

An Aesthetics of Multiculturalism

Asian American Assimilation and the Learning Corporation of America's *Many Americans* Series (1970–1982)

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From the early 1970s to the early 1980s, the Learning Corporation of America (LCA) produced a ten-part series, *Many Americans*, aimed at promoting intercultural understanding in the classroom and beyond. As a subsidiary of Columbia Pictures, the LCA produced some of the most insightful and timely social education films for both the classroom and television during the company's existence from 1968 to the mid-1980s. These short films on controversial subjects such as race and immigration were intended to help educators manage new demands for diversity in youth education. Films in the LCA's *Many Americans* series range from twelve to twenty-eight minutes and feature an immigrant, racial, or ethnic minority child and his or her attempts at navigating the challenges of everyday life. Of the ten films in the series, half were about new immigrant families and their struggles with racial discrimination, societal expectations, learning the English language, and economic survival. As suggested by the title of the series, these dramatic narrative shorts brought the stories of America's marginalized peoples to the screen in an effort to redefine a national imaginary based on the promising idea of an inclusive multiculturalism.

The *Many Americans* series was part of a larger movement advocating for film's usefulness in educating American youth about multiculturalism in the 1970s and '80s. Following the civil rights movement, changes in immigration policy, the Vietnam War, and other events that marked dramatic

shifts in America's racial politics, many educational film companies began producing ethnic-conscious films aimed at helping teachers address the need for multicultural awareness in the curriculum. Recent scholarship has observed the centrality of race relations in postwar educational films and vice versa, focusing particularly on African American and Anglo American integration following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to abolish racial segregation in public schools and the 1964 Civil Rights Act.¹ While the politics of black-white integration and civil rights certainly initiated the move toward civic education in the 1950s and '60s, teaching ethnic consciousness in the decades that followed increasingly meant rethinking the boundaries of what and who would be considered American in the first place. Ongoing immigration crises (as they were repeatedly called throughout the history of nonwhite immigration to the U.S.) not only raised concerns about racial integration but also elicited anxieties about the very notion of an authentic American identity. As more new immigrants began partaking in public culture, Americans were faced with hard questions about what modern American society ought to look like.

A study of how the politics of immigration were entangled with those of film deepens and extends our understanding about how the educational film industry responded to shifting racisms and mutable structures of racial exclusion. Focusing on the LCA's *Many Americans* series, this chapter demonstrates how the educational film industry in the 1970s and '80s was attuned to changes in immigration policy during a transformative period in U.S. ethnic politics. This chapter begins by situating the 1960s educational film industry amid a broader marketplace of Cold War cultural politics, paying particular attention to the crisis of national identity caused by the new wave of non-European immigration that followed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act. The representation of multiethnic citizens in educational films was the direct result of new markets for multiracial education that emerged from Cold War federal grants and nationwide policies intent on furthering visions of American democracy. The camera's ability to capture the ethnoscaples of America's multiple ethnic groups, combined with the wider availability of projectors in schools and a developed system of educational film distribution, allowed nontheatrical films to render nonwhite America visible.

While the *Many Americans* series sought to teach multiculturalism, racial equality, and diversity, a closer look at how multiculturalism was aestheticized in its films brings out ideological frictions about assimilation and the place of nonwhite immigrants in the new American citizenry. The second

part of this chapter discusses *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?* (1970) as an example of how film aesthetics were entangled with Asian American immigration politics and Cold War progressivism in the 1970s. The film's hybrid style and deeply humanist narrative questioned the singularity of American identity even as it upheld problematic racializations of Asians in America. Indeed, while the cinematic apparatus enabled the visual projection of America's multiple races and ethnicities, its outcomes were as fraught as contemporary understandings of what it meant to be multicultural. Even as the educational film industry met strong support for the production of films that taught intercultural understanding, unresolved debates about the place of assimilation amid shifting ideas of Americanness produced an aesthetics of multiculturalism that existed in tension between ideas of desirable difference versus cultural essentialism, and shared identity versus the erasure of cultural histories.

Race, Immigration, and the Flourishing of the Educational Film Industry

Geoff Alexander describes the period from 1961 to 1985 as educational film's "golden era," in terms of the expansion of the industry as well as the improvement of the quality of the films themselves.² A series of federal-level policy shifts directing funds to educational institutions for the development of learning aids, instructional materials, and curricula and the purchasing of audiovisual material by schools provided a boost for a struggling industry.³ The National Defense Education Act of 1958 and the Elementary and Secondary School Education Act of 1965 were instrumental in providing the funds for schools to purchase audiovisual equipment, establish libraries for films, and develop educational programming that grew the market for educational films in schools.⁴ The passage of this legislation coincided with civil rights and post-1965 immigration, resulting in a growing market for classroom films for multiethnic education.

