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Finding a Path Forward

ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS THEME STUDY

Edited by Franklin Odo

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Essay 13

Asian Americans and Cultural Retention/Assimilation

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In her groundbreaking documentary *My America or Honk if You Love Buddha* (1997), Renee Tajima-Pena highlights the nuanced diversity of Asian Americans in the U.S. with humor, candor, and political insight. As Tajima-Pena travels across the U.S., we visualize Asian Americans' roles in the socio-cultural impact on space and place. The documentary frames the reality of Asian American communities having to battle to retain their culture while at the same time trying to assimilate in a country that does not accept or embrace them as Americans. This documentary spans the continent in search of "My America" and captures the nuanced experiences of Asian Americans, from New York to the internment camps of Manzanar. The dance of assimilation and cultural retention has spanned over two centuries. In many ways the socio-political-economic landscape has shaped the way in which Asian Americans (AA) have been introduced to America and also has played a

The May Day Queen and King are crowned at the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho. Photo by Joe Tanaka, c. 1944; courtesy of the Densho Digital Repository, Bain Family Collection.

critical role in the way Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have responded to the demands to conform. The first Asians to set foot on U.S. soil came to visit and learn from the U.S. educational system, yet the pioneers were sojourning laborers whose presence grew as the economic need for their labor increased. Economic necessity pulled the migrant workers, but their existence in everyday life threatened the European migrants' claim to land and power. There are key social-political factors that impacted cultural spaces for AAPIs. This essay contextualizes assimilation and resistance through a historical-social lens. Utilizing the primary research from *Asian American Society* (Danico, 2015), I examine the ways in which the labor market sparked the influx of Asian Americans; when access to rights became unattainable, AAPIs had to negotiate assimilating in a place that did not want them as permanent settlers even as they fought to secure a place in the society and to help shape the U.S. landscape. While the economic influence has always been significant, what has become more noticeable in the contemporary world are the cultural landscapes and the roles that AAPIs have played in shaping America through the arts, media, and social activism.

Woman en route to the shower at the Minidoka Relocation Center in Idaho. Photo courtesy of the Densho Digital Repository, Bain Family Collection.

ECONOMY AND LABOR AS A SITE OF RACIAL OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

It is argued that racial categories in the U.S. were constructed largely to prevent a class revolution among working poor whites and workers of color. This began with the construction of "Whiteness" to prevent class-consciousness and revolt against Euro-American elites. As a result of the solidification of racial hierarchies, the clash among the working poor became about race and not about the exploitation of workers by the elites. To ensure that Asian Americans did not receive access to land or mobility, major legislation between the 1840s and the 1930s provided the legal structure to ensure racial inferiority and alien, non-citizen status. The most blatant exclusionary laws to affect Asian Americans were passed in the first phase of migration from the 1870s to the 1930s. Some relaxation of legal restrictions against Chinese, Filipinos, and Asian Indians marked the second phase of Asian migration from 1941 to 1965. Several laws instituted in the first era of immigration were repealed in this phase. However, one of the most damning actions, Executive Order 9066, signed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, led to the incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans who were deliberately miscast as threats to American security. Then, later, with the 1965 Immigration Act and its amendments, there was a significant increase in Asian American populations in the United States.

Asian Americans have been part of the U.S. workforce since the mid-19th century. Chinese workers were drawn to California during the Gold Rush and later helped build the First Transcontinental Railroad linking the western and eastern United States. They worked on the plantations of Hawai`i before it became a territory and later the 50th state. Chinese and other Asian workers were instrumental in the development of California's agricultural industry, helped to establish the fishing and cannery industries along the Pacific Coast, and served as a crucial source of labor in numerous urban industries for generations. They successfully navigated the new frontier and, in the process, became a threat to white hegemony. In order to prevent economic and social parity, Asian workers were suppressed through the creation of conflict between Asian immigrants and other workers of color. Still, Asian Americans did not isolate themselves but instead established coalitions to protest injustice. In spite of racially discriminatory laws and policies, Asian American workers have a history of resistance and organizing. Chinese railroad workers in the 1860s were involved in strikes to protest low wages and unfair treatment. Asian plantation workers in Hawai‘i were engaged in numerous organizing efforts against the plantation owners in the 19th and 20th centuries.

As early as 1903, a multiracial alliance of Japanese and Mexican Americans organized a union of farm workers in Oxnard, California. In the 1930s, Filipino farm workers continued this tradition and organized throughout California's Central Valley. In Hawai‘i, the 1946 Great Sugar Strike was a pivotal multiracial protest which led to a 79-day strike of nearly 25,000 workers, impacting over 100,000 people (20 percent of the population). It was to become the showdown between the newly organized International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and the neo-colonial power structure of the "Big Five" corporations.[1] The 1946 sugar strike was the first successful strike against the sugar planters because it was the first to explicitly include all ethnic groups of workers to defeat the "divide and rule" strategy of the plantation owners. The ILWU motto, "An Injury to One is an Injury to All," was articulated for Hawai‘i by longshore organizer Harry Kamoku as, "We're all brothers under the skin." The cross-racial coalition highlights the class struggle of the workers, which trumped the interracial tensions that existed on the plantations.[2]

In 1965, Larry Itliong and the Filipino Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee approached Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta to launch the historic Delano Grape Strike, which lasted five years. The emergence of the United Farm Workers of America was the result of a merger between Filipino and Mexican American farm labor organizations that met in Delano, a site now called Agbayani Village. Yet, the role of Filipinos in galvanizing a collective was not well documented until recently. Agbayani Village became a retirement home for retired Filipino farm workers that actively promoted the UFW.[3]

In 1982, Chinese garment workers launched a strike that mobilized tens of thousands of immigrant women in the streets of New York's Chinatown, one of the largest Asian American demonstrations in U.S. history. Other organizing campaigns in recent decades involving low wage Asian American immigrant workers have taken place in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Honolulu. The lifting of racially restrictive immigration policies led to the exponential growth of the Asian American population and workforce since the 1960s.

