

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

From Archives to Action: Zines, Participatory Culture, and Community Engagement in Asian America

By Todd Honma



FIGURE 1. GRAPHIC FROM THE COVER OF THE FIRST ISSUE OF *GIDRA*
ALL ILLUSTRATIONS PROVIDED BY AUTHOR

Introduction

Zines are currently experiencing a resurgence across the country. The proliferation of zine fests, zine distros, and zine makers (or zinesters) point to a rejuvenation in zine culture not seen since the 1990s. For those unfamiliar with zines, R. Seth Friedman, publisher of the now defunct *Factsheet Five*, defines a zine as a “small handmade amateur publication done purely out of passion, rarely making any money or breaking even” (quoted in Chu, 1997). Stephen Duncombe, author of the seminal zine text *Notes from the Underground*, provides this definition: “zines are noncommercial, nonprofessional, small-circulation magazines which their creators produce, publish, and distribute by themselves” (Duncombe, 2008). In addition to the renewed interest in the production of zines, a concerted effort to archive zines has also been growing. Zine archivists (both professional and DIY, or do-it-yourself) have established institutional archives (e.g., Bernard College Zine Collection), community based archives (e.g., Independent Publishing Resource Center in Portland, Zine Archive & Publishing Project in Seattle) and digital archives (e.g., Queer Zine Archive Project, POC Zine Project, Digital Fanzine Preservation Society). These zine archives have not only helped to preserve this ephemeral form of material culture, they have also created new pathways for learning about marginalized histories by increasing accessibility to these once obscure documents.

Zines are often used in the classroom to promote alternative pedagogies and forms of creative self-expression that are unencumbered by the need for technological skill or pressures to conform to particular aesthetics or abilities. Because of their do-it-yourself ethos, zines are often embraced by those from marginalized backgrounds because of their freedom to experiment with different modes of writing, expression, and presentation. Previous studies about zines in the classroom emphasize their effectiveness in bolstering individual agency and self-actualization (Chu, 1997; Guzzetti & Gamboa, 2004). In a way, this makes sense given how zines are often framed in mainstream discourse as a DIY project geared toward self-expression and individuality (Duncombe, 2008). Less attention has been devoted to the ways in which zines can be used to foster off-campus community partnerships and community engagement. The aim of this article is to highlight the latter approach to zine creation, or what Piepmeier refers to as the “embodied community” of zine culture (Piepmeier, 2008). The community aspects of zines include resource sharing, skills development, and the promotion of participatory culture, in which everyone is encouraged to contribute according to their own capacities towards a shared collective experience. Shifting from the individualistic focus of zines to their role in community building entails establishing a counter-narrative that frames zine-making within a history of political activism. Presenting zines as part of a larger archive of social movement history is key in this regard. Such a reframing is particularly important when teaching about the topic of Asian American zines and their relationship to community mobilization and social transformation.

I teach in the Asian American Studies department at a private liberal arts college in Los Angeles county where I regularly offer a course about Asian American zines and community engagement. The college has a longstanding history of emphasizing social justice and intercultural understanding within its curriculum, and the course contributes to the social responsibility praxis breadth requirement at the college. The course, entitled *Zines, Creativity, Community*, examines different forms of zine-making and DIY politics and the relationship of zines to community collaboration and social transformation. The guiding question we consider throughout the course is: how can we combine our labor, creativity, and available materials to come up with forms of individual and collective expression and empowerment (vis-a-vis zines) for use in community building and social change? One of the key aspects of this course is understanding how zines embody a form of participatory culture, mindful of the political and ethical concerns that such participation entails. In other words, the course is designed to create a space in which students enact a praxis (theory and practice) of participatory action and empowerment in communities beyond the college campus.

Zines are often used in the classroom to promote alternative pedagogies and forms of creative self-expression that are unencumbered by the need for technological skill or pressures to conform to particular aesthetics or abilities.

Because the college attracts a population of students who are already motivated to pursue critical inquiry around issues of social justice, the students who enroll in my class are usually quite enthusiastic about making the linkages between art and activism using zines. The racial demographics of the students are usually mixed, with varying degrees of familiarity with Asian American studies, as a discipline, and Asian American experiences, in general. In order to create a common base of knowledge, the first few class sessions involve contextualizing zines within a history of independent publishing, grassroots movements, and community activism. In particular, this entails understanding how independent publishing was a pivotal aspect of the Asian American Movement of the 1960s and 1970s in constructing a shared racial identity and a forum for mobilizing communities against social injustice.

