Asian American Studies is a multidisciplinary field of study that grapples with pressing questions of identity, belonging, and power from the perspectives of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Asian/Pacific diasporic histories, communities, and cultures. Since its emergence out of the 1960s-1970s US social movements, Asian American Studies has aimed to create knowledge that is relevant and useful for solving big problems of inequity and injustice. Scholars, practitioners, and students approach these puzzles from a variety of disciplinary perspectives spanning the arts, humanities, and social and behavioral sciences. Indiana University Bloomington's Asian American Studies program (AAST), established in 2007, maintains this vision through our research, creative activity, teaching, and programming with the goal of generating novel possibilities for the globalizing world of the 21st century.
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Dear Friends of IUB Asian American Studies,

It’s the best time of the year in Bloomington—May! The semester wraps up, seniors celebrate graduation, and bursts of colorful flowers (and pollen) surround us. Everyone’s mood lightens as days lengthen temperatures warm. Loveliness everywhere.

May is also an ideal moment to pause and look back on all that our program has accomplished over the past year. I’m pleased to report that 2018–2019 has been a period of GROWTH for Asian American Studies. We remain a small program overall, but we’ve been able to expand our reach in modest but significant ways.

On the curriculum front, AAST rolled out *two* new courses in Spring 2019. One was “Asian American Sexualities,” an upper-division course taught by our newest faculty affiliate Dr. Cynthia Wu, Associate Professor jointly appointed in Gender Studies and Asian American Studies. From the course description: “How do people of Asian descent in North America love? With whom do they share familial, sexual, and romantic intimacies? Some bonds contribute to well-being, while others leave something to be desired, and many do both at the same time. Through fiction, film, and first-person testimony, this course will address the complexities of Asian American sexualities in the context of immigration law, civil rights movements, women of color feminism, and queer activism.” This course is an invigorating addition to our curriculum, and one that we are psyched to add to our regular rotation.
The other AAST course that debuted in Spring 2019 was “Contemporary Issues in Asian-American Studies: Asian American and Pacific Islander Communities and Social Change,” an experimental class team-taught by Melanie Castillo-Cullather, director of IUB’s Asian Culture Center, and Roy Chan, Ph.D. candidate in Education Policy Studies in IUB’s School of Education. Thanks to funding from the College of Arts and Sciences, 23 IU undergrads had the unique opportunity to explore historical, political, social, educational, and economic trends shaping contemporary Asian American and Pacific Islander identities, families, and communities. This deep-dive included not only conventional classroom work but a week-long field study component to Chicago! In April, students took part in the Asian Culture Center’s (ACC) and Community Education Program’s “DestinAsian” trip where they visited multiple Asian American historical sites, neighborhoods, and community organizations throughout the Windy City. This approach distilled the guiding spirit of Ethnic Studies—founded 50 years ago—by connecting “theory” to on-the-ground, real-world community experiences. Crossing our fingers that AAST will be able to re-up this course again in the near future! Stay tuned.

Meanwhile, AAST continued to offer two courses from our regular line-up, both taught by our stalwart lecturer Lisa Kwong (MFA, Indiana University). A101, Introduction to Asian American Studies, surveys Asian American history in the US, current events, and representations in literature and popular media. A200, Asian American Literature, is a deep-dive a wide range of work by Asian American writers, artists, and scholars from a variety of backgrounds. Students sample a smorgasbord of genres: short stories, novels, poetry, memoir, film, TV, comics, visual art, photography, music, and dance. Both A101 and A200 are popular courses and continue to fill each semester.

On the programming front, we kicked off the 2018-2019 academic year with a welcome back party jointly hosted with the Center for Research on Race and Ethnicity in Society (CRRES) and the other Program in Race, Migration, and Indigeneity (RMI) units (Latino Studies and Native American Indigenous Studies).
AAST celebrated the publication of three new books by friends of the program during the fall semester. In September, we organized a Double Book Release Celebration in September to cheer Dr. Cynthia Wu’s *Sticky Rice: A Politics of Intraracial Desire* (Temple University Press, 2018) and Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort, a member of AAST’s Graduate Advisory Board and a PhD student Gender Studies) *Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your Faith* (Fortress Press, 2018).

Both authors gave a lovely reading with a lively Q&A and reception following. In October, AAST partnered with the Asian Culture Center to showcase the launch of local writer Debra Kang Dean’s *Totem America*, a story of loss that is informed by her upbringing in Hawai‘i as the grandchild of immigrants from the Far East. Totem America has been described by Filipinx American poet Eugene Gloria as “a necessary work for our survival in these strange times,” one that “testifies to our humanity.” (Read on in the newsletter for a sneak peek!)

For the symposium, AAST was delighted to co-sponsor Professor Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia (IUB Class of 1996), Pennsylvania State University School of Law, Samuel Weiss Faculty Scholar, Clinical Professor of Law, and Director of the Center for Immigrants’ Rights Clinic. In her highly informative session, “Building Community Through Compassion Around Immigration Policy,” Professor Wadhia spoke to us about the current state of hot topics in immigration law and policy including the travel ban, DACA, and border enforcement, her work with the Center for Immigrant Rights Clinic, and how Hoosiers can help individuals and families impacted by ongoing immigration issues.

In October 2018 AAST celebrated the 20th Anniversary of Indiana University’s Asian Culture Center (ACC). ACC unequivocally the heartbeat of the Asian/Pacific/American community—not only on campus but in the Bloomington community more generally—and we were absolutely thrilled to join in the festivities: welcome-back dinner, symposium, and banquet. Our own Lisa Kwong also curated a special poetry reading “An Evening with Asian American Writers,” at the Bishop, with a terrific lineup: Soleil David, Debra Kang Dean, Rachel Ronquillo Gray, JL Kato, Anni Liu, Nancy Chen Long, Hiromi Yoshida. Alumni from all over came back to IU and shared their amazing stories during the 20th Anniversary events—we were happy to connect with them!

Fall continued with two additional community-building events. The AAST Graduate Advisory Board hosted a meet and greet over snacks with Dr. Cynthia Wu in November to learn more about her and her work. We wrapped up the semester with our holiday open house tradition. Every December, the Program in Race, Migration, and Indigeneity units co-host a luncheon. This year, for the first time, we held the event at the First Nations Educational and Cultural Center (FNECC)—a warm and inviting space. Thanks to FNECC for their hospitality!
Our programming momentum continued through Spring 2019 with more exciting events. February saw our annual Asian American Studies research symposium—a lovely showcase of innovative work by IUB faculty and students. This year’s theme, selected by the AAST Graduate Advisory Board, was “Navigating through Intersections: Organizing and Advancing Asian American Issues and Identity”: Contemporary Asian American issues and identity are multifaceted and complex. This symposium examines the ways in which Asian Americans organize towards social equity and complicate ever-fluid constructions of racial identities under existing power structures. Presenters will explore Asian American positionality in the current racial landscape. Our presenters were Dr. Dina Okamoto (Professor, Sociology and Director, CRRES), Ben Hartman (PhD student Sociology, and Monica Heilman (PhD student, Sociology). Stephanie Kung (PhD student, English) served as moderator.

The keynote by political scientist Dr. Janelle Wong (University of Maryland, American Studies/Asian American Studies) tackled the complexities of current affirmative action controversy head-on. Dr. Wong discussed the rise of organized opposition to affirmative action and related issues, particularly by recent, relatively affluent Chinese Americans. Dr. Wong, a leading expert on race, immigration, and political mobilization, recently published Immigrants and American Civic Institutions (2006, University of Michigan Press), and the co-authored Asian American Political Participation: Emerging Constituents and their Political Identities (2011, Russell Sage Foundation), based on the first nationally representative survey of Asian Americans’ political attitudes and behavior. This groundbreaking study of Asian Americans was conducted in eight different languages with six different Asian national origin groups. We were particularly stoked to have her speak given her experience working closely with social service, labor, civil rights, and media organizations that serve the Asian American population.

On the heels of the symposium, the AAST Graduate Advisory Group launched the Asian American Studies reading group. This gathering is an interdisciplinary hub committed to critically engaging the cultures and histories of Asian Americans. To engage these interests, the reading group aims to map out the current critical conversations animating the field of Asian American Studies. Please contact us if you’re interested in getting involved!

In March, AAST co-sponsored the RMI panel “Transnational Asias in Indiana,” featuring a unique group of speakers engaged in research and creative activity on the experiences of local Asian/Americans. Dr. Himanee Gupta-Carlson, associate professor of Historical Studies at SUNY Empire State College, shared from her new book Muncie, India(na): Middletown and Asian America (Illinois, 2018). Asri Saraswati, Ph.D. candidate in the American Studies program at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, narrated a fascinating look at Budi Darma, an Indonesian scholar who wrote about his time studying in Bloomington in the 1970s. And two friends of AAST, IUB alumni Jenny Huang and Steven Johnson (Class of 2017), came back to campus to share from their multimedia project MIDDLE COUNTRY: Stories of Chinese American Hoosiers.
We capped off the 2018-2019 year with our annual Movement: Asian/Pacific America film series, presented as part of Indiana University’s annual Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebration in conjunction with the Asian Culture Center and IU Cinema’s Creative Collaborations Program. MOVEMENT grapples with themes of identity, belonging, and power from the perspectives of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Asian/Pacific diasporic directors, screenwriters, actors, and subjects. The series invites audiences to consider the multifaceted vibrancies and complexities of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Asian/Pacific diasporic individuals and communities. MOVEMENT evokes evolution and transformation—both within and beyond Asian/Pacific America.

This year’s lineup was really memorable. We kicked off with a visit by Cambodian American filmmaker Caylee So, who screened her short RUPTURE and her award-winning feature IN THE LIFE OF MUSIC. The film—in English and Khmer—tells a triptych of stories: three chapters, three generations, and three worlds indelibly transformed by the Khmer Rouge. It is an unforgettable exploration of love, war, and a family’s relationship to “Champa Battambang,” made famous by Sinn Sisamouth, the King of Cambodian music.

Next up was FOR IZZY, a narrative feature drama told in a documentary format and infused with elements of magical realism. Anna, a retired divorcee, and Dede, her lesbian daughter, move next door to Peter, a lonely widowed father to Laura, an adult with autism. Unexpected romance, friendship, and demons emerge as a result.

