was really organize and prompt Asian Americans to contemplate their identity as a culture and to step into the shoes of what a full “Asian American” was and meant. I think in order to assert one’s constitutional rights as an American, one must also know his/her cultural history. And this is what happened along the course of the movement.

A pivotal point for the Bay Area Asian American movement specifically was the struggle against the eviction, or better put the gentrification, of the International Hotel tenants in San Francisco. As the class witnessed in the featured documentary, the International Hotel began as a local fight between a financial district developer and mostly Filipino residents living within the Manilatown area. What troubles me here is the undeniable discrimination towards the tenants. Had they been white or American, I’m sure a few things would’ve been done differently. If one was not white, it would be that much harder to have your voice heard and respected. And as the end of the film shown, no real construction as planned ever took place following the evictions- which just

correlates again to the aspect of discrimination and inequity. At the end of the day, where does inequity and unfairness take us? Nowhere. If people as human beings don't learn to tolerate, things can really only stay the same and real progress in anything substantially new can never be made- as was what happened with the hotel.

Just last Friday, Sarah Hoyer from CNN published an Oct. 22nd articleⁱ detailing the recent racial violence in a South Philadelphia high school that ultimately led to the assault of a number of Asian Americans by a group of black students last year. The violence of racial tension between black and Asian students was reaching a breaking point. Realizing they had had enough, a total of roughly 50 students organized an eight-day boycott of the school, hoping to draw attention to what they felt was an insufficient response by the school staff to the ongoing violence. Months later, a federal investigation was open after a formal civil rights complaint was filed by the Asian American Legal Defense Fund. Much like the Civil Rights Movements decades ago, Asian Americans today feel strongly that being labeled as a "silent" minority in the eyes of society can come with harmful effects. But being able to defend and express one's entitled constitutional liberties as not just an Asian American, Latino American, or African American, but as a human being, is always of importance.

Establishing and integrating oneself in any society is a long process. But through the 1960's and 70's movement, being Asian American instilled conviction in those who held on to their new identity while also resolving their "identity crisis." The Asian American identity has definitely become a collective one that has transcended the barriers over the years of individual Asian ethnic groups to ultimately connect with the rest of the greater society.

ⁱ Hoye, Sarah. "Racial violence spurred Asian students to take a stand." CNNLiving News. 22 October 2010.