One publication in particular stands out during this time period: the radical grassroots newspaper *Gidra*, which is known as the premier Asian American movement periodical (Maeda, 2009). *Gidra* occupies an important place in the history of Asian American zines. It was founded by UCLA students who desired an alternative publication that was accountable to the communities where they came from. *Gidra* is often credited for galvanizing an entire generation of Asian Americans to take action against social injustice, racial discrimination, and oppression. Eric Nakamura, the founder of the highly influential zine-

turned-magazine *Giant Robot*, has cited *Gidra* as being one of the inspirations for his own work. Nakamura views *Gidra* as launching the first wave of Asian American zines in the 1970s. This history is important to our understanding of zines because it establishes zines as a community-based endeavor, built on collaboration, radical politics, and social change.

Recently, the online Densho Archives (www.densho.org) has worked with one of the founders of *Gidra*, Mike Murase, to digitize the entire run of the periodical (1969-1974). Densho's mission is to make accessible primary sources that "document the Japanese American experience from immigration in the early 1900s through redress in the 1980s with a strong focus on the World War II mass incarceration." According to their website, "Densho is a Japanese term meaning 'to pass on to the next generation,' or to leave a legacy." Densho's *Gidra* archive serves an important function in making this part of the Asian American experience widely accessible to those seeking to understand a history that often goes unnoticed.

When teaching about Asian American zine culture, I place zines within an oppositional history of Asian American independent publishing and its relationship to community politicization and mobilization.

As a pedagogical tool, zines exist at the intersection of radical history, analog creativity, participatory culture, and community involvement. By situating zine culture within a genealogy of resistance and community mobilization, students are encouraged to see themselves as a part of this history and to continue this legacy in their own class projects. As Schwartz and Cook point out, "Archives validate our experiences, our perceptions, our narratives, our stories" (Schwartz & Cook, 2002). Using archives in the classroom enables students to make the connection between their work and the struggles that have come before them. This article presents one example of how to make the connection between community archives and community action. The first half of this article discusses the use of Densho's online archive of the complete print run of *Gidra* as a way to teach students about community experiences, perceptions, narratives, and stories through the examination of histories of Asian American independent publishing, racial formation, and grassroots activism. The second part of this article moves from archives to action, illustrating how students can use the skills and knowledge that they learn from these archival materials and apply them to current events and community-based projects.

Learning from *Gidra*

During its five year print run, *Gidra* covered a wide spectrum of topics, ranging from anti-war protests to the prison industrial complex to Asian American fashion to how

to fix a toilet. Today, it is mostly remembered for its influence in Asian American community politics, and its role in establishing a radical pan-Asian political consciousness (Lopez, 2011; Maeda, 2009). *Gidra* also inspired similar Asian American independent publications across the country. At the same time, *Gidra* embodied not just a particular form that is relevant to thinking about zines and community-based media, but also a particular ethos of participation, collaboration, and interdependency that is part of the culture of zine making. In describing the relationships that cohered around the creation of *Gidra*, Mike Murase writes: "It has been an experience in sharing—in giving and receiving—in a sisterly and brotherly atmosphere. It has meant a chance to actively work for something we really believe in. It has meant a chance to express ourselves in a variety of ways. It has been a lesson in humility and perseverance. It has meant working with people who care about people, and genuinely feeling the strength that can only come out of collective experience" (Murase, 1976).

When teaching about Asian American zine culture, I place zines within an oppositional history of Asian American independent publishing and its relationship to community politicization and mobilization. When we cover this particular module on zine history, I assign students the task of exploring the online *Gidra* archive and ask them to approach it as a resource in thinking about the relationship between content and form. I encourage students to investigate the specific topics, concepts, and issues that were pertinent back then, and reflect upon the ways in which the messages were conveyed, paying attention to aesthetics, layout, tone, and language. To supplement the archival sources, I also show a clip of the film *Drawing the Line: Japanese American Art, Design, and Activism in Post-War Los Angeles*, which features interviews with founding members of *Gidra* and explains the publication's mission and aesthetic strategies. During classroom report back, we examine how creativity can be used to convey a political message, using a variety of strategies including graphics, illustrations, poems, comics, letters, personal essays, and journalism. We discuss how this DIY mixed media style is similar to the tools used in what we now recognize as the aesthetics of zines.

