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ADVOCATE
Spring/Summer 2017

#REMEMBERVINCENTCHIN





About OCA – Asian Pacific American Advocates

OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates is a national membership-driven organization of community advocates dedicated to advancing the social, political, and economic well-being of Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) in the United States.

To fulfill its mission, OCA has adapted the following goals to:

- Advocate for social justice, equal opportunity and fair treatment;
- Promote civic participation, education, and leadership;
- Advance coalitions and community building; and
- Foster cultural heritage

Founded as Organization of Chinese Americans in 1973, OCA has since grown to a robust national advocacy organization to advance the civil rights of Asian Pacific Americans and aspiring Americans. The organization presently has over 100 chapters, affiliates, and partners, impacting more than 35,000 individuals all across the country through local and national programming. While the organization's headquarters remain in Washington, DC, allowing OCA to directly engage in critical public policy issues on a macro level, it continues to largely remain as a grassroots constituency of lay advocates from all walks of life and diverse ethnic identities addressing uniquely local level issues impacting over 19 million Asian Pacific Americans across the country.

OCA takes no collective position on the politics of any foreign country, but instead focuses on the welfare and civil rights of Asian Pacific Americans.

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From the Board

Greetings Advocates!

History plays an important role in advocacy that we often take for granted. It is through the documentation of events of the past that we are able to learn from for organizing and politicking today. Through history, we are able to remember and honor those who have fought and sacrificed for us to be where we are today: our families who immigrated to the United States, our brothers and sisters who have fought in wars past and present, pioneering activists and community leaders. We are also able remember those who have suffered injustices and see how, sadly, those same injustices happen to Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) today.



This year has been historical in many ways. We welcome a new Presidential administration and a record number of AAPI congressmen and women in office; we remembered the 135th anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, the 35th anniversary of Vincent Chin's murder and the 25th anniversary of the LA riots. Each of these has played a role in mobilizing our community of Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) to unite and advocate.

In solidarity,
Sharon M. Wong, *OCA National President*



Dear Advocates,

As we transition into the second half of 2017, OCA continues to grow into a robust national civil rights organization because of your support. The organization has some very exciting plans for our chapters with more engagement and capacity building coordinated with our advocacy efforts. Our programs are building more future leaders than ever and we're expanding our portfolio to uplift different segments of our community. In these ever changing times, we are building on the foundation that we were given to become stronger and have a greater impact in our communities.

In this issue, you will see some stylistic changes as well as a common theme of honoring our civil rights legacy while focusing on our future with feature articles including the 135th Anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Act, touching on contemporary AAPI issues in media, and how the 35th commemoration of Vincent Chin's death has so much relevance today. This shift is not only intentional but also symbolic of the times that we live in. Like this issue of IMAGE, I hope that you will join us in being intentional about honoring our legacy while uplifting a new generation of AAPIs.

In solidarity,
Kendall Kosai, *OCA National Deputy Director*

HIJACKED STORIES: LESSONS FROM THE LA RIOTS

Written by: Kim Hall



Twenty five years ago in April 1992, the acquittal of four Los Angeles Police Department officers who beat taxi-driver Rodney King ignited one of the largest riots in modern American history. Mass demonstrations over racial injustice ensued for the next six days, but the situation resulted in \$1 billion in property damage and 53 deaths from widespread looting and rioting. The images of this destruction beamed across the globe with little context as to why these events had occurred.

