Reimagining Learning Communities

APIA FUTURES

Spring 2022 • ED91b: Selected Readings

2 Reckoning with Anti-Asian Violence: Racial Grief, Visionary Organizing, and Educational Responsibility (Coloma et al., 2021)

APIA Histories & Origins

20 Learning from the 60s (Audre Lorde)
26 Chronology of Major Works and Events, 1763-2014 (Parikh, 2020)
32 Canon, Institutionalization, Identity: Asian American Studies (Lowe)

Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader

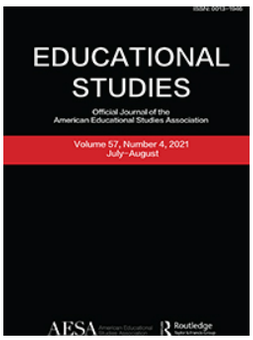
55 (3) Detroit Blues: "Because of You Motherfucker" (Zia)
75 (4) A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia (Eng & Han)
100 (5) Home Is Where the Han Is: A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals (Kim)
119 (6) Recognizing Native Hawaiians: A Quest for Sovereignty
138 (7) Situating Asian Americans in the Political Discourse on Affirmative Action (Omi & Takagi)
146 (10) Public Health and the Mapping of Chinatown (Shah)
171 (11) The Secret Munson Report (Weglyn)
191 (13) Out of the Shadows: Camptown Women, Military Brides, and Korean (American) Communities (Yuh)
208 (14) The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority Myth (Lee)
224 (15) Why China? Identifying Histories of Transnational Adoption (Dorow)
250 (16) The "Four Prisons" and the Movements of Liberation (Omatsu)
283 (17) Youth Culture, Citizenship, and Globalization: South Asian Muslim Youth in the United States After September 11th (Maira)
304 (18) Asian Immigrant Women and Global Restructuring, 1970s-1990s (Parreñas)

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies

319 Introduction: Crisis, Conundrum, and Critique (Schlund-Vials)
338 (2) Has Asian American Studies Failed? (Yu)
350 (3) The Racial Studies Project: Asian American Studies and the Black Lives Matter Campus (Sharma)
368 (5) Un-homing Asian American Studies: Refusals and the Politics of Commitment (Mannur)

Pedagogies

384 (2-3) Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire)
440 (1, 13-14) Teaching to Transgress (hooks)



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Educational Studies

A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/heds20

Reckoning with Anti-Asian Violence: Racial Grief, Visionary Organizing, and Educational Responsibility

Roland Sintos Coloma, Betina Hsieh, OiYan Poon, Stephanie Chang, Sung Yeon Choimorrow, Manjusha P. Kulkarni, Grace Meng, Leigh Patel & Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales

To cite this article: Roland Sintos Coloma, Betina Hsieh, OiYan Poon, Stephanie Chang, Sung Yeon Choimorrow, Manjusha P. Kulkarni, Grace Meng, Leigh Patel & Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales (2021) Reckoning with Anti-Asian Violence: Racial Grief, Visionary Organizing, and Educational Responsibility, Educational Studies, 57:4, 378-394, DOI: 10.1080/00131946.2021.1945607

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2021.1945607

Published online: 30 Jul 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 666

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=heds20

EDUCATIONAL STUDIES
2021, VOL. 57, NO. 4, 378–394
https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2021.1945607

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Reckoning with Anti-Asian Violence: Racial Grief, Visionary Organizing, and Educational Responsibility

Roland Sintos Coloma[a], Betina Hsieh[b], and OiYan Poon[c], with Stephanie Chang[d], Sung Yeon Choimorrow[e], Manjusha P. Kulkarni[f], Grace Meng[g], Leigh Patel[h], and Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales[i]

[a]Wayne State University; [b]California State University Long Beach; [c]Spencer Foundation; [d]Michigan State Senate; [e]National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum; [f]Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council; [g]US House of Representatives; [h]University of Pittsburgh; [i]San Francisco State University

ABSTRACT

This commentary is an edited transcription of a historic and dynamic discussion on "Reckoning with Anti-Asian Violence" among a distinguished panel of elected legislators, community leaders, and academic researchers. This discussion took place virtually as a presidential session during the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association on April 11, 2021, in response to the increasing attention as well as escalating fear due to anti-Asian racism and violence in the United States and globally, including the mass shooting in Atlanta on March 16, 2021. Over 100 attendees across the United States and internationally bore witness to this important yet rare convening of high-profile Asian American female politicians, organizers, and scholars. Many recognized the historic significance of this topic and gathering and asked for its documentation. As session organizers and panelists, we offer this commentary for our communities as part of a national and global archive of the current state of affairs.

Betina Hsieh

Let us take a moment to collectively breathe together. In doing so, let us be present to our own bodies and the lands we each occupy and be present to the toll that living in a society that has perpetuated sustained anti-Asian violence for well over 200 years, anti-Black violence for over 400 years, and anti-Indigeneity for over 500 years has on each of us, has had on our ancestors, and may have on our future generations if we do not reckon with the root causes of this violence.

This session came about in the hours and days following a targeted mass shooting rampage in Atlanta, Georgia, during which eight people were killed, including six Asian women who worked in local spas. The killings drew national attention, but the racialized and gendered nature of the mass shooting was dismissed by local officials as a result of a "bad day" on the part of the assailant. This official narrative refuses to reckon with this incident as a clear example of gendered anti-Asian violence built upon hypersexualized and dehumanized notions that render Asian and Asian American

CONTACT Roland Sintos Coloma rscoloma@wayne.edu Wayne State University, Detroit, MI48202, USA.
© 2021 American Educational Studies Association

Back to top.

women and their lives invisible and useful only in the service of others (Fujiwara & Roshanravan, 2018; Shimizu, 2007).

The racialized nature of the Atlanta shootings was one crest to the latest wave of anti-Asian violence we have seen since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. However, Atlanta is certainly not the only example of this recent wave of horrific anti-Asian violence, much of which has been documented on video over the last year. Recent attacks on various Asian American individuals, who were simply walking their dogs on the street, on their way to church, or out in their neighborhoods, appear in my social media timeline at least weekly, sometimes more often. These videos and the news of these attacks are forms of violence and trauma-inducing for so many, reminding us of the tenuous safety of any privileges that we may enjoy. These attacks are painful and are built upon a long legacy of anti-Asian violence in this country (Kurashige, 2016; Tchen & Yeats, 2014).

However, another facet of the pain that makes it more complicated is a lack of acknowledgement of our racialized trauma as Asian Americans, a lack of awareness of the history of anti-Asian violence in this country, and the invisibility and oversimplification of Asian Americans' experiences—experiences which are rich with resistance, coalition, and solidarity. These experiences are shaped by race and race-conscious policies, policies that continue to shape our experiences and the experiences of Asian diasporic people in the Americas. We are grateful to engage with our panelists in a conversation that begins to unpack the impact of anti-Asian violence and racial grief on ourselves, in our communities, and the ways in which we can work together within and across communities to engage in visionary organizing. We have chosen to construct the panel as a conversation between politicians, community organizers, and academics, as we consider each of our roles in reckoning with anti-Asian violence.

Roland Sintos Coloma

Anti-Asian racism is on the rise in the United States. The heinous killing of six Asian women in Atlanta and the assaults against Asian Americans, predominantly targeting women and the elderly, point to escalating hate crimes and terrorizing violence against a minority group. What does this moment of increased bigotry, within the context of long-standing systemic violence against Asian Americans, lay bare about their racialized condition and suffering in the United States? How does our prevailing understanding of race and racism simultaneously capture and elide the prejudiced rhetoric and actions directed toward them? How do Asian Americans turn their racial grief into grievance that merits compassion, solidarity, and accountability?

Reckoning with intersectional and systemic anti-Asian violence, we envisioned this session to situate Asian American experiences within broader historical and ongoing conditions of exclusion, disposability, and dehumanization in the United States (Lee, 2015; Ngai, 2014). It will delineate the "racial grief" and "minor feelings" of Asian Americans that are often illegible in mainstream and education frameworks of discrimination and inequity, yet offer complex insights into their logics and consequences at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels (Cheng, 2001; Hong, 2020). It will also foreground the "visionary organizing" of Asian Americans in educational and

community contexts to assert their agency, address internal dynamics, and work in coalition with Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Middle Eastern, and other communities of color for racial and intersectional justice (Boggs & Kurashige, 2012; Iyer, 2015). With a distinguished panel of political leaders, community advocates, and education researchers, this session will invoke a critical responsibility that not only holds ourselves accountable to impacted communities but also enacts an ethic of love and solidarity for a more just and humane world (Shah, 1997; Spivak, 1994).

For this session, we have asked our panelists to consider the following two sets of questions. First, while we don't want to focus only on racial trauma, we know that anti-Asian violence has real impact on our communities and on us as individuals. Could you share with us any of your experiences or thoughts on the impact of anti-Asian violence on your own lives or on the lives of those close to you? Second, can you talk about your vision for what transformational organizing and educational responsibility look like? What actions have you taken in addressing anti-Asian violence both within and beyond our communities? And what guidance and advice would you give to others interested in addressing anti-Asian racism?

Grace Meng

I really feel like, this last year, it has been such a roller coaster of emotions. I felt like our community has said and done so much to warn people about the rhetoric that was being used from the highest levels of government with phrases like "Chinese virus" and "kung flu." Most of mainstream society really started paying attention in more recent weeks when there was an increase of attacks on the elderly and with the murders that occurred in Atlanta.

A few weeks ago, I went to Atlanta with some of my [U.S. Congress] colleagues, and I visited with some of the families of the victims. And as sad as their situation was, and one that I will never be able to fully understand, I thanked them and told them that their moms gave voice to so many Asian Americans, especially women. They reminded us, they reminded me at the very least, that our stories are American stories. They are stories of lives, jobs, sacrifices, and dedication to families. Growing up as an Asian American, I always felt like my story, my parents as restaurant workers, was not American enough. It was an experience and upbringing that I was embarrassed about growing up. But I said to these family members, "Your mom gave voice to me and to so many Asian Americans across the country," and I'm so thankful for that.

Going forward, I'm incredibly grateful for the tremendous showing of ally-ship. I have never seen such a widespread showing of support from people who aren't Asian American, showing love and concern, and wanting to take action to support the Asian Pacific American community. This is my challenge: that we're not just having conversations with our allies, whether they're Asian American or not. So much work needs to be done, including within our own communities.

We have been talking a lot about hate crimes and hate incidents. And I will say something that's not popular: *we're not going to hate crime our way out of this situation*. Even if we charged and prosecuted every perpetrator with a hate crime, it's not going to solve the problem. I want to remind people that it's not just the hate crime issue.

Of course, we need to collect more data, find out how we can better investigate these types of incidents, and provide more resources for our local community groups confronting these incidents every single day. We also have to address larger issues, like mental illness. In the long term, it has to be about education and continued ally-ship.

I love how we started this program reminding us about the history of anti-Asian, anti-Black, and anti-Indigenous violence that has been happening for hundreds of years in this country and that many people, even Asian Americans, don't know about.

I will say another thing that's probably not popular. I've had conversations with people in our own community, for example, ethnic media which we depend on so much. I said, when we're talking about perpetrators, we have to be responsible and constructive. When we're talking about a perpetrator that's White, oftentimes the race and ethnicity is not mentioned at all. But when the perpetrator is Black or Hispanic, the headlines often go in deep detail. I've been going on the press, taking pictures of these headlines, because I want them to understand that, even though it's not intentional, we have to be more responsible as a community and the narrative that we're creating.

Lastly, we are pushing legislation in Congress that would provide more resources to local community groups, that would have dedicated personnel, the Department of Justice, to be able to analyze these [anti-Asian violence] cases and to help make it easier for victims locally to report these incidents. Something that's near and dear to my heart, I worked on this in the state legislature, a local law that would require or allow a judge to include counseling and education in convictions of hate crime defendants because it really is about education in the long-term.

Sung Yeon Choimorrow

At our organization, the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, our staff and members have noted that many of us were being publicly harassed in ways that we had not experienced in the past. Asian American women are experiencing racialized sexual harassment, especially a new kind of street harassment during the pandemic. In conversations about returning back to the office, the number one reason why some do not want to go back to the office was not about catching the coronavirus. It was fear of being harassed in public because of the way we look. As data from Stop AAPI Hate shows, anti-Asian violence and harassment are disproportionately affecting women and the elderly.

In terms of solution, nonprofit and community organizations have been committed to making sure that the solution to address hate crimes, violence, and harassment against Asian Americans is not about increasing policing. I don't feel any safer with more law enforcement on the streets. It's a whack-a-mole approach. It's reactive and doesn't keep people safer. We have been trying to advocate for a community unity awareness approach, so that we support and look out for each other. Relying on law enforcement to keep us safe is not an effective way to go about it.

In terms of visionary organizing and longer term solution, especially as it relates to the education sector, the reason why this is happening and continues to be allowed to happen is due to the invisibility of Asian Americans in the curriculum (An, 2016; Rong & Endo, 2011). I see this in my daughter's school. Our story and our life here [in the

United States] are not seen as American, no matter how long and how many generations we've been here. Our children are always being asked about their home country or where they're from (An, 2020). I have a friend whose daughter was made fun of. A classmate said, "I don't want to play with you because I hear that Chinese people eat cats and that's gross. I don't like playing with kids who eat cats." The teachers didn't take it seriously because, in their mind, that's not really racism. The student didn't say the N-word. The teachers thought the student was just being mean and needed to apologize. But it wasn't addressed as a racist issue. So how do we make Asian Americans more visible in the curriculum?

I live in a very diverse suburb [of Chicago, Illinois] where, in my daughter's classroom, White kids are the minority and most of the White kids themselves are immigrants. Yet their curriculum is very white-centric (Sandoval, Ratcliff, Buenavista, & Marín, 2016; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). As a parent, I have front-row experience with the school curriculum. My daughter is in kindergarten and, with virtual learning, we have to be very hands-on. I'm really surprised by the lack of diversity, even in the examples that are used, aside from talking about Martin Luther King Jr. during Black History Month or tokenizing people of color in the curriculum. There isn't any integration of using the diversity of our country as everyday examples of how we learn. The school is very good at teaching my kid about Groundhog Day, St. Patrick's Day, or other random days that are not part of the core curriculum. But for other days that are important to the rest of us, their response is "Well, if that matters to you, why don't you come and read a book [to the students] about it?" That's the approach that public schools have. We need to address inclusion, and really seeing and humanizing Asian Americans. It is important to increase the integration, awareness, respect, and inclusion of Asian Americans in American society.

Manjusha P. Kulkarni

I'm going to be sharing our data from Stop AAPI Hate (Jeung, Yellow Horse, Popovic, & Lim, 2021), including examples that are emblematic of what has been submitted to our online reporting center. The incidents run the gamut, including refusal of service from a ride-hailing company; elderly grandparents who are accosted on their street; a physician who was upbraided while treating a patient; an individual who is physically attacked at a hardware store; and a middle school student who was physically attacked and verbally assaulted on the school yard. He was accused of being a COVID carrier and was told to go back to China, even when he said he was not Chinese. He was punched in the face and head 20 times.

Our work [on addressing anti-Asian violence] at the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON) got started before there was a single confirmed case of COVID-19 in southern California. Incidents like the one in the middle school are why we in A3PCON, along with Chinese for Affirmative Action and San Francisco State University, started Stop AAPI Hate. As we have been working in the community for a combined century, we knew how important it was to do outreach and provide our information in multiple Asian languages for limited English proficient and immigrant community members.

Based on data from March 2020 to February 2021, we have received about 3,800 incident reports from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The vast majority are hate incidents and not hate crimes. So as Congresswoman Grace Meng said, we're not going to police our way out of this problem. 95% do not involve an underlying criminal element whatsoever. AAPI communities have experienced high rates of violence, and AAPI women have experienced it at extremely high rates. We really thank NAPAWF [National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum] for their leadership on this issue. 68% of the reports we've received are from women. And also from other vulnerable groups, such as seniors at 6.2%, and youth at 12.6%. So when we look at the types of bias, verbal harassment and name calling, avoidance and shunning, and physical assault top the list. These are not mutually exclusive categories. Some involve verbal harassment as well as physical assault, shunning and avoidance, and refusal of service. The last four categories fall under the rubric of civil rights violations, so it means that we can still have accountability. The incident does not have to be criminal in nature, but we can use civil rights laws to tackle workplace discrimination, being barred from establishment, vandalism and graffiti, and being barred from transportation.

When we look at the site of incidents at Stop AAPI Hate, 35% come from businesses, followed by public streets, public parks, and public transit. The numbers for schools and universities are quite small. We believe that's the case largely because some of our biggest school districts are still not in session in-person, including in Los Angeles County. Los Angeles Unified School District will start re-opening schools tomorrow [April 12, 2021], and many school districts will continue to be hybrid. So will our university campus classes.

When we look at targeted ethnicities, Chinese Americans are, in fact, the largest target. This is reflective of the plurality of individuals who've reported to us, followed by Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, and other parts of the AAPI community. Pacific Islanders and South Asians also have reported to us, but their numbers are below 1%. We will be releasing specific data on those communities very shortly. Our last national report includes a vignette involving a Pacific Islander. These communities are experiencing hate that is very similar to being told to go back to their countries of origin and being told that they also brought COVID like East Asian or Southeast Asian community members. For the "Asian" category, they are largely folks who are multiracial or otherwise identify as Asian, as opposed to identifying with a specific ethnicity. We also have White, Latinx or Hispanic, and Black. These individuals have witnessed the hate, and we've allowed them to also report to our center. Even though they don't come from our community, they have seen and experienced it.

I want to end by stating that [the escalating anti-Asian racism] has impacted our mental health, with increases in depression and anxiety as well as with high rates of unemployment and small business closures. It is not just the hate incidents themselves, but also the anti-immigrant policies that have resulted in a lot of what we've seen against our communities.

Leigh Patel

I would like to add some texture to some of the things that our three panelists already spoke on. Why is it that we're not going to hate crime our way out of this? One is that

we have to understand that there's no way to actually grab a hold of what happened to the women in Atlanta without the use of an intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1989; Matsuda, 1991). We have to understand the intersecting vectors of oppression of white hetero-patriarchy, white nationalism, and anti-Asian racism. We have to understand that exploitation of labor is an aspect of vulnerable labor here. We have to understand the specific kinds of ways that Chinese-appearing or East Asian-appearing women are subjugated, and that is distinct yet connected to the way South Asian women might be subjugated (Fujiwara, 2018). Another reason why we cannot hate crime our way out of this is it's not a robust enough term. It collapses into individualism and relies on a criminal justice system that is interested in increasing the militarization of the police force.

One of the things we also need to do is un-collapsing the pan-ethnic category of "Asian American" that often prevents us from engaging the distinct yet deeply connected histories in the Asian diaspora and in originating countries (Espiritu, 1993; Schlund-Vials, Wong, & Chang, 2017). We need that level of detail if we are to contend with the particular ways that this nation has the capacity to shapeshift quickly. What is the particular ethnicity of hate that it wants to be violent to? After 9/11, there was the initial of T.W.A., which stood for "Third World Assassin." Now we're seeing that the ethnicity of Chinese—read as Chinese or Chinese American—is the ethnicity of danger. That can happen so easily when a pan-ethnic category is allowed to ride roughshod over distinct histories that are so connected. Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, was bludgeoned to death because his murderers believed him to be both Japanese and the symbolic and imagined enemy of United States corporations (Choy, 1987). The murder of Vincent Chin is often highlighted in Asian American Pacific Islander month: May. However, this nation, borne of racist and patriarchal violence, purposefully presents obstacles to dealing with systemic racism.

I want to thank the organizers for having the word "trauma" [as part of this session]. We don't want to build a house and stay in trauma, but we cannot ignore it, either. Its denial only adds to the erasure of Asian Americans' very diverse and important histories. When we start with trauma in education, we make a mistake right there. So education needs to start with histories that are based on facts. The historian Gail Okawa (2020) provides us with rich details of how Japanese Americans who were interned found ways to communicate and create art in order to resist what they refer to as the iron fence of disease, the theft of their property, and the theft of their culture. We benefit as a field when we understand ourselves in our strength and not just through trauma.

I also want to lift up the artist Kyoko Takenaka who created a video called "Home" (Takenaka, 2018). In this video, what Kyoko does is surface real-time racial slurs, specifically how they are directed to women. So again, intersectionality is key. This video is so powerful: it lifts up what is often silenced, what is often unspoken. Part of the trauma that's happening now is that people are paying attention. That is good and hard, because Asian Americans, particularly those who are read as East Asian, are explaining the long history of oppressions their people have weathered, and that harm has done damage and traumatizes people. I want to acknowledge that weight that is happening now. It is good that more people are paying attention, but we have to be conscious of taking care of ourselves and not re-traumatizing ourselves.

Having sisterhoods, community, and co-conspirators are important to me. I don't need allies. I need people who are co-conspirators and who are family because family and community can carry that weight and can ground us. Ally-ship is largely performative, and we don't need that. We need lots more digging into histories that are there waiting for us. How often is W.E.B. DuBois talked about in relation to B.R. Ambedkar? Ambedkar was a South Asian man and a Dalit leader. He and DuBois had a friendship, and there's connection here between the untouchables, the Dalit people, and what was happening with anti-Black racism and the aftermath of slavery (Purakayastha, 2019; Sharpe, 2016). These connections are there, and they're waiting for us.

So, how do we get from here to there, to a number of different theres? Part of how we get there is to understand that "people of color" is not an identity; it is a political location. Understanding how people of color are named, what do we want to do with that political space? When we say "Asian American," let's deal with its pan-ethnic problematic. That's political work that we can do together. In that beautiful struggle, that's where we find kinship. We don't find solidarity in categories that were created to keep us separate from each other, or a category that is so widespread that it's actually hard for us to get to the precise details. Put more simply, we find solidarity in the struggle.

I do not know of any way of engaging in cultural work and social transformation than with love—love for ourselves, love for each other, a radical love. I'm not talking about a romantic love. I'm talking about a radical love that knows no boundaries, that would make white supremacy quiver in its shoes and freshly ironed shirts. Remember that white supremacy is not only done by White people. Working within our communities, with love, we can refuse the various ways that intersectional violence and racism happen through.

Stephanie Chang

Next year we are coming toward the 40th anniversary of the death of Vincent Chin (Yoo, 2021), who was murdered in Highland Park, in the middle of Detroit, which is where I live, which is my home. As someone born and raised in Michigan, I did not learn about the history of Vincent Chin until I got to high school with an Asian American teacher who became a mentor of mine. That made it really clear that we have a lot of work to do so we are learning Asian American history in our schools.

I'm lucky, in a way, that I haven't directly encountered anti-Asian physical violence. However, I've definitely had my fair share of teasing or bullying growing up. I remember, when I was in middle school, my parents shielding me but telling my older sister about racial slurs written on the side of our house. For those of you in the Midwest, maybe you're familiar with this sense of just trying to try to fit in. My parents didn't know what word to use or how to describe what was happening. That conversation [about anti-Asian incidents] is something many Asian American parents are trying to figure out right now.

[Based on the Stop AAPI Hate data] out of the 3,795 incidents across the country, at least 25 in Michigan have been reported, including a friend of mine who is a dance instructor. She was Zoom-bombed with racial slurs and hateful rhetoric early on during the pandemic. Asian American community leaders and elected officials have been

talking about the damage of hateful rhetoric—terms like "kung flu," "Chinese virus," and "Chinese flu." It's unfortunate that it took over a year for much of America to wake up to this hate. There is also a huge lack of awareness about the history of anti-Asian racism in our country, as well as the intersections of racism against other communities of color.

What does educational responsibility look like? Part of it is ensuring that we teach Asian American history in our schools, that we are making connections between Asian American history and Black history, and the connections between our immigrant struggles and the struggles of Latino immigrants. In Michigan, we have the largest Arab American population outside of the Middle East, and so we need to connect to that history. Always remembering Indigenous people in the lands that we're on. We need to continue talking about the need to build this curriculum.

In terms of work that I've been doing, last March 2020, even before the first COVID cases were announced in Michigan, my colleagues and I were already talking about the harmful rhetoric and its impact on our community, issuing press statements, and convening a town hall with the Asian American community. We focused on knowing your rights, what is discrimination, what is a hate crime. We're finding that many people don't know the basic things about who to report to and what the terms and definitions are. More recently, the Michigan Legislature, which is Republican-led, passed two resolutions—one in the House and another in the Senate—condemning anti-Asian hate crimes, discrimination, and hateful rhetoric, and encouraging community members to report. And that is just the start. At first, I was not sure what the Senate Majority Leader was going to do with the resolution. I'm grateful they decided to move it forward.

It has been a whirlwind and emotional roller coaster, as Congresswoman Meng has described for so many of us. In addition to working on policy, many of us have been encouraging people to reach out and share their personal experiences of discrimination and hate crimes, and we are trying to figure out ways to support them. Another important action is to help convene spaces of healing. I'm on the board of a local organization, Rising Voices of Asian American Families, where we've helped put together two virtual healing spaces—one for Asian Americans in Michigan, and one that was a BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] space for healing from racial trauma. I'm also working on, for our next round of state COVID appropriations, dedicating an increased amount of money toward our state's Department of Civil Rights, which has been decimated over the past few decades. There is hardly anyone there anymore. It's like a quarter of the staff that it had to address discrimination. Also increasing support for our Attorney General's Hate Crimes Unit, to be able to staff them adequately so they can work with the community, do outreach, increase reporting, and increase knowledge of our rights. These are really basic things, but in Michigan we are just so far behind.

I'm also beginning to work and communicate with our state Department of Education. They have not yet issued any guidance to our school districts about bullying and harassment in the classroom, whether it's in-person or virtual, related to anti-Asian rhetoric or hate during this pandemic. I am engaging with community members across the state, and pushing their own local school districts to do more in teaching Asian American history and supporting their students. We are hearing of incidents of

bullying, whether or not they're actually getting officially reported. We know that many of our parents and students are not getting the support that they need. We know that our school districts are really struggling, but at the same time they have the responsibility to do more. In Michigan, working at the school district level is so important. It may not be politically feasible at this time to get actual legislation passed to incorporate Asian American history into our state curriculum. However, that's a long-term goal. With the right make-up of the legislature, hopefully we'll be able to work on that, as well.

The last thing I'll say about the question on transformational organizing: it has to be a combination of looking beyond election cycles. Connecting issues, building solidarity, and building community. It's really about centering on healing right now because we are at a moment when many Asian Americans, especially Asian American women, are reliving so much trauma. We are reliving so much pain from growing up, from being Asian American in this country. So we have to start there. We have to start with that healing, considering basic needs, and making sure that we're supporting people where they are. That has to be the center of the work that we continue to do.

Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales

I'm kind of struggling, and I'm going to speak differently, more from the heart. Talking about [anti-Asian violence] is traumatizing, so I'm not going to apologize for my emotion. A few days after the violence in Atlanta, I was giving a talk with Bettina Love and Danny Solorzano, and it felt good to be in community with them. I felt held and vulnerable, like in this space. I was also nervous because of the chat. The chat [during the webinar] was saying all kinds of stuff, and it's triggering for me. During the session, I was very vocal about how I felt about the violence that was happening against Asians. I was also very critical of a different kind of violence, specifically how the California Department of Education passed an Ethnic Studies model curriculum that was neoliberal, assimilationist, and watered down. That is a type of violence that we haven't quite addressed today.

After my talk in the webinar, I checked the Q&A window, and I saw a question being asked by an anonymous participant. And the question was "Aren't you afraid of being attacked?" It was a simple question. The facilitator didn't ask me that question, trying to protect me, and I absolutely appreciated that. But I felt the need to address the question, "Are you afraid of being attacked?" That question itself felt like an attack. Having to prove that the things I was saying were important and that it could be data driven—all of that felt, in my body, wrong. I was afraid of being attacked. During that time, I was working specifically on police violence. Angelo Quinto, who was a Filipino in Antioch, California, was killed by the police. He was murdered by the police similar to George Floyd, with the police officer's knee on his neck. So, yes, I was afraid of being attacked because his family was also afraid of being attacked. They are literally in tears whenever we meet. So the Justice for Angelo Quinto campaign became a huge part of my life. This is anti-Asian violence, too.

There are all these things happening: Asian American children missing school over fears of harassment; Stop AAPI Hate documented 3,800 hate incidents, and this has

already gone up since then; and Asian American women are hyper-sexualized. I'm tired of people telling me this is not about race, this is not about my body, and this is not about women. But it is! I've lost a lot of sleep. I could not sleep thinking about this question and what's happening with our people. And then a 65-year old Asian woman was knocked down and repeatedly kicked, as witnesses just watched. She looks so much like my mom. There's something so powerful in seeing that. Then some people posted the guy who did this, and they started to attack him [virtually], but didn't really think deeply about what that's going to do with the psyche of the American people and our relationships [with other communities of color]. So that's also bothersome.

Earlier today, I spent several hours with a healing group, and this is what's keeping me together. All of them are Pinay in this healing group, and my colleague Jocyl Sacramento shared with us that this experience of violence has been going on for generations to women, specifically to women of color (INCITE!, 2016). Those on the border. The missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people (McDiarmid, 2019). And also the police violence. We cannot remove this from the long history of colonialism and imperialism, which is violence on our people before we step foot in the United States. I want to thank Jocyl for that because it reminded me that this violence has a much longer history. This fear of being attacked has been going on for generations. [Based on the number of incidents from the Stop AAPI Hate data] 70% were reported by women. This has been bombarding us for generations. In a room full of academics, it can't just be about terms; it has to be about the people. It has to be about the moment. It has to be about all of this history that we cannot ignore. We have historical amnesia when we start talking about this as if it just happened a week ago.

So, am I afraid? I am afraid to be attacked, every single day of my life, even before I understood what this meant. I felt afraid of being attacked, and for many years, that kept me silent. But what will allow me the strength to talk about this? I think deeply about my ancestors. The people who have continually fought, and the people whose justice still has not been served. Breonna Taylor—we may not be of the same color skin, but she is my ancestor. The mother and sister of Angelo Quinto. My grandmother whom I lost a few months ago—she is all up in my blood, and I am wearing her shirt today. And Dr. Dawn Bohulano Mabalon, many of you know of her work (Mabalon, 2013), and she is continually inspiring me. The Pin@y Educational Partnerships—this is my family, this is my community. Even if I am afraid, there is no time for me to be silent. How can I be silent when all these people are in danger? I am just beginning to recalibrate my understanding of all of this. Leigh, thank you so much for your words. We need to talk about violence, about this history of violence.

What do we need to grapple with? Here from my sister Kuttin Kandi. I gave her a doctorate this year because she deserves it. We know that ending anti-Black racism is also the work of ending anti-Asian racism. Solidarity movement-building is ending anti-Asian racism. Abolition is ending anti-Asian racism. So let's rethink and recalibrate how we're approaching this. Here from Greg Cendana—he says, if we are upset and devastated about the killings of six Asian women in Atlanta, he's calling upon our communities to be equally passionate about the other forms of violence in our communities. From Connie Wun—she says, do not use violence against Asians, especially massage parlor workers, migrant workers, and sex workers, to reinstate or increase police

surveillance or the carceral state. Let's be careful about how we approach that. Our communities are also survivors of police violence and the criminal justice system. And this is becoming so much more real to me as I continue to work with the Quinto family.

And let me just say that schools are a proponent in that violence, and we need to consider this matter as academics of education. We are perpetuating violence on young people every single day in schools. They don't want to go back to school, not just because they're afraid of being Asian. They don't want to go back because it does not serve them well and their wellness. From Dr. Arlene Daus-Magbual—she says, school reopening plans better include how to dismantle white supremacy and systemic racism. As we talk about reopening schools, what does that mean it for reopening a door that is violent toward young people?

I am coming here with a lot of anger. I am indignant, but I also know how important it is to provide some offerings. When we think about reckoning with anti-Asian violence, we need to allow space for racial grief—for your grief and that of those whom you are in solidarity with. Not just solidarity, but kinship. We are kin with each other. So I'm going to ask this question, drawing from Suryia Nayak's (2014) work: how do we occupy racial grief to be harnessed as a force for collective action directed against the multiple, interconnected, intersectional social injustices of racism? Why do I ask this kind of question with the word "occupy"? You've heard the word "occupied" used by a lot of movements in the last few years. Racial grief isn't going away unless white supremacy goes away, unless racism goes away.

My second offering is to resist historical amnesia and to resist American myopia. It is not just happening in America, and it's not just happening now. We need to think about this as a global issue. And we need to resist reducing systemic violence to an incident or crime of hate. My colleague Dylan Rodriguez (2021) asks the question: "What if anti-Asian violence is not reducible to 'hate,' and is in fact a persistent, unexceptional presence in the long historical, civilizational terror-making machine that is the United States?" We need to think about this, because what else is part of that system? What else is part of that mission to schools? And we are all here in relationship to school, because most of us work in education.

Lastly, we need to become radical educators. What do I mean? We need to re-purpose schools and education that centers love and that protects the wellness of students and educators of color. How do we build a coalitional resistance of radical educators, drawing on the work of Hsieh and Nguyen (2021)? These are my offerings, and I hope that you consider the questions that my colleagues and I are putting out.

OiYan Poon

For our brief Q&A, we have one integrated question from the chat, and that is from Dr. Eujin Park: "The insightful comments from Representative Meng about the inadequacy of hate crime legislation and Sung Yeon Choimorrow's discussion of community-based solutions have got me thinking about how valuable abolitionist frameworks (Love, 2019) are for responding to anti-Asian racism." We'd love to hear our panelists think together on this topic.

Sung Yeon Choimorrow

I would like to jump in here. What's so amazing is, I've never met most of you all before, and here we are thinking of this amazing, well-woven narrative about what needs to be done in our analysis. It goes to show the depth of a commonly felt experience and analysis of what's happening. To address a lot of this, we also need to focus attention on white supremacy. Whether the perpetrators are White or not, that's not important. They're living and functioning out of a white supremacist framework. Our education system is based on a white supremacist framework. We live in a country that operates in mainstream white supremacist framework. We could get into an argument about "well, what about the Black people that are harming our community?" But if you go back to the fundamentals of white supremacy and what that does to our communities and inter-racial relations, that's a much more productive conversation to have than shifting blame or being distracted by what white supremacy would rather have us do, which is blame each other for what's going on.

To get to an abolitionist framework, you have to understand what the source of the problem is. So my encouragement is to start there. For the Asian American context, we need to think about transnational militarism, colonialism, and imperialism that have led to what I've been speaking a lot about in media since the shooting of the Atlanta victims. [The shooting] is racially motivated because that's how Asian American women experience racism, often in the form of sexual violence. It is very much tied to our history, dating all the way back to the Page Act of 1875 (Lew-Williams, 2018). I'm so surprised at how many reporters and journalists have no idea that Asian American women have been treated a specific way because of the historical geopolitical context. The violence against women of color is something we need to be able to talk about. I try to have intersectional framing in my interviews, but all you see is whatever the media wants to put in. There is an element of holding them accountable about how they frame our stories and narratives. Thankfully, with technology, we can put our own narratives out there in a more complex way.

Stephanie Chang

So, I'm an anomaly because I'm a young Asian American woman, representing a [state senate] district that is mostly Black in one part, which is Detroit, and then mostly White in the Downriver part. I'm also someone who has spent a lot of my time in the legislature working on criminal justice reform and working toward decriminalization. But I'll be honest, this is where I struggle because I've done a lot of work within the Asian American community, but much of it has felt very separate. In thinking about where is the Michigan Asian American community right now, I just don't think that the term "abolitionist framework" is in the vocabulary of most of the Asian American community leaders that I work with. So how do we start to have that kind of dialogue? For Asian American community leaders, who are mostly much older than me, what is the Asian American history that they know? What is the Black history that they know?

What we are discussing in this panel is definitely where we need to be headed. But what do people in the community that I serve know? If I were to walk down my street, on the east side of Detroit, most folks probably don't know much about Asian

American history or about my racial identity. At the same time, when I go out into the suburbs or certain parts of Detroit, where there are pockets of Asian Americans, what level of familiarity do they have with an abolitionist framework? And would that have any resonance at all? There is a lot of connectivity that is just not there right now, and we have a lot of work to do. This is giving me a lot to think about in my role as someone who serves this district, as an Asian American who's trying to help build those bridges, and that is not going to happen overnight.

One of the things I said on a radio show a few weeks ago is adults need to learn Asian American history, in addition to our students. I feel like we need something where professors, educators, and people of color develop curriculum and work together to learn about Asian American history, Black history, Latino history, Arab American history. We don't know each other's histories as adults. I agree about teaching our kids, but as adults we have to learn it, too.

Leigh Patel

Stephanie, you really have me thinking about how much knowledge has been stolen from us, over time, and how purposeful that has been. Allyson, you used the word "amnesia," and there has been this purposeful amnesia that has been put upon Asian American peoples, and how it has functioned within our communities. This has been an absolute theft. The shorthand term for the United States as an imperialist settler colony is this is a nation formed out of stolen labor on stolen land. As I come to you from my mother's house in Omaha, Nebraska, the Omaha people's unceded territory, there are so many different forms of theft that we need to reckon with. We need to name as this was stolen from us. This is another way in which hate crime is not going to fix that for us. We have to actually name it as systemic. We have to create our learning communities. We need more freedom schools in abolition.

I love this question that you pulled together, OiYan. How do we dream freedom with having one foot firmly planted in histories and knowledges that were stolen from us, but that are waiting for us? They are not gone. They're waiting for us. We need one foot planted firmly in order to dream freedom that works across categories that were created to keep us apart. To dream freedom in which we don't seek safety from a militarized police officer who sees us as objects that need to be controlled and sexualized. That is not where we will find freedom. We are able to dream a freedom that has healing. We've talked about love and how much healing is in there.

I'm taking a class on healing-centered coaching because, as a professor, I love the work that I do, but we don't talk much about healing in our work. In community spaces, in our relationships, and in our kinships is where we find healing. So how do we reclaim the education, the knowledges, the home spaces that were stolen from us and do it in such a way that we heal as we return to these histories that were taken from us?

Betina Hsieh

I want to thank our panelists for your presence, honesty, advocacy, and for all of the work that you do. You are who you are, and you bring that into every space, and it's a gift to all

of us. I want to acknowledge you, your humanity and your beauty. Thank you for the gift of your time.

So what can you do to further address anti-Asian violence? First, you can get to know various Asian American advocacy organizations and support them with your time, talent, and a one-time or regular donation. Second, learn about Asian American Studies. Learn about our stories, histories, and perspectives. Promote deeper study of racial theory that is inclusive of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities because we're erased and we don't know our own histories and the histories of other communities of color. We will perpetuate racism and white supremacy in our society if we don't. Third, those of us who are educational researchers, let us use our research, platforms, and privilege to impact and address questions in our communities and within our spheres of influence. When we belong to people, they listen to us and we can speak to them, so let us speak on this work wherever we belong. Lastly, in this panel, we have politicians and elected officials, so let's continue to develop working relationships with them, or even run for office. That will help us support and shape policies. In closing, we just want to thank you again for being here.

Disclosure statement

The session organizers are Roland Sintos Coloma, Betina Hsieh, and OiYan Poon. Coloma is a professor of Teacher Education at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. Hsieh is an associate professor of Teacher Education at California State University, Long Beach, and is chair of the Research on the Education of Asian and Pacific Americans (REAPA) special interest group in the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Poon is a Program Officer at the Spencer Foundation, based in Chicago, Illinois.

The distinguished panel consists of elected legislators, national leaders, and prominent academics—Stephanie Chang, Sung Yeon Choimorrow, Manjusha P. Kulkarni, Grace Meng, Leigh Patel, and Allyson Tintiango-Cubales. State Senator Chang, representing the first district of Michigan, is the Senate's Minority Floor Leader, and is the first Asian American woman to be elected to the state legislature. Choimorrow is the executive director of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, based in Chicago, Illinois. Kulkarni is the executive director of the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, based in Los Angeles, California, and is one of the leads of the Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center. Congresswoman Meng, representing the sixth district of New York, is the first Asian American to be elected to the U.S. Congress from the state of New York, and is the first vice chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. Patel is a professor of Educational Foundations, Organizations, and Policy at the University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. Tintiangco-Cubales is a professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University in northern California.

Coloma, Hsieh, and Poon would like to thank AERA, especially executive director Felice Levine and president Shaun Harper, for supporting this session when it was initially proposed after the heinous Atlanta shootings and for elevating it as a presidential session. The session is co-sponsored by AERA Division B (Curriculum Studies), Division G (Social Context of Education), and the REAPA special interest group. They would also like to thank the *Educational Studies* journal editors Ming Fang He and Bic Ngo for recognizing the significance of this high-profile discussion and for publishing this Commentary.

ORCID

Roland Sintos Coloma http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0375-517X

References

An, S. (2016). Asian Americans in American history: An AsianCrit perspective on Asian American inclusion in state US history curriculum standards. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, *44*(2), 244–276. doi:10.1080/00933104.2016.1170646

An, S. (2020). Disrupting Curriculum of Violence on Asian Americans. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, *42*(2), 141–156. doi:10.1080/10714413.2020.1753492

Boggs, G. L., & Kurashige, S. (2012). *The next American revolution: Sustainable activism for the twenty-first century*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cheng, A. A. (2001). *The melancholy of race: Psychoanalysis, assimilation, and hidden grief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Choy, C. (1987). *Who killed Vincent Chin?* [Film]. Film News Now Foundation and WTVS.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *1989*, 139–167.

Espiritu, Y. L. (1993). *Asian American panethnicity: Bridging institutions and identities*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Fujiwara, L. (2018). Multiplicity, women of color politics and an Asian American feminist praxis. In L. Fujiwara & S. Roshanravan (Eds.), *Asian American feminisms & women of color politics* (pp. 27–42). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Fujiwara, L., & Roshanravan, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Asian American feminisms and women of color politics*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Hong, C. P. (2020). *Minor feelings: An Asian American reckoning*. New York: One World.

Hsieh, B., & Nguyen, H. T. (2021). Coalitional resistance: Challenging racialized and gendered oppression in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *72*(3), 355–367. doi:10.1177/0022487120960371

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. (2016). (Eds.). *Color of violence: The INCITE! Anthology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Iyer, D. (2015). *We too sing America: South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh immigrants shape our multiracial future*. New York: New Press.

Jeung, R., Yellow Horse, A., Popovic, T., & Lim, R. (2021). *Stop AAPI Hate national report, 3/19/20 – 2/28/21*. Retrieved on April 20, 2021 from https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-210316.pdf.

Kurashige, L. (2016). *Two faces of exclusion: The untold history of anti-Asian racism in the United States*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Lee, E. (2015). *The making of Asian America: A history*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Lew-Williams, B. (2018). *The Chinese must go: Violence, exclusion, and the making of the alien in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom*. New York: Beacon Press.

Mabalon, D. B. (2013). *Little Manila is in the heart: The making of the Filipina/o American community in Stockton, California*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Matsuda, M. J. (1991). Beside my sister, facing the enemy: Legal theory out of coalition. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1183–1192. doi:10.2307/1229035

McDiarmid, J. (2019). *Highway of tears: A true story of racism, indifference, and the pursuit of justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Nayak, S. (2014). *Race, gender and the activism of Black feminist theory: Working with Audre Lorde*. New York: Routledge.

Ngai, M. M. (2014). *Impossible subjects: Illegal aliens and the making of modern America* (2nd ed.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Okawa, G. Y. (2020). *Remembering our grandfather's exile: US imprisonment of Hawai'i's Japanese in World War II*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Purakayastha, A. S. (2019). W.E.B. DuBois, B.R. Ambedkar and the history of Afro-Dalit solidarity. *Sanglap: Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry*, *6*(1), 20–36.

Rodriguez, D. (2021, April 8). The "Asian exception" and the scramble for legibility: Toward an abolitionist approach to anti-Asian violence. *Society & Space*. Retrieved on April 25, 2021, from https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/the-asian-exception-and-the-scramble-for-legibility-toward-an-abolitionist-approach-to-anti-asian-violence.

Rong, X. L., & Endo, R. (Eds.). (2011). *Asian American education: Identities, racial issues, and languages*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.

Sandoval, D. M., Ratcliff, A. J., Buenavista, T. L., & Marín, J. R. (Eds.). (2016). *"White" washing American education: The new cultural wars in ethnic studies*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Schlund-Vials, C. J., Wong K. S., & Chang, J. O. (Eds.). (2017). *Asian America: A primary source reader*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Shah, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Dragon ladies: Asian American feminists breathe fire*. Boston, MA: South End Press.

Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Shimizu, C. P. (2007). *The hypersexuality of race: Performing Asian/American women on screen and scene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Sleeter, C., & Zavala, M. (2020). *Transformative ethnic studies in schools: Curriculum, pedagogy, and research*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1994). Responsibility. *Boundary 2*, *21*(3), 19–64. doi:10.2307/303600

Takenaka, K. (2018). *Home*. Retrieved on April 25, 2021, from https://vimeo.com/242145479.

Tchen, J. K. W. & Yeats, D. (Eds.). (2014). *Yellow peril! An archive of anti-Asian fear*. New York: Verso.

Yoo, P. (2021). *From a whisper to a rallying cry: The killing of Vincent Chin and the trial that galvanized the Asian American movement*. New York: Norton Young Readers.

Learning from the 60s*

MALCOLM X IS a distinct shape in a very pivotal period of my life. I stand here now – Black, Lesbian, Feminist – an inheritor of Malcolm and in his tradition, doing my work, and the ghost of his voice through my mouth asks each one of you here tonight: Are you doing yours?

There are no new ideas, just new ways of giving those ideas we cherish breath and power in our own living. I'm not going to pretend that the moment I first saw or heard Malcolm X he became my shining prince, because it wouldn't be true. In February 1965 I was raising two children and a husband in a three-room flat on 149th Street in Harlem. I had read about Malcolm X and the Black Muslims. I became more interested in Malcolm X after he left the Nation of Islam, when he was silenced by Elijah Muhammad for his comment, after Kennedy's assassination, to the effect that the chickens had come home to roost. Before this I had not given much thought to the Nation of Islam because of their attitude toward women as well as because of their nonactivist stance. I'd read Malcolm's autobiography, and I liked his style, and I thought he looked a lot like my father's people, but I was one of the ones who didn't really hear Malcolm's voice until it was amplified by death.

I had been guilty of what many of us are still guilty of – letting the media, and I don't mean only the white media – define the bearers of those messages most important to our lives.

When I read Malcolm X with careful attention, I found a man much closer to the complexities of real change than anything I had read before. Much of what I say here tonight was born from his words.

* Talk delivered at the Malcolm X Weekend, Harvard University, February 1982.

In the last year of his life, Malcolm X added a breadth to his essential vision that would have brought him, had he lived, into inevitable confrontation with the question of difference as a creative and necessary force for change. For as Malcolm X progressed from a position of resistance to, and analysis of, the racial status quo, to more active considerations of organizing for change, he began to reassess some of his earlier positions. One of the most basic Black survival skills is the ability to change, to metabolize experience, good or ill, into something that is useful, lasting, effective. Four hundred years of survival as an endangered species has taught most of us that if we intend to live, we had better become fast learners. Malcolm knew this. We do not have to live the same mistakes over again if we can look at them, learn from them, and build upon them.

Before he was killed, Malcolm had altered and broadened his opinions concerning the role of women in society and the revolution. He was beginning to speak with increasing respect of the connection between himself and Martin Luther King, Jr., whose policies of nonviolence appeared to be so opposite to his own. And he began to examine the societal conditions under which alliances and coalitions must indeed occur.

He had also begun to discuss those scars of oppression which lead us to war against ourselves in each other rather than against our enemies.

As Black people, if there is one thing we can learn from the 60s, it is how infinitely complex any move for liberation must be. For we must move against not only those forces which dehumanize us from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves. Through examining the combination of our triumphs and errors, we can examine the dangers of an incomplete vision. Not to condemn that vision but to alter it, construct templates for possible futures, and focus our rage for change upon our enemies rather than upon each other. In the 1960s, the awakened anger of the Black community was often expressed, not vertically against the corruption of power and true sources of

Back to top.

control over our lives, but horizontally toward those closest to us who mirrored our own impotence.

We were poised for attack, not always in the most effective places. When we disagreed with one another about the solution to a particular problem, we were often far more vicious to each other than to the originators of our common problem. Historically, difference had been used so cruelly against us that as a people we were reluctant to tolerate any diversion from what was externally defined as Blackness. In the 60s, political correctness became not a guideline for living, but a new set of shackles. A small and vocal part of the Black community lost sight of the fact that unity does not mean unanimity – Black people are not some standardly digestible quantity. In order to work together we do not have to become a mix of indistinguishable particles resembling a vat of homogenized chocolate milk. Unity implies the coming together of elements which are, to begin with, varied and diverse in their particular natures. Our persistence in examining the tensions within diversity encourages growth toward our common goal. So often we either ignore the past or romanticize it, render the reason for unity useless or mythic. We forget that the necessary ingredient needed to make the past work for the future is our energy in the present, metabolizing one into the other. Continuity does not happen automatically, nor is it a passive process.

The 60s were characterized by a heady belief in instantaneous solutions. They were vital years of awakening, of pride, and of error. The civil rights and Black power movements rekindled possibilities for disenfranchised groups within this nation. Even though we fought common enemies, at times the lure of individual solutions made us careless of each other. Sometimes we could not bear the face of each other's differences because of what we feared those differences might say about ourselves. As if everybody can't eventually be too Black, too white, too man, too woman. But any future vision which can encompass all of us, by definition, must be complex and expanding, not easy to achieve. The answer to cold is heat, the answer to hunger is food. But there is no simple monolithic solution to racism, to sexism, to homophobia. There is only the conscious focusing

within each of my days to move against them, wherever I come up against these particular manifestations of the same disease. By seeing who the *we* is, we learn to use our energies with greater precision against our enemies rather than against ourselves.

In the 60s, white america – racist and liberal alike – was more than pleased to sit back as spectator while Black militant fought Black Muslim, Black Nationalist badmouthed the nonviolent, and Black women were told that our only useful position in the Black Power movement was prone. The existence of Black lesbian and gay people was not even allowed to cross the public consciousness of Black america. We know in the 1980s, from documents gained through the Freedom of Information Act, that the FBI and CIA used our intolerance of difference to foment confusion and tragedy in segment after segment of Black communities of the 60s. Black was beautiful, but still suspect, and too often our forums for debate became stages for playing who's-Blacker-than-who or who's-poorer-than-who games, ones in which there can be no winners.

The 60s for me was a time of promise and excitement, but the 60s was also a time of isolation and frustration from within. It often felt like I was working and raising my children in a vacuum, and that it was my own fault – if I was only Blacker, things would be fine. It was a time of much wasted energy, and I was often in a lot of pain. Either I denied or chose between various aspects of my identity, or my work and my Blackness would be unacceptable. As a Black lesbian mother in an interracial marriage, there was usually some part of me guaranteed to offend everybody's comfortable prejudices of who I should be. That is how I learned that if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive. My poetry, my life, my work, my energies for struggle were not acceptable unless I pretended to match somebody else's norm. I learned that not only couldn't I succeed at that game, but the energy needed for that masquerade would be lost to my work. And there were babies to raise, students to teach. The Vietnam War was escalating, our cities were burning, more and more of our school kids were nodding out in the halls, junk

was overtaking our streets. We needed articulate power, not conformity. There were other strong Black workers whose visions were racked and silenced upon some imagined grid of narrow Blackness. Nor were Black women immune. At a national meeting of Black women for political action, a young civil rights activist who had been beaten and imprisoned in Mississippi only a few years before, was trashed and silenced as suspect because of her white husband. Some of us made it and some of us were lost to the struggle. It was a time of great hope and great expectation; it was also a time of great waste. That is history. We do not need to repeat these mistakes in the 80s.

The raw energy of Black determination released in the 60s powered changes in Black awareness and self-concepts and expectations. This energy is still being felt in movements for change among women, other peoples of Color, gays, the handicapped – among all the disenfranchised peoples of this society. That is a legacy of the 60s to ourselves and to others. But we must recognize that many of our high expectations of rapid revolutionary change did not in fact occur. And many of the gains that did are even now being dismantled. This is not a reason for despair, nor for rejection of the importance of those years. But we must face with clarity and insight the lessons to be learned from the oversimplification of any struggle for self-awareness and liberation, or we will not rally the force we need to face the multidimensional threats to our survival in the 80s.

There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives. Malcolm knew this. Martin Luther King, Jr. knew this. Our struggles are particular, but we are not alone. We are not perfect, but we are stronger and wiser than the sum of our errors. Black people have been here before us and survived. We can read their lives like signposts on the road and find, as Bernice Reagon says so poignantly, that each one of us is here because somebody before us did something to make it possible. To learn from their mistakes is not to lessen our debt to them, nor to the hard work of becoming ourselves, and effective.

We lose our history so easily, what is not predigested for us by the *New York Times*, or the *Amsterdam News*, or *Time* magazine.

Maybe because we do not listen to our poets or to our fools, maybe because we do not listen to our mamas in ourselves. When I hear the deepest truths I speak coming out of my mouth sounding like my mother's, even remembering how I fought against her, I have to reassess both our relationship as well as the sources of my knowing. Which is not to say that I have to romanticize my mother in order to appreciate what she gave me – Woman, Black. We do not have to romanticize our past in order to be aware of how it seeds our present. We do not have to suffer the waste of an amnesia that robs us of the lessons of the past rather than permit us to read them with pride as well as deep understanding.

We know what it is to be lied to, and we know how important it is not to lie to ourselves.

We are powerful because we have survived, and that is what it is all about – survival and growth.

Within each one of us there is some piece of humanness that knows we are not being served by the machine which orchestrates crisis after crisis and is grinding all our futures into dust. If we are to keep the enormity of the forces aligned against us from establishing a false hierarchy of oppression, we must school ourselves to recognize that any attack against Blacks, any attack against women, is an attack against all of us who recognize that our interests are not being served by the systems we support. Each one of us here is a link in the connection between antipoor legislation, gay shootings, the burning of synagogues, street harassment, attacks against women, and resurgent violence against Black people. I ask myself as well as each one of you, exactly what alteration in the particular fabric of my everyday life does this connection call for? Survival is not a theory. In what way do I contribute to the subjugation of any part of those who I define as my people? Insight must illuminate the particulars of our lives: who labors to make the bread we waste, or the energy it takes to make nuclear poisons which will not biodegrade for one thousand years; or who goes blind assembling the microtransistors in our inexpensive calculators?

We are women trying to knit a future in a country where an Equal Rights Amendment was defeated as subversive legisla-

tion. We are Lesbians and gay men who, as the most obvious target of the New Right, are threatened with castration, imprisonment, and death in the streets. And we know that our erasure only paves the way for erasure of other people of Color, of the old, of the poor, of all of those who do not fit that mythic dehumanizing norm.

Can we really still afford to be fighting each other?

We are Black people living in a time when the consciousness of our intended slaughter is all around us. People of Color are increasingly expendable, our government's policy both here and abroad. We are functioning under a government ready to repeat in El Salvador and Nicaragua the tragedy of Vietnam, a government which stands on the wrong side of every single battle for liberation taking place upon this globe; a government which has invaded and conquered (as I edit this piece) the fifty-three square mile sovereign state of Grenada, under the pretext that her 110,000 people pose a threat to the U.S. Our papers are filled with supposed concern for human rights in white communist Poland while we sanction by acceptance and military supply the systematic genocide of apartheid in South Africa, of murder and torture in Haiti and El Salvador. American advisory teams bolster repressive governments across Central and South America, and in Haiti, while *advisory* is only a code name preceding military aid.

Decisions to cut aid for the terminally ill, for the elderly, for dependent children, for food stamps, even school lunches, are being made by men with full stomachs who live in comfortable houses with two cars and umpteen tax shelters. None of them go hungry to bed at night. Recently, it was suggested that senior citizens be hired to work in atomic plants because they are close to the end of their lives anyway.

Can any one of us here still afford to believe that efforts to reclaim the future can be private or individual? Can any one here still afford to believe that the pursuit of liberation can be the sole and particular province of any one particular race, or sex, or age, or religion, or sexuality, or class?

Revolution is not a one-time event. It is becoming always vigilant for the smallest opportunity to make a genuine change

in established, outgrown responses; for instance, it is learning to address each other's difference with respect.

We share a common interest, survival, and it cannot be pursued in isolation from others simply because their differences make us uncomfortable. We know what it is to be lied to. The 60s should teach us how important it is not to lie to ourselves. Not to believe that revolution is a one-time event, or something that happens around us rather than inside of us. Not to believe that freedom can belong to any one group of us without the others also being free. How important it is not to allow even our leaders to define us to ourselves, or to define our sources of power to us.

There is no Black person here who can afford to wait to be led into positive action for survival. Each one of us must look clearly and closely at the genuine particulars (conditions) of his or her life and decide where action and energy is needed and where it can be effective. Change is the immediate responsibility of each of us, wherever and however we are standing, in whatever arena we choose. For while we wait for another Malcolm, another Martin, another charismatic Black leader to validate our struggles, old Black people are freezing to death in tenements, Black children are being brutalized and slaughtered in the streets, or lobotomized by television, and the percentage of Black families living below the poverty line is higher today than in 1963.

And if we wait to put our future into the hands of some new messiah, what will happen when those leaders are shot, or discredited, or tried for murder, or called homosexual, or otherwise disempowered? Do we put our future on hold? What is that internalized and self-destructive barrier that keeps us from moving, that keeps us from coming together?

We who are Black are at an extraordinary point of choice within our lives. To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (they don't mean me) or by despair (there's nothing we can do). Each of us must find our work and do it. Militancy no longer means guns at high noon, if it ever did. It means actively working for change, sometimes in the absence of

any surety that change is coming. It means doing the unromantic and tedious work necessary to forge meaningful coalitions, and it means recognizing which coalitions are possible and which coalitions are not. It means knowing that coalition, like unity, means the coming together of whole, self-actualized human beings, focused and believing, not fragmented automatons marching to a prescribed step. It means fighting despair.

And in the university, that is certainly no easy task, for each one of you by virtue of your being here will be deluged by opportunities to misname yourselves, to forget who you are, to forget where your real interests lie. Make no mistake, you will be courted; and nothing neutralizes creativity quicker than tokenism, that false sense of security fed by a myth of individual solutions. To paraphrase Malcolm – a Black woman attorney driving a Mercedes through Avenue Z in Brooklyn is still a "nigger bitch," two words which never seem to go out of style.

You do not have to be me in order for us to fight alongside each other. I do not have to be you to recognize that our wars are the same. What we must do is commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities. And in order to do this, we must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness.

If our history has taught us anything, it is that action for change directed only against the external conditions of our oppressions is not enough. In order to be whole, we must recognize the despair oppression plants within each of us – that thin persistent voice that says our efforts are useless, it will never change, so why bother, accept it. And we must fight that inserted piece of self-destruction that lives and flourishes like a poison inside of us, unexamined until it makes us turn upon ourselves in each other. But we can put our finger down upon that loathing buried deep within each one of us and see who it encourages us to despise, and we can lessen its potency by the knowledge of our real connectedness, arcing across our differences.

Hopefully, we can learn from the 60s that we cannot afford to do our enemies' work by destroying each other.

What does it mean when an angry Black ballplayer – this happened in Illinois – curses a white heckler but pulls a knife on a Black one? What better way is there to police the streets of a minority community than to turn one generation against the other?

Referring to Black lesbians and gay men, the student president at Howard University says, on the occasion of a Gay Student Charter on campus, "The Black community has nothing to do with such filth – we will have to abandon *these people*." [italics mine] Abandon? Often without noticing, we absorb the racist belief that Black people are fitting targets for everybody's anger. We are closest to each other, and it is easier to vent fury upon each other than upon our enemies.

Of course, the young man at Howard was historically incorrect. As part of the Black community, he has a lot to do with "us." Some of our finest writers, organizers, artists and scholars in the 60s as well as today, have been lesbian and gay, and history will bear me out.

Over and over again in the 60s I was asked to justify my existence and my work, because I was a woman, because I was a Lesbian, because I was not a separatist, because some piece of me was not acceptable. Not because of my work but because of my identity. I had to learn to hold on to all the parts of me that served me, in spite of the pressure to express only one to the exclusion of all others. And I don't know what I'd say face to face with that young man at Howard University who says I'm filth because I identify women as my primary source of energy and support, except to say that it is my energy and the energy of other women very much like me which has contributed to his being where he is at this point. But I think he would not say it to my face because name-calling is always easiest when it is removed, academic. The move to render the presence of lesbians and gay men invisible in the intricate fabric of Black existence and survival is a move which contributes to fragmentation and weakness in the Black community.

In academic circles, as elsewhere, there is a kind of name-calling increasingly being used to keep young Black women in line. Often as soon as any young Black woman begins to recognize

that she is oppressed as a woman as well as a Black, she is called a lesbian no matter how she identifies herself sexually. "What do you mean you don't want to make coffee take notes wash dishes go to bed with me, you a lesbian or something?" And at the threat of such a dreaded taint, all too often she falls meekly into line, however covertly. But the word *lesbian* is only threatening to those Black women who are intimidated by their sexuality, or who allow themselves to be defined by it and from outside themselves. Black women in struggle from our own perspective, speaking up for ourselves, sharing close ties with one another politically and emotionally, are not the enemies of Black men. We are Black women who seek our own definitions, recognizing diversity among ourselves with respect. We have been around within our communities for a very long time, and we have played pivotal parts in the survival of those communities: from Hat Shep Sut through Harriet Tubman to Daisy Bates and Fannie Lou Hamer to Lorraine Hansberry to your Aunt Maydine to some of you who sit before me now.

In the 60s Black people wasted a lot of our substance fighting each other. We cannot afford to do that in the 80s, when Washington, D.C. has the highest infant mortality rate of any U.S. city, 60 percent of the Black community under twenty is unemployed and more are becoming unemployable, lynchings are on the increase, and less than half the registered Black voters voted in the last election.

How are you practicing what you preach – whatever you preach, and who exactly is listening? As Malcolm stressed, we are not responsible for our oppression, but we must be responsible for our own liberation. It is not going to be easy, but we have what we have learned and what we have been given that is useful. We have the power those who came before us have given us, to move beyond the place where they were standing. We have the trees, and water, and sun, and our children. Malcolm X does not live in the dry texts of his words as we read them; he lives in the energy we generate and use to move along the visions we share with him. We are making the future as well as bonding to survive the enormous pressures of the present, and that is what it means to be a part of history.

Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger*

*Where does the pain go when it goes away?***

EVERY BLACK WOMAN in America lives her life somewhere along a wide curve of ancient and unexpressed angers.

My Black woman's anger is a molten pond at the core of me, my most fiercely guarded secret. I know how much of my life as a powerful feeling woman is laced through with this net of rage. It is an electric thread woven into every emotional tapestry upon which I set the essentials of my life – a boiling hot spring likely to erupt at any point, leaping out of my consciousness like a fire on the landscape. How to train that anger with accuracy rather than deny it has been one of the major tasks of my life.

Other Black women are not the root cause nor the source of that pool of anger. I know this, no matter what the particular situation may be between me and another Black woman at the moment. Then why does that anger unleash itself most tellingly against another Black woman at the least excuse? Why do I judge her in a more critical light than any other, becoming enraged when she does not measure up?

---

* An abbreviated version of this essay was published in *Essence*, vol. 14, no. 6 (October 1983). I wish to thank the following women without whose insights and support I could not have completed this paper: Andrea Canaan, Frances Clayton, Michelle Cliff, Blanche Wiesen Cook, Clare Coss, Yvonne Flowers, Gloria Joseph, Adrienne Rich, Charlotte Sheedy, Judy Simmons and Barbara Smith. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Sheila Blackwell Pinckney, 1953-1983.

** From a poem by Dr. Gloria Joseph.

CRYSTAL PARIKH

CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR WORKS AND EVENTS, 1763–2014

1763 Filipino seamen working on a Spanish galleon establish a village in the Louisiana bayous.

1784 The United States–China trade begins with the departure of the Empress of China from New York, which leads to the arrival of Chinese immigrants, along with Chinese goods, to the United States.

1849 The start of the California Gold Rush draws the first significant number of immigrants to the United States.

1854 The California Supreme Court decides in the case of *People v. Hall* that the Chinese should be classified as "Indian" and are therefore not eligible to provide witness against a white person.

1868 The signing of the Burlingame Treaty between the United States and China establishes formal friendly relations between the two nations and encourages immigration from China to the United States.

1875 Under the guise of preventing the transporting of prostitutes to the United States, the passage of the Page Act by Congress effectively prohibits the immigration of women from China to the United States.

1882 The Chinese Exclusion Act is the first law to significantly restrict immigration and eliminates most new Chinese immigration to the United States.

1898 With the signing of the Treaty of Paris at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War, the United States acquires the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. Duke University Libraries, on 05 Jun 2020 at 22:40:00, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316155011

Back to top.

	island territories of the Philippines (and other territories in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean regions).
	The United States annexes the Kingdom of Hawai'i. Queen Lili'uokalani, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*
1899	Onoto Watanna (aka Winnifred Eaton), *Miss Nume of Japan*
1901–1905	In a series of Supreme Court cases known as the Insular Cases, concerning the status of the former Spanish colonies acquired by the United States, the Court designates these territories, including the Philippines, as "foreign in a domestic sense." Residents of these territories are granted the status of "American nationals" rather than U.S. citizens.
1907	The signing of the Gentlemen's Agreement, a treaty between the United States and Japan, drastically reduces the number of Japanese immigrants to the United States; it also cedes control of the Korean peninsula to Japan, marking the beginning of decades of brutal colonial rule.
1912	Sui Sin Far (aka Edith Maude Eaton), *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*
1917	The 1917 Immigration Act restricts immigration from the "Asiatic Barred Zone."
1922	The ruling in the Supreme Court case of *Ozawa v. U.S.* rejects Takao Ozawa's petition for U.S. citizenship on the basis that the Japanese do not qualify as white.
1923	The decision in the Supreme Court case of *U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind* finds that Asian Indians are not eligible for U.S. citizenship because they are not white.
1924	The passage of the Johnson-Reed Act effectively ends almost all immigration from Asian countries (as well as from Southern and Eastern Europe).
1925	Shōson Nagahara, *Lament in the Night* (in Japanese)
1941	The Imperial Japanese Navy launches a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawai'i. As a result, the United States enters World War II.
1942	President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066 on February 19, authorizing the creation of military zones and the relocation of Japanese Americans from areas considered

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. Duke University Libraries, on 05 Jun 2020 at 22:40:00, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316155011

	vital for military security; most are eventually resettled in internment camps for the duration of World War II.
	U.S. and Philippine troops are forced on a brutal trek to prison camps in the Bataan Province of the Philippines in what comes to be known the Bataan Death March.
1943	Pardee Lowe, *Father and Glorious Descendant*
1945	U.S. forces drop atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. World War II ends.
	Jade Snow Wong, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*
1946	The Philippines are granted independence from the United States.
	Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*
1949	The Communist Revolution in China brings Mao Zedong to power, who establishes the People's Republic of China.
1950–1953	The Korean War
1952	The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, ends Asian exclusion.
1953	Monica Sone, *Nisei Daughter*
1955	Representatives from twenty-nine countries meet in Bandung, Indonesia, for the Afro-Asian Conference.
1957	John Okada, *No-No Boy*
1958	The musical production of *Flower Drum Song*, based on the 1957 novel by C. Y. Lee, opens on Broadway.
1959	Hawai'i is granted U.S. statehood.
1960–1975	The Vietnam War
1964	Richard Kim, *The Martyred*
	The clash between U.S. and North Vietnamese naval forces in the Gulf of Tonkin leads to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution by Congress and increased U.S. military deployment in Vietnam.
1965	The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act eliminates the national origins quota system and extensively restructures immigration policy.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. Duke University Libraries, on 05 Jun 2020 at 22:40:00, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316155011

	The theater company East West Players is founded in Los Angeles, California.
1967	The Supreme Court decision in the case of *Loving v. Virginia* strikes down bans on interracial marriage.
	Daniel K. Inouye, *Journey to Washington*
1970	Poetry carved into the walls of the then-shuttered Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay by Chinese migrants who had been detained there between 1910 and 1940 is discovered.
1972	*The Chickencoop Chinaman* by Frank Chin is first produced in New York.
1974	The Supreme Court decision in the case of *Lau v. Nichols* finds that schools need to provide special services for students who are unable to speak English.
	Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chang, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, Eds., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian American Writers*
	Frank Chin, *The Year of the Dragon*
1975–1994	The United States imposes an embargo on Vietnam.
1975	Milton Murayama, *All I Asking For Is My Body*
1976	Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*
1977	Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men*
1978	Eric Chock and Darrell Lum found the Bamboo Ridge Press in Hawai'i.
1980	The passage of the Refugee Act provides for the systematic admission, resettlement, and economic assistance of refugees in the United States.
1981	The English translation of Nieh Hualing's *Mulberry and Peach* (originally published serially in Chinese in the 1970s) is published.
	Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, Eds., *This Bridge Called My Back*
	Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. Duke University Libraries, on 05 Jun 2020 at 22:40:00, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316155011

1982	Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée*
1983	Dennis Carroll, *Kumu Kuhua Plays*
	Cathy Song, *Picture Bride*
1988	Congress passes the Civil Liberties Act, which issues an official apology and provides for reparations for surviving Japanese internees.
	David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*
1989	Asian Women United of California, *Making Waves*
	Jeannie Barroga, *Walls*
	Le Ly Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*
	Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club*
1990	Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters*
	Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*
1991	The United States closes its military bases in the Philippines.
	Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Shawn Wong, *The Big Aiiieeeee!*
1994	Sharon Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside*
1995	Chang-rae Lee, *Native Speaker*
	R. Zamora Linmark, *Rolling the Rs*
1996	Dale Furutani, *Death in Little Tokyo*
	Shirley Geok-lin Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces*
	Helie Lee, *Still Life with Rice*
1997	Nora Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman*
1998	The Association for Asian American Studies awards its prize in literature to Lois-Ann Yamanaka for her novel *Blu's Hanging* (1997) but rescinds it soon after, sparking much heated controversy.
	Susan Choi, *The Foreign Student*
	Ruth Ozeki, *My Year of Meats*
1999	Andrew X. Pham, *Catfish and Mandala*

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. Duke University Libraries, on 05 Jun 2020 at 22:40:00, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316155011

2001	Terrorists from al-Qaeda launch a series of coordinated attacks in New York City and the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, resulting in the deaths of more than 3,000 people.
	President George W. Bush declares "war on terror"; the war in Afghanistan begins.
	Congress passes the USA PATRIOT Act.
	Phil Yu launches the blog *Angry Asian Man*.
	Playwright David Henry Hwang stages his "revisical" of *Flower Drum Song* on Broadway.
2002	Ted Chiang, *Stories of Your Life and Others*
2003	United States invades Iraq.
	lê thị diễm thúy, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*
	Monique Truong, *The Book of Salt*
2004	Ha Jin, *War Trash*
2005	The English translation of *The Guest* (2001) by Korean writer Hwang Sok-Yong is published.
	Gish Jen, *The Love Wife*
2006	Kip Fulbeck, *Part Asian 100% Hapa*
2007	Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*
	Ed Lin, *This Is a Bust*
2008	Mahvish Khan, *My Guantánamo Diary*
	Nam Le, *The Boat*
	Linh Dinh, *Love Like Hate*
2009	Rajiv Joseph, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*
2011	Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*
2013	Maxine Hong Kingston receives the National Medal of Arts.
	Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*
2014	Chang-rae Lee, On Such a Full Sea

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. Duke University Libraries, on 05 Jun 2020 at 22:40:00, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316155011

2

Canon, Institutionalization, Identity: Asian American Studies

> In our headlong rush to educate everybody, we are . . . destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanised caravans.
>
> —T. S. Eliot, *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* (1949)

> Mrs. Hammerick . . . Boiling Spring Elementary School . . . I was scared of her like no dark corners could ever scare me. You have to know that all the while she was teaching us history . . . she was telling all the boys in our class that I was Pearl and my last name was Harbor. They understood her like she was speaking French and their names were all Claude and Pierre. I felt it in the lower half of my stomach, and it throbbed and throbbed.
>
> —Monique Thuy-Dung Truong, "Kelly" (1991)

In the previous chapter, I argued that the modern nation-state forms abstract citizens for the political sphere, disavowing the racialization and gendering of noncitizen labor in the economic sphere through the reproduction of an exclusive notion of national culture in the cultural sphere. Here, I extend this argument to focus on the liberal educational apparatus of the university as an important site in which these processes come into contradiction. Approaching the question of Asian American Studies in the university as one location of visible struggles over culture, education, and citizenship, I pose T. S. Eliot's 1949 lament that democratized education puts Western culture at risk from the encroachments of both non-Western cultures and mass culture against Monique Thuy-Dung Truong's 1991 short

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

Back to top.

story "Kelly" in order to ground my discussion in two fundamental relationships. First, the juxtaposition of Eliot's nostalgia for the "ancient edifice" of Western culture and Truong's story of a Vietnamese immigrant girl in a North Carolina classroom renders explicit a relationship between the culturalist narrative that valorizes Western culture as a separate sphere and the materially, racially, and sexually differentiated society against which that notion of autonomous culture is constructed and whose contradictions it works to conceal. Second, I hope my discussion may reinscribe a connection between the developmental narrative that privileges the elite subject of a "prior" Western civilization and the voiceless invisibility imposed on students of color in the classroom produced by that narrative. In this chapter, I explore the institutionalization of Asian American literary study as a medium for the contradictions implied by these two relationships and consider the importance of Asian American Studies as an oppositional site from which to contest the educational apparatus that reproduces and continues to be organized by Western culturalist, as well as developmental, narratives. Considering the contemporary university as an "ideological state apparatus," in which intellectual and pedagogical labors make and remake alternative spaces by exploiting the contradictions of that state apparatus, I locate the critical engagement with Asian American cultural identity in the university as a *locus* of struggle by focusing especially on questions of literary canon and the formation of the subject. In the following chapter, I will turn to a discussion of popular culture in order to continue this critical interrogation of the production of Asian American cultural identity by dominant institutions and within the discourse of Asian American cultural politics itself. In both discussions, I suggest that while Asian American cultural identity emerges in the context of the racialized exclusion of Asian immigrants from enfranchisement in the political and cultural spheres of the United States, important contradictions exist between an exclusively Asian American cultural nationalist construction of identity and the material heterogeneity of the Asian American constituency, particularly class, gender, and national-origin differences among peoples of Asian descent in the United States.

We need not look far to find residues of Eliot's distress over Western cultural "disintegration" within contemporary American discourse about

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

education; William Bennett, Lynne Cheney, Allan Bloom, Dinesh D'Souza, and others have contributed their share to this concerted lament. Yet, it is evident that these attempts to maintain a fixed, autonomous notion of Western culture belie precisely the material strata and social differentiations for which this notion has traditionally functioned as a resolution. As Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton have pointed out, the rise of modern humanities in the eighteenth century and their institutionalization in the nineteenth century were themselves directly related to the rise of the Western bourgeoisie, who won their battle with the old aristocracy by redefining the liberal subject in the context of competition by free agents in the marketplace.[1] In the last half of the twentieth century in the United States, society's need for a trained, yet stratified labor force; the Civil Rights movement that exposed the realities of race beneath the promise of democracy; as well as post-1965 increases in racialized immigrant populations: each have made it all the more difficult for contemporary discourse about education, both liberal and neoconservative, to ignore, as Eliot's nostalgia for "a more articulated society" did, the mandate for the democratization and diversification of the modern educational apparatus. In this sense, the neoconservative educational agenda, as Henry Giroux and Peter McClaren have observed, operates through two platforms: on the one hand, through the advocacy of "cultural unification" and a demand for a recanonization of Western classics; and on the other, through an expansion (at the expense of humanities or social science research) of a technicist or vocationalist curriculum that blames the demise of U.S. economic hegemony on the failure of education to train competitive professional and technical classes adequately.[2] The liberal discourse on education has challenged this reformulation of a unified Western culture by advocating a diversification of the humanities curriculum and urging an integration of the university through student and faculty affirmative action. Yet to the degree that liberal challenges have remained wedded to a culturalist paradigm, however "multiculturalist," that still tends to isolate culture from material relations, they have yet to disrupt adequately the neoconservative management of the function of university education. The university continues to be organized by means of a bifurcated conception that at once protects Western cultural study as a largely autonomous domain and "democratizes" the institution

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

only to the extent that it addresses the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student population through the development of business, engineering, technical, and other professionalizing programs. The result is a contradiction in which "culture" remains canonical in the traditional Western European sense, while the educational system (claiming a "multicultural" conscience) serves to socialize and incorporate students from other backgrounds into the capitalist market economy. In Martin Carnoy's analysis, the contradiction which brings new social groups into the educational system for vocationalization but which continues to universalize a closed, autonomous notion of culture precisely implies "an exploitable political space for those that are willing to engage in the struggle for change."[3]

In contemporary universities, this contradiction is visibly animated in the emergence of interdisciplinary fields, such as Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies, Third World Studies, and Cultural Studies. Interdisciplinary studies express contradiction—or in Carnoy's terms, "exploitable political space"—to the degree that they provide the sites from which to reevaluate disciplinary methods that assume Western cultural autonomy and the universality of the Western subject. Interdisciplinary studies disrupt the narratives of traditional disciplines that have historically subordinated the concerns of non-Western, racial and ethnic minority peoples, and women, insofar as they hold the potential to transform disciplinary divisions that guarantee the self-evidence of these narratives. In women's studies, for example, work by and about women of color—for example, the very different theoretical work of Chela Sandoval, Kimberlé Crenshaw, or Evelyn Nakano Glenn—illustrates this interdisciplinarity to the degree that this work makes use of a varied constellation of critical apparatuses that refuses univocality, totalization, and scholarly indifference.[4] This work redefines the traditional separations of the scholar-subject and the object of study; it persistently argues for the inseparability of the nonequivalent determinations of race, class, and gender. To the extent that the university and its institutionalized divisions of knowledge production often pressures interdisciplinary studies to formalize and legitimate themselves in terms of established criteria, however, interdisciplinary programs and departments have always needed to be vigilant in relation to institutionalization. In this sense, Ethnic Studies scholars do not reproduce the methods of literary,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

historical, or sociological studies merely to celebrate "ethnic culture" as an object separated from the material conditions of production and reception; they theorize, in a critical, dialectical manner, the relationship between cultural artifacts and the social groupings by which they are produced and which they, in turn, help to produce.[5] At the same time, institutionalizing such fields as Ethnic Studies still contains an inevitable paradox: institutionalization provides a material base within the university for a transformative critique of traditional disciplines and their traditional separations, and yet the institutionalization of any field or curriculum that establishes orthodox objects and methods submits in part to the demands of the university and its educative function of socializing subjects into the state. While institutionalizing interdisciplinary study risks integrating it into a system that threatens to appropriate what is most critical and oppositional about that study, the logic through which the university incorporates areas of interdisciplinarity provides for the possibility that these sites will remain oppositional forums, productively antagonistic to notions of autonomous culture and disciplinary regulation and to the interpellation of students as univocal subjects. In terms of Asian American Studies, the approach to questions of reading texts, constituting objects of study, and teaching students can determine the extent to which Ethnic Studies serves the traditional function of the university and the extent to which it provides for a continuing and persistent site from which to educate students to be actively critical of that traditional function.

One manner by which Asian American Studies' interdisciplinarity and self-determination can be incorporated into the university is through a particular deployment of a brand of "multiculturalism," which must be clearly distinguished from panethnic or cross-racial coalitions of students and faculty which ally with other groups around the demand for more radical transformations of the university.[6] Exploiting the notion of "multiculturalism," the university can refer to the study of ethnic cultures in its claim to be an institution to which all racial and ethnic minority groups have equal access and in which all are represented, while masking the degree to which the larger institution still fails to address the needs of populations of color. For example, though many universities have begun to reappraise their curricula in the humanities, adding texts by non-Western or female

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

authors to Western civilization courses, there are fewer Black students attending college today than in 1975. A multiculturalist agenda may thematize the pressures that demographic increases of immigrant, racial, and ethnic populations bring to the educational sphere. But these pressures are registered only partially and inadequately when the studies of ethnic traditions are, on an intellectual level, assimilated as analogues of Western European traditions or exoticized as primitive and less "developed" and, on an institutional level, tokenized as examples of the university's commitment to "diversity," while being marginalized through underfunding. Such pluralist multiculturalism may be, for the contemporary period, a central arena for what Antonio Gramsci called "hegemony," the process by which a ruling group gains "consent" of its constituents to determine the cultural, ideological, and political character of a state. The terrain of multiculturalism is then marked by the incorporative process by which a ruling group elicits the "consent" of racial, ethnic, or class minority groups through the promise of equal participation and representation; but to the extent that multiculturalism—as a discourse designed to recuperate conflict and difference through inclusion—is itself the index of crisis in a specific dominant formation, the terrain of multiculturalism also provides for the activities of racial, class, and sexual minority groups who organize and contest that domination. Within this context, we can appreciate the evident importance of self-determined interventions by groups that both distinguish themselves from liberal multiculturalism and do not exclusively reproduce pluralist arguments of inclusion and rights.

The establishment of a canon of Asian American literature is one part of a project of institutional change within which racialized Americans as social subjects articulate an educational space within the university and constitute literary objects as expressions of a distinct, self-determining group and through which the notion of the "subject" interpellated by the university is altered and revised in light of the heterogeneous social formations of racialized immigrant subjects. Yet, paradoxically, according to the contradiction that I have just outlined, the definition of an "ethnic literature," figured by an "ethnic canon," may compromise the *critical* project of institutional change if it is forced to subscribe to criteria defined by the majority canon

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

in order to establish the formal unity of a literary tradition; for it is precisely the standard of a literary canon that the Eurocentric and professionalizing university demands of Asian Americans and other racial and ethnic minority cultures so as to formalize those cultures as "developed" traditions. In drawing a distinction between "major" and "minor" literatures, David Lloyd has argued that the Anglo-European function of canonization is to unify aesthetic culture as a domain in which material stratifications and differences are reconciled. A "major" literary canon traditionally performs that reconciliation by means of a selection of works that uphold a narrative of ethical formation in which the individual relinquishes particular differences through an identification with a universalized form of subjectivity; a "minor" literature may conform to the criteria of the "major" canon, or it may interrupt the function of reconciliation by challenging the concepts of identity and identification and by voicing antagonisms to the universalizing narrative of development.[7] In response to the demand that the Asian American canon function as a supplement or corollary to the "major" tradition of Anglo-American literature, Asian American literary texts often reveal heterogeneity rather than reproducing regulating ideas of cultural identity or integration. On one level, this heterogeneity is expressed in the unfixed, unclosed field of texts written by authors at different distances and generations from cultures as different as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Philippine, Indian, Vietnamese, and Lao—or, as in the case of Hawaiian and Pacific Islander cultures, not *immigrants* at all but colonized, dispossessed, and deracinated.[8] The Asian American constituency is composed of men and women of exclusively Asian parents and of mixed race, of refugees and nonrefugees, of the English speaking and the non-English speaking, of people of urban, rural, and different class backgrounds, and of heterosexuals as well as gays and lesbians. For this reason, even when anthologies have offered selected literary works to represent the tradition, such as in *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (1975) or the more recent *Forbidden Stitch: An Asian American Women's Anthology* (1989) and *Unbroken Thread: An Anthology of Plays by Asian American Women* (1993), their editors have clearly historicized their definitions as products of particular moments of Asian American cultural definition and, to thematize the possibility of shifts, revisions, and different formations, to account for the

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

heterogeneous and uneven development of the various groups that make up the Asian American community.[9] Mayumi Tsutakawa writes of *Forbidden Stitch,* for example, that "no one should think of this book as the single definitive text. . . . This is not a book with a shelf life of forever" (14).

On another level, the literature expresses heterogeneity not merely in the constituency it is construed to "represent" but also in the manners through which it puts into relief the material conditions of production. Indeed, the study of Asian American literature has been historically an endeavor that has been committed to a consideration of the work in terms of its material contexts of production and reception. For this reason, Elaine Kim's immeasurably important first critical study, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982), emphasizes "how the literature elucidates the social history of Asians in the United States" rather than focusing exclusively on "the formal literary merit" of those works.[10] Kim makes clear that her decision to interrogate Asian American literature as an expression of social context is due not to the literature's lack of stylistic or rhetorical complexity but to the way in which the literature itself captures a "movement between social history and literature." Asian American literature, by virtue of its distance from the historical formation of American national literature, resists the formal abstraction of aestheticization and canonization. We have understood that the moment of "cultural negativity" in Asian American literature resides not in its status as autonomous "high" art but in material contradictions of history that generate concrete particulars unassimilable to dominant forms. If Asian American literary expression is evaluated in exclusively canonical terms, it reveals itself as an aesthetic product that cannot repress the material inequalities of its conditions of production; its aesthetic is defined by contradiction, not sublimation, such that discontent, nonequivalence, and irresolution call into question the project of abstracting the aesthetic as a separate domain of unification and reconciliation. It is a literature that, if subjected to a canonical function, dialectically returns a critique of that function.

In this sense, just as the conception of an Asian American canon animates a contradiction between an institutional demand for assimilation to major criteria and the unassimilable alterity of racialized cultural difference, so too do Asian American works themselves precisely underscore

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

the tension between unifying American cultural narratives and the heterogeneous, intersecting formations of racialized immigrant subjects that are antagonistic to those narratives. Considering one of the core works of Asian American literature—Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* (1943)—we observe that on one level the novel may be read as an Asian American version of the form of the bildungsroman, or novel of formation, to the degree that it narrates the protagonist's development from the uncertainty, locality, and impotence of "youth" to the definition, mobility, and potency of "maturity." At the same time, to the degree that the narrative captures the complex, unsynthetic constitution of the immigrant subject between an already twice-colonized Philippine culture, on the one hand, and the pressure to conform to Anglo-American society, on the other, it troubles the closure and reconciliation of the bildungsroman form. Whether the novel is read as a narrative of immigrant assimilation or even as a narrative of successful self-definition (the hero leaves the poverty and lack of opportunity of the Philippines to become a laborer in the United States; he achieves a state of self-consciousness that allows him to become a journalist and to author his autobiography), both characterizations privilege a telos of development that closes off the most interesting conflicts and indeterminacies in the text. In addition, reading the novel as an analogue of the European novel subordinates Asian American culture in several significant ways: not only does the form itself structurally imply an integration and submission of individual particularity to a universalized social norm (which, in the case of the Asian American novel, is racial or ethnic difference coded as anterior to, less than, Western civilization), but in privileging a nineteenth-century European genre as the model to be approximated, Asian American literature is cast as imitation, mimicry, the underdeveloped other. For these reasons, we can attend instead to the ways in which a novel such as *America Is in the Heart* does not comply with the notion of a unified aesthetic form and how the concepts of development, synthesis, and identity are themselves challenged in the text. Taught as an ethnic bildungsroman, as a tale of the subject's journey from foreign estrangement to integrated citizenship, the novel responds to the reconciliatory and universalizing functions of canonization; taught with attention to social and historical, as well as formal and thematic, contradictions, the novel may eloquently thematize how the demand

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

for canonization simultaneously produces a critique of canonization itself.

Bulosan's novel portrays its hero as highly seduced by the notion of individual freedom through education. The narrative that begins in the Philippines, where the hero's family sacrifices greatly to send their oldest son, Macario, to school, figures both English literacy and American education as paths to freedom and self-development, particularly in the myths of Robinson Crusoe and Abraham Lincoln. Once in the United States, however, the hero does not have access to formal schooling and is forced to teach himself; that he creates his own curriculum out of the fragments of books and resources available to him reveals the disjunction between the promise of education and the unequal access of different racial and economic groups to that education. From the outset, the protagonist's literary education is a disrupted, partial, and fragmentary one. Moreover, his "education" is equally informed by his observations of the exploitation, violence, marginality, and incarcerations suffered by Philippine immigrants to the United States, which further challenge his belief in the promise of American democracy. This contradiction is explicitly foregrounded when the narrator ponders the paradox of America: "Why was America so kind and yet so cruel? Was there no way to simplifying things in this continent so that suffering would be minimized? Was there no common denominator on which we could all meet? I was angry and confused and wondered if I would ever understand this paradox."[11] When he suggests that there is a "common denominator on which we could all meet," the narrator poses his questions within the adopted language of democratic pluralism, a language that pronounces a faith in the promise of equal opportunity and inclusion. Yet it is precisely this notion of "common denominator" that the narrator comes to understand as contradictory and riddled with exceptions, strata, and exclusions, when he later quotes his brother Macario at length:

> America is a prophecy of a new society of men: of a system that knows no sorrow or strife or suffering. . . .
> America is also the nameless foreigner, the homeless refugee, the hungry boy begging for a job and the black body dangling on a tree. America is the illiterate immigrant who is ashamed that the world of books and intellectual opportunities is closed to him. We are all that nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illit-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

> erate immigrant and that lynched black body. All of us, from the first Adams to the last Filipino, native born or alien, educated or illiterate—*We are America!* (188–89)

In this later meditation, two starkly different visions of "America" are posed against each other: the national fiction of democratic nation-state without sorrow or suffering, and a nation whose members barely survive owing to exclusion from that nation-state. The "America" that is "in the heart" is a stratified, contradictory figure divided between the named promise of democracy and the unnamed refugees, immigrants, and victims of violence who live beneath that promise. In this sense, the proclamation "We are America!" does not represent an identification of the immigrant subject with the national fiction of inclusion so much as it contests that identification by inserting a heterogeneous "we"—"that nameless foreigner, that homeless refugee, that hungry boy, that illiterate immigrant and that lynched black body"—into the concept of polity. This insertion introduces antinomy into the promise of synthesis, displaces unity with antagonism, and renders visible the political differentiation and disenfranchisement prematurely resolved by a fiction of reconciliation; through the insertion of these *allegories* of immigration, the figure of "the immigrant" is unfixed as *symbol* and *bildung* and dialectically placed within the shifting formation of history. The narrative of *America Is in the Heart* is punctuated throughout by the continual migration of Filipino work crews that move from job to job up and down the western United States, and the novel closes with a description of the narrator departing again with another crew en route to Portland. He observes, from the window of the bus, a group of workers in the fields: "I wanted to shout good-by to the Filipino pea pickers. . . . How many times in the past had I done just that?" (326). The novel ends with the repetition of yet another departure and relocation, framed as symptomatic of a continuing inequality between powerful agribusiness capital and immigrant labor, rather than with settlement, permanence, or resolution. It is an uneven, divided notion of America that concludes the novel, rather than a naturalized unification of those unevennesses and divisions. Thus, *America Is in the Heart* does not "develop" the narrating subject's identification with a uniform American nation: the achievement of narrative voice is precisely the effect of the subject's critical estrangement from and dissymmetrical

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

relationship to American culturalist, economic, and nationalist formations.

The manner in which Asian American literature refuses the premature reconciliation of Asian immigrant particularity is also illustrated by three novels that portray the internment and relocation of first- and second-generation Japanese in the United States and Canada during World War II. Monica Sone's *Nisei Daughter* (1953), John Okada's *No-No Boy* (1957), and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) each represent different narrative treatments of Japanese North Americans during and following the internment, men and women who were forced either to identify with the Japanese state and be named enemies of the United States, or Canada, or to assimilate unquestioningly to American or Canadian culture and to repudiate any Japanese cultural affiliation. This impossibly binary demand, encountered in different ways by the protagonists of all three novels, is not dissimilar to the predicament of many racialized minority peoples who face disenfranchisement unless they abandon their particular cultures to become citizens assimilated by way of a common culture. Yet for Japanese American and Japanese Canadian men and women, this process was coercively enforced through physical detention in the camps and for nisei men through the demand that they prove their patriotism by enlisting in the armed services to fight against Japan. In portraying the effects of the internment on Japanese North Americans, none of the novels delivers an undivided, assimilated subject who comes to identify with the American or Canadian citizenry; all three narratives refuse, in different manners, to develop, reconcile, and resolve.

Of the three novels, Sone's *Nisei Daughter* is formally the most conventional—a semiautobiographical first-person narrative that proceeds linearly from a girlhood in the Seattle Japanese community, moves through and beyond the events of the internment, and ends by pronouncing that "the Japanese and American parts of me were now blended into one."[12] But because of *Nisei Daughter*'s depiction of anti-Japanese racism, employment segregations, immigration restrictions, and ultimately the internment, the blending of "Japanese" and "American" is conceived only in terms of the larger structure of unequal power within which Japanese Americans are subordinated by the U.S. government. Throughout the novel, many scenes dramatize the nonequivalent force of Japanese and American cultures on

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

the nisei, and this nonequivalence contextualizes the final statement of "blending" as a rhetorical response to the demand that the nisei resolve their identity issues by assimilating as American citizens. Considering the larger narrative, we can read for the "false ring" of the ending, can call its premature resolution into question. While the nisei child rebels against the normalizing expectations of both Japanese and American socializations, the Japanese customs are encouraged by parents and family friends, whereas the representative agents of American ways are armed policemen who, in one episode, storm into the Itoi home to arrest Kazuko's father on false charges of which he is later cleared. Thus, midway through the novel when the Itoi family is interned, this nonequivalence becomes even more explicit, and the narrative turns into a concerted critique of the suppression of Japanese and Japanese Americans by the U.S. government. After a family friend has been abducted by the FBI, the Itois are warned that they must destroy everything and anything Japanese that could incriminate them, yet Kazuko cannot bring herself to destroy all the Japanese items in their home: "I gathered together my well-worn Japanese language schoolbooks which I had been saving over a period of ten years with the thought that they might come in handy when I wanted to teach Japanese to my own children. I threw them into the fire and watched them flame and shrivel into black ashes. But when I came face to face with my Japanese doll which Grandmother Nagashima had sent me from Japan, I rebelled" (155). The destruction of Japanese-language books described in this passage emblematizes the ways in which Japanese Americans were forced to internalize the negation of Japanese culture and to assimilate to Anglo-American majority culture during World War II. Kazuko's refusal to destroy all Japanese items is reiterated at other moments in the novel in which she expresses defiant anger at the treatment of the Japanese—for example, in the rage she feels while looking at the barrel of the soldier's gun pointed toward internees boarding a bus (170). These moments, which underscore the attempted destruction of Japanese American cultural forms by the U.S. state and its repressive military and police apparatuses, render the final "blending" of two equal parts a provisional response to both social and canonical demands for resolution. Rather than a final synthesis which denies the damage of the internment or which reconciles the Japanese American subject divided by the

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

"enemy/not enemy" logic of the state, we can read the declaration of Japanese and American "blending" as a manner of naming a continuing project of suspicion and survival as the nisei subject narrates the violence of a system that demands assimilation through internment, obligatory patriotism, and military service.

The suspicion beneath the premature reconciliation of *Nisei Daughter* is thrown even further into relief when Sone's text is considered in conjunction with Okada's *No-No Boy,* a novel of discontent in which the Japanese American protagonist angrily refuses adjustment to his postinternment and postimprisonment circumstances, and Kogawa's *Obasan,* a weave of personal, familial, and historical memory whose formal modernism suggests the recomposition of fragments, rather than a unified development, as the narrative expression of the relocated Japanese Canadian subject.[13] Virtually ignored when it was published in 1957 and rejected by the reading public for its uncompromisingly unconventional style, *No-No Boy* was reissued in 1976 by the University of Washington Press after an excerpt of it was featured in the anthology *Aiiieeeee! No-No Boy* may be characterized as a realist narrative to the extent that its action proceeds chronologically. But it is *antidevelopmental* in the sense that its condensed, almost static portrait takes place within the small period of several weeks, and it repeatedly undermines uniperspectivalism by alternating inconsistently between a third-person omniscient narration and despairing, angry, or confused interior monologues. The narrative shifts back and forth between different voices within long, run-on sentences, conveying the confusion and entropy of the protagonist Ichiro on his return to Seattle after two years of internment and two subsequent years in prison for refusing to serve in the U.S. Army, and documenting his bitter confusion, isolation, and shame as he confronts nisei soldiers and veterans, nisei women, white Americans, his parents, and other Japanese issei. Ichiro is a deeply divided subject, antagonistic both to the American government that interned and imprisoned Japanese Americans and to Japanese patriots like his mother who feverishly deny Japan's defeat in the war; in effect, the "no-no boy" not only refuses loyalty to either Japan or the United States but also refuses the "enemy/not-enemy" logic of the choice itself. Just as Ichiro's "no" dramatizes the Asian American subject's refusal to accept the dividing, subordinating terms of assimilation, so

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

the novel's stasis, fragmentation, and discontent refuse the development, synthesis, and reconciliation required by traditional canonical criteria.

Formally more complex than either *Nisei Daughter* or *No-No Boy*, Kogawa's *Obasan* makes use of different narrative and dramatic techniques to portray the splitting, silencing, and irresolution of Japanese Canadian subjects. The novel's opening places the narrator in 1972, three decades after the internment and relocation of the Japanese Canadians; the text moves back and forth between different time periods, making use of private memory, dreams, diaries, letters, and documented history to dramatize the narrator's project of reconstructing the events which led to the loss of her mother, father, and grandparents and to the fragmented dispersal of other family and community during the relocation and internment years. Yet the task of recomposing history out of silence and fragmentation requires the narrator first to recount her childhood sexual abuse by a neighbor, which has become conflated with the confiscation of property and the dislocation of internment, as well as the separation from her mother who left for Japan the same year. Throughout the course of the novel, she must reach back to confront and bear the deaths of her uncle, father, grandfather, and grandmother and, ultimately, to piece together the details of her mother's anguished suffering in the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. The violences to the narrator and her family, figured throughout *Obasan* in metaphors of abuse, silence, darkness, and disease, cannot be lightened or healed; they can only be revealed, narrated, and reconfigured.[14] Out of the fragmentations of subject, family, and community, there emerges nothing like a direct retrieval of unified wholeness. Rather, the narrator retraces and recomposes an alternative "history" out of flashes of memory, tattered photographs, recollections of the mother's silence, and an aunt's notes and correspondence: dreams, loss, and mourning. In this sense, all three novels are antagonistic to the reconciliation of Asian American particularity within a narrative of development, as much as the formal differences between the three works further signify the discontinuous, heterogeneous range of Asian American alternative narratives.

There are other Asian American texts that even more dramatically disrupt the narrative that incorporates the immigrant subject into a national or cultural uniformity. For example, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée* (1982),

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

which I discuss at greater length in Chapter 6, is a Korean American text that refuses to provide either a linear, unified development of the writing subject or an aesthetic synthesis or ethical resolution at the text's conclusion.[15] In combining autobiographical and biographical fragments, photographs, historical narrative, calligraphy, and lyric and prose poems in a complex multilingual piece, *Dictée* blurs conventions of genre and narrative authority, troubling the formal categories on which canonization depends. Furthermore, *Dictée* challenges the notion of a discrete typology of "Asian American experience," for it evokes a Korean American subject who not only is the product of multiple determinations—gender, language, religion—but bears the traces of differentiated layers of colonial and imperial dominations as well. The text juxtaposes a series of disparate episodes that alternately depict subjects incompletely formed within specific linguistic and historical circumstances: for example, the first section thematizes the use of dictation and recitation in the conversion of the student into a faithful French Catholic subject; the section "Clio" alludes to the disciplining of the Korean as colonial subject during the period of Japanese occupation (1910–1945); in "Melpomene" the narrator describes the incorporation of the individual into South Korean nationalism during the Korean War (1950–1953); and in "Calliope," written from the standpoint of a Korean American returning to South Korea, the narrator recalls her naturalization as an immigrant into American citizenship. The series of unfinished subject formations—illustrating the female student's antagonism to the educational and religious apparatuses, the colonized subject's disloyalty to the empire, and the Korean immigrant's incomplete incorporation into the U.S. state—suggests not only that subjectivity is multiply determined but also that each determination is uneven and historically differentiated, with no single one continuously or monolithically defining the subject. *Dictée* thus dramatizes that each interpellation organizes the female/colonized/postcolonial/racialized subject irregularly and incompletely, leaving a variety of residues that remain uncontained by and antagonistic to the educational, religious, colonial, and imperial modes of domination and assimilation. If one function of canonization is the resolution of material contradiction through a narrative of formation in which differences—of gender, race, nationality, or sexuality—are subsumed through

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

the individual's identification with a universalized form, *Dictée* is a text that continually disrupts such identifications. *Dictée,* instead, "voices" the traces of colonial and imperial damage and dislocation on the Korean immigrant subject. In rearticulating the immigrant subject's displacement from the various national fictions of identity and development, it "performs" and imagines a new subject, for whom the "disidentification" from national forms of identity is crucial to the construction of new forms of solidarity.

Another important manner in which Asian American literature defies canonization is that it is a literature that is still being written—an unclosed, unfixed body of work whose centers and orthodoxies shift as the makeup of the Asian-origin constituency shifts and within which new voices are continually being articulated.[16] The diversity of contemporary interventions is evident in, for example, a 1991 collection of writing by younger Asian/Pacific authors, *Burning Cane,* a special issue of the *Ameriasia Journal* that includes writings by Asian American gays and lesbians, by mixed-race Asian Americans, and by a variety of Southeast Asian American writers.[17] While *Burning Cane* is unified by a common project of articulating cultural resistance, the heterogenous selection of pieces suggests that given the increasingly various Asian American constituency, the profile of traits that characterize Asian American "identity" is as much in flux as the orthodoxy of which constituencies make up and define Asian American "culture." First-generation, post-1975 Southeast Asian writing introduces new themes to and emphasizes concerns different from those in the existing body of multigenerational Asian American literature—for example, some of the pieces in *Burning Cane* by newer immigrants focus on deracination and displacement, rather than on struggles against incorporation or assimilation. In T. C. Huo's short fiction "The Song Sent across the Mekong," the narrator meditates on the image of a man singing to a woman left behind on the riverbank as a paradigmatic figure for leaving, separation from family, and loss of homeland. While the narrator identifies with the man who has left, his mourning consists of different attempts at narrating the woman's position, reconstructing her thoughts and actions, and imagining her dead and alive. Huynh-Nhu Le's poem "Hearts & Minds" expresses a similar grief through a simple yet poignant chiasmus in which Vietnam, the poet's birthplace, is alien and unknown, whereas the new land of the United States is

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

overly familiar, yet unwelcoming: "Vietnam: / A land I know not much, / A water I did not swim, / A mountain I did not climb / . . . / America: / A land I know quite well, / A river I might have drowned, / A mountain I have fallen." (98) The suppression of prepositions in Le's poem—not "A water I did not swim *through,* / A mountain I did not climb *up,*" but "A water I did not swim, / A mountain I did not climb"—underscores the sense of displacement. Other stories in this collection broaden the spectrum of Asian American writing by depicting Asian American subjects as formed by a multiplicity of intersecting and conflicting determinations—gender, generation, sexuality, national origin, and economic class, as well as race and ethnicity; some explore the tensions and connections between subjects of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. The narrator of Patrick Leong's story "Graveyard Picnics" is a Chinese/Mexican American who, attending the gravesite of his Chinese grandfather, ponders whether he ought to worship the dead in the traditional Chinese ceremony led by his father or pray for them in church according to the Catholic traditions of his maternal family. Inheriting aspects of different cultural systems, yet belonging wholly to neither, the narrator finds himself located as a "hinge" between two separate but interlocking ethnic cultures. Wynn Young's "Poor Butterfly!" is narrated by a bitterly ironic, young Asian American gay, as he considers the fetishism of white gays who prefer Asian men and as he worries about being endangered by his partner's uncurbed sexual activity. Such a collection as *Burning Cane* opens up the definitions of what constitutes Asian American writing by drawing attention to recent immigrant writing and by featuring pieces that explore the intersecting, complex determinations that characterize the Asian American subject.

By way of conclusion, I return to the story by Monique Thuy-Dung Truong with which this discussion began, which appears in *Burning Cane.* The narrator is a Vietnamese American woman who recalls her elementary school education in a predominantly white town in North Carolina during the 1970s: "Mrs. Hammerick . . . I was scared of her like no dark corners could ever scare me. You have to know that all the while she was teaching us history . . . she was telling all the boys in our class that I was Pearl and my last name was Harbor. They understood her like she was speaking French

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

and their names were all Claude and Pierre. I felt it in the lower half of my stomach, and it throbbed and throbbed. . . . It would be so many years . . . before I would understand that Pearl Harbor was not just in 1941 but in 1975."[18] Truong's story portrays the simultaneous indictment and silencing of the young Asian immigrant student within the classroom regulated by an American nationalist projection of the Asian as *enemy*. A binary logic of patriot and enemy invigorates American nationalism during the Vietnam War period, gathering more force through a conflation of the Viet Cong and the Japanese that naturalizes American neocolonialism in Vietnam through the appeal to a nationalist historical narrative about World War II. The narrator's observation that the teacher's history lesson addresses "all the boys" further instantiates how the American nationalist narrative recognizes, recruits, and incorporates male subjects, while "feminizing" and silencing the students who do not conform to that notion of patriotic subjectivity. But at the same time, Truong's story is an epistolary fiction addressed to one of the narrator's few friends within that classroom, a white female student named Kelly. Although the classroom is remembered as a site of pain, the retrospective renarration of that pain, not as individually suffered, but as a shared topos between writer and addressee, is in contrast a source of new pleasure and a differently discovered sense of community. The narrator writes: "I guess it was Mrs. Hammerick's books that brought you and me together. I think you and I would have had to find each other anyway, but I like to tell our story this way, you know, like it was destiny and not necessity. . . . You and I were library kids, do you remember that?" (43). The repetition of "you and me," "you and I," and "you and I" sutures, on the narrative level, the intersubjective relationality between the narrator and Kelly. As the story proceeds, it delicately portrays relationships that cross boundaries of race, class, and constructions of femininity; girls are thrown into tentative but sympathetic intimacies based on their quite different exclusions—the narrator is ostracized as a Vietnamese immigrant, her friend Kelly because she is overweight, and another girl Michelle because of her family's poverty. The girls' friendships are marked by distinct, yet overlapping dynamics of power and powerlessness, but in response they form courageous bridges across distinct lines of opportunity and restriction.

Truong's story yields several points with which I wish to end this chapter

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

on Asian American literary canon and the university. First, by focusing on the classroom as the place where the narrator's difference is most sharply delineated, the story emphasizes that education is a primary site through which the narratives of national group identity are established and reproduced, dramatizing that the construction of others—as *enemies*—is a fundamental logic in the constitution of national identity. Second, it is suggestive about the process through which the students' conformity to those narratives is demanded and regulated: the historical narrative about victors and enemies elicits an identification of the male student with that victorious national body, and in that process of identification, the student consents to his incorporation as a subject of the American state. I refer to this subject of ideology in the classroom as a "he," for just as the history lesson in Truong's story is addressed to "all the boys," I would argue that the subject position of the American student/citizen is coded, narrated, and historically embodied as a masculine position. We might say that the American nationalist narrative of citizenship incorporates the subject as male citizen according to a relationship that is not dissimilar to the family's oedipalization, or socialization, of the son. In terms of the racialized subject, he becomes a citizen when he identifies with the paternal state and accepts the terms of this identification by subordinating his racial difference and denying his ties with the feminized and racialized "motherland."

Third, by representing this classroom from the perspective of the immigrant female student, the story underscores how this identification requires the painful suppression of differences. In terms of group formation, it calls attention to how curricula that universalize the values and norms of a "common" national culture are in contradiction with a society that is materially divided and stratified in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, and national origin. In terms of individual subject formation, it suggests that the interpellation of the individual splits the subject off from itself, suppressing those material, racial, and sexual aspects that contradict and are in excess of that generic subject formation.[19] But this interpellation, or oedipalization, is not univocal or total, for even though aspects may be conditionally split off, the subject may be insufficiently captured by the nationalist subject formation such that antagonisms arise against that formation out of the contradiction of interpellation itself. In using the term "contra-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

diction" to conceive of both group and individual identities, I mean to take up the sense in which contradiction describes the condition within which a system produces, in the course of providing for its effective hegemony, the conflicts that will bring about its own expiration and undoing. The contradiction of nationalist identity formation is that it is precisely the demand for national cultural uniformity that inflects differences with oppositional significance in antagonism to the apparatuses whose function it is to dictate that uniformity. In other words, the dominant construction of American nationalist identity logically provides for the negative critiques of that identity from the standpoints of groups racialized, sexualized, or classed as *other*. Another condition of contradiction is of course that none of these valences of otherness is independently articulated; throughout lived social relations, race is class-inflected, sexuality is racialized, and labor is gendered. There is no contradiction that is not articulated with other contradictions, and society is increasingly characterized by intersections, in which racial, gendered, and economic contradictions are inseparable and mobilized by means of and through one another.

In this regard, the final point I would like to draw out of Truong's story is that by focusing on the friendships among three differently marginalized female students, the story ultimately allegorizes a network of alliance across lines of race, class, and gender, a network that is not only a means of surviving the classroom but also the basis of contesting the historically differentiated but intersecting determinations of racist colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism, for which that classroom is a primary locus of reproduction. Sites that express overdetermination or the convergence of a complex of contradictions may move in the direction of either an inhibition and neutralization of contradictory possibility or a rupture, a mobilization of contradictions within which the coincidence of racial, gender, and class determinations would bring forward a disruption of the multiply articulated structure of domination. The concerted articulation of converged contradiction "fuses" what Louis Althusser calls a "ruptural unity" that makes possible the emergence of different subjects and constituencies in a "grouped assault" on a specific hegemony or a specific dominant formation.[20] We will discuss in Chapter 3 how Gramsci writes of hegemony as not simply a political rule but also a process within which any specific dominant con-

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

figuration exists always within the context of contesting pressures from other sites, classes, and groups in different conditions of self-identification and formation.[21] Put otherwise, the overdetermination of class, race, and gender contradictions in the construction of American nationalist identity makes possible the continuation of painful silences and exclusions in the American classroom, but this convergence of contradictions may also constitute precisely the ground from which antiracist, feminist, and class struggles against those nationalist dominations necessarily emerge.

I want to cast the project of securing the conditions for teaching U.S. racialized minority, postcolonial, and women's literatures in the contemporary university as something like the network of alliances described in Truong's story, as a collection of linked alternative pedagogies central to contesting both the traditional function of the educational apparatus to incorporate students as subjects of the state, and the narratives through which that socialization takes place. Like the affinities in Truong's story, it is a set of links that is not predicated on notions of similarity or identity but is a project built out of material, historical, and topical differentiation. Let us observe, too, that Truong's story is a U.S. racialized minority, postcolonial, *and* woman's text; it is an object that dissolves the notion that these three areas can be conceived as discrete or discontinuous. Through concerted pedagogical and curricular changes taking place in different institutional sites, we can locate and displace the powerful ideological narratives that traditionally structure the current university (that is, the two with which we began: the culturalist one that projects Euro-American culture as an autonomous domain, and the developmental narrative that abstracts and privileges the subject of that "prior" Western civilization, defining that subject against others who are identified with less autonomous, less developed, and disintegrated and disintegrating contemporary cultures). The teaching of an immigrant female and postcolonial text, like Truong's, decenters the autonomous notion of Western culture by recentering the complexities of racialized female and postcolonial collectivities and unmasks the developmental narrative as a fiction designed to justify the histories of colonialism, neocolonialism, and forced labor and to erase the dislocations and hybridities that are the resulting conditions of those histories. Through such pedagogical and curricular shifts, we may also be able to alter the ways in which

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

students are interpellated as subjects by the educational apparatus, opening the possibility that the university will ultimately offer to students more than a universalized subject formation, more than an incorporation into a dehistoricized national or cultural identity, and more sites and practices than those permitted by one generic subject position.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/818234/9780822379010-002.pdf by SWARTHMORE COLLEGE user on 06 March 2022

Detroit Blues

"Because of You Motherfuckers"

Helen Zia

I arrived in Detroit in 1976 with little more than my beat-up Chevy Vega, a suitcase, a few boxes, and about a hundred dollars. My first order of business was to find a job, preferably at an auto factory. I was on a mission, a grand adventure, to learn what it meant to be an American in America's heartland. I was finally doing what we had talked about endlessly in college—going to the grass roots, the workplaces and neighborhoods where we could learn from the people who were the real makers of history. This was not the road my ancestors had planned for me.

Like many Asian American immigrant parents, mine had instilled in me the virtues of education and scholarship. But our family's tiny baby novelty business offered little exposure to possible careers. My parents had few ideas of where my studies might take me. I was so unsure of what to do in my life beyond college that I did what any good Asian American child would do: I applied to medical school. Though I majored in public and international affairs, and minored in East Asian Studies and student activism, I also took a few pre-med courses—just to be safe. I even got accepted, and within days of starting on my M.D. I began to realize I had made a terrible mistake. But my filial obligation to my parents—and my entire line of ancestors—was a core part of my Chinese heritage, so I stayed on.

After struggling for two years, I finally mustered the courage to ruin forever my parents' dream—and that of nearly every Asian immigrant parent—to have an offspring who is a doctor, who will care for them in their old age. I quit medical school, spurning my path to respectability, wealth, and filial nirvana. But I was clueless about what to pursue instead. I still wanted to be part of the big social changes I discovered during the student protest years. My equally idealistic friends encouraged me to move to Detroit, which they viewed as the real America. My parents saw this as further evidence that I had lost my mind.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

Back to top.

Almost immediately, I landed a job as a large-press operator at a Chrysler stamping plant, making car hoods, fenders, and other parts. I joined the United Auto Workers union. In a factory of several thousand workers, I was one of perhaps three Asian faces; I definitely stood out. I was a rarity on the streets of Detroit as well, with its 60 percent African American population and the rest mostly working-class whites, many from the South. At the time, Detroit had only 7,614 Asian Americans in a population of 1.2 million—not even one percent of the city.

I didn't go to Detroit to find a large Asian American population, but I had hoped to find some palatable Chinese food. I was unhappy with the restaurants in the diminutive and decaying Chinatown, whose residents seemed too old and fragile to move elsewhere. Desperate, I asked my co-workers at the stamping plant where to go.

"Stanley's is the happening place for Chinese food," the African American autoworkers unanimously told me. I wouldn't have been so trusting had I recalled that any dish more exotic than sweet and sour pork unnerved many of my black friends. At Stanley's, I wasn't surprised to find that the cocktails wore pink umbrellas. But I was stunned by the gigantic, flaky dinner rolls that accompanied my order. Rice was optional, and everything was smothered in heavy brown gravy. I didn't fault Stanley's—like Chinese everywhere in the diaspora, they had to survive and adapt to the environment. But if culinary influence was an indication of political status in Detroit, Asian Americans weren't even on the map.

Two years later, I was no longer a press operator. As easily as I found my job at the auto plant, I lost it, along with some 300,000 other autoworkers in the devastating collapse of the auto industry. I was learning more about "real Americans" than I ever imagined; my biggest lesson was that we were not so different. There was the occasional racial confrontation—like the drunken worker who pointed her finger in my face and said, "I don't care if you're from Jap-pan, the Philippeenes or Ha-wah-yeh, you're on my turf," but she was the rare exception. Standing together on the assembly line and the unemployment line, we shared our lives and recognized our common humanity.

In the midst of that social upheaval, I discovered journalism. I began writing for the *Detroit Metro Times* and other "alternative" news publications. I wrote about the auto industry and the labor movement for *Monthly Detroit* magazine, then joined the staff of a new city magazine, *Metropolitan Detroit.* I spent my days reporting on the life and trends that made Detroit dynamic. Asian American issues were not among them.

The last thing I expected to find in Detroit was an Asian American mandate that would compel the scattered groups across the nation into a broad-based pan-Asian movement. I was in for a big surprise.

In the years leading up to the summer of 1982, Detroit was a city in crisis. Long lines of despair snaked around unemployment offices, union halls, welfare offices, soup kitchens. Men and women lost homes, cars, recreational vehicles, summer cottages, and possessions accumulated from a lifetime of hard work in a once-thriving industry. They were named the "new poor." For many, gloom turned to anger as they searched for the cause of their miseries.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

At first, the companies blamed the workers for incompetence and malaise, for wanting too much in exchange for too little. The workers, in turn, pointed to decrepit factories and machines that hadn't been upgraded since World War II, profits that had been squandered and not reinvested in plants and people. The government was faulted for the usual reasons. Before long, however, they all found a common enemy to blame: the Japanese.

While Detroit had once scoffed at the threat of oil shortages, Japan's automakers were busily meeting the demand for inexpensive, fuel-efficient cars. In 1978, a new oil crisis and subsequent price hikes at the gas pumps killed the market for the heavy, eight-cylinder dinosaurs made in Detroit, precipitating the massive layoffs and a crisis throughout the industrial Midwest. The Japanese auto imports were everything the gas-guzzlers were not—cheap to buy, cheap to run, well made and dependable. They were easy to hate.

Anything Japanese, or presumed to be Japanese, became a potential target. Japanese cars were easy pickings. Local unions sponsored sledge-hammer events giving frustrated workers a chance to smash Japanese cars for a dollar a swing. Japanese cars were vandalized and their owners were shot at on the freeways. On TV, radio, and the local street corner, anti-Japanese slurs were commonplace. Politicians and public figures made irresponsible and unambiguous racial barbs aimed at Japanese people. Lee Iacocca, chairman of the failing Chrysler Corporation and onetime presidential candidate, jokingly suggested dropping nuclear bombs on Japan, while U.S. Representative John Dingell of Michigan pointed his fury at "those little yellow men."

Bumper stickers threatened "Honda, Toyota—Pearl Harbor." It felt dangerous to have an Asian face. Asian American employees of auto companies were warned not to go onto the factory floor because angry workers might hurt them if they were thought to be Japanese. Even in distant California, Robert Handa, a third-generation Japanese American television reporter, was threatened by an autoworker who pulled a knife and yelled, "I don't likee Jap food . . . only like American food."

I had lost my job at Chrysler in the first round of layoffs, four years earlier, but every time I drove my car I was grateful that it was American-made. The tension was an ominous reminder of dangerous times past. It seemed only a matter of time before the anger turned to violence.

That summer, a twenty-seven-year-old man named Vincent Chin was destined to become a symbol for Asian Americans. Vincent was a regular Detroit guy who happened to be of Chinese descent. Cheerful and easygoing, Vincent was a recent graduate of Control Data Institute, a computer trade school, and worked as a draftsman during the day and a waiter on weekends. He liked nothing more than spending a lazy afternoon fishing with his buddies. He hadn't been touched by the Asian American movement and knew little of the violence endured by past generations of Asians in America. But he had felt the sting of racial prejudice and witnessed the hardships of his immigrant parents, who worked in the laundries and restaurants of Detroit.

On June 19, 1982, a week before his wedding, Vincent's pals took him out for the all-American ritual the bachelor party. They went to Fancy Pants, a raunchy

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

striptease bar in Highland Park, a tattered enclave of Detroit, near the crumbling mansions once home to auto magnates and Motown stars and only blocks away from the abandoned buildings where Henry Ford manufactured the Model T. Vincent, who grew up in that neighborhood, had been to Fancy Pants several times before.

That night, his mother admonished him, "You're getting married, you shouldn't go there anymore."

"Ma, it's my last time," he replied.

"Don't say 'last time,' it's bad luck," she scolded, conjuring up old Chinese superstitions.

At the lounge, two white men sat across the striptease stage from Vincent and his three friends—two white men and one Chinese American. Ronald Ebens, a plant superintendent for Chrysler, and his stepson, Michael Nitz, a laid-off autoworker, soon made it clear that they found Vincent's presence distasteful. The friends of the groom-to-be were paying the dancers handsomely to shower their favors on Vincent. According to witnesses, Ebens seemed annoyed by the attention the Chinese American was receiving from the nude dancers. Vincent's friends overheard Ebens say "Chink," "Nip," and "fucker." One of the dancers heard him say, "It's because of motherfuckers like you that we're out of work." Vincent replied, "Don't call me a fucker," and a scuffle ensued. Nitz's forehead was cut, possibly by a punch or chair thrown by Vincent. Both groups were ejected from the bar.

Ebens and Nitz hunted for Chin and the other Chinese man in his group. In the dark summer night, they drove through the area for a half hour with a neighborhood man whom they paid to help them "get the Chinese." Finally they spotted Vincent and his friend in front of a crowded McDonald's on Woodward Avenue, Detroit's main central thoroughfare. Creeping up behind the Chinese Americans, Nitz held Vincent Chin down while his stepfather swung his Louisville Slugger baseball bat into Vincent's skull four times, "as if he was going for a home run." Two off-duty cops who were moonlighting as security guards witnessed the attack. The impact of the blows broke a jade pendant that Vincent wore—to some Chinese, a sign of bad luck. Mortally wounded, Vincent died four days later. His four hundred wedding guests attended his funeral instead.

The *Detroit Free Press* featured the bridegroom's beating death on its front page, telling of Vincent's life and hopes for his marriage, but offering no details of his slaying—none of the circumstances were yet known. Detroit's Asian Americans, unaccustomed to any media coverage, took notice. But they remained silent even though many believed that race was a factor in the killing. The community was small and unorganized. Conventional wisdom of the "don't make waves" variety admonished that visibility could bring trouble. Even if they wished to protest, they had no advocacy or watchdog group to turn to. It seemed that the matter would end there. I read the story with sadness and alarm, too aware of the racial tensions swirling around the region. I wondered how this Chinese American came to be killed, when there were so few Asian Americans in Detroit. As an enterprising young journalist, I clipped the story out and filed it, certain that there was a bigger story behind Vincent's death.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

Nine months later, on March 18, 1983, new headlines appeared on the front pages of Detroit's two dailies: "Two Men Charged in '82 Slaying Get Probation" and "Probation in Slaying Riles Chinese." It seemed to be the courtroom conclusion to Vincent Chin's death. The two killers pleaded guilty and no contest to savagely beating Chin to death; each received three years' probation and $3,780 in fines and court costs to be paid over three years. The judge, Charles Kaufman, explained his reasoning: "These aren't the kind of men you send to jail," he said. "You fit the punishment to the criminal, not the crime." The lightness of the sentence shocked Detroit. Two white killers were set free in a city with a population more than 60 percent black, where African Americans routinely received harsher sentences for lesser crimes. The sentence of probation drew cries of outrage. Local pundits harshly criticized Judge Kaufman. "You have raised the ugly ghost of racism, suggesting in your explanation that the lives of the killers are of great and continuing value to society, implying they are of greater value than the life of the slain victim. . . . How gross and ostentatious of you; how callous and yes, unjust," wrote *Detroit Free Press* columnist Nikki McWhirter.

Detroit News reporter Cynthia Lee, herself a Chinese American from Hawaii, interviewed members of the Chinese American community, who voiced their disbelief. "You go to jail for killing a dog," said Henry Yee, a noted local restaurateur who was described as the "unofficial mayor of Chinatown." Vincent's life was worth less than a used car, cried a distraught family friend.