We then spend time in class exploring how materials in the *Gidra* archive guide us in understanding four inter-related themes: (1) identity and action; (2) positionality and politics; (3) local and global; and (4) campus and community. Using the *Gidra* materials they encountered in the Densho archive, students form small groups to discuss and brainstorm about each of these four topics and to present what they talk about to the class. Some of the key themes and concepts that we covered include the following.

Identity & Action

When combing through the *Gidra* archive, students were struck by both individual and collective forms of identity formation and the politics of representation. For example, one Asian American student remarked how powerful it was to see Asian Americans represent themselves on their own terms, challenging stereotypical

images found in dominant media where Asian Americans are tokenized as foreign, exotic, or the model minority. We also discussed how the members of *Gidra* contextualized their work within broader histories of activism, drawing parallels to other movements and historical events (Japanese internment, Filipino farmworkers movement, the Vietnam War) in order to define an Asian American identity. This prompts discussion about theories of racial formation, or what Omi and Winant characterize as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi & Winant, 1994). We also examined the use of local narratives to address larger issues; for example, how current events at the time, such as corporate redevelopment in Little Tokyo, city and county electoral politics, and student activism at UCLA, connect to broader understandings about capitalism, resistance, and the development the Yellow Power movement. This provides students specific examples of how a pan-ethnic Asian American identity emerged from community activism and movements for self-determination (Omatsu, 2000).

Positionality & Politics

By reading *Gidra*, students come to realize the relationship between their positionality or social location and their political worldview. More specifically, students remarked on how members of *Gidra* were able to create a close-knit community with people who share a common positionality and political viewpoint. We discussed how engaging in political projects shapes your position in your community, and we also emphasized the need to engage in praxis, or the way in which politics and positionality inform each other through a constant cycle of action and reflection. As one student mentioned, one of the lessons that *Gidra* offers is how to embrace a dynamic view of identity: how your identity reflects upon what you do and how you take action. In addition, the very act of creating a community around independent publishing demonstrates how you can use writing to explore the relationship between positionality and politics for others to read and learn from.

Local & Global

The articles in *Gidra* are useful in thinking about the interconnectedness between the local and the global. For example, students identified how Asian American identity and activism have been influenced by both local issues (racialization in the United States) and global issues (migration, war). Because the demographic profile of Asian America continues to be shaped by the constant inflow of migration to the United States, global geopolitics are an important part of how we think about Asian America, both historically and in the present (Lowe, 1996). For example, Asian American activists in the 1970s struggled against the influx of capital and corporate redevelopment from overseas investors, particularly in regards to the impact this had on ethnic communities such as Little Tokyo. As the political writing in the pages of *Gidra* indicate, the burgeoning Asian American internationalism of movement activists created a broader Asian American consciousness about how domestic and international spheres are connected. When students in the class investigated this

aspect of Asian American history, they particularly noted the impact that global U.S. expansion and imperialism had on local identities. They highlighted how the members of *Gidra* thought of themselves as children of imperialism, and how this fostered a collective response in coming together under an Asian American pan-ethnic framework (Espiritu, 1992).

Campus & Community

One of the more immediately relevant topics that *Gidra* asks students to consider is the connection between campus and community, particularly the role that students play beyond the classroom. Many of the articles in *Gidra* focus on the fight to establish ethnic studies within higher education. This allows us, as a class, to discuss the various contributions that ethnic studies has made to the college curriculum. For example, we are able to contextualize our Asian American zines class as a legacy of the fight for ethnic studies, and how our class curriculum is indebted to the call from ethnic studies, and more specifically Asian American activists, to redefine education and re-orient student learning to address the particular problems found in marginalized ethnoracial communities (Omatsu, 2003). Some of the central tenets of ethnic studies include drawing upon community knowledge and moving beyond the separation of campus and community. In this context, the classroom becomes a place to redefine what education entails, honoring local knowledge and learning from the community. Some of the lessons that members of *Gidra* wrote about that resonated with students included how to use campus resources to address community needs and how to sustain the movement. Since the college population is characterized by an inherently limited temporality, these issues continue to resonate with students to this day.

