



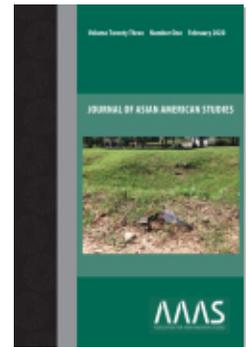
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*Illuminating Militarized Rupture: Four Asian American
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Dorothy Fujita-Rony

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ILLUMINATING MILITARIZED RUPTURE

Four Asian American Community-Based Archives

Dorothy Fujita-Rony

ABSTRACT. This essay argues for the importance of utilizing a framework of militarized rupture in analyzing the cultural narratives that shape the formations and meanings of many Asian American community-based archives. I focus upon four case studies: Aiko and John “Jack” Herzig’s collection of U.S. government documents regarding the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans; Fred and Dorothy Cordova’s development of the Filipino American National Historical Society and the National Pinoy Archives; the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine; and my own research gathering twentieth-century Indonesian American family materials in an interimperial context.

Introduction: Militarized Rupture versus Multicultural “Loss”

In multicultural narratives of Asian American migration to the United States, “loss” is often invoked as a byproduct of the immigration process. As the standard migration narrative tells us, Asian immigrants travel to the United States in search of the American dream to find better economic and political possibilities, especially for the sake of the next generation. Despite hardship and different kinds of barriers, families gain opportunities in the “land of freedom” through considerable sacrifice. In the process, however, there are major stages of “loss” felt by both the immigrant generation and their U.S.-born children. In particular, immigrants lose their familiar home culture to enter into their new home of the United States, and their U.S.-born children lose their parents’ languages, extended family,

and cultural knowledges that would have accompanied their lives in their parents' homeland. Yet, as the narrative goes, this hard work and sacrifice are worth it, as these individuals establish new lives, joining others as they begin their journeys in the multicultural United States. What is often missing in this analysis of "multicultural loss," however, is the fundamental and ongoing role of U.S. empire and militarism in producing these issues in the first place. My concern is that our primary focus on the emotional quality of "loss" leads to the deemphasis of other institutional or structural issues that produced this "loss," and relegates these issues to something an individual has to "get over" or move beyond. The focus on "loss" as a necessary part of the migration context privatizes these issues in this narrative of multiculturalism, locating responsibility in the individual, family, and community for not "passing on" languages or knowledges through intergenerational transmission.

I begin this essay by addressing this process of "multicultural loss" as a way to compare it to another analytical framework by which to consider these issues, which I want to characterize as "militarized rupture." I use the phrase "militarized rupture" to move our gaze from individual and familial responsibilities to "pass on" these knowledges. Instead, I want to direct our collective attention to how these issues are manifested through the larger processes of empire, militarism, capitalism, and war. Hence, my specific project in this essay will be to illuminate militarized rupture, by focusing on how these issues arise as constituent features in the development of most, if not all, Asian American community-based archives. In doing so, my intent is not to diminish in any way the affective qualities of "loss" as the rationale why communities set up their own archives, especially in terms of the passing of older generations and the need to preserve archival knowledge for future generations. However, I am concerned about how an overemphasis on "loss" fits so neatly within the framework of multiculturalism and naturalizes the ruptures caused by U.S. empire and militarism, subsuming them within a U.S.-bound migration narrative without fully accounting for U.S. global ambitions overseas.

To undertake my task, I begin by addressing common narratives about the nation-state and Asian Americans in archival formations, before analyzing how issues regarding militarization reveal themselves in four different case studies. If militarized rupture causes a loss of continuity and understanding, these archives then collect and bring together new frameworks and knowledges for greater clarity. I begin with the most known of Asian American archival collections to emerge from U.S. militarism, Aiko and John "Jack" Herzig's collection of U.S. government documents regarding the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans. I then continue my

argument with two other examples that are roughly contemporaneous in terms of their emergence in the 1980s: Fred and Dorothy Cordova's development of the Filipino American National Historical Society and the National Pinoy Archives, and the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine, which documents the experiences of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees due to U.S. militarism in the Vietnam War era. My last example focuses on my own research gathering twentieth-century Indonesian American family materials in an interimperial context, as that is the most recent manifestation of collections within this group of Asian American archives.

Before I embark upon my discussion in this essay, I register a disclaimer about my positionality and perspective as a humanities scholar in undertaking my analysis for this article. Humanities scholars and archival studies scholars typically approach the discussion of community-based archives from different vantage points, approaches that emanate from the integrity of their own specific fields. While I hope that this article may be of interest to practitioners in both disciplines, I emphasize that this article is focused upon considering the cultural narratives that shape the formations and meanings of Asian American community-based archival collections from a humanities perspective, rather than being a critique of principles and methodologies of archiving. I hope, however, that my consideration of these issues might help to engender more of a dialogue between our respective fields. In keeping with these distinctions, I also add a note about terminology. As I am referring to specific archival collections in my discussion and not to "the archive" in the broader, metaphysical sense; I utilize the term "archives" in keeping with archival studies scholar Michelle Caswell's critique regarding the too casual elision of the terms "archive" and "archives" by humanities scholars.¹

Combatting Narratives

In beginning to untangle these issues, it is important to establish that archives themselves are far from neutral, and as they organize knowledge, they develop epistemological processes that have tangible political results. Terry Cook argues that archives not only are repositories of evidence but also create memory. Rather than being "neutral repositories," archival materials in fact are "social and political constructs, each subject to mediation, interpretation, bias, and power relationships."² Furthermore, Michel-Rolph Trouillot names archival sites as instrumental in the narrativizing of history, as materials are gathered in "an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility."³ Hence, for Asian American communities,

archives are much more than a simple physical repository or a site of commemoration. Rather, as Long Bui argues, archives create cultural capital as well as serve as “an axiological site for thinking about national space itself,” giving us different insights into our understandings of the nation.⁴ As such, archives exemplify different kinds of contestations over the historical process, especially given their wide range in terms of political and economic resources. The most visible and powerful archives typically are institutional archives that emerge from the federal government or other sites of national power whose records document and justify institutional action. On the other end of the scale, as is characteristic of many Asian American archives as a genre, they might be collections organized through the efforts of communities that develop as counter-repositories to government, anthropological, military, university, or other institutional collections. Or they might fall somewhere in between, as will be demonstrated by the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine.⁵ These issues are crucial, for our relationship to archival collections shapes not only how knowledge is compiled about different groups, but also how knowledge is then produced and distributed. For Asian American communities, organizations like the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas in New York, and the South Asian American Digital Archives (SAADA; located online) establish a crucial historical and cultural intervention for documentation of these groups in U.S. culture, especially from the perspective of the communities themselves.

