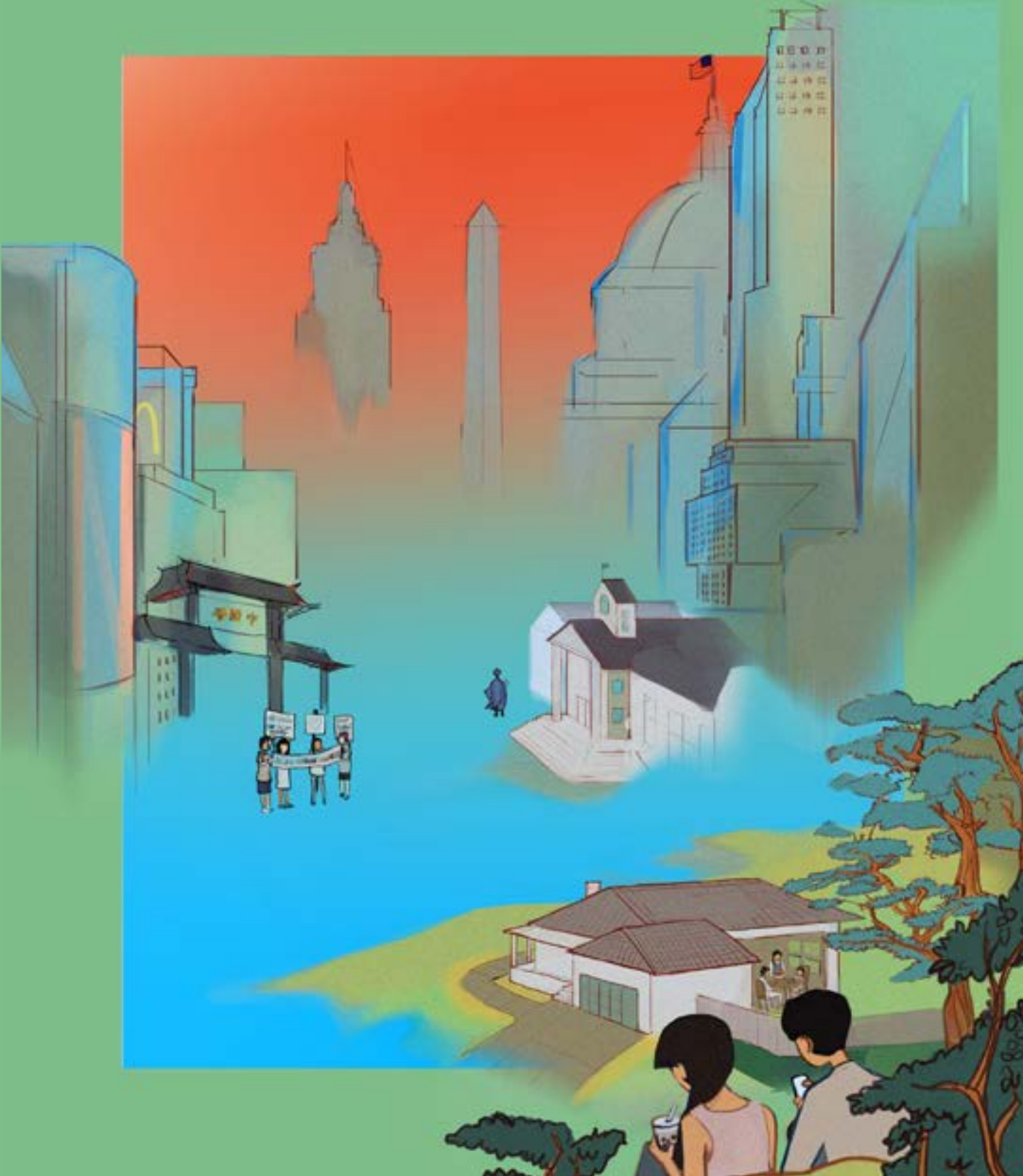


ISSUE 33

ASIAN AMERICAN

Policy Review

A HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL STUDENT PUBLICATION





GRACE ZHONG

About the Cover: Artist's Statement

When I was given the theme of “spaces” as the central idea to convey for the cover art, my brainstorming led me to my roots as a Chinese American. I drew inspiration from the Chinese traditional ink painting style, a key feature of which is the use of blank space in between the brushwork elements to create a cohesive landscape scenic tableau. The blank space emphasizes the envelopment and grandeur of the landscape against the miniature people within. I felt that these features of harmony between people and their surroundings and the emphasis of space are elements suited to this issue's theme, and with that I created a modernized interpretation.

The red and blue frame in the center background is a watercolor-like gradient to convey the notion of dawn and the new era, while also using the United States' colors as a framework for our life and identity. This choice of colors also represents the duality in cultural, political, and self identity that are central motivators toward activism and advocacy.

The elements in the artwork are depictions of landmarks that hypothetically feature in everyday life: the home, school, and society. These elements are not confined within the frame but flow in and out, creating a wider space that conveys freedom and exploration. I want to convey an expansive mindset of branching out and making our own spaces beyond preconceived notions of identity.

Overall, this artwork represents the importance of space in the conversation of Asian American policy and advocacy. It showcases the use of traditional Chinese art style to convey a modern message and the duality in identity. The use of space and environment to create depth in the artwork also highlights the importance of finding our own place in society and exploring our own spaces.

“The ethnic literary project has always
been a humanist project in which
nonwhite writers must prove they are
human beings who feel pain.”

—

CATHY PARK HONG, AUTHOR AND POET
MINOR FEELINGS: AN ASIAN AMERICAN RECKONING

Table of Contents



Photography by Jason Leung, 2021

Editor's Note Forthcoming

A Place for Us: Parks as a Social Justice Issue for Asian Americans Shekar Krishnan and Chuck Park	06	Identity Crisis Aesther Chang	80
No Place for Hate California: A Model for Community-Centered Policymaking Candice Cho, Annie Lee, and Santosh Seeram-Santana	12	Asian Critical Race Theory and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Frameworks for Implementing Asian Ethnic Studies in PK-12 Education Kayla Mendoza Chui, Camille Ungco, Doua Kha, Kriya Velasco, Theresa Lee, Rae Jing Han, Saraswati Noel	82
Countering a History of Invisibility, Erasure, and Exclusion through an Asian American Ethnic Studies Course Josephine M. Kim, Shubh Agrawal, Clara Kang, Kiki Nakamura-Koyama, and Leah Porter	26	Do you hear us now? Esther Lim	90
Saving Affirmative Action: The Youth-Led Coalition Fighting Back at the Supreme Court Angie Shin	36	Remembering the "Comfort Women": Intergenerational Asian American Care Work Grace J. Yoo and Eunice Kim	94
White Rice Claire Liu	42	Ten Years After Oak Creek: Federal Policy Recommendations to Protect Communities Targeted by Hate Nimarta Narang	108
Asian American Teachers as Interlocutors: Racializing Agendas of Ascription and Skill Trish Morita-Mullaney, Diep Nguyen	50	How will they hold us? Tony DelaRosa	114
Asian American Youth and Spatialized Violence in Los Angeles Kevin Lam	66	Filibuster Reform Is the Critical for AAPIs in America Varun Nikore	118



Photography by Juan Ordonez, Jackson Heights, 2020

A similar version of this article was published for the Gotham Gazette.

A Place for Us: Parks as a Social Justice Issue for Asian Americans

By Shekar Krishnan and Chuck Park

Our communities of Jackson Heights and Elmhurst in New York City—home to a 75,000-strong, rapidly growing Asian American population—were the epicenter of not one, but two pandemics in 2020. As COVID-19 claimed the lives of our elders, trapped in nursing homes and cramped apartments, anti-Asian hate awaited us at every turn, stalking us on subway platforms and sidewalks.

As these twin pandemics surged through our communities, our parks saved our lives. Our open spaces allowed us to escape the physical, mental, and social constraints of quarantine into fresh air. They allowed us to exist in community with our neighbors. And today, from daily t'ai chi ch'uan and yoga to annual Diwali, Eid, and Lunar New Year celebrations, our parks have become places of continued healing and growth.

Here and across New York City, our public open spaces are essential to meeting the multiple challenges we face, from public health to public safety. We must recognize the extraordinary value of our park system and deepen our investment for all neighborhoods, and for future generations. Every community needs and deserves space to thrive.

Parks, playgrounds, and natural areas are not luxuries only for certain neighborhoods to enjoy at the expense of others. They are part of our critical infrastructure. But, like so much other infrastructure, poor communities of color lack access to high quality parks. On average, neighborhoods of color have 44% less park space¹, per person than predominantly white neighborhoods. And because Asian New Yorkers experience the highest rates of poverty² of the city's racial or ethnic groups, we are particularly in need of—and deprived of—park space. As an extreme example, the historic Upper West Side is sandwiched between 840 acres of Central Park and 310 acres of Riverside Park, while the immigrant communities of Jackson Heights and Elmhurst have fewer than 12 acres of public parks—some of the least park space per person in all of New York City.

If we are to provide public spaces for our physical, mental, and civic health, then we must dramatically increase investments in their maintenance to ensure they are safe for all to enjoy.

This glaring imbalance is no accident. Maps of New York City prepared by the federal government in the 1930s show neighborhoods where the government decided not to invest at all due to the “infiltration” of immigrants and Black people. Today, these same communities are so-called “urban heat islands,” where sparse tree cover and exposed asphalt cause temperatures to soar to deadly highs each summer.³ In so many ways, the lack of green space caused by generations of disinvestment leads to real harm to the most vulnerable New Yorkers and exacerbates the impacts of the climate crisis on communities of color.

Beyond public health, our parks also promote our city’s civic health. For as long as New York City has existed, its parks and public spaces have been focal points of political organizing and mass movements. In 1970, Stonewall activists seized Christopher Street for the first Pride. The occupation of Zuccotti Park in 2011 mobilized a generation of economic justice activists. Over the past two years, Columbus Park and Confucius Plaza in Chinatown and Diversity Plaza in Jackson Heights have been gathering points for recurring protests against the wave of anti-Asian violence in the city. To deprive our communities of public space is to limit our political power.

And there are so many other intangible, but no less important ways that our parks improve our city. Well-designed parks and well-placed street trees can prevent the kind of stormwater flooding that took the lives of so many of our immigrant neighbors trapped in basement apartments during Hurricane Ida. Open plazas provide places for social interaction, for our youngest kids to our elders and everyone in between. Walkable public corridors support local businesses and vendors. Here in Jackson Heights, we cherish 34th Avenue, the city’s “gold standard” open street,⁴ which we should further transform into a linear park. Open spaces can help reorient our city towards people and our needs.

Beautiful, clean parks are also safe parks. If we are to provide public spaces for our physical, mental, and civic health, then we must dramatically increase investments in their maintenance to ensure they are safe for all to enjoy.

In short, our parks are a matter of social justice for Asian American New Yorkers. Beyond representing a vibrant community of Chinese, Nepali, Bangladeshi, Burmese, and Korean neighbors, our office serves as Chair of the New York City Council’s Committee on Parks and Recreation, and we believe we must use our resources to create parks where none exist, and systematically invest in green spaces in neighborhoods like ours that have long been ignored.

As we emerge from the double pandemic of COVID-19 and anti-Asian hate, our parks are critical to healing and transforming our communities and our city.



Thai dancers perform at a street festival celebrating the renaming of Woodside Avenue to ‘Little Thailand Way’ in Elmhurst, NYC. Photography by Chanel Martinez



Community members enjoy the Lunar New Year lion dance at the Moore Homestead Park in Elmhurst, NYC. Photography by Chanel Martinez

About the Authors



Shekar Krishnan

Shekar Krishnan represents Elmhurst and Jackson Heights in the New York City Council, and as the Chair of the Committee on Parks and Recreation, he negotiated the largest-ever budget for the City's Department of Parks and Recreation. He is the first Indian-American elected to any office in the New York City government. Before his election to City Council, Shekar was a civil rights lawyer fighting housing discrimination and a long-time community activist in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst.



Chuck Park

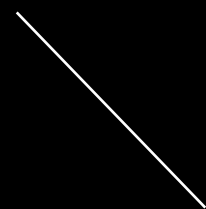
Chuck Park is Chief of Staff to Council Member Krishnan. Prior to city government, he worked as Civic Participation Manager at the MinKwon Center for Community Action, overseeing the community organization's campaigns to increase the political participation of Asian immigrants across New York City. Before MinKwon, Chuck worked as a U.S. diplomat for almost a decade serving tours in Ciudad Juarez, Lisbon, and Vancouver before resigning in August 2019.

Endnotes

- 1 Ronda Chapman, "Parks and an Equitable Recovery," *Trust for Public Land*, September 13, 2022, <https://www.tpl.org/parks-and-an-equitable-recovery-parkscore-report>.
- 2 Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University, "The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in New York City," *Robin Hood* 5 (2023), https://www.robinhood.org/wp-content/themes/robinhood/images/poverty-tracker/pdfs/POVERTY_TRACKER_REPORT38.pdf.
- 3 Jeremy S. Hoffman, Vivek Shandas, and Nicholas Pendleton, "The Effects of Historical Housing Policies on Resident Exposure to Intra-Urban Heat: A Study of 108 US Urban Areas," *Climate* 8, no. 1 (January 2020): 12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli8010012>.
- 4 Winnie Hu, "The Pandemic Gave New York City 'Open Streets.' Will They Survive?" *The New York Times*, August 9, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/09/nyregion/open-streets-jackson-heights.html>.

Two of my family members (an elderly grandmother and her adult daughter) were walking home and an elderly white man was following them once he saw what they looked like. He kept following them on the sidewalk and shouted, ‘Go back to your country!’ He started shouting and cursing, ‘f**k this, f**k you.’

FEMALE, NEW YORK



I was waiting for the bus at the bus stop. A man forced me to not take the bus. He said ‘Ching c---g c---g don't take the bus. You will spread the virus to everyone.’ He told me if I entered the bus, he would stab and kill me. So, I had no choice. I went far away from the bus stop, and took Lyft to school.

MALE, MIDWEST

No Place for Hate California: A Model for Community- Centered Policymaking

By Candice Cho, Annie Lee, and Santosh Seeram-Santana

INTRODUCTION

These are just three of more than 11,000 reports of hate against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) shared with the Stop AAPI Hate coalition during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many more acts continue to go unreported, making the actual number much higher — potentially in the millions. Reports of anti-AAPI hate come from all fifty states and the District of Columbia, with nearly 40 percent from California.

In response to the rise in hate against AAPI communities, Stop AAPI Hate introduced No Place for Hate California, a package of first-in-the-nation, state-level policy proposals. Together, these proposals take a gender-based, public health, and civil rights approach to addressing the racialized and sexualized verbal harassment experienced by AAPIs (especially AAPI women) in public, which comprise a majority of the reports submitted to Stop AAPI Hate. Stop AAPI Hate partnered with state legislators and mobilized a coalition of over fifty community-based organizations. By the end of the 2022 legislative year, two of the proposed bills were signed into law: Increasing Safety for Public Transit Riders (Senate Bill 1161, authored by Senator Dave Min and co-sponsored by LA Metro) and Protecting Customers' Civil Rights at Businesses (Assembly Bill 2448, authored by Assemblymember Phil Ting).

These new laws represent a seismic departure from existing policy responses to anti-AAPI hate, which typically focus on increasing the policing and prosecution of hate crimes.

The laws apply a non-carceral framework to addressing non-criminal threats to public safety. In many cases, the perpetrators who make public spaces less safe for AAPIs and others cannot be identified and prosecuted. Their conduct is not criminal and cannot be criminalized, consistent with First Amendment protections for free speech. Although these bills grew out of experiences shared by AAPIs, they are not limited to AAPIs. Verbal harassment based on race, gender, or other personal characteristics –often called street harassment when it occurs in public spaces like streets and sidewalks –restricts the safety, well-being, and freedom of movement not only of AAPI women but all women of color, especially Black women, and LGBTQIA+, low income, and other vulnerable communities.

These new laws begin to shift the burden of being safe away from individuals and toward institutions. Accountability should not depend on the person being harassed to respond or a bystander to intervene, and should not be limited to the individual perpetrating hate. Institutions such as government, businesses, and public transit should be held accountable for preventing and responding to hate, especially as they are not immune from, and often reinforce, structural racism and sexism. These new laws are a first, but by no means the last, step toward addressing anti-AAPI hate. As our coalition looks back on what we learned and looks toward the next fight, we offer the following insights in the hopes that policymakers and policy practitioners embrace a richer and more complete understanding of what it takes to stop hate against our communities.

FROM DATA TO POLICY

Stop AAPI Hate was co-founded in March 2020 by AAPI Equity Alliance (then the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council), Chinese for Affirmative Action, and San Francisco State University’s Asian American Studies Department. Collectively, the organizations bring to the coalition more than 150 years of service in AAPI communities. This makes our online reporting form a trusted place for AAPIs to share their experiences with hate, in their own words, using the language they prefer, and without fear of retaliation or other collateral consequences. Today Stop AAPI Hate is the leading aggregator of self-reported acts of hate against AAPIs in the United States.

Collection of this data – accounts of hate shared by AAPIs with Stop AAPI Hate – enables our coalition to understand what is happening in our communities, where, when, and to whom. We use this understanding to raise awareness among the public, the press, and policymakers of what anti-AAPI hate looks like. Since our launch, we have published twenty-four reports, on subjects ranging from the impact of hate on specific populations such as elderly Asian Americans or Pacific Islander girls and women, to the role that political rhetoric plays in inflaming anti-Asian scapegoating. We also use this data to advocate for the kinds of changes that are often missing from policy responses to anti-AAPI hate. These responses typically focus on punishing individual offenders who commit the most widely publicized violent attacks against AAPIs. These attacks are horrific and traumatizing. But we also know they are only part of the problem and that defining anti-AAPI hate as simply a new wave of COVID-19-era hate crimes does a disservice to AAPIs in at least three ways.

First, focusing exclusively on hate crimes discounts a majority of experiences with hate, as reported by AAPIs. Most of the reports to Stop AAPI Hate do not involve a crime, let alone a hate crime. Second, focusing solely on individual accountability releases institutions from responsibility for participating in the racist systems and structures that allow anti-AAPI hate to persist. Third, focusing solely on the pandemic ignores the historical antecedents of the anti-AAPI hate experienced today. For example, AAPI women have been long exoticized, fetishized, and punished at the crossroads of racism and misogyny. Too often these norms are ratified by time and rendered invisible over time, leaving them outside the scope of serious consideration by policymakers.

In advocating for policy change in California or elsewhere, we believe in centering the thousands of AAPIs who have trusted us with their experiences. Our coalition already reviews each report of hate to analyze the data for our publications. We conducted a second review of the reports to identify patterns in AAPI experiences with hate. Then we engaged more than twenty experts across academia, government, business, and nonprofits on subjects ranging from gender-based violence to civil rights. These conversations helped us identify gaps in existing ways to address the policy problems emerging from the data.

Based on our review of the data we saw that a majority of reports shared by AAPIs in California described experiences with hate that took place in person, with women reporting at twice the rate of men. An overwhelming majority involved conduct that was not a crime, let alone a hate crime. Nearly two-thirds were of verbal harassment, such as racist or sexist slurs, obscenities, accusations (of causing or having COVID), or threats, often in fleeting encounters with strangers such as passing drivers or fellow customers. By contrast, fewer than a fifth of reports were of physical assault or property damage, which, while potentially crimes, ranged in severity and would not all result in prosecution. More than three-quarters of reports described experiences with hate that took place in spaces open and accessible to the public.

In other words, the data confirmed what we instinctively knew based on our personal experiences, and our organizations’ experiences serving AAPI communities: that the harassment of AAPIs in public is pervasive. Even today AAPIs continue to tell us that they experience hate in every corner of life – walking to school, riding public transit, or shopping for groceries. Although these hate incidents may not pose a life-or-death emergency, their impact is real and immediate. They shatter one’s sense of normalcy, and profoundly alter a person’s feelings of safety, freedom of movement, and physical and mental well-being.

In our home state of California, we did not see any state-level policy efforts to address hate beyond hate crimes, to demand accountability from institutions, or to challenge the normalized, even banal, racism and misogyny faced by AAPIs, especially women. No Place for Hate California is a first step towards addressing this.

NO PLACE FOR HATE CALIFORNIA

No Place for Hate California consisted of three bills and two budget requests for the 2022 state legislative season, focused on protecting AAPIs, women of color, LGBTQIA+ people, and other vulnerable communities who are common targets of harassment in public spaces, public transit, and businesses.

“I was shopping at a [store] with my mask on. A white older man came up and started screaming at me saying, ‘You need to stay 10 ft away from me, you disgusting bat-eating bitch!’”

FEMALE, CALIFORNIA

ENDING STREET HARASSMENT

Stop AAPI Hate partnered with the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, a statewide grassroots organization that addresses the health and environmental needs of the nail salon workforce, to develop a bill and budget request to end street harassment. Authored by Assemblymember Mia Bonta, Assemblymember Akilah Weber, MD, and Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi, Assembly Bill 2549 (AB 2549) situated street harassment within a public health, rather than criminal, context by defining street harassment in the state’s Health and Safety Code and directing the California Department of Public Health to study street harassment and create a multi-year and statewide public education campaign for awareness and prevention. The bill defined street harassment as words, gestures, or actions directed at a specific person in a public place, without the consent of that person, based on the person’s actual or perceived protected characteristic, that the person experiences as intimidating, alarming, terrorizing, or threatening to their safety.

National reports confirmed the data from Stop AAPI Hate on the widespread nature of street harassment. For instance, the University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health and the nonprofit Stop Street Harassment found that 71 percent of women in the United States reported experiencing street harassment. Furthermore, a 2014 national study commissioned by Stop Street Harassment found that street harassment especially impacts women of color, as Black and Latina women are more likely than white women to experience street harassment. Research and personal experiences also show that street harassment impacts a person’s freedom of movement, physical and mental health and well-being, and ability to care for themselves and their families.

Ending street harassment requires a public health approach, not a criminal one. While street harassment feels intractable because it is so commonplace, public health campaigns have been effective at changing societal norms. For example, through public health campaigns, Americans have reduced cigarette smoking and encouraged seat belt wearing. Similarly, AB 2549, with its corresponding budget request directing money to the Department of Public Health, was intended to tackle the societal challenge of street harassment by changing societal norms around acceptable behavior between strangers in public.

IMPROVING PUBLIC TRANSIT RIDERSHIP SAFETY

Stop AAPI Hate developed a bill and budget request to increase safety for public transit riders. Senate Bill 1161 (SB 1161), authored by Senator Dave Min and co-sponsored by LA Metro, required the top ten transit agencies in California to collect information on the street harassment of women and other vulnerable riders and, in consultation with communities, develop data-driven initiatives to prevent and respond to street harassment on public transit systems.

Stop AAPI Hate focused on street harassment on transit due to the pervasive nature of the problem, the critical role public transit plays in people’s lives, and the opportunity to reverse years of declining public transit ridership in California. According to the University of California San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health and Stop Street Harassment, 29 percent of women experience sexual harassment on mass transit. Yet women are also more likely to be dependent on transit because a smaller percentage of women in California have driver’s licenses and access to a private vehicle, compared to men. The reliance on transit and exposure to harassment is especially true for women and girls of color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ individuals. As a result of the street harassment experienced while riding public transit, women and members of other vulnerable communities adjust their behavior or take precautions. For instance, LA Metro found that women leave a bus or train mid-trip to avoid harassment, avoid travel in the evening, avoid certain settings such as crowded buses, and avoid walking alone. Yet many transit agencies do not focus on rider experiences with street harassment when considering the safety of transit systems. Thus, they rarely capture information about street harassment and have limited understanding or knowledge of how to resolve this problem.

Stop AAPI Hate also led a budget request to provide funding for the top ten transit agencies to implement SB 1161, which specifically prohibited this funding from increasing transit police, private security, or other law enforcement. We incorporated this non-carceral approach because the communities that are most at risk of street harassment are also those who feel least assured by police and law enforcement. In fact, for communities of color and LGBTQIA+ communities, increased police presence does not always engender a feeling of increased safety but one of heightened scrutiny against these communities. Research has found that police in nearly every setting — transit, schools, sidewalks — disproportionately target Black and brown people. These interactions with police can become physically dangerous for people of color, as seen in the fatal police shootings of unarmed Black people and the deportation of Ariel Vences-Lopez after a Minneapolis police officer checked his fare. Even when police are in transit systems for race-neutral reasons (e.g., for fare inspection or patrolling stations), research shows they disproportionately stop Black and brown riders, which makes these riders feel targeted and unsafe on transit. Similarly, according to the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, LGBTQIA+ communities have experienced a long history of mistreatment by law enforcement, including profiling, entrapment, discrimination and harassment by officers, and victimization often ignored by law enforcement. Instead of failed carceral responses to transit safety issues, SB 1161 encouraged transit agencies to develop real solutions to serve riders.

—

Stop AAPI Hate developed a third bill to protect customers’ civil rights in businesses.

EXPANDING CIVIL RIGHTS AT BUSINESSES

Assembly Bill 2448 (AB 2448), authored by Assemblymember Phil Ting, required the state's Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) (which was renamed the Civil Rights Department in July 2022) to create a model training for employees on how to spot, report, and properly respond to incidents of discrimination and harassment against customers, and model signage notifying customers of their rights. AB 2448 also required the Department to report on harassment at businesses and to develop and evaluate a pilot program that publicly recognizes businesses for creating safe and welcoming environments. It further empowered customers to patronize businesses prioritizing customer safety. Lastly, AB 2448 required large businesses (defined as a business with over one hundred employees in California) to train employees using the model training, post the signage, and report incidents of harassment perpetrated by customers to DFEH.

More than one-quarter of the incidents reported to Stop AAPI Hate occurred in businesses, mostly big box stores such as Costco and Target. Nor are AAPIs alone in experiencing racialized harassment in businesses. A 2019-2020 study on racial bias in retail found that two in five shoppers personally experienced unfair treatment based on their race or skin color. Black customers have long reported unfair treatment while shopping, according to more than two decades of Gallup polling, and nearly 40 percent of Black adults and one-quarter of Hispanic adults reported experiencing race-based discrimination in a store where they were shopping. Bias-motivated harassment at businesses is not limited to race or ethnicity. Three-quarters of women in California reported experiencing sexual harassment in a public space, including a store, restaurant, movie theater, or gym, in a May 2019 study. More than one-half of LGBTQ respondents in a 2020 Center for American Progress study said they experienced harassment or discrimination in a public place, including a store.

While existing federal and state civil rights laws prohibit businesses from discriminating against customers and state law protects Californians from bias-motivated violence or threats of violence, including at businesses, these laws do not adequately protect community members against harassment, including harassment by other customers.

NAVIGATING THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The California State Legislature is a full-time legislative body with two houses, the Assembly and the Senate. Thousands of bills are introduced each year, approximately 300 to 400 make it to the Governor's desk for signature, and even fewer get signed into law. Stop AAPI Hate introduced the No Place for Hate California package in February 2022. By September 2022, Governor Newsom signed into law amended versions of SB 1161 and AB 2448, which became effective on January 1, 2023. Together, these laws are an essential first step toward preventing hate and harassment in the places where Californians shop and travel.

Legislating is an incremental and unpredictable endeavor. On the following page, we share some insights gained and lessons learned in our coalition's inaugural legislative fight for comprehensive solutions to anti-AAPI hate.

STREET HARASSMENT: IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT

AB 2549, the bill to end street harassment, was widely supported in the California State Legislature by both Democrats and Republicans alike. The bill was placed on the consent calendar, which means both Democrats and Republicans agreed on the policy vision of the bill, rendering unnecessary a hearing on the merits of the legislation. Nevertheless, the bill did not progress past the Assembly, the house in which it was introduced.