MOVEMENT concluded with Matangi / Maya / M.I.A. Drawn from a cache of personal videos from the past 22 years, this Sundance award-winning documentary is a startling profile of the critically acclaimed M.I.A., chronicling her remarkable journey from refugee to immigrant to global phenom. Matangi / Maya / M.I.A. provides unparalleled, intimate access to the artist in her battles with the music industry and mainstream media en route to becoming one of the most recognizable, outspoken, and provocative voices in music today.
Thank You!

A huge THANK YOU to our staff and many supporters and partners this year—all of whom were indispensable in helping to GROW Asian American Studies at IUB: Paula Cotner, Carol Glaze, Julia Mobley, Sydney-Paige Patterson, Chithra Vendantam, Lisa Kwong, Melanie Castillo-Cullather, Roy Chan, Kristen Murphy, Stacy Weida, AAST Graduate Advisory Board, Asian Culture Center, Center for Research on Race and Ethnicity in Society, College Arts and Humanities Institute, College of Arts and Sciences, First Nations Educational and Cultural Center IU Cinema, Latino Studies, Native American and Indigenous Studies, Program in Race, Migration, and Indigeneity.

We also appreciate all our contributors to this edition of the AAST newsletter. Read on for interesting and even surprising content!

A truly heartfelt thanks to IUB alumni who generously donated to the Asian American Studies IU Foundation account this year: Kim Wallihan, Ann K. Yang, Robert G. Yang, and Simon D. Wu, MD. Their contributions are already going far to help AAST GROW its reach. For the very first time, we are now able to expand our research/creative activity/travel grant competition to IUB graduate students beyond the College of Arts and Sciences to support their Asian American Studies-relevant work.

Finally, a fond farewell and good luck to our longtime fiscal officer Carol Glaze, who accepted a position as fiscal officer in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. Carol was much like the wizard behind the curtain for us—running things behind the scenes like making sure our courses got scheduled and our bills got paid. Much gratitude to Carol!

Looking forward to another year of GROWTH—hope to see old and new friends of AAST in 2019–2020!

Best wishes,
Ellen Wu
Director, IUB Asian American Studies
"BROKEN"

DEBRA KANG DEAN

Debra Kang Dean’s third and most recent full-length collection of poetry is Totem: America (Tiger Bark, 2018). Her poems have been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, and on the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day website. Her essays are included in the expanded edition of The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World and in Until Everything Is Continuous Again: American Poets on the Work of W. S. Merwin. She was born and raised in Hawai‘i and is on the faculty of Spalding University’s low-residency MFA in Writing Program.

Pressed by the skillet’s weight
the blue plate pitched from the drainer
and shattered. I picked up the pieces,
swept up fragments, saying,
“There, now, rest.” In that moment,
marking its fall, I was godly.

And yet who wouldn’t want instead
to have nourished by serving,
to have grown hot or cool, to frame
what it held? Steaming water streamed
over the plate, reddened my hands
as I rinsed then watched it, helpless,
fall . . . the way each year on the eve
of New Year’s day, a sorry quarrel
between one or another pair of brothers
abruptly brought the gathering
to a close, the women interposing
their worn bodies, saying,

“Let’s go home.” Every year,
some grievance surfaced,
something dark, ancestral.

Like the shattered pieces
of the plate, the family struck
against a floor that wanted give.

Come morning, my father,
having slept it off,
would return to himself
and tend his portion of earth
under a sunlit sky grown
clear, blue, and inviting.

In me, too, something is broken.
Here is the ground my hands work,
damp with my father’s sweat.
A NOTE FROM DEBRA KANG DEAN

Among the poems that comprise Totem: America, “Broken” has a unique history. It was commissioned for Reaching Out for Peace: Poetry for World Peace, 2005, an international anthology. As you might imagine, I was both surprised and honored when I received an invitation from a scholar in South Korea to contribute to this anthology. Included in it are poems by Robert Hass and Robert Pinsky, both former U.S. poets laureate, and Wole Solyinka, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. Each poem written in languages other than Korean was translated and written in hangul and appears in the anthology on a page facing the poem written in the author’s own hand. The holographs were subsequently exhibited at the Manhae Foundation, if I am remembering correctly, in Seoul. Manhae (1879–1944), it is worth noting, was a Buddhist monk, poet, and activist engaged in the struggle for Korean independence.

I wrote the poem from personal experience, but the vast silences of my childhood began to speak after I studied Asian American history because I had grown up in a family without shared stories, perhaps, in part, because I am bi-ethnic—my mother is Okinawan—and, in part, because I couldn’t communicate directly with my grandparents: I could neither understand nor speak their languages. What I learned from books is that my paternal grandfather was part of the First Wave of immigrants from East Asia; he and my grandmother, who later arrived as a picture bride, were among the 2,000 Koreans allowed to emigrate during a two-year window in the early twentieth century, when Japan occupied Korea.

Recent research has suggested that family trauma, by nature as well as nurture, is passed down from one generation to the next, and though my paternal grandparents remain outside the poem, their trauma is at the heart of my poem about the way the work of the hands can bring a measure of peace; for my father, it was working in the yard, and for me, it is working on the page. Often I may not understand the import of the images I am given when I begin a poem, but after thirty-three years of writing in earnest, I’ve come to trust them and hope that I have acquired the skill to do them justice.
The Asian Culture Center’s 20th Anniversary
Celebrating Its Storied Past and Continued Mission

Stephanie Nguyen

Stephanie Nguyen is a doctoral student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program. Her dissertation focuses on how Asian American Studies programs developed in the Midwest. She has served as the Asian American Association’s graduate advisor since 2014.

From October 11-13, 2018, the Asian Culture Center (ACC) celebrated the 20th Anniversary of its grand opening at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). IUB community members and alumni returned to campus for the two-day celebration that included a symposium and banquet. Opened on October 3, 1998 at the 807 E. 10th Street campus location, the ACC remains at the iconic yellow house to this day under the continued leadership of Melanie Castillo-Cullather, who was hired as the founding director of the cultural center.

The ACC’s 20th Anniversary celebrated both its storied past and continued mission to increase the presence of Asian Americans within American spaces and discourse. Beginning in 1990, students sustained the decade-long activism that established IUB’s and the Midwest’s first Asian American cultural center. For the 20th Anniversary, the ACC invited alumni such as Dr. Yuko Kurahashi, Dr. Jules Lin, and Joon Park to reflect on their advocacy efforts. On the first day of the ACC’s 20th Anniversary weekend, Dr. Kurahashi, 1996 IUB doctoral graduate and theater professor at Kent State University, presented on how she first introduced undergraduates to Asian American history and activism. As a doctoral student, she taught one of IUB’s very first Asian American Studies courses and, with an all-IUB Asian American cast, produced Velina Hasu Houston’s stage play Tea at the Monroe County library. Her contributions inspired undergraduates to create IUB Asian American cultural programming and advocate for a cultural center.
At the 20th Anniversary luncheon, Dr. Jules Lin, 1995 IUB graduate and Professor of Thoracic Surgery at the University of Michigan, delivered a keynote speech about how he, as the Asian American Association’s (AAA) 1993–1995 President, created IUB’s first Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month in 1994. Through the simple act of gathering for a meal, AAA collaborated with 12 different student groups to host the AAPI Heritage Month, aimed at dispelling campus stereotypes while raising awareness on Asian American issues. Alums such as Joon Park, 1998 IUB graduate and currently Chief Operating Officer of Chicago-based Alyeska Investment Group, acknowledged prior IUB graduates’ “little steps of courage” inspired him to draft a proposal requesting $50,000 to create the ACC. In his keynote address at the October 12th banquet, he credited 1990-1991 AAA President Mona Wu for igniting the student movement to create the ACC, and Dr. Lin creating the AAPI Heritage Month to challenge the university’s lack of Asian American programming.

As part of the ACC’s 20th Anniversary symposium, alumni Khai Yang and Dr. Paul Park also shared that much work is still needed to increase Asian American leadership within fields such as business and health. When discussing about the paucity of Asian Americans within corporate leadership, Yang, a IUB 1997 graduate and Director of Data & Analytics for Allstate Insurance, shared how her involvement with the Student Coalition—a multicultural student advocacy group that helped found the ACC—influenced her to assume work and service positions aimed towards racial justice. “I didn’t strive to be a leader,” Yang said, “But I found out I have to be a leader because that’s how things can be changed.” Based on his travels to Guatemala, Rwanda, and the Wampanoag Native American reservation, Dr. Park, a 2004 graduate and a director at Partners in Health, encouraged Asian Americans entering the health field to focus their talents to solve global health inequities. He credited his undergraduate leadership for his lifetime commitment to strengthening health initiatives within marginalized communities. Dr. Park founded the IUB’s Timmy Global Health and was AAA’s first Political Advocacy Chair (2002–2004), in which he spearheaded campaigns to include Asian Americans into the Hudson & Holland Scholars Program and establish IUB’s Asian American Studies Program.

Although the 20th Anniversary commemorates the ACC’s enduring impact on the IUB campus, it is an opportunity to reflect on the future goals for the center’s third decennial. The ACC symbolizes the persistence of student activists who wanted a designated space to educate both Asian Americans and non-Asians about Asian American issues. The ACC’s activist past continually reminds us—instructors and staff—that we must continue to educate incoming IUB students about pervasive issues such as implicit yet harmful Asian American stereotypes and inequities between ethnic Asian groups. The ACC’s 20th Anniversary symposium theme of “Building and Empowering Underrepresented Communities” also reminds us that a college education should be used to serve our surrounding communities. The ACC, along with many other co-curricular opportunities, can be spaces where students can apply classroom concepts to identify community issues, practice creative problem solving, and define their leadership styles.
On Thursday, March 23, 2019, the Program in Asian American Studies and the Center for Research on Race and Ethnicity in Society (CRRES) co-sponsored a panel discussion organized by the Program in Race, Migration, and Indigeneity (RMI) called “Transnational Asias in Indiana.” The speakers included Asri Saraswati, a doctoral candidate in American Studies at the University at Buffalo (SUNY); Jenny Huang and Steven Johnson, 2017 alumni of Indiana University; and Himanee Gupta-Carlson, an associate professor of Historical Studies at SUNY Empire State College.

