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Cover: "I VOTED."

With the election season quickly coming to a close, what else is left to consider alongside the name of the new president of our country? Voter turnout. For the past decade, Asian Americans have slowly been increasing their numbers at the polls: what will our numbers look like for the 2008 election? Will we be able to make a strong standing and affect the election? If we all participate, will it even make a difference?

editor's notes

So I woke up this morning with a bug bite on my eyelid.

Yeah. You heard me. A bug—a nasty God-forsaken disease-ridden BUG—decided to rest its cruel microscopic jaws onto my fleshy juicy eyelid. It's swollen up to the point where my eye is hardly distinguishable behind the pink swelling. I seriously contemplated buying an eyepatch, because hey, it's Halloween season, so they'd probably be sold cheap, right? But then I'd have to buy a pirate costume or something to match, and that's just too much effort.

Tonight, I bravely decided to step outside my house and face the outside world, swollen eye and all. Of course, the first reaction people had when seeing me was "AUGH. What happened?" with a horrified expression. But after the initial shock and horror, people relaxed, and then reassured me by saying, "no, it's not that bad." But I'm still left trying to (somehow) casually cover my eye with my hand, or duck my face behind my bangs.

The shame I felt over my eye wasn't really because other people were constantly reacting to it. It was more so that I was ever-conscious of its abnormality. The more I saw people looking, the more I wondered "Are they looking at my face?!" It wasn't really about everyone else: it was about how I had assumed others were seeing me. And I think the more I thought about it, the more others knew too, and could focus on nothing else. Whenever I talked to someone, that was all we could talk about. Conversation proved awkward and uncomfortable.

Can't the same be said for our identities and how we acknowledge them around others? (did you like that transition? haha) Sometimes people are so ever-presently conscious of all the labels they carry—Democrat, conservative, Christian, feminist, Asian, gay, etc. to the extent that it's hard

to relate to those who aren't the same. I think sometimes these strong affiliations with labels can blind us at times from being able to communicate past those identities. Not to say that these identities are unimportant or should be ignored, but rather, we should not let these labels limit us from our interactions with one another. I realize that my bug bite is pretty crazy looking, but what made it worse was my constant obsessing over how I looked. It might have been better to accept how I looked, take it in stride, and not let it define my conversation with others. It's there, yes, but whatever—tell me about your week! I'd like to know.

How best can we learn about others? How can we learn more about tolerance? Through conversation, openness, interaction, and the ability to see past yourself. Don't get me wrong: it's definitely good to be aware of your identity, but let's not let it limit us. There will always be people who we don't understand, who we can't talk to, and who we'll disagree with. Let's make those interactions less abrasive by focusing on others, and not ourselves and how we differ.

I hope those analogies made sense. Or perhaps that bug bite had a little venom of some sort in it and its slowly seeping into my brain. Whatever the case, I hope everyone enjoys this issue and gets something out of it! Tell me what you think. It's okay, I'll listen: I'm interested in what you have to say!

Cheers,
Elaine Chen
layout editor

Liked what you read? Feel like joining our staff? Want to send us angry letters? Then contact us!
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in this issue...

03 Wake Up, the World's on Fire melani sutedja

04 Why Care? elaine chen

05 The Death of Ethnic Press montague hung

06 Breaking Through the Bars matt blesse

07 Obama's Blueprint for Change annie kim noguchi

08 Big Success on a Small Screen eunice kwon

09 Beyond "Oriental", Beyond "European" naomi oren

10 Kicking Off Hmong New Year julie tse

11 Living the Mixed Life laylaa abdul-khabir

12 Writing the Good Fight cecilia tran

12 Lost in Translation Comic maria kim

12 hardboiled November Playlist davin chang

WAKE UP, THE WORLD'S ON FIRE

GENERATIONS OF API ORGANIZERS

four decades of Asian American organizers come together to talk activism

by melani sutedja

Imagine coming to Cal your freshman year, not only to be sunburned by roommate and workload anxieties, but to encounter the wake of a tumultuous storm occurring—the third world Liberation Strike brewing, conflicts over People's Park, US involvement in Southeast Asia...

This characterizes Professor Michael Omi's first year as an undergraduate at UC Berkeley. Standing on a podium, he recalls the days when he too was a dorm student at Unit 3.

"I was shocked one day when I made my way through campus, seeing people being flanked by the National Guard with rifles and bayonets on their rifles," says the Ethnic Studies professor. "I remember being caught up in Dwinelle Plaza, where tear gas was sprayed in order to disperse anti-war protesters. In other words, one couldn't remain an innocent bystander."

Yet, the fervor of the activism of the past and present doesn't just reside within Omi this Saturday evening, but a whole audience.

The UC Berkeley Asian Pacific American Alumni Luncheon, held on October 11, 2008, included a parthenon of alumni activists from the past four decades. Bringing personal memories and experiences to life, the various generations of Cal organizers reminded us of a rather neglected catalyst of the revolutionary Berkeley we've all come to associate with excessive 'hippies' and 'flower power'- the role of Asian Americans in the '60s, to the present.

Organized by the Asian Pacific American Student Development (APASD), the luncheon held a forum that opened with former Chinese Students Club President and twLF organizer Dr. Floyd Huen, alumnus from the class of 1969. Testimonies included those ranging from leaders of the Sixties who struggled to get Ethnic Studies into university curriculum, such as former Black Panther member Richard Aoki.

Admitting that he almost did not even become a teacher "because of machismo," Aoki went on to describe how Asian American studies made an impact on him amongst times of turbulence. "Strange things were happening," says Aoki, "the primary leadership of my group was in prison, dozens were killed including our treasure, two field marshals, Bunchy Carter..." The activist, whose shades-and-beret-clad image is burned into counterculture legacy, went on to describe how Asian American studies stayed with him. "And life has not been the same."

Former twLF organizer Harvey Dong also touched

upon the sentiment of the 1968 strikes. Upon emphasizing the importance of creating cross generational communications, Dong also stressed the need for support between all people of color. "Basically, if we formed determined solidarity, not just among Asian American students, but black, brown, gold, and red, we can actually have power."

The current Ethnic Studies professor, whom colleagues deemed the "badass" organizer of the afternoon, went on to describe the survival tactics of the strike's ten week livelihood.

"One thing we also got out of it, was how to fight the system, fight the police, how to run away," says Dong. Rethinking what members probably had to resort to in their attempts to achieve a full-fledge third world college, Dong jokes, "(it was) probably illegal... but to hell with that. It was back in the day."

Those in attendance were overwhelmed by the plethora of recognizable figures. "It's empowering," says Marwin Yeung, a first year intended Sociology major. "It was just a quick reminder that the movement towards social justice and greater education is still in the works, especially in the API community. Bridging our experiences and our goals with the CAL API Alumni will generate even greater progress."

Organizers also discussed a time when Asian American studies was yet to be a field, and often times, overlooked. Omi himself recollects, "My professor told us, 'open a history book and what do you find? History of the West, Greco Roman tradition, the founding of American Nation States.. and then Asia, Africa, and Latin America only appeared when 'discovered' by Europeans."

What Asian American studies sought to do, says Omi, was re-center the histories of Asian American experience, as well as realize the growing role of transnationalism during the prevailing state between Asia and America. "After all, the Asian American slogan," says Omi, "was 'Why fight the racist war,' not 'bring the troops home,'" says Omi.

The reception heightened as alumni and students paid tribute to former professor (and top OG) Ronald Takaki, for his contributions to the Asian American movement, and the continuing struggle for liberation.

One of his former students, Greg Mark, recounts how Takaki organized the first Asian American course in the country—Asian American 100X.

"There were 150 of us in that Wednesday night class. The electricity that we feel now, we felt in the class. Paul organized an amazing class." Mark, an alumnus in the class of 1969, goes on to describe Takaki's role as a lead speaker in the American Yellow Identity Symposium on January 9, 1969, the 1st Asian Pacific American Conference in the US. The conference, which had three speakers and housed 800 in Pauley Ball Room, was planned less than two months before.

"He was just not my professor, but my friend, my mentor... and he even gave me a parking pass," joked Mark.

Of course, the panel came to include more recent alumni who donned the characteristic grassroots poster-paper-and-marker style that has permeated today's progressive student groups.

Generations down the line came to symbolize the emergence of female empowerment within progressive spaces, especially when Jidan Koon took the podium.

A second generation organizer from the class of 1998, Koon exhibited a more contemporary edge towards topics within the Asian Pacific Islander community.

