

ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

JOHN F. KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



Volume XV • 2006

Heterogeneity: Deconstructing Asian America

INTERVIEWS

**From Chinatown to City Council: An Interview with Sam Yoon,
Boston City Councilor**
Interviewed by PJ Kim

**In the Pursuit of Justice: An Interview with Karen Narasaki,
Asian American Justice Center**
Interviewed by Eugene Yoon

RESEARCH

**Electoral Politics and the Contexts of Empowerment, Displacement,
and Diaspora for Boston's Vietnamese and Cambodian American
Communities**
Peter Nien-chu Kiang and Shirley Suet-ling Tang

**Out of Time: Asian Americans, Time Limits, and Welfare Reform in
California**
Dana Y. Nakano

COMMENTARIES

**How MTV and Other Corporations Are Challenging Asian America:
An Examination of the Business Perspective on Asian American
Identity**
Daniel Y. Jang

Heterogeneity
Hua Ting-ting Liang

BOOK REVIEW

Assimilation at the Cost of Authenticity
Kenji Yoshino's
Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights (2006)
Reviewed by Rebecca K. Lee

FILM REVIEW

Grace Lee as Asian America:
A Film Review of *The Grace Lee Project* (2005)
Reviewed by David S. Lee

NGO SPOTLIGHT

Reflections of a Nepalese American NGO
Omprakash Gnawali and Atul Pokharel



ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

Support the Review

As an independent journal, we rely on the generosity of subscribers and donors like you.

About the Review

The *Asian American Policy Review* is a student-run journal published annually at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Subscriptions

Current volumes are available at \$40 per copy for libraries and other institutions, \$20 for individuals, and \$10 for students. Back issues are also available for purchase.

Donations

Donations in support of the *Asian American Policy Review* are tax-deductible as a gift under the John F. Kennedy School of Government's nonprofit IRS 501 (c) (3) status. Grants and other contributory assistance should specify intent for use by the *Asian American Policy Review* in order to facilitate processing.

For all inquiries regarding submissions, advertising, and subscriptions, please contact us at:

Asian American Policy Review
John F. Kennedy School of
Government
Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 496-8655
Fax: (617) 384-9555
aapr@ksg.harvard.edu
www.ksg.harvard.edu/aapr

ASIAN

AMERICAN

POLICY

REVIEW

Volume XV • 2006

Fifteenth Issue



John F. Kennedy School of Government

Harvard University

The articles, commentaries, interviews, book reviews, and additional editorial content appearing in the *Asian American Policy Review* do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the sponsoring university, or the members of the advisory boards.

© 2006 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. All rights reserved. Except as otherwise specified, no article or portion herein is to be reproduced or adapted to other works without the expressed written consent of the editors of the *Asian American Policy Review*.

ISSN# 1062-1830

BOARD MEMBERS

EXECUTIVE ADVISORY BOARD

Fred Wang, Chair
Wang Foundation

Rod Hsiao

Sharon Maeda
United Methodist Church

Grant Ujifusa
Almanac of American Politics

ACADEMIC ADVISOR

Dr. Richard Parker
Harvard University

HONORARY BOARD

The Honorable March Fong Eu
Former Ambassador, Federated States
of Micronesia

The Honorable Dennis Hayashi
AC Transit Director

Henry Hwang
Rock Asia Capital Group, Ltd.

Peter Kiang
University of Massachusetts Boston

Elaine H. Kim
University of California, Berkeley

Lee C. Lee
Professor Emeritus, Cornell University

ACADEMIC ADVISORY BOARD

Angelo Ancheta
Harvard University

Archon Fung
Harvard University

Taeku Lee
University of California, Berkeley

Pei-te Lien
University of Utah

Donald T. Nakanishi
University of California, Los Angeles

Paul Watanabe
University of Massachusetts Boston

Robert George Lee
Brown University

The Honorable Norman Mineta
U.S. Department of Transportation

Irene Natividad
Natividad & Associates

William G. Ouchi
University of California, Los Angeles

Ronald Takaki
University of California, Berkeley

William Tamayo
U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

Elizabeth Ahn Toupin
Dean Emeritus, Tufts University

L. Ling-chi Wang
University of California, Berkeley

S.B. Woo
University of Delaware

Benjamin Wu
U.S. Department of Commerce

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Liza Khan
Cecilia Mo

Managing Editors

Sharon Chae
Samuel S. Lee

Associate Publisher: Subscription and Marketing

Sharon Chae

Associate Publisher: Finance

Linda Lee

Editorial Staff

David An
Autumn Chang
Vishal Gujadhur
Peter Kim
Kyong-Eun Koh
Kai-Yan Lee
Linda Lee
Therese Leung
Holger Siebrecht

Publisher

Christine Connare

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Richard Parker

Special Thanks To

Angelo Ancheta
Helaine Daniels
Dean David Ellwood
Archon Fung
Dean Joseph McCarthy
Elizabeth Ahn Toupin
Fred Wang
Asian Pacific American Law Students Association
Kennedy School Student Government

FROM THE EDITORS

Our staff is pleased to present the fifteenth annual volume of the *Asian American Policy Review (AAPR)* of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The theme of this year's journal is "Heterogeneity: Deconstructing Asian America." Our theme reflects the concept that there is no single Asian American identity in the United States today. The work of the artists, policy makers, and scholars in this journal explores the multifaceted dimensions of Asian American lives and communities, the implications of heterogeneity for Asian American life, and the policies that shape and are increasingly shaped by it.

This volume features interviews with two dynamic individuals who have emerged as influential policy leaders and advocates for the Asian American community. **Sam Yoon**, a Boston City Council member and graduate of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, candidly shares his experiences as the first Asian American to hold elected office in Boston to Kennedy School student **PJ Kim**. Being involved in a movement to join together Blacks, Latinos, and Asians to advance a common agenda for communities of color in Boston, Yoon describes the importance of constructing a unifying, common group between all Asian American groups and different minority communities. **Karen Narasaki**, president and executive director of the Asian American Justice Center, discusses this year's theme in an interview conducted by Kennedy School student **Eugene Yoon**. Narasaki describes the issues, like immigration, that have been successful in bringing together the diverse elements of the Asian American community. At the same time, in her remarks to Yoon, Narasaki also reflects on some of those issues that have been more divisive among Asian Americans, like affirmative action.

This year, the editorial staff has selected two research articles that further explore the issue of heterogeneity. **Peter Nien-chu Kiang** and **Shirley Suet-ling Tang** examine how two Asian American communities in Boston united to advocate for racial justice during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their research demonstrates that unity within a heterogeneous community is not only possible but can also lead to political change. **Dana Y. Nakano** explores one possible unifying issue in the California context. Nakano studies the impact of the federal welfare reform policy of 1996 on different minority groups. Assessing the data in California, Nakano argues that the reform has had a disproportionate number of Asian Americans in California being pushed off of welfare and analyzes the factors that led to this reality.

To elucidate the importance of seeing differences as well as commonalities between different Asian American subgroups, we include two timely commentaries. A commentary by **Daniel Y. Jang** examines MTV's recent foray into the Asian American entertainment market. From Jang's perspective, the company's decision to create a number of channels targeted to specific Asian American subgroups reflects an awareness of the non-monolithic and increasingly diverse Asian American population. **Hua Ting-ting Liang** writes a commentary on this year's theme arguing that the heterogeneity in Asian American identity can and should be bridged to move Asian American policy forward. Without doing so,

Liang argues, the Asian American community risks failure in creating a political voice loud enough to achieve necessary social, political, and economic goals.

From the world of art, **Rebecca K. Lee** writes a review of **Kenji Yoshino's** memoir and cultural critique *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* highlighting both the dangers and attributes of "covering" identity to assimilate to dominant cultural norms. Politically, socially, and economically, Yoshino suggests, covering may be a necessity, but it can also come at great personal costs. **David S. Lee** reviews the film *The Grace Lee Project*, directed by Grace Lee, which follows the lives of Korean women living across the United States who share a single attribute, the name **Grace Lee**. The film highlights the fact that while all these women might share the same name, the lives they lead are quite different. Asian American identity, Lee concludes, cannot be reduced to simple stereotypes in much the same way a single woman cannot represent every Grace Lee.

Finally, this volume includes a spotlight of the Nepalese Children's Education Fund (NCEF), a Nepalese American NGO. Written by two founding members, **Omprakash Gnawali** and **Atul Pokharel**, the spotlight shows how NCEF attempts to enable poor children in Nepal to obtain basic levels of education. *AAPR* hopes to begin a tradition of highlighting the positive advocacy and policy work done by Asian Americans.

Creating this year's journal would not have been possible without the endless support and assistance provided by **Christine Connare**, our journal publisher. Christine's experience and aid paved every stage of the editorial and publication processes. We would like to thank our managing editors, **Sharon Chae** and **Samuel Lee**, whose spirit, energy, and hard work brought new life into the journal's office and pages. We would also like to thank the *AAPR* staff. This year's staff has been incredible. Finally, we are grateful to **Fred Wang** and the **Wang Foundation** for his generous and enduring support of the *AAPR*.

This year's journal reflects the enthusiasm of an excellent staff. We hope that you find each piece in this edition of the *AAPR* as engaging and informative as we have regarding important issues affecting the Asian American community.

Liza Khan
Cecilia Mo
Co-Editors-in-Chief

FIFTEENTH ISSUE

Volume XV • 2006

Heterogeneity: Deconstructing Asian America

INTERVIEWS

From Chinatown to City Council: An Interview with Sam Yoon,
Boston City Councilor

Interviewed by PJ Kim 1

In the Pursuit of Justice: An Interview with Karen Narasaki,
Asian American Justice Center

Interviewed by Eugene Yoon 7

RESEARCH

Electoral Politics and the Contexts of Empowerment,
Displacement, and Diaspora for Boston's Vietnamese
and Cambodian American Communities

Peter Nien-chu Kiang and Shirley Suet-ling Tang 13

Out of Time: Asian Americans, Time Limits, and Welfare
Reform in California

Dana Y. Nakano 31

COMMENTARIES

How MTV and Other Corporations Are Challenging Asian America: An
Examination of the Business Perspective on Asian American Identity

Daniel Y. Jang 49

Heterogeneity

Hua Ting-ting Liang 57

BOOK REVIEW

Assimilation at the Cost of Authenticity

Kenji Yoshino's *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (2006)

Reviewed by Rebecca K. Lee 59

FILM REVIEW

Grace Lee as Asian America: A Film Review of *The Grace Lee Project* (2005)

Reviewed by David S. Lee 63

NGO SPOTLIGHT

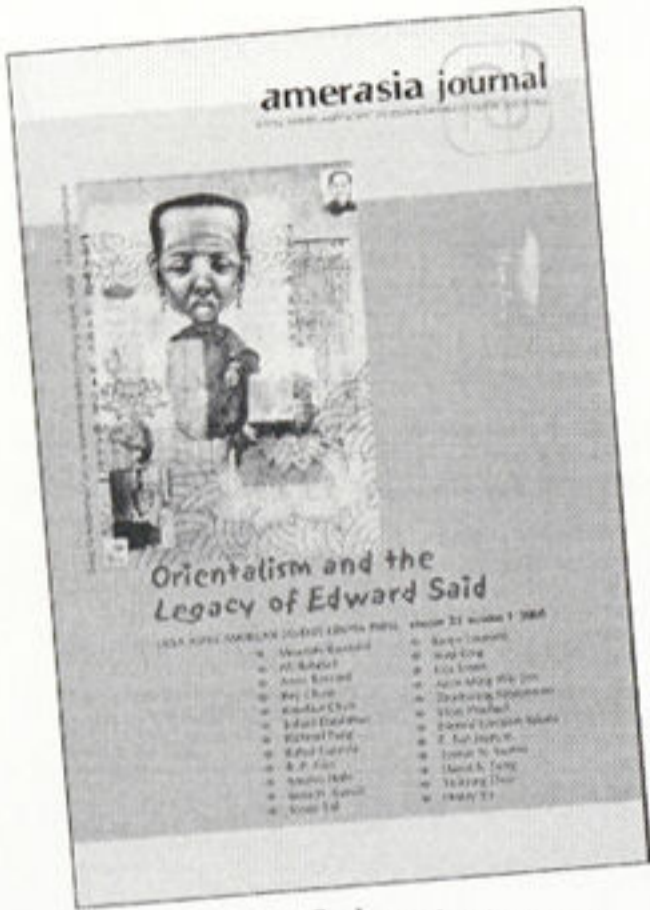
Reflections of a Nepalese American NGO

Omprakash Gnawali and Atul Pokharel 67

SUBSCRIBE

Amerasia Journal:

Asian American/Pacific Islander/Transcultural Societies



Every issue of *Amerasia Journal* offers you in-depth articles, essays, and perspectives on Asian American history, social issues, immigration, politics, economy, literature and culture; community studies; and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and Asia. The national interdisciplinary journal of independent scholarship, criticism, and literature on Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and transcultural studies.

▲ Subscriptions ▲
 three issues/year ▲ All *Amerasia Journal* subscribers receive a free subscription to *CrossCurrents*, newsmagazine of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center.
www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO: **UC Regents**

MAILING ADDRESS: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press
 3230 Campbell Hall, Box 951546
 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1546

▲ (310) 825-2968/2974 FAX (310) 206-9844

ORDER BY EMAIL: aascpress@aasc.ucla.edu

I want to subscribe to *Amerasia Journal*

- \$35.00/year (individual)* \$_____
- \$295.00/year (institution)* _____
- Students—\$20 for 1-year subscription*
 (photocopy of current student identification required) _____
- *California residents add 8.25% sales tax _____
- Foreign subscriptions add \$15.00 per year _____
- Total \$_____

Name _____

Address _____

State _____ Zip _____

Credit Card Number VISA/MASTERCARD/DISCOVER accepted _____ Expiration Date _____

Signature _____ Phone # _____

From Chinatown to City Council: An Interview with Sam Yoon, Boston City Councilor

Interviewed by PJ Kim

Introduction

When Sam Yoon won a seat on the Boston City Council in 2005, he made history as the first Asian American to hold elected office in Boston. During his historic run, Yoon made economic development, public education, affordable housing, and public safety the centerpieces of his campaign. He believes these issues are key to making Boston a better, stronger, and safer place to live.

Prior to his election to the city council, Yoon worked for numerous community-based nonprofits. Most recently, he was development director for the Asian Community Development Corporation (ACDC), working to create affordable housing and economic development in Boston's Chinatown. He has also been involved in a number of volunteer activities including The New Majority—a coalition of Blacks, Latinos, and Asians who have joined together to advance a common agenda for communities of color in Boston—of which he was a founding member and core steering committee member.

Yoon is a graduate of the Kennedy School of Government and Princeton University.

The following interview was conducted by *AAPR* staff member PJ Kim in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 2 February 2006.

PJ Kim is a Soros Fellow concurrently pursuing a master's in public administration at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and a master's in business administration at Harvard Business School. He was born in South Korea, grew up in Louisiana and Tennessee, and became a U.S. citizen in 1999. He received an undergraduate degree from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School for Public and International Affairs and seeks a career in public service that combines his interests in entrepreneurship, New York City redevelopment, and politics.

Interview with Sam Yoon

AAPR

As a city councilor, what are the most important issues that you deal with every day?

Yoon

Well, because the election was so recent, I am still working on figuring out what is most important politically. The issues are clear to me: affordable housing, access to quality schools, crime and violence, being a voice for the voiceless. The tricky part—the politics—lies in how we as a city, and I as a city councilor, make progress in those areas. How soon? How much? Who is involved? Who is not?

AAPR

What was your path to public service, and how was it influenced by your family and professional background?

Yoon

My inspiration to run for office came largely out of my work in Chinatown. In that sense, it was very recent. Running for office was not a lifelong dream. In fact, I am almost embarrassed to say, I came out of the Kennedy School of Government in 1995 quite cynical about government and its ability to effect real and lasting change. Obviously I've changed my mind about this.

What I saw during my time in Chinatown was that elected officials can make a huge difference. I worked directly with two state legislators, one of whom is now the speaker of the House [Representative Sal DiMasi] and the other the most powerful politician of color in the state [Senator Dianne Wilkerson)], to file legislation that would return a piece of state-owned land to Chinatown. Even though that bill was never passed, their involvement and their advocacy alone spurred the entire community to unite behind this cause and gave me the power to push for change.

In addition, my Kennedy School training was incredibly important in enabling me to make connections between what was happening in people's lives to what was financially feasible to what was politically possible. My family, of course, was a major influence in my life decisions. Keep in mind that even before I ran for office, I was doing public service. After the Kennedy School, I was committed to working only for nonprofit organizations, specifically because public benefit, as opposed to profit, was their primary goal. My father was a doctor and my mother was a stay-at-home mom, but their life really was about service to their community, which was our Korean American church community. I think this must have had a profound influence on my life and my values. I saw that a good life was one in which you serve others.

AAPR

Can you provide some background on your previous work as the development director for the Asian Community Development Corporation?

Yoon

At ACDC I was charged with developing affordable housing in Chinatown. I did this from about 2002 to 2005, right before I began campaigning full time for city council. Chinatown in Boston has the unique characteristic of still being a gateway community for recent immigrants, while also having some of the highest real estate values in the city, given Boston's market pressures and its downtown location. It is also a very small neighborhood of maybe 40 or 50 acres in size. So this means that land is very expensive, and therefore you have to justify this expense by building big and often high affordable housing or no affordable housing. Projects that are twenty stories tall, costing up to \$100 million aren't really the kind of project that a small nonprofit with a small budget can take on by itself. And so ACDC had to partner with deep-pocketed, for-profit developers.

It's fair to say that my work at ACDC, in contrast to other housing nonprofits I have worked at, was more about organizing than about development per se. This was by necessity. Because I understood real estate development and finance, and because I also understood the needs of the community, the role I had to play was to create a community process for the neighborhood as well as a partnership agreement with a developer that would create as much low-income housing as possible. And you can imagine, given Chinatown's history of exploitation, its isolation, and the money that is involved in high-rise development, this work was inherently political. It was really good training for what I am doing now.

AAPR

How did growing up in rural Illinois and Pennsylvania color your view of race? Do you remember a point at which you became race conscious?

Yoon

I remember a scene from my childhood in Illinois when I had to do a book report on Abraham Lincoln. This was probably when I was in the second or third grade, and I had this realization that I can't be like Abraham Lincoln because I'm Korean. This was one of the early memories I have of being conscious of my race and realizing that I'm in a world that may or may not accept me because I am an Asian American. Ironically enough, I'm reading a biography of Lincoln these days. and now I'm thinking, "Hey, I can do this."

AAPR

One of the effects of the model minority myth is that most people just assume that Asian Americans are a monolithic group. They don't know about the different subgroups and the variations in terms of class and economic status. Do you think that this perception of the Asian community is changing? And then, even outside of it, in terms of the need to look at issues that cut across different communities, like housing, do you see that as one of your roles? Or do you feel like you have a broader goal?

Yoon

Well, I do. I have both, definitely. I have a role to play within the Asian American community, for sure. Then I have a role to play in the larger community as being someone who represents or has had a leadership role and, therefore, needs to explain or represent or be an ambassador to other communities. I definitely do both.

First, with respect to the Asian community, through the campaign, I had circumstances which allowed me to shuttle between three large Asian communities. I lived in Fields Corner, and so to the Vietnamese community, I would say, "I'm your neighbor." I hadn't lived there that long before starting the campaign—only about two years. But nevertheless, I said, "I'm your neighbor." And the Vietnamese people would reply, "Oh, you're our neighbor. Plus, you're Asian."

In the Chinese community, I had the benefit of having worked in Chinatown for so many years. I knew a lot of the community. I'd say, "I know the community. I work for your community." And then being a Korean American, who are mostly in the suburbs, I would obviously say, "I'm your son." I had the opportunity to say, "I'm proud to be a Korean American," in one part of my speech and then say, "We need to do this for the Asian American community." The other parts of the speech reinforced both of these statements, saying I'm proud of who I am ethnically, but there is a broader context. Also, with the Chinese community, I learned how to write my Chinese name, and I showed that to people and said, "I have that connection with you." That was a really important thing to do.

The model minority myth—I'll tell you flat out—the campaign exploited that. Because if you have to choose a myth, this is probably not the worst one to have. But to what extent does it affect people's understanding of the real problems that we have as Asian Americans? I think that's something that requires more work, in terms of explaining.

But we're starting that in Boston, for sure. I know *The Boston Globe* is covering a lot more stories about the Vietnamese community and peeling behind the layers of the food and the Vietnam War and seeing more depth to their community and issues—the same with all the other Asian American communities. That will definitely start to happen.

In fact, in May, during Asian Pacific Heritage Month, I will be doing a series of town-hall style meetings in Chinatown, in Fields Corner, and a section of Boston called Allston-Brighton, which is home to a growing number of Asian immigrants. Leaders from the Chinese and Vietnamese communities are putting this together so we can address issues that affect Asian residents in the city. Some of those issues may be crosscutting issues like schools and housing. Others may be unique to us like ESL classes, linguistic access in government, immigrant rights, voter registration, small business ownership, and so on.

AAPR

One of the dynamics in big cities like Los Angeles and New York is that Asian American communities are very fragmented. Multiple Asian American candidates run, splitting the Asian American vote. What do you think the likelihood is of that happening in Boston? Also, how can you build a sense of pan-Asian ethnicity

among Chinese, Cambodians, and Koreans who might not necessarily know each other or talk to each other or even like each other?

Yoon

In Boston, the number of Asian Americans, collectively, is so few that we have no choice but to cooperate to get somebody in. And that's exactly what happened. To the extent that there is proliferation within communities who run their own candidates, that's actually happened in one particular state representative race in Boston. There was an open seat in a district where there was a large Haitian community. Three Haitian Americans were in the race, along with two Irish American candidates. And there was all this consternation about it.