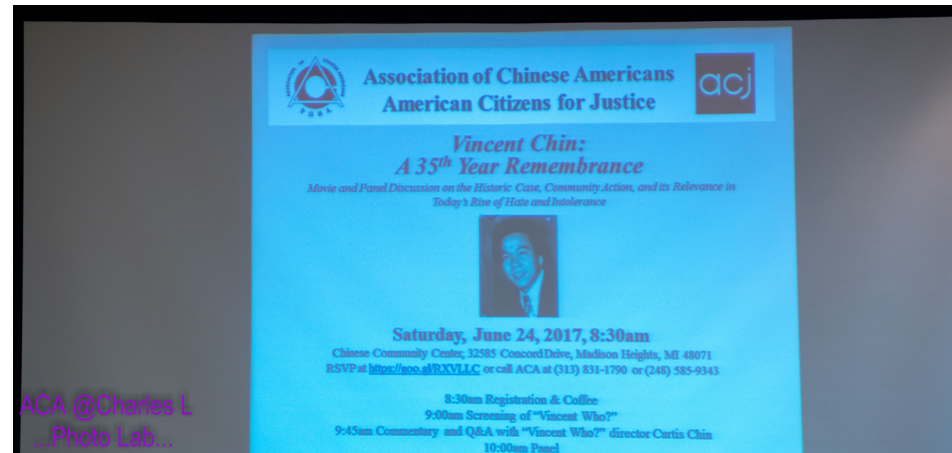
What the media did not show was that the LA Riots were a result of a series of events that led to rising racial tensions between black and whites, and police brutality. It brought attention to the racial hierarchy that had been fast emerging over the decades before across America. It also brought attention to how the Korean American community had been used as a racial wedge, buffering the privileged, affluent whites from addressing the system of racism or the damage it inflicts. Instead of highlighting the historic divestment from low-income communities of color and corruption within a major urban police department that exasperated the riots, myopic news stories ran on a loop that relegated the complexity of the riots to a one dimensional narrative of Black criminality and Asian victimhood.

Reflecting on the LA riots shows us the harm of being complacent in the status of a "Model Minority" – a term that paints Asian Americans as monolithic and successful but also a term that has been used to erase the struggles of other marginalized communities by ignoring the inequities and racism that affect particular groups. The Model Minority Myth has been used to pit groups against each other by the dominant group. The LA Riots showed us that pitting groups against each other always fails and delineated what is on the line when we allow those on the top of the social hierarchy to portray wide sweeping narratives of whole communities. We must disrupt the mainstream images of communities of color and continue to have ownership over our own narratives and struggles. When we lose ownership of our own narratives, we are [vulnerable] to becoming a tool to perpetuate racism. Let's demand a nuanced view of our communities and see them for what they are: dynamic, diverse, and much more than stereotypes ■

35 YEARS LATER, VINCENT CHIN'S MURDER

We remember Vincent Chin, the 27-year old Chinese American who was bludgeoned to death with a baseball bat swung by Ronald Ebens while his stepson Michael Nitz held Chin in a bear hug on Woodward Avenue in Highland Park, Michigan in 1982. We remember the hate that Ebens spewed: “because of you mother f-----s we’re out of work,” “nip,” and “chink.”

We remember the 3 years of probation and the \$3,000 fine assessed by the Judge followed by community outrage that erupted following the sentencing. We remember the two federal civil rights trials that resulted in Ebens and Nitz never having to serve a single day in jail for their heinous murder of Vincent Chin.



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RINGS RELEVANT TODAY

Written by: Kendall Kosai

But most consequentially, we remember that his death sparked a pan-Asian civil rights movement.

This year, the OCA – Detroit chapter (also locally known as the Association of Chinese Americans) and American Citizens for Justice/Asian American Center for Justice held the 35th commemoration of Chin’s Death at the Chinese Community Center of Detroit. Over 70 individuals attended the gathering which focused predominantly on how Chin’s death still resonates today.

“To take on hate, I think this is still very personal,” says Roland Hwang, OCA – Detroit President. “There are people around that still remember Vincent Chin and Lily Chin. We, the community, have to realize that it is still a case that is important in the civil rights movement.”

Hwang, along with several other notable individuals, has been one of the advocates at the forefront of seeking justice for Chin in Detroit for over three decades. He emceed the commemoration with gusto.

“We have to realize that racism is out still there and we must address it in our community, being vigilant in terms of preaching tolerance and cultural understanding and collective unity; those are our values,” says Hwang. “This is not an ‘us’ vs ‘them’ America. We have to focus on our shared interests and values.”

Over the past several years, hate crimes have dramatically increased. In 2014, the FBI reported 1,314 anti-Muslim biased hate crimes while in 2016, the number nearly doubled to 2,213. In February of this year, Srivinas Kochibhotla, an individual South Asian



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descent, was killed in Olathe, Kansas after a man who thought he was Iranian and yelled “Get out of my country” before shooting him. Federal prosecutors have classified it as a hate crime.

Also at the event were several representatives from the Michigan region showing joint solidarity for the event. Notable guests included Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion CEO Steve Spreitzer, Michigan Department of Civil Rights Director Agustin Arbulu, AARP Vice President of Multicultural Markets and Former OCA Executive Director Daphne Kwok, and Activist Helen Zia. Attendees also included members of the Chin family including Amy Lee and Carmen Lee, and Vincent’s longtime friend Gary Koivu. A grave site memorial service followed the panel discussion with a somber service led by Pastor Andrew Cheng

of the Chinese Bible Church who spoke about healing and reconciliation.

