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"Slaying the Dragon": A Case Study

Shoba S. Rajgopal
Lecturer, Department, Department of Ethnic Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO

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"Slaying the Dragon": A Case Study

Abstract

Courses regarding Race, Gender and Representation are not easy to teach under any circumstances, but even more so in predominantly white classrooms. Instructors need to handle the subject matter carefully. But these courses can be effective too if the students are sufficiently engaged by the readings given to them or the films shown in class.

Shoba S. Rajgopal

Lecturer, Department, Department of Ethnic Studies, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO

Courses regarding Race, Gender and Representation are not easy to teach under any circumstances, but even more so in predominantly white classrooms. Instructors need to handle the subject matter carefully. But these courses can be effective too if the students are sufficiently engaged by the readings given to them or the films shown in class.

I use a specific documentary for a number of my Ethnic Studies courses, which is ideal to demonstrate how images from Hollywood and the press have been used in the past century, to further the "Othering" of a specific immigrant population, Asian Americans. This documentary, Deborah Gee's *Slaying the Dragon, was* originally made in the late 1980s, but, if used with supplementary films and readings, is still very effective as an ice breaker, to get the ball rolling to get students talking, to confront racial and gender stereotypes and move slowly into the complexities behind such representations.

The cinematic depiction of people of color in the West over the past century has been extremely racist. Film theorists like Ward Churchill have examined what he describes as "the cinematic colonization of American Indians" in Hollywood movies, while African American feminist theorists like bell hooks and others have examined the representation of Black men and women in the cinema. But it is only very recently that Asian American theorists have joined them in critiquing their representation in mainstream western cinema. Hence the role of Deborah Gee in filming her path breaking documentary *Slaying the Dragon is* very important indeed.

It is through such stereotypes that images of people of color have passed into "common sense," making it possible for dominant society to establish control over what passes as Truth. Literature and cinema thus become insidious political forces of mass deception whereby the public are robbed of their ability to see the substance for the shadow, and comprehend the reality behind the stereotype. But getting students who have absolutely no background in this media manipulation of reality to comprehend the power of these media images in distorting reality is even more difficult.

Moreover, instructors who belong to the specific races or regions under scrutiny face even more of an uphill task. As a new American of Asian descent, being the wife of an American citizen, I decided to plunge headlong into the subject matter, and was rewarded

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in more ways than I could imagine. This paper is a case study of my utilization of a specific documentary for my foray into the area of race and representation with my Ethnic Studies students: Deborah Gee's "Slaying the Dragon."

Presenter

Dr. Shoba S. Rajgopal is a Lecturer (Adjunct) at the Dept. of Ethnic Studies, CU, Boulder, where she teaches courses in Asian American and Ethnic Studies. Dr. Rajgopal has also worked in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, teaching courses in Communication Theory. She is also a freelance writer, and have contributed articles for various international magazines on issues ranging from identity to culture and globalization in Asia. She holds a Ph.D. in Media Studies from the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder, a Women's Studies Graduate Certificate, also from CU, Boulder, and an M.S. in Mass Communication from the Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS. Her research areas include postcolonial theory, feminist theory, globalization, diasporic identities, South Asian Cinema, religious fundamentalism in Asia and its impact on women, and cultural nationalism. Dr. Rajgopal has seven years experience as a TV reporter and anchor for the Indian TV Networks.