The reaction within the Detroit area's small, scattered Asian American population was immediate and visceral. Suddenly people who had endured a lifetime of degrading treatment were wondering if their capacity to suffer in silence might no longer be a virtue, when even in death, after such a brutal, uncontested killing, they could be so disrespected. Disconnected, informal networks of Asian Americans frantically worked the phones, trying to find some way to vent their frustrations and perhaps correct the injustice.

I, too, was stunned. Here was the incredible ending to the story I had clipped out for future reference. I felt distraught, betrayed—and furious. The probationary sentences seemed to echo the familiar taunt, "a China-man's chance," that grim reminder of the days when whites lynched Chinese with impunity. The lessons from my Asian American student movement days came rushing back to me. After I read the articles, I telephoned the person named in the *Detroit News* article. Introducing myself to Henry Yee, whose common Chinese American name was the same as my older brother's, I offered to help in any way I could. Henry invited me to meet him and some others that afternoon. At Carl's Steak House, I met Henry Yee and Kin Yee (not related), president of the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council. A woman named Liza Chan, a Hong Kong–born attorney of my own generation, joined us. We talked generally about possible actions. The first step would be to conduct a larger meeting that could include more members of the Chinese and Asian American community.

The Chinese Welfare Council was the public face of the local branches of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the On Leong Merchants Association, a tong, a form of Chinatown organization often associated with the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

seamier side of Chinese American ghettoes. In Detroit it served a social function. Both organizations had long histories in Chinatowns. The business association, also known as the Six Companies, began in San Francisco in the 1860s to provide public services denied to Chinese by local governments. The association arbitrated disputes, representing Chinese concerns to the city, state, and federal governments. The tongs, on the other hand, were alleged to conduct organized crime activities in Chinatowns, using their networks to run gambling, prostitution, drug-trafficking, and protection rackets. Some tongs performed legitimate community and civic functions; in Detroit, the Chinese Welfare Council and On Leong Merchants Association were well established, and both Henry Yee and Kin Yee were members.

Merchants were the Chinese pioneers in Detroit. In 1872, the first Chinese Detroiter, Ah Chee, arrived and set up a laundry business; subsequent arrivals did the same. The first Chinese restaurant opened in 1905. The Chinese business community hit its peak in the 1920s, when the city counted 300 Chinese laundries and 32 restaurants. Since that time, the Chinatown population and business base had dwindled, becoming a mere shadow of its peak days.

Over the years, the Asian American population in the Detroit area changed considerably. The Immigration Act of 1965 had ushered in a new generation of Chinese immigrants, as well as those from Korea, the Philippines, and South Asia. Because the new immigration regulations heavily favored educated professionals, the newer Asian immigrants included highly trained scientists, engineers, doctors, and nurses. Many of the top researchers for the Big Three automakers were Ph.D.'s from throughout Asia. The professionals lived in the suburbs, far from Detroit's urban core and Chinatown. By the 1980s, Chinatown's shrinking base reflected the diminished role of the merchants. The children of the laundry and restaurant owners had gone to college and moved to the suburbs or to other cities. The family businesses in Chinatown faded.

The 1980 census reported only 1,213 Chinese in the entire city; while that is surely an undercount, the population was unquestionably small. On Leong ran the Chinese Culture and Recreational Center, offering activities for youth and English-language instruction to new immigrants. It also assisted the aging bachelor Chinese, settled disputes among immigrants, and maintained a cemetery plot for Chinese. If it had more nefarious pursuits, they weren't obvious, though the notorious Hong Kong–based chief of the national On Leong, Eddie Chan, was well known to the FBI and Interpol. The Detroit Chinese Welfare Council represented Chinatown interests to the city and at political functions. Both groups were run by the same aging elders who realized they needed to bolster their membership by attracting new, and younger, blood. The late Vincent Chin was one of their younger members.

Vincent's background was like that of many second-generation Chinatown Chinese. His father, David Bing Hing Chin, had worked in laundries all his life, from the time he arrived from China in 1922 at the age of seventeen until his death in 1981, the year before Vincent was slain. He had served in the Army during World War II, which earned him his citizenship and the right to find a wife in China. Lily came to the United States in 1948 to be married, like so many

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

other Chinese women of her generation, including my mother. Lily knew her husband-to-be's family, and looked forward to joining him in America. Lily's father opposed the move because his grandfather had worked on the transcontinental railroad, but was driven out. He feared Lily might face similar bigotry. In Detroit, Lily worked in the laundries and restaurants alongside her new husband.

In 1961, Lily and David Bing Chin adopted a cheerful six-year-old boy from Guangdong Province in China. Vincent grew up into a friendly young man and a devoted only child who helped support his parents financially. He ran on his high school track team, but he also wrote poetry. Vincent was an energetic, take-charge guy who knew how to stand up for himself on the tough streets of Detroit. But friends and co-workers had never seen him angry and were shocked that he had been provoked into a fight.

For Chinese Americans, the identification with the Chin family was direct. The details of the Chins' family history mirrored those of so many other Chinese Americans, who, like Lily and David, came from Guangdong Province. So did the military service that made it possible for Chinese American men to get married, and their work in the restaurants and laundries. Vincent was part of an entire generation for whom the immigrant parents had suffered and sacrificed. Other Asian Americans also found a strong connection to the lives of Vincent, Lily, and David Chin. Theirs was the classic immigrant story of survival: work hard and sacrifice for the family, keep a low profile, don't complain, and, perhaps in the next generation, attain the American dream. For Asian Americans, along with the dream came the hope of one day gaining acceptance in America. The injustice surrounding Vincent's slaying shattered the dream.

But most of all, Vincent was everyone's son, brother, boyfriend, husband, father. Asian Americans felt deeply that what happened to Vincent Chin could have happened to anyone who "looked" Japanese. From childhood, nearly every Asian American has experienced being mistaken for other Asian ethnicities, even harassed and called names as though every Asian group were the same. The climate of hostility made many Asian Americans feel unsafe, not just in Detroit, but across the country, as the Japan-bashing began to emanate from the nation's capital and was amplified through the news media. If Vincent Chin could be harassed and brutally beaten to death, and his killers freed, many felt it could happen to them.

After the news of the sentences of probation for Vincent's killers, his mother, Lily, wrote a letter in Chinese to the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council: "This is injustice to the grossest extreme. I grieve in my heart and shed tears in blood. My son cannot be brought back to life, but he was a member of your council. Therefore, I plead to you. Please let the Chinese American community know, so they can help me hire legal counsel to appeal, so my son can rest his soul."

As phone calls and offers of help from Chinese Americans and others poured in from all over the Detroit area, Henry Yee and Kin Yee called for a meeting on March 20, 1983, under the auspices of the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council at the Golden Star Restaurant in Ferndale, a working-class suburb just north of

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

Detroit. Vincent had worked at the Golden Star as a waiter. The restaurant was three miles from the McDonald's on Woodward Avenue where he was killed.

One week after the sentencing, about thirty people crammed into the back dining room of the Golden Star. I had never been to the restaurant, but its familiar decor of red, black, and gold-speckled mirrors reminded me of Chinese restaurants everywhere. The lawyers stood at the front, fielding questions from the group. Barely a half dozen of them, they constituted the majority of Asian American attorneys in the entire state. Most were under thirty. None specialized in criminal law, but they agreed on one thing: once a sentence was rendered, little could be done to change it; the law offered few options. The impasse forced an uneasy quiet over the gathering, broken only by the low sounds of Lily Chin weeping at the back of the room.

Aside from Kin Yee, Henry Yee, and Liza Chan, whom I had just met, I knew no one at the meeting. At that moment I had to decide between being a reporter on the sidelines and being an active participant in whatever happened. I hesitated, then raised my hand. "We must let the world know that we think this is wrong. We can't stop now without even trying." At first there was no response. Then the weeping stopped. Mrs. Chin stood up and spoke in a shaky but clear voice. "We must speak up. These men killed my son like an animal. But they go free. This is wrong. We must tell the people, this is wrong."

With Mrs. Chin's words as a moral turning point, the group decided to press forward. The lawyers recommended a meeting with the sentencing judge, Charles Kaufman. But who would accompany Mrs. Chin and Kin Yee to meet the judge? Some of the lawyers stepped back, explaining how such an act might jeopardize their jobs. In a community with so little political clout, to be "the nail that sticks out" was an invitation to disaster. After another pause, a woman spoke up. "I'll meet with Kaufman." It was Liza Chan, the only Asian American woman practicing law in Michigan. I took on the task of publicizing the news that Asian Americans were outraged and preparing to fight the judge's sentence. From the beginning, women would play a major role in the case.

In the next few days, Liza and Kin attempted to meet with the judge, who by now was flooded by angry phone calls, letters, and media inquiries, as Asian Americans and others challenged his sentence. He skipped their appointment. When I joined Liza and Kin for the next scheduled meeting, we were told that the judge had suddenly decided to go on vacation. On a pro bono basis, Liza began the work of finding and interviewing witnesses to reconstruct what happened to Vincent Chin that fateful night, so that Mrs. Chin and the community could assess their legal options. It soon became clear that there were failures at every step of the criminal justice process. The police and court record was slipshod and incomplete. The police had failed to interview numerous witnesses, including the dancers at the bar and a man the killers hired outside the bar to help them "get the Chinese"; when Liza and I visited the arresting officer, he had the murder weapon, the Louisville Slugger baseball bat, sitting behind his desk. The first presiding judge had set the initial charges against the killers at second-degree murder, which other legal experts determined to be too low. Almost as outrageous as the sentence itself was the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

fact that no prosecutor was present when Judge Kaufman rendered his sentence of probation.

After the community meeting at the Golden Star, I issued our first press release. We were flooded with numerous requests for information and offers to help. Without an existing advocacy group to manage the community response, we decided some kind of organization would have to be formed. The founding meeting was set for the following week, after we contacted the various community groups, which were mostly religious, cultural, and professional in nature. The meeting would be held at the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council building.

On the evening of March 31, more than a hundred solidly middle-aged and mainly middle-class Asian Americans from towns surrounding Detroit packed the dingy, low-ceilinged hall. The threat of a Michigan frost still lingered, but the topic under debate this night was hot and unprecedented among Asian Americans: whether to form a pan-Asian organization that might seek a federal civil rights investigation in the slaying of Vincent Chin. There had never before been a criminal civil rights case involving anyone of Asian descent in the United States.

Once again, the gathering was mostly Chinese American, with a few other Asian ethnicities offering a thin slice of diversity. The imagery was staunchly conservative: a faded portrait of Chiang Kai-shek at the front, flanked by the red-white-and-blue—not Old Glory but the flag of Taiwan, the Republic of China.

The main order of business was to create an organization that could file petitions and legal actions, raise money, and organize the outcry for a response. The idea was to form an umbrella organization to coordinate the efforts of the area's varied Asian American groups. Members of some twenty groups had come that night, mostly Chinese, from the Association of Chinese Americans and the Greater Detroit Taiwanese Association, to such professional associations as the Detroit Chinese Engineers Association; cultural groups like the Chinese American Educational and Cultural Center; church organizations from the Chinese Community Church to the Detroit Buddhist Church; and a women's group, the Organization of Chinese American Women.

Detroit had not seen such a broad gathering of Chinese since the China War Relief effort of the 1930s. Non-Chinese were also represented, including the Japanese American Citizens League, the Korean Society of Greater Detroit, and the Filipino American Community Council.

The pan-Asian intent of the group became clear as the group discussed what to name the new organization. "Citizens for Fair Sentencing in the Cause of Vincent Chin" and "Justice Committee of the Chinese Welfare Council" were rejected as too narrow. "Chinese Americans for Justice" limited the concern to Chinese. The vote overwhelmingly went to "American Citizens for Justice," which offered an inclusive base and a vision for justice beyond a single case. The founding of the American Citizens for Justice, or ACJ, marked the formation of the first explicitly Asian American grass-roots community advocacy effort with a national scope. Third-generation Japanese American James Shimoura was the first, and at

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

the time only, non-Chinese to serve on the executive board. Japanese, Filipino, and Korean American groups joined in support, assured that they would be welcome. As word of our efforts spread, both white and black individuals also volunteered, making the campaign for justice multiracial in character.

That night, the new pan-Asian American organization drafted its statement of principles:

ACJ BELIEVES THAT:

1. All citizens are guaranteed the right to equal treatment by our judicial and governmental system;
2. When the rights of one individual are violated, all of society suffers;
3. Asian Americans, along with many other groups of people, have historically been given less than equal treatment by the American judicial and governmental system. Only through cooperative efforts with all people will society progress and be a better place for all citizens.

ACJ's first mandate was unambiguous: to obtain justice for Vincent Chin, an Asian American man who was killed because he looked Japanese.

Hard questions came quickly as the newly formed ACJ sought to gain supporters outside the Asian American community. Our first efforts at mounting a national media campaign were crude and amateurish as we learned the process of getting our news out; in the days before fax machines, each press release was hand-delivered, often by a retired Chinese American couple, Ray and Mable Lim. ACJ held its first news conference at the Detroit Press Club on April 15, 1983. The entire spectrum of local media appeared—it was big news to see Asian Americans coming together to protest injustice. To the reporters and the people of Detroit, Asian Americans seemed to emerge from nowhere. Our task, and mine in particular, was to educate them quickly, in sound bites, about Asian Americans.

An appearance that Liza Chan and I made on a popular African American talk radio program drew numerous calls from black listeners. Some were pleased that Asian Americans would reach out to their community to talk about this injustice. Others asked if Asians were just trying to "ride the coattails" of African Americans, and still others accused Asian people of prejudice against blacks. We tried to answer questions frankly, acknowledging that anti-black prejudice exists among some, but not all, Asian Americans, and that ACJ was trying to address racial bias and injustice against any group, including attitudes held by Asians. The talk shows gave us an opportunity to point out the contributions of Asian Americans to the civil rights struggles. The listeners' comments also underscored the need for us to bring such discussions to the more recent Asian immigrants who had arrived after the 1965 Immigration Act with little awareness of the U.S. civil rights movement.

The growing prominence of the case gave Asian Americans our first direct entry on a national level into the white–black race dynamic with an Asian American issue. We tried to explain that we recognized and respected African

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

Americans' central and dominant position in the civil rights struggle; we wanted to show that we weren't trying to benefit from their sacrifices without offering anything in return. On the other hand, many European Americans were hostile or resistant to "yet another minority group" stepping forward to make claims. Underlying both concerns was the suggestion, a nagging doubt, that Asian Americans had no legitimate place in discussions of racism because we hadn't *really* suffered any.

Still, many did welcome Asian Americans into the civil rights fold, as a new voice from a previously silent neighbor. As ACJ began to make its case, African American organizations such as the umbrella Detroit-Area Black Organizations quickly endorsed ACJ's efforts. Its president, Horace Sheffield, became a dependable supporter at ACJ events, and Asian Americans reciprocated. The Detroit chapter of the NAACP, the largest chapter in the country, issued a statement about the sentence. Several prominent African American churches gave their support, as did the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the Detroit Roundtable of Christians and Jews. ACJ sought and won the support of other communities as well, including Latinos, Arab Americans, and Italian Americans. A diversity of women's groups from the Detroit Women's Forum to Black Women for a Better Society endorsed ACJ, as did a number of local political leaders from the president of the Detroit City Council to U.S. Representative John Conyers.

Many Asian Americans wanted to express their outrage, but were unsure how race fit in the picture. Their tentativeness about the issue of race was evident in ACJ's carefully crafted public positions. ACJ focused on Judge Kaufman's unjust sentence, deliberately not commenting on possible racial bias by the judge or the potential for a racial motivation in the killing of Vincent Chin. A few of us in the core organizing effort—attorneys Roland Hwang and Jim Shimoura, educator Parker Woo, and I—had an understanding of civil rights from the Asian American student movement days and felt that racism permeated the case on many levels. But we also knew that other Asian Americans would need to hear more conclusive evidence if they were to take a strong position on race.

ACJ waited to see if Liza Chan's interviews with witnesses would produce evidence of a racially motivated killing. I worded our press releases carefully to convey the context of our history with racism, while avoiding an outright accusation; one of the first ACJ press statements said: "This case has aroused the anger of the Asian community by recalling the days of 'frontier justice,' when massacres of Chinese workers were common-place." News reporters, on the other hand, wanted ACJ to call Kaufman a racist. Journalists discovered that Kaufman had been held in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp during World War II. ACJ refused the bait.

Soon the smoking gun the community needed appeared. A private investigator hired by ACJ to uncover the facts leading to Vincent's death reported that Racine Colwell, a tough blond dancer at the Fancy Pants, overheard Ebens tell Chin, "It's because of you motherfuckers that we're out of work." At a time when bilious anti-Japanese remarks by politicians, public officials, and the next-door

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

neighbors spewed forth regularly, Asian Americans knew exactly what Ebens meant. A nude dancer with nothing to gain from her testimony had produced the link to a racial motivation that the community was waiting for. ACJ attorneys and leaders realized it was enough to charge Ebens and Nitz with violating Vincent Chin's civil rights. It was time to talk about race.

The next meeting of the ACJ was held at Ford Motor Company World Headquarters, in Dearborn. David Hwang, who had worked at Ford as a research engineer for thirty-six years, secured the use of the company cafeteria on a Sunday evening. More than two hundred people packed the cavernous room to hear updates on the legal efforts and to coordinate the grass-roots, volunteer work. A quick roll call identified Asian American employee groups from the top corporations of the Detroit area, from Burroughs and Detroit Diesel to General Motors and Volkswagen. The meeting's featured speaker from the U.S. Department of Justice explained the difficult process of getting the federal government to conduct a civil rights investigation. The FBI would need to show that there was a conspiracy to deprive Vincent Chin of his civil rights, he advised. The strong public outcry would also be a factor in its decision to investigate.

After the Department of Justice official left the meeting, a gray-haired engineer from General Motors raised his hand. In the clipped English of a native Cantonese speaker, he voiced the uneasiness of the crowd. "If we try to pursue a civil rights case," he asked, "is it necessary for us to talk about race?"

The simple question captured the race conundrum bedeviling Asian Americans. Should Asian Americans downplay race to stay in the "safe" shadows of the white establishment? Or should they step out of the shadows and cast their lot with the more vulnerable position of minorities seeking civil rights? Was there a third, Asian American way that would take sides with neither?

"We may alienate our supporters," argued an earnest-looking businessman, who voiced his fears that a stand on racism might affect an already fragile existence between black and white. "Could we win the NAACP but lose the FBI?" asked another.

Behind the discomfort of "talking about race" was the question of where Asian Americans fit in America, and, more important, where we wanted to be. Asian Americans had never been included in broad discussions on race, nor had we interjected ourselves. The questions were many. If race was such a volatile subject for whites and blacks, why should Asian Americans step in, to face potential wrath from one or the other, or both? Organizing over race might make us seem like troublemakers, as African Americans were often perceived, but we lacked the numerical strength and political power of blacks; if we stepped out of the shadows to make waves, wouldn't we risk becoming targets again?

One by one, people discussed their uncertainties. Those of us who had been involved with Third World movements knew the political theories about race and racism, but making the argument to struggling restaurant workers or comfortable professionals was another matter. Even in 1983, fifteen years after the term "Asian American" first designated a pan-Asian identity, civil rights and their importance to Asian Americans were simply not familiar at the grass-roots

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

level of the Asian ethnic communities. We tried to give direct, even practical answers: yes, a civil rights suit would involve race, and if we wanted to pursue a federal case, we would have to get comfortable educating people—including ourselves—about our experiences with race. But remaining silent would not protect us from the anti-Japanese racial hostility all around us and we could all become targets anyway, the way Vincent Chin had.

Suddenly people began talking about the anger and frustration that brought them to this meeting, why they were touched and outraged by what happened to Vincent Chin. "I've worked hard for my company for forty years," said a computer programmer, his voice shaking. "They always pass me over for promotion because I'm Chinese. I have trained many young white boys fresh out of college to be my boss. I never complain, but inside I'm burning. This time, with this killing, I must complain. What is the point of silence if our children can be killed and treated like this? I wish I'd stood up and complained a lot sooner in my life."

The outrage overcame the fear. "We want to win this case, and we want equal justice for all, including Asian Americans," David Hwang reminded the group. In the end, we reached a consensus: to fight for what we believed in, we would have to enter the arena of civil rights and racial politics. Welcome or not, Asian Americans would put ourselves into the white–black race paradigm.

ACJ began to publicize its findings of racial slurs and comments made by Vincent Chin's killers and to call for a civil rights investigation. The backlash that some had feared was immediate. Non-Asians, most particularly those in a position to make policy on civil rights and race matters, openly resisted claims by Asians of racial discrimination and prejudice. Angry white listeners called in to radio talk shows to complain: "What does race have to do with this?" and "Don't white people have civil rights?"

White liberals were the most skeptical. When Wayne State University constitutional law professor Robert A. Sedler met with Liza Chan and other ACJ attorneys about the legal issues in a civil rights case, he told them to forget it. In his opinion, civil rights laws were enacted to protect African Americans, not Asians. Asian Americans cannot seek redress using federal civil rights law; besides, he said, Asians are considered white.

Sedler wasn't alone in this view. The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan initially dismissed the outcry from Asian Americans as a law-and-order, "mandatory sentencing" movement. Later, as the community outrage continued, Howard Simon, its executive director, issued a report absolving Judge Kaufman of bias and blaming the prosecutors for failing to prepare the facts of the case for sentencing. The Michigan ACLU wasn't interested in the civil rights aspects of Chin's slaying.

Nor did the Detroit chapter of the National Lawyers Guild, which defined itself as part of the political left, find any connection between Vincent Chin's killing and racism. But the Guild's West Coast chapters, more familiar with Asian Americans' history with racial violence, mustered the votes to give the national endorsement to ACJ's efforts. A near mutiny broke out in the Detroit chapter, but the national body prevailed.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

To build a broad coalition of support, ACJ decided to approach the United Auto Workers union, and not just for its powerful presence in Detroit. We felt that if we could change some of its members' anti-Japanese rhetoric, we might be able to prevent future attacks on Asian Americans—and possibly save lives. The UAW department of fair practices was across from Solidarity House, the international headquarters, so it was impossible to avoid the racially inflammatory signs and bumper stickers adorning the parking lot entrance. "300,000 Laid-Off Autoworkers Say Park Your Import in Tokyo" proclaimed one large sign; Volvos, VWs, Saabs, and other European imports apparently presented no problem. I recognized Joe Davis, the fair practices director, from my days as a Chrysler press operator, when he was president of a militant UAW local. Davis told us that the UAW condemned the attack on Vincent Chin. "But if he had been Japanese," noted Davis, an African American, "the attack would be understandable, and we wouldn't give you our support." I had a similar encounter with Doug Fraser, the former president of the UAW, at a reception. I had just shown a city council member, Maryann Mahaffey, a supporter of ACJ, the photo of a poster at Auto World theme park in Flint, Michigan, that featured a buck-toothed, slant-eyed car dropping bombs on Detroit—an example of autoworkers' racial hostility. Mahaffey showed the photo to Fraser, who burst into gleeful laughter—until he saw me standing nearby. As a former UAW member, I was embarrassed and repulsed by the union's acquiescence in racism. I recalled the violent anti-Asian campaigns of Samuel Gompers and wondered when the chain would be broken.

In spite of the backlash, local, national, and international support for ACJ's efforts was growing daily. The legal twists and turns garnered steady local news coverage, and the mobilization of Detroit's Asian Americans was an interesting new phenomenon for reporters. The Vincent Chin case broke into national news by a strange twist of fate. I had rented a car while my American-made auto was in the shop; as I waited at the car rental agency, I stood in line behind a woman with a *New York Times* notebook and copies of the two Detroit daily newspapers, each open to a story about the Chin case. I happened to be carrying several ACJ press packets and asked her if she wanted more information. She turned out to be Judith Cummins, a *New York Times* reporter in town visiting relatives. She wrote a story about the killing and the controversy, even though the local bureau chief had shrugged us off. Perhaps Cummins recognized the story's importance because she was African American and the bureau chief missed it because he was white; in any case, the *New York Times* coverage brought other national media interest, including national network news, TV news magazine specials, and an appearance on the Phil Donahue show.

It was the first time that an Asian American–initiated issue was considered significant national news. Ethnic media from the Asian American community, as well as foreign-language news media from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan, followed the case closely—sending to Asia images of Asian Americans raising political Cain over issues of race, racism, and racial unity. As the news of the case spread, groups from all over the country and the world contacted ACJ to extend their support. We developed an international following. Several Chinese Canadian groups offered assistance, as did the North American representative of

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

Taiwan; ACJ politely declined Taiwan's help, deciding not to accept money from foreign governments. Families of other hate crimes victims reached out from afar; a representative for the family of Steven Harvey, an African American musician who was killed by whites in Kansas City, came to an ACJ meeting. Asian Americans and African Americans pledged mutual support.

ACJ was pursuing a three-pronged legal effort. It called on Judge Kaufman, who finally heard arguments by Liza, to set aside his own sentence, since it was based on incomplete information. ACJ filed briefs with the Michigan Court of Appeals to overturn Kaufman's sentence. The third approach was the civil rights case. Kin Yee and Lily Chin went to Washington, D.C., to meet with William Bradford Reynolds, President Ronald Reagan's civil rights chief, about a federal civil rights investigation. As the local and state actions turned sour, the FBI began to take an interest in the case. To capture the mounting frustration of the community, the ACJ decided to hold a citywide demonstration at Kennedy Square in downtown Detroit, the site of many historic protests. We had held a number of noisy picket lines in front of City Hall, but there had never before been a protest in Detroit organized by the broad Asian American community. This would possibly be the first in the country outside the larger Asian American centers of New York City and the West Coast.

The "demonstration committee" was headed by David Chock, Michael Lee, and Man Feng Chang, all senior scientists from the General Motors Tech Center. They enlisted the help of other engineers, and joked that this would be the most precisely planned demonstration in history. The out-pouring of support was unprecedented. Waving American flags and placards that demanded equal justice, hundreds of professionals and housewives marched alongside waiters and cooks from Chinese restaurants across the region. The restaurant owners shut their doors during the busy weekday lunch rush to allow employees and their own families to participate in the demonstration. Children and seniors, hunched and wizened, walked or rode in wheelchairs. Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos marched in pan-Asian unity. Support statements were made by the city's major African American and religious organizations, local politicians, and even the UAW. At the rally's emotional end, Mrs. Chin appealed to the nation. Through her tears, she said haltingly, "I want justice for my son. Please help me so no other mother must do this." Finally, the demonstrators marched to the Federal Courthouse singing "We Shall Overcome," and hand-delivered to U.S. Attorney Leonard Gilman a petition with three thousand signatures seeking federal intervention.

ACJ used the demonstration to launch its call for a federal prosecution of the killers for violating Chin's civil right to be in a public place, even if that place was a sleazy nude bar. In his speech to the demonstrators, ACJ president Kin Yee read the group's carefully worded position on race: "Eye-witnesses have come forward to confirm something that we suspected all along: that Vincent Chin was brutally slain as a result of a racial incident. Ronald Ebens, a foreman at Chrysler, was so consumed with racial hatred toward Asian people that he started a fight, blaming Asians for the problems of the ailing auto industry. Even non-minority immigrant groups like the Irish and the Poles have faced violence

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

from others who blamed them for their problems. This misguided view encourages attacks on Asian American people and it must be fought against by all who cherish justice and have respect for human dignity."

In direct yet subtle terms, ACJ showed the ways in which Asian Americans had been made scapegoats for the ills of the modern American economy, naming anti-Asian violence as a present-day phenomenon that should concern all people. This created a framework for Asian Americans to organize nationally, and was a first step toward placing Asian Americans in the center of domestic and international economic, political, and social policy contexts. Across the country, in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Chicago—cities with far greater Asian American populations than Detroit's—pan-Asian coalitions were being built to support the campaign and to address anti-Asian violence in the local community. Fund-raising efforts nationwide encompassed the entire spectrum of Chinese American society, from the National On Leong Association and local chapters, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and the Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance, to overtly left-leaning groups like the Chinese Progressive Association and the Chinese Association for Human Rights in Taiwan. In between were civil rights groups like the Organization of Chinese Americans, Asian American Law Students Association, Chinese restaurants and business enterprises, and church groups. Dozens of chapters of the Japanese American Citizens League sent money, as did the Korean American Association of Illinois and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. The broad cross section showed that the Vincent Chin case was able to overcome the forces of tradition and fear of the unknown, particularly in the arena of race politics. Asian Americans were finally joining together to correct perceived injustices.

Such unity was difficult to maintain. It was rare for the highly educated suburbanites who spoke the Northern Chinese Mandarin dialect to be aligned so closely with Cantonese-speaking Chinatown merchants and workers whose roots were in Southern China. In addition to differences in language, class, and kinship bonds, there was the political gap. Many business owners were Chiang Kai-shek loyalists and fervent anti-Communists, while the more left-wing groups openly supported Mao Tse-tung and the People's Republic of China.

Partly to avoid fractious conflict over "homeland" politics, the charter of the Organization of Chinese Americans, for example, expressly prohibited taking stands on international issues—a policy that is still in effect. ACJ's policy was to admit all who supported its goals, as long as they also maintained an open and tolerant policy toward others. Vincent Chin's story had struck such a raw nerve that Asian American groups were competing to be affiliated with ACJ. In San Francisco, with its rich profusion of Asian American groups, near warfare broke out among various factions. The first cracks appeared when the Chinatown business groups, a powerful constituency in San Francisco, withdrew their support of the case because leftist, pro–People's Republic groups were involved. They used their influence over several Chinese-language newspapers to criticize the fund-raising efforts.

Meanwhile, the leftists were at odds with one another. The Reverend Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign manager for Northern California, Eddie Wong, arranged for Jackson to stop in San Francisco's Chinatown to meet Mrs. Chin,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

who was attending local support events in California. Jackson became the first national political leader of any race to speak out against racial violence toward Asians. During Jackson's speech in front of a swarm of national reporters and TV cameras at Chinatown's historic Cameron House, where assistance had been provided to Chinese immigrants since 1874, the leaders of two rival leftist groups pinched and shoved each other, trying to elbow the other off the stage just beyond Jackson's view.

Despite the rumblings among the Chinese, ACJ continued to actively reach out to other Asian ethnicities. The second non-Chinese board member was Minoru Togasaki, a second-generation Japanese American. The Chinese speakers on the board felt worried that they might insult Min by mispronouncing his polysyllabic name, difficult for Chinese speakers accustomed to single-syllable ones. A practice session was held, with a room full of Chinese Americans gingerly repeating the name "To-ga-sa-ki" until they got it right.

Detroit's growing Korean community was represented by two large groups: the Korean Society of Greater Detroit, and the Korean American Women's Association. The two groups had rarely worked together. The Korean women were the wives of non-Korean GIs and were often looked down upon by other Koreans—but their support for the Vincent Chin case brought them together. The Filipino and South Asian populations were larger than any of the others and had well-established connections with both Republican and Democratic parties. Their political savvy and access to politicians made it clear to other Asian American groups why they needed to get involved in politics, which many new immigrants tended to shun.

At ACJ's first fund-raiser dinner, a prominent local citizen appeared, the architect Minoru Yamasaki, designer of the World Trade Center towers in New York and other buildings of world renown. Yamasaki, then seventy-three years old, unexpectedly came to join the gathering as an ordinary citizen. Looking dignified but frail, he rose up slowly from his seat with the assistance of a companion. A hush fell over the banquet room as Yamasaki said in a strong, clear voice, "If Asian people in America don't learn to stand up for themselves, these injustices will never cease."

The civil rights investigations dragged on. In November 1983, a federal grand jury indicted Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz for violating Vincent Chin's right to enjoy a place of public accommodation; the trial would take place the following June. During this period, other racial attacks drew the attention of the Asian American community. In Lansing, Michigan, a Vietnamese American man and his European American wife were harassed and repeatedly shot at by white men shouting racial slurs. In Davis, California, a seventeen-year-old Vietnamese youth was stabbed to death in his high school by white students, while in New York a pregnant Chinese woman was decapitated when she was pushed in front of an oncoming subway car by a European American teacher who claimed to have a fear of Asians.

In other cities, Asian Americans followed the Detroit Asian American community's example and organized to track such incidents. In Boston, a pan-Asian

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

group called Asians for Justice was formed after an escalating number of anti-Asian attacks against Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and Cambodian Americans, as well as the stabbing death of a Vietnamese American man. As such new groups raised public awareness about the particular kind of racial hostility against Asians, they prompted more people to come forward to file hate crime reports. The growing list of cases underscored the existence of racism against Asian Americans.

ACJ expanded its civil rights work from anti-Asian hate crimes. It took on employment and discrimination referrals; successfully lobbied the governor to create a statewide Asian American advisory commission; campaigned against offensive media images, like the poster of the slant-eyed car displayed in Flint, Michigan, and a children's TV program whose host, Jim Harper, appeared in yellowface as a sinister Fu Manchu character with a phony Asian accent. To reach out to children and young people, ACJ members Pang Man and Marisa Chuang Ming sponsored a ten-kilometer Run for Justice, while Harold and Joyce Leon's three daughters, professional violinists and a cellist with the world's leading symphony orchestras, performed a special benefit concert for ACJ.

When the federal civil rights trial began on June 5, 1984, in the courtroom of Judge Anna Diggs Taylor, a dignified jurist who was one of the first African American women to serve on the federal bench, ACJ knew that the courtroom battle would be uphill. Many people had a hard time believing that Asian Americans experienced any kind of racial prejudice, let alone hate violence. What Asian Americans found to be racially offensive fighting words drew only shrugs from people who would otherwise never use racial epithets—at least not in public.

The words Racine Colwell, the stripper, heard—"It's because of you motherfuckers that we're out of work"—didn't contain a single racial slur. Asian Americans recognized that they were being singled out in that comment, but to others it was simply a true statement. Don Ball, the veteran *Detroit News* reporter covering the trial, wrote that such statements and the fact that Ebens and Nitz hunted for Vincent and his one Chinese buddy, while ignoring his white friends, were "flimsy evidence that Chin's slaying was racially motivated."

On June 28, the federal jury in Detroit disagreed, and found Ebens guilty of violating Vincent Chin's civil rights; Nitz was acquitted. The jury foreperson explained to filmmakers Christine Choy and Renee Tajima in their documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* that Racine Colwell's testimony was the clincher—in Detroit, it was clear that "you motherfuckers" meant the Japanese, or people who looked like them. Ebens was sentenced to twenty-five years by Judge Taylor.

But the case won a retrial on appeal in 1986 because of pretrial publicity and evidentiary errors associated with audiotapes made of witnesses when ACJ was first investigating the case. It was a cruel irony that the very interviews that convinced Detroit's Asian American community and the U.S. Department of Justice of the killers' racial motivation would be used to grant Ebens's appeal. The new trial would be held in Cincinnati, where there was less chance that prospective jurors knew of the case.

Located across the Ohio River from Kentucky, Cincinnati is known as a conservative city with Southern sensibilities. Absent was the heightened racial

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

consciousness of Detroit, with its black majority and civil rights history. If Asians were hard to find in Detroit, they were near-invisible in Cincinnati—but not completely invisible; on July 4, 1986, a gang of patriotic whites shot up the homes of Southeast Asian refugees in the city. When the jury selection process for the new trial began on April 20, 1987, potential jurors were interrogated on their familiarity with Asians. "Do you have any contact with Asians? What is the nature of your contact?" they were asked, as though they had been exposed to a deadly virus.

Their answers were even more revealing. Out of about 180 Cincinnati citizens in the jury pool, only 19 had ever had a "casual contact" with an Asian American, whether at work or the local Chinese takeout joint. A white woman who said she had Asian American friends was dismissed as though the friendship tainted her; also dismissed was a woman whose daughter had Asian friends, and a black man who had served in Korea.

The jury that was eventually seated looked remarkably like the defendant, Ronald Ebens—mostly white, male, and blue-collar. This time the jury foreperson was a fifty-something machinist who was laid off after thirty years at his company. This time the defense attorneys tried to argue that ACJ and the Asian American community had paid attorney Liza Chan to trump up a civil rights case; that argument was objected to by the prosecutors and overruled by the judge.

It was a terrible disappointment, but not a surprise, when the jury of this second civil rights trial reached its not-guilty verdict on May 1, 1987, nearly five years after Vincent Chin was killed. This jury, composed of people with so little contact with Asian Americans and knowledge of our concerns, couldn't see how "It's because of you motherfuckers" might contain a racial connotation.

Mrs. Chin was distraught. "Vincent's soul will never rest. My life is over," she said. She cried every day for Vincent, when she awoke in the morning and when she lay down at night. Soon after, she moved to New York, then San Francisco, to stay with relatives. Detroit had too many hard memories. Once the legal proceedings were over, Mrs. Chin, disheartened by the failure of the courts to bring her son's killers to justice, moved to her birthplace in Guangdong Province, China, after spending fifty of her seventy years in the United States.

In a civil suit against Ebens and Nitz for the loss of Vincent's life, a settlement judgment of $1.5 million was levied in September 1987 against Ebens, who later told documentary filmmaker Christine Choy that Mrs. Chin would never see the money. He stopped making payments toward the judgment in 1989. At no point did Ebens ever publicly express remorse for taking Chin's life; he never spent a full day in jail. He and his wife, Juanita, moved several times, leaving a trail in Missouri and Nevada en route to whereabouts unknown.

ACJ, however, vowed to continue in its mission of equal justice for all. After the Cincinnati trial, its president, Kim Bridges, a Korean American, announced that ACJ was founding a Midwest Asian American Center for Justice.

Losing the legal effort in its first national campaign of this magnitude after five years of intensive organizing did not devastate the Asian American community; instead, it had been transformed.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

The legacy of the Vincent Chin case has lived on, in mainstream America as well as the Asian American community. The documentary *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* is a staple on college campuses, retelling the story to generations of students. Musicians from balladeer Charlie Chin to jazz artist Jon Jang have created songs and musical arrangements about the struggle for justice in the Vincent Chin case. The Contemporary American Theater Festival of Shepherdstown, West Virginia, near Washington, D.C., commissioned playwright Cherylene Lee to write the play *Carry the Tiger to the Mountain*; West Virginia Governor Cecil H. Underwood used the issues raised by the play to launch a statewide dialogue on race, modeled after President Clinton's Race Initiative. Consuelo Echeverria, a Latina sculptor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, welded a life-size installation from forged steel auto parts, portraying the baseball bat slaying, called *Because They Thought He Was . . .*

Los Angeles attorney and activist Stewart Kwoh, a MacArthur Fellowship "genius" award winner, attributes to the Vincent Chin case his inspiration for establishing the Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California and the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, which conducts an annual audit of anti-Asian hate crimes. New generations of Asian American activists, such as Victor M. Hwang, a civil rights attorney with the Asian Law Caucus in San Francisco, cite the influence of the Vincent Chin case on their desire to make a difference as Asian Americans.

Numerous scholars have studied the Vincent Chin case and its impact on the Asian American community. As Yen Le Espiritu, professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of California at San Diego, wrote in her book *Asian American Panethnicity:*

> Considered the archetype of anti-Asian violence, the Chin killing has "taken on mythic proportions" in the Asian American community (W. Wong 1989a). As a result of the Chin case, Asian Americans today are much more willing to speak out on the issue of anti-Asianism; they are also much better organized than they were at the time of Chin's death. . . . Besides combating anti-Asian violence, these pan-Asian organizations provide a social setting for building pan-Asian unity.

After a century of seeking acceptance by distancing from one another, Asian Americans were coming together to assert their right to be American.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:29.

A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia

David L. Eng and Shinhee Han

I wondered if whiteness were contagious. If it were, then surely I had caught it. I imagined this "condition" affected the way I walked, talked, dressed, danced, and at its most advanced stage, the way I looked at the world and at other people.

—Danzy Senna, *Caucasia*

The "Condition" of Whiteness

Configuring whiteness as contagion, Birdie Lee, the narrator of Danzy Senna's *Caucasia*, connects assimilation to illness and disease. Separated from her African American activist father, Birdie Lee and her blue-blooded mother flee from the law in a racialized and radicalized 1970s Boston. Eventually, the two take up residence in New Hampshire, where Birdie passes as "Jesse" and for white.[1] This assimilation into the whiteness of New Hampshire plagues Birdie, who wonders if she "had actually become Jesse, and it was this girl, this Birdie Lee who haunted these streets, searching for ghosts, who was the lie." This vexing "condition" of whiteness not only alters the narrator's physical world—the manner in which Birdie walks, talks, dresses, and dances. It also configures the sphere of the affective—the ways in which Birdie ultimately apprehends the world and its occupants around her. Physically and psychically haunted, Birdie/Jesse feels "contaminated."[2]

This is the condition of racial melancholia.

In Place of a Dialogue

This essay is the result of a series of sustained dialogues on racial melancholia that we recorded in the autumn and winter of 1998. We—a Chinese American male professor in the humanities and a Korean American female psychotherapist—transcribed, rewrote, and edited these dialogues into their present form. However, we hope that our distinct disciplinary approaches to psychoanalysis—from literary

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

Back to top.

theory as well as from clinical practice—not only remain clear in this essay but also work to supplement each another. The pressing need to consider carefully methods by which a more speculative approach to psychoanalysis might enhance clinical applications, and vice versa, is urgent. This essay, in part, is a critical response to the disturbing patterns of depression that we have been witnessing in a significant and growing number of Asian American students with whom we interact on a regular basis. "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia" provides, then, an opportunity for us to propose several ways of addressing race in psychoanalysis, a topic largely neglected in this field.

As Freud's privileged theory of unresolved grief, melancholia presents a compelling framework to conceptualize registers of loss and depression attendant to both psychic and material processes of assimilation.[3] Although Freud typically casts melancholia as pathological, we are more concerned with exploring this psychic condition as a depathologized structure of feeling. From this particular vantage, melancholia might be thought of as underpinning our everyday conflicts and struggles with experiences of immigration, assimilation, and racialization.[4] Furthermore, even though melancholia is often conceived of in terms of individual loss and suffering, we are interested in addressing group identifications. As such, some of our observations bring together different minority groups—people of color as well as gays and lesbians—from widely disparate historical, juridical, cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. We are wary of generalizing, but we also hope that, in forging theoretical links among these various minority groups, we might develop new intellectual, clinical, and political coalitions.

This essay is framed by two larger questions: How might psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice be leveraged to think about not only sexual but also racial identifications? How might we focus on these crossings in psychoanalysis to discuss, in particular, processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialization underpinning the formation of Asian American subjectivity?

ASSIMILATION AS/AND MELANCHOLIA

Freud's theory of melancholia provides a provocative model to consider how processes of assimilation work in this country and how the depression that characterizes so much of our contemporary culture at the turn of this century might be thought about in relation to particularly marked social groups. In the United States today, assimilation into mainstream culture for people of color still means adopting a set of dominant norms and ideals—whiteness, heterosexuality, middle-class family values—often foreclosed to them. The loss of these norms—the reiterated loss of whiteness as an ideal, for example—establishes one melancholic framework for delineating assimilation and racialization processes in the United States precisely as a series of failed and unresolved integrations.

Let us return for a moment to Freud's 1917 essay, "Mourning and Melancholia," in which he attempts to draw a clear distinction between these two psychic states through the question of "successful" and "failed" resolutions to loss. Freud reminds us at the start of this essay that "mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition."[5] Mourning, unlike melancholia, is a psychic process in which the loss of an object or ideal occasions the withdrawal of libido from that object or ideal. This withdrawal cannot be enacted at once; instead, it is a gradual letting go. Libido is detached bit by bit so that, eventually, the mourner is able to declare the object dead and to invest in new objects. In Freud's initial definition of the concept, melancholia is pathological precisely because it is a mourning without end. Interminable grief is the result of the melancholic's inability to resolve the various conflicts and ambivalences that the loss of the loved object or ideal effects. In other words, the melancholic cannot "get over" this loss, cannot work out this loss in order to invest in new objects.

To the extent that ideals of whiteness for Asian Americans (and other groups of color) remain unattainable, processes of assimilation are suspended, conflicted, and unresolved. The irresolution of this process places the concept of assimilation within a melancholic framework. Put otherwise, mourning describes a finite process that might be reasonably aligned with the popular American myth of immigration, assimilation, and the melting pot for dominant white ethnic groups. In contrast, melancholia delineates an unresolved process that might usefully describe the unstable immigration and suspended assimilation of Asian Americans into the national fabric. This suspended assimilation—this inability to blend into the "melting pot" of America—suggests that, for Asian Americans, ideals of whiteness are continually estranged. They remain at an unattainable distance, at once a compelling fantasy and a lost ideal.

In configuring assimilation and melancholia in this particular manner, it is important to challenge Freud's contention that melancholia ensues from a "pathological disposition"—that it emerges from the disturbance of a one-person psychology rather than the disruption of an intersubjective relationship. In our model, the inability to "get over" the lost ideal of whiteness, we must emphasize, is less individual than social. For instance, Asian Americans are typically seen by the mainstream as perpetual foreigners on the basis of skin color and facial markings. Despite that they may be U.S.-born or may have resided here for many years, Asian Americans are continually perceived as eccentric to the nation. At other times, Asian Americans are recognized as hypermodel minorities—inhumanly productive—and hence pathological to the nation. In both scenarios, mainstream refusal to see Asian Americans as part and parcel of the American "melting pot" is less an individual failure to blend in with the whole than a socially determined interdiction. Indeed, Freud suggests in "Mourning and Melancholia" that melancholia may proceed from "environmental influences" rather than internal conditions that threaten the existence of the object or ideal.[6]

Freud goes on in "Mourning and Melancholia" to delineate the debilitating psychic consequences of melancholia. When faced with unresolved grief, he tells us, the melancholic preserves the lost object or ideal by incorporating it into the ego and establishing an ambivalent identification with it—ambivalent precisely because of the unresolved and conflicted nature of this forfeiture.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

From a slightly different perspective, we might say that the melancholic makes every conceivable effort to retain the lost object, to keep it alive within the domain of the psyche. However, the tremendous costs of maintaining this ongoing relationship to the lost object or ideal are psychically damaging. Freud notes that the "distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment."[7]

In identifying with the lost object, the melancholic is able to preserve it but only as a type of haunted, ghostly identification. That is, the melancholic assumes the emptiness of the lost object or ideal, identifies with this emptiness, and thus participates in his or her own self-denigration and ruination of self-esteem. Freud summarizes the distinction between mourning and melancholia in this oft-quoted citation: "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself."[8] He contends that melancholia is one of the most difficult of psychic conditions both to confront and to cure, because it is largely an unconscious process. Freud observes:

> In yet other cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of the kind occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him.[9]

Freud tells us that the depression often accompanying melancholia is extremely dangerous, characterized by the tendency to suicide.[10] Here, we must add, suicide may not be merely physical; it may also be a psychical erasure of one's identity—racial, sexual, or gender identity, for example.

NATIONAL MELANCHOLIA

For Asian Americans and other groups of color, suspended assimilation into mainstream culture may involve more than severe personal consequences; ultimately, it also constitutes the foundation for a type of national melancholia, a national haunting, with negative social effects. In Senna's *Caucasia*, the ambivalence characterizing whiteness leaves the narrator with the constant and eerie feeling of "contamination."[11] Writing about the nature of collective identifications, Freud notes in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego:* "In a group every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest. This is an aptitude very contrary to his nature, and of which a man is scarcely capable, except when he makes part of a group."[12] Our dialogue on racial melancholia insists on thinking what happens when the demand to sacrifice personal to collective interest is accompanied not by inclusion within but by exclusion from the larger group.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

As we know, the formation of the U.S. nation-state quite literally entailed, and continues to entail, a history of institutionalized exclusions, from Japanese American internment to immigration exclusion acts, legislated by Congress, brokered by the executive, and upheld by the judiciary, against every Asian immigrant group.[13] For example, from 1882 to 1943, Chinese Americans experienced one of the longest juridical histories of immigration exclusion as well as bars to naturalization and citizenship. Yet, few people realize that the first exclusion laws passed against a particular ethnic group were passed against the Chinese. These laws were followed by a series of further exclusion acts culminating in the 1924 National Origins Act and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, which effectively halted all Asian immigration and naturalization. At the same time, other laws were instituted against miscegenation and ownership of private property.

Discourses of American exceptionalism and democratic myths of liberty, individualism, and inclusion force a misremembering of these exclusions, an enforced psychic amnesia that can return only as a type of repetitive national haunting—a type of negative or absent presence.[14] The popular model-minority stereotype that clings to Asian Americans is both a product—and productive—of this negative or absent presence.[15] In its compulsive restaging, the model minority stereotype homogenizes widely disparate Asian and Asian American racial and ethnic groups by generalizing them all as economically or academically successful, with no personal or familial problems to speak of. In this manner, the stereotype works not only to deny the heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity of various Asian American groups who do not fit its ideals of model citizenry.[16] It also functions as a national tool that erases and manages the history of these institutionalized exclusions. The pervasiveness of the model minority stereotype in our contemporary vocabulary works, then, as a melancholic mechanism facilitating the erasure and loss of repressed Asian American histories and identities. These histories and identities can return only as a type of ghostly presence. In this sense, the Asian American model minority *subject* also endures in the United States as a melancholic national *object*—as a haunting specter to democratic ideals of inclusion that cannot quite "get over" the histories of these legislated proscriptions of loss.

Before moving on, we extend our observations on the psychic consequences that this model of national melancholia exacts on the individual Asian American psyche. One compelling example comes from Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men* (1980). In Kingston's historical novel, the narrator wildly speculates about the disappearance of "The Grandfather of the Sierra Nevada Mountains" after he helps to complete the transcontinental railroad, the greatest technological feat of the nineteenth century: "Maybe he hadn't died in San Francisco, it was just his papers that burned; it was just that his existence was outlawed by Chinese Exclusion Acts. The family called him Fleaman. They did not understand his accomplishments as an American ancestor, a holding, homing ancestor of this place."[17] Kingston understands that the law's refusal to recognize Chinese Americans as citizens "outlaws" their existence, placing them under erasure. At the same time, she also underscores how this national refusal gains its efficacy through a simultaneous psychic internalization of its interdicting imperatives on

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

the part of excluded Asian American subjects. That is, the grandfather's own family refuses to recognize him. They cannot perceive his accomplishments in building the railroad as legitimizing his membership in the American nation. How, in turn, can it be possible to see themselves as legitimate members of this society?

In this regard, racial melancholia might be described as splitting the Asian American psyche. This cleaving of the psyche might be productively thought about in terms of an altered, racialized model of classic Freudian fetishism.[18] That is, assimilation into the national fabric demands a psychic splitting on the part of the Asian American subject, who knows and does not know, at once, that she or he is part of the larger group. In the early 1970s, Asian American psychologists Stanley Sue and Derald W. Sue coined the term "Marginal Man" to describe an Asian American subject who desires to assimilate into mainstream American society at any cost. The Marginal Man faithfully subscribes to the ideals of assimilation only through an elaborate self-denial of the daily acts of institutionalized racism directed against him. In "Chinese-American Personality and Mental Health," the Sues write about the complex psychological defenses that the Marginal Man must necessarily employ in order to "function" within American society. The Marginal Man finds it "difficult to admit widespread racism since to do so would be to say that he aspires to join a racist society."[19] Caught in this untenable contradiction, the Marginal Man must necessarily become a split subject—one who exhibits a faithful allegiance to the universal norms of abstract equality and collective national membership at the same time as he displays an uncomfortable understanding of his utter disenfranchisement from these democratic ideals.

In Senna's *Caucasia*, Birdie's unresolved assimilation into the whiteness of New Hampshire gives us a final reflection on the psychic effects of splitting in racial melancholia on the level of the signifier. Through the twinning of her name, the impossible mulatta child is marked by doubleness: Birdie (mulatto) → Jesse (white). Here, Birdie/Jesse is the object of melancholia for a nation organized by an ecology of whiteness. At the same time, she is the subject of melancholia, a girl haunted by ghosts. It is difficult not to notice that much of contemporary ethnic literature in the United States is characterized by ghosts and by hauntings from both these perspectives—the objects and subjects of national melancholia. For instance, the subtitle of Maxine Hong Kingston's well-known *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*.[20] In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," the Nobel laureate Toni Morrison writes that the African American presence is "the ghost in the machine."[21]

MIMICRY; OR, THE MELANCHOLIC MACHINE

Racial melancholia as psychic splitting and national dis-ease opens upon the interconnected terrain of mimicry, ambivalence, and the stereotype. Homi Bhabha's seminal essay, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" (1984), is crucial here. Bhabha describes the ways in which a colonial regime impels the colonized subject to mimic Western ideals of whiteness.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

At the same time, this mimicry is also condemned to failure. Bhabha writes, "Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually reproduce its slippage, its excess, its difference. . . . *Almost the same but not white*."[22] Bhabha locates and labels the social imperative to assimilate as the colonial structure of mimicry. He marks not only this social imperative but also its inevitable, built-in failure. This doubling of difference that is almost the same but not quite, almost the same but not white, results in ambivalence, which comes to define the failure of mimicry.

Here we would like to connect Bhabha's observations on mimicry in the material space of the colonized with the psychic domain through the logic of melancholia. It is important to remember that, like Bhabha's analysis of mimicry, Freud marks ambivalence as one of melancholia's defining characteristics. In describing the genealogy of ambivalence in melancholia, Freud himself moves from the domain of the material to the register of the psychic. He notes that the "conflict due to ambivalence, which sometimes arises from real experiences, sometimes more from constitutional factors, must not be overlooked among the preconditions of melancholia."[23] Melancholia not only traces an internalized pathological identification with what was once an external and now lost ideal. In this moving from outside to inside (from Bhabha to Freud, as it were), we also get a strong sense of how social injunctions of mimicry configure individual psychic structures as split and dis-eased—another angle from which to consider the cleaving of the Marginal Man. The ambivalence that comes to define Freud's concept of melancholia is one that finds its origins in the social, in colonial and racial structures impelling systems of mimicry and man.

It is crucial to extend Bhabha's theories on colonial mimicry to domestic contexts of racialization in order to consider how we might usefully track this concept to explore further the material and psychic contours of racial melancholia for Asian Americans. One potential site of investigation is the stereotype. In an earlier essay entitled "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism" (1983), Bhabha also aligns ambivalence and splitting with the stereotype, suggesting that the process of mimicry and the phenomenon of the stereotype might be considered together. The stereotype, Bhabha writes, "is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . for it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency."[24]

If we conceptualize the model minority myth as a privileged stereotype through which Asian Americans appear as subjects in the contemporary social domain, then we gain a more refined understanding of how mimicry specifically functions as a material practice in racial melancholia. That is, Asian Americans are forced to mimic the model minority stereotype in order to be recognized by mainstream society—in order *to be* at all. To the extent, however, that this mimicry of the model minority stereotype functions only to estrange Asian Americans from mainstream norms and ideals (as well as from themselves), mimicry can operate only as a melancholic process. As both a social and a psychic malady,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

mimicry distances Asian Americans from the mimetic ideals of the nation. Through the mobilization and exploitation of the model minority stereotype, mimicry for Asian Americans is always a partial success as well as a partial failure to assimilate into regimes of whiteness.

Let us analyze this dynamic from yet another angle. While Asian Americans are now largely thought of as "model minorities" living out the "American Dream," this stereotyped dream of material success is partial, because it is at most configured as economic achievement. The "success" of the model minority myth comes to mask our lack of political and cultural representation. It covers over our inability to gain "full" subjectivities—to be politicians, athletes, and activists, for example—to be recognized as "All American." To occupy the model minority position, Asian American subjects must follow this prescribed model of economic integration and forfeit political representation as well as cultural voice. In other words, they must not contest the dominant order of things; they must not "rock the boat" or draw attention to themselves. It is difficult for Asian Americans to express any legitimate political, economic, or social needs, because the stereotype demands not only an enclosed but also a passive self-sufficiency.

From an academic point of view, the model minority stereotype also delineates Asian American students as academically successful but rarely "well-rounded"—well-rounded in tacit comparison to the unmarked (white) student body. Here is another example of Bhabha's concept of mimicry as nearly successful imitation. This near successful assimilation attempts to cover over that gap—the failure of well-roundedness—as well as that unavoidable ambivalence resulting from this tacit comparison in which the Asian American student is seen as lacking. This material failure leads to a psychic ambivalence that works to characterize the colonized subject's identification with dominant ideals of whiteness as a pathological identification. It is an ambivalence that opens upon the landscape of melancholia and depression for many of the Asian American students with whom we come into contact on a regular basis. Those Asian Americans who do not fit into the model minority stereotype (and this is probably a majority of Asian American students) are altogether erased from—not seen in—mainstream society. Like Kingston's grandfather in *China Men*, they are often rejected by their own families as well.[25]

The difficulty of negotiating this unwieldy stereotype is that, unlike most pejorative stereotypes of African Americans (but not unlike the myth of the black athlete), the model minority myth is considered to be a "positive" representation, an "exceptional" model for this racialized group. In this regard, not only mainstream society but also Asian Americans themselves become attached to, and split by, its seemingly admirable qualities without recognizing its simultaneous liabilities—what Wendy Brown terms a "wounded attachment."[26] According to Bhabha, in its doubleness the stereotype, like mimicry, creates a gap embedded in an unrecognized structure of material and psychic ambivalence. In Gish Jen's *Typical American*, for instance, we encounter Ralph Chang, who chases the American Dream through his attempts to build a fried-chicken kingdom, the Chicken Palace.[27] Eventually, the franchise fails, the *a* falling off the sign so that

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

"Chicken Palace" becomes "Chicken P lace." This falling-off is the linguistic corollary to the gap in the American Dream that Ralph unsuccessfully attempts to mime. Perhaps it is in this gap—in this emptiness—that Freud's theory of melancholia emerges and dwells. It is in this gap—this loss of whiteness—that the negotiation between mourning and melancholia is staged.

Mourning/Melancholia/Immigration

This structure of mimicry gestures to the partial success and partial failure to mourn our identifications with whiteness. Moreover, it gestures to our partial success and partial failure to mourn our identifications and affiliations with our "original" Asian cultures. Thus far, we have been focusing on the loss of whiteness as an ideal structuring the assimilation and racialization processes of Asian Americans. However, the lost object can be multifaceted. Since the 1965 reformation of the Immigration and Nationality Act, there are more first-generation Asian American immigrants living in the United States today than any other generation of Asian Americans. A majority of Asian American college students are the offspring of this generation. Hence, many of our clinical observations lead us to a more concerted focus on the relationship of mourning and melancholia to questions of immigration and intergenerational losses involving Asian identity.

The experience of immigration itself is based on a structure of mourning. When one leaves one's country of origin, voluntarily or involuntarily, one must mourn a host of losses both concrete and abstract. These include homeland, family, language, identity, property, status in the community—the list goes on. In Freud's theory of mourning, one works through and finds closure to these losses by investing in new objects—in the American Dream, for example. Our attention to the problematics of mimicry, ambivalence, and the stereotype, as well as our earlier analysis of the history of juridical exclusions of Asian Americans, reveals a social structure that prevents the immigrant from fully assimilating. From another perspective, this structure might be said to deny him or her the capacity to invest in new objects. The inability to invest in new objects, we must remember, is part of Freud's definition of melancholia. Given our current discussion of the ways in which Asian American immigrants are foreclosed from fully assimilating, are they perpetually consigned to a melancholic status? If so, how do we begin to address Freud's notion of melancholia as pathological? Clearly not all Asian American immigrants are confined to melancholic or depressive states. If this is the case, how do Asian American immigrants negotiate their losses? And how do their offspring inherit and inhabit these losses?

If the losses suffered by the first generation are not resolved and mourned in the process of assimilation—if libido is not replenished by the investment in new objects, new communities, and new ideals—then the melancholia that ensues from this condition can be transferred to the second generation. At the same time, however, can the hope of assimilation and mastery of the American Dream also be transferred? If so, mourning and melancholia are reenacted and lived out by the children in their own attempts to assimilate and to negotiate

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

the American Dream. Here, immigration and assimilation might be said to characterize a process involving not just mourning *or* melancholia but the intergenerational negotiation between mourning *and* melancholia. Configured as such, this notion begins to depathologize melancholia by situating it as the inherent unfolding and outcome of the mourning process that underwrites the losses of the immigration experience.

Let us turn to a clinical example. Elaine, a U.S.-born Korean American female college student, grew up in Texas. Her father is a professor and her mother is a homemaker. An academic dean referred Elaine to Ms. Han because she was at risk of failing her first year in college. In a tearful presentation, Elaine reported, "My parents have sacrificed everything to raise me here. If my parents had stayed in Korea, my mom would be so much happier and not depressed. She would have friends to speak Korean with, my father would be a famous professor, and we would be better off socially and economically. I wouldn't be so pressured to succeed. They sacrificed everything for me, and now it's up to me to please them and to do well in school." When asked the reasons for her academic probation, she responded, "I didn't do well because at a certain point, I didn't care anymore, about myself or anything else."

Elaine's case is an illustration of an intergenerational transference between the immigrant parents and child, which might be usefully described through the logic of melancholia. The loss experienced by the parents' failure to achieve the American Dream—to achieve a standard of living greater than that which they could have putatively achieved in Korea—is a loss transferred onto and incorporated by Elaine for her to "work out" and to repair. In particular, Elaine reenacts these losses through her relationship with her mother. Elaine's depression is a result of internalized guilt and residual anger that she not only feels toward but also identifies with in her mother. Through this incorporation, she also functions as the place-holder of her mother's depression. This mother–daughter predicament has been widely debated in feminist circles.[28] Here, the question is how racial difference comes to intersect what is a strongly gendered formation.

This crossing of sexual and racial difference is a narrative that is very common in Asian American literature (especially Asian American women's writing). Numerous stories portray the first generation (or, alternately, the second generation depending on the particular historical moment and ethnic group) as being a lost generation—bereft, traumatized, with few material or psychic resources.[29] Is it, however, only at the moment in which the first generation acknowledges its failure to achieve the American Dream that this theme of first-generation sacrifice then emerges to be retroactively projected onto the second generation? In other words, are Asian American parents as completely selfless as the theme of sacrifice suggests, or is this theme a compensatory gesture that attaches itself to the parents' losses and failures? Could the ambitions of Elaine's father to become a professor in an American university have motivated their family's immigration? Sacrifice, it is important to remember, is built upon the assumption of nonequivalence and the melancholic notion that what is forfeited and lost can never be recuperated. In turn, do children of immigrants

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

"repay" this sacrifice only by repeating and perpetuating its melancholic logic—by berating and sacrificing themselves?

Yet can sacrifice also be considered the displaced residue of hope—a hope for the reparation of melancholia, of the American Dream? Can hope also be transferred from parent to child and from child to parent? Elaine's case evokes Rea Tajiri's stunning video *History and Memory*,[30] which is about a young Japanese American girl whose parents endure internment during World War II. While her mother has repressed all memories of the internment experience, the daughter has nightmares that she cannot explain: recurring images of a young woman at a watering well. The daughter is depressed, and the parents argue over the etiology of her depression. Eventually, the daughter discovers that these nightmares are reenactments of the mother's histories in the camp. Ironically, the mother has history but no memory, while the daughter has memory but no history. For both mother and daughter, history and memory do not come together until the daughter visits the former site of the internment camp, Poston. Here she realizes that it is her mother's history that she remembers.

Tajiri's video is a compelling example of the ways in which historical traumas of loss are passed down from one generation to another unconsciously. It illustrates Freud's maxim that the losses experienced in melancholia are often unconscious losses. Yet, at the same time, it also diverges from Freud's conception of the disease insofar as it posits a theory of melancholia that is not individually experienced but intergenerationally shared among members of a social group, Japanese Americans. It also departs from Freud's definition of melancholia as pathology and permanence. Here, the hope for psychic health is stitched into the fabric of melancholia but only as an optative gesture that must be redeemed by subsequent generations. In contrast with Freud's contention that melancholia is a classic, one-person psychology—a permanent psychic condition if not solved within a generation—Tajiri's version of melancholia approaches this condition from a different perspective. It refines our theory of racial melancholia as a psychic state focused on bonds among people—an intersubjective psychology—that might be addressed and resolved across generations. Indeed, in *History and Memory* the daughter's return to Poston initiates an incipient healing process in her mother.

In melancholia, the subject's turning from outside (intersubjective) to inside (intrapsychic) threatens to render the social invisible. What is striking in both these examples, of Elaine and of *History and Memory*, is the manner in which the daughters' bodies and voices become substitutes for those of the mothers—not just the mothers' bodies and voices but also something that is unconsciously lost in them. To return to Freud, the melancholic "knows *whom* he has lost but not *what* he has lost in him."[31] Elaine's narrative and the daughter's nightmares are not their own histories. These daughters have absorbed and been saturated by their mothers' losses. The mothers' voices haunt the daughters. These losses and voices are melancholically displaced from the external world into the internal world of the psyche. The anger that these daughters feel toward the loved object is internalized as depression. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud reminds us that the reproaches against the self are, in fact, displaced

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

reproaches against the loved object that have been shifted onto the individual's own ego.[32]

In this respect, melancholia might be said to trace a trajectory from love to hate of the lost object. This hate is subsequently transformed into self-hate in the course of moving from the outside world into the internalized domain of the psyche. As such, the internal monologue that the daughters direct toward themselves should rightly be an external dialogue between daughter and mother. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler writes:

> The melancholic would have *said something*, if he or she could, but did not, and now believes in the sustaining power of the voice. Vainly, the melancholic now says what he or she would have said, addressed only to himself, as one who is already split off from himself, but whose power of self-address depends upon this self-forfeiture. The melancholic thus burrows in a direction opposite to that in which he might find a fresher trace of the lost other, attempting to resolve the loss through psychic substitutions and compounding the loss as he goes.[33]

This turning from outside to inside threatens to erase the *political* bases of melancholia. When Asian American students seek therapy, for example, their mental health issues—overwhelmingly perceived as intergenerational familial conflicts—are often diagnosed as being exclusively symptomatic of *cultural* (not political) conflicts. That is, by configuring Asian cultural difference as the source of all intergenerational dis-ease, Asian culture comes to serve as an alibi or a scapegoat for a panoply of mental health issues. These issues may, in fact, trace their etiology not to questions of Asian cultural difference but rather to forms of institutionalized racism and economic exploitation. The segregation of Asian American health issues into the domain of cultural difference thus covers over the need to investigate structural questions of social inequity as they circulate both inside and outside the therapeutic space of the clinic. For instance, not to recognize the history of Japanese internment when analyzing Tajiri's mother–daughter relationship serves not only to repress and to deny this history but also to redouble and to intensify the source of the daughter's melancholia. Lisa Lowe writes in *Immigrant Acts*:

> Interpreting Asian American culture exclusively in terms of the master narratives of generational conflict and filial relation essentializes Asian American culture, obscuring the particularities and incommensurabilities of class, gender, and national diversities among Asians. The reduction of the cultural politics of racialized ethnic groups, like Asian Americans, to first-generation/second-generation struggles displaces social differences into a privatized familial opposition. Such reductions contribute to the aestheticizing commodification of Asian American *cultural* differences, while denying the immigrant histories of material exclusion and differentiation.[34]

A therapeutic process that solely attributes cultural differences to intergenerational conflict may not only result in the failure to cure; it may also serve to endanger further the mental health of the Asian American patient.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

Mourning/Melancholia/Language

This discussion on intergenerational immigration issues brings us to the corollary issue of language. Nelson, a first-generation Japanese American student who immigrated from Osaka to New Jersey when he was five, sought therapy with Ms. Han, presenting chronic struggles with depression associated with identity conflicts regarding race. Nelson's family history reveals that he is the eldest child and has two siblings, a brother and a sister, both of whom were born in the United States. Before Nelson entered school, his mother spoke only Japanese to the children. When Nelson started kindergarten, his teacher strongly advised the mother to replace Japanese with English at home if she wanted her children to assimilate and become successful students. Despite the mother's broken English, she followed the teacher's instruction assiduously, speaking only English to her children. Nelson recounts a story that later took place in grade school. During a reading lesson, he mispronounced *crooked* as though it had only one syllable: "crook'd." His teacher shamed him publicly for this failed mimicry and demanded to know where he learned to (mis) pronounce such a simple word. Nelson reluctantly replied that he learned this pronunciation from his mother. Nelson remembers, in particular, the social embarrassment and ridicule of his classmates.

What we learn about Nelson's case is that, although his original connection to the primary object (the mother) was through the Japanese language, this connection was abruptly interrupted by a foreign property, English. The mother's "poor" mimicry of English abandoned and revised the earliest mother-son attachment, one brokered in Japanese. As such, Nelson could no longer mirror himself from his mother, in Japanese or in English. This estrangement from language, native and foreign, is a double loss. While acquiring a new language (English) should be perceived as a positive cognitive development, what is not often acknowledged or emphasized enough is the concomitant psychic trauma triggered by the loss of what had once been safe, nurturing, and familiar to the young child (Japanese).

The loss of Japanese as a safe and nurturing object reveals another concrete way to think about racial melancholia in relation to Asian American immigration and assimilation. In Nelson's case, melancholia results not only from a thwarted identification with a dominant ideal of unattainable whiteness but also from a vexed relationship to a compromised Japaneseness. Nelson's analytic situation reveals how on two fronts ideals of whiteness and ideals of Asianness are lost and unresolved for the Asian American subject. In both instances, language is the privileged vehicle by which standards of successful assimilation and failed imitation are measured. In this sense, language itself might be thought of as a kind of stereotype, as demanding a flawless mimicry on the part of the young Nelson, whose poor performance leads him to shame and self-abasement.

Nelson's transition from Japanese to English is another good example of the negotiation between mourning and melancholia in the immigration and assimilation process. That is, although he suffers a loss and revaluation of his "mother" tongue, his transition into the "adopted" language (or ideal) of English is anything but smooth. We need to emphasize that the shaming ritual to which the grade

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

school teacher subjects Nelson—one all too common in the Darwinian space of the classroom—is one that not merely makes his transition into English difficult but also demonizes the mother (the mother tongue and accent) at the same time. What was once a loved and safe object is retroactively transformed into an object of insecurity and shame. To the extent that the mother originally represents the safe notion of "home," Nelson's estrangement from his mother and his mother tongue renders it *unheimlich*—unhomely, unfamiliar, uncanny.[35]

The relationship between language and assimilation into national citizenry is developed in a short story by Monique T.-D. Truong. "Kelly" is about a young Vietnamese refugee girl, Thuy-Mai, who finds herself in the improbable space of a 1975 North Carolina classroom.[36] Truong's narrator writes a distressing epistolary monologue to Kelly, her one and only (and now absent) friend from that dark period of her life. In doing so, she mimes the melancholic logic discussed earlier. That is, an intersubjective external dialogue meant for two parties is melancholically internalized and transformed into an intrasubjective, interminable monologue of one, remarkable for its anger and depressed solipsism. What is an epistolary, after all, but an impassioned (though not necessarily answered) plea to the other?

Truong's narrator recalls their grade school teacher:

> Kelly, remember how Mrs. Hammerick talked about Veteran's Day? How about the Day of Infamy when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor? Mrs. Hammerick, you know, the mayor's wife always had a sweet something surrounding her like she had spent too much time pulling taffy. . . . Kelly, you only knew that she liked the Beths and the Susans cause they wore pink and never bulged and buckled out of their shirt plackets. I was scared of her like no dark corners could ever scare me. You have to know that all the while she was teaching us history she was telling, with her language for the deaf, blind, and dumb; she was telling all the boys in our class that I was Pearl and my last name was Harbor. They understood her like she was speaking French and their names were all Claude and Pierre.[37]

Truong's story expands our discussion of language and its effects on the constitution of good and bad national subjects. Here, Mrs. Hammerick's common language for the "deaf, blind, and dumb"—a language from which Thuy-Mai is emphatically excluded—is used to create good and bad students within the institutionalized space of the classroom. The Susans and the Beths, the Claudes and the Pierres, are all, as Louis Althusser would put it, "interpellated" by the mayor's wife as good citizen-subjects of the classroom and consequently the nation.[38] Truong emphasizes how education is a primary site through which narratives of national group identity are established, reinforced, and normalized. At the same time, the Vietnamese refugee Thuy-Mai is pathologized as Asian enemy, dismissively labeled "Pearl Harbor," erroneously conflated with the Japanese, and implicitly rendered a menace to the coherence of the U.S. nation-state. Mrs, Hammerick is, of course, not literally speaking French. However, Truong's attention to language underscores the ways in which an unconscious discourse of racism is circulated in the space of the classroom as a nationalizing tract.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

Furthermore, as Lisa Lowe points out, Mrs. Hammerick's nationalizing tract is also a gendered discourse: "The narrator's observations that the teacher's history lesson addresses 'all the boys' further instantiates how the American nationalist narrative recognizes, recruits, and incorporates male subjects, while 'feminizing' and silencing the students who do not conform to that notion of patriotic subjectivity."[39] Racialized subjects, such as Nelson and Thuy-Mai, become "good" citizens when they identify with the paternal state and accept, as Lowe summarizes, "the terms of this identification by subordinating [their] racial difference and denying [their] ties with the feminized and racialized 'motherland.'"[40]

On Good and Bad Racialized Objects

In the case of Nelson, the teacher's shaming of the mother brings the mother's image into crisis, reconfiguring her return in the guise of a "bad" mother. Like Elaine, Nelson, as the Asian American child of immigrant parents, becomes the arbiter of not only his mother's ambitions and losses but also his own. His attempts to "reinstate" his first love-object and caretaker (the Japanese mother) as well as his first language (Japanese) are torturous and compromised.

Nelson's case history brings us to the work of Melanie Klein on good and bad objects, which might be usefully factored into our discussion of racial melancholia for Asian Americans. In "Mourning and Manic-Depressive States," Klein extends Freud's theory on mourning: "While it is true that the characteristic feature of normal mourning is the individual's setting up the lost loved object inside himself, he is not doing so for the first time but, through the work of mourning, is reinstating that object as well as all his loved *internal* objects which he feels he has lost. He is therefore *recovering* what he had already attained in childhood."[41] States of mourning in adult life are dealt with and resolved through the alignment of the lost object with all the loved internal objects of infancy. This clustering of the lost object with the good objects of the past is, as Klein points out, an attempt to recover and hence to reinstate the securities of infancy before the mother was split into good and bad (a necessary but impossible project). In this manner, the loved object is "preserved in safety inside oneself," and depression can be negotiated.[42]

Unlike Freud's theory, then, Klein's formulation for mourning, as well as her prescription for psychic health, depends upon the introjection of the lost object, on retaining it through a melancholic logic of internalization, but an internalization that attempts to reinstate the lost object by aligning it with a cluster of good internal objects.[43] Klein warns, however, of the difficulties often accompanying this rebuilding of the inner world, this recovery and reinstatement of the lost object as "good." Depression will surely ensue, Klein warns, when the lost object cannot be clustered with the good objects of the past. In particular, she writes about the advent of depression through the forfeiture of the "good" mother. In "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," Klein observes that from

> the very beginning of psychic development there is a constant correlation of real objects with those installed within the ego. It is for this reason that the anxiety I have

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

> just described manifests itself in a child's exaggerated fixation to its mother or whoever looks after it. The absence of the mother arouses in the child anxiety lest it should be handed over to bad objects, external and internalized, either *because* of her death or because of her return in the guise of a "*bad*" mother.[44]

Nelson's case illustrates what happens when the mother returns in the guise of a "bad" mother precisely through the loss—the death—of "Japaneseness." Nelson's "good" mother of infancy returns as a "bad" mother of childhood at the moment of the teacher's sudden linguistic interdiction. After this childhood trauma, Nelson cannot easily repair and realign an image of the mother as "bad" with his earlier perceptions of this nurturing figure. Klein summarizes:

> In some patients who had turned away from their mother in dislike or hate, or used other mechanisms to get away from her, I have found that there existed in their minds nevertheless a beautiful picture of the mother, but one which was felt to be a *picture* of her only, not her real self. The real object was felt to be unattractive—really an injured, incurable and therefore dreaded person. The beautiful picture had been dissociated from the real object but had never been given up and played a great part in the specific ways of their sublimations.[45]

Nelson's case history challenges us to consider what must be shorn away from the shamed Japanese mother in order to reinstate her to a world of loved internal objects, in order to create from her a "beautiful picture." In this instance, it would seem that it is racial difference—Japaneseness itself—that must be dissociated from the figure of the injured and dreaded mother in order for this reinstatement to occur. In turn, however, through the shaming of his mother and mother tongue as well as his attempts to repair them, Nelson's Japanese identity becomes dissociated from him, repressed into the unconscious and transformed into a bad object. Nelson's case history emphatically underscores the way in which good attachments to a primary object can be threatened and transformed into bad attachments *specifically through the axis of race.*

What we are proposing here is the refinement of Klein's theory into an account of "good" and "bad" *racialized* objects. Nelson and his mother are bound together as mourners. Nelson's mother becomes overwhelmed with guilt about her broken English. She transfers the burden of this trauma as well as the burden of hope onto Nelson's shoulders. As such, Nelson attempts to save himself by reinstating his mother (and thus his own ego) as good object. His fixation with perfecting his English is indicative of an obsessional mechanism that negotiates the depressive position for him. This process of perfecting English might be seen as Nelson's displaced attempt to preserve the image of the beautiful Japanese mother. Nelson's efforts to reinstate an image of beauty can never be fulfilled (for him or anyone). However, these attempts are a "necessary failure," for Klein warns that if this image of beauty is removed completely—if the death wish against the mother is fulfilled—then guilt is not reduced but in fact heightened. Were this to happen, the self-abasement accompanying melancholia's guilt and ambivalence would only redouble and heighten.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

Indeed, the racial melancholia that underwrites Nelson's unresolved loss of the Japanese mother renders any attempt to reinstate this loved object extraordinarily tenuous. This compromising of Nelson's efforts vexes the "proper" work of mourning, leaving him depressed. Klein states, "The ego endeavours to keep the good apart from the bad, and the real from the phantasmatic objects."[46] However, it may be that the racial melancholia and depression that ensue for Nelson can be avoided only through the most difficult psychic process of dissociation—splitting of Japaneseness from the figure of the mother as well as segregating racial and sexual difference. Klein comments, "The attempts to save the loved object, to repair and restore it, attempts which in the state of depression are coupled with despair, since the ego doubts its capacity to achieve this restoration, are determining factors for all sublimations and the whole of the ego development."[47] Nelson's chronic depression and sustained ambivalence toward the figure of his mother indicate the torturous process of reinstatement that clearly impedes proper ego development. It is racial difference that must be attended to here.

At this point, we would like to return to Butler. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler makes the observation that melancholia instantiates a psychic topography in which the ego constitutively emerges in relation to a superego that admonishes and judges it to be lacking. Melancholia, Butler states, "produces the possibility for the representation of psychic life."[48] She makes this claim through a deconstruction of mourning and melancholia. In his first account of the disease, Freud contrasts the pathological condition of melancholia to the normal work of mourning. Later, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud revises this earlier distinction between mourning and melancholia. He reconceptualizes it, Butler notes, when he realizes that the ego itself is composed of abandoned object-cathexes internalized as constitutive identifications: "But let us remember that in *The Ego and the Id* Freud himself acknowledges that melancholy, the unfinished process of grieving, is central to the formation of identifications that form the ego. Indeed, identifications formed from unfinished grief are the modes in which the lost object is incorporated and phantasmatically preserved in and as the ego."[49] If the ego is composed of its lost attachments, then there would be no ego—indeed, no distinction between inside and outside—without the internalization of loss along melancholic lines. Melancholia thus instantiates the very logic by which the ego and its psychic landscape are constituted. It is only after this partition of internal and external worlds that the work of mourning—that subjectivity itself—becomes possible.[50]

Butler aligns this deconstruction of mourning and melancholia with the social emergence of gender and a system of compulsory heterosexuality. She focuses on Freud's contention, in *The Ego and the Id*, that the primary lost object of desire for the little boy is the father. As such, Butler argues that heterosexual male subjectivity is created melancholically through the father's forfeiture as an object of desire and his internalization as a primary and constitutive identification. She writes that heterosexual identity is thus

> purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love that it disavows: the man who insists upon the coherence of his heterosexuality will claim that he never loved

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

> another man, and hence never lost another man. That love, that attachment becomes subject to a double disavowal, a never having loved, and a never having lost. This "never-never" thus founds the heterosexual subject, as it were; it is an identity based upon the refusal to avow an attachment and, hence, the refusal to grieve.[51]

Butler concludes that in opposition to a conception of (hetero)sexuality that is said to reflect a natural gendered order, gender in this case is understood to be composed of precisely what remains melancholically disavowed in sexuality.

Klein's theory of good and bad objects is a useful theoretical supplement here, because she addresses something unaddressed by Butler. If a system of gender melancholy instantiates compulsory male heterosexuality, we nevertheless do not typically describe the normative male subject as melancholic or depressed. In other words, as Adam Phillips suggests, if the normative heterosexual male claims to be relatively untroubled by this disavowal, is it the task of the psychoanalyst to engineer its undoing?[52] Here, the clinical implications of this undoing diverge from the speculative payoff of rethinking a system of compulsory heterosexuality.

In both cases, however, Klein's notion of the good and the bad object—of "recovery" and "reinstatement"—allows us to understand how certain losses are grieved because they are not, perhaps, even seen as losses but are seen as social gains. These include access to political, economic, and cultural privilege; alignment with whiteness and the nation; and "full" subjectivity and a sense of belonging. In other words, the loss of the father as object of desire for the little boy can be more acceptably mourned than other losses, for this "forfeiture" has widespread social support and approbation. Indeed, it provides the very foundation of oedipalization. As such, this "forfeiture" is seen not as an abandonment but as a culturally rewarded transaction. To return to Phillips, we must continue to ask why it is that the normative heterosexual white male can claim to be untroubled by his melancholic disavowals.

Let us contrast this normative story of oedipalization and the "loss" of the father with Nelson's compromised loss of the mother and the mother tongue. Our present deconstruction of mourning and melancholia tells us that it is crucial to recognize that all identities are built on loss. Loss is symptomatic of ego formation, for both dominant as well as marginalized subjects. The crucial point to investigate, then, is the social and psychic status of that lost object, idealized or devalued, and the ways in which that lost object can or cannot be reinstated into the psychic life of the individual in order to rebuild an internal world. It is Klein who lends us a theoretical account to make these distinctions.

DEPATHOLOGIZING MELANCHOLIA

The process of assimilation is a negotiation between mourning and melancholia. The ethnic subject does not inhabit one or the other—mourning *or* melancholia—but mourning *and* melancholia coexist at once in the process of assimilation. This continuum between mourning and melancholia allows us to understand the negotiation of racial melancholia as *conflict* rather than *damage*. Indeed, might

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

we consider damage the intrasubjective displacement of a necessarily intersubjective dynamic of conflict? This attention to racial melancholia as conflict rather than damage not only renders it a productive category but also removes Asian Americans from the position of solipsistic "victims." We are dissatisfied with the assumption that minority subjectivities are *permanently* damaged—forever injured and incapable of ever being "whole." Our theory of intersubjective conflict, intergenerationally shared, evokes Klein's notion of rebuilding on a communal level. This notion of communal rebuilding provides the foundation for the reparation of individual psyches as well as group identities.

Our discussion of immigration, assimilation, and racialization pursued here develops them as issues involving the fluid negotiation between mourning and melancholia. In this manner, melancholia is neither pathological nor permanent but, as José Esteban Muñoz, following Raymond Williams, eloquently suggests, "a structure of feeling," a structure of everyday life. In *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz states that, for queers as well as for people of color, melancholia is not a pathology but an integral part of daily existence and survival. He provides a corrective to Freud's vision of melancholia as a destructive force and states that it is instead part of the

> process of dealing with all the catastrophes that occur in the lives of people of color, lesbians, and gay men. I have proposed a different understanding of melancholia that does not see it as a pathology or as a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism. Rather, it is a mechanism that helps us (re) construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names.[53]

Within the continuum of mourning and melancholia is a productive gap inhabited by the various issues under discussion here: immigration, assimilation, and racialization; mimicry, ambivalence, and the stereotype; sacrifice, loss, and reinstatement. The material and psychic negotiations of these various issues are the conflicts with which Asian Americans struggle on an everyday basis. This struggle does not necessarily result in damage but is finally a productive and a necessary process. It is the work of rebuilding. "Suffering," Klein adds, "can become productive":

> It seems that every advance in the process of mourning results in a deepening in the individual's relation to his inner objects, in the happiness of regaining them after they were felt to be lost ("Paradise Lost and Regained"), in an increased trust in them and love for them because they proved to be good and helpful after all. This is similar to the way in which the young child step by step builds up his relations to external objects, for he gains trust not only from pleasant experiences, but also from the ways in which he overcomes frustrations and unpleasant experiences, nevertheless retaining his good objects (externally and internally).[54]

We would like to think about the numerous difficulties of Asian American immigration, assimilation, and racialization processes in terms of "Paradise Lost and Regained."

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

In the work of racial melancholia there, too, lies a nascent ethical and political project. In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud originally describes in rather negative terms the melancholic's inability to "get over" loss. We instead focus on the melancholic's absolute refusal to relinquish the other—to forfeit alterity—at any costs. In his essay, Freud lays out the provocative idea that in melancholia "the shadow of the object fell upon the ego."[55] In most of the Freudian oeuvre, it is indubitably the ego that holds sway; his majesty the ego's narcissism reigns supreme. Throughout his writings, Jacques Lacan, even more, emphasizes the narcissism of the ego, reversing this particular formulation by insisting that it is always the shadow of the ego that falls upon the object.[56] In this present formulation, however, we have the loved object, not the ego, holding sway. Racial melancholia thus delineates one psychic process in which the loved object is so overwhelmingly important to and beloved by the ego that the ego is willing to preserve it even at the cost of its own self. In the transferential aspects of melancholic identifications, Freud suggests, "is the expression of there being something in common which may signify love."[57]

This community of love—as W.R.D. Fairbairn, Jessica Benjamin, Christopher Bollas, and others have noted—is possible only through the aggressive and militant preservation of the loved and lost object.[58] Hence, the melancholic process is one way in which socially disparaged objects—racially and sexually deprivileged others—live on in the psychic realm. This behavior, Freud remarks, proceeds from an attitude of "revolt" on the part of the ego. It displays the ego's melancholic yet militant refusal to allow certain objects to disappear into oblivion. In this way, Freud tells us, "love escapes extinction."[59] This preservation of the threatened object might be seen, then, as a type of ethical hold on the part of the melancholic ego. The mourner, in contrast, has no such ethics. The mourner is perfectly content with killing off the lost object, declaring it to be dead yet again within the domain of the psyche.

While the ambivalence, anger, and rage that characterize this preservation of the lost object threaten the ego's stability, we do not imagine that this threat is the result of some ontological tendency on the part of the melancholic; it is a *social* threat. Ambivalence, rage, and anger are the internalized refractions of an ecology of whiteness bent on the obliteration of cherished minority subjectivities. If the loved object is not going to live out there, the melancholic emphatically avers, then it is going to live here inside me. Along with Freud, "we only wonder why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind."[60] It is the melancholic who helps us come face to face with this social truth. It is the melancholic who teaches us that "in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill."[61]

Both Judith Butler and Douglas Crimp isolate the call of melancholia in the age of AIDS as one in which the loss of a public language to mourn a seemingly endless series of young male deaths triggers the absolute need to think about melancholia and activism. Muñoz highlights the communal nature of this activist project—the community-oriented aspect of group rather than individual losses, of group rather than individual identifications, and of group rather than individual activism: "Communal mourning, by its very nature, is an immensely

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

complicated text to read, for we do not mourn just one lost object or other, but we also mourn as a 'whole'—or, put another way, as a contingent and temporary collection of fragments that is experiencing a loss of its parts."[62] A series of unresolved fragments, we come together as a contingent whole. We gain social recognition in the face of this communal loss.

There is a militant refusal on the part of the ego—better yet, a series of egos—to let go, and this militant refusal is at the heart of melancholia's productive political potentials. Paradoxically, in this instance, the ego's death drive may be the very precondition for survival, the beginning of a strategy for living and for living on. Butler asks of melancholia: "Is the psychic violence of conscience not a refracted indictment of the social forms that have made certain kinds of losses ungrievable?"[63] And Crimp ends his essay "Mourning and Militancy" with this simple and moving call: "Militancy, of course, then, but mourning too: mourning *and* militancy."[64] We pause here to insert yet another permutation of this political project in relation to the Asian American immigration, assimilation, and racialization processes we have been discussing throughout this essay: "mourning *and* melancholia."

Epilogue: Living Melancholia

This essay is an engagement with psychoanalysis and racial difference that belongs neither in the speculative nor in the clinical arena proper. Rather, this essay, like our theory of racial melancholia, exists in a gap between two spheres and seeks to establish a productive relationship between them. We wrote this essay with the hope of proffering a number of new critical interventions significant to both realms and with the desire to understand better our students, our communities, ourselves.

It also occurs to us that our dialogue—crossing into the often disparate realms of the literary and the clinical—is an exercise in new models of communal interaction that we advocate in our various discussions on the everyday living out of racial melancholia by Asian Americans. Much of this essay reexamines the ways in which the genealogy of racial melancholia as individual pathology functions in terms of larger social group identities—as a type of "psychic citizenship." Indeed, it is our belief that the refusal to view identities under social erasure as individual pathology and permanent damage lies in the communal appropriation of melancholia, its refunctioning as a structure of everyday life that annuls the multitude of losses continually demanded by an unforgiving social world.

To that end, we conclude with a few words on one strategy of community-building within the space of the university. A recent, albeit contested, trend in the academy is the establishing of Asian American studies programs. In the face of this trend, the model minority stereotype is consistently marshaled by university administrations as proof that Asian Americans neither are in want of any special recognition nor have any particular needs as a distinct and socially marked group. The popular vision of Asian Americans as model minorities, as having the best of both worlds (two cultures, two languages), is a multicultural

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

fantasy in the age of diversity management. Our investigation here of immigration, assimilation, and racialization as conflicted and unresolved processes of mourning and melancholia reveals the link between East and West as less than fluid. For Asian Americans, the reparation of these unresolved processes requires a public language. It requires a public space where these conflicts can be acknowledged and negotiated.

In their ideal form, Asian American studies programs provide this publicity, a physical and psychic space to bring together various fragmented parts (intellectual, social, political, cultural) to compose, borrowing from Winnicott, a "holding environment," a "whole" environment.[65] This type of public space ultimately facilitates the creation of new representations of Asian Americans emerging from that gap of ambivalence between mourning and melancholia. These new representations not only contest conventional ways in which Asian Americans have been traditionally apprehended but also refunction the very meanings of "Asian American" within the public sphere.

In the final analysis, this essay has been an exercise for us to mourn the various passings of Asian American students who no longer felt tied to our present world, such as it is. However, this dialogue—this production of new ideas about the conditions and constraints of racial melancholia—should not be taken as a summary moment. Instead, it might be understood as only an initial engagement in the continued work of mourning and melancholia and the rebuilding of new communities.

NOTES

This essay was originally published in *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* 10, no. 4 (2000): 667–700. We would like to thank The Analytic Press, Inc., for allowing us to reproduce it here. The epigraph is from Danzy Senna, *Caucasia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 329.

1. "Jesse" presents herself as Jewish (and not black), significantly complicating the racial complexities of "whiteness" in Senna's novel. Although Jesse is marked differently from the WASPs populating her New Hampshire environment, her part-Jewish background is mobilized so that she can "pass." It is ostensibly used as an explanation for her darker skin tone and hair.
2. Senna, *Caucasia*, 329.
3. It is important to remember that melancholia and depression are not synonymous psychic conditions, although they often coexist and can trigger one another.
4. The relationship between melancholia and processes of immigration, assimilation, and racialization is underdeveloped in both Asian American studies and clinical practice. We suggest that those interested in this intersection read Asian American literature by authors such as Frank Chin (*The Chinaman Pacific and Frisco R.R. Co.*, 1988), Maxine Hong Kingston (*The Woman Warrior*, 1976), Wendy Law-Yone (*The Coffin Tree*, 1983), Chang-rae Lee (*Native Speaker*, 1995), Fae Myenne Ng (*Bone*, 1993), Hualing Nieh *(Mulberry and Peach*, 1981), and Chay Yew *(Porcelain*, 1997). For a discussion of Asian American immigration, see Sucheng Chan, ed., *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882–1943* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850–1990* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); and Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

For a discussion of Asian American immigration and mental health issues, see Salman Akhtar, "A Third Individuation: Immigration, Identity, and the Psychoanalytic Process," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 43, no. 4 (1995): 1051–84; and Yu-Wen Ying, "Psychotherapy for East Asian Americans with Major Depression," in *Working with Asian Americans: A Guide for Clinicians*, ed. Evelyn Lee (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 252–64.

5. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 243.
6. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 243.
7. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.
8. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 246.
9. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 245; emphasis in original.
10. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 252.
11. Here, Senna is reconfiguring a long history of "contamination" that racializes individuals with "one drop of black blood" as colored. There is also a long history that configures immigrants as diseased and contaminated, carriers of illness that infects the national body politic. Contamination is thus one theme for thinking about the intersections of African American and Asian American racialization processes.
12. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 18, 75.
13. For a history of these immigration exclusion acts see Chan, *Entry Denied;* Hing, *Making and Remaking Asian America;* and Lowe, *Immigrant Acts.*
14. See Anne Anlin Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race," *Kenyon Review* 19, no. 1 (1997): 51–52.
15. For a history of the model minority stereotype, see Bob H. Suzuki, "Education and the Socialization of Asian Americans: A Revisionist Analysis of the Model Minority Thesis," *Amerasia Journal* 4, no. 2 (1977): 23–51. For a critique of the model minority thesis in terms of Asian, white, and black relations, see Mari Matsuda, "We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?" in *Where Is Your Body? And Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 149–59.
16. For an elaboration of the concepts of "heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity," see Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, chapter 3, 60–83, from which this phrase is drawn.
17. Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* (New York: Vintage, 1989; originally published 1980), 151.
18. See Freud's essays "Fetishism," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 21, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), 152–57; and the "Splitting of the Ego in the Defensive Process," in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 23 (1938), 271–78. This argument on racial fetishization and the following discussion on the "Marginal Man" come from David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham,N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).
19. Stanley Sue and Derald W. Sue, "Chinese-American Personality and Mental Health," *Amerasia Journal* 1, no. 2 (July 1971): 42.
20. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage, 1989; originally published 1976).
21. Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28 (winter 1989): 11. The phrase was coined by Gilbert Ryle.
22. Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (spring 1984): 126, 130; emphasis in original.
23. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 251.
24. See Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination, and the Discourse of Colonialism," in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 66; reprinted from *Screen* 24, no. 6 (November–December 1983).
25. Tazuko Shibusawa points out that we must also consider how the model minority stereotype dovetails with a Confucian tradition within East Asian societies. This tradition mandates

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

a strict hierarchical relationship among members of individual family units and between individual family units and the political representatives of the state.

26. For an elaboration of this concept, see Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). In particular, see chapter 3, "Wounded Attachments," 52–76, in which Brown writes:

> But in its attempts to displace its suffering, identity structured by *ressentiment* at the same time becomes invested in its own subjection. This investment lies not only in its discovery of a site of blame for its hurt will, not only in its acquisition of recognition through its history of subjection (a recognition predicated on injury now righteously revalued), but also in the satisfactions of revenge, which ceaselessly reenact even as they redistribute the injuries of marginalization and subordination in a liberal discursive order that alternately denies the very possibility of these things and blames those who experience them for their own condition. Identity politics structured by *ressentiment* reverse without subverting this blaming structure; they do not subject to critique the sovereign subject of accountability that liberal individualism presupposes, nor the economy of inclusion and exclusion that liberal universalism establishes. (70)

27. Gish Jen, *Typical American* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991).
28. See, for example, Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).
29. The question of generational sacrifice is historically as well as ethnically specific. For example, during the exclusion era, many first-generation Asian immigrants barred from naturalization and citizenship exhibited a strong identification with their home country as "sojourners." Consequently, it was the second generation during this historical period (especially those born on U.S. soil) who exhibited the stronger characteristics of a lost generation—for instance, the Nisei interned during World War II. After the 1965 reformation of the Immigration and Nationality Act, Asian immigrants were legally guaranteed—and in much larger numbers—access to the space of the nation-state as citizens. The narrative of sacrifice thus attaches itself more strongly to these first-generation immigrants, whose hopes for assimilation and integration into the national fabric are more evident.
30. Rea Tajiri, dir., *History and Memory* (New York: Women Make Movies, 1991).
31. Freud, "Mourning and Melacholia," 245.
32. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 248.
33. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 182; emphasis in original.
34. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 63; emphasis in original.
35. See Freud's essay "Uncanny." For a discussion of the uncanny and nation-building, see Sauling Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature, from Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), chapter 2; and Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), chapter 1.
36. Monique Thuy-Dung Truong, "Kelly," *Amerasia Journal* 17, no. 2 (1991): 41–48.
37. Truong, "Kelly," 42.
38. See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–86.
39. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 55.
40. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*, 56.
41. Melanie Klein, "Mourning and Manic-Depressive States," in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, ed. Juliet Mitchell (New York: Free Press, 1987), 165–66; emphasis in original.
42. Melanie Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," in *The Selected Melanie Klein*, 119.
43. It might be useful here to consider Freud's notion of mourning and melancholia against Abraham and Torok's concept of "introjection" versus "incorporation." See Nicolas

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, vol. 1, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapter 5, "Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation," 125–38.

44. Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 121; emphasis in original.
45. Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 125; emphasis in original.
46. Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 123.
47. Klein, "The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 124.
48. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 177.
49. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 132.
50. Butler writes that in melancholia, the

> inability to declare such a loss signifies the "retraction" or "absorption" of the loss by the ego. Clearly, the ego does not literally take an object inside itself, as if the ego were a kind of shelter prior to its melancholy. The psychological discourses and its various "parts" miss the crucial point that melancholy is precisely what interiorizes the psyche, that is, makes it possible to refer to the psyche through such topographical tropes. The turn from object to ego is the movement that makes the distinction between them possible, that marks the division, the separation or loss, that forms the ego to begin with. In this sense, the turn from the object to the ego fails successfully to substitute the latter for the former, but does succeed in marking and perpetuating the partition between the two. The turn thus produces the divide between ego and object, the internal and external worlds that it appears to presume. (*The Psychic Life of Power*, 170)

51. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 139–40.
52. Adam Phillips, "Keep It Moving: Commentary on Judith Butler's 'Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification,'" in Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 155.
53. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 74.
54. Klein, 'The Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States," 163–64.
55. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 249.
56. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, book 2: *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).
57. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 250.
58. See W.R.D. Fairbairn, *An Object-Relations Theory of the Personality* (New York: Basic Books, 1954); Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); and Jessica Benjamin, *The Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
59. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 248, 257.
60. Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 246.
61. Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *The Standard Edition*, vol. 14, 85.
62. Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 73.
63. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 185.
64. Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October* 51 (1989): 18; emphasis in original.
65. See D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:01.

Home Is Where the *Han* Is

A Korean American Perspective on the Los Angeles Upheavals

Elaine H. Kim

About half of the estimated $850 million in material losses incurred during the Los Angeles upheavals was sustained by a community no one seems to want to talk much about. Korean Americans in Los Angeles, suddenly at the front lines when violence came to the buffer zone they had been so precariously occupying, suffered profound damage to their means of livelihood.[1] But my concern here is the psychic damage which, unlike material damage, is impossible to quantify.

I want to explore the questions of whether or not recovery is possible for Korean Americans, and what will become of our attempts to "become American" without dying of *han*. *Han* is a Korean word that means, loosely translated, the sorrow and anger that grow from the accumulated experiences of oppression. Although the word is frequently and commonly used by Koreans, the condition it describes is taken quite seriously. When people die of *han*, it is called dying of *hwabyong*, a disease of frustration and rage following misfortune.

Situated as we are on the border between those who have and those who have not, between predominantly Anglo and mostly African American and Latino communities, from our current interstitial position in the American discourse of race, many Korean Americans have trouble calling what happened in Los Angeles an "uprising." At the same time, we cannot quite say it was a "riot." So some of us have taken to calling it *sa-i-ku*, April 29, after the manner of naming other events in Korean history—3.1 (*sam-il*) for March 1, 1919, when massive protests against Japanese colonial rule began in Korea; 6.25 (*yook-i-o*) for June 25, 1950, when the Korean War began; and 4.19 (*sa-il-ku*) for April 19, 1960, when

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

Back to top.

the first student movement in the world to overthrow a government began in South Korea. The ironic similarity between 4.19 and 4.29 does not escape most Korean Americans.

Los Angeles Koreatown has been important to me, even though I visit only a dozen times a year. Before Koreatown sprang up during the last decade and a half,[2] I used to hang around the fringes of Chinatown, although I knew that this habit was pure pretense.[3] For me, knowing that Los Angeles Koreatown existed made a difference; one of my closest friends worked with the Black–Korean Alliance there,[4] and I liked to think of it as a kind of "home"—however idealized and hypostatized—for the soul, an anchor, a potential refuge, a place in America where I could belong without ever being asked, "Who are you and what are you doing here? Where did you come from and when are you going back?"

Many of us watched in horror the destruction of Koreatown and the systematic targeting of Korean shops in South Central Los Angeles after the Rodney King verdict. Seeing those buildings in flames and those anguished Korean faces, I had the terrible thought that there would be no belonging and that we were, just as I had always suspected, a people destined to carry our *han* around with us wherever we went in the world. The destiny (*p'aljja*) that had spelled centuries of extreme suffering from invasion, colonization, war, and national division had smuggled itself into the United States with our baggage.

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND KOREAN AMERICAN CONFLICT

As someone whose social consciousness was shaped by the African American–led civil rights movement of the 1960s, I felt that I was watching our collective dreams for a just society disintegrating, cast aside as naive and irrelevant in the bitter and embattled 1990s. It was the courageous African American women and men of the 1960s who had redefined the meaning of "American," who had first suggested that a person like me could reject the false choice between being treated as a perpetual foreigner in my own birthplace, on the one hand, and relinquishing my identity for someone else's ill-fitting and impossible Anglo-American one on the other. Thanks to them, I began to discern how institutional racism works and why Korea was never mentioned in my world history textbooks. I was able to see how others besides Koreans had been swept aside by the dominant culture. My American education offered nothing about Chicanos or Latinos, and most of what I was taught about African and Native Americans was distorted to justify their oppression and vindicate their oppressors.

I could hardly believe my ears when, during the weeks immediately following *sa-i-ku*, I heard African American community leaders suggesting that Korean American merchants were foreign intruders deliberately trying to stifle African American economic development, when I knew that they had bought those liquor stores at five times gross receipts from African American owners, who had previously bought them at two times gross receipts from Jewish owners after Watts.[5] I saw anti-Korean flyers that were being circulated by African American political candidates and read about South Central residents petitioning against

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

the reestablishment of swap meets, groups of typically Korean immigrant-operated market stalls. I was disheartened with Latinos who related the pleasure they felt while looting Korean stores they believed "had it coming," and who claimed that it was because of racism that more Latinos were arrested during *sa-i-ku* than Asian Americans.[6] And I was filled with despair when I read about Chinese Americans wanting to dissociate themselves from us. According to one Chinese American reporter assigned to cover Asian American issues for a San Francisco daily, Chinese and Japanese American shopkeepers, unlike Koreans, always got along fine with African Americans in the past.[7] "Suddenly," admitted another Chinese American, "I am scared to be Asian. More specifically, I am afraid to be mistaken for Korean."[8] I was enraged when I overheard European Americans discussing the conflicts as if they were watching a dogfight or a boxing match. The situation reminded me of the Chinese film "Raise the Red Lantern," in which we never see the husband's face. We only hear his mellifluous voice as he benignly admonishes his four wives not to fight among themselves. He can afford to be kind and pleasant because the structure that pits his wives against each other is so firmly in place that he need never sully his hands or even raise his voice.

BATTLEGROUND LEGACY

Korean Americans are squeezed between black and white and also between U.S. and South Korean political agendas. Opportunistic American and South Korean presidential candidates toured the burnt ruins, posing for the television cameras but delivering nothing of substance to the victims. Like their U.S. counterparts, South Korean news media seized upon *sa-i-ku*, featuring sensational stories that depicted the problem as that of savage African Americans attacking innocent Koreans for no reason.[9] To give the appearance of authenticity, Seoul newspapers even published articles using the names of Korean Americans who did not in fact write them.[10]

Those of us who chafe at being asked whether we are Chinese or Japanese as if there were no other possibilities or who were angered when the news media sought Chinese and Japanese but not Korean American views during *sa-i-ku* are sensitive to an invisibility that seems particular to us. To many Americans, Korea is but the gateway to or the bridge between China and Japan, or a crossroads of major Asian conflicts.[11]

Although little known or cared about in the Western world, Korea has been a perennial battleground. Besides the Mongols and the Manchus, there were the *Yŏjin* (Jurched), the *Koran* (Khitan), and the *Waegu* (Wäkö) invaders. In relatively recent years, there was the war between China and Japan that ended in 1895 and the war between Japan and Russia in 1905, both of which were fought on Korean soil and resulted in extreme suffering for the Korean people. Japan's thirty-six years of brutal colonial rule ended with the United States and what was then the Soviet Union dividing the country in half at the 38th parallel. Thus, Korea was turned into a cold war territory that ultimately became a battleground for world superpowers during the conflict of 1950–53.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

BECOMING AMERICAN

One of the consequences of war, colonization, national division, and superpower economic and cultural domination has been the migration of Koreans to places like Los Angeles, where they believed their human rights would be protected by law. After all, they had received U.S.-influenced political educations. They started learning English in the seventh grade. They all knew the story of the poor boy from Illinois who became president. They all learned that the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights protected the common people from violence and injustice. But they who grew up in Korea watching "Gunsmoke," "Knight Rider," and "McGyver" dubbed in Korean were not prepared for the black, brown, red, and yellow America they encountered when they disembarked at the Los Angeles International Airport.[12] They hadn't heard that there is no equal justice in the United States. They had to learn about American racial hierarchies. They did not realize that, as immigrants of color, they would never attain political voice or visibility but would instead be used to uphold the inequality and the racial hierarchy they had no part in creating.

Most of the newcomers had underestimated the communication barriers they would face. Like the Turkish workers in Germany described in John Berger and Jean Mohr's *A Seventh Man*,[13] their toil amounted to only a pile of gestures and the English they tried to speak changed and turned against them as they spoke it. Working fourteen hours a day, six or seven days a week, they rarely came into sustained contact with English-speaking Americans and almost never had time to study English. Not feeling at ease with English, they did not engage in informal conversations easily with non-Koreans and were hated for being curt and rude. They did not attend churches or do business in banks or other enterprises where English was required. Typically, the immigrant, small-business owners utilized unpaid family labor instead of hiring people from local communities. Thanks to Eurocentric American cultural practices, they knew little or nothing good about African Americans or Latinos, who in turn and for similar reasons knew little or nothing good about them. At the same time, Korean shop owners in South Central and Koreatown were affluent compared with the impoverished residents, whom they often exploited as laborers or looked down upon as fools with an aversion to hard work.[14] Most Korean immigrants did not even know that they were among the many direct beneficiaries of the African American–led civil rights movement, which helped pave the way for the 1965 reforms that made their immigration possible.

Korean immigrant views, shaped as they were by U.S. cultural influences and official, anticommunist, South Korean education,[15] differed radically from those of many poor people in the communities Korean immigrants served: unaware of the shameful history of oppression of nonwhite immigrants and other people of color in the United States, they regarded themselves as having arrived in a meritocratic "land of opportunity" where a person's chances for success are limited only by individual lack of ability or diligence. Having left a homeland where they foresaw their talents and hard work going unrecognized and unrewarded, they were desperate to believe that the "American dream" of social and economic mobility through hard work was within their reach.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

SA-I-KU

What they experienced on April 29 and 30 was a baptism into what it really means for a Korean to "become American" in the 1990s.[16] In South Korea, there is no 911, and no one really expects a fire engine or police car if there is trouble. Instead, people make arrangements with friends and family for emergencies. At the same time, guns are not part of Korean daily life. No civilian in South Korea can own a gun. Guns are the exclusive accoutrement of the military and police, who enforce order for those who rule the society. When the Korean Americans in South Central and Koreatown dialed 911, nothing happened. When their stores and homes were being looted and burned to the ground, they were left completely alone for three horrifying days. How betrayed they must have felt by what they had believed was a democratic system that protects its people from violence. Those who trusted the government to protect them lost everything; those who took up arms after waiting for help for two days were able to defend themselves. It was as simple as that. What they had to learn was that, as in South Korea, protection in the United States is by and large for the rich and powerful. If there were a choice between Westwood and Koreatown, it is clear that Koreatown would have to be sacrificed. The familiar concept of privilege for the rich and powerful would have been easy for the Korean immigrant to grasp if only those exhortations about democracy and equality had not obfuscated the picture. Perhaps they should have relied even more on whatever they brought with them from Korea instead of fretting over trying to understand what was going on around them here. That Koreatown became a battleground does seem like the further playing out of a tragic legacy that has followed them across oceans and continents. The difference is that this was a battle between the poor and disenfranchised and the invisible rich, who were being protected by a layer of clearly visible Korean American human shields in a battle on the buffer zone.

This difference is crucial. Perhaps the legacy is not one carried across oceans and continents but one assumed immediately upon arrival, not the curse of being Korean but the initiation into becoming American, which requires that Korean Americans take on this country's legacy of five centuries of racial violence and inequality, of divide and rule, of privilege for the rich and oppression of the poor. Within this legacy, they have been assigned a place on the front lines. Silenced by those who possess the power to characterize and represent, they are permitted to speak only to reiterate their acceptance of this role.

SILENCING THE KOREAN AMERICAN VOICE

Twelve years ago, in Kwangju, South Korea, hundreds of civilians demonstrating for constitutional reform and free elections were murdered by U.S.-supported and -equipped South Korean elite paratroopers. Because I recorded it and played it over and over again, searching for a sign or a clue, I remember clearly how what were to me heartrendingly tragic events were represented in the U.S. news media. For a few fleeting moments, images of unruly crowds of alien-looking Asians shouting unintelligible words and phrases and wearing white headbands inscribed with unintelligible characters flickered across the screen. The Koreans were made to

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

seem like insane people from another planet. The voice in the background stated simply that there were massive demonstrations but did not explain what the protests were about. Nor was a single Korean ever given an opportunity to speak to the camera.

The next news story was about demonstrations for democracy in Poland. The camera settled on individuals' faces, which one by one filled the screen as each man or woman was asked to explain how he or she felt. Each Polish person's words were translated in a voiceover or subtitle. Solidarity leader Lech Walesa, who was allowed to speak often, was characterized as a heroic human being with whom all Americans could surely identify personally. Polish Americans from New York and Chicago to San Francisco, asked in man-on-the-street interviews about their reactions, described the canned hams and blankets they were sending to Warsaw.

This was for me a lesson in media representation, race, and power politics. It is a given that Americans are encouraged by our ideological apparatuses to side with our allies (here, the Polish resisters and the anticommunist South Korean government) against our enemies (here, the communist Soviet Union and protesters against the South Korean government). But visual-media racism helps craft and reinforce our identification with Europeans and whites while distancing us from fearsome and alien Asiatic hordes.

In March 1992, when two delegates from North Korea visited the Bay Area to participate in community-sponsored talks on Korean reunification, about 800 people from the Korean American community attended. The meeting was consummately newsworthy, since it was the first time in history that anyone from North Korea had ever been in California for more than twenty-four hours just passing through. The event was discussed for months in the Korean-language media—television, radio, and newspapers. Almost every Korean-speaking person in California knew about it. Although we sent press releases to all the commercial and public radio and television stations and to all the Bay Area newspapers, not a single mainstream media outfit covered the event. However, whenever there was an African American boycott of a Korean store or whenever conflict surfaced between Korean and African Americans, community leaders found a dozen microphones from all the main news media shoved into their faces, as if they were the president's press secretary making an official public pronouncement. Fascination with interethnic conflicts is rooted in the desire to excuse or minimize white racism by buttressing the mistaken notion that all human beings are "naturally" racist, and when Korean and African Americans allow themselves to be distracted by these interests, their attention is deflected from the social hierarchies that give racism its destructive power.

Without a doubt, the U.S. news media played a major role in exacerbating the damage and ill will toward Korean Americans, first by spotlighting tensions between African Americans and Koreans above all efforts to work together and as opposed to many other newsworthy events in these two communities, and second by exploiting racist stereotypes of Koreans as unfathomable aliens, this time wielding guns on rooftops and allegedly firing wildly into crowds.[17] In news programs and on talk shows, African and Korean American tensions were discussed

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

by blacks and whites, who pointed to these tensions as the main cause of the uprising. I heard some European Americans railing against rude and exploitative Korean merchants for ruining peaceful race relations for everyone else. Thus, Korean Americans were used to deflect attention from the racism they inherited and the economic injustice and poverty that had been already well woven into the fabric of American life, as evidenced by a judicial system that could allow not only the Korean store owner who killed Latasha Harlins but also the white men who killed Vincent Chin and the white police who beat Rodney King to go free, while Leonard Peltier still languishes in prison.

As far as I know, neither the commercial nor the public news media has mentioned the many Korean and African American attempts to improve relations, such as joint church services, joint musical performances and poetry readings, Korean merchant donations to African American community and youth programs, African American volunteer teachers in classes for Korean immigrants studying for citizenship examinations, or Korean translations of African American history materials.

While Korean immigrants were preoccupied with the mantra of day-to-day survival, Korean Americans had no voice, no political presence whatsoever in American life. When they became the targets of violence in Los Angeles, their opinions and views were hardly solicited except as they could be used in the already constructed mainstream discourse on race relations, which is a sorry combination of blaming the African American and Latino victims for their poverty and scapegoating the Korean Americans as robotic aliens who have no "real" right to be here in the first place and therefore deserve whatever happens to them.

THE *NEWSWEEK* EXPERIENCE

In this situation, I felt compelled to respond when an editor from the "My Turn" section of *Newsweek* magazine asked for a 1,000-word personal essay.[18] Hesitant because I was given only a day and a half to write the piece, not enough time in light of the vastness of American ignorance about Koreans and Korean Americans, I decided to do it because I thought I could not be made into a sound bite or a quote contextualized for someone else's agenda.

I wrote an essay accusing the news media of using Korean Americans and tensions between African and Korean Americans to divert attention from the roots of racial violence in the United States. I asserted that these lie not in the Korean-immigrant–owned corner store situated in a community ravaged by poverty and police violence, but reach far back into the corridors of corporate and government offices in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C. I suggested that Koreans and African Americans were kept ignorant about each other by educational and media institutions that erase or distort their experiences and perspectives. I tried to explain how racism had kept my parents from ever really becoming Americans, but that having been born here, I considered myself American and wanted to believe in the possibility of an American dream.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

The editor of "My Turn" did everything he could to frame my words with his own viewpoint. He faxed his own introductory and concluding paragraphs that equated Korean merchants with cowboys in the Wild West and alluded to Korean/African American hatred. When I objected, he told me that my writing style was not crisp enough and that as an experienced journalist, he could help me out. My confidence wavered, but ultimately I rejected his editing. Then he accused me of being overly sensitive, confiding that I had no need to be defensive—because his wife was a Chinese American. Only after I had decided to withdraw the piece did he agree to accept it as I had written it.

Before I could finish congratulating myself on being able to resist silencing and the kind of decontextualization I was trying to describe in the piece, I started receiving hate mail. Some of it was addressed directly to me, since I had been identified as a University of California faculty member, but most of it arrived in bundles, forwarded by *Newsweek*. Hundreds of letters came from all over the country, from Florida to Washington state and from Massachusetts to Arizona. I was unprepared for the hostility expressed in most of the letters. Some people sent the article, torn from the magazine and covered with angry, red-inked obscenities scratched across my picture. "You should see a good doctor," wrote someone from Southern California, "you have severe problems in thinking, reasoning, and adjusting to your environment."

A significant proportion of the writers, especially those who identified themselves as descendants of immigrants from Eastern Europe, wrote *Newsweek* that they were outraged, sickened, disgusted, appalled, annoyed, and angry at the magazine for providing an arena for the paranoid, absurd, hypocritical, racist, and childish views of a spoiled, ungrateful, whining, bitching, un-American bogus faculty member who should be fired or die when the next California earthquake dumps all of the "so-called people of color" into the Pacific Ocean.

I was shocked by the profound ignorance of many writers' assumptions about the experiences and perspectives of American people of color in general and Korean and other Asian Americans in particular. Even though my essay revealed that I was born in the United States and that my parents had lived in the United States for more than six decades, I was viewed as a foreigner without the right to say anything except words of gratitude and praise about America. The letters also provided some evidence of the dilemma Korean Americans are placed in by those who assume that we are aliens who should "go back" and at the same time berate us for not rejecting "Korean-American identity" for "American identity."

> How many Americans migrate to Korea? If you are so disenchanted, Korea is still there. Why did you ever leave it? Sayonara.

> Ms. Kim appears to have a personal axe to grind with this country that has given her so much freedom and opportunity. . . . I should suggest that she move to Korea, where her children will learn all they ever wanted about that country's history.

> [Her] whining about the supposedly racist U.S. society is just a mask for her own acute inferiority complex. If she is so dissatisfied with the United States why doesn't she vote

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

> with her feet and leave? She can get the hell out and return to her beloved Korea—her tribal afinity [*sic*] where her true loyalty and consciousness lies [*sic*].

> You refer to yourself as a Korean American and yet you have lived all your life in the United States . . . you write about racism in this country and yet you are the biggest racist by your own written words. If you cannot accept the fact that you are an American, maybe you should be living your life in Korea.

> My stepfather and cousin risked their lives in the country where your father is buried to ensure the ideals of our country would remain. So don't expect to find a sympathetic ear for your pathetic whining.

Many of the letter writers assumed that my family had been the "scum" of Asia and that I was a college teacher only because of American justice and largesse. They were furious that I did not express gratitude for being saved from starvation in Asia and given the opportunity to flourish, no doubt beyond my wildest dreams, in America.

> Where would she be if her parents had not migrated to the United States? For a professor at Berkeley University [*sic*] to say the American dream is only an empty promise is ludicrous. Shame, shame, shame on Elaine!

> [Her father and his family] made enough money in the USA to ship his corpse home to Korea for burial. Ms. Kim herself no doubt has a guaranteed life income as a professor paid by California taxpayers. Wouldn't you think that she might say kind things about the USA instead of whining about racism?

At the same time some letters blamed me for expecting freedom and opportunity: "It is wondrous that folks such as you find truth in your paranoia. No one ever promised anything to you or your parents."

Besides providing indications of how Korean Americans are regarded, the letters revealed a great deal about how American identity is thought of. One California woman explained that although her grandparents were Irish immigrants, she was not an Irish American, because "if you are not with us, you are against us." A Missouri woman did not seem to realize that she was conflating race and nationality and confusing "nonethnic" and "nonracial," by which she seems to have meant "white," with "American." And, although she insists that it is impossible to be both "black" and "American," she identifies herself at the outset as a "white American."

> I am a white American. I am proud to be an American. You cannot be black, white, Korean, Chinese, Mexican, German, French, or English or any other and still be an American. Of course the culture taught in schools is strictly American. That's where we are and if you choose to learn another [culture] you have the freedom to settle there. You cannot be a Korean American which assumes you are not ready to be an AMERICAN. Do you get my gist?

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

The suggestion that more should be taught in U.S. schools about America's many immigrant groups and people of color prompted many letters in defense of Western civilization against non-Western barbarism:

> You are dissatisfied with current school curricula that exclude Korea. Could it possibly be because Korea and Asia for that matter has [*sic*] not had . . . a noticeable impact on the shaping of Western culture, and Korea has had unfortunately little culture of its own?

> Who cares about Korea, Ms. Kim? . . . And what enduring contributions has the Black culture, both here in the US and on the continent contributed to the world, and mankind? I'm from a culture, Ms. Kim, who put a man on the moon 23 years ago, who established medical schools to train doctors to perform open heart surgery, and . . . who created a language of music so that musicians, from Beethoven to the Beatles, could easily touch the world with their brilliance forever and ever and ever. Perhaps the dominant culture, whites obviously, "swept aside Chicanos . . . Latinos . . . African-Americans . . . Koreans," because they haven't contributed anything that made—be mindful of the cliche—a world of difference?

> Koreans' favorite means of execution is decapitation. . . . Ms. Kim, and others like her, came here to escape such injustice. Then they whine at riots to which they have contributed by their own fanning of flames of discontent. . . . Yes! Let us all study more about Oriental culture! Let us put matters into proper perspective.

> Fanatical multiculturalists like you expect a country whose dominant culture has been formed and influenced by Europe . . . nearly 80% of her population consisting of persons whose ancestry is European, to include the history of every ethnic group who has ever lived here. I truly feel sorry for you. You and your bunch need to realize that white Americans are not racists. . . . We would love to get along, but not at the expense of our own culture and heritage.

> Kim's axe-to-grind confirms the utter futility of race-relations—the races were never meant to live together. We don't get along and never will. . . . Whats [*sic*] needed is to divide the United States up along racial lines so that life here can finally become livable.

What seemed to anger some people the most was their idea that, although they worked hard, people of color were seeking handouts and privileges because of their race, and the thought of an ungrateful Asian American siding with African Americans, presumably against whites, was infuriating. How dare I "bite the hand that feeds" me by siding with the champion "whiners who cry 'racism'" because to do so is the last refuge of the "terminally incompetent"?

> The racial health in this country won't improve until minorities stop erecting "me first" barriers and strive to be Americans, not African-Americans or Asian-Americans expecting privileges.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

> Ms. Kim wants preferential treatment that immigrants from Greece-to-Sweden have not enjoyed. . . . Even the Chinese . . . have not created any special problems for themselves or other Americans. Soon those folk are going to express their own resentments to the insatiable demands of the Blacks and other colored peoples, including the wetbacks from Mexico who sneak into this country then pilfer it for all they can.
>
> The Afroderived citizens of Los Angeles and the Asiatic derivatives were not suffering a common imposition. . . . The Asiatics are trying to build their success. The Africans are sucking at the teats of entitlement.

As is usual with racists, most of the writers of these hate letters saw only themselves in their notions about Korea, America, Korean Americans, African Americans. They felt that their own sense of American identity was being threatened and that they were being blamed as individuals for U.S. racism. One man, adept at manipulating various fonts on his word processor, imposed his preconceptions on my words:

> Let me read between the lines of your little hate message:
>
> . . . "The roots . . . stretch far back into the corridors of corporate and government offices in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Washington, D.C."
>
> **All white America and all American institutions are to blame for racism.**
>
> . . . "I still want to believe the promise is real."
>
> **I have the savvy to know that the American ideals of freedom and justice are a joke but if you want to give me what I want I'm willing to make concessions.**
>
> Ms. Kim . . . if you want to embody the ignorant, the insecure, and the emotionally immature, that's your right! just stop preaching hate and please, please, quit whining.
>
> Sincerely, A proud White-American
> teaching my children not to be prejudicial

Especially since my essay had been subdued and intensely personal, I had not anticipated the fury it would provoke. I never thought that readers would write over my words with their own. The very fact that I used words, and English words at that, particularly incensed some: one letter writer complained about my use of words and phrases like "manifestation" and "zero-sum game," and "suzerain relationship," which is the only way to describe Korea's relationship with China during the T'ang Dynasty. "Not more than ten people in the USA know what [these words] mean," he wrote. "You are on an ego trip." I wondered if it made him particularly angry that an Asian American had used those English words, or if he would make such a comment to George Will or Jane Bryant Quinn.