But let it happen. I would welcome more Asian Americans entering a race, even if he or she competes against me. I think that if the race is a race that is run with integrity, it will only ensure that the best-qualified candidate will win. Incidentally, a Haitian American won that state rep race, and she won by a landslide. People in her district and throughout the city were ecstatic.

AAPR

How do you think you'll be able to link local issues that got you elected to the larger state and national issues? I'm sure a lot of people will look to you on things like foreign policy, gay marriage, and policy towards North Korea, hate crimes, and affirmative action. How do you think you'll be able to balance the nuts and bolts of being a city councilman at-large versus being pulled into these very issue-specific things that don't have a direct bearing on your district?

Yoon

Well it all depends on the audience. I don't think I necessarily need to make a link with those types of issues, unless it's relevant to the audience that I'm talking to.

I have no problem commenting on anything that has a national scope. But people will have to understand that my role in the city council limits me from actually doing anything about it other than being someone who can influence opinion or take a very vocal stance on, or how people organize around, that kind of issue.

I think a large part of being a local elected official that has had national interest, especially from the Asian community, is definitely going to be about being relevant to what people care about, particularly to those who supported me. I think that's just one of the roles of someone who is a leader in an elected office.

AAPR

Thank you very much for your time.

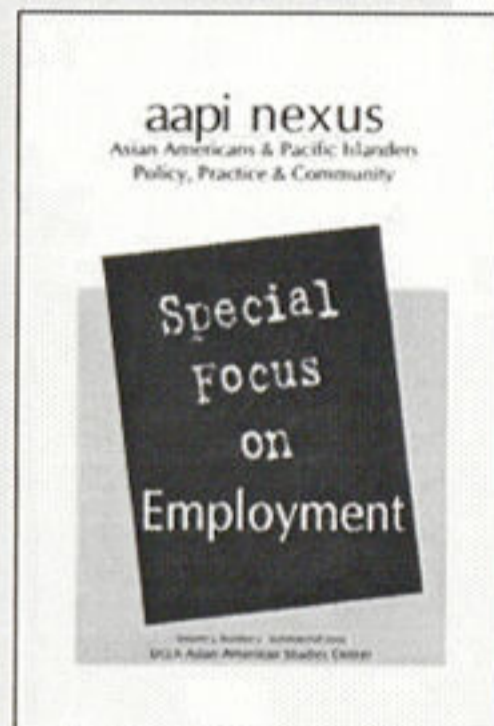
aapi nexus

Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders
Policy, Practice and Community

AAPI Nexus: Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders Policy, Practice, and Community draws from professional schools, applied social science scholars and practitioners with the explicit goal of reinvigorating Asian American Studies' traditional mission of serving communities and generating practical research.

Past issues have focused on:
Community Development (1:1, 2003);
Civil Rights (2:1, 2004); Voting (2:2, 2004);
Health (3:1, 2005); Employment (3:2, 2005);
and Glass Ceiling? & Health Data (4:1, 2006)

www.aasc.ucla.edu/aascpress/nexuscollection.htm



MAILING ADDRESS: UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press
3230 Campbell Hall ❖ Box 951546 ❖ Los Angeles, CA 90095-1546
(310) 825-2968 ❖ FAX: (310) 206-9844 ❖ E-mail: aascpress@aasc.ucla.edu

YES, I would like a 1-year subscription (2 issues) to aapi nexus
(includes a free subscription to CrossCurrents, newsmagazine of the
UCLA Asian American Studies Center):

\$25.00*/individual \$55.00*/institution

Make checks payable to: UC REGENTS

*CA residents, add 8.25% sales tax

No shipping charges on aapi nexus subscriptions in U.S.
Foreign subscriptions to aapi nexus, add \$15.00 per year.

Name

Address

State

Zip

Card Number VISA/MASTERCARD/DISCOVER accepted

Expiration Date

Signature

Phone Number

Total

In the Pursuit of Justice: An Interview with Karen Narasaki, Asian American Justice Center

Interviewed by Eugene Yoon

Introduction

Karen Narasaki is the president and executive director of the Asian American Justice Center (AAJC), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, civil-rights organization whose mission is to advance the human and civil rights of Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) through advocacy, public policy, public education, and litigation. Narasaki is a nationally recognized leader in the Asian American community where she serves as the chairperson of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans and as the chairwoman of the Asian Pacific American Media Coalition.

Before joining AAJC, Narasaki was the Washington, D.C., representative for the Japanese American Citizens League. Prior to that she was a corporate attorney at Perkins Coie in Seattle and served as a law clerk to Judge Harry Pregerson on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in Los Angeles.

Narasaki graduated magna cum laude from Yale University and Order of the Coif from the UCLA School of Law.

The following interview was conducted by *AAPR* staff member Eugene Yoon in Washington, D.C., on 6 February 2006.

Interview with Karen Narasaki

AAPR

What is the mission of the Asian American Justice Center? Does the name change (from the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium) reflect a different focus from the previous policy? Also, what is your role within the AAJC?

Eugene Yoon is a J.D./M.P.P. candidate at Harvard Law School and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. He worked at the Asian American Justice Center as a summer law clerk in 2005.

Narasaki

I am president and executive director of the Asian American Justice Center. I have been at the organization for the last decade. Our mission is to advance and defend the civil and human rights of Asian Americans.

The name change does not reflect a change in our philosophy, but it really more accurately captures our vision and our values. While we focus on Asian Americans, of course, our approach is really more global because we believe that you can't really advance and defend the rights of Asian Americans if you aren't trying to support the human and civil rights of other minorities.

AAPR

Could you tell us a little bit about your own personal background? What made you decide to leave the private sector in favor of your work at AAJC?

Narasaki

I'm fourth-generation Japanese American. My parents and their families were both on the West Coast and were interned during World War II. I didn't learn about it, that is, the internment, until I was in junior high. It's always affected me, the disappointment that there weren't more Americans willing to defend the rights of the Japanese Americans.

Part of the reason why I decided to get a law degree rather than a business degree is that I wanted to have a degree where I could do something for the community. When I was a corporate lawyer, I was doing a lot of pro bono advocacy and was very active in the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association's (NAPABA) civil-rights community and got to a certain point in my career where I felt that I really had to make a choice because it was beginning to be a challenge to be a conservative corporate lawyer by day and a progressive civil-rights activist by night.

AAPR

What do you think are the most important policy issues that currently face the Asian American community?

Narasaki

I think the biggest one is the issue of immigration and the rights of immigrants, both in terms of the incredible backlash and scapegoating that's going on against immigrants, in addition to the fact that the anti-immigrant policies are horrendously inhumane and unfair. These problems not only affect immigrants, but families who have members who are immigrants. It also affects anybody who is suspected of being an immigrant.

It's not just what's happening since 9/11, although those policies are clearly bad. But, for example, in the Voting Rights Act, there is a provision that has been there since the 1970s that mandates language assistance. The provision is meant to help a wide range of citizens. It covers native Americans as well, but it also covers newly naturalized citizens who would feel more comfortable voting in their own first language. It expires next year, and several House members just announced

their opposition to renewing it because they don't think that immigrants should be allowed to vote in their own language. So instead of embracing the fact that immigrants want to vote, that newly naturalized citizens want to vote, want to engage in the process, want to be informed, this is an active effort to keep them from being able to do that.

In addition, other policies increase distinctions between immigrants and nonimmigrants in terms of benefits and program eligibility as well as the types of jobs that they can get. Given the fact that the Asian American community is over two-thirds foreign-born, any policies that start to make bigger and bigger distinctions based on whether you're a citizen or not can have a disproportionate impact on our community.

AAPR

It sounds like some of the issues may be a reflection of the increasing numbers of the Asian American community. Do you feel like there is an undercurrent within society right now that is pushing the rights of Asian Americans in the opposite direction or away from the advancements that we've made over the past several decades?

Narasaki

I do think that part of the backlash to immigrants is because they are largely Asian and Latino as opposed to White. It's clear that a lot of Americans—too many Americans—still have a hard time accepting Asians as fully American, despite the fact that you have Asians who are immigrants and children of immigrants who are currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

You can see evidence of the backlash in the recent incident on the Adam Corolla radio show.

AAPR

Perhaps you can share some of that with our readers who might not be aware of the incident.

Narasaki

Adam Corolla is a shock jock on the CBS Radio Network. A couple of weeks ago, he spoofed the AZN Television Channel's Awards Ceremony that was honoring outstanding Asian Americans. He was supposedly playing a clip from the ceremony, but the spoof was simply someone repeating, "ching-chong, ching-chong, ching-chong" under the assumption that Asians who are in America must not speak English.

The fact that this hasn't been picked up by the major press is a problem. I think it's really striking because if they had done something along those lines involving the African American community or the Jewish community, the media would have been all over it.

AAPR

Some contend that because APAs comprise such a small portion of the electorate, it's

difficult to advance APA-specific issues in Washington. How would you view this contention, perhaps both from the media standpoint and the political standpoint?

Narasaki

The media standpoint is a little different from politics. If you look at where networks have their main audiences, they're all in regions of the country that have significantly high Asian American representation. But it's hard to get companies and statisticians to recognize the increasing presence of Asian Americans and to track what we're watching. While Asians have always been included in national samples, it hasn't been in numbers large enough to tell. The way it works is, if nobody is measuring it, then it doesn't matter. But we are making progress here.

In politics, the numbers are a mixed issue, because the Asian community is so active on several levels. The Jewish community is smaller than the Asian community, yet has much more influence on the political process. So I think it's not so much the number of Asians, but the fact that we're such a diverse community. And so, while we share interests in certain issues, the various levels of priorities that the issues have is very different for each community. I think the fact that the Asian American community has come together on issues, but not on a focused agenda, [is] what's holding us back from really breaking through.

AAPR

That answer actually directly addresses the main theme of this year's *Asian American Policy Review*, which is heterogeneity and basically how the Asian American community encompasses so many distinct cultures and backgrounds. From the AAJC's perspective in representing the rights of all Asian Pacific Americans, how does the AAJC balance these particular interests? And how does AAJC decide which issues it will prioritize?

Narasaki

Well, the issues that we work on are crosscutting issues that affect communities across the different ethnic groups and largely across age and class lines, including race relations and hate crimes. Various communities get targeted more fiercely at different times, but it's an issue that really cuts across the different communities. The issue of immigrant rights is similar to that, except for the Japanese community. You know, every other community has grown rapidly and largely through immigration. Even the Japanese community has a fair percentage of people who are immigrants; just relative to the other Asian communities, it's a lot less. So the issue of immigration gets constantly reviewed. Undocumented immigration also cuts across different communities to different degrees. And because a significant percentage of the community are immigrants, language and cultural barriers are also relevant to almost every group. So again, while it affects each community differently, it's the same issue.

Also, the issue of what rights you have and how you get treated in the voting process cuts across all the communities. That's why we're very focused on making

sure that voting rights are protected. If voting rights are being adamantly protected, then we have a chance of being able to protect other rights.

Television diversity is another issue that cuts across all of our communities, because none of our communities are being portrayed particularly well. The census is a similar issue, where it's important that the government accurately counts and analyzes our community. This is an issue that affects all of the Asian communities.

While there is a lot of diversity in the communities, there are a lot of issues that bring us together.

AAPR

It sounds like there are a number of issues that the Asian American community faces together. In terms of coming to a joint agenda, what are the next steps that the APA community needs to take to advance?

Narasaki

The Asian American community is getting there. In the last presidential election, national groups were able to come together and endorse a joint platform. The platform was sixty pages long, but it was a joint platform. So I think the next step is for us to be able to really think hard in terms of trying to set our priority agenda, which is harder to do. The community on the national level has actually worked relatively well together, and we try to coordinate as much as possible, because with such limited resources available it doesn't make sense to have multiple groups doing the same thing. It's important to coordinate.

AAPR

In terms of getting a joint platform together, has AAJC ever faced opposition on any particular issue within the Asian American community?

Narasaki

Well, in that way, the Asian community is no different than the White community or the Black community. You don't have full agreement across the community on anything. But I think issues like affirmative action have been more challenging, because while there's a majority who support it, there is a split in the community. There's a conservative part of our community, and we try to work across both conservative and progressive lines, but the AAJC is clear that we come from a tradition that takes a more progressive view on what an inclusive community should look like.

AAPR

Can you talk about the role of minority coalitions in policy making and how actively you work with organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Council of La Raza?

Narasaki

We work incredibly closely. Almost all of our work is in some kind of coalition.

Even the African American community has a difficult time these days being able to get something done all by themselves. Everything is a battle. So, both for practical reasons, because you have a better shot of actually achieving your objective, and for philosophical reasons, meaning we are working for the rights of all people, we work in coalitions.

What has changed over the past fifteen years in Washington, however, is that Asian Americans, particularly the AAJC, is not just at the table, but sometimes we're leading the table. We are about to launch a campaign for the Rights Working Group, which is a coalition of civil rights, human rights, civil liberties, and immigrant rights organizations, as well as faith-based and other communities. It's not an Asian American only coalition, and yet we are staffing and chairing.

AAPR

Thank you very much for your time.

Electoral Politics and the Contexts of Empowerment, Displacement, and Diaspora for Boston's Vietnamese and Cambodian American Communities

Peter Nien-chu Kiang and Shirley Suet-ling Tang

Abstract

Beginning with a brief summary of relevant findings from a national/local multi-lingual survey of Asian voters in 2004, this article relates the stories and legacies of two history-making local rallies for racial justice organized by Cambodian (Khmer) and Vietnamese communities in metro Boston during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Though sharing some commonalities in terms of Southeast Asian refugee migration and initial resettlement, these two local communities have evolved in markedly different ways that reveal pragmatic and conceptual insights about diasporic political dynamics in under-resourced, urban Asian refugee/immigrant, minority communities.

Introduction

In November 2005, Sam Yoon, a 35-year-old Korean American, became the first-ever Asian American to be elected to Boston's City Council. Married with two children and living in Dorchester, a neighborhood that is home to the city's large Vietnamese concentration, Yoon had worked professionally for the Asian Community Development Corporation based in Boston Chinatown. Though there

Peter Nien-chu Kiang, Ed.D., is professor of education and director of the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. He currently serves as chair of the Massachusetts Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and is copresident of the Chinese Historical Society of New England.

Shirley Suet-ling Tang, Ph.D., is assistant professor in the American Studies and Asian American Studies Programs at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Her teaching and research interests include: comparative urban cultural history, Southeast Asian American community studies, transnational feminism, and activist community art.

is not a substantial Korean American base in Boston, Yoon was, nevertheless, the top candidate for Asian American voters across the city. Moreover, he received a total of nearly 42,000 votes citywide, the third-highest tally among eight candidates competing for only four at-large city council seats.

Just prior to Yoon's historic campaign victory, the city of Boston had faced a U.S. Department of Justice lawsuit on behalf of Asian American and Latino immigrant plaintiffs, with support from community organizations such as the Chinese Progressive Association and the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), who alleged that they had been prevented from fully exercising their right to vote due to language discrimination during previous elections. In settling the lawsuit, the city agreed to ensure access for immigrant voters by providing multilingual ballots and election materials (in Chinese, Vietnamese, and Spanish) and hiring Chinese or Vietnamese bilingual election workers to be on site at more than sixty specified polling stations across the city where significant numbers of immigrant voters are registered.

These recent individual and collective victories in relation to Asian American political participation in Boston reflect a combination of factors ranging from local and regional majority-minority demographic shifts (Sum et al. 2005, Abraham 2005, Bluestone and Stevenson 2000) to histories of sustained organizing and advocacy, particularly in Chinatown (Lowe and Brugge 2005, Liu 1999, Leong 1997, Sagara and Kiang 1992, Kiang and Ng 1989, Asian American Resource Workshop 1987, Liu 1983), and coalition-building between communities of color in the city (Jones, forthcoming, Watanabe 1996, Gaston and Kennedy 1986, Green 1983). The body of work about Boston Chinatown as a site of political empowerment is especially rich, including articles, reports, and theses as well as organizational resources and archives that clearly document the community's elaborate capacity to defend and develop its land, challenge police brutality, and protect legal rights of immigrants.¹ Continued documentation and critical analysis of recent victories in Boston, such as the 2005 Yoon election and bilingual voting rights struggle, are important for researchers and practitioners to understand and advance the local Asian American electorate further (Watanabe and Liu 2004).

With this in mind, our work examines two other local, urban Asian communities that have received far less attention from both scholars and pan-Asian organizers/activists. Our work contributes in several ways to the literature of Asian American political participation and activism/advocacy nationally as well. For example, empirical research on Asian American voter participation has tended to draw on aggregate data sets that are either national or California-specific (Cho and Cain 2001, Lien 2001). Such studies, however, are of limited value in understanding local contexts and complexities, particularly with ethnic-specific populations outside of California and also for populations whose political commitments are expressed in multiple ways distinct from or in addition to voting in national elections at one moment in time (Nakanishi 2001).

In addition, though increasing attention is paid to the "suburbanization of Asian American politics" (Lai 2005), in which predominantly post-1965 Asian immigrant professionals assert their impressive socioeconomic and educational advantages initially by establishing suburban residential and commercial ethnic concentrations,

followed by efforts to gain political representation at the local level—a significant trend reflected in numerous electoral victories recently in California and that began with the well-documented example of Monterey Park (Fong 1994)—we argue here for the value of researcher resources being invested in communities where such possibilities for mainstream political incorporation are not nearly so readily achievable. In this spirit, our article describes some of the recent context of local and global politics in Boston’s Southeast Asian American communities during the past two decades—vantage points from where these current electoral victories, both locally and nationally, can be better understood, celebrated, and critiqued.²

Voting Profiles by Metro Boston Southeast Asian American Communities

The precedent-setting voting rights lawsuit and settlement by the city of Boston in 2005 was based, in part, on documentation gathered one year earlier in November 2004 when AALDEF conducted a national, multilingual exit poll of nearly 11,000 Asian American voters ($n= 10,789$) across eight states and twenty-three cities in the United States. AALDEF’s pathbreaking, collaborative study (2005) included a Vietnamese community site in Boston’s Fields Corner/Dorchester neighborhood and a Cambodian community site in Lowell, Massachusetts. Though Southeast Asians comprised only 6% of AALDEF’s total national sample, they represented nearly half (47 percent) of all respondents in Massachusetts (MA total $n= 777$).

These two Massachusetts locations are significant both locally and nationally as sites of Southeast Asian American community development: Fields Corner/Dorchester is the largest Vietnamese concentration in the northeastern United States and the fifth-largest in the country, while Lowell is the second-largest Khmer community in the United States, after Long Beach, California. Although stories and struggles in both Fields Corner and Lowell have been documented in modest ways by local researchers and practitioners (Aguilar-San Juan 2003, Bui, Tang, and Kiang 2004, Gerson 1998, Kiang 1994), Southeast Asian American studies’ researchers and topics are still relatively marginal within the larger field of Asian American studies (Kiang 2004). AALDEF’s commitment to conduct multilingual research, in particular, in Southeast Asian American communities, including not only Fields Corner and Lowell, but also Falls Church, Virginia, and Providence, Rhode Island, then, is much-needed and especially commendable.

AALDEF’s report presents several noteworthy findings. For example, among Southeast Asian voters in AALDEF’s national sample, 85 percent were foreign-born naturalized citizens, and 48 percent identified themselves as being “limited English proficient.” Nearly six out of ten (57 percent) Cambodian respondents in the national sample and 46 percent of all Southeast Asians were voting for the first time in the United States. Specifically in Massachusetts, AALDEF reported that 74 percent of the Vietnamese voters in Dorchester (Boston) identified as limited English proficient, with 60 percent needing interpreter assistance and 55 percent needing translated written materials. For Cambodian respondents in Lowell, 39 percent iden-

tified as limited English proficient, with 35 percent needing interpreter assistance and 32 percent needing translated written materials (see Table 1). Along with other factors that may facilitate or discourage electoral participation by Southeast Asian (and other Asian) immigrant/refugee populations, AALDEF's study suggests that linguistic needs and resources are critically important to consider.

In addition to revealing the basic role of language in Asian voter participation (as well as in research about Asian voter participation), a distinct, but related contribution of AALDEF's study is to show the influence of ethnic media as critical sources of news about politics and community issues. More than half of all Asian respondents nationally (51 percent) got their news from ethnic media sources rather than mainstream English media. For Southeast Asians in the national sample, the figures were slightly less, with 48 percent relying on ethnic sources and 52 percent using mainstream media in English. In Massachusetts, however, 62 percent of Vietnamese respondents relied on ethnic media sources compared to just 38 percent who utilized mainstream English-language media. Similarly, 56 percent of Cambodian respondents in Massachusetts got their news about politics and community issues from ethnic media sources compared to 44 percent who used mainstream media sources (see Table 2).

Clearly, ethnic media outlets—ranging from native-language and bilingual newspapers to radio and cable television programming and Internet sites—provide crucial sources of information and ideas about politics and community affairs for many Southeast Asians and other Asians who are participating in U.S. politics. It is also reasonable to assume that ethnic community-based media sources are even more widely utilized by Southeast Asian (and other Asian) constituencies not included in AALDEF's sample—those who are not U.S. voters due to limited English proficiency, length of U.S. residency, immigration/naturalization status, etc. Furthermore, such ethnic media resources typically offer far more information and analysis regarding homeland and diasporic politics than mainstream U.S. sources, though this is not a focus of AALDEF's study. Thus, the role of these resources may be even more influential in communities than what AALDEF documents.

Finally, AALDEF's report indicates that crucial differences exist between Vietnamese and Cambodian respondents in Massachusetts, particularly in terms of their political party affiliations and voting preferences for president. For example, a majority of Vietnamese respondents (51 percent) were enrolled as Republicans, while 31 percent were unenrolled, and only 15 percent were registered as Democrats. In contrast, 62% of Cambodian respondents were Democrats, while 26% were unenrolled, and only 12 percent were Republicans (see Table 3).

