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Countervisions: Asian American Film Criticism. Edited by Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.

Anyone who has recently taught an Asian American Studies class recognizes the need for scholarship on the rapidly growing number of films and videos by Asian Americans. In response to this need, Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Sandra Liu have compiled *Countervisions*, a sophisticated, innovative, and engaging collection. Asian American film criticism from its inception in 1960s and 1970s counterculture has had a political engagement that has honed its analytical edge. As editor Hamamoto suggests, "in the main, Asian American film criticism has avoided the excesses of psychoanalytic abstractions and theoreticism while holding to the primacy and determinate force of history and politics in explaining and

However, Shimabukuro has not set out merely to chronicle the Seattle redress movement. Instead, as the rather audacious title of his book suggests, he argues that “[r]edress began in Seattle” (113). One of the protagonists of his narrative is Henry Miyatake, a Boeing engineer who began researching the legality of incarceration and possible modes of redress in 1968. By 1973, he had developed a plan for winning redress. Known later as the “Seattle Plan,” it proposed payments of \$5,000 to each person affected by Executive Order 9066 or Public Law 503, plus \$10 for each day spent under incarceration.⁴ It also included a clever “tax checkoff” provision for funding. Japanese Americans would put their federal taxes into a fund from which redress payments would be made, first to the eldest members of the community and continuing until all eligible recipients had been paid (16–18). Miyatake presented the plan to the Seattle JACL chapter in November 1973, and a small group that became known as the Seattle Evacuation Redress Committee (SERC) formed to press the issue. Rebuffed by the national JACL, which saw redress as a political non-starter and feared that it would stir up anti-Japanese American sentiment, SERC turned to grassroots organizing. They used local Japanese American networks to advance their agenda and raise funds for the campaign. In turn, they used these funds to produce an information packet and audiotape entitled “An Appeal for Action to Obtain Redress for the World War II Evacuation and Imprisonment of Japanese Americans,” which they mailed to 102 JACL chapters. In addition, they conducted a survey that revealed that 94 percent of respondents favored reparations and 89 percent favored payments to individuals (28).

The claim that redress was “born in Seattle” is debatable. Certainly, Edison Uno’s 1970 JACL resolution predated the unveiling of Miyatake’s plan in 1973. However, the Seattle Plan was the first concrete redress proposal and incorporated the one key element of the redress legislation that finally passed in 1988—payments to individuals, rather than block grants to community agencies. Seattleites can be justifiably proud of the central role they played in the larger movement. Their singular achievements include holding the first ever Day of Remembrance in 1978 at the former Camp Harmony in Puyallup Fairgrounds and local artist Frank Fujii’s creation of the *de facto* logo of the redress movement. Moreover, they made indispensable contributions to the national effort with their energy, dedication, and ideas.

Together, these two books, with their contrasting scopes and methodologies, make valuable contributions to our understanding of recent Asian American history and the enactment of public policy. Shimabukuro points to the importance of doing the unglamorous work of “nuts-and-bolts, grind-it-out lobbying, vote

understanding the impact of racial inequality on minority communities" (3). This is not to say that this volume is light on theory. Essays in the collection employ current approaches to analyzing filmmaking practices and reception in a broad range of examples from independent and mainstream venues.

The first two essays by Cynthia Liu and Peter Feng move back in time to consider how contemporary Asian American concerns might reassess film icons such as the actresses Anna May Wong and Nancy Kwan. Liu and Feng eschew simple dismissals of certain screen roles as stereotypical; instead, they speculate on the power of spectators to re-interpret and recast "Orientalist" films, imaginatively or literally rewriting such performances in a form of "creative redress." Though somewhat different in spirit from the rest of the book, these two essays present fascinating possibilities for reassessing Orientalist cinematic representation and the performances of Asian American actors from earlier in the century.