Asian American activism in a broader sense dates back to the 19th century when Asian immigrants in large numbers began arriving in the United States. Chinese workers were striking for higher wages and better working conditions as early as the 1860s; over the next several decades, similar incidents involving Japanese Americans and other Asian groups developed. Additionally, Asian radicals occasionally protested discriminatory practices and promoted distinctive cultural identities. However, it was the influence of the civil rights movement and the anti-war protests of the 1960s and 1970s that led to Asian American activism marked by efforts of pan-ethnic groups with a common political identity and shared histories of immigration and discrimination. With an influx of immigrants from South Asia and Southeast Asia in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the definition of the term *Asian American* and the range of Asian American activism continued to expand.

Asian American activism began in response to discrimination. One of the earliest examples was the strike waged by 2,000 Chinese railroad workers in 1867. Wong Chin Foo (1847–98), sometimes called the first Chinese American, was the best known of the early activists. Through public lectures and newspaper articles, Wong defended Chinese immigrants from pervasive racial stereotypes and advised his compatriots to acculturate by learning English, adopting Western dress, and shaving off their queues. Seven decades before Martin Luther King, Jr., Wong articulated the same principle: character rather than skin color should be the measure Americans apply when judging others. He founded the first Chinese newspaper east of the Rockies in 1883, naming it the *Chinese American*, the first recorded use of the term, and founded the first association of Chinese voters in 1884. Wong founded the Chinese Equal Rights League in 1892 to demand the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Although the most famous, Wong was not the only early Asian American activist. In 1893, Fong Yue Ting, a New York City laundryman, and two others protested a registration law that required Chinese to carry internal passports, identification much like those that South African blacks were required to have during apartheid. Fong and his friends were arrested and eventually deported for their efforts, although not until after his case was heard by the Supreme Court. The 1930s was a particularly active period as Chinese laundrymen formed the Chinese Hand Laundry Association. The group took on both the government of New York City and the merchants of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association to protest a discriminatory laundry tax that required a $1,000 bond from hand laundries, which typically made about half that amount in annual profits. In Washington State, Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino activists joined efforts to campaign successfully against bills that would have made interracial marriage illegal.

While the roles of Chinese immigrants are better understood, at least in a state like California, the experiences of Filipino laborers, who were the first migrant workers in the US, are rarely accessible. These workers, also known as Manila men, traveled from Mexico to Louisiana, where they established fishing villages, at least as early as the mid-19th century, in the bayous outside of New Orleans.[4] In March 1883, journalist and travel writer Lafcadio Hearn published "St. Malo: A Lacustrine Village" in *Harper's Weekly*. This essay chronicles Hearn's and J. O. Donaldson's sailing excursion from New Orleans to Bayou St. Malo, located at the southern edge of Lake Borgne. (Donaldson was the artist who drew the sketches that accompanied Hearn's essay.) St. Malo was the site of a Malay and Tagala fishing settlement (*Malay* and *Tagala* are the terms used by Hearn). Hearn's travelogue and Donaldson's sketches are critical texts that partially reveal the everyday life of Manila men in 1880s Louisiana. The Filipino settlers caught and dried shrimp for export to Asia, Canada, and South America via New Orleans. They pioneered the dried shrimp industry and were credited with developing the first major harvesting and processing business, predecessors of the modern shrimping industry. Today, the Filipino fishing industry itself has all but vanished. Like many 19th century white American writers, Hearn used American orientalist imageries and tropes to emphasize the supposed exoticism, primitivism, and uncivilized nature of the Tagala or Malay fishermen while simultaneously upholding white supremacist notions of American civility, gentility, and cultural and racial superiority. St. Malo was destroyed by a hurricane in 1915. Manila Village, a settlement of Filipino sailors, fishermen, and laborers on an island of Barataria Bay in Jefferson Parish, was destroyed by Hurricane Betsy in 1965. As of 2016, only a small remnant of Manila Village, about one acre in size, remained. In 2012, a historical marker, in honor of the early settlers, was erected in front of the Village Hall of Jean Lafitte. It is the first officially sanctioned Filipino memorial in the nation. The Philippine-Louisiana Historical Society has served as the legal entity and was instrumental in establishing the marker.[5]

Despite the long and complicated history of subordination along racial and economic lines, Asian immigrants fought discriminatory attitudes and policies. Immigrants protested poor wages and working conditions in addition to challenging existing public policies aimed at keeping them beyond the continental United States or marked as inferior others within the American context. Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino workers often resorted to strikes to protest their exploitation as underpaid laborers for railroads, factories, or plantations.

In more recent history, sites of resistance developed in response to racially charged hate crimes against Asian Americans. On June 19, 1982, Chinese American Vincent Chin attended his bachelor party at a suburban strip club *Fancy Pants* where he had a confrontation with a white autoworker, Ronald Ebens. Ebens had been laid off from his job and blamed the Japanese auto industry and the Japanese themselves for his plight. He taunted Chin and a fight ensued. Chin and his friends left the bar. Some time later, Ebens and his stepson, Michael Nitz, found Chin in front of a fast food restaurant. Nitz held Chin while Ebens used a baseball bat to crush Chin's skull. Four days later, Vincent Chin died as a result of his injuries. Despite eyewitness accounts and the physical evidence, Ebens and Nitz received no jail time. What followed in Detroit was a mass galvanizing of Asian Americans who collectively protested the racial injustice of the judicial system and the social commentary of foreignizing Asian Americans. The journalist and community organizer, Helen Zia, referred to the killing of Vincent Chin as a watershed moment for all Asian Americans.