Introducing alumni to acronyms of current student

organizations, such as the REACH! Recruitment and Retention Center, Koon emphasized the power of direct service as a base building strategy. Having partnered with APASD on the annual Asian Pacific Islander Issues Conference to bring youth from Oakland High, the coalition sought to create a more contemporary edge to the table.

"We wanted to concentrate on more than Asian in media and glass ceilings, but things prevalent in our community-gang violence, community issues workshops," says Koon.

The advent of Proposition 209 in 1996 and its ban on affirmative action within the UC system would especially be of much concern. Koon describes a time when REACH! took over Sproul for a week to hold teach-ins about the impacts of affirmative action. "With a rotation of ten people sleeping on Sproul Plaza each night during the middle of midterms, I remember making our ramen on stove burners and studying by the floodlight on Sproul," she says.

Just as the Black Student Union, Asian American Political Alliance, and Mexican American Student Union would create the third world Liberation Front in 1969, there would be a greater emphasis on coalition building between Asian Americans

and other ethnic groups. "Out of 209, there was more solidarity with the other groups, especially to form the bridges coalition to build solidarity, and do programming together, such as a multicultural junior college day," says Koon.

Former CalSERVE Senator and recent alum Maurice Sealy also echoes the importance of building coalition, especially amidst last year's

struggle to create a multicultural center. Latent with frustration and swagger, he becomes blunt about the University's neglect in establishing permanent ground.

"From 240 Cesar Chavez, to Heller, what's happened to our people have been moved around around," says Sealy. "Getting a permanent multicultural center was no longer about getting space on the campus, but making it known that we'd no longer be displaced by the University and the institutions that govern us. We got power."

Nevertheless, the Oakland native also acknowledges the hypocrisy he finds in the Asian American community. Just as Omi mentioned of a modern day "brain drain" that "told Asian Americans in the Sixties to assimilate and move on to mainstream economic lifestyles," Sealy acknowledges the problem of what he calls "sideline" activism.

"There are 42.9% Asian americans on campus. Cool. But where is that population of Asian Americans who are gonna be about their communities, not just about being in Haas business school, not just getting into law school. You can pretend to be socially conscious, listen to progressive music, but when it comes to being accountable to the community, be busy in cafe shops sipping in the lattes listening to Malcolm X."

Koon agrees. "It's important for our culture not to just get a degree and go straight to their career of choice, but to get exposure to new ideas," she says. "People get radicalized."

Koon's own parents, who were involved in the progressive movement of the Sixties, were present as their daughter gave her testimony.

"In some sense, we are not familiar with the new situation," says Koon's mother. "It's somewhat new to us. Yet, this generation's activism is much deeper." And as for seeing their daughter on stage, a remnant of their former selves?

"She is a joy to any parent, we are very proud," her mom says.



MC, Mike Tran welcomes Richard Aoki to the stage.

I just want to comment on an article called "Non-first generation students".

I myself, am a second-generation Chinese-American, and found myself attracted to this quote:

"We easily conformed to our American classmates and sung to tunes such as "America the Beautiful" and "Grand Ole Flag." In middle school, we were all part of some social studies class that tricked us into thinking that history was something that made the clock tick slower—something that extended the number of pages in our textbooks without our knowledge. High school was not much different for most of us. What was not boring was simply irrelevant. The irony of it all is that very few people challenged or even thought to challenge the irrelevance of textbook history. I have recently been drawn to a little something called reflection, and cannot help but reflect on why no one ever asked, "Where are all the Asian Americans in history?" The omission of generations and generations of Asian Americans throughout history is something many of us have just realized. Such a realization has had a profound effect on how non-first-generation Asian Americans situate themselves in modern society."

These are true facts. However, in order to really ask the question, "Where are all

the Asian Americans in history?", one must ask: why does that matter?

I don't know; it's important to know AA history, but people I know don't care about Asian-American activism/history because they are more focused on their lives, not on going on wondering what their identities are. They're happy doing whatever they are right now. That's why there isn't much of a priority about AA history, even within my age group. Our US history textbook, for example, does not mention how AAs fought for civil rights (where's International House and The Third World Liberation Front, or Vincent Chin?). It's going to be a hard audience to persuade on why it matters; I find myself wondering why it matters, even though I believe it's important. Most people around me do not care about AA history/studies as much as the previous generations because we have a lot of opportunities around us.

In the coming years, as we are facing more problems, such as the economy, foreign policy, global warming, the dwindling supply of fossil fuels, you're going to turn to faces asking us: why does it matter that we learn about Asian-American history the same way people will ask why East Asian Languages are important? Why does it matter? Even though I enjoy reading hardboiled, I myself have grown apathetic towards the Asian-American movement because of more "important problems" which our world is facing today.

Why care? The importance of education and empowerment of our communities



www.vincentchin.net



www.bookmice.net

by elaine chen

Although a few of our editors (...or maybe just one of our editors) are convinced that this email to us is all part of a huge conspiracy (since we didn't really think high school students read our magazine), I still felt compelled to respond to a lot of the comments made.

Firstly, it's easy to see where you're coming from. Why care? As a high school senior, it's easy to question "why care" raise that question about anything. When I was a senior in high school, all I cared about was getting into Berkeley and making sure I didn't screw up my last year in high school. I didn't have time to think about my "Asian American identity" (whatever that meant), or to contemplate why Asian Americans weren't in textbooks. Sure, I'd occasionally make the fleeting comment about the subtly racist nature of our history books and how the only thing I really learned about "my people" was that they worked on the railroads, wore long queues, and lived in dirty dingy Chinatown, but that was the extent of my socialization as an Asian American up until that point. So like I said, it's easy to see where you coming from. Why care about these things if we aren't even exposed to them in the first place?

However, coming to Berkeley (and taking a few Asian American studies classes) has lead me to realize that race permeates society, no matter how much we'd like to avoid it and claim that the world is now colorblind. Everything is fairer now than it was in the past, right? Because hey, at least we're not interning people all over the place and having Jim Crow laws that prohibit certain races from exercising their rights. And, yeah, wasn't that what the Civil Rights Movement was for? So that we didn't have to worry about these things anymore? But if this world were truly colorblind, where are all the Asian American CEOs? Why do you have to squint so hard to find the Asian American representation in Congress? Why do so many Asian Americans get glossed over in college admissions amidst all the claims that Asian Americans are "overrepresented"?

I think a lot of times people mistake Asian American studies as being just a bunch of classes where people gripe about racism that they've experienced and how much society sucks. Although there's always a fair amount of those moments in the more poorly run discussion sections, to me, I always saw Asian American studies as broadening my world view and outlook on things. Where was all this information, growing up in my life? Why didn't I see institutional racism before? Why didn't I know that Asian Americans could actually fight back

and start a movement? Why couldn't I see the community as something varied, diverse, different, and friggin' amazing?

I had always brushed aside this lack of attention to Asian Americans in textbooks with the assumption that the materials were simply outdated. These books are from the '80s, so they probably don't have Asians in them because Asians in American are only a recent phenomenon—my own parents didn't come until the '80s, so it would make sense if their stories weren't covered... right? That was what I had thought up until my sophomore in college before taking my first Asian American studies course here. It was in this course where I realized that what was worse than being omitted from textbooks was contributing to this erasure with my own thoughts.

I didn't like this feeling of being erased. And I didn't like this feeling of a whole community of people, making up 45% of Berkeley and nearly 40% of my hometown of Temple City, being erased.

I procrastinated this article for a long time. Despite being the type of person that would begin hyperventilating at the very knowledge of a missed deadline, I really did not know the best way to respond to this—probably because I struggle with this question so much myself. After weeks of wondering about this, I've come to the conclusion that the reason why it matters so much to me is simply because I love this community.

To me, studying Asian American studies and working in the Asian American community isn't just about recognizing racism wherever and whenever it appears and being able to point it out to everyone. It's about so many other things: it's about empowerment, it's about loving yourself, it's about acceptance and tolerance.

I don't think I had this kind of love growing up. If I did, it was definitely underdeveloped and shallow. Of course it would be—how could I love something that I knew nothing about? The love was undeveloped because, though I was surrounded by Asians growing up, I didn't realize the significance of their presence in my life. All I knew about Asians were that we were lumped together in the same racial category and we all came from Asia at one point.

But as I began to learn about my communities and the people that make them up, I began to realize that it's not so much that Asian Americans don't have a story, but that it's a story often untold. Why care about the Asian American movement in the '60s? Why know about Vincent Chin? Who

cares about I-House? To me, these events all illustrate the dominant power structure trying to muffle the voices of my communities, and ultimately, muffling my voice.