The panel showcased original research on the Asian American and Asian diasporic presence in Indiana. The Midwest, in general, and Indiana, in particular, are often erroneously construed as spaces of homogeneous whiteness. Asian American populations, by extension, tend to be cast as largely West Coast phenomena. This panel intervened in these twinned misconceptions. Saraswati’s presentation focused on the life and work of Budi Darma, a Fulbright fellow at IU in the 1970s who went on to become one of Indonesia’s most well-known writers. A large number of Fulbright fellows during the Cold War were assigned to host institutions in the Midwest. Fulbright administrators liked the Midwest’s reputation as a region far from the “corrupting” influences on the coasts. A stint at one of these universities, it was believed, would present the truest form of American life to these international scholars, who the United States was trying very hard to impress in this form of soft diplomacy.

Huang and Johnson are the founders of a podcast called Middle Country, which features interviews with Indiana residents of Chinese descent. These stories can be found here: https://middlecountry.atavist.com/about. Some of the interview subjects include Liana Hong Zhou, the director of the Kinsey Institute Library and Special Collections at IU, and Elaine Wagner, a city councilperson in Columbus. Huang and Johnson debuted portions of their latest interview during their presentation. This one was of Kiwah Wu, who immigrated from Guangdong in the 1980s, and became a fixture in the Chinese American community in South Bend.

Gupta-Carlson presented from portions of her recent book, Muncie, India(na): Middletown and Asian America (Illinois, 2018). The Immigration Act of 1965 changed the demographics of the United States because of its lifting of national quotas. Large numbers of middle-class professionals from East Asia and South Asia arrived to fill labor needs, including those at universities. Ball State University, located in Muncie, was one such institution that recruited academics and researchers from Asia, changing the landscape of its local population.
The life of an international student in the U.S. is not easy. Language barriers, homesickness, lack of support groups, and cultural shock are among the few challenges that many international students have to face daily as we go to class. While many people quickly undermine these experiences as temporary ailments that would easily be cured when these visitors return to their countries, one international student at the IU Bloomington decided to document and explore the intricate feelings of being a foreigner in this college town. This student was Budi Darma, an Indonesian scholar who pursued an M.A. and a Ph.D. in the English Department.

Writing about Bloomington

After completing his studies at IU, Darma published a collection of short stories titled Orang-orang Bloomington (The Bloomington People) in Indonesia. There are eight stories in the anthology, written over the span of 1976 to 1979. He wrote the stories when he was on school breaks or while he was waiting for feedback from his dissertation committee. The stories are set in various places in Bloomington (some which still exist today), such as Tulip Tree Apartments, Marsh Supermarket, Fess Street, Campus View Road, the Indiana Memorial Union building, Nick’s English Hut, or other places that Darma came across.
BUDI DARMA CONT.

The Bloomington People tells about peculiar people who lived in Bloomington, often the elderly and the physically and mentally disabled. All of the stories are told from the perspective of a first-person narrator, usually a non-local or an international student, who is making an observation of the people in the town. The characters usually live a lonely life, carrying secret obsessions and easily irritated.

Some of the stories tell about how the narrators envy the well-knit families they saw or the American friends and neighbors who held parties without inviting them. Sad and lonely, the annoyed outsiders are driven to inconceivable actions, such as slashing people’s tires when they were partying next door, or leaving broken glass in the park where kids played, to make sure they would play elsewhere. At other times, it is the Bloomington people themselves who did surprising and inconceivable actions.

Darma’s stories reveal his dark, and at times funny, commentary about life in Midwestern America, its people and their behaviors, as well as its norms and laws. The names of the Bloomington people are set as the titles to each story, placing the townspeople front and center. Meanwhile, the narrators are left nameless throughout the book. The narrators are “mere” foreigners and observers who struggle to engage and adapt with their surroundings, slowly sinking into the background.

Different from the sad experiences of his characters, Darma was never tormented in IU. When I talked to him a few years back, he recalled his time in Bloomington fondly: “I enjoyed my time there. I was not lonely.” When I asked why he chose to convey Bloomington the way he did, Darma referred to E.M. Forster’s Passage to India, saying, “When life is so dull, you exaggerate!” Indeed, Darma often wrote during school breaks, when Bloomington turned desolate, and the anxieties of an international student intensified.

A Writer Was Born

The Bloomington People was published in Indonesia in 1980. It won the Southeast Asia Write Award, a prestigious award in the Southeast Asian region, granted by The Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). After this book, Darma went on to write a novel titled Olenka, which is also set in Bloomington.
After his time at IU, Darma returned to his profession as a tenured professor in a teacher’s college in Indonesia. He built a career as a prominent scholar, and he continues to write fiction up today. He has published numerous books, and he has become one of the canonical writers in Indonesian literature.

While Darma’s stories of Bloomington are not yet translated into English, non-Indonesian speakers can read his more recent short stories in an anthology titled Conversations (2015). Some of his writings are also included in the book New York After Midnight (1990), which gathers stories by Indonesian writers and scholars who have spent time in the U.S.

Bringing Darma’s Book to IU

The Bloomington People remains as a masterpiece that is continuously reprinted. I encountered the book during my undergraduate years and remained haunted by it, particularly when I (like many of Darma’s narrators) became an international student myself. As if looking for a source of strength, the book was in my luggage when I first arrived in the U.S.

Last March, I participated in a panel titled “Transnational Asias in Indiana” held at IU, an event organized by the Program in Race, Migration, and Indigeneity and co-sponsored by the Asian American Studies Program. As I talked about Budi Darma and The Bloomington People, I felt honored to be a part of the book’s journey. Four decades ago, Darma was at IU, writing some of his stories in his student apartment, and there I was, introducing his book to students in one of the university’s halls. It felt like a full circle. Darma was emailing me as I gave the talk, asking about how the trip to Bloomington went. Though he has not been back to IU in years, his love for this college town remains.

Many people undervalue international students’ views about the U.S. Since we are not local to the country, it is assumed that we do not know enough to offer a critical view about what is going on in America. Darma’s The Bloomington People shows otherwise. We can actually learn so much from the perspective of “temporary visitors.” It’s time to bring us to the table.
Last March, I took part in an Indiana University panel on Transnational Asians in Indiana. That topic forms an undercurrent of my book Muncie, India(na): Middletown and Asian America, though in the book I do not address it explicitly. Soto consider the question of what it has meant to be a transnational Asian in Indiana, I started to reflect on what transnationality might mean for people like me, people who are in their fifties and sixties and were born in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s to a particular generation of immigrant Indians. The image my mind conjured up was one of many moving parts. In this image, there is no real sense of permanence; there is just a continual sense of questioning about identity and place: who one is, where one belongs.

I am from Muncie, Indiana. I arrived there in 1966 at age 3 in the backseat of the Plymouth Valiant my dad was driving at the time. My mother was in the front seat holding my sister in her lap. In her belly was growing my other sister. We all grew up in Muncie and graduated in the 1980s from the same high school, a high school that fell victim to the population losses that resulted from deindustrialization and no longer exists even as an all-classes reunion is set to take place this summer. My sisters stayed in Indiana for college, but I left after high school. I was looking for something more than I felt Indiana could offer.
I left first for Northwestern University in suburban Chicago. Young adulthood took me via a journalism career through Boise, Idaho; Washington, DC; suburban St. Louis, Fort Worth, Texas, northeastern Pennsylvania, Kansas City, Seattle, and Honolulu. In Honolulu, in my mid-thirties, I left full-time journalism to go to graduate school. I planned in graduate school to study the legacies of British colonialism in India in shaping the racial positionality of Indians and other South Asians in the United States.

As my studies took shape, I began to look more closely at how a potential sense of racial inferiority that might have emerged through the colonizing experience might be driving Hindu Indians in the United States to support Hindutva—a fascist right-wing religious fundamentalist movement against Indian Muslims, Christians, and those of Dalit, non-caste, and other oppressed backgrounds.

I grew interested in Edward Said’s writings on culture and imperialism and intrigued by the concepts of discourse and power that emerged through the works of such theorists as Stuart Hall. I also got interested in transnationality, partly because in Hawai‘i and at the academic conferences that I began attending I was meeting Indians from everywhere, born in India, raised in London or Brunei, descendants of laborers sent to Fiji or Guyana, living in large diaspora communities in New York, Chicago, or Edison, New Jersey, from and of everywhere, it seemed, but Indiana. They spoke many languages, had traveled widely, and seemed sophisticated. They seemed transnational, in contrast to the rural bumpkin that was me.

Being Indian in Indiana – particularly in a town such as Muncie, which is known for its reputation for all-American typicality, thanks to the legacy of Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd and their Middletown studies – did not seem to mean being transnational as much as it meant being not-quite-American. The Lynds, as we know, excluded African Americans from their study as insignificant and chose Muncie as their site of study because it lacked a large foreign-born population. The portrayal of a white, largely Christian community divided into working- and middle-class camps came to be regarded as an epitome of a typical America that I argue in Muncie, India(na) persists into the 21st century. In this typical America, my mother wore a sari, often added a makeup dot of a bindi to her forehead, and prepared dal and roti for dinner several times a week. She and my father spoke Hindi to each other but communicated with us largely in English. They seemed to understand that there was a gap between them and their children, that they would be perpetual foreigners and that we would be Americans. Accordingly, they were lifelong vegetarians but took us to a now defunct burger joint known as Mr. Fifteen to ensure that we learned to eat hamburgers.

Despite these efforts, I felt somehow that I was Indian, but only when I was in Indiana. When we went to India – twice as a child in 1967 and 1973 respectively – I felt “Indianan.” That difference created confusion for me as a child and became a source of many fitting-in problems for me as a teen. I never thought of myself, however, as a transnational. I was here, in the United States, in Muncie. India was there, that place in Asia on the world map that hung on the wall in our family’s first house. Out of sight. Never entirely out of mind.
Some of this disconnect had to do with the conditions under which pre-1965 immigrants from India and other countries of Asia entered the United States, and particularly the middle part of America. Asian immigration to the U.S. historically was largely to the West Coast, with small pockets in various parts of the northeast and southeast in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although a handful of individuals of Indian or other Asian ancestry did pass through and settle in the Midwest, these instances were few and far between. Indiana, in general, was not regarded as much of an attractor of immigrants even from Europe, partly because of a lack of tillable land along with a reputation for being somewhat backward.[i]

Nationally, immigration laws grew increasingly restrictive toward Asians as anti-immigrant sentiment rose in the early twentieth century. Immigration from India pretty much ceased from about 1920 through 1950. After World War II, these restrictions started to ease and immigration from Asia picked up again. Still, much of the migration went to the coasts; very little arrived in the Midwest. My father, in personal writings, has observed that coming to Muncie in 1966 meant getting used to living in a community without fellow Indians. My parents had met many international students and individuals who had traveled to India as graduate students at the University of Iowa and had interacted with a number of young Indian couples in Cleveland where they had lived for about eighteen months before coming to Muncie. At the time that they came to Muncie, Ball State had just undergone a shift from being primarily a teachers’ college to a research university. Ball State itself had always preferred to hire faculty from Indiana. The transition forced them to look outside the state, the Midwest, and increasingly abroad.[ii] This was the situation that my family moved into.

