

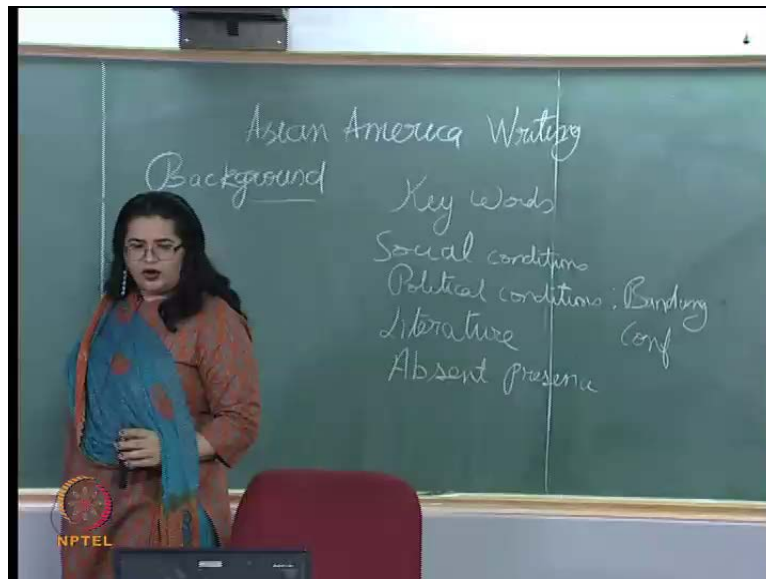
Contemporary Literature
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Module No. # 01

Lecture No. # 36

Good morning, in our last class on Asian-American writings we were talking about Frank Chins and holology called Aiiieeeee!, which was published first in 1974 and the central idea of the edited anthology is that Asian-Americans, particularly the Chinese and the Japanese in American literature as written by the white people, their masculinity is undermined, they are presented as a people who lack masculinity.

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And in order to address this, Louis Chu wrote a book called Eat a Bowl of Tea, which was a response to this so called emasculation of the Chinese or the Asian male. So, that is the point where we stop last time and I will take you to the political conditions of this time.

Now, I am sure some of you are familiar with a term called the Bandung Conference in 1955. So, this is it, the Bandung Conference which was held or organized in Indonesia, in 1955.

It was a meeting of leaders from the 29 newly decolonized nations in Asia and Africa, who came together and issued a sense of shared purposes. Because, see, this is extremely important, it was felt that Asian-Americans, we were seeing here last time that there is no fits entity called Asian-Americans; Asian-Americans, what are they? They could be Chinese, they could be Indians, Japanese, Indonesians, Vietnamese, Philippines in any number of **you know** even from Singapore and Hong Kong, so what exactly constitutes that particular identity?

So, because they do not have a shared sense of purpose, this particular meeting was held called the Bandung Conference in 1955 and it was also directly related to NAM or Non-Aligned Movement of 1961. So, what happens at Bandung? A meeting of Asian-African states organized jointly by Indonesia, Myanmar, that is the erstwhile Burma, Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan, it was held in Bandung city called Bandung in Indonesia, and that 29 countries represented, where more than half of the world populations sent their delegates.

So, it was an important event at least politically and what were the highlights of the Bandung Conferences? Bandung Conference, one was that the Asians felt that their decisions, they have no voice or they have no role in the decision making process, which most of the powerful western countries may and decide determining their state of affairs, determining their future.

So, the purpose of Bandung Conference was with even the Asian countries should have a voice, should have a say in the matter that was the most important resolution. And they also expressed their tension **sorry** they are concerned over tension between China and the US, it is nothing new it has been happening for several decades. So, they expressed their concern over the growing tension between China and the USA and then they also denounced the Colonial Practices, there was some countries which were still colonized. Even during that, remember, we are talking about 1955, so Hong Kong was a British Colony and some countries in Africa which were colonized by the French, so those were the major concerns.

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Now, from a politics I will take you to literature and there was an important novel called No-No boy published in 1957, see Bandung Conference happen in 1955, No-No boy **yeah** was published in 1957, the author was John Okada. It talks about the Japanese people in Seattle during the Second World War. And it is a study of racism in America and you find several derogative terms which are apply to the Japanese people, for example, they are called the little yellow people, which are extremely condescending and they were called the Jape Boys. And then one refrained is, **persist with** the one sentence that persistently appears is go back to Tokyo. And what John Okada is trying to hint at is the phenomenon or is a term called the Strain of Americanism.

