

Asian American Superheroes:

Interview with Keith Chow, Parry Shen & Jeff Yang (Editors)



Come hear the editors speak about their new Asian American Superhero Anthology, "Secret Identities"!

Wednesday,
April 1st
4:00 p.m.
Student
Center East,
Illinois Room
BC

For more information,
Contact Corinne
Kodama at
ckodama@uic.edu or
312-413-9569

aarcc.uic.edu

What are your favorite comics?

Jeff: X-Men because they were a metaphor for life. They're seen as society's greatest menace and are also secret saviors. When you are not sure whether or not your identity is something that is a powerful thing, a good thing, a positive thing, or something that you kind of have to hide and keep secret, the way the X-Men's story unfolded was very compelling.

Parry: Flash. And Robin of Batman & Robin. I never gravitated toward the major characters. I liked the second string guys that had more personality. Those characters are wise-asses and had real problems that were worked into their storyline. Flash could run super fast and burned a lot of calories so he is constantly having to eat. I love details like that. And Robin, I like that he doesn't necessarily have real powers, per se, but he's been able to step it up and be Batman's sidekick and fight crime. He used his wit and physical prowess to do things as opposed to having a power that goes into the realm of the super natural.

What was your inspiration to create Asian American superheroes?

Keith: We've got Asian American editors, writers, artists and everyone behind the scenes. Yet we don't see any realistic representation on the page. They were always stereotypes or comic relief, less-than-human. The forties were filled with Japanese people, they just all have giant buck teeth and get their heads smashed in by Captain America.

Jeff: The only thing that was kind of a saving grace for me was that I encountered manga. The characters were not necessarily recognizably Asian but came from a cultural perspective and ate food and had traditions that were sort of similar to mine and made sense.

Parry: As an actor I see what Asian American roles are seen by millions of people and influence the way they perceive us. The Asian American male is emasculated, really good at his work, usually tech-based and awkward around women. These writers are not Asian and they write, not maliciously, but with ignorance. Not to say that only Asians can write for Asians but for this particular book, that's why we wanted all contributors to be Asian.

How did you come up with the title of "Secret Identities"?

Parry: Being Asian American you're growing up with the same television shows and things like that and you're essentially as American as your next door neighbor. But at the same time you have this secret identity which involves eating foods they probably haven't heard of and you were concealing it but you also wanted to share it because it's something unique.

Jeff: The central myth of the superhero, this notion of having two lives, the external outward facing identity and one that you keep private because you want to protect something, your secret innermost self. That was something that was really compelling as a metaphor for the Asian American condition. This notion that Asian Americans have always been there, we've always been in the phone booth and that was sort of our chance of going 'up and away.'

How did you decide who to include in the anthology?

Parry: What it came down to was a story had to be innately from an Asian American perspective. We're trying to shepherd them into a feature film or ongoing television or animated series. A lot of producers see a concept and they're like, 'I love this but let's change this character to white or Latino or black.' Very rarely do they say, 'Hey let's make them Asian.' We have to almost tip the scales so that it has to be an Asian character. But they also had to be really cool and fun stories so that people who weren't Asian were able to connect universally as well.

Keith: Ultimately our criteria was, 'Is this a cool idea? Will this work as a comic book story? Will this work as a superhero story?' We had stories where Asian-ness wasn't necessarily part of their character, these guys just happened to be Asian. And then we had the other extreme of 'yellow power man.' We wanted their identity to be organic and at the same time, we wanted there to be good stories to tell.

What do you think the impact is of telling a serious story like internment in comic book form?

Parry: My mom gave me a book that was basically a comic form of the Bible and I remember getting in the stories. Next thing you knew, I knew every single story in the Bible.

It tricked me into learning. I think we have so much stuff in this new book that will "trick" a new generation into being curious and learning about Asian American issues in history.

Keith: Comics can be a vehicle through which to teach historical lessons. For example, "Maus" tells a story of the Holocaust but Art Spiegelman recast the Nazis as cats and the Jews as mice. That won the Pulitzer twenty years ago. So I think just because it's in cartoon or comic form, I don't think it diminishes it. Using the metaphor of the superhero actually adds weight and gravity to a lot of the stories that we tell.

Who are your Asian American role models?

Jeff: We talk about how there's so few Asian American heroes but I think there have been a ton of them, it's just that they don't get the kind of public avowal in the media.