“Vincent would have been 62 today,” said Zia at the event. “That’s a whole lifetime that he did not get to have. But these 35 years we have seen so much change. So much organizing. So many different efforts that have been going on.”

Those efforts and Vincent is why we remember ■

OCA thanks several organizations for their incredible support including: the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity & Inclusion, the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, Michigan Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission, the Council of Asian Pacific Americans, Chinese Association of Greater Detroit, and Japanese American Citizens League – Detroit Chapter. In addition, OCA thanks each of the panelists and to the organizing committee: Roland Hwang, Ayesha Ghazi, Sharon Dow, James Beni Wilson, Shenlin Chen, David Liou, and others.

OCA encourages individuals who have experienced or witnessed an act of hate to report it to the organization’s hate crime website found at www.aapihatecrimes.org.



FRUSTRATION: A REFLECTION ON “GOOK”

I sat down with some OCA Summer 2017 interns, whose names are protected for their privacy, who had seen Justin Chon's film, GOOK, previously at a film festival. We discussed the film's portrayal of an overlooked historical event as well as its greater implications as a piece of art and activism. The film will be released in select theaters August 18th and 25th which you can find at <http://bit.ly/ocagook>.

How much of the Rodney King riots did you all study?

Everyone: Never... Nothing... Not even a one line mention... I think the first time I heard about it was in college... I never really heard about how it related to Asian Americans at all... No, I don't think I ever heard about it, until probably last year, and I live in SoCal.... We learned about it but that's because I live in LA, but we learned it very quickly and brushed over it.

How is this film, and how Justin portrays the LA riots, different from how you learned about the LA riots?

MC: When I learned about the LA riots, it was very much viewed through a Black and White lens. The way the film is centered around the Korean brothers is not something that was explained - it wasn't explained how Korean American community members fit into it all.

BT: I definitely think history leaves out a lot of interaction between the two communities. The movie did a pretty good job of showing Koreans and Blacks living in the same neighborhood and interacting with each other. When I learned about it, they made it seem that there were clear distinctive groups and that they are separated by neighborhoods and territories but in reality they were probably more mixed together than people let on.

Was there anything surprising? What was the most surprising thing that you saw in the film?

JY: This wasn't necessarily surprising but I was thinking how throughout the movie, we saw flashes of the origin of the model minority myth. Like how the Black community was like, 'Well [the Koreans] obviously must be doing well. They own a shop, they're selling things, that means they have money,' when the reality was the brothers basically were about to go under on their last legs and everyone else in the neighborhood was just as broke. And that was the foundation of the tension between the Korean and Black communities. By all means you can be united against the general white oppressor that is the LA riots but it just didn't happen and I think that [tension] played into that.

MC: Yeah I guess what surprised me was the scapegoating of these Korean American community members. Growing up, the way I understood how Asian Americans fit into my community was very much that of a model minority narrative - myself included. Being that there weren't that many Asian Americans as it was, the way they were seen fit into the successful, hardworking image. So through this film, it's interesting to see how the model minority works against us in a way that I hadn't really thought about.

BT: What surprised me was that when they were talking about the riots, it was to the side. They were just using the riots as a way to set the tone and historical time period to establish what's going on. But then everything is happening on the side - so it's not exactly about the riots, but at the same time it is?

JN: I think it was just tangible, the feeling of frustration that spread throughout the Black and Korean American communities living there. When I was watching it I could feel the frustration, but I've never felt that level of tenseness in my life. Seeing the film put the riots into perspective for me: that they affected not just the Black and White community but also everyone who was living in that area. Everyone viewing the film can feel how difficult the time was.

JY: My parents were living there at that time, and now it's making me wonder like maybe I should go and ask them what they were doing and their reactions.

MC: That's a tough conversation...

JN: My friend's parents were living in South Central at the time and they never said anything about it. It was

interesting because I learned about it.

It would be interesting to ask your parents about it because when I learned about the LA riots, it was just about Koreans versus the Blacks and whites. You know there had to be other Asians in the area but of course, they were all lumped together.