Where the bill may have fell short was placing its oversight within California's Department of Public Health during a time when the state was experiencing several urgent public health crises: the COVID-19 pandemic, the fentanyl crisis, and the U.S. Supreme Court decision reversing the right to an abortion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. All these issues may have collectively kept street harassment from rising to the top of the department's agenda. While the street harassment of women and other vulnerable groups is important, it lacked urgency compared to the other public health crises the state was facing.

In addition to competing with other urgent public health priorities, the street harassment of women and other vulnerable communities is longstanding, commonplace, and considered socially acceptable. This may point to the need for campaigns to change the narrative around its acceptability and reframe it as a policy matter necessitating state action — in other words, to elevate its urgency for the women of color and others whose safety is compromised on a daily basis when navigating public spaces.

CIVIL RIGHTS AT BUSINESSES: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

AB 2448, the bill to expand civil rights in businesses, passed the Assembly and policy committees in the Senate before being significantly amended by the Senate Appropriations Committee. In the California Legislature, the appropriations committee within each house is where bills go to die without explanation. It is a black box where advocates, sponsors, and authors do not know whether their bill will be reported out intact and move to the legislative floor for a vote, whether it will be amended on its way, or whether it will stall.

It is also the place where AB 2448 was substantially modified. The final version signed into law directs the Civil Rights Department to develop a first-of-its-kind pilot program to publicly recognize businesses for creating safe and welcoming environments and empower customers with information about which businesses address hate and harassment through concrete steps, such as training employees on their duties under civil rights laws. We were able to move forward despite the modifications in part because the implementing agency, the Civil Rights Department, committed to implementing a robust version of the pilot program. We had engaged the Department early and often, even before we had introduced the bill, alongside other stakeholders such as the Chamber of Commerce and labor unions, to ensure that the bill was workable.

Many aspects of the legislative process are out of an advocate's hands, including the final result. However, we were able to best position our bill to go the distance by building trusted relationships with key stakeholders, including securing buy-in from the implementing agency.

RIDER SAFETY ON PUBLIC TRANSIT: FINDING THE FUNDING

SB 1161, the bill to improve rider safety on public transit, received a great deal of support from the legislature and the media. The bigger challenge, however, was the accompanying budget request. In California, a bill that makes its way past the Legislature and to the Governor's desk without funding is vetoed.

We did not begin the legislative year as experts in the arcane and complex world of state transportation funding in California, so — as with AB 2448 — we engaged key stakeholders early and often. We worked closely with the state's transportation agency and the main association representing transit agencies to identify a funding source intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing street harassment on public transit can increase ridership, which in turn can lead to fewer vehicles on the road and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. However, the Legislature resisted opening this pot of funds beyond its prescribed uses, fearing the precedent that this would set. Ultimately, we moved forward with a modified version of the bill for which there was funding. SB 1161 directed the creation of a survey tool that promotes consistency in the information transit agencies collect about their riders, from rider demographics to their experiences with safety, including street harassment. We can't fix what we don't measure, and this bill is the first step toward centering rider experiences to prevent and reduce hate and harassment on public transit.

In February 2023, we introduced the next step: SB 434, again authored by Senator Min. This bill directs the state's ten largest transit agencies to gather and publish quantitative and qualitative data regarding the street harassment experienced by riders as they wait for and ride public transit. As transit operators look to bring back riders, centering their voices and experiences with street harassment is critical to making public transit a safer experience for AAPIs and other vulnerable riders and rebuilding rider trust and patronage.

Our fight for SB 1161 was a reminder that policy is made through legislation but also budgets, and that policy advocacy is an endurance sport. As we look back on our first legislative year as a coalition and advocate through our second, we remind ourselves that hate against Asians and Pacific Islanders has existed for as long as our communities have been in the United States, and even before the nation was formed. We receive reports of anti-AAPI hate still, even after the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially subsided. Dismantling these systems and structures of oppression is the work of many, from community groups like ours to those who walk the halls of government, to the public and press who beat the drum. It is the work of us all.

STOP
AAPI
HATE

Stop AAPI Hate was co-founded in March 2020 by AAPI Equity Alliance, Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA), and San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies Department. The mission of Stop AAPI Hate is to advance equity, justice, and power by dismantling systemic racism and building a multiracial movement to end anti-AAPI hate. Candice Cho is the Managing Director of Policy and Counsel at AAPI Equity Alliance, Annie Lee is the Managing Director of Policy at CAA, and Santosh Seeram-Santana is the Director of Legislation at CAA.

About the Authors



Candice Cho

Candice Cho is the Managing Director of Policy and Counsel at AAPI Equity Alliance. She previously served as the chief legal advisor on immigration in New York City, advising on sanctuary city laws and suing the Trump Administration to protect immigrant New Yorkers. She was also Chief of Staff to a NYC commission whose proposals to increase democratic participation were approved by voters. She began her career as a legislative staffer for U.S. Senator Richard J. Durbin (D-IL). Candice is a graduate of Harvard College and Columbia Law School and is admitted to practice law in New York and California.



Santosh Seeram-Santana

Santosh Seeram-Santana is the Legislative Director for Chinese for Affirmative Action. She develops, advocates and implements CAA's state budget and policy agenda at the state capitol. Santosh played a critical role in co-leading a budget campaign and administrative advocacy to create the One California Immigrant Services Funding. Prior to CAA, she was the Legislative Advocate for Asian American for Civil Rights & Equality, the Senior Lobbyist for Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California, and a staffer for Assemblymember Martha Escutia. Santosh is a graduate of the University of Southern California, Sol Price School of Public Policy and UC Berkeley.



Annie Lee

Annie Lee is the Managing Director of Policy at Chinese for Affirmative Action, where she advances workers' and immigrants' rights, language diversity, education equity, and racial justice. Annie previously worked as a Civil Rights Attorney with the U.S. Department of Education and enforced civil rights laws that protect students from discrimination. Annie began her legal career as an Equal Justice Works Fellow at the National Center for Youth Law, and prior to that, she was an 11th grade American history teacher in the Bronx. Annie graduated from Harvard Law School, Fordham's Graduate School of Education, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Endnotes

- 1 "Two Years and Thousands of Voices: What Community-Generated Data Tells Us About Anti-AAPI Hate," *Stop AAPI Hate*, July 20, 2022, <https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Stop-AAPI-Hate-Year-2-Report.pdf>.
- 2 "National Report: 3/19/20-9/30/21," *Stop AAPI Hate*, November 18, 2021, <https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Nov-2021-Stop-AAPI-Hate-National-Report-2021-11-11.docx.pdf>
- 3 "Two Years and Thousands of Voices," *Stop AAPI Hate*.
- 4 "No Place for Hate California," last modified 2023, <https://noplacementohateca.org/>.
- 5 "California State Policy Recommendations to Address AAPI Hate: A Starting Point for Taking Action," *Stop AAPI Hate*, October 13, 2021, https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Tq-mczL2ula2FzKGSTtdNbHWngo6Hn8a/view?usp=share_link.
- 6 Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, "Governor Newsom Strengthens State's Commitment to a California For All," September 13, 2022, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2022/09/13/governor-newsom-strengthens-states-commitment-to-a-california-for-all/>.
- 7 State of California, Senate, Transit operators: street harassment survey, Senate Bill No. 1161, introduced in Senate February 17, 2022, https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB1161.
- 8 State of California, Assembly, Civil rights: businesses: discrimination and harassment of customers: pilot program, Assembly Bill 2448, introduced in Assembly February 17, 2022, https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB2448.
- 9 See e.g., COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act.
- 10 "Report Incident," *Stop AAPI Hate*, <https://stopaapihate.org/reportincident/>.
- 11 "Reports," *Stop AAPI Hate*, last modified 12 October 2022, <https://stopaapihate.org/reports/>.
- 12 "The Blame Game: How Political Rhetoric Inflames Anti-Asian Scapegoating," *Stop AAPI Hate*, October 2022, <https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Stop-AAPI-Hate-Scapegoating-Report.pdf>.
- 13 Cady Lang and Paulina Cachero, "How a Long History of Intertwined Racism and Misogyny Leaves Asian Women in America Vulnerable to Violence," *TIME*, April 7, 2021, <https://time.com/5952819/history-anti-asian-racism-misogyny/>.
- 14 "California State Policy Recommendations," *Stop AAPI Hate*.
- 15 Year 2 report, <https://stopaapihate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Stop-AAPI-Hate-Year-2-Report.pdf>.
- 16 See, e.g., AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, "Increasing Discrimination against Asian Americans a Major Concern," May 26, 2021, https://apnorc.org/projects/increasing-discrimination-against-asian-americans-a-major-concern/?doing_wp_cron=1676530057.6433579921722412109375 ("[B]oth Asian and Black Americans are much more likely than white people to say they often or sometimes feel unsafe in public").
- 17 Josie Huang, "Asian Households Are More Likely To Report Food Shortages Because Residents Fear Going Out," *LAist*, August 11, 2021, <https://laist.com/news/food/asian-households-more-likely-to-report-food-shortage-fear->

Endnotes Continued

- [of-going-out-census-analysis](#); Jack Healy, “For Asian Americans Wary of Attacks, Reopening Is Not an Option,” *The New York Times*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/08/us/asian-american-attacks.html>.
- 18 Anne Saw, Aggie J. Yellow Horse, and Russell Jeung, “Mental Health Report,” *Stop AAPI Hate*, May, 27 2021, <https://stopaapihate.org/mental-health-report/>.
- 19 In California, the following are protected characteristics: race, color, ethnic group identification, ancestry, national origin, religion, mental disability, physical disability, medical condition, genetic information, age, marital status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.
- 20 Street harassment has been defined slightly differently by other entities. For instance, Washington D.C.’s Street Harassment Prevention Act of 2018 defines street harassment as any disrespectful,
- 21 “Measuring #MeToo: A National Study on Sexual Harassment and Assault,” *UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health and Stop Street Harassment*, April 2019, <https://gehweb.ucsd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/2019-metoo-national-sexual-harassment-and-assault-report.pdf>.
- 22 “Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: a National Street Harassment Report,” *Stop Street Harassment*, March 2014, <https://stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/National-Study-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf>.
- 23 “California State Policy Recommendations,” *Stop AAPI Hate*.
- 24 See Jennifer C. Duke, et. al, “Effect of a Statewide Media Campaign on Smoking Cessation Among Florida Adults,” February 2020, https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2020/19_0271a.htm.
- 25 See Maryam Akbari, et. al, “The effectiveness of mass media campaigns in increasing the use of seat belts: a systemic review,” *Traffic Inj. Prev.* 22(7) (2021), 495-500, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34355980/>.
- 26 “Measuring #MeToo,” *UC San Diego Center on Gender Equity and Health and Stop Street Harassment*.
- 27 “Changing Lanes: a Gender Equity Transportation Study,” *Los Angeles Department of Transportation*, June 2021, <https://ladot.lacity.org/sites/default/files/documents/changing-lanes-report.pdf>.
- 28 *Id.* See also, Chris Van Eyken, “Safety for All,” *Transit Center*, July 2021, <https://transitcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SafetyForAll.pdf>.
- 29 “Understanding How Women Travel,” *LA Metro*, August 30, 2019, http://libraryarchives.metro.net/DB/Attachments/2019-0294/UnderstandingHowWomenTravel_FullReport_FINAL.pdf.
- 30 Poignant anecdotal evidence (see below for research): Cynthia [@cynthia4nyc], “A Girl I Know Felt Unsafe on a Train Car with Just One Other Person on It so She Switched Cars and Was Subsequently Questioned by NYPD Officers. They Proceeded to Follow Her off the Train, Refusing to Let Her Leave the Station, Accusing Her of Fare Evasion & Arrested Her.” Tweet, *Twitter*, March 27, 2022, <https://twitter.com/cynthia4nyc/status/1508135096745926662>; hua xi [@huaxixyz], “Today Three Cops Randomly Stopped Me at Canal St to Ask Me to Translate for a Confused Asian Woman They Were Charging for Fare Evasion and They Kept Refusing to Let Her Go Bc She Didnt Have an Id 1/,” Tweet, *Twitter*, May 12, 2022, <https://twitter.com/huaxixyz/status/1524572153500286976>.
- 31 Van Eyken, “Safety for All.”
- 32 Amir Whitaker, et. al, “Cops and No Counselors: how the lack of school mental health staff is harming students,”
- ACLU, March 2019, www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/030419-acluschooldisciplinereport.pdf.
- 33 Christopher Dunn and Michelle Shames, “Stop-and-Frisk in the de Blasio Era,” *NYCLU*, March 2019, https://www.nyclu.org/sites/default/files/field_documents/20190314_nyclu_stopfrisk_singles.pdf.
- 34 Van Eyken, “Safety for All.”
- 35 Talisa J. Carter and Lallen T. Johnson, “Blacks Can’t Jump”: the Racialization of Transit Police Responses to Fare Evasion,” *Race and Justice* (2021), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/21533687211007548>.
- 36 Christof Spieler, “Racism has shaped public transit, and it’s riddled with inequities,” *Rice University Kinder Institute for Urban Research Urban Edge*, August 24, 2020, <https://kinder.rice.edu/urbanedge/racism-has-shaped-public-transit-and-its-riddled-inequities>.
- 37 Christy Mallory, et. al., “Discrimination and Harassment by Law Enforcement Officers in the LGBT Community,” *The Williams Institute*, March 2015, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Discrimination-by-Law-Enforcement-Mar-2015.pdf>.
- 38 Stop AAPI Hate found promising initiatives, including the Not One More Girl campaign launched by Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) in conjunction with community organizations Alliance for Girls, Betti Ono, Black Girls Brilliance, and the Unity Council’s Latinx Mentorship and Achievement Program. The campaign brought awareness to sexual harassment on BART by adding a new reporting category (“unwanted sexual harassment (non-criminal)”) to the BART reporting app, publicizing youth-created campaign posters and slogans about sexual harassment, increasing unarmed transit ambassadors and youth leaders with violence prevention backgrounds, and more. A year after the launch of Not One More Girl, BART found that 65 percent of riders responded they were more aware of sexual harassment, 59 percent responded they know what to do if they witness harassment on BART, 46 percent responded they know where to get help if they experience harassment on BART, and 36 percent responded feeling safer riding BART. Such evidence proves that transit agencies can implement SB 1161 and prevent and reduce harassment on transit without a criminalization approach.
- 39 Pittman Claytor, C., Crockett, D., Dunlap Fowler, W. and Raspberry, P, “The Racial Bias in Retail Study,” commissioned by SEPHORA, 2020. [https://www.sephora.com/contentimages/belong/january2021/Sephora_RacialBias_eBook_DES_12-23-20_V12%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.sephora.com/contentimages/belong/january2021/Sephora_RacialBias_eBook_DES_12-23-20_V12%20(1).pdf).
- 40 Melissa Repko, “As Black buying power grows, racial profiling by retailers remains persistent problem,” *CNBC*, July 5, 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/07/05/as-black-buying-power-grows-racial-profiling-by-retailers-remains-a-problem.html>.
- 41 Liz Hamel et al., “The Undeclared Survey on Race and Health,” *KFF and ESPN*, October 13, 2020, <https://www.kff.org/report-section/kff-the-undeclared-survey-on-race-and-health-main-findings/>.
- 42 “Measuring #MeToo in California A Statewide Assessment of Sexual Harassment and Assault,” *Center on Gender Equity and Health, California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and Stop Street Harassment*, May 2019, https://gehweb.ucsd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/cametooreport_052419.pdf.
- 43 Lindsay Mahowald, Sharita Gruberg, and John Halpin, “The State of the LGBTQ Community in 2020: A National Public Opinion Study” *Center for American Progress*, October 6, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/state-lgbtq-community-2020/>.
- 44 Laurel Rosenhall, “The Suspense Files: California bills vanish almost without a trace,” *Cal Matters*, September 6, 2017, <https://calmatters.org/politics/2017/09/capitol-suspense-california-bills-vanish-almost-without-trace/>.
- 45 State of California, Senate, Transit operators: street harassment survey, Senate Bill 434, introduced by Senator Min, February 13, 2023, https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240SB434.
- 46 “Asian American and Pacific Islander Historical Timeline,” *Stop AAPI Hate*, <https://stopaapihate.org/timeline/>.

Countering a History of Invisibility, Erasure, and Exclusion through an Asian American Ethnic Studies Course

By Josephine M. Kim, Shubh Agrawal, Clara Kang, Kiki Nakamura-Koyama, and Leah Porter



A Japanese American business puts up an 'I am an American' banner in Oakland, California the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, December 1941. Photo by Dorothea Lang, Library of Congress

INTRODUCTION

In response to the racial reckoning in 2020, school districts and classrooms across the United States have started to incorporate more histories of diverse people in their curriculum. A long line of scholars and activists, including members of the Third World Liberation Front at University of California Berkeley, Rudine Sims Bishop, Jocelyn Glazier and Jung Seo, and Beverly Tatum, have published numerous empirical studies highlighting the significance of curriculum representation on the development of positive ethnoracial identities of students of color.¹ More contemporary scholars interested in understanding identity development specifically in Asian American populations have discovered that positive ethnoracial identity is associated with higher social, psychological, and academic wellbeing.² Moreover, exposure to Asian American representation in the media, curricula, and interpersonal interactions extends to non-Asian Americans and their everyday treatment of Asian Americans.³

NAMING THE PROBLEM

Despite the growing scholarship on the significance of nurturing positive ethnoracial identities for Asian American populations through accurate representation, the standard curriculum falls egregiously short. Students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) who have taken Professor Josephine Kim's course H503M Race, ethnicity, and culture: Contemporary issues in Asian America, reported that while their K-16 curriculum incorporated Asian American history, the content only included brief comments about wars, threats, and immigration policy. Without accurate Asian American representation, the full context of a complex racialized nation is lost, rendering Asian Americans invisible and wedged between an uncomplicated Black-White binary that often dominates race conversations in the U.S.⁴ In addition, without representation of Asian Americans, the Asian American population is vulnerable to stereotype and discrimination.⁵ Asian Americans are the fastest growing population in the United States, and in order to sustain a disparate nation, it is imperative that the educational curriculum is reflective of its population.⁶

POTENCY OF ETHNIC STUDIES

Since the development of Ethnic Studies courses in the 1960s, numerous studies have consistently found Ethnic Studies curricula to have a positive impact on students, both academically and socially.⁷ Participation in Ethnic Studies courses has been shown to increase student outcomes such as attendance, GPA, graduation rates, academic engagement, and more.⁸ Many researchers attribute these outcomes to the relevant and meaningful nature of Ethnic Studies curricula, which highlights the narratives and voices of those traditionally excluded from education, increasing visibility and combating erasure.⁹ Ethnic Studies courses promote cultural relevance and make explicit connections to students' ethnoracial identities, presenting a "race-reimagined" perspective in which students see themselves directly reflected in curricula.¹⁰

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES OF H503M

H503M is an inaugural Asian American Ethnic Studies course at HGSE. Through the voices of its students, we examined the potency of ethnoracial curriculum representation and its impact on Asian American students and their ethnic-racial identity development. Of notable observation was the sense of "being seen for the first time," as students in H503M discussed how curricular representation enhanced their sense of engagement, belonging, and pride (all student names are pseudonyms):

Patty, a multi-racial Japanese and White woman stated, "As simple as it sounds, just being seen and in a class full of people with a similar background felt so welcoming. Sharing that space and learning about shared history — that alone was effective." Sarah, a Chinese American woman, named that in H503M, "I finally existed again in the classroom space. Every single class was about us!" Maggie, a multi-racial Chinese, Vietnamese and White woman, echoed these sentiments, noting that "taking this course allowed me to be in community with so many wonderful people. I felt seen and appreciated as the person I am."

While students' sense of visibility increased as H503M progressed, it led to both a lamenting of "not knowing" what they "did not even know to know" through their prior K-16 schooling and a newfound awakening of "finally knowing":

Peter, a biracial Japanese and white man expressed, "I did not learn about Asian American history in any of my K-16 educational experiences...and H503M made me acutely aware of how Asian Americans have experienced invisibility, erasure, and exclusion. It gave me historical context for these forms of oppression and helped me connect that context to my own experiences and those of my family." John, a Chinese American man, further highlighted his own experiences of erasure from prior schooling, "In this course, I learned history that I literally didn't know existed. I was given access to readings, media, and stories that I genuinely maybe never would have encountered on my own, and now, I feel like I have things that I can bring and share with others." Julie, a Korean American woman, shared similar sentiments in this way, "This was the first time I learned about Asian American history...H503M opened up a lot of conversations that I didn't know existed until it was brought up in class."

Students also reiterated and celebrated the role H503M played in furthering their understanding of their own intersecting racial and cultural experiences and identities:

Jobe, a Taiwanese-American man, said about engaging in the course, "I took away the realization that Asian Americans are not a 'privileged' minority. They have experienced tremendous oppression over the last few centuries." Parker, a Korean American woman, shared that she learned "more about the nuances of the 'Asian

"Learning about Asian American history in this class—both the heartbreaking parts and the encouraging parts—made me feel empowered and has helped me gain a sense of self-agency in crafting my own narrative of who I am."

MIA, CHINESE AMERICAN

American' experience," while Shuqi, an Asian woman, described how she feels more "proud" of her "Asian identity following this course."

How Asian American students experience their racial, cultural, and ethnic identity critically affects their self-perception and influences how they engage with others. Asian American Ethnic Studies courses like H503M often provide the first space of its kind for students to gain insight into the historical context of their racial and cultural identity. Multiple students highlighted the ways in which the course was indeed their introduction to identity affirmation through a contextualized historical lens:

Mia, a Chinese woman, elaborated, "Learning about Asian American history in this class — both the heartbreaking parts and the encouraging parts — made me feel empowered and has helped me gain a sense of self-agency in crafting my own narrative of who I am. Even though I did not learn about Asian American history in college (I don't think it was ever offered at my school...), the ideas and stereotypes of the model minority constantly came up in conversations and life outside of classes, which in retrospect shows how much my peers and I have been affected and have both consciously and subconsciously played into the model minority myth."

Students also gave voice to navigating a K-16 curriculum that rarely recognized Asian American history, further contributing to their feelings of being perceived as "perpetual foreigners."¹¹ Many students expressed varied reactions to recognizing the lack of attention given to Asian American issues in the K-16 experience, contributing further to their feelings of erasure and invisibility in American history, their education, and even more broadly, in life:

Carrie, a Korean American woman, described the sense of grief and loss stemming from a missing history, "By contextualizing the history of Asian America and putting Asian American experiences and narratives in dialogue with more widespread knowledge of other racial groups in the U.S. around the same timeline, I was able to clearly see how much Asian American history was left out in my K-16 educational career. While I learned about the challenges and triumphs of Western culture, I was never exposed to the stories of Asian America, let alone told from the perspective of a fellow Asian American." Andre, a Filipino American man, shared further that the course made him feel "angry and proud," and that he was "angry knowing that Asian Americans are a part of building this country yet are rendered invisible and erased due to the model minority myth and the perpetual foreigner stereotypes." He added, "I'm proud to know that this course

exists at Harvard and that even non-Asian Americans are taking this course. That, in and of itself, is a metric of social change towards the Asian American community.”

The invisibility and marginalization of cultural identities can be reinforced as students progress through their own racial identity development while navigating the pressure to conform to majority culture.¹² This process may lead some students to implicitly idealize white culture and consider rejecting their own Asian American identity, often resulting in dissonance, anxiety, and racial ambivalence.¹³ H503M students described the role the course played in challenging pro-white idealization and racial ambivalence that many had first-handedly experienced throughout their lives:

Susan, a multi-ethnic Asian American woman, writes, “I have...learned of my own trauma maneuvering the U.S. as an Asian American and the impact of assimilation on me and my children. I bought into the notions of white beauty, wanting my eyes to be bigger, my skin to be fairer, and my accent to be whiter. I regret not insisting that my kids learn Mandarin because I feared their not being able to stay on top of school work if they speak a different language at home...After this class, I now know that my children and I have trauma stemming from trying to change ourselves so that we fit into the white American mold.” Similarly, Jen, a Korean woman, described her observations in this way, “H503M... allowed me to unpack years and years of unspoken, sometimes unidentified, struggles,” while Mee, another Korean American woman, elevated the importance of facilitating a collective space, “I realized that my own racial, cultural, and ethnic identity cannot be shaped by myself. Connecting with other students through the course materials gave me the comfort and courage needed to open up and ask tougher questions.”

Enrollees in H503M were impacted by the course in ways that were as disparate as their ethnoracial identities, and they emphasized the importance of stories as their key takeaway from H503M:

Sam, a Korean American woman, wrote that she hoped to share more stories from her community, “I started asking myself tougher questions. I am in Korea for the first time in my life, and I’m working on a project where I hope to share stories from traditionally marginalized communities. I realize that a lot of the stories I hope to share were sparked from H503M discussions and the final project.”

Students also expressed pride for the way H503M amplified Asian American narratives and empowered the lived experiences of Asian Americans.

Amy, a Chinese American woman, wrote, “H503M centers the history, literature, and lived experiences of Asian Americans. Rather than vainly straining for visibility, the course is grounded in the assumption and belief that Asian Americans matter and their stories and histories matter. Learning about Asian American issues with this foundational belief already in place has been transformational.” Tee, a Vietnamese American man, added similar reflections, “H503M validated the fact that Asian American history is American History,” while Sue, a Korean American woman, pointed out that “even just being able to put a name to the experiences that we face made us feel more powerful and able to engage in dismantling systems of oppression.” Furthermore, Joe, a Chinese American man, shared that after taking H503M, he embraces “the power of stories and the individual stories of people.”

Other key takeaways from H503M related to critical theory, in particular the impact of “racial triangulation” and its role in maintaining the status quo of anti-blackness and pro-whiteness.¹⁴ While students described how the course instilled in them the importance of advocating on behalf of Asian Americans, the most compelling key takeaway from H503M was how the course fostered in them the salience of perspective-taking and acting on behalf of other marginalized populations:

Erica, a Korean American woman, explained that “the complex relationships amongst the Asian American community and other people of color communities and coming face to face with ways in which we have both suffered because of racist systems was invaluable. Most importantly, discussing the responsibility we have to engage in our collective liberation from these systems was empowering. Representation matters not only as a conduit to understanding one’s own history but also in understanding how all of our fates are entwined.”

Students who enrolled in H503M reported that the course influenced them personally in a myriad of ways and named the reverberating effects of Ethnic Studies that not only benefit students who take the class but the society and community in which they interact and reside:

Patty, a Chinese American woman, stated, “H503M was easily one of the best courses I’ve taken during my time at Harvard. The impact it has had on me, and as a result, on my students, is immeasurable.” Another student further elaborated that, “This course was so impactful, resulting in students applying to law school, wanting to start similar courses at other institutions, and creating the AAPI graduation ceremony at Harvard University.” Tommy, a Filipino American man, shared, “I eventually want to pitch a similar course as I pursue my Ph.D. in Asian American Ethnic Studies Policy. Most institutions outside of HGSE that focus on Education Leadership or Policy Analysis, don’t teach anything on Asian American studies. That needs to change. This course has the ability to be a successful template in teaching other schools of education how to teach Asian American histories and studies.”

Much like Beverly Tatum’s ABC framework which posits that marginalized groups are best positioned for success and leadership when they locate affinity in groups, H503M is a testament to the power of healing in an education setting and the exponential potency of Ethnic Studies curriculum in reaching all students.¹⁵ Students found their voices in their curiosity of the Asian American diaspora and learned to gauge the sensitivity of the current Asian American climate, racism, and conversations around them, actively engaging their voices to push against social injustices against Asian Americans.

