

Introduction

Revisiting Contemporary Asian America

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At the dawn of the new millenium, one cannot help but examine the development and growth of the Asian American community. What is the state of Asian America in 1999? How has it evolved since the 1960s, a turbulent decade in America's history that witnessed the birth of the nation's ethnic-consciousness movements? To what extent has the Asian American community asserted itself socially and politically and constructed an "Asian American" identity? These are but a few of the questions posed by this anthology, an introductory reader for those interested in the issues facing the Asian American community today. We have selected a number of themes that critically inform the current state of the community. Our goal in compiling this anthology was to make it personally meaningful to our readers, incorporating ideas that expose individuals to the evolution of Asian American Studies and to the broader social transformations in American society that have historically affected (and continue to affect) people of Asian descent and their communities.

Activism, the Movement, and the Development of Asian American Studies

For Asian Americans, the struggles transformed our communities. They spawned numerous grassroots organizations. They created an extensive network of student organizations and Asian American Studies classes. They recovered a buried cultural tradition as well as produced a new generation of writers, poets, and artists. But most importantly, the struggles profoundly altered Asian American consciousness. They redefined racial and ethnic identity, promoted new ways of thinking about communities, and challenged prevailing notions of power and authority.

—Glenn Omatsu (this volume)

The Significance of the Asian American Movement

The birth of the Asian American Movement coincided with the largest student strike in the nation's history. At San Francisco State College, members of the Third

World Liberation Front (TWLF), a coalition of African Americans, Latino Americans/Chicanos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, launched a student strike in November 1968. The strike made demands on the university for curricular reform, initially aimed at three specific goals. First, student strikers sought to redefine education and to make their curriculum at once more meaningful to their own lives, experiences, and histories and more reflective of the communities in which they lived. Second, they demanded that racial and ethnic minorities play a more active role in the decision-making process and that university administrators institute an admissions policy to give minorities equal access to advanced education. Third, they attempted to effect larger changes in the institutional practices by urging administrators to institutionalize ethnic studies at San Francisco State College. The strike, in which Asian Americans played an integral role, brought about significant institutional changes; in particular, it led to the establishment of the nation's first School of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State College. More than just a token concession to the students, the School began to implement the students' objectives of curricular reform and equal access to education.

In his seminal article, "The 'Four Prisons' and the Movements of Liberation" (this volume), Glenn Omatsu, a veteran activist of the Movement and a longtime resident scholar at UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, contends that the San Francisco student strike not only marked the beginning of the Asian American Movement but also set the agenda for the articulation of an Asian American "consciousness." Omatsu argues that those involved in the Movement were not simply seeking to promote their own legitimacy or representation in mainstream society. Rather, the Movement raised questions about subverting ideals and practices that rewarded racial or ethnic minorities for conforming to white mainstream values. The active involvement of Asian Americans extended well beyond college campuses on which many of these issues were being raised; it reached the working-class communities from which many students originated. Omatsu highlights several emerging themes that exerted a profound impact on the Asian American struggles in the 1970s: (1) building a coalition between activists and the community, (2) reclaiming the heritage of resistance, (3) forming a new ideology that manifested in self-determination and the legitimization of oppositional practices as a means of bringing about change to the racist structures inherent to American society, (4) demanding equal rights and minority power, and (5) urging mass mobilization and militant action. For Omatsu, the Asian American Movement was a grassroots working-class community struggle for liberation and self-determination.

The political actions of the 1960s unleashed shock waves that have continued to reverberate in the larger Asian American community today. As both Karen Umemoto and Glenn Omatsu recount in their articles on the Movement (this volume), the spirit that initially infused the period carried over into the next two decades, despite a changing political climate that marked the onset of what Omatsu deems "the winter of civil rights and the rise of neo-conservatism." The Movement has evolved to incorporate a broader range of diverse viewpoints and voices, helping frame the ways in which many students approach Asian American Studies today. Not only does the Movement provide students with an understanding of the strategies employed by

racial and ethnic minorities in their fight against racism and oppression in American society; it also suggests specific ways in which these strategies can be effectively used for minority empowerment.

Institutional Development

Shortly after the founding of the first ethnic studies program at San Francisco State College in 1968, other universities across the United States set to work on developing their own academic programs. According to a survey conducted by Don Nakanishi and Russell Leong in 1978, at least fourteen universities established Asian American studies programs, including the Berkeley, Los Angeles, Davis, and Santa Barbara campuses of the University of California; the San Francisco, Fresno, San Jose, Sacramento, and Long Beach campuses of the California State University; the University of Southern California; the University of Washington; the University of Colorado; the University of Hawaii; and City College of New York. The programs at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State University had the largest enrollment, with 1,500 each, and offered sixty and forty-nine courses respectively. The programs on other campuses offered four to sixty courses per academic year and enrolled 100 to 650 students. All Asian American Studies programs, with the exception of UCLA's, listed teaching as their primary goal, with community work and research ranked as second and third priorities. UCLA, in contrast, made research and publications its top priority, with teaching ranked second. By 1978, at least three universities—UCLA, San Francisco State University, and the University of Washington—offered graduate courses (Nakanishi and Leong 1978).

In the span of only twenty-five years, Asian American Studies has experienced unparalleled growth as Asian American student enrollment has increased at unprecedented rates at American universities. Today, Asian Americans account for 4 percent of the U.S. population, but Asian American students make up more than 6 percent of total college enrollment and a significantly larger proportion at prestigious public and private universities. In 1995, for example, Asian American students represented more than 10 percent of the student populations at all nine UC campuses and at twelve of the twenty CSU campuses, as well as at Harvard, Yale, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia, and other first-ranked universities. The UC system, in particular, has seen its Asian American population grow rapidly, representing 22 percent to 39 percent of students at seven of the nine campuses (Editors of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* 1995). The *Los Angeles Times* reported, in 1998, that Asian Americans made up more than 58 percent of the undergraduates at UC Irvine and more than 40 percent at three other UC campuses (41 percent at Berkeley, 40 percent at UCLA, and 43 percent at Riverside). The nations leading universities also reported disproportionate increases in enrollment of Asian Americans, who made up 28 percent of the undergraduates at MIT, 27 percent at Caltech, 24 percent at Stanford, 23 percent at Wellesley, 22 percent at New York University, 19 percent at Harvard, 17 percent at Yale, and 17 percent at Columbia.¹

In response to these demographic changes, major public universities and a growing number of private universities in which Asian American student enrollments are

disproportionately large have established Asian American Studies departments or interdepartmental programs. Today, all the University of California and the California State University campuses have established Asian American Studies programs, some of which have evolved into Asian American Studies departments. Outside California, many universities and colleges have established similar programs, often in response to student protests and even hunger strikes, as was the case in 1994 at Columbia University, where an Asian American Studies program is still struggling to get off the ground (Monaghan 1999). The current directory of Asian American Studies programs, compiled at Cornell University, shows an incomplete count of forty-one departments, centers, or programs nationwide. These departments or interdepartmental/interdisciplinary programs offer a wide range of courses on the diversity of Asian American experiences. UCLA has the largest teaching programs in Asian American Studies in the nation and for the past twenty-five years has been one of two major sites for the training of Asian American Studies scholars. It has an M.A. program (the nation's only graduate program in the field and one that has been training future researchers and community leaders for the past fifteen years), a B.A. major and an undergraduate specialization minor. Each year it offers fifty to sixty classes, which enroll more than 2,000 students.

Despite the current boom, however, institutional development has often met with obstacles, ranging from the loss of faculty and staff positions to the retirement of veteran or founding faculty to budget cuts arbitrarily imposed on relatively young but growing departments. Although continued expansion of programs and departments is not inevitable, and is likely to be a matter of ongoing conflict, demographic pressure and the political weight of the Asian American community, as well as the continuing intellectual development of Asian American Studies as a field, make the prospects for growth very promising.

Asian American Studies as an Interdisciplinary Field

What is Asian American Studies? Is it an academic field with a perspective of its own and with intellectually cohesive themes, or is it a field that brings together people of different disciplines who share common interests and who work on similar topics?

At the early stage of its development, Asian American Studies understood itself as the offspring of the social movement from which it emerged. Thus, in its self-conceptualization, Asian American Studies sought to reproduce central aspects of the broader movement for social change in which it started out, as an oppositional orientation preoccupied with refuting the prevailing theoretical paradigm of assimilation and fostering self-determination through a Third-World consciousness (Chan 1978; Nakanishi and Leong 1978; Omatsu, this volume; Umemoto, this volume). Both curricular development and research in the field focused on history, identity, and community (Tachiki et al. 1971). Meanwhile, Asian American Studies explicitly served as an institutionalized training center for future community leaders, trying to connect scholars and students with grassroots working-class communities. Since the students and Asian American faculty of the 1960s and 1970s were mostly Japanese Americans

and Chinese Americans, with a smaller number of Filipino Americans, most of the teaching and research were focused on these ethnic populations.

Of course, the guiding theoretical principles and self-understanding of the founders, themselves, still very much present and influential in the field, cannot be accepted without question. The founders' views carry the characteristic traces of the baby boom generation of which the founders are a part: namely, the sense of constituting a unique group whose actions mark a rupture with the past. Indeed, in the late 1960s and the 1970s, both the Asian American Movement and the academic field were intent on distancing themselves from the traditional academic disciplines and the more established, or "assimilated," components of the Asian American community. For example, the ethnic consciousness movements of the 1960s also fundamentally changed how historians and other social scientists interpreted Asian American history. The pre-Movement historiography of the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans tended to interpret this experience as a grave national mistake but one that had been corrected by the postwar acceptance of Japanese Americans into American society. The Movement challenged this established interpretation and influenced Japanese Americans and others to reexamine the internment experience within the context of the ongoing debate over past and present racism in American society. Although redress was successfully obtained, the issue of Japanese American internment continues to be linked with contemporary issues of racial justice.²

In retrospect, it is clear that contemporary Asian American Studies stands in continuity with earlier attempts by Asian American intellectuals, within and outside the academy, to rethink their own experience and to link it to the broader sweep of American history. The connection is most evident in sociology: Paul Siu, Rose Hum Lee, and Frank Miyamoto, who were members of an older cohort, and Tamotsu Shibutani, Harry Kitano, James Sakoda, Eugene Uyeki, Netsuko Nishi, John Kitsuse, and many others, who were members of a younger cohort, all made important contributions to the study of Asian America, as well as to broader areas in sociology. To the extent that Asian American Studies involves activities that derive from an attempt at self-understanding, one also needs to point out the crucial literary, auto-biographical, and polemical works of an earlier period: we note the writings of Jade Snow Wong, Monica Sone, Carlos Bulosan, Louis Chu, and John Okada, among others, a corpus that has now become the subject of considerable academic work within Asian American Studies. Also noticeable is a small group of Euro-American researchers who work within the mainstream disciplines, but without the assimilatory, condescending assumptions that mar earlier work and who have made significant contributions to the study of Asian America *prior* to the advent of the Asian American Movement, providing notice to the disciplines that this was a topic worthy of their attention. The historians Alexander Saxton, Roger Daniels, and John Modell and the sociologist Stanford Lyman deserve particular mention.

In its recent development, Asian American Studies is facing a new reality that is at odds with the Asian American community of the 1960s and 1970s. Asian American scholars have keenly observed several significant trends that have transformed Asian America, with attendant effects on Asian American Studies within the academy: an unparalleled demographic transformation from relative homogeneity to increased

diversity; an overall political shift from progressive goals of making societal changes toward more individualistic orientations of occupational achievements; unprecedented rates of socioeconomic mobility and residential desegregation of native-born generations; and a greater separation between academia and the community (Fong 1998; Hirabayashi 1995; Kang 1998, Wat 1998). These trends mirror the broader structural changes that have occurred in American society since the late 1970s, which we shall discuss in greater detail shortly, and create both opportunities and challenges for the field.

To a large extent, Asian American Studies has been energized by the interdisciplinary dynamism that exists not only in history, literature and literary works, and cultural studies, but also in anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, political science, social welfare, and public policy. The field has traditionally been guided by varying theoretical concerns—Marxism, internal colonialism, racial formation, postmodernism, and postcolonialism, among others—and has steadily widened its purview of topics and subject matters. Interdisciplinary course offerings and research have touched on the daily experiences of the internally diverse ethnic populations; course subjects range from the histories and experiences of specific national origin groups to Asian American literature, film and art, and religion, as well as to special topics such as gender studies, gay and lesbian studies, immigration, and health. The field has also expanded into comparative areas of racial and ethnic relations in America, diasporic experiences, transnational communities, and the interconnectedness of Asians and Asian Americans, while maintaining a community focus through extensive internship and leadership development programs. These interdisciplinary and comparative approaches allow Asian American scholars and students to get beyond the simple assumption that, because people share certain phenotypes, they must also share the same experiences, values, and beliefs. Asian American Studies has also injected historical and ethnic sensibility into various academic disciplines and prevented itself from being trapped as an isolated elective subdiscipline.

On the academic front, however, there has been a debate over the relationship between theory and practice. Michael Omi and Dana Takagi voice a central concern over the lack of a sustained and coherent radical theory of social transformation, arguing that this absence may lead to a retreat to "more mainstream, discipline-based paradigmatic orientations." These scholars see the "professionalization" of the field at universities, the demands of tenure and promotion for faculty, and new faculty's lack of exposure to and experience of the Movement of the earlier period as the main contributing factors to this trend of retreat. They suggest that the field should be "transdisciplinary" rather than "interdisciplinary" and that it should be revisited, rethought, and redefined according to three main themes—the scope and domain of theory, the definition of core theoretical problems and issues, and the significance of Asian American Studies as a political project (Omi and Takagi 1995).

Meanwhile, some scholars and students are concerned that Asian American Studies is being diverted from its original mission of activism, oppositional ideology, and community-oriented practices (Endo and Wei 1988; Hirabayashi 1995; Kiang 1995; Loo and Mar 1985–1986). As the field gains legitimacy at universities, it is increasingly uprooted from the community. Although students have continued to involve them-

selves in community affairs, their activities tend to be framed in terms of service provision, since the social infrastructure in many Asian American communities is always almost in need of volunteers, as one might expect. But volunteering is all too often a part-time event, in which students may pass through the community and then ultimately maintain a distance from it. Lane Ryo Hirabayashi (1995) points out that the divergence goes beyond the institutional "reward structure" that prioritizes theoretical contributions over applied research. He alludes to the problems of essentialized notions of race and ethnicity, the presumed unity of the community, and the impacts of poststructural and postmodern critiques aiming at deconstructing academic dominance. He believes that these concerns can be effectively addressed by redefining the community as a multidimensional entity with ongoing internal class, generational, political, gender, and sexual divisions, reconceptualizing Asian American communities as a dynamic social construct, and incorporating new theories and methodologies into community-based research.

Finding a common ground from which to approach issues in Asian American Studies is a challenging task. Many scholars have made concerted efforts to develop alternative paradigms and perspectives to deal with issues confronting a new Asian America that has become more dynamic and diverse. For example, Lisa Lowe reconceptualizes contemporary Asian American in terms of heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity to capture the material contradictions among Asian Americans (this volume). L. Ling-chi Wang (1995) proposes a dual-domination model for understanding Asian American experiences that takes into account the diplomatic relations between the United States and Asian countries and the extraterritorial interaction between Asian American communities and their respective homelands. Sau-Ling C. Wong (1995) uses the term "denationalization" to address transnational concerns that have emerged from the intrinsic relations between Asia and Asian America. Sylvia Yanagisako (1995) advances the idea of contextualizing meanings, social relations, and social action and of liberalizing the confines of social borders that cut across nation, gender, ethnicity, kinship, and social class in Asian American history. Shirley Hune (this volume) calls for the rethinking of race. She suggests that theoretical paradigms be shifted to articulate the multiplicity of racial dynamics that has moved beyond the black-white dichotomy and that more attention be paid to the differential power and agency of minority communities in the United States and to the situation of Asian America in connection to diasporic communities around the globe.

While the ongoing discussion of goals and methodologies is at once refreshing and evident of the field's continuing vitality, it also testifies to the degree to which intellectual and organizational tensions are built into the field. On the one hand, the very language of the debate, often filled with jargon and trendy concepts, stands in conflict with the self-professed orientation toward the community and its needs. On the other hand, there is a certain nostalgia among veteran activists, now mainly tenured professors, for the spirit of the 1960s and, to some extent, that yearning for the past ironically threatens to produce a divide between U.S.-born (and/or U.S.-raised) scholars and some of their Asian-born counterparts, especially those whose education in the United States was more likely to begin at the college and graduate

level, and who may not share the same connection to a history that they never experienced.³ Moreover, the ideological presuppositions of the scholars oriented toward the Movement has the potential to create distance between them and the growing number of Asian American (often Asian-born) scholars who work on Asian American topics, but from the standpoint of the more traditional disciplines of history, sociology, demography, economics, political science, and so on. Of course, work in the traditional disciplines is by no means value free, but the ideological presuppositions do not preclude the potential for expanding our understanding of the Asian American experience. Finally, we note the irony in the unspoken consensus about which groups are eligible for consideration as "Asian American," namely, everyone with origins east of Afghanistan. As Henry Yu has pointed out, the very definition of Chinese and Japanese as an "Asian American community" was itself the product of earlier externally imposed definitions of America's "Oriental Problem." (Yu 1998). The field has indeed initially organized itself around the study of peoples of East Asian descent, leaving others who are no less eligible on intellectual grounds nor, for that matter, any less vulnerable to discrimination or stigmatization than the "official" Asian American categories to different schools of "Oriental" studies.⁴

In our view, Asian American Studies is best construed in the broadest possible terms, understood as that body of scholarship devoted to the study of Asian American populations, conducted from any number of standpoints, from within the frameworks most commonly found among scholars affiliated with Asian American Studies as well as from standpoints more closely connected to the traditional disciplines. Just as we reject the conventional disciplinary boundaries, we also opt for an expanded view of the field's geographical scope, in particular, emphasizing a transnational framework that enables us to "better understand the ways that flows of people, money, labor, obligations, and goods between nations and continents have shaped the Asian American experience" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; see also Lowe, this volume). Next, we describe these transnational linkages through the process of immigration and examine the ways in which contemporary immigration affects Asian American communities and challenges the founding principles of Asian American Studies.

