

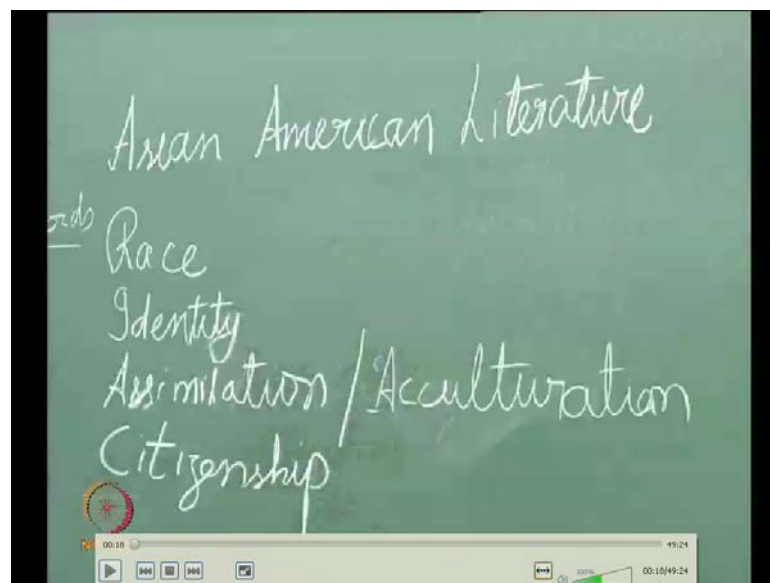
Contemporary Literature
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Module No. # 01

Lecture No. # 35

Good morning, so our topic for the day is Asian American literature with particular reference to Asian American fiction or novels.

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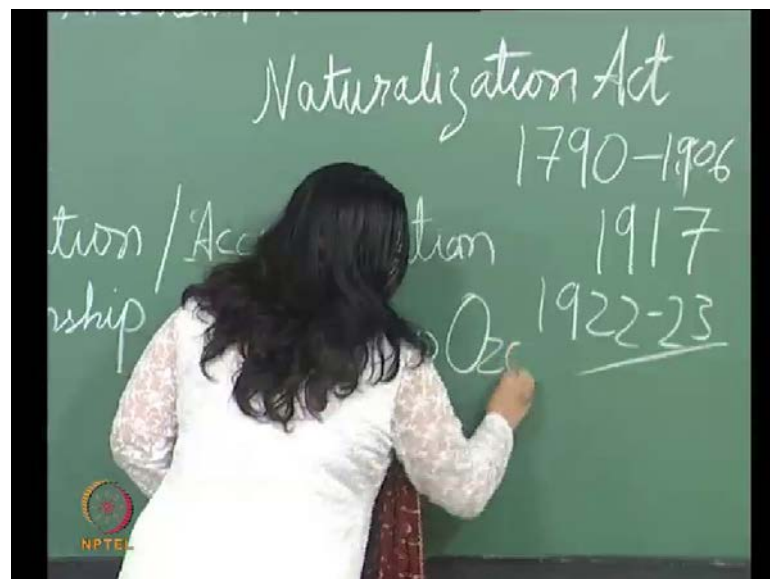


So, tell me what do you understand when I say something like Asian-American, you know community, so what comes to mind? Good, Asians settled in America and who are those Asians, how do you define Asians - Indians, Chinese, Koreans, who else? Indonesia, Japanese, Vietnam, Philippines, and people who come from the south Asian part of the world, that includes Indians, Pakistani's, Nepal's, Bhutanese, Srilankans etcetera, so this is Asian American, so that the scope is extremely vast. So, when we start talking about the constrict, the idea of Asian American then, it is not just Japanese and Chinese as it is a traditionally understood, it also comprises several other nationalities its extremely vast, and you can say that all these communities when they come together it is not a very homogeneous growth, so that is the quality of Asian American literature.

