

ETHNS 330: INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES



Talitha Angelica Trazo
Sacramento City College

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This text was compiled on 10/18/2026

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1: THE ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR ETHNIC STUDIES

By Dr. Mario Alberto Viveros Espinoza-Kulick

Learning Objectives

- Describe the fundamental values, concepts, and historical context of Ethnic Studies scholarship;
- Identify various ongoing activities in the field of Ethnic Studies, including scholarship, activism, and policy advocacy;
- Discuss the role of student activists in leading Ethnic Studies as a discipline.

1.1: Introduction

1.2: Ethnic Studies Frameworks

1.3: Historical Roots of Ethnic Studies

1.4: The Beginning of Ethnic Studies

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1.1: Introduction

Introducing the Struggle for Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies is the critical and interdisciplinary study of race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of diverse Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. The field of Ethnic Studies and the various disciplines like Black Studies/Africana Studies, Asian American Studies, Pacific Islander Studies, Arab American Studies, American Indian/Native American Studies, and Chicanx/Latinx and Latinx Indigenous Studies all work to center the knowledge and expertise of historically minoritized groups. Ethnic Studies has always been interdisciplinary in nature, meaning that it combines the strengths and perspectives of multiple disciplines. Scholars in the field of Ethnic Studies have also maintained a critique of the ways in which other disciplines have been associated with systems of power and domination. This has led to a critique of disciplines themselves, including the idea of a “canon” that many disciplines use to define a core set of authors, perspectives, and works that make up the foundation of the field.

There is no singular beginning to Ethnic Studies or a set of scholars who wrote the field into existence. It emerged out of struggles and the long histories of communities of color and Indigenous peoples who value education for its potential to transform lives, inspire change, raise awareness, and disrupt systems of power and exploitation. In this chapter, you will learn a bit about those traditions and the way that various movements, students, and activists came together to form what we now call Ethnic Studies.

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1.2: Ethnic Studies Frameworks

Geohistorical Macroscales of Ethnic Studies

While there is no fixed canon to Ethnic Studies, some scholars have offered frameworks that can be used to describe the scope and significance of the field. Tolteka Cuahutin (2019) offers us the idea of four **geohistorical macroscales of Ethnic Studies**:

1. Indigeneity and Active Roots
2. Coloniality, Dehumanization, and Genocide
3. Hegemony and Normalization; and
4. **Decoloniality, Regeneration, and Transformational Resistance.**

Indigeneity and Active Roots mean beginning with and centering the sovereignty and self-determination of Indigenous peoples. It also means providing students and educators with the tools to critically understand the relationships we have as people in this world with our ancestors, the land, and the historical realities that come to bear on our lives. Second, **coloniality, dehumanization, and genocide** is the first component of actively recognizing those historical and current-day political realities. In Figure 1.2.1, the image shows an activist sign with the phrase, "No History, No Self," written in red and black. This sign was used at a protest in support of students on a hunger strike for Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University in 2016. The message emphasizes the way that Ethnic Studies as a discipline benefits students by connecting to the true and authentic histories of race, Indigeneity, and culture.



Figure 1.2.1: Ethnic Studies Hunger Strike at San Francisco State. (CC BY 2.0; Melissa Minton via Wikimedia)

Ethnic Studies is critical because it opens the door to recognizing and understanding these aspects of society and culture that are often diminished or hidden. This brings us to the third geohistorical macroscale of Ethnic Studies, which is hegemony and normalization. **Hegemony** refers to the systems by which violence and exploitation are maintained in regular patterns to advantage socially dominant groups and maintain the oppression of Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities, including women and non-binary people, as well as people of diverse faiths, abilities, and immigration statuses. Finally, Ethnic Studies goes beyond revealing and examining violence and pain to bring students and education into the work of transformation, resistance, and social change. This means that Ethnic Studies is always political, always evolving, and intimately connected to social movements, grassroots activism, and advocacy for change.

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1.3: Historical Roots of Ethnic Studies

Native and Indigenous Pedagogies

Native and Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (a name for North and Central America used by various Indigenous peoples of the western hemisphere) have practiced educational pedagogies that center resistance, justice, and equity long before the introduction of Ethnic Studies as a phrase or academic field. Traditional knowledge that has been sustained and carried forward in the face of settler-colonialism provides key insight into the importance of activism and strategies of resistance against oppressive systems (Jacob et al., 2018). **Native and Indigenous Pedagogies** are as diverse as the peoples who practice them. However, there are some common values and tools that have contributed to current-day Ethnic Studies. Native and Indigenous pedagogies are place-based and incorporate the cultural, historical, environmental, economic, and literary context of students (Johnson, 2012). This means learning with and from the local context, highlighting the importance of contributing directly to local communities through educational projects, and it emphasizes reciprocity and relationality.

Traditions of Education and Resistance

The introduction of **colonial educational** and epistemological frameworks led to the attempted erasure and genocide of Indigenous lifeways. Building on centuries of colonization, in 1869, the U.S. government and Christian churches began systematically kidnapping Native American children and trafficking students into government and church-run Boarding Schools, which were designed to forcefully strip students of their Native American heritage and impose the use of English, Christian religious customs, and colonized modes of dress. These norms enforced colonial gender binaries, conditioning girls to do housework with boys focused on outside labor. Speaking Native languages and practicing religious or familial customs were violently punished in these Boarding Schools (Lomawaima 2018). This is just one example of instances where educational institutions have functioned to support systems of violence, exploitation, and forced assimilation.

The roots of current-day Ethnic Studies are also present in the ongoing resistance to oppressive educational systems. Throughout the 19th and 20th Centuries, the United States greatly expanded the role of public education. This infrastructure was built up unequally, with schools actively segregated by race. The separation of students by race helped to reinforce the existing racial hierarchy. This also has major implications for the wealth disparities between racial and ethnic groups. For a more in-depth exploration of this topic, please review [Chapter 9: The Racial Wealth Gap](#).

Challenges to Legal Segregation

In 1884, Mary and Joseph Tape, a Chinese American couple living in San Francisco, California, sought to enroll their daughter in the primary school in their neighborhood, which was an all-white school. The administration blocked their enrollment, and the Tapes sued. Their case made it to the California Supreme Court in 1885, which affirmed that public schools must be open to all children. California legislators and federal policy moved quickly to affirm segregation, which would remain the law of the land for nearly another 70 years. The San Francisco School Board created a separate Chinese primary school in Chinatown. However, the racial status quo was not without challenge. In the 1947 case *Mendez v. Westminster*, Sylvia Mendez, and her family brought a federal case against the Westminster School District of Orange County, California, to challenge the exclusion of Mexican American students from white schools. While Mexican Americans were considered legally white, they were excluded on the basis of Spanish-speaking children. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed in their decision that equality in education means opening schools to all children, in defiance of the presiding “separate but equal” doctrine. In Figure 1.3.1, there is a video that describes in more detail the story of *Mendez vs. Westminster* and its significance in addressing discrimination in California. The video is nine minutes and 45 seconds.

Sidebar: *Mendez vs. Westminster* and Discrimination in California's Public Schools

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Figure 1.3.1: "*Mendez v. Westminster Case: Discrimination in California's Public Schools*" (CC-BY 3.0; Anu Mande via YouTube)

It was not until the U.S. Supreme Court decided in 1954 in the *Brown v. Board of Education* case that racial segregation in public schools was outlawed nationwide. In this case, Linda Brown's family sued the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, because their daughter was denied entrance to their local school because of her race. This landmark decision invalidated the idea that separate facilities, services, and institutions based on race can be equal and affirmed that segregation itself is a form of racial discrimination.

The Court instructed segregated schools across the country to implement desegregation "with all deliberate speed." However, white supremacist groups emerged to resist these changes, including in Little Rock, Arkansas. Despite vocal and public bigotry and hatred directed at them, nine Black students registered to attend the formerly all-white Central High School: Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Patillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls. With support from the Arkansas NAACP, this group, the "Little Rock Nine," courageously faced racial violence and adult protestors who attempted to prevent them from going to school. The Governor of Arkansas called in the Arkansas National Guard to prevent students from entering the campus, which eventually prompted President Eisenhower to send National Guard troops to escort the students to school. In Figure 1.3.2, Elizabeth Eckford is shown walking to school in sunglasses while she is surrounded by an angry white mob, with Hazel Bryan Massery behind her, shouting hateful comments.



Figure 1.3.2: Elizabeth Eckford being verbally assaulted by Hazel Bryan Massery for exercising her right to pursue an education. (Public Domain; Will Counts via Wikimedia Commons)

Generations of students and activists have had to fight for the rights of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities to receive an education at all. Beyond this struggle, the schools and instructional methods that were created by and for white people to maintain white supremacist culture and class superiority are not designed to support BIPOC students. While advocates have worked to open access to these spaces and transform them to better serve the needs of all students, others have focused on creating alternative educational spaces that directly serve the needs of students through culturally and politically relevant pedagogy. This sentiment is captured in the phrase, "Education Justice is Racial Justice," which is represented through an artistic poster of an activist and social movement in Figure 1.3.3.



Figure 1.3.3: [Education Justice is Racial Justice](#). (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0; Favianna Rodriguez via [Justseeds](#))

Formation of Autonomous Schools

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) began organizing Freedom Schools in 1963. Civil rights leaders like Fannie Lou Hamer, Bob Moses, and Stokely Carmichael had begun organizing voter education initiatives to offer vital education to Black communities. SNCC sought to expand these efforts and work against the pervasive educational disadvantages faced by Black communities in the Jim Crow South. The Freedom Schools provided students of all ages with an opportunity to learn vital information about history, mathematics, culture, and other topics. This offered personal benefits to the participants while also encouraging folx to join a movement of engaged and politically motivated community members. This is just one example of BIPOC communities creating autonomous learning environments that promote cultural pride and relevant knowledge and preserve shared languages. Historically Black Colleges and Universities have been major leaders in this area. You can learn more about these institutions in [Chapter 9, section 9.5: "Counternarratives in Racial Wealth Disparities."](#) As well, native Hawaiian communities have been leaders, especially in language preservation, with the Kamehameha Schools opening in 1887 to defend Native traditions and preserve culture for the next generation.

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1.4: The Beginning of Ethnic Studies

Early Days of Ethnic Studies

Throughout the 1960s, colleges and universities were the sites of student-led protests for racial justice, environmental justice, gender liberation, and in opposition to the war in Vietnam. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale met at Merritt College in Oakland, California, where they were inspired by the writings of the Black radical author, Franz Fanon. A sign on the Merritt College campus is shown in Figure 1.4.1. They began a student group called Soul Students Advisory Council and advocated for the first Black Studies program, before going on to found the Black Panther Party (Rojas, 2010). At the same time, similar efforts were underway throughout California and across the country. The Black Student Union at San Francisco State College (SFSC) was started in 1963 by activists who had trained with the Black Panther Party and SNCC (Rojas, 2010). The organization supported the small minority of Black students at SFSC at the time and sought to increase enrollment. In 1966, Jimmy Garret from SNCC arrived on campus to mobilize and organize Black students (Rojas, 2010).

You've come up with what you hope will be a great thesis for your paper. Want to make sure before you get started with it? Ask yourself the following questions:



Figure 1.4.1: Merritt College. (CC BY 4.0; Photo by Jordan Burkart)

At SFSC, the administration allowed students to teach each other courses not included in the traditional curriculum through the Experimental College. Students resisted any attempt to control the content of these courses, including invited speakers. The culture and operations of the Experimental College attracted radicalized Black students. Students, especially leaders in the Black Student Union, used the Experimental College to build the Black Studies curriculum. By 1968, the Black Studies curriculum covered history, social sciences, and the humanities, including courses like Sociology of Black Oppression, American Institutions, Culture in Cities, Composition, Modern African Thought and Literature, Recurrent Themes in Twentieth Century Afroamericano Thought, Creative Writing, Avant-Garde Jazz, Play Writing, and Black Improvisation.

The Longest Student Strike

George Murray was a beloved English instructor at SFSC, who was known for his vocal critiques of racism and the Vietnam War. He also served as the Minister of Education for the Black Panther Party. After he was fired on November 1, 1968, student leaders from the BSU and **Third World Liberation Front (TWLF)** started a strike. The TWLF was a multi-ethnic coalition of students that were awoken to the fact that they were being taught in ways that were dominating and irrelevant to themselves (Maeda, 2012), and included a coalition of the Black Student Union (BSU), Latin American Student Organization (LASO), Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), Mexican American Student Confederation, Philippine (now Pilipino) American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE),

La Raza, Native American Students Union, and Asian American Political Alliance. These movements built on intergenerational traditions of protest and advocacy that informed the emergent groups that formed, established, and nurtured Ethnic Studies (Delgado, 2016). Penny Nakatsu was one of the strike's leaders, and her speeches emphasized the importance of connecting student oppression with U.S. Imperialism and Militarism that creates adverse conditions throughout Third World countries. Nesbit Crutchfield was also a prominent leader in the organization and the first striker to be arrested. He spent over a year in jail.

Police officers used militarized tactics on strikers, including directly assaulting students. The College's President at the beginning of the strike, Robert Smith, was initially sympathetic to students and interested in hearing out their demands. However, the administration quickly replaced President Smith with Samuel Ichiyé Hayakawa, who represented the interests of the predominantly white California State College Board of Trustees and then California Governor Ronald Reagan. The TWLF made a conscious choice in their organizing to center the leadership of students of color. However, the strike also garnered support from white students and community members, as well as the faculty union, a local chapter of the American Federation of Teachers. The strike lasted for nearly five months and at its peak, had halted nearly all classes and college operations. Although the protestors were met with hostility, resistance, arrests, and violence, they countered this with a strategy called the "War of the Flea," which focused on disruptive tactics that would pressure the administration to take action. For example, protestors checked out massive amounts of books from the library, disrupted classes to encourage students to join the strikes, and staged massive public demonstrations with music and chanting (Rojas, 2010).

Outcomes of the Strike

In the end, the strikers won nearly all of their demands, including the creation of a Black Studies Department, the funding of 11.3 new full-time equivalent faculty positions, a new Associate Director of Financial Aid, the creation of an Economic Opportunity Program (EOP) with 108 students admitted for Spring 1969 in this program, as well as 500 seats committed for non-white students in the Fall of 1969 with 400 additional slots for EOP students, and a commitment to creating the School of Ethnic Studies (Rojas, 2010). The School of Ethnic Studies later became San Francisco State University's College of Ethnic Studies, which includes Africana Studies, American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, Latina/Latino Studies, and Race and Resistance Studies. The strikers' unmet demands included that Dr. Nathan Hare and George Murray were both denied faculty employment in the newly formed Black Studies program. Despite these losses, to this day, the strike remains *the* longest student strike in U.S. history and is a testament to the power of student mobilization (Delgado, 2016; Maeda, 2012; Rojas, 2010).

Sidebar: San Francisco State College Strike Demands

Black Student Union Demands

1. That all Black Studies courses being taught through various departments be immediately part of the Black Studies Department and that all the instructors in this department receive full-time pay.
2. That Dr. Hare, Chairman of the Black Studies Department, receive a full-professorship and a comparable salary according to his qualifications.
3. That there be a Department of Black Studies which will grant a Bachelor's Degree in Black Studies; that the Black Studies Department chairman, faculty and staff have the sole power to hire faculty and control and determine the destiny of its department.
4. That all unused slots for Black Students from Fall 1968 under the Special Admissions program be filled in Spring 1969.
5. That all Black students wishing so, be admitted in Fall 1969.
6. That twenty (20) full-time teaching positions be allocated to the Department of Black Studies.
7. That Dr. Helen Bedesem be replaced from the position of Financial Aid Officer and that a Black person be hired to direct it; that Third World people have the power to determine how it will be administered.
8. That no disciplinary action will be administered in any way to any students, workers, teachers, or administrators during and after the strike as a consequence of their participation in the strike.
9. That the California State College Trustees not be allowed to dissolve any Black programs on or off the San Francisco State College campus.
10. That George Murray maintain his teaching position on campus for the 1968-69 academic year.

Third World Liberation Front Demands

1. That a School of Ethnic Studies for the ethnic groups involved in the Third World be set up with the students in each particular ethnic organization having the authority and control of the hiring and retention of any faculty member, director, or administrator, as well as the curriculum in a specific area study.

2. That 50 faculty positions be appropriated to the School of Ethnic Studies, 20 of which would be for the Black Studies program.
3. That, in the Spring semester, the College fulfill its commitment to the non-white students in admitting those who apply.
4. That, in the fall of 1969, all applications of non-white students be accepted.
5. That George Murray and any other faculty person chosen by non-white people as their teacher be retained in their positions.

The tenacity of the strikers inspired students at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) to form their own Third World Liberation Front in January 1969, who began a separate strike for Ethnic Studies at UCB (Delgado, 2016). Strikers called for a Third World College, but the administration ultimately formed a Department of Ethnic Studies. Throughout the country, racial justice and student activism were front and center, leading to a cascade of activism for Ethnic Studies programs, including the core disciplines of Black Studies, Chicano Studies, Asian American Studies, and American Indian Studies. In 1969, Chicana/o/x activists came together at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and published El Plan de Santa Barbara, a document that united diverse activists from around the state of California and laid out a roadmap for Chicana/Chicano Studies, as well as programs to increase the retention, engagement, and success of students from minoritized backgrounds (see Chapter 6, section 6.2: "Roots and Resistance- The Development of Chicanx and Latinx Studies"). UCSB created the first Chicano Studies department in the University of California in 1970, now Chicana and Chicano Studies; and eventually formed the first PhD program in the field in 2003. California State University, Los Angeles was also a forerunner in this area and established a Mexican American Studies program, which became the Department of Chicano Studies in 1971, and is now called the Department of Chicana(o) and Latina(o) Studies.

ADAPT 1.4.1

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1.5: The Significance of Ethnic Studies

Learning Objectives

At the end of the module, students will be able to:

1. understand the difference between race and ethnicity
2. discuss the social construction of race
3. explain racial framing
4. compare intergroup relations in terms of racial-ethnic group conflict and tolerance
5. assess systemic racism and structural explanations for racial and ethnic inequality
6. evaluate the intersectionality of race, ethnicity and other social categories on systems of oppression
7. provide examples of racial-ethnic stratification and inequality
8. define majority (dominant) and minority groups (subordinate)
9. interpret social indicators and data on racial and ethnic inequality in the United States

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

Achieved Status	Otherness
Ascribed Status	Paternalistic Pattern
Competition	Patterns of Intergroup Relations
Dominant Group	Pluralism
Double Consciousness	Population Transfer
Egocentric	Race
Ethnicity	Racial Disparities and Inequality
Ethnocentrism	Racial Formation
Fluid Competitive Race Relations	Rigid Competitive Pattern
Genocide	Segregation
Internal Colonialism	Social Status
Intersectionality	Sociocentrism
Labels	Status Shifting
Macro-level	Stratification
Micro-level	Subordinate Group
Minority Groups	Systemic Racism
Multiculturalism	Unequal Power

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had your experience or story misrepresented or retold in an inaccurate way?

Has anyone ever taken something of value from you without asking or providing compensation?

The feelings and thoughts you hold about these questions are not different from other people in the United States, particularly those who were forcibly driven from their homeland, smuggled into this country from another place, stripped of their identity, exploited for their resources and labor, or those who have been killed or murdered for being different. The most disturbing part of our history and the characterization of these incidences is the ongoing denial, recognition, and reparations for the people who today remain inflicted by the misrepresentation and injustice of our social structures, institutions, and ideologies. No one likes their history or experience retold through fallacies, stereotypes, or lies. No one likes their life or way of living taken from them involuntarily.

Technology and social media have made it easy to block out and change what we hear and think about each other, our experiences, and our stories. Ironically, these tools have also made it easier to share our lives and bring others into our world without time or borders.

Why is it important to share your experience or tell your story in an honest and accurate way? What is the value in sharing your experience or story?

By telling our stories and sharing our experiences, we acknowledge our existence and humanity. Because we have not retold or allowed some people to share their stories and experiences, we deprive them of this acknowledgement. We make some people less than human and justify it by keeping truths and facts hidden.

This book examines race and ethnicity as understood through our history and the experiences of major underrepresented racial groups including African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinx Americans, and Native Americans in the United States. We will explore a broad range of sociocultural, intellectual, and historical experiences that form the construction and intersectionality of race and ethnicity in the United States by applying macro and micro perspectives of analysis. Furthermore, we will examine the cultural and political contexts behind the systems of power, privilege, and inequality impacting Americans of color. Emphasis is placed on racial and social justice with methods for building a just and equitable society.

UNDERSTANDING RACE

There are two myths or ideas about race. The first suggests people inherit physical characteristics distinguishing race. The second insinuates that one race is superior to others or that one “pure” race exists.

Scientific research mapping of the human genome system found that humans are homogenous (Henslin, 2011). Race is truly an arbitrary label that has become part of society's culture with no justifiable evidence to support differences in physical appearance to substantiate the idea that there are a variety of human species. Scientific data finds only one human species making up only one human race. Evidence shows physical differences in human appearance including skin color are a result of human migration patterns and adaptations to the environment (Jablonski, 2012). These data underline the fact that the concept of race is socially



constructed.

Society chooses to define the basis and classification of physical characteristics. Racial terms classify and stratify people by appearance and inherently assign individuals and groups as inferior or superior in society based on their physical traits (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012). This classification and social status of race and racial groups change over time and varies from one society to another as viewpoints, perspectives, and knowledge adapts and evolves. People use physical characteristics to identify, relate, and interact with one another.

In this book, we will discuss and use the terms race and racial group interchangeably. Even though the concept of race is not biologically sound, people do identify with the term and are often grouped based on the socially constructed concept of race. In reality, race and racial group classification influences people's life experiences and choices (Farley, 2010; Winant, 1994; Taylor, 1998; Duster, 2001).

The social process of recognizing and defining racial characteristics, labels, and groups is known as racial formation (Omi & Winant, 1994). This process solidifies how race is understood and is propelled by political interests. The results directly impact the social and political consequences of people's lives, and it is the primary reason society recognizes race as an important classification and why its definition and meaning transform over time (Farley, 2010). Powerful and influential people use race to



create divisions or bring people together, whichever serves their interests.

Ethnicity refers to the cultural characteristics related to ancestry and heritage. Ethnicity describes shared culture such as group practices, values, and beliefs recognized by people in and the group itself (Griffiths et al., 2015). People who identify with an ethnic group share common cultural characteristics (i.e., nationality, history, language, religion, etc.). Ethnic groups select rituals,

customs, ceremonies, and other traditions to help preserve shared heritage (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012).

Lifestyle and other identity characteristics such as geography and region influence how we adapt our ethnic behaviors to fit the context, environment, or setting in which we live. Culture is also central in determining how humans grow and develop including diet, food preferences, and cultural traditions promoting physical activities, abilities, well-being, and sport (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012). A college professor of Mexican decent living in Central California will project different behaviors than someone of the same ethnic culture who is a housekeeper in Las Vegas, Nevada. Differences in profession, social class, and region will influence each person's lifestyle, physical composition, and health though both may identify and affiliate themselves as Mexican.

The ethnicity of parents largely determines the ethnicity of offspring through socialization. Ethnicity is a social characteristic, like race, that is passed from generation to generation (Farley, 2010). For example, the California natives of the San Joaquin Valley known as Yokuts, meaning people, were divided into true tribes each with their own name, language, and territory (Tachi Yokut Tribe, 2021). Learning cultural traits and characteristics are important for developing identity and ethnic group acceptance. Cultural socialization occurs throughout one's life course.

Not all people see themselves as belonging to an ethnic group or view ethnic heritage as important to their identity. People who do not identify with an ethnic group either have no distinct cultural background because their ancestors come from a variety of cultural groups and offspring have not maintained a specific culture, instead have a blended culture, or they lack awareness about their ethnic heritage completely (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012). It may be difficult for some people to feel a sense of solidarity or association with any specific ethnic group because they do not know where their cultural practices originated and how their cultural behaviors adapted over time.

What is your ethnicity? Is your ethnic heritage very important, somewhat important, or not important in defining who you are? Why?

RACE-ETHNIC RELATIONS TODAY

At present, people of color are now more than 80% of the world's population and becoming the demographic majority (Feagin, 2014). The U.S. population is more diverse than ever in its history, and it is projected that by the year of 2040 Whites will become the statistical minority in the United States. With these demographic changes, Americans of color will become more influential in politics, economics, and increase societal pressure to them with greater equity and justice.

Intergroup relations between racial-ethnic groups are complex. Because racial-ethnic group creation is politically motivated, people of color often experience frustration, anger, and trauma from ongoing conflict, discrimination, and inequality (Farley, 2010). Our race and ethnic heritage shapes us in many ways and fills us with pride, but it is also a source of conflict, prejudice, and



hatred.

There are seven distinct patterns of intergroup relations between majority (powerful) and minority (subordinate) groups influencing not only the racial and ethnic identity of people but also the opportunities and barriers each will experience through social interactions. Maladaptive contacts and exchanges include genocide, population transfer, internal colonialism, and

segregation. Genocide attempts to destroy a group of people because of their race or ethnicity. “Labeling the targeted group as inferior or even less than fully human facilitates genocide” (Henslin, 2011, p. 225). Population transfer moves or expels a minority group through direct or indirect transfer. Indirect transfer forces people to leave by making living conditions unbearable, whereas direct transfer literally expels minorities by force.

Another form of rejection by the dominant group is a type of colonialism. **Internal colonialism** refers to a country's powerful dominant group exploiting the low-status, minority group for economic advantage. Internal colonialism generally accompanies segregation (Henslin, 2011). In **segregation**, minority groups live physically separate from the dominant group by law.

Three adaptive intergroup relations include assimilation, multiculturalism, and pluralism. The pattern of **assimilation** is the process by which a minority or less powerful group assumes the attitudes and language of the dominant or mainstream culture. An individual or group gives up its identity by taking on the characteristics of the dominant culture (Griffiths et al., 2015). For example, the original language, cultures, and family ties of African Americans were destroyed through slavery, and any wealth or resources gained since have been challenged or taken through White-on-Black oppression. When minorities assimilate by force to dominant ideologies and practices, they can no longer practice their own religion, speak their own language, or follow their own customs. In permissible assimilation, minority, low-status groups adopt the dominant culture in their own way and at their own speed (Henslin, 2011).

Multiculturalism is the most accepting intergroup relationship between the powerful dominant and subordinate minority. Multiculturalism or pluralism encourages variation and diversity. Multiculturalism promotes affirmation and practice of ethnic traditions while socializing individuals into the dominant culture (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012). This model works well in diverse societies comprised of a variety of cultural groups and a political system supporting freedom of expression. Pluralism is a mixture of cultures where each retains its own identity (Griffiths et al., 2015). Under pluralism, groups exist separately and equally while working together such as through economic interdependence where each group fills a different societal niche then exchanges activities or services for the sustainability and survival of all. Both the multicultural and pluralism models stress interactions and contributions to their society by all ethnic groups.



Intergroup conflict has many social and political consequences affecting the life of every American (Farley, 2010). The most unsettling aspect is the inability or unwillingness of Whites to see and understand the racist reality in the United States. Many Whites continue to deny histories of racism, believe racism is a thing of the past, and do not acknowledge contemporary racial framing and discrimination (Feagin, 2014). Whites perpetuate the ideology of “intergroup conflict and relations” to establish the perception that all racial groups have equal impact or resources. This corroborates an image of a level playing field among all racial groups rather than the reality of a White-dominated and controlled systemic structure. To give an example, for over four centuries African Americans have been subordinated and exploited for their labor. Racial oppression has reinforced anti-Black practices, political-economic power of Whites, racial and economic inequality, and racial framing to legitimize White privilege and power in economic, political, legal, educational, and other institutions (Feagin, 2014).

People of color experience the social world differently from Whites. The life chances and opportunities for Americans of color are restricted in many ways, such as, who they can marry, where they can live, what they wear or eat, who is a member of their school's student body, what curriculum and instruction they receive, what jobs or careers they can obtain, how they pray, who they pray

to, who represents their political interests, and what, if any, healthcare they receive (Feagin, 2014). The institutions and services that are readily available to Whites are not the same or always accessible for Americans of color. The few opportunities gained by some people of color because of circumstance or chance, does not mitigate the inequities and injustice most Americans of color live and experience. The White majority speaks about equality but does not practice it across racial groups. Unaddressed inequities result in continued turmoil between the majority and minority groups in the United States.

RACE-ETHNIC GROUP PERCEPTIONS

All Americans are indoctrinated in the patriotic principles of our nation's history and the ideologies of equality and freedom; however, these ideologies as defined by the founding fathers and the United States Constitution are largely free of critical examination or criticism (Parenti, 2006). Racial framing people of color dates back to our early history of colonialism and slavery which established the foundation for White-dominated policies and institutions that today continue to legitimize and encourage racist practices. In the United States, racist thought, sentiments, and actions are structured into everyday life such that large portions of the White population do not view racist words, imagery, or commentary as serious (Feagin, 2014). Racial framing is concrete and advantageous for Whites, while it constructs obstacles and is painful for Americans of color. Everyone is directly and indirectly impacted by racial framing.

Systemic racism in our institutions by its very definition creates and maintains racial oppression. In the United States, systemic racism is the "culture." The policies and norms created by the racist system is socially reproduced like any other form of culture. What Americans call collective culture is selective transmission of elite-dominated values (Parenti, 2006). We are socialized to understand and maintain the ideologies of our ancestors even if we are the racial-oppressed or the racial oppressors (Feagin, 2014). The culture is embedded in our systems we live in (e.g., economy, politics, education, religion, family, etc.) so it becomes unconscious in our everyday lives and practices. Not everyone is aware of or sees racism because it is a social norm.

This systemic structure of racism embodies other forms of societal differences and establishes norms within those social categories as well. This includes formal and informal norms around (dis)ability, age, gender, sexuality, social class, among others. These categories are interconnected and apply to individual and group systems of disadvantage and discrimination. The **intersectionality** of social categorizations creates overlapping and interdependent systems of oppression. For example, the social markers of "Black" and "female" do not exist independently in one's life experience. It is the intersection of these categories that influences the life's opportunities or challenges, such as Black women earning \$0.62 for every \$1.00 by men of all races (Center for American Progress, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

The ongoing denial of systemic racism has resulted in racial disparities and inequality among Americans of color including voter discrimination, racial profiling and police brutality, school segregation, housing discrimination, inequity and intolerance in college and professional sports, discrimination against faculty and administrators in higher education, and pro-White favoritism in top-level employment sectors and boards of directors (Feagin, 2014). The denial of racism stems from the ideologies of our founding fathers designed during the 1787 Constitutional Convention. Many convention delegates of the time were anti-democratic in their thinking fearing the "masses." At least 40% of the delegation were slaveowners and many others were merchants, shippers, lawyers, and bankers who profited from commerce in slave-produced products or supplies (Feagin, 2014). The founding fathers were aware of how they profited from slavery, and despite this understanding would describe their own sociopolitical condition with England as "slavery by taxation without consent." To this end, the Constitutional Convention built a new nation to protect the wealth of our founding fathers and those like them by defining rights using social labels and categories such as Americans from Africa as "slaves by natural law," indigenous peoples as "separate nations," or altogether excluding people, like women, by directly avoiding inclusion. These policies and ideologies have become the foundation of American



tradition.

The creation of a national racial order established at the Constitutional convention has ensued severe consequences for centuries and yet remains the United States moral foundation. At no point has a new Constitution or convention been held by representatives of all people to delete the original text of racist provisions or eradicate the institutions that continue to hold Americans of color in bondage (Douglas, 1881; DuBois, 1920; Feagin, 2014). The Constitution created and maintained racial separation and oppression that has ensured White, elite men would rule for centuries. Ordinary and poor Whites, even today, accept racialized order because a White ruling class benefits White Americans and creates a positive image of Whiteness.

Most recently, social scientists, analysts, and a new generation of Americans have argued that there has been little attention on the racial histories, policies, and discrimination of people of color in the United States (Feagin, 2014). There have been a variety of amendments and resolutions by the U.S. government to acknowledge the racial injustice of our past such as the 2009 non-binding apology on the injustice of slavery and Jim Crow laws. However, these acts do not provide real commitments or congressional actions to address the long-term impacts of racial oppression or reduce contemporary racial discrimination (Feagin, 2014).