“By contextualizing the history of Asian America and putting Asian American experiences and narratives in dialogue with more widespread knowledge of other racial groups in the U.S. around the same timeline, I was able to clearly see how much Asian American history was left out in my K-16 educational career.”

CARRIE, KOREAN AMERICAN

CONCLUSION

Ethnic Studies courses like H503M provide a psychologically safe forum where collective grieving, celebrating, and exploring can take place, resulting in new-found pride, resilience, and strength for marginalized racial, ethnic, and cultural groups in the U.S. Augmenting awareness on the historical context surrounding the lived experiences of Asian Americans powerfully shifts internalized perceptions of inferiority so commonly harbored by ethnic and racial minorities in the U.S., accurately locating the problem in the systemic and prolonged oppression, deprivation, and denigration that Asian Americans have endured for centuries. The testimonies of H503M students elevate the urgency of proactively and deliberately creating intentional and institutionalized opportunities for students to explore their ethnoracial identity within the confines of a classroom. Co-curricular diversity and inclusion programs that facilitate critical race conversations have an important role to play in higher education, but they are optional, peripheral, and at best, serve as isolated, one-off attempts at increasing knowledge and awareness of a self-selected few. Incentivizing Ethnic Studies courses with academic credit as part of a sustained and comprehensive curriculum ensures student access to appointed faculty, dedicated staff support, designated physical space, and pointed library resources, concretizing an institution's ongoing commitment to equity and justice.

About the Authors



Josephine M. Kim

Josephine M. Kim is an East Asian American Senior Lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a Licensed Mental Health Counselor. She lends her expertise on diversity and inclusion training design focused on anti-racism in the workplace at The United Nations and in The Inclusive Policy Lab at UNESCO, and she is a Diversity Scholar at the National Center for Institutional Diversity at the University of Michigan.



Shubh Agrawal

Shubh Agrawal is a South Asian clinical psychology doctoral student at William James College and a graduate of HGSE in the Prevention Science and Practice and C.A.S. programs. She centers her work on strengths-based, culturally humble practices and the intersectionality of identities and experiences of clients. She hopes to continue to amplify the voices of Asian youth and dismantle barriers to mental health within our communities.



Clara Kang

Clara Kang is a Korean American school-based social worker and counselor in Boston with an EdM and CAS from HGSE. Born in Korea and raised in Southern California, she started her education career as a Fulbright English teacher in Gwangju, South Korea, where she was born. In her current role, she focuses on supporting young people's mental health, social emotional wellbeing, and identity development.



Kiki Nakamura-Koyama

Kiki Nakamura-Koyama is a Japanese American educator at Harvard University's Center on the Developing Child. She was formerly a high school English teacher passionate about “mirrors and windows” literature in rural, white public schools. She taught at Northampton High School, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, and abroad through the Fulbright program in Indonesia prior to receiving an EdM at HGSE.



Leah Porter

Leah Porter is a Chinese-Malaysian American administrator at Red Rocks Community College who supports minoritized students on the STEM pathway. Born and raised in Malaysia, she started her education journey as an adult learner, mom, and first-generation college student at Arapahoe Community College. Leah has an Ed.M. in Education, Leadership, Organization, and Entrepreneurship from HGSE.

Endnotes

- 1 “Third World Liberation Front Research Initiative (TwLF), Center for Race and Gender,” n.d. Accessed March 2, 2023. <https://crg.berkeley.edu/third-world-liberation-front-research-initiative-twlf/>; Rudine Sims Bishop, “Walk Tall in the World: African American Literature for Today’s Children,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 59 (4): 556, 1990, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2295312>; Glazier, Jocelyn, and Jung-A Seo, “Multicultural Literature and Discussion as Mirror and Window?,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 48, no. 8 (May 2005): 686–700, <https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.48.8.6>; and Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations about Race*, Third trade paperback edition, New York: Basic Books, 2017.
- 2 Lisa Kiang, Melissa R. Witkow, and Mariette C. Champagne, “Normative Changes in Ethnic and American Identities and Links with Adjustment among Asian American Adolescents,” *Developmental Psychology* 49 (2013): 1713–22, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030840>.
- 3 Krista Maywalt Scottham, Robert M. Sellers, and Hóia X. Nguyễn, “A Measure of Racial Identity in African American Adolescents: The Development of the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity--Teen,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 14, no. 4 (October 2008): 297–306, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.14.4.297>.
- 4 Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou, *The Asian American Achievement Paradox*, Russell Sage Foundation, (2015), Accessed March 2, 2023, <https://www.russellsage.org/asian-american-achievement-paradox>.
- 5 Monica H. Lin, Virginia S. Y. Kwan, Anna Cheung, and Susan T. Fiske, “Stereotype Content Model Explains Prejudice for an Envied Outgroup: Scale of Anti-Asian American Stereotypes,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 34–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167204271320>.
- 6 Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), Accessed March 4, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.
- 7 Christine E. Sleeter, “The Academic and Social Value of Ethnic Studies: A Research Review,” 2011.
- 8 Sade Bonilla, Thomas S. Dee, and Emily K. Penner, “Ethnic Studies Increases Longer-Run Academic Engagement and Attainment,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 37 (September 14, 2021): e2026386118, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2026386118>; Nolan L. Cabrera, Jeffrey F. Milem, Ozan Jaquette, and Ronald W. Marx, “Missing the (Student Achievement) Forest for All the (Political) Trees: Empiricism and the Mexican American Studies Controversy in Tucson,” *American Educational Research Journal* 51, no. 6 (December 1, 2014): 1084–1118, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214553705>; Thomas Dee and Emily Penner, “The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum,” *American Educational Research Journal* 54(1), no. 54(1) (March 10, 2017): 127.
- 9 Janine de Novais and George Spencer, “Learning Race to Unlearn Racism: The Effects of Ethnic Studies Course-Taking,” *The Journal of Higher Education* 90, no. 6 (November 2, 2019): 860–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1545498>; Patricia Espiritu Halagao, “Holding Up the Mirror: The Complexity of Seeing Your Ethnic Self in History,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 32 (2004): 459–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2004.10473265>; and Colette Van Laar, Jim Sidanius, and Shana Levin, “Ethnic-Related Curricula and Intergroup Attitudes in College: Movement toward and Away from the in-Group,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 38 (2008): 1601–38, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2008.00361.x>.
- 10 Francesca López, Norma González, Rosario Hutchings, Giselle Delcid, Crystal Raygoza, and Lorenzo López, “Race-Reimagined Self-Determination Theory: Elucidating How Ethnic Studies Promotes Student Identity and Learning Outcomes Using Mixed-Methods,” *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 71, no. 102119 (October 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2022.102119>.
- 11 Sohyun An, “AsianCrit Perspective on Social Studies,” *The Journal of Social Studies Research* 41, no. 2 (April 2017): 131–39, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2016.06.002>.
- 12 Alvin N. Alvarez and Janet E. Helms, “Racial Identity and Reflected Appraisals as Influences on Asian Americans’ Racial Adjustment,” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, Asian American Acculturation and Ethnic/Racial Identity: Research Innovations in the New Millennium, 7, no. 3 (August 2001): 217–31, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.7.3.217>.
- 13 Jason Chan, “Complexities of Racial Identity Development for Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) College Students: Complexities of Racial Identity Development,” *New Directions for Student Services* 2017, no. 160 (December 2017): 11–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20240>; Alvin N. Alvarez, “Racial Identity and Asian Americans: Support and Challenges,” *New Directions for Student Services* 2002, no. 97 (2002): 33–44, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.37>.
- 14 Claire Kim, “2. THE RACIAL TRIANGULATION OF ASIAN AMERICANS,” *Asian Americans and Politics*, edited by Gordon H. Chang, 39–78, Stanford University Press, 2002, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503619166-007>.
- 15 Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Can We Talk about Race? And Other Conversations in an Era of School Resegregation*, 1st ed. Race, Education, Democracy Series, Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2007.



Student demonstrators outside of the Supreme Court. Photography by Scott Applewhite, AP

Saving Affirmative Action: The Youth-Led Coalition Fighting Back at the Supreme Court

By Angie Shin

The day after the Supreme Court heard oral arguments for the Students for Fair Admissions' case against Harvard College, Prof. Ben Eidelson from Harvard Law School posted a Twitter thread to "highlight the incoherence of the position put forward by opponents of [affirmative] action yesterday." In this thread, Eidelson proposes a hypothetical scenario: If student S submits an essay about being a Black Republican, SFFA's current argument as presented before the Supreme Court would not know how to formulate a lawful input to a favorable judgment about S's candidacy and application to a university. He expands on the problem: there is no way to "reason coherently about people's pasts or futures — both spent in a world where their race bears some significance — while stipulating that one's analysis must come out the same way regardless of a person's stated race."¹

The Supreme Court, according to Eidelson, will be perpetually unable to formulate coherent standards about race-blind admissions, because it won't be able to get around the fact that admissions decisions are about people, and race unequivocally matters in people's lives.

This fundamental truth formed the basis for the vibrant, ambitious and intentional organizing that students of Harvard, including myself and more than two dozen other Harvard student and alumni organizations, did in opposition to the goal of this suit: to overturn affirmative action. Students For Fair Admissions (SFFA) first sued the President and Fellows of Harvard College in November of 2014 with two claims: that Asian American applicants experienced stricter standards for admissions based on their race and that Harvard had violated the Equal Protection Clause and Title VI of The Civil Rights Act by engaging in a prohibited form of racial balancing. Headed by conservative financial adviser Ed Blum, this lawsuit is the newest addition to his lifelong career dedicated to race-blind American policy. In a duplicitous move, Blum's lawsuit claims to represent the interests of Asian prospective students, but his goal is to overturn affirmative action with the intention of reducing Black and Hispanic

enrollment in our nation's universities. As the largest minority groups in America, Black and Hispanic students are already disproportionately underrepresented in the hallways of Harvard and many other universities; affirmative action is one tool that schools have used to rectify centuries of discrimination and oppression that systematically excluded these students from the chance at a college education.

In September 2019, the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts ruled in favor of Harvard, having found that Harvard's admissions policies did not exercise any discriminatory practices against Asian American applicants. The First Circuit found the same. 18 months later, SFFA's appeals reached the Supreme Court of the United States, for both this case and a similar one they had brought against the University of North Carolina (UNC). The Supreme Court granted both petitions, and on July 25, 2022, 25 Harvard student and alumni organizations, represented by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF), filed an amicus curiae brief in support of Harvard.

I first became involved in the case in the summer of 2021, when I began my tenure as Co-President of the Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Women's Association (AAWA). At the time, I only helped liaise attorney-client privileged communications from the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF), who represented AAWA and 25 other student and alumni groups to file an amicus curiae brief in support of Harvard. In April the following year, LDF's legal team invited me, my outgoing Co-President, and the student leaders of other select amicus organizations to become members of a new Activism Working Group for the case, which included students, civil rights nonprofits, grass roots organizations, and other civic and social partners all over the country. We met weekly on Zoom from May to October to discuss organizational goals; I served as acting secretary.

By leveraging our collective networks, the Working Group grew over the summer of 2022 to include student representatives from Yale, Princeton, MIT, Stanford, Columbia, UPenn and dozens of other educational institutions across the United States. The Harvard students created a new ad hoc student group on campus the following Fall, called the Affirmative Action Coalition, with four key organizing goals for the semester: a student-led teach-in with LDF; an intercollegiate sign-on statement; a national week of action dedicated to holding affirmative action events every day for a week leading up to the date of oral arguments; and a public demonstration in front of the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. 150 students joined our Slack workspace and attended weekly virtual meetings to plan our programming ahead of the Court's hearing of the case.

There was not a single waking minute in the month of October when I wasn't completely consumed by my organizing role. I ate, slept, and breathed this coalition, constantly texting the Slack workspace with preparation requests, making myself available for every meeting with every stakeholder, and sharing endless feedback and questions in discussions of programming and intention. I skipped lectures that I could afford to watch remote recordings of later in the week, I came late to club meetings and rehearsals, and I put everything else in my life on hold. And I was so, so happy to do it. Organizing for Harvard's affirmative action was the most meaningful work I've done in my life so far. I was swept up in this incredible wave of momentum, focus, determination, passion, connection, and community that was only made possible by the members of the Coalition. I was so grateful to my peers who had signed up to join, not because of any established organizational prestige or a promise of a guaranteed job after college, but because of the mere idea that students of color deserve equitable, just, and policy-supported access to higher education.

This work culminated with our trip to D.C., where we held a protest outside the Supreme Court the day of the *SFFA v. Harvard* oral arguments. We trudged our way to airports and bus stops, catching rides back to Harvard's campus when oral arguments began.

Most observers expect the Supreme Court will overturn affirmative action. Whether or not it will be because they decide the initial justification for its use has expired, or because they decide that race-conscious admissions is flat-out unconstitutional, it will have massive repercussions on how not only higher education institutions but also businesses and industries across America's economy select and intake future generations of students and employees. The nation's faith in the Supreme Court is already at an all-time low; in the post-Dobbs age, it is now possible to think that the Supreme Court could overturn a landmark decision that once protected the civil rights of millions of Americans.

I came home from D.C. tired beyond belief. It hadn't occurred to me that the momentum building could make me feel that way, where suddenly ceasing the overdrive of action and energy left me dizzy, eager for rest. However, after a couple of weeks spent catching up on my schoolwork and recharging with my support network of friends and family, the core nagging question started plaguing me again. What can activists do if the Court overturns *Grutter*?

Hypothetically, a few things, however unlikely. Congress could pass a bill to technically strip jurisdiction from the Court with regards to hearing the Harvard case. But this remedy is unlikely to work for state schools such as UNC, another plaintiff in this case. President Biden's recently-formed Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States is exploring changing the make-up of the Court, from term limits to floating appointments to court-packing. And states such as California have been working on reparations legislation that could allocate funding to students descended from slaves, making access to higher education financially easier.

But we cannot forget the power we have as Harvard students to stage public protest that can push the needle on this vital issue. The Harvard community has a history of organizing for justice, from the early days of the Civil Rights Movement to standing in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. The work of the Coalition harkens back to this rich legacy and has rejuvenated the campus and its civic engagement with issues of educational justice. Such action must be kept alive on campus to keep these problems salient in the eyes of not only undergraduates but graduate students, prospective employees, high school students and prospective college applicants, and all other allied bodies in the fight for fixing America's broken education system.

Work like this rarely sees short-term goals to fruition. Instead, we are part of an incredibly driven group of students, alumni, researchers, lawyers, journalists, and leaders committed to creating national momentum around this vital issue. This is the work that sets up the changemakers of the future, and nourishes their hopes and ambitions for a world where race and its complexities can be truly understood by all and treated with care in the eyes of the law. This is the work that honors all those who have been fighting for justice and peace for so long — and I am excited to keep honoring that legacy while I can.

¹ Ben Eidelson [@beidelson], "(C) 'S's Stated Belief about the Likely Effects of Admitting S..." Tweet, *Twitter*, November 1, 2022, <https://twitter.com/beidelson/status/1587461755655147521>.

About the Author



Angie Shin

Angie Shin (they/she) is an undergraduate student concentrating in Physics and Government at Harvard College. In light of the *SFFA v. Harvard* Supreme Court case, they co-founded and co-led the Affirmative Action Coalition — a group of student activists from over 30 undergraduate and graduate organizations at Harvard University — to organize events of public action and education about the future of affirmative action, its constitutionality in the United States, and the importance of race-conscious college admissions and diversity in higher education institutions. They worked with students, community organizers, practitioners, allies, and leadership at Harvard University, Princeton University, Yale University, NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, The African American Policy Forum, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, and The Coalition for a Diverse Harvard.

锄禾日当午
汗滴禾下土
谁知盘中餐
粒粒皆辛苦

“When the sun is at the highest point, sweat drips down to the earth, who knows that in the bowl of rice, each grain is made of exhausting work.”

White Rice

By Claire Liu

Place your middle fingers on your temples. Closer to the corner of your eyes. No. A little up. Ok. Press them tight and pull back.

Leer at yourself in the mirror. Keep pulling until you can feel the smooth layer of white under your pores and the water in your eyes makes it too hard to see.

Chinese poems are a few lines. Chinese epics are novels. There is no in between. The value

is concentrated in small shots of espresso or taken in chugs of water. From the ages of three to four, every Chinese-American kid has these poems drilled into their

heads in the vain hope of retaining their culture in a big (read smaller) new country. Poems that shook the earth they were read upon, poems that consumed the souls of their creators, poems that were specifically expressed in the exact brushstrokes of ancient Chinese calligraphy, awkwardly stacked into even fonts of simplified typography in overpriced textbooks.

The Chinese school I attended was technically my brother's middle school, hijacked by a ferocious team of Chinese teachers every Saturday from 7:00 in the morning to some ambiguous time in the afternoon that I never waited long enough to discover. Chinese was my first language for all of my life but after three years of American public school education, I had unlearned everything I knew and was sent back to my brother's middle school to learn it again (properly this time, I was told).

The first poem I learned in class was one of the most famous, meaning I had already heard my parents tell me it dozens of times before.

悯农

No one could remember the poet.

锄禾日当午，
汗滴禾下土，
谁知盘中餐，
粒粒皆辛苦。

“When the sun is at the highest point, sweat drips down to the earth, who knows that in the bowl of rice, each grain is made of exhausting work.”

I mean, that’s what it should have sounded like. In my mouth, it sounded more like this.

锄禾日当午汗滴禾下土谁知盘中餐粒粒皆辛苦.

The students stood in a phalanx, pronouncing the characters, unfeeling. Relatives and

teachers alike have taught us the meaning, but when we read it, we’re never really sure we understand. We are not Chinese. Too foreign to be considered American, too ignorant to be named Chinese. Nevertheless, we recite the poem perfectly. Verses of sweat and heart brush past our lips, carelessly thrown into the world. Left to defend themselves and find meaning in cold classrooms called Chinese for the weekend.

We cannot comprehend the poem. We will never experience the push of the soil against a till, never feel the beating sun split our skin on an open field, but we have been taught well. We lift our bowls and shovel mouthfuls of rice into our open jaws, no grain left behind. Our pride does not allow us to use spoons. Instead, we furrow our brows and focus on pushing individual kernels with thin bamboo chopsticks, and for half a moment we are almost Chinese.

I never fully understood American weddings. There’s a lot that is difficult to grasp,

something old, something new, something blue. The most puzzling tradition was not the haunting white dresses (the pale color was reserved for funerals in China), the four tier wedding cakes (Chinese hotels skip the fourth floor out of superstition), but the rice. A couple walking hand in hand down an aisle on what is supposed to be the happiest day of their lives, striding through a rain of white. Handfuls of grain tossed into the aisle, stepped on and sprinkled into the earth like salt.

Every time I see the happy couple grind the pebbles of starch under their heels, my innards flinch. They coil up inside themselves, disgusted and bewildered at the gross expense of the food.

In Mandarin, the character, “fan,” represents both “meal” and “rice.” Each is equivalent and incomplete without the other. The crunch of each footstep down the aisle ricochets in my stomach: breakfast, lunch, dinner, repeat. I feel my grandmother look on with her brows furrowed in disapproval, lines creasing down her mouth, letting out a heavy breath from the other side of the world. Americans are so wasteful, she sighs, and I nod heavily in agreement. The words have lost their meaning but it feels empty to leave them unsaid.

This is the only time my grandmother looks at me without seeing a foreigner. Every other time she examines me, my tan skin, flat nose, black hair, and brown eyes; she laughs and pats my head, exclaiming how funny it is to see such “Americanness” in a familiar body. But during these specific moments, when we turn our heads and our insides grimace in the shared protection of our precious rice, we step closer together. And so I must look like a fool. Shaking like a bobblehead on the happiest day of some strangers’ lives, nodding along to the unspoken words of my grandmother across the sea.

Good habits save you money, treat your belongings well. I don’t mean to pontificate on

overused comparisons of Chinese families refusing to wear shoes in the house, but the notion is true. So it came at no surprise to me when it took my father fifteen years of habitually picking up leftover potato peels and soggy peppercorns from the sink with bare hands and throwing them into the trash until he finally called a plumber to come unclog our sink pipe for the first time.

The man held himself with confidence, tracking dust prints into my home with stained sneakers without a second thought. After clearing up the pipe, he stood up, dusted his knees, and proceeded to give a lecture to my father and I on all the things we had learned by the first two years of our fifteen year run. Understanding the man’s intentions as good, we stood smiling, waiting to escort him out. Before he turned to leave, he snapped back and pointed at the sink.

“Make sure you don’t rinse any rice down there.”

Our smiles widened and we chuckled. No, we would remember not to do that. Of course, put it in the trash. Right, we'll call you if there are any problems. It belongs in the garbage. Great, thank you for coming by. Watch your step. Goodbye.

My father went back to his endless tabs of research and I returned to my room and sulked on my bed. How dare he assume that my family ate rice, of all things? My brain supplied its indignation with the ammunition of facts I had gathered: there are dozens of ethnicities in China, each has unique cultures and foods, et cetera, et cetera.

Yet no matter how many arguments poured out of me, in my most private heart, I was ashamed because he was right. I did eat rice. Almost on a daily basis. Something that had once been a point of pride that proved my almost-Chinese identity turned bitter. My admiration of the countless hours, totaled years, of backbreaking work that my ancestors spent on rice patties disappeared into nothingness.

Finally, the years of discipline and pride my Chinese teachers and relatives had instilled in me learning how to be Chinese finally bubbled to the surface and I laughed. I howled at the absurdity of watching our precious rice slip down into the plumbing until tears ran down my face and my laughs were silent gasps of air. My family is too Chinese for that.

Daily bowls of plain white rice serve as a reminder of the unlucky miracles that push my life

forward. Rice is my great grandfather moving from his rural town in West China to the cities, knowing he would never see his family again. Rice is my grandmother sacrificing her education for her family in the largest famine of human history. Rice is my father and his sisters surviving the organized prosecution of their parents. Rice is my mother ignoring whispered slurs in sanitized workplaces. Rice is the hyphen in Chinese-American.

It is dizzying to look at the experience of a Chinese-American, of any second generation immigrant I'd wager, because the eyes on a human being are fixed to the front. An all-encompassing

view of our lives requires one to spin around constantly: snorts at our ignorance from our relatives on the left, glares of distrust from our neighbors on the right, calls from the media to defend our culture from their appropriation at the back. We were not born to live in human bodies. Rather, our function calls on us to be the giant Argus, except the eyes that cover our skin are squinted, angled, and small.

Unfortunately, as a person sans any extra eyes, I keep my view trained ahead, counting days by bowls of rice and writing out little horizontal lines bisecting the only options listed for me on bubble sheets for standardized tests. I imagine a grain of rice sitting between the words. Rice is the harsh outer shell of an uncooked pearl, a dash that divides and connects two uncontrollable identities that I cannot wholly claim as my own.

I live in the grain. It is inseparable from my body, and after years of failed psychological surgery, I am no longer interested in removing it. The gleaming shell of white is the extension of my soul that holds me together. To my left, I am both ashamed and comforted by all that I have abandoned by being born. To my right, I am proudly highlighted yellow by my skin. The pang of metallic humiliation and the delightful narcissism of being "different" are contained in steaming bowls of white. The Chinese-American identity crisis in a four letter word.

Scoop up the rice in your spoon and suck it into your mouth. Smash the overcooked mush

against the roof of your mouth with your tongue, feel the grain split apart on your gums. Savor the bland sweetness of starch and swallow it down, let each fragment slide down your throat and sink into your stomach. Focus with the efforts of a new sommelier-in-training.

Do you taste the fragrance of Chinese sweat and tears? Is it plain? Boring?

The word rice is thrown at you from all sides. Chinese and Americans alike hurl the grain towards you with none of the extravagance of the wedding tosses. Let the rice sink into your pores, settle under your skin, and live there. Stand under the white stream with an open mouth. Catch a

About the Author

handful and hold it in your palm, count the grains under your thumb. One. Two. Three. Four. The rice is not good. It is not bad. It is not bland. It is not interesting. It is not exotic.

Five. Six. Seven. It is a little girl relearning her native language in a classroom. It is the love between a foreigner and her grandmother. It is a plastered smile towards a plumber with good intentions.

Eight. Nine. Ten. Give up counting, but clench your fingers together and squeeze the kernels into your skin. Each grain is precious. Press one into your pocket. Do not let it get stepped on, flushed down the sink, or left behind. Learn your culture, regard happiness with confusion, keep your belongings in a good condition, never leave a grain of rice behind. Look back into the mirror and stare at your reflection. Observe your features. Poke at your skin and peel back your eyelid.

Don't blink.



Claire Liu

Claire Liu is a student at Harvard University pursuing a dual concentration in the realms of Economics, Theatre, Dance, and Media. Originally from Illinois, she became involved and enthralled with the arts from a very young age. Throughout her life, she has grown an immense passion for the intersection between activism and the arts, particularly in producing art with purpose and meaning. This mission has driven her to create Project Said: A Global Platform for Diversity and Equity in the Arts. In the future she hopes to work as a producer, director, and writer that traverses industries from Hollywood to K-pop.



Asian American Teachers as Interlocutors: Racializing Agendas of Ascription and Skill

By Trish Morita-Mullaney and Diep Nguyen

INTRODUCTION

In racialized America, Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) often describe the space they occupy professionally as the “in-between space,” ascribed to the role of interlocutor, and expected to mediate conflicts between groups and ease the operation of institutional goals and policies.¹ Interlocutors are individuals who are 1) involved in a conversation; and 2) within that conversation, they are representing another individual or group of individuals.² Other sources regard an interlocutor as a neutral, arbitrating party that equally represents two or more parties that may have different perspectives, beliefs, and dispositions. The construct of interlocutor has been used within business, and translation studies, but less so in education. For business, an interlocutor is an individual who is a liaison between the institution’s interests and the client who may be doubtful about the product or service a business is marketing. Sometimes referenced as ambassadors or liaisons, the interlocutor attends to the interests and beliefs of the client while simultaneously representing the greater interests of the company. Their role is to understand the client and come to a consensus on what products or services will be best suited to their needs. In the end, the hope is for a business transaction to be made.

In translation studies, a bilingual interpreter works between two parties to convey a source message. The interpreter does not merely transmit a precise message from source message to receiver; rather, the interpreter anticipates how the receiver may conceive a message and adapts their words and expressions accordingly. Oftentimes, such interpretation events take longer as the interpreter anticipates what the source messenger means and how the receiver will conceive that message. The source messenger may be doubtful that the actual message is being sent with precision as such adaptivity involves more time and lengthier descriptions.³ As the source messenger lacks the language proficiency and capacity to understand the message being delivered in a language other than their own, they often must trust the interpreter to convey the message as intended since they do not have full access to the conveyed message.

In these two examples from business and translation studies, an interlocutor is seen as a neutral practitioner. However, in practice, the power disequilibrium that privileges the institutional structures, policies, and goals as the primary source of truth changes the function of AAPIs from a neutral interlocutor to one that serves mainly the institutional purpose as the primary and superior source. Scrutiny and suspicion prevail.

In this paper, we theorize through a lens of decoloniality that interrogates how power is positioned and embodied by AAPI-identifying educators in the field of K-12 education. Our inquiry takes place in the Midwest, providing a unique context for investigation given the smaller proportion of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders (AAPI). We ask the following research question:

How do AAPI K-12 educators describe their experiences as racialized interlocutors?

**LITERATURE REVIEW
AND CONCEPTUAL
FRAMEWORK**

Asians are underrepresented in the teaching profession. The proportion of AAPI teachers in the field of K-12 teachers is 2.5%.⁴ This rather low representation has been persistent throughout the last 30 years, with many AAPI students being geared into professions other than education, based on the potential for a higher income and due to lower threats of discrimination.⁵ K-12 education is perceived to have an evolving and changing landscape, with new students coming into classrooms each year with faculties and leadership shifts. Education is perceived as a profession with less career advancement and less stable working conditions.