Now, the key words that we are going to focus on are race, ethnicity, identity, what are those tropes, some marks of identities that define this particular group called Asian Americans, and even among Asian Americans there is no unity, as we are going to see soon. The ideas - the efforts - to assimilate and to integrate and to acculturate with the host country, so this is also extremely important and it lies at the core of all Asian American literature. The idea to get integrated and acculturated with the host country - host culture, and of course, actually this should come right at top citizenship, because citizenship at the beginning for these people - this community collision an American - was not something easily accessible or available.

So, we begin with talking about the immigration process in America, I am taking you very back in time, I am taking you to something earlier a part of the 20 th century - last century - so that is when the immigration process actually begin, so the idea of Asian people in America is not very old, just 100 or so, so America had a law called naturalization act, we should know that.

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Now, naturalization act, what is it mean to you? If you are born in America you are an American right, but if you are a naturalized American, how does that happen? Good, you are born somewhere else in the world, but you become a naturalized citizenship. We also have something like this in India, yeah, as far as I understand, so this was an act which was in practice 1790 - 1906 and this was a very interesting law 1790 to 1906, it existed

during that period, and it said that only those people can become naturalized citizens who were white people.

So, now, how do you define whiteness, can anyone tell me what is white, only whites can become, yeah, citizens perhaps, but a whiteness of the skin was one of the necessary factors. By 1917 something interesting happen, the United States of America barred entry to those people who came from the so called Asiatic region that was in 1917, not so long ago. And then there is a another interesting year, 1922 and 23 where something very interesting happen, two men of Asian descent in America, they went to the supreme court in America and they had their cases heard regarding citizenship.

So, they wanted to become the so called naturalized citizens of America, so one was Takio Ozawa, a man of Japanese descent. Now, his case was the way he presented his case in front of the US supreme court, he said that he has gone to the best of American schools and colleges although he is a Japanese, but his family is shifted and he has been exposed to the main stream US culture and education.

He also said that he is immersed in American culture, but this is also very important when we talk about intercultural relationships, there is an idea of immersion. Now, what do you understand - I mean - I would like to know your opinion on the definition of immersion, it is a very controversial topic, its acculturation and immersion. What you understand, I am immersed in American culture, and how do you become immersed in some culture? Exactly, you live, and you know more or less it means that I am living the way an average American - a general American - would live, so that becomes very positive in your life - I mean - I do not know how many of us would be very proud to say that, that we are completely acculturated, I do not know what is it, this kind of position differs from person to person wouldn't it, What would you say.

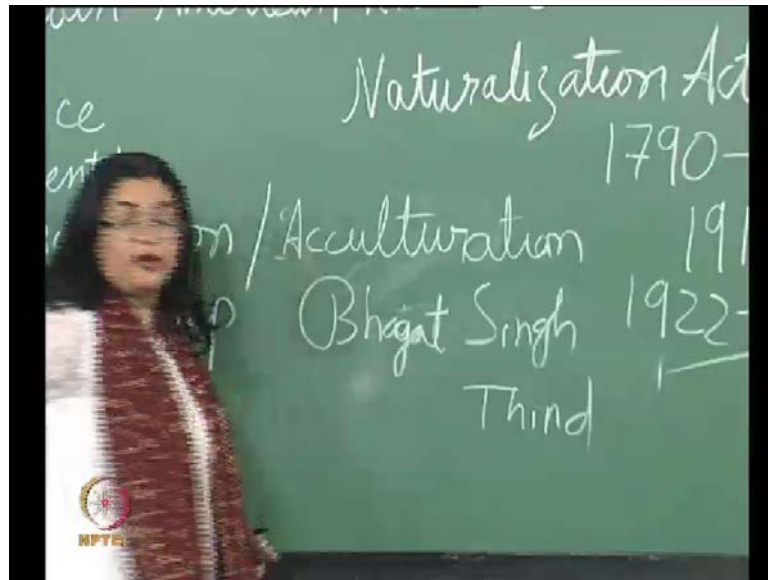
Some people would like to maintain their racial identity; certain people would like to get immersed completely in the host culture. Now, what would the native people prefer, what would the so called host country people from, yeah, immersion. So, they do not want small pockets where people claim their racial identities, they want people who would be completely immersed, so that is how. So, when Ozawa projected or submitted his case before the supreme court in 1922, this was one of the defenses, this was one of the reasons he put up before the court that he should be granted naturalized citizenship,

because he has immersed himself in the US culture - in the main stream US culture. Then, he gave evidence that he goes to the American churches and not to any Japanese place of religion, so that became one thing, so when you are talking about what constitute immersion going to the places of **religious of in so** we go to the churches, our family goes to the churches, our children go to American schools where English is the predominant language, and we have nothing to do with our own language and culture.