The remainder of the book concentrates on instances of contemporary Asian American and Asian film and video. Darrell Hamamoto traces the pervasive deformation of Asian American sexuality through looking at its manifestation in films ranging from Wayne Wang's *Eat a Bowl of Tea* (Columbia Pictures, 1989) to video pornography. Sandra Liu uses Wang's career to measure how filmmakers must negotiate economic as well as creative and political pressures. Her essay argues that the tremendous changes of the film industry in the 1980s and 1990s blurs the distinction between "good" independents and conformist or "bad" mainstream movies; she concludes that "[a]ssuming that the United States will continue to be a consumption-oriented market economy, film activism cannot be the sole responsibility of filmmakers" (104). Lindsey Jang's tongue-in-cheek advice to Asian American filmmakers seems in keeping with this hard pragmatism. Jang suggests that Asian Americans take the lead from successful Asian filmmakers—making their films "exotic," "sexy," and "violent"—so as to win box-office success and more widespread recognition.

A trio of essays by Kent Ono, Glen Masato Mimura, and Elena Tajima Creff all deal with the "genre" of films and videos depicting Japanese American internment. Each of these essays acknowledges the political importance of reconstructing this historical past through film yet remains skeptical of particular films and techniques that reinforce conventionally racialized and gendered representations. Ono provides a thoughtful overview of how these films partake of different discourses of transnational migration, U.S. racial politics, and "ocularcentrism" (131). Mimura looks at the "postmodern" work of Lise Yasui, and Janice Tanaka, as well as Rea Tajiri's *History and Memory* (1991), a film that

draws praise and attention from a number of the essays in this book. Creef's essay provides a careful reading of Steven Okazaki's *Days of Waiting* (National Asian American Telecommunications Association, 1988), with an eye towards reading the particular tropes of gender and spectatorship within the film's own version of trauma, repression, and recuperation.

Part VI, "Exploring Form" acts as a forum for experimental filmmakers such as Valerie Soe and Trinh T. Minh-ha to discuss their sources of inspiration and techniques of filmmaking. This section also includes an essay by Jun Xing on the experimental techniques of Trinh, Soe, and Shu Lea Cheang, as well as Tajiri, Yasui, and Tanaka. Eve Oishi concentrates on films by Asian American queer artists who might be thought of as "bad": "directly confrontational, politically charged, and assertive in ways that took apart the common image of Asians and Asian Americans as the quiet, conservative, 'model minority'" (224).

The final section of the book also presents the voices of politically conscious Asian American filmmakers such as Renee Tajima-Peña and Celine Salazar Parreñas. In "No Mo Po Mo and Other Tales of the Road," Renee Tajima-Peña decries the jargon of cultural theory and calls for Asian American filmmaking to "return to the collective spirit of engagement among artists, scholars, and activists, unfettered by the parochialism of overspecialization" (260). Parreñas, on the other hand, sees her filmmaking as a "certain form of social action, practice, and theory" (270–71) and expresses a hope "to theorize an analytics of speaking for a community rather than simply speak for a community" (270). The final two essays in the book focus on the transnational aspects of film production and distribution as well as subject matter. Gina Marchetti's analysis of Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* (Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1993) and Julian Stringer's analysis of three Hong Kong films—*An Autumn Tale* (D&B Films, 1987), *Full Moon in New York* (Stanley Kwan, 1989), and *Rumble in the Bronx* (New Line Cinema, 1995)—makes one particularly aware of the permeability of "Asian American" and "Asian" film practices.

Though occasionally repetitive, *Countervisions* represents well the richness and depth of current scholarship on Asian American film and video. Its essays illuminate how cinematic practices involve complex representational, affective, and political dimensions; the collection makes especially clear how we might understand the distinctive emotional and sensational effects that film engages. Cynthia Liu muses on the considerable pleasures of the film image, and suggests that we try to "understand the nature of that pleasure before we dismiss it as delusional, co-opted, or mediated" (43); and Kent Ono describes the power of film to transport the spectator into another world, eliciting "the desire for a place,

space and time *to be*, for reconciliation with a past elsewhere, and for a metaphorically empowered community in the United States” (138). Such insights—most clearly manifested in the movies—help us understand many other incarnations of Asian American cultural practice as well.

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