Despite the low representation of AAPI teachers in the profession, the AAPI student community has nearly doubled between 2000 to 2019.⁶ One of the impacts of this disequilibrium between the number of AAPI students and professional educators is that these students continue to be underserved, and AAPI teachers are overworked and underrepresented.

AAPI representation. For the small proportion of AAPI teachers who do join the field, they are confronted with how they are ascribed within the field of K-12 education. Some become the de facto Asian curriculum provider for their colleagues and students,⁷ and are assumed to be interpreters for any Asian language represented within the student body.⁸ While AAPI individuals may resist such ascriptions, claiming that the community is not monolithic and no person can universally represent the Asian diaspora, such constructions are commonplace in schools. This construction is aligned with another ascription of AAPIs as the forever foreigner, regardless of their immigration and generational status, alongside the racialized construction of the model minority myth.⁹

Forever Foreigner. The forever or perpetually foreign has long been ascribed to Latino and Asian groups in the US, detailing their supposed lack of English proficiency and non-adoption of cultural and ethnic norms of the dominant society as reasons for their legal and, later, their ascribed exclusion. Regarded as unassimilable or insufficiently acculturated, they are under-identified for advancement and reach a perpetual glass ceiling in their work, inclusive of K-12 education, where senior administrative roles are seldom attainable.¹⁰ The forever foreigner stereotype was reproduced more overtly during COVID-19, with the pandemic constructed as the fault of the international Asian diaspora who imported the disease from Wuhan, China.¹¹

Model Minority Myth (MMM). The MMM has historic ties among Protestant missions who worked persistently to spread Christianity across the globe, a movement that largely regarded Asians as malleable converts.¹² The actual naming of the MMM can be traced to Petersen’s commentary about the mediated and attained success of Japanese Americans.¹³ He wrote, “Denied access to many urban jobs, both white-collar and manual, they undertook menial tasks with such perseverance that they achieved modest success.” With this ascription of Japanese Americans (East Asians) as tenacious, cooperative agents of the dominant American ideal, they came to be regarded as the successful minority relative to other minoritized groups. The East Asian ascription later mapped itself onto other AAPI groups, and Asian groups not inhabiting the MMM were considered aberrant and uncooperative with this positive stereotype of success,¹⁴ creating intra-racial tension across differently identifying Asian communities. The MMM can reproduce itself when AAPIs inhabit and perform White adjacency — reducing markers or affiliation with their Asian identities and heritages. The aversion to the negative stereotype of the forever foreigner may be pushing AAPI individuals toward the ideals of the seemingly positive alternative of the model minority myth, problematically constructing these two intersecting stereotypes to exploit AAPI labors and talents without granting them the benefits of group membership, reproducing the ideals of colonialism and White Supremacy (Figure 1). Neither stereotype is a suitable description for the multivocality of the Asian diaspora.

Figure 1. Performativity that Reinscribes the Model Minority Myth



Such constructions occur in relation to the Black/White binary, particularly given the Midwestern context of this investigation, where the proportion of AAPI families is smaller relative to the coasts. Kim’s research¹⁵ shows that this construction is two-fold. First, there is a racial construction of hierarchy where Blacks have little privilege, whereas Whites have the most, and any other groups fall between these two bookends.¹⁶ Secondly, there is ‘relative valorization’ where a dominant group valorizes Asians over Blacks while still subordinating both groups. Concurrently, Asians are

depoliticized by the dominant group, and thus Asians experience ‘civic ostracism,’ constructing them as outsiders and, thereby, unassimilable. Kim’s racial triangulation theory claims that racial subgroups are essentialized as fixed social categories, immutable to alternative constructions. Claims of multiple and intersecting identities and hybridity do not fall neatly into this paradigm of countable and fixed identity categories.

ASIAN EDUCATORS AS INTERLOCUTORS

As Asians are stereotyped as immutable and unassimilable but positively hardworking and smart, this shapes the experiences of AAPI educators in K-12 education. ¹⁷ Asian-identifying teachers aspiring to professional advancement and attempting to refute or reframe the forever foreigner ascription may do so by taking on educational leadership roles, both in formal and informal ways, often reinforcing the MMM.¹⁸ Their efforts are perhaps driven by the belief that their individual and collective identities will be more positively regarded, holding promise for their greater and fuller inclusion. In their leadership experience, the AAPI educators find themselves assigned to the role of being an “intermediary/ broker” for White and all identifying groups of color. The tenet of our examination is the AAPI educator serving as the racialized interlocutor. We begin with a review of the definition of an interlocutor who has entered the arena of education of and with AAPI educators and students.

In the application of the interlocutor role to education, Ramanathan¹⁹ found that AAPI educators were informally identified as interlocutors between Black and White students and parents when conflicts arose. Conceived as neither Black nor White and rendered “colorless,” AAPI educators were commissioned to serve as liaisons in these often-tenuous negotiations between different racial groups. Because Asian teachers were constructed as impartial, they could mitigate the conflict without showing alliances or allegiances to either group.

Interlocution is positioned as a distinct skill that can be contracted out to AAPI teachers when the senior administration has no such representation in their teaching or administrative team, creating additional labor distinct to AAPI teachers. Morita-Mullaney and Greene²⁰ found that being an Asian interlocutor between a Black teacher and a White parent disgruntled over her child’s grades was not an invitation to engage in cross-racial dialogue but rather to subcontract out the work, so the Asian teacher would simultaneously represent the administration and alleviate potentially volatile arguments with the parent. ²¹ Praised for such work, the power relationship was inherently unequal, with the institution claiming its solution-oriented stance and the Asian teacher ignorant and/or acquiescent to the request, further constructing AAPI teachers as invisible, and reinforcing the ideal that Asians are honorary Whites. Ultimately, being a guest or having honorary status contributes to such invisibility or what Hong²² references as “disappearing” and what Chang²³ calls the muting of other identities.

While interlocution is a positively framed skill that transcends multiple fields and social locations, how it is ascribed to AAPI educators is problematic because it places an undue burden upon AAPI educators, where the institution does little to change its structural and ideological practices. Utilizing AAPI educators in the interlocution role to serve the school senior administration is a silent maneuver by the institution to maintain its power and control and, thereby, effectively reproduces a system of inequity within education.

METHODOLOGY

Employing a narrative case study, we look to the narratives from previously conducted studies with AAPI identifying female teachers and administrators in the Midwest²⁴ along with more recently collected data with a new lens of interlocution.²⁵ Narratives are the storied embodiments of participants that reflect their current and historical dilemmas and attend to long vignettes so traces of emotion and nuance are more adequately captured.

Data collection

The data consists of interviews conducted from 2011 to the present with anyone identifying as an AAPI educator in the field of English language learning. Participants were recruited at various educational venues throughout the Midwest. Interviews were semi-structured and focused on questions related to teaching and leadership within their school and district contexts and specifically on their racialized experiences in schools. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and ranged between forty-five minutes to two hours.

Data analysis

Using the lens of interlocution, we attended to two units of analysis: Power distribution and racialization. Using emergent coding, we examined how themes of power were racialized and experienced by the participants in the context of interlocution. To ensure consistency across coders, we compared our respective themes. When disagreement emerged, we discussed it until a consensus was met.

FINDINGS

Three AAPI-identifying participants from the Midwest participated in the study. All served in teacher roles; some had advanced into administrative roles in their districts. Madeline identified as a third-generation Chinese American with a Chinese mother and a White father. She described her appearance as ethnically ambiguous, as her colleagues would ascribe her racially as fitting into a Latina or mixed category, but not White. She has nineteen years of teaching experience and served as a teacher leader in her middle school. Tanya identified as a third-generation Japanese American with a Japanese father and White mother but phenotypically presented as an East Asian woman. She has twenty-four years of teaching experience and served as a district director for bilingual education at the time of the study. Thu identified as a first-generation Vietnamese immigrant, having moved to the US during the Fall of Saigon. Her first language is Vietnamese, and her second is English. At the time of the inquiry, she served as a senior administrator in a mid-sized school district and has forty-one years of teaching experience.

Participant Pseudonym	District Pseudonym	Role at time of study	Years in education
Madeline	Beginnings District	English Learner Teacher	19
Tanya	Beginnings District	Bilingual Director	24
Thu	Clockenstein District	Senior District Administrator	41

In all district contexts in which the participants worked, their districts had committed to a public inquiry with their teachers on race and racism. The motives for their district's professional development on race and racism were mixed, with some focused on racial disparities in achievement. Other interests were driven by a neoliberal agenda of maintaining the economic stability of their districts, with one district mainly focused on retaining a White student constituency with the unspoken discourse of "keeping up real estate values." In one district, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was applying pressure given the disproportionate representation of Black students in suspensions and expulsions. The inquiry into race and racism in all the districts created the conditions for revealing how AAPI-identifying educators were racialized as interlocutors.

Madeline and Tanya's district had contracted with an agency to facilitate professional development for its teachers on racial equity. Madelyn and Tanya reflected together on an activity called the "color line." Based on the foundational work of Dubois²⁶ and built upon by Peggy McIntosh,²⁷ educators were asked to create a line based on their racialized experiences. Teachers began in one straight line together, all standing up and facing the facilitator. The facilitator then posed a series of questions inviting teachers to step back if they experienced levels of privilege. Such examples included "I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time" or "I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared".²⁸ Once the activity concluded, predictably, those with the most privilege stood on the outskirts of the room looking at their colleagues of color, with Asian colleagues closest to them, Latinos next, and Blacks most distant from them. Instrumentally, the goal was for educators to experience and identify that race and racism are not overt acts of "meanness" but institutional acts that reproduce dominance along the lines of race with Whites prevailing.²⁹ Madeline shared,

So that's where it became, like, visually apparent to me. And when I was able to start articulating like, oh, I'm like, solidly in the middle. Not just because I feel that way, but because all of these tangible things and all of these tangible ways that I experience the world in the middle.

Madeline continued to describe her role in the 'middle' in the context of how she was racialized at school.

But also, there is still that sense of like, well, you're not really with us, though, no matter which side I'm looking at. Like, Black people kind of pushed me towards grouping with Whites, and I think White people kind of pushed me towards working with people of color.

Honorary inclusion. While Madelyn questioned this ascription from her Black and White colleagues, there was an honorary inclusion of being White enough and Black enough, but neither felt like a genuine inclusion, rather an esoteric invitation. Specifically, Madeline did not feel like she contributed substantively to the social construction of her racial identity. She was perplexed by how her White and Black colleagues invited her to their racialized identity group. Because this construction was made without her contribution, she did not have the opportunity to interlocate; rather, she was forced to accept the congratulatory racial membership as White and a person of color.

An interlocutor is seen as a neutral practitioner. However, in practice, the power disequilibrium that privileges the institutional structures, policies, and goals as the primary source of truth changes the function of Asian Americans from a neutral interlocutor to one that serves mainly the institutional purpose as the primary and superior.

Scrutiny and suspicion prevail.

Tanya, also from Madeline's district and a district leader, discussed how she felt this in-betweenness that she struggled to negotiate with her colleagues, who were predominantly White, with a few Black colleagues. She shared,

While we were talking about racial diversity and Critical Race Theory in our district, White colleagues would come to me to reconcile conflicts with our Black colleagues. Black colleagues would use me as a sounding board for issues with White colleagues. This was a weird role. I wasn't one or the other. I was a neutral in-between. But it sure didn't feel neutral.

Invisible labor. While Tanya's colleagues regarded her as a neutral arbitrator, this was not an identity nor position that she had claimed, nor was it a formal assignment. It was a role that emerged as the investigation of race and racism had fueled discomfort and conflict among her White and Black colleagues. Such informality demonstrates the invisible labor that Tanya adopted, believing that this could contribute to this critical inquiry on race and racism.

Labor in Secrecy. Despite Tanya's peculiarly situated enthusiasm to continue in this role, it was a particular labor that she felt operated in relative secrecy. Tanya sensed that her White and Black colleagues wanted her interlocution role to be confidential. White colleagues did not want to be constructed as racists, and Black colleagues did not want to be constructed as uncooperative with racial equity pursuits. Tanya guarding their secrets is a form of interlocution. By taking on this mediator role, she constricted intra-racial dialogue between them as she provided the venue for a dress rehearsal for interaction. In the end, an intra-racial performance never took place.

Instrumental Tokenization. Thu's district also engaged in racial equity professional development. As a senior administrator in a school district where she described a history of power struggles between Whites and Blacks, Thu found herself in a complex intermediary role. She was invited formally to assist a set of White and Black educators in arriving at a consensus about professional development content on racial equity. Her White supervisor made it clear that it should not become embroiled in conflict or disagreement. The leadership expectation was to get the two groups to arrive at a consensus. Yet, in the end, the final decisions were made by White and Black individuals and groups other than herself. Her contribution as an interlocutor did not seem to influence the ultimate decisions. Thu reflected that she became an instrumental device for White and Black stakeholders to claim agreement and consensus because she, the AAPI, was involved. Thu was discouraged that she was tokenized by her White boss, who wanted instrumental agreement across racial lines and could ultimately claim it had been accomplished, even though Thu felt like she was the casualty of the event as she was rendered invisible.

Despite Thu's frustration with the tokenization and the instrumental labor she provided to her district, she found creativity within the role of interlocutor. Thu stated,

What we really are, in some ways, is a power mediator in a very oppressive, racialized system, in that we translate, buffer, and protect. In some ways, we buffer the impact of harmful actions that those in power imposed on those who are not. Yet, in other ways, we also buffer for those in power against the criticism and complaints of those who are being oppressed. It is a complicated, precarious role that we play at the intersection of racial struggles. We are depended upon to get things done, yet not entirely trusted, excluded, and not quite accepted. I don't know if "mediator" is even a good word to describe this complicated role...

Protection. Thu drew from her deep history and knowledge of working in districts that oppressed minoritized groups directly and indirectly. She saw how her interlocution protected educators and students of color. By allowing her predominantly White administrative colleagues to feel resolved in their beliefs and actions with her, she could ask important rhetorical questions that were not necessarily action-oriented but belief-changing, all while simultaneously protecting marginalized students and educators.

Subversive Advocacy and Agency. In addition to protecting multiple groups of color, Thu learned to be subversive in her interlocutory role, knowing that she would be called into this role regardless of invitation and requirement. She remembered,

So, there is both agency and subversiveness that interplay in our role as mediators. And that's why it's complicated. It's not as straightforward as the definition of the neutral interlocutor would have you believe. In order to be successful in our role, we have to work at retaining our status and, you know, move up the corporate ladder or whatever. At the same time, we have to work at being subversive... find creative ways to protect and advance the well-being of the people that is disempowered without being called out too much.

Thu demonstrates how her consistent enactment of interlocutor in the districts moved her "up the ladder" into the senior ranks of district administration. Unlike Madeline and Tanya, who were flummoxed by their positioning, Thu's years of experience allowed her to inhabit the interlocutory role, developing a resiliency that informed her steps of subversive advocacy.

Subversion as a Suspect Class. Yet, Thu's adoption and continued development of the interlocutory role ultimately led her to be regarded as a suspect class due to her adjacency with White leadership. In the school district where Whites' and Blacks' struggles were prominent; she called herself 'discarded'. Despite an excellent performance evaluation, her contract was not renewed. This decision effectively ended her school administration career without impunity to the school district or its leadership. Thu summarized her painful experience in this way:

I had a great year and felt highly optimistic when I was given an excellent yearly evaluation by my supervisor. Then, two days later, I was told that my contract was not going to be renewed. The decision for non-renewal came swiftly, behind closed doors and without any opportunity for appeal or due process. 'Reorganization' was the school administration's public pretext to explain my departure. Internally, a code of silence was imposed to suppress any inquiry into the matter. It was a perfect storm that caught me completely by surprise. When I insisted on knowing the reason for my termination, I was given no evidence except that I had become a suspect to one of the school board members. It took me a long time to recover from this trauma. In reflection, I realized that I was merely a convenient pawn in a long history of racial struggle between the White and Black communities in the school district and that I could be easily discarded when I was no longer useful for both parties. I felt dehumanized and erased.

“While we were talking about racial diversity and Critical Race Theory in our district, White colleagues would come to me to reconcile conflicts with our Black colleagues. Black colleagues would use me as a sounding board for issues with White colleagues. This was a weird role. I wasn’t one or the other. I was a neutral in-between. But it sure didn’t feel neutral.”

TANYA

All three AANHPI participants took on interlocution roles informally, pointing to a de facto educational policy directing their labor, a role that was not officially sanctioned nor recognized but expected and adopted. This de jure policy led to an invisible de facto labor of the AAPI participants, which reinforced their marginalization, with little to no process for discussion or resolution.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

In this study, we illuminate the invisible labor that AAPI educators experienced in their Midwestern contexts. While all the districts had de jure policies stating that there would be professional development focused on racial equity, with the aim of disrupting and dismantling ideological and institutional structures, how AAPI educators experienced this policy differed. All three AAPI participants took on interlocution roles informally, pointing to a de facto educational policy directing their labor, a role that was not officially sanctioned or recognized but expected and adopted. This de jure policy led to an invisible labor of the AAPI participants, which reinforced their marginalization, with little to no process for discussion or resolution. Madeline, Tanya, and Thu’s aspired to help their districts with their de jure policy of racially conscious professional development, yet in practice it led to their contractual and invisible labor. In the end, a de facto policy of AAPIs as interlocutors emerged, which reinforced their invisibility among their White, Black, and Latino colleagues.

Invisibility is a component of erasure or what Hong references as not being the power “but become[ing] absorbed by power, not share[ing] the power of Whites but be[ing] stooges to a white ideology that exploited our ancestors.”³⁰ By defining and framing erasure as a structural behavior of oppression, interlocution is unsettled as a skill and, more specifically, defined as a social location and positioning of marginalization upon AAPI educators. The unrecognized labor of interlocution that AAPI navigate is a means for institutional structures to naturalize this construction and its related behaviors. Interlocution operates best when it masquerades.

When erasure is ascribed to AAPI communities as a whole, other identities are muted, obscured, and omitted. One’s skills as a teacher or an educational leader, a curriculum specialist, or a multilingual interpreter become squashed as they are secondary to the primary construction of “Asianness” and supposed cooperation with maintaining historic school structures and practices. In the end, they are dismissed and rendered invisible.

Drawing on the construct of erasure and its manifested ‘interlocution,’ Kim’s racial triangulation theory is helpful.³¹ Interlocution within cross-racial dialogue can create suspicion from both ends of the racial continuum. Interlocution events could be constructed as Asian-Black conflict, and such cleavages need to be resolved among communities of color, making the work of racial reconciliation incumbent upon people of color and not the labor of Whites. Such a de facto policy was and is not the aim of the racial equity work that Madeline, Tanya, and Thu’s schools adopted, but it reveals how Whiteness and White supremacy avoid the gaze of disruption and unsettling. Ultimately, the racial equity pursuits that their districts commissioned fell short of its policy aims of racial reconciliation (de jure), with de facto policy taking hold for the AAPI female-identifying educators. In the end, Tanya, Thu, and Madeline left their school districts for academic posts, now enabling a systematic view of their shared experiences of interlocution in social locations presumably focused on racial equity pursuits for all groups of color.

This study has specific implications for educational policy focused on solidarity building. Many districts claim the problematic moniker of “diversity” or “changing demographics” as their rationale for seeking outside help to fix the constructed effects of diversity. Such transformative and equity-oriented work cannot be contracted out; rather, it must draw from the inside and be long-term in focus and commitment. To this end, we recommend that such professional development and/or technical assistance begin with affinity mapping.

Affinity Spaces. Asian educators within schools may or may not have formally sanctioned or organized groups as was the case in our study, and thus racial affinities may be constructed informally. Yet, creating a structure for Asian educators to meet can uniquely identify what they believe to be the challenges and issues within their schools and community in relationship to their claimed identities. In practice, affinity groups can be regarded as suspicious by dominant, White stakeholders who are concerned that their centrally located position of power is being questioned. Other groups of color may also wonder about the discussions taking hold in other affinity groups of color, yet it is important to recognize that this sort of suspicion operates in relationship to Whiteness,³² and should not dissuade affinity groups from gathering. The purpose of an affinity group is not about acquiring power like that of the dominant group, rather the focus is on finding the power and the resources within each given affinity group and ultimately, reconstituting power in systems and practice. Further, an AAPI identifying affinity group can create a sense of belonging that may be absent within their local institutions.

In the affinity groups, it is crucial that members historicize the racial experiences of their given community. For the AAPI community, what drew them to live in this school community? What are the histories of migration, immigration, and resettlement across different generations? By mapping these histories, they come to understand their shared experiences, but also where differences may be evident, building intra-racial understanding.

In historic racially conscious projects like the one described in our study, we often move too quickly into cross-racial discussions with the aim of solidarity building. While this is an aspirational goal, moving toward this too quickly can delimit the types of conversations within AAPI identifying groups. Oftentimes AAPI affinity groups begin based on shared experiences, but they have an important goal of developing belonging and a source of healing, which takes time. Further, because AAPIs may be called upon to embody interlocution activities, understanding the normalization of this role, and detailing how it manifests is a crucial exercise in recognizing their positionality within their institutions. As such, AAPI educators can begin to formulate the ways in which defacto policies of interlocution create a racialized exercise of exclusion that is historic and systemic.

By recognizing the allure of interlocution, AAPIs can begin to identify how this is locally constructed and formulate methods of response that may include recognition, refusal, or remedy, creating newer defacto policies that can inform newer de jure policies. For example, if an AAPI educator is delegated to serve as a racial interlocutor, how can they assist their expectant colleagues in understanding the positioning of this type of labor? The mere questioning of this type of behavior, demonstrates key tenets of resistance which may lead to refusal or remedy, while simultaneously pausing the system to recognize the aims and the problematic habits of interlocution imposed upon AAPI educators. In this way, there is ideological space to collectively unpack such actions and beliefs, holding hope for policy changes impacting the AAPI community over time.

About the Authors



Trish Morita-Mullaney

Trish Morita-Mullaney is an Associate Professor at Purdue University. Her research focuses on the influences of educational policy at the federal, state, district, school, and classroom levels and how this informs the practices and policies of educators who work with and among racialized emergent bilinguals. Framed by critical language, critical race, and feminist theories, she uses participatory and constructivist methods with her study participants, as they unpack, critique, and analyze their orientations towards racialized emergent bilinguals and multilingualism. Her most recent work focuses on how equity is obscured and trapped for AAPI identifying emergent bilinguals.



Diep Nguyen

Diep Nguyen is the Director of Research, Educator Learning and Practice at WIDA, a project of the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Using the lens of critical language and critical race theories, her research focuses on how pre K-12 dual language education impacts students from various racial groups differently and how this informs bilingual educational policies and practices. She also investigates the experiences of AAPI professionals in K-12 education and the challenges they face in their professional trajectories as educational leaders.

Endnotes

1. Trish Morita-Mullaney and Michelle C.S. Greene, "Narratives of Asian/American Educators: A Case Study of Resistance and Rhetoric," in *Modern Societal Implications of the Model Minority Stereotype*, ed. Nicholas Hartlep (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2015), 291-332, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-7467-7.ch011>.
2. Merriam-Webster, "Interlocutor." Merriam-Webster Dictionary, December 10, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interlocutor>.
3. Trish Morita-Mullaney, "Trustworthiness in spoken interpretation among English Learner (ELs)"
4. Bettina Hsieh and Jung Kim, "Challenging the invisibility of Asian Americans in education." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 42, no. 2 (May 2021): 95-103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2020.1760643>.
5. Morita-Mullaney and Greene, "Narratives of Asian/American Educators," 291-332.; Hema Ramanathan, "Asian American Teachers: Do They Impact the Curriculum? Are There Support Systems for Them?" *Multicultural Education* 15, no. 1 (2006): 31-35, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ759644>; Xue Lan Rong and Judith Preissle, "The Continuing Decline in Asian American Teachers." *American Educational Research Journal* 34, no. 2 (1997): 267-93, <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312034002267>; Zhixin Su, "Teaching as a Profession and a Career: Minority Candidates Perspectives." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 13, no. 3 (1997): 325-40, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(96\)00021-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(96)00021-2).
6. Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz. Key Facts About Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population. Pew Research Center, April 21, 2021, accessed December 10, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.
7. Ramanathan, "Asian American Teachers," 31-35.
8. Morita-Mullaney and Greene, "Narratives of Asian/American Educators," 291-332.
9. Shelley Wong, "Perpetual Foreigners: Can an American Be an American?." in *Color, Race, and English Language Teaching: Shades of Meaning*, ed. Andy Curtis and Mary Romney (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2009), 81-92.
10. Trish Morita-Mullaney and Diep Nguyen, "Asian American Female Leaders Navigating Institutional Racism in Schools: The Lapdog Syndrome," *American Educational Research Association*, Chicago, IL, 2012, https://www.academia.edu/12265434/Asian_American_female_leaders_navigating_instiutional_racism_in_schools_the_Lapdog_Syndrome.
11. Lin Wu, "Sounds About White!": Countering the Erasure of Asian American Scholars in *Critical Whiteness Studies*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 35, no. 7 (2022): 730, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2022.2061733>.
12. Ellen D. Wu. *The color of success: Asian Americans and the origins of the model minority*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400848874>.
13. William Petersen, "Success, Japanese-American Style." *New York Times*, January 9, 1966, 180, <https://www.nytimes.com/1966/01/09/archives/success-story-japaneseamerican-style-success-story-japaneseamerican.html>.
14. Morita-Mullaney and Nguyen, "Asian American Female Leaders."; Hsieh and Kim, "Challenging the Invisibility," 95-103.
15. Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans." *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 105-138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329299027001005>.
16. Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," 105-138.
17. Jung Kim, A. Lin Goodwin, and Bettina Hsieh, *The Racialized Experiences of Asian American Teachers in the US: Applications of Asian Critical Race Theory to Resist Marginalization*, (New York: Routledge, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003138389>.
18. Morita-Mullaney and Nguyen, "Asian American Female Leaders."
19. Ramanathan, "Asian American Teachers," 31-35.
20. Morita-Mullaney and Greene, "Narratives of Asian/American Educators," 291-332.
21. Morita-Mullaney and Greene, "Narratives of Asian/American Educators," 291-332.
22. Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, (New York: One World, 2020).
23. Robert Chang, *Disoriented: Asian Americans, Law, and the Nation-State*. Critical America. (New York: New York University Press, 1999), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2659705>.
24. Morita-Mullaney and Greene, "Narratives of Asian/American Educators," 291-332; Morita-Mullaney and Nguyen, "Asian American Female Leaders."
25. Ramanathan, "Asian American Teachers," 31-35.
26. W.E.B. Du bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. 2nd Pr. Millwood, 1980, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315631998>.
27. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, no. 1, (1989): 1-3, psychology.umbc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2016/10/White-Privilege_McIntosh-1989.pdf.
28. McIntosh, "White Privilege."
29. McIntosh, "White Privilege."
30. Cathy Park Hong. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, (New York: One World, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2021.0023>.
31. Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," 105-138.
32. Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," 105-138.

Asian American Youth and Spatialized Violence in Los Angeles

By Kevin D. Lam

ABSTRACT This article engages the relationship between spatiality and racialization for Asian American youth gangs in the Los Angeles area during the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike black and Chicano/Latino youth groups in Southern California, Asian American youth are not confined to the traditional understanding of space. Rather, they have what I call “imagined territoriality.” That is, their relationship to space is very different due to the particularities of Asian labor migration and resettlement in the diaspora. I articulate a critical theory of spatiality for Asian American youth and call for a return to historical and *geographical* materialism.