People who live and walk amongst us and are part of our history who are terrific role models. As you page through this book, you end up getting a sense that there's a real world here of Asian Americans who should be acknowledged with the same kind of reverence we use for Superman and Batman.

Keith: There's one person we paid homage to in the book. Most people know the story of the 100th/442nd Nisei battalion. What most people don't know is that the commander of that unit was Korean American and he volunteered because despite the fact that he wasn't interned, he had encountered discrimination as a career army guy and had common cause with his Japanese American brethren. Despite being fully aware of the historical conflicts between Koreans and Japanese, he said, 'We're all Americans. We're going to fight this war together' and continued to be a leader both in the military and in the Asian American community for the rest of his life. He's proof there is something that Asian Americans have in common. We can transcend historical, ethnic, cultural differences 'cause we're fighting for a common cause.

Person on the Street

What did you like best about working at AARCC this year?



Elisa Lim
Campus Outreach

Whenever I walk in the door, everyone saying "Hey Elisa" made me always feel welcomed and at home. Yay. :)

Advice: Even through the toughest times, life goes on so stick with all the troubles; it's worth it in the end.



Brandon Lee
Community Outreach

Getting to know, and interacting with, an unforgettable group of individuals.

Advice: Plan as far ahead as possible!



Jung Kim
Graduate Assistant

Working at AARCC let me meet a lot of fun, different people. Plus, there was always food in the office!

Advice: Work hard and laugh alot!



Joyce Yin
Publications

The people, the food, the conversations, I pretty much love everything about AARCC. AARCC has become my second home & I'll miss it a lot! :]

Advice: Plan ahead and schedule your time efficiently!

Need a job for next academic year? Join us at AARCC!

We are looking for motivated, enthusiastic, and organized students to work at AARCC for 2009-2010! AARCC is a great place to work, develop skills, and learn more about Asian American issues—plus we think we're fun people to hang out with! We have three positions available that will start in the fall semester:

Community Outreach: Responsible for working on programs that connect UIC students to Chicagoland Asian American communities and organizations, including service projects and neighborhood tours.

Publications Coordinator: Responsible for coordinating AARCC publications such as AARCCConnections, the Asian American Student Resource Book, and event fliers.

Mentor Program Graduate Assistant: This position is reserved for graduate students and will be 10 hours a week for fall semester ONLY. The G.A. will assist in supervising undergraduate peer mentors, coordinating events, and other administrative tasks for the Asian American Peer Mentor program.

Each of these positions will also involve working on publicity, programming, and other tasks related to AARCC activities such as AAA Month. We anticipate these positions will be 10-15 hours per week, and welcome students on Work-Study.

More details as well as applications will be available soon in the AARCC Office or on our website and will be due Friday, April 10th. Interviews will take place before the end of Spring Semester. For more information, contact AARCC at 312-413-9569 or Corinne Kodama at ckodama@uic.edu.

1st Annual Asian American Knowledge Bowl!



This year's Asian American Studies, in collaboration with AARCC, will host the 1st UIC Asian American Knowledge Bowl competition. Student organization teams face off in this exciting quiz contest to win cash prizes for their respective orgs. Each team will consist of four members, and the questions will test the participants' knowledge

about Asian American history and culture. The Asian American Knowledge Bowl promises to be both educational and entertaining. It gives the campus community at UIC the opportunity to increase their knowledge of Asian Americans in a fun atmosphere with games and food.

**Wednesday, April 22nd
4 p.m.
Cardinal Room,
Student Center East.**

For more information, contact Surbhi Malik at smalik3@uic.edu.

Asian American Awareness Month

Asian American Awareness Month presents a series of events, talks, workshops, and movie screenings relating to issues of concern to Asian Americans. The aim of the month is both to increase campus awareness of Asian American concerns and to celebrate the diversity of the cultures and traditions of Asian Americans on campus.

Pick up your copy of the Asian American Awareness Month Poster today at AARCC!



For more information, please call AARCC at 312-413-9569 or visit aarcc.uic.edu

Asian American Studies Courses for Fall 2009

ASAM 123 Introduction to Asian American Literature—3hrs

Same as ENGL 123. Creative Arts, and US Society course.

27062 LCD 12:00pm—12:50pm MWF Helen Jun

ASAM 228 Sociology of Asia and Asian Americans—3 hrs

Same as ASST 228 and SOC 228. Prerequisite(s): SOC 100. Individual and Society, and US Society course.