So, this is one feature that all those who are interested in studying Asian-American literature should understand, what exactly do we mean by Strain of Americanism? It means affronting to white supremacy in America in order to survive that is the central theme, central idea of No-No boy.

Now, all this was happening, something else socially was taking place as well, now during the late 1950's the great newspaper "The New York Times", it featured a story which was called success story, Japanese-American style. A feature which was published in the New York times around the same time as No-No boy. And another important publication did a feature called, 'Success Story of One Minority Group in the US' and this standards story was about the Chinese-Americans.

So, the Japanese-Americans, the Chinese-Americans, so two features came in quick succession and highlighted two Asian, the achievements of these two major Asian-American communities. And what did this say, what the highlight of these articles was, one was the Asian-Americans have overcome the racial discrimination and have displayed praise worthy American values, now this again is a very a controversial term. What do you understand by displaying praise worthy American values, can you tell me Gopika?

(O)

Yes, so this is what we are talking about. So, look, this could not have been coincidence, the novel talks about the strain of Americanism, the newspaper, the journalistic feature praises these Asian-Americans for displaying virtues which are decidedly Americans. So, that means, that it was true, what Okada said was really a happening, because the idea was that they should assimilate, they should integrate completely into the American system and there by diminishing their own cultural identities, so that was considered extremely praise worthy, that was the highlight of the two articles.

So, good people who come to America they assimilate and integrate completely with the society. And of course, the communities in these two articles was also praised for having low crime rates, so we were told that Asian-Americans as the community, they have lower crime rates, they have higher education standards and they have little need for government welfare programs. Therefore, the two communities were termed “Model Minorities” a very interesting term model minorities, they displayed all the characteristics of a model minority. And if you do a sociological or anthropological study of the communities, you will feel that the imperative was to belong, not to question, not to interrogate, but to belong to assimilate, to integrate.

Now, I will take you to some from sociopolitical and literary highlights, to something which is extremely political in nature, but not really so well discussed.

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How many of you are familiar with this term Manzanar? This was a place in America, specifically in the Owen valley of California; literally it means an Apple Orchard - the Spanish term Apple Orchard. Now, this is a little known facet of the American history, Manzanar was a sort of camp where almost a 120000 Japanese-Americans were relocated or imprisoned rather during the Second World War.

This place is very much in America and the Japanese-Americans who were imprisoned were of American origin, so they were not like refugees, they were people who had established or **a** settled, who were settled in America, but why did that happen and why did this particular event Manzanar happen? Now, Manzanar it has been referred to through various terms, so one is a War role Relocation Center, it was called a War Relocation Center, it was also called a Relocation Camp, but most popularly it is called the Internment Camp.

So, the controversy still exists, what should be the exact or the specific nomenclature of Manzanar, was it a War Relocation Center? Was it a concentration camp? And was it camp internment camp? So, what really happen? The immediate cause was the 'Bombing of Pearl Harbor' 1942 during the Second World War that was the immediate cause- 1942 Bombing of Pearl Harbor during the Second World War.

And President Franklin Roosevelt felt, that there is a need to relocate the Japanese-American population in the western part of the United States, so they were asked to leave their homes and move to 1 of 10 Relocation Centers or such facilities across the Nation.

Sadly most of these relocated Japanese were of American birth, so this order came about as a result of great prejudice and war time hysteria, **Japanese**, the bottom line is that you cannot be trusted; we cannot allow you to co-exist with the white Americans. So, even though you have been living here for several decades or even **you know** one or two generations, we still do not trust you because of the Pearl Harbor incident. So, they were forced to leave their homes and stay or and live in those relocation center, so the typical error as we call in literature the fear of the other.

Now interestingly, this historical fact has not been addressed in much depth in literature, on in any of the publications. So, these facts remain unpublicized for a very long period, that there was any such thing a called Manzanar or there were such centers called the War Relocation centers, why do you think that this happen?

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So, there is another critic called Marita Sturken, who has coined a term called, perhaps you know not exactly coined, but popularized a term called the “Absent Presence”, Marita Sturken a media critic, who has given us a term called the Absent Presence; this is in relation to the Manzanar incident.

Now, what is Absent Presence? And why do you think this particular, very embarrassing incident was never highlighted by the media?

And then, they did not want to give publicity because they need not, they were not really inbounded on this issues and they wanted to support American (()) in that form.

Yeah.

