

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: GENRES OF MEMORY AND
ASIAN/AMERICAN WOMEN'S
ACTIVISM

Katie Bramlett, Doctor of Philosophy, 2022

Dissertation directed by: Professor Jessica Enoch
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As human rights and racial inequality dominate public discourse, it has become increasingly clear that Americans are invested in conversations of public memory. The removal of confederate monuments and demands for equity in memorialization for people of color underscore the point that *who* is remembered and *how* they are honored is important. Further, the growing awareness of violence against Asian/Americans and the hate crime against Asian/American women in Atlanta has emphasized the need to understand the history of violence against Asian/Americans, Asian/American gendered stereotypes, and the Asian/American activists who fight for equal rights.

This dissertation examines three distinct memorial genres—a statue, a traveling exhibit, and a documentary—created by Asian/Americans about Asian/American women activists. My interdisciplinary research engages feminist memory studies, Asian/American studies, and cultural rhetorics to investigate how public memory activists leverage the affordances of different memorial genres to recover Asian/American women's activism. I consider the ways Asian/American women's memorials contest the past and navigate the politics of memorialization to influence the present. Each chapter considers how memorials not only remember past activism, but also work to reframe current conversations about Asian/American women in more just and equitable frameworks. I claim that my chosen

memorials are created by memorial activists and each seek to expand U.S. memory beyond traditional gendered stereotypes that are pervasive in the United States.

GENRES OF MEMORY AND ASIAN/AMERICAN WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

by

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Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2022

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Steve and Carol Bramlett, and my sister, Sarah Kelley, for always believing in me and making me laugh through it all.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my committee members for their ongoing support as I wrote “Genres of Memory.” I especially want to thank my dissertation chair, Jessica Enoch for being my mentor and for your support every step of my dissertation. Thank you for guiding me to become a teacher, administer and scholar; for asking hard questions as you read endless drafts; for introducing me to feminist memory studies; and for giving me so many different opportunities to grow. Many thanks to Scott Wible, Edlie Wong, Sara Wilder, and GerShun Avilez who attended mock job talks and interviews and gave great advice. I also want to thank Jane Donawerth, Julius Fleming, and Vessela Valiavitcharska who helped me in early stages of my research.

My fellow UMD graduate students deserve many thanks, including Danielle Griffin, Dara Liling, Ruth Osorio, Joe Good, Elizabeth Catchmark, Nabila Hijazi, Elizabeth Ellis Miller, Nathan Tillman, Britt Starr, and Lexi Walston. We spent many hours working through ideas in writing groups, sharing meals (and a congratulatory pie), and Zoom calls. Thank you for your friendship and support.

My dissertation was supported by a summer grant from the University of Maryland’s English Department. This grant allowed me travel to San Francisco and visit the *Column of Strength*. I am also grateful to the Muscogee Creek Tribe of Oklahoma who provided doctoral grants throughout my studies. Additionally, I want to include Lillian Sing, Phyllis Kim, and Titchie Carandang-Tiongson—Thank you for talking with me about your memorials and sharing your knowledge and passion in our interviews.

I am deeply grateful to my mentors who guided me since before my doctoral program. At the University of Oklahoma, Susan Kates, Chris Carter, Sandra Tarabochia, Michelle Eodice, and James Ziegler helped me start my graduate studies. Fellow graduate students

Michael Mohon, Evin Groundwater, Rebecca Gerdes-McClain, Shannon Madden, and Lauren Brentnell continue to provide support and friendship.

I especially want to thank my roommate, Jessica Hatch, who survived my intense writing sessions, listened to me complain and work through difficult ideas, and who made me cookies when I needed them. My friends in Silver Spring made Maryland feel like a home and helped me survive the pandemic. Thank you to Alicia Bentley, Leah Campbell, Maya Raghu, Carla Stadelmann, and Cherisse Wells, I couldn't have asked for a better group of friends.

I want to thank my family, Carol and Steve Bramlett, and Sarah Kelley for too much for a single paragraph: for every tiny (and giant) way you have supported me my whole life. Mom, thank you for always going the extra mile and for showing me how to multitask. Dad, thank you for your never-ending faith in my ability to finish my PhD. Sarah, thank you for being my best friend, sister, and person I can always turn to. I am so glad you married Madison; he is a perfect fit for our family. You all are my best friends and I love you all so much.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

In 2020 amidst a global pandemic, former President Donald Trump repeatedly touted COVID-19 as the “China virus” and never acknowledged the harm or danger such rhetoric could incite. Russell Jeung, a co-founder of Stop AAPI¹ Hate, directly links Trumps’ incendiary remarks with the “subsequent hate speech spread on social media and the hate violence” (Lang). The resulting effect on the Asian/American community was immediate and violent. According to the NYPD, “hate crimes motivated by anti-Asian sentiment jumped 1,900% in New York City in 2020” (Lang). In 2021, there continues to be a rise in violent crimes and robberies against Asian/American elderly (Lang). In fact, according to the San Francisco Police, compared to 2020 there was an “567% increase in anti-Asian hate-crime reports in 2021” (Timsit). States across the United States saw similar increased reports of anti-Asian hate crimes. Of these crimes, almost 33% involved physical violence, 60% occurred in public settings, and 63% were reported by women (“More Than”).

One example of this violence is the March 2021 Atlanta spa shootings, where eight people were killed, six of whom were Asian/American women. While this incident sparked conversations around the nation about anti-Asian hate, many still fail to “discuss the root cause of this massacre and similar acts of violence—the deadly intersection of anti-Asian racism and misogyny” (Choimorrow). Anti-Asian sentiment in American society has a disturbing history and society often categorizes Asian/American women with exoticized and sexualized stereotypes. This began as early as 1875 when the Page Act, “the U.S.’s first immigration law, banned Chinese women from entering the country on the grounds of sexual

¹ Asian American Pacific Islander

deviance” (Choimorrow). During the 1900s, this perception of Asian women was reinforced as wars in Asia inspired films and popular culture, like or *Full Metal Jacket* and *Miss Saigon* to perpetuate images of Asian women as evil seductresses or subservient sexual objects. Although there have been recent movies and television that provide a more rounded view of Asian/American women, much of American history and memory fails to correct these gendered stereotypes.

As human rights and racial inequality dominate public discourse, it has become increasingly clear that Americans are invested in conversations of public memory. The removal of confederate monuments and demands for equity in memorialization for people of color underscore the point that *who* is remembered and *how* they are honored is important. Memory is an effective outlet through which memorial activists articulate more equitable representations of history. Memorials that remember Asian/American women seek to remember the history of violence against Asian/Americans, Asian/American gendered stereotypes, and the Asian/American activists who fight for equal rights. This dissertation engages Asian/American memorials and the variety of methods Asian/Americans employ to combat the violence, both symbolically and literally, perpetuated through these xenophobic, violent, and toxic stereotypes. Memory work is a strategic outlet to contest racist rhetoric because it can work to reimage Asian/Americans as part of the American present and future and draw attention to the violence propagated throughout history.

In this dissertation, I analyze memorials dedicated to Asian/American women activists that challenge stereotypes and envision Asian/American activism. This dissertation also emphasizes memory work as an activist outlet because Asian/American memorials strive to recover and reclaim Asian/American’s women activist history and trauma as part of the American memory landscape and advocate for a larger cause. Through an examination of

memorial genre, this dissertation assesses how each iteration strategically achieve those aims. Because the Asian/American community is comprised of diverse groups and values, I study three distinctly different topics and genres in each of my three chapters:

- Chapter 2: “The Washington Home of Philippine Suffrage,” a traveling exhibit that recovers the forgotten stories of Filipina suffragists
- Chapter 3: *The Column of Strength*, a Pan Asian coalition’s statue dedicated to World War II sex crime victims in San Francisco
- Chapter 4: *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*, a documentary that follows over seventy years of activism of a Chinese American black power activist

Although these sites memorialize diverse Asian/American women’s experiences, they offer evidence of the challenges Asian/American memorials encounter including: archival scarcity, gendered stereotypes, and geopolitical attempts to influence or erase these histories. I discuss each case study in detail in the first section of this introduction. This dissertation argues that Asian/American memorialization employs strategic rhetorical techniques that uses memorial genre to evoke historical context while navigating present-day geopolitical issues to (re)imagine the Asian/American women’s stereotypes.

In this introduction, I begin by giving an overview of my three case studies and the specific arguments each chapter makes. After outlining each case study, I provide an overview of Asian/American gendered stereotypes that the case studies work to challenge and recast. As I am engaging three separate case studies through a variety of research methods and methodologies, the next section is divided into three subsections that overview my scholarly methods and methodologies, as well as the scholarly interventions I make to

Asian/American rhetoric, feminist memory studies, and cultural rhetorics. I end with an overview memorial genres my case studies engage.

Since this dissertation is considering race, culture, and gender, it necessary for me to acknowledge my own positionalities. I am a white and Native American, cisgender woman who is also middle-class and able-bodied. Although I identify as Native, I am white passing and have profited from the institutional structures that privilege whiteness. My research seeks to challenge and expand memories that often are dominated by white, male narratives and amplify the memories of Asian/American women as they are remembered by Asian/American community members.

Case Studies Overview

My first case-study chapter, “Stories of Filipina Suffrage: Remembering Marginalized Histories in Colonial Contexts,” considers a traveling exhibit that displays newspaper articles, photos, and other documents about acts of Filipina civic engagement that challenge colonized and national boundaries. This chapter analyzes a traveling exhibit, “The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement,” (WHPSM) that was created by two Filipino expats who conducted archival research to recover and put on display stories of Filipina suffragists who lived in Washington D.C. in the early twentieth century. In this chapter, I assess how “The Washington Home” uses the affordances of a traveling exhibit (plus a lecture) and a scrapbook style of display to reclaim DC as a “home” for Filipina activism and history. I argue that the creators use a memorialization method to amplify not only Filipina activists’ goals, but also to ask audiences to reconsider what counts as suffrage activism and what counts as American history. I see this method of scrapbooking not just mimicking the stylization or visual of a scrapbook, but as a performative act that the memorialists employed to embody the voices of their project. The panels’ scrapbooked display often feels as if the

historical women composed the exhibit themselves, instead of a memorial project recovering their memory. Although moments of the exhibit reorient the audience into the modern moment, the overall feel is very personal and engaging. This chapter seeks to understand the impressions this performative scrapbook gives and how that shapes an argument of suffrage to make DC a home for Filipina activism.

My second chapter, “Sculpted Advocacy: Remembering the “comfort women” through the San Francisco Pan Asian Coalition Statue,” analyzes Asian/American memorialization practices seeking to include gendered violence against Asian/Americans into the U.S. memory landscape. This chapter focuses on a San Francisco statue, *The Column of Strength*, created by The “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition (CWJC). The statue remembers the “comfort women,” the thousands of Asian women who were forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese army during WWII. Japan has worked to deny these women’s experiences. The *Column of Strength* depicts three young girls holding hands representing the “Comfort Women” victims from South Korea, China, and the Philippines. The monument also includes a statue of an older woman, Kim Hak-Sun, representing the “Comfort Women” activists who began advocating for better treatment of war crime victims in the 1990s. In this chapter, I analyze how the *Column of Strength* reflects and extends the “Comfort Women” Movement’s statues and argue that the CWJC strategically works to combat historical denialism through and to think about the “comfort women” through multicultural and activist frameworks. I explore ways coalitional memorial activism repositions Asian/American women’s history in terms of grief and healing while also promoting justice for the “comfort women” and awareness of sex crimes.

My dissertation’s third case-study chapter, “Documenting Afro-Asian Allyship in Detroit: Remembering Grace Lee Boggs’ Seventy Years of Activism,” examines the

documentary, *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*, a documentary that remembers the life of Grace Lee Boggs, a Chinese American Black Power activist. I consider how the two main characters in the documentary, Boggs, and the director, Grace Lee, a Korean American filmmaker interested in combating passive gendered stereotypes of Asian/American women, often are in conflict with one another as they work together to memorialize Boggs' life. This dissertation chapter focuses on ways *American Revolutionary* leverages memorial conflict as a meaning-making tool. Victoria Gallagher and Margaret LaWare assert that conflict is an integral part of memorialization. They argue that memorialization often evokes complex stories that involve "conflict and contestation over how events and individuals are represented materially within the public realm" (106). I consider the genre of documentary memorials and analyze how *American Revolutionary* utilizes documentary features like testimony, interviews, and editing and utilizes conflict as a generative story-telling method. From this prospective, conflict is not a negative, combative force, but a more dialogic process in which both speakers honor one another and collaboratively create a space in which both positions can be considered (Ratcliffe 53). Thus, I argue that it is through memorial conflict that *American Revolution* presents a more complex and considered history of Afro-Asian allyship and activism.

Each chapter considers how memorials not only remember past activism, but also work to reframe current conversations about Asian/American women in more just and enlightened frameworks. I claim that my chosen memorials are created by memorial activists and each seek to expand U.S. memory. Further, I consider how memorials seek to frame Asian/American women as activists and outside negative stereotypes that often shape Asian/American women's experiences in the United States. I discuss these stereotypes further in the next section.

Asian/American Stereotypes

One of the key elements that Asian/American scholars and memorialists contend with is ways that American social narrative often imagines Asian/Americans as outside of “American” cultural identity. This takes form in racialized stereotypes. Stereotypes work to Other Asian/Americans and two prevailing stereotypes include as the “model [minority] (read: already assimilated and thus invisible) or as perpetual foreigners (read: outside the nation’s history)” (*Writing Against*, Hoang 4). The perpetual foreigner stereotype constructs Asian/Americans as “foreign-born outsiders. . . where the permanency of equal status as citizens cannot be fully realized” (Ng et al. 96). The model minority stereotype presents Asian/Americans “as a monolithically hardworking racial group whose high achievement undercuts claims of systemic racism made by other racially minoritized populations, especially African Americans” (Poon et al. 469). The perceived academic success of the “model minority” creates fear in white Americans that the “Asian “horde” will take over the classrooms to raise test scores and ruin the grading curve” (Ng et al. 95).

V. Jo Hsu argues that the model minority myth is not a real reflection of Asian/American culture and was a strategic attempt to prioritize whiteness: “the model minority myth reveals that it is both a fantasy and a very real strategy of racialization in the United States. This trajectory offers a narrow set of acceptable behaviors—forms of education, familial relations, and labor—that merit national belonging” (Hsu). The model minority myth creates the false impression that Asian/Americans do not experience racial discrimination, that they are rich and successful. However, the Asian/American community is the most economically diverse groups in the United States and the model minority myth “continues to make it difficult for Asian American students and scholars to articulate the specific nature of oppression in educational institutions and fails to note the wide disparity,

on average, between members of various subgroups, such as Hmong or Filipino Americans, within the umbrella of Asian American” (Kimoto 141).

Further, the model minority myth positions Asian/Americans as apolitical and are not associated with protest, social unrest, speaking out, or civil disobedience: “Asians and Asian Americans. . . are often left out of political narratives, such as the Civil Rights movement, which prevents Asian and Asian Americans from being seen as a generative force for political rhetoric and change” (Dich). My case study chapters directly challenge this apolitical notion of Asian/American women. For example, Chapter Four considers a memorial that speaks to what it means to be an Asian/American activist by diving into the life of Grace Lee Boggs, a Chinese American Black Power activist. This chapter focuses on how memorials can expand understandings of Asian/American activism to include cross-cultural solidarity and what that means for understanding Asian/American identity and activism.

While women are equally subjected to the model minority and perpetual foreigner stereotypes, there are also two gendered stereotypes that seek to categorize Asian/American women in particular. Renee Tajima examines stereotypes of Asian/American women and locates two exoticized, sexualized personas: the Dragon Lady which is the exotic the evil seductress, and the Lotus Blossom, sometimes known as the China Doll, which is the quiet, passive figure that is an object of lust and objectification for white men (Tajima 309). Throughout the 1900s and into today, these perceptions of sexualized Asian women have infiltrated films and popular culture perpetuating images of Asian women as evil seductresses or subservient sexual objects.

The Dragon Lady stereotype is a gendered version of the perpetual foreigner stereotype. In addition to being highly sexualized, the Asian Dragon Lady is seen to embody the "bad" Asian female characteristics: “greed, selfishness, and sophisticated intelligence

combined with base cunning and an entirely unsentimental perspective on ‘love.’ And she's out to possess your empire” (Caputi and Sagie 102). Film was one of the primary ways this stereotype was perpetuated and one of the first instances of this stereotype is embodied in silent film actress Anna May Wong’s career. Wong most often played a stereotyped characterized version of Asian and Chinese women, including criminals (H. Wang 85). Wong is important because as Hanying Wang argues “it is from her roles on the black-and-white screen that people take images of the Dragon Lady. Of course, she didn’t originate the stereotype, but her on-screen representations of it helped make the image an unforgettable part of Western consciousness” (H. Wang 85). This image of the Asian/American woman as sexualized, perpetually “othered” individuals results in a “spectacle of racism” in which dominant Western culture produces a highly stereotyped reflection of Asian/American culture for mass production (Pham and Ono 176). Such representations are consumed by public audiences and further solidify prejudiced conceptions of Asian/American gender and culture.

The Lotus Blossom stereotype reflects the model minority myth, but with heteronormative gendered expectations. In film, the Lotus Blossom characterization presents Asian women as passive, subservient, and helpless especially when compared to a white heroine (Tajima 309). This stereotype crafted Asian women as sexualized dolls meant to do as men directed. Although films featured Asian/American women as Lotus Blossom figures, this stereotype was furthered in American society following WWII when soldiers brought home Asian wives. Newspapers and soldiers built up Asian women as “excellent wives, cute, docile, knowing how to please their husband and great homemakers” (Zhou and Bryant 1088). This perpetuated a model minority type of scenario in which Asian women are figured as apolitical or less political than other women and “reinforces the Orientalist distortion of Asian American women” (Roshanravan 262). This “model” Lotus Blossom wife stereotype further places them as silent figures in white society.

The Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossom stereotype are important for this dissertation for several reasons. First, these stereotypes sexualize Asian/American women making them objects for the male gaze, especially white men. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Asian/American women's bodies were often associated with prostitution and subjection. Soldiers interacted with Asian sex workers and carried home stories of "Orientalist fantasies" where Americans were the dominant colonizers (Azhar et al. 294). The Asian sex worker has played a role in many popular movies, including *Full Metal Jacket* or *The World of Suzie Wong*. On social media, Asian/American women experienced sexual harassment because of these stereotyped characters. In 2016, Asian/American women reported men would message them via social media asking the women to fulfill their Lotus Blossom or Dragon Lady fantasy. Many Asian/American women reported being approached by especially white men that wanted "the fantasy of the brothel and the massage parlor" and to interact with Asian women through "racialized and sexualized domination" (Azhar et al. 294).

The hyper-sexualization of Asian/American women is important throughout my dissertation. For example, Chapter Two draws upon colonized histories of the Philippine nation and Filipinas were often framed through stereotypes. Samantha Heinrich writes, a newspaper report on the 1904 World Fair discussed an exhibit of Filipino natives and maligned them as "'dog-eaters', 'savages' and/or 'barbarians'" (Heinrich 26). While Filipino men were considered barbarians, women were continually labeled under Lotus Blossom type stereotypes and were viewed as "the indolent, cloistered victims of their savage husbands" (Prieto 224). For Chapter 3, the "comfort women" were literally forced into sexual slavery and modern-day Japanese supports seek to paint them as sex workers. For example, former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and other government officials have directly questioned Japan's involvement with the "comfort women" and have suggested that the women were not coerced but were paid volunteers (Pike 3-4). These stereotypes persist today and in order to challenge

sexualized stereotypes, my dissertation chapters highlight how memory projects work to refigure these stereotypes through different genres of memorialization. I approach each case study through careful methodological approaches in order to amplify the Asian/American voices that work to challenge these stereotypes. The following section outlines the scholarship and methods I used throughout my research.

Methods, Methodologies, and Scholarly Conversations

Throughout my dissertation, I employ a variety of research methods including interviews, site visits to my case study's memorials, rhetorical listening, and rhetorical analysis to help me magnify and examine the stories told through different memorial genres. I also contextualize my study in current socio-political conversations that consider gendered and raced public memory as well as Asian/American experience and culture.

My research also includes evidence from interviews and site visits.² For Chapter Two, my primary evidence includes site visits to “The Washington Home of Philippine Suffrage” exhibit, a lecture given by the creators Titchie and Erwin Tiongson, and an in-person interview and emails with Titchie Tiongson. Chapter Three also includes primary evidence. This evidence was gathered because of a University of Maryland’s English Department grant that enable me to travel San Francisco. During my trip to California, I conducted site visits to the *Column of Strength* and interviewed two founding members of the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition (CWJC), Lillian Sing and Phyllis Kim. I also exchanged several emails and texts with both Sing and Kim.³

² I received IRB exemption status for this research.

³ Unfortunately, although I sent several requests for interviews to Grace Lee, the director of *American Revolutionary*, I was unable to talk with her about the documentary for Chapter Four and her goals and purposes for that documentary.

I approached these interviews and research with care and consideration. I strove to listen to the histories and stories the memorials presented and amplify their creators' voices and goals through my case studies chapters. To do this work, I draw upon three primary fields of study, including Asian/American women's rhetoric, feminist memory studies, and cultural rhetorics.

Asian/American (Women's) Rhetoric

Asian/American rhetoric is a growing field within the scope of rhetorical studies. LuMing Mao and Morris Young's *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric* (2008) defines and explore issues in Asian/American rhetoric. Mao and Young define Asian/American rhetoric as "the systematic, effective use and development by Asian Americans of symbolic resources, including this new American language, in social, cultural, and political contexts" (Mao and Young 3). *Representations* works to redefine Asian/American identities and challenge Western representations of a diverse culture in relation to memory and daily life. Ten years later, *Enculturation's* special edition, "Asian/American Rhetorical Trans/formations," expanded Mao and Young's work and considered Asian/American rhetoric from a more globalized framework. My dissertation builds on these texts and is influenced by scholars such as David Palumbo-Liu, V. Jo Hsu, and LuMing Mao and Morris Young. This section gives a brief introduction to the guiding principle of current Asian/American rhetoric scholarship and ways the field is expanding to consider gender in relation to Asian/American identity.

My research answers the 2018 special edition of *Enculturation's* call for researchers to investigate "Asian/American" rhetoric over "Asian American." This is an intentional stylization that draws upon Palumbo-Liu's theory of a transnational Asian/American identity.

Accordingly, this use of a slash underscores a more transnational understanding of Asian/American identity where

the *solidus*/slash acts as both border and bridge and perhaps provides both a textual and graphic representation of movement, relationship, and a reaching across and beyond—beyond the nation-state. . . [and includes a] dynamic, unsettled, and inclusive movement between Asian and American as subject, or between Asia and America as imagined global geographies. (1)

Although all my case studies were created by individuals living their lives in the United States, the memorials engage Asian history and women. Thus, the “slash” expands understandings of what is included in the “Asian American” memorial landscape to be more transnational in scope. Further, according to V. Jo Hsu, while the slash connects countries it also draws upon a complicated U.S. history where immigrants are not included in political narratives. In other words, it connects the United States and Asia, but also between the U.S. government and Asian immigrants. Further, this slash challenges stereotypes like the model minority and the perpetual foreigner as “the slash. . . calls much-needed attention to how “Asian American” has sometimes presumed a monolithic, fixed community and culture, and it splits open that term for (re)examination and resignification” (Hsu). As Asian and European influences play a part in Asian/American culture, a transnational approach allows for consideration of global connections to the local lives of community members (Mao and Young 7).

While Asian/American rhetoric is a growing field, there is a growing need for scholars to consider gender and Asian/American identity. In *Representations*, Terese Guinsatao Monberg explores Filipina feminist work through the study of Dorothy Laigo Cordova, founder and executive director of the Filipino American National Historical Society

(FANHS) (85). In the same collection of essays, Mary Louise Buley-Meissner reflects on the reception of Asian American women's literary works and K. Hyoejin Yoon challenges historical and current societal norms placed on Asian/American women's behavior. Others, like Wendy S. Hesford and Theresa A. Kulbaga, examine immigrant labor of Asian/American women. Such work lays the foundation for understanding rhetorical constructions of history and identity formation within Asian/American communities in relation to gender. My work builds upon the methods and methodologies these scholars introduce.

Feminist Memory Studies

Public memory focuses on the subject being memorialized, the place and style in which it is remembered, and the resulting sensations the memorial invokes for the visitors (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 29). Public memory and memorialization “function as sites for engaging—or eliding—difficult ideological battles over race, gender, and, indeed, what comes to stand as ‘truth’” (Mandziuk 272). My research engages women's memory and considers how race, gender, class, and other positionalities are being remembered through my three case studies. Specifically, I see my research entering into and guided by a feminist memory studies framework. This section defines feminist memory studies and overviews the scholarship that has influenced my research and methodological approaches, including Haivan V. Hoang, Terese Guinsatao Monberg, and Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch. My dissertation intervenes in these discussions by exploring how memorials craft understandings about Asian/American gendered experiences and how commemorators navigate memorial genres to push back against Asian/American women's stereotypes.

Feminist memory studies, an emerging specialization in the field of rhetoric, expands feminist research to consider the way women are remembered or erased from public memory

and how gender is composed and recast through memorialization. According to Jessica Enoch and Jordynn Jack, feminist memory scholars seek to understand “how and why rhetorical women exist (or don't exist) in articulations of public memory” (521). Critical literary theorist Anna Reading argues the need for memory studies to engage gendered issues and women's oppression (196). Scholars sought to extend memory studies to include women's commemorations. Scholars have been interested in expanding the rhetorical canon to include women (Jarratt), considering how memory is used to influence women's experiences (Stormer), and exploring ways public memory is used to limit women's identities (Kitsch). Scholars are also interested in ways memory works to engage gender through reductive or limited scopes. For example, Eileen Eagan examines how statues have historically represented masculine histories and statues of women embodied feminine ideals like “justice” or “motherhood” instead of actual historical figures (Eagan 33). This scholarship works to recover, expand, or reimagine the memory landscape to include women's experiences through memorialization.

Further, feminist memory scholars are interested in ways issues like race, class, sexuality, and other positionalities are memorialized in relation to gender. Maureen Reed's article “How Sacagawea Became a Pioneer Mother” highlights the complex nature of memorialization when concerning race and ethnicity as she examines the appropriation of a Native American woman's image by white suffragists through the Sacagawea monument. Other scholars engage nontraditional memory genres like cookbooks (Collings Eves) and children's biographies (VanderHaagen) to examine how African American women's agency and identity are remembered. Although the field is placing an increasing emphasis on the connection between gender, memorialization, and culture (Coker, Mandziuk, Vartabedian), few rhetoric scholars directly research Asian/American memorials and the gendered experiences they represent.

Asian/American memory scholars consider how memory works to exclude Asian/American identities as outside of what is considered American. Lisa Lowe's *Immigrant Acts* considers the relationship between Asian/American identity and American public memory through an examination of Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial. Lowe argues that because Lin identifies as Asian/American her interpretation of the Vietnam war was rejected by many Americans as not a "true" representation of American history and thus led to the erection of a the more traditional *Three Soldiers* statue (Lowe 3-4). Asian/American scholar Haivan Hoang argues that memorials are sites in which "intricate layers of cultural memories are recollected into compositions and . . . foster social involvement and community solidarity" ("Asian American," Hoang 81). According to Hoang, Asian/American rhetorical memory can be seen as a "rejoinder to the persistent forgetfulness that displaces Asian Americans from commonplace understandings of what is American" (63). Both Lowe and Hoang consider public memory from a racial and cultural framework and this dissertation draws upon their work to engage issues of gender, race, and public memory.

This dissertation in particular draws upon Terese Guinsatao Monberg's intervention surrounding Asian/American women's rhetorical production. Monberg researches Filipina memory and argues that the recovery of feminist rhetorics is guided by Western ideological assumptions about whose activities count as feminist and may "prevent many Asian/American women from being heard" (84). She argues for the need of research that engages Asian/American women's voices and the place, spaces, and histories they embody, instead of comparing them to white Western understandings of feminist activism ("Listening" 83; 103). In this research, she maintains that scholars should adopt "listening" as a methodology and interpretative framework in order help make visible histories and even feminist research that often make Asian/American women invisible. Listening allows for scholars to understand the historical context and understand how Asian/American women in

particular participated in society beyond a limited scope of activism. Thus, individuals whose actions do not fit Western versions of feminist activity can still be valued. This method for listening allows for Asian/American memory work to be more inclusive of the ways Asian/American women participated in society. This approach helps reimagine these histories as feminist even if they might not be considered feminist by a Western framework.

I also use feminist research methodologies to build an interpretive framework to shape my feminist memory studies approach to Asian/American memorials. I use critical imagination throughout my sites visits. In *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch see critical imagination as thinking “between, above, around, and beyond” gathered evidence to speculate on “what might likely be true based on what we have in hand” (71). Using critical imagination, I engage the memorials and make connections between the figures and stories displayed and think about their connections to Asian/American women’s history and identity. This approach encourages inquiry into the type of critical imagination the community invoked when they created the memorial. How did they research, fill in the gaps, and reinterpret discursive practices? My research engages critical imagination as this type of inventive inquiry allows for me to draw connections between history, daily lives, and the types of meaning making that community values. Riley-Mukavetz encourages scholars to build interpretive frameworks from the communities that we study instead of applying an outside lens. Critical imagination then helps bridge the gap between the memorial and the community and encourages an analytical engagement with the memorial from the standpoint of the community. By employing feminist methodology for this project, it focuses my research on communities who are performing memory work and the women Asian/American they are remembering. The following section goes into more detail about how I ethically and responsibly engage these communities.

Cultural Rhetorics

Today, people frequently come in contact with cultures that are not their own, prompting rhetoric scholars to consider how they can ethically engage in research with groups and cultures that were not their own. Cultural rhetorics emerged from this line of critical thought and the field seeks to create a foundation for ethical methods and methodologies to engage diverse cultures and rhetorical production. Andrea Riley-Mukavetz defines cultural rhetorics research as scholarly work that “investigates meaning making as it is situated within a specific cultural community” (Riley-Mukavetz 110). Riley-Mukavetz asserts that to engage community practices from a cultural rhetorics standpoint, researchers need to consider “the spaces/places people share, *how* people organize themselves, and *how* they practice shared beliefs” (110). In particular, Riley Mukavetz places particular emphasis on *practice* to understand the intersections between culture and rhetoric. For my dissertation, I consider the practice of and product of memorial work to understand articulations of Asian/American women activists’ memory. Riley-Mukavetz encourages scholars to build interpretive frameworks from the communities that we study instead of applying an outside lens. In my research, I seek to honor the stories and experiences being told through Asian/American women’s commemoration and by the communities seeking to remember the past. My dissertation extends conversations about cultural rhetorics to explore how memorials are sites for cultural expression and activism.

Public images, historical memory, and representations of cultures can have a direct effect on Asian/American culture and identification, past, present, and future. American culture and media have historically homogenized the Asian/American identity often in negative or culturally misguided ways (Uba 106). As such, a project that focuses on the history of not only an ethnic group, but women from that ethnic group, challenges public

representations of what it means to be an Asian/American today. Representation, either dominant or counter, can affect the ways people identify or think about the subject (Machida 36). Memory projects can directly affect this identification: “For many other diasporic groups, historical memory is also a key source of identity” (Mikyong, “Memorializing” 90). For my case study, the identity of Asian/Americans in the U.S. can act as a bridge through which other Asian/Americans can relate and understand both memory and their place in society today.

As I engage my case studies, I am guided by a cultural rhetorics research tool that Mary Garrett calls self-reflexivity. This requires one to temper instinctual responses and instead try to consider another’s position (245). Researchers need to acknowledge their positions of privilege. Therefore, knowing that an academic researcher comes from a place of power and is studying a culture that might be historically subjected to colonizing ideals, means that a researcher must consider multiple layers of colonization. In my dissertation, I considered institutions of racialized oppression in the U.S., the colonization of the Philippines, and post-colonial politics in Asia. Riley-Mukavetz sees self-reflexivity as a methodological lens. By using self-reflexivity, it can allow for a reorientation of meaning-making to help a culture’s practices visible and decolonize the spaces in which we interact (109). In Chapter Two, the Filipinas not only had to deal with gender politics, they also had to navigate colonial politics as the Philippines were under United States’ colonial rule in the early 1900s. In Chapter Three, the Asian “comfort women” lived under Japanese colonial rule and this colonial mindset still influences present day politics. For Chapter Four, although this chapter takes place in the United States, colonization and colonial systems of injustice have long influenced American race relations. Thus, as I engage these histories and memorials, I acknowledge my own privilege and the larger ways colonialism has influenced the lives and realities of the Asian/American women being remembered.

From a cultural rhetorics framework, I approach Asian/American memory projects as they seek to reinterpret, challenge, or reconsider dominant public histories. As Asian/American women's history is often erased, dismissed, or misinterpreted, the memorials can be viewed as counter memorials. Some counter memorials are instituted to rethink established beliefs, take a unique or uncommon form, have a multidimensional visitor experience, and/or challenge the visitor to engage critically with the topic (Stevens, Franck, and Fazakerley 954). Cultural communities often seek to decolonize the spaces in which they live by sharing their own narratives. Memorials could be seen as the material product of those narratives and lived experiences and would employ counter memorial practices and decolonial remembrance. Cultural communities' memorialization involves a certain amount of trauma as it resurrects the past for reconciliation or social justice (Alderman and Inwood 194). The memorials I engage in my case study often show the conflict and contestation that goes into remembering Asian/American women.