But there are also stories about people rising up and fighting back, trying to get counted and making a difference. To say that we too are part of America, and we can't really be erased from existence. These stories aren't told to just illustrate that racism exists. These stories are told to illustrate to us that as a community, we are beautiful and significant. Although we are frequently forgotten in the between the black-and-white divide, that does not mean that we can't break through and become noticed.

The work that I do today is to indicate to everyone else that they could play important roles in the community too. But how can they know that if they aren't educated first? That is so central. There are plenty of Asian Americans out there, even at Berkeley, even in Asian American clubs on campus, that ask themselves "Why care?" There are people out there who have no idea that they even are a part of this "Asian American community" or realize the importance of this membership. This is painful to see.

Education is so central towards recognizing your own importance and significance here in America. And that starts with learning about your communities, where you came from, and why. Why care about history? Why care about the Asian American community? Because you shouldn't be erased, you shouldn't feel erased, and you shouldn't be invisible merely because you are of a certain race.

PS

You should totally apply to Berkeley. And join hardboiled!

"To me, studying Asian American studies and working in the Asian American community isn't just about recognizing racism. It's about so many other things: it's about empowerment, it's about loving yourself, it's about acceptance and tolerance."

IMAGES left: Demonstrators respond to the 1982 slaying of Vincent Chin right: Japanese individuals gather in an internment camp in Tanforan in 1942.

The Death of Ethnic Press

A look at the predicament facing ethnic news as they combat the internet and slumping revenues

by montague hung

Ethnic newspapers today are at risk of becoming extinct due to a combination of the rise of the Internet and even more importantly, the severe economic recession. Ethnic newspapers are dearly important to the Asian American community for a myriad of reasons. When ethnic newspapers report on issues important to the ethnic community, they are first and foremost enabling their readers to stay connected to their roots. Immigrants also need ethnic newspapers in order to help ease their transition to life in America.

The Internet has revolutionized the way that people receive news by allowing them to access millions of news articles from various sources with a simple click of a mouse. Many people are switching media formats because the internet version of the news is so much more convenient: it's free, easily browsed and searched, and best of all, no inky fingers. With the number of paper subscribers decreasing, the Newspaper Association of America estimates that advertising revenue for the newspaper industry in 2008 is expected to decline 11.5% to \$40.1 billion, with most of the lost ad revenue attributed mostly to the drop-off of print advertising.

However, the rise of the Internet as a news source is second to the economy as the most pressing danger to ethnic newspapers. The recent economic turmoil has threatened to choke off the main source of revenue for ethnic newspapers: advertisements. Small ethnic newspapers tend to rely heavily on local business ads for revenue. However, recent economic hardships affecting businesses have in turn led to a decrease in the number of ads.

The KoreAm Journal, a monthly Korean-American magazine based in

Southern California, recently published an open letter to readers asking for donations and stressing the need for new subscribers. Managing editor Michelle Woo comments on KoreAm's one third decrease in advertising: "That's huge. Ads account for 70% of revenue. What really jumped us into action was seeing some other ethnic publications fold suddenly."

Other newspapers that have ads account for 100% of their revenue are hit even harder from the economic downturn. Vivian Truong Gia, publisher for the San-Jose based Viet Tribune, said, "It's very hard at this time. The real estate section is totally gone from other newspapers. I still have eight pages for that section. Before, I had 20 pages." Commenting on the effects of the ads reduction, Hoang Nguyen, editor in chief for the Viet Tribune, said, "The drop in advertising has forced the Viet Tribune to cut the length of its issue and have less articles from contributors." If the economy's downturn continues to discourage businesses from advertising, ethnic newspapers will have to cut their issues even more, if not totally close.

The possibility of losing ethnic newspapers is extremely detrimental to the Asian American population. Many Asian Americans who know limited English depend on these ethnic newspapers as their main source of information. A study done by New California Media finds that 75% of the Asian population in California receives Asian American media, with 34% of these Asian Americans preferring ethnic newspapers over mainstream newspapers. Ethnic newspapers allow Asian Americans to easily educate themselves on current events such as the latest political developments or health issues. Without ethnic newspapers, many

Asian Americans will struggle to keep up with current events.

Even if the language barrier is breached, ethnic newspapers are necessary to document the Asian American experience in a way that today's predominant newspapers cannot. Many of our concerns and interests are different from mainstream America. Barbara Straus Reed, professor of journalism at Rutgers University, says, "Some issues of real concern to immigrants are not reported at all." With the growing homogenization of mainstream news, issues such as immigration, civil rights, economic opportunity, and cultural diversity are covered by ethnic newspapers in a way that mainstream newspapers do not: from the perspective of an ethnic minority. Ethnic newspapers magnify the implications of news to the ethnic community by giving them an outlet to articulate their opinions in solidarity and provide a unique viewpoint.

A new strategy is needed for ethnic newspapers to survive with the changing times. Yuru Chen, editor in chief of the Chinese newspaper World Journal, says, "More and more Chinese readers are going online to get their news. Chinese media has to go online. We face the same challenges as mainstream media: How do we put content online; how do we profit from our online content; and how do we make sure this doesn't hurt our print circulation?" World Journal has succeeded so far in maintaining their publishing by putting news stories online but keeping analysis and features exclusive to print. The World Journal has also realized that more students are learning the Chinese language and this has led them to collaborate with U.C. Berkeley to have their articles used in the classroom.

However, going online will not solve all of the troubles ethnic newspapers face. Print editions of the news is essential because the correct layout allows readers to digest information more easily than if the same article was scripted online. Even if the layout is sacrificed for the Internet, there still exists problems. For one, Internet ad revenue is not as profitable as print ad revenue. The even bigger issue is once again, the economy. Hoang Nguyen laments, "There is no solution to the bad economy. We can't force businesses to give us more advertising. We have to try to survive the recession and hope times get better." Nguyen's sentiments are shared by many in the Asian American community who feel that ethnic newspapers let Asian Americans stay informed and connected to their culture. It is imperative for businesses to start advertising more in order to save the ethnic press.

The truth is that Asian Americans are a minority in the U.S. Losing ethnic newspapers would mean losing empowerment in the Asian American community and losing part of our voice. Ethnic newspapers have provided service to their community with a sense of loyalty and responsibility that comes only with a sense of shared background. Losing ethnic print media would have an incredible impact on Asian Americans and it is a cause that is noble of fighting for. Many ethnic newspapers are free of charge and it is worth it to send donations to help keep them afloat. People who read the online versions of ethnic newspapers could also start subscribing to the paper edition. Besides the enhanced experience that print media gives, Asian Americans simply cannot afford to see such a crucial source of their power die out.



Hoang Nguyen, Editor of the Viet Tribune, takes a moment to reflect on the future of ethnic newspapers.

Hard-hit by the economic downturn, KoreAm Journal launched a three month campaign in order to raise funds and awareness.

Save KoreAm Journal
Our magazine. Our Korean American experience.

<http://savekoream.wordpress.com/>

PROPOSITIONS 6 & 9

BREAKING THROUGH THE BARS

by matt blesse

Chances are you haven't even heard about Propositions 6 and 9 on this November's ballot. And if you have, it has more than likely been in terms of its impact on African American and Latino populations.

Proposition 6, labeled as the "safe neighborhoods act" by its supporters, seeks to clean up our streets by pouring billions into the prison industry complex and imposing harsher sentences for "gang" related offenses and drug offences. Its main target: poor youth of color.

Compound this with the already skyrocketing and disproportionate rates of incarceration among Black and Latino populations and the decrepit state of social services in California, it's not too hard to imagine the devastating impact that such a proposition would have on these minority communities.

But where do Asian Americans fit into this picture?

As the minority group with the lowest incarceration rates and highest average income why should we, to put it frankly, give a damn? After all, we made it; why didn't they? Let us ignore for a moment the obvious moral problem of simply "standing by" as Latino and Black populations—who form the backbone of California's economy by doing all the shit that is vital to making this state livable—are racially profiled, criminalized, and incarcerated. Let's pretend for a moment that we only care about saving our own asses.

The question becomes: how will these propositions affect us, as Asian Americans?

