

Reframing Empathy

Using case studies of interracial and interethnic solidarity in U.S. history to arrive at a new conception of empathy

**How would you
define empathy?**

What is empathy?

**The next image shows an act of violence.
You may choose to leave the room or
look away before we view the photo.**



LIFE

NOVEMBER 1963





Who is showing empathy in these scenes?

Case Studies in Empathy

- **1919-1920:** Filipino and Japanese worker solidarity on Hawaii's sugar plantations
- **1930s:** Nihonmachi, jazz clubs, and green books in the International District of Seattle
- **1960s:** Larry Itliong, Cesar Chavez/Dolores Huerta, and the United Farm Workers
- **1960s:** Yuri Kochiyama, Grace Lee Boggs, and Black Power
- **1968-9:** Third World Student Strike

How would you define empathy now?

Empathy: the practice of affording others the complexity that you afford yourself

(João Biehl)

Empathy **begins** (not ends) with an **attempt to imagine** what someone's lived experience is like in their sociopolitical environment.

It **continues** with an acknowledgment that complete understanding is **impossible**. Human compassion must be built on more than the capacity to fully relate to another person, or to respond to one story of injustice with your own.

Solidarity: empathetic action

Teaching Goals

- To place Asian Americans within American history and organizing history
- To (re)define and examine interracial solidarity through case study analysis
- To propose a new model of empathy founded in action rather than perspective-taking

Learning Objectives

- SWBAT use visual media from the past and present to analyze new concepts.
- SWBAT identify and analyze Asian American interracial collaboration through a historical framework.
- SWBAT develop new and dynamic definitions of empathy and solidarity.

Resources (for teachers; see notes)

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