Considering the recent, high-profile incidents of police violence against African Americans, what is the likelihood of racial change in the United States? Will contemporary racial issues and social awareness change the way Americans think? According to a Pew Research Center survey by Horowitz, Parker, Brown, and Cox (2020), approximately 76% of Americans note a major or minor change in the way they think about race and racial inequality, but only 51% believe there will be major policy changes to address racial inequality. Results from the same survey found African Americans (86%), Asian Americans (56%), Latinx Americans (57%), and Whites (39%) believe when it comes to giving Black people equal rights with White people, our country has not gone far enough. Approximately 48% of these respondents say more people participating in training on diversity and inclusion would do



a lot to reduce inequality.

EXPLANATIONS OF RACIAL INEQUALITIES

Social scientists use theories to study people. Theories help us examine and understand society including the social structure and social value people create and sustain to fulfill human needs. Theories provide an objective framework of analysis and evaluation for understanding the social structure including the construction of the cultural ideologies, values, and norms and their influence on thinking and behavior. **Macro-level** analysis studies large-scale social arrangements or constructs in the social world. The macro perspective examines how groups, organizations, networks, processes, and systems influences thoughts and actions of individuals and groups (Kennedy, Norwood, & Jendian, 2017). **Micro-level** analysis studies the social interactions of individuals and groups. The micro perspective observes how thinking and behavior influences the social world such as groups, organizations, networks, processes, and systems (Kennedy et al., 2017).

To understand the inequities in power and resources between racial-ethnic groups, we must understand the social, political, and economic structure of society. A macro-level perspective helps us understand the effect the social structure has on our life chances, opportunities, and challenges. Whereas a micro-level perspective focuses on interpreting individual or personal viewpoints and influences. Using only a micro-level perspective to understand racial-ethnic inequality leads to an unclear understanding of the world from singular bias perceptions and assumptions about people, social groups, and society (Carl, 2013). To study race and ethnic relations and inequality, we must analyze groups and societies not simple individuals.

Race and ethnic identity influence social status or position in society. **Social status** serves as a method for building and maintaining boundaries among and between people and groups. Status dictates social inclusion or exclusion resulting in **stratification** or hierarchy whereby a person's position in society regulates their social participation by others. Racial-ethnic inequality is a circumstance of stratification where inequality is based on race and ethnic composition of the individual or group.

There are several structural factors that shape social stratification and intergroup relations in society. According to Farley (2010), there are seven characteristics of a society that effect majority-minority relations. The major influences include economics, politics, institutions, social and cultural characteristics, and history.

Table 1. Structural Factors of Social Position and Intergroup Relations

Structural Factor	Description
Economic System	Type of economy (i.e., capitalist, feudal, socialist, etc.) including methods of income and wealth distribution
Economic Production	Labor, capital, goods and services to create and distribute products
Political System	Type of politic structure, power relationships between groups, and degree of political freedom
Fundamental Institutions	Characteristics of major institutions including family, education, and religion

Structural Factor	Description
Dominant Culture	Controlling and imposed ideologies and value system
Cultural & Social Characteristics of Groups	Customs, lifestyles, values, attitudes, aesthetics, language, education, religion, formal and informal rules, social organization, and material objects of each group
Historical association	Past contact and interactions between racial-ethnic groups (i.e., voluntary or involuntary immigration, colonialism, segregation, etc.)

This material (Table 1) developed from concepts introduced by John E. Farley (2010) in *Minority-Minority Relations* (6th ed.) published by Prentice-Hall.

People may occupy multiple statuses in a society. At birth, people are **ascribed status** in alignment to their physical and mental features, race, and gender. In some societies, people may earn or **achieve status** from their talents, efforts, or accomplishments (Griffiths et al., 2015). Obtaining higher education or being an artistic prodigy often corresponds to high status. For example, a college degree awarded from an “Ivy League” university social weighs higher status than a degree from a public state college. Just as talented artists, musicians, and athletes receive honors, privileges, and celebrity status.

In addition, the social, political hierarchy of a society or region designates social status. Consider the social labels within class, race, ethnicity, gender, education, profession, age, and family. **Labels** defining a person’s characteristics serve as their position within the larger group. People in a majority or **dominant group** have higher status (e.g., rich, White, male, physician, etc.) than those of the minority or **subordinate group** (e.g., poor, Black, female, housekeeper, etc.). Overall, the location of a person on the social strata influences their social power and participation (Griswold, 2013). Individuals with inferior power have limitations to social and physical resources including lack of authority, influence over others, formidable networks, capital, and money.

Minority groups are defined as people who receive unequal treatment and discrimination based on social categories such as age, gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, religious beliefs, or socio-economic class. Minority groups are not necessarily numerical minorities (Griffith et al., 2015). For example, a large group of people may be a minority group because they lack social power. The physical and cultural traits of minority groups “are held in low esteem by the dominant or majority group which treats them unfairly” (Henslin, 2011, p. 217). The dominant group has higher power and status in society and receives greater privileges. As a result, the dominant group uses its position to discriminate against those that are different. The dominant group in the United States is represented by White, middle-class, Protestant people of northern European descent (Doane, 2005). Minority groups can garner power by expanding political boundaries or through expanded migration though both efforts do not occur with ease and require societal support from both minority and dominant group members. The loss of power among dominant groups threatens not only their authority over other groups but also the privileges and way of life established by this majority.



People sometimes engage in **status shifting** to garner acceptance or avoid attention. DuBois (1903) described the act of people looking through the eyes of others to measure social place or position as **double consciousness**. His research explored the history and cultural experiences of the American slavery and the plight of Black folk in translating thinking and behavior between

racial contexts. DuBois' research helped social scientists understand how and why people display one identity in certain settings and another in different ones. People must negotiate a social situation to decide how to project their social identity and assign a label that fits (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012). Status shifting is evident when people move from informal to formal contexts. Our ethnic or cultural identity and practices are very different at home than at school, work, or church. Each setting demands different aspects of who we are and our place in the social setting.

There are three major patterns of race and ethnic relations which influence the system of stratification in the United States. The paternalistic, rigid competitive, and fluid competitive intergroup relationships affect social status and life chances (Van den Berghe, 1958, 1978; Wilson, 1973, 1978; Farley, 2010). The first **paternalistic pattern** is ascribed at birth, based on racial composition, and determines one's social status for life. Under this pattern, the roles and status of majority and minority groups are understood and supported through a system of "racial etiquette" with frequent contact between groups but the contact itself is unequal (Farley, 2010). In this relationship, the minority group is dependent on the majority, and there is no racial conflict or competition. Individuals who do not cooperate or break the norms are severely penalized.

The second **rigid competitive pattern** is also ascribed at birth, based on race. However, under this pattern majority and minority members compete in areas such as work and housing, and racial groups are segregated. As competition threatens the majority group, discrimination against the minority or subordinate group increases as well as intergroup conflict to instill power and assertiveness among the majority (Farley, 2010).

Lastly, in **fluid competitive race relations**, majority and minority group members are ranked on their own skills and abilities and able to pursue all in life. This pattern results in frequent interracial contact in work and business settings though groups live separately primarily among their own racial groups (Farley 2010). Nonetheless, most minorities have fewer resources to start and compete with majority group members as a result of historic racism and discrimination. The majority group dominates and controls the main systems and institutions to serve their own interests (Farley, 2010). In addition, competition and racial group conflicts increase when fewer resources such as jobs are available. Even when members of a minority group attain high status, racial stratification remains present within and outside the subordinate group.

According to Noel (1968), ethnocentrism, competition, and unequal power lead to racial-ethnic stratification. **Ethnocentrism** evaluates people and their culture from the perspective of one's own cultural life. People tend to believe their life and way of living is the norm and judge others from that perspective. This attitude and mindset lend itself to categorizing people or assigning status based on the closeness and comfort to one's own culture. The opportunity to exploit a group by another in **competition** over resources further creates a framework for social inequality. A competitive environment or atmosphere provides the opportunity for one group to benefit from the subordination of another (Farley, 2010). When a group is powerful enough to dominate or subordinate others, inequality further develops. A social structure of **unequal power** allows the control of one group over another solidifying racial-ethnic stratification.

The natural propensity of human behavior is to focus on self and those around us (Paul & Elder, 2005). However, people do not always value others as they value self. Without guidance and support to appreciate and respect all humans, people lose concern for others. For example, a stratified society fortifies an egocentric ideology to win or survive at any cost. In the plight to obtain wealth or achieve success (i.e., education, health, resources, or money, etc.), people strategize and fight for an advantage. This thinking legitimizes prejudice, self-justification, and self-deception driven by ideas such as "I'm right," "I need to earn a living," "I work hard," "I deserve it," "I'm not hurting anyone," "they don't matter," or "they don't deserve it," "they're worthless," and "they don't belong here."

A person's reasoning or problem-solving skills is only as strong as their experience with an issue, topic, or situation. Life experience plays a significant role in the ability to critically think about issues of race and ethnicity. If you have limited experiences, your thought processes will be limited. If you are unaware or have limited knowledge about race, ethnicity, and the social world, then much of your thinking will have a focus on self or ego which lends itself to egocentric, ethnocentric, and sociocentric attitudes and behaviors.

Assessing other people and our surroundings is necessary for interpreting and interacting in the social world. When we think of only ourselves, without regard for the feelings and desires of others, we are **egocentric** or self-centered. The inability to understand another person's view or opinion may be different than your own is egocentric. This cognitive bias is inflated when we judge others using our own cultural standards.

The practice of judging others through our own cultural lens is called ethnocentrism. This practice is a cultural universal meaning the behavior is common to all known human cultures throughout the world. People everywhere think their culture is true, moral, proper, and right (Kottak & Kozaitis, 2012). By its very definition, ethnocentrism creates division and conflict between social groups whereby mediating differences is challenging when everyone believes they are culturally superior, and their culture should

be the standard for living. People justify or validate egocentric and ethnocentric thinking and behavior by reaffirming they are simply concerned with or centered on their own social group which is sociocentrism. Overall, the ego emphasizes self and the cultural superiority of one's social group.

REALITY OF INEQUALITY

By studying the structure of social institutions, we understand how race, ethnicity, and other social categories work as systems of power. The social world we live in is supported by ideological beliefs that make existing power structures and discrimination appear normal (Andersen & Collins, 2010). However, the social categories we use to label or identify people are socially constructed and developed through historical processes and intergroup relations. Additionally, these constructs are defined in binary terms of “either/or” (e.g., Black/White, female/male, poor/rich, gay/straight, alien/citizen, etc.) which create “**otherness**” stigmatizing minority or subordinate groups as out-groups by the majority or powerful (Andersen & Collins, 2010). Otherness directly relates to the advantages and disadvantages of individuals and groups based on their status or location in the stratified society. Because racial formation and racism shape everyday life, we find significant indicators of inequity for Americans of color in family income, poverty, home ownership, education level, and employment.

Table 2. Indicators of Racial-Ethnic Inequity in the United States ¹

	Population	Income	Poverty	Home Ownership ²
Racial-Ethnic Group	% of U.S. Population	Median Family Income (\$)	% Below 100% of Poverty	% Home Ownership (2020)
African American	13.4	58,518	18.8	45.3
Asian American	5.9	112,226	7.3	60.3
Latina/o/x	18.5	60,927	15.7	50.1
Native American	1.3	54,920 ³	23.0 ³	54.0
White	76.3	\$89,663	7.3	71.3

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC).

² Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey/Housing Vacancy Survey, March 9, 2021.

³ Source: 2019 American Community Survey 2019: 1-Year Estimates Selected Population Profile in the U.S.

Table 3. Indicators of Racial-Ethnic Inequity in the United States ¹

	Years of School Completed			Employment ³	
Racial-Ethnic Group	% High School Diploma	% Bachelor's Degree	% Graduate Degree	Employed	Unemployment Rate
African American	30.5	18	9.9	57.0	7.7
Asian American	15.8	34.2	26.9	63.6	3.5
Latina/o/x	28.1	14.4	6.5	64.3	5.1
Native American	31.5 ²	10.4 ²	5.7 ²	53.5	8.0
White	24.3	25.6	15.7	60.0	3.9

¹ Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2020 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC).

² Source: 2019 American Community Survey 2019: 1-Year Estimates Selected Population Profile in the U.S.

³ Source: 2019 American Community Survey 2019: 1-Year Estimates Selected Population Profile in the U.S.

In the United States, under tribal sovereignty, indigenous tribes have the inherent authority to govern themselves within the nation's borders. The U.S. recognizes tribal nations as domestic dependent nations and reaffirms adherence to the principles of government-to-government relations (The United States Department of Justice, 2020). As a result, the U.S. Census Bureau has challenges in conducting and collecting accurate data in American Indian and Alaska Native areas as available data for Native Americans is presented in Table 2. Estimates conducted by the American Community Survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/about/acs-and-census.html>) are shown for indicators where current data



is not available.

To help us understand the impact of systemic racism of Americans of color, let's explore the data collected and published by the U.S. Census Bureau.

1. According to Table 2, which racial-ethnic groups have the lowest median family incomes?
2. In the same table, which groups have the highest poverty rates?
3. Which groups have the lowest homeownership rates?
4. According to Table 3, which groups complete the highest levels of education? Which groups achieve the lowest levels?
5. In the same table, which groups obtain graduate (i.e., Master's, professional, or doctorate) degrees?
6. Which groups have the highest unemployment numbers? How does unemployment correspond to population size by racial-ethnic group?
7. Review your analysis of the data presented in Table 2 and 3. What racial-ethnic group patterns do you find?

Data and factual information provide relevant context to understanding racial-ethnic relations and inequality in our social world. We cannot develop the capacity to recognize, appreciate, and empathize with each other if we do not know all the facts of our country's history and experiences of all people living in it. Current psychological research has found that knowledge of historical racism is related to own's ability to understand contemporary racism (Feagin, 2014). Data and factual information are critically important to helping us make connections that lead to insights and improvements in the quality of life for all Americans and all of humanity. Everyone has an important role to play in the future of our country and our lives together.

SUMMARY

In Module 1, we explored race as a social construct and ethnicity as a matter of cultural group identity. We learned that racial formation compels how race is understood and driven by historical, social, political, and economic interests. You were asked to demonstrate greater consciousness about the significance of naming, land acknowledgement, and the value of intergroup dialogue. We also examined patterns of intergroup relations and conflict between Americans of color and the White majority. And lastly, we analyzed the racial reality of the U.S. including racial oppression, inequality, systemic racism, and White power and privilege.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Describe the terms race and ethnicity.
2. Discuss racial framing and its influence on constructing ideas and perceptions about race.
3. Explain racial-ethnic group relations in the United States. Identify maladaptive and adaptive interactions between majority and minority groups and the three major patterns of race and ethnic relations influencing the system of stratification in the United States.
4. Use data and factual information to illustrate the impact of racial framing, intersectionality, otherness, and systemic racism on racial and ethnic oppression and inequality.
5. Explain why we need to participate in open and honest conversation about race and ethnicity.

TO MY FUTURE SELF

From the module, what information and new knowledge did I find interesting or useful? How do I plan to use this information and new knowledge in my personal and professional development and improvement?

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1.6: Growth and Expansion of Ethnic Studies

Ethnic Studies as a Site of Growth

In the over fifty years since the founding of Ethnic Studies as an academic field, it has grown substantially to include a range of scholarly associations, degree-granting programs at all levels of higher education, growth in the K-12 education system, inclusion within general education curricula, and as a site of struggle and solidarity for racial justice, decolonization, and intersectionality. Subsequent generations of students and scholars have added to the field of Ethnic Studies and expanded its potential for liberatory praxis. As an interdisciplinary field committed to a relevant education, Ethnic Studies has always been a dynamic project that can change and grow.

Scholarly Associations and Degree Programs

Scholarly associations are voluntary organizations of professional researchers who organize the exchange of ideas through activities like conferences where scholars present and share their work, newsletters, peer-reviewed publications, scholarships, and research grants. Within Ethnic Studies fields, many scholarly organizations exist which focus on specific disciplines and populations of scholars. Some of these predate the 1968 protests for Ethnic Studies, like the [Association for the Study of African American Life and History](#), founded in 1915, which is the group responsible for Black History Month. The [Association for Ethnic Studies](#) was formed in 1972, just four years after the San Francisco State College strike began. The National Association for Chicano Social Scientists first began in 1972 and later became the National Association for Chicano Studies in 1973. Due to the activist of feminist scholars and their allies, the group changed its name to the [National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies](#) in 1995, which remains the name today. However, a single association is often not enough to reflect the diversity and complexity of an academic field. For example, [Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social](#) was founded in 1982, focusing on Chicana/Latina scholarship separately from what was known as the National Association for Chicano Studies at the time.

With respect to the other core disciplines of Ethnic Studies, the [National Council for Black Studies](#) began in 1975 to help provide a structure to the growing fields of Africana/Black Studies, bringing together scholars of the African diaspora studying various aspects of the global experience of Blackness. In 1979, the [Association for Asian American Studies](#) was formed to organize this discipline. The [American Indian Studies Association](#) was formed in 1999 to develop the fields of American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Indigenous Studies. As well, the [Native American and Indigenous Studies Association](#) was formed in 2007 and publishes the journal, *Native American and Indigenous Studies* with the University of Minnesota Press. Academic associations typically encourage student participation and have specific opportunities and scholarships available to students in that field. There are also associations within other disciplines that utilize a racial justice or decolonial lens, such as the [Association of Black Sociologists](#), the [Black Women's Studies Association](#), and the [Association of Indigenous Anthropologists](#).

There are a range of degree programs that are offered in Ethnic Studies fields, reflecting the complexity and depth of experiences among people of color and Indigenous peoples in the United States and around the world. Ethnic Studies programs are united in their shared focus on power and domination, as well as a connection to real-world struggles for justice and equity. This is distinguished between traditional fields of regional studies, cultural studies, and American Studies. For example, researchers who study African cultures, traditions, history, and science may offer a program in African Studies or a degree specific to a region or country on the continent. These programs are distinct from a Black Studies program or Africana Studies program, which focuses on the self-determination and struggles of Black communities in the U.S. or in a transnational context. Ethnic Studies programs may offer degrees in Comparative Ethnic Studies, which addresses multiple historically defined racialized groups, or with a specific concentration in disciplines like Black Studies, African American Studies, Africana Studies, Native American Studies, Indigenous Studies, American Indian Studies, Chicanx and Latinx Studies, Asian American Studies, Critical Pacific Islands & Oceania Studies, Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diasporas, and Critical Middle East/Southwest and North Africa Studies.

Institutional Growth and Policies

While Ethnic Studies has grown as an academic discipline, it has always maintained its connection to community collaborations and ensuring that scholarship and education are useful to communities affected by historical violence, settler-colonialism, and systems of exploitation. Student activists are a key force in Ethnic Studies, and groups like BSU (Black Student Union) and MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicane de Aztlán or the Chicane Student Movement of Aztlan) build student leadership, advocate for

equity and policy change, and develop relationships with historically underserved communities in higher education. Students have also been a major part of advancing Ethnic Studies programs and speaking out when they face budget cuts and administrative threats. For instance, in 1999, the Third World Liberation Front at UCB emerged once more and organized hunger strikes to protest the proposed cuts to both funding and faculty support for the Ethnic Studies department. The movement also included rallies, sit-ins, and building occupations, and managed to stop the cuts to the department and generated an administrative commitment to establishing a research center that was eventually called the Center for Race & Gender. In 2016, the TWLF emerged again, this time at San Francisco State University, also staging hunger strikes as part of a strategy to pressure the administration into making investments in the College of Ethnic Studies. The College faced a nearly \$250,000 deficit in funding, with the University failing to provide adequate financial resources to cover the salaries of all faculty and permanent staff. The student demonstrations, including a 10-day hunger strike and camping overnight on campus grounds, led to university administrators committing a total of over \$650,000 to both address the shortfall and expand the faculty for teaching high-quality and innovative Ethnic Studies courses.

Ethnic Studies classes are a great opportunity for students to deepen their knowledge and passion for these topics. Educators have also shown that these classes have general benefits for all students, as well as campus communities as a whole (Bonilla, Dee, and Penner, 2021). This has led faculty advocates and administrators to establish Ethnic Studies as a **general education graduation requirement**. In 2020, the California state legislature passed Assembly Bill 1460 (authored by Assemblymember Shirley Weber), which changed the general education curriculum to include Ethnic Studies as a graduation requirement for all 23 campuses in the California State University (CSU) system. The CSUs enroll nearly half a million students (485,550 in 2022) and are the largest public research university system in the world. The legislative directive in AB 1460 made it so that all students must take an Ethnic Studies class taught in an Ethnic Studies department, separate from any related diversity or multiculturalism requirements. This acknowledged the status of Ethnic Studies as a distinct field of scholarship. The California Community Colleges followed suit by establishing Ethnic Studies as a graduation requirement, while the University of California system Academic Council is considering both an Ethnic Studies graduation requirement and admission requirement for high school students hoping to attend the UC.

Ethnic Studies curriculum has a long history in the K-12 educational context as well. In 1970, the Native American Materials Development Center created a K-6 curriculum for Navajo children that included both historical content and culturally relevant pedagogies. As early as 1993, the Berkeley Unified School District created a 9th grade course in Ethnic Studies and made it a graduation requirement. In 2007, Kailu High School in Hawai'i established Ethnic Studies as a required 9th-grade course for all students. In 2014, El Rancho Unified in Pico Rivera, CA, created a high school requirement for Ethnic Studies. The **Ethnic Studies Now Coalition** helped to spread the successes of Ethnic Studies to other communities, including through advocacy as well as sharing resources. With more and more districts adopting Ethnic Studies, statewide advocates in California moved to formalize the curriculum and establish a framework for Ethnic Studies teachers. Campus programs like the UCLA Center X / Teacher Education Program, Exito at UCSB, and XITO (Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing) have started to train educators interested in working in this growing field.

Threats Against Ethnic Studies

While Ethnic Studies scholarship and curriculum have seen substantial growth over 50 years, this has always been threatened by counter-movements and institutional resistance. In 1998 in Tucson, Arizona, the school district established a Mexican American Studies program that grew to 48 course offerings and was the largest Ethnic Studies program in any school district nationwide. The department offered student support and facilitated teachers' and parents' involvement in Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x student success, which directly increased graduation rates and grades in all classes (Cabrera, Miley, and Marx, 2012). In 2010, state lawmakers passed Arizona House Bill 2281, which dismantled the program. The ban was overturned in 2017, as it was deemed racist and unconstitutional. The rhetoric from this law, which claimed to restrict teachers from promoting "resentment toward a race or class of people" or advocating "ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals," re-emerged in 2021 as conservative activists passed statewide bans on **Critical Race Theory** to intimidate K-12 educators working to have discussions about race and ethnicity in their classrooms. Despite this political hostility and counter-mobilization, Ethnic Studies educators and others invested in student equity and success continue to work at the front lines to inspire students and ensure that the next generation has access to a relevant education.

As California has continued to formalize and institutionalize Ethnic Studies, scholars and activists have contended over the boundaries of the field and its purpose for higher education and society. In 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill 101 (authored by Assemblymember Jose Medina), which established that all high school districts will be required to offer Ethnic Studies by the 2025-2026 school year and require an Ethnic Studies course for graduation by 2029-2030. Prior to establishing an Ethnic Studies requirement, the state Department of Education adopted an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum in March 2021. The first draft of the Model Curriculum included lessons on the occupation of Palestine and its connection to Third

World solidarity movements in the United States. However, the final draft removed this content and emphasized General Ethnic Studies, along with the four core disciplines centered on historically defined racial groups: African American Studies, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x Studies, Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies, and Native American Studies, along with sample lessons on Jewish Americans and Arab Americans. The [Liberated Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum](#) was created by independent scholars as a guide for K-12 educators that also includes Arab American Studies, along with Intersectional and Comparative Ethnic Studies. This group of educators is working to ensure that diverse perspectives within Ethnic Studies are continuously cultivated and represented.

Sidebar: Contention over the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum

In 2019, the California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Advisory Committee convened at the California Department of Education in Sacramento. The convening began with a land acknowledgment, showing a commitment to Indigenous peoples. And, the first draft of the high school curriculum incorporated the attempted genocide and resistance of California Natives. In its first version, the model curriculum had a lesson about land acknowledgment as well as protection of sacred sites, but they were removed. By 2022 when the final version was published, the [Indigenous \(Mayan\) inspired poem, In Lak'Ech](#), was removed from the approved Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum for high schools.

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2: ASIAN AMERICAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDIES

By Kay Fischer and Dr. Teresa Hodges

Learning Objectives

- Analyze and evaluate major social issues experienced by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders including racialization, orientalism, militarization, colonization, imperialism, immigration, and climate change;
- Critically analyze the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, class, citizenship, age/generation, and/or language in Asian American and Pacific Islander communities;
- Describe the historical and contemporary experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States and assess the growth and diversity of this community;
- Recognize theories and knowledge produced by Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders;
- Identify Asian American and Pacific Islander participation in resistance and social struggles, solidarity work, and/or other examples of their participation in social and institutional transformation for racial justice and equity.

2.1: Introduction

2.2: Who are Asian Americans?

2.3: Our Story - Asian Americans

2.4: Immigration and Exclusion

2.5: Wars and Imperialism

2.6: Pacific Islander Studies

2.7: Contemporary Demographics

2.7.1: History and Demographics

2.7.2: Intergroup Relations

2.7.3: Intersectionality

2.7.4: Social Institutions

2.7.5: Social Change and Resistance

2.8: Why Asian American Studies Matter

2.9: References

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2.1: Introduction

Introduction to Asian American Studies and Pacific Islander Studies

Asian American Studies is one of the core disciplines within the larger field of Ethnic Studies, that applies an interdisciplinary lens on the experiences of diverse Asian communities in the United States. Asian Americans played an essential role in the 1960s student-led Third World Liberation Front strikes of San Francisco State (1968) and UC Berkeley (1969) leading to the creation of the first Asian American Studies departments. Over fifty years later, Asian American Studies is still fighting for legitimacy at higher education institutions, and programs, courses, or departments are often only instituted upon student demand.

In response to a major demographic shift of the Asian American and Pacific Islander population after 1965, we've seen an addition of courses, course content and literature that focus on newer immigrant and refugee communities, especially Southeast Asian Americans from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Some programs also include a focus on Arab American, Pacific Islander, and Mixed Race Asian American populations as well. More consideration has been given to the diversity of national origin, class, immigration status (including undocumented Asian Americans), gender and sexual orientation, but there is still more work to be done to make sure Asian American Studies curriculum includes this increasingly diverse population.

In this chapter, the authors will introduce some key frameworks, theories, and topics typically discussed in the field of Asian American Studies, organized into four sections. In section 5.2, *"Who Are Asian Americans?"*, we will review the most recent Census data on who makes up the population and consider the ways Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have been grouped together. We will also introduce the theory of orientalism and how Asian presence in the Americas is rooted in Western colonialism and imperialism of Asia and the Americas. The section will also introduce key theories of racialization of Asian Americans and how they intersect with gender and sexuality. In section 5.3, *"Immigration and Exclusion,"* the authors will examine how various historic events, policies and laws have shaped Asian American communities throughout the past 500 years. Section 5.4, *"Wars and Imperialism"* will review key examples of when wars and imperialist actions shaped the lives and trajectory of various Asian American communities based in the United States. And finally, Section 5.5, *"Pacific Islander Studies,"* will introduce the burgeoning field sometimes located within Asian American Studies that center on the histories, cultures, and experiences of Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Tongan, Chamorro, Fijian, and other Pacific Islander communities.

Notes on Terminology:

- The authors may use Asian, Asian American, Asian American and Pacific Islander, or Asian Pacific Islander interchangeably.
- When writing about Asian Americans as a community or demographic, we are not referring to citizenship, but to a diverse Asian community based in the U.S., including members who are transnational who may also reside in another country part of the year. Asian Americans include people who may have been born in the U.S., hold American citizenship, are legal permanent residents, are undocumented, and people who either identify as American, immigrants, refugees, or undocumented, or in any combination of the aforementioned identities.
- Authors use Filipina/x/o to label what is traditionally known as Filipinos and recognize non-binary identities within the community. Some sources may use only one Filipina, Filipino, Filipinx and authors will cite according to how it is presented in the texts. Filipina/x/o can indicate any and all gender and non-binary identities just as Filipinx can as well and authors might use this interchangeably.

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2.2: Who are Asian Americans?

Asian American is Panethnic

When we teach our Asian American Studies courses, we tell students that Asian Americans are not homogenous; we are diverse and there is no one way of “looking” or “acting” Asian. As Asian Americans in California, our experiences growing up in the Bay Area, So Cal, or the Central Valley may be very different from Asian American communities throughout the West, East, Hawai’i, or increasingly Asian Americans in the Midwest and the South. Over [20 million Asian Americans](#) were counted in the 2020 census and have origins in more than 20 different countries (Gebeloff, et al, 2021). Contrary to the “[model minority](#)” [myth](#) which we’ll get into in a later subsection, Asian Americans represent an array of educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Simply put, you can’t put Asian Americans in one box.

Still, there have been significant historical events that have shaped the racialization of Asian Americans in the U.S. and in some ways forced or encouraged Asian Americans to come together as one. This is what [panethnic](#) means: when people of various ethnicities are grouped together, largely for political reasons. Since Asian immigrants faced fierce immigration restrictions from the 19th century into the mid-twentieth century, the population has remained small, and after the 1965 Immigration Act (Hart-Cellar Act), the population is now the fastest growing racial demographic in the U.S.

The following list highlights recent Census data on the diversity of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities:

- Previous decades showed that Asian Americans were concentrated in east and west coasts, however the 2020 Census revealed that the highest *growth* of Asian American populations included states in the Southwest and South (Gebeloff, et al, 2021).
- In 2020, it was reported that the two largest Asian ethnic groups are Chinese and Indian at 4.1 million each (Monte and Shin, 2022).
- They are followed by Filipino (2.9 million), Vietnamese (1.8 million), Korean (1.5 million), Japanese (768,985), Pakistani (≈500,000), Hmong (305,525), Cambodian (259,307), Thai (204,150), Taiwanese (194,263), Laotian (192,929), Bangladeshi (185,177), Burmese (169,915), Nepalese (162,993), Indonesian (76,873), Sri Lankan (51,735), Bhutanese (26,534), Mongolian (21,199), Malaysian (20,758), and Okinawan (3,526) (Monte and Shin, 2022).
- The Census counted 532,135 Asian Americans who counted two or more Asian ethnicities (Monte and Shin, 2022).
- And [4.1 million people](#) identified as Asian in combination with another race (Monte and Shin, 2022).
- Over 1 million and 100,000 people identify as Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI).
- The largest group is Native Hawaiians at around 620,000, followed by Samoan (212,000), Chamorro (156,000), Tongan (65,000), and Fijian (50,000) (Monte and Shin, 2022).
- In California, the Asian American population grew by 25% and now has more than 6 million people of Asian descent (Beam, 2021).

Anti-Asian Racism in the time of COVID-19



Figure 2.2.1: Rally to Stop Asian Hate, Washington, D.C. March 21, 2021. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Victoria Pickering via Flickr)

[Stop AAPI Hate](#) was established on March 19, 2020 by three Asian American organizers and professors after they were denied support from the California Attorney General's office in creating an anti-Asian discrimination reporting center. They launched their own reporting center titled Stop AAPI Hate, which helped track and analyze anti-Asian hate at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Professor of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley, Catherine Ceniza Choy pointed out that the swift thinking and coordination of the reporting center, “emerged from a legacy of six decades of Asian American activism as well as a response to contemporary anti-Asian violence” (2022, p. 19). A political infrastructure already existed. Asian Americanists and Asian American organizers grew concerned about the backlash that could be faced by the Chinese and Asian American communities when it was reported that the coronavirus spread in China, especially since president Donald Trump publicly referred to it as the “Chinese virus.” They were right. Stop AAPI Hate received around 100 anti-Asian incidents a day in its first week alone (p. 20).