26726 LCD 11:00am—12:15pm TR Anna Guevarra

ASAM 290 Special Topics in Asian American Studies: History of Asians in the United States—3 hrs

May be repeated to a maximum of 12 hours.

29009 LCD 5:00pm—7:50pm T Eric Tang

HIST 297 Topics in Culture: The South Asian Diaspora

LCD 2:00pm—3:15pm TR Rama Mantena

More courses to be announced!

For more information, contact Gayatri Reddy at gayatri@uic.edu.

AARCC Essay Contest Winners!

The Kamal Kishore Kapur Memorial Prize is awarded annually to an undergraduate student at UIC for an essay sharing a perspective on Asian American experiences. All essay submissions are judged anonymously by a panel made up of members representing the AARCC Advisory Board, AARCC staff, Asian American Studies faculty, and the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Asian Americans.

AARCC launched the essay contest in 2008 with a generous contribution by a donor who wanted to honor her grandfather's commitment to education that helps one find one's voice in the world and use it. The goal of the prize is to foster student engagement with social and political issues as a way to create new ways of knowing and being that will transform our community.

This year's essay prompt was "Asian Americans Under Construction." Please join us in congratulating the winners and all of the essay contest writers who honored the spirit of this award by taking seriously their voices as students and the vital role that students play in shaping our society.

- Karen Su,
AARCC Director

Here is a Brief Timeline of How I Became an Asian American and Why I Believe in Asian American Studies By: Vicky Lim (First Place)

Vicky Lim is an English major. The story of her life is written by Haruki Murakami in a short novel called Sputnik Sweetheart.

Fall 2006

My first semester at UIC. I didn't think about race much. I must have identified with the color-blind ideology, as if by pretending that I was just myself, without the physical features that mark me as an "other," would allow everyone else to see me for me. Except I was not even myself because I was just trying to fit in.

Spring 2007

One day, I walked through the quad without paying attention to the Speak Out, which, by just a few glances, I was aware was a fight for Asian American Studies at UIC. All I remember was walking fast and hearing statistics.

Later in my SOC 100 discussion, my TA was in disbelief over what a Dean had said regarding this fight. She said: you guys wanna know what he said? We said: what'd he say? She said that the Dean said: Asian students don't need their own program; they have the Honors College! This was before I thought about model minorities; so I scoffed because she scoffed, but I didn't realize further implications of what was said.

Fall 2008

Read *Shortcomings* by Adrian Tomine, and I really disliked Ben Tanaka, except, for a long time, I was Ben Tanaka. So I realized after reading the comic, that just because I pretend my race is invisible, it does not mean that others will too.

Took the seminar: Debunking the Myth of the Model Minority.

Presented at this conference with a panel on anti-racist work in Writing Centers.

Joined student groups for the first time: Feminists United, Asian American Coalition Committee, Radical Student Union. I like the people that I've met a lot.

Spring 2009

Taking Asian American Literature. I'm upset that half of my classmates do not seem to make the same efforts to participate, which doesn't add to the argument for a minor if some people disregard it as a cake study, which it is not, because a presence in the university is very significant. And I really like this class.

Will attend the Midwest Asian American Student Union Conference! Exciting!

Ate real sushi for the first time.

Camouflage by: Susan Kang (Second Place)

Susan is a second generation Korean American. Both her parents were born in Jeju, an island off the coast of Korea. They arrived in America in 1984 with dreams of a better future.

I was kidnapped and placed in what seemed to be a foreign land. Where to start?

In high school, I prided myself in being the sole Asian American friend among many. I suppose this does not carry much weight, due to the fact that the Asian population of my senior class was six. Hey, but that is how it has been my entire life. After being accepted to the University of Illinois at Chicago, UIC, I heard rumors that it was actually called the University of Indian and Chinese. Well, I am not that credulous. However, I was still shocked for what was to come.

My first day at UIC was nice, warm, and sunny. On a day like this, who would not be outside absorbing the last fleeting scent of summer? As I looked around, faces vaguely familiar began to come into focus. A language with varying pitches, that I did not comprehend, hit my eardrum like

a wave of bullets, creating mass chaos. Where am I? Who are these people? Then panic arose as I began to realize they were everywhere. My eyes scanned across the campus, and I gasped with horror when I realized they were familiar because they looked like me. Well, they did not look exactly like me, but they were Asian. I crossed over onto foreign grounds. I may be over-exaggerating a teensy bit but that was my freshman year.