Trans-Pacific Movement: Contemporary Immigration from Asia

Anyone who rides the subway in New York, drives on the freeway in California, or walks into any urban classroom will immediately feel the impact of contemporary immigration, the large-scale, non-European immigration to the United States that has accelerated since the late 1960s after a long period of restricted immigration (Massey 1995). Between 1971 and 1995, approximately 17.1 million immigrants came to the United States, almost matching the total number of immigrants who arrived during the first quarter of the century (17.2 million admissions between 1901 and 1925), when immigration was at its peak.⁵ Unlike turn-of-the-century immigrants, today's newcomers have come predominantly from non-European countries. Since the 1980s, 88 percent of the immigrants admitted to the United States come from the

Americas (excluding Canada) and Asia; only 10 percent come from Europe, compared to more than 90 percent at the earlier peak. The share of immigrants from Asia as a proportion of the total admissions grew from a tiny 5 percent in the 1950s to 11 percent in the 1960s and 33 percent the 1970s and has remained at 35 percent since 1980.⁶ The Philippines, China/Taiwan, Korea, India, and Vietnam have been on the list of top-ten sending countries since 1980 (USINS 1997). What caused this massive human movement in recent years, particularly from Asia? Who are these newcomers? How does the host society receive them? How do the immigrants impact the host society and the native peoples of Asian descent who share their cultural heritage? These questions are of central importance, as they will certainly determine the future of Asian America.

The Driving Forces behind Contemporary Immigration from Asia

Immigration Legislation. U.S. immigration legislation has always claimed to be humanitarian in principle and democratic in ideology. However, beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, various laws were passed by Congress to prohibit immigration from the "barred zone" (known as the Asia-Pacific triangle) and to single out Asian immigrants for exclusion. Asian immigrants were not only barred from re-entering the country but were also considered "aliens ineligible to citizenship," which prevented them from owning land, attaining professional occupations, sending for their family members, out-marrying, and becoming equal participants in American society. World War II marked a watershed for Asian Americans since their homelands, Japan excepted, were allies of the United States. Congress repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and other Asian exclusion acts at the end of the war and passed the War Brides Act in 1945 to allow American GIs to reunite with their Asian wives in the U.S. In 1947 more Asian wives were allowed to join their Asian American husbands by an amendment to the War Brides Act. The public began to shift its perception of Asian Americans from "yellow peril" to the "model minority." Postwar Japanese Americans also experienced a public image transformation from potential saboteurs to loyal Americans, even though more than 110,000 Japanese Americans along the Pacific coast (two-thirds of whom were citizens) were confined to American-style concentration camps during World War II. In 1952, Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Act, making all national origin groups eligible for naturalization and eliminating race as a bar to immigration but still keeping the national origins quota systems.

During the 1960s, the United States was entangled in an unpopular war against Vietnam while also in the throes of the civil rights movement. Both international and domestic crises pushed Congress to clean up the remaining discriminatory immigration legislation. Meanwhile, labor market projections showed that an acute shortage of engineering and medical personnel would soon materialize unless the United States opened its door to foreign labor. As a result, Congress passed the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965. This landmark piece of legislation abolished the national origins quota system, aiming at two goals: a humanitarian goal of reuniting families and an economic goal of meeting the labor market demand for skilled labor. Since the law

went into effect in 1968, immigration from Asia and the Americas has increased rapidly, with little sign of slowing down. Between 1971 and 1996, a total of 5.8 million Asians were admitted into the United States as legal immigrants (not counting the thousands of refugees). The majority of contemporary Asian immigrants were either family-sponsored migrants (more than two-thirds) or employer-sponsored skilled workers (about one-fifth). Without a doubt, the Hart-Cellar Act has had a profound impact on Asian immigration. But the main driving forces are beyond the scope of U.S. immigration policy. Recent changes worldwide—global economic restructuring, rapid economic development in Asia, and increasing U.S. political, economic, and military involvement in Asia—have all combined to perpetuate Asian immigration into the United States.

Globalization. The globalization of the U.S. economy since the 1960s has forged an extensive link of economic, cultural, and ideological ties between the United States and many developing countries in the Pacific Rim. Globalization perpetuates emigration from developing countries in two significant ways. First, direct U.S. capital investments into developing countries transform the economic and occupational structures in these countries by disproportionately targeting production for export and taking advantage of raw material and cheap labor. Such twisted development, characterized by the robust growth of low-skilled jobs in export manufacturing, draws a large number of rural, and particularly female, workers into the urban labor markets. Increased rural-urban migration, in turn, causes underemployment and displacement of the urban work force, creating an enormous pool of potential emigrants (Sassen 1989). Second, economic development following the American model in many developing countries stimulates consumerism and consumption and raises expectations regarding the standard of living. The widening gap between consumption expectations and the available standards of living within the structural constraints of the developing countries, combined with easy access to information and migration networks, in turn create tremendous pressure for emigration (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). Consequently, U.S. foreign capital investments in developing countries have resulted in the paradox of rapid economic growth and high emigration from these countries to the United States.

On the U.S. side, unprecedented growth in capital-intensive, high-tech industries and in services has created a severe shortage of skilled workers. American businesses and policy makers believe that importing skilled labor is the quickest solution. Since the 1980s, about one-third of the engineers and medical personnel in the U.S. labor market have come from abroad—mostly from India, China, Taiwan, and the Philippines. However, the shortage of skilled labor is not a sufficient explanation for the trends in highly skilled migration, since skilled immigration disproportionately originates from selected countries in Asia (almost 60 percent of the total skilled immigration in 1995). It is the global integration of higher education and advanced training in the United States in interaction with the opportunity structure in the homelands that have set in motion the highly skilled immigration. The infusion of the educational systems with globalization in many developing countries—notably India, Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan—has given rise to a sizable professional class. Many

members of this emerging middle class are frustrated by the uneven economic development and lack of mobility opportunities at home that devalue their education and skills, and they feel powerless to make changes because of repressive political systems in their homelands. They therefore aggressively seek emigration as the preferred alternative, and the change in U.S. immigration policy facilitates their move (Liu and Cheng 1994). Also, the emergence of the United States as the premier training ground for international students has been instrumental in supplying the U.S. economy with needed skilled labor (Ong et al. 1992). Many foreign students have found permanent employment in the United States after completing their studies or practical training. For example, in fiscal year 1995, close to 40 percent of the immigrants from mainland China were admitted under employment-based preferences. Almost all of them had received higher education or training in the United States.

U.S. Military Involvement in Southeast Asia and the Refugee Exodus. Southeast Asian refugees constitute a significant share of contemporary Asian immigration. Since 1975, more than 1 million refugees have arrived from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as a direct result of the failed U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia. The United States originally had little economic interest in the region but was drawn in because of the threat of Communist takeovers in several countries in the region, according to the then popular “domino” theory. The development of the Communist bloc, dominated by the former Soviet Union, the Communist takeover in China in the late 1940s, and the direct confrontation with Communist troops in the Korean War prompted a U.S. foreign policy aimed at “containing” communism, which ultimately pushed Americans into Indochina. The Vietnam War, its expansion into Southeast Asia and political turmoil in the region left millions of people living in poverty, starvation, and constant fear, while forcing many others to flee from their homelands. One ironic consequence of the U.S. involvement in Indochina is that sizable parts of the populations of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are now in America (Rumbaut 1995). As of 1996, more than 700,000 refugees from Vietnam, 210,000 from Laos, and 135,000 from Cambodia had been admitted to the United States.

Southeast Asian refugees fled their countries in different waves. Although Saigon, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh fell to the Communist forces roughly at the same time in 1975, only the Vietnamese and a small number of the Hmong resistance force had the privilege of being “paroled” (being allowed under special provision of the law) into the United States immediately after the war. Approximately 130,000 Vietnamese refugees and only 3,500 Hmong refugees landed on U.S. soil in 1975 (Chan 1994), while the majority of Hmong resistance forces, Laotian royalists, and Cambodians sought refuge in Thailand. A large refugee exodus occurred at the end of the 1970s, during what is known as the second wave, when thousands of refugees fled Vietnam by boat, creating the “boat people” crisis, while many others fled on land to China and Thailand. About a quarter of a million Vietnamese refugees went to China, and some half a million were floating in the open sea to be picked up by the national guards of whichever country they happened to be near. It was reported that almost half of the “boat people” perished at sea, and the remaining half ended up in camps in

Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. Thousands of refugees also fled Laos and Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia) on land to seek refuge in crowded camps along the Thai border. Despite harsh repatriation efforts by the Thai government, about 600,000 Cambodians (15 percent of the country's population) and some 100,000 Hmong and 200,000 lowland Laotians (10 percent of the country's population) fled on land to Thailand, awaiting resettlement in a third country (Chan 1991). The refugee exodus continued in large numbers in the early 1980s. Although the new governments in Southeast Asia did not plunge the three countries into a bloodbath as so many had once feared, continuing political and religious repression, economic hardship, incessant warfare, and contacts with the outside world led many Southeast Asians to escape in search of a better life (Zhou and Bankston 1998).

Migration Network. Once set in motion, international migration is perpetuated by extensive and institutionalized migration networks. Networks are formed by family, kinship, and friendship ties, facilitating and perpetuating international migration because they lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to such movement (Massey et al. 1987). U.S. immigration policy has been instrumental in sustaining and expanding family migration networks. The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments give preference to family reunification, providing immediate relatives of U.S. citizens with unlimited visa numbers and other relatives with the majority of visa allocations subject to the numerical cap. More than two-thirds of the legal immigrants admitted to the United States since the 1970s have been family-sponsored immigrants. Even among employer-sponsored migrants and refugees, the role of networking is crucial. Family, kin, and friendship networks also tend to expand exponentially, serving as a conduit to additional and thus potentially self-perpetuating migration. In the next decade or so, immigration from Asia is expected to continue at its high volume because many recent immigrants and refugees will have established citizenship status and will become eligible sponsors who can send for family members to reunite in the United States.

Overall, contemporary immigration has been influenced and perpetuated not simply as a result of the Hart-Cellar Act but also by the interplay of a complex set of macro- and microstructural forces. Understanding its dynamics requires a reconceptualized framework that takes into account the effects of globalization, uneven political and economic developments in developing and developed countries, and the role of the United States in world affairs, as well as the social processes of international migration. One significant implication arising from these processes is that high levels of immigration will continue to remain an inseparable part of Asian American life for years to come.

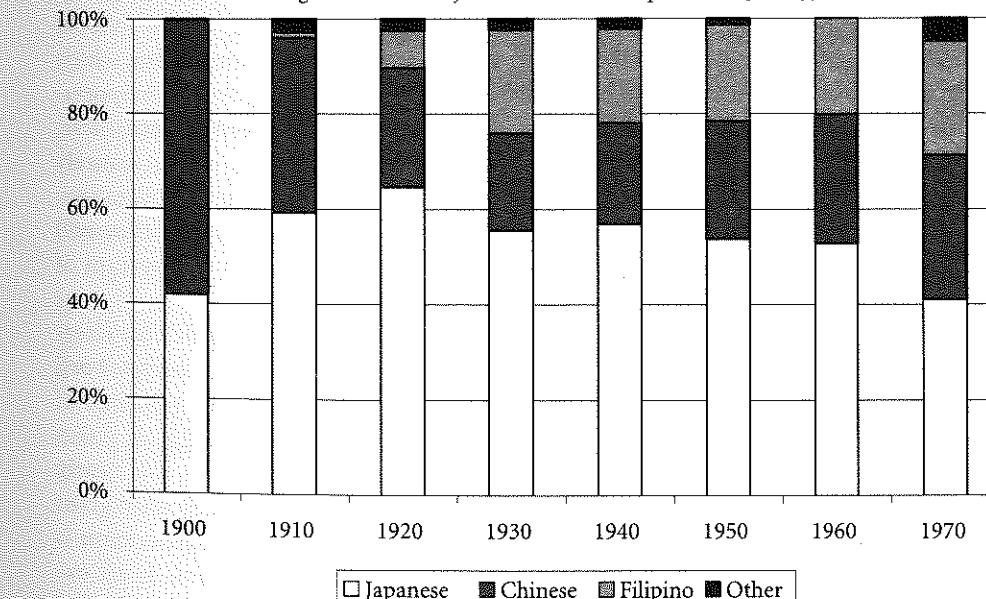
Population Dynamics

Immigration is transforming Asian America in ways unanticipated by long-time Asian immigrants and their U.S.-born children. Although Asian Americans as a group are relatively few in number, making up less than 4 percent of the United

States population, they have aggressively asserted their presence in the American milieu, fighting their way, with varied success, into mainstream economic, social, and political institutions. Before the immigration surge in the late 1960s, the Asian American population was a tiny fraction of the total U.S. population—about 0.3 percent in 1900 and 0.7 percent in 1970—and was composed mainly of three national-origin groups—Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino. Figure I.1 shows the percentage distribution of the Asian American population from 1900 to 1970 (Barringer et al. 1993). During the first three decades of the twentieth century Asians in America were mainly either Chinese or Japanese adult immigrants. The next four decades saw a significant increase in the proportion of Filipinos, who were mostly brought into the United States to fill the labor shortage caused by anti-Asian legislation and the restrictive National Origins Act of 1924. By 1970, Japanese Americans were the largest national-origin group, making up 41 percent of the Asian American population, followed by Chinese Americans (30 percent) and Filipino Americans (24 percent). Members of other national-origin groups (mostly Koreans) represented less than 5 percent of the total.

Pre-World War II immigrants from Asia represented less than 5 percent of the total new arrivals admitted to the United States, a direct result of anti-Asian prejudice and various restrictive immigration laws. Most of the earlier Asian immigrants came from China and Japan, with a smaller number from the Philippines, India, and Korea. These earlier immigrants, like “the tired, huddled masses” from Europe, were typically poor and uneducated peasants, and many of them intended to make a quick

FIGURE I.1
Percentage Distribution of Asian American Population: 1900–1970



SOURCE: Barringer et al. 1993. *Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States*, p. 42.

fortune to bring back to their homelands. Because of the drastic differences in migration histories among the earlier Asian-origin groups, only Japanese immigrants were able to develop family-based communities with a significant U.S.-born population in the pre-World War II period. Chinatowns, the rather dispersed Filipino enclaves, and other Asian immigrant communities were primarily bachelor societies, with single adult males overrepresented and with few women, children, and families (Chan 1991; Takaki 1989; Zhou 1992).

The distorted population growth in Asian American communities was living evidence of decades of legal exclusion and discrimination. From the time of their arrival, Asian immigrants were subject to laws that served to exclude them from the social and economic opportunities available to most white immigrants. Despite the repeal of the Chinese exclusion laws and the passage of the War Brides Act during World War II and the further relaxation of Asian exclusion laws in the 1950s, the Asian American population grew very slowly, making up barely 0.5 percent of the total U.S. population in 1950. The number of people in some Asian-origin groups was so minuscule, in fact, that the U.S. Census did not even categorize them until 1980 (Nash 1997).⁷ Nonetheless, the relaxation of immigration legislation during the early 1940s and 1950s, combined with a postwar baby boom, did give rise to a notable native-born youth cohort, most of whom lived on the West Coast. This age cohort, comprising mostly Japanese and Chinese, came of age in the late 1960s to form the core force of the Asian American movement at college campuses on the West Coast and in the Northeast.

The diversity of the Asian American population started to take shape during the 1970s. The dramatic increase in Asian immigration marked the beginning of contemporary Asian American. In sheer numbers, the U.S. Asian and Pacific Islander population grew from a total of 1.4 million in 1970, to 7.3 million in 1990, and to almost 9 million in 1997 (in contrast to 205,000 in 1900), an impressive fivefold increase in just two decades. Much of this growth is attributed to immigration, which has accounted for more than two-thirds of the total population growth. The populations of most of the new national-origin groups—Indians, Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and the Hmong—grew at spectacular rates, almost entirely because of immigration. It is estimated that, if the current levels of net immigration, intermarriage, and ethnic affiliation hold, the size of the Asian population will increase from 9 million in 1995 to 34 million in 2050, growing from 3 to 8 percent of the total U.S. population (Smith and Edmonston 1997).

The recency of Asian immigration highlights two distinct demographic characteristics of the Asian American population: a disproportionately large foreign-born component and a disproportionately young U.S.-born component. As indicated in the upper panel of figure I.2, the foreign-born component dominates all Asian American groups, except for Japanese Americans; 64 percent of Filipinos, and nearly 80 percent of Vietnamese and other Asians are foreign born. While many immigrant children move with their parents, the great majority of the immigrant generation is of working age. By contrast, the U.S.-born Asian American population is an extremely youthful group. As shown in the lower panel of figure I.2, more than half of U.S.-born Asian Americans are under fifteen years of age; again, Japanese Americans

are the exception. Among the new groups, more than 75 percent were in this young age cohort. One implication about this emerging new second generation is that it will grow up in an era of continuously high immigration, joined by a sizable foreign-born cohort—the 1.5 generation—whose members are far more diverse in ethnic backgrounds, the timing of immigration, degrees of acculturation, orientation, and outlooks. This is a situation quite distinct from that which faced the second generation of immigrants in the 1950s and 1960s, because of restrictive immigration.

Diversity

Diversity in National Origins. The dramatic growth in absolute numbers of Asian Americans has been accompanied by increasing ethnic diversity within the Asian American population itself. As of 1990, the U.S. Census recorded seventeen national-

FIGURE I.2
Asian American Population: Nativity and Age
Nativity: Proportion Foreign Born, 1980 v. 1990

Group	1980 (%)	1990 (%)
Japanese	~30	~35
Chinese	~65	~70
Filipino	~65	~68
Korean	~85	~75
Indian	~70	~75
Vietnamese	~95	~80
Other	~95	~85

Age: US-Born Age Cohort 0–14, 1990

Group	Percentage
Japanese	~18
Chinese	~45
Filipino	~50
Korean	~70
Indian	~75
Vietnamese	~85
Other Asian	~50
All API	~50

SOURCE: U.S. Census of the Population, 1980, 1990.

