
Review: Citizenship and the Immigrant Body

Reviewed Work(s): Mothers Without Citizenship: Asian Immigrant Families and the Consequences of Welfare Reform by Lynn Fujiwara: Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America by Sarah E. Chinn: Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War by Grace M. Cho

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Citizenship and the Immigrant Body

Lynn Fujiwara's *Mothers Without Citizenship: Asian Immigrant Families and the Consequences of Welfare Reform*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008

Sarah E. Chinn's *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009

Grace M. Cho's *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008

Nerissa S. Balce

The question of citizenship and the manifold forms of violence experienced by the “noncitizen” remain important issues for feminist and race studies scholars. In a recent online essay, critic Lisa Lowe (2008) observes that there is currently proposed legislation that seeks to criminalize more than twelve million undocumented immigrants living and working in the United States. In the same vein, the emotional and often racially charged 2009 debates regarding Barack Obama’s controversial birth certificate—recently revived by Sarah Palin on a right-wing radio show (Gay 2004)—and the movement against health care reform attest to the lingering American fear of the noncitizen who “encroaches” on American soil and has come to “leech off” the resources of the country. In *Immigrant Acts*, Lowe writes that the question of citizenship, or the coming into being of an “abstract citizen” requires and is inaugurated by violence, in particular “the negation of a history of social relations that publicly racialized groups and successively constituted those groups as ‘nonwhites ineligible for citizenship’” (1996, 26–27). The abstract citizen of an American liberal democracy can thus only exist through the erasure and the institution-alized disavowal of the U.S. nation’s violent histories of race and racism. Another critic, Grace Kyungwon Hong, in her most recent work, *The Ruptures of American Capital*, notes that women of color feminism must attend to the contradictions of nationalism and citizenship, that is, “that the very rhetoric of inclusion and universality ensures racialized and gendered dis-possession” (2006, xix). Hong adds that during the early 20th century,

citizenship was the means by which the U.S. nation-state recruited and disciplined workers and facilitated “the hierarchization of workers and the extraction of capital” (xxiii).

Today, in the early twenty-first century, a new generation of U.S. feminist scholars engages with critiques of citizenship—as a disciplinary technology and as a foundational and violent logic of capital—in different ways. Citizenship and the “immigrant body” are the theoretical analytics of three new studies: Lynn Fujiwara’s sociological study of the aftereffects of three anti-immigrant policies, Sarah E. Chinn’s genealogy on the creation of modern adolescence in the early twentieth century, and Grace M. Cho’s interdisciplinary study of the Korean comfort woman as a figure of shame and the traumas of war for diasporic Koreans. All three authors approach the question of citizenship, gender, and immigrant identity in distinct ways, using diverse methodologies and archives. As such, I will address their work individually along with pedagogical suggestions for teaching these texts.

In Fujiwara’s *Mothers Without Citizenship: Asian Immigrant Families and the Consequences of Welfare Reform*, we return to the 1990s. More than a decade ago, a strong anti-immigrant movement, one that Fujiwara carefully traces in media, culture, and policy, culminated in three laws that continue to affect immigrants and communities of color to this day. We can thus consider Fujiwara’s work as an archaeology of the anti-Asian ideology and the xenophobia of current anti-immigrant and nativist movements. In 1996, under Democratic president William Jefferson Clinton, three anti-immigrant enactments were signed into law: the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), and the Antiterrorism Effective Death Penalty Act or Antiterrorism Act. Fujiwara argues that these laws were implemented haphazardly and caused panic and fear. Close to a half million “elderly, disabled and blind immigrants were expected to lose their Supplemental Security Income,” and “seventy-two percent” of those immigrants were women (xv). In fact nearly one million elderly and disabled immigrants lost their food stamp benefits (xv). Fujiwara sheds light on the impact of these laws on Asian immigrant women and their families—from poverty and foreigner discrimination to incidents of depression and a rash of suicides among elderly Asian women. She links the traumas experienced by Asian immigrant women to the pervasiveness of the “model minority” myth that renders Asian immigrant and refugee

poverty invisible. Central to her study is the connection between welfare and immigration reform, in particular how “citizenship as a formal demarcation of belonging placed Asian immigrant women outside of entitlement through a particular gendered *foreigner* racialization process that deemed them inassimilable, perpetrators of welfare fraud, and welfare-dependent” (xvii). Fujiwara employs a feminist “participatory research” approach that entailed three years of fieldwork in different immigrant community outreach programs; immigrant welfare workshops and forums, citizenship drives in the Bay Area of Northern California (xxiii); and thirty interviews with activists, social service providers, and advocates (xxiv). Fujiwara constructs what she calls the “Asian noncitizen” as “immigrants and refugees” (xx). This radical recentering of the noncitizen recalls sociological studies in Asian American and ethnic studies scholarship that focuses on immigration and the racialization of poverty, yet this time Fujiwara highlights gender in her analysis.