INTRODUCTION At the turn of the twenty-first century, the estimated number of youth gangs nationally was over 30,000, and the number of gang members was over 800,000. The Los Angeles area, with its 8,000 gangs and 200,000 gang members, is often referred to as the “gang capital of the US,” if not the world.¹ Asian American youth gangs account for three to six percent of the entire gang population, as reported by the National Youth Gang Center. These statistics provide a general sense of Asian American youth gang formation. However, it is oftentimes difficult to account for the various degrees of gang involvement for Asian American youth.² While Asian American youth gangs make up a relatively small percentage of youth gangs nationally, they are overwhelmingly concentrated in the major cities, especially on the West Coast. At its peak, it was reported that there were close to 20,000 gang-affiliated Asian American youth in Los Angeles County alone.³

This paper examines how Asian American youth gangs occupy and make sense of space. I begin by discussing the dominant discourse on youth gangs and space. I continue with a brief genealogy of Asian American youth gang formation in Los Angeles. Next, I focus on Asian American “suburban” gangs, using Los Angeles’s San Gabriel Valley (the “SGV”) as a specific site to engage the dialectical relationship between 1) spatiality and racialization, 2) racialization and violence, and 3) class struggle and spatiality for Asian American youth in the Los Angeles area over the last four decades, with an emphasis on gang formation in the 1980s and 1990s. These two decades marked a significant moment in urban history when thinking about gang formation, anti-youth legislation, educational and public policy, and the concept of place — in context of economic restructuring in the capitalist city. They followed the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970s, which were marked by social and political upheaval both domestically and abroad, including the fallout of the American War in Vietnam, student protests for ethnic studies (and hence self-determination), and economic recession. By the late 1980s, youth gang formation in Los Angeles and across a number of US metropolises had firmly cemented its place in both popular and sociological imagination.⁴ I conclude with a discussion of the need for critical human geography — using the body as a starting point of analysis.

DOMINANT DISCOURSE ON YOUTH GANGS AND SPACE

The dominant discourse on US youth gangs often suggests that youth gangs are a black and brown issue. The images of black and Chicano/Mexicano/Latino gang youth have been front-page fodder since the 1980s. Nancy Reagan’s “just say no” became, in some way, the slogan of the decade in the fight against “inner-city” gangs, drugs, and crimes.⁵ However, youth gang formation in these communities in the Los Angeles area is nothing new — with Chicano gangs emerging in the 1920s and 1930s and black youth forming groups for protection from white youth in the 1940s and 1950s after migrating up from the US South shortly after the Second World War.⁶ Asian American youth, at least in their “street” variety, began to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s with Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino American youth,⁷ and the 1980s and 1990s with Southeast Asian youth.

Dominant discourse also suggests that youth gangs are an “urban” problem — at least the way “urban” has traditionally been defined. It has been described as something that can be controlled, marked, and demarcated, and thus, can only happen in so-called spatially defined “inner-city” areas. Liberal social science research, a by-product of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “war on poverty” campaign of the 1960s and 1970s, has helped shape how scholars and policymakers alike make sense of racialized populations in the US for decades to come.⁸ The “underclass” argument becomes part and parcel of the narrative imposed on the natives and refracted by the colonizers. The roots of inner-city pathologizing can be traced back to liberal social science research. Sociologists, anthropologists, and other social science scholars became immersed in trying to understand the urban political economy and poverty. However, in the process of marking, demarcating, and categorizing youth of color and people of color in general, they have also been objectified and thingified — and hence frozen in time. The terms “ghetto,” “barrio,” and “the hood” become synonymous with gang violence and inner-city discord.⁹ This suggests that anything outside of socially constructed and racially marked spaces is deemed insignificant or worthy of research and analysis.

GENEALOGY OF YOUTH GANG FORMATION

The history of youth gang formation in Los Angeles dates back almost a century and is intertwined with the legacy of enslavement, genocide, and US imperialism for youth of color.¹⁰ The formation of Asian American youth gangs is by no means isolated and is connected to other gang formations, particularly Chicano gangs, due to migration history and resettlement patterns. Given the history of residential segregation and the sheer number of Latinos in Southern California, Asian Americans and Latinos are closest to each other in proximity, which affects how they occupy, share, and negotiate space with each other and among themselves.¹¹ Chicanos began to migrate from Mexico to Southern California in large numbers in the 1920s and 1930s, and by the early 1940s, an emerging second-generation Mexican American youth subculture began to form.¹² Black Americans were also fleeing the Jim Crow South after World War II in the 1940s and 1950s seeking work in the defense plants and other public sectors that opened up in the ensuing decades.¹³

Although Asian American youth gangs emerged in mainstream consciousness the last few decades, there is a much longer history with Filipino and Mexican American cross-fertilization in the 1920s and 1930s around the Temple Street area in Downtown Los Angeles (now what is known as Filipinotown).¹⁴ Japanese American youth became involved in the decades after internment during World War II, often sharing and occupying spaces with Chicanos and blacks in areas like Boyle Heights, Crenshaw, Sawtelle, and Gardena.¹⁵ Due to their socio-spatial history in Los Angeles, Japanese Americans were comfortable and highly familiar with minority cultures. A Japanese American stated: “If you lived in Boyle Heights, you hung out with Chicanos and acted Chicano. If you grew up in South Central, you hung out with blacks and acted black.”¹⁶ Heeding national trends, it is important to note that while Los Angeles has become more diverse than ever, it has also become more segregated than ever.

Two major events changed the face of Asian American youth subculture. First, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (the “INA”) allowed for a large influx of immigrants from Asia like never before — drawing predominantly from the professional and highly-educated class.¹⁷ It was an attempt by the US to compete internationally with the Soviet Union during the Sputnik-era “space race.” Second, the impact of war and genocide in Southeast Asia in the 1970s and 1980s led to the mass exodus of Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong to the belly of the beast.¹⁸ This legacy set the stage for major Asian American gang movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Asian American youth violence was already a known commodity within ethnic pockets on both US coasts by the 1960s and 1970s, but the influx from Southeast Asia brought it to the mainstream. Asian American youth (especially those most marginalized) were trying to find a sense of identity and belonging in a country that did not necessarily welcome them — and in a context that had always been framed within a black/white analytical lens.¹⁹ However, the Los Angeles area is unique in the sense that it has long been home to diverse populations, including a substantial number of Asian Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, blacks, and whites.²⁰

THE SAN GABRIEL VALLEY AS A SITE OF ANALYSIS FOR “SUBURBAN” GANGS

Asian American youth do not claim space the same way that Chicano and black youth do. The idea of place is much more associated with Chicano and black youth gangs because their territorial claims go back multiple generations — a genealogy tied to state-sanctioned racism and residential segregation.²¹ On the other hand, Asian American youth (with the exception of perhaps Cambodians in Long Beach and a few other examples connected to the central city) do not necessarily claim streets, blocks, and neighborhoods in ways that are deeply entrenched in Chicano and black spatial and geographical experiences. Instead, Asian Americans have what is called “imagined territoriality,” drawn from Benedict Anderson’s notion of “imagined community.”²² P-Dog, an Asian American gang member in Los Angeles’s San Gabriel Valley, explains the connections between space, racialization, ethnic difference, and class location for different Asian American youth groups:

“Even though we’re family, we’re from the same thing, there’s always that line you don’t pass, you know. They [Cambodians and Filipinos] always going to look at you differently because of your race. You look at them differently because you don’t know what the fuck they’re saying to you. Like us down here [in the West San Gabriel Valley], we gangbang the Asian way...like [Asian gangs in] in Long Beach. “Long Beach” gangbang like Mexicans and blacks...stand around the corner and shit, taking care of blocks, you know. Why take care of one block when you can take care of the whole neighborhood, the whole city?”²³

This paper focuses on “suburban” gangs in the SGV. Recent concerns with suburban gangs as a new phenomenon simplify and reify the false urban/suburban divide. In fact, “suburban” formation (relative to central city formation) is not new and not necessarily unique. Although certain groups originated from the urban core, a number had originated from “suburban” spaces. This has always been the case for Asian American youth. In the past, Asian American youth gangs might have origins in the central city — in ethnic enclaves like Chinatown, Filipinotown, and Koreatown. However, given the educational attainment and class status of some Asian Americans prior to arrival on US soil, they end up resettling in relatively affluent neighborhoods across different parts of the Southland, particularly in the suburbs of Los Angeles like the San Gabriel Valley, which have become new ethnic enclaves.²⁴

As geographer Wendy Cheng notes, the San Gabriel Valley covers a wide range of areas, including forty-five municipalities and unincorporated communities stretching just east of central Los Angeles to the western edge of the Inland Empire.²⁵ I focus specifically on the West San Gabriel Valley. It consists of the four municipalities of Monterey Park, Alhambra, San Gabriel, and Rosemead, described by Cheng as:

“A densely populated suburban region just minutes by car east of downtown, with a landscape characterized by sprawling strip malls, clusters of industry, and housing ranging from nondescript apartment complexes to faux-Mediterranean townhomes to stately mansions.... This subregion’s distinct features have been shaped by processes including differentially racialized suburbanization and global economic restructuring — forces that have structured the landscape and created a unique Asian American and Latino/a majority characterized by shared residential spaces and relative class parity.”²⁶

Asian American youth in the Southern California region add another layer to a discourse that is geographically-based, historically-situated, and hence highly contextualized.²⁷ To be sure, there are material and ideological consequences to the

spatial designation of “suburban” gang formation for Asian American youth. I examine three issues or points of analysis for Asian American youth when articulating the suburbanization, globalization, and Californization of youth gangs, to borrow from critical geographer Edward Soja.²⁸ Given the changing demographic terrain and economic restructuring both nationally and internationally, we not only need to redefine “urban” youth gangs²⁹ — we need to redefine the “suburban” as well.

01 FIRST IMPLICATION: DIFFERENTIAL RACIALIZATION

The notion of racialization, as described by British Marxist sociologist Robert Miles, is an ideological process of “delineation of group boundaries and of allocation of persons within those boundaries by primary reference to (supposedly) inherent and/or biological (usually phenotypical) characteristics.”³⁰ In addition, the use of racialization encompasses a “dialectical process of signification where those characteristics that are ascribed to define the Other, necessarily elicit a definition of the Self by the same criterion.”³¹ In thinking about the spatial dimension of Los Angeles, geographer Laura Pulido offers the notion of “differential racialization.”³² That is, different groups have been racialized in distinct ways as a “particular set of racial meanings are attached to different racial groups that affect not only their class position and racial standing but also a function of it.”³³ Pulido states that there is insufficient attention to how different communities of color may experience racism, and in that sense, how their bodies (and histories, discourses, etc.) serve as a racializing mechanism and hegemonic force.³⁴

For this reason, a political economy of labor migration and racism, forcefully articulated by Miles,³⁵ and hence a critique of capitalism and US imperialism, is useful in understanding the specificities of Asian America in the twenty-first century. The popular and scholarly image of Asians and Asian Americans as affluent, highly educated, and living in suburban spaces is a reification that reinforces historical and contemporary racialization. While this may be true for some, it is misleading and ignores the experiences of many others.

Framing youth violence as an “urban” problem that only affects black and brown bodies and spaces oversimplifies the complex understanding of this phenomenon in a changing political economy of the US, California, and Los Angeles. For Asian American youth who come from middle-class families, go to middle-class schools, and live in middle-class communities, it leads us to question why they would choose to be involved with gang life and extreme violence. In addition, Asian Americans as “gangbangers” disrupt the conventional (according to Gramsci) notion of Asian Americans as the “model minority” or Vietnamese as the “good refugee.”³⁶ It speaks to how Asian Americans have always been used as a strategic wedge for other racialized groups, particularly blacks and Latinos in the US,³⁷ and how Asian American youth gang members disrupt this picture.

The impact of racism on Asian Americans is real and cannot be easily dismissed given its adhesive value. The mainstream media and academic research have racialized Asian American youth as the “good student” and Asian American males as meek, soft, and effeminate have left their imprint. They essentialize the ways in which young Asian Americans move, occupy space, and make sense of the world. The hegemonic logic is that they are not capable of violence. The juxtaposition of the Asian male body as emasculated and weak but “smart” and the black male body as hyper-masculine, strong, but deemed “unintelligible” gets reproduced in our analysis of youth gangs. Hence, racism and violence are represented as confined to only urban, and hence, black spaces. Such racialization delimits and conceals violence outside its spatial, ideological, political, and pedagogical parameters. Hence, violence in suburban or

relatively affluent spaces is unfathomable nor deemed as not legitimate because it does not play neatly into the “underclass” narrative of gang formation in social science research and public policy analyses. Youth violence and crime, for understandable reasons, are already unreported or underreported. This is perhaps even more so for Asian American youth in suburban spaces (i.e., anywhere outside the “inner-city”) since their involvement is considered minimal and inconsequential.

Scholars and policymakers often fail to understand the root and depth of Asian American youth gang involvement, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, because of how Asian American bodies are racialized. As a way to signal their place in the gang discourse and affirm their Los Angeles-based identity and “street” legitimacy, a number of Asian American youth (primarily the second generation) adopted “cholo” dress and style and working-class black vernacular, with West Coast “gangsta rap” serving as the soundtrack. This was a conscious break from how Asian immigrant youth gangs dressed in the mid and late 1980s, as their influence of dress, style, and music came from Europe during the “New Wave” period.³⁸ Indeed, there is a strong connection between spatiality and temporality with racialization. The impact of black and Chicano style, discourse, and aesthetics in the 1990s harkens back to Japanese American youth making sense of their identity and belonging after being systematically incarcerated by the US government during World War II.³⁹ This speaks directly and indirectly to a burgeoning “third-world” consciousness that profoundly influenced their political and intellectual formation.⁴⁰

02 SECOND IMPLICATION: OBSCURING YOUTH VIOLENCE

The process of spatially containing youth violence also obscures the reality of youth violence for Asian Americans. Youth violence is usually understood within the confines of certain racialized and classed spaces. Sociologist Victor Rios discusses the hyper-criminalization and under-policing paradox when it comes to thinking about the policing of young black and Latino boys in Oakland, CA.⁴¹ Speaking of an area known as the “Lower Bottom” in Oakland, Rios states that “criminalization created spatial demarcation; police set parameters for where individuals could loiter or commit a crime. The consequences of “playing” or “hanging out” beyond the established limits of invisible and marginalized spaces included brutalization, harassment, and arrest.”⁴² In other words, certain transgressions were permissible within the parameters of certain streets, blocks, and even apartment complexes. Moving beyond such spaces (with law enforcement patrolling its borders) becomes an exponentially punitive process for youth of color. Although Rios focused on black and Latino boys, Southeast Asian youth also face similar recourse in the area. But unlike the policing of young black and Latino boys, the policing of Asian youth is not discussed, articulated, and analyzed in the same manner.

As a result, scholars and practitioners alike might not be aware of the actual lived reality and material conditions for Asian American youth and their families — in all of its complexity in the last half a century (perhaps even more). Particularly, intense racialization and violence, especially in the early and mid-1990s, were happening in Asian American communities in unprecedented ways. Anti-youth and anti-immigrant legislation (Prop 21, STEP Act of 1988, Prop 187, etc.) in California and nationally profoundly impacted marginalized communities,⁴³ leaving a deleterious legacy for Southeast Asian American communities who were trying to find their footing in the years following the imperialist war in Southeast Asia.

For example, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), both signed into law within months of each other in 1996 by President Bill Clinton, have had serious and far-reaching implications for Southeast Asian refugee and immigrant youth — as they were being summoned to be deported due to their criminal record.⁴⁴ US-socialized Cambodian youth, for instance, were (and are) being sent back to their country of origin, where they left as babies or toddlers, and thus, have very little connection to the place. According to Asian American studies scholar Soo Ah Kwon, the IIRIRA, in particular, made significant changes by “facilitating the deportation of permanent residents and refugees to their home countries after serving out their prison sentences.⁴⁵ Yet it was not until Cambodia and the US signed a formal repatriation agreement, a memorandum of understanding (MOU), on March 22, 2002, that deportation began.”⁴⁶ 229 Cambodian refugees (all male except two), according to the Returnee Integration Support Center, have been deported from the US since 2010, and approximately 2,000 more await deportation.⁴⁷ In many ways, Asian American youth are coming full circle — being deported back to a country they were forced to leave due to the circumstances created by the very presence (and then absence) of the US military and economic apparatus. This is especially the case for youth caught up in urban/gang life.

The articulation of Asian American youth gangs in Southern California requires a different analysis of urban and suburban spaces — a different scale. Perhaps the scale in this instance must also include a legacy of war, genocide, and US imperialism when considering Asian American youth violence. To understand this phenomenon in Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Van Nuys, we must broaden our scope of analysis to Southeast Asia, 8,000 miles away. By widening our aperture and scope of analysis, we can gain a broader and more nuanced perspective. Youth violence as containment delimits our analysis around the complexity of spatiality and temporality. Asian American youth violence (and perhaps for other minoritized groups as well) in Los Angeles during the 1980s and 1990s would be difficult to duplicate anywhere else and at any different time. In addition, this one-dimensional understanding reproduces essentialized notions of land. Youth violence has never been and never will be just a “ghetto,” “barrio,” or “inner-city” problem. This is especially the case for Asian American youth who do not claim space in that traditional sense, as they are not necessarily tied to land, space, and territory. In addition, there are historical, cultural, political, and economic specificities that make their experiences different from others.

Youth violence outside the confines of “urban” or permissible spaces disrupts an analysis that has been ingrained in our psyches, what sociologist Robert Blauner referred to as the “internal colony” of the US.⁴⁸ Perhaps it is convenient to suggest that youth gang formation and violence are just in black and brown spaces and thereby, a “poor people” problem. Youth violence outside the “ghetto” or “barrio,” as historically understood, requires attention and specificity. It would ask us to dig deeper in understanding differences in the context of change in the twenty-first century. One would have to deal with the complexity of multiple spaces, bodies, and identities relative to spatial and economic restructuring.

Psychiatrist Frantz Fanon speaks to a nuanced understanding of violence — one that must include both physiological and psychic violence.⁴⁹ I would also add that it is transnational violence for Asian Americans. Perhaps the larger question here is to think through the impact of globalization (or US capitalism) and its relationship to space and youth violence.

03

THIRD IMPLICATION: OBFUSCATING CLASS DIFFERENCE

Asian American youth gangs complicate the historical narrative/discourse on youth gangs as exclusively belonging to “the underclass.” Their heterogeneity as a racialized group offers a different immigration history and resettlement pattern to the Los Angeles metropolis. The INA profoundly impacted Asian migration in the decades that followed. There were relatively sizeable Asian communities before 1965; however, these communities were separated into ethnic enclaves tied to national origin and languages — and were largely invisible to mainstream America.⁵⁰ Asian American youth gangs bring complexity to the conversation because they also include, due to selective immigration, a number of middle-class, affluent youth and their families. In this sense, they put the “underclass” argument on its proverbial head. They include but are not limited to, a number of East Asians from Taiwan and some Filipinos whose families are made up of the highly educated professional class and, as a result, were able to bring a number of resources such as advanced education and capital with them.

Thus, while most Asian immigrant youth and families had their start in the central city, over the last few decades, they have forgone the central city and its ethnic enclaves (i.e., Chinatown) all together and moved directly to the suburbs. The suburbs, or what geographer Wei Li calls “ethno-burbs,” are now the new ethnic enclaves.⁵¹ Historically, we tend to associate the suburbs with affluence and desirable spaces and “urban” as poor and undesirable spaces. However, given the spatiality of the Los Angeles area, we see contradictions for Asian Americans and other racialized groups. We know what can be considered the “suburban poor” and “urban rich.” In the West SGV, the area closest to the central city, there is a combination of affluent and working-class/poor people occupying suburban spaces. Where these “suburban” spaces are situated, speaks to different class locations. For example, La Canada and San Marino are not the same (tied to income level and property value) as Monterey Park and Alhambra, yet all four municipalities are “suburbs” in the SGV. La Canada and San Marino, among the richest in the state, have median household incomes of \$117,393 and \$154,744, while Monterey Park and Alhambra is \$51,608 and \$49,792, respectively.⁵²

The West SGV, along with Little Saigon in Orange County, has, become the cultural, economic, and social hub for Asian immigrant and refugee communities since the late 1980s and early 1990s, surpassing Los Angeles Chinatown. The region has become a thriving business area with many Asian restaurants, cafes, banks, supermarkets, and other social institutions. However, the perception of economic “success” in the area obscures class division and differences among Asian Americans. There are those who are part of the trans-Pacific capital, investment, and power regime, considered the Asian bourgeoisie, and those who are product of war, genocide, and US imperialism. Along with predominantly poor and working-class Southeast Asians coming from context of war and genocide, some are products of select migration. Hence, they (including many East Asians) came to the US under very different circumstances and class position.⁵³ Both social groups are under the “Asian American” category, but their material conditions and lived histories are diametrically different. One does not have to go to “historic ethnic enclaves to find poor and work-class Asians working side by side with poor and working-class Latinos, where they labor as garment workers, busboys, dishwashers, mechanics, butchers, manicurists, and other service-sector jobs.”⁵⁴

In the aftermath of the INA, class struggle must be central to analysis and articulation when thinking about questions of spatiality, racialization, and youth gang formation in the capitalist city. It is not possible to separate political economy and gang formation in the US, given the legacy of imperialism for Asian American youth as well as other immigrant and racialized youth. This struggle became prominent by the 1980s as a

large number of Asian migrants arrived in the US as both sought-after labor (H-1B visa) and also political refugees from Southeast Asia.⁵⁵ These two groups have been brought together in Asian American racialization but have also had to contend with major differences. This gets played out on the streets and in the restaurants, pool halls, clubs, and other social spaces Asian American youth occupy.

Therefore, understanding context is imperative to understanding difference. For example, during the 1990s, a war was brewing between the two largest Asian American youth groups in Southern California: Asian Boyz (AB) and Wah Ching (WC) in the San Gabriel Valley, and especially in the municipalities of Monterey Park, Alhambra, San Gabriel, and Rosemead, as well as other adjoining cities like Arcadia, Rowland Heights, and Hacienda Heights. Wah Ching (WC) members, depending on factions or “sides,” were primarily of Taiwanese/Chinese descent and affluent, while the Asian Boyz were more working-class, and at least in the San Gabriel Valley, consisted primarily of Vietnamese and ethnic-Chinese Vietnamese. Along with ethnocentrism (ethnic pride), the notion of “class warfare” manifested between the two groups. Class conflict and tension arose with different Asian ethnic groups (inter-ethnic) and Chicano/Latino youth in the area (inter-racial). P-Dog, a member of the Asian Boyz at the time, stated:

“A lot of people struggle [economically]. The point is that some bad people make it right. There’s a lot of rich kids out here gang-banging. They’re from Arcadia [a middle-class area in the San Gabriel Valley] ...a lot of Taiwanese gangs. They’re rich man...I don’t understand my damn self why rich kids gang-bang. I figure it’s for the thrill...a lot of us, we go out there and make our money to survive. I don’t have to get money from my mama or dad, you know. We got to do what we got to do to survive, ay. The lifestyle we live...It’s not [that] we choose this life...I was given this fucking life.”⁵⁶

TOWARD A CRITICAL THEORY OF SPATIALITY

I borrow from a chapter title of Soja’s *Postmodern Geographies*, which in turn borrowed from a slogan of the *Los Angeles Times*: “It all comes together in Los Angeles.” Los Angeles proves to be a significant site because, in many ways, this analysis only comes together in the Southland and cannot be duplicated, given its particular history, location, and time. Although Los Angeles has made systematic efforts by way of campaigning and organizing for the city for much of the twentieth century, the Los Angeles area has always been decentralized. In that sense, it is reflective of gang formation in the region. Unlike the spatially developed central cities of the Midwest or other metropolises along the East Coast, Los Angeles is like “a hundred suburbs” that want to be a city.⁵⁷ Hence, gang formation is a product of excessive structuring and modernization in the capitalist region. It is not by accident that gang formation is most pronounced in the region. Not surprisingly, Asian Americans (given Los Angeles as the hub of the Pacific) have left an indelible mark on the West Coast.

One would be remiss not to think about the impact of US capitalism on youth gang formation. This is especially the case in the Los Angeles urban area (covering the five counties Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, Riverside, and San Bernardino), which by the mid-1980s was one of the largest industrial metropolises in the world surpassing the greater New York area in manufacturing employment and total industrial production.⁵⁸ Second, I argue that the legacy of colonialism (both external and internal) has

profoundly affected youth gang formation and place. There are reasons why youth violence has been part and parcel of racialized communities and why it comes together in Los Angeles. It is the cumulative impact of racism and colonialism coupled with the rise of capitalism over the last one hundred years in Southern California. Youth gang formation in the capitalist city is not by accident. The theorization of space (with its connection to time) is paramount to articulating such a phenomenon. It provides a particularity to macro (structural) analysis of major demographic and economic changes, shifting class relations, and changing dynamics of racism globally and comparatively.

As a number of Marxist geographers have made clear, space tends to be treated as “fixed, dead, and undialectical,” and time is perceived to be with “richness, life, and dialectic, the revealing context for critical social theorization.”⁵⁹ As Soja noted and as I have attempted above, I provide “life-stories” that have a geography.⁶⁰ It is a geography that is mapped spatially, historically, and theoretically. It is mapped on bodies as well:⁶¹ “They have milieu, immediate locales, provocative emplacements which affect thought and action. The historical imagination is never completely spaceless, and critical social historians have written, and continue to write, some of the best geographies of the past.”⁶² It is from this historical materialist tradition that this paper owes much of its intellectual and political debt — in thinking about youth violence, spatiality, and racialization.

In addition to political economy of migration and racism analytical framework that is connected to restructuring in Southern California in those historical moments, there is also a bodily/physiological dimension at play. At the core of the space/time dialectic is the body — and the ways in which the body has always been implicated.⁶³ This bio-political is commensurate with a globalization of capital, as well as a globalization of violence. That is, for Southeast Asian Americans like Cambodians and Central American youth groups like those from El Salvador, there is a transnational element to youth gang formation — by bringing in and taking violence out to other spaces.⁶⁴

This points to the significance of a critical human geography — using the body as a starting point of analysis. It rearticulates a critical theory of spatiality. That is, the reassertion of space is germane to analyzing youth gang formation. This paper makes it clear that this is especially true for Asian American youth. A paradigmatic shift in how we make sense of place and racism in the city over the last four decades is not only essential, but necessary. It requires different historical and theoretical framing to understand the practical. Articulating a critical theory of spatiality, in conjunction with naming the “life stories” this paper posits, allow us to understand how youth violence impacts us all in very real and profound ways. There are ideological implications and material consequences. Hence, in line with other critical scholars working from this tradition, I am also calling for a return to historical and geographical materialism.