Fast forwarding to my current sophomore year, I have learned a lot both academically and personally from that first memorable day of college. Taking my Asian Diaspora and Asian American Studies class and joining Servants, a Christian organization on campus, I realized that I am an Asian American under construction. I have yet to learn more and get in tune with my Asian side. I am American enough. I have learned

about the many culture differences between Asian and American people in my Asian Diaspora class, and read many South Asian novels such as *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali. I have learned about the hate crimes that innocent people, such as Vincent Chin, suffered due to their salient Asian features.

Now, on those sunny days, I see around me faces that share with me my history, my language, and my culture. I have learned much in my past two years here at UIC, but I do not think that I am ready to dispose of my yellow “Under Construction” sign. But it’s okay; it’s hardly noticeable and camouflages well with my skin.

Letter to Mother by: Syeda Asad (Honorable Mention)

Syeda is a sophomore, Pre-Med. She was born in India, came to America when she was 1.

Hello Mom, how are you? Oops, I meant Assalamualaikum. Sorry about that, I keep forgetting. I know you’re probably sitting on the custard cream leather sofa in our burgundy and gold living room, propped up against three saggy burgundy couch pillows clucking your tongue and nodding your head from side to side saying “these American kids- don’t know where they are from.” But Mom, don’t worry. We do know where we came from—me and the other three barn animals you claim are my sisters. I know about the fields of emerald-green that stretches so far, until it has no choice but to curve over gigantic bumps of earth. I know about the massive ball of glowing, radiating heat that takes up the expanse of the sky and gives everything and everyone an ethereal glow. That ball of fire is also what gives us a burnt caramel-toffee color. You think I don’t Mom, but I know about the colors of where I’m from. I’m familiar with the blinding fuchsias, the deep blood reds, the lemon yellows, the tangy oranges, and the emerald island greens. You think I don’t but I do know how it is to make a living where I come from. I know that you need to be ready to move before the sun wakes up. You need to have barely anything on your back—maybe a raggedy-cotton “shirt” torn in more places than it is whole, barely any seams left intact. Your pants feel like a burlap sack made for a seven year old. At least it doesn’t have a tendency to say, “Come heat, come, I will absorb you,” and to stick to your coffee brown skin creating rivers and streams of sweat. I know you work until the fire turns into an uncharted darkness but right before you almost fall weightless into the field because all you wanted was a taste of what over 70% of the Earth is made of. I also know that when you go home, you take a fistful of the hordes of rice you worked that day, I know you don’t think so, Mom, but I do know about the rhythmic beat of the dhol, emptying your body and your mind of all feeling safe for fluid-liquid movement under your skin. I know that this is the same rhythm that emanates from deep inside the earth of our land. I know that this same rhythm matches beat for beat with the one in your heart. I remember where I came from Mom, because you made sure I wouldn’t forget. Thank you.

UIC Asian American Resource and Cultural Center

Asian American Resource and Cultural Center

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To learn more about AARCC events, through
our listserv AARCC-News or to e-subscribe
to AARCCConnections, contact aarcc@uic.edu.



AARCC Resource Book Cover Contest

Want to win \$100?

Design the next Asian American Resource and Cultural Center's Resource Book cover.

Deadline: April 25th

Dimensions: 5.5" x 8.5"

Cover must include the following:

Front:

Asian American Resource Book 2009-2010

Back:

Presented By:

Asian American Resource and Cultural Center

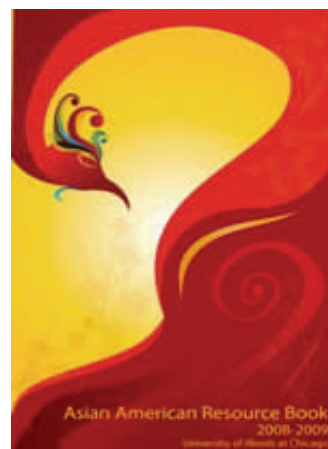
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826 S. Halsted Street (MC 203)

Chicago, IL 60607-7029

312-413-9569

aarcc.uic.edu



2008-2009 Resource Book

Please also include AARCC logo.

****For complete details visit aarcc.uic.edu or contact Corinne Kodama at 312-413-9653 or**

ckodama@uic.edu.