This unit presents background knowledge on the Asian American Movement from the late 1960s to key events in the 1970s and 1980s. It provides narratives that occurred during the larger civil rights movement but are often unknown outside of Asian American circles.

A history of the term Asian American begins the unit, then short summaries of three key events are listed: The Third World Liberation Front strikes, the fall of the International Hotel, and the murder of Vincent Chin. Each summary is preceded by links to videos about each event and several questions to check comprehension and probe student thinking. Primary sources are also included to encourage historical thinking and further enhance student understanding.

Historical thinking is a process by which students can make meaning of historical documents by gaining an understanding of the familiar past and its distant counterpart (Wineburg, 2001). Encourage students to examine the following videos and other primary sources carefully and answer the questions that follow. Consider emphasizing empathy within the presented historical contexts (rather than interpreting history using a lens from the present) and asking students how viewing multiple perspectives about an event helps them gain more information.
Yuji Ichioka originated the term “Asian American” when he co-founded the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at UC Berkeley in May 1968. Inspired by the Free Speech Movement and groups like the Black Panthers and engaged in movements against the Vietnam War, Yuji and his wife and fellow activist Emma Gee wanted to gather together a diverse group of Asian Americans. They began by going through the roster of the Peace and Freedom Party, a radical anti-war organization allied with the Black Panthers. Yuji and Emma picked out all the people on the list with Asian names and began calling them to invite them to an Asian meeting. From its beginnings, the AAPA was designed as a multiethnic group for all Asians, regardless of whether they themselves were immigrants or the children/grandchildren of immigrants. Members were also recruited from various Asian student social organizations.

The AAPA emphasized politics over cultural and social organization and understood the United States to be exploitative and racist. It sought to achieve justice through “self-determination,” the understanding that people of color should control their own communities and institutions that was upheld by groups like the Black Panthers. The AAPA also declared solidarity with colonized and newly decolonized nationas in Asia, Latin America and Africa and supported the building of a “Third World consciousness.” The AAPA became very important and influential, playing a role in the events that follow in this unit. However the Berkeley chapter was short-lived, disbanding in late 1969, though it inspired Asian Americans across the country to organize politically and form AAPA chapters.
What did the students of San Francisco State University (SFSU) want from the administration?

Why weren't black and other ethnic studies courses implemented as promised?

What happened on November 6, 1968? What was the notion they were fighting over?

How did the police treat the SFSU protestors? What types of consequences did these create for students who wanted to assemble and express their concerns?

How long was SFSU shut down before the strike ended?

What agreements were ultimately made between the strikers and SFSU administration?

What were the long-term effects of the SFSU strikes? What connections can be made to the types of classes offered today at the high school and college level?

During the height of the Civil Rights Movement and a month before the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., students at San Francisco State University (SFSU) organized a collective organization known as the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) in the winter of 1969. TWLF was formed with the Black Students Union, the Mexican American Student Confederation, the Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor, the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, the Latino American Students Organization, and an American Indian student organization. They joined together in response to several university decisions related to race, student organizations, and the suspension of English instructor and Black Panther Minister of Education George Murray.

TWLF members boycotted classes and went on strike with several demands on November 6, 1968. They viewed SFSU policies as racist and classist and demanded changes in admissions policy, in who taught courses, and in the types of courses that were offered. Specifically, they wanted to create a Third World College focused on ethnic studies courses and to give members of TWLF power in deciding who was hired to teach them and the types of courses that would be offered. The strike went on for five months and clashes with San Francisco police made national news. On March 20, 1969, the strike officially ended when a joint resolution was signed by representatives of the TWLF and SFSU.

SFSU’s College of Ethnic Studies was established in Fall 1969 and was composed of four departments: Asian American Studies, Africana Studies, Raza Studies, and American Indian Studies. Today the college offers over 175 courses each semester and serves over 6,000 students. The TWLF strike remains the longest campus strike in American history, and was a time when students, faculty, and community activists came together to demand equal access to higher education, more senior faculty of color, and curriculum that reflected the history and culture of all people. Many of the people involved in the TWLF strike went on to become professors of ethnic studies, activists, or politicians.
San Francisco State College Strike Daily, November 6, 1968

From the San Francisco State College Strike Collection,
http://www.library.sfsu.edu/about/collections/strike/essay.html
Protesters march near 19th and Holloway on SF State campus, 1968, from "Crisis at SF State" © 1969 by Insight Publications
The International Hotel
San Francisco, California, August 3-4, 1977

VIDEO: SFGTV International Hotel, minutes 1:33-8:28 (YouTube)

- Who lived in the International Hotel?
- What made the hotel’s location the subject of struggle?
- Why were the hotel’s residents evicted?
- What was the hotel’s significance in Manilatown?
- What did the San Francisco community do to protest the evictions?
- How did the International Hotel’s tenants use the court system to their advantage?
- What occurred on August 4, 1977? Who was in attendance? How did it make the narrator feel?
- Where did the International Hotel tenants go after their eviction? What were their lives like afterward?
- Why was the struggle to save the International Hotel significant in Asian American History?
- How did Manilatown re-emerge in 2005?

