

# The Asian Reporter

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**TALKING STORY IN ASIAN AMERICA**



■ Polo

## When I'm sixty-four, ooooh

**P**retty soon I'll be sixty-four. There's a fun Beatles song about this. About how abuelos like me can still be "handy, mending a fuse when your lights are gone." And that's true. I still can.

Pero what's also true is how — in neighborhoods rich in Native- and Spanish-speaking Americans; in cozy households from all over Asia, from Father Russia, from Mothers India, Africa, and China; around family tables from several Pacific and Caribbean island nations — at sixty-four, folks like me finally get some Respect. With a cap R.

They say we've earned some perspective. We can see above housetops and treetops, and across borders supposedly separating peoples and places, over the immediacy of time rushing by you and me.

And looking back, over the relatively short time our familia has lived in this otherwise kind and creative country, here's an astounding fact: the United States has warred fifteen times. That's a lot. That's five decades of our government crushing families where they sleep and school and work; where they shop and sit down for coffee or tea. All that awfulness, on the premise that we're killing some very bad people. Threats to you and me.

What's evident to me now — and I say this with a grandpa's great love for America — is what actually allows our policy leaders to war on faraway communities like that, is the same emotional and moral segregation that's killing you and me in Ferguson, in Baton Rouge and Baltimore. In short: We've become a nation of consumers. And what we consume, disconnects us. The nation — once our achy earth's expression of participatory democracy, of an idealistic people pitching in, shaping our world — is today a very passive place.

**When America meant it**

Here's what I mean: When I was a squirrely *krotjong*, our elders spoke fondly of slim and polite soldierboys nicknamed Red, Brooklyn, and Ski. Earnest Yanks who sent our enemy, Imperial Japan's brutal army, running. Then they rebuilt our schoolhouse. They made us a seesaw and a swing set from construction leftovers. We shared Lucky Strikes and Hershey bars. Our grandparents and parents cried, these boys cried, when they sailed away, longing for their own moms, wives, and girlfriends.

Ultimately, we sailed away too. To here. Thank

**Instead of worldliness, our settled neighbors seem locked into much smaller universes. Sworn to newsy networks. Stuck among agreeable Facebook friends.**

God. But unlike past era migrants who had to break with their elders and ancestors, my generation of newcomers participate in a robust circulating systems of peoples, products, and ideas. We jumbo jet, Facetime, and ATM round and round. This connectedness matters a lot.

In quiet conversation with any New American from any of those energetic communities mentioned earlier, it's not uncommon to hear about a time she was sharing a bad or a beautiful moment she has lived with her settled American co-workers, and have them turn that conversation to a Huffington Post article or a *New York Times* bestseller. The disconnect startles us, every time.

Instead of worldliness, our settled neighbors and co-workers seem locked into much smaller universes. Sworn to newsy networks. Stuck among agreeable Facebook friends. Sure, they're less exposed to sorrow, to joy and our inevitable loss of it. But thus disconnected, they seem so vulnerable to curators of niche knowledge. To distributors of shallower experience. And containers of narrower selfhood.

What results is a shared narrative that's so intellectually and emotionally affirming that actually acting in a dissonant world of "others" becomes unnecessary. Indeed, unlikely. This outcome is bad for Afghanis and North Koreans, both homogenous folk locked into small, poor countries. This is really bad for Americans.

**How we got so small**

Stanford's best MBAs are on it. They're on to us, every time your peepers touch your iPhone. About 80 times per day. "Like" someone or something and tightly tailored commerce closes in even more. Their rapid cycles of research, development, and distribution are making *real time* (painful familial or communal or national history) irrelevant. Their products, like cliché characterizations of rural Republicans or un-understandable Islamic clerics, make *real people* unnecessary. The truth of *real places*

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