So, both the American media as well as the Japanese media, the incident was sort of swept under the carpet, the Americans did not want to highlight it for very obvious reasons, it tarnishes their image as a free nation, as the world's leading democracy, you cannot call yourself a democracy and then indulge or then practice these things.

On the other hand, why did the Japanese publicize? Why did the Japanese writers remain silent? The reason is clear, they did not want to become very visible, they did not want to incur the wrath of the American government, so again we are talking about this the Model Minority system, they should present as and no matter what happens, we still get to live in America that is important.

So, therefore, this term called the absent presence, make yourself invisible and silent and remain here and prosper, nobody will question, but if you raise your voice then there is trouble. So, this is a very good term to indicate the situation during the Second World War, any questions, anything that you want to comment on.

(())

Very long time,

So, meant for much later after the Second World War and then

Things got normal.

So, for this is poem Janice Mirikitani something were breaking silence

Yeah, when did it come out?

I think it is (()), I do not know, I will remember the exact (()), but when they speaks about this silence, true.

Yes, this kind of literature happen much

That is what he said, **yeah**.

So, this was a response to Manzanar, it is like **you know** the other day we were talking about the Holocaust, for a long time there was no literature, people did not want to address those, because it was too immediate **and** incident, too painful **an** incident and also people wanted normalcy to be restored and only after this such issues can be addressed; so there was a sort of dull before the literally storm.

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Now, if you remember we were talking about Frank Chin's Anthology, I just **to** refer to it, **yeah**, Aiiieeee, which criticize the emasculation of the Chinese-Asian or Asian men in the writings of the white people, especially the Americans. The idea again was that Asian men particularly or not as masculine as their white counter parts, and in this connection we have a feminist critic Elaine Kim, a very influential critic, a Chinese-American critic Elaine Kim, who comments that Asian men have been coded as have been no sexuality; Asian men have been coded as having no sexuality, while Asian women have nothing else, they have only sexuality and both exist to define the white man's virility and the white races superiority.

So, I will repeat the quotation, Asian men have been coded as having no sexuality, while Asian women have nothing else, both exist to define the white men's virility and the

white races superiority (No audio from 21.43 to 21.59). Those who are familiar with the works of adversities, orientalism, they may also recall that such observations have been made by Syed also in orientalism.

So, what is the central argument here? Asian men have no sexuality, no virility; Asian women are highly sexual beings, and if the white man who have all the masculinity, what does it mean? What does it translate into? Controversial terms, but what does all this lead to?

Yeah,

Yeah, it is a gender prejudice that exists,

Gender prejudice is of course, that Asian women moves to (O) American men and the white, they were attracted to women's, they are Asian, they are own Asian, they were not really interested in.

Well, it is sort of you know legitimized white man's taking over of the Asian women, it justifies, why because your men have no virility and no masculinity, that, yeah, in other words you know from gender you can also apply the argument to ration superiority, because by nature Asian men lack masculinity, lack strength, whereas the white men has all these things.

So, it sort of legitimizes the taking over of the Asian territory, the African territories by the white men. So, all these are extremely controversial ideas and however, extremely successful, Aiiieeeee, become one of the major documents of the Asian-American writings, it became so popular that there was a Second Edition in 1991. So, from 1974, we had the Second Edition in 1991 and it was called the "Big Aiiieeeee", in 1991, where the editors almost, most of them were the same group of people, same group of scholars and where they argued for presentation of selected Chinese and Japanese heroic epics as the sources of Asian heroic tradition.

So, the idea was that to present or to represent the Asian-American male as a hero, something which was not addressed so far by the white writers or by the white dominated media and publishing his industry. So, what they did was they brought out an anthology where all the stories focused on the mythic and the heroic men of Asian

origin, especially the Chinese-Japanese origin and they argued that authentic Asian-American writing must look back to these heroic tales and to early emigrant in endeavors, early emigrant in endeavors that is when Asian-Americans first started arriving in America.

And who were the first Chinese and Japanese people who arrived in America? Traders as well as the working class people who helped in building of the railroads and the harbors. The shipping industry, the railways, they much of their existence to the hard work and the labor of these immigrants, so the idea was to mythologies, to heroism these people who were the first emigrants - first generation of emigrants - and also the heroes in mythologies of China and Japan. But not just that, it was not just lionizing or glamorizing the heroes, the men of the community, at the same time in the Big Aiiieeeee, you also find the announcement of writers such as Amy Tan and writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston are you familiar with these names - Amy Tan, Maxine Hong Kingston and David Hwang.