Professor Choy pointed out that while the more disturbing examples of anti-Asian violence made it to the news, less sensational incidents were still reported to Stop AAPI Hate, including: people being prevented from utilizing public transportation; being coughed at; being verbally harassed or harassed online; and vandalism (2022, p. 21). The data analysis also showed that Asian American women experienced discrimination at over twice the rate of men. They reported that although Chinese were the most targeted, 60% of respondents were of other ethnicities, including Korean, Vietnamese, Filipinx, Japanese, Taiwanese, Hmong, Thai, Lao, Cambodian, and those of mixed ethnicities, proving “the significance of ‘Asian American’ as a panethnic category” (p. 22). Often, the racialization of Asian Americans doesn't make distinctions between ethnicities, and Choy brings up the importance of collecting both aggregated and disaggregated data that helped to express the shared experiences among Asian Americans and distinct experiences of Asian ethnic groups.

Many Americans found anti-Asian hate during the pandemic as unexpected or surprising, but anti-Asian violence is not new in the United States. Historian, Dr. Erika Lee testified before Congress on the topic of [“Discrimination and Violence Against Asian Americans”](#) on March 18, 2021. She started out by affirming the rate of anti-Asian violence rising in the aftermath of the COVID pandemic that started in late 2019, early 2020. Lee testified,

As shocking as these incidents are, it is so vital to understand that they are not random acts perpetrated by deranged individuals. They are an expression of our country's long history of systemic racism targeting Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. We've heard in the past 24 hours many describe anti-Asian discrimination and racial violence as unAmerican. Unfortunately, it is very American. This history, this *American* history, is over 150 years old (House Committee on the Judiciary, 2021, 01:22:48 - 01:23:25).

Lee informed the committee of one of the largest mass lynchings by a mob in U.S. history, happening in 1871 when seventeen Chinese men were lynched by a white mob of 500 in Los Angeles. She also shared that in 1886 a mob forced out all of Seattle's Chinese residents; similarly South Asian immigrants were attacked and driven out of their homes, and Japanese and Filipinx

people were subject to beatings and other racially motivated attacks. She brought up the brutal 1982 killing of Vincent Chin, and the wave of anti-Asian violence in the 1980s that targeted Korean shopkeepers and Southeast Asian refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. She reminded the committee that in the weeks after September 11, 2001, hate crimes against Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities increased by 1,600 percent. Lee continued, "As these incidents reveal, Asian Americans have been terrorized, we've been treated as enemies, we've been discriminated against. Today we are still viewed as foreigners, rather than U.S. citizens" (House Committee on the Judiciary, 2021, 01:24:17 - 01:24:31).

These historical and contemporary events are often not taught in our schools. Even our Asian American students often end up internalizing the "model minority" myth; that Asian Americans are successful and don't face racism, and even that Asian Americans are "honorary whites." We've read many essays by Asian American students who'll write that they've never faced racism, but follow up with examples of racial discrimination. Deceptively "positive," the "model minority" myth only works to divide people of color and ignore the long legacy of systemic racism and racially motivated violence against Asian Americans. The most recent expression of anti-Asian discrimination and hate is simply an extension of this legacy.

Sidebar: Varying Degrees of Pan-ethnicity

As a diverse group, Dhingra and Rodriguez (2021) explain how Asian Americans exhibit varying degrees of connection with other Asian Americans. For example, East Asian Americans (such as Japanese and Chinese Americans) display a stronger sense of pan-ethnicity as Asian Americans than South Asian Americans or Southeast Asian Americans. South Asian Americans (such as Indian and Pakistani Americans) "do not develop a pan-ethnic identity, possibly due to their distinct racialization and reliance on one another rather than on other Asian Americans (Schachter 2014)" (p. 126). A distinct racialized experience for South Asian Americans was during the post-911 Islamophobic attacks on South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and South West Asian communities who were targets of hate crimes, harassment and racial profiling ([South Asian Americans Leading Together](#)). Southeast Asian Americans (such as Vietnamese and Cambodian Americans) may not identify with the "model minority" stereotype and feel distinct because of their refugee experience. Dhingra and Rodriguez also point out how a focus on structural inequality may lead Southeast Asian Americans to "salient ethnic rather than pan-ethnic identities," such as in the case pointed out by Bindi Shah (2008) who argues that Laotian Americans center their ethnic rather than pan-ethnic identity in their social justice organizing when assisting refugees and low-paid workers (2021, p. 126).

Vincent Chin and the pan-Asian American Movement of the 1980s

The 1982 murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin in Detroit, Michigan, is considered an important landmark in Asian American history and panethnic political identity development. Asian Americans protested the fact that two white men, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, were sentenced to probation and a small fine with no prison time for their manslaughter conviction. The case led to the development of a nationwide consciousness around Anti-Asian hate, and established some groundwork for continued civil rights and social justice campaigns (Tajima-Peña, 2014, p. 185).

Journalist and activist Helen Zia witnessed the collapse of the auto industry in Detroit, with hundreds of thousands of mostly Black and also white working class auto workers left to fend for themselves. Described as "a city in crisis," people in Detroit lost their jobs, homes and cars, and "gloom turned to anger as they searched for the cause of their miseries" (2010, p. 36). Japan made an easy target. First, the oil crisis of 1978 essentially "killed the market for heavy, eight-cylinder dinosaurs made in Detroit," leading to massive layoffs. Meanwhile, Japan's auto industry was beginning to grow, meeting the demand for inexpensive and fuel-efficient vehicles. Zia continued, "They were easy to hate. Anything Japanese, or presumed to be Japanese, became a potential target" (p. 37). Unions sponsored events where they sledge-hammered Japanese cars. Zia reflected that living in Detroit at the time, "It felt dangerous to have an Asian face" (p. 37).

Vincent Chin, age 27, was out with his friends celebrating his bachelor party on June 19, 1982 at a local strip bar. Ronald Ebens, a Chrysler plant superintendent and his stepson, Michael Nitz, a laid-off autoworker, seemed annoyed that Vincent was receiving attention from the dancers. Vincent's friend overheard Ebens say, "Chink," "Nip," "fucker," and one of the dancers heard him say, "It's because of motherfuckers like you that we're out of work." Vincent responded, "Don't call me a fucker" and they fought. When both groups were kicked out of the bar, Ebens and Nitz drove around searching for Vincent. Once they found Vincent, Nitz held him down while Ebens swung a baseball bat into his skull four times. Vincent was mortally wounded and died four days later. Zia wrote, "His four hundred wedding guests attended his funeral instead" (2010, p. 38).

On March 18, 1983, it was reported that the two killers were charged for Vincent's slaying. They pleaded guilty and no contest to beating Vincent to death, yet each received three years of probation and \$3,780 in fines, with Judge Charles Kaufman defending

his sentencing, stating, “These aren’t the kind of men you send to jail” (Zia, 2010, p. 39). People were enraged and called out this obvious example of systemic racism, where the lives of two violent killers were valued above the life of an Asian American hate crime and murder victim, Vincent Chin.

As more and more Asian Americans heard about Chin’s slaying and the “slap-on-the-wrist” sentencing, they began to demand justice. They felt that what Vincent experienced could have happened to them and to anyone who “looked” Japanese. This was the start of another panethnic Asian American movement. Over 100 people came together to form a pan-Asian organization that could seek civil rights justice for Chin’s murder. They were called American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), and news on the efforts of ACJ spread across the country due to lobbying and press coverage. “It was the first time that an Asian American-initiated issue was considered significant national news,” wrote Zia (2010, p. 48). ACJ was naming anti-Asian violence as “present-day phenomenon” and they helped to create an organizing framework for Asian Americans.

Eventually, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) opened an inquiry and a federal grand jury indicted Ebens and Nitz for depriving Vincent Chin of his civil rights and conspiracy to do so. The jury found Ebens guilty of the civil rights charge, but not conspiracy. Nitz was found not guilty for both charges. Ebens was sentenced to 25 years, but he appealed and his conviction was overturned in 1987 (Tajima-Peña, 2014, p. 186). Mrs. Chin moved back to Guangdong Province in China. Ebens and Nitz never publicly expressed remorse, nor did they ever spend a full day in jail (Zia, 2010, p. 53).

Zia wrote that losing its first national campaign didn’t devastate the Asian American community, “instead, it had been transformed” (2010, p. 53). The legacy of the Vincent Chin case lived on through award-winning documentaries and as author and Ethnic Studies professor Yen Le Espiritu pointed out, as a result, Asian Americans are more willing to speak on anti-Asian racism, are better organized, and this era paved the way for building “pan-Asian unity.”

“Asian American” Panethnicity and “Third World” Solidarity:



Figure 2.2.2: “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power” Art in Oakland. Photo taken February 20, 2023. (CC BY 4.0; Photo by Jordan Burkart)

Inspired by various nationalist liberation movements of the 1960s such as the Black Power movement, second-generation Asian youth started to use the term “Asian American” to describe a panethnic identity rooted in solidarity. Asian Americans of diverse ethnic backgrounds attended a UCLA conference in the summer of 1968 to discuss issues of identity, power and the war in Vietnam. They rejected the term “Oriental” since it “smacks of European colonialism and imperialism,” noting that Asia is only east in relationship to Europe (Espiritu, 1992, p. 32). This forced students to consider Asian American as an alternative to “Yellow” and “Oriental” and the first organization to apply this term was the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at UC Berkeley in 1969 (p. 33). Yen Le Espiritu, Ethnic Studies Professor at UC San Diego, wrote on pan-Asian ethnicity and explained how Asian Americans were also inspired by the success of anticolonial revolutions and “Third World” solidarity between Africa, Asia, and Latin America (such as “Afro-Asia” solidarity displayed at the Bandung conference in 1955).

Instead of cultural bonds, panethnic identity is a result of political and social processes. Espiritu emphasizes the political nature of the development of a panethnic identity for Asian Americans, with the purpose of struggling for power and resources (1992, p. 14). As Asian American Studies professor Diane Fujino, UC Santa Barbara, notes, this was a political strategy “to contest racial

oppression” (2014, p. 1104).

The Asian American Movement focused on solidarity with Asia, and both global and internal Third World communities. Activist Amy Uyematsu wrote that the movement rejected their parents’ assimilationist goals and “turned the racial order on its head by asking Asian Americans to see a shared oppression with black Americans and to challenge the anti-black racism harbored by many Asian Americans” (2014, p. 1105). AAPA was anti-imperialist and organized the Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State (1968) and UC Berkeley (1969), standing in unity with other students of color to demand Ethnic Studies in the longest and most violent student struggle in the U.S.

Espiritu adds that the development of Asian American Studies was perhaps the most important outcome of the Asian American Movement and the discipline continues to build on an Asian American heritage. Asian American Studies curriculum expresses both similarities and differences across diverse Asian American communities and helps Asian American students understand who they are (1992, p. 36). Standing in solidarity with other oppressed groups also highlighted the view “that their own liberation was intricately linked to the liberation of peoples everywhere” (Fujino, 2014, p. 1106).

Since these movements of the 1960s and 1980s, we’ve witnessed and participated in the development of Asian American Studies, panethnic non-profits, conferences, news, film festivals, political campaigns and voter drives that organize for better political representation across diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander groups.

Sidebar: Richard Aoki: an Asian American Black Panther



Figure 2.2.3: Richard Aoki. (CC BY 2.0; Davis Sasaki via Flickr)

Richard Masato Aoki (1938-2009) was only 3 years old when he and his family were incarcerated at Topaz, Utah during World War II for being Japanese. Afterwards, his family moved to West Oakland and Richard grew up in a segregated Black neighborhood, which he shared was “one of the best experiences I ever had” because he was immersed in African American society (Wang and Cheng, 2009, 11:54 - 12:03). He knew both the co-founders of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (BPP), Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton. Newton asked Richard to join the party, as they were both politically engaged, and he became an early member. Richard shared that when Newton approached him, he replied, “Wait a minute now...I don’t look exactly Black.” Newton responded, “the struggle for freedom, justice and equality transcends racial and ethnic barriers” (01:22 - 01:51). As a “Field Marshall,” Richard became the only Asian American panther member who had a leadership position.

As the call for freedom and self-determination were some of the core principles of the panther’s 10-point platform, so was the right to self-defense. Richard Aoki helped to supply and trained party members on how to clean and break down guns. BPP leader Kathleen Cleaver strongly affirmed that Richard helped to start the organization because he witnessed “people being subjected to unfair, racist domination...and he knew it was wrong and so he was quite willing to help his friends fight against this” (Wang and Cheng, 2009, 44:10 - 44:24).

In 1968, Richard was a student at UC Berkeley and the chair of the Asian American Political Alliance. He helped organize the 3-month strike in 1969 with the Third World Liberation Front, helping to establish Ethnic Studies at the university. He was on the frontline being beaten by police, getting arrested, and physically fighting back. Richard became one of the first coordinators of Asian American Studies at UC Berkeley. Afterwards, he worked for the community college system and Diane Fujino noted that he would “go to bat” for first-generation college students, often students of color from working class and/or immigrant backgrounds. Fujino, who was also Richard’s biographer, stated, “He would try to get them scholarships...try to encourage them to take certain classes...encourage them to stay in school” (Wang and Cheng, 2009, 1:20:20-1:20:33).

Later in life, he unofficially mentored various youth activists, college students, and community organizers, including author, Kay Fischer. Richard also spoke regularly at various campus and community events about his life as an activist and social change agent. He supported and advised the Ethnic Studies strike of 1999 at UC Berkeley.

Due to serious illness, Richard ended up taking his own life in 2009. Four years after his death, journalist Seth Rosenfeld came out with a book titled, *Subversives: The FBI’s War on Student Radicals and Reagan’s Rise to Power*. He claimed that Richard was an FBI informant, and although his book mostly focused on the FBI’s covert operations on student movements during the 1960s, Rosenfeld benefited from sensationalist press coverage right before the release of his book that explicitly focused on outing Richard Aoki, a well-known activist. Progressives in the Bay Area were divided on the issue of whether they believed Rosenfeld’s claim, or felt that there wasn’t strong enough evidence. Fujino questioned the timing of the release of these documents and pointed out how revealing the identity of an informant was a “serious breach of FBI protocol” (Gonzales, 2012). She also stated that after reading Rosenfeld’s book, she was surprised to find that there was very little information on Rosenfeld’s claim, and simply put, the evidence was not substantial. Fujino continues that after evaluating the FBI documents herself, it’s not clear whether he was an informant or the one being observed (Democracy Now!, 2012).

Many of Richard’s friends and life-long activists have also come out to defend Richard’s legacy and integrity. The impact of Richard’s revolutionary commitment to liberty and justice is not lost. Richard’s narrative of fighting for Black Liberation and for Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley was an important demonstration of interracial solidarity. Musician, writer and activist, Fred Ho, also [wrote to rebut claims about Richard](#), stating that he must have been a “piss-poor” informant as he ultimately shaped the Third World movements of the 1960s. Richard’s commitment to change continued into the 1990s and 2000s as he mentored and inspired the next generation of activists. Those who knew Richard remembered him as forward thinking, generous, principled, for the people, and consistent. As Ho pointed out, Richard “remained a revolutionary for life” (Ho, 2012).

Under Western Eyes: Orientalism

One idea that’s remained a part of the way Asian Americans are racialized is that Asians, no matter how American, are “Forever Foreign.” A common microaggression that Asian Americans face, for some on a daily basis, are questions or comments like

- “Where are you from?...No, where are you *really* from?”
- “You speak English so well.”
- “Go back to where you came from!”

Although 71% of Asian American adults were born in another country (Budiman and Ruiz, 2021), Asian Americans have a 500-year-old history in the Americas starting with Filipinx sailors who traveled with Spanish colonizers on the Manila-Acapulco Galleon (Ding, 2001, 06:35 - 07:34). Ethnic Studies professor and ground-breaking Asian American documentarian, Loni Ding states in her documentary, *Ancestors in the Americas*: “People sometimes think Asians are only recent immigrants. But, actually Asians have been in North America even before America became a republic” (2001, 05:45 - 05:55).



Figure 2.2.4: An illustration of a Spanish Manila Galleon in the Ladrones Islands (Mariana Islands) in the Pacific Ocean, 1590. (Public Domain; Artist Unknown via [World History Encyclopedia](#))

In fact, when we dig deeper into *why* Asians began arriving to the Americas, we must actually start with Europe. Christopher Columbus, who for so long has been celebrated in American classrooms as the person to “discover” America, stumbled onto the territories of the Taino people in 1492, and thought he had landed in Asia! In fact, Columbus was commissioned by the Spanish monarchy to find another route to Asia or “the Indies,” with hopes to grow their riches and power through trade. It wasn’t Asians that came to the West, it was the West who came to Asia.

Orientalism: A Western Invention

Professor and author Gary Y. Okihiro wrote,

Asians entered into the European American historical consciousness long before the mid-nineteenth century Chinese immigration to “Gold Mountain”...The “when and where” of the Asian American experience can be found within the European imagination and constructions of Asians and Asia and within their expansion eastward and westward to Asia for conquest and trade (1992, p. 7).

We can find examples of what Europeans thought of people from Asia even among the ancient Greeks from over 2,000 years ago. They made general statements about a people they didn’t know well, enabling an “exotic, alienating construction of Asians, whether witnessed or simply imagined” (Okihiro, 1992, p. 9). For example, Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote in 4th century BCE that Asians were in a constant state of subjection and slavery, and Alexander the Great called Asians effeminate and “a nation of slaves” (p. 9). These baseless generalizations of a complex and diverse group of humans in a vast region were passed on from generation to generation in a static, frozen manner, as if the stereotypes of Asia and Asian people never transformed or changed over the centuries.

This is what Palestinian American literary critic, author and professor, Edward Said described as **orientalism**: the European invention of Asians as “the Other,” a system of ideas that supported a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority” over Asia (Said, 1979, Introduction). The European identity was based on how it contrasted from “the Other,” helping to inform the West’s desire to project itself as “a masculine, conquering Europe” as opposed to “a feminized Asia ripe for conquest” (Lee, 2015, p. 15). The function of these ideas were to “...substantiate Europe’s identity rather than to understand Asia in an accurate or nuanced manner” (Sang-Hee Lee, 2014, p. 7). Orientalism was based on the idea of the European authority on the “Orient” and was never concerned with the actual ideas, thoughts, and experiences of people from this region. Orientalism was rooted in the “impulse to dominate, possess” and it was about setting Europeans apart as a people who are not only different, but *superior* to Asia. Over the centuries, these ideas persisted and became common sense, “the Orient was backwards because it was and people had been saying this for a long time” (p. 9).

Simultaneous Colonization of the Americas and Asia

Crusaders and European travelers described “bizarre creatures, alien plants, and strange customs of the ‘East’” (Lee, 2015, p. 16), and by the 13th and 14 centuries, Asian goods started to appear. Marco Polo, who traveled to Asia and the Middle East, told narratives of fantastical creatures like unicorns and endless riches like “mountain streams flowing with diamonds” and “ample accounts of prostitutes, sex, and women” (Okiehiro, 1992, p. 14; Lee, 2015, p. 16). Books like *The Travels of Marco Polo* became popular and influential. Europeans developed a taste for goods from Asia like spices, silk, and sugar, and cargo from Asia would yield massive profit. In 1615, Sir Walter Raleigh stated, “whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself” (Lee, 2015, p. 17; Raleigh, 1829, p. 325).

Columbus was, in fact, inspired by Marco Polo and had his own well-worn copy of his book. Upon landing in the island of what's today called Cuba, his description of the land and the people was influenced by the ideologies of orientalism. Columbus described Indigenous people as “children” and the land in feminine and sexualized qualities, such as describing the mouth of the Orinoco River as shaped “like a woman’s nipple” (Okiehiro, 1992, p. 17). He died in 1506, still thinking the Caribbean was Asia.

Spanish colonizers followed and began growing their empire, *Nueva España*. And as the Spanish continued to search routes to Asia, soon “Asia and the Americas were linked in the Spanish imagination and became two parts of the New World, *ambas Indias*, both Indies, that could be conquered and converted to Christianity,” claiming control of the Philippines archipelago starting in 1521 (Lee, 2015, pp. 18 - 19). Europeans colonized large swaths of land in Asia and by the early 20th century, Japan did the same. Soon, the U.S. expanded beyond the territories of the Americas and took over Hawai’i, Guam, and the Philippines. Colonial expansion extended to the so-called New World, with the British, Dutch, Portuguese, French, Russians, and Spanish drawing random boundaries that never existed before, displacing and killing tens of millions of Indigenous people through genocidal policies and with diseases.

Gary Okiehiro states, “So if we think about the general spread and expansion, we can understand that Asia was always on the mind. They were always looking toward Asia” (Ding, 2001, 11:50 - 12:05).

Race, gender, and sexuality

From its inception, race has been used to categorize people into separate and unequal groups in a hierarchical manner. The physical differences we give meaning to are superficial differences, and our “race” has no determination over intelligence, athletic ability, or personality traits. Nor do people in one “race” have more in common genetically with one another than with people in different racial groups. Racist ideologies and the arbitrary categorizations that followed were developed to justify mass removal and genocidal policies against Indigenous populations and to rationalize and moralize the enslavement of millions taken from Africa. Since ideas of race “...emerged in the context of European colonialism, it is organized around the logic of white supremacy, that is, those who are considered white are considered intellectually and morally superior over those who are nonwhite” (Dhingra and Rodriguez, 2021, p. 26). For more on white supremacy and its origin in colonialism, see also [Chapter 7, section 7.2 "Defining Whiteness and White Supremacy."](#)

Furthermore, in the United States, notions of race are often limited within the black-white binary. The racial experiences of Asian Americans are not like either Black or white Americans, but they’ve been racialized as close to Black or close to white. Historically, Asian Americans have been legally defined as nonwhite, as they were excluded from nationality, land ownership and marriage to whites. They’ve also been “stereotyped as morally deviant and explicitly compared to African Americans” (Dhingra and Rodriguez, 2021, p. 39). Yet, at other times, depending on the political and economic context, Asians have been described as “outwhiting” whites when it comes to education and household income. Additionally, Asian Americans are racialized as “forever foreign,” no matter how long they’ve been in the U.S. Their exclusion is heightened during times of perceived threat from Asia. This subsection will review how Asian Americans have been racialized in a duality: yellow peril or model minority, and sometimes both.

Yellow Peril

Yellow Peril is an extension of Orientalism and frames Asians and Asian nations as a threat to the West: either economically, politically, sexually, or morally. Examples include white anxiety around Asian immigrant labor replacing white workers or Asian men soiling the “purity” of the white race by “going after” white women. Asian women in the context of yellow peril framing are presented as evil temptresses or prostitutes that manipulate white men. Asian American scholar, Robyn Rodriguez and Pawan Dhingra in their book, *Asian America (2nd Edition)* point out that the “yellow peril” stereotype typically only arises when the U.S. is at war or during a “crisis of capital” (Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng 1994, as cited in Dhingra and Rodriguez, 2021, p. 40). Dhingra

and Rodriguez further point out that the U.S. doesn't have to be in a literal war for Asian Americans to be perceived as a threat, as in the case of the Vincent Chin murder in 1982. Similarly, when news of the coronavirus outbreak reached the U.S., Trump called himself a "wartime president." Americans blamed Asians and people perceived to be Chinese for the virus and anti-Asian discrimination, harassment, and violence grew exponentially in 2020 and 2021.

The term "yellow peril" is the exact translation of a painting commissioned by German Kaiser Wilhelm II who woke from a nightmare in 1895. He dreamt that the "great" nations of Europe were facing an invasion from the East. Convinced that this was what to come, Wilhelm commissioned a painting of his dream, titled it *Die Gelbe Gefahr* (The Yellow Peril) as seen under Figure 2.2.5 and sent reproductions to European leaders and president of the U.S., William McKinley. The painting centered female warriors representing European countries with the Christian cross hanging above them. Archangel Michael is pointing toward the threat: the supposed menacing Buddha riding a Chinese dragon headed toward Europe with dark clouds and lightning overhead, and a burning city right below (Lee, 2015, pp. 122 - 123).



Figure 2.2.5: "The Yellow Peril" - "Peoples of Europe, guard your dearest goods." 1895 (Public Domain; by Hermann Knackfuss via Wikimedia Commons)

This image helped popularize the term "yellow peril" and ended up being "the most influential political illustration of the late nineteenth century" (Lee, 2015, p. 123). This message found "a ready audience in the United States" merely a decade after the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

Ironically, the Japanese Shogunate of the 17th century instituted a policy of isolation to protect Japan from European colonialism. Determined to expand its influence in Asia and frustrated with Japan's refusal to trade, it was the U.S.'s own gun-boat diplomacy that led to Japan restructuring its nation in order to compete with U.S. and European imperialism. U.S. Commodore Matthew C. Perry sailed 4 armed navy ships in 1853 to the shores of Edo (Tokyo) Bay and threatened to use force unless Japan opened its doors to trade (Lee, 2015, p. 110). It was not Asian countries that invaded European nations or the U.S. for the purposes of empire building. For hundreds of years it was European nations that were threatening to Asia and other parts of the world, seizing land, exploiting resources, and displacing or stealing people in the continents of Africa, Australia, Asia, and the Americas, and the islands of the Pacific, all in the name of expanding their nations, power, and wealth.

The Model Minority

A seemingly opposing racialization of Asian Americans is the "**model minority**" **myth** or stereotype; that Asians and Asian Americans are culturally or biologically smarter, economically well-off, and successful, but also obedient and docile. Since the mid-20th century, U.S. media often highlight stories of Asian American success by focusing on their disproportionately high educational attainment, higher median income, and residential integration of Asian American families in traditionally white suburbs. Dhingra and Rodriguez point out,

This apparently positive portrayal has more going on than a representation of imagined social trends. This stereotype has gained currency because, like all stereotypes, it fits various preconceptions and racialized ideologies. First, it works to

denigrate Asian Americans, even as it purports to praise them. The “model minority” is cast as subservient and obedient. While the “model minority” appears highly valorized, s/he remains a foreigner (2021, p. 42).

Instead of examining structural factors or immigration policies that explain the data around educational attainment, the model minority myth proclaims that Asian culture or Confucian principles lead to their success. Thereby, Asian Americans can be considered successful, but still not “assimilated enough to be seen as everyday citizens, much less civic or corporate leaders” (Dhingra and Rodriguez, 2021, p. 42). In fact, the framing of this newer racialization of Asian Americans conveniently became popular during the Civil Rights Movement. African Americans and their allies were calling out the U.S. as a racist country, and to counter that and contain demands for social justice, the model minority myth worked to uphold ideologies of colorblindness and meritocracy. Asian American were “proof” that anyone willing to work hard enough could achieve the “American dream.” To further elaborate, Robert G. Lee writes, “The elevation of Asian Americans to the position of model minority had less to do with the actual success of Asian Americans than with the perceived failure—or worse, refusal—of African Americans to assimilate” (2010, p. 256).

Starting with World War II, America was being called out for their blatantly white supremacist laws and practices, especially on a global scale. Germans, the Japanese, and later the Soviet Union and other communist movements around the globe were calling out the U.S.’s hypocrisy around fighting Nazism, yet incarcerating over 120,000 Japanese Americans (and Canadians and Latin Americans) simply for their heritage and their anti-Semitic policy of refusing to accept Jewish refugees from Europe. Lee explains that the U.S. had a strong motive to push the narrative of the U.S. as “...a liberal democratic state where people of color could enjoy equal rights and upward mobility” (2015, p. 257). The U.S. understood that the nation’s legacy of racial discrimination impacted their relationships with other countries. During the Cold War, the U.S. engaged in a struggle for global influence and worked to promote an image of the U.S. as a multiracial and liberal democracy; to top it off, they claimed that U.S.-style capitalism meant anyone could “make it,” including immigrants and racial minorities.

With the onset of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and '60s, biological racism and blatantly racist rhetoric was no longer socially acceptable. In its stead, ideologies around cultural racism tried to turn the blame of racial inequality away from structural and system reasons and toward African Americans for their own failures. In 1966, two major magazines *The New York Times* and *U.S. News and World Report* published articles centering on Asian American success stories. Lee notes how the media blatantly pit minorities groups against each other, with the *U.S. News* asserting, “At a time when it is being proposed that hundreds of billions be spent on uplifting Negroes and other minorities, the nation’s 300,000 Chinese Americans are moving ahead on their own with no help from anyone else” (2015, p. 261).

Furthermore, during the Cold War, “homophobia and anticommunism went hand in hand” and homosexuality was seen as a threat to national security, going so far as banning gay men and women from federal employment in 1953 (Lee, 2015, p. 269). The nuclear family was valorized, and only offered a narrow approach to being a patriotic American family: middle-class, with the wife at home, and the husband providing for the family, with the added duty of reproducing children who would be faithful patriots of this great nation. The model minority stereotype highlighted Asian Americans who, for the most part, met this nuclear model. Asian Americans who didn’t meet the “model minority” image were quickly forgotten and their problems ignored. This includes members of the LGBTQ, poor Asian Americans, those struggling in school, or Asian Americans who are disabled, struggling with mental health, facing abuse, or incarcerated.

Hypersexualization of Asian Women



Figure 2.2.6: Rally for Asian American Women in Chinatown. April 10, 2021. (CC BY 2.0; Andrew Ratto via Flickr)

Asian women have been portrayed as a sexual threat or perpetual sex workers. In fact, before the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882, Asian women were particularly targeted for exclusion in the 1875 Page Act. The act targeted Chinese and other Asian women suspected of prostitution from entering the United States (Schlund-Vials, Wong, and Chang, 2017, p. 38). This is an important example of how a gendered and sexualized framing of the yellow peril stereotype influenced policy that criminalized all Asian female immigrants as undesirable, causing “moral and racial pollution,” and therefore excluded from the U.S. (Lee, 2015, p. 91).

The correlation between Asian women and hypersexuality or sexual deviance continued into the 20th and 21st centuries. One of the first Asian American actresses on the silver screen was Anna May Wong (1905-1961) who was type casted to play “Dragon Lady” characters: deceitful and cunning, but also exotic and sensual women who used their sexuality for foul play. Such representations continued into modern days, such as Lucy Liu’s character on *Ally McBeal* (1997) and *Kill Bill* (2003).

When the “model minority” stereotype became prevalent, Asian men were asexualized and deemed effeminate, especially since they were depicted as undermining patriarchal gender roles for doing “women’s work” (i.e. the prevalence of Chinese men doing laundry work). Meanwhile, Asian women were framed as a submissive “Lotus Blossom,” eager to please white men in Hollywood films. Musicals, operas, and movies like *Madam Butterfly* (1904), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Miss Saigon* (1989), *Kill Bill: Vol. 1* (2003), *The Last Samurai* (2003), *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), *The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift* (2006), and more portrayed Asian female characters in hyper feminine and exotic manners. Asian women have been portrayed as quiet, passive, and subservient, willing to cater to a man’s every whim. These images were rooted in U.S. expansion through wars in Asia, such as the post-WWII U.S. occupation of Japan, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War.

Hollywood films depicting interracial pairings were an endorsement of interracial relationships. However, media critic Dr. Ben Tong notes, “It was a certain form of miscegenation that was endorsed: white man, Asian women, not the reverse” (Gee, 1988, 21:10 - 21:17). These movies romanticized white male/Asian female relations and often overshadowed the very limited opportunities of rural and poor women. Living in the aftermath of the post-war economic destruction of their native countries, women had limited options for work, and were sometimes enticed by American pop culture. Some worked at U.S. military bases as clerks or servers and others entered sex work in order to survive or were tricked into it. Rest and Recreation sites surrounding U.S. military bases in Asia, supported by the U.S. military and local authorities, involved local women to cater to American soldiers. These sites were described as “Playgrounds...for American men fighting in the Korean War, and later camptowns in Korea and Thailand and the Philippines for soldiers fighting in Vietnam” (Kim, 2011, 06:59 - 07:19). In fact, camptowns continued even during peace times, “for today’s American empire is an empire of military bases” (07:18 - 07:26).