Evolving policies on immigration played a large role in the push toward reformulations of the curriculum to include diverse histories as part of American cultural knowledge. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was a major turning point in the history of nonwhite immigration to the U.S. because it marked the abolition of racial quotas and national origin preferences that favored Europeans; instead, visas were made available on the basis of American labor needs and family relations. Where early periods of immigration were characterized by immigration from Europe, post-1965 immigration was ostensibly marked by a majority of new immigrants

coming from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act further initiated a new wave of immigration from Southeast Asia and designated Vietnamese, Cambodian, and, later, Lao and Hmong peoples as refugees to be resettled in the U.S.⁵ Post-1965 immigration dramatically altered the racial and ethnic diversity of the country.⁶

Meanwhile, the government supported educational reforms that endorsed multiculturalism and racial harmony. It was politically expedient to disseminate positive stories about race and U.S. democracy to combat Soviet Cold War accusations about racist practices in America.⁷ Early moves toward ethnic-conscious programming in the curriculum had emerged after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision led to school desegregation.⁸ Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 further prohibited “discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance,” thus putting pressure on school districts to demonstrate that desegregation measures were being undertaken.⁹ The emergence of the field of multiethnic education in the 1960s and the anti-assimilationist ethnic studies movement led to calls for educational material that included minority histories to be part of the school curriculum. Early advocates railed against the absent or stereotypical representations of racial minorities in textbooks and called for more accurate and positive portrayals of racial minorities.¹⁰ Eventually, multiethnic education broadened to encompass ethnic groups that were not racial minorities, such as Appalachian Americans, as well as immigrants and groups of different national origin, social class, gender, and sexuality—thereafter becoming known as “multicultural education.”¹¹

Studies emerged on how film and media could enhance a multicultural education. Researchers found that PBS’s *Sesame Street* had a positive effect on the racial attitudes of children who watched it for long periods.¹² Educators believed that film enabled viewers to “experience intercultural contact with [their] eyes and ears,” thus helping students develop empathy and understanding across racial lines and for characters with whom they would otherwise have little in common.¹³ Teachers were also in need of classroom aids to address topics on discrimination, racism, and segregation that many felt unequipped or uncomfortable talking about.¹⁴ Instructors unaccustomed to teaching in a multiethnic classroom were encouraged to learn from and teach with films and audiovisual material on diverse ethnic groups.¹⁵ As educators from K–12 schools, universities, and other educational institutions

turned to film as an ideal medium for multicultural education, a new market for educational films that featured ethnic minorities flourished in the 1970s.

Whereas in the 1950s, films that confronted issues of race and prejudice were implicitly addressed to a white audience, later decades also saw a new market emerge for films intended for nonwhite or mixed-group audiences.¹⁶ This was particularly the case for new cohorts of first-generation immigrant youths who would have attended schools in mixed-race and multilingual neighborhoods. For example, the LCA catalog marketed *Overture: Linh from Vietnam* (1981), a story about the intercultural conflict between a new Vietnamese immigrant family and a Mexican American community, as “especially useful in schools with multi-racial students, and of interest to church and community groups sponsoring immigrants or working with resettlement programs.”¹⁷ *Overture* and *Welcome to Miami, Cubanos* (1981) reflected the need for teaching materials that addressed racism and interracial tension between and within immigrant, nonwhite communities. The Bilingual Education Act of 1968, which enabled school districts to fund bilingual education programs with federal funds, allowed students to study in native languages such as Spanish or Chinese, thus calling for films that featured nonnative English speakers.

Federal support for films on multicultural education alongside these emerging markets had a significant effect on an industry that had traditionally been rather conservative.¹⁸ Elementary and Secondary School Education Act funding, in particular, enabled educational film production companies to have bigger budgets that allowed for greater artistic creativity, professional actors, better sets, and multiple cameras.¹⁹ Joining this new rush to create film content, in 1969 Columbia Pictures started the Learning Corporation of America as a subsidiary company. Under the direction of President William F. Deneen and Senior Vice President Linda Gottlieb, the LCA produced and distributed films that seized upon the cultural shifts that were gripping the field of education.