About the Author



Kevin D. Lam

Kevin D. Lam is Associate Professor of Urban and Diversity Education at Drake University, USA. His research and teaching interests include Asian American youth violence, critical theory of racism, critical pedagogy, urban education, and political economy. Lam is the author of *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling: Vietnamese American Youth in a Postcolonial Context* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Endnotes

1. James Diego Vigil, *Rainbow of Gangs: Street Cultures in the Mega-City* (University of Texas Press, 2002).
2. Kevin D. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling: Vietnamese American Youth in a Postcolonial Context* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
3. "Asian Gangs in Los Angeles County," *StreetGangs.com*, accessed 2012, <http://www.streetgangs.com/asian>.
4. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (University of Oxford Press, 1959).
5. Joan Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio: Homeboys and Homegirls in Change* (Temple University Press, 1991).
6. Alex Alonso, "Racialized Identities and the Formation of Black Gangs in Los Angeles," *Urban Geography* 25, no. 7 (2004): 658-74, <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.25.7.658>.
7. Karen Ishizuka, *Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (Verso, 2018).
8. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo' Mama's DisFUNKtional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Beacon Press, 1997).
9. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*; Zeus Leonardo and Margaret Hunter, "Imagining the Urban: The Politics of Race, Class, and Schooling," *International Handbook of Urban Education*, ed. William Pink, 769-92. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2007, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5199-9_41.
10. Kevin D. Lam, "Critical Perspectives in Youth Gang Formation in the United States," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*, ed. George Noblit (Oxford University Press, 2019), 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.382>.
11. Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006); Wendy Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1086/678201>.
12. James Diego Vigil, *Barrio Gangs: Street Life and Identity in Southern California* (University of Texas Press, 1988), <https://doi.org/10.7560/776135>; Luis Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot: Youth and Resistance during World War II* (University of California Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.114.4.1106>.
13. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (University of California Press, 2007); Donna Murch, "The Campus and the Street: Race, Migration, and the Origins of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, CA," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 9, no. 4 (2007): 333-45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999940701703794>.
14. Bangele D. Alsaybar, "Deconstructing Deviance: Filipino American Youth Gangs, 'Party Culture,' and Ethnic Identity in Los Angeles," *Amerasia Journal* 25, no. 1 (1999): 116-38, <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.25.1.p5274h67q1l1077k>.
15. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*.
16. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 54.
17. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996).

Endnotes Continued

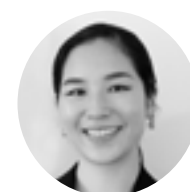
18. Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding: Refugees, Citizenship, and the New America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520229983.001.0001>.
19. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*.
20. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 5.
21. Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*; Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio*.
22. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983).
23. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*, 132.
24. Merlin Chowkwanyun and Jordan Segall, "The Rise of the Majority-Asian Suburb," *The Atlantic CityLab*, August 24, 2012, <http://www.citylab.com/politics/2012/08/rise-majority-asian-suburb/3044/>.
25. Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes*, 3.
26. Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes*, 3.
27. Alonso, "Racialized Identities and the Formation of Black Gangs in Los Angeles."
28. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989).
29. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*.
30. Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989); Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres, *After Race: Racism After Multiculturalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814729229.001.0001>.
31. Miles, *Racism*, 75, quoted in Darder and Torres, *After Race: Racism After Multiculturalism*, 11.
32. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 24.
33. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 24.
34. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 24.
35. Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (London: Routledge, 1982); Miles, *Racism*; Miles, *Racism after "Race Relations"* (London: Routledge, 1993).
36. Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195146998.001.0001>; Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520277700.001.0001>.
37. Benji Chang and Wayne Au, "You're Asian, How Could You Fail Math? Unmasking the Myth of the Model Minority" in *Rethinking Multicultural Education: Teaching for Racial and Cultural Justice*, ed. Wayne Au (Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 2009), 207-17.
38. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*.
39. Alvarez, *The Power of the Zoot*.
40. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*.
41. Victor Rios, *Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 54, <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/193/book/11092>.
42. Rios, *Punished*, 56.
43. Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.
44. Soo Ah Kwon, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees: Youth Activism, State Reform, and Imperial Statecraft," *positions* 20, no. 3 (2012): 737-62, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-1593519>.
45. Kwon, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees," 737-62.
46. Kwon, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees," 737.
47. Kwon, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees," 738.
48. Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1972).
49. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).
50. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from the Different Shore* (New York: William Morrow, 1989); Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994).
51. Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes*; Chowkwanyun and Segall, "The Rise of the Majority-Asian Suburb."
52. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*, 70.
53. Cheng, *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes*; Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*.
54. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*, 124.
55. Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*.
56. Lam, *Youth Gangs, Racism, and Schooling*, 120-21.
57. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*.
58. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 192.
59. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 11.
60. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*.
61. David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), doi.org/10.1515/9781474468961.
62. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, 14.
63. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*.
64. Gustavo Adolfo Guerra Vasquez, "Homies Unidos: International Barrio Warriors Waging Peace on Two Fronts" in *Youthscapes: The Popular, the National, and the Global*, eds. Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005) 103-18.



Aesther Chang
Identity Crisis, 2022
 7 x 9 inches, Charcoal on paper

Artist's Statement

This drawing is a self-portrait that touches upon the themes of displacement and an illusion of belonging as an Asian American. In this drawing, charcoal is used as the primary medium due to its tendency to be erased and wiped out easily. This reflects the centuries of U.S. history in which the voices of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans have been either omitted, marginalized, or forgotten. On a personal level, the interwoven marks and the many layers of charcoal express the elusive identity of the portrait, whereas the engulfing darkness evokes a sense of displacement and suggests an uncharted inner-world where identity has formed no roots. What is left is but a faint trace of the past, a specter of an identity waiting to awaken.



About the Artist

Aesther Chang (she/her/hers) identifies as a Taiwanese-American artist and a current student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education: Learning Design, Innovation, and Technology (LDIT) Program with a concentration in Arts & Learning. Prior to HGSE, Aesther graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in 2017 with a B.F.A in Painting. She spent the past six years between Italy and New York City exhibiting with galleries around the world and teaching at various art institutions. Works by the artist reside in numerous private and public collections worldwide, including New York; Los Angeles, Paris; London; Tokyo; Singapore; Milan; Amsterdam; and Taipei. Aesther is currently represented by Jean Jacobs Gallery (New Canaan, CT) and Galerie Une Fille Aux Cheveux Noirs (Paris, FR). Beyond her studio practice, Aesther is interested in the intersection of art and youth education. By designing engaging and authentic art-learning experiences within informal settings, she is committed to helping learners develop a lifelong appreciation for art beyond the classroom. For more information about her work, please visit www.aestherchang.art.

Asian Critical Race Theory and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Frameworks for Implementing Asian Ethnic Studies in PK-12 Education

By Kayla Mendoza Chui, Camille Ungco, Doua Kha, Kriya Velasco, Theresa Lee, Rae Jing Han, Saraswati Noel

Under the structures of white supremacy, the pandemic has unveiled the dehumanization of Asian folks in the US. For many of us who are members of Asian communities, these lived realities have existed since the arrival of Chinese laborers in the 1850s.¹ We went from “dog eaters” to “bat eaters”;² we exist dually as model minorities and perpetual foreigners;³ we’re seen as apolitical, non-combative, and submissive, yet also as the threatening yellow peril;⁴ we’re fetishized yet desexualized;⁵ weaponized to perpetuate anti-Blackness;⁶ and the list goes on.

This dehumanization over hundreds of years has allowed for continued violence against Asians in the US. Every level of this normalized violence must be disrupted — from microaggressions to mass murder.⁷ Therefore, it is important to teach and learn about the strategic ways that Asian communities in the US continue to resist oppressive forces. By passing down sociopolitical wisdom and experiential knowledge,⁸ we refuse to be included into a white supremacist and settler colonial school system. Anti-Asian violence is quite literally an issue of life or death, and we call for accountability on domestic terrorism.⁹

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Americans were largely invisible from schools’ curricula,¹⁰ and representation was limited to deficit-based narratives.¹¹ Demands to address anti-Asian hate in schools during the pandemic gave rise to Asian American Studies state legislation in PK-12 public education in 2020. This change offers a space to critically engage learners in 1) seeing themselves represented in the curriculum from a strengths-based perspective, 2) becoming aware of interlocking systems of power, 3) identifying their positionalities within these systems of power, and 4) actively choosing to disrupt systems of power and build liberatory futures.

Ten states across the US have already passed mandates to include Asian American histories in public school curricula, and eight states are currently considering similar policies. However, as Dr. Jason Oliver Chang states, “In some ways the legislation was the easy part.”¹² Many Asian American Studies scholars, educators, and community organizations are now contending with how to teach these (soon-to-be) mandated courses, with Illinois and New Jersey being the first states to implement this mandate in high school public schools in 2022.¹³ Other states will soon follow suit, like Rhode Island in 2023,¹⁴ and Connecticut and California in 2025.¹⁵

We urge policymakers and educators to learn with and from Asian organizers, community educators, and artists who have and continue to teach and pass down critical and navigational knowledge and practices toward liberatory futures. It is important to note that these legacies have been and continue to be a fugitive practice,¹⁶ in light of the ongoing attacks on Critical Race Theory and Ethnic Studies and the threat they pose to colonialism and white supremacy. Further, for many Communities of Color,¹⁷ public schools are sites of harm, cultural erasure, and spirit murdering,¹⁸ as evidenced by the slow and arduous introduction of Asian Ethnic Studies in public schools. It is often in community spaces outside of school where Organizers, Community Educators, and Artists of Color cultivate young learners’ critical consciousness, honor their communities’ cultural wealth,¹⁹ and engage them as leaders for social change.

As a collective of Asian PhD graduates and candidates in the fields of critical studies and teacher education, we value and continue to learn with and from Asian organizers, community educators, and artists to inform our teaching, research, and engagement in our communities. From these experiences, we recognize the use of Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit)²⁰ and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)²¹ frameworks to facilitate the passing down of critical and navigational knowledge and practices in their/our communities’ spaces. Therefore, we recommend utilizing AsianCrit and CSP frameworks to guide curricula, instructional strategies, and educational policies. Below, we briefly describe these frameworks.

AsianCrit offers tenets that speak to the specific experiences of Asian American diasporic communities in the US and address the disruption of systems of oppression. It is inclusive of but not limited to the specific stereotypes and forms of racialization that are placed upon Asian Americans across intersectional identities, their/our migration stories and transnational contexts, and strategic organizing and commitment to social justice. Additionally, this lens recognizes entangled oppressions and liberations of all peoples. AsianCrit therefore critically acknowledges Indigenous histories and sovereignty. It also honors cross-racial solidarities and aims to disrupt anti-Blackness, cis-hetero patriarchy, imperialism, and settler colonialism.

Additionally, raising consciousness in Asian Ethnic Studies cannot be done in silos as we look to ongoing movement within spaces and practices of Communities of Color. CSP recognizes this need and offers expansive instructional strategies that center (1) the knowledges and practices of Communities of Color; (2) collaborations with students and communities; (3) commitments to being in good relationship with lands and waters, Indigenous communities who steward the lands and waters we are on, and one another; and (4) consistent and scaffolded opportunities to engage in self-reflexivity in order to disrupt internalized oppression and our complicity in any and all systems of oppression.²²

For the AsianCrit Collective, utilizing AsianCrit and CSP in teaching, research, and in community with each other and beyond includes the following examples:

Teaching

1. We invite creative storytelling within our reflective assignments. This includes photography, autobiographical mapping, music, collective altar building, and poetry.
2. We center discussion topics around the ways Asian folks are targeted by and perpetuate systems of oppression. Topics include model minority myth and anti-Blackness, perpetual foreigner trope and settler colonialism, legacies of queerness in our cultures, and intersectional experiences with gender and disability.
3. We intentionally build our classes around multimodal resources by assigning podcasts, Instagram videos, comics, music, videos, and zines alongside academic readings.

Research²³

1. We prioritized ongoing consent (e.g., in participation, photos), accessibility (e.g., carpooling to and from the meeting space, food allergy and religious accommodations, ADA compliance), and safety (i.e., masks required and made available, option to pass on any activity).
2. We practiced communicating recognition and appreciation toward community partners through active listening and affirmations of their shared stories, personalized gratitude gift bags, and promotion of their work (e.g., art, photography, articles).
3. We ensured relatable and meaningful focus group discussion prompts to honor the complex identities and experiences our co-researchers hold (e.g., explicitly asking what they hope to come from the research project, meeting and building a relationship with them individually before the start of the project)

In community with one another and beyond

1. We support and tend to each other's holistic well-being; for example, by sharing scholarly resources, community engagement opportunities, and job prospects in addition to personal life updates and dreams of establishing our own community space.
2. We recommend local Acupuncturists and Healers of Color to one another in the same breath as social science theories, over shared meals at Asian-owned restaurants.
3. We remind one another that our work involves sharing joy, at times discomfort, and collectively moving toward our own conceptions of liberation — that caring relationships span the personal and the professional.

We chose these pedagogies and practices with the intention to honor our relational responsibilities to one another, our students, and our community partners, and we hope they can offer others a way to reimagine future possibilities.

We conclude this commentary with calls to action informed by AsianCrit and CSP for policy makers and educators who support Asian and Asian American students and communities.

Moving forward, we demand the following from policy makers:

1. Improve data disaggregation and use. Asian and Asian American communities are often treated as a monolith, and this practice continues to fuel misconceptions and hyper-invisibility. One example is the way federal reports often present Asian families as having attained social and economic upward mobility while ignoring how Southeast Asian communities, especially those who are refugees or immigrants, often lack access to the same resources.²⁴ Disaggregating data by dividing “Asian” into ethnic and cultural groups allows us to see and address gaps within different communities when creating policies, especially when improving education for Asian students.²⁵
2. Invest and build long-term, reciprocal partnerships with local community-based organizations that serve Asian communities, especially young people. By building partnerships with organizations that are leading the work, policymakers can learn with and from them to ensure that policies strengthen and address the needs of the local community.
3. Invite and compensate local community experts when drafting policies. There are many experts within our community who can provide unique and important insights. By inviting them to be a part of policy development from the beginning, we can ensure that policies will reflect the community they are meant to serve and protect.

At the same time, we invite educators to take action as follows:

1. Critically reflect on their own intersecting identities and how their positionalities impact their work with Asian and Asian American students. Engaging in ongoing listening and learning assists with understanding the many different experiences within Asian diasporic communities.
2. Amplify Asian and Asian American perspectives within learning spaces across all grade levels and contexts. Attending to intersecting identities when making decisions about representation (e.g., Asian folks with disabilities, queer and trans Asian folks) will center Asian folks' lived experiences and worldviews. Remember that no one person can speak to the Asian experience.
3. Consider how knowledge and ways of knowing are culturally situated and create space for expansive forms of learning (e.g., creative practices, storytelling, multigenerational learning, land-based learning). Educators should attune to and disrupt the ways that certain forms of knowledge production are privileged over others within learning spaces.
4. Directly address sociopolitical issues that affect Asian and Asian American students and holding space for youth to process and share their experiences, understandings, and emotional responses. By engaging students to critically analyze social injustices within historical and systemic contexts, educators can support their participation in social transformation and collective liberation work.

We are grateful and indebted to the Black, Indigenous, Latine, Pacific Islander, and Asian scholars and community organizers who have and continue to pave the way for Ethnic Studies and the liberation of all people. Our commentary is not intended to suggest that this is the only way to implement Asian Ethnic Studies effectively. Rather, we offer one way rooted in our values of community, collective care, the abolition of all systems of oppression, and liberatory futures for all. We hope to continue to be in dialogue and collaborative action with those committed to the same.

About the Authors

AsianCrit Collective, University of Washington

The AsianCrit Collective at UW is a group of Asian and Asian American (HMoob, Korean, bi-racial Malaysian, Filipinx, Chinese), first-and second-generation immigrant and refugee, non-binary folks and women, who are current and former doctoral students at UW-Seattle. They came together because they wanted to see themselves and their values of abolition in the curriculum. Instead of waiting for the college to offer a class centering Asian experiences and voices, the AsianCrit Collective created it themselves. They facilitate interactive classes and workshops that utilize creative and artistic storytelling methods to center Asian American narratives and learn about collective liberation from systems of oppression.



Kayla Mendoza Chui



Camille Ungco



Doua Kha



Kriya Velasco



Theresa Lee



Rae Jing Han



Saraswati Noel

Endnotes

- 1 We complicate “the first arrival” of Asians in the US. While Filipino laborers were brought to Chumash lands (Morro Bay, California) by Spaniards in the 1580s, we are intentionally differentiating between Asian existence on pre-colonial Turtle Island and Asian existence within the structures of a settler colonial US. While white supremacy and its consequential dehumanization of Asian folks precedes the formation of the US and its geopolitical boundaries, our commentary focuses on Asian folks within the US context. See, e.g., “Valerie Ooka Pang and Li-Rong Lilly Cheng, eds., *Struggling to be Heard: The Unmet Needs of Asian Pacific American Children* (SUNY Press, 1998), <https://sunypress.edu/Books/S/Struggling-To-Be-Heard2>; Ronald T. Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Penguin Books, 1990), <https://worldcat.org/en/title/1080597694>.”
- 2 Hannah Tessler, Meera Choi, and Grace Kao. “The anxiety of being Asian American: Hate crimes and negative biases during the COVID-19 pandemic.” *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 45, no. 4 (2020): 636-646, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09541-5>.
- 3 Jennifer C. Ng, Sharon S. Lee, and Yoon K. Pak. “Chapter 4 Contesting the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner Stereotypes: A Critical Review of Literature on Asian Americans in Education,” *Review of Research in Education* 31, no. 1 (2007): 95-130, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X07300046095>.
- 4 Yao Li and Harvey L. Nicholson. “When ‘Model Minorities’ Become ‘Yellow Peril’ — Othering and the Racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Sociology Compass* 15, no. 2 (2021): e12849–n/a, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12849>.
- 5 Rosalind S. Chou, *Asian American Sexual Politics: The Construction of Race, Gender, and Sexuality* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442209251/Asian-American-Sexual-Politics-The-Construction-of-Race-Gender-and-Sexuality>.
- 6 Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, “Colonized Loyalty: Asian American Anti-Blackness and Complicity” (2020), Faculty Publications, Published Version, Submission 78, https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/englfac_pubs/78.
- 7 Tatiana Piper and Jackie Strohm, “Racial and Sexual Violence Pyramid”, 2019, *Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape*, https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdfs/racial_sexual_violence_pyramid.pdf.
- 8 Sonia Abigail Sánchez Carmen, et. al, “Revisiting the Collective in Critical Consciousness: Diverse Sociopolitical Wisdoms and Ontological Healing in Sociopolitical Development,” *The Urban Review* 47, no. 5 (2015): 824–846, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-015-0338-5>.
- 9 Carolyn A. Fan, “Beyond #StopAAPIHate: Expanding the Definition of Violence Against Asian Americans,” *American Journal of Public Health* 112, no. 4 (2022): 604–6, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2022.306740>.
- 10 Sohyun An, “Asian Americans in American History: An AsianCrit Perspective on Asian American Inclusion in State US History Curriculum Standards,” *Theory & Research in Social Education* 44, no. 2 (2016): 244-276, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1170646>.
- 11 Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409-428, <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.3.n0016675661t3n15>.
- 12 Ileana Najarro, “States Are Mandating Asian American Studies. What Should the Curriculum Look like?” *Education Week*, October 28, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/states-are-mandating-asian-american-studies-what-should-the-curriculum-look-like/2022/10>.

- 13 Isis Davis-Marks, “Illinois becomes first state to mandate teaching Asian American history,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 14, 2021, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/illinois-becomes-first-state-mandate-teaching-asian-american-history-public-schools-180978160/>; Nicole Chavez, “New Jersey becomes second state to require Asian American history to be taught in schools,” *CNN*, January 18, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/18/us/new-jersey-schools-asian-american-history/index.html>.
- 14 Tat Bellamy-Walker, “Rhode Island becomes fourth state to require Asian American history in schools,” *NBC News*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/rhode-island-becomes-fourth-state-require-asian-american-history-schoo-rcna46720>.
- 15 “Ethnic Studies for All: California’s New High School Requirement,” *California 100*, February 1, 2023, <https://california100.org/ethnic-studies-for-all-californias-new-high-school-requirement/>.
- 16 Jarvis R. Givens, “Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching” (Harvard University Press, 2021), <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674983687>.
- 17 We capitalize this and similar phrases like Organizer, People, and Communities of Color to honor the ways Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latine, and Pacific Islander (the communities we are referring to when using this phrase) are capitalized.
- 18 Michael J. Dumas, “‘Losing an Arm’: Schooling as a Site of Black Suffering.” *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 17, no. 1 (2014): 1–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.850412>; K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, “To Remain an Indian”: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education (Teachers College Press, 2006), <https://www.tcpres.com/to-remain-an-indian-9780807747162>; Robin West and Patricia L. Williams. “Murdering the Spirit: Racism, Rights, and Commerce.” *Michigan Law Review* 90, no. 6 (1992): 1771–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1289447>.
- 19 Tara J. Yosso. “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth.” *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (2005): 69–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006>.
- 20 Jon S. Iftikar and Samuel D. Museus, “On the Utility of Asian Critical (AsianCrit) Theory in the Field of Education,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 31, no. 10 (2018): 935–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2018.1522008>; Edward Curammeng, Tracy Lachica Buenavista, and Stephanie Cariaga, “Asian American Critical Race Theory: Origins, Directions, and Praxis,” *Center for Critical Race Studies at UCLA*, no. 9 (June 2017): 1-4, https://issuu.com/almaiflores/docs/ec_tlb_sc_asianam crt.
- 21 Django Paris. “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice.” *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (2012): 93–97, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>.
- 22 Django Paris, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Our Futures,” *The Educational Forum* (West Lafayette, Ind.) 85, no. 4 (2021): 364–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2021.1957634>.
- 23 In this project, we worked with Asian non-binary and women organizers, community educators, and artists in-person during the COVID pandemic. We wanted to learn about their values as social justice movement leaders, their experiences as folks positioned at multiple intersections of systems of oppression, and their hopes for liberatory futures. In focus group discussions, we prompted them to utilize creative storytelling methods to reflect on their histories of migration and place-making, their embodied experiences with Asian racialization, and their/our personal roles and responsibilities within social justice and solidarity work that strives toward liberation for our own and other communities.
- 24 Christian Edlagan and Kavya Vaghul. “How data disaggregation matters for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders,” *Washington Center for Equitable Growth*, December 14, 2016, <https://equitablegrowth.org/how-data-disaggregation-matters-for-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders/>.
- 25 Anna Byon and Amanda Janice Roberson, “Everyone Deserves to Be Seen: Recommendations for Improved Federal Data on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI)” (2020), <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/100571/AsianAmericanPacificIslander.pdf?sequence=1>.



알아 들었어 ala-deul-us-suh

Do You Hear Us Now?

By Esther Young Lim, Photography by Jeremy Knies

I consider the San Gabriel Valley (SGV) an Asian melting pot. Growing up here meant that you were surrounded by the best Asian food (you would know when it was really good if the restaurant took cash only), boba was life, and your parents were most likely immigrants. For me and my friends, being a child of immigrants entailed silently dealing with being interpreters for our parents. I can't tell you the countless times my mom pushed the phone to my ear out of nowhere to carry on a conversation with the cable company or to translate school flyers, even when she always had the Korean-English dictionary on hand. As I grew older, translating written material got more complex.

My mom immigrated to California with her siblings from South Korea in the 80s and was so excited to live in the country that promised so much hope and opportunity, where it was the "best" place to live. Shortly after, she married my dad, who was also new to the States, and they both learned quickly that they needed to assimilate to their new American environment to survive. We had the American flag posted on our car window and celebrated Thanksgiving with dry turkey and ham even when we preferred galbi and kimchi. From what I saw first hand, no matter how hard my parents tried, assimilating to American culture meant to be stripped of their pride, to be humiliated in public because of how they pronounced a word differently, to be mistreated, to stay silent, and to have to endure it all. Even through their hurt buried deep inside and their silent cries at night, my parents put on a happy face in front of me and my siblings.

When hate crimes against Asian Americans began rising amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, my parents and I once again struggled with being treated as an “other.” I couldn’t bear the thought of them becoming victims of hate when it seemed we had finally found our place in this country. I said to myself “not again and not to my parents” and asked myself how I could protect them when the government didn’t seem to care. The only way was to empower them by advising them on the steps necessary to stay safe, find support, and report the crime if they are ever physically assaulted.

I created the *How to Report a Hate Crime* booklet as a means for my parents to fight for their rights by utilizing the free resources that are already in place for these types of situations (i.e., victim compensation, mental health care, etc.). While researching all of this information to educate my parents about, I realized everything was written in English and there was nothing accessible to them in their native Korean language regarding these existing resources.

At the beginning of my research in April 2020, I called the LAPD Hate Crimes Division and learned that they had only received 7 reports of hate crimes that year. This small number did not accurately add up to reflect the personal stories I’ve heard from friends and community members. I realized then that the problem was underreporting due to a lack of language access and made it my mission to bridge that gap by creating a series of booklets called *How to Report a Hate Crime*.

Considering that the Asian population is the fastest growing racial group in America, and that there are over 4.6 million Asians who are not fluent English speakers, the ability to access resources and services provided by the state and federal government is a fundamental right that seems to be lacking in this community.¹ To serve the immediate need for my parents to know their rights—including that California has a penal code for hate crimes and that there are specific resources dedicated to support hate crime victims—I created a booklet for them in Korean. From there, people from different Asian communities started reaching out to ask how they could access this booklet in their parents’ native languages. The need was desperate when I first started this work and it still is now.

From a team of two, me and my graphic designer, the *How to Report a Hate Crime* team has grown to become a movement of 40, a true testament to community effort. Volunteers of various languages with immigrant parents/grandparents/loved ones, have readily and generously offered their skills, time and resources to address this common need. The shared experiences of witnessing our elders othered in America resonates deeply among us, moving us to empower our aging parents and pave a brighter future for the younger generations through peaceful action.

This little booklet of *How to Report a Hate Crime* has been published in 13 different languages and counting, with over 110,000 booklets printed nationwide. Its pages hold the cries of our community and empower us to bring attention to our grievances; do you hear us now?

About the Author



Esther Young Lim

Esther Young Lim is the creator of the *How to Report a Hate Crime* booklet as well as the founder and Executive Director of Through Peace, a non-profit that focuses on educating minority communities of their fundamental human rights. Esther received nationwide media recognition for her advocacy in the AAPI community. She has been recognized by Lizzo at the People’s Choice Awards and by the County of Los Angeles as recipient of the Yvonne B. Burke Courage Award. Esther currently serves as Board Chair of the Los Angeles County District Attorney AAPI Advisory Board.

¹ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population, Pew Research, 4/29/21 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>; US Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2015.

Remembering the “Comfort Women” Intergenerational Asian American Care Work

By Grace J. Yoo, Eunice H. Kim, Soojin Jeong

ABSTRACT Asian American activists have been key to remembering the “comfort women” in the U.S. and globally. The act of remembering is often done through creating memorials, exhibits, films, conferences, and educational efforts. This paper examines Asian American activists’ remembrance work in building a memorial in the city of San Francisco. This paper utilizes a content analysis of the September 17, 2015 San Francisco Board of Supervisors hearing to identify key frames that Asian Americans have used to advocate for the building of a “comfort women” memorial. A key theme is that the act of remembering is often done with “care.” Additional key themes of the care work to build this memorial highlighted the role of breaking silences and speaking personal truths and stories; demonstrating pan-ethnic compassion and solidarity; and building to remember and teach the next generation. Understanding remembrance work as care work across generations has implications for voice and empowerment, solidarity, and healing for “comfort women” and all who are connected and exposed to this work.

INTRODUCTION Approximately 400,000 young women and girls from Korea, China, the Philippines, and Indonesia (then Dutch East Indies) were forced into sexual slavery by Japanese soldiers during World War II.¹ In 1991, former “comfort woman” Kim Hak-Sun of South Korea broke over fifty years of silence to tell her story.² Her public disclosure started a global campaign demanding justice and reparations for former “comfort women.” The need for acknowledgement of the Japanese military system of sexual slavery has been a transnational movement.