The continued popular portrayal of Asian women as “spoils of war,” particularly for American soldiers helped to conflate all Asian women with sex work and hypersexualization, as if it was in our very nature to be sexually alluring and pleasing toward Western men. This was a common portrayal in American films about the war in Vietnam. Movies like *Deer Hunter* (1978) reinforced the fantasy of the “sexually pleasing Asian woman.” Such portrayals ignore the prevalence of rape, abuse, and killings amongst

real Asian sex workers, Asian women and girls who live near and around U.S. military bases, and Asian women married to U.S. servicemen. Some examples of such violence include:

- 1992, South Korea: camptown sex worker Yun Geum-i was sexually assaulted and murdered by private Kenneth Markle
- 1995, Okinawa: three US servicemen kidnapped a 12-year-old local girl, bound her, beat her and took turns raping her
- 2002, South Korea: two 14-year-old girls, Shin Hyo-sun and Shim Mi-seon, were struck and killed by an armored U.S. military vehicle
- 2015, Philippines: Lance Corporal Pemberton was convicted and later pardoned for killing Jennifer Laude, a trans Filipina

Furthermore, in Asian Women United's documentary, *Slaying the Dragon: Reloaded* (2011), Asian American Studies professor and author, Elaine H. Kim articulates,

Part of the fantasy about Asian women is that they need to be saved from the East by the West. In fact, saving women from the oppression of Islam and Muslim men has been one of the U.S.'s justifications for invading the Middle East (12:02 - 12:16).

Such framing of Asian women's sexuality is related to the countless websites, porn sites, massage parlors, and online dating services catering to racist fantasies about sexualized and available Asian women. These prevailing images of Asian women can be connected to why Asian American women reported twice as many hate incidents after COVID-19. The March 16, 2021 slaughter of eight people in Atlanta, Georgia across three Asian massage parlors, with 6 of the victims being Asian American women, is an extension of the normalization of harm and violence toward Asian women that stems from Orientalism, misogyny, anti-immigrant sentiment, and the criminalization of sex workers. The names of [the eight killed in the Atlanta mass shooting are](#): Soon Chung Park, 74; Hyun Jung Grant, 51; Suncha Kim, 69; Yong Ae Yue, 63; Delaina Ashley Yaun Gonzalez, 33; Xiaojie Tan, 49; Daoyou Feng, 44; and Paul Andre Michels, 54 (Nieto Del Rio, Sandoval, Berryman, and Knoll, 2021).

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2.3: Our Story - Asian Americans

Learning Objectives

At the end of this module, students will be able to:

1. describe the typical immigration patterns of Asians throughout U.S. history
2. identify key legislation that prevented Asians from migrating to America and accessing the naturalization process
3. explore the various forms of xenophobic behavior of Americans regarding Asian immigrants
4. explain the civil rights efforts of the Asian American communities during the 1960s and 1970s
5. assess how globalism and warfare of the 20th century impacted Asian Americans and Asian refugees in America
6. explore the issues of the late 20th and early 21st century and how they have impacted Asian Americans

KEY TERMS & CONCEPTS

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882	Pull Factor
Chinese Massacre of 1871	Push Factor
COVID-19	Snake River Massacre
Executive Order 9066	Stockton School Shooting
Gold Rush	<i>Thind v. U.S.</i> (1923)
Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965	<i>U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark</i> (1898)
Japanese Internment	Vincent Chin
Model Minority	Yellow Power
<i>Ozawa v. U.S.</i> (1922)	Xenophobia
Page Act	

INTRODUCTION

Many Americans have little to no knowledge about the role of Asian Americans in this nation's history. Their stories are usually left out of history books with brief mention of internment camps, WWII, and Vietnam. This oversight has occurred for two reasons. First, Asia is a vast continent that has supplied the most diverse population of American immigrants over the course of our history. To cover the history of all these immigrants would prove quite difficult in most high school or college courses. Secondly, most history books used in public schools and colleges offer little coverage of the role of Asian Americans in U.S. history. For many years, it was believed that Asian Americans had little impact in America. This is false.

From China to India to the Philippines, Asians have been migrating to the U.S. in ebbs and flows since about the 19th century. Like many other immigrant groups, specifically non-Whites, Asians were largely unaccepted and at times even met with aggression by American society. Like many non-White immigrants, Asians were used for difficult, sometime dangerous labor, but cast aside as inferior and unable to enter the fold of American society. Asian immigrants faced numerous legal obstacles from entry to the country, to access to citizenship, to general social acceptance.

When studying Asian American history, it is useful to break up the history into multiple blocks of time. Like many other diverse

ethnic groups, there is not one solitary wave of immigration that occurred with Asians.

We will be focusing our study of Asian Americans in three waves: the arrival of large numbers of East Asians during the American Gold Rush, aspects of mid-20th century global conflicts, and the wave of immigration that shifted the American demographic during the mid-1960s. During each of these times, the Asians were met with much adversity, but many still managed to prosper in America despite it.

This is their story.

MID 1800S TO EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Europeans have had a long-held fascination with the far East due to medieval travelers and traders like Marco Polo. For much of the early modern period, Spanish and Portuguese sailors attempted to find new trade routes to access the highly coveted exotic goods of the east. By the mid-16th century, Spanish explorers had much contact with Asians, and even employed some from their colonizing efforts in places like the Philippines. The earliest Asian arrivals to the North America were Filipino crew amongst the Spanish ships that landed in Northern California in the year 1587 (Lee, 2015). Due to Spanish colonization of the Americas, a mixture of Japanese, Chinese, and Filipino peoples migrated to South America during this era. Although Asians arrived with the Spanish, generally they were treated with much derision: paid less than Spanish sailors aboard these ships, given substandard living conditions and provisions.

By the early 19th century, a significant number of Asian immigrants, mostly Chinese, arrived in America. The motivation for migration was due to a variety of reasons, reasons that are called push and pull factors. A push factor would be something that compels an individual or group to leave a country, such as a political upheaval or armed conflict. A pull factor is a reason that would compel a person or group to enter a country, such as economic opportunity. The primary opportunity during this time for the Chinese to migrate to America was the Gold Rush.

The **Gold Rush** began when a new settler to California named James Marshall found a shiny substance in a riverbed in the year 1848. Thereafter, the scramble to pan and mine for gold became a global pull factor. Immigrants flocked from around the world and the U.S. to benefit from this discovery including many Chinese. Named for the year at the height of this rush, the “49ers” established towns, businesses, and laws to support this influx of people. Asian immigrants that made landfall on the west coast came in droves, but they faced obstacles linked to their countries of origin. Racial discrimination made it difficult to capitalize on the success of gold mining and panning, compared to other Americans and White immigrants.

The Chinese men who immigrated were immediately “othered” for their appearance. Many of them had a haircut called a *que*, which had a hairline shaved halfway up their scalps and worn in a long ponytail in the back. They wore clothes that appeared to be cotton pajamas to Americans, and they ate food with sticks (chopsticks) and strange sauces. These men were labeled “celestials” to complete their perception of strange and untrustworthiness. Lee Chew recounted the treatment of Chinese immigrants like himself, calling it “wrong and mean,” and that Chinese men were used only for “cheap labor.” Chew compared himself to other immigrants of the time like the Irish and Italians, and how the Chinese were unfairly denied citizenship or belonging as “law abiding, patriotic Americans” (Chew, 1882).

The start of the Gold Rush occurred when California was not yet annexed as a state, meaning it had no political officials, state constitution, or organized law enforcement. This was the “wild west,” and local sheriffs and deputies were often stretched thin, and law was enforced haphazardly. Venerable groups like the Chinese were offered little protection during this tenuous time, and these “celestials” were received with fear and hatred. This type of behavior is called **xenophobia**, a fear or hatred of foreigners. Often, this behavior erupted into violence upon the immigrant groups.

This tension would come to a head in events like the **Chinese Massacre of 1871**. Americans’ xenophobia led them to resort to violence to discourage the Chinese from settling permanently in America. Protests erupted in many cities to drive out these immigrants. In Los Angeles, tensions escalated into violence when Chinese men were accused to have killed two White men in the city, one of them a police officer. Chinese men were openly stalked and killed, resulting in 19 dead, and 15 later lynched by hanging.

Another instance of xenophobia were the events of the **Snake River Massacre of 1887** when two small groups of Chinese men obtained mining permits in Oregon. White men conspired to attack these men, tracking them through the Oregon hills and systematically murdering them. An accurate number of the men killed is unknown since their bodies were left to the elements for an extended period and their gold stolen. The White perpetrators were brought to trial and later acquitted. This violent event was

one of many that exhibits open violence against Asians with little to no consequences.

Despite having little success in gold mining, the Chinese found other ways to make a living in the U.S. In the 1860s, the Chinese found work mostly in the construction of railroads. These men did the most difficult and dangerous work, blasting rock with dynamite, clearing away the debris, shoveling and more. The achievement of the transcontinental railroad helped build the wealth of the U.S. during the 19th century, and 90 percent of its work was done by Chinese immigrants. When the railroad was completed in 1869, not one Chinese worker was present in the picture to commemorate the completion (Lee, 2015).

After much violence and conflict, Americans were ready to solidify their discrimination into legislation. Beginning in the 1860s, many laws were passed at local and state levels to prevent Asian immigrants from economic advancement. This eventually led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, a piece of legislation that would prevent Chinese immigrants from entering the US for 10 years unless entering for temporary stays related to business or education. The Chinese were also banned from obtaining naturalized citizenship, a law that would be challenged later.



Perhaps even more damaging was the **Page Act**, passed in 1875, which banned Asian women from entering the country because they were suspected of prostitution. This act had two ramifications. First, there was the implication that Asian women were suspected of sex work or corruption of society with promiscuity. Many lawmakers and others argued frequently at the time that both Asian men and women posed a sexual danger to American society. Secondly, it was very common for men to immigrate first, then send for the rest of their families. If wives attempted to enter the country after their husbands settled in the U.S., they faced an additional obstacle of being suspected of prostitution upon entry. Therefore, families were prevented from uniting as a result of this act, and Chinese women were blanketed with the label of promiscuity and sexual deviancy.

The Asians that were already in the country were treated with hostility and suspiciousness. The first picture identification cards were carried by the Chinese to identify them as foreign. Law makers in America then wondered, where do the Chinese and other Asians “fit” in society? Should they be Americanized, assimilated, or educated?

Asian immigrants and Asian Americans tried to fit in, acclimate to American society, and “become” American in a variety of ways. Methods included learning English, changing clothing and cultural practices, marrying Americans, and more. Most importantly, Asian Americans worked within the court systems in the U.S. to assert their civil rights. The following three cases illustrate some key court battles.

U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark (1898)

Wong Kim Ark was an American born Chinese man. His parents were born in China, but Ark was from California. In 1894, Ark took a trip to China to visit, and when he attempted to return to his home in San Francisco, he was denied entry. Officials in California denied his citizenship because his parents were ineligible for naturalization under Chinese exclusionary policies. After Ark’s case was tried before the U.S. Supreme Court, the fourteenth amendment was upheld, granting Ark birthright citizenship as being a native-born citizen. Ark’s case was monumental and would serve as a precedent for birthright citizenship, regardless of race from



that point onward.

Ozawa v. U.S. (1922)

In the year 1922, one Japanese man decided to challenge the legality of Asian immigrants being barred from the naturalization process and American definitions of race. Takao Ozawa sought to claim his rights and access to the American dream by attempting naturalization. Ozawa felt entitled to the right, mainly by the basis of his success, contributions to society, and efforts to Americanize. The most interesting argument was the color of his skin. It appeared “White” just like many other American citizens. Ozawa attempted assimilation much like Italians and Irish had in his recent past. He said, “I am not American, but at heart I am a true American.” However, the courts declared against him, and the country would not see Japanese immigrants achieve citizenship for many years after.

Thind v. U.S. (1923)

Bhagat Singh Thind was a high caste Indian man who arrived in America to attend university. He served in the U.S. army during WWI and attempted to obtain citizenship. His naturalization process was denied, on the basis of his “Hindu” status, despite the fact that he was Sikh. Thind sued, on the basis that he was, in fact, Caucasian. This logic follows the anthropological distinction that classified Thind as Caucasian, since his ancestors descended from the Caucasus mountains. The court ruled against him, and his citizenship was revoked, along with other East Indians that had previously been granted citizenship.

As a result of this case, many other “non-White” persons lost their citizenship. One of those men was Vaishno Das Bagai. He escaped British tyranny in India and established a successful business in San Francisco. He received his citizenship in 1921, only later to have it revoked after the Thind ruling. Bagai took his own life in 1928 and his suicide note was published in the newspaper.



His words - "I came to America thinking, dreaming and hoping to make this land my home...But now they come to me and say, I am no longer an American citizen...Humility and insults, who is responsible for all this? Myself and the American government. I do not choose to live the life of an interned person: yes, I am in a free country and can move about where and when I wish inside the country. Is life worth living in a gilded cage?"

These three court cases prove that Asian Americans were continually denied a place in American society, despite military service, economic status, or willingness to adapt to society. This precedent continued into the later 20th century; even as American society diversified even further.

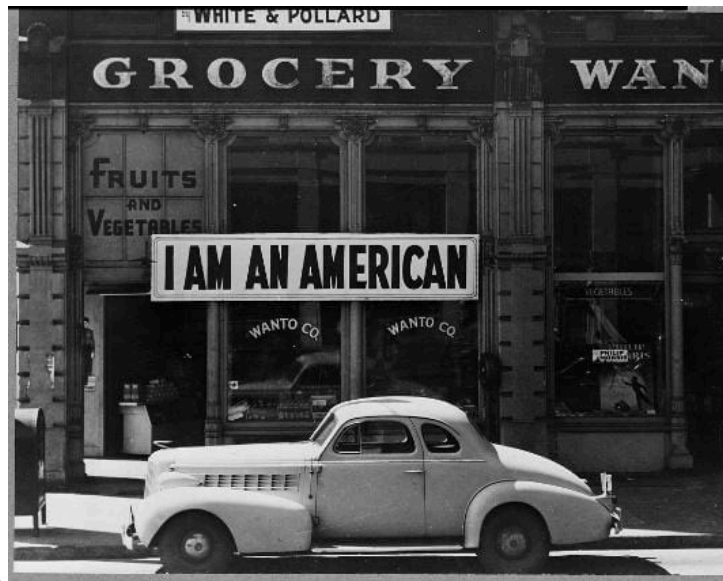
GLOBAL CONFLICTS & THE 20TH CENTURY

As the U.S. propelled into the new century, so did their involvement in global affairs. We begin at the turn of the century wherein many industrialized countries were participating in "new imperialism," efforts of colonization and imperialism in non-White countries. The U.S. was involved in armed conflicts in the western hemisphere like the Spanish-American War which ended in 1898 with U.S. control over Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Freedom fighters led by Filipino nationalist Emilio Aguinaldo rejected U.S. sovereignty having fought side by side their American allies against the Spanish. This rejection prolonged the war, now fought between the U.S. and Filipinos until 1902.

Colonization of the Philippines was characterized by President McKinley and other lawmakers as a boon to Filipinos who were believed to be too uncivilized and savage for self-rule. It was these same principles that continued to prevail foreign policy throughout most of the first half of the 20th century.

World wars during the 20th century brought Americans together with an abundance of national pride and duty to the country. At times, war also evoked feelings of anxiety and xenophobia to the nations involved in the conflict. World War II is one of those times.

Just before the winter of 1941, there were about 125,000 people of Japanese descent living in America, most of them in west coast regions. Pearl Harbor was a U.S. naval station in Hawaii that was the victim of a surprise attack by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. This attack resulted in mass American casualties and was too close to the mainland for officials. As a result, Americans stepped up their involvement in the war, and in February of 1942, President Roosevelt issued the Executive Order 9066. This order authorized the militarized internment of all "persons of Japanese ancestry" residing in the western regions of the U.S. The justification was that Americans suspected that anyone of Japanese ancestry could still have loyalties to their ethnic homelands and would practice espionage. There was little to no evidence to support this concept, nevertheless, many supported this order and about 110,000 Japanese, many of them citizens and American born, many of them children, were put



into internment camps.

Forced internment caused almost \$2 billion in property loss and even more in income loss for those interned. Internment lasted until the end of the war, and some even remained in the camps post-war because they no longer had homes to return to, for they were repossessed by authorities. It was not until the 1980s when the U.S. government paid restitution to the families that were affected in the amount of \$20,000 per Japanese American families that were interned.

NEW IMMIGRANTS & EXPANSION OF DIVERSITY

The end of World War II brought the U.S. a new role on the global stage. The use of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war made the U.S. the most powerful country in the world, while also causing mass death and destruction in the name of democracy. The paradox of these two concepts conveyed a conflict in American ideology.

In order to maintain the moral high ground, the U.S. passed new immigration policies in 1952, revising earlier immigration quotas of the 1920s. This act loosened some restrictions on Asian nations to immigrate to the U.S., and also made naturalization possible for Japanese, Korean, and Chinese immigrants, but only from these countries of origin.

The next decade brought milestones for racial minorities. These changes included legislation, social movements, and community activism that remade Asian Americans for the next few decades.

First, the legislation that passed broadened the definition of Asian American and dramatically diversified America. This was the **Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965**, also referred to as the **Hart-Cellar Act**. The act overturned previous legislation that granted entry into the country based on national origin. Instead, the act created preference for highly skilled immigrants and ones that already had family in the country. Policymakers did not anticipate the impact of this legislation. Immigration rates increased dramatically, and many of those immigrants came from Asian countries.

Next, as the Civil Rights movement propelled equality forward for African Americans, the same call for equality was inspired in many other groups. Asian Americans took to the streets just as other racially minoritized groups demanding for equality. Asian Americans like Grace Lee Boggs participated in marches for equality on behalf of African Americans, then turned to inspire Asian communities to do the same. Philip Vera Cruz was a Filipino American who was active in promote fair labor practices for farmers in California and was instrumental in Cesar Chavez's protest movements in Delano, California. Asian Americans formed a pan-Asian coalition nationwide of Asians that would reject discriminatory labels like "Oriental" and "yellow," and demand equality on all fronts for Asian Americans. Like many other minoritized groups, in an effort to reclaim a once derogatory term, supporters of Asian American rights claimed **Yellow Power** in their rhetoric.

Although the label of "Oriental" is now largely understood as inappropriate, another more nefarious label was applied to the Asian community, one that has very complex ramifications. This is the label of "model minority." The concept of the **model minority** characterizes Asians as obedient, law-abiding, and submissive to authorities (Thrupkaew, 2002). It also uses three types of Asians, the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean as prime examples of what a successful immigrant should be. These three groups have had their hardships but have been able to become successful in the U.S. and statistically held jobs with higher wages and

did not rely on government programs. This concept created much tension between minority groups as well as within the Asian community itself.

First, the model minority paradigm was created to juxtapose the perceived success of Asians against the perceived failures of other persons of color like African Americans and Hispanic Americans who were reliant of government programs and assistance at higher rates. By upholding the Asian community as “model minorities,” the accusation on other ethnic groups was a questioning on why they also could not live up to those standards.

Secondly, the model minority term created tensions between Asian Americans. Japanese, Korean, and Chinese immigrants had a longer history of emigrating into the U.S., and as a result were second and third or more generations of wealth by this point. Additionally, by the 1950s, preference was given to highly skilled Asians who were of these three groups to enter the country, providing a solid economic foundation from the start. And lastly, these three groups reflect a clear bias of colorism, for decedents from these groups tend to be lighter complected than newer immigrants and refugees post 1965. All of these factors created tension and resentment between Asians who either benefitted from the label or were disadvantaged as a model minority.

Although the 1960s brought a push for social change in America, equality continued to be an uphill battle for Asian Americans. Further social conflicts around the globe like the Vietnam War and human rights crises brought even more Asians into the U.S., but this time as refugees. Southeast Asian groups like Vietnamese, Laos, Cambodian, and Hmong immigrants came to the U.S. and were received with fear and suspicion that heightened tensions in some pockets of the nation. Waves of new immigrants typically bring fears to Americans who anticipate a strain on resources that directly affect their livelihoods. These tensions will sometimes erupt in violence as they did in two separate cases during the 1980s.

The 1980s brought an economic downturn that inflated the sense of limited community resources and employment. This anxiety is best exemplified with the murder of **Vincent Chin**, a Chinese man who lived in Detroit, Michigan. Economic strain was felt in blue collar jobs in this city, mainly the automobile industry. Chin was coming home from his bachelor party when he was beaten to death by two White men who claimed he was a “Jap” that was taking jobs away from Americans. These men plead guilty, but received no jail time, only probation with a \$3,000 fine.

In Stockton, California, at the end of the decade, 1989, another heinous act motivated by racism occurred. This **Stockton school shooting** marked the deadliest school shooting with the highest number of fatalities and injuries until Columbine in 1999. A White man used an AK-47 to enter Cleveland Elementary School of predominantly Asian American children and opened fire. He shot 34 people and killed 5 that were between the ages of 6 and 9. This elementary school was known to have been attended by mostly Asian students, many of them refugees from Southeast Asia. Of those children killed, all of them were Asian.

THE RECENT PAST

By the 21st century, bias and discrimination continued as a result of the historical racial discrimination of the previous decades. The model minority myth continues to be the way in which most Americans view the Asian American community. While there is some truth to the success of select Asian American groups that reside in the U.S., still many reportedly experience racial discrimination and hate crimes even to this day.

By 2020, a global pandemic made the fears and anxieties of many Americans manifest in different ways, amplified, and proliferated by the internet and social media. Known as COVID-19, the virus that is believed to have originated in China has affected the Asian American community in terrible ways. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have reported countless acts of violence against Asians every day. These acts of violence range from calling names, spitting in faces, to physical violence reigned down mostly on the elderly.

Perhaps one of the more significant acts of violence occurred in Atlanta, Georgia in 2021. This incident involved a White man entering into a spa and shooting at its occupants. Eight people were killed, six of them Asian women. The shooting was the alleged result of the shooters Christian faith at odds with his sex addiction. However, the shooting exemplified another incident of anti-Asian sentiment following the tensions of the pandemic. The incident sparked protests in multiple cities against anti-Asian violence that were being reported across the country.

In the 21st century, Asian Americans remain the most ethnically diverse, rapidly growing ethnic groups in America. The Democratic Presidential nominee campaign of Andrew Yang put a prominent Asian at the forefront of American politics. A Korean foreign language film, *Parasite*, won Best Picture at the Academy Awards with overwhelming praise. These are signals that Asian Americans are not only active and prominent members of society but have even more room to grow in the coming years.

BIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION 5.1

SOUTHEAST ASIAN REFUGEES

When Southeast Asian refugees from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam started to flow into American cities starting in 1976 and into the 1980s, most Americans didn't know who we were, much less what we had gone through before coming to the United States. In many ways, we were hoping no one would know who we were. Our neighbors thought we were Chinese or Japanese – after all, all Asians look alike to them, and so we must be the same. “Are you Chinese? Are you Japanese?” they asked. We knew English enough to know those questions were about who we were, but we shook our heads, saying, “No, no.” And perhaps we could've told our neighbors that we were Hmong, but it would be too difficult to explain why we came to the United States. Silence was the better choice.

Another generation had to be immersed in the English language and culture before we could tell our story. Our story of survival and resilience and collaboration with the U.S. to fight communists simply had to wait. Among first-generation SE Asian college students, we felt the need to capture our own respective lived experiences from our own lenses rather than waiting for another non-SE Asian person to give us another watered-down version of our plight. Young scholars from the Cambodian and Vietnamese communities had already documented their own refugee experiences through various publications in recent years. In my case as a first-generation Hmong college student and now a professor of political science and ethnic studies, I'm compelled to provide my own version of the Hmong plight to the U.S. and secondary migration to the Central California.

Community and social dialogues among Hmong elders revealed that the first few Hmong families to move to the Central Valley, California started in Merced in 1979. From those families, words got around to relatives across the country – wherever resettlement agencies had scattered us (Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Ohio, Tennessee, or Oklahoma) – that California's Central Valley had fertile land for farming, the only method the Hmong had been familiar with in making a living. We came from the mountainous terrains in Laos but found the flat valley attractive, serving as a magnetic device that continued to pull Hmong families across the country to start their new lives in Merced and Fresno. This massive secondary migration of Hmong refugees to the Central Valley caused social workers to accuse the Hmong of taking advantage of the generous California welfare system. In 1985 the welfare dependency among the Hmong was about 75%. Our big families of 6.9 children in 1986 received more welfare cash aid than a father working \$4.25 an hour minimum wage job.

Though small in number, Southeast Asians in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam played a pivotal role in the Cold War, international political power jostling between the United States and the Soviet Union. For fifteen years from 1960 – 1975, Americans read in newspapers and saw the disaster of the Vietnam War unfolded on television. The political quagmire that engulfed Southeast Asia expanded over three presidential administrations – Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon – became a permanent scar on the American consciousness, a hefty price to pay both in human lives and money (more than 58,000 dead and over 300,000 wounded and \$168 billion – \$1 trillion in today's money.)

In part this American foreign policy (communist containment) in Southeast Asia was the core of the United States' response to communist expansion in Asia at large. In 1949, China turned communists with Mao Zedong's victory over the Nationalist Chinese forces. A year later with the support of the Soviet Union and China, communist North Korea invaded democratic South Korea. The conflict ended in an armistice in 1953. In Southeast Asia, the three French colonies Cambodian, Laos, and Vietnam were vying for their respective independence from France beginning in 1945. Subsequently, Cambodia and Laos were granted independence in 1953 without military conflicts. However, France would not relinquish the same to Vietnam until it was militarily defeated at the battle of Dien Bien Phu by the Vietnamese nationalist Viet Minh in 1954. The United States orchestrated the Geneva Accord of 1954 to divide Vietnam into two countries – North Vietnam, communist controlled and South Vietnam, democratic. This strategy of using South Vietnam as a buffer zone to protect Thailand and Burma was part of the “domino theory” hysteria that if one country fell to communists, then the neighboring one will also fall, and then the one after.

Peace in Southeast Asia proved fragile as the power vacuum created by the departure of France resulted in the monarchies in Laos and Cambodia too unstructured to govern. Accusations of corruption and other internal conflicts ensued, creating ideological factions that could not come to political consensus. The Geneva Accord of 1962, an international agreement to establish Cambodia and Laos as neutral countries, meaning they supported neither communism nor democracy, and there were to be no foreign troops in Laos or Cambodia. But this agreement simply proved its own ineffectiveness. The regional powers like China and North Vietnam and the superpower of the Soviet Union and China never adhered to the terms. North Vietnam infiltrated to Laos and Cambodia through the Ho Chi Minh Trail that cut through eastern Laos, bordering North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Under the Kennedy administration, the CIA secretly recruited democratic leaning Hmong, Lao, and other indigenous hilltribes to fight the North Vietnamese communists on the Trail. Leading this effort was a Hmong man named Vang Pao, also known as General Vang Pao, who rose to prominence as a freedom loving fighter and staunch American ally. The primary duties of the Hmong under his command were to: 1) disrupt the flow of supplies to South Vietnam, 2) rescue downed American pilots, 3)

provide strategic intelligence on enemy operations, and 4) guard satellite installations. The Hmong became the sacrificial lamb in America's secret war to contain communists by paying with 10% of its population in Laos – 30,000 dead among 300,000.

The calamity of American foreign policy in Southeast Asia created one of the largest exoduses of refugees out of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. People who had sided with the American effort were targeted for reprisals by communist forces after the war. About 200,000 Cambodians fled the terror of their own countrymen, the Khmer Rouge, which was responsible for killing over 2 million of its own population. In Laos nearly 300,000 Hmong, lowland Lao, Mien, Khmu, Lahu and other hilltribes made their own escapes to neighboring Thailand. Over a million Vietnamese fled South Vietnam to the Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore. This tragedy of constant refugees fleeing persecution continued into the mid 2000's, but politically speaking, people who fled Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam after 1991 were no longer categorized as refugees.

This story "Southeast Asian Refugees" by Silas Cha is licensed under [CC BY NC ND 4.0](#)

SUMMARY

Like previously covered groups, people of Asian descent have been present in the Americas since the 16th century. Peoples from Asia have typically been regarded as perpetually foreign, admired for their exoticism, but devalued as too otherworldly. Asians have struggled to be accepted amongst American society, despite their contributions of labor, military service, and wealth. Even when utilizing the justice system to assert their civil rights, Asians were met with opposition and oppression. Regardless of their rejection, Asian Americans forged a place for themselves in American society, growing in number and influence as one of the most diverse and fast-growing groups in the U.S. today.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did people of Asian descent make their way to the Americas during the colonial period?
2. How were Asians generally received during the 1800s?
3. Explain some of the ways Asians attempted to assimilate into American society?
4. What political policies of the 20th century impact Asian Americans?
5. What kinds of racial discrimination did Asian Americans endure after WWII?
6. How did Asian Americans assert their civil rights during the 1960s and 70s?

TO MY FUTURE SELF

From the module, what information and new knowledge did I find interesting or useful? How do I plan to use this information and new knowledge in my personal and professional development and improvement?

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2.4: Immigration and Exclusion

Immigration and Exclusion: Labor

Since the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, there have been laws enacted that correspond with anti-Asian sentiments. In the early 1900s, there were anti-Japanese sentiments and the fear of Japanese immigrants (Lee, 2015). This led to the 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement Act that restricted Japanese laborers from immigrating. In 1907, South Asian immigrants had to flee Bellingham, Washington when they were attacked without much warning (Lee, 2015). Ultimately the Asiatic Barred Zone in 1917 restricted Indians and others from immigrating. In the 1930s, Filipino farmworkers were attacked in what was called the Watsonville Riots. Like some of the other Asian laborers, Filipinos were seen as competition with white workers. Further, these white workers and community members didn't like the way that Filipino men had relationships with white women. Anti-miscegenation laws strictly prohibited interracial marriage and sexual relations between whites and non-whites. California didn't overturn this law until 1948 and the last anti-miscegenation law to be struck down was through the Loving vs. Virginia case in 1967. While many of the Asian laborers were seen as competition, Chinese and Japanese immigrants were specifically feared based on the idea that China and Japan, and by extension Chinese and Japanese immigrants, were taking over the U.S. This is seen as "[yellow peril](#)." Yellow peril emphasizes the perceived foreignness and fear of invasion, getting rid of "American morals."

Chinese Exclusion Laws

The Page Act of 1875 is the first law created to exclude people on the basis of race, where Chinese women were forbidden from immigrating to the United States if they were deemed prostitutes. In practice, this was applied to all Chinese women and by extension all Asian women, whether they were sex workers or not. The [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882](#) is a part of the group of first exclusionary acts on the basis of race, but this time banning all Chinese laborers due to the fears that they were taking over the country, and that they were taking jobs away from whites. Lee (2002) calls the 1882 act to be the first to function as a gatekeeper. Lee analyzes historical documents to connect how the 1882 Act paved the way for larger systemic gatekeeping through immigration. She claims this act served as "Precursors to the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, United States passports, 'green cards,' illegal immigration and deportation policies can all be traced back to the Chinese Exclusion Act" (Lee, 2002, p. 37).

Since the exclusion acts against Chinese nationals, each major Asian immigrant group experienced exclusion, one after the other. At first, each group was brought in to fill the labor gaps from the group before. For example, after Chinese laborers were excluded, Japanese laborers were relied on more. In 1907, Japanese laborers were then also excluded because people feared Japanese people were taking over and also because Japanese laborers were seen as extreme competition to white workers.

In the late 1880s/early 1900s, immigrants from Asia were seen as a threat through the idea of [Yellow Peril](#) specifically targeting Chinese or Japanese laborers and countries.

1907 Gentlemen's Agreement and Picture Brides

The 1907 Gentlemen's Agreement closed the door to Japanese laborers from entering the United States but negotiations still enabled Japanese women to "emigrate as family members" (Wilson and Hosokawa in Takaki, 2008, p. 234). However, Japanese women didn't always meet their husbands before immigration and sometimes took part as "picture brides." As picture brides, families arranged single Japanese women with the help of go-betweens to find Japanese men in the United States to marry (p. 234). Thus, Japanese women would send pictures of themselves and they would have an arranged marriage. This became a more common way for Japanese women to immigrate during this time, as 20,000 Japanese "picture brides" between 1908 and 1920 emigrated to Hawai'i and to the U.S. (Lee, 2015).

Halting and Starting Immigration

The Asiatic Barred Zone halted immigration of Indians in the 1920s. The Immigration Act of 1924 then completely terminated immigration from all of Asia. It wasn't until the Immigration Act of 1965 that Indians began immigrating again and many "had high human capital and worked as doctors and engineers" (Basu, 2017, p. 5). Later, "the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act 1975 gave Vietnamese war refugees special status and Congress granted them relocation aid" (Basu, 2017, p. 5).



