

BUILDING AN ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT

"...Uncovering the intersections, refusing to have our communities aggregated into neat racial packages, airing our dirty laundry, diverging from (sometimes self-) prescribed monolithic identities and disrupting the vast erasures of our history across the diaspora is a start to re/building Asian America."

-Alison Roh Park, 2016

ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINISM IS A WORLD-BUILDING PROJECT.





The beauty of the Asian American feminist movement is that we can continue to shape and evolve it. We can (and must) constantly reflect upon and refine a political agenda that works for all of us. In the spirit of producing different spaces and stories and also stronger coalitions, we look forward to connecting and building community with you to produce new ideas and better worlds.

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"A COLLECTIVE IS WHAT DOES NOT STAND STILL BUT CREATES AND IS CREATED BY MOVEMENT...A MOVEMENT COMES INTO EXISTENCE TO TRANSFORM WHAT IS IN EXISTENCE." - SARA AHMED

FIRST TIMES

EXCERPTS FROM ASIANAMFEMINISM.ORG/STORIES

SO HAPPY TOGETHER

MIMI ZHU

what does it mean to be happy together?

I have become so much better at seeking love, at recognizing it in its truest forms. But a platonic love that nourishes, a familial love that is chosen, a different kind of love...

I have found love in feeding my friends, in tender moments that come without expectation and explanation, in experiencing the world together and sharing our pain with one another.

...I started to allow the phrase "happy together" to roll around my head like a pearl. I repeated it over and over again, redefining and re-understanding. I felt comfort in the fact that we were all reflecting, sharing a moment of vulnerability, embracing and being proud of our queerness.

Our own versions of happy together turned into a shared comfort, a moment of union. We were now together,

and happy.

so far from what I thought it meant the first time,

and so precious the second time around.

I'M THE MAP

BEATRIZ KAYE

IV.
my Body is the Map in dora the explorer's purple backpack

It's just that she only speaks my grandfather's native tongue

Pangasinan

with too many syllables welled up in my throat

she keeps speaking to me but i don't speak her language anymore,
so i just started singing

i'm the map, i'm the map, i'm the fucking map

BIRTH

IONA TAN



THEY RIPPED HER OPEN
WE BOTH SUFFERED

Read the full series online. Our digital storytelling series brings the breadth and depths of our own lived experiences, conditions, and historical contexts towards imagining political possibilities of what we can collectively accomplish together.



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A DEFINITION:

WE DEFINE ASIAN/AMERICAN FEMINISM AS AN EVER-EVOLVING MODE OF KNOWLEDGE, POLITICS, AND PRACTICE AND APPROACH TO SOCIAL JUSTICE.

Drawing from the 1977 Combahee River Collective Statement, a document written by a collective of Black socialist feminists, we believe that the “personal is political.” Our politics are grounded in our experiences as Asian/Americans.

We seek to address the multi-dimensional ways with which the Asian/American community, particularly women, queer, and/or trans and gender-nonconforming people, confront systems of power. Transnational cultural, economic, and geopolitical configurations of racism, capitalism, and colonialism position us differently in relation to each other and to other communities of color.

We are indebted to ways Black feminist thought, Third World feminist movements in the late 60s and 70s, and Women of Color feminism enable us to think and act critically through our own positionalities to address how systems of global racial capitalism, anti-Black racism, settler colonialism, and xenophobia impact our communities. We are both vulnerable and complicit within these structures, and Asian/American feminism is our ongoing orientation and reorientation towards a politics that can account for and address the perpetuated historical legacies of racialized, gendered, and colonial violence.

(RE)BUILDING, (RE)WRITING:

Our goal in creating a working definition of Asian American feminism and a manifesto was to begin collectively identifying the key foundations, stakes, values, and issues for an Asian American feminist movement. This text brings together content and lessons learned from activists, academics, writers, community leaders, and also you.

We sent out a call to our communities to help us draft a manifesto, and through the process of writing and building together, we learned just how tricky and complex the politics of language could be. Part of writing a definition and manifesto is to develop a shared language to communicate collective politics...

...yet language often remains elusive, nonexistent, imprecise, and incomplete.