So, this was the way he presented his case before the court, he also said that we not only that we also use English at home and we do not talk in Japanese at all, so all these things are a big positive in our favor, alongside he also produced sufficient evidence that culturally and socially he interacts more with the American people, and he had successfully distanced himself from people of his own country, that is the Japanese people in America. And I do not know what would be your feelings towards this, but his a lawyer also said that Ozawa should be granted citizenship, because the color of his skin is white.

He is whiter than most Europeans, you see Europe also comprises several communities and several people, so there are brown Europeans as well exactly Hispanics, Puerto Ricans, in America. So, if you are not talking about Europe then, let us talk about south America, you have the people from Latin America, and people from Brazil if the all these countries Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Hispanic people they are not really as white as an average American, but Ozawa was really white. And the lawyer said that this makes for the case very strong case, and what do you think what have been the verdict? No, not granted, he was not granted the citizenship in spite of all these. Now, we will look at the second case, we were talking about two interesting cases for naturalized citizenship in America, and second person was Bhagat Singh thind from Punjab. Bhagat Singh also applied for citizenship that is the naturalized citizenship during the same time period 1922 and 23.

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He made a strong case for himself, he said that he has been to the university of Barkley, the University of Barkley is no ordinary university, it is one of the latest institutes of education in America. Another thing in his favor was that he had participated as a soldier of high rank in the first world war, and he yet fought from the side of the allied's.

Then, now, this in Ozawa's case, we saw that he made a case for himself on the basis of his skin color, I am very white therefore, I should be granted. Thind said that he comes from a very upper cast high class Hindu family – Sikhs - but Hindu of course, so I come from a very upper class Hindu family from Punjab in India, and therefore, I deserve to be assimilated with the whites who are almost like the high class people or high caste people in India. So, you see the analogy - the similarities - we are looking at the case from Thind's point of view.

His case was, he is an upper class Hindu, and an upper class Hindu should be allowed to mix freely with the whites who are the upper class in America. So, he said I am not like the poor black, I am not like the your average Hispanic or Puerto Rican, you know you cannot club me along with these people, by virtue of being a high class or high caste Hindu. I have every reason to hope to become assimilated with your culture, and I can trace who my linguistic and physical and racially is to the so called Aryan community.

The Aryan ancestry, who are the Aryans, yes Nareen, when you say trace your lineage to the Aryans what are you say, so I can trace my ancestry to European people because on virtue of being an upper class - upper caste Hindu. So, I can easily seek alignment with the cock Asian's with the Europeans, and if citizenship can be granted to the white people to the Europeans, then why not to me who claims direct descent from the Aryan lineage, and what was the result the same as Ozawa, no citizenship - no naturalized citizenship. Now, what do these two cases tell us, they say a lot, but what on the surface what do they tell us

Ok.

Everybody can be (())

Ok.

And general all the united societies.

