Asian American DH: Building Radical Communities through Justice-Oriented Praxis

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Description:
In recent years, ethnic studies scholars have carved an increasingly visible space for digital scholarship informed by and attuned to ethnic and critical race studies. Perhaps less visible amongst these interventions has been the work done in Asian/Asian American Studies. As many would contend, however, before digital humanities emerged as the field we recognize today, Asian Americanists had been researching and publishing on issues of digital labor, online communities, infrastructure, and networks. We situate this scholarship from Asian American Studies in the genealogy of Digital Humanities.

This forum brings together Asian Americanist faculty, librarians, and students to unpack and frame research, pedagogy, and praxis in both digital humanities *and* Asian American studies: What does Asian/Am DH look like? What form might a community of practice in Asian/Am DH take? How best can we support Asian Americanists, whose field is historically grounded in community organizing and activism, in applying DH methods to their scholarship? As we address these questions, we will foreground how Asian/Am DH, like other ethnic studies informed DH praxis, centers concerns of race, social justice, transnationalism, and community.

This forum will begin with facilitators each presenting 5-minute introductory talks to illuminate keywords related to themes and approaches to Asian/American Digital Humanities. In the ethos of public digital humanities, one of the conference themes for DH2020, this forum emphasizes inclusion, care, community, and anti-racist collaboration.

Opening keywords:
- **Networks** - How do Asian Americans on social networks and in digital media use rhetorics of authenticity to develop resistant narratives of identity? To what extent should Asian American digital communities be seen as countercultural, and how and when do they become legible as mainstream?

- **Activism** - What are the connections between the radical tradition of activism in Asian American Studies and the resurgent interest in social and racial justice in digital humanities communities?
- **Collaboration** - How can we interrogate collaboration and its politics in dh? How can we address the challenges of building and sustaining long-term and equitable partnerships? And how can we learn from historical cross-racial social justice alliances as we practice dh?
- **Accessibility** - What are the implications of using the sound spectrograph as an analytical research methodology or assistive pedagogical tool today? Given its historical formation as a means of British imperialism, how can we avoid the reproduction of violence inflicted upon indigenous and immigrant communities in North America?
- **Iteration** - Improvisation, change, and adaptation has been increasingly integral to dh practice. Knowing this, how can we best acknowledge the creativity, troubleshooting, and failures that accompany digital diasporic scholarship?

A substantial amount of time will be reserved to engage with audience members, who will be asked directed questions, and will also be encouraged to contribute to a collaborative document that we hope to eventually publish in an open format. We hope that this panel will provide space to build a community of practice and start conversations about a special interest group or caucus around Asian/Am digital humanities.

In Lieu of the Virtual Forum, 07/22/2020:
A lot has changed since October 2019 when we put together the Asian American DH Forum to discuss building radical communities through justice-oriented praxis. As COVID-19 cases started to emerge in the United States in February 2020, the White House started blaming the People's Republic of China for the global pandemic, and such false accusations led to the surge in hate crimes against Asians and Asian Americans in the U.S. Even being challenged by journalists about the consequences of such racist remarks, the President continues to willfully refer to the virus with various xenophobic terms including "Kung Flu" or "Chinese Virus" to divert the public attention from his dire mismanagement of this public health crisis.

Just as the current administration's rhetorics around the pandemic has incited the legacy of racialization that has long marked Asian Americans as the Yellow Peril and perpetual "foreigners," COVID-19 has also exacerbated the existing inequities bolstered by centuries-old systemic racism in the U.S. To date, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the lives of Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, as many work as frontline workers, rely on public transportations, suffer from housing insecurity, and lack basic social infrastructural needs such as access to clean running water and affordable health care. Meanwhile, rightwing militia groups brandished assault rifles on as they gathered to protest their state's order to shelter in place, a policy designed to collectively curve the infection rates. This was April 30th.

While ignoring the gun-bearing protestors refusing to quarantine or to wear masks in public, the police have continued to inflict violence upon Black lives. On May 25, 2020, a white police officer

named Derek Michael Chauvin murdered George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN, by keeling on Floyd's neck for nearly nine minutes. The killing of Floyd came after the killing of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor and many others before them at the hand of police and other state-sanctioned vigilantes. Such a heinous act of Floyd's killing captured on video and widely circulated on the Internet sparked public outrage. For Asian American communities, it was especially appalling to witness Tou Thao, an Asian American police officer, standing guard while Floyd suffocated for air. The moment woefully encapsulated how white supremacy has assured itself by pitting BIPOC communities against one another, and that anti-Blackness within Asian American communities must be dismantled.

The Black Lives Matter movement that saw a myriad of street protestors demanding immediate justice for Black communities has now turned into an abolitionist movement: to end excessive policing; to replace the police with community social services equipped to respond to the public health crisis; and to terminate the mass incarceration which disenfranchises Black Americans and sustains capitalism run on their prison labor.

While the call for "care not cages" has mobilized activists and allies to work towards abolition, however, ICE announced a new guideline on July 6th with its plan to deport international college students unless students attend in-person courses in Fall 2020. Like the police, ICE shows no regard for human life, as it has terrorized undocumented students on university campuses as they actively keep immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in crowded cages, even in times of COVID-19. This latest attempt of the xenophobic policy was meant to target a particular group of Chinese students as a political stunt, but it echoes the exclusionary anti-Chinese immigration policies of the 19th century and which take on new life in the age of coronavirus. Attacking international students allows the White House to demonstrate its misguided commitment to the "America First" ideology that blames immigrants for historic high rates of unemployment--just as the same administration tried to justify dismantling of the DACA program in the past--and claim COVID-19 as biological warfare fabricated by a foreign nation. These actions on the part of this administration all act as diversions, drawing attention away from the fact that the current administration's mismanagement of the public health crisis led us all here in the first place.

In a moment of heightened anti-Black and anti-Asian racism, our commitment to building radical communities through justice-oriented praxis is of vital importance. It could not have been more timely for us to engage in discussions with scholars, teachers, and activists in the field of digital humanities to forge our way forward by reintroducing Asian Americanists who have been doing the work that is attuned to ethnic and critical race studies. Asian American studies emerged out of and remain committed to Afro-Asian solidarity, and continue to work against U.S. imperialism and white supremacy in all forms.

At the same time, the constant assault from the racist White House coupled with the new normal of working and homeschooling in quarantine has been draining. We are tired. We have therefore decided to prioritize our wellbeing and community care over academic productivity, which has long

tasked BIPOC communities with emotionally taxing labor to address prolonged injustice in the U.S. and in our institutions without the necessary support.

Although we cannot engage in these dialogues with you in-person, we share this statement with our larger DH community with the added heartfelt wish that you all remain safe and well. We also hope that you take this time to reflect on your own positionality, your own actions, your own complicity, and consider ways that you can work towards racial justice.

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