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So, the editors of the Big Aiiieeeee, condemned writers, particularly these three ones for being complicit with the white publishing industry and distorting the great Asian legends. So, the argument was that writers like these they work in complicity with the white publishing industry, and what do they want? What does the white publishing industry want? They want the reinforcement of the stereo types and the accusation by the

editors of the Big Aiiieeeee was that these people are pandering to the whims and requirements of the white people; therefore they present the traditional stereo typical American notions of gender issues and racial issues.

So, women warrior you see.

She is not talking about the heroic male, she is not talking about

Madame Butterfly,

Where a women is where a Chinese women is highly sexualized.

He actually glorifies all these Chinese tradition, but there also again he speaks about a formula and women whatever, yes.

All there are yeah the women is, yeah.

So, the editors of the Big Aiiieeeee, they argued for reasserting the masculinities of the American male, it has nothing to do with a presenting the famines point of view, whereas in the words of these writers they felt that because the female characters are so strong. Therefore, they it auto we know automatically sub words the masculine authority so that was, yeah. So, they accuse them of creating unflattering pole trades of the Chinese male that was the major condemnation - the major criticism.

And Frank Chin and others they went to the other extreme of calling these people as Fake American writing - Fake Asian-American writing, whereas they identified their writings as the real and authentic American writings, so Fake versus real (No audio from 30.30 to 30.48). So, this is what we were talking about the growth of literature any questions, any comments, you would like to make at this point, any anything?

Mam, this is also like in the, but now they focuses on both issues, yeah Feminism and both women and men are focused right not just masculine.

No, no, we are talking about one of the earliest attempts to give a definitive structure to this phenomenon called Asian-American writing.

So, is on masculinity

Masculinity especially, because 1974's Aiiieeeee, that was one of the first major, earliest, major attempts, before that all those novels which came they were just like pandering to the white supremacy. How well the Japanese-Americans, the Chinese-Americans should integrate or you in between you had works like the No-No boy, where the central idea was the same you know strain of Americanism, but it was not a subversion or not an interrogation of the American practices, but with Aiiieeeee it was considered extremely radical for those times, because in a way it was asserting the Asian men supremacy over the white male.

So, it has a lot to do with gender issues and how gender supremacy can be associated with racial superior.

Which was written by the white American, which definitely portrait the Chinese manners and (()).

Yeah, several works of literature, but then it is not like whether the whites were highlighting the Asian-American presence, it was Asian-American men would be minor characters in major works. So, it was not like they were consciously writing literature about the Asian-American people, male or female, that was not happening at all, the society's attitude was such that Asian-American male were a emasculated. So, it is not like some major work of literature was done just to highlight this issue, but minor characters were portrayed as extremely sort of repressed and suppress characters, a very submissive characters who lagged virility, so minor characters, minor roles for the people of Asian-American.

And coming to the point you just made, so we were talking about the Big Aiiieeeee in 1991, and then after that there was you know of course Amy Tan who wrote the very famous, very successful the Joy Luck Club.

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So, Joy Luck Club is another major study of people of Asian-American origin, who now a successful in America. This was the novel came in the late 80's, now I am going to talk about a novel called Tropic of Orange, which is a work of 1997 (No audio from 34.22 to 34.35) and the author is Karen Tei Yamashita. The story set in alley and it is a story full of Magical Realism and it combines the elements of film Nova, hip-hop culture and Chicanismo, are you familiar with the term Chicanismo, when we do American literature and especially contemporary American literature the Chicano is an important part, what is Chicanismo?

It is tribes

Not a tribe, do not call it a tribe

It seems a community

Yeah, community, the native America community

No, no, not at all, is the Mexican community, Mexican-American.

(O)

Not all, all Chicano's not necessarily Hispanic, it combines, for example, Asian-American there is no fixed stable construct, likewise Chicano is not a stable construct, it combines people from Mexican origin, Puerto Rico, Hispanics, etcetera. So, Chicanismo a word like Machismo is about the hyper masculinity of the Chicano male, but also you can stretch it to mean all those features which are common in the Chicano community.

And then of course since the novel is set in alley, so a reference to Hollywood is inevitable. So, Tropic of Orange combines all these elements, so it is a typical post-modernist inter textual pastiche kind of a work, the several themes and several stylistic sounds collide and co-exist. The plot basically covers only one week, but it is extremely epic and global in scope, so you have Angels descending from all over, so at one point you also have wrestling match between the Devil and an Angel, how does this happen? So, the plot combines incorporates two major elements or events, first event is that there is a traffic accident, because the driver bites an orange, therefore the name Tropic of Orange, the driver bites an orange containing Cocaine, lethal combinations of Cocaine.

