

Matthew Zaldaña

Mr. David K Song

Asian American 001

August 21, 2021

### Final Exam

As it has occurred with millions of immigrants in the United States upon arrival, racism, discrimination, and anti-immigrant feelings swap the country's current residents. For Asian American immigrants in the 1960s, this was nothing new. Asian Americans had suffered in the United States racist society ever since the first wave of immigrants had arrived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, the Asian American movement of the 1960s called "Yellow power" which was a "call for all Asian Americans to end the silence that has condemned us to suffer in this racist society and to unite with our black, brown, and red brothers of the Third World for survival, self-determination and the creation of a more humanistic society" (Kubota, Gidra) was created. However, it is important to note the historical context of the Asian American movement, how political support affected its direction in the following decades of its emergence, and how activist Larry Kubota who wrote what the Yellow Power call entailed envisioned what would occur to Asian Americans during and after those years.

The Yellow Power movement "emanated from the forces of white supremacy and imperialism" (Lee 218). Amy Uyematsu details Yellow Power as "an articulated mood rather than a program", which causes disillusionment and alienation from white America (Uyematsu). It stemmed from the "black power" movement. "Young Asian Americans were inspired by the writings of black intellectuals" (Lee 214) and their exposure to black political organizing embraced a wider level of antidiscrimination feelings towards what they should have seen in their

communities at those times. They were following Malcom X, Huey Newton, among others, who were credited for “laying the groundwork” for the Asian American movement (Lee 214). A notable experience of someone who lived the racism that the black power was fighting against was the radical Sansei Pat Sumi who was born when Japanese Americans were furloughed from the WWII internment camps” (Sumi). She didn’t question their experiences, until she discovered how much “courage even the youngest of the black community” were willing to face the Klan (Sumi). At a time when black racism was at its peak, the Asian American movement started to rise. However, for Sumi, although she met college students from all parts of the country who wanted to help the black community, she was not interested in the “pacifist” side of things. Instead, she turned her attention to soldiers who opposed the war and “came back with a hatred of Vietnamese” (Sumi). On a different note, one of the goals of the Asian American movements within the student population was to draw awareness of the lack of diverse courses taught in higher education such as universities regarding the Asian ethnicity history and related subjects. For this reason, in the San Francisco State University, “student activists joined the coalition organization the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF)” (Lee 220) playing an integral role in a strike that led the establishment of the courses. This not only occurred at San Francisco State but was repeated in the bay, the state, and eventually, across the country. This recalls the sixth point in the 12-point program from the I Wor Kuen organization. The sixth point addressed is “an education that exposes the true history of western imperialism in Asia and around the world” (I Wor Kuen). This way, the United States and many other imperialist countries could be viewed in the exact same eyes as their ruled Asian citizens viewed them while under their control. These along with the gay movement among Asian Americans, the international imaginational views of activists on Asian America, political awakenings such as the Red Guard, were the “new

orthodoxy of liberal multi-culturalism” that came to characterize the national discussions on sensitive topics never expressed so openly in any culture (Lee 231). It changed what the Asian American movement was working towards and entrenched its goals in changing what the Asian American life was in the United States.

The Asian American differed from their predecessors greatly. In the process of trying to become an “American”, the Asian American has tried to transform themselves into something they aren’t “both mentally and physically” (Uyematsu). However, thanks to the black power, the “yellow power” emerged as the new awareness in “Asian Americans to be proud of their physical and cultural heritages” (Uyematsu). After the passage of the Hart-Celler act in 1965 and the United States government allowing the immigration of Asians into the country, socioeconomically, the post-1965 Asian immigrants were quite different. About a third of these, mostly family units, “were professionals”, skilled immigrants (Lee 233). However, since the 1980s, the professional and technical immigration declined, and the US saw more a shift “toward a more working-class immigrant population” (Lee 235). These immigrants mostly worked in the US in labor jobs, however, “according to a 1989 survey of Los Angeles, nearly 40 percent of employed Korean American men owned their own business” proving what Peter Kim, a bakery owner based in Gardena said about his culture: “Most Koreans would rather be self-employed rather than work for someone else” (Lee 236). As more and more immigrants heard these stories, they were also impulse in doing the same thing, no matter what it took to prosper. For example, Chinese restaurants in suburbs were something never seen. When they first began, they “served primarily co-ethnic customers” but from the 60s and onwards, they “found that they had to reach out to a broader and more diverse clientele to survive” (Lee 238). On another note, Filipinos were having a harder time. Uyematsu notes that Asian American success is a myth when

considering Filipino Americans. For example, in “1960, the 65, 549 Filipino residents of California earned a median annual income of \$2,925, as compared to \$3,553 for blacks and \$5,109 for whites” (Uyematsu). Even their Chinese and Japanese counterparts were doing better. According to the US Census of 1970, “Japanese and Chinese Americans outpaced whites in median family income” (Lee 241). On the downside, when reexamining Asian American sentiments that accompanied their arrival, Lee finds that “they were blamed for problems associated with rapid commercial and residential growth” (Lee 242). Lee notes that by the late 1970s, “land speculation and construction in the community had inflated property values and increased rents” (Lee 242).

Nonetheless, the much-needed skills coming from Asian Americans drove legislators to push for more political awakening. However, even in these circumstances, while racism was now seen at a minimum and nowhere near what it had been decades earlier, Vijay Prashad argued that the creation of the non-immigrant visas during the 1990s shift praised Asian professionals and at the same time created an air of disinterest in letting these professionals stay (Lee 242). Under this visa, a worker could come to the US for three years, but then forced to return home. As far as Sikh immigration goes, “the rate of return migration” increased while “sentiments in favor of emigration declined” as jobs in India can offer a more prospered chance in surviving within a culture that wouldn’t discriminate against professionals as much.

Hitting now a more modern time, the newer Asian American generation tended to “excel academically and gained admission to the nation’s most selective colleges and universities” (Lee 245). These were the children of the of Asian American immigrant population of post-1965. There was a growing “unease among Americans, white and non-white, about the heightened presence of Asian American students in US schools” (Lee 246). With regards to the Asian

American movement, its goals are clearly digressed. However, even during the 1980s and forward, Uyematsu's words are still notable for the "silent protest" that the new Asian Americans partook in during these times (Uyematsu). There was clearly "resentment against high-achieving Asian Americans" and this "bubbled over into racialized violence" (Lee 246). This trend continued from the 1980s onward. What was known as the "Yellow power" became power not in the sense of the word, but as "yellow peril" as Asians across the country were continuously mistreated for their intelligence. Efforts came out aimed at "toughening hate crimes laws while forging unity among Asian Americans" (Lee 250). Kubota's goals were still being reflected even during this time as the main goal was to unite Asian Americans in the development, pride, and self-respect that they wanted to achieve. While laws were passed and China emerged as an economic power in the late 1990s, another reminder to the US that competition was coming overseas but that they already had some of it on this side of the hemisphere (Lee 256), Asian Americans individually and collectively strived to be one mind and one heart.

In all, while "yellow people in America seem to be silent citizens" as Uyematsu put it they have adjusted their ways of living to be able to fit in a diverse culture that was and is the United States, pushing against immigration. Had more political laws been put into place when they most needed it, Asian Americans post-1965 may not have suffered as much, but they also may not have understood the value of hard work as they had lived it.