Figure 2.4.1: "Photograph of immigrants arriving at Immigration Station on Angel Island (ca. 1931)." (Public Domain; mákvirágok via Flickr)

1965 Immigration Act

The **1965 Immigration Act** went into effect in 1969 (Lobo and Salvo, 739, 1998). The law created immigration preference categories for family reunification and professional skills, allotted "170,000 immigrant visas" for the "Eastern Hemisphere" which was "Asia, Europe, Africa, and Oceania" and allowed only 20,000 visas per country (Lobo and Salvo, 1998, p. 742). Lobo and Salvo (1998) state that "besides physicians, a large number of Asian nurses, dentists, and pharmacists, scientists, and engineers entered during this period" (Lobo and Salvo, 1998, pp. 740 and 741).

Sidebar: A Closer look at the 1965 Immigration Act

From the period of 1972-1977, Asian immigration totaled an average of 136,827 yearly while the total of all immigrants yearly average was about 405,000 (Lobo and Salvo, 1998, p. 743).

For the types of visas, China's highest percent of immigration visas were allocated through employment preferences for the last period of 1992-1994 with about 53% (p. 743). India had their highest percent immigration visas in family during 1978-1991 with about 60% and highest for employment in 1972-1977 with 57%. The Philippines had their highest percentage of visas allocated from the immediate relatives category. Finally, Vietnam in 1972-1977 had the highest percent yearly allocations in the refugee category.

The 1965 Immigration Act ended the Immigration Act of 1924 "quota" based system that severely restricted immigration and therefore redirected immigration to include more Asian and other people of color immigrants unlike before (Basu, 2017, p.1). Basu writes, "Preference categories for admissions were created based on family ties, critical skills, diversity, and refugee status" (Basu, 2017, p.5). The initial Asian immigrants who came following this act "were employed in high-skill, high-wage occupations" (Basu, 2017, p. 2).

Chinese people, Indians, and Filipinx people are the largest Asian groups in the U.S.

Coolies

After slavery was abolished in the U.S., plantation owners needed workers to work on the land since Blacks were no longer forced to work for them. Latin America became a hotspot for indentured labor from Asia, and in particular Chinese and Indian workers. These indentured laborers who worked under contract were called **Coolies**. Women workers from India came later but only if they were deemed "moral" such as being "widowed" or "married" because "single women" were said to cause strife between male workers who would compete to have sex with them (Lee, 2015, p.4). Lee writes, "The first group of 396 Asian indentured laborers arrived in May of 1838... After reports of abuse of workers surfaced, the experiment ended the next year, but the system resumed

in 1844, and from 1838 to 1917, 429,623 South Asians and 17,904 Chinese went to the British West Indies as indentured laborers” (2015, p. 3 ebook). Some of the places the laborers went included: British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, Cuba, Peru, Panama, Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, and more.

Coolies was a term used in Latin America and especially in the United States to depict workers who were seen as job-stealing competition (Lee, 2015, p.1). Coolie labor was related to the slavery system as they were often mistreated like slaves (Lee, 2015, p.5) and sometimes held against their will. Some laborers under the coolie system were forcibly sent to work in Latin America and even tricked into doing so (Lee, 2015, pp.4-5). Lee documents instances where sometimes they were forced into labor even years after their contract ended (Lee, 2015, p.5).

Hawai'i Plantation Labor

Hawai'i became a popular place for Asian immigrants who wanted to come to the United States. They worked on largely sugar plantations for low wages, they fought for better conditions in their work and home, they were pitted against one another in their struggle against the white plantation leadership. Besides Japanese laborers, there were others that were “Hawaiians, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, Chinese... Portuguese, and Koreans” with an “overseer” that was usually “white” (Takaki, 2008, p. 240). Women laborers made less than men despite doing the same work (Lillian Ota Takaki in Takaki, 2008, p. 240). Lillian Takaki writes, “ ‘Female field hands, for example, received an average wage of only fifty-five cents per day in 1915, compared to the seventy-eight cents for male field hands’.” (Takaki in Takaki, 2008, p. 240). Laborers complained that working in the fields was very difficult and they “worked like machines” and were “watched constantly” (Takaki, 2008, p. 240).

Takaki states that Japanese laborers were stereotyped as not causing trouble because they are “accommodating” and didn’t make a lot of noise but in reality they constantly fought back about the conditions they faced at work especially through striking (Takaki, 2008, p. 242). What Japanese and other workers realized was that when members of their group fought for better working conditions, others would be used and pitted against them through a “divide-and-control” or divide-and-conquer technique. They would amplify and pit needs and advantages against the needs and disadvantages of others and therefore attempt to highlight differences through preferences in order to squash any semblance of commonalities that people would recognize across groups. Many times groups were able to see how they were being used against one another and came together to fight for better working conditions.

From the beginning, the workers camps were cramped. Later as laborers had families, “... [planters] wanted to ‘stimulate’ a ‘home feeling’ in order to make their workers happier and more productive” (Takaki, 2008, p.247). For some of the various ethnic groups including Japanese laborers, there were religious institutions, language schools, and sometimes for many the sharing of ethnic foods (p. 248). Pidgin was created and grew into popularity, with Pidgin being “a simple English that incorporated Hawaiian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Chinese phrases as well as their rhythms and intonations” (p. 249). Pidgin was spoken on the plantation amongst the workers who created this common dialect to speak with one another. Tagalog and Ilocano were also said to have influenced Pidgin but the earlier mentioned languages were said to have the biggest influence.

Sidebar: Philip Vera Cruz



Figure 2.4.2: A mural in Historic Filipinotown, L.A with Philip Vera Cruz on the top left. (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0; Photo by Kenny Chang via Flickr)

Philip Vera Cruz became the second vice-president of the United Farm Workers union (UFW) until his resignation in 1977. He was the highest-ranking Filipinx officer in the UFW. Before helping to form the UFW and leading the grape strike, Vera Cruz was an officer in the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), AFL-CIO which combined with the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) led by César Chávez and Dolores Huerta, to form the UFW (Scharlin and Villanueva 2000, 31). For Vera Cruz, participating in the UFW changed his life, stating that joining the union gave him “the opportunity to participate in the political struggles of this country...as a worker struggling along with my fellow workers for our constitutional rights” (p. 33).

Vera Cruz was a farm laborer, and when he joined the AWOC, he also studied the history of labor movements. He understood the value in multiethnic strikes, while a majority-white led Teamsters union tried to convince Filipinx workers from merging with Mexican workers. Vera Cruz, along with others in the AWOC, including Larry Itliong, understood that “we must unite all the races so we’ll have one strong union that represents all workers. We explained how in the past you could see that because the workers were divided they were weak” (Scharlin and Villanueva, 2000, p. 46), also pointing out that growers would play one group off another in order to maximize their profits. Vera Cruz noted that Itliong had reservations about merging with Mexican workers, fearing that Filipinx workers would be pushed out, but ultimately he felt that his primary goal was to improve the conditions for all farm workers. On August 1966, a year into the grape strike, the AWOC and NFWA merged and turned into one union: the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFW), vastly supported by both Filipinx and Mexican farm workers. Vera Cruz also pointed out the role that Teamsters played to “fan the flames” between whatever disputes existed between Filipinx and Mexican farm workers, eager to bring Filipinx members over to their union (p. 49). See also [Chapter 11, section 11.5 on the agricultural labor movement](#) in California.

From Colonization to Nursing

Catherine Ceniza Choy (2019), writes that “U.S. colonization” greatly contributed to the high amount of Filipinx nurses in the United States due to “Americanized professional nurse training,” English being one of the main languages for exams, and the presence of other types of medical nursing courses to students. Choy further writes, “According to the [2016 Survey of California Registered Nurses](#), Filipinos make up the second largest group of the state’s active RN workforce, nearly 18 percent. Among younger nurses, they’re even more predominant, with Filipino nurses representing nearly a quarter of nurses between ages 35 to 44 years and more than one-fifth of RNs 45 to 54 years old” (2019). However, “from Covid, Filipino nurses are [just 4 percent of the nursing workforce](#) in the United States, but constitute nearly [one-third of nursing deaths](#) due to Covid-19, according to a research study conducted by National Nurses United last fall” (Ocampo, 2021).

Choy (2019) writes,

Filipino immigrant nurses also bring experience with Philippine traditional therapies such as hilot, faith healing, and the use of medicinal plants. Hilot is a traditional form of massage therapy or chiropractic manipulation that relieves aches and pains. This knowledge of Philippine healing modalities is important not solely because the use of alternative therapies in the U.S. has become more mainstream, but also because a growing number of Americans are of Filipino heritage. Between 1980 and 2016, the Filipino immigrant population in the United States [nearly quadrupled](#). California is home to the largest Filipino-American population in the nation with over 1.6 million of Filipino descent (Choy, 2019).

Race and Asian American Space

Little Manila

Filipina American historian, the late Dawn Mabalon (2013) discusses the Filipinx American movement in Stockton, CA from 1967 to 1972 in her text *Little Manila is in the Heart: The Making of a Filipina/o American Community in Stockton, California*. She writes, “Galvanized by anger over displacements of urban renewal and freeway construction, these seemingly disparate groups drew on their community development to forge a formidable alliance that challenged the white and Filipina/o power structure in Stockton, as well as the notion that Filipinas/os should remain second-class citizens” (p. 300).

Mabalon (2013) recognized that contrary to popular belief about Filipinas/xs/os, a lot of conflict that made organizing the community difficult wasn’t due to regionalism (i.e. differences between being from Luzon, Visayas, or Mindanao) but instead language differences, whether Tagalog, Visayan languages, Ilocano, and others (p. 103). Mabalon (2013) recalls the discrimination and segregation that Filipinxs faced.

As mentioned earlier, some of the impetus for fighting was due to the idea that Filipinx Americans were considered “second-class citizens.” The following memory from a Stockton resident during that time shows the discrimination and treatment of Filipinas/xs/os in regards to basic needs. This discrimination dehumanized them and is also reminiscent of Civil Rights Struggles in the 1960’s. Mabalon (2013) writes,

The only place Filipinas/os were allowed to live and congregate in downtown was south of Main Street, in the Oriental Quarter. Most institutions, businesses, and gathering places outside of the campo and the streets of the West End were strictly forbidden to Filipinas/os. Many hotels in the downtown West End refused to rent rooms to them. Immigrants recalled seeing the signs that warned Filipinas/os not to let the sun set on them in the city. “I personally saw signs on some hotel stairways on El Dorado Street, openly discriminating against Filipinos saying ‘Positively No Filipinos allowed’ or ‘No Filipinos or dogs allowed,’ ” remembered by Anita Bautista, a second-generation Pinay (p. 113).

Japantown



Figure 2.4.3: Peace Pagoda in Japantown, San Francisco. (CC BY 4.0; Photo by Jordan Burkart)

What was once a comfortable Japantown in San Francisco became a place that completely changed when Japanese Americans were forced to leave West coast cities during World War II due to Roosevelt's [Executive Order 9066](#) signed two months after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. When Japanese American residents of Japantown in San Francisco came back to their homes after living in the camps, they sometimes came to find new ownership and establishments, as well as sometimes losing their homes. Upon returning, they found that a lot of the area had been targeted for redevelopment. Some residents were able to come back and those who were able have been fighting against redevelopment ever since, a common occurrence amongst communities of color in urban spaces.

To “Save Japantown,” they formed a committee that included “designated city planners, local community, merchants, homeowners’ associations, and residents.” (Takashi, 2014, p. 6). Efforts to “Save Japantown” have faced the difficult challenge of balancing various interests and prioritizing cultural preservation or economic revitalization. One issue included whose interest did the initiative serve? For example, Japanese Americans may be fighting to preserve Japanese culture but others argue that Japanese Americans used to be against Japanese (as in Japan) investments and are now fighting against outside investments (Takashi, 2014, p.10). Another issue was what exactly did preservation look like (p. 8)? As with other ethnic neighborhoods, they fought gentrification, fighting against outsiders redeveloping the area and taking away their ethnic ties and local establishment. Further, Takashi writes,

Interviewee C : Business owner and community leader (Sansei male):

I think most of the property owners are Nisei and ... don't always like governmental intervention. They are like “let me do whatever I want on my property” ... “let me control my own destiny” ... “I don't want government to tell me what to do” ... it's typical Nisei. I'm sure all the experience they've had through the Depression, the War and discrimination and redevelopment ... Everything has affected their decisions (2014, p. 9).

As expressed in this quotation, there is a lot of history impacting the way that the different groups involved are navigating how to “Save Japantown” including within the Japanese and Japanese American community. One white community planner called the presence and impact of history “an open wound” within the community and efforts to save the community (Takashi, 2014, p. 9).

Chinatown



Figure 2.4.4: "Dragon Gate" in San Francisco. (CC BY 4.0; Photo by Jordan Burkart)

Shah (2001) writes,

nineteenth-century San Francisco health officials and politicians conceived of Chinatown as the preeminent site of urban sickness, vice, crime, poverty, and depravity; furthermore, “health authorities readily conflated the physical condition of Chinatown with the characteristics of Chinese people. They depicted Chinese immigrants as a filthy and diseased “race” who incubated such incurable afflictions as smallpox, syphilis, and bubonic plague and infected white Americans” (San Francisco Board of Health, 1876-1881 in Shah, 2001, pp. 1-2).

These attributes contributed to the idea of who is an “acceptable” kind of immigrant, who is healthy and desirable.

Shah (2001) writes that during the 19th century, “Chinese Americans found it impossible to move outside the boundaries of Chinatown. Attempts to move encountered resistance from white real estate brokers, who refused to show Chinese Americans houses in exclusively white neighborhoods, and from white landlords, who turned down Chinese tenants (p. 230). Shah found various sources that demonstrate this that includes a Survey of Race Relations collection and interviews as a part of *Combined Asian American Resources Oral History Project*. Because of this, Chinese Americans lived in segregated Chinatowns before being able to slowly find housing in white neighborhoods in the twentieth century when they proved they could be trusted to be clean, “adapted to American living styles and standards in furnishings and decor and by Chinese families who conformed to idealized nuclear-family social dynamics” (p. 230). Such heteronormativity contrasted with the historically bachelor societies in Chinatowns and other ethnic neighborhoods that were said to harbor disease and promote uncleanness amongst same-sex housing (p. 230).

In their quest for humanization, middle-class Chinese Americans fought laws and went to court to challenge their treatment, and gained media visibility and sympathy from many. Shah (2013) remarks that this helped shift perceptions of Chinese Americans, but sometimes at the cost of others. For example, fighting for middle-class Chinese Americans and making the claim that they are upright and moral, clean citizens and that their wealth and status proves it, often came at the detriment of those who lived in bachelor societies (p. 230). Many of these bachelor societies existed because of the limited immigration allowable for Asian women and thus the settling and homemaking often done by longer-term immigrants.

Undocumented Asian Americans

Tracy Buenavista (2018) states, “more than one million are undocumented Asian immigrants, or 12 percent of the total undocumented population” out of a total of about 11 million undocumented people in the U.S. (p. 79). Buenavista argues that because Asian American undocumented students are more so seen as “silent”, she claims it “prevent[s] them from seeking support networks and resources among the larger undocumented immigrant community” and that even though they refrain from seeking support, they still achieve “academic mobility like college access” (p. 80).

Enriquez (2019) compares some differences between Latinx undocumented students and Asian undocumented students. One Asian undocumented immigrant recognized how they were seen differently from Mexican undocumented immigrants and how it enables them more access. “Edith Oh, a Korean [undocumented immigrant] student, noted, ‘They would probably think you’re legal here [Asians] and you followed all the laws...I guess just [because] Asians are obedient. Since they were little they listen to their parents. And they follow the laws [and] regulations’ ” (p. 265). Enriquez specifically states how such assumptions about Asian undocumented immigrants helped keep them safe as people didn’t assume they were undocumented and so people were less likely to question them about lacking documentation (p. 265). There were markers that indicate a lack of foreignness to people or a status attributed to something else. “Anna Kwon, who arrived at the age of ten, explained, ‘They assume that I’m Korean American since I speak [English] fluently. So it’s like, they don’t assume that I’m undocumented’ ” (p. 266). However, she adds that if not documented, “they would think I’m an international student” (p. 266).

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2.5: Wars and Imperialism

Studying the Impact of Wars and Imperialism in Asian American Studies

Asian American Studies professors, Wei Ming Dariotis and Wesley Ueunten remind us that due to the “model minority” myth and the general lack of knowledge about Asian American history, most Americans don’t realize how issues of war impact today’s Asian American communities. They point out that “Asian Americans of all generations are affected by the ghosts of wars in Asia, the Pacific, and Europe in myriad ways that vary distinctly by community” (2010, p. 747). Dariotis and Ueunten emphasize how many of these issues are related to the “overarching logic in the construct of Orientalism” or the construction of the collective “Orient” (Asia and the so-called Middle East) as foreign, feminized, and “othered” in order to justify years of Western colonization (p. 748).

This section of the chapter will review just a few examples of how U.S.-involved wars and imperialism have shaped the racialization of Asian Americans and continue to impact their lives today. We will center the narratives of silenced Asian American stories, often misrepresented in mainstream media. Dariotis and Ueunten (2010) also point out how focusing on contemporary Asian American issues related to war contributes to understanding Asian American history and migration as related to U.S. militarism and expansionism; for, “Most of Asian America would not exist if it had not been for the push-pull effect exerted by the destabilization of Asian homelands through U.S. military actions, pushing Asians out of Asia...and the related increased wealth the U.S. enjoys that pulls Asians to the United States” (p. 749).

Forgotten Wars: the Philippines and Korea

Dariotis and Ueunten (2010) point out how the U.S. tends to reinforce the message of being victims of attacks on U.S. soil, as “they provide an impetus to war” (p. 750). Contrary to this, we are just as quick to forget or hide U.S. military actions that work to minimize its impacts and reduce the number of years involved or people killed. These examples of U.S. involved wars or imperialism are not commonly celebrated, nor are they given a significant time in history textbooks. These are the “Forgotten Wars” of the U.S.

Philippine-American War and U.S. Imperialism

One such example is the Philippine-American War between the U.S. and Filipinx revolutionaries. After 400 years of Spanish colonization in the Philippines, the U.S., in its desire for global domination, took the opportunity to go to war with Spain as Cubans were fighting for independence. In the Philippines, Spanish domination had already been weakened by hundreds of years of resistance by Filipinx people who wished for nothing more than to be able to govern themselves and dismantle Western occupation. Thanks to these liberation efforts, the U.S. was able to come in at a crucial moment and help defeat the Spanish in four months. It was uncovered fairly quickly that the real motive by the U.S. was not about supporting independence in Cuba or the Philippines, but about expanding the U.S. empire. In the 1898 Treaty of Paris, the United States was “given control” over the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and Cuba.

This move was an extension of the [Manifest Destiny](#) ideology, that the U.S. was destined to expand their empire. Americans began to construct a narrative that justified their occupation of the Philippines, proclaiming that “it was their duty to expand both Christianity and democracy in the word” (Parks, 2013, p. 264). It’s important to note that not all Americans believed this and in fact there was a strong force of anti-imperialists who opposed the U.S. occupation of the Philippines. People of the Philippines also opposed U.S. control and resisted. The Philippine-American War (1899 - 1901) ensued, with Filipinx revolutionaries led by Emilio Aguinaldo. The war was claimed to have ended upon Aguinaldo’s capture, but rebellions continued into 1913.

“White Man’s Burden”

A poem by famous British writer, Rudyard Kipling, “[The White Man’s Burden](#): The United States and the Philippine Islands” was first published in 1899 at the start of the Philippine-American War. Kipling was “a staunch advocate of Western imperialism” (Parks, 2013, p. 265). The poem proclaimed that it was the moral obligation of the “superior” white race to guide their “little brown brothers” into the light of Western civilization. This white supremacist ideology only worked to justify U.S. imperialist and military actions in the Philippines as then-President William McKinley welcomed this poem. “White Man’s burden” became “a euphemism for Western imperialism” (p. 265).

Many scholars agree that white supremacy reinforced a unifying principle of whiteness, a shared racial identity that cut across class lines. [White supremacy](#) allowed white Americans to unite as one race and feel superior to others (Strain, 2003, 44:04 - 44:34). Multiple racial projects throughout the 19th century sent the message to poor whites that at least they're better than non-whites. This allowed them to feel united with land-owning, upper-class whites who actually wielded power over them and distracted them from class-based inequalities through narratives of white supremacy. White man's burden and the U.S. occupation of the Philippines were racist projects that reinforced the ideologies of white supremacy.



Figure 2.5.1: "Igorot Singing Lessons. [Philippine Reservation in the Department of Anthropology at the 1904 World's Fair]". (Public Domain; Jessie Tarbox Beals via Missouri Historical Society)

The 1904 St. Louis, Missouri World's Fair was another of these racial projects to "showcase America's achievements." They featured human exhibits of "savage" peoples in their "natural habitats" in order to demonstrate their contrast with U.S. superiority. White fair-goers took pictures next to "savage" people in order to physically demonstrate "how civilized they were." One organizer described it as "a practical illustration of the best way of bearing the white man's burden" (Strain, 2003, 49:09 - 51:30). These human exhibits attempted to demonstrate "a bucolic view of slave life" and Geronimo, an Apache warrior, signed autographs. The Philippine Exposition was one of the fair's largest exhibits, attempting to indicate the benefits of U.S. influence on one of the empire's newly conquered peoples (51:37-52:31). Author Scott Malcolmson stated, "White people saw their advance as being historical," giving them "enormous motivation to see the lives of people who were not white as being outside of history and not part of this progressive advance" (53:40-53:54).

Korean War



Figure 2.5.2: A war weary Korean girl by a stalled tank at Haengju, Korea. June 9, 1951. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Maj. R.V. Spencer, UAF. (Navy) via [Morning Calm Weekly Newspaper Photo Archive - Flickr](#))

The Korean War is often recorded to have lasted from 1950 to 1953, however many scholars, activists and survivors of the war in the Korean peninsula recognize that we are still technically at war today with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea). No peace treaty has ever been signed and military drills still happen at the 38th parallel, which has divided the land and families for over seventy years. Still, what is recognized as the Korean War with active combat and bombings between the USSR-occupied North and U.S.-occupied South is also known as “The Forgotten War” by many Americans.

Korea was colonized by the Japanese empire from 1910-1945. For 35 years Koreans suffered under Japanese repression, forced to speak the Japanese language, use Japanese names, and bow to the Japanese emperor. Koreans were left hungry and sometimes forcefully removed from their homes and land. Koreans resisted the Japanese for decades and Kim Il Sung, soon to be the “father” of the DPRK, was one of many Korean guerilla fighters who fought for Korean liberation. These class-based revolutionaries in the North were communists backed by the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. Fearful of the spread of communism, United States became involved in Korea in order to exercise their Cold War policy of containment. The U.S. military occupied the South and divided the Korean peninsula into two at the 38th parallel and a civil war ensued between the “South” and “North.” The nation is still divided 70 years later and the U.S. military continues to operate in South Korea.

The war devastated Korea, killing four million and displacing over nine million people. Eleven million families were separated due to division and war, and many children were left orphaned. Asian American Studies professor Grace J. Yoo writes that “No Korean family was untouched by this war” (2012, p. 63). Yoo highlighted Korean women impacted by the war, discussing how 300,000 women became widows forced to peddle in order to survive and care for their families. In Hee Kim had no money or place to live, and started a shrimp selling business. Others sold sweet potato or rice cakes on the road (pp. 71-72). Yoo summarizes that decades later, the women are still haunted by the memories of war. But they shared their stories via hundreds of pages of handwritten notes in hopes that the next generation of Korean Americans won't forget the war (p. 73).

Mass Incarceration of Japanese in the Western Hemisphere

Japanese Americans have a long history in the United States. Today, Japanese popular culture and food are quite recognizable in the U.S. In combination with the push for the “model minority” myth, the image painted may be that Japanese Americans have fully assimilated and don't face any discrimination. Yet by now, we hope the reader recognizes that such broad generalizations of the Asian American community often overshadow important aspects of U.S. history that prevents us from fully comprehending the impact of Orientalist, White Supremacist, and Anti-Asian ideologies that justified extended acts of violence and legalized discrimination against Japanese Americans. One of these major instances was the legalized mass incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans, Canadians, and Peruvians during World War II.

In the Aftermath of Pearl Harbor

By the time the Japanese army bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States government had already made steps toward increasing surveillance of the Japanese American community. For decades before, Yellow Peril and Orientalist ideologies pushed the narrative that Japanese immigrants were to take over the West. The 1940 Alien Registration Act made all alien residents register and provide their fingerprints to the federal government. Agencies like the FBI had already been collecting information about Japanese American communities, including the names of people who led cultural organizations, language teachers, martial arts instructors, or anyone suspected by the U.S. government to be too “Japanesey” (Lee, 2015, p. 212; Kochiyama, 2001, p. 344). Within just a few hours of the Pearl Harbor bombing by Japan, the U.S. government initiated so-called security measures targeting Japanese, and some German, and Italian nationals. Martial law was established in Hawai’i, and the FBI began arresting individuals they suspected were spies for the Japanese government. Over one thousand Japanese were arrested within two days, largely community leaders on the government’s list. By February of 1942, over 2,000 Japanese people were held in U.S. Department of Justice camps (Lee, 2015, pp. 215 - 216).

This included the now famed and respected Japanese American activist, Yuri Kochiyama’s father. Kochiyama was only nineteen when the bombs were dropped, and her father, who owned a fish market in San Pedro, CA, had just come home after a surgery. On the very day Pearl Harbor was attacked, Kochiyama’s father was taken by the FBI and detained in a federal prison. He was released and allowed to return home on December 20, but he was extremely frail and could not talk. He died 12 hours later (Kochiyama, 2001, pp. 343-344).

Historian Erika Lee explains that the arrests and other government actions like freezing bank accounts created a catastrophe among the Japanese American community (Lee, 2015, p. 216). Hysteria against the Japanese continued with baseless claims in newspapers and among U.S. politicians and military personnel who believed Japanese Americans were spies for the Japanese military. Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt was convinced that Japanese Americans were enemies and stated, “a Jap is a Jap” (p. 217). Ironically, the Japanese government *did* place spies in the U.S., but the nineteen Americans arrested for spying were all white (p. 213). In fact, two U.S. government surveys confirmed that Japanese Americans were overwhelmingly loyal to the United States. Curtin B. Munson informed President Roosevelt in 1941 that there was “no Japanese problem” and that up to 98% of second-generation Japanese Americans were “pathetically eager to show this loyalty” (p. 213).



Figure 2.5.3: "Members of the Mochida Family Awaiting Evacuation Bus." Hayward, CA. May 8, 1942. Records of the War Relocation Authority. (Public Domain; Photographed by Dorothea Lange via National Archives Catalog)

Despite this data, on February 19, 1942, only two months after Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, authorizing the secretary of war to set up military areas where they could restrict the movement of people considered “enemy aliens,” particularly Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans (Schlund-Vials, et al, 2017, p. 138). Lee reminds us that the ultimate responsibility rests with Roosevelt who signed this order, ignoring reports from the FBI, the Office of Naval Intelligence, and his own investigators who reported that a mass removal and incarceration was not necessary (Lee, 2015, p. 222).

Under the guise of “military necessity” all people of Japanese ancestry were forcefully removed from Washington, California,

Oregon, and parts of Arizona. Exclusion orders were posted all over cities and towns, also stating where Japanese Americans were now banned. Japanese Americans had one week to pack and bring with them only what they could carry (Lee, 2015, pp. 229 - 230). Many families had no choice but to sell or abandon their homes, farms, and businesses. Japanese Americans were ordered to assemble on their “evacuation” days when they were met with armed soldiers who gave them ID tags. Monica Sone wrote, “From then on, we were known as Family #10710” (p. 230).

They were first sent to “assembly centers,” such as the one Kochiyama’s family was sent to in Arcadia, California. Most assembly centers were on fair grounds or race tracks and people were forced to sleep in horse stalls. She explained, “...for mattresses they gave us muslin bags, and told us to fill them with straws” and pointed out how it was especially challenging for families with young children since they couldn’t carry much besides their children and babies (Kochiyama, 2001, p. 345).

Sidebar: Fred Korematsu



Figure 2.5.4: Fred Korematsu at a press conference with member of his *coram nobis* legal team. (CC BY-NC 2.0; Courtesy of the family of Fred T. Korematsu via J Curnow, Flickr)

Fred Korematsu, born in Oakland, CA, attempted to avoid the removal order by undergoing plastic surgery. He went into hiding, but was arrested and sent to jail. Ernest Besig, with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), approached Korematsu and asked him if he was willing to challenge the legality of mass removal and detention of Japanese Americans. Korematsu said yes as he “intended to fight for the civil rights of Japanese Americans as a whole” (Okiihiro, 2013, p. 94).

Korematsu’s lawyers charged that the mass relocation was unconstitutional because it denied Japanese Americans their due process protections, but Korematsu was found guilty of violating a military order. When Korematsu filed an appeal, his case moved up to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1944, the majority decision on *Korematsu v. the United States*, was that due to “real military dangers,” the detainment of Korematsu was justified. Korematsu was sent to Topaz camp until the end of World War II, and then moved on with his life, married, and had two children.

In the 1980s, it was discovered that the government lied to the Supreme Court about Japanese American wartime cases, including *Korematsu*, and this finding allowed for a *coram nobis* appeal. Korematsu went to court again, testifying, “I would like to see the government admit that they were wrong and do something about it so this will never happen again to any American citizen of any race, creed or color” (Irons, 1989, pp. 25 - 26; cited in Okiihiro, 2013, p. 95). Finally in 1988, the U.S. Congress passed the Civil Liberties Act, signed by Ronald Reagan, and issued a national apology to Japanese Americans for mass removal and incarceration. The government also paid \$20,000 each to living survivors who were US citizens or legal residents. Korematsu was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998 by President Bill Clinton, and continued to advocate against the racial profiling of Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities who were targeted after September 11, 2001. Korematsu passed away on March 30, 2005 and is buried in Oakland, CA where he grew up (Okiihiro, 2013, p. 95).

Mass Incarceration



Figure 2.5.5: Winter at Manzanar. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Don Graham via Flickr)

Starting in the summer of 1942, Japanese Americans were moved again to ten newly constructed War Relocation Authority (WRA) camps in various desolate and hostile locations throughout the country (Lee, 2015, p. 236). The WRA provided housing, medical care, and education, and inmates did various jobs at the camps. They were not paid at first, but eventually earned some wages, usually at mere fractions of what people were normally paid, such as \$8 or \$12 a month for full-time work (Okubo, 2014, p. 62). Yuri Kochiyama and her family were sent to the Arkansas swamplands, assigned to sleep in army barracks with more than 200 people per block. Their camp was surrounded by barbed wire and armed soldiers. She described the ways Japanese Americans had to come together and organize in order to survive, writing,

Just before we went in to the camps, we saw that being a Japanese wasn't such a good thing....But when I saw the kind of work they did at camp, I felt so proud of the Japanese, and proud to be Japanese...(2001, p. 347).

Incarcerated Japanese Americans tried their best to live life and did so in a communal way. They built vegetable gardens, a silkscreen poster shop, and a tofu factory. Children still attended school, though materials were in short supply. The curriculum emphasized "Americanization," yet the irony was that children were taught about being a free American and to live in a democracy behind barbed wires (Lee, 2015, p. 237). Since cameras were not permitted at the camps, Miné Okubo, a young college student at the time, decided to record everyday life at the Tanforan Assembly Center and Topaz concentration camp, through sketches, drawings, and paintings. She attempted to record the "Crazy things" that happen when you have ten thousand people confined to one square mile with no privacy (Okubo, 2014, p. xxvi). Her illustrations uncovered challenges like when camp police would surveil the premises (p. 60), the stinging sand storms in Utah (p. 127), and the time an elderly man was shot and killed by a guard from one of the watchtowers (p. 180).

Okubo also illustrated scenes of resilience and how Japanese American inmates survived the years of uncertainty during their incarceration. Such as how people created art out of wood, toothbrush handles, and peach seeds (Okubo, 2014, p. 169); and how recreation halls offered ping pong, basketball, and baseball to pass the time (p. 170). Over time, however, Japanese Americans grew angry, frustrated and restless. Conflict grew within camp communities between those who wanted to cooperate with the government and those who wanted to express dissent. At Manzanar, the arrest of a man who beat someone he suspected to be an informant resulted in riots, martial law, and soldiers firing into an unarmed crowd. Two people were killed and nine were injured (Lee, 2015, p. 238).