Ten years after the murder of Vincent Chin, the first multiracial riots ensued in Los Angeles following a not guilty verdict that freed Los Angeles police officers accused of beating Rodney King. The riots were in response to police brutality and the racial profiling of black Americans, but much of the anger and hatred was directed towards Korean Americans working in South Central Los Angeles. The eruptions were inflamed by the fueling of tension and conflicts between African Americans and Korean merchants. A series of highly publicized events from the 1990 boycott of a Family Red Apple store in Brooklyn, New York, and the R.& N. Fruit and Vegetable Market in Brownsville, New York, where Korean merchants were accused of being racist toward African American customers. In one notorious incident in 1991, Latasha Harlins, a 15 year old African American, was shot in the back of her head by a Korean merchant. The merchant did not receive any prison time. Before there was a Black Lives Matter movement, these events brought to life the realities of African Americans living in the U.S. Unfortunately, the incidents shared by the media began to form a narrative of systemic Korean/black conflict, which communities began to believe. Hence when the Rodney King verdict was handed down, the outrage was immediately directed toward the Korean merchants of South Central Los Angeles. The 1992 Riots were deemed the first multiracial riots in the United States because it involved all of the communities living there. Unlike the Watts Riots of the 1960s, these uprisings articulated the collective frustrations of communities living in the midst of racial tension and suspicions. For Korean Americans, the meaning of the violent upheaval was different. Second generation Korean Americans and those who had immigrated as young children responded as they watched Angela Oh, attorney for the merchants, articulate the challenges and frustrations of their communities. Unlike their immigrant parents, Oh spoke articulately in unaccented English. She spoke with conviction and determination to find justice for the merchants who were victimized by the riots. From the riots emerged a string of Korean American leaders who began to articulate their roles in the U.S. landscape. They did so primarily by contesting the notion of Koreans as perpetual foreigners and protesting the fact that they were not fully accepted as Americans. This time period also pushed Asian Americans to rethink the ideas of pan-ethnicity and the potential power to be generated in a collective identity.

WAR AS A SITE OF RESISTANCE AND ASSIMILATION

The discriminatory policies and institutionalized barriers for Asian Americans did not deter many from serving their new adopted home. As early as the Civil War, Asian Americans served in the military. War is a site of "nationalism," and resistance has been a reccurring pattern for Asian Americans. The paradox of war is most evident when looking at the role of Asian Americans during the Civil War. Charles Chon, a Chinese national, was a private in Company K, 24th Texas Dismounted Cavalry Regiment and C.S.A. He died on November 30, 1864, at the Battle of Franklin and is buried on the battlefield at the McGavock Confederate Cemetery. There were other Asian Confederates who remain on the margins of American history. Chinese American researcher Shaie Mei Deng Temple of New Orleans, Louisiana, found at least eighteen Asian Confederates in various Louisiana units; they had names like Chou, Coo, Ding, Fai, Foo, Gong, Hai, Ho, Joung, Lin, Lee, Lou, Pang, Poo, Ting, and Wong. These men remain lost to history. So, too, are the names of Chinese men who fought for the Union.

Asian Americans fought in the 1898 Spanish American War as well as in WWI. But their participation in WWII was particularly noteworthy. For Japanese Americans, the experiences were brutal and traumatic. After the Japanese navy bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawai'i, the president of the United States declared war on Japan and subsequently issued Executive Order 9066. President Roosevelt's Executive Order, signed on February 19, 1942, led to the forced removal of 120,000 Japanese Americans, most of whom were American-born citizens, from the Pacific Coast into what the government called "relocation centers." The internment experiences in American concentration camps followed a long history of virulent anti-Asianism. World War II divided the Japanese American community with those who demonstrated their loyalty by serving in the military and others who asserted their patriotism by rejecting service in the armed forces while their families were unconstitutionally incarcerated. The Japanese American 442nd Regimental Combat Team became the most highly decorated unit for its size and length of service for its outstanding record of bravery and sacrifice on European battlefields. However, at the same time, Japanese American draft resisters insisted they would go to prison until the nation freed their families from barbed wire camps. They questioned how they could possibly serve a country that criminalized them solely on the basis of their ethnicity. In a clumsy questionnaire intended to separate loyal from potentially disloyal, some Japanese Americans resisted the incarceration by refusing to follow the government's lead. The U.S. removed them from their original camps to prisons or to Tule Lake, in northern California, a militarized internment camp. In "exchange," the War Relocation Authority transferred those deemed loyal to other camps. Discontent at Tule Lake erupted in organized protests in October 1943. A month later, with worsening relations between the internees and the camp administration, many prisoners rioted. Unable to maintain order, camp administrators stepped aside, and martial law was declared. Dissidents were sent to prisons in Oregon and northern California or were imprisoned in the camp's newly built stockade, a prison within a prison. Some of these men remained in federal custody after the end of the war. Their act of resistance was frowned upon at the time by fellow Japanese Americans; later, some found them both principled and heroic.

There were other "accidental heroes," like Fred Korematsu, who became a fugitive when he refused, voluntarily, to surrender to the authorities for removal from Oakland, California, into the camps. His case, *Korematsu v. the United States*, became one of the key legal challenges to the constitutionality of the mass removal and incarceration of Japanese Americans, although the legality of the internment order was upheld by the United States Supreme Court in 1944. His conviction was vacated decades later after the disclosure of evidence indicating that the executive branch deliberately withheld evidence that challenged the necessity of the internment. In California and Virginia, every January 30th marks Fred Korematsu Day, highlighting his work during and after the Japanese incarceration. Much like Rosa Park's, Korematsu's role as an activist inspired many to take action against injustice. Today, there are elementary schools in Davis, California, and Oakland, California, and a middle school in El Cerrito, California, named after Fred Korematsu.

Asian Americans have been in every American war since the Civil War, but the Vietnam War is often credited with raising the awareness of a shared Asian identity and the need for an Asian American movement. The conflict in Vietnam fostered a heightened perception of all Asians as "the enemy" – for example, in the increased use of the pejorative term "gooks" – and pushed Asian Americans of all ethnicities to recognize their shared history of racial discrimination. The activism of African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement was another guiding force in the Asian American movement. Moved by the moral courage of African Americans in fighting for equal rights, many Asian Americans, like Americans from many ethnicities, supported the struggle for social justice. Their involvement in the movement developed their awareness that Asian Americans as a group had also been victims of institutional racism.