Another important element of cultural rhetorics/feminist memory studies research that guides my dissertation is audience. Public memory focuses on the subject being memorialized, the place and style in which it is remembered, and the resulting sensations the memorial invokes for the visitors (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 29). The audience plays an important role in public memory as memorialization "has been variously described as responding to needs of the present, serving the interests of the present, animating the present, serving as rhetorical resources of the present" (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 12). Through this framework, even though memorials remember the past, they are responding to the audience. In cultural rhetorics, the importance of audience for memory work becomes more diverse. This is because memorials from a specific cultural community asks audiences to learn about the community, acknowledge a harm, or recognize a reinterpretation of memory of a specific cultural community's point of view. For Lisa King, when considering cultural rhetorics and

sites of public memory, the audience becomes even more important as the site not only must represent cultural values or history, but also make those legible for those inside and outside the community (24). The difference in a cultural community site is that the creators must be all the more aware of what the community's values are and how they might be engaging a larger public that might disagree and misunderstand said values.

My research considers audience from a cultural rhetorics standpoint in several ways. In Chapter Two, Titchie and Erwin Tiongson remember a Filipina history that has been erased or forgotten. The presence of the Filipina suffragists in DC have gone mostly unremarked. Their memorial seeks to not only claim a space in DC for Filipino history, and the exhibit also asks non-Filipino audience members to see DC as a place as a site that includes Asian/American history. Thus, it creates DC as a more diverse and inclusive present. Chapter Two's *The Column of Strength* monument responds to an audience that is doubting or rewriting the history of the "comfort women." Thus, the statue seeks to educate audience members who do not know this Asian history, but also responds to those that seek to label the "comfort women" as prostitutes. Chapter Three directly considers the audiences respond to the documentary. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of tweets that respond to *American Revolutionary* and Grace Lee Boggs' role as an Asian/American activist and ally to the African American community, I contextualize how an audience engages a memorial that has been widely circulated and explore how this memorial speaks to current moments around African American social justice movements and the violence against Asian/American women.

Memorial Genres

As my research works at the intersection of Asian/American rhetoric, feminist memory studies, and cultural rhetorics, my case studies are organized by genres of memory.

Risa Applegarth defines rhetorical genre as organizational method for rhetorical activity. Genres have overarching qualities that help identify texts as part of that genre, but Applegarth argues for flexibility, creativity, and innovation in genres (“Rhetorical Scarcity” 452-453). Public memory genres help to organize methods of representing the past and understanding how different memorials shape and represent specific memories (Tota 132). This section outlines overviews of the genres I am engaging in this dissertation.

Important for analyzing genres is considering the overall rhetorical situation that influences the genre (Coe 197). Therefore, public memory genres must respond to and engage current moments or otherwise they could be considered ineffectual and forgotten in the wake of other memorial projects. Carol Mattingly calls the process “sifting,” which is when proposed or existing monuments have been forgotten or “been gradually sifted from public collective memory” (134). Thus, these monuments fall out of the public eye as new or more relevant memory work becomes more dominant. I discuss in each chapter the relevant histories and present moments the memory projects engage to remain relevant. Further, as Asian/American women’s memory work is a growing field, part of my dissertation’s purpose is to argue ways genres the projects employ help combat forces that might wish to forget or sift the women’s memories from public recollection.

Exhibit

My first case study chapter engages the genre of traveling museum exhibit. This exhibit is constructed of six large panels and an introductory banner that are put on display across the larger Washington, D.C. metro area. It is a “traveling” exhibit because it has no permanent home and is only on display by request in libraries, museums, and other interested institutions. While different elements influence this genre, I am guided by rhetoric scholar Lawrence Prelli’s work *Rhetorics of Display*. According to Prelli, to read a display, or to

analyze an exhibit by considering its rhetorical significance, means to consider how a display employs strategic elements to persuade the audience for a certain goal and to assess how those persuasive elements manifest in the display (1). Rhetorics of display means to highlight what is displayed for audience and how it is displayed.

In my assessment of the genre of display, I consider “The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement” artistic blend of archival material, including photographs, newspaper articles, stamps, letters, and more. Additionally, this case study chapter considers how the traveling nature of the documentary works to reclaim D.C. as a site for Filipina history even though D.C. memory projects are dominated by a largely white, male history (Blair 276). “The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement” intervenes in this by strategically using elements of display and location to recompose D.C. history to include Filipinas.

Statue

Statues have long been a subject of research in public memory studies. Feminist memory scholars (Carole Blair, Eileen Eagan, Brenda Frink) have considered how gender is composed and recast through statues. Other feminist scholars (Roseann Mandzuik, Jenny Woodley, Maureen Reed) reflect on how the genre of statues composes race or ethnicity in relation to gender. This scholarship takes into consideration the statue’s creators, subject, the materiality of the statues, the statue’s location, and the history and contemporary moment the statue reflects. The case study in Chapter Three engages these elements surrounding the “comfort women” statue in relation to how the *Column of Strength* speaks to Asian/American women’s identities and experiences.

The *Column of Strength* is an especially compelling site of research because memorials that remember rape, domestic violence, or other crimes against women are rare.

This is due in part because memorializing gendered violence is a complicated process. Gendered violence is highly personalized and requires individualized healing and processes of grief. Many see rape or other sex crimes as a private ordeal not meant for public display. So how do you memorialize rape or sex crimes? Sites that seek to remember these topics often take a more creative or abstract approach in memorialization. Thus, the fact that the *Column of Strength* is a statue, a genre of memorialization that many associate with towering symbols where national heroics that are played out in the public sphere or more traditional, mainstream memory projects, makes this choice much more significant. This underscores the need to understand how genre is a part of this memorialization process and how the statue enters polemic conversations about race, nationality, and sex crimes. Further, few statues represent Asian/American women in the United States making the *Column of Strength* a needed intervention.

Documentary

Documentaries are complex illustrations of ways narrators use the past and rhetorical modalities to reconstruct the past via film. According to Paula Rabinowitz, the documentary genre and historical memory are linked as a documentary “seek[s] to reconstruct narrative, but it often functions as a historical document itself” (119). Audiences who watch documentaries see them as reflective of the historical past. Scholars (Rabinowitz, Hesford and Kulbaga, Ong, and Pham) who engage documentaries as memory projects consider testimony, camera and filming choices, editing, director influence, subject participation, use of archival footage, and other elements to understand how documentaries work to compose a narrative of the past. This chapter engages the documentary *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* to better understand how documentary features like testimony, interviews, and editing shapes audiences understanding of Asian/American women’s activism and identity and cross-cultural allyship.

For the past twenty-five years, Asian/Americans have been producing documentaries⁴ to reshape the dominant American historical narrative through recording personal testimonies and embodied experiences (see Hesford and Kulbaga, Ong, and Pham). Rhetoric scholar Rory Ong argues that these documentaries are part of “transnational Asian American rhetorical practices. . . that engage in the reinvention, rearticulation, and rememory of trans migrations, particularly as they expose the Asian diaspora in relation to western expansion rather than mere cultural travel or sharing across boundaries” (Ong 27). As these documentaries are recording Asian/American culture, experience, and identity within the United States, few scholars or documentarians consider the relationships between other minorities. Chapter four focuses on the documentary *Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* and considers how the documentary speaks to the present moment’s need for Afro-Asian allyship.

Conclusion

This project is in essence influenced by social justice concerns and seeks to engage ways race and gender are composed through memory projects. Although my case studies are diverse, they work together to paint a vibrant Asian/American community that is working together to recover and expand Asian/American women’s historical activism. Further, they evidence innovative ways to engage genres of memorialization to advocate for social justice issues. Therefore, the case studies not only engage memory projects but also consider how Asian/Americans become memorial activists themselves as they seek to remember a more inclusive history. As “the politics of public memory is the locus of the contestation over the meaning of justice in contemporary liberal democratic politics” (Hooker 107), the memory projects work to challenge Asian/American stereotypes both directly and indirectly because

⁴ See *Slaying the Dragon* and *Slaying the Dragon: Reloaded*.

they depict women outside an apolitical, sexualized persona that directly were involved in justice issues.

Further, this dissertation considers Asian/American rhetorical practice and answers V. Jo Hsu's call to consider issues like violence, race, and gender for a more inclusive praxis for understanding Asian/American identity: "We must envision ways of *doing* Asian American identity that dismantle forms of imprisonment, systems of wealth and poverty, and structures of gendered racialization that subject 'deviant' bodies to interpersonal and systemic abuse" (Hsu). By considering topics like resisting colonialized gendered formulations, sexual slavery, and cross-cultural solidarity, my dissertation surveys three diverse examples of practice that works to expand the conversation of Asian/American rhetoric from a vibrant, dialogic, and multicultural intervention to understanding Asian/American memorial efforts that actively work against the erasure of women's voices and trauma.

CHAPTER TWO: Stories of Filipina Suffrage: Remembering Marginalized Histories in Colonial Contexts

According to the group StopAAPIHate, in 2021, over 11 incidents of anti-Asian hate occur each day in the United States and these incidences are twice as likely to affect Asian/American women as men (Kuo and Leong). In response to the growing violence around the United States, many states are passing resolutions to help combat anti-Asian sentiment. Yet, Asian/Americans across the United States remain afraid of rejoining public gatherings post COVID-19. Many Asian/Americans are frightened of sending their children to school (C. Wang) or to visit other traditionally more Asian/American locations, like markets or karaoke bars (Huynh).

This prejudice against Asian/Americans are not a new phenomenon; in particular, Filipino Americans have faced a history of oppression that still holds true today. During the late 1800s and early 1900s the large mass of immigrants on American soil experienced harsh prejudice and violence: “After 1898, Filipinos were racialized as savage black bodies, and this idea of Filipino savagery would affect the lives of Filipino migrant workers in the 1920s and later decades” (Balce 45). The savage label placed upon Filipino bodies coalesced into a movement colloquially called “Positively No Filipinos Allowed.” Such a phrase was something that became commonplace in the mid-1900s. American Studies scholar at the University of New Mexico Antonio Tiongson reflects on the prominence of “Positively No Filipinos Allowed” signs and the social and political realities Filipinos faced during this time:

Displayed prominently on doors of hotels and other business establishments throughout California in the 1920s and 1930s, it was a sign Filipinos frequently encountered in their day-to-day lives symptomatic of their

racialization—as nationals and aliens through state-sanctioned practices and policies, and as cheap labor by capital interests and imperatives—that resulted in their disenfranchisement and disempowerment. As a consequence, Filipinos were denied not only public accommodation but also access to rights and entitlements, including citizenship, the franchise, and property ownership. (1)

While the U.S. has moved beyond “Positively No Filipinos Allowed,” historical prejudices have influenced modern day Filipino American mental and physical health. Psychology scholars E. J. R. David and Sumie Okazaki assert that earlier American policies have a direct correlation to how modern-day Filipino Americans experience being Filipino in America today (6).

These historical and modern instances reveal that Asian/Americans experience violence, rejection, and prejudice in American public and private spaces. Further, although there is a rich and diverse history of Filipino culture⁵ in the U.S., this history often remains unmarked or erased in historical accounts. According to Philippines on the Potomac (POPDC), an organization created by Titchie and Erwin Tiongson⁶ dedicated to recovering Filipino history in the Washington, D.C. area, landmarks that are a part of Filipino history often “are hidden in plain view and often go unmentioned in tours and guidebooks” (“Introduction”). POPDC has recovered over 150 historical sites in the D.C. area significant for Filipino history (“Introduction”). However, of these sites, few are dedicated to women. This is perhaps due in part because of the lack of Filipina immigrants, as Filipinas make up

⁵ The term “Filipino” designates “a wide range of social formations, subject positions, and cultural practices. . . ‘Filipino American’ constitutes a fluid and contingent social formation with shifting boundaries and meanings. . . it is a signifier that evokes a multiplicity of positions that cannot be construed in the singular” (A. Tiongson 11).

⁶ Throughout this chapter I refer to Titchie and Erwin Tiongson as the Tiongsons and Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson. I often use the informal Tiongsons as I have interviewed, emailed, and spent time with them in relation to their project. Additionally, Titchie Tiongson goes by “Tiongson” informally, publishes under Carandang or Carandang-Tiongson. These all refer to the same individual and the informal use of Carandang-Tiongson or the Tiongsons helps make it clear who I am referencing.

less than 30% of the Filipino population in the United States in the 20th Century (Mabalon 157). However, the lack of attention on Filipina history reflects a larger trend in both American history and academic scholarship. Terese Guinsatao Monberg underscores that feminist rhetorical history also suffers from the lack of focus on Filipinas (83). Further, Monberg makes a call to remedy this lack and in particular argues for the need to analyze the *spaces* of Filipina rhetorical performances (emphasis added). A focus on Filipina rhetorical spatial performances (Where did Filipinas engage in public life? What tools did they use?) provide evidence beyond institutionalized memory to expand collective memory to include “emergent, diverse, often transcultural and transnational” Filipina traditions (“Listening,” Monberg 104).

This chapter takes up Monberg’s call and analyzes a POPDC public memory project, “The Washington Home of the Philippine⁷ Suffrage Movement” (WHPSM), which focuses on Filipina activism in D.C. This traveling exhibit is dedicated to establishing the presence of Filipina suffragists in Washington, D.C. and making clear the relationship between U.S. history and women’s voting rights in the Philippines. Further, although the exhibit’s title focuses on suffrage, the exhibit is also concerned with mapping a relationship between early literacy activists, Filipina suffragists, and modern Filipina rights activists. This approach extends early suffragist-based activism to include a community of Filipina activists dedicated to social justice and women’s rights throughout 100 years of history. This exhibit was created in 2016 by Titchie and Erwin Tiongson, a husband-and-wife research team who are not archivists or professional historians. Rather, they are what we might see as everyday public memory activists. WHPSM travels around the D.C. area and has been displayed in various

⁷ Throughout this chapter I use the terms Filipino, Filipina, and Philippine. Filipino represents culture, society, and groups of either all men or men and women who claim heritage in the Philippines. Filipina denotes that the group or cultural item is related to a feminine identity. I use Philippine to denote a larger scale term that includes politics, historical movement, or more official title that also includes political governing bodies.

libraries, museums, and archives, including the University of Maryland library, Philippines Embassy, and Fairfax Museum and Visitor's Center. The Tiongsons also travel with the exhibit and lecture about their research, the exhibit, and Filipina suffrage history in the United States. This exhibit works to recover the history of Filipinas that has mostly been forgotten or overlooked.



Figure 1: “The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement” exhibit, panels 1-3.

Although the title and exhibit make it clear that a major theme for the exhibit is Filipina suffrage history in the United States, the exhibit does not focus on suffrage activities alone. With the help of Monica Bascon, a graphic designer, the Tiongsons transformed their collection of eclectic archival documents into a scrapbook-like display that engages topics

from literacy and suffrage activism to modern day politics and social justice concerns. As seen in Figure 1, the exhibit is made of six large, olive-green panels that display an abundance of material the Tiongsongs recovered, including photos, letters, newspaper clippings and more. The material is dedicated to remembering the Philippine Suffrage movement in D.C. and various Filipina nationals who lived or visited D.C. during the twentieth century. While all the women featured in the exhibit were active in civic life of some sort, including membership in charitable organizations, advocates for women's literacy rights, and politicians in their own right, the materials displayed paint them not only as activists, but also as mothers, socialites, sisters, and wives. Thus, although suffrage ties many of the women together the overall purpose of the exhibit is to create a cross-generational connection between early suffragist history and modern Filipina activists in D.C and connects Filipina activism with other activists throughout history.

The result is that the exhibit evokes the genre of a scrapbook, one that recovers an eclectic picture of the daily activities and identities of Filipina activists in twentieth century United States. Amy Mecklenburg-Faenger maintains that scrapbooks have historically allowed for women to construct their own histories and identities to act as a counter to dominant historical narratives that dismissed or erased their contributions (142). In the same way, the Tiongsongs created a public scrapbook that recovers the lives of women who had been forgotten. The exhibit's vision of what belongs within suffrage history is expansive and challenges viewers to think broadly about connections between suffrage and other forms of women's activism within the Filipina community. While the collection and display of these material are important, the presentation of that display via the scrapbook format is equally as influential for the audience. Rhetoric scholar Lawrence Prelli calls this type of display a demonstration that necessitates an audience as it is "enact[ing] a rhetorical performance that anticipates the presence of others; it is the staging of a spectacle to be seen" (Prelli 14). The

rhetorical performance for the exhibit is two parts: 1. The display of the exhibit in various libraries, archives, and embassies and 2. A traveling lecture series by the Tiongsons.

In this chapter, I assess how WHPSM uses the affordances of a traveling exhibit (plus a lecture) and a scrapbook style of display to reclaim D.C. as a “home” for Filipina activism and history. I argue that the creators use a memorialization method I call “performative scrapbooking” that not only amplifies Filipina activists’ goals, but also asks audiences to reconsider what counts as suffrage activism and what counts as American history. I see this method of scrapbooking not just mimicking the stylization or visual of a scrapbook, but as a performative act that the memorialists employ to embody the voices of their project. Thus, everything from the archival material displayed to the blank spaces between the pictures, newspaper articles, and other material collected by the Tiongsons has meaning. The panels’ scrapbooked display often feels as if the historical women composed the exhibit *themselves*, instead of a memorial project recovering their memory. Although moments of the exhibit reorient the audience into the modern moment, the overall feel is very personal and engaging. This chapter seeks to understand the impressions this performative scrapbook gives and how that shapes an argument of suffrage to make D.C. a home for Filipina activism.

I begin this chapter with an overview of the Philippine women’s movement to orient the reader in important history that the exhibit references. The next section gives a detailed overview of the exhibit and the scrapbook display. The following three sections examine how the scrapbook display rhetorically reimagines suffrage and reclaims D.C. as a site of Filipina activism. I then examine how the Tiongson’s lecture and the traveling exhibit amplifies the effect of the scrapbook display. I conclude with a focus on the traveling exhibit because I believe the exhibit’s display enhances the traveling element’s impact. Therefore, by exploring the scrapbook display in detail, the impact of traveling becomes clear. Traveling in this sense

is also an extension of the performative nature of the scrapbook because it embodies the movements and goals the Filipinas employed themselves as they traveled and lectured throughout DC.

Filipina History: Inspiring the “Washington Home”

“The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement” was inspired by one serendipitous trip to the Library of Congress when Titchie and Erwin Tiongson unearthed a photograph (see Figure 2). The photo was taken in 1922 and its description in the Library of



Figure 2: Twenty-two Filipina women are greeted by First Lady Harding on the White House lawn.

Congress holdings was simple: “Philippine women received by the first lady.” The photograph features twenty-two Filipinas on the White House lawn with First Lady Harding but, as the description of the photo indicates, there was little information about who the women were or what they were doing at the White House. Deeply interested in learning more about the image, the Tiongsons discovered that the Filipinas were the family members of a Filipino delegation that was visiting the United States (Carandang and Tiongson 76). The

delegation was known as the Philippine Independence Mission of 1922. This delegation advocated for Philippine freedom from U.S. imperial control⁸ (Onorato 559). While the Filipino delegation members and their meeting with President Harding is well documented, the lives and activities of the Filipinas during this same time is not as easily accessible. Unable to let go of the mystery of exactly who these women were and their role in Filipino history, the Tiongsos set out to prove it was not “just one more vintage photograph—pretty, yet unremarkable” but instead this was a photo of “some of the most extraordinary women of their time,” who would help to rewrite suffrage laws in the Philippines (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). The Tiongsos eventually learned the names of most of the twenty-two women in the photo. A key to establishing their connection to suffrage was through the central figure in the photograph who is easily recognizable as Sofia de Veyra, one of the most recognizable Filipina suffragists. The other women were students, activists, wives, or daughters of politicians who worked in the U.S., refugees, and other short-term visitors to the U.S. (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). Unfortunately, historical records often have limited information about these women or their lives in the United States.

This photograph is a touchstone for the exhibit and guides the project as it seeks to remember Filipina activists in Washington, D.C. by accounting for who these women were and what their activist purpose was. The photo also contains many of the women featured in the exhibit. Although the purpose of the project asserts a connection with these Filipinas within the Washington D.C. area, the activists themselves lived and worked for the majority of their lives in the Philippines and took part in the Philippine women’s movement. The Philippines celebrated the centennial of the women’s movement in 2005. However, Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza argues that the marker for the women’s movement should include

⁸ The Philippines gained independence from the United States in 1946.

earlier “socio-civic” activities (like literacy advocacy groups and other civil rights groups) and the beginning of the movement should begin as early as 1898 with the beginning of U.S. imperialism (217). WHPSM includes information on activists from 1898 to the late 1990s. However, as the White House lawn photograph is central to the memorial, I believe that an overview of the larger historical implications the activists were working within aids in better understanding the exhibit. Therefore, this section gives a historical overview of the Philippine women’s movement, and the following section gives an overview of how WHPSM contextualizes this history.⁹ The history in this section is targeted to remember both larger scale moments in Filipina history as well as some specific groups or individuals of which will be useful to better understand the exhibit.¹⁰

One of the most important aspects to understanding Filipina history is understanding the role of almost 400 years of imperialism in the Philippines. Spanish colonialism of the Philippines began in the mid 1500s and lasted until 1898. Under Spanish control, Philippine culture saw a significant shift toward more westernized gendered expectations. Before the Spanish invasion, women in the Philippines held equal status to men and many held positions of power (Veneracion-Rallonza 216). Under Spanish colonialism, “the transformation of women from highly respected equals of men to objects of subjugation began” (Santos 25). The new woman in this context was influenced by European understandings of gender and the Filipinas’ new role was that of a meek, obedient daughter and devout Catholic virgin. With the new rule, lower class women also were expected to work as slaves or in other positions of servitude for the upper-class, rich men (Santos 26). Religion became essential to

⁹ This section also gives information on specific women who are memorialized in the exhibit. I’ve used footnotes to help readers orient this historical overview with the women from the exhibit. These footnotes reference panels in the exhibit. For more information about these panels please see “Scrapbooking Arguments” section of this dissertation.

¹⁰ Because of the scarcity of information about many Filipina suffragists, I’ve included footnotes with short bios collected from a variety of sources including *Wikipedia*, blogs, magazines, etc. The footnotes and other details on suffragist reflect a targeted list of women remembered in the exhibit.

gender roles in the Philippines and the role of women was limited to that of “hearth, home, and heaven” (Santos 27). One group that combated these gendered expectations were “The Women of Malolos.” The Women of Malolos advocated for the right to educate women and for their inherent potential (Santos 28). In 1888, 20 women signed a letter to the Philippines’ Governor-General about women’s Spanish education in the Philippines. An organizing member of this group was Mercedes Tiongson Sandiko¹¹ (Maño). Overall, education became a way in which women not only fought for equal rights but combated the multiple layers of gendered expectations both in a Western context and in the Philippines.

Historically, the Filipina suffrage and equal rights movement suffered from disconnect because of class and gendered expectations: “the main stumbling block has been their own fragmented and disjointed view of themselves as members of the so-called ‘opposite sex’ and as members of a class divided, male-dominated society” (Santos 23). The women had to combat challenges within their country and without. Western feminist groups and organizations influenced Filipinas’ conception and formation of a movement. Women in the United States often used organizations and groups as a way to gain rights in both domestic and international spheres (Sharer 35). Yet, American women’s groups that were working abroad, like the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), undercut women of color as many saw “nonwhite populations as naïve and inferior in political understandings” (Sharer 41). Groups like the Women of Malolos were an important element arguing for Filipina access to equal rights, but they also acted as a counterbalance of the narratives groups like the WILPF might have maintained.

¹¹ Mercedes Sandiko was in the original photo and is memorialized on Panel #2. Sandiko was an active literacy activist and supported her family. She acted as a manager for her family’s land, gave aid and supplies to the Katipunan during the Philippine Revolution, and was also a founding member of the Red Cross in the Philippines (Maño). The Katipunan was a covert militia that sought to free the Philippines from Spanish rule in 1892 (“Katipunan”).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States took imperial control in the Philippines. Instead of giving Filipino citizens' rights to participate in United States politics, the new rule placed Filipinos in a political limbo. Beginning in 1901, Filipinos in the United States and abroad were considered as neither foreign alien nor American citizen, but simply as ambiguous U.S. "nationals" who held no U.S. political rights (Baldoz 74). Filipinos were granted the right to vote in elections in the Philippines in 1907 and women gained the same right in 1937 (Carandang and Tiongson 81). However, as U.S. nationals, Filipinos could not become U.S. citizens or vote in American politics. The history of voting rights for Filipino Americans reveals inconsistent and prejudicial policies perpetuated by the U.S. government concerning American colonial subjects.

Filipinas continued advocating for their own rights during American colonialism and early activist movements were influenced by white, American suffragists. American groups often sought to silence Filipinas to maintain "American superiority" and colonial control of the Philippines. Because of imperial laws and regulations, Filipinas were often limited in what they could achieve. Therefore, groups often worked in conjunction with existing American groups while trying to maintain their own goals and ideals. Many of the Filipina groups in the 1900s were more closely aligned with pro-American rhetoric and advocated for Spanish/English literacy¹² (Angeles 233). In 1906, the Asociacion Feminista Filipina (AFF, the Feminist Association of the Philippines) was formed and they "lobbied for prison, education, and labor reforms, campaigned against prostitution, gambling, drinking, and other vices, and supported women in politics" (Angeles 234). AFF often worked with and supported American goals. However, AFF cofounder Clemencia López worked against

¹² Ines Villa Gonzalez was an early supporter of Filipina rights and an advocate of Spanish/English literacy. She was an award-winning author, educator, and civil rights worker (Brainard). She is memorialized on Panel #4 of the exhibit and is in the original White House lawn photo.

colonial messaging and for Philippine Independence (Angeles 234). López¹³ was an anti-imperialist activist who spent several years in the United States advocating for Philippine Independence from the United States. From 1901-1903, López acted as a vocal advocate in the United States for the Philippine's right to self-govern despite the American belief in the uncivilized and dependent nature of Filipinos (Murphy 261). Upon returning to the Philippines, López became a feminist activist who argued for women's rights (Prieto). López worked with Sofia de Veyra to establish the AFF. De Veyra¹⁴ was one of the most influential and well-known suffragists in the Philippines. De Veyra was married to the Filipino Commissioner to the U.S. She was also president of a women's rights organization in Manila and was a key figure in the Filipina suffrage movement (Underwood).

While many Filipinas began to speak out against American imperialism, a group that started organizing for the legalization of women's right to vote is *Asociacion Feminista Ilongo* (AFI, Feminist Association of Ilonggo). This group was created by Pura Kalaw¹⁵ in 1906 and successfully convinced Congressman Filemon Sotto to sponsor a suffrage bill in 1907 (Davis 127). Unfortunately, this bill ultimately failed. Pura Kalaw, Sofia de Veyra, Pilar Hidalgo Lim, Estefania Aldaba Lim¹⁶, and Aurora Quezon all played an integral part in women's rights in the Philippines. Pilar Hidalgo Lim asserted that the repeated rejection of suffrage represented the continued need to maintain patriarchal traditions and keep women in the home (Davis 127). Pilar Lim was an educator, civic rights advocate, and a suffragist. She was married to Vicente Lim, a Filipino general, and was the mother of six children, including Luis Lim ("Pilar"). Luis Lim was a scholar who later married Estefania Aldaba Lim.

¹³ López is memorialized on Panel #2; however, she is not in the original photo. López, Pilar Lim, and Estefania Lim all have a panel entry but did not meet with First Lady Harding in 1922.

¹⁴ De Veyra was considered the leader of the group in the photo that inspired the exhibit. She has an entire panel (Panel #3) dedicated to her memory.

¹⁵ Pura Villanueva Kalaw has an entry on Panel #4 of the exhibit and is in the original White House Lawn photo. Kalaw was a famous beauty queen, feminist, and human rights activist (Rivera).

¹⁶ Pilar Lim and Estefania Lim are both featured on Panel #5; however, they are not in the original photo.

Together they had six children. Estefania Aldaba Lim held a PhD from the University of Michigan and worked as a clinical psychologist, child psychologist, and was the “founder and president of Philippine Mental Health Association in 1952” (Xie) She worked with the Girls Scouts, advocated for child welfare, and was an active member of the Filipina rights movement (Xie).

The Filipina suffrage movement began to gain momentum in 1935 with the election of Manuel Luis Quezon and his suffragist wife Aurora Quezon¹⁷. In 1935, The Philippine Constitution asserted that women should be allowed to vote (Veneracion-Rallonza 218). In 1936, President Quezon changed Philippine law and asked women around the country to vote on a suffrage bill (Davis 127). President Quezon created a special referendum called the 1937 “plebiscite” that asked Filipinas to speak for themselves concerning women’s right to vote. For women to gain the right to vote permanently, 300,000 women would need to vote “yes” in the special plebiscite (Aquino 36). The Philippine National Assembly committee “thought this requirement would be virtually impossible to meet because women had never voted before. And that would be the end of this pesky suffrage issue which have been blowing hot and cold for two decades” (Aquino 36).

Although many thought that this would be impossible, suffragists like Aurora Quezon and her compatriots launched a campaign that demonstrated a resolve and dedication for women’s rights (Veneracion-Rallonza 218). One of the most influential elements of this campaign was the General Council of Women. The General Council help motivate women to vote through a variety of public outreach initiatives including press and radio updates,

¹⁷ Aurora Quezon is found on Panel #4 of the exhibit and is also in the original White House Lawn Photo. She held an active role in Philippine politics and as a suffragist. Aurora Quezon is one of the most beloved figures in Filipino history as she was the first official First Lady of the Philippines. Quezon supported Girls Scouts, Red Cross, and was an active member of the women’s rights movement in the Philippines. She was assassinated after WWII by a group of Filipino militia fighters (Limo).

“posters, rallies, house-to-house visits, speaking tours, distribution of sample ballots, [and] informational lectures” (Aquino 36-37). The General Council even helped with food, housing, transportation, and childcare. In the end, almost 500,000 Filipinas voted and over 90 percent of Filipinas voted in favor of granting women the right to vote in the Philippines (Davis 127). By 1937, the law was put into place and the Philippines was one of the first Asian countries to pass a women’s suffrage law (Veneracion-Rallonza 218).

Scrapbooking Arguments: The Creation of the Filipina Exhibit

After finding the photograph of the women on the White House Lawn and discovering that there was little information on the twenty-two Filipinas, the creators of WHPSM reimagined what could be considered as sources for archival research and expanded their research methods to discover more about who the women were. Cheryl Glenn and Jessica Enoch assert the capacity of “smaller collections or accidental discoveries” to “expand our notions of what counts as a primary resource, as an archive” (328). The Tiongsos spent months reading biographies and newspapers, contacting community members¹⁸ who had family oral histories and photographs of Filipinas in the twentieth century, and visiting archives that had collections dedicated to Filipino history, like the University of Maryland’s Hornbake library. Through such actions, the Tiongsos “reth[ought] the scene of the archive” and collected archival materials from sources not typically taken advantage of by scholars (327). By using the D.C. Filipino community as a resource, Titchie and Erwin engaged the community to rewrite dominant narratives of history and allow for marginalized voices to make a claim on D.C.’s memorial and spatial landscape

¹⁸ Cecelia Manguerra Brainard, a Filipina blogger, is an example of this. In a March 216 blog entry, she discusses how Titchie Tiongson reached out to her because she was in touch with Louie Nacorda. Nacorda was in touch with Ines Villa-Gonzalez’s grandnephew Mario Villa. Nacorda interviewed Gonzalez’s nephew and Brainard’s blog post shared facts from this interview. This emphasizes how information about these women was scarce and a legitimate way community historians are recovering the past is through family links and associations.

(O'Brien). These community resources and smaller archives created a valuable outlet in which the Tiongsongs could follow the traces of the women's histories and collect a multitude of evidence about their lives in the United States.

By rethinking the scene of the archive, Titchie and Erwin Tiongson culled enough material to create a scrapbook-like memorial. Because of the scarcity of information about the women, a scrapbook exhibit became a way to document the materials they could find, allow for the display of "extraneous" material or material that did not fit with an overarching narrative, and allowed for jumps in time or left-out details that might not have been easily recovered. As Jacqueline Jones Royster asserts, historical narrative can often require "imagination" or the process of "making connections and seeing possibility" especially if this past has been erasure or forgotten (83). Thus, the scrapbook style of display mirrors a performative process of research connection and storytelling that helps overcome a lack of details about the historical moment. Performative scrapbooking in this sense begins before the memory project is constructed and includes the process of research and recovery.

This scrapbook exhibit has six large olive panels, an introductory banner, and a small collection of books that is displayed to the side of the exhibit. Each panel follows a similar pattern where in the center is a historical overview or biography about a particular theme or individual. These overviews are surrounded by photos and other documents (See Figure 1) relevant for that historical excerpt. Each panel has one to three overviews. The introductory banner is dedicated to displaying the White House Lawn photo and giving a brief overview of the women in the photo and the purpose of the exhibit. However, the core of the exhibit is comprised of the six panels that display the archival material. Like the introductory banner,

Panel #1¹⁹ is also dedicated to the White House lawn photo and general history of Filipina suffrage. The following panels are dedicated to one or two Filipinas who contributed to Filipina history and visited the United States sometime during her life. After Panel #1, the remaining panels follow a mostly chronological narrative. Panel #2 or the “Pioneer Reformers” panel gives an overview of activists who visited the U.S. in the early 20th Century and the Panel #6 ends with women from the 1990s.