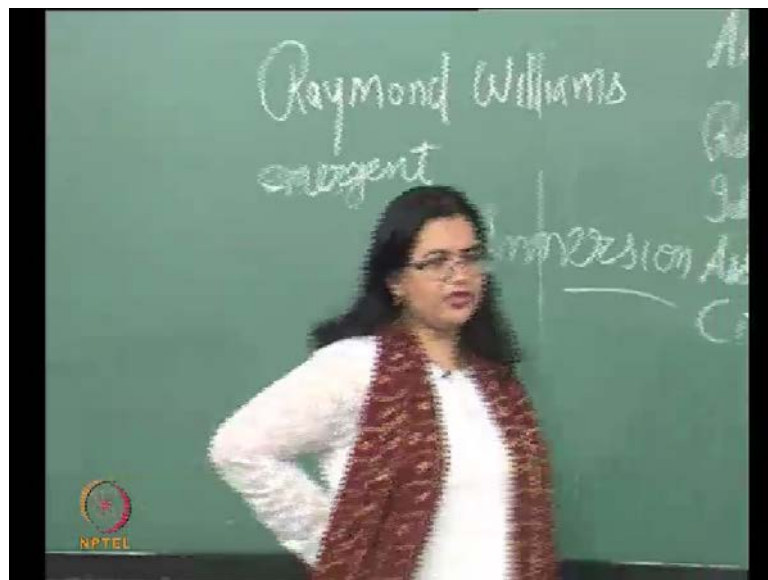
Yeah, so fine, one is that the charm - the lure - of being an American, on the other hand, you have the Americans resisting, yeah, this kind of an encroachment on the territories, things are different now, but we will come to that, I am talking about a two major historical events, so things may be very different today. But, there was a time when getting a citizenship was very difficult and also the grounds on which citizenship was sort was also very interesting, people used to seek citizenship on the grounds of their skin color and their ancestry.

Now, things are very different, and that naturally the court denied citizenship to both these gentlemen. Now, we come down a few years, and then we see what happens, so during the forties, that is during the period of the Second World War, one was the fear of violence in America towards people of Asian descent. Now, why do you think that people of Asian descent would be fearful of violence against them? Exactly, so the Japanese were the enemies - at that time Japan was the enemy - and Asian Americans especially from that part of the world they look quite alike, you know, it like you cannot distinguish between a person of Indian or Bangladeshi or Pakistani but when we go outside to a European to an American, we all look alike, do not we? Yeah, even a person from Srilankan. So, most of us from this part of the world we look alike, likewise people

from Korea, from Vietnam, from Japan, from Chinese, everyone was clubbed in the same category that this is the face of the enemy, so all of them looks like Japanese to an average American, and there was lot of violence against them.

Now, what happens when there is violence against one section of the community, we are talking about Asian American community, Japanese are the enemies, but that also includes somehow Koreans, Vietnamese, and a Chinese are also drag into that. What will happen, what would be their reaction, protective or defensive, take a guess, would they be, yeah they became extremely defensive, so what they did was a complete disavowing of the Japanese people.

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So, this is an important term that you should know, the disavowal of the Japanese people by the Vietnamese, Koreans, and Chinese people, because they did not want to get involved, there were lots of racial attacks, physical attacks on them, and they did not want to get, and so the Japanese people were completely isolated during the time. Now, there is a cultural practitioner, I am sure you have heard of this name, a Raymond Williams, if you have not then you should know Raymond Williams is a key cultural practitioners of the last century and he gives as a term called emergent cultural practices.

Now, by emergent cultural practices he means that when a society gives birth, gives rise to new structures, then those new structures militate against the dominant structures

present in the society, so that is the idea, so it is not a rebellion, it does not constitute a rebellion against the dominant society it becomes, according to Raymond Williams a very legitimate narrative of identity and a sense of belonging.

So, Raymond Williams idea of emergent cultural practices that whenever a group is extremely dominant there is always the birth of new structures which in a way militate against the dominant groups, and it is not really a fight, but it is a struggle to make themselves visible and to make their legitimize narratives be heard. It its nothing but you know having a voice in a culture which is dominated by the forces of majority, ask me any question if you have any **question** at this point. So, we were talking about the cases of Odawa and braggart Singh thing, so that was in 1922, now by 1960 there was a change, I am sure you have heard of president linden Johnson who did he follow president Kennedy, he succeeded president John F Kennedy, president linden Johnson.

Now, in 1965 linden Johnson's congress enacted and passed a law that selection of immigrants here after will be based on, remember, we were also talking about a period when naturalized citizenship was denied to people, people who were extremely eligible, but they were denied. Then there was also a period when there was a total ban on the entry of people of the Asiatic origin, from the Asian parts of the world. We have seen that also now during the reign of president linden Johnson the congress enacted a law passed a law which said that from here onwards the selection of immigration or the immigrants will be based on three choices - three categories.