Moreover, nearly eight of ten Vietnamese respondents in Massachusetts (79 percent) voted for George W. Bush for president, while only 21 percent voted for John Kerry. Well over eight out of ten Cambodian respondents in Massachusetts (86 percent), however, voted for Kerry, and only 13 percent voted for Bush (see Table 4).

AALDEF's report does not attempt to explain this striking disparity in the U.S. electoral/political identities and behaviors of these two communities. Clearly, though, it is important not to combine Vietnamese and Cambodian voters into a "Southeast Asian" aggregate category that would hide their political differences, much in the same way that "Asian American" aggregate data distorts the diversity

and complexity of populations subsumed under its umbrella. This is often a serious limitation of using quantitative measures to describe Asian American realities, whether in terms of socioeconomic status, academic achievement, or voting behavior. Moreover, by capturing voter choice at a particular moment in time, exit poll data typically does not provide insight about the individual or social/community contexts, histories, and subjective meanings that voters' decisions may reflect.

Complementary Contextual and Methodological Approaches

In the following sections, then, we present additional forms of community research and analysis generated during the past two decades through our own direct involvements with local Cambodian and Vietnamese communities as well as with University of Massachusetts Boston students and colleagues who come from and/or are also engaged deeply within these communities themselves. By drawing on archival materials and organizational records, local and community-based media sources, and practitioner reflections and other first-person accounts, along with our own independent participant observations over time, we provide stories, contexts, and insights that enable connection, interpretation, and validation of quantitative information about Asian American political participation in relation to critical cultural/historical perspectives and grassroots community knowledge. The analysis that follows, however, is not the result of a single, discrete research study with a bounded beginning and end. Rather, it reflects long-term, methodological, and programmatic commitments to grounded theory and critical ethnography in following the holistic development and life stories of these communities (Tang, forthcoming, Kiang, Suyemoto, and Tang, forthcoming 2007, Kiang 2002).

Consistent with Anderson and Lee's recent call (2005) for a more robust conceptualization of diasporas and displacements to serve as a theoretical paradigm for the study of Asians in the United States, we similarly see such an emphasis in the Asian American studies field as necessary for understanding diasporic populations and their experiences with, for example, racial formations, political identities, and electoral politics. But by tracing the disaggregated cultural-historical contexts of these two local communities through identifying specific history-making moments of justice-centered political engagement, we suggest that the context of empowerment is an additional dimension with which to analyze how these communities have made specific and concrete meanings of "migration," "place," and "global/local connections."

In our research, we examine how such meanings at the community level have been actively contested and constructed. Community knowledge, as colleagues at MIT's Center for Reflective Community Practice led by Ceasar McDowell explain, is "not merely procedural—it is also developmental, actively constructed and continually evolving through the experience of living and working in struggling communities. This way of knowing integrates context and personality, history and politics, culture and action, and offers a significant, sophisticated and complex understanding of how communities work" (2004, 8). As such, our practices of community research and analysis complement the quantitative measures that typically characterize studies of Asian American electoral political activity with contextual analyses of diaspora, displacement, and empowerment—themes that

have concrete validity and long-term resonance over time for the two local Southeast Asian American communities we describe in the next sections.

Rallying for Racial Justice and Community Development: The Case of Vietnamese in Fields Corner

In June 1992, two-hundred members of Boston's Vietnamese community and allies from throughout the city rallied at Boston City Hall to call for racial equality and demand a public apology from a Boston city councilor, Albert "Dapper" O'Neil, who had complained openly, "I thought I was in Saigon, for Chrissakes.... It makes you sick, for Chrissakes!" (Sege 1992) after passing by a vibrant, newly emerging Vietnamese commercial/residential community at a well-attended local parade in Boston's Fields Corner/Dorchester neighborhood.

But, with fewer than one-hundred Vietnamese Americans registered to vote in Boston at that time, and with most Vietnamese residents still struggling in poverty amidst refugee realities (Pham 1992), their capacity to exert local political pressure directly through votes or campaign contributions was minimal, despite their outrage over such blatant and official disrespect. In fact, Councilor O'Neil attended the racial justice rally himself and defiantly refused to apologize (Rezendes, 1992a). Having held office since 1971, O'Neil consistently received the highest vote totals in Boston's at-large city council elections throughout the 1980s and continued to do so throughout the next decade until dying in office at age 78 in 1999.

The 1992 city hall rally, though, made history as the first public, mass demonstration by Boston's Vietnamese community focusing on local politics and issues of racial justice (Sege 1992). Well-organized political rallies, lobbying efforts, and public ceremonies coinciding with April 30 commemorations to mark the fall of Saigon or to protest local visits by groups from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam had taken place regularly at Boston City Hall, the State House, and other sites since the mid-1980s. The Vietnamese refugee/immigrant community's capacity for political organizing was already highly engaged, but such demonstrations were—both then and now—primarily symbolic in appealing to the public's moral conscience externally while sustaining anticommunist ideological discipline internally within the community itself.

In the immediate wake of the 1992 city hall rally, the president of the Vietnamese Community of Massachusetts, the umbrella coordinating body of thirty-seven Vietnamese organizations across the state, asserted, "We will work harder to push the people to register to vote...if we want the political system in Boston area or everywhere in America to pay attention to our role, we have to get involved with our right to vote" (Sege 1992). Two years later, the establishment of a new, neighborhood-based community development corporation, Viet-AID, marked a significant upgrade in the community's organizational capacity. Envisioned initially by 1.5 generation Vietnamese Americans who had helped to organize the 1992 city hall rally, the founders of Viet-AID sought an organizational model that would not be overly constrained by either the ideological commitments enforced by the older generation in the community or the dominant client/deficit-centered paradigm that

characterized social service agencies and refugee mutual assistance associations locally and nationally. Viet-AID's mission opened new conceptual and programmatic possibilities for capacity building, particularly in relation to affordable housing development and home ownership, self-sufficient economic development, child care and native-language education, neighborhood safety, and, by necessity, communication and organizing within the multicultural Dorchester neighborhood across ethnicity, language, and race.³

Following the later-1990s period of U.S. immigration and welfare "reform," the focus of local civic engagement efforts turned to stress the urgency for Vietnamese refugees and immigrants to gain citizenship in order to be protected against the drastic elimination of rights and benefits for non-U.S. citizens mandated by Congress. As further public policy attacks against immigrants continued locally through a 2002 statewide ballot initiative financed by California businessman Ron Unz that successfully eliminated bilingual education in Massachusetts, advocates and organizers in Boston's Vietnamese community established an ongoing coalition known as Viet-Vote with the mission to build Vietnamese community electoral power.

In 2003, the Viet-Vote Campaign carried out voter education and registration activities at community events, businesses, and churches, as well as door to door; produced a civic participation curriculum and bilingual voter information materials for newsletters, newspapers, leaflets, and Vietnamese ethnic media; provided bilingual support and transportation, particularly for elders, at polling stations on election day; and created a database of almost three thousand Vietnamese registered voters in Boston. These efforts yielded an impressive 941 percent increase in Vietnamese voter participation in the fall 2003 city elections (compared to 1999) for the three local wards targeted by Viet-Vote in Dorchester. Interestingly, according to a survey conducted immediately after the elections, the average age of the Vietnamese voter in these wards was 55. Thus, the elder population emerged as the politically active voting group within the Vietnamese community, even though Viet-Vote activities had been carried out primarily by college students and young professionals.

Beyond simply being a good example of grassroots, electoral machine building with working class immigrants, the Viet-Vote Campaign is, like the community itself, a story of civic engagement with both local and transnational meanings in diasporic context. While Viet-Vote's voter education efforts worked to connect desires for Vietnamese voice, power, and representation with critical local issues ranging from crime and jobs to affordable housing and bilingual education, a complementary strategy focused on gaining recognition of the flag from the former Republic of South Vietnam as the "official" flag of the Vietnamese community in the city of Boston. The yellow flag with three red stripes embraced by Vietnamese refugees and their families often flies with U.S. flags outside Vietnamese-owned houses and businesses in Dorchester and has always been present at major community events for the past twenty-five years. But in this effort, community advocates used it to mobilize and impact public policy in the city.

This diasporic, local/global political strategy culminated in August 2003 when—with roughly one hundred Vietnamese Americans cheering from the

gallery—Councilor Maureen Feeney, who represents the Dorchester/Fields Corner neighborhood, submitted a city resolution that was approved unanimously by the Boston City Council to recognize “the Heritage and Freedom Flag as the official symbol of the Boston Vietnamese-American community.” In response, the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, D.C., quickly issued a formal statement of protest, asserting: “A small minority of Vietnamese-Americans who claim themselves representatives of the Vietnamese-American community living in Boston aim at sowing division, rekindling the past hatred and painful pages of the history between our two nations and among the Vietnamese themselves” (Abraham and Slack 2003, B8). Embassy officials then personally visited city hall to insist that the only proper flag to fly is that of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which is recognized by the U.S. government. Disregarding such claims while acknowledging the growing clout of the local Vietnamese community, one city councilor explained at a formal meeting with the Embassy’s deputy chief of mission, “What you feel in Washington, that is in Washington, and we here in Boston support our community here” (Abraham and Slack 2003, B8).

Ironically, when Boston’s Vietnamese community demonstrated at city hall in 1992 about a local racial justice issue unrelated to Vietnam politics, the official response from City Councilor O’Neil at that time was “apologize to who? For what? I didn’t say anything to any of them” (Rezendes 1992b). Showing both his own power and the marginal political influence of the Vietnamese community, O’Neil went on that same year to be selected as the city council’s president. A decade later, in contrast, diplomatic officials from Vietnam came to Boston City Hall to protest, but were ignored by city councilors who voted unanimously to support what they believed were the wishes of their local Vietnamese constituency.

These two historical moments at Boston City Hall are linked closely—though in nonlinear and seemingly contradictory ways—through the complex process of street-level Vietnamese community capacity-building and development. Issues of racial justice and homeland political passions are both implicated in and essential to Vietnamese community civic engagement. Given the specific symbolic and functional roles of the flag as a focus for local political mobilization in 2003, it is no surprise that the most active sector voting in the 2003 elections were Vietnamese elders because their migration histories and cultural/political identities are most closely associated with service and sacrifice for the Republic of Vietnam.

Furthermore, these factors may also help to explain the striking findings from AALDEF’s exit polling at Fields Corner one year later in the 2004 U.S. presidential election where 51 percent of Vietnamese respondents claimed affiliation with the Republican party, and 79 percent of Vietnamese respondents voted for Bush—or against Kerry, whose late 1960s anti-Vietnam war activism and more recent advocacy of normalized U.S.-Vietnam diplomatic relations were harshly criticized in Vietnamese community settings, particularly by elders (Ebbert 2005). Though markedly different from the voter profiles of other Asian ethnic groups in the AALDEF study, including the Cambodian profiles from nearby Lowell, these Vietnamese political choices are not unlike older-generation Cuban community profiles whose anticommunist, exile perspectives they share.⁴

Rallying for Racial Justice and Community Development: The Case of Cambodians in Revere

To gather Cambodian voter data, AALDEF's research team chose to sample polling sites in Lowell, a city forty-five minutes northwest of Boston that is home to the second-largest Khmer community in the United States. Lowell represents the largest local/regional Khmer community not only in population size, but also in organizational resources, community development capacity, and civic/political engagement. Though not the focus of this article, Lowell's story deserves attention.

In 1999, for example, Chanrithy Uong, a high-school guidance counselor, made history by becoming the first non-White ever elected to the Lowell City Council and the first Cambodian American to gain elective office in any major city in the United States.⁵ A decade earlier, a remarkable coalition of Southeast Asian and Latino parents in Lowell had sued the city for denying equal educational opportunities to students needing bilingual services (Kiang 1994). Renewed legal action in 1998 on behalf of Southeast Asian and Latino students at Lowell High School charged school officials with discriminatory practices that selectively excluded them from receiving college scholarship recommendations and that selectively targeted them for more frequent and severe disciplinary punishment (Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1998). In this context, Uong's electoral victory and subsequent reelections in 2001 and 2003 have reflected and represented long-standing struggles by both the Southeast Asian and Latino communities for local political empowerment (Gerson, forthcoming 2006, Kiang 1996). In this context, it is not surprising, therefore, that the party affiliations and presidential voting preferences of Cambodians in Lowell documented by AALDEF in 2004 are similar to local Latino (predominantly Puerto Rican and Dominican in Lowell) electoral profiles.

Lowell was not the first or only local Khmer community to develop in Massachusetts, however. Rather, the Khmer community case highlighted here in recognition of its historical legacy is that of Revere—an ethnically stratified, working class city of metro Boston that served as a critical site for Cambodian refugee resettlement during the early 1980s, several years before Lowell's Khmer community established itself through secondary migration and other factors. By the mid-1980s, the Shirley Avenue neighborhood of Revere included not only a residential Khmer concentration, but also the basic building blocks of community development, including Khmer ethnic/family markets, community agencies and organizations with Khmer bilingual services, and a Cambodian Buddhist temple. At the same time, however, Revere was also the site of intense, sustained, street-level racial conflict targeting Cambodian residents. Occurring five years before the Fields Corner Vietnamese community rally of 1992, the story of Cambodians in Revere is also punctuated by a dramatic, history-making rally two decades ago.

After a series of devastating anti-Asian arsons in 1986, including one on Christmas eve that left twenty-one refugee residents homeless, Revere's Khmer community made history in organizing the first public demonstration for racial justice by Cambodian Americans in the United States. Having endured many incidents of racist harassment, vandalism, and violence for six years in Revere, the

community finally decided to assert its public claims of voice, space, and rights by marching from city hall to the arson site with signs and banners that proclaimed in Khmer and English, "Enough Is Enough!" The January 1987 rally in Revere also marked a proud, inspiring moment when local pan-Asian organizations, civil rights leaders, and other multiracial constituencies firmly united together to support the Cambodian community's demands for justice and peace.

Moments do not make movements, however. Over time, the elementary school-age children who, with their parents and families, held hand-painted signs saying, "Enough Is Enough" at the 1987 rally, continued to grow up experiencing racism in school and on the streets. Many turned to gangs as a form of self-defense and identity and faced increasingly severe racial profiling and harassment from the police and criminal justice system (Tang 2002). Young people who acquired criminal records and never became U.S. citizens—including 1,400 Cambodian Americans nationally, some of whom were from Massachusetts with Revere roots—have faced detention and deportation to Cambodia since 2002 following an agreement between the governments of Cambodia and the United States, even though the youth, in most cases, had already fully served prison sentences in U.S. jails for their crimes.

The recent and continuing crisis in Cambodian American communities concerning forced deportations exemplifies how diasporic, transnational realities are intimately connected with sociopolitical life in the United States (Hing 2005). In fact, the deportation issue shows not only the urgency of recognizing these local/global connections, but also of understanding the holistic and historic connections between immigration status, gang involvement, and youth responses to racist violence. Had interventions to address discrimination, exclusion, and anti-Asian violence against Southeast Asian refugees in the 1980s been more thorough and sustained, perhaps far fewer young people would have felt the need to turn to gangs as their organizational strategy to survive, and fewer today would be facing deportation as a result of having criminal records.

Furthermore, though predating the well-established community in Lowell and functioning as a critical center of commercial/residential/cultural life for Cambodians in Massachusetts since 1981, Revere's Khmer community was unable to survive against economic and political forces associated with land redevelopment that made it too expensive for most Cambodian American residents and small businesses to remain in the city. The out-migration from Revere, as reflected in Census figures showing roughly three thousand Cambodians in 1990 and only 879 in 2000, marks the dispersal/destruction of the physical Cambodian American community in Revere, thus achieving the same final outcome that racist arsons and assaults were meant to accomplish in the mid-1980s.

Despite showing solidarity at the 1987 Enough Is Enough rally, few Asian American individuals or groups outside of Revere remained involved to challenge the relentless realities of displacement and disempowerment confronting the Cambodian American community. The lack of pan-Asian American organizing or advocacy in Revere is especially striking, compared with the successful community development efforts of Boston's Vietnamese community in Fields Corner/Dorchester (Aguilar-San Juan 2003) and the sophisticated, inspiring com-

mitments to fight displacement and disempowerment in Boston's Chinatown during the same period of time (Liu 1999, Leong 1997).

It is no surprise, then, that AALDEF's Khmer-speaking exit poll researchers went to Lowell rather than Revere. There is simply no longer enough of a Cambodian community in Revere either to base research and documentation or to mobilize for advocacy and civic participation. Meanwhile, many former Khmer residents of Revere moved in the past decade to the adjacent city of Lynn where housing prices were lower—thus establishing what is currently the fifth-largest concentration of Cambodians in the United States. But with little Khmer commercial infrastructure or organizational capacity in Lynn, the community development process is just beginning once again, as if the population were newcomers.⁶ The prospects for Khmer political empowerment in Lynn, therefore, seem discouragingly distant. This profile also contrasts sharply with political conditions for Vietnamese in Boston where, not only are mainstream elected officials increasingly responsive, but possibilities for local Vietnamese American candidates to gain political office seem quite likely in the next decade.

Conclusions

In this article, we seek to model a focus on Southeast Asian American community realities that enables researchers and practitioners in the areas of Asian American Studies and Asian American politics to better understand, respect, and respond to the struggles, visions, complexities, and differences among those Asian American populations who are most vulnerable or oppressed in U.S. society. Although U.S.-centered electoral politics at the local and national levels represent an important domain of research, analysis, and advocacy as AALDEF's 2004 exit poll study demonstrates, we suggest the value of viewing issues holistically and locally/globally—making connections, for example, between racial violence, gang activity, immigration status, and deportation. Likewise, the impressive first-time voter profile of Vietnamese in Boston that AALDEF documented in 2004 and the large increase in Vietnamese voter participation due to the Viet-Vote campaign in 2003 cannot be understood without recognizing either the basic organizing and capacity-building efforts, particularly by staff and volunteers from the younger generation within the community, or the diasporic resonance of the flag issue as one important signifier of local political clout and representation, particularly for the older generation who comprised the large core of new Vietnamese voters.

Though insights about the importance of looking beyond a domestic U.S. agenda to understand Asian American politics are not new (Nakanishi 1976), the contemporary life stories and trajectories of Southeast Asian American community members and leaders, including those most respected for their activism in the domains of civil rights and political empowerment such as Rithy Uong, clearly show the importance of diasporic commitments and visions. In fact, Bong Rithy's participation in the United Nations-monitored election process in Cambodia during the early 1990s was a crucial factor in his decision-making process to run for city council when he returned to Lowell after devoting some years to the economic, educational, and civic development of his homeland. A review of the visions,

histories, and priorities of local and national Southeast Asian American organizations also confirms this point.⁷

Nevertheless, realities of inequality facing Southeast Asian American communities in the United States are profound. To capture more fully their complex local/global political dynamics, research and documentation efforts need to be grounded in community sites such as temples/churches, nail salons, and coffee shops as well as city halls and polling stations on election days. Observations within a Cambodian Buddhist temple, for example, reveal multiple issues faced by elders, especially women, whose daily realities are not represented by either Asian American service agencies or mainstream advocacy groups who have missions to protect the rights of the aged and/or people with disabilities. Meanwhile, intense homeland/transnational political dynamics directly affect the sociocultural and spiritual quality of life within temples, including one site that has been vital to Cambodian community development in Lowell.⁸ Similarly, amidst the recent wave of church closings in metro Boston that have followed the moral/ethical/financial crises facing the Archdiocese of Boston due to numerous scandals involving pedophile priests, three different churches with significant Vietnamese congregations in Dorchester were targeted for closure. Through intensive, multilingual, multiracial political mobilizations, St. Mark's Church—a vibrant, local parish that serves Vietnamese, Haitians, Irish, Nigerians, and other Afro-Caribbean immigrants—was allowed to remain open, while St. Peter's Church and St. William's Church were each ordered to close. Engaging with these types of community sites can reveal more fully how local meanings and processes of community development are shaped by intense transnational sensibilities as well as multiracial/multicultural neighborhood realities and racialized relationships with mainstream political institutions.

Looking beyond the historically grounded stories of Vietnamese and Cambodian community rallies described above, we can easily envision a future rally at Boston City Hall to celebrate the eventual inauguration of the city's first Vietnamese American elected official, especially in light of Sam Yoon's 2005 victory as an at-large Asian American candidate. While appreciating the proud accomplishments represented by such a history-making future occasion, we will also continue to recall that metro Boston's historic Khmer community rallied for justice and peace in Revere in 1987, but never gained adequate capacity or power to develop. Indeed, neither local nor global political dynamics within diasporic Asian communities have any concrete meaning unless those communities actually continue to exist over time. Without sustained interventions, the stories of many communities go unknown and unshared. This echoes the silence that defines dominant understandings of Asian immigrants' deep political engagements,

Endnotes

1 See for example: www.chinatownbanquet.com/; www.aamovement.net/community/flpcnc1.html; and www.aamovement.net/community/long_guang_huang/justice_for_huang.html.

2 Portions of this article are adapted from Bui, Tang, and Kiang (2004) and Kiang (2004). We also pres-

ent data provided by the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (2005) report and its summary of local data from Massachusetts.

3 See www.vietaid.org.

4 See, for example, Andrea O'Reilly Herrera's *ReMembering Cuba: Legacy of a Diaspora*, Austin: University of Texas Press (2001).

5 Rithy Uong stepped down from office in 2004. In the most recent local election in November 2005, two Cambodian Americans ran for city council and one ran for school committee. None were elected, however.

6 In 2004, a newly emerging community organization based in Lynn, the Khmer Association of the North Shore, conducted a needs assessment with the assistance of University of Massachusetts Boston's Asian American Studies Program. See Tang 2004.