As I entered adulthood, I became interested in exploring my roots, like many college-aged individuals. I began interacting with Indians on my suburban Chicago college campus, going to Devon Avenue for Indian food, and following news about the home country - was it the home country? I remember waking up on a fall morning in 1984 during my senior year of college, to a radio report on WLS that the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, had been assassinated. A surge of horror shot through me, and later that day at lunch as friends of mine began talking about her not-so-good record of human rights, I burst into tears. It seemed as if it were a moment for national mourning, and I wanted to be a part of that moment.

I made my first trip to India as an adult in 1992, with my mother. We traveled for five weeks in Delhi, Allahabad, Baroda, down to Kerala, and up through Ahmedabad, where I gathered material for my first international story, a feature on the Self-Employed Women’s Association or SEWA, with my mother serving as my interpreter. During this trip to India, memories of the Ramayana story were often rekindled. I remembered the mythological tale of the hero-god Ram being told as a bedtime story to me and my sisters, sometimes in Muncie and sometimes in India, where we had lived from 1973-74. In this story, Ram and his brother Lakshman are sent into an exile into the forest with Ram's wife Sita. Sita is kidnapped by a 10-headed demon known as Ravana. Ram and Lakshman ultimately slay Ravana, with help of the monkey Hanuman who sets the kingdom of Lanka on fire with his massively curled tail. The Ram story had re-emerged in India in the 1980s as a television series that drew a mass following and ignited a desire to see the story less as myth and more as historical truth. The movement known as Hindutva also had begun to rekindle itself in the wake of Indira Gandhi’s murder by her Sikh bodyguards and by the early 1990s was evolving into a strong political movement bent on making India a Hindu-first state. Their symbol of Hindu pride was a reinvented angry militant Ram, whose birthplace in Ayodhya was said to have been despoiled by the construction in 1528 of a mosque.


[ii]Anthony O. Edmonds and E. Bruce Geelhoed, Ball State University: An Interpretative History (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001.)
GROWING UP INDIA(NA) CONT.

I spent about three months traveling in 1992 in India, Japan, Hong Kong, and Chile, where my partner at the time had come from. After my return, I wrote several stories about India, including one about the mosque in Ayodhya, which was known as the Babri Masjid (the mosque of the Mughal emperor Babar) that Hindu fundamentalists had claimed as Ramjanmabhoomi, the birthplace of Ram. A couple of weeks after my stories ran, my partner looked up from the paper.

“You know, that town that’s known as Ram’s birthplace,” he began.

“Yes?”

“They tore the mosque down.”

The same sense of horror that I remembered from 1984 surged through me, as I took in the news. I couldn’t understand how Hindus, whom I had perceived as an isolated minority in the U.S., sometimes harassed for worship of deities, wearing of bindis, and protection of cows, could be so hostile to another minority group. I decided I needed to learn more about this movement and left my position as a Seattle Times staff writer to go to graduate school.

I found my moorings in graduate school in diaspora and transnational studies. But I still didn’t see myself as a transnational subject. I lacked – and still lack – the cosmopolitan ease of moving across nations, languages, customs, and cultures. I do not routinely make international calls or even fly out of the U.S. very much. Furthermore, despite having lived in many parts of the United States, the Indiana twang in my speech has never entirely left me. As much as I might try, I seem like an American, a provincial American.

Is that a bad thing?

In 1997, I attended a talk given by Hawaiian educational philosopher Manulani Ali’uli Meyer. Meyer at the time was completing her doctorate at Harvard and was beginning to articulate her sense of a Hawaiian epistemology, or a way of knowing.[i] She was creating this epistemology for her people as a part of a Native Hawaiian nation building project. But, as she contended in this talk, the idea wasn’t exclusive to one nation/one people. It was transportable. To illustrate, she had us close our eyes and massage the hands of the person sitting next to us. While doing so, we were to let our minds relax into a scene of the past.

My mind went to Muncie, a transnational Muncie, where my mother and other aunties never stopped wearing their saris; where a plane trip to India required stops in New York, London, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Beirut, Cairo, Karachi, and finally Delhi; where a phone call between Muncie and Delhi required the help of an operator and would cost $17 a minute to communicate across oceans of static; where a plumber in 1980 at the height of the Tehran hostage crisis refused to do repairs for my parents because he believed they were Iranian. In this sense, the typical America that Muncie embodied was always an India just as India always was a little bit of Muncie, by virtue of the human alliances and family networks that had enabled flows of capital and labor to bind in a speck of a way two distant places and peoples together.

In Muncie, India(na), I recount a riddle my uncle told me in 1967, when I was a child visiting India for the first time:

A ship left Bombay for USA. What was the name of the captain.

What? I would respond.

My uncle would giggle. What was the name of the captain.

In the riddle emerges a story of ships carrying Indians out of their homeland and spreading them through the world, with desired destination being USA.
According to Meyer, the scene that our imaginations conjured was our epistemology. I have to admit that at first this was not particularly pleasant. I had hoped for something more glamorous. Couldn’t my epistemology be, say, a street scene in Delhi, or Devon Avenue in Chicago? But alas. It was Muncie, a Muncie where an Indian community was always present. “What Indian community?”

Even today, those three words boom through my head, creating a surge of uncertainty. As I note in Muncie, India(na), they came in 2003 from one of the Ball State faculty members who help start the Center for Middletown Studies. The center was established in 1981 in honor of the Middletownstudies and the legacy they established, a legacy as noted earlier views America as typically white and Christian. “What Indian community?” illustrates how.

For many months, the comment bothered me. How could one not know there was an Indian community in Muncie? I had grown up in it. I had watched it expand from our family to several. I had seen the formation of a community organization and had watched festivals like Diwali migrate out of private homes and into public spaces. But this individual was not the only one who could not see the Indian community. Friends, new acquaintances, even members of the community itself questioned its existence.

In a sense, this blindness reinforced the powerful dominance of the racialized hierarchies of American life. As I started to write to show people the existence of an Indian – or rather South Asian community because Muncie’s community of 79 in 2003 included Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and Nepalis – it became apparent that the community itself did have the character of transnationality as many moving parts. There were individuals who had lived in England, Germany, Kenya, Uganda, and various provinces of Canada before finding their way into the United States, and ultimately making Muncie their home. There were commonalities of class and caste but wide variations in first-language practices, locales in India from which they had come, and religious practices.

As I asked what brought them together as a community, many suggested commonalities in appearance, familiarity with India’s popular films and music, and shared affinities for certain foods. As I delved deeper, I found also a common chord of loneliness and loss, a loss that I try to capture in our family story of a lost-then found-then lost again suitcase, a loss that cannot be easily explained. It is a sense of loss that I sometimes feel now, no longer as a resident of Indiana but as a professor in a rural part of New York, where I have a good life but still wonder what it would like to have deep community roots. To know who one was, to know where one belonged. Such is the tempo by which transnational Asians move through life, in Indiana and beyond.
CAYLEE SO
The Compassionate Voice We All Need to Hear
INTERVIEWED BY: HALEY SEMIAN

Caylee So: a filmmaker, a storyteller extraordinaire, a Cambodian-American, and an overall badass human being. Caylee was born in a refugee camp in 1981, just a couple years after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. Her parents were of the many Cambodians fleeing a country plagued with a genocide that took an upward of 2 million lives, making it one of the deadliest mass killings of the 20th century. Three years later, her family immigrated to Northern Virginia where she would be raised. After high school, she was eager to see more of the world and saw joining the US Army as a way to do it. While on duty, she was entranced by a film that made her forget she was at war. As she began understanding more of the roles in film, she decided to delve in and never looked back.

In her debut feature film In the Life of Music, Caylee provides a look into Cambodia before, during, and after the war. The film acknowledges the hardships of Cambodia’s past while also showing that there’s more to the Cambodian people than their trauma. There’s rich culture, deep love, great music, and an exploration of one’s identity about what it means to have Cambodian roots.

We were lucky to ask Caylee some questions that discuss her unique filmic voice, her connectedness to her Cambodian heritage, and her latest film In the Life of Music.
Haley Semian: What were your first steps in becoming a filmmaker?

Caylee So: When I was in 7th grade I signed up for a theatre class even though the idea of being on stage frightened me to no end. Coincidentally, I got cast as the narrator of the play Daedalus and Icarus. That profound experience stayed with me, and even though I knew onstage was not where I wanted to be, I constantly signed up for theatre classes, always observing, never vying for any big role. I just wanted to be part of the storytelling in some way. The idea of becoming a filmmaker didn’t occur to me until my mid-20’s, and it happened while I was in the Army, stationed in Iraq, viewing a bootlegged version of Million Dollar Baby. I should probably thank Clint Eastwood for making me feel so much heartache for Maggie’s journey that I forgot I was in the middle of my own war. I wondered then, who gets to do that? Who gets to transport people and immerse them in such a way, that they forget their own circumstances? So yeah, I looked up the job description of a “director” and decided that I would try to be that. When I returned home from duty that year (I believe it was 2005), I decided to drop my business major, enter into a creative writing BA degree and apply for film school for my graduate studies. It was like a light was flipped on. I’ve been on this road ever since.

HS: There seems to be a bit of irony that your family had left a war-torn country and then you later went on to serve in the U.S. Army. Did your family’s past influence that direction? Was there ever a sense of control over a bad situation that came with being on duty? Or was joining the army solely a way for you to experience and do more in your life?