MC: Yeah like in the film, in that scene in the car where she's saying 'I hear what they say, those Chinese guys with their store selling shoes.' Going back to the way the story was told through the characters rather than about the events... It's interesting because something I was concerned about before watching this film was: how do you go about telling this story without demonizing the Black community? Especially if we're looking at it through an AAPI lens? I do think making it more personal and relating the frustration back to familial ties is a good way to do that, but I guess there's also the added concern of trying to put this story on individual characters. Do you lose some of the importance of understanding the structural factors that went into this as well?

GM: Yeah, I mean, I don't really know the history, so when I was watching it, I still felt the tension just from the way that they made the film. But it does make me want to know what happened and what these LA riots were about.

JY: I would add that I could easily see someone - who did not know the historical context, about the tensions between the black and the white community - jumping to the conclusion that this is a Korean vs Black narrative. And that is dangerous. I really would have to emphasize that because we're Asian, it's easier for us, even if we didn't have the historical context, to transcend that conclusion.

MC: I think that's a sensitive subject, particularly for young Asian Americans who tend to be a little more progressive and a little bit more aware of the racial dynamic. We need to remember that historically the Asian community has been used as a tool in white supremacy, and I'm unsure if the film really spells this out for viewers. I agree that education before watching this movie would be important because I think there could be some dangerous misinterpretations.

JY: Even if it's just a two minute thing about the beating of Rodney King. Considering the police brutality cases that we've heard this year, I think that would be enough.

MC: I also think it would be good to talk about what happened after: the split in activism that grew out of the Asian American community. On the left you had people who were like 'this is exactly why we need coalitions between communities of color' and then you had people on the right who were more conservative who were like 'we need to protect our own interests and focus on our businesses.' I mean, that's definitely something that still exists within our own communities especially as a generational thing. So I think, again, depending on who is watching this, that information might be important as well.

JY: Oh, I just created a hypothesis as to why it was shot in black and white... It's because the issues are not just black and white...

BT: I definitely think the movie did a really good job of illustrating the frustration that really resulted from a lack of communication or dialogue between the black and korean communities. Kamila is the bridge, and so I think that's a lesson I pull from this: if there was open communication and dialogue, that could have prevented some of the issues that we saw in the movie.

JY: And that speaks to the wider issue in that struggle is universal, it's just a matter of whose struggle do you prioritize more. I think Kamila was only able to [be a bridge] because she was too young to understand that people would supercede their own interests over another's. That's so sad - only a young child was able to act as



that bridge. In the context of things, even if there were more of her, I'm not sure how much that would change. You could extrapolate that to today and say that the young need to bridge these communities together so that could be the ending message, but that'd be a stretch to rely on the young.

JN: Well Kamila to me represented this symbol of young innocent unity between two different communities. Her two best friends were Koreans, her family is of course Black, and so I think her death was really just dark to me because it shot that unity. Especially in the hospital, they were beating each other up even after helping each other get her there. That's why it was so dark and tense when the movie ended because the unity didn't stay.

MC: And not to be pessimistic, but even though you make those connections personally and relationally, there's a lot of work that needs to be done in the communities structurally in order to overcome all of those racial tensions. Like, my family is mixed race and they love me and I love them but they still can't understand structural things and where I sit in society. So I guess, my concern with the film and with these kinds of discussions about individuals having to build those bridges - I think that's great - but it has to go alongside a deeper education.

JY: Yeah! That's like saying, 'Oh I have a black friend, I'm not racist! That doesn't mean anything unless you build something meaningful off that relationship.'

MC: It's a tough balance though. With all the racial tensions that go on, people say 'Oh if people could just humanize and understand,' especially with the waves of Muslim Americans trying to go out into the community and tell people about who they are and present themselves. I guess I wonder how far that can go especially with people who are so resistant.

JY: Like the Muslim man standing in front of Times Square blindfolded and offering hugs isn't going to change the man in Nebraska's mind about threats to the nation. Yeah, that's another thing I'm worried about: this film is incredibly well done and imparts a message but it's not ever going to be seen by the people who need their minds to be changed.

JN: When Kamila was asking about what gook meant, and he was trying to explain how it meant country and stuff, I thought that was interesting because I thought he was trying to shield her from the racial slur meant and instead try to educate the next generation and steer the word away from being a racial slur. I thought that that brought out a certain innocence, 'this doesn't mean what it means.'