The middle panels tell the stories of many of the Filipinas mentioned above. Panel #3 is dedicated to Sofia de Veyra and is the only Filipina who has an entire panel dedicated to her memory alone. Panel #4 is dedicated to Quezon, Kalaw, and Gonzalez. Aurora Quezon was First Lady of the Philippines leading up to WWII. Pura Kalaw was a Spanish language journalist and Ines Villa Gonzalez was a scholar, women’s rights advocate, and journalist. On Panel #5, viewers learn about a new wave of women’s rights activists. Pilar Hidalgo Lim was a suffrage activist in the 1930s and worked into the 1960s for Philippine civic rights. Estefania Lim was a clinical psychologist, women’s education advocate, and was the first female Secretary in the Philippines when she was awarded the position of Secretary of Social Services and Development in the 1970s.²⁰

Each panel resembles a scrapbook page entry and the women described above each have a portion of the panel (or the entire panel in the case of de Veyra) recording her life and activism. These scrapbook “entries” all follow a similar pattern. At the top of the entry is the woman’s name and in the middle of her entry is a black box. The black box is a biographical

¹⁹ For ease of reference for this chapter, I refer to the panels based on a roughly chronological order of history they represent. Panel #1 is the background for the inspiration for the exhibit, Panel #2 begins with history in 1898, and Panel #6 represents history from 1970-1990. However, while the introductory banner will often be the first element of the exhibit audiences experience because it is often displayed in front of the exhibit or in the room leading to the exhibit, the actual order of panels can be viewed in any order and it will not affect the overall viewing experience.

²⁰ This information can be learned from the exhibit in the biographical overviews each panel presents.

overview that contains around three to seven paragraphs about the woman. This information often includes general life facts about the women, but also includes a specific story, usually about a feat of activism that was important in the woman's life. The black box is surrounded by pictures, newspapers, clips of speeches or letters, and other material that often relate to the activist story or could just be from her life. Each panel has photographs collected from family collections, larger archives, or from newspapers. These photos are seemingly pasted on the panel often in jaunty angles and in no particular order. Each entry mirrors a real historical scrapbook page, as if the Filipinas themselves created the exhibit. However, there are elements that contradict this feeling as the exhibit also includes stamps from the Filipina suffrage Centennial, excerpts from academic papers and essays written about the women, and information from almost 100 years of history. Audience members can view the photographs, speeches, and other documents in any order they choose. Mecklenburg-Faenger asserts that "by selecting, arranging, and re-contextualizing items such as newspaper and magazine articles, [scrapbookers] were able to exert more control over what various clippings might mean" (144). In the same way, by displaying the materials as the exhibit does, it encourages the viewer to engage with either the general themes of the panels or to do a deep dive into the material to learn details about the histories. No document is emphasized, and each can be viewed as an individual moment or part of the collection of material that shows the Filipina's experience and influence in American culture.

The fact that the entries *appear* to be created by the women themselves is important because it emphasizes a rhetorical tactic of amplifying the women's voices and contributions. The Tiongson's mirrored scrapbook entries as if the women created themselves and ask the audience to imagine they are viewing documents collected by the women. By using this method, the exhibit seems like it is merely displaying the words and deeds of the women themselves instead of telling a story for them. Although the Tiongson's occasionally add

information or material that would challenge this, such as mentioning events that will happen after the scrapbook entry, the overarching feel is of a legitimate historical scrapbooked document. Mecklenburg-Faenger argues that scrapbooks have historically functioned as sites in which collective groups asserted their own agency by constructing their civic lives in an “uniquely femininized space” because the scrapbook style reflects the creator (142).

However, the Tiongsons are not directly recording family members or activities in which they participated. The exhibit is not a scrapbook is not a personal book, rather the Tiongsons remediated real archival documents into a scrapbook display. Therefore, the Tiongsons are mirroring the practices of early women’s groups and created a scrapbook that performs as if it was a creation from the past. Thus, performative scrapbooking is not only part of the creation and research process, but also performative in its display as it asks its audience to imagine that the product reflects the lives of the women.

One way the performative scrapbook display engages the audience is by asking them to reconsider traditional definitions of “suffrage.” For example, the title of the exhibit (“The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement,”) the introductory banner, and Panel #1 all focus on Filipinas in the U.S. who were advocating for Filipina suffrage or the right to vote in the Philippines. However, Panel #2: “The Pioneer Reformers” does not engage issues of suffrage. In fact, the first entry on this panel is Mercedes Tiongson Sandiko, a literacy activist. As noted above, in 1889, Sandiko, along with twenty other women, known as the Women of Malolos, requested a Spanish language school through a letter to the Governor General, Valeriano Weyler.²¹ Sandiko died before women gained the right to vote in the Philippines; however, the panel marks her and the Women of Malolos as part of the

²¹Weyler held a high-ranking position in the Spanish government and influenced education in the Philippines. Spain colonized the Philippines in 1565 and maintained control until 1898.

Philippine women's movement that led to women gaining rights in 1937 (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson).

Sandiko's biographical overview expands suffrage into a more diverse, inclusive definition of suffrage. The first sentence begins by saying that "though not considered a suffragist, Mercedes Tiongson Sandiko was considered revolutionary" (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). The overview continues mapping out her experiences as one of the Women of Malolos. By beginning this way, the exhibit asks the audience to critically imagine or make a connection between suffrage and arguments for literacy. Royster and Kirsch see critical imagination as thinking "between, above, around, and beyond" gathered evidence to speculate on "what might likely be true based on what we have in hand" (71). The Tiongsons first critically imagined the connection between Sandiko and Filipina suffrage and simply by displaying a variety of photographs and information, the exhibit asks viewers to make connections between the activists and stories displayed and to think about their connections to women's rights and suffrage especially given their Filipino identity. While the exhibit does not equate literacy and suffrage, the inclusion of Sandiko in the exhibit emphasizes the many roles Filipinas had to play to gain voting rights. Rhetorical scholar Wendy Sharer also considers the connection between literacy, women's rights advocacy, and suffrage. Literacy played a key role in both maintaining U.S. women's political consciousness and was a precursor to getting the 19th Amendment passed as it strategically helped the women to "participate actively in larger, more complex processes of information access and use" (9). Women in the United States historically negotiated multiple identities to gain voting and education rights. The exhibit considers activists, like Sandiko, as part of the larger Filipina suffrage movement, as literacy would help Filipinas gain the right to vote and participate in politics. As literacy leads to learning, the right to education, and a means to better organizing, literacy is seen as the first step to equal rights.

Expanding Filipina suffrage to include other civic-based activism creates a more inclusive memorial that reflects how Filipinas and other women of color navigated social constraints to gain human rights. According to Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza, to accurately encapsulate Filipina suffrage activities, histories “should not be only a story of what happened in the formal echelons of power” and but they should also include activities like Sandiko and the Women of Malolos and other “socio-civic” organizations (217). Monberg argues traditional recovery of feminist rhetorics is guided by western understandings of what counts as activism (“Listening,” 84). Thus, if the Tiongsons had left out Sandiko they might have a limited outlook of Filipina suffrage. The scrapbook display and the separate panels visually reconstruct a more inclusive definition of suffrage, provides an inroad or connector to other activism, and aids the audience in making connections across topics as they imagine how the various activisms and stories connect across geographical location and decade. Further, as some of the panels do not discuss suffrage at all, the focus on a more inclusive understanding socio-civic engagement becomes clear to the audience.

By reimagining Filipina suffrage for a more diverse set of activities and recovering the Filipina’s voices, the significance of the scrapbook style of WHPSM becomes clear. The use of the genre can be seen as an intervention or rewriting of the traditional ways users have used scrapbooks throughout history to be more inclusive of marginalized voices. Historically, American cultural citizenship has worked to rhetorically “other” Asian/Americans. Asian/American rhetorical scholar Haivan Hoang asserts that historical and current othering resides in a distinct connection between literacy, civic engagement, and race (*Writing Against* 6-7). Specifically, she argues that the lack of historical accounts of Asian/American literacy practices could be explained by “the unfailing construction of Asian immigrants and their American-born children as always foreign, always foil to an ideal American ethos” (Hoang, *Writing Against* 9). This “othering” of Asian/Americans is a bordering practice that

engineers conceptions of “border(ed) bodies as perverse and beyond normalized citizenship” (Johnson 33). Even in situations in which Asian/Americans have citizenship, bordering practices often deny them access to cultural citizenship in ways that force communities to (re)write themselves in dominant narratives. For example, Vincent N. Pham examines rhetorical strategies enacted by Asian Americans “that perfor[m] belonging by situating their memories as part and parcel of ‘Americana’” (para. 3) They assert Asian Americans articulated memories to redefine and expand the experience of being “American.” Thus, the use of a scrapbook style in WHPSM recovers histories of civic engagement and race in the nation’s capital and writes them into a historical narrative that otherwise forgot them. The next section explores how the exhibit uses photographs to connect Filipina suffrage to the nation’s capital and American culture and identity.

American By Association: Filipinas on the White House Lawn

As the last section made clear, the exhibit’s use of scrapbook display works to create an understanding of Filipina suffrage that includes socio-civic activities that expand suffrage work beyond strictly political activities dedicated to gaining the right to vote. This section builds off this assertion and emphasizes the technique the Tiongsons employed to expand the Philippine women’s movement, most of which occurred in the Philippines, with American culture and history. The scrapbook style of display once again helps amplify this argument as they repeat a single photograph four separate times. The White House lawn photograph is featured once on the introduction banner and three times on Panel #1. Photographs are “powerful sites of analysis within diverse fields of memory studies, not least because they provoke questions about how to conceive of the relationship between past and present, and provide scope for exploring the politics involved in making meanings and constructing histories” (Nugent 97). Photographs provide an outlet through which memory is built and

asks the audience to consider multiple layers of political and power structures that photograph represents.

The repetition of the photograph, which I call the White House lawn photograph, not



Figure 3: Sofia de Veyra and First Lady Harding from the White House lawn photograph

only establishes the theme of the exhibit it also works to connect the exhibit to American politics and the recovery of Filipina suffrage in the U.S. The introduction banner on the exhibit has a blown-up, black and white photo of women in fancy dresses and hats. Below the photo, is a historical overview that introduces the audience to the purpose of the exhibit, the background of the photograph, and a brief history of Filipina suffrage. By reading the historical overview, audiences learn that the central figures in the photograph are Mrs. Harding and Sofia de Veyra

(see in Figure 3). In this photograph, the two women are facing one another and seem to be looking the other in the eyes. The photograph asks the audience to see the two women as equals. Supporting the idea that the two women should be viewed as equals, the first two lines of the historical overview connect the First Lady with Filipina suffrage by asserting that she acted as their host and asserting that Sofia de Veyra was the leader of the White House Lawn group (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). The combination of a simple scrapbook style of display of a photograph and two sentences of context help establish a connection to American politics and suggests equal status between Sofia de Veyra and First Lady Harding.

Displayed at four different points in the exhibit, the White House lawn photo suggests the social prominence of the Filipinas, especially as they relate to American politics. In a scrapbook display, a photo can “act as both icon (literally representing a real-world referent)

and index (evoking a range of related forms and feelings)” (Christensen 84). The photograph acts as an index showing that the Filipinas had access to powerful figures in American history. It records twenty-two Filipinas on the White House lawn, including four of the most important suffragists in Filipina history: Sofia de Veyra, Pura Villanueva Kalaw, Aurora Quezon, and Ines Villa Gonzalez. Even though what the women discussed with Mrs. Harding remains unknown, the exhibit uses the photo over and over again as proof that Filipina activists were present in the U.S. Further, because the “Philippine Suffrage” is displayed prominently above and around the many iterations of the photo, the audience will most likely will conclude that the women discussed issues of suffrage with the first lady. Thus, the photo in many ways also becomes symbolic for the Filipina suffrage movement, asking viewers to critically imagine that the photo documents a Filipina suffrage delegation.

Panel #1 extends the introduction banner’s argument through repetition of the photograph and extended details about the Filipinas influence. The top third of Panel #1 features two White House Lawn photos and a large panel title: “The Women of the 1922 Independence Mission.²²” The most obvious White House Lawn photo takes up the majority of the space and is an almost an exact photo from the introduction banner (See Figure 1). In the middle of the panel. There is a historical overview that works to offer more details about the women in the photo and Filipina suffrage. The overview asserts that “Florence Harding would have been pleased to know that her guests, Sofia de Veyra, Pura Villanova Kalaw, Aurora Quezon, and Inez Villa Gonzalez would later be instrumental in the passing of the September 1937 Election Law that allowed Filipina women to vote and run for office” (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). This information is important because it firmly places the exhibit in context with women who played a key role in Filipina suffrage. Further, by

²² As noted above, the 1922 Independence Mission was a delegation of Filipinos to the White House. This photograph is of the wives, daughters, and sisters of the male delegates.

focusing on Sofia de Veyra as a leader of the movement, the photograph visually argues that de Veyra is held similar positions of power like other U.S. suffragist leaders.

The repetition of the photographs also creates a memory claim in which the Filipinas belong in the space of the White House and therefore American politics and history. According to Jenny Rice, a “memory claim” is a type of memorializing through which individuals recall narratives of the past to denote “what kinds of values and actions are considered worthy” (102). The repetition of the photograph becomes a memory claim that announces the importance of the Filipinas. The third repetition of the photograph is found in the top left-hand corner of Panel #1.²³ It is much smaller than the other photographs and is placed at a jaunty angle on top of the larger White House lawn. This photograph differs significantly from the other iterations because it is a bird’s eye view of the women standing on the White House Lawn. In this photograph, the audience sees around 15 men standing around the Filipinas with their cameras. While the small photograph does not cover up the larger, more formal photograph that dominates the top half of the panel, it does make a claim that the women in the photograph were important. This photograph shows the production and the value of the moment. Rice was interested in ways that citizens used memory claims to (re)imagine Austin Texas. They saw the development of Austin as a place where they did not belong and the old, remembered space as their preferred ideal (112). Memory claims are important because they can work to (re)claim spaces where individuals feel like they do or do not belong. I extend Rice’s understanding of memory claims in relation to space and assert that the repetition of a photograph can act as a memory claim or a “rhetorical orientation device” (125). With the photograph, the Tiongsons create a visual conversation through which they are claiming the White House as a site in which Filipinas not only belonged, but

²³ These photographs are part of the Library of Congress’s collection; however, only Figure 1 is available via digital repository.

as a site where Filipina suffrage activities occurred and were valued. As I will discuss in later sections, the fact that the exhibit also travels around the D.C. area also amplifies this argument. Rice draws on Bradford Vivian's claims that multiple iterations of a memory can "transforms its character" (Bradford 299 as qtd. in Rice 125). Thus, by repeating the photograph, the Tiongsons transform the photograph from a random photograph of Filipinas on the White House lawn into a message of connection between Filipina suffrage and American politics, the nation's capital, and space. As the introductory banner asserts that not much is known about these women, WHPSM fills in these gaps by repeating the photograph and adding biographs and historical overviews. Thus, these scrapbooking tactics work to overcome archival scarcity make arguments as just because there is a lack public memory evidence does not mean that memory is not authentic²⁴ (Rice 125).

The use of visual representation of Filipinas in the White House works to imagine the space of the United States and the nation's capital as part of Filipina history. The White House symbolically represents American politics, culture, and power and the presence of Filipinas on the steps of the White House metaphorically claims not only the space of the White House, but also connects to its symbolic counterparts: politics, culture, and American power. This is because space is not just material reality, but also includes social and cultural capital. This versatile view of space is known as the "social imaginary" which states that locations have hierarchies (Mountford 24). Social imaginary dictates who belongs and who does not based on cultural practice. By rewriting the White House Lawn to include Filipina bodies, the exhibit asks the audience to create mental map of Washington, D.C. as a home for this history. As Nedra Reynolds as asserts, mental mapping is a process through which "the

²⁴ Jenny Rice believes that memory claims can be problematic because they are feeling-based and as a result the "opportunity for a subject grounded in inquiry is lost" (126). While in many ways I agree, I also think memory claims in the form of archival evidence expands this beyond purely emotional recollection. Archival evidence might not always qualify as a memory claim, as Titchie and Erwin use a scrapbook style of display, they are embodying the memories of the women and therefore the archival material becomes more personal.

real and the imagined or the physical and the emotional come together” (109). Thus, the repetition of the photograph performatively instigates a *counter*-mental map for the audience whose knowledge of Washington, D.C. might not have included Filipina history.

By repeating the White House lawn photograph, the Tiongsons not only make an argument about the Filipinas connection to American politics and the right to space within that political system and culture, but they also echo the rhetorical tactics the Filipinas used in order to gain rights. Many of the Filipinas in the photograph were visiting for a short amount of time or living in the United States as refugees (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). During their stay they might have been rejected from restaurants or other public venues by signs that read “Positively No Filipinos Allowed.” The “Positively No Filipinos Allowed” movement declared that they did not belong in the public spaces of the United States. As the following section will discuss in more detail, the act of being present and Westernized was a key rhetorical strategy these women used to argue for basic human rights (Prieto 199). In the same way, the exhibit’s repetition of the photo mirrors the fact that these women continually had to assert their right to be a part of an American public.

After connecting the Filipina suffrage movement to the First Lady and the White House, Panel #1 also seeks to connect the Filipinas to the larger American suffrage movement. On Panel #1, below the White House lawn photograph is a middle section that features the historical overview, newspapers clippings about the women and other Filipinas in the U.S., pictures of Filipina activists, and a picture of American suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt. The historical overview announces that ten years before the Filipinas visited the U.S., Catt visited the Philippines and “met with American and Filipina women (Sofia de Veyra and Pura Villanueva Kalaw among them) about forming an organization to promote women’s rights” (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). The overview includes a direct quote from

Catt's diary where she expressed doubts about the success of her visit "as the Filipinas are afraid of the ridicule of the men." However, despite Catt's doubts, the meeting directly inspired the founding of the Women's Club of Manila (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). By invoking Catt and highlighting her connection with Filipina suffragists and her investment in their rights, the exhibit expands visions of the suffrage movement beyond the U.S. These women were U.S. nationals who worked with prominent American suffragists, and the exhibit is intervening in the typical omission of this fact. By first emphasizing the White House Lawn photo, the exhibit asks the audience to see an implicit connection between politics and suffrage. Thus, the picture of Catt becomes part of that story as audiences are encouraged to read her image as connected to the women on the White House Lawn.

The scrapbook-like style of the exhibit reinforces the association with U.S. suffrage. According to Danielle Elise Christensen, "scrapbooks can also be experienced as exhibits that makers use to position themselves actively within symbolic discourses and regimes of value" (44). As discussed early, the Tiongsons created the exhibit through "entries" that seem to be created by the Filipina suffragists, the photograph of Catt and the historical overview rhetorically creates an association between the women in the White House photograph, especially de Veyra, and American suffrage. As the text points out, the photo was taken two years after women in the U.S. were granted the right to vote in 1920. Filipinas at home and abroad were still barred from the franchise. By drawing on Catt, the exhibit creates an unfinished narrative of American suffrage, one which de Veyra would take up the mantle to gain Filipinas the right to vote. Further, as the exhibit also was created by modern day public memorialists, the Tiongsons also work to place modern Filipino culture in relation to this history. The scrapbook display claims the memory of the women as part of the present narrative of Filipino Americans.

The White House lawn photo is found for the fourth time on the bottom third of Panel #1; this iteration is a repetition of the same photograph as the introductory banner but is used to emphasize the lack of history in American culture that remembers these women. As seen in



Figure 4, the photo is surrounded by seventeen headshots. Seventeen participants are labeled with a number that corresponds with their individual snapshots, leaving five women as of yet unidentified. The snapshot lets the viewers know the names of the women in the photo and a few of the women are featured in later exhibit panels, but for some all that could be remembered is their name. According to Titchie Carandang-Tiongson, simply discovering who the women were was particularly difficult as many of the women had married before or after the photo was taken, had differing or various names, and recovering their identities took significant work. Seeing this portion of the exhibit, viewers simultaneously learn who the women are, but also witness the realities of archival scarcity and the need for critical imagination. The unlabeled women emphasize the unfinished story, but by asks the viewer to critically imagine their connection to prominent figures like Sofia de Veyra, suffrage, and First Lady Harding.

Through this strategy, the Tiongsos emphasize the lack of history surrounding Filipina Suffragists in American memory. According to Risa Applegarth, the listing of names has significance in memory projects: “reading supporters’ names aloud extends the act of petition into public space, claiming status as members of a collective who speak their desires through [a] statue” (“Children Speaking” 61). The listed names in the “Washington Home” create a collective of Filipinas who were in the U.S., but the unlisted names emphasize the lack of ability for modern day Filipino Americans to claim or understand that history. Further, the historical overview emphasizes how these women were forgotten. The last paragraph of the overview gives an overview of First Lady Harding’s life: “Florence Harding holds the distinction of being the first U.S. First Lady following the ratification of the 19th constitutional amendment granting women the right to vote. Mrs. Harding was also a member of the League of Women Voters and the National Women's Party” (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). Following Harding’s biographical overview is a list of sixteen women that were in the photo. Each woman has her name listed and a male relation. For example, the first name reads: “Gloria Abad Santos, niece of Pedro Abad Santos and Jose Abad Santos, married Guillermo Peraita and later Albert Kindt” (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). The list draws on the woman’s relationship to their male relations which emphasizes how history has remembered her.

The banner and the Panel #1 also highlight how official American histories have forgotten these women. A few of the women listed have a panel dedicated to them, but for many, like Gloria Abad Santos, the Tiongsos could only find her name and her male relative names to remember her by. Following the list, the overview reads, “The names above appear on official lists but some could not be positively matched on the photo” (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). This indicates that the official lists could be incorrect, no information about the women could be located, or the photo of the woman was too blurry to

positively identify. This also means that from the official list remembering these women, six women were left out and Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson could only identify one additional woman (Maria Tejico Kalaw). In addition to forgetting the women's names, the introductory banner also makes clear that the meeting between the Filipinas and Mrs. Harding is also still a mystery as they might not have been there to discuss suffrage. However, viewers are asked to use their critical imaginations to think about what might have been a topic of discussion. The introduction banner asserts that the exhibit "honor[s] these women, their predecessors, and their modern-day successors. . . [M]ark[ing] their ties to the city[.]. . . we remember a group of women's graceful and fleeting moment on the South Lawn" (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). The full biography of Harding further highlights the lack of the information about the Filipinas and encourages the audiences to ask about the politics of remembrance and why these women have all but been forgotten.

This forgetting or erasure has particularly effected Filipinas in the United States. Frank Cordova calls Filipino Americans the "forgotten Asian Americans" and Rocco Cimmarusti asserts that Filipino Americans are all but invisible as a minority group within the United States (as qtd. in David and Okazaki 6). As the Philippines was colonized by the United States, psychology scholars E. J. R. David and Sumie Okazaki assert that this colonization has negatively impacted modern-day perceptions of Filipina culture in the United States (2). David and Sumie's study on Filipino American mental health found a correlation between colonization and negative feelings about Filipino culture and history (8). Further, memories of colonialization or the colonized have often been strategically forgotten or presented in a fashion that creates a narrative in which the colonization was a just use of power (Hannoum 371). Yet citizens with origins from previously colonized nations often experience prejudice and articulate the colonial past in vastly different ways than national state-sanctioned narratives (Hannoum 368).

In the face of the state's strategic forgetting of colonialism and the status of Filipino Americans as invisible, I maintain that the scrapbook style of display emphasizes not only the material Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson collected, but also emphasizes the negative space *between* the documents that represent the forgotten, erased, or other narratives that might not be included in the exhibit. For example, the bottom portion of Panel #1 is sparse, made up of only the White House Lawn photograph and head shots of the Filipinas identified in the picture. The only story this portion of the exhibit makes is emphasizing the labor it took to recover the women's names and faces and as well as the missing women who were not identified. This argument is furthered by the scrapbook style, as the pictures are separated by blank space and remain unconnected to other documents. Historians often "suture" memories of women's activism into "a vision of uninterrupted linear succession" (Scott 287). The exhibit's use of a scrapbook display however emphasizes a disconnection between memories. Blank spaces of the scrapbook ask the audience to imagine discontinuities and forgotten truths. The disconnect between photos leaves metaphorical and literal space between the displayed material and the other histories that have been lost. Further, each panel stands alone, separated from the other panels even as they create one exhibit. The space between the material displayed and the panels themselves create a disconnect between the stories they tell and stories they cannot tell. Instead of a continuous narrative, the disconnect suggests that the Filipinas' stories on display are incomplete and that because of colonialism, U.S. isolation of Filipino culture, and other factors there is more history to uncover.

Challenging Gendered Stereotypes: Clemencia López's Elite Performance

As "The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement" uses a scrapbook display as a memory technique to create a connection between the Philippine suffrage movement and Washington, D.C., the exhibit also uses the scrapbook display to represent the

various types of activism those Filipinas performed while in Washington, D.C. Specifically, the WHPSM scrapbook display considers gendered identities that Filipinas negotiated to further their social justice causes. Historically, scrapbooks have been a way for white Americans to construct a fantasy life of upward mobility as “the craft of clipping took on new connotations of class-climbing, self-improvement and cultural uplift” (Good 568). The act of scrapbooking was one of cultural self-improvement in which crafters performed idealized, richer versions of themselves. According to Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farrell, this practice has continued into modern practice where it is a primarily gendered activity performed by middle-class women. These scrapbooks are not only evidence of aesthetic, artistic outlets, but also spaces which engage issues of memory, citizenship, and identity. Katriel and Farrell argue that scrapbooking can be viewed as “an American art of memory *and* as a rhetorical practice of construction and performance of self” (2, emphasis in original). Thus, scrapbooks can be engaged as a rhetorical memory piece that reflects memories of identities that are embedded in social and cultural constructions of gendered, class, and national identities.

Because scrapbooks have historically been sites where mainly white, middle-class women have (re)articulated themselves into chosen identities there is a need to understand how other women, especially women of color, have employed the same rhetorical tactics. Early nineteenth century Black women would display scrapbooks or friendship albums to emphasize their own wealth and prestige (Cobb 28-29). These scrapbooking women recognized that this “genre of writing reflected their commitments to respectability, education, and social uplift” (Cobb 29).²⁵ In this section, I extend scrapbooking scholarship by considering how the WHPSM scrapbook frames Clemencia López’s Filipina identity, in

²⁵ Few scholars discuss how Asian/American women’s identities have been crafted through scrapbooks. A notable exception is women studies scholar Judy Tzu-Chun Wu. Wu wrote about a twentieth century Asian/American doctor Margaret Chung. Wu’s article focuses on the construction of Chung’s lesbian identity and uses evidence from letters from Chung preserved in Sophie Tucker’s scrapbook. Tucker was a white singer and actress who was in a relationship with Chung in the 1940s and 1950s (Wu 60).

particular. López visited the U.S. in 1902 to advocate for her three brothers' release from prison. Her brothers had been imprisoned because they were labeled as anti-American radicals and advocated for Philippine independence. During her visit to the U.S., López not only fought to free her brothers, but she was also an anti-imperialist activist and gave lectures and interviews advocating for Filipino freedom from U.S. control (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). While the exhibit features other notable women, I focus on López because the exhibit emphasizes how she strategically crafted a public persona that allowed her to safely address anti-imperial topics to American audiences (Prieto 212). Further, while the exhibit's other panels discuss the rhetorical tactics of suffragists who employed similar tactics to López, like Pura Kalaw, Aurora Quezon, and Sofia de Veyra,²⁶ López was the first Filipina to visit the U.S. and paved the way for the others. Thus, I think López is important to understand because by focusing on an anti-imperialist activist, the exhibit underscores how colonialism shaped Filipina identity, Filipina activism, and U.S. prejudice against Asian/Americans. Specifically, this section examines how the exhibit displays López's gendered performance as an elite social in order to challenge negative stereotypes that Filipinas faced in the early 1900s and further an anti-colonial agenda.

Clemencia López's scrapbook entry focuses on actions early Filipina rights activists employed. López's entry is found on Panel #2, "The Pioneer Reformers," below Mercedes Sandiko's entry.²⁷ Panels #3-5 do not have a title but instead focus on the women they memorialize. Each panel has a woman's name in large letters followed by scrapbooked material surrounding a biographical overview. Differing from these panels, Panel #2 does not include López or Sandiko's names as a title. Instead, the panel is divided by the title, "Pioneer Reformers" in large lettering. The top section is dedicated to Sandiko, and López is

²⁶ For more information on Sofia de Veyra's gendered performance see Katie Bramlett's *Peitho* article.

²⁷ See Figure 1.

memorialized in the later half. These entries use scrapbook material and the biographical overview to shape the audience's perception of the women instead of their names. As a result, the audience is asked to pay more attention to the women's activities instead of her name and see them as pioneers of the Philippine Women's Suffrage Movement.

As the exhibit explains, López's primary purpose for visiting the U.S. was to advocate for her brothers' freedom and through her endeavors to help her brothers, she came in contact with a wide array of influential American political figures. López's biographical overview explains that upon López's visit she met with President Roosevelt to discuss her brothers release and was expected to be allowed to testify before the Senate for her brother's freedom. However, in May of 1902, the committee in charge of U.S./Philippines relations decided not to allow López to testify (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). While advocating for her brothers' freedom, López also navigated a complex U.S. society and was one of the first Filipinas to visit the U.S. to speak out against American imperialism. She was considered a pioneer of her dedication to the cause and because she met with more success than her male counterparts. This was due in part to her gender and the tactics she employed to rhetorically challenge gendered stereotypes Filipinas faced (Prieto 220).

Panel #2 paints López as a public figure who carefully constructed an elite persona to gain public attention. One way the exhibit helps the audience understand this elite gender performance is through repetition of a photograph. López's entry follows a similar rhetorical tactic used on Panel #1 and the introduction banner: A single picture is repeated almost eight

times. This photograph, as seen in Figure 5²⁸, is a portrait of López. This photograph is important because it paints a picture of Clemencia López as a refined, trustworthy individual. As pictured, she has an updo with earrings and is wearing what appears to be an elaborate dress. The photo is located at the top of López's entry, directly below the title "Pioneer Reformers." To the left of the photo are excerpts from newspaper articles that feature the same photo.



Figure 5: Clemencia Lopez

Below these articles and to the right of her biographical overview is another set of newspaper articles featuring the photo. The repetition encourages the audience to consider the purpose or meaning behind the photo. López's biography asserts that this photograph was part of a strategic public outreach campaign that sought to establish her as feminine elite to help free her brothers and open doors so that she might address audiences concerning Philippine Independence. This photo was released in 1902 to the general public and was meant to spread the image of a "civilized" Filipina. Soon after, newspapers across the country began to report on López. In the end, the photograph helped gain attention for her brothers' plight. A few of the articles are displayed in the exhibit and these materials show that her public marketing ploy was ultimately

²⁸ Photo from Canning Eyot.

successful as the American public reported on her “beauty, courteousness, and cultured air which was a sharp contrast to most popular images of Filipinas and Filipinos” (Prieto 212).

As the exhibit displays López’s public persona and emphasizes that she had perform an elite identity in order to gain access by those in power. Through the scrapbook display, the exhibit shows the audience not only what López’s activist endeavors included, but also how she navigated U.S. high society and performed a gendered identity in order to so. Specifically, López rhetorically employed clothing and hairstyle as something that Americans would see as feminine and nonthreatening. Refined clothing and other feminine outlets of expression such as cookbooks can be useful outlets for cultivating elite identities to advocate for equal rights. Carol Mattingly notes the sophisticated way women used clothing to “capitalize on the intense attention given their appearance in order to undermine criticism and to re-direct audience to their words” (36). Thus, the scrapbook material emphasizes her gendered performance of an elite identity where she maintained an elegant façade and association with American socialites.

As the exhibit suggests, López leveraged her gender and elite persona to help reshape the American narrative of Filipinas and “instead of presenting her as racially inferior, published accounts expressed appreciation of her feminine refinement and perceptions of her beauty as exotic” (Prieto 199 as qtd. in Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). López’s gendered performance is important because as noted, Filipina women were often denied entrance to Filipinos under the “Positively No Filipinos Allowed” era. However, while Filipino men were considered barbarians, women were continually labeled under Lotus Blossom type stereotypes and were viewed as “the indolent, cloistered victims of their savage husbands” (Prieto 224). Thus, American society viewed Filipinas as exotic, passive individuals and López challenged this by perception by being a sociable, “cultured” figure

who worked independently. López's construction of an elite, gendered persona "challenged both the notion of an inherently patriarchal savagery and the feminist noblesse oblige that demanded intervention. . . [and] "shows how gender could complicate and even subvert the repressive politics of empire" (Prieto 223; 232).

Not only was López's performance of a gendered, elite identity acknowledged as a type of activism to gain attention of those in power, this same tactic is used in order to fulfill other activists' goals, especially advocating for women's rights and independence for the Philippines. The scrapbook style of display helps audiences see how her gendered performance was linked to these various types of activism. In order to do so, the exhibit displays an academic article by Lauren Prieto in order to emphasize the value of López for historical study, but also to show another voice that values her gendered performance. The scrapbook includes an excerpt from Prieto's article which underscores the multiple identities Filipinas navigated to gain equal rights:

López argued that Filipinos like herself were already a civilized people and thus did not need Americans' "benevolent assimilation." . . . Americans simultaneously perceived her as apolitical because of her sex. López was thus able to take advantage of American gender politics to discuss the "delicate subject" of autonomy for the Philippines in ways that anti-imperialist Filipino men could not. (199 as qtd. in Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson)

By using her elite status and gendered identity, López took advantage of Americans' dismissal of women's ability to participate in politics to advocate for Philippine independence. By displaying the first page of this academic article, the exhibit directly links the archival material and the memory of López and the other Filipinas activities to the argument made by Prieto. Essentially, it suggests that not only did López rhetorically

construct her elite persona, the exhibit also is honoring her work and reconstructing ways Filipinas presented themselves to the American public.