Resistance to inequality occurred early on in Asian American history but it was the Black Power movement, particular the writings of Malcolm X, that proved most influential in inspiring Asian Americans to adopt a new form of activism. The cultural nationalism of the movement with its emphases on racial pride and African American culture held a strong appeal for Asian Americans. Yuri Kochiyama was one of the first Asian American women who built coalitions with the African American community and became an engaged member of the Black liberation movement, working alongside Malcom X. Her relationship to Malcom X became evident when he was shot during a rally at Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, New York. Richard Aoki became a key leader of the Black Panthers in the bay area and was often the face of the Third World Liberation Movement and the Black Panthers. His role with the Black Panthers was highlighted in Diane Fujino's book "Samurai Among Panthers;" yet in 2014, FBI documentation questioned Aoki's loyalty to the Panthers and noted that Aoki was an informant. The debate whether Aoki was or was not an informant does not, for many, minimize his role in propelling the issues of violence against black communities, the disenfranchisement of groups of color, and Aoki's need to fight for a just cause.

The civil rights movement led to a growing sense of Asian American identity and a feeling of kinship for other people of color who shared histories of discrimination and oppression. College campuses proved particularly fertile ground for sowing seeds of pan-Asian identity and cross-cultural cooperation. Asian American students, along with African Americans and Chicanos, were involved in the five-month strike at San Francisco

State College in 1968, the longest campus strike in U.S. history. They were also involved in other Third World Liberation strikes that ultimately led to the development of ethnic studies programs at colleges and universities across the country. Also in 1968, Asian American students founded the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at the University of California, Berkeley. With close ties to the Black Panther Party and to the Red Guard, an Asian American organization patterned after the Panthers, the AAPA did not limit their activities to classroom concerns. The group was equally concerned about equal representation within the student body and among faculty and with larger issues, such as ending the war in Vietnam, police brutality, and the exploitation of farm workers. Chapters of the AAPA were organized at Yale, Columbia, the University of Illinois, Oberlin, and the University of Michigan. The racism that became glaringly evident during the Civil Rights Movement also highlighted the lack of Asian American presence in pop culture and media. In film, television, and music, Asian Americans have struggled with getting airtime, often watching Asian roles assumed by white actors. Despite ongoing "yellow face," Asian Americans have utilized the media as sites of assimilation as well as resistance.

POP CULTURE AND MEDIA AND AAPI REPRESENTATION

Media and the arts have played an integral role in shaping the American cultural landscape. For Asian Americans, the primary challenge has been lack of representation. The presence of AAPI actors, singers, or performers has always been sparse. The notion that Asian American actors are underrepresented in Hollywood is not news, but it remains a space for resistance and accommodation. According to a 2008 report by the Screen Actor's Guild, Asian American actors participated in 3.8 percent of all film and TV roles—1.8 percent below their U.S. population of 5.6 per cent. Historically, Asians were subjects for Hollywood films, as early as 1896, through yellow face. White actors played the first Asian characters by putting on wigs, makeup, and eye prosthetics and speaking in broken English. However, there were key pioneer actors. Sessue Hayakawa, a pioneer Asian American actor in the silent film era, was typecast as a sadistic Asian villain (most famous in *The Cheat*, 1915). Nonetheless, he was also a popular matinee idol and received an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor as the honorable villain, Colonel Saito, in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). Anna May Wong, who starred in more than 50 movies between 1919 and 1960, may be one of the most influential Asian American actors in U.S. history. Her most famous roles were in *The Thief of Baghdad* (1924), *Old San Francisco* (1927), and *Shanghai Express* (1932). While she played the stereotypes of Asian American women, she screen tested for the lead role of Olan in *The Good Earth* (1937) but lost to German actor Luise Rainer (who won an Academy Award for her performance in yellowface). Years later, Wong returned to Hollywood as the first Asian American actor to star in a television show in *The Gallery of Madame Liu Tsong* (1951). Her early success in 1920s and 1930s Hollywood paved the way and also influenced subsequent casting and descriptions of roles for Asians in the censorship era of Hollywood film in the 1930s and 1940s. Although the term *dragon lady* was not used before the 1930s, it is now commonly used in contemporary popular culture with variations such as the "tiger mom" to describe powerful Asian and Asian American women (in the past and present). On the other hand, representations of docile or submissive characters in American culture are often tied to depictions of Asian women in American war films as picture brides,

Anna May Wong, one of the few Asian Americans considered among the most influential actors in U.S. history, appeared in more than fifty movies. Photo from the *Hawai'i Times* Photo Archives Foundation, courtesy of Densho.

war brides, geishas, prostitutes, and hookers with hearts of gold. Perhaps not surprisingly, between 1944 and 1952, there were more than 100,000 marriages in Asia between Americans and Asian women. Kazue Nagai was the first Japanese war bride who married Air Force cryptographer Frederick H. Katz in 1946 in Tokyo and settled in San Francisco. The Yokohama native preceded some 72,700 Asian war brides, 46,000 from Japan, that emigrated to the United States between 1947 and 1964. The first Korean war bride was Lee Yong Soon, who was nicknamed Blue by the military men in Korea. She became Mrs. Johnie Morgan and moved to Seattle, Washington, in 1951 to a hero's welcome in *LIFE*'s November 1951 article titled "A War Bride Named 'Blue' Comes Home."

The story of love and war was translated often in film and theater. One of the most famous examples of the docile character is the heroine Cio-Cio San from Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904). *Madama Butterfly* is one of the most popular operas performed around the world, and the narrative of the docile Asian woman who sacrifices herself for love endures more than 100 years after the opera premiered. A similar story line with the backdrop of 1970s Saigon and the Vietnam War drives the music and narrative of the hit musical *Miss Saigon*, which premiered in 1989. In the early 1990s, the controversy over the musical *Miss Saigon* surfaced when Asian American actors protested the casting of British actor Jonathan Pryce in the role of the half-Vietnamese engineer in the Broadway production of the musical. The protest was led by many prominent Asian American theater artists, including actor B. D. Wong, Tisa Chang, and playwright David Henry Hwang. Asian American actors initially lost their fight when the musical opened on Broadway with Pryce. The musical would later employ a number of Asian American actors while also recasting the role of the engineer with an Asian American.

