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## What the Vincent Chin Documentaries mean to me

Sat, 06/23/2012 - 13:42 30th anniversary of vincent chin Remembering Vincent Chin

Here's my essay submitted to Frances Wang for her book project (<http://www.rememberingvincentchin.com/p/book.html>) about what the Vincent Chin case means. Unlike the founding movement leaders, whose venerable voices are significant and prominent, extending back thirty years, this is more the perspective of a person who only recently discovered the case but can somewhat relate. I hope Frances will be able to review all the memorable articles, and Tweets, and put together a wonderful anniversary book.

I was born and raised in an ultra-conservative catholic Chinese family. When I first heard about the Vincent Chin documentaries, for a long time I was mixed up between the movies, *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* vs. *Vincent Who?* Even though it was *Vincent Who?* that caught my eye first, both were available to some extent at YouTube.

It is important to have the opportunity to view *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* first, to really understand the case, then *Vincent Who?* in order to understand how and why it became a movement. The courage to start this movement, I believe, should be credited to Helen Zia. Without her unflagging efforts, the case could not have captured the national imagination. It was an early version of the Trayvon Martin case, pretty much.

Pretty much because no matter what, I remain influenced by the older generation. The World War II generation, who reinforced using harsh physical punishment, still outweigh my voice at times. The model minority myth would deny sympathy for Vincent Chin's fate. What was he doing at a no-good bar late at night? Why did he not obey his parents? Why did he pick a fight and then hit a white man? Didn't he have it coming?

Thus there are still those who, in my figure of speech, will be content panning the leavings from white gold miners' claims. Make no trouble, cause no trouble, and you can survive on just a few dollars a day. Do not stray outside the white chalk line, and you will live. Do not compete with white people, let them be first.

There's something wrong with these myths. Asians were not born to pick through consignment store leftovers. The economy is not creatively stimulated by following orders and conforming to Western concepts. When all one does is follow, one ends up never knowing who one can really become. Certainly not President of the United States, like President Obama today.

When Asians are followers, we learn to approve rejections, learn to live in denial, learn to accept two-facedness, to emphasize passivity, and even teach apathy. What kind of freedom is that? It was our fault for being homely, for having darker skin, for having a disability, for being older, for not behaving completely in accordance with how white people think Asians should behave (which frankly is less than All-American).

Examining the details from the movies again, I realize that the second part of the fight was grossly wrong and unfair. That worse, no one at that time really thought it was. The cop, the bar-hostess, the defense team, and many more couldn't recognize anything wrong with not trying to stop the vengeful manslaughter. Where had Vincent's alleged friends gone? Why didn't they try to prevent the escalation? Where did they go after their friend passed away? It seems that few of them even had the audacity to speak up. One of them, brave and courageous woman, was Vincent Chin's mother.

Although this is just one case where there have been dozens in the legal battles, I am very glad that these movies were made to recapture the nation's audience. Today the movies *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* and *Vincent Who?* form a legitimate critical segment in the Asian-Pacific American studies. Especially for those of us who continue to suffer personal, familial, and/or professional misfortunes, *Vincent Who?* helps instill hope and belief in equal opportunity and social justice for all Asian-Pacific Americans.

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