López's section on Panel #2 displays letters from President Roosevelt below her biographical overview; these letters emphasize the mixed results of López's campaign to free her brothers. Unfortunately, the letters outline that nothing was to be done for López's brothers and that would remain in jail.²⁹ Laura Prieto's article asserts that these letters indicated an end to her fight for her brothers' freedom. Prieto asserts that López learned that "neither chivalry nor the civilities of polite society applied to a colonial subject. Her class status and family background did not even merit the same courtesies that her American hosts could expect" (210). Although Prieto's assessment of the American view of colonial subjects is certainly true and some might interpret the letters as acknowledgment of failure on behalf of López, I believe that by including these letters, the exhibit is asking the audience to reconsider this idea. The exhibit presents the letters as evidence that López's campaign was met with success even if she did not free her brothers. Instead, the exhibiting of the letters and the numerous newspaper articles featuring her photograph displays López's ability to craft an elite persona, as she was able to create a new dialogue about Filipinas in print media; reach all sorts of socially active groups in America; and emphasize ways López's rhetorical tactics forced the highest level of office to take note of her and her brothers' case. Viewed from this light, audience members can see the many hurdles faced in gaining equal rights and that López was just one of the pioneer activists who paved the way for others who would come after her.

²⁹ The López brothers were released from jail sometime after these letters were sent based off a change in U.S. army relations with the Philippines. This decision seemed to have no direct relationship to Clemencia López or her time in the United States (Prieto 210).

The exhibit also shows the audience what the photographs and the construction of an elite Filipina persona achieved and connects López to suffrage activities. Another document on the exhibit is a copy of a speech López gave in May 1902 to the New England Woman Suffrage Association. The speech is cleverly constructed to advocate for Philippine independence through arguments carefully constructed to appeal to suffragists. She begins by saying even though she cannot match the other suffragists' rhetorical acumen, López begged for audience's "indulgence" so that she might shape a different view of Filipinos as most Americans believe Filipinos "to be savages without education or morals" (López as qtd. in Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). This rhetorical tactic acknowledged the biases of the suffragists but asked them to put these aside so that they might listen to her arguments for Philippine Independence. By showing this in the exhibit, audience can see how even amongst suffragists, and other American activists, López and the other Filipinas faced prejudice. Like the WILPF³⁰ and other groups, women's organizations often supported the idea of Filipinos as savages; thus, López's introduction genuflected to their sense of superior intellect with the hopes that she might convince them of Filipino's equality. The speech itself also goes on to compare the fight for Filipino independence to the fight for equal rights for women in the United States. By displaying this speech, the exhibit not only shows evidence of López's rhetorical position as orator in American society in 1902, but also shows why it was essential for López and other Filipinas to craft their elite persona. As suffragists might have held prejudices, without having previously had the newspapers distribute her image, López might not have gotten the chance to speak to American suffragists.

Like a scrapbook, the exhibit highlights and includes disparate artifacts that reflect of López's significance and amplifies López's rhetorical tactics she used to help gain her

³⁰ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, see Filipina History section above for more information.

brothers' freedom. The overall emphasis of the scrapbook display creates an image of López as the refined sister struggling to help her brothers gain freedom. This was López's desired image as it was an acceptable feminine identity that would not threaten American sensibilities nor labeled her as a savage. As a result, because she was an elite, nonthreatening figure, who abided by and adopted white feminine ideals, she could advocate for her brothers' freedom, promote Filipina suffrage, and give anti-colonialist lectures on American soil. López's gendered performance allowed her to achieve things her brothers or other Filipino men could not, because of her embodied, nonthreatening feminine identity.

Interestingly enough, Clemencia López was not in the White House Lawn photo that inspired the exhibit but, unless the viewer pays careful attention, this fact is not readily apparent. Clemencia López's biography overviews that she worked with Sofia de Veyra and Mercedes Sandiko and had close associations with several of the other women memorialized in the exhibit. By critically imagining López as part of Filipina Suffrage and the White House Lawn photo, López's performance as an elite, feminine public figure expands understanding of what suffrage and activism entailed for Filipinas during the twentieth century.

By displaying Clemencia López within more "feminine" identity frameworks, the exhibit asks audience to reconsider their preconceptions of both historical and modern Asian/American women. As Asian/American women were often cast as the passive lotus flower or the dangerous dragon lady, the combined presentation of the more traditional feminine persona (read lotus blossom) with the confident suffragist (read dragon lady) troubles an easy association with either identity, creating a more diverse image of López. Further, López's entry is one of the only other entries in the exhibit to explicitly address the prejudices Filipinas faced in the U.S. By doing so in the early years, shows that this is something that influenced Filipina experience in the U.S. and also shows the importance of

performing a gendered elite identity as it was a successful tactic the other Filipinas were undoubtedly aware of. The scrapbooked entry recasts López as an Asian/American women activist outside gendered stereotypes and emphasizes the rhetorical tactics Filipinas used to advocate for equal rights.

Cross-Generations of Memories: Future, Past, and Present Filipinas in D.C.

If the introductory banner and Panel #1 emphasize archival scarcity and the presence of Filipina activism in the U.S. and Panels #2-4 establish the *types* of activism the women employed (especially through gendered performance). #3 is dedicated to Sofia de Veyra and Panel #4 is dedicated to Aurora Quezon, Pura Kalaw, and Ines Villa Gonzalez. Each panel follows a similar pattern of memory by providing needed historical overviews and displays a scrapbooked history of the women and their lives in D.C. These women are in the White House Lawn photo or closely connected with Filipina's suffrage and gendered performance they employed in order to pursue their activist endeavors. However, Panel #5 begins to shift away from a story of Filipina suffrage and begins to tell a more modern history of Filipina activism. Panel #5 is dedicated to Pilar Hidalgo Lim and Estefania Aldaba Lim. This section explores how panels #5 and #6 further extend WHPSM overall message from one of focusing on suffrage to one that considers the value of socio-civic engagement. Further, these panels create cross-generational connections between early activists and modern-day Filipinos living in the U.S. An examination of Panels #5 and #6 reveals how the Tiongson's memorial creates a network of Filipina activism for modern day Filipino Americans and reclaim D.C.'s memory landscape as a symbolic territory in which to trace a lineage of activism.

Panel #5 acts as a bridge from early Filipina suffragists to a more modern version of Filipina activism. This panel focuses on the lives of Pilar Hidalgo Lim and her daughter-in-law Estefania Aldaba Lim. It features a single, shared biographical overview and is

surrounded by photos and newspaper clippings about Pilar Lim and Estefania Lim's live and role in the U.S. The scrapbook entry seems more modern than previous panels. While the photos are still black and white, they are sharper and better quality. The newspaper entries also reference events from the 1950s and seem to indicate a shift from colonial mindsets to creating an equal connection between the now independent Philippines and the U.S.

The first line of the shared biographical overview states that Pilar and Estefania “embodied the new generation of Filipino women in the middle of the 20th Century” (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). Pilar Lim worked with suffragists like de Veyra, but also held influential political positions like acting as the only female Commissioner for the U.S.'s Commission for the Rehabilitation of the Philippines in Washington D.C. Her role as a suffragist and leader within a larger U.S. political entity marks a distinct difference from early Filipina activists who had to work within women's groups or within confines of traditional feminine roles. The overview begins by emphasizing Pilar Lim's connection to the suffragist movement and the audience can easily make a connection between the panels. However, Estefania Lim never worked as a suffragist and the audience is once again asked to imagine the connection between the memory of a network of Filipina activism. Estefania Lim used the PhD in Psychology she earned from the University of Michigan to influence public health. She acted as a member of the U.S. Public Health Service in Washington, D.C. Estefania Lim did work for women's rights, but mostly through her efforts in psychology. Both women stayed in the U.S. and made their home in Washington, D.C. for an extended period and moved back to the Philippines after WWII (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). While the scrapbook display still features of their family and home life, the fact that Estefania and Pilar both had careers and education outside of their husband or strictly women's rights issue connects their memory to a more modern version of the Filipina activist.

The final panel moves the exhibit into the modern moment and includes history from the 1970s-1990s. The title of the panel is “In the Footsteps of the Leaders of the Philippine Suffrage Movement.” This title literally announces that the women memorialized on the panel are part of the network of Filipina activists and the work they are doing has a clear connection to early Filipina history. Like the other panels, this panel includes scrapbooked documents about Filipina activists in the Washington, D.C. Unlike the other panels, this panel’s documents are in color and feature modern excerpts from magazines like *Time* and pictures of Bill Clinton with Gloria Arroyo. The panel includes biographical overviews of women like Senator Leticia Ramos Shahani, Philippine Opposition Leader Corazon Aquino, and 2001 President of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. These modern women held political and activist roles in modern day Philippines, but by memorializing them in the exhibit, the Tiongsongs claim their activities as part of the memory of American Filipina activism. While earlier suffragists activities were part of colonial American history, the modern Filipina activist has a purely symbolic connection to the network of Filipina activism established by the exhibit.

Through the inclusion of the new generation of Filipina activism, the exhibit expands American Filipina history into a cross-generational network. Panel #6 claims that Filipinas born and raised outside of colonial American control still play a part in the modern Filipina American legacy and creates a network of Filipina activism: “A network of activists can consist of people who have never experienced face-to-face relations and yet feel strong interpersonal linkages. . . They are part of an emotional community, based on the sharing of real or symbolic territory” (Lacey 291). Thus, the exhibit is building a community of activists through their shared goals and space: Filipina activists in Washington, D.C.

However, the exhibit also transcends *time* and connects almost 100 years of diverse Filipinas. The exhibit traces texts as they circulated across different times and places and creates a picture of the women and the multiple identities they negotiated to advocate for equal rights. Through this lens, Filipina suffrage can be viewed through seemingly disparate documents that represent various times and places and create a network of connections that helped them gain the right to vote in 1937. The exhibit represents history beginning in 1898 and ends in the 1990s. By ending in the near past, the exhibit connects almost a century worth of activism to the achievements of modern Filipina politicians and argues for a consideration of how these actions animate one another. According to Amanda Kearney, memory is used as a tool in Indigenous communities to connect cultural identities across generations (166). Through this framework, time does not flow in a linear, progressive narrative, but in an interconnected, interwoven flow that connects the “contemporary self, ancestors, past, present, future and memory” (Kearney 166). I maintain that by representing activists from 1898 to the 1990s, WHPSM is creating a similar notion of time and connecting generations of Filipina activists across time and space. The scrapbook style display further emphasizes this interpretation as each panel follows the same aesthetic pattern. Further, as mentioned above, the blank spaces in the scrapbook entries speaks to archival scarcity, but it also allows for temporal jumps. The archival material is connected through the scrapbook entry, but each piece is from a different moment and time throughout history. Even the panels themselves are not connected. Thus, the blank spaces in the scrapbook display acts as not negative space, but symbolically works to complete a cross-generational connections between Filipina activists. This scrapbooked cross-generational memory also connects the exhibit to the modern moment as it suggests a larger connection to D.C. history and Asian/American history in D.C. The following section explores how this connection is further develop in the travel nature and location of the exhibit.

Traveling Exhibit: Lecturing and (Re)Claiming D.C.

As audience members browse the exhibit, it soon becomes clear that the focus of the exhibit is creating a connection between Filipina suffrage and Washington D.C. throughout the Philippine Suffrage movement. Public memory scholars engage memory texts as they “travel and circulate through networks and across geographical, temporal and other borders” (Nugent 96). Therefore, the spaces in which memory occurs and how the audience accesses them is important. As the previous sections discussed, the scrapbook display creates a connection between Philippine Suffrage and Washington, D.C. and also highlights the gendered performances Filipinas navigated in Washington, D.C. to gain rights. As WHPSM (re)imagines D.C. as a “Home” for Filipina suffrage, the exhibit further claims D.C. as a space for this history by traveling throughout the DMV³¹ area. This section is dedicated to assessing the impact of the traveling exhibit as it works to reclaim D.C. as a space for Filipina identity.

To begin, I consider the limitations and affordances a traveling exhibit entails. As this is a community driven project, meaning that a local group created the project and used local resources, there are not large scale demands to display the exhibit. Therefore, for the exhibit is only displayed when an organization or museum offers an invitation. Additionally, the location must be within a reasonable distance of the Washington D.C. metro area where the Tiongsongs call home. This is due in part because it is a large exhibit and would need to be personally transported to and from the Tiongsongs’ home when it is not being displayed. I have seen the exhibit several times, one of which was when the exhibit was not displayed and the Tiongsongs were kind enough to let me view it in their home. Thus, the limitations of a small-scale project become clear as they are limited by geographical scope and will reach a

³¹ The Washington D.C. metro area includes the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia

smaller audience as a result. Yet, I also believe that this underscores the challenges that communities of color face when trying to circulate their histories. Not only have the Filipina suffragists have all but been forgotten, the Tiongsons' memorial has to navigate archival scarcity in order to recover this history.

Nevertheless, the Tiongsons have still displayed their exhibit in several locations and I want to consider two of those institutions. The first institution I want to consider is the University of Maryland's Hornbake Library, a special collections and archival library. WHPSM was displayed in Hornbake in March and April of 2017. It was displayed at the same time as a mini-exhibit called "The Women's Suffrage in Maryland." Because the Maryland suffrage display was simultaneously exhibited, visitors would naturally connect the two exhibits. This connection is important as WHPSM is arguing that Filipina suffrage history should be a part of American history. Thus, the display of the WHPSM in Hornbake helped to shape the way the viewers engaged and understood the exhibit in relation to knowledge, history, and the status of Filipina history on campus. The second location I want to consider is the Embassy of the Philippines in Washington D.C. The exhibit was on display on June 2016. The exhibit was put on display to help celebrate 70 years of U.S/Philippines diplomatic relations. It was also part of an initiative to celebrate women and diversity. The exhibit launched to some amount of fanfare with speeches from several diplomats and leaders in the Filipino community (Carandang-Tiongson and Tiongson). The combination of these two sites provides interesting insight into who is interested in remembering Filipina suffrage and shows how WHPSM is being displayed in both political and educational realms.

The places in which the exhibit has travelled provide context for the exhibit and also speaks to the idea of "spatial justice." Spatial justice includes the right of all inhabitants to have access to public amenities and to not experience spatial segregation. It is also the right

to be different within those spaces and to challenge hegemonic forces that seek to impose social control (Soja 99). The exhibit represents a history in which Filipinos were denied spatial justice and access to amenities, but also challenges the active forgetting of Filipino history in the DMV. As discussed earlier, WHPSM is part of a larger project, Philippines on the Potomac (POPDC), which is actively seeking spatial justice for the right to D.C. as a space of Filipino culture and history. POPDC has created a walking tour and a virtual map that locates specific areas of the city that are significant for Filipino history. However, WHPSM does not have a single geographical location³² for which audiences can observe Filipina suffrage activities, but through its ability to travel it can claim multiple spaces. The exhibit seeks to reclaim D.C. a site where the Filipinas lived, worked, and participated in activism. Therefore, the scrapbook display sets up the initial connection between D.C. and the exhibit and the traveling portion of the exhibit physically places the exhibit in locations across the city and proclaims the right for Filipina culture and history to exist in those spaces.

The goal of reclaiming the nation's capital as a place for Filipina history gains importance, especially considering the history of colonialism in the Philippines. Carole Blair believes that the presence of memorials, especially in D.C., helps to reiterate ideals of nationhood and identity. Blair sees a lack of in the D.C. memorial landscape as it decides "what kinds of bodies have been deemed 'appropriate' or acceptable markers of national history and identity. And of course, it is obvious in an attentive walk around Washington, D.C. that there is a nearly unitary answer—male bodies" (Blair 276). The presence of Asian/American women in the wide array of the nation's memorials is overwhelmingly lacking. While the Vietnam memorial was created by a Chinese American woman, it sparked

³² The White House lawn photo was inspiration for the exhibit. The exhibit wants to connect the Filipinas to the White House, but also throughout D.C. as they gave speeches, went into public, and lived as women and activists.

debate across the country that questioned rather or not the daughter of Chinese immigrants could create something that could represent the country (Lowe 3-4). However, few museums directly consider Filipina history. Therefore, it is important that the exhibit travels through the areas around D.C. as it helps to (re)claim D.C. for Filipina history and contribute Asian/American voices to the D.C. memory landscape. The limitations it faces seems to reflect a lack of support from the larger American community and acts as a call for the need of other Asian/American voices in the D.C. memory landscape.

Conclusion

“The Washington Home of Filipina Suffrage” displays the forgotten histories of Filipina suffragists in Washington, D.C. The Filipinas were in the nation’s capital in the midst of anti-Filipino sentiment. The women were physically present when businesses across the country were denying Filipinos entrance. As the Filipinas were fighting not only for voting rights but to combat racism that targeted Filipinos, the Tiongsons’ project reads suffrage more broadly as activities around civics, gendered performance, and activism and considers how Filipinas might negotiate stigmas like being labeled “savages” and being denied rights by U.S. imperial rule. Filipinas recast themselves as feminine human beings, worthy of rights and paved the way for women to become presidents and active participants in politics.

When faced with these prejudices, how did Filipinas advocate for rights in a country where they were considered less-than human? How did they do this in a way that was also mindful of their cultural and social values? To truly understand the answer to these questions deserves more research; however, the exhibit and its collection of the archival artifacts suggest what Filipina civic participation entailed—they were navigating elite personas and arguing for literacy, they were wives, mothers, and daughters, they worked with Carrie

Chapman Catt, they rewrote suffrage laws in the Philippines, and they attended tea with First Ladies. The “Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement” exhibit helps us understand and think about suffrage in a more global light. By presenting them in this multifaceted way, this project rethinks what our centennial celebrations might look like and helps to (re)claim D.C. for Filipina histories that have been erased. Further, because through WHPSM’s use of a scrapbook and traveling display, the exhibit speaks to ways history and Asian/American memory is interconnected across time and holds importance for the current moment. Even though the last scrapbook entry ends in the 1990s, scrapbooks are meant to be part of an ongoing conversations. The display could easier expand to seven panels, and it encourages the audience to leave wondering: How are Asian/Americans today advocating for their rights in D.C.? Will you be the Filipina featured on Panel #7?

CHAPTER THREE: Sculpted Advocacy: Remembering the “Comfort Women” through the San Francisco Pan Asian Coalition Statue ³³

August 14, 2021 marked the thirtieth anniversary of Kim Hak-Sun’s³⁴ testimony describing her experiences as a “comfort woman.” The “comfort women”³⁵ were young Asian women who were forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese government in the early 1930s and throughout WWII (J. Kim 402). The women were from South Korea, China, the Philippines, and other southeast Asian countries and they were kept in “comfort” stations, or government sponsored brothels set up in Asian countries Japan had colonized (“Number”). These women were repeatedly raped, brutalized, and tortured by Japanese soldiers (McDougall 5). In August 1991, Kim was a 67-year-old woman who shared her horrifying story of a 17-year-old girl and “gave a human face to a history that many political leaders in Japan had denied for decades, and that many still do” (Sang-Hun, “Overlooked”). Kim was the first comfort woman to speak out and to publicly bring focus on Japan’s war crimes against the “comfort women”. Kim’s testimony inspired over 240 other South Korean women to share their experiences and together they started a transnational movement that recognizes the pain and suffering of these women (Sang-Hun, “South;” J. Kim 403).

Although Kim’s testimony worked to bring public awareness to the “comfort women”, the “comfort women” remain a source of geopolitical conflict between South Korea and Japan and remains a significant problem in intercultural relations (Sang-Hun, “South”). Over the past thirty years, the “comfort women” survivors and their supporters have been

³³ This chapter will discuss difficult topics including rape, sexual violence, sexual slavery, and denying survivors’ testimony.

³⁴ Also known as Kim Hak-Soon.

³⁵ The phrase “comfort women” comes from the Japanese phrase “慰安婦” which roughly translates into “comfort women” or prostitute. The term is often used in quotes of the connotation of the words denotes a sense of well-being or state of existence that undermines the brutality the women endured—the comfort provided was for the Japanese Army and not the women themselves. Please see [APPENDIX A](#) for more information.

advocating for acknowledgment of their suffering and working toward bringing awareness to sex crimes; as the women work to have their voices heard, the Japanese government and others who doubt the “comfort women”, have worked to cast doubt, erase, or disparage the survivors. For example, the former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and other government officials have directly questioned Japan’s involvement in the comfort stations and suggested that the women were not coerced but were paid volunteers (Pike 3-4). Japan has also removed all references of the “comfort women” from their textbooks (Mirkinson 154; Lee and Crowe 347). Further, since 2015, Japan has seen the rise of right-wing supporters who deny Japan’s involvement in kidnapping or otherwise coercing women into sexual slavery. These groups work to undermine or rewrite a colonial past and violence done to thousands of women (Mirkinson 154) which has serious consequences for how future individuals will talk about rape and responsibility. Therefore, it is imperative to understand and engage methods that combat historical denialism and advocate for the “comfort women”.

Japan’s continued resistance to the “comfort women” issue reflects a concerning trend to ignore the colonial histories in Asia and to suppress women’s and other minorities through historical revisionism (Han 262). In response to the Japanese mishandling of the “comfort women”, Kim and other “comfort women” began to testify. They soon began to work together and started what is now known as the “Comfort Women” Movement. These activists are bringing the “comfort women” to the attention of groups like the United Nations and other governing parties around the world. In response to Japan’s propaganda and denial, activists in the “Comfort Women” Movement began to erect “comfort women” statues all over world. These statues sought to memorialize and remember these women in response to the Japanese government attempts to erase them. Many of the statues are in places like Berlin, Shanghai, and Seoul totaling over 60 statues worldwide. These statues have recently become a focal point in which the Japanese government and other groups have focused on

and have launched various campaigns to try to have the statues removed.³⁶ In particular, statues in the United State have drawn attention and have caused conflict between Japan and the United States. Japan sent a delegation to New Jersey in attempt to have one memorial removed (Semple) and ended the sister city relationship between San Francisco and Osaka because of *The Column of Strength* (Inger).

The Column of Strength, the first “comfort women” statue in a major U.S. city, has been central to much of U.S. “comfort women” activism. *The Column of Strength* is located near San Francisco’s Chinatown and was created by the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition (CWJC). The CWJC is a Pan-Asian community social justice group that works to educate the public about the “comfort women”, advocate for reparations for the survivors, and bring awareness to modern sex crimes. *The Column of Strength* was unveiled in 2017 and as seen in Figure 6,³⁷ it features three young Asian women

standing on a four-foot circular column and an older woman on the ground level. There is also a plaque behind the older woman. The plaque is in Korean, English, and Chinese, and gives a brief history of the “comfort



Figure 6: *The Column of Strength*, a statue in San Francisco that remembers the “comfort women.”

³⁶ For examples, see Mirkinson 171; P. Kim 187-188; Chun 377; Nguyen; Cabco; Sing and Kim; and Semple.

³⁷ All pictures of the “comfort women” statues are personal photos.

women”.³⁸ It also states the purpose of the statue is to hold governments who support sex crimes accountable. According to Communication scholars Julia Khrebtan-Hörhager and Minkyung Kim the “*Column of Strength* Memorial in San Francisco centers trans-generational impact, global outreach, and female resilience against institutionalized patriarchy” (Khrebtan-Hörhager and Kim 445).

The *Column of Strength* is an especially compelling site of research because rape, domestic violence, or other crimes against women are rarely memorialized on the public memory landscape. This is partially because memorializing rape is a complicated, personal process that involves grief and trauma. As many see rape and other sex crimes as a private burden not meant for public display, those who want to memorialize the issue must grapple with the question of how to effectively memorialize rape or sex crimes. When memorialized, projects that seek to remember these topics often take a creative or abstract approach.³⁹ Thus, the fact that the *Column of Strength* is a statue and not an abstract representation is significant because it offers a physical representation of the women and asks the audience to see the girls and remember what happened to their bodies. Further, statues are a genre of memorialization that many associate with national heroics that are played out in the public sphere or more traditional, mainstream memory projects, makes the choice of using a statue that more significant. This underscores the need to understand how genre is a part of this memorialization process and how the statue enters polemic conversations about race, nationality, and sex crimes. The “comfort women” statues, especially in the United States, are some of the most visible memorials dedicated to gendered violence (Hasunuma and

³⁸ See [Appendix B](#) for full description of the Plaque.

³⁹ Notable examples of gendered violence memorials include the museum, peace park, and statue garden that memorializes the Rape of Nanjing,³⁹ the mass rape and murder of Chinese women and men by Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese war (Cui et. al); *The Captive*, a play about the rape of a young girl that memorializes conflict between Peruvian military and local “revolutionaries” that killed almost 70,000 Peruvians, many of whom were of Indigenous descent (Boesten 3); and Marianne’s Park, a park that members a woman killed by her partner in Canada in the early 1990s (Bold, Knowles, and Leach 133).

McCarthy 146). Further, few statues represent Asian/American women and the violence against them in the United States making the *Column of Strength* a needed intervention.

As the “comfort women” activists seek to remember these traumatic experiences, the *Column of Strength* and other “comfort women” statues around the world point to Japanese culpability and accountability. This conflict surrounding the “comfort women” raises questions about memory, power, and gender including: Whose voices should be heard? What does it mean to memorialize sex crimes and trauma? Who has the right to Asian women’s memory? As the statues have continually challenged Japan’s right to revise history, the statues make it clear that public memory can facilitate geopolitical conflicts and be part of activist movements for human rights.

In this chapter, I consider how the *Column of Strength* employs feminist memory techniques to counter Japan’s historical erasure of women’s testimony. I see the *Column of Strength* as a site that challenges stereotyped images of Asian/American women that could prompt people to dismiss the sexual violence these women experienced and recast this history from a United States framework. I argue that the *Column of Strength* enters into a larger conversation of memory surrounding the “comfort women”, but also employs an innovative portrayal of the survivors and activism that distinguishes it from other “comfort women” statues. By portraying an embodied representation of the “comfort women” as young girls and activists, the statue asks the audience to consider the realities of sex crimes. Further it draws upon transnational women’s solidarity and challenges gendered stereotypes to combat historical denialism. Further, I explore ways coalitional memorialization repositions Asian/American women’s history in terms of grief and healing while also promoting justice for the “comfort” women and awareness of sex crimes.

This dissertation chapter is guided by an activism of care framework. As noted in the introduction and throughout this dissertation, American society has a disturbing history that

often categorizes Asian/American women in specific ways: the Dragon Lady which is the exotic the evil seductress, or the Lotus Blossom, sometimes known as the China Doll, which is the quiet, passive sexual object (Taijima 309). Throughout the 1900s and into today, this perception of sexualized Asian women has infiltrated films and popular culture perpetuating images of Asian women as evil seductresses or subservient sexual objects. Further, the “model minority” stereotype asserts that Asian/Americans are good at school, hardworking, and overall have achieved a high level of success in American society. This is problematic for many reasons, but a major issue includes the fact that the model minority myth positions Asian/Americans as passive, apolitical people who are often categorized as simply “Asian” instead of the vast difference between Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, and other Asian heritage. These stereotypes are important for the “comfort women” because historical deniers want to paint them as prostitutes who volunteered. This version of the “comfort women”, casts them not as activists or survivors, but as sexualized individuals who are lying about their experiences and are trying to throw blame on Japan.

I begin this chapter with a historical overview of the “comfort women” and define historical denialism and Japan’s approach to remembering the “comfort women”. In the next section I give an overview of the “comfort women” statues. I explain how historical denialism has specifically shaped *The Column of Strength* and the consequences of historical denialism in relation to the statues. I then consider the genre of statue as embodied by the *Column of Strength* first in relation to a larger conversation of memorialization and the “comfort women” statues that exist around the world. Next, I analyze the *Column of Strength* and its memorial attributes. In conclusion, I consider ongoing community memorial practices employed through the *Column of Strength* and the CWJC.

Christine Bold, Ric Knowles, and Belinda Leach argue that despite the tensions faced when memorializing gendered violence, feminist memorialization both works to address

these tensions and embrace the contradictory emotions and affect memorializing gendered violence can entail. They assert that feminist memorializing “needs to acknowledge the systemic, quotidian character of gendered violence without losing the sense of horror at its individual instances. It needs to negotiate the tension between the planned, scripted, and manageable memorial event and the possibilities for disruption” (132). Bold, Knowles, and Leach’s assessment of the layered emotional burdens involved in memorializing gendered violence provides a useful framework of considering emotional labor and the performative, everyday actions of recognizing and remembering trauma of sexual violence.

Throughout this chapter I use a variety of methods to investigate and analyze the monument and build my argument. I traveled to San Francisco to visit and analyze the statue and interviewed two members of the CWJC, Lillian Sing⁴⁰ and Phyllis Kim⁴¹. Sing and Kim are founding members of the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition and are currently acting members on its board. The three of us had been texting and emailing for a few weeks and I finally made it to California in May 2019 to meet members of the coalition and see the statue for the first time. Over a span of two hours, we sat down for lunch and had a conversation that changed my understanding of the “comfort women”. The topic of the “comfort women”, sexual slavery, and sex crimes is by no means a light-hearted or easy conversation. Kim and Sing made me immediately feel welcome and most of our lunch felt like a conversation between old friends. Although most of the exchange was free-flowing, there were moments of silence in which I think we all were processing the real-impacts the topic entailed. Sing

⁴⁰ The Honorable Judge Lillian Sing was a California State judge who worked in the 1990s for the Rape of Nanjing (RNRC) movement and the Chinese Justice coalition. Sing recently retired so she could act as the CWJC co-chair with the Honorable Judge Julie Tang.

⁴¹ Phyllis Kim is the current executive director of the Korean American Forum of California and was inspired to begin advocating for the “comfort women” in 2007 when she worked a cross-country Ad Hoc committee for the “comfort women.” During this time, she acted as an interpreter for activist and past “comfort woman” Grandma YongSoo Lee who was in the United States advocating for recognition for the movement. Kim joined the CWJC soon after its founding and is now a board member.

and Kim were open, engaged, and incredibly knowledgeable. It was obvious that they are passionate for the cause and work tirelessly to bring justice to the memory of the “comfort women.” I left feeling inspired and more enthused about my academic research than ever before.

This chapter relies on my rhetorical analysis of the statue, information from my interview with Sing and Kim, and engagement with a variety of resources such newspaper and social media posts on the events related to the statue. Additionally, this chapter explores the geopolitical response and the relationship between the United States, South Korea, and Japan. For many, this remains a sensitive issue and I approach these topics from an empathic framework to honor the diverse cultures and traumatic pasts I research. As a result, I point out historical and current inconsistencies in Japanese responses to the “comfort women” and often criticize the lack of justice for these women. While I do engage these issues, I am not casting judgment about Japanese or Japanese American lives, but rather pointing out how politics infuse this memory project and has worked negatively to deny justice for victimized women.

Historical Denialism and the “Comfort Women”

In 1931, the Japanese army took control of Manchuria, a region in China, and in 1937 launched an invasion into China (Kushner 2). It is during their invasion of China that the origins of the “comfort women” began. In Shanghai, China, sometime around 1932, the Japanese military established government sponsored brothels called “ianjo” or “comfort stations” (Tanaka 8). However, it was not until the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 that the first “comfort women” were sent to China to work in military sponsored prostitution. The first women sent to China were most often Korean women⁴² who lived in

⁴² Korean women were targeted because Japan maintained colonial control of South Korea from 1910-1945.

Japan (Tanaka 9-10). Over 400 comfort stations existed, the majority of which were in China. 120 stations were in Burma, the Philippines, and Southeast Asian countries as Japan continued to invade and take control of parts of Asia (“Number”). The majority of the “comfort women” were Korean, but Chinese, Filipina, and Dutch women were also forced into sex slavery (McDougall 51). In a report ordered by a United Nation’s Human Rights Commission to investigate the “comfort women”, the so-called comfort stations were more accurately described as rape centers that caused the death of 75%⁴³ of the women (McDougall 41; 39-40).

While the accounts of calculating the total women differ, the “comfort women’s” realities of sexual slavery are shocking. The young women were taken from their homes and often spent months in captivity (“Women”). Some of the women were as young as eleven years of age and “were forcibly raped multiple times on a daily basis and subjected to severe physical abuse and exposed to sexually transmitted diseases” (McDougall 39). Further, the women might have also been forced into labor during the day and prostitution in the evening. There were various reports of the “women being mutilated, humiliated and tortured sexually before being killed or left to die from their injuries” (McDougall 5).

Although many outside of Japan remained ignorant of the realities of the “comfort women’s” experiences, the comfort woman has long been a recognizable figure in Japanese culture, but often cast from a stereotypical view point. Popular Japanese literature and film romanticizes the “comfort women” as sexualized caricatures who happily served. For example, in the 1950s and 60s, movies and novels painted the “comfort women” as erotic, exotic figures who happily flirted and lived amongst Japanese soldiers (Chun 380). Similar

⁴³ Other sources estimate up to 90% of the women were killed (Blakemore; Ashford 190).

portrayals of the “comfort women” continued into the 1990s when a Japanese manga⁴⁴ was published and told the story of the “comfort women’s” fun and happy life (Chun 379).

Until the 1990s the “comfort women” were largely unknown on a global scale when survivor turned activist Kim Hak-Sun’s testimony sparked the “Comfort Women” Movement. Following her testimony, Kim worked with other “comfort women” activists and led a protest for reparations outside of the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea every Wednesday at noon⁴⁵ (Sang-Hun, “Overlooked”). Kim also inspired other survivors from South Korea, China, and other countries to speak up (J. Kim 403). After Kim’s testimony, women who had been “comfort women” “formed an international solidarity network, led by the Korean Grandmas”⁴⁶ to advocate for “comfort women” recognition and against sexual slavery (P. Kim 180). Today, these Grandmothers continue to speak out and are considered to be human rights activists (J. Kim 403).

Following Kim’s testimony, Japan amplified their attempts to silence the women or evade responsibility for their actions. (Myung-Hee 46). In this campaign, government officials, academics, and other deniers work to cast doubt or sway public opinion against the “comfort women”. Although many women have offered testimony and advocated for reparations, Japan’s response to the “comfort women” includes claims that are inconsistent, dismissive, and sometimes even express outright denial. Other Japanese conservatives or nationalists also have worked toward discrediting the survivors and have especially targeted Kim Hak-Sun’s testimony, stating she is unreliable.⁴⁷ Some of the key methods “comfort

⁴⁴ Asian comic book.