The four themes indicated above allow students to make linkages between what Asian America means then and now. From research in the archive, students realize how the issues that were covered in *Gidra* continue to be relevant for Asian Americans (and other marginalized communities) up to the present day. In particular, we focus on the struggle around gentrification, fair and affordable housing, tenants’ rights, and the destructive forces of capitalism, neoliberalism, and urban renewal. As Mike Murase states in the final issue of *Gidra*, “The ever-changing conditions call for deeper analysis, new strategies and greater resolve. And we need to understand the present, not as a static and isolated instant, but as a flowing moment in history” (Murase, 1976). By highlighting how the struggle against gentrification is not just a historical phenomenon but an issue that continues to affect Asian American and other ethnoracial communities in the present, we are able to investigate a concrete example of the how the present is indeed part of a “flowing moment in history,” as Murase suggests.

Using the *Gidra* archive as a way to connect the past and present also provides students with a foundation to think about how independent media, like community newspapers and zines, can be used to instigate change in local communities. To illustrate this point, we discussed the fight against corporate development in Little Tokyo, its negative effects on the Japanese American community, and

how Asian Americans organized forms of grassroots resistance to protest these changes. This discussion underscores the importance of student participation in social justice campaigns and the struggle against capitalist redevelopment that decimate economically disenfranchised communities. Topically this is relevant for their community project that focuses on gentrification in Los Angeles Chinatown. *Gidra* provides an example of how to employ various aesthetic strategies to depict controversies around corporate development and community mobilization against top down “urban renewal.” [See Figures 2 and 3] By creating these linkages, students are challenged to conceive of the archive as a living history—rather than a static and isolated repository—and in so doing, apply their knowledge from the archive to community action as part of their community zine project.



FIGURE 3. PHOTOGRAPH FROM *GIDRA* DEPICTING COMMUNITY ACTIVISM IN LITTLE TOKYO



FIGURE 2. ILLUSTRATION FROM *GIDRA* DEPICTING CORPORATE DEVELOPMENT IN LITTLE TOKYO

Connecting to the Community

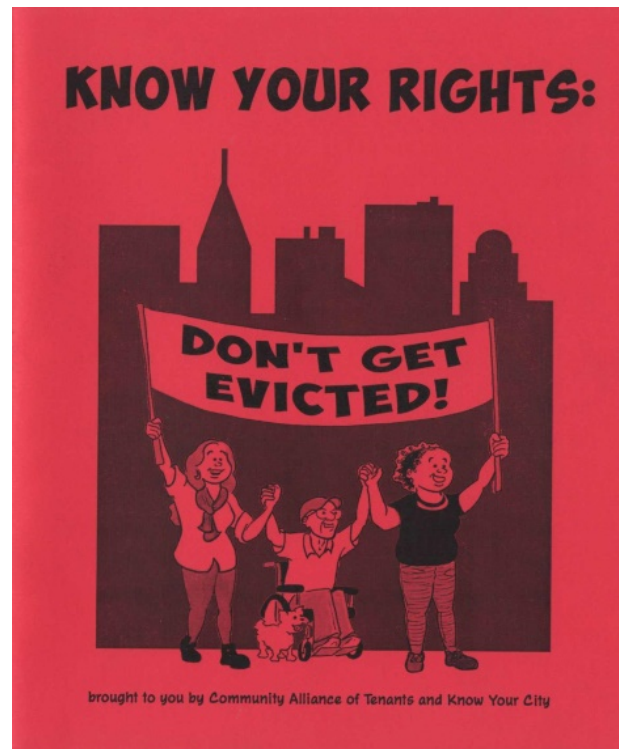
Gidra serves as a model for community-engaged publishing and collaborative work ethic. Just as *Gidra* addressed the uneven urban development and the lack of affordable housing in Little Tokyo in the 1970s, our community zine project focuses on gentrification and tenants’ rights in Los Angeles Chinatown in the current moment. Since the expansion of the Metro Gold Line and the redevelopment of Downtown Los Angeles (located just south of Chinatown), increasing numbers of urban professionals have moved into the area, displacing local residents. Many families in Chinatown live below the poverty line, and these residents feel the immediate effects of gentrification in their neighborhood (Mai & Chen, 2013; Park & Lin, 2008). High cost luxury apartments are replacing affordable housing, driving long-time residents out of the area. Furthermore, the affordable housing that is available exists at substandard levels. Working with the local community organization Chinatown Community for Equitable Development (CCED), the students in the class strategize about how zines can be used to uncover unheard voices, foster education and outreach, and mobilize the Chinatown community. In this way, students are encouraged to connect the concepts and strategies of *Gidra* to the themes of the community project as a way to continue the legacy of using community-based media to address community needs.