So, therefore, there is an accident and as a result of that accident, there is a traffic jam on the highway, so what happens people start walking away, they abandon their cars and very soon people start abandoning their homes as well, because it becomes just goes out of proportion the chaos, the traffic, the population and everything just goes beyond everyone's control, and the rich people starting deserting and abandoning their homes and their cars.

Now, what happens when the rich let go of their property the poor take over, the poor they suddenly come into so much of wealth, so there is real estate, there is so much of metal forms and shapes of cars and then they take over and soon they built their own very lively, thriving, a flourishing community and it is extremely democratic, so that is one event and it is a tire all also on.

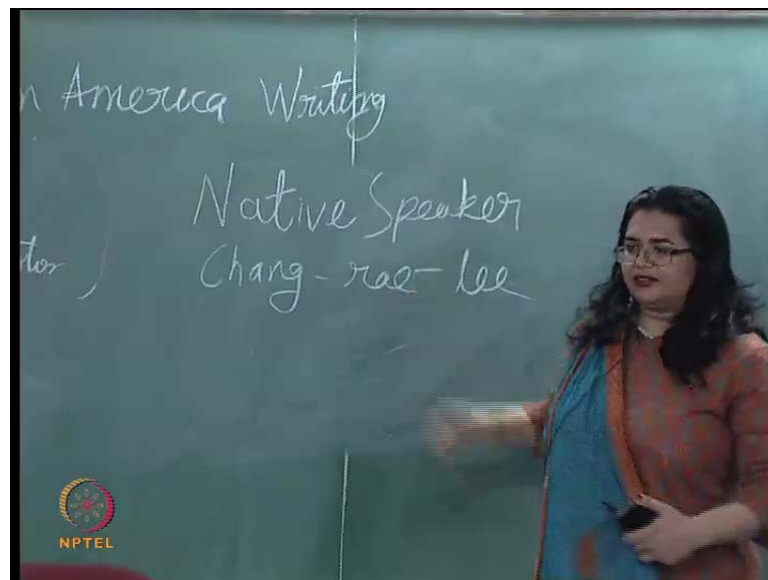
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It is Metaphorical; it can spend for anything, but in the novel orange. And then of course, what something else interesting happens that is the second event, major event, relocation of the Tropic of Cancer.

You know tropic of cancer is a geographical imaginary line, but that gets relocated because an orange from a tree growing exactly at the latitude of the tropic of cancer falls to the ground and the Archangels job now is to bring the equilibrium back to its normal, that is the literal story, but it can also be read very figuratively, which is the conflict between the North and South Americans, yeah.

So, North is represented by the Archangel and South is represented by this Evil Angel for the Seattle. And then after tropic of orange lets discuss another major work, which is Native Speaker by Chang-Rae-lee, who is a Korean writer and the novel was published in 1995, which is set in contemporary New York.

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So, if you read Tropic of Orange and if you read native speaker, you will realize what a long way Asian-American writing has come, **from No-No boy** from the days of Okada's No-No boy where a strain of Americanism is felt so much **and** to these writers, where they are under no pressure. So, they write like any ordinary American person, **any** so there is no question of asserting any identity, but in native speaker, the problem is no longer of ethnic representations, that is not a problem anymore, which was a big problem in the earlier works. And you do not have problems of the gender issues, the white superiority and supremacy, so all those issues are no longer present.

The problem, the hero, Henry Park, the narrator his problem is that his English is so perfect, total change, the total world far from the earlier writers, so perfect that he has lost his own language that is the problem.

It is not **it is he and** he is married to a white woman, he is going through the same marital crisis that most people of his generation go through and so it is nothing, there is no highlighting or there is no problematizing the racial identity. So, if look at these two novels you will find that there has been a major change. I will read you an accept from native speaker, the hero is described as a B plus student of life, B plus student not in some cause, but of life, he is an illegal alien - an emotional alien -so not an illegal emigrant and alienated kind of a person, therefore emotional alien, New American, a stranger, follower, traitors, spy and that is what is his wife calls – his white wife.

So, **it is** he does feel that he belongs neither to the American culture completely, nor to his own culture, because he is completely lost his language, so loss of language equates loss of identity, bi-cultural, **yeah**. So, now, when we conclude this talk today, so what does it mean to be white in 21 century America? So, what does it mean to be white, I am not asking you what does it mean to be an Asian-American in 21 century America, what does it mean to be a white when you have so many Asian-American making the presence felt? What do you think? What does it mean to be a white now?