In Chapter 2, she unpacks the discourse of the “politics of disgust” (28) toward the stereotype of the “Welfare Queen” by adding that popular assumptions of black pathology converged with a growing anti-Asian immigrant movement after the Immigration Act of 1965. In the decades after the liberalization of immigration laws, we have witnessed an increase in the rates of welfare use by Asian noncitizens. Fujiwara writes that this spurs nativist resentment against “visible inassimilable foreigners” (40). The author adds that PRWORA is the culmination of attacks against the welfare gains of black women since the civil rights movements, and the new law assumed that “mothers were poor because they failed to take personal responsibility, by finding work and staying employed” (35). By the Reagan era, wage earning had assumed the definition of responsible citizenship and functioned as the foundation and logic of late capitalism. Her Chapter 3 is a moving account of the violence of citizenship and how noncitizens are assaulted by poverty, fear, depression, and suicide as they hold on to ideas of reciprocity, loyalty, and belonging. Fujiwara writes that Southeast Asian refugee communities believe that the United States betrayed them twice: by pulling out of their homeland during the Vietnam War and by rescinding welfare in 1996 (70). The participation of Hmong and Vietnamese communities in U.S.-sponsored wars in Southeast Asia did not always offer a shortcut to social and legal citizenship, social mobility, and comfort, as the cases of Chia Yang and Ye Vang prove. As such, Fujiwara’s book would enrich Asian American studies or women’s studies

seminar discussions on citizenship and immigration or on the legacies of the Vietnam War for contemporary Asian American communities.

The visual and cultural studies work of Sarah E. Chinn, *Inventing Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America*, focuses on the creation of the idea of modern American adolescence that she traces from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. The author contends that our contemporary notions of adolescence are relatively new, and her genealogy begins with the arrival of European immigrants to cities in the Northeast in the late nineteenth century. Chinn's important contribution to scholarship on fin de siècle American culture is her claim that the national discourse of "teenagers as potential trouble-makers" (6) formed and informed the nation's fear of immigrants and social "reformers" or activists. The strengths of her study are her excellent archives and her close reading of texts. Her sources—the work of G. Stanley Hall, photographs of child labor, the Jane Addams Labor Museum, the letters of the young former prostitute Maimie Pinzer, dance halls in New York City, and the lives of three bohemian intellectuals—are rich lodes for U.S. historians and feminist cultural studies scholars. But a curious blind spot of her work is the absence of an analysis of whiteness, in particular white American identity in the Progressive Era. While there are moments in her book that belatedly admit to the study's focus on the white ethnic child laborers from "southern, eastern, and Central Europe" (39), she mentions this briefly and moves on. There is no discussion, for example, of how American child labor activists sought to preserve the rights of only "Anglo-Saxon children" (39) even as white ethnic children who were not quite white, as well as newly freed black children, toiled in America's new industries and factories. So in Chinn's readings of immigrant child labor images (29–76) and the history of "urban immigrant dance halls" in New York (103–29), the term "immigrant" means "white" or "European." The invisibility of a critique of a national construction of white American citizenship aside, Chinn's theoretical interventions are still worth noting.

Chapter 2 is a historical discussion on the politics of "photographs of working children" (33) taken by Lewis W. Hine. Chinn examines the construction of the Romantic American childhood by juxtaposing this ideal with the white working-class child as "a symptom of industrialization and the devouring maw of capitalism" (37–38). For child labor reformers of the time, white child labor was objectionable because "it was about making money rather than about shaping young minds" (38). Chinn

notes that Hine's photographs "condemned not just the larger structures of capital that kept children separated from the right to play and develop, but the immigrant parents who he believed were either unable or refused to see the damage they were doing to their children" (57). As such, the anti-child labor critique of Hine contained a xenophobic bias against the European immigrant parents of the children. In Chapter 5, Chinn discusses three historical figures who popularized white adolescent identity in the mainstream: the anti-war writer Randolph S. Bourne, the anarchist leader Emma Goldman, and the anthropologist Margaret Mead. The chapter analyzes the idea of youthful rebellion through the lives and writings of these American intellectuals. Chinn writes that "Anglo-American bohemians" intellectually connected and interacted with "children of eastern and southern European immigrants" in "labor activism, café culture," and radical projects such as Goldman's anarchist magazine *Mother Earth* and the Modern School sponsored by the Francisco Ferrer Center, a center named after a prominent Spanish anarchist and educator (136). The epitome of "bohemianism, working-class radicalism, and new immigrant cultures" was the young Emma Goldman, publisher of the anarchist magazine *Mother Earth*. In Chinn's account, Goldman's life combined a white immigrant story of "radicalization into anarchism by the Haymarket Massacre of 1887, a bohemian existence of free speech and free love, and a social calendar and circle of friends . . . among immigrant cafés, sweatshops, union halls, theaters, and elite social clubs" (138). Chinn's work would dovetail perfectly with American studies courses on whiteness, youth culture, and the Progressive Era, or as a comparative text for seminars on race, gender, and urban histories.