⁴⁵ These protests are still ongoing as of March 2022.

⁴⁶ Terms like “comfort women” victim grandmothers” or “Korean Grandmothers” are also common. This chapter will use the appellation “Grandma” when referring to “comfort women” activists and survivors, including the South Korean activists who started the movement and the international survivors who joined. This carries on the trend the community upholds and is a sign of respect for the survivors’ experience and wisdom.

⁴⁷ These sources will not be cited as I do not want to give credence to those that seek to villainize survivors or minimize women’s trauma, especially as there is undeniable evidence supporting these women’s claims: “Despite the facts that have come to light, including clear historical records and physical artifacts that show clearly where comfort stations had been established, and the recognized validity of the survivors’ own testimony

women” deniers use to sway public opinion include misreading testimony, misinterpreting historical material, using contradictory arguments, making hasty assertions and conclusions, and misrepresenting arguments made by others (Myung-Hee 49). Eric Heinze defines historical denialism as a practice used “by governments aimed at curtailing critical public awareness of salient histories” (44). Further, Heinze maintains that historical denialism is a human rights issue and argues that to partake in denialism undermines public access to human rights because it dis-enables publics to acknowledge atrocities and traumas to make reparations (44). Japan and other deniers leverage historical denialism as a way to maintain geopolitical power and avoid international condemnation. In other words, by denying the “comfort women’s” testimonies, Japan will face no consequences for their actions and can continue growing their influence in Asia (Myung-Hee 48).

Historical denialism of the “comfort women” is important because it reveals important connections between the construction of memory, gender, and politics. According to Korean studies scholar Kim Myung-Hee, the historical denialism directed at the “comfort women” reflects Japan’s consideration of gender, especially in relation to human rights and accountability (44). Japan maintains it holds no legal responsibility to make reparations because of a 1965 treaty made between Japan and South Korea that “extinguished all individual claims by Koreans against Japan as a result of wartime conduct” (Ward and Lay 258). While a few methods of reparations have been introduced to give funds to survivors, including the 1995 “Asian Woman’s Fund” and the 2015 “Reconciliation and Healing Foundation,” the government of Japan consistently rules against claims made by “comfort women” (Kuzae 623). Japan’s continued denial not only obfuscates the past, but also hinders the present from addressing ongoing sex crimes against women.

by international organizations, including the United Nations, the Japanese government has carefully avoided admitting its legal or political responsibility” (Kazue 623).

The *Column of Strength*: Resisting Historical Denialism

As Japan persistently denies “comfort women” testimony, activists in the “Comfort Women” Movement challenged misrepresentation of the past through statues. These memorials are an intervention and means to advocate for justice, both for the “comfort women” survivors and to help raise awareness of sex crimes. The statues became a way to challenge the Japanese nation-state history and the monuments are creating presence when Japan is working toward erasure. According to Media and Communication scholar Shanti Sumartojo, state-sponsored history is when a nation or group with power uses memory to craft an “official” story of the past meant to sway the public for a particular purpose (449). Because of Japan supports a version of history where the “comfort women” were prostitutes or volunteers, the statues challenge this story and in doing so have become contested sites targeted by those that buy into Japan’s state-sponsored version of the past. The “comfort women” memories are being contested in the material realities of statues that are now found across the globe. Japan’s continued denialist narrative concerning the “comfort women” is a violence in itself. The *Column of Strength* reflects on the growing contention between the Japan and the “comfort women”. This section considers how memorial choices of the statue directly enter into geopolitical conversations around history and sex crimes.

The first statue in a major U.S. city, *The Column of Strength* statue was unveiled in San Francisco in 2017. The statue marked a political shift between the Japanese government and the United States. In October 2018, Japan officially ended six decades of intercultural relationships between sister cities Osaka and San Francisco because of the “comfort women” statue (Ingber). According to Phyllis Kim and Lillian Sing, CWJC board members, the primary reason behind this break a phrase in the first sentence found on the monument’s plaque. It states: “This monument bears witness to the suffering of hundreds of thousands of women and girls...” The Japanese government had a problem with the statue asserting that

there were “hundreds of thousands” of “comfort women”. While this seems like a small detail, the actual number of women forced into slavery remains unclear and this inconsistency has been a huge reason behind Japan’s dealing with the “comfort women” issue.

The number of total women is highly controversial even amongst “comfort women” supporters. There are varying estimates concerning the exact number of “comfort women”, some estimates claim there were hundreds of “comfort women” while others assert there were hundreds of thousands of women (“Number,” Pike). Others claim there were at least 200,000 Chinese and Korean women victims alone (Huang 123; McDougall 3). Scholars Peipei Qiu, Su Zhiliang, and Chen Lifei report that these early estimations are incorrect and should include the entire Japanese occupation in China starting with the 1931 invasion of Manchuria and end in 1945 following WWII. With this extended date range, Qiu, Zhiliang, and Lifei assert that there were over 400,000 “comfort women” over half of which were Chinese (6). There are a variety of reasons these numbers differ so greatly, including the low numbers of women who are likely to report a rape, the low survivor rates from the rape centers, and the lack of available accounts in English (Qiu, Zhiliang, and Lifei 6).

Japan however is hesitant to accept historians’ totals for the “comfort women”. Japan has produced material stating that actual numbers of “comfort women” could range as low as 20,000 women (Murayama10-11). Further, Japan emphasizes that many historians are using incorrect or inflammatory accounts and that not all the comfort centers were “rape centers” (Murayama 12). By focusing on inconsistent numbers, Japan is rewriting history to focus on historical data over women’s testimony. The *Column of Strength*’s use of the ambiguous but significant “hundreds of thousands” directly challenges Japan’s historical denialism and speaks for the women who are unaccounted in “comfort women” history. Japanese government officials have called the statues one-sided interpretations, asserting that accounts of “the number of women who were enslaved and how they were treated during their time in

captivity were embellished” (Inger). Further, by casting doubt on the accuracy of the number of victims, Japan opens up a pathway to question other aspect of the “comfort women’s” experiences (Myung-Hee 54). Thus, not only does questioning the official count give Japan the ability to pull out of the sister city relationship, it also allows for them to further build their campaign of doubt. The miseducated, the misinformed, and others will be tempted to ask: if the numbers are incorrect, what else could be wrong?

The *Column of Strength*’s plaque overtly sides with the higher estimations of the amount of “comfort women”. This was seen as a direct challenge to the Japanese narrative, thus ending the Osaka/San Francisco relationship. By saying “hundreds of thousands” the statue honors the accounts and testimonies of women like Kim Hak-Sun and also memorializes the women who have not spoken. And while some might argue that the exact number does not matter, it speaks volumes that a decade long sister-city relationship ended because the numbers do matter and the statue seeks to honor not only the women who died or did not speak out, but the hundreds of thousands of women today who still suffer from sex crimes. Samantha Joo asserts that these statues embody “a counter-narrative that challenge[d] the master narrative of the Japanese government. . . By representing the stories of the “comfort women” who were systematically enslaved for sex during World War II (WWII), the statue[s] dare[d] to question and therefore tarnish a sovereign nation’s dominant historical narrative of Imperial Japan” (81). *The Column of Strength* became an extension of Kim Hak-Sun’s and other “comfort women’s” testimony and worked to challenge Japan’s denial of the “comfort women” history and to advocate and remember others who are victims of sexual slavery.

Challenging Japan’s narrative has far-reaching effects. Japan’s historical denialism has helped to legitimize the rise of violent rhetoric from far-right groups, such as the Rompa Project. The Rompa Project is a subsidiary of a Japanese religious cult, Happy Science,

dedicated to Japanese nationalist ideals. The Rompa project was formed with the sole purpose of ending the conversation about the “comfort women” and destroying any and all statues dedicated to the women. They have not yet become mainstream but have continually created and published political cartoons in magazines that employ anti-”comfort women” rhetoric. One particularly striking one is of a Japanese figure traveling toward America with a pick-axe that he later uses to destroy “comfort women” statues (“Rompa”). There has been a global rise in nationalistic ideologies over the last decade and the fact that the “comfort women” statues could be seen to challenge such groups is significant and emphasizes ways public memory work goes beyond its bounded scope and can challenge and be the target of negative global rhetorical practices.

While no direct action has been credited to the Rompa Project, “comfort women” statues across the world are facing defacement and censure. In July 2019, a statue in Glendale, California was vandalized and smeared with what appeared to be dog feces (Nguyen). Although separate, this is not the first time that statue has been vandalized nor center to a larger controversy. In 2014, Glendale residents and a group against reparations for the CW “filed a lawsuit that sought the removal of the statue, arguing, in part, that Glendale overstepped its bounds and infringed on the United States’ ability to conduct foreign affairs” (Nguyen). While this lawsuit failed, other statues have been taken down. The Philippines president, Rodrigo Duterte, had a “comfort women” statue in Manilla removed in May 2018 because he reportedly did not want to insult the Japanese government (Cabico). In July 2019, another statue was displayed in a museum exhibit in Japan. Upon the exhibit’s debut, several of former Prime Minister Shinzō Abe’s right-leaning party openly opposed its presence at the festival. Further, Mayor of Nagoya, Takashi Kawamura argued it should be closed as it “tramples on the feelings of Japanese citizens” (Rich). In the cases that have taken down

statues or closed exhibits, the majority of the reasoning behind these actions included the desire to not embarrass the Japanese government or cause conflict with the government.

Echoes of Memory: Transnational Histories and Materially Challenging Stereotypes

The “Comfort Women” Movement has produced statues around the globe. As the *Column of Strength* works to (re)claim the silenced voices of survivors of sex crimes, it also echoes a larger conversation of memory. Although there are exceptions, and the *Column of Strength* does not exactly follow this generic trend, most of the “comfort women” statues follow a similar visual aesthetic.⁴⁸ In memory studies, echoes of memory are important because it allows audiences to see what values the present moment holds (Scott 486). When representing a cultural moment or identity for a group of people, an echo presents a complex and diverse depiction (Scott 493). In other words, as the statues reflect the memory of the “comfort women”, they also are echoing one another by using similar form and material. This section considers ways the *Column of Strength* enters into a feminist community of memory as it related to other “comfort women” statues and the echoes/repetitions across statuary.

By choosing to make their memorial a statue, the CWJC entered into a larger community practice of memorialization. Andrea M. Riley Mukavetz (2014) asserts that to engage community practices from a cultural rhetorics standpoint researchers need to consider “the spaces/places people share, *how* people organize themselves, and *how* they practice shared beliefs” (110). Here, Riley Mukavetz places particular emphasis on *practice* to understand the intersections between culture and rhetoric. When considering practices of community meaning making, memorials created by multicultural groups provide an

⁴⁸ Other countries have also introduced a variation of the “original” design. For example, the Filipino statue is of a blind-folded woman. A Chinese statue in Hong Kong features several Chinese girls, one of which is visibly pregnant. At least one statue sits in Seoul that features both a Chinese girl and a Korean girl, both of whom mirror the Chinese and Korean from the *Column of Strength*.

interesting outlet for investigation. This practice includes what is being remembered, how it is being remembered, but also how it came about. Essentially, the process and practice of creating a memorial matters especially since it is a cross-cultural endeavor. Building bridges through this coalition for the distinct purpose of remember the “comfort women” and fighting against sex trafficking can help to create solidarity and aid in future political endeavors and the resisting of oppression (Seo 231).

The majority of the “comfort women” statues around the globe follow *The Peace Monument*’s model. In December of 2011, twenty years after Kim Hak-Sun first broke the silence surrounding the “comfort women”, the first “comfort women” statue of a teenaged Korean girl was immortalized in bronze. *The Peace Monument*⁴⁹ sat across from the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea. *The Peace Monument* demanded reparations for the “comfort women” and their families (Choe). The statue was later moved to another South Korean city on behest of the Japanese government; however, the monument sparked controversy that united individuals around the globe.

The Peace Monument was the first “comfort women” statue and many of the “comfort women” statues draw inspiration from its design. *The Peace Monument* is a bronze statue and features “a tight-lipped girl in a traditional Korean dress, sitting on a chair with clenched fists on her lap, staring straight ahead. Beside her is an empty chair, a place reserved for victims of sexual slavery who have passed and for anyone to sit and reflect on the experiences and brutal history of the so-called ‘comfort women’” (Han 261, emphasis in the original). There is a bird on her shoulder, and she is barefoot. The bird is seen to represent future peace and freedom for sexual crimes victims. The chair is seen as a place holder for victims of sexual slavery or for visitors to reflect on this horrible history (Han 261). The invitation to sit with

⁴⁹ Also known as *The Statue of Peace* or 평화의 소녀상 which translates a statue of girl. It was later removed at the request of the Japanese government and moved to another Korean city.

the girl women seems to reach audiences through a sense of calmness and contemplativeness. Many of the other statues feature the same Korean girl, bird, and chair with slight variations. This is rhetorically significant because the statues are not only visually similar, the repetition across statues ensures the audience will connect them with the larger movement and their message about the “comfort women” and sex trafficking.

The *Column of Strength* employs a similar commemorative repetition by echoing the other statues in the form of the Korean girl, who wears similar clothing, has similar hair, and has bare feet. This echo is important because it connects the statue to the global effort of memorializing and connects the *Column of Strength* to the other statues through a transnational memory that goes beyond borders. Like the other statues around the world, *The Column of Strength* strategically uses the girls’ appearance to encourage the audience to think about the trauma the “comfort women” faced. Figure 6 reveals the girls in the statue are smaller, are young, and have bare feet. Bare feet often indicate childhood, but in this case, it also emphasizes their vulnerability. Their youthful appearance is offset by their knowing eyes and serious looks. Despite being made of stone, their faces seem to be filled with the trauma they have seen. The atrocities they suffered certainly quickly ended their childhood, as some of the women forced into slavery were as young as 11. The statue’s representation of their youth underscores the horrors of the trauma the “comfort women” faced and makes the crimes of sexual violence even more egregious because of their youth; they’re clearly children and challenge the idea that “comfort women” willingly participated.

It is important to note that as the three figures on the column of the *Column of Strength* are clearly young⁵⁰ girls they are challenging understandings of childhood in

⁵⁰ Throughout this essay I refer to the statue in terms of teenaged girls, children, and young women. This is because although the statue depicts the girls as in their younger teen years (which is still a part of childhood), they also have experiences that challenge society’s understanding of what should happen to children. Therefore, I use these terms interchangeably to emphasize ways the ways the statue makes us realize how young many of the “comfort women” were.

significant ways. Modern day culture paints childhood not only within biological constructs, but also by cultural frameworks. Children are not represented as complex beings but used in more figurative constructs that emphasize cultural ideals of childhood, like that of innocence or the future (Applegarth, “Children Speaking” 54-55). Moreover, when children are visibly present in memorials, they are often used within paradigms that “often employ representations of children to motivate adult action, while displacing actual children’s complex experiences of agency and vulnerability” (Applegarth, “Children Speaking” 55). Thus, cultural ideas and discussions about childhood often do not include difficult topics like death, rape, suicide, or other complex issues.

The *Column of Strength* and other states acknowledge the difficult histories of the “comfort women,” but give off a feeling of respect and empathy. It is important to note that the repetition of a similar figure across these statues plays an important role in the process of remembering the “comfort women”; further, the repetition gains more significance through an activism of care framework. According to memory scholar Kendall Philips “the disciplined repetition of recollection, we find the glimmer of hope that memory can be stabilized and in this way to fulfill the promise of presenting the past in a reliable and ‘accurate’ way” (217). Through this framing, we can see that repetition is a strategic act in which the “comfort women” statues and their creators hope to stabilize a history that includes the voices and recollections of the survivors. Further, Philips asserts that repetition of memories shares a root with an ethics of caring for the past and present: “memory entail[s] a responsibility to re-present the past and, moreover, to re-present the past in a stable and seemingly immutable way” (218). Through this, the *Column of Strength*’s use of the Korean girl can be read as a method not only to connect with the other statues, but also to care for the past through repetition.

The *Column of Strength*'s echoing of memory is important not only because it builds upon and is supported by the memory work of activists around the globe, but it is also important because it recovers a silenced history and educate the public on what it meant to be a "comfort woman." For some, having a "Comfort Women" Movement or memorializing the "comfort women" might seem odd because the term "comfort women" in Japanese is rooted in a silencing and dismissal of the women's experiences. "Comfort women" comes from the Japanese word "*ianfu*." This term is important because it has serious implications for gender rights and sex crimes. Asian law scholars Constance Youngwon Lee and Jonathan Crowe dive into the colonial and ideological implications of the term:

The term *ianfu* is the perpetrators' construct. It silences the coercion, the complete lack of autonomy characterizing the wrong. Instead, by this label, the women are constructed as willing participants to the act. This label morally foregrounds consensual servitude as the defining role of a woman. "Comfort women" thus identifies the victims in terms of the larger patriarchal discourses to which they remain confined. . . Not only is the repugnant nature of sexual slavery comfortably hidden away from view, but this label leaves the victims at the mercy of their perpetrators for the definition of their realities. The women are even divested of the means to choose their own construction. It is therefore important to transparently acknowledge the 'unrepresentative quality of the term' by, at least, 'encasing [it] in quotes to register [our] disapproval.' (345)

Audience members will see the term "comfort women" in quotation marks and often the first introduction of the term will include a "so-called" in the same sentence. Therefore, *The Column of Strength* and other statues still use this term, but work toward making audiences aware of the violent history of what "comfort" really means.

The Genre of Statues: Multicultural Identities and Materiality

As the *Column of Strength* statue echoes the other memorials around the globe, it also expands a rich tradition of global public memory work. It extends the “comfort women” memory into the context of the United States so that the *Column of Strength* reflects the larger “Comfort Women” Movement and speaks to the San Francisco community where it makes its home. The use of statues as a site of resistance challenges typical customs seen historically and today concerning the memorialization women and people of color. Statues have historically represented masculine histories and statues of women embodied feminine ideals like “justice” or “motherhood” instead of historical figures (Eagan 33). Statues embody and represent people and they assert and circulate ideas about gender and gendered experience. This section explores how *The Column of Strength* creates a transnational representation of the “comfort women” that extends the memory work started by the “comfort women” statues and speaks to an Asian/American identity in San Francisco and the larger United States.

A significant element of the *Column of Strength* for articulating Asian/American identity is its focus on multicultural representation. As visitors approach the *Column of Strength*, they discover that the three girls standing on the column are dressed in distinctly different outfits. Instead of representing a single culture, the girls on the column are dressed in the traditional garb of three different cultures, including Chinese, Filipina, and Korean girls, representing the three largest home countries of the “comfort women.” The center figure represents a young Korean girl, and the older figure, standing on the ground gazing at the girls on the column, who is also Korean wears a similar dress. The next figure on the column represents China, while the final girl, who is in the back of the circle, represents is a

Filipina. These girls stand in a circle holding hands. The handheld circle specifically connects these different nationalities and cultures. Since the U.S., in general and in San Francisco more particularly, has a diverse Asian/American population, the statue calls viewers to see how these sexual atrocities were enacted on women from various Asian cultural backgrounds and how their activism against this violence is united. This diversity embodies feminist scholar Lynn Fujiwara's concept of coalitional building through multiplicity, where the groups build lines across color, affiliation, and culture, and by holding hands they provoke "shared political investments and a consciousness of difference and power" (258). The statue's emphasis on multinational and multiethnic identities draws attention to the girls' differences but also connects them through a shared goal to speak out about the violence enacted against them.

The Column of Strength's emphasis on multicultural representation of women from around the Asia helps portray a more complete and representative history of the "comfort women". Women from across Asia, including the Philippines and other Asian countries also were victimized and are not often included in the typical of "comfort women" statues. Further, the fact that there is two Korean women pays homage to the memory of the "Comfort Women" Movement and history as many of the first activists were Korean and some estimate that between 80-90% of the "Comfort Women" were Korean (Joo 166). Akwi Seo argues that actions that work to highlight inter- and cross-cultural relationships can work to address "the intersectionality of colonialism and gender, based on participants' experiences of multiple oppressions as women of the colonial diaspora" (230-231). Essentially, because the *Column of Strength* recognizes multiple women from different cultures and was created by representatives from diverse cultures, the intersectionality of experience and of culture works toward decolonizing historical accounts of the "comfort women" as prostitutes.

Further, the presence of a diverse Asian/American statue in San Francisco also becomes a way to claim the “comfort women” as part of Asian/American women’s history and an important element of the Asian/American identity in the U.S. and beyond. In an American context, the multicultural representations are extremely important in addressing larger concerns facing Asian/American communities. An unsettling pattern in dominant American cultural practices tends to label Asian Americans as “model minorities”—which according Haivan Hoang renders not only the presence of Asian/American culture virtually invisible, it also homogenizes Asian American heritage, equating differences and complexities under a single umbrella (*Writing Against*, 4). This statue however rhetorically claims a more complex identity that aligns with Asian/American rhetorical scholars who call for an understanding of culture that speaks to, challenges, and extends Asian/American identity as a distinctly plural community (Mao and Young 9). By including these diverse cultures within the city of San Francisco, a city with a prominent Asian/American population, the *Column of Strength* expands who has the right to remember histories beyond geopolitical borders. Further, by including Asian/American activism, the statue claims activist history as a part of Asian/American history challenging perceptions of Asian/American women as apolitical (Dich). Thus, the statue works to reflect San Francisco’s diverse Asian/American population and also challenges the gendered stereotypes Americans might have when thinking about Asian/American women as passive and not interested in activism.

Another difference between *the Column of Strength* and the other “comfort women” statues is that the girls in the statue are not sitting down like previous statues, but are facing the world as if in challenge. *The Column of Strength*’s hand-held circle seems to represent solidarity between nations and support for the women who experience similar trauma, but as the girls also have their backs to one another it is as if they need to watch out for one another. Such an arrangement emphasizes the need to protect one another as rape, sex trafficking, and

sex crimes still exist. From a feminist practice of memorialization, it is important to note the interconnection between the statues and the strength these women portray. As the statue memorializes sexual assault and trauma, these women come to represent speaking out about sexual violence and counter yet another stereotype. By representing Asian women as survivors who speak out against violence done against them, it actively challenges stereotypes like that of the submissive, silent Lotus Blossom.

While most of the statues around the globe are made of a single color, usually bronze or a goldish hue, *The Column of Strength* is made of a three-toned color scheme. From the waist down, the women are a dark brown and their faces, shoulders, and arms are a chalky grey-white. The two colors are separated by a streak of clay red, almost the same color as the column they are standing on, that runs across the middle of their torso and elbows. Maureen Daly Goggin argues that identity is socially and culturally mediated through materiality. This entails the idea that the materials we make and engage with on a daily are inherently entwined with identity performance (19). I maintain that the three-tone girls challenge the naturalization of Japan historical denial narrative and instead emphasizes the disturbance caused to the girls' childhood. The three-toned structure makes for an "unnatural" or unusual body, reminding the violence done to their bodies. The older lady also follows this pattern, but the central red streak is more muted and blended in on her body. More of her body is white and she is looking at the girls on the column instead of the audience. Her color schema seems to indicate a certain amount of healing, but still shows how past sexual violence does not simply disappear. For the entire stature the colors become a material representation of sexual violence's embodiment and how its memories still echo in the present.

The "Comfort Woman" Activist: Remembering Kim Hak-Sun

Although emphasizing the multicultural identity and trauma of these girls is important in the *Column of Strength*, the statue is also interested in current and ongoing activism for the

“comfort women”. This aspect of the *Column of Strength* is materialized in the older woman who stands next to the young girls’ column, as seen in Figure 7. This woman represents Kim Hak-Sun, the first Korean activist who spoke of her experiences during WWII as well as the other Grandmother activists who began their activist work in the 1990s. Because the *Column of Strength* features Grandmother Kim,⁵¹ one of the first “comfort women” activists, the San Francisco statue also speaks to the process of healing and activism against sex crimes. This section considers the



Figure 7: Close up of Kim Hak-Sun statue in *The Column of Strength* monument.

rhetorical positioning and embodiment of Grandmother Kim as activist to challenge stereotypes. Further, I also consider how this representation of Grandmother Kim speaks to larger global and political conversations and embodies the ideals of the “Comfort Women” Movement.

The first important element to consider for Grandmother Kim’s rhetorical effect on the audience as her placement looking up at the girls, on ground level. Grandmother Kim faces the girls with hands clasped and a look of concern on her face. She seems to embody a literal guardian set to care for her past self and the other voiceless or nameless girls. She is the present-day the activist remembering the atrocities enacted on these girls, and literally stands on the ground as she works to gain justice for the past.

⁵¹ For the purposes of clarity, this chapter refers to Kim Hak-Sun, the activist, as Kim Hak-Sun or simply her family name, Kim. “Grandmother Kim” will be used to reference the statue’s representation of Kim.

Grandmother Kim also represents how the *Column of Strength* disrupts a chronological narrative of sex crimes. According to Communication scholars Julia Khrebtan-Hörhager and Minkyung Kim, Grandmother Kim's presence in the San Francisco statue "suggests a cross-generational connection and the importance of honoring the past for the present and the future" (445). This cross-generational connection is embodied in the two Koreans who are dressed almost identically. Judging by the similar physical appearances, the statue could suggest that Grandmother Kim is not only the guardian of the past but is also looking at her past self. From this interpretation, that statue becomes an almost time-paradox or memory echo, where Kim is simultaneously a young girl and the older activist. The statue proclaims a narrative through which Grandmother Kim not only protects but gives strength to the girls so that they will survive and become strong women who one day will actively use their voices to fight against oppression.

Further, Grandmother Kim's representation is also that of an older Asian/American woman that expands and challenges expectations of the "comfort women" and activist. Asian/American women face ongoing stereotypes and representation has historically been an issue the "comfort women" have faced. While much of mainstream narratives were silent concerning the "comfort women", there was some popular literature and cinematic portrayals of the "comfort women" in Japan. These portrayals of the women often worked to stereotype women as eroticized and exoticized figures by Japanese war veterans (Chun 380). This trend was continued by a 1990s Japanese manga that displays the "comfort women" as having fun and happy in their position: "these representations of the women have serious consequences and none of these phantasmagoric reincarnations of "comfort women" in postwar Japanese popular culture have the traces of enslavement and violence perpetrated by the state and army ever appeared" (Chun 379). Asian Studies scholar Dongho Chun argues that the young Korean girl's image that is found in statues around the world rejects a "sexualized image of

‘comfort women’” and challenges the “colonizing male subjects’ romantic fantasy (380). I confirm Chun’s assessment and believe that Grandmother Kim’s older visage furthers the distance from earlier sexualized representations and asks the viewers to image the consequences of the violence of sexual slavery as it relates to the women later in their life.

Having Grandmother Kim physically present in the monument speaks to a certain awareness of the ability of memory to shape an event—the statue is remembering activism by the “comfort women” and therefore speak to modern efforts to advocate against sex crimes. The monument acknowledges that by speaking out, Grandmother Kim reshaped the past, remembered something that was once forgotten, and is still fighting to make changes as Japanese government seeks to discount her voice. By having Grandmother Kim look at herself in the past and being in the “present” moment, the *Column of Strength* creates a “dialogical space” through which a “community across racial difference and power differentials” can consider Asian women’s traumatic history (Kelley as qtd. In Bold et al. 129).

Memorializing an older woman as an activist expands typical images of activism and reflects the larger “comfort women” activist movement—today, few of the original 240 South Korean Grandmothers are still living. Yet, many of these women remain activists and make appearances at rallies and events. Grandmother Kim’s older façade indicates wisdom, but also a certain about of fragility that comes with age. From this standpoint, it asks the audience to reimage what activists look like and what their activism might entail. The inclusion of an older Grandmother Kim acknowledges the ongoing ways the Grandmas are activists and is the embodied representation of an older Asian/American woman.

By including an older Grandmother Kim, the statue not only calls upon thirty years of activism it also contests to the ongoing trend that seeks to silence and discredit the “comfort women’s” testimony. The fact that the *Column of Strength* memorializes Kim in particular is

also a statement to challenge Japan's historical denialism. After Kim Hak-Sun testified, many historical deniers actively worked to discredit her and worked to figure Kim and the other "comfort women" as greedy and untrustworthy. One example of relevance to the Column of Strength is the case of *Asahi Shimbun*⁵² reporter Takashi Uemura. Uemura was one of the first reporters to interview and report on Kim Hak-Sun's August 1991 testimony and experience as a comfort woman. His reporting has undergone intense scrutiny and even lawsuits as "rival newspapers attacked him for twisting the truth, and more far-right figures went so far as to accuse him of fabrication" ("Takashi"). The majority of the complaints surrounding his reporting is concerned whether or not he used the correct terms to describe Kim's experience. What essentially is an interrogation of his professional credibility has larger implications for how audiences engage testimonies of rape. This is because by challenging Uemura's reporting also casts doubts on Kim Hak-Sun's words. The public scrutiny of Uemura also has included the implicit consideration of whether or not Kim Hak-Sun's testimony is trustworthy or if she is not an outright liar (and to this end, if she is not reliable, does it mean that the hundreds of "comfort women" activists are also frauds?).

One of the most well-known, present-day examples of modern historical deniers is Harvard Law professor J. Mark Ramseyer's 2021 article on the "comfort women". Ramseyer's article "claims sex slaves taken by the Imperial Japanese Army during World War II were actually recruited, contracted sex workers" (Kim and Levien). In response to his article, hundreds of Harvard students had signed a petition demanding an apology and academics around the globe responded by questioning the validity of his statements and the soundness of his research (Kim and Levien). Such assertions uncomfortably echo the stereotype of the evil Dragon Lady. By remembering Grandmother Kim, the *Column of Strength* remembers an actual activist and woman who lived through the atrocities. But as

⁵² A Japanese newspaper.

she's a woman who's been under attack and scrutiny, the monument stands in defense of her and other "comfort women" as well.

Immortalizing Grandmother Kim works to challenge those that seek to silence Kim Hak-Sun's memory and also highlights the larger framework of Japanese denialism and mishandling of the legal and diplomatic rulings that involve the "comfort women". One of the most controversial rulings in recent years is the 2015 Japan-South Korean Agreement that led to the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation. This agreement was "the 'final and irreversible' settlement on the 'comfort women' issue" agreed to by both the South Korean and the Japanese governments (Chang 138). As part of these measure, Shinzō Abe made an apology for the past and money was put into the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation to be given to the survivors. However, this agreement was hugely unpopular with the "comfort women" advocates and the general South Korean population. In particular, not only were the survivors not consulted on the agreement, but the activist movement had also been advocating for seven demands for two and a half decades and the 2015 Japan-South Korean Agreement failed to meet a single demand. The demands included:

1. Full acknowledgement of the Japanese government's responsibility for the sexual enslavement of women for its military
2. Official apology
3. Direct, legal reparations
4. Thorough investigation of the crime
5. Prosecution of any surviving perpetrators
6. Ongoing education in Japan's public schools
7. Building of museums and memorials (directly quoted from P. Kim 196-197)

Further, many in Japan also disagreed with the agreement and those in South Korea felt like it was more about finances than human rights. Mikyoung Kim of the Hiroshima Peace Institute

asserts that the instigator behind the deal was the United States and that the U.S. made the deal in order to prove to China that East Asia was still influenced by the U.S (“The Big”).

Following the 2015 Japan-South Korea Agreement, the CWJC was formed and two years after that the statue was unveiled. Although the Reconciliation and Healing Foundation was dismantled in 2018 because of negative public opinion (Chang 139), Grandmother Kim stands as a reminder to the audience that none of the Grandmothers’ seven human rights demands were met. Further, she represents the American Korean diasporic and San Francisco Asian/American community’s support of the larger transnational movement.

Ultimately, I maintain that the presence of Grandmother Kim is a moment where the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition is not only listening to the “comfort women” activist movement, but also advocating for audiences to listen to the “comfort women” and other sex crime survivors. By having a statue with an Asian activist in a large metropolitan American city, the CWJC is advocating that her voice matters to American history. By placing Asian history in the United States and putting the *Column of Strength* in conversation with statues around the world, the memory of the “comfort women” transcends our built environment to engage issues of culture and politics in a more dialogic approach to memory work.

Specifically, awareness of multi-sited memory projects help to connect histories and places and blur geographical lines and understandings (Karugia 331). For the “comfort women” statues, the statues not only mirror one another and draw upon shared meaning and history, they also reflect a larger political conversation. The *Column of Strength* draws upon the Japanese response to the “comfort women” statues, but more specifically to the women from around the world that suffered. In this light, the “comfort women” statue found in San Francisco is interconnected with the communities across the globe concerning political, social, and cultural histories that transcends boundaries.

While the rise of historical denialism is a legitimate concern facing the statue and the “comfort women” testimonies, this issue does bring to the forefront delicate intercultural relationships within the United States, particularly toward Japanese Americans. According to an interview of Lillian Sing, a CWJC founder, opponents to *The Column of Strength* exploited the fraught environment of race relations in the United States. These claims asserted the CWJC were “Japan bashing” and claimed that the statue could affect Japanese American children and could have an especially harsh impact on schools. While these claims might or might not have been overstated, it is something to consider as the United States’ history with Japanese American population could generously be described as rocky. During the Second World War, the United States forcefully removed and incarcerated hundreds of thousands of Japanese immigrants and Nisei, second-generation Japanese American citizens (Robinson 25). This act of segregation denied them access to American society, rights, and culture and labeled them as the enemy or perpetual Other. Additionally, the forced removal questioned what inherent rights American citizenship entailed, as many of those incarcerated were legally American citizens. Upon the end of WWII, individuals of Japanese heritage faced almost a half century of continued prejudice.