Silent majority

Yes, they have become a silent majority, yes, they have become a silent majority, and there is an increasing presence of Asian-Americans both in intellectual, political as well as fear, as well as in the remnants of popular culture **yeah**.

So, the whites have become like **you know** silent majority or minority in their own plan and this you can perhaps credit to or discredit to the forces of transnationalism, forces of globalization.

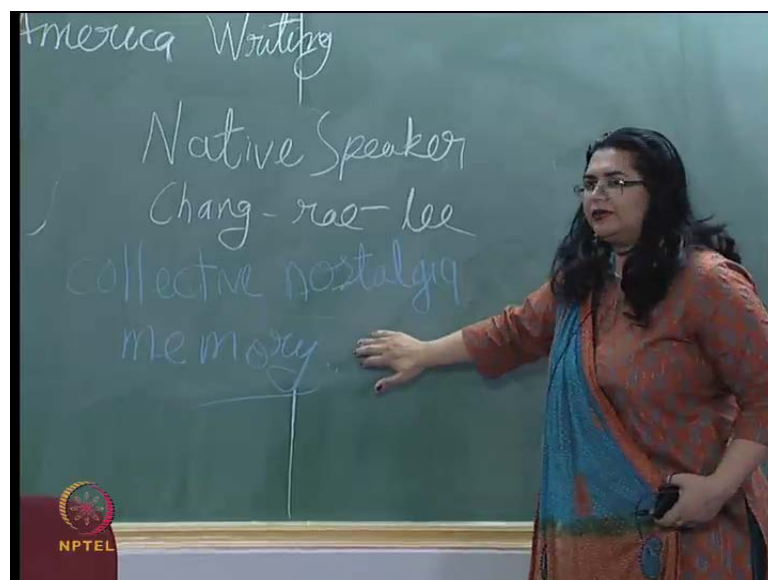
They are more liberal

Exactly they can say that they have become more open to, because you know **we were last** in the last class, we were talking about establishment of centers like Asian-American centers and in places like Lucille Barkley, see all these strong radical movements they are political, but also very intellectual in nature.

So, when people start voicing their descent, where their concerns, so then the majority have no other choice but to listen. So, there was a movement which started very forcefully from the 60's onwards and we have seen all the major movements in the last class, counter culture movement, Vietnam, assassination of very important political social figures.

And all this has led to and then we have also seen major radical movements in terms of writings, publication of Aiiiiiii, for example and responses to that, **why** both white responses as well as famines responses to writings like Aiiiiiii. Then the subsequent success of the Asian-Americans in the spears of literature and intellectual life and political life, social life and today, we have come to this, where they have made their presence increasingly very vital when very important.

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But in spite of all this, there is always a sense and this is another term that you should always keep in mind while discussing Asian-American writing.

Is a sense of Collective Nostalgia, how important this is to understand, Collective Nostalgia and Constructs of Memory. See memory as a topic as its own theories, there are so much of theory on memory that one can do an entire P.hd dissertation on constructs of memory and identity, so these are the two themes that you should be concern with, collective nostalgia and constructs of memory.

As we were talking about last time that Asian-Americans even community wise, there is too much of diversity in the term **like** you have philipinose and Vietnam, Chinese, Americans, Indians, we were talking about that. Apart from that as we were discussing recently there is also diversity in terms of whether those Asian-Americans are born in the US or outside US, so born in Asia or in America, they are born of Asian parents or though they have mixed parentation.

So, there can be one parent of some other race and coming, so that also influences or impacts on their writings, whether they belong to the educated or the working class, this is extremely important, educated or working class, both these categories will have very different perspectives. Whether they are refugees or non-refugees, **you know** refugees are like **they just** they were forced to leave the country, they are living in exile or whether they chose to live in America that also impacts. So, when you look at those writings you should be concern with those elements, whether they come from the urban or the rural part of their countries. And then of course what matters most is the degree of their identification with the home land.

So, Nostalgia Memory and how much do they miss their home land, that also defines this category, so **you know** these are some of the features. And as we were saying the construct of Asian-American remains unstable and changeable, so you can do as much reading of the Asian-American writing and literature especially in contemporary times, the construct, the notion will always remain extremely unstable, you cannot define it categorically. Look at the works of Jhumpa Lahiri this stand upon extremely unique in their perspectives, so any question you have? All right then, thank you so much.