Despite the obstacles, Asian Americans have long contested the rigid monolithic view of Asian American communities and identities as depicted, for example, in the musical *Flower Drum Song* (1961). This film featured Asian Americans acting, singing, and dancing as Chinese Americans living in San Francisco's Chinatown. It was one of the first films not only to frame the transnational lives of Asian Americans but it also provided a more nuanced Asian American and immigrant narrative in San Francisco prior to the Civil Rights Movement. This film also showcased Miyoshi Umeki, the first Asian American actor to win an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress in the film *Sayonara* (1957). Nancy Kwan, who made her acting debut as the title character in *The World of Suzy Wong* (1960), played lounge singer Linda Low. Yet, the challenge for Asian American actors to gain roles in the entertainment media was still next to impossible. The customary "yellowface" in Hollywood often surrendered Asian American or Asian roles to white actors who flourished by exploiting racist stereotypes.

Bruce Lee (1940-1973) became an icon by leaving the country both to contest and to create stereotypes. Early in his career, Lee displayed a virile masculinity that was simultaneously empowering and savage. Son of a Cantonese Opera star, Lee began performing at a young age. He played Kato, a Japanese houseboy and chauffeur on the television series *The Green Hornet* (1966–67), as well as a number of other minor roles. *Kung Fu* (1972–75) was Lee's chance to star in his own series, but he lost the role to white actor David Carradine. This rejection propelled him to leave for Hong Kong to star in films like *Fist of Fury* (1972) and *Return of the Dragon* (1972), which Lee also wrote and produced. His final film, *Enter the Dragon* (1973), was the first English language martial arts film produced by a major U.S. studio in Hong Kong. Though Lee's life ended when he was only 32 years old, his martial arts legacy lives on. Bruce Lee has become a pop culture icon for Asian Americans and for martial arts fans across the globe. He is buried in Lake View Cemetery in Seattle, Washington. To this day, thousands of fans, admirers and visitors visit his gravesite to pay homage to one of the first Asian American icons in contemporary society.

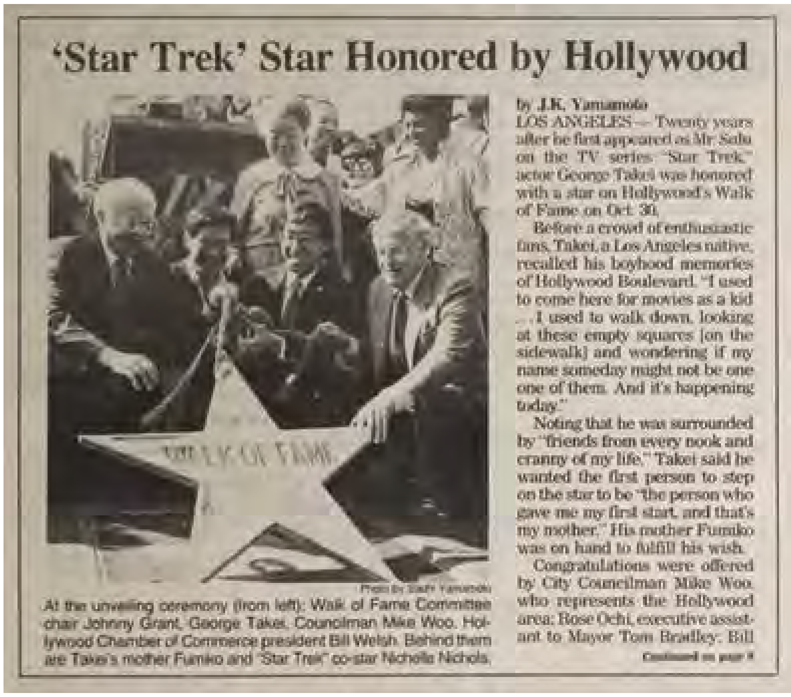
With shifting racial policies post-civil rights, we began to see hints of Asian American actors on television. In the 1970s, the precinct of Barney Miller was as diverse as Star Trek's Enterprise and included Jack Soo's Japanese American detective Nick Yemana, known for his gambling, sense of humor, and poor organizational skills—a significant change from the Asian robot often portrayed in entertainment as hyper-competent with little personality. Soo (Suzuki), who had been among the Japanese Americans forced into internment camps during World War II, refused to play roles he found derogatory to Asians, including those of houseboys and domestic servants, the default role for Asians on television before *Star Trek*. George Takei broke barriers as Sulu on the cult classic Star Trek as the sole Asian American actor in the ensemble. The legacy of Star Trek continues, but Takei's activism began much later. Openly sharing his interment experience at Rohwer in Arkansas and, later, at the Tule Lake Segregation Center in Northern California, his semi-autobiographical story turned into a musical entitled *Allegiance* and is about life in the WWII internment camps.

Acting and resistance also took place in the theater. The Asian American Theater Company (AATC, San Francisco) was established in 1973 by playwright Frank Chin. Chin argued that Asian American actors needed to work with Asian American playwrights in order to avoid being cast in stereotypical roles and to be independent of the mainstream industry. The AATC inspired more creative work by Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) by starting a workshop to explore the paradoxes and confusion within the AAPI identity. The Asian American Theater Company was housed in the Asian American Theater Center in San Francisco's Richmond district. The theater center was damaged by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake but was reopened a year later; it has since moved its administrative office to the Japantown area and produces plays throughout the city.[6]

The Northwest Asian American Theater (Seattle) began as the Theatrical Ensemble of Asians at the University of Washington in 1974, bringing additional energies to the world of Asian American theater. It developed a component of social justice and became a cultural center in Seattle.

The Pan Asian Repertory Theater, founded by Tisa Chang, emerged as part of Off-Off Broadway theater in 1978. This new group in New York City brought Asian American theater to East Coast audiences. In the 1980s and 1990s, more Asian American theater companies emerged with original plays, the Ma-Yi Theater Company in New York City, for example. The National Asian American Theatre Company (NAATCO) in New York City staged Western plays with casts comprised of Asian Americans. The Mu Performing Arts Company in Minneapolis incorporated Asian themes into plays that could be consumed by the local audience. These theater companies along with key figures (Nobuko Miyamoto, Roberta Uno, Joanna Wan-Ying Chan, Jessica Hagedorn) and counter-cultural performances (solo performance, multi- media, and alternative theater) constitute what might be termed the "diversification of Asian American theater." This new generation of playwrights became a significant moment when the torch was handed from the founders to a new generation. Perhaps this became, also, a form of "mainstreaming" of Asian American theater.