While I discovered no reports about Japanese Americans outright protesting or claiming harm as directly related to *The Column of Strength*,⁵³ it is important to note that it is not just the Japanese government and right-wing supporters that are not alone in being uncomfortable with memorialization of the “comfort women”. In 2016, 62% of Japanese people polled said they agreed with the government, and they wanted to eliminate all “comfort women” statues (Chun 377). However, according to Chun, this sentiment is rooted

⁵³ After the unveiling of a statue in Glendale, California in 2013, a group of Japanese-Americans asked that it be removed because it caused “a diplomatic problem and thus infringed on the federal government’s exclusive authority on diplomatic matters” (Chun 376). Several lawsuits were filed, and the case reached the U.S. Supreme court in 2017. The Japanese government submitted documents in favor of removing the statue alleging that the statue interfered with foreign diplomacy. The case was dismissed by the Supreme Court in March 2017 (Chun 377).

in a sense of “shame, denial, and self-defense” that reflects the values of a still predominantly patriarchal Japanese society” (Chun 377-378). It is never comfortable to remember things like race or mass genocide, but they remain a part of human history and deserve to be memorialized. Further, in relation to the *Column of Strength*, the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition worked closely with the Japanese American community in California.

The CWJC worked with Japanese communities across California to help mitigate the difficult memory and tricky international politics to create a more collaborative and just statue. In fact, Fred Korematsu, Jeff Adachi, Dale Minami, Karen Kai, and Robert Rusky, all influential San Francisco Japanese American leaders, became CWJC co-chairs. Additionally, for the first Board of Supervisors meeting, the CWJC had representatives from the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) gave favorable testimonial in support of CWJC work in both San Francisco and Los Angeles. Such measures are essential in making sure the Japanese American community has a voice and are represented in such a highly controversial topic. Their active participation underscores as well that the memorial and the activist movement surrounding the “comfort women” reparations discussions are about history and gender rights and not about denigrating a culture and race. Instead, this cross-cultural collaboration emphasizes the need for governmental action that people of all cultures are demanding for the “comfort women” survivors and stop denying history.

The CWJC’s Memorial Community

The *Column of Strength* reflects the ideals of the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition (CWJC) and shows the importance of a feminist construction of community. Feminist theorist Aimee Carrillo Rowe coined the term “coalitional subjectivities” to better understand communities of support. The coalitional emphasis on community belonging across power and race lines is essential for creating a more equitable feminist platform so that “privileged and

oppressed people learn to long to belong to one another and to learn from one another about the nature of power and the possibility for social change” (Griffin and Chávez 11). This type of intersectional exchange across different genders, classes, and cultures allows for a stronger alliance to achieve social change. Through Coalitional building, the statue was created to enter and expand a larger conversation of memory surrounding the comfort. Further, this intervention helped challenge stereotypes and include the “comfort women” as part of the Asian/American narrative. Further, I see the coalitional ideals and platform as an essential part in creating a more equitable memorial and contributes to the ability to circulate and research a wider public. Thus, this section considers three examples of ongoing process of memorialization by the CWJC that provide a variety of diverse positionalities in the San Francisco area and beyond opportunities to learn about and take part in the “Comfort Women” Movement.

In 2015, the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition (CWJC) was formed. It was inspired by the Rape of Nanjing movement and got its start when Eric Mar, a professor of Asian/American studies at San Francisco State, suggested that there was a need for such an organization. The group quickly formed with several founding board members and set about working toward raising the statue and creating a multicultural, community-based coalition dedicated to advocating for gender rights. The formation of the coalition strategically sought to include community organizations across the Bay Area that are multicultural, multiethnic and diverse in scope. Members of the community, including honorary co-chairs the Third Baptist Church’s Rev. Amos C. Brown, San Francisco Public Defender Jeff Adachi, and the Jewish Community Relations Council’s Rabbi Douglas Kahn, all play an active part in the ongoing memory work that is the foundation of the CWJC. The coalition is supported by Asian/Americans, Japanese Americans, and a diverse array of individuals local to San Francisco. Such strategic formation of the coalition with this diverse group embodies feminist

scholar Lynn Fujiwara's concept of coalitional building through multiplicity, where the groups build lines across color, affiliation, and culture that insight "shared political investments and a consciousness of difference and power" (258). While there are community leaders, the coalitional format helps to ensure that the members have a voice, and the focus is on the cause rather than individual pursuits.

The founding principles of the CWJC and the *Column of Strength* are solidarity, education, and justice. Their memorial is based-on remembering a difficult past and for a future with more gender rights:

We dedicate our memorial to all the "comfort women" and their unwavering resolve for justice. We pledge to continue our struggle against all forms of sexual violence, and for an end to the sexism, racism, colonialism, militarization, and wars that fuel it. We envision a world free from fear of sexual violence, where all women and girls can live a life with respect and dignity. *The Column of Strength*

The CWJC's first order of business was to create the statue and continue working for justice for the "comfort women" using the statue as a focal point for their actions. After hosting a competition in which artists from around the world participated, a panel of artists, CWJC members, and community members selected a design by Steven Whyte of California. It was unveiled on September 22, 2017 ("The Making"). The statue and the CWJC are inherently connected as the statue is the physical representation of the suffering of the women, but also the continued fight for rights of the CWJC. Additionally, the design of the statue was an inherent part of the coalition's goals and the statue continues to be the groundwork from which their collaborative efforts are founded.

Although the statue is the most visual element of the CWJC's memorializing, the statue also acts as a catalyst and focal point for a variety of activities that build a memorial community. The CWJC focuses on fundraising galas, educational projects, and other

memorial events hosted at the statue—the foundational purpose of these events being to remember the “comfort women” and to raise awareness for present-day sex slavery. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CWJC also hosted educational and activism driven Zoom sessions and have an active presence on social meeting, including Twitter and Instagram. These communities and activities speak to a vibrant community of activism in which the statue is only part of a process of memory making in the attempts to incite change: “it is not as much the *product* of memory projects, although important, that go towards healing and prevention, as it is the *process* of truth-telling when contextualized within a human rights-conscious raising context” (Laplante 434). Thus, the process and events surrounding the statue can expand the statue’s reach into other realms and create more consciousness of the “comfort women”.

One of the largest aspects of the statue and the coalition is the desire to educate the public about the “comfort women” and to advocate for a future where women who are victimized can find justice. After years of hard work, the coalition successfully advocated to add the “comfort women” into historical curriculum of the California Education systems. The coalition, with help from Phyllis Kim and other education experts, created a textbook for California high school students to learn about the history of the “comfort women.” Textbooks have long played a part in the ongoing debate surrounding the “comfort women.” In 1997 Japan, a campaign began to delete the “comfort women” from Japanese textbooks and by 2002 only one textbook had any mention of the “comfort women” (Rose). Thus, the creation of the new textbook helps to rewrite history. The textbook gives a history of the “comfort women,” an overview of the statues in the U.S. and the column of strength, provides lesson plans and more.

The California textbook provides clear historical explanations, historical primary evidence, and emphasizes the ongoing fight about historical accuracy and memory

concerning the “comfort women”. It opens with a quote from a former comfort woman: “Our worst fear is that our painful history during World War II will be forgotten” (*Curriculum 2*). The first section precedes to outline the basic information and history of the “comfort women”. The first paragraph asserts that Americans should learn about the “comfort women” history for the same reason we learn “about historical atrocities like American Slavery, the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust—to examine the painful lessons of the past and prevent similar tragedies in the future” (*Curriculum 2*). The section goes on to talk about rape, human trafficking, and other details pertinent to the issue. The section ends for a call to education students about the grandmothers’ experience because it is “a study not only in human survival, but also of a larger struggle for justice, historical accuracy, and civic responsibility in the face of the potential abuse of power resulting from conflicts among nations” (3). The next section provides historical documents in Japanese written by the military and other official outlets about the “comfort women” and photos, of the actual “comfort women” themselves. The following units include information about the “comfort women” memorials and in-depth activities for the students to complete.

The curriculum creates an extended community through two primary ways: 1. It invites students to take an active role in remembering the “comfort women” and 2. It foregrounds the voices of the “comfort women” as historical evidence. Part of the CWJC efforts asks students who learn about the “comfort women” to create artistic interpretations of the “comfort women.” High School students from around the state submit drawings to the CWJC and they publish the winners on Instagram, Facebook, and my copy of the textbook has three 2018 winners included as part of the introductory material. This effort asks students to claim the history and interpret what it means to them. The second interesting element of community building is an activity that asks students to read and/or listen to a testimony from a “comfort woman” survivor. The students are asked to do three tasks. The first is “listen” to

the author and report on their experience. The second is to reflect on the significance of their words. And finally, the students consider the role of testimony as historical evidence (23). These activities once again invite the students to learn about the community of “comfort women,” but it also extends the voices of the memorial into the classroom so that the words and testimony that might be silent in the statue are spoken.

A second example that is more closely related to the *Column of Strength* are funeral rites held at the statue. As WWII has been long past, the “comfort women” survivors are getting older and only a few self-identified “comfort women” are still alive as of 2022. When a Grandmother passes on, the CWJC holds a funeral vigil where the community comes together to mourn her passing and further support the cause. Various members of the coalition speak and the attendees place flowers, candles, and photos on the statue as part of the funeral rite. These acts embody memorialization in which communities create temporary memorials to highlight grief and advocate for change (Margry and Sánchez 2). Further, by drawing attention to a single woman’s life it can be a call to the larger goal of the statue as it “positions individual memory as both common ground and trigger for a larger collective remembrance and call for action, situating one. . . within a systemic pattern of social violence and organized resistance” (Bold et al. 135). Therefore, the funeral rites help to remind the community of the personal effect of their cause but also of the ongoing need for justice for the “comfort women” and other women effected by sex crimes.

My final example is Zoom sessions that educate the public about the “comfort women” cause and the CWJC. Many of these events might have been in-person had COVID-19 not forced everything online and although it may have been an unforeseen advantage these sessions had the opportunity to reach a wider audience and provide space for protest for people who might not have the ability or desire to join in physical protest. There have been several Zoom sessions dedicated to remembering the “comfort women” and advocating for

the ongoing fight against sexual slavery during 2020-2021, however, I want to focus on a recent session I attended that responded to Professor Ramseyer's article. The CWJC and the Harvard student association hosted *Debunking Denialism on the "Comfort Women" Issue Through the Grassroots Movement in the U.S.* on February 16, 2021. While there were testimonies from students, a panel of CWJC board members, and questions from the audience, I want to focus on another moment where the CWJC focused on a past "comfort woman's" testimony. After the student introductions, Grandma Lee YongSoo spoke to the audience about her experiences as a "comfort woman," her feelings about the ongoing Japanese denial of her experiences, and her hopes for the future. Her testimony was translated by Phyllis Kim and her words were filled with kindness and strength. She focused on the movements desire not for monetary compensation, but for justice through Japan acknowledging and apologizing for the past so that future atrocities might be prevented. According to Grandma Lee, the continued denial of Japan of the "comfort women" reminds her of the attitude the Japanese government held when they imprisoned her as a sex slave. She places her hope in grassroots organizations like the CWJC and wants a future where everyone can work together. She wanted to make it clear that she had no ill-feelings toward the Japanese people, but hated the crimes of the past (Lee). These words emphasize the healing and caring undertones of the movement and encourages the participation of the audience to help advocate for justice for the cause.

Conclusion

The struggle for justice for the "comfort women" is ongoing and involves geopolitics that complicate and devalue the trauma these women experienced. While the *Column of Strength* is powerful representative of memorial activism and should be valued, the "comfort women's" testimony is also bolstered by a network of activists and scholars, including Korean feminist Yun Chung-Ok, historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki, and feminist sociologist Chung

Chin-Sung work to construct “a platform from which “comfort women” may testify against their perpetrators” (Lee and Crowe 341). The CWJC and other statues respond to Japan’s historical denialism in an effort to care for the past and a rhetorical responsibility to continue to advocate for justice. According to Laurie Gries, activism should be guided by rhetorical responsibility that guides action to be propagative and ethical (337). In the same way, I maintain that memorial activism, like the “comfort women” statues movement, is more effective when guided a responsible engagement with the past like the CWJC’s honoring of the “comfort women’s” voices. The continued contentiousness behind the Japanese government’s attitude has serious consequences concerning gender and human rights. However, the ongoing activism by the CWJC is working to “cultivate a population of conscience citizens who vigilantly serve as collective memory-keepers as well as watchdogs for future risks of repression” (Laplante 435). By working together, the CWJC worked with the community to create a “coalitional visibility that communicates solidarity” to memorialize the “comfort women” with careful consideration and ethical engagement with the past (Roshanravan 266).

CHAPTER FOUR: Documenting Afro-Asian Allyship in Detroit:

Remembering Grace Lee Boggs' Seventy Years of Activism

In May 2020, the world was outraged because of a viral video of a white Minnesota policeman kneeling on an African American man's neck for almost ten minutes. The killing of George Floyd by the policeman prompted worldwide anti-police protests advocating against brutality against people of color. While not as widespread, Floyd's death also inspired an equally important conversation about anti-Black sentiment within Asian/American communities. This was because former Officer Tou Thao, a Hmong American, stood with his back turned as Floyd begged for his life (Yam). Although Thao was fired, it sparked the opportunity understand how anti-Black racism reverberated through the Asian/Asian-American community. Asian/American historians (Anderson, Blain, Prashad, Onishi) map out an enduring and complicated relationship between the African American and Asian/American communities throughout U.S. history. This tension escalated in 1990s LA, when following the death of a Black man at the hands of white police officers sparked a riot that damaged property in Black and Korean communities. Although media highlighted the violence and hostility between Black and Korean communities, much of this conflict was fed by the media and policies that promoted white supremacy (Rubio 3). Further, "the narrative of Black-Asian hostility is rooted in immigration and economic policies that have historically pitted these communities against one another" (Demsas and Ramirez para. 7).

In 2021, the U.S. media has further perpetuated the narrative of Black-Asian hostility. Former President Donald Trump's 2020 rhetoric calling COVID-19 the "China virus" evoked a rise of hate-crimes against Asian/Americans (Lang). The media paid increasing attention to violent attacks against the Asian/American community; however, "because some of the video-taped perpetrators appear to have been Black, some observers immediately reduced anti-Asian violence to Black-Asian conflict" (Lee and Huang "The Trope," para. 1).

Although there appears to be Black perpetrators of the violence against Asian/Americans, the violence is much more widespread and cannot be merely reduced to a conflict between the African and Asian/American communities. Further, while these acts of violence finally were recognized after almost a year of hate-crimes going basically unreported, passing the blame onto the Black community invokes “anti-Black sentiment and reignite[s] the trope of Black-Asian conflict” (Lee and Huang “The Trope,” para. 1).

Although the media has influenced interpretations of hate crimes against Asian/Americans and the history of hostility between the two communities, the Asian/American community has come together to discuss ways to support the Black community and address anti-Black sentiment. According to Claire Jean Kim, Asian/Americans have been identified within an anti-Black framework where “Asians have been figured as not White but also, and primarily, as not Black. They have been subjected to discriminatory exclusions but also immunized from Negrophobia. White supremacy has pushed them down, and anti-Blackness has provided the floor beneath which they cannot fall” (10). Comparative Race and Ethnic studies scholar Jeanelle Hope posits that the #Blacklivesmatter era not only highlights a complicated and sometimes capricious relationship between the Black community and Asian/Americans, but the modern era also provides new opportunities for the communities to increase cross-cultural solidarity (222-223). Claire Jean Kim asserts that Asian/Americans have undoubtedly been subject to discrimination from primarily white-privileged, policies and laws. However, these same individuals live within a system while they are not white, they also benefit from anti-Black sentiment (Kim 10).

Within this system, Asian/Americans then must not only advocate for their own visibility but must “rethink what visibility should mean for Asian Americans who have benefited from the model-minority racial project at Black Americans’ expense” (Roshanravan

263). The model-minority stereotype posits that Asian/American are “high-achieving, hardworking, and intellectually superior monolithic group characterized by universal and unparalleled academic and occupational success” (Yi and Museus 1). Further, this myth has been used by the political right to “dismiss civil rights activists’ claims that racism was responsible for the struggles of people of color and to delegitimize challenges to racial oppression” (Yi and Museus 1). In other words, the Asian/American model minority myth conjectures that Asian/American success was achieved through American ideals like hard work and perseverance. Thus, if Asian/Americans did not suffer from racism, other minorities could find success if only they work as hard as Asian/Americans. This myth also enacts a sort of invisibility on Asian/Americans rendering them apolitical (Dich). For Asian/American feminist scholar Tamsin Kimoto, “rethinking visibility” involves Asian/American women and activists speaking out against all injustice, resisting staying in places of privilege at the expense of others, and forming coalitional support for justice for all women of color (145-150).

I turn to a memorial that considers a prominent figure in both the Asian/American and African American communities, the award-winning documentary, *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*. This documentary tells the life story of Grace Lee Boggs, a Chinese American Black Power activist who spent over seventy years working with the Detroit community for Black rights. The 2013 documentary was created by Korean American Grace Lee⁵⁴ and functions as a memorial to Boggs’ life and Boggs’ dedication to Black rights. The film also includes Grace Lee as an interviewer, participant, and filmmaker whose goals and physical presence in the film extends Boggs’ story beyond just a simple retelling of Boggs’ activism into a conversation that includes Lee. Lee’s goal in the film is to consider

⁵⁴ As the documentary director and the subject of the documentary share a name, I will refer to the documentary director as Grace Lee or simply Lee and to the subject as Grace Lee Boggs or Boggs.

how Boggs' race and gender influenced her experiences as an activist while Boggs wants to talk about her activism and the struggles that face the Detroit Black community. While Boggs seems almost superhuman in her dedication to the Black community, Lee is the inquisitive sidekick who follows Boggs as she journeys throughout Detroit. Audiences learn little about Lee's own life, but it is made clear that her primary goal for the film is to refute the gendered stereotype of the passive Asian American woman. Boggs often dismisses the role her gender or race played in her activism, creating a marked contrast between Boggs' testimony and the creator's overall goals. This conflict, which I call the Boggs/Lee conflict, is present throughout the film and emphasizes the women's own differing positionalities and goals.

This dissertation chapter focuses on ways *American Revolutionary* leverages memorial conflict as a meaning-making tool. Victoria Gallagher and Margaret LaWare assert that conflict is an integral part of memorialization. They assert that memory often evokes complex stories that involve "conflict and contestation over how events and individuals are represented materially within the public realm" (Gallagher and LaWare 106). I place conflict as an important aspect of *American Revolutionary* and ask: How is the Boggs/Lee conflict used to shape an understanding of Afro-Asian history, especially in relation to Asian/American gender, race, and cross-cultural relations? To answer this question, I consider the genre of documentary memorials and assert that through testimony, interviews, and editing, *American Revolutionary* memorializes the life of Grace Lee Boggs and utilizes conflict as a generative story-telling method. From this prospective, conflict is not a negative, combative force, but a more dialogic process in which both speakers honor one another and collaboratively create a space in which both positions can be considered (Ratcliffe 53).

Boggs' goal is to demonstrate and educate the audience about her activism and dedication to the Detroit Black community; however, Lee memorializes an Asian/American woman activist who challenges the model minority myth and stereotype of the passive Asian

woman. Although Boggs' goals are primary throughout the film, Lee's voice and memorial objective provides a contrast to Boggs' position. Even if the women disagree, they never are rude or dismissive of the others' position which posits differences in a productive, respectful framework. Therefore, I argue that the conflict between Boggs and Lee is leveraged both a strategic tool to allow for multiple voices in retelling the past, but also as a way to allow for the audience to interpret and engage with Boggs in a flexible and adaptive way. The documentary allows for Boggs to be framed as a Black Power Activist, Asian American woman, and an Afro-Asian ally. Through these various interpretations, the memorial remembers Boggs through an intersectional framework that helps audiences understand allyship.

Allyship and intersectionality are important in understanding this dissertation chapter. Allyship is a complicated term and modern concepts of cross-cultural solidarity often fail to understand what allyship entails. According to a series of interviews of seventy college students who self-identified as an ally of some sort, wide range misconceptions about structural racism, cross-cultural cooperation and support, and tendencies of blaming minorities for inequities underpin notions of modern day allyship (Sumerau 1). Rhetoric scholar Laura Tetreault defines allyship as a "rhetorical process that requires awareness of context and positionality, and the work of developing allies' activist rhetorical awareness must foreground accountability to vulnerable communities" (viii). This definition foregrounds allyship as a rhetorical activity that necessitates context and culpability for interracial solidarity that promotes justice. Intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and asserts that multiple marginalized people cannot only be understood from a singular definition of identity like gender, race, sexuality, etc. Instead, an intersectional framework allows for multiple identifications (9).

This dissertation chapter has six sections that work to engage and analyze *American Revolutionary*. The first section summarizes Grace Lee Boggs' activist career and is followed by a summary of the documentary which includes an overview of Lee and Boggs' goals for the film. The following three sections explore the Boggs/Lee conflict. I begin by showing the role of the Boggs/Lee conflict in *American Revolutionary*. The next section, "Embodied Allyship" examines Boggs' goals through her use of testimony and "Editing Conflict" examines how Lee uses editing to aid her goals for the film. I end with an analysis of the audience's engagement with Boggs' memory via Twitter in order to understand how the audience makes sense of the conflict and a conclusion.

Who is Grace Lee Boggs?

To understand the impact of *American Revolutionary* as a memory project, it is important to recognize Grace Lee Boggs' history as a person and as an activist and scholar. Boggs was born in Rhode Island in 1915. Boggs credits her upbringing as a key element contributing to her work as an activist. Boggs grew up as a first generation Chinese American in a mostly white community that had few role models (as qtd. in Ward 60). Further, throughout the 1920s and 30s, the Chinese exclusion Act of 1882 was still upheld by American policies and laws and she grew up unable to publicly embrace her Chinese heritage: "from an early age we [Chinese Americans] were raised to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible, in part because so many of us had relatives or knew people who were illegal immigrants" (Boggs qtd. in Ward 60). Boggs' early development was shaped by her parents' view of gender and culture. Boggs spent a good deal of her life working in her father's Chinese restaurant (Ward 66). While Boggs' father supported her goals in life, he also promoted a very narrow idea of gendered roles as he had a very "fixed notion of womanhood completely defined by motherhood and marital subordination" especially in

relation to Boggs' mother (Ward 66). These gendered roles extended into Boggs' own life as in her childhood, "the best a woman could aim for was to become a teacher or a nurse" (Boggs 120). Boggs' mother had a very different view of what it meant to be a woman. For Boggs' mother, she identified as an American instead of Chinese because she believed the identity of American gave women more rights (Ward 67). Until almost the 1970s the term "Asian American" did not exist and Boggs' father identified as a Chinese national. As a result, Boggs was raised with "a complicated relationship to China and Chinese identity" (Ward 69).

By the age of 25, Boggs had received a Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr College and had moved to Chicago. Although she had received a degree in higher education, she could not find a job that reflected her educational level and was living in poverty (Ward 83-84). In particular, because of her Asian heritage, Boggs found it difficult to get a job (10:55). However, she did get a job with a newspaper in Chicago and lived in a basement apartment in a Black community. Living amongst the Chicago Black community raised her awareness of widespread inequities and prompted her activist career (11:00-11:24). In early 1940s Chicago, Boggs began her activist career working as a Black rights activist and for the Workers' party (Ward 89). She continued this work and by the 1950s, Boggs had moved to Detroit to take a central role in the fight for Black rights, housing equality, and other activist endeavors (Boggs 124). Early in her career in Detroit, Boggs worked for a newspaper through which she frequently attended lectures about Black activism and protest. Through one such event, Boggs met and was impressed by a lecturer, Jimmy Boggs, an African American scholar and activist, who would later become her husband (Ward 136). Boggs and Jimmy Boggs eventually married and lived in Detroit for the remainder of their lives. They were married for forty years and worked together as activists, scholars, and teachers. Historians like Stephan Ward and others are interested in studying the relationship between a Black man

and a Chinese woman as they worked together as Black Rights activists during the 20th Century.

Grace Lee Boggs and Jimmy Boggs worked throughout the 1960s as Black Power activists. The Boggses coauthored several books, including *Revolution and Evolution in the 20th Century* in 1974 (Ward 125). This book is significant because it reflects a theory of activism that would guide their activism throughout the rest of their career. *Revolution and Evolution* asserted that there was a significant difference between rebellion and revolution. Their idea of revolution was guided by a dialogic, humanistic view of the world in which revolutions not only corrected past injustice, but they did also so with the intent to inspire future change. This theory posited humanity as an essential part of activism and that humans should use creativity, self-evaluation, and a sense of political and ethical responsibility to better the world around them (as qtd. in Ward 328-329). Historian Stephan Ward's *In Love and Struggle* maps these theories out in detail and *American Revolutionary* maps them out in a more succinct, audience friendly overview.

Boggs was involved in over 50 years of Detroit history. Detroit experienced an influx of African Americans during the 1950s called the "Great Migration" to work in a booming industrialization economy; however, following a decline in the industry in the 1960s left devastated the city. The Black community was increasingly hit hard as the job market, housing market, and overall economy went into steep decline (Hartigan 11). After the fall of the market, Detroit experienced severe inequities and the Black community experienced segregation and aggression and mistreatment from the police (Yarrish 7). These conditions led to a series of riots and racial upheaval throughout the 1960s. However, these demands were continually ignored by the government which did not address the inequities that faced Detroit (Yarrish 8). As a result, the quality of living in Detroit continued to decline. Today,

African Americans represent the majority in Detroit; however, the city is still experiencing poor economic prosperity and problems with drugs (Hartigan 12).

As the city of Detroit experienced various hardships, Boggs' activism reflected the needs of the city's Black community. During the Civil Rights Era and the Black Power Movement, Boggs helped organize protests, marches, and other events that advocated for various Black rights causes in the Detroit community and beyond (Boggs 125). In response to declining graduation rates of Black students, Boggs organized an educational project called Detroit Summer which endeavors to "give our young people a sense of continuing participation in creating change" and to help mitigate dropout rates, especially amongst Black students (Boggs 127). She is also the author of several books and Boggs' philosophies expand upon the theories she constructed with Jimmy Boggs. Grace Lee Boggs remained active in the Detroit community in some aspect until her death in 2015. Throughout her career, she advocated for a variety of causes, including equal housing for the Black community, the Black Power Movement, and other social justice causes, but central to her activism was equal rights for Black Americans, the right to politics and education, and equal access to services like education, housing, and community spaces for Black Americans in Detroit.

Although Boggs maintained an active role in Detroit and Black rights, according to Grace Lee it was only within the ten years she worked with Boggs on *American Revolutionary* that Boggs' ideas have started to gain traction: "Grace has been trying to wage a revolution in the United States for the past 70 years. . . [and her] ideas have started to catch fire" (5:55). Boggs continued her work as an activist into her 80s and 90s, but her overall impact gained a lot of attention with the publication of her autobiography and the creation of the documentary.

Overview of American Revolutionary

American Revolutionary was released in 2013 and won several awards upon its release, including a *Peabody* award. It was directed by Grace Lee and focuses on Grace Lee Boggs' activist life in Detroit. The film features interviews between Lee and Boggs, interviews of activists and historians that are familiar with Boggs, and extensive personal testimony from Boggs. The documentary was inspired by another project entitled *The Grace Lee Project*, directed by Lee about Asian/American women sharing the same name. Boggs was featured in this film and after meeting her, Lee decided to dedicate an entire documentary to her life. The film was shot over ten years and Lee spent time during this decade interviewing Boggs and filming her various activist activities. Today, the documentary is still being shown across the United States. Although a variety of institutions have featured screenings of the film, it is often shown at universities or for Asian/American focused groups. A few past screenings include Yale Law School (2015), University of Maryland's Asian American Studies Department (2017), and a question/answer session with Grace Lee plus a screening in honor of Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month through the Geena Davis Institute (2021).

The documentary memorializes Boggs' life and important moments in history related to her activism and dedication to the Black community of Detroit. Although the film covers over 70 years of history, it does so by employing a nonchronological story-telling technique. The documentary does not follow traditional linear events, but instead jumps in time, from topic to topic. While audiences acquire a good understanding of Boggs' purpose and a history of activism in Detroit, *American Revolutionary*'s nonchronological organization makes it difficult to summarize. The documentary shows clips of Boggs in her 90s giving speeches, in her 80s marching against drugs in Detroit, giving lectures on Black Power with her husband, Jimmy Boggs in the 60s, and more. Nevertheless, the film does follow Boggs' career as an activist and audiences learn about her childhood, education, and the different types of

activities Boggs participated in as she fought for the Black community. She was an active member of the Detroit Black Power movement and especially later in life spent time working with children and teenagers in need in the Detroit community. For each of these facets of activism, the documentary shows Boggs participating and organizing a variety of events, like civil rights marches or community gardens. Boggs did a little of everything and participated in these events to gain rights for the Black community. The film also educates viewers on the history of Black rights in Detroit. Using pictures and video clips, viewers see how Boggs' life relates to the politics and activism seen in Detroit from her early career into the modern moment.

Another important aspect addressed in *American Revolutionary* is an overview of Boggs' activist theories. The film educates viewers about her theories of activism and how her theories and ideas changed throughout her career. Her theories are complex and rooted in highly regarded philosophies and ideologies that many find hard to comprehend. To help honor Boggs' emphasis on the importance of these foundational ideas to activism, the film used animated vignettes that sum up a theory in easy-to-understand language. For example, audiences learn that Boggs began her career as a Marxist. The documentary begins this sequence in Lee's home and the audience can see Lee video chatting with Boggs. Boggs is trying to explain the difference between dialectical humanism versus dialectical materialism. During this explanation, Lee makes eye contact with the camera, and it is clear that she has no idea what Boggs is saying (13:48-13:56). Thus, the film immediately cuts to a Black animated screen and jaunty instrumental music. Red text flashes across the screen letting the audience know that they will be learning about Marxism in "30 seconds" (14:00). The film uses these animated vignettes to explain her theories, influences like Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and other difficult ideas.

While Boggs' early activist career was inspired by Marxism, Martin Luther King Jr., and Malcolm X, she soon developed her own theories of activism. The second half of the film is dedicated to helping the audience understand her specific theories of activism. She developed these with her husband Jimmy Boggs and continued to theorize and write after his death. According to the film, Boggs and her husband reflected on ways to merge Martin Luther King Jr.'s theories with Malcolm X's. By foregrounding conversation or dialogue, Boggs believed that enacting real change is rooted in dialogic, collaborative exchange. As outlined in *American Revolutionary*, central to her ideals was that Boggs believed that for real change individuals should not only participate in activist movements, they should also reflect and consider larger issues that affect daily life, like government, ideologies, and systems of oppression. Boggs and her husband formed conversation groups dedicated to developing theories of activism and ideas for change. Boggs asserts that by "talking together we were able to create, a kind of consciousness of ourselves" (41:21). She believed in a more balanced, "two-sided transformation and not just the oppressed person—it's the oppressor. We had to change ourselves to change the world" (48:05). Through the film viewers can see that the major change in Boggs' life was her dedication to the Black cause and her relentless support of the Black community. The documentary also includes evidence that Boggs' ideas started to gain more recognition in the late 1990s. Much of this attention began after Boggs published her own autobiography (1:05:55).

The overarching theme of the film reveals Boggs' ultimate goals for *American Revolutionary*: to educate the public about her activist career and theories and Black Rights in Detroit. While the film never presents Boggs' "this is my goal for the documentary" statement, she instead performs her goals for the documentary. She willingly answers questions about her past, about her activism, about her theories, and about Black rights. She rarely shares information about herself or her personal life. However, viewers learn about her

career, dedication to the Black community, theories, and the Detroit community through her testimony, video clips of her activities in Detroit, newspaper clippings, photographs, and interviews from historians and activists familiar with Boggs' life. The audience witnesses video evidence of her dedication and how her contribution changed and evolved over the years. Boggs' goal for the documentary is important because she is the primary voice featured throughout. Although other experts chime in and Lee, as the director, plays a role in the film, Boggs' performance as activist, philosopher, and ally to the Black community is central to the film.

Director Grace Lee's goals are more explicitly stated in the documentary. Lee is interested in contesting the stereotype of the passive or the lotus blossom stereotype of Asian/American women (4:02-4:06). The Lotus Blossom stereotype is a gendered version of a model minority, or an apolitical, passive figure. The Lotus Blossom is a quiet, passive Asian/American woman that is an object of lust and objectification for white men (Taijima 309). Further, Lee also works to humanize Boggs. In an interview with PBS, she states that she wants audiences to consider the woman behind the legacy: "It's about an elderly woman who spends most of her days sitting in her living room thinking and hatching ideas about the next American revolution" ("Film"). While the film is mostly guided by Boggs' testimony, Lee's role is important to consider as she is not a passive observer or merely a neutral narrator and her influence shapes Boggs' memory in significant ways. Although Lee is not often seen on camera and she is often silent as she follows Boggs throughout Detroit, she narrates, asks pertinent questions about activism, or has conversations with Boggs. Further, Lee frames her participation in the documentary as a way for her to understand and make a connection with such an important historical figure. Documentary scholars believe that filmmakers who acknowledge their own personal biases can make the audience and

themselves more aware of their own positionality and can hopefully engage topics with more openness and honesty (Garret 245).