Sidebar: Mine Okubo Collection

Check out the [online collection of drawings by Miné Okubo](#), illustrating life in the Tanforan assembly center in California and Topaz concentration camp in Utah during World War II. These drawings served as the basis for her renowned book, *Citizen 13660*, which was printed in 1946 and was the first personal account published on the camp experience.

Japanese Americans who fought in the war and those who resisted

In 1943, the U.S. wanted to recruit detainees to fight in the war. The War Relocation Authority initiated a loyalty review program and made any Japanese American male aged seventeen and older fill out a questionnaire that they thought would determine their loyalty to the United States. There were two questions that were the most concerning:

- Question 27: “Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?”
- Question 28: “Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America...and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power or organization?” (Lee, 2015, pp. 238 - 289; Lee, J.H.X., 2018, p. 88).

Most answered “yes” to both questions. Some *Nisei* shared that it was easy to respond “yes” since they were eager to get out of the camps. They were soon issued draft notices in 1944. Thirty-three thousand Japanese American men fought in segregated units: the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Infantry Battalion, later called the “Purple Heart Battalion” for their many losses and 900 Purple Hearts (Lee, 2015, p. 242). The 442nd became one of the most decorated units with 3,600 Purple Hearts, and hundreds of Silver Stars, Bronze Stars, 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, and one Congressional Medal of Honor (p. 243).

Others who questioned the government’s motives found the questionnaire to add insult to injury. After having lost his family business and incarcerated, Dan Harada stated that the government now asking for his allegiance and to serve in combat duty “didn’t just sound right” (Lee, 2015, p. 239). He answered “no” to both questions. In fact, approximately 12,000 men answered “no” to both questions, later known as “**no-no boys**” and as a punishment were sent to Tule Lake Segregation Center where they were met with various atrocities (p. 239). This was the largest camp and turned into “a maximum security center with additional barbed wire, increased guards and tanks, and an eight-foot-high double ‘man-proof’ fence” (p. 240). Deplorable work conditions led to a death, and 800 inmates went on strike in 1943. They were beaten and the army initiated martial law at Tule Lake. No-no boys also met backlash from fellow Japanese Americans, like the leaders of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) who criticized them as draft dodgers and dishonorable (Lee, J.H.X., 2018, p. 89).

Another three hundred and fifteen Japanese Americans resisted the draft. The Fair Play Committee at Heart Mountain camp in Wyoming asserted their loyalty to the U.S. and the core principles of freedom and justice, but first demanded that civil rights be restored before complying with the draft. They were convicted of a felony and incarcerated for their actions (Lee, 2015, p. 243; Lee, J.H.X., 2018, p. 89). This community was also shunned and vilified by the JACL.

Japanese Latin Americans

Detention of people of Japanese descent extended to Canada and Latin America as well. Viewing the entire Western Hemisphere as a sphere of interest under the Monroe Doctrine, and in the interest of hemispheric security, the U.S. pressured Latin American nations to send Japanese people to the U.S. to be used for hostage exchanges for U.S. prisoners of war held by Japan (Okihiro, 2013, p. 85). Roughly 2,300 Japanese Latin Americans, about 80% from Peru, were expunged from their homes and interned on U.S. soil. The U.S. government took their passports and labeled them as “illegal aliens.” More than 800 were forced to participate in prisoner exchanges with Japan. After the end of the war, over a thousand Japanese Latin Americans were deported to “war-devastated Japan” since the Peruvian government refused to readmit Japanese Peruvians (Shimizu and Ueunten, 2010, pp. 816-817). The 300 or so who remained in the U.S. fought for legal residence status and many became U.S. citizens.

Even though Japanese Latin Americans were removed and detained because of the U.S. government, they were excluded from redress granted to Japanese Americans in the 1980s. For several decades now, internees, their descendants, and supporters have sought redress and justice for Japanese Latin Americans through lawsuits and legislative efforts. Additionally many have helped to educate the public about this “little-known wartime history and the ongoing struggle” (p. 818).

The Vietnam War, “The Secret War,” and the Cambodian Genocide

U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia: A Failed Attempt to Contain Communism:

U.S. strategy of containment in response to the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949 led to a series of U.S. interventions in Asia, including the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the “Secret War” in Laos, and the civil war and genocide in Cambodia. All these actions resulted in a new wave of Asian immigration to the United States. Displaced from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, 1.2

million Southeast Asian refugees fled the destructive and deadly effects of war and political turmoil (Choy, 2022, p. 33).

As Catherine Ceniza Choy points out,

...just as American wars and policies have indelibly impacted Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, and Cambodian peoples and their homelands, so too have Southeast Asian refugees, their descendants, and immigrant generations transformed the U.S. landscape with their labor and ingenuity, and their community organizing and creativity (2022, p. 32).

The story of Southeast Asian refugees is one of the least understood narratives in U.S. mass media. As Vietnamese American graphic novelist Thi Bui writes in her family memoir, *The Best We Could Do* (2018), “I think a lot of Americans forget that for the Vietnamese the war continued, whether America was involved or not” (p. 209). Many Hollywood movies focused on the point of view of American soldiers and an oversimplified story of American heroes and Viet Cong communist enemies. The silenced background characters were of screaming Vietnamese people who were brutally killed or sexualized bar girls and prostitutes as side pieces for American GIs. Choy writes,

The plethora of controversial issues contributes to a US-centric history that has reduced Vietnam to a story about war and a consequence of the failed US strategy to contain the spread of communism This narrative erases the meanings and memories of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos as homelands, the beauty of their landscapes, and the diversity and humanity of their peoples (2022, pp. 33-34).

Choy (2022) also importantly underscores how the histories of this group have been deleted in large part because U.S. military actions were covert. The U.S. was already involved in Vietnam as early as the 1950s. France colonized Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos since 1859, calling it “French Indochina,” but for decades Vietnamese nationalists organized for their liberation. One of these people was Ho Chi Minh, whose call for independence was ignored by the West and he turned to communism and fought the French in the First Indochina War. Eventually, France let go and the 1954 Geneva Accords divided Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel and the North was led by Ho Chi Minh and the U.S. backed the southern government (Lee, 2015, pp. 315-316).



Figure 2.5.6: A U.S. Navy McDonnell F-4B Phantom II of Fighter Squadron VF-111 Sundowners drops 227 kg Mk 82 bombs over Vietnam during 1971. (Public Domain; U.S. Navy National Museum of Naval Aviation via Picryl)

President Dwight Eisenhower sent 1,000 U.S. military advisors to Vietnam by the time he left office, and Kennedy continued to support the southern regime by sending in the special forces and more U.S. military into Vietnam. President Johnson escalated U.S. involvement. The 1964 Gulf of Tonkin Resolution allowed the U.S. to bomb North Vietnam and deploy U.S. troops, starting the Second Indochina War (Lee, 2015, p. 316). By 1967, there were 540,000 U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, and more than a million tons of bombs were dropped in North Vietnam and four million tons of bombs in South Vietnam, destroying buildings, roads, waterways, and more infrastructure that people depended on (p. 316). The tonnage of bombs dropped in Southeast Asia was greater than the total tonnage dropped on Nazi-occupied territories during the whole of World War II. In addition, the U.S. used chemical warfare including napalm and agent orange that displaced 12 million people from South Vietnam (p. 317).

By 1973, another U.S. President was in charge, Richard Nixon, and due to U.S. troops losing, and increasing pressures to end the

war in Vietnam, a peace agreement between the U.S. and North Vietnam was signed on January 27, 1973 (Lee, 2015, p. 317). But the U.S. never withdrew from Southeast Asia, continuing to carpet bomb Cambodia and Laos in covert operations that completely destroyed and destabilized both nations. Laos and Cambodia were both under communist regimes by 1975 and the people there today are still contending with the effects of war in the form of millions of land mines left in the region (p. 317).

The CIA's "Secret War" in Laos



Figure 2.5.7: Bomb shells left over from the U.S.'s secret bombing campaign, lined up in a village outside Phonsavan, Laos. (CC BY-NC 2.0; Lorna via Flickr)

Award-winning Hmong American author, Kao Kalia Yang starts her family memoir, *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* (2008) with this line: "The world that they were living in could no longer hold them safe. It was 1975 and the Vietnam War, as the world knew it, was over" (p. 7). U.S. bombings of Laos helped to destabilize the nation, where there was a civil war between the communist Pathet Lao and the anticommunist Royal Lao government. When the Pathet Lao won a majority of seats in the coalition government in the 1958 elections, the U.S. took secret action against this political shift in Laos. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) "set its sights on recruiting Hmong soldiers to take on covert actions on behalf of the United States" (Lee, 2015, p. 318).

As an ethnic minority originally from China, Hmong people have lived in the mountains of Laos since the early 1800s. They were fairly isolated from the rest of the Lao population, often discriminated against by the government. Vang Pao helped the CIA recruit Hmong soldiers to attack the North Vietnamese traveling through Laos in exchange for military and humanitarian aid. Many Hmong also believed that the U.S. promised a "long-sought Hmong homeland or sanctuary" (Lee, 2015, p. 318). The death rate was high in America's "Secret War," as an estimated 50,000 Hmong were killed, and by 1970 the CIA began recruiting boys as young as 10. Laos became the most heavily bombed country in the world and with the "most displaced population in the world" (p. 319).

When communist Pathet Lao came to power in Laos in 1975, they announced: "It is necessary to extirpate, down to the root, the Hmong minority" (Yang, 2008, p. 7). The CIA and the Americans had abandoned the Hmong. Yang wrote, "the Hmong knew that the only thing coming for them was death" (p. 8). Many fled to the thick jungle in order to escape imprisonment, starvation, torture, hard labor, and executions, including both of Yang's parents who were teenagers at the time. For three years they foraged in the forest, constantly moving to escape nearing North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao soldiers. Yang wrote:

They were hungry and dirty. They had gotten used to the scabs on their backs from the heavy packs, the gnawing hunger, the feeling that there was air in their stomachs all the time, and the bombs that fell from the sky destroying green canopy and shattering the bodies of old men and women who could not run fast enough (2008, p. 10).

Yang's young parents met while scavenging for food and they married in a clearing, no more than "three to four banana-leaf-covered lean-tos around a small fire" (Yang, 2008, p. 15). Yang's mother was given an embroidery that told the Hmong peoples' story, and a heavy silver necklace that symbolized "being a Hmong woman" (p. 17). A month into their marriage, Yang's parents visited Yang's maternal grandmother, which ended up being the last time she ever saw her family in person.

Yang's mother was separated from her husband while pregnant, captured by Lao and Vietnamese soldiers. Yang's father and his brothers hatched an escape plan and snuck them away from capture in the middle of the night months later. Yang's mother had already given birth to their first-born, Dawb. The extended family ran as dogs barked and soldiers chased after them, firing their guns. They decided to cross the Mekong River and head for refugee camps in Thailand.

When they reached the Mekong, Yang described it as "raging and wild and high," as the Mekong River is the "twelfth longest river in the world...known in both Laos and Thailand as the mother river" (2008, p. 35). As soldiers started to approach the shore, Yang's mother buried pictures of her family that she carried on her, telling herself that "One day, she would find the pictures again" (p. 37). Yang's father cut and tied bamboo strands to himself, his mother, his wife and baby. He couldn't swim, and instead dragged his family across the river. The silver necklace Yang's mother was given on her wedding got lost in the undertow of the river. Yang's family made it across as soldiers on the other side were firing guns and they walked until some Thai soldiers guided them toward the United Nations compound where they could register as refugees. They lived in under-resourced, crowded, and unsanitary conditions in the refugee camps for years.

Yang was born in the Ban Vinai Refugee Camp in 1980, a year and five months after her family crossed the Mekong River. Tens of thousands of Hmong refugees lived in these camps, located in hot and arid places. Rations of old grains of rice and hard to digest fish came only three times a week and families had to find whatever else to eat on the other days of the week (2008, p. 61). Yang's grandmother was a respected medicine woman and allowed to travel into the mountains with armed guards to find herbal remedies (p. 69).

Yang's family remained in the camp for years until leaving in 1987 (2008, p. 88). They settled in the housing projects of St. Paul, Minnesota, along with many other Hmong families. The city later became known as the "Hmong Capital of the World." Yang's grandmother came later, eventually settling in Minnesota. Yang spent many years with her grandmother, listening to her tell stories of life in Laos. When her grandmother passed away, Yang promised her they would meet again, writing: "We will become Hmong, and we will build a strong home that we will never leave and can always return to. We will not be lost and looking our whole lives through" (p. 268).

Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979)



Figure 2.5.8: Cheung Ek Killing Fields site, near Phnom Penh, Cambodia. May 2009. (CC BY-SA 3.0; Adam Jones via Wikimedia Commons)

The U.S. led a covert bombing campaign in Cambodia from 1965 to 1973, targeting eighty-three sites and carpet bombing with B-52 bombers. This pushed Vietnamese communists deeper into the nation, radicalizing more against their government. An estimated 250,000 Cambodians were killed from U.S. destruction. This combined with the U.S. leaving the region contributed to the ascent of the Khmer Rouge's power. Choy (2022) writes,

The Khmer Rouge attempted to create a classless society made up of rural agricultural workers by destroying culture and traditions. The regime's leaders called this idea "Year Zero" and put it into practice by shutting down schools and universities, evacuating people from cities and moving them to rural areas, separating children from their parents and placing them in labor camps, abolishing money, and banning music (p. 34).

“Class enemies” affiliated with wealth, education, or in any way with the West were targeted for execution or re-education. Cultural leaders, including singers, artists and martial artists were persecuted, along with members of religious and ethnic minorities. An estimated 1.5 to 3 million Cambodians were killed in the genocide under Pol Pot’s regime from 1975 to 1979, having to endure, “forced labor, starvation, disease, and mass executions, after which the sites of these atrocities became popularly known as the ‘killing fields’” (Choy, 2022, p. 34).

Many fled Cambodia secretly like Bun Thab, a Cambodian refugee who published his story under a pseudonym. Bun fled with two friends, but witnessed one of them get brutally killed. He hid underwater as a soldier jumped over his head. They walked for days without anything to eat until reaching the border of Thailand, where an old man fed them rice. Even after settling in the U.S. Bun was haunted by the trauma he experienced stating, “I still have nightmares of that Khmer Rouge jumping over my head, and I wake up shivering with fear” (Welaratna, 1993, p. 127; cited in Choy, 2022, p. 36).

Southeast Asian Refugee Life in the U.S.

These newer communities of migrants didn’t have any “long-established ethnic enclaves.” Due to the inability to bring material wealth and our government’s dispersal policy, Southeast Asian refugees mostly ended up living in neglected and impoverished areas of the U.S. (Dariotis and Ueunten, 2010, pp. 751-752).

It’s important to note the use of the term **refugee** and how it differs from immigrant. Immigrants generally are able to make a plan of departure, and may bring resources including material wealth, and even family members. Overall, immigrants in many cases have more agency in deciding to migrate to a new nation, and once in the new place of residence, they are more likely to come into a more stable situation and have support from family and extended ethnic enclaves that have settled previously. Refugees, on the other hand, have no choice when fleeing their homeland, often torn away from family, and may not have the ability to bring much with them. Refugees are either fleeing war or political situations that are deadly or very dangerous in the least.



Figure 2.5.9: Fall of Saigon - Refugees hanging onto a Supply Helicopter in Xuan Loc, Vietnam. April 14, 1975. (CC BY 2.0; manhhai via flickr)

April 1975 marked the “Fall of Saigon,” also called Liberation Day in Viet Nam, and U.S. troops began to withdraw. U.S. officials described scenes of “absolute chaos” as those most vulnerable to persecution under communist leadership scrambled to leave Vietnam. Around 7,500 people were evacuated a day by U.S. airplanes, and 73,000 left by sea on South Vietnamese Navy vessels. One person who fled early on a U.S. military transport plane realized that he may never see Vietnam again, sharing, “My heart had shattered to pieces. I lost not only my country but also everything I have loved” (Chan, 2006, p. 104-112; cited in Lee, 2015, p. 321). Later called the “first wave” of refugees from Vietnam, this group were from elite or middle-class backgrounds, educated and had come with some English or French fluency. They may have already had some relationships with Americans in Vietnam which of course helped their relatively faster transition to their new lives in the United States (Lee, 2015, p. 321).

Lee reminds us that the resettlement effort of Southeast Asian refugees was “cloaked in the heady rhetoric of U.S. humanitarianism” (2015, p. 325). For example, “Operation Babylift” was one of these “humanitarian” efforts to airlift 1,700 “orphans” to the U.S., mixed-race babies fathered by U.S. military personnel. Ford claimed it was America’s “moral obligation” to

help refugees and 130,000 Southeast Asians were admitted in the first wave by the end of 1975. Another 433,000 came from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia until 1980 due to political persecution and economic restructuring (p. 325). For example, ethnic Chinese people in Vietnam were targeted by the communists. This second wave of refugees were left to their own devices to flee under the cover of night, typically on boats to nearby Southeast Asian countries where they could find temporary refuge. This group of refugees was less educated and had fewer resources. They were called “boat people” (p. 326).

In *The Best We Could Do* (2018), Bui illustrates her parents' experience working as teachers under the new communist government. They were careful to wear humble clothing so as to not stick out. They noticed that people started to disappear and hatched a plan to leave in secret with their three young children. Under the cover of night, Bui's parents, including her pregnant mother, left Vietnam with their children on a boat. Bui remembers getting nauseous, and how they were almost followed by pirates. They arrived in Malaysia after three days, and her mother gave birth at the Pulau Begar refugee camp in 1978. Life was not easy, as they had to gather and boil their own drinking water, and they missed basic necessities like toilet paper, but Bui also described how for the children it was like a vacation, an escape from regular life, and that there was no school. The Buis were lucky as they only stayed at the camp for a few months, sponsored by her mother's sister and her husband already in America (pp. 268 - 274).

After surviving months, sometimes years in refugee camps, Southeast Asians continued facing challenges in the United States. For example in many families, “parent-child hierarchies flipped as children grasped the English language with more proficiency than their elders” and helped to pay a bill or translate at school (Choy, 2022, p. 39). Furthermore, refugees were haunted by the trauma and memories of war and in the 1980s, many Southeast Asians, mostly Laotian and Hmong men, would die in their sleep for unexplainable reasons. They also faced anti-Asian violence, hostility and racial tensions. Choy explains that, “These racial hostilities partly stemmed from the way that Americans lumped Southeast Asian refugees with other Asian American groups who, in the 1960s and 1970s, were increasingly portrayed as successful immigrants and model minorities” (pp. 39 - 40). Americans also resented that Southeast Asian refugees received public assistance.

When her family moved to San Diego, Bui told how she and her father were called “Gook” and spit on, explaining, “San Diego was a naval and marine corps base, where the wounds of the Vietnam War were still fresh and not everyone welcomed our presence” (2018, p. 66). In 1990, Cambodian American, Heng Lim was struck on the head by a piece of wood by Timothy Meitzler and later died from head injury. Meitzler called him a “fucking Chinese.” Attacks against this community was common across the country in the '80s and '90s, including “campaigns of violence...in the Boston area,” the beating death of Cambodian, Bun Vong in 1985, and a 1989 shooting rampage at Cleveland Elementary School in Stockton, California by Patrick Purdy who killed five children: four Cambodian and one Vietnamese (Choy, 2022, p. 41).

Southeast Asian youth were left to fend for themselves in impoverished neighborhoods rife with gang violence, as their parents were still navigating a new life in America. Some sought kinship in gangs. Cambodian American Billy stated that his parents were too traumatized from the war to realize what was happening with the kids.

I was a good boy at home...so they didn't know anything about gangs. We just got into gangs to protect ourselves. We were just kids, thrown into the inner city with Mexicans and Blacks. We're the product of the American system (Lee, J.H.X., 2015, p. 408).

Many Cambodians who ended up in prison turned their lives around, like Karney who got his GED after dropping out of school in seventh grade. Despite this, Karney was taken by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), now Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), to a detention center when he finished his sentence in state prison. He was detained for 12 months and then sent to Cambodia, separated from his daughters (Lee, J.H.X., 2015). The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center reported that 2,000 Southeast Asian Americans have been deported out of the U.S. since 1998, and currently 15,000 live with a final order of removal; 80% of removal orders are based on past convictions (Choy, 2022, p. 41). The 1996 passing of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act led to increased deportations of immigrants for crimes they committed even before the laws were passed. Many of these were nonviolent offenses, as the new laws extended the list of deportable crimes and wouldn't allow judges to prevent deportations. Some crimes that didn't qualify as felonies under state law were listed as “aggravated felonies” under immigration law (Cengel, 2018, p. 10). After September 11, the U.S. pressured Cambodia into receiving deportees, including system-impacted individuals and did so beginning in June of 2002.



Figure 2.5.10: Protest outside ICE for the release of Cambodian refugees in St. Paul, Minnesota. January 17, 2017. (CC BY 2.0; Fibonacci Blue via Flickr)

Many were deported or face deportation despite having completed their prison sentences. Most had never spent time in their homelands or left when they were still very young, and hardly spoke the language. Karney luckily did speak Khmer and had relatives in Cambodia. He still missed his family and children sharing, “It’s hard on them, hard on their families. The kids end up growing up with no dad. And they can’t support them” (Lee, J.H.X., 2015, p. 409). He ended up marrying a Cambodian woman and had three children with her. But not everyone is able to adjust to life in Cambodia, as some deportees turn to drugs, end up back in prison, and a few have committed suicide. Asian American Studies professor, Jonathan H.X. Lee wrote, “There was no system of assistance that was planned for these Cambodians” (2015, p. 410).

Back in the states, activists and communities have come together to organize against deportations. The [Asian Prisoner Support Committee](#) (APSC) led anti-deportation campaigns and supported more than thirty individuals receiving gubernatorial pardons, post-conviction relief, and administrative actions to prevent and reverse deportations. APSC successfully advocated for the release of Bounchan “Boun” Keola from ICE custody. Boun was an incarcerated firefighter and was granted a pardon from Governor Newsom in 2021 (APSC, 2022). They are currently lobbying for the passing of the VISION Act (Voiding Inequality and Seeking Inclusion for Our Immigrant Neighbors) in California, or AB 937, which would end the transfer of refugee and immigrant prisoners eligible for release from state or local custody to ICE. It would also ensure protection from inhumane and unsanitary conditions in immigration detention centers, and deny state and local agencies and courts from using their immigration status to deny access to various programs ([Vision Act, AB 937, Fact Sheet](#)).

Choy (2022) points out how Southeast Asian Americans have transformed the landscape through ethnic enclaves like Little Saigons in Orange County and San Jose. With distinct temples and Buddhist statues, the Vietnamese American community have physical places that may remind them of what they were forced to leave behind. For Vietnamese Americans born in the U.S., they make yearly pilgrimages to Little Saigon for the Tet festival, or Lunar New Year, and such sites serve “deeper social and spiritual meaning” for the community (p. 43). Countless restaurants and shops offer food that remind many of home, like banh mi and pho.

Ted Ngoy fled Cambodia with his wife and settled in California. He survived by working at a gas station and as a church custodian. One day he tasted a donut, reminding him of the Cambodian *nom kong*. He eventually opened his own donut shop and “sparked what would become Cambodian predominance in California’s donut industry...a ‘pink box’ revolution” (Choy, 2022, p. 45).

Hmong American political leaders have emerged since the 1990s, starting with Choua Lee, who gained attention when becoming the first Hmong American to be publicly elected when winning the race for a position on the St. Paul School Board (Lee, 2015, p. 346). Olympic gold medalist, Sunisa Lee became the first Hmong American to join a U.S. Olympic team at only 18-years-old and elated Hmong Americans and Asian Americans across the nation during the 2021 Tokyo Olympics (Diaz and Chappell, 2021). Pictures and video of her family and the Hmong American community cheering her on in Minnesota went viral that summer.

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2.6: Pacific Islander Studies

People and Place

Chamoru (Chamarro from Guahan or Guam) Poet and scholar Craig Santos Perez (2016) writes,

We belong to Oceania. We belong to a diverse sea of moving peoples, cultures, languages, and ecologies. We belong to navigation that teaches us how to read the stars, waves, winds, and horizons. **Pacific Islanders** peopled Oceania thousands of years ago and developed complex societies based on the values of interconnection, harmony, balance, sustainability, and respect. We named and recognized the sacredness of waters and lands (Perez, 2016, p. 373).

In naming his people, Perez (2016) recognizes the relationship to the land, to the Earth, to the seas, to one another. He recognizes cultural philosophies and values, and generational longevity. In doing so, he amplifies the persistence and presence of Pacific Islander peoples to this world and beyond and calls attention to the wholeness and oneness. This section will use longer block quotations to help amplify Pacific Islander voices.

Sidebar: Definition of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

Wright and Balutski (2013) share the official categorization by the Office of Management and Budget of the White House. They share, “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander is defined as the following:

A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. (The term “Native Hawaiian” does not include individuals who are native to the State of Hawaii by virtue of being born there). In addition to Native Hawaiians, Guamanians, and Samoans, this category would include the following Pacific Islander groups reported in the 1990 census: Carolinian, Fijian, Kosraean, Melanesian, Micronesian, Northern Mariana Islander, Palauan, Papua New Guinean, Ponapean (Pohnpean), Polynesian, Solomon Islander, Tahitian, Tarawa Islander, Tokelauan, Tongan, Trukese (Chuukese), and Yapese (OMB, 1997 in Wright and Balutski, 2013, p.97).

This definition shares who is Pacific Islander and includes who is not by explaining that people are not “Native Hawaiian” just because they are born in Hawai’i. Furthermore, the definition shows the vast cultures and peoples included, as well as some that aren’t as recognized in the mainstream. This also dispels the notion that Pacific Islanders are only made up of a few groups.

Place and People

The late Teresia K. Teaiwa (2017) wrote this as part of her introduction about teaching Pacific Studies,

How does one begin to describe the enormity of the Pacific Ocean? The most prominent geographic feature on this planet, it occupies one-third of the Earth’s surface area. How does one begin to describe the history of the first peoples to settle this watery region (p. 265).

Teaiwa and others put the Pacific Ocean at the forefront of identity and culture. The description of the ocean helps to provide more prominence to it especially as an overlooked aspect of the planet by those who may not come from the Pacific. She pays homage to the ancestors from which they came.



Figure 2.6.1: "Pacific Ocean Sunrise" (Guam). (CC BY-SA 4.0; Jonathan Miske via Flickr)

Teves and Arvin (2018) show the expansiveness of Pacific Islanders:

The Pacific Ocean contains upward of 25,000 islands, extending from the Arctic to Antarctica and from the coasts of the Americas to the coasts of Asia. What are often referred to as the "Pacific Islands" number into 30,000, home to 2.3 million people and 1,500 languages, constituting a third of the earth's surface and nearly 50 percent of its water (p. 108).

This also expands the understanding that Pacific Islands are not confined to a small space with little diversity and that this population is significant to our world. Finally, we see Pacific Islanders in the diaspora, with a sizable population on the west coast. Camacho (2021) writes, "According to the 2010 census, 150,749 Pacific Islanders now dwell in California, with more than one-third residing in Los Angeles" (p. 23).

Amplifying Pacific Islander Voices

Henderson discusses stereotypes about big sizes of Samoans such as Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson playing a Samoan character in book to film *Be Cool* (1999) and "[his] character is still marked in the text by his size and propensity for violence" (Henderson, 2011, p. 282). These two tropes of big size and being violent are two common stereotypes Henderson finds in many works and cultural representation about Samoan men. Further, she points out that part of the problem is that stereotypes have material consequences at "stake" (p. 289). Two "ramifications" that she mentions are within education and law enforcement; notions about Samoan men

1. mediate a lot of their career or educational pathways into athletics as the "only expected pathway to success" (Henderson, 2011, p.289);
2. and have high rate of incarceration and a lot of claims of police profiling.

Because of the misconceptions about Pacific Islanders, this section aims to show a glimpse of who Pacific Islanders really are.

Tamaira and Fonoti (2018) share an important piece about how Pacific Islanders have worked hard to influence the way their stories are told, especially to the general public. Their work discusses the collaboration between "academic and nonacademic" Pacific Islanders (called Oceanic Trust) and Disney to create the movie *Moana* (2016). One of the things they discuss is the way that Pacific Islanders interjected to show more accurate displays of culture within the film and how there were actually transformed outcomes. For example, the Trust grappled with Disney's Moana wearing tuiga, or Samoan ceremonial dress, in different scenes for various occasions but they argued that it should only be worn ceremonially (p. 316). In spite of the hard work the Trust put into the film, they still experienced naysayers from the community that believed they shouldn't have collaborated with Disney. The work the Trust did to embody authenticity in *Moana* shows so much power in cultural representation. This section, as mentioned elsewhere, leaves a lot of "showing" to Pacific Islander scholars and I recognize my ability to amplify their voices.

Differences between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Teves and Arvin make clear distinctions between Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and call for the clear need to distinguish between them and not combine them. Although there are points of relation, there is a deep marginalization amongst the community where even Asian Americans sometimes commit sub-oppression onto Pacific Islanders. They explain similarities but emphasize the points of departure in order to express a marginalization that stems from how power dynamics operate, not just within each group or between them, but also within the larger society. They write,

We share simultaneous struggles against U.S. imperialism and settler colonialism, white supremacy, and the expectations that our communities will simply "assimilate" into whiteness—all structures that are deeply gendered and thus wreak violence on Asian American and Pacific Islander women in particular ways. We also share analogous struggles within our own communities to decenter heteropatriarchy and anti-Blackness in the many ways that we have internalized such ideals. But the call we have put out in this essay is clear. To advance our important common work, Asian American feminists must recognize and change the ways they participate in Pacific Islander erasure and cultural appropriation, and commit to being our allies in decolonization (Teves and Arvin, 2018, p. 133).

Further, Hall points out that much of the use of API/AAPI/APA refers to connections solely to Hawai'i and not to other Pacific Island groups. This can be problematic because whereas Asian American do not represent Pacific Islanders, Native Hawaiians don't represent all Pacific Islanders (Hall, 2015, pp. 738-739).

General Education

Dropout rates show another reason why Asian American and Pacific Islander statistics and naming should be disaggregated. In the following quote, more than 20% of Pacific Islanders are affected in stark contrast to Asian American and white students.

According to a report released in 2008 by the University of California Asian American and Pacific Islander Policy Multicampus Research Program (Education Work Group), Pacific Islanders' dropout rates are much higher than their Asian American (7.9%) and White (11.5%) peers—more than one-fifth of Pacific Islanders drop out of school between grades 9 and 12 (Chang et. al 2010 in Saeula et. al, 2017, p.123).

Studies show that culturally relevant pedagogies greatly aid in student success. However, Saeula et. al. (2017) find that this and other elements are missing from Pacific Islander student experiences. They write, "The literature that does exist on Pacific Islanders offers a stark landscape, noting achievement gaps, limited access to resources, and the need for more culturally relevant material" (Ah Sam & Robinson, 1998; EPIC, 2014; Hune & Yeo, 2010; Kawakami, 1990; UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 2006; Takeuchi & Hune, 2008; Tran et. al, 2010; Tsutsumoto, 1998; Vakalahi, 2009) (in Saeula et.al p.124).

Higher Education

Statistics on Pacific Islanders show a huge gap in educational opportunity whether in K-12 or in higher education, "...according to the U.S. Census, only 18% of Pacific Islander adults (Age 25 and older) hold a bachelor's degree, a rate lower than the national average (28%) and identical to African Americans" (Saelua et. al., 2017, p. 124).

A model for culturally relevant and community responsive education can be seen in Hawai'i not only for the university and students, but for all Native Hawaiians. Wright and Balutski (2013) explain,

On May 16, 2007, the University of Hawai'i Board of Regents approved the establishment of the Hawai'i inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge (HSHK), the only college of Indigenous knowledge in a U.S. research Institution...[which was guided by] a report of recommendations and research compiled by a task force of Native Hawaiian faculty and staff in the UH system (Wright and Balutski, year, p. 100).

It is significant that a Research Institution recognizes the significance of Indigenous knowledge and it is also significant that the efforts of "Native Hawaiian faculty and staff" research materialized.