Early Broadway musicals such as *The King and I* and *Flower Drum Song* cast "Oriental" actors and also employed white actors in yellow face. The use of Asian American actors waned in the 1960s, and many of them could not find work within mainstream productions. The use of yellow face contributed to the lack of Asian actors being employed, and so Asian American actors joined in solidarity to challenge Asian American stereotypes in mainstream



'Star Trek' Star Honored by Hollywood

by J.K. Yamamoto

LOS ANGELES — Twenty years after he first appeared as Mr. Sulu on the TV series "Star Trek," actor George Takei was honored with a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame on Oct. 30.

Before a crowd of enthusiastic fans, Takei, a Los Angeles native, recalled his boyhood memories of Hollywood Boulevard. "I used to come here for movies as a kid . . . I used to walk down, looking at these empty squares [on the sidewalk] and wondering if my name someday might not be one one of them. And it's happening today."

Noting that he was surrounded by "friends from every nook and cranny of my life," Takei said he wanted the first person to step on the star to be "the person who gave me my first start, and that's my mother." His mother Fumiko was on hand to fulfill his wish.

Congratulations were offered by City Councilman Mike Woo, who represents the Hollywood area; Rose Ochi, executive assistant to Mayor Tom Bradley; Bill

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Photo by [illegible]

At the unveiling ceremony (from left): Walk of Fame Committee chair Johnny Grant, George Takei, Councilman Mike Woo, Hollywood Chamber of Commerce president Bill Welsh. Behind them are Takei's mother Fumiko and "Star Trek" co-star Nichelle Nichols.

"Star Trek Star Honored by Hollywood." George Takei, second from left, became the only Asian American in the classic Star Trek series as the character Sulu. Photo courtesy of Densho Digital Repository.

Three Japanese actors performing in a show. Photo from the *Hawai'i Times* Photo Archives Foundation, courtesy of Densho.

culture. In the 1970s, Asian American actors were well organized in their fight for jobs and positive images for Asians. In New York, an activist group called Oriental Actors of America regularly protested openings of shows with white actors playing Asians. In 1965, frustrated with the limited opportunities available, actors Mako, James Hong, Beulah Quo, Pat Li, and June Kim, together with Guy Lee and Yet Lock, formed East West Players (EWP) in Los Angeles. This provided Asian American actors the opportunity to perform as lead, pivotal characters. It became the most visible venue for Asian American actors to find employment and to participate in resistance practices. The company's proximity to Hollywood attracted many ambitious and talented Asian American actors.

Today, Media Action Network for Asian Americans led by Guy Aoki has become the watchdog group leading protests and resistance against anti-Asian American portrayals in film, arts, and theater. Based in Los Angeles, Aoki has worked with grassroots organizations to respond to problematic portrayals. Through press releases and social media outlets, racist and stereotypical depictions rarely go unchallenged, but the struggle remains ongoing.

Music has been a venue where Asian Americans have experienced relative success, albeit more noticeably in the areas of classical and jazz. Musicians have also used their art to speak out about social issues and political issues. The pathbreaking trio "A Grain of Sand" featured singer/activists Chris Kando Iijima, Nobuko Joanne Miyamoto, and William "Charlie" Chin. Produced by Paredon in 1973, the album inspired an entire generation of college students. The trio became a modern-day group of troubadours, bringing news of community and campus projects, activities, and anti-war movements across the nation. *Yokohama, California* is the vinyl LP record released in 1977 by Asian American musicians in the San Francisco Bay Area and San Jose. Strongly influenced by "A Grain of Sand," the music was created in the midst of the Asian American movement. The front jacket photograph, taken in J-Town, San Jose, depicts the atmosphere of those days, including not only the band members but also P. J. Hirabayashi, San Jose Taiko, and LP recording staffer, in the photo. The band members were Peter Horikoshi, Sam Takimoto, and Michael Okagaki who were later joined by Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo and Keith Inouye to record the album. Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo (Filipino and Japanese) also performed as a cultural artist for many Filipino and Asian American conferences. His early spoken-word, rap-like song, "Vegetables," was a hit among college students with lyrics depicting brown Filipino farmworkers toiling in the fields. He continues his Asian American cultural work with the theater storytelling group Eth-Noh-Tec.

Another Asian American group to record under the Paredon label in 1976 was the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP, translated from *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipinos*) with their songs of the struggle, "Philippines: Bangon! (Arise!)," against the Philippines martial law dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. The KDP performed and helped produce politically charged theatrical musicals at Filipino conventions and student conferences and toured many communities. They also helped organize Filipino community Christmas caroling with fund-raising, carrying the message to support political prisoners in the Philippines. Another popular Filipino American community movement song was actually created from a poem written by United Farm Workers Union (UFW) leader Philip Vera Cruz, "Profits Enslave the World." It was put to music by Chris Bautista and was often sung at Filipino People's Far West Conventions in the 1970s and 1980s. Bataan Nitollano, aka Joe Bataan, is known as one of the instigators of the Latin Salsa Soul sound but hardly known as being of Filipino and African

American descent. He continues to tour and appreciates performing before diverse, crossover crowds, such as the annual Festival of Philippines Arts and Culture (FPAC) concert held in San Pedro, California.

Hawaiian music, traditional and contemporary, is also part of the Asian American movement landscape. The history of Asian Americans in Hawai`i, the struggle to preserve Hawaiian cultural values, and the pressure of the tourism industry have all shaped Hawaiian music over the years. From ancient hula story chants to contemporary Jawaiian reggae influences, Asian Pacific Americans of Hawai'i have produced artists and music appreciated around the world. When asked about the beginnings of Hawaiian contemporary music by Hawaiian music blogger Art Hadley, L. D. Reynolds, founder of the Voice of Hawaii.org, suggested that it seemed to coincide with the music revolution on the continent during the Vietnam era. Folk-rock was a major influence on the Hawaiian musicians and songwriters during the mid-late 1960s. It was used to communicate anger and sorrow over the 'selling' of Hawai'i and also to inspire hope for the future. 'Waimanalo Blues' by Country Comfort is considered by most to be the first contemporary Hawaiian 'protest' song.