The culturally diversifying landscape of America became a major theme for many of the LCA’s works.²⁰ Films from the LCA’s *Learning to be Human* and *Searching for Values* series addressed aspects of ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. In the *Many Americans* series, the constellation of nonwhite characters brought the sensitive subject of racism and immigration to the screen. *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?*, *Felipa: North of the Border* (1971), *Miguel: Up from Puerto Rico* (1970), *Overture: Linh from Vietnam*, and *Welcome to Miami, Cubanos* (1981) explicitly addressed the topic of immigration

from Asia and Latin America. Synopses of the films in the LCA's catalogs emphasized how the *Many Americans* series aspired to help the viewer understand the emotional conflicts that young people from minority or immigrant families face. The catalog description for *Geronimo Jones* (1970), for instance, asks viewers to think about "How . . . an Indian boy feel[s] when he sees himself stereotyped by white America."²¹ The LCA eventually became known as one of the most reputable producers of educational sociodramas.²²

The LCA made its films and services easily available to schools and institutions through film libraries and from its nationwide regional offices. The broader audience for the *Many Americans* series were school-going youths of all ethnicities and socioeconomic groups from elementary school to junior high. Reviews in multiple town newspapers indicate that LCA films also traveled across the country, screening at school events, media fairs, and church gatherings.²³ Meanwhile, U.S. television sought to tell a story of "moderate racial progress" and "color-blind equality."²⁴ Alongside this move was the rise of public expectation that children's programming on network television had a cultural responsibility to represent America's racially diverse society. Nickelodeon, for example, was criticized by the *New York Times* for not featuring a show "with an ethnic focus."²⁵ The LCA's ability to produce multicultural and socially responsible content for television added to the company's reputation as "probably the most respected producer of young people's programs in the nation."²⁶

The LCA also attempted to cultivate a culture of engagement around thorny issues of race and immigration. Study guides included in film cans helped teachers generate classroom discussions on race. Containing a summary of the film, stating lesson objectives, suggesting questions for discussion, and outlining postscreening activities such as role-plays and research projects, these guides positioned the films as avenues to discussion about race and American identity. For example, postscreening activities for *Angel and Big Joe* (1975)—which tells the story of a fifteen-year-old son of migrant laborers of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent—encouraged students to imagine themselves as migrant workers whose parents lose their jobs, or to consider how privileges such as unemployment benefits are denied to segments of the labor population. Rather than didactic talking heads, the films sought to bring perspectives of what it means to be American up for debate by capturing a day in the life of America's ethnic minorities "with sensitive photography, and with a minimum of dialogue in whatever language would naturally be used."²⁷

Throughout the twentieth century, American citizens were defined against Asian immigrants.²⁸ As Lisa Lowe points out, the figure of the Asian immigrant “has served as a ‘screen,’ a phantasmatic site, on which the nation projects a series of condensed, complicated anxieties” that have to do with perceived threats to the symbolic whole of the nation.²⁹ Until the 1965 act, Asian immigration policies were shaped by beliefs that Asians were unable to assimilate and that the U.S. should limit the entry of Asians into the country.³⁰ Historical constructions of Asian Americans as “perpetual foreigners within”—linguistically, culturally, and racially outside of the national polity and yet ever present within America’s workplaces—indicate the fundamental contradiction of nonwhite immigrants in the national imaginary, of being both “foreign” and “within.”³¹ The Asian American figure thus functions as a critical site where new ideas of American multiculturalism that celebrated racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity competed with long-held notions of assimilation as an inevitable (and desirable) outcome of immigration.

The racial formation of Asian Americans in the *Many Americans* series illustrates how educational films aestheticized and narrated state discourses of assimilation and alien citizenship amid turbulent ideas of what multiculturalism ought to look like in an era of widespread nonwhite immigration. *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?* addresses the new wave of Asian immigration that followed the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. In the film, young Siu Mei Wong dreams of becoming a ballet dancer but is held back from pursuing her dream by her father, who insists that she attend Chinese language classes instead. Through a particular aesthetics of assimilation, the film delineates Chinese spaces as distinct from American ones and parses out Chinese values against American ideals through the use of repeated visual and stylistic binarisms that cast assimilation as the only way to become American.

Shot on location in Los Angeles, the film’s opening is an ode to the American Chinatown, introducing the viewer to what is marked as a clearly ethnicized space. The first shot is of a rotating sign for the 76 gas station on Union Street: on one side of the spherical lantern, the words “seventy-six” are printed in Chinese characters; on the other, “76 Union” is written in English. This opening shot introduces the thematic binarisms that continue through the film—the supposedly incompatible existence of Siu Mei’s immigrant Chinese heritage and her American identity, Cantonese and English, Chinese school and dance, the old ways and the new.