Memorial Conflict: The Boggs/Lee Chats

American Revolutionary opens on a figure slowly wandering down a tree-lined lane. Within seconds, the camera pans out and the scene is transformed from an idyllic winter street into an urban dystopia where an older woman is arduously pushing a walker toward a dilapidated building ornamented by broken windows and splashes of graffiti. She says, “I feel so sorry for people not living in Detroit” (00:17). She continues with her observations of Detroit, in a solemn yet succinct overview of her love for the city of Detroit. She notes that the city itself is “a symbol of how giants fall” (00:52). The year is 2011 and Grace Lee Boggs is 95 years old. Immediately following the introduction, a new unknown voice begins to narrate, and the audience sees a simple brick house with bright orange and red panels. It is a snowy, winter day and in a shot that directly mirrors the first minute, the camera follows a woman as she walks through the snow towards the house. She says, “For over a decade, I have been coming to Detroit, to this house, for an unfinished conversation” (1:57). She reaches the front door, rings the bell, and waits. In the corner of the screen, a subtitle appears letting audiences know that her name is Grace Lee and that she is a filmmaker, aged 41 (2:07). Lee is greeted by an older Boggs and the film crew are welcomed into her home, where she offers hospitality. In her kitchen, Boggs asks if anyone wants a vodka or beer, and gets a haircut from Lee. Lee and Boggs talk about the struggles of aging and Boggs’ struggle to remain mobile. In these moments, the audience sees Boggs not as activist, but as human.

Much of the film was shot in Boggs’ kitchen and throughout her Detroit home; the setting of the documentary works to humanize Boggs’ memory. The setting for the documentary reflects not only a concession for the aging activist, but also speaks to Lee’s goal of humanizing Boggs’ memory. As memory created in domestic spaces are private,

“class and gender, ethnicity and family, may be more salient than national identities” (Meah and Jackson 513). Several important conversations, which I call “kitchen chats,” occur between Boggs and Lee in the documentary. Angela Meah and Peter Jackson assert that because kitchens are filled with domestic materials and food rituals often associated with family and home, conversations in kitchens can act as a “narrative doorway” that reveal the past (518; 520). Importantly, as the film begins with Lee and Boggs in Boggs’ kitchen, it also ends with a conversation between the women in the same kitchen. The fact that the film bookends Boggs’ life story with these conversations emphasizes that Lee is a part of the documentary and through Lee’s role in the documentary, the memory of Boggs is not only accessed through Boggs’ personal testimony, but also through conversation or interviews between the women. These exchanges also reveal the conflict between the women, even as the audience sees their friendship and trust in these moments.

The first kitchen chat takes place in the first five minutes and emphasizes Lee and Boggs’ diverging goals for the film. This sequence reveals that Lee’s goal is to “refute the stereotype of Asian American women as passive” (4:02-4:06). Boggs on the other hand was surprised by being categorized as a Chinese American woman for the purposes of the documentary (4:07-4:10). It is made clear that Lee has asked about gendered stereotypes again and again, but Boggs refuses to answer questions about this. Instead, Boggs wants to talk about her work with the Detroit community. Although Lee and Boggs’ exchange shows that Boggs is frustrated by being questioned about gendered stereotype and introduces the two women’s conflicting goals for the film, this interchange also does two important things: 1) it introduces Lee’s goals as a guiding factor of the film and 2) it honors Boggs’ purpose, ideas, and ultimate differing from Lee’s goals. The audience is immediately made aware that the two controlling voices of *American Revolutionary* are in disagreement which is over how Boggs will be cast as a Black Power activist or a Chinese American, woman, and ally.

The opening kitchen chat emphasizes Lee's goal for the film, to challenge the passive Asian/American stereotype. To support this goal, Lee not only includes the kitchen chats but also includes Boggs' changing activism as she aged. *American Revolutionary* began filming in the early 2000s and shows how Boggs activism changed as she grew older, even during the ten years of filming. In the 1990s, Boggs was still actively going out into the community, working in gardens, and working to help beautify Detroit. However, as she aged, she began to lecture more and have less hands-on roles. The audience witnesses Boggs at the beginning of filming: older, but extremely mobile. By the final days of filming the documentary, Boggs has limited mobility. The documentary does not soften or exalt the aging process, but instead offers an honest depiction. For example, it highlights the physical demands aging places on the body as Boggs is seen with a walker, with a physical therapist, and using a cane. These images and experiences are laced with stories including everything from the difficulties of personal hygiene to hair that unexpectedly grows in nostrils with aging, Boggs sums up aging succinctly saying: "You can't practice being old and aging is not for sissies." (1:18:02). Boggs' body performs the aging process, as she is actively shown throughout the documentary in different ages with different mobilities. She speaks honestly and with humor about aging, admitting that she is in the process of dying. Through this testimony and performance, *American Revolutionary* and Boggs assert that a 95-year-old woman could be an activist. Further, the documentary shows that the disabilities that come with aging change the shape of activism individuals might enact but does not negate the possibilities of enacting change in a community.

That Lee includes reflections from Boggs about her age is important because it helps contribute to an intersectional view of Boggs and has elements of her identity that shapes not only what her activism looks like but how others respond to her. Seeing an aged Boggs is important from Lee's standpoint because older individuals are increasingly invisible in

American culture (Thompson). Asian/American bodies are particularly affected as “the employment of visibility and invisibility is particularly significant to Asian/American transnational work because too often Asian bodies are made invisible in political contexts, unless the hypervisibility of Asian bodies are made to serve political ends” (Dich). While projects exist that work toward integrating positive imagery of aging bodies into mainstream culture; gender, class, and ethnicity negatively impact individuals experience and representation of aging. “Women are more often the subject of ageist stereotypes within popular culture, just as they are at the same time overlooked and underrepresented” (Richards et al. 65). Asian/American elderly are overlooked and are disproportionately affected in times of recession and social hardships (Cruikshank 118). For Asian/Americans immigration laws and stereotypes elevate chances for poverty and negative representations. In fact, the “model minority” stereotype combined with laws that dehumanize those of Asian descent decrease access to state run support and increase poverty levels of the elderly across the United States (Phua et al. 74). Aging has historically been dominated by overarching normative narratives and by the 1950s the process of aging became situated in terms of whiteness and “heterosexual able-bodied men” (Gilleard and Higgs vii).

Considering the role of bodily performance in a memory project is important as the “performance of the body allows the, otherwise, unspeakable and under-represented memories emerge beyond vocal records” (Meng 274). Bodily performance is significant for considering memorials as Dubriwny and Poirot assert that “the power of the objective female body as witness remind us that cultural understandings of women’s bodies come to matter in these public memory sites” (199). However, this documentary allows viewers to see two Asian/American women, it enters into the realm in which their bodies perform a racial identity that could invoke large scale, misunderstandings of race that reads outward appearances as indicative of internal positionality (Grice 257). In particular, such

technologies or embodied modalities can place diverse women in positions of vulnerability: “The ethnic subject finds herself prey to objectification as both an ethnic and female subject, drawing the gaze of the white/male spectator. This process of objectification can be seen to produce the pressure to conform to dominant definitions of beauty” (Grice 267). Thus, even as the documentary presents a picture of a confident activist and engaged documentarian it must combat a history fraught with stereotypes and misrepresentation of the Asian/American feminine body. Although Lee’s framing of the first kitchen chat leads the audience to consider her embodied experience as an aging activist, Lee also does not edit out Boggs’ doubt the importance of her role as a Chinese woman. By including both Lee’s editing and Boggs’ doubt in the first kitchen chat, impetus is placed on the audience to decide which opinion holds more sway.

Another kitchen chat, which is one of the final scenes of the documentary, extends the Boggs/Lee conflict. Lee tells the viewers that because Boggs has such a dominant personality, she would often control the conversation and reveal little about herself. As a result, Lee started pushing back and tried to get Lee to reveal some of emotional responses she felt during her time as an activist. Boggs however remained positive, revealing little about the struggle she must have faced. In response, Lee says: “I guess I’m trying to find like some kind of connection to you. You’re so confident about your positions and ideas” (1:14:41). Lee’s personal statement about self-doubt, finding human connections, and confidence invites Boggs to respond with a personal response. However, Boggs avoids getting emotional and instead responds with a general statement about different life choices and how hers just made sense for the type of person she was. During Boggs’ speech, Lee is visibly uncomfortable and responds: “I can’t relate to someone who doesn’t doubt themselves is what I’m saying. Or question, you know, “Did I ever make a mistake?” ‘Cause your whole thing about self-transformation should require like an internal struggle.” As Lee speaks, the

camera focuses on Boggs, who is obviously listening carefully. After Lee finishes, Boggs sits for a moment of awkward silence. Boggs finally responds, saying “Well, I think, probably. . . [another long silence] That’s a—that’s a criticism that I should be making of myself. That, that I should talk so much about transformation, and not experiencing it. I think this encounter will be with me for quite a while. I’ll have to sort of internalize it, and see what it means to me” (1:15:46). Boggs is not upset by Lee’s pushing and her response that she will think about it is believable and reflects her outlook on life. Yet, her response is not satisfactory as the audience learns little about Boggs’s internal struggle. Lee wants to make a connection, to understand Boggs, because she *wants* to see Boggs as an Asian/American woman. This search for a connection and Boggs refusal to comment increases the feeling of conflict between the women.

Through the Boggs/Lee kitchen chats, conflict is presented without anger, hostility, or judgment and facilitates a type of dialogic memory through which conflict is not ignored or erased but openly addressed. According to public memory scholar Aleida Assmann, dialogic memory allows for two or more invested voices to remember the past through “a new framework of moral and historical accountability” (206). Although Assmann is addressing histories that remember violence on a global scale, it is applicable on a smaller scale as it foregrounds the need for both parties to recognize their own position in relation to the past and to approach the other within emphatic frameworks (208). Boggs’ response reinforces her belief in the dialogic process and her willingness to be changed or self-reflect. In this light, conflict is more about listening and dialogue than traditional concepts of conflict. Krista Ratcliffe argues that conflict can actual be productive in that “gaps and/or conflicts between the embodied discourses construct spaces from which a person’s agency may emerge. Moreover, as cultural discourses become embodied, boundaries between inside and outside blue and beg discussions of one’s own accountability to self and other” (53).

Conflict between Lee and Boggs, then not only allows for both Boggs and Lee to consider the others' opinion, but also for the audience to consider each woman's ideas. Memory projects often have a unified goal, but as *American Revolutionary* includes two goals, it creates a memory project that invites audiences to consider these chats in relation to their own needs. Depending on the audience member, they can focus on either Lee's goal of consider Boggs' gender and race, or to consider Boggs' focus on activism. Memorials often reflect the needs of the present moment, and I see this conflict as a strategy that allows for flexible interpretations that can respond to various needs. As a memorial, *American Revolutionary* is primarily dedicated to remembering Boggs, but through incorporating conflict as a part of the memory making process, the documentary expands Boggs' story into a more complex framework.

Although the conflict allows for more consideration of each woman's goals, Lee's influence on the final product has a lot of impact on the audience. By humanizing Boggs, the kitchen chats become "spaces of attention" where audiences are asked to read into the surrounding elements and decide for themselves how to interpret Boggs' identity (Zagacki and Gallagher 188). Historically, the kitchen, and more broadly the home was a center to "feminine" identity and would be viewed as part of the feminine domain (Osgerby 100). While I do not think Lee ascribes to these reductive gender delineations, I do think Lee realizes the power of materiality for the audience to ascribe these associations with the kitchen (Zagacki and Gallagher 172). Therefore, I maintain that Lee intentionally bookended the documentary in the kitchen in order to draw out these associations with Boggs' character as a Chinese woman. This choice influences the audience to think about her identity as an Asian/American woman, but because Lee also includes Boggs' activist activities throughout the documentary, the use of the kitchen as setting helps to conceptualize gender beyond stereotyped associations with domesticity, passiveness, or other reductive associations.

Stereotypes against Asian/American posit that they are not activists or interested in politics (Dich) and perpetuate a power imbalance against Asian/American women and the elderly. Images of Asian/American women are problematic as both the general audience and Asian/American women are influenced by these depictions. Scholar Hanying Wang emphasizes the negative effect of misrepresentations of the Asian/American feminine body as it is reified through media and historical narrative which “encourages viewers to internalize confining definitions of identity and self-worth” (86).

As a memorial, *American Revolutionary* does not actively combat these stereotypes, but instead forefronts Lee as documentarian and Boggs as activist and their bodily performance as alternative to a passive image of Asian/American women. Boggs’ open assessment of aging explicitly confronts bodily realities of the elderly and works toward (re)composing a more inclusive picture of older women of color and Asian/American women. David Wallace asserts that women need spaces in which they can speak and write about their bodies, especially with openness and humor. He argues that such narratives offer a “kind of resistance that might not set as its goal the overthrow of the system but instead finding places for resistance” (Wallace 35). Boggs’ testimony and performance of aging then might not squelch the exoticized, sexualized stereotypes Asian/American feminine bodies that dominant American media but creates a space for resistance against a homogenized narrative.

Although both women share their opinions, Lee, as creator of the memorial, has the ultimate power to shape the audiences’ perception of Boggs. In particular, I see the opening kitchen chat as a strategic choice that rhetorically frames Boggs according to Lee’s goals. By choosing the kitchen, Lee frames Boggs with material and verbal reminders for the audience of her gender and race (Meah and Jackson 513). Further, even as Boggs and Lee discuss activism, the opening kitchen chat is set up to humanize Boggs. In this scene, we see more of

Boggs' personality than in any other moment in the film, she is laughing, talking about aging, and acts as a host by offering Lee and the camera crew something to drink. By choosing to be bodily present in the documentary, Lee also frames her own identity in relation to the kitchen chats. As Lee identifies as Korean American, her own identity reflects on Boggs and the opening scene, making it more likely that the audience will also see the same characteristics in Boggs.

Embodied Allyship: Intersectionality, Testimony, and Nuancing the Boggs/Lee Conflict

One of the keyways that Boggs participates in *American Revolutionary* is through her personal testimony. Jing Meng argues that testimony is performative and works to “(re)construct” subjectivities through the process of “self-re-examination and reflection” (270). Boggs believes that her testimony is important to help the Black community in Detroit gain equal rights. She uses testimony to not only share her life's story, but also to educate the audience about her activist theories and her belief in the need for ongoing activism. According to Boggs, her testimony reconstructs the past as essential to the present. Through Boggs' testimony, audiences learn about her goal for the film: to depict a life of activism for the Detroit Black community. Although Boggs never explicitly discusses her goals for the documentary, her testimony exhibits an embodied dedication to the community and performatively outlines for her audience how she became aware of the needs of the Black community and changed her life and mindset to become an activist. Boggs' testimony provides stories of her experiences in the community, her theories about activism, and shows how she dedicated her life to the community. These words paint a picture in which the audience can envision how Boggs' life was dedicated on multiple levels to the Detroit community.

As a memory project, the documentary uses testimony as a way for Boggs to define her activism and is a performative tool for both the audience and the speaker. For the speaker,

Boggs is performing and embodying her ideals. For the audience, Boggs is asking them to act as witness to her ideas. Specially Powell and Rowlands assert that witness is also performative. The audience takes part in “performative processing” of the testimony which is the “process of creating the story/narrative to include reciprocity and engagement with identity” (14). Essentially, by witnessing Boggs words the audience is asked to process her ideas of activism and think about her life in relation to their own.⁵⁵ Through this step of self-reflection and engagement, testimony can enact social change and Boggs’ memories can influence how viewers see and understand her activism in the Black community (Powell and Rowlands 14). Testimony is a mediated process that helps the audience to engage with the overall performance of the text (Powell and Rowlands 14). Therefore, the following paragraphs analyze elements of Boggs’ testimony to show how her story remediates understandings of activism.

Boggs begins by framing her first concept of activism through a coming-of-age story where she becomes aware of racial inequalities in the U.S. and specifically of the greater disparities in Black communities. In the first ten minutes of the film, Boggs shares her early life history. Specifically, she states that the seeds of her activism are credited with her family. She grew up in a family of Chinese immigrants (7:53). Nevertheless, Boggs lived a relatively privileged life and received a PhD by the 1940s. Even though she was highly educated, Boggs stated that even when she would apply at department stores, they would reply “We don’t hire Orientals” (10:55). As a result, she took the only job she could find at a newspaper in Chicago and was offered free rent in a basement of a home located in a predominately Black community. Boggs was appalled by the living conditions and the realities of what many Black families faced. This experience opened her eyes to how race, especially

⁵⁵ The final section of this chapter expounds on how the audience has engaged both Boggs’ goals and Lee’s goals.

Blackness created differences in living situations in the United States: “I was aware that people were suffering, but it was a more statistical thing. And here in Chicago, I was coming into contact with it as a human thing” (11:24-11:28). Upon this realization, Boggs supported tenets rights in Chicago and would soon dedicate her entire life to supporting the Detroit and the Black Power movement. This first experience offers the audience evidence of her first awareness of racial disparity and models how her life course began to shift in response.

Even as Boggs’ eventually found a place within the Black Power movement, she began her dedication to the Detroit community feeling like an outsider. Throughout most of her early career, Boggs was overtly aware of the differences between herself and her adopted community, stating “I was a Chinese American living in an African-American community, and saw myself as a part of, and apart from the community” (24:10). It was not until the 1960s that she began to see herself as part of the community. The shift in her identification with the community, shows how identifications change and shift over time. Part of this shift could be accounted to her age and experience but is also undoubtedly related to her development of her theories and status as a teacher in the community. The documentary emphasizes that early in her career, Boggs referred to the community as “the negro community” or other distancing phrases and emphasized her detachment from the community itself. However, by the 1960s, she began to use the pronoun “we” to advocate for Black rights (33:00). This rhetorical shift indicates a radical change in her identification and the documentary uses Boggs’ testimony and historical audio clips to underlie this alteration. Although not explicitly stated, I believe that Boggs’ rhetorical affirmation of solidarity indicated a personal acceptance that she could both be a Chinese American woman and an influential part of an African American community. Further, this grammatical shift shows evidence of true solidarity. Kimoto asserts that part of supporting communities of color requires Asian/Americans to “refus[e] to stay in the places of relative privilege” (149). For

Boggs, not only does she live in the Detroit Black community, she also reorients herself as part of the community as a part of her identity. Thus, she refuses to stay within a privileged category and further dedicates herself to the cause. The documentary continues to share numerous moments of Boggs life where she reorients her positions, changes her activist approach, or goes back to the drawing board to be a better ally and meet the needs of her community. Ultimately, she believed that “we had to change ourselves to change the world” and her testimony evidences her beliefs. Through her testimony, she become a member of the community.

Despite Boggs’ emphasis on her lack of status in the Asian/American community, Lee provides other evidence that suggests that others see her in this way. For example, Lee interviews Asian/American historian Scott Kurashige who maintains that Boggs plays an important role in the Asian/American community: “Where do Asians fit in a world that’s mostly white and Black? When we think about Grace [Lee Boggs] in the 20th Century, she is very much an outsider. In the 21st Century, she represents the uniting of people from different races and different backgrounds in a way that is now defining America” (1:06:21-1:06:45). Kurashige’s interview places the conflict between Boggs and Lee in terms of cross-cultural solidarity. While it does not solve the conflict, Lee’s interview with Kurashige frames her as an important part of Asian/American history as well as a Black ally.

Not only do many see Boggs as an Asian/American ally for the Black community, but Lee frames also *American Revolutionary* in ways that consider how Boggs’ gender and race play a part in her story. For instance, Lee interviews Boggs about her gender and Boggs reveals an example when Boggs realized that the women around her were seeing her as a passive figure and following her example: “I grew up in a male-oriented movement. I subordinated myself very consciously. Then what I was noticing was that there were a lot of women around and I felt that if I didn’t begin struggling with [my husband] Jimmy, I would

give them the completely wrong impression” (48:41). As a result, she began to take a more active part in the community and began debating and challenging her husband in public.

Boggs, however, often refuses to answer questions about her gender or outright rejects such categories: “I think that if we stick to those categories of race and class and gender, we are stuck” (5:06). This statement shows Boggs’ “coalitional” dedication to the Detroit community in that she does not ignore her own privileges but has placed the Detroit community as forefront in her “affective ties” (Rowe 3). As Boggs becomes more involved in the community, she rejects her raced and gendered categories in favor of seeking justice. This does not mean she does not acknowledge her own identity, but instead places the need for Black activism over consideration of her gender or race. Further, the majority of her career was about the Black community of Detroit and Boggs explicitly says that she was not only ignorant of the Asian American movement, she was certainly not an Asian/American icon (1:06:00).

These conflicting opinions on the role of race and gender produce dialogue that allows the audience to see moments where Boggs is both an activist and an intersectional ally to the Black Detroit community. Although the audience see the benefits of moving beyond strict categories of gender through Boggs’ testimony, Lee framing brings to mind historical context. This is important because although the Black Panther party spouted equal gender roles, in reality, women often faced gender discrimination and were relegated to menial roles (Spencer). Elaine Brown goes further saying that “a Black woman asserting herself was a pariah. . . If a Black woman assumed a role of leadership, she was said to be eroding Black manhood, to be hindering progress of the Black race. She was an enemy of the Black people” (357). The idea of a “Black woman leader as enemy” is fraught with disturbing insinuations for Black women fighting for their rights. The suspicion of Black women during this time certainly indicates the need to better understand how Boggs’ gender and race contributed to

her acceptance in the movement. Few current histories of the Black Panther party that address gender mention Boggs,⁵⁶ but Black women in the movement were supportive of intersectional activism as it related to gender equality and solidarity across multicultural community lines (Farmer 192). Nevertheless, Boggs' move to debate her husband is a significant moment because Boggs specifically considered her gender as an important part of her activism. Without Lee's framing of these moments with her questions about gender and race, the intersectional connection of this revaluation might have lost some of its value for the audience. Thus, in this moment Lee and Boggs' goals are working together because gender is considered in a way that furthers a very allyship focused approach to supporting the Black community.

As a memorial project, *American Revolutionary* uses conflict shows embodied allyship through a dialogic framework, where Lee's contribution helps to bring needed nuance to Boggs' story. These two approaches to considering Boggs' cultural heritage reflects differences in how the audience might also approach allyship. She has embodied her position within the community and is worried about inequalities of power and not caught up in debating terminologies. This focus on power and the need for justice in the Detroit community, embodies what Rowe calls coalitional subjectivities where Boggs has actually become part of the community in need (3). Lee on the other hand is more like many of the audience who may need to consider how race, gender, and class shaped Boggs' own ability to take part in the community. This reflects Laura Tetreault's assertion that allyship is a rhetorical process. Through this framework, the ally's own positionality is important to understand so that the activist "awareness must foreground accountability to vulnerable communities" (16).

⁵⁶ None of the following mention Boggs: *Strategic Sisterhood: The National Council of Negro Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (2018), *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (2017), and *The Revolution has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (2016).

From an allyship framework, Lee/Boggs' approaches are not that different, but the audience might interpret them as differing. Coalitional allyship focuses on a coalescing of goals and positionalities, while process based allyship balances intersectional identities and understanding how they recognize privilege to support vulnerable communities. On the surface, especially without an understanding of allyship theories, the approaches between Boggs (coalitional) and Lee (process) make it seem like the two women disagree about allyship, but with closer examination, it is merely different interpretations of allyship each espouses. Boggs is the expert and Lee is trying to understand that expertise and the two goals in concert helps the audience better frame and understand both intersectionality and allyship. Further, because the surface level conflict between these two positions is never resolved and a definition of allyship is never given, the audience is encouraged to consider each women's ideas and find the type of allyship that they best understand. In this light, the conflict between the two women helps the audience gain a textured understanding of allyship. Conflict becomes a generative process that helps the audience better understand nuances and examples of allyship.

Editing Conflict and Narrative: Lee's Invisible Influence

As the Boggs/Lee conflict is present through Boggs' testimony and interviews, so too does the editing of the film insinuate conflict between the two women's goals for the memory project. This section examines two primary ways the documentary uses editing as a tool to shape Boggs' memory. Each of these methods uses Boggs' testimony to present a narrative and is edited by Lee in ways that influence the audiences' engagement with *American Revolutionary* to consider her raced identity. While Lee's influence in the film in this instance is seemingly invisible, these examples show how editing as part of a memory project is important to examine as it is neither neutral nor ultimately invisible.

The first tool I explore is the editing is during a montage that outlines the backstory behind the documentary's title: *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*. The evolution/revolution montage features conflict between Boggs' dedication to Black rights and Lee's interest in Boggs' gender and cultural heritage as seen in the visual editing. Boggs's overall theory of activism is rooted in conversation and exchange in ideas with the ultimate goal of individual change to make change—thus lasting *revolution* is only achieved through *evolution* of the self. As Boggs reveals her evolution/revolution theory, the documentary supplements the narration with photos in a montage. Specifically, Lee's editing in *American Revolutionary* employs a dialectical montage which is a montage of images or video clips that contains a message that could be counter to the film's goals, extend the narration's goals, or reveal depth not achieved through narrative (Hershfield 41). The evolution/revolution montage creates dissonance between Boggs' theory and Lee's creative approach to *American Revolutionary* and underscores the differing goals for the overall documentary.

Lee begins the montage by narrating: "During Grace's lifetime, hundreds of revolutions have taken place around the world" (47:48-47:51). Lee narrates over video clips of revolutions around the world. The shots begin in Black and white and are of smiling people waving flags and crowds of jubilant people cheering in success. As the clips progress, they travel forward in time and improve in color and quality. The montage takes the viewer around the world and through time in about 15 seconds. However, the images begin to change when Boggs begins to speak. As the documentary transitions from Lee's narration to Boggs' testimony, the images mirror the tone of each narrators' message. And the images follow suit, Lee's revolutions are joyous, but Boggs begins a cautionary tale of revolution: "People thought of revolution chiefly in terms of taking state power, but we've had revolutions and we've seen how the states they have created have turned out to be like

replicas of the states which they opposed” (47:52-48:07). Even though Boggs is not talking about China, Lee’s invokes China by transitioning to images of men with large guns followed by four or five images important in recent Chinese history while Boggs speaks. These images include the Chinese revolution and Tiananmen Square, both which involved violent revolutions that killed innocent people. The montage goes quickly, but the images of China underscore Boggs’ words stating that revolution does not necessarily mean change if there is not an evolution of the way society is imaged.

While the full impact of these clips is aided by an understanding of Chinese history, the average viewer can still easily pick up on the distinctly Chinese influence in the evolution/revolution montage, both through the Chinese symbols and the highly recognizable Tiananmen Square. The Tiananmen Square massacre occurred during Boggs’ life. Although she never left the United States, rarely discussed her cultural heritage, and focused primarily advocating for African American equal rights, the inclusion of these images was a conscious choice by Lee and consequently connects this cultural reference to Boggs. Asian/American scholars note that many documentaries created by Asian/Americans “characterize the extent to which western colonization and empire building in the Asia Pacific region has played a significant role in the deployment of an Asian diaspora and Asians’ transnational life stories” (Ong 29). By using these photos of Chinese revolutions, Lee is essentially forcing the audience to at least momentarily consider the influence of Western colonization and Chinese history as it connects to Boggs and her life story. While a knowledge of Chinese history reveals the progression of these images is a sophisticated rhetorical argument that mirrors Boggs’ view of revolution, the images also contain a simpler, implied message that Lee edits in: Because Boggs is Chinese American, her life’s work might be influenced by her heritage and events that took place in China as she was developing her theories and advocating for equal rights. It also creates a cross-cultural connection and transnational window into Boggs’

localized narrative. While Boggs is focused on Detroit, the sequence encourages audiences to think about Boggs' cultural identity, history, and world politics and blends this message unobtrusively with Boggs' evolution/revolution narrative.

Despite the interesting correlation between Boggs' words and the images, the forced inclusion of China in a pivotal moment where the titular theme and Boggs' theories finally coalesce and places Boggs' words and Lee's goals into overt conflict. While Boggs remains silent about her own gender and race, Lee's editing and involvement in the film forces the audience to think about her cultural heritage. Thus, as the editing and the testimony work together, Boggs' overall theory of activism resultingly becomes more complicated. Boggs had never been to China and the inclusion of the images of China shift the scale of Boggs' memory from the local to the global. By shifting the focus away from Detroit to China, Lee's editing challenges Boggs' goals and underscores a keyway in which memory, even those that feature personal testimony, can be changed by the creator of a memorial.

The second editing tool I explore is the nonchronological organization of the film. The film constantly uses flashbacks and jumps anywhere between 70 years in the past to ten years in the past. By jumping back and forth in time, the editing embodies Boggs' theory of activism and echoes the opening line: "Evolution is not linear, times interact. . . History is a story, not only of the past but of the future" (Boggs). The documentary becomes a living memorial that actively reflects this idea, that times do interact. This is achieved through flashback which film studies scholar Maureen Turim asserts "is a privileged moment in unfolding that juxtaposes different moments of temporal reference. A juncture is wrought between the past and the present and two concepts are implied in this juncture: memory and history" (1). Films that use flashback, blend together narrative, images, and editing to present the historical past in the form of memory: "biographical flashback films inevitably present images of history, usually both the more personal memories about the central character and

the more widely shared collective representations of the historical past within which the central character lived and acted” (Maland 72). Thus, the flashbacks used in *American Revolutionary* are shaped by the director and influence the present.

A powerful example of this is when the Black Power movement and the election of Obama is connected through Boggs’ story. As the documentary begins to discuss the late 1960s and 70s, the documentary highlights the African American individuals who were elected to government positions with the support of the African American community. This is highlighted with a photomontage of these elected officials from the 1970s throughout time and ended with a video clip of Obama being sworn in as president. It is a wonderfully inspiring chain of events, as it shows African American individuals finally gaining a place in government and in the ultimate position of power. The documentary then shifts to Grace Lee and Grace Lee Boggs watching Obama being sworn in. Boggs is extremely excited with her eyes “glued to the screen” (51:22). As the scene continues, we get to hear tidbits of Obama’s inspiring inauguration address and Boggs’ begins to narrate over his words of success: “We expect too much of our leaders. . . one learns very soon, that the changes we need are not going to come from the top by electing somebody else” (51:55). Boggs was happy that Obama was elected president but believes that he is ultimately not essential for change. Boggs believes that change happens over time and must begin with individuals reflecting on and changing themselves and listening to others. Thus, too much faith in icons or specific people can be harmful. The documentary then returns to 1970s Detroit where an African American mayor, Coleman Young, has just been elected. This time shift jars the viewer and makes a parallel connection between Obama and Young, when the fall of the auto industry sent Detroit into a downward spiral. This shift in time underscores Boggs’ narrative that activism is not always straight forward and moments of success, like getting elected to mayor or president, might have little impact in the overall fight for human rights.

The disruption of chronological time and of a progressive narrative speaks to what LuMing Mao calls “being importantly present.” This is an Asian/American rhetorical practice that intentionally “complicate[s] linear temporality. . . [and] begin[s] to privilege process and becoming over permanence and linearity and to value experience and multiplicity of locations over reified or objectified knowledge” (Mao). Essentially, Mao argues that to engage time chronologically places history into a hierarchy that places Euro-American rhetorical practices as dominant. Instead, he asserts that nonlinear histories that allow for multiple voices and a nonprogressive narrative allows for a more inclusive representation of history that is becoming increasingly common in Asian/American rhetorical practice (Mao). In this point Boggs’ theory of activism and Lee’s creative disruptions converge, allowing for the memorialization of an Asian/American activist and for a more realistic version of activism. Further, it also coincides with an allyship narrative as by disrupting the idea of white ownership of the future, it opens the door for more cross-cultural solidarity (Kimoto 149). As a memory project, audiences can see not only how Boggs’ life connects to the present, but the editing encourages them to see the need for ongoing activism.

Audience Engagement: Circulation, Twitter, and Afro-Asian Solidarity Futures

Lee asserts that Boggs’ ideas began to “catch fire” during the time when *American Revolutionary* began filming (5:55). The film charts this rise by following Boggs in her 80s and 90s as she gave lectures to packed rooms, gave TV interviews, and even got her own t-shirt. Boggs did not understand her growing popularity, but she remains an important figure even today as Boggs is mentioned in tweets, *American Revolutionary* screenings occur across the U.S., and activist memorials are hosted in her honor. In fact, on June 23, 2021, a tribute to Boggs and her husband entitled “From #StopAsianHate to Cross-Racial Solidarity” was hosted by Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, Danny Glover, and Maya Soetoro-Ng. This

ongoing attention deserves consideration and as the film was released in 2013, it is important to understand how audiences engage Boggs' memory today.

Documentaries have multiple layers of composition, including the narrator, the editing and shooting of the scene, and the audience. According to Jing Meng, "to document memory is to rework one's past, and memory is often recalled through dialogues between narrator, cameraperson and audience. Different from documenting the present, documentaries about memories have to re-enact the past that no longer exists in reality" (266). While both Lee and Boggs worked to create a story, audiences are the end interpreters that decide what type of memory project it is. *American Revolutionary* has the opportunity to reach diverse audiences, unlike a statue or exhibit: "Digital technologies and representations afford visibility not just for emerging global youth but also for populations that may not have had previous ways of being seen within their own countries and/or on a global scale" (Dich). The audience's response helps to show how both the documentary and Boggs are remembered. Therefore, audiences' responses to the film help define the success of the project and reflects the success of Boggs' and Lee's goals for the film.

Social media websites like Twitter and Facebook mark not only who consumed the documentary, but how they consumed it. @GLBoggsFilm, *American Revolutionary*'s official Twitter handle, has over 1,500 followers and continues to be tweeted about in a variety of situations, as seen in Figure 8. On @GLBoggsFilm's Twitter feed, the film tweeted about a variety of topics including advertising that Bitchmedia voted *American Revolutionary* of the top 5 documentaries of 2016 to watch for women's history month (@GLBoggsFilm) and that the women's march labeled Boggs a feminist hero tweeting: "We are the leaders we've been waiting for." Grace Lee Boggs inspires us. Shout out your shero! #WomensConvention" (@womensmarch). The main purpose of the film's Twitter account seems to be retweeting

places the film screenings occur, ways to watch the film, and other tidbits that remember Boggs' life.



Figure 8: Tweets from Audience members at *American Revolutionary*'s Twitter account.