Last, Grace M. Cho's book, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, is innovative in its methodology and arresting in content and analysis. The experimental structure of the book—with "narrative and nonnarrative" texts and the use of "nonlinear temporalities, repetition, fantasy, and fiction" (18)—engages with impossibilities and limitations of official history. Cho focuses on the figure of the *yanggongju*, or Korean "prostitute," a woman who has had sexual relations with American soldiers during or after the Korean War of 1950 (3). Cho's work blends psychoanalytical theories on trauma, memory, and history with "semifictional vignettes" culled from oral histories of war survivors and Korean brides of U.S. servicemen, interviews with Korean sex workers and former comfort women, popular media, and contemporary Korean fiction

and film about the *yanggongju* (44). In Cho's study, the *yanggongju* is the central historical figure of the Korean diaspora: "Yankee whore. Western princess. GI bride. *Yanggalbo*. *Yangssaekshi*. GI's plaything. UN lady. Bar girl. Entertainment hostess. *Wianbu*. Fallen woman. Formerly a comfort woman. Formerly called a comfort woman. Daughter of a comfort woman. Camptown prostitute. Military bride" (3). Cho asserts that *yanggongju* is a pejorative term laden with trauma and meaning so that it is "at the same time an unspeakable and 'phantomogenic' word for the Korean diaspora" (3). She describes the "dead *yanggongju*" as a "trope of diasporic memory" and links her many incarnations—former comfort woman, sex worker, war bride, and others—with the lives of all ethnic and diasporic Koreans in the United States (23). This radical gesture highlights the scholar's desire to reject familial U.S.-Korea narratives of assimilation and to depart from traditional sociological studies of Asian immigrant communities by exploring "the affective potential of haunting" and trauma (25). Cho argues that "questions of invisibility are still crucial for understanding the workings of power" (33). As such, she returns to the notion of how narratives of citizenship require the negation or erasure of violent U.S. histories as she deconstructs the United States as both "benevolent protector" and as a violent occupying force with the *yanggongju* "as the symbol of a nation raped by the United States" (22).

Cho traces the hidden and unspeakable horrors of traumas across wars—the Japanese colonial period and the Korean War—and the devastation that followed: tortures, bombings, massacres, mass killings, and many other atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers, including 875 rapes documented in Seoul in 1950 (67). Chapter 2 blends historical accounts with an art installation by a Korean American artist, semifictional vignettes, archival photographs of Korean War survivors, and psychoanalytic readings of war and trauma. With these counternarratives, Cho lays bare the violence of the romance of U.S.-Korea relations: "The official script . . . reads that the United States has always been a friend to South Korea, a friend that has come to its rescue many times: to liberate a country left demoralized by Japanese colonialism, to fight the communist north in the name of freedom and democracy, to rebuild a country left devastated by war, to grow its economy to miraculous proportions, to save its orphans, to marry its women, to take them to the land of opportunity where they are welcomed with open arms and assimilate quickly" (59). As some Asian

American studies scholars will note, Cho makes a somewhat tenuous claim when she writes that only Korean Americans can claim that their history has been “covered over . . . by an illusion of interracial romance and international cooperation” (23). In fact Korean Americans, like Filipinos, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong, are living proof of American imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia and are “bodies bearing the marks of militarization” (23). This minor slip aside, Cho continues with elegant readings on “the fantasy of honorary whiteness” through a critique of assimilation (139–61) and ends her study with what she terms a “diasporic vision” through a discussion of Korean American art and film (162–96). Cho’s experimental book would be an ideal text for a course on the cultures of war, gender, and militarization or a course on contemporary Asian American art and culture.

These three studies offer new paradigms and different ways for understanding the politics of citizenship and its costs. In Chinn’s work, the white working-class adolescents would over time transform from abject youth (61) into “white bourgeoisie youth” (153) or the idealized citizens of the U.S. nation. Fujiwara’s and Cho’s studies, on the other hand, focus on the perennially abject “noncitizens” who result from forced migration and the legacies and traumas of wars in Asia. It would seem that acquiring citizenship of an imperial nation such as the United States entails submitting to acts of violence that are either physical or psychic—that is, working as a child laborer, participating in U.S.-sponsored wars, or accepting American military occupation as a benevolent myth and as collective memory. In all cases, one could say that citizenship extracts labor, blood, and memory.

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