7 National Southeast Asian American organizations include: Cambodian American National Council (CAN-C), cancweb.org; Hmong Network Development (HND), www.hndlink.org; Laotian American National Alliance (LANA); National Alliance of Vietnamese American Service Agencies (NAVASA), www.navasa.org; and Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), www.searac.org.

8 University of Massachusetts Lowell Political Scientist Jeffrey Gerson explores this issue in his unpublished 2005 paper, "The Battle for Control of the Cambodian Temple: Homeland Politics at Work." Also see Lewis I. Rice's "The Battling Buddhists: A Bitter Feud Between Two Monks Divides a Community and its Temple. Literally." in *Boston Magazine*, November 2004 (www.buddhistchannel.tv/).

References

Abraham, Yvonne. 2005. Voter turnout: 'New' Bostonians embrace an old rite of passage. *Boston Globe*, November 9. Available online at www.boston.com/news/local/massachusetts/articles/2005/11/09/new_bostonians_embrace_an_old_rite_of_passage?mode=PF.

Abraham, Yvonne, and Donovan Slack. 2003. A fight for Viet flag. *Boston Globe*, 13 August: B1, B8.

Aguilar-San Juan, Karin. 2003. Fields of dreams: Place, race, and memory in Boston's Vietnamese American community. *Amerasia Journal*, 29(1): 80-96.

Anderson, Wann W., and Robert G. Lee (eds.). 2005. *Displacements and diasporas: Asians in the Americas*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund. 2005. The Asian American vote: A report on the multilingual exit poll in the 2004 presidential election. New York: Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Asian American Resource Workshop. 1987. To live in peace: Responding to anti-Asian violence in Boston. Boston: Asian American Resource Workshop.

Bluestone, Barry, and Mary Huff Stevenson. 2000. *The Boston renaissance: Race, space, and economic change in an American metropolis*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bui, James D., Shirley Suet-ling Tang, and Peter N. Kiang. 2004. The local/global politics of Boston's Viet-vote. *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice & Community* 2(2): 10-18.

Center for Reflective Community Practice. 2004. Vital difference: The role of race in building community. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Cho, Wendy K. Tam, and Bruce E. Cain. 2001. Asian Americans as the median voters: An exploration of attitudes and voting patterns on ballot initiatives. In *Asian Americans and politics: Perspectives, experiences, prospects*, 133-152. Edited by Gordon H. Chang. Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press.

-
- Ebbert, S. 2005. Asian-Americans step up to ballot box: Survey finds surge in first-time voters. *Boston Globe*, 26 April: B1, B4.
- Fong, Timothy P. 1994. *The first suburban Chinatown: The remaking of Monterey Park, California*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Gaston, Mauricio, and Marie Kennedy. 1986. Blue print for tomorrow: The fight for community control in Black and Latino Boston. *Radical America* 20(5): 7-22.
- Gerson, Jeffrey. Forthcoming 2006. The Cambodian-Americans of Lowell, MA: A cautionary tale of new immigrant and refugee political incorporation. *New Immigrants in New England: A Workshop*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Gerson, Jeffrey. 1998. Cambodian political succession in Lowell, MA. *New England Journal of Public Policy* 13(2), Spring/Summer.
- Green, James. 1983. The making of Mel King's rainbow coalition: Political changes in Boston, 1963-1983. *Radical America* 17(6): 9-34.
- Hing, Bill Ong. 2005. Deporting our souls and defending our immigrants. *Amerasia Journal* 31(3): xi-xxxii.
- Jones, Hubie. Forthcoming. *Social and Political History of Race in Boston from 1950-2000*.
- Kiang, Peter N. 2004. Checking Southeast Asian American realities in Pan-Asian American agendas. *AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice & Community* 2(1): 48-76.
- Kiang, Peter N. 2002. Stories and structures of persistence: Ethnographic learning through research and practice in Asian American studies. In *Ethnography and schools: Qualitative approaches to the study of education*, 223-255. Edited by Yali Zou and Henry T. Trueba. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kiang, Peter N. 1996. Southeast Asian and Latino parent empowerment: Lessons from Lowell, Massachusetts. In *Education reform and social change: Multicultural voices, struggles, and visions*, 59-69. Edited by Catherine E. Walsh. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kiang, Peter N. 1994. When know-nothings speak English only: Analyzing Irish and Cambodian struggles for community development and educational equity. In *The state of Asian America: Activism and resistance in the 1990s*, 125-145. Edited by Karin Aguilar-San Juan. Boston: South End Press.
- Kiang, Peter N., and ManChak Ng. 1989. Through strength and struggle: Boston's Asian American student/community/labor solidarity. *Amerasia Journal* 15(1): 285-293.
- Kiang, Peter N., Karen L. Suyemoto, and Shirley Suet-ling Tang. Forthcoming 2007. Developing and sustaining community research methods and meanings in Asian American studies coursework. In *The handbook of research methods in ethnic studies*. Edited by Tim Fong. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lai, James S. 2005. The suburbanization of Asian American politics. In *National Asian Pacific American political almanac: 2005-2006*, 7-10, 12th Edition. Edited by Don T. Nakanishi, James S. Lai, and Daphne Kwok. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center.
- Leong, Andrew. 1997. The struggle over Parcel C: How Boston's Chinatown won a victory in the fight against institutional expansionism and environmental racism. Occasional paper. Boston: Institute for Asian American Studies. September.
- Lien, Pei-Te. 2001. Voting participation: Race, gender, and the comparative status of Asian American women. In *Asian Americans and politics: Perspectives, experiences, prospects*, 173-193. Edited by Gordon H. Chang. Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press.
- Liu, Michael C. 1999. *Chinatown's neighborhood mobilization and urban development in Boston*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts Boston.

-
- Liu, Mike. 1983. Grass roots politics and Boston's Asian community. *Radical America* 17(6): 80-87.
- Lowe, Lydia, and Doug Brugge. 2005. Grassroots organizing in Boston Chinatown: A comparison with CDC-style organizing. Unpublished paper. Boston: Chinese Progressive Association.
- Massachusetts Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. 1998. *Civil Rights Briefing*, November 6.
- Nakanishi, Don T. 2001. Beyond electoral politics: Renewing a search for a paradigm of Asian Pacific American politics. In *Asian Americans and politics: Perspectives, experiences, prospects*, 102-129. Edited by Gordon H. Chang. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Stanford University Press.
- Nakanishi, Don T. 1976. Minorities and international politics. In *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, 81-85. Edited by Emma Gee. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center.
- Pham, Mai-Lan. 1992. Strangers in Fields Corner: The formation of a Vietnamese community in Dorchester. *Boston Review* 17(5): September, October.
- Rezendes, Michael. 1992a. O'Neil is hooted off stage at racial unity rally. *Boston Globe*, June 16: B30.
- Rezendes, Michael. 1992b. Vietnamese leaders hit O'Neil remarks. *Boston Globe*, June 11: B31.
- Sagara, Carleton, and Peter N. Kiang. 1992. *Recognizing poverty in Boston's Asian American community*. Monograph. Boston: Boston Foundation Persistent Poverty Project.
- Sege, Irene. 1992. Vietnamese find their voice after Boston councilor's remarks, community focuses on political power. *Boston Globe*, June 26: B1.
- Sum, Andrew M. et al. 2005. *The changing face of Massachusetts*. Boston: MassINC. June.
- Tang, Shirley, S. Forthcoming. Community-centered research as knowledge/capacity-building in immigrant/refugee communities. In *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics and methods of activist scholarship*. Edited by Charles R. Hale. University of California Press.
- Tang, Shirley, S. 2004. An assessment of Khmer American community needs in Lynn, Massachusetts. Lynn, MA: Khmer Association of the North Shore.
- Tang, Shirley S. 2002. "Enough is enough!" Struggles for Cambodian American community development in Revere, Massachusetts. Ph.D. dissertation. State University of New York at Buffalo.
- Watanabe, Paul Y. 1996. *A dream deferred: Changing demographics, challenges, & new opportunities for Boston*. Boston: Institute for Asian American Studies and the Boston Foundation.
- Watanabe, Paul Y., and Michael Liu. 2004. *Enabling the Asian American electorate*. Boston: Institute for Asian American Studies.

**Table 1. AALDEF Massachusetts Multilingual Asian Exit Poll 2004
Language Status and Need of Assistance by Ethnicity (n= 777)**

	Limited English Proficient	Needed an Interpreter	Needed Translated Written Materials
Cambodian	39%	35%	32%
Vietnamese	74%	60%	55%

**Table 2. AALDEF Massachusetts Multilingual Asian Exit Poll 2004 Media
Source by Ethnicity (n=777)**

	Ethnic Media in Asian Language	Ethnic Media in English	Mainstream English-Language Media
Cambodian	32%	24%	44%
Vietnamese	42%	20%	38%

**Table 3. AALDEF Massachusetts Multilingual Asian Exit Poll 2004
Party Enrollment by Ethnicity (n= 777)**

	Republican	Democrat	Unenrolled	Other
Cambodian	12%	62%	26%	--
Chinese	2%	51%	45%	2%
Vietnamese	51%	15%	31%	3%
Total Massachusetts Asian Sample	18%	44%	36%	2%

**Table 4. AALDEF Massachusetts Multilingual Asian Exit Poll 2004
Vote for President by Ethnicity (n= 777)**

	Voted for Bush	Voted for Kerry	Voted for Other
Cambodian	13%	86%	1%
Chinese	8%	89%	3%
Vietnamese	79%	21%	--
Total Massachusetts Asian Sample	30%	68%	2%

ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW
ANNOUNCES THE RELEASE OF
VOLUME XV

The 2006 issue of the **Asian American Policy Review** is devoted to the theme "**Heterogeneity: Deconstructing Asian America.**"

- Interviews with Sam Yoon, the first Asian American to be elected into the Boston city government as a city councilor, and Karen Narasaki, president and executive director of the Asian American Justice Center, discussing the diverse elements of the Asian American community.
- Stimulating academic research on welfare reforms and electoral policies in various Asian American communities, as well as reviews on the newest books and films portraying the many faces of Asian America.

Throughout the issue, we uncover important and fascinating insights into the multifaceted, vibrant identity that is Asian America today.

RESERVE YOUR COPY OF VOLUME XV TODAY

- \$20 individuals
 \$40 institutions

- Payment enclosed
 Bill my VISA MC

Name (print) _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Card # _____ Exp. date: _____ / _____
Signature _____

Mail this form to
Asian American Policy Review
John F. Kennedy School of Government
79 John F. Kennedy Street ♦ Cambridge, MA 02138
www.ksg.harvard.edu/aapr/ ♦ aapr@ksg.harvard.edu
phone: (617) 496-8655 ♦ fax: (617) 384-9555.

Out of Time: Asian Americans, Time Limits, and Welfare Reform in California

Dana Y. Nakano

Abstract

Perhaps the most significant change in federal welfare reform policy in 1996 was the sixty-month lifetime limit. An identical change was also made at the state level in California in 1998. When the first cohort of welfare recipients reached its lifetime limit, or timed out, in California on 1 January 2003, a disproportionate number of timed-out individuals shared a common characteristic—they were Asian American. After disaggregating country-level data, one can see that the majority of Asian Americans who were timed out were of Southeast Asian descent. Analysis indicates that Asian Americans are disproportionately represented in the timed-out cohort because they face barriers that place them in the “hard-to-employ” category of welfare recipients. For Asian Americans, these barriers include: mental and physical health issues, low educational attainment, limited work experience, and limited English proficiency. In addition to falling into the hard-to-employ category, Asian Americans are also impeded in their attempts to move off of welfare before reaching their lifetime limit by stringent and constrictive “work-first” policies. It is the purpose of this article to analyze the factors leading to a disproportionate number of Asian Americans in California being pushed off of welfare because they reach their lifetime welfare time limit of sixty months, even though they are employed during their time on welfare.

Dana Y. Nakano received his undergraduate degrees in international relations, Japanese, and engineering from the University of Pennsylvania in 2004 and is currently a master's student in the Asian American Studies Department at San Francisco State University (Class of 2007). As a yonsei (fourth-generation Japanese American) born and raised in Southern California and educated on the East Coast, personal experiences have largely shaped Nakano's research interests in social justice and activism, pan-ethnicity, and later generations in the Asian American community. He is currently working on his master's thesis on pan-Asian American leadership and hopes to continue his education as a doctoral student in sociology.

Introduction

Hien Vo, a 55-year-old father of three, was once an agricultural engineer in his native Vietnam. Vo came to San Jose, California, as a refugee following the Vietnam War. But, speaking only halting English, he could only find work at a local hotel as a busboy, waiter, and kitchen worker. His total monthly income was less than \$1,500 per month. He received public assistance in the form of supplemental income and took part in a California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Career Advancement Program studying computers, accounting, and tax preparation. In December 2002, Vo was well into his studies and looked to open his own tax office, but knew he needed more time to complete his studies and gain financial grounding. On 1 January 2003, however, Vo lost all of his benefits because he reached his sixty-month time limit for receiving public assistance under the CalWORKs program. With all his benefits discontinued, Vo was unable to complete any of his training programs (de Sa 2002).

As unfortunate as Vo's experience has been, more unfortunate is the data that shows Hien Vo is one of many. In Vo's home county of Santa Clara alone, more than 1,200 families on public assistance had parents timed out¹ on benefits in January 2003. Of these 1,200 families, 80 percent were Vietnamese refugees with limited English ability, and 64 percent were working while on welfare (de Sa 2002). In Los Angeles County, nearly 37 percent of those cases affected by the time limit in January 2003 were Asian American, the most of any racial subgroup (Moreno et al. 2004). In Alameda County, 72 percent of the Vietnamese Americans who reached their time limit in 2003 were working while on public assistance (National Asian Pacific Women's Forum 2002).

As this data and the story of Hien Vo demonstrate, too many Asian Americans in California are being pushed off of welfare because they reach their lifetime welfare time limit of sixty months despite being employed during their time on welfare. Like Vo, many Asian American welfare recipients are employed but do not make a sufficient wage that would allow them to move off the welfare rolls. If the current trend continues, there will be a large number of Asian Americans, particularly Southeast Asian Americans, who will continue to face extreme financial hardship but will be ineligible for government assistance. In this way, welfare loses its original purpose of providing a safety net for all Americans who fall on hard financial times.

This article examines the issues Asian American welfare recipients face due to welfare reform and the newly instated time limits. The first section gives a description of recent changes in welfare reform in order to give a historical context to this problem. The next section shows the scope of the problem and provides statistical evidence of the extent to which Asian Americans are affected by poverty and CalWORKs' sixty-month time limit. The third section of this report provides a review of current literature—providing an explanation of hard-to-employ welfare participants, time limits, and racial discrepancies in welfare reform outcomes. In examining current literature, it is possible to find the lacuna in current research. The fourth section analyzes the causes of this problem. Sections five and six will provide an overview of a current model program and potential solutions. Finally,

after an evaluation of the costs and benefits of each potential solution and sample program, the last section explains a comprehensive policy recommendation to address the complex issues contributing to the situation of timed-out Asian American welfare recipients like Hien Vo.

Welfare Reform in Recent History

In 1996, Congress passed the much anticipated and highly contested welfare reform entitled the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Under this new legislation, the major changes to the welfare system were block grant funding, time limits, and work requirements. The open-ended funding program of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was replaced by the block grant funding of Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF). PRWORA set out to decrease adult dependence on government aid and promote job training and work. In order to meet these goals, TANF set a limit for federal dollars provided to states to fund welfare benefits. A federal lifetime limit of sixty months was also placed on cash assistance. Individual states had the option of decreasing the time constraints on cash assistance, but could only exempt a maximum of 20 percent of recipients from the federal time limit. Benefits could be continued, however, at the state's own cost. To receive cash aid under PRWORA, welfare recipients were also required to work after two years on welfare. To enforce this requirement, states must maintain a minimum work participation rate or face financial deductions in their federal grant (Weil and Finegold 2002).

In response to the new restrictions of PRWORA and TANF, the state of California put the CalWORKs program into effect on 1 January 1998. While states were given flexibility on time limit and exemptions, California decided to allow the maximum sixty-month lifetime limit. In California, the time limit only applies to adults. In families with children, only adult benefits and cash assistance would end when the sixty-month limit is reached.

As stated previously, the CalWORKs program was instated on 1 January 1998. This date also marked the start of the time-limit clock for all current adult welfare recipients. Therefore, the first cohort of recipients timed out of its welfare benefits on 1 January 2003 (Graves 2002).

Who Is Being Affected?

It is frequently a common belief that people of Asian ancestry living in the United States are not affected by the ill effects of poverty. On the contrary, welfare and poverty are two topics of great importance and impact for the Asian American community, as demonstrated in Graphs 1 and 2.

Graph 1 shows that Asian Americans have one of the lowest rates of poverty of any racial group. At 12.83 percent, Asian Americans fall victim to poverty less often than Hispanic, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Asian Americans have a lower rate of poverty than the general population. While Asian Americans appear to have a marginally higher rate

of poverty than the White population, 12.83 and 10.46 percent, respectively, this data is misleading. The White group is not disaggregated to White Hispanic and White non-Hispanic. When the disaggregated data is taken into account, the Asian American poverty rate becomes considerably higher than the non-Hispanic White poverty rate of 7.84 percent.

While Graph 1 shows the aggregated Asian American poverty rate to be among the lowest of all racial groups, Graph 2 shows that poverty rates of various Asian American ethnicities compare very differently. By disaggregating the Asian American group into separate ethnicities, a greater understanding of the effects of poverty in Asian Americans can be obtained. Within the Asian American communities, Southeast Asian ethnicities are most affected by poverty—with rates ranging from 18.03 percent to 37 percent. The apparent disparities between Asian ethnic groups and between Southeast Asian ethnicities and the general American population shows that the Asian American community and government agencies on the state and federal levels have a vested interest in the effects of poverty, and by extension welfare, on the Asian American population.

In January 2003, when the first group of families would time out of the CalWORKs program, 5,573 cases reached their time limit. It was projected that during the following 18-month period (January 2003 to June 2004) more than 64,000 cash-assistance cases would be affected by the time limits. Individuals were projected to continue to time out at a lower, steadier rate thereafter (Graves 2002). A disproportionate share of those who timed out had one or more of the following characteristics:

- Working adult
- Adult who speaks a primary language other than English
- Adult in two-parent family

Being Asian American is another characteristic disproportionately represented in the first cohort to time out of its welfare benefits (Graves 2003).

The information in Graph 3 represents two sets of important data. First, the gray bars show the percentage of all welfare recipients that timed out of welfare benefits in January 2003. The second feature of Graph 3, represented by the black bars, is the percentage of all timed-out individuals whose primary language is an Asian language in the same six counties. In all counties referenced, Asian Americans are being disproportionately affected by time limits in comparison to all welfare recipients in the same time frame. In addition, in four of the six counties studied the majority of Asian Americans on welfare lost their cash assistance due to time limits in January 2003.

Beyond the data shown in Graph 3, counties have compiled more recent data that demonstrates the severe disproportionate impact of welfare reform time limits on Asian American welfare recipients. In Alameda County, out of 2,660 individuals who timed out by June 2003, approximately 1,250 individuals, or 47 percent, were Asian American. At the same time, only 17 percent of all welfare recipients were of Asian descent. For the same time period in the county of San Francisco, findings show 60 percent of timed-out individuals were either Chinese or Vietnamese

American—despite the fact that they accounted for only 15 percent of all caseloads in the county. Finally, in Santa Clara County, 83 percent of 1,927 individuals who timed out between January 2003 and June 2004 were of an Asian ethnicity. Asian Americans made up only 24 percent of the county's CalWORKs recipients. From this county data and the data in Graph 3, welfare time limits clearly have an impact and a disproportionate effect on Asian Americans in California (Chow, Osterling, and Xu 2005).

In general, welfare information on Asian Americans is not disaggregated by ethnicity. Ethnic-specific information, however, is important, as shown in Graph 2, as it enables policy makers to gain a greater perspective on which groups are in need of aid.

Examining the racial distribution of timed-out individuals in Los Angeles County also demonstrates the disproportionate effect of welfare time limits on Asian Americans. Asian Americans, at 37 percent, compose the highest percentage of any racial group in Los Angeles County to time out of welfare as of June 2003. In breaking down the information in a different way, a more significant disparity becomes apparent.

A breakdown of timed-out individuals in Los Angeles County by primary language demonstrates that the Southeast Asian ethnicities compose the majority of not only Asian ethnic representation, but also a strong share of all timed-out individuals: Vietnamese, 19 percent, and Cambodian, 5 percent. In reorganizing data by primary language, as opposed to race, there emerges a clearer picture of the impacted groups. Shifting the focus to the entire welfare recipient population, data from April 1999 shows that Asian Americans made up only 8 percent of all welfare recipients, but encompassed 37 percent of timed-out individuals as of June 2003. This shows a severe overrepresentation of Asian Americans among those welfare recipients losing their benefits due to time limits.

When Los Angeles County welfare recipients are broken down by primary language spoken, a similar disproportionate representation of Asian-language-speaking individuals is revealed. Cambodian- and Vietnamese-speaking individuals make up only 2 percent of all welfare recipients each, but account for 5 percent and 19 percent of timed-out individuals, respectively. Similarly, Chinese-speaking individuals make up only 1 percent of all welfare recipients, but 8 percent of timed-out individuals. As previous data in this analysis has demonstrated, various Asian ethnicities are affected disproportionately in comparison to other racial and ethnic groups by the CalWORKS reforms on the welfare system.