CS: The irony of escaping one war to join another didn’t occur to me until years later. But coming home that day after secretly signing up, I’ll never forget the sadness in my mother’s face. It was a look that said, “I’m sorry that I have failed you in some way.” I didn’t understand it then, not fully. To her, signing up for the U.S military and joining the war was not something she wanted for me. This was after 9/11 and I didn’t reconcile her experiences with the path that I was choosing for myself, as an American. See, my parent’s silence on the subject of the Killing Fields kept me very far removed from Cambodia’s history. I didn’t understand the extensive loss the genocide had on our family. I didn’t come into that full understanding until much later in life, not until my mother past away in 2002, and I sought to piece together her history as a way to keep her alive somehow.
CAYLEE SO CONT.

HS: How important is it for you to keep your roots strong to the Cambodian community and culture in both the U.S. and Cambodia? How has becoming more connected to Cambodia led you to have more of a “completeness” in your identity? What struggles have you experienced trying to become more connected to the people there?

CS: I used to only understand the American part of my identity, and that identity never felt whole to me growing up, but I never questioned why or even sought to understand or fill the isolation I felt, not until my third year in film school, when I pitched to make a thesis film about gambling inside the Cambodian community. It was a way of offering up a piece of our story, as I understood it and witnessed it growing up. I had no idea that in making that film I would connect with other Cambodian-Americans in such a profoundly familial way. They fully embraced that story, and they fully embraced me. In turn, I had found my filmic voice. There were and still are so few Cambodian/Cambodian-American filmmakers, so visually, our stories felt in some ways so evidently “invisible.” I learned recently that after the release of that short film Paulina that it was being studied in film classes in Cambodia, as a way of portraying what the future of cinema in Cambodia could look like. It still feels strange to have accidentally become a pioneer in some way.

HS: You have helped create a space for Cambodian stories and filmmakers through the co-founding of the Cambodian Town Film Festival (CTFF). What has this experience been like for you and what importance does it bring being able to elevate these voices?

CS: It’s been a challenge to try to find space and time to do both. To separate one from the other. A film critic, a film supporter. Before our feature film In the Life of Music I felt like a festival director (in awe at how miraculous it is just to get a Cambodian film made), but now, now I get to live in the chaos of being both a filmmaker and festival director. I’m lucky, both my job descriptions allow me to, as my DP puts it, “feed my heart.”
HS: The characters in your films seem to all lack a certain amount of control despite trying to regain it. In Paulina, the main character grapples with solving her own issues, but she cannot save her father from his. In Testigo Illegal, Oscar wants to do something about what he saw but his situation holds him back. In Rupture, Leila tries to save her daughter but cannot. Ultimately, they all are struggling to overcome a specific hardship, of which their family is entangled. What attracts you to these kinds of stories?

CS: Great question. I’ve never been asked to critique my own work in that manner before... I think I’m heavily drawn to the idea of people inside inherited circumstances. It’s not lost on me that I’m a refugee baby and that the characters that interests me are characters with heavy burdens and hard losses. I didn’t write Testigo, but it was the first film I chose to direct. That story was about the limited choices one has when one is an immigrant with no country. In the same vein, an aspect of Paulina explores the stories of displaced immigrants finding refuge in the comfort of a gambling community.

Rupture was about ending the cycle of inheriting these limitations and making choices that would free our children from following paths that were set down by our history. We have to reconcile who we were (our circumstances) with who we can be (our futures are the consequences of our choices). I can find a piece of myself living in all those stories, it’s probably why I chose to tell them...
HS: What significance does In the Life of Music hold for you in terms of telling both a very Cambodian and very Cambodian-American story?

CS: Cinematically, at that time, I couldn’t find a feature film that told of a time before the war, during the war, and after the war. It’s like the genocide took away so much that for a very long time death and loss were the center of every conversation about Cambodia’s history. I remember wearing a red-and-white checkered krama (scarf) at a family function and being told that I looked like a Khmer Rouge soldier, and that I shouldn’t be wearing it. I didn’t have the same sentiments towards it because I didn’t have any memories of the war, so to me, the red krama was a piece of beautiful Cambodian cloth. So, in writing the script, I sought to take back the things that we had lost. I wondered, can I tell a story that would convey the beauty of the Cambodia before the war and can I build a bridge for the Cambodian diaspora to want to reconnect to their history; to find a common language between what was, and what will be? Can I make Cambodia understand the ways in which its people have changed?

The character Hope is representation of that change. She might have lost her language, but not her culture, nor her history. In this manner, having music as the universal language in our film makes sense. Music crosses barriers, crosses time, can transport us, reconnect us.

I knew even though some of our second generation didn’t understand the lyrics, that in hearing the melodies of the songs, they will want to understand. Our experiences of Cambodia shouldn’t be limited to just the Killing Fields.

HS: How has Sinn Sisamouth’s music influenced you and how did it inspire you to create In the Life of Music?

CS: I don’t know how or when I became such a big Sinn Sisamouth fan. It happened slowly over decades. My parents and my sister had been listening to his music all their lives, but the only song I related to Sinn Sisamouth was “Champa Battambang.” In that manner, there was no question as to what song would be featured in our film. “Champa Battambang” itself felt like such a contradiction. Before my film and our interpretation of that song, people often thought of it as a “happy song” you can rock out to. When the teaser hit, some people even thought it was blasphemous to slow down the song in the way that we did. They hadn’t even seen our film but couldn’t imagine why a cover of a Sinn Sisamouth song would be used with images of the Khmer Rouge era. But you see, Sinn Sisamouth was a phenomenal lyricist. His songs always had nuanced metaphors. I heard the sad longing in the lyrics of “Champa Battambang,” and I knew that that same longing would be profound for the story we were telling.
HS: What is so hard to do but that you master so well is telling stories that are personal and human that strike people in the heart. There is a strong point of view and your voice holds a strong presence in each of your films. For young filmmakers who may be struggling to find their voice, what advice do you have for them in embracing their identity to create visceral stories?

CS: I often get asked if I would make a Hollywood blockbuster film. I don’t know how to answer that question. For me, I’m just trying to be inspired by the stories I choose to tell, whether its mainstream or not. If you can’t get that story out of your head, if that story haunts you, and you feel like you’re the only one who can tell it, that’s the film you should make. That’s how I felt about Paulina, Rupture, and In the Life of Music. I knew I could give myself to those stories. Directing is hard. There will be numerous subjective voices telling you how to make your story work, just remember to hold strong to the story you want to tell and in doing that, you’ll find your filmic voice, not someone else’s.

HS: In the past you have said that choosing to continue being a filmmaker is hard. What have you had to conquer to keep choosing film and what advice would you give for people who may be short on hope?

CS: Yes, I did say that... Every day I have to keep choosing to be a filmmaker. When we were in post-production of In the Life of Music, a two-year process, I wasn’t sure where the finish line was, we kept going back into the editing room, figuratively banging our heads against the screen. People were literally beginning to think the film was a myth. So yeah...of course there’s an exhaustive nature to this work and a considerable amount of passion needed to do it. But if it’s the only thing you can imagine yourself doing, then you’re in the right place. You just have to find great collaborators and know that it takes a village to make film. So, find your village.

HS: What’s next for you on your film making journey?

CS: We’re developing a couple of stories right now. I’m very excited for what’s next.
Hello everyone and welcome! My name is Chithra Vedantam and I’m the Undergraduate Liaison for the Asian American Studies program! On behalf of the Asian American Studies Program, The Asian Cultural Center, and the Global Popular Music Mellon Platform, thank you all for coming to our showing of Matangi/Maya/M.I.A directed by Steven Loveridge and winner of the World Cinema Documentary Special at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival.

Special thanks to the staffs of the Asian Culture Center, the Asian American Studies Program, and the IU Cinema Staff, especially Brittany Friesner, for making tonight's screening possible. And of course thank you for coming out tonight!

This film is part of the Movement: Asian/Pacific America film series which is curated as part of IU’s celebration of Asian And PI Heritage Month! This film series seeks to explore the multifaceted vibrancies and complexities of AAPI individuals and communities and to ask questions about identity, power, and art.

Today’s movie explores these questions through the life of Matangi Arulpragasm, better known as hip hop icon M.I.A. Matangi is the daughter of a Tamilian Freedom fighter and she and her family fled Sri Lanka as refugees early in her life. She rose to fame in the early 2000’s she has since been nominated for an Academy Award, three Grammy Awards and the Mercury Prize and her single Paper Planes was certified gold in New Zealand and three times platinum in Canada and the US.

People often describe music as freedom, and I think that M.I.A. really personifies this. Throughout her career she consistently stretched and broke the borders that the world tried to put on her.

She became well known for making herself heard on political and social issues. Her highly political lyrics, which touch on issues of immigration, war, poverty, and identity politics, insighted debate particularly during the 2003 Iraq War in the Middle East. This political activism has garnered her both praise and criticism. In fact, her second studio album had to be recorded in a variety of places around the world because she was denied a U.S visa in 2005 and was on the US Homeland Security Risk List for a brief time.

Despite this her music has been met with wide critical and audience acclaim worldwide. Her music took hip-hop to a place it had never been before and created soundscapes that were truly global in scale. Although she is a rapper, for me her rage- against -the- machine energy really calls back to something punk rock and radical. For many South girls around the world, MIA was the first major artist who looked like them and she has always been vocal about her Tamil heritage. However, she has also always refused to be categorized, either in her music or in her life, and that feels particularly poignant today, where more and more it feels that we are boxed and labeled and othered. So we hope you enjoy this personal look at this acclaimed artist rise from refugee to rebel artist.
On this early morning of March 30th, a good mood and high energy were felt in Woodburn Hall for the fifth Indiana Asian American Conference. Despite the rain and the conference being held on a Saturday morning, a crowd of students milled around, chatting, laughing, grabbing a bite at the breakfast table, checking each other’s snazzy outfits. The main organizers greeted conference attendees with a warm welcome, handing out programs showcasing the fresh faces of the two guest speakers invited to give a talk: Chris Lam and Chris Chyung.

This year’s theme was “Young Revolutionaries: Carving a Place for Our Voices”. I could sense the excitement in the audience of having two young and brilliant leaders in their respective fields. Chris Lam is a YouTube content creator, producer, and host who has previously worked at Buzzfeed. Now an independent host and producer, he is regularly invited to speak about issues of popular culture, and in particular on the intersections of gayness, nerd culture, and marginalized communities. The second speaker was Chris Chyung, Indiana’s first Asian American state lawmaker and one of the youngest members recently elected in Congress. Lam and Chyung are two trailblazers, carving a path for themselves and others in the Asian American community to follow in their footsteps.