Clearly I had encountered part of America's legacy, the legacy that insists on silencing certain voices and erasing certain presences, even if it means deportation, internment, and outright murder. I should not have been surprised by what happened in Koreatown or by the ignorance and hatred expressed in the letters to *Newsweek*, any more than African Americans should have been surprised by the Rodney King verdict. Perhaps the news media, which constituted *sa-i-ku* as news, as an extraordinary event in no way continuous with our everyday lives, made us

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

forget for a moment that as people of color many of us simultaneously inhabit two Americas: the America of our dreams and the America of our experience.

Who among us does not cling stubbornly to the America of our dreams, the promise of a multicultural democracy where our cultures and our differences might be affirmed instead of distorted in an effort to destroy us?

After *sa-i-ku*, I was able to catch glimpses of this America of my dreams because I received other letters that expressed another American legacy. Some people identified themselves as Norwegian or Irish Americans interested in combating racism. Significantly, while most of the angry mail had been sent not to me but to *Newsweek*, almost all of the sympathetic mail, particularly the letters from African Americans, came directly to me. Many came from Korean Americans who were glad that one of their number had found a vehicle for self-expression. Others were from Chinese and Japanese Americans who wrote that they had had similar experiences and feelings. Several were written in shaky longhand by women fervently wishing for peace and understanding among people of all races. A Native American from Nashville wrote a long description of cases of racism against African, Asian, and Native Americans in the U.S. criminal justice system. A large number of letters came from African Americans, all of them supportive and sympathetic—from judges and professors who wanted better understanding between Africans and Koreans to poets and laborers who scribbled their notes in pencil while on breaks at work. One man identified himself as a Los Angeles African American whose uncle had married a Korean woman. He stated that as a black man in America, he knew what other people feel when they face injustice. He ended his letter apologizing for his spelling and grammar mistakes and asking for materials to read on Asian Americans. The most touching letter I received was written by a prison inmate who had served twelve years of a thirty-five-to-seventy-year sentence for armed robbery during which no physical injuries occurred. He wrote:

> I've been locked in these prisons going on 12 years now . . . and since being here I have studied fully the struggles of not just blacks, but all people of color. I am a true believer of helping "your" people "first," but also the helping of all people no matter where there at or the color of there skin. But I must be truthful, my struggle and assistance is truly on the side of people of color like ourselves. But just a few years ago I didn't think like this.
>
> I thought that if you wasn't black, then you was the enemy, but . . . many years of this prison madness and much study and research changed all of this. . . . [I]t's not with each other, blacks against Koreans or Koreans against blacks. No, this is not what it's about. Our struggle(s) are truly one in the same. What happened in L.A. during the riot really hurt me, because it was no way that blacks was suppose to do the things to your people, my people (Koreans) that they did. You're my sister, our people are my people. Even though our culture may be somewhat different, and even though we may worship our God(s) different . . . white-Amerikkka [doesn't] separate us. They look at us all the same. Either you're white, or you're wrong. . . . I'm just writing you to let you know that, you're my sister, your people's struggle are my people's struggle.

This is the ground I need to claim now for Korean American resistance and recovery, so that we can become American without dying of *han*.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

Although the sentiments expressed in these letters seemed to break down roughly along racial lines—that is, all writers who were identifiably people of color wrote in support—and one might become alarmed at the depth of the divisions they imply, I like to think that I have experienced the desire of many Americans, especially Americans of color, to do as Rodney King pleaded on the second day of *sa-i-ku*: "We're all stuck here for awhile. . . . Let's try to work it out."

In my view, it's important for us to think about *all* of what Rodney King said and not just the words "we all can get along," which have been depoliticized and transformed into a Disneyesque catchphrase for Pat Boone songs and roadside billboards in Los Angeles. It seems to me the emphasis is on the being "stuck here for awhile" together as we await "our day in court."[19]

Like the African American man who wrote from prison, the African American man who had been brutally beaten by white police might have felt the desire to "love everybody," but he had to amend—or rectify—that wish. He had to speak last about loving "people of color." The impulse to "love everybody" was there, but the conditions were not right. For now, the most practical and progressive agenda may be people of color trying to "work it out."

FINDING COMMUNITY THROUGH NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The place where Korean and American legacies converge for Korean Americans is the exhortation to "go home to where you belong."

One of the letters I received was from a Korean American living in Chicago. He had read a translation of my essay in a Korean-language newspaper. "Although you were born in the U.S.A.," he wrote, noticing what none of the white men who ordered me to go back to "my" country had, "your ethnical background and your complexion belong to Korea. It is time to give up your U.S. citizenship and go to Korea."

Some ruined merchants are claiming that they will pull up stakes and return to Korea, but I know that this is not possible for most of them. Even if their stores had not been destroyed, even if they were able to sell their businesses and take the proceeds to Korea, most of them would not have enough to buy a home or business there, since both require total cash up front. Neither would they be able to find work in the society they left behind because it is plagued by recession, repression, and fierce economic competition.

Going back to Korea. The dream of going back to Korea fed the spirit of my father, who came to Chicago in 1926 and lived in the United States for sixty-three years, during which time he never became a U.S. citizen, at first because the law did not allow it and later because he did not want to. He kept himself going by believing that he would return to Korea in triumph one day. Instead, he died in Oakland at eighty-eight. Only his remains returned to Korea, where we buried him in accordance with his wishes.

Hasn't the dream of going back home to where you belong sustained most of America's unwanted at one time or another, giving meaning to lives of toil and making it possible to endure other people's hatred and rejection? Isn't

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

the attempt to find community through national consciousness natural for people refused an American identity because racism does not give them that choice?

Korean national consciousness, the resolve to resist and fight back when threatened with extermination, was all that could be called upon when the Korean Americans in Los Angeles found themselves abandoned. They joined together to guard each other's means of livelihood with guns, relying on Korean-language radio and newspapers to communicate with and help each other. On the third day after the outbreak of violence, more than 30,000 Korean Americans gathered for a peace march in downtown L.A. in what was perhaps the largest and most quickly organized mass mobilization in Asian American history. Musicians in white, the color of mourning, beat traditional Korean drums in sorrow, anger, and celebration of community, a call to arms like a collective heartbeat.[20] I believe that the mother of Edward Song Lee, the Los Angeles–born college student mistaken for a looter and shot to death in the streets, has been able to persevere in great part because of the massive outpouring of sympathy expressed by the Korean American community that shared and understood her *han*.

I have been critical lately of cultural nationalism as detrimental to Korean Americans, especially Korean American women, because it operates on exclusions and fosters intolerance and uniformity of thought while stifling self-criticism and encouraging sacrifice, even to the point of suicide. But *sa-i-ku* makes me think again: what remains for those who are left to stand alone? If Korean Americans refuse to be victims or political pawns in the United States while rejecting the exhortation that we go back to Korea where we belong, what will be our weapons of choice?

In the darkest days of Japanese colonial rule, even after being stripped of land and of all economic means of survival, Koreans were threatened with total erasure when the colonizers rewrote Korean history, outlawed the Korean language, forced the subjugated people to worship the Japanese emperor, and demanded that they adopt Japanese names. One of the results of these cultural-annihilation policies was the fierce insistence on the sanctity of Korean national identity that persists among Koreans to this day. In this context, it is not difficult to understand why nationalism has been the main refuge of Koreans and Korean Americans.

While recognizing the potential dangers of nationalism as a weapon, I for one am not ready to respond to the antiessentialists' call to relinquish my Korean American identity. It is easy enough for the French and Germans to call for a common European identity and an end to nationalisms, but what of the peoples suppressed and submerged while France and Germany exercised their national prerogatives? I am mindful of the argument that the resurgence of nationalism in Europe is rooted in historical and contemporary political and economic inequality among the nations of Europe. Likewise, I have noticed that many white Americans do not like to think of themselves as belonging to a race, even while thinking of people of color almost exclusively in terms of race. In the same way, many men think of themselves as "human beings" and of women as the ones having a gender. Thus crime, small businesses, and all Korean–African American interactions are seen and interpreted through the lens of race in the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

same dominant culture that angrily rejects the use of the racial lens for viewing yellow/white or black/white interactions and insists suddenly that we are all "American" whenever we attempt to assert our identity as people of color. It is far easier for Anglo-Americans to call for an end to cultural nationalisms than for Korean Americans to give up the national consciousness that makes it possible for us to survive the vicious racism that would deny our existence as either Korean Americans or Americans.

Is there anything of use to us in Korean nationalism? During one thousand years of Chinese suzerainty, the Korean ruling elite developed a philosophy called *sadaejui*, or reliance of the weak on the strong. In direct opposition to this way of thought is what is called *jaju* or *juche sasang*, or self-determination.[21] Both *sadaejui* and *juche sasang* are ways of dealing with unequal power relationships and resisting the transformation of one's homeland into a battlefield for others, but *sadaejui* has never worked any better for Koreans than it has for any minority group in America. *Juche sasang*, on the other hand, has the kind of oppositional potential needed in the struggle against silence and invisibility. From Korean national consciousness, we can recover this fierce refusal to accept subjugation, which is the first step in the effort to build community, so that we can work with others to challenge the forces that would have us annihilate each other instead of our mutual oppression.

What is clear is that we cannot "become American" without dying of *han* unless we think about community in new ways. Self-determination does not mean living alone. At least for now, that may mean mining the rich and haunted lode of Korean national consciousness while we struggle to understand how our fate is entwined with the fate of others lying prostrate before the triumphal procession of the winners of History.[22] During the past fifteen years or so, many young Korean nationalists have been studying the legacies of colonialism and imperialism that they share with peoples in many Asian, African, and Latin American nations. At the same time that we take note of this work, we can also try to understand how nationalism and feminism can be worked together to demystify the limitations and reductiveness of each as a weapon of empowerment. If Korean national consciousness is ever to be such a weapon for us, we must use it to create a new kind of nationalism-in-internationalism to help us call forth a culture of survival and recovery, so that our *han* might be released and we might be freed to dream fiercely of different possibilities.

NOTES

1. According to a September 1992 Dun and Bradstreet survey of 560 business owners in Koreatown in South Central Los Angeles, an estimated 40 percent of the businesses damaged during *sa-i-ku* have closed their doors permanently. Moreover, almost 40 percent had no insurance or were insured for 50 percent or less of their total losses ("L.A. Riot Took Heavy Toll on Businesses," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 September 1992).
2. Following quota changes in U.S. immigration laws in 1965, the Korean population in America increased more than eightfold to almost one million. Between 1970 and 1990, Los Angeles Koreatown grew from a few blocks of stores and businesses into a community base for all sorts of economic and cultural activities.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

3. Pretense, of course, because I was only passing for Chinese. The temporary comfort I experienced would come to an end whenever it was discovered that I could speak no Chinese and that I had no organic links to Chinese Americans, who frequently underscored both our commonalities and our differences by telling me that everything Korean—even *kimchi*, that quintessentially Korean vegetable eaten at every Korean meal—was originally Chinese.
4. The Black–Korean Alliance (BKA) was formed, with the assistance of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, to improve relations between the Korean and African American communities after four Korean merchants were killed in robberies during April 1986. The BKA sponsored activities and events, such as joint church services, education forums, joint cultural events, and seminars on crime prevention and community economic development. The BKA never received political or financial support from the public or private sectors. The organization had neither its own meeting place nor a telephone. Grassroots participation was not extensive, and despite the good intentions of the individuals involved, the BKA was unable to prevent the killing of a dozen more Korean merchants in southern California between 1990 and *sa-i-ku*, or to stop the escalation of tensions between the two communities after the shooting of fifteen-year-old Latasha Harlins by Korean merchant Soon Ja Du in March 1991. By June of that year, after police declared the killing of an African American man by a Korean liquor store owner "justifiable homicide," African American groups began boycotting the store, and the BKA failed to convince African American boycotters and Korean merchants to meet together to negotiate an end to the conflict. Nor were the members of the BKA successful in obtaining the help of members of the Los Angeles City Council or the California State Legislature, who might have been instrumental in preventing the destructive violence of *sa-i-ku* if they had had the integrity and farsightedness to address the intensifying hostilities before it was too late. After *sa-i-ku*, the BKA was in disarray, and as of this writing, its members are planning to dissolve the group.
5. According to John Murray, founder of the southern California chapter of Cal-Pac, the black beverage and grocers' association, African American liquor store owners "sold stores they had bought in the mid-1960s for two times monthly gross sales—roughly $80,000 at the time, depending on the store—for five times monthly gross, or about $300,000." After the Jews fled in the wake of the Watts riots, African Americans were enabled by civil rights legislative mandates to obtain for the first time credit from government-backed banks to start a number of small businesses. But operating liquor stores, although profitable, was grueling, dangerous, and not something fathers wanted their sons to do, according to interviews with African American owners and former owners of liquor stores in African American communities. Former liquor merchant Ed Piert exclaimed: "Seven days a week, 20 hours a day, no vacations, people stealing. That's slave labor. I wouldn't buy another liquor store." When liquor prices were deregulated in 1978 and profit margins shrank in the face of competition from volume buyers, many African American owners sold out to Korean immigrants carrying cash collected in rotating credit clubs called *kye* (Susan Moffat, "Shopkeepers Fight Back: Blacks join with Koreans in a Battle to Rebuild Their Liquor Stores," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May 1992).
6. In a newspaper interview, Alberto Machon, an eighteen-year-old junior at Washington Preparatory High School who had moved to South Central Los Angeles with his family from El Salvador ten years ago, said that he was laughing as he watched every Korean store looted or burned down because "I felt that they deserved it for the way they was treatin' people . . . the money that we are giving to the stores they're taking it to their community, Koreatown." Thirty-two-year-old Arnulfo Nunez Barrajas served four days in the Los Angeles County jail for curfew violation. He was arrested while going from Santa Ana to Los Angeles to see his aunt, whose son had been killed during the upheavals. According to Nunez, "[T]he ones they've caught are only from the black race and the Latin race. I haven't seen any Koreans or Chinese. Why not them? Or white? Why only the black race and the Latinos? Well, it's racism" (*Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 1992).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

7. L. A. Chung, "Tensions Divide Blacks, Asians," *San Francisco Chronicle,* 4 May 1992.
8. *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1992.
9. They were also given to gloating over the inability of American authorities to maintain social order as well as the South Korean government can. In an interview, a South Korean diplomat in Los Angeles remarked to me that he was astonished at how ill-prepared the Los Angeles police and the National Guard were for "mass disturbances." They did not react quickly enough, they were very inefficient, they had no emergency plan, and even their communications network broke down, he observed. He could not imagine "riots" getting out of control in South Korea, which was ruled by the military from 1961 to 1987; there, he commented, "the police are very effective. They work closely with the military."
10. For example, a story about the "black riots" in the 6 May 1992 *Central Daily News* in Seoul listed the writer as Korean-American sociologist Edward T'ae-han Chang, who was astonished when he saw it because he hadn't written it (personal communication).
11. In 1913, a group of Korean American laborers was run out of Hemet Valley, California by a mob of anti-Japanese whites. The Koreans responded by insisting that they were Korean, not Japanese. What might seem a ludicrous response to racist expulsion has to be viewed in light of the fact that the United States sanctioned Japan's 1909 annexation of Korea, closing all Korean delegations and placing Korean immigrants under the authority of Japanese consulates. Since they were classified as Japanese, Korean Americans were subject to the Alien Land Acts that, in California and nine other states, targeted Japanese by denying them the right afforded all others regardless of race, nativity, or citizenship: the right to own land. Also, foreign-born Koreans were able to become naturalized U.S. citizens only after the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 permitted naturalization of Japanese. I have heard some Asian Americans equate the Chinese and Japanese American use of signs and buttons reading "I Am Not Korean" during *sa-i-ku* with the Korean American (and, not coincidentally, Chinese American) practice of wearing buttons saying "I Am Not Japanese" during World War II. But, in light of the specificities of Korean and Korean American history, this cannot be a one-to-one comparison.
12. In a 23 July 1992 interview, a fifty-year-old Korean immigrant woman whose South Central Los Angeles corner grocery store had been completely destroyed during *sa-i-ku* told me, "The America I imagined [before I arrived here] was like what I saw in the movies—clean, wide streets, flowers everywhere. I imagined Americans would be all big, tall . . . with white faces and blond hair. . . . But the America here is not like that. When I got up to walk around the neighborhood the morning after we arrived in Los Angeles from Korea, it was as if we had come to Mexico."
13. John Berger and Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man: A Book of Images and Words about the Experiences of Migrant Workers in Europe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1975). I want to thank Barry Maxwell for bringing this work to my attention.
14. I am not grappling directly with social class issues here because, although I am cognizant of their crucial importance, I am simply not qualified to address them at the present time. The exploited "guest workers" in Europe described by Berger and Mohr, unlike the Korean immigrants to the United States, brought with them their laboring bodies but not capital to start small businesses. Because they are merchants, the class interests of Korean American shop owners in Los Angeles differ clearly from the interests of poor African American and Latino customers. But working with simple dyads is impossible, since Korean American shop owners are also of color and mostly immigrants from a country colonized by the United States. At the same time, it seems to me that class factors have been more important than race factors in shaping Korean American immigrants' attitudes toward African American and Latino populations. Perhaps because of the devastation caused by Japanese colonization and the Korean War, many Koreans exhibit intensely negative attitudes toward the poor and indeed desperately fear being associated with them. I have often marveled at the importance placed on conspicuous consumer items, especially clothing, in South Korean society, where a shabbily dressed person can expect only shabby treatment. In the 1960s, a middle-class American could make a social

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

statement against materialistic values by dressing in tattered clothing without being mistaken for a homeless person. Now that this is no longer true, it seems to me that middle-class Americans exhibit some of the fears and aversions I witnessed in South Korea. Ironically, in the society where blackness and brownness have historically been almost tantamount to a condemnation to poverty, prejudice against the poor brought from Korea is combined with homegrown U.S. racism, and the results have been explosive.

At the same time, I have also noticed among Korean merchants profound empathy with the poor, whose situation many older immigrants know from firsthand past experiences. I personally witnessed many encounters between Korean merchants who lost their stores and African American neighbors in South Central during July 1992, when I accompanied the merchants as they visited their burned-out sites. None of the encounters were hostile. On the contrary, most of the African American neighbors embraced the Korean shop owners and expressed concern for them, while the merchants in turn asked warmly after the welfare of their neighbors' children. Although Korean–African American interaction has been racialized in the dominant culture, the quality of these relationships, like the quality of all human relationships, proved far more individual than racial schematizing allows for.

15. Every South Korean middle school, high school, and college student is required to take a course in "National Ethics," formerly called "Anticommunism." This course, which loosely resembles a civics class on Western civilization, government, constitutionalism, and political ideology, emphasizes the superiority of capitalism over communism and the importance of the national identity and the modern capitalist state. From the early 1960s through the 1970s, when most of the Los Angeles Korean immigrant merchants studied "Anticommunism" or "National Ethics," they were taught that "capitalism" and "democracy" are the same, and that both are antithetical to "communism" or "socialism." According to this logic, criticisms of the United States, a "democracy," are tantamount to praise of "communism." Such a view left little room for acknowledgment of racism and other social problems in American society. Indeed, the South Korean National Security Law formerly prosecuted and jailed writers who depicted Americans negatively and filmmakers who portrayed North Koreans as good-looking or capable of falling in love. Today, however, the interpretation of what constitutes antistate activity is far narrower, and although the South Korean government maintains that "pro–North Korea" activities are against the law, anti–U.S. sentiments have been common in South Korea since the mid-1980s.
16. I cannot help thinking that these violent baptisms are an Asian American legacy of sorts, for in some sense it was the internment that forced the Japanese Americans to "become American" half a century ago.
17. Many Korean Americans have criticized the *Los Angeles Times* and local television news, and the ABC network in particular, for repeatedly running stories about Soon Ja Du shooting Latasha Harlins (the tape was the second-most-played video during the week of the riots, according to the media-watch section of *A Magazine: An Asian American Quarterly* 1, no. 3 [1991]: 4). They complained that the Los Angeles ABC affiliate aired the store videotape in tandem with the King footage. ABC even inserted the Du–Harlins tape segment into its reportage of the height of the *sa-i-ku* upheavals. Korean Americans have also protested the media focus on armed Korean American merchants. In particular, they objected to the repeated use of the image of a Korean merchant pointing a gun at an unseen, off-camera target. They knew that he was being shot at and that he was firing only at the ground, but they felt that the image was used to depict Korean immigrants as violent and lawless. They argued that by blocking out the context, the news media harmed Korean Americans, about whom little positive was known by the American public. Tong S. Suhr wrote in a Korean American newspaper:

> The Harlins killing is a tragic but isolated case. . . . This is not to condone the Harlins killing; nor is it to justify the death by countering with how many merchants

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

> in turn have been killed. Our complaint is directed to the constant refrain of "the Korean-born grocer killing a black teen-ager," which couldn't help but sow the seeds of racial hatred . . . [and make me wonder]: Was there any conspiracy among the . . . white-dominated media to pit one ethnic group against another and sit back and watch them destroy one another? . . . Why were the Korean American merchants portrayed as gun-toting vigilantes shooting indiscriminately when they decided to protect their lives and businesses by arming themselves because no police protection was available? Why wasn't there any mention of the fact that they were fired upon first? Why such biased reporting? ("Time for Soul Searching by Media," *Korea Times*, 29 June 1992)

I would challenge representatives of the news media who argue that visual images of beatings and shootings, especially when they are racialized or sexualized, are "exciting" and "interesting," even when they are aired hundreds or thousands of times, when compared with "boring" images of the everyday. Three months after *sa-i-ku*, I visited a videotape brokerage company in search of generic footage that could be used in a documentary about the Korean immigrant experience of losing their means of livelihood. Almost every inch of the stringers' footage contained images of police cars, fire engines, and uniformed men heroically wiping their brows as they courageously prepared to meet the challenges before them. Since there were neither police nor firemen anywhere in sight in South Central or Koreatown during the first three days of *sa-i-ku*, none of this footage was of use to me. No doubt the men who shot these scenes chose what seemed to them the most "interesting" and "exciting" images. But if I, a woman and a Korean American, had had a camera in my hands, I would have chosen quite different ones.

18. *Newsweek*, 18 May 1992.
19. The text of King's statement was printed in the *Los Angeles Times* (2 May 1992) as follows:

> People I just want to say . . . can we all get along? Can we get along? Can we stop making it horrible for the older people and the kids? . . . We've got enough smog here in Los Angeles, let alone to deal with the setting of those fires and things. It's just not right. It's not right, and it's not going to change anything.
>
> We'll get our justice. They've won the battle but they haven't won the war. We will have our day in court and that's all we want. . . . I'm neutral. I love everybody. I love people of color. . . . I'm not like they're . . . making me out to be.
>
> We've got to quit. We've got to quit. . . . I can understand the first upset in the first two hours after the verdict, but to go on, to keep going on like this, and to see a security guard shot on the ground, it's just not right. It's just not right because those people will never go home to their families again. And I mean, please, we can get along here. We all can get along. We've just got to, just got to. We're all stuck here for awhile. . . . Let's try to work it out. Let's try to work it out.

20. The news media that did cover this massive demonstration invariably focused on the Korean musicians because they looked and sounded alien and exotic. Ironically, most of them were young, American-born or at least American-educated Korean Americans who learned traditional music as a way to recover their cultural heritage. They perform at many events: I remember them in the demonstrations against the 1991 Gulf War.
21. *Juche sasang*, the concept of self-determination, was attractive to Koreans before the division of the country after the defeat of Japan in World War II. However, since the term *juche* is central to the official political ideology in communist North Korea, the synonym *jaju* is used in South Korean officialdom.
22. I borrow this image from Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 256. I would like to thank Shelley Sunn Wong for helping me see its relevance to Korean Americans in the 1990s.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:10:41.

Recognizing Native Hawaiians

A Quest for Sovereignty

Davianna Pomaika'i McGregor

Native Hawaiians comprise a distinct and unique indigenous people with a historical continuity to the original inhabitants of the Hawaiian archipelago who exercised sovereignty as a nation centuries before the beginning of continuous European and American contact in 1778.

—Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act of 1992
(42 U.S.C. 1994)

The Hawaiian people remain determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territory, and their cultural identity in accordance with their own spiritual and traditional beliefs, customs, practices, language, and social institutions.

—Public Law 103–150, Senate Joint Resolution of Apology,
November 23, 1993

The truth and significance of these statements of findings by the U.S. Congress in the Native Hawaiian Health Care Improvement Act and Public Law 103–150 is at the heart of the most important human rights issue facing Hawai'i's people in the new millennium.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in the *Rice v. Cayetano* case, ruled on February 23, 2000 that elections for the trustees of the State of Hawai'i Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), in which only Native Hawaiians were allowed to vote, used unconstitutional race-based qualifications.[1] The majority of the members of the court ruled that the Native Hawaiian OHA election violated the 15th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution which states that the right to vote cannot be denied on account of race or color.[2] Subsequently, in the November 2000 election for the trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, all registered voters,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

Back to top.

regardless of Native Hawaiian ancestry, were allowed to cast votes and to run for these offices.

The U.S. Supreme Court, in its ruling, stated that Native Hawaiians have a shared purpose with the general public in the islands and that the Constitution of the United States has become the heritage of all the citizens of Hawai'i, including Native Hawaiians. In addition, the court raised questions about whether or not Native Hawaiians are, in fact, a distinct and unique indigenous people with the right of self-governance and self-determination under the U.S. law or whether they are, instead, an ethnic or racial minority. Under the U.S. Constitution, indigenous Native American tribes are recognized as domestic dependent nations, with inherent powers of self-governance and self-determination, for whom the U.S. federal government sustains a trust responsibility.[3] This status has been extended to Eskimos, Aleuts, and Native Alaskans under the Alaskan Native Claims Act. However, ethnic and racial minorities within the fifty U.S. states do *not* enjoy the status of nationhood, they do *not* have the right of self-governance and self-determination, and the federal government does *not* have a trust responsibility for them.

In the ruling, a majority of the Supreme Court justices also raised, but did not resolve, four fundamental questions regarding the status of Native Hawaiians. May Congress treat the Native Hawaiians as it does the Indian tribes? Has Congress in fact determined that Native Hawaiians have a status like that of Indians in organized tribes? May Congress delegate to the State of Hawai'i the authority to preserve that status? Has Congress delegated to the State of Hawai'i the authority to preserve that status?[4] A negative answer to any of these questions could result in a determination that Native Hawaiians do not qualify under U.S. law for the rights and protection afforded other indigenous peoples within the fifty states. The majority of the Supreme Court Justices also seemed to open the door to future legal challenges on the status of Native Hawaiians when it stated,

> It is a matter of some dispute, for instance, whether Congress may treat the native Hawaiians as it does the Indian tribes. Compare Van Dyke, The Political Status of the Hawaiian People, 17 Yale L. & Pol'y Rev. 95 (1998), with Benjamin, Equal Protection and the Special Relationship: The Case of Native Hawaiians, 106 Yale L.J. 537 (1996). We can stay far off that difficult terrain however.

Suddenly, the status, rights and entitlements which Native Hawaiians had enjoyed throughout the 20th century could be legally challenged out of existence. Moreover, the Supreme Court ruling seemed to contradict the policy of the U.S. Congress toward Native Hawaiians.

Beginning in 1906 and through 1998 the U.S. Congress, in effect, recognized a trust relationship with the native people of Hawai'i through the enactment of 183 federal laws that explicitly included Native Hawaiians in the class of Native Americans.[5] Some of the laws extended federal programs set up for Native Americans to Native Hawaiians, while other laws represented recognition by the U.S. Congress that the United States bore a special responsibility to protect

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

Native Hawaiian interests.[6] Although the operational policy of the U.S. Congress has been to exercise a trust responsibility with Native Hawaiians similar to Native Americans, none of the laws passed extended an explicit and formal recognition that Native Hawaiians are a sovereign people, with the right of self-governance and self-determination. Without such an explicit law, Native Hawaiians stand to lose the special benefits, entitlements, and protection that the U.S. Congress has extended to Native Hawaiians beginning in 1906.

In light of the ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court, Hawai'i's congressional delegation, led by Senators Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye, drafted and introduced legislation (called The Akaka Bill) to explicitly and unambiguously clarify the trust relationship between Native Hawaiians and the United States. Although the bill failed to pass in 2000, the Hawai'i congressional delegation reintroduced the bill for passage in 2001. When passed, the bill would formally and directly extend the federal policy of self-determination and self-governance to Native Hawaiians, as Hawai'i's indigenous native people. The legislation provides a process for the recognition by the United States, under the Secretary of the Department of Interior, of a Native Hawaiian governing entity.[7]

Opponents of Native Hawaiian recognition successfully lobbied Republican congressmen to oppose the bill in 2000. They continued their efforts to prevent its passage in 2001. Calling themselves "Aloha For All," the group is supported by the National Coalition for a Color Blind America. On their Web page, which lists four members, they state that they are "creating web pages, speaking to Rotary clubs, Exchange Clubs and other organizations, writing letters to the editor and presenting op/ed articles to the media, testifying before legislative bodies, and litigating."[8] The Web page also states their opposition to the Akaka Bill, as follows:

> This legislation is dangerous to the people of Hawai'i and to the sovereignty of the United States. It is an attempt to divide the thoroughly integrated people of Hawai'i along racial lines. It would partition the State of Hawai'i by setting up an apartheid regime to which only *kanaka maoli* (the name Native Hawaiians prefer to call themselves) could belong . . . One of the most troubling aspects of the Akaka bill is its attempt to create an Indian tribe where none currently exists. It would be the first time in history when Congress recognizes a currently non-existent political entity and then puts in place a procedure to populate it.[9]

The Aloha For All group claims that all residents of Hawai'i are Hawaiian and that the limitation of any benefits to those who are "racially Hawaiian" is discriminatory and violates the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.[10]

The developments outlined above, which challenge Native Hawaiian status, rights, and entitlements, set the scene for this article. In the first part of this article, I review the indicators which show that Native Hawaiians continue to be a distinct people with a unique language, culture, economic life, and national lands. In the second part of this article I review the historical and political basis for the recognition of Native Hawaiian sovereignty and the organized efforts of Native Hawaiians to re-establish a government to exercise sovereignty.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS OF NATIVE HAWAIIANS

In 1988, approximately 218,000 Native Hawaiians comprised 20.7 percent of the overall Hawai'i population. Of that amount, only 10,000 were pure Hawaiian and another 70,000 were estimated to have half Hawaiian ancestry or more. Thirty-two percent of all Native Hawaiians still lived outside of O'ahu on neighboring islands.[11]

In 1990, Native Hawaiians earned low incomes comparable to the most recently arrived immigrant groups, held low-status jobs, and had the highest rate of unemployment of all the ethnic groups in the islands. By contrast, the descendants of Caucasian, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants earned high incomes and held a greater portion of the managerial and professional jobs in Hawai'i. Moreover, a significant portion of the Native Hawaiians earned incomes that were insufficient to provide for their families and thus received public assistance to supplement their incomes. Among these, some depended entirely upon welfare support to meet their day-to-day needs.[12]

In 1992, 35 percent of the adult inmate population in state correctional facilities were of Native Hawaiian ancestry.[13]

In 1980, Native Hawaiians had the lowest life expectancy among the ethnic groups in Hawai'i, at 67.6 years compared to 73 for Caucasians, 77 for Japanese, 72 for Filipinos, and 76 for Chinese.[14] In 1989, the Native Hawaiian infant mortality rate was 11.8 per thousand. This represented 44 percent of the infant deaths in the state in 1989. Heart disease was the major cause of death among Native Hawaiians. While Native Hawaiians did not have the highest incidence of cancer, they had the highest mortality rates for most cancers. Native Hawaiian men had the highest incidence of lung cancer and Hawaiian women had the highest rates of breast cancer. Native Hawaiians over age 65 had the highest incidence of chronic diseases and were disproportionately afflicted by diabetes.[15]

These socioeconomic statistics reflect a disparity in the standard of living between Native Hawaiians and Caucasians, Japanese, and Chinese in Hawai'i. They also indicate a high degree of alienation from the social system and the political power structure of modern Hawai'i. On one hand, it represents the effect of institutionalized cultural barriers that prevent equal access to opportunities in the educational system, equal access to health care delivery systems, and adequate representation in the judicial system.[16] On the other hand, it reflects the persistence of Native Hawaiian cultural customs and practices in rural-based Hawaiian communities where Native Hawaiians did not assimilate into Westernized Hawai'i society.

These statistics reflect the individual and collective pain, bitterness and trauma of a people whose sovereignty has been and remains suppressed; who are dispossessed in their own homeland; and who lack control over the resources of their ancestral lands to provide for the welfare of their people. Sovereignty is looked to as a means of providing control over key resources to enable the Native Hawaiian people to be uplifted.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

SURVIVAL OF THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN CULTURE

The present generation of Native Hawaiians stand upon the threshold of history as no previous generation of Native Hawaiians. Since first contact with Europeans and Americans, generation after generation of Native Hawaiians have faced the specter of decline, displacement, and impoverishment. However, the possibility of extinction as a people with a distinct language, culture, and land base has never been so imminent and real as it is for Native Hawaiians today. Action or inaction on their part will determine whether the Native Hawaiian language, culture, religion, subsistence farming, and fishing and land base will survive or gradually disappear with the passing away of their *kupuna* (elders).

At each critical juncture of Hawai'i's history, Native Hawaiians were challenged by changes that would undermine their traditional culture. Some Native Hawaiians chose to accept those changes. They passively accommodated and adjusted to Western society. Many actively assimilated and participated in Western political, social, and economic activities. Others chose to stand firm, reject, and resist change—actively or by withdrawing from mainstream economic and political activities.

Of singular importance to the perpetuation of the Native Hawaiian people are isolated and undeveloped rural communities that were historically bypassed by the mainstream of social and economic development. Native Hawaiians in these rural areas did not fully assimilate into the changing social system. Instead, they pursued traditional subsistence livelihoods in which they applied cultural customs, beliefs, and practices. They also sustained extended family networks through sharing and exchange of food, work, and services.

Rural Hawaiians still acquire the basic necessities for their families through subsistence activities upon the land by employing traditional knowledge and practices passed down to them from their *kupuna*. Family knowledge about prime fishing grounds and the types of fish that frequent the ocean in their district at different times of year usually assure Native Hawaiian fishermen of successful fishing expeditions.

Many Native Hawaiians in rural districts continue to cultivate fish in ponds and the open ocean by regularly feeding the fish in conjunction with making offerings at the *ku'ula* (fish deity) shrines that marked their ocean fishing grounds. Taro and other domestic crops are planted by the moon phase to assure excellent growth. Rural families take advantage of seasonal fruits and marine life for their regular diet. Native plants are still utilized for healing of illness by traditional methods that involve both physical and spiritual cleansing and dedication.

Cultural knowledge attached to the traditional names of places, winds, and rains of their district informed rural Hawaiians about the effect of the dynamic forces of nature upon the ocean and the land in their area. Legends and chants inform them about how their ancestors coped with such elements.

Thus, in these rural communities, Native Hawaiian custom, belief, and practice continue to be a practical part of everyday life, not only for the old people, but also for the middle-aged and the young. By contrast, such customs and

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

beliefs have assumed an air of mystery and superstition for urban Native Hawaiians whose day-to-day lives depend solely upon wage-earning activities in a modern commercial economic system.

An analogy that conveys a sense of the significance of these areas can be found in the natural phenomena in the volcanic rainforest. Botanists who study the volcanic rainforest have observed that eruptions which destroy large areas of forest land leave oases of native trees and plants which are called *kipuka*. From these natural *kipuka* come the seeds and spores for the eventual regeneration of the native flora upon the fresh lava. Rural Native Hawaiian communities are cultural *kipuka* from which Native Hawaiian culture can be regenerated and revitalized in the contemporary setting.

Beginning in the 1970s Native Hawaiians engaged in a cultural renaissance that reaffirmed the consciousness of, pride in, and practice of Native Hawaiian cultural and spiritual customs and beliefs. In rallying around protection of the island of Kaho'olawe from bombing by the U.S. military, the traditional practice of *aloha 'aina* gained prominence and the importance of these rural Hawaiian communities as strongholds of traditional Native Hawaiian subsistence lifestyles was recognized.

Rural Hawaiian communities threatened with development organized to protect their landholdings and the surrounding natural resources in their districts from the assault of proposed tourist, commercial and industrial development. On the island of Hawai'i, Ka'u Hawaiians formed the Ka 'Ohana O KaLae to protect the natural and cultural resources of their district from a planned spaceport to launch missiles.[17] The Pele Defense Fund formed to protect the volcano deity Pele from the development of geothermal energy and electric plants.[18] On Moloka'i, the Hui Ala Loa, Ka Leo O Mana'e, and Hui Ho'opakela 'Aina are community groups which formed to protect the natural and cultural resources of Moloka'i for farming and fishing rather than for tourist resort development. On the island of Maui, the Hui Ala Nui O Makena organized to keep access to the ocean open for traditional fishing and gathering as well as recreation; Hana Pohaku developed community-based economic development projects on their *kuleana* lands in Kipahulu; and the Ke'anae Community Association worked to keep the water flowing to their taro patches rather than being diverted for development in Kula and Kihei or for hydroelectric plants. On Kaua'i island, the Native Hawaiian Farmers of Hanalei initiated community-based projects at Waipa and Ka Wai Ola organized to protect the shoreline of Hanalei from ruin by numerous tour boat operations. On O'ahu, community-based economic development projects were pursued on the Wai'anae Coast by Ka'ala Farms, the Opelu Project and Na Hoa'aina O Makaha. Malama I Na Kupuna O Hawai'i Nei, a statewide group, formed to protect and provide proper treatment of traditional Native Hawaiian burials.

Traditional navigational arts and skills were revived with the transpacific voyages of the Polynesian Voyaging Society on the *Hokule'a*, the *Hawai'i Loa*, and the *Makali'i*. *Halau hula*, the schools that teach traditional Hawaiian dance and chant, increased and flourished. *La'au Lapa'u*, traditional herbal and spiritual healing practices, were recognized as valid holistic medicinal practices. Hawaiian

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

Studies from the elementary to university level was established as part of the regular curricula. Hawaiian music evolved into new forms of expression and gained greater popularity.

Perhaps the most remarkable development was the rejuvenation of the Hawaiian language. In 1987 there were only 2,000 native speakers of Hawaiian.[19] Most were in their sixties and seventies. Only thirty were under five years old. Extinction of the language because of America's colonial policy was imminent. However, Hawaiian language professors and students at the University of Hawai'i visited Aotearoa (New Zealand) and were inspired with the efforts of the Maori people to rescue their language through Maori language immersion preschools. They began Punana Leo Hawaiian language immersion preschools in Hawai'i and went on to establish Hawaiian language immersion classes in state schools throughout the islands. In the 1999–2000 school year, 1,750 students were enrolled in eighteen Hawaiian language immersion public schools.

All of these efforts, combined, reaffirmed the continuity and perpetuation of Native Hawaiians as unique and distinct with their own cultural and spiritual beliefs, customs, practices, language and ancestral national lands.

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BASIS OF NATIVE HAWAIIAN SOVEREIGNTY

Centuries before the beginning of continuous European and American contact, the Native Hawaiian people lived in a highly organized, self-sufficient, subsistence social system based on communal land tenure with a sophisticated language, culture, and religion. Hawaiian ancestral chants trace the origins from Papa, the earth; Wakea, the sky; Kane, springs and streams; Kanaloa, the ocean; and Pele, the volcano. *He Hawai'i kakou*: We are Hawai'i. Native Hawaiians are inseparable from the *'aina*, earth, sea, sky and the magnificent power of these life forces. Family genealogies link contemporary Native Hawaiians to astronomers, navigators, planters, fishermen, engineers, healers, and artisans who settled Hawai'i and constructed great walled fishponds, irrigated taro terraces, dryland agricultural systems, *heiau* (temples), *pu'uhonua* (refuge areas), adze quarries, coastal and inland trails, and extended family settlements. Native Hawaiians were a nation of people living in harmony and balance with the land, the *akua* (gods), and each other: *lokahi* (balance and harmony). Each *ahupua'a* valley system provided the families living within them the necessities of life: from abundant marine life in the ocean, to fresh water streams and springs, gentle sloping fertile lands for cultivation, and forests with trees for building houses and canoes, as well as plants for healing.[20]

After contact with the west, islanders began trading in cultivated food crops and sandalwood. As trade increased the Native Hawaiian people suffered periodic famine and were continuously exposed to devastating epidemics of foreign disease. A unified monarchial government of all the Hawaiian Islands was established in 1810 under Kamehameha I, the first King of Hawai'i (1779–1819). Trade was conducted with China, England, and the United States on a regular basis. In 1819, Kamehameha died and his successors abolished formal observance of traditional

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

religious ritual and ceremony. Rival chiefs defended the traditional gods but were defeated. In the following year, American missionaries began to settle Hawai'i and convert Native Hawaiians to Christianity. By 1823, after only forty-five years of contact, the Native Hawaiian people had declined from 400,000 to 135,000. Commercial whaling attracted increasing numbers of foreign settlers who demanded rights of citizenship and private ownership of land.[21]

By 1840, King Kamehameha II transformed the government into a constitutional monarchy, having signed a Bill of Rights in 1839 and a Constitution for the Kingdom of Hawai'i in 1840. In 1845, despite petitions of protest signed by 5,790 Native Hawaiians, foreigners were allowed to become naturalized citizens and to hold public office. Ka Mahele in 1848 established a system of private land ownership which concentrated 99.2 percent of Hawai'i's lands among 245 chiefs, the Crown, and the government. Less than one percent of the lands were given to 28 percent of the people, leaving 72 percent of the people landless. In 1850, foreigners were given the right to own land. From this point on foreigners, primarily Americans, continued to expand their interests, eventually controlling most of the land, sugar and pineapple plantations, banks, shipping, and commerce.[22]

Throughout the 19th century until 1893, the United States recognized the independence of the Hawaiian Nation and extended full and complete diplomatic recognition to that government. The United States government entered into treaties and conventions with the Hawaiian monarchs to govern commerce and navigation in 1826, 1842, 1850, 1855, 1875 and 1887.[23]

By 1887, Hawai'i had treaties and conventions with Belgium, Bremen, Denmark, France, the German Empire, Great Britain, Hamburg, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New South Wales, Portugal, Russia, Samoa, Spain, the Swiss Confederation, Sweden, Norway, Tahiti, and the United States.[24] On November 28,1843, Great Britain and France signed a joint declaration recognizing the independence of Hawai'i and pledging never to take possession of Hawai'i.[25] Hawai'i was also a member of one of the first international governmental organizations, the Universal Postal Union. It had established approximately a hundred diplomatic and consular posts around the world.[26]

In 1887, American planter interests organized a coup d'etat against King David Kalākaua, forcing him to sign the Bayonet Constitution, which took away his sovereign powers as king and the civil rights of Hawaiians. In 1889, eight men were killed, twelve wounded, and seventy were arrested in the Wilcox Rebellion, which attempted to restore the Hawaiian Constitution. By 1890, non-Hawaiians controlled 96 percent of the sugar industry and Native Hawaiians were reduced to only 45 percent of the population due to the importation of Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese immigrant laborers by the sugar planters.

In the year 1893, the United States Minister assigned to the Kingdom of Hawaii, John L. Stevens, conspired with a small group of non-Hawaiian residents of the Kingdom, including citizens of the United States, to overthrow the indigenous and lawful Government of Hawai'i.[27] In pursuance of that conspiracy, the United States Minister and the naval representative of the United States caused 162 armed naval forces of the United States to invade the sovereign Hawaiian Nation in support of the overthrow of the indigenous and lawful

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

Government of Hawai'i and the United States Minister thereupon extended diplomatic recognition to a provisional government declared by eighteen conspirators, mostly American, without the consent of the native people of Hawai'i or the lawful government of Hawai'i, in violation of treaties between the two nations and of international law.[28]

Without warning or a declaration of war, this surprise attack upon a friendly and peaceful nation caught the government and its citizens totally unprepared to respond. Protesting the U.S. role in this conspiracy and receiving assurances of an immediate and fair investigation, the Queen, on January 17, 1893, trusted the "enlightened justice" of the United States and yielded, under protest, to the U.S. forces until an investigation could be completed and she could be restored. She wrote:

> I Lili'uokalani, by the Grace of God and under the Constitution of the Hawaiian Kingdom, Queen, do hereby solemnly protest against any and all acts done against myself and the Constitutional Government of the Hawaiian Kingdom by certain persons claiming to have established a Provisional Government of and for this Kingdom.
>
> That I yield to the superior force of the United States of America whose Minister Plenipotentiary, His Excellency John L. Stevens, has caused United States troops to be landed at Honolulu and declared that he would support the Provisional Government.
>
> Now to avoid any collision of armed forces, and perhaps the loss of life, I do under this protest and impelled by said force yield my authority until such time as the Government of the United States shall, upon the facts being presented to it, undo the action of its representative and reinstate me in the authority which I claim as the Constitutional Sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands.
>
> Done at Honolulu this 17th day of January, A.D. 1893.[29]

Queen Lili'uokalani, the lawful monarch of Hawai'i, and the Hawaiian Patriotic League, representing the aboriginal citizens of Hawai'i, promptly petitioned the United States for redress of these wrongs and for restoration of the indigenous government of the Hawaiian nation, but this petition was not acted upon.

In a message to Congress on December 18, 1893, then President Grover Cleveland reported fully and accurately on these illegal actions, and acknowledged that by these acts, described by the President as acts of war, the government of a peaceful and friendly people was overthrown, and the President concluded that a "substantial wrong has thus been done which a due regard for our national character as well as the rights of the injured people requires that we should endeavor to repair." The following are excerpts from his report:

> The lawful Government of Hawaii was overthrown without the drawing of a sword or the firing of a shot by a process every step of which, it may safely be asserted, is directly traceable to and dependent for its success upon the agency of the United States acting through its diplomatic and naval representatives . . .
>
> But for the lawless occupation of Honolulu under false pretexts by the United States forces, and but for Minister Stevens' recognition of the provisional government when the United States forces were its sole support and constituted its only military strength,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

> the Queen and her Government would never have yielded to the provisional government, even for a time and for the sole purpose of submitting her case to the enlightened justice of the United States. . . .
>
> Believing, therefore, that the United States could not, under the circumstances disclosed, annex the islands without justly incurring the imputation of acquiring them by unjustifiable methods, I shall not again submit the treaty of annexation to the Senate for its consideration. . . . I instructed Minister Willis to advise the Queen and her supporters of my desire to aid in the restoration of the status existing before the lawless landing of the United States forces at Honolulu on the 16th of January last, if such restoration could be effected upon terms providing for clemency as well as justice to all parties concerned.[30]

The Provisional Government refused to acquiesce to President Cleveland's request to restore the Queen to the throne. They continued to hold state power and lobby for annexation to the United States. Cleveland, not ready to shed American blood for the Hawaiian people and their Queen, took no further action.[31]

On July 4, 1894, the provisional government proclaimed the Republic of Hawai'i under a new constitution.[32]

On January 7, 1895, royalists organized an armed insurrection aimed at restoring the Queen to the throne. The restoration was crushed; 220 royalists, including the Queen herself, were arrested and charged as prisoners of war for treason and concealment of treason.[33]

On January 24, 1895, while being held prisoner in 'Iolani Palace, Queen Lili'uokalani was forced to sign a statement of abdication in favor of the Republic of Hawai'i. Once free, the Queen renounced the abdication, contending that she had signed the statement because it had been falsely represented to her that the royalists who had been arrested would be immediately released.[34]

In 1898, the United States annexed Hawai'i through the Newlands Resolution without the consent of or compensation to the Native Hawaiian people or their sovereign government. Native Hawaiians were thereby denied the mechanism for expression of their inherent sovereignty through self-government and self-determination, their lands and ocean resources.[35]

Through the Newlands Resolution and the 1900 Organic Act, the United States Congress received 1.75 million acres of lands formerly owned by the Crown and Government of the Hawaiian Kingdom and exempted the lands from then existing public land laws of the United States by mandating that the revenue and proceeds from these lands be "used solely for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands for education and other public purposes," thereby establishing a special trust relationship between the United States and the inhabitants of Hawai'i.[36]

From 1900 through 1959, Hawai'i was governed as a Territory of the United States. The official U.S. policy was to Americanize the multiethnic society of the Hawaiian Islands, beginning with the children through the American public school system. Hawaiian and other languages except English were banned as official languages or as a medium of instruction. An elite group of Americans

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

who were the owners and managers of what was called the Big Five factories had monopoly control over every facet of Hawai'i's economy and social system.[37]

In 1921, Congress enacted the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, which designated 200,000 acres of the ceded public lands for exclusive homesteading by Native Hawaiians, thereby affirming the trust relationship between the United States and the Native Hawaiians, as expressed by then Secretary of Interior Franklin K. Lane. Lane was cited in the Committee Report of the United States House of Representatives Committee on Territories as stating, "One thing that impressed me . . . was the fact that the natives of the islands who are our wards, I should say, and for whom in a sense we are trustees, are falling off rapidly in numbers and many of them are in poverty."[38]

In 1938 the United States Congress again acknowledged the unique status of the Native Hawaiian people by including in the Kalapana Extension Act a provision to lease lands within the extension to Native Hawaiians and to permit fishing in the area "only by native Hawaiian residents of said area or of adjacent villages and by visitors under their guidance."[39]

A plebiscite on statehood was held in 1940 by the territorial government. The question posed was, "Do you favor statehood for Hawai'i?"; 67 percent of the voters answered "yes." Almost one-third of the voters opposed statehood. In 10 of the 162 precincts the majority voted "no." Slightly more than 20 percent of those eligible did not vote.[40]

In 1946, the United States, as required under Chapter XI, Article 73 of the U.N. Charter, "Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories," included Hawai'i on the list of its non-self-governing territories together with Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, Panama Canal Zone, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. By this action the U.S. accepted responsibility to assist the Territory of Hawai'i in achieving self-government. This was to be achieved when the inhabitants voted for one of the following three alternative statuses:

Complete independence from any other state.
Free association with another state.
Complete integration into another state.[41]

In 1959, in accordance with the Admission Act of March 18, 1959, a second statehood plebiscite was held. The plebiscite provided that the qualified voters of Hawai'i adopt or reject three propositions, all of which had to be adopted for Hawai'i to become a state: (a) "Shall Hawai'i immediately be admitted into the Union as a state?" (b) acceptance of the boundaries of the State, and (c) acceptance of all the provisions contained in the Statehood Bill. Any American citizen who had resided in Hawai'i for one year was eligible to vote. The result of the plebiscite was: 132,938 voters in favor of statehood and 7,854 opposed.[42]

For a plebiscite to be considered free and fair it must meet the criteria of (1) neutrality of the plebiscite area; (2) freedom from foreign occupation; and (3) control of the administration of the plebiscite by a neutral authority. Given these criteria, advocates of independence for Hawai'i charge that the 1959

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

plebiscite cannot be considered an adequate exercise in self-determination by the true residents of Hawai'i.

First, those who participated in the plebiscite could not be considered the correct "self," reflecting those citizens of Hawai'i or descendants of them who had been denied the continued exercise of their independent nation by the U.S. invasion in 1893. The U.S. government defined the qualifications for voting in such a way that it resulted in the exercise of an altered "self"-determination. By 1959, Hawai'i had been Americanized by years of transmigration from the United States of America and socialization through control over the media, the economy, and the educational, social, legal, and political system of Hawai'i. Following four generations of U.S. control over the society, the United States permitted the "qualified" voters in Hawai'i to become equal American citizens. Qualified voters were American citizens who were residents of Hawai'i for at least one year. Only U.S. declared citizens could vote. Those who resisted the American domination and insisted on their Hawaiian citizenship could not vote.

Second, the question, "Shall Hawai'i immediately be admitted into the Union as a State?" was unfair and fell short as a measure of self-determination. It failed to afford the people the range of choices from integration within the United States or to reemerge as an independent nation. The question, "Should Hawai'i be a free and independent nation?" should have been but was never asked.

Additional factors that make the 1959 plebiscite fraudulent as an exercise of self-determination were that the United States stated the question to be asked; supervised the plebiscite process; and counted the votes. The United States military maintained a strong presence in the territory when the plebiscite was conducted. Many in the U.S. military also participated in the plebiscite. The United States failed to carry out or to see that others carried out an educational program on the right to independence. In fact, the United States caused fear within the society by promoting a communist scare and a nuclear arms race scare which later proved, on both fronts, to have been fabrications of the government of the day. The United States did not inform the people of their right to self-determination or of the responsibility of the United States to the people regarding decolonization as called for under Chapter XI, Article 73 of the U.N. Charter.[43]

In 1959, after the Hawai'i statehood plebiscite, the U.S. removed Hawai'i from the U.N. list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. As evidence, the U.S. submitted a memorandum to the Secretary General, the text of the Congressional Act admitting Hawai'i into the U.S. as a state (1959 Admission Act),[44] a Presidential Proclamation, and the text of Hawaii's Constitution. In response, the U.N. General Assembly, through Resolution 1469 (XIV), expressed the opinion that Hawai'i had effectively exercised the right of self-determination and had freely chosen its status as a state of the Union. This relieved the United States of further responsibility to report to the U.N.[45]

While the 1959 Admission Act incorporated Hawai'i and its multiethnic population into the United States of America as the fiftieth state, it also recognized and reaffirmed a trust relationship with the Native Hawaiian people.

Under the Admission Act, the United States mandated the new State of Hawai'i to assume responsibility for administration of 200,000 acres of Hawaiian

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

Home Lands for the exclusive benefit of native Hawaiians. It also reaffirmed the trust relationship which existed between the United States and the Native Hawaiian people by retaining exclusive power to enforce the trust, including the power to approve land exchanges and legislative amendments affecting the rights of beneficiaries under the act.

Under the Admission Act, the United States also transferred responsibility for administration over portions of the ceded public lands trust not retained by the United States (approximately 1,200,000 acres) to the State of Hawai'i but reaffirmed the trust relationship which existed between the United States and the Native Hawaiian people by retaining the legal responsibility of oversight over the State for the betterment of the conditions of Native Hawaiians under section 5(f) of the Admission Act.

After 1959, Congress enacted over 100 pieces of legislation that addressed the special needs of Native Hawaiians ranging from healthcare and education, to economic development and cultural and natural resource preservation. Some examples of these include the Native Hawaiian Study Commission Act, Pub. L. No. 98–139, 97 Stat. 871 (1983); Native Hawaiian Health Care Act of 1988, Pub. L. No. 100–579,102 Stat. 4181; and the Native Hawaiian Education Act, Pub. L. No. 103–382, 108 Stat. 3518 (1994).[46]

These laws culminated with the Apology Resolution of November 23, 1993, which directly acknowledged the inherent sovereignty of Native Hawaiians at the time of the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai'i. The Apology Resolution also acknowledged the vested rights of the Native Hawaiian people in the crown and government lands of the Kingdom of Hawai'i; and that Native Hawaiians continue to be a distinct people determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territory and their cultural identity in accordance with their own spiritual and traditional beliefs, customs, practices, language, and social institutions.[47]

GOALS AND STRATEGIES

There are two distinct goals for Hawaiian governance: achieving nation-within-nation status, like other Native Americans, and achieving independence from the United States, under free-association status like the republics in Micronesia or as an independent state like island nations of the South Pacific.

Hawaiian groups tend to pose "nation-within-nation" and "independence" as two competing goals. However, it is my contention that these are actually complementary. In fact, we are really looking at one status that will address the unique and special conditions of the indigenous Hawaiian people and one status that will address the broader issues of the decolonization of Hawai'i as a whole for the indigenous Hawaiians in partnership with the "local" multi-ethnic population.

What is called nation-within-nation status is what has thus far been accorded to more than 550 Native American nations in the United States. It is important to emphasize that this status can and should be accorded to the indigenous Hawaiian nation whether Hawai'i is a part of or independent from the United States.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

The process of decolonization toward total independence is a status for indigenous Hawaiians to pursue in conjunction with the broader "local" population, those who primarily identify culturally, socially, economically, and politically with Hawai'i as their homeland. This would include Hawai'i residents who distinguish themselves from America as well as from the nation from which their ancestors originated.

By the end of the twentieth century, the majority of indigenous Hawaiians seemed prepared to begin a process to re-establish Hawaiian sovereignty, but the broader local population appeared to need more time and education to unite in a process building toward decolonization.

A survey on support for sovereignty was conducted by SMS Research in February 1994. The survey asked the question, "Some Hawaiians have said that sovereignty can only be realized by declaring independence from the state, but others feel they can achieve sovereignty by working within the state and federal government. Which do you believe?" In response, 74 percent favored working within the system and 12 percent favored independence, while 14 percent were undecided.[48] Table 1 shows the breakdown by ethnic group.

TABLE 1

	Total	*Hawaiian*	*Caucasian*	*Japanese*	*Filipino*
Within System	74%	73%	79%	70%	71%
Independent	12%	11%	8%	15%	14%
Undecided	14%	16%	13%	15%	15%

This poll is one indication of the broad support for recognition of Native Hawaiian sovereignty and the lack of support among the broad spectrum of Hawai'i's population, including Native Hawaiians, for the total independence of Hawai'i. If a vote had been taken in 1994, the majority of people born and raised in Hawai'i would probably have voted for Hawai'i to remain a state and for the recognition of Native Hawaiian sovereignty.

In July 1996 the Hawaiian Sovereignty Elections Council organized a Native Hawaiian Vote with funding from the Hawai'i State Legislature. The Council mailed out 81,507 ballots to registered Native Hawaiian voters which asked, "Shall the Hawaiian people elect delegates to propose a Native Hawaiian government?" A total of 30,423 ballots were cast, representing 37 percent of the registered voters. Of these, 22,294 (73.28 percent of the ballots cast) voted "yes" and 8,129 (26.72 percent of the ballots cast) voted "no."

There are numerous Native Hawaiian organizations working for the reestablishment and recognition of a sovereign Native Hawaiian nation. Native Hawaiians involved in these organizations seek to improve and uplift Hawaiian health, education, and standard of living. They also seek to protect and perpetuate the natural and cultural resources essential for religious, cultural, and subsistence custom, belief, and practice. Ultimately, Native Hawaiians seek full redress for past injustices; restitution of all of the territory of the Native Hawaiian nation;

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

compensation for mismanagement and destruction of national lands and natural resources; and most significant, the re-establishment and recognition of a government to exercise sovereignty and self-determination.[49]

CONCLUSION

In the recognition of the status, rights, and entitlements of Native Hawaiian people as just lies the future of human rights in Hawai'i. Many non-Hawaiians claim they bear no obligation to reconcile with the descendants of Native Hawaiians for the injustices that occurred decades ago by persons to whom they bear no relation. However, non-Hawaiians in Hawai'i benefit, while Native Hawaiians bear the burden of the results of those historical injustices. Moreover, the U.S. Congress and the President of the United States in Public Law 103–150 outlined a series of historical injustices for which they acknowledge responsibility and apologized "to Native Hawaiians on behalf of the people of the United States." The Apology Resolution also committed the Congress and all the people of the United States to a process of reconciliation with the Native Hawaiian people.

Among the reasons given by those who oppose Native Hawaiian entitlements is that the privileging of one ethnic group over the others is unfair and will cause resentment and undermine the spirit of *aloha* in contemporary Hawai'i: *Aloha mai no, aloha aku* (when love is given, love should be returned).[50] However, this *'olelo no'eau* means that *aloha* is reciprocal. Native Hawaiian people have given *aloha* to newcomers and their descendants for generations. Now is the time for *aloha* to be acknowledged and returned to the Native Hawaiian people and their descendants. The Akaka Bill introduced by Hawai'i's congressional delegation would provide an avenue for both the people of Hawai'i and the U.S. Congress to correct the historic injustices they have suffered collectively as a people, and enable them to exercise self-determination through self-governance to heal as a people. While federal recognition would represent a culmination of a century-old trust relationship between Native Hawaiians and the U.S. Congress, it would really constitute a small first step in the re-establishment of a Native Hawaiian government since the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893.

NOTES

1. In the Apology Resolution, a Native Hawaiian (both words capitalized) is defined as "any individual who is a descendant of the aboriginal people who, prior to 1778, occupied and exercised sovereignty in the area that now constitutes the State of Hawai'i." The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act and the Admission Act use the term native Hawaiian (lower case n, capital H) to mean "Any descendant of not less than one-half part of the blood of the races inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands previous to 1778." The term *"Kanaka Maoli"* is promoted as the indigenous name for Native Hawaiians. However, *"Kanaka Maoli"* simply means native or indigenous, while *"Kanaka Maoli Hawai'i"* means native or indigenous Hawaiian. In the 1859 Civil Code of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, Chapter VIII, *"kanaka Hawai'i"* is used to translate "native of the Hawaiian Islands" and *"ke kanaka maoli"* is used to translate "native." In the 1878 Census of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, *"He kane kanaka maoli* (Hawai'i)" was used for "Native Male" and *"He wahine kanaka maoli* (Hawai'i)" was

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

used for "Native Female." However, this must have referred to pure Hawaiians only, as there was a category for "Half-Caste Male" ("He *hapahaole kane*") and "Half-Cast Female" (*"He hapahaole wahine"*). In this article, I will use "Native Hawaiian" to refer anyone who has Hawaiian ancestry, that is, who is descended from a *"Kanaka Maoli Hawai'i"* ancestor, and "native Hawaiian" to refer to those who are of half or more Hawaiian ancestry. Under the law, thus far, only "native Hawaiians" are the beneficiaries of the Hawaiian Home Lands and the ceded public lands trusts, as discussed below.

2. No. 98–818, February 23, 2000. Kennedy, J. delivered the opinion of the Court, in which Rehnquist, C. J., O'Connor, Scalia, Thomas, J.J. joined. Breyer, J. filed an opinion concurring in the result, in which Souter, J. joined. Stevens, J. filed a dissenting opinion in which Ginsburg, J. joined as to Part II. Ginsburg, J. filed a dissenting opinion.
3. 1993–1998/Federal Indian Policies/June 12, 1998.
4. These questions were raised in the following statement: "If Hawaii's restriction were to be sustained under Mancari we would be required to accept some beginning premises not yet established in our case law. Among other postulates, it would be necessary to conclude that Congress, in reciting the purposes for the transfer of lands to the State—and in other enactments such as the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act and the Joint Resolution of 1993—has determined that native Hawaiians have a status like that of Indians in organized tribes, and that it may, and has, delegated to the State a broad authority to preserve that status. These propositions would raise questions of considerable moment and difficulty."
5. List of laws include the Older Americans Act; the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act Amendments of 1987; the Veterans' Benefits and Services Act of 1988; the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 1988; the Native Hawaiian Health Care Act of 1988; the Health Professions Reauthorization Act of 1988; the Nursing Shortage Reduction and Education Extension Act of 1988; the Handicapped Programs Technical Amendments Act of 1988; the Indian Health Care Amendments of 1988; and the Disadvantaged Minority Health Improvement Act of 1990.
6. Department of Interior and Department of Justice, "From Mauka to Makai: The River of Justice Must Flow Freely, Report on the Reconciliation Process Between the Federal Government and Native Hawaiians," Washington, D.C., October 23, 2000, p. 56.
7. Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions—April 6, 2001 (Senate—April 06, 2001) by Mr. Akaka (for himself and Mr. Inouye).
8. www.angelfire.com/hi2/hawaiiansovereignty; www.aloha4all.org.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., KITV News, June 4, 2001; *Honolulu Advertiser*, June 5, 2001, p. B-2.
11. The difference in the two sources is due to the difference in handling persons of mixed parentage. The census did not have a mixed category and assigned persons of mixed ancestry to one of the categories on the basis of self-identification or the race of the father. The Health Surveillance Program bases it on birth statistics. The figure of 70,000 is from Office of Hawaiian Affairs, "Population Survey/Needs Assessment, Final Report" (Honolulu: Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 1986). In a study of the Health Surveillance Program data, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs estimated that there were 208,476 Hawaiians in Hawai'i in 1984, out of which 72,709 had 50 percent to 99 percent Hawaiian ancestry and 8,244 had 100 percent Hawaiian ancestry.
12. Health Surveillance Program, 1988. According to the 1988 Health Surveillance Program, 18.9 percent of the Hawaiian families earned less than $15,000 per year as compared to 12.5 percent of families in other ethnic groups. In the $60,000 or more category, only 13.6 percent of the Hawaiian families earned incomes at that level, while 21.4 percent of the families in other ethnic groups earned incomes at that level. According to the Research and Evaluation Division of the Department of Human Services, 20,487 Hawaiian families received public financial assistance and Medicaid in 1990. This represented 26 percent of all of the families in Hawai'i who received financial assistance and Medicaid in 1990. The same source reported that 14,956 Hawaiian families received Aid

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1990. This represented one-third (33.4 percent) of all of the families in Hawaii who received AFDC in 1990.

13. Department of Public Safety—Corrections Division, "Distribution of the Inmate Population By Ethnicity and Facility As Of June 30, 1992." The ethnic breakdown of the adult inmate population was as follows: Black (5.3 percent), Caucasian (22.9 percent), Chinese (0.9 percent), Filipino (7.9 percent), Hawaiian/Part Hawaiian (35 percent), Japanese (3.4 percent), Korean (0.9 percent), Samoan (3.9 percent), Other (16.1 percent)
14. George S. Kanahele, *Current Facts and Figures About Hawaiians* (Honolulu: Project WAIAHA, 1982), p. 8.
15. *Native Hawaiian Health Data Book* (Honolulu: Papa Ola Lokahi, 1992).
16. Alu Like, "Summary of the Analysis of the Needs Assessment Survey and Related Data," 1976. Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate, 1983. Native Hawaiian Health Research Consortium, Mental Health Task Force, Alu Like, Inc. *E Ola Mau: Native Hawaiian Health Needs Study: Mental Health Task Force Report* (Honolulu: Native Hawaiian Health Research Consortium, Alu Like, Inc., 1985).
17. "Sociocultural Impact Assessment" in the Environmental Impact Statement for the Commercial Satellite Launching Facility, Palima Point, Ka'u, Hawai'i, with Jon Matsuoka, 1991.
18. Davianna McGregor, "Pele vs. Geothermal: A Clash of Cultures," in *Bearing Dreams, Shaping Visions: Asian Pacific Americans Facing the 90's* (Seattle: Washington State University Press, 1993).
19. John Heckathorn, "Ua Hiki Anei Ke Ola Ka 'Olelo Hawai'i?—Can the Hawaiian Language Survive?" *Honolulu Magazine* 21, no. 10 (April 1987).
20. E. S. Craighill Handy, "The Hawaiian Planter—Volume I: His Plants, Methods and Areas of Cultivation," *Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum Bulletin* 161 (Honolulu: Bernice P. Bishop Museum, 1940); E. S. Craighill Handy and Mary Kawena Pūku'i, *The Polynesian Family System in Ka'u, Hawai'i* (Wellington: Polynesian Society, 1958; reprint, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1976); Samuel Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* (Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools Press, 1961); Samuel Kamakau, "Ka Po'e Kahiko: The People of Old," *BPBM Spec. Publ.* 51., 1964; Samuel Kamakau, "The Works of the People of Old," *BPBM Spec. Publ.* 61, 1976; David Malo, *Hawaiian Antiquities*, trans. Dr. Nathaniel B. Emerson (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1971); T. G. Thrum (ed.), "Fornander Collection of Hawaiian Antiquities and Folk-Lore," *BPBM Memoirs* 4, 5, 6 (1916–1920); Martha W. Beckwith, *Hawaiian Mythology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1970); David Kalākaua, King of Hawaii, *The Legends and Myths of Hawaii: The Fables and Folklore of a Strange People* (Tokyo & Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1973).
21. Kamakau 1961; Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom, Volume I, 1778–1854: Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press; 1938; reprint, Honolulu: The University Press of Hawai'i, 1980).
22. Kuykendall 1980; Davianna McGregor, "Voices of Today Echo Voices of the Past," in *Malama Hawaiian Land and Water*, edited by Dana Naone Hall (Honolulu: Bamboo Ridge Press, 1985).
23. A convention negotiated December 24, 1826, a Treaty of Commerce, declared that the "peace and friendship" between the United States and Hawai'i was "confirmed and declared to be perpetual." The Tyler Doctrine of 1842 included Hawai'i within the U.S. sphere of influence by stating that it "could not but create dissatisfaction on the part of the United States at any attempt by another power, should such attempt be threatened or feared, to take possession of the islands, colonize them, and subvert the native government." There was also the Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation, August 24, 1850; Rights of Neutrals at Sea, March 25, 1855; Treaty of Commercial Reciprocity, September 1876; Treaty of Commercial Reciprocity, November 9, 1887. See *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America*, V. 8.
24. *Treaties and Conventions Concluded Between the Hawaiian Kingdom and Other Powers Since 1825.*

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

25. Senate Ex. Doc. 52 Cong. 2 Sess., No. 57, p. 12.
26. F. M. Hustat, *Directory and Handbook of the Kingdom of Hawai'i* (Honolulu: Polk, 1892).
27. U.S. Congress, House, Report No. 243, "Intervention of United States Government in Affairs of Foreign Friendly Governments," 53rd Congress, 2nd Session, December 21, 1893 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893); U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, "Hawaiian Islands," Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations With Accompanying Testimony and Executive Documents Transmitted to Congress from January 1, 1893 to March 19, 1894, Volumes I and II (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894. Also referred to as "The Morgan Report"); U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Report No. 227, "Report from the Committee on Foreign Relations and Appendix in Relation to the Hawaiian Islands, February 26, 1894," 53rd Congress, 2nd Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894); U.S. Department of State, "Papers Relating to the Mission of James H. Blount, United States Commissioner to the Hawaiian Islands" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893).
28. Close to 5:00 P.M. on January 16, 1893, 162 U.S. naval forces with 80 rounds of ammunition each, one Gatling gun and one 37-millimeter revolving gun, landed at the foot of Nu'uanu Avenue and marched up Fort Street to Merchant Street. They were accompanied by a hospital corps with stretchers and medical supplies. Some troops were deployed to guard the U.S. consulate and some were sent to the U.S. legation. The main body of three companies ultimately took up quarters at Arion Hall near the government building and the palace. William De Witt Alexander, *History of the Later Years of the Hawaiian monarchy and the Revolution of 1893* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette Co., 1896).

    In a report to Congress on December 11, 1893 President Cleveland observed that:

    > There is as little basis for the pretense that such forces were landed for the security of American life and property. If so, they would have been stationed in the vicinity of such property and so as to protect it, instead of at a distance and so as to command the Hawaiian Government building and palace. Admiral Skerrett, the officer in command of our naval force on the Pacific station, has frankly stated that in his opinion the location of the troops was inadvisable if they were landed for protection of American citizens whose residences and places of business, as well as the legation and consulate, were in a distant part of the city, but the location selected was a wise one if the forces were landed for the purpose of supporting the provisional government. (Grover Cleveland, "Message of the President," December 18, 1893, in 53rd Congress 2nd Session, House of Representatives, Report 243, p. 7)

29. Queen Lili'uokalani, *Hawaii's Story By Hawaii's Queen* (Boston: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, Co., 1898; reprint, Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1977), pp. 387–388.
30. U.S. House of Representatives, 53rd Congress, 2nd Session, December 21, 1893, pp. 13–14.
31. Alexander 1896; Lili'uokalani 1898.
32. Ibid.
33. Hawai'i State Archives, 1895 Insurrection File; Albertine Loomis, *For Whom Are the Stars?* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press and Friends of the Library of Hawai'i, 1976).
34. Lili'uokalani, 1898.
35. Robert M.C. Littler, *The Governance of Hawaii: A Study in Territorial Administration* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1929).
36. U.S. Congress. 56th Congress, 1st Session 1899–1900. "Congressional Debates on Hawaii Organic Act, Together With Debates and Congressional Action on Other Matters Concerning the Hawaiian Islands." Washington, D.C. (photostat reproduction from the Congressional Record, v. 33, pts. 1–8), 1899–1900.
37. Lawrence Fuchs, *Hawaii Pono: A Social History* (San Diego, Calif.: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961); Noel Kent, *Hawaii, Islands Under the Influence* (New York: Monthly Review

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

Press, 1983); Andrew Lind, *An Island Community: Ecological Succession in Hawaii* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1938; reprint, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

38. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on the Territories, Report No. 839, 66th Congress 2nd Session. Seen in Hawai'i State Archives, Delegate Kalanianaole File on Rehabilitation.
39. Act of June 20, 1938 (52 Stat. 781 et seq.).
40. Roger J. Bell, *Last Among Equals: Hawaiian Statehood and American Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1984).
41. Rob Williams, esq., working paper for "Status and Entitlements of Hawaiian Natives" study, funded by the Ford Foundation, to the Native Hawaiian Advisory Council, 1992–1993; Hawaiian Sovereignty Advisory Council Report To The Legislature, January 1992; Presentation of Russell Barsh, esq., to the Hawaiian Sovereignty Advisory Commission, November 5–6, 1993, Hawai'i State Tower.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. "An Act to provide for the admission of the State of Hawai'i into the Union," approved March 18, 1959 (Pub.L. 86–3, 73 Stat. 4)
45. Hawaiian Sovereignty Advisory Council Report To The Legislature, January 1992.
46. Department of Interior and Department of Justice, "From Mauka to Makai: The River of Justice Must Flow Freely, Report on the Reconciliation Process Between the Federal Government and Native Hawaiians," Washington, D.C., October 23, 2000, pp. 56–57.
47. Apology Resolution, Public Law 103–150.
48. *Honolulu Advertiser*, February 22, 1994, pp. A-1 and A-4.
49. Ka Lahui Hawai'i, claiming to represent 20,000 members, has held four constitutional conventions to establish their own national legislature, governor, and council of elders. As strong advocates for nation-within-nation status, Ka Lahui Hawai'i seeks recognition from the U.S. Congress and the State of Hawai'i as the nation of Hawaiians to exist within the nation of the United States of America. In the 1993 legislative session they introduced a bill calling for the transfer to their nation of all of the Hawaiian national lands controlled by the state government. The State Hawaiian Homes Association claims to represent 30,000 Hawaiians who are settled on Hawaiian Homelands. They seek immediate and direct control over the homestead lands they live on and use, seeking home rule over the Hawaiian Homelands. The statewide Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs has traditionally represented the more conservative sector of the Native Hawaiian community. The clubs support Native Hawaiian sovereignty. There are several organizations that seek to totally decolonize Hawai'i. Smaller in number than the advocates of nation-within-nation status, they nevertheless comprise a very eloquent, determined, and militant sector of the community. Included among the organizations seeking total independence from the United States are the Institute for the Advancement of Hawaiian Affairs, the Nation State of Hawai'i, Ka Pakaukau, the Sovereign Kingdom of Hawai'i, the Hawaiian Patriotic League, and the Lawful Kingdom of Hawai'i.
50. Pūku'i, 1983, no. 113, p. 15. *Aloha mai no, aloha aku; o ka huhu ka mea e ola 'ole at.* When love is given, love should be returned; anger is the thing that gives no life.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:48:42.

7 Situating Asian Americans in the Political Discourse on Affirmative Action

Michael Omi and Dana Takagi

The hegemonic "black/white" paradigm of race relations has fundamentally shaped how we think about, engage, and politically mobilize around racial issues. Historical narratives of racialized minorities in the United States are cast in the shadows of the black/white encounter. Contemporary conflicts between a number of different racial/ethnic groups are understood in relationship to this bipolar model, which the media then utilize as a master frame to present such conflicts. During the Los Angeles "riots" of 1992, for example, various racial subjects were identified (for example, Koreans, Guatemalans), but the popular interpretation of the civil disorder was fundamentally shaped by the hegemonic paradigm.

This prevailing bipolar model of race significantly obscures the complex patterns of race over time. Tomás Almaguer, in his study of race in nineteenth-century California, breaks from the dominant mode of biracial theorizing by illustrating how Native Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, and Japanese are racialized and positioned in relation to one another by the dominant Anglo elite.[1] His discussion draws attention to how the Asian American historical experience is essential to a full comprehension of racial dynamics in the West.

We want to suggest that a more complex and nuanced understanding of the affirmative action debate needs to be attentive to how distinct political positions socially construct and represent Asian Americans. Our intent is to locate Asian Americans within the political discourse on affirmative action, a move that would serve to deepen a critical analysis of the black/white paradigm, and, in doing so, reveal some intriguing aspects about racial politics in the current period.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

Back to top.

Gary Y. Okihiro, in a collection of essays on Asian American history and culture, asks: "Is yellow black or white?"[2] His discussion of this question highlights how Asian Americans have historically been located somewhere between black and white. Depending on the period in question, Asian Americans have been seen as racially "black"[3] or as a group "outwhiting the whites."[4]

The question of how to situate Asian Americans on a spectrum—close to African Americans at one end or closer to whites on the other—helps to critically define the distinctive political positions on affirmative action. Both the Right and the Left of the political spectrum implicate, in varying degrees, Asian Americans in the ongoing debate. Unlike "black" and "white" as racial categories, there is a greater fluidity to "Asian American" that can be manipulated in particular ways to suit particular positions. It may not matter whether specific claims about Asian Americans are empirically correct or not. In fact, much of what both the Left and the Right claim about Asian Americans is contestable. Thus, the "truth" of the claims is immaterial. What matters are the kinds of rhetorical constructions, and their emotional impacts, that the Right and the Left deploy.

RIGHT POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND ASIAN AMERICAN VICTIMS

In January 1996, Governor Pete Wilson upheld his support for the July 1995 decision by the University of California (UC) Regents to eliminate race as a consideration for admissions, hiring, and contracting. It was the "right decision," he argued, one premised on the principles of equal opportunity: "Racial preferences are by definition racial discrimination. They were wrong 30 years ago when they discriminated against African-Americans. And they're wrong today, when they discriminate against *Asian* or Caucasian Americans" (emphasis ours).[5] Wilson's strategic assignment of Asian Americans to the white side of the battle lines is noteworthy. The UC Regents' questioning of affirmative action was precipitated by a complaint lodged by Jerry and Ellen Cook, a white San Diego couple who began examining statistical information on the five medical schools in the UC system when their son was denied admission to the UC San Diego Medical School. The Cooks claimed that at UC Davis, for example, Chicanos were offered admission at five times the rate of whites and *nineteen times* the rate of Japanese Americans.[6] The signal was clear. "Preferential policies" victimized Asian Americans as much as, perhaps more than, whites.

Deploying this particular social construction serves an important political purpose. By raising the issue of Asian American victimization, the Right could deflect the charge levied against them by their critics that their opposition to affirmative action represents merely a thinly veiled attempt to preserve white skin privilege. At work here is a specific *rearticulation* of the issue of affirmative action.[7]

This rearticulation has several interesting effects that creatively engage the existing field of racial meanings. One effect, as we suggested above, is to disrupt the understanding of the racial issue as an expression of white/nonwhite difference and conflict. The Right evokes Asian Americans to demonstrate that another nonwhite, racialized minority is being hurt by such policies. This representation

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

of Asian Americans as disadvantaged by affirmative action plays into popular constructions of Asian Americans as "friends" of whites and "foes" of African Americans. The specter of black/Asian American conflict, evident in numerous cinematic portrayals of ghetto life,[8] is elevated to a national level of policy debate.

The historical experience of Asian Americans becomes a particularly convenient narrative to exploit. Asian Americans are presented as a group that has been subject to extreme forms of racial discrimination in the past (including immigration exclusion, the denial of naturalization rights, and, in the case of Japanese Americans, incarceration). Despite these obstacles, they have become a "model minority," not by means of state assistance, but through their own hard work and efforts. This narrative questions the efficacy of state intervention to change patterns of racial inequality, and feeds into the reductionist accounts that claim that a group's "culture" is the key to their mobility and success.[9]

The Right also takes pains to note that Asian Americans are not active discriminators in the present. There is, so it seems, no "yellow skin privilege." Given the weight of the past and their location in the present, it is truly unfair, the Right argues, that Asian Americans must now confront a new and pernicious form of discrimination under the guise of equality. Dinesh D'Souza makes this clear:

> One can hardly maintain that preferential policies strictly serve the goals of social justice. Take the case of Asian Americans: Members of this minority group have experienced both *de facto* and *de jure* discrimination, and they have played no part in any of the historical crimes that affirmative action was designed to remedy. In fairness, why should the burden of preferential policies be placed on historically innocent parties?[10]

In June 1995, Governor Wilson stated that "it is not just the 'angry white males' who think the time has come for change." He went on to describe his conversation with a Vietnamese senior at prestigious Lowell High School in San Francisco. The young woman was "deeply troubled" that Vietnamese students were admitted with lower scores than Chinese students.[11] Many of the Right's principal themes are condensed in this example. The "troubled" Vietnamese student bears more than a passing resemblance to that African American student evoked by numerous conservative political commentators, the student whose self-esteem and sense of worth is shaken by the belief that she or he is an affirmative action case. The example also reveals that the Right's construction of Asian Americans as the victims of affirmative action does not necessarily rely on treating the group as undifferentiated and monolithic. The Right's argument is nuanced and attentive to the diversity among Asian Americans and the different political claims that can potentially surface.

The Right's representation of Asian Americans with respect to affirmative action is full of irony. We read it as the strategic use of race to deflect the issue of race. The Right has rearticulated the racial meanings embedded in the affirmative action debates by representing Asian Americans as an "innocent" group wronged by racial preferences. Race has been rendered more complex, but in so doing, attention has been distracted from the hegemonic position of whites

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

on the playing field. Such an ideological sleight of hand allows racial privilege to be sidelined while an agenda based on individual merit, social justice, and the creation of a "colorblind" society is promoted.

LEFT POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND ASIAN AMERICAN INVISIBILITY

On 18 January 1996, student advocates for affirmative action staged a dramatic and emotional protest inside the UC Board of Regents meeting in San Francisco. During a brief public comment session on SP-1 and SP-2, approximately fifty students applied whiteface and pasted stickers reading "Reclaim Our Education" over their mouths.[12] Their "white" faces, they explained, represented the increasing whiteness of the University of California, and the corresponding lack of racial diversity that would result when the resolutions took effect. The mouth stickers were worn to underscore the students' lack of voice in UC policy. The visual symbols deployed by the students were a stunning display of what many progressives believe is the future of UC without affirmative action.[13]

Outside the meeting, some four hundred students from across the nine-campus system supported the (mostly but not always) silent protesters inside with a loud and enthusiastic rally. The student protesters were galvanized by chants of "no University without diversity" and "UC diversity, we see hypocrisy." Somewhat predictably, the gaggle of TV news cameras and reporters organized their feature stories and news coverage by juxtaposing images of painted faces and silent protest inside the meeting with those of noisy demonstrators outside the meeting. The imagery and representations of the January meeting, resonant with past debate and demonstrations about affirmative action at UC, prompt us to think about how Asian Americans are positioned in pro–affirmative action and Left discourses on racial preferences.

If Asian Americans assume the status of newfound victims of discrimination in Right narratives, they occupy a kind of racial pariah position in Left and progressive accounts of affirmative action. Left discursive practices have been organized in two ways, both problematic. In the first, Asian Americans are simply left out of the affirmative action debate. Part of this is attributable to the hegemonic, bipolar model of race relations we emphasized earlier. Many pro–affirmative action statements from major organizations, for instance, focus entirely on black/white inequalities, with nary a whisper about Asian Americans. Their absence from the debate can also be accounted for in the argument that historically Asian Americans have not been the beneficiaries of racial preferences. Hence, the debate about SP-1 and SP-2 does not concern Asian Americans per se. Perhaps another explanation for the deletion of Asian Americans from Left discourses concerns the numerical size of the Asian American population. At three percent of the national population in 1990, Asians are arguably a tiny minority—and hence expendable in the "big" picture of race relations. Yet another explanation might be that many progressives worry that Asian Americans, because they see themselves benefiting from the end of affirmative action, are likely to oppose racial preferences. Hence, the less said about Asian Americans, the better.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

A second discursive practice, and one that we believe is more prevalent than the first, includes Asian Americans as relatively unproblematic partners in a wider coalition politics. The chant "no University without diversity" is suggestive of a broad phalanx of diverse constituencies, including Asian Americans. Here, while we are sympathetic to the politics of a "united front" of opposition to SP-1 and SP-2, we remain concerned that such a politics presumes that Asian American interests are similar enough to other interests to make the coalition claims viable and rhetorically persuasive. In our view, the assumption that Asian Americans share a similar social location as, for example, African Americans in the affirmative action debate, is wrong. Rather, it is precisely the difference between these groups that has played an important part in the mobilization of the Right. While the Right has capitalized on Asian American achievement in higher education, the Left has weakly insisted on the "shared interests" model of politics.

Interrogating the concept of "shared interests" among people of color raises a host of questions, including that of the nature of racism in the United States. We tend to think of racism as hostility directed against those of a different skin color believed to be "inferior"—in terms of class and status, in intellectual ability, or in cultural orientation. This hostility is coupled with structural forms of discrimination—in the job market, in politics, in residential patterns—and negative cultural representations. Clearly African Americans are subject to this type of racism.

Asian Americans, however, are subject to a different form of racism. They are often the objects of *resentment* by other groups who perceive that they do "too well," that they secure wealth and other material resources and social advantages unfairly. This resentment has resulted historically in political disenfranchisement and exclusionary laws in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, and in "English-only" initiatives and more stringent curbs on immigration and foreign capital investment today.

The status of Asian Americans in higher education and projections regarding their increased growth renders the "shared interest" model of coalition politics quite problematic. In the midst of debate about UC admissions policy in July 1995, the University's Office of the President projected that Asian Americans would be the only nonwhite group to benefit from passage of SP-1 and SP-2. The estimate that Asian enrollment would increase by twenty percent, while other racial minority enrollments would decline, presented an interesting dilemma for Left and pro–affirmative action activists. While some groups would support racial preferences on the grounds of self-interest in admissions, Asian Americans would presumably support preferences on the basis of altruistic sentiments about the needs of, and rights owed to, other racial minorities.

We wish to emphasize our agreement with the students in whiteface that declining diversity is an inevitable consequence of SP-1 and SP-2. But we also wish to open up a nagging question about the racial narrative conveyed by the dramatic student protest: will the University become primarily *white*? How will the discursive politics about preferences shift and change if, as the projections suggest, the University becomes increasingly *Asian American*?

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

BLACK, WHITE, OR "OTHER"?

Both the Right and the Left are vying for custody of the political "interests" of Asian Americans. For the Right, the Asian American "model minority" figures as the Allan Bakke replacement for the 1990s assault on affirmative action. On the other hand, Left and progressive forces hope that Asian Americans will broaden the political coalition of pro–affirmative action and pro-diversity forces and thereby expand the unified front of opposition to the Right. One side pits Asian Americans against whites, the other pits Asian Americans against racial minorities. From there, the discussion descends into quibbles over whether Asian Americans are more like African Americans or, alternatively, more like whites in the politics of race in the United States. In our view, neither the Left nor the Right has custodial rights to the experiences of Asian Americans. Attempts on both sides to meld Asian America into a vision of "whiteness" or "racial diversity" will always be problematic given the unique racial formation of Asian Americans.

Asian American educational achievement, for example, threatens to subvert both Right and Left versions of preferential policies. Members of the Right, including Regent Ward Connerly and Governor Pete Wilson, have argued for the substitution of class preferences for race in UC admissions. Parts of the Left as well have hinged the viability of affirmative action on class, with the assumption that underrepresented racial minorities would continue to be given preference through class variables. But the use of class preferences will present a clear *racial* advantage for Asian American applicants to all UC campuses. If socioeconomic status is used as an admissions criterion instead of race, UC officials predict that Asian American enrollment will *increase* by fifteen to twenty-five percent while African American enrollment will drop forty to fifty percent, Latino enrollment will fall five to fifteen percent, and white enrollment will stay about the same.[14]

The class-based initiatives presented above serve as one example of the tendency to delete race from both sides of the rhetorical divide about affirmative action. For the Right, opposition to affirmative action is premised on ideas of individual merit and the advancement of a colorblind society, and any hints of "color consciousness" are suspiciously viewed as forms of racial discrimination. For part of the Left, there is a tendency to keep the Pandora's box of race closed to avoid the messy racial issues that threaten to emerge from it. The UC faculty challenge to the Regents' decision, for example, emphasizes threats to faculty governance and the intrusion of partisan politics into the academy, rather than the desirability of racial preferences.

What is missing from the conversations about affirmative action—on the Left *and* the Right—is an explicit discussion of the nature of race and racism in the United States today. Both the Right and Left have wrestled with how to situate Asian Americans in affirmative action debates and how to frame particular strategic representations of them. Their attempts reveal the complexity of race in the current period when the bipolar model of race relations has revealed an increasing inability to comprehend the patterns of conflict and accommodation that now occur between, and among, many different racialized groups. Race in

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

the United States can no longer, if it ever could, be adequately understood by narrowly assessing the relative situations of whites and blacks.

We need a new framework that is attentive to a complex understanding of racial location and interest, one that does not essentialize race but interrogates how groups are constructed and represented, one that understands that social policies—regarding immigration, welfare, crime, as well as affirmative action—have a differential impact on different groups and the way they are defined. This framework will be crucial to an understanding of politics in a period when the traditional discourse of civil rights is being rearticulated by the Right in ways that preserve the structure of racial privilege. A post–civil rights perspective will have to grapple with the increased visibility of Asian Americans and how they are implicated in a range of racial issues. Asian Americans can no longer be cast in the shadows of black/white relations. Yet observers continue to do just that. Andrew Hacker, for example, needs to talk extensively about Asian Americans in order to examine race-based admissions policies in higher education.[15] Unfortunately his analysis does not lead him to consider that the United States, in this area as well as in many others, may be more than "two nations," black and white.

Asian Americans as a group are, we think, a crucial barometer of the contemporary racial climate. It will indeed be interesting to see how the issue of affirmative action is recast by both the Right and the Left if, as a consequence of SP-1 and SP-2, the student bodies of the two UC flagship campuses—Berkeley and Los Angeles—become overwhelmingly Asian.

NOTES

1. Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley, 1994).
2. Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture* (Seattle, 1994), chap. 2.
3. Dan Cauldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California," *Southern California Historical Quarterly* 1 (June 1971).
4. "Success Story: Outwhiting the Whites," *Newsweek*, 21 June 1971.
5. Pete Wilson, "Why Racial Preferences Must End," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 January 1996, A21.
6. Richard Bernstein, "Moves Under Way in California to Overturn Higher Education's Affirmative Action Policy," *New York Times*, 25 January 1995, B8.
7. By rearticulation we mean "the process of redefinition of political interests and identities through a process of recombination of familiar ideas and values in hitherto unrecognized ways." Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2d ed. (New York, 1994), 163 n. 8.
8. A particularly explosive example is the Allen Hughes and Albert Hughes film *Menace II Society* (1993).
9. This position is best articulated by Thomas Sowell in his numerous publications. For the most current example, see his *Race and Culture: A World View* (New York, 1994).
10. Dinesh D'Souza, "The Failure of the 'Cruel Compassion,'" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 15 September 1995, Bl.
11. Yumi Wilson, "Wilson Explains His Affirmative Action Plans," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 June 1995, A16.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

12. SP-1 and SP-2 are the two UC Regents resolutions passed on 20 July 1995 that ban the use of race and gender preferences in, respectively, admissions and employment practices at the University of California.
13. Indeed, this imagery of the meeting was carried by all the major newspapers the following day—the *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*—and depicted in television reports as well.
14. "Affirmative-Action Aftermath," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 4 August 1995, A18.
15. Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York, 1992), chap. 8, esp. 9–10. Hacker justifies his bipolar framework by suggesting that over time Asian Americans may be absorbed into a new expansive definition of what "white" is.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:12:04.

Public Health and the Mapping of Chinatown

Nayan Shah

Nineteenth-century San Francisco journalists, politicians, and health officials feared an impending epidemic catastrophe festering in the tenements of what was then labeled as Chinatown. In the press coverage of public health inspections, newspaper reporters described the Chinatown labyrinth as hundreds of underground passageways connecting the filthy "cellars" and cramped "garrets" where Chinese men lived. In their salacious portrayals, journalists related how dozens of Chinese men slept on narrow wooden shelves squeezed into claustrophobic rooms, "which was considered close quarters for a single white man." Opium fumes, tobacco smoke, and putrefying waste pervaded the atmosphere in these windowless and unventilated rooms, and "each cellar [was] ankle-deep with loathsome slush, with ceilings dripping with percolations of other nastiness above, [and] with walls slimy with the clamminess of Asiatic diseases."[1]

Periodic public health investigations—both informal midnight journeys and official fact-finding missions—fed the alarm about the danger Chinese men and women posed to white Americans' health. Seizing upon the suspected causes of contamination, health officials emphasized the "overcrowded" tenements, "unventilated underground habitations," and stale "nauseating" air.[2] These investigations produced a "knowledge" of Chinese women and men's seemingly unhygienic habits, the unsanitary conditions in which they lived, and the dangerous diseases they carried. The widespread publicity of the horrors of percolating waste, teeming bodies, and a polluted atmosphere in Chinese habitations underscored the vile and infectious menace of Chinatown spaces. Almost at once the threat of illness became the legitimate grounds for the city government's intervention and shaped health policy toward Chinatown and Chinese residents.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

Back to top.

How did these revolting images become the incontestable truth about Chinese residents of San Francisco? How did the descriptions offered by health officers and journalists achieve the stature of scientific knowledge and pervasiveness of common sense? In order to understand how quickly public-health knowledge came to identify a place and its inhabitants as dangerous, it is necessary to examine the process by which description became policy through scientific knowledge. The category of Chinese race and place created the field of study for investigations; strategies of scientific knowing generated the rich descriptive data that were then interpreted by medical reasoning. This formation of scientific knowledge shaped regulatory policy that in turn spurred further investigations, and the process of knowledge creation intensified.

The investigations targeted Chinatown, identifying its location and its boundaries and surveying the spaces within it. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "Chinatown" ghettos proliferated in both cities and small towns throughout North America. The generic naming of a Chinatown in some locations referred to a handful of buildings and in others to a set of streets. Although the physical boundaries of these "Chinatowns" constantly shifted, the name signaled a potent racial designation of Chinese immigrant inhabitation. The cartography of Chinatown that was developed in government investigations, newspaper reports, and travelogues both established "knowledge" of the Chinese race and aided in the making and remaking of Chinatown. The idea of Chinatown as a self-contained and alien society in turn justified "recurring rounds" of policing, investigation, and statistical surveys that "scientifically" corroborated the racial classification.[3]

The creation of "knowledge" of Chinatown relied upon three key spatial elements: dens, density, and the labyrinth. The enclosed and inhuman spaces of dens were where the Chinese lived. High density was the condition in which they lived. And the labyrinth was the unnavigable maze that characterized both the subterranean passageways within the buildings and the streets and alleys aboveground. These spatial elements established the basic contours of the representation of Chinatown and provided the canvas for detailed renderings of Chinese living styles, conditions, and behaviors. The investigations and the accompanying publicity not only established the Chinatown spatial elements of dens, density, and the labyrinth but also generated the stereotyped imagery that would be used more intensively over the decades and that illuminates how racial categories in the United States were produced in the late nineteenth century and persisted in the twentieth century.

Five government-sponsored investigations were both emblematic and politically pivotal in defining the Chinatown menace: the 1854 inquiry by the San Francisco Common Council (the precursor to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors) that reestablished the municipal Board of Health; the investigation that resulted in the 1869 report of the San Francisco health officer C. M. Bates; the 1871 investigation by Dr. Thomas Logan, the secretary of the California State Board of Health; the 1880 inspection by the Board of Health that declared Chinatown a "nuisance"; and the 1885 survey of Chinatown by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Although these expeditions were not always led by physicians, medical expertise shaped their

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

findings and implicitly supported the "truth" they exposed. From 1854 to 1885, reports of every official investigation recycled these spatial metaphors and both consistently and uncritically channeled the imagery of "dense" and "enclosed" living conditions into the interpretive framework of epidemic danger for white San Francisco residents.

Over the span of forty years, four strategies of scientific knowing developed that transformed the knowledge of Chinatown. These strategies were scientific observation, standards of normalcy and deviance, statistics, and mapping. Scientific observation emphasized firsthand descriptions. These descriptions were offered in a realist style, evoking a travel narrative rich in visceral sensory details. The strategy of creating standards of normalcy and deviance was especially critical to evaluating density in residential space. This primarily involved the calculation of room dimensions in relation to the number of inhabitants. Against the yardstick of the middle-class white ideal, Chinese residential practices were, therefore, designated as deviant and a sign of inhumanity. The strategy of using statistics stipulated the frequency of health violations and census enumeration of the inhabitants. The enumeration demonstrated both the ordinariness and the extensiveness of the dangerous conditions in Chinatown. Finally, through the regularity and thoroughness of sanitary surveillance, the public health authorities developed a map that identified every business and residence in Chinatown.[4] It was the combined weight of all four strategies that enhanced the intensity of scientific knowledge formation and substantiated claims to objective truth.

By 1880, the understanding of Chinatown as the site of filth, disease, and inhuman habitation had achieved a pervasiveness in public discourse as both scientific truth and common sense. Political discourse, travel writing, journalism, and public health reports all shared these strategies of scientific knowledge and interpretation. Public health alone did not invent this knowledge of Chinatown but rather organized it. The persuasive power of public health knowledge was its capacity to identify, intensify, and relentlessly classify popular representations into a limited array of mutually sustaining racial and medical meanings. The shared knowledge of Chinatown produced explanations that tenaciously connected the Chinese race to place, behavior, and cultural differences and framed the endurance of the Chinatown ghetto as a living repository of the strange, peculiar, and unassimilable in San Francisco.[5]

INVESTIGATING CHINESE SETTLEMENT

Medical interest and municipal investigation of Chinese settlement began in 1854, when it was first possible to see and describe a San Francisco street as being predominantly "Chinese." The Chinese population had grown rapidly from a handful in 1848 to more than 2,000 Chinese residents six years later. The first substantial number of Chinese immigrants had entered the port of San Francisco in 1849. Chinese men, mostly from the southeastern province of Guangdong, emigrated in large numbers to California in the early 1850s. In California overall, the Chinese population leaped from 450 in 1850 to 20,026 in 1852. The Cantonese men called their destination *Gamsaan*, or Gold Mountain. Lured by the 1848 gold

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

strike in the Sierra, most Chinese men traveled to the hinterlands to seek their fortunes. Even so, Chinese men accounted for 12 percent of San Francisco's total population, and a visible cluster of Chinese businesses emerged on Sacramento Street, between Kearny Street and Dupont Street. Chinese residents and travelers themselves recognized the cluster of their compatriots' businesses and in time called Sacramento Street *Tongyan gaai*, or "Street of the Chinese."[6]

In August 1854 a local physician, Dr. William Rabe, was perturbed by the "filthy" conditions on Sacramento Street and demanded that the Common Council immediately investigate the Chinese settlement in the city. The unhealthy living conditions of Chinese residents aggravated council members' concerns about Chinese immigration.[7] The council's official investigation of the nascent Chinese district became the model for the next half century's expeditions. These expeditions presumed first that discrete racial territories existed, and then that their features could be known through direct observation and expert analysis. In 1854, city council officials enlisted a police officer to conduct a tour and ferret out the hidden dangers of the settlement. The party was accompanied by Dr. Rabe, who provided medical expertise to diagnose the territory's problems.[8]

The political atmosphere around the 1854 investigation was charged, however, with the tensions of escalating anti-Chinese politics and the specter of epidemic disease. The *Daily Alta California*, an avowed opponent of Chinese immigration and the leading daily in the city, claimed that the Chinese were "notoriously filthy," an assertion that could be validated by "taking a walk through any of the Chinese quarters of the City."[9] News of a cholera epidemic heightened worries about Chinese filth. The newspaper issued frequent reports of a national cholera epidemic, detailing weekly death tolls in major Eastern cities and the rapid spread of cholera westward.[10] This coverage revisited the history of nineteenth-century cholera epidemics; the October 1850 outbreak was responsible for forty deaths in San Francisco.

The *Daily Alta* editors warned their readers that despite overall improvements in sanitation, cholera could erupt in "filthy localities like the Chinese quarters" because "cholera delights in filth, in decaying garbage, and stagnant water, and dirty clothing and filthy bodies: particularly when all of these are united in crowded localities." The editors employed popularized medical knowledge about the causes of cholera—waste, contaminated water, and filth—and combined it with an abhorrence of "crowded" and impoverished localities and bodies. The wave of cholera epidemics in Europe and in the United States since 1832 had generated intense medical and popular debate about the causes and spread of the disease. Although there was recognition that social status offered no immunity to the disease, there was a widespread moral and medical belief that the living conditions of society's poor and marginal were responsible for the spread of cholera. The *Daily Alta* had characterized the spaces inhabited by the Chinese as "dirty, filthy dens" where "sickly" Chinese were "piled together like pigs in a pen." The editors called upon municipal authorities to enforce sanitary regulations to eliminate these "dens" and expel the Chinese population from the city.[11]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

These images of filth, density, and sickliness reappeared in the Common Council's investigation. The report identified the most intense dangers as being in the boardinghouses owned by the so-called Chinese Companies and depicted them as the "filthiest places that could be imagined." In some of these dormitories "hundreds of Chinamen are crowded together . . . and the stench which pervade [s] the air is insupportable." The crowding and filth generated rampant disease and resulted in high illness rates that affected 10 to 15 percent of the occupants of each house on average. Physicians and middle-class commentators in the period perceived the unsanitary living conditions as both evidence of moral turpitude and an incubator of fatal epidemics. The filth and density of the homes of the poor and working classes enfeebled the occupants, making them unusually susceptible to common illnesses and even more vulnerable to epidemics. The investigating committee concluded that the Chinese settlement posed a health menace to the rest of the city's inhabitants; for example, the "excessive" number of Chinese was "dangerous to the health of the inhabitants owing to the crowded state of the houses of Chinamen, the sickness which they introduce and the extreme and habitual filthy condition of their persons and their habitations."[12]

The Chinese were characterized repeatedly in terms of "excess"—of their number, of their living densities, of the diseases they spawned, and of the waste they produced. The references to excess and extremes stood in menacing contrast to the presumed norms of the white middle class. The danger of excess lay in its perceived capacity to expand across class and racial differences and spatial boundaries, carrying lethal contagion. The investigators feared not only that cholera would "make short work of the Chinese in their quarters" but also that it would strike "our own citizens." The differentiation between Chinese "aliens" and the municipal "citizens" enabled the committee to entertain the suggestion of taking "extraordinary measures" to suppress the epidemic by expelling the Chinese and thereby "removing from our midst the germs of pestilence." In their rhetoric, the committee members shifted from attributing the health threat to collective Chinese *behavior* to denouncing the Chinese as the very *embodiment* of disease. Their substitution revealed how effortlessly the classification of racial difference could shift from social to biological attributes. Despite the interest in radical removal, the committee endorsed a plan to revive the Board of Health, implement health regulations, and appoint a public health officer to enforce them. Although the committee failed to remove the Chinese population, whom they regarded as disease carriers, they demanded that the Chinese Companies make provisions to take "their sick countrymen outside the city limits."[13]

Early in the history of Chinese settlement, Chinese merchants took the lead in establishing associations, known in Chinese as *huiguan* (literally, meeting halls), which translated into English as "company." The immigrants from each of the districts of Guangdong province spoke different dialects of Cantonese and identified strongly with places of origin. The district *huiguan* served as a mutual-aid umbrella group that comprised various subgroups organized around village origins and surnames. These associations were run by elected

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

officers, usually merchants, and they provided their members with accommodations, work and business opportunities, and when necessary, health care and burial assistance. Although relations between the district *huiguan* were often strained, these *huiguan* banded together to respond to local and national political, immigration, and legal challenges. In the 1870s, the coordinating council of six *huiguan*—the Zhonghua (Chinese) Huiguan—adopted a formal English name, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA), and was commonly known as the "Six Companies."[14]

In 1854 leaders of several district *huiguan*, who referred to themselves as "respectable Chinese residents," convened the day before the Common Council hearings to respond to the report's recommendations. Supporting the public health concerns about the deleterious relationship between filth, crowding, and disease, the Chinese merchants developed a series of resolutions intended to "remove the causes of complaints which have been made recently against the Chinese." These resolutions included assurances that boardinghouses would be "cleaned and renovated" and "excess boarders" immediately removed, that "all Chinamen present will take immediate steps to have their premises cleaned," and that a hospital would be built on the outskirts of the city. Seeking to develop moral distinctions within the Chinese population, these Chinese merchants invited the intervention of inspectors to "force" noncompliant Chinese to abate "nuisances." They were eager to claim that the merchants represented at the meeting were law-abiding and responsive to the concerns of the city government. The business elite represented at the meeting served to further establish its "respectable" status by differentiating its members from those merchants engaged in illicit business. They requested that the police suppress Chinese brothels and gambling houses, "which the meeting considers to be a great grievance to the Chinese residents." In every regard, the merchants who petitioned the city council sought to ensure that the "innocent shall not suffer with the guilty."[15]

The "respectable merchants" retreated from a class condemnation of the Chinese laborers living in boardinghouses. Instead they denounced the brothel keepers and gambling-den owners. They conflated the operation of illicit businesses with sanitary negligence. Since the respectable merchants operated the boardinghouses, they were eager to prove compliance with city regulations and their good intentions. In the mid-nineteenth century, service delivery in the city was uneven and garbage collection and even police protection were transacted privately by businesspeople and residence owners. Merchants complained that white police officers collected weekly payments from merchants on Sacramento and Dupont Streets to "clean their respective quarters" and provide protection, but these same merchants rarely received proper trash removal or sanitary services. They felt helpless to redress the police extortion and fraud in light of the absence of regular city services.

The Chinese merchants' pledge to build a "suitable" hospital for Chinese immigrants outside city limits raised questions about the civic ambivalence toward providing services to the Chinese and especially about the unwillingness to include Chinese residents in the body politic. The city council's unusual

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

requirement that they build outside city limits expressed the fear that "sick Chinese" would radiate contagion and the belief that they must be removed beyond city boundaries. City council members further questioned the effectiveness of Chinese medical treatment and hospital care and in the end refused any plans for a Chinese hospital. These suspicions belied the unwillingness of city and state officials to take any responsibility for providing health care and for opening the public hospitals to Chinese patients. The *Daily Alta* editor argued that the state of California was responsible for ill Chinese immigrants. In 1852 the state legislature had passed a tax on passengers arriving at the port of San Francisco, in order to pay the costs of the State Marine Hospital in San Francisco and public hospitals in Sacramento and Stockton. Although Chinese immigrants contributed substantial tax receipts, these immigrants were not entitled to medical care and treatment in public facilities.[16]

The cholera panic quickly subsided in September 1854, and in its wake emerged a new city health authority in the revived Board of Health and a new perception of space, race, and contagion. The *Daily Alta* disingenuously criticized the "unnecessary alarm among the nervous portion of our citizens." Without acknowledging the newspaper's own responsibility in fanning the hysteria with reports of "authenticated [Chinese] cases" of cholera the week before, the *Daily Alta* editor admonished those who would rely upon "rumors."[17] The hysteria and rumors created fears based on a new articulation of space and race. Chinatown had become a singular and separate place that henceforth could be targeted in official inspections and popular commentary.

From a single block on Sacramento Street in 1854, the territory described as Chinatown expanded by 1885 to a fifteen-square-block region bounded by Kearny, Broadway, Sacramento, and Powell Streets. The growth to the west and north was shaped by the hilly topography, exponential population growth, and the rapid articulation of other zones of the city. The Chinese businesses and residences spread rapidly west up the hill to Powell Street and north to the relatively flat streets as far as Broadway. The sharp ridges on California Street limited the expansion south. Although in the 1850s the businesses and residences occupied by the Chinese immigrants were located throughout the city, by the 1870s these businesses and residences had been consolidated in the Chinatown zone. In the last third of the century, the borders of Chinatown abutted four defined zones of the city: the elite residential district of Nob Hill on the west; the main commercial and business districts on the south and east; and the Latin Quarter (which in the twentieth century became known as North Beach) to the north.

The number of Chinese residents remained stable during the decade of the 1850s, but like San Francisco's population as a whole, the number of Chinese residents climbed rapidly in the 1860s. The total population of San Francisco nearly tripled in size, to 149,473, and the Chinese population quadrupled to over 12,000 in 1870. By the 1880 census the Chinese population stood at 21,745, out of a total of 233,979. In the 1860s, Chinese commercial enterprises and labor contractors set up business in San Francisco. Workers often circulated through the city between work contracts for rural agriculture and construction. After the completion of the Central Pacific Railroad, Chinese immigrant workers migrated to San

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

Francisco, where they found work in the growing manufacturing industries and service trades.[18] The Chinese were the largest racial minority group in San Francisco at the time. By comparison, the population of blacks hovered between 1,100 and 1,800 throughout the nineteenth century.[19]

Although throughout the late nineteenth century the area called Chinatown had a variety of inhabitants, the predominance of Chinese residents meant the entire location had only one racial identity. Businesses and residences occupied by Irish, Italian, Portuguese, Mexican, Canadian, and Anglo Americans continued to thrive in so-called Chinatown, but they were of little interest to the health inspectors. These inspectors imagined the preeminent site of contagion as the spaces of Chinese residence, particularly the bunking houses of Chinese bachelor workers.

In the late 1860s and 1870s the increase in Chinese population exacerbated white fear of Chinese spaces. Health officials continued to identify Chinese behavior as the cultural cause of the perceived medical menace. In 1869 the city health officer C. M. Bates issued his report stating that Chinese "habits and manner of life are of such a character as to breed and engender disease wherever they reside." In the report, Bates warned that "unless their style of life is changed[,] . . . some disease of a malignant form may break out among them and communicate itself to our Caucasian population." Bates feared the perceived lethal consequences of Chinese living standards and styles: "As a class, their mode of life is the most abject in which it is possible for human beings to exist. The great majority of them live crowded together in rickety, filthy and dilapidated tenement houses, like so many cattle or hogs. Considering their mode of life, it is indeed wonderful that they have so far escaped every phase of disease. In passing through that portion of the city occupied by them, the most absolute squalidness and misery meets one at every turn. Vice in all its hideousness is on every hand."[20]

The "abjectness" of the Chinese "mode of life" was manifested in the comparisons to farm animals, feeding a perception not only of Chinese immigrants' inferiority but also of their inhumanity. In health reports and journalistic reports of health inspections, Chinese were likened to a wide array of animals, including rats, hogs, and cattle. The choice of animals underscored a relationship to waste and an imperviousness to crowding. As David Sibley has observed, rats and pigs especially have had a "particular place in the racist bestiary because all are associated with residues—food waste, human waste—and in the case of rats there is an association with spaces which border civilized society, particular subterranean spaces like sewers, which also channel residues and from which rats occasionally emerge to transgress the boundaries of society."[21] The insinuations that the Chinese were wallowing in cesspools and in possession of an instinct for crowded, decaying environments made the metonyms of reviled creatures all the more menacing and transgressive to the readers. Like pigs and cattle herded into pens, the living densities of Chinese "dens" demonstrated Chinese indifference to human comforts. Bates claimed that "apartments that would be deemed small for the accommodation of a single American [were] occupied by six, eight or ten Mongolians, with seeming indifference to all ordinary

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

comforts."[22] The Chinese were presumed to relish these "miserable" circumstances of poverty, squalor, and filth.

As city health officer, a position created in the 1870 reorganization of the Board of Health, Bates held responsibility for the daily enforcement of sanitary regulations. Therefore, his pronouncements carried the weight of regulative authority. He carefully cultivated the professional objectivity of a physician to buttress this authority and distanced himself from the opportunistic "politicians and demagogues" who had manipulated hostility toward the Chinese for political advantage. Bates was particularly concerned that his conclusions would be dismissed by the city's business community and elected officials because they appeared similar to those of the Anti-Coolie Association, a white labor group who opposed Chinese immigration and settlement.

The tension between the white manufacturers and white laborers was exacerbated by a devastating commercial panic and depression in the late 1860s. After the completion of the transcontinental railroad, San Francisco's population increased 30 percent in two years, but manufacturing output plummeted once trade from the East Coast made the price of consumer goods plunge. Thousands of white workingmen were unemployed, and they blamed white capitalists and the Chinese workers for their troubles. The Anti-Coolie Association formed in March 1867 and coordinated boycotts of manufacturers who employed Chinese workers. The organization engaged in selective industrial sabotage citywide and persistently harassed and assaulted Chinese men. Its rapid growth and frequently violent mobilization of anxious white tradesmen and unemployed workers alarmed San Francisco's commercial elite.[23]

The Anti-Coolie Association deftly borrowed and elaborated upon the medical menace of Chinese settlement. In 1869 the organization outlined the threat posed by Chinese immigrants to white labor, national prosperity, and the general health of American citizens. The 1868 smallpox epidemic, which had left 760 dead in its wake, served as an ominous sign of the extreme health dangers posed by Chinese immigration. The virulent strain of smallpox "baffled the skill of our medical men" and was "unknown among the Caucasian race." The Chinese allegedly bred disease as a result of the "density of their population and their peculiar mode of living." To the medical causality that Chinese living densities and habits contributed to infection, the Anti-Coolie Association added the ominous assertion that Chinese immigrants carried peculiar disease strains.[24]

This problem of the Chinese possessing potentially innate dispositions to illness was taken up by Thomas Logan, secretary of the California State Board of Health and a nationally reputed physician who was elected in 1872 as president of the American Medical Association. For the California State Board of Health, Logan had commissioned in 1871 an investigation of San Francisco's Chinatown, charging not only that Chinese habits and living conditions had vital implications for all San Francisco inhabitants but also that Chinatown's conditions could "spread dismay and desolation throughout the land." Logan was attentive to environmental conditions and behavior but feared the contagious consequences of Chinese innate racial propensities. Logan predicted that their "hereditary vices" or "engrafted peculiarities" preordained the Chinese to chronic and unusual illness. In Logan's

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

assessment, Chinese cultural behavior was not shaped by historical context but rather emerged from hereditary traits that were naturalized in their very bodies. This conflation of behavior and body as both the cultural and biological heritage of the Chinese "race" powerfully influenced the public-health knowledge of Chinatown and Chinese people.[25]

Logan's investigation not only contributed new explanations of medical causality but also advanced a key strategy of accumulating knowledge about the Chinatown "underworld." Logan popularized the eyewitness journey into Chinatown's dens and proclaimed the journey's narrative as the primary evidence of its hidden horrors. The vivid and visceral narration of the midnight journey through Chinatown became one of the standard forms of knowledge used in both medical and popular accounts to establish the truth of Chinatown as the preeminent site of vice, immorality, degradation, crime, and disease.[26] By visiting and surveying Chinatown, individual doctors, journalists, and middle-class tourists delineated the utter foreignness, exoticism, and evil of the place. The firsthand account and the narration of visual and olfactory sensations provided authoritative and seemingly transparent evidence of the true nature of the Chinese problem. The eyewitness account became indispensable to the social diagnosis and policy advanced by health officers like Bates, who had concluded that "nothing short of an ocular demonstration can convey an idea of Chinese poverty and depravity."[27] Investigators later in the century recommended a visit to Chinatown for skeptics in order to ensure that the official findings were not considered an "exaggeration" or a fictional "sketch." These investigators were confident that an excursion through the Chinatown labyrinth would produce sufficient "ocular and olfactory proofs."[28]

The question of "proof" and "evidence" shaped the procedures and itinerary of the eyewitness investigation and its narrative report. Logan's journey emphasized all the characteristic procedures and features of the investigation. Despite the confidence that visual scrutiny would provide proof, Logan and other investigators simultaneously held a keen appreciation that the "truth" of Chinatown was hidden from public view. The most revealing journeys, then, had to be conducted at night, when the "true character" of the quarter—with its gambling houses, opium dens, and brothels—revealed itself. Logan solicited the services of a police escort to navigate the serpentine and subterranean passageways—the labyrinth—and to provide physical protection from routine threats of violence. His party also included the local medical expert, Bates, who could interpret the consequences of "vice and abominations." Although the itinerary of the investigation could include the "tangled maze of narrow streets" and "dark alleys," the crucial objective was to penetrate underground and visit the labyrinth of bunking houses, opium dens, and barricaded gambling houses. Logan's itinerary ignored other Chinatown spaces—the merchants' homes, dry goods stores, temples, meeting rooms, and Chinese opera theaters included in other kinds of travelogues—since these more visible sites offered little evidence of filth, sickness, and pathology that demanded medical evaluation.[29]

The narrative of Logan's midnight journey dispensed with the posture of professional objectivity and disinterested observation. His narrative featured a

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

dramatic selection of circumstances, details, and medical explanation that passionately yielded the author's own personal and immediate sensations and reactions. Logan offered his medical colleagues and the curious public some instances of his momentary disorientation, horror, disgust, and fascination. He described his visit to the "lowest dens of degraded bestiality," where he saw opium smokers, prostitutes, and furtive gamblers. The investigators crept through "foul labyrinthine passages" that would occasionally "open into a dimly lit room," where they saw "dusky human beings lying on tiers of broad shelves . . . with a foul opium pipe, and dirty little oil lamp used for lighting the pipe." In other rooms, female prostitutes "with painted lips and rosy-tipped fingers" solicited the visitors, or male gamblers would "hurry and scuffle to conceal" their illicit games. In their inspection of large lodging houses, Logan discovered tiny rooms that had been "cut up and divided into what might be called pens."[30]

Logan's medical authority transformed sensational observations into somber appraisals of environmental conditions that necessitated immediate public health surveillance and redress. His medical scrutiny fixed on the insupportable "stench" that made his party feel "enveloped in a physical atmosphere as tainted and disgusting, from superadded stale opium smoke, as the moral one was degraded." Logan conflated the unventilated physical atmosphere with the moral degradation of opium smoking, gambling, and prostitution. Unventilated space that locked in stale smoke and produced a horrible "stench" violated "sanitary law," requiring "immediate redress." The "absolute absence of ventilation" provided the pretext for the intervention of the health officials. Influenced by the miasma theory of disease that remained popular in the 1870s, Logan regarded Chinatown, with its "foul and disgusting vapors" and unsanitary conditions, as the primary source of atmospheric pollution.[31]

Logan was assured in his ability to faithfully narrate the "real" conditions and offer authoritative diagnosis of social ills. This self-confident medical authority made it possible for him to draw freely from both literary and political sources and to repackage fictional and partisan rhetoric into irreproachable medical diagnosis. For instance, he borrowed literary allusions to heighten the drama of an opium den encounter. In subterranean dormitory "pens," Logan encountered "half naked" Chinese "inmates . . . reposing on shelves—some sleeping, others blowing out curling puffs of narcotic fumes from their broad nostrils." The immodesty, lethargy, and unabashed narcotic addiction recalled for Logan the figure of the "opium-smoking hag" in Charles Dickens's novel *Edwin Drood*, which presented a "graphic instance of civilization touching barbarism."[32] The dramatic literary scene amplified the dangers of Oriental "barbarism" in the midst of the "civilized," modern city of San Francisco, particularly with the horrifying possibility of white American men and women being discovered among the addicts. Logan worried about both the physical and moral dangers to the body and society that opium addiction posed.

Logan's ready use of literary analogy did not confound his purpose of exposing the "real" conditions of Chinatown. Logan used realist narrative devices and evoked Dickens's "morally-ordered universe" to effectively communicate the hidden dangers of Chinese habitation. Nineteenth-century realist narratives appeared

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

in a range of forms—newspapers, government inquiry, autopsy reports, and novels. The popularity of represented and sensationalized reality offered readers melodramatic experiences, naturalistic details, and the disclosure of private truth to a public world. Logan's description of sensations and realist narrative secured his authority as the eyewitness observer. His revulsion and his unfaltering judgment, however, demonstrated his distance from his object of study and bolstered his claims to comprehensive knowledge of the true nature of the Chinese residents. Logan applied both medical and moral discernment in his prognosis of the dens and showed little concern that his readers would mistake his literary allusions for the facts of Chinatown's dangers.[33]

Logan was equally unfazed by the potential taint of political partisanship. In a discussion of density in the boardinghouses, Logan supplemented his analysis with a quote from the Anti-Coolie Association deputation to the San Francisco Board of Health: "Some houses have five hundred lodgers—some one thousand; and in the Globe Hotel—standing on ground sixty by sixty, and three stories high—there are twenty five hundred tenants." Once Logan had marshaled the Anti-Coolie Association anecdote about the Globe Hotel, he propelled that description into a popular and credible shorthand for the condition of all Chinese boardinghouses and a poignant example of the degeneration that followed Chinese habitation of any site. White travelogue writers and labor politicians freely seized on the devolution of the Globe Hotel at 1001 Dupont Street from the most opulent hotel for Gold Rush prospectors to a decaying and filthy tenement for the "flotsam and jetsam of Chinatown." All the official and popular accounts of the Globe Hotel shared a description of how, over the course of thirty years, the spacious and luxurious accommodations had been subdivided into congested and claustrophobic bunkrooms. Estimates of the number of inhabitants ranged from eight hundred to twenty-five hundred Chinese "crammed" inside.[34] The itinerary of this example—from Anti-Coolie deputation to Dr. Logan's report to the myriad popular travelogues—raises questions about precisely who investigated the building, what they saw, and how they arrived at the wide range of estimates. Was it even important to distinguish between the facts and an exaggeration in this migration from political anecdote to commonsense truth? The number of inhabitants reported simply accentuated the shared idea that Chinatown boardinghouses were extraordinarily crowded and overpopulated.

The sensationalist imagery overpowered the range of estimates, and all writers were quick to emphasize the typical and pervasive nature of the problem of density and crowding. The Anti-Coolie anecdote in 1869 claimed that "Chinamen have burrowed dens, even beneath the streets, holes that would 'not admit a coffin.'" The images of cramped, hidden, and subterranean living quarters that resembled "pens," "dens," "coffins," and "dungeons" was an imagery common to both physicians and political activists, reflecting ubiquitous anxiety and an abhorrence for crowded and dark spaces. These spaces were fit for animals, criminals, and the dead, not for human habitation.[35] In 1886, the travelogue writer Walter Raymond claimed that the general character of Chinese boardinghouses was a "noisome density in the atmosphere, which cannot be received

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

into the system without great nausea. . . . Here can be experienced all the horrors of a catacomb, packed with living, disease-breeding flesh, slowly drifting into their graves."[36] The atmosphere Raymond related gave white readers every indication of the experience of being trapped alive in a grave. He detailed the horrors of visiting a place that lacked light, oxygen, and free space, the opposite of the sun-drenched, ventilated, airy, and clean middle-class home—the presumed type of home inhabited by the visitors and the readers.