Time Limits, Asian Americans, and Welfare Reform in Current Literature

While data is available from both government and community-based organization sources on how Asian Americans are affected by the CalWORKs time limit, there has been limited academic articles and reports on the topic. Examination of current literature reveals information on the subjects of time limits and racial disparities in welfare reform, but articles and reports combining these two subjects are few and

far between. This section will briefly discuss some of the available articles that describe the issues of time limits and racial disparities separately.

Defining "Hard to Employ"

Being of an Asian ethnicity does not in itself cause the disparities shown in the previous section. Characteristics common to many Asian Americans on welfare place them in the category of "hard to employ," or "hard to serve." "Hard to employ" describes individuals on welfare who face significant and/or multiple barriers to employment. Barriers may include any combination of the following:

- Substance abuse
- Mental and physical health issues
- Disability
- Low educational attainment
- Limited work experience
- Limited English proficiency
- Exposure to domestic violence (U.S. General Accounting Office 2001)

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) released a report, "Moving Hard-to-Employ Recipients into the Workforce" (2001), which demonstrated the need to place greater attention on meeting the needs of those individuals on welfare who have characteristics that make employment difficult. As caseloads have declined since PRWORA was passed in 1996, the percentage of cases with one or more of these characteristics has increased as more easily employed individuals leave welfare to work. Despite GAO data showing individuals who have one or more hard-to-employ characteristics have a lower rate of employment than individuals without such characteristics, the GAO recommends that more steps be taken at the state level to "estimate the number and characteristics of hard-to-employ TANF recipients, and identify who will reach their 60-month limit on benefits before they are able to work" (U.S. GAO 2001, 35).

The lack of data collection or data analysis is frequently repeated within this 2001 report. The six states surveyed for this study, including California, took various measures to aid hard-to-employ cases, such as screening and assessment or offering aid after an individual was unable to find work after initial attempts were made. In addition, states offered programs including expanded case management services, training, and work experience. Little data is collected on the effectiveness of these programs. This represents a huge gap in the study of the effects of welfare reform. Another gap in this study is the lack of attention given to the representation of various racial groups among the hard to employ. Greater data collection and analysis must be taken in this area as well. Without proper data, there can be no informed programmatic recommendations or decisions. Accurate data must be kept and shared on a more immediate basis so programs and policies can make appropriate shifts.

Racial Discrepancies in the Effects of Welfare Reform

Previous studies reflect on the issues of welfare without consideration to potentially racialized outcomes. Racial disparities in the effects of welfare reform are discussed in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* article, "Whites Are Now Leaving the Welfare Roles Faster Than Blacks" (1998). In 1998, for the first time in history, Black welfare recipients outnumbered their White counterparts. Blacks constituted 37 percent of all welfare recipients nationwide; Whites were only 35 percent. Since 1994, the year when welfare rolls were at their peak, the number of Whites receiving public assistance has declined by 25 percent, while Black numbers only reduced by 17 percent. This discrepancy was more marked in some regions of the country.

The difference in reaction to welfare policy changes by differing racial groups shows that the welfare reforms of 1996 may have unforeseen and unintended racial consequences. This article highlights the need to assess how varying racial groups are being affected by the welfare reforms that have been instated throughout the country since 1996. Changes or enhancements may be needed in existing welfare reforms in order to ensure that they do not promote existing racial inequities.

Overall, the existing literature on the subject of hard-to-employ cases, time limits, and racial discrepancies shows a need for greater data collection and analysis. More specifically, greater attention must be paid to the case of Asian American welfare recipients in relation to each of these subjects. This need has been demonstrated by the welfare statistic on Asian Americans given in previous sections of this essay. It is understood that the issues of welfare today have only recently come to light as national welfare reform took place less than ten years ago and reform in California was passed even more recently. However, it is imperative that immediate action be taken to collect data on the effects of welfare reforms, including the effects across racial lines.

Southeast Asian American Welfare Recipients in Wisconsin

While information on California's Southeast Asian American welfare recipients is limited, reports have been released in other states with sizeable refugee populations. One example can be found in the state of Wisconsin where more than 39,000 Hmong American refugees reside. A report released by the Institute for Wisconsin's Future, written by Thomas Moore and Vicky Selkove (1999), gives an overview of the status of Hmong aid recipients just prior to reaching the state-mandated, 24-month time limit. This qualitative study was based on interviews with 137 Hmong welfare recipients from throughout the state. The experience of the Hmong in Wisconsin reinforces the hard-to-employ status of Asian American welfare recipients.

This study found that the majority of Hmong were married with more than five children, had limited English proficiency, lacked job skills, and suffered from childcare and mental health issues. While Wisconsin's welfare program, Wisconsin Works (W-2), provides job skills training, these courses remain inaccessible to Hmong aid recipients due to difficulty communicating with their caseworker and difficulty attending courses due to lack of English-language proficiency, health issues, and lack of childcare.

The recommendations made by this study include greater language assistance, expanded education and technical training opportunities, and extension of the two-year time limit. Language assistance and expanded training programs would be highly relevant in the case of Asian American welfare recipients in California. However, the application of a time-limit extension may have less relevance in a state like California, which already allows the federal maximum of sixty months of assistance. In addition, the Institute for Wisconsin's Future report does little to explain the precise need or intended outcome of a time-limit extension. Such data would be more useful in analyzing how such a recommendation would function in other states like California.

Existing research on time limits and the hard to serve pay little to no attention to the Asian American experience. Articles discussing racial disparities due to welfare reform also leave out Asian Americans—opting to maintain the Black-White paradigm of racial analysis. Research on Asian American welfare recipients consistently falls short of analyzing how Asian Americans will be affected by being timed out of welfare and how time-limit extensions may help this hard-to-serve community. Given the extent to which Asian Americans are being affected by reaching their time limit, future research must pay greater attention to how time limits and potential changes to welfare reform will affect the Asian American community, not only along racial lines, but along ethnic lines as well.

Causes of Hard-to-Serve Status among Asian Americans

With the understanding that Asian Americans, Southeast Asian ethnicities, specifically, are being disproportionately affected by time limits on welfare benefits, a greater analysis of the causes of the disparities is needed.

Lifetime time limits did not exist in welfare policies until the passage of PRWORA and the creation of TANF in 1996. Welfare reform also introduced a new focus for national welfare policy—"work first." This new focus produced the desired outcome of putting more welfare recipients to work, but left the hard-to-serve welfare population behind. Included in this hard-to-serve population are many Southeast Asian refugees. Factors leading to Southeast Asian refugees' hard-to-serve status are as follows:

- English-language deficiency
- Low education/work experience
- Mental health problems
- Poor economy
- Stringent work-first policies

There are multiple factors that contribute to the problem of Asian Americans, or any hard-to-employ individuals, being pushed off of welfare too early due to the sixty-month time limit.

The policy shift in welfare accompanying PRWORA and TANF has changed the way in which welfare workers, advocates, and welfare recipients cope with the barriers. Time limits and work first are new standards that policy makers must work

within and around in order to produce services and programs that give the most optimal and efficient forms of welfare aid.

During the time following the passage of PRWORA and CalWORKs, the United States enjoyed strong economic growth and unemployment was very low—5 percent in 1998 and 4 percent in 2000 (Loprest 2003). Easy-to-serve welfare recipients moved off the rolls quickly leading to the dramatic decline in caseloads across the country.

The economy situates welfare reform in a tenuous location. Will the “success” of welfare reform and its declining caseloads continue in today’s weakening economy? Today’s weakening economy reduces job opportunities. Due to low-skill levels, former welfare recipients will likely be the first fired in harsh economic times. Understanding welfare reform in the context of America’s economic ebb and flow will allow for the creation of more robust and effective policy, programs, and services.

Under PRWORA, and by extension CalWORKs, there is a requirement for all cash aid recipients to begin working after 24 months on welfare. Largely, job training and English-language courses do not count as work for this requirement (Weil and Finegold 2002). The work-first policy forces many hard-to-serve welfare recipients to seek employment before completing language or occupational skills courses. Frequently, they find work in low-wage positions that do provide benefits. The low wages earned are not sufficient to move individuals off of welfare rolls. At the same time, because individuals are often working at, or near, full time, there is little opportunity to balance training courses with work and family responsibilities.

A Current Model Program: AsianWORKs

The hard-to-serve, or hard-to-employ, status of many Asian American welfare recipients has not gone entirely unnoticed. While federal, state, and county offices have not given special attention to this sector of the welfare rolls, several community-based organizations have taken action. One such program is AsianWORKs, serving primarily Southeast Asian American welfare recipients in Oakland, California. AsianWORKs attempts to approach this population with greater cultural and language competence in order to help it better utilize the welfare system and exit more successfully.

The “AsianWORKs: A TANF Program for Southeast Asian Americans in Oakland, California” (Chow, Bester, and Shinn 2001) article highlights Asian Americans, particularly Southeast Asian Americans as a hard-to-serve population. Similar to hard-to-employ cases described in the GAO report, Southeast Asian Americans often have language difficulties, low education levels, and lack viable job skills. In addition to these barriers, Southeast Asian Americans also experience a higher rate of adjustment and mental health issues due to their refugee experience. These issues further compound Southeast Asian American welfare recipients’ abilities to remove themselves from the welfare rolls.

Due to these characteristics, AsianWORKs, a TANF-funded program, works in Oakland to better meet the needs of the hard-to-serve Southeast Asian community. AsianWORKs focuses on the major characteristics of Southeast Asian American

welfare recipients that make them hard to serve and helps recipients overcome these issues so they can enter the workforce in upwardly mobile positions.

By creating greater access for the Cambodian American community in Oakland, AsianWORKs removes many cultural and language barriers and creates a positive image within the community. AsianWORKs also aims to educate both the mainstream and local communities on issues of mental health and other general barriers faced by Southeast Asian refugee welfare recipients. AsianWORKs represents a different, and highly localized, approach to meeting the needs of the hard to serve and hard to employ.

The AsianWORKs program continues to face difficulties because its participants continue to face language and cultural barriers in the labor market, which has only limited opportunities for employment overall. Alternative job opportunities must be developed to help meet the needs of this hard-to-serve sector of the population. Despite these shortcomings, the success of this program points to a greater need to use TANF program funding in more innovative and efficient ways.

While this study shows this program to be successful, the scale remains very small. This study measured AsianWORKs success by how well the program “engages its participants in the process of minimizing their barriers to participation in the labor force.” This study, however, does not provide quantitative measurements of such success.

The AsianWORKs program aids its participants in gaining greater access to various welfare programs, but it remains unclear how effective these welfare programs are once the community accesses them. It is not an inevitability that participating in government welfare programs will lead to a successful exit from the system. If the available government training and language programs do not significantly help these Southeast Asian American recipients move off welfare, these individuals will remain on welfare and time out of their benefits once they reach their sixty-month limit. Access to programs is not, on its own, a solution to Asian Americans being disproportionately affected by welfare time limits in California.

Potential Solutions in Serving the Hard to Employ

Taking the experience of the AsianWORKs program into consideration, other solutions must address the threat of welfare time limits on the Asian American community. Given the specific barriers faced by Southeast Asian refugees on the welfare rolls, three general solutions can be prescribed to help ease the transition from welfare recipient to self-sufficient worker with a sustainable wage. Each of these solutions will be analyzed within the specific context of Southeast Asian American recipients and also more generally across all welfare recipients. They will also be measured based on their ability to reduce barriers faced by hard-to-serve welfare participants and the additional financial appropriation necessary for implementation. The proposed solutions are as follows:

1. Months where recipients meet employment requirements should not be counted towards the lifetime time limit (Work Stops the Clock).

Many Asian American former welfare recipients were employed during at least part of the sixty months prior to reaching the lifetime limit for receiving benefits. While many individuals were working while on welfare—64 percent of Vietnamese Americans who timed out in Santa Clara County—most were forced into work without completing job and English-language training that would allow them to enter the labor market with greater prospects of job security, upward mobility, and a sustainable income. Many former Southeast Asian American welfare recipients in California complained that they were in the process of training but were unable to complete their education because they reached their lifetime limit. Due to work-first policies and the limited time spent on welfare rolls, many Asian Americans enter the job market in occupations with little chance for advancement.

An employment requirement may be set by either minimum hours worked per week or a minimum income. For example, if the requirement was a minimum of thirty hours of work per week, then individuals working thirty hours every week in a given month would not have that month counted toward the sixty-month time limit.

As Asian Americans, and other welfare recipients, use up their welfare time allocation, they lose access to the original intent of the welfare system—the social and economic safety net. If former welfare recipients have diminished their sixty-month time allocation and fall below the poverty line, they cannot rely on government cash assistance and cannot enter the welfare system. This is a severe long-term danger of the federally mandated lifetime limit on the welfare eligibility of individuals who meet employment requirements but do not earn a sufficient income to leave the welfare rolls.

2. Activities meeting work-first requirements should include participating in training and education programs.

Greater inclusiveness of activities that qualify as “work” to meet work-first requirements would allow participants to spend more time in and complete training programs. In completing courses, welfare recipients would enter the job market with greater skills at a higher wage level. Additionally, welfare recipients would be more likely to retain employment in occupations with opportunities for advancement. With higher wages and upward mobility, recipients would be able to leave welfare rolls in a more stable position.

This solution may be implemented in conjunction with or in lieu of the above solution, Work Stops the Clock. In conjunction with Work Stops the Clock, this solution would allow welfare recipients to prolong their time on welfare beyond sixty months by partaking in training, language, and/or education programs. Participating in language or job-training programs would count as the employment requirements regardless of the work-first policy. Months when welfare recipients attended qualifying courses would not count toward the sixty-month time limit. If this recommendation were used in lieu of Work

Stops the Clock, this solution would allow recipients to utilize education and training programs to fulfill their work-first requirement and maintain their benefits during their sixty months on welfare. Rather than find employment to fulfill work-first requirements, welfare recipients would be able to spend more time in training and education programs and better situate themselves in the job market.

3. Targeted training, education, and other service programs should be expanded and made more accessible to all welfare recipients.

As seen in the example of the AsianWORKS program in Oakland, TANF funds can be used to sponsor programs run and created by community-based organizations. Similarly, these same funds should be used to create programs like AsianWORKS within the government welfare offices themselves. It is possible to create initiatives that can target the specific needs of specific sections of the welfare population, such as Cambodian Americans in Alameda County.

Specifically, welfare programs need to expand and provide a more comprehensive set of services to help welfare recipients move toward self-sufficiency. This solution directly impacts the barriers that face the hard to employ—Southeast Asian American or otherwise. Necessary programs and services fall into the following categories:

- Skills—job training, retention, and mobility services
- Resources—transportation, mental health, healthcare, child care
- Education—English language, general education

Currently, participants have limited access to programs that offer these types of resources and training because of rules restricting the number of months of English-language and job-training courses that can be counted toward work requirements—as few as three months.

With limited English language proficiency, many participants in welfare report that training program curricula do not reflect issues of language skill or emotional status. Additionally, participants are often unaware of the value of various welfare programs to help them successfully enter the job market. For many Asian American welfare recipients, requirements are seen as useless and an additional obstacle to receiving benefits. Program effectiveness could be further enhanced by more efficient and timely communication of time-limit rules and the number of eligible months individuals have left. A better understanding of rules and remaining eligibility would allow participants to better utilize the available resources and move off of welfare more efficiently.

Costs and Benefits of Potential Solutions

While all these solutions seem to require some extra appropriation from the state or a shift in the budgeting of existing federal grants, it is important to note that in order to receive TANF block grants, states are required to spend “significant amounts of state funds on cash assistance and related programs” (Weil and Finegold 2002). Hence, all states currently have a budget allocation that may cover, at least in part, the changes suggested within each of these suggestions.

Allowing months where recipients meet employment requirements not to count toward their lifetime limit, or Work Stops the Clock, has a number of costs associated with it. As federal mandates only allow federal funds to be used for time-limit exemptions for a maximum 20 percent of timed-out individuals, the costs of creating yet another exemption would fall to the states. Costs may also increase due to individuals who are currently working and eligible for welfare but are not enrolled in welfare programs. The ability to work and maintain welfare benefits may give the unenrolled, eligible individuals motivation for entering the system. In not counting months when participants are employed and working, this policy would extend the amount of time individuals would remain on welfare. Cost, however, is also a factor in allowing greater inclusiveness in work-first policies. By including job skills training and English-language courses as qualifying work-first activities, there will be increased participation in these programs. This increased participation will require providing more classes and greater resource and monetary allocation. Due to lack of research and data, it is unclear which policy would require a greater expansion of the state's welfare budget.

While financial considerations are important in any policy recommendation, the benefits gained from such policy change must also be taken into account. Both proposed solutions—Work Stops the Clock and expansion of work-first activities—would provide welfare participants with a greater opportunity to complete their training—a major issue for many timed-out Asian Americans. Allowing recipients to finish their training programs will help them leave the welfare rolls independently and with a greater knowledge base. With both potential policies, aid recipients will enter the job market at a higher wage level and with a more stable occupation with opportunity for advancement.

Adding time-limit exemptions offers other benefits not provided by expanding work-first qualifications. Allowing employed aid recipients to remain on the welfare rolls will increase the work participation rate. Work participation rate is the percentage of welfare recipients who are employed and working while receiving aid. This percentage is used to rank states in order to distribute TANF block funds annually. If states do not meet the federal set work participation rate, they will face financial deductions.

The second appealing outcome of not counting months when recipients meet an employment requirement toward the sixty-month time limit is that it guarantees that individuals who are working and compliant with policies during their stay on welfare will not lose the intended safety-net feature of the welfare system. Despite the potential of including training and language courses as fulfilling work-first requirements to help individuals maintain the safety net, it is not a guarantee. This is especially relevant in the case of Asian American welfare recipients who often face obstacles in accessing training and language courses. While maintaining the safety net, this policy is not comprehensive, as it does not account for the ineffectiveness of current programming, especially with regard to the hard to employ.

Neither more inclusive work-first policies nor an expansion of time-limit exemptions will improve the welfare system for Asian Americans if the training programs continue to be inaccessible due to language and cultural barriers. The potential policy change of expanding and refocusing training and language programming

attempts to address the issues and needs of the hard to serve. More efficient programs would add to the ability of the welfare system to prepare aid recipients for exit from government assistance at a sustaining wage level. Greater effectiveness of these programs would have high short-term costs as programming would need to be reworked to account for cultural and language specifications. However, costs would be minimized in the long run as participants move through the programs, and therefore the welfare system, more efficiently. As shown in the case of AsianWORKs, federal TANF funds may be used for such programming. As the federally allocated budget is already stretched to its limits, an increase and reworking of existing programs would require a shifting of the existing budget allotments.

A Complex Solution for a Complex Problem

As mentioned previously, expanding work-first activities and including work as a time-limit exemption are not mutually exclusive policies. In fact, all three potential solutions, in concert, represent a comprehensive policy recommendation. In adding minimum hours per week worked as an exemption, the welfare system will maintain its intended purpose as a financial safety net for individuals on welfare who comply with all regulations and policies.

The timeline and path of welfare recipients under current welfare policies pressures participants to find work quickly without acquiring the necessary language and job skills for success in the job market. This leads many Asian American welfare recipients to take jobs that do not pay a sufficient living wage, do not provide benefits, and have little opportunity for advancement. In allowing training and language courses to count as work-first activities, the portion of the timeline spent on training would expand, but the overall time on welfare would potentially decrease. Welfare programs would better prepare recipients for work before sending them into the job market. In doing so, welfare recipients will be better able to attain higher wages in occupations that provide benefits and opportunities for advancement. As welfare recipients are able to achieve these ends, they will be able to exit the welfare system more successfully and efficiently.

Creating more targeted and efficient training and language programs intends not only to improve the experience of welfare participants, but also to shorten their stay on welfare. Targeted, language and culturally competent programs would allow California's welfare system to better serve not only Asian Americans, but all welfare recipients and truly help them move off of welfare and out of poverty. Greater effectiveness and efficiency will, in the long run, enable participants to receive sufficient training, enter the job market prepared, and leave the welfare rolls in less time.

This comprehensive solution attempts to address the various causes of the problem of too many Asian Americans in California being pushed off of welfare because they reach their lifetime welfare time limit of sixty months despite being employed during their time on welfare. However, before any policy decisions can be made, greater research must be completed to better understand this complex issue. More comprehensive and efficient data collection is needed to better understand the effects of time limits. This must include both individuals still on the welfare rolls and individuals who have already timed out. Additionally, studies on

the financial consequences of such policy decisions must be conducted for policy makers to make a truly informed decision. This complex problem requires policy makers to look more broadly and not neglect the original intent of the welfare system as a financial safety net for the American people.