Freshly arrived from California that morning, Lam flew through a list of points he had prepared, from issues with self-critique within the community, “performative wokeness”, and the need to tackle identities in an intersectional way in the Asian American community. He then gave a number of great advice for his audience, in particular on the ways we consume and communicate through media: “Be curious and mindful”, “Engage with works that are not about your own identity”, and “Don’t be afraid to get mental health work done before it’s ‘too late’”. In line with the theme of the conference, he added: “You don’t have the luxury to not be political. Politics affect everybody”. For the Q&A, he settled into a more conversational tone to discuss with the audience the generational gap in the community, whether in families where older generations still advise their children to lay low and not get politically involved, or in the curriculum. Lam and the audience agreed that some fields, like sociology for instance, sometimes remain “too theory based.” Including more recent media (podcasts, videos, movies) into classes and teaching students how to be critical would be helpful. Lam also mentioned that we can celebrate films like Crazy Rich Asians and still critique the lack of diversity in representations of Asian Americans in popular culture: he wants to see more Brown, non-binary, queer, Middle Eastern Asians, for instance.

Chyung’s talk really showcased his natural ability as public speaker. Despite being only 26, among the youngest in the Indiana legislature and with no previous training in politics, the Dyer, IN native captured his audience with his affability and simplicity. His victory against the incumbent Republican representative was hard won. But he still encouraged everyone to get involved: “You are more than qualified to run,” he said to the students assembled that morning. Representative Chyung had a lot of tips for the youth to get involved, other than running for office: knowing who your representatives are and what power they have over you; calling or emailing representatives; being an advocate for issues that matter to you; and charting your own path, by choosing what issues you respond to.
IN THE NEWS

Lam and Chung are two young Asian Americans whose relative position of influence within their respective areas (US media at large, and the political field) means that the community is looking up to them. The audience was particularly interested in discussing intergenerational relations, bringing up the need for more conversations to happen. The tension between fulfilling parental expectations in the AAPI community, and following one’s dreams, was discussed at length. Both Lam and Chyung agreed that this generation faces obstacles when choosing non-traditional paths like politics and media, but that it was now urgent to be bold to make a difference in this world.

I had to skip the afternoon’s workshops to interview Representative Chyung for Hearabouts, the Asian American Midwest radio on WFHB. Chris talked about his own experience to appear “less different” as an Asian American growing up in the Midwest, as opposed to areas in the US that have a larger proportion of Asian Americans. He said he ended up running for office somehow by accident, when no one would challenge the incumbent representative. Chris pointed out the steep learning curve to understand state legislature, but he worked fast and filed as many pieces of legislation as he could in his first couple of months in office. Chris didn’t have a big shot mentor or advisors, but worked his way from the bottom up: knocking on thousands of doors to meet his constituents and relying on volunteers helped him the most. Among his top priorities for the state of Indiana, Chris mentioned addressing climate change, creating more accountability for the funding of private schools, a better support of the public school system to make it more competitive, and affordable health care. When I asked him about this past year’s change in the demographics of Congress, he said: “The makeup of Congress or your state legislature does not match the population of the state or the country as a whole... we have got to have more people who have the experience and the problems and will know better how to fix them”. Chyung’s election points us in that direction! You can listen to the interview here: https://wfhb.org/news/hearabouts-asian-american-midwest-radio-chris-chyung/

The fifth Indiana Asian American Conference was definitely a success, and the lunch served in the GISB atrium seems to confirm this. Laughter was echoing in the beautiful space, as people lined up to fill their plates with veggies, sautéed noodles, a tofu dish, and sesame balls for dessert. The organizing committee did a terrific job, and lunch was so convivial and delicious. The two speakers were busy chatting with students. Many pictures and selfies were taken in a dedicated corner. I got to hear more about what undergrads do these days, such as Youtube travel vlogs! The conference was definitely an exciting experience. Students of the Asian American Association in charge of organization can be proud of their work. With the admission fee costing only $5, and 60 percent of the proceeds going to the Burmese American Community Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting Burmese immigrants and refugees in Indianapolis, the event was very accessible and ensured its dedication to serve social justice. The participants of the conference will have heeded Chyung’s advice: reframe the idea of what Asian American success is, for the next generations.

Morgane Flahault is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature and American Studies at Indiana University Bloomington. Her research and teaching examine intersectional representations of race and gender in contemporary U.S. culture. She is also an avid community gardener and hopes to bring social and environmental activism together with her academic engagement.
In spring 2019, the Asian American Studies Graduate Student Advisory Board decided to convene a reading group. As an interdisciplinary group with participants hailing from Sociology, Education, History, Religious Studies, and English Literature, the reading group was committed to cultivating critical conversations on campus about the cultures and histories of Asian Americans. One of the central themes that emerged from our discussions this semester were the ways in which Asian American and African American identity have been shaped in relation to each other.

We started with a discussion of Helen Zia’s *Asian American Dreams*, which traces the development of Asian Americans as a group of separate ethnic groups into a self-identified racial group. Zia’s book examines the murder of Vincent Chin, the boycott of Korean-owned businesses in black neighborhoods in Brooklyn, the Los Angeles Riots, and other historical events that galvanized the development of Asian American racial consciousness and activism movements. For many of us, reading about these events underscored the ways in which activism played a foundational role in the emergence of Asian American studies as a discipline and still continues to play a role in our own work and lives. Moreover, we were particularly interested in Zia’s account of the African American boycott of Korean stores in Brooklyn in 1988. Zia identifies the conditions under which the boycott spread, enumerating how longstanding resentment over the social and economic decline of black neighborhoods as well as black perceptions of Korean Americans as economic interlopers in these neighborhoods helped foment this boycott.

This line of inquiry on charged Afro-Asian American relations continued with another set of readings that included political scientist Claire Jean Kim’s “Are Asians the New Blacks?” and literary critic Helen Heran Jun’s *Race for Citizenship*. While Zia’s work seeks to provide insight on “real” Asian Americans in the “rich textures of who we are, why we are here, and what we bring to America,” this second set of readings is concerned with representations of Asian Americans as a trope that performed the rhetorical work of reinforcing exclusion against other racial minorities in the U.S.
READING GROUP CONT.

What the reading group found particularly illuminating were the ways in which Kim and Jun’s work complicate narratives of interracial solidarity that dominate comparative ethnic studies scholarship. Indeed, Jun observes that much of comparative ethnic studies scholarship are oriented to revealing the shared structural conditions of white supremacy and colonialism that oppress racial groups or historical moments of cross-racial consciousness. However, Jun observes that these moments of interracial solidarity are exceptional rather than the norm. Indeed, both Kim and Jun document a history in which Asian Americans have critiqued exclusion in ways that reinforced stereotypes of black lawlessness and criminality or denied the existence of anti-black racism altogether. Adding to this, Jun unfolds a history in which African Americans have deployed Orientalist tropes in their bid for recognition as fully fledged U.S. citizens. However, this fraught history should not deter us from forging cross-racial alliances. On the contrary, we recognize that we must understand this history if we are to form strong, enduring, and resilient progressive cross-racial coalitions.

We have enjoyed this rich discussion about the identity formation of Asian American and African Americans this semester, and we thank the Asian American Studies Program for their enthusiasm and support for collaborative forms of education. This line of inquiry on charged Afro-Asian American relations continued with another set of readings that included political scientist Claire Jean Kim’s “Are Asians the New Blacks?” and literary critic Helen Heran Jun’s Race for Citizenship. While Zia’s work seeks to provide insight on “real” Asian Americans in the “rich textures of who we are, why we are here, and what we bring to America,” this second set of readings is concerned with representations of Asian Americans as a trope that performed the rhetorical work of reinforcing exclusion against other racial minorities in the U.S. What the reading group found particularly illuminating were the ways in which Kim and Jun’s work complicate narratives of interracial solidarity that dominate comparative ethnic studies scholarship. Indeed, Jun observes that much of comparative ethnic studies scholarship are oriented to revealing the shared structural conditions of white supremacy and colonialism that oppress racial groups or historical moments of cross-racial consciousness. However, Jun observes that these moments of interracial solidarity are exceptional rather than the norm. Indeed, both Kim and Jun document a history in which Asian Americans have critiqued exclusion in ways that reinforced stereotypes of black lawlessness and criminality or denied the existence of anti-black racism altogether. Adding to this, Jun unfolds a history in which African Americans have deployed Orientalist tropes in their bid for recognition as fully fledged U.S. citizens. However, this fraught history should not deter us from forging cross-racial alliances. On the contrary, we recognize that we must understand this history if we are to form strong, enduring, and resilient progressive cross-racial coalitions.

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I interviewed Professor Cynthia Wu to discuss her recently published monograph, *Sticky Rice: A Politics of Intraracial Desire*, which analyzes representations of same-sex desire among Asian American men in canonical Asian American literature and their implications for our field. The following interview has been edited for length and clarity.
SK: I’m interested in your argument that Asian American studies has always been queer. You’re interested in complicating the narrative of the emergence of the discipline as one that developed from activist movements that reinforced heteropatriarchy that were later challenged by feminism and queer thought. And you do this by looking at canonical Asian American literature that represents same-sex desire between Asian American men. Later, you elaborate on how these canonical texts are queer: “The bonds between men in *Sticky Rice* blur the boundaries between among the homosocial, the homoerotic, and the homosexual in ways that lie beyond our concepts of modern gay identity” (13). For you, what does it mean to be queer and for Asian American studies to be queer?

CW: That’s a very good question. So the first part of your question about Asian American queerness not conforming to mainstream, sanctioned models of gay identity – that has a lot of do with my dissatisfaction with these more normative iterations of gay liberation that are neo-liberal, middle-class, pro-military, and that are ultimately about absorbing oneself into a racist, capitalist, settler state rather than contesting these power differentials. I think that these examples of Asian American men exhibiting gender and sexual non-normativity that I cover in *Sticky Rice* are not invested in this model of liberal inclusion, but rather are committed to contesting heteronormativity in all of its various guises. And, also, capitalism and respectability and in all of its various guises. So it’s not about joining the nation-state but contesting the bases on which the nation stands.

