

THE API DIASPORA AND HISTORY OF ACTIVISM



Yuri Kochiyama (left) and Grace Lee Boggs (right). Photo from Reproductive Health Access Project.

Asian American activism, though not well-known in the mainstream, has a long and rich history of allyship in resisting structural inequities and fighting for transformative change in terms of labor rights, access to food, education, healthcare, and housing. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, migrants from India, Japan, the Philippines, and China worked as servants, sugarcane plantation workers, transcontinental railroad workers, and farmers. Xenophobia, yellow peril, and perpetual foreigner stereotypes portrayed those with Asian ancestry as monoliths. Like other racial minorities, perceived labor competition led to riots and racist laws designed to prevent them from gaining citizenship, voting, owning land, and marrying non-Asians. Restrictive quotas were placed by Congress to limit the number of immigrants from Asia until the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, which abolished the former restrictive policies to attract skilled labor from Asia.

Organizing was primarily ethnic-specific prior to the 1960s, however, the Asian American Movement emerged in the 1960s and activists worked in multiracial and international solidarity. Yuri Kochiyama, a Japanese-American activist, befriended Malcolm X in 1963 and joined his Organization of Afro-American Unity. Grace Lee Boggs, a Detroit-based activist, spent much of her life fighting for labor and civil rights. During the Delano grape workers strike, Mexican and Filipino workers successfully organized a labor strike against grape growers. In the 1980s, Southeast Asian refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam arrived. They bound together with Latinx parents to fight for bilingual services and equitable access to the curriculum. Understanding these intertwined struggles are important for seeing Asian Americans as part of the long-haul for social change.



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Below are links to programs that serve the Black community here in the bay! Check them out!



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SOURCES

“Asian American History in 4 Minutes.” YouTube, 6 May 2017,
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“Southeast Asian Refugees: Asian Americans.” PBS LearningMedia, PBS
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