There are many contemporary Hawaiian groups with songs carrying the message of Hawaiian sovereignty and cultural pride. However, just as more and more contemporary artists were gaining mainstream popularity for Hawaiian music, in April 2011, the Grammys restructured some of the category awards, effectively eliminating future Hawaiian music from being recognized within a much broader field of genres. Ironically, it was just on March 25, 2011, that the song "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" by IZ (the late Israel Kamakawiwo'ole) won Germany's Echo Award for Hit of the Year. The song had set records in Hawai'i years ago and even dominated the German singles charts with 10 straight weeks as their number one hit. IZ had also produced songs that expressed native Hawaiian cultural identity and pride, along with many other fellow Grammy artists under the Mountain Apple Company label.

RESISTANCE AND ACTIVISM

While the challenges of assimilation are ongoing for AAPI, not until the Black Power movement and the Civil Rights Movement did Asian Americans find their own voices. As a collective pan-Asian community but also as racialized others who found solidarity with their ethnic counterparts, they created new cultural forms. The common bond of experiencing and witnessing inequality propelled key AAPI leaders into action. For example, they watched as Native Americans occupied Alcatraz Island in 1969. A notorious prison, Alcatraz had been abandoned by the federal government in 1963. An old treaty with the federal government had allowed abandoned U.S. properties to revert to Native American ownership, and Indian activists were attempting to capitalize on this precedent and reclaim Alcatraz. Asian American activists, some of whom were members of the Japanese American Citizens League, brought food and supplies to the Native Americans. They also unfurled a banner reading "Japanese Americans Support Native Americans" and connected the occupation with their own campaign to repeal Title II of the Internal Security (McCarran) Act of 1950. Nicknamed the "concentration camp law," Title II authorized the construction of detention facilities in which the president, through the attorney general, could apprehend and detain any person whom the government suspected of engaging in espionage or sabotage in the event of invasion, war, or insurrection. Support for the Indian occupation of Alcatraz was part of the JACL's strategy of making alliances with other minority groups and gaining support for its own campaign. Title II was repealed in 1971.

The occupation of Alcatraz was not conceived as a cross cultural or cross-racial protest, having been organized explicitly and exclusively by Native American activists. However, it did inspire solidarity and support among some Asian American activists, beyond the JACL members. In particular, the Asian American newspaper *Gidra*, which covered the Asian American movement during its run from 1969 to 1974, published several pieces that expressed solidarity with Native American protest actions.

Asian American involvement in Native American protest actions continued with the occupation of Wounded Knee, which began on February 27, 1973, when about 200 Oglala Lakota and followers of the American Indian Movement seized and occupied the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. An article in the May 1973 issue of *Gidra*, "From Manzanar to Wounded Knee," reports that a contingent of about 50 Asian American activists arrived from Los Angeles to join efforts to break the federal blockade. The occupation ended on May 8, 1973, after an agreement was reached between Oglala elders and U.S. government officials.

In Karen Tei Yamashita's novel, *I Hotel* (2010), one of the storylines involves a group of three Japanese American activists joining the occupation in order to look for "that plug of earth that can grow into a continent." Yamashita stages Alcatraz as the place where these Asian Americans began their journey of figuring out their place in the world and credits the Native American protest action as inspiration for their own activism.

EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

From its inception to the present, bilingual education in the United States has been shaped by sociopolitical, economic, and ideological factors that have broadly characterized its historical phases, at times overlapping, as permissive, restrictive, tolerant, and dismissive. With English spoken as the language of the majority of the settlers in the colonies that eventually formed the original 13 states, English has served and continues to serve the interests of powerful majority groups, namely through educational policies of language exclusion and inclusion.

With the introduction of a common public school system in the mid-1800s and the objective to unite a linguistically and ethnically diverse nation, English gradually became the universal medium of instruction for public schools by the 1920s. This period marks the restrictive stage due to widespread attempts to Americanize communities speaking native languages other than English. With the prevalence of yellow peril campaigns that reflected anti-Japanese as well as anti-Asian attitudes, Hawai'i and California prohibited the teaching of Japanese in schools, while 22 states legally banned the teaching of foreign languages in elementary school by 1923. Additionally, Hawai'i also established an elitist two-tiered educational system where white Anglophone students were instructed in English, while native Hawaiians and children of immigrants were taught in Hawaiian Creole English, an arrangement that reinforced social inequality. Eventually, the restriction on teaching foreign languages, in this case German, was ruled unconstitutional in *Meyer v. Nebraska* in 1923. Later in 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court also declared Hawaii's plans to shut down Japanese, Korean, and Chinese extracurricular heritage language schools in *Farrington v. Tokushige* also unconstitutional. Oddly, Hawaii's legislature passed the "Act regulating the teaching of foreign languages to children" in 1943 on the basis that children's cognitive and academic abilities would be compromised if they learned a foreign language during their formative years. As a result, in *Mo Hock Ke Lok Po v. Stainback*, parents of Chinese descent fought and won the right to teach their children their heritage language with the Supreme Court citing parents' rights to educate their children as they wish.

With passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958, the latter half of the 20th century ushered in a period of tolerance. This act allocated federal funds for the study of specific areas of the world and foreign languages to support the United States' military defense agendas. A bilingual teacher in New York City in 1964 with recent immigrant Chinese students instructs the class partly by displaying cards with their names written in both Chinese and English. The 1960s saw significant changes in attitudes toward bilingual education as immigration increased dramatically from Asian and Latin American countries.