However, these startling assessments of unhealthy Chinatown conditions raise the question of why such "gross violations" had not resulted in more frequent epidemic disaster. Unbelievably, Logan explained that the city was blessed by natural ventilation: "Were it not for the strong oceanic winds which prevail during the summer months, San Francisco would . . . have suffered the heaviest penalties." Over the years, many of the city's public health officials and physicians would evoke the presence of good crosswinds to explain the city population's relative good health despite the dangers posed by Chinatown. This explanation demonstrated how the environment could both contribute to epidemic and suppress it. In the miasma theory of infection, festering waste would breed disease in enclosed rooms, and natural ventilation could air out rooms with windows. Yet it remained a mystery as to how winds could quickly decontaminate the vapors that rose from the rotting waste in Chinatown's unventilated cellars before it infected its white neighbors in other parts of the city.[37]

The mysteries of infection and contamination had not, however, dissuaded white labor politicians from elaborating on discourses of racial hygiene in their struggles for political power. In the late 1860s complicated relationships had emerged between white working-class political mobilization, anti-Chinese ideology, public health, and municipal politics in San Francisco. These interests became increasingly entangled by the end of the decade. In 1877, at a moment of financial panic and the conclusion of a widespread smallpox epidemic, new political and social arrangements emerged that attributed economic distress and death to the Chinese "race." At the same time, workers organized the Workingmen's Party of California (WPC), which appropriated this "knowledge" in their political rhetoric and action.

The party became an increasingly potent political force in local and statewide politics. By the September 1879 general elections, the WPC had absorbed much of the Democratic Party's electoral constituency and swept dozens of candidates into office. On the state level, the Working-men's Party and the Republican Party split election results; a Republican became California's governor, while a WPC candidate won the seat of chief justice on the California Supreme Court. In San Francisco, after an extraordinary mayoral campaign punctuated by assassination attempts and accusations of sexual impropriety, the WPC candidate and pastor of the Baptist Metropolitan Temple, Issac Kalloch, won the mayoral race.[38] Kalloch's campaign swept into office WPC candidates for sheriff, auditor, tax collector, district attorney, and public administrator as well. The labor organizer Frank Roney speculated years later in his memoirs that a deal had been made between the WPC and the bipartisan establishment to divide municipal administration. The Workingmen's Party won the mayoralty and a number

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

of posts controlling patronage, while the real power centers—the board of supervisors and the police—remained in the hands of the establishment Republicans and Democrats. The divided administration created intractable government deadlocks.[39]

In his inaugural address, Mayor Kalloch outlined a WPC mandate to use the powers of city government to remedy the Chinese problem, provide relief for unemployed white workers, and reduce the tax burden by a voluntary salary cut for all elected officials. Although the work relief and tax abatement programs required the approval of the hostile board of supervisors, Kalloch could directly influence the Board of Health in his capacity of presiding officer. The health officer John Meares and the other state-appointed physicians on the board—Henry Gibbons Jr., William Douglass, James A. Simpson, and Hugh Huger Toland—were already sympathetic to the idea that Chinatown was a threat to public health.[40] Immediately after Kalloch's inauguration, Meares and Gibbons conducted a rapid investigation of Chinatown. The WPC was eager to supplement the findings of the official investigation; in January its Anti-Chinese Council commissioned a committee of physicians and other sympathetic members to conduct their own investigation of Chinatown's sanitary conditions.[41]

In the 1880 Board of Health report on the living conditions in the Chinese quarter, Logan's images of slime, filth, and underground habitations were reapplied with even more horrifying detail than before. Gibbons, Meares, and Kalloch had conducted the investigation, concluding that "unnatural overcrowding" was detrimental to the health of the Chinese and endangered the "health of the city." They gave a detailed description of several of the subterranean dwellings:

> Near the entrance to this underground den there are large waste pipes running from the water-closets and sinks of the building above ground, which empty into open wooden boxes above the sewer, and the mass of filth is so great that the sewer is frequently choked and the troughs run over. The crowded occupants of the underground regions are hardly to blame for avoiding such wretched apologies as their "water-closets" for the purpose of nature. . . . Amongst all this smoke and stench and rottenness, in rooms barely 10 × 12, feet, 12 persons eat and sleep. . . . In another basement near by, thirteen Chinamen . . . live in a room eight feet square. In a room 6 × 6 feet ten Chinese men and women huddled together in beastly promiscuousness. . . . [These rooms] are absolutely without proper ventilation, and it seems unaccountable how human beings can live in them for a single night.[42]

These descriptions emphasized the sheer physicality of the "sickening filth" and "slime" and reiterated the animality and inhuman living density of the Chinese residents. In a boardinghouse where two hundred "Chinamen" lived, the report described "its inmates [as] having a ghastly look, and [they] are covered with a clammy perspiration. On the other side the rooms appeared to be filled with sick Chinamen, and ranged around the walls are chicken-coops, filled with what appeared to be sick chickens." [43] The equation of Chinese men with sick animals heightened perceptions of the intolerable, horrific living conditions and continued the comparison of Chinese to animals started by Bates.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

The process of inspection and regulation of living conditions generated detailed knowledge of the location and nature of individual aberrations. Regulation, with its legal rules, standards, and threat of routine surveillance, generated knowledge that could be quantified and compared over time and against circumstances in other buildings and neighborhoods. The report catalogued dozens of health ordinances that the "Chinese people" habitually violated. During the 1870s, the city had passed ordinances regulating housing density, garbage disposal, the quarantine of contagious disease victims, the sanitary condition of food vendors, the condition of sewage systems, the construction of toilets, and the condition and location of hospitals. The report detailed a litany of stopped-up sewers, stench, and slime, all of which provided yardsticks by which to judge the unsanitary living conditions.[44]

When the committee catalogued the public health infractions in the Chinese quarter, they were quick to repudiate the idea that their investigation was biased by "race prejudice or class hatred," neglecting to consider how both race and class discrimination had forced Chinese immigrants to live in crowded and dilapidated tenements. They complimented some Chinese for "living quite decently and cleanly as any people could do who have to live under similar circumstances." The committee members emphasized that Chinatown—not necessarily the Chinese people—was a nuisance. The Board of Health unanimously adopted the report and the motion to declare Chinatown a nuisance to the public's health arid welfare. The investigating members of the board adamantly advocated that the "Chinese cancer must be cut out of the heart of the city." They reasoned that such radical action would benefit "the Chinese themselves" as well as "our people." However, their rhetoric revealed that their disgust of Chinatown actually did extend to the "health-defying" and "law-defying" Chinese women and men themselves.[45]

At the February 25, 1880, meeting, the Republican-dominated board of supervisors initially supported the Board of Health's condemnation of Chinatown as a "sanitary nuisance." However, the board of supervisors expressed concern that the health notice would fuel an extralegal "incendiary" response by white workingmen, and promptly gave orders to the police to hire four hundred additional officers. Supported by the local business establishment, the board of supervisors feared a recurrence of the 1877 riot, where a white working-class mob threatened to torch Chinatown. Not only were the businessmen and the supervisors concerned with maintaining the general social order, many of the white business elite were protecting their own interests: the majority of property leased by Chinese businesses and residents was owned by white businessmen. The WPC suspected that the bipartisan establishment that controlled the police would resist executing any orders that would eradicate Chinatown, knowing that East Coast capitalists feared that such summary use of police powers would disrupt manufacturing and trade on the West Coast. Sheriff Thomas Desmond, elected on the WPC ticket, assured the party's rank and file that he would execute the Board of Health's orders and warned that, if the police refused to comply, the city authorities "would call on the Workingmen to clear out Chinatown." And the WPC issued resolutions warning that, if there were any interference in the "abatement of the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

Chinese nuisance," the WPC would "visit upon low-designing minions of power, backed up though they may be by cowardly capitalists and corporations, a punishment so swift and terrible that the reader of the history will shudder at the record."[46]

In light of these threats, Kalloch had difficulty convincing the board of supervisors that there was "nothing revolutionary or radical" in the removal of the Chinese from the city center and the razing of Chinatown for sanitary reasons. Many of the board's constituents among the elite commercial establishment feared that property they leased to the Chinese would be destroyed and they would lose their tenants. On February 28, the board of supervisors decided to rescind its earlier endorsement of the Board of Health's declaration of "Chinatown [as] a nuisance."[47] Although the mayor and the WPC organized mass meetings and pamphlet campaigns to marshal support for the Board of Health's order, the WPC rank and file remained orderly, and the city administration remained politically deadlocked—until the end of Mayor Kalloch's term and the dissolution of the WPC in 1881. No legal or extralegal action on the Board of Health's condemnation of Chinatown ever occurred. However, the Board of Health did continue to impose routine sanitary surveillance, vaccination campaigns, and fumigation of dwellings in Chinatown.

In 1882 the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which disallowed Chinese workers to immigrate. Although the law exempted Chinese merchants, students, diplomats, and their families, it consolidated the disenfranchisement of all Chinese people by prohibiting any state or federal court from admitting Chinese immigrants to naturalized citizenship. Subsequent legislation virtually cut off Chinese immigration and that of other East and South Asian immigrants—as well as abridged opportunities to win citizenship and the right to political participation—by branding Chinese and other Asian immigrants as perpetual "aliens ineligible for citizenship." Throughout the western states, local white vigilantes drove out Chinese settlers. Many Chinese laborers sought safety in San Francisco along with the white laborers who flocked to the city because of a severe economic downturn in the eastern United States.[48]

Three years later, the Republican-dominated board of supervisors under the Democratic mayor Washington Bartlett revisited the issue of Chinese residents in San Francisco and commissioned a special committee to survey Chinatown. In May 1885, supervisors Willard Farwell and John Kunkler presented their comprehensive report to the public. They confined their investigation to the area bounded by California, Kearny, Broadway, and Stockton Streets, a twelve-block area. Although the supervisors recognized that the Chinese population had "drifted" into the blocks west of Stockton Street, they restricted the report to the popularly assumed boundaries of Chinatown because of fiscal considerations.[49]

The zeal of health officials to know the spaces within Chinatown culminated in a report that also produced the cartography of Chinatown. Nearly two decades of systematic surveillance and normalizing public health codes had aided in producing a map of the street-level Chinatown settlement. The special committee employed surveyors who accompanied them on visits of "every floor and every room." The detailed report of the "conditions of occupancy of every

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

room"—its use, number of inhabitants, and sanitary condition—enabled the committee to make a map of the district, specifying the "character of occupancy" of the first floor of each of the buildings as well as providing a detailed accounting of all the basements, the subbasements, and the floors above the street level. Titled the *Official Map of "Chinatown" in San Francisco,* it was color coded to distinguish "General Chinese Occupancy," "Chinese Gambling Houses," "Chinese Prostitution," "Chinese Opium Resorts," "Chinese Joss Houses," and "White Prostitution." The "General Occupancy" sections were further identified by the type of factory, store, or lodging, which were tagged by street number. The white sections sprinkled throughout the district and on its edges were identified as "white" groceries, saloons, bakeries, and residences.

This explicit map of Chinatown represented a new strategy of knowledge.[50] This cartography substantiated the 1885 report's goal of obtaining a "correct idea of the general condition of things there and the ordinary mode of life and practices of its inhabitants" by providing precise dimensions and visual representations of the extent of Chinatown. The map ordered and made intelligible at least the street level of the heretofore impenetrable and labyrinthine geography of Chinatown. Thorough inventories of sanitary infractions, indices of manufactures, and catalogues of the secret exits and entrances of "barricaded gambling dens," in combination with the precise map of Chinatown, injected the "medium of crystallized fact and the inexorable logic of demonstrated truth" into the heated political debate about the condition of Chinatown. It also served to further "crystallize" the seemingly transparent relationship between race and place.[51]

The map and inventories were the products and tools of extensive surveillance, but they also ensured that more intensive surveillance would occur in the future. The report emphasized the scores of public health violations throughout Chinatown, knowledge of which had been reaped from the systematic investigation. The report presented an image of a normative regulatory apparatus that employed inspectors, police, and judges who forced all habitations in the city to comply with standard regulations. Although the surveillance and investigation of Chinatown were extraordinary, the violations were quite ordinary. A five-page catalogue of the most egregious, most frequent infractions merely cited inadequate plumbing and drainage, including clogged water closets, urinals, and sinks; stagnant cesspools; and the lack of plumbing connections to street sewers. As a catalogue, however, these violations were no longer individual or singular anomalies but were interpreted as a collective manifestation—evidence of collective behavior. They were perceived as evidence of "lawlessness" and resolute disregard by the Chinese population.

The precise mapping of vice onto Chinatown buildings and the perception of Chinese "lawlessness" inflamed fears of municipal corruption. For instance, in the early twentieth century an anonymous individual scribbled on one copy of the 1885 map of Chinatown a handwritten annotation that demonstrated acute political cynicism and grave doubts about police and public health enforcement: "This 'Official Map' of Chinatown shows official knowledge of the illegal gambling resorts, houses of prostitution, opium dens and houses of white prostitutes, which

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

by the payment of blackmail have secured immunity from prosecution etc. and continue collecting filth and unhealthy surroundings which provided the ostensible excuse for the fraudulent quarantine and plague scare of 1900 by the Board of Health." The accumulation of knowledge through surveillance and mapping did not necessarily result in effective prosecution and long-term reform. The anonymous critic's allegations of police corruption also underscored a suspicion that the Board of Health would overreact to its own negligence in enforcing sanitary regulations. During the 1900 bubonic plague crisis, according to the writer's accusation, the Board of Health freely spent "public money to clean up nuisances that it was their duty to compel owners and tenants to do at their own expense." The writer emphasized a breakdown in governance, in which municipal officials were unwilling to curb vice that bred both unsanitary conditions and lawlessness. For some investigators and political commentators, the evidence of unabated vice and filth in Chinatown exacerbated fears of widespread government corruption and social anarchy that could spread beyond Chinatown borders.[52]

Officials had long worried that within Chinatown no respectable society existed that put moral and social checks on the culture of vice, lawlessness, and disease. The 1885 investigation included a population census that numerically demonstrated this presumed absence of respectable nuclear families in Chinatown. The enumeration of persons, within households and classified by their social relations, created an assessment of Chinese society driven by statistical evidence, not anecdote. These numbers revealed that the Chinese were at odds with the social structures and classification that organized the dominant white society. In their tabulations of women and children, Farwell and Kunkler observed that more than 40 percent of the women and more than 90 percent of the children were "herded together with apparent indiscriminate parental relations, and no family classification, so far as can be ascertained."[53] Like the late-nineteenth-century surveyors of urban England and colonial Africa who attributed disease and disorder to the improper social and spatial distribution of bodies, Kunkler and Farwell were horrified by the lack of distinctive and discernible nuclear families.[54] Many women and children lived together without the presence of a male head of household. And among "professional prostitutes," mothers and children lived "in adjoining apartments and intermingle freely," which for Farwell made it impossible to tell "where the family relationship leaves off and prostitution begins." This vision of middle-class domesticity and morality, which favored the presence of well-bounded and visibly distinct persons, families, and habitations, was widespread among European and American public health reformers in their imposition of proper sanitary practices.[55]

Not only did investigators want to prove collective activity, but they also intended to present the systematic nature of Chinese living conditions. In order to substantiate the assertion that the Chinese lived in "constant and habitual violation" of the cubic air ordinance, the report presented "some instances illustrating the *ordinary* habits of the Chinese laboring classes in the matter of sleeping and living accommodations," rather than providing "extreme cases" as investigators had repeatedly done in the past. Through statistical tables, the committee listed the addresses of more than two dozen locations, comparing

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

the number of actual occupants with the allowable number of occupants. In every case, more than three times as many people lived in housing than could be legally accommodated. Farwell and Kunkler followed up their establishment of statistical "proof" with a more typically lurid and extreme description of an underground den. It featured all the conventions of previous medical travelogues; however, the statistical preface substantiated the description's claim to represent "ordinary" conditions:

> Descend into the basement of almost any building in Chinatown at night; pick your way by the aid of the police-man's candle along the dark and narrow passageway, black and grimy with a quarter of a century's accumulation of filth; step with care lest you fall into a cesspool of sewage abominations with which these subterranean depths abound. Now follow your guide through a door, which he forces, into a sleeping room. The air is thick with smoke and fetid with an indescribable odor of reeking vapors. . . . It is a sense of a horror you have never before experienced, revolting to the last degree, sickening and stupefying. Through this semi-opaque atmosphere you discover perhaps eight or ten—never less than two or three—bunks, the greater part or all of which are occupied by two persons, some in a state of stupefaction from opium, some rapidly smoking themselves into that condition, and all in dirt and filth.

According to Farwell and Kunkler, the statistics and the description combined to provide authoritative "proof" for their assertion that the "mode of life among the Chinese here are [*sic*] not much above 'those of the rats of the waterfront.'"[56]

Following the now popular logic of medical discourse, the report predicted that dire health consequences would result from the presence of filthy, overcrowded, and inhuman conditions. These conditions presented "a constant menace to the welfare of society as a slumbering pest, likely at any time to generate and spread disease should the city be visited by an epidemic in any virulent form." Not only was Chinatown characterized as "the rankest growth of human degradation that can be found upon this continent," outstripping all other slums in "filth, disease, crime and misery," but, authorities suggested, no amount of cleansing would improve these conditions. The Chinese were expected to "relapse" into a "more dense condition of nastiness, in which they apparently delight to exist." Since its inhabitants were walking, seemingly unaffected, disease carriers, Chinatown constituted a constant and continual "source of danger." Disease was conceived as organic to every Chinese racialized space. Inhuman living conditions appeared to be "inseparable from the very nature of the race," and city authorities warned that Chinatown would remain a "cesspool" so "long as it is inhabited by people of the Mongolian race."[57]

The knowledge of Chinatown spaces, conditions, and social relations provided a material and representational terrain to explore the extreme contrasts between the "Chinese race" and the "American people." In public health reports the contrast fed the tension between aberrant and normal and the racial difference that separated the Chinese aliens from white Americans. In travelogues, this binary opposition of two irreconcilable peoples generated the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

underlying dramatic tension that propelled the narratives. G. B. Densmore's central "argument" that drove his *Chinese in California* travelogue was the "radical difference between Caucasian and Mongolian civilization."[58] These differences of civilization and "standard of living" emerged from the obsessive descriptions of Chinatown as a space of difference antagonistic to the rest of the city. The editor of a local newspaper, Curt Abel-Musgrave, took the popular idea of Chinatown as a "subterranean world" to its logical extreme. In a bracing fantasy about a cholera epidemic unleashed in San Francisco, Abel-Musgrave conceptualized the territory of San Francisco as two distinctive cities—the "healthy paradise" of the true San Francisco above-ground and the "hell" of Chinatown underground. He explained that Chinatown below was impervious to the city's natural cleansing features: "Sunbeams that shine on us don't penetrate 50 feet deep into the pestilential dens of the Chinese population, and the fresh breezes which purify the air of our streets and our houses leave the sepulchres untouched in which for 30 years foul and disgusting vapors have been gathering."[59] Curiously, city officials offered detailed Chinatown maps to the street level only; it was up to travelogue writers to imagine and sketch out maps of the underground passageways and dens. Only Walter Raymond in his *Horrors of a Mongolian Settlement* offered a diagram of the subterranean roads and passageways of his journey.[60]

The public-health knowledge of dens, density, and the labyrinth cast Chinatown as a deviant transplantation of the traditional East in the modern Western city. This contrast emphasized the uneasy coexistence of growing, progressive San Francisco and decaying, regressive Chinatown. Chinatown was impervious to progress and was instead liable to rot and regress like the enervated Chinese empire across the Pacific. The environmental conditions of Chinatown could only harm the rest of the city.[61] The representation of the Chinese inhabitants was that of a race and culture apart and unaffected by the forces of modernity. City officials and travelogue writers represented the Chinese as burdened by the weight of an ancient civilization and impervious to beneficial change. These officials and writers conceived of time, in relation to Chinatown and the Chinese people, as a passage in which the physical environment was decaying and regressing while the residents lived without past or future. They perceived among the inhabitants of Chinatown ancient racial habits and proclivities that caused the Chinese to live in a "timeless present where all 'his' actions and reactions are repetitions of 'his' usual habits."[62] As with comparable racial formations, there was an insistent repetition of images that gave an ahistorical and unchanging quality to the represented reality of Chinatown and its inhabitants.[63] What propelled the endless, obsessive repetition of the idealized representation was the inherent impossibility to achieve the stereotyped racial category. The project of naturalizing race identity involved the production of effects that posed as "reality," a daunting but compulsive task for those invested in the reproduction of racial "truths."[64]

In the racial formation of Chinese and Chinatown, medical discourses employed and adapted prevailing political and social discourses of Chinese "vice," "criminality," "immorality," "slavery," and "subversiveness" and, in turn, informed these popular discourses with the threat of Chinese "dirt" and "disease."[65] However, the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

reports of threats of disease originating in the social conduct of Chinese immigrants and the spaces in which they dwelled did not appear originally or exclusively in public health records or at the insistence of physicians. The *Daily Alta* newspaper and the anti-Chinese labor organizations from the very beginning of this period articulated concern about the unsanitary environment in Chinatown and the spatial elements of dens, density, and the labyrinth, which preoccupied city and state officials during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Medical discourse lent scientific weight to the project and turned every one of these stylized features of Chinatown into a cause of pathology and source of disease. The keepers of public health had broad powers, and over time they developed the authority to put these "ideas" about race into practice. Health officials and politicians justified the idea of Chinatown as inherently pestilent, and they invested this idea, through the accumulation of these stereotyped images in their reports and rhetoric, with the value of a natural truth.[66]

During the late nineteenth century, the imagery of Chinatown and the Chinese race as pestilent intensified to such an overwhelming pitch that any contradictions and inconsistencies were bent into and subsumed by the prevailing interpretations of the Chinese medical menace. The practices of "scientific" investigations and fact-finding missions persuasively defined the "truth" of Chinatown in terms of constricted, crowded, immoral, unsanitary, and unnavigable space. These discursive practices profoundly affected the lives of Chinese men and women in San Francisco. Disease-producing and death-engendering threats defined Chinatown as a civic problem and emboldened the nascent Board of Health to intervene decisively to regulate Chinese space and, more generally, to manage the environment and inhabitants of San Francisco. Race and public health had become inextricably linked, producing a combination that would have profound and far-reaching consequences for every inhabitant of the city.

NOTES

1. "The Chinese Quarter: Chinatown Overhauled by Health Inspectors—a Terrible State of Affairs Found to Exist—Crowded into Garrets and Cellars—Radical Sanitary Regulations Needed," *Daily Alta California*, May 16, 1870; "Moving on Their Works: Health Officer Dr. J. L. Meares Notifies the Chinese to Set Their Houses in Order," *San Francisco Examiner*, February 24, 1880.
2. SFBH, *Annual Report*, 1880–81, p. 5; SFBH, *Annual Report*, 1881–82, p. 9; SFBH, *Annual Report*, 1879–80, p. 2.
3. K. J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875–1980* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), p. 31.
4. Thomas W. Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Thomas Osborne, "Security and Vitality: Drains, Liberalism, and Power in the Nineteenth Century," in *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and the Rationalities of Government*, ed. Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 99–122; Margaret Cohen, ed., *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, and Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

5. Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Communicative Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 5–27; Lorraine Daston, "Historical Epistemology," in *Questions of Evidence: Proof, Practice, and Persuasion across the Disciplines*, ed. James Chandler, Arnold I. Davidson, and Harry Harootunian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 282–89; Thomas C. Holt, "Reflections on Race-Making and Racist Practice: Toward a Working Hypothesis" (paper prepared for the Newberry Seminar in American Social History, Chicago, May 30, 1991), pp. 17–18; Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured under Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980); T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 56 (June 1985). For another example of the conflation of race, culture, behavior, and a ghetto location, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo Mama's Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), particularly chapter 1.
6. *Gamsaan* was the Yale Cantonese transliteration, and *Jinshan* the Mandarin pinyin transliteration. Similarly, *Tongyan gaai* is *Tangren jie* in pinyin. Dupont Street was renamed Grant Avenue in 1908 during the reconstruction of San Francisco. *Daily Alta California*, November 21, 1853; Thomas W. Chinn, Him Mark Lai, and Philip P. Choy, *A History of the Chinese in California: A Syllabus* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1969), pp. 10–11; Paul M. Ong, "Chinese Labor in Early San Francisco: Racial Segmentation and Industrial Expansion," *Amerasia* 8, no. 1 (1981): 70–75.
7. "Common Council," *Daily Alta California*, August 19, 1854.
8. *Daily Alta California*, August 15, 19, and 22, 1854.
9. Ibid., August 17 and 22, 1854.
10. Ibid., August 15, 1854; and "Spread of the Cholera," *Daily Alta California*, August 19, 1854. Cholera epidemics in the early nineteenth century became the occasion for intense debates about the administration of public health and national borders, and, more generally, about the role of government in ensuring social and political order in France and the United States. See Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); François Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization: The Cholera in Paris*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Boston: MIT Press, 1986).
11. *Daily Alta California*, August 15 and 22, 1854; Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*; Delaporte, *Disease and Civilization*; Cathy Kudlick, *Cholera in Postrevolutionary Paris* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).
12. "Common Council, Board of Aldermen, August 21," *Daily Alta California*, August 22, 1854.
13. Ibid.
14. Him Mark Lai, "Historical Development of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association/Huiguan System," in *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (San Francisco) (1987): 13–51; Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *China and Overseas Chinese in the U.S., 1868–1911* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1983), pp. 31–38; William Hoy, *Chinese Six Companies* (San Francisco: Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, 1942); Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 71–73.
15. The meeting was chaired by the Chinese merchant A Hing; a white journalist, William Howard, editor of the *Golden Gate News*, served as secretary and submitted the petition as part of the Common Council's official record. Letter to William Rabe from William Howard, August 21, 1854, with petition, printed in *Daily Alta California*, August 22, 1854.
16. Editorial, *Daily Alta California*, August 17, 1854.
17. "More Chinese Emigrants," *Daily Alta California*, August 15, 1854; "The Exchange Chinamen," *Daily Alta California*, August 22, 1854; "Health of the City," *Daily Alta California*, August 26, 1854.
18. Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860–1910* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 37–78; Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1989), esp.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

pp. 86–94; Roger Daniels, *Asian American: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), pp. 9–69.

19. Census records did not account for the range of Spanish-speaking migrants (from Chile, Peru, Mexico, Spain, and the Caribbean), but they were not a significant portion of the population in the period 1860 to 1920. William Issel and Robert Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865–1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), p. 56; Douglas Henry Daniels, *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), p. 13.
20. C. M. Bates, "Health Officer's Report," included in San Francisco Board of Supervisors (SFBS hereafter), *San Francisco Municipal Report* (San Francisco, 1869–70), p. 233.
21. David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 28; Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 132–33.
22. Bates, "Health Officer's Report," 1869–70, p. 233.
23. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 72–77; Neil Larry Shumsky, "Tar Flat and Nob Hill: A Social History of Industrial San Francisco during the 1870s" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1972).
24. "The Chinese on the Pacific Coast. The Statement of the Anti-Coolie Association," *Daily Alta California*, June 24, 1869.
25. California State Board of Health (CSBH hereafter), *Biennial Report of the State Board of Health of California* (Sacramento, 1870–71), pp. 44–47 and the appendix, p. 55.
26. Among the most famous popular accounts are B. E. Lloyd, *Lights and Shades in San Francisco* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft and Co., 1876), pp. 236–66; Walter Raymond, *Horrors of the Mongolian Settlement, San Francisco, California: Enslaved and Degraded Race of Paupers, Opium Eaters, and Lepers* (Boston: Cashman, Keating, and Co., 1886); Rudyard Kipling's series of articles for the *Allahbad "Pioneer"* (1889), reprinted in Rudyard Kipling, *Rudyard Kipling's Letters from San Francisco* (San Francisco: Colt Press, 1949), pp. 31–32; William Walter Bode, *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown* (San Francisco: Crocker, 1896); G. B. Densmore, *The Chinese in California: Description of Chinese Life in San Francisco. Their Habits, Morals, Manners* (San Francisco: Petit and Russ, 1880), pp. 20, 23, 117; J. W. Buel, *Metropolitan Life Unveiled; or, the Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities* (St. Louis, Mo.: Historical Publishing Company, 1882).
27. Bates, "Health Officer's Report," 1869–70, p. 233.
28. SFBS, *Report of the Special Committee of the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco on the Condition of the Chinese Quarter and the Chinese in San Francisco, July 1885* (San Francisco, 1885), p. 19.
29. CSBH, *Biennial Report*, pp. 44–47. Logan's medical explanations of the dangers of underground spaces reappeared in popular travelogues through the late nineteenth century. See Lloyd, *Lights and Shades in San Francisco*, p. 257; Bode, *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown*, pp. 7, 13; Kipling, *Letters from San Francisco*, pp. 31–32; Buel, *Metropolitan Life Unveiled*, p. 276.
30. CSBH, *Biennial Report*, p. 46.
31. Ibid., p. 47.
32. Ibid., p. 46.
33. Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Margaret Cohen and Christopher Prendergast, eds., *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, and Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995); Laqueur, "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative," pp. 176–204.
34. Bode, *Lights and Shadows of Chinatown*, p. 14; Densmore, *The Chinese in California*, p. 25.
35. CSBH, *Biennial Report*, pp. 44–47; SFBS, *San Francisco Municipal Report*, 1869–70, p. 233.
36. Raymond, *Horrors of the Mongolian Settlement*, pp. 52–53.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

37. CSBH, *Biennial Report*, p. 47; M. P. Sawtelle, "The Plague Spot," *Medico-Literary Journal* 1, no. 4 (December 1878): 10–12; SFBH, *Annual Report*, 1871–72, p. 4; SFBH, *Annual Report*, 1872–73, p. 21; SFBH, *Annual Report*, 1879–80, p. 2.
38. This narrative of Kalloch's 1879 election relies on the historical research and analysis of Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*; Issel and Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865–1932*, pp. 127–30; Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, pp. 73–75.
39. Frank Roney, *Frank Roney, Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader*, ed. Ira Cross (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1931), cited in Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*, pp. 141–42.
40. Doctor Hugh Huger Toland was a prominent figure in the development of an understanding of the Chinese medical threat. In the mid-1870s his testimony to the California State Senate and U.S. congressional committees on the transmission of syphilis from Chinese female prostitutes to white adolescent males became the authoritative medical opinion on the subject and was cited in almost every subsequent report on Chinese female prostitution. See chapter 3 of Nayan Shah, Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001). Toland died on February 27, 1880, in the midst of the controversial declaration that Chinatown was a sanitary nuisance. Letter to the Board of Supervisors from I. S. Kalloch, February 27, 1880, printed in the *San Francisco Examiner*, February 28, 1880.
41. "Moving on Their Works: Health Officer Dr. J. L. Meares Notifies the Chinese to Set Their Houses in Order."
42. The report of the committee has been reprinted in Workingmen's Party of California, Anti-Chinese Council, comp. (WPC hereafter), "Board of Health: Resolutions of Condemnation," in *Chinatown Declared a Nuisance*! (San Francisco: Workingmen's Party of California, 1880), pp. 3–4. Curiously I have not found a reference to this report in the SFBH, *Annual Report*, 1879–80; or SFBS, *San Francisco Municipal Report*, 1879–80.
43. WPC, *Chinatown Declared a Nuisance*! p. 4.
44. Ibid., p. 6.
45. Ibid., pp. 5–6.
46. "The Workingmen in Session," *San Francisco Examiner*, February 26, 1880.
47. "Again Solicited to Cooperate," *San Francisco Examiner*, February 28, 1880.
48. Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Charles J. McClain, *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 145–220; S. Chan, *Asian Americans*; Elmer Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973).
49. SFBS, *Report of the Special Committee*, p. 3.
50. J. B. Harley, "Deconstructing the Map," *Cartographica* 26 (1989): 1–20; Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power" in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 277–312.
51. SFBS, *Report of the Special Committee*, pp. 3, 4, 32.
52. SFBS, *Official Map of "Chinatown" in San Francisco* (San Francisco: Bosqui Engraving and Printing, 1885), in Maps Collection, Bancroft Library. Copy 1 has manuscript annotation.
53. Ibid., p. 8.
54. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 265–94; Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study of the Relationship between the Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).
55. SFBS, *Report of the Special Committee*, p. 9.
56. Ibid., pp. 18–25.
57. Ibid., pp. 4–5, 67.
58. Densmore, *The Chinese in California*, pp. 117–21.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

59. Curt Abel-Musgrave, *The Cholera in San Francisco: A Contribution to the History of Corruption in California* (San Francisco: San Francisco News Company, 1885), p. 5.
60. Raymond, *Horrors of the Mongolian Settlement*, p. 2.
61. Fernando Coronil, "Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 1 (February 1996): 51–87; Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).
62. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 64.
63. Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989); David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).
64. For a theoretical elaboration of the processes of representation and repetition in relation to the performative and incomplete production of identity, see Homi K. Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817," in *"Race," Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) pp. 163–84; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories/Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991) pp. 13–31.
65. Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785–1882* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 145–204; Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California*, pp. 25–39.
66. K. J. Anderson, *Vancouver's Chinatown*, pp. 81–82.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:47.

The Secret Munson Report

Michi Nishiura Weglyn

One important difference between the situation in Hawaii and the mainland is that if all the Japanese on the mainland were actively disloyal they could be corralled or destroyed within a very short time.

—Curtis B. Munson, November 7, 1941

I

By fall of 1941, war with Japan appeared imminent. For well over a year, coded messages going in and out of Tokyo had been intercepted and decoded by Washington cryptoanalysts. With relations between Tokyo and Washington rapidly deteriorating, a desperate sense of national urgency was evidenced in messages to Ambassador Nomura, then carrying on negotiations in the nation's capital. On July 25, Japan had seized south French Indo-China. The activation the following day of the Morgenthau-Stimson plan, calling for the complete cessation of trade with Japan and the freezing of her assets in America—Great Britain and the Netherlands following suit—had resulted in the strangulation and near collapse of the island economy.

By late September, Tokyo's coded messages included demands for data concerning the Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor. Of great implication for U.S. Army and Naval Intelligence was the September 24 dispatch directed to Consul Nagao Kita in Honolulu:

> henceforth, we would like to have you make reports concerning vessels along the following lines in so far as possible:
>
> 1. the waters of pearl harbor are to be divided roughly into five sub-areas. we have no objection to your abbreviating as much as you like. area a. waters between ford island and the arsenal. area b. waters adjacent to the island south and west of ford island. this area is on the opposite side of the island

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

Back to top.

FROM AREA A. AREA C. EAST LOCH. AREA D. MIDDLE LOCH. AREA E. WEST LOCH AND THE COMMUNICATING WATER ROUTES.

2. WITH REGARD TO WARSHIPS AND AIRCRAFT CARRIERS WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOU REPORT ON THOSE AT ANCHOR (THESE ARE NOT SO IMPORTANT), TIED UP AT WHARVES, BUOYS, AND IN DOCK. DESIGNATE TYPES AND CLASSES BRIEFLY. IF POSSIBLE, WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE YOU MAKE MENTION OF THE FACT WHEN THERE ARE TWO OR MORE VESSELS ALONGSIDE THE SAME WHARF.[1]

With all signs pointing to a rapid approach of war and the Hawaiian naval outpost the probable target,[2] a highly secret intelligence-gathering was immediately ordered by the President.[3] Mandated with *pro forma* investigative powers as a special representative of the State Department was one Curtis B. Munson.[4] His mission: to get as precise a picture as possible of the degree of loyalty to be found among residents of Japanese descent, both on the West Coast of the United States and in Hawaii.

Carried out in the month of October and the first weeks of November, Munson's investigation resulted in a twenty-five-page report of uncommon significance, especially as it served to corroborate data representing more than a decade of prodigious snooping and spying by the various U.S. intelligence services, both domestic and military. *It certified a remarkable, even extraordinary degree of loyalty among this generally suspect ethnic group.*

Yet, for reasons that still remain obscured, this highest level "double-checking" and confirmation of favorable intelligence consensus—that *"there is no Japanese problem"*—was to become one of the war's best-kept secrets. Not until after the cessation of hostilities, when the report of the secret survey was introduced in evidence in the Pearl Harbor hearings of 1946, did facts shattering all justification for the wartime suppression of the Japanese minority come to light.

What is more remarkable, perhaps, is that to this very day, the unusual significance of these findings has been strangely subdued.

Evidence would indicate that the Munson Report was shared only by the State, War, and Navy departments; yet, paradoxically, Cordell Hull, Henry L. Stimson, and Frank Knox, who then headed up these Cabinet posts, were to end up being the most determined proponents of evacuation. Researchers and historians have repeatedly—and with justification—leveled an accusatory finger at Stimson's War Department cohorts as being the Administration's most industrious evacuation advocates. The question naturally arises: Were aides of the Secretary kept in the dark regarding the "bill of health" given the vast majority of the Japanese American population?

On February 5, 1942, a week before the go-ahead decision for the evacuation was handed down, Stimson informed the Chief Executive in a letter sent along with the President's personal copy of the Munson Report: "In response to your memorandum of November 8 [see Appendix 10], the Department gave careful study and consideration to the matters reported by Mr. C. B. Munson in his memorandum covering the Japanese situation on the West Coast." This meant that the General Staff had had fully three months to study, circulate, review, and analyze the contents of the report before it was returned to the President.[5]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

Owing to the wartime concealment of this important document, few, if any, realized how totally distorted was the known truth in pro-internment hysterics emanating from the military, with the exception of those in naval intelligence and the FBI, whose surveillance of the Japanese minority over the years had been exhaustive. Both services, to their credit, are on record as having opposed the President's decision for evacuation.[6]

To the average American, the evacuation tragedy, well shrouded as it remains in tidied-up historical orthodoxy and in the mythology spawned by the "total-war" frenzy, remains no more than a curious aberration in American history. Only during the civil rights turbulence of the sixties, when personal liberties of unpopular minorities were once again in jeopardy, was interest sharply rekindled in this blurred-out episode in America's past. A generation of the nation's youth, who had grown up knowing nothing or little of so colossal a national scandal as American-style concentration camps, suddenly demanded to know what it was that had happened. Noticed also was an upsurge of interest among the "Sansei" (the children of the second-generation "Nisei"), some of whom had been born in these camps, who now wanted to be told everything that their parents and grandparents, the "Issei," had tried so hard to forget.[7]

Yet the enormity of this incredible governmental hoax cannot begin to be fathomed without taking into consideration the definitive loyalty findings of Curtis B. Munson, especially in relation to the rationale that in 1942 "justified" the sending of some 110,000 men, women, and children to concentration camps: namely, that an "unknown" number of Japanese Americans presented a potential threat of dire fifth-column peril to the national security; that it would be difficult to sort out the dangerous ones in so short a time, so to play it safe all should be locked up.

II

Behind it all was a half century of focusing anti-Asian hates on the Japanese minority by West Coast pressure groups resentful of them as being hyperefficient competitors. An inordinate amount of regional anxiety had also accompanied Japan's rapid rise to power. Years of media-abetted conditioning to the possibility of war, invasion, and conquest by waves and waves of fanatic, emperor-worshiping yellow men—invariably aided by harmless-seeming Japanese gardeners and fisherfolk who were really spies and saboteurs in disguise—had evoked latent paranoia as the news from the Pacific in the early weeks of the war brought only reports of cataclysmic Allied defeats.

In 1941, the number of Japanese Americans living in the continental United States totaled 127,000. Over 112,000 of them lived in the three Pacific Coast states of Oregon, Washington, and California. Of this group, nearly 80 percent of the total (93,000) resided in the state of California alone.

In the hyperactive minds of longtime residents of California, where antipathy toward Asians was the most intense, the very nature of the Pearl Harbor attack provided ample—and prophetic—proof of inherent Japanese treachery. As the Imperial Army chalked up success after success on the far-flung Pacific front, and as rumors of prowling enemy submarines proliferated wildly, the West

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

Coast atmosphere became charged with a panicky fear of impending invasion and a profound suspicion that Japanese Americans in their midst were organized for coordinated subversive activity. From the myriad anti-Oriental forces and influential agriculturists who had long cast their covetous eyes over the coastal webwork of rich Japanese-owned land, a superb opportunity had thus become theirs for the long-sought expulsion of an unwanted minority.[8]

By enlisting the support of civic leaders, politicians, and their powerful mass-media allies, with special emphasis on those important in the military, the tide of tolerance which had surprisingly followed the news of attack was reversed by what soon appeared like a tidal wave of cries for evacuation. In the more inflammatory journals, the switch-over from tolerance to mistrust had been as simple as juxtaposing news of the bestial, despised enemy with that of "Japs" in their own backyards. The public became totally confused in their hatred.

Because little was known about the minority which had long kept itself withdrawn from the larger community in fear of rebuff, it was possible to make the public believe anything. The stereotype of the Oriental of supercunning and sly intent was rekindled and exploited in such a manner that Chinese Americans and other Asians began wearing "I am a Chinese" buttons in fear of being assaulted and spat upon. The tactics used in manipulating public fears were hardly different from those used to achieve the cutoff in Chinese immigration in 1882 and in bringing a halt to all Japanese immigration in 1924.

Significant for those maximizing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity was that although the Japanese minority comprised only a minuscule 1 percent of the state's population, they were a group well on their way to controlling one-half of the commercial truck crops in California. Centuries-old agricultural skills which the Japanese brought over with them enabled Issei farmers not only to turn out an improved quality of farm produce but also to bring down prices. The retail distribution of fruits and vegetables in the heavily populated Southern California area was already a firmly entrenched monopoly of Japanese Americans.

And it was in the name of the citizen Nisei that much of the rich growing acreage belonged to the immigrants.

Like the Chinese before them, the immigrant Japanese were denied the right to become American citizens. Because they lacked this right of naturalization, they could not own land. Even the leasing of land was limited by a 1913 land law to three years. But the Issei found ways to get around such laws devised to drive Orientals away from California, the most popular of which was for the Issei to purchase property in the name of their citizen offspring.

It was a common practice among the Issei to snatch up strips of marginal unwanted land which were cheap: swamplands, barren desert areas that Caucasians disdained to invest their labor in. Often it included land bordering dangerously close to high-tension wires, dams, and railroad tracks. The extraordinary drive and morale of these hard-working, frugal Issei who could turn parched wastelands, even marshes, into lush growing fields—usually with help from the entire family—became legendary. In the course of the years, notably

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

during period of economic crisis, a hue and cry arose of "unfair competition" and accusations that "the Japs have taken over the best land!"

Then, with the wild tales of resident Japanese perfidy that Pearl Harbor unleashed, rumors flew back and forth that Issei landowners had settled in stealth and with diabolical intent near vital installations. Their purpose: a "second Pearl Harbor." At the Tolan Committee hearings, then ostensibly weighing the pros and cons of evacuation, impressive documentation was unfurled by the top law officer of California, Attorney General Earl Warren (later to become the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court), purporting to support his theory of a possible insurrection in the making: that, with malice aforethought, Japanese Americans had "infiltrated themselves into every strategic spot in our coastal and valley counties." Substantiation of this county-by-county penetration read, in part, as follows:

ALAMEDA COUNTY
Japs adjacent to new Livermore Military Airport.
Japs adjacent to Southern Pacific and Western Pacific Railroads.
Japs in vicinity of Oakland Airport.
Japs in vicinity to Holt Caterpillar Tractor Co., San Leandro. . . .

SAN DIEGO COUNTY
Thirty miles of open coast broken by small water courses with a Jap on every water course.
Thirty miles of main railroad and highway easily blocked by slides, etc., with Japs throughout their entire length. . . .
Japs adjacent to all dams supplying water to San Diego and vicinity. . . .
Japs adjacent to all power lines supplying the city of San Diego and vicinity.[9]

There was no possible way of separating the loyal from the disloyal, insisted the Attorney General: "when we are dealing with the Caucasian race we have methods that will test the loyalty of them. . . . But when we deal with the Japanese we are in an entirely different field and we cannot form any opinion that we believe to be sound." Warren urged speedy removal.

Unfortunately for the Nisei and Issei, it was an election year. The tide of "public opinion"—the ferocity of the clamor, at least—indicated total unconditional removal, citizen or not. And all politicians were falling in line.

In a desperate last-ditch effort to halt the mass uprooting, Nisei leaders proposed the formation of a volunteer suicide battalion, with parents as hostages to insure their good behavior. Just one opportunity to demonstrate the depth of Nisei integrity, implored Mike Masaoka, the mystic mainspring behind the audacious proposal. How else could they disprove Attorney General Warren's outrageous assertion that "there is more potential danger among the group of Japanese who were born in this country than from the alien Japanese who were born in Japan"?

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

Though Masaoka's brash proposal was summarily rejected at the time, it would later be reconsidered and implemented by the military, notwithstanding their initial insistence that America did not believe in the concept of hostages or of a segregated battalion—except, of course, for blacks.

Being one of the outstanding members of the xenophobic brotherhood of the "Native Sons of the Golden West" and not having access to Munson's intelligence summation, Attorney General Warren may have been merely vociferating some widely held concepts of supremacist groups as he readied himself for the gubernatorial race in the fall. But the army, which did have the facts, went on to interpret the surprising lack of disloyal activity among the Japanese minority as proof positive of intended treachery: "The very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken."

Because the decision for concentrating the Japanese American population was one made in total isolation from the American people, the justifications given for it were often conflicting, varying from authority to authority. Humanitarian groups and civil libertarians who sharply protested the stamping out of due process were assured that it was merely a "protective custody" measure deemed necessary to shelter "these admirable people" from mob action. Yet when violence and intimidation were encountered by families who attempted voluntarily to relocate themselves in the "Free Zone" of California (the eastern half) and in intermountain areas of the American interior, not one move was made by federal authorities to help stem the harassment and vigilantism so that an orderly resettlement might have been made possible. The proven failure of this voluntary movement, halted by a military freezing order on March 27, 1942, was given as one more justification why "drastic measures" were called for. The Nisei who pleaded to be allowed to remain free, and Caucasian friends who attempted to aid them, were reduced to helplessness, since Washington and the military insisted they had knowledge of certain facts not known to the average person, that only the authorities were equipped to know what was best for the "Japanese."

To explore such facts not then known to the U.S. citizenry—indeed, to cut through the morass of long-nurtured, still-persisting myths—is therefore the primary objective of this chapter.

III

Apart from occasional brief references to the Munson Report in works of scholarly research, the eye-opening loyalty findings of Curtis B. Munson have yet to receive merited exposure in the pages of history. As it is a document which brings into better perspective the often grievously misunderstood and misinterpreted 1942 federal action, its more pertinent passages have been excerpted for examination in the pages which follow. For readers interested in studying the report in its entirety, a reprint of the document may be found in the Pearl Harbor hearings of the 79th Congress, 1st session. The original copy of the report may be found at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

A duplicate copy may be found in the files of the assistant Secretary of War, National Archives.

A far greater portion of the allotted investigatory time had been spent by Curtis Munson in probing the West Coast Issei and Nisei; for the three naval districts (11th, 12th, and 13th) covered in Munson's coastal survey encompassed the full length of the West Coast—Southern California, Northern California, Washington, and Oregon. The report on the findings of the Special Investigator began as follows:

> JAPANESE ON THE WEST COAST
>
> *Ground Covered*
>
> In reporting on the Japanese "problem" on the West Coast the facts are, on the whole, fairly clear and opinion toward the problem exceedingly uniform. . . . Your reporter spent about a week each in the 11th, 12th, and 13th Naval Districts with the full cooperation of the Naval and Army Intelligence and the FBI. Some mention should also be made of the assistance rendered from time to time by the British Intelligence. Our Navy has done by far the most work on this problem, having given it intense consideration for the last ten or fifteen years. . . .
>
> Opinions of the various services were obtained, also for business, employees, universities, fellow white workers, students, fish packers, lettuce packers, farmers, religious groups, etc. The opinion expressed with minor differences was uniform. Select Japanese in all groups were sampled. To mix indiscriminately with the Japanese was not considered advisable chiefly because the opinions of many local white Americans who had made this their life work for the last fifteen years were available. . . .

In other words, long before the bombs began to fall on Pearl Harbor, efficient counterintelligence activity along the West Coast of the United States had resulted in all necessary loyalty-disloyalty information on Japanese Americans being evaluated, correlated, and catalogued—an impressive amount of amassed data representing more than a decade's worth of surveillance and intelligence-gathering. What is equally impressive is that this vast accumulation of military and domestic intelligence estimates (including opinions of private organizations, individuals, and informers) was, "with minor differences," in the estimation of the presidential sleuth, "exceedingly uniform."

Yet, with amazing aplomb, the army, whose own intelligence service had been an integral part of the investigative teamwork, was to maintain baldly throughout that the loyalties of this group were "unknown" and that "time was of the essence." If the time factor had, indeed, been so critical as to prevent holding hearings to separate the loyal from the disloyal, it is curious that some eleven months were to elapse before the last of such men, women, and children constituting a special menace were removed from restricted areas.

For the benefit of executive officers deficient in knowledge of the "Japanese background," historical and sociological background data "as [they have] a bearing on the question" were then briefly summarized by Munson. "No estimate of the elements characteristics of the Japanese is complete without a word

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

about 'giri,'" explained the Special Investigator, displaying a keen power of observation for a nonspecialist working under obvious pressure:

> There is no accurate English word for "giri." The nearest approach to an understanding of the term is our word "obligation," which is very inadequate and altogether too weak. Favors of kindnesses done to a Japanese are never forgotten but are stored up in memory and in due time an adequate quid pro quo must be rendered in return. . . . "Giri" is the great political tool. To understand "giri" is to understand the Japanese.

Individuals aware of this ingrained character trait of the Japanese were even then attempting to convince the President that the strategy of tact and civility would prove more constructive than threats, sanctions, and affronts to Japan's pride. Among such individuals concerned for peace was the eminent theologian E. Stanley Jones, who sought repeatedly in the months preceding the attack to convince the President that if America were to revoke its punitive protectionist stance and accord discretionary treatment to a "have-not" nation vexed by problems of an exploding population, Japan would not only doubly reciprocate but also might possibly end up as an ally.

Severely damaging then to the Nisei was the habit of being lumped as "Japanese," or the pejorative "Japs," which also meant "the enemy." Munson was careful to point out to policy makers that "in the United States there are four divisions of Japanese to be considered." A brief definition of each followed:

1. The *ISSEI*—First generation Japanese. Entire cultural background Japanese. Probably loyal romantically to Japan. They must be considered, however, as other races. They have made this their home. They have brought up children here, their wealth accumulated by hard labor is here, and many would have become American citizens had they been allowed to do so. [The ineligibility of Orientals to acquire citizenship through naturalization had been determined by a Supreme Court decision: *Ozawa v. U.S.*, 260 U.S. 178(1922).] They are for the most part simple people. Their age group is largely 55 to 65, fairly old for a hard-working Japanese.

2. The *NISEI*—Second generation who have received their whole education in the United States and usually, in spite of discrimination against them and a certain amount of insults accumulated through the years from irresponsible elements, show a pathetic eagerness to be Americans. They are in constant conflict with the orthodox, well disciplined family life of their elders. Age group—1 to 30 years.

3. The *KIBEI*—This is an important division of the *NISEI*. This is the term used by the Japanese to signify those American born Japanese who received part or all of their education in Japan. In any consideration of the *KIBEI* they should be again divided into two classes, i.e. those who received their education in Japan from childhood to about 17 years of age and those who received their early formative education in the United States and returned to Japan for four or five years Japanese education. The Kibei are considered

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

the most dangerous element and closer to the Issei with special reference to those who received their early education in Japan. It must be noted, however, that many of those who visited Japan subsequent to their early American education come back with added loyalty to the United States. In fact it is a saying that all a Nisei needs is a trip to Japan to make a loyal American out of him. The American educated Japanese is a boor in Japan and treated as a foreigner. . . .

4. The *SANSEI*—The Third [*sic*] generation Japanese is a baby and may be disregarded for the purpose of our survey.

One of the gross absurdities of the evacuation was that a preponderance of those herded into wartime exile represented babes-in-arms, school-age children, youths not yet of voting age, and an exhausted army of elderly men and women hardly capable of rushing about carrying on subversion. The average age of the Nisei was eighteen. The Issei's average age hovered around sixty.

The Nisei generation, the American-born and -educated, had appeared relatively late on the scene, for only after years of saving up from his meager earnings did the early male immigrant send back to Japan for a bride. "Between these first and second generations there was often a whole generation missing," notes sociologist William Petersen in a January 9, 1966, *New York Times Magazine* article, "for many of the issei married so late in life that in age they might have been their children's grandparents." Owing largely to this generational chasm which separated the Issei from their fledgling offspring, the Nisei suffered not only from a serious communication gap—neither group speaking the other's language with any facility—but from the severe demands of an ancestral culture totally alien to the Americanizing influence of the classroom: a culture which emphasized strict conformity as opposed to individuality, duty more than rights.

The Kibei, the return-to-America Nisei, were an extreme product of this paradox. Some 8,000 of these native-born Americans had received three or more years of schooling in prewar Japan, often a desperate and sacrificial move on the part of parents at a time when even the highest level of educational preparation could not break down white employment barriers on the West Coast. Severe maladjustment problems were usually the lot of the Kibei on their return to a Caucasian-dominated society, causing some to withdraw into a shell of timidity. Ostracized not only by whites but also by their more Americanized peers as being too "Japanesey," the Kibei (often the older brothers and sisters in the family) suffered in angry isolation, feeling contemptuous of the Nisei as being a callow, culturally deprived generation whose "kowtowing" to whites they found distasteful. Marched into concentration camps before many had had a chance to readjust to the culture shock, and where the Kibei were subjected to stricter security surveillance, the more strident camp firebrands and disruptive deviants were inevitably to emerge from this group of misfits.

The factor of ethnicity, or "racial guilt" for the crime of adhering to old world cultural patterns, had been another of the bizarre arguments advanced by the military in justification for the preventive detention of a minority. In the words of Colonel Karl Bendetsen, the army architect-to-be of the racial uprooting, it

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

was highly suspect that Japanese Americans were then part of a "national group almost wholly unassimilated and which had preserved in large measure to itself its customs and traditions." In the event of a Japanese invasion, he determined, the Issei and Nisei would hardly be able to "withstand the ties of race."

And for Secretary of War Stimson, mere racial identification with the fiendish Asiatic foe, whose military might had been woefully miscalculated, was cause enough to have little confidence in the American-born Nisei: "The racial characteristics are such that we cannot understand or trust even the citizen Japanese."[10]

In striking contradiction to such insinuations and untruths fabricated of prejudice, a far kindlier assessment of Issei and Niesi acculturation, aspirations, and value priorities had been documented for the President in the weeks prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Munson's prewar assessment had been strongly positive; his commendation of the Nisei was glowing:

> Their family life is disciplined and honorable. The children are obedient and the girls virtuous. . . .
>
> There are still Japanese in the United States who will tie dynamite around their waist and make a human bomb out of themselves. We grant this, but today they are few. Many things indicate that very many joints in the Japanese set-up show age, and many elements are not what they used to be. The weakest from a Japanese standpoint are the Nisei. They are universally estimated from 90 to 98 percent loyal to the United States if the Japanese-educated element of the Kibei is excluded. The Nisei are pathetically eager to show this loyalty. They are not Japanese in culture. They are foreigners to Japan. Though American citizens they are not accepted by Americans, largely because they look differently [*sic*] and can be easily recognized. The Japanese American Citizens league should be encouraged, the while an eye is kept open, to see that Tokio does not get its finger in this pie—which it has in a few cases attempted to do. The loyal Nisei hardly knows where to turn. Some gesture of protection or wholehearted acceptance of this group would go a long way to swinging them away from any last romantic hankering after old Japan. They are not oriental or mysterious, they are very American and are of a proud, self-respecting race suffering from a little inferiority complex and a lack of contact with the white boys they went to school with. They are eager for this contact and to work alongside them.

Noting the "degrees to which Americans were willing to believe almost anything about the Japanese," Professor Roger Daniels (*Concentration Camps USA*: Holt, Rinehart and Winston) wonders whether Munson's apocryphal reference to the fanatic-minded Japanese "who will tie dynamite around their waist and make a human bomb out of themselves" might not have contributed to alarming the President.

In 1941, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) was still a politically unsophisticated neophyte organization preoccupied with the problems of how to better the status of their own minority in the United States; most Nisei were not yet old enough to belong to it. In an eagerness to gain white approbation, and moved by the deep and unselfish ideals of the Republic, the League had early

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

taken the route of superpatriotism, leading in time to a near-systematic disavowal of things Japanese. This marked compulsion on the part of the minority's youth generation to demonstrate an extraordinary allegiance may have accounted for the excellent bill of health given the Nisei, generally, and the Investigator's positive recommendation to policy makers: "the Japanese American Citizens League should be encouraged." Which military and civilian authorities proceeded to do to such a discriminatory degree that the manifest partiality shown JACL leaders in the stressful removal and adjustment period was to later become the fundamental cause of intracamp ferment.

Contradicting widely held assumptions to the contrary, Munson's following assessment of the immigrant group reveals the personal esteem in which many Issei had been held as individuals, even in the face of mounting prewar feelings:

> The Issei, or first generation, is considerably weakened in their loyalty to Japan by the fact that they have chosen to make this their home and have brought up their children here. They expect to die here. They are quite fearful of being put in a concentration camp. Many would take out American citizenship if allowed to do so. The haste of this report does not allow us to go into this more fully. The Issei have to break with their religion, their god and Emperor, their family, their ancestors and their after-life in order to be loyal to the United States. They are also still legally Japanese. Yet they do break, and send their boys off to the Army with pride and tears. They are good neighbors. They are old men fifty-five to sixty-five, for the most part simple and dignified. Roughly they were Japanese lower middle class, about analogous to the pilgrim fathers.

A strong factor in the Issei's ability to adapt to their inhospitable environment was that most of the immigrants had come from the lower rung of the social and economic ladder of their highly class-conscious homeland, thus were inured to inequalities in rights. Their self-effacing, uncritical admiration of America despite obvious repudiation was something "short of miraculous," recalls the Reverend Daisuke Kitagawa, an Episcopal priest from Japan who had worked among them in the less populous Pacific Northwest, where a lesser degree of discrimination was experienced than in California.

The Issei's admiration of, and ever-increasing attachment to, their adopted land was profoundly reinforced as the Nisei began to be inducted into the army under the Selective Service Act of 1939, Father Dai notes discerningly:

> When he saw his son standing proudly in a U.S. Army uniform, he knew that he had been wedded to the United States for all these years, even though there had been many in-laws, as it were, who mistreated him. . . . At that moment the Issei was in a frame of mind that would easily have led him to fight the Japanese forces, should they invade the Pacific Coast. Emotionally it would have been an extremely painful thing for him to do, but he would have done it just the same, for he saw quite clearly that it was the only thing for him to do as one who had been "wedded" to the United States. The traditional Japanese ethic, when faithfully adhered to, would not only justify, but more positively demand, his taking the side of the United States.[11]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

The Nisei "show a pathetic eagerness to be Americans" had been Munson's perceptive summation, and it was an apt one; for it described the state of mind of a substantial majority of draft-age Japanese Americans when pridefully answering their nation's call to arms as a heaven-sent opportunity to prove that, first and foremost, they were Americans—that their love and loyalty were for the Stars and Stripes.

The report continued: "Now that we have roughly given a background and description of the Japanese elements in the United States, the question naturally arises—what will all these people do in case of a war between the United States and Japan?" In other words, could Japanese Americans be trusted to withstand the ties of "blood" and "race" in the ultimate test of loyalty, of being pitted against their own kind? Would there be the *banzai* uprisings, the espionage and sabotage long prophesied and propagandized by anti-Oriental hate exploiters? "As interview after interview piled up," reported Investigator Munson, "those bringing in results began to call it the same old tune."

> The story was all the same. There is no Japanese "problem" on the Coast. There will be no armed uprising of Japanese. There will undoubtedly be some sabotage financed by Japan and executed largely by imported agents. . . . In each Naval District there are about 250 to 300 suspects under surveillance. It is easy to get on the suspect list, merely a speech in favor of Japan at some banquet being sufficient to land one there. The Intelligence Services are generous with the title of suspect and are taking no chances. Privately, they believe that only 50 or 60 in each district can be classed as really dangerous. The Japanese are hampered as saboteurs because of their easily recognized physical appearance. It will be hard for them to get near anything to blow up *if it is guarded*. There is far more danger from Communists and people of the Bridges type on the Coast than there is from Japanese. The Japanese here is almost exclusively a farmer, a fisherman or a small businessman. He has no entree to plants or intricate machinery.

Despite the restrained intelligence estimate that "only 50 or 60 in each district can be classed as really dangerous," the ferocity of the sneak attack which followed provided apparent justification for a ruthless sweep for suspects, made possible by the blanket authority given the Attorney General by Presidential Proclamation No. 2525, of December 7, 1941. Over 5,000 Issei and Nisei were pulled in by the FBI, most of whom were subsequently released after interrogation or examination before Alien Enemy hearing boards. Over 2,000 Issei suspects bore the anguish of having businesses and careers destroyed, reputations defiled in being shipped to distant Department of Justice detention camps for an indefinite stay.

Herbert V. Nicholson, a former Quaker missionary to Japan who then headed up a Japanese American congregation in Los Angeles, recalls the haphazardness of the indiscriminate pickups—that the FBI, with the help of law enforcement officers,

> . . . picked up anybody that was the head of anything. The same thing they did when Lenin and the Communists took over in Russia. . . . Anybody that was a *cho*—that

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

> means "head"—he was picked up. Heads of prefectural organizations were picked up. Just because we come from the same country, we get together occasionally, see, and just have a social time and talk about our friends back in Japan. But everybody that was head of anything was picked up, which was a crazy thing. . . . Because of public opinion and pressure, others were picked up later for all sorts of things. Buddhist priests and Japanese language schoolteachers were all picked up later . . . because of public opinion, they picked up more and more.[12]

Since it was assumed that years of social and legislative slights had hopelessly estranged the Japanese American minority, little did authorities then realize that with all their zealotry, not one instance of subversion or sabotage would ever be uncovered among the Issei, or a single case involving the Nisei. James Rowe, Jr., then second-in-command at the Justice Department as the Assistant Attorney General (today a prominent Washington attorney) recently admitted with candor that "we picked up too many . . . some of this stuff they were charged on was as silly as hell."[13]

The four-week probe of the West Coast "problem" had ended up putting the Nisei entirely in the clear. Munson was positive the enemy would look elsewhere for agents: "Japan will commit some sabotage largely depending on imported Japanese as they are afraid of and do not trust the Nisei."

> There will be no wholehearted response from Japanese in the United States. They may get some helpers from certain Kibei. They will be in a position to pick up information on troop, supply and ship movements from local Japanese. . . . [Another salient passage that may have alarmed the President.]
>
> For the most part the local Japanese are loyal to the United States or, at worst, hope that by remaining quiet they can avoid concentration camps or irresponsible mobs. We do not believe that they would be at the least any more disloyal than any other racial group in the United States with whom we went to war. Those being here are on a spot and they *know* it.

IV

A total of nine days were spent by the Special Investigator in Honolulu. As had been done in the Pacific Coast probe of the Japanese minority, an independent check was made with "the full cooperation of Army and Navy Intelligence and the FBI" on intelligence estimates of each agency, culled from years of accumulated surveillance data. Munson's assessment of the Hawaiian-Japanese problem began as follows:

> The consensus of opinion is that there will be no racial uprising of the Japanese in Honolulu. The first generation, as on the Coast, are ideologically and culturally closest to Japan. Though many of them speak no English, or at best only pigeon-English, it is considered that the big bulk of them will be loyal. . . . The second generation is estimated as approximately ninety-eight percent loyal. However, with the large Japanese population in the Hawaiian Islands, giving this the best interpretation possible, it

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

> would mean that fifteen hundred were disloyal. However, the F.B.I, state that there are about four hundred suspects, and the F.B.I.'s private estimate is that only fifty or sixty of these are sinister. . . .

Following the Pearl Harbor assault, 980 suspects from the Hawaiian Japanese community were to be pulled in by authorities and penned up at the Hawaiian Detention Center before their removal to mainland Justice Department camps. It is worth noting that the Honolulu-based FBI appears to have exercised far more restraint than its West Coast counterparts, considering that twice as many mainland Issei were to end up in Justice's custody.

A marked difference between the kind of discrimination being practiced on the Islands as compared to that on the mainland caught the attention of the Special Investigator. On the West Coast, there was no mistaking that racial attitudes were at the root of the animosity against the Issei and Nisei: "there are plenty of 'Okies' to call the Japanese a 'Yellow-belly,' when economically and by education the Japanese may not only be their equal but their superior." On the other hand, discrimination as practiced in Hawaii (where the Japanese "fit in" because "the bulk are dark-skinned of one kind or another") struck Munson as being based more on one's financial standing—on whether one fitted in on a social and economic basis.

> The result of this is that the Hawaiian Japanese does not suffer from the same inferiority complex or feel the same mistrust of the whites that he does on the mainland. While it is seldom on the mainland that you find even a college-educated Japanese-American citizen who talks to you wholly openly until you have gained his confidence, this is far from the case in Hawaii. Many young Japanese there are fully as open and frank and at ease with a white as white boys are. In a word, Hawaii is more of a melting pot because there are more brown skins to melt—Japanese, Hawaiian, Chinese and Filipino. It is interesting to note that there has been absolutely no bad feeling between the Japanese and the Chinese in the islands due to the Japanese-Chinese war. Why should they be any worse toward us?

More than a few Nisei and Kibei detained by Hawaiian authorities were to end up, with family members, in mainland "relocation centers," where the breezy outspokenness of Hawaiian youths and their uninhibited tendency to be openly resentful of insult was to come as a shock and special vexation to administrators—accustomed, as they were, to the docile, more taciturn mainland Nisei.

However marked the difference in personality makeup, the compelling need to demonstrate love of country and loyalty to the flag was a character trait shared in common by both the Hawaiian and mainland Nisei, or one might gather as much by their positive attitude toward army enlistment—no doubt a moral imperative—"country before self"—passed on to them by their duty-conscious parents. Noted the Investigator:

> Due to the preponderance of Japanese in the population of the Islands, a much greater proportion of Japanese have been called to the draft than on the mainland. As on the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

> mainland they are inclined to enlist before being drafted. The Army is extremely high in its praise of them as recruits. . . . They are beginning to feel that they are going to get a square deal and some of them are really almost pathetically exuberant.

Postwar statistics were to dramatize this remarkable *esprit de corps* more tellingly. A higher percentage of Americans of Japanese ancestry ended up serving in the U.S. Army during World War II than any other racial group, divided almost equally between the mainland Nisei (13,528) and those in Hawaii (12,250). "The final count of Hawaiian war casualties revealed that 80 percent of those killed and 88 percent of those wounded throughout the war were of Japanese descent," states Andrew Lind, writing in *Hawaii's Japanese.*

V

Los Angeles, California: December 20, 1941 (or some two weeks *after* the Pearl Harbor attack).

Munson offered no comments or post-mortems on the "surprise" attack which finally came—in obvious anticipation of which he had warned Washington from his Hawaiian vantage point in the early part of November: *"The best consensus of opinion seemed to agree that martial law should be proclaimed now in Hawaii."*

From his post-Pearl (December 20) Los Angeles vantage point, Munson volunteered some strong private opinions on a fast-developing situation which augured no good for the Coastal Japanese.

> We desire respectfully to call attention to a statement of the Secretary of the Navy evidently made to some reporter on his return to Washington after the Pearl Harbor attack as printed in the *Los Angeles Times* of December 18. . . . We quote, "I think the most effective Fifth Column work of the entire war was done in Hawaii with the possible exception of Norway," Secretary of the Navy Knox said. . . . Fifth Column activities, such as in Norway, impugns [*sic*] the loyalty of a certain large proportion of a population. Your observer still doubts that this was the case in Honolulu. . . .
>
> Some reaction of an undesirable nature is already apparent on the West Coast due to this statement of the Secretary's. In Honolulu your observer noted that the seagoing Navy was inclined to consider everybody with slant eyes bad. This thought stems from two sources: self-interest, largely in the economic field, and in the Navy usually from pure lack of knowledge and the good old "eat 'em up alive" school. It is not the measured judgment of 98% of the intelligence services or the knowing citizenry either on the mainland or in Honolulu. . . .

Knox's allegations of foul play were providing the opening wedge for racist forces to begin reactivating slumbering anti-Oriental prejudices along the Pacific Coast. Subsequently, the climate was to take an abrupt turn toward intolerance, notably when the Roberts Commission Report on the attack, released on January 25, 1942, reinforced the misleading impression that the aid of resident traitors had been received by the spy operation then centered in the Japanese Consulate: "some were consular agents and others were persons having no open relations

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

with the Japanese foreign service." Yet Washington was to remain remarkably silent about it. By the time official denials reached the mainland public, the developing fear hysteria had become irreversible.

Even as Munson sought to set the record straight, the President and his Cabinet had agreed, as early as December 19, 1941, to concentrate all aliens of Japanese ancestry on an island other than Oahu.[14] Navy Secretary Knox doubted that the measure went far enough and sought, from the outset, to convince the President that citizens, too, should be included. In a memorandum of February 26, a supremely confident President assured Knox that there would be no problem in removing "most of the Japanese": "I do not worry about the constitutional question, first because of my recent order [West Coast evacuation], second because Hawaii is under martial law. The whole matter is one of immediate and present war emergency. I think you and Stimson can agree and then go ahead and do it as a military project."[15]

Had the island roundup involved only aliens, as originally agreed upon, the Hawaiian evacuation might have proceeded swiftly, without hindrance. Approximately 20,000 aliens and 98,000 citizens then lived on the island of Oahu, the Japanese minority then making up one-third of the total island population. The small Issei population might have been readily replaced by an equivalent work force.

But because of Knox's stubborn insistence on a large-scale evacuation, which would have involved some hundred thousand Nisei and Issei (recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on March 11, 1942, and approved by the President on March 13, 1942),[16] the project was to end up becoming unwieldly and unworkable, especially since the Joint Chiefs of Staff ruled on removal to the mainland "utilizing empty ships returning to the west coast" at a time when shipping facilities were being taxed to their utmost.

The Hawaiian evacuation, to begin with the removal of 20,000 of "the most dangerous" aliens and citizens, was vigorously opposed—later thwarted—by island army and navy authorities closer to the problem as being too costly, logistically complex, and self-defeating. As Munson had prophetically forewarned in his pre–Pearl Harbor report, "it would simply mean that the Islands would lose their vital labor supply by so doing, and in addition to that we would have to feed them . . . it is essential that they should be kept loyal."

Accordingly—and paradoxically—it had become a veritable military necessity for authorities to retain, *not detain*, Hawaii's Japanese population in a battle zone thousands of miles closer to the enemy mainland than the jittery state of California and to do everything possible to encourage their loyalty so that all would stay at their tasks.

It was in sharp contrast to the policy pursued on the West Coast in reference to a people then posing an increasing threat to the prosperity of native farmers and merchants though still an infinitesimal percentage of the population—thus expendable, both politically and economically. Should the "Japanese" on the mainland "prove actively disloyal *they could be corralled or destroyed within a very short time*," the Special Investigator, in his prewar assessment, had dramatically punctuated this expendability.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

But on the basis of the highly favorable impression he had gained during the hurried survey, Munson was moved to submit to the President his own well-considered recommendations with the reassurance "Your reporter, fully believing that his reports are still good after the attack, makes the following observations about handling the Japanese 'problem' on the West Coast."

A. The loyal Japanese citizens should be encouraged by a statement from high government authority and public attitude toward them outlined.
B. Their offers of assistance should be accepted through such agencies as:
   1. Civilian Defense
   2. Red Cross
   3. U.S.O., etc., etc.
C. This assistance should not be merely monetary, nor should it even be limited to physical voluntary work in segregated Nisei units. The Nisei should work with and among white persons, and be made to feel he is welcome on a basis of equality.
D. An alien property custodian should be appointed to supervise Issei (first generation-alien) businesses, *but* encouraging Nisei (second generation-American citizen) to take over.
E. Accept investigated Nisei as workers in defense industries such as shipbuilding plants, aircraft plants, etc.
F. Put *responsibility* for behavior of Issei and Nisei on the leaders of Nisei groups such as the Japanese American Citizens League.
G. Put the *responsibility* for production of food (vegetables, fish, etc.) on Nisei leaders.

In essence, Munson's power-to-the-Nisei policy was to involve federal control:

> In case we have not made it apparent, the aim of this report is that all Japanese Nationals in the continental United States and property owned and operated by them within the country be immediately placed under absolute Federal control. The aim of this will be to squeeze control from the hands of the Japanese Nationals into the hands of the loyal Nisei who are American citizens. . . . It is the aim that the Nisei should police themselves, and as result police their parents.

Munson's suggested course of governmental action, which would have catapulted the Nisei into a position of leadership and control, might have proved sound had both the Issei and Nisei been permitted to remain at liberty as in Hawaii. But the power-to-the-Nisei policy was to become the root cause of resentment and conflict, when imposed behind barbed wire, in abortively speeding up the process whereby the still fledgling Nisei were taken out from under the control of elders, a generation to whom they owed unlimited deference and obedience.

Regrettably ignored was Munson's strong recommendation that the public's attitude toward the minority be positively led with a reassuring statement by the "President or Vice President, or at least [someone] almost as high"—as was the adopted policy in Hawaii, where the newly appointed military governor acted swiftly to squelch fifth-column rumors while assuring justice and equitable treatment to aliens and citizens alike, if they would remain loyal.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

But on the U.S. mainland, where other pressing considerations apparently outweighed justice for so inconsequential a minority, fear and fiction were allowed to luxuriate as part of the total war propaganda. And for reasons that defy easy explanation, Secretary of the Navy Knox was to further crucify a powerless minority by reporting to the Tolan Committee in a letter of March 24, 1942:

> . . . There was a considerable amount of evidence of subversive activity on the part of the Japanese prior to the attack. This consisted of providing the enemy with the most exact possible kind of information as an aid to them in locating their objectives, and also creating a great deal of confusion in the air following the attack by the use of radio sets which successfully prevented the commander in chief of the fleet from determining in what direction the attackers had withdrawn and in locating the position of the covering fleet, including the carriers. . . .[17]

It can only be assumed that Knox's tissue of fallacies impugning the fidelity of the resident Japanese was meant merely to divert, to take political "heat" off himself and the administration for the unspeakable humiliation that Pearl Harbor represented. By the convenient redirection of public rage, a nation on the verge of disunity and disaster was finally—and purposefully—united as one.

The actions of Knox and the wartime suppression of the Munson papers, like the more familiar Pentagon Papers, once again make evident how executive officers of the Republic are able to mislead public opinion by keeping hidden facts which are precisely the opposite of what the public is told—information vital to the opinions they hold.

In the case of Japanese Americans, data regarding their character and integrity were positive and "exceedingly uniform," the facts clear-cut. But as once observed by Nobel Peace Prize recipient Sir Norman Angell: "Men, particularly in political matters, are not guided by the facts but by their opinions about the facts." Under the guise of an emergency and pretended threats to the national security, the citizenry was denied the known facts, public opinion was skillfully manipulated, and a cruel and massive governmental hoax enacted. According to one of the foremost authorities on constitutional law, Dr. Eugene V. Rostow: "One hundred thousand persons were sent to concentration camps on a record which wouldn't support a conviction for stealing a dog."

NOTES

1. For documentation of key enemy message decoded in the weeks and months preceding the attack, see Admiral Robert A. Theobald's *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor.* The book's Foreword, written by Admiral William F. Halsey, hero of the Pacific War, reads in part: "Had we known of Japan's minute and continued interest in the exact location and movement of our ships in Pearl Harbor, as indicated in the 'Magic Messages,' it is only logical that we would have concentrated our thought on meeting the practical certainty of an attack on Pearl Harbor. . . . I have always considered Admiral Kimmel and General Short [commanders at Pearl Harbor] to be splendid officers who were thrown to the wolves as scapegoats . . . They had to work with what they were given, both in equipment

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

and information. They are our outstanding military martyrs." Works of historians William L. Langer, Roberta Wohlstetter, and Thomas A. Bailey might be consulted for a defense of Roosevelt's conduct of foreign policy leading up to the attack.

2. According to the findings of the Army Pearl Harbor Board investigating the attack: " . . . Washington was in possession of essential facts as to the enemy's intentions and proposals. This information showed clearly that war was inevitable and late in November absolutely imminent. . . . It would have been possible to have sent safely, information ample for the purpose of orienting the commanders in Hawaii, or positive directive for an all-out alert." U.S. Army. The Army Pearl Harbor Board. *Report to the Secretary of War*, October 20, 1944, Vol. 39, pp. 103–4 of the *Hearings before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack.*
3. " . . . the State Department and the President were not satisfied with intelligence of the Army and the Navy and the FBI and they sent out their own intelligence agents to get certain information in relation to the Japanese both in Hawaii and the Japanese on the west coast," declared Senator Homer Ferguson on making the Munson document public for the first time as Chairman of the Congressional Investigation into the Pearl Harbor Attack (November 15, 1945, to May 31, 1946). The operation had been set up by John Franklin Carter (Jay Franklin), a journalist-radio-commentator-friend of FDR. See Appendix 10 for Carter's covering memorandum on the report. [Editor's Note: This chapter is an excerpt from Michi Nishiura Weglyn's *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976); this note refers to an Appendix in Weglyn's book.]
4. Confidential investigative assignments for the State Department were taken on by Curtis Burton Munson whenever called upon. Examples: Assignments in 1941 included "Investigation into German interests of Anaconda and of General Motors" and, in September, a report on the "Attitude of French-Canadians toward the European War." From July 1942 to November 1943, Lieutenant Commander Munson served as Assistant Naval Attaché and Assistant Naval Attaché for Air to the Embassy in London. See name card index, 1940–44, of the Department of State.
5. The General Staff had also received about this time a copy of a ten-page report of Commander K. D. Ringle—intelligence chief of the Southern California naval district—strongly opposing the evacuation as "unwarranted," as the problem had been "magnified out of its true proportion because of the physical characteristics of the people." (All three West Coast naval districts had received copies of the Munson Report.) Ringle declared, moreover, that he "heartily agrees with the reports submitted by Mr. Munson." Report, Lieutenant Commander K. D. Ringle to the Chief of Naval Operations, undated (submitted "around February 1, 1942," according to Army historian Conn), Records of the Office of the Secretary of War (hereafter cited as "ASW," denoting the "Assistant Secretary of War," who then had been given charge of all matters relating to the Japanese problem), ASW 014.311 WDC, RG 107, National Archives.
6. J. Edgar Hoover believed that the demand for evacuation was "based primarily upon public political pressure rather than upon factual data" and that the FBI was fully capable of handling the small number of suspects then under surveillance. Naval authorities favored the use of hearing boards and the policy of selective internment.
7. "Issei" means "first generation"; "Nisei" means "second generation"; and "Sansei" is "third generation" in the Japanese language. As is done with other nationalities in the U.S., author will use the term "Japanese" to refer to the Japanese American minority whenever there is no possibility of confusion. Also, author will tread lightly on areas treated exhaustively in other evacuation works.
8. For a listing of pressure groups and organizations strongly anti-Japanese American, see Bosworth's *America's Concentration Camps*, pp. 30–32 in paperback edition.
9. Statements attributed to Earl Warren are taken from *Hearings*, 77th Congress, 2nd sess. Select committee Investigating National Defense Migration (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942). The Tolan Committee hearings (conducted from February 21

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

through March 7, 1942) were a sham. Executive Order of February 19 had already given the evacuation go-ahead to the Army, yet the "road show," with stops in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle, was allowed to go on—with exclusionist groups well in control of all the hearings. Assistant War Secretary McCloy had instructed General John L. DeWitt to "cooperate" with the Tolan Committee "insofar as it was compatible with military interests. . . . You might therefore suggest to Mr. Tolan that he should quietly conduct his investigations . . . into the dislocations which would be caused by the removal of these elements and into the best methods of dealing with the problem of their resettlement. There is no need for any investigation of the military aspect of the problem." Memorandum, John J. McCloy to General DeWitt, February 18, 1942, ASW 014.311 *Aliens*, Enemy Aliens on WC, RG 107, National Archives.

10. Burns, p. 215.
11. Kitagawa, pp. 32–33. Copyright © 1967 by The Seabury Press, Inc. Used by permission.
12. Mitson, p. 31.
13. *Ibid.*, see fn. 19.
14. Conn, Engelman, Fairchild, p. 207
15. Memorandum, Roosevelt to Frank Knox, February 26, 1942, OF 18, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York. Knox was then advocating the removal of 140,000 from Oahu. See Appendix 1 in Weglyn, *Years of Infamy*.
16. Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *op. cit.*, p. 210. See Appendix 2 in Weglyn, *Years of Infamy* for the Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of March 11, 1942.
17. Letter, Frank Knox to John H. Tolan, March 24, 1942. House of Representatives, *Fourth Interim Report of the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration*, 77th Congress, 2nd sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), pp. 48–49.

REFERENCES

Bosworth, Allan R. *America's Concentration Camps*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1967.

Burns, James MacGregor. *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970.

Conn, Stetson; Engelman, Rose C.; and Fairchild, Byron. *The United States Army in World War II: The Western Hemisphere: Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1964.

Daniels, Roger. *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans and World War II*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Kitagawa, Daisuke. *Issei and Nisei, The Internment Years*. New York: Seabury Press, 1967.

Lind, Andrew W. *Hawaii's Japanese: An Experiment in Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946.

Mitson, Betty E. "Looking Back in Anguish: Oral History and Japanese-American Evacuation." New York: The Oral History Association, Inc., 1974.

Munson, Curtis B. "Report on Japanese on the West Coast of the United States," in *Hearings*, 79th Congress, 1st sess., Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946.

Peterson, William. "Success Story, Japanese-American Style." *New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1966.

Rostow, Eugene V. "Our Worst Wartime Mistake." *Harper's* 191 (1945): 193–201.

Theobald, Robert A. *The Final Secret of Pearl Harbor*. New York: Devin-Adair, 1954.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:17.

Out of the Shadows

Camptown Women, Military Brides, and Korean (American) Communities

Ji-Yeon Yuh

A group of women wanted to participate in the life of their church, whose congregants, like themselves, were Korean immigrants to the United States. After much discussion, the women decided that they wanted to help prepare the food for the annual Thanksgiving dinner. Their proposal, however, was rejected by the church women's group. The church women's group was composed of Korean women married to Korean men, but the women who wanted to participate in the annual church event were Korean women who had married American soldiers. The Korean wives of Korean men believed that the Korean wives of American soldiers were dirty, unclean, unsanitary, and just not fit to prepare food. The message to the so-called "internationally married women" was clear: "You are not really one of us. We will tolerate your presence, but only as long as we can ignore you" (Yeo, personal interview).

Activists who work with Korean women in the camptowns surrounding U.S. military bases in South Korea often link militarized prostitution with Japan's militarized sex slavery. Along with scholars like Lynn Thiesmeyer, they argue that today's camptown women are a modern-day version of Japan's comfort women. But when they tried to expand the protest against militarized sex slavery to include militarized prostitution, they met with profound resistance. Comfort women, they were told, were innocent victims of Japanese colonial aggression, but camptown women were, well, weren't they just loose women looking to make easy money? (Kim, personal interview.)

Although these stories take place on opposite sides of the vast Pacific Ocean and involve two different groups of Korean women—those who married American

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

Back to top.

soldiers and immigrated to the United States, and those who service American soldiers in camptowns—they are intimately linked, for it can be said that Korean military wives are to the Korean immigrant community in the United States what camptown women are to Korean society in South Korea: pariahs to be kept away from "respectable" society.

Korean military brides are among the tens of thousands of Asian women who married U.S. soldiers after World War II, immigrating to the U.S. in what can be called a silent, unnoticed and ignored phenomenon. Most Koreans assume that the so-called military brides or "internationally married women" have come from the camptowns, even though many of the women—perhaps most of them—have not. Many camptown women, influenced by Korean societal norms regarding marriage and motherhood, perceive marrying an American soldier as their best hope for leaving the camptown life and approximating what they see as a "normal" life as a wife and mother.[1] Camptown women often talk about the women they know who have taken that route, wondering how so-and-so is doing in her new life, or perhaps passing around a letter written by a former camptown woman. Thus the camptown woman and the military bride are linked as if they were each other's missing half, the one representing an assumed past and the other a hoped-for future. In this way, the camptown has a larger-than-life presence for Korean military brides, and they live with its ever-present shadow. Camptown women, who live with the camptown reality every day, are in turn living with the as-yet-unrealized possibility of becoming a military bride. Few other Koreans, however, whether in Korea or in America, are aware that camptown women and military brides are pervasive presences in their lives as well. Indeed, most Koreans either consciously or unconsciously dismiss both camptown women and military brides as outside the realm of Korean society.

This paper argues that such a dismissal allows Koreans to negate the realities of their subjugation under the United States and to glorify the United States as the object of desire.[2] This in turn allows immigrants to affirm their new American identity even as they assert their Koreanness, and allows Koreans to imagine the South Korean nation as the equal partner of the United States.

The history of the camptowns has been sketched primarily by journalists such as Oh Yun Ho, workers with Korea Church Women United, and activists with My Sister's Place, a community center for camptown women in Uijongbu. The following discussion is based on their work. Camptowns emerged with the arrival of U.S. forces in Korea in September 1945. By the end of that year, the first camptown was established in Bupyong near the western port city of Inchon. The growth of the camptowns followed the trajectory of the U.S. military presence; as the number of bases and troops increased, so did the number of camptowns and camptown women.

In addition to Bupyong, some of the earliest and largest camptowns include Itaewon in Seoul; areas of the southern port city of Pusan called Hialeah and Texas; Tongduchon; and Songtan. The camptowns in Pusan were among the most stable, as U.S. soldiers were stationed there throughout the Korean War. (This was possible because Pusan, a port city located at the southeastern tip of Korea, left UN control—virtually synonymous with U.S. control—only briefly

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

during the war.) The U.S. military used Pusan as a landing port, and the camptowns of Hialeah (next to Camp Hialeah) and Texas soon appeared. Hialeah remains a camptown today, while Texas (located next to the Pusan train station) has become a camptown serving not only the U.S. military but also sailors and other itinerant travelers passing through the port.

The 1960s were the heyday of the camptowns, when more than 30,000 women earned their living entertaining some 62,000 U.S. soldiers stationed in virtually every corner of South Korea. The Paju area northwest of Seoul, militarily important due to its proximity to the Demilitarized Zone approximating the 38th Parallel and serving as the dividing line between North and South Korea, contained the highest concentration of U.S. troops until 1971. Nicknamed the GI's Kingdom, the area was home to the 1st Marine Division and the 24th, 7th and 2nd Infantry Divisions. The largest camptown during this period was Tongduchon, nicknamed Little Chicago and located just east of Paju and north of Seoul. When Camp Casey was established at the end of the Korean War in 1953 as the main infantry base, Tongduchon was transformed from a remote farming village into a chaotic world of drugs, sex, crime and black market deals in PX goods. During its height in the mid-1960s, some 7,000 women in Tongduchon worked as prostitutes serving the U.S. military.

Because U.S. bases were one of the few steady sources of income in the poverty-stricken years of the 1940s through 1970s, the camptowns attracted not only poor women, including war widows, and orphans seeking to make a living, but also entrepreneurs and criminals. In collusion with American GIs, Korean civilians smuggled military supplies and PX goods out of the bases, selling them for a handsome profit on the black market. Pimps and madams established clubs catering to the soldiers, hiring women at starvation wages to work as hostesses cum prostitutes. Villagers opened laundries, restaurants, stores and other businesses serving the more mundane needs of the soldiers and the camptown women. The newspaper *Dong-A Ilbo* reported on the development of these camptowns, using as a model Uijongbu, a camptown just north of Seoul but south of the larger Tongduchon. Before the war, Uijongbu had about 10,000 residents and one silk mill as the sole industry. But with the war, hundreds of unemployed people, UN forces and criminals literally invaded the town, bringing with them various underworld activities. About 2,000 women worked as camptown women, and the small town was suddenly filled with cabarets, bars, tailor and dress shops and other stores. By the 1960s, an estimated 60 percent of the 65,000 Koreans in Uijongbu were engaged in some form of business catering to the U.S. military.[3]

With the construction of U.S. military bases came not only the transformation but also the literal destruction of Korean villages. In July of 1951, Songtan—about an hour south of Seoul by bus—was invaded by the bulldozers of the 417th Squadron of the U.S. Air Force. The squadron built an airfield, causing 5,000 people (1,000 families) to lose their homes. These families had farmed the same plots of land in Songtan for generations, making their living from the annual rice harvest and the charcoal they made from the wood they chopped. As they left their ancestral lands, each family held a piece of paper from the U.S.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

military promising—in neatly typed Korean and English—monetary compensation for their loss. The promised compensation, which was much less than the market value of the land, never materialized despite years of legal battles. The issue was resolved in favor of the U.S. military with the 1966 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which stipulated that the United States can use without charge any and all land necessary for its military operations in South Korea (Oh 140–142). Over the years, more residents were displaced as Osan Air Base expanded to become the largest base in Korea and the second largest Air Force base in Asia.[4] Journalist Oh Yun Ho describes the transformation of Songtan:

> Oblivious to the local residents' resentment, the airfield was completed at top speed within six months. The surrounding area became the land of the Stars and Stripes. Thatched-roof houses gave way to all kinds of stores with English signs, aluminum cans replaced gourds, and a village full of shy maidens with their long braided hair instantly became a village full of yang gongju.[5] (142)

With the construction of the airfield, Songtan became home to a major hub of U.S. military activity in Asia and a thriving camptown. When the United States began to reduce its land forces in 1971, camptowns such as Tongduchon suffered, but Songtan grew as the United States continued to emphasize air power. In addition to the air squadron stationed there, soldiers regularly fly in from Okinawa for weekend training sessions (*Korea Church Women United* 33). Songtan today is one of the largest camptowns, with about 1,500 prostitutes. The projected move to Osan of the Eighth Army and the headquarters for the U.S. forces in Korea (currently located in Seoul) is likely to make Songtan Korea's camptown capitol.

American Town is a camptown developed with the collusion of both the South Korean and American governments. Built by a South Korean general and a landowner in 1969 during the height of the Park Chung Hee regime, American Town turned farm fields in North Cholla Province into a sanctioned red-light district for U.S. soldiers. Distinctly marked off from the nearby civilian town of Kunsan and the surrounding countryside by chain-link fences, American Town at first was wholly owned by the two developers, but later became a corporation with shareholders. During the 1970s business was so good that the clubs opened even during the day and a fleet of buses ferried soldiers between Kunsan Air Force Base and the town. Today, two buses operate daily between the camptown and the base. The town includes dormitory-like housing for the women, about 20 clubs, a dozen stores, and a government-run health clinic where the women receive mandatory testing for sexually transmitted diseases (My Sister's Place, 33–34).

For the South Korean government, these camptowns and the regulation of camptown women have been crucial to maintaining smooth relations with the U.S. government. Katharine Moon points out that making sure that camptown women played their proper role as entertainers and sexual playmates who would foster good will toward Korea among American soldiers was essential for the South Korean government. Thus the South Korean government embarked on an official program during the 1970s that praised the women as patriots for

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

earning foreign exchange and boosting the economy, and for contributing to the national defense by serving as personal ambassadors to U.S. troops. At monthly meetings in camptowns across South Korea, high-ranking government officials thanked the women for their hard work and assured them that their sacrifice for the sake of the nation would not be forgotten. But the official rhetoric of camptown women as patriots and civilian ambassadors is a thin cover-up for the exploitation of the women as sacrificial lambs, so to speak, to the United States. Although prostitution is illegal in South Korea, several hundred "special entertainment districts" are set aside where prostitution is regulated by the government. Not coincidentally, these districts correspond to the camptowns. The United States, for its part, takes it for granted that its soldiers "need" paid sexual companions for high morale and demands that camptown women be kept free of venereal disease so that soldiers do not become infected. Thus, as Moon describes, the South Korean government and the U.S. military have engaged in a decades-long collaboration to regulate camptown women and their behavior. The regulation, which appears likely to continue for as long as the United States stations troops in Korea, includes licensing camptown women to work in the clubs, requiring regular checkups for sexually transmitted diseases, and forcing the women to wear numbers so that their customers can easily identify them. Both Korean and U.S. military authorities also routinely stop women in the camptowns to check for valid licenses. Furthermore, while soldiers are encouraged to identify the women they believe caused their infection, women are not allowed to similarly identify the soldiers (Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, 176–179).

The presence of the U.S. military and the consequent development of camptowns have had profound effects on Koreans. For some, it has meant life as a prostitute serving foreign soldiers, struggling to survive in the harsh world of the camptowns. For others, it has meant immigration to America through marriage with a soldier. For still others, seeing a daughter or sister live and work in a camptown or immigrate to America as a military bride. For residents near camptowns, it has meant business opportunities catering to the needs of soldiers and camptown women. For the general Korean populace, it has meant access to U.S. goods, smuggled out of the bases via the camptowns and sold on the black market. It has also meant contact with American culture as conveyed by GIs, AFKN (Armed Forces Korea Network, the U.S. military's television station in Seoul, until recently accessible through any television set in the Seoul area), and the black market goods themselves. In short, as Nancy Abelmann and John Lie point out when they write that "GI s carried the United States to South Korea," American soldiers (and by extension the camptowns) have been the first point of contact with American culture for Koreans (56).

GIs, camptowns, *yang gongju* and military brides are thus intricately intertwined for Koreans. They also hold dual meanings. On the one hand, they are despised for what is seen as their immorality and corrupting influence. GIs and *yang gongju* frequently appear in Korean novels and short stories, for example, in story lines and descriptions that leave little doubt as to the cruelty and crassness of the GIs and the tawdry, tragic lives of the *yang gongju*. As one middle-aged man who grew up in rural southwestern Korea notes, "We all knew about the *yang*

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

gongju, but it wasn't part of our lives. We just knew that they were dirty. Everyone knew that." But on the other hand, they can be imbued with an alluring glow by their link to America's modernity and material abundance. The term *yang gongju* itself embodies that duality, as does the term *yang saeksi*: Although both are derogatory terms for camptown women, the literal meaning of the first is western princess and of the second, western bride. (Another derogatory term, *yang galbo*, is more straightforward. The term simply means western whore, and is clearly the most insulting of the three terms.) One camptown woman explains how her longing to enter the luxurious America pictured in the movies and on television led her to naively seek out a camptown:

> When I watched TV and the movies during my youth, I wanted to go live in America. When I was a little older, I wanted to have some luxuries, but that was impossible in our poor household. So I came to the camptown to meet Americans and earn lots of money. But once I got here, I found that many things were different from what I had expected. I never imagined that I would have to do this kind of work. And it doesn't even earn lots of money. If I had known that it was this kind of place, I would never have come. (*My Sister's Place*, 17)

Despite America's direct connection to the despised camptowns, *yang gongju*, and military brides, however, America remains the object of envy and admiration. This seeming contradiction stems from the unequal, neo-colonial relationship between South Korea and the United States. The lure that America exerted (and to a large extent still exerts) on Koreans is the lure of the metropole on the colony. Abelmann and Lie discuss this lure in the context of transnationalism, pinpointing the ways in which American culture enters Korea and serves to promote a longing for that culture (49–84). This lure is all the stronger because America has been seen as a liberator, not a colonizer. As scholars such as Kang Hyeon-Dew and Manwoo Lee have pointed out, under the dominant discourse of America as the savior who rescued Korea from Japanese imperialism and then saved Korea from communism, American heroism and generosity joins with American material abundance into an image of utopia. The same Korean man who spoke of everyone knowing that camptown women are dirty continued by saying, "But America was like our big brother, our ally. And we felt gratitude to the soldiers for helping us defend our country." Although a countering image of America as a corrupting influence, even an imperial power, has run parallel with this Utopia image, the positive image has been dominant. Only since the 1980 Kwangju massacre and the persistent unearthing of post-1945 history by Korean scholars that details American acts of atrocity and imperialism in Korea has anti-Americanism become a persistently voiced opinion in South Korea.[6] Still, the power, wealth and modernity that America symbolizes have largely overshadowed the negative consequences of America's dominance over Korea.

Their connection to the envied and admired America, however, does not save camptown women and military brides from contempt and ostracism. Traditional patriarchal mores emphasizing female chastity and a centuries-old pride in what

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

Koreans consider to be a homogeneous culture and race has worked against these women. Those who, like the camptown woman quoted above, come to camptowns seeking the America of their dreams are quickly disillusioned by a reality they never imagined. But patriarchal mores and extremes of cultural/racial pride alone cannot account for the contempt heaped on camptown women and military brides. Those same mores and that same pride kept the issue of comfort women a secret for decades, but while comfort women are now held up as innocent victims of an imperialist aggressor, camptown women remain pariahs. Indeed, former comfort women themselves disdain any links with camptown women. What can account for this difference? Part of the answer lies in the identity of the aggressor. Japan is seen as a former colonizer who has yet to fully come to terms with its history, who may yet have designs on its former colony. The United States, however, is still primarily seen as an ally and a friend who deserves thanks, whose freedoms and material abundance are ideals to be envied and pursued. To see the camptown women as victims of militarized prostitution, as modern-day comfort women, would be to shatter that vision of America. It would force Koreans to confront the myriad humiliations and brutalities committed by Americans and the U.S. military, incidents tucked away in small print in obscure corners of the newspaper, hidden in half-forgotten memories. Land seized by force and farmers forced out to make room for U.S. military installations; American troops firing into small groups of unarmed civilians peacefully demonstrating against the division of their country and against the U.S. military government; workers thrown out of factories they had begun to operate on their own after the Japanese owners left in the wake of Japan's defeat in 1945; countless Korean civilians murdered or brutalized by American soldiers who are given little more than slaps on the wrist by U.S. military authorities. Memories and newspaper accounts of numerous such incidents, painstakingly researched by journalist Oh Yun Ho, testify to an America that is imperialist, cavalier and ruthlessly self-centered in its dealings with "junior partners" such as South Korea. In addition, recent revelations about not only the 1980 Kwangju massacre but also the 1948 Chejudo massacre reveal an America brutal in its treatment of Korea—an image that directly contradicts the dominant discourse.[7] Seeing camptown women as victims of U.S.-sponsored militarized prostitution would shatter a self-conception of Korea as a sovereign nation. It would force a realization of the ways in which the United States oppresses Korea and Koreans, of the fact that Korea is at best a junior, a very junior, partner, and at worst a victim, even a pawn, of an imperialist America. Koreans would be forced to examine their own relationships to America, to see how U.S. aggression affects and has affected Koreans. They would have to acknowledge the reality of their own subjugations, subjugations which only begin with the military occupation of their nation by a foreign power. The U.S. military presence in South Korea has meant, for example, that whole towns have grown economically dependent on the local U.S. military base, their fortunes waxing and waning with the number of troops. In short, towns such as Uijongbu, Songtan and Tongduchon are economically dependent on decisions made thousands of miles away by the leaders of a foreign country. But if such realities are faced, a national self-identity as a sovereign nation in

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

partnership with the United States against the evil of communism (read: North Korea) would be in tatters.

The projection of camptown women as an other who then affirms the self-identity of the Korean nation follows a gendered pattern discussed by numerous scholars such as Susan Jeffords and Cynthia Enloe. The self-identity as a sovereign nation is a distinctly masculine one. To keep itself masculine and sovereign, it must banish the feminine and the subordinate. Camptown women, as prostitutes servicing the soldiers of a foreign power, are emblematic of the feminine and the subordinate. They serve to symbolize all the humiliations that Korea suffers at the hands of the United States. Indeed, political radicals in South Korea are increasingly using the image of the camptown woman as a metaphor for a nation brutalized under imperialism.[8] But for Koreans in the mainstream, it is necessary to condemn these women as whores and/or cynically praise them for patriotism as civilian ambassadors and earners of foreign exchange, all the while relegating them to the shadows. Only by doing so can they ignore/deny subjugation under a foreign power and the consequent shame, thus allowing the officially sanctioned discourse of Korean sovereignty and American benevolence to remain dominant. America's golden image is left relatively untainted, allowing Koreans to despise camptowns and camptown women even as they believe in America's rhetoric of freedom and opportunity and long for the material wealth, power and modernity that America symbolizes. In effect, the realities of U.S. influence on Korean society are interpreted as individual depravity—the women are prostitutes not because of Korea's circumstances and relations with the U.S., but because the women are morally corrupt. The logic of national pride requires this interpretation.[9]

Camptown women are well aware of their pariah status in Korean society. Interviews with camptown women conducted by My Sister's Place (Report) and by Saundra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus show that they believe that they too have rights as human beings and should not be condemned for being prostitutes. But most, if not all, view coming to the camptowns as a mistake. For camptown women, the concept of sex work as a legitimate profession is literally foreign. Many dream of a "normal" life as a wife and mother, and since this life is impossible to achieve with a Korean man due to Korean society's ostracism of camptown women, they dream of marrying an American soldier. How to survive and how to escape the camptown is the daily concern of most camptown women. The historical and social conditions underpinning camp town prostitution render largely irrelevant the arguments of some Western feminists and activist prostitutes who claim that prostitution can be an empowering occupation and a way out from under patriarchal domination.[10] Instead, I would argue that the converse is true in the case of militarized prostitution in Korea: the camptown women live under extremes of patriarchal domination literally practiced on their bodies by both Korea and the United States. This domination takes not only the form of rhetorical and social "othering" that serves to ostracize the women in order to affirm a masculine identity as a sovereign nation, as I have shown above, but it also takes the form of the daily policing and regulation of their behavior, restrictions that are placed upon them by masculine nation-states for the sake of their masculine national security interests and the masculine morale of soldiers.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

The pariah status of camptown women extends to military brides. Because marriages between Korean women and American soldiers are made possible by the continued U.S. military presence in Korea, the military bride, like the camptown woman, is a potent reminder of that presence. In other words, she reminds other Koreans that a foreign military occupies their nation, as well as of some of the personal and social consequences of that occupation. As such, military brides stand as another emblem of South Korea's subjugation under the United States, and thus become another object of condemnation and ostracism. Most Koreans also assume that military brides were once camptown women, thus making a neat link between the two. This link allows Koreans to rationalize their condemnation of military brides as justified moral approbation of prostitutes, eliminating the need to further interrogate their motivations. Some military brides did indeed once work in camptowns. But while camptowns are one place where Korean women and American soldiers meet and then get married, it is not the only place. And although it may have been the primary place in the past for the blossoming of such international marriages, it can no longer be assumed that that remains the case. Yet the phenomenon of militarized prostitution is critically important to the phenomenon of marriages between Korean women and American soldiers. The very existence of militarized prostitution deeply affects the lives of Korean women who marry American soldiers, even when those marriages began in locales other than camptowns. The stereotype of the camptown woman often prompts military wives to censor the behavior of themselves and their fellows, to go out of their way to prove that they are good wives and mothers and not loose women. Older military brides at the church I attended for some two years, for example, would sometimes take aside a younger military bride and tell her to stop wearing short skirts or clothing that they deemed flamboyant and reminiscent of camptowns. These women took pains to dress modestly, keep an orderly house and raise their children. In an apparent reference to camptown women, a number of the military brides whom I interviewed complained that the behavior and backgrounds of a few "bad women" tainted the image of military brides in general. For some women, a desire to distance themselves from the stereotype leads them to distance themselves from other military brides, to prove that they are not "one of them," thus depriving them of one source of community. And of course, the stereotype works to keep Korean military wives isolated from both mainstream American society and mainstream Korean society, whether in South Korea itself or in Korean immigrant communities in America, for it makes the women an easy target for contempt. Combined with language and cultural barriers that make interaction with non-Korean Americans difficult, this in effect leaves most women isolated within tightly restricted social circles where their only relationships are with their immediate family and other Korean military wives.

And yet, just as camptown women have played critical roles in South Korea, military brides have been crucial in the formation of Korean immigrant communities. By inviting their family members under the family reunification provision of U.S. immigration law, it is estimated that military brides are responsible (directly and indirectly) for bringing 40 to 50 percent of all Korean immigrants since 1965. (Lee, 1997, 97) Some women are the beginning of chain migrations that include

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

dozens of extended family members. Nearly every military bride I met had invited at least one family member to the United States.

The first Korean military brides began arriving in the 1950s. Of the women I interviewed, the earliest to arrive came in 1951. As wives of U.S. citizens, they were able to immigrate during a time when immigration from Korea and most of Asia was legally blocked. Thus they make up the largest group of Korean immigrants between 1945 and 1965, when immigration laws were liberalized after some five decades of strict, anti-Asian immigration restrictions. With the exception of small communities of immigrant Koreans in Hawaii and California, many of whom came during the first few years of the 20th century to work the Hawaiian sugar plantations, most other Koreans in the United States during that time period were international students. The students, mostly male, generally came from prominent, well-to-do families in Seoul, in contrast to most military brides, who came from relatively poor families in the provinces. The two populations also had little substantive contact in America. The world of colleges and universities in which the students traveled rarely connected with the military brides' world of bases, poor rural communities and urban neighborhoods. Thus in addition to the camptown shadow, class differences kept these two groups of Korean immigrants apart. These differences can be seen in many Korean immigrant communities today, where those immigrants who came as students and have attained professional status often keep their distance from those immigrants who came through the sponsorship of relatives—perhaps a military bride—and labor in small businesses and factories.[11]

Daniel B. Lee notes that between 1962 and 1968, Korean women who immigrated as wives of U.S. citizens accounted for 39.4 percent, the largest single immigration category, of all Korean immigration to the United States. Lee estimates that between 1950 and 1989, some 90,000 Korean women have immigrated to America as wives of U.S. soldiers (1997, 96–97).[12] They followed their husbands to every corner of the United States, from rural Kansas to urban Philadelphia, to places where they were the only Korean, if not the only Asian. A Korean immigrant presence in rural America is often the presence of military brides and their families. In most cases, a U.S. military base is nearby. This is true in Colorado, for example, where until recently the Korean community was primarily composed of military brides who had followed their husbands to Fort Collins. When the women invite their family members—usually parents and siblings—to immigrate to the United States, the relatives often first settled nearby. The women help their relatives adjust to U.S. society, find jobs, work their way through U.S. bureaucracy, put children in schools and find places to live. Often, the women provide these services for other immigrants as well.

But almost without exception, the women find that they are shunned once they outlast their usefulness. They are shunned even by their siblings, cousins and extended family members. One Korean American woman, a college student, recalled that one of her aunts had married an American soldier. This aunt had sponsored their immigration to the United States, and through that link, most members of the extended family came to America. But this aunt was rarely invited to family gatherings. Furthermore, the student said, the adults in the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

family made it clear to the children that having a military bride in the family was to be kept a secret. While ethnocentrism is certainly part of the dynamic of this kind of shunning, it is also a way for Korean immigrants to become American, much the same way that shunning camptown women allows Korea to be a sovereign nation in partnership with the United States. At the same time, it also allows Korean immigrants to affirm a Koreanness that seems threatened in the context of lives lived in America.

Lisa Lowe argues that Asian immigrants are forced to negate their own histories—of war, of oppression under imperialist and neo-imperialist powers, of racial discrimination—in order to become American. Post-1965 Asian immigrants, she argues, are in contradiction with the American sense of national identity precisely because of that history. Becoming American, then, requires negating that history and adopting the U.S. national narrative that disavows American imperialism (1–36). For Korean immigrants, negating their history of subjugation under the United States begins even before they step on American soil, for the ostracism of camptown women is nothing less than that negation. This negation continues with their shunning of military brides. By shunning her, the Korean immigrant simultaneously denies the history of subjugation, thus adopting the U.S. national narrative, and denies that he/she is like her in any way, thus affirming their Koreanness.

In the Korean (immigrant) imaginary, the military bride is figured as a lost soul—someone who has turned her back on her culture and her people in favor of an American and an American life. The military bride is thus seen as somehow not really Korean, as someone who has crossed a racial/ethnic border delineating Koreans and non-Koreans. That her children are not full-blooded Koreans only serves to underscore this otherness within a culture and society that prizes the alleged purity of the Korean bloodline. She is also figured as a pathetic wretch, a victim of domestic abuse, betrayal and abandonment by an American husband, someone who may "return" to prostitution, or an easy sexual conquest. Her status as victim—mostly at the hands of American men—serves to warn that crossing that border over into non-Korean territory leads only to disaster. But this characterization of military brides is not only a gross stereotype, it also serves to deflect attention away from the otherness of Korean immigrants themselves in relation to Koreans in Korea. Korean immigrants, like the military bride, have crossed a border by crossing the Pacific Ocean to live in a foreign land, raise their children as citizens of that land, and die in that land. To Koreans who have remained in Korea, the *jae mi gyopo* (a term for people of Korean descent in America) is a dual figure, someone to be envied for having achieved access to the American Utopia, but also someone who has forsaken the homeland. Portrayals of Korean Americans in the popular media, in television dramas such as *L.A. Arirang* and *1.5*, illustrate this duality. In the wake of the 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest, which was widely reported in Korea, "American beggar" has become the popular term for Korean Americans, one that highlights the immigrants' failure to find success. Thus for Korean immigrants who may be insecure about their identity, who may be ambivalent about their own history of immigration and who may question whether coming to America was

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

the right thing to do, shunning military brides is one way to affirm an identity as Koreans.

This ostracism from Korean immigrant society does not mean, however, that the women are left without community. They have formed their own communities among themselves, and while these communities are not as large or as institutionalized or as strong as mainstream Korean immigrant communities, they are a valuable resource for military brides. The communities are often more akin to loose networks or groups of friends. They center around regional organizations of military brides, around churches near military bases whose congregations are composed almost exclusively of military brides, and around networks of friends and fictive sister relations. Their primary activities include helping each other in times of need, providing opportunities to socialize in a Korean atmosphere, doing charity work on behalf of Amerasian children in Korea, and publicizing Korean culture to the American public, usually through participating in multicultural festivals or international days.

One organization of military brides, Korean International Daughters Society (KIDS), was founded specifically to help Amerasian children in Korea. This organization holds an annual fundraising banquet, with the proceeds going to orphanages. The women also sponsor adult Amerasians who wish to immigrate to the United States. Although most military brides eschew any relationship to the camptowns, many of their organizations do similar charity work on behalf of Amerasian children, most of whom come from the camptowns. According to several of the women I interviewed, the women feel a connection with Amerasian children in Korea because their own children are also Amerasian.

Other clubs formed by military brides are primarily social. They meet once a month at the home of a member, eat a potluck dinner of Korean foods, and socialize. For some women, this is their only chance to speak Korean, eat Korean food, and be with other Korean women.

Communities also form around churches whose congregants are primarily military brides.[13] As is the case with Korean immigrant churches in general, the church becomes a place not only for religious expression, but also for cultural expression and social connection with fellow Koreans.[14] Much of that expression centers on food. At the church I attended for nearly two years, whose 100-some congregants were all military brides and their family members, the Sunday service was followed by lunch, always Korean food. The church women's club made *kimchee*, and each year also did *kimjang*, the making of winter *kimchee* that would last until early spring. These are communal activities that in Korea would be done by the women of an extended family, by close friends, or by a mother/daughter or mother-in-law/daughter-in-law combination. For many of the women, these are activities that they cannot do at home, simply because their American husbands and children do not like Korean food and/or because there are no other Korean family members with whom to share such an activity.

The women at this church also participate each year in the multicultural festival at the local school. Wearing traditional Korean clothes, the women prepare and sell Korean foods such as stuffed dumplings, barbecued beef, glass noodles with meat and vegetables, and rice/seaweed rolls. They also display their prized

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

valuables to show Americans Korean cultural goods—lacquered jewelry boxes, embroidered screens, ceramic vases, jade jewelry.

The communities formed by the military brides serve other practical functions as well. They exchange information about jobs, often referring each other to job openings. They take in newcomers and teach them how to survive in America. They baby-sit each other's children and cook each other's food.

These communities, I argue, are primarily based on a sense of sisterhood that flows from shared identities as Koreans and as "internationally married women." To put it another way, these women reject the notion that they are no longer "really" Korean due to their outmarriage and immigration to the United States, and have created their own forms of Korean ethnic identity. This identity—gender specific, often class specific, and particular to their situation—challenges the validity of a monolithic Korean identity and opens up spaces for difference within Korean communities. Their experiences of sisterhood also demonstrate that shared gender, even when combined with shared ethnicity, is not enough to create bonds, but that sisterhood requires other commonalities grounded in concrete experiences.

The military brides' insistence on their Korean identity challenges the dominant self-identity for both Koreans and Korean Americans. This self-identity is based on notions of racial and cultural homogeneity which fail to recognize the diversity within Korean/American society. For example, as anthropologist Kyeyoung Park has shown, 1.5-generation Korean Americans have their own distinct sense of identity, one that incorporates and transforms elements of their Korean and American upbringings. Korean adoptees and many second-generation Korean Americans may not seem recognizably "Korean" to South Koreans or to the immigrant generation, but they too are part of Korean/American society. Mixed race people who are part Korean are increasingly claiming their Korean heritage and insisting that "full-blooded" Koreans recognize their claims to inclusion. This diversity—marginalized, suppressed and ignored—belies the dominant discourse of homogeneity.

Whether consciously or not military brides are refusing this marginalization by insisting on their Korean identity. They are pressing for a new definition of who and what is Korean, for an acknowledgment of the ways in which the United States has shaped Korean identity both in Korea and in the United States, and for recognition that they are also daughters of Korea, to borrow from the title of one internationally married woman's autobiography (Edwards). To engage this challenge, Koreans in Korea must face the reality of camptowns in their midst and must acknowledge the possibility that all of South Korea may be one huge camptown, that the degradation endured by camptown women is something that extends to all Koreans and something for which all Koreans are partially responsible. For Korean Americans, it means recognizing that their immigrant paths are linked to military brides, that their immigrant lives are intimately connected to the immigrant lives of military brides. What this requires are new conceptualizations of nation and peoplehood and community, conceptualizations that are open-ended and inclusive rather than closed and exclusive. I would argue also that these re-conceptualizations must take place simultaneously on both sides of the Pacific.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

As a start, it may be useful to begin post-1945 Asian American history with the history of military brides. For although my work has examined only the case of Korean military brides, Asian military brides as a whole have been left out of Asian American communities and of Asian American studies.[15] Narratives of Asian American immigration history, if they mention Asian military brides at all, focus on immigration statistics for Asian wives of U.S. citizens, ignoring military bride experiences and their importance in Asian American history.[16] Perhaps ignoring the history of Asian military brides has been one way to occlude those experiences with imperialism that contradict the dominant American narrative. Putting Asian military brides—from Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Vietnam, all countries where the United States has acted as an imperial power—back into Asian American history requires us to look at the history of U.S. intervention in Asia and the ways in which relations between Asia and the United States influence Asian immigration. It requires us to do precisely what Oscar Campomanes, in a recent essay, calls on Asian American studies to do: begin to develop and use a "more radical epistemology that accounts for the problematics of nationalist narrativity and twentieth-century U.S. imperial power" (526–527). This means recognizing and exploring the ways in which Asian American history is intertwined with U.S. imperialism. It means recognizing that military brides are Asian immigrants whose lives are part of Asian American histories. It means recognizing that these women are among our Asian American forebears. It also means re-examining Asian American communities today, and asking, where are the military brides? How to begin making the links between mainstream Asian American communities and Asian military brides?

Finally, I want to go back to the church incident regarding Thanksgiving dinner. Faced with blatant rejection, the military brides at that church did not quietly return to the shadows assigned to them. They went ahead and prepared food. In a direct response to stereotypes of dirt and uncleanliness, they wore pure white aprons and chefs' hats to serve up a Thanksgiving meal of turkey with all the trimmings. It was a hit with the children at the church, and the food prepared by the military brides ran out while the food prepared by the other Korean women was left over (Yeo, personal interview).

NOTES

1. The "normal" and "respectable" path for women in Korea remains marriage and motherhood. Few camptown women view themselves as rebelling against this societal norm. Rather, the overwhelming majority see themselves as having been forced into camptown life due to unfortunate circumstances and desire to find a way out. Knowing that they have little to no chance of marriage with a Korean man due to societal prejudice against camptown women, many view marriage with an American as a desirable alternative.
2. This paper is drawn from a larger study of Korean military brides using oral history interviews with Korean military brides, participation/observation in Korean immigrant communities, and research in a camptown in South Korea.
3. *Dong-A Ilbo*, 7/22/1962, as cited in Moon, p. 42.
4. Since the closing of Clark Air Base in the Philippines in 1992, Osan is now the largest.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

5. This is a derogatory term for camptown women.
6. The 1980 Kwangju massacre was a brutal, military crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in which the United States has been implicated. For a discussion of U.S. government documents that confirms long-standing suspicions about the U.S. role in the massacre, see Shorrock, Tim, "Ex-Leaders Go On Trial In Seoul." *Journal of Commerce*. Five Star Edition, Feb. 27, 1996. A1, and Shorrock, Tim, "Debacle in Kwangju." *The Nation*. Dec. 9, 1996. 19–22.
7. See Bruce Cumings' 1998 address, "The Question of American Responsibility for the Suppression of the Chejudo Uprising," presented at the 50th Anniversary Conference of the April 3, 1948 Chejudo Rebellion, Tokyo, March 14, 1998.
8. While this may appear to be a more sympathetic reading of the camptown woman, it has its own problems, not least among them that this usage of the figure of the camptown woman is yet another way that these women are objectified and their voices silenced, their life experiences used for someone else's purpose.
9. As violent crimes committed by American soldiers—such as the 1992 murder of Yoon Geum-yi, in which she was sexually tortured and beaten to death—are widely publicized, Koreans are becoming increasingly willing to condemn America and American soldiers. Nevertheless, this does not seem to be accompanied by a corresponding increase in understanding or sympathy for the camptown women.
10. See, for example, Pheterson, Gail. Ed. *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores*. (Seattle: Seal Press, 1989), and Delacoste, Frederique, and Priscilla Alexander. Eds. *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*. (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1998).
11. Bong-Youn Choy discusses class characteristics of post-1945 (mainly post-1965) *Korean Immigrants in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979). He does not, however, discuss military brides, giving them only a brief mention on page 218.
12. Statistics on the actual number of Korean women who entered the United States as wives of U.S. military personnel are not kept by any agency, but must be teased out of records kept by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, the City of Seoul's records of marriages between Korean citizens and citizens of foreign countries, and records kept by the South Korean Emigration Office. With these sources and others, Lee has compiled the most complete figures available on this subject.
13. See Daniel Y. Moon, "Ministering to 'Korean Wives' of Servicemen," in *Korean Women in a Struggle for Humanization*, edited by Harold Hakwon Sunoo and Dong Soo Kim, (Memphis, Tenn.: Assocation of Korean Christian Scholars in North America, 1978), pp. 97–116, for a discussion of the role that churches can play in the lives of military brides.
14. Korean immigrant churches have been a favorite topic of research for many Korean American scholars and most, if not all, anthologies of the Korean American experience include one or more articles on the subject. Jung-Ha Kim's *Bridge-makers and Cross-bearers: Korean American Women and the Church* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997) is a recent book-length study that looks at Korean American women's church lives.
15. Few studies of Asian Americans include substantive discussions of Asian military brides. An exception is Evelyn Nakano Glenn's *Issei, Nisei, War Bride* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). To my knowledge, no book-length study has focused on military brides from Asia other than Bok-Lim C. Kim, et al.'s *Women in Shadows: A Handbook for Service Providers Working with Asian Wives of U.S. Military Personnel* (La Jolla, Calif.: National Committee Concerned With Asian Wives of U.S. Servicemen, 1981). Like other studies of Asian military brides conducted by social work scholars and social service providers, this book focuses primarily on issues of marital conflict, dysfunctionality, and other problems, rather than linking military bride histories to Asian American histories.
16. This is the case, for example, in both Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore* (Boston: Little Brown, 1989) and Sucheng Chan's *Asian Americans: An Interpretative History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

WORKS CITED

Abelmann, Nancy, and John Lie. *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Campomanes, Oscar V. "New Formations of Asian American Studies and the Question of U.S. Imperialism." *positions: east asia cultures critique* 5.2 (fall 1997): 523–550.

Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989.

Choy, Bong-Youn. *Koreans in America*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979.

Cumings, Bruce. "The Question of American Responsibility for the Suppression of the Chejudo Uprising." Paper presented at the 50th Anniversary Conference of the April 3, 1948 Chejudo Rebellion. Tokyo. March 14, 1998.

Delacoste, Frederique, and Priscilla Alexander, eds. *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*. Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1987.

Durebang and Korea Church Women United, eds. *Great Army, Great Father: Militarized Prostitution in South Korea; Life in GI Towns*. Seoul, Korea: Juhanmigun Beomjoi Geunjeoleulwihan Undongbonbu, 1995.

Edwards, Chon S. (Song Jun-Gi). *Na-do Hangug-ui Ddal (I Am Also a Daughter of Korea)*. Seoul: Mirae Munhwasa Press, 1988.

Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. *Issei, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986.

Jeffords, Susan. *The Remasculinization of the United States*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Kang, Hyeon-Dew. "Changing Image of America in Korean Popular Literature: With An Analysis of Short Stories Between 1945–1975." *Korea Journal* October, 1976. 19–33.

Kim, Bok-Lim C., et al. *Women in Shadows: A Handbook for Service Providers Working with Asian Wives of U.S. Military Personnel*. La Jolla, Calif.: National Committee Concerned with Asian Wives of U.S. Servicemen, 1981.

Kim, Jung-Ha. *Bridge-makers and Cross-bearers: Korean American Women and the Church*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997.

Kim, M.B. (Staff member at My Sister's Place, Uijongbu, Korea.) Personal interview. March 1997.

Lee, Daniel B. "Korean Women Married to Servicemen." In *Korean American Women Living in Two Cultures*. Eds. Young In Song and Ailee Moon. Los Angeles: Academia Koreana-Keimyung-Baylo University Press, 1997. 94–123.

Manwoo Lee. "Anti-Americanism and South Korea's Changing Perception of America." In *Alliance under Tension: The Evolution of South Korea-U.S. Relations*. Eds. Manwoo Lee, Ronald D. McLaurin and Chung-in Moon. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1988. 7–27.

Lowe, Lisa. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996.

Moon, Daniel Y. "Ministering to 'Korean Wives' of Servicemen." In *Korean Women in a Struggle for Humanization*. Ed. Harold Hakwon Sunoo and Dong Soo Kim. Memphis, Tenn.: Association of Korean Christian Scholars in North America, 1978.