FIGURES 16.1–16.2. A rotating spherical lantern features English and Chinese characters on opposite faces. *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?* (Michael Ahnemann, Learning Corporation of America, 1970). Frame enlargements courtesy of usc Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.



FIGURE 16.3. A shot of a desolate alley in Chinatown captures the austerity of immigrant life. *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?* (Michael Ahnemann, Learning Corporation of America, 1970). Frame enlargement courtesy of USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

From the very outset, Siu Mei's inevitable assimilation into Americanness is aestheticized through Michael Ahnemann's eye for documentary realism in his depiction of a declining Chinatown. Ahnemann had established himself as a documentary film producer with the United States Information Agency in the 1960s, directing the Academy Award-nominated short documentary *Cowboys* (1966). Los Angeles's Chinatown is pictured through scenes of industrial decay peppered with kitschy signifiers of Orientalism. Static shots of graphic shapes cast by deserted storefronts, a smoggy skyline, and littered alleys are juxtaposed with ornamented friezes and pagoda-styled rooftops against a stripped-down ambient soundtrack of birds chirping and dogs barking. The filmmaker's almost fetishistic preoccupation with Oriental architecture emphasizes the cultural and linguistic liminality of Chinatowns as alien spaces at the heart of American cities—a reference to the trope of the outsider within. In the contemporary public imaginary, they symbolized a space of lapsed assimilation and ethnic segregation that failed to accommodate Cold War ideas of acculturation.³²

Along a littered and run-down alleyway, the camera pans up toward a window on the second floor, and Siu Mei Wong comes into view, her face caged inside the dilapidated building in which she lives. Like other films in

the *Many Americans* series, *Siu Mei Wong* was shot on location, using streets and homes of people from the community. The use of real locations and a narrative motivated by the everyday struggles of new Asian immigrants in the United States reflects the film's desire to capture an authentic account of the challenges faced by new Americans.

In Siu Mei's bedroom, pinups of Chinese models sit beside a *New Standard English-Chinese Dictionary* alongside images of a Caucasian and a Chinese ballerina—a montage that represents the competing elements in Siu Mei's life. Her cramped breakfast table is not shared by a prototypical nuclear family, but rather by an extended family that reflects the familial dynamics that arose from the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which was also referred to as the Brothers and Sisters Act since immigrants and naturalized Americans could petition for relatives to enter the United States. Siu Mei's living room has been converted into the workspace, and the relentless and dull mechanical clatter of her father's sewing machine recurs to remind the viewer of the realities of their crowded home and low-income labor. The home space of Siu Mei's world is unadorned but cluttered by the everyday exigencies of immigrant life.

The film's dramatic tension is predicated on the notion that Chinese tradition clashes with the American pursuit of individual identity. Scholars in Asian American studies have observed the “essential separation of Asians from ‘Americans,’ a distinction buttressed by a belief system deeply ingrained in an American imaginary which insists on the fundamental difference of racialized peoples.”³³ This incompatibility between Chineseness and Americanness is embodied through the primary source of conflict in the plot—when Siu Mei's father insists that she attend extracurricular Chinese language classes instead of ballet so that she learns to “be proud to be Chinese.” Failing to understand her father's attachment to the world they left behind, Siu Mei protests, “We live in America now!”

Aesthetically, this tension is expressed through the film's juxtaposition of a primarily realist mode with surrealist fantasy whenever Siu Mei dreams about ballet. Approximately midway through the film is a one-and-a-half-minute scene where Siu Mei dances in a field (figure 16.4). Shot in slow motion with long dissolves between shots, the camera takes on an almost painterly quality in its meditative gaze on Siu Mei's dancing form. The scene interrupts the narrative of the film, presenting a moment of elevating, evanescent beauty. Emblematic of America as the land of opportunity, this scene expresses how dance transports Siu Mei from cultural obligation into a world of individual freedom. At Siu Mei's English-language school, in a classroom



FIGURE 16.4. Long dissolves and slow-motion shots of Siu-Mei's solo dance in a small field amid the industrial setting of Chinatown. *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?* (Michael Ahnemann, Learning Corporation of America, 1970). Frame enlargement courtesy of USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

with other Asian children, she is taught how to spell the words “government,” “disregard,” “society,” and “humanity” as the visuals crosscut with a poster of a Chinese ballerina (figure 16.5). The scene reveals Siu Mei's inner desires to disregard her social obligations (and previous ethnic-national identities) to pursue the supposedly American values of individualism and opportunity. The juxtaposition of the American fantasy space in contrast with the realist immigrant domain is embedded in the social and cultural politics of ethnic exclusion—signifying the dualism between beauty/individualism/modern American values and reality/social obligation/traditional Chinese values that has historically defined discourse about Asian Americans.