Moreover, in analyzing Asian American community-based archives, we also need to address the fact that multiculturalism typically has been naturalized as the dominant analytical framework by which to “read” Asian American community archives. However, multiculturalism also has its own political project, and is far from neutral as well. In the wake of progressive movements like civil rights and women’s liberation, other emerging campaigns like the women of color movement have challenged foundational conceptions regarding race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and other issues, putting forth a more radical sense of difference. But as these issues were incorporated into national culture in succeeding decades, a more mainstream model of multiculturalism emerged as the central accepted framework for these issues. Premised on issues of inclusion, this model presumes the centrality of the U.S. nation-state and its perspectives, and the incorporation of different groups within that U.S. nation-state rubric as a “nation of immigrants” to achieve diversity. As such, this iteration privileged a migration narrative of various communities coming to the United States to pursue the American dream and claim space within the nation-state, a narrative that very much shaped how Asian Americans

were positioned in U.S. culture. In doing so, multicultural ideology characterizes the U.S. nation-state as neutral and essentially democratic, and either deemphasizes or selectively characterizes the structures of power that fundamentally shape the relationship of communities to the U.S. in differential ways due to militarization.⁶ So, for example, the U.S. conquest of the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century, U.S. covert military actions in Laos during the 1970s, and the extended U.S. military presence in South Korea become relegated to being causal factors that propelled Asian migration to the United States in the first place, as opposed to being foundational realities that have continuing impact. In addition, there also are specific inflections of these kinds of narratives depending on the group, as demonstrated by Mimi Thi Nguyen's discussion of the United States as a "place of refuge" where Vietnamese refugees are bestowed, as Nguyen writes, "the gift of freedom".⁷ When discussed at the national level, community-based archives are often read within this multicultural framing, in the context of "adding difference" to the national discourse, with the underlying presumption that diversity is the ultimate goal of these kinds of endeavors. Even as Asian American community-based archives themselves might be structured on very different rationales such as challenging social and political injustice, they nevertheless regularly navigate mainstream perceptions of multiculturalism, whether on the level of political recognition or through seeking nonprofit funding.

In contrast, addressing the role of militarized rupture leads us to consider how Asian American archives themselves might be militarized constructs, which demonstrate how the U.S. political landscape has been constituted by U.S. military force and strategic expansion in the region and shaped by the transpacific flow of Americans overseas. Read in this manner, the militarized nature of many Asian American community-based archives emerges as foundational to the collection of Asian American history in the twentieth century, particularly because of the United States' abiding interest in the Pacific during this period. I want to underscore here that I am not arguing that these collections are military archives in terms of the scope or foci of their collections, but rather that their production is imbedded in what can be considered a militarized archival landscape due to U.S. interests in Asia and the Pacific. On the most fundamental level, the militarized relationship of the United States to different countries in Asia such as Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam during the twentieth century generated an outflow of documents, photographs, films, and other materials that would develop into their own archival collections in institutional settings like the National Archives. Some groups like Japanese Americans find their histories permanently yoked to U.S. military involvement in the

Pacific. For Japanese Americans, the power of the militarized archival landscape is so strong that even as archives like Densho broaden their focus beyond the war, the weight of gravity still pulls back to World War II, especially because of how the rationale and funding for these projects are so inextricably tied to government reparations for World War II injustice as well as the continuing resonance of these issues in contemporary times.⁸ Furthermore, these collections often are perceived through narratives that rationalize U.S. involvement overseas, such as the demand for Asian Americans to “prove” that they are worthy for inclusion in the U.S. nation-state through military sacrifice. These epistemologies are so imbedded in the discussion of specific communities that they require constant recognition and disentanglement, precisely because they become fundamental to the way in which Asian American history is constituted. For instance, in addressing U.S. campaigns in Korea during the Korean War, Grace M. Cho discusses how “the violence of U.S. militarism has been covered up through the reiterative practices of social scientific discourse” even as “the unconscious memory of trauma” interrupts and pushes back at this silencing.⁹ To give another example, YẾN LÊ Espiritu has written about the strategic amnesia and organized forgetting that envelopes U.S. understandings of the Vietnam War and incorporates Vietnamese Americans.¹⁰ Furthermore, the covert nature of U.S. involvement in Asia still leaves much that remains undiscussed and unspoken, as Geoffrey Robinson says regarding U.S. government reaction to the mass incarceration and killings in 1965–1966 in Indonesia, for instance.¹¹ One major consequence is that Indonesian American history becomes a largely *absent* history, not only due to our small population numbers within the United States, but also because U.S. involvement in Indonesia during the Cold War primarily relied on more covert means of intervention.

How then, do you build and utilize archives based on these issues caused by war and militarism? To explore these issues, I turn now to a closer examination of four archival formations in order to emphasize how each of these archives was shaped by militarized rupture. All of the archival projects are community based in different ways, emerging in alternative spaces with their own counter-epistemologies. The first archive, created by Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga and Jack Herzig, is a collection drawn from U.S. government documents housed in the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and demonstrates how the militarized production of records by the U.S. government can become the basis for political justice on a national level. The second example, the National Pinoy Archives of the Filipino American National Historical Society, is an archival intervention shaped by the selective absence of Filipinx Americans in official archives like the

National Archives, and underscores the imbedded knowledges produced by U.S. militarism on local and community levels. The third case study, the Southeast Asian Archive at the University of California, Irvine, has become a launching ground for what I call “cultural reckonings” from younger generations who engage with the militarized landscape of Asian American archives to produce writings and other productions that challenge and reframe these issues. And the fourth example centers on a transnational and interimperial Indonesian American family archive organized through the labor of my grandmother and mother, an intergenerational archive that has been profoundly shaped by not only U.S. militarism but also Dutch, German, and Japanese empire. I have chosen these archival collections not only because they represent different kinds of institutional and community-based configurations, but also because of my own personal familiarity with all four collections due to my interest in Asian American public history since the 1980s.

Challenging the State: The Archival Activism of Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga and Jack Herzig

I begin my discussion of these archival formations at the National Archives itself within Washington, D.C., literally the archival heart of the U.S. nation-state. The militarized rupture here was due to the U.S. government’s decision to incarcerate Japanese immigrants and their American-born children as enemy aliens, tearing them away from the homes and businesses that they had built in California and other parts of the West Coast, in the face of institutionalized exclusion due to race. For decades after the World War II Japanese American prisons were closed, the dominant narrative in U.S. culture was that the camps were a “mistake.” It thus took several years of legal organizing, including the finding of key archival evidence by activists like Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga and Jack Herzig, to push the government into admitting that it deliberately undertook Japanese American exclusion with full knowledge that it was not a military necessity. Part of the reason that their work was so exemplary is that their archival activism located and curated new legal evidence within official government records that already existed in plain sight within public view, thus transforming the official story put forth about the Japanese American incarceration, as Thomas Fujita-Rony argues.¹² While the other archival collections that I profile also utilize government records as part of their composition, the rest of them emerged in alternative spaces outside of the federal government, unlike the collection amassed by the Herzigs.

Decades before, at the outbreak of World War II, Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga was sent as a nineteen-year-old to the inland concentration camp of

Manzanar, where she would be imprisoned for three years while a young mother. Regarding her experiences following her release, she recalled, "Like many other members of the Nisei generation, despite having been forced into compliance with government powers, I had survived the trauma of our mass expulsion and imprisonment during World War II".¹³ But the memories endured, and so did Herzig-Yoshinaga's sense of being wronged. Watching the political unrest of the 1950s and 1960s crystallized Herzig-Yoshinaga's sense of injustice, pushing her to recognize the parallels in her own life in addition to her incarceration during World War II.¹⁴ After moving to New York City when her incarceration ended, Herzig-Yoshinaga became a clerical worker for decades, which would provide her with the knowledge and know-how to later catalogue and analyze government records. As her political consciousness grew, she gravitated toward political movements, such as becoming involved with other Japanese American activists in the group Asian Americans for Action (AAA) in her New York City home. After her retirement in 1978, she married Jack Herzig, a retired U.S. lieutenant colonel who had served in combat in the Pacific as a paratrooper during World War II, and they made their home in Virginia, close to the National Archives. She originally intended to look for family records from the World War II period, but author Michi Nishiura Weglyn, who also had been incarcerated and wrote *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps*, urged Herzig-Yoshinaga to expand her research. In pursuit of documents the Herzigs journeyed to sites across the country, such as the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York; the Hoover Institute at Stanford; and the San Bruno and Laguna Niguel locations of the National Archives.¹⁵ Throughout this period, Herzig-Yoshinaga continued to comb through the immense collection of the National Archives, page by page, to unearth a paper trail documenting that the U.S. government knowingly incarcerated the Japanese American community. It was a full-time job from Monday to Saturday for fifty to sixty hours a week for years. Herzig-Yoshinaga examined the documents with a meticulous eye and an elaborate and painstaking cross-referencing system that grouped documents by subject, date, and physical site.¹⁶

Herzig-Yoshinaga notes that when she sought work at the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) in 1981, she and Jack Herzig already had acquired about eight thousand documents relevant to the commission's work. Hence, their personal archival collection became the base for the resources utilized by the CWRIC. Not only did Herzig-Yoshinaga assign a CWRIC number to each document and its citation or source, she also provided a short compilation of essential points. In doing so, she developed and indexed a catalogue of documents

that formed the foundation for the commission's collection of evidence.¹⁷ In 1982, her perusal of "hundreds of thousands of pages of documents" showed that the U.S. Army had lied about the "military necessity" for the Japanese American concentration camps.¹⁸ The Herzigs' research was fundamental to multiple legal campaigns, including the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR), which put forward a class action lawsuit, *William Hohri, et al., v. U.S.A.*, as well as the campaigns for the writ of coram nobis petitions for Fred Y. Korematsu, Gordon K. Hirabayashi, and Minoru Yasui who, in 1942, had sought to challenge the constitutionality of the mass removal and incarceration. Evidence was discovered that federal officials had committed perjury before the wartime Supreme Court in these cases and that the government had falsified, suppressed, altered, and destroyed critical evidence. Lawyers successfully argued the cases as immense violations of civil rights and illegal power wielded by the government.¹⁹ Over these decades of research, the Herzigs kept the base of documents in their apartment, generously allowing researchers to examine them and even pulling them out for researchers' specific projects because of their knowledge of the documents. National Archives staff like Aloha South even referred researchers to the Herzigs because of their compendious knowledge of the documents.

In negotiating the vast files related to World War II, Herzig-Yoshinaga also analyzed the meanings of the documents and the language that government officials employed, with expertise from her decades as an administrator and her politicized experience as a former prisoner.²⁰ In her 2009 essay "Words Can Lie or Clarify," she took the U.S. government to task for the misleading way in which government terms were deployed. As a CWRIC researcher, Herzig-Yoshinaga regularly encountered the opaque language utilized by the government to hide their wrongdoing, as she notes: "During the course of my work as a CWRIC researcher I learned that 'relocation center,' 'nonaliens,' and 'evacuation' were only a few of many euphemisms that were deliberately used to obscure and conceal what was done to American citizens under the fraudulent rationale of 'military necessity.'"²¹ One of the biggest issues was the use of the term "concentration camp" to address the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans, as it is commonly used to refer to the Nazi death camps in Europe during World War II. Herzig-Yoshinaga and others pushed for the use of the term for historical accuracy, not only showing its employment by government officials during World War II but also underscoring how "concentration camp" itself was a euphemistic term utilized by the Third Reich for what were really "death camps."²² As Mira Shimabukuro explains, "Herzig-Yoshinaga rhetorically attended the National Archives," discerning the significance of

and reframing source materials in her and Jack Herzig's activism for social justice.²³ Although decades of users had not found sufficient evidence, it was the archivist-activists Aiko Yoshinaga-Herzig and Jack Herzig whose finding and arranging of this evidence resulted in the production of new meanings and interpretations.

The archives built by the Herzigs thus became its own political space, not only as a resource for a legal team challenging the U.S. government in terms of Japanese American incarceration, but then also in its later incarnation as a university-based collection now housed at UCLA. By compiling documents from several different collections, the Herzigs curated possibilities for more comprehensive ways of seeing the Japanese American incarceration through their dedication and perseverance. When Aiko and Jack Herzig moved to Los Angeles from Virginia in the 2000s, the boxes came with them, transported in a U-Haul truck they drove across the country. Eventually they donated this collection to UCLA, where it resides in UCLA Library Special Collections, in "219 boxes, 21 shoe boxes, and 2 oversize flat boxes", in a sense "relocated" back home to communities in California that were targeted for this racial and militarized exclusion.²⁴ Their efforts underscore not only the long reach of militarization in shaping Asian American archives but also the possibilities of reclaiming these records for a community's own purposes to achieve political justice at the level of the federal government.

Negotiating Empire: The Filipino American National Historical Society

In my second example, I profile the Filipino American National Historical Society (FANHHS), a national community-based endeavor that is located outside of a government or university structure, among a group of archives that developed out of the social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s to rectify the absence of underrepresented groups in the U.S. national historical experience. Through FANHHS, the Cordovas generated materials to address the historical amnesia about Filipinx Americans in the United States, particularly as former colonials, and the relative absence of Filipinx American history in other archives. The militarized rupture in this case was caused by U.S. movement across the Pacific in its search for colonial political possessions and new sites for the United States to expand its strategic control in the Pacific. As a result, U.S. military bases in the Pacific and the utilization of Filipinx as military workers in sites like the U.S. Navy were critical in U.S. twentieth-century military campaigns. This militarized relationship of U.S. empire is reflected in the extensive relevant collections available in the National Archives, such as records of the Bureau of Insular

Affairs, the government branch that oversaw U.S. colonial possessions, as well as in records available through various military branches.

Reflecting on the U.S.-Philippines relationship gives us a different lens by which to read the important work of FANHS and the National Pinoy Archives (NPA) in its documentation of this militarized historical terrain, beyond the migration model in which the Filipinx American experience is often relegated. The case of FANHS reminds us to insist upon addressing the militarized history of Asian American communities, even despite the national cultural inclination to read Filipinx as “immigrants” as opposed to “postcolonials.” In the case of Filipinx Americans, it is important to consider how the narrative of the United States as a “nation of immigrants” renders invisible how so many Filipinx traveled to the United States as U.S. colonials following the U.S. military conquest of the Philippines, which left hundreds of thousands of Filipinx dead. This early generation not only struggled against the societal barriers they found as colonials, but also endured widespread race and class discrimination and, particularly for women, gender discrimination. For example, future archivist Fred Cordova grew up in California, an adopted child of migrant workers who were active in the Stockton community. Cordova’s strong working-class consciousness was shaped by the challenges he faced, and as someone who was born while his parents’ homeland was still under U.S. colonization. He remembers attempting “to wash the brownness off my hands” when he was in fourth grade, and questioning the barriers that he encountered: “Why did I live in a box car? Why did I live in a bunk house that you could see through the walls? Why was it that we were forever always in the camps?”²⁵

As chronicled by Terese Guinsatao Monberg, rather than focusing on records already in existence like the Herzigs, Dorothy and Fred Cordova essentially created a resource base through the development and compilation of new archival materials. The strength of their efforts lay not only in their address of national subjects such as the U.S. Navy, but also in their insistence on documenting local and individual experiences as informed by their grassroots organizing over the previous decades. Active in the civil rights community in the 1950s and 1960s, the Cordovas began the Filipino Youth Activities of Seattle, Inc. in 1957, and were instrumental with the Young People’s Far West Conferences during the 1970s. Then in 1971 and 1972, a group of Asian American social workers ran a tri-city “Demonstration Project for Asian Americans” (DPAA) funded by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to analyze and seek advocacy for the Japanese American, Korean American, and Samoan communities in Los Angeles, the Chinese American community in San Francisco, and the Filipinx American community in Seattle. Dorothy Cordova was hired for

the Seattle office, and when funding was finished and the Los Angeles and San Francisco offices closed up, she continued as an unpaid staff member until new financial support could be secured. A few years later, in 1974, the Washington State Archives approached Cordova with the possibility of documenting Filipinx Americans as part of a larger state project utilizing the then relatively new practice of oral history collection. Thus, Cordova led a research team conducting groundbreaking research, with focus on Filipinx Americans who had migrated in the first decades of the twentieth century. Eventually, Dorothy Cordova and others gathered more than three hundred oral histories and mini-journals, in the process creating a substantial and innovative collection on Filipina American women. Dorothy Cordova also secured National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funding in 1979 to research and develop programs around Filipinx Americans and Korean Americans, for which she created and led a national team of researchers, many of whom were community-based.²⁶

When NEH decided not to fund DPAA for a third year, Dorothy Cordova founded and became executive director of FANHS in 1982 to move forward the nationwide networks that had developed around Filipinx American history research on both the university and community levels. The infrastructure created during the DPAA and NEH eras would prove instrumental for the eventual founding of FANHS in 1982 and the creation of the NPA. FANHS was organized in 1982, with the first chapter chartered by the state of Washington in 1985, with trustees from twelve states. Based on Dorothy Cordova's research, Fred Cordova wrote and published *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* in 1983. In addition to being the founding FANHS president, Fred Cordova also was the archivist for the NPA housed with the FANHS National Chapter.²⁷ Through regular biennial conferences, the FANHS journal, and the NPA, FANHS continues to forge connections among different kinds of researchers and provide an alternate space for community-based researchers in light of the relations of power that traditionally structure how knowledge is made and disseminated.²⁸ In particular, with its emphasis on organizing around the chapter levels, and highlighting the different sites that the chapters represent, FANHS underscores the integrity and strength of local experience and knowledge, a prominent feature of community archiving.

Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd articulate that community archiving also is a form of resistance and activism, as differentiated from "official" archives at local or state levels. As a result, independent archives typically face different issues of economic survival and independence, as well as ownership of and access to resources and records.²⁹ In the case of the NPA, remaining independent and easily accessible within the neighborhood is a

foundational principle. Occupying two rooms in the FANHS national office in Seattle, FANHS and its archives are based in the heart of the Central District, where Dorothy Cordova grew up. Inside the archives, the materials are organized in boxes by subject. Fred Cordova spent years patiently clipping news articles and arranging materials, developing the base of materials that he knew was crucial not only for the present community, but also for future community members and researchers. One of the important features of the collection is that Filipinx Americans are encouraged to start their own file in the archives, another way that the collection relies on participatory archiving. Although other institutions have expressed interest in acquiring the collection, FANHS has chosen to maintain the NPA's independence, knowing that space and location matter to would-be patrons who might be reluctant to visit a university archives.³⁰

Analyzing the militarized nature of Asian American archives directs our gaze to consider how these issues are specifically embodied in the NPA in its subject files, such as through the experience of Filipino veterans from World War II in the Bataan Association of Southern California subject file or the women represented in the War Brides subject file who migrated after marrying servicemen in the U.S. armed forces. Another point to consider in regard to these files is their temporal quality, which is continuous over many different eras, especially as the Philippines was one of the most forward U.S. military spaces within the Pacific until the United States closed Clark Air Base in 1991 and Subic Bay Naval Base in 1992. Importantly, these files demonstrate not only the significance of specific military engagements through subject files like World War I and World War II but also how this militarized history is remembered in the present day, such as a War Booty subject file that documents a 1996 protest over the display of booty taken by the U.S. military during the Philippine-American War at the turn of the century. Subject files also document activist organizations that resisted the Marcos administration during the martial law era in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Movement for a Free Philippines, National Committee for the Restoration of Civil Liberties in the Philippines, and National Coordinating Committee of the Anti-Martial Law Movement (Philippines). In addition, there are files that document the continued role of military service as an occupation for the Filipinx American community, including the Fil-Am Marines Association, U.S., the Filipino American Military Medical Officers Society, and the Filipino-American Naval Officers Association. These issues of militarization also pervade the archives in less obvious ways. It is no accident, for instance, that the geography of Filipinx Americans as evidenced in the archives can be read as militarized, such as the heavy representation of communities who live in or near military bases, issues that

are subsequently reflected in chapters of the organization in Seattle, San Diego, and Hampton Roads, Virginia. This phenomenon is further reflected in the files of individuals, especially through subheadings on the front of many individual files naming military branches, revealing the common role of military service within the community. This topography of subject headings and subheadings underscores the militarized archival landscape in which Asian American history is produced, and that seeing militarism merely as a causal factor for migration becomes a form of containment.

Generative Spaces: The Southeast Asian Archive

The third example, the Southeast Asian Archive, is a community and university collaboration located at the University of California, Irvine, that primarily chronicles the militarized migration and consequent community formations of Vietnamese Americans, Laotian Americans, and Cambodian Americans in Orange County, the state of California, and the United States more generally.³¹ This archive literally emerged out of war and the growth of a Southeast Asian refugee diaspora. As such, the Southeast Asian Archive is a response to the militarized rupture and violence caused by U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia during the U.S. Cold War.

Rupture for the communities documented by the Southeast Asian Archive is profound and traumatic due to the nature of the refugee experience, especially as so many were fleeing military violence and death. Many of these community members came with few possessions, surviving separation from and loss of other family members on their journey to the United States. These hardships not only create silences within the community, but also shape the kinds of stories that community members want to share in the context of their U.S. lives.³² As Khatharya Um writes, "In the diaspora, this historical trauma, which registers its presence in the refugee body, the fractured families, and the destabilized institutions, is made even more acute by what is, for most, not only a forced severance from their homeland but also permanent exile. As the body moves, where does memory live?"³³ Hence, for organizations like the Southeast Asian Archive, preserving stories and artifacts related to these experiences requires deliberate political strategy.

To more fully understand the significance of the Southeast Asian Archive, it is crucial to understand the relative lack of representation of the communities it represents in other archives, and how archives generate discourse about Asian American history and its significance. Turning to our central national repository, the National Archives, here is a list of what is produced when entering these related terms into the National Archives

catalog: "Vietnam" (128,047 records), "Vietnam military" (58,886 records), "Laos" (14,000 records), "Cambodia" (9,018 records), "Vietnam War" (11,747 records), "Vietnamese Americans" (3,808 records), "Cambodian Americans" (716 records), and "Laotian Americans" (323 records).³⁴ By numbers alone, the emphasis is on records "over there" in Southeast Asia as opposed to "here" in the United States. Even so, for someone researching the history of Southeast Asian Americans in the United States, the last three searches on ethnic American communities might seem promising. However, many of these records emphasize the relationship of the United States and Southeast Asia, including military campaigns and the evacuation of refugees as opposed to the lived experience of Southeast Asian American communities in the United States. This balance is slowly changing, to the credit of those advocating for Asian Pacific American history in the kinds of documents collected by the National Archives. However, this archival absence reflects, in the words of Long Bui, how Southeast Asian Americans like Vietnamese Americans historically have been "archival others." In his investigation of a Vietnam War-focused archives in Texas, Bui documents that the absence of the Vietnamese themselves was foundational: "The database searches based on keywords like 'Vietnamese' or 'Vietnamese American' produced photos, interviews, and military records, mostly from U.S. veterans but none from the Vietnamese."³⁵ Finally, when a staff member suggested that Bui try the keyword "gook," he was able to discover Vietnamese people in the archival record, as revealingly, this was how the Vietnamese were characterized in donated materials.³⁶

In contrast, the Southeast Asian Archive was opened in 1987 through the Libraries of UCI to center the experience of Southeast Asian Americans themselves. The archives maintains archival collections connected to migrants from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam, with some resources on groups like the *lu Mien* and the *Cham*, along with materials regarding country of origin and migration to other communities around the world. Unlike other university-based collections that develop through faculty research, curricula, or alumni donations, the archives was the idea of Dr. Pham Cao Duong, who was a former history professor at the University of Saigon. The founding librarian for the Southeast Asian Archive was Anne Frank, who at that time was responsible for Orange County materials as well. Originally, the collection began its life in a few file cabinet drawers in the basement of the library. Doctor and author Dr. Vu Dinh Minh, who solicited donations internationally in 1987, gave a collection of Vietnamese-language books, and was able to secure three thousand dollars from the Vietnamese American Foundation for further library acquisitions. Early news coverage from the *Orange County Register* and the *Los Angeles Times*

also sparked donations locally, nationally, and even internationally. Soon, more materials were added to this initial base, including theses, books and other monographs, government and agency reports, unpublished works, media resources, and other ephemera. Especially important were the donations of primary materials such as photographs, correspondence, and other personal items. In addition to these written materials, the archives also has collected a significant number of paintings, cultural artifacts, and other material culture.³⁷

From its space in the basement, the archives then was moved into its own six-hundred-square foot reading room in the 1990s, and then finally into the new Orange County and Southeast Asian Archive (OC & SEAA) space in the UCI Libraries' Gateway Study Center. As the present curator for the Southeast Asian Archive for the UCI Libraries, Thuy Vo Dang prioritizes which organizational and individual records to collect and is building donor ties by working with individuals and community groups. Since the opening of the OC & SEAA, Vo Dang manages the archives space, supervises programs to enable people to utilize the collections, and offers instruction using the archival collections for students at UCI and beyond. The Southeast Asian Archive additionally has a close relationship with Viet Stories, formerly the Vietnamese American Oral History Project, which started in 2011 (Vo Dang was its inaugural project director) with support from the Department of Asian American Studies. While the Southeast Asian Archive now is housed in Special Collections, online access to the collection can be gained through the Online Archive of California (OAC) and the SEAAdoc project, which presents a collection of materials for elementary to community-college-level students to learn more about populations from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.³⁸ Now the largest collection of its kind in the country, the Southeast Asian Archive continues to build its collection steadily. Part of its significance is that it remains community-oriented even despite its university base. For the Southeast Asian Archive, establishing relationships with community groups and members is foundational, and often can span years. Thus, supporting the efforts of groups to collect and document their own histories, whether or not the organizations or individuals decide to donate materials to the archives, is pivotal to Thuy Vo Dang's work. In that way, the Southeast Asian Archive builds a space of intervention for the future, even as new generations within different communities come of age and realize the importance of the Southeast Asian Archive as a repository for memory.

While the Southeast Asian Archive is a crucial resource for scholars from around the world who are interested in researching the Southeast Asian diaspora, I would argue further that the archives performs a pivotal

community-based function that addresses the effects of militarized rupture, one that is often seen in other Asian American community-based archives. The archives also has emerged as an alternative space for intergenerational transmission and communication across the silences that stretch across institutional repositories and family memory, which has led to a generative outpouring of new forms of cultural production by younger Southeast Asian Americans in a kind of “cultural reckoning.” Militarized rupture is foundational to these issues, even as younger generations explicitly seek to address the silences within families and institutional archives caused by militarism. For example, contributing artist Trinh Mai created one installation called “Quiet” that was inspired by a box of letters in the Southeast Asian Archive shown to her by Vo Dang. These letters and photographs were sent to an international agency by parents desperate to find their missing children after the Fall of Saigon. Mai hung ninety-two white cotton sashes, each with a person’s name and picture. Utilizing a typewriter, Mai wrote out the letter that had been sent, and provided an answer to it. As expressed in art, these imagined records enable people to connect with the past so the missing could be remembered, and their memory carried into the future. In replicating these letters and then writing an answer to them, Trinh Mai was providing a space for closure, healing, and acknowledgment, remembering the missing through these imagined records.³⁹ Trinh Mai’s work not only suggests the power of cultural production, but also underscores the role of the militarized archives in our present lives. Mai’s work is just one of many examples of how younger generations have utilized and been inspired by the Southeast Asian Archive to challenge militarized rupture. For instance, utilizing collections from the Southeast Asian Archive, UCI graduate student Ravi Seng Ly wrote about the profound nature of family photographs for Cambodian Americans who have escaped genocide, where the everyday and the mundane becomes a gift and an evocation of humanity.⁴⁰ Another UCI graduate student, Sophaline Chuong, explored the archival collections of the Long Beach–based community organization Khmer Girls in Action as well as the UCI Southeast Asian Student Association to write about how young women’s leadership bridges the intergenerational silences wrought by Cambodian genocide and refugee migration to the United States.⁴¹ Hence, the labor of Mai, Seng Ly, and Chuong demonstrates how the Southeast Asian Archive serves as an alternative political space for younger generations, as they come to terms with the past and carry its lessons into the future. While militarized ruptures render intergenerational transmission of memory especially fraught, the Southeast Asian Archives serves as a generative space for both older and younger generations alike, transforming the militarized archival landscape

that these communities inhabit. These issues reminds us that militarized rupture has an impact not only on those who directly experienced its effects, but also on younger generations who must contend with its legacies.

An Archives in the Making: A Transpacific Indonesian American Family Collection

In this last case study, I discuss an archival reconciliation in progress that actually sparked my initial interest in the militarized nature of Asian American community-based archives and that demonstrates the importance of moving beyond the U.S. national context to address archival projects across empires and nations.⁴² A few years ago, my now eighty-seven-year-old mother told me that she wanted to write down stories of her father, who had been killed in wartime battle when the Dutch tried to retake Indonesia in July 1947. His death was a military rupture to the family archives in its most stark form. As the oldest family member who remembered the pre-World War II years, my mother hoped to preserve her memories so that knowledge of her father would not be forgotten by immediate family members, a process that led to her compiling her autobiographical narrative. Building on my more than thirty years of work with community-based archives, we began an archival journey that eventually became both transpacific and transatlantic. First, starting from our home base in Southern California, I scanned my mother's personal collection of several hundred photographs and documents. Subsequently, we took three trips with other family to my grandfather's home village in North Sumatra, where our work included recovering and moving papers and photographs from the ancestral home so they could be kept safely by family members in Jakarta. My grandmother was a meticulous memorykeeper, and maintaining photographs, documents, and other artifacts always was an integral part of her labor for the family. Even so, many of the earlier documents and photographs already were gone. During World War II and the Japanese occupation, one of my grandfather's patients had warned my grandparents that they were slated to be killed as the Dutch-educated elite, and urged them to hide all traces of their status. As a result, my grandfather, who had been an amateur photographer since his early days as a young doctor, buried the family photographs and documents. Luckily, my grandparents' lives were spared before the military orders could be carried out. But when my grandfather went to recover the family's archives, he found that they had been destroyed by their exposure to moisture in the ground and were not recoverable. The destruction of these family's photographs and documents for the very survival of family members vividly underscores the archival ruptures wrought by militarism, and what it means to have an "archives

of absence," a phrase that was suggested to me by historian Susie Woo in reflecting upon her own family's collection after the ravages of the Korean War. The materials of these archives of absence are photographs, documents, and other artifacts that can be remembered and imagined but can never physically be recovered, a process that is familiar to so many Asian American communities who have undergone experiences of war in recent generations.

In my family's case, we were lucky in that there were documents and photographs that did survive in other sites, and after World War II, both my grandmother and my mother continued their work of women's memorykeeping for the family during the next several decades. Performed as gendered labor within the family context, their devoted and meticulous compilation ensured that the past would be carried forward to the future, a process that was especially important in my mother's Toba Batak ethnic clan in which she is a sixteenth generation descendant of our originary ancestor. My grandmother's and mother's efforts chronicle the family's twentieth-century interimperial journey as they encountered the multiple foreign powers that entered their lives in Indonesia: the Netherlands, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Nevertheless, the militarized ruptures in archival record are profound in nature, not only because of the physical violence and occupation of empires, but also because of the consequent linguistic impositions they instituted, and the spatial distribution of the records across both the Pacific and the Atlantic. The reason I address these issues now is to underscore not only the ruptures created through these historical events but also the changes in languages required. Poised at the interface of multiple empires in the first half of the twentieth century, my mother not only learned the family's ethnic language of Toba Batak but also attended school in different linguistic curriculums as well over the course of her educational career in Indonesia. The family awareness of the crucial nature of language also shaped her learning English, which her father began teaching her and her brother during the Japanese occupation. Our investigation of Indonesian American history through the documentation of our family thus became an interimperial process. We not only analyzed materials that were held in the United States in personal and institutional collections but also traveled to the ancestral village in North Sumatra to search the family archives. In addition, we visited the collections of colonial officials who had administered the Toba Batak region at Leiden University in the Netherlands as well as the Rhenish Mission archives in Wuppertal, Germany, as German Lutheran missionaries had engaged in conversion efforts among the Toba Batak.⁴³

This history has emphasized to me, as an Asian American studies scholar, the role of the United States in an interimperial context, first acting as an “adjacent empire,” as I term it, and later emerging as a dominant empire following World War II. The United States was profoundly interested in Indonesia in the early twentieth century, especially because of its investment in exporting oil and rubber for the burgeoning U.S. car industry.⁴⁴ Following the United States’ emergence as a world leader during the global Cold War, Indonesia also took on greater political significance—before 1965, even more so than Vietnam—especially with the growth of decolonization and the competition of both the United States and the Soviet Union for political influence.⁴⁵ Through both overt and covert activities, the United States established its claims on Indonesia, which affected my family’s later labor in the United States not only as language teachers and cultural informants but also as students. These issues are key in our building of Asian American archives because they remind us of the importance of recognizing U.S. military activity whether or not it is visible or acknowledged, especially as it is too often deemphasized in the more generalized immigration narrative that I have discussed. As Lisa Yoneyama underscores in *Cold War Ruins*, Cold War knowledges fundamentally shape U.S. cultural narratives of this period, and these implications continue to the present.⁴⁶ Similarly, Jodi Kim argues, “In other words, the Cold War is not only a historical period, but also an epistemology and production of knowledge, and as such it exceeds and outlives its historical eventness. This constitutes what I call *the protracted afterlife* of the Cold War.”⁴⁷ In the case of my family archives, it is important to underscore that these issues of the militarized archives not only are interimperial but also become transnational and diasporic, hence complicating how we understand the locations of the Asian American militarized archives and the cultural effects it produces. This example reminds us to consider how utilizing the concept of militarized rupture provides us with a lens of seeing to recognize historical truths that might otherwise go unacknowledged.

Conclusion

In the end, my intention is not to overdetermine the role of Asian American community-based archives and their impact upon the production of Asian American history solely through a militarized lens. Clearly, militarism is not the only source of rupture in the archives, as other issues like global capitalism, gender hierarchies, and racial oppression produce ruptures as well. However, I do emphasize that the twentieth-century relationship between the United States and Asia has been profoundly and consistently shaped

by U.S. military interests in Asia and the Pacific, whether overt or covert. Relying primarily on a framework of inclusion and diversity precludes our ability to do historical justice to either the archival collections that document the history of Asian Americans or the ways that militarism structured, and continues to structure, Asian American historical life. In particular, I have argued that rather than focus on “multicultural loss,” we should instead be alert to the processes of “militarized rupture” precisely to point to the larger forces, including war and empire, that forge these breaks in the archival record. These issues call for us to recognize and navigate this terrain as a persistent theme in Asian American history, especially because of the United States’ status as a world leader and its continued military activities at home and abroad.

Furthermore, these issues call us to consider how the militarized landscape inhabited by Asian American archives shapes our work for and relationship to archives. Because the U.S. national culture tends to privilege certain wars and interventions, this kind of analysis reminds us to consider the impact of militarism in shaping how and why communities are visible in the archives. For example, there is a marked difference in visibility for groups associated with World War II—incarcerated Japanese Americans in inland U.S. camps, for example—than in Cold War efforts such as the Korean War. This helps us to understand how a militarized archival landscape privileges some over others, especially if a group’s interaction with the U.S. government and empire led to legally sanctioned modes of entry, such as refugees, spouses of U.S. military personnel, or Asian orphans adopted by U.S. families.

Furthermore, in a related way, how do these issues have an impact on what histories are seen as even worthy of documentation? For example, how do specific geographic places like Bataan and Corrigedor in the case of the Filipinx American community, or a temporal date like April 30, 1975, which marks the Fall of Saigon for the Vietnamese American community, emerge as nodes for memory and archival production for different Asian American communities? Conversely, what happens to communities who might migrate through militarized conditions, but not be officially recognized as such through U.S. official activities? How might these nodes of memory be less recognized and commemorated, resulting in overlooked political knowledges regarding the role of U.S. militarism in Asia? How do these issues then shape how people remember and generate archival materials in later time periods, the sites of contestation that are enacted, or the personal narratives that emerge?

Thus, analyzing the militarized nature of Asian American community-based archives offers us a way to better comprehend how the Asian

American militarized archives profoundly organizes our labor as chroniclers of Asian American history, as well as having considerable impact on the knowledges that we produce. While the urge to “move past” the militarized history of the United States in Asia and its consequent effects on Asian American community formations is understandable, the reality is that U.S. empire is alive and well, and to ignore these issues does a disservice to the complexity of experiences felt within Asian American communities and passed onto younger generations. As Yến Lê Espiritu notes regarding the case of Vietnamese Americans, “Although I am certainly sympathetic with this desire to move beyond the war, I worry that such a decoupling of Vietnamese Americans from the Vietnam War risks assimilating Vietnamese into the apolitical and ahistorical category of ‘cultural diversity,’ in which Vietnamese become represented as just one of marker of cultural difference in the U.S. multicultural landscape.”⁴⁸ I see these issues realized too in the labor of the students whom I teach across different communities who engage in “cultural reckoning,” who directly confront and combat the ruptures of the militarized archives, and who strive to make sense of the complex and missing pieces that have been produced. By doing so, they do not “move past” but “move with” the militarized archives, both acknowledging as well as recontextualizing the power that militarism occupies in the formation of Asian American archives.

Last, as opposed to our gaze primarily resting on Asian American community formations to and within the United States, analyzing the effects of militarized rupture pulls us back to consider the role of migration in wider, global context. Although there are specific ways that the militarized archival landscape has manifested itself in an Asian American setting because of U.S. campaigns in the region, these issues push us to consider the ways that militarized rupture shapes the trajectories of other groups, such as Samoans or Guamanians. Furthermore, Asian American archival collections are not alone in their militarization, especially because of the widespread nature of U.S. activity overseas in other sites like the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Middle East. These issues too work in tandem with the growth of critical refugee studies and drive us to address how militarism affects Asian American groups in differential ways, and has major impact across the experiences of various groups. If critical refugee studies challenges our ideological investment in understanding the national space of the United States as a haven for refugees, the militarized archival landscape for Asian Americans reminds us to consider carefully what narratives are being preserved and promoted, and to what end. By taking on this task we are better able to address how the militarized nature of the U.S.-Asia relationship helps to imbue the very category of “Asian American” with

specific meaning, and what it reveals about the very formation of the political category “Asian American” itself.

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Notes

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3. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995; Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 51–52.
4. Long T. Bui, *Returns of War: South Vietnam and the Price of Refugee Memory* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), Locations 546 and 653 of 5492.
5. For an example of how archives show relations of power, in her discussion of the Frank Murphy Memorial Museum, Sarita See demonstrates that the several hundred artifacts collected as a result of Murphy's role as governor-general of the Philippines during the U.S. colonial period themselves narrate a tale of U.S. imperial control in the Philippines from the early decades of the twentieth century. Sarita Echavez See, *The Filipino Primitive: Accumulation and Resistance in the American Museum* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 71.
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12. Thomas Fujita-Rony, "'Destructive Force': Aiko-Herzig-Yoshinaga's Gendered Labor in the Japanese American Redress Movement," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 24, no. 1 (2003): 48–50.
13. Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, "Words Can Lie or Clarify: Terminology of the World War II Incarceration of Japanese Americans" (December 14, 2009), 4, www.nps.gov/tule/learn/education/upload/Words_Can_Lie_or_Clarify.pdf.
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15. *Ibid.*, 4–5; Michi Nishiura Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (New York: Morrow, 1976).
16. Fujita-Rony, "'Destructive Force.'"
17. Herzig-Yoshinaga, "Words Can Lie or Clarify," 5–6.
18. Fujita-Rony, "'Destructive Force,'" 38–39, 42, 46.
19. *Ibid.*, 47–53.

20. Ibid., 42–46, 52–53. For an important discussion of Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga's work with government archival documents, see Emiko Hastings, "No Longer a Silent Victim of History: Repurposing the Documents of Japanese Internment," *Archival Science* 11, no. 1: 40–41.
21. Herzig-Yoshinaga, "Words Can Lie or Clarify," 2.
22. Ibid., 29. Herzig-Yoshinaga's meticulous analysis of language in these archival documents led to a set of recommendations in her essay "Words Can Lie or Clarify," including "immediate replacement" of the term "evacuation" with other words like "banishment, diaspora, eviction, exclusion, exile, forced removal, mandatory or forced evacuation, uproot." Similarly, she argued that the terms "detainee, evacuee, internee, and relocatee" should be changed to "excluee, inmate, prisoner."
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 37. Dorothy Fujita-Rony and Anne Frank, "Archiving Histories: The Southeast Asian Archive at University of California, Irvine," *Amerasia Journal* 29, no. 1 (2003); Jerry Hicks, "Southeast Asian Archive Preserves Part of Our History," *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1997, www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-nov-18-me-55010-story.html; Kristine Hoang, "UCI's New Orange County and Southeast Asian Archive Center Now Open," *OC Weekly*, May 15, 2015, <https://ocweekly.com/ucis-new-orange-county-and-southeast-asian-archive-center-now-open-6482212/>.
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 41. Sophaline Chuong, "SEA Us Rise: Feminist Praxis of Intimacy in Southeast Asian American Youth Organizing" (master's thesis, University of California, Irvine, 2019).

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46. Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016), Location 79 of 8603.
47. Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), Location 59 of 4138.
48. Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 15. Espiritu further cautions us in this passage, "I am also concerned that, even some forty years after its 'end,' a 'determined incomprehension' remains the dominant U.S. public stance on the history and legacy of the Vietnam War."