

Editor's Note: A second review of *My Cambodia* and *My Cambodian America* by Van Anh Tran is available in the online supplements for this issue.

My Cambodia and My Cambodian America

DIRECTED BY RISA MORIMOTO

PRODUCED BY RYLAN SEKIGUCHI AND RISA MORIMOTO

18 MINUTES (*MY CAMBODIA*), 13 MINUTES (*MY CAMBODIA*

AMERICA), COLOR

EDGEWOOD PICTURES, 2014

CURRICULUM MATERIALS ARE BY RYLAN SEKIGUCHI FOR THE STANFORD UNIVERSITY PROGRAM ON INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL EDUCATION (SPICE). FILMS AND RELATED MATERIALS ARE AVAILABLE AT STANFORD.IO/1SI162V

Reviewed By Tobey C. Reed

My interest in Asia dates back to when I was a child. My interest in Cambodia started when I began my teaching career in Attleboro, Massachusetts. Attleboro was one of the places where a large group of Cambodian families moved after leaving the refugee camps in Thailand after the Khmer Rouge period. My first Cambodian students in 1999 were born in Thailand in the Site II camp. Now, sixteen years later, my Cambodian-American students are second-generation Americans who are heading off to college and have a very different life than their older siblings, uncles, and cousins, who suffered the problems that first-generation students often have. I have taught Asian studies since 2005 as a senior elective, as well as World History II to freshmen. In both classes, I have spent a considerable amount of time on Cambodia. In all this time, one of the things that has been severely lacking is a curriculum or resources designed for teachers around the topic of Cambodia. We tend to view Cambodia from the view of wonderful ancient dynasties and horrible genocide, and this binary view distorts our approach to the real truth behind the complex history and wonderful culture that existed in the past, and continues to flourish in Cambodia and beyond. That curriculum has been lacking until now. SPICE released *My Cambodia/My Cambodian America* last October, and it fills a tremendous void. *My Cambodia* is an eighteen-minute film and *My Cambodian America* is a thirteen-minute film, along with a teacher's guide that contains suggested lesson plans, handouts, extension activities, and resources.

My Cambodia

My Cambodia is a video that follows Dr. Khatharya Um as she travels to Phnom Penh to discuss the genocide that occurred during 1975–1979.



Professor Um praying at the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Screenshot from *My Cambodia*.

Students can learn about the history, but it is not just a historical documentary. It instead is like visiting Toul Sleng (S-21), the torture prison, or Choeung Ek (one of the killing fields) with a very personal guide who tells you what she is thinking as she encounters these places. Her arrival at Choeung Ek is especially moving, as she clearly struggles with the idea of coming to pay respects to a somber memorial while tourists

walk around taking photos and gawking at a horrible site. The realness of her narration makes this a video that can be used in a variety of ways other than teaching about the Khmer Rouge period.

My Cambodian America

In the *My Cambodian America* video, we follow Pete Pin, a first-generation Cambodian-American who moved here from the refugee camps



Pete photographing the Cambodian World Dance Troupe in New York Times Square. Screenshot from *My Cambodian America*.

when he was very young. He is now a photographer and is working on a series of diptychs where he pairs a portrait of a Cambodian-American with a picture of something that they brought with them from Cambodia or the camps. As he discusses with other Cambodian-Americans

what it is like to live in America, the students get a keen insight into some wonderful themes that transcend Cambodian culture and speak to our common humanity.

Each video is short enough to watch in a single class period and give teachers and students plenty of time to debrief and reflect upon what they watched. The teacher's guide that is attached has five days of lesson plans with all necessary handouts, presentations, quizzes, readings, and anything else a teacher would need to use. The wonderful thing about this curriculum is that it can be easily utilized as packaged as a five-day activity or shortened or lengthened as needed without too much effort. These videos would work great as a standalone activity in a variety of classrooms. The obvious place to use this would be in World History, World History AP, or other such courses, but it can work well in a variety of Literature courses. Pete Pin's background as a photographer would even make it appropriate to use in an art classroom discussing identity and culture.

I used the curriculum in my Modern Asia elective. In my classes it was refreshing to see the students react to someone like them telling a story that was very similar to their families. We often stop teaching about Cambodia in 1979, as if the Vietnamese intervention meant Cambodia's problems were solved. It is wonderful to have a resource that continues the story, brings it up to today, and depicts how the people have coped with the events of the past.

The teacher's guide has a wonderful section that focuses on the themes of the documentaries. Themes such as identity, cultural loss, survival and resilience are important. Students relate to these themes and that gives a teacher an opportunity to make the curriculum relevant, rather than just learn something that happened in the past. This theme resonates with most high school students since they are in the process of crafting their own identities.

I was very pleased to hear that *My Cambodia/My Cambodian America* won the Buchanan Prize, as it certainly deserves it and it is nice to see some much needed recognition for Cambodian curriculum materials. ■

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