SK: This is a related question to queering the Asian American canon. I’m intrigued by your reading methodology of queering canonical Asian American literature texts that often isn’t aren’t perceived as queer objects of study. This makes me think of other methodologies of reading that have been recently theorized in literary criticism. For instance, I’m thinking, of course, of symptomatic reading [where one discovers the underlying presuppositions of the text that is repressed because of its ideological convictions] and surface reading [where one attends to the surfaces of text rather than plumb its depths]. However, it strikes me that your methodology doesn’t quite neatly conform to either symptomatic and or surface reading. How would you characterize your own methodology?

CW: I’m really excited that you asked this question as well because in the first draft of my introduction I talked about this tension between surface and paranoid reading. Both of my readers decided that this was beside the point when it came to the discussion at hand and recommended that I strike it out in the revision of the introduction. On the one hand, paranoid reading, or what we call close reading, is a very useful tool in a lot of cases, and I don’t want to completely get rid of it. But at the same time, I also think that surface reading is useful for engaging with our creative writing colleagues in a way that sees their contributions as equal to ours and sees them as colleagues and equals rather than mere scribes that produce these texts upon which we exert our interpretative apparatus. I like the close, I like the paranoid, but I also like the surface as well for that reason.
STICKY RICE CONT.

SK: I wanted to ask you about coalition politics because I think that is the biggest stake for you in discussing this trope of Asian American men expressing same-sex desire for other Asian American men. I’m interested in your wariness of thinking about sticky rice politics as a form of coalition politics. There are several moments in the book where you’re careful to observe that Asian American men expressing same-sex desire for other Asian American men does not necessarily result in a progressive relationship or coalition. It does not necessarily result in confronting, recognizing, and working through differences in ethnicity, class, gender, etc. that exist among Asian Americans. Could you talk more about your caution of sticky rice politics as coalition politics?

CW: I love this question because on the one hand, on the surface, it seems like good politics and good erotics to be attracted to one’s own and to favor one’s own in the face of white normativity and white supremacy. But then on the other hand, these expectations that we will build intimacies within our own race can also be very limiting in of themselves and can also erase these power differentials within racial groups, which is something that Asian American studies has always grappled with. It’s this extremely heterogeneous population and there are a range of structural conditions and material resources that people have within this racial category. Yet there is this racial category that we must contend with. And what do we make of that?

One of the readers for my manuscript was Hoang Nguyen, who is a friend and colleague of mine at the University of California at San Diego. A couple of years ago he posted on social media this photograph of him as a weary very young child. It’s this black and white photograph and he’s holding in front of him what looks like a piece of cardboard box that has been broken down. On this piece of cardboard is written in black magic marker a number. And he said, “This is my refugee identification photo.” I remember looking at that and thinking, there’s this aspect of the Asian American lived experience and then there are aspects of the Asian American lived experience that involve these transnational subjects coming into New York City and investing billions of dollars in housing developments. What do we make of the fact that there are people who fled their homelands with very little and there are people who are part of the global elite who can jet around the world and invest in projects that are so far removed from what we can imagine?
SK: Would you say that there are more productive categories of identity than “Asian American” for us?

CW: One of the ways we might think about this division between white and non-white, citizen and non-citizen, and all of those binaries that inform our work is global South and global North. But you know even within that category there lies a lot of heterogeneity. So what do we do with the economic elites?

SK: In your book, you briefly describe the writing process for Sticky Rice: You assembled the manuscripts from unrelated articles, talks, and thoughts that spanned over several years. Could you elaborate on the process from turning these different pieces into a manuscript? How did you develop the book’s overarching framework, sticky rice politics?

CW: The first chapter of this book was originally part of a different book project. And a few months into that project, I found out that the No-No Boy chapter actually belongs in this [Sticky Rice] and not the other one. And so I extricated that chapter from the other book project and put it in this one. And then, chapter two on The Book of Salt was one of those things that I wrote as a labor of love. I didn’t realize that it would eventually become a part of the book. I thought that it would be a freestanding article. But then I also thought, well, within this context, it also works well. I wonder whether I was grappling with these questions for a long time without realizing that I had a coherent monograph in the works.
STICKY RICE CONT.

SK: You mentioned that your first chapter on No-No Boy was part of another project. Was it part of your project on the U.S. military in the Asian American imagination? I think you’ve mentioned this project at another AAST event held earlier this year. So I’m curious about your upcoming projects. And what is the relationship between your next projects and Sticky Rice and your earlier works?

CW: The project on gender, masculinity, and sexuality within Asian America within the parameters of the military—that used to be part of what I thought of as my second book project. This is maybe a long-winded way of explaining why my second book project got shuttled to the back burner while I finished this one. At my previous institution, I didn’t have any research support, so all of the archival work that I did for my first book and anything else I needed to do came out of my own pocket, when it came to my expenses. And I decided that I didn’t want to continue doing that. So for my second book, I decided that I would sit in one place and write a piece of literary criticism that didn’t require going to archives, didn’t require doing interviews, or anything complicated like that. Because I just couldn’t financially afford to do that again. I decided that this will be the book that gets me another job and hopefully this other job will come with research resources. And this is really the reason why I backburnered the project that I thought would be my second book.

SK: I also read on your faculty profile page that you’re working on a project on the racial logics of copper. I’m excited that you’re working on this project.

CW: I’m excited too. I was in Montana and decided to visit some of the historical sites. And that’s when I became interested in the place of Chinese immigrant workers in the copper mining industry in Montana. This historian named Matthew Basso had written a book on precisely this topic of copper mining and working class identity in Montana. I didn’t realize that amongst these European immigrant groups in that industry, there was so much infighting during most of the nineteenth century. The Irish Americans were at war with the German Americans, who were at war with the Italian Americans, and so on and so forth. There was so much ethnic factionalism among European immigrants in copper mining. But the way that they resolved their differences was in excluding all non-white miners from their industry. So they kicked the Chinese workers, African Americans, and indigenous peoples out. And they decided that they would present this model of rugged but also disciplined middle working class white masculinity in this industry by setting non-white workers as the constitutive outside. At the same time, Chinese exclusion was going on in full force. There was this international student at University of Chicago, who was not subjected to exclusion because he was among the exempted class. But he decided to write a letter of protest against the Statue of Liberty, which was in the process of construction at that time. As you might expect, you’ve constructed this symbol of liberty but you’ve done it at the expense of excluding from immigration these racialized others from China. And then the Statue of Liberty is made from copper and meanwhile, these Chinese immigrants are being excluded from the copper mining industry in Montana. So it’s interesting that all of these discourses come together.
REFLECTIONS ON THE ACADEMIC YEAR

LISA KWONG, ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES LECTURER

In Introduction to Asian American Studies, students learned about significant historical events and engaged with Asian American issues through a variety of media and literature, including the TV shows Fresh Off the Boat, Kim’s Convenience, and Master of None; the poem “Oriental” by Aimee Nezhukumatathil, the films Flower Drum Song and The Girl Who Spelled Freedom, the spoken word performances of Kit Yan, and the graphic novel American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang. For the final project, students researched the lives of influential AAPIs. Celebrities, such as Bruce Lee, Tiger Woods, and Anna May Wong, were popular choices, but this year students also studied AAPIs in a wide range of fields, including the military, hip hop music, physics, politics, film directing, fashion design, and even space travel.

In Asian American Literature and Media, students had lively discussions about Aimee Nezhukumatathil’s newest poetry collection Oceanic, Hasan Minhaj’s comedy special Homecoming King, Anna May Wong’s role in Shanghai Express, Maggie Q as the hero-assassin Nikita, and the novels Mambo in Chinatown by Jean Kwok and Short Girls by Bich Minh Nguyen. Students enjoyed meeting and chatting with Nezhukumatathil who read at the IMU University Club, and lecturer Lisa Kwong and her students treated Kwok to a dramatic reading of her novel via Skype. The class also took Skype visits to the Bay Area with novelist Nguyen and her cats and to the Chinese Canadian diaspora with genealogist and blogger Linda Yip.

In 2018, Lisa Kwong concluded a successful run as an event coordinator of the tri-annual Fountain Square Poetry Series, presented by Writers Guild at Bloomington. Ms. Kwong began working on the series in May 2012 when she was an IU M.F.A. student. Her primary goals were to provide a venue for a diverse range of local voices, including Asian American poets, and to foster collaboration between the university and local writing communities. The Department of English and the Asian Pacific Faculty and Staff Council recognized her efforts with the Guy Lemmon Award in Public Writing and Asian Pacific American Inspiration Award in 2014. Her final event in October 2018 featured its first all Asian American line-up: Soleil David, M.F.A. student; Rachel Ronquillo Gray, M.F.A. alumna; and Debra Kang Dean, author of Totem.
When we were planning for programs to mark the 20th Anniversary of the ACC, we thought of activities that might bring the ACC closer to the students. Last fall, we achieved that goal by hosting a symposium, alumni reunion gatherings, a celebratory program and banquet. This spring semester, we were delighted to be able to continue the celebration of this milestone by offering a hybrid academic course.

In conjunction with the Asian American Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences, the ACC developed a course integrating the mission of the Asian Culture Center with academic goals of the College. We led the instruction of A300, Asian American and Pacific Islanders and Social Change. We had an engaging class of 22 students. Most of our students found the course to be their first exposure to the study of Asian American experience and culture. In class, we took a deep-dive into topics at the core of AAPI identity, family, immigration, philanthropy, and transnational influences. It featured seminar-style discussions, a research paper, and field trips to non-profits in Indianapolis and Chicago. We studied the diverse histories and cultures of AAPI communities starting with the impact of the 1965 Immigration Act to the current immigration laws banning certain ethnic groups’ entry to the U.S. We looked at the different challenges facing the present day lives of ethnic groups including Burmese, Cambodian, and Rohingya Americans through the lens of philanthropic organizations that provide much-needed services.
SOCIAL CHANGE CONT.

Our students attended the Myanmar Union Day hosted by Burmese American Institute in Indy. Later in the semester, the students participated in “DestinAsian Chicago,” beginning with a tour in Argyle/Uptown, which is a neighborhood that has experienced gentrification. We learned from our host, the nonprofit Asian Americans Advancing for Justice, about the current state of Asian American and immigrant communities in the area. Included in our Chicago trip were group tours, briefings, and dialogue with staff at the Cambodian American Museum and Killing Fields Memorial, Japanese American Citizens League, and Rohingya Cultural Center. In addition, we had an opportunity to take the students to watch, “Detour Guide,” presented by the Silk Road Rising Theater. The show was about an alternative tour of the Arab World and Arab America. The performing artist and storyteller, Karim Nagi, was brilliant in this one-man musical show, which was a combination of percussion, mixed media and soundscape. It was definitely a tour that transported us into gaining new perspectives about the Arab American community. We all came away realizing how little we know and how much we have to learn.