The film suggests that Siu Mei's desire to take ballet instead of attending Chinese school does not mean that she disavows being Chinese. Siu Mei says proudly to her class that her dream is not to simply be a ballet dancer, but to be a “Chinese ballet dancer.” Siu Mei's ballet class is attended primarily by young Asian girls, reinforcing that being Chinese and a ballet dancer are not mutually exclusive.



FIGURE 16.5. Poster of the Chinese ballerina that inspires Siu Mei. *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?* (Michael Ahnemann, Learning Corporation of America, 1970). Frame enlargement courtesy of USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

What the figure of the Chinese ballet dancer lays bare is not multiculturalism, but a politically expedient logic of assimilation that erases diverse ethnic or cultural practices but leaves behind biological racial difference as a marker of U.S. progressive inclusion. Nicholas De Genova describes assimilation “as that horizon at which ‘the ethnic’ ceases to be ‘ethnic.’”³⁴ Attending Chinese school is too ethnic, not only a marker of racialization but one that suggests a willfulness to be distinct from Anglo Americans by continuing to embrace a language largely inaccessible to non-Chinese Americans. The space of the Chinese-language school—a space that Siu Mei’s father associates with having pride in one’s Chinese heritage—is depicted as exclusionary and impossible to assimilate into mainstream America. The racial homogeneity of the language class held at the Confucius temple is juxtaposed with an earlier scene from a racially diverse ballet studio. As Siu Mei recites her lines in Cantonese, she dreams of dark- and light-skinned legs in ballet shoes. The temple’s gated fence and obscured windows contrast with the welcoming space of the ballet studio, where the African American teacher invites Siu Mei to join the class. In contrast to the foreign, unassimilable,

and racially homogenous space of the Chinese school, the ballet school is depicted as appropriately American—marked by biological racial diversity yet permeated by white middle-class sensibility. Not only is ballet typically perceived as a Western genre of dance and thus racially neutralized by the invisibility of whiteness, Siu Mei's picture of the Chinese ballet dancer (figure 16.5) is legible as a ballerina first and as Asian second. Edmond, Siu Mei's classmate, misidentifies the image as "a picture of a ballet dancer," to which Siu Mei protests, "No! It is a picture of a *Chinese* ballet dancer." The significance of this moment lies precisely in Edmond's failure to recognize the dancer's Asianness. Edmond sees the cultural whiteness of the image while Siu Mei inscribes it with Chineseness—but one that is merely skin deep. Siu Mei's aspirations toward being an Asian ballet dancer indicates what the film presents as just the right kind of upwardly mobile, yet neutered, racial pride.

Siu Mei's experience speaks to what is and what is not considered within the limits of acceptable ethnic behavior in Cold War assimilationist logics. Stereotypes of the poorly assimilated Asian stoked fears of "bad Asians" loyal to communist regimes, as was particularly the case with Chinese Americans.³⁵ Cindy Cheng describes assimilation as "a discursive sign that operated in conjunction with Cold War civil rights to develop a narrative of progress"—modernity in Asian America was about the exhibition of happy assimilation and cultural naturalization.³⁶ While Mr. Wong initially resists his daughter's desire to give up Chinese class for ballet, he grudgingly relents by the end of the film. Read in this light, the film presents *Siu Mei Wong* as an assimilation story, wherein some aspect of the immigrant's original cultural practices or values are given up in exchange for a mainstream identity.

The film's treatment of assimilation, however, is not without criticism of its inevitability. Just after Siu Mei's father relents and gives her the go-ahead to study ballet, he pauses. A close-up of Mr. Wong's face lingers on silent and suppressed emotions that shadow his features. This shot registers the weight of Mr. Wong's decision, suggesting deep sadness and sacrifice. Though he remains inarticulate, this powerful moment of *photogénie* touches the surface of an interiority whose depths the audience cannot comprehend but whose weight is distinctly felt.³⁷ We have a sense that something has been lost, both across the father-daughter generation and in Siu Mei's abandonment of her ties to her Chinese heritage.