Moon, Katharine H.S. "International Relations and Women: A Case Study of United States-Korea Camptown Prostitution, 1971–1976." Diss. Princeton University, 1995.

My Sister's Place. Report on camptowns and camptown prostitution in South Korea. Draft. Uijongbu, Korea. 1997.

Oh, Yun Ho. *Sikminji-ui Adul-ae-gae* (To The Sons of the Colony). 3rd ed. Seoul: Baiksan Sudang, 1994.

Pheterson, Gail, ed. *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores*. Seattle: Seal Press, 1989.

Shorrock, Tim. "Ex-Leaders Go on Trial in Seoul," *Journal of Commerce*. Five Star Edition, Feb. 27, 1996. A1.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

———. "Debacle in Kwangju," *The Nation*, Dec. 9, 1996. 19–22.
Sturdevant, Saundra Pollock, and Brenda Stoltzfus. *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia*. New York: The New Press, 1992.
Takaki, Ronald. *Strangers from a Different Shore*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989.
Thiesmeyer, Lynn. "U.S. Comfort Women and the Silence of the American Other." *Hitting Critical Mass: A Journal of Asian American Cultural Criticism* 3.2 (Spring 1997) 47–67.
Yeo, Geumhyun. (Director of the Rainbow Center, Flushing, N.Y.) Personal interview. December, 1997.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:02.

The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority Myth

Robert G. Lee

Racist Love

In 1974, the writer Frank Chin expressed it this way: "Whites love us because we're not black."[1] The elevation of Asian Americans to the position of model minority had less to do with the actual success of Asian Americans than with the perceived failure—or worse, refusal—of African Americans to assimilate. Asian Americans were "not black" in two significant ways: They were both politically silent and ethnically assimilable.

The Cold War construction of Asian America as a model minority that could become ethnically assimilated, despite what *U.S. News and World Report* euphemistically called its "racial disadvantage," reveals the contradiction between the continuing reproduction of racial difference and the process of ethnic assimilation. The representation of Asian Americans as a *racial* minority whose apparently successful *ethnic* assimilation was a result of stoic patience, politica1 obedience, and self-improvement was a critically important narrative of ethnic liberalism that simultaneously promoted racial equality and sought to contain demands for social transformation. The representation of the Asian American as the paragon of ethnic virtue, who the *U.S. News and World Report* editors thought should be emulated by "Negroes and other minorities," reflected not so much Asian success as the triumph of an emergent discourse of race in which cultural difference replaced biological difference as the new determinant of social outcomes. Although the deployment of Asian Americans as a model minority was made explicit in the mid-1960s, its origins lay in the triumph of liberalism and the racial logic of the Cold War.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

Back to top.

The narrative of Asian ethnic assimilation fit the requirements of Cold War containment perfectly. Three specters haunted Cold War America in the 1950s: the red menace of communism, the black menace of race mixing, and the white menace of homosexuality. On the international front, the narrative of ethnic assimilation sent a message to the Third World, especially to Asia where the United States was engaged in increasingly fierce struggles with nationalist and communist insurgencies, that the United States was a liberal democratic state where people of color could enjoy equal rights and upward mobility. On the home front, it sent a message to "Negroes and other minorities" that accommodation would be rewarded while militancy would be contained or crushed.

The successful transformation of the Oriental from the exotic to the acceptable was a narrative of Americanization, a sort of latter-day *Pilgrim's Progress*, through which America's anxieties about communism, race mixing, and transgressive sexuality might be contained and eventually tamed. The narrative of Asian ethnic assimilation helped construct a new national narrative for the atomic age that Walter Lippman had dubbed the American Century.

WORLD WAR II AS PRELUDE

Ironically, it was Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into the Second World War that began the unraveling of the Yellow Peril myth. The Second World War was a watershed event for Asian Americans. The treatment of Asian American ethnic groups brought into sharp focus the contradiction between their exclusion as racial subjects arid the promise of their assimilation as ethnic citizens.

America's entry into the war against Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan made it increasingly difficult to sustain national policies based on theories of white racial supremacy. After Dunkirk, the United States and its allies depended on support from their colonial subjects in India, China (not, strictly speaking, a colony), southeast Asia, and north Africa. The very nationalist movements whose representatives had been summarily dismissed by Woodrow Wilson at Versailles were now actively courted by the United States as allies against the Axis powers. In August 1941, four months before the United States entered the war, Roosevelt and Churchill signed the Atlantic Charter recognizing the right of "peoples" to decide their own form of government. Later that year, in response to the threat by civil rights leader A. Phillip Randolph to lead a massive protest march on Washington, Roosevelt signed an Executive Order outlawing racial discrimination by companies doing business with the federal government and established a Committee on Fair Employment Practices.

Official pronouncements of racial equality notwithstanding, the wholesale and brutal incarceration of the Japanese American population on the west coast underscored, in no uncertain terms, the willingness of the U.S. government to invoke race as a category of subordination to achieve its goals.[2] This willingness to use racial categories would result in physical hardship, economic ruin, family disintegration, and psychological trauma for more than 120,000 Japanese Americans, men and women, elderly and infant, citizen and immigrant.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

After Pearl Harbor, the United States found itself allied with a weak and divided China. The Yellow Peril, that alliance of Japanese brains and Chinese bodies that had fired the racial nightmares of turn-of-the-century strategists of empire from Kaiser Wilhelm to Sax Rohmer, had remained imaginary. Japan's plans for empire, though couched in Pan-Asian anticolonial rhetoric, met with resistance in China and elsewhere in Asia. For the first time, being able to tell one Asian group apart from another seemed important to white Americans. Two weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the War, *Life* magazine ran a two-page pictorial entitled "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese." The reporter for *Life* magazine wrote:

> U.S. citizens have been demonstrating a distressing ignorance on the delicate question of how to tell a Chinese from a Jap. Innocent victims in cities all over the country are many of the 75,000 U.S. Chinese, whose homeland is our stanch [*sic*] ally. . . .
>
> To dispel some of this confusion, *Life* here adduces a rule of thumb from the anthropomorphic conformations that distinguish friendly Chinese from enemy alien Japs.[3]

On the right side of the article, two facial portraits of Orientals are juxtaposed one above the other. The top picture (of the Minister of Economic Affairs of the Chinese Nationalist government) is captioned "Chinese public servant" while the one below (of Admiral Tojo, the Japanese Prime Minister) is captioned "Japanese Warrior." Although the pictures are the same size and the proportions of the facial features virtually identical, the notes tell a vastly different story. The Chinese, *Life* told its readers, has "parchment yellow complexion, more frequent epicanthic fold, higher bridge, never has rosy cheeks, lighter facial bones, longer narrower face and scant beard." Tojo, "representative of the Japanese people as whole . . . betrays aboriginal antecedents, has an earthy yellow complexion, less frequent epicanthic fold, flatter nose, sometimes rosy cheeks, heavy beard, broader shorter face and massive cheek and jawbone."

In addition, the *Life* article showed two pictures whose captions read, respectively, "Tall Chinese Brothers" and "Short Japanese Admirals." *Life*, taking no chances with its racial taxonomy, supplied the following "field" notes: The Chinese brothers were "tall and slender" with "long legs" while the admirals were "short and squat" with "shorter legs and longer torso." Had *Life* only added blonde hair and blue eyes, it might have created the perfect Aryan Chinaman.

Not wanting to appear unlearned in the matter of racial anthropology, *Life* pointed out that its illustrations were drawn from Northern Chinese. Southern Chinese (at that time, the overwhelming majority of Chinese residents of the United States), the magazine noted, were short, and "when middle aged and fat, they look more like Japs." The *Life* editors went on to tell the reader that

> Southern Chinese have round, broad faces, not as massively boned as the Japanese. Except that their skin is darker, this description fits the Filipinos who are [also] often mistaken for Japs. Chinese sometimes pass for Europeans, but Japs more often approach the Western types.[4]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

Lest this confusing racial taxonomy fail Americans in this time of crisis, *Life* reassured its audience that cultural difference could also be identified visually. "An often sounder clue is facial expression, shaped by cultural, not anthropological, factors. Chinese wear the rational calm of tolerant realists. Japs, like General Tojo, show the humorless intensity of ruthless mystics."[5]

Aware that readers might be suspicious that this exercise in racial cataloguing was similar to that being practiced by Nazi social scientists, *Life* assured its audience that American physical anthropologists were "devoted debunkers of race myths." Debunking notwithstanding, *Life* asserted that the ability to measure the difference between the Chinese and Japanese "in millimeters" enabled American scientists to "set apart the special types of each national group." To lend an air of precision, scientific objectivity, and authority to the photos and the accompanying text, *Life*'s editors festooned the pictures with handwritten captions and arrows simulating anthropological field notes.

The same disjuncture between the newly articulated ideals of racial egalitarianism and the practice of racial discrimination can be seen in the Supreme Court's decisions in the Japanese American internment cases. In the case of Gordon Hirabayashi, a student at the University of Washington who had challenged the right of military authorities to establish a curfew applicable only to persons of Japanese ancestry, the court stated that discrimination on the sole basis of race was "odious to a free people." Nevertheless, the court refused to curb the authority of the military in times of national emergency and upheld Hirabayashi's conviction (he had refused to leave the university library at the hour appointed for Japanese Americans to be in their homes). Likewise in the case of Fred Korematsu, a house painter from Oakland who had evaded relocation, the court held that while race was an "inherently invidious" category for discrimination by the state and subject to "strict scrutiny," the court accepted the state's claim of military necessity for the incarceration of Japanese Americans.[6]

Despite its massive mistreatment of Japanese Americans, the still rigidly enforced segregation of African Americans throughout most of American society (not least in the Armed Forces), and the deadly anti-Semitic policy of denying refuge to Europe's Jews, the U.S. government condemned the Nazi's doctrine of racial superiority and identified the defeat of racism as one of the reasons "Why We Fight." While Japanese Americans were singled out on the basis of their "race," other Asian American ethnic groups began to receive favorable treatment from the federal government.

In 1943, Congress voted to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act, which had for sixty years forbidden Chinese, with few exceptions, to enter the United States. Repeal of exclusion had been a foreign policy goal of successive Chinese governments for more than half a century. Repeal was pushed through the U.S. Congress on the grounds that it would keep the wavering Nationalist Chinese government of Chiang Kai-shek in the war against Japan.[7]

In the next year, two bills were introduced in Congress to establish immigration quotas for India and the Philippines. These two bills were passed in 1946, on the eve of Philippine independence. The repeal of Chinese Exclusion and

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

the effective dismantling of the Asiatic Barred Zone of 1917 had greater symbolic value than immediate demographic effect, since the number of visas issued to Asian countries was still severely restricted. Nevertheless, the ideological statement implied by the dismantling of racially specific barriers signaled an erosion of white supremacy as a national doctrine.[8]

MAKING THE MODEL MINORITY MYTH

In January 1966, the *New York Times Magazine* published an article with the title "Success Story: Japanese-American Style," and in December *U.S. News and World Report* published an article focusing on Chinese Americans, "Success Story of One Minority in the US."[9] As their titles suggest, both articles told the story of Asians in America as a narrative of triumphant ethnic assimilation.

This new popular representation of Asian Americans as the model of successful "ethnic assimilation" was created in the crisis of racial policy that had surfaced at the highest levels of the federal government the previous year. The policy debate, that emerged in 1965 reflected deep ideological division over responses to the demands for racial equality that had developed in the two decades since the end of the Second World War.

The Watts riot in the summer of 1964 and the growing demands of African Americans for economic equity as well as formal political rights, along with the gradual dismantling of Jim Crow segregation in the South, plunged racial policy into crisis. The contours of the crisis can be seen in the conflicting responses of the Johnson Administration to black demands for racial equality. In March 1965, Lyndon Johnson's assistant secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, published a *Report on the Black Family*, which laid much of the blame for black poverty on the "tangle of pathology" of the black family. He admonished African Americans to rehabilitate their dysfunctional families in order to achieve economic and social assimilation. In June, at commencement exercises at all-black Howard University in Washington, D.C., the president articulated a vision of racial equality through sweeping social reconstruction in a massive War on Poverty. Both men genuinely claimed to support racial equality and civil rights, but their two documents could not have been further apart in their analysis and proposed solutions. The conflict between Johnson's response and Moynihan's response forms the ideological context in which the Asian Americans emerged as the model minority.

Johnson's speech emphasized the historical reality of race in America as compelling logic for extending civil rights into the economic sphere. Referring to the disadvantaged position of many blacks in the American economic structure, Johnson declared, "You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair."[10] The president went on to lay the principal responsibility for black poverty on white racism, both historical and present, and he outlined an agenda of government-sponsored social change to ameliorate discrimination and poverty.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

Moynihan took a radically different political tack. Quoting his former Harvard colleague, sociologist Nathan Glazer, Moynihan complained that "the demand for economic equality is now not the demand for equal opportunities for the equally qualified; it is now the demand for equality of economic results. . . . The demand for equality in education . . . has also become a demand for equality of results, of outcomes."[11]

Moynihan left implicit Glazer's ominous threat that American society, despite a commitment toward the former, would be "ruthless" in suppressing the latter. Moynihan went on to describe a black culture of poverty as a "tangle of pathology" born in slavery but "capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world."[12] In particular, Moynihan identified the prevalence of female-headed households as a barrier to economic success. For Moynihan, the key to both racial integration and economic mobility was not in structural changes or social reorganization that might correct past injustice, but in the rehabilitation of "culturally deprived" black families.

The *U.S. News* article was quite explicit about the political context of its report when it asserted, "At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent on uplifting Negroes and other minorities, the nation's 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own with no help from anyone else." Foreshadowing an obsession that was to shape Richard Nixon's campaign rhetoric a year later, the writer of the *U.S. News* article described America's Chinatowns as "havens for law and order" and made no fewer than six references to low rates of delinquency among Chinese American youth.[13]

MAKING THE SILENT MINORITY

The construction of the model minority was based on the political silence of Asian America. An often cited example of Asian American self-reliance was the underutilization of welfare programs in 1970. Despite the fact that 15 percent of Chinese families in New York city had incomes below the federal poverty level, only 3.4 percent had enrolled to receive public assistance. This statistic has often been used as an example of a cultural trait of self-reliance and family cohesion. An alternative explanation, grounded in recent Asian American history, would stress apprehension and mistrust of the state's intentions toward them.

Wartime incarceration had left deep wounds in the Japanese American communities. The removal to fairgrounds and racetracks, the relocation to remote, barbed-wired camps, the uncertainty of loyalty oaths, the separation of family members, all traumatized the Japanese American community. The Japanese American Citizens League's policy of accommodation with the War Relocation Authority and its role in suppressing dissent within the camps had left bitter divisions among many Japanese Americans. Japanese Americans, for the most part, were anxious to rebuild their lives and livelihoods and reluctant to relive their experience. In particular, the American-born Nisei generation remained remarkably silent about its camp experience until the emergence of the Asian American movement in the 1970s and the Redress Movement of the 1980s.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

Social psychologists have likened the response of Japanese Americans who had been unjustly incarcerated to that of victims of rape or other physical violation. They demonstrated anger, resentment, self-doubt, and guilt, all symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome.[14]

While postwar Japan became America's junior partner, the People's Republic of China became its principal enemy. After the Korean War broke out in 1950, and especially after China entered the war in 1951, the United States made every effort to isolate communist China, economically and diplomatically, and embarked on a military policy of confrontation aimed at "containing" the expansion of Chinese influence throughout Asia and the Third World.

The fear of Red China extended to the Chinese American community. In 1949, Chinese communities in the United States were divided in their attitudes toward the communist revolution. Although the number of communists in Chinese American communities was tiny, many who were not communist or even leftist nonetheless found some satisfaction in the fact that a genuinely nationalist, reputedly honest, and apparently more democratic government had finally united China after a century of political chaos, weakness, and humiliation. On the other hand, Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang Party had long enjoyed the support of the traditional elites in the larger Chinatowns.[15]

When the Korean War broke out in 1950, Congress passed the Emergency Detention Act, which vested the U.S. Attorney General with the authority to establish concentration camps for any who might be deemed a domestic threat in a national emergency. The mere authorization of such sweeping powers of detention served as a stark warning to Chinese Americans that what had been done to Japanese Americans a decade earlier could also be done to them without effort.

The pro–Chiang Kai-shek Chinatown elite, working with the FBI, launched a systematic attempt to suppress any expression of support for the new communist regime in China. The Trading with the Enemy Act, which prohibited any currency transfers to the Peoples Republic of China, including remittances to family, was used as a tool to attempt to deport suspected communist sympathizers. Although only a few leftists and labor leaders were actually deported, the threat of deportation had a deeply chilling effect, since many hundreds of Chinese had come to the United States as "paper sons" during the long decades of exclusion and were in the United States under false pretenses.

In 1952 Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act, which dismantled racial prohibitions on immigration and established an Asian-Pacific Triangle with an immigration quota cap of two thousand visas. Even though McCarran-Walter still strictly limited Asian immigration, the red scare that was its impetus was contagious. In 1955, Everett F. Drumwright, the U.S. consul in Hong Kong, issued a report warning that Communist China was making use of "massive" fraud and deception to infiltrate agents into the United States under cover as immigrants. Drumwright's hysterical and largely unsubstantiated report provided the rationale for massive FBI and INS raids into Chinatowns around the country to search out pro-China subversives. Chinatowns were flooded with public notices and street flyers warning of potential spies and

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

subversives, while "innocent residents" were encouraged to report suspected subversives to the FBI.

In 1957 Congress authorized the Chinese Confession Program. Chinese Americans who had come as paper sons were encouraged to confess their illegal entry. In return for consideration for an appropriate (but not guaranteed) adjustment of their status, the applicant had also to make a full disclosure on every relative and friend. The information gathered in the Chinese Confession Program was used to try to deport those who were identified by the FBI's informants as supporters of China or as domestic troublemakers. Membership in leftist support organizations, in labor unions, in "pro-China" organizations melted away in the face of the sustained harassment and attack from the conservative elite within Chinatowns, and the FBI and INS from without.[16]

CONTAINING THE RED MENACE: THE FORDIST COMPROMISE

At the close of the Second World War, American labor was infused with a renewed militancy. During the war years union membership had grown from nine million in 1940 to about fifteen million in 1945. This represented almost thirty-six percent of the non-agricultural work force, the highest proportion of unionized labor in the country's history. During the war years, organized labor had agreed to a no strike policy and to curb wage demands as a patriotic obligation to the war effort. However, at the war's end pent-up wage demands and the problems of reabsorption of millions of men leaving the service led to a resurgence of demands for wages and a reassertion of control over work conditions. Labor strife soon boiled over at General Motors and in the oil industry. In 1945 forty-five hundred work stoppages, mainly wildcat strikes and sit-downs, involved five million workers. Some of these work stoppages took the form of hate strikes aimed at driving women and black workers from the factory positions they had earned during the war.[17]

In 1946, the steelworkers went on strike, then the miners. Strike fever spread when a general strike was called in Stamford, Connecticut. In 1947 militant labor called general strikes to shut down business in Houston, Rochester, Pittsburgh and Oakland.

In May 1946, President Truman seized the railroads to prevent a strike. Altogether Truman would seize and operate nine industries under powers granted the executive branch by the War Labor Disputes Act. Management launched a massive attack on radical, particularly Communist Party, leadership within the labor movement. Their most effective tool was the Taft-Hartley Act, passed in 1948, which outlawed the closed shop, secondary boycotts, and jurisdictional strikes in violation of decisions of the National Labor Relations Board; jointly administered welfare funds; and made unions subject to suit in federal courts for violation of contracts. The Taft-Hartley law stripped collective bargaining rights from unions having communists among their leadership and resulted in successive purges of the labor movement. Employers and employees could petition for decertification elections, and federal employees were forbidden to

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

strike. State right-to-work laws were legalized, and the president was given power to enforce eighty-day cooling off periods during which labor would be compelled to return to work.

The long period of economic growth that sustained America's rise to hegemonic power depended on a sustained accord between labor and management. This pattern of cooperation has been called the Fordist Compromise, since it seemed to usher in that stage of capitalism which Henry Ford had envisioned, in which working-class demand for durable consumer goods would drive economic growth. The Fordist Compromise permanently institutionalized many of the features of "scientific management" that had been introduced during the war. Under the new production-oriented union leadership, labor contracts developed a pattern of close collaboration between labor leadership and management on issues of supervision, productivity, and work rules.[18] In return, management and the state worked together to create a working class that had the social characteristics of a middle class. Real income rose by 30 percent between 1945 and 1960. The Fordist Compromise also called for a relatively high degree of state intervention, from the mediation of labor relations through the National Labor Relations Board, to the regulation of working conditions through agencies such as the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, to the organization of a "welfare state" of permanent entitlements for the new "middle" class, such as social security, subsidized housing, educational financing, unemployment insurance, and increased public higher education. The state also took on an expanded role in intervening in the economy through an ever-wider range of fiscal control policies and by exercising its economic power as the purchaser of last resort.

The sustained economic growth on which the Fordist Compromise depended was fueled by several sources, but initially it was $40 billion in wartime personal savings and a pent-up demand for durable consumer products that drove production. This required the reinvigoration of the patriarchal nuclear family. Wartime production had increased the number of women in the labor force from just under fourteen million in 1940 to just over nineteen million in 1945.[19] Both management and federal agencies worked to encourage and sometimes force women back into the home while work assignments in many plants were resegregated along racial lines.[20] As men returned from war and started families, the birth rate in the United States grew for the first time in several decades, leading to the sustained growth of a domestic market for housing, education, and durable consumer goods. The nuclear family was the necessary social unit of consumption for durable goods—the automobiles (fifty-eight million sold in the 1950s), refrigerators, toasters, and televisions whose production drove the economy.

The realization of the Fordist Compromise could only be imagined in a world in which the United States had reconstructed a sphere of influence based on free trade and open markets. In the late 1930s and '40s, American policy planners in the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations had initially imagined a "Grand Area" of American influence, to include the Western Hemisphere and the Asia-Pacific area. By the end of the war, the United States was in position to supplant Britain, France, and the Netherlands in many, if not all, of their

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

colonial territories.[21] The American postwar project of global transformation supplanted European colonial administrations in Asia with nationalist elites whose economic interests and political allegiances were aligned with American interests. By the end of the 1940s, one-third of all manufactured goods in the world were made in America, and U.S. officials emphasized a high level of exports as a critical factor in avoiding a postwar depression.[22] American policymakers therefore took it as an article of faith that the reconstruction of a stable, multilateral, capitalist economic system would rely on the unobstructed movement of capital and labor.

America's strategy for global reconstruction required the reconstruction of both western Europe and Japan as major industrialized trading partners. In Europe, the Marshall Plan funneled millions of dollars into the rebuilding of western Europe. Financing the reconstruction of Europe could not be funded solely through European-American trade, however; imports from Europe only amounted to one third of one percent of the U.S. gross national product. The United States therefore looked to Asia and the Pacific to close the "dollar gap."

The development of a Pacific Rim economic strategy therefore became a central requirement for American policy planners directly at the war's end. Although MacArthur had begun to dismantle prewar cartels such as Mitsui and Mitsubishi as a means of democratizing the Japanese economy along with its political system, by 1947 the reverse decision was made to reconstruct Japan's prewar economic machine as a foil to a possible revolutionary China. Japanese manufacturing was to become what the Council on Foreign Relations called "the workshop of the American lake." Japan was to play a critical role as a junior partner in the Pacific Rim strategy. After the "loss" of China, Japan, with American encouragement, focused its economic attention on southeast Asia. In its report on Asian economic development in 1952, the Institute for Pacific Relations spelled out the role that Japan was to play between the United States and the Southeast Asian market.

> There can be little question that . . . the best area for Japanese economic expansion is in Southeast Asia, with its demands for capital and consumer goods, its raw materials and rice surplus. . . . It would seem that Japan should be encouraged to develop trading outlets there in the interest of the overall structure of Pacific security. Japan has herself shown keen interest in these trade possibilities, especially in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and India.[23]

The Pacific Rim was not only a crucial market for American goods but also a highly profitable region for export of capital. In addition to the redeployment of Japanese capital, direct U.S. investment in the Pacific Rim was a major source of profits for American corporations. While overseas investments grew at about 10 percent per annum—twice the growth rate of domestic investment—American investment in the Pacific Rim outside Japan brought a 25.5 percent return on investment, and investment in the Japanese economy brought in 11.3 percent. Between 1951 and 1976, the book value of American investments in the Pacific Rim grew from $16 billion to $80.3 billion.[24]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

CONTAINING THE BLACK MENACE: ETHNIC ASSIMILATION

In 1944, the same year in which the Supreme Court heard the Japanese internment cases, Gunnar Myrdal published *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, a massive collaborative study of American race relations. Drawing on the work of a generation of American liberal social scientists, notably sociologist Robert E. Park and his students, *An American Dilemma* signaled the intellectual discrediting of biological theories of racial superiority and the triumph of the concept of ethnicity as the dominant paradigm for explaining and transforming race relations. Myrdal's report to the Carnegie Foundation focused on the disparity between the egalitarian ethos articulated in the nation's founding documents and the practice of racial discrimination in American society. Myrdal was clear about the implications of the "American dilemma" for America's role as the principal organizer of the postwar world order: "If America in actual practice could show the world a progressive trend by which the Negro finally became integrated into modern democracy, all mankind would have reason to believe that peace, progress, and order are feasible."[25]

Myrdal's hope was a statement of liberal faith. The triumph of liberalism, including ethnic liberalism, was made possible by the victory of the United States and its allies over the Axis powers and necessary to the rise of a *Pax Americana* in the postwar era.

The Cold War provided a national security dimension to the "race problem." Although Soviet communism was perceived as the greatest threat to the established order, after the Soviet Union exploded its own atomic bomb in 1949 the struggle against the Soviet Union was limited to a war of containment.[26] Since the establishment of relatively stable opposing blocs in Europe in the mid-1950s, the struggle between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was played out principally in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In 1954, the term "Third World" was coined as India, the People's Republic of China, and Indonesia (with the tacit support of the Soviet Union) sponsored a conference of non-aligned nations at Bandung, Indonesia. The demands of the Third World nations, largely peoples of color, for independence, self-determination, and economic development became the ideological arena in the contest between the Soviet Union and the United States.

It is not surprising, then, to find federal intervention on behalf of civil rights expressed in the language and logic of the Cold War. As early as 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, a case involving restrictive covenants in real estate, the federal government's brief supporting the dismantling of racial restrictions on housing "relied" on the State Department's view that "the United States has been embarrassed in the conduct of foreign relations by acts of [racial] discrimination in this country."[27] In the most significant postwar desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, both the Justice Department and the NAACP briefs emphasized the important foreign policy implications of the case. The Justice Department's amicus brief stated the foreign policy case explicitly:

> The existence of discrimination against minority groups in the U.S. has an adverse effect upon our relations with other countries. . . . Racial discrimination furnishes grist

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

> for the Communist propaganda mills and it raises doubts even among friendly nations as to the intensity of our devotion to the democratic faith.[28]

A decade later, in the aftermath of the Watts riots, both Johnson's Howard University speech and the preface to Moynihan's *Report* referred to this ideological struggle and framed the problem of civil rights and social justice in the United States within the global context of the Cold War. Both initially emphasized the need to provide the world with a model of the "true American revolution" as an alternative to communism. The president opened his speech by declaring,

> Our earth is the home of revolution. . . . Our enemies may occasionally seize the day of change. But it is the banner of our movement which they take. And our own future is linked to this process of change in many lands in the world. But nothing in any country touches us more profoundly, nothing is freighted with meaning for our own destiny, than the revolution of the Negro American.[29]

Moynihan opened his report with the observation that "the [Black] movement has profound international implications . . . [and that] it was not a matter of chance that the Negro movement caught fire in America at just that moment when the nations of Africa were gaining their freedom."[30] He went on to invoke the threat of perceived separatist Black Muslim doctrines or the "attractiveness of Chinese communism" to American blacks.

Anxious to replace the invidious category of race, for which there was little scientific justification and significant political cost, liberal theorists subsumed race relations to ethnicity. Ethnicity theory was grounded in the belief that while certain historically anachronistic patterns of racial segregation persisted, modern American society was open to the full participation of all who were willing to participate. Liberal social scientists who promoted the ethnicity paradigm argued that the desired assimilation of blacks into modern American society could be achieved in two steps. The barriers of Jim Crow segregation had to be dismantled (over the objections of "pre-modern" segregationists like the Klan, the White Citizens Councils, and an entrenched Southern power structure), and non-whites had to accommodate themselves to the "universal" demands of modernity.

The blueprint for ethnic assimilation was Robert Park's theory of a four-stage ethnic or race relations cycle. Park identified four stages in a natural and irreversible process of ethnic assimilation: initial contact between the outsider and the host society, economic and political competition, economic and cultural accommodation of the ethnic to the host society, and finally, assimilation into the host society. These patterns of cultural assimilation and integration were assumed to be universally applicable to all "newcomers" into the modern city and applicable to racial as well as ethnic relations. This was a narrative of modernization drawn from studies of the historical experiences of European immigrant groups in American cities. The ethnic component of cultural identity was identified with the Old World. Seen as pre-modern and dysfunctional, ethnic differences

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

of language, custom, and religion were transcended as the immigrant became modern and American.

Since the stages of assimilation were based on a narrative of universal modernization and not on a theory of subordination, the burden was on the latecomer to modernization to accommodate the host society. It did not occur to assimilation theorists that racially subordinated people might be reluctant to abandon cultures of survival that had been developed over centuries of oppression. The black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, a student of Park and one of the most important contributors to *The American Dilemma*, wrote:

> Since the institutions, the social stratification, and the culture of the Negro community are essentially the same as those of the larger community, it is not strange that the Negro minority belongs among the assimilationist rather than the pluralist, secessionist, or militant minorities. It is seldom that one finds Negroes who think of themselves as possessing a different culture from whites and that their culture should be preserved.[31]

Assimilationists supported the civil rights movement in the dismantling of Southern Jim Crow segregation and encouraged voting rights and electoral political participation. Assimilation theory, however, suggested that the duty of the state was limited to the dismantling of formal, legislated barriers to participation. Since the greater part of assimilation rested on the accommodation of the minority to the host society, state regulation of private activity in the interest of equal condition was seen to have little positive and possibly greater negative effect. The sociologist Milton Gordon, who in the early 1960s elaborated and refined Park's race relations cycle into a seven-stage theory of ethnic assimilation, warned explicitly:

> The government *must not* use racial criteria positively in order to impose desegregation upon public facilities in an institutional area where such segregation is not a function of racial discrimination directly, but results from discrimination operating in another institutional area or from some other causes.[32] [Emphasis added]

In the 1950s and early 1960s, liberalism, with its universalist claims on science and progress, became the hegemonic ideology of the American imperium. The political requirements of the Cold War and the logic of liberal universalism required an adherence to a doctrine of racial equality. Liberal social scientists articulated a theory of modernization that could be deployed as an ideological alternative to communism in resolving the problem of the Third World. Its domestic version, ethnic assimilation, would provide a similar nonradical solution to the "Negro problem."

Ethnicity theory met the requirements of liberalism by articulating a doctrine of individual competition in a "colorblind" society or, in Milton Gordon's view, a society in which the state played a neutral role. Ethnicity theory articulated a vision of the colorblind society but evaded a critique of the historical category of race altogether. Ethnicity theory offered a promise of equality that could be achieved, not through political organization and community empowerment, but only through individual effort, cultural assimilation, and political accommodation. For liberals

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

who sought both to develop the Negro and to contain black demands for the systematic and structural dismantling of racial discrimination, the representation of Asian-American communities as self-contained, safe, and politically acquiescent became a powerful example of the success of the American creed in resolving the problems of race.

In 1955, less than a year after the Supreme Court had shocked the system of Southern segregation by declaring separate but equal education inherently unequal and unconstitutional, the torture, lynching, and mutilation of Emmett Till, a black fourteen-year-old who was accused of flirting with a white woman, shocked the world. The exoneration of Till's killers by a jury of their white peers signaled a strategy of "massive resistance" to racial equality in the South. The murder of Emmett Till served as the counternarrative of racial intolerance and violence that threatened to undermine the liberal narrative of Myrdal's American creed so painstakingly assembled and elaborately articulated.

CONTAINING THE WHITE MENACE: THE NUCLEAR FAMILY AS CIVIL DEFENSE

In 1948, Alfred Kinsey shocked America by reporting that a third of American men had engaged in some homosexual activity during the course of their lives and that a majority had experienced homoerotic desire. The news should not have come as a surprise. The 1940s had witnessed a marked expansion of sexual freedom and experimentation with new definitions of gender relations. During the war years, millions of young men went into the armed forces and millions of young women went into the factories. These young people established new patterns of dating and had a more relaxed attitude toward premarital sex than did their parents. During the same period, gay and lesbian public cultures emerged in cities around the country.[33]

Kinsey's study, *The Sexual Behavior of the Human Male*, a dry sociological survey of 12,000 respondents, became an immediate best seller. It also drew the ire of conservative churchmen and politicians. For reporting these activities of Americans, Kinsey was accused of aiding and abetting the communist cause and was investigated by the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

In the Cold War search for traitors and subversives, homophobia and anticommunism went hand in hand. Following on the heels of Senator Joe McCarthy's search for communist agents, the Senate launched investigations to root out homosexuals in the federal government. Nonreproductive sexuality, homosexuality in particular, was seen as a threat to the national security. Anticommunist crusaders warned that homosexuality weakened the nation's "moral fiber," making it susceptible to both sexual and political seduction. Just as communism was considered a perversion of the natural economic order, homosexuality was considered a perversion of the natural biological order. When the sudden turn from World War to the high anxiety of the Cold War could only be explained by treason, homosexuals were seen to have secret lives much like spies or foreign agents. Shortly after his inauguration as president in 1953, Dwight Eisenhower issued an executive order barring gay men and lesbians from Federal employment.[34]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

The link between anticommunism and homophobia was not merely psychological or metaphorical; in the atomic age, reproducing the nuclear family was understood to be the key to national survival. In the 1950s and early 1960s, seeking to take advantage of America's advantage in nuclear weapons, strategic planners stressed survivability in nuclear war. This strategic doctrine relied on a program of civil defense, the mass mobilization and education of the civilian population regarding their duties during nuclear war. At the heart of civil defense was the belief that the nuclear family was the primary social unit through which the American way of life could be preserved or resurrected.[35] Talcott Parsons, perhaps the most influential American sociologist between 1940 and the 1960s, argued that the middle-class family, with its "natural" division of labor between the sexes, was the most efficient and implicitly the highest form of social organization. In the absence of a state apparatus that might be obliterated or cut off from its people by nuclear war, the nuclear family was a natural social unit that would reproduce America.

NOTES

1. Frank Chin et al., eds., *Aiiieeeee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974).
2. In this case, the goal was not to meet a real threat to national security but to ease anxieties about the government's preparedness and to mobilize support for policies of austerity and sacrifice. See, for example, Michi Weglyn, *Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America's Concentration Camps* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1976); and Peter H. Irons, *Justice at War: The Story of the Japanese American Internment Cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
3. "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese," *Life*, December 19, 1941, 14; "How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs," *Time*, December 22, 1941, 33.
4. "How to Tell Japs from the Chinese," 14.
5. Ibid., 14.
6. *Korematsu v. United States* in Hyung-chan Kim, ed., *Asian Americans and the Supreme Court* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 833–867. Under "strict scrutiny," discrimination by the state on the basis of race is held to be illegitimate unless the state can show an overriding national interest. This ruling, that race is a "suspect category," became a much-cited justification of subsequent rulings against racial discrimination. Under *coram nobis*, Korematsu, Hirabayashi, and Yasui were granted a new trial in 1984. In 1986, Hirabayashi was vindicated, and the government decided not to contest the other cases. See Yasuko I. Takezawa, *Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).
7. Fred Warren Riggs, *Pressures on Congress: A Study of the Repeal of Chinese Exclusion* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950).
8. Reference to Asiatic Barred Zone of 1917. Asian immigration was "normalized" under the provisions of the Immigration Act of 1924, which had established a system of national quotas. Each country was assigned a quota of visas equivalent to 5 percent of the total number of immigrants from that country of origin who resided in the United States in 1905. The resulting quota for Chinese visas was a mere 105 per year, and Indian and Filipino visas were limited to 100 for each country.
9. William Peterson, "Success Story: Japanese-American Style," *New York Times Magazine* (January 9, 1966), 38; "Success Story of One Minority in the U.S.," *U.S. News and World Report* (December 26, 1966), 73.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

10. Lee Rainwater and William Yancey, *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1967), 79.
11. Ibid., 124.
12. Ibid., 49. The likelihood that Moynihan also drafted Johnson's speech does not negate the point that the speech and the report reflect two quite different ideological tendencies.
13. "Success Story of One Minority in the U.S.," 73–78.
14. Yasuko I. Takezawa, *Breaking the Silence: Redress and Japanese American Ethnicity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995).
15. See H. Mark Lai, "The Chinese Marxist Left in America to the 1960s," in *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Association of America, 1992), 3–82.
16. See Bill Ong Hing, *Making and Remaking of Asian America through Immigration Policy, 1850–1990* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); Robert G. Lee, "The Hidden World of Asian Immigrant Radicalism," in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, ed. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 256–288.
17. George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).
18. David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 170.
19. Claudia Goldin, *Understanding the Gender Gap* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 152.
20. George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight*, 69–95.
21. Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter, *Imperial Brain Trust: The Council on Foreign Relations and United States Foreign Policy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977).
22. In 1960, the United States still enjoyed a favorable balance of trade of six billion dollars.
23. Cited in Noel J. Kent, *Hawaii: Islands under the Influence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 95.
24. Noel Kent claims that in this period the United States' direct investment abroad grew by approximately 10 percent annually, or twice as fast as the U.S. economy as a whole. Ibid., 97.
25. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), lxxii.
26. See, for example, Franz Schurmann, *The Logic of World Power: An Inquiry Into the Origins, Currents, and Contradictions of World Politics* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 16–19, 91–114, and *passim*.
27. Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* 41 (November 1988): 105.
28. Ibid., 110.
29. Rainwater and Yancey, *The Moynihan Report*, 79.
30. Ibid., 47; the full text of Glazer's essay is in Nathan Glazer, *Affirmative Discrimination: Ethnic Inequality and Public Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1975).
31. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 681.
32. Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 249.
33. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 282.
34. Ibid., 292–293.
35. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 102–104. See also Guy Oakes, *The Imaginary War: Civil Defense and American Cold War Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:38.

Why China?

Identifying Histories of Transnational Adoption

Sara Dorow

We should not conflate a haunted history with nonspecificity; on the contrary, haunted history alerts us to context.

—Anne Anlin Cheng (2001: 28)

Contemporary poststructural and psychoanalytic theorists define *identification* as a process that occurs where individual lives meet the haunting of social relationships—a process that "names the entry of history and culture into the subject" (Fuss 1995: 3; see also Cheng 2001).[1] In this sense, there are several overlapping histories that "identify" Chinese adopted children: trans-Pacific migration, the social and legal contexts of domestic and international adoption, and the unfolding dynamics of China/U.S. adoption itself. I see the traces of these histories in the stories American parents tell about how they decided to adopt a child or children from China. As prospective adoptive parents sift through their options, the ways in which they imagine the child that might become "our own" conjure elements of these histories. The title of this chapter, "Why China?" thus refers to two things at once: (1) parents' reasons for choosing to adopt from China and (2) the historical forces that might explain the popularity and growth of the China adoption program.[2]

The histories that are invoked when parents choose *transnational* adoption tell us about racialized and gendered citizenship in the *domestic* nation and family. Yet my focus on parents is not meant to put them on the spot. Rather, parents' expressions of transnational family building should lead us to interrogate the historical weight of dominant social discourses and practices that reach beyond—and inform—individual beliefs and everyday interactions in contemporary American social life more generally (Anagnost 2000; Eng 2003). For the adoption process

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

Back to top.

itself, this means we should try to understand how parents' choices are shaped within institutionalized practices in state and social service agencies. So while parent motivations for adopting are portrayed in the literature as notoriously difficult to pin down (Kirton 2000: 43–44), this becomes a problem for "knowledge about adoption" only when motivations are assumed to spring from inside the bounded individual decision maker, rather than from the juncture of individual and collective practices. I take the messiness of parents' decisions as evidence of the circulating forces of history that shape the possible horizons of identification for them and their children.

Throughout the following pages, I focus in particular on moments in my ethnographic data when adoptive choices meet racialized exclusions—those places where histories of color blindness, salvation, and universal humanism meet their dialectical partners of white privilege, marginalization, and particularity. My intention is not to attempt any kind of exhaustive history, nor to permanently hitch contemporary China/U.S. adoption to specific historical sign posts, but rather to suggest resonances of a discursive and practical nature. When it comes to racial formations, for example, I am more interested in how adoption decisions might play off of the shifting topography of imagined black-white-Asian relationships than I am in reinforcing the imprint of a racial hierarchy on American culture.

I begin with the story of just one adoptive parent to suggest what historical traces I mean, and what I intend to argue in this chapter on "why China." When we spoke in 1998, Jackie Kovich was a single white woman who had only recently adopted a daughter from China. Like most adoptive mothers and fathers I interviewed, Jackie began her adoption story with an explanation of her decision to adopt at all. She drew on humanitarianism and nonbiological parenting as naturally linked in a tacitly white embrace of a "different" child:

> I've always had the feeling that adoption was what people ought to do, from a political perspective, and from a, from a social justice perspective also. And I've never had the need to reproduce, to see a child that looks like me. . . . And I've always worked with underserved people and in the Third World.

This expressed commitment to and familiarity with global political and social inequities recalls a long-standing but selectively invoked thread of adoption discourse in the United States: fulfilling national and familial discourses of generous humanitarian outreach (Briggs 2003; Modell 2002). But it also laid the narrative groundwork for Jackie's choice to adopt from China in particular:

> [A]bout three months after I came back from a business trip to China, I went to see my sister. And she said, "Oh, did you see the thing on TV about the Chinese orphanages?" And I said, "Yeah, and you know, those children are so beautiful. There are no ugly Asian children." And my sister said, "Why don't you adopt one?" Okay? And I'd never mentioned anything to her [about wanting to adopt]!

In Jackie's account, a prescient remark by her sister seals her destiny with China, but only because overdetermined by the dual desirability of Chinese children as

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

both needy and beautiful. "The thing on TV" refers to a 1995 media exposé of poor conditions in Chinese orphanages, beginning with a documentary titled *The Dying Rooms*, that ended up influencing a number of parents in their decision to adopt from China. At the same time, "there are no ugly Asian children" resonates with a history of American and European fascination with aestheticized, feminized Oriental others (Said 1994 [1978]; R. G. Lee 1999; Register 1991).

Taken together, these transnational expressions of need and desire figure through yet a third lens of domestic racialized history. A bit later in our discussion, Jackie had just finished telling me how important she thought it was to teach her daughter about Chinese culture, when she continued, "I mean, look at the black community. If they truly had pride in who they were, the community wouldn't be disintegrating. . . . I think the reason why the Asian communities have excelled in our society is that they *do* have pride in who they are." Simultaneously referencing discourses of the culture of poverty (associated with blacks), the model minority (associated with Asians), and globalized humanism (associated with whites), Jackie imagines what her daughter is and can be against what she is not and will not be. A racially and culturally proud, desirable, redeemable Asian child is distinguished from the racially and culturally abject, marginalized, and possibly irredeemable black (collective) body. As Cheng (2001) asserts, the "strain of Asian euphoria" that marks the model minority discourse "serves to contain the history of Asian abjection, as well as to discipline other racialized groups in America" (23). Explanations for transnational family building sometimes expose not only the historical blinders of American multiculturalism invoked by Cheng and others (Okihiro 2001; Omi 1996; Prashad 2003) but also its unspoken whiteness (which has little need to be culturally proud). Jackie's story of choosing or being fatefully chosen for China—while more overt in its racial constructions than was the case in most of my interviews—brings to the surface several histories that reproduce/transform white middle-class subjectivity at the juncture of domestic and transnational practices and through the migrating adoptee.

FLEXIBLE DIFFERENCE: ADOPTION AS A CHAPTER IN TRANS-PACIFIC MIGRATION HISTORY

China/U.S. adoption came along at the right time, or perhaps more accurately, because the times were right—that is, a confluence of historical processes made it both possible and attractive. It is toward this claim that my argument in this chapter is aimed, organized around three kinds of history that weave through Jackie's story. In subsequent sections I deal with adoption histories themselves, but I begin with the migration of people, cultural imaginaries, and material objects between China and the United States, a history that is in some ways the least recognized of contextual histories of adoption, yet which leaves a certain imprint on the reasons people give for adopting from China. Parents imagine their and their children's relationships to China through the traces of a long history of "trans-Pacific flights" of people, ideas, and sentiments. In other words, the reasons parents give for adopting from China are inseparable from the images and sociopolitical relationships that characterize the history of China/U.S. migration (Shiu 2001).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

I do not want to suggest a direct and continuous link from century-old images and constructions of China to the present, but as Gungwu Wang (2001) has argued,

> [A]ny study of Chinese today must take account of the historical experiences of those who left China in the 19th and early 20th centuries, whose descendants form the majority of those abroad who are still identified as Chinese in some ways. Those experiences provide an important background to what it has meant for Chinese to live among different kinds of non-Chinese during the last hundred years or so. (119–20)

China/U.S. adoption fits Wang's general description of migration yet reworks the relationship between contemporary and past experiences of Chinese migration. Because Chinese adoptees enter at a young age into the legal and social embrace of (usually) white American homes, adoption migration abruptly raises the question of what it means to "live among" non-Chinese and at the same time suggests a path free of some of the usual obstacles to doing so. Chinese adopted children leapfrog into the national interior across boundaries of kinship, class, nation, and race. And it is for that very reason that their presence compels explanation.

Adoption migration thus turns our gaze to non-Chinese and, more specifically, white American imaginaries of the immigrant past. It forces us to consider the Chinese experience of migration as it both shapes and is shaped by Western images of China—those familiar and contradictory historical traces that "have designated China in a range of ways, as worthy of admiration, sympathy, curiosity, fear, ridicule, hostility, conversion to Christianity, or as a means of profit" (Mackerras 1989: 11). One kind of American discourse of China has placed it at the center of an increasingly transnational and "borderless" world, for instance, as invoked in the notion of the open economy of the Pacific Rim (Palumbo-Liu 1999). At the same time, however, representations of the Pacific Rim tend to recover East/West binaries; its Orientalized others, as Said's (1994 [1978]) pivotal work demonstrated, "recuperate a specific western individual at the core of reality" (Palumbo-Liu 1999: 339). These different but simultaneous imaginaries of China have developed through migration in both directions across the Pacific, for example, missionaries to China and railway workers to California. The cultural economy of adoption similarly occurs through the movement of people, ideas, and resources both from and to China.

The question of trans-Pacific migration must address the different historical contexts of the two areas in which I conducted research in the United States: the San Francisco Bay Area and the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan area. The former has a 150-year history of Asian and especially Chinese immigration. Starting in the mid–nineteenth century, American westward expansion included the idea of developing East Asia (Dirlik 1993, referenced in Palumbo-Liu 1999), with San Francisco as its gateway to trade with China (Takaki 1989) and as the gatekeeper of Chinese immigrants who would provide labor for American nation building (E. Lee 2003; Takaki 1989). This means that in the contemporary Bay Area, where 30 percent of the population reports being Asian, Chinese American people and cultural representations are more pervasive as well as more variable

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

than in the Twin Cities, where significant Chinese immigration is one or two generations old and only about 8 percent of the population is Asian.[3] Thus, the Asian America of the Twin Cities is an instance of the more recent expansion of Chinese and other East Asian student, business, and family immigration to North America. Also significant is that in San Francisco, an estimated one-fourth to one-third of families adopting from China include at least one Asian or Asian American parent (mostly Chinese American but also some who identify as Japanese American and Filipina American, for example)[4]—a proportion substantially higher than Minneapolis–St. Paul and probably most any other location in the United States. For these reasons, the question of "why China" begs consideration of geographic location. Of course, location must always be considered alongside other social factors. Jackie Kovich, for example, contrasted her child's identity to that of adoptive families living just over the hill from her in the Bay Area; she drew on the "free" cultural resources of her multiethnic working-class neighborhood, while wealthier white adoptive parents a few miles away could afford to send their children to private schools offering formal programs in Mandarin language and Chinese cultural arts.

Whether in San Francisco or the Twin Cities, parents' narratives of "choosing China" both echo and challenge a central theme of the history of China/U.S. migration: the American construction of the Asian Other as both strange and familiar, as insider and outsider, and as variably suited to incorporation into national projects of citizenship (Lee 2003; Palumbo-Liu 1999; Lowe 1996). Since the nineteenth century, immigration policies and practices have sometimes invited, sometimes forced, and sometimes barred the migration of Chinese workers and students and the relatives (including "paper sons")[5] who have joined them. From the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, to the 1965 reforms abolishing official race-based immigration, to the grounding of the *Golden Venture* that stranded hundreds of illegal Chinese immigrants in New York Harbor in 1993, China/U.S. migration has been shaped by universal discourses of transnational capital as well as particularizing notions of the uncivilized or exotic Asian, or more recently, the virtuous model minority (Palumbo-Liu 1999; Lowe 1996). The *flexibility* of Asian difference—strange but adaptable—has thus enabled contradictory positions of expansionary transnationalism, nativist exclusion, and assimilationist embrace.

The liminal space occupied by Asian America is and has been accomplished on cultural and racial territory, and in response to material realities. The reaction to increasing labor pressures in California that catalyzed the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century exclusion period, for example, was as much a manifestation of Orientalist discourses of the untrustworthy and uncivilized Chinaman (E. Lee 2003) as it was a class issue. Brought back by American missionaries and traders, these racialized discourses were reproduced "at home" in various ways; one exemplary case is provided in Nayan Shah's (2001) study of political and social responses to Chinatown's "contagion" in turn-of-the-century San Francisco. But then, even as the 1906 establishment of the Angel Island immigration station ensured increasingly standardized practices of keeping out unwanted Asian people (E. Lee 2003), the importation of "Oriental-style" decorative arts and

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

consumer products reached heights previously unprecedented in middle-class white American culture (R. G. Lee 1999).

This dialectic of danger and exoticism has echoed again since the 1960s in the seemingly more benign "model minority" discourse, which Lowe (1996) argues is yet another instance of the projection of American national anxieties onto the site of Asian American immigration. While purporting admiration of "traditional values," the model minority discourse tends also to depoliticize the material realities of racism and to deny histories of labor exploitation by promising "deliverance of minority subjects from collective history to a reified individualism" (Palumbo-Liu 1999: 415). But even so, there is regular confirmation that such transformation is not fully possible, as the case of Wen Ho Lee demonstrated.[6] R. G. Lee (1999) points out that in the late capitalist national American imaginary, Asian Americans have become both model minority and potential enemy within. In discourse echoing some of the nativist tone of the late nineteenth century, Asians are in and to America "economically productive but culturally inauthentic" (191). A more recent surge of "Asian cool"—hip but respectable popular Asian American culture—is perhaps the latest reinvention of America's flirtation with the exotic potential of such inauthenticity (see Galang 2003).

Reasons parents give for adopting from China at times reflect this contradictory history of Asian America, sitting uneasily on the impossible binary of rejecting/embracing images and ideologies of flexible Asian difference. Some of the multicultural promise of adopting children from China hinges on cultural-racial desirability and accessibility. But Asianness may still threaten to exceed the bounds of consumable difference. I argue below that such excess is at least partly kept in check through the construction of black difference as less assimilable difference. As suggested in Jackie's narrative, motifs of model Asian America play off the construction of abject black America and failed black-white relations (Gotanda 2000; Palumbo-Liu 1999), allegedly manifest in welfare dependence, criminality, and ingratitude.

For a select group of parents, feelings of connection to China and Chinese culture come from histories of trans-Pacific migration in their own families. Some Chinese American adoptive parents I interviewed cited a "natural" connection based on cultural heritage, even as they were sometimes quick to distinguish their second-, third-, or fourth-generation Chinese American experience from the Chinese heritage their children seemed more directly to embody. A number of white adoptive parents also cited a direct connection to China because they had relatives who had been missionary, diplomatic, or academic sojourners there or had themselves lived in or frequently visited China as businesspeople or teachers. But most white parents expressed an affinity with Chinese culture that bore more indirect traces of the cultural and political histories of migration discussed above. It was not uncommon, for example, for white adoptive parents to indicate a preexisting or growing interest in "ancient Chinese culture." Some named such an interest as a circumstantial bonus, while others indicated they thought it was a mistake for people to adopt from China if they did not have such an interest. Cultural knowledge and interest on the part of adoptive parents is encouraged by Beijing

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

as well. The China Center of Adoption Affairs has long asked prospective foreign adopters to indicate in writing that they will teach their children about Chinese culture.

White parents usually construed Chinese culture as admirably different but accessible, lending itself to some form of celebration or incorporation into their family lives. Adoptive father John Padding said, "We obviously wanted to adopt for *us,* but maybe another reason it makes it okay is that it's also a good thing, for our daughter, for the world, for multiculturalism"; he later added, "We like Chinese people and food and things and culture, so it was an easy thing to connect to." In the middle of my interview with the Cook family, adoptive mother Nancy stopped mid-sentence to muse, "You know, I was just thinking as we're sitting here, looking at our house . . . we have a lot of Asian influence, and most of this was before we adopted her. This was just our *taste*, I guess." In the San Francisco Bay Area in particular, the accessibility of "things Chinese" contributed to justifications for adopting from China. As Jason Bradley discussed his and his wife's decision to adopt from China, for example, he noted that having lived on the West Coast for so long, "we had had Asian American friends, and had had exposure to that culture." On a number of occasions parents in the Bay Area contrasted its multicultural and especially Asian population to some town in the Midwest that represented a problematic lack of the same.[7] While white parents in Minnesota did not as often or as confidently claim to have been primed for adoption from China through "exposure" to Asian cultures and peoples, their reasons for being attracted to the China program also sometimes referenced the accessible difference of Chinese culture itself, and thus the imagined adaptability of their children.

Accessibility—naming the appeal of Chinese food and art objects or naming Asian American friends—was in turn made possible by the *definability* and *longevity* of Chinese culture. As Mackerras (1989) argues, late-twentieth-century images of China remained focused "on the past, and the strength of its role in present-day China" (217). Parents fairly consistently used words such as *strong*, *rich*, and *ancient* to describe Chinese culture, suggesting a reliable and contained kind of difference with which children (and parents) could proudly identify and be identified. Lila Noonan said it was important in her and her husband's decision to adopt that "Chinese history is so advanced, so developed. . . . I'm Hungarian American, and growing up with the traditions, the history, the values—it's made me who I am."

The point is not that parents thought they could fully adopt Chinese culture along with the children they brought home; for some, in fact, part of the attraction was that an authentic China remained just out of reach, even as it could be celebrated, admired, and accessed. China itself—"actual" China—was sometimes even narrated as intimidating. Cindy Coombs noted, "At the beginning, it was still a mystery. The idea that China might actually be a place that we could feel comfortable didn't even occur to us." Jennifer Bartz made clear that she knew her daughter's understanding of China through *Mulan* and picture books was an "abstraction from the real thing." This was true as well for a couple of Chinese American parents in the Bay Area who had chosen to adopt from China so they could have a child "like us," yet who laughed ironically at feeling

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

"inauthentic" in relation to the China from which their grandparents or great-grandparents, and now their children, had directly come.

The flexible racialization of Asian subjects in the American imaginary is crucial to understanding the dialectic of strangeness and familiarity that contributed to "why China." This is especially so for white adoptive parents, who sometimes saw their own amorphous racial identities—what Frankenberg (1993: 205) calls the "unadorned, basic, essential" feeling of whiteness—potentially enlivened through transracial adoption. Deena Houston sheepishly admitted she had been somewhat disappointed that her daughter "was so white"; she had imagined one of those darker, rosy-cheeked country girls you saw in *National Geographic*, an outcome that might have made their whole family more interesting. Jennifer Bartz described her experience of the "difference" of China, which was also the experience of her own difference, as a kind of rush:

> I was overwhelmed by being in China. I had never been any place like China. There were times when I would just have to stop on the street and let it wash over me. And I would be standing on the street watching the tidal wave of bicycles go by, at sundown, and the sunlight would be filtered through the dust in the air, and you'd hear the sound of bicycle bells, and I would just stand and take it in, and people would be staring at me. You know, people from the country would be staring at me. Or their heads would swivel. And I had never had an experience like that. I liked it. I liked being—I liked having the experience of being Other. Because so rarely in my life have I been Other, except maybe as a lesbian. And even then, it's not like you could pick me out of a lineup. . . . I grew up the majority in a Midwestern suburb. So whatever hardwiring and life experience came to be that allowed me to enjoy feeling, most of the time, like Other, that felt good to me.

In Jennifer's description, the experience of being Other exposes the "hardwiring" of whiteness but then just as quickly welcomes relief from its bland normalcy. The transracial, transnational adoptive journey can be a dangerous pleasure, promising mutually beneficial Asian-white relations both through and for the child.

The potential to make whiteness more colorful depends in turn on the racial and cultural flexibility of Chinese children themselves. With particular attention to the commoditization of this process, Eng (2003) explores how the transnationally adopted child is both object and subject, performing the ideological labor of reproducing the white heterosexual nuclear family. He asks, "What does it mean that, in our present age, full and robust citizenship is *socially* effected from child to parent and, in many cases, through the position of the adoptee, its visible possession and spectacular display?" (8; emphasis in original). In this formulation, the American family and nation reproduce whiteness and weak multiculturalism[8] through the embrace of the transnational, transracial adoptee's cultural and racial difference (see also Shiu 2001; Ortiz and Briggs 2003). We are reminded that the history of struggles over the citizenship of Asian immigrants in America was also always about national citizenship in its dominant white patriarchal form (Palumbo-Liu 1999; Lowe 1996). But in the age of multiculturalism, and under the condition of unquestioned legal citizenship for the immigrant adoptee, social citizenship is

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

not so much about making clear distinctions between "us" and "them" as it is about the extent to which "us" and "them" are reconstructed through the uneven exchange of difference.

Model minority discourses are part of the flexible racialization that facilitates the double act of making child and family for each other. While the assimilability of Chinese immigrants was largely questioned and denied up until the mid–twentieth century, the invention of the model minority and changes to immigration law have since allowed for a limited transformation from alien to citizen (Lowe 1996). While many parents saw model minority stereotypes as both a blessing and a curse, reasons for adopting from China found some justification in them. As an adoptive father I met in China put it, his Midwestern hometown was pretty homogeneously white, but he didn't think it would be a problem for his daughter because Asians had a "different kind of stereotype."

Of further importance is that, in some parents' narratives, this "different kind of stereotype" relied on the more weighty abjection of blackness. Discourses of enfranchisement and national identity in the nineteenth century may have relied on black/white binaries to repudiate the uncivilized "Oriental," but by the 1960s the model minority discourse had redeemed Asians as "not black" (R. G. Lee 1999)—a social topography of abjection that echoed in adoptive parent narratives of choosing China. "Real" race and racism were sometimes reserved for blacks, not Asians, whose appreciable cultural characteristics can be read off their bodies. Social worker Rita Jasper described one kind of encounter she has with prospective parents:

> People come in here and they say, "Okay, I'm open to adopting a child from anywhere." I'll say, "Okay, great. So how about doing a domestic adoption, African American child?" "Oooooohhh, no." "Okay, well why?" "Well really, it would be so hard for the child." "Okay, so why would it not be so hard for the child coming from China?" [Here Rita lowers her voice to mimic a parent talking to her in a knowing whisper.] "Well, you know, Rita . . ." [She laughs.] And they're afraid to say it. And what I end up saying is yeah, in this country there is definitely a hierarchy, and the darker color your skin, the more prejudice there is. . . . [She becomes the voice of the rationalizing parent again.] "Oh well, I'm not thinking about us, I'm thinking about the child."

Teresa, a white woman married to a Chinese American, told me, "It seems in the overall scheme of things that as far as stereotypes go, the Asian stereotype tends to be a little more 'favorable' than say the black or Hispanic stereotype." Patty expressed a similar sentiment: "It's really not that harsh for Asians. There's a little bit of, you know, 'they're smarter,' but there's not really the same kind of racism there is against blacks, unfortunate as that is." Aaron Kretz, a Jewish father living in California, owned that racism toward African Americans was embedded in and around him in part because race itself was conflated with black:

> To be honest, with me it was a racial thing. I didn't want a black child, and it was pretty much China or South America, and in South America you could get kids of color, and I didn't want to do that. You can't ask. And I just don't have any biases about Asians, so

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

> for me it was an easier fit. . . . I mean, black is still, uh, not only a minority to me in this country, but a minority that doesn't, you know, fit in, as well as some other minorities. And like Jews, the minority of Jews, have chosen to fit in, or do fit in, or whatever, pretty much. There's other minorities that kind of get blended in. . . . I mean, it goes back to why I wanted to do Chinese. For me, [race] doesn't come up. I've gotta admit that if I had a black child, I'd probably think of us as more biracial.

Chinese children were in some instances desirable because they could be imagined as neither white nor black—interesting without being so different that they would not "fit in." We have here the suggestion of a racial "passing" in which the recognition of difference is key to the reproduction of whiteness and kinship. Indeed, the model minority discourse promises to scale down the Asian threat precisely by writing particularized cultural admiration onto racial difference—a far cry from the anxieties of the mid–nineteenth to mid–twentieth centuries that prompted Chinese immigrants to try to "pass" as respectable middle-class non-Chinese, or that produced a series of laws about marriages between Chinese and whites (E. Lee 2003). This does not mean that adoptive parents did not express anxieties about the interracial intimacy of their families, including explaining it to relatives and friends. But where and how parents found ways to explain it points to an aesthetics of racial passing that not only references a broad racial topography but also intersects with gendered and class productions of identity.

In a context in which 95 percent of adoptees are girls, it is important to address questions of how racialized desire might intersect with the construction of Asian *female* bodies. Cheung (2000), for example, argues that in American cultural history Asian women have been endowed with an "excess" of womanhood (alongside the full manhood denied Asian men). And in China/U.S. adoption, mothers Deena Houston and Jackie Kovich were not alone in conjuring the image of beautiful, enthralling Chinese girls. Adoption agencies consistently use photos of cute, dolled-up Asian girls in their advertising; some use phrases such as "From China with Love" to attract would-be parents. Some of those prospective parents said they had become enchanted with their friends' or neighbors' Chinese girls. Margaret Jennings said she saw a photo of a Chinese adopted girl in the paper and "knew I wanted to adopt from China right then." Some expressed embarrassment at what they suspected hinted at "racist love"—embrace of the "acceptable model" of the racial minority (Chan 1972, quoted in Cheung 2000: 309). Just days after she had met her daughter, Barbara and I were discussing what seemed among some new adoptive mothers an obsession with dolling up their daughters, when Barbara stopped to say in a low tone, "I hate to ask this, but are all the children beautiful? It seems like they're all beautiful."

Such raced and gendered aesthetics have bearing on social and legal citizenship, especially when considered along with the class conditions of belonging. Historically, Chinese women and children in particular gained legitimacy through formal kinship ties with respectable citizens (e.g., the War Brides Act that allowed Chinese Americans in the armed forces to bring spouses to the United States) and through other associations with whiteness (e.g., having white witnesses who could attest to nativity at citizenship hearings) (E. Lee 2003: 106–7).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

Class and capital further differentiated racialized and gendered citizens, and continue to do so. In her work on late-twentieth-century Asian immigrant experiences in the United States, Aihwa Ong (1996) argues that class interacts with race and gender such that "money whitens"; transnational practices and exchanges of capital afford some transnational immigrant subjects more flexibility than others (Ong 1998). And while the model minority discourse in particular has underwritten a successful Asian class position over and above that of African Americans (Gotanda 2000), at the same time there lurks in the recent American imaginary the threat of both cheap Chinese labor and Chinese economic power (E. Lee 2000; Palumbo-Liu 1999).

Yet, as discussed above, China/U.S. adoption simultaneously creates kinship for both citizen parent and immigrant child. And here we must consider issues of class and capital from an angle somewhat different from what the history of immigration might usually suggest: it is the material and social capital of white middle-class citizen families that catalyzes the flexible belonging of Chinese adoptee migrants, who in turn reproduce and transform the family. The class (and race) position of adoptive parents is signified in a series of "choices"—the choice to adopt, the choice to adopt internationally, the choice to adopt from China—which then enable both parents and children to gain fuller social recognition. The point is underscored by cases in which parents' choice to adopt from China is marked by an excess of difference. Even as adoption might help fulfill middle-class family values for gay and lesbian parents (Eng 2003), for example, many choose China because it is one of few options available to them.[9] For Lisa and Gerry, a lesbian couple who are respectively white and Asian American, this choice was overdetermined by historical intersections of race, gender, and class. While they initially considered adopting a white child domestically, one crucial factor that led them to China was the painful awareness that with a white child in her arms, Gerry would be more likely to be read as the child's nanny than her mother. Their story demonstrates that the adoptive family is one of those sites of social formation that reflect, govern, and potentially challenge racialized and gendered social relationships, at the intersection of the national and transnational (Lowe 1996: 172).

REDEEMING ACTS: CHINA/U.S. ADOPTION AS A CHAPTER IN DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION HISTORIES

While parents' narrations of "why China" both reiterate and contest the racialized, gendered, and classed relations of power that have marked China/U.S. immigration history, they must equally be understood within the history of adoption in the United States. This history, when domestic and international adoptions are considered together, especially foregrounds the dialectical relationship between acts of rescue and acts of market exchange. In my interviews, "saving" Chinese children was usually not first among reasons parents gave for adopting from China, but it often served as a complementary justification. Humanitarian rescue discourses helped distinguish international adoption from domestic adoption options. But as a number of researchers have pointed out, the idea of "rescuing a child" does not always sit comfortably with cultures of

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

choice, value, and upward mobility (Melosh 2002; Modell 2002; Anagnost 2000; Zelizer 1985). Domestic family and nation can be imagined only by distinguishing themselves from but also imagining influence on "the global," through a prism of differentiating who can be saved and how. As I argue in this section, racialized projections of the nation shape China/U.S. adoption as fulfilling the needs of both humanitarian outreach as well as increasingly commodified formations of kinship and citizenship.

The story of adoption in the United States over the last century reflects a cultural struggle over the commodification and sacralization of children (Berebitsky 2000; Melosh 2002). In *Pricing the Priceless Child*, Viviana Zelizer (1985) traces in the period 1870–1930 a transition in the kind of value assigned to children, from economic usefulness to sentimental fulfillment. At the confluence of several broad social trends—differentiation between economic production and home life, the specialization of women into expert full-time motherhood, and the growing sacralization of the child—domestic adoption began to emphasize the "best interest of the child" and the emotional fulfillment the child would bring to adoptive parents. By the 1930s, legal adoption of "strangers" was much more common, and more focused on middle- and upper-class families looking for an infant to love. But this growing sentimentalization also meant a growing adoption business, both unofficial and official. "An apparently profound contradiction was thereby created, between a cultural system that declared children priceless emotional assets, and a social arrangement that treated them as 'cash commodities'" (Zelizer 1985: 201). As Berebitsky (2000) makes clear in her study of the "Child-Rescue Campaign" run by the magazine *The Delineator* from 1907 to 1911, commodification of children went hand in hand with their rescue, fulfilling the destiny of the nation. Urban orphans could be rescued from poor and backward Eastern European immigrants and transformed into valuable citizens in the hands of white middle-class mothers. Market exchanges thus facilitated the rescue of children but also the redemption of those upright citizens in whose care they would thrive.

This seeming contradiction between rescue and desire, care and market, continued to haunt adoption practices and narratives in various ways, and adoption professionals and adoptive families in turn sought ways to resolve it. The Child-Rescue Campaign promulgated the notion that "the rescued always paid back the rescuer" (59), anticipating subsequent official and unofficial discourses of adoption that emphasized "parity of need" and "matching" between parents and children. Families (meaning, for the most part, infertile white couples) and children who needed each other could be matched up for the mutual fulfillment of individual, familial, and national identities. Indeed, as adoption was professionalized under the management of state and social service agencies in the first half of the twentieth century, it constructed itself over and against markets, substituting the language of proper placement and matching for that of direct rescue and crass exchange. Parents thus learned to narrate adoption as raising children "like our very own," mirroring biological kinship. At the same time, however, the growth of consumer society meant that professional matching could ensure a child "had the ability to achieve the class position and status aspirations of its parents" (3). The

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

matching criteria seen as most important to doing so have changed over time, but they have continually been crosscut by supply and demand as well as cultural and racial politics.[10]

The post–World War II era ushered in several decades of increasing acceptance of adoption, accompanied by charged discourses of race and rescue and complicated by the growth of international adoption and its relationship to the American imaginary of itself. It began with the placement of war orphans from Europe and Japan; then, in 1949, Pearl S. Buck established her Welcome House program of placing Amerasian orphans. This was followed by adoptions from Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s–70s, the former in numbers that now total more than 150,000.[11] As Lovelock (2000) and others have noted, intercountry adoption programs have often come in the wake of war and strife; "its history maps the global suffering wrought by war, hatred, hunger, and political oppression" (Melosh 2002: 195). The history of intercountry adoption is thus one immediately steeped in notions of rescue and humanitarian outreach. But that is not the whole story, as transnational adoption also sheds light on the valuation of children in relation to race and national origin (Modell 2002: 145). Adoption of war orphans, as Briggs (2003) so well argues, enacted Cold War emphases on the necessity of American intervention, the conflation of family and national security, and the color-blind universalisms that underwrote whiteness. Race and ethnic difference were subsumed under (and perhaps enabled) an ideology of rescuing poor Third World children for a "better life" in the bosom of American households (Lovelock 2000: 922). Gailey (1999) argues that "the adoption of Korean infants seemed at least in some way a laboratory for assimilationist beliefs in the redemptive qualities of capitalist culture. These children were going to become 'real' American Asians, because they would be reared by 'real,' that is, middle class, conservative and patriotic (i.e. military), white Americans" (60).

While rescue and color blindness (or, alternatively, multiculturalism) became impetuses for intercountry adoptions into the United States, especially from an underdeveloped Third World understood to *need* adoption, this history cannot be divorced from the politics of race at home. As many historical accounts of adoption suggest, the expansion of international adoption starting in the 1970s was entangled with at least two important developments in domestic adoption: an increasing demand for infants[12] and protests by the National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) against transracial placements, especially of black children with white parents (Lovelock 2000; Modell 2002; Melosh 2002; Patton 2000). Lovelock (2000) has suggested that a double standard emerged that made race an issue in domestic placements but not in international placements. But she goes on to suggest that this double standard was in fact a complementary set of racializations that served the needs of the proper national family and its prospective adoptive parents (922); in other words, the NABSW's cries of cultural genocide may have simultaneously resonated with white segregationist sentiments and fueled white humanitarianism outreach abroad.

Race has thus served as fulcrum for playing international and domestic adoptions off each other, shaping them as respectively "good" and "bad" adoptions

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

(Modell 2002).[13] How so, and to what end? International adoption became increasingly desirable over the last two decades (from eight thousand children in 1989 to more than twenty thousand children in 2004)[14] to prospective adopters who experienced infertility, did not think they met the requirements (age, health, sexual orientation, marital status) for domestic adoption, and sometimes harbored fears of domestic birth parents with questionable backgrounds and the power to reclaim children (Modell 2002)—all motivations that shape parents' decisions to adopt from China. As adoptive mother Lila Noonan put it, she was "afraid of contact" with birth families, and besides, she just knew "how traumatic children's life is in the States before they finally get in the system." In addition, domestic adoption of "nonsystem" children, i.e., healthy white infants, also looked increasingly marketized to some parents, as they competed for and even solicited birth mothers; adoptive father Jason Bradley cited the "sort of buy-a-baby tone" to domestic adoption as one motivation for going to China. Ironically, international adoption can be just as and often more expensive than domestic adoption,[15] and there are increasing concerns of trafficking in some international adoption programs, but it is here that multiple racializations help construct international adoption as meeting the needs of both children and parents—the former rescuable from poverty and abandonment, the latter able to fulfill their desire for family. Such discourses bring to the surface the racialized relationship between commodified and sacralized childhoods—between consumption and rescue—that makes some children more adoptable than others. This kind of humanism tends to bind people into sameness through various kinds of conscious or unconscious exclusion (Shiu 2001; Goldberg 1993; Balibar 1988a).

By the mid-1990s, vocal opposition to transracial placements in the United States—meaning, by default, African American and, to some extent, Native American children in white homes—had waned considerably and had even been replaced by a new official color blindness in adoption.[16] But in practice, as Patton (2000) has convincingly argued, this shift killed at least two birds with one stone, favoring the consumptive choices of white heterosexual families while vilifying single black (read "welfare") mothers. The former could be kept safe from the latter through a popular pathologizing of unreliable welfare mothers who gave birth to "crack babies." Despite official race parity, such children could be understandably labeled as unadoptable, while orphans abroad remained rescuable—what Ortiz and Briggs (2003) call "resilient (overseas) and toxic (U.S.) childhoods" (40). Ortiz and Briggs argue that even though domestic transracial adoption is promoted, it is promoted in ways that reproduce proper white families and barely redeemable black children, fixed on the interior as biologically and culturally tainted. Transnational adoption, in contrast, conjures children whose difference makes them both rescuable and valuable.[17] Instead of being fixed to abject mothers and cultures, they are innocent victims of "unpromising infrastructural soil" (Ortiz and Briggs 2003: 43). A complex interplay of interior and exterior racial categories joins family and nation in what Briggs (2003) calls "a coherent cultural logic that invest[s] the foreign in the domestic and the domestic in the foreign" (181).

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

We have already seen how the racial and cultural flexibility of Asianness may contribute to the desire for Chinese children, but it also contributes to notions of rescuability. One adoptive mother suggested that helping needy children provided some balance for the loss of physical sameness that would have been produced had infertility treatments been successful:

> I mean, there was that, there was the fantasy. We would have had, you know, a red-haired baby or something. You know, because we both had red hair. But for me it was a lot more important to be a parent, and to have a baby . . . for there to be a baby that *needed* to have a family. And there were real ones there, in that orphanage [in China], waiting!

Jackie Kovich told me she had briefly been tempted to adopt from Lithuania so she would not have to deal with issues of racial difference. "But then," she said, "I quickly went back to why I was attracted—why I wanted to do this in the first place," that is, to help a child in need. While Jackie had indicated she found Chinese children desirable for their looks, her reference to Lithuania—where there are children who might just as easily be seen as needing homes—indicates that Chinese children are also desirable for being "more" needy. Ortiz and Briggs (2003) suggest that being Third World and nonwhite makes for more rescuable subjects.

So then, we might also consider how the backwardness that produces marginalized Chinese children compares through racialized discourses to the backwardness that produces marginalized American children. For some parents, for example, a 1995 exposé of poor conditions in Chinese orphanages affirmed that China and its orphan children were in need; a few felt, out of religious conviction, that China was a society short on morals; and many referred to a China struggling to develop and modernize, burdened by a large population, low education, and a communist legacy. The American imaginary of such comparisons is, at times, arguably racialized. One white father who had originally looked into domestic adoption told me that when the possibility of adopting a biracial (meaning "black and white") child arose, some family members balked. "Yeah," he said, "we brought back a communist baby from a communist country and that was okay, but not a biracial child in our own country!" The rescuability of Chinese children—from the backwardness of communism and poverty—is contrasted to the abjectness of domestic black children. An adoption social worker was blunt about how this worked in some parents' adoption decisions: "I think there's a romanticism about saving a starving child on the other side of the planet. I'm often amazed that people would take an older child from the other side of the world but won't consider an older child here. I think it's racism." It must be noted, too, that the professional adoption world of which she is a part gives mixed messages about the rescuability of domestic and international children, and of what kinds of parents are right for what kinds of children.

The rescuability of Chinese children is intertwined with several dimensions of imagined racial flexibility. As indicated above, some parents felt they had to give up on the competition and long wait for healthy white infants. Parents also

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

expressed nagging fears regarding the more accessible but less palatable route of domestic public adoption, which usually meant special-needs and/or nonwhite children. Lila Noonan said of the forces that pulled her away from domestic transracial adoption and toward international adoption, "I just knew too much; if I didn't, I would have been more open." Chinese children become flexibly rescuable, then, *in contrast to* a continuity of abject (black, older, special-needs) and unattainable (white, young, healthy) children at home. And just as important, they are seemingly less burdened by a volatile history of intractable black-white relations, read as a cautionary tale by some adoptive parents. African Americans could even be seen as recalcitrant for not making their children available for adoption. June, a white adoptive mother, told me that the newspapers in her hometown of Detroit were full of horror stories about children in foster care who were abused or even returned to abusive homes. She became indignant, then, that "the black community is so against placing black children in white families." Both Chinese and black children needed to be rescued, but it was easier to imagine the former being absorbed into white kinship.

Race and gender thus contribute to making orphans from abroad desirable as citizen-subjects; as some parents see it, children can be not only rescued *from* their unfortunate conditions abroad but also absorbed *into* a new life at home. They are at once strange and familiar, different yet knowable (Yngvesson 2000; Shiu 2001). On the one hand, people may be attracted to Chinese children for the differences of origin that make them both culturally/racially interesting and economically in need of rescue. On the other hand, they may be attracted to the change the children will undergo and enact in their parents. One reason parents gave for choosing China was that while not receiving the best possible orphanage or foster care, the available children seemed to "catch up" quickly. (A number of social workers and parents have lamented that Chinese children in particular are surrounded by a mythology of resilience that sometimes precludes attention to attachment or developmental problems.) As I argue in the next section, the history of the China/U.S. adoption program in particular neatly turns rescue into transformation of both children and parents, through a mutual "matching" of needs.

LIGHT BAGGAGE: HISTORY OF THE CHINA/U.S. ADOPTION PROGRAM

International adoptions have moved from a dominant discourse of rescue and humanitarian outreach for children who need families to one that just as emphatically endorses the needs and desires of prospective adoptive parents (Lovelock 2000; Solinger 2001). Adoption professionals prefer this as a more "honest" acknowledgment that prospective adoptive parents adopt for themselves as much as for children. Parents' expressed reasons for adopting from China are, in fact, dominated by how the characteristics of the program and of available children meet those of their own situation. Chinese children need rescue, and China is underdeveloped, but not so much as to threaten the desire for healthy, young infants whom parents can claim as their own. This symbiotic relationship

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

between choice and rescue, consumption and care, is a necessary backdrop to the history of the China adoption program. "Why China"—why the formal inception and growing popularity of the program in the 1990s—must be understood as a mixture of material conditions of choice in China and the United States through which circulate imagined ways of belonging. We have seen how cultural intrigue, racial mapping, gendered images, and humanitarian national outreach have historically shaped the desirability of Chinese adoptions, but they are so important precisely because they animate the mundane matter of the policies and demographics that institutionalize the "fit" between Chinese parents and their prospective American parents. Fitting and belonging, as I argue in this section, are in large part a matter of smooth dislocations and desirable transformations.

Why the international adoption of Chinese children was implemented when it was and why it developed so quickly are separate but interrelated questions that must take into account perceived needs in both China and the United States. Research to date has not fully traced the developments that led Beijing to draft China's first adoption law in 1991 and increasingly to formalize international adoption in the succeeding few years; the details of this history are murky enough that Melosh (2002) simply assigns it to "unknown reasons" (193). But Kay Johnson's (2004) invaluable work foregrounds a social welfare system underfunded and overwhelmed by abandoned babies, many of them girls.[18] The crisis came to a head in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in part because of crackdowns in the enforcement of the family-planning policy. The resulting upsurge of abandoned children increased the burden on the cash-strapped social welfare system in China, where facilities were quite basic; per-child allowances for food, clothing, and medical care were minimal; and caregivers' salaries even in the year 2000 were rarely more than 400 RMB (U.S. $50) per month.[19] Even though a broadened acceptance of domestic adoption had grown in China, for the state to promote domestic adoption would mean the risk of pointing a finger right back at the sensitive family-planning policy and its drastic gendered effects; besides, argues Johnson, the adoption law was itself meant to combat those who "cheated" on the family-planning policy by adopting children over quota (145–46). In fact, early versions of China's international adoption policy mirrored its domestic regulations, restricting overseas adopters to childless people.

It is here that the question of why China opened to international adoption and the question of why China was so popular for American adopters become closely linked. By the early 1990s, the demand for international adoption in the United States was on the rise, especially as the Korea program decreased in size and domestic adoption became in some ways less attractive, for reasons discussed above (competition for "high-demand" children; age, health, and race of children available; fears of open adoption). Romania and Russia opened up, but by the late 1990s, the rapid increase in placements of Chinese children was matching that of Russia. There is little doubt that the rise in Russian adoptions in the 1990s was due in some measure to the availability of white children, meeting the "as-if-begotten" criterion Modell (2002) argues is still a strong strain in adoption. At the same time, however, "the claim of diversity in being a parent is

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

equally powerful" (Modell 2002: 146), and the flexible racialization of Chinese children as "different, but not too different" made it an attractive adoption option for some.

But there are equally significant explanations that have to do with the matching of supply and demand. The Chinese adoption program offered relatively healthy young infants, free of ties to birth families. As one parent put it to me, she had been attracted to China in part because the children "wouldn't come with a lot of baggage." Things that bind children to a preadoptive identity—such as older age and birth-family contact—can appear especially burdensome to prospective parents who have come to adoption by way of a road strewn with the obstacles of infertility, their own older age, or their partnership status. From the perspective of the "demand" side, then, the less-restrictive requirements and fairly straightforward process of the China adoption program matched the experiences and demographics of an array of people eager to become parents.

In narrating their reasons for adopting at all, most parents, whether married or single, straight or queer, indicated that they had "reached a point" of some kind. Most of the forty families I interviewed had been through brief or extended infertility treatment, had explored various other reproductive alternatives, or had "given up" on looking for the right partner with whom to have a child. As one woman put it, "You reach an age in your life where you know you want to have at least one child. You know, you do not appear to be on the road to producing one of your own, so. . . ." For those who had opted for adoption after exhausting medical reproductive alternatives, their narratives often reflected the mantra of professionals that counsel this transition: "we decided it was more important to be a parent than to have a child that shared our DNA." Others—some in their late forties and early fifties—had decided they wanted to be parents at a point in their life course when biological parenting was a risky or missing option. There are both personal and systemic fragilities in "reaching this point." Many domestic and international adoption programs carry restrictions that preclude certain prospective parents[20] or seem risky from the perspective of parents searching for an adoption option. Jason Bradley told me, "It would have been more difficult and a lot more time-consuming for people our age to adopt an infant in the U.S." The China Center of Adoption Affairs in Beijing had and continues to have a fairly generous upper age limit, has been open to single and married applicants, and until the late 1990s seemed to turn a blind eye to placing children with gay and lesbian parents. And apart from quite early in the program, its bureaucratic but uniform process and reasonable timetable seemed to offer reliability and transparency to parents tired of obstacles. As Lila Noonan put it, "I wanted a guarantee. I wanted my baby."

That "guarantee" and "baby" are parallel constructions is significant; it is also significant that Lila went on to say that she badly wanted a daughter. Not only did China seem to want these parents, these parents wanted—and adoption agencies promoted—the healthy young infant girls that seemed to fill Chinese orphanages. Infants are desirable for a number of reasons, but often because their kinship and cultural attachments are seen as not fully formed; this translates into a child ready for a fresh start in her new family and nation.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

Being able to make Chinese children "one's own" is a function of the child's age but also of (lack of) kinship ties. This was apparent in the comfort many parents expressed at not having to deal with birth parents who might reclaim children or want to be part of their children's lives. Peggy Peterson put it this way: "We felt more comfortable with China or Vietnam because they pretty much are not going to want to have the child back in a year." While media stories of domestic child reclamations loomed large, so did fears of having to share a child beyond the confines of the nuclear, adoptive family. One new adoptive mother told me she did not want a twenty-year-old dropping in six times a year with presents. "What kind of mother is that?" she asked, adding that one reason she liked Chinese adoption was that it was "clean, pure." Indeed, Chinese adoptions fit well with the "clean break" policies and practices of transnational adoption, whereby a child's adoptability is predicated on being legally and socially "free" of ties to family and place of birth (Yngvesson 2000; Ouellette and Belleau 2001; Gailey 2000).[21] Agencies variously join in promoting clean breaks. In an unusually stark example of this, one adoption agency stated on their Web site: "Adopting a Chinese child is very simple. There will be no birth mother knocking on your door. In China, it is a crime to abandon a child. If a birth mother changes her mind and comes back to a welfare home for the child, she will be put in prison."[22]

It is in statements like these that Chinese birth mothers, safely entangled in social and legal proscriptions, become a racialized medium for the baggage-free child. They are not only the right kind of mother because, as marginalized "Third World" women, they cannot touch their children but also because, in contrast to some other countries and to the United States, women in China can be constructed as giving up babies for reasons other than being young, unfit, and unhealthy social deviants. When Ian, a white father, said that he and his wife, Amy, adopted from China because they knew the children "were very, very healthy," Amy added, "You know, we knew that some of them were small and maybe not as well-nourished . . . but we knew that Chinese women didn't typically drink and smoke, culturally? Isn't that right?" Rather than being made villains in the story, Chinese birth mothers can be made into unfortunate but healthy victims. One adoptive mother pointed out that children in China were abandoned "just because they are girls"; to her and her husband, this meant they would not have to worry about the poor prenatal care, drugs, and alcohol that characterized the birth mothers—implicitly black and/or poor—whose children were in the American public welfare system. Why prospective American adopters prefer girls is complicated, but that Chinese children were abandoned ostensibly *because* they were girls made them unattached to birth family, and for reasons other than (in many cases) poor health.

The choices that make adoption an act of clean breaks and fresh starts, of detaching and reattaching, are enabled by class distinctions. Of increasing concern to critical observers is that "light baggage"—racial flexibility, good health, young age, distanced birth mothers—comes with a price tag through a stratified system that literally values some children more than others (Solinger 2001; Mansnerus 1998).[23] Most parents who adopt from China make this choice in part because they can—because they have or can find the means to pay the U.S.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

$20,000-plus that it costs. The material means that drive this choice must be linked not only to the delimited choices of Chinese birth parents but also to the delimited desirability of other children. As I have argued, factors of race, gender, age, and health play into the narratives of choice that imagine the possible relocation of some children, and not others, into adoptive homes; but the imagined transformation of the child in her new adoptive family rests in part on the ability of such a family to enact it through material means.

It should not be surprising, however, that the material means that enable adoption choices remain mostly an arena of silence and indirect reference. The consumptive overtones that haunt adoption exchanges and exclusions (Yngvesson 2000; Modell 2002; Anagnost 2000) are coded in the meeting of needs and the giving of gifts, or narrated in terms of "how much we have to offer" a child. As adoptive mother Wanda Jones put it, "You know, if you were born here, or even being able to come here young, you have so many opportunities. And to be able to give those opportunities to somebody else is really important." Material choices were also tacitly expressed in the photos of nice homes sent in parents' applications to Beijing (and expected by Beijing) and mitigated by allusions to rescue. Barbara, for example, told me that she and her husband had initially considered adopting a white child from Russia. Given "all the problems" the children seemed to have, she and her husband had decided instead to go to China for a healthy infant girl. But for acquaintances who did not otherwise understand why the couple would adopt a child from another country, and especially one that did not look like them, Barbara found "saving a child" a quick and acceptable explanation. When orphaned Chinese children were "saved" by American church groups in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,[24] civilizing benevolence was the guiding principle; in contemporary China/U.S. adoption, rescue discourses are corollary to professionally managed choices, and immigration laws and adoption policies smooth rather than block the way for well-off American citizens adopting Chinese children.

Consumptive choices haunt adoption in a dialectical pair of anxieties: that adoption will be seen as a market and that as a market it will take a downturn. One particular event in the history of China/U.S. adoption exemplifies this tension and highlights the nexus of benevolent desires and material resources in which it is embedded. In 1995, less than two years after international adoptions from China had started to take off, reports of poor conditions, high mortality rates, and intentional neglect in Chinese welfare homes reached a high level of exposure in the Western media, in the form of a Human Rights Watch report and a BBC documentary titled *The Dying Rooms*.[25] The reports had several significant effects: major U.S. media outlets covered the story as a sensational scoop but also covered the counterresponses of agencies and adoptive families; the Chinese government, issuing defensive and propagandistic retorts, shut down Chinese orphanages to foreign and many Chinese visitors;[26] and adoption agencies and adoptive families organized to tone down or discredit the reports through media releases, appeals to Washington, D.C., and letters and faxes to Beijing that claimed conditions were improving, many orphanages were doing their best, and there was no evidence of a national policy of relieving an

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

overburdened orphanage system through deliberate starvation (Johnson 2004).[27] I am most interested in the last response, since it was in part born of a fear that China would shut down adoptions, or at least make the process more difficult, and that it would appear that only very malnourished, poorly cared-for children waited in Chinese orphanages. The human rights exposés had the effect of inspiring some prospective parents to save Chinese orphans through adoption. But adoption organizations cannot let rescue be the dominant motivation for international adoption. It not only portends an unequal parent-child relationship but also suggests children with more "baggage" than the current political economy of adoption choices can sustain. In the ensuing years, a strange equilibrium has resulted from the 1995 reports: China kept open its adoption doors and has increased numbers ever since; Beijing could be seen as struggling but sincere in its efforts for abandoned Chinese children; and those children could be seen as needy, but not too needy.

CONCLUSION: THE RETURN OF THE "WHYS" OF CHINESE ADOPTION

Jeff D. Opdyke, adoptive parent of a Chinese child and personal finance reporter for the *Wall Street Journal*, titled his "Love and Money" column on September 21, 2003 (p. D6): "Why We Decided to Adopt from China." In many ways, it summed up the impetuses for adopting from China I have covered in this chapter: providing hope to a child in the Third World, the ease of a fairly efficient process, availability of healthy infants, and reliable birth mothers. Opdyke set this in the framework of a kind of cost-benefit analysis that made China "worth it," putting in writing the considerations many parents weigh in their decisions but would probably express in less economic terms: "So in the end, an international adoption may not save us much money. But at least we would be assured of getting what we want—an infant." And given all the other factors that entered the equation, China came out on top: "At the end of the day, of course, it all comes down to personal choice for each family . . . and in dealing with those choices, Amy and I came to a unified conclusion: The road to our daughter runs through China."

Of course, individual choices do not occur in a vacuum—they drip with the residue of social relationships and of imaginaries of the identities of self and other. The sketch art that accompanied Opdyke's article showed a simple, stark scene of exchange: a woman handing a swaddled baby across the Great Wall, into the outstretched arms of a man whose female partner stands waiting beside him. Actually, given the particular poses of the characters, the piece could conceivably work the other way: the man *could* be handing the child to the lone woman. But this goes against the grain of what we imagine makes Chinese children and American parents a good match, why China "works": birth *mothers* (enclosed behind the Great Wall) reluctantly but necessarily give up children who can be rescued into the arms of middle-class, white, heterosexual couples who have calculated "the financial components of our decision because we want the limited dollars we have now and in the future to go as far as they possibly

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

can." Opdyke unwittingly provides the first clue to why this calculation of desires and guarantees is a compromised prospect from the outset. His road runs *through* China and presumably back to him, making China one part of an ongoing circulation of resources and ideas that reproduce the family, and the adoption system. But this also means that the child and her new parents, as they move away from the Great Wall, carry with them not just the meanings of that moment of exchange but all the conditions that made it possible.

A Korean adoptee and friend has wryly suggested to me that perhaps all the factors that make adoption from China desirable make children from China the model minorities of adoption, or "model adoptees." But as with the Asian model minority rubric, this is a myth. And like all myths, it is powerful and revelatory, but it begs to be unpacked. Chinese children are not as easily rescuable/consumable, flexible, or baggage-free as dominant discourses of adoption would suggest—and not only because they individually come with their own quirks and needs or because the process does not always go smoothly. I have considered both senses of "why China" in this chapter—why parents choose to adopt from China and why, more generally, the practice has thrived—in order to open up the historical contexts that particularize it. I have looked especially at the racialized histories that impose themselves on adoptive choices. Imaginaries of flexible, rescuable identities take us *through* China and back to the exclusive desires of an American culture haunted by the fixations of race and market.

NOTES

1. I see this definition of identification as an updated version of C. Wright Mills's (1959) proverbial call to "understand what is happening in selves as minute points in the intersections of biography and history" (7). Nancy Riley (1997) also invokes Mills in her study of the sociopolitical matrices in which individual abandonment and adoption decisions are made in both China and the United States.
2. Portions of this chapter appear also in Sara Dorow, "Racialized Choices: Chinese Adoption and the 'White Noise' of Blackness," in a 2006 issue of *Critical Sociology*.
3. The implications of the differences between the two metropolitan areas are discussed further in chapter 7 of *Transnational Adoption* by Sara Dorow (2006), as are comparisons of the experiences and practices of Asian American and white adoptive parents. Statistics on the ethnic makeup of cities come from factfinder.census.gov, accessed February 2005.
4. While the kind of research necessary to get an accurate count of the racial and ethnic identities of adoptive parents is beyond the scope of this project, my description of San Francisco is based on informal fact-finding among adoptive parent support groups and my own interactions with a variety of adoptive parents and adoption agencies. It should also be noted that the proportion of Asian American adoptive parents varies quite significantly in different parts of the Bay Area.
5. Paper sons and daughters were Chinese individuals who, after the 1906 fire in San Francisco that destroyed most immigration and citizenship paperwork, immigrated to the United States under manufactured paperwork that claimed they were the children of American citizens of Chinese descent who had returned to China.
6. Dr. Wen Ho Lee was a physicist from Los Alamos National Laboratories, accused by the government in 1999 of violating the Atomic Energy Act. He allegedly mishandled material containing restricted nuclear weapons data, with the intent of unlawfully providing it to China. He was released in 2000 under a plea bargain. The handling of the story in the media and by the government invited accusations of racial profiling and anti-Asian sentiment.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

7. In her popular book *The Lost Daughters of China: Abandoned Girls, Their Journey to America, and the Search for a Missing Past*, Karin Evans (2000) remarks on this as well: "In the San Francisco Bay Area or other places with substantial Chinese populations, it's relatively easy to offer children exposure to the Chinese community and the culture into which they were born, even if they have no recollections of it and their parents have to learn from scratch. But introducing children to the dragon dance or Mandarin in a small town in the South or deep in the heart of Amish country, say, may be somewhat challenging" (181).
8. Weak multiculturalism, sometimes associated with the work of Charles Taylor, maintains that differences among people are superseded by certain central values such as tolerance and respect for individual rights. As Steven Yates (1992) puts it, weak multiculturalism asserts that "peoples are different in some respects but alike in others, and can therefore learn by communicating openly with one another" (440); it rejects what it sees as "the naïve view that all cultures are epistemological and moral equals" (451). ("Multiculturalism and Epistemology," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 6: 435–56.)
9. Despite Chinese adoptions being officially closed to gay and lesbian parents, a kind of "don't ask, don't tell" policy characterized much of China/U.S. adoption practice until the CCAA formally instituted guidelines curtailing child placements with gay and lesbian parents in 2000 and 2001.
10. See Linda Gordon's (1999) *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* for a fascinating history of a 1905 case in which the courts upheld the "rescue" of white Catholic children from New York originally placed with Mexican families in a town in Arizona. And see Melosh (2002), especially the chapter "Families by Design," on changing and diverse "matching" criteria in the middle decades of the twentieth century.
11. Two things are noteworthy here. First, the largest number of Korean adoptees is found in California and Minnesota, the two states in which I conducted my U.S. fieldwork. Second, parents adopting from China have looked to this large, older cohort of Korean adoptees—online, at adoption seminars, in writings and films—for both affirmation of their own white-Asian adoptive families and advice on how to handle issues of racial and cultural difference.
12. Berebitsky (2000) argues that demand has always exceeded supply. By the 1970s and 1980s, panic over a shortage of infants reflected new kinds of demands from infertile couples and a new focus on meeting their needs. An increased demand for (healthy white) infants also came from newly empowered groups of adopters, namely, gays and lesbians and single straight people. Solinger (2001) has argued that this expansion of the choice to parent must be linked to the choices that contributed to a decreased "supply" of babies: abortion and single parenthood.
13. Only 5 to 10 percent of domestic adoptions in the United States are transracial (Freundlich 2000), but as is the case with China/U.S. adoptions, the cultural impact of the accompanying narratives and imagery are more powerful than the numbers might suggest.
14. Statistics on numbers of international adoption visas issued are from the U.S. State Department: http://travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html.
15. This includes a scale of adoptions in the United States ranging from "less adoptable" children that are available not only without fees but also possibly subsidized, to very costly private adoptions of healthy white infants. International adoptions do not vary quite as much but can vary from several thousand dollars to over thirty thousand.
16. See Patton (2000) and Ortiz and Briggs (2003) for more detailed commentary on the Adoption Promotion Act and Personal Responsibility Act of 1996.
17. Rescue serves to resolve distinctions not only between domestic and international adoption but also between adoption and other forms of migration from China. Anagnost (2000) offers a compelling argument regarding rescue discourse as a way privately to manage the political effects of adoption as an exceptional form of migration; to recognize its distinction among migrating bodies is to bring again to the surface the problem of privilege.
18. While most children in orphanages are girls, there are also a large number of special-needs children of both sexes and some healthy boys. It must be noted that the unbalanced sex ratio cannot be straightforwardly attributed to families not wanting girls. As

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

Greenhalgh and Li (1995) argue, the ideal family in China is "one of each," but under family-planning policies and social expectations of care and labor, girls are more likely to be abandoned than boys.

19. The dismantling of China's state-run work system means a growing demand for social welfare provisions, even as the state tries to put the burden of care back on families. Public institutions of all kinds have been encouraged to start profit-making enterprises or to seek other funding sources.
20. A 1991 report from the U.S. Senate Committee on Intercountry Adoption cited a survey in which parents said they were seeking adoption abroad because they did not meet requirements for domestic adoption (Modell 2002: 193).
21. The importance of a clean break to the attractiveness of adoption reveals the social importance placed on singularity of origin—of the difficulty of belonging to two places and families and mothers at once. See Eng (2003) for a smart discussion of the political and social reasons for a lack of psychic space that can accommodate two mothers.
22. From the Great Wall China Adoption agency (http://www.gwcadopt.org/facts.html), accessed in August 2000. While abandonment is indeed a crime in China, it is difficult to say how often or to what degree the laws against it are enforced.
23. "Hard-to-place" children in the United States, for example, can often be placed for free or with subsidies, while private adoptions of white infants and international adoptions are often U.S. $20,000 or more. It is important to note that from the perspective of adoption professionals, this is understood as a necessary strategy: minimizing costs is a way to attract families for children who might otherwise have little chance of finding homes, perhaps even subsidized by the higher fees paid for "more adoptable" children.
24. Jane Hunter (1984) has documented, for example, that American missionary women to China in this period adopted or fostered local children, even as racial proscriptions from missionary boards warned of such closeness going against "disinterested benevolence." At the same time, Presbyterian organizations in San Francisco established a shelter to "save" orphaned Chinese babies from a Chinatown characterized as unhealthy and uncivilized (even as local protests to the presence of so many Oriental children prompted regulations that would keep them contained) (Shah 2001).
25. For a more detailed explanation of and response to *The Dying Rooms* and the Human Rights Watch report, see Johnson (2004).
26. This was a predictable response, given that the BBC filmmakers, who won a Peabody Award, had apparently received access to Chinese orphanages by posing as social workers and had gathered footage with hidden cameras. In ensuing years, Beijing has opened an increasing number of orphanages to foreigners, starting with "showcase" institutions that have updated facilities, grounds, and equipment. For the most extensive example of Beijing's official (and propagandistic) rebuttal, see The Situation of Children in China (*Zhongguo de Ertong Zhuangkuang*) (April 1996), Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China.
27. I am indebted to Dan Kelliher, professor of political science at the University of Minnesota, for his careful, insightful study of the construction of childhood innocence in these events ("The Politics of Childhood Innocence," unpublished manuscript, 2000).

REFERENCES

Anagnost, Ann. 2000. "Scenes of Misrecognition: Maternal Citizenship in the Age of Transnational Adoption." *positions: east asia cultures critique* 8 (2): 390–421.

Balibar, Etienne. 1988. "The Nation Form: History and Ideology." In *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, edited by E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein. London: Verso.

Berebitsky, Julie. 2000. *Like Our Very Own: Adoption and the Changing Culture of Motherhood, 1851–1950*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Briggs, Laura. 2003. "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption." *Gender & History* 15 (2): 179–200.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

Cheng, Anne Anlin. 2001. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cheung, King-Kok. 2000. "The Woman Warrior versus the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose between Feminism and Heroism?" In *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, edited by J. Yu-wen Shen Wu and M. Song. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Dorow, Sara. 2006. *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship*. New York: NYU Press.

———. 2006. "Racialized Choices: Chinese Adoption and the 'White Noise' of Blackness." *Critical Sociology* 32 (2–3): 357–379.

Eng, David L. 2003. "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas." *Social Text* 21 (3): 1–37.

Evans, Karin. 2000. *The Lost Daughters of China: Abandoned Girls, Their Journey to America, and the Search for a Missing Past*. New York: Tracher/Putnam.

Frankenberg, Ruth. 1993. *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Freundlich, Madelyn. 2000. *Adoption and Ethics*. The Role of Race, Culture, and National Origin in Adoption 10. Washington, D.C.: Child Welfare League of America, The Evan B. Donaldson Institute.

Fuss, Diana. 1995. *Identification Papers*. New York: Routledge.

Gailey, Christine Ward. 2000. "Ideologies of Motherhood and Kinship in US Adoption." In *Ideologies and Technologies of Motherhood*, edited by H. Ragoné and F. Winddance Twine. New York: Routledge.

———. 1999. "Seeking 'Baby Right': Race, Class, and Gender in US International Adoption." In *Mine, Yours, Ours . . . and Theirs: Adoption, Changing Kinship and Family Patterns*, edited by A. Rygvold, M. Dale, and B. Saetersdal. Oslo: University of Oslo.

Galang, M. Evelina. 2003. *Screaming Monkeys: Critiques of Asian American Images*. Minneapolis: Coffee House Press.

Goldberg, David Theo. 1997. *Racial Subjects: Writing on Race in America*. New York: Routledge.

Gordon, Linda. 1999. *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Gotanda, Neil. 2000. "Multiculturalism and Racial Stratification." In *Asian American Studies: A Reader*, edited by J. Yu-wen Shen Wu and m. Song. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Greenhalgh, Susan, and Jiali Li. 1995. "Engendering Reproductive Policy and Practice in Peasant China: For a Feminist Demography of Reproduction." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20 (31): 601–41.

Hunter, Jane. 1984. *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Johnson, Kay Ana. 2004. *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son: Abandonment, Adoption, and Orphanage Care in China*. St. Paul, Minn.: Yeong & Yeong Book Company.

Kirton, Derek. 2000. *'Race,' Ethnicity and Adoption*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lee, Erika. 2003. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Lee, Robert G. 1999. *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lowe, Lisa. 1996. *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Lovelock, Kirsten. 2000. "Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice: A Comparative Analysis of Intercountry Adoption and Immigration Policy and Practice in the United States, Canada and New Zealand in the Post W.W.II Period." *Internatinoal Migration Review* 34 (3): 907–49.

Mackerras, Colin. 1989. *Western Images of China*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mansnerus, Laura. 1998. "Market Puts Price Tags on the Priceless." *New York Times*, October 26, p. A1.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

Melosh, Barbara. 2002. *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Mills, C. Wright. 1999 [1959]. *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Modell, Judith S. 2002. *A Sealed and Secret Kinship: The Culture of Policies and Practices in American Adoption*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Okihiro, Gary Y. 2001. *Common Ground: Reimagining American History*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Omi, Michael. 1996. "Racialization in the Post-Civil Rights Era." In *Mapping Multiculturalism*, edited by A. F. Gordon and C. Newfield. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ong, Aihwa. 1998. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

———. 1996. "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making." *Current Anthropology* 37 (5): 737–51.

Ortiz, Ana Teresa, and Laura Briggs. 2003. "The Culture of Poverty, Crack Babies, and Welfare Cheats: The Making of the 'Healthy White Baby Crisis.'" *Social Text* 21 (3): 39–57.

Ouellette, Françoise-Romaine, and Hélène Belleau, with the collaboration of Caroline Patenaude. 2001. *Family and Social Integration of Children Adopted Internationally: A Review of the Literature*. Montreal: INRS-Urbanisation, Culture et Société.

Palumbo-Liu, David. 1999. *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Patton, Sandra L. 2000. *BirthMarks: Transracial Adoption in Contemporary America*. New York: New York University Press.

Prashad, Vijay. 2003. "Bruce Lee and the Anti-Imperialism of Kung Fu: A Polycultural Adventure." *positions: east asia cultures critique* 11 (1): 51–82.

Register, Cheri. 1991. *"Are Those Kids Yours?" American Families with Children Adopted from Other Countries*. New York: Free Press.

Riley, Nancy E. 1997. "American Adoptions of Chinese Girls: The Socio-Political Matrices of Individual Decisions." *Women's Studies International Forum* 20 (1): 87–102.

Said, Edward. 1994 [1978]. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Shah, Nayan. 2001. *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shiu, Anthony. 2001. "Flexible Production: International Adoption, Race, Whiteness." *Jourvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6 (1–2). At http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jourvert/v6i1–2/shiu.htm.

Solinger, Rickie. 2001. *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang.

Takaki, Ronald T. 1989. *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Wang, Gungwu. 2001. *Don't Leave Home: Migration and the Chinese*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.

Yngvesson, Barbara. 2000. "'Un Niño de Cualquier Color': Race and Nation in Intercountry Adoption." In *Globalizing Institutions: Case Studies in Regulation and Innovation*, edited by J. Jenson and Boaventura De Sousa Santos. Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate.

Zelizer, Viviana A. 1985. *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. New York: Basic Books.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 17:17:26.

The "Four Prisons" and the Movements of Liberation

Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s

Glenn Omatsu

According to Ali Shariati, an Iranian philosopher, each of us exists within four prisons.[1] First is the prison imposed on us by history and geography; from this confinement, we can escape only by gaining a knowledge of science and technology. Second is the prison of history; our freedom comes when we understand how historical forces operate. The third prison is our society's social and class structure; from this prison, only a revolutionary ideology can provide the way to liberation. The final prison is the self. Each of us is composed of good and evil elements, and we must each choose between them.

The analysis of our four prisons provides a way of understanding the movements that swept across America in the 1960s and molded the consciousness of one generation of Asian Americans. The movements were struggles for liberation from many prisons. They were struggles that confronted the historical forces of racism, poverty, war, and exploitation. They were struggles that generated new ideologies, based mainly on the teachings and actions of Third World leaders. And they were struggles that redefined human values—the values that shape how people live their daily lives and interact with each other. Above all, they were struggles that transformed the lives of "ordinary" people as they confronted the prisons around them.

For Asian Americans, these struggles profoundly changed our communities. They spawned numerous grassroots organizations. They created an extensive network of student organizations and Asian American Studies classes. They

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

Back to top.

recovered buried cultural traditions and produced a new generation of writers, poets, and artists. But most importantly, the struggles deeply affected Asian American consciousness. They redefined racial and ethnic identity, promoted new ways of thinking about communities, and challenged prevailing notions of power and authority.

Yet, in the two decades that have followed, scholars have reinterpreted the movements in narrower ways. I learned about this reinterpretation when I attended a class recently in Asian American Studies at UCLA. The professor described the period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s as a single epoch involving the persistent efforts of racial minorities and their white supporters to secure civil rights. Young Asian Americans, the professor stated, were swept into this campaign and by later anti-war protests to assert their own racial identity. The most important influence on Asian Americans during this period was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who inspired them to demand access to policy makers and initiate advocacy programs for their own communities. Meanwhile, students and professors fought to legitimize Asian American Studies in college curricula and for representation of Asians in American society. The lecture was cogent, tightly organized, and well received by the audience of students—many of them new immigrants or the children of new immigrants. There was only one problem: the reinterpretation was wrong on every aspect.

Those who took part in the mass struggles of the 1960s and early 1970s will know that the birth of the Asian American movement coincided not with the initial campaign for civil rights but with the later demand for black liberation; that the leading influence was not Martin Luther King Jr., but Malcolm X; that the focus of a generation of Asian American activists was not on asserting racial pride but on reclaiming a tradition of militant struggle by earlier generations; that the movement was not centered on the aura of racial identity but embraced fundamental questions of oppression and power; that the movement consisted of not only college students but large numbers of community forces, including the elderly, workers, and high school youth; and that the main thrust was not one of seeking legitimacy and representation within American society but the larger goal of liberation.

It may be difficult for a new generation—raised on the Asian American code words of the 1980s stressing "advocacy," "access," "legitimacy," "empowerment," and "assertiveness"—to understand the urgency of Malcolm X's demand for freedom "by any means necessary," Mao's challenge to "serve the people," the slogans of "power to the people" and "self-determination," the principles of "mass line" organizing and "united front" work, or the conviction that people—not elites—make history. But these ideas galvanized thousands of Asian Americans and reshaped our communities. And it is these concepts that we must grasp to understand the scope and intensity of our movement and what it created.

But are these concepts relevant to Asian Americans today? In our community—where new immigrants and refugees constitute the majority of Asian Americans—can we find a legacy from the struggles of two decades ago? Are the ideas of the movement alive today, or have they atrophied into relics—the curiosities of a bygone era of youthful and excessive idealism?

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

By asking these questions, we, as Asian Americans, participate in a larger national debate: the reevaluation of the impact of the 1960s on American society today. This debate is occurring all around us: in sharp exchanges over "family values" and the status of women and gays in American society; in clashes in schools over curricular reform and multiculturalism; in differences among policy makers over the urban crisis and approaches to rebuilding Los Angeles and other inner cities after the 1992 uprisings; and continuing reexaminations of U.S. involvement in Indochina more than two decades ago and the relevance of that war to U.S. military intervention in Iraq, Somalia, and Bosnia.

What happened in the 1960s that made such an impact on America? Why do discussions about that decade provoke so much emotion today? And do the movements of the 1960s serve as the same controversial reference point for Asian Americans?

THE UNITED STATES DURING THE 1960S

In recent years, the movements of the 1960s have come under intense attack. One national bestseller, Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, criticizes the movements for undermining the bedrock of Western thought.[2] According to Bloom, nothing positive resulted from the mass upheavals of the 1960s. He singles out black studies and affirmative action programs and calls for eliminating them from universities.

Activists who have continued political work provide contrasting assessments. Their books include Todd Gitlin's *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*; James Miller's *"Democracy Is in the Streets": From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*; Ronald Fraser's *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*; Tom Hayden's *Reunion: A Memoir*; Tariq Ali's *Street Fighting Years*; George Katsiaficas's *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*; and special issues of various journals, including *Witness*, *Socialist Review*, and *Radical America*.

However, as Winifred Breines states in an interesting review essay titled "Whose New Left?" most of the retrospectives have been written by white male activists from elite backgrounds, and reproduce their relationship to these movements.[3] Their accounts tend to divide the period into two phases: the "good" phase of the early 1960s, characterized by participatory democracy; followed by the post-1968 phase, when movement politics "degenerated" into violence and sectarianism.

"Almost all books about the New Left note a turning point or an ending in 1968 when the leadership of the movement turned toward militancy and violence and SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] as an organization was collapsing," Breines observes. The retrospectives commonly identify the key weaknesses of the movements as the absence of effective organization, the lack of discipline, and utopian thinking. Breines disagrees with these interpretations:

> The movement was not simply unruly and undisciplined; it was experimenting with antihierarchical organizational forms. . . . There were many centers of action in the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

> movement, many actions, many interpretations, many visions, many experiences. There was no [organizational] unity because each group, region, campus, commune, collective, and demonstration developed differently, but all shared in a spontaneous opposition to racism and inequality, the war in Vietnam, and the repressiveness of American social norms and culture, including centralization and hierarchy.[4]

Breines believes that the most important contributions of activists were their moral urgency, their emphasis on direct action, their focus on community building, and their commitment to mass democracy.

Similarly, Sheila Collins in *The Rainbow Challenge*, a book focusing on the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign of 1984 and the formation of the National Rainbow Coalition, assesses the movements of the sixties very positively.[5] She contends that the Jackson campaign was built on the grassroots organizing experience of activists who emerged from the struggles for civil rights, women's liberation, peace and social justice, and community building during the sixties. Moreover, activists' participation in these movements shaped their vision of America, which, in turn, became the basis for the platform of the Rainbow Coalition twenty years later.

According to Collins, the movements that occurred in the United States in the sixties were also part of a worldwide trend, a trend Latin American theologians call the era of the "eruption of the poor" into history. In America, the revolt of the "politically submerged" and "economically marginalized" posed a major ideological challenge to ruling elites:

> The civil rights and black power movement exploded several dominant assumptions about the nature of American society, thus challenging the cultural hegemony of the white ruling elite and causing everyone else in the society to redefine their relationship to centers of power, creating a groundswell of support for radical democratic participation in every aspect of institutional life.[6]

Collins contends that the mass movements created a "crisis of legitimation" for ruling circles. This crisis, she believes, was "far more serious than most historians—even those of the left—have credited it with being."

Ronald Fraser also emphasizes the ideological challenge raised by the movements due to their mass, democratic character and their "disrespect for arbitrary and exploitative authority." In *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*, Fraser explains how these concepts influenced one generation of activists:

> [T]he anti-authoritarianism challenged almost every shibboleth of Western society. Parliamentary democracy, the authority of presidents . . . and [the policies of] governments to further racism, conduct imperialist wars or oppress sectors of the population at home, the rule of capital and the fiats of factory bosses, the dictates of university administrators, the sacredness of the family, sexuality, bourgeois culture—nothing was in principle sacrosanct. . . . Overall . . . [there was] a lack of deference toward institutions and values that demean[ed] people and a concomitant awareness of peoples' rights.[7]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

THE SAN FRANCISCO STATE STRIKE'S LEGACY

The retrospectives about the sixties produced so far have ignored Asian Americans. Yet, the books cited above—plus the review essay by Winifred Breines—provide us with some interesting points to compare and contrast. For example, 1968 represented a turning point for Asian Americans and other sectors of American society. But while white male leaders saw the year as marking the decline of the movement, 1968 for Asian Americans was a year of birth. It marked the beginning of the San Francisco State strike and all that followed.

The strike, the longest student strike in U.S. history, was the first campus uprising involving Asian Americans as a collective force.[8] Under the Third World Liberation Front—a coalition of African American, Latino, American Indian, and Asian American campus groups—students "seized the time" to demand ethnic studies, open admissions, and a redefinition of the education system. Although their five-month strike was brutally repressed and resulted in only partial victories, students won the nation's first School of Ethnic Studies.

Yet, we cannot measure the legacy of the strike for Asian Americans only in the tangible items it achieved, such as new classes and new faculty; the strike also critically transformed the consciousness of its participants, who in turn profoundly altered their communities' political landscape. Through their participation, a generation of Asian American student activists reclaimed a heritage of struggle—linking their lives to the tradition of militancy of earlier generations of Pilipino farm workers, Chinese immigrant garment and restaurant workers, and Japanese American concentration camp resisters. Moreover, these Asian American students—and their community supporters—liberated themselves from the prisons surrounding their lives and forged a new vision for their communities, creating numerous grassroots projects and empowering previously ignored and disenfranchised sectors of society. The statement of goals and principles of one campus organization, Philippine-American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE), during the strike captures this new vision:

> We seek . . . simply to function as human beings, to control our own lives. Initially, following the myth of the American Dream, we worked to attend predominantly white colleges, but we have learned through direct analysis that it is impossible for our people, so-called minorities, to function as human beings, in a racist society in which white always comes first. . . . So we have decided to fuse ourselves with the masses of Third World people, which are the majority of the world's peoples, to create, through struggle, a new humanity, a new humanism, a New World Consciousness, and within that context collectively control our own destinies.[9]

The San Francisco State strike is important not only as a beginning point for the Asian American movement, but also because it crystallizes several themes that would characterize Asian American struggles in the next decade. First, the strike occurred at a working-class campus and involved a coalition of Third World students linked to their communities. Second, students rooted their strike in the tradition of resistance by past generations of minority peoples in America. Third, strike leaders drew inspiration—as well as new ideology—from

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

international Third World leaders and revolutions occurring in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Fourth, in its demands for open admissions, community control of education, ethnic studies, and self-determination, the strike confronted basic questions of power and oppression in America. Finally, strike participants raised their demands through a strategy of mass mobilizations and militant, direct action.

In the decade following the strike, several themes would reverberate in the struggles in Asian American communities across the nation. These included housing and anti-eviction campaigns, efforts to defend education rights, union organizing drives, campaigns for jobs and social services, and demands for democratic rights, equality, and justice. Mo Nishida, an organizer in Los Angeles, recalls the broad scope of movement activities in his city:

> Our movement flowered. At one time, we had active student organizations on every campus around Los Angeles, fought for ethnic studies, equal opportunity programs, high potential programs at UCLA, and for students doing community work in "Serve the People" programs. In the community, we had, besides [Asian American] Hard Core, four area youth-oriented groups working against drugs (on the Westside, Eastside, Gardena, and the Virgil district). There were also parents' groups, which worked with parents of the youth and more.[10]

In Asian American communities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Stockton, San Jose, Seattle, New York, and Honolulu, activists created "serve the people" organizations—mass networks built on the principles of "mass line" organizing. Youth initiated many of these organizations—some from college campuses and others from high schools and the streets—but other members of the community, including small-business people, workers, senior citizens, and new immigrants, soon joined.

The *mass* character of community struggles is the least appreciated aspect of our movement today. It is commonly believed that the movement involved only college students. In fact, a range of people, including high-school youth, tenants, small-business people, former prison inmates, former addicts, the elderly, and workers embraced the struggles. But exactly who were these people, and what did their participation mean to the movement?

Historian George Lipsitz has studied similar, largely "anonymous" participants in civil rights campaigns in African American communities. He describes one such man, Ivory Perry of St. Louis:

> Ivory Perry led no important organizations, delivered no important speeches, and received no significant recognition or reward for his social activism. But for more than 30 years, he had passed out leaflets, carried the picket signs, and planned the flamboyant confrontations that made the civil rights movements effective in St. Louis and across the nation. His continuous commitment at the local level had goaded others into action, kept alive hopes of eventual victory in the face of short-term defeats, and provided a relatively powerless community with an effective lever for social change. The anonymity of his activism suggests layers of social protest activity missing from

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

most scholarly accounts, while the persistence of his involvement undermines prevailing academic judgments about mass protests as outbursts of immediate anger and spasmodic manifestations of hysteria.[11]

Those active in Asian American communities during the late 1960s and early 1970s know there were many Ivory Perrys. They were the people who demonstrated at eviction sites, packed City Hall hearing rooms, volunteered to staff health fairs, and helped with day-to-day operations of the first community drop-in centers, legal defense offices, and senior citizen projects. They were the women and men who took the concept of "serve the people" and turned it into a material force, transforming the political face of our communities.

THE "CULTURAL REVOLUTION" IN ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

But we would be wrong to describe this transformation of our communities as solely "political"—at least as our society narrowly defines the term today. The transformation also involved a cultural vitality that opened new ways of viewing the world. Unlike today—where Asian American communities categorize "culture" and "politics" into different spheres of professional activity—in the late 1960s they did not divide them so rigidly or hierarchically. Writers, artists, and musicians were "cultural workers," usually closely associated with communities, and saw their work as "serving the people." Like other community activists, cultural workers defined the period as a "decisive moment" for Asian Americans—a time for reclaiming the past and changing the future.

The "decisive moment" was also a time for questioning and transforming moral values. Through their political and cultural work, activists challenged systems of rank and privilege, structures of hierarchy and bureaucracy, forms of exploitation and inequality, and notions of selfishness and individualism. Through their activism in mass organizations, they promoted a new moral vision centered on democratic participation, cooperative work styles, and collective decision making. Pioneer poet Russell C. Leong describes the affinity between this new generation of cultural workers and their communities, focusing on the work of the Asian American Writers Workshop, located in the basement of the International Hotel in San Francisco Chinatown/Manilatown:

> We were a post–World War II generation mostly in our twenties and thirties; in or out of local schools and colleges. . . . [We] gravitated toward cities—San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York—where movements for ethnic studies and inner city blocks of Asian communities coincided. . . . We read as we wrote—not in isolation—but in the company of our neighbors in Manilatown pool halls, barrio parks, Chinatown basements. . . . Above all, we poets were a tribe of storytellers. . . . Storytellers live in communities where they write for family and friends. The relationship between the teller and listener is neighborly, because the teller of stories must also listen.[12]

But as storytellers, cultural workers did more than simply describe events around them. By witnessing and participating in the movement, they helped to

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

shape community consciousness. San Francisco poet Al Robles focuses on this process of vision making:

> While living and working in our little, tiny communities, in the midst of towering high-rises, we fought the oppressor, the landlord, the developer, the banks, City Hall. But most of all, we celebrated through our culture; music, dance, song and poetry—not only the best we knew but the best we had. The poets were and always have been an integral part of the community. It was through poetry—through a poetical vision to live out the ritual in dignity as human beings.[13]

The transformation of poets, writers, and artists into cultural workers and vision makers reflected larger changes occurring in every sector of the Asian American community. In education, teachers and students redefined the learning process, discovering new ways of sharing knowledge different from traditional, authoritarian, top-down approaches. In the social-service sector, social workers and other professionals became "community workers," and under the slogan "serve the people" redefined the traditional counselor/client relationship by stressing interaction, dialogue, and community building. Within community organizations, members experimented with new organizational structures and collective leadership styles, discarding hierarchical and bureaucratic forms where a handful of commanders made all the decisions. Everywhere, activists and ordinary people grappled with change.

Overall, this "cultural revolution" in the Asian American community echoes themes we have encountered earlier: Third World consciousness, participatory democracy, community building, historical rooting, liberation, and transformation. Why were these concepts so important to a generation of activists? What did they mean? And do they still have relevance for Asian American communities today?

Political analyst Raymond Williams and historian Warren Susman have suggested the use of "keywords" to study historical periods, especially times of great social change.[14] Keywords are terms, concepts, and ideas that emerge as themes of a period, reflecting vital concerns and changing values. For Asian Americans in the 1980s and 1990s, the keywords are "advocacy," "access," "legitimacy," "empowerment," and "assertiveness." These keywords tell us much about the shape of our community today, especially the growing role of young professionals and their aspirations in U.S. society. In contrast, the keywords of the late 1960s and early 1970s—"consciousness," "theory," "ideology," "participatory democracy," "community," and "liberation"—point to different concerns and values.