Race, Gender, and Stereotypes

There are racialized and gendered experiences that also distinguish Pacific Islanders from Asian Americans. The hypersexualization of Asian American women and the emasculation of Asian American men is often broadly and wrongly applied

to Pacific Islanders. Hall writes, “In my 2009 essay ‘Navigating Our Own ‘Sea of Islands’ I noted:

Geisha girls, dragon ladies, and delicate flowers are not the stereotypes Islander women battle. The sexualized stigmatization of “promiscuous” native women is about a perceived lack of civilization, not the orientalism that creates stereotypes of decadence and sexual artifice. . . . On the continent, large-bodied and dark-skinned Islander men are gendered/ racialized as black men, with the attendant prejudice and danger of stereotypes of hyper-masculinity, not feminized with the stereotypes Asian American men face. The police violence experienced by Samoan and Tongan men in southern California, for example, has everything to do with their perceived blackness and savagery, not their emasculation. Neither set of stereotypes is “worse” than the other, but they are not the same.” Text originally found in: Lisa Kahaleole Hall, “Navigating Our Own ‘Sea of Islands’: Remapping a Theoretical Space for Hawaiian Women and Indigenous Feminism,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24.2 (2009). (in Hall p. 742).

Perez (2016) comprehensively compiles stereotypes about Pacific Islanders and reiterates how “Pacific poetry” resists these stereotypes.

The Pacific Ocean has been viewed as an empty, virgin space awaiting American exploitation and power. Our islands have been seen as tropical paradises, stepping stones, unsinkable military bases, Hollywood sets, or scientific and agricultural laboratories. Pacific Islanders have been represented as violent, primitive, hyper-sexual, exotic, childlike, cannibalistic, dependent, noble, athletic, hyper- masculine, uncivilized, and hospitable. Much of Pacific poetry aims to challenge these stereotypes and humanize (Perez, 2016, p. 376).

These stereotypes relate to and often reflect the Manifest Destiny of colonizers, and stereotypical characterizations especially of Native Americans and Black Americans mostly from the 16th century to the 20th century. But unlike these groups, the relationship between the Pacific Island peoples, their land, and the Pacific Ocean conveys a deeper connectedness amongst them that these stereotypes miss and wrongly characterize, not recognizing the richness and wisdom that actually exist.

Ethnicity, Age, and Generation

Scholar Camacho (2021) complicates the relationship to culture with age and generation. While within a culture, one may uphold generational practices but Camacho problematizes such treatment amongst those who are expected to follow but not benefit. He says,

Across the region, many societies uphold their elders, knowing that they embody the chiefly, genealogical, material, sacred, and supernatural worlds of the lands, skies, and seas. In Sāmoa, for instance, the children acknowledge the prestige bestowed upon their elders. Very seldom, though, do the children receive such accolades and authority. As one Sāmoan put it, “Children are not heard, nor seen.” Text Originally from Frances King Espiritu, “From Childhood to Chief,” in *Pacific Voices Talk Story: Conversations of American Experience*, 4 vols., ed. Margo King Lenson (Vacaville, CA: Tui Communications, 2007), 4:57. (in Camacho, 2021, p.12).

But Camacho also illustrates how others are able to draw from their positionalities to promote culture and facilitate access by saying,

...they show how the youth develop new terms about the media in Bislama, the lingua franca of Vanuatu. As in other areas of Melanesia, the youth of Port Vila have been the trendsetters in communicating and mainstreaming novel ideas, stories, and technologies across diverse ethnolinguistic groups. Text originally found in: Christine Jourdan and Johanne Angeli, “Pijin and Shifting Language Ideologies in Urban Solomon Islands,” *Language in Society* 43, no. 3 (2014): 268. (In Camacho, 2021, p.72).

Race, Ethnicity, and Generation

In considering literature, McDougall highlights a writer who is from a famous lineage and demonstrates the intersections of his identities.

John Dominis Holt was among the first major writers in English to publish in the 1960s in Hawai‘i. Born in 1919, Holt was descended from ali‘i (chiefly) lineage and was the grand-nephew of Queen Lili‘uokalani, Hawai‘i’s last reigning monarch (McDougall, 2015, p. 40).

McDougall writes about Holt’s work by saying,

Similarly, in *Waimea Summer*, the young protagonist Mark Hull is urbanized, light skinned and hapa (half-Hawaiian, half-haole), but the keeper of family mo'olelo (stories), who is, therefore, more sensitive to the ancestral. In visiting relatives in Waimea, and coming from Honolulu, he is, however, fearful of being given ancestral knowledge and ultimately turns away (McDougall, 2015, p. 41).

The protagonist Hull being mixed race is representative of many Pacific Islanders who are mixed race. The focus of ancestral knowledge in this mentioning helps to demonstrate the presence and grappling of generational knowledge and epistemology, or the way we understand knowledge. McDougall also highlights the cultural divide between the city and the smaller town, at least for the way the protagonist interprets different types of knowledge and ways of being.

Militarization

Wright and Balutski (2013) explain what it's like to have military testing done in the Pacific Islands:

During the 12-year period between 1946 and 1958, a total of 66 atomic and hydrogen bombs were tested in the Marshall Islands. Robie (1990) explains, "Many islanders claimed they were used as guinea pigs for the experiments. Now, more than 40 years after the first Bikini tests, many islands are still uninhabitable because of the high radiation levels while the Bikinians and Rongelap islanders remain exiled people (p. 2)" (in Wright and Balutski, 2013, p. 99).

Not only does their land become "uninhabitable" but the occurrences go largely unnoticed by the general public. Using the land for testing also shows the disregard for Pacific Islander lives.

Settler Colonialism

Haunani Kay Trask (1993) illustrates what it's like when Native Hawaiians are seen as exoticized commodity as a part of **settler colonialism**,

Thus Hawai'i, like a lovely woman, is there for the taking. Those with only a little money get a brief encounter, those with a lot of money, like the Japanese, get more. The state and counties will give tax breaks, build infrastructure, and have the governor personally welcome tourists to ensure that they keep coming. Just as the pimp regulates prices and guards the commodity of the prostitute, so the state bargains with developers for access to Hawaiian land and culture... Permits are fast-tracked, height and density limits are suspended, new groundwater sources are miraculously found... Our people who work in the industry-- dancers, waiters, singers, valets, gardeners, housekeepers, bartenders, and even a few managers-- make between \$10,000 and \$25,000 a year, an impossible salary for a family in Hawai'i. Psychologically, our young people have begun to think of tourism as the only employment opportunity, trapped as they are by the lack of alternatives (Trask, 1993, pp. 144-145).

Those with more money have more access. Governmental policy will favor tourism and initiatives that bolster tourist entities. There is a fight for more land and entities will do whatever they can to make it happen. Trask further states that the workers make a little per year and is not enough to live on. She importantly mentions that "young people have begun to think of tourism as the only employment opportunity" so they don't see any way out or 'alternative' pathways for jobs."



Figure 2.6.2: "Honolulu Pride Parade 2012". (CC By 4.0; Daniel Ramirez via Flickr)

Climate Change

Brown Pulu (2013) brings to attention “Tonga’s Minister for Environment and Climate Change, Lord Ma’afu” and his “plea” to the “international” community.

Snared in the small island, uncertainty of rising sea levels was the inevitability, climate change refugees might need another place to live (Bedford and Bedford, 2010; Fagan, 2013). Where would they go? Who would take them in? What countries would help the Pacific Islands? (Pulu 2013).

Bryant-Tokalau (2018) shows us what it’s like when “Indigenous Knowledge Systems” are accessed as a way of knowing especially in this time of extreme climate change. The author explains ways of knowing when predicting occurrences of “cyclones” “such as very hot and wet weather, the high abundance of mangoes and breadfruit, an increase in land crabs and changes in the flight paths of sea birds”. Text originally in Brookfield 1977 (in J. Bryant-Tokalau, p. 68).

Sidebar: Climate Change in Northern Mariana Islands

Climate change in the Pacific Islands is a huge issue. Check out some of the sources that explain more about the crisis in this post titled: ["Climate Change in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands: Indicators and Considerations for Key Sectors."](#)

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2.7: CONTEMPORARY DEMOGRAPHICS

2.7.1: History and Demographics

2.7.2: Intergroup Relations

2.7.3: Intersectionality

2.7.4: Social Institutions

2.7.5: Social Change and Resistance

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2.7.1: History and Demographics

Like many groups discussed in this module, Asian Americans represent a great diversity of cultures and backgrounds. The experience of a Japanese American whose family has been in the United States for three generations will be drastically different from a Laotian American who has only been in the United States for a few years.

How and Why They Came

The national and ethnic diversity of Asian American immigration history is reflected in the variety of their experiences in joining U.S. society. Asian immigrants have come to the United States primarily in the third wave (1880-1914) and fourth wave (1965-present), but also in the second wave (1820-1860). The [1965 Immigration and Nationality Act](#) removed national-origin quotas established in 1921, resulting in marked population growth during this period with 491,000 Asian immigrants in 1960 and 12.8 million Asian immigrants in 2014, which accounts for a 2,597% increase. As of 2014, the top five origin countries of Asian immigrants were India, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Korea.

The first Asian immigrants to come to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century were Chinese. These immigrants were primarily men whose intention was to work for several years in order to earn incomes to send back to their families in China. Their main destination was the American West, where the Gold Rush ('49 ers) was drawing people with its lure of abundant money. The construction of the Transcontinental Railroad was underway at this time, and the Central Pacific section hired thousands of migrant Chinese men to complete the laying of rails across the rugged Sierra Nevada mountain range. Chinese men also engaged in other manual labor like mining and agricultural work. This work was grueling and underpaid, but like many immigrants, they persevered.

Japanese immigration began in the 1880s, on the heels of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Many Japanese immigrants came to Hawaii to work in the sugar industry; others came to the mainland, especially to California. Unlike the Chinese, however, the Japanese had a strong government in their country of origin that negotiated with the U.S. government to ensure the well-being of their immigrants. Japanese men were able to bring their wives and families to the United States, and were thus able to produce second- and third-generation Japanese Americans more quickly than their Chinese counterparts.

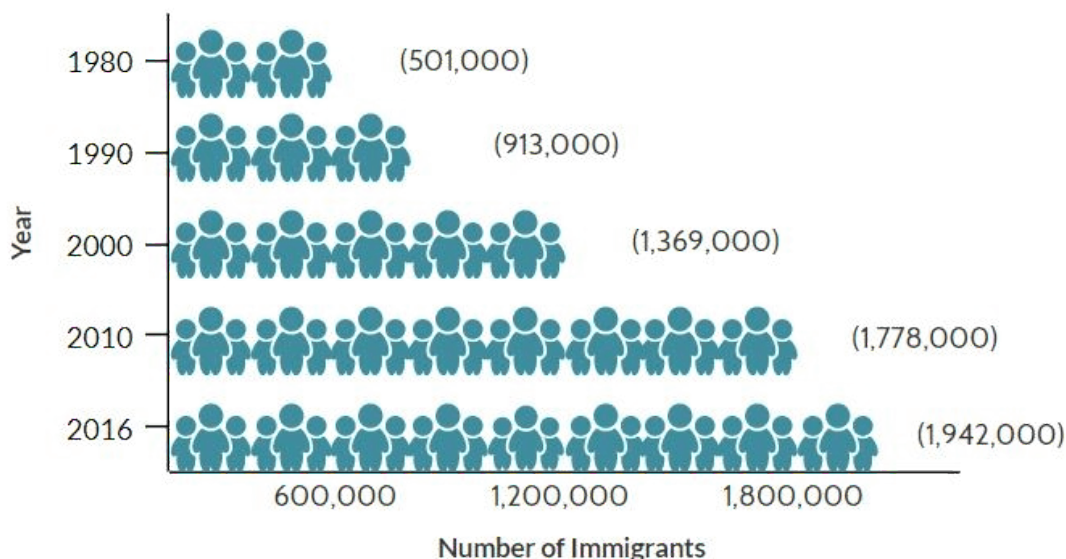


Figure 2.7.1.1: Filipino Immigrant Population in the United States, 1980-2016. (Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2016 American Community Surveys (ACS), and Campbell J. Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-2000" ([Working Paper no. 81](#), U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, February 2006) (CC BY 4.0; via Lumens)

Fourth wave Asian immigration included immigrants from India, Korea, Vietnam, and the Philippines. As you can see in Figure 9.1.2, Indian immigration grew between 1980 and 2010 more than eleven-fold, roughly doubling every decade. It is composed primarily of English-speaking, highly educated immigrants, many of whom qualified for an H-1B (a temporary visa for highly skilled

immigrants). In 2013, India and China supplanted Mexico as the top sources of newly arriving immigrants in the United States.

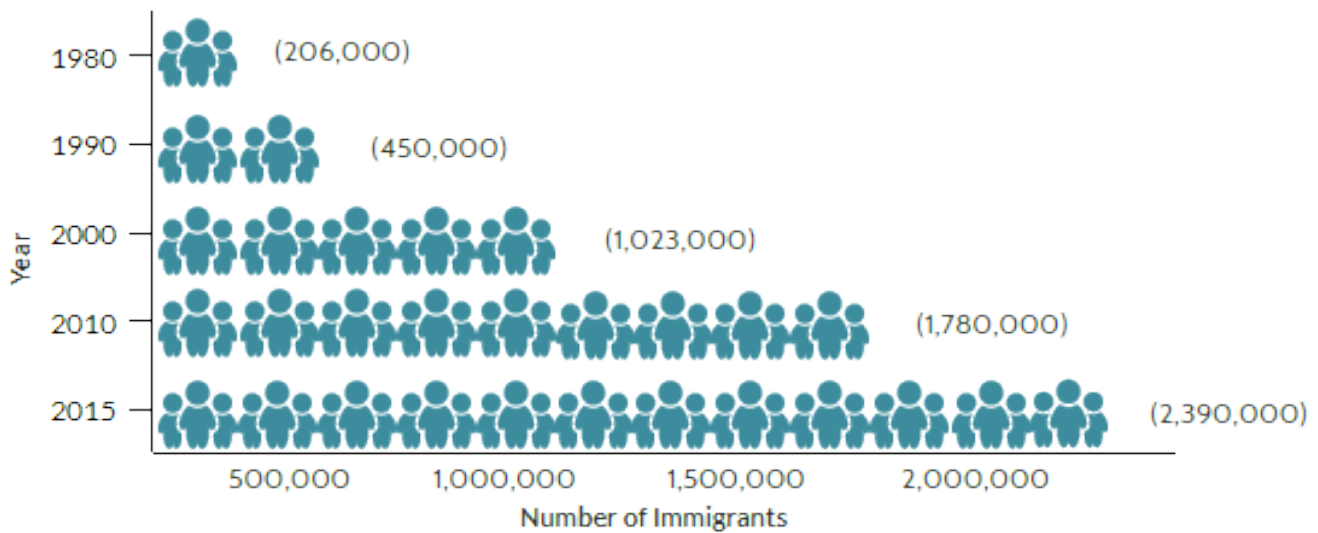


Figure 2.7.1.2: Indian Immigrant Population in the United States, 1980-2015. (Data from U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2015 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1980, 1990, and 2000 Decennial Census, www.migrationpolicy.org/arti...-united-states) (CC BY 4.0; via Lumens)

Wars in Korea and Vietnam led to increased immigration from those countries after 1965. While Korean immigration has been fairly gradual, Vietnamese immigration was more concentrated after 1975, when the formerly U.S.-backed city of Saigon fell and a restrictive communist government was established. Whereas many Asian immigrants came to the United States to seek better economic opportunities, Vietnamese immigrants came as political refugees, seeking asylum from repressive conditions in their homeland. The Refugee Act of 1980 helped them settle in the United States, with large numbers coming from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Many of these refugees settled in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, forming ethnic enclaves in urban areas (ethnic enclaves defined in [Chapter 1.3](#)).



Figure 2.7.1.3: Thirty-five Vietnamese refugees wait to be taken aboard the amphibious USS Blue Ridge (LCC-19). They are being rescued from a thirty-five-foot fishing boat 350 miles northeast of Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, after spending eight days at sea. (CC PDM 1.0; PH2 Phil Eggman (U.S. Navy) via [Wikimedia](#)) (CC BY 4.0; via Lumens)

Current Status

Asian Americans are a rapidly growing part of the population. The New York University (NYU) Center for the Study of Asian American Health examines growth in New York City. Researchers there found that New York City (NYC) is home to nearly 1.2 million documented and undocumented Asian Americans, representing more than 13% of the total NYC population. This diverse population (more than 20 countries of origin and 45 languages and dialects) grew by 110% from 1990 to 2010.

Immigrant and Emigrant Populations by Country of Origin and Destination

Click below on the [Interactive map on immigrant and emigrant populations](#) to examine where many of the world's 258 million international migrants moved. You can use the dropdown menu to select a country of origin to see where emigrants have settled.

Embedded Object

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this Embedded Object online](#)



Figure 2.7.1.4: Immigrant and Emigrant Populations by Country of Origin and Destination. (CC BY 4.0; via Lumens)

Model Minority Myth

Asian Americans certainly have been subject to their share of racial prejudice, despite the seemingly positive stereotype as the model minority. The **model minority** stereotype is applied to a group that is seen as achieving significant educational, professional, and socioeconomic success without challenging the existing establishment. This stereotype is typically applied to Asian groups in the United States, and it can result in unrealistic expectations by putting a stigma on those who do not meet the presumed standard. Stereotyping all Asians as smart and capable can also limit much-needed government assistance, and can result in educational and professional discrimination.

According to the NYC Opportunity tabulations, 17.9% of people living in poverty in New York City were Asian Americans, and they had the highest poverty rate of any racial or ethnic group at 29%. Contradictorily, Asian American community organizations received only 1.4% of the city's social service contract dollars from the Department of Social Services.

Crazy Rich Asians

The [trailer](#) from the blockbuster hit Crazy Rich Asians (2018) is but one example, portrayal of Asian American immigrants. Then consider the questions that follow.

- Why do you think there is such a disconnect between numbers of Asian Americans in poverty and funding for Asian community organizations?
- What would be the unique challenges of obtaining survey data in Asian communities that might not pose the same challenges in other minority communities? How would you suggest addressing these sampling challenges?
- In what ways is the model minority an ideology to justify inequality and racism?
- Do you think dark-skinned Asian Americans might be subjected to more prejudice and discrimination than light-skinned Asian Americans?

Ethnic Communities & Enclaves

Immigration is a major component in the lives of many Asian Americans -- why they come, how many, and what happens to them after they arrive. Since the establishment of the first Asian American communities in the U.S., Asian American "enclaves" have

become a significant part of virtually every major city in America. As more Asians immigrate to the U.S., traditional communities not only grow but also evolve as they absorb the new arrivals and adapt to the non-Asian environment around them. This section looks at the numbers of immigrants who come to the U.S., their ethnic communities, and the economic and cultural issues that affect these groups.

First, The Demographics

Before we explore the origins and dynamics of ethnic enclaves and communities, you may be wondering, considering that about two-thirds of all Asian Americans are immigrants, exactly how many Asians have immigrated to the U.S.? To answer that question, view Table 9.5 below ([Immigration and Naturalization Service](#) data). It shows the number of immigrants and refugees/asylees who have arrived in the U.S. for the six largest Asian origin countries, plus Hong Kong (remember, before 1997, Hong Kong was a colony of Great Britain) and all Asian countries combined, for each of the past three decades plus the latest year in which final numbers are available, 2000. Finally, it includes numbers from Europe, the Caribbean, Central and South America, and Mexico for comparison.

Table 2.7.1.5: The number of immigrants, refugees, and asylees (1971-2004). (Data from the Department of Homeland Security)

	1971-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2004
China	138,068	354,675	426,722	212,724
Hong Kong	116,935	100,131	110,390	30,336
India	164,175	250,786	365,604	267,081
Japan	49,831	47,195	67,966	31,628
Korea	267,703	333,866	164,192	74,055
Philippines	355,200	548,764	509,913	207,908
Viet Nam	323,086	605,235	493,002	144,494
All Asian Countries	1,798,861	3,450,249	3,147,019	1,332,264
All European Countries	872,226	917,062	1,786,302	738,898
Caribbean, Central & South America	1,424,865	1,924,312	2,236,032	971,635
Mexico	640,496	1,655,843	2,249,837	717,408

As you can see, the Asian ethnic country that has sent the most immigrants to the U.S. since 1971 is the Philippines (over 1.5 million since 1971), followed by India, Korea, and Viet Nam (all around 3/4 of a million). However, these numbers pale in comparison to the number of immigrants from Mexico, who total over 4.5 million since 1971 -- wow! The U.S. is truly the land of immigrants. Before we discuss the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics and impacts of Asian immigrants, let us examine how they've formed their own ethnic communities after arriving in the U.S.

Origins of Asian American Enclaves

The first Asian American enclave ("enclave" and "community" are used interchangeably) were not Chinatowns but were actually Manila Villages in Louisiana in the 1750s. But the Chinatowns that developed as increasing numbers of Chinese workers came to northern California and Hawai'i in the mid-1800s expanded the scale of such enclaves to a whole new level. As the Chinese population spread to other parts of the country, new Chinatowns spread to other major cities, such as New York City, Los Angeles, and Chicago.

But after Chinese immigration was all but stopped in the 1880s, the Japanese then followed in the steps of the Chinese and "Little Tokyos" began cropping up, first in Hawai'i, San Francisco and then in Los Angeles. As the Japanese mainly worked in agriculture, they became drawn to the relatively undeveloped land and abundant farming opportunities in Southern California. Since this period in the early 1900s, a few small Asian American communities existed throughout the country but they were relatively unnoticed for the most part.



Figure 2.7.1.6: Cambodian mother and daughter. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Gerd Eichmann via Wikimedia)

However, it was not until the [1965 Hart-Cellar Immigration Act](#) that the structure of Asian American enclaves changed radically. With the influx of new immigrants from China, the Philippines, Korea, India/South Asia, and Viet Nam, almost overnight new ethnic enclaves became established and quickly grew in size, almost exponentially. New enclaves soon appeared in several major U.S. cities while existing ones expanded rapidly.

Soon there were Koreatowns in Los Angeles and New York, Little Manilas in Los Angeles and San Francisco, South Asian enclaves in New York, and Little Saigons in Orange County (CA), San Jose, and Houston. By the mid-1980s, the existing Chinatown in Manhattan grew so much that there wasn't any more land into which it could expand so new Chinatowns sprang up in Sunset Park, Brooklyn and Flushing, Queens.

Today, you could find an Asian American enclave in almost every major metropolitan area you go. Some may even be in place where you would never expect, such as a thriving Hmong community in Minneapolis/St. Paul. There are also expanding Asian communities in many Canadian cities, in particular Toronto and Vancouver. Each Asian community offers its own mix of traditional culture and cuisine along with new elements borrowed from its surrounding community.

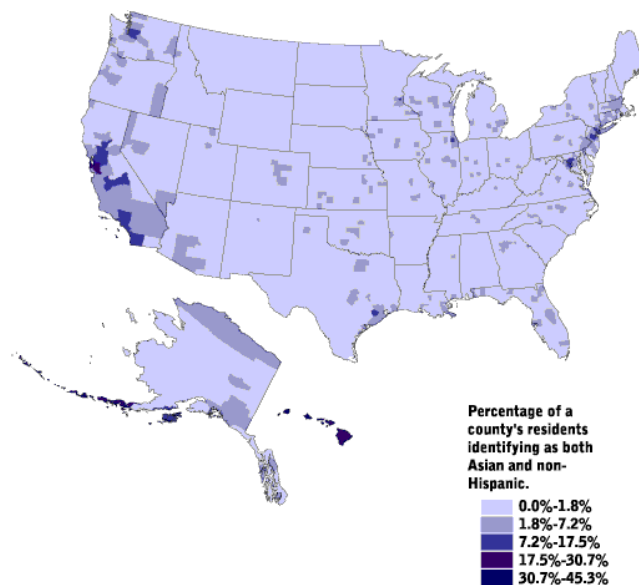


Figure 2.7.1.7: Asian Americans as a Percentage of a County's Total Population. (Used with permission, CensusScope.org /Social Science Data Analysis Network) (CC BY 4.0; via Lumens)

The map above, Figure 1.1.7, is from CensusScope/Social Science Data Analysis Network and it shows Asian Americans as a

percentage of a county's total population from the 2000 census. What it basically shows, not surprisingly, is that the counties that have the largest proportion of their population as Asian American are located in California, Washington, and along the mid-Atlantic and New England states. However, there is also a scattering of counties in the midwest and Texas that, while not huge, have a notable proportion of their population as Asian as well.

To look in more detail at perhaps the most dynamic county in the U.S. in terms of racial/ethnic diversity, the maps in Figure 1.1.8 are compiled by Michele Zonta and Paul Ong at the Ralph & Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Analysis at UCLA. The maps illustrate different racial-ethnic distributions and concentrations in cities within Los Angeles (L.A.) County for 1980, 1990, and 2000. The results show that in 1980, the only cities that had an Asian Pacific Islander (API) majority were ones directly north of downtown and in east L.A. However, by 1990, more API majorities sprung up in east L.A. and west of Compton. Most recently in 2000, **API majorities have expanded** to include most of east L.A. and San Gabriel and much of the eastern part of the county.

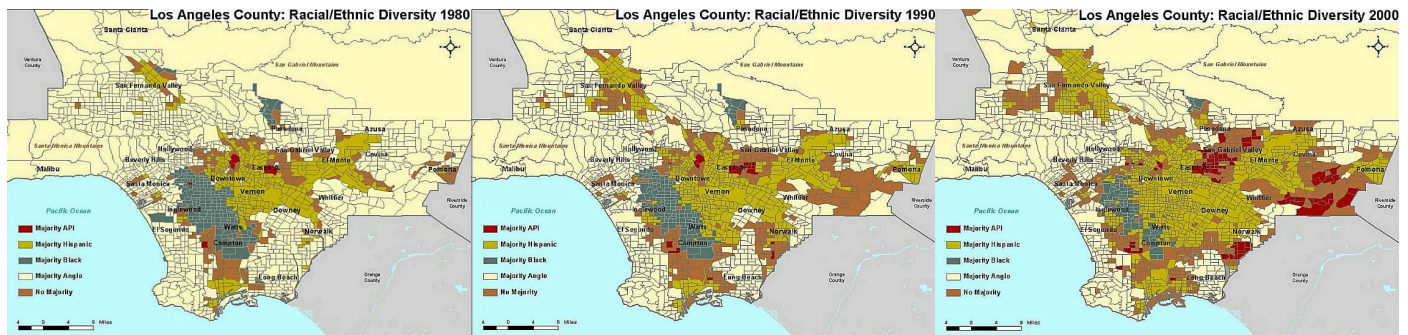


Figure 1.1.8: Growth of API in Southern California. (Courtesy of Asian-Nation.org)

Multiracial/Hapa Asian Americans

Asian Americans of mixed racial ancestry have been referred to as multiracial, mixed-race, biracial, "Hapa" (a native Hawaiian term that originally meant half Hawaiian), and Amerasian, among others. Their presence in not only the Asian American community but also in mainstream American society has a long history. However, the political, demographic, and cultural implications of their increasing numbers have only recently emerged for both Asian Americans and non-Asians alike.

Evolution of Racial Identity Among Asians

The origin of mixed-race or multiracial Asian Americans can be traced back to the early period of Asian immigration to the U.S. in the mid-1700s, with large scale migrations common by the mid-1800s. Because the vast majority of these early Asian immigrants were men (mostly from the Philippines or China), in many instances, if they wanted to be in the company of women, these early Asian immigrants had little choice but to socialize with non-Asian women. Eventually, the children from these interracial unions became the first multiracial Asian Americans, especially in Hawai'i where Chinese-Native Hawaiian intermarriages were common.

Eventually, as the numbers of immigrants from Asia began to swell in the mid- and late-1800s, the native white population increasingly began to view their presence in the U.S. with hostility. Objections were raised concerning perceived economic competition with native U.S. workers that Asian immigrants supposedly posed, along with doubts over whether Asians were cultural and racially compatible with mainstream American society.

This nativist and xenophobic backlash, popularly characterized as the "anti-Chinese movement," eventually led to several pieces of legislation at the local, state, and federal levels, culminating with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. These laws restricted the rights and activities of first, Chinese immigrants, then later broadened to include virtually all subsequent immigrants from Asia. Included in these restrictive laws were **anti-miscegenation** provisions that prevented Asians from marrying whites.

These anti-miscegenation laws were first passed in the 1600s to prevent freed Black slaves from marrying whites. Later versions added persons of Asian origin or ancestry to the list of groups forbidden to marry whites. While early examples of such anti-miscegenation laws singled out those of "Mongoloid" origin specifically, they were later amended to include Filipinos (who claimed that they were of "Malay" origin) and Asian Indians (who characterized themselves as "Aryan" in origin).



Figure 2.7.1.9: The pursuit of Hapa-ness. (Thinkstock.com via [Asian-Nation.org](https://www.asian-nation.org/))

One noteworthy exception was the War Brides Act of 1945 that allowed American GIs to marry and bring over wives from Japan, China, the Philippines, and Korea. Several thousands of Asian women immigrated to the U.S. as war brides and their offspring became the first notable cohort of multiracial Asian Americans. Anti-miscegenation laws were finally declared unconstitutional in the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court *Loving v. Virginia* case.

Interracial marriages involving Asian Americans and their multiracial offspring started to increase significantly following the passage of the [Immigration Act of 1965](#). This Act replaced the restrictive National Origins quota system that had been in place for the past four decades and which effectively limited the number of Asian immigrants to a token few each year.

In its place, the 1965 Immigration Act was structured around provisions that favored the immigration of family members, relatives, and professional workers. Eventually, these provisions substantially increased the numbers of Asian immigrants coming to the U.S., which in turn significantly increased the marriage pool, or the numbers of potential marriage partners, for Asians and non-Asians alike.

The end of the Viet Nam War also played an important role in increasing the numbers and visibility of multiracial Asian Americans, in this case "[Amerasians](#)" -- the children of Vietnamese mothers and American GIs who served in Viet Nam. After the fall of Saigon in and the reunification of Viet Nam in 1975, several thousand Amerasians were left behind as all remaining American personnel were evacuated. After enduring systematic discrimination and hostility back in Viet Nam as direct legacies of the U.S.'s involvement in the war, the Vietnamese Amerasian Homecoming Act of 1988 allowed approximately 25,000 Amerasians and their immediate relatives to immigrate to the U.S.

Characteristics and Demographics of Multiracials

Efforts to get an accurate national count of multiracial Asian Americans have been stymied in previous censuses since respondents could not choose more than one racial/ethnic identity. However, for the 2000 Census, the Census Bureau reversed its policy and allowed respondents to identify with more than one "race," finally allowing researchers to get a reliable count of the number of multiracial Asian Americans in the U.S.

According to the 2000 census, ([The Asian Population: 2000](#)), out of the 281,421,906 people living in the U.S., 10,242,998 of them identified themselves as entirely of Asian race (3.6%). Additionally, there were 1,655,830 people who identified themselves as being part Asian and part one or more other races (as noted in the Methodology explanation, the Census Bureau considers Hispanics/Latinos to be an ethnic, rather than a racial, group). The following table breaks down the distributions of Asian Americans who identify with more than one race.

Table 2.7.1.10: Number of Multiracial Asians by Racial/Ethnic Combinations, 2000. (Data via U.S. Census Bureau)

Number of Multiracial Asians by Racial/Ethnic Combinations, 2000		
	Number	% of all Multiracial Asians
Asian and Other Race(s)	1,655,830	100%
Asian and white	868,395	52.4%
Asian and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	138,802	8.4%
Asian and Black/African American	106,782	6.4%
Asian and Some Other Race	249,108	15.0%
All Other Combinations, incl. Other Asian	292,743	17.7%
All Asians Alone or with Other Races	11,898,828	4.2% of Total U.S. Population

As we can see, by far the largest group of multiracial Asians are those who are half Asian and half white. Historically, many of these mixed-race Asians have also been called "Amerasians." These include older multiracial Asian Americans who are the children of war brides and U.S. military personnel stationed in countries such as Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea, along with those who are the result of more recent non-military interracial marriages involving Asian Americans.