Firstly, Propositions 6 and 9 are fiscal disasters. Proposed during a time of epic, economic fuck-ups, they seek to spend billions of dollars a year (from the State's general fund) on programs with no oversight, thus taking away limited and precious resources from the social and educational services that we (including you middle-class Asian Americans out there!) take advantage of daily. Yet despite all this spending, Proposition 9 suffers from a lack of oversight and accountability.

Similarly, Proposition 6 will create and allocate millions of dollars to numerous oversight boards, committees and councils---useless and costly governmental structures which the independent California Legislative Analyst found to have "no definable goals" and "no identifiable results."

On top of that, none of these committees, at the state or local level, will include representatives from organizations who work directly with the "at-risk" youth that these programs seek to help which begs the question: how effectively is our money being used under this proposition?

Proposition 9 will similarly impact taxpayers by delaying parole hearings for up to 15 years thus blocking responsible release programs and overcrowding prisons.

Without providing any sources of funding to pay for solutions to our overused prison system, priority must be given for the construction of more prison facilities while our health care, public safety programs, educational services, and firefighting programs continue to suffer.

Not to sound like another vinyl recording of Britney Spears wailing about her comeback on repeat—in other words, a broken record (OH SNAP!)—but in a time of global financial crisis can we, as taxpayers toler-

ate such careless and thoughtless spending? However, this bill does not just affect Asian Americans as law abiding taxpayers and school-goers.

News flash: Asian Americans also suffer from systematic problems like poverty, mental and physical health inequalities, language barriers, and unemployment---the very conditions in which crime and gangs tend to flourish.

Here I am specifically talking about Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders, who are incarcerated at high rates in comparison to their white counterparts.

According to a study done in 2006 entitled "Profiling Incarcerated Asian and Pacific Islander Youth", PI youths in California are "twice as likely to be incarcerated relative to their share of the age-appropriate population." Furthermore there is significant Southeast Asian involvement in gangs.

Originally created as a source of community and protection, today large numbers of Laotian and Vietnamese youth are members of gangs.

Proposition 6 particularly affects the Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander communities by expanding the definition of gang-related activities and imposing harsher sentences for those "gang members" who are convicted-- including the provision that states that children as young as 14 could be tried as adults.

In an act of lunacy, Prop 6 calls for the expansion of the legal definition of gang-related activity to include such non-violent offences as graffiti and "wrongfully obtaining DMV documentation". Which brings me to my last point: These propositions target not only poor people of color, but immigrants as well.

According to David Steinhart, Director of the Commonwealth Juvenile Justice Program, Proposition 6 has a "disproportionate impact on immigrant populations".

This is mostly due to the expansion of the definition of gang-related activities to include such acts as "the unlawful use of personal identifying information". Through this proposition, immigrants are not only criminalized (what's new?), but are also reclassified as gang members as far as the California legal system is concerned.

Sound a little harsh? Proposition 6 also mandates background checks for those living in public housing, and when caught, immigrants here "illegally" would be denied bail. Under this law it is unclear exactly which legal entity will be responsible for the intricate and complex determination of someone's legality, but what is certain is that Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) will be notified of the individual's detainment.

Make no mistake; these bills are not about crime and gang prevention. Almost every criminal justice study of "high crime communities" has determined that a multifaceted approach—that includes community workers, mental health solutions, and substance abuse services—is the best solution to the crime problem facing our communities. Propositions 6 and 9 fail to address the fundamental sources of inequality and crime that affect the Asian American population.

They unjustly criminalize Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and are a burden on the Asian American, middle-class taxpayers. On November 4th, vote no on Props 6 and 9.

What you should expect to see on your ballot:

PROPOSITION 6

POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT FUNDING. CRIMINAL PENALTIES AND LAWS. INITIATIVE STATUTE.

- * Requires minimum of \$965,000,000 each year to be allocated from state General Fund for police, sheriffs, district attorneys, adult probation, jails and juvenile probation facilities. Some of this funding will increase in following years according to California Consumer Price Index.

- * Makes approximately 30 revisions to California criminal law, many of which cover gang-related offenses. Revisions create multiple new crimes and additional penalties, some with the potential for new life sentences.

- * Increases penalties for violating a gang-related injunction and for felons carrying guns under certain conditions.

PROPOSITION 9

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM. VICTIMS' RIGHTS. PAROLE. INITIATIVE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AND STATUTE.

- * Requires notification to victim and opportunity for input during phases of criminal justice process, including bail, pleas, sentencing and parole.

- * Establishes victim safety as consideration in determining bail or release on parole.

- * Increases the number of people permitted to attend and testify on behalf of victims at parole hearings.

- * Reduces the number of parole hearings to which prisoners are entitled.

- * Requires that victims receive written notification of their constitutional rights.

- * Establishes timelines and procedures concerning parole revocation hearings.

For more information visit:
<http://www.votenoprop6.com>
<http://www.votenoprop9.com>



Propositions 6&9 will add to the problem of overcrowding in prisons. Photo Courtesy of <http://www.kcbs.com/pages/2008990.php>?

Obama's 'Blueprint for Change' to solve issues affecting the AAPI community

by annie noguchi

Election Day is just around the corner, and apparently Barack Obama is Asian American and/or Pacific Islander now. Or at least, he considers himself as one: "I have often said that I consider myself to be an honorary AAPI member. So I understand and am committed to the issues that are important to the AAPI communities." In his newly released Blueprint For the Change We Need, he goes on to say that growing up in Hawaii, rooming with an Indian and a Pakistani in college, and having a sister who is half Indonesian and married to a Chinese Canadian makes him an honorary Asian American.

While I have to admit that I can appreciate that Obama has had such a strong Asian American presence in his life, his reasons for how Asian American he is made me giggle just a little... Come on, an Indian roommate in college? Is that detail really necessary? Oh wait, he had a Pakistani roommate too. That seals it! Obama is an honorary Asian! And that makes me an honorary half-Polish, quarter-Irish, quarter-German from Chicago, by way of my roommate.

But all jokes aside, Obama's "Barack Obama's Blueprint For The Change We Need for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders" is pretty dang awesome. While I'm sure he had a bunch of help from a team of analysts and his Pakistani roommate (and maybe a few Chinese Canadians too), Obama's Blueprint definitely shows that he is aware of AAPI issues and has plans to create policy addressing these issues if he is elected.

In short, Obama's Blueprint might have just convinced me that Obama not only understands some of the major issues facing the AAPI community but is committed to working to resolve them.

Here is my take on some aspects of the document, which is really a very comprehensive and truthful analysis of many of the issues facing AAPIs today.

Released on October 9, Obama's "Blueprint for the Change We Need for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders" is the most comprehensive planning document for Asian Americans ever released by a presidential nominee. The 53-page Blueprint details the issues that AAPI communities face, as well as policies to address these issues. The document is split into categories including economic opportunity, education, immigration, health care, home ownership, seniors, women, civil rights, foreign policy, veterans, and faith.

In his introduction of the Blueprint, Obama says, "I will work with AAPI communities to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable, accessible health care for all by reducing the language and cultural barriers...[I will] make college affordable through an annual \$4,000 tax credit in exchange for community service. [I will] do more to support small businesses, including strengthening programs that provide capital to minority-owned businesses. By reaching out directly to the AAPI communities, we can ensure that AAPIs are well represented in this national conversation about our future and the movement to write our destiny."

Am I sensing a warm fuzzy feeling growing inside of me? (And by fuzzy I mean the fuzzies I get when I think about civil liberties and social justice before I go to sleep at night.)

Obama goes on: "Beyond acknowledging the contributions of the AAPI communities, we also recognize the challenges we still face. Our nation is at war, our planet is in peril and for increasing numbers of Americans of Asian and Pacific Islander descent, the American dream is in danger of slipping away. As President, I will restore the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and direct that office to work towards the original goal of helping the federal government meet the underserved needs of Asian American and Pacific Islanders."

Yes, I think they are fuzzies! Because Obama's next quote reads like the synopsis to a **hardboiled** article. (Albeit one lacking in our usual wit and sarcasm. Understandable—we can't all be take-no-prisoners paramilitary journalistic juggernauts living under self-imposed martial law to bring you the best in political rabblerousing, community muckraking, and pop culture machinations—do you want to battle me?!)