TABLE I.1
Asian American Population: 1980-1990

	1980	% Total	1990	% Total
Chinese	812,178	21.6%	1,645,472	22.8%
Filipino	781,894	20.8%	1,406,770	19.5%
Japanese	716,331	19.0%	847,652	11.7%
Indian	387,223	10.3%	815,447	11.3%
Korean	357,393	9.5%	798,849	11.1%
Vietnamese	245,025	6.5%	614,547	8.5%
Cambodian	16,044	0.4%	149,047	2.1%
Laotian	5,204	0.1%	147,375	2.0%
Hmong	47,683	1.3%	94,439	1.3%
Thai	45,279	1.2%	91,360	1.3%
Other Asian	97,585	2.6%	265,436	3.7%
Hawaiian	172,346	4.6%	211,014	2.9%
Guamanian	39,520	1.1%	49,345	0.7%
Samoaan	30,695	0.8%	62,964	0.9%
Other Pacific Islander	8,040	0.2%	27,269	0.4%
Total	3,762,440	100.0%	7,226,986	100.0%

SOURCE: U.S. Census of the Population, 1980, 1990.

origin groups, and eight Pacific Islander groups, as revealed in table I.1. Since 1980, no single group has accounted for more than one-third of the Asian American population. While major national-origin groups—Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Indian, and Vietnamese—were proportionally represented in 1990, other national-origin groups—Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong—marked their presence in Asian America for the very first time. Because of the unique migration patterns in each of the originating countries, national origins are strongly associated with the type of legal admission (family-sponsored, employer-sponsored, or refugees) and with the skill levels of immigrants. For example, many Filipino immigrants to the United States are college graduates with transferable job skills; many are physicians and nurses sponsored by U.S. employers in the health care industry. Indian immigrants are mostly employed as physicians and computer programmers, as well as small entrepreneurs. Koreans are predominantly middle-class professionals but tend to be disproportionately self-employed in small-scale retail trade. Chinese immigrants are more mixed, including fairly even proportions of rural peasants, urban workers, and the highly skilled. Southeast Asian refugees, in contrast, were pushed out of their homelands by force and suffer tremendous postwar trauma and social displacement, compounded by a lack of education and professional skills, which negatively affects their resettlement.

Socioeconomic Status. Another distinguishing characteristic of contemporary immigrants from Asia is their diverse socioeconomic status. The 1990 U.S. census attests to the vast differences in their levels of education, occupation, and income by national origins. For example, more than 60 percent of immigrants (age 25 years or older) from India and Taiwan reported having attained college degrees, three times the proportion of average Americans, but fewer than 5 percent of those from Cambodia and Laos so reported. Among the employed workers (age 16 years or older), about 45 percent of immigrants from India and Taiwan held managerial or professional occupations, more than twice the proportion of average American workers,

but fewer than 5 percent of those from Laos and only about 10 percent of those from Cambodia so reported. Further, immigrants from India, the Philippines, and Taiwan reported a median household income of about or above \$45,000, compared to \$30,000 for average American households; those from Cambodia and highland Laos (Hmong) reported a median household income below \$20,000. Poverty rates for Asian immigrants ranged from a low of 7 percent for Filipinos, Indians, and Japanese to a high of more than 60 percent for Hmong and 42 percent for Cambodians, compared to about 10 percent for average American families (Zhou 1999).

Settlement Patterns. A third salient feature of contemporary immigration from Asia is the diverse geographic settlement patterns of immigrants. Historically, most Asian immigrants in the United States have been concentrated in Hawaii and in states along the Pacific coast, with a small number of Chinese moving east to settle in New York. Within each area of settlement, they have been highly segregated in ethnic enclaves, such as Chinatowns, Little Tokyos, and Little Manilas. Today, geographic concentration continues to be significant as newcomers follow the footsteps of their predecessors to settle on the West Coast in disproportionate numbers. California has become the preferred destination for immigrants from Asian countries and has 40 percent of the nation's Asian American population. Tables I.2 and I.3 show the geographic distribution of Asian Americans by metropolitan areas, further confirming historical and contemporary patterns of ethnic concentration.

Nonetheless, the Asian American population has begun to disperse throughout the Northeast, the Midwest, and the South. For example, sizable ethnic communities are found in New Orleans (Vietnamese), Houston (Vietnamese and Chinese), and Minneapolis (the Hmong), cities that traditionally received few Asian immigrants. Although there is still evidence of clustering along national or ethnic lines at the local level, there are very few examples of the large and distinctly monoethnic enclaves that were common in the past. In San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York, there are no new Chinatowns where more than half of the residents are coethnics; Koreatowns in New York and Los Angeles and Little Saigon in Orange County are no

TABLE I.2
Asian and Pacific Islander Population by U.S. Metropolitan Area

	Population	Percent of total
Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA	925,561	12.72%
New York, NY	553,443	7.61%
Honolulu, HI	413,349	5.68%
San Francisco, CA	316,751	4.35%
Oakland, CA	259,002	3.56%
San Jose, CA	254,782	3.50%
Anaheim-Santa Ana, CA	240,703	3.31%
Chicago, IL	227,742	3.13%
Washington, DC-MD-VA	200,113	2.75%
San Diego, CA	184,596	2.54%
Seattle, WA	128,656	1.77%
Houston, TX	125,529	1.73%
Top-12 Subtotal	3,830,227	52.66%
Total API Population in the US	7,273,662	100.00%

SOURCE: U.S. Census of the Population, 1990.

TABLE I.3
Top Three Metropolitan Areas of Concentration by National Origin (1990)

	Largest concentration	2d Largest concentration	3d Largest concentration	All U.S.	Top 3 as a percentage of total
Chinese	New York, NY 246,817	LA-Long Beach, CA 245,033	San Francisco, CA 162,636	1,645,472	39.77%
Filipino	LA-Long Beach, CA 219,653	Honolulu, HI 120,029	San Diego, CA 95,945	847,562	51.40%
Japanese	Honolulu, HI 195,149	LA-Long Beach, CA 129,736	Anaheim-Santa Ana, CA 29,704	1,460,770	24.27%
Indian	New York, NY 106,270	Chicago, IL 53,702	LA-Long Beach, CA 43,829	815,447	24.99%
Korean	LA-Long Beach, CA 145,431	New York, NY 74,632	Washington, DC-MD-VA 39,850	798,849	32.54%
Vietnamese	Anaheim-Santa Ana, CA 71,832	LA-Long Beach, CA 62,594	San Jose, CA 54,212	614,547	30.69%
Cambodian	LA-Long Beach, CA 27,819	Stockton, CA 10,350	Lowell, MA-NH 6,516	147,411	30.31%
Laoian	Fresno, CA 8,174	Sacramento, CA 7,861	San Diego, CA 7,025	149,014	15.48%
Hmong	Fresno, CA 18,321	Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN-WI 16,435	Merced, CA 6,458	90,082	45.75%

SOURCE: U.S. Census of the Population, 1990.

exception. Filipinos Americans and Indian Americans are comparatively more spread out across the urban landscape, with few identifiable ethnic enclaves. For example, in 1990, only 12 percent of Los Angeles County's Chinese Americans lived in Chinatown, 22 percent of Korean Americans lived in Koreatown, and a tiny number of Japanese Americans (about 700) lived in Little Tokyo. Overall, trends of spatial integration (moving into white, middle-class neighborhoods) and suburbanization among Asian Americans have been particularly strong in recent years, resulting in decreasing levels of residential segregation even in areas of high concentration (Massey and Denton 1987).

The Impacts of Immigration on Asian America

The impact of diversity in national origins is straightforward. National origins evoke drastic differences in homeland cultures, such as languages, religions, foodways, and customs; histories of international relations; contexts of emigration; reception in the host society; and adaptation patterns. Such differences persist most significantly in the private domain, affecting not only the immigrant generation but also the native-born generations. For some national origin groups, such as the Chinese and Asian Indians, internal differences in languages or dialects and religions are quite substantial. It is therefore extremely difficult to group everybody under a pan-Asian umbrella at the individual level, creating an obstacle for panethnic coalitions. However, ethnic diversity among the second and third generations associated with homeland cultures is blurred because of these groups' rapid language switch to English and high rates of out-marriages.

Second, socioeconomic diversity gives rise to diverse mobility patterns. New immigrants may continue to follow the traditional bottom-up route to social mobility, starting their American life in isolated urban enclaves, but some segment of this urban population may be permanently trapped in poverty with dim prospects for the future. Those with sufficient social and economic resources may simply bypass the bottom starting line, moving directly into mainstream labor markets and settling directly into suburban middle-class communities (Portes and Zhou 1993). These trajectories to social mobility not only affect life chances of the first generation but also have a profound implication for the new second generation, since the current state and future prospects of immigrant offspring are related to the advantages or disadvantages that accrue through parental socioeconomic status.

Third, socioeconomic diversity leads to divergent destinies, creating a bifurcated distribution of the Asian American population along class lines. Some national-origin groups, such as the Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Koreans, and Asian Indians, have converged with the general U.S. population, with the rich and the poor on the ends and an ever-growing affluent class in the middle. But, many others, especially the most recent refugee groups, are struggling in the most underprivileged segment of U.S. society. Consequently, class bifurcation toward two ends of society's class spectrum will likely lead to fragmentation of the larger Asian American community, creating new obstacles for political mobilization and ethnic solidarity. Bifurcation

also affects the new second generation. Unlike the second generation of the 1960 and 1970s, most of whom grew up in segregated urban enclaves, a visible proportion of today's second generation is growing up in affluent Euro-American neighborhoods in suburbia. Members of the suburban middle class maintain little contact with their working-class coethnics in urban enclaves and show limited interest in working-class issues.

Fourth, settlement patterns have long-term implications for the state of Asia America. Those who are currently segregated in the inner city are confronted with a reality more daunting than the one faced by their earlier counterparts. Today, the United States has an emerging "hourglass" economy in which movement from bottom to top has gotten progressively more difficult. Those newcomers who are poorly educated and who lack marketable skills may find themselves stalled or, even worse, stumbling beneath the ranks of the lower working class, either because they are unable to obtain employment or because the jobs they do obtain do not pay a decent family wage. Consequently, they and their children may become trapped in poverty, poor schools, and a generally disruptive social environment plagued with social ills. In contrast, those who have achieved residential mobility are undoubtedly more privilege, enjoying comfortable homes, safe neighborhoods, quality schools, and more channels to mobility. They may, however, become politically powerless in the face of racism and racial discrimination or strained U.S. relations with the ancestral homeland precisely because they "melt" into a mainstream that has not yet welcomed them wholeheartedly.

Last but not least, immigration complicates intergenerational relations and ethnic solidarity. Native-born children and grandchildren of Asian ancestry have felt the intense cultural and social impact of contemporary immigration and settlement. Almost overnight, native-born Asian Americans, especially those assumed to be "assimilated," are faced with a renewed image of "foreigners." Stereotyped images of "American" create both psychological and practical problems for native-born Americans who phenotypically resemble the new arrivals. Harassment of a native-born Mexican American suspected of being an undocumented immigrant and comments about a third-generation Japanese American's "good English" are frequently heard. The children, U.S.-born and similar to other American children, suffer from persistent disadvantages merely because they look "foreign" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1988, 1992). While they are infuriated by their unfair treatment as foreigners, native-born Asian Americans are also caught between including immigrants in their struggle for racial equality and excluding them. Similar to other Americans in speech, thought, and behavior, native-born Asian Americans often hold values about labor rights, individualism, civil liberty, and, ultimately, the ideology of assimilationism that are different from those of their foreign-born counterparts. These differences, intertwined with the acculturation gap between immigrant and native-born generations, have impeded ethnic coalition, ideological consensus, and collective action (Zhou 1998).

Contemporary Asian America: Identity, Emerging Ethnicity, and the Assimilation Problem

"Who Am I?"

We ABC [American-born Chinese] were ridiculed by the old immigrants as "Bamboo Stick" for not being able to speak Chinese and not being accepted as "white people." We are not here. We are not there. . . . We are different. Most of us are proud of the Chinese cultural heritage, but due to the pressure to assimilate and the lack of opportunity, we don't know much about the Chinese way.⁸

The issue of identity has always occupied a central place in the minds of Asian Americans. Changing demographics and residential mobility in contemporary Asian America make it more salient than ever before. However, this issue has concerned native-born generations more than the first generation, because native-born generations are caught in the insider/outsider divide: they suffer from the paradoxical experience of being in America but not fully a part of it. Both immigrants and their native-born children encounter this paradoxical experience, yet their feelings about it are different.

"While in America, do what the Americans do and become an American" has long been an ideal goal that all immigrants are pressured to attain. However diverse and initially disadvantaged, immigrants are expected to assimilate into mainstream society as quickly as possible. Behind this ideology of assimilationism, however, there is an invisible force for inclusion and exclusion. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur described an American as "either an European or the descendant of an European" (1904 [1782]). More than a century later, Israel Zangwill characterized an American as an "immaculate, well-dressed, accent-free Anglo" (1914). These kinds of definitions of "American," widely if often unconsciously held, make it hard, if not impossible, for people to feel fully American if they happen to be nonwhite, including those whose ancestors settled on this land long before the first Europeans reached American shores. The 1790 National Origin Act prohibited immigrants of certain national origins from becoming U.S. citizens. Thus, not all outsider groups were afforded the privilege of becoming American. A second-generation Chinese American in her sixties explained her isolation from mainstream American society and her socially imposed otherness in these words:

The truth is, no matter how American you think you are or try to be, you do not look "American." If you have almond-shaped eyes, straight black hair, and a yellow complexion, you are a foreigner by default. People will ask where you come from but won't be satisfied until they hear you name a foreign country. And they will naturally compliment your perfect English.⁹

Immigrants are deemed "outsiders," and they tend to cope with their alienation from the immigrant perspective. Historically, people of Asian descent were considered members of "inferior races" and were negatively portrayed as the "indispensable enemy" and as the "yellow peril." No matter how hard they tried to accommodate to American ways, they were considered undesirable and unassimilable aliens and were legally, socially, and economically excluded from the "melting pot" (Chan 1991).

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the first immigration act in U.S. history to exclude an entire category of immigrants purely on the basis of national origin, is a prime example. The forced removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II is another case in point. The federal government, under provision of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066, justified these actions as a "military necessity" vital to the national defense of the United States. In contrast, no such categorical treatments were imposed on German Americans and Italian Americans.

As a reactive strategy to resist subjugation and discrimination, Asian immigrants retreated into their own ethnic communities, rebuilding ethnic institutions that resembled those found in the homeland and relying on one another for moral and practical supports. Extreme adversity allowed them to develop a clear sense of their position in the host society as "foreigners" and to maintain tangible ties to their ethnic community and their homeland, which became internalized as part of their shared experience. Since most Asian immigrants chose to come to the United States to seek better opportunities either for themselves or for their children, their shared experience of marginalization reinforced their determination to push their children into the mainstream by choosing a path of least resistance (Kitano 1969). For example, prewar *Issei* (first generation) drew on extensive ethnic resources in developing trade and business associations to negotiate favorable arrangements with the larger economy and to support their children's education (Matsumoto 1993; Nishi 1995). War-traumatized Japanese American parents or grandparents were reluctant to share wartime memories with their children and grandchildren for fear of hurting their children's chances of social integration (Takezawa, this volume). Post-1965 Korean immigrants pushed their children toward prestigious universities because they looked to their children to regain the social status the parents had lost in the host society (Kim 1999).

Unlike members of the first generation, who tend to avoid arousing antagonism by subscribing to the dominant society's mode of behavior—hard work, education, delayed gratification, nonconfrontational attitudes in the face of injustice—their offspring, American citizens by birth, are likely to fully embrace the principles of freedom, equality, and civil liberties on which citizenship is based. They are unlikely to think of their parents' home country as a place to which they might return, nor do they use it as a point of reference by which to assess their progress in the new land. Rather, their expectations are governed by the same standards to which other Americans aspire, and it is by those standards that native-born Asian Americans assess themselves and are assessed by others. However, American society is not color-blind, and the phenotypes of the second generation subject them to the same types of discrimination and injustice faced by the first generation, regardless of how long they have been in the United States. A third-generation Japanese American from Monterey Park, California, expressed frustration at being objectified as a "foreigner":

Asian Americans fought for decades against discrimination and racial prejudice. We want to be treated just like everybody else, like Americans. You see, I get real angry when people come up to me and tell me how good my English is. They say: "Oh, you have no accent. Where did you learn English?" Where did I learn English? Right here in America. I was born here like they were. We really hated it when people assume that

just because Asian Americans look different we were foreigners. It took us a long time to get people to see this point, to be sensitized to it. Now the new immigrants are setting us back. People see me now and they automatically treat me as an immigrant. I really hate that. The worst thing is that these immigrants don't understand why I am angry (Cheng and Yang, this volume).

An examination of today's Asian American populations highlights the demarcation between the different generations. Because of legal exclusion in the past, Asian Americans remain primarily an immigrant group, in which the first generation makes up 62 percent of the total Asian American population.¹⁰ It is only among Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans that we notice a sizable third or fourth generation. Among Asian American children under eighteen years of age, more than 90 percent are either foreign-born or children of foreign-born parents. Growing up in the context of an immigrant family is extremely difficult for Asian American children. Parents often place multiple pressures on their children to "do and say the right things" or to "act white" as a means of moving into the mainstream and accessing resources typically reserved for "insiders." In the process of growing up, the children often find themselves vacillating between the outsider's world from which they came and an insider's world into which they were born; they are increasingly ambivalent about their conflicting identities.