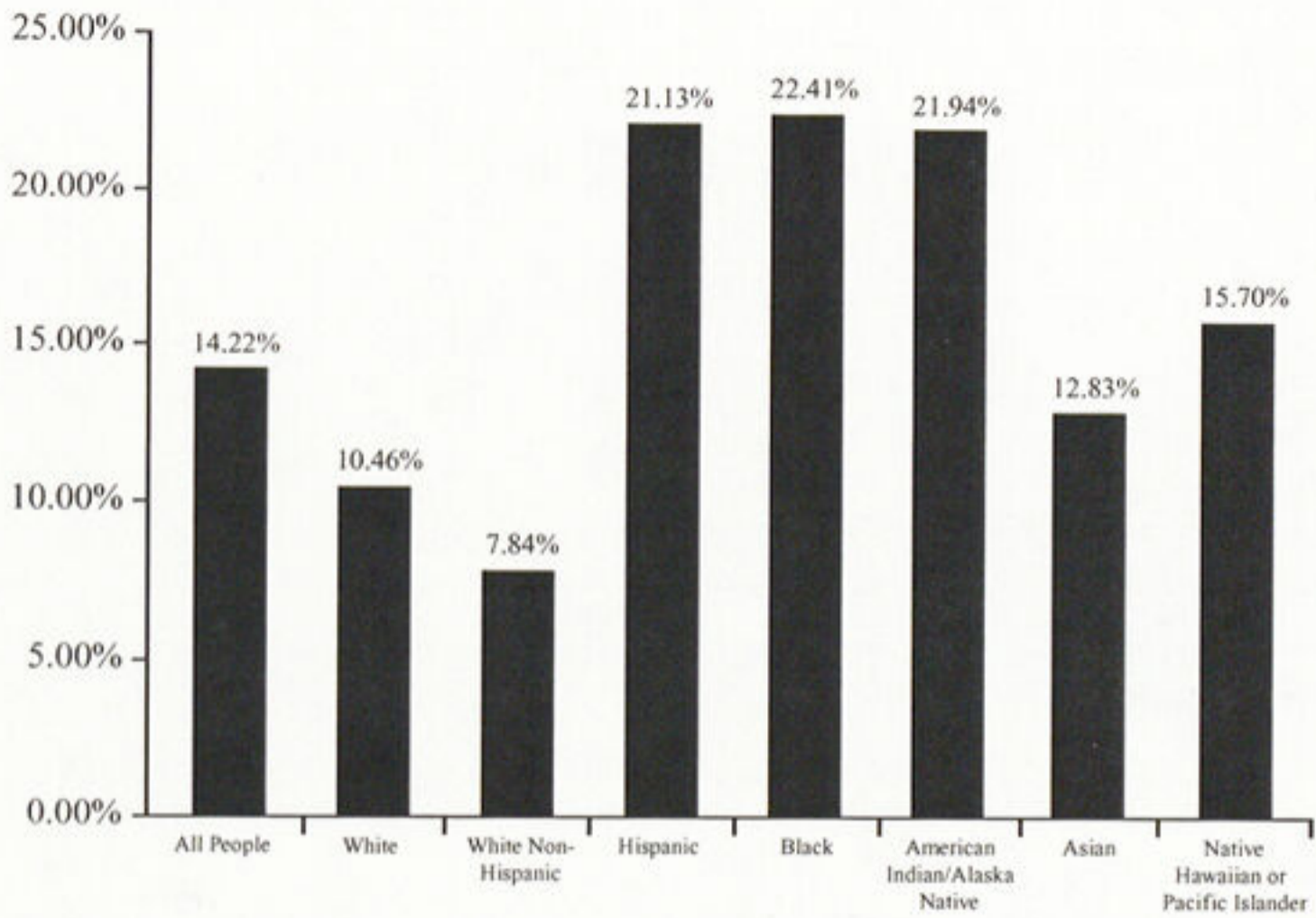
Endnotes

1 "Timed out" refers to recipients reaching their sixty-month lifetime limit.

References

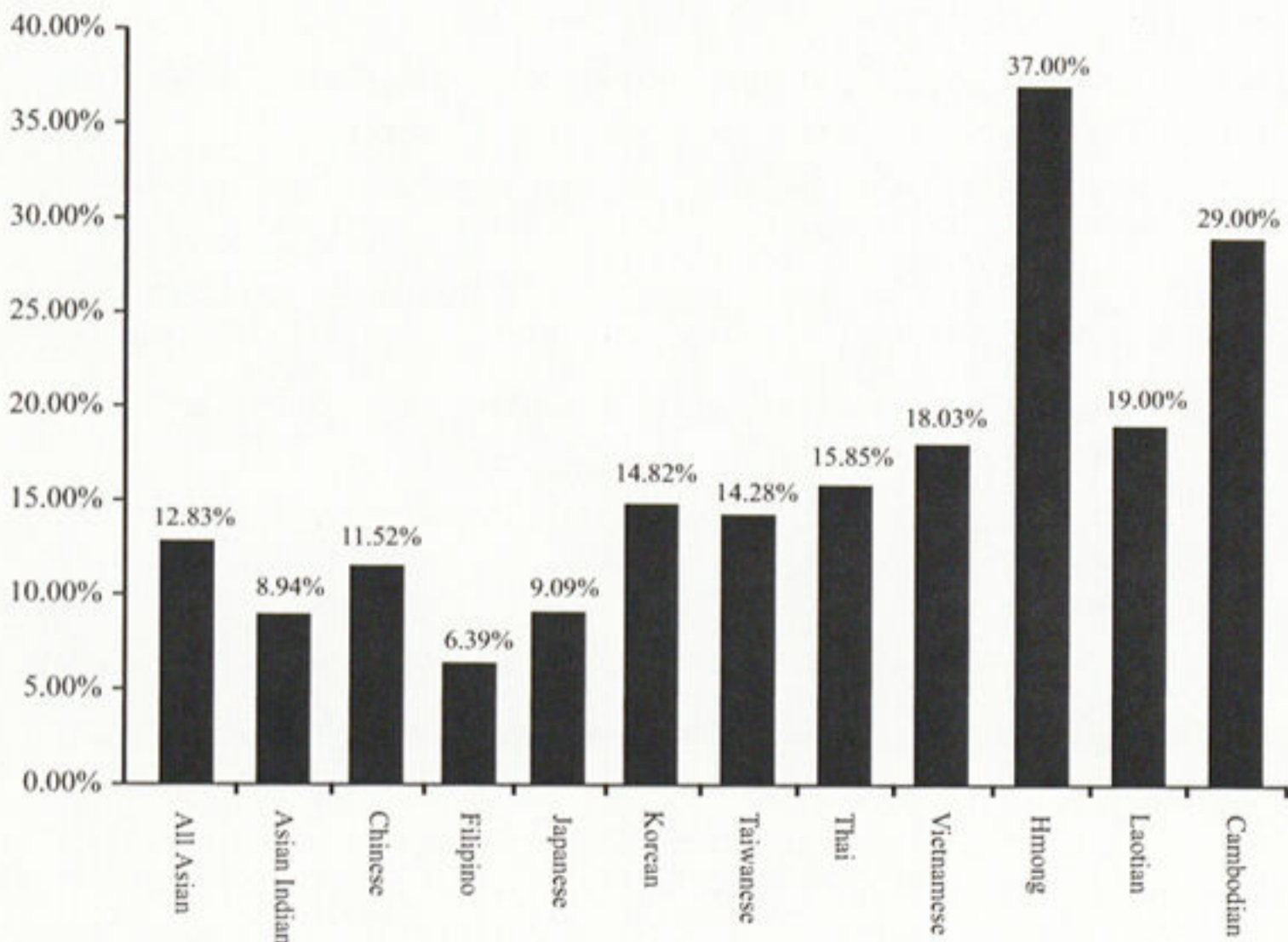
- Chow, J., N. Bester, and A. Shinn. 2001. AsianWORKs: A TANF program for Southeast Asian Americans in Oakland, California. *Journal of Community Practice* 9(3): 111-124.
- Chow, J.C., K.L. Osterling, and Q. Xu. 2005. The risk of timing out: Welfare-to-work services to Asian immigrants and refugees. *AAPJ Nexus* 3(2): 85-104.
- Crow, S.E., and J. Anderson. 2004. Working against the clock: Implementing five-year welfare time limits in California. In California Policy Research Center brief: Welfare Policy Research Project 16(4), June.
- de Sa, K. 2002. California's welfare cutoffs will predominantly impact Asian Americans. *San Jose Mercury News*, December 17. Available online at www.modelminority.com.
- Graves, S. 2003. Welfare reform: Early impact of CalWORKs 60-month time limit. California Budget Project, June.
- Graves, S. 2002. Timing out: CalWORKs recipients face the state's five-year time limit. California Budget Project, December.
- Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. 1998. Whites are now leaving the welfare rolls faster than Blacks. *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 21: 70.
- KAC-CIC and UCLA/CAPACD. 2002. Poverty, with information from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Advanced Query.
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services. 1999. CalWORKS caseload characteristics. April.
- Loprest, P. 2003. Fewer welfare leavers employed in weak economy. In *Assessing the New Federalism*. The Urban Institute, August.
- Moore, T., and V. Selkove. 1999. The impact of welfare reform on Wisconsin's Hmong aid recipients. The Institute for Wisconsin's Future, December.
- Moreno, M.N. et al. 2004. Researching time limits in Los Angeles County: A study of an early cohort. County of Los Angeles, Chief Administrative Office, Service Integration Branch, Research and Evaluation Services, January.
- National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum. 2002. Welfare reform and Asian immigrant women.
- U.S. General Accounting Office. 2001. Welfare reform: Moving hard-to-employ recipients into the workforce. March.
- Weil, A., and K. Finegold. 2002. Introduction. In *Welfare reform: The next act*, xi-xxxi. Edited by A. Weil and K. Finegold. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.

Graph 1. Poverty among Racial Groups in California



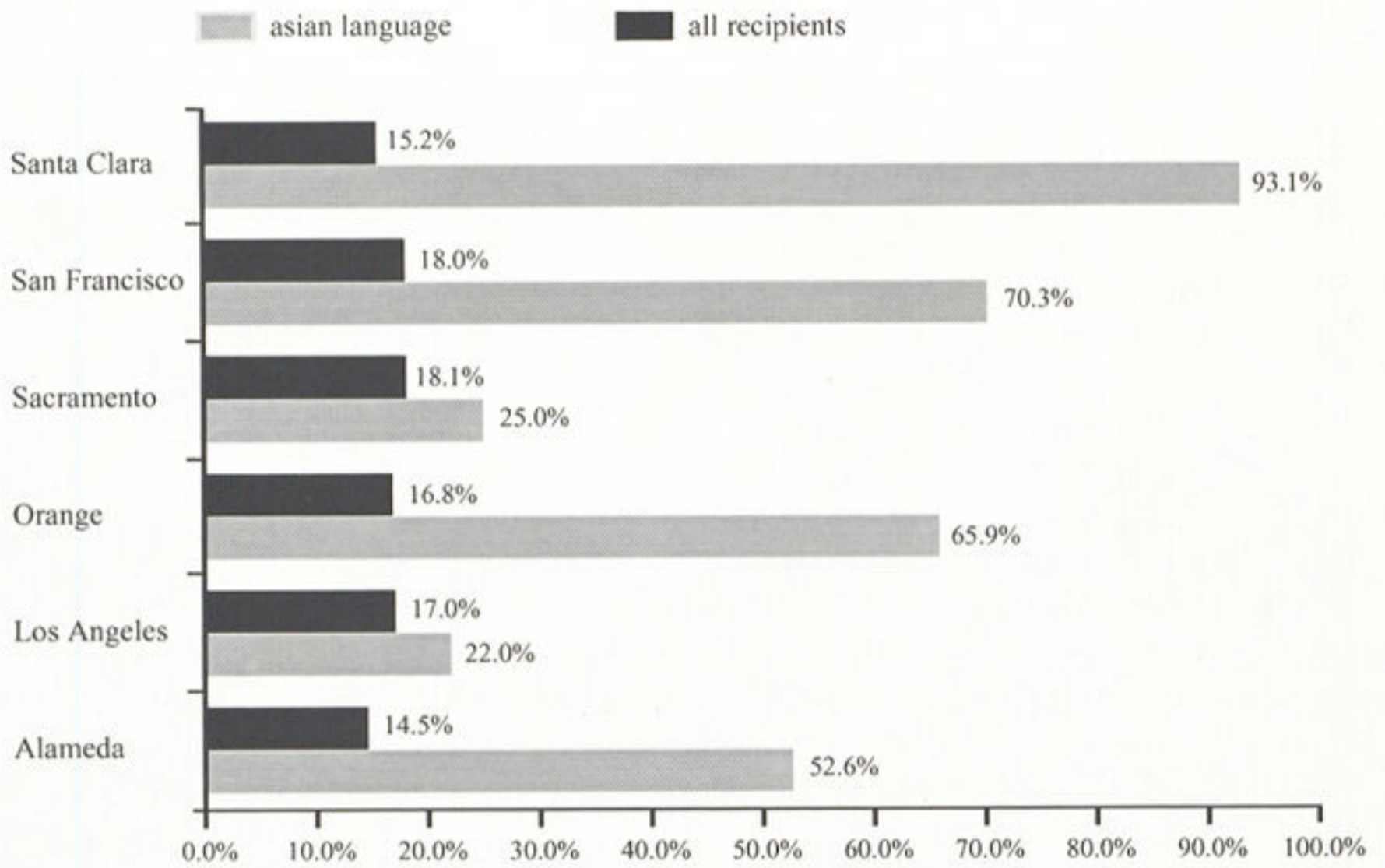
Source: KAC-CIC and UCLA/CAPACD 2002.

Graph 2. Poverty among Asian Ethnicities in California



Source: KAC-CIC and UCLA/CAPACD 2002

**Graph 3. Percentage of Adults who Reached Time Limits in January 2003
(Select California Counties): All Welfare Recipients Versus Recipients whose
Primary Language is an Asian Language**



Source: Tables 1 and 2 in Graves 2002.



Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy

RESERVE YOUR COPY OF VOLUME XII TODAY

The 2006 issue of the *Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy*, "A Nation Exposed: Rebuilding African American Communities," is currently available. The journal is a must-read for scholars, students, social scientists, and practitioners with an interest in redeveloping the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. "A Nation Exposed" explores the issues of community and economic development, education, environmental quality, civic participation, and health care and provides recommendations for the revitalization of the Gulf region. Contributors to Volume XII include:

- Melanie L. Campbell
- Congresswoman Donna M. Christensen
- Dr. Michael Eric Dyson
- Marc Morial

COMPLETE THIS FORM TO ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY!

YES, please sign me up as an annual subscriber to the **Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy.**

\$10 students

Payment enclosed

\$20 individuals

Bill my VISA MC

\$40 libraries & institutions

Name (print) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Card # _____ Exp date: _____ / _____

Signature _____

Mail this form to:

Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy
John F. Kennedy School of Government ♦ Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street ♦ Cambridge, MA 02138
www.ksg.harvard.edu/HJAAP ♦ Email: hjaap@ksg.harvard.edu
Phone: (617) 496-0517 ♦ Fax: (617) 384-9555

house06

How MTV and Other Corporations Are Challenging Asian America: An Examination of the Business Perspective on Asian American Identity

Daniel Y. Jang

When MTV announced that it was launching a new division called MTV World in 2004, it became the first major media company to target the Asian American community. MTV World would offer three new networks specifically for Asian American audiences in the United States, including MTV Desi for South Asian Americans, MTV Chi for Chinese Americans, and MTV K for Korean Americans. Nusrat Durrani, general manager of MTV World, explained that the decision to develop these networks was based on MTV's recognition of an underserved, yet rapidly growing Asian American market. "We looked at the U.S. Census, how Asian Americans are the third largest group in the country, the fastest growing, with very vibrant cultures and [a] lot of diversity" (Daswani 2005). The channels would not be mere reproductions of MTV's international networks but would offer "customized programming" reflecting the "bicultural identities" of the audiences here in the United States (Yang 2005). MTV Desi hit the airwaves first in July 2005, MTV Chi launched in December 2005, and MTV K is scheduled to roll out later this year.

MTV's venture in the Asian American market can be regarded as a compelling business strategy for an organization facing the challenges of a maturing brand; the company must continue to find new ways to connect with its audiences and expand into new markets. However, the creation of MTV World should be regarded as much more than simply a business strategy. It is, in fact, also a meaningful policy statement

Daniel Y. Jang is a consultant at Monitor Group, where he works exclusively with private equity fund Monitor Clipper Partners. Previously, he was a summer analyst at a venture capital firm based in Seoul, South Korea. Jang currently also leads newSpark group, a nonprofit start-up providing full-time young professionals opportunities to volunteer on international development projects. In 2003-2004, he was an Urban Fellow at the NYC Economic Development Corporation where he received the President's Award for his contributions to redevelopment initiatives in upper Manhattan. Jang received a B.A., cum laude with distinction, in economics from Yale University, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa.

on Asian Americans and Asian American identity. It is MTV's policy statement—one that I would argue is shared increasingly by more corporations today.

The Asian American community needs to understand the policies and perspectives of corporate America. Policy discussions involving Asian American race and identity have been dominated historically by the academic, public, and nonprofit spheres. The corporate perspective is rarely considered, which is remarkable when we reflect on the many recent controversial incidents involving companies that have sparked public debate about racial politics and policy. Examples include the "Tsunami" song on Hot 97, a New York City station owned by Emmis Communications; the "Wong Brothers" T-shirts manufactured by Abercrombie & Fitch; and the "Gay or Asian?" advertisement printed in *Details*, owned by Fairchild Publications. Given the effect companies' attitudes and actions can have on all Asian Americans, it is not sufficient merely to be reactive to certain negative corporate practices by voicing complaints on occasion. Instead, we must consider companies as key stakeholders in the public discourse on the issue of Asian American identity and be proactive in seeking out their perspectives on a regular basis.

MTV Approach

Based on recent announcements and business decisions, I would suggest that MTV subscribes to two simple yet significant viewpoints regarding Asian Americans. First, MTV believes in the importance and relevance of the Asian American community today, enough to invest substantially in this market. Other lesser-known platforms ostensibly also share this view, as they have created their own Asian American networks, such as AZN and ImaginAsian (note that MTV was the first major media company to enter this space but not actually the first player). Second, and perhaps more importantly, MTV believes in the necessity of segmenting within the Asian American market to launch three distinct networks. According to Durrani, MTV aims to "superserve" the Asian American ethnic markets and "make the environment as customized and as comfortable as possible for viewers, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach" (Yang 2005).

MTV's approach to the Asian American market reflects a broader shift in the corporate perspective toward Asian Americans. Many companies are beginning to recognize some important underlying trends that will shape how they think about Asian Americans going forward.

1. Asian Americans are a fast-growing demographic.

With the passage of key immigration reform laws, including the 1965 Hart-Cellar Act, which eliminated the national origins quota system, the population of Asian Americans in the United States has skyrocketed from 1.4 million in 1970 to 13.2 million in 2005 (Zhou 2004, Humphreys 2005). From 1990 to 2005, the Asian American population increased by more than four times the growth rate of the U.S. population as a whole, thus constituting a significant portion of the U.S. population (Humphreys 2005). As of the most recent census data, Asian Americans comprise approximately 4% of the entire U.S. population and are projected to make up 10% by the year 2050 (Humphreys 2005, Kaufman-Scarborough 2000).

2. Asian Americans have an increasing level of buying power.

In 2005, Asian Americans were estimated to have accounted for approximately \$397 billion in purchasing power, more than the gross domestic product of all but sixteen nations (Humphreys 2005). From 1990 to 2005, spending power was projected to have more than tripled, in part due to increasing numbers of Asian Americans with higher education, whether attained in the United States or brought with them at the time of immigration (Humphreys 2005, Gitlin 2005, Chalamwong 2004). It is projected that Asian American spending power will rise to \$579 billion by 2010 (Humphreys 2005).

3. Asian Americans are not monolithic and are increasingly diverse.

In 1970, the majority of Asian Americans (approximately 95%) included Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino Americans (Zhou and Gatewood 2000). As of 2000, Asian Americans include more than twenty different ethnic groups, with 87.5% of the total Asian American population represented by one of six ethnic groups, including Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese Americans (Kang & Lee 2004).

The emergence of these three trends is driving corporate America to reconsider the Asian American market. First, companies are paying more attention to this group, as seen at MTV. Saul Gitlin, an executive for an advertising agency focusing on the Asian American market remarks, "Whereas in the last 10 to 15 years, multicultural programs have been considered as good options, they are now increasingly being viewed by top corporate executives as business imperatives" (Gitlin 2005). He later states that this is especially true for the Asian American market, given the characteristics previously described.

Second, not only are corporations increasingly aware of the Asian American market overall, but they are also developing a more nuanced perspective on Asian Americans. Companies recognize the need to market in a way that is culturally relevant, whether that is "in language" or "in culture," specific to a particular ethnic subsegment (Cultural Marketing Communications 2005). In a study on marketing to Asian Americans, Carol Kaufman-Scarborough comments on "the need to identify and examine areas in which the Asian American 'market' is really composed of numerous submarkets, with neglected similarities and critical differences to take into account" (Kaufman-Scarborough 2000).

We are beginning to see this nuanced approach to Asian Americans not only at trend-setting media companies such as MTV but also at companies in more traditional industries. For example, in July 2005, Kraft announced that it would launch a marketing campaign targeting Asian Americans and, in particular, Chinese Americans. Kraft planned to develop Chinese-language print ads targeting immigrant Chinese-speaking mothers. The company also planned to deploy bilingual brand ambassadors to retailers to offer samples or give basic product information. Finally, Kraft announced that it would target specific community events, such as the Harvest Moon Festival in Los Angeles. In an article by Sonia Reyes describing Kraft's marketing strategy launch (2005), Bill Imada, president of the Asian

American Advertising Federation, remarked that he believes "Kraft's entry will make a big difference to those food makers who are on the fence."

Beyond the media and food industries, we might expect to see companies in the consumer-packaged goods, pharmaceutical, computer hardware/software, and travel/leisure areas increasingly target the Asian American market as well (Gitlin 2005). An entire industry is spinning up around corporations that are marketing to Asian Americans and looking to develop specialized in-culture promotions designed to attract particular ethnic subsegments. New companies such as Admerasia, an advertising agency focused on Asian Americans, have formed in recent years. Other more established firms, such as Kang & Lee, have experienced solid growth (Marketing Publishers of America 2004). Going forward, we should expect to see further adoption of this nuanced corporate view of Asian Americans.

Alternative Approach

It should be noted that not all companies agree with the MTV approach to segmenting Asian Americans. These companies do recognize the importance of the three trends involving Asian Americans described earlier and agree that they should focus more on the Asian American community. However, they also heavily weigh the potential ramifications of another emerging trend that would suggest the need for a very different approach to targeting Asian Americans: an increase in the population of multiracial individuals.