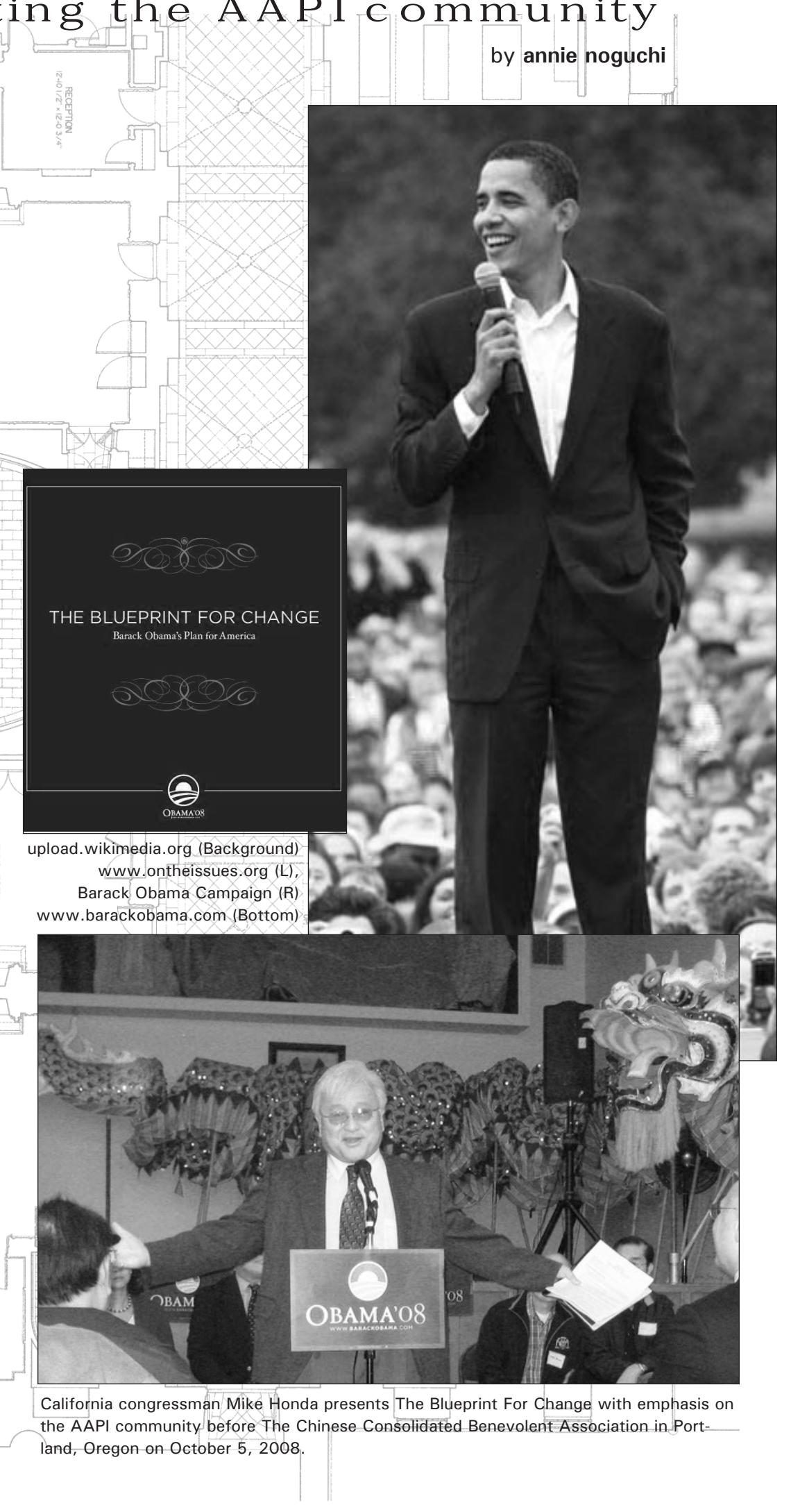
Obama says: "Many AAPIS face barriers to good-paying jobs and lack the training necessary to achieve greater job opportunities. Less than half of Cambodian Americans participate in the labor force and less than a third of Hmong Americans do so. Many AAPIS work in sweatshops and other hard conditions, often in violation of wage, hour, health, safety and other labor laws. On the other end of the labor market, AAPIS often encounter a 'glass ceiling' to promotion and professional advancement. AAPIS are less than one percent of all Fortune 500 companies, are only one percent of higher education administrators and have one of the lowest tenure rates among university faculty."

Definitely fuzzies: "AAPIs are not universally successful in academics and face unique cultural and linguistic challenges as basic as just learning English. The 'model minority' myth about AAPIs is misleading and inaccurate which has resulted in policy makers focusing less attention on their needs and the disparities in the educational services provided to them."

The Blueprint also details Obama's past record on addressing issues within the Asian American community, proving that he is not all talk and warm fuzzies, but in fact has a history of commitment to the Asian American community.

So in short, Obama's Blueprint has not only succeeded in giving me at least three cases of the fuzzies and causing a passionate outburst of **hardboiled** pride, but also in creating a document that simply speaks for itself. While Obama's Blueprint For Change can't save the nation, the analysis and perspective Obama shows is hope that, for the first time, a presidential candidate actually understands, cares about, and is ready to address the issues that affect our diverse community of AAPIs today.

For Obama's complete "Blueprint for the Change We Need for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders," visit <http://my.barackobama.com/aapiblueprint>.



California congressman Mike Honda presents The Blueprint For Change with emphasis on the AAPI community before The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in Portland, Oregon on October 5, 2008.

Big Success on a Small Screen

by eunice kwon

Asian Americans Gain Visibility in TV Commercials



www.babytalent.com

I really like commercials. When I switch on the television, I can't help but smile as marketers try to win me over with clever lines or with fat adorable babies. I can't stop myself from wondering what Oprah knows, that I don't, about life inside the prison system. I'm tempted to ask my doctor about Xanafil, because it just may save my life even though I have no idea what it is. I really like commercials because they try so hard to appeal to me, and darn it, sometimes they hit a soft spot.

Recently however, I've become hardened to their pleas for my product loyalties, time investments and financial resources. Their tricks no longer impress me. Bright colors, pretty people, talking animals – I'm over it.

Anyway, while I doubt that my declining level of consumerism has a direct impact in the commercial market (market of commercials, not the non-governmental sector of our economy), a small part of me believes that I'm more important than I actually am, and that I've played a role in creating this new phenomena in the world of advertising -- Asian American people in commercials. More specifically, Asian American people without ninja costumes or heavy accents or calculators. Just plain ol' American folks who happen to be of Asian descent. Asian Americans who shop at Home Depot, who go on dates, who are stuck in dead-end jobs... we're a whole new generation on screen! Granted, there are still quite a few advertisements with stereotypical depictions of Asian Americans. But to see numerous ads with Asian American

actors, in which the content is free from any racist implications, is truly satisfying.

"It's refreshing to be represented accurately," states Kevin Hatakeyama, an Asian American student, "any screen time we're getting where we're not being portrayed in a stereotypical way helps develop our real image."

Some people are not as enthusiastic.

"It doesn't seem like that big of a deal," comments Janice Chan, a first-year student at Cal, "commercials are short and it just means we see an Asian person on the screen for five extra seconds. But I guess that's better than nothing?"

It's much better than nothing. While it's hard to imagine that a screenshot of an Asian American man eating cereal in his kitchen is effectively helping to erase stereotypes, it is most definitely a significant step. Research shows that children under the age of 8 are significantly affected by the commercials they see on TV, and it plays a role in their perceptions of gender and race. These commercials featuring Asian Americans, being generally unspectacular, send a message to Asian American kids that they too are unspectacular (in a good way!) That is, that Asian Americans are Americans too.

As for me, these commercials make me want to whip out my wallet and start spending again. Did I mention I really do like commercials? Especially when they're done right.



Asian Americans are gaining more screen time in commercials, such as this one from Home Depot. Photo courtesy of www.babytalent.com



BEYOND "ORIENTAL" BEYOND "EUROPEAN"

by naomi oren **A Look at the Asian American Modern Art at the de Young**

Have you ever wished that you had a time traveling gadget to explore Asian American history beyond verbose lectures and boring textbooks?

Unfortunately, time-machines have yet to be invented, but there is another great alternative to get your fix of Asian American history: the Fine Arts of San Francisco Museum's de Young is currently exhibiting *Asian/American/Modern Art: Shifting Currents*. It is the first comprehensive Asian American modern art exhibit showcasing renowned masterpieces by Asian American artists from 1900-1970. This exhibit chronicles the flow of Modern art beginning with prominent early 20th century artists such as Yun Gee and Chiura Obata and culminates with Maya Lin's exhibit Systematic Landscapes.