The International Hotel (I-Hotel) was located in the Manilatown district of San Francisco. Located on the edge of Chinatown, Manilatown was home to many elderly retired Filipino farmworkers, merchant marines, and service workers. In the 1960s, the nearby Financial District began expanding into Manilatown and tried to turn the residential community into “higher use” development.

The owner of the I-Hotel, Walter Shorenstein, wanted to demolish the building to build a parking lot. On November 27, 1968, 150 elderly Filipino and Chinese tenants of the I-Hotel began a nine-year-long anti-eviction campaign against the encroachment of the Financial District. Tenants of the I-Hotel marched to Mr. Shorenstein’s office in protest and succeeded in getting a lease agreement that would be signed on March 16, 1969. But in the early morning of that day, a suspicious arson fire occurred on the top floor of the I-Hotel, killing three tenants. Mr. Shorenstein’s company refused to sign the agreement and used the fire as an excuse to demolish the now “unsafe” building.

However, news of the demolition plan spread through the Asian American and local community. Students who had participated in the Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State University, community activists, and organizers began conducting loud demonstrations while others fought the evictions and demolition through the legal system.
When the court finally ordered evictions in January of 1977, five thousand people surrounded the building, barricading the doors and shouting, “No evictions, we won’t move!” The judge granted a stay of eviction, but it was overturned by the California Supreme Court in August.

At three in the morning on August 4, 1977, 400 police in full riot gear rushed the barricade of over 3,000 protestors to evict the 50 or so elderly residents of the I-Hotel. The pictures of old tenants being forced out on the streets made national news. After the eviction, the property was empty while the debate over its use raged on. In 1981, the building was finally demolished. In 2003, construction began on a new I-Hotel, which was completed in August of 2005. The new building contains 105 apartments for senior housing as well as a community center and historical display that commemorates the original I-Hotel.
The Murder of Vincent Chin

Detroit, Michigan June 19, 1982

VIDEO: Vincent Who?, Chapter 1, minutes 2:30-5:31 (YouTube, written & produced by Curtis Chin)

Show students the 3 minute clip from Vincent Who?, where Judy Chu describes learning about the murder of Vincent Chin interwoven with news clips and interviews with his fiancée and the judge who decided the case of his murderers. After viewing, ask students the following questions:

- Why did Roger Ebens and Michael Nitz start yelling at Vincent?
- What was the reason that many U.S. auto workers felt hostility toward Japan/Japanese?
- What similarities did Judy Chu identify between herself and Vincent Chin?
- Judge Charles Kaufman says Nitz and Ebens “attempted to administer a punishment... too severely” out of recklessness. He argued that Chin was not brutally murdered. Based on the description on the video, do you agree?
- Do you agree with Judy Chu’s statement that the sentence given to Vincent showed that his life was worthless, no more valuable than a dog? Why or why not?
- Why was this event significant to the Asian community?
- What connections can you make to current examples of race-based violence?

Vincent Chin was a Chinese American engineer who was engaged to marry a woman named Vikki. During a pre-wedding celebration with friends at a Detroit club, an argument began between Vincent and an older White American named Roger Ebens. Roger blamed Japanese people for taking away jobs at the auto factory where he worked, and wrongly assumed that Vincent was Japanese.

In this photo, members of the United Autoworkers Local 588 of the Ford Motor Co. stamping plant wield sledgehammers and bars on a 1975 Toyota Corolla March 3, 1981, during a rally against buying foreign-made products. Japanese auto and government officials in 2005 are worried about a replay of the “Japan-bashing” trade friction of the 1980s, when Toyota and others were blamed for stealing car sales and U.S. jobs, prompting outraged auto workers to smash Japanese cars in protest. (AP Photo/Str)
Vincent, Roger, and Roger’s stepson Michael fought in the club. After they stopped fighting and left the club, Roger pulled a bat out of his car and threatened Vincent, who ran across the street to a McDonald’s. Roger and Michael followed Vincent and beat him severely with the bat. Two off-duty police officers witnessed the beating. Vincent was hospitalized for four days then died due to injuries from Roger’s beating.

Roger and his stepson Michael were charged with the murder of Vincent Chin. However, his lawyers negotiated a deal to avoid a trial by jury. This deal allowed Roger to plead guilty to the less serious charge of manslaughter. Although Roger was convicted guilty of manslaughter by the judge, his sentence was three years of house arrest and a $3,000 fine. Roger served no time in jail for murdering Vincent, which outraged many members in the public and the Asian American community in particular.

Activists like Helen Zia and lawyer Liza Chan pushed for federal prosecution against Roger and Michael. In 1984, the federal court found Roger guilty and acquitted Nitz. However Roger appealed the verdict and had a retrial in 1987 that cleared him of all charges. Although the fight for justice for Vincent Chin was unsuccessful, his case reinvigorated the Asian American movement and began pushes for pan-Asian unity and hate crime laws in the United States.
**References**

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*Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (Documentary)

*Vincent Who?* (Documentary) [www.vincentwhomovie.com](http://www.vincentwhomovie.com), [www.apaforprogress.org](http://www.apaforprogress.org)