At the end of the film, we return to the shot of the lonely alleyway, the camerawork mirroring the same shot at the beginning of the film. This time, however, Siu Mei is missing from her bedroom. One might read this as her successful assimilation into the American mainstream, a literal freeing from



FIGURE 16.6. A close-up of Mr. Wong as he contemplates questions of assimilation and cultural identity. *Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be?* (Michael Ahnemann, Learning Corporation of America, 1970). Frame enlargement courtesy of USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

the racially marked space of her Chinatown home. However, Ahnemann's decision to mirror the camerawork that opens the film suggests emptiness rather than liberation. Rather than music, it is the sound of Mr. Wong's sewing machine that breaks the stillness. The closing shot of the film is not of Siu Mei but of Mr. Wong working away at his machine, his back to the camera, alone in his work: an elderly Chinese gentleman, sequestered in a dark apartment, excluded from mainstream America. Rather than triumphalism, the film ends on a note of quiet lament.

While assimilation is presented in the film as the inevitable trajectory of becoming American, the film's ambiguous ending troubles such a straightforward reading, pointing toward deeper cultural instabilities and discursive tensions about assimilation versus cultural diversity, and about ethnic plurality. Extrafilmic materials reveal that the LCA was engaged in a deliberate effort to generate classroom discussion around thorny questions of what it meant to be American in the 1970s. In the extension activities suggested in the accompanying study guide for *Siu Mei Wong*, students are asked to

pretend to be Mr. Wong and to write Siu Mei a letter asking her to keep her Chinese heritage alive. Discussing the concept of assimilation, students are encouraged to think about how Siu Mei “want[ed] to be very American and forget her Chinese past” and why it is important to be proud of one’s background.³⁸ Encouraging every student to see his or her own history as a history of immigration, viewers were also invited to think about why their own ancestors immigrated to the U.S. *Siu Mei Wong* and its study guide thus seek to present a troubled view of the idea of assimilation.

The politics in the film reflect the fraught transition from earlier twentieth-century models of assimilation toward ideas of multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s, when ethnoracial groups supported the idea that the U.S. ought to enable rather than erode the diversity of distinctive cultures. In the era’s new multiculturalist model, the preservation of diverse cultures by their practitioners and their safe consumption by the rest of society (students were encouraged to visit a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown on Chinese New Year after watching *Siu Mei Wong*) presented modern American citizenship as a celebration of ethnocultural diversity.

While old-fashioned ideas of assimilation were supposedly being displaced by contemporary ideals of multiculturalism post-1965, immigrants were still configured in the public imaginary as undergoing Americanization, a process that involved shedding particular markers of ethnic and cultural identity while performing certain others. The LCA catalog’s description for *Felipa: North of the Border*, for example, states that “the ‘Americanization’ of the Mexican immigrant is a daily struggle to master both a new culture and a new language.”³⁹ Even as a new era of multiculturalism ushered in an appreciation of cultural diversity, the inescapable inscription of alienness upon nonwhite immigrant bodies contained them in a precarious state of inside/outsideness.

The conditions of American multiculturalism are then predicated on the synthetic hypervisibility of racial difference whitewashed of troubling notions of imperialism, structural inequality, and equal-opportunity activism. Erasing histories of continued U.S. colonialism, for instance, *Lee Suzuki: Home in Hawaii* (1973) features Hawai‘i as a microcosm of an idealized multicultural America. Against shots of Honolulu’s multiracial residents, young Lee introduces himself by describing his mixed-race heritage: “Just like a lot of people who live in Hawai‘i, I’m only part Hawai‘ian. I am also part Japanese, part Irish, part Filipino, and somewhere way back, part Swedish.” Hawai‘i’s story of ethnic diversity, racial harmony, and successful Asian American integration was exemplary of Cold War American democracy,

multiculturalism, and racial inclusion.⁴⁰ Just like Siu Mei, who is proud to be a Chinese ballet dancer but who gives up Chinese school and the language, one wonders if these articulations of American multiculturalism are, in Susan Koshy's words, "loose and free floating signifier[s] of Asian Americanness that lack any cultural density."⁴¹

The LCA's 1971 catalog asks the question, "What does a child have to give up to be 'American'?"⁴² In the *Many Americans* series, Americanness is an elusive concept. Defining who is American enough and who falls short is an endeavor circumscribed by finely tuned cultural logics of labor, language, race, and national values that inscribe minorities within the precarious task of living up to ever-shifting ideas of cultural legitimacy. The fundamental contradiction of nonwhite immigrants in the Cold War national imaginary as both desirably different and yet in need of assimilation troubles the projection of American multiculturalism. Even as the educational film industry thrived on the push for the visual representation of a diverse American citizenry in the classroom, rendering what such a vision of multiculturalism would look like on film resulted in an aesthetic that was caught between the celebration of ethnic difference and its erasure.

FILMOGRAPHY

All available films discussed in this chapter can be streamed through the book's web page at <https://www.dukeupress.edu/Features/Screening-Race>.

Felipa: North of the Border (1970), 17 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Bert Salzman. PRODUCTION: Bert Salzman Production. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. EDITOR: John Schmerling, Dick Cadenas, Lebowitz Films. PHOTOGRAPHY: Paul Glickman. SOUND: Wes Scott. CAST: Phyllis Valencia, David Herrera, Francisco Soto, Dolores Jaurique. CONSULTANT: Howard Storm. ACCESS: University of Southern California (USC) Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Geronimo Jones (1970), 21 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Bert Salzman. PRODUCTION: Robert J. Kaplan. EDITOR: John Schmerling. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. MUSIC: Michael Shapiro. CAST: Martin Soto, Chief Feronimo Kuth-Li, Mel Todd. CONSULTANT: Howard Storm. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Lee Suzuki: Home in Hawaii (1973), 19 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Bert Salzman. PRODUCERS: Peter Funk, Lou Girolami. PRODUCTION: Oberon Communications, Inc. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. EDITOR: Lebowitz Films. PHOTOGRAPHY: Peter Eco. SOUND: Philip Wilson. CAST: Francs Keb, Elaine Keb, Ted Fukushima, Willard Gray,

William Mitchell, Giboney Whyte. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Matthew Aliuk: Eskimo in Two Worlds (1973), 18 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Bert Salzman. PRODUCERS: Peter Funk, Lou Girolami. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. PHOTOGRAPHY: William Hartigan. EDITOR: Lebowitz Films. MUSIC: Arlon Ober, Mel Zelniker. SOUND: Steven Glover. CAST: Tony Pushruk, Simon Pushruk, Thomas Pushruk, Helen Pushruk. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Miguel: Up from Puerto Rico (1970), 15 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Bert Salzman. PRODUCER: Lynne Littman. PRODUCTION: Bert Salzman Production. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. EDITOR: Barry Prince. PHOTOGRAPHY: Paul Glickman. CAST: Kelvin Malave, Ramona Torres, Allen Garfield, Jose Torres, Richard S. Diaz. CONSULTANT: Ramón Arbona. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Overture: Linh from Vietnam (1981), 26 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Seth Pinsker. PRODUCER: Elaine Sperber. EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: Ronald MacDonald. CAST: Kim Ngan Ly, Panchito Gomez. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Siu Mei Wong: Who Shall I Be? (1970), 17 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR: Michael Ahnemann. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: Sarah Sappington Kuhn. PRODUCTION: Michael Ahnemann Motion Pictures. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. PHOTOGRAPHY: Caleb Deschanel. ASSISTANT CAMERA: Frank Lisciandro. SOUND: Eric Stacey. CONSULTANT: Herbert Leong. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Todd: Up from Appalachia (1970), 12 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Herman J. Engel. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. PRODUCTION: Herman J. Engel Film Productions. PHOTOGRAPHER: William P. Steele. COLLABORATOR: Jon Henrikson. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

Welcome to Miami, Cubanos (1981), 28 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR: Peter Mark Schifter. PRODUCER: Elaine Halpert Sperber. WRITERS: Luis Santeiro, Michael Bonadies, Franklin Getchell. EDITING: Pamela S. Arnold. PHOTOGRAPHY: Marty Pitts. MUSIC: Jose Raul Bernado. CAST: Manny Rodriguez, Frank Perez, Teresa Rojas. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. ACCESS: USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive.

William: From Georgia to Harlem (1971), 17 min., 16mm

DIRECTOR AND WRITER: Hank Nadler. PRODUCTION: Hank Nadler Perspectives Films. ASSOCIATE PRODUCER: Annetta Nadler. CAMERA: William Montgonery. ASSISTANT CAMERA: Daniel Lerner. MUSIC: Arlon Ober. PRESENTED BY: Learning Corporation of America. CAST: Shelly King, Steven Isler, Cornel Berry Jr., Maurice

NOTES

Dino Everett, archivist for the USC Hugh M. Hefner Moving Image Archive, made titles in the *Many Americans* series available online. Geoff Alexander, director of the Academic Film Archive of North America, generously extended his knowledge and time. Cheryl Naruse provided feedback on an earlier draft.