The keywords of two decades ago point to an approach to political work that activists widely shared, especially those working in grassroots struggles in Asian American neighborhoods, such as the Chinatowns, Little Tokyos, Manilatowns, and International Districts around the nation. This political approach focused on the relationship between political consciousness and social change, and can be best summarized in a popular slogan of the period: "Theory becomes a material force when it is grasped by the masses." Asian American activists believed

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

that they could promote political change through direct action and mass education that raised political consciousness in the community, especially among the unorganized—low-income workers, tenants, small-business people, high-school youth, and so on. Thus, activists saw political consciousness as rising not from study groups, but from involving people in the process of social change—through their confronting the institutions of power around them and creating new visions of community life based on these struggles.

Generally, academics studying the movements of the 1960s—including academics in Asian American Studies—have dismissed the political theory of that time as murky and eclectic, characterized by ultra-leftism, shallow class analysis, and simplistic notions of Marxism and capitalism.[15] To a large extent, the thinking was eclectic; Asian American activists drew from Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao—and also from Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Che Guevara, Kim Il-sung, and Amilcar Cabral, as well as Korean revolutionary Kim San, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Paulo Freire, the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, the women's liberation movement, and many other resistance struggles. But in their obsessive search for theoretical clarity and consistency, these academics miss the bigger picture. What is significant is not the *content* of ideas activists adopted, but what activists *did* with the ideas. What Asian American activists *did* was use the ideas drawn from many different movements to redefine the Asian American experience.

Central to this redefinition was a slogan that appeared at nearly every Asian American rally during that period: "The people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history." Asian American activists adapted the slogan, which originated in the Chinese revolution, to the tasks of community building, historical rooting, and creating new values. Thus, the slogan came to capture six new ways of thinking about Asian Americans:

- Asian Americans became active participants in the making of history, reversing standard accounts that had treated Asian Americans as marginal objects.
- Activists saw history as created by large numbers of people acting together, not by elites.
- This view of history provided a new way of looking at our communities. Activists believed that ordinary people could make their own history by learning how historical forces operated and by transforming this knowledge into a material force to change their lives.
- This realization defined a political strategy: political power came from grassroots organizing, from the bottom up.
- This strategy required activists to develop a broad analysis of the Asian American condition—to uncover the interconnections in seemingly separate events, such as the war in Indochina, corporate redevelopment of Asian American communities, and the exploitation of Asian immigrants in garment shops. In their political analyses, activists linked the day-to-day struggles of Asian Americans to larger events and issues. The anti-eviction campaign of tenants in Chinatown and the International District against powerful corporations became one with the resistance movements of peasants in Vietnam,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

the Philippines, and Latin America—or, as summarized in a popular slogan of the period, there was "one struggle, [but] many fronts."

- This new understanding challenged activists to build mass, democratic organizations, especially within unorganized sectors of the community. Through these new organizations, Asian Americans expanded democracy for all sectors of the community and gained the power to participate in the broader movement for political change taking place throughout the world.

The redefinition of the Asian American experience stands as the most important legacy from this period. As described above, this legacy represents far more than an ethnic awakening. The redefinition began with an analysis of power and domination in American society. It provided a way of understanding the historical forces surrounding us. And most importantly, it presented a strategy and challenge for changing our future. This challenge, I believe, still confronts us today.

THE LATE 1970S: REVERSING DIRECTION

As we continue to delve into the vitality of the movements of the 1960s, one question becomes more and more persistent: Why did these movements, possessing so much vigor and urgency, seem to disintegrate in the late 1970s and early 1980s? Why did a society in motion toward progressive change seem suddenly to reverse direction?

As in the larger Left movement, Asian American activists heatedly debate this question.[16] Some mention the strategy of repression—including assassinations—U.S. ruling circles launched in response to the mass rebellions. Others cite the accompanying programs of cooptation that elites designed to channel mass discontent into traditional political arenas. Some focus on the New Right's rise, culminating in the Reagan presidency. Still others emphasize the sectarianism among political forces within the movement, or target the inability of the movement as a whole to base itself more broadly within communities.

Each of these analyses provides a partial answer. But missing in most analyses by Asian American activists is the most critical factor: the devastating corporate offensive of the mid-1970s. We will remember the 1970s as a time of economic crisis and staggering inflation. Eventually, historians may more accurately describe it as the years of "one-sided class war." Transnational corporations based in the United States launched a broad attack on the American people, especially African American communities. Several books provide an excellent analysis of the corporate offensive. One of the best, most accessible accounts is *What's Wrong with the U.S. Economy?*, written in 1982 by the Institute for Labor Education and Research.[17] My analysis draws from that source.

Corporate executives based their offensive on two conclusions: first, the economic crisis in the early 1970s—marked by declining corporate profits—occurred because American working people were earning too much; and second, the mass struggles of the previous decades had created "too much democracy" in America. The Trilateral Commission—headed by David Rockefeller and composed of corporate executives and politicians from the United States, Europe, and

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

Japan—posed the problem starkly: either people would have to accept less, or corporations would have to accept less. An article in *Business Week* identified the solution: "Some people will obviously have to do with less. . . . Yet it will be a hard pill for many Americans to swallow—the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more."

But in order for corporations to "have more," U.S. ruling circles had to deal with the widespread discontent that had erupted throughout America. We sometimes forget today that in the mid-1970s a large number of Americans had grown cynical about U.S. business and political leaders. People routinely called politicians—including President Nixon and Vice President Agnew—crooks, liars, and criminals. Increasingly, they began to blame the largest corporations for their economic problems. One poll showed that half the population believed that "big business is the source of most of what's wrong in this country today." A series of Harris polls found that those expressing "a great deal of confidence" in the heads of corporations had fallen from 55 percent in 1966 to only 15 percent in 1975. By the fall of 1975, public opinion analysts testifying before a congressional committee reported, according to the *New York Times*, "that public confidence in the government and in the country's economic future is probably lower than it has ever been since they began to measure such things scientifically." These developments stunned many corporate leaders. "How did we let the educational system fail the free-enterprise system?" one executive asked.

U.S. ruling elites realized that restoring faith in free enterprise could only be achieved through an intensive ideological assault on those challenging the system. The ideological campaign was combined with a political offensive, aimed at the broad gains in democratic rights that Americans, especially African Americans, had achieved through the mass struggles of previous decades. According to corporate leaders, there was "too much democracy" in America, which meant too little "governability." In a 1975 Trilateral Commission report, Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington analyzed the problem caused by "previously passive or unorganized groups in the population [which were] now engaged in concerted efforts to establish their claims to opportunities, positions, rewards, and privileges which they had not considered themselves entitled to before." According to Huntington, this upsurge in "democratic fervor" coincided with "markedly higher levels of self-consciousness on the part of blacks, Indians, Chicanos, white ethnic groups, students and women, all of whom became mobilized and organized in new ways." Huntington saw these developments as creating a crisis for those in power:

> The essence of the democratic surge of the 1960s was a general challenge to existing systems of authority, public and private. In one form or another, the challenge manifested itself in the family, the university, business, public and private associations, politics, the government bureaucracy, and the military service. People no longer felt the same obligation to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talents.[18]

The mass pressures, Huntington contended, had "produced problems for the governability of democracy in the 1970s." The government, he concluded,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

must find a way to exercise more control. And that meant curtailing the rights of "major economic groups."

The ensuing corporate campaign was a "one-sided class war": plant closures in U.S. industries and transfer of production overseas, massive layoffs in remaining industries, shifts of capital investment from one region of the country to other regions and to other parts of the globe, and demands by corporations for concessions in wages and benefits from workers in nearly every sector of the economy.

The Reagan presidency culminated and institutionalized this offensive. The Reagan platform called for restoring "traditional" American values, especially faith in the system of free enterprise. Reaganomics promoted economic recovery by getting government "off the backs" of business people, reducing taxation of the rich, and cutting social programs for the poor. Meanwhile, racism and exploitation became respectable under the new mantle of patriotism and economic recovery.

THE WINTER OF CIVIL RIGHTS

The corporate assault ravaged many American neighborhoods, but African American communities absorbed its harshest impact. A study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities measures the national impact:

- Between 1970 and 1980, the number of poor African Americans rose by 24 percent from 1.4 million to 1.8 million.
- In the 1980s, the overall African American median income was 57 percent that of whites, a decline of nearly four percentage points from the early 1970s.
- In 1986, females headed 42 percent of all African American families, the majority of which lived below the poverty line.
- In 1978, 8.4 percent of African American families had incomes under $5,000 a year. By 1987, that figure had grown to 13.5 percent. In that year, a third of all African Americans were poor.[19]
- By 1990, nearly half of all African American children grew up in poverty.[20]

Manning Marable provides a stark assessment of this devastation in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America:*

> What is qualitatively *new* about the current period is that the racist/capitalist state under Reagan has proceeded down a public policy road which could inevitably involve the complete obliteration of the entire Black reserve army of labor and sections of the Black working class. The decision to save capitalism at all costs, to provide adequate capital for restructuring of the private sector, fundamentally conflicts with the survival of millions of people who are now permanently outside the workplace. Reaganomics must, if it intends to succeed, place the onerous burden of unemployment on the shoulders of the poor (Blacks, Latinos and even whites) so securely that middle to upper income Americans will not protest in the vicious suppression of this stratum.[21]

The corporate offensive, combined with widespread government repression, brutally destroyed grassroots groups in the African American community. This

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

war against the poor ripped apart the social fabric of neighborhoods across America, leaving them vulnerable to drugs and gang violence. The inner cities became the home of the "underclass" and a new politics of inner-directed violence and despair.

Historian Vincent Harding, in *The Other American Revolution*, summarizes the 1970s as the "winter" of civil rights, a period in which there was "a dangerous loss of hope among black people, hope in ourselves, hope in the possibility of any real change, hope in any moral, creative force beyond the flatness of our lives."[22]

In summary, the corporate offensive—especially its devastation of the African American community—provides the necessary backdrop for understanding why the mass movements of the 1960s seemed to disintegrate. Liberation movements, especially in the African American community, did not disappear, but a major focus of their activity shifted to issues of day-to-day survival.

THE 1980S: AN AMBIGUOUS PERIOD FOR ASIAN AMERICAN EMPOWERMENT

For African Americans and many other people of color, the period from the mid-1970s through the Reagan and Bush presidencies became a winter of civil rights, a time of corporate assault on their livelihoods and an erosion of hard-won rights. But for Asian Americans, the meaning of this period is much more ambiguous. On the one hand, great suffering marked the period: growing poverty for increasing numbers of Asian Americans, especially refugees from Southeast Asia; a rising trend of racist hate crimes directed toward Asian Americans of all ethnicities and income levels; and sharpening class polarization within our communities—with a widening gap between the very rich and the very poor. But advances also characterized the period. With the reform of U.S. immigration laws in 1965, the Asian American population grew dramatically, creating new enclaves—including suburban settlements—and revitalizing more established communities, such as Chinatowns, around the nation. Some recent immigrant business people, with small capital holdings, found economic opportunities in inner city neighborhoods. Meanwhile, Asian American youth enrolled in record numbers in colleges and universities across the United States. Asian American families moved into suburbs, crashing previously lily-white neighborhoods. And a small but significant group of Asian American politicians, such as Mike Woo and Warren Furutani, scored important electoral victories in the mainstream political arena, taking the concept of political empowerment to a new level of achievement.

During the winter of civil rights, Asian American activists also launched several impressive political campaigns at the grassroots level. Japanese Americans joined together to win redress and reparations. Pilipino Americans rallied in solidarity with the "People's Power" movement in the Philippines to topple the powerful Marcos dictatorship. Chinese Americans created new political alignments and mobilized community support for the pro-democracy struggle in China. Korean Americans responded to the massacre of civilians by the South Korean dictatorship in Kwangju with massive demonstrations and relief efforts,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

and established an important network of organizations in America, including Young Koreans United. Samoan Americans rose up against police abuse in Los Angeles; Pacific Islanders demanded removal of nuclear weapons and wastes from their homelands; and Hawai'ians fought for the right of self-determination and recovery of their lands. And large numbers of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders worked actively in the 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns of Jesse Jackson, helping to build the Rainbow Coalition.

Significantly, these accomplishments occurred in the midst of the Reagan presidency and U.S. politics' turn to the right. How did certain sectors of the Asian American community achieve these gains in the midst of this burgeoning conservatism?

There is no simple answer. Mainstream analysts and some Asian Americans have stressed the "model minority" concept. According to this analysis, Asian Americans—in contrast to other people of color in America—have survived adversity and advanced because of their emphasis on education and family values, their community cohesion, and other aspects of their cultural heritage. Other scholars have severely criticized this viewpoint, stressing instead structural changes in the global economy and shifts in U.S. government policy since the 1960s. According to their analysis, the reform of U.S. immigration laws and sweeping economic changes in advanced capitalist nations, such as deindustrialization and the development of new technologies, brought an influx of highly educated new Asian immigrants to America. The characteristics of these new immigrants stand in sharp contrast to those of past generations, and provide a broader social and economic base for developing our communities. Still other political thinkers have emphasized the key role played by political expatriates—both right-wing and left-wing—in various communities, but most especially in the Vietnamese, Pilipino, and Korean communities. These expatriates brought political resources from their homelands—e.g., political networks, organizing experience, and, in a few cases, access to large amounts of funds—and have used these resources to change the political landscape of ethnic enclaves. Still other analysts have examined the growing economic and political power of nations of the Asian Pacific and its impact on Asians in America. According to these analysts, we can link the advances of Asian Americans during this period to the rising influence of their former homelands and the dawning of what some call "the Pacific Century." Finally, some academics have focused on the significance of small-business activities of new Asian immigrants, arguing that this sector is most responsible for the changing status of Asian Americans in the 1980s. According to their analysis, Asian immigrant entrepreneurs secured an economic niche in inner city neighborhoods because they had access to start-up capital (through rotating credit associations or from family members) and they filled a vacuum created when white businesses fled.[23]

Thus, we have multiple interpretations for why some sectors of the Asian American community advanced economically and politically during the winter of civil rights. But two critical factors missing from the analyses can help us better understand the peculiar shape of our community in the 1980s and its ambiguous character when compared to other communities of color. First is the legacy

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

of grassroots organizing from the Asian American movement, and second is the dramatic rise of young professionals as a significant force in the community.

A stereotype about the movements of the 1960s is that they produced nothing enduring—they flared brightly for an instant and then quickly died. However, evidence from the Asian American movement contradicts this commonly held belief. Through meticulous organizing campaigns, Asian American activists created an extensive network of grassroots formations. Unlike similar groups in African American communities—which government repression targeted and brutally destroyed—a significant number of Asian American groups survived the 1980s. Thus far, no researcher has analyzed the impact of the corporate offensive and government repression on grassroots organizations in different communities of color during the late 1970s. When this research is done, I think it will show that U.S. ruling elites viewed the movement in the African American community as a major threat due to its power and influence over other communities. In contrast, the movement in the Asian American community received much less attention due to its much smaller size and influence. As a result, Asian American grassroots formations during the 1970s escaped decimation and gained the time and space to survive, grow, and adapt to changing politics.

The survival of grassroots organizations is significant because it helped to cushion the impact of the war against the poor in Asian American communities. More important, the grassroots formations provided the foundation for many of the successful empowerment campaigns occurring in the 1980s. For example, Japanese Americans built their national effort to win reparations for their internment during World War II on the experiences of grassroots neighborhood organizations' housing and anti-eviction struggles of the early 1970s. Movement activists learned from their confrontations with systems of power and applied these lessons to the more difficult political fights of the 1980s. Thus, a direct link exists between the mass struggles of activists in the late 1960s and the "empowerment" approach of Asian Americans in the 1980s and 1990s.

But while similarities exist in political organizing of the late 1960s and the 1980s, there is one crucial difference: who is being empowered? In the late 1960s and 1970s, activists focused on bringing "power to the people"—the most disenfranchised of the community, such as low-income workers, youth, former prisoners and addicts, senior citizens, tenants, and small-business people. In contrast, the "empowerment" of young professionals in Asian American communities marks the decade of the 1980s. The professionals—children of the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s—directly benefited from the campaigns for desegregation, especially in the suburbs; the removal of quotas in colleges and professional schools; and the expansion of job opportunities for middle-class people of color in fields such as law, medicine, and education.

During the 1980s, young professionals altered the political terrain in our communities.[24] They created countless new groups in nearly every profession: law, medicine, social work, psychology, education, journalism, business, and arts and culture. They initiated new political advocacy groups, leadership training projects, and various national coalitions and consortiums. They organized political caucuses in the Democratic and Republican parties. And they joined

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

the governing boards of many community agencies. Thus, young professionals—through their sheer numbers, their penchant for self-organization, and their high level of activity—defined the Asian American community of the 1980s, shaping it in ways very different from other communities of color.

The emergence of young professionals as community leaders also aided mass political mobilizations. By combining with grassroots forces from the Asian American movement, young professionals advanced struggles against racism and discrimination. In fact, many of the successful Asian American battles of the past decade resulted from this strategic alignment.

The growing power of young professionals has also brought a diversification of political viewpoints to our communities. While many professionals embrace concerns originally raised by movement activists, a surprisingly large number have moved toward neoconservatism. The emergence of neoconservatism in our community is a fascinating phenomenon, one we should analyze and appreciate. Perhaps more than any other phenomenon, it helps to explain the political ambiguity of Asian American empowerment in the 1980s.

STRANGE AND NEW POLITICAL ANIMALS: ASIAN AMERICAN NEO-CONSERVATIVES

Item: At many universities in recent years, some of the harshest opponents of affirmative action have been Chinese Americans and Korean Americans who define themselves as political conservatives. This, in and of itself, is not new or significant. We have always had Asian American conservatives who have spoken out against affirmative action. But what is new is their affiliation. Many participate actively in Asian American student organizations traditionally associated with campus activism.

Item: In the San Francisco newspaper *Asian Week*, one of the most interesting columnists is Arthur Hu, who writes about anti-Asian quotas in universities, political empowerment, and other issues relating to our communities. He also regularly chastises those he terms "liberals, progressives, Marxists, and activists." In a recent column, he wrote: "The left today has the nerve to blame AIDS, drugs, the dissolution of the family, welfare dependency, gang violence, and educational failure on Ronald Reagan's conservatism." Hu, in turn, criticizes the Left for "tearing down religion, family, structure, and authority; promoting drugs, promiscuity, and abdication of personal responsibility."[25]

Item: During the militant, three-year campaign to win tenure for UCLA Professor Don Nakanishi, one of the key student leaders was a Japanese American Republican, Matthew J. Endo. Aside from joining the campus-community steering committee, he also mobilized support from fraternities, something that progressive activists could not do. Matt prides himself on being a Republican and a life member of the National Rifle Association. He aspires to become a CEO in a corporation but worries about the upsurge in racism against Asian Pacific peoples and the failure of both Republicans and Democrats to address this issue.

The Asian American neoconservatives are a new and interesting political phenomenon. They are new because they are creatures born from the Reagan-Bush

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

era of supply-side economics, class and racial polarization, and the emphasis on elitism and individual advancement. And they are interesting because they also represent a legacy from the civil rights struggles, especially the Asian American movement. The neoconservatives embody these seemingly contradictory origins.

- They are proud to be Asian American. But they denounce the Asian American movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s as destructive.
- They speak out against racism against Asian Americans. But they believe that only by ending affirmative action programs and breaking with prevailing civil rights thinking of the past four decades can we end racism.
- They express concern for Asian American community issues. But they contend that the agenda set by the "liberal Asian American establishment" ignores community needs.
- They vehemently oppose quotas blocking admissions of Asian Americans at colleges and universities. But they link anti-Asian quotas to affirmative action programs for "less qualified" African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians.
- They acknowledge the continuing discrimination against African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians in U.S. society. But they believe that the main barrier blocking advancement for other people of color is "cultural"—that unlike Asians, these groups supposedly come from cultures that do not sufficiently emphasize education, family cohesion, and traditional values.

Where did these neoconservatives come from? What do they represent? And why is it important for progressive people to understand their presence?

Progressives cannot dismiss Asian American neoconservatives as simple-minded Republicans. Although they hold views similar at times to Patrick Buchanan and William Buckley, they are not clones of white conservatives. Nor are they racists, fellow travelers of the Ku Klux Klan, or ideologues attached to Reagan and Bush. Perhaps the group they most resemble are the African American neoconservatives: the Shelby Steeles, Clarence Thomases, and Tony Browns of this period. Like these men, they are professionals and feel little kinship for people of lower classes. Like these men, they oppose prevailing civil rights thinking, emphasizing reliance on government intervention and social programs. And like these men, they have gained from affirmative action, but they now believe that America has somehow become a society where other people of color can advance through their own "qualifications."

Neoconservative people of color have embraced thinkers such as the late Martin Luther King Jr., but have appropriated his message to fit their own ideology. In his speeches and writings, King dreamed of the day when racism would be eliminated—when African Americans would be recognized in U.S. society for the "content of our character, not the color of our skin." He called upon all in America to wage militant struggle to achieve this dream. Today, neoconservatives have subverted his message. They believe that racism in U.S. society has declined in significance, and that people of color can now abandon mass militancy and

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

advance individually by cultivating the content of their character through self-help programs and educational attainment, and retrieving traditional family values. They criticize prevailing "civil rights thinking" as overemphasizing the barriers of racism and relying on "external forces" (i.e., government intervention through social programs) to address the problem.

Asian American neoconservatives closely resemble their African American counterparts in their criticism of government "entitlement" programs and their defense of traditional culture and family values. But Asian American neoconservatives are not exactly the same as their African American counterparts. The growth of neoconservative thinking among Asian Americans during the past 25 years reflects the peculiar conditions in our community, notably the emerging power of young professionals. Thus, to truly understand Asian American neoconservatives, we need to look at their evolution through the prism of Asian American politics from the late 1960s to the early 1990s.

Twenty-five years ago, Asian American neoconservatives did not exist. Our community then had only traditional conservatives—those who opposed ethnic studies, the antiwar movement, and other militant grassroots struggles. The traditional conservatives denounced Asian American concerns as "special interest politics" and labeled the assertion of Asian American ethnic identity as "separatist" thinking. For the traditional conservative, a basic contradiction existed in identifying oneself as Asian American and conservative.

Ironically, the liberation struggles of the 1960s—and the accompanying Asian American movement—spawned a new conservative thinker. The movement partially transformed the educational curriculum through ethnic studies, enabling all Asian Americans to assert pride in their ethnic heritage. The movement accelerated the desegregation of suburbs, enabling middle-class Asian Americans to move into all-white neighborhoods. Today, the neoconservatives are mostly young, middle-class professionals who grew up in white suburbs apart from the poor and people of color. As students, they attended the elite universities. Their only experience with racism is name-calling or "glass ceilings" blocking personal career advancement—and not poverty and violence.

It is due to their professional status and their roots in the Asian American movement that the neoconservatives exist in uneasy alliance with traditional conservatives in our community. Neoconservatives are appalled by the violence and rabid anticommunism of reactionary sectors of the Vietnamese community, Chinese from Taiwan tied to the oppressive ruling Kuomintang party, and Korean expatriates attached to the Korean Central Intelligence Agency. They are also uncomfortable with older conservatives, those coming from small-business backgrounds who eye the neoconservatives warily, considering them political opportunists.

Neoconservatives differ from traditional conservatives not only because of their youth and their professional status but most important of all, their political coming of age in the Reagan era. Like their African American counterparts, they are children of the corporate offensive against workers, the massive transfer of resources from the poor to the rich, and the rebirth of so-called "traditional values."

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

It is their schooling in Reaganomics and their willingness to defend the current structure of power and privilege in America that gives neoconservative people of color value in today's political landscape. Thus, Manning Marable describes the key role played by African American neoconservatives:

> The singular service that [they] . . . provide is a new and more accurate understanding of what exactly constitutes conservatism within the Black experience. . . . Black conservatives are traditionally hostile to Black participation in trade unions, and urge a close cooperation with white business leaders. Hostile to the welfare state, they call for increased "self-help" programs run by Blacks at local and community levels. Conservatives often accept the institutionalized forms of patriarchy, acknowledging a secondary role for Black women within economics, political life and intellectual work. They usually have a pronounced bias toward organizational authoritarianism and theoretical rigidity.[26]

Marable's analysis points to the basic contradiction for African American neoconservatives. They are unable to address fundamental problems facing their community: racist violence, grinding poverty, and the unwillingness of corporate and government policymakers to deal with these issues.

Asian American neoconservatives face similar difficulties when confronted by the stark realities of the post-Reagan period:

- The neoconservatives acknowledge continuing discrimination in U.S. society but deny the existence of institutional racism and structural inequality. For them, racism lies in the realm of attitudes and "culture" and not institutions of power. Thus, they emphasize individual advancement as the way to overcome racism. They believe that people of color can rise through merit, which they contend can be measured objectively through tests, grades, and educational attainment.
- The neoconservatives ignore questions of wealth and privilege in American society. In their obsession with "merit," "qualifications," and "objective" criteria, they lose sight of power and oppression in America. Their focus is on dismantling affirmative action programs and "government entitlements" from the civil rights era. But poverty and racism existed long before the civil rights movement. They are embedded in the system of inequality that has long characterized U.S. society.
- The neoconservatives are essentially elitists who fear expansion of democracy at the grassroots level. They speak a language of individual advancement, not mass empowerment. They propose a strategy of alignment with existing centers of power and not the creation of new power bases among the disenfranchised sectors of society. Their message is directed to professionals, much like themselves. They have nothing to offer to immigrant workers in sweatshops, the homeless, Cambodian youth in street gangs, or community college youth.
- As relative newcomers to Asian American issues, the neoconservatives lack understanding of history, especially how concerns in the community have

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

> developed over time. Although they aggressively speak out about issues, they lack experience in organizing around these issues. The neoconservatives function best in the realm of ideas; they have difficulty dealing with concrete situations.

However, by stimulating discussion of how Asian Americans define community problems, the neoconservatives bring a vibrancy to community issues by contributing a different viewpoint. Thus, the debate between Asian American neoconservatives and progressives is positive because it clarifies issues and enables both groups to reach constituencies that each could not otherwise reach.

Unfortunately, this debate is also occurring in a larger and more dangerous context: the campaign by mainstream conservatives to redefine civil rights in America. As part of their strategy, conservatives in the national political arena have targeted our communities. There are high stakes here, and conservatives regard the Asian American neoconservatives as small players to be sacrificed.

The high stakes are evident in an article by William McGurn entitled "The Silent Minority" appearing in the conservative digest *National Review*.[27] In his essay, he urges Republicans to actively recruit and incorporate Asian Americans into party activities. According to McGurn, a basic affinity exists between Republican values and Asian American values: many Asian immigrants own small businesses; they oppose communism; they are fiercely pro-defense; they boast strong families; they value freedom; and in their approach to civil rights, they stress opportunities not government "set-asides." McGurn then chastises fellow Republicans for their "crushing indifference" to Asian American issues. He laments how Republicans have lost opportunities by not speaking out on key issues such as the conflict between Korean immigrant merchants and African Americans, the controversy over anti-Asian quotas in universities, and the upsurge in anti-Asian violence.

McGurn sees Republican intervention on these issues strategically—as a way of redefining the race question in American society and shifting the debate on civil rights away from reliance on "an increasingly narrow band of black and liberal interest groups." According to McGurn:

> Precisely because Asian Americans are making it in their adoptive land, they hold the potential not only to add to Republican rolls but to define a bona-fide American language of civil rights. Today we have only one language of civil rights, and it is inextricably linked to government intervention, from racial quotas to set-aside government contracts. It is also an exclusively black-establishment language, where America's myriad other minorities are relegated to second-class citizenship.[28]

McGurn's article presages a period of intense and unprecedented conservative interest in Asian American issues. We can expect conservative commentaries to intensify black-Asian conflicts in inner cities, the controversy over affirmative action, and the internal community debate over designating Asian Americans as a "model minority."

Thus, in the coming period, Asian American communities are likely to become crowded places. Unlike the late 1960s, issues affecting our communities

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

will no longer be the domain of progressive forces only. Increasingly, we will hear viewpoints from Asian American neoconservatives as well as mainstream conservatives. How well will activists meet this new challenge?

GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING IN THE 1990S: THE CHALLENGE OF EXPANDING DEMOCRACY

> *Time would pass, old empires would fall and new ones take their place, the relations of countries and the relations of classes had to change, before I discovered that it is not quality of goods and utility which matter, but movement; not where you are or what you have, but where you have come from, where you are going and the rate at which you are getting there.*[29]
>
> —C.L.R. JAMES

On the eve of the twenty-first century, the Asian American community is vastly different from that of the late 1960s. The community has grown dramatically. In 1970, there were only 1.5 million Asian Americans, almost entirely concentrated in Hawai'i and California. By 1980, there were 3.7 million, and in 1990, 7.9 million—with major Asian communities in New York, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Texas. According to census projections, the Asian American population should exceed 10 million by the year 2000, and will reach 20 million by the year 2020.[30]

Moreover, in contrast to the late 1960s—when Chinese and Japanese Americans made up the majority of Asian Americans—today's community is ethnically diverse, consisting of nearly thirty major ethnic groups, each with a distinct culture. Today's community is also economically different from the 1960s. Compared to other sectors of the U.S. population, there are higher proportions of Asian Americans who are very rich and very poor. This gap between wealth and poverty has created a sharp class polarization in our community, a phenomenon yet to be studied.

But the changes for Asian Americans during the past twenty-five years have not been simply demographic. The political landscape has also changed due to new immigrants and refugees, the polarization between rich and poor, and the emergence of young professionals as a vital new force. Following the approach of C.L.R. James, we have traced the origins of these changes. We now need to analyze where these changes will take us in the decade ahead.

Ideologically and politically, activists confront a new and interesting paradox in the Asian American community of the 1990s. On the one hand, there is a great upsurge of interest in the community and all things Asian American. Almost daily, we hear about new groups forming across the country. In contrast to twenty-five years ago, when interest in the community was minimal and when only progressive activists joined Asian American organizations, we now find a situation where many different groups—including conservatives and neoconservatives, bankers and business executives, and young professionals in all fields—have taken up the banner of Asian American identity.

On the other hand, we have not seen a corresponding growth in consciousness—of what it means to be Asian American as we approach the twenty-first century. Unlike African Americans, most Asian Americans today have yet to articulate the "particularities" of issues affecting our community, whether these

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

be the debate over affirmative action, the controversy regarding multiculturalism, or the very definition of empowerment. We have an ideological vacuum, and activists will compete with neoconservatives, mainstream conservatives, and others to fill it.

We have a political vacuum as well. In recent years, growing numbers of Asian Americans have become involved in community issues. But almost all have come from middle-class and professional backgrounds. Meanwhile, vast segments of our community are not coming forward. In fact, during the past decade the fundamental weakness for activists has been the lack of grassroots organizing among the disenfranchised sectors of our community: youth outside of colleges and universities, the poor, and new immigrant workers. Twenty-five years ago, the greatest strength of the Asian American movement was the ability of activists to organize the unorganized and to bring new political players into community politics. Activists targeted high school youth, tenants, small-business people, former prison inmates, gang members, the elderly, and workers. Activists helped them build new grassroots organizations, expanding power and democracy in our communities. Can a new generation of activists do the same?

To respond to this challenge, activists will need both a political strategy and a new ideological vision. Politically, activists must find ways to expand democracy by creating new grassroots formations, activating new political players, and building new coalitions. Ideologically, activists must forge a new moral vision, reclaiming the militancy and moral urgency of past generations and reaffirming the commitment to participatory democracy, community building, and collective styles of leadership.

Where will this political strategy and new consciousness come from? More than fifty years ago, revolutionary leader Mao Zedong asked a similar question:

> Where do correct ideas come from? Do they drop from the skies? No. Are they innate in the mind? No. They come from social practice, and from it alone. . . . In their social practice, people engage in various kinds of struggle and gain rich experience, both from their successes and their failures.[31]

In the current "social practice" of Asian American activists across the nation, several grassroots organizing projects can serve as the basis for a political strategy and new moral vision for the 1990s. I will focus on three projects that are concentrating on the growing numbers of poor and working poor in our community. Through their grassroots efforts, these three groups are demonstrating how collective power can expand democracy, and how, in the process, activists can forge a new moral vision.

The three groups—the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) Workers Center in Boston, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) in Oakland, and Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates (KIWA) in Los Angeles—address local needs. Although each organization works with different ethnic groups, their history of organizing has remarkable similarities. Each organization is composed of low-income immigrant workers. Each has taken up more than "labor" issues. And each group has fashioned very effective "united front" campaigns involving

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

other sectors of the community. Thus, although each project is relatively small, collectively their accomplishments illustrate the power of grassroots organizing, the creativity and talents of "ordinary" people in taking up difficult issues, and the ability of grassroots forces to alter the political landscape of their community. Significantly, the focus of each group is working people in the Asian American community—a sector that is numerically large and growing larger. However, despite their numbers, workers in the Asian American community during the past decade have become voiceless and silent. Today, in discussions about community issues, no one places garment workers, nurses' aides, waiters, and secretaries at the forefront of the debate to define priorities. And no one thinks about the working class as the cutting edge of the Asian American experience. Yet, if we begin to list the basic questions now confronting Asian Americans—racism and sexism, economic justice and human rights, coalition building, and community empowerment—we would find that it is the working class, of all sectors in our community, that is making the most interesting breakthroughs on these questions. They are doing this through groups such as KIWA, AIWA, and the CPA Workers Center. Why, then, are the voices of workers submerged in our community? Why has the working class become silent?

Three trends have pushed labor issues in our community into the background during the past two decades: the rising power of young professionals in our community; the influx of new immigrants and refugees, and the fascination of social scientists and policy institutes with the phenomenon of immigrant entrepreneurship; and the lack of grassroots organizing by activists among new immigrant workers.

Thus, although the majority of Asian Americans work for a living, we have relatively little understanding about the central place of work in the lives of Asian Americans, especially in low-income industries such as garment work, restaurant work, clerical and office work, and other service occupations. Moreover, we are ignorant about the role labor struggles have played in shaping our history.[32] This labor history is part of the legacy that activists must reclaim.

In contrast to the lack of knowledge about Asian American workers, we have a much greater understanding about the role of young professionals, students, and, most of all, small-business people. In fact, immigrant entrepreneurs, especially Korean immigrants, are perhaps the most studied people of our community. However, as sociologist Edna Bonacich notes, the profile of most Asian immigrant entrepreneurs closely resembles that of workers, due to their low earning power, their long work hours, and their lack of job-related benefits. Thus, Bonacich suggests that while the world outlook of Asian immigrant entrepreneurs may be petit bourgeoisie, their life conditions are those of the working class and might better be studied as a "labor" question. Asian immigrant small businesses, she contends, play the role of "cheap labor in American capitalism."[33]

Other researchers have only begun to investigate the extent of poverty among Asian Americans and the meaning of poverty for our community. In California, the rate of poverty for Asian Americans rose from about 10 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 1990. But more important, researchers found that there are higher numbers of "working poor" (as opposed to "jobless poor") in

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

the Asian American community than for other ethnic groups. Thus, in contrast to other Americans, Asian Americans are poor not because they lack jobs but because the jobs they have pay very low wages. According to researchers Dean Toji and James Johnson Jr., "Perhaps contrary to common belief, about half of the poor work—including about a quarter of poor adults who work full-time and year-round. Poverty, then, is a labor question."[34]

Activists in groups such as KIWA, AIWA, and the CPA Workers Center are strategically focusing on the "working poor" in the Asian American community. KIWA—which was founded in 1992—is working with low-income Korean immigrants in Los Angeles Koreatown, including garment workers and employees in small businesses. AIWA—founded in 1983—organizes Chinese garment workers, Vietnamese garment and electronics workers, and Korean hotel maids and electronics assemblers. And the CPA Workers Center—which traces its roots to the landmark struggle of Chinese garment workers in Boston in 1985—is composed primarily of Chinese immigrant women. Although their main focus is on workers, each group has also mobilized students and social service providers to support their campaigns. Through these alliances, each group has carried out successful community organizing strategies.

The focus of the three groups on community-based organizing distinguishes them from traditional unions. Miriam Ching Louie of AIWA explains this distinction:

> AIWA's base is simultaneously worker, female, Asian, and immigrant, and the organization has developed by blending together several different organizing techniques. As compared to the traditional union organizing strategy, AIWA's approach focuses on the needs of its constituency. *Popular literacy / conscientization / transformation* [based on the teachings of Paulo Freire] is a learning and teaching method which taps into people's life experiences as part of a broader reality, source of knowledge, and guide to action. *Community-based organizing* takes a holistic view of racial/ethnic people and organizes for social change, not only so that the people can win immediate improvements in their lives, but so that they can also develop their own power in the course of waging the fight.[35]

AIWA's focus on grassroots organizing is illustrated by its "Garment Workers' Justice Campaign," launched in late 1992 to assist Chinese immigrant women who were denied pay by a garment contractor. AIWA organizers shaped the campaign to respond to the peculiar features of the garment industry. The industry in the San Francisco Bay Area is the nation's third largest—behind New York and Los Angeles—and employs some 20,000 seamstresses, 85 percent of them Asian immigrant women. The structure of the industry is a pyramid with retailers and manufacturers at the top, contractors in the middle, and immigrant women working at the bottom. Manufacturers make the main share of profits in the industry; they set the price for contractors. Meanwhile, immigrant women work under sweatshop conditions.

In their campaign, AIWA and the workers initially confronted the contractor for the workers' back pay. When they discovered that the contractor owed a

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

number of creditors, they took the unusual step of holding the garment manufacturer, Jessica McClintock, accountable for the unpaid wages. McClintock operates ten boutiques and sells dresses through department stores. The dresses—which garment workers are paid $5 to make—retail in stores for $175. AIWA and the workers conducted their campaign through a series of high-profile demonstrations at McClintock boutiques, including picket lines and rallies in ten cities by supporters. AIWA designed these demonstrations not only to put pressure on McClintock and educate others in the community about inequities in the structure of the garment industry, but also to serve as vehicles for empowerment for the immigrant women participating in the campaign. Through this campaign, the women workers learned how to confront institutional power, how to forge alliances with other groups in the community, and how to carry out effective tactics based on their collective power.[36]

Thus, through its activities promoting immigrant women's rights, AIWA is expanding democracy in the community. It is bringing labor issues to the forefront of community discussions. It is creating new grassroots caucuses among previously unorganized sectors of the community, and forming new political alignments with supporters, such as students, young professionals, labor unions, and social service providers. Finally, AIWA is developing a cadre of politically sophisticated immigrant women and promoting a new leadership style based on popular literacy, community building, and collective power.

Similarly, in Boston, the CPA Workers Center is expanding democracy through its grassroots efforts around worker rights. The Center emerged out of the Chinese immigrant women's campaign to deal with the closing of a large garment factory in Boston in 1985.[37] The shutdown displaced 350 workers and had a severe impact on the local Chinese community due to the community's high concentration of jobs in the garment industry. However, with the assistance of the Chinese Progressive Alliance, the workers formed a labor-community-student coalition and waged an 18-month campaign to win job retraining and job replacement. Lydia Lowe, director of the CPA Workers Center, describes how the victory of Chinese immigrant women led to creation of the Workers Center, which, in turn, has helped other workplace campaigns in the Chinese community:

> This core of women activated through the campaign joined with community supporters from the CPA to found a community-based workers' mutual aid and resource center, based at CPA. . . . Through the Workers Center, immigrant workers share their experience, collectively sum up lessons learned, find out about their rights, and develop mutual support and organizing strategies. Today, the Workers Center involves immigrant workers from each of its successive organizing efforts, and is a unique place in the community where ordinary workers can walk in and participate as activists and decision-makers.[38]

Moreover, forming the Workers Center reshaped politics in the local Chinese community, turning garment workers and other immigrant laborers into active political players. "Previously the silent majority, immigrant workers are gaining

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

increasing respect as a force to be reckoned with in the local Chinese community," states Lowe.

In Los Angeles, the formation of KIWA in March 1992—only a month before the uprisings—has had a similar impact. Through its programs, KIWA is bringing labor issues to the forefront of the Asian American community, educating labor unions about the needs of Asian American workers, and forming coalitions with other grassroots forces in the city to deal with interethnic tensions. KIWA is uniquely positioned to take up these tasks. Out of the multitude of Asian American organizations in Los Angeles, KIWA distinguishes itself as the only organization governed by a board of directors of mainly workers.

KIWA's key role in the labor movement and community politics is evident in the recent controversy involving the Koreana Wilshire Hotel.[39] The controversy began in late 1991 when Koreana Hotel Co. Ltd., a South Korean corporation, bought the Wilshire Hyatt in Los Angeles. The change in ownership meant that 175 unionized members, predominantly Latino immigrants, were out of jobs. Meanwhile, the new hotel management hired a new work force, paying them an average of $1.50 per hour less than the former unionized work force. The former workers, represented by Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 11, called upon labor unions and groups from the Asian American, African American, and Latino communities to protest Koreana's union-busting efforts. Local 11 defined the dispute as not only a labor issue, but a civil rights issue. With the help of groups such as KIWA and the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, Local 11 initiated a letter-writing campaign against Koreana, began a community boycott of the hotel, and organized militant actions outside the hotel, including rallies, marches, and a picket line, as well as civil disobedience at the nearby Korean consulate. In each of these actions, Local 11 worked closely with KIWA and members of the Asian American community. Due to the mass pressure, in late 1992 the Koreana management agreed to negotiate with Local 11 to end the controversy and rehire the union members.

Throughout the campaign, KIWA played a pivotal role by helping Local 11 build alliances with the Asian American community. In addition, KIWA members promoted labor consciousness in the Korean community by urging the community to boycott the hotel. KIWA members also spoke at Local 11 rallies, mobilized for picket lines, and worked with the union in its efforts to put pressure on the South Korean government. By taking these steps, KIWA prevented the controversy from pitting the Korean community against Latinos and further inflaming interethnic tensions in Los Angeles.

Also, through campaigns such as this one, KIWA is educating Asian immigrants about unions; training workers around the tasks of political leadership; and creating new centers of power in the community by combining the resources of workers, young professionals, and social service providers.

Thus, through grassroots organizing, KIWA—like AIWA and the CPA Workers Center—is expanding democracy in the Asian American community. Moreover, the three groups collectively are reshaping community consciousness. They are sharpening debate and dialogue around issues and redefining

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

such important concepts as empowerment. What is their vision of empowerment, and how does it differ from prevailing definitions?

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: BUILDING AN ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

> *[A] movement is an idea, a philosophy. . . . Leadership, I feel, is only incidental to the movement. The movement should be the most important thing. The movement must go beyond its leaders. It must be something that is continuous, with goals and ideas that the leadership can then build on.*[40]
>
> —PHILIP VERA CRUZ

In the late 1960s, Asian American activists sought to forge a new approach to leadership that would not replicate traditional Eurocentric models—i.e., rigid hierarchies with a single executive at the top, invariably a white male, who commanded an endless chain of assistants. In their search for alternatives, activists experimented with various ideas borrowed from other movements, but most of all, activists benefited from the advice and guidance of "elders" within the Asian American community—women and men with years of grassroots organizing experience in the community, the workplace, and the progressive political movement. One such "elder" was Pilipino immigrant labor leader Philip Vera Cruz, then in his sixties. Vera Cruz represented the *manong* generation—the first wave of Pilipinos who came to the United States in the early twentieth century and worked in agricultural fields, canneries, hotels, and restaurants.

Now eighty-eight years old, Vera Cruz continues to educate a new generation of activists. His lifetime of experience in grassroots organizing embodies the historic themes of Asian American activism: devotion to the rights of working people, commitment to democracy and liberation, steadfast solidarity with all who face oppression throughout the world, and the courage to challenge existing institutions of power and to create new institutions as the need arises. These themes have defined his life and shaped his approach to the question of empowerment—an approach that is different from standard definitions in our community today.

Vera Cruz is best known for his role in building the United Farm Workers (UFW), a culmination of his many years of organizing in agricultural fields. In 1965, he was working with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFLCIO, when Pilipino farmworkers sat down in the Coachella vineyards of central California. This sit-down launched the famous grape strike and boycott, eventually leading to the formation of the UFW. Many books and articles have told the story of the UFW and its leader, Cesar Chavez. But until recently, no one has focused on the historic role of Pilipinos in building this movement. Craig Scharlin and Lilia Villanueva have filled that vacuum with their new publication about Vera Cruz's life.

Following the successful grape boycott, Vera Cruz became a UFW vice president and remained with the union until 1977, when he left due to political differences with the leadership. He was critical of the lack of rank-and-file democracy in

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

the union, and of the leadership's embrace of the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. Since 1979, Vera Cruz has lived in Bakersfield, California, and has continued to devote his life to unionism and social justice, and to the education of a new generation of Asian American youth.

Vera Cruz's life experiences have shaped a broad view of empowerment. For Vera Cruz, empowerment is grassroots power: the expansion of democracy for the many. Becoming empowered means gaining the capacity to advocate not only for one's own concerns but for the liberation of all oppressed peoples. Becoming empowered means being able to change fundamentally the relationship of power and oppression in society. Thus, Vera Cruz's vision is very different from that of today's young professionals. For them, empowerment is leadership development for an elite. Becoming empowered means gaining the skills to advocate for the community by gaining access to decision makers. Thus, for young professionals, the key leadership quality to develop is assertiveness. Through assertiveness, leaders gain access to policy makers as well as the power to mobilize their followers. In contrast, Vera Cruz stresses the leadership trait of humility. For him, leaders are "only incidental to the movement"—the movement is "the most important thing." For Vera Cruz, empowerment is a process where people join to develop goals and ideas to create a larger movement—a movement "that the leadership can then build on."

Vera Cruz's understanding of empowerment has evolved from his own social practice. Through his experiences in the UFW and the AFL-CIO, Vera Cruz learned about the empty democracy of bureaucratic unions and the limitations of the charismatic leadership style of Cesar Chavez. Through his years of toil as a farmworker, he recognized the importance of worker solidarity and militancy and the capacity of common people to create alternative institutions of grassroots power. Through his work with Pilipino and Mexican immigrants, he saw the necessity of coalition-building and worker unity that crossed ethnic and racial boundaries. He has shared these lessons with several generations of Asian American activists.

But aside from sharing a concept of empowerment, Vera Cruz has also promoted a larger moral vision, placing his lifetime of political struggle in the framework of the movement for liberation. Three keywords distinguish his moral vision: "compassion," "solidarity," and "commitment." Vera Cruz's lifetime of action represents compassion for all victims of oppression, solidarity with all fighting for liberation, and commitment to the ideals of democracy and social justice.

Activists today need to learn from Vera Cruz's compassion, solidarity, commitment, and humility to create a new moral vision for our community. In our grassroots organizing, we need a vision that can redefine empowerment—that can bring questions of power, domination, and liberation to the forefront of our work. We need a vision that can help us respond to the challenge of conservatives and neoconservatives, and sharpen dialogue with young professionals. We need a new moral vision that can help fill the ideological vacuum in today's community.

Nowhere is this ideological challenge greater than in the current debate over the model minority stereotype. This stereotype has become the dominant image

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

of Asian Americans for mainstream society, and has generated intense debate among all sectors of our community. This debate provides an opportunity for activists to expand political awareness and, in the process, redefine the Asian American experience for the 1990s.

In the current controversy, however, activists criticize the model minority stereotype politically but not ideologically. Activists correctly target how the concept fails to deal with Asian American realities: the growing population of poor and working poor, the large numbers of youth who are not excelling in school, and the hardships and family problems of small-business people who are not "making it" in U.S. society. Activists also correctly point out the political ramifications of the model minority stereotype: the pitting of minority groups against each other, and growing interethnic tensions in U.S. society. In contrast, conservative and neoconservative proponents of the model minority concept argue from the standpoint of both political realities and a larger moral vision. They highlight Asian American accomplishments: "whiz kids" in elementary schools; growing numbers of Asian Americans in business, politics, and the professions; and the record enrollment of youth in colleges and universities. Conservatives and neoconservatives attribute these accomplishments to Asian culture and tradition, respect for authority, family cohesion, sacrifice and toil, rugged individualism, and self-reliance—moral values they root in conservative thinking. Conservatives and neoconservatives recognize that "facts" gain power from attachment to ideologies. As a result, they appropriate Asian culture and values to promote their arguments.

But is Asian culture inherently conservative—or does it also have a tradition of militancy and liberation? Do sacrifice, toil, and family values fit with a conservative moral vision only—or do these qualities also constitute the core of radical and revolutionary thinking? By asking these questions, activists can push the debate over the model minority concept to a new, ideological level. Moreover, by focusing on ideology, activists can delve into the stereotype's deeper meaning. They can help others understand the stereotype's origins and why it has become the dominant image for Asian Americans today.

Historically, the model minority stereotype first arose in the late 1950s—the creation of sociologists attempting to explain low levels of juvenile delinquency among Chinese and Japanese Americans.[41] The stereotype remained a social-science construct until the 1960s when a few conservative political commentators began to use it to contrast Asian Americans' "respect for law and order" with African Americans' involvement in civil rights marches, rallies, and sit-ins. By the late 1970s, the stereotype moved into the political mainstream, coinciding with the influx of new Asian immigrants into all parts of the United States. But the widespread acceptance of the stereotype was not simply due to the increase in the Asian American population or the new attention focused on our community from mainstream institutions. More importantly, it coincided with the rise of the New Right and the corporate offensive against the poor. As discussed earlier, this offensive economically devastated poor communities and stripped away hard-won political gains. It also included an ideological campaign designed to restore trust in capitalism and values associated with free enterprise. Meanwhile, conservatives and neoconservatives fought to redefine the language

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

of civil rights by attacking federal government "entitlement" programs while criticizing the African American "liberal establishment."

In this political climate, the model minority stereotype flourished. It symbolized the moral vision of capitalism in the 1980s: a celebration of traditional values, an emphasis on hard work and self-reliance, a respect for authority, and an attack on prevailing civil rights thinking associated with the African American community. Thus, the stereotype took on an ideological importance above and beyond the Asian American community. The hard-working immigrant merchant and the refugee student winning the local spelling bee have become the symbols for the resurrection of capitalist values in the last part of the twentieth century.

Yet, we know a gap exists between symbol and reality. Today, capitalism in America is not about small-business activities; it is about powerful transnational corporations and their intricate links to nation-states and the world capitalist system. Capitalist values no longer revolve around hard work and self-reliance; they deal with wealth and assets, and the capacity of the rich to invest, speculate, and obtain government contracts. And the fruits of capitalism in the last part of the twentieth century are not immigrant entrepreneurship and the revival of urban areas; they are more likely to be low-paying jobs, unemployment, bankruptcies, and homelessness.

However, as corporations, banks, and other institutions abandon the inner city, the immigrant merchant—especially the Korean small-business person—emerges as the main symbol of capitalism in these neighborhoods. For inner city residents, the Asian immigrant becomes the target for their wrath against corporate devastation of their neighborhoods. Moreover, as this symbol merges with other historical stereotypes of Asians, the result is highly charged imagery, which perhaps underlies the ferocity of anti-Asian violence in this period, such as the destruction of Korean small businesses during the Los Angeles uprisings. The Asian immigrant becomes a symbol of wealth—and also greed; a symbol of hard work—and also materialism; a symbol of intelligence—and also arrogance; a symbol of self-reliance—and also selfishness and lack of community concern. Thus, today the model minority stereotype has become a complex symbol through the confluence of many images imposed on us by social scientists, the New Right, and the urban policies of corporate and political elites.

Pioneer Korean immigrant journalist K. W. Lee—another of our Asian American "elders"—worries about how the melding of symbols, images, and stereotypes is shaping the perception of our community, especially among other people of color. "We are not seen as a compassionate people," states Lee. "Others see us as smart, hard-working, and good at making money—but not as sharing with others. We are not seen as a people who march at the forefront of the struggle for civil rights or the campaign to end poverty."[42] Like Philip Vera Cruz, Lee believes that Asian Americans must retrieve a heritage of compassion and solidarity from our past and use these values to construct a new moral vision for our future. Asian Americans must cast off the images imposed on us by others.

Thus, as we approach the end of the twentieth century, activists are confronted with a task similar to that confronting activists in the late 1960s: the need to redefine the Asian American experience. And as an earlier generation

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

discovered, redefining means more than ethnic awakening. It means confronting the fundamental questions of power and domination in U.S. society. It means expanding democracy and community consciousness. It means liberating ourselves from the prisons still surrounding our lives.

In our efforts to redefine the Asian American experience, activists will have the guidance and help of elders like K. W. Lee and Philip Vera Cruz. And we can also draw from the rich legacy of struggle of other liberation movements.

In closing this chapter, I want to quote from two great teachers from the 1960s: Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Their words and actions galvanized the consciousness of one generation of youth, and their message of compassion continues to speak to a new generation in the 1990s.

Since their assassinations in the mid-1960s, however, mainstream commentators have stereotyped the two men and often pitted one against the other. They portray Malcolm X as the angry black separatist who advocated violence and hatred against white people. Meanwhile, they make Martin Luther King Jr. the messenger of love and nonviolence. In the minds of most Americans, both men—in the words of historian Manning Marable—are "frozen in time."[43]

But as Marable and other African American historians note, both King and Malcolm evolved, and became very different men in the years before their assassinations. Both men came to see the African American struggle in the United States in a worldwide context, as part of the revolutionary stirrings and mass uprisings happening across the globe. Both men became internationalists, strongly condemning U.S. exploitation of Third World nations and urging solidarity among all oppressed peoples. Finally, both men called for a redefinition of human values; they believed that people in the United States, especially, needed to move away from materialism and embrace a more compassionate worldview.

If we, too, as Asian Americans, are to evolve in our political and ideological understanding, we need to learn from the wisdom of both men. As we work for our own empowerment, we must ask ourselves a series of questions. Will we fight only for ourselves, or will we embrace the concerns of all oppressed peoples? Will we overcome our own oppression and help to create a new society, or will we become a new exploiter group in the present American hierarchy of inequality? Will we define our goal of empowerment solely in terms of individual advancement for a few, or as the collective liberation for all peoples?

> *These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wombs of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. "The people who sat in the darkness have seen a great light." We in the West must support these revolutions. It is a sad fact that, because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch antirevolutionaries. . . . Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.*
>
> —MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.[44]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

I believe that there will ultimately be a clash between the oppressed and those who do the oppressing. I believe that there will be a clash between those who want freedom, justice and equality for everyone and those who want to continue the system of exploitation. I believe that there will be that kind of clash, but I don't think it will be based on the color of the skin.

—MALCOLM X[45]

NOTES

1. Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati's four prisons analysis was shared with me by a member of the Iranian Students Union, Confederation of Iranian Students, San Francisco, 1977.
2. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).
3. Winifred Breines, "Whose New Left?" *Journal of American History* 75, no. 2 (September 1988).
4. Ibid., 543.
5. Sheila D. Collins, *The Rainbow Challenge: The Jackson Campaign and the Future of U.S. Politics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1986).
6. Ibid., 16.
7. Ronald Fraser, *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 354–355.
8. Karen Umemoto, " 'On Strike!' San Francisco State College Strike, 1968–69: The Role of Asian American Students," *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989).
9. "Statement of the Philippine-American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) Philosophy and Goals," mimeograph; quoted in Umemoto, " 'On Strike!' " 15.
10. Mo Nishida, "A Revolutionary Nationalist Perspective of the San Francisco State Strike," *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989): 75.
11. George Lipsitz, "Grassroots Activists and Social Change: The Story of Ivory Perry," *CAAS Newsletter*, UCLA Center for Afro-American Studies, 1986. See also George Lipsitz, *A Life in the Struggle. Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).
12. Russell C. Leong, "Poetry Within Earshot: Notes of an Asian American Generation, 1968–1978," *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989): 166–167.
13. Al Robles, "Hanging On to the Carabao's Tail," *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989): 205.
14. Warren J. Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973); and Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
15. John M. Liu and Lucie Cheng, "A Dialogue on Race and Class: Asian American Studies and Marxism," in *The Left Academy*, vol. 3, ed. Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1986).
16. See Mary Kao, compiler, "Public Record, 1989: What Have We Learned from the 60s and 70s?" *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989): 95–158.
17. Institute for Labor Education and Research, *What's Wrong with the U.S. Economy? A Popular Guide for the Rest of Us* (Boston: South End Press, 1982). See especially chapters 1 and 19.
18. Samuel Huntington, "The United States," in *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, ed. Michel Crozier (New York: New York University Press, 1975).
19. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Still Far from the Dream: Recent Developments in Black Income, Employment and Poverty* (Washington, D.C., 1988).
20. Center for the Study of Social Policy, *Kids Count: State Profiles of Child Well-Being* (Washington, D.C., 1992).
21. Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 252–253.
22. Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Afro-American Studies, and Atlanta: Institute of the Black World, 1980), 224.
23. For analyses of the changing status of Asian Americans, see Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, eds., *Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before*

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

World War II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, eds., *Struggles for a Place: The New Asian Immigrants in the Restructuring Political Economy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); and Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991).

24. For an analysis of the growing power of Asian American young professionals, see Yen Espiritu and Paul Ong, "Class Constraints on Racial Solidarity among Asian Americans," in *Struggles for a Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).
25. Arthur Hu, "AIDS and Race," *Asian Week*, 13 December 1991.
26. Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, 182.
27. William McGurn, "The Silent Minority," *National Review*, 24 June 1991.
28. Ibid., 19.
29. C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 116–117.
30. LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, *The State of Asian Pacific America: Policy Issues to the Year 2020* (Los Angeles: LEAP and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1993).
31. Mao Zedong, "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" in *Four Essays on Philosophy* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1966), 134.
32. See "Asian Pacific American Workers: Contemporary Issues in the Labor Movement," ed. Glenn Omatsu and Edna Bonacich, *Amerasia Journal* 18, no. 1 (1992).
33. Edna Bonacich, "The Social Costs of Immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Amerasia Journal* 14, no. 1 (1988).
34. Dean S. Toji and James H. Johnson Jr., "Asian and Pacific Islander American Poverty: The Working Poor and the Jobless Poor," *Amerasia Journal* 18, no. 1 (1992): 85.
35. Miriam Ching Louie, "Immigrant Asian Women in Bay Area Garment Sweatshops: 'After Sewing, Laundry, Cleaning and Cooking, I Have No Breath Left to Sing,'" *Amerasia Journal* 18, no. 1 (1992): 12.
36. Miriam Ching Louie, "Asian and Latina Women Take On the Garment Giants," *Cross-Roads*, March 1993.
37. Peter N. Kiang and Man Chak Ng, "Through Strength and Struggle: Boston's Asian American Student/Community/Labor Solidarity," *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989).
38. Lydia Lowe, "Paving the Way: Chinese Immigrant Workers and Community-based Labor Organizing in Boston," *Amerasia Journal* 18, no. 1 (1992): 41.
39. Namju Cho, "Check Out, Not In: Koreana Wilshire/Hyatt Take-over and the Los Angeles Korean Community," *Amerasia Journal*, 18, no. 1 (1992).
40. Craig Scharlin and Lilia V. Villanueva, *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement* (Los Angeles: UCLA Labor Center and UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1992), 104.
41. For an overview of the evolution of the "model minority" stereotype in the social sciences, see Shirley Hune, *Pacific Migration to the United States: Trends and Themes in Historical and Sociological Literature* (New York: Research Institute on Immigration and Ethnic Studies of the Smithsonian Institution, 1977), reprinted in *Asian American Studies: An Annotated Bibliography and Research Guide*, ed. Hyung-chan Kim (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989). For comparisons of the "model minority" stereotype in two different decades, see "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S.," *U.S. News and World Report*, 26 December 1966, reprinted in *Roots: An Asian American Reader*, ed. Amy Tachiki et al. (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971) and in the present volume, chapter 13; and the essay by William McGurn, "The Silent Minority," *National Review*, 24 June 1991.
42. Author's interview with K. W. Lee, Los Angeles, California, October 1991.
43. Manning Marable, "On Malcolm X: His Message & Meaning" (Westfield, N.J.: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1992).
44. Martin Luther King Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," speech delivered at Riverside Church, New York, April 1967.
45. Malcolm X, interview on Pierre Breton Show, 19 January 1965, in *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 216.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:49:53.

17 Youth Culture, Citizenship, and Globalization

South Asian Muslim Youth in the United States after September 11th

Sunaina Maira

Introduction: A State of Siege[1]

In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, questions of citizenship and racialization have taken on new, urgent meanings for South Asian immigrant youth. Many South Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans, or individuals who appeared "Muslim," have been victims of physical assaults and racial profiling as part of the renewed anti-Muslim backlash and demonization of Arabs in the U.S.[2] This is not a new form of racism, of course, for it has been experienced by Arab Americans and Muslim Americans for many years,[3] but South Asian Americans suddenly found themselves the objects of intensified suspicion and surveillance. There has been a shift, if only temporary, in U.S. race politics after 9/11 where the fault lines are no longer just between those racialized as white Americans/people of color, or even black/white Americans, but between those categorized as Muslim/non-Muslim, American/"foreign," or citizen/non-citizen.

Within six weeks of September 11, Congress passed the USA-PATRIOT Act of 2001 (which conveniently stands for **U**nited and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bstruct **T**errorism Act) under considerable pressure from Attorney General John Ashcroft, who threatened Congress that "Those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberties . . . only aid terrorists."[4] Not so conveniently for Muslim, Arab,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

Back to top.

and South Asian Americans, the new laws gave the United States government sweeping new powers of investigation and surveillance—powers in many cases that had been circumscribed after the Church Committee brought to light the excesses of the FBI's COINTELPRO operation that investigated and infiltrated civil rights groups in the 1960s.[5]

The Patriot Act has violated basic constitutional rights of due process and free speech, and, in effect, sacrificed the liberties of specific minority groups in exchange for a presumed sense of "safety" of the larger majority by creating an ambiguously defined category of "domestic terrorism"; by granting the government enhanced surveillance powers; and by taking away due process rights from non-citizens who can be placed in mandatory (and in actuality, indefinite and secret) detention and deported because of participation in broadly defined "terrorist activity" (often for minor immigration violations and also in secret).[6] Before 9/11, about eighty percent of the American public thought it was wrong for law enforcement to use racial profiling, popularly used to refer to the disproportionate targeting of African American drivers by police for the offense of "driving while black." However, after the shock of the 9/11 attacks, sixty percent favored racial profiling, "at least as long as it was directed at Arabs and Muslims."[7]

After the terrorist attacks, popular feeling was that "somebody had to pay" domestically, as well as internationally, to restore the illusion of national security for Americans. The groups whose civil rights were considered expendable were two populations who historically have had little power to combat infringement on their civil rights: immigrants and Arab Americans. Surveillance of Arab American communities is not new in the U.S. It is closely tied to U.S. support of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and clampdowns on those who have protested U.S. policy in the Middle East at various times since the 1967 Israeli-Arab war—from the FBI's monitoring of the General Union of Palestinian Students in the 1980s, to the attempted deportation of the pro-Palestinian activists known as the "L.A. 8," to the nationwide monitoring and interviews of Arab American individuals and organizations before and during the first Gulf War.[8]

However, South Asians in this country have generally had a different relationship than Arab Americans to the policies of the national security state. Since the early twentieth century, the anti-colonial activities of Indian immigrants who mobilized in the U.S. and published radical pamphlets such as "Ghadar" [Mutiny] have been targeted.[9] The primary influx of immigrants from South Asia actually came to the United States beginning in the late 1960s as part of an effort by the U.S. to shore up its scientific and military technology expertise during the Cold War. Graduate students, scientists, and professionals who emigrated after the Immigration Act of 1965 generally did not engage in challenges to their adopted home state's policies, and despite economically strategic lobbying for minority status in the 1970s to obtain civil rights benefits, the first wave of South Asians has, for the most part, tried hard to live up to the mythic "model minority" image.[10] However, the second wave of South Asian immigrants, who began coming to the U.S. in the 1980s through the family reunification provisions of the 1965 Act, was less affluent and credentialed than their predecessors, more likely to come from small towns or even villages, and to have had a very different

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

exposure to U.S. race politics and the welfare state than those earlier immigrants. In addition, while immigrants from the first wave typically reside in middle- and upper-middle-class, predominantly white suburbs in the U.S., these more recent immigrants generally live in urban areas, often in multi-ethnic communities, and work in service-sector jobs or in small businesses. The civil rights crisis after 9/11 thus not only affected South Asian, Arab, and Muslim African Americans differentially due to their varied histories of arrival and residence in the U.S., and the different relationships of the U.S. with their home nation-states. It also affected various South Asian American communities differentially, based on their class status and previous understandings of U.S. racism. Unfortunately, it seems that so far there has been no nationally based, collectively organized response to the post-9/11 civil rights crisis.

This lack of coordinated national response by South Asian Americans is disturbing but not surprising. The relative absence of civil rights organizations established by the first wave of South Asian immigrants and the class schism in the community means that there is no organized national South Asian civil rights infrastructure, akin to the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, to respond to the crisis affecting the South Asian American community.[11] The crisis of civil rights for South Asian Americans after 9/11 is the most virulent example of large-scale scapegoating of and violence against South Asians in the U.S. since the anti-Indian riots on the West Coast in the early twentieth century. As part of the domestic "War on Terror," at least 1,200 and up to 3,000 Muslim immigrant men were rounded up and detained in the aftermath of 9/11, without any criminal charges, some in high-security prisons. Nearly forty percent of the detainees are thought to be Pakistani nationals, though virtually none of the detainees has been identified publicly and the locations where many have been held remain secret, still true of the ongoing detentions in 2004.[12] After 9/11, Muslim families began experiencing the "disappearances" of their husbands, brothers, and sons, and many families ended up leaving the country after indefinite separations and loss of the means of family support.[13] Although unreported in the mainstream media, there have been mass deportations of Pakistani nationals leaving on chartered planes, some leaving in the middle of the night from New York State.[14]

In June 2002, the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) was established; this grossly discriminatory system requires all male nationals over sixteen years of age from twenty-four Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as North Korea, to submit to photographing and fingerprinting at federal immigration facilities.[15] After news broke of mass arrests of Iranians complying with special registration in southern California in December 2002, some undocumented immigrants and those with pending immigration applications, worried about registering and not being released, tried to flee to Canada. By 12 March 2003, the Canadian immigration service reported 2,111 refugee claims by Pakistanis just since 1 January of that year.[16] The irony of Pakistanis leaving the U.S. to try to get political asylum in another country is hidden, rather than lost, for most Americans. The earlier fear and anxiety surrounding the detentions in the first year following 9/11 seem to have

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

largely diminished in the public sphere, and within South Asian American communities, seem to be borne ever more by Muslim and Sikh Americans to the exclusion of those who feel they are not "targets" of the war on terror. My own work on issues of immigrant rights with South Asian Americans in the Boston area reveals that there is, understandably, a heightened sense of fear and vulnerability in Muslim immigrant communities, particularly among working-class immigrants who cannot as easily afford legal counsel to help them if they are harassed or detained.

It would not be too dramatic to say that many in these communities feel under siege. The profiling and hysteria depicted in the eerily prescient 1998 film *The Siege*—in which Muslim and Arab Americans in New York are rounded up behind barbed wire in response to a terrorist threat—resembles truth more than fiction. The profiling of Muslim and Arab immigrants affects the composition of communities and the nature of relationships within them. This is particularly prominent in areas with large concentrations of these populations that have seen an exodus of immigrants seeking to avoid arrest or deportation, such as Brooklyn's "Little Pakistan" on Coney Island Avenue.[17] More than 15,000 undocumented Pakistanis had reportedly left the country for Canada, Europe, and Pakistan by June 2003, according to the Pakistani Embassy in Washington.[18] Perhaps more alarming, "an unknowable number of immigrants have burrowed deeper underground," creating an even more subliminal and precarious world of individuals who cannot fully admit they exist, who cannot safely live their lives in the U.S. for fear of deportation and so live in the shadows, as well as under siege.[19]

SOUTH ASIAN MUSLIM IMMIGRANT YOUTH IN CAMBRIDGE

These events in the aftermath of 9/11, now called the "war at home," raise questions about what the racial profiling and anti-Muslim backlash mean for South Asian and Muslim immigrant youth coming of age in the U.S. at a moment when their "right to belong" in the nation is suspect. How do U.S. immigration and "homeland security" policies targeting Muslim immigrants affect the understandings of race, nationalism, and citizenship of South Asian Muslim immigrant youth? This paper is based on an ethnographic study that I began in fall 2001, focused on working-class, Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi immigrant students in the public high school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and on their notions of cultural citizenship. As part of my research, I also interviewed immigrant parents, school staff, community and religious leaders, city officials, and community activists. I argue here that young Muslim immigrants' understandings of citizenship shed light on the ways in which nationalism in the U.S. is defined in relation to transnationalism and globalization, multiculturalism and polyculturalism, and increasingly overtly, to the links between domestic and foreign policy that underlie U.S. imperial power. Not all the immigrant youth in this study have been directly targeted by the War on Terror, but I found that all of them in some way had to grapple with the scapegoating of Muslims, the demonization of Islam, and the fear of surveillance and deportation after 9/11. I also found that some youth, rather than accepting uncritically the premises of

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

the state's domestic and international War on Terror, were critical of U.S. responses to 9/11 from the perspective of global human rights, thus reframing the basis of citizenship, as my analysis will demonstrate.

Cambridge, Massachusetts is an interesting site for this research, for, while media attention and community discussions of racial profiling were primarily focused on South Asians in the New York/New Jersey area, there were hundreds of incidents around the country in places where South Asians have not been as visible in the public sphere or as organized, including incidents in the Boston area. It is also useful to focus on communities such as Cambridge, known to be more politically liberal, to understand what kinds of responses such a setting allows and does not allow, particularly for youth. The Cambridge Public High School has an extremely diverse student body that reflects the city's changing population, with students from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. Students from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan constitute the largest Muslim population in the school, followed by youth from Ethiopia, Somalia, and Morocco. There are about sixty students of South Asian origin, including a few Nepali and Tibetan youth, who are almost evenly split between immigrant students and second-generation youth.[20]

The South Asian immigrant student population is predominantly working- to lower-middle class, recently arrived (within the last five to seven years), and with minimal to moderate fluency in English. As such, these youth generally seem to socialize predominantly with other South Asian immigrant youth and with other immigrant students in the bilingual education program. The majority of Indian immigrant youth are from Sunni Muslim families, most from small towns or villages in Gujarat in western India. Several of the South Asian students are actually related to one another as their families have sponsored relatives as part of an ongoing chain migration. Whole families have migrated from the same village in Gujarat, recreating their extended family networks in the same apartment building in Cambridge. The immigrant parents of these adolescents generally work in low-income jobs in the service sector, and they themselves work after school, up to thirty hours a week, in fast food restaurants, gas stations, retail stores, and as security guards.

At least half of the South Asian immigrant youth in the school live in public and/or private high-rise apartment complexes in North Cambridge. The remainder live in the Central Square area, an ethnically and racially diverse neighborhood that is undergoing gentrification. The families of these South Asian (Sunni) Muslim youth are not very involved in local Muslim organizations or mosques that draw a diverse Arab, North African, Asian, and African American population. They tend to socialize mainly with people from their own ethnic community, but neither do they seem to affiliate with the Indian American or Pakistani American community organizations in the Boston area, which tend to involve mainly middle- to upper-middle class, suburban families.[21] Thus the responses of these immigrant youth are rooted in the specificities of their urban, working-class experience, an experience that is often completely unknown to their more privileged South Asian American counterparts in the area.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

I found that in nearly all my conversations with South Asian immigrant youth, as well as with their parents, the discussion would inevitably turn to citizenship, for this was an issue that had profoundly shaped their lives and driven their experiences of migration. Research on youth and citizenship is meager and generally tends to come out of traditions of developmental psychology or functionalist socialization theory, both of which assume a limited definition of what constitutes the "political." More recent work challenges these assumptions and pays attention to young people's own understandings of politics, and the ways they negotiate relationships of power in different realms of their everyday life.[22]

Citizenship has traditionally been thought of in political, economic, and civic terms, but increasingly, analysis focuses on the notion of cultural citizenship, for the rights and obligations of civic citizenship are mediated by race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, as well as religion, as apparent in the post-9/11 backlash.[23] Cultural citizenship, according to anthropologist Lok Siu, is comprised of the "behaviors, discourses, and practices that give meaning to citizenship as lived experience" in the context of "an uneven and complex field of structural inequalities and webs of power relations," the "quotidian practices of inclusion and exclusion."[24] Cultural citizenship becomes an important construct to examine because legal citizenship is clearly no longer enough to guarantee protection under the law with the state's War on Terror, as is clear from the profiling, surveillance, and detention of Muslim Americans who are U.S. citizens.

The concept of cultural citizenship has been developed by persons such as Latino studies scholars Renato Rosaldo and William Flores and Rina Benmayor, who take a new social movement–based approach to immigrant and civil rights. Their use of cultural citizenship analyzes how "Cultural phenomena—from practices that organize the daily life of individuals, families, and the community, to linguistic and artistic expression—cross the political realm and contribute to the process of affirming and building an emerging Latino identity and political and social consciousness."[25] The notion of cultural citizenship has also been developed, from a Foucauldian perspective, by cultural theorists such as Aihwa Ong, who are concerned with citizenship as a regulatory process, and who define cultural citizenship as "A dual process of self-making and being-made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society."[26] Some writers in this vein, such as Toby Miller, have been skeptical about the possibility for using citizenship as the collective basis for political transformation—given its increasingly individualized, privatized definition—but are still open to its potential. My work, in a sense, bridges these two approaches. I am interested in the critical possibilities of cultural citizenship to galvanize the struggle for civil and immigrant rights, particularly for young immigrants, as suggested by the work of Latino Studies scholars. At the same time, I view citizenship as being a limited basis for social transformation, given that it is state-sponsored and also increasingly privatized.[27] Cultural citizenship brings with it all the contradictions of liberal multiculturalism and the inequities of global capital in which it is embedded, and so it is necessarily politically ambiguous in its emanicipatory possibilities.[28]

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

In my research, I am finding that issues of economic or legal citizenship spill over into cultural citizenship. These categories are more blurred than some theorists of cultural citizenship have traditionally acknowledged, so it not always possible to cleanly distinguish between the economic, legal, and cultural bases of citizenship.[29] At this early stage in my analysis, I think there are three ways in which South Asian immigrant youth understand and practice cultural citizenship: flexible citizenship, multicultural or polycultural citizenship, and dissenting citizenship. These terms, drawn from the ways in which the young immigrants in my study expressed and practiced cultural citizenship, build on existing theories of flexible and multicultural citizenship, extending them but also suggesting new, critical forms (polycultural and dissenting), all of which, however, have their own contradictions and ambiguities. These three categories point to the ways in which the questions facing these youth go beyond debates about cultural rights to questions of economic, civil, and human rights, but, at the same time, point to the limitations of rights-based discourses, as the experiences of these youth demonstrate.

The forms of citizenship that emerged from this study—flexible, multicultural and polycultural, and dissenting citizenship—are responses produced by these immigrant youth simultaneously to the condition of living a transnational adolescence. They are not exclusive of one another, nor do they exist in some kind of hierarchy of political or personal efficacy. I view these modes of citizenship not as static categories in a typology but as processes that are dynamic, and crossing different spheres: social, economic, and political. These citizenship practices are performed by adults as well, but it is clear that young people have to negotiate particular concerns due to their positioning in the family and social structure, as well as their participation in education. While immigrant youth have to deal with the migration choices of their parents and the demands of being both students and workers, it is clear that their lives are profoundly shaped by the state and economic policies that drive their parents to cross national borders. Young people, too, grapple with the meaning of the state's role in their lives and with the implications of war, violence, and racism for an ethics of belonging.

FLEXIBLE CITIZENSHIP

"Flexible citizenship" is a concept that emerged to describe the experience of migrants who use transnational links to provide political or material resources not available to them within a single nation-state,[30] as has been argued for affluent Chinese migrants by Aihwa Ong. It is different from traditional notions of dual citizenship, which imply an actual legal status as citizen of two nation-states, for it leaves open questions of national loyalty or strategic uses of citizenship status. The Muslim immigrant youth in my study understand citizenship in relation to the U.S. as well as one or more nations in South Asia. For them, national affiliations (such as "Indian" or "Bangladeshi") as well as linguistic-regional identities (such as Gujarati or Pathan) were very important, and they viewed all these identifications as compatible with U.S. citizenship. Most of these young immigrants desired and had applied for U.S. citizenship since they came to the U.S.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

sponsored by relatives who are permanent residents or citizens, in some cases fathers who migrated alone many years earlier. At least two boys had been separated from their fathers for about fifteen years. Faisal said his father had left Pakistan for the U.S. right after he was born, and had in effect missed his son's childhood while he was working in the U.S. to support him and the rest of his family until they could be reunited. By the time Faisal came to the U.S., however, his older brother was too old to enroll in high school and had to struggle to get a GED and find a job with limited English skills.

About half of these South Asian Muslim immigrant youth have green cards already; the rest are a mix of citizens and undocumented immigrants. They desired a U.S. passport because of what they perceived as its civic and also economic benefits. A few stated that they wanted to be able to vote, and several said that they wanted to be able to travel freely between the U.S. and South Asia, to be mobile in work and family life. After 9/11, of course, citizenship seemed to become less a matter of choice for immigrants, particularly Muslims and South Asian/Arab Americans, than a hoped-for shield against the abuses of civil rights. In fact, a few were surprised that I myself had not yet obtained citizenship in the fall of 2001, and were in some cases concerned that I seemed to have taken so long to obtain this vital document!

Citizenship for these immigrant youth is part of a carefully planned, long-term, family-based strategy of migration in response to economic pressures on those living in, or at the edge of, the middle class in South Asia. Some of these youth in Cambridge imagine their lives spanning national borders and speak of returning to South Asia, at least temporarily, once they have become U.S. citizens and perhaps when their parents have retired there. Transnational marriages and social ties are common in their families. For example, Sohail, who worked as a computer assistant after school, wanted to set up a transnational hi-tech business so that he could live part-time in Gujarat and part-time in Boston while supporting his parents. He saw this as a development strategy for Non-Resident Indians (or NRIs, a term used by the Indian government) to fulfill their obligations to the home nation-state, using the benefits of U.S. citizenship. It seems to me that these young immigrants' notions of flexible citizenship are based on at least two linked processes of "self-making" and "being-made" as citizens in relation to the various nation-states with which they affiliate.[31] First, their identification with India or Pakistan is based largely on transnational popular culture, on Bollywood films, South Asian television serials, and Hindi music that they access through video, DVD, satellite TV, and the Internet. In the interest of space, I cannot delve here into an analysis of transnational popular culture, but it is clearly an important arena for the expression of cultural citizenship by immigrant youth.[32]

Second, flexible citizenship is necessarily intertwined with labor and education, issues that are interrelated for working-class, immigrant youth. These youth have come to the U.S. with their families, in some sense, as migrant workers. They work in low-wage, part-time jobs in retail and fast food restaurants and struggle in school to get credentials for class mobility. These are the same jobs that are generally also occupied by young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

in the U.S.[33] However, unlike non-immigrants who provide this cheap and flexible labor, immigrant youth can perform the economic citizenship required of neoliberal citizenship, which is predicated on individual productivity in the capitalist state, but cannot win cultural citizenship because they are non-white, immigrant youth—and currently, because they are identified as Muslim. Their participation in U.S. public culture, in fact, is largely through work. Their relations outside the school and community are mainly with other immigrant or young workers and with employers. Waheed, for example, lamented that he could never go out into the city with his friends because they all worked on different schedules and it was almost impossible for them to have a night off together, since he worked night shifts at his weekend job as a security guard.

Compared to more affluent or highly credentialed South Asian immigrants, these working-class youth are more ambiguously positioned in relation to what Ong calls the U.S. neoliberal ideology of productivity and consumption that emphasizes "freedom, progress, and individualism."[34] They see the limits of this model of the self-reliant consumer-citizen—and of the "American Dream"—in their own lives and that of their families. Soman, who works in his family's Bengali restaurant in Central Square after school and who often waits on South Asian students from MIT, says, "Here, you live in a golden cage, but it's still a cage. . . . My life is so limited. I go to school, come to work, study, go to sleep." The idea of productive citizenship is necessarily predicated on legal-juridical regulations of citizens and workers, and on the need for a low-wage, undocumented/non-citizen labor pool by employers who wish to depress wages and keep labor compliant. The work of citizenship as a disciplining technology of the state that keeps labor and immigrants vulnerable to exploitation and suppresses dissent is very evident after 9/11 with the ongoing arrests and deportations of immigrant workers for visa violations.[35] There is a greater fear among non-citizens who have transnational ties, political or familial, that they are increasingly suspect when the "threat" to national security is attributed to specific foreign nations.

Yet, in the face of such regulations of citizenship and its cultural boundaries, it became apparent to me that these young Muslim immigrants thought about citizenship in ways that were themselves flexible, shifting, and contextual. In some cases, it seems that religious identity actually prompts youth to think of themselves as belonging to the U.S., or at least identifying with its concerns, if not identifying as "American." Sohail said to me in fall 2001, "Islam teaches [us that] whatever country you live in, you should support them. . . . See, if I live in America, I have to support America; I cannot go to India." This, of course, is the same boy who said that he ultimately wanted to return to India and support its development. But these statements are not as contradictory as they first appear. Sohail is able to frame his relationship to Islam in a way that will help him think through questions of loyalty at a moment in the U.S. when Muslims are being framed as non-citizens *because* of a particular construction of Islam. Instead, Sohail uses Islam to counter this technology of exclusion of Muslims from the nation-state, both officially and unofficially, and to support a flexible definition of citizenship.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

At a Boston rally in November 2001, protesting the imminent war in Iraq, Imam Talal Eid of the Islamic Center of New England used rhetoric of Muslim citizenship that has been increasingly adopted by Muslim clerics and commentators after 9/11. He said that he spoke for peace as a U.S. citizen of many years who believed that Muslim Americans could contribute to the "civilizing" of America (an interesting turn on Samuel Huntington's phrase). Sohail's strategy is part of a rather sophisticated understanding of citizenship as necessarily mobile, as drawing on different ideological resources to respond to the exigencies of diverse moments and places. Flexible citizenship is clearly an economic/family strategy for these youth but also part of a cultural strategy that allows them to manage diverse national affiliations.

MULTICULTURAL OR POLYCULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

Not surprisingly, some of these immigrant youth talked about ideas of "cultural difference" and relationships with others in terms of multicultural citizenship, even if only implicitly, since multiculturalism is such a pervasive discourse of cultural belonging in the U.S., particularly in the arena of education. Their vernacular understandings of multicultural citizenship are not just in Will Kymlicka's sense of minority cultural rights, but of everyday understandings of pluralism embedded in the social fabric of their relationships. For most of these youth, it is important to emphasize that they have friendships that cross ethnic and racial boundaries. In their daily lives, they do, in fact, hang out with Latino, Caribbean, African American, and Asian students, and with Muslim African youth from Somalia, Ethiopia, or Egypt, potentially forming an incipient pan-Islamic identity. Yet it is also apparent that students in the school, as in most American high schools and colleges, tend to cluster by ethnic group. Sohail comments that his friendships with non-South Asian students are sometimes questioned by other "desi" (South Asian) youth, but he defends himself by arguing for a more expansive conception of community:

> I hang out with different kids but even I heard it from a lot of desis who say, "Why you go with them?" They don't like it, but I say if you want to live in a different world, you have to exist with them. . . . Sometimes you have to go outside [your group] and say, "Yeah, alright, we are friends too, we are not going to discriminate [against] you, because you are white, we don't look like you." . . . Your relationship is gonna be bigger, right. But if you're gonna live in the desi community, you're only going to know desi people, not the other people.

Sohail seems to trace the value he places on multiculturalist co-existence to an idealized notion of India as a multi-ethnic nation, at least before the horrific massacre of Muslim Indians during the Gujarat riots in India in spring 2002. He said: "India is a really good place to live in . . . because they've got a lot of religions, different languages, different people."

It is also true that there are moments of tension among these different groups of youth, as there are in any school or community. After September 11,

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

some of the South Asian immigrant youth, particularly the Muslim boys, felt targeted by other high school youth. Accusations of "You're a terrorist" or "You're a bin Laden" enter into what might otherwise be just an outbreak of youthful aggression among boys, but which is now a part of a national discourse about Islam in the U.S. The South Asian Muslim boys, and girls, feel this acutely: does this mean *they* are the enemy, and how can they live as such?

One anti-Muslim incident in Cambridge occurred in the high school when an African American girl accused two Pakistani boys, Amir and Wahab, of "killing people" and reportedly called them "Muslim niggers." The girl was eventually suspended, but Amir was, in fact, a friend of the girl's brother and said he tried to intervene to soften her punishment. Both boys emphatically refused to portray the incident as a Black/South Asian or Black/Muslim conflict. They insisted that this was the case of a lone individual who, Waheed half-jokingly said, must have been "drunk" or "high." Amir, in fact, said that he thought African Americans were less likely to have an uncritically nationalist response to the events of 9/11 than white Americans, even though he was hesitant to extend this generalization to their responses to the military campaign in Afghanistan.

For Waheed and Amir, 9/11 prompted a heightened self-consciousness about racialization that seemed, if anything, to reinforce the black/white racial polarization. Waheed felt that African Americans were not as shattered by the attacks on the U.S. because, in his view, black Americans feel alienated from the nation-state due to the legacy of slavery. While this racialized difference after 9/11 is more complex than Waheed suggests, what is important is that he *believes* that African Americans share his experience of marginalization within the nation. But Waheed does not completely dismiss the renewed nationalism of Americans after 9/11, saying, "The first thing is they're born here in the USA, so that's their country. . . . We are immigrants. . . . If something happens back home, like 9/11, and someone else did it, we're gonna be angry too, right?" Yet it is also apparent that 9/11 seems to have drawn him into an understanding of citizenship that is based on racialized fissures in claims to national identity and affiliation with other youth of color.

For Waheed and others, the response of African Americans seems more significant than that of Latinos or even of Arab Americans because, on the one hand, they are the largest group of students of color in the school, and on the other hand, they stand for a particular manifestation of contested U.S. citizenship to these youth, even if not all are actually U.S.-born. The responses of these young Pakistani males suggests to me a potential *polycultural citizenship*, based not on the reification of cultural difference that multiculturalism implies, but on a complex set of political affiliations and social boundary-crossings, as Robin Kelley's notion of polyculturalism suggests.[36] This nascent polycultural citizenship is embedded in the messiness and nuance of relationships of different groups with one another and with the state, and allows for political, not just cultural resonance, based on particular historical and material conjunctures.

Polycultural citizenship is not an idealization, however, of the complexities of race politics. I do not want to suggest that polyculturalism exists in the absence of anti-black racism in this community, or that racialized antagonisms and suspicion

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

in the school are not taken in at all by immigrant youth. In getting to know these youth over a period of time, I have found that these tensions do indeed exist. Rather, I would like to argue that there is room in my notion of polycultural citizenship to acknowledge the resentment and competition bred by daily struggles for turf or resources. Given that polyculturalism critiques the idea of "pure" culture, or even "pure" hybridity, it would therefore not envision a "pure" politics of multiculturalist tolerance without any tension or negotiation. These young immigrants simultaneously invoke a multiculturalist discourse of pluralist coexistence and a polyculturalist notion of boundary-crossing and affiliation, embedded in political experience but also in popular culture practices shared with youth of color.

Muslim immigrant youth sense a connection with other youth of color and with African Muslim youth in the city, even as they struggle with the challenges that Muslim identity has posed to liberal multiculturalism. Syed Khan, an Indian immigrant who is on the Board of Religious Directors of the Islamic Center of Sharon, Massachusetts, is the founder of Muslim Community Support Services, an organization that is holding forums on issues of civil rights and cultural citizenship for Muslim Americans. He argues that the post-9/11 backlash has shown the limits of U.S. multiculturalism, in its inability to absorb Islam as a marker of difference within the nation, in a cultural if not religious sense. Khan said to me in fall 2002, "If this had happened to some other religious or ethnic group, which professors would speak out? How many rallies have you seen? How many protests? None of those traditional forms of response have happened. . . . Everybody is scared to speak up about basic values that are enshrined in the U.S. constitution or psyche." Like other Muslim Americans, Khan is grappling with the ambiguities of secularism and civil rights at a moment when the state uses religion, in addition to national origin, as the basis of its profiling.

DISSENTING CITIZENSHIP

Muslim Americans and Arab Americans are defined, particularly after 9/11 but also at other moments (such as the Iran hostage crisis and the Gulf War), as political scapegoats and therefore cultural aliens.[37] Their presumed cultural difference is highlighted as part of the Bush administration's political and cultural doctrine that defines U.S. interests and national identity in opposition to a "foreign enemy" and an "enemy within." In fall 2002, when referring to the White House's public embrace and then neglect of Muslim American leaders after 9/11, Khan commented, in a conversation with me: "Initially leaders, including Bush, had spoken up [against racial profiling], but afterwards, when it wasn't as critical, outreach to Muslim Americans has stopped completely. Now, it's bashing time."

Other South Asian Muslims living in the Boston area were quick to point out to me the outpouring of support offered by neighbors and friends after 9/11. The two perspectives are, of course, both true. Individual acts of solidarity have co-existed with acts of discrimination, private and state-sponsored, on a mass scale.[38] The two processes actually work together in racial profiling, which works

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

on these multiple levels and through these contradictions of rhetoric and policy.[39] Legal scholar Leti Volpp argues that the post-9/11 moment has "facilitated the consolidation of a new identity category" that conflates "Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern" with "terrorist" and "non-citizen." This identity category is obviously not new, but Volpp is right to point out that a "National identity has consolidated that is both strongly patriotic and multiracial."[40] This national identity both excludes and racializes Muslim identity, even if it is not racial at all, in the slippery sense of race in the U.S. The paradoxical racialization of Muslim identity is what Moustafa Bayoumi calls the "tragic irony" of "racial profiling" after 9/11.[41]

Khan worries that Muslim American communities have not been speaking up enough against the prospect of social and political, if not physical, internment. However, it seems to me that some immigrant youth are willing to voice political views, even publicly, that most South Asian middle-class community leaders have not been expressing. The Muslim immigrant youth I spoke with had an analysis of 9/11 and the U.S. war in Afghanistan that drew on a notion of international human rights and resisted the nationalization of the Twin Towers tragedy. Amir said to me in December 2001: "You have to look at it in two ways. It's not right that ordinary people over there [in Afghanistan], like you and me, just doing their work, get killed. They don't have anything to do with . . . the attacks in New York, but they're getting killed. And also the people in New York who got killed, that's not right either."

Jamila, a Bangladeshi girl, said, "I felt bad for those people [in Afghanistan] . . . because they don't have no proof that they actually did it, but they were all killing all these innocent people who had nothing to do with it." Aliyah, who could very easily pass for Latina, chose to write the words "INDIA + MUSLIM" on her bag after 9/11. For her, this was a gesture of defiance responding to the casting of Muslims as potentially disloyal citizens. She said, "Just because one Muslim did it in New York, you can't involve everybody in there, you know what I'm sayin'?" This critique of the anti-Muslim backlash was pervasive amongst the South Asian Muslim youth. Karina said, "After September 11, they [Americans] hate the Muslims. . . . I think they want the government to hate the Muslims, like, all Muslims are same."

After the anti-Muslim incident at Cambridge High School, the International Student Center organized a student assembly featuring two Arab American speakers who criticized the War on Terrorism and the attack on civil liberties. Amir, Waheed, and a Gujarati Muslim girl, Samiyah, delivered eloquent speeches condemning racism to an auditorium filled with their peers. Amir said that when he was threatened by some young men in Boston, "I could have done the same thing, but I don't think it's the right thing to do." Amir is a muscular young man and his call for non-violent response was a powerful one at that assembly—one that could also be taken to be an implicitly political statement about the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan in response to the attacks. Samiyah stood up in her salwar kameez and said, "We have to respect each other if we want to change society. You have to stand up for your rights." Muslim immigrant youth are being visibly drawn into race politics and civil rights debates in the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

local community, although it is not clear yet what the impact of this politicization will be over time. But a year later on the anniversary of September 11, when the International Student Center organized another student assembly in 2002, Samiyah's younger sister and another Gujarati Muslim girl voluntarily made similar speeches that were reported in the local press.

Even though these working-class youth do not have the support of or time to participate in community or political organizations, they have become spokespersons in the public sphere, willing to voice a dissenting view. Other Muslim American youth have been forced to play the role of educators as well, giving speeches at their schools and in community forums about Islam, though a coordinator of a Muslim youth group at the Central Square mosque says that it is a role not without pressure or fatigue for young Muslim Americans. Understandably, some of them are also hesitant to speak publicly about political issues given that even legal citizens are worried about expressing political critique or dissent, as the state has acquired sweeping powers of surveillance with the USA-Patriot Act. Repression works on two levels to silence dissent, as Corey Robin points out: on a state level, but also on the level of civil society, where individuals internalize repression and censor themselves.[42] Robin astutely observes that there is a "division of labor" between the state and civil society for "fear does the work—or enhances the work—of repression." Robin argues that the "effects of 'Fear, American Style' are most evident today in immigrant, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities, as well as in the workplace where 'suppression of dissent' is evident since 9/11."[43]

In the face of such repression, I have found the Muslim immigrant youth with whom I spoke to be engaged in a practice of dissenting citizenship. Their expression of dissenting citizenship is based on a critique and affirmation of human rights that means they stand apart at some moments, even as they stand together with others outside the borders of the nation. Dissenting citizenship is not coeval with cosmopolitanism, at least in this instance, for it seems to me that even notions of cosmopolitanism that account for its particularity (as opposed to universalism), plurality of form, and imbrications with nationalism do not quite capture the specific political critique being waged here.[44] The critique of these Muslim immigrant youth is both far more attached to regional and religious identity, and far more critical in its appraisal of U.S. nationalism and state powers than some liberal theorists of cosmopolitanism allow.[45] The perspective of Muslim immigrant youth is very much rooted in their identities as Muslims who are targeted as such by the state, and also sheds light on the links between U.S. policies at home and abroad. In this critique of the U.S. state, I argue, dissenting citizenship goes beyond the debate between liberal and conservative appraisals of possibilities of cosmopolitanism because it raises an issue that is not emphasized enough by these critics:[46] that of cosmopolitanism, and relatedly of globalization, as an *imperial feeling*. I use the term "imperial feeling" to capture an emerging acknowledgment, by media commentators on both the right and the left, that U.S. policy on the global stage is linked to economic and military dominance. This view is generally expressed not as a full-blown critique in the U.S. mass media, but as an emerging sentiment in the public

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

sphere, a growing "feeling" (often an anxiety) that the U.S. is occupying the role of a new *empire*.[47]

The dissenting views of Muslim immigrant youth implicitly critique this imperial feeling of U.S. nationalism after 9/11 through their linking of warfare *within* the state to international war. It is this link between the domestic and imperial that makes their perspective an important mode of dissent because the imperial project of the new "Cold War," as in earlier times, works by obscuring the links between domestic and foreign policies. Legal studies scholar Kathleen Moore points out that even before the post-9/11 curtailment of civil liberties, the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act narrowed the definition of "civil community" in response to the "heightened sense of insecurity required to maintain a restructured, wartime regulatory state after the primary security target disappears."[48]

Moore emphasizes that the distinction between citizens/non-citizens is used in political discourse to support foreign policy and justify the military campaigns and domestic priorities of the U.S. state, such as the battles over "welfare, affirmative action, and immigration reform."[49] This is even more true when the illusion of a "peacetime economy" is discarded for a nation at war as in the present moment. Furthermore, the War on Terror is an extension of the "war on immigrants" waged since the late 1980s, for it has stripped civil rights from non-citizens and led to sweeps and mass deportations of undocumented immigrants, extending the assault on immigrant rights begun with the anti-immigrant Proposition 187 passed in California in 1994, the heightened policing of U.S. borders, and the 1996 immigrant acts.[50]

The dissent of Muslim immigrant youth is not vanguardist because it does not need to be. These young immigrants are simply—but not merely—subjects of both the "war on terror" *and* the "war on immigrants." Their exclusion from processes of "being-made" as citizens, legally and culturally, and their emergent political "self-making" highlight the ways in which civic consent to state policy is secured by imperial power. The targeting of a population demonized as "other," and the absorption of previously targeted communities into a unifying nationalism and climate of fear, shift attention away from the ways in which the war at home and the war abroad actually work in tandem, at the expense of ordinary people everywhere.[51] It is the links *between* legal, economic, and cultural citizenship that are so important for U.S. empire. Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff argue that the neoliberal mode of "millennial capitalism" increasingly obscures the workings of labor and highlights instead processes of consumption, so that citizenship is recreated as consumer identity.[52] The immigrant youth in this study are not outside this process of consumer-citizenship. They too understand themselves as consumers of, among other things, a lifestyle or education that compelled their parents to migrate from South Asia.

The process of dissenting citizenship is not without its wrinkles, for it seems that these young immigrants implicitly understand the limits of a state-based notion of citizenship, in its economic, cultural, and political senses. As "transmigrants,"[53] they strategically use citizenship even as they manage the failures of both home and host states to guarantee protection and equal rights to Muslim

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

subjects. The anti-Muslim massacres in Gujarat in 2002 and the military standoff between India and Pakistan reinforce a sense that South Asian Muslim youth are in an ambiguous zone between religious and national identification, between an Islamic state and a secular state turned Hindu nationalist. Although so far not many of the Indian immigrant youth seem ready or willing to speak about this, it is possible that the state-condoned anti-Muslim massacres in Gujarat have raised questions about their belonging and their rights for equal protection under the law in India. This is understandably a difficult subject even for their parents to speak about, but one Indian Muslim immigrant told me that in "private spaces" there are expressions of the vulnerability that Muslim immigrants have felt, both in the U.S. and at "home." At the least, perhaps, there is a sense that their cultural citizenship and loyalties are in question in both nations. When India and Pakistan were on the brink of war in 2002, one teenage Indian male said to me: "In India . . . they were asking Indian Muslims what we should do, right, that should we kill them because they are Muslims too," but he also said, "Pakistan is getting stupid right now . . . they don't think that all Muslims who live in India are Muslim, they think they are Hindu."

And yet, ironically, at the same moment, Indian Muslims in the U.S. were being targeted if they were identifiably Muslim and the allegiance of South Asian Muslims and Arab Americans, in general, was suspect. The post-9/11 moment has highlighted the gap between what the state can presumably guarantee, through citizenship or constitutional rights, and what a specific political project such as the War on Terror actually puts into effect, overriding the rights of citizens in order to secure a new Cold War agenda.

CONCLUSION

This moment of *empire* underscores that notions of citizenship developed by youth, some of which I have explored here, are constructed in a dynamic relationship with various institutions, including the state, which are themselves, of course, mutable and multi-faceted. The flexibility of capital evokes strategies of flexible citizenship by young immigrants and their families, but the state is also flexible in its implementation of regimes of governmentality. After 9/11, for example, immigrants and Muslim/Arab/South Asian Americans have been forced to respond to new and constantly shifting measures to limit their civil rights, some of which are not widely publicized, creating more uncertainty and terror. The loss of immigrant rights makes non-citizens vulnerable to hyper-exploitation by employers after 9/11, and to fear of simply living their lives. For instance, in Cambridge, I heard several such stories, from an undocumented immigrant girl unable to enroll in a community college and continue her education, to another high school graduate confused about whether she could marry an undocumented immigrant for fear that he would be deported.

Yet it is important to remember that there are important continuities, before and after 9/11, that are often not acknowledged enough. My use of "post-9/11" is not meant to signify a radical historical or political rupture, but rather a moment of renewed contestation over ongoing issues of citizenship and

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

transnationalism, religion and nationalism, civil rights, and immigrant rights. This state of emergency, this crisis of civil rights and its concomitant mode of dissenting citizenship, is, in fact, not exceptional in the U.S.,[54] for the post-9/11 moment builds on measures and forms of power already in place. This is a state of everyday life in *empire*.

Contrary to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's amorphous theory of de-centered "*empire*,"[55] I argue that it is, in fact, *imperialist* power that is at work, even if it has been clearly transformed by the new logic of global capital and the weakened link between the state and the economy. It is clear that the relations among nation, state, and capital have been transformed since earlier eras of imperialism,[56] not to mention the fact that the state's power itself is in decline.[57] However, imperial power does not necessarily require direct governance of colonized states; thus, the model of "imperialism without colonies"[58]—or of neocolonial occupation, as in Iraq. The current moment of *empire* is situated in a long history of what some call "informal" U.S. *empire* that has used the framework of "universal rights" to cloak a project of reconstituting social and economic relations into a global capitalist order.[59]

The conceptualization of U.S. empire is a project that has drawn renewed attention now that the term *empire* has come out of the closet in the academy and mass media. The power of the U.S. state to exercise the globality of violence and of economy characterizes this new mode of *empire*.[60] U.S. *empire* has become increasingly "covert," if not more formal, as U.S. economic and military power is visibly tied to unilateral foreign policy and national interests, particularly after the demise of Soviet communism and especially after the events of 9/11, which have led to an increasingly authoritarian exercise of U.S. state power both at home and abroad.[61] Although I share the skepticism of new theorists of *empire* and globalization about a state-bound notion of citizenship, I am interested in developing an ethnography of the new *empire* to understand the everyday struggles of those, such as immigrant youth, whose lives have been transformed by this ongoing crisis.

NOTES

1. The research on which this paper is based was funded by the Russell Sage Foundation and supported by my research assistants, Palav Babaria and Sarah Khan. Thanks to Louise Cainkar for her editorial feedback.

2. There were 700 reported hate crimes against South Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans, including four homicides (two involving South Asian American victims), in the three weeks following 9/11/01. Jeff Coen, "Hate crime reports reach record level," *Chicago Tribune* (October 9, 2001). At least 200 hate crimes were reported against Sikh Americans alone. Jane Lampan, "Under attack, Sikhs defend their religious liberties," *Christian Science Monitor* (October 31, 2001). The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) reported that it had documented 960 incidents of racial profiling in the five weeks after 9/11/01, with hate crimes declining and incidents of airport profiling and workplace discrimination on the increase. Associated Press, San Jose, Calif/, "Hate crime reports down, civil rights complaints up" (October 25, 2001). The trend only continued to intensify; the CAIR report, *The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States, 2004*, documented that in 2003 there was a nearly seventy percent increase in

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

"reports of harassment, violence and discriminatory treatment" against Muslim Americans since the previous year. <http://www.cairnet.org/asp/execsumm2004.asp> (August 1, 2004).

3. CAIR, 1998. *The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States: Patterns of Discrimination* (Washington, D.C.: Council on American-Islamic Relations Research Center, 1998); Jack G. Shaheen, "Hollywood's Reel Arabs and Muslims," in *Muslims and Islamization in North America: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Ambreen Haque (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1999), 179–202.
4. Nancy Chang, *Silencing Political Dissent: How Post-September 11 Anti-Terrorism Measures Threaten Our Civil Liberties* (New York: Seven Stories/Open Media, 2002), 94.
5. Chang, *Silencing*, 29–32.
6. Chang, *Silencing*, 43–66s.
7. David Cole and James Dempsey, *Terrorism and the Constitution: Sacrificing Civil Liberties in the Name of National Security* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 168.
8. Cole and Dempsey, *Terrorism and the Constitution*, 35–48; Louise Cainkar, "No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion After September 11," *Middle East Report* 224 (Fall 2002): pages. Accessed through website: <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer224/224_cainkar.html> (August 1, 2004); Jordan Green, "Silencing Dissent," *ColorLines* 6:2 (2003): 17–20.
9. Joan Jensen, *Passage from India: Asian Indian Immigrants in North America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 163–193.
10. Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 69–82.
11. There have been impressive efforts by local groups such as Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) in New York City, that has been organizing around the detentions, South Asian American Leaders of Tomorrow (SAALT) in Washington, D.C., South Asian Network in L.A., and Alliance of South Asians Taking Action (ASATA) in the Bay Area, among others. In addition, several progressive, community-based South Asian American organizations shifted their focus to address the impact of 9/11 on their constituents. South Asian Muslims have also worked within Muslim civil rights organization, such as the American Muslim Alliance, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Muslim American Society, and Council on American-Islamic Relations.
12. Stephen J. Schulhofer, *The Enemy Within: Intelligence Gathering, Law Enforcement, and Civil Liberties in the Wake of September 11* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 2002), 11.
13. Chang, *Silencing*, 69–87.
14. Oliver Ryan, "Empty Shops, Empty Promises for Coney Island Pakistanis," *ColorLines* 6:2 (2003): 14–16; 16.
15. The re-registration component of the program was officially ended by the Department of Homeland Security in December 2003, after protests by immigrant/civil rights and grassroots community organizations, while other aspects of the program remained in place, and the detentions and deportations put in place by the program continue.
16. Ryan, "Empty Shops," 16.
17. Ryan, "Empty Shops," 16.
18. Rachel L. Swarns, "More Than 13,000 May Face Deportation," *New York Times* (7 June 2003).
19. Swarns, "More Than 13,000."
20. The high school has approximately 2,000 students, of which about forty per cent are white and the remaining sixty per cent are students of color. African Americans are the largest group of students of color (about twenty-five per cent), followed by Latino(a)s (fifteen per cent), and Asian Americans (about seven per cent). In 2000–2002, thirty-three per cent of students had a first language other than English and fourteen per cent were in the bilingual program, which suggests that the immigrant student population in the school is somewhere between these figures.
21. The 2000 Census reported 2,720 Indian immigrants (2.7 per cent of the population), 125 Pakistanis, and 120 Bangladeshis in Cambridge, a city that is 68.1 per cent white

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

American, 11.9 per cent African American, 11.9 per cent Asian American, and 7.4 per cent Latino (U S. Census Bureau, 2000: <http://factfinder.census. gov/bf._lang=en _2000_SF3_U_D_P2_geo_ID> (November 13, 2002). This, of course, does not include undocumented immigrants. The "native" population is 74.1 per cent, and foreign-born is 25.9 per cent; 17.7 per cent are not citizens and 31.2 per cent speak a language other than English. Cambridge is of course skewed by the presence of the academic community; while 8.2 per cent (3,108) of those enrolled in schools are in high school, fully 70.5 per cent are in college or graduate school, and 38.5 per cent of the population over twenty-five years old has a graduate or professional degree.

22. Kum-Kum Bhavnani, *Talking Politics: A Psychological Framing for Views from Youth in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); David Buckingham, *The Making of Citizens: Young People, News, and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).
23. Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997); Kathleen Coll, "Problemas y necesidades: Latina Vernaculars of Citizenship and Coalition-Building in Chinatown, San Francisco" (paper presented at Racial (Trans)Formations: Latinos and Asians Remaking the United States, Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, Columbia University, New York, March 2002); Toby Miller, *The Well-Tempered Subject: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship, Inequality, and Multiculturalism," in *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights*, eds. William. F. Flores and Rina Benmayor (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 27–38.
24. Lok Siu, "Diasporic Cultural Citizenship: Chineseness and Belonging in Central America and Panama," *Social Text* 69 19:4 (2001): 7–28; see 9.
25. William V. Flores and Rina Benmayor, eds., *Latino Cultural Citizenship: Claiming Identity, Space, and Rights* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 6.
26. Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship as Subject-Making," *Current Anthropology* 37:5 (December 1996): 738.
27. Gill Jones and Claire Wallace, *Youth, Family, and Citizenship*, (Buckingham, England and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992).
28. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995); John Hutnyk, Stephen Corry & Tris Jean-Klein vs. Richard Wilson & John Hutnyk, in *The Right to Difference is a Fundamental Human right*, ed. Peter Wade (GDAT debate no. 10) (Manchester: Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory, University of Manchester, 2000), 40–52.
29. T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950).
30. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, eds., *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1994).
31. Aihwa Ong, "Cultural Citizenship," 737; Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999).
32. See Maira, forthcoming.
33. Katherine S. Newman, *No Shame in My Game: The Working Poor in the Inner City* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf and the Russell Sage Foundation, 1999); Stuart Tannock, *Youth at Work: The Unionized Fast-Food and Grocery Workplace* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).
34. Ong, "Cultural Citizenship," 739.
35. Manu Vimalassery, "Passports and Pink Slips," *SAMAR (South Asian Magazine for Action and Reflection)* 15 (2002): 7–8, 20; see Ong, "Cultural Citizenship," for a fuller discussion.
36. Robin D. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional! Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).
37. Cole and Dempsey, *Terrorism*; Fereydoun Safizadeh, "Children of the Revolution: Transnational Identity Among Young Iranians in Northern California," in *A World*

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

Between: Poems, Short Stories, and Essays by Iranian-Americans, ed. Persis Karim and Mohammad M. Khorrami (New York: George Braziller, 1999), 255–276.

38. See Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen, *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation-Building—The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997).
39. Bill O. Hing, "Vigilante Racism: The De-Americanization of Immigrant America," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law* 7:2 (2002): 441–456; Vijay Prashad, "The Green Menace: McCarthyism After 9/11," *The Subcontintental: A Journal of South Asian American Political Identity* 1:1 (2003): 65–75; Corey Robin, "Fear, American Style: Civil Liberty After 9/11," in *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order*, ed. Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 47–64.
40. Leti Volpp, "The citizen and the terrorist," *UCLA Law Review* 49 (2002): 1575–1600; see 1584.
41. Moustafa Bayoumi, "How Does It Feel To Be a Problem?" *Amerasia Journal* 27:3/28:1 (2001/2002): 69–77; see 73.
42. Corey Robin, "Fear, American Style," 48.
43. Robin, "Fear," 48, 53.
44. James Clifford, "Mixed Feelings," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 362–370. Bruce Robbins, "Introduction, Part I: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism," in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 1–19.
45. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," in *For Love of Country,* ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 3–17.
46. Martha C. Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen, eds., *For Love of Country* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).
47. For example, Michael Ignatieff's cover article, "The Burden," *New York Times Magazine* (5 January 2003), <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/05/magazine/05EMPIRE.html> (August 3, 2004), and the pro-empire historian Niall Ferguson's "The Empire Slinks Back," *New York Times Magazine* (27 April 2003), 52–57. See also the cover story of a recent issue of *Harper's Magazine*, titled "The Economic of Empire," by William Finnegan (May 2003), 41–54.
48. Kathleen Moore, "A Closer Look at Anti-Terrorism Law: American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee v. Reno and the Construction of Aliens' Rights," in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, ed. Michael Suleiman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 84–99; see 95. The 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act "Reintroduced to federal law the principle of 'guilt by association' that had defined the McCarthy era," reintroducing "guilt by association" with groups defined by the state as "terrorist" and thus reviving the ideological exclusion of the Cold War–era McCarran-Walter Act, and giving the authority to deport non-citizens on the basis of secret evidence (Cole and Dempsey, *Terrorism*, 117–126). From 1996 to 2000, the government sought to use secret evidence to detain and deport two dozen immigrants, almost all of them Muslims, but ultimately the government evidence was thrown out and the accused were released (see Cole and Dempsey, *Terrorism*, 127).
49. Moore, "A Closer Look," 87.
50. Bill O. Hing, "No Place for Angels: In Reaction to Kevin Johnson." *University of Illinois Law Review* 2 (2000): 559–601; Bill O. Hing, "The Dark Side of Operation Gatekeeper," *UC Davis Journal of International Law & Policy* 7:2 (2001): 123–167.
51. See Prashad, "Green Menace," 65–75.
52. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," in Jean and John L. Comaroff, eds., *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 1–56.
53. Nina Glick Schiller and Georges Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), 3.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

54. Keya Ganguly, *States of Exception: Everyday Life and Postcolonial Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
55. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).
56. Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney, "The Debate about Globalization: An Introduction," in *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order*, ed. Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (New York: Basic Books, 2003), xi–xxx; Karen Barkey and Mark von Hagen, eds., *After Empire: Multiethnic Societies and Nation Building—The Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg Empires* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997); Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, "Global Capitalism and American Empire," in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, eds., *The New Imperial Challenge* (London: Merlin Press, 2003), 1–42.
57. Glick Schiller and Fouron, *Georges Woke Up*, 208–214.
58. Harry Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003).
59. Panitch and Gindin, 10–13.
60. Alain Joxe, *Empire of Disorder* (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2002).
61. Manning Marable, "9/11: Racism in a Time of Terror," in Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney, eds., *Implicating Empire: Globalization and Resistance in the 21st Century World Order* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 3–14; see 6.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Wu, J. Y. S., & Chen, T. (Eds.). (2010). Asian american studies now : A critical reader. Rutgers University Press.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:08:55.

Asian Immigrant Women and Global Restructuring, 1970s–1990s

Rhacel Salazar Parreñas

Genny O'Connor, a Filipina domestic worker in Los Angeles, left her office job in the Philippines in hopes of seeking a much higher paying job in the United States. In the Philippines, her salary could barely cover her day-to-day expenses and, needless to say, did not leave her with many resources to provide her family with the financial support expected of her as a single daughter. Having attained a bachelor's degree in the Philippines, Genny had not anticipated that without documents in the United States she would find a job only in the low-wage informal sector. Even after years in domestic work, she is still trying to adjust to her experience of underemployment. She states:

> I was crying all the time. (Laughs.) When my employer gave me the bucket for cleaning, I did not know where I had to start. Of course we are not so rich in the Philippines, but we had maids. I did not know how to start cleaning and my feelings were of self-pity. I kept on thinking that I just came to the U.S. to be a maid. So that was that. I would just cry and I wanted to go home. I did not imagine that this was the kind of work that I would end up doing.[1]

Like many other immigrant women, Genny O' Connor faces severe underemployment. Her participation in the U.S. labor market entails a sharp decline in occupational and social status.

Ever since she was a young girl in the Philippines, Beth Orozo had dreamed of working as a nurse in the United States. Growing up in a not-so-well-to-do family, Beth aspired to leave the Philippines in order to provide financial support to her parents. Since arriving in 1992, Beth has worked as a registered nurse in a convalescent hospital, which is the easiest avenue available for

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

Back to top.

Philippine nursing graduates to enter the United States. Now earning much more than the average nurse, Beth works as a supervisor at a skilled nursing facility. On average, she works one hundred hours every two weeks, logging in overtime hours to increase her pay. Overall, she likes her life in the United States and feels proud that she can provide for her parents in the Philippines. However, her path to the United States was not an easy one. For one thing, it was made difficult by various examinations, the first being the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools, which she had to take two times, and the second being the State Nursing Board Examination of California. Having overcome these obstacles, Beth has been able to put to use the education she earned in the Philippines and describes her migratory experience as one of "success."[2]

The stories of Genny O' Connor and Beth Orozo are but two of the many different experiences of Asian immigrant women in the U.S. labor market. Post-1965 Asian women migrants to the United States include professionals who correct the labor shortage in certain skilled professions, immigrant entrepreneurs who fill abandoned labor markets in declining urban economies, and workers who provide low-wage labor in service and decentralized manufacturing employment in global cities.

The recent labor migration of Asian Pacific American women takes place in the context of global economic restructuring.[3] This macrostructural process refers to the integration of national economies into a single global labor market. From advanced capitalist nations such as the United States to developing nations such as the Philippines, countries trade goods and services, export products to achieve a viable economy, and depend on multinational corporations and foreign direct investments to increase domestic production.[4] This chapter situates the labor market experiences of recent Asian immigrant women in the globalization of the market economy.

It examines three categories of workers—unskilled laborers, entrepreneurs, and professionals. In this chapter, I show that, each in their own way, these three groups of workers provide "cheap labor" to the U.S. economy—meaning, the costs of their labor are cheap acquisitions for U.S. society and/or the conditions of their employment are below prevailing labor standards. The shared experience of providing cheap labor should be underscored because it is a platform for coalition among diverse classes of immigrant Asian women.

GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING

As the development of a single global market economy contributes to the formation of a decentered global labor market—that is, multiple consumer markets in different regions of the world—it also results in the relocation of production. Under globalization, manufacturing activities have moved from advanced capitalist countries such as the United States to developing countries such as the Philippines and newly industrialized nations such as Korea; for as an intratrade industry develops in globalization (i.e., countries trade similar goods), domestic producers must compete with foreign producers and businesses more than ever to find low-cost resources (e.g., labor and materials) to reduce production costs

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

and maximize profits. Consequently, 25 percent of U.S. manufacturing is done outside the country's national borders.[5]

A new global division of labor is forming from the relocation of manufacturing production. As manufacturing has declined significantly in advanced capitalist nations, export-oriented economies have emerged across the globe. There is a difference between the growth potential of nations that export primary goods and those that export more highly demanded manufactured goods. As shown by the economic boom of the newly industrialized countries in East Asia, the latter are more likely to achieve rapid economic growth.

Globalization does not bode as well for export-based nations without highly demanded goods. Nations such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines not only seek investments of transnational corporations and export products or goods manufactured in free-trade zones; they also export the bodies of their citizens to introduce foreign currency into their economies. The Philippines is doing so to a growing extent, as the number of emigrants (who send remittances) has increased steadily since the 1970s. Numbering fewer than 50,000 in the early to mid-1970s, the number of overseas contract workers annually deployed jumped to 266,243 in 1981 and to more than 700,000 workers in 1994. Of these workers, roughly 60 percent are women.[6]

Globalization induces labor migration from export-oriented developing countries to both newly industrialized nations such as Singapore and Malaysia and advanced capitalist nations in North America and Europe. In the case of newly industrialized nations, the traditional proletariat female workforce, who would otherwise perform low-wage service jobs, now seek higher-paying manufacturing positions. This shift in labor market concentration generates a need for the lower wage labor of women, prompting emigration from neighboring countries such as the Philippines.

In advanced capitalist countries, secondary tiers of manufacturing and service industries have expanded under globalization. To compete with low production costs in developing countries, corporations now increasingly rely on post-Fordist modes of production, decentralized and deregulated forms of manufacturing such as those reflected in assembly lines and sweatshops. Low-wage service jobs have also increased because of the emergence of global cities, where multinational corporations with production facilities across the globe maintain their central operations. Specialized professional services (e.g., legal, financial, accounting, and consulting services) in these new economic centers (e.g., New York and Los Angeles) generate a need for low-wage services to maintain the lifestyles of professionals.[7] The vulnerability of Asian immigrant women, who face social, political, and cultural barriers (e.g., language), makes them a target group to fill various low-wage positions.

Globalization also spurs the migration of skilled workers. Both newly industrialized nations and advanced capitalist nations fill labor shortages by recruiting professionals from developing countries. In a stratified global economy, such workers are attracted by the higher wages offered in more developed nations. Moreover, they seek the knowledge brought about by the greater technological advances in these nations. However, sending nations usually lose, as

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

skills are transferred out of their country. Migration consequently results in the shortage of certain skilled labor in export-oriented nations. In contrast, receiving nations benefit from the skills of immigrant professionals without having to invest in the costs of the education and training needed to reproduce their skilled workforce.

Not surprisingly, the Immigration Act of 1990 put into effect legislation that responded to the economic need for the U.S. workforce to have a supply of highly skilled professionals and technicians. At the same time, this law acknowledged the existing need for the U.S. economy to maintain a supply of low-wage workers. Under this act, the United States raised the number of occupational preference visas from 534,000 to 738,000 by 1995.[8] Preference was given to migrants with "extraordinary ability," for example, those with advanced degrees, or professionals. Eligibility was also given to ten thousand "other workers," including the unskilled.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LABOR MARKET ACTIVITIES OF ASIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Since the 1930s, women have for the most part outnumbered male migrants in the United States.[9] The shift from a male- to a female-dominated flow of immigrants took place with the prioritization of family reunification as an immigration criterion, beginning most critically with the War Brides Act of 1945.[10] This trend continued with the Hart-Cellar Act, or 1965 Immigration Act, which ended four decades of Asian immigration restrictions and increased the immigration quota to twenty thousand for each country. This law radically changed the composition of the Asian population by gender and level of educational attainment with the direct recruitment of skilled workers. Taking advantage of the priority given to family-based migration, these workers, in turn, have sponsored the migration of their relatives. In fact, most Asian immigrants, including the Chinese, Asian Indians, and Filipinos, enter the United States via family-preference categories.[11]

Due to the large inflow of migrants, the Asian American population grew exponentially, from 1.5 million in 1970 to 3.7 million in 1980 and to 7.3 million in 1990. The majority of Asians (65.6 percent) in the United States in 1990 were foreign-born.[12] This flow is also women-dominated. Between 1975 and 1980, working-age women immigrants from China, the Philippines, Taiwan, Korea, Burma, Indonesia, Japan, and Thailand outnumbered men.[13] The notable exception has been India, where men constitute a greater number of working-age migrants, likely due to the high demand for their skills in science and technology.

Most Asian women migrate as part of a family unit. Approximately 75 percent of professional Asian immigrants who entered the United States between 1988 and 1990 migrated with their families. Moreover, Southeast Asian refugees usually enter the United States with their families.[14] While many Asian women enter the United States as "secondary migrants," to create or reunite a family, they also enter as primary migrants who sponsor the migration of families. This is especially true of Filipinos. The heavy recruitment of nurses spurred the primary migration of women in this community.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

Regardless of their mode of entry into the United States, Asian immigrant women actively participate in the labor market. They contribute to the family income and maintain dual-wage-earning households so as to make up for their husband's earnings, which are generally lower than those of native-born men. Income pooling is the primary reason for the high median family income of Asian Americans.[15] Of the general female population age sixteen years and over, 56.8 percent are in the paid labor force.[16] As Table 1 indicates, the percentage of labor market participation of Asian immigrant women compared to immigrant men varies by ethnic group.

TABLE 1
Labor Market Participation of Asian American and Asian Immigrant Women (by percentage), 1990

	All	*Foreign-born*
Japanese	47.5	40.8
Chinese	65.4	57.8
Filipina	77.7	73.1
Korean	61.0	55.5
Indian	56.9	59.6
Vietnamese	56.9	55.8

Source: U.S. Census, *1990 Census of the Population, Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993.

Notably, the rate of labor force participation among Filipina immigrant women far exceeds that of the general population and of other Asian groups and is much higher than in the Philippines, where women's labor force participation was 33.7 percent in 1992.[17] Their higher labor force participation has various reasons, including their better command of the English language and concentration in wage labor. Filipinos have the lowest rate of self-employment in the United States, at thirty-two per thousand. In contrast, the rate of self-employment for the general U.S. population stands at 69.74 per 1,000 and is even higher for other Asian ethnic groups: 180.46 per 1,000 for the Koreans and 72.77 per 1,000 for the Chinese.[18] Thus, it is likely that the rate of labor market participation for other Asian immigrant women is undercounted because the assistance they offer as wives in family businesses is not officially recognized as paid labor activity.

For Asian immigrant women, their generally high levels but also diverse range of educational attainment within and across ethnic groups have implications for their employment. In 1990, 20.3 percent of the U.S. general population had completed four years of college.[19] In contrast, the level of educational attainment of foreign-born Asian women in the five largest ethnic groups is significantly higher (Table 2). Only Southeast Asian refugees have a much lower percentage than the general population.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

TABLE 2
Educational Attainment of Bachelor's Degree or Higher of Asian American and Asian Immigrant Women, 1990

	All	*Foreign-born*
Chinese	35.0	32.4
Filipina	41.6	44.5
Japanese	28.2	22.2
Asian Indian	48.7	49.0
Korean	25.9	25.5
Vietnamese	12.2	12.7
Cambodian	3.2	3.1
Hmong	3.0	3.0
Laotian	3.5	3.4
Thai	24.9	24.9

Source: U.S. Census, *1990 Census of the Population, Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993.

