

TH10.50.15 : The promise, potential, and limitations of the nonprofit worker center movement in the U.S.

“Our Lives, Our Stories”?: Testimonial Theatre and Storytelling in Contemporary Domestic Worker Organizing in the U.S.

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This article examines storytelling as a form of activism in domestic worker organizing in the contemporary U.S. Storytelling is not only central to labor organizing and advocacy efforts that seek to humanize and dignify the plight of domestic workers, but also an important pedagogical tool as part of a worker-center based political education. I look at “Our Lives, Our Stories,” a theater production that features the testimonies of Latina im/migrant domestic workers, highlighting their migration trajectories, labor organizing efforts, and the development of their political consciousness. I contend that while “Our Lives, Our Stories” provided a space for the testimonies of working-class immigrant women to be voiced and heard by employers and policymakers, their narratives were curated in ways that inadvertently reified problematic stereotypes of Latina immigrant women. That is, by rendering domestic workers' narratives (and lives) as homogenous and interchangeable, domestic worker organizers could mobilize them as an advocacy and fundraising tool.

The Resentful Foreigner: Racialization of Chinese Workers in Asian Fusion Restaurants

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The saturation of Chinese take-out restaurants and the refusal of young Chinese workers to toil away in them have led to a new wave of Asian fusion restaurants across towns in the United States. Whereas Chinese take-out restaurants serve cheap eats in racially diverse neighborhoods, many of the new Asian Fusion restaurants operate in white middle-class areas providing higher-priced foods such as Japanese sushi, hibachi, and Thai specialties. This paper focuses on the social encounters inside these restaurants and explores how Chinese workers interact with the predominantly white patronage and white co-workers. I argue that workplace socialization is a powerful medium through which Chinese workers are racialized. Through reflection, Chinese workers develop a collective understanding of their social position as “perpetual foreigners” in American society. This racialization process intersects with their position as service workers to produce forms of disillusion and resentment that can be a basis for mobilizing “invisible” low-wage workers.