Many second-generation Asian Americans of the 1960s and 1970s went through a period of profound confusion, feeling trapped by the ironies of being in America but not a part of it. In the wake of the Asian American Movement, young Asian Americans who entered American institutions of higher education began to confront these identity issues. The Movement forged a space in which these young people not only shared their own personal experiences of racism and suffering in American society but also began to articulate an Asian American consciousness and to refashion their own identities in ways that were meaningful to their experiences—an Asian American identity. At a time when Asian Americans began to empower themselves across panethnic lines and raise ethnic consciousness to a new level for future generations, it is ironic that much of the shame and frustration that previously engulfed the second generation has resurfaced among the children of contemporary immigrants from Asia. Some of the children, especially those who live in suburban, white, middle-class neighborhoods, internalize the negative stereotypes that the society imposes upon their parents' generation and have undergone traumatic, even suicidal, identity crises, in which they feel ashamed of who they are, try to become who they are not, and end up being neither, as so vividly described in *A Letter to My Sister* (Park, this volume). A Chinese-American college student, born in the early 1980s, reveals her confusion as a teenager:

As a child, I had a very difficult time coping with my ethnic identity. I was hesitant to call myself American because as I perceived it, American meant all the beautiful Anglo children in my classes. Yet I was also hesitant to call myself Chinese for two reasons. First, I had no clear concept of what Chinese was besides the fact that my parents were from China. [Second,] I did not feel Chinese. I did not want to be Chinese. I wanted to be White.... I tried to hide my identity. I buried it deep within my subconscious, became oblivious to it. Yet every so often, it would be invoked.... Perhaps the most

notorious manifestation of my shame was my inability to answer the simple question, "What are you?" ... When I was confronted with questions concerning my racial background, I found myself unable to answer. ... Unable to utter the simple words, "I am Chinese." I just could not do it. It was too painful for some reason. The words seemed too dissonant and distasteful. So many times I simply shrugged and said: "I don't know."¹¹

The pressure to assimilate and the conditional acceptance by mainstream society take a heavier toll on the second generation growing up in suburban, white, middle-class neighborhoods than on those who live in ethnic enclaves in the inner-city (Sung 1987). Within the enclave, the homeland is transplanted, ancestral culture and values are honored and practiced as a way of life, and ethnic pride is invigorated. Outside the enclave, ethnicity is subject to the rank order of the racial stratification system, operating under the assumption that ethnic traits should be abandoned in order to become "American." In the midst of an identity crisis, native-born children who are seemingly assimilated structurally may find that they lack a homeland on which they can fall back and an ethnic space in which they can express their fear and anxieties. This explains, in part, why so many Asian American college students demand ethnic studies classes. These ethnic studies classes do not merely serve to disseminate information or transport knowledge but provide a space in which Asian Americans address the issue of identity, allowing them to release negative feelings about themselves as well as inner tensions and anxieties. The classes let them rebuild a sense of self-worth and a group identity as a means of ethnic empowerment.

The Salience of Ethnicity

Identity crises are not uncommon among adolescents as they grow into adulthood, but they are not necessarily defining experiences for all members of native-born generations. Since the birth of the Asian American Movement, a vibrant and multi-faceted ethnic culture has emerged and been reconstructed among native-born Asian Americans in their attempt to reclaim their identity. This culture is neither mainstream American nor clearly associated with the immigrant generation. It is a hybrid form that has come to assume tremendous significance among Asian Americans as a viable means of resistance and compromise within the existing power structure. This phenomenon indicates the fluid nature of ethnicity.

Emergent Ethnicity. The sociologist William Yancey and his colleagues argue that the emergence of an ethnic culture has relatively little to do with the country of origin but more to do with the structure of opportunity in America. Instead of viewing the transplanted cultural heritage as the principal defining characteristic of an ethnic group, these scholars suggest that the development and persistence of ethnicity is a paradoxical process. On the one hand, it is defined in the context of frequent association and interaction with others of common origins and cultural heritage. On the other hand, it is dependent on structural conditions that characterize the positions of groups in American society and create common experiences and interests, thereby setting the potential for collective mobilization around shared goals. Ulti-

mately, it is "a manifestation of the way populations are organized in terms of interaction patterns, institution, personal values, attitudes, lifestyle, and presumed consciousness of kind"—the result of a process that continues to unfold (Yancey et al. 1976, 400). Drawing on this reasoning, we see that Asian Americans develop different patterns of ethnic identification according to the length of time they are in the United States, internal group dynamics, and structural situations that the particular immigrant group and its descendants have encountered.

As we have discussed, identity formation varies across generations and national origin groups. The immigrant generation generally reaffirms its ethnic identity on the basis of homeland cultures and life experiences not only through ethnic practices but also through memories of its lived experiences in the homeland or during the process of movement. For example, Southeast Asian refugees share the common experience of having lived through internal power struggles in their home countries, the horrors of war, and the ordeal of exile and death. These life-threatening experiences become the basis for ethnic solidarity. Drastic cultural changes and adverse societal treatments or disadvantages associated with immigrant status in the host society can reinforce ethnic identity, as in the case of ethnic enclaves where transnational ties and kinship networks remain strong and homeland cultures are often frozen in time as the result of a collective, concerted effort to preserve them.

U.S.-born Asian Americans and those who arrived in the United States as infants or school-age children, in contrast, usually do not seize on traditional cultural symbols as a mode of defining their ethnicity. Rather, they tend to build their identities largely on the basis of mediating *interpretive memories* of homeland cultures in which they have never personally lived and their own diverse life experiences in the United States. Living in immigrant families and in (or close to) ethnic communities has made life in the homeland a continuing reality because parents often communicate to children with a strong sense of determination and instill in them a sense of origin. Close proximity to kinship networks and ethnic enclaves certainly exerts an important effect on the native born, providing an infrastructure that keeps alive the memories of homeland cultures. The collective memory of Chinese exclusion, the U.S. colonization of the Philippines, and the incarceration of Japanese Americans serve as pivotal organizational principles for ethnic identity among native-born Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans and Japanese Americans, respectively. The Museum of the Chinese in the Americas in New York and the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles are living proof that even the most "assimilated" of Asian Americans clearly retain vital links to their ethnic culture and to the community that sustains it.

Often, however, actual experiences in American society outweigh memories. Transplanted cultural heritage is no longer the requirement or the defining characteristic of ethnicity for the native born. Rather, the emergence and persistence of ethnicity depend on the structural conditions of the host society and the position that the immigrants group occupies in that social structure. The treatment of Asian Americans as foreigners, the glass-ceiling barrier, and racially motivated hate crimes all serve to reaffirm ethnic identity. However, this ethnic identity, even when it is affiliated with a national origin, differs for the first generation and for its native-born

offspring in that the ethnicity of the first generation has a taken-for-granted nature, whereas that of native-born generations is derived both from the collective memory of the historical experience and from the native-born generations' actual experience, in a more self-conscious, reflexive way.

This vibrant emergent ethnic culture transcends the spatial boundaries of ethnic enclaves as well as the symbolic meaning of ethnicity. It is a culture characterized by structures that promote cooperation among coethnics while adopting activities and organizations (e.g., ethnic churches, sports clubs, trade guilds, political organizations) as a means of resistance (Espiritu 1992; Tuan 1999). Yet, what ethnicity means, stands for, or symbolizes differs from region to region, city to city, town to town in the vast expanse of the United States. Being Japanese American in Hawaii or Chinese American in Monterey Park or Vietnamese American in Little Saigon, is not the same as having those identities in New York, Houston, or New Orleans.

Symbolic or Instrumental Ethnicity. Is this emergent ethnicity symbolic? The sociologist Herbert Gans asserts that "as the functions of ethnic cultures and groups diminish and identity becomes the primary way of being ethnic, ethnicity takes on an expressive rather than instrumental function in people's lives, becoming more of a leisure-time activity" (Gans 1979, 9). Among the features of symbolic ethnicity is that it does not carry with it material consequences and does not serve to enhance group solidarity. Indeed, ethnic identity associated with a homeland has become blurred among the second or third generations, who have lost their ancestral languages, intermarried at rates far exceeding the national average, and no longer involved themselves with their ethnic communities on a daily basis, making their ethnicity "symbolic." Our argument about interpretive memories of homeland culture points to the importance of symbolic ethnicity. Clearly, ethnicity is not an either/or matter but rather a variable outcome that varies in its intensity. As we have noted earlier, Asian Americans, both foreign- and native-born, experience high levels of educational attainment, occupational mobility, and residential integration, have high rates of intermarriage, and rapidly lose facility in the native language; hence, much of Asian ethnicity may be optional. As they climb up the socioeconomic ladder in American society, many established Asian Americans may have more choices as to whether they want to be Asian and how Asian they should be when they want to.

At the societal level, however, we argue that the notion of symbolic ethnicity does not always apply well to Asian Americans or to other racial minority groups, since being nonethnic American is still not an option for them, as it is for most European immigrants and their offspring (Waters 1990; see also Takezawa, this volume). The outcry that "America does not include me, only a part of me" is heard here from many native-born, "well-assimilated" Asian Americans. This suggests that unless the whole racial perception of Americans changes and includes other groups as Americans, emergent ethnicity, often in the form of panethnicity, will continue to remain instrumental for the excluded social groups.

Panethnicity. Ethnicity is situational and structurally conditioned. Under certain circumstances, it can evolve into panethnicity, a form of ethnic aggregation typically

oriented toward achieving certain material ends and empowerment. In thinking about panethnicity, we draw on the work of the sociologists David Lopez and Yen Espiritu, who link it to a set of cultural and structural preconditions: shared cultural values and life experiences in American society, imposed societal perception and treatment as one phenotypical group, and the internal need for political mobilization to fight for minority rights and to protect group interests (Lopez and Espiritu 1990). We add to these rapid language switch to English and increasing interethnic and interracial marriages, which also contribute to the formation of panethnicity. Today, Asian Americans intermarry extensively with members of other racial or ethnic groups. In Los Angeles County, for example, about one-third of Asian Americans and about half of all second-generation Asian Americans marry outside their ethnic groups. Ambiguous phenotype and social constraints imposed by the existing racial stratification system may foster a strong sense of panethnicity among multiracial Americans.

However, lumping together all peoples of Asian ancestry complicates the notion of ethnicity and its subsequent application to a particular ethnic group, because panethnicity accounts neither for regional or national differences nor for the historical legacies of intergroup conflicts. At this juncture, the term "Asian American," in and of itself, assumes a political agenda for those who subscribe to it, and panethnicity remains a political identity for instrumental purposes. The Asian American community today is, and continues to be, marked by tremendous diversity in the era of high immigration. Diverse languages and religions and differing historical legacies of domination and colonization in Asia make it unlikely that a panethnic coalition will develop in the near future. Differences in class background among the immigrant generation and divergent modes of incorporation of that generation can also deter the formation of panethnicity. The success of Asian Americans' integration into American society as individuals can both enhance and weaken their ability to act collectively. Also, while it is true that discrimination and violence against one Asian group serve to unite Asian Americans, it can also create intragroup conflicts. During World War II, the United States government singled out Japanese Americans as enemies and targets for incarceration. Fearing similar treatment, some Chinese Americans found themselves constantly invoking their Chinese ethnicity and even wore buttons with derogative anti-Japanese words to distinguish themselves. The negative stereotypes about welfare dependency and gang violence among southeast Asians also cause some Asian American groups to distance themselves from them and even to blame them for their plight.

The Assimilation Problem

The issue of assimilation has been at the core of a classic scholarly debate on immigration and racial and ethnic relations. Classical assimilation theory predicts a linear trajectory toward structural integration into the mainstream of society. In this view, the children and the grandchildren of immigrants move beyond the status of the first generation and progressively become less distinct from other Americans. This particular perspective shares a series of assumptions: outsider groups, however

diverse and initially disadvantaged, all absorb a common culture and gain equal access to the opportunity structure; they do so in a more or less natural way, gradually deserting old cultural and behavioral patterns in favor of new ones; and the whole process, once set in motion, moves inevitably and irreversibly toward the dissolution of the original group. Consequently, observable ethnic differences are largely a function of time and generational status in the United States. In some cases, the time span for assimilation may be prolonged, but, in the end, distinctive ethnic characteristics eventually fade, retaining only some symbolic importance (Alba 1985; Gans 1979; Gordon 1964; Warner and Srole 1945).

Assimilation theories arose as an abstraction from the experience of earlier European immigration. The theoretical reflections developed largely while the process of immigrant adaptation was under way. Now that it is over, one can safely conclude that the descendants of the 1880–1920 wave have overcome earlier disadvantages, achieving parity with, if not outdistancing, “white” Americans of English ancestry, or what Milton Gordon calls the “core cultural group” (Gordon 1964). Unfortunately, assimilation theories provide no account of why this outcome should have transpired—unless one subscribes to that variant of the modernization theory that most earlier writers embraced but many contemporary social scientists have now challenged. Most important, past success may be due to the specific circumstances encountered by earlier immigrants and their offspring—the fact that between the 1920s and the 1950s, America experienced a long period of restricted immigration, which almost certainly weakened immigrants’ attachment to their culture and patterns of group affiliation. Should this be the case, the past is unlikely to prove a useful guide to the future, since we appear to be headed for more, not less, immigration in the years to come.

Assimilationism—the ideology that imposes the dominant core culture on all immigrants to American society—is highly exclusive. The “melting pot” does not wholeheartedly embrace non-European immigrants. The experiences of African Americans are a case in point. Nathan Glazer (1993) shows how racism serves to exclude African Americans from assimilating or sharing in the opportunities of economic and social mobility. Racism and prejudice have also affected the situation of Asian Americans, although to a different degree. Examples are ample, but we point out three of the most obvious.

First, the perception of Asian Americans as “foreigners” has imposed and perpetuated the “otherness” on the group. As we have discussed in detail in the previous section, it is the socially imposed category based on phenotype, rather than acculturation and social mobility, that governs how group members are received and treated in American society. Speaking perfect English, effortlessly practicing mainstream cultural values, and even intermarrying members of the dominant group may help reduce this “otherness” at the individual level but have little effect on the group as a whole, given the relatively small size of the third or later generations of the Asian American population (only 12 percent of the total) and the high levels of recent immigration.

Second, the image of “the yellow peril,” although largely repudiated in the post-World War II period, has repeatedly resurfaced throughout American history, espe-

cially when the United States is at odds with immigrants’ ancestral homelands in Asia. The bombing of Pearl Harbor during World War II turned Japanese immigrants and Americans of Japanese ancestry into potential enemies who were forcefully exiled from their homes and put into internment camps. The Communist takeover of China in the late 1940s and the subsequent Cold War made Chinese Americans of the 1950s prime suspects of treason and espionage. The perceived economic threat from Japan in the 1980s led to the murder of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, mistaken for a Japanese, who was beaten to death by disgruntled unemployed auto workers in Detroit. The renewed spy stereotype is currently manifested in the case of a Taiwan-born scientist, Wen Ho Lee, who was convicted of stealing nuclear secrets for China in the court of public opinion before ever appearing in a court of law. This litany of examples is endless.

Third, the “model minority” stereotype has reinforced the “otherness” of Asian Americans. It is important to note that this stereotype derives from a larger political agenda, serving the ideological function of delegitimizing African American (in particular) claims for equalization of outcomes as opposed to equalization of opportunities. Although Asian Americans as a group are above average on just about any socioeconomic indicator that counts, the “model minority” stereotype obscures the very real problems that many highly “successful” Asians encounter. In particular, highly skilled professionals, who are most definitely part of the middle if not the upper-middle class, are not doing quite as well as their non-Hispanic white counterparts; they experience disproportionate underemployment because of overqualification and overwork (Zhou 1993, 1997; Zhou and Kamo 1994). Furthermore, the stereotype paints a one-sided picture of the Asian American population, obscuring the plight of those who are not doing well and thus further absolving the broader society of any responsibility for redress. There are immigrant workers who are doing poorly; some subjected to severe exploitation. Some groups—Laotians, Hmong, and Cambodians—are still struggling at the very bottom of the social ladder, facing the risk of being trapped in the urban underclass, and others—perhaps the Filipinos—may be stuck in the lower middle class, showing trends of downward mobility (Oropesa and Landale 1997).

In sum, the notion of assimilation, whether it is manifested in a straight line or a bumpy line, seems to clearly imply a *single* line—an idea that is very difficult to reconcile with the historical record of large and significant differences in the rate at which various groups move ahead in American society. Because of the complexity of the reality, with its multifaceted and dynamic nature, it is difficult to comprehend the experiences of today’s racial minorities, Asian Americans included, within the assimilationist framework that makes explicit or implicit Anglo-conformist assumptions. Assimilationism may still be a social or moral imperative imposed on immigrants by the dominant culture, but it may not necessarily be the imperative toward which all immigrant groups and their succeeding generations are striving.

“On Strike!”
San Francisco State College Strike, 1968–1969:
The Role of Asian American Students

Karen Umemoto

The sixth of November, nineteen hundred and sixty-eight. Few thought this would mark the first day of the longest student strike in American history. Student leaders of the San Francisco State College Third World Liberation Front marched with their demands for an education more relevant and accessible to their communities. Their tenacity engaged the university, the police, and politicians in a five-month battle giving birth to the first School of Ethnic Studies in the nation. Batons were swung and blood was shed in the heat of conflict. But this violence was only symptomatic of the challenge made by activists to fundamental tenets of dominant culture as manifested in the university. African American, Asian American, Chicano, Latino, and Native American students called for ethnic studies and open admissions under the slogan of self-determination. They fought for the right to determine their own futures. They believed that they could shape the course of history and define a “new consciousness.” For Asian American students in particular, this also marked a “shedding of silence” and an affirmation of identity.

The strike took place against the backdrop of nationwide Third World movements which had profound impact on the culture and ideology of America. Never before had a convergence of struggles—civil rights, antiwar, women, student and oppressed nationality—so sharply redefined the social norms of our society. Originating from the call for basic rights, protestors moved on to demand power and self-determination. When the State resisted, activists held to their convictions “by any means necessary.” Though these movements did not produce major changes in the economic or political structure, they strongly affected popular ideology and social relations. They also resulted in the formation of mass organizations and produced a cadre of activists who would continue to pursue their ideals.