When entering the exhibit, the viewer is welcomed by a monumental landscape painting of the High Sierra Mountains by Chiura Obata. Emigrating from Japan in 1903, Obata's training in traditional sumi-e has influenced his hybrid approach. He incorporates the flatness often associated with traditional Asian ink paintings with a peculiar denseness generated by the deep blues in the lake basin and the greens that surround the mountains.

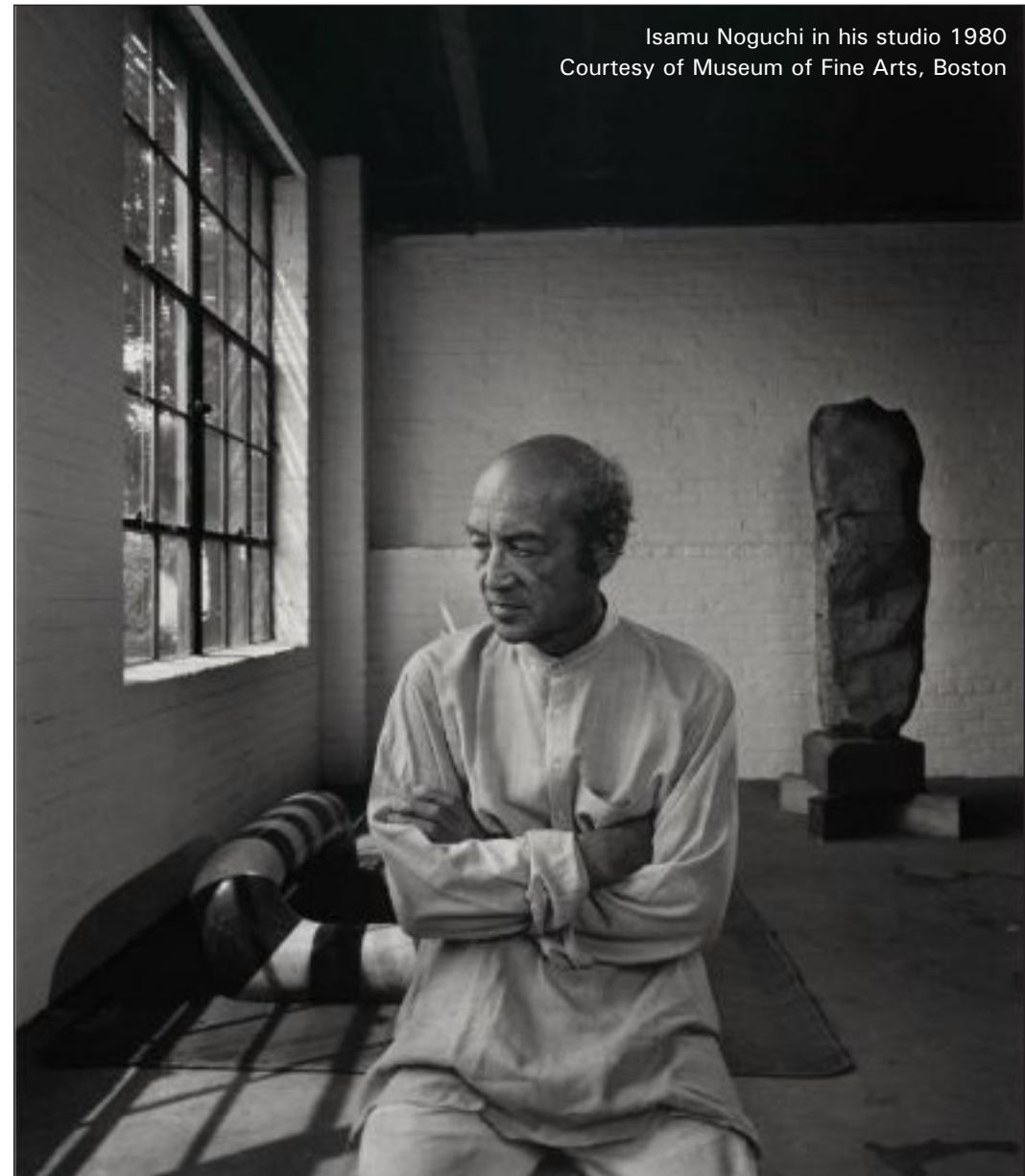
Obata's art was created during a time where "Orientals" were seen as only useful in working blue-collar jobs and limited to making a living by altering their own culture to the preferences of the dominant culture (this is the reason why American kung pao chicken is entirely different from China's gongbao jiding). Asian American artists who employed European artistic traditions in their art were seen as inferior copycats of the "genuine" art styles emanating from Europe. Similarly, these artworks were constantly compared to hanging scroll ink paintings and traditional Japanese woodblock prints. Works like Obata's were not quite "Oriental",

"Asian American artists who employed European artistic traditions in their art were seen as inferior copycats of the "genuine" art styles emanating from Europe."

nor were they quite American. It's a story all too familiar.

The exhibit begins with the story of immigration from Asia. The pain of saying farewell to your mother as you sail to a new country to fulfill your dreams can be vividly felt in Yun Gee's *Where is My Mother?* The romanticism of the American dream is boldly defined in Obata's rich landscapes. Walking through the second section, the story of hardship unfolds as Henry Sugimoto's large mural-like paintings reveals the pain of toiling the soil among racist signs like "Japs Go Home" during WWII hysteria. Political criticism of Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace is vibrantly abstracted in Val Laigo's *Dilemma of the Atom* (1953). Dong Kingman's humorous sci-fi panel of flying saucers soaring above warehouse workers reflects the 1950s obsession with space travel. Isamu Noguchi's *Orpheus*, a gigantic aluminum screen with slight bends at particular points ending in fruit-can sized holes is another oddly divine piece that coincides with the machine fetish of the 1960s. Kusama Yayoi's disturbing repetition of swirling yellow chains on a black background parallels the crazy-anything-goes era of the 1970s. And the list goes on....

The de Young's exhibit is a rare occasion to see a stupendous amount of diverse Asian American Modern artists gather in one hall. In most cases, only an individual or a limited group is exhibited. Finally, we can see the progression of how Asian American artists have grown from beyond the status of "Oriental outsider" to being recognized as an integral part of American art history.



Isamu Noguchi in his studio 1980
Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

de Young Museum Visiting Information

Address:

Golden Gate Park
50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr.
San Francisco, CA 94118

Hours:

Tuesday through Sunday
9:30 am – 5:15 pm
Friday 9:30-8:45 pm
Closed on Mondays

Admissions:

Youths (13-17)	\$16
Adults	\$20
Seniors	\$17
Students with college ID, children 12 and under, and FAMSF members	FREE.

Special Events:

Masami Teraoka
Curator and Artist Discussion:
Asian/American/Modern Art
Friday, Nov 7, 2008, 7:00 pm
www.deyoungmuseum.org
415.750.3600

The first Tuesday of every month is FREE (\$10 special exhibition applies)

Kicking Off Hmong New Year

by julie tse

Celebration brings culture to surrounding cities

It's that time of the year again—time to start over. But it's only November; New Year in the US isn't for another month and a half.

So whose New Year is it? Chinese? Japanese? Korean?

No, it's Hmong New Year.

For the Hmong culture, New Year is an opportunity to fulfill religious and social functions.

The celebration overflows the senses. On every corner, you can smell barbecue chicken diffusing into the air as young adults dressed in the colors of traditional Hmong clothes watch performers on the stage playing the queej—a bamboo instrument used for cultural rituals and dances. Fairgrounds are also filled with vendors selling sticky rice with Hmong sausage and sweet drink, clothes, CDs and flowers.

Hmong New Year is a cultural tradition that takes place annually in select areas where large Hmong communities exist. The Hmong do not have an official date to celebrate the New Year because it depends on the timing of the harvesting season. New Year was recently celebrated in Chico and will be held in Stockton this weekend. The celebration lasts about three days during the months of November and December.

The three most important aspects of new years are linking young people to potential mates, religious rituals and displays of wealth.

During New Year, singles take advantage of the opportunity by searching for future potential "soul mates." New Year is celebrated during different dates in every city so people from other cities can go to other cities' new years. This gives singles a chance to go to other cities to meet a mate.

One activity practiced by the Hmong during the New Year is a ball-tossing game called pov pob. Single boys and girls line up across from one another and toss a ball back and forth until someone drops the ball. The one who drops it must give the other person a piece of their clothing or jewelry.

Religious rituals take place on the last day of the old year, which is called hnub peb caug, the 13th day.