For the first time in U.S. history, the 2000 Census allowed respondents to select more than one race. Although we will have to wait for future studies to see how the trends are developing exactly, many scholars have already begun to analyze the data and extrapolate projections. One key indicator that provides some insight into the population trend of multiracial Americans with Asian heritage is the number of Asian interracial marriages. As of 2000, 44 percent of U.S.-born Asian American wives and 32 percent of U.S.-born Asian American husbands are in an interracial marriage (Lee and Edmonston 2005). When considering both interracial and intra-racial interethnic marriages, the percentages are higher. Although less than 40 percent of Asian Americans are U.S.-born, these figures suggest that the number of multiracial Americans with Asian heritage will increase markedly over time (Marketing Publishers of America 2004).

Some leaders in the corporate sector, in addition to scholars and policy makers, are beginning to grapple with the implications of this ever more diverse and complex Asian American community. Regarding the impact of this trend on the appropriateness of the ethnic-subsegmentation approach to marketing, one advertising executive explained his views this way: "Ethnic marketing could very easily inflame a diminishing problem which, according to the next generation, was never a reality at all. Racial differentiation is subsiding in the hands of the emerging generations...Would kids in the upcoming, inclusive generation find it flattering to be singled out in an ad?" (Klara 2005). As a result, this executive might advocate for the use of "broad brush" communication to market to Asian Americans; however, this type of approach may look all too similar to the "diffuse, untargeted campaign that many marketers say is a waste of money" (Klara 2005).

It is still unclear how companies would target the Asian American community in this emerging context. There are few marketing examples to study and learn from at this early stage. However, it seems that a marketing strategy suitable for this multiracial context would require a different frame of mind from the ethnic segmentation approach taken by MTV and others. Underlying this new marketing strategy, whatever it may be, will be a new policy statement and an alternative, broader corporate perspective toward Asian Americans.

Implications for Policy

Whether companies adopt a perspective closer to that of MTV or that of the emerging alternative approach, it is apparent that a general shift in the corporate attitude toward Asian Americans is currently taking place. Both perspectives reflect an increasing appreciation for the quickly growing Asian American demographic. In addition, both perspectives highlight the increasingly diverse and complex nature of the Asian American community.

These two simple yet powerful developments in corporate perspectives toward Asian Americans present both opportunities and challenges for the Asian American community. Greater appreciation and focus on the community should be viewed as a positive. As a result, we may experience over time benefits ranging from an overall heightened corporate awareness of issues affecting the Asian American community to, more specifically, greater exposure in the media.

Greater attention to the diverse, even fragmented, nature of the Asian American community may pose significant challenges, particularly to the notion of the Asian American identity itself. The Asian American identity has always been and remains a tenuous one. In a recent interview with reporter Evi Mariani (2005), Professor Evelyn Hu-deHart of Brown University described the Asian American identity as a political construct created in the 1960s that not many individuals buy into. She states, "So this [Asian American identity] is a political identity and it only works for those who have political consciousness." In other words, the Asian American identity is one that does not inherently inspire affiliation, given the nature of its origins. The Asian American label requires an active, conscious adoption by individuals who recognize the political good that comes from embracing the identity. The reality is that few Americans of Asian heritage readily identify themselves as Asian Americans (Zhou 2004).

Amidst this already uncertain context in which Asian Americans must embrace or reject the Asian American paradigm, corporate America enters the fray. In the case of MTV, marketing practices will place increasing pressure on Asian Americans to identify with their specific ethno-national background. As a Korean American, I will see on MTV K someone who looks like me, talks like me, and struggles with the same issues with which I do. I will learn to identify more and more with this character, rather than a generalized Asian American character. In short, the MTV-corporate perspective may implicitly encourage Asian Americans to reject the Asian American construct.

In the case of the alternative approach, the implications are also considerable. The focus on marketing to multiracial individuals will raise questions regarding the

relevancy of all preconceived notions of race in the first place. If my father is a Korea-born American, and my mother is a Caucasian American, what does that make me? If I then marry a Brazilian American and have a child, what does that make my child? Even if I can provide answers to these questions on paper, what is the significance of such categorizations any longer? In short, the alternative corporate perspective will push this (very necessary) dialogue and, in the process, may help shatter the logic of the Asian American construct altogether.

Conclusion

Since the 1960s, Asian Americans have continuously struggled to define the “Asian American” identity. Professor Don Nakanishi of the UCLA Asian Studies Department eloquently describes the fundamental challenge facing Asian Americans when he writes:

Their [Asian Americans’] unusual internal heterogeneity will challenge leaders and organizers of different Asian and Pacific Islander sectors and communities—often separated by both real and symbolic boundaries of national origin, language, culture, social class, religion, and other characteristics—to find common ground on key policy issues, to cope with the uneven political development and maturation of different ethnic groups, and to seek effective mechanisms for pursuing shared interests in a unified manner on both continuous and ad hoc bases. (Nakanishi 2001)

Asian American scholars, leaders, and organizers continue to debate the changing strategic, ideological, and tactical connotations of the terms “Asian American” and “Asian Pacific American” (Nakanishi 2001).

Amidst this ongoing debate on Asian American identity taking place in the public sphere, a simple but very clear perspective has begun to emerge from the private sphere. Grounded in demographic trends, the corporate perspective highlights two key elements about the Asian American community: 1) it is fast growing and deserves greater focus, and 2) it is increasingly diverse/complex and must be targeted accordingly. Companies have begun to execute marketing strategies involving variations on ways to market to a diverse population, whether it is through ethnic subsegmentation or some alternative method.

As we have already seen, these seemingly simple corporate marketing approaches could have serious consequences on the Asian American community. To be clear, corporate perspectives and policies certainly will not cause the dissolution of the Asian American identity. However, given the fundamental challenges inherent to the Asian American identity described by Nakanishi, the influence of the corporate perspective that stresses and caters to diversity can and, most probably, will exacerbate any preexisting difficulties in community building.

Therefore, it would be naïve to disregard the potential impact of the private sector on the development of the Asian American community and identity. First, we must make sure to remain aware of the corporate perspective through ongoing examination of business strategies and practices. Investigation into areas other than marketing strategy, such as human resource practices, may help further clarify the

emerging corporate perspective on Asian Americans. Then, if we agree that the Asian American identity is still relevant and helpful especially for political purposes, Asian American leaders must consider how best to respond to these new challenges. How will they adapt to an increasingly diverse Asian American community given the aforementioned pressures exerted by the private sector?

The challenges presented here require Asian American leaders to reconsider seriously and recapture the significance of the Asian American identity for the future. Some scholars and leaders have already begun to do this by focusing on an identity united by shared experiences rather than shared ethnicities (Lee and Edmonston 2005, Klara 2005, and Chu et al. 2006). Such efforts must continue. Asian America is reaching a critical inflexion point. We must be willing to reconstruct a new and relevant Asian American identity for a rapidly changing and diversifying population if it is not to become a failed experiment of the past.

References

- Chalamwong, Yongyuth. 2004. The migration of highly skilled Asian workers in OECD member countries and its effects on economic development in East Asia. Presented at the Experts' Seminar at OECD Headquarters, June 10-11.
- Chu, Jeff et al. 2006. Between two worlds: Born in the U.S.A. to Asian parents, a generation of immigrants' kids forges a new identity. *Time*, January 16, 1-7.
- Cultural Marketing Communications. 2005. Public relations and marketing to Asian Pacific American consumers. Available online at www.culturalmarketingcommunications.com/asianamericanmarketing.htm (accessed February 20, 2006).
- Daswani, Mansha. 2005. MTV World's Nusrat Durrani. Available online at www.worldscreen.com/print.php?filename=durrani0805.htm (accessed February 20, 2006).
- Gitlin, Saul. 2005. The Asian-American market: Midway between Census 2000 and 2010. Available online at www.multicultural.com/experts/art_asian.html (accessed February 20, 2006).
- Humphreys, Jeffrey M. 2005. Economy 2005. America's minority buying power. *Georgia Business and Economic Conditions* 65(3): 1-27.
- Kang & Lee Advertising. 2004. Asian American market "101." Available online at www.kanglee.com/market/index.html (accessed February 20, 2006).
- Kaufman-Scarborough, Carol. 2000. Asian-American consumers as a unique market segment: fact or fallacy? *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 17(3): 249-262.
- Klara, Robert. 2005. Consumer insights: Land of confusion. Available online at www.newamericandimensions.com/NEWS_articles.html (accessed February 20, 2006).
- Lee, Sharon M., and Barry Edmonston. 2005. New marriages, new families: U.S. racial and Hispanic intermarriage. *Population Bulletin* 60(2): 1-40.
- Mariani, Evi. 2005. Working for multicultural America. *The Jakarta Post*, 16 July.
- Marketing Publishers of America. 2004. Asian American market profile. Available online at www.magazine.org/content/files/market_profile_asian.pdf (accessed February 20, 2006).
- Nakanishi, Don. 2001. Political trends and electoral issues of the Asian Pacific American population, 170-199. In *America becoming: Racial trends and their consequences*. Edited by Neil J. Smelser, William Julius Wilson, and Faith Mitchell. Washington, D.C., National Academy Press.

Reyes, Sonia. 2005. Targeting Kraft initiative woos Asian American moms. Brandweek, July 25. Available online at <http://admerasia.com/kraftmom.html>.

Yang, Jeff. 2005. Asian pop channeling Asian America: Six new 24-hour TV channels go after the hearts, minds, and eyeballs of English-speaking Asians in the U.S. Available online at www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/archive/2005/02/02/asiaTV.DTL (accessed February 20, 2006).

Zhou, Min. 2004. Are Asian Americans becoming "White." *Context* 3(1): 29-37.

Zhou, Min, and James V. Gatewood. 2000. Mapping the terrain: Asian American diversity and the challenges of the twenty-first century. *Asian American Policy Review* IX: 5-29.

Heterogeneity

Hua Ting-ting Liang

“While Asians share common interests as victims of white racism, their union is merely a pragmatic alliance of different nationalities, languages, cultures, and religions,” writes Asian American Studies Professor Peter Kwong. He asserts that the Asian American consciousness is a “reactive one” that formed around the 1960s in response to the advent of the civil-rights movement (Kwong 1995). This question of the salience of an Asian American identity is especially relevant today as our government structure increasingly moves away from one of hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations acting alone to flat, networked relationships among individual actors. The shift to a web-like structure of autonomous actors working together to tackle complex, multifaceted problems requires participants who are clear about their organizational mission, preferences, and capacity. In order to clarify organizational goals and assess internal and external constraints and resources, careful self-analysis is required of each autonomous actor.

The Asian American community, which is really a coalition of autonomous ethnic groups each with its own culture, history, and diversity, has struggled to locate its purpose and mission in the past. With a community as diverse and in flux as ours, there is no right answer as to what our collective goals should encompass. At the same time, without some sense of the values that tie together our community, we are at a disadvantage in today’s political climate. The need to understand and embrace our shared identity is essential in moving Asian American policy beyond just building pan-Asian or pan-ethnic coalitions to collaborations across sectors, socioeconomic classes, political party affiliations, and religions. Few issues today are tackled by institutions acting alone. The multifaceted nature of social, political, and economic problems demands collaboration between actors that focus on commonalities rather than linger over differences.

More than a “pragmatic alliance” of disparate histories, the Asian American identity is a deeply personal journey, a confluence of experiences ranging from social pressure, to political awakening, to a sense of belonging. While shared experiences

Hua Ting-ting Liang grew up in Rochester, New York, and majored in East Asian Studies at Yale University. Before entering the M.P.A. program at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, she worked in New York City for a city agency that developed affordable housing and then for a New York state senator. She will venture into public finance in the private sector upon graduating this June.

of racism may have initially forged the identity as a means of amplifying the political voice of culturally distinct Asian ethnic groups, the Asian American identity today embodies more than merely a reaction to exclusion from life in the mainstream. If Kwong is right that shared experiences of exclusion from the majority are the linchpin that holds together our diverse community, then it should follow that as more Asians assimilate into mainstream American society, the relevance of an Asian American identity diminishes. But, in fact, I see the opposite being true. While first- and second-generation Asian immigrants work hard for the right to live the American dream, I see many second- and third-generation Asian Americans eagerly embracing their ethnic identity and breaking down the racial and cultural walls that immured their parents.

In a 2000-2001 postelection survey of 1,218 Americans of Asian descent living in five metropolitan areas, respondents were asked whether they identified themselves as American, Asian American, Asian, ethnic American (i.e., Chinese American), or by one's ethnic identity (i.e., Japanese) (Lien et al. 2001). While results varied by ethnicity, on average 15 percent of respondents selected Asian American as their primary self-identification. I find this percentage surprisingly high given that I have always considered Asian American as a secondary self-identification, one of several identities that I embrace. In addition, those respondents who did not select Asian American as their *primary* identification were asked, "Have you ever thought of yourself as an Asian American?" Overall 49 percent said yes, 41 percent no, 5 percent were not sure, and 4 percent refused to answer. This indicates that nearly half of Americans of Asian descent found some relevance in a collective Asian American identity. While these results should be taken with a grain of salt (like all survey data), they indicate that the significance of a collective Asian American identity has not diminished since the social movements of the 1960s.

Regardless of where we Asian Americans place ourselves along the Black-White racial spectrum, the outcry following the federal response to Hurricane Katrina that shifted race-based politics right back into the spotlight has implications for our community. The correlation between quality of provision of public services and race is there whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. What does this mean for Asian Americans, the model minorities, whose average income parallels if not exceeds those of White Americans? What does this mean for the perceived needs of the poorest in our community?

The message here is not that "we should take care of our own." But, rather, without strength in numbers, without working in coalition within our community and across communities, we diminish our capacity to help all those in need.

References

Kwong, Peter. 1995. Asian American studies needs class analysis. In *Privileging positions: The sites of Asian American studies*. Edited by Marilyn Alquizola, Dorothy Fujita Rony, Wong K. Scott, and Gary Y. Okihiro. Washington State University Press.

Lien, Pei-te et al. 2001. A summary report of the pilot study of the National Asian American Political Survey. In *National Asian American political almanac*, tenth edition. Edited by Don Nakanishi and James S. Lai. Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center.

Assimilation at the Cost of Authenticity

Kenji Yoshino's

Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights (Random House 2006)

Reviewed by Rebecca K. Lee

I had always been able to leap for him. From the days when he would open his arms to me in the swimming pool to the days when he told me I could go to Exeter, or Harvard, or Oxford, I had trusted him, and leapt. If he could come to America at eighteen and become a professor, then I could do anything in my own country, the language that was my own. But where was I now? I could not sit still to read a paragraph, I could barely force myself to eat. I sat before him stripped of my carapace of accomplishment, the turtle unturtled.

"I'm sorry, Papa," I finally said. "I can't do anything. I've failed. I have nothing." Then I paused. Could I say it? I could not. Something dull spoke instead: "I am nothing."

I felt him before I heard him. It was not his usual brisk embrace, but as if, in the warm parentheses of his arms, he had made me part of him.

He said: "You are my son."

And I began to sob.¹

Writing from a place of courage and conviction lifted from doubt and pain, author Kenji Yoshino emotively sheds layers of his covered self to make real his case for human authenticity in his recent book *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. Yoshino, a dean and law professor at Yale, offers us a work that infuses cultural insight into legal argumentation, interlaced with his own exquisitely narrated

Rebecca K. Lee is a practicing attorney in Washington, D.C. She received a B.A. from the University of Chicago in 1997 and worked as a teacher with Teach for America. She earned an M.P.P. degree in 2001 from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and served as the comanaging editor of the Asian American Policy Review. Lee obtained her J.D. from the Georgetown University Law Center in 2004, where she was editor-in-chief of the Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy. Her academic work on civil rights and gender equality has been published in the Brooklyn Law Review and William & Mary Journal of Women and the Law. Her most recent manuscript will be published in the Columbia Journal of Gender and Law in the summer of 2006.

story as a gay, Asian American man. As the excerpt above demonstrates, the halting conversations that he has with his Japanese-immigrant parents are among the most poignant parts of the book and, for Yoshino, a master of language owing to his poetic dexterity, quite difficult even for him, as he admits, to fully convey in words.

In this book, Yoshino elaborates on the concept of “covering” as termed by sociologist Erving Goffman, explaining that covering is the act of downplaying a disfavored identity—even when this identity is known or apparent to others—in order to present oneself more palatably as part of the so-called American mainstream. For instance, a person of color may cover his or her race or ethnicity by adopting an Anglicized name to replace one that is perceived as foreign, speaking only English even when he or she is bilingual, or majoring in American literature rather than in a particular field within ethnic studies. Yoshino begins his discussion from the vantage point of gay covering as this relates most closely to his own experience, followed by a broader examination of other forms of group identity-based covering: racial covering, sex-based covering, disability-based covering, and religious covering. All of these behaviors may seem harmless, and even beneficial in the name of American assimilation, but Yoshino maintains that the cultural imperative to conform to dominant-group norms is the under-noticed harm of assimilation—a harm that impedes the full advancement of historically marginalized groups. To illustrate his point, he provides examples of racial and ethnic minorities who feel compelled to cover by imitating White norms in order to achieve mainstream markers of success. When they challenge such covering demands by bringing race-discrimination claims in court, they commonly lose. To be clear, Yoshino does not thoughtlessly devalue assimilation as he acknowledges that it is a necessary part of social life. He nonetheless wants us to seriously consider the ways in which assimilation serves to undermine the goals of the civil-rights movement by maintaining the cultural status quo of the dominant groups.

Yoshino posits that individuals cover along four axes of behavior: appearance, affiliation, activism, and association. He describes how his parents encouraged him to cover his Japanese racial identity in America but to reverse cover this same identity when visiting Japan. At boarding school and in college, Yoshino followed this advice, choosing to distance himself from ethnic courses, causes, and groups on campus. Only later as a law professor did he begin to critically reconsider particular forms of racial covering that he had earlier viewed as benign. Relaying the story of a Black lawyer who diligently worked at covering his race, Yoshino finds that even those who noiselessly cover do so at considerable personal sacrifice and without guaranteed acceptance into society’s center.

To address the problem of covering on a legal level, Yoshino advocates for a new model of civil rights based largely on the concept of universal liberty. This model would uphold the rights of all people to act in certain ways or be different, in contrast to the current paradigm that rests on equality rights for historically oppressed groups. He notes the value of accommodation rights for existing traditional civil-rights groups, but given that every person covers in some way to be seen as “normal,” he places more emphasis on a new understanding of civil rights that would allow all individuals to put forth their authentic selves. Yoshino’s de-prioriti-

zation of traditional civil rights raises concerns because it could be understood to suggest that discrimination against people of color, women, gays, the disabled, and religious minorities no longer is a serious problem. At the same time, Yoshino's larger point may be not so much to minimize the continuing importance of protecting historically disadvantaged groups as it is to extend the relevance of coerced covering to all individuals, as he aims to underscore our commonalities rather than differences.

According to Yoshino, each of our own inner searches for the authentic self "is the most important work we can do."² While it is clear that the quest for authenticity is central in Yoshino's life, it is unclear that this search is a crucial concern in the lives of others—for instance, those who are faced with more urgent troubles such as poverty, violence, and sickness, and the individuals who labor to help them. Yoshino admits that his endeavors have stemmed more from a need for self-protection than from distress about the plight of others, and his personal suffering explains why he has concentrated on inward-looking pursuits. Nevertheless, as Yoshino maintains, embracing one's authentic identity is consequential for full human prospering.

Concerned that his argument may unwittingly reinforce rather than dispel stereotypes based on "essential" identity traits, Yoshino cautions that we should not assume that everybody who engages in acts of assimilation is covering. Instead, he asserts that what is understood to be authentic is something to be determined by each person for herself or himself, without a static notion of what this should entail. Admittedly, his proposition that we harness our true selves may appear to be an abstract exercise, one that can be difficult to execute in practice because we are inevitably influenced by others in terms of who we think we are and who we project ourselves to be. Yet in other ways, the task may feel primarily visceral, as Yoshino's coming-out narrative movingly reveals.

Keenly aware of the law's limitations, however, Yoshino wants civil rights to move beyond the law and become the work of lawyers and nonlawyers alike. Bringing together the greater objective of civil rights and his vision of universal human flourishing, he wants to bring the concept of covering into the common vernacular. He urges us to take part in what he calls "reason-forcing conversations" in which the individual faced with a covering demand asks the demander why he or she should comply. Yoshino hopes such exchanges will prompt the demander to rethink the demand altogether, in light of the burdens it may place on the individual on the receiving end. These would not be courtroom debates, but informal discussions that occur in all other places people inhabit. He leaves it open to the participants to determine which reasons for covering will be regarded as justifiable, apart from grounds that illegitimately stem from bias. In the course of discussion, individuals may find that the traits of one uncovered self conflict with those of another to an extent not readily resolvable. Even so, Yoshino would insist, the conversation should continue to happen.

Given the cultural context of covering, it seems appropriate for Yoshino to prescribe a cultural cure, one that supplements rather than replaces legal remedies. His argument is appealing and significant because it articulates a substantive vision of civil rights that probes beneath surface discrimination to unearth layers of subtle

discrimination that lie fertile. Yoshino's discourse-centered model further promotes a deliberative democracy in which individuals join in thoughtful dialogue to reach understanding on matters important to who they are and why they care. One might describe his proposal as the town-hall meeting *writ small*—consisting of informal but serious exchanges on a smaller scale to air out issues of mutual concern. Social change is born from such private discussions that build and spread, eventually leading to broader public perception.

Covering as a memoir and cultural critique showcases what an individual can achieve when he embraces his true self as he sees and feels it and the artistry with which one can express oneself in writing. The self that Yoshino uncovers in this book is—as his college poetry professor called him—“radiating,” but not naïve. Yoshino's project moves forward from the belief that one's perspective needs to be shared even though it may tend toward the utopian, because it will resonate with others. And a story properly heard is one that is not forgotten.