The San Francisco State strike was a microcosm of this struggle over cultural hegemony. The focus of the strike was a redefinition of education, which in turn was linked to a larger redefinition of American society. Activists believed that education should be “relevant” and serve the needs of their communities, not the corporations. The redefinition of education evolved from the early 1960s when students initiated

programs to broaden the college curriculum and challenge admission standards. They supported the hiring and retention of minority faculty. They demanded power in the institution. When they were met with resistance, activists organized a campus-wide movement with community support for their demands. They built organizations, planned strategies and tactics, and published educational literature. Their activities were rooted in and also shaped more egalitarian relationships based on mutual respect. While this doctrine was not always fully understood nor always put into practice, it was the beginning of a new set of values and beliefs, a "New World Consciousness."

The emergence of this alternative vision is important to study today for several reasons. First, by understanding the beginnings of this vision, today's generation of students can revive certain "counterhegemonic" concepts that have been usurped and redefined by those in power. For example, campus administrators have revamped the concept of "self-determination" to the more benign ones of "diversity" and "cultural pluralism." Thus, the right of a group to decision-making power over institutions affecting their lives has been gutted to the level of "student input" by campus administrators.

Second, studying the strike can deepen our understanding of the process through which ideological currents develop among oppressed groups. Organizers are constantly trying to "raise political consciousness" among the people. But in what ways do the nature of the conflict, methods of organizing, strategy and tactics, propaganda and agitation, and historical factors influence mass consciousness within these movements?

This study will analyze the growth of political consciousness among Asian American students during the San Francisco State strike. I will analyze the development of the strike in four stages from 1964 to 1969, defined according to dominant concepts within the movement. They are: (1) 1964-66—end of the civil rights era marked by the ideals of "racial harmony" and "participatory democracy"; (2) 1966-67—implementation of programs under the banner of "serve the people" and "self-determination"; (3) Fall 1968/Winter 1969—struggle "by any means necessary"; and (4) Spring/Summer 1969—repression of protest and continued "commitment to the community." These concepts signify trends in ideological development and provide a means of understanding the strike as a seed of a revolutionary transformation in America.

1964-1966: "Racial Harmony" and "Participatory Democracy" and the Civil Rights Era

The civil rights era profoundly impacted the racial ideology of the nation, particularly Third World youth. The dreams of Martin Luther King, Jr., and unsung heroes inspired actions for equality, dignity, and self-respect. The African American movement clearly revealed the deep-rooted, institutionalized nature of racial oppression. Although protests resulted in reforms limited to the legal arena, their impact was felt in all other sectors of society.

Many Asian American students who were later to become active in the strike were moved by the protests. One Pilipino activist, R. Q., volunteered for a federal program on the East Coast:

When I was in VISTA and worked in a black neighborhood. . . . They had riots in New Haven. . . . I came back to State College in '67, and the black students were at the forefront in wanting programs. . . . I think the black students and the Black Movement of the sixties made a major impact. They laid the groundwork, which made it a lot easier for us.¹

The civil rights movement reshaped popular thinking about one's role in society. One student, B. I., described the impact on him:

It had a very heavy impact because I found that to have anyone listen to you, you had to be forceful, expressing yourself, not being quiet. If you know you are in the right, you have every right to speak up and organize your people to a just cause. So that brought home to me the necessity of organized action, and to verbalize your feelings about what is going on.²

The protests forced President Kennedy to publicly support civil rights. His entrance into the historic March on Washington in 1963 lent federal legitimacy to the idea of racial harmony through integration. The enacting of legislation provided legal sanction for racial equality. Kennedy's slogan of a "New Frontier" also encouraged youth to participate in American democracy and transform society. This idealism contributed to formations of Students for a Democratic Society and Third World student organizations nationwide.³ Faith in democracy led to initial acceptance of nonviolent protest and to the reform-oriented goals within mass movements.

This idealism manifested itself in experimentation in all aspects of life. What was called "counterculture" was indeed a reshaping of traditional goals, values, and behavior. One activist, I. C., explained this shift:

There was all this emphasis on doing things for other people, such as the Peace Corps. All those ideas were instilled in us. . . . "doing something, giving back to society." You couldn't just live for yourself. And I think that influenced my participation in the strike more than anything.⁴

Prior to 1963, student activism at San Francisco State centered around these themes. Students joined a 1960 walk to San Quentin prison against capital punishment, protested at the 1960 House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) hearings, established an outdoor free speech area, joined the 1962 Freedom Rides, and organized lunch counter sit-ins at a local Mel's Drive-in. But 1963-64 also saw the assassination of Medgar Evers, the murder of four black children in an Alabama church bombing, the murder of three Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) workers, and preparation for an escalation in the war in Vietnam. These and other conflicts provided the context for a growing student movement.

Meanwhile, the slogan of racial harmony clashed with the reality of racial conflict. Asian Americans faced discrimination, especially in the areas of education, employment and housing. A. S. described going to school in Stockton, California:

I went to Franklin because of where I lived. But Edison was . . . [a] minority school, our kissing cousin school—many Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Mexicans, and Black Franklin had more poor Whites . . . You were told where to go. . . . There was a strict code that was enforced.⁵

For J. M., a growing awareness of racism caused conflicts within herself which altered life goals:

I was going with a white man whom I met at Berkeley, whom I eventually married. And so I don't know how to explain this to you, it seems very disorganized and very chaotic, but at the same time I was aspiring to be White, wanting a white child, wanting to marry a white man, I was simultaneously being impacted by all of these events that were challenging me as an Asian woman.⁶

B. I. was like the vast majority of students at San Francisco State who came from the ranks of the working class. He was a farmworker while in high school:

I spent some time in Fairfield, stoop labor, so I knew what they were saying about the low wages, and the twelve to fourteen-hour day. . . . I learned later on that Pilipinos were involved in organizing the first farmworkers' strike. And that made me very proud. . . .⁷

Several strike activists were with the U.S. armed forces in Asia and faced racial hostilities. E. D. C., who became involved with Pilipinos in the strike, described an instance where he was used to "play an agent enemy, in other words, a gook or whatever."⁸

Although it is difficult to determine if those who understood racism were more disposed to strike involvement or if their involvement sensitized them to racial issues or both, it is clear that racial cleavages were at the center of the Asian American experience.

Student-Initiated Programs

The period 1964–66 saw the development of student-run programs to address racial issues and other social concerns. These programs functioned within the university as alternative schools or "counterhegemonic sites" through which many students developed ideas running counter to prevailing paradigms.

The initial programs included the Fillmore Tutorial, [the] Community Involvement Program, the Experimental College, and the Work-Study Program. They were initiated with Associated Student government monies under its president, Tom Ramsey, a socialist, who wanted to use the \$400,000 budget for community work.⁹

The Fillmore Tutorial was an African American-initiated program which tutored youth in the Fillmore District of San Francisco. The Community Involvement Program was an outgrowth of this. Students organized community activities including graphic arts workshops, a housing and job co-op, and support activities for the National Farmworkers Association and the Delano strike.¹⁰

The Experimental College offered alternative courses on topics including "Perspective on Revolution," "Urban Action," and "Competition and Violence." One

outgrowth was the Work-Study Program, which was later renamed the Community Services Institute in 1968. A 1966 statement stated that education should be redefined to be relevant to community needs, to equip people to control their lives, and to teach that knowledge came from work in the community.¹¹

These programs became increasingly popular. By fall 1966, the college had approximately fifteen courses with 300 students; by spring 1967, there were sixty courses with 800 students¹² and by fall 1968, nine experimental colleges existed in the eighteen-campus university system.¹³

A Master Plan for Future Confrontation

The foundation for growing contradictions between students and administrators was the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education in California. The plan restructured education to meet the changing needs of industry and the growing student population. Projections estimated that by 1975, more than 1 million students would be enrolled in California higher education, nearly triple the full-time enrollment of 1958. Technically skilled and managerial workers were needed for developing high-tech and defense industries. The California Master Plan was preceded by the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), major federal legislation which provided aid to all levels of public and private education with particular support for the math, science, and foreign language fields. The linking of defense and education coincided with developments in the Cold War, including the 1957 Soviet lift-off of Sputnik, which launched the "space race."

The Master Plan established three tiers: University of California, California State College, and junior college systems, each with target student populations, specialized functions, and centralized governing boards. The UC system for the top 12.5 percent of high school graduates was provided "exclusive jurisdiction over training for professions and the sole authority in public higher education to award the doctor's degree."¹⁴ The state college system was to provide "instruction in the liberal arts and sciences and in professions and applied fields . . . and teacher education." Previously open to 70 percent of high school graduates, it was now reserved for the top 33 percent.¹⁵ The junior colleges were to provide vocational training, general liberal arts background, and preparation for transfer to a four-year institution.

The Master Plan's "solution" to the increasing numbers of students was the "diversion" of students from state colleges and UC campuses to junior colleges.¹⁶ To improve the "quality" of students, the UC system and state colleges were directed to develop new admissions requirements for the fall 1962.¹⁷ Thus, instead of expanding the four-year institutions, the Master Plan restricted admissions. The net result was the decline of minority enrollments. At San Francisco State, African American enrollment dropped from an estimated 11 percent in 1960 to 3.6 percent by 1968.¹⁸

The Master Plan centralized decision making in the hands of business and political figures. A twenty-one-member Board of Trustees was established to govern the state college system with the system-wide chancellor and board holding absolute control over all academic programs, distribution of allocated funds, and major personnel decisions.

Corporate spokespersons backed the Master Plan. In a 1969 speech entitled "Business and Campus Unrest" to the Education Section Meeting in Sacramento, E. Hornsby Wesson, the board chairman of the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, stated:

The best we in business can do is to try and work with you . . . furnishing the most clear-cut guidelines . . . to produce the type of young man and woman we need to keep our state and our national economy moving in the years ahead. The interest stems from what I already have expressed: business depends on education to produce young men and women capable of meeting the demands of our free enterprise system and thus living full, economically independent life. [Italics added]¹⁹

Business concerns received strong political support with Ronald Reagan's rise to [the] governorship in 1966. Under his leadership, a collision course was set with growing student radicalism on the issues of university access, relevancy, and control.

1966–May 1968: "Serve the People" and "Self-Determination"

As I got involved, I saw what happened [on campus] in terms of a microcosm . . . of what was going on in the city and the larger picture of inequality. You can stay neutral and let it slide by you, or you can walk away from it and deny those problems, or you can become a participant. To me, I was going to become a participant.²⁰

—B. L., student government and ICSA member

The process through which action gave rise to new ideas and new ideas shaped action was dialectical. For Asian American students, this process took many forms. Some were involved in the Experimental College, [the] Tutorial Program, and other Associated Student activities. Some became involved through friendships or contact with other activists. Others literally walked into the strike. Regardless of how they got involved, their actions led to greater questioning and understanding, which in turn shaped later actions.

International events had profound impact on the Third World movements in the United States. Anti-imperialist wars were raging in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Works of revolutionary intellectuals like Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Che Guevara and Mao Zedong were studied by activists in the United States. The concept of "internal colonialism" became popular to depict the oppressed status of minorities in America. For those who used the colonial analogy, liberation movements abroad suggested that freedom also could be won at home. Anti-imperialism challenged fundamental tenets from the civil rights era. Instead of racial integration, anti-imperialist movements argued for national independence. Instead of nonviolence, they initiated armed struggle. And instead of shared power, they called for "self-determination."

Events abroad were coupled with a growing discontent at the limitations of civil rights programs. The discontent was felt most deeply by working class sectors of Third World communities, those least affected by legislation. An influential figure who clearly represented this sector was Malcolm X, who was killed in 1963 but whose

message was popularized for years later. He called for African Americans to control the resources and institutions of their communities "by any means necessary" and to identify their primary enemies as established institutions and those who supported the status quo.²¹ These themes are evident in the formation of Asian American organizations during this period. Although these groups were influenced by the African American movement, their development was unique to their cultures and respective experiences in the United States. These groups promoted pride in national heritage; they sought "self-determination" and "power to the people." These slogans captured the diverse life experiences of the activists who were conscious of racism and their lack of political power.

Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA)

ICSA was formed in October 1967 by Chinese students who were mainly interested in social, cultural, and community activities. They worked as volunteers for Chinatown social service agencies including the War on Poverty office, taught immigrant teenagers English language skills, and later solicited monies from the Associated Student government to expand the tutorial project and to study the Chinatown power structure.²²

As campus conflicts intensified with a May 1968 sit-in, a new leadership arose and eventually steered ICSA toward the strike. By July 1968, the group established an office in Chinatown at 737 Clay Street. Though the organization was community-oriented from its founding, the new leadership was more militant. It immediately joined the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). It also challenged the traditional Chinatown power brokers, particularly the Six Companies, over the use of Economic Opportunity Council monies and over problems of youth and working-class Chinese.

For the new ICSA leader, A. W., "power to the people" meant "a piece of the pie," since his experience showed him that poor people were rarely given anything. A. W. described himself as being a "playboy" and a "hippie." He accidentally walked into the May 1968 sit-in when he attempted to pay his fees in the administration building and "got busted" by the police.²³

Following that incident, he and M. W. were approached by a member of the Black Students Union (BSU). They were impressed by his militancy and suggested joining forces, but A. W. initially saw it as benefiting only African Americans. He described his change of mind:

And I said, "Okay fine, you Blacks need to go to school, so you guys fight it, and I won't go against it. But I'm not for it because what am I getting out of this?" And he said, "What about all your Chinese who can't get into school? . . ." And I said, "Okay you convince me what you can give me and my people." . . . And he said, "We've got counseling, tutoring service, we have special admission." . . . So I said, "All right, I'm in." That was the first time in my life that somebody, not Asian, was willing to share with me their pot of gold. So I had nothing to lose, and all to gain, and then I got involved.²⁴

Other ICSA members got involved through community issues. I. C. worked in Chinatown and was aware of the difficulties of immigrant youth. She helped to

coordinate ICSA's tutorial program. In reflecting on the reasons for her involvement she discussed the strong influence of her family who "taught you that you had to do what was right, do what was fair. And when you would see things that were not right, were not fair, [it] just upsets you."²⁵

Others like J. C., who came from a middle-class family and grew up for most of his life in a predominately white Bay Area suburb, experienced a cultural and political awakening through his participation in ICSA. His involvement in the strike "was the process of constructing an identity."²⁶ In high school, he felt competition between the peers over "who was whiter than who." But the strike was different:

We came together, I think, a little more comfortable with who we were.... We found issues we felt [were] lack[ing] in our lives. So we could organize ourselves. We could socialize with one another. We could actually sacrifice part of our egos. So we could join a movement towards some objective that we all thought was correct. I think the one thing you can't do when you are trying to melt into the white world is to complain about it. But if you join with others of your own kind, you have the opportunity to trade stories... and articulate your hostility.²⁷

This quest to validate the ethnic experience fit squarely with the ICSA demand for Chinese American Studies under the authority of the people themselves.

M. W. and A. W. proceeded to involve the ICSA in the TWLF. M. W. described the conflict within ICSA:

And so we had two factions. One faction that wanted to get more involved in the Third World group, because we figured that's where the power was.... There was another group that said, "No, we don't need that; we can go by ourselves".... and so we had elections, and all of a sudden I won... and we became part of the Third World Liberation Front, and became very active in the strike... which was radical for a lot of people at that time. They thought we were crazy.²⁸

This was a major turning point for the organization and brought to power those who saw the importance of unity with other nationalities for the benefit of Chinese Americans.

Although joining with other Third World groups, the new ICSA leaders drew from figures in Chinese history, including Sun Tzu.²⁹

During the strike we read *The Art of War*.... All the Chinese in military history are raised on this... [which] says the main goal of war is to win... and the true leader doesn't lose lives.... The key to win victories is "know thyself."³⁰

"Power to the people" for ICSA implicitly meant power to the working class of Chinatown. This is clear from their attacks on the landlords and power brokers, including the Six Companies. Frustrations had mounted over the latter's resistance to youth programs, including those of Leways and the Hwa Ching to develop jobs and programs. On 17 August 1968, ICSA members and community leaders including Reverends Larry Jack Wong, Ed Sue, and Harry Chuck led a peaceful march through Chinatown in support of "education, employment, health, housing, youth, senior citizens, and immigration."³¹ ICSA members participated in a coalition called Concerned Chinese for Action and Change. The coalition held a press conference to

present several demands, including those for a senior center, a full investigation of the Chinatown-North Beach Equal Opportunity Commission office, immediate action for a community youth center, and the future establishment of a multiservice center, educational program, and low cost housing.³² Students also attended many of the EOC meetings to demand seats on the board and programs to serve youth and low-income residents.

A. W. sat on a community board to the police department. He joined discussions about youth "problems" in the public schools. He pointed to the need for institutions to speak to the needs of immigrant youth:

At that time, I think that Galileo [High School] was about 80 percent Chinese and 50 percent were non-English speaking. I said, "You need bilingual classes, and you need to give the students some pride." Their argument was that [the students] didn't want to participate. I said "How do you expect them to participate?... Give them something to be proud of and they will, in turn, turn Galileo into a good school." They thought it was horse shit.... Now they have all those things.³³

Just as ICSA participation in Chinatown helped build opposition to the Six Companies, their increased understanding of Chinatown's problems strengthened their resolve to fight for ethnic studies. In a position paper, the group stated:

Chinatown is a GHETTO. In San Francisco there are approximately 80,000 Chinese of whom the vast majority live in Chinatown. It is an area of old buildings, narrow streets and alleys and the effluvia of a great deal of people packed into a very small space.... Tuberculosis is endemic, rents are high and constantly rising... and space is at such a premium as to resemble the Malthusian ratio at its most extreme conclusion.³⁴

The position paper advocated ethnic studies. It stated, "There are not adequate courses in any department or school at San Francisco State that even begin to deal with problems of the Chinese people in this exclusionary and racist environment."³⁵

Community efforts converged with that of students. For example, G. W., who worked with Hwa Ching youth, returned to school after the strike began. He and others initiated the Free University for Chinatown Kids, Unincorporated, "to find ways to merge the college students and street kids together and hopefully share the best of their experiences."³⁶ The acronym, F.U.C.K.U., was a statement: "You guys [the university] don't like us? Well, we don't like you either."³⁷ F.U.C.K.U. met for several sessions with films, speakers, and discussion on problems and solutions for Chinatown youth.