One was employment needs and preferences of the US, second factor would be that would determine the selection of immigrants would be family reunification, and third and most important - see, first and second or economics and social - third was political, people who flee communist countries, so selection of immigrants would be based on the kind of profession you are in, for example, what kind of professions do you think - I mean - it hasn't changed much, people especially in the science bracket they would be welcomed, because that is what we need a doctors and nurses and engineers perhaps.

But not every profession was, people from all kinds of professions it was not like that that they would be welcomed as well, but particular you know experts, the professionals and some categories they were encouraged to come, because that became the necessity for the American people, perhaps they did not have those kind of people, they were

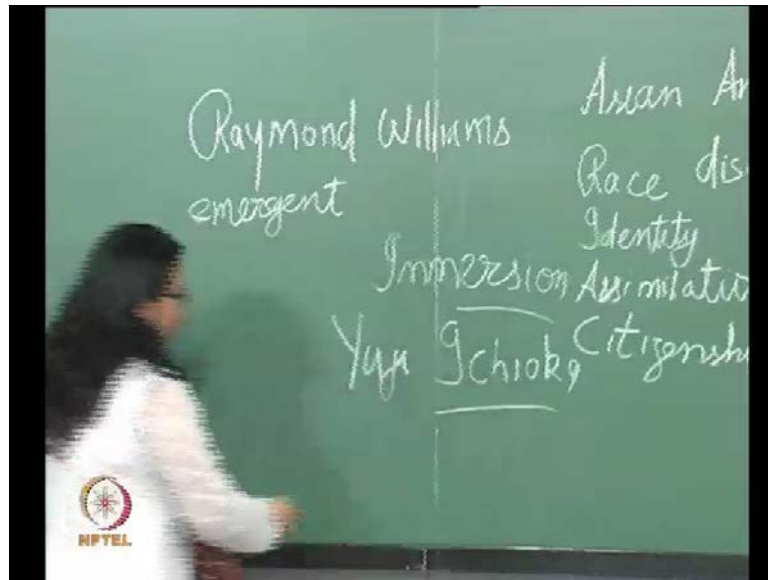
looking for. Perhaps, they there was scarcity of doctors and nurses, perhaps there was assume kind of positive for engineers, so you need them, so therefore, they will be given preferences.

Second family reunification, husband has been working for a long time, wife and children are back home, so naturally they will be called and families reunited that also so the citizenship would be based on such factors as well. Third was people who are escaping the communist resumes and countries, so this is vast area which we will look at, when we look at a couple of novels, so that is important. Now, this immigration law transformed the landscape of the USA because what do you think would have happened once this kind of law was introduced.

See, this categorize are fluid, you can make use of these conditions and find your way into the United States, so earlier it was so difficult to gain employment or to get citizenship, to get any sort of recognition, but now it seem that the USA had opened its doors and so, more and more people has started going, so this is the period of the 60, so this is 60 we are talking about. I mean, this was the peak period when people of Asian origin is started flowing into the US. And now because of the hard work because of the professional qualifications, and education, and back ground, the Asians became a new kind of a role model in the USA.

So, they are lots of reasons why they were welcomed, but this is also because of their kind of likes being there and they also assimilated well there. Now, let us consider a term like Asian American, so the term itself was coined by someone called Yuji g chioka.

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So, this is the man who first coined, who originated the term Asian-American and this was established, this a center called Asian-American center was established at UCLA University of California Berkeley in 1969. And this men of Japanese origins was responsible for creating this particular center for Asian-American studies. So, he was not just a great academician, he was also a social activist and imagine we are talking about 1969, so in American history what does that remind you, what period was that the late 60's, what was happened in America? Yes, Ravi.

The civil rights movement,

Civil rights movements, good, that is a good example anything else.

Counter culture.

Counter culture movement, yes.

Good, the Vietnam War, so now choice was a specially interested in the counter culture moment as well as in mobilizing student protest against the Vietnam war. You should remember that you know Asian American community itself was a such a minority that you know there was no way that they could have been very active in civil rights moment, which was dominant by the black people. So, the black people had their own leaders, they had their own religious affinities, so that was our also a very distinctive group Asian

-American community. On the other hand, they wanted to assimilate seamlessly, and live very peacefully, so that was so, they kept themselves quite detached or distance from the black moment, but when a war against Vietnam is started when America was on the brent with the war against Vietnam.