Although generations removed, the “comfort women” experience of World War II is a historical trauma that has impacted many Asian Americans including those of Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, and Filipino descent.³ Stories from WWII of the fear and trauma faced by women and girls fleeing Japanese soldiers have been part of many

Asian American intergenerational family histories.⁴ Asian Americans have been key to bringing voice and remembrance of “comfort women” locally, nationally, and globally. Emerging in the mid 1990s, the stories of the “comfort women” inspired diverse Asian American generations to bring voice to the “comfort women” issue through writing, film, exhibits, and the creation of various organizations and campaigns for reparations and remembrances. They include fiction and nonfiction such as Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Women* and Evelina Galang’s oral histories of Filipina comfort women *Lolas’ House: Filipino Women Living with War*, as well as her children’s books *Angel De La Luna and the Fifth Glorious Mystery*. They also include films such as *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*, *The Apology*, and *Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of the Comfort Women Issue*.⁵ Campaigns in the U.S. have included those spearheaded by the Gabriela Network (a Filipina/o network against sex-trafficking of Filipinas) and the work of the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition.⁶

Asian American activists have been working in solidarity with former “comfort women” to confront the Japanese government’s denial and coercion of hundreds of thousands of women and girls into the largest known sexual slavery system of the twentieth century.⁷ There have also been various campaigns for apologies, reparations, and remembrances such as the U.S. House Resolution 121 in 2007, introduced by third generation Japanese American Congressman Michael Honda, which urged the Government of Japan to bring closure to the issue by way of formal apology and reparations to the victims of those crimes. YouTube videos created by filmmakers Annabel Park and Eric Byler mobilized the international movement via the internet.⁸ Additional campaigns for remembrances/ memorials and inclusion in public school curriculum have all been spearheaded by Asian Americans who have come together to bring voice to “comfort women.”⁹

REMEMBRANCE WORK: REMEMBERING “COMFORT WOMEN” THROUGH PUBLIC MEMORIALS

More recently, there has been activism to remember the “comfort women” through the building of memorials. To date, there are sixteen memorials that have been built in the United States.¹⁰ In 2010 the first “comfort women” memorial in the U.S. was erected in Palisades Park, New Jersey. It was followed by locations in Westbury, New York; Eisenhower Park, New York; Glendale, California; Fairfax, Virginia; Union City, New Jersey; Southfield, Michigan; Fullerton, California; and San Francisco, California. Outside South Korea, the U.S. is home to the largest number of memorials with a total of sixteen as of April 2020.¹¹ Indeed, hosting such a number of memorials on U.S. public lands is the result of three decades of organizing and consciousness-raising by Asian Americans, especially Korean Americans. Korean Americans’ involvement in erecting “comfort women” memorials is a prime example of how diaspora can play out homeland issues in their adopted home in ways that take advantage of the institutional features and distinctive environment of that adopted home.¹²

Active opposition groups to “comfort women” memorials in the U.S. have included ultranationalist individuals from the Japanese government, Japanese Americans, and Japanese immigrants who have created an alliance to regularly oppose “comfort women” memorials in the U.S. and operate in a politically similar fashion as right wing groups in the U.S.¹³ Opposition groups have long denied justice for comfort women. For instance, an opposition group filed a lawsuit in 2014 seeking the removal of a “comfort women” memorial in Glendale, California.¹⁴ After a three-year legal battle, the Supreme

Court decision concluded by declining the lawsuit filed against the City of Glendale in Los Angeles County by the Global Alliance for Historical Truth-US Corporation (GAHT-US). In addition, upon the erection of a “comfort women” memorial in San Francisco, Osaka cut “sister city” ties with the city. Osaka mayor Hirofumi Yoshimura said the monument “destroyed the two sides’ relationship of trust.”¹⁵

Despite opposition groups’ efforts, public memorialization of “comfort women” has brought together a decentralized social movement involving diaspora politics, coalition building, and gender rights.¹⁶ The movement has achieved the erection of “comfort women” memorials or statues and the passage of the U.S. House of Representative Resolution 121, which called for Japan to acknowledge and apologize for the use of sexual slavery during the 1930s and 1940s. These efforts in the U.S. occurred simultaneously with lobbying for the inclusion of “comfort women” in United Nations reports on sexual violence and the UNESCO Memory of the World register.¹⁷ In San Francisco, the “comfort women” memorial building was spearheaded by the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition (CWJC), a multi-ethnic and multi-national organization of people guided by the surviving grandmothers of the “comfort women” experience. CWJC played a pivotal role in unveiling the memorial in San Francisco. The organization’s co-chairs, Lillian Sing and Julie Tang, led a movement to recognize the importance of educating the war atrocity so it is never repeated. CWJC asserts “few memorials speak of women, even less of their suffering, courage, endurance and determination to achieve justice.”¹⁸ With their efforts, in 2015, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution to build a memorial for the “comfort women” in the city.

In policy hearings, framing has traditionally been a key way in which policy is moved forward.¹⁹ Framing is about the construction of meaning.²⁰ Although the movement to build “comfort women” memorials has been reported on in different ways by various organizations and in locations outside the U.S. such as South Korea, Japan, and Australia, there have been no in-depth studies of local policy hearings. Rather, the study of framing of “comfort women” has been limited to new stories and media depictions.²¹ This paper examines the framing used by Asian Americans advocating for a “comfort women” memorial at a San Francisco Board of Supervisors public hearing.

METHODS This paper utilizes a content analysis of the transcript and video of the 2015 San Francisco Board of Supervisors public hearing on “Urging the Establishment of a Memorial for ‘Comfort Women.’” The purpose of this approach is to identify key frames that Asian Americans have used to advocate for the building of the San Francisco “comfort women” memorial. Analyzing the framing of Asian American remembrance work in building the “comfort women” memorial in the City of San Francisco is important since public hearings in the US have included Japanese nationalists using the public comment to voice opposition to any sort of remembrance.²² In this content analysis, we focus on Asian Americans who were in favor of the memorial in San Francisco, including public officials, guests, and the public.

Past studies examining policy issues have used a content analysis of policy hearings to understand how issues have become framed.²³ The transcript and video from the City and County of San Francisco Board of Supervisors Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee meeting of September 17, 2015, were obtained through the San

Francisco Board of Supervisors meeting archives.²⁴ This hearing was selected as it included the statements of politicians as well as guests and public comment from the community. The transcript was read in its entirety by all three authors and analyzed using standard coding analysis procedures.²⁵ In reviewing this transcript, the authors focused on statements made by Asian Americans in favor of the memorial. These statements were then thematically analyzed, from which the authors developed frames of how Asian American politicians, activists, and members of the public advocated for and supported the building of this memorial.

FINDINGS The findings of this content analysis highlight frames that Asian Americans used to support the San Francisco memorial including the following: breaking silences across generations, speaking personal truths and stories, demonstrating pan-ethnic compassion and solidarity, and building to remember and teach about “comfort women” to the next generation.

BREAKING SILENCES ACROSS GENERATIONS: SPEAKING PERSONAL TRUTHS AND STORIES

“Comfort women” remembrances have been important symbols for breaking silences. A model for this has always been the public testimonial by Grandmother Kim Hak-sun in August 1991 that was soon followed by the first class action suit against Japan by a Korean “comfort women” survivor.²⁶ Moreover, in 1992, survivors in South Korea protested every Wednesday in front of the Japanese Embassy, requesting that the Japanese government formally apologize.²⁷ In 1993, eighteen Filipina former “comfort women” filed lawsuits against Japan.²⁸ These events broke decades of silence. Such courageous and resilient actions have been models for Asian Americans in speaking, teaching, and creating actions for remembrances.

Breaking silences and speaking truths were key themes in the San Francisco hearings. In the September 17, 2015 hearing, San Francisco City and County Board of Supervisor Jane Kim discussed how the present moment is about breaking silences, and shared her memories hearing stories about the occupation, the war, and women and young girls taken from their homes to serve as sexual slaves for the Japanese military. These were stories that she grew up hearing from so many women in her family who were fearful that they could have been taken as “comfort women.” She stated:
The greatest revolution that you can give is not just to survive but survive and tell the stories. The experience and the story are humiliating and challenging to hear... It is so important we not only know our history but we remember the story so they won't happen again.

Supervisor Eric Mar also described the San Francisco hearings acts of breaking silences. He stated:

Today's hearing is about a history of breaking silences. It's about a fight for empathy, for hundreds of thousands of women and girls. It's a fight for justice, and my hope is that we focus on the stories that are told today. I wanted to say that, as a member of this board of supervisors, we pass lots of laws and policies, but I think there are times where something in our chambers within us and

with visitors transforms us. It changes us to be more human. As Detroit's Grace Lee Boggs shows, how we've become more human with more compassion and empathy for others is a way to move our city forward.

Mar further shared that as a Chinese American and a father of a 15-year-old daughter who is Chinese and Japanese American, he wants youth and future generations to know these stories. He further broke his family's silence by telling a personal truth of domestic violence in his grandparents' family. He stated:

Allow those stories and that spirit to transform them as well as we move forward with a history and with a passion for peace and justice...Grandma Lee brings us together, unifies our communities for a future without oppression of women and girls, a few of peace and justice for all...I wanted to say that grandma lee helps to bring together many of our communities.

Breaking silence over generations is one common theme we saw in the Board of Supervisors meeting. Mar, then Supervisor of District One, introduced Grandma Lee as "an example of courage and a story of breaking silence over generations." Former "comfort woman" Grandma Yong Soo Lee (Halmoni Lee) traveled from South Korea and spoke at the hearing, presenting herself as living history of the hate crimes against her and many other women by the Imperial Japanese Army. For the sake of future generations, she was committed to speaking out and sharing her truth before she and only forty seven other survivors were not able to do so. She stated:

I am the living evidence of history...For the sake of our next generation and children and grandchildren I think we need to teach them accurate history. I want to tell you the truth will come out no matter what. I want to tell the leaders of Japan to change your mind...We are nearly at the end of our lives. We are old people. In Korea, there are only 47 survivors...These grandmothers are so sick.. They cannot get up... they cannot talk clearly.. So before they all pass away I want to urge you to resolve this clearly as soon as possible in a peaceful manner.

Several speakers during the open public comment reiterated the need to break silences.

They spoke about the importance of personal experiences. Jihi Yoo, a mother and activist, spoke to the audience about the importance of seeking justice for the victims and acknowledging these hate crimes as not just a political issue but a human rights issue. Yoo spoke on the importance of breaking silences and teaching future generations about justice and truth. She stated:

This is not a Japan/Korea issue. It is a human rights issue. It's a women's issue. it's a justice issue.. It's [about] doing the right thing for our children so they understand the history [and] they understand what is truthful.. They understand that when we hurt somebody that we make it right.

She stated that she personally got involved because she wanted to educate the next generation — her 17-year-old daughter — who had been asking about the "comfort women" after learning about a resolution introduced in Congress six times that has still not passed. Her daughter's questions and concern became a catalyst to her own awakening of the importance of speaking up on this issue.

COMING TOGETHER: PAN-ETHNIC ASIAN AMERICAN COMPASSION AND SOLIDARITY

During the September 17, 2015 hearing, "comfort woman" survivor *Halmoni Yongsoo Lee* came to support San Francisco's effort to build a memorial. These meetings entailed hours of public comment primarily by supportive Asian Americans but also denialists to the comfort women experience. The movement to memorialize was marked by sharp divisions and tensions between Japanese Americans and Japanese nationalists who deny the existence of comfort women for fear of backlash directed towards Japanese Americans reminiscent of WWII. Despite divisions and tensions in the Japanese community made clear during the San Francisco hearing, Japanese Americans advocating for the memorial prevailed and joined other Asian Americans in solidarity. Pan-ethnic Asian American solidarity emerged as a compassionate and empathetic response to support and build a "comfort women" memorial in San Francisco. Such pan-ethnic Asian American solidarity first emerged in the 1968 San Francisco State University (SFSU) student strike in which students of various Asian backgrounds came together alongside other students of color to demand the first college of Ethnic Studies at SFSU.²⁹ After the 1968 student strike, many other social movements would emerge encouraging Asian Americans to organize across ethnic backgrounds around their shared experience.³⁰ During the San Francisco hearing, Asian American pan-ethnicity focused on solidarity and finding a shared historical experience. Japanese Americans were key in leading efforts in remembering "comfort women." During the public comment, Judy Hamaguchi of the San Francisco chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) spoke on record that the San Francisco chapter did not oppose a memorial to honor the "comfort women" and that the members of their board unanimously voted in support. She stated that her organization was made up of volunteer activists who believe in education and human rights for all. She also paralleled the "comfort women" experience to the World War II incarceration of Japanese Americans. She remarked how in her son's class at UC Santa Cruz how like the "comfort women," the Japanese American incarceration was challenged and questioned:

In a class discussion about the concentration camp, several students challenged the idea that such a thing occurred here in America. "It never happened," they said. On the other side of the other world, the people, the civilians, my stepfather, my uncle, and my mother saw destruction and death in a flash. It creates a world of nightmares—we cannot minimize the horrors that "comfort women" suffered. We cannot deny their unimaginable pain and suffering. We have stories to share as caution to the rest of the world. We are compelled to educate so future generations will read about the gruesomeness of war rather than experience it.

In this example, compassion and connection are key examples of solidarity as expressed by Professor Wesley Ueunten, a scholar of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University who teaches the Japanese American experience. After witnessing several Japanese nationalists in the public comment speak to defame, shame, and minimize the "comfort women" experience, he said:

Throughout these hearings, I've heard people call them [comfort women] liars and prostitutes and agents of propaganda. It seems as though people aren't seeing them. We have a comfort woman here, but we're not seeing her as a human, equal human. ... I've worked in the Japanese American community for twenty years trying to bring people together, but this is an opportune time. I've never seen

opportunities like this to bridge the gaps between Japanese Americans from mainland and Hawaii, Shin Issei, and Nisei... This is a great time for us to open our hearts.

Professor Ueunten challenged those who chose to deny the “comfort women” experience to show compassion. Other Japanese Americans echoed similar support for the “comfort women.” Grace Shimizu, a Japanese American community activist, spoke up about her support for the “comfort women” memorial by reflecting on the experiences of her family members in Peru being kidnapped and imprisoned in an incarceration camp. She discussed how some individuals in the Japanese American community have voiced opposition to any attention to this history, and to the idea of a “comfort women” memorial itself. Although in the minority, some Japanese Americans expressed concern that a memorial could inflame Japan bashing and racist attacks on Japanese Americans by guilt of association. Shimizu urged in her speech to move past this fear and find courage in remembering these wartime tragedies so the next generation can learn.

Cathy Matsuoka of Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress stressed the importance of acknowledging and advocating for the truth of the “comfort women” experience just as the Japanese American community has spoken out for redress for those interned in camps during World War II, and others have advocated to stop the scapegoating of Arab and Muslim Americans in the aftermath of 9/11. She explained that Japanese Americans shared parallel experiences of inhumane treatment during World War II when they were incarcerated in camps and that their histories were denied until they spoke up after years of being silenced. She stated:

I am extremely proud of our community because we spoke up about the pain of the camps after forty years of silence. Similar to the “comfort women” who bravely broke their silence after 70 years, I am proud of how our community stood... The “comfort women” continued to speak the truth to those that say they were willing participants in this [and that] this never happened ... As Japanese Americans we can educate others about our history and bring communities together by supporting the “comfort women”...

A key component of the care work that operated during the hearings to build the “comfort women” memorial is a sense of solidarity and a compassionate and empathetic understanding of historical context and experience. Throughout the hearings, Japanese denialists who opposed the building of the memorial suggested that by building this site, San Francisco would incite a negative image of Japanese people worldwide. Individuals who spoke against the building suggested that it divided the community and could create “Japan bashing.” They proposed that the installation of a memorial of the “comfort women” was an act of hate. Those Asian Americans who testified in favor of building the memorial worked to move the discussion from fear and hate directed at Japanese people to an inclusive compassionate solidarity about remembering the “comfort women” in order to promote healing.

BUILDING TO REMEMBER AND TEACH THE NEXT GENERATION

The Asian American movement to build the San Francisco memorial worked beyond just breaking silences around this historical trauma. A final theme that emerged in the transcript was the importance of remembrance for the history of “comfort women,” especially during a time when denialists were starting to encroach on efforts to memorialize and recognize “comfort women” in the U.S.³¹ Acknowledging that this happened is important as there has been a history of denying and silencing the voices of the “comfort women.” Phyllis Kim of the Korean American Forum brought up the importance of acknowledging the trauma and violence that “comfort women” experienced and putting an end to the struggle between victims and the “deniers.” She further emphasized that these deniers are “not the Japanese Americans who live in America, [but] the [Japanese] Prime Minister and the ultra-Nationalist who have been financed to fight the effort to remember.”

Miho Kim Lee, then CWJC Coordinator, condemned nationalism stirred by a Japanese government that sought to deny the “comfort women” experience. She shared:

It’s important to recognize the anti-memorial movement in the U.S. actually emboldened this historical revisionism. Whatever your reasons, if you don’t support this memorial, make no mistake it will be touted as a victory for the denialists up and down the political food chain...We’re advocating for [the] “comfort women” memorial as a vehicle for understanding and change that can unite all people for women’s human rights

Throughout the San Francisco Board of Supervisors meeting, many speakers advocated for women’s rights and the need to continually recognize and address the violence that the Imperial Japanese Army committed against women during World War II. A large part of acknowledging this history is to honor the survival of “comfort women.” The memorial in San Francisco was also described by Asian American activists as a tool to teach the next generation about this injustice. In the hearing, members of the Jewish American community illustrated associations between “comfort women” memorials and Holocaust memorials. They recognized these memorials serve as a monument for reconciliation and “shine a light on unspeakable crimes against humanity, so that lessons could be learned for the future.” Kei Fischer, a Jewish Asian American and at the time Lecturer in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University, used personal examples to express the importance of breaking the silence of war. She was inspired by narratives of survivors and dedicated over a decade of her life to this work. Fischer continued on to note the importance of breaking silence and erecting this memorial to start the necessary work towards justice and peace as well as make an impact on younger generations by teaching the atrocities of war and never letting history repeat itself. Fischer said:

I was also inspired by the narratives of the courageous survivors of this atrocity... It sparked my interest in the anti-war and anti-oppression peace work that I’ve dedicated the last 15 years of my life to. This memorial is a symbol of this necessary work towards peace and justice that must happen both here locally in San Francisco and globally as well... I know firsthand the power these memorials have on the younger generation. This memorial commemorates the mass sexual enslavement of women from more than 10 different nationalities... teach our coming generations about the horrors of war so such atrocities cannot be repeated.

Asian American intergenerational care work has connected “comfort women” trauma to present day issues ranging from the #MeToo movement to human trafficking. The issue of “comfort women” brings up painful emotions regarding sexual violence that women in current generation have experienced. In part, the “comfort women” movement for Asian Americans in the twenty first century is fueled by the past but also serves as an example of breaking the silences of Asian American women in this current generation. The building of a “comfort women” memorial in San Francisco offered an opportunity to bring together Asian Americans to remember not only the past but also connect it today and to women’s issues. In the hearings, various Asian American speakers discussed the importance of connecting the past historical experiences of “comfort women” with issues of the current day. Grace Shimizu shared:

The comfort women memorial is an important opportunity to make connections with and among communities. Engaging in dialogue, deepening our understanding of our past and drawing lessons for the challenges we face today especially human trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children during times of war. We can open our minds, soften our hearts, be compassionate and hear and understand each other for the sake of all of our children. We can stand strong together.

A remembrance of “comfort women” in the city of San Francisco can also mean the recognition of ongoing issues of human trafficking and sexual violence. Finally, remembering the “comfort women” is a collective responsibility to make sure these horrors are not forgotten or repeated.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this content analysis of the September 17, 2015 San Francisco Board of Supervisors public hearing on “Urging the Establishment of a Memorial for ‘Comfort Women’” illustrate that remembrance work is done with *care* to the past, present, and future. Key themes of this care work to build the memorial highlighted the role of breaking silences and speaking personal truths and stories, demonstrating pan-ethnic compassion and solidarity, and building to remember and teach the next generation about “comfort women.” As seen in this analysis, Asian Americans from a wide range of backgrounds successfully advocated for the memorial to be built despite resistance by Japanese denialists. As demonstrated in this analysis, the voices of Asian Americans have been critical in the building of “comfort women” memorials in the United States.

Today, the “comfort women” memorial is situated in St. Mary’s Park in the heart of San Francisco’s Chinatown community. The bronze statue is made up of three young women representing Korea, China, and the Philippines holding hands back-to-back in solidarity. Another statue gazing up at the young woman memorializes *Halmoni* Kim Hak Sun, the first “comfort women” survivor to speak up about her experience. With a grand view of the city, the park is a safe place for communities to gather and remember the brave women. The memorial is not only a monument, but an activator of safety and justice for women and girls.³² This monument also shines a light on the processes in which Asian American pan-ethnic solidarity was sustained in this movement to remember.

Asian Americans remembering the “comfort women” have also illustrated how movements can work across generations for voice, empowerment, and remembrance. In the Asian American community, care work across generations happens through empathy, connection, and the willingness to be a voice, a phenomenon which has been documented in movements such as the Japanese American redress movement.³³ Intergenerational pan-Asian American movements, such as building the “comfort women” memorial in San Francisco, pave the way for future generations to break barriers and continue breaking silences across multiple issues. Like remembrance work to memorialize the “comfort women,” the #StopAAPIHate movement is an example of present-day pan-Asian American intergenerational community organizing in which the advocates and voices are those of the next generation. For example, Mina Fedor, a 12 year-old San Francisco Bay Area resident, organized an anti-hate rally in March of 2021 as an empathetic response to elderly Asian Americans who have faced the brunt of anti-Asian verbal harassment, shunning, and physical assault during the Covid-19 pandemic.³⁴

Asian Americans remembering the “comfort women” has become an opportunity to extend the possibilities of pan-ethnicity beyond U.S.-based racialized boundaries and identities to include transnational and gender rights issues. Asian Americans remembering the “comfort women” has allowed for discussion of sexual assault and violence that continues to be silenced in Asian American community. For Asian Americans, shame and stigma around sexual violence are rooted in misogyny and lead to underreporting.³⁵ Indeed, remembering the “comfort women” offers healing for those affected by sexual violence today as the “comfort women” models encourage speaking about the violence done to them.

In the September 17, 2015 San Francisco Board of Supervisors public hearing, *Halmoni* Lee bravely spoke her truths. The bravery demonstrated by her and other “comfort women” in speaking up despite the stigma and shame has paved a way for future generations to speak up and seek justice and healing. As scholars and activists have demonstrated, the aim in truth telling is not only in disclosing historical facts, “but also to publicly acknowledge responsibility.”³⁶ Thanks to *Halmoni* Lee’s act, future generations as well as the Asian American community can claim space that fosters healing. Memorializing the “comfort women” is a way for future generations to resist and break silences around sexual violence and demand responsibility for injustices from the past. The message to future generations is that we no longer have to conceal our pain, abuse, and trauma. We will continue to take space, speak out, and advocate for one another.

About the Authors



Grace J. Yoo

Grace J. Yoo, Ph.D., MPH is a Professor and former Chair of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. She is the co-editor of *Encyclopedia of Asian Americans Today*, and *Koreans in America: History, Identity and Community* and co-author of *Caring across Generations: The Linked Lives of Korean American Families*.



Eunice Kim

Eunice Kim, M.P.A. is a program manager at Stop AAPI Hate, a coalition that addresses anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Asian American Studies and Master of Public Administration from San Francisco State University. Ms. Kim also has been a Lecturer in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University.



Soojin Jeong

Soojin Jeong, M.A. is a doctoral student in East Asian Studies at University of California Irvine. She received a Master degree from San Francisco State University in Asian American Studies. Her research is in social reproduction, political economy, Asian American literature and Korean Studies.

Endnotes

1. Phyllis Kim, "Looking Back at 10 Years of the "Comfort Women" Movement in the US," In *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery*, eds Pyong Gap Mi, Thomas R. Chung and Sejung Sage Yim (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020), p. 196.
2. Laura Hyun Yi Kang, *Traffic in Asian Women*, (Duke University Press, 2020).
3. Laurence J. Kirmayer, Joseph P. Gone, and Joshua Moses, "Rethinking historical trauma," *Transcultural psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 299-319, Grace Yoo, Teaching about "Comfort Women," (Paper presented at the Association of Asian American Studies, San Francisco, April 2018).
4. Kirmayer et al "Rethinking historical trauma;" Yoo, Teaching about "Comfort Women."
5. Nora Okja Keller, *Comfort Women*, (Penguin, 1998); Evelina M. Galang, *Lolas' House: Filipino Women Living with War*, (Northwestern University Press, 2017); Evelina M. Galang, *Angel De La Luna and the Fifth Glorious Mystery* (Coffee House Press, 2013); Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*, written, directed, produced by Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, (San Francisco, CA: National Asian American Telecommunications Association, 2000); Tiffany Hsiung, *The Apology*, DVD, directed by Tiffany Hsiung (2016, Toronto: National Film Board of Canada, 2018); M. Dezaki, *Shusenjo: The Main Battleground of Comfort Women Issue*, (No Man Productions LLC, Amerika Serikat, 2018).
6. "Comfort Women" Justice Coalition," accessed January 2, 2023, <https://remembercomfortwomen.org/directions/>, Gabriela Network access February 10, 2023 <http://gabrielausa.org/>
7. "Comfort women" is in quotes as it is euphemism for militarized sexual slavery
8. Kim, "Looking Back at 10 Years of the 'Comfort Women' Movement in the US"
9. Kim, "Looking Back at 10 Years of the 'Comfort Women' Movement in the US"
10. Lin Li, "Comfort Women" Memorials at the Crossroads of Ultrnationalist, Feminist, and Decolonial Critiques: Triangulating Japan, South Korea, and the United States," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 43, no. 3 (2022): 89-116., <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2022.0025>.
11. "Map of "Comfort Women" Memorials in the U.S.," Education for Social Justice Foundation, Accessed on January 1, 2023, <https://www.e4sjf.org/map-of-comfort-women-memorials-in-the-united-states.html>
12. Mary M. McCarthy and Linda C. Hasunuma, "Coalition Building and Mobilization: Case Studies of the Comfort Women Memorials in the United States" *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6, no. 3, (2018): 411-434, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1491865>.
13. Judith Mirkinson, "Building the San Francisco Memorial: Why Is the Issue of the 'Comfort Women' Still Relevant Today?," In *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery*, eds Pyong Gap Min, Thomas R. Chung and Sejung Sage Yim (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020): 149-178; Lin Li, "Comfort Women" Memorials at the Crossroads of Ultrnationalist, Feminist, and Decolonial Critiques: Triangulating Japan, South Korea, and the United States," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 43, no. 3 (2022): 89-116., Phyllis Kim, "Looking Back at 10 Years of the "Comfort Women" Movement in the US," In *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery*, eds Pyong Gap Min, Thomas R. Chung and Sejung Sage Yim (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020): 179-200; Rin Ushiyama, "'Comfort Women must fall?' Japanese governmental responses to 'Comfort Women' statues around the world," *Memory Studies* 14, no. 6 (2021): 1255-1271; Tomomi Kinukawa, "'De-national' Coalition Against Japan's Gendered Necropolitics: The