An organization which actively supported the strike was Leways. Short for "legitimate ways," it set up a pool hall and soda fountain at 615 Jackson Street called the "Fountain of Youth." Leways member Alex Hing wrote, "Because the strike was aimed precisely at giving oppressed Third World people access to college, Leways became the staunchest supporters of the TWLF in Chinatown."³⁸ Leways assisted in educational, fund-raising, and picket activity during the strike. Through the strike and community involvement, Leways became increasingly political, and later some members formed the revolutionary Red Guards.

Supporters came from many political persuasions. Despite differences, important

alliances were built over strike demands. The Equal Opportunity Council board, Chinatown, dominated by members of the Six Companies, held more conservative views as compared with those of strike organizers. However, they shared concern over educational access. G. W. described an exchange which began as a board member responded to students' appeal for support:

"How dare you people make such a racket! My grandson's trying to apply for the university and couldn't get in!" I said in Chinese to him. "Read our demand carefully. We're doing this for your grandson. It is precisely people like your grandson who feel that they have been kept out . . . and we want to get him in." And he said, "Oh, is that right? I'm for it!" And he turned around and looked at everybody. And since he's for it, the rest of the people said "for," and we got a majority. So we had EOC in Chinatown voting to support the San Francisco State Third World strike.³⁹

Philippine-American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE)

PACE was established in spring 1968 by P. S. to organize and fight for the rights of Pilipino youth. He had learned about the efforts of Third World students through Professor Juan Martinez. PACE organized counseling programs, tutorial programs, tutor training, study centers, high school recruitment drives, newsletters, fund-raising dances, ethnic studies curricula, community outreach, and liaison with student government.

The backgrounds of PACE members were as diverse as those of other groups. However, most were foreign-born. A number came from military family backgrounds as well as farmworker families. A. S. remarked that "you had multidiverse types of Pilipinos who started PACE, which was really a miracle we even stuck together." But he added, "We had common backgrounds, we had common goals. And we really had a common thought . . . that there really had to be something better in life than what we were used to."⁴⁰

PACE saw the inequality they faced as rooted in racism. It felt that uniting Third World people to create a new consciousness would enable them to control their own destinies. This viewpoint was expressed in the statement of goals and principles, which read:

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.⁴¹

One of the ways this "New World Consciousness" would develop was through ethnic studies. These courses would educate people to the Pilipino American experience, thus lessening racist attitudes.

Some PACE members organized support for their demands within the community

through explaining the concept of "self-determination" with concrete illustrations. P. S. explained:

Self-determination was probably the closest [term] to making other people understand what we were trying to express. Because when you had to explain self-determination, you had to explain the other side, against what? . . . So that buzzword was just convenient to open up . . . discussions . . . I thought it better to express how what we were doing was going to help. I would say it in different forms . . . how what we were doing would help kids get in school, get jobs . . . very visual things that they could relate to.⁴²

Like ICSA members, PACE members saw "self-determination" as taking control over one's life. They initiated community programs through an off-campus office at 829 Cortland. The purpose was fourfold: to encourage and aid low-income Pilipino-American students in the Mission area to enter college; to establish communication channels between youth organizations in the Bay Area; to research socioeconomic problems and their solutions; and to serve as a referral agency for employment, medical, housing, recreation, and counseling services.⁴³

PACE worked with youth groups at schools and churches like Mission High School and St. Patrick's. One focus was to recruit Pilipino high school youth to college through the Educational Opportunity Program. Once in college, PACE worked with students to "make sure they stayed on campus" and completed their education. E. I. helped to recruit students and described:

Yeah, particularly on the south of Market . . . they played basketball to keep off the street. If they were out on the street, they would get busted . . . or they wound up in the Army. A lot of people got drafted. You know that the rank and file in the army was Third World . . . So there was a better alternative: to get them onto campus.⁴⁴

One issue in Manilatown and Chinatown concerned the eviction of elderly residents, community organizations, and small businesses from the International Hotel due to the encroaching financial district. Tenants and supporters resisted evictions for over ten years. Pilipino and other Asian students were active participants throughout the period of the campus strike. E. I. continued:

Sometime in November, mid-December, there were eviction notices posted on the International Hotel door. It said, "You who live here are hereby notified . . . that the Hotel is going to be demolished and you have to leave." . . . And I enlisted the support of (M. W.) and (G. W. of ICSA) and they marched with us. And we had 120 Pilipinos out there, senior citizens, residents of that building. We picketed down Montgomery . . . These were elderly people, retired veterans. . . . I got appointed to the board of that association. And it was then becoming an issue that totally involved me, and I was a student.⁴⁵

The community programs not only enabled a large number of students to participate in PACE, but it involved students in an implicit challenge to the individualistic pursuits promoted by the university. PACE's activities captured the sentiments of students to uplift their people. The membership roster included almost seventy out of an estimated 125 Pilipino students on campus.⁴⁶

Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA)

AAPA was formed in late summer 1968 at San Francisco State College by mainly Japanese American women. It was a vehicle for students to share political concerns in a pan-Asian organization. One founder, P. N., had worked in the Experimental College and had participated in the May sit-in. During that summer, she met a woman whose brother was a member of AAPA at the University of California, Berkeley. She and others attended those meetings and by fall organized an AAPA at San Francisco State:

I felt a lot of need to do something about racism. Also, there was a need to do something about the lack of political involvement of Asians.... [There] was also this amorphous sense of wanting to build a sense of Asian American identity and... overcome what I saw as nationalistic kinds of trends. I wanted to see Asians from different ethnic backgrounds working together.⁴⁷

The ideological development of San Francisco State AAPA was influenced by movement at UC Berkeley. P. N. recalled that many of their concepts "were developed as a result of meetings and discussions, trying to get a sense of what AAPA should be and what its goals should be, what kinds of interests it should address." In one of the first issues of the UC Berkeley AAPA newspaper in fall 1968, an article described the group as a "people's alliance to effect social and political changes."

We believe that the American society is historically racist and is one which has systematically employed social discrimination and economic imperialism both domestically and internationally to exploit all people, but especially nonwhites.⁴⁸

AAPA saw the problems facing Asian people as rooted in racism and imperialism; thus, it was important to build alliances based on race as well as common oppression. A political organization should not only effect change but build new nonhierarchical social relationships; therefore, AAPA was only a transition to generate ideas "to effect fundamental social, economical, political changes." A parallel was drawn to the movements against imperialism in the Third World. "We Asian Americans support all oppressed peoples and their struggles for Liberation and believe that Third World People must have complete control over the political, economic, and educational institutions within their communities."⁴⁹

At San Francisco State, AAPA attempted to organize political study which offered critical perspectives for its activity. One founding member stated that activists studied the "Red Book," which contained writings of Mao Zedong. They also read writings of Frantz Fanon and Black Power leaders, including the Black Panther Party newspaper. She described the impact of these readings:

I think they helped to provide me with a conceptual framework within which I could look at how my involvement fit in with other events: the Vietnam war in particular and the connections between the strike, domestic issues, property, and international issues.⁵⁰

Though AAPA did not have an off-campus office, there were informal gatherings at a house in the Richmond district, several miles west of Japantown. P. Y. explained

how this house became a congregating point for AAPA activities, "like an extended family":

Towards the end of the strike, they found us a big house on 4th and California, 4th and Cornwall actually.... They got the whole house, it was three stories, two big flats. There were about eight people living there, seven of them were AAPA members. And it became the meeting place. There was a [mimeo] machine in there, and all of our stuff was printed out of there, all the meetings were held there, all the parties were held there. If anybody came in from out of town—a lot of people from L.A. used to come up—and that's where they would come. So that became a real home for AAPA.⁵²

Cultural activities strengthened the closeness that P. Y. and many others spoke about during this period. One artist was Francis Oka, who was killed in an accident shortly after the strike. M. O. described his influence:

We were like brother and sister. And he would always be the theoretical one; we kind of balanced each other off. And he was trying, struggling to be a writer and a poet and a songwriter. His idol was Dylan, Dylan Thomas.... because of our friendship, he always opened my mind up and made me read things.... He was the foremost idealist in my life.⁵³

The strike unleashed a creative spirit. AAPA member Janice Mirikitani became a leading figure in the Asian American arts movement. The strike provided a focus for her creative expression. She and others created the Third World Communications Collective, a Third World Women's Collective, and published one of the first Asian American journals, *Aion*.

The appointment in late 1968 of S. I. Hayakawa as San Francisco State College president stirred up controversy in the Japanese American community. Public protest against Hayakawa challenged social codes within the community which discouraged confrontation. However, a minority of Nisei publicly supported the students. The director of the YMCA office in Japantown, Y. W., explained this viewpoint:

It could be that we had more contact with the younger generation in the course of our work. It could also be that we were far more interested in civil liberties, and in the question of freedom of speech, the freedom of assemblage.... It could also be that we really didn't feel that restrained to rock the boat, to challenge the status quo. I think it might have been the lessons learned from the evacuation. If there is a wrong, you don't keep quiet about it.... I think the evacuation was wrong, and this was one way to say so many years later.⁵⁴

His sentiments may have been shared by some 100 Japanese Americans who expressed support and even pride for striking students at a community meeting at Christ United Presbyterian Church on 6 December 1968. The program consisted of student presentations followed by discussion. A statement by an elderly woman marked a turning point as she expressed her joy that young people were standing up for their rights.

On the evening of 21 February 1969, 125 Japanese Americans picketed a dinner featuring Hayakawa as a speaker. The dinner was sponsored by the Community Interest Committee of Nihonmachi, organized by several individuals affiliated with

the Japanese American Citizen's League. AAPA members along with community leaders, including Yori Wada and Rev. Lloyd Wake of Glide Memorial Church organized the protest and a press conference.

Third World Liberation Front (TWLF)

Closer relations among Third World students impacted the ideological development of Asian Americans by emphasizing the commonalities among "people of color" and creating a forum which facilitated a "cross-pollination of ideas." The demands of the coalition set a foundation for unity and defined the political issues and struggles which occurred through the course of the strike. Due to the development of the African American movement and the participation of relatively experienced members of the BSU and Black Panther Party, African American students played an influential role in the TWLF.

One individual who was influential in the formation of the TWLF was Juan Martinez, a lecturer in the history department and the faculty advisor of the Mexican American Students Confederation (MASC). The TWLF coalition was formed with his encouragement in spring 1968. He had earlier encouraged P. S. to organize Pilipino students and when PACE was formed, it joined the TWLF. ICSA joined in spring. AAPA joined in summer 1968.

The themes of freedom and self-determination are evident in the "Third World Liberation Front Philosophy and Goals," which stated:

The TWLF . . . has its purpose to aid in further developing politically, economically, and culturally the revolutionary Third World consciousness of racist oppressed peoples both on and off campus. As Third World students, as Third World people, as so-called minorities, we are being exploited to the fullest extent in this racist white America, and we are therefore preparing ourselves and our people for a prolonged struggle for freedom from this yoke of oppression.⁵⁵

The TWLF saw immediate reforms in the context of radical, long-term change. A change in consciousness was seen as necessary to eliminate exploitation and racism.

Racism had been traditionally defined as a set of bigoted assumptions held by individuals. But in this period, racism was redefined as being "institutionalized" into all realms of society. The concept put emphasis on the structure of the economic and political system. Students began to deepen their analysis of society by merging this concept with their own life experiences.

In the immediate work, these ideas manifested themselves in three main demands made to the administration. First, the TWLF advocated the right of all Third World students to an education. They highlighted the existence of "institutionalized racism" as manifested in culturally biased "standardized" tests used as admissions criteria. They demanded open admissions and an expanded special admissions program.

In March and April 1968, TWLF members recruited many high school students to apply for admission to the university. On 30 April, they sponsored an orientation at which several hundred students presented their applications to President Summer-

skill's office. They later called for the college to use all special admissions slots for disadvantaged students. In 1966 and 1967, the state colleges had admitted only .27 and .85 percent "disadvantaged" respectively, even though 2 percent were allowed through the "exception rule."⁵⁶

Second, the TWLF challenged the fundamental purpose of education by demanding a School of Ethnic Area Studies. This demand stressed that education should be relevant to their lives and communities. Relevancy in education was clarified by students in their stated purpose of a School of Ethnic Area Studies:

The school clearly intends to be involved in confronting racism, poverty and misrepresentation imposed on minority peoples by the formally recognized institutions and organizations operating in the State of California.⁵⁷

This perspective represented a fundamental challenge to the underpinnings of the Master Plan. While the Master Plan called for restructuring the university based largely upon the priorities of the corporate sector, students advocated a redefinition of education to serve their communities. I. C., who was tutoring in Chinatown, stated that "the community had so many needs, and there were so few people that participated. We always hoped that when these courses came about, more people would be encouraged to go back and help the community."⁵⁸ PACE member R. Q also stated, "I know nothing about my background, nothing historically about the people here in this country, and less about the Philippines."⁵⁹ Students wanted an education which would help them retrieve their historical legacy as well as contribute to social change in their communities.

Third, the TWLF demanded the right to have ethnic studies classes taught and run by Third World peoples. "Self-determination" meant that each nationality had the right to determine its own curriculum and hire its own faculty. Students argued that those who had lived a particular ethnic experience were best able to teach it to others. ICSA's M. W. added that "the winners are the ones who write the history books"⁶⁰ and that oppressed people had their own version of history. The TWLF also recognized that the existing criteria to evaluate ethnic studies and Third World faculty would be biased by racism. Thus, the TWLF demanded programmatic autonomy. The BSU had the most developed curricular philosophy. In their newspaper, *Black Fire*, they listed six goals for teaching:

- (1) a cultural identity, because we live in a society that is racist, that degrades and denies cultural heritage of Third World people, specifically black people; (2) to educate our people to understand that the only culture we can have is one that is revolutionary (directed toward our freedom and a complete change in our living conditions), and that this will never be endorsed by our enemy; (3) to build a revolutionary perspective and to understand the need for using the knowledge and skills we have and get only for our liberation and the destruction of all the oppressive conditions surrounding us; (4) to educate ourselves to the necessity of relating to the collective and not the individual; (5) to strive to build a socialist society; (6) to redistribute the wealth; the knowledge, the technology, the natural resources, the food, land, housing, and all of the material resources necessary for a society and its people to function.⁶¹

The politics of the TWLF were not as overtly revolutionary as those of the Black Panthers, but nonetheless were influenced by them. For example, in the TWLF's demand for a School for Ethnic Area Studies, a similar rationale was put forward:

As assurance against the reoccurrence of education's traditional distortion and misrepresentation of Third World people's cultures and histories, the School of Ethnic Area Studies is to be developed, implemented, and controlled by Third World people. Whether an area study is at a developmental or a departmental level within the school, the people, of an area study will have sole responsibility and control for the staffing and curriculum of their ethnic area study.⁶²

Resistance to the Challenge

DeVere Pentony, who had served as chairman of the Department of International Relations, dean of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences, and deputy president at San Francisco State, wrote:

The more promising the programs became in exploring and modifying basic assumptions, the more resistance grew. As student programs moved away from strictly academic problems toward direct action, problems of budget, propriety, the role of the university and the place of students in the scheme of things came sharply into view.⁶³

As early as June 1967, students had pushed the Council of Academic Deans to authorize a special "task force" to establish Black Studies, but nothing had resulted from it. And by summer 1968, there was still no Black Studies program. When President John Summerskill resigned after the May sit-in, Robert Smith took over the presidency. In his co-authored book, he attributes the delays in the establishment of Black Studies to the fact that "the college did not sense the urgency of the demand; the black students did not trust the world of the honkies."⁶⁴ In his view, both sides were being unreasonable; the strike could have been avoided. But he fails to recognize the fundamental contradictions underlying the conflict: student demands ran totally contrary to those who held greatest power in the university and the state. Smith's position was eventually overridden by the trustees; he was forced to resign after the strike began.

Some trustees objected to Experimental College courses and ethnic studies on the grounds that they were not "objective" or had introduced politics into the curriculum. Chancellor Dumke opposed partisan stands of students and faculty on social issues. "If the campus enters politics no force under heaven can keep politics from entering campus . . . the university must remain pure and unsullied and above the battle." Nor did Dumke believe there was a need to expand special admissions. In a letter of transmittal on the question of expanding the 2 percent special admit limit, he stated that "programs for the disadvantaged are a relatively recent development, and that the actual number of students admitted as exceptions . . . is not at present sufficient in itself to justify either expansion or maintenance of present limitations."⁶⁵

The resistance by administrators and trustees led students to use different tactics. In May 1968, Third World students and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) staged a sit-in at President Summerskill's office. This resulted in the granting of 412

slots for Third World students over the next two semesters, the creation of at least ten faculty positions for Third World professors with student voice in the hirings, and the rehiring of Juan Martinez in the history department.⁶⁶ SDS's demand for ROTC to be expelled from campus was the only demand denied. During the May sit-in, police responded with their first major act of violence against student protesters. One policeman charged a woman. Terrence Hallinan, an attorney, intervened. He was clubbed on the head. Ten were injured and taken to the hospital⁶⁷ and twenty-six were arrested. Conflicts heightened when Summerskill resigned a few months later without fulfilling the promises he had made in a signed agreement with the students.

P. N., who participated in this sit-in and later founded AAPA, felt that the administration's resistance to students' demands was rooted in a racially biased understanding of history. "The hardest thing for a lot of administrators to comprehend was the notion [that] there was an existing deficit in the way history brings us [knowledge]—there are subjects we weren't taught." Institutional racism, she continued, "was a very, very difficult thing for people to comprehend, and not just white people."⁶⁸

The resistance of the administration, along with police violence, led greater numbers of students to challenge traditional protest channels. The sentiment to use more militant tactics rose as frustration and anger mounted.