Comments, reflections, and ideas from different people demonstrated the plurality and multiplicity of ‘Asian American feminism’ and interrogated ‘Asian American’ as a category for identification, association, and claims given differential scales of racial and colonial violence. We also received various snippets from the long and varied history of Asian and Asian American women organizing for their own survival and to improve cultural, social, political, and economic aspects of livelihood. Resistance often doesn’t look like big and grand gestures, but most often in small, accumulated moments of refusal and vulnerability.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

We are grateful to the leadership, scholarship, and activism of Marion Aguas, AC Dumlao, Jenn Fang, Connie Cho, Samantha Seid, Annie Tan, Shahana Hanif, Adrienne Favis, Vivian Truong, Julia Yang-Winkenbach, Caitlin Ho, Eunice Ok, Annie Pei, Alison Roh Park, Thahitun Mariam, and Diane Wong and also the many people who contributed to the initial call to edit to the definition and manifesto document.

5 BOOKS ON HISTORY

- 1 Karen Ishizuka (2016) *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties.*
- 2 J. Kehaulani Kauanui (2008) *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism And The Politics Of Sovereignty And Indigeneity*
- 3 Mae Ngai. (2014) *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*
- 4 Ellen Wu (2013) *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority.*
- 5 Helen Zia (2000) *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of An American People*

5 NOVELS:

- 1 Mia Alvar (2015) *In the Country: Stories*
- 2 Thi Bui (2016) *The Best We Could Do*
- 3 Tanwi Nandini Islam (2015) *Bright Lines*
- 4 Lisa Ko (2017) *The Leavers*
- 5 Min Jin Lee (2017) *Pachinko*



Image from Thi Bui, *The Best We Could Do* via NBC News

5 BOOKS OF POETRY:

- 1 Fatimah Asghar (2018) *If They Come For Us*
- 2 Theresa Hak Young Cha (1982) *Dictee*
- 3 Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner (2017) *Iep Jaltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*
- 4 Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-samarasinha (2015) *Bodymap*
- 5 Nayyirah Waheed (2015) *Salt*



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WHY ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINISM?

In the groundswell of feminist resistance that launched the Women's March and Strike in January 2017, we have yet again seen the exclusion and tokenization of women of color. It became imperative to revive Asian American feminism and activism to ensure political resistance also adequately represented the needs of Asian American women and girls and gender non-binary people.

WE URGENTLY NEED INTERSECTIONAL COALITIONS THAT MOVE AWAY FROM POLITICS THAT CRY OUT 'ME FIRST.'

Recently, we've seen anti-immigration reforms, the dismantling of reproductive rights, increased U.S. militarization at home and abroad, and environmental policies that disproportionately target poor people of color and reductions to federal land protections that impact Native sovereignty. The attacks on the connected issues of gender equity, justice for poor and working class people, justice for queer and trans people, the Movement for Black Lives, and immigrant justice demonstrate a need for movements that don't rely on divide and conquer tactics.

This present moment is not exceptional, but rather an extension of a longer national history built on Native dispossession, Black enslavement, and racialized exclusion and segregation.

WE BRING OUR HISTORIES TO FEMINISM.

An Asian American feminist movement allows us to draw upon our own lived experiences, material conditions, and historical contexts to move beyond narrow bids for national political and economic inclusion and instead push towards other pathways for justice.

"I came into feminism through the ancestral histories and life stories that my 94-year-old 奶奶 (paternal grandmother) has told me over the years. They always featured women as healers, herbalists, mystics, guides, prophets, and warriors. My 奶奶 is a Chinese medicine practitioner; she herself was part of a feminist collective in her hutong in Shanghai, China that brought together three generations of women to organize around gender oppression in China." - Diane Wong

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ILLUSTRATION BY SHANTI BASU
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WHO WE ARE:

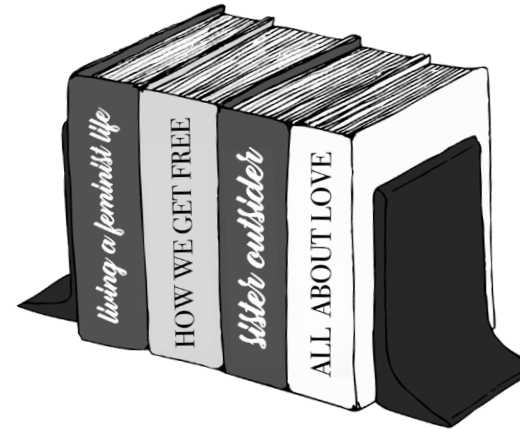
We engage in intersectional feminist politics grounded within our communities, including those whose backgrounds encompass East, Southeast, and South Asian, Pacific Islander, multi-ethnic and diasporic Asian identities. Through public events and resources, we seek to provide spaces for identity exploration, political education, community building, and advocacy.