Like other cultures, the Hmong believe in a variety of good and bad spirits. They have superstitions and rituals such as calling home the spirits and sweeping the home to get rid of all the dust. "It's like a christening thing with a baby; it's to re-bless the family for the New Year," said Nou Her, a junior at San Joaquin Delta College.

Wealth is revealed by clothing and all the jewelry that a family attains. In the mountains of Southeast Asia, homeland of most Hmong in the United States, the Hmong express their wealth by wearing French coins around their neck, called Xaux ncais; the

more, the better. But in America, everyone is basically at the same level of wealth so everyone has the coins to show off. Traditional Hmong clothes are rich in color to create a colorful scenes at New Year. When young boys and girls become teenagers they are to dress up and find a companion. The traditional clothing for men consists of a white or black shirt and a pair of long black trousers wrapped with a plain red band. Women's clothing are more elaborate and varies according to the family's dialect.

It is a shame that this colorful, delicious and cultural holiday will only be of importance to no more than 60 students of the UC Berkeley population, according to junior Linda Vu, founder

did you know?

Listed below are some interesting facts that are unknown by most:

- There are only 17 Hmong last names, such as Vang or Yang.
- The two dominant Hmong dialects are White and Green.
- Hmong people are not from Mongolia; they have no native country.
- Their alphabet was invented by Westerners.
- An interesting book regarding the struggles of a Hmong refugee family living in Merced is "The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down," by Anne Fadiman.

of Hmong Student Association at Berkeley.

This distribution of students makes Stephanie Yang, Public Relations Director of HSAB, question the word "diversity" on a campus that is known to be very diverse. "Cal has all its pictures around campus and we look like we're diverse but the Hmong population is a very underrepresented group and is overshadowed by this term."

With the sparse number of Hmong students, Vu and Yang have encountered peers who had not even heard of the ethnicity and have had to retell their entire history and culture in order to educate others.

"It's disappointing but I'm not surprised because we don't have a lot of representation here" said Vu.

Yang agrees. "Basically, the Southeast Asian population is so low, it makes me wonder why my community isn't here and why we're not being outreached to," she said. "If this is the case,



As the harvesting season ends, families gather to celebrate the one holiday they have to enjoy themselves in traditional values. Lovers hold a symbolic rose that represents their love.
Photo contributed by Julie Tse and Julie Tcha

is Cal as diverse as it claims?"

HSAB was established in order to make a change by providing a space for Hmong students to talk and learn about the culture, history, and current issues of the Hmong people.

And along with tradition comes with changes and adaptations to the social and economic needs of the Hmong community in America.

"We're trying to preserve (the tradition)," said Vu, "but being in America so long, we're trying to include it with what we already have" like voting and promoting higher education. For example, Vu stated that there is a low retention rate of Hmong students pursuing higher education because "many live under poverty and go to school with few resources and role models." So in an effort to serve as a role model and provide the necessary resources, Vu has collaborated with other Hmong organizations at other colleges and will set up a booth in the upcoming Sacramento New Year to distribute brochures and information about college. She also plans to pass out posters of Hmong college students at new years so "high school students can visually see themselves as college students and how it looks like to be in college."

HSAB will be participating in this event. One of the activities they plan on hosting is a ball tossing activity to try to tie the younger generation to older traditions. As families extend generation to generation in America, there is an inevitable loss of culture and its customs that the younger generation causing a disconnection between the two. Nowadays, the younger generation more commonly visits New Year celebrations to socialize, see old friends and eat. With the traditional activity, HSAB hopes to bring back some of those traditional customs while providing an enjoyable social game.

As of now, HSAB is still a new organization; they are working on building a strong foundation and are slowly making their way into the Asian Pacific American Coalition community and Cal. With members now, HSAB is trying to make them welcomed, at home and increase retention.



Hmong girls playing a traditional New Years game Photo courtesy of <http://hilltop.mhc.edu>

Upcoming New Year Events

STOCKTON

November 8-9

San Joaquin County Fairground

1658 S. Airport Way.

Stockton, CA 95206

SACRAMENTO

November 27-30

CalExpo

1600 Exposition Blvd.

Sacramento Ca 95815

MERCED

December 19-22

Merced County Fairgrounds

900 Martin Luther King Jr. Way.

Merced, CA 95340

FRESNO

December 26-January 2

Fresno Fairgrounds

1121 S. Chance Ave.

Fresno, CA 93702

Living the Mixed Life: Growing up as a Black Chinese Muslim in America

by laylaa abdul-khabir

As a young girl, I thought my ethnic identity was the same as everyone else's. At five-years old, I had just returned to the United States from China after living with my grandparents in Beijing for two years. Starting elementary school in America, I thought all the kids in my class were the same 'color' as me and I didn't consider that anyone had different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. I didn't think at the time that my mom is Chinese, and my dad is African-American; to me, they were just my mom and dad and we were no different from the typical American family. Being raised in a Muslim home, I wore a scarf on my head to school to cover my hair, and when my classmates asked me why, I said, "It's because of my religion." I had a vague sense of being different from the other kids because of this, but otherwise, I was a kid caught up in my own world. In class, I fitted my shapes together, organized my Crayolas, and usually finished first in the mini-Math problem set. (Should I have known I was Asian then?) Of course, I counted my numbers in Chinese when learning addition and subtraction, but this didn't bother me; I just did it naturally. I didn't perceive myself to be distinctively different from the standard first-grader.

It was only later, during the last few years of elementary school, when I noticed I had to start defining myself. Since I look more Asian than Black, kids would approach me and ask me things like, "Are you Japanese?" or "What are you?" and, the question that would follow me throughout my middle and high school years, "Why do you wear that thing on your head?" That's when I began identifying myself as "Chinese," in response to those first questions. I did so mainly because it seemed to satisfy others' queries as to my Asian appearance. I'm not sure if I felt entirely Chinese then; for the most part, I still felt like everybody else because I didn't distinguish people primarily in terms of their ethnicity. As to the headscarf, I was still part of some vague 'other' religion that identified me as a Muslim, but it was an identity that I myself did not yet quite understand or identify with.

In my family, my mother has always been the one who has emphasized education for me and my sisters, while my father places the focus on religion. My mother is a first-generation Chinese immigrant, and she met my father when she went to college in Ohio, where he grew up and became the first in his family to go beyond a high school education. My parents are both converts to Islam. Growing up in our household wasn't easy; both parents had high standards for my siblings and me, in terms of our personal behavior and academics. Today, my

"My ethnicity, in essence, does not define me; it is simply an ornament to my identity."

sisters and I attempt to carve out our own paths and identities, growing out of, yet separate from the strong personalities and one ethnic group out of the many that exist in this country, I became more cosmopolitan in thinking. I began to feel like I had a little of everyone in me; being Black, Chinese, Muslim, and American all at once, nearly anyone I came across could relate to me in some way after learning my background. Encompassing so many identities allowed many people of various backgrounds to feel an affinity for me. My close friends in community college were of various ethnic stripes; some were Jordanian, Chinese, Korean, Black, Caucasian, and Mexican. I realized the great potential of race, and my racial identity in particular, to serve as a bridge between people of different backgrounds.

On the other hand, however, things weren't always straightforward. I have so many identities that sometimes, as I was growing up, it was difficult deciding who I was. Society tends to propagate sets of stereotypes or myths associated with each ethnic group, and although we sometimes write these off outrightly, I feel as if they subconsciously affect us, seeping into us when we aren't paying attention. From casual racial jokes to associating qualities with people based on their ethnicity, I feel

Are we defined by our ethnicity?



that we have, perhaps inadvertently, created sets of expectations that are associated with each ethnic identity. For a while as I was growing up, I felt increased pressure, mostly self-inflicted, to succeed in academics in a misguided effort to 'embrace' my Asian identity. Being one of the few Asians at my school, I especially felt I had to prove myself in my math and science courses. I was trying to find my 'niche' and I did so by attempting to live up to a general stereotype of Asians, which in my mind had turned into an expectation. While most of us wouldn't outright agree with general race stereotypes like, for instance, that Asians are inherently better at the sciences or that African-Americans have innate athletic prowess, the subtle influence of these messages is often underestimated.