Structure and Organization of the TWLF

During this period, there were many efforts to split the ranks of the student coalition by administrators, media, and others. There were also efforts to learn from these events. In one instance, the TWLF issued a leaflet summing up the major lessons from the 30 April 1968 high school orientation. This was precipitated by mischaracterizations of the event in several news articles. Excerpts from the leaflet read:

Members of TWLF, beware. What resulted after the April 30 event is exactly what emasculates any effort, actions or programs within an organization when the constituents blame one another for what the outside sources of media . . . take to slander and falsify charges against whatever an organization, like TWLF, stands for or does.⁶⁹

Disunity emerged during the May sit-in. According to one account, the BSU was granted some concessions preceding the sit-in. Several members were still on probation from an earlier confrontation between BSU members and the *Gator* campus newspaper staff. BSU decided not to join the sit-in, and their refusal caused mistrust among some in the TWLF. Also, MASC and PACE were reported to have set up the SDS-TWLF joint action without formal approval of the TWLF coordinators. This upset the Latin American Students Association (LASO), which reportedly pulled out of the action a few days before the sit-in.⁷⁰

Conflicts with the white left on campus also shaped the functioning of the TWLF. Self-determination was applied to the movement itself; white students were expected to respect the right of Third World organizations to lead their respective movements. Nationalism, which deemed one nationality's struggle as important above all other

causes, influenced some Third World activists. However, this viewpoint was distinct from sentiments for national pride, identity, and self-determination which were held by the majority of activists. Some sectors of the white left failed to distinguish between narrow nationalism and national self-determination. Additionally, members of the Progressive Labor Party considered all nationalism to be reactionary.

Nationalism was a point of conflict within the TWLF. While most activists were committed to improving the conditions of their people, there was a growing suspicion that some were looking out only for themselves. As the movement faced setbacks, the administration encouraged divisions by offering settlements to each group individually.

To counteract divisions and to insure internal accountability, the BSU developed an organizational structure which was to have great impact on the TWLF. BSU Central Committee member Terry Collins described this structure in a *Black Fire* article:

In the spring of 1968 the Black Students Union saw that there was a need for democratic centralism. Before that time the Black Students Union had no formal structure. Dominant personalities of two or three people tyrannically reigned over the other students. Factionalism was rampant, potential revolutionary brothers were disillusioned, sisters were used and abused in the name of "blackness." It was the era of the bourgeois cultural nationalism, a stage of evolution that all black students involved in the movement move through, but must shake quickly. Bourgeois cultural nationalism is destructive to the individual and the organization because one uses "blackness" as a criterion and uses this rationale as an excuse not to fight the real enemy when the struggle becomes more intense. That is why we presented a new structure to the people in the spring of 1968 and called for the election of a central committee.⁷¹

In the TWLF structure, each of the six organizations⁷² had two representatives to a Central Committee whose decisions were to be implemented by all groups. Chairpersons would be alternated every four months to provide training and to share responsibilities. No one was authorized to speak for the coalition, negotiate with the administration, make statements to the media without the sanction of the TWLF.⁷³ Democracy was to be promoted by input through the respective organizations around three principles: fight against racism, fight for self-determination for Third World peoples, and support the TWLF demands.⁷⁴

Strategy and Tactics

The BSU's approach towards strategy also influenced the TWLF. BSU members popularized the concept of "heightening contradictions" in order to educate people. Black Studies professor Nathan Hare explained:

For by heightening the contradictions, you prepare people for the confrontation which must come when they are fully sensitized to their condition. Rushing into confrontations without having heightened contradictions contrarily cripples the confrontation.⁷⁵

Hare saw "heightening the contradictions" as a *strategy* to prepare people for confrontational *tactics*. The strategy was to educate the general student population

about TWLF problems with the aim of involving them in confrontations to win demands. Violence was seen as a confrontational tactic rather than an organizing principle.

In contrast, P. N. of AAPA recalled a different interpretation:

I guess the main reasons for using violent tactics . . . was . . . [to] heighten the contradictions, increase the level of confrontation. Because . . . the greater the amount of pressure, the more incentive there is to resolve it. So by heightening the contradictions, or by heightening the level of tensions . . . there may be a faster resolution than if things stayed at a lower level of activity.⁷⁶

This interpretation defined "heightening the contradictions" as a tactic. P. N. also observed that "there was a certain amount of macho that was also involved, as distinguished from looking at violence in a more analytical perspective as a tactical movement."⁷⁷ The "macho" attitude may have reflected a larger difference; some students may have viewed violence as a *strategy* to win their demands.

The idea of exposing contradictions between students and the administration was based on the assumption that underlying the conflict was a fundamental difference in values, beliefs, and most of all, interests. Many students came to believe that racism, class, and political interests belied all rhetoric about the university as a neutral and objective entity.

1968-1969: "By Any Means Necessary"

The trustees are worried about a Black Studies department having an all-black faculty. They didn't mention that there are departments with all-white faculties. These people are scared of giving black people control over their own destinies. Does the college plan to do something about institutional racism or is it just going to fire Black Power advocates? I haven't seen anybody fired for being a racist.⁷⁸

—Elmer Cooper, Dean of Student Activities

Students were angered by the refusal of the administration to act on their demands despite prior commitments. This period also saw police violence and political repression against mass movements, including the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. Protesters at the Democratic National Convention were severely beaten. Many believed that substantive change would not be willingly given; it had to be won through force. Thus, they echoed the slogan of Malcolm X—"by any means necessary."

Many engaged in confrontational tactics after they had exhausted other channels. Some students had been seeking the expansion and institutionalization of ethnic studies and special admissions programs for four years. Promises had been made by Summerskill and others but were never implemented. Now, the administrators were using police to suppress student actions. Due to this repression, students began to understand that their demands represented a more fundamental challenge to the system. Although this understanding varied among students, it was widely shared and provided the basis for mobilizing hundreds in the confrontations with the

administration. PACE's B. I. stated that Even "the silence on the part of the administration [told me] that our demands were not relevant, told me that our contributions were not anything. So that's what led me to get more involved."⁷⁹

Firing of George Murray Heightens Confrontation

BSU central committee member George Murray was fired from the English department for his political beliefs and activism in November. He had been hired in May to teach Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) courses. The Board of Trustees opposed his hiring due to his public statements challenging the racism of the university. Murray was also Minister of Education of the Black Panther Party. In the alternative campus newspaper, *Open Process*, summarized the reason for his termination:

Institutionalized racism is embedded in the status quo of American society; to challenge it with that in mind is to challenge the very foundations of society. George Murray was suspended not because he is black, but because as a member of the Black Panther Party he has challenged the institutions which have always enslaved black people including the educational system.⁸⁰

The controversy over Murray's case reflected a polarization within the administration and faculty. Smith, like other liberals, argued that "if we are to continue as a nation ruled by law, we must give all citizens the benefit of *due process* and the protection of the law."⁸¹ Chancellor Dumke was less concerned with due process than with the problem of "certain tiny groups of students . . . who have lost faith in our system, and are simply interested in overthrowing the establishment." He expressed his determination to suppress any disruption with whatever force necessary.⁸²

One month after the publication of Dumke's statements, George Murray gave a speech at a rally at a trustees board meeting in Fresno. In his speech, he spoke about the betrayal of America by politicians.

So you get people deceiving college students, deceiving the general populace in the United States . . . to manipulate you to the extent that you'll die for some nonfreedom in Viet Nam, that you'll die for some nonfreedom throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America fighting people of color who have never victimized any American persons.⁸³

He discussed the demands of African Americans, including the right of self-determination and exemption from the draft. Murray pointed to the examples of revolutionary struggles to win demands.

We understand that the only way that we're going to get them [is] the same way which folks got theirs in 1776, the same way black people in Cuba got theirs in the 1950s . . . that is with guns and force. We maintain that political power comes through the barrel of a gun.⁸⁴

After the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported Murray advocating "guns on campus," trustee opposition to his appointment increased. On 1 November the administration announced his suspension. Murray was later arrested during the first week of Hayakawa's administration, suspended again, and jailed without parole.

War of the Flea

On 28 October, only days before Murray's suspension, the BSU called a rally to announce the strike and their demands.⁸⁵ In the following week, meetings were held by the BSU and TWLF, and the strike date was set as 6 November. On the day before the strike, the TWLF held a general meeting attended by nearly 700 Third World students and community supporters. SNCC representative Stokeley Carmichael delivered a speech which raised the level of analysis of many students. He warned against trying to solve institutional racism simply by replacing white administrators with Blacks. He said, "Now the way to insure that you get somebody . . . who has the same political ideology that you have is to make sure that you can choose or you have control over that person." He also urged them to take the struggle seriously, stating "do not start off with something you cannot maintain because in the long run you not only hurt yourself but movements to come." He concluded, "It is easier to die for one's people than it is to work and live for them, to kill for them, and to continue to live and kill for them."⁸⁶

Following Carmichael, Benny Stewart presented the strategy of the "war of the flea." This strategy was adapted from the guerrilla war conditions facing many anti-colonial movements in which the strength was based on mass support, familiarity with the terrain, and the advantage of elusivity. He pointed to the failure of other campus movements after leaders had been arrested and argued for a new strategy for a prolonged struggle:

We call it the war of the flea. . . . What does the flea do? He bites, sucks blood from the dog, the dog bites. What happens when there are enough fleas on a dog? What will he do? He moves. He moves away. . . . We are the people. We are the majority and the pigs cannot be everywhere. . . . And where they are not, we are.⁸⁷

One influential writer during this period was Frantz Fanon with his widely read book, *Wretched of the Earth*. He emphasized the role of revolutionary struggle by the oppressed to achieve liberation. Fanon and other Third World thinkers had great influence on student activists. At the same time, these ideas were integrated with the students' own experiences, both on campus and in American society. This period was marked by a rash of police incidents, including violence against the Panthers, assaults on Chicano youth in the Mission district, and the shooting of a Chinese woman in the eye by a drunk officer. Students also rallied at UC Santa Barbara, San Jose State, College of San Mateo, and throughout the nation. Student activity in Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, Spain, Japan, and China also received publicity. All of these events profoundly affected San Francisco State activists.

On 6 November, mobile teams of Third World students entered buildings, dismissed classes, set trash cans on fire, and otherwise disrupted campus operations. Meanwhile, 400 white students marched to President Smith's office in support of the TWLF demands. In contrast to characterizations of strikers as irrational youth, there was in fact a clear reasoning for actions based on a redefinition of violence.

Soon after the strike began, Smith called in the police and closed the campus. The next day, 600 persons marched on the administration building during a noon rally.

By the third day, the *Gator* reported a 50 percent drop in classroom attendance. By that time, students altered tactics and sent "educational teams" into classrooms to explain the strike issues.⁸⁸

On 13 November, the San Francisco police Tactical Squad beat several TWLF members. A rally was called and 1,000 students gathered, ending in more police violence. By the end of the day, seven students had been arrested and eleven taken to the hospital for injuries.⁸⁹ Smith announced, "We'll keep classes closed until such time as we can reopen them on a rational basis."⁹⁰ The trustees gave Smith until 2 November to reopen the college. The faculty refused to resume classes and held "convocations" to try to resolve the problems. The BSU stated they would refuse to participate unless classes were canceled. When classes were not canceled on 2 November, 2,000 students rallied, and police again beat and arrested students. In the first two weeks of the strike, the police arrested 148 participants.⁹¹ Though many Asian student activists participated in militant tactics, some were reluctant. AAPA member M. O. did not oppose the basic strategy because she believed that in order to gain ethnic studies, "the only answer at that time seemed to be: force them [administration]."⁹² However, she selectively chose not to participate in violent action. "When I got to the point of throwing, I could pick it up, but I couldn't throw it. I thought, 'no, my involvement will have to be in other ways.'"⁹³ Another student opposed those tactics as he saw that the debris was cleaned up by Third World workers, including his father, who worked as a custodian on campus.

Winter-Spring 1968: Repression and Continued Community Commitment

On 26 November, President Smith resigned, explaining his failure "to get from the chancellor and the trustees the resources and kinds of decisions I felt we needed... Further, we could not get them to look past serious provocative acts to basic problems."⁹⁴ However, underneath the "problems" were basic differences, which the trustees and California Governor Ronald Reagan clearly understood.

The silencing of liberals matched the rise of conservative national and state political figures. Following the election of Reagan as governor in 1966, Nixon became President in 1968. Republicans won the majority in both houses of the California state legislature. Through appointments, Reagan gained control of the state college Board of Trustees.⁹⁵ The naming of faculty member S. I. Hayakawa as president of the college was part of this political realignment. Hayakawa and colleagues in the Faculty Renaissance organization had courted Chancellor Dumke. They proposed to deliver ultimatums, restrict due process, suspend students, and fire disobeying faculty.⁹⁶ Hayakawa was a perfect choice, being of Japanese descent. He took a hard line against the student movement and served as a public spectacle for media consumption.

On 2 December, 1,500 gathered after Hayakawa's ban on campus rallies. Hayakawa personally jumped onto the sound truck and ripped off the speaker cords. As the crowd was attempting to leave, several hundred police sealed off a section of

campus and beat and arrested students, reporters, medics, and community supporters.⁹⁷ Hayakawa stated at a press conference, "This has been the most exciting day of my life since my tenth birthday, when I rode on a roller coaster for the first time!"⁹⁸

On the evening of 2 December, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) held an emergency meeting and voted to request strike sanction from the San Francisco Central Labor Council. Their main concerns were faculty issues, including a nine-unit teaching requirement. On 4 December, 6,000 persons rallied on campus, and on 6 December a large rally was marked by police violence and arrests.⁹⁹ On 11 December, the AFT set up an informal picket line in front of the administration building. And on 13 December, Hayakawa announced an early Christmas recess.

TWLF leaders noted the tentativeness of their alliance with the AFT, whose strike began 6 January. "We view it as positive that the AFT has finally gone on strike. It must be clear, however, that the AFT is, by their own admission, striking primarily for their own demands and only secondarily, under pressure, for the fifteen demands of TWLF."¹⁰⁰

As students, faculty, and community supporters gained strength, the university prepared to take more repressive measures. On 23 January, over 500 persons demonstrated on campus. Within five minutes, the police encircled the crowd and arrested 453 people.¹⁰¹ Many spokespersons were incarcerated, leaving a void in the organized leadership. P. Y. of AAPA summarized this period:

We just didn't have the money or the time to deal with 400 arrests at one time. At that point a lot of energy went preparing for trials.... From that point on, the strike went downhill. A lot of EOP students and people who weren't directly involved in the day to day organization just stopped showing up.... A large part of the white student population that had supported the strike stopped going to school.... And everybody's court dates were starting to come up.... Some people were being pulled in for probation violation, for previous arrests. That's what happened to me, all of February. I don't know what happened during the last part of the strike because I was in jail.¹⁰²

For the following months, much time was consumed in legal support efforts. Most trials took between four and six weeks, and by the year's end, 109 persons were convicted, and many served jail sentences.¹⁰³ Statewide, over 900 students and faculty were arrested on the state college campuses between November 1968 and March 1969.¹⁰⁴ This repression severely crippled the movement.

State repression impacted Asian students' understanding of the police in several ways. For AAPA member P. Y., this experience reinforced his developing understanding of society:

I think most kids have a real negative attitude [towards police]. What became clearer was that the political context they operated in... the role of the police [as] an internal army... against the working class and Third World people.¹⁰⁵

P. Y. was indicted and served a jail sentence. In jail, he saw that the treatment in prison epitomized the status of poor and Third World people in society. From his four-month internment, he learned that "jail is like almost any other segment of society... class is such a determining thing on people's lives. For me that put into

perspective a lot of the issues of the strike."¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Reagan, the trustees, Hayakawa were able to distort the strike through the media and sway public support for their repressive measures. For example, Hayakawa described students as "a gang of goons, gangsters, con men, neo-Nazis, and common thieves."¹⁰⁶ Also, in a statement to the U.S. Congress on 3 February 1969, he boasted about the use of police repression:

I believe that I have introduced something new to this business of preserving order on campuses. At most institutions the use of police is delayed as long as possible and when assistance is finally requested, the force is usually too small to handle the situation and new troubles develop. I went the other way.... The opposition has received my message. I think I have communicated successfully.¹⁰⁷

B. L. stated his anger at the mischaracterization of the strike in the popular media. Their main focus points were probably on Hayakawa and the so-called violence. Like maybe you break a window. But what about the inequity, the psychological damage inflicted on an individual and [the destruction] of their history. What about that kind of violence?¹⁰⁸

Negotiation and Evaluation

The internal weaknesses of the student movement and the external repression by the state forced students into a position of negotiating the "nonnegotiable" demands. Their negotiating power was weakened when the AFT returned to work on 5 March after voting 112–104 to end the strike, despite an unsatisfactory compromise.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, to prevent public questioning of their repressive strategy, Hayakawa and Reagan felt pressure to reopen the campus.

After several attempts, Hayakawa recognized a "Select Committee" of faculty which "expected to act with the full authority of the president"¹¹⁰ and negotiate with the TWLF. However, this committee was more liberal than Hayakawa, and it negotiated a compromise to his objection. On 14 March, the committee met with Hayakawa to formalize the settlement. Since Hayakawa was to leave at 9 A.M. for a meeting with President Nixon, their meeting was set for 7:30 A.M., at which time he was quoted as saying, "I'll give you a month.... If all is quiet by April 11, I'll consider your recommendations. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to catch my plane for Washington. Good morning."¹¹¹ Hayakawa never signed the negotiated resolution. TWLF members and faculty proceeded to implement the resolution.