Users continue to reference the film through [@GLBoggsFilm](#) and other hashtags like [#AmericanRevolutionary](#). Pham argues that tweets and the like translate into a “spreadable” practice in which others can learn about the film and viewers can “cultivate connections.” Overall, while Netflix and other streaming services provide access to the documentary, social media further circulates the memory of Boggs. A tweet then becomes a promotional method and a trace of memory itself. By reading and engaging tweets, the audience shapes the impact

of the memory project. Twitter can become an active way to gauge the way the documentary not only affected the audience, but also reimaged the past.

An analysis of tweets reveals how Twitter users are interpreting *American Revolutionary* and work to collaboratively (re)construct a memory of Boggs. Hundreds of tweets represent real viewers' ideas about the impact of *American Revolutionary* on their identities in relation to their gender, race, culture, age, or class, and more. The tweets reflect a personal connection from the audience on a variety of topics, including linking Boggs with African American history, human rights, Asian and Chinese American topics, activism, feminism, intersectionality, and community service. However, the focus and emphasis of those tweets have changed throughout the years. In 2014, the year after the film was released, there were almost 600 tweets about Grace Lee Boggs, about 50% also mentioned *American Revolutionary* in some way. However, starting in 2016 users were less interested in documentary, but continued to tweet and remember Boggs in different formats. In the following paragraphs, I analyze hashtags trends that trace how Boggs memory has changed through social media and how hashtags work to construct a complex memory of Boggs and the documentary as a historically exigent activist.

Perhaps the most influential hashtag dedicated to Boggs is #GraceLeeTaughtMe which remembers Boggs as a teacher and inspirational icon. #GraceLeeTaughtMe first appeared on October 5, 2015, the day Grace Lee Boggs passed away. The first tweet by @gregorycendana asks users: "What has #GraceLeeBoggs taught you? Please share using: #GraceLeeTaughtMe." Before long, hundreds of tweets responded remembering Boggs and what she taught them. Although users did not often directly link to @GLBoggsFilm, they often referenced scenes from the film or directly quoted lines from Boggs' testimony. The very first tweet to respond with #GraceLeeTaughtMe asserted that "#GraceLeeTaughtMe movement building doesn't just happen in electric moments; it happens in kitchens & living

rooms & libraries” (@cayden). Although this does not specifically mention *American Revolutionary*, the opening and closing scene in the film occur in a kitchen and the film overtly emphasizes that revolution happens through conversation. Soon tweets began to reference @GLBoggsFilm (@Combsthepoet; @FilmEssaying) and directly link #GraceLeeTaughtMe as part of the continuation of the film’s memory outreach.

In *American Revolutionary*, Boggs’ testimony becomes a tool in which the audience and Lee learns about her activism, her life, and Detroit. Throughout the film, Grace Lee Boggs is seen in classrooms, giving speeches, and mentoring women and men. In the 90s, she developed a mentorship and beautification program to help get young men and women take an active part in their neighborhood. Through Boggs’ theories and praxis, the documentary posits teaching and mentorship as a lifelong tool that is part of activism. By linking #GraceLeeTaughtMe and @GLBoggsFilm, the tweets reveal how the film shaped their memory of Boggs. Further, as Boggs and Lee share a name, when directly linking #GraceLeeTaughtMe with *American Revolutionary* also indicates the director helped to create the documentary and therefore also helped them learn about activism, race, and other important issues the documentary entails.

The most popular hashtag Twitter users used in relation to Boggs and the film is #BlackLivesMatter. The use of this hashtag directly reflected events related to Black rights in the United States and/or Boggs’ life in the United States. For example, in 2014 eight days after the police killed Michael Brown and seven days after the protests began, the first Twitter user tweeted about Grace Lee Boggs and Ferguson, tweeting in support of “both protest and building #Ferguson” (@ortegawilliams_). The following year Boggs passed away and the tweets using #BlackLivesMatter and Boggs more than doubled in frequency. #Ferguson, #Chinese, #AsianAmerican, and #policebrulaity were commonly used in addition to #BlackLivesMatter. 14% of tweets advocated Boggs as an ally or Asian/American icon

and the remaining 86% of the tweets made no mention of Boggs' race, connection to Asian/American community, or gender. Of the 2015 #BlackLivesMatter tweets, 17% of users recommended watching *American Revolutionary*. After 2015, an increasingly small number of Boggs tweets used #BlackLivesMatter, including only one tweet in 2018 and zero in 2019. Of the tweets from 2016-2018, 70% of users who did use #BlackLivesMatter and Boggs tweeted about allyship or Asian American solidarity with the Black community. Suggesting that there was a drop in popularity in these tweets, it is significant to note that despite the fact that Boggs was in her late 90s during the formation of the Black Lives Matter movement and died not soon after the movement started, these tweets evidence that Twitter users recast her memory and the film as relevant to the movement seeing her as a Black ally. One user tweeted that *American Revolutionary* taught her that Boggs was an “activist, Black ally, feminist, inspiration, total bad ass” (@MsLynnChen).⁵⁷ This trend in tweets shows that Boggs' activist philosophies and the documentary resonates with the movement often times in relation to Asian/American allyship. In 2021,⁵⁸ the film was tweeted in reference to a variety of online movements and events.

In 2020, users once again began tweeting about Boggs and #BlackLivesMatter and almost doubled the number of tweets in one year compared to the previous four years. Further, in 2020, 60% of tweets addressed important issues following the death of George Floyd in May 2020 or focused on Boggs' role as a Black Rights advocate. As the introduction of this chapter points out is an important issue for Asian/Americans and Afro-Asian solidarity. For example, one user posted a quote from Boggs as a call to address white supremacy: “How do we learn to live differently so that others may live?” - Grace Lee Boggs #BlackLivesMatter #EndWhiteSupremacy” (@thoughtcrime9). Although the majority of the

⁵⁷ To read full tweets referenced in this section, please see [Appendix C](#) at the end of this document.

⁵⁸ This count and the other Twitter references reflects data collected and updated as of June 26, 2021.

tweets focused on Boggs' role as a Black Rights advocate, many of the users tweeted about supporting the Black Community. Two days after the fatal killing of George Floyd tweeted a picture of protestors holding a sign reading “#Asians4BlackLives: End the War on Black People.” @NGUYENTendo64 makes an impassioned call: “I see you, I am sad with you, I am angry with you, I support you, I love you--my Black brethren. YOU matter. As my predecessors before me--Grace Lee Boggs, Patsy Mink, Yuri Kochiyama, and countless AAPI--I will shout that #BLACKLIVESMATTER.” These tweets are important because it shows a revival of Boggs' memory in relation to major moments in the ongoing fight for Black Rights. Even after 2019 when zero users tweeted about these topics, Boggs' memory was recomposed in online forums in relation to American politics and new developments in Black Rights.

Tweets provide evidence that although Boggs was hesitant to define herself as Asian/American, the memory project and the audience are applying that term to her. The film was included as part of a @gofundme campaign to #StopAsianHate and to celebrate AAPI Heritage month in May 2021 (@KinemaHQ). Clips of the film are also used as part of the #May19thProject to show “powerful examples of Black-Asian solidarity” (@originalspin). The #May19thProject is “a campaign to elevate solidarity among Asians and Black Americans and other people of color” (@originalspin). Of the 2020 tweets that linked #BlackLivesMatter with the Asian/American community, 100% framed their tweets through the lens of allyship or solidarity. For example, the Japanese American National Museum tweeted: “One of the officers responsible for George Floyd's murder (Tou Thao) is Asian, one of our own. He must be held accountable. George Floyd was killed for the color of his skin, so we will not pardon Thao for the color of his” (@jamuseum). In response, a user directly challenged Asian/Americans not to stay silent and to learn from the memory of people like Boggs: “To eliminate racism, the Asian American community must continue to

speak up and take action like our elders before us (Yuri Kochiyama & Grace Lee Boggs) . . .
 Black lives have always and will always matter #SilenceIsDeafening #BlackLivesMatter”
 (@suzanneito). Such tweets and hashtags like #Asians4BlackLives connect Boggs’ memory
 to solidarity and allyship, but also create the online archive of tweets as one of allyship as
 well.

2021 also saw a shift in Boggs’ memory as Twitter users began to pair her memory
 with #StopAsianHate due to the pandemic and rising anti-Asian hate crimes. This trend
 reflects the growing awareness in the U.S. of the escalating violence toward Asian/American
 elderly and women during the COVID-19 pandemic. On March 16, 2021, six Asian women
 were killed in the Atlanta spa hate crime killings and #StopAsianHate soon became a
 trending hashtag. During the month of March alone, Twitter users tweeted about Boggs and
 #StopAsianHate in numbers that almost matched the amount of #BlackLivesMatter/Boggs
 tweets from the entire year of 2015. However, while users were interested in tweeting about
 Boggs in an effort to bring awareness to the violence against women in the Asian/American
 community, only 20% of users tweeted about Boggs’ role or memory in relation to allyship or
 the Black community.

These tweets provide evidence that the Grace/Lee conflict allows for the audience to
 use the documentary to meet the current need to the present moment. She is remembered as
 an activist, an intersectional ally for the Black community, and as an Asian/American
 woman. Overall, social media posts concerning the film were liked, retweeted and actively
 engaged the memory of Boggs and the film and successfully become a trace of the
 documentary as they are “thoughtfully investigating memorial signs, interweaving memories,
 and thereby engaging the public to which one belonged” (Hoang 68). Even more, as the
 tweets are actively interpreting Boggs’ words, they enter into conversation with both the film
 and her theories and spread it to their own digital communities—extending the conflict of

how to remember Boggs as seen in *American Revolutionary*. The film then enacts a collaborative meaning-making process through Boggs' memory that begins with Boggs interpreting her own life, then shaped by Lee, and finally discussed and consumed by Twitter users and their followers. Leaders within the Asian/American community reflect these meaning making process as people like Christopher Kang, National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA) Director, and National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) Executive Director Miriam Yeung, confirm Boggs as a leading Asian/American feminist activist and an essential part of Asian/American history (Kai-Hwa Wang).

Conclusion

Documentaries from around the world have become a "alternative public archive of history" where grass-roots filmmakers reimagine Asia from a more multi-dimensional platform (Meng 265). *American Revolutionary* helps expand Asian heritage from an allyship and intersectional framework. This is important because as racism and violent attacks against Asian/Americans have increased in the wake of COVID-19 and President Trump's rhetoric, allyship and intersectional are increasingly important. To further gain rights, allyship is important "not only as support for another group under white heteropatriarchy and capitalist exploitation, but also as unsettling the places in which Asian Americans find themselves in the racial landscape of the United States" (Kimoto 147). *American Revolutionary* shows audiences two Asian/American women who did not stay silent and what allyship looks like in history and today.

The widespread circulation of *American Revolutionary* repositions the audience as active interpreters. This is because new technologies "have switched from being top-down to more bottom-up by relying on the audience/users to generate content, consume media, and share such content in active ways throughout the community" (Pham). By including the evolution and changing Tweets about Boggs and *American Revolutionary*, I provide evidence

that the Boggs/Lee conflict allows for the audience to interpret Boggs' memory in diverse and adaptable ways. Boggs' memory becomes simultaneously one of an activist, Afro-Asian ally, and Asian/American woman. The conflict between Boggs and Lee opens the doors for these interpretations and creates a memorial that will help keep Boggs' memory relevant throughout diverse present conflicts and cross-cultural exchanges.

CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion

This dissertation considers three memorials, including a traveling exhibit, a statue, and a documentary, created by Asian/Americans that memorialize Asian/American women activists. The case studies also consider how gender and race are addressed in memorial genres and emphasize how a more inclusive understanding of feminist activism is needed to represent Asian/American women's activism. Each chapter considers how memorials can challenge gendered stereotypes in order to provide a more just and equitable representation of the past. Although these three case studies are very different, my research shows how Asian/American memorial activists strategically use different memorial genres to (re)imagine American history to include Asian/American women's history.

In the first case study chapter, I examine a traveling exhibit entitled "The Washington Home of the Philippine Suffrage Movement" (WHPSM). This exhibit memorializes Filipina suffragists in Washington D.C. The exhibit was created by two Filipino expats, Titchie and Erwin Tiongson, and is made of six large, olive-green panels and an introductory banner. The panels are separate boards that stand about six feet tall and are covered in an abundance of material, including photos, letters, newspaper clippings and more. The material is dedicated to remembering the Philippine Suffrage movement in D.C. and various Filipina nationals who lived or visited D.C. during the twentieth century. The display emphasizes the types of activism and prejudiced situations the Filipinas faced in the United States as they sought equal rights. The exhibit remembers Filipinas starting from 1898 and into the 1990s. I argue that the exhibit employs a scrapbook style of display and travels throughout the Washington, D.C. area to claim D.C. as a home for Filipina history and activism. My analysis highlights how gender is composed through the scrapbook display which highlights how gendered performances challenge colonial rules that limit civic participation in the U.S. and the Philippines for Filipinas. Further, I consider how repetition of archival memorial addresses

archival scarcity and how U.S. narratives of suffrage and colonial history has worked to forget the Filipina activist. Finally, I consider how the scrapbook display works to create a network of over 100 years of Filipina activism in order to invite modern day Filipinas to see themselves as connected to D.C. and the stories of these Filipinas on display.

My second case study chapter engages a San Francisco statue, *The Column of Strength*. This statue was created by the Comfort Women Justice Coalition (CWJC) that sought to remember the “comfort women,” the hundreds of thousands of Asian women who were forced into slavery by the Japanese army during WWII. The *Column of Strength* was created in 2017. It features three young Asian girls standing on a four-foot column and an older woman on the ground level looking up at the young girls. There is also a plaque behind the older woman that gives a brief history of the “comfort women” and the statue. Although hundreds of “comfort women” have come forward to offer testimony about their experience, the Japanese government operates from a historical denial standpoint. This means that Japanese government officials and other deniers have actively worked to discredit “comfort women” testimony. This historical denialism frames the women as prostitutes who volunteered. The Japanese government is actively in opposition to individuals or groups that seek to remember the “comfort women” as victims of sex crimes. This chapter argues that the *Column of Strength* enters into and expands a larger memorial tradition that seeks to challenge the Japanese government’s denialism as it tries to frame the “comfort women” as “nymphomaniac prostitutes willing to participate in Japanese past war efforts” (Chun 380). This chapter analyzes how gender, race, and age help to (re)compose the memory of the “comfort women” to challenge Japanese narratives and to advocate for audiences to remember the realities of gendered violence.

The final case study chapter considers *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*. This documentary memorializes the life of Grace Lee Boggs, a Chinese

American activist for the Black Power movement. This chapter explores how elements of the genre of documentary, including testimony, editing, and interviews, highlight memorial conflict between the director and Boggs. I see memorial conflict as a productive, dialogic, process that allows for representation of multiple perspectives. In *American Revolutionary*, the two figures grapple over how Boggs should be remembered: either as a Black Power Activist (Boggs) or as an Asian American woman (Lee). I argue that memorial conflict is a method for allowing the audience to interpret Boggs' memory through a variety of frameworks, including remember Boggs as a Black Power Activist, as an Asian/American woman, or as an Afro-Asian ally. Memorial conflict is a strategic tool that allows for the audience to play an active role in interpreting Boggs' memory while still understanding Boggs' life through complex activist, allyship, and intersectional frameworks. To emphasize the role of memorial conflict as it relates to the audience, this chapter includes an overview of audience composed tweets. These tweets reflect the various interpretations of Boggs' memory presented in *American Revolutionary*. Further, the tweets remember Boggs in different modes according to the historical moment which shows that memorial conflict and the representation of multiple voices in *American Revolutionary* allows for audiences to remember Boggs in reflexive and adaptable ways.

My case studies work to show how Asian/American memorial projects recover and expand diverse Asian/American women's experiences to challenge mainstream histories that silence or erase their historical contributions. This dissertation argues that Asian/American memorialization practices strategically use memorial genres to navigate large scale geopolitical matters to (re)imagine Asian/American women's stereotypes, seeing them as activists, suffragists, allies, and survivors.

Memorial Genres

As my dissertation asserts, the memorials in my three case studies emphasize how genre is used to strategically intervenes in the construction of the memory of Asian/American women activists. Across these chapters, my research underscores that Asian/American community members create memorials that expands understandings of activism and many become activists projects themselves. This section summarizes how my dissertation engages genre and how Asian/American memorialists employed genres in innovative or unexpected ways.

Statue

Although there are a expanding array of museums and cultural sites that memorialize Asian/American culture, issues of entitlement of who controls memory and the multiple layers of identity associated with being Asian American persists (Hoang, “Asian” 63). The CWJC created the statue to educate the public about the “comfort women” and to advocate for awareness of sex crimes. This is significant because the genre of statues often are seen as stagnate, immobile representations of the past that could be separate from social justice issues.

However, the statue acts as a touchstone for a variety of endeavors that reach beyond the material representation of the past, including fundraising galas, educational projects, and other memorial events hosted at the statue. The CWJC has an active online presence including their own website, Instagram, and Facebook. The CWJC’s first order of business was to create the statue and continue working for justice for the “comfort women” using the statue as a focal point for their actions. The coalition values democratic and collaborative representations of the past. For example, after hosting a competition in which artists from around the world participated, a panel of artists, CWJC members, and community members selected a design by Steven Whyte of California. It was unveiled on September 22, 2017 (“The Making”). The statue and the CWJC are inherently connected, as the statue is the

physical representation of the suffering of the women and symbolically represents the continued fight for rights of the CWJC. Additionally, the design of the statue was an inherent part of the coalition's goals and the statue continues to be the groundwork from which their collaborative efforts are founded.

Traveling Exhibit

Public Memory scholars have considered the genre of museum displays (King; Dickinson, Blair, and Ott; Crane) and this dissertation's analysis of WHPSM considers how a performative scrapbook display speaks to issues of gendered identity and Filipina activism. However, an important element of this memorial genre is not only its display, but also the traveling nature of the display. Therefore, my chapter seeks to better understand how the mobile nature of the exhibit is navigated. I see WHPSM's traveling display as a strategic rhetorical (re)claiming of Washington, D.C. as a site for Filipina activism and presence.

(Re)claiming D.C. is important because the history of Filipino culture and Asian/American culture is underrepresented in D.C. In fact, even when Asian/American culture is memorialized, it is often coopted by white ideals. Scholars and community members across the United States are increasingly concerned with the effects of gentrification on ethnic communities. Spaces like Chinatowns and Little Manilas are quickly changing and being whitewashed or disappearing altogether. Although many of these spaces have a complicated, even racially charged history, they also were spaces in cities which allowed for Asian/Americans to live. The recent gentrification of these communities has caused economic benefits but also major problems. For example, in Chinatowns "independent small Chinese American businesses and low-income residents are being evicted or displaced by rising commercial and residential property prices and rents" (Lin 114). This practice moves toward a whitewashing of cultures to meet dominant, white middle-class values. Tone Huse argues that city gentrification methods employ a type of "ethnic packaging" that commodifies

immigrant cultures and furthers a racial and class divide (30). Overall, gentrification becomes a tool in which cities are reformed and new lines are drawn: “Gentrification, America’s newest form of residential segregation, reverses the twentieth-century geographic diffusion of racial/ethnic minorities and uses spatial organization of cities and residents to determine citizens and interaction based on race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Durr 101).

WHPSM uses its mobility and content to construct a counternarrative-memorial that rhetorically claims DC as a significant Filipino historical site. Carole Blair asserts that memorials, especially in D.C., help to declare what is valued in terms of nationhood and identity. In Blair’s analysis, Washington, D.C. is dominated by memorials of white, male histories (276). WHSPM’s social justice aims become clear when considering the United States’ history of biases laws and policies that work to segregate minority access to space. For example, in addition to the “Positively No Filipinos Allowed” era which barred Filipinos from entering businesses in the 1920s, overt hostility toward Filipino Americans increased when the U.S. government passed The Housing Act of 1949. Under this law, policy makers targeted ethnic “slums” for urban revitalization. Housing projects were destroyed and new homes for working class individuals were not built and thousands were displaced (Mabalon 76-77). This revitalization hit the Filipino community particularly hard. One of the only ethnic enclaves for Filipinos was almost completely destroyed by the 1970s (Mabalon 88). Stockton’s Little Manilla in California was targeted by urban developers and continue an “ongoing struggle[s] over space, power, policy, resources, history, and memory” (Mabalon 74). This history exhibits a type of spatial discrimination where laws are employed to legally claim U.S. land to claim space for white, middle-class values. By displaying newspapers, photographs, and other material as evidence that there were Filipinas in D.C. and having the exhibit traveling across the city moves through the footsteps where the women were and rhetorically claims the city as a site for Filipina memory and activism.

Documentary

Documentary as a genre offers multimodal engagement, including voiceover narrative and visual aids, to construct memory. For some, documentary and media are key elements in memory in a technological age: “Memory in the age of electronic reproducibility and dissemination has become public; memory has become socialized by technology. . . the power over what is shared as popular memory has passed into the hands of those who produce these images (Kaes 112). However, instead of producing a single memory that seeks to indoctrinate the audience with a narrow conception of Boggs’ identity, *American Revolutionary* uses memorial conflict to create a more dialogic, engaged memory of Boggs. Kenneth Cissna and Rob Anderson define dialogic rhetoric as “coexperiential, collaborative, constitutive, open, expansive, and both traditional and radical” (39). They expand this point by saying that dialogic exchanges are rooted in dialogue that forefronts immediate and present exchange, a “thoughtful honesty,” recognition and caring for “other,” and a sense of vulnerability and willingness to change (Cissna and Anderson 42). *American Revolutionary* allows both Lee and Boggs’ to share testimony, interviews, and edit content (Lee) in order to provide a balanced overview of their goals: Boggs’ wanted to be remembered as a Black Power activist and Lee’s wanted to think about how Boggs’ gender and race effects Boggs’ activism. Therefore, the Boggs/Lee conflict and the presentation of both women’s ideas, allows for depth in Boggs memory.

Further, through the emphasis on the public nature of media, documentaries become situated as a rhetorically constructed text that allows for audience engagement. Specifically, this chapter considers how audiences use Twitter to remember Boggs. By reproducing the sentiments, images, and themes of the documentary, the audience actively engages in shaping how the memory of Boggs is shaped. As a result, audience members remediate the plethora of details about Boggs’ life and remember in assorted ways from Boggs as a Black Power Activist, Asian/American woman, and an Afro-Asian ally. Because the genre of

documentary's multimodal format allowed for this conflict, it facilitated these multiple interpretations and helps ensure that audiences can continually engage with Boggs' memory.

Challenging Stereotypes, Gender, and Asian/American Culture

As this dissertation shows, representation and stereotypes are an important issue for Asian/American women's memorialization practice. In the United States, stereotypes like the Dragon Lady (read: an evil foreign seductress), Lotus Blossom (read: a passive sexual object), or the model minority myth (read: apolitical, successful, and invisible) are still prevalent, while actual histories and stories of Asian/American women are often forgotten, erased, or misrepresented. Asian/American studies scholar Tasha Oren argues that Asian/Americans stereotyped images are still widespread because "there is a lack of association between Asian Americans and racial anger in Americans' collective cultural imagination, which facilitates [Asian/Americans'] positioning as a demographic 'free of past grievance—in short as honorary whites'" (Oren 353). Oren's argument asserts that Asian/Americans are often viewed as "honorary whites" or through a context of the model minority. In this framework, Asia/Americans do not experience racial biases and therefore will not become angry at the proliferation of stereotyped images.

Not only is the perception of Asian/American women as apolitical incorrect, stereotypes remain pervasive and can do real world harm. Vincent Pham and Kent Ono argue that stereotypes are a colonizing tool that those with power use to shape the ideological perceptions of Asian/Americans and are an example of "symbolic violence" (195). Pham and Ono assert that this results in a "spectacle of racism" in which dominant Western culture produces a highly stereotyped reflection of Asian/American culture for mass production (176). Without contextualization, such representations are consumed by public audiences and further solidify prejudiced conceptions of Asian/American culture. For Pham and Ono, it is

important to understand how Asian/Americans resist these stereotypes as the practice of (re)framing Asian/American identity helps create narratives of Asian/Americans as active members of public conversations (193). The following section considers how my dissertation sees memorial activism at play in my case studies.

Asian/American Memorial Activism

My case studies provide an important intervention in feminist memory studies by emphasizing memorials about Asian/American women activists that challenge the image of the passive, apolitical Asian woman. Each memorial focuses on activism in unique ways, but ultimately reveal an image of Asian/American woman that advocate for rights and systems of fair and equitable treatment for all people. In particular, I maintain that through the act of recovering these narratives, the memorials were created by Asian/American *memorial activists*. This section shows how these memorialists contribute to Asian/American activism and preserving Asian/American memory.

My second chapter assesses a project that became an activist endeavor in a quest to recover the erasure of Filipina voices. WHPSM was inspired by one serendipitous trip to the Library of Congress when Titchie and Erwin Tiongson unearthed the White House Lawn photograph (see Figure 2). When they first found the photo, the women were mostly unknown. Unable to let go of the mystery of exactly who these women were and their role in Filipino history, the Tiongsons set out to prove it was not “just one more vintage photograph—pretty, yet unremarkable” but instead this was a photo of “some of the most extraordinary women of their time,” who would help to rewrite suffrage laws in the Philippines (Tiongson and Carandang-Tiongson). Through endless archival research, researching out to Filipino community members, and working with Liberians, the Tiongsons become memorial activists and recovered a history otherwise forgotten.

Further, the scrapbook display seeks to expand activism for more inclusive gendered performances. WHPSM preserves an Asian/American women's history that has been virtually forgotten and, even more, reconsiders what rights, rhetorics, and public memory might entail for women whose culture, nationality, and gender prevented them from gaining rights in both the Philippines and in the United States. The exhibit advocates for viewing a broad range of socio-civic endeavors that multiply marginalized women engaged to fight, not only for the right to vote, but also for the right to be viewed as human. However, instead of asserting this in assertive or aggressive exclamations, the exhibit *displays* archival material. This act asks the audience to travel through time and through various lives of the Filipinas in order to dialogically experience the history through photographs, newspapers, and other material. This subtle, yet effective use of display helps further claim D.C. as a space for Filipina history as the exhibit uses a more collaborative, conversational stance to challenge the previous narratives that left out Filipina voices.

My third chapter considers an Asian/American memorial that is a community led activist project. A foundational element of the CWJC is creating cross-generational connections between cultural communities in San Francisco and educating the public. The formation of the coalition intentionally sought to include multicultural, multiethnic and diverse individuals from across the Bay Area. The group uses a feminist, coalitional decision-making process that helps to ensure that the members have a voice, and the focus is on the cause rather than individual pursuits. The group has created the statue, created curriculum that is available in California for high schoolers, and host a variety of events surrounding the statue in order to educate the public and advocate for the survivors of sex crimes. The CWJC's coalitional decision-making processes created a statue with intentional memorial activism goals.

My final case study chapter is an example of memorial activism because of the dedication and time spent on an Asian/American activist. The documentary spends extensive time and effort explaining Boggs' activist career and theories. In addition, similar to the Tiongsongs, the director spent time researching archival footage to (re)claim Boggs' role in activist movements. About thirty minutes into the documentary, Lee tells the audience about her experience researching Boggs' activist history. Boggs helped organize the 1963 Detroit March to Freedom, which featured a speech by Martin Luther King Jr. that was a practice for his famous "I Have a Dream Speech." Lee narrates that despite the fact that Boggs played a significant role in organizing the march, Boggs is almost entirely absent from archival records of the event. Lee explains that after thoroughly searching through old footage she only found one document that featured Boggs. The photo is of a large crowd and Boggs is barely recognizable (27:53). This recovery work and dedication to exploring Boggs' activist life situates *American Revolutionary* as part of memorial activism.

Through these activist endeavors, each memorial also makes an argument about Asian/American gender and culture. As the memorials try to intervene in stereotyped gendered perceptions of Asian/American, I see this activist memorialization as a type of feminist curatorship of the past. For a memorialist to engage in feminist curatorship he or she would additionally intervene in established arguments or institutions or expand or reimagine existing knowledge of issues related to gender (Deepwell 66). As this dissertation shows, these memorials use genre to expand how audiences see and understand Asian/American women.

Conclusion

In the last few years, conversations about racial justice have dominated conversations in the United States. As a result, Asian/American women have had more representation in

popular culture, from *Crazy Rich Asians* to *Turning Red*, and more people around the globe are seeing different iterations of Asian/American women vastly different than the Dragon Lady, Lotus Blossom, and model minority stereotypes. So, while there seems to be a shift in how people are perceiving and representing Asian/American women, white washing and violence against Asian/Americans accentuate the need for ongoing conversations about social injustices like gender violence, stereotypes, and historical erasure. Therefore, this dissertation sought to highlight ways Asian/Americans are entering into these conversations and shaping the memory of Asian/American women for a more just history.

My research engages genres of memory to develop an understanding of the rhetorical methods memorial activists employ to expand U.S. memory beyond traditional landscapes defined by nation, temporality, and gendered expectations and challenge gendered stereotypes. As I continue researching, I am interested in how these memorials relate to American memories and representation of Asian/American women. As there are more diverse imagery of Asian/American women in popular culture, how do these memorials challenge and expand understandings of gender and race in the Stop Anti-Asian Hate era? How can these memorials be included in our larger conversations about what it means to be an American?

Appendices

Appendix A

Today, these women are known simply as “comfort women”; however, this term is rooted in a silencing and dismissal of the women’s experiences. “Comfort women” comes from the Japanese word “*ianfu*.” This term is important because it has serious implications for gender rights and sex crimes. Asian law scholars Constance Youngwon Lee and Jonathan Crowe dive into the colonial and ideological implications of the term:

The term *ianfu* is the perpetrators’ construct. It silences the coercion, the complete lack of autonomy characterizing the wrong. Instead, by this label, the women are constructed as willing participants to the act. This label morally foregrounds consensual servitude as the defining role of a woman. “Comfort women” thus identifies the victims in terms of the larger patriarchal discourses to which they remain confined. . . Not only is the repugnant nature of sexual slavery comfortably hidden away from view, but this label leaves the victims at the mercy of their perpetrators for the definition of their realities. The women are even divested of the means to choose their own construction. It is therefore important to transparently acknowledge the ‘unrepresentative quality of the term’ by, at least, ‘encasing [it] in quotes to register [our] disapproval.’ (345)

For almost fifty years following WWII, the “comfort women” were silenced. This all changed when Kim Hak-Sun spoke out about her experiences. In 1991, there was growing tension between South Korea and Japan. Japan had still not recognized the harm done by their military run rape centers and Kim’s testimony challenged the official narrative that worked to deny the issue (J. Kim 402). Although the larger global community was mostly unaware of the “comfort women”, it was a widely known “open secret” within Japan (Kazue

622). Few in Korea would talk about rape or other sensitive topics; however, in the late 1980s, South Korea became more democratized and allowed for women to speak up about sexual violence (Ward and Lay 257). This opened the window for Kim to break the “silence” around the “comfort women” and reframed the pasts into a human rights issue (Kazue 622).

Appendix B

“Our worst fear is that our painful history during World War II will be forgotten.”
–Former ‘Comfort Woman’

This monument bears witness to the suffering of hundreds of thousands of women and girls, euphemistically called “comfort women,” who were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces in thirteen Asian Pacific countries from 1931 to 1945. Most of these women died during their war time captivity. This dark history was largely hidden for decades until the 1990s, when the survivors courageously broke their silence. They helped move the world to declare that sexual violence as a strategy of war is a crime against humanity for which governments must be held accountable.

This memorial is dedicated to the memory of these women, and to eradicating sexual violence and sex trafficking throughout the world.”

–From the *Column of Strength’s* plaque

Appendix C

@womensmarch (Women's March). "We are the leaders we've been waiting for." Grace Lee Boggs inspires us. Shout out your shero! #WomensConvention." *Twitter*, 24 Oct. 2017.

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@ian_shin (Ian Shin 冼健義). "There are lots of timely & engaging films to choose from, and those I've recommended include:- PBS Asian Americans documentary series by @rtajima, @SLeoChiang & @anothergracelee - @FirstVoteFilm by @c35films - #NailedIt doc - @GLBoggsFilm - Abacus: Small Enough To Jail." *Twitter*, 2 April 2021.

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“wedge” against other comms. of color....abt Yuri Kochiyama, Grace Lee Boggs, & their solidarity work w/the Black comm. From, an amazing resource!” *Twitter*, 24 Mar. 2021.

@ACLU_SoCal (ACLU SoCal) ““That is how change takes place... not from above but from within, from many local actions occurring simultaneously.” Grace Lee Boggs believed in the power & responsibility of people coming together to build transformative change. #AAPIHM #BlackLivesMatter.” *Twitter*, 31 May 2020.

@scottkurashige (Scott Kurashige). “SPECIAL EVENT: Join @RashidaTlaib @mrdannyglover & Maya Soetoro-Ng online as we discuss #StopAsianHate & the urgent need for models of cross-racial solidarity in the spirit of James and Grace Lee Boggs. Please register & share!” *Twitter*, 9 June 2021.

@ortegawilliams_ (Anna Ortega-Williams). “Grace Lee Boggs talks about slow social change. It's in every alternative we create and sustain. Yes to both protest and building #Ferguson.” *Twitter*, 17 Aug. 2014.

@thoughtcrime9 (thoughtcrime161 @//©). ““How do we learn to live differently so that others may live?” - Grace Lee Boggs #BlackLivesMatter #EndWhiteSupremacy.” *Twitter*, 26 June 2020.

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@originalspin (Jeff Yang). “Did you know that today—May 19—is the shared birthday of Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X? That’s why today we’ve launched the **#May19thProject**—a campaign to elevate solidarity among Asians and Black Americans and other people of color. Watch this in full at <http://seeusunite.org/Unite>!” *Twitter*, 19 May 2021.

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