

Teach Your Parents Well

By Ali Wong

Every culture perpetuates some sort of heroic icon. A person, place, group or thing can serve to represent that heroic icon, but the person tends to be the most powerful. For people of color in America, our heroic icons tend to be fiery orators who had the power to unify. Black people have Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King. Latino people have Cesar Chavez. All of those leaders and speakers were voices for people to articulate what they had been feeling. They gave their communities hope before their communities even knew what to hope for. If you see someone looking like you have courage, you will find it easier to identify with the possibility of having that same courage.

Philip Vera Cruz is a very important heroic icon in Asian American Studies. I had never heard of the man before coming to UCLA. But I knew about Cesar Chavez: how he had the education of a sixth grader, went on a hunger strike and led his people. His face is everywhere in San Francisco murals and there's even a street named after him too. But I had never heard of how the Filipinos first declared the strike, how Philip Vera Cruz founded a co-op and wrote passionately about human dignity. As Asian American Studies students, how do we share the legacy of Phillip Vera Cruz?

Using images is the best way to solve the "historic amnesia" in the Asian American community. Students need to help immigrants to live and breathe historic images in their everyday life so that those images are not forgotten. That Asian American Studies labor

class mural we saw in Chinatown made a huge impression on me. The Asian American activist holding the “Free Huey” sign struck me the most. It speaks to Asian Americans’ historical solidarity with the Black Panther party. Not a lot of people know about that or even want to believe that. The media’s “battle of the minorities” portrayal of the L.A. riots lead mainstream Americans to think that all Asian Americans hate and fear Black people. Some Asian Americans do fear Black people, but I think it’s important to admit to the reality of it and question why. Regardless, it’s important for Asian American immigrant workers to be aware of historic multi-ethnic solidarity movements. I’ve always been very proud of the fact that Nobuko Miyamoto was a close friend of Fred Hampton, that students of color banded together at S.F. State to fight for Ethnic Studies and that Cecil Williams marched in the I-Hotel protests. Asian American movements depend on and grow from these multi-ethnic coalitions and the more images of them the better.

I hope that when immigrant workers in Chinatown pass that mural, they ask others who “Huey” is, why he was not free, and why Asian Americans cared. What would be great was if students could be there to answer those questions. Students can teach immigrant workers by leading political tours with AND for immigrant workers. That way, students could interpret and reinterpret art images, markets, sweatshops and street names with immigrants in the context of Asian American history.

In “Community Education: A Guide for Asian American College Students,” I thought a lot about this idea of tailoring the message for a particular audience, that is the ASSI

immigrant workers. For me, I want to send the message that Asian Americans have an important history of resistance in America that applies to the inspiring work they're doing today.

The ASSI immigrant workers do not have time to read more pamphlets or sit through student-run lectures on Asian American history. The Friday picket lines are the most ideal time to pass on our knowledge of Asian American history. The students will have their audience ready and can entertain the immigrant workers. I know that Asian people, especially immigrants, adore soap operas. They like the melodrama, the epic stories, the conflict and most importantly, the romance. As students, we could write out a series of 4-week long soap opera-esque street plays and perform them for the Friday picket lines. Students should design the ends of plays as cliff-hangers so that there is some suspense and therefore, a desire to see the next episode. A play about the history of the United Farmworkers Movement could include a taboo affair between a Latino immigrant worker and a Filipino immigrant worker. A play about the Chinatown garment district strikes could portray the struggles those women faced with their husbands. The possibilities for plots are endless with a history as rich as ours. But the important basic idea is to spoon-feed stories with a message to our audience.

In "An Interview With Philip Vera Cruz," he compares the strength of the AWOC: So education is a two-way street. While we try to give information about our struggle and how we live on farms to others, why they come over here also, and educated us in their own way" (306). "They" are the students, the churches, CORE and the people who were

going to the South to participate in the civil rights movement. I take great pride in the fact that students have clearly played a very historic role in specifically educating the immigrant workers. It's imperative that our class actively remember this role by exercising it throughout the ASSI campaign.