Filipina and Chinese women occupy a wide variety of jobs in the labor market, while other Asian ethnic groups are more highly concentrated in particular occupational categories, for instance, Koreans in self-employment and Vietnamese in low-wage employment. In some ethnic groups, the labor market incorporation of women is bifurcated. For example, 24.6 percent of employed Chinese female migrants are in managerial and professional occupations and 29.7 percent are in service and manufacturing production employment.[20] This contradicts the common description of immigrant women as mostly disadvantaged low-paid workers in dead-end jobs, with limited financial security and upward mobility.[21]

Although the generally high level of educational attainment among Asian immigrant women has allowed them to seek a wider range of occupations than their Latina and Caribbean counterparts, the educational capital of Asian immigrant women does not necessarily mirror the characteristics of their labor market incorporation. Skilled Asian immigrant women have turned to lower-skilled occupations because of restrictive measures against foreign-trained professionals as well as language barriers.[22] For instance, in 1990, 23.7 percent of Asian Indian women migrants held professional and managerial occupations, even though 49 percent of them had completed four or more years of college.[23]

Underemployment is a quintessential way that Asian immigrant women provide "cheap labor" for the skills that they bring into the U.S. labor market. An example is the case of migrant Filipina domestic workers. In my study of Filipina domestic workers in Los Angeles, I found that seventeen of twenty-six interviewees have achieved some years of college.[24] Ten had education degrees and worked as teachers prior to migration. As domestic workers, they enhance the low-cost services that they provide employers by offering free tutoring and other educational services to their wards.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

To summarize, Asian immigrant women have a high rate of labor market participation and a diverse range of levels of educational attainment. Unlike other immigrant women, they hold a wide variety of occupations in the U.S. labor market and actively participate in the labor force in myriad ways.

ASIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND GLOBAL RESTRUCTURING

How are the labor market activities of contemporary Asian immigrant women situated in global restructuring and linked together? Addressing a similar question, Lisa Lowe illustrates the material links that tie the activities of low-wage manufacturing Asian women migrant workers to those in Asia by situating them in global restructuring. As she describes:

> Women migrate from countries of origin formerly colonized by the United States, or currently neocolonized by U.S. corporate capital and come to labor here as racialized women of color. In this sense, despite the obstacles of national, cultural, and linguistic differences, there are material continuities between the conditions of Chicanas and Latinas working in the United States and the women working in maquiladoras and low-cost manufacturing zones in Latin America, on the one hand, and Asian women working both within the United States and in Asian zones of assembly and manufacturing, on the other.[25]

The material continuities that Lowe draws between low-wage women workers across advanced capitalist and developing nations should be extended to include other groups of Asian migrant workers, as they are also part of the singular socioeconomic process of globalization and in various ways provide low-cost labor for the benefit of the U.S. economy.

Low-Wage Workers

Asian immigrant women fill the labor market need for low-wage manufacturing and service workers in urban centers of the United States. They are in decentralized industries, particularly in the garment industry, performing low-wage assembly jobs, and they provide services, including affordable manicures, to middle- and upper-class professionals.

With the offshore relocation of manufacturing, the production that does remain in the United States (e.g., garment, electronics, and furniture production) is decentralized and informal. For instance, the garment industry is structured like a pyramid. Manufacturers cut the costs of production by subcontracting to garment shops and awarding contracts to the lowest bidders. Consequently, they do not leave contractors with much capital to pay seamstresses wages that meet prevailing labor standards. As a result, native women usually shun this work. Without the same opportunities and human capital (e.g., language proficiency) as their native counterparts, immigrant women, including Asian women, fill this existing demand in the labor market.

Garment shops tend to be located in ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown, where the access of potential immigrant entrepreneurs to a pool of co-ethnics

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

as a cheap labor force makes them more attractive and lucrative. Immigrant entrepreneurs are also attracted to sewing shops because they require less investment and lower overhead costs than other businesses. For instance, in Oakland, newspaper ads indicated that "$25,000 is sufficient to start a ten to fifteen person shop."[26]

By using immigrant labor, small-business operators facilitate the process of global restructuring. In the garment industry, they give manufacturers direct access to the low human capital of immigrant women. In this way, manufacturers can remain flexible to the constant turnover in fashion trends and at the same time remain competitive against production in the Third World. Overworked and underpaid, immigrant seamstresses are usually paid by piece rate and often lack overtime pay, as well as health insurance and other work compensations.[27]

In the global cities of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, sewing jobs have pulled a large number of Chinese female immigrants into the bottom rungs of the garment industry and made them "the garment workers par excellence." In New York City, over half of Chinese immigrant women workers are in the garment industry, with most of them working as sewing-machine operators.[28] In the San Francisco Bay Area, 90 percent of garment workers are women, with over 80 percent of them Chinese-speaking.[29] In Los Angeles, approximately 10 percent of the estimated 120,000 garment workers are Asians.[30]

Streamlining production is another way that U.S. manufacturers reduce overhead costs. For the most part, low-level manufacturing employment has been divided into simpler and simpler tasks and is therefore low-paying. These jobs are often unsafe (e.g., they expose workers to hazardous materials), are monotonous, and require few skills.[31] In the Midwest, meatpacking plants increasingly rely on the low-wage labor provided by Southeast Asian refugees. For Vietnamese and Laotian women, packing plants are often their best option for employment, as the work requires few skills (e.g., jobs are set up as mechanized assembly work), provides better pay than other available low-skill employment, and is now shunned by the Anglo-American men who traditionally dominated the industry.[32] In Silicon Valley, one study indicates that in the late 1980s women made up approximately 80 percent of production workers, with most being members of minority groups and with Filipina women as the largest group of recent migrants entering assembly-line manufacturing.[33]

Low-wage service work is another way that Asian immigrant women provide cheap labor to the U.S. economy. Many of the available low-wage service jobs are considered women's work, as they have been relegated to women historically in a sex-segmented labor market. These personal and industrial services are provided in different economic sectors, including the informal sector (e.g., domestic workers), the formal industry sector (e.g., hotel housekeepers, restaurant workers, and certified nurse's aides), and ethnic economies (e.g., manicurists and restaurant workers).[34]

Providing low-wage service is difficult work. Domestic work such as elder care may require twenty-four hours of labor.[35] Trinidad Borromeo, a sixty-eight-year-old

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

woman whom I interviewed in Rome, describes a daily work routine that generally reflects those of her counterparts in Los Angeles.[36]

> I begin at seven in the morning. I change her, feed her, give her all of her injections and medication. Then I clean the apartment. When you take care of an elder, the first thing you have to have is patience. If you don't have it, you won't last. For example, when you feed her, it can take up to an hour. It gets hard when they don't want to open their mouth or swallow the food. But taking care of an elder like this one is better than a mobile one. Those ones are demanding. You wipe them already then they want you to wipe them again. They have no shame. These types are better . . . you just move them around from the bed to the chair. You have to just clean her bed everyday because it will smell like pee around the house if you don't. . . . I wake up at four in the morning just to check that the woman is still alive. Then if there is no problem, I sleep until a little bit before seven and I am done with her by nine. I just serve her coffee and biscuits. I sleep around midnight or one in the morning.

Despite their nonstop labor, elder caregivers seldom take a day off because of the tremendous emotional dependence of their elderly patients.[37]

Along with their Caribbean and Latina counterparts, contemporary Asian immigrant women respond to the demand for low-wage service labor in various global cities in the United States, but they do so to a much lesser degree. Yet they are more heavily concentrated in this labor market sector in certain cities. For example, according to the Pilipino Worker's Center, immigrant Filipina workers dominate elder caregiving in Los Angeles, in both personal (e.g., private home) and industrial (e.g., nursing home) services.[38] In the Filipino immigrant community, recent women migrants frequently turn to domestic work because of their limited options in the labor market.[39] In a study of undocumented women in the San Francisco Bay Area, Chris Hogeland and Karen Rosen found that 41 percent of fifty-seven survey participants from the Philippines are elder care or childcare workers and an additional 23 percent are employed as housekeepers.[40]

Other groups of Asian immigrant women provide low-paid services through ethnic economies. For instance, ethnic entrepreneurs have taken up running nail salons to take advantage of the concentration of service professionals in global cities.[41] In this way, Asian immigrant women provide cheap labor by making this luxury affordable to a wider range of consumers. Any visitor to New York or Los Angeles will notice the abundance of nail salons operated by Korean and Vietnamese women who provide low-cost services to compete with each other. One study found that Koreans operate up to 80 percent of nail salons in New York City.[42]

Small-Business Entrepreneurs

Contemporary Asian immigrant workers contribute to the economic development of global cities in another crucial way. They spur economic growth with the operation of small businesses. For example, they provide convenient services such as dry cleaning to the growing professional class and run contracting shops that are part of the informal manufacturing economy.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

Immigrant Koreans have entered the deteriorating urban centers of the United States in full force; more than 50 percent of them operate small businesses.[43] Many of these businesses are not enclosed in ethnic enclave economies (e.g., Koreatown) but instead cater to a larger urban clientele. These types of urban businesses include greengrocers, dry cleaners, liquor stores, and retail shops of Asian manufactured goods (e.g., wigs, clothing). Opening a business in an urban area is more affordable for prospective entrepreneurs than in, for example, the safer area of the suburbs. High levels of crime and poverty have made urban neighborhoods—ghettos and barrios—what Jennifer Lee calls "vacant niches," as local economies have been abandoned by large corporations such as gasoline companies and supermarkets.[44] Taking advantage of these abandoned neighborhoods, Koreans have franchised gasoline stations and opened groceries and liquor stores in these "high-risk" markets. In doing so, they give big businesses access to these once-deserted markets but at the same time absorb the risks that the big businesses choose to avoid.

Immigrants are often disadvantaged to compete against the native-born in the primary labor market because they are unable to put to use their educational and occupational capital, face language difficulties and discrimination, and are unfamiliar with American cultural practices.[45] To avoid low-wage jobs like those performed by Chinese garment workers or Filipino hotel housekeepers in San Francisco, immigrants with class and ethnic resources may choose to operate small businesses to better negotiate the segmented U.S. labor market. In doing so, they take advantage of the business know-how brought by their human capital (e.g., high levels of educational attainment) and the ethnic resources (e.g., rotating credit associations) that make available financial capital required to open a business.[46]

Although they have more resources and advantages than contemporary Asian immigrant women in low-wage manufacturing and service employment, small-business entrepreneurs provide cheap labor as well.[47] First, the maintenance of such businesses requires long hours. As Kyeyoung Park describes, "Korean men and women involved in small business often work more than twelve hours daily and six or seven days a week. According to an August 1987 survey by the Korean American Small Business Service Center of New York, 85 percent of Korean proprietors kept their stores open more than ten hours per day. Some 70 percent used family labor."[48] Second, businesses also rely on the unpaid labor of wives and children. How do long hours and family work translate to cheap labor? Edna Bonacich explains, "If one adds up the hours of work put into many immigrant enterprises and divides that number by the money taken out of business to live on, the result is not infrequently a very low rate of earnings."[49]

In general, small ethnic businesses could not possibly survive without family labor, most importantly the often unrecognized labor of women. While unrecognized, the work of women in small businesses also suffers from a gendered hierarchy that relegates the "less skilled" and thus more monotonous work to them. For instance, men often take over the managerial tasks (e.g., accounting) that are required in the daily operation of small Korean businesses. Similarly, in Chinese take-away shops in England, Miri Song observed that

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

mothers often performed the more labor-intensive and unskilled labor in the kitchen.[50] By relegating the less-skilled and seemingly less important work to women, men are able to justify their own lower contributions to housework. As a result, the "double day" plagues women in small businesses as well as in low-wage work. Women are not only expected to keep long hours in small businesses but are also relied upon to perform the bulk of domestic chores in the household.[51]

Professional Women

The global labor market also needs to attract the highly skilled professionals to their global cities. In this way, advanced capitalist countries such as the United States economically benefit from immigrants' know-how while amending the shortages in certain skilled professions that have been created by cutbacks in social spending.

The growth of capitalism in the United States has led to the greater reduction of social, health, and education benefits to society.[52] As such, the labor shortage of professionals in the United States, which is an acute problem in the fields of science, engineering, and health, is an institutionalized structural problem that has been mended in part by the recruitment of Asian professionals. These workers provide cheap labor in that their educational training did not cost the United States any money. By facilitating their entry, the U.S. government can avoid the consequences of its failure to invest in the reproductive costs of the country's labor force. The highly skilled labor of Asian immigrants, particularly women, is also arguably cheaper than that provided by their native-born counterparts. One study found that Asian women who are employed in core industries earn $2,179.06 less than white female scientists and engineers.[53]

Recent Asian immigrants have helped fill the professional labor force shortage. From 1988 to 1990, more than half of the 150,000 highly skilled migrants who entered the United States originated in Asia.[54] That they have done so more than any other group is a legacy of U.S. colonialism.[55] In particular, the modeling of the educational infrastructure in Asia after that in the United States has homogenized educational standards and objectives to create an expanded international labor pool of professionals who constitute an available resource for the U.S. labor market.[56]

Due to the direct recruitment of Asian professionals into the United States, the percentage of Asian American scientists and engineers increased from 2 percent in 1970 to 7 percent in 1990. Moreover, the numbers of scientists and engineers escalated from just 21,000 to 150,000 in two decades.[57] While the majority of professional immigrants are men, 42 percent of the highly skilled Asian migrants who entered the United States from 1988 to 1990 were women.[58]

A high percentage (68 percent) of highly skilled women from the Philippines entered the United States during this time. As the Philippines is the largest source of foreign-trained health professionals in the United States, many entered as nurses, for which the labor shortage is estimated at 370,000.[59] The reluctance of the United States to invest in the reproductive costs of its labor

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

force is much to blame for this shortage. As Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng describe:

> The United States has been reluctant to spend money on the training of health personnel, such as nurses, in a general effort at cost containment for health care. The ultimate goal is to reduce health care costs for capitalist employers by lowering the costs of their benefits packages. This policy creates a shortage of nurses in the United States and a demand for immigrant nurses.[60]

Yet the process of labor migration is neither easy nor convenient. In most cases, Filipina nurses first enter as temporary workers. During this time, they are ineligible to sponsor the migration of their families, whom they are forced to leave behind in the Philippines. Foreign-trained nurses also relieve the sponsoring medical facility of the costs of their recruitment and bear most of the costs of their labor placement. On average, migration to the United States costs Filipino nurses $7,000, which is usually deducted from their pay.[61] This debt binds them and consequently leaves them vulnerable to the sponsoring facility. Once in the United States, they also find themselves with the most demanding and stressful jobs. In the mid-1980s, one survey found that 82 percent of Filipino nurses work in hospitals, versus 53 percent of non-Filipinos.[62] Often these hospitals are concentrated in inner cities and are more congested and busier than other health facilities.

At the same time that the "cheapening of labor" in the United States has forced employers to turn to the recruitment of professional Asian workers, it has also deepened the cheap labor pool and limited the opportunities of underprivileged members of society. As Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng describe:

> In general, the cheap labor approach to restructuring has the impact of curbing the development of local professionals by limiting the opportunities of the local working class. People who work for minimum wage can hardly afford to send their children to college. Attacks on the working class thus have the consequence of undermining the strategy of reorganization and innovation by limiting the growth of the class that can implement it. This contradiction sets the stage for the immigration of professionals and managers.[63]

Thus, while the entrance of professionals into receiving nations such as the United States helps deepen the cheap labor pool, global restructuring also generates the need for their recruitment.

CONCLUSION

The labor market activities of recent Asian immigrant women indicate that their economic adaptation is unlike that of other groups of immigrant women. They can be found in a wide variety of occupations in the U.S. labor market, both cross-ethnically and within ethnic groups. As such, it is difficult categorically to address their labor market incorporation in a singular framework that is inclusive of the

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

diverse range of their labor market activities. The high rate of labor market participation of Asian immigrant women as well as the diversity of their labor market activities attest to the feminization of the wage labor force under globalization. However, the conditions of their labor market incorporation and their low standards of employment suggest that women still hold a fairly low status in the labor market.

By surveying the labor market activities of recent Asian immigrant women and by viewing these activities as processes embedded in global restructuring, I argued that they provide cheap labor in the U.S. economy in myriad ways. The concept of cheap labor is one that I loosely describe to mean that in some way the costs of their labor are "cheap" acquisitions for U.S. society and/or the conditions of their employment are below prevailing labor standards. This definition applies to unskilled workers, ethnic entrepreneurs, and professionals. For instance, it is applicable to the experiences of migrant Filipina nurses whose training did not come with any financial costs to the United States, to the Korean women who operate small businesses for long hours, and to the Chinese immigrant women who dominate the needle trade in various global cities in the United States.

The women workers in the three categories I have surveyed have unequal levels of mobility. They face different opportunities and constraints. While they may share the opportunity to earn more than they would in their countries of origin, a nurse such as Beth Orozo and a domestic worker such as Genny O'Connor cannot be considered equally displaced by the capitalist system in the United States. For one, Beth has been able to transfer her educational capital, while Genny clearly has not. Thus, our understanding of their labor market activities should not disregard their differences.

So as not to ignore the diversity of the labor market participation of Asian immigrant women, my analysis emphasizes the specificities in the location of three groups of workers in the larger schema of global restructuring. My analytical approach accounts for the specific contexts of each of these groups' labor market incorporation. Employing such an approach shows that the material realities of their labor are quite different. At the same time, it shows that from their specific location in global restructuring, Asian immigrant women contribute some form of "cheap labor" to the United States.

NOTES

1. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Woman, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 150.
2. Personal interview with author, Iloilo City, Philippines, May 2001.
3. By recent immigrants, I refer to those who entered after 1965, which is when the United States eliminated discriminatory racial barriers and established an open-door policy based on the criteria of occupational skills and family reunification.
4. David Held, David Goldblatt McGrew, and Jonathan Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, and Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), chaps. 3–5.
5. Harold Perkin, *The Third Revolution: Professional Elites in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 19.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

6. Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, chap. 2.
7. Saskia Sassen-Koob, "Notes on the Incorporation of Third World Women into Wage Labor through Immigration and Offshore Production," *International Migration Review* 18:4 (1984): 1144–67.
8. Kitty Calavita, "Gaps and Contradictions in U.S. Immigration Policy: An Analysis of Recent Reform Effects," in David Jacobson, ed., *The Immigration Reader: America in a Multidisciplinary Perspective* (Maiden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 105.
9. Marion F. Houstoun, Roger G. Kramer, and Joan Mackin Barrett, "Female Predominance of Immigration to the United States since 1930: A First Look," *International Migration Review* 28:4 (1984): 908–63.
10. This law facilitated the entrance of more than two hundred thousand Asian war brides, fiancées, and children into the United States. See Judy Yung, "Appendix: A Chronology of Asian American History," in Asian Women United of California, eds., *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 423–31.
11. See Bill Ong Hing, "Asian Immigrants: Social Forces Unleashed after 1965," in Jacobson, ed., *The Immigration Reader*, 144–82; and Pyong Gap Min, "An Overview of Asian Americans," in Pyong Gap Min, ed., *Asian Americans: Contemporary Trends and Issues* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 10–37.
12. U.S. Census, *1990 Census of the Population, Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).
13. Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 63.
14. Ibid., 62.
15. Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
16. U.S. Census, *Census of Population and Housing, 1990 PUMS* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).
17. Sylvia Chant, *Women-headed Households: Diversity and Dynamics in the Developing World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).
18. Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 72.
19. U.S. Census, *Census of Population and Housing 1990 PUMS.*
20. U.S. Census, *1990 Census of the Population, Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States.*
21. According to Linda Miller Matthei, half of immigrant women enter low-wage employment in operations and services, because they lack educational credentials and have few employment skills. See "Gender and International Labor Migration: A Networks Approach," in Susanne Jonas and Suzie Dod Thomas, eds., *Immigration: A Civil Rights Issue for the Americas* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc, 1999), 77.
22. Examples are provided by Esther Chow, "Asian American Women at Work," in Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, eds., *Women of Color in U.S. Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 203–27.
23. Keiko Yamanaka and Kent McClelland, "Earning the Model Minority Image: Diverse Strategies of Economic Adaptation by Asian American Women," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17:1 (January 1994): 79–114.
24. Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, introduction.
25. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 165.
26. Miriam Ching Louie, "Immigrant Asian Women in Bay Area Garment Shops: 'After Sewing, Laundry, Cleaning and Cooking, I Have No Breath Left to Sing,'" *Amerasia Journal* 18:1 (1992): 1–26.
27. See also Xiaolin Bao, chapter 17, in Shirley Hane and Gail Nomura, eds., *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).
28. Nancy Foner, "Benefits and Burdens: Immigrant Women and Work in New York City," *Gender Issues* 16:4 (1998): 8.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

29. Louie, "Immigrant Asian Women," 2.
30. Richard Kim, Kane K. Nakamura, and Giselle Fong, with Ron Cabarloc, Barbara Jung, and Sung Lee, "Asian Immigrant Women Garment Workers in Los Angeles," *Amerasia Journal* 18:1 (1992): 69.
31. Karen Hossfeld, "Hiring Immigrant Women: Silicon Valley's 'Simple Formula,' " in Zinn and Dill, eds., *Women of Color*, 765–93.
32. Janet E. Benson, "The Effects of Packinghouse Work on Southeast Asian Refugee Families," in L. Lamphere, A. Stepick, and G. Grenier, eds., *Newcomers in the Workplace: Immigrants and the Restructuring of the U.S. Economy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 109.
33. Rebecca Villones, "Women in the Silicon Valley," in Asian Women United of California, eds., *Making Waves*, 172.
34. See Ivan Light, Georges Sabagh, Mehdi Bozorgmehr, and Claudia Der-Martirosian, "Beyond the Ethnic Enclave Economy," *Social Problems* 41:1 (1994): 65–79. By definition, *ethnic economy* refers to the self-employed with co-ethnic employees.
35. Charlene Tung, "The Cost of Caring: The Social Reproductive Labor of Filipina Live-in Home Health Caregivers," *Frontiers* 21:1/2 (2000): 72.
36. Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*, 159.
37. Tung, "The Cost of Caring," 76.
38. Informational brochure provided by Pilipino Worker's Center, 1996.
39. This is caused by a combination of their undocumented status, their inability to put to use their training and work experience from the Philippines, and the ethnic niche in caregiving that has developed in the Filipino migrant community from the large flow of nurses into the United States.
40. Chris Hogeland and Karen Rosen, *Dreams Lost, Dreams Found: Undocumented Women in the Land of Opportunity* (San Francisco: San Francisco Coalition for Immigrant Rights and Services, 1990).
41. Millian Kang, "Manicuring Race, Gender, and Class: Service Interactions in New York City Korean-owned Nail Salons," *Race, Gender, and Class* 4:3 (1997): 143–64.
42. Kyeyoung Park, *The Korean American Dream* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 117.
43. Pyong Gap Min, "Korean Americans," in Min, ed., *Asian Americans*, 199–231.
44. Jennifer Lee, "Striving for the American Dream: Struggle, Success, and Intergroup Conflict among Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurs," in Min Zhou and James Gatewood, eds., *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 284.
45. Ibid., 280.
46. Ivan Light and Edna Bonacich, *Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Koreans in Los Angeles, 1965–1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
47. Edna Bonacich, "The Social Costs of immigrant Entrepreneurship," *Amerasia Journal* 14:1 (1988): 119–28.
48. Kyeyoung Park, "Impact of New Productive Activities on the Organization of Domestic Life: A Case Study of the Korean American Community," in Gail M. Nomura, Russell Endo, Stephen H. Sumida, and Russell C. Leong, eds., *Frontiers of Asian American Studies* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989), 147.
49. Bonacich, "Secret Costs," 120.
50. Miri Song, *Helping Out: Children's Labor in Ethnic Businesses* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 55.
51. Park, "Impact of New Productive Activities," 140–50.
52. Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, "The Political Economy of Capitalist Restructuring and the New Asian Immigration," in P. Ong, E. Bonacich, and L. Cheng, eds., *The New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 3–35.
53. Shang-Luan Yan, "The Status of Asian American Women Scientists and Engineers in the Labor Force," *Race, Gender, and Class* 6:3 (1999): 119.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

54. William Kanjanapan, "The Immigration of Asian Professionals to the United States: 1988–1990," *International Migration Review* 291 (1995): 15.
55. John Liu and Lucie Cheng, "Duality of Post-1965 Asian Immigration," in Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng, eds., *New Asian Immigration*, 80.
56. Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng, "Political Economy of Capitalist Restructuring," 3–35.
57. Paul Ong and Evelyn Blumenberg, "Scientists and Engineers," in Darrell Y. Hamamoto and Rodolfo D. Torres, eds., *New American Destinies: A Reader in Contemporary Asian and Latino Immigration* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 166.
58. Kanjanapan, "Immigration of Asian Professionals," 20.
59. See Paul Ong and Tania Azores, "The Migration and Incorporation of Filipino Nurses," in Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng, eds., *New Asian Immigration*, 164–95.
60. Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng, "Political Economy of Capitalist Restructuring," 25.
61. Information obtained from informal interviews I conducted with recruitment agencies and prospective migrants in the Philippines between January and July 2000.
62. Ong and Azores, "Migration and Incorporation," 164. See also Catherine Ceniza Choy, chapter 20 in Shirley Hune and Gail M. Nomura, eds., *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women A History Anthology* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).
63. Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng, "Political Economy of Capitalist Restructuring," 25–26.

Copyright © 2010. Rutgers University Press. All rights reserved.

Asian American Studies Now : A Critical Reader, edited by Jean Yu-Wen Shen Wu, and Thomas Chen, Rutgers University Press, 2010. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=867806.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-02-22 16:50:04.

INTRODUCTION

Crisis, Conundrum, and Critique

Cathy J. Schlund-Vials

In April 1969, five UCLA students—Mike Murase, Dinora Gil, Laura Ho, Colin Watanabe, and Tracy Okida—founded *Gidra*, a radical monthly newspaper envisioned as a politically progressive, open forum for Asian American activists, authors, and artists. Christened by its creators as the "Voice of the Asian American Movement," *Gidra*—which ran from 1969 until April 1974—unfailingly showcased articles that meditated on systemic oppression at home and critiqued U.S. imperialism abroad. It likewise featured pieces that considered the possibility of cross-racial solidarities alongside the challenges of such work due to internalized racism and mainstream model minoritization. Concurrent with the West Coast institutionalization of ethnic studies as an interdisciplinary field of race-based inquiry, and coherent with the interdiscipline's rallying cry of "making education relevant," *Gidra* capaciously anticipated and significantly reflected the ways in which Asian America (as legible demographic and identifiable communal formation) was from the outset a distinctly political and expressly migratory project. On the one hand, *Gidra*'s reportage concerning anti-Asian racism, post-1965 Hart-Celler Act xenophobia, racialized U.S. foreign policy, people of color solidarities, and Yellow Power activism

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

Back to top.

productively mirrored and tellingly refracted the liberatory aspirations and recovery-oriented ambitions of the Asian American movement.[1]

On the other hand, *Gidra*'s tactical engagement with progressive frames vis-à-vis revolutionary imaginings and historicized agendas—which correspondingly and contemporaneously rendered visible the parameters of mid-century social movements, civil rights era formations, and U.S. empire via disastrous wars in Southeast Asia—operate as recognizable starting points and source coordinates for Asian American studies, a field that concomitantly came into being as a direct consequence of race-based protest and racialized predicaments (e.g., state-sanctioned discrimination "over here" and state-authorized violence "over there"). Such histories and origin points analogously serve as initial moorings for *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, a collection that expressively commences with *Gidra*'s forward-looking mission and open-minded activist vision to consider—almost fifty years later—the possibilities of and limitations inherent in Asian American studies as historically entrenched, politically embedded, and institutionally situated interdiscipline. Unequivocally, *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* investigates the multivalent ways in which the field has—and, at times and more provocatively, *has not*—responded to various contemporary crises, particularly as they are manifest in prevailing racist, sexist, homophobic, and exclusionary politics at home, ever-expanding imperial and militarized practices abroad, and neoliberal practices in higher education. To be sure, the title for this wide-ranging anthology is meant to suggestively illuminate various conundrums and dilemmas constitutive of a vexed twenty-first-century reality punctuated and characterized by a diverse set of "flashpoints." Connotative of "a place, event, or time at which trouble, such as violence or anger, flares up," a flashpoint demands—in the face of political calamity and systemic oppression—reflection, response, and recalibration.[2]

As *Gidra* contributor and Asian American poet/activist Amy Uyematsu avers in her opening essay, while five decades have passed since the rise of the Asian American movement and the institutionalization of Asian American studies, there remains a prevailing sense of déjà vu with regard to current events, or flashpoints; such returns, on one level, encapsulate multiple fronts, human rights campaigns, and social justice crusades: Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan; Selma to Ferguson; the Black Liberation Movement (BLM) of the 1970s to the present-day Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement; along with third world liberation fronts and the contemporary boycott movements involving Palestinian human rights. On another level, the recent contested election of the nation's forty-fifth

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

president—Donald J. Trump—has quite dramatically and alarmingly engendered another "flashpoint" and rendered even more urgent these past/present contemplations. Catastrophically reminiscent of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century calls to "shut the door" on Asian immigrants (via so-termed "Asiatic barred zones" and wholesale criminalization), devastatingly allusive of the World War II–era incarceration of Japanese/Japanese Americans, and calamitously redolent of fascist isolationism (e.g., "America First"), the Trump presidency is in many ways a distressingly familiar "past is prologue" administration. As a contemporary flashpoint, the administration's wide-ranging assaults against those on the margins are, even in the early stages of the Trump presidency, quite recognizable to Asian Americanists and other ethnic studies/gender/sexualities practitioners whose work endeavors to accentuate the identarian dimensions embedded in reiterative racist policy (against the undocumented and disenfranchised), xenophobic acts (emblematized by country-specific refugee bans), and sexist/homophobic initiative (via national gag orders and state-ratified bathroom laws).

These reverberations—which move between the mid-twentieth century and hover above the turn-of-the-twentieth century—frame *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, a project that critically charts and acutely interrogates the relevance of Asian American studies in the contemporary political moment. The diverse essays included in this volume—authored by Asian American scholars, artists, and activists, inclusive of Asian Americanist manifestos, commentaries, treatises, and expositions—are connected via their overarching consideration of the field's presentist successes and shortcomings, which make possible an attendant meditation on its future directions and unrealized possibilities.

Such connectedness is at once evident in the ways in which *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* is dialogically linked to other anthologies that endeavor to reframe, reconsider, and re-evaluate the intellectual parameters and critical contours of Asian American studies as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry and critique. These include *Cultural Compass: Ethnographic Explorations of Asian America* (2000), edited by Martin F. Manalansan IV; *Asian American Studies: A Reader* (2000), edited by Min Song and Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu; *Asian American Studies after Critical Mass* (2004) and *A Companion to Asian American Studies* (2004), both edited by Kent A. Ono; *Asian Americans in New England: Culture and Community* (2009), edited by Monica Chiu; *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader* (2010), edited by Jean Yu-wen Shen Wu and Thomas Chen; and *Asian Americans in Dixie* (2014), edited by Khyati Y. Joshi and Jigna Desai. These anthologies,

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

which bring together scholars from multiple disciplines (in the humanities and social sciences) and provocatively engage alternative sites (inclusive of divergent geographies and underexplored subjectivities), render discernible the extent to which Asian American studies is by no means a static field but instead one marked by an expanding scholarly trajectory.

Moreover, as a number of field collections that have recently been published or are forthcoming indicate, Asian American studies has most certainly arrived as an established interdiscipline. These include *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature* (2014), *Keywords for Asian American Studies* (2015), *The Cambridge History of Asian American Literature* (2015), and *The Routledge Handbook of Asian American Studies* (2016) (among others). Notwithstanding the considerable strengths of each of these collections, and despite the value such works carry with regard to archive and investigation, these anthologies render palpable the ways in which Asian American studies is now a firmly institutionalized site within the dominant U.S. academy. Such institutionalization, which carries with it the overt markers of professionalization alongside the perils of disciplinary triumphalism, function as a point of profound departure for *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, which begins with the controversial, nuanced premise that the field has incompletely fulfilled and at times fallen short of the radical politics that undergirded its foundation and facilitated its initial formation.

The disconnect between revolutionary activist vision, progressive politics, and moderate (or, at times, conservative) academic incorporation is explored in each of the essays that comprise *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*. In so doing, *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* takes seriously Roderick Ferguson's provocative directive in *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (2012). Explicitly, practitioners, scholars, and students of Asian American studies require, as Ferguson notes in his analysis of ethnic studies and gender/sexuality studies, "a critical itinerary that can outline and interrogate the constitutive contradictions of minoritized formations in the years after the sixties social movements, contradictions that have to do with the simultaneous identifications with and antagonisms to the institutional embodiments of power. . . . We also need analytic models that will help us imagine ways to maneuver taken-for-granted contradictions so that their economies are not constantly tilted toward identification but move in the direction of disidentification and on to more sustained embodiments of oppositionality."[3] *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* is accordingly guided by such a

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

"critical itinerary," which in its emphases on contradiction and oppositionality enables a wholesale reassessment of the field's past/present politics and impact.

Complicit Solidarities: Asian America in the Twenty-First Century

These past/present politics and impacts as connected to Asian American studies (as an interdisciplinary field) and Asian America (as distinct political formation) are, as the essays in *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* bring to light, strikingly relevant when situated within the ostensibly colorblind logics of contemporary U.S. racial dynamics and the imperialistic practices of U.S. militarization (particularly in the Middle East and Pacific Rim). With regard to the latter, the rising tide of Islamophobia, aforementioned calls to "shut the door" on Muslim and South Asian immigrants, along with the reinvigorated foreign policies that accompany recent declarations concerning "America's Pacific Century" cannot fully be comprehended without attending to contradictory machinations that have historically cast Asian immigrants and Asian Americans as perilous subjects and would-be beneficiaries of U.S. empire (à la what Yên Lê Espiritu characterizes within Southeast Asian American studies as "the good refugee"). Nor can such convoluted actualities be considered without a serious examination into the ways in which U.S. knowledge production—as coopted, corporatized enterprise and in light of the ever-growing Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement—requires a "different way of seeing" ethnic studies (and, by proxy, Asian American studies) to facilitate a prospective site of resistance and critique. In a more domestic vein, these "different ways of seeing" are especially important when contemplating present-day anti-Black racism and U.S. racial dynamics, as emblematized by the topical case of and public protests concerning New York Police Department (NYPD) officer Peter Liang.

On November 20, 2014, while on routine vertical patrol in east New York City, two NYPD rookie officers—the abovementioned Liang and Shaun Landau—entered the eighth-floor stairwell of the Louis H. Pink Houses.[4] With unlit hallways, little to no elevator service, peeling paint, and exposed, rusted pipes, the mid-rise tenement—despite its comparatively cheerful, optimistically colorful name—was among the most neglected, dilapidated, and notorious of the city's public housing projects. Located in one of the metropole's highest crime areas (on Brooklyn's outer edges), the Pink Houses were constructed in 1959 and named after

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

the former chair of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) who—despite the present-day appalling conditions of his architectural namesake—furiously dedicated a working life to eradicating the city's slums through subsidized, low-income housing. In the face of constant safety complaints from tenants, in spite of repeated petitions for basic maintenance, and notwithstanding persistent NYPD officer concerns about security, the NYCHA repeatedly responded with inaction and recurrently countered with indifference: In the past three years, the NYCHA failed to replace burned-out lightbulbs, fix broken security cameras, and attend to critical building repairs.

Irrefutably, the NYCHA was not alone with regard to engendering extreme human insecurity at the Pink Houses: The NYPD—confronted with occupant objections concerning racial profiling and antagonized by resident requests that more seasoned patrols be assigned to the area—continually sent newly minted recruits who lacked the necessary understanding, compulsory familiarity, and crucial experience to deal with routine tenant engagements, more serious criminal altercations, and what even New York Police Commissioner Bill Bratton confessed was a recent and critical "spike in violence" in the neighborhood.[5] Such administrative neglect—which incontrovertibly occurred in tandem with increased state-authorized racial profiling (via codified NYPD policy) and pervasive short-sighted cop deployment (vis-à-vis the widespread use of probationary officers)—would have tragic consequences and dramatic repercussions that late November evening.

On that evening, at approximately 11:15 P.M., Liang and Landau began their nightly surveillance of the housing project. As per established vertical patrol protocol, Liang had his 9mm Glock drawn in his left hand; he steadied a small, police-issue flashlight in his right. Startled by a noise approximately one flight below, Liang—without specific target, with no visibility, and sans probable cause—discharged his weapon. Subsequently deemed an unfortunate "accident" by aforementioned Police Commissioner Bratton, NYPD's Internal Affairs, and the Brooklyn District Attorney's office, the bullet ricocheted off a wall and struck Akai Kareem Gurley, a twenty-eight-year-old father of a two-year-old girl; originally from Saint Thomas (U.S. Virgin Islands), Gurley had, like Liang (who, aged twenty-seven, was born "elsewhere," in Hong Kong), emigrated to New York at a young age.[6] Gurley and his girlfriend (a Pink Houses resident) had entered the complex just minutes after Liang and Landau; it was afterward reported that Gurley was at the Pink Houses to have his hair braided in anticipation of the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. Suffering

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

from shock, Gurley was unaware of the seriousness of his injuries; attempting to run from his then-unknown assailants, Gurley frantically sought refuge in the Pink Houses, though he only made it to the project's fifth-floor hallway. According to after-the-fact eyewitness accounts and trial transcripts, Liang and his partner, oblivious to the fatal detail that Gurley had been hit and unmindful that their unintended target was in dire need of emergency care, argued for almost four minutes about whether or not they should call their supervisor to report the incident. At no point did either officer provide Gurley with medical assistance, who—without basic CPR and the benefit of rudimentary first aid—quickly succumbed to the gunshot wound in his chest.[7]

Notwithstanding the specific circumstances and particular conditions that undergirded Liang's so-declared inadvertent killing of Akai Gurley, the case was—when simultaneously situated adjacent *to* and retrospectively set *against* a national imaginary of disproportionate anti-Black police violence—decidedly and ineludibly *not* exceptional. To wit, a mere two days after the Pink Houses shooting, on November 22, officers Timothy Loehmann and Frank Garmback responded to a call involving a "black male sitting on a swing and pointing a gun at people" in a Cleveland, Ohio, park.[8] The person reporting the incident clearly stressed at the beginning and reiterated at the middle of the call that the pistol was "probably fake" and that the suspect was "probably a juvenile."[9] As the officers arrived on the scene, the suspect—twelve-year-old Tamir Rice—allegedly moved his hands and reached for his waist. Officer Loehmann fired two shots; one bullet missed Rice entirely, while the other pierced the preteen's torso. As was the case in the Akai Gurley shooting, neither officer administered elementary treatment or simple medical aid; not surprisingly and quite heartbreakingly, Rice passed way the following day at MetroHealth Medical Center.[10] Indubitably, the caller's initial characterization of the pistol as "probably fake" was swiftly confirmed: Rice's "weapon" was a relatively common air gun replica filled with nonlethal plastic pellets.[11]

Placed on administrative leave, both officers—despite past complaints and previous acts to the contrary—indefatigably insisted on their wholesale innocence and tirelessly emphasized categorical nonwrongdoing.[12] Such pleas of law enforcement virtuousness were apparently heeded and believed, as made clear by a court ruling that occurred one year later: On December 28, 2015, a Cleveland grand jury elected not to indict Loehmann and Garmback. This distressing pattern of police shooting and nonarraignment—wherein prosecuting the deaths of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement are belatedly pursued, incompletely

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

mediated, and juridically dismissed—was upsettingly foreshadowed two days after Rice's slaying and four days after Gurley's shooting, when Saint Louis County prosecutor Robert McCulloch announced on November 24, 2014, that a grand jury would—regardless of firsthand testimonials concerning racist bias and even with eyewitness accounts—not prosecute Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson on criminal charges connected to his August 9, 2014, shooting and killing of unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown. Moreover, a little over a week following the Ferguson ruling and two weeks after the Gurley shooting—on December 3, 2014—a Richmond County (New York) grand jury familiarly followed suit in its indiscriminate determination that NYPD officer Daniel Pantaleo would not face indictment for the chokehold death of Eric Garner, an African American male (aged forty-three). This juridical nonprosecution occurred notwithstanding the investigative fact that the New York City Medical Examiner's Office—from the outset and quite publicly—ruled the passing of the father of six to be a homicide.[13]

These recurring miscarriages of justice, which lay bare the state-authorized disposability of black lives via an all-too-frequent convergence of police violence and African American mortality, were contemporaneously at the forefront of the previously discussed Liang shooting of Akai Gurley. Notwithstanding recognizable registers with regard to suspicious circumstance and catastrophic end, however, Liang was—by contrast to his aforementioned law enforcement brethren—actually indicted by a grand jury on February 10, 2015, and charged with second-degree manslaughter, second-degree assault, reckless endangerment, criminally negligent homicide, and two counts of official misconduct.[14] Controversially, Liang was not only arraigned; he would—at the end of the trial—be the first NYPD officer to be convicted for a shooting that occurred in the line of duty in over a decade.[15] Liang predictably pleaded not guilty to the charges; he was—one year later, on February 11, 2016—found guilty of manslaughter and official misconduct. Two months after the verdict, on April 19, 2016, Brooklyn Supreme Court Justice Danny Chun sentenced Liang to probation (five years) and eight hundred hours of community service.[16] In the interim period between indictment and sentencing, Liang's case drew a number of reactions, principally among Asian American activists and politicians who, as will subsequently be clear, faced a peculiarly racialized conundrum.

With Liang's trial underway, more than three thousand Chinese Americans gathered at New York City Hall in March to accordingly support the Chinese American officer and register their objection to his indictment;

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

the following month, in April, thousands marched across the Brooklyn Bridge to Manhattan's Chinatown (in the Lower East Side) to raise awareness about the case and campaign on Liang's behalf. Integral to these protests and central to these demonstrations were problematic references to the civil rights movement (wherein Martin Luther King Jr.'s "injustice everywhere" declarations served as rallying cries) and the overriding assertion that Liang's prosecution upsettingly fit the convenient rubrics of a racially inflected scapegoat narrative. Indeed, as state assemblyman Ron Kim surmised, "Our system failed Gurley and it failed Liang. It pitted the unjust death of an innocent young black man against the unjust scapegoating of a young Asian police officer who was frightened, poorly trained, and who committed a terrible accident."[17] For many Asian American community activists, such legally inflected "firsts"—which encapsulated Liang's singular indictment vis-à-vis recent NYPD history and included above-discussed nonprosecuted shootings in Cleveland and Ferguson (among so many others)—ostensibly brought to light wrongful rebukes part and parcel of racially driven condemnations.

Even so, such protests expectedly drew quick criticism and some ire from other antiracist activists, who—under the banner of the previously mentioned Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement—had consistently levied critiques against the United States as de facto police state; these pro-Liang campaigns likewise garnered reproach from other organizations such as #Asians4BlackLives-NYC, which repeatedly stressed "solidarity with the family of Akai Gurley" and demanded that "all police officers are held accountable when they cause unjustified death and injuries in communities that are paid to protect and serve." Noting that supporters of Peter Liang "made reference to Martin Luther King Jr., the legacy of the Civil Rights movement, and the murder of Vincent Chin," #Asians4BlackLives-NYC asked, "Can we see that the death of Akai Gurley and so many black lives are linked to this history of racism in this country? Like Peter Liang, the men responsible for Vincent Chin's death never saw a day in jail. Can we see that Vincent Chin shares more in common with Akai than with Peter?"[18] These bipartisan invocations of the midcentury civil rights movement and the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin (a veritable touchstone in Asian American studies), as specifically deployed in pro-Liang campaigns, renders discernible the extent to which Asian America—as imagined political enclave and conflicted community formation—is more often than not precariously complicit vis-à-vis contemporary debates concerning rights, race, and racism.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

Allusive of "involvement with others in an activity that is unlawful or morally wrong," connotative of collaborative engagement, and indicative of implicit agreement, *complicit* on one level operates as an apt adjectival modifier for Liang, whose shooting of Akai Gurley was illegal, ethically vexed, and—to varying degrees and divergent ends—consistent with a national police practice of anti-Black, racist profiling.[19] Such a term likewise functions as an appropriate descriptor for pro-Liang activists, who utilized the histories of anti-Asian racism and the civil rights movement as a means of militating against Liang's indictment. On another level, as status quo indicator, *complicity*—as paradoxically mediated in the public declarations of #Asians4BlackLives-NYC—encompasses the in-between-ness of Asian America as a distinct demographic location and heterogeneous political site. As Jay Caspian Kang in a *New York Times* article titled, "How Should Asian-Americans Feel about the Peter Liang Protests?", convincingly summarizes:

> Many Asian-Americans felt that Liang had been offered up as a sacrificial lamb to appease the ongoing protests against police violence that started two summers ago in Ferguson, Missouri. The pro-Liang protests, in turn, sparked small counterprotests by black activist, who argued that justice had been served and that a killer cop was a killer cop, period. A discomforting paradox lay beneath the whole confrontation, one that cut straight across the accepted modern vision of Asians and their adjacency to whiteness: if Liang (and, by extension, all Asian Americans) enjoyed the protection of whiteness, then how do you explain his conviction? . . . It is my belief that Asian-Americans have to form their own way of talking about race, privilege, and justice, one that acknowledges both our relative privilege and the costs of our invisibility.[20]

Kang's consideration of the Liang conundrum—which pivots on the urgent acknowledgment of "adjacent whiteness," the implicit evaluation of model minoritized Asian American privilege, and the problematics of binaried black/white invisibility—very much intersects with the nuanced queries and analyses that compose *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*. As the individual essays bring to light, this multilayered attention to "race, privilege, and justice" necessarily begins with an acknowledgment of racial privilege or, more directly, "adjacent whiteness." This racial proximity to privilege and power—attributable to the assimilative ongoingness of model minoritization and threatened by the specter of perpetual foreignness—accentuates the current state and stakes of Asian American

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

studies, an institutionalized interdiscipline marked by comparative paradigms, (in)visible racial projects, past/present paradoxes, and domestic/foreign polemics.

Essay Overviews

Such Janus-faced appraisals and critical juxtapositionings, which bring into focus the many contradictions of U.S. exceptionalism, are evident in Part One, titled "Ethnic Studies Revisited." As suggested at the titular level, this section examines the past, present, and future of ethnic studies via a consideration of where Asian American studies has been (as institutionalized discipline and public race project) and maps where it may be going (in light of recent student protests and the wholesale defunding of U.S. higher education). Part One begins with Amy Uyematsu's "Five Decades Later: Reflections of a Yellow Power Advocate Turned Poet," which evocatively looks back on the artist's foundational Asian American manifesto, "The Emergence of Yellow Power"; this retrospective engagement presages Uyematsu's subsequent meditation on the ways in which the aims of Yellow Power have yet to be realized despite the large-scale institutionalization of Asian American studies as viable academic focus and concentrated field. Such movement reflections foreground Timothy Yu's "Has Asian American Studies Failed?" which takes as a starting point the still-forming notion of discernible Asian American "publics." Arguing that the field's critical work—particularly with regard to deconstructing race, nation, and power—is largely restricted to narrow academic imaginaries, Yu pushes practitioners to make this labor "more public" and urges scholars to intervene far more quickly and aggressively in national discussions around race and Asian Americans.

Yu's appeal for more aggressive interventions via larger debates concerning race and racialization is divergently deliberated in Nitasha Sharma's "The Racial Studies Project: Asian Americans Studies and the Black Lives Matter Campus." Fixed to the recent "successful" institutionalization of Asian American studies at Northwestern University, Sharma advocates for the expansion of the field's ethno-racial sites as a means of making more relevant the work of Asian American studies to antiracist student activists; such relevance is incontrovertibly predicated on a need to move beyond the study of Asian populations to more clearly accentuate the field's critical centrality in social justice campaigns involving racial violence and mainstream conversations concerning contested U.S. racial formations. This politicized attentiveness to applicability, program building, and

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

institutionalization is differentially contemplated in Cathy J. Schlund-Vials's "Planned Obsolescence, Strategic Resistance: Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, and the Neoliberal University." Arguing that the higher education establishment of ethnic studies was at its very inception precarious because of nonpermanent funding tracks and ephemeral faculty lines, Schlund-Vials deconstructs the politics of program formation as a means of militating against the neoliberal dynamics of what has euphemistically been characterized as "diversity management" by college and university administrators. Such stresses on the politics of program formation and the polemics of institutional obligation are further explored in Anita Mannur's "Un-homing Asian American Studies: Refusals and the Politics of Commitment," which provocatively accesses via personal administrative account the assimilative costs of curricular integration and disciplinary collapse.

Whereas Part One contemplates the institutionalization of Asian American studies and Asian American publics, Part Two—"Displaced Subjects"—includes essays that critically question the perils of field codification, the hazards of latent intervention, and the problems of field silence. Junaid Rana's "No Muslims Involved: Letter to Ethnic Studies Comrades" interrogates the constraints of U.S. race-based inquiries via a pointed critique of what is tantamount to a polemics of exclusion with regard to Palestine, the War on Terror, and pervasive Islamophobia; in so doing, Rana issues a potent challenge to both ethnic studies and Asian American studies theorists vis-à-vis radical revision and revolutionary inclusion. Such revisionary calls to shift the insular focus of Asian American studies to accommodate global politics and terrains are echoed in Asha Nadkarni's "Outsourcing, Terror, and Transnational South Asia," which initially explores the ways in which outsourcing and terror function as distinct transnational circuits between the United States and South Asia. The tracing of this particular phenomenon presages Nadkarni's subsequent assessment of contemporary discourses concerning development via British imperialism, postcolonial nationalisms, and U.S. neoimperialism. These transnational and international evaluations accordingly substantiate Nadkarni's insistence that Asian American studies must expand its global purview to better theorize the contemporary relationships between and representations of outsourcing and terror that are incontrovertibly constitutive of U.S. domestic politics and American foreign policy.

Whereas Rana and Nadkarni analogously advocate to extend the theoretical sights of Asian American studies to better accommodate for the actualities of neoliberalism and the terror-driven realities of U.S. empire, Rajini Srikanth and Candace Fujikane consider the displaced "site" of

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

Palestine as both organizing issue and human rights locus. Srikanth's "Asian American Studies and Palestine: The Accidental and Reluctant Pioneer" considers the perplexing aftermath of the Association for Asian American Studies' (AAAS) academic boycott of Israel. Notwithstanding the fact that the AAAS was the first academic organization in the United States to issue such a resolution, and despite subsequent BDS boycotts by the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) and the American Studies Association (ASA) (among others), there has—to date—been no further discussion about this "pioneering action" within the AAAS, the field's primary organizational hub. Srikanth's essay deliberates upon this silence and interrogates whether such restraint signals a field failure with regard to rights-oriented academic activism. Such silences with regard to the "displaced subject" of Palestine are correspondingly evaluated in Fujikane's "Against the Yellowwashing of Israel: The BDS Movement and Liberatory Solidarities across Settler States," which maps the intersection of Hawaiian settler-colonial politics and anti-Palestine agendas via senator Daniel Inouye's career-long support of Israel. In particular, Fujikane dismantles the strategic use of Japanese American incarceration/internment in the opportunistic elevation of Israel as alleged asylum state.

These global critiques of Asian American studies as an at times inconsistently engaged, transnationally inflected field continue in Part Three, "Remapping Asia, Recalibrating Asian America." This section opens with "Transpacific Entanglements," co-authored by Yên Lê Espiritu, Lisa Lowe, and Lisa Yoneyama. "Transpacific Entanglements" offers an analysis of what Espiritu, Lowe, and Yoneyama assert are "the often disavowed histories of U.S. war, colonialism, capitalism, and militarized empire in Asia and the Pacific Islands and the racialized figure of the 'Asian American.'" Espiritu, Lowe, and Yoneyama congruently push for a re-evaluation of the postwar period as one that was shaped by U.S. Cold War social science and problematic narratives of liberation; this tactical use of science and narrative correspondingly governs in imperialistic, militarized fashion subjects in Asia. Such rethinking of Asian subjects, which carries with it a geopolitical re-evaluation of academic politics, scholastic polemics, and governmental agendas, presages the focus of Martin F. Manalansan IV's "Tensions, Engagements, Aspirations: The Politics of Knowledge Production in Filipino American Studies." Contending that Filipino American studies as diasporic field negotiates to varying ends the vexed borders of area studies, American studies, and ethnic studies, Manalansan observes that the problems of borders are by no means limited to semantics but instead encompass issues of unequal power distribution. Indicative of a

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

heretofore underexamined epistemic privilege, these inequalities render visible the present and future predicaments of Filipino American studies within what Manalansan characterizes as "North-South imperial relations, neoliberal university policies, and disciplinary formations."

The complicated academic relationship between "North" and "South" is productively revised to fit the likewise contested contours of "East" and "West" in Cynthia Wu's "Asian International Students at U.S. Universities in the Post-2008 Collapse Era," which addresses the ways in which Asian American studies' overriding insistence on recovering a useable resistant past via the aforementioned rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s has made it troublingly reluctant to examine relevant accommodation. As the title suggests, Wu considers how the intellectual trajectory of the field, dominated by a limited U.S.-centrism, has proved largely ineffective with regard to the twenty-first century influx of international students from Asian countries at U.S. universities. Such "East-West" reorientations assume a different register in Kandice Chuh's "Asians Are the New . . . What?," which opens with recent debates involving Asian Americans, university admissions, and affirmative action. Noting the "constitutive ambivalence that has characterized the production of 'Asian' as a racial category in the U.S. political and cultural imagination," and connecting this process of "Asian racialization" to economically determined "middleman" model minority discourses within the social ontology of the U.S. populace, Chuh calls for a critical reckoning of the model minority-identified Asian American subject. Such reckonings, in turn, enable a critical diagnosis of the continuing dominance of global capitalism as a defining feature of the U.S. nation.

Part Four—"Toward an Asian American Ethic of Care"—shifts the focus from the systemic to the affective in its diverse contemplation of embodiment, engagement, and ethos. To that end, Yoonmee Chang's "Asian Americans, Disability, and the Model Minority Myth" operates as a significant transition essay that revises Chuh's contemplation of the model minority-identified Asian American subject via a sustained critique of the ableist aspects of Asian American studies. Such ableism, as Chang convincingly maintains, obscures through minoritized exceptionalism the possibility of a disabled Asian American personhood, rendering such bodies as "impossible subjects." Seeing "otherwise" with regard to Asian American personhood and incarnation is likewise the focus of Sharon A. Suh's "Buddhist Meditation as Strategic Embodiment: An Optative Reflection," which seriously scrutinizes the relationship of Buddhism, "one of America's racialized other religious darlings," to Asian American studies, which has yet to

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

consistently recognize religion as a legitimate site upon which to map race, gender, and sexuality. Suh argues that "the common Buddhist units of measure and authenticity"—for instance, Orientalized monks and Eastern meditation—"are uncritically reproduced in larger Asian American discourses that continue to overlook the nondevotional and nonmeditative practices of Buddhist laity." Suh's essay counters those discourses by engendering a new way of seeing meditation politics as a means of ameliorating bodily alienation and internalized white supremacy.

This shift to the ethical and contemplative, facilitated by a perceptible turn to interiority, undergirds Brandy Liên Worrall-Soriano's "What Is Passed On (Or, Why We Need Sweetened Condensed Milk for the Soul)," which engages the personal means of reflecting upon the political. In particular, Worrall-Soriano—whose recently published cancer memoir, *What Doesn't Kill Us* (2014) has received much critical acclaim—reflects upon how the field of Asian American studies, notwithstanding its preoccupations with state-authorized conflict and trauma, has historically failed to deal with widespread stigmatizations involving illness. Worrall-Soriano maps these omissions via a creative nonfiction exploration of her familial past; such forays, which assume the form of intergenerational palimpsest, bring to light the degree to which Asian American studies remains—in the face of teleology and despite critical movement—a post-traumatic stressed engagement. Such interior moves are divergently explored in Min Hyoung Song's "An Ethics of Generosity," which uses as a main contrapuntal premise the logics of neoliberal self-interest and its disastrous implications for Asian Americans and other groups of color. Song accordingly calls for a deconstruction of such logics as a means of militating against the disastrous legacies and consequences of neoliberalism; such resistance, Song successively maintains, demands a different relationship and reaction to various forms of systemic violence. Last, but certainly not least, *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* closes with Viet Thanh Nguyen's afterword, "Becoming Bilingual, or Notes on Numbness and Feeling," which unwaveringly and unabashedly deconstructs how Asian American studies has become professionalized and entrenched, and in that sense, has both succeeded and failed.

Taken together and in drawing to a close, the essays included in *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* accentuate a series of tensions, a set of contradictions, and a structure of possibilities that have, from the interdiscipline's inception, been at the forefront of a field that was and remains—notwithstanding various vistas and diverse sites—unwaveringly domestic and international, irresolutely transnational and diasporic, and intermittently

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

accommodationist and activist. As significant, such wide-ranging terrains, which productively and unavoidably encompass the inconsistences of American democracy, the logics of U.S. imperialism, and the dynamics of in-flux racial formation, reinforce the political possibilities of the interdiscipline's ever-more relevant critical dimensions. These dimensions, which contain and intersect with what Lisa Lowe constructively termed "Asian Americanist critique," render pressingly palpable the necessity of the interdiscipline in what is—in the post-Obama, Trump era—an extreme and multifaceted moment of crisis.

To that end, as Lowe reminds us, Asian American culture (and politics) "is the site of more than critical negation of the U.S. nation; it is a site that shifts and marks alternatives to the national terrain by occupying other spaces, imagining different narratives and critical historiographies, and enacting practices that give rise to new forms of subjectivity and new ways of questioning the government of human life by the national state."[21] As *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies* underscores, integral to interrogating the interdiscipline's potential and limitations is the indefatigable and unending labor of envisioning "different narratives and critical historiographies" to instantiate the formation of new subjectivities, under-mined coalitions, and underexplored locales of resistance (within and outside the academy). Such reimagined investments vis-à-vis field, practice, and activism ultimately serve as a potent through-line for this volume, which takes seriously the present-day precariousness evident in multiple facets of political, academic, and everyday life.

NOTES

1. Passed in 1965, the Hart-Celler Act (known alternatively as the Immigration and Nationality Act) ended an era of Asian exclusion. The Hart-Celler Act not only increased Asian immigration overall; it concomitantly inaugurated immigration by groups previously underrepresented within Asian America, such as Koreans and South Asians. The act is credited for facilitating the first en masse migration of Asian immigrations to the United States.

2. *OED Online*, s.v. "flashpoint, n., 1," https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flashpoint.

3. See Roderick A. Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 17.

4. "Vertical patrols" refer to the practice of posting officers on different floors of a building simultaneously; this practice is specific to the surveil-

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

lance of housing projects. The technique was originally deployed by the Chicago Housing Authority Police Department (which is now defunct) and is presently used by the New York City Police Department Housing Bureau. This is considered a controversial practice insofar as it targets low-income populations (because of setting) and is often guided by the concomitant racial profiling of those populations.

5. Snejana Farberov, "'We Cannot Repeat the 1970s': NYPD Commissioner Bill Bratton Calls for Crackdown on Gun Violence after 22 Are Shot and Killed in New York over the Weekend," *Daily Mail*, August 3, 2015, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3184172/We-repeat-fiasco-1970s-NYPD-Commissioner-Bill-Bratton-calls-crackdown-gun-violence-bloody-weekend-New-York-sees-22-shot-three-killed.html.

6. See Hansi Lo Wang, "'Awoken' By N.Y. Cop Shooting, Asian American Activists Chart Way Forward," *NPR.org*, April 23, 2016, http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/04/23/475369524/awoken-by-n-y-cop-shooting-asian-american-activists-chart-way-forward.

7. As details of Gurley's shooting came to light, the question of whether or not Liang had been properly trained in CPR emerged as a key prosecutorial consideration. On November 3, 2016, Landau testified that Liang had received approximately two minutes' worth of CPR training at the police academy. See Sarah Maslin Nir, "Officer Liang's Partner Testifies He Got Little CPR Training," *New York Times*, November 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/nyregion/officer-liangs-partner-testifies-he-got-little-cpr-training.html?_r=0.

8. "Hear the 911 Call about Tamir Rice: Gun Is 'Probably Fake,' Caller Says," *Los Angeles Times*, November 26, 2014, http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-tamir-rice-911-call-20141126-htmlstory.html. Purportedly, Loehmann and Garmback were unaware of the suspect's age when they responded to the call; this information had been left out of the original police dispatch.

9. Ibid.

10. Eric Heisig, "FBI Agent Who Gave First Aid to Tamir Rice said Cleveland Officers on Scene 'Didn't Know What to Do,'" *Cleveland.com*, June 14, 2015, http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2015/06/fbi_agent_who_gave_first_aid_t.html.

11. Ibid.

12. It was subsequently revealed that the Cleveland Police Department had received numerous complaints concerning police brutality and disproportionate force prior to the Tamir Rice shooting. See Timothy Williams and Mitch Smith, "Cleveland Officer Will Not Face Charges in Tamir Rice Shooting Death," *New York Times*, December 28, 2015,

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/29/us/tamir-rice-police-shootiing-cleveland.html?_r=0.

13. On July 17, 2014, Eric Garner was apprehended by officers in Staten Island, New York, on the basis that he was selling cigarettes without a license. Pantaleo attempted to place Garner in handcuffs; upon reaching for his wrist, Garner pulled away. Pantaleo then placed Garner in a chokehold that lasted roughly twenty seconds. According to eyewitness accounts, Garner stated—eleven times—that he could not breathe; the officers on site eventually placed Garner on his side but offered no additional medical assistance. Garner died as a result of injuries incurred during the chokehold.

14. Jaeah Lee, "Why Was Peter Liang One of So Few Cops Convicted for Killing an Unarmed Man?," *Mother Jones*, April 9, 2016, http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/03/peter-liang-police-conviction-nypd.

15. See Thomas Tracy, "NYPD Officer Peter Liang Found Guilty of Manslaughter in Fatal Shooting of Akai Gurley in Brooklyn Housing Development," February 12, 2016, *New York Daily News*, http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/nypd-peter-liang-guilty-fatal-shooting-akai-gurley-article-1.2528827.

16. Matt Hansen and Matt Pearce, "No Prison Time for Ex-NYPD Officer Peter Liang in Fatal Shooting of Akai Gurley," April 19, 2016, *Los Angeles Times*, http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-liang-sentencing-20160419-story.html.

17. Quoted in "Former NYPD Cop Peter Liang's Guilty Verdict Leaves a Community Divided," *NBC News*, February 13, 2016, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/former-nypd-cop-peter-liang-s-guilty-verdict-leaves-community-n518056.

18. Quoted in Annie Tan, "Peter Liang Was Justly Convicted. He's Not a Victim," *Huffington Post*, February 23, 2016, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/annie-tan/peter-liang-was-justly-convicted_b_9299860.html.

19. *OED Online*, s.v. "complicit,. adj, 1," https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flashpoint.

20. Jay Caspian Kang, "How Should Asian Americans Feel about the Peter Liang Protests," *New York Times*, February 23, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/23/magazine/how-should-asian-americans-feel-about-the-peter-liang-protests.html.

21. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On American Cultural Politics* (New York: Duke University Press, 1996), 29.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-03-06 18:07:28.

CHAPTER 2

Has Asian American Studies Failed?

Timothy Yu

Has Asian American studies failed?

That was the question I asked myself in December 2011, after reading a review in the *New York Times* of a new learning center at Heart Mountain, one of the camps where Japanese Americans were interned during World War II. In the midst of praise for the center, the review takes a surprising detour toward historical revisionism. Responding to "the explanation, now standard, that they were a result of wartime hysteria and racism," the author, Edward Rothstein, argues that internment was "more the rule than the exception" and was applied to other ethnic groups as well. Japan was "a racist, militant society" and "a number of Japanese-American organizations on the West Coast . . . were financially and ideologically devoted to the mother country and its policies." Finally, "the Japanese were known for similar espionage elsewhere." Rothstein concludes that although the internment was "racially tinged," "the context demonstrates that the relocation was a response—an extreme one—to a problem."[1]

As I sit down to write this, almost six years later, such defenses of internment have reached the national political scene. In November 2015, as numerous American politicians announced their opposition to accepting

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

Back to top.

refugees from Syria, Mayor David A. Bowers of Roanoke, Virginia, issued a statement citing the internment of Japanese Americans as a precedent for turning away Syrian refugees. "I'm reminded that President Franklin D. Roosevelt felt compelled to sequester Japanese foreign nationals after the bombing of Pearl Harbor," Bowers wrote, "and it appears that the threat of harm to America from ISIS now is just as real and serious as that from our enemies then."[2] Although Bowers apologized for his statement several days later, its reverberations reached the presidential campaign. When Donald Trump, who had called for banning the entry of all Muslims to the United States, was asked repeatedly by a *Time* reporter whether the internment was wrong, he refused to answer, replying only that "I would have had to be there at the time to tell you."[3] New Hampshire state representative Al Baldasaro, a cochair of Trump's New Hampshire campaign, was far less circumspect, telling John DiStaso of WMUR that Trump's ban on Muslims was "100 percent right" and explicitly comparing it to internment: "What he's saying is no different than the situation during World War II, when we put the Japanese in camps."[4]

Such views of Japanese American interment—that it was merely a product of military necessity, that Japanese Americans represented a legitimate threat, that there were substantial reasons to doubt the "loyalty" of Japanese Americans—are, of course, the very views that were originally used to justify the internment. And they are the very views that have been thoroughly debunked by historians of Asian America, who have helped establish what Rothstein calls the now "standard" view of the camps as a product of racism. This knowledge that the camps were a racist injustice was the direct product of decades of struggle by Japanese Americans and other Asian American activists to force the U.S. government, and the nation in general, to acknowledge the injustice of internment. In the course of that struggle, the experience of internment became one of the foundational narratives of the Asian American experience. Every major history of Asian Americans takes internment as one of its centerpieces, and any student who has spent five minutes in an Asian American studies classroom should know the history of internment. So how could it be, I wondered, that everyone from *New York Times* reporters to elected officials from both parties could reject the message that internment was wrong?

The question I asked myself—and then asked aloud on my blog—was whether this ignorance of the most basic facts of Asian American history could be seen as a failure of Asian American studies.[5] Had our field had so little impact on public consciousness? Had it failed in its task of giving Asian Americans a place in the American story?

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

My question sparked a surprisingly strong response, and the discussion that followed included Asian American activists, bloggers, and students as well as academics. It led to a forum in the *Journal of Asian American Studies* and to a standing-room-only panel at the Association for Asian American Studies annual conference.[6] My provocation, it seemed, had spoken to a set of ongoing anxieties within our field but also to our field's largest ambitions. For of course, to ask whether Asian American studies has failed is to ask what the goals of Asian American studies are in the first place.

As the conversation went on, I realized that my question was not the traditional concern that Asian American studies had abandoned its roots in serving Asian American communities. Instead, my concern was an outward-looking one: Was Asian American studies doing enough to project its knowledge to a wider public, to reshape American discourses about race? While it seems at times that Americans like nothing more than to talk *about* Asians, Asian Americans are still rarely *heard* in such discussions. There thus seemed to be a disconnect between the substantial institutional successes of Asian American studies over the past several decades and the impact its practitioners have had in the wider public sphere. What I wanted was a more public practice of Asian American studies, one in which the insights of our field would not exist merely on the margins of political discourse but could be brought to bear on the most central political questions.

In my blog post, I offered several suggestions for how we might advance a more public Asian American studies:

> Popularize the insights of our field for a wider audience
> Look outward toward "mainstream" audiences
> Advocacy: rapid response to public controversies involving Asian Americans
> Cultivate public intellectuals among the ranks of Asian Americanists

Asian Americanists, of course, have been doing all of these things for years, but how, if at all, could we amplify these efforts, expanding the space for practitioners of Asian American studies to intervene in public discourse?

Whether something was already changing, or whether I simply began noticing things I hadn't before, I can't say, but in the wake of my initial observations, I thought I did begin to see more evidence of voices from Asian American studies making their way into public and political discourse. In particular, I want to highlight several events in the past few years where Asian Americans emerged, perhaps unexpectedly, at the center

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

of public debates or controversies. In some ways, these incidents show that Asian American studies has had an impact on the public sphere but not necessarily in predictable ways. I want to emphasize two elements of these events: first, the impact of generational change on how Asian American studies influences the wider world; and second, the role of media, both traditional and digital, in linking Asian American studies to the public.

The first phenomenon was the unprecedented rise of Jeremy Lin as the first Asian American basketball superstar in 2012, which put Asian Americans at the center not just of the sports world but—for a moment at least—at the center of American popular culture. "Linsanity" became a national, even an international, phenomenon. Race was not incidental to this phenomenon but central to it, as the novelty of an Asian American star in a sport dominated by African Americans became the main storyline. Lin was hailed as a breakthrough figure, even as he was also dismissed by some as a "flash in the pan" and also, of course, made the target of racist jokes. To many Asian Americans, he became a hero, perhaps the most significant icon of Asian American masculinity since Bruce Lee.

One thing that struck me at the time was that some Asian Americanists didn't seem to take Linsanity very seriously. Asian American obsession with Linsanity seemed to concentrate among scholars and writers in their thirties and forties, who filled social media and the blogosphere with Lin-centric posts. Linsanity briefly opened up a space, indeed a hunger, for commentary on Asian Americans in the national media. And I think it's no accident that the academics who were able to jump into that space—Oliver Wang in the *LA Times*, erin Khuê Ninh for ESPN.com, myself for CNN.com—were either former journalists or bloggers. The ability to move between academic and popular audiences, and above all to respond quickly to current events, may be a kind of cross-training that many younger academics have and that even more could benefit from.

I want to touch on just one other element of Linsanity, which is the debate over how to label Lin and how Lin himself intervened in that debate. The media initially described Lin primarily as "Chinese American," but as reporters realized that Lin's parents had immigrated from Taiwan, they almost universally adopted a rather awkward phrasing, calling Lin "the first Chinese or Taiwanese American player in the NBA." The debate over how to label Lin was almost always framed in geopolitical terms, with articles referencing battles over Taiwanese sovereignty and the competing attempts of fans and journalists in both Taiwan and mainland China to claim Lin as a native son. For an Asian Americanist, of course, the problem here is

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

almost too obvious to note: It's the myth of the perpetual foreigner, the idea that Lin "belonged" to one or the other of these ancestral origins rather than being American.

Lin himself has been diplomatic in responding to such discussions, nodding to both his Chinese ancestry and his parents' immigration from Taiwan. But Lin more frequently, and much more naturally, refers to himself simply as "Asian American." As Howard Beck of the *New York Times* reported, Lin was asked during a 2012 All-Star Weekend press conference about whether his ethnicity had caused him to be overlooked earlier in his career. Lin replied: "I think just being Asian American, obviously when you look at me, I'm going to have to prove myself more so, again and again and again. . . . But I think that's fine. It's something that I embrace, and it gives me a chip on my shoulder. But I'm very proud to be Asian American and I love it."[7]

I think it's important that Lin didn't say here what he easily could have said, which was "Perhaps I was overlooked, but now I want people just to see me as a basketball player, not an Asian American basketball player." He declined the universalizing or postracial move in favor of racial pride. And the identity he chose was not "Chinese American" or "Taiwanese American" but the pan-ethnic, racialized category of "Asian American." I want to point to this moment as a moment of success. Asian American studies, and the Asian American movement of which it is a part, has indeed succeeded in educating a generation for whom the self-identification "Asian American" comes naturally. Lin's Asian American identifications go well beyond mere naming; as media scholar Lori Kido Lopez notes, Lin is also an active participant in the Asian American online universe, making a series of videos with Asian American YouTube superstar KevJumba.[8]

I make this point as a way of counterbalancing our disciplinary inclination toward a relentless deconstruction of the term "Asian American." At least since Lisa Lowe's groundbreaking *Immigrant Acts*, we have sought to show how the category "Asian American" is internally divided, hybrid, and unstable.[9] Our embrace of transnational and diasporic frameworks has further challenged the category's boundaries. Kandice Chuh's widely cited theorization of Asian American studies in *Imagine Otherwise* as a "subjectless discourse" may make us wonder what remains to ground our discipline.[10] It's useful to remind ourselves, then, that "Asian American" still functions as a powerful point of identification, particularly for young people. That identification does not have to be understood as a monolithic one. It doesn't prevent Lin from embracing his global role as a basketball

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

ambassador to Taiwan and China. Nor does it prevent my own students, who are passionately advocating for a strengthening of Asian American studies, from simultaneously demanding ethnic-specific classes in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Hmong diasporic studies. We should ask ourselves whether what I see as an increasing theoretical allergy to the term "Asian American" really speaks to the expansive and flexible ways young Asian Americans are using it.

The second event I want to touch on briefly is the 2014 debate in California over SCA 5, a bill that would partially reverse the ban on affirmative action at public colleges and universities enacted by Proposition 209 in 1996. After SCA 5 passed the state senate, it became the subject of heated debate. It wasn't surprising that the debate featured divisive racial politics, but rather than pitting whites against people of color, much of the national media coverage of the debate focused on the role of Asian Americans in the debate.

Many of the headlines I was seeing proclaimed that "Asian American groups" were leading the opposition to SCA 5. As many of my colleagues pointed out, this flew in the face of survey data indicating that affirmative action enjoyed something like 60–70 percent support among Asian Americans. Closer examination revealed that the "Asian American" opposition to SCA 5 was dominated by a few Chinese American groups, while numerous other Asian American groups were lining up in support of the measure. Yet the narrative was firmly established, and "Asian American opposition" came to be seen as the primary reason for the bill's eventual withdrawal from consideration in the state assembly.

How, if at all, was Asian American studies invoked in this debate, and how did Asian Americanists intervene? As Asian American activists and bloggers sought to rally support for SCA 5, they cited academic research showing the benefits of diversity for Asian American students and illustrating persistent inequities in higher education. Veteran blogger Jenn Fang of *Reappropriate* was particularly active in creating a clearinghouse for pro–affirmative action information.[11] And there were a few examples of direct interventions by Asian Americanists themselves. Political scientist Karthick Ramakrishnan published an op-ed in the *LA Times* on March 7 calling for an end to "a debate based on fear."[12] Several days later, the blog *Angry Asian Man* featured a blistering attack on the "hate, fear, and lies" of the SCA 5 opposition by OiYan Poon, who has worked extensively on issues around Asian Americans and college admissions.[13] Poon also spearheaded the use of the hashtag #NoLiesNoHate on Twitter as a way of rallying support for SCA 5, particularly among Asian Americans.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

Poon's intervention may suggest a new model of academic engagement with public debates. Her piece appeared not in a traditional media outlet but on a blog widely read by Asian Americans, and her extension of the campaign onto Twitter suggests the increasingly central role of social media in activism—a topic I'll touch on again in just a moment. The role of the medium is also reflected in the tone of Poon's piece for *Angry Asian Man*, which is far from a dispassionate academic discourse: It fearlessly calls out the "bullshit" of the "haters" of SCA 5 and boldly mixes analysis and advocacy. This example suggests an increasingly powerful network among younger Asian American scholars, activists, bloggers, and journalists, and it's one that may form a model for projecting Asian American studies more forcefully into the public sphere.

We should note, though, that this is not entirely a success story either. By the time Poon's post went up on March 10, the media was already reporting that the tide was turning against SCA 5, and it was pulled from consideration in the assembly a week later. One of the problems with attempts by scholars to intervene directly in public debates is that we often just can't move fast enough; scholarship takes time, of course, but we're also generally unused to producing copy on demand and lack obvious outlets to do such of-the-moment publishing. Poon's intervention happened at light speed by our usual standards, but are there things that our field can do, institutionally, to make it possible for Asian Americanists to respond even more rapidly on matters of public concern?

Of course, the fastest-moving discourse of all is now on social media, and Asian Americans have taken a prominent role in so-called Twitter or hashtag activism. In December 2013, #NotYourAsianSidekick began trending on Twitter, with thousands of posts from Asian Americans, particularly Asian American feminists, expressing frustration with their exclusion not only from mainstream discourse but from conversations about race and gender. While the hashtag attracted widespread media coverage, from the *Washington Post* to *Time* and *Salon*, it also attracted critique from within the Asian American activist community. An article by Kai Ma in *Time* cited a tweet by veteran activist Mari Matsuda: "We theorized #NotYourAsianSidekick ideas since the 70's but kids gotta learn it from a damn hashtag. Still no Asian Am Studies at most U's."[14] Matsuda's tweet explicitly contrasted the ephemeral "success" of a trending tweet with the institutional "failure" to nurture Asian American studies within higher education.

The topic heated up again when #CancelColbert sprung up in reaction to a joke made by Stephen Colbert of *The Colbert Report* referencing his fictional "Ching-Chong Ding-Dong Foundation." (Colbert was mocking

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

attempts by the owner of Washington, DC's NFL team to placate Native American critics of his team's name.) Launched by Suey Park, who had also initiated #NotYourAsianSidekick, #CancelColbert proved far more divisive, drawing rebukes and even ridicule from white liberals and ambivalence from many Asian American writers and activists.

While I did see some academics participating in both hashtags and retweeting some of the most popular posts, with a few exceptions Asian Americanists did not get directly involved in these heated debates. What's curious is that although many of the terms that ran through both of these conversations—feminism, racism, colonialism, orientalism—are concepts central to our work, they were being used in ways that seemed relatively disconnected from academic discourse. The connection that Matsuda suggested—between activism and Asian American studies—seemed absent. Yet thousands of young Asian Americans participated passionately in these Twitter conversations, suggesting a deep unmet need in the discourse on race. While in the cases of Linsanity and SCA 5, academics were able to find ways of participating in media and policy discourses—with varying degrees of success—the minute-by-minute unfolding of a phenomenon like #CancelColbert represents the polar opposite of the deliberate pace of scholarship. The entire controversy erupted and was over within the course of less than a week, and few academics—few people, honestly—have the energy or stamina to engage in protracted Twitter warfare of the kind such conversations demand.

Is the "success" of #NotYourAsianSidekick and #CancelColbert a "failure" for our field? Let me suggest instead that it is a challenge. There is a large and growing population of young Asian Americans out there who we are not reaching. They live online, react quickly to media controversies, are familiar with terms like "microagressions" and "white privilege." But we can't reach them all in our classrooms, certainly not without a lot more resources being devoted to Asian American studies across the country. Without stopping being scholars—without shortchanging the vital research that we do—how can we make the lessons of Asian American studies more available, more vital, for the people who most need them: young Asian Americans themselves? The examples I've described here offer a few possible guidelines: forming stronger networks among scholars, bloggers, journalists, and activists; responding more quickly and nimbly to fast-moving political and cultural events. Individuals are already doing this. Can we, as a discipline, more effectively support and strengthen such efforts, so that the vital work Asian American studies does is projected ever more effectively into the public sphere?

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

The last couple of years have, I think, offered some positive signs of progress toward a more public Asian American studies. The first development has been the rise of more organized efforts to gather and present the expertise of Asian Americanists in a way that can have a more visible impact on public discourse. I'm thinking in particular of Karthick Ramakrishnan's AAPI Data project, which has been gathering social science research and survey data on Asian Americans and presenting them in media-friendly infographics that can easily be picked up by reporters or that can form the basis for social media posts or longer op-eds.[15] One possible area of future work could be to see if such efforts can be expanded to include more disciplines within Asian American studies—an effort that would require coordination across our discipline, as well as some willingness on the part of scholars in various fields to think about how to popularize their work.

We have also been reminded recently that it's possible for a single book by an accomplished scholar or writer to have a significant impact on public discourse. We might think of past examples like Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore*, for many years both a standard textbook in Asian American history and a more widely read popular work, or Helen Zia's *Asian American Dreams*. Erika Lee's 2015 book *The Making of Asian America*, a wide-ranging new survey of Asian American history, attracted widespread media attention and reviews in the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*.[16] (Perhaps just as significantly, these two reviews themselves were written by Asian American reviewers.) Lee's book, framed by her own family history, is grounded in the most recent scholarship but is also consciously aimed at a popular audience, and it seems to have been successful in reaching a wide audience and in providing its author with a platform to intervene in current political debates; Lee authored a widely circulated editorial in the *New York Daily News* schooling Donald Trump on the issue of birthright citizenship and highlighting the role of Asian Americans in the history of that issue.[17]

Finally, I think we have started to see some trend toward media outlets actually turning to Asian American scholars and authors when issues relevant to Asian Americans hit the news. A small example can be found in the recent controversy over a literary anthology, *The Best American Poetry 2015*. The anthology included a poem by an author named Yi-Fen Chou, who turned out to be a white author, Michael Derrick Hudson, claiming to have adopted this Chinese name to increase his chances of publication. The ensuing uproar was, remarkably enough, widely reported in national and international media. Although the initial conversation revolved around

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

questions of pen names and "artistic freedom"—a conversation, moreover, dominated by white writers—the loud outrage of Asian American writers, particularly on social media, at Hudson's act of "yellowface" quickly shifted the focus of the discussion to racism.

My own social media response was to write a lengthy public Facebook post in which I humorously claimed to be the real author behind the fictitious "Michael Derrick Hudson," who remained unaware that he was not real. The post came to the attention of a reporter at *Slate* who interviewed me for a story she wrote on the controversy. I was subsequently interviewed by NBC, the *Guardian*, and the *Christian Science Monitor*, while poet and professor Victoria Chang was interviewed for a widely circulated article in the *Washington Post*.

While I've written more about the Yi-Fen Chou affair elsewhere, two aspects of the controversy seem particularly relevant here.[18] First, both Chang and I came to the attention of reporters through social media (Chang had criticized Hudson on Twitter), emphasizing the role of social media as a conduit between academic Asian American studies and mainstream media outlets. Second, both of us are creative writers in addition to being academics (Chang is a professor of creative writing, while I am primarily a scholar who also writes poetry), and the media often seems more willing to give space to Asian American creative writers than to Asian Americanist scholars. Since it is rare for writers (even Asian American writers) covering Asian American issues in the media to be familiar with scholarship in Asian American studies, a stronger social media presence by Asian Americanist scholars may help create links to mainstream media, as may the cultivation of "dual threat" Asian Americanists who can work in both scholarly and creative or popular genres.

In sum, I think there are many things we can do, both individually and collectively, to help rectify the "failure" of Asian American studies to have greater public impact. We can popularize the insights of our field; we can use both traditional and social media to increase connections between academic and mainstream discourses; we can consciously work to increase our collective capacity to intervene quickly and forcefully in public debates.

Returning to the examples with which I opened also reminds us that such public interventions are themselves deeply political. Contemporary apologies for Japanese American internment may at times be grounded in ignorance, but it is a willed ignorance, one that refuses to admit to the history of racism even in the face of "official" acceptance of the idea that the internment was racist. The few insights from Asian American studies and

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

Asian American experience that have made it into official history and public consciousness are far from secure in their place, and it must continue to be a goal of our field to establish a public space for the lessons of Asian American studies.

NOTES

1. Edward Rothstein, "The How of an Internment, but Not All the Whys," *New York Times*, December 9, 2011.

2. David A. Bowers, "David Bowers Statement on Syrian Refugees," *Roanoke Times*, November 18, 2015.

3. Michael Scherer, "Donald Trump Says He Might Have Supported Japanese Internment," *Time*, December 8, 2015.

4. John DiStaso, "State GOP Chairwoman Says Trump's Call to Ban Muslims from U.S. is 'Un-American,'" WMUR.com, December 7, 2015.

5. Timothy Yu, "Has Asian American Studies Failed?" Timpanyu.com, December 21, 2011.

6. Timothy Yu, "Has Asian American Studies Failed?" *Journal of Asian American Studies* 15, no. 3 (October 2012): 327–29.

7. Howard Beck, "Lin's New Challenge: Media Onslaught at All-Star Weekend," *New York Times*, February 24, 2012.

8. Lori Kido Lopez, part of the roundtable "Linsanity: Media, Culture, Masculinity," Association for Asian American Studies Conference, April 18, 2013.

9. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996).

10. Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

11. Jenn Fang, "List of #AAPI Groups & Posts in Support of Affirmative Action and #SCA5," *Reappropriate*, March 12, 2014.

12. Karthick Ramakrishnan, "Affirmative Action at California Colleges: A Debate Based on Fear," *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 2014.

13. OiYan Poon, "Hate, Fear, and Lies: How Anti-Affirmative Action Haters are Shoveling Bullsh*t about SCA5," *Angry Asian Man*, March 10, 2014.

14. Kai Ma, "#NotYourAsianSidekick Is Great. Now Can We Get Some Real Social Change?" *Time*, December 18, 2013.

15. Karthick Ramakrishnan, AAPI Data, http://aapidata.com/.

16. Erika Lee, *The Making of Asian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

17. Erika Lee, "A History Lesson for Donald Trump and His Supporters," *New York Daily News*, August 18, 2015.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

18. Timothy Yu, "The Real Yi-Fen Chou: What a Fake Poet Taught Us about Actual Asian Poets," *Angry Asian Man*, November 10, 2015, http://blog.angryasianman.com/2015/11/the-real-yi-fen-chou-what-fake-asian.html. This piece, written for the blog *Angry Asian Man*, was itself an attempt to put into practice some of the ideas I am raising here.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:44.

CHAPTER 3

The Racial Studies Project: Asian American Studies and the Black Lives Matter Campus

Nitasha Sharma

What is the role of ethnic studies, and specifically Asian American studies, in student activism against the corporate university? Founded by student movements in the 1960s, African American studies, Asian American studies, Latina/o studies, and Native American studies were born of a political desire for representation in higher education that privileged community and demanded structural change. Today students in campuses across the nation from California State University, East Bay to the University of Missouri and Yale University continue to make demands of administrators.[1] But they want more than representation, a seat at the table, or the promise of assimilation offered through the rhetoric of "inclusion."

At my home institution of Northwestern University, just north of Chicago in Evanston, student activists have taken administrators to task for their discourse on "diversity" that has come, in students' views, with little change in the wealthy, white, hetero- and gender-normative, and sexist cultures they experience on campus. The national Black Lives Matter movement has catalyzed student activists on my campus to become involved in innumerable issues that I discuss, below. What has been singular about their protests and activities is that they cross identity-based

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

Back to top.

lines to unite around specific concerns while drawing links across issues. The activities of campus activists have ignited my rethinking of the ethnic studies project—now segmented into autonomous identity-based areas of study (including Asian American studies) as a result of increasing institutionalization—in a more holistic manner more accurately termed the racial studies project.

This essay examines the role that a broader understanding of ethnic studies has played in recent student activism occurring on my campus, one of many elite universities facing such pressures. Campus leaders—mostly minority students and including many Black women—made numerous demands ranging from divestment in coal, private prisons, and Israel and Palestine to goals directly related to the Black Lives Matter movement. I initially wanted this essay to chart how the knowledge *we* impart in ethnic studies frames student leaders' understanding of campus politics. This line of thinking, however, ended up suggesting the opposite flow: that the subfields of ethnic studies should take cues from the intersectional and connective analyses that frame the demands of students. Their transnational, cross-racial, and issues-rather-than-identity-oriented frameworks suggest a unified racial studies project, rather than a growing commitment to the circumscribed subfields we are hired into as a result of increasing institutionalization. A collective racial studies approach (commonly called "ethnic studies") could prevent the co-optation of Asian American studies that results from our institutional recognition and diversity work within the neoliberal and corporate university.

Student Activism and the Institutional Formation of Ethnic Studies

In 1968, student strikers from the Black Student Union, with the support of the Third World Liberation Front, demanded the formation of an Ethnic Studies College that was created the following year at San Francisco State University—a college that has just waged a battle over budget cuts in 2016. Ethnic studies began that same year at the University of California Berkeley, which became my institutional home when I was a graduate student transplant fleeing the constraints of anthropology at another UC campus in the late 1990s. I found support as a student of comparative race studies and benefitted from graduate students who were politically oriented (the very things anthropology discouraged at the time) and the encouragement of faculty like Ronald Takaki and Evelyn Nakano Glenn—faculty whose hires were due to the earlier student strikes. Strikers' demands included "that, in the Fall of 1969, all applications of non-white students be

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

accepted," that faculty "chosen by non-white people as their teacher, be retained in their position," and "that 50 faculty positions be appropriated to the School of Ethnic Studies, 20 of which would be for the Black Studies program."[2] Early activists appealed for a transformed educational structure.

Their actions led to the institutionalization of the subfields of ethnic studies, which have since evolved alongside one another, albeit with uneven success and access to resources. In some cases, they are housed together under an ethnic studies or American studies umbrella, as in the case of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. In other cases (such as my home institution), the subfields are independent or not (at) all present. Many campuses have no Native American or Indigenous studies programs.[3]

The original demands of the 1968 student strikers appear to have been met, with hundreds of ethnic studies departments and programs across the United States and rising (if unbalanced) numbers of nonwhite students and faculty. Each year, Northwestern and similar universities issue press releases that focus on "metrics" of excellence in diversity, meaning they provide race, class, and first generation student head counts that are to reflect a progressive stance in a global world. Northwestern University also boasts a team of "Diversity Leaders" and multiple task forces, while its website offers an impressive number of reports (excluding the more damning ones) written by innumerable committees. However, institutional recognition means that faculty across ethnic studies also face pressure to publish or perish, to serve on numerous committees, and to prove their irreplaceability to campus administrators. This can lead us away from the ethnic studies project of providing counter-hegemonic understandings of the operations of power as they have created and affected various racialized groups, including a critique of the very institutions we inhabit.

What, then, does the institutionalization of terms like *diversity* and the various ethnic studies subfields mean within our current academic climate? On the one hand, Asian Americans—and increasingly Asian international students—are touted as part of the "URM" or underrepresented minority student body demographics and constitute innumerable cultural and ethnic organizations. On the other hand, administrators and student services conflate Asian Americans with White students and provide few resources for helping them to contend with their specific experiences as racialized minorities. Administrators and fellow colleagues deny tenure to Asian American studies professors across the nation, many of them women. Yet, the Asian American Studies Program at Northwestern just won the right

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

to grant a major in the field. This happened through the efforts of committed undergraduate students who undertook years of consciousness raising about the need for the major, distinguishing Asian American studies from Asian studies, compiling hundreds of signatures on petitions, and educating people about the field. This victory was in no small part due to timing: Student activists inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement demanded this change at a time when students were holding administrators accountable for racism on campus across the United States. Student activism helps counteract the corporatization of universities that push the professionalization of our fields and the institutionalization of Asian American studies.

A Seat at the Table? Disciplining Asian American Studies

> There's been much talk lately—at academic institutions, among religious groups, and within mainstream discourse—about creating space at the table: "the table" symbolizing access and inclusion into dominant society.
>
> *Nyle Fort, "A Seat at the Table: Lupita Fever and American Pathology"*

Asian American studies appears to be a healthy, even thriving subfield. We have growing numbers of programs across the United States and universities like Yale that have small numbers of Asian Americanists have been motivated to increase them. The Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) is a vibrant and growing national association with international membership that hosts a first-rate annual conference with close to one thousand attendees. In addition, Asian American studies is a part of most university and college curricula. As significant are the scholars in our field whose research critically intervenes in debates about affirmative action and the causes and consequences of war, immigration, and settlement. Our scholarship provides alternative accounts and gives voice to silenced views of world history, racial capitalism, and global inequalities. Yet, with few exceptions, our scholarship is generally only read by those with an interest in Asians in the United States.

Notwithstanding program formations and academic reputations, the field remains vexed. Returning to Northwestern, with our approved major and our growing numbers of minors and majors (over thirty), the number of tenure track lines has—since I arrived over a decade ago—remained the same at just two full lines (we all have split appointments). Numbers may be one way to gauge the health of the field: numbers of tenured Asian

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

Americanists, numbers of Asian American students on campus, the number of programs and departments, numbers of majors and minors, our fiscal budgets, and so on. Yet if we move away from metrics and pressures to "get butts in seats" and prioritize the immeasurables—including our politics—that once motivated the ethnic studies project, we can see why, despite our "growth," Asian American studies maintains a sense of anxiety.

Crises are not new to our field: In 1998, the controversy surrounding the decision of the Association for Asian American Studies to rescind the Literary Book Award to Lois-Ann Yamanako, author of *Blu's Hanging*, made national headlines. Our annual conference features panels centered on crisis and reflection, including "Whither the Academic in Crisis" (2016) and "State of the Field: Asian American History" (2014). Panelists discuss precarity in the age of the corporate university and misunderstandings about Asian American studies (such as conflating it with Asian studies). There are panels on the struggle to fund and staff our programs and mentorship committees addressing the perils of earning tenure. "Crisis" is thus a central—albeit by no means predominant—thematic. When it leads to careful and committed reflection, this is one of our strengths. Our self-questioning and the precarious position of Asian Americanist scholars in the university allegorizes the uncertain racial positioning of Asian Americans in the United States. And this is something that cannot be measured but instead depends upon an analysis of our politics—the very task Asian Americanists are trained to undertake.

The disciplining, or creation of autonomous Asian American studies programs, suggests the health of our field. The subject matter, methods, and motives of our field are unique and they, along with the large number of Asian and Asian American students in higher education, affect our institutional location and direction. But our separate institutional development away from an ethnic studies formation that I am now terming "racial studies" suggested by the Black Student Union in 1968 partially accounts for our devaluation. Unlike other fields and particularly African American studies, Asian American studies has not garnered the respect, resources, or levels of autonomy it could in collaboration. More troubling, however, are the political and intellectual myopias that result from our shift away from cross-fertilization of knowledge production and teaching across ethnic studies.

Ethnic studies subfields are defined by identity groups. The mission statements of Asian American studies programs define their subject: "Asian-ancestry groups" (University of California, Berkeley), "Asian Americans in the United States" (University of Maryland), and "Asian and Pacific

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

Islander Americans" (California State University, Fullerton). Similarly, Black studies across the nation is described alternately as the study of "the global black experience" (Northwestern University), "the experiences of people of African descent in Black Atlantic societies" (Yale University), and "African descended people in America" (Arizona State University). However, unlike the robust theoretical contributions of African American studies on, for instance, race and colonialism that are widely read and shape our understanding of *all groups*, Asian American studies has yet to move beyond the study of Asian populations to be known for our overarching concepts such as diaspora and theories of immigration. I am not suggesting that the quality of our scholarship accounts for this insularity; rather Asian American studies, like Asians in the United States writ large, are generally not heard. How, then, can we more widely circulate our findings?

In 2003, Kandice Chuh articulated the limits of identity-based paradigms with a focus on Asian American studies and Gary Okihiro similarly urges us to move beyond population-based studies.[4] Yet, the development of distinct and autonomous ethnic studies subfields within colleges and universities further entrenches the study of identity-defined groups that limits both our intellectual contributions as well as the expansive political orientations that emerge through engagement across ethnic studies. The experiences of students within my two institutional locations (African American studies and Asian American studies) reveal the impacts of an identity-based and separate study of racialized groups on a university campus in the Black Lives Matter era.

Access/Tenure Denied: Asian American Studies and Black Lives Matter

> Why I would want to sit in the same place and around the same people that excluded and inferiorized me, and those who look like me, for so long? I don't want a seat at a table that was built and is maintained in the interest of consolidating power for a privileged elite. I don't want a seat at the table of white supremacy, nor do I want to fellowship at the tables of patriarchal domination, religious homophobia, or economic inequality. The table *is* the problem, not me, not black women, not us. Inviting an "exceptional" few from a historically oppressed community to "the table" is not a sign of progress. It's hegemony masquerading as progress. Symbolism is not structural change. Symbolic gestures don't fundamentally change, let alone challenge, the system of evil that created the table in the first place. The table, itself, must be destroyed.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

> And we *will* destroy it. We will burn it to the ground with . . .
> prophetic fire!
>
> *Nyle Fort, "A Seat at the Table: Lupita Fever and American Pathology"*

The strength of Black studies across the nation relative to other ethnic studies subfields is signified in the number of autonomous PhD-granting departments, the number of faculty, and a general understanding of and engagement with Black studies on and off campus. This institutional recognition is an allegory for the position of Black people in the United States as a (hyper)recognized racial group, the one signaled by the term "race" in mainstream U.S. discussions about "race relations." The primary association of African Americans (and not Indigenous, Asian, or Latina/o groups) with "race" is not only a result of this country's slave past and historic Jim Crow segregation. The ongoing, brutal, and particular forms of state and everyday mob violence faced by Black people in the United States is unique and sustained at crisis levels of incarceration and death.

Today, the Black Lives Matter movement founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi is the largest and most energized and potentially effective movement for social change since those that led to the rise of ethnic studies in the 1960s. Their call for police accountability for the murders of young Black men and women and the significance of having to actually state that particular lives matter has reverberated in all sectors of society. If segregation and the ongoing oppression of Black people inspired national movements for civil rights and Black Power that included student calls for Black faculty hires in 1968, the crisis faced by Black people today led to the Black Lives Matter movement, which includes student activist groups such as Black Lives Matter Northwestern University. Their demands have been met with open, if cautious, administrative ears. However, if the mainstream U.S. and campus politics do not recognize Asian Americans as racialized minorities subjected to historic and contemporary forms of exclusion and violence, how does this affect our claims for space within the university and within racial studies, more specifically? Whence Asian Americans and Asian American studies in the Black Lives Matter university?

In 2016, Dartmouth University denied tenure to a well-respected professor of English, representing the devaluation and misunderstanding of Asian American studies. A nationwide cry of dissent followed with charges of racism (redoubled in public comments about the case) and highlighted the overtaxation and undervaluation of women of color's service in and to the academy.[5] Misinformed comments at the end of online articles about

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

the case assumed the scholar was trained in Asia rather than at Princeton, an American bastion of knowledge. It revealed the stakes of particular nativist strains of racism faced by Asian Americans within the academy. This case highlights the stakes of being an Asian Americanist within traditional fields like English while holding intellectual communion across ethnic studies in a diversifying and neoliberal university.[6] At the time Aimee Bahng, housed in the English Department and an affiliate of the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, African and African-American Studies, and Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Programs, had a book forthcoming from the top press in her field and was part of the Ferguson Teaching Collective that was central to "Teaching Why Black Lives Matter" at Dartmouth University.[7] Was Bahng punished for raising her voice against anti-Black racism? More broadly, how has Black Lives Matter affected Asian American studies and students within the university? I speak to this through my appointment in both Asian American studies and African American studies and my engagements with faculty and students across the two fields.

As an anthropologist-turned-comparative race studies scholar, my career path was informed by the Department of Ethnic Studies and the Department of African American Studies and African Diaspora Studies at UC Berkeley. I taught, took classes, and interacted with students and faculty mentors from across the subfields. Ethnic studies trained me for my current split appointment with African American studies. In my individual work and teaching, it is nonetheless easy for me to forget that I am not in a unified ethnic studies department because I engage Asian American studies, African American studies, and American studies and cross-list my courses. I am likewise invested in the development of Native and Indigenous studies and maintain a relationship with Latina/o studies, which is physically housed with Asian American studies on my campus. Other than service for the broader university, I primarily interact with faculty and students across ethnic studies, which means I mostly interact with minorities and progressive Whites on a primarily White campus. I was hired alongside other ethnic studies colleagues who also have split appointments through a de facto comparative race studies and interdisciplinary cluster hire. We can relay to one department the kinds of support we may need in our other programs and vice versa, thereby building a flow of information and coalition of economic, programming, and intellectual support. Through teaching and mentorship, I get to interact with student activists, including those at the forefront of Black Lives Matter Northwestern University, who bridge these institutional divides in both their academic training and

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

their political worldviews. Dissonance occurs when I confront those in the academy who identify strongly and singularly with the one subfield of ethnic studies to which they are attached.

The intellectual and political projects of students reflect the ways they crisscross—or do not crisscross—the various fields that study race in the United States. Over the past year, I witnessed a twofold shift among my students that includes a (re)consolidation of identity politics. Among some students in African American studies, this means that Blackness, or rather, anti-Blackness, trumps any and all other kinds of racisms (if, indeed, critics acknowledge the reality of any other kind of racism). In this view, anti-Blackness is global and foundational to the formation of society. It is the basis from which other racisms, such as Islamophobia, Native genocide, and immigrant nativism, emerge. I thus found a different reaction to my articulation of the lessons I had learned through ethnic studies: that slavery, colonialism, indentured servitude, detentions and disappearances of Brown people at national borders and prisons intersected through the demands of White supremacy and capitalism. Some African American studies students recently interpreted my presentation of comparative race studies as "anti-Black" and students, especially those moved by the scholarship on afro-pessimism, read this as a move away from the specificity and exceptionalism of the Black condition as one of abjection. The combination (but not conflation) of these intellectual and political currents also led some people on campus to assume that one's politics is reflected in what Ronald Takaki called our "racial uniform."

This retrenchment of identity politics echoed in the second tendency among a different cohort of students: Asian American studies minors who take ethnic studies classes. We have, as I mentioned, over thirty majors and minors, most of whom are Asian American and include a number of multiracial, Black, Latina, and Latino students. Notably, and quite possibly due to our Asian American Studies Program's focus on comparative race and diaspora, none of our minors or majors are White.

Our Asian American studies students in the past few years have been wrestling with their role in movements for liberation (and particularly Black Lives Matter). They also are attempting to politicize other Asian students on campus who disparage the movement and find it, along with Asian American studies, irrelevant. Asian American studies students sought guidance on when and where to enter conversations on race that were taking place on campus. Black student activists told one Asian American student that he was not a minority, he was not Black, and therefore was, like White students, there to listen rather than to speak. Students have found

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

other ways to express their solidarity. A *desi* (South Asian American) student organized an impressive year-long series of panels titled "South Asians for Black Lives." The flier encouraged people to: "Come to a series of workshops on colorism, racial profiling, and the model minority myth to learn about anti-blackness in the South Asian American community. Let's discuss how we can be effective allies to #BlackLivesMatter as people of color!" The student, who was taking my cross-listed course called "Black and Asian Historical Relations in the U.S.," spoke with me about forming the series. Her initiative and commitment reflects broader links students made between coursework across ethnic studies and community action on campus.

My own teaching and scholarship was influenced by being a teaching assistant for an ethnic studies class at UC Berkeley, "A Comparative Survey of Racial and Ethnic Groups in the U.S.," taught by Victoria Robinson. This course was thick with the connections between the Irish indentured workers and early Chinese laborers. It taught students about refugees from Cuba and Southeast Asia. We covered the spectacle of the U.S.-Mexico border "crisis" within the context of changing economics that led to the rise of *maquiladoras* and transnational female migration from Mexico to the United States. Robinson analyzed the first and second Great Migrations as they intersected with political and industrial changes in the western and northern United States. She presented Asian Americans as more than model minority immigrants, analyzing their depictions on the silver screen and in U.S. politics. The sixteen-page syllabus (which I still have and refer to almost twenty years later) was a treasure of poems, critical questions, and short essays that summed up the major thematics of the course, alongside the reading and writing assignments.

It is no surprise that Robinson was central to the development of an "American Cultures" (i.e., diversity) requirement, which her course fulfills at Berkeley (one that Northwestern University still does not have) or that she is the director of the American Cultures Center and the American Cultures Engaged Scholarship Program. Robinson's intersecting, expansive, and multiscalar approach to various racialized groups in the United States informed my approach to teaching and scholarship. It represents what an overarching racial studies project does. It focuses on representation, but more than that it reveals the linked, uneven, overlapping, contested, and crossover relationships among groups in this nation structured by the demands of White supremacy and capitalism. To center any one group is necessarily an incomplete project.

The troubling trends I discussed above emerge from the incorporation of ethnic studies within the university (e.g., one can earn a PhD in African

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

American studies; many universities have Latino/a studies majors) and our rising professionalism. Being hired within a distinct unit submits faculty to pressures of having to conduct research in narrow areas and publish in field-specific venues (meaning identity-based ones, such as the *Journal of Asian American Studies*, *The Black Scholar*, or *Latino Studies*). It also means that ethnic studies faculty, along with those in gender, women's, and sexuality studies, "earn" (but are not rewarded for) time- and emotional-heavy service assignments as we attempt to counsel minority students underserved by the university. Student activists who struggle with self-care seek mentorship from the very faculty who face a similar structure of neglect.

Perhaps it is time to consider the death of Asian American studies in favor of an expansive racial studies project that more fully attends to race, racism, colonialism, imperialism, settler-colonialism, militarism, and the shared political project of liberation. If the autonomous structure of these programs discourages relational and time-consuming work across ethnic studies, undergraduate student activism reveals otherwise.

The Expansive Model of Student Activism

Student activists model an expansive intellectual and political project in their cross-sectional demands to the university that are informed by study across African American studies, Latina/o studies, Asian American studies, and Indigenous studies. In just the last couple of years, students at Northwestern University demanded that the university divest from private prisons, Israeli occupation of Palestine, and coal. Unshackle NU passed a resolution "about the prison industrial complex and mass incarceration's disproportionate impact on communities of color, especially Black communities. It asks Northwestern to divest from companies such as the security firm G4S that profit from human rights violations across the U.S. and elsewhere."[8] Other students (and sometimes the same ones) drew links between Palestine and the U.S.-Mexico border.

Student activism also comes from within the administration: In 2015, two students in the Associated Student Government (ASG) walked out of a function held at the university president's home to speak out about coal divestment. These same two students ran—and won (albeit not without controversy)—the 2016 ASG presidency and vice presidency despite their platform centering minority and marginalized students and class issues on a predominantly white and uber-wealthy campus. Other members of the Associated Student Government proposed a bill in 2016 in opposition to the administration's opaque and misguided hiring of Karl Eikenberry, former

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan (a man with neither a PhD nor peer-reviewed publications that the administration was willing to circulate), whom the university provost hired to head the over $100 million Buffett Institute.[9] After his hire, Karl Eikenberry withdrew his acceptance, quite possibly because of sustained, significant, and collaborative faculty and student pressure against the hiring process. The Eikenberry Affair made national headlines, as was activism just the previous year from perhaps a more unlikely source: members of the Northwestern University football team that fought unsuccessfully to become unionized.[10] The results of student activism on campus in alliance with faculty support over the past two years have been remarkable, especially at a time of declining faculty governance and an active board of trustees that increasingly shapes the (re)order of campus priorities.[11]

But the most igniting and powerful movement this campus recently witnessed was the predominantly Black women student–led Black Lives Matter Northwestern University movement. They staged a protest that brought out over one hundred supporters and disrupted a major fundraising event held by the university president to present their demands.[12] Called "Demands of a Concerned Student at NU" or "Morty [Schapiro, University President], What's Good?" their expansive list of demands supported multiple communities.[13] They included renovations to the Black House and the Multicultural Center. They insisted on passing the overdue yet stalled "US centric diversity requirement for all majors" (similar to the aforementioned American Cultures requirement at UC Berkeley) and the development of "a Native/Indigenous Studies Department immediately."

Demand number seven of the original nineteen states: "We demand that the university implement an Asian American Studies Major by the 2016–2017 school year." And they succeeded.

It is thus in no small part because of Northwestern University's Black Lives Matter activists—many of whom had learned strategies from organizing in downtown Chicago against police violence—that Asian American studies earned a major decades after a student hunger strike that formed the program. The powerful Black Lives Matter Northwestern University movement led to a number of other immediate victories. The university has since committed to renovate and respect the autonomy of the student space called the Black House, provide resources for minorities in the STEM fields, and launched a Native/Indigenous studies hiring cluster. (In early 2017, the Mellon Foundation awarded Northwestern University with a $1.5 million grant to establish an Indigenous and Native Studies Center.) Students representing other groups also fought for the rights of Sodexo food

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

workers and for the survivors of sexual assault, which made administrators revisit their Title IX policy.

Unlike the viewpoints of some students within our programs or those who are indifferent to ethnic studies more generally, these undergraduate student demands were expansive rather than narrow. Their persistence led the university to raise a flag with the words "Black Lives Matter" outside the student center and a two-week long series of events on topics concerning Black people. Their approach mirrors the internally diverse umbrella orientation of the national Black Lives Matter movement. Embracing the many faces of Blackness, leaders of the national movement created a video that clarified that their work on behalf of "Black Life" includes Black trans people, Black men, Black women, disabled Black people, and so on. The demands of campus activists embraced and exceeded this definition, finding the rights of Palestinians, Asian Americans, and Native peoples in addition to those of Black people central to their fight for full equality and protection from oppression. Thus, on-campus activist demands appear to be comparative, alliance-based, and intersectional, whereas the scholarship within our subfields often reflects programs of study based on populations instead of broader processes and politics.

Who Speaks for Asian America?

The activism that I have witnessed on my campus, from within student government to renegade formations that act in stealth, may have been influenced by their courses in ethnic studies. But what is more compelling is that they reflect a racial studies project, whether or not they took our classes. This perspective leads to my sense that Asian American studies should operate under the umbrella of racial studies, which includes Black and Latinx studies and critical mixed race studies and that should advocate on behalf of Native and Indigenous studies in ways that make institutional, intellectual, and political sense to Native scholars. We would continue to specialize in Asian American studies, highlighting our histories, experiences, and conceptual frameworks. The point is that when racial studies is instituted separately in the university, pressures for tenure shape our hiring and teaching practices. It can push us toward myopic studies of single racial or ethnic groups that incompletely represent broader historic and global systems of race and racism that work comparatively or, if you prefer, relationally, under White supremacy and capitalism.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

It is a straw man I have built, saying that we should get rid of Asian American studies. Campuses need Asian American studies, but ideally it should be located alongside or within the other racial studies and engaged by scholars across race. There would be greater engagement with our work, as well, if we continued to develop more conceptual approaches to our material and engage in public discussions on race as guests on major news outlets. Rooting Asian American studies in a conceptual and lateral axis could give us the vocabulary for getting out of certain stalemates that have national significance such as Asian anti-Black racism and affirmative action. Why is it that conservative Asian American voices are usually the ones to earn the attention of the mainstream media? This coverage then informs others' perspectives about who Asian Americans are and what we stand for, which filters the ways that others view Asian Americans and Asian American studies.

Asian Americans were in the national news for the 2016 coverage of the trial of Peter Liang, a Chinese American police officer convicted of killing a Black man, Akai Gurley. Nearly fifteen thousand mostly Asian American protesters in New York rallied against what they considered his "unfair" conviction. Although the judge gave Liang no prison time, parts of the community felt he was unfairly scapegoated since white officers who murder Black people are not generally convicted. Yet why were these activists putting Liang's life (a person who chose to be a police officer and who did kill a young man) ahead of the death of a Black man? The myopia of Liang supporters stems from the same kinds of limited identity politics that leads not to Black Lives Matter but to the argument that anti-Blackness is the only relevant articulation of racism today.

Some Asian American journalists have attempted to make Black Lives Matter relevant by making the case that we "also face oppression." A widely cited *Times* article by Jack Linshi, "Why Ferguson Should Matter to Asian-Americans," used this line of reasoning in its subheading: "Ferguson Isn't Simply Black versus White." In the article, Linshi wants to challenge Asian American indifference about the murder of Michael Brown by stating "Michael Brown's death has several parallels in Asian-American history," including Vincent Chin (Chin's niece wrote a letter condemning the parallel).[14] These dynamics replicate particular contemporary formations of troubling rather than empowering identity politics I described as affecting some of my students. Nationally and on campus, we must move away from such identity politics: Black Lives Matter should not matter to Asian Americans because Asian Americans have also faced police violence and

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

have died in police custody. It should matter to Asian Americans because Black lives matter.

Timothy Yu has rightly called on Asian Americanists to take greater part in national discussions on race and many scholars have done so. But our voices tend to focus on policy (immigration, education) and people (convicted officer Peter Liang) and not on general articulations of Asian Americans' political stances vis-à-vis other people of color and *as* people of color. Asian American studies can become a louder and more progressive part of these conversations through ethnic studies scholarship that illustrates the historical and ongoing forms of racism that target groups differentially.

Asian American Studies within the Collective Racial Studies Project

Racial studies reflects U.S. census categories and thus the constructs of race created through colonialism, genocide, slavery, and exclusion. But racial studies is also a political project, not one existing to "diversify" the curriculum. It articulates how power operates across race, time, and space. Asian American studies within a racial studies framework teaches us how to speak to the ways that nativism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, and Native erasure intersect. It is also a space within the academy where we may craft visions of the future through broadscale politics for social change. A racial studies framework explains the specificities of a particular group's histories and experiences and shows how these are rooted in shared processes of domination.

A collective racial studies project counters these specific renditions of insular identity politics in ways that expand the definition of the field of Asian American studies as the study of Asian American populations. A twenty-first-century Asian American studies is up to the task of both modeling a more expansive politics through a conceptual approach to race and power and providing our students and the wider population with the vocabulary and information about the kinds of distinct and ongoing forms of oppression that Asians in the United States face. The racial studies project was and still should be broadscale, cross-group, and globally antiracist (the kind modeled by Angela Davis, who draws links between U.S. prisons and Palestine). This includes careful research on the particular racialization of Asians through Orientalism and nativism and the ongoing exclusions and forms of violence that take place alongside specific forms of oppression faced by other communities of color.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

Asian American studies is a strong, viable, and growing field. It is not the precariousness of our field within the academy that concerns me but rather the question of how we should project our growing and increasingly professionalized voice. Each spring our faculty in Asian American studies worry about our graduating seniors. How they will fare? And will the momentum of their activism on campus exit with them? Yet with the entrance of fresh faces each fall, we feel the excitement of knowing that there are students who will become deeply affected by our courses and who, through activism and sustained intellectual inquiry, will fulfill our guiding mission.

Inevitably, it is those students who most quickly feel disaffected on campus and who commit the most to changing it. While institutions are reluctant to change, these students take on the neoliberal work of being and doing diversity while attempting to fix problems not of their own making. What emerges from their work, politics, and passion is a framework not based on particular identities or populations. Rather, recent campus activists fought for structural changes that will benefit all members of the campus community. The students wove lessons from across the university, and from nonexistent programs, such as a White student who created an ad hoc Native American studies major and led the fight for Native American studies. Student action outside of the classroom provides an antidote to the limits of the subfields in ethnic studies. Students are able to take a broader approach to their studies, if they so choose, compared to the constraints of teaching within fields with tenure requirements and contract renewals based on expertise in primary areas that are increasingly institutionalized during a time of "diversity and inclusion."

We may have come to believe that, like race, institutional structures have always existed and that we and our work are defined by these institutional boundaries. But as an interdisciplinary political project, racial studies stems from what is happening in the world. And just like the Third World Liberation Front students who supported Black Student Union activists in the 1960s, our students today remind us that the whole is greater than the sum of our parts. And they are busy tearing down existing tables and replacing them with what is to come.

NOTES

1. For a list of demands from student activists at many universities, please see http://www.thedemands.org/.

2. Daniel Diaz, "Third World Liberation Front Notice of Demands," Sutori, accessed June 20, 2016, https://www.sutori.com/story/a-history-of-ethnic-studies.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

3. Notable exceptions include Native American studies at places like the University of Oklahoma, the University of New Mexico, University of California campuses including Riverside and Los Angeles. Strengths in Pacific Island studies include the University of Hawai'i at Manoa's Pacific Island Studies Program, the Center for Hawaiian Studies, and the Pacific Islander Studies Initiative at the University of Utah.

4. Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003); Gary Okihiro, *Third World Studies: Theorizing Liberation* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016).

5. This case was unique for its national coverage, including Colleen Flaherty, "Tenure Denied," *Inside Higher Ed*, May 17, 2016, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/05/17/campus-unrest-follows-tenure-denial-innovative-popular-faculty-member-color, and Catherine Morris, "Denied Tenure at Dartmouth, Aimee Bahng Feels Diversity Efforts Ring Hollow," *Diverse Education*, May 18, 2016, http://diverseeducation.com/article/84350/.

6. Relatedly, the field of English's national academic association, the Modern Language Association (MLA) voted to reject the academic boycott of Israel, in contrast to the Amercian Studies Association (the de facto ethnic studies association) and the Association for Asian American Studies—which was the first of all major academic organizations to support the boycott.

7. Hannah Silverstein, "Faculty Panel Discusses the Teaching of 'Black Lives Matter,'" *Dartmouth News*, January 28, 2016, http://now.dartmouth.edu/2016/01/faculty-panel-discusses-teaching-black-lives-matter.

8. Caroline Spiezio, "ASG Passes Unshackle NU'S Divestment Resolution," *North by Northwestern*, March 3, 2016, http://www.northbynorthwestern.com/story/asg-passes-unshackle-nus-divestment-resolution/.

9. The university provost, who oversaw the hire, also stepped down shortly after the conclusion to the "Eikenberry Affair," also with no full explanation. See David Fishman, "More than 40 Northwestern Faculty Call for Withdrawal of Karl Eikenberry's Appointment as Buffett Institute Executive Director," *Daily Northwestern*, February 11, 2016, http://dailynorthwestern.com/2016/02/11/campus/more-than-40-northwestern-faculty-call-for-withdrawal-of-karl-eikenberrys-appointment-as-buffett-institute-executive-director/; Neha Reddy and Matt Herndon, "Letter to the Editor: Our Experience Challenging the Hiring of Karl Eikenberry," *Daily Northwestern*, June 7, 2016, http://dailynorthwestern.com/2016/06/07/opinion/letter-to-the-editor-our-experience-challenging-the-hiring-of-karl-eikenberry/; Nick Anderson, "How Northwestern Faculty Derailed Retired General's Global Studies Job," *Washington Post*, May 31, 2016,

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-northwestern-drops-karl-eikenberry-20160531-story.html.

10. Dave Zirin, "The Absurd, Cowardly, and Morally Bankrupt NLRB Decision against the Northwestern Football Union," *The Nation*, August 17, 2015, https://www.thenation.com/article/the-absurd-cowardly-and-morally-bankrupt-nlrb-decision-against-the-northwestern-football-union/.

11. For two excellent books on diversity politics on campus, see Roderick Ferguson's *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012) and Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012).

12. Amal Ahmed, "NU Students Stand in Solidarity with Mizzou, Interrupt Groundbreaking Ceremony," *North by Northwestern*, November 13, 2015, http://www.northbynorthwestern.com/story/we-have-nothing-to-lose-but-our-chains-nu-students/.

13. Fathma Rahman, "Student Activists Add 15 Demands to Original List Sent to Schapiro," *Daily Northwestern*, January 28, 2016, http://dailynorthwestern.com/2016/01/28/campus/student-activists-add-15-demands-to-original-list-sent-to-schapiro/.

14. Annie Tan, "Peter Liang Was Justly Convicted: He's Not a Victim, Says This Niece of Vincent Chin," *Medium*, February 22, 2016, https://medium.com/listen-to-my-story/peter-liang-was-justly-convicted-he-s-not-a-victim-says-this-niece-of-vincent-chin-739168c9c944#.957koumfi.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:15.

CHAPTER 5

Un-homing Asian American Studies: Refusals and the Politics of Commitment

Anita Mannur

On the morning of February 8, 2013, I woke up with considerable nervousness and excitement. It was the day my university's trustees would meet to put their final stamp of approval on tenure decisions. I had only been at my institution for four years and came up early for tenure. For most of 2012 all I heard was that I had nothing to worry about and I was being neurotic. I remember being in my chair's office while he and another senior colleague told me for the quadrillionth time, or so it seemed, that I was a slam dunk case. Despite the seeming pomp and ostensible circumstance, the day came and went. I learned nothing. I forgot that it was my mother's birthday. My mother texted me that evening from India to remind me I forgot—not because she was mad but because she didn't want my father thinking I was so self-involved that I had forgotten my mother. So, I called her and wished her a happy birthday.

Two days later, on Sunday, I checked the university website to see if there was any news on what was then called the "e-report." And there, finally—in print—were the words I longed to see. In an article titled, "Faculty Receive Promotion and Tenure" was a one-line sentence: "During the Feb. 8 meeting, Miami University's board of trustees approved

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

Back to top.

recommendation for tenure and promotion effective July 1, 2013." What followed were a list of faculty members? There was my name and my department affiliation (English). I was lucky number 13. I had been hired as the first joint appointment in Asian/Asian American Studies. I was the first faculty member in the program to receive tenure, but that fact was rendered invisible. But still, eleven years after completing my PhD I had tenure, effective on my thirty-ninth birthday. As a naïve twenty-seven-year-old in May 2002, I did not think it would take me over a decade to get tenure. I wanted to get tenure before I turned forty and I just made it.

I begin with this story because it is the hinge upon which this article pivots, affectively, temporally, institutionally, and intellectually. I turn to a situated personal narrative to theorize the conditions of precarity under which Asian American studies existed in two different institutional homes to contextualize my own unexpected politics of refusal. Having spent ten years orienting myself toward a future within Asian American studies, I found myself reorienting away from the institutional formation of Asian American studies. I reluctantly became a part of its imminent institutional demise—paradoxically, it might seem, to continue the intellectual work of Asian American studies. In other words, this is a critical narrative about how I had to refuse Asian American studies to remain committed to its intellectual vision.

Tenure and the Asian Americanist

I now joke that I was on the ten-year rather than tenure track. Two postdoctoral fellowships gave me the space to write and think but took three years from my life. I was hired at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign as a postdoctoral fellow in 2002–2003. Though the program in Asian American studies at the time was conducting a search for a specialist in literature, I was not shortlisted, even though the initiative was designed to retain and hire diverse new faculty. When I asked for feedback, I was told by the chair of the search committee that I was not likely to earn tenure at the University of Illinois. I subsequently spent the next two years at Wesleyan University on a Freeman Postdoctoral Fellowship. At my interview, I was informed from that outset that I would not be considered for a tenure-line position; however, my role would require me to engender interest among the students in Asian American studies, develop related curriculum, and organize cocurricular programming. In return I would be mentored and they would do their best to prepare me for a tenure-line

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

job. Of the fifty or so students I taught over the course of two years, three of the students I mentored went on to earn PhDs, one earned her JD, three have secured tenure-track positions at Research 1 universities and at least one is a high school teacher who regularly integrates Asian American studies in her courses. All of them have used their training in Asian American studies.