OUR USES OF 'WE' IMAGINE A POLITICAL POSSIBILITY OF WHAT AN ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT MIGHT BE ABLE TO COLLECTIVELY ACCOMPLISH TOGETHER.

In defining a collective, the distinctions of who is included in 'we' and 'us' remain slippery. Within our communities, there are often inequalities of power between groups. Differences within 'Asian America' across class, color, gender, sexuality, religion, immigration status and history, and national origin produce asymmetrical and uneven histories and encounters with state violence. Additionally, calls for community might strategically offer unity yet conflate the differentiated effects of racialization and colonization under one umbrella.

RATHER THAN DEMAND INCLUSION INTO MAINSTREAM FEMINISM, ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINISM OFFERS A PLATFORM FOR SHARING NARRATIVES THAT SPEAK TO DIFFERENT INTERSECTIONS OF HISTORIES & EXPERIENCES.

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OUR BOOK SHELF

10 BOOKS ON FEMINIST THOUGHT AND PRACTICE:

- 1 Sara Ahmed (2017) *Living a Feminist Life*
- 2 Grace Lee Boggs (2011) *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism For The 21st Century*
- 3 Angela Davis (2016) *Freedom Is A Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, & the Foundations Of A Movement*
- 4 bell hooks (2018) *All About Love: New Visions*
- 5 Audre Lorde (1984) *Sister Outsider*
- 6 Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*
- 7 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*
- 8 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed. (2017) *How We Get Free: Black Feminism & the Combahee River Collective.*
- 9 Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds (1983) *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color.*
- 10 Deepa Iyer (2017) *We Too Sing America: South Asian, Arab, Muslim, & Sikh Immigrants Shape Our Multiracial Future*

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ILLUSTRATION BY AENEA LIANG



*"my chest hurts from folding over
my back hurts from shrinking smaller
are you hitting on me?
are you hitting on me?
or are you going to hit me?"*

- Vivek Shraya, I'm Afraid of Men (excerpt)

"My feminism's future is not "female," it exists beyond the Western patriarchal binary."

- AC Dumlao

WE ARE COMMITTED TO TAKING DOWN SEXISM AND PATRIARCHY.

One way we do so is by deconstructing toxic masculinity, specifically the ways in which Asian American men reaffirm their masculinity by conflating masculinity with misogyny (see Jenn Fang, 2014). We support men in our communities working to re-envision Asian American masculinity through anti-racist, womanist, and queer frameworks (see Mark Tseng-Putterman, When Asian Emasculation Meets Misogyny).

WE ARE COMMITTED TO CENTERING QUEER, TRANS, AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING ASIAN AMERICANS.

Historically and currently, queer women of color have spearheaded our movements and continue to be on the frontlines of political activism all while facing discrimination and violence from the state and our own communities. Asian American feminism expands beyond cis, heteronormative frameworks and we aim to center queerness in this movement. Queering Asian American feminism fundamentally changes and informs how we approach feminist thought and practice and how we think about key frameworks like relating to each other, intimacy, and family.

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COMMITMENTS



"Non-Black people of color, when offered a choice between solidarity with Black people and more access to whiteness, choose the latter virtually every time."

- Mia McKenzie (In The Solidarity Struggle)



WE ARE COMMITTED TO ACTIVELY DISMANTLING STRUCTURES OF ANTI-BLACKNESS AND SETTLER COLONIALISM UPON WHICH THE NATION-STATE AND NOTIONS OF HUMANITY ARE FOUNDED.

This means committing to a politics that turns away from whiteness.