The Hapa Issues Forum quotes a recent Congressional Record report that indicated "between 1968 and 1989, children born to parents of different races increased from 1% of total births to 3.4%." The 2000 Census further shows that 30.7% of those who identify as at least part Japanese are multiracial, the highest proportion among the six largest Asian American ethnic groups. Next are Filipinos (21.8% of whom are multiracial), Chinese (15.4%), Korean (12.3%), Asian Indian (11.6%), and Vietnamese (8.3%).

Overall, the Census Bureau reports that there are about 1.8 million Americans who identify as half-Asian and half one or more other races. Of these, 52% are half -Asian and half-white. If we include all multiracial Asian Americans as their own "ethnic" group, they would be the fourth-largest group, comprising 8% of the entire Asian American population. Multiracial Asian Americans would also be the fastest-growing group as well.

In fact, demographers predict that by the year 2020 almost 20% of all Asian Americans will be multiracial and that figure will climb to 36% by the year 2050. In other words, as [intermarriages](#) involving Asians increase, multiracial Asians are becoming a more prominent group within the Asian American community, and within [mainstream American society](#) in general.

Pacific Islanders

Until 1980, "Hawaiian" was the only Pacific Islander group listed on the Census questionnaire; Guamanian and Samoan were added in 1990 and the census category today, reads "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander". There are an estimated 1.4 million people who identify with this category in the United States, 41% of which identify as Native Hawaiian, with the remainder identifying as Samoan (13%), Guamanian (10%), Tongan (5%), Fijian (3%), Marshallese (2%) or other Pacific Islander (26%) (Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, 2014). Scholars have argued that because these groups face a different struggles with Pacific Islanders contending with issues relating to sovereignty and decolonization, and Asian Americans dealing with immigration, they deserved a label distinct from "Asian American." Given these dynamics, it is argued that the experience of Pacific Islanders is much more akin to that of Native Americans (Ishisaka, 2020).

Native Hawaiians

In 1778, the year that Captain James Cook of England arrived, the estimated population of Hawaiians was between 400,000 and 800,000. In 1893 U.S. naval forces overthrew the monarchy originally founded in 1810 by King Kamehameha I, then in 1898 the Hawaiian islands were annexed by the United States as the Republic of Hawai'i. Much like the experience of Native Americans, European diseases introduced by colonization brought the population down to 29,800 Native Hawaiians and another 7,800 Hawaiians of mixed ancestry by 1900. Today, Native Hawaiians in Hawaii experience lower incomes, have the highest unemployment rate, and hold lower status jobs when compared to all ethnic groups in the islands. As is the case with other

marginalized groups, this lower socioeconomic position leaves Native Hawaiians more vulnerable to health disparities such as lower mortality rates and higher rates of disease and cancer (Lai & Arguelles, 2003).

As an indigenous minority group, Native Hawaiians are recognized as having a "special trust relationship" with the U.S. government, similar to Native American Indians (along with Native Alaskans), entitling them to special programs and resources. However, in February 2000, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed established policies of the U.S. Congress and ruled that the composition of the trustees who control Native Hawaiian rights and entitlements (the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, or OHA) was unconstitutional because they were based on racial identity qualifications. This decision basically throws into question the fundamental rights of Native Hawaiians.

In light of the ruling, Hawai'i's two Senators, Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye introduced the "Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act" (aka the "Akaka Bill") before Congress in 2000. The bill would formally extend the federal policy of self-determination to Native Hawaiians and put them on the same legal status as Native American Indians. Opponents of the bill argue that it promotes racial/ethnic separatism and that similar to debates about affirmative action, non-Hawaiians should not unfairly bear the consequences of reconciling events that occurred several generations ago.

Hawaiians have a saying, Aloha mai no, aloha aku -- When love is given, love should be returned. Sovereignty supporters believe that now is the time for aloha to be acknowledged and returned to the Native Hawaiian people and their descendents. The Akaka bill would provide an avenue for both the people of Hawai'i and the U.S. Congress to correct the historical injustices they have suffered collectively as a people, and enable them to exercise self-determination through self-governance, in order to heal as a people.

The House version of the bill (H.R. 505) passed on October 24, 2007 and the Senate version is still being considered.

Samoans & Guamanians

According to the United States Census Bureau, there are approximately 204,000 Samoan people including those with partial Samoan ancestry and about 160,000 Guamanians in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

Like the Native Hawaiians, they are considered Polynesians, and are theorized to have migrated from the west (the East Indies, the Malay peninsula or the Philippines) as far back ago as 1,000 B.C.E. Today, the islands are divided up into American Samoa and Samoa. The former is only 76 square miles, has a population of around 67,000, and sends a delegate to the U.S. Congress. Samoa, known as Western Samoa until 1997, is an independent nation with islands totaling 1,090 square miles, and a population of 179,058.

The economy of American Samoa remains undeveloped; nearly one-third of workers are employed in the fishing or canning industry. Tourism has not taken off. In recent years, one of American Samoa's main exports has been football players. There are more than 200 playing Division I college football, and 28 in the NFL, reported ESPN in 2002. Perhaps the most famous has been linebacker Tiaina "Junior" Seau.

After Samoans, the next-largest NHPI group are the natives of the island of Guam, also known as Chamorro. There are only about 157,000 people living on today's multicultural Guam, of whom about half are Chamorro. So like American Samoa, a larger number of Chamorro actually live abroad-in the U.S., there are nearly 93,000 people of pure or part-Chamorro descent.

Today the U.S. military maintains a large, albeit declining, presence in Guam, with 23,000 military personnel and their families living on the island. Though the government has lobbied to free Guam from its "unincorporated" U.S. territory status, the island has yet to be granted the Commonwealth recognition given Puerto Rico. And although the people are given U.S. citizenship, they do not vote in U.S. presidential elections. Economically, the growing tourist industry catering to Japanese visitors has helped offset the military downsizing.

Contributors and Attributions

- Tsuhako, Joy. (Cerritos College)
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2.7.2: Intergroup Relations

The experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are diverse and different groups have experienced different intergroup consequences. For example, the experiences for some groups is best explained by genocide, such as with Cambodian Americans, as the civil war in their home country in the 1970s led many to their migration to the United States as refugees, fleeing oppression and death. In contrast, to survive and thrive in U.S. society, many Asian Americans formed ethnic enclaves which is a form of separatism and others advocate for pan-Asianism to challenge oppressive and discriminatory practices.

Patterns of Intergroup Relations: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

- **Extermination/Genocide:** The deliberate, systematic killing of an entire people or nation (e.g. Cambodian genocide).
- **Expulsion/ Population Transfer:** The dominant group expels the marginalized group (e.g. refugees from Viet Nam).
- **Internal Colonialism:** The dominant group exploits the marginalized group (e.g. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882).
- **Segregation:** The dominant group structures physical, unequal separation of two groups in residence, workplace & social functions (e.g. prison camps during WWII).
- **Separatism:** The marginalized group desires physical separation of two groups in residence, workplace & social functions (e.g. ethnic enclaves).
- **Fusion/ Amalgamation:** Race-ethnic groups combine to form a new group (e.g. Hapa).
- **Assimilation:** The process by which a marginalized individual or group takes on the characteristics of the dominant group (e.g. Asian immigrants changing names to sound more “American”).
- **Pluralism/ Multiculturalism:** Various race-ethnic groups in a society have mutual respect for one another, without prejudice or discrimination (e.g. pan-Asianism).

History of Intergroup Relations

Chinese immigration came to an abrupt end with the [Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882](#). This act was a result of anti-Chinese sentiment burgeoned by a depressed economy and loss of jobs. White workers blamed Chinese migrants for taking jobs, and the passage of the Act meant the number of Chinese workers decreased. Chinese men did not have the funds to return to China or to bring their families to the United States, so they remained physically and culturally segregated in the Chinatowns of large cities. Later legislation, the Immigration Act of 1924, further curtailed Chinese immigration. The Act included the race-based National Origins Act, which was aimed at keeping U.S. ethnic stock as undiluted as possible by reducing “undesirable” immigrants. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is an example of **internal colonialism** because the Chinese workers were economically exploited while in the United States. It was not until after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that Chinese immigration again increased, and many Chinese families were reunited.

Chinese/Asian Exclusion

Many Chinese men had been recruited by the railroad companies to work on the Transcontinental Railroad—a vast, complex, engineering feat to span the continent and link the entire expanse of the middle of North America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean. By 1887, the project was completed and many of the Chinese workers, having saved the majority of their pay, returned home, or, conversely, began to send for their families—parents, siblings, wives and children, sweethearts, cousins—beginning a steady migration stream from China to the United States. Many of these former railroad workers settled along the West Coast and began to compete, economically, with the white population of the region. Feeling serious economic pressure from the Chinese immigrants, whites on the West Coast petitioned Congress to stop migration from China. Congress complied and passed a bill titled the “Asian Exclusionary Act.”



Figure 2.7.2.1: "First Transcontinental Railroad Historical Sign" (CC BY-NC 2.0; J. Stephen Conn via Flickr)

Expansion of Asian Exclusion

From the 15th century through the 19th century, Japan was a xenophobic, feudal society, ostensibly governed by a God-Emperor, but in reality ruled by ruthless, powerful Shoguns. Japan's society changed little during the four centuries of samurai culture, and it was cut off from the rest of the world in self-imposed isolation, trading only with the Portuguese, Spanish, English, and Chinese, and then not with all of them at once, often using one group as middlemen to another group. In the mid-19th century, (1854), the United States government became interested in trading directly with Japan in order to open up new export markets and to import Japanese goods at low prices uninflated by middleman add-ons. Commodore Matthew Perry was assigned to open trade between the United States and Japan. With a flotilla of war ships, Perry crossed the Pacific and berthed his ships off the coast of the Japanese capital. Perry sent letters to the emperor that were diplomatic but insistent. Perry had been ordered not to take no for an answer, and when the emperor sent Perry a negative response to the letters, Perry maneuvered his warships into positions that would allow them to fire upon the major cities of Japan. The Japanese had no armaments or ships that could compete with the Americans, and so, capitulated to Perry. Within thirty years, Japan was almost as modernized as its European counterparts. They went from feudalism to industrialism almost over night.

Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907

Chinese immigration to California boomed during the Gold Rush of 1852, but the strict Japanese government practiced policies of isolation that thwarted Japanese emigration. It was not until 1868 that the Japanese government lessened restrictions and that Japanese immigration to the United States began. Anti-Chinese sentiment motivated American entrepreneurs to recruit Japanese laborers. In 1885, the first Japanese workers arrived in the Kingdom of Hawaii, which was then independent.



Figure 2.7.2.2: "Japanese Immigrant 1940's" (CC BY-ND 2.0; chiyomaru01 via Flickr)

Most Japanese immigrants wanted to reside in America permanently and came in family groups, in contrast to the Chinese immigration of young men, most of whom soon returned to China. They assimilated to American social norms, such as on clothing. Many joined Methodist and Presbyterian churches.

As the Japanese population in California grew, they were seen with suspicion as an entering wedge by Japan. By 1905, anti-Japanese rhetoric filled the pages of the San Francisco Chronicle, and Japanese Americans did not live only in Chinatown but throughout the city. In 1905, the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League was established and promoted four policies:

1. Extension of the Chinese Exclusion Act to include Japanese and Koreans
2. Exclusion by League members of Japanese employees and the hiring of firms that employ Japanese
3. Initiation of pressure the School Board to segregate Japanese from white children
4. Initiation of a propaganda campaign to inform Congress and the President of that "menace".

Tensions had been rising in San Francisco, and since the 1905 decisive Japanese victory against Russia, Japan demanded treatment as an equal. The result was a series of six notes communicated between Japan and the United States from late 1907 to early 1908. The immediate cause of the Agreement was anti-Japanese nativism in California. In 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education passed a regulation whereby children of Japanese descent would be required to attend separate, segregated schools. At the time, Japanese immigrants made up approximately 1% of the population of California, many of whom had immigrated under a treaty in 1894 that had assured free immigration from Japan.

In the Agreement, Japan agreed not to issue passports for Japanese citizens wishing to work in the Continental United States, thus effectively eliminating new Japanese immigration to the United States. In exchange, the United States agreed to accept the presence of Japanese immigrants already residing there; to permit the immigration of wives, children, and parents; and to avoid legal discrimination against Japanese American children in California schools. There was also a strong desire on the part of the Japanese government to resist being treated as inferiors. Japan did not want the United States to pass any such legislation as had happened to the Chinese under the Chinese Exclusion Act. US President Theodore Roosevelt, who had a positive opinion of Japan, accepted the Agreement as proposed by Japan to avoid more formal immigration restrictions.

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In 1924, anti-minority sentiment in the United States was so strong that the Ku Klux Klan had four million, proud, openly racist members thousands of whom were involved in a parade down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC, that was watched by thousands of Klan supporters, and other Americans. Their definition of who should qualify as American was largely reflected the United States Supreme Court rulings on questions of naturalization, which largely excluded East and South Asian immigrants until the 1940s. For example, in 1922 the Supreme Court ruled in *Ozawa v. United States* that Takao Ozawa who was born in Japan but had live in the United States for 20 years, was not considered Caucasian which meant he did not fit the popular definition

of a "free white person" as the Naturalization Act of 1906 specified. Within three months, Justice George Sutherland authored a similarly unfavorable ruling in a Supreme Court case concerning the petition for naturalization of a Sikh immigrant from the Punjab region in British India, who identified himself as "a high caste Hindu of full Indian blood" in his petition, *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*. The upshot of this ruling was that like the Japanese, "high-caste Hindus, of full Indian blood" were not "free white persons" and were racially ineligible for naturalized citizenship. To support this conclusion, Justice Sutherland reiterated Ozawa's holding that the words "white person" in the naturalization act were "synonymous with the word 'Caucasian' only as that word is popularly understood".

World War II and Anti-Japanese Policies

On December 7, 1941, at 7:55 A.M. local time the Japanese fleet in the South Pacific launched 600 hundred aircraft in a surprise attack against U.S. Naval forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Within four hours, 2, 400 people, mostly military personnel had been killed, including the 1,100 men who will be entombed forever in the wreckage of the U.S.S. Arizona when it capsized during the attack. Although this was a military target, the United States was not at war when the attack occurred.

The U.S. response to the attack was **segregation** wherein the dominant group structures physical separation of two groups, in this case Japanese, German and Italian-descended Americans and everyone else. Within 3 months, on February 19, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed and issue Executive Order 9066 which authorized the secretary of war to prescribe certain areas as military zones, clearing the way for the incarceration of these groups in U.S. concentration camps. As a result, approximately 112,000 men, women, and children of Japanese ancestry were evicted from the West Coast of the United States and held in American concentration camps and other confinement sites across the country. Japanese Americans in Hawaii were not incarcerated in the same way, despite the attack on Pearl Harbor. Although the Japanese American population in Hawaii was nearly 40% of the population of Hawaii itself, only a few thousand people were detained there, supporting the eventual finding that their mass removal on the West Coast was motivated by reasons other than "military necessity" (U.S. Department of State). The fact is that the labor of Japanese Americans in Hawaii was crucial to the economic health of Hawaii which protected them from internment in the prison camps.

In less than six months after the attack, Congress passed the Japanese Relocation Act. Below, is reproduced the order that was posted in San Francisco.

The Japanese American Relocation Order

THE JAPANESE AMERICAN RELOCATION ORDER

WESTERN DEFENSE COMMAND AND FOURTH ARMY

WARTIME CIVIL CONTROL ADMINISTRATION

Presidio of San Francisco, California

May 3, 1942

INSTRUCTIONS TO ALL PERSONS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY

Living in the Following Area:

All of that portion of the City of Los Angeles, State of California, within that boundary beginning at the point at which North Figueroa Street meets a line following the middle of the Los Angeles River; thence southerly and following the said line to East First Street; thence westerly on East First Street to Alameda Street; thence southerly on Alameda Street to East Third Street; thence northwesterly on East Third Street to Main Street; thence northerly on Main Street to First Street; thence northwesterly on First Street to Figueroa Street; thence northeasterly on Figueroa Street to the point of beginning.

Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 33, this Headquarters, dated May 3, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Saturday, May 9, 1942.

No Japanese person living in the above area will be permitted to change residence after 12 o'clock noon, P. W. T., Sunday, May 3, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the representative of the Commanding General, Southern California Sector, at the Civil Control Station located at

Japanese Union Church,

120 North San Pedro Street,

Los Angeles, California

SEE CIVILIAN EXCLUSION ORDER NO. 33

Such permits will only be granted for the purpose of uniting members of a family, or in cases of grave emergency.

The Civil Control Station is equipped to assist the Japanese population affected by this evacuation in the following ways:

1. Give advice and instructions on the evacuation.
2. Provide services with respect to the management, leasing, sale, storage or other disposition of most kinds of property, such as real estate, business and professional equipment, household goods, boats, automobiles and livestock.
3. Provide temporary residence elsewhere for all Japanese in family groups.
4. Transport persons and a limited amount of clothing and equipment to their new residence.

The Following Instructions Must Be Observed:

1. A responsible member of each family, preferably the head of the family, or the person in whose name most of the property is held, and each individual living alone, will report to the Civil Control Station to receive further instructions. This must be done between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Monday, May 4, 1942, or between 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M. on Tuesday, May 5, 1942.
2. Evacuees must carry with them on departure for the Assembly Center, the following property:
 - (a) Bedding and linens (no mattress) for each member of the family;
 - (b) Toilet articles for each member of the family;
 - (c) Extra clothing for each member of the family;
 - (d) Sufficient knives, forks, spoons, plates, bowls and cups for each member of the family;
 - (e) Essential personal effects for each member of the family.

All items carried will be securely packaged, tied and plainly marked with the name of the owner and numbered in accordance with instructions obtained at the Civil Control Station. The size and number of packages is limited to that which can be carried by the individual or family group.

3. No pets of any kind will be permitted.
4. No personal items and no household goods will be shipped to the Assembly Center.
5. The United States Government through its agencies will provide for the storage, at the sole risk of the owner, of the more substantial household items, such as iceboxes, washing machines, pianos and other heavy furniture. Cooking utensils and other small items will be accepted for storage if crated, packed and plainly marked with the name and address of the owner. Only one name and address will be used by a given family.

6. Each family, and individual living alone will be furnished transportation to the Assembly Center or will be authorized to travel by private automobile in a supervised group. All instructions pertaining to the movement will be obtained at the Civil Control Station.

Go to the Civil Control Station between the hours of 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M., Monday, May 4, 1942, or between the hours of 8:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M.,

Tuesday, May 5, 1942, to receive further instructions.

Lieutenant General, U. S. Army

Commanding

This map shows the location of the American concentration camps where Japanese Americans were interned during WWII.

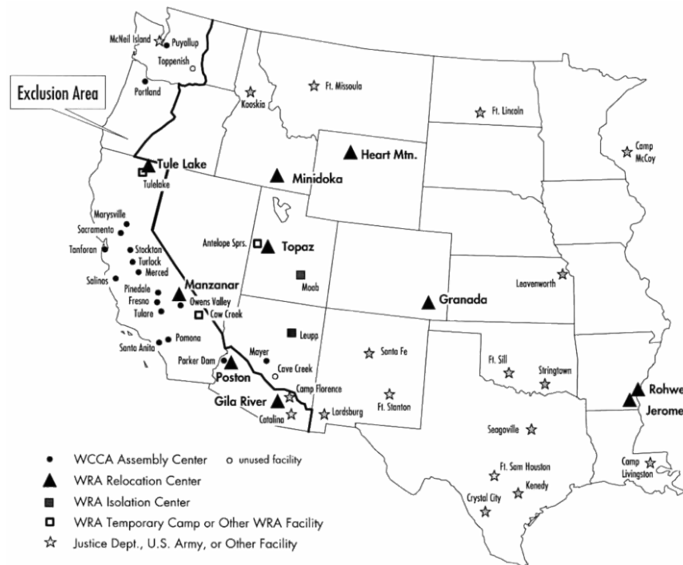


Figure 2.7.2.3: Map of World War II Japanese American prison camps. (CC PDM 1.0; National Park Service via [Wikimedia](#))

In 1943, Fred Korematsu, with the assistance of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed suit in federal court arguing that it was unconstitutional to deprive American citizens of their civil rights without due process of law. The Supreme Court of the United States decided that, in times of great national strife, it was Constitutional to deprive one specific segment of the population of their civil rights because of the potential for harm by that specific group. You might be interested to know that this decision has never been overturned, which means that it is still the law of the land. A similar case *Hirabayashi v. United States*, (1943), was a case in which the United States Supreme Court held that the application of curfews against members of a people of color were constitutional when the nation was at war with the country from which that group's ancestors originated.



Figure 2.7.2.4: "Russell Lee: Japanese-American family waiting for relocation, Los Angeles, 1942" (CC BY 2.0; trialsanderrors via Flickr)

Although Japanese Americans have deep, long-reaching roots in the United States, their history here has not always been smooth. The California Alien Land Law of 1913 was aimed at them and other Asian immigrants, and it prohibited aliens from owning land. An even uglier action was the Japanese internment camps of World War II, discussed earlier as an illustration of **expulsion**.

Cambodian Genocide

One example of **extermination/genocide** is the period from 1975-1979 in Cambodia when the Khmer Rouge killed approximately 1.2-1.7 million people, or approximately 20% of the population (Williams, 2005). The political philosophy that drove these atrocities required a restructuring of the social and economic order of Cambodia and the "persecution and elimination" of those deemed a threat to the new political state (Ratner, S. & Abrams, J., 1997). After the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979 and ended the reign of terror of the Khmer Rouge, Cambodians fled to refugee camps and eventually resettled in Western countries such as Australia, Canada, France and the United States.

As a result, the largest population of Cambodians outside of southeast Asia resides in Long Beach, California. Though these refugees were eligible for a variety of welfare programs, they still often had to combine welfare with low wage and cash jobs to survive and raise children, not unlike other working class families and ethnic minorities, in addition to coping with the mental and physical health conditions that made it difficult for them to learn and work in English (Quintiliani, 2009). Cambodian Americans contend with "model minority" stereotypes while also being considered the "Black sheep" of the Asian community (Ly, 2003, p. 119). Under the Khmer Rouge, any sign of wealth or education meant death, contrasting that experience with immigration from Japan, China, and Korea which was largely driven by a desire for better standards of living and new opportunities, one can see how important it is to consider how these contexts shapes different behavior and outcomes of these groups in the United States. Unlike these other East Asian groups, Cambodian parents rarely pressure their children to pursue higher education, which in part explains why they have the lowest percentage of college and graduates and the highest percentage of high school dropouts (Ly, 2003). These realities expose the inaccuracy of one of the most persistent stereotypes about Asian Americans: That they are all the same. As exemplified by the experiences of Cambodian Americans, this stereotype can erase the different challenges some groups face and can also prevent those groups from receiving the specialized attention and supports they need.

Why Enclaves Are So Popular

On the continuum of intergroup relations, ethnic enclaves are an example of **separatism**. As Sociologists and other social scientists note many reasons why these ethnic enclaves are so popular with new immigrants and Asian Americans who have lived in the U.S. all their lives. They actually have different definitions for an ethnic "community" versus an ethnic "enclave." Without getting into the academic details too much, enclaves are ethnic communities that have a well-developed economic structure that operates mainly through racial-ethnic dynamics.

At any rate, we will discuss the issue of Asian American **small businesses** in another section. For now, we'll focus on how these

ethnic enclaves grew so quickly and why they continue to thrive. In one word, it's because of immigration. Immigrants from Asia keep coming to these ethnic communities and infuse them with new life.

There are many theories on why people immigrate to the U.S., especially from Asian countries. Again, without getting too academic, the usual scenario goes something like this: American multinational corporations set up businesses in foreign countries and soon begin to dominate that country's politics and economy. This "globalization of capital" disrupts and transforms the traditional way people in these Asian countries make a living as the fundamental structure of their national economy changes from one dominated by farming and agriculture to the beginnings of a modern capitalist economy that emphasizes manufacturing and export sectors.



Figure 2.7.2.5: Asian businesses in the enclaves provide immigrants with jobs. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Nandoro via Wikimedia)

Many workers struggle to survive economically, to adapt to these rapid changes, and many become "displaced" (i.e., they lose their jobs or their land). Nonetheless, having already been exposed to U.S. culture, either through direct contact with those connected to the American businesses now operating in their country or through TV programs and U.S. media portrayals, many workers dream about working in the U.S. and earning lots of money. Their expectations for "the good life" become heightened but they also realize that they can't achieve these new goals in their current situation. They also see that by working in the U.S. and earning more money, they can help out other family members who have also been displaced.

In the meantime, companies in the U.S. are looking to hire immigrant workers who are frequently willing to work for lower wages than U.S.-born workers. Many times, these companies actively recruit foreign workers to come to the U.S. Further, earlier immigrants from that country help in the immigration process by providing helpful information about jobs or assistance in the actual immigration and adjustment process. After this initial cycle, immigration becomes almost self-perpetuating through these established social networks as immigrant workers repeat the cycle of helping their family, relatives, and friends come to the U.S. to find work.

Once these Asian immigrants get to the U.S., they frequently end up living or working in these established Asian enclaves. This makes sense because these enclaves give them a sense of familiarity and emotional comfort, which makes it easier for them to adapt to life in the U.S. They also are more likely to get a job in the enclave, especially if they are not fluent enough in English to get a job outside the enclave. Being employed also helps them adjust to their new life in the U.S.

Finally, these new workers help these small ethnic businesses survive and even prosper, perhaps to the point where they can contribute to the local economy in the form of taxes and hiring more workers, Asian and non-Asian. In the meantime, non-Asians are able to learn about and enjoy the rich Asian culture and food of these enclaves. These new understandings and friendships can form the bridge that helps us to overcome the old suspicions of "us" versus "them" and that immigrants can be Americans too.

At the same time, many point out that not everything is always quite so rosy for these Asian immigrant workers. They argue that many Asian business owners are more than willing to exploit the relative powerlessness of these new immigrants and their willingness to accept lower wages and less-than-optimum working conditions. Specifically, many Asian-owned sweatshops,

restaurants, and other small businesses have been accused of taking advantage of their own people in this manner for their own financial gain.



Figure 2.7.2.6: Vibrant Asian enclaves are everywhere. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Owen and Aki via Flickr)

In fact, many Asian American non-profit community organizations were established to protest against these exploitative conditions by picketing Asian small businesses and pressuring their owners to improve working conditions and wages, and by trying to unionize these immigrant workers. Academic research also shows that working within an ethnic enclave is frequently beneficial for Asian business owners but not for their workers who may be able to earn more and enjoy slightly better working conditions in jobs outside the ethnic enclave.

On the other hand, other scholars argue that while immigrant workers in ethnic enclaves may be slightly "penalized" in terms of wages and working conditions, they benefit in other ways. Specifically, they enjoy the psychological familiarity and comfort of being surrounded by others like them as they adapt to a strange new society. They also learn the ins and outs of running a small business; in fact, many workers eventually go on to opening up their own small businesses, sometimes by buying the business from their former owners.

In short, while there are some disadvantages for workers in the ethnic enclave, the fact remains that Asian ethnic communities have the enormous potential to benefit everyone involved -- new immigrants, established Asian Americans, the local non-Asian community, and American society as a whole.

What's in a Name?

Like other communities of color, Asian Americans must contend with an Anglo-dominant society that views those with "foreign sounding" names as outsiders. Some **assimilate**, or take on the characteristics of the dominant group, by anglicizing their names, like many Chinese international students in the United States (Fang & Fine, 2019), while others endure microaggressions of having their names mispronounced or changed by educators and others in position of authority (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). On the one hand, as Kohli & Solórzano argue these practices can reinforce the idea of cultural and racial hierarchy of inferiority of non-Anglos and leave lasting impacts on the self-perceptions of children, especially, but in the case of taking on chosen names can also allow for self-expression and agency to select a name that projects an imagined self (Fang & Fine, 2019).

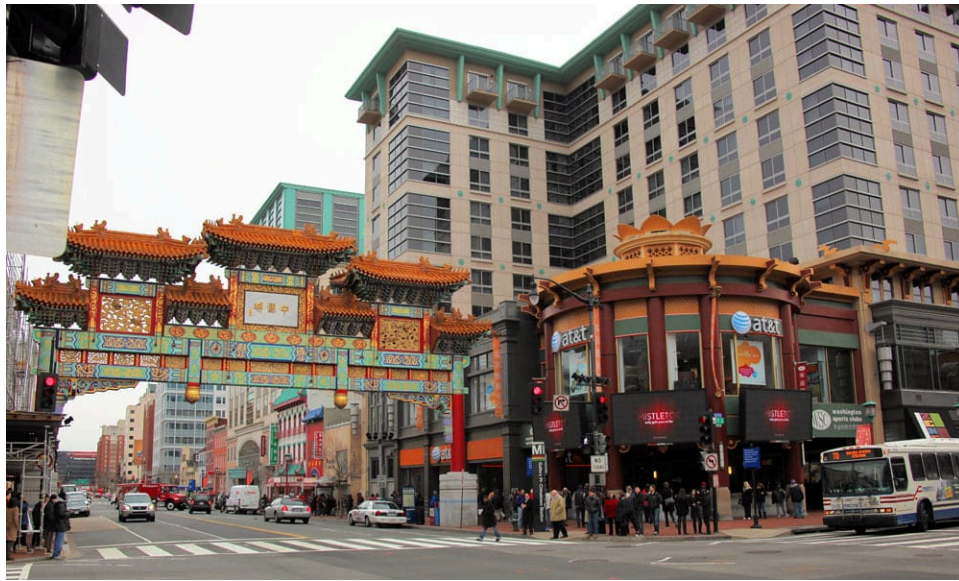


Figure 2.7.2.8: "Chinese Friendship Arch and Gallery Place Building 01 - Chinatown - DC" (CC BY-SA 2.0; Tim Evanson via Flickr)

Thinking Sociologically

Do you have a non-Anglo name? If you do, how do you feel about the idea of changing it in order to assimilate? If not, imagine that you did. Would you want to change your name or keep it? Why?

All Mixed Up?

An example of **fusion/amalgamation** which is where racial or ethnic groups combine to form a new group, is the case of "Hapas", or those that have one Asian parent and one non-Asian parent. Traditionally, multiracial Asian Americans, like many other multiracial individuals, have been looked upon with curiosity and/or suspicion by the both sides of their ancestry and the rest of society. In the past, the racist "one drop rule" dictated that anyone who even had any trace of non-white ancestry (i.e., a single drop of non-white blood) was "colored" and therefore non-white. To a certain extent today, many Americans still see multiracial Asian Americans as "half-breeds" and don't consider them to be truly white, Black, etc. or even truly American.

On the other hand, many in the conventional Asian American community also do not consider multiracial Asian Americans to be truly "Asian" and rather, see them as "whitewashed." Politically, many worry that the Asian American community will lose government funding if people who previously identified themselves as solely Asian now identify themselves as multiracial. In other words, many multiracial Asian Americans still face distrust and even hostility from both their Asian and non-Asian sides.

Sociologists argue that one of the defining characteristics of the U.S. racial/ethnic landscape is the tendency for Americans, white and non-white alike, to prefer a sense of clarity when it comes to racial/ethnic identity. In situations where the racial/ethnic background of a person cannot be immediately identified, many Americans become uncomfortable with this cultural ambiguity. This may help to explain the traditional emphasis on prohibiting the "mixing" of different races, a motivation that continues to drive many neo-Nazi or white supremacist ideologies.

As a result of these cultural dynamics, many (although certainly not all) multiracial Asian Americans encounter difficulties in establishing their own ethnic identity as they try to fit into both the Asian American community and mainstream American society. As many multiracial Asian American writers have described, as they grow up, they are frequently caught between both sides of their racial/ethnic background. Frequently this involves feeling alienated, marginalized, and that they do not legitimately belong in either community, Asian or non-Asian.

Moving Forward and Forging A New Identity

However, recent research suggests that, rather than trying to fit themselves into just an Asian identity or just a white identity, multiracial Asian Americans report the most happiness and the least stress when they **create their own unique racial/ethnic**

identities that combine all of their ancestries. In other words, instead of trying to "pass" as a member of a single racial group, they may be better off when they actively create their own definition of fitting in that is based on synthesizing their unique and multiple characteristics. In doing so, multiracial Asian Americans develop