Then, there was a sense of solidarity, and people like etyoka, they organized a student - mobilized a student moments to protest against the Vietnam war, so am along with that choice also helped in the formation of group called the Asian American political aliens APA. Now, this was one of the first moment - one of the first efforts - to give some kind of a political identity to this group called Asian-Americans. Earlier it was just like a struggle for survival, a struggle for gaining recognition and acceptance and to get acculturated and assimilated in the main stream that was the idea, but now they started behaving more and more like Americans. So, when you form political alliances and groups and launch protest against something which the government is doing, then that means, the simulation is a more or less complete, they started identifying themselves with the name stream, they felt they have every right to do these things.

Earlier they would not have - I mean - just think 1 or 2 decades earlier, they would not have dreamt of doing or launching very visible kind of protest against the government, they needed the government to give them the citizenship, but by the late 1960 things is started changing, now contrary to what ever ichioka was doing. There was an American called Todd Gitlin; Todd Gitlin in 1968, he gave us a term called Days of rage, and this term is a quite pivotal and the development of US cultural politics and political culture and people like Gitlin, they contributed to the declaim of the new left.

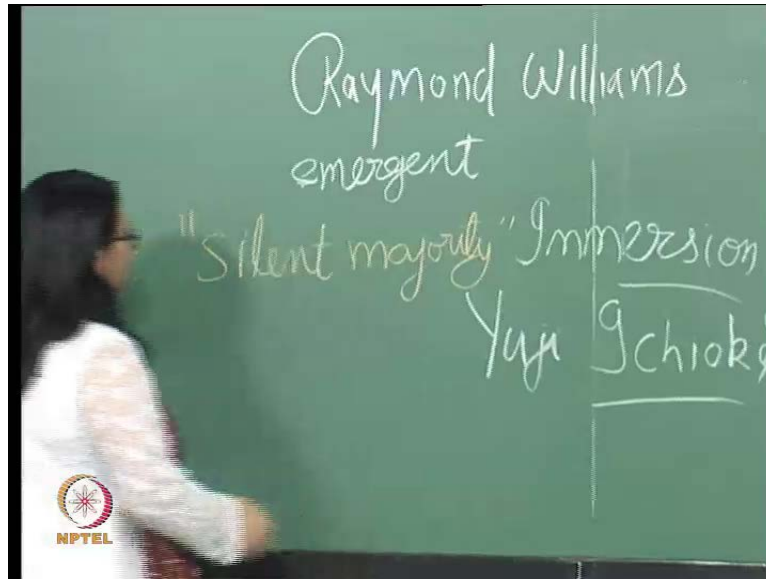
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However, they were other scholars who celebrate the year 1968 has a water shed year in the development of the historical self consciousness among its non-white people. So, 1968 is a year of much political turmoil, on one hand you had people who were calling for going back to the old ways of life. On the other hand, you had the people from the Asian-American origins who wanted to assert the identities and their self consciousness. At the same time you had the president Nixon, this is also a period politically, you had Nixon as the president, and how did he come into ascendance, how did president Nixon come into prominence, what did he talk about.

No, we are not talking about his impeachment and (O) that happen later, but how did he win the American people over, no idea, he won the election on the basis of a slogan called and this you will find a very interesting The Silent Majority and who are the silent majority according to Nixon the white people that is why we have become silent in our own country, in spite of being in majority, why? Because you have Asian Americans asserting their dominance, you have the black people making their presence felt, and what happens to the majority, it has become silent.

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So, it was a very reactionary, very radical right wing kind of political system that Nixon was endorsing. So, Nixon's political leadership in a way caused so called death of the new left he embodied everything that was right method, so it was in during this period that we talk about, people like Yuji ichioka. So, people like ichioka they were concerned - let me get back to what I have been saying all along - first concerned was the united states of Americas involvement in Vietnam.