FIGURE 4. CCED LOGO

CCED is a multiethnic, inter-generational community organization made up of activists, residents, small business owners, workers, youth, and friends of LA Chinatown. [See Figure 4] CCED was founded in 2012 in response to Walmart's controversial plans to develop in Chinatown, a move that many in the community believed would have detrimental effects on the residents and businesses in Chinatown. According to the mission statement on the CCED website (www.ccedla.org), CCED's goal is to build grassroots power with low-income and immigrant communities to preserve the integrity of LA Chinatown as a vibrant and diverse ethnic and cultural space, where everyone is valued for their talents and contributions to the larger community. Through organization, education and mutual help, CCED seeks to revitalize a thriving Chinatown with good jobs for residents, clean recreational spaces, affordable housing, and accessible education. Currently, CCED is the only Chinatown grassroots organization to organize, mobilize, and create a presence in LA Chinatown that is opposed to residential and business redevelopment and the destruction of its traditional character.

As part of their community project, students in the class connect with members of CCED and collaborate to create a zine project that addresses the organization's goal of advocating for the Chinatown community in the fight against gentrification. In addition to the *Gidra* issues in the Denso Archive, I also expose students to the work of contemporary zinesters who have published zines about gentrification in various cities, such as New Orleans, Brooklyn, San Francisco, Portland, London, and Toronto. [See Figures 5 and 6] This allows students to contextualize their work both historically and within the current moment, as gentrification is a phenomenon that is happening in major cities around the world, with many community-based zines emerging to confront this issue.



FIGURES 5 AND 6. RECENT ZINES ADDRESSING THE TOPICS OF GENTRIFICATION AND TENANTS' RIGHTS

The goals of the community project are: to learn about tenants' rights, gentrification, and the current problems in LA Chinatown; to support CCED in existing projects and campaign work; to raise awareness on campus and locally about current issues affecting Chinatown; to develop outreach skills by talking to community members and other students; and to foster a community-based praxis including mindfulness of one's own positionality and critical self-reflection. Developing a community-based zine is a collaborative process that involves a multi-method approach to research, preparation, engagement, and production, including site visits to LA Chinatown and conducting oral histories/interviews. For example, students participated in CCED sponsored events (e.g., Lunar New Year celebration) and worked with members of CCED on door-to-door outreach to raise awareness about tenants' rights and to learn about the difficulties that Chinatown residents are experiencing. They also interviewed members of the community to gather oral histories and testimonies about substandard housing conditions that could then be incorporated into the zine project.

By encouraging students to work closely with the community organization and members of the Chinatown community, the community zine project challenges the individualization of learning found in today's neoliberal

classroom, which "limit students' perspectives about their capacities to contribute to the common good" (Bencze & Carter, 2011). As Peter McLaren points out, the neoliberalization of education works to "suppress the teaching of oppositional and critical thought that would challenge the rule of capital . . . [and] ensures the ideological and economic reproduction that benefits the ruling class" (McLaren, 2003). Working together as a group requires that students enact a critical, collective engagement with the uneven material conditions of the world around them. In particular, collaborating with CCED on the class project connects coursework to real world issues and expands the students' understanding of their own capacity to contribute to social change. It also impresses upon students the importance of working in solidarity with historically disenfranchised communities, exposing them to the ways in which Asian American communities harness their own agency to empower themselves and develop a political voice in confronting issues affecting their community (Vö, 2004). As Janelle Wong notes, nonprofit social service agencies and community-based organizations are among the most active institutions mobilizing immigrants politically today, and this work helps to foster a sense of belonging, self-worth, and avenues for political involvement, using unique and creative strategies (Wong, 2006).

The zine project highlights the experiences of Chinatown residents who face various obstacles in accessing the political apparatus that would allow them to enact social change. A majority of the residents are seniors, low income, with limited English proficiency, and limited understanding of their rights as tenants. Housing management takes advantage of the vulnerability of this population by using unlawful tactics to intimidate residents from taking action. Tenants face problems such as environmental health hazards, unlawful rent increases or eviction notifications, and substandard living conditions such as apartments left in a perpetual state of disrepair. The zine helps to amplify the voices of the dispossessed and opens up avenues to circulate the stories of the injustices that are occurring in this community. The mutual collaboration between the students, CCED, and Chinatown residents contribute to a larger political project that aims to transform the oppressed from passive victims to agents of history (Freire, 2000). For the students, learning from elders in the community demystifies the structure of property ownership and property relations and fosters the development of a critical consciousness and a mindfulness about the different creative approaches that can be used in the struggle for social transformation. In this way, the community zine project functions as a mode of critical pedagogy, which Peter McLaren notes, "locates its central importance in the formidable task of understanding the mechanisms of oppression imposed by the established order . . . from the perspective of the dispossessed and oppressed themselves," which then must be linked to political and anticapitalist struggle (McLaren, 2003).

The final result of the project was the publication of a zine entitled "Chinatown Changing: Gentrification in LA". [See Figure 7] The contents of the zine included a profile of Los Angeles Chinatown, stories from the Chinatown residents about housing struggles, information about tenants' rights, an overview of the work that CCED provides in the community, and personal outreach stories from the perspective of the students. Similar to the form and content of the work found in *Gidra*, students used a variety of strategies including graphics, illustrations, personal essays, and photography to document what is currently happening in Chinatown. Since its publication, the zine has served many different purposes: helping CCED get in contact with more Chinatown residents; raising awareness among non-residents about the current issues in LA Chinatown; publicizing the work that CCED does in the community; and providing resources about tenants' rights and contact information for those who would like to get involved. The students provided copies of the zine to CCED and distributed the zine in the community, on campus, and at zine fests. In addition, students donated copies of the zine to our college library's zine collection so as to document the students' work, share the knowledge among other members of the campus community, and continue the efforts at preserving zines in an institutional setting. Finally, the students provided the master copy of the zine (commonly referred to as "zine flats") to CCED so that the organization can continue to duplicate the zine into the future.



FIGURE 7. CLASS ZINE PROJECT ENTITLED "CHINATOWN CHANGING: GENTRIFICATION IN LA"

Overall, the students responded enthusiastically to the community zine project and appreciated how the assignment provided what one student called "a solid understanding of how to use zines to contribute to social activism and community building." Another student commented that working collaboratively on a community-based zine helped her to more thoroughly understand the participatory aspect of zine culture, especially in regards to being more intentional about the types of community materials that were included in the zine and being mindful about the relationship between content and form in how the zine is presented. All the students expressed their gratitude for being able to hear the "genuine testimonials" of the Chinatown community, which gave them a clearer portrait of how gentrification affects low-income ethnic neighborhoods. Furthermore, many students remarked how the project allowed them to move beyond the abstraction of theory to understanding the issues on a

more personal and emotional level. An Asian American female student remarked on how learning about theories can become so dense and convoluted when limited to the space of the classroom, and that practice is essential to grasp the concepts and ideas. She elaborated, "I've learned that with community organizing you put yourself out there because you are sick and tired of these community conditions and politics that are demeaning to the common people." Another Asian American student who grew up in similar conditions in Oakland Chinatown emphasized the need to center the members of the community in project planning to ensure that they have agency in the process. She eloquently characterized the zine project as one that "weaves a story about the collective pain of displacement."

The project was not without its difficulties and challenges. The issue of insider/outsider status when embarking on a community project can be quite pronounced, particularly along racial lines. Reading previous scholarship on community-based education, particularly Jean Wu's "Race Matters in Civic Engagement Work," about college students volunteering in Boston's Chinatown, helped to anticipate many of the challenges that students would face (Wu, 2010). However, some lessons are learned most effectively through direct experience. For example, some of the white students in the class noted the difficulty in interviewing Chinatown residents because of language barriers and the reluctance of some of the Chinatown residents to engage with the students due to a general unfamiliarity of what they were doing in their community. A white female student reflected on how the failure of those entering the community to address their own biases and assumptions can undermine their participation as well as the solidarity that is crucial to promoting community development. This insightful comment underscores the necessity of understanding one's positionality and privilege when approaching community engagement work and the importance of being mindful of the ethical implications of working with a community to which one does not necessarily belong. All of the students, regardless of background, noted how important it is to consider the ethics involved in working with community, and that working in solidarity with the community means being sensitive to what the community envisions for itself.

Another important lesson was the realization that social justice work is an ongoing project. One Asian American male student stated, "I know very well that our completion of this project in no way means that we have solved the issues at hand. Gentrification is an ongoing problem in LA Chinatown as well as all across the country. I feel inspired to get involved with grassroots organizations like that of CCED depending on where I end up after I graduate." His sentiments illustrate how community-based learning plays a significant role in the politicization of college students by introducing them to real world issues. Through the process of action and critical reflection, students come to realize that they are a part of a larger struggle for social justice (Jung, 1989). In addition, the project helps to impart the significance of everyday interactions in transforming social relations, and how small local actions collectively add up and contribute to a broader

struggle (Chiu, 1989; Omatsu, 2003). Grace Lee Boggs writes that one of the goals of education is transforming relations by "overcoming the 'dehumanization' that has been fostered by the commodification of everything under capitalism and building more democratic, just, and nourishing modes of relating to people" (Boggs, 2012).

Conclusion

In telling the history of the underground press in the United States, Ellen Gruber Garvey notes how independent publishing functioned as a radicalizing activity, creating oppositional identities and subverting conventional power relationships (Garvey, 2002). By moving beyond dominant paradigms that frame zines within a discourse of individualism and self-interest, we can also tell a counter-history of zines situated within a radical tradition based on collectivity and community mobilization (Nguyen, 2012). Archives play a crucial role in contextualizing zines within this history of activism and community empowerment. As we have seen with the example of *Gidra*, archives can be used as a way to link students to worlds beyond the classroom and engage in community struggles for social justice. As Haivan Hoang writes, "*Gidra* began as a way to assert self-determination but concluded with lessons about the rhetorical work involved in cultural production and the need to make connections, to alter subject positions, and to question what role writing has in social processes" (Hoang, 2015). By drawing linkages between the past and the present vis-à-vis the study of *Gidra* and the creation of a community-based zine, students enact similar lessons about connecting to communities beyond campus, interrogating their personal subjectivity and positionality in working with marginalized communities, and recognizing how zine-making can play a role in social transformation.

Stephen Duncombe writes that zines can be considered "pre-political" because they do not directly effect change at the structural level. He states, "The focus of political discourse is always on the consequences of political injustice, with little attention paid to identifying and grappling with underlying causes" (Duncombe, 2008). While this may be a bit of an overstatement, since many zines do confront systemic forms of oppression, this differentiation helps to identify the potential of zines as a vehicle for an emergent political consciousness. In other words, the form and ethos of zines allow flexibility and malleability that can be put to use in a variety of contexts and projects, both directly political as well as "pre-political." This creative approach also avoids the narrow definitions and prescriptions often found in institutional politics, and instead encourages innovative pathways to community activism and social change. As Adela Licona points out, zines reveal the "emergence of a coalitional consciousness and practices of articulation that have the potential to create and mobilize communities for social justice based on egalitarian social relationships" (Licona, 2005). Relationships such as the cooperation between individuals and the collaboration between different community constituents characterize zines as a form of participatory culture, challenging students to think beyond hegemonic educational strategies that reproduce atomistic

learning. In that sense, zines provide an exciting way to translate their “pre-political” momentum into community politics and mobilization, guiding students’ enthusiasm for creativity and hands-on learning from do-it-yourself (DIY) to do-it-together (DIT), from individual to collectivity, from campus to community.

The archival impulse currently at work in zine culture provides a window to a radical past that allows us to consider historical alternatives for models of collaboration and community action. The increased access to these materials, particularly in the digital archival arena, encourages students to think about their own role in history and the importance of documenting their work for other generations to learn from and build upon. Incorporating the community voices found in the archive into the classroom can unlock creative and innovative possibilities for reshaping our community-based pedagogies. Kate Eichhorn writes, “What makes the archive a potential site of resistance is arguably not simply its mandate or its location but rather how it is deployed in the present” (Eichhorn, 2013). The digitization of *Gidra* in the Denso Archives not only provides increased accessibility to these important historical materials but allows for their activation within contemporary movements and reorientation in pedagogies of social justice. This is particularly key for archives that document marginalized and under-represented communities, which provide a way for students who come from these communities to see themselves in the archive and to empower themselves as shapers of history. As Schwartz and Cook point out, archives are “active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed” (Schwartz & Cook, 2002). Linking archives with practice, and in doing so, learning from the past to inform our work in the present, encourages us to re-envision education from the ground up, embracing what Glenn Omatsu refers to as “the rich possibilities embedded in our communities and within ourselves” (Omatsu, 2003).