Being cast as 'perpetual foreigners' may have fueled a desire for some Asian immigrants to survive by seeking ways to assimilate in order to have access to the same resources and privileges as those with the most economic and political power – wealthy, white Americans. Further, because U.S. citizenship has historically been cast as the domain of "free white persons," early cases where Asian Americans sought access to citizenship, such as *Takao Ozawa vs US* (1922) and *US v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), depended on strategies that rely on a claims towards whiteness and a repudiation of blackness.

This is a refusal to be incorporated into projects of whiteness that produces barometers of inclusion and exclusion.

If Asian American is going to be our call to community, then we must center those in our communities who experience the most vulnerability under current regimes of the state. This includes Indigenous and Black Asians, queer and trans folks, and low-income Asian groups. For non-Black and non-Indigenous Asian people, we have to acknowledge that our own experiences of racism and of oppression are different from anti-Black racism and Indigenous disenfranchisement.

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WE ARE COMMITTED TO TRANSNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS THAT ADDRESS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES OF RACISM, SEXISM, AND COLONIALISM.

Our racialization as Asian Americans is constituted internationally through conditions of empire. Such frames help us better address the needs of transnational adoptees and multiracial and multiethnic Asian Americans. Transnational frameworks also allow us to pursue an intergenerational politics and intimate forms of activism that build with our families, our parents, and our elders. Drawing from Indigenous feminist scholarship, what are the practices that better enable us to ethically relate to our families and communities, by thinking about 'place' as a network of complex, multidimensional, and intimate relationships?

Asian American feminism offers a way to navigate and challenge our desires and yearnings to connect to ideas of 'home' or feel 'at home' both in the U.S. and overseas. U.S. imperialism abroad in Asia and the Pacific through war, militarism, occupation, and capital expansion has created conditions of forced migration, the normalization of sexual violence against Asian women, and exploitative labor conditions. We must address the fact that the technological tools we rely upon—the very material possibilities for our movement building—are primarily produced by factory workers in East, Southeast, and South Asia where young women make up a high proportion of factory workers. The expansive industrial economy exploits the age, gender, and migration statuses of factory workers, who work long production shifts and whose livelihoods are constricted by economic and geographic immobility.

"While the majority of the energy has been spent on disputing the "perpetual foreigner" myth and declaring belongingness to the US, it is also important to remember the transnational commitments of the communities. As migration becomes much more transitory and politically charged, Asian-American politics should be working on opening borders instead of closing off the existing, already narrowly-defined citizenship."
- Wen Liu

"To me, being an immigrant daughter means my feminism is intimately tied to class oppression and anti-capitalism." - Senti Sojwal

WE ARE COMMITTED TO A POLITICS OF CLASS TO TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION WAYS RACIAL FORMATION IS EMBEDDED IN CAPITALISM.

Class is at the crux of Asian racialization and links across issues such as immigration, labor, access to healthcare, gender and sexual violence and also produces dynamics of inequality between different Asian groups. We also recognize the more precarious forms of labor, such as Asian immigrant women in service industries and domestic workers. We support sex workers rights. Further, both Asian Americanness and feminism tends to be primarily defined by academic and professional voices thus producing top-down political models. Our hope is that through community-based work, we will begin to create further networks of accountability in both our writing and practice.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO THE ACTIVE DISMANTLING OF THE "MODEL MINORITY MYTH".

State sponsored programs for immigrant economic assimilation (see Tamara Nopper's "The Myth of Imported Success") as well as restrictive and selective immigration and visa policies along the lines of high/low-skilled labor contribute to class divisions in migration pattern, as well as to the racialized narrative that positions some Asian American groups as a model of success. The model minority myth serves as a disciplinary tool of anti-Black racism and also produces narratives of 'good' and 'deserving' versus 'bad' and 'undeserving' immigrants (Jung 2014). To undo this myth, we must tackle ways we have internalized this myth as a protective buffer against the stigma of being seen as forever foreign outsiders. We must refuse to be used as a wedge in racial politics and as a tool to disenfranchise other communities of color, such as in disputes over affirmative action that use Asian Americans to strip away educational access.

"Different threads of migration to the US impacted how quickly communities assimilated, grew, prospered, and did well for themselves... For Bangladeshis in NYC, our community is still very working class, and thus the feminist issues I must address...are very different from other Asian-American feminists' struggles." - Tahitun Mariam