I know it seems like only people like us, only progressives would watch this film. But at the same time, if this film didn't exist at all, it's the little things like this where someone pulls in their friend who is not poc or who is poc but has no idea about Rodney King- there is something to be said about them coming in and being like "wow, i wanna know about these riots" and after that, domino effect hopefully.

MC: I agree, I think films like this are really important, and like, I think when you're in spaces like this, it's



easy to be critical because we are so excited about these things and we want them to deliver so much, but I think in so many ways sometimes for us, just showing up is kind of like an act of participation, and I think for getting these things out there, just to have somebody tell the story in the first place means something.

JN: I'm really glad it's here.

GM: I think it was important to see for sure, but I would definitely like more context to understand it ■

FROM 1882 TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY: OCA OBSERVES THE 135TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT

By: Stephanie Wong

This past May, OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates and its chapters recognized the 135th anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Act by supporting Day of Inclusion efforts nationwide.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was signed into law by President Chester A. Arthur on May 6, 1882. This was the only law in American history to specifically exclude an ethnic group from entering the United States, as a result of decades of anti-Chinese sentiment where Chinese were blamed for unemployment and crime. The law also prohibited Chinese immigrants and their descendants from obtaining citizenship. This law remained in effect for over 60 years until it was finally overturned on December 17, 1943 and remains among the most shameful episodes in our nation's history.

The Magnuson Act repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and marked a turning point regarding society's harsh attitudes towards immigration and immigrants. By repealing the "Chinese Exclusion" prohibitions, the United States expressed its commitment to continue to break down cultural barriers, appreciate differences, enrich cultural diversity, and further racial, religious and cultural tolerance.

In 2009, Assemblyman Mike Eng authored the "Day of Inclusion" resolution and designated by means of California State Assembly Concurrent Resolution (ACR) 76 to be December 17th. "Day of Inclusion" is a day set aside for all of us to remember and learn about the sacrifices and contributions of our immigrant heritage in becoming American by embracing our shared differences and common goals.

On June 19, 2012, Congresswoman Judy Chu introduced a bipartisan resolution that formally expresses the regret of the House of Representatives for the Chinese Exclusion Act and other legislation that discriminated against people of Chinese origin in the United States. The resolution was unanimously passed and is only the fourth resolution of regret passed by both houses of the U.S. Congress in the past 25 years.

Now in 2017, in observance of the 135th anniversary, OCA chapters around the country led efforts to pass resolutions and proclamations observing the anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Act in their local cities and counties. Cities that issued a resolution or proclamation include: Alameda, CA; Berkeley, CA; Cincinnati, OH; Milwaukee, WI; Pittsburgh, PA; Sacramento, CA; and Seattle, WA. This accompanies other resolutions in San Francisco, CA and Los Angeles, CA. In addition to this, OCA participated in rallies for Inclusion in San Francisco Chinatown.

“We are glad that our chapters have called upon their elected officials to openly state that exclusion was wrong then, and it is wrong now. As we celebrate our numerous achievements in this country, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders must continue to remain steadfast in speaking out for inclusion of all members of our society, regardless of religion or national origin. Let this day be known as a Day of Inclusion, as a reminder that we can never fall back to exclusion,” said Vicki Shu, Vice President of Public Affairs.

OCA – St. Louis past president, Caroline Fan, stated that in the St. Louis area the number of people of Chinese descent has grown dramatically in the last 20 years. Fan said that while people of Chinese descent are embraced in the community now, that has not always been the case.

There has been much growth since 1882 to our present-day, from the Chinese Exclusion Act to local resolutions that now recognize the historical injustice. However, there is still a great deal of progress that needs to be made. Fan said that there is a lack of social and government services that are language and culturally competent. Fan became concerned about xenophobia towards people of Chinese descent during elections on both a national and local level due to xenophobic rhetoric being displayed on ads.

It is important for everyone to commemorate the contributions of all immigrants, as well as work towards encouraging fair treatment to various cultures. The hope and aspiration of America’s future lies in embracing our shared differences.



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- Andrew Torelli** Westchester/Hudson Valley
- Victor Yau** Westchester/Hudson Valley
- Vincent Young** Westchester/Hudson Valley
- Mary Ann Yu** Westchester/Hudson Valley
- Alice S. and Charles W. Cha** Westchester/Hudson Valley
- Janet Lew Carr** Wisconsin



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