These events later coincided with the Civil Rights Movement demanding fairer educational treatment for racial and linguistic minority groups. About the same time, the Immigration Act of 1965 brought an end to the national origin quota system, leading to increases in Asian and Latin American immigrant populations. The significant numbers of immigrant students entering U.S. schools and unable to understand English necessitated instructional policy changes. Interestingly, the Cuban Revolution and exile of Cubans in Florida paved the way for a bilingual model called two-way (also dual language) immersion. As exiled Cubans anticipated their stay in the United States to be temporary with their children eventually resuming their education in Cuba, leaders in the community established a bilingual education program for Cuban children that would foster bilingualism and bi-literacy in English and Spanish at the Coral Way Elementary School in Dade County in 1963. Based on the success of Coral Way, which can be attributed to community support and a highly skilled teacher workforce, more two-way immersion programs gradually spread around the United States, first in Spanish, but later in other languages, including Cantonese, Japanese, Korean, and Mandarin.

In 1974, the seminal case of *Lau v. Nichols* represented a turning point for bilingual education and immigrant students. In a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of 1,800 Chinese Americans in the San Francisco school system, the Supreme Court ruled that inappropriate linguistic provisions denied these students equal educational opportunities because classroom instruction was not provided in a language they could understand. The Supreme Court concluded the same treatment for language majority and minority students (i.e. English only instruction) was a violation of non-English speaking students' civil rights. Symbolically, the court's decision drew much needed attention to the importance of bilingual education; logistically, however, no specific guidelines were provided on how to effectively educate English language learners.

Despite the progress achieved through the implementation of bilingual programs, bilingual education entered the dismissive period by the 1980s. Against a backdrop of growing immigration and rising xenophobia, public resentment toward the special treatment of language minorities led to a backlash against offering instruction in a non-English language and even accommodations such as bilingual driver's tests. One common, albeit misinformed, concern expressed by opponents of bilingual education was that students were only learning their native language and not learning English. Under the Reagan and Bush administrations, federal funds for English language learners were diverted to transitional models of bilingual education or ESL programs in spite of research demonstrating that students in additive bilingual education programs, such as two-way and maintenance, achieve higher levels of academic success, as well as bilingual competency over a five-year period than their counterparts in transitional bilingual education programs. Policy makers may have been swayed by research that indicates, over the short term, students in subtractive programs, including transitional bilingual education and ESL classes, demonstrate higher gains than those in additive bilingual programs, which would be expected because students are being tested in a language they are just starting to learn.

The dismissive period also witnessed the birth of organizations such as U.S. English and English First, dedicated to eliminating bilingual education. Leaders of these groups often cited the lore of past immigrants who succeeded in learning English without bilingual education as proof that English only instruction is superior. However, what is not mentioned is the high dropout rate of early generation immigrants and the limited level of English required for manual labor positions, in which these generations were typically employed.

While bilingual education programs are officially prohibited in California, Arizona, Colorado, Washington, and Massachusetts, parents can still apply for a waiver to enroll their children in a bilingual education program if one is available. Otherwise, English language learners in these states typically attend ESL classes. Across the United States, two-way immersion programs have been gaining in popularity in Cantonese, Korean, Japanese, and Mandarin, mainly at the elementary level, although a small number of secondary programs does exist.

For example, when second-generation Chinese, Japanese, and Filipina women of the early Cold War era (1948–55) speak for themselves, we learn about aspects of their youth culture, such as their views on beauty in magazines. We also find them confronted with expectations to perform in community beauty pageants as a show of their ethnic group's Americanness. That some Asian American women accommodated these requests and others resisted and even refused to participate in community pageants is revealing of their choices and the meaning they give to them in regard to the use of their bodies by their communities and the larger society. Similarly, studies of Vietnamese, Cambodian or Khmer, and Hmong communities, most of whom arrived as refugees in the United States during the mid-1970s through 1980s, feature women as well as men. In providing rich details of family life, gender, and generational role tensions and negotiating new ways of being and doing, women's agency and contributions in their households' adaptation to a new culture and society are ever present.

CONTINUING STRUGGLES

The struggle over cultural retention among Asian Americans continues. The recent political climate has resurfaced the fears and anxieties of Executive Order 9066 with threats to register Muslims and tentative assertions that the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII might have been justified. The difference now is that many AAPIs have found a collective voice. After the September 11, 2001, attacks on the twin towers in New York City, Japanese Americans were among the first to come forward to remind Americans to stay calm and to avoid national and religious profiling. When Republican candidate Donald Trump insisted that he would register all Muslims, Japanese American leaders were among the first to remind America of the history of forced internments. George Takei's musical *Allegiance* commemorates the historical injustice of the internments and reminds Americans never to commit the same injustice. One of the key differences from the 1940s is that contemporary Asian Americans will stand up with other ethnic groups under attack. There will be no sign insisting "I'm not Muslim" as occurred during WWII – instead Asian Americans and others are more likely to join in solidarity with Muslims to confront religious and national profiling. The challenges that Asian Americans have faced politically, socially, and culturally all have shaped the ways in which AAPIs respond to oppression today. No longer do they want, overwhelmingly, to assimilate into the dominant white culture but insist on their rights, places, and positions in the shaping of America. From the railroads, to the farmlands, to the businesses, to media and arts, Asian Americans have been a part of the dynamic organism that we call America. As policies and social climates fluctuate, AAPIs adapt, sometimes moving with the current, at times resisting.

Endnotes

1 Teresa Bill, 2015. "Hawai'i 1946 Sugar Plantation Strike" in *Asian American Society,* ed. Mary Danico, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Press, 2014), 438-440.

2 Dean T. Alegado, "The Filipino Community in Hawai'i: Development and Change" *The Social Process in Hawai'i,* Vol. 33, (1991), 13-38.

3 Prosy Abarquez-Delacruz; Enrique Delacruz, "The Birthplace of Labor Rights becomes a Historic Landmark" *in Asian Journal*, February 26, 2011.

4 Kale Farjado, "Manila Men" in *Asian American Society,* ed. Mary Danico, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Press, 2014)

5 Tina Soong, "Filipino American Culture Celebrations Coming New Orleans-wide Oct. 8-9," *Times Picayune-Greater Louisiana*, September 14, 2016.

6 Omar Abdullah, "Theater and Drama" in *Asian American Society,* ed. Mary Danico, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Press, 2014), 900-902.

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