Works Cited

- Bencze, L., & Carter, L. (2011). Globalizing students acting for the common good. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 48(6), 648–669.
- Boggs, G. L. (2012). *The next American revolution: Sustainable activism for the twenty-first century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Chiu, P. (1989). Something to encourage us to continue. *Amerasia Journal*, 15(1), 105.
- Chu, J. (1997). Navigating the media environment: How youth claim a place through zines. *Social Justice*, 24(3), 71–85.
- Duncombe, S. (2008). *Notes from underground: Zines and the politics of alternative culture* (2nd ed). Bloomington, Ind: Microcosm Publishing.
- Eichhorn, K. (2013). *The Archival turn in feminism: Outrage in order*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Espiritu, Y. L. (1992). *Asian American panethnicity: Bridging institutions and identities*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). New York: Continuum.
- Garvey, E. G. (2002). *Out of the mainstream and into the streets: Small press magazines, the underground press, zines and artists’ books*. In S. Caspar, J. Chaison, & J. Groves (Eds.), *Perspectives on American book history: Artifacts and commentary* (pp. 367–402). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Guzzetti, B. J., & Gamboa, M. (2004). Zines for social justice: Adolescent girls writing on their own. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 39(4), 408–436.
- Hoang, H. V. (2015). *Writing against racial injury: The politics of Asian American student rhetoric*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Jung, K. (1989). The forces of revolution were on the rise. *Amerasia Journal*, 15(1), 135–137.
- Licona, A. C. (2005). (B)orderlands’ rhetorics and representations: The transformative potential of feminist third-space scholarship and zines. *NWSA Journal*, 17(2), 104–129.
- Lopez, L. K. (2011). The Yellow press: Asian American radicalism and conflict in *Gidra*. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 35(3), 235–251.
- Lowe, L. (1996). *Immigrant acts: On Asian American cultural politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Maeda, D. J. (2009). *Chains of Babylon: The rise of Asian America*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mai, R., & Chen, B. (2013). *The state of Chinatown Los Angeles*. Department of Urban Planning, Luskin School of Public Affairs, University of California, Los Angeles.
- McLaren, P. (2003). Critical pedagogy and class struggle in the age of neoliberal globalization: Notes from history’s underside. *Democracy & Nature*, 9(1), 65–90.
- Murase, M. (1976). Toward barefoot journalism. *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, 307–19.
- Nguyen, M. T. (2012). Riot grrrl, race, and revival. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 22(2–3), 173–196.
- Omatsu, G. (2000). The “four prisons” and the movements of liberation. In M. Zhou & J. V. Gatewood (Eds.), *Contemporary Asian America: a multidisciplinary reader*. New York: New York University Press.
- Omatsu, G. (2003). Freedom schooling: Reconceptualizing Asian American Studies for our communities. *Amerasia Journal*, 29(2), 9–34.
- Omi, M., & Winant, H. (1994). *Racial formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Park, K., & Lin, J. (2008). Los Angeles Chinatown: Tourism, gentrification, and the rise of an ethnic growth machine. *Amerasia Journal*, 34(3), 110–125.
- Piepmeyer, A. (2008). Why zines matter: Materiality and the creation of embodied community. *American Periodicals*, 18(2), 213–238.
- Schwartz, J. M., & Cook, T. (2002). Archives, records, and power: The making of modern memory. *Archival Science*, 2(1–2), 1–19.
- Võ, L. T. (2004). *Mobilizing an Asian American community*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Wong, J. (2006). *Democracy’s promise: Immigrants & American civic institutions*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Wu, J. Y. (2010). Race matters in civic engagement work. In J. Y.-W. S. Wu & T. C. Chen (Eds.), *Asian American studies now: A critical reader* (pp. 581–602). New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).



This journal is published by the [University Library System](https://www.library.pitt.edu/) of the [University of Pittsburgh](https://www.pitt.edu/) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](https://www.dscribe.com/), and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](https://www.press.pitt.edu/).