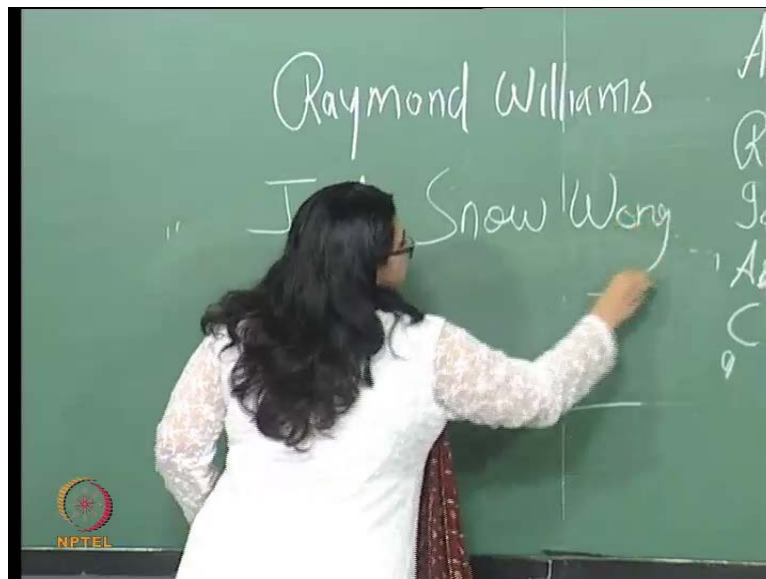
Now, it was believed that Vietnam was an extremely weak country, a very poor country, one of the poorest countries in Asia at that time and an attack on Vietnam caused strong ways of sympathy among the people of Asian origins that was one thing and then there was a constant intervention of the U S in Asian territories. So, you think of a pearl harbor Second World War, you also think of a Americas defense of South Korea against North Korea, so there was several conditions that you know encouraged or promoted the birth of people like ichioka and this desire to create a distinct political identity, a cultural identity like Asian Americans.

So, there was a need to assert themselves because they felt that US is getting too imperialistic, US is getting too domineering, interfering too much and there is a need to stop them. So, ichioka and his groups they created and groups - an Asian American groups particularly - there were debates, there were class room discussions, and from

class rooms they came out in the streets and they were the people who organized several war rallies, the so called anti war rallies in America.

So, it all begin with this creation of the Asian American center at U C Allay. Now, what was happening in to literature all this while we will started the class talking about Asian-American literature, and then we talked about citizenship, and race, and political, identities. Now, a very interesting development was happening during the middle part of the last century, as far as literature was concerned, literature of writings by the Asian American people. Now, there is one autobiography called the 5 th Chinese daughter which was published in 1945 by a women writer Jade Snow Wong.

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Now, the a novel published in 1945, it gained instant acclaimed because the author talks about accepting Americanism as a way of life and what she argued for was that the Americans and the American culture is an extremely binan culture and the only way one can find true happiness in America is by completely immersing ourselves in the American main stream culture, so that was 5 th Chinese daughter.

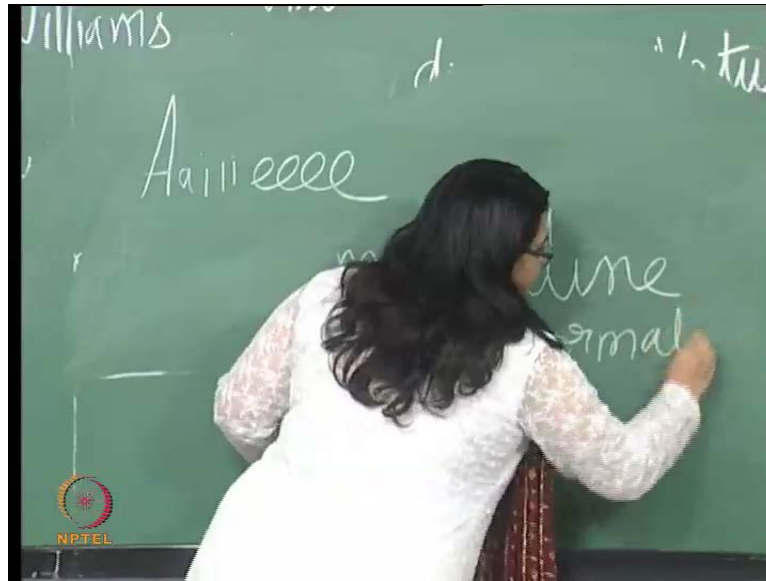
And U S government was naturally very happy, extremely pleased, when the publication of this novel, and in order to promote this kind of writing, they got it translated in several languages of the world and distributed it all across the world. When it was a best seller, and that the U S government also encouraged miss Jade Snow Wong to travel to major Asian countries. Now, we have writers travelling far and write for book promotional