- 1 Anna McCarthy, "Screen Culture and Group Discussion in Postwar Race Relations," in *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Films in the United States*, ed. Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 397–423; Marsha Orgeron, "'A Decent and Orderly Society': Race Relations in Riot-Era Educational Films, 1966–1970," in Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, *Learning with the Lights Off*, 424–41.
- 2 Geoff Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 9.
- 3 Devin Orgeron, Marsha Orgeron, and Dan Streible, "A History of Learning with the Lights Off" in Orgeron, Orgeron, and Streible, *Learning with the Lights Off*, 48.
- 4 Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 38–47; Anthony G. Picciano and Joel Spring, *The Great American Education-Industrial Complex: Ideology, Technology, and Profit* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 144–46.
- 5 By the end of 1975, 130,000 Southeast Asians, the vast majority of whom were Vietnamese, were given refuge in the U.S. From 1975 to 1980, an additional 433,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos arrived in the U.S. Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 323–25.
- 6 In 1965, whites of European descent accounted for 84 percent of the U.S. population, with Hispanics accounting for 4 percent and Asians accounting for less than 1 percent. Fifty years later, 62 percent of the U.S. population was white, 18 percent was Hispanic, and 6 percent was Asian. Muzaffar Chishti, Faye Hipsman, and Isabel Ball, "Fifty Years On, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Continues to Reshape the United States," in *Migration Information Source*, Migration Policy Institute, October 15, 2015, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/fifty-years-1965-immigration-and-nationality-act-continues-reshape-united-states>.
- 7 Cindy I-Fen Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America: Democracy and Race during the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
- 8 Widely broadcast staged discussions about racial integration helped parents and teachers handle desegregation in schools. McCarthy, "Screen Culture and Group Discussion."

- 9 Civil Rights Act of 1964, § 7, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq (1964).
- 10 For a history of multicultural education, see Geneva Gay, "Promoting Equality through Multicultural Education," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 19, no. 3 (spring 2004): 193–216.
- 11 "As an idea or concept, multicultural education maintains that all students should have equal opportunities to learn regardless of the racial, ethnic, social-class, or gender group to which they belong. Additionally, multicultural education describes ways in which some students are denied equal educational opportunities because of their racial, ethnic, social-class, or gender characteristics." James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education and Curriculum Transformation," *Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 4 (autumn 1995): 391. For a brief study of the history of "multicultural education," see James A. Banks, "Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice," *Review of Research in Education* 19 (1993): 3–49.
- 12 Samuel Ball and Gerry Ann Bogatz, *Summative Research of Sesame Street: Implications for the Study of Preschool-Aged Children* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 1971), 1–27.
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- 16 Orgeron, "A Decent and Orderly Society," 425.
- 17 "Building Relationships," in *Film Video: Stimulating the Mind's Eye* (New York: Learning Corporation of America, n.d. [ca. 1980]), 55.
- 18 Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 44, 64.
- 19 For a history of the federal programs advancing the educational film industry, see Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 38–46. See also Orgeron, "A Decent and Orderly Society," 424.
- 20 Alexander, *Academic Films for the Classroom*, 46.
- 21 "The Many Americans," in *Films: A Catalog of Films for Schools, Colleges and Libraries* (New York: Learning Corporation of America, 1975), 89.
- 22 Geoffrey Alexander, *Films You Saw in School: A Critical Review of 1,153 Educational Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013), 224.
- 23 "First Part of Unique Film Series at Ogunquit," *Lewiston Evening Journal*, July 15, 1974, 3; "North Heights Set Media Fair," *Rome New Tribune*, October 10, 1971, 2E; "Beth Abraham Men Prepare First Program," *Lewiston Maine Daily Sun*, October 12, 1973, 8.
- 24 Aniko Bodroghkozy, *Equal Time: Television and the Civil Rights Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 11–12.

- 25 Alexis Greene, "What Cable Offers Children," *New York Times*, April 25, 1982, 28.
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- 27 "The Many Americans," in *Films: 1971/72 Catalog of Films, Film Loops and Filmstrips for Schools, Colleges and Libraries* (New York: Learning Corporation of America, 1971), 25.
- 28 For more on Asian racial exclusion in American citizenship, see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
- 29 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 18.
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- 31 Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 8–10; see also Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America*, 13.
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- 33 David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 3.
- 34 Nicholas De Genova, *Race, Space, and "Illegality" in Mexican Chicago* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 84.
- 35 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, 275–76.
- 36 Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America*, 12.
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