We are grateful to the Asian American Studies (AAST) program in the College of Arts and Sciences for granting this opportunity for the ACC to lead and teach a course about one of the most significant diverse and understudied ethnic groups in the U.S. It was very fulfilling to be able to extend the role of the center to the classroom and vice versa. We hope to be able to continue this symbiotic relationship with AAST. We look forward to charting new similar partnerships with other academic units that will help benefit students, not only in meeting their academic requirements on diversity and multicultural education, but more importantly, to help them gain more transformational experiences during their time at Indiana University.
Professor Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia from Penn State Law explored the current state of immigration law and policy, discussing topics such as the travel ban, DACAm and immigration enforcement at the IU Asian Cultural Center’s Anniversary Symposium. Professor Wadhia serves as Director of the Center for Immigrants’ Rights Clinic at Penn State University, where she integrates research on the role of prosecutorial discretion in immigration law and intersections of race, national security, and immigration with on-the-ground work at the clinic. The presentation was organized into three parts:

First, Professor Wadhia introduced the origins of immigration law and key stakeholders involved in implementation of immigration policy. Immigration law comes from US constitutions, immigration and nationality acts, regulations, and policy guidance and memoranda. The framework for contemporary immigration policy is primarily based on the Immigration Statute of 1952. Stakeholders include the Department of Homeland Security (Immigration and Custom Enforcement, Customs and Border Protection, and US Citizenship and Immigration Services), Department of Justice, and Department of Education.

Second, Professor Wadhia discussed the biggest challenge for immigrants in rural Pennsylvania and how she and her clinic have engaged with the community regarding outreach on immigration law. Access to information is a key concern for immigrants; language from legislation is difficult to understand especially in the current landscape of ever-changing policies. These changes include Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA), family separation and detention, the ban on Muslim immigration, limitations to refugee admissions, and immigration enforcement priorities. Professor Wadhia and her team respond to the community’s needs rapidly, by handing out fact sheets and holding community forums and information sessions in addition to running the legal clinic. Moreover, Professor Wadhia encourages involvement with local school districts, municipal government, universities, and the general public.

Third, Professor Wadhia talked about how Hoosiers can help individuals and families impacted by current immigration policies—gaining the trust of immigrants is most important because these vulnerable individuals have to share “the worst things that ever happened to them.” With regards to communicating with those holding different ideologies, Professor Wadhia encourages a story-telling approach where one inquires about specific experiences with immigrant neighbors and colleagues to learn more about the context shaping others’ worldviews.

Professor Wadhia closed the presentation with a quote from Eleanor Roosevelt “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. That’s what it means to bridge compassion and the law. Knowledge without being channeled in a way that is caring and uplifting will not matter.”

Listen to an interview with Professor Shoba Sivaprasad Wadhia, featured guest for the Thanksgiving 2018 episode of WFHB’s HEARABOUTS: ASIAN AMERICAN MIDWEST RADIO
In February, AAST held our annual Asian American Studies Research Symposium. This year, AAST in collaboration with the Asian American Studies Graduate Advisory Board, decided to focus on the theme of organizing and intersectional identities. The symposium “Navigating Through Intersections: Organizing and Advancing Asian American Issues and Identity” examined the ways in which Asian Americans organize towards social equity and complicate ever-fluid constructions of racial identities under existing power structures. Faculty and student presenters explored Asian American positionality in the current racial landscape.

The event featured keynote speaker Dr. Janelle Wong (Professor of American Studies, University of Maryland - College Park). Dr. Wong presented on “Navigating Through Intersections: Organizing and Advancing Asian American Issues and Identity” and highlighted important political concerns in the Asian American community—namely, the polarization of Asian American voters with regards to affirmative action. Importantly, a majority of Asian Americans support affirmative action. However, the trend changes when studying different Asian subgroups across years 2012, 2014, and 2016.

Using data from the National Asian American Survey, Dr. Wong showed that decline in support for affirmative action comes from immigration patterns among Chinese Americans in recent years; immigrants from China tend to be skilled individuals entering the country for educational or economic endeavors. Additionally, the rise of social media platforms such as WeChat has contributed to organizing efforts on the issue of affirmative action in education, where some have historically felt slighted in the college admissions process. Dr. Wong emphasized the importance of having Asian American support for race-conscious policies when it comes to sustaining civil rights gains from past decades and continuing to address massive racial and ethnic inequalities through multiracial civil rights coalition-building.

IU students and faculty also provided a glimpse of their exciting, new research pursuits at the AAST Research Symposium. Dr. Dina Okamoto (Sociology) presented on “Boundary Claims and Comparisons: Substantiating Asian American Pan-ethnicity,” which used content from over 250 magazine issues during the 1970s to study how Asian Americans developed and articulated pan-ethnic identities prior to adoption by mainstream institutions in the US. Dr. Okamoto and her team identified three types of practices for drawing boundaries among Asian Americans: ambiguous definitions, prototypes, and group comparisons. Importantly, this work informs race and ethnic scholars on the boundary substantiation process and how emerging groups establish themselves into mainstream society through boundary claims.

Benjamin Hartmann (Sociology) presented on “Racial/Ethnic Identity, Belief in Linked Fate, and Racial Solidarity in Asia America,” which used data from the National Asian American Survey to study attitudes and support of solidaristic racialized socio-political action among Asian Americans. Monica Heilman (Sociology) presented on “What Are You? Lived vs. Learned Racial Identity among Multiracial Asians,” which used a series of interviews to explore how multiracial individuals experience identity differently based on the salience of race in their lives. The breadth of research at symposium is demonstrative of the vibrancy of the AAST community at IU—we are incredibly excited to see what the future holds for these amazing scholars!
Congratulations!

2018-2019 ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES STUDENT AWARD RECIPIENTS

*Thanks to the generosity of alumni donors, we were able to open the competition this year to applicants outside the College of Arts and Sciences*

GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH/Creative Activity/Travel Grants

- Giselle Cunanan (American Studies)
- Jiyoung Kang (Curriculum and Instruction, School of Education)
- Mihee Kim-Kort (Religious Studies)
- Stephanie Nguyen (Higher Education + Student Affairs, School of Education)

UNDERGRADUATE ESSAY COMPETITION

- Samuel Reitenour, 1st Place (Major: History)
  “Divergent Paths of Women in the Asian American Movement and the Black Panther Party”

2018-2019 ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES FACULTY NEWS

DR. DINA OKAMOTO

- Academic Leadership Program (ALP) Fellow, Big Ten Academic Alliance for 2018-19

DR. ELLEN WU

- Starred on TruTV’s Adam Ruins Everything. The Season 3 episode "Adam Ruins Sitcoms" spotlights the history of some of the US’s most prevalent racial and gender stereotypes, including the Asian American “model minority” myth. Parts of the script were based on her book The Color of Success (Princeton University Press, 2014), and she weighed in on the writing process.
Consider supporting the Asian American Studies Program with a financial gift this year! Any amount is appreciated.

Your donation will support building IU's Asian American Studies community, providing research funding for students and faculty, bringing guest speakers to campus, developing innovative programming, and furthering community outreach.

give now

To donate, go to iufoundation.iu.edu and specify your designation as Asian American Studies. Donations are tax-deductible.
INTERESTED IN A

MINOR IN ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

A minor in Asian American Studies enriches your understanding of diversity and provides you with an area of specialized knowledge as you prepare for a career in diverse fields: Law, Public Policy, Urban Planning, International Relations, Human Geography, Education (Teaching, Counseling, Policy), Arts, Arts Administration, Journalism, Medicine, Nursing, Social Psychology, Business, Marketing, Public Relations.

The AAS minor is also versatile as courses usually fulfill either an Arts & Humanities or a Social & Historical Studies requirement.

ALL YOU NEED IS 15 CREDIT HOURS

Introduction to Asian American Studies (AAST-A 101)
OR
Sociology of Asian America (SOC-S 101)
AND
12 credit hours of Asian American or Asian Diaspora classes

* 6 credit hours of which must be Asian-American focused and 9 credits must be 300 level or above

Thank You To Our Donors

Kim Wallihan
Simon D. Wu, MD
Ann K. Yang
Robert G. Yang
2019-2020 AAST EVENTS

FALL 2019

Friday, August 30
Joint Welcome Back Reception with CRRES, AAADS, AAST, Latino Studies, Native American Indigenous Studies, & RMI. Time/Location TBD

September 12th/13th and September 19th
"Remembering Dolores Huerta’s Past and Present Activism within the Latinx Community"
On September 12 or 13, 2019, there will be an on campus screening of documentary, “Dolores.” On September 19, 2019 at 6pm, Keynote Address at President’s Hall, Indiana University. Reception starts at 6pm, followed by 7pm keynote address by Dolores Huerta (Q&A to follow).

Friday, September 27
Program on Race, Migration, and Indigeneity Symposium
“Immigrant and Indigenous Intersections, 2.0.”
Speakers: Hi`ilei Hobart, ManuKaruka, Brian Gilley.
Global and International Studies Building (GA 0001)
10-11:30 am. Lunch will be served.

Thursday, November 14
Dr. Meredith Oda, Associate Professor of History. University of Nevada, Reno
“Commemoration and Forgetting in the Gateway to the Pacific: Japanese and African Americans in San Francisco’s Foreign Relations and Neighborhoods”

Date/location TBA
Meet and greet with Dr. Christine Peralta, CRRES post-doctoral fellow
“Medical Modernity: Rethinking the Health Work of Filipina Women, 1870-1948.”
She will be teaching an undergraduate course for History this year on “U.S. Empire, Race, and Comic Books.”

Dates/locations TBA
Asian American Studies reading group, hosted by AAST Graduate Advisory Board

SPRING 2020

February
AAST Annual Research Symposium, showcasing work by IUB students and faculty. Keynote by invited scholar.

March-April
MOVEMENT: ASIAN/PACIFIC/AMERICA annual film series for Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebration, co-sponsored by AAST, Asian Culture Center, IU Cinema
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES