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‘Who Killed Vincent Chin?’ inducted into the National Film Registry

Detroit Public TV’s 1987 documentary examines the tragic murder of a Chinese American and the political movement it ignited

DETROIT (Dec. 15, 2021), “Who Killed Vincent Chin?” – a 1987 documentary produced by Detroit Public Television (DPTV) and Film News Now – received the ultimate film honor, as it was named as one of the 25 influential motion pictures inducted this year into the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress.

The documentary focuses on the brutal murder in 1982 of Vincent Chin, a 27-year-old Chinese American, who was beaten to death with a baseball bat in Detroit by two white autoworkers and how it galvanized the Asian American community into political action. It received a nomination for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1989 and a duPont-Columbia Award in 1991.

Directed by Christine Choy and Renee Tajima-Peña for Detroit Public TV, the film was recently restored by the Academy Film Archive and The Film Foundation to mark the 40th anniversary of Chin’s death. It was recently unveiled at the prestigious New York Film Festival.

Plans are being finalized for screening the documentary as part of a larger program scheduled in Detroit in June, exploring the Vincent Chin case, its many political ramifications and the current surge of violent assaults against Asian Americans in this country.

“The attack on Vincent Chin was a tragic but significant incident in local and American history,” said Rich Homberg, DPTV’s president and CEO. “The film is a moving testament to the loss of a young man’s life and to the people who rose up to protest this terrible injustice. It speaks more loudly now than ever about the contemporary issues in race relations that we are still struggling to cope with.

“We are honored and grateful that the Library of Congress has recognized its importance and placed it among the greatest American films of all time. We congratulate the filmmakers and everyone else who participated in the production of the film.”

The murder of Vincent Chin made national headlines when it occurred at the height of hysteria over the decline of the U.S. auto industry as Americans elected to buy Japanese cars. Those who killed Chin likely assumed he was Japanese. In the end, the two men were found guilty of manslaughter but given probated sentences and served no jail time.

While the murder of Vincent Chin and the Asian American movement that followed have always been central to Asian American history, the wave of anti-Asian hate that raced across America during the COVID-19 pandemic has rekindled interest in the issues it explores.

"When we began examining the Vincent Chin case 38 years ago, we knew we would be telling a story that explored contemporary issues of national significance," said Juanita Anderson, associate professor of teaching and head of media arts and studies at Wayne State University, who was DPTV's executive producer of the film. "Now that story is not only a vital chapter in American history, it resonates in our present-day struggles against social injustice.

“We are honored and humbled that ‘Who Killed Vincent Chin?’ is being inducted into the National Film Registry, and that it will be preserved for future generations.”

For more information on the National Film Registry, please visit the Library of Congress [website](#).