

ASIAN AMERICANS
The Fight for Ethnic Studies

Episode, Lesson #	Episode 4, Lesson 3. Ethnic Studies
Grade Level(s)	7-12
Lesson Overview	This lesson focuses on the birth of Ethnic Studies through the two longest student strikes in the country’s history, led by youth of color forming the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State University and University of California, Berkeley.
Lesson Objectives	Students will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand the strikes’ causes, methods, and the resistance mounted by the schools ● Explore how educational experiences may be shaped by the addition of ethnic studies ● Research authors from diverse backgrounds and synthesize ways in which their work can supplement their existing curriculum

BACKGROUND ESSAY:

With the struggle for civil rights and the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, students were expressing an interest in classes that explored Black history and culture. San Francisco State University (SF State) was a college with a mostly white student body and the Black Student Union began to question whether their own education was failing them. They started to demand curriculum that reflected their lives and a better representation of faculty of color. With these demands from the Black Student Union, Asian American students took note.

Just across the Bay, a University of California Berkeley (UC Berkeley) grassroots youth organization called the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) became the first in the country to embrace and proclaim the identity of “Asian Americans.” Fed up with racism, the AAPA chose to align themselves with the **Black Panthers** and chose “Yellow Power” as their rallying cry.

Working together, students of color established the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at SF State, followed by UC Berkeley. The TWLF was a coalition of students from the Black Student Union, the Asian American Political Alliance, the Latin American Student Organization, the Filipino-American Student Organization, Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor, El Renacimiento. These students were united in this cause of educational and **racial justice**.

The Asian American Political Alliance along with the Third World Liberation Front organized the two longest student strikes in U.S. history. The strikes became impactful in “speaking truth to power” and gained much momentum — but not without repercussions. Soon after the strike began at SF State in November 1969, the police and national guard were sent in to disrupt the student protests. Several were beaten and bloodied, and arrests were made. The same violence also occurred at UC Berkeley where some students were beaten unconscious and incarcerated.

However, the students’ perseverance prevailed and they achieved success. On March 3, 1969, UC Berkeley administrators agreed to launch the first Department of Ethnic Studies with SF State following three weeks later. These acts helped to inspire other universities to follow in their lead, bringing in a wave of ethnic studies departments in universities across the U.S.

VOCABULARY

- **Black Panthers:** political organization founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale in 1966 in Oakland that played an influential role in the Black Power movement. Drawing from Marxist ideology, the organization was founded to address the widespread police brutality against African Americans and called for racial justice, African American political representation and equality. Declared a communist organization and targeted by the FBI, the Black Panther Party was dissolved in 1982.
- **Communities of Color:** a term used to describe communities that are identified as having shared characteristics of racial identity, and the term and identification often involve the shared experience of racism and marginalization.
- **Racial Justice:** systemic change to produce equal treatment and outcome for all, regardless of race.
- **Social Justice:** transforming society so that everyone is treated fairly and equitably, no matter their background, and given equal opportunity to succeed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why were these students questioning whether their own education was failing them?
- Do you think education has similar failings today? If so, how?
- How did the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) students achieve their goals? Do you think that students today could help orchestrate this type of change?
- How and why did different groups come together in solidarity?
- Do you think the strike was worth it for the students? Why or why not? What is your main take-away from this documentary segment?
- Do you think your classes, and your school encourage you and help you figure out who you are, and teach the diverse story of your ancestors and your peoples?

ACTIVITIES

Activity 1: The Fight for Ethnic Studies Today

While the strikes at San Francisco State University and University of California Berkeley resulted in ethnic studies departments at these colleges and influenced other university programs, these changes have mostly been limited to higher education. The fight for ethnic studies continues today at the high school level, as students and community organizations advocate for curriculum that includes the narratives of communities of color.

- A. Ask students to research the campaigns for ethnic studies at state and local levels. Students should choose one state to research and may start with California, New Mexico, or Texas, where curriculum changes have been noted. Ask students to conduct their independent research with an eye to the following questions:
1. What are the campaigns for ethnic studies asking for? What kinds of classes or curriculum changes do they want?
 2. What reasons do they give for these positions? What are the benefits to including ethnic studies in high schools?
 3. What opposition have they faced? What reasons are given for the opposition?
 4. What tactics have these campaigns used? Compare and contrast with the methods you saw used by student protesters in the film clip.
 5. Finally, how would you organize such a campaign? What next steps would you like to take in order to achieve the campaign's objectives, and why?

Teachers may choose to assign students a report or a presentation, depending on what skills students need to develop and the class time available. In either assignment, students should summarize their research findings and present their own analysis of campaign strategy. Remind students to cite all sources and provide evidence for their claims.

Activity 2: Ethnic Studies in Your Classroom

- A. Ask students to choose one significant author from a community of color to research. Students should research the author's life and read 2-3 short pieces (e.g., poems, essays, short stories) by the author to better understand their body of work. A list of possible authors to research is provided below as a starting point:
- Maya Angelou
 - Sandra Cisneros
 - Rudolfo Anaya
 - Carlos Bulosan
 - Gary Soto
 - Toni Morrison
 - Jhumpa Lahiri
 - Maxine Hong Kingston
 - Amy Tan
 - Phillis Wheatley
- B. Instruct students to write a report on their author of choice using the following guidelines:
1. Summary of the author's life and contributions to American literature
 2. Selection of one piece by the author that you would choose to include in a high school curriculum, and the reasons why
 - What would this piece add to your current curriculum that is not already there?
 - In what ways does this piece give new insight into America or American society?
 - How do you hope students will benefit from inclusion of this work?
- C. Upon submission of the report, split students into partners. Each student will exchange the short story, essay, or poem they selected from their author and "assign" it to their partner to read. Afterward, pairs will hold a mini book club and discuss their reactions to the partner's selected piece. They may use the following discussion questions as a guide:
1. What did you find striking or surprising about the work? What parts of it stick out to you?
 2. Did the piece resonate with you in any way? Did you identify with it using experiences or observations from your own life? In what ways?
 3. How is this piece different from the books or materials you usually read in school? Why?
- D. Afterwards, facilitate a classroom discussion on their experiences, leading students to discuss the following prompts:
1. How did the activity make you feel? What new things did you learn?
 2. How was this experience different from (or similar to) your other classroom experiences? Why?
 3. Thinking back to the film clip and the fight for ethnic studies in California, the student protesters were fighting for their right to be taught the authors and narratives that you learned about during this assignment. Do you view the students' actions in a different light after this assignment? What do you think was driving the students to risk so much for a prolonged strike? Do you think it was "worth" it?

FURTHER INFORMATION

Asian American Political Alliance, E-Plaque (2005). [Organization]. Berkeley Historical Plaque Project. <http://berkeleyplaques.org/e-plaque/asian-american-political-alliance-aapa/>

SF State College Strike Collection (n.d.). [Education]. Diva, a project of Academic Technology at San Francisco State University. <https://diva.sfsu.edu/collections/strike>

The Third World Liberation Front, Documents (n.d.). [Education]. Revolution Berkeley. <http://revolution.berkeley.edu/projects/twlf/>