It is important to note the BSU's reasons for entering negotiations with the administration. BSU Central Committee member Leroy Goodwin outlined "major contradictions" in a May 1969 *Black Fire* article. A major reason to enter negotiation was "the determination and support of the people rapidly decreasing due to a low political level, communication gaps, and paranoia or fear of the Central Committee." Also, he pointed to five classifications of opportunism which plagued the movement. They included: those who fronted as spokespersons and collected honorariums for themselves; those who left the struggle after the BSU secured their grades; spokespersons motivated by their personal prestige over the plight of the people; "shit slingers"

who mainly criticized; and disruptiveness of the Progressive Labor Party.¹¹² He concluded, saying sarcastically, "But we came to grips with the reality that the struggle of oppressed people was more important than fourteen individuals walking around with the myth of the revolution going on in their minds. Imagine a flea worried about losing face."¹¹³

The BSU summation reflects demoralization and an emphasis on internal problems. Although there were internal contradictions, they existed within a context. This context included the alliance of conservative forces, popular sanction of police repression, racism in society including chauvinism in the white left, and the youthfulness of the movement, which, among other things, lacked more experience and theoretical grounding to sustain itself in an organized form.

Community Commitment

The lives of Asian student activists were changed in many ways. A common theme, however, voiced by all participants focused on a deep-rooted commitment to social change for the benefit of their communities. Some students stated that the strike may not have drastically altered their life. E. I., for example, felt he "would have wound up here anyway,"¹¹⁴ working as a housing advocate and social worker. Others, like G. C., reflected upon the strike as a pivotal time in their lives:

I think it changed my life in terms of providing some focus to the extent that my career wasn't that important to me.... Take a look at the decisions people made back then. It was what the community needed first; and what you could contribute emanated from that.¹¹⁵

P. N. stated that her "what it means to be an Asian in American society" [sic]¹¹⁶ shaped her view of legal work:

I don't think I would have gone to law school if it hadn't been for the strike.... The reason why I did go to law school was to get some skills... to practice law, and look at law as a vehicle for social change.¹¹⁷

Others, including A. S., stated that student activism led them to utilize their skills in channeling resources to their communities "to build low-income housing, parks for the people."¹¹⁸ A. W. stated that though most of the leadership went into the community, he "chose to stay [to teach] in the university."¹¹⁹

Many activists expressed a feeling of personal liberation. Speaking out and taking stands to the point of facing serious consequences instilled a boldness of character. P. N. added that she became "more adventurous, less looking for the safe way to do things," while at the same time "more cautious" in dealing with the complexities of human nature.¹²⁰

M. W. discussed the political ramifications:

What it did is, I think, make me more politically conscious... when a person in administration, who is supposed to have authority, a title, ... [you find that those] people use that [power] to put the pressure on you. Then after getting involved with

bureaucrats and politicians, [you realize] that they are people like anyone else. I think that is one of the things I learned: not to be intimidated.¹²¹

Some activists left the campus with the view of reforming society. B. I. remarked "I saw myself as a reformist working within the system, to try and get those things that would benefit poor people, regardless of whether you are Black, White or Asian."¹²² However, others like P. N. added: "I'd always felt since the strike that what was necessary to eliminate or alleviate racism was a major restructuring of our society, both economically and in eliminating barriers in terms of participation of Third World people in all walks of life."¹²³

Conclusion: The Altered Terrain

Asian American students played a significant role in student movements of the sixties as clearly demonstrated in the San Francisco State strike. The struggle was unique in that it was situated in an urban, multiethnic, liberal, working-class city. Perhaps this more closely tied the campus struggle to the respective national movements, while at the same time making bonds between them. In their challenge to the university, Asian students followed in the legacies of Pilipino farm labor organizers, International Hotel tenants, and concentration camp resisters. Their demand for a relevant and accessible education stemmed from the aspirations of peoples who had fought for justice and equality since their arrival in the United States. And, in many ways, it was this legacy which steeled the movement and today frames a context to understand the long-lasting significance of the strike.

The most obvious accomplishment was the establishment of the first School of Ethnic Studies in the nation. This school partially met the terms outlined in the TWLF demands, including the commitment of over twenty-two faculty positions, the establishment of a Black Studies department upon which the other ethnic studies departments were based, student participation in the committee to recommend the final plan for the school, and faculty power commensurate with that accorded other college departments. In addition, unused special admission slots were promised to be filled in spring 1969. Campus disciplinary action was recommended to be limited to suspension through fall semester 1969. Demands to retain or fire individual personnel were not met. Though negotiations fell short of meeting the demands in full, the school remains the largest national program in its faculty size and course offerings. The winning of these concessions set a precedent for other universities to follow. In fact, the organization and militancy shown by San Francisco State students led some administrators at other campuses to initiate minor concessions.

A less tangible, but equally significant, outcome of the strike was the emergence of a new generation of fighters who either remained on campus or entered their communities. Many took the concept of self-determination to establish self-help programs to continue political education and promote self-reliance. Many formed or joined organizations to define a collective approach to addressing problems. Some pursued advanced degrees to secure positions of influence within the system, while

others concentrated on grassroots organizing to build progressive, community-based movements. Almost without exception, those interviewed affirmed a deep commitment to the basic values and beliefs forged during their days as students active in the strike; many traced their convictions to the period of the strike itself.

The legacy of the strike has also set the terrain for another generation of Asian students. Stemming from the post-1965 immigration, today's students have formed organizations based on the foundations set by an earlier generation. The institutionalization of ethnic studies and affirmative action programs has not only given students important support systems but has also led to greater political influence for Asians in higher education.

These gains, however, have been increasingly contested. Then-governor Reagan launched his political career to become President of the United States, marking the rise of the New Right. The U.S. economic decline has resulted in government cuts in education and social programs. Universities increasingly rely on private donations, defense-related contracts, and foundation grants, influencing the priorities of the university. Meanwhile, it is estimated that one-half of all ethnic studies programs have already been eliminated. Of those which remain, much of the emphasis has shifted away from the original intent for social change. Most programs have not enjoyed programmatic autonomy or student/community involvement in decision making, and many have lost relevance to community needs. Support for affirmative action has also waned. Since the landmark Bakke decision in 1978, minimum quotas for minority admissions have turned into invisible ceilings for Asians who are perceived as "overrepresented." The attention called to these unfair practices is now being used to question affirmative action for Chicanos, African Americans, and Native Americans. And Asians have been effectively eliminated from virtually all such programs. Tenure cases, particularly for minority faculty, have become battlegrounds over the definition of legitimate and relevant research. In short, the essence of the conflict in the San Francisco State strike remains central today.

The strike offers no blueprint for movements today. Its history, however, begins to reveal the nature of clashes between students and administrators. It reminds us that the existence of ethnic studies and special programs for oppressed groups has only been the result of hard-fought struggle. Students of today's movements can study this history as a benchmark to assess their own conditions. And, with that, democratic empowerment movements may set a new terrain for the next generation.

NOTES

1. R. Q., Interview, 11 September 1985, San Francisco.
2. B. I., Interview, 5 September 1985, San Francisco.
3. See also, Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York, 1974) and Harry Edwards, *Black Students* (New York, 1970).
4. I. C., Interview, 13 September 1985, San Francisco.
5. A. S., Interview, 12 September 1985, Fremont, California.
6. J. M., Interview, 11 September 1985, San Francisco.
7. B. I., Interview, 5 September 1985, San Francisco.

8. E. D. C., Interview, 3 September 1985, San Francisco.
9. William Barlow and Peter Shapiro, *An End to Silence: The San Francisco State College Movement of the 60s* (New York, 1971), 49.
10. Ibid., 68.
11. Robert Smith, Richard Axen, and DeVere Pentony, *By Any Means Necessary: The Revolutionary Struggle at San Francisco State* (San Francisco, 1970), 39.
12. Ibid., 8.
13. DeVere Pentony, Robert Smith, and Richard Aven, *Unfinished Rebellions* (San Francisco, 1971), 25.
14. Master Plan Survey Team, *A Master Plan for Higher Education in California, 1960-70* (Sacramento, 1960), 43.
15. Ibid., 73.
16. Ibid., 60.
17. Ibid., 74.
18. Staff Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence prepared by William H. Orrick, Jr., *Shut It Down! A College in Crisis; San Francisco State College* (Washington, D.C., 1969), 75. Figures not available for other ethnic groups.
19. E. Hornsby Wasson, "Business and Campus Unrest" (Speech delivered 16 January 1969), *Vital Speeches* 35:11 (15 March 1969): 335.
20. B. I., Interview, 10 September 1985, San Francisco.
21. For a discussion on the influence of Malcolm X on the African American student movement, see Harry Edwards, *Black Students* (New York, 1970).
22. Compiled from William Barlow and Peter Shapiro, *An End to Silence*; Kuregiy Helmaria, "The Third World Movement and Its History in the San Francisco State College Strike of 1968-69" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1972).
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24. Ibid.
25. I. C., Interview, 13 September 1985, San Francisco.
26. J. C., Interview, September 1985, San Francisco.
27. Ibid.
28. M. W., Interview, 13 September 1985, San Francisco.
29. See Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated and with an introduction by Samuel Griffith (London, 1963).
30. M. W., Interview, 13 September 1985, San Francisco.
31. *East West*, 28 August 1968, 1, 4.
32. *East West*, 4 September 1968, 12.
33. A. W., Interview, September 1985.
34. ICSA Position Paper, mimeographed, Special Collections Library, San Francisco State University.
35. Ibid.
36. G. W., Interview, 21 March 1987, San Francisco.
37. Ibid.
38. Alex Hing, "'On Strike, Shut It Down!': Reminiscences of the S. F. State Strike," *East Wind* 2:2 (Fall/Winter 1983): 42.
39. G. W., Interview, 21 March 1987, San Francisco.
40. A. S., Interview, 12 September 1985.
41. "Statement of the Philippine-American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) Philosophy and Goals" mimeograph.
42. P. S., Interviews, 14 May, 6 June 1986.
43. "PACE (Philippine-American Collegiate Endeavor) Program, S. F. State," mimeographed.
44. E. I., Interview, 13 September 1985, San Francisco.
45. Ibid.
46. Mimeographed roster of PACE members.
47. P. N., Interviews, 27 May 1984 and 11 September 1985.
48. Ibid.
49. "AAPA Is," *Asian American Political Alliance Newspaper* 1 (UC Berkeley, late 1968): 4.
50. "AAPA Perspectives," *Asian American Political Alliance Newspaper* 1:5 (UC Berkeley, fall 1969): 7.
51. P. N., Interviews, 27 May 1984 and 11 September 1985.
52. P. Y., Interviews, May 1984 and 9 September 1985.
53. M. O., Interview, 14 September 1985, San Francisco.
54. Y. W., Interview, 4 September 1985, San Francisco.
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56. Coordinating Council for Higher Education, *California Higher Education and the Disadvantaged: A Status Report* (Sacramento, March 1968), table v.
57. "Third World Liberation Front, School of Ethnic Area Studies," mimeographed packet,
58. I. C., Interview, 13 September 1985.
59. R. Q., Interview, 11 September 1985.
60. M. W., Interview, 13 September 1985.
61. Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 332.
62. "School for Ethnic Area Studies."
63. Pentony et al., *Unfinished Rebellions*, 51.
64. Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 134.
65. Coordinating Council for Higher Education, *California Higher Education*, 53.
66. Barlow and Shapiro, *An End to Silence*, 167-170; "After the Strike: A Conference on Ethnic Studies Proceedings" (School of Ethnic Studies, San Francisco State University; Proceedings from 12, 13, 14 April 1984 Conference), 14; Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 58-59.
67. Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 50-51.
68. P. N., Interviews, 27 May 1984 and 11 September 1985.
69. TWLF Newsletter, n. d.
70. Barlow and Shapiro, *An End to Silence*.
71. Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 140-141.
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78. Staff report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence prepared by William H. Orrick, 52.
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80. Quoted in Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 29.
81. Ibid., 113.
82. Campus Violence—Crackdown Coming: Interview with Glenn S. Dumke, "Leading College Official," *U.S. News and World Report* 65 (23 September 1968): 49.
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86. Dikran Karagueuzian, *Blow It Up! The Black Student Revolt at San Francisco State College and the Emergence of Dr. Hayakawa* (Boston, 1971), 100–102.
87. Quotes in Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 144–145.
88. Events compiled from Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*; Barlow and Shapiro, *An End to Silence*; Karagueuzian, *Blow It Up!*; and various chronologies.
89. Barlow and Shapiro, *An End to Silence*.
90. Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 166.
91. Ibid.
92. M. O., Interview, 14 September 1985.
93. Smith et al., *By Any Means Necessary*, 187.
94. Ibid., 90.
95. Ibid., 207–208.
96. Barlow and Shapiro, *An End to Silence*, 263–264.
97. Ibid., 264.
98. Ibid., 267–269 for a fuller account.
99. Quoted in Smith et al., 258–259.
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107. "Statement by President S. I. Hayakawa, of San Francisco State College: Order on Campuses," *Congressional Record* 115 (3 February 1969): 2462.
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110. Ibid., 311.
111. Ibid.
112. *Black Fire* [San Francisco] (May 1969).
113. Ibid.
114. E. I., Interview, 13 September 1985, San Francisco.
115. G. C., Interview, September 1985, San Francisco.
116. P. N., Interviews, 27 May 1984 and 11 September 1985, San Francisco.
117. Ibid.
118. A. S., Interview, 12 September 1985.
119. A. W., Interview, September 1985, San Francisco.
120. P. N., Interviews, 27 May 1984 and 11 September 1985, San Francisco.
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122. B. L., Interview, 5 September 1985, San Francisco.
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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 movement 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 recovered buried cultural traditions as well as 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 antiwar 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 policymakers 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 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?

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 policymakers 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 move-

ments 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' *The Imagination of the New Left: A Global Analysis of 1968*, and special issues of various journals, including *Witness*, *Social Review*, and *Radical America*.

However, as Winifred Breines states in an interesting review essay titled "Who Was the New Left?", most of the retrospects 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 retrospects 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 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 legitimization" 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 fias 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 towards institutions and values that demean[ed] people and a concomitant awareness of people's rights.⁷

The San Francisco State Strike's Legacy

The retrospects about the 1960s 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 Amer-

ican 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 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 farmworkers, 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 following 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 international Third World leaders and revolutions occurring in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Fourth, the strike in its demands for open admissions, community control of education, ethnic studies, and self-determination 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 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 transfor-

mation 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 charting 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 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 highrises, 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 of “serve the people” redefined the traditional counselor/client relationship by stressing interaction, dialogue, and community building. Within community organizations, members exper-

imented 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 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, etc. 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. DuBois, 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 to 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 American rally during that period: "The people, and the people alone, are the main force in the making of world history." Originating in the Chinese revolution, Asian American activists adapted the slogan 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 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, 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 for 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 to suddenly 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.

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 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 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 considered themselves entitled to before." According to Huntington, this upsurge of "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, must find a way to exercise more control. And that meant curtailing the rights of "mass 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 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 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 hate crimes directed toward Asian Americans of all ethnicities and income levels; 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—revitalizing more established communities, such as Chinatowns, around the nation. Some recent immigrant businesspeople, 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 Honda 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 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 Hawaiians 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 amidst 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 es-

specially 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 Asia 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 are missing from the analyses that 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 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 struggle 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 in 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 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 decade of the 1980s.

Strange and New Political Animals: Asian American Neoconservatives

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 antiAsian 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 Dan 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 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 peoples 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 fellow travelers of the Ku Klux Klan, or ideologues attached to Reagan and Bush. Perhaps the group that 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 class. 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 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 twenty-five 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. In 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 warily eye the neoconservatives, considering them as 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.

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 towards organizational authoritarianism and theoretical rigidity.²²

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.

African 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 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 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, 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 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 over 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 prodefense; they boast strong families that 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 setaside 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 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 if, 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 Hawaii 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 comprised 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 been simply demographic. The political landscape has also changed due to 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 of the Asian American community of the 1990s. On the one hand, there is a massive 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 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.³

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 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 that labor struggles have played in shaping our history.³² Labor history is part of the legacy that activists must reclaim.

In contrast to the lack of knowledge about Asian American workers, we have 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 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 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 Jonhson, 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—following 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 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 severely impacted 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 eighteen-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 work 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 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 assisting 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 enflaming 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 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 work place, 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, AFL-CIO, 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 the union and 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 fundamentally change 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 policymakers 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. The stereotype has become the dominant image 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 that 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 comprise 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" to African Americans' involvement in civil rights marches, rallies, and sit-ins. By the late 1970s, the stereo-

type 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. This offensive also included an ideological campaign designed to restore trust in capitalism and values associated with free enterprise. Meanwhile, conservatives and neoconservatives fought to refine the language 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—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—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 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.

Thus, 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 generations 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."⁴⁴

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

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.⁴⁵

—Malcolm X

NOTES

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16. See Mary Kao, compiler, "Public Record, 1989: What Have We Learned from the 60s and 70s?" *Amerasia Journal*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1989, pp. 95-158.
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42. Author's interview with K. W. Lee, Los Angeles, California, October 1991.
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44. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam" speech, Riverside Church, New York, April 1967.
45. Malcolm X, interview on Pierre Breton Show, January 19, 1965, in *Malcolm X Speaks*, ed. George Breitman, New York: Grove Press, 1966, p. 216.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Trace the evolution of the San Francisco State College Strike outlined by Umemoto. What motivated the strike? Who was involved? In what ways did the strike transform the consciousness of its participants? What other struggles evolved out of the strike? What were the significant effects of the strike, and what legacy did it leave behind for Asian Americans?
2. Omatsu contends that the 1970s signaled the ultimate disintegration of the social movements founded in the 1960s, specifically those movements centered on the liberation of racial and ethnic minorities. How did this process of disintegration contribute to what Omatsu calls "the winter of civil rights"? What implications were there for Asian American Studies?
3. How did the political landscape change for Asian America in the 1980s? Why were the 1980s an ambiguous period for Asian American empowerment? How does this period compare with the 1960s and with the 1990s? Are the concepts developed during the Asian American movement—self-determination, liberation, militant struggle—meaningful and relevant to Asian Americans today? 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?

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Part II

Making History
The Asian American Experience