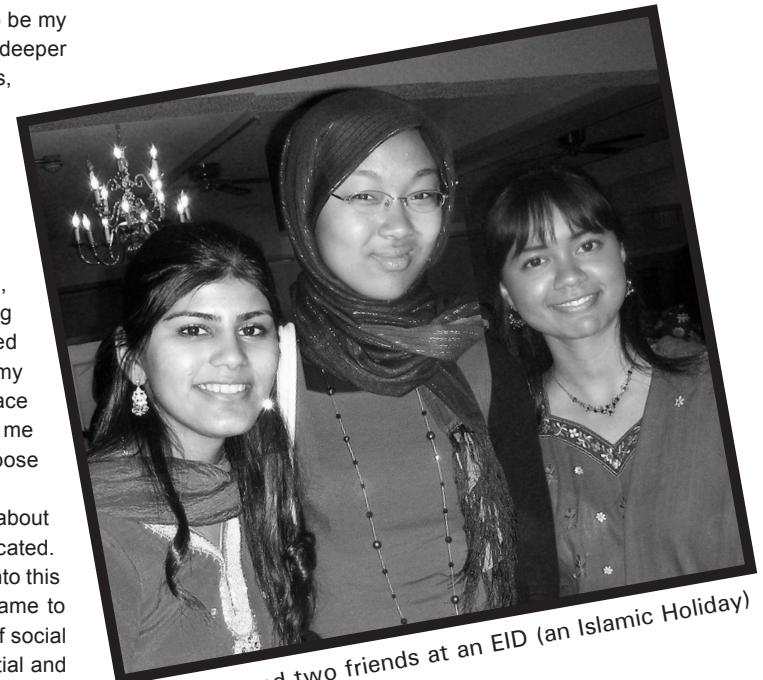
I've grown out of living up to stereotypes now. Since leaving the home of my parents and coming to Berkeley, I've had to forge my own path and identity. I feel that there is a large number of people who go through their lives trying to live up to the expectations that they believe their family, friends, community and/or the larger society holds for them. In addition, I feel that many people take their identity almost as a given, not as either something they themselves have constructed, or that others have constructed for them. I believe in constructing my own identity, based on the value and belief system I have accepted. My ethnicity speaks to where I come from, the cultures of my parents and grandparents, and also the cultural environment in which I was raised. However, my ethnicity says little about the person that I am, because it does not speak to the values or beliefs I hold, or even to my personality. My ethnicity, in essence, does not define me; it is simply an ornament to my identity. I love my interracial heritage, and it is interesting and unconventional, but it doesn't enrich my life with deeper meaning. Despite how intriguing my racial background is, it was not something I had a choice in.

Since deciding that I didn't want my ethnicity to be my primary level of identifying myself, I've had to go on a deeper search in the construction of my identity. In earlier times, my Islamic faith had simply been something I inherited from my parents, not something I found for myself and embraced. Today, I identify myself first as a Muslim, because my faith directs my value system, and gives my life greater purpose and meaning. Faith gives a person an explanation for why they are here in this world, and what they must do with their lives until they inevitably die, something I couldn't find anywhere else. Since starting community college and later coming to Berkeley, I've learned a lot about other religions and belief systems. I choose my faith, Islam, because it gives me a level of clarity and peace that I don't see anywhere else. My cultural heritage gives me a history, a backdrop upon which to paint the person I choose to be, and the values, beliefs and actions that define me.

Today, I still get asked the same questions about ethnicity as I did when I was a kid, only slightly more sophisticated. I grapple with issues of race and identity, and where I fit into this complex puzzle that is American society. When I first came to Berkeley, the great diversity in its people and the range of social and political expressions I observed intrigued me. My initial and lasting impression is that Berkeley is a place in which people have great freedom in expression, as evidenced by its history, and it's a place where people are free to define themselves. I've tried to hold on to this sentiment as I struggle to define and give voice to my identity.



... Laylaa and her sisters



... Laylaa and two friends at an EID (an Islamic Holiday) Banquet

writing the good fight

Vietnamese journalists arrested for reporting on federal corruption by cecilia tran



Thanh Nien's article on their former reporter Nguyen Viet Chien and Tuoi Tre reporter Nguyen Van Hai Photo courtesy of Thanh Nien (<http://cache.daylife.com/imageserve/0dXnfLz8n0gON/610x.jpg>)

In 2006, Vietnamese journalists Nguyen Viet Chien, 56, and Nguyen Van Hai, 33, reported on a government scandal of massive proportions. They, among other journalists, worked to investigate the Project Management Unit 18 (PMU 18) plan to spend 2 billion dollars on improving national infrastructure. The ultimate discovery was that officials had used these funds on gambling, luxury cars, and prostitutes. The report quickly led to the arrest of PMU 18 director, Bui Tien Dung and investigations on fellow project heads. However, many officials were acquitted and on May 2008, both journalists were arrested by the federal government for their allegedly biased work.

If the irony is not yet oozing off the page, let's take a look at the specific charges. Nguyen Viet Chien, reporter for Thanh Nien (*Gentlemen*) newspaper (in the image), and Nguyen Van Hai, reporter for Tuoi Tre (*The Youth*) newspaper, were originally accused of "abusing their professional

power and position" to taint the government's image. The basis of the state's charges was that the men had exploited the content of the scandal with the objective of discrediting the Communist party in power. These charges were later adjusted to "abusing freedom and democratic rights to breach the interest of the State and legal rights of organizations and citizens."

In both cases, the journalists stated that prior to being charged with committing a federal crime this year, no one had approached them about revising any part of their articles on PMU 18. The men followed journalistic procedures and have the evidence to demonstrate that they had not falsified their information. A major point of contention was the report that officials linked to the PMU 18 scandal had offered bribes to ensure their acquittal. Nguyen Viet Chien aptly provided documentation of interviews with qualified government sources. Instead of helping their cases, this information led to the indictment and punishment of two police officials--the former chief of the Department on Social Crime Investigative Police, Pham Xuan Quac, received an official warning while Senior Lieutenant Colonel Dinh Van Huynh, was sentenced to one year in prison. They were charged with providing inaccurate and unconfirmed government information.

There is also a significant disparity in the punishments for the journalists. Nguyen Van Hai pleaded guilty to the federal accusations. The judge ruled that Nguyen Van Hai would be held under house arrest and undergo two years of re-education. In contrast, Nguyen Viet Chien who pleaded innocent, was sentenced on October 15 to two years in prison. At the Hanoi People's Court, Nguyen Viet Chien said in his defense, "With my journalist conscience, I can say I never have any other purpose in mind when writing my reports but exposing wrongdoing and fighting corruption."

The contradictions in this case are enormous. While the government asserts that their charges are aimed at protecting democratic rights, they are committing acts of blatant suppression. Is it in any way due process to wait two years to arrest journalists for false reporting, especially when the reporters were never first contacted to make corrections? International media watchdogs such as Reporters without Borders and Committee to Protect Journalists are up in arms stating that the Vietnamese government has taken vengeful steps to silence the journalists.

Although the Vietnamese government allowed international press access to the trials to signify that they are in fact open to international inquiry, the message of the trials is clear: free speech on a domestic level is extraordinarily limited. These trials may cause Vietnamese reporters to fear taking an oppositional stance towards the government and further damage the government's image on an international level. In a constant battle between the pen and the sword, it now becomes the role of other international media sources and the Vietnamese people to voice their dissent in the name of free press.



(based on a true story)



[RADIO STATION] hardboiled november mix

5 Asian American artists / musicians to check out for this month compiled by davin chang

RACHAEL YAMAGATA

Headquarters: Virginia Beach, VA
Genre: Pop, Blues

Latest Release: Elephants...Teeth Sinking Into Heart
Check her out if you like: Fiona Apple, Norah Jones
Hear her at: myspace.com/rachaelyamagata

MISHA

Headquarters: New York, NY
Genre: Pop, Electronica
Latest Release: Teardrop Sweetheart
Check her out if you like: The Postal Service, Psapp
Hear her at: myspace.com/mishatheband

THAO WITH THE GET DOWN STAY DOWN

Headquarters: San Francisco, CA
Genre: Indie, Folk
Latest Release: We Brave Bee Stings and All
Check her out if you like: Cat Power, Laura Viers
Hear her at: myspace.com/thaomusic

MIKE PARK

Headquarters: San Jose, CA
Genre: Acoustic Rock, Alternative
Latest Release: North Hangook Falling
Check her out if you like: Fountains of Wayne, Pedro the Lion
Hear her at: myspace.com/mikepark

THE CATARACS

Headquarters: Berkeley, CA
Genre: Dance, Hip-Hop

Latest Release: The 13th Grade
Check her out if you like: The Pack, T-Pain
Hear her at: myspace.com/thecataracs

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