activities, so she was one of the first literature person to be sponsored by the government to go on book promotional visit, promoting the book because they were so happy with the kind of contents and with that, specially the kind of ideology that the book was promoting, and America used that book as a document to illustrate how well they treat their racial minorities.

So, it is just a myth that there is racism in America, you see, we have an author of Asian-America decent who is writing her autobiography, the ship rises the treatment of the minorities at the hands of the American people, and American government in particular. Then, there was another author - a Japanese author this time - Daniel Okimoto, who wrote an auto biography called an American in disguise, it was published in 1971. And this is another extension of the fifth Chinese daughter where the writer claims and affinity between Japanese-Americans and the white Americans. There is lot of things which are common between us and therefore, the only way we can see harmony is by leaving peacefully together and by assimilating our self completely into the American culture, and this book also became a major best seller.

Now, something else happened at the same time, there was a writer called Frank Chin, and he despised writers like Jades Snow Wong and Daniel Okimoto for writing books of such which was so clearly propagandist in nature. So, accommodative in nature, and he deeply resented the ideological contents on these book. So, frank chin felt that there was a deep casam between America's claim to democracy, and its imperial march through Asian. So, frank chin wrote a seminal essay called 50 years of our whole race which was published in 1974, 50 years of our whole race is an essay and it was published in an anthology of Asian-American writings, Asian American writers an anthology of Asian American writers first book of its kind published in 1974.

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And this is what is it called, I do not know how to pronounce it yes, so it has a couple of vowels running through its called aaiieeee anthology of Asian American writers, edited by Frank Chin who contributed the seminal assert 50 years of our whole race.

He challenges the notion of which has been popularized by the Americans, that Asian American's suffer from this dual identity complex. He said Asian-Americans are actually treated badly, and they are treated as emasculated citizens, who are in popular culture, you must have come across this term called little yellow man. You know, the Chinese are treated like as if they do not have any courage or strength or anything, they do not know how to talk, they do not know **how to you know they** are not familiar with the sophisticated way of life. So, he criticized and condemned the popular American notions which supported such believe. You also lashes out against the white American supremacy in this essay, and he presents his culture - the Asian American culture - as being extremely, and this has become another very controversial idea. Asian American is promoted, the culture is promoted as extremely masculine and Heteronormative, I will read you an extract and that will give you the idea of what is masculine according to frank chin.

Language is the medium of culture and the people sensibility into including the style of manhood, language coheres the people into a community by organizing and codifying the symbols of the peoples common experience, its turn that tongue and you have lobbed

of the culture and sensibility on the simplest level a man in any culture speaks for himself without a language of his own, he is no longer a man.

So, look at the repetitious we use of man, so Asian culture is masculine culture, an Asian men are highly masculine as well as Heteronormative, and remember this comes in the wake of the famous stone wall geoids. Do you know this that a particular incident, you did counter culture moment, are you aware of this, stone wall gay rights? There was a police ride on in a gay club called stone wall in Newyork city, and because there was a ride, the gay people fought back. So, its famously known in history as stone wall rights, but it is not to say that there are no gays at the Asian-American community, but they were not accepting the Asian-Americans were highly reluctant to accept or admit to the presence of these people - the gay people - in their community. So, the idea was to project themselves as heterosexual and highly masculine, we will continue with the lecture in next class, thank you so much.