

# Detroit News Columnist Trivializes Vincent Chin's Murder and Its Legacy

By Stewart Kwoh, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, April 30, 2014

LOS ANGELES—*Stewart Kwoh, President and Executive Director, Asian Americans Advancing Justice - LA, issued the following statement on behalf of Asian Americans Advancing Justice.*

1) In a recent article, headlined "What We All Assume We Know about the Vincent Chin case Probably Isn't So," columnist Neal Rubin of the *Detroit News* claims that the killing of Vincent Chin was no more than a "disastrous bar brawl" gone awry. Based entirely on the account of a third party (a former local reporter who covered the story), his column attempts to debunk the prevailing view that the case was a race-motivated hate crime.

2) His effort to correct the historical record would be more persuasive had he bothered to interview any of the individuals directly involved in either the initial criminal trial or the subsequent federal civil rights trial— including me (I served as the only out-of-town counsel to American Citizens for Justice, the Detroit-area group fighting for justice for Chin.

3) I would have been able to tell him that our investigations identified a number of dancers who witnessed the racial epithets, all of whom provided testimony that was used in the first federal civil rights prosecution. (Rubin's article names only one dancer.) Their accounts, as well as other eyewitnesses', also indicated that Chin's killers exhibited aggressively violent behavior, both inside and outside the bar. Ruben's claim that Chin was the aggressor

("Outside, Chin attempted to prolong the fight") is therefore hard to believe.

4) Most damningly, Rubin gives short shrift to the fact that the first federal civil rights trial, tried in a Detroit court, with a Detroit jury, resulted in a conviction of one of Chin's two murderers. The verdict was overturned on a technicality and a retrial was conducted, far away from Detroit, in front of an all-white jury in Cincinnati that absolved the killer. A more credible attempt at reexamining this case would have discussed these facts in greater detail.



Photos, left: Lily Chin at the podium with Rev. Jesse Jackson looking on. © Estate of Vincent Chin.

*"Lily Chin's bravery inspired Asian Americans of all ages and backgrounds to speak up against hate crimes in their own communities."*

*– Helen Zia on Lily Chin*

5) Rubin's own biases are suggested when, in mentioning that Chin and his murderers had been drinking, he provides a blood alcohol reading only for Chin. Why? Were the statistics not available for the perpetrators? Did Rubin even attempt to find out? Unlikely, because finding out may have undermined the narrative that he presents as the real story: that a drunken, out-of-control Chin brought his death upon himself.

6) Even Rubin's concession that Chin was in fact murdered comes in a line that ends "it has never made sense that [his killers] didn't go to jail." We would submit that more than being just nonsensical, the fact that neither of Chin's killers would spend even a single day in jail was a travesty of justice. It was outrage over the killers' manslaughter conviction and \$3,780 fine that compelled not only Asian Americans but countless allies in other communities to mobilize to persuade the federal government to prosecute the case as a hate crime. And although justice for Chin was never truly achieved, his case proved to be a wake-up call for all Asian Americans. Our communities became more conscious of the need to organize and

mount coordinated defenses whenever any of our civil rights came under attack.



*One of many rallies across the U.S. calling for Justice for Vincent Chin. © Estate of Vincent Chin.*

7) Momentous periods in our history should be subject to reexamination, including the Chin case, since historical accuracy is critical to our understanding of who we are as Americans. But an effort like Rubin's, marred by his failures and biases, is difficult to take seriously. Coming on the eve of this year's Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, his article is especially egregious, a wrongheaded minor coda to the story of tragedy and eventual triumph that the case of Vincent Chin represents for Asian Americans.

**Source:** <http://www.advancingjustice-la.org/blog/detroit-news-columnist-trivializes-vincent-chins-murder-and-its-legacy#.VcvoSXizDzJ>