Four years at another tenure-track job and four pre-tenure years at my current institution ate up my thirties. Tenure, for many academics, is the ultimate goal. It confers freedom, status, and security. It removes the precarity with which one lives, particularly for the normative subject. It means having a stable home and offers a range of privileges. For me getting a tenure-track job wasn't just about attaining a form of recognition; instead, it was about the idea of feeling at home, intellectually and personally, and securing the right to stay in place, what Alicia Schmidt Camacho—in vastly different context—has described as "el derecho a no migrar."[1] I came to the United States in 1993 and lived, until 2005, as a nonimmigrant alien. I was sponsored for a green card by my family and got my first tenure-track job that same year. It was serendipitous because if that hadn't worked out, I would need a tenure-track job to sponsor me for a green card. Of the offers I received in 2005, only one provided the possibility of a green card sponsorship. It wasn't my top choice for a job. It was not the R1 job that seemed written for me. It was not the job in the ethnic studies department I so wanted to take and that for years I would regret turning down, forgetting that the strictures of U.S. citizenship prevented me from accepting it. It was at Denison University, a small private liberal arts college in the middle of Ohio where the center of town was marked by a four-way stop with a church at each corner.

Soon after I arrived, it became apparent that I had been hired because the English Department thought their chances of getting a hire would be better if they put in for a diversity hire and that this would likely have to be a temporary home. How do I know? *They told me*. The job advertisement had asked for someone who could teach either "Asian American or Latino Literature." My first year, I taught two Asian American literature classes. Both enrolled fewer students than ever before in the English Department's history. I taught another one the next year to even fewer students. After that, it was politely suggested that I consider enfolding Asian American literature into other courses: It was suggested that I teach some Asian American authors in my American women writers course, my food course, or my first-year composition course. *But, of course, it was up to me*. And just like that, after three semesters, my hopes of building Asian Amer-

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

ican literature classes were dashed. Even in the face of disappointment, I initially did not want to go on the job market again. I was comfortable and liked my life in Columbus, Ohio (a safe thirty minutes away).

Nevertheless, I became increasingly disconnected and disenchanted. After all, I had spent my time in graduate school helping to build a home for Asian/ Asian American Studies at the University of Massachusetts (my alma mater) and within the larger Five-College consortium to which it belonged. I wasn't the kind of scholar who could remain in stasis merely teaching the authors I love at an institution that had made it clear that I was valued for the diversity work I did while it remained unwilling to commit substantial resources to revise the curriculum. I wanted to build opportunities for students and create community and curriculum, particularly in the Midwest where Asian American studies meant something different and where the few students who took my classes walked away transformed.[2]

As Sara Ahmed notes, the responsibility for diversity and equality is rarely distributed evenly. One needs to think of the individual who embodies diversity within institutions of whiteness as doing a form of diversity work. Such individuals, she notes, frequently "get stuck in institutions by being stuck to a category."[3] I returned to the job market in 2007 because I wanted to become unstuck. I was the "race" person but I could not do "race work." In 2009 I was hired into the newly formed Asian/Asian American (AAA) Studies Program at Miami University, jointly appointed between that program and English as part of a cluster hire. The model upon which cluster hires are designed is to counteract the effects of institutional failure. There is an implicit recognition of the need to hire and retain faculty, particularly those of color and those teaching in underrepresented areas of the curricula. The year prior, a similar hiring initiative in History, English, and Latino/a and Latin American Studies had yielded four tenure-line hires; 2008, though, was a different story.

The financial crisis of 2008 had hit hard and all searches were on hold; the then-dean had the foresight and intellectual commitment not to cancel the cluster hire but to downsize it from three or four to two resulting in hires in English (myself) and Sociology. This position allowed and asked me to establish new curricula. Though never put in writing, I was being mentored to eventually become the program's director. I took an interest by way of regular meetings with my chair and mentor in addressing curricular needs, program development, and outreach. Within a year, I had proposed a new course, "Introduction to Asian/Asian American Studies." A year later, I was teaching a pilot section with twenty students. Three

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

years later, the course was enrolling forty—more if I would allow students in. At the same time a new course, "China and Globalization," had been proposed and offered to similar, if not greater, success by the person hired in my cohort. Though she left academia soon thereafter, her course remained on the books. With some tweaking, we renamed it "Asia and Globalization" to allow our fledgling program of 0.5 fulltime faculty and four to five dedicated affiliate faculty to teach the course. A minor in Asian/Asian American studies was also quickly approved. Other courses were soon processed and offered at the 300 level. A unique boost to the quality of our program was the fact that we now had a handful of MA and PhD students, primarily in the English Department, interested in the study of Asian America, who could contribute to the teaching of Asian American studies. By 2015, multiple sections of these courses could be offered because of the general education needs that some of these courses served. Our small faculty was teaching between five hundred and six hundred students a year. We had a handful of minors. In our seven years, I had organized several key lectures by prominent Asian Americanists—several of whom are anthologized in this collection—who all spoke to packed audiences.[4] By these metrics, the program was flourishing, a veritable success story of Asian/Asian American studies finding a "home" in this institution.

But there is another narrative that lurks beneath this happy exterior that signals how the project of Asian American Studies at Miami was oriented toward "failure" as much as it had been at Denison. This is a narrative I can only tell because I have tenure. In "Tenured and Happy," Cynthia Wu writes, "Let's not forget the original purpose of tenure—to protect academic freedom. The writing I've produced in the past year reflects a newfound sense of ease and inventiveness. This position of stability emboldens me to take risks in my scholarship that I otherwise wouldn't have dared."[5] Like Wu, I too have a position of stability that emboldens me to take the risks that are ethical positions that people with tenure ought to be able to exercise without fear of reprisal. But, in the years after what has dubiously been come to be known as the "Salaita Affair," tenure and academic freedom are not sacred anymore. Perhaps they never were for scholars of color, critical of the neoliberal university or the racist machinations of state violence. But for me, there was a stopgap of about three years before I could voice dissent about the imminent failure of Asian American studies. Like many women of color, tenure did not grant me freedom but instead plunged me into the vortex of administration, un-homing me from the already fragile structures of a joint appointment by adding a third layer of responsibility to an already heavy work burden.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

Let's, for a moment, flashback to 2013. I've just earned tenure. I'm hosting a guest speaker and during the reception for that speaker, I'm approached by a couple of faculty members to apply for the position of Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. My own research directly engages gender and sexuality, but as a joint appointment I have not had time in my three and a half years to build all the bridges with academic units I would like. I'm not terribly good at saying no and the offer to direct a program comes at a time when the new administration is not going to give me the opportunity to direct Asian/Asian American (AAA) Studies. Instead, that position is unilaterally handed over to the former director of the Confucius Institute, who has no academic training in the transpacific Asian/Asian American Studies vision that defined our program. That Asian American Studies is to be directed by a faculty member whose salary is paid by the Confucius Institute is politically vexed.

Since 2004, Confucius Institutes have been established on 465 university campuses in 123 countries. An article published in the *Telegraph* notes that "they are designed to project a favourable image of China's ruling Communist Party around the world through language and cultural programmes, but are allowed to restrict discussions of topics unpalatable to China's ruling Communist Party such as the occupation of Tibet."[6] This rapid expansion of China's soft power has been the source of much critique on college campuses. An AAUP statement formulated in response to the impact of globalization on U.S. colleges, universities, and academic freedom observes: "Globalization has also meant that university administrators have welcomed involvement of foreign governments, corporations, foundations, and donors on campuses in North America. These relationships have often been beneficial. But occasionally university administrations have entered into partnerships that sacrificed the integrity of the university and its academic staff."[7] The statement subsequently explores the specific impact on memorandum of understandings that are established between U.S. universities and the Confucius Institutes, noting:

> Confucius Institutes function as an arm of the Chinese state and are allowed to ignore academic freedom. Their academic activities are under the supervision of Hanban, a Chinese state agency which is chaired by a member of the Politburo and the vice-premier of the People's Republic of China. Most agreements establishing Confucius Institutes feature nondisclosure clauses and unacceptable concessions to the political aims and practices of the government of China. Specifically, North American universities permit Confucius Institutes to advance a state agenda in the recruitment and control of

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

> academic staff, in the choice of curriculum, and in the restriction of debate.

Despite collective objections, which involved not the individual directing the unit but rather the process through which leadership and resources were allocated through the Confucius Institute, AAA starts to feel, for many of us, unmoored. The program is effectively left without an advocate who effectively understands AAA's mission.[8] We are barely off the ground before we are floundering; rather than engage our own critical scholarship, we are being asked to serve the needs of the ever-growing business school, their specific interests in Asia, and promote for the university-at-large a positive vision of Asia. In 2009 AAA had been focused on cocurricular programming focused on lectures about social justice. Under this new change, AAA was now sponsoring events to promote cultural goodwill about the people of China among American college students, what has been dubbed a form of "culturetainment" by which the diversity of China's cultures has been reduced by Hanban to a "uniform, quaint commodity," characterized by Chinese opera and dance performances."[9] Somewhere along the way the mission of social justice had been lost.

Amid this radical and unsettling shift, the program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (WGS), a longstanding program with a commitment to social justice and intersectionality, was actively recruiting me to take on a leadership role. Before July 1, 2013, rolls around and I'm officially tenured, I've picked up another title as WGS director. For all intents and purposes I am the chair of a department that holds tenure lines, has a robust major, minor, and graduate certificate, and faculty who will need mentoring to get through to tenure. I have so many meetings that I joke with a fellow administrator that our meetings have meetings. My campus hours are so long, I've forgotten what the sun looks like. On the bright side, I always get a great parking spot because I'm on campus before sunup.

In agreeing to chair another unit—though my official title is director since WGS, along with Latino Studies (LAS), Black World Studies (BWS), Asian American Studies, American Studies (AMS), and International Studies (ITS) are programs—I had to give up some responsibilities in what is referred to as my "home" program, Asian/Asian American Studies.[10] My new teaching load of 1–1 is to rotate among WGS/ENG/AAA. A visiting assistant professor is hired to replace me in the second year of my directorship when it becomes clear that I cannot remain "stuck" to as many units as the university would like. It also becomes apparent what is to happen with AAA. It is now almost entirely staffed and taught by affiliate faculty,

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

contingent faculty, and graduate students. There is a complete disconnect between ethics and responsibility in terms of how this program is to be sustained. In 2014, the collective pressure among the affiliate faculty to disarticulate the Confucius Institute with AAA has yielded some success. The unit has a new director, the third in five years, drawn from the tiny pool of affiliate faculty. The initial promise with which I was recruited and hired has disappeared—there is little effort at retention and the burden of running the program rests entirely with the goodwill of graduate students, contingent labor, and overworked affiliate faculty of color and queer faculty who are either joint or triple appointments.

The situation I'm describing is not unique to my university or to fledgling Asian American studies initiatives that are expected to generate revenue and student demand without full institutional support. There was no malicious intent behind appointing the director of the Confucius Institute to be the director of AAA; rather it was a cost-saving measure that was willfully ignorant of the incompatibility of the vision of these two programs. Nevertheless, this impasse signals the lack of commitment to thinking about Asian American studies as doing anything other than diversity work, let alone functioning as a viable intellectual space. As such I want to focus on the micro-level destructions that occur in the building of programs as a way of thinking about how microaggressions translate in institutional settings. As Cathy Schlund-Vials notes in her essay for this volume, institutional demise is rarely positioned as an outright goal. Rather:

> such planning—which took shape vis-à-vis joint appointments, "soft" funding lines, constant restructuring, and divisive resource allocations—has made possible the relatively facile elimination (or, more euphemistically, "sunsetting") of African American, Native, Asian American, and Latino/a studies programs across the country. To wit, while the mid-century emergence of Ethnic Studies and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies represented for many a collegiate revolution via the formation of new departments and academic units, the institutional demise of these programs at the turn-of-the-twenty-first century was nevertheless planned from the outset.[11]

The aptly named "sunsetting" of programs is a micro-level destruction of programs. In Miami's case, it would be too soon to "sunset" a program that was just into its seventh year and had barely found a home. In fact, there was no physical space on campus for Asian American studies. The only home we had was a virtual one on a website, and the "home" moved

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

with each director. Thus, the sunsetting works through consolidation. Though the previous dean had been committed to building ethnic studies, the financial crisis of 2008 had immediately put the smallest programs on the chopping block. Unless the metrics could show that these courses had the requisite numbers to maintain their autonomy, no program would be guaranteed autonomy. With no faculty lines, AAA could not sustain the numbers; without the numbers, AAA could not make the case to argue for faculty lines. AAA's best shot at survival was not to call attention to itself but to, in effect, take on the role of the model minority program and serve at the pleasure of the university's administration.

Mergers and Consolidations: Creating New Homes

The WGS program, however, posed a very different kind of challenge. With eight fulltime faculty, all but one of whom were joint appointments, and only thirty or so majors, the program had long been targeted for sunsetting. Despite contributing to the general education curriculum via courses in global and intercultural competency, the lack of undergraduate majors had put WGS along with LAS, BWS, AMS, and now AAA on the institution's radar as programs to be sunsetted via merger into a larger unit. In 2014, it was announced that AAA, along with five other programs—WGS, LAS, AMS, ITS, BWS—would be merged into a department of Global and Intercultural Studies. Though each program had held out for almost a decade, the fact that tenure-line hiring had been frozen (I was the last new tenure-line hire in 2009) had meant the programs were running on empty and highly reliant on contingent, graduate, and affiliate labor. In such situations, the neoliberal university demands that directors take on the role of compliant subjects while also holding out the promise of future hiring as the incentive. Unsurprisingly, women of color and queer faculty are often placed in a precarious position. In hindsight, it was clear that consolidation was a fait accompli—it was up to the directors to rally the troops. Program autonomy was not going to be an option and yet to eliminate programs that contributed to diversity education was not an option. When smaller units focused on the study of race and ethnicity are required to merge into a larger unit, there is also often an implicit mandate that these micro-level destructions that have long-lasting consequences are not labeled as racist, sexist, or homophobic. The faculty member or director who is charged with rallying the troops to go along with the vision of the neoliberal university that flattens out difference is often expected to "go along with the happy image of an organization" and

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

to convey that the new vision to which we must comply is necessarily a better one with more opportunities for hiring and collaboration.[12] In this context, compliant subjects, or subjects who are seen as less unruly, are charged with doing the work of getting everyone on board to get along. Sara Ahmed describes this phenomenon as a kind of passing, whereby one passes as the "'right kind' of minority, the one who aims not to cause unhappiness or trouble."[13]

To be in a such a position when one knows that decisions have already been made and that no one individual can be castigated for destroying the integrity of ethnic or gender studies is one of precarity. The pernicious nature of the neoliberal university is that it systematically erodes the value of ethnic and gender studies but will also create scapegoats who are deemed responsible for the failure of these programs and institutions. It is more than likely that I was hired because of my ability to work efficiently and to get along well. I was a prime example of the compliant subject who passed well in the terms Ahmed describes.[14] This is, of course, an unwinnable position. Those above you will always want you to push harder to get your faculty on board; your colleagues will want you to "push back," a vague and amorphous term that is more rhetorical than practical. In such a position, one is pushing up against an institutional wall of diversity that Ahmed describes wherein "the wall gives physical form to what a number of practitioners describe as institutional inertia, the lack of an institutional will to change."[15] One of my junior colleagues chastised me for not pushing hard enough and deemed me "too nice," effectively erasing all the behind-the-scenes labor I was doing to preserve the program's vitality and to build its national reputation.

Eventually, one becomes weary. The institution counts on it. It operates under a different temporality that can wait out stubborn feelings and anger, a kind of temporality that is not increasingly unavailable to faculty and subjects who look around at the national scene and see the physical violence that countering neoliberalism does to the human body. With little to go on but anecdotal information, there is a very real toll that going up against walls takes on the bodies and health of women of color. The workspace becomes a place that triggers chronic illnesses such as migraines, weight gain, insomnia, depression. In my case, administrative bloat was literal. Institutions can wait for us to fall apart but increasingly we, as women of color, must reorient our energies and desires and say no to this kind of bodily harm.

By the beginning of 2015, the various units began the difficult task of creating a home together. But with so many different visions of a home

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

imposed from above, consensus is hard to build. The small remained small and the big grew bigger. Programs like AAA, unsurprisingly, did not fare well in the first year. Despite three tenure-line searches, not one Asian Americanist was offered a position. Despite three tenure-line searches, not one person of color was hired.[16] Despite three tenure-line searches, not one specialist in queer studies was hired. In 2014, as part of my charge as director of WGS I had been expected to get WGS on board with joining this new department. As the longest holdouts, with legitimate concerns that a Department of Global and Intercultural Studies would marginalize queer studies and not retain the commitment to hiring faculty of color that had been WGS's mission, I had served as a go-between with the promise that one of the first hires made into the new department would be in queer studies and that the hiring and retention of people of color would be a priority. I had gone so far as to speak in front of the university senate to convince the faculty-at-large to endorse the merger because these promises had been made. When my own colleagues in my new department circumvented these promises, I refused to comply. Tired of being the compliant subject, I turned to the language of racism and sexism in calling out the hiring decisions and asked where was the commitment to diversity that had been promised if we all agreed to live in this new home. I became the bad subject for not going with the flow. I had hit the wall and the spurious applications of numbers to try to convince me that smaller programs like WGS, AAA, LAS, and BWS were being protected did not convince me or others who were not protected by tenure.

In an interview published in *Meridians* former faculty member in the English Department at Yale, Sanda Mayzaw Lwin discusses the unreliability of mathematical certainty when relying on numbers to count diversity. She notes,

> I thought of the English department where I teach and I realized that if you took two away from ten, you could be left with zero. That is, if you were to subtract me and the other junior faculty of color who is my colleague from ten, or even from all fifty or so members of the English department, you would be left with zero junior faculty of color. And I began to think about how numbers, when it comes to bodies, are not always so reliable, stable, or incontestable. In this case, 10–2 = 0 faculty of color. This is why critical mass is so essential. Having a larger group of people doing this type of work changes the dynamic so that 10 minus 2 can equal 8 again. Of course we always need a critical mass of faculty of color, but it is also important to reach a critical mass not just of "physical bodies" representing diversity but

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

> also a critical mass of people who engage with and are supportive, at the very least, of work around issues of race and migration.[17]

In many ways, what I had been looking for, and what I continue to look for, is not just a home for ethnic and gender studies, particularly Asian American studies, but a just and nonprecarious one. Certainly, this may seem Pollyanna-ish to think this is possible, but more relevant to me is the structure that animates this desire for a home.

In "Refusing Subjects and (Dis)owning America in Asian American Studies," a review of Kandice Chuh's groundbreaking *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique*, literary critic Allan Isaac hones in on the place of and desire for home that Chuh investigates in her book. Isaac asks, what are the terms of national belonging that Asian American critique aspires to? Is this home "place or desire?"[18] Asian American novels provide a space to think through the desires of Asian American institutionalization precisely because of the oft-emphasized theme of securing a place to call home and a place to stay put. *A Gesture Life*, the topic of Chuh's study, focuses on the character Doc Hata, an elderly Korean immigrant who takes pride in the home he owns and only very reluctantly parts with it as he ages. As Isaac notes, "though the novel refuses a resolution with a definite home rather than a cause of lament, I would suggest that the powerful attraction for a home offers infinite elsewheres at each narration of this desire for home. That is, frustrated desire locates a focal point but each representation or re-vision of home or belonging offers multiple narrative possibilities."[19] It is useful to conceptualize the desire for institutionalization as a desire for home precisely because it is about a desire to stay put. It is about a politics of recognition and value that dares to imagine the possibility of not having to reinvent oneself again and again as so many Asian American studies programs have had to do.

Coda

As of July 1, 2016, I am no longer jointly appointed. I am a full-fledged member of the English Department. I deliberately gave up affiliate status in the very intellectual programs that most speak to my research. I did something I never expected to do. I asked to have my line moved out of Asian/Asian American Studies and fully into English. And yet the lead up to this was met with considerable resistance, not because there was any concern for my being but because of the question of how it looked for the new department to have a senior woman of color opt out. A personal responsibility

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

was placed on me to remain in an unhappy position because I filled many boxes. In the end, the choice for me was to choose among two literary characters as my models. Did I want to be Willy Loman, and follow the path of "being well liked" and eventually self-destruct? Or, did I want to be Bartleby the Scrivener and quietly resist?

In the end, I opted for the latter. I preferred not to be included. I preferred not to be a part of a project I could no longer believe in. As Ahmed notes, "we can be constrained even by the categories we love."[20] In my case the institutional formations of Asian American and gender studies were constraining me from doing the very work those interdisciplines had allowed me to do. But I also felt an obligation to always turn up and, as Ahmed notes, "becoming the race person means you are the one who is turned to when race turns up. The very fact of your existence can allow others not to turn up."[21] I reluctantly chose not to turn up anymore because when I turned up, it let other people off the hook. When I refused to turn up for a search committee, I had to be replaced by two people, a member of the WGS faculty and an affiliate of AAA. I had become so well stuck to multiple categories that I was the easiest go-to person for race and gender. This was certainly not what I understood intersectionality to mean.

The paradox of the neoliberal university is that it asks us to subsume our personal well-being and happiness for the greater good. And yet it is never clear what the greater good is and how exactly it benefits students or faculty. When one turns away from the academy, and from the institutional formations of gender or ethnic studies, it is often cast in terms of betrayal. And yet, as the 2016 case of Sara Ahmed's well-publicized resignation from Goldsmiths College suggests, turning away from institutional "homes" is often the only way to remain committed to the goals of gender and ethnic studies critique. Resignation in this case can be better thought of as a re-signification and a reorientation toward other kinds of goals. And so, one must necessarily ask, what if institutionalization is not the goal? One often hears about the success of Asian American studies discussed in very specific terms that privilege visibility. To gain institutional recognition is success. To measure up to the right metrics is success. To serve the university's strategic plan is success. But how does this success shore up for the Asian Americanist who was never schooled with these ideas of success in mind? I returned to the English Department in large part because it was a home to the kind of work I wanted to do. Though faculty always rotate in and out, I work in a department where I am one of five Asian Americanists. Among our tenure-line faculty, we have a pre-eminent

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

Latina writer, a Native Americanist, and four African Americanists. There are at least three queer-identified faculty and there are more women than men. As a department, we have little interest in hiring according to standard English literary periods. Sometimes I think we are the best kept secret among progressive English departments in the country.

In her bold essay on the strategic ways in which we might think about failure as a necessary goal, literary scholar Frances Tran advocates for a kind of unraveling that she names undisciplining. She writes: "Undisciplining encourages a shift in perspective and affect, a *dis*investment from the security of disciplinary formations and institutional paradigms of success, contained in what I have been calling the 'good life' fantasy. It proposes a different way of conceiving our scholarly activity, not as shoring up a particular interdiscipline, but rather as an unraveling that contests the constraints imposed by the academy's racialized structure of knowledge."[22] Following Tran, I submit that to undiscipline is also to un-home. To undiscipline is to refuse a home. To undiscipline is to prefer not to. To undiscipline is to recognize that failure is not failure. To undiscipline is ultimately what we perhaps should strive for to ensure a radical critique in gender and ethnic studies. To undiscipline is to allow the tenured Asian Americanist to work responsibly and to think about how to transform the discipline even as one thinks of tenure as the right to be in place.

NOTES

1. Alicia Schmidt Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S. Mexico Borderlands* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 4.

2. This is entirely based on my perception up until 2009. I cannot speak for institutional commitments and hiring decisions made by subsequent administrations post-2009. The fact remains that there is no major and that classes are offered sporadically in Asian American literature. More often, they are enfolded into the umbrella of ethnic literature, the rubric under which I most often taught any Asian American literary texts.

3. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012), 4.

4. At last count, this included, in no particular order, talks or readings by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Gayatri Gopinath, Robert Ku, Martin Manalansan, Jigna Desai, Catherine Ceniza Choy, Robert Diaz, Sangeeta Ray, Stan Thangaraj, Lisa Lowe, Cynthia Wu, R. Radhakrishnan, Neelanjana Banerjee.

5. Cynthia Wu, "Tenured and Happy," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 30, 2015, https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/03/30/essay-earning-tenure-and-considering-responsibilities-faculty-life.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

6. Peter Foster, "US Professors Urge Western Universities to End Ties with China's Confucius Institutes," *Telegraph*, June 18, 2014, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10907971/US-professors-urge-Western-universities-to-end-ties-to-Chinas-Confucius-Institutes.html.

7. "On Partnerships with Foreign Governments: The Case of Confucius Institutes," Statement Issued by the American Association of University Professors, June 2014, https://www.aaup.org/file/Confucius_Institutes_0.pdf.

8. The truncated mission statement on the website notes, "Asian/Asian American Studies is an interdisciplinary program that applies a transnational and transcultural lens to critical inquiries into important issues both affecting and connecting Asia and Asian America and that prepares students to become global citizens of the twenty-first century. The program studies how the historical, socio-cultural, and political forces shape our understanding and knowledge about people of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage in the United States and in the diaspora. It aims to develop new paradigms and perspectives to close down past divisions and boundaries and to open up space for dialogue and engagement." Miami University Asian/Asian American Studies Department website, http://miamioh.edu/cas/academics/programs/aaa/academics/index.html, accessed July 31, 2016.

9. Elizabeth Redden, "Confucius Says . . . . , " *Inside Higher Ed*, January 4, 2012, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/01/04/debate-over-chinese-funded-institutes-american-universities#sthash.1XrPR3mX.9wWDPAi7.dpbs.

10. Hereafter I will refer to the various interdisciplinary programs by their acronyms.

11. Cathy Schlund-Vials, "Planned Obsolescence, Strategic Resistance: Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, and the Neoliberal University."

12. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 157.

13. Ibid.

14. The institutional battles I had prioritized were to secure tenure for two women of color and to facilitate the promotion of a queer faculty member. Doing this kind of labor demanded that I always had to soften moments of anger and mitigate bad feelings.

15. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 26.

16. I should be clear that this is not about the individuals hired or their commitments to diversity and social justice. Rather it is about the process that reproduces whiteness and upends promises that are made to increase faculty diversity.

17. Nina Ha, "When Ten Minus Two Equal Zero: An Interview with Sanda Lwin," *Meridians* 3, no. 1 (2002): 5.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

18. Allan Punzalan Isaac, "Refusing Subjects and (Dis)owning America in Asian American Studies," *Kritika Kultura* 12 (2009): 73.

19. Ibid., 74.

20. Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 4.

21. Ibid., 5.

22. Frances Tran, "How to Live *Un*Safely: Towards a Better Good Life for Asian American Studies," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 19, no. 3 (2016): 231.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

Copyright © 2017. Fordham University Press. All rights reserved.

Flashpoints for Asian American Studies, edited by Cathy Schlund-Vials, Fordham University Press, 2017. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swarthmore/detail.action?docID=5017550.
Created from swarthmore on 2022-04-26 19:02:22.

PAULO FREIRE

PEDAGOGY of the OPPRESSED

• 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION •

Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos

With an Introduction by Donaldo Macedo

continuum
NEW YORK • LONDON

Back to top.

CHAPTER 2

A careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally *narrative* character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness.

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration—contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become a hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.

The outstanding characteristic of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power. "Four times four is sixteen; the capital of Pará is Belém." The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of "capital" in the affirmation "the capital of Pará is Belém," that is, what Belém means for Pará and what Pará means for Brazil.

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to

memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into "containers," into "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher's existence—but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher.

The *raison d'être* of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students.

This solution is not (nor can it be) found in the banking concept. On the contrary, banking education maintains and even stimulates the contradiction through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:

(a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
(b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
(c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
(d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
(e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
(f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
(g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
(h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
(i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
(j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

The capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed. The oppressors use their "humanitarianism" to preserve a profitable situation. Thus they react almost instinctively against any experiment in education which stimulates

the critical faculties and is not content with a partial view of reality but always seeks out the ties which link one point to another and one problem to another.

Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them";[1] for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. To achieve this end, the oppressors use the banking concept of education in conjunction with a paternalistic social action apparatus, within which the oppressed receive the euphemistic title of "welfare recipients." They are treated as individual cases, as marginal persons who deviate from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society. The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated," "incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken."

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not "marginals," are not people living "outside" society. They have always been "inside"—inside the structure which made them "beings for others." The solution is not to "integrate" them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become "beings for themselves." Such transformation, of course, would undermine the oppressors' purposes; hence their utilization of the banking concept of education to avoid the threat of student *conscientização*.

The banking approach to adult education, for example, will never propose to students that they critically consider reality. It will deal instead with such vital questions as whether Roger gave green grass to the goat, and insist upon the importance of learning that, on the contrary, Roger gave green grass to the rabbit. The "humanism" of the banking approach masks the effort to turn women and men into automatons—the very negation of their ontological vocation to be more fully human.

1. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Pensée de Droite, Aujord'hui* (Paris); ST, *El Pensamiento político de la Derecha* (Buenos Aires, 1963), p. 34.

Those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize), fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality. But, sooner or later, these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a *process*, undergoing constant transformation. If men and women are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanization, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation.

But the humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them.

The banking concept does not admit to such partnership—and necessarily so. To resolve the teacher-student contradiction, to exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of student among students would be to undermine the power of oppression and serve the cause of liberation.

Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator. In this view, the person is not a conscious being (*corpo consciente*); he or she is rather the possessor of *a* consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside. For example, my desk, my books, my coffee cup, all the objects before me—as bits of the world which surround me—would be "inside" me, exactly as I am inside my

study right now. This view makes no distinction between being accessible to consciousness and entering consciousness. The distinction, however, is essential: the objects which surround me are simply accessible to my consciousness, not located within it. I am aware of them, but they are not inside me.

It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world "enters into" the students. The teacher's task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously, to "fill" the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge.[2] And since people "receive" the world as passive entities, education should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world. The educated individual is the adapted person, because she or he is better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it.

The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe. The theory and practice of banking education serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements,[3] the methods for evaluating "knowledge," the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking.

The bank-clerk educator does not realize that there is no true security in his hypertrophied role, that one must seek to live *with* others in solidarity. One cannot impose oneself, nor even merely

2. This concept corresponds to what Sartre calls the "digestive" or "nutritive" concept of education, in which knowledge is "fed" by the teacher to the students to "fill them out." See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Une idée fundamentale de la phénomenologie de Husserl: L'intentionalité," *Situations I* (Paris, 1947).

3. For example, some professors specify in their reading lists that a book should be read from pages 10 to 15—and do this to "help" their students!

co-exist with one's students. Solidarity requires true communication, and the concept by which such an educator is guided fears and proscribes communication.

Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible.

Because banking education begins with a false understanding of men and women as objects, it cannot promote the development of what Fromm calls "biophily," but instead produces its opposite: "necrophily."

> While life is characterized by growth in a structured, functional manner, the necrophilous person loves all that does not grow, all that is mechanical. The necrophilous person is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things. . . . Memory, rather than experience; having, rather than being, is what counts. The necrophilous person can relate to an object—a flower or a person—only if he possesses it; hence a threat to his possession is a threat to himself; if he loses possession he loses contact with the world. . . . He loves control, and in the act of controlling he kills life.[4]

Oppression—overwhelming control—is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life. The banking concept of education, which serves the interests of oppression, is also necrophilic. Based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialized view of consciousness, it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power.

4. Fromm, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

When their efforts to act responsibly are frustrated, when they find themselves unable to use their faculties, people suffer. "This suffering due to impotence is rooted in the very fact that the human equilibrium has been disturbed."[5] But the inability to act which causes people's anguish also causes them to reject their impotence, by attempting

> . . . to restore [their] capacity to act. But can [they], and how? One way is to submit to and identify with a person or group having power. By this symbolic participation in another person's life, [men have] the illusion of acting, when in reality [they] only submit to and become a part of those who act.[6]

Populist manifestations perhaps best exemplify this type of behavior by the oppressed, who, by identifying with charismatic leaders, come to feel that they themselves are active and effective. The rebellion they express as they emerge in the historical process is motivated by that desire to act effectively. The dominant elites consider the remedy to be more domination and repression, carried out in the name of freedom, order, and social peace (that is, the peace of the elites). Thus they can condemn—logically, from their point of view—"the violence of a strike by workers and [can] call upon the state in the same breath to use violence in putting down the strike."[7]

Education as the exercise of domination stimulates the credulity of students, with the ideological intent (often not perceived by educators) of indoctrinating them to adapt to the world of oppression. This accusation is not made in the naïve hope that the dominant elites will thereby simply abandon the practice. Its objective is to call the attention of true humanists to the fact that they cannot use banking educational methods in the pursuit of liberation, for they would only negate that very pursuit. Nor may a revolutionary society inherit these methods from an oppressor society. The revolutionary society which practices banking education is either misguided or

5. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, 1960), p. 130.

mistrusting of people. In either event, it is threatened by the specter of reaction.

Unfortunately, those who espouse the cause of liberation are themselves surrounded and influenced by the climate which generates the banking concept, and often do not perceive its true significance or its dehumanizing power. Paradoxically, then, they utilize this same instrument of alienation in what they consider an effort to liberate. Indeed, some "revolutionaries" brand as "innocents," "dreamers," or even "reactionaries" those who would challenge this educational practice. But one does not liberate people by alienating them. Authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it. Those truly committed to the cause of liberation can accept neither the mechanistic concept of consciousness as an empty vessel to be filled, nor the use of banking methods of domination (propaganda, slogans—deposits) in the name of liberation.

Those truly committed to liberation must reject the banking concept in its entirety, adopting instead a concept of women and men as conscious beings, and consciousness as consciousness intent upon the world. They must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world. "Problem-posing" education, responding to the essence of consciousness—*intentionality*—rejects communiqués and embodies communication. It epitomizes the special characteristic of consciousness: being *conscious of*, not only as intent on objects but as turned in upon itself in a Jasperian "split"—consciousness as consciousness *of* consciousness.

Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information. It is a learning situation in which the cognizable object (far from being the end of the cognitive act) intermediates the cognitive actors—teacher on the one hand and students on the other. Accordingly, the practice of problem-posing education entails at the outset that the teacher-student contradiction to be resolved. Dialogical relations—indispensable to the capacity of cognitive

actors to cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object—are otherwise impossible.

Indeed, problem-posing education, which breaks with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfill its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of* freedom, not *against* it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher.

The banking concept (with its tendency to dichotomize everything) distinguishes two stages in the action of the educator. During the first, he cognizes a cognizable object while he prepares his lessons in his study or his laboratory; during the second, he expounds to his students about that object. The students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher. Nor do the students practice any act of cognition, since the object towards which that act should be directed is the property of the teacher rather than a medium evoking the critical reflection of both teacher and students. Hence in the name of the "preservation of culture and knowledge" we have a system which achieves neither true knowledge nor true culture.

The problem-posing method does not dichotomize the activity of the teacher-student: she is not "cognitive" at one point and "narrative" at another. She is always "cognitive," whether preparing a project or engaging in dialogue with the students. He does not regard cognizable objects as his private property, but as the object of reflection by himself and the students. In this way, the problem-posing educator constantly re-forms his reflections in the reflection of the

students. The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. The teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as the students express their own. The role of the problem-posing educator is to create; together with the students, the conditions under which knowledge at the level of the *doxa* is superseded by true knowledge, at the level of the *logos*.

Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality.

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings; and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed.

Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.

> La conscience et le monde sont donnés d'un même coup: extérieur par essence à la conscience, le monde est, par essence relatif à elle.[8]

8. Sartre; *op. cit.*, p. 32.

In one of our culture circles in Chile, the group was discussing (based on a codification[9]) the anthropological concept of culture. In the midst of the discussion, a peasant who by banking standards was completely ignorant said: "Now I see that without man there is no world." When the educator responded: "Let's say, for the sake of argument, that all the men on earth were to die, but that the earth itself remained, together with trees, birds, animals, rivers, seas, the stars . . . wouldn't all this be a world?" "Oh no," the peasant replied emphatically. "There would be no one to say: 'This is a world'."

The peasant wished to express the idea that there would be lacking the consciousness of the world which necessarily implies the world of consciousness. *I* cannot exist without a *non-I*. In turn, the *not-I* depends on that existence. The world which brings consciousness into existence becomes the world *of* that consciousness. Hence, the previously cited affirmation of Sartre: *"La conscience et le monde sont donnés d'un même coup."*

As women and men, simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena:

> In perception properly so-called, as an explicit awareness [*Gewahren*], I am turned towards the object, to the paper, for instance. I apprehend it as being this here and now. The apprehension is a singling out, every object having a background in experience. Around and about the paper lie books, pencils, inkwell, and so forth, and these in a certain sense are also "perceived", perceptually there, in the "field of intuition"; but whilst I was turned towards the paper there was no turning in their direction, nor any apprehending of them, not even in a secondary sense. They appeared and yet were not singled out, were not posited on their own account. Every perception of a thing has such a zone of background intuitions or background awareness, if "intuiting" already includes the state of being turned towards, and this also is a "conscious experience", or more briefly

9. See chapter 3.—Translator's note.

> a "consciousness of" all indeed that in point of fact lies in the co-perceived objective background.[10]

That which had existed objectively but had not been perceived in its deeper implications (if indeed it was perceived at all) begins to "stand out," assuming the character of a problem and therefore of challenge. Thus, men and women begin to single out elements from their "background awareness" and to reflect upon them. These elements are now objects of their consideration, and, as such, objects of their action and cognition.

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. Although the dialectical relations of women and men with the world exist independently of how these relations are perceived (or whether or not they are perceived at all), it is also true that the form of action they adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. Hence, the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action.

Once again, the two educational concepts and practices under analysis come into conflict. Banking education (for obvious reasons) attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way human beings exist in the world; problem-posing education sets itself the task of demythologizing. Banking education resists dialogue; problem-posing education regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition which unveils reality. Banking education treats students as objects of assistance; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the *intentionality* of consciousness by isolating consciousness from

10. Edmund Husserl, *Ideas—General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London, 1969), pp. 105–106.

the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. In sum: banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take the people's historicity as their starting point.

Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming*—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed, in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompletion. In this incompletion and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity.

Education is thus constantly remade in the praxis. In order to *be*, it must *become*. Its "duration" (in the Bergsonian meaning of the word) is found in the interplay of the opposites *permanence* and *change*. The banking method emphasizes permanence and becomes reactionary; problem-posing education—which accepts neither a "well-behaved" present nor a predetermined future—roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary.

Problem-posing education is revolutionary futurity. Hence it is prophetic (and, as such, hopeful). Hence, it corresponds to the historical nature of humankind. Hence, it affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. Hence, it identifies with the movement which engages people as beings aware of their incompletion—an historical movement which has its point of departure, its Subjects and its objective.

The point of departure of the movement lies in the people themselves. But since people do not exist apart from the world, apart from reality, the movement must begin with the human-world relationship. Accordingly, the point of departure must always be with men and women in the "here and now," which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene. Only by starting from this situation—which determines their perception of it—can they begin to move. To do this authentically they must perceive their state not as fated and unalterable, but merely as limiting—and therefore challenging.

Whereas the banking method directly or indirectly reinforces men's fatalistic perception of their situation, the problem-posing method presents this very situation to them as a problem. As the situation becomes the object of their cognition, the naïve or magical perception which produced their fatalism gives way to perception which is able to perceive itself even as it perceives reality, and can thus be critically objective about that reality.

A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel themselves to be in control. If people, as historical beings necessarily engaged with other people in a movement of inquiry, did not control that movement, it would be (and is) a violation of their humanity. Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects.

This movement of inquiry must be directed towards humanization—the people's historical vocation. The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism, but only in fellowship and solidarity; therefore it cannot unfold in the antagonistic relations between oppressors and oppressed. No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so. Attempting *to be more* human, individualistically, leads to *having*

more, egotistically, a form of dehumanization. Not that it is not fundamental *to have* in order *to be* human. Precisely because it *is* necessary, some men's *having* must not be allowed to constitute an obstacle to others' *having,* must not consolidate the power of the former to crush the latter.

Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization.

Problem-posing education does not and cannot serve the interests of the oppressor. No oppressive order could permit the oppressed to begin to question: Why? While only a revolutionary society can carry out this education in systematic terms, the revolutionary leaders need not take full power before they can employ the method. In the revolutionary process, the leaders cannot utilize the banking method as an interim measure, justified on grounds of expediency, with the intention of *later* behaving in a genuinely revolutionary fashion. They must be revolutionary—that is to say, dialogical—from the outset.

CHAPTER 3

As we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: *the word*. But the word is more than just an instrument which makes dialogue possible; accordingly, we must seek its constitutive elements. Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers. There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.[1] Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.[2]

An unauthentic word, one which is unable to transform reality, results when dichotomy is imposed upon its constitutive elements. When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into *verbalism*, into an alienated and alienating "blah." It becomes an empty word, one which cannot denounce the world, for denunciation is impossible without a commitment to transform, and there is no transformation without action.

---

1. Action
   Reflection } word = work = praxis
   Sacrifice of action = verbalism
   Sacrifice of reflection = activism
2. Some of these reflections emerged as a result of conversations with Professor Ernani Maria Fiori.

On the other hand, if action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into *activism*. The latter—action for action's sake—negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. Either dichotomy, by creating unauthentic forms of existence, creates also unauthentic forms of thought, which reinforce the original dichotomy.

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. Human beings are not built in silence,[3] but in word, in work, in action-reflection.

But while to say the true word—which is work, which is praxis—is to transform the world, saying that word is not the privilege of some few persons, but the right of everyone. Consequently, no one can say a true word alone—nor can she say it *for* another, in a prescriptive act which robs others of their words.

Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming—between those who deny others the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression.

If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which

3. I obviously do not refer to the silence of profound meditation, in which men only apparently leave the world, withdrawing from it in order to consider it in its totality, and thus remaining with it. But this type of retreat is only authentic when the meditator is "bathed" in reality; not when the retreat signifies contempt for the world and flight from it, in a type of "historical schizophrenia."

is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. Nor yet is it a hostile, polemical argument between those who are committed neither to the naming of the world, nor to the search for truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation; it must not serve as a crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another. The domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of humankind.

Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love.[4] Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. It is thus necessarily the task of responsible Subjects and cannot exist in a relation of domination. Domination reveals the pathology of love: sadism in the dominator and masochism in the dominated. Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is commitment to their cause—the cause of liberation. And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical. As an act

4. I am more and more convinced that true revolutionaries must perceive the revolution, because of its creative and liberating nature, as an act of love. For me, the revolution, which is not possible without a theory of revolution—and therefore science—is not irreconcilable with love. On the contrary: the revolution is made by people to achieve their humanization. What, indeed, is the deeper motive which moves individuals to become revolutionaries, but the dehumanization of people? The distortion imposed on the word "love" by the capitalist world cannot prevent the revolution from being essentially loving in character, nor can it prevent the revolutionaries from affirming their love of life. Guevara (while admitting the "risk of seeming ridiculous") was not afraid to affirm it: "Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality." *Venceremos—The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara*, edited by John Gerassi (New York, 1969), p. 398.

of bravery, love cannot be sentimental; as an act of freedom, it must not serve as a pretext for manipulation. It must generate other acts of freedom; otherwise, it is not love. Only by abolishing the situation of oppression is it possible to restore the love which that situation made impossible. If I do not love the world—if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue.

On the other hand, dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance. Dialogue, as the encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I regard myself as a case apart from others—mere "its" in whom I cannot recognize other "I"s? How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of "pure" men, the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are "these people" or "the great unwashed"? How can I dialogue if I start from the premise that naming the world is the task of an elite and that the presence of the people in history is a sign of deterioration, thus to be avoided? How can I dialogue if I am closed to—and even offended by—the contribution of others? How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness? Self-sufficiency is incompatible with dialogue. Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world. Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know.

Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the "dialogical man" believes in others

even before he meets them face to face. His faith, however, is not naïve. The "dialogical man" is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power. Far from destroying his faith in the people, however, this possibility strikes him as a challenge to which he must respond. He is convinced that the power to create and transform, even when thwarted in concrete situations, tends to be reborn. And that rebirth can occur—not gratuitously, but in and through the struggle for liberation—in the supersedence of slave labor by emancipated labor which gives zest to life. Without this faith in people, dialogue is a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation.

Founding itself upon love, humility, and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence. It would be a contradiction in terms if dialogue—loving, humble, and full of faith—did not produce this climate of mutual trust, which leads the dialoguers into ever closer partnership in the naming of the world. Conversely, such trust is obviously absent in the anti-dialogics of the banking method of education. Whereas faith in humankind is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue, trust is established by dialogue. Should it founder, it will be seen that the preconditions were lacking. False love, false humility, and feeble faith in others cannot create trust. Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party's words do not coincide with their actions. To say one thing and do another—to take one's own word lightly—cannot inspire trust. To glorify democracy and to silence the people is a farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate people is a lie.

Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men's incompletion, from which they move out in constant search—a search which can be carried out only in communion with others. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it. The dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of

the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait. As the encounter of women and men seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the dialoguers expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious.

Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking—thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity—thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. Critical thinking contrasts with naïve thinking, which sees "historical time as a weight, a stratification of the acquisitions and experiences of the past,"[5] from which the present should emerge normalized and "well-behaved." For the naïve thinker, the important thing is accommodation to this normalized "today." For the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men. In the words of Pierre Furter:

> The goal will no longer be to eliminate the risks of temporality by clutching to guaranteed space, but rather to temporalize space . . . The universe is revealed to me not as space, imposing a massive presence to which I can but adapt, but as a scope, a domain which takes shape as I act upon it.[6]

For naïve thinking, the goal is precisely to hold fast to this guaranteed space and adjust to it. By thus denying temporality, it denies itself as well.

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communi-

5. From the letter of a friend.
6. Pierre Furter, *Educação e Vida* (Rio, 1966), pp. 26–27.

cation, and without communication there can be no true education. Education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated. Thus, the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself *what* she or he will dialogue with the latter *about*. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education.

For the anti-dialogical banking educator, the question of content simply concerns the program about which he will discourse to his students; and he answers his own question, by organizing his own program. For the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student, the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition—bits of information to be deposited in the students—but rather the organized, systematized, and developed "re-presentation" to individuals of the things about which they want to know more.[7]

Authentic education is not carried on by "A" *for* "B" or by "A" *about* "B," but rather by "A" *with* "B," mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes on the basis of which the program content of education can be built. In its desire to create an ideal model of the "good man," a naïvely conceived humanism often overlooks the concrete, existential, present situation of real people. Authentic humanism, in Pierre Furter's words, "consists in permitting the emergence of the awareness of our full humanity, as a condition and as an obligation, as a situation

7. In a long conversation with Malraux, Mao-Tse-Tung declared, "You know I've proclaimed for a long time: we must teach the masses clearly what we have received from them confusedly." André Malraux, *Anti-Memoirs* (New York, 1968), pp. 361–362. This affirmation contains an entire dialogical theory of how to construct the program content of education, which cannot be elaborated according to what the *educator* thinks best for the *students*.

and as a project."[8] We simply cannot go to the laborers—urban or peasant[9]—in the banking style, to give them "knowledge" or to impose upon them the model of the "good man" contained in a program whose content we have ourselves organized. Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed.

For the truly humanist educator and the authentic revolutionary, the object of action is the reality to be transformed by them together with other people—not other men and women themselves. The oppressors are the ones who act upon the people to indoctrinate them and adjust them to a reality which must remain untouched. Unfortunately, however, in their desire to obtain the support of the people for revolutionary action, revolutionary leaders often fall for the banking line of planning program content from the top down. They approach the peasant or urban masses with projects which may correspond to their own view of the world, but not to that of the people.[10] They forget that their fundamental objective is to fight

8. Furter, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

9. The latter, usually submerged in a colonial context, are almost umbilically linked to the world of nature, in relation to which they feel themselves to be component parts rather than shapers.

10. "Our cultural workers must serve the people with great enthusiasm and devotion, and they must link themselves with the masses, not divorce themselves from the masses. In order to do so, they must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned. It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses. . . . There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them." From the *Selected Works of Mao-Tse-Tung*, Vol. III. "The United Front in Cultural Work" (October 30, 1944) (Peking, 1967), pp. 186–187.

alongside the people for the recovery of the people's stolen humanity, not to "win the people over" to their side. Such a phrase does not belong in the vocabulary of revolutionary leaders, but in that of the oppressor. The revolutionary's role is to liberate, and be liberated, with the people—not to win them over.

In their political activity, the dominant elites utilize the banking concept to encourage passivity in the oppressed, corresponding with the latter's "submerged" state of consciousness, and take advantage of that passivity to "fill" that consciousness with slogans which create even more fear of freedom. This practice is incompatible with a truly liberating course of action, which, by presenting the oppressors' slogans as a problem, helps the oppressed to "eject" those slogans from within themselves. After all, the task of the humanists is surely not that of pitting their slogans against the slogans of the oppressors, with the oppressed as the testing ground, "housing" the slogans of first one group and then the other. On the contrary, the task of the humanists is to see that the oppressed become aware of the fact that as dual beings, "housing" the oppressors within themselves, they cannot be truly human.

This task implies that revolutionary leaders do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of "salvation," but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation—the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist. One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion,[11] good intentions notwithstanding.

The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires

11. This point will be analyzed in detail in chapter 4.

a response—not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.[12]

We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears—programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their *situation* in the world. Educational and political action which is not critically aware of this situation runs the risk either of "banking" or of preaching in the desert.

Often, educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Accordingly, their talk is just alienated and alienating rhetoric. The language of the educator or the politician (and it seems more and more clear that the latter must also become an educator, in the broadest sense of the word), like the language of the people, cannot exist without thought; and neither language nor thought can exist without a structure to which they refer. In order to communicate effectively, educator and politician must understand the structural conditions in which the thought and language of the people are dialectically framed.

It is to the reality which mediates men, and to the perception of that reality held by educators and people, that we must go to find the program content of education. The investigation of what I have termed the people's "thematic universe"[13]—the complex of their "generative themes"—inaugurates the dialogue of education as the practice of freedom. The methodology of that investigation must likewise be dialogical, affording the opportunity both to discover

12. It is as self-contradictory for true humanists to use the banking method as it would be for rightists to engage in problem-posing education. (The latter are always consistent—they never use a problem-posing pedagogy.)

13. The expression "meaningful thematics" is used with the same connotation.

generative themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to these themes. Consistent with the liberating purpose of dialogical education, the object of the investigation is not persons (as if they were anatomical fragments), but rather the thought-language with which men and women refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their view of the world, in which their generative themes are found.

Before describing a "generative theme" more precisely, which will also clarify what is meant by a "minimum thematic universe," it seems to me indispensable to present a few preliminary reflections. The concept of a generative theme is neither an arbitrary invention nor a working hypothesis to be proved. If it were a hypothesis to be proved, the initial investigation would seek not to ascertain the nature of the theme, but rather the very existence or non-existence of themes themselves. In that event, before attempting to understand the theme in its richness, its significance, its plurality, its transformations, and its historical composition, we would first have to verify whether or not it is an objective fact; only then could we proceed to apprehend it. Although an attitude of critical doubt is legitimate, it does appear possible to verify the reality of the generative theme—not only through one's own existential experience, but also through critical reflection on the human-world relationship and on the relationships between people implicit in the former.

This point deserves more attention. One may well remember—trite as it seems—that, of the uncompleted beings, man is the only one to treat not only his actions but his very self as the object of his reflection; this capacity distinguishes him from the animals, which are unable to separate themselves from their activity and thus are unable to reflect upon it. In this apparently superficial distinction lie the boundaries which delimit the action of each in his life space. Because the animals' activity is an extension of themselves, the results of that activity are also inseparable from themselves: animals can neither set objectives nor infuse their transformation of nature with any significance beyond itself. Moreover, the "decision" to perform this activity belongs not to them but to their species. Animals are, accordingly, fundamentally "beings in themselves."

Unable to decide for themselves, unable to objectify either themselves or their activity, lacking objectives which they themselves have set, living "submerged" in a world to which they can give no meaning, lacking a "tomorrow" and a "today" because they exist in an overwhelming present, animals are ahistorical. Their ahistorical life does not occur in the "world," taken in its strict meaning; for the animal, the world does not constitute a "not-I" which could set him apart as an "I." The human world, which is historical, serves as a mere prop for the "being in itself." Animals are not challenged by the configuration which confronts them; they are merely stimulated. Their life is not one of risk-taking, for they are not aware of taking risks. Risks are not challenges perceived upon reflection, but merely "noted" by the signs which indicate them; they accordingly do not require decision-making responses.

Consequently, animals cannot commit themselves. Their ahistorical condition does not permit them to "take on" life. Because they do not "take it on," they cannot construct it; and if they do not construct it, they cannot transform its configuration. Nor can they know themselves to be destroyed by life, for they cannot expand their "prop" world into a meaningful, symbolic world which includes culture and history. As a result, animals do not "animalize" their configuration in order to animalize themselves—nor do they "deanimalize" themselves. Even in the forest, they remain "beings-in-themselves," as animal-like there as in the zoo.

In contrast, the people—aware of their activity and the world in which they are situated, acting in function of the objectives which they propose, having the seat of their decisions located in themselves and in their relations with the world and with others, infusing the world with their creative presence by means of the transformation they effect upon it—unlike animals, not only live but exist;[14] and their existence is historical. Animals live out their lives on an atemporal, flat, uniform "prop"; humans exist in a world which they are

14. In the English language, the terms "live" and "exist" have assumed implications opposite to their etymological origins. As used here, "live" is the more basic term, implying only survival; "exist" implies a deeper involvement in the process of "becoming."

constantly re-creating and transforming. For animals, "here" is only a habitat with which they enter into contact; for people, "here" signifies not merely a physical space, but also an historical space.

Strictly speaking, "here," "now," "there," "tomorrow," and "yesterday" do not exist for the animal, whose life, lacking self-consciousness, is totally determined. Animals cannot surmount the limits imposed by the "here," the "now," or the "there."

Humans, however, because they are aware of themselves and thus of the world—because they are *conscious beings*—exist in a dialectical relationship between the determination of limits and their own freedom. As they separate themselves from the world, which they objectify, as they separate themselves from their own activity, as they locate the seat of their decisions in themselves and in their relations with the world and others, people overcome the situations which limit them: the "limit-situations."[15] Once perceived by individuals as fetters, as obstacles to their liberation, these situations stand out in relief from the background, revealing their true nature as concrete historical dimensions of a given reality. Men and women respond to the challenge with actions which Vieira Pinto calls "limit-acts": those directed at negating and overcoming, rather than passively accepting, the "given."

Thus, it is not the limit-situations in and of themselves which create a climate of hopelessness, but rather how they are perceived by women and men at a given historical moment: whether they appear as fetters or as insurmountable barriers. As critical perception is embodied in action, a climate of hope and confidence develops which leads men to attempt to overcome the limit-situations. This objective can be achieved only through action upon the con-

15. Professor Alvaro Vieira Pinto analyzes with clarity the problem of "limit-situations," using the concept without the pessimistic aspect originally found in Jaspers. For Vieira Pinto, the "limit-situations" are not "the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begin"; they are not "the frontier which separates being from nothingness, but the frontier which separates being from nothingness but the frontier which separates being from being more." Alvaro Vieira Pinto, *Consciência e Realidade Nacional* (Rio de Janeiro, 1960), Vol. II, p. 284.

crete, historical reality in which limit-situations historically are found. As reality is transformed and these situations are superseded, new ones will appear, which in turn will evoke new limit-acts.

The prop world of animals contains no limit-situations, due to its ahistorical character. Similarly, animals lack the ability to exercise limit-acts, which require a decisive attitude towards the world: separation from and objectification of the world in order to transform it. Organically bound to their prop, animals do not distinguish between themselves and the world. Accordingly, animals are not limited by limit-situations—which are historical—but rather by the entire prop. And the appropriate role for animals is not to relate to their prop (in that event, the prop would be a world), but to adapt to it. Thus, when animals "produce" a nest, a hive, or a burrow, they are not creating products which result from "limit-acts," that is, transforming responses. Their productive activity is subordinated to the satisfaction of a physical necessity which is simply stimulating, rather than challenging. "An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product."[16]

Only products which result from the activity of a being but do not belong to its physical body (though these products may bear its seal), can give a dimension of meaning to the context, which thus becomes a world. A being capable of such production (who thereby is necessarily aware of himself, is a "being for himself") could no longer *be* if she or he were not *in the process of being* in the world with which he or she relates; just as the world would no longer exist if this being did not exist.

The difference between animals—who (because their activity does not constitute limit-acts) cannot create products detached from themselves—and humankind—who through their action upon the world create the realm of culture and history—is that only the latter are beings of the praxis. Only human beings *are* praxis—the praxis which, as the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is

16. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Dirk Struik, ed. (New York, 1964), p. 113.

the source of knowledge and creation. Animal activity, which occurs without a praxis, is not creative; people's transforming activity is.

It is as transforming and creative beings that humans, in their permanent relations with reality, produce not only material goods—tangible objects—but also social institutions, ideas, and concepts.[17] Through their continuing praxis, men and women simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings. Because—in contrast to animals—people can tri-dimensionalize time into the past, the present, and the future, their history, in function of their own creations, develops as a constant process of transformation within which epochal units materialize. These epochal units are not closed periods of time, static compartments within which people are confined. Were this the case, a fundamental condition of history—its continuity—would disappear. On the contrary, epochal units interrelate in the dynamics of historical continuity.[18]

An epoch is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude. The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede the people's full humanization, constitute the themes of that epoch. These themes imply others which are opposing or even antithetical; they also indicate tasks to be carried out and fulfilled. Thus, historical themes are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites. Nor can these themes be found anywhere except in the human-world relationship. The complex of interacting themes of an epoch constitutes its "thematic universe."

Confronted by this "universe of themes" in dialectical contradiction, persons take equally contradictory positions: some work to maintain the structures, others to change them. As antagonism deepens between themes which are the expression of reality, there

17. Regarding this point, see Karel Kosik, *Dialética de lo Concreto* (Mexico, 1967).

18. On the question of historical epochs, see Hans Freyer, *Teoría de la época atual* (Mexico).

is a tendency for the themes and for reality itself to be mythicized, establishing a climate of irrationality and sectarianism. This climate threatens to drain the themes of their deeper significance and to deprive them of their characteristically dynamic aspect. In such a situation, myth-creating irrationality itself becomes a fundamental theme. Its opposing theme, the critical and dynamic view of the world, strives to unveil reality, unmask its mythicization, and achieve a full realization of the human task: the permanent transformation of reality in favor of the liberation of people.

In the last analysis, the *themes*[19] both contain and are contained in *limit-situations;* the *tasks* they imply require *limit-acts.* When the themes are concealed by the limit-situations and thus are not clearly perceived, the corresponding tasks—people's responses in the form of historical action—can be neither authentically nor critically fulfilled. In this situation, humans are unable to transcend the limit-situations to discover that beyond these situations—and in contradiction to them—lies an *untested feasibility.*

In sum, limit-situations imply the existence of persons who are directly or indirectly served by these situations, and of those who are negated and curbed by them. Once the latter come to perceive these situations as the frontier between being and being more human, rather than the frontier between being and nothingness, they begin to direct their increasingly critical actions towards achieving the untested feasibility implicit in that perception. On the other hand, those who are served by the present limit-situation regard the untested feasibility as a threatening limit-situation which must not be allowed to materialize, and act to maintain the status quo. Consequently, liberating actions upon an historical milieu must correspond not only to the generative themes but to the way in which these themes are perceived. This requirement in turn implies another: the investigation of meaningful thematics.

19. I have termed these themes "generative" because (however they are comprehended and whatever action they may evoke) they contain the possibility of unfolding into again as many themes, which in their turn call for new tasks to be fulfilled.

Generative themes can be located in concentric circles, moving from the general to the particular. The broadest epochal unit, which includes a diversified range of units and sub-units—continental, regional, national, and so forth—contains themes of a universal character. I consider the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of *domination*—which implies its opposite, the theme of *liberation*, as the objective to be achieved. It is this tormenting theme which gives our epoch the anthropological character mentioned earlier. In order to achieve humanization, which presupposes the elimination of dehumanizing oppression, it is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which people are reduced to things.

Within the smaller circles, we find themes and limit-situations characteristic of societies (on the same continent or on different continents) which through these themes and limit-situations share historical similarities. For example, underdevelopment, which cannot be understood apart from the relationship of dependency, represents a limit-situation characteristic of societies of the Third World. The task implied by this limit-situation is to overcome the contradictory relation of these "object"-societies to the metropolitan societies; this task constitutes the untested feasibility for the Third World.

Any given society within the broader epochal unit contains, in addition to the universal, continental, or historically similar themes, its own particular themes, its own limit-situations. Within yet smaller circles, thematic diversifications can be found within the same society, divided into areas and sub-areas, all of which are related to the societal whole. These constitute epochal sub-units. For example, within the same national unit one can find the contradiction of the "coexistence of the non-contemporaneous."

Within these sub-units, national themes may or may not be perceived in their true significance. They may simply be *felt*—sometimes not even that. But the nonexistence of themes within the sub-units is absolutely impossible. The fact that individuals in a certain area do not perceive a generative theme, or perceive it in a distorted way, may only reveal a limit-situation of oppression in which people are still submerged.

In general, a dominated consciousness which has not yet perceived a limit-situation in its totality apprehends only its epiphenomena and transfers to the latter the inhibiting force which is the property of the limit-situation.[20] This fact is of great importance for the investigation of generative themes. When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, they would have to reverse their starting point: they would need to have a total vision of the context in order subsequently to separate and isolate its constituent elements and by means of this analysis achieve a clearer perception of the whole.

Equally appropriate for the methodology of thematic investigation and for problem-posing education is this effort to present significant dimensions of an individual's contextual reality, the analysis of which will make it possible for him to recognize the interaction of the various components. Meanwhile, the significant dimensions, which in their turn are constituted of parts in interaction, should be perceived as dimensions of total reality. In this way, a critical analysis of a significant existential dimension makes possible a new, critical attitude towards the limit-situations. The perception and comprehension of reality are rectified and acquire new depth. When carried out with a methodology of *conscientização* the investigation of the generative theme contained in the minimum thematic universe (the generative themes in interaction) thus introduces or begins to introduce women and men to a critical form of thinking about their world.

20. Individuals of the middle class often demonstrate this type of behavior, although in a different way from the peasant. Their fear of freedom leads them to erect defense mechanisms and rationalizations which conceal the fundamental, emphasize the fortuitous, and deny concrete reality. In the face of a problem whose analysis would lead to the uncomfortable perception of a limit-situation, their tendency is to remain on the periphery of the discussion and resist any attempt to reach the heart of the question. They are even annoyed when someone points out a fundamental proposition which explains the fortuitous or secondary matters to which they had been assigning primary importance.

In the event, however, that human beings perceive reality as dense, impenetrable, and enveloping, it is indispensable to proceed with the investigation by means of abstraction. This method does not involve reducing the concrete to the abstract (which would signify the negation of its dialectical nature), but rather maintaining both elements as opposites which interrelate dialectically in the act of reflection. This dialectical movement of thought is exemplified perfectly in the analysis of a concrete existential, "coded" situation.[21] Its "decoding" requires moving from the abstract to the concrete; this requires moving from the part to the whole and then returning to the parts; this in turn requires that the Subject recognize himself in the object (the coded concrete existential situation) and recognize the object as a situation in which he finds himself, together with other Subjects. If the decoding is well done, this movement of flux and reflux from the abstrct to the concrete which occurs in the analysis of a coded situation leads to the supersedence of the abstraction *by* the critical perception of the concrete, which has already ceased to be a dense, impenetrable reality.

When an individual is presented with a coded existential situation (a sketch or photograph which leads by abstraction to the concreteness of existential reality), his tendency is to "split" that coded situation. In the process of decoding, this separation corresponds to the stage we call the "description of the situation," and facilitates the discovery of the interaction among the parts of the disjoined whole. This whole (the coded situation), which previously had been only diffusely apprehended, begins to acquire meaning as thought flows back to it from the various dimensions. Since, however, the coding is the representation of an existential situation, the decoder tends to take the step from the representation to the very concrete situation in which and with which she finds herself. It is thus possible to explain conceptually why individuals begin to behave differently with regard to objective reality, once that reality has ceased to look

21. The coding of an existential situation is the representation of that situation, showing some of its constituent elements in interaction. Decoding is the critical analysis of the coded situation.

like a blind alley and has taken on its true aspect: a challenge which human beings must meet.

In all the stages of decoding, people exteriorize their view of the world. And in the way they think about and face the world—fatalistically, dynamically, or statically—their generative themes may be found. A group which does not concretely express a generative thematics—a fact which might appear to imply the nonexistence of themes—is, on the contrary, suggesting a very dramatic theme: *the theme of silence*. The theme of silence suggests a structure of mutism in face of the overwhelming force of the limit-situations.

I must re-emphasize that the generative theme cannot be found in people, divorced from reality; nor yet in reality, divorced from people; much less in "no man's land." It can only be apprehended in the human-world relationship. To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people's thinking about reality and people's action upon reality, which is their praxis. For precisely this reason, the methodology proposed requires that the investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as *co-investigators*. The more active an attitude men and women take in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality.

Some may think it inadvisable to include the people as investigators in the search for their own meaningful thematics: that their intrusive influence (n.b., the "intrusion" of those who are most interested—or ought to be—in their own education) will "adulterate" the findings and thereby sacrifice the objectivity of the investigation. This view mistakenly presupposes that themes exist, in their original objective purity, outside people—as if themes were *things*. Actually, themes exist in people in their relations with the world, with reference to concrete facts. The same objective fact could evoke different complexes of generative themes in different epochal sub-units. There is, therefore, a relation between the given objective fact, the perception women and men have of this fact, and the generative themes.

A meaningful thematics is expressed by people, and a given moment of expression will differ from an earlier moment, if they have changed their perception of the objective facts to which the themes refer. From the investigator's point of view, the important thing is to detect the starting point at which the people visualize the "given" and to verify whether or not during the process of investigation any transformation has occurred in their way of perceiving reality. (Objective reality, of course, remains unchanged. If the perception of that reality changes in the course of the investigation, that fact does not impair the validity of the investigation.)

We must realize that the aspirations, the motives, and the objectives implicit in the meaningful thematics are *human* aspirations, motives, and objectives. They do not exist "out there" somewhere, as static entities; *they are occurring*. They are as historical as human beings themselves; consequently, they cannot be apprehended apart from them. To apprehend these themes and to understand them is to understand both the people who embody them and the reality to which they refer. But—precisely because it is not possible to understand these themes apart from people—it is necessary that those concerned understand them as well. Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character.

The real danger of the investigation is not that the supposed objects of the investigation, discovering themselves to be co-investigators, might "adulterate" the analytical results. On the contrary, the danger lies in the risk of shifting the focus of the investigation from the meaningful themes to the people themselves, thereby treating the people as objects of the investigation. Since this investigation is to serve as a basis for developing an educational program in which teacher-student and students-teachers combine their cognitions of the same object, the investigation itself must likewise be based on reciprocity of action.

Thematic investigation, which occurs in the realm of the human,

cannot be reduced to a mechanical act. As a process of search, of knowledge, and thus of creation, it requires the investigators to discover the interpenetration of problems, in the linking of meaningful themes. The investigation will be most educational when it is most critical, and most critical when it avoids the narrow outlines of partial or "focalized" views of reality, and sticks to the comprehension of *total* reality. Thus, the process of searching for the meaningful thematics should include a concern for the links between themes, a concern to pose these themes as problems, and a concern for their historical-cultural context.

Just as the educator may not elaborate a program to present *to* the people, neither may the investigator elaborate "itineraries" for researching the thematic universe, starting from points which *he* has predetermined. Both education and the investigation designed to support it must be "sympathetic" activities, in the etymological sense of the word. That is, they must consist of communication and of the common experience of a reality perceived in the complexity of its constant "becoming."

The investigator who, in the name of scientific objectivity, transforms the organic into something inorganic, what is becoming into what is, life into death, is a person who fears change. He or she sees in change (which is not denied, but neither is it desired) not a sign of life, but a sign of death and decay. He or she does want to study change—but in order to stop it, not in order to stimulate or deepen it. However, in seeing change as a sign of death and in making people the passive objects of investigation in order to arrive at rigid models, one betrays their own character as a killer of life.

I repeat: the investigation of thematics involves the investigation of the people's thinking—thinking which occurs only in and among people together seeking out reality. I cannot think *for others* or *without others*, nor can others think *for me*. Even if the people's thinking is superstitious or naïve, it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas—not consuming those of others—must constitute that process.

People, as beings "in a situation," find themselves rooted in temporal-spatial conditions which mark them and which they also mark. They will tend to reflect on their own "situationality" to the extent that they are challenged by it to act upon it. Human beings *are* because they *are in* a situation. And they *will be more* the more they not only critically reflect upon their existence but critically act upon it.

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be "in a situation." Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from *emergence*, and results from the *conscientização* of the situation. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence.

Every thematic investigation which deepens historical awareness is thus really educational, while all authentic education investigates thinking. The more educators and the people investigate the people's thinking, and are thus jointly educated, the more they continue to investigate. Education and thematic investigation, in the problem-posing concept of education, are simply different moments of the same process.

In contrast with the antidialogical and non-communicative "deposits" of the banking method of education, the program content of the problem-posing method—dialogical par excellence—is constituted and organized by the students' view of the world, where their own generative themes are found. The content thus constantly expands and renews itself. The task of the dialogical teacher in an interdisciplinary team working on the thematic universe revealed by their investigation is to "re-present" that universe to the people from whom she or he first received it—and "re-present" it not as a lecture, but as a problem.

Let us say, for example, that a group has the responsibility of coordinating a plan for adult education in a peasant area with a high percentage of illiteracy. The plan includes a literacy campaign and a post-literacy phase. During the former stage, problem-posing education seeks out and investigates the "generative word"; in the post-literacy stage, it seeks out and investigates the "generative theme."

Let us here, however, consider only the investigation of the generative themes or the meaningful thematics.[22] Once the investigators have determined the area in which they will work and have acquired a preliminary acquaintance with the area through secondary sources, they initiate the first stage of the investigation. This beginning (like any beginning in any human activity) involves difficulties and risks which are to a certain point normal, although they are not always evident in the first contact with the individuals of the area. In this first contact, the investigators need to get a significant number of persons to agree to an informal meeting during which they can talk about the objectives of their presence in the area. In this meeting they explain the reason for the investigation, how it is to be carried out, and to what use it will be put; they further explain that the investigation will be impossible without a relation of mutual understanding and trust. If the participants agree both to the investigation and to the subsequent process,[23] the investigators should call for volunteers among the participants to serve as assistants. These volunteers will gather a series of necessary data about the life of the area. Of even greater importance, however, is the active presence of these volunteers in the investigation.

Meanwhile, the investigators begin their own visits to the area, never forcing themselves, but acting as sympathetic observers with an attitude of *understanding* towards what they see. While it is normal for investigators to come to the area with values which influ-

22. Regarding the investigation and use of "generative words," see my *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*.

23. According to the Brazilian sociologist Maria Edy Ferreira (in an unpublished work), thematic investigation is only justified to the extent that it returns to the people what truly belongs to them; to the extent that it represents, not an attempt to learn about the people, but to come to know with them the reality which challenges them.

ence their perceptions, this does not mean that they may transform the thematic investigation into a means of imposing these values. The only dimension of these values which it is hoped the people whose thematics are being investigated will come to share (it is presumed that the investigators possess this quality) is a critical perception of the world, which implies a correct method of approaching reality in order to unveil it. And critical perception cannot be imposed. Thus, from the very beginning, thematic investigation is expressed as an educational pursuit, as cultural action.

During their visits, the investigators set their critical "aim" on the area under study, as if it were for them an enormous, unique, living "code" to be deciphered. They regard the area as a totality, and visit upon visit attempt to "split" it by analyzing the partial dimensions which impress them. Through this process they expand their understanding of how the various parts interact, which will later help them penetrate the totality itself.

During this decoding stage, the investigators observe certain *moments* of the life of the area—sometimes directly, sometimes by means of informal conversations with the inhabitants. They register everything in their notebooks, including apparently unimportant items: the way the people talk, their style of life, their behavior at church and at work. They record the idiom of the people: their expressions, their vocabulary, and their syntax (not their incorrect pronunciation, but rather the way they construct their thought).[24]

It is essential that the investigators observe the area under varying circumstances: labor in the fields, meetings of a local association (noting the behavior of the participants, the language used, and the

24. The Brazilian novelist Guimaraēs Rosa is a brilliant example of how a writer can capture authentically, not the pronunciation or the grammatical corruptions of the people, but their syntax: the very structure of their thought. Indeed (and this is not to disparage his exceptional value as a writer), Guimaraēs Rosa was the investigator par excellence of the "meaningful thematics" of the inhabitants of the Brazilian hinterland. Professor Paulo de Tarso is currently preparing an essay which analyzes this little-considered aspect of the work of the author of *Grande Sertão—Veredas* [in English translation: *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* (New York, 1963)].

relations between the officers and the members), the role played by women and by young people, leisure hours, games and sports, conversations with people in their homes (noting examples of husband-wife and parent-child relationships). No activity must escape the attention of the investigators during the initial survey of the area.

After each observation visit, the investigator should draw up a brief report to be discussed by the entire team, in order to evaluate the preliminary findings of both the professional investigators and the local assistants. To facilitate the participation of the assistants, the evaluation meetings should be held in the area itself.

The evaluation meetings represent a second stage in the decoding of the unique living code. As each person, in his decoding essay, relates how he perceived or felt a certain occurrence or situation, his exposition challenges all the other decoders by re-presenting to them the same reality upon which they have themselves been intent. At this moment they "re-consider," through the "considerations" of others, their own previous "consideration." Thus the analysis of reality made by each individual decoder sends them all back, dialogically, to the disjoined whole which once more becomes a totality evoking a new analysis by the investigators, following which a new evaluative and critical meeting will be held. Representatives of the inhabitants participate in all activities as members of the investigating team.

The more the group divide and reintegrate the whole, the more closely they approach the nuclei of the principal and secondary contradictions which involve the inhabitants of the area. By locating these nuclei of contradictions, the investigators might even at this stage be able to organize the program content of their educational action. Indeed, if the content reflected these contradictions, it would undoubtedly contain the meaningful thematics of the area. And one can safely affirm that action based on these observations would be much more likely to succeed than that based on "decisions from the top." The investigators should not, however, be tempted by this possibility. The basic thing, starting from the initial perception of

these nuclei of contradictions (which include the principal contradiction of society as a larger epochal unit) is to study the inhabitants' level of awareness of these contradictions.

Intrinsically, these contradictions constitute limit-situations, involve themes, and indicate tasks. If individuals are caught up in and are unable to separate themselves from these limit-situations, their theme in reference to these situations is *fatalism*, and the task implied by the theme is *the lack of a task*. Thus, although the limit-situations are objective realities which call forth needs in individuals, one must investigate with these individuals their level of awareness of these situations.

A limit-situation as a concrete reality can call forth from persons in different areas (and even in sub-areas of the same area) quite opposite themes and tasks. Thus, the basic concern of the investigators should be to concentrate on the knowledge of what Goldman calls "real consciousness" and the "potential consciousness."

> Real consciousness [is] the result of the multiple obstacles and deviations that the different factors of empirical reality put into opposition and submit for realization by [the] potential consciousness.[25]

Real consciousness implies the impossibility of perceiving the "untested feasibility" which lies beyond the limit-situations. But whereas the untested feasibility cannot be achieved at the level of "real [or present] consciousness," it can be realized through "testing action" which reveals its hitherto unperceived viability. The untested feasibility and real consciousness are related, as are testing action and potential consciousness. Goldman's concept of "potential consciousness" is similar to what Nicolaï terms "unperceived praticable solutions"[26] (our "untested feasibility"), in contrast to "perceived practicable solutions" and "presently practiced solutions," which

25. Lucien Goldman, *The Human Sciences and Philosophy* (London, 1969), p. 118.

26. See André Nicolaï, *Comportment Économique et Structures Sociales* (Paris, 1960).

correspond to Goldman's "real consciousness." Accordingly, the fact that the investigators may in the first stage of the investigation approximately apprehend the complex of contradictions does not authorize them to begin to structure the program content of educational action. This perception of reality is still their own, not that of the people.

It is with the apprehension of the complex of contradictions that the second stage of the investigation begins. Always acting as a team, the investigators will select some of these contradictions to develop the codifications to be used in the thematic investigation. Since the codifications (sketches or photographs)[27] are the *objects* which mediate the decoders in their critical analysis, the preparation of these codifications must be guided by certain principles other than the usual ones for making visual aids.

The first requirement is that these codifications must necessarily represent situations familiar to the individuals whose thematics are being examined, so that they can easily recognize the situations (and thus their own relation to them). It is inadmissible (whether during the process of investigation or in the following stage, when the meaningful thematics are presented as program content) to present pictures of reality unfamiliar to the participants. The latter procedure (although dialectical, because individuals analyzing an unfamiliar reality could compare it with their own and discover the limitations of each) cannot precede the more basic one dictated by the participants' state of submersion, that is, the process in which individuals analyzing their own reality become aware of their prior, distorted perceptions and thereby come to have a new perception of that reality.

An equally fundamental requirement for the preparation of the codifications is that their thematic nucleus be neither overly explicit nor overly enigmatic. The former may degenerate into mere propa-

27. The codifications may also be oral. In this case they consist of a few words presenting an existential problem, followed by decoding. The team of the *Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario* (Institute for Agrarian Development) in Chile has used this method successfully in thematic investigations.

ganda, with no real decoding to be done beyond stating the obviously predetermined content. The latter runs the risk of appearing to be a puzzle or a guessing game. Since they represent existential situations, the codifications should be simple in their complexity and offer various decoding possibilities in order to avoid the brainwashing tendencies of propaganda. Codifications are not slogans; they are cognizable objects, challenges towards which the critical reflection of the decoders should be directed.

In order to offer various possibilities of analysis in the decoding process, the codifications should be organized as a "thematic fan." As the decoders reflect on the codifications, the codifications should open up in the direction of other themes. This opening up (which does not occur if the thematic content is either too explicit or too enigmatic) is indispensable to the perception of the dialectical relations which exist between the themes and their opposites. Accordingly, the codifications reflecting an existential situation must objectively constitute a totality. Its elements must interact in the makeup of the whole.

In the process of decoding, the participants externalize their thematics and thereby make explicit their "real consciousness" of the world. As they do this, they begin to see how they themselves acted while actually experiencing the situation they are now analyzing, and thus reach a "perception of their previous perception." By achieving this awareness, they come to perceive reality differently; by broadening the horizon of their perception, they discover more easily in their "background awareness" the dialectical relations between the two dimensions of reality.

By stimulating "perception of the previous perception" and "knowledge of the previous knowledge," decoding stimulates the appearance of a new perception and the development of new knowledge. The new perception and knowledge are systematically continued with the inauguration of the educational plan, which transforms the untested feasibility into testing action, as potential consciousness supersedes real consciousness.

Preparing the codifications further requires that insofar as possi-

ble they should represent contradictions "inclusive" of others which constitute the system of contradictions of the area under study.[28] As each of these "inclusive" codifications is prepared, the other contradictions "contained" therein should also be codified. The decoding of the former will be dialectically clarified by the decoding of the latter.

In this connection, a very valuable contribution to our method has been made by Gabriel Bode, a young Chilean civil servant in one of the most significant Chilean governmental institutions: the *Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario* (INDAP).[29] During his use of this method in the post-literacy stage, Bode observed that the peasants became interested in the discussion only when the codification related directly to their felt needs. Any deviation in the codification, as well as any attempt by the educator to guide the decoding discussion into other areas, produced silence and indifference. On the other hand, he observed that even when the codification[30] centered on their felt needs the peasants could not manage to concentrate systematically on the discussion, which often digressed to the point of never reaching a synthesis. Also, they almost never perceived the relationship of their felt needs to the direct and indirect causes of these needs. One might say that they failed to perceive the untested feasibility lying beyond the limit-situations which engendered their needs.

Bode then decided to experiment with the simultaneous projection of different situations; in this technique lies the value of his contribution. Initially, he projects a very simple codification of an existential situation. He terms his first codification "essential"; it represents the basic nucleus and opens up into a thematic fan extending to "auxiliary" codifications. After the essential codification is decoded, the educator maintains its projected image as a reference

28. This recommendation is made by José Luis Fiori, in an unpublished manuscript.

29. Until recently, INDAP was directed by the economist and authentic humanist Jacques Chonchol.

30. These codifications were not "inclusive," in Fiori's definition.

for the participants and successively projects alongside it the auxiliary codifications. By means of the latter, which are directly related to the essential codification, he sustains the vivid interest of the participants, who are thereby enabled to reach a synthesis.

The great achievement of Gabriel Bode is that, by means of the dialectics between the essential and the auxiliary codifications, he has managed to communicate to the participants a sense of *totality*. Individuals who were *submerged* in reality, merely *feeling* their needs, *emerge* from reality and perceive the *causes* of their needs. In this way, they can go beyond the level of real consciousness to that of potential consciousness much more rapidly.

Once the codifications have been prepared and all their possible thematic facets have been studied by the interdisciplinary team, the investigators begin the third stage of the investigation by returning to the area to initiate decoding dialogues in the "thematic investigation circles."[31] These discussions, which decode the material prepared in the preceding stage, are taped for subequent analysis by the interdisciplinary team.[32] In addition to the investigator acting as decoding co-ordinator, two other specialists—a psychologist and a sociologist—attend the meetings. Their task is to note and record the significant (and apparently insignificant) reactions of the decoders.

During the decoding process, the co-ordinator must not only lis-

31. Each "investigation circle" should have a maximum of twenty persons. There should be as many circles as necessary to involve, as participants, ten percent of the area or sub-area being studied.

32. These subsequent meetings of analysis should include the volunteers from the area who assisted in the investigation, and some participants of the "thematic investigation circles." Their contribution is both a right to which they are entitled and an indispensable aid to the analysis of the specialists. As co-investigators of the specialists, they will rectify and/or ratify the interpretations the latter make of the findings. From the methodological point of view, their participation gives the investigation (which from the beginning is based on a "sympathetic" relationship) an additional safeguard: the critical presence of representatives of the people from the beginning until the final phase, that of thematic analysis, continued in the organization of the program content of educational action as liberating cultural action.

ten to the individuals but must challenge them, posing as problems both the codified existential situation and their own answers. Due to the cathartic force of the methodology, the participants of the thematic investigation circles externalize a series of sentiments and opinions about themselves, the world, and others, that perhaps they would not express under different circumstances.

In one of the thematic investigations[33] carried out in Santiago, a group of tenement residents discussed a scene showing a drunken man walking on the street and three young men conversing on the corner. The group participants commented that "the only one there who is productive and useful to his country is the souse who is returning home after working all day for low wages and who is worried about his family because he can't take care of their needs. He is the only worker. He is a decent worker and a souse like us."

The investigator[34] had intended to study aspects of alcoholism. He probably would not have elicited the above responses if he had presented the participants with a questionnaire he had elaborated himself. If asked directly, they might even have denied ever taking a drink themselves. But in their comments on the codification of an existential situation they could recognize, and in which they could recognize themselves, they said what they really felt.

There are two important aspects to these declarations. On the one hand, they verbalize the connection between earning low wages, feeling exploited, and getting drunk—getting drunk as a flight from reality, as an attempt to overcome the frustration of inaction, as an ultimately self-destructive solution. On the other hand, they manifest the need to rate the drunkard highly. He is the "only one useful to his country, because he works, while the others only gab." After praising the drunkard, the participants then identify themselves with him, as workers who also drink—"decent workers."

In contrast, imagine the failure of a moralistic educator,[35] sermoniz-

33. This particular investigation was, unfortunately, not completed.

34. The psychiatrist Patrício Lopes, whose work is described in *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*.

35. See Niebuhr, *op cit*.

ing against alcoholism and presenting as an example of virtue something which for these men is not a manifestation of virtue. In this and in other cases, the only sound procedure is the *conscientização* of the situation, which should be attempted from the start of the thematic investigation. (Obviously, *conscientização* does not stop at the level of mere subjective perception of a situation, but through action prepares men for the struggle against the obstacles to their humanization.)

In another experience, this time with peasants, I observed that the unchanging motif during an entire discussion of a situation depicting work in the fields was the demand for an increase in wages and the necessity of joining together to create a union to obtain this particular demand. Three situations were discussed during the session, and the motif was always the same.

Now imagine an educator who has organized *his* educational program for these men, consisting of reading "wholesome" texts in which one learns that "the water is in the well." But precisely this type of thing happens all the time in both education and politics, because it is not realized that the dialogical nature of education begins with thematic investigation.

Once the decoding in the circles has been completed, the last stage of the investigation begins, as the investigators undertake a systematic interdisciplinary study of their findings. Listening to the tapes recorded during the decoding sessions and studying the notes taken by the psychologists and the sociologist, the investigators begin to list the themes explicit or implicit in the affirmations made during the sessions. These themes should be classified according to the various social sciences. Classification does not mean that when the program is elaborated the themes will be seen as belonging to isolated categories, but only that a theme is viewed in a specific manner by each of the social sciences to which it is related. The theme of development, for example, is especially appropriate to the field of economics, but not exclusively so. This theme would also be focalized by sociology, anthropology, and social psychology (fields concerned with cultural change and with the modification of atti-

tudes and values—questions which are equally relevant to a philosophy of development). It would be focalized by political science (a field concerned with the decisions which involve development), by education, and so forth. In this way, the themes which characterize a totality will never be approached rigidly. It would indeed be a pity if the themes, after being investigated in the richness of their interpenetration with other aspects of reality, were subsequently to be handled in such a way as to sacrifice their richness (and hence their force) to the strictures of specialties.

Once the thematic demarcation is completed, each specialist presents to the interdisciplinary team a project for the "breakdown" of his theme. In breaking down the theme, the specialist looks for the fundamental nuclei which, comprising learning units and establishing a sequence, give a general view of the theme. As each specific project is discussed, the other specialists make suggestions. These may be incorporated into the project and/or may be included in the brief essays to be written on the theme, These essays, to which bibliographic suggestions are annexed, are valuable aids in training the teacher-students who will work in the "culture circles."

During this effort to break down the meaningful thematics, the team will recognize the need to include some fundamental themes which were not directly suggested by the people during the preceding investigation. The introduction of these themes has proved to be necessary, and also corresponds to the dialogical character of education. If educational programming is dialogical, the teacher-students also have the right to participate by including themes not previously suggested. I call the latter type of theme "hinged themes," due to their function. They may either facilitate the connection between two themes in the program unit, filling a possible gap between the two; or they may illustrate the relations between the general program content and the view of the world held by the people. Hence, one of these themes may be located at the beginning of thematic units.

The anthropological concept of culture is one of these hinged

themes. It clarifies the role of people in the world and with the world as transforming rather than adaptive beings.[36]

Once the breakdown of the thematics is completed,[37] there follows the stage of its "codification": choosing the best channel of communication for each theme and its representation. A codification may be simple or compound. The former utilizes either the visual (pictorial or graphic), the tactile, or the auditive channel; the latter utilizes various channels.[38] The selection of the pictorial or graphic channel depends not only on the material to be codified, but also on whether or not the individuals with whom one wishes to communicate are literate.

After the thematics has been codified, the didactic material (photographs, slides, film strips, posters, reading texts, and so forth) is prepared. The team may propose some themes or aspects of some themes to outside specialists as topics for recorded interviews.

Let us take the theme of development as an example. The team

36. With regard to the importance of the anthropological analysis of culture, see *Educação como Prática da Liberdade.*

37. Note that the entire program is a totality made up of interrelated units which in themselves are also totalities.

The themes are totalities in themselves but are also elements which in interaction constitute the thematic units of the entire program.

The thematic breakdown splits the total themes in search of their fundamental nuclei, which are the partial elements.

The codification process attempts to re-totalize the disjoined theme in the representation of existential situations.

In decoding, individuals split the codification to apprehend its implicit theme or themes. The dialectical decoding process does not end there, but is completed in the re-totalization of the disjoined whole which is thus more clearly understood (as are also its relations to other codified situations, all of which represent existential situations).

38. CODIFICATION

a) Simple:
   visual channel
      pictorial
      graphic
   tactile channel
   auditive channel
b) Compound: simultaneity of channels

approaches two or more economists of varying schools of thought, tells them about the program, and invites them to contribute an interview on the subject in language comprehensible to the audience. If the specialists accept, an interview of fifteen to twenty minutes is taped. A photograph may be taken of each specialist while he is speaking.

When the taped interview is presented to the culture circle, an introductory statement indicates who each speaker is, what she or he has written, done, and doing now; meanwhile, the speaker's photograph is projected on a screen. If, for instance, the speaker is a university professor, the introduction could include a discussion regarding what the participants think of universities and what they expect of them. The group has already been told that the recorded interview will be followed by a discussion of its contents (which function as an auditive codification). The team subsequently reports to the specialist the reaction of the participants during the discussion. This technique links intellectuals, often well-intentioned but not infrequently alienated from the reality of the people, to that reality. It also gives the people an opportunity to hear and criticize the thought of intellectuals.

Some themes or nuclei may be presented by means of brief dramatizations, containing the theme only—no "solutions"! The dramatization acts as a codification, as a problem-posing situation to be discussed.

Another didactic resource—as long as it is carried out within a problem-posing rather than a banking approach to education—is the reading and discussion of magazine articles, newspapers, and book chapters (beginning with passages). As in the case of the recorded interviews, the author is introduced before the group begins, and the contents are discussed afterward.

Along the same lines, it is indispensable to analyze the contents of newspaper editorials following any given event: "Why do different newspapers have such different interpretations of the same fact?" This practice helps develop a sense of criticism, so that people will react to newspapers or news broadcasts not as passive objects of

the "communiqués" directed at them, but rather as consciousnesses seeking to be free.

With all the didactic material prepared, to which should be added small introductory manuals, the team of educators is ready to represent to the people their own thematics, in systematized and amplified form. The thematics which have come from the people return to them—not as contents to be deposited, but as problems to be solved.

The first task of the basic-education teachers is to present the general program of the educational campaign. The people will find themselves in this program; it will not seem strange to them, since it originated with them. The educators will also explain (based on the dialogical character of education) the presence in the program of the hinged themes, and their significance.

If the educators lack sufficient funds to carry out the preliminary thematic investigation as described above, they can—with a minimum knowledge of the situation—select some basic themes to serve as "codifications to be investigated." Accordingly, they can begin with introductory themes and simultaneously initiate further thematic investigation.

One of these basic themes (and one which I consider central and indispensable) is the anthropological concept of culture. Whether men and women are peasants or urban workers, learning to read or enrolled in a post-literacy program, the starting point of their search to know more (in the instrumental meaning of the term) is the debate of the concept. As they discuss the world of culture, they express their level of awareness of reality, in which various themes are implicit. Their discussion touches upon other aspects of reality, which comes to be perceived in an increasingly critical manner. These aspects in turn involve many other themes.

With the experience now behind me, I can affirm that the concept of culture, discussed imaginatively in all or most of its dimensions, can provide various aspects of an educational program. In addition, after several days of dialogue with the culture circle participants, the educators can ask the participants directly: "What other themes

or subjects could we discuss besides these?" As each person replies, the answer is noted down and is immediately proposed to the group as a problem.

One of the group members may say, for example: "I'd like to talk abut nationalism." "Very well," says the educator, noting down the suggestion, and adds: "What does nationalism mean? Why is a discussion about nationalism of any interest to us?" My experience shows that when a suggestion is posed as a problem to the group, new themes appear. If, in an area where (for example) thirty culture circles meet on the same night, all the "co-ordinators" (educators) proceed in this fashion, the central team will have a rich variety of thematic material for study.

The important thing, from the point of view of libertarian education, is for the people to come to feel like masters of their thinking by discussing the thinking and views of the world explicitly or implicitly manifest in their own suggestions and those of their comrades. Because this view of education starts with the conviction that it cannot present its own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people, it serves to introduce the pedagogy of the oppressed, in the elaboration of which the oppressed must participate.

Teaching to Transgress

Education as the Practice of Freedom

bell hooks

Routledge
New York London

Back to top.

academic public that I encounter at my lectures always shows surprise when I speak intimately and deeply about the classroom. That public seemed particularly surprised when I said that I was working on a collection of essays about teaching. This surprise is a sad reminder of the way teaching is seen as a duller, less valuable aspect of the academic profession. This perspective on teaching is a common one. Yet it must be challenged if we are to meet the needs of our students, if we are to restore to education and the classroom excitement about ideas and the will to learn.

There is a serious crisis in education. Students often do not want to learn and teachers do not want to teach. More than ever before in the recent history of this nation, educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge. We cannot address this crisis if progressive critical thinkers and social critics act as though teaching is not a subject worthy of our regard.

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. For years it has been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn. With these essays, I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions, I celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement against and beyond boundaries. It is that movement which makes education the practice of freedom.

I

Engaged Pedagogy

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.

Throughout my years as student and professor, I have been most inspired by those teachers who have had the courage to transgress those boundaries that would confine each pupil to a rote, assembly-line approach to learning. Such teachers approach students with the will and desire to respond to our unique beings, even if the situation does not allow the full emergence of a relationship based on mutual recognition. Yet the possibility of such recognition is always present.

Paulo Freire and the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh are two of the "teachers" who have touched me deeply with their work. When I first began college, Freire's thought gave me the support I needed to challenge the "banking system" of education, that approach to learning that is rooted in the notion that all students need to do is consume information fed to them by a professor and be able to memorize and store it. Early on, it was Freire's insistence that education could be the practice of freedom that encouraged me to create strategies for what he called "conscientization" in the classroom. Translating that term to critical awareness and engagement, I entered the classrooms with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer. Education as the practice of freedom was continually undermined by professors who were actively hostile to the notion of student participation. Freire's work affirmed that education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor. That notion of mutual labor was affirmed by Thich Nhat Hanh's philosophy of engaged Buddhism, the focus on practice in conjunction with contemplation. His philosophy was similar to Freire's emphasis on "praxis"—action and reflection upon the world in order to change it.

In his work Thich Nhat Hanh always speaks of the teacher as a healer. Like Freire, his approach to knowledge called on students to be active participants, to link awareness with practice. Whereas Freire was primarily concerned with the mind, Thich Nhat Hanh offered a way of thinking about pedagogy which emphasized wholeness, a union of mind, body, and spirit. His focus on a holistic approach to learning and spiritual practice enabled me to overcome years of socialization that had taught me to believe a classroom was diminished if students and professors regarded one another as "whole" human

beings, striving not just for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world.

During my twenty years of teaching, I have witnessed a grave sense of dis-ease among professors (irrespective of their politics) when students want us to see them as whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge. When I was an undergraduate, Women's Studies was just finding a place in the academy. Those classrooms were the one space where teachers were willing to acknowledge a connection between ideas learned in university settings and those learned in life practices. And, despite those times when students abused that freedom in the classroom by only wanting to dwell on personal experience, feminist classrooms were, on the whole, one location where I witnessed professors striving to create participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge. Nowadays, most women's studies professors are not as committed to exploring new pedagogical strategies. Despite this shift, many students still seek to enter feminist classrooms because they continue to believe that there, more than in any other place in the academy, they will have an opportunity to experience education as the practice of freedom.

Progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy" is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized that "the practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people." In the United States it is rare that anyone talks about teachers in university settings as

healers. And it is even more rare to hear anyone suggest that teachers have any responsibility to be self-actualized individuals.

Learning about the work of intellectuals and academics primarily from nineteenth-century fiction and nonfiction during my pre-college years, I was certain that the task for those of us who chose this vocation was to be holistically questing for self-actualization. It was the actual experience of college that disrupted this image. It was there that I was made to feel as though I was terribly naive about "the profession." I learned that far from being self-actualized, the university was seen more as a haven for those who are smart in book knowledge but who might be otherwise unfit for social interaction. Luckily, during my undergraduate years I began to make a distinction between the practice of being an intellectual/teacher and one's role as a member of the academic profession.

It was difficult to maintain fidelity to the idea of the intellectual as someone who sought to be whole—well-grounded in a context where there was little emphasis on spiritual well-being, on care of the soul. Indeed, the objectification of the teacher within bourgeois educational structures seemed to denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports compartmentalization.

This support reinforces the dualistic separation of public and private, encouraging teachers and students to see no connection between life practices, habits of being, and the roles of professors. The idea of the intellectual questing for a union of mind, body, and spirit had been replaced with notions that being smart meant that one was inherently emotionally unstable and that the best in oneself emerged in one's academic work. This meant that whether academics were drug addicts, alcoholics, batterers, or sexual abusers, the only important aspect of our identity was whether or not our minds functioned, whether we were able to do our jobs in the classroom. The self was presumably emptied out the moment the threshold was crossed, leaving in place only an objective mind—free of experiences and biases. There was fear that the conditions of that self would interfere with the teaching process. Part of the luxury and privilege of the role of teacher/professor today is the absence of any requirement that we be self-actualized. Not surprisingly, professors who are not concerned with inner well-being are the most threatened by the demand on the part of students for liberatory education, for pedagogical processes that will aid them in their own struggle for self-actualization.

Certainly it was naive for me to imagine during high school that I would find spiritual and intellectual guidance in university settings from writers, thinkers, scholars. To have found this would have been to stumble across a rare treasure. I learned, along with other students, to consider myself fortunate if I found an interesting professor who talked in a compelling way. Most of my professors were not the slightest bit interested in enlightenment. More than anything they seemed enthralled by the exercise of power and authority within their mini-kingdom, the classroom.

This is not to say that there were not compelling, benevolent dictators, but it is true to my memory that it was rare—absolutely, astonishingly rare—to encounter professors who were deeply committed to progressive pedagogical practices. I was dismayed by this; most of my professors were not individuals whose teaching styles I wanted to emulate.

My commitment to learning kept me attending classes. Yet, even so, because I did not conform—would not be an unquestioning, passive student—some professors treated me with contempt. I was slowly becoming estranged from education. Finding Freire in the midst of that estrangement was crucial to my survival as a student. His work offered both a way for me to understand the limitations of the type of education I was receiving and to discover alternative strategies for learning and teaching. It was particularly disappointing to encounter white

male professors who claimed to follow Freire's model even as their pedagogical practices were mired in structures of domination, mirroring the styles of conservative professors even as they approached subjects from a more progressive standpoint.

When I first encountered Paulo Freire, I was eager to see if his style of teaching would embody the pedagogical practices he described so eloquently in his work. During the short time I studied with him, I was deeply moved by his presence, by the way in which his manner of teaching exemplified his pedagogical theory. (Not all students interested in Freire have had a similar experience.) My experience with him restored my faith in liberatory education. I had never wanted to surrender the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination. I needed to know that professors did not have to be dictators in the classroom.

While I wanted teaching to be my career, I believed that personal success was intimately linked with self-actualization. My passion for this quest led me to interrogate constantly the mind/body split that was so often taken to be a given. Most professors were often deeply antagonistic toward, even scornful of, any approach to learning emerging from a philosophical standpoint emphasizing the union of mind, body, and spirit, rather than the separation of these elements. Like many of the students I now teach, I was often told by powerful academics that I was misguided to seek such a perspective in the academy. Throughout my student years I felt deep inner anguish. Memory of that pain returns as I listen to students express the concern that they will not succeed in academic professions if they want to be well, if they eschew dysfunctional behavior or participation in coercive hierarchies. These students are often fearful, as I was, that there are no spaces in the academy where the will to be self-actualized can be affirmed.

This fear is present because many professors have intensely hostile responses to the vision of liberatory education that connects the will to know with the will to become. Within professorial circles, individuals often complain bitterly that students want classes to be "encounter groups." While it is utterly unreasonable for students to expect classrooms to be therapy sessions, it is appropriate for them to hope that the knowledge received in these settings will enrich and enhance them.

Currently, the students I encounter seem far more uncertain about the project of self-actualization than my peers and I were twenty years ago. They feel that there are no clear ethical guidelines shaping actions. Yet, while they despair, they are also adamant that education should be liberatory. They want and demand more from professors than my generation did. There are times when I walk into classrooms overflowing with students who feel terribly wounded in their psyches (many of them see therapists), yet I do not think that they want therapy from me. They do want an education that is healing to the uninformed, unknowing spirit. They do want knowledge that is meaningful. They rightfully expect that my colleagues and I will not offer them information without addressing the connection between what they are learning and their overall life experiences.

This demand on the students' part does not mean that they will always accept our guidance. This is one of the joys of education as the practice of freedom, for it allows students to assume responsibility for their choices. Writing about our teacher/student relationship in a piece for the *Village Voice*, "How to Run the Yard: Off-Line and into the Margins at Yale," one of my students, Gary Dauphin, shares the joys of working with me as well as the tensions that surfaced between us as he began to devote his time to pledging a fraternity rather than cultivating his writing:

> People think academics like Gloria [my given name] are all about difference: but what I learned from her was mostly about sameness, about what I had in common as a black man to people of color; to women and gays and lesbians and the poor and anyone else who

> wanted in. I did some of this learning by reading but most of it came from hanging out on the fringes of her life. I lived like that for a while, shuttling between high points in my classes and low points outside. Gloria was a safe haven . . . Pledging a fraternity is about as far away as you can get from her classroom, from the yellow kitchen where she used to share her lunch with students in need of various forms of sustenance.

This is Gary writing about the joy. The tension arose as we discussed his reason for wanting to join a fraternity and my disdain for that decision. Gary comments, "They represented a vision of black manhood that she abhorred, one where violence and abuse were primary ciphers of bonding and identity." Describing his assertion of autonomy from my influence he writes, "But she must have also known the limits of even her influence on my life, the limits of books and teachers."

Ultimately, Gary felt that the decision he had made to join a fraternity was not constructive, that I "had taught him openness" where the fraternity had encouraged one-dimensional allegiance. Our interchange both during and after this experience was an example of engaged pedagogy.

Through critical thinking—a process he learned by reading theory and actively analyzing texts—Gary experienced education as the practice of freedom. His final comments about me: "Gloria had only mentioned the entire episode once after it was over, and this to tell me simply that there are many kinds of choices, many kinds of logic. I could make those events mean whatever I wanted as long as I was honest." I have quoted his writing at length because it is testimony affirming engaged pedagogy. It means that my voice is not the only account of what happens in the classroom.

Engaged pedagogy necessarily values student expression. In her essay, "Interrupting the Calls for Student Voice in Liberatory Education: A Feminist Poststructuralist Perspective," Mimi Orner employs a Foucauldian framework to suggest that

> Regulatory and punitive means and uses of the confession bring to mind curricular and pedagogical practices which call for students to publicly reveal, even confess, information about their lives and cultures in the presence of authority figures such as teachers.

When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. In my classrooms, I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share. When professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material. But most professors must practice being vulnerable in the classroom, being wholly present in mind, body, and spirit.

Progressive professors working to transform the curriculum so that it does not reflect biases or reinforce systems of domination are most often the individuals willing to take the risks that engaged pedagogy requires and to make their teaching practices a site of resistance. In her essay, "On Race and Voice:

Challenges for Liberation Education in the 1990s," Chandra Mohanty writes that

> resistance lies in self-conscious engagement with dominant, normative discourses and representations and in the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces. Resistance that is random and isolated is clearly not as effective as that which is mobilized through systemic politicized practices of teaching and learning. Uncovering and reclaiming subjugated knowledge is one way to lay claims to alternative histories. But these knowledges need to be understood and defined pedagogically, as questions of strategy and practice as well as of scholarship, in order to transform educational institutions radically.

Professors who embrace the challenge of self-actualization will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply.

13

Eros, Eroticism, and the Pedagogical Process

Professors rarely speak of the place of eros or the erotic in our classrooms. Trained in the philosophical context of Western metaphysical dualism, many of us have accepted the notion that there is a split between the body and the mind. Believing this, individuals enter the classroom to teach as though only the mind is present, and not the body. To call attention to the body is to betray the legacy of repression and denial that has been handed down to us by our professorial elders, who have been usually white and male. But our nonwhite elders were just as eager to deny the body. The predominantly black college has always been a bastion of repression. The public world of institutional learning was a site where the body had to be erased, go unnoticed. When I first became a teacher and needed to use the restroom in the middle of class, I had no clue as to what my elders did in such situations. No one talked about the body in relation to teaching. What did one do with the body in the

classroom? Trying to remember the bodies of my professors, I find myself unable to recall them. I hear voices, remember fragmented details, but very few whole bodies.

Entering the classroom determined to erase the body and give ourselves over more fully to the mind, we show by our beings how deeply we have accepted the assumption that passion has no place in the classroom. Repression and denial make it possible for us to forget and then desperately seek to recover ourselves, our feelings, our passions in some private place—after class. I remember reading an article in *Psychology Today* years ago when I was still an undergraduate, reporting a study which revealed that every so many seconds while giving lectures many male professors were thinking about sexuality —were even having lustful thoughts about students. I was amazed. After reading this article, which as I recall was shared and talked about endlessly in the dormitory, I watched male professors differently, trying to connect the fantasies I imagined them having in their minds with lectures, with their bodies that I had so faithfully learned to pretend I did not see. During my first semester of college teaching, there was a male student in my class whom I always seemed to see and not see at the same time. At one point in the middle of the semester, I received a call from a school therapist who wanted to speak with me about the way I treated this student in the class. The therapist told me that the students had said I was unusually gruff, rude, and downright mean when I related to him. I did not know exactly who the student was, could not put a face or body with his name, but later when he identified himself in class, I realized that I was erotically drawn to this student. And that my naive way of coping with feelings in the classroom that I had been taught never to have was to deflect (hence my harsh treatment of him), repress, and deny. Overly conscious then about ways such repression and denial could lead to the "wounding" of students, I was determined to face whatever passions were aroused in the classroom setting and deal with them.

Writing about Adrienne Rich's work, connecting it to the work of men who thought critically about the body, in her introduction to *Thinking Through the Body*, Jane Gallop comments:

> Men who do find themselves in some way thinking through the body are more likely to be recognized as serious thinkers and heard. Women have first to prove that we are thinkers, which is easier when we conform to the protocol that deems serious thought separate from an embodied subject in history. Rich is asking women to enter the realms of critical thought and knowledge without becoming disembodied spirit, universal man.

Beyond the realm of critical thought, it is equally crucial that we learn to enter the classroom "whole" and not as "disembodied spirit." In the heady early days of Women's Studies classes at Stanford University, I learned by the example of daring, courageous woman professors (particularly Diane Middlebrook) that there was a place for passion in the classroom, that eros and the erotic did not need to be denied for learning to take place. One of the central tenets of feminist critical pedagogy has been the insistence on not engaging the mind/body split. This is one of the underlying beliefs that has made Women's Studies a subversive location in the academy. While women's studies over the years has had to fight to be taken seriously by academics in traditional disciplines, those of us who have been intimately engaged as students or teachers with feminist thinking have always recognized the legitimacy of a pedagogy that dares to subvert the mind/body split and allow us to be whole in the classroom, and as a consequence wholehearted.

Recently, Susan B., a colleague and friend, whom I taught in

a Women's Studies class when she was an undergraduate, stated in conversation that she felt she was having so much trouble with her graduate courses because she has to come to expect a quality of passionate teaching that is not present where she is studying. Her comments made me think anew about the place of passion, of erotic recognition in the classroom setting because I believe that the energy she felt in our Women's Studies classes was there because of the extent to which women professors teaching those courses dared to give fully of ourselves, going beyond the mere transmission of information in lectures. Feminist education for critical consciousness is rooted in the assumption that knowledge and critical thought done in the classroom should inform our habits of being and ways of living outside the classroom. Since so many of our early classes were taken almost exclusively by female students, it was easier for us to not be disembodied spirits in the classroom. Concurrently, it was expected that we would bring a quality of care and even "love" to our students. Eros was present in our classrooms, as a motivating force. As critical pedagogues we were teaching students ways to think differently about gender, understanding fully that this knowledge would also lead them to live differently.

To understand the place of eros and eroticism in the classroom, we must move beyond thinking of those forces solely in terms of the sexual, though that dimension need not be denied. Sam Keen, in his book *The Passionate Life,* urges readers to remember that in its earliest conception "erotic potency was not confined to sexual power but included the moving force that propelled every life-form from a state of mere potentiality to actuality." Given that critical pedagogy seeks to transform consciousness, to provide students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better and live in the world more fully, to some extent it must rely on the presence of the erotic in the classroom to aid the learning process. Keen continues:

> When we limit "erotic" to its sexual meaning, we betray our alienation from the rest of nature. We confess that we are not motivated by anything like the mysterious force that moves birds to migrate or dandelions to spring. Furthermore, we imply that the fulfillment or potential toward which we strive is sexual—the romantic-genital connection between two persons.

Understanding that eros is a force that enhances our overall effort to be self-actualizing, that it can provide an epistemological grounding informing how we know what we know, enables both professors and students to use such energy in a classroom setting in ways that invigorate discussion and excite the critical imagination.

Suggesting that this culture lacks a "vision or science of hygeology" (health and well-being) Keen asks: "What forms of passion might make us whole? To what passions may we surrender with the assurance that we will expand rather than diminish the promise of our lives?" The quest for knowledge that enables us to unite theory and practice is one such passion. To the extent that professors bring this passion, which has to be fundamentally rooted in a love for ideas we are able to inspire, the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears. In many ways this is frightening. Nothing about the way I was trained as a teacher really prepared me to witness my students transforming themselves.

It was during the years that I taught in the African American Studies department at Yale (a course on black women writers) that I witnessed the way education for critical consciousness can fundamentally alter our perceptions of reality and our actions. During one course we collectively explored in fiction the power of internalized racism, seeing how it was described in the literature as well as critically interrogating our experi-

ences. However, one of the black female students who had always straightened her hair because she felt deep down that she would not look good if it were not processed—were worn "natural"—changed. She came to class after a break and told everyone that this class had deeply affected her, so much so that when she went to get her usual "perm" some force within said no. I still remember the fear I felt when she testified that the class had changed her. Though I believed deeply in the philosophy of education for critical consciousness that empowers, I had not yet comfortably united theory with practice. Some small part of me still wanted us to remain disembodied spirits. And her body, her presence, her changed look was a direct challenge that I had to face and affirm. She was teaching me. Now, years later, I read again her final words to the class and recognize the passion and beauty of her will to know and to act:

> I am a black woman. I grew up in Shaker Heights, Ohio. I cannot go back and change years of believing that I could never be quite as pretty or intelligent as many of my white friends—but I can go forward learning pride in who I am. . . . I cannot go back and change years of believing that the most wonderful thing in the world would be to be Martin Luther King, Jr.'s wife—but I can go on and find the strength I need to be the revolutionary for myself rather than the companion and help for someone else. So no, I don't believe that we change what has already been done but we can change the future and so I am reclaiming and learning more of who I am so that I can be whole.

Attempting to gather my thoughts on eroticism and pedagogy, I have reread student journals covering a span of ten years. Again and again, I read notes that could easily be considered "romantic" as students express their love for me, our class. Here an Asian student offers her thoughts about a class:

> White people have never understood the beauty of silence, of connection and reflection. You teach us to speak, and to listen for the signs of the wind. Like a guide, you walk silently through the forest ahead of us. In the forest everything has sound, speaks . . . You too teach us to talk, where all life speaks in the forest, not just the white man's. Isn't that part of feeling whole—the ability to be able to talk, to not have to be silent or performing all the time, to be able to be critical and honest—openly? This is the truth you have taught us: all people deserve to speak.

Or a black male student writing that he will "love me now and always" because our class has been a dance, and he loves to dance:

> I love to dance. When I was a child, I danced everywhere. Why walk there when you can shuffle-ball-change all the way. When I danced my soul ran free. I was poetry. On my Saturday grocery excursions with my mother, I would flap, flap, flap, ball change the shopping cart through the aisles. Mama would turn to me and say, "Boy, stop that dancing. White people think that's all we can do anyway." I would stop but when she wasn't looking I would do a quick high bell kick or tow. I didn't care what white people thought, I just loved to dance-dance-dance. I still dance and I still don't care what people think white or black. When I dance my soul is free. It is sad to read about men who stop dancing, who stop being foolish, who stop letting their souls fly free. . . . I guess for me, surviving whole means never to stop dancing.

These words were written by O'Neal LaRon Clark in 1987. We had a passionate teacher/student relationship. He was taller than six feet; I remember the day he came to class late and came right up to the front, picked me up and whirled me around.

The class laughed. I called him "fool" and laughed. It was by way of apologizing for being late, for missing any moment of classroom passion. And so he brought his own moment. I, too, love to dance. And so we danced our way into the future as comrades and friends bound by all we had learned in class together. Those who knew him remember the times he came to class early to do funny imitations of the teacher. He died unexpectedly last year—still dancing, still loving me now and always.

When eros is present in the classroom setting, then love is bound to flourish. Well-learned distinctions between public and private make us believe that love has no place in the classroom. Even though many viewers could applaud a movie like *The Dead Poets Society,* possibly identifying with the passion of the professor and his students, rarely is such passion institutionally affirmed. Professors are expected to publish, but no one really expects or demands of us that we really care about teaching in uniquely passionate and different ways. Teachers who love students and are loved by them are still "suspect" in the academy. Some of the suspicion is that the presence of feelings, of passions, may not allow for objective consideration of each student's merit. But this very notion is based on the false assumption that education is neutral, that there is some "even" emotional ground we stand on that enables us to treat everyone equally, dispassionately. In reality, special bonds between professors and students have always existed, but traditionally they have been exclusive rather than inclusive. To allow one's feeling of care and will to nurture particular individuals in the classroom—to expand and embrace everyone—goes against the notion of privatized passion. In student journals from various classes I have taught there have always been complaints about the perceived special bonding between myself and particular students. Realizing that my students were uncertain about expresssions of care and love in the classroom, I found it necessary to teach on the subject. I asked students once: "Why

do you feel that the regard I extend to a particular student cannot also be extended to each of you? Why do you think there is not enough love or care to go around?" To answer these questions they had to think deeply about the society we live in, how we are taught to compete with one another. They had to think about capitalism and how it informs the way we think about love and care, the way we live in our bodies, the way we try to separate mind from body.

There is not much passionate teaching or learning taking place in higher education today. Even when students are desperately yearning to be touched by knowledge, professors still fear the challenge, allow their worries about losing control to override their desires to teach. Concurrently, those of us who teach the same old stubjects in the same old ways are often inwardly bored—unable to rekindle passions we may have once felt. If, as Thomas Merton suggests in his essay on pedagogy "Learning to Live," the purpose of education is to show students how to define themselves "authentically and spontaneously in relation" to the world, then professors can best teach if we are self-actualized. Merton reminds us that "the original and authentic 'paradise' idea, both in the monastery and in the university, implied not simply a celestial store of theoretic ideas to which the Magistri and Doctores held the key, but the inner self of the student" who would discover the ground of their being in relation to themselves, to higher powers, to community. That the "fruit of education . . . was in the activation of that utmost center." To restore passion to the classroom or to excite it in classrooms where it has never been, professors must find again the place of eros within ourselves and together allow the mind and body to feel and know desire.

14

Ecstasy

Teaching and Learning Without Limits

On a gorgeous Maine summer day, I fell down a hill and broke my wrist severely. As I was sitting in the dirt, experiencing the most excruciating pain, more intense than any I had ever felt in my life, an image flashed across the screen of my mind. It was one of me as a young girl falling down another hill. In both cases, my falling was related to challenging myself to move beyond limits. As a child it was the limits of fear. As a grown woman, it was the limits of being tired—what I call "bone weary." I had came to Skowhegan to give a lecture at a summer art program. A number of nonwhite students had shared with me that they rarely have any critique of their work from scholars and artists of color. Even though I felt tired and very sick, I wanted to affirm their work and their needs, so I awakened early in the morning to climb the hill to do studio visits.

Skowhegan was once a working farm. Old barns had been converted into studios. The studio I was leaving, after having

had an intense discussion with several young black artists, female and male, led into a cow pasture. Sitting in pain at the bottom of the hill, staring in the face of the black female artist whose studio door I had been trying to reach, I saw such disappointment. When she came to help me, she expressed concern, yet what I heard was another feeling entirely. She really needed to talk about her work with someone she could trust, who would not approach it with racist, sexist, or classist prejudice, someone whose intellect and vision she could respect. That someone did not need to be me. It could have been any teacher. When I think about my life as a student, I can remember vividly the faces, gestures, habits of being of all the individual teachers who nurtured and guided me, who offered me an opportunity to experience joy in learning, who made the classroom a space of critical thinking, who made the exchange of information and ideas a kind of ecstasy.

Recently, I worked on a program at CBS on American feminism. I and other black women present were asked to name what we felt helps enable feminist thinking and feminist movement. I answered that to me "critical thinking" was the primary element allowing the possibility of change. Passionately insisting that no matter what one's class, race, gender, or social standing, I shared my beliefs that without the capacity to think critically about our selves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow. In our society, which is so fundamentally anti-intellectual, critical thinking is not encouraged. Engaged pedagogy has been essential to my development as an intellectual, as a teacher/professor because the heart of this approach to learning is critical thinking. Conditions of radical openness exist in any learning situation where students and teachers celebrate their abilities to think critically, to engage in pedagogical praxis.

Profound commitment to engaged pedagogy is taxing to the spirit. After twenty years of teaching, I have begun to need

time away from the classroom. Somehow, moving around to teach at different institutions has always prevented me from having that marvelous paid sabbatical that is one of the material rewards of academic life. This factor, coupled with commitment to teaching, has meant that even when I take a job that places me on a part-time schedule, instead of taking time away from teaching, I lecture elsewhere. I do this because I sense such desperate need in students—their fear that no one really cares whether they learn or develop intellectually.

My commitment to engaged pedagogy is an expression of political activism. Given that our educational institutions are so deeply invested in a banking system, teachers are more rewarded when we do not teach against the grain. The choice to work against the grain, to challenge the status quo, often has negative consequences. And that is part of what makes that choice one that is not politically neutral. In colleges and universities, teaching is often the least valued of our many professional tasks. It saddens me that colleagues are often suspicious of teachers whom students long to study with. And there is a tendency to undermine the professorial commitment of engaged pedagogues by suggesting that what we do is not as rigorously academic as it should be. Ideally, education should be a place where the need for diverse teaching methods and styles would be valued, encouraged, seen as essential to learning. Occasionally students feel concerned when a class departs from the banking system. I remind them that they can have a lifetime of classes that reflect conventional norms.

Of course, I hope that more professors will seek to be engaged. Although it is a reward of engaged pedagogy that students seek courses with those of us who have made a wholehearted commitment to education as the practice of freedom, it is also true that we are often overworked, our classes often overcrowded. For years, I envied those professors who taught more conventionally, because they frequently had small class-

es. Throughout my teaching career my classes have been too large to be as effective as they could be. Over time, I've begun to see that departmental pressure on "popular" professors to accept larger classes was also a way to undermine engaged pedagogy. If classes became so full that it is impossible to know students' names, to spend quality time with each of them, then the effort to build a learning community fails. Throughout my teaching career, I have found it helpful to meet with each student in my classes, if only briefly. Rather than sitting in my office for hours waiting for individual students to choose to meet or for problems to arise, I have preferred to schedule lunches with students. Sometimes, the whole class might bring lunch and have discussion in a space other than our usual classroom. At Oberlin, for instance, we might go as a class to the African Heritage House and have lunch, both to learn about different places on campus and gather in a setting other than our classroom.

Many professors remain unwilling to be involved with any pedagogical practices that emphasize mutual participation between teacher and student because more time and effort are required to do this work. Yet some version of engaged pedagogy is really the only type of teaching that truly generates excitement in the classroom, that enables students and professors to feel the joy of learning.

I was reminded of this during my trip to the emergency room after falling down that hill. I talked so intensely about ideas with the two students who were rushing me to the hospital that I forgot my pain. It is this passion for ideas, for critical thinking and dialogical exchange that I want to celebrate in the classroom, to share with students.

Talking about pedagogy, thinking about it critically, is not the intellectual work that most folks think is hip and cool. Cultural criticism and feminist theory are the areas of my work that are most often deemed interesting by students and

colleagues alike. Most of us are not inclined to see discussion of pedagogy as central to our academic work and intellectual growth, or the practice of teaching as work that enhances and enriches scholarship. Yet it has been the mutual interplay of thinking, writing and sharing ideas as an intellectual and teacher that creates whatever insights are in my work. My devotion to that interplay keeps me teaching in academic settings, despite their difficulties.

When I first read *Strangers in Paradise: Academics from the Working Class,* I was stunned by the intense bitterness expressed in the individual narratives. This bitterness was not unfamiliar to me. I understood what Jane Ellen Wilson meant when she declared, "The whole process of becoming highly educated was for me a process of losing faith." I have felt that bitterness most keenly in relation to academic colleagues. It emerged from my sense that so many of them willingly betrayed the promise of intellectual fellowship and radical openness that I believe is the heart and soul of learning. When I moved beyond those feelings to focus my attention on the classroom, the one place in the academy where I could have the most impact, they became less intense. I became more passionate in my commitment to the art of teaching.

Engaged pedagogy not only compels me to be constantly creative in the classroom, it also sanctions involvement with students beyond that setting. I journey with students as they progress in their lives beyond our classroom experience. In many ways, I continue to teach them, even as they become more capable of teaching me. The important lesson that we learn together, the lesson that allows us to move together within and beyond the classroom, is one of mutual engagement.

I could never say that I have no idea of the way students respond to my pedagogy; they give me constant feedback. When I teach, I encourage them to critique, evaluate, make suggestions and interventions as we go along. Evaluations at

the end of a course rarely help us improve the learning experience we share together. When students see themselves as mutually responsible for the development of a learning community, they offer constructive input.

Students do not always enjoy studying with me. Often they find my courses challenge them in ways that are deeply unsettling. This was particularly disturbing to me at the beginning of my teaching career because I wanted to be like and admired. It took time and experience for me to understand that the rewards of engaged pedagogy might not emerge during a course. Luckily, I have taught many students who take time to reconnect and share the impact of our working together on their lives. Then the work I do as a teacher is affirmed again and again, not only by the accolades extended to me but by the career choices students make, their habits of being. When a student tells me that she struggled with the decision to do corporate law, joined such and such a firm, and then at the last minute began to reconsider whether this was what she felt called to do, sharing that her decision was influenced by the courses she took with me, I am reminded of the power we have as teachers as well as the awesome responsibility. Commitment to engaged pedagogy carries with it the willingness to be responsible, not to pretend that professors do not have the power to change the direction of our students' lives.

I began this collection of essays confessing that I did not want to be a teacher. After twenty years of teaching, I can confess that I am often most joyous in the classroom, brought closer here to the ecstatic than by most of life's experiences. In a recent issue of *Tricycle,* a journal of Buddhist thought, Pema Chodron talks about the ways teachers function as role models, describing those teachers that most touched her spirit:

> My models were the people who stepped outside of the conventional mind and who could actually stop my mind and completely open it up and free it, even for a moment, from a conventional, habitual way of looking at things. . . . If you are really preparing for groundlessness, preparing for the reality of human existence, you are living on the razor's edge, and you must become used to the fact that things shift and change. Things are not certain and they do not last and you do not know what is going to happen. My teachers have always pushed me over the cliff. . . .

Reading this passage, I felt deep kinship, for I have sought teachers in all areas of my life who would challenge me beyond what I might select for myself, and in and through that challenge allow me a space of radical openness where I am truly free to choose—able to learn and grow without limits.

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.