- “Comfort Women” Justice Movement in San Francisco and Geography of Resistance,” *Feminist Formations* 33, Issue 3, (Winter 2021): 140-174.
14. Agnes Constante, “Supreme Court Declines Case over Lawsuit to Remove 'Comfort Women' Memorial,” *NBC News*, 31 Mar. 2017, www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/supreme-court-declines-case-over-lawsuit-remove-comfort-women-memorial-n740996
 15. Casey Quackenbush, “Osaka Ends San Francisco Ties over 'Comfort Women' Statue,” *Time*, 5 Oct. 2018, <http://time.com/5416425/japan-osaka-san-francisco-comfort-women-stature>
 16. Lin Li, “Comfort Women” Memorials at the Crossroads of Ultrnationalist, Feminist, and Decolonial Critiques: Triangulating Japan, South Korea, and the United States.” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 43, no. 3 (2022): 89-116, <https://doi.org/10.1353/fro.2022.0025>.
 17. Mary M McCarthy and Linda C. Hasunuma, “Coalition Building and Mobilization: Case Studies of the Comfort Women Memorials in the United States,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 6, no. 3 (2018): 411-434.
 18. “SF Memorial,” “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition,” 9 Aug. 2021, <https://remembercomfortwomen.org/sf-memorial/>.
 19. Anne L. Schneider and Helen M. Ingram, eds., *Deserving and entitled: Social constructions and public policy*, (SUNY Press, 2005). Grace J. Yoo, “Immigrants and welfare: Policy constructions of deservingness,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 6, no. 4 (2008): 490-507. Jonathan J. Pierce, Saba Siddiki, Michael D. Jones, Kristin Schumacher, Andrew Pattison, and Holly Peterson, “Social construction and policy design: A review of past applications,” *Policy Studies Journal* 42, no. 1 (2014): 1-29.
 20. Ibid
 21. Hyeong-Jun Pak, “News reporting on comfort women: Framing, frame difference, and frame changing in four South Korean and Japanese newspapers, 1998-2013.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 93, no. 4 (2016): 1006-1025; Majia Nadesan and Linda Kim. “The Geopolitics of Public Memory: The Challenge and Promise of Transnational Comfort Women Activism,” *Women's Studies in Communication* 45, no. 2 (2022): 123-142.
 22. Mirkinson, “Building the San Francisco Memorial: Why Is the Issue of the ‘ Comfort Women ’ Still Relevant Today?,” 149-178; Li, “Comfort Women” Memorials at the Crossroads of Ultrnationalist, Feminist, and Decolonial Critiques: Triangulating Japan, South Korea, and the United States,” 89-116, Kim, “Looking Back at 10 Years of the “Comfort Women” Movement in the US,”: 179-200; Ushiyama, ““Comfort Women must fall”? Japanese governmental responses to ‘Comfort Women,” 1255-1271; Kinukawa, ““De-national” Coalition Against Japan’s Gendered Necropolitics: The “Comfort Women” Justice Movement in San Francisco and Geography of Resistance,” 140-174.
 23. Anne L. Schneider and Helen M. Ingram, eds., *Deserving and entitled: Social constructions and public policy*, (SUNY Press, 2005). Grace J. Yoo, “Immigrants and welfare: Policy constructions of deservingness,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 6, no. 4 (2008): 490-507; Jonathan J. Pierce, Saba Siddiki, Michael D. Jones, Kristin Schumacher, Andrew Pattison, and Holly Peterson, “Social construction and policy design: A review of past applications,” *Policy Studies Journal* 42, no. 1 (2014): 1-29.
 24. City & County of San Francisco Board of Supervisor Hearing, Public Safety & Neighborhood Services Committee,, Urging the Establishment of a Memorial for “Comfort Women” (Sep 17, 2015) accessed March 1, 2019 https://sanfrancisco.granicus.com/player/clip/23681?view_id=178&redirect=true&h=36cd6aee662605340073e5fcf3fb7c1c
 25. Klaus Krippendorff, *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. (Sage publications, 2018); Robert Philip Weber,. *Basic content analysis*, (Sage, 1990).
 26. Sang Hun Choe, Overlooked No More: Kim Hak-soon, Who Broke the Silence for ‘Comfort Women,’ *New York Times*, October 21, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/21/obituaries/kim-hak-soon-overlooked.html>
 27. Tae Ik Kim, Former 'comfort women' Hold 1000th Protest at Japanese Embassy,” *The Chosun Ilbo* (English Edition), December 14, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/12/14/2011121401645.html
 28. “Lawsuits in Japanese Courts,” Asian Women’s Fund, Accessed January 1, 2023, <https://www.awf.or.jp/e4/lawsuit.html>
 29. Karen Umemoto, ““On strike!” San Francisco state college strike, 1968-69: The role of Asian American students.” *Amerasia Journal* 15, no. 1 (1989): 3-41.
 30. Grace J Yoo, Mitch Wu, Emily Zimmerman and Leigh Saito, “Twenty-Five Years Later: Lessons Learned from the Free Chol Soo Lee Movement,” *Asian American Policy Review* 19 (2009/2010): 73-84. Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American panethnicity: Bridging institutions and identities*, (Temple University Press, 1992), Frank H. Wu, “Embracing mistaken identity: how the Vincent Chin case unified Asian Americans,” *Asian American Policy Review* 19 (2009): 17.
 31. Mirkinson, “Building the San Francisco Memorial: Why Is the Issue of the ‘ Comfort Women ’ Still Relevant Today?,” 149-178; Li, “Comfort Women” Memorials at the Crossroads of Ultrnationalist, Feminist, and Decolonial Critiques: Triangulating Japan, South Korea, and the United States,” 89-116, Kim, “Looking Back at 10 Years of the “Comfort Women” Movement in the US,”: 179-200; Ushiyama, ““Comfort Women must fall”? Japanese governmental responses to ‘Comfort Women,” 1255-1271; Kinukawa, ““De-national” Coalition Against Japan’s Gendered Necropolitics: The “Comfort Women” Justice Movement in San Francisco and Geography of Resistance,” 140-174.
 32. “ Comfort Women” Justice Coalition,” accessed January 2, 2023, <https://remembercomfortwomen.org/directions/>
 33. Grace J. Yoo & Barbara W. Kim, *Caring across generations: the linked lives of Korean American families*, (NYU Press, 2014); Valarie Kaur, *See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love*, (New York: One World publishing, 2020); Mitchell Takeshi Maki, Harry HL Kitano, S. Megan Berthold, and Sarah Megan Berthold, *Achieving the impossible dream: How Japanese Americans obtained redress*, (University of Illinois Press, 1999).
 34. Bay City News “12-Year-Old East Bay Girl Organizes Rally to Stop Anti-Asian Hate.” *NBC Bay Area*, NBC Bay Area, 28 Mar. 2021, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/east-bay/12-year-old-east-bay-girl-organizes-rally-to-stop-anti-asian-hate/2504578/>.
 35. Sumie Okazaki, “Influences of Culture on Asian Americans’ Sexuality,” *Journal of Sex Research* 39, no. 1 (February 2002): 34-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490209552117>
 36. Mark R. Amstutz, *The Healing of Nations: The Promise and Limits of Political Forgiveness*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Elizabeth Rosner, *Survivor Café: The Legacy of Trauma and the Labyrinth of Memory*. (Counterpoint, September 2017)

Ten Years After Oak Creek: Federal Policy Recommendations to Protect Communities Targeted by Hate

By Nimarta Narang

One decade on, it is essential to revisit the 2012 attack on the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin—and to reflect on what more we must do to better protect our communities from similar horrific violence.

2022 was a year marked with significant anniversaries of hate against the AAPI community both historic and recent, from the 40th anniversary of the hate-driven murder of Chinese American immigrant Vincent Chin to the one-year anniversary¹ of recent mass shootings in Atlanta and Indianapolis.² These commemorations, moreover, came amidst a series of hate crimes targeting Sikh men in Richmond Hill, Queens,³ and a years-long spike in violence against Asian Americans⁴ — particularly Asian American women⁵ — ignited by the COVID-19 pandemic. One anniversary in 2022, however, is both important on its own right as a marker in the history of targeted violence and useful for contextualizing recent trends of hate in the United States: the 10-year remembrance of the shooting at a gurdwara, a Sikh house of worship, in Oak Creek, Wisconsin.⁶

On August 5, 2012, a white supremacist gunman stormed the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek. He opened fire on worshippers who were preparing for Sunday morning services; six people lost their lives that day, and a seventh was severely paralyzed before succumbing to his injuries in 2020. Others, including a responding police officer who was shot 15 times, survived the attack with severe medical complications. The

entire Sikh community — both in Oak Creek and across the nation — was left in mourning and disbelief that a sacred space could be targeted with such horrific violence.

In some respects, Oak Creek was the culmination of a decade of anti-Sikh sentiment that had surged after 9/11. Ever since the beards and turbans of Sikh men were falsely conflated with terrorism in the American public conscience, the community had to persevere in the face of individual acts of hate and systemic discrimination. The most high profile example of the former was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a turbaned Sikh man living in Mesa, AZ, who was shot and killed in the first deadly post-9/11 hate crime on September 15, 2011.⁷ The attack in Oak Creek could also be viewed as an early indicator of the targeted violence against religious minorities, communities of color, and women that would grow over the next decade. This trend, driven by white supremacy, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, misogyny, and other noxious and overlapping ideologies, can be seen in subsequent acts of terror including those in Charleston,⁸ Pittsburgh,⁹ Poway,¹⁰ El Paso,¹¹ Atlanta,¹² Buffalo,¹³ and others.

Despite both of these trends, ten years after the attack on Oak Creek, the Sikh community has not wavered from the spirit of *chardi kala*, the idea of relentless optimism in the face of struggle. This resilience has been particularly exemplified by the Oak Creek *sangat*, or congregation. On September 20, 2011, Harpreet Singh Saini, an 18-year-old Sikh man, testified before a Senate subcommittee to pay an emotional tribute to his mother, who had been murdered less than a month before.¹⁴ His testimony changed history: in 2013, U.S. Attorney General Eric H. Holder announced that the FBI would begin tracking hate crimes specifically against Sikhs.¹⁵ Pardeep Singh Kaleka, whose father was murdered in the attack, sought to understand the ideology that had driven this act of hate: he reached out to Arno Michaelis, a former white supremacist, and the two men went on to partner in a decade's worth of work to promote deradicalization and interfaith understanding.¹⁶ In August of 2022, the local *sangat* continued to step up, leading efforts to commemorate this solemn anniversary with a series of events involving different communities, elected officials, and national advocacy organizations.

It is undeniable that the Sikh community has done tremendous work commemorating and honoring the lives lost and impacted in the 2012 attack in Oak Creek. While their courage, resilience, and love displayed through 10 years of activism and compassion are powerful, the fact remains that communities across the United States continue to suffer under the pattern of targeted violence that has continued to ramp up in the last decade. Despite recent steps forward — including the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, the most significant federal hate crimes legislation passed in more than 12 years — the action taken by federal lawmakers has been disproportionately small in comparison to the urgent threat presented by violent hate. Accordingly, there are steps that Congress must take now to move all of us, in the AAPI community and beyond, towards a safer future.

First, in a direct answer to acts of violence against not just the Oak Creek *gurdwara*, but also synagogues, churches, mosques, and temples across the nation, Congress should do more to help marginalized communities secure our institutions. Passing the Nonprofit Security Grant Program (NSGP) Improvement Act¹⁷ will increase the grant funding from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and state administrative agencies to help houses of worship and other community gathering points with “target hardening and other physical security enhancements.”

Second, it is important to effectively respond to acts of hate that affect individuals. Current U.S. law prohibits the Department of Justice (DOJ) from prosecuting hate crimes where bias is not the sole reason for a perpetrator's actions — a difficult legal standard to meet. The Justice for Victims of Hate Crimes Act, however, would close this loophole and allow the DOJ to take a more active role in prosecuting hate crime cases.¹⁸ This is an essential reform to prevent cases from being neglected or lost by state and local authorities; we need look no further than the murder of Ahmad Aubery for a reminder of the extraordinary effort it takes to achieve any kind of justice or accountability in hate crime cases.

And third, the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act must be re-introduced and passed.¹⁹ This comprehensive legislation would direct the DOJ, FBI, and Department of Homeland Security to “monitor, analyze, investigate, and prosecute” domestic terrorism, with a particular eye towards what the government already acknowledges²⁰ as the top security threat: racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists. The legislation would also establish and fund related trainings, task forces, and investigations — and critically, would structure these components through a racial equity lens to ensure that its policies do not inadvertently target Black and brown communities like so many post-9/11 counterterrorism laws did.

On the eve of the ten year Oak Creek anniversary, more than 90 gurdwaras across the country signed a letter²¹ to President Biden urging him to use his executive authority to strengthen the security of marginalized communities' houses of worship. The following day, the Biden-Harris Administration released a fact sheet²² offering a series of strong first steps, including expanding funding for securing places of worship and other nonprofit entities, creating a one-stop online clearing house of federal resources designed to counter terrorism and targeted violence, and making grant programs more accessible, amongst other initiatives. In 2023, as we swear in new members of Congress, we have a significant opportunity to build on commitments to keep all of our communities safe.

2022 showed us that commemorating hate violence anniversaries takes a toll on our communities. For too long, the onus has been on those impacted to not just provide support and remembrance, but to also push for change. Targeted communities have done their part, and will continue to do so — but the responsibility to act should also be shouldered by our elected officials. They, after all, are the ones who are charged with protecting our collective rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. These simple asks outlined above should be viewed as neither radical nor polarizing, but as common sense reforms in the interest of all. At the end of the day, we must come to view these attacks as preventable rather than inevitable. Only that change of mindset will determine if the safety of religious minorities, communities of color, and women will be prioritized, and whether our communities will be spared from having to bear further painful commemorations.

About the Author



Nimarta Narang

Nimarta Narang is a writer and journalist from Bangkok, Thailand. Currently based in New York, she is a graduate of Tufts University, the University of Oxford, and New York University. She has lived in Bangkok, London, Oxford, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and New York.

Endnotes

1. Celeste Pewter, “How the Murder of Vincent Chin Changed My Family’s Life,” *Teen Vogue*, May 3, 2021, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/vincent-chin-death-asian-american-history>.
2. Norman Chen, “Hate Crimes Should Not Be Judged by Intent Alone, but by How They Affect All of Us,” *Religion News Service* (blog), April 18, 2022, <https://religionnews.com/2022/04/18/hate-crimes-should-not-be-judged-by-intent-alone-but-by-how-they-affect-all-of-us/>.
3. Liam Stack and Samira Asma-Sadeque. “Within 10 Days, Three Sikhs Were Attacked on the Same N.Y.C. Block,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 2022, sec. New York, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/15/nyregion/sikh-attacks-nyc.html>.
4. Julie Ae Kim, “3 Asian American Community Activists Share What Safety Looks Like to Them,” *Teen Vogue*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/anti-asian-violence-safety-community>.
5. The AP, “More Than 9,000 Anti-Asian Incidents Have Been Reported Since The Pandemic Began.” *NPR*, August 12, 2021, sec. National, <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/12/1027236499/anti-asian-hate-crimes-assaults-pandemic-incidents-aapi>.
6. Harmeet Kaur, “The Oak Creek Massacre Signaled the Rise of White Supremacist Violence. But the Warnings Went Unheeded.” *CNN*, August 5, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/05/us/oak-creek-shooting-anniversary-white-supremacy-rise-cec/index.html>.
7. Harmeet Kaur, “A Sikh Man’s Murder at a Gas Station Revealed Another Tragedy of 9/11.” *CNN*, September 11, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/09/us/balbir-singh-sodhi-9-11-cec/>.
8. Patrick Phillips, “Friday Marks 7 Years since Charleston Church Shooting.” <https://www.live5news.com>, June 17, 2022, <https://www.live5news.com/2022/06/17/friday-marks-7-years-since-charleston-church-shooting/>.
9. Campbell Robertson, Christopher Mele, and Sabrina Tavernise. “11 Killed in Synagogue Massacre; Suspect Charged With 29 Counts.” *The New York Times*, October 27, 2018, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/27/us/active-shooter-pittsburgh-synagogue-shooting.html>.

10. Shannon Van Sant and James Doubek. “California Synagogue Shooting Investigated As A Hate Crime After 1 Killed, 3 Injured,” *NPR*, April 27, 2019, sec. National, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/27/717849871/injuries-reported-in-shooting-at-california-synagogue>.
11. “Texas Walmart Shooting: El Paso Gun Attack Leaves 20 Dead,” *BBC News*, August 3, 2019, sec. US & Canada, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-49221936>.
12. Richard Fausset, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, and Marie Fazio, “8 Dead in Atlanta Spa Shootings, With Fears of Anti-Asian Bias,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 2021, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/03/17/us/shooting-atlanta-acworth>.
13. “Complete Coverage: 10 Killed, 3 Wounded in Mass Shooting at Buffalo Supermarket,” *Buffalo News*, February 15, 2023, https://buffalonews.com/news/local/complete-coverage-10-killed-3-wounded-in-mass-shooting-at-buffalo-supermarket/collection_e8c7df32-d402-11ec-9ebc-e39ca6890844.html.
14. Oak Creek Temple Member Testifies in D.C., 2012, <https://www.wisn.com/article/oak-creek-temple-member-testifies-in-dc/5730272>.
15. Eric Holder, “Healing Communities and Remembering the Victims of Oak Creek,” *The U.S. Department of Justice Archives*, August 2, 2013, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/blog/healing-communities-and-remembering-victims-oak-creek>.
16. Harmeet Kaur, “His Father Was Killed in a Massacre at a Sikh Temple. To Understand Why, He Reached out to a Former White Supremacist — and Formed a Surprising Friendship,” *CNN*, October 30, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/10/30/us/violent-extremism-kaleka-michaelis-undivided-cec/index.html>.
17. Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, [D-MS-2. Nonprofit Security Grant Program Improvement Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. H.R.6825 (2022), <http://www.congress.gov/>.
18. Sen. Amy Klobuchar [D-MN. Justice for Victims of Hate Crimes Act, Pub. L. No. S. 3228 (2020), <http://www.congress.gov/>.
19. Rep. Bradley Scott Schneider, [D-IL-10. Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act of 2022, Pub. L. No. H.R.350 (2022), <http://www.congress.gov/>.
20. Merrick Garland, “Attorney General Merrick B. Garland Remarks: Domestic Terrorism Policy Address,” U.S. Department of Justice, June 15, 2021, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-merrick-b-garland-remarks-domestic-terrorism-policy-address>.
21. “2022 Oak Creek Gurdwara Letter,” *Sikh Coalition*, August 4, 2022, <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/2022-Oak-Creek-gurdwara-letter-website-final.pdf>.
22. “FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Takes Action to Protect Places of Worship,” *The White House*, August 5, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/05/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-takes-action-to-protect-places-of-worship/>.

How will they hold us?

By Tony DelaRosa



On May 31, 2021, HB 376 also known as the TEAACH Act passed in IL mandating Asian American History to be taught across the state. This spurred other states to follow suit.

How will they hold us?

By Tony DelaRosa

What separates a mandate from a movement
are the shepherds who inherit the stories.

What will shepherds do with us:

“fastest growing racial group”

48 countries deep

2300 languages

and an ocean of dialects

Who will carry our stories?

Will they cradle us precious?

Like Yuri did Malcolm at his darkest of hours?

Like the Black Panthers did Yellow and Brown Power?

Like the Black Feminist Movement during the Philippine American War?

Or like Blasian March building Black, Blasian, and Asian radical rapport?

How loud will they teach this invisible race
beyond the silence outside of October and May?

What if they drop one of us?

Will they pick us up like a fallen soldier

or will they stumble over a minefield

and fumble us forgotten?

Who entrusted them

with our spices, jackfruit, and diamonds?

Will they style us windows and pick up a mirror?

Will they dance a revolution or wallflower reform?

Will they wade in the binary or swim ultraviolet upstream?

Will they study our mountains and our movements?

Do they know us beyond a hashtag?

Beyond San Francisco and Times Square?

Beyond the Black & white binary that flattens and binds us?

Can they name our mothers before our fathers?

Will they badge themselves “allies,” “co-conspirators,” “kinfolk,”

after they *discover* our names in a book club

that doesn’t smell of our vinegar, blood, salt, and dust?

Will they play our battle drums?

Will they steal or plant our Chrysanthemums?

About the Author



Tony DelaRosa

Tony DelaRosa (he/siya) is a Filipino American anti-bias and anti-racist educator, racial equity strategist, spoken word poet, and motivational speaker. He holds a Master's in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and is currently a PhD student at the University of Wisconsin Madison focused on Education Leadership & Policy Analysis. He is a forthcoming author of the book, *Teaching the Invisible Race: How to Embody a Pro-Asian American Lens in Schools* from Jossey-Bass Publishing. He is the 2023 recipient of The Asian American Foundation (TAAF)'s Community Trailblazer Award, and will be featured on the Hulu series "TAAF AAPI Heritage Heroes." Follow him on Twitter and Instagram @TonyRosaSpeaks.

Filibuster Reform Is Critical for The Future of AAPIs in the United States

By Varun Nikore

The fate of American democracy is intricately tied to whether Congress ever passes federal legislation to protect the voting rights that have been systematically targeted by Republican legislators across the country — from Texas¹ to Georgia² to Arizona.³ The stakes are high for our democracy, but they are even more pressing for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community — and for that matter, all communities of color. If Congress is unable to pass sweeping voting rights protections before the next election, voters of color will be further silenced. And the great gains in voter turnout in 2022 and 2020 will be mere flukes, rather than a harbinger of greater democratic participation to come.

Thanks to the hard work of organizers, community leaders, and civic engagement organizations, as well as expanded choices to safely cast ballots during the COVID-19 pandemic, AAPI voters turned out in record numbers in the 2020 election. To date, data coming in for the 2022 election seems to reflect the same strong upward trend of increasing AAPI voter participation. Compared to 2016, the increase in AAPI voter turnout in 2020 rose more than any other demographic.⁴ Amazingly, nearly a quarter of the AAPI voters who went to the polls in 2020 were first-time voters!⁵

The strong turnout of AAPI voters in the South and Sunbelt states in 2020 is not surprising when considering AAPIs are the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the United States. The AAPI community is projected to be the largest minority group in the U.S. by 2055.⁶ These population trends mean more AAPI houses of worship, civic organizations, and community groups can be activated to turn out our vote.

High AAPI voter turnout made the difference in key swing states during the 2020 Presidential elections. In Georgia, the AAPI community increased their total votes cast by a record 84 percent in 2020 compared to 2016.⁷ Georgia's AAPI voters flipped the 7th Congressional District blue, elected the state's first Black and Jewish Senators, and delivered Democratic control of the United States Senate. Nationally, voters of color helped secure Democratic control of the White House by creating a path to victory for Joe Biden in battleground states.

Unfortunately, in retaliation to the growing power of voters of color, Republican legislatures and governors subsequently fast-tracked a flurry of bills to significantly hamper voting rights, one of which made it more difficult to receive an absentee ballot and another banned volunteers from providing food and water to voters waiting in long

lines. One particularly egregious bill in Georgia even proposed banning Sunday voting in an attempt to curb the voting power of primarily Black voters who engage in “Souls to the Polls” voting drives.⁸ It was thankfully struck out of the final bill, in response to activists who made their voices heard. This wasn't just an attack on voting — it was an attempt to destroy and suppress power in our communities of color.

Since *Shelby v. Holder* gutted the Voting Rights Act in 2013, new attacks on voting rights across the country that target voters of color “with surgical precision” are part of the onslaught against American democracy.⁹ Following the 2020 elections, we have seen an unfettered proliferation of bills aimed at suppressing voting rights — chipping away at our fragile democracy. In 2021, legislatures enacted nearly fifty bills in at least twenty-one states to suppress voting.¹⁰ On top of this, Republicans are taking advantage of every opportunity to gerrymander their electorate to ensure that they choose their voters — rather than the other way around.

Further, a 2020 election organizer from the Sunbelt region highlighted the challenges in identifying AAPI voters by sub-ethnicity, since voter rolls only distinguished whether a voter is white or Black. This could largely be attributed to administrative remnants established during the Jim Crow period, aimed at restricting and monitoring Black voters. Since then, Secretaries of State have updated voter forms to be more inclusive and reflective of our nation's ethnic and racial diversity.

But the legacies of Jim Crow remain a barrier to protecting voting rights for minority voters. The next biggest barrier: the Senate filibuster. Without eliminating the filibuster, Democrats and other allies of voting rights will not be able to pass the voting rights reform legislation we need to protect access to the ballot box for AAPI communities.

We can save democracy by pursuing filibuster reform. In both 2020 and 2022, Americans overwhelmingly favored Democratic candidates. However, this preference is not reflected in the Senate. By 2040, an analysis of Census data projects that two-thirds of the U.S. population will reside in the fifteen largest states.¹¹ This means that less than a third of the Senate (thirty senators — twenty-two Democrats and eight Republicans) will represent two thirds of the country. In contrast, the other third of the country will be represented by seventy senators. Even if a simple majority was sufficient to pass legislation, Democrats would still require sixty votes to achieve cloture — a sometimes politically insurmountable feat. With fifty-one votes in hand, Democrats should consider reevaluating the Senate filibuster to protect voting rights — even if it necessitates brokering a deal with House Republicans.

The responsibility to save democracy rests with the millions of American voters who elect their representatives. The Voting Rights Act, for decades, was repeatedly passed with unanimous support from these elected leaders. However, Republicans have recently started saying the quiet part out loud — expressing their open disregard for democracy. If we hold onto the archaic procedural anomaly that is the filibuster, we'll be saying loud and clear that we agree with them.

While AAPI voters have shown that we are a force to be reckoned with when we organize, our survival as a people in the United States counts on us being able to vote — free and unencumbered from restrictions that Republicans have laid across our path in places like Georgia, Texas, and Arizona. I hope our leaders in the Senate see this and take swift action.

About the Authors



Varun Nikore

Varun Nikore has served as founding Executive Director of the AAPI Victory Alliance, a national AAPI 501c4 organization, since its inception in 2017. Nikore also served as founding President of the AAPI Victory Fund from 2015 to 2021, a national SuperPAC focused on mobilizing AAPI voters. In his current role, he is responsible for managing political and legislative strategy, strategic planning, as well as leading the organization's newly launched think tank. Nikore holds a Bachelor's degree from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University in Aviation Business Administration and a Master's Degree from George Mason University in International Commerce and Policy.

Endnotes

1. Nick Corasaniti, "Abbott Signs Texas Election Law, Ending a Fierce Voting Rights Battle," *The New York Times*, September 7, 2021.
2. Nick Corasaniti and Reid J. Epstein, "What Georgia's Voting Law Really Does," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/02/us/politics/georgia-voting-law-annotated.html>.
3. Jennifer Medina, "Arizona G.O.P. Passes Law to Limit Distribution of Mail Ballots," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/11/us/politics/arizona-voting-bill.html>.
4. Karthick Ramakrishnan, "In 2020, AAPIs Saw the Highest Increases in Voter Turnout," *Data Bits* (blog), May 18, 2021, <https://aapidata.com/blog/2020-record-turnout/>.
5. Tom Bonier, "The Unprecedented Impact of the AAPI Vote on the 2020 Election," *TargetSmart Newsletters*, May 7, 2021, <https://insights.targetsmart.com/the-unprecedented-impact-of-the-aapi-vote-on-the-2020-election.html>.
6. Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, "Key facts about Asian Americans, a diverse and growing population," *Pew Research Center*, 2021, <https://pewrsr.ch/3e3t4nF>.
7. Kimmy Yam, "Georgia's Asian American Voter Rates Hit Record High. How Voting Bill Threatens Progress," *NBC News*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/asian-american-voter-rates-georgia-hit-record-high-how-voting-n1262682>.
8. Mark Niese, "Sunday Voting Restored in Georgia Bill That Tightens Election Rules," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, n.d., sec. Politics, <https://www.ajc.com/politics/sunday-voting-restored-in-georgia-bill-that-tightens-election-rules/DMWUG2DVMBHZ7IDP4KZSRYZ7LY/>.
9. N.C. State Conference of the NAACP v. *McCrory*, 831 F.3d 204 (4th Cir. 2016).
10. "The State Voting Rights Tracker," *Voting Rights Lab*, 2022, <https://tracker.votingrightslab.org/>.
11. Gerald F. Seib, "The Varied — and Global — Threats Confronting Democracy," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-variedand-globalthreats-confronting-democracy-1511193763>; Shonel Sen, "National Population Projections: 2020, 2030, 2040," *Stat Chat* (University of Virginia, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service), February 11, 2019, <http://statchatva.org/2019/02/11/national-population-projections-2020-2030-2040/>.