Endnotes

1 Yoshino, Kenji. 2006. *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights*. New York: Random House, 56-57.

2 Ibid, 184.

Grace Lee as Asian America: A Film Review of *The Grace Lee Project* (2005) Directed by Grace Lee

Reviewed by David S. Lee

Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity. — Martin Luther King Jr.

Director Grace Lee's exploration of identity and ethnicity in her humorous yet incisive film *The Grace Lee Project* adroitly highlights the atomistic identities of the Grace Lees that the director encounters in her journey. At its core, the film epitomizes the question, "What's in a name?" Building on the faces and stories of each Grace Lee, *The Grace Lee Project* is a wonderful heuristic device uncovering the multifaceted reality of Asian America, particularly female Asian America.

The bliss of being the only Grace Lee around was short-lived for the director when she emerged from her childhood in Colombia, Missouri, and moved to New York and subsequently California and discovered her name was not unique. Indeed, in Los Angeles alone there are more than three hundred Grace Lees.

Beyond the quotidian nature of the name, the identities of all these disparate Grace Lees had somehow seemed to merge into a trite recitation of attributes, often recounted when the director was told of another Grace Lee. Overwhelmingly, Grace Lee was a good girl, obedient, and quiet, often a devout Christian who played a musical instrument like the violin, and almost always an overachiever in school. It quickly became apparent that a monolithic Grace Lee identity had formed, inculcating many of the most common stereotypes associated with Asian Americans.

In an effort to parse the seemingly uniform identity that the name Grace Lee invoked, the director embarked on meeting her counterparts—the other Grace Lees. Through word of mouth, referrals, and a Web site (www.gracelee.net), the

David S. Lee is currently in the final year of a dual degree program, earning a law degree (J.D.) from UCLA School of Law and a master's degree (A.M.) in East Asian Studies from Harvard University. He is currently an articles editor for the Pacific Basin Law Journal at UCLA and was formerly the Korea area editor for the Harvard Asia Quarterly. His work has appeared in various publications at Harvard, Stanford, and UCLA. Additionally, Lee is active in UCLA's Asian Pacific Islander Law Student Association, serving as its head during his second year of law school. Lee has a keen interest in development, international relations and law, modern Korea (including North Korea), and Asian/Korean American issues.

director formed a network of Grace Lees living in the United States and abroad. It is the story of these Grace Lees and their unique lives and experiences that leads viewers of *The Grace Lee Project* to alternate between laughter, feelings of commonality, and wonderment—ultimately leaving them with a new lens through which to view Asian America.

Through the vignettes portrayed in the film, viewers are left with a revealing cross section of salient issues demonstrating the heterogeneity of Asian America. This review briefly explores three key areas highlighted by the lives of the protagonists featured in *The Grace Lee Project*.

Foremost, the film's underlying theme confronts the notion that all Grace Lees are alike. Further, deploying Grace Lee as a metaphor for Asian Americans, it presents the message that like the many Grace Lees in the world, Asian Americans are not a monolithic group. As great diversity exists amongst the Grace Lees in the film, there is also significant variation between, and within, Asian American communities. Indeed, Asian America is a complicated landscape, not easily captured in hackneyed descriptions.

The model minority stereotype¹ represents the most common form of this practice. The image of Asian Americans as hardworking, successful, and obedient begins emerging as early as the mid-1960s² and has continued until today. The film demonstrates the pervasiveness of this thinking when people, asked to describe the Grace Lee they know, uniformly respond with “intelligent,” “nice,” and “quiet”—adjectives commonly associated with the characterization of Asians as the model minority. As the film illustrates, the name Grace Lee may be ubiquitous, however, the lives of each individual Grace Lee are quite unique. The same holds true for the tremendous diversity that exists amongst Asian Americans. A real, complicated modality exists that does not lend itself to the facile, unsophisticated analysis that the model minority thesis represents.

Concomitant with *The Grace Lee Project's* rebuttal of a homogenous Grace Lee, (and by extension Asian America) is its reflection on an oft overlooked topic, the Asian American female. Indeed, descriptions of Grace Lee as “quiet” and “nice” in the film comport with the banal characterization of Asian women as demure and submissive so often depicted in popular media. Conversely, the Grace Lees shown in the film demonstrate a direction and resolve, even a grace, if you will, in their lives and in the activism they show within their communities. The Grace Lee Boggs (“Grace X”) of Detroit, Michigan, age 88, an African American community activist, particularly exemplifies a vocal leader whose life has not conformed to the traditional stereotypes and gender roles that have been constructed for Asian American women. Of course, the Grace Lee that set fire to her high school also deconstructs the notion of Asian American women as docile. Related to the discussion above regarding Asian American women, *The Grace Lee Project* also explores the sensitive issue of abuse³ when looking at a Grace Lee who was adopted into an abusive family and who many years later assists a friend and her children in escaping an abusive spouse/father. Unfortunately, this aspect of Asian America has not been given the attention it so desperately needs.⁴

Lastly, *The Grace Lee Project* touches on various aspects of sexuality, identity, and relationships.⁵ There are Grace Lees that have interracial marriages. There is a

lesbian Grace Lee, formerly a gay and lesbian activist in Seoul who discontinued her work over concerns about embarrassing her family. In contrast, there is Grace Lee, a pastor's wife in Cupertino, California, who teaches sexual abstinence to the youth at her church. Another Grace Lee, a recent college graduate and a pastor's daughter, already has a timetable for marriage and childbearing—married by 25 and children by 27. Even the small sample group above demonstrates the diversity of perspectives that exists regarding relationships and sexuality for Grace Lees. These perceptions highlight the different influences, namely family, culture, and religion (i.e., Christianity→Grace!), that frame how Asian Americans view and, in some cases, confront their sexual identity when it falls outside what is culturally “accepted” (e.g., interracial relationships or homosexuality). Though not directly addressed, there is a tension created by the juxtaposition of different ideals associated with sexuality, alluded to in the film and very palpable in the lives of many Asian Americans.

Perhaps the only drawback of the film is the minimal attention allotted to explaining how a Grace Lee stereotype ever formed. How did Grace Lee become synonymous with “quiet,” “hardworking,” and “well-behaved?” Also, implicit within that question is the broader implication of how the Asian American identity was created. The process of identity formation is the critical underpinning of the director's endeavor, yet it is only given scant attention in the film. A brief historical treatment portraying the construction of Asian American identity, juxtaposed with the director's introductory personal narrative, would have laid an even more robust and informative starting point for the rest of the film.

As an immigrant story, *The Grace Lee Project* is implicitly transnational. It is this common denominator that creates the setting for the Grace Lee (Asian American) experience. The film, however, moves us beyond our commonality as immigrants. It serves as a vehicle that expresses the complicated contours of Asian America in an enjoyable and delightful way. *The Grace Lee Project*, however, does beg the question, “When do the rest of us with common Asian American names (i.e., Jennifer Kim/Lee, John Kim/Lee, David Kim/Lee, etc.) get our movie?”

Endnotes

1 For a discussion of the model minority stereotype, see Frank H. Wu, *Changing America: Three Arguments About Asian Americans and the Law*, *American University Law Review*, 45(3): 811 (1996); Keith Osajima, “Asian Americans as the Model Minority: An Analysis of the Popular Press Image in the 1960s and 1980s,” 449-58, in *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood (eds.), New York: New York University Press, 2000; and Lucie Cheng and Philip Q. Yang, “The ‘Model Minority’ Deconstructed,” 459-82, in *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*, Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood (eds.), New York: New York University Press, 2000. For a discussion on how the model minority thesis fails to represent all Asian American communities, see Susan Taing, *Lost in the Shuffle: The Failure of the Pan-Asian Coalition to Advance the Interests of Southeast Asian Americans*, *La Raza Law Journal*, 16(1): 23 (2005). For an excellent analysis on the formation and consequence of stereotypes (implicit bias), see Jerry Kang, *Trojan Horses of Race*, *Harvard Law Review*, 118 (2005).

2 See William Patterson, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1966, 20-21, 33, 36, 38, 40-41, 43.

3 For a greater understanding of issues faced by abused Asian American women, see Karin Wang, *Battered Asian American Women: Community Responses from the Battered Women's Movement and the Asian American Community*, *Asian Law Journal* 3, 1996.

4 For those in Southern California needing help or information, the Center for the Pacific Asian Family (www.cpaaf.info/) focuses on violence and abuse in the Asian Pacific Islander community. Additionally, Break the Cycle (www.break-the-cycle.org/) is a national organization focused on dealing with dating and abuse.

5 For an examination of how gender and racial stereotypes affect Asian women, see Sumi K. Cho, *Converging Stereotypes in Racialized Sexual Harassment: Where the Model Minority Meets Suzie Wong*, *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 1 (133), 1997.

Reflections of a Nepalese American NGO

Omprakash Gnawali and Atul Pokharel

There are numerous grassroots organizations around the world, all working to provide basic human necessities to the poor. Many achieve this goal by using the resources available in economically developed countries to enhance the local knowledge of volunteers in the poorer communities abroad. The following spotlight offers our reflections of one such organization, the Nepalese Children's Education Fund (NCEF), which attempts to enable poor children to obtain basic levels of education in Nepal.

In Nepal, education is not viewed as a fundamental right, but rather as a dispensable luxury. Children are not bussed to and from public school nor are they provided with meals. Instead, those who attend public schools must find their own means of transportation to school and pay for meals as well as various other education-related expenses, such as school uniforms, examination fees, building maintenance fees, and activities fees. Because of the overwhelming fees and issues of poverty, there is a large population of children for whom basic public education is an unaffordable luxury. This reality led us to create an organization in 2002 that provides need-based, ten-year scholarships to underprivileged children in Nepal.

In 2002, we constructed a team of Nepalese students in the United States and a team of social workers and volunteers in Nepal and founded Nepalese Children's Education Fund (NCEF) to promote universal primary education in Nepal. The basic function of the organization was and continues to be the provision of need-based financial assistance to families in Nepal who are otherwise unable to send their children to school. Although the concept of a need-based scholarship

Omprakash Gnawali is pursuing a Ph.D. in computer science at the University of Southern California. He has master's (2002) and bachelor's (2001) degrees in computer science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Gnawali grew up in Kathmandu, Nepal, and has visited twenty-seven (out of seventy-five) districts in Nepal, many on foot. He is involved in the Nepalese Children's Education Fund as its chief executive officer and chairman of the board.

Atul Pokharel was born in Kathmandu and after completing a B.A. in mathematics from Princeton University is currently at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University studying the effects of international capital flows on home countries. Along with the rest of the Nepalese Children's Education Fund team, he shares a deep interest in making basic education a birthright to underprivileged children in Nepal.

organization is uncommon in Nepal, the practice of putting exchange rates to the service of the poor is a familiar one that plays out in other small-scale grassroots efforts.

The two volunteer teams of NCEF operate in two vastly different nations. They are accountable to different government structures and operate in two distinct cultures that have significantly different attitudes toward work, school, and education. Our teams' cross-boundary approach holds great potential, but also illustrates the challenges an organization faces when attempting to bridge significant cultural differences between an advanced, developed nation and one of the poorest nations in the world. Thus far, NCEF has been successful in "bi-national" operations.

In terms of logistics, having lived and studied in Nepal as well as in the United States, we were aware of some of the pervasive pressures of trying to operate a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in the United States and Nepal. As a result, our approach is cautious. First, our team in Nepal screens initial applicants at the beginning of the year and then transfers the applications to the U.S. team for the final selection. This is ideal as the U.S. team is not as subject to the pressures of the local communities as the Nepali team. Second, we disburse the funds to the area coordinator throughout the year to help pay for school and supplies rather than entrusting it to the parents, who may not always have the most fair-handed way of managing their funds. Third, we visit and interview the recipients of the funding regularly in order to assess the effectiveness of the program.

As we move forward, we realize that we do not have the scope to make broad systemic changes to ensure universal basic education, but we wish to address systemic challenges in conjunction to our scholarship provision work. We have identified that the next challenge in education in Nepal is going to be providing ample supplies, identifying and reducing fees in disguise, and coping with opportunity costs of sending a child to school. It is time that funding agencies like ourselves start thinking about addressing those larger aspects of primary and secondary education.

ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

Available Back Issues: 1992–2005

Volume XIV (2005)

On Message: The Republican National Committee's Vision for Expanding the Party and Reaching out to Asian Pacific Islander Americans: An Interview with Mina Nguyen, Director of Government Affairs at the Republican National Committee

Interviewed by James Ku

How the Democratic National Committee Handles Asian Pacific Islander American Outreach: An Interview with Victoria Lai, Director of the Office of Asian Pacific Islander American Outreach at the Democratic National Committee

Interviewed by Hyun Kim

Creating Educational Institutions as Centers of Academic Excellence, Community, Identity, and Empowerment: The Case for Asian Americans

Larry Hajime Shinagawa

Volume XIII (2004)

The Impact of National Security and Civil Liberties on the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community: An Interview with U.S. Congressman Mike Honda (D-Calif.)

Interviewed by T. Linh Ho

Blazing a Path in the Big Apple: An Interview with New York City Councilman John Liu

Interviewed by PJ Kim

Activism Against Racial Injustice in Times of War

Yuri Kochiyama and Kareem W. Shora

Volume XII (2003)

Into the National Consciousness of America: An Interview with the Honorable Gary Locke, Governor of the State of Washington

Interviewed by Georgette Bhathena

Sowing Seeds: An Interview with the Honorable Lon S. Hatamiya,
Secretary of California's Technology, Trade, and Commerce Agency
Interviewed by T. Linh Ho

On the Ballot: Asian Pacific Islander American Candidates Fare Well in
2002 Elections
Rodney Jay C. Salinas

Volume XI (2002): Post 9/11 and Civil Rights

Hate Crimes in the Aftermath of September 11
Judy Chu

Notes of a Journalist: Racial Profiling, Scapegoating, and the U.S. Media
in 2001
Helen Zia

Fighting for Asian American Civil Rights: An Interview with Stewart Kwoh
Interviewed by Omar Brownson and Yi-Ru Chen

Volume X (2001): Tenth Anniversary Issue

Liars, Traitors, and Spies: Wen Ho Lee and the Racial Construction of
Disloyalty
Brant T. Lee

Political Clout and Equal Opportunity
S.B. Woo

Asian Pacific Americans: Are We Ready to Be at the Political Table?
Daphne Kwok

Volume IX (2000): Asian Pacific Americans in the New Millennium

Mapping the Terrain: Asian American Diversity and the Challenges of the
Twenty-First Century
Min Zhou and James V. Gatewood

The Backdoor and the Backlash: Campaign Finance and the Politicization
of Chinese Americans
Taeku Lee

Counting Multiracials in the 2000 Census
Albert Sanghyup Hahn

Volume VIII (1998): Asian Pacific Americans and the Nonprofit Sector

Effective Participation? Asian American Community-Based Organizations
in Urban Policy and Planning

Paula Sirola, Paul Ong, and Vincent Fu

The Nature of the Nonprofit Sector: Professionalism Versus Identity
Politics in Private Policy Definitions of Asian Pacific Americans

Jiannbin Lee Shiao

Corporate Grantmaking for Asian Pacific American Nonprofits

Steve Paprocki and Albert Chung

Volume VII (1997): Transnationalism

Racial Aspects of Media Coverage on the John Huang Matter

Frank Wu and Mary Nicholson

The Overseas Chinese Miracle

Peter Kwong

An Examination of Policy Opinions among Asian Americans

Pei-te Lien

Volume VI (1996): Affirmative Action

The Three Percent Solution: Asian Americans and Affirmative Action

Dana Takagi

Discrimination in the Workplace

Paul M. Igasaki

The Presidential Review of Affirmative Action

Dennis Hayashi and Christopher Edley, Jr.

Volume V (1995): The Immigrant Experience

Immigrant Rights: A Challenge to APA Political Influence

Ignatius Bau

Asian American Admissions to an Elite University

Stephen S. Fugita and Marilyn Fernandez

Welfare Reform: Effects on the Legal Permanent Immigrant

Andrew Leong

Volume IV (1994)

Anti-Asian Violence and Community Mobilization

Kathy Yep

Commentary: Reflections on Running for Congress

Gloria Ochoa

Volume III (1993)

Dispelling the Myth of a Health Minority

Asian American Health Forum

Equal Justice Denied: *Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio*

Dennis Hayashi and Daphne Kwok

Volume II (1992)

Asian Immigrant Battered Women and U.S. Immigration Policy

Danna L. Jang

Commentary: The Politics of Ethnic Identity and Empowerment

Ling-chi Wang

Public Address: *Irene Natividad*, President, National Women's Political
Caucus

ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

Subscription Order Form

Please indicate the quantity of the volumes you wish to purchase below:

Current Volume:

___ Vol. XV (2006)

Back Volumes:

___ Volume XIV (2005)

___ Volume XIII (2004)

___ Volume XII (2003)

___ Volume XI (2002)

___ Volume X (2001)

___ Volume IX (2000)

___ Volume VIII (1998)

___ Volume VII (1997)

___ Volume VI (1996)

___ Volume V (1995)

___ Volume IV (1994)

___ Volume III (1993)

___ Volume II (1992)

___ Volume I (out of print)

Subscriber Information:

___ I'm a new subscriber ___ Renew my subscription

Current Volume: ___ \$20 individuals ___ \$40 institutions ___ \$10 students

Back Volumes: ___ \$10 per volume

Total due: \$ _____ ___ Check enclosed ___ Bill my credit card

Name (print) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Credit Card: ___ MC ___ VISA Signature _____

Card # _____ Exp. date _____

E-mail _____

Please enclose payment with order. Make checks payable to

Asian American Policy Review and mail to:

Asian American Policy Review

John F. Kennedy School of Government

Harvard University

79 John F. Kennedy Street

Cambridge, MA 02138

Tel: (617) 496-8655

Fax: (617) 384-9555

aapr@ksg.harvard.edu

www.ksg.harvard.edu/aapr

INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS

The *Asian American Policy Review* considers for publication original, unpublished works that explore public policy or social issues affecting Asian Pacific Americans. Please see the back cover for the 2007 Call for Papers. Articles for the feature section should not exceed twenty-five double-spaced, typed pages in length. Commentaries and book reviews should be no longer than five double-spaced, typed pages. All submissions to the journal should use 12-point Times New Roman or Times font. Additionally, articles should be formatted in Microsoft Word. All articles for the features section must include a brief abstract of the article (sixty words). Commentaries and book reviews do not require abstracts. All submissions must include an abstract, author's name and brief biography, mailing address, e-mail address, and telephone number.

Authors should obtain permission for the use of materials found in other works. It is the author's responsibility to ensure the accuracy of all citations.

All submitted works become the property of the journal and will not be returned unless the journal receives a written request for submitted materials. Authors should be willing to transfer copyrights to the journal. The transference of copyright does not imply that authors will not be able to obtain permission to use their work in other forms, such as edited collections.

Notes on Style and Citation

Authors should maintain consistent style throughout. For citations, the journal uses the author-date citation style. For questions about the author-date style, please see *The Chicago Manual of Style*. If necessary, we will allow endnotes for additional substantive comments or explanations. Do not use footnotes.

The basic form of author-date citation in running text or at the end of a quote contains the author's last name and the publication year of the work: for example, (Alford 1975), (Biller 1976, 136), and (May and Wildavsky 1978). Examples of correct styling for citation when the author's name is mentioned in the text are Alford (1975), Biller (1976, 136–7), and May and Wildavsky (1978).

Works with citations must contain a bibliography following the endnotes, under the heading, References. Examples of bibliographic citations follow:

Book: Alford, Robert. 1975. *Internet Policy*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Work in a Collection: Campbell, David. 1971. Reforms as Experiments. In *Readings in Evaluation Research*. Edited by Jill Caro. New York: Russell Sage.

Collection: May, Jill, ed. 1978. *Policy Cycles*. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Journal: Biller, R. 1976. Understanding the Effects of Restrictive Zoning: Some Observations. *Housing Policy Sciences* 7(2): 133–149.

ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

CALL FOR PAPERS, Volume XVI

The *Asian American Policy Review* is currently accepting submissions for Volume XVI, which will be published in spring 2007. The *Asian American Policy Review* bridges the divide between academia and practitioners by offering scholars, elected officials, policy analysts, and community leaders a forum to discuss critical public policy issues affecting the Asian Pacific American community. The *Asian American Policy Review* provides in-depth analysis of policy issues, creates change in the Asian American community by presenting new research and ideas, and plays a vital role in stimulating debate over policy proposals that affect the Asian American community.

SELECTION CRITERIA

The *AAPR* is committed to the following principles in selecting papers for publication:

- Timeliness of topic to current policy discussions
- Originality and thoroughness of research and ideas
- Cohesiveness, sophistication, and consistency of arguments
- Contribution to scholarship and policy making
- Style, tone, and coherency of language
- Overall effectiveness

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

- Articles must be original and unpublished
- Commentaries should be between two thousand and three thousand words; research articles should be between four thousand and seven thousand words
- A disk copy (Microsoft Word), five hard copies, an abstract, author's name and brief biography, mailing address, e-mail address, and telephone number must be submitted by the deadline
- Citations must be formatted using the author-date system guidelines outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*

SEND SUBMISSIONS TO

Asian American Policy Review
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University
79 John F. Kennedy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Phone: (617) 496-8655
Fax: (617) 384-9555
aapr@ksg.harvard.edu
www.ksg.harvard.edu/aapr

SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

1 November 2006

ASIAN AMERICAN POLICY REVIEW

John F. Kennedy School of Government

Harvard University

79 John F. Kennedy Street

Cambridge, MA 02138

Phone: (617) 496-8655

Fax: (617) 384-9555

aapr@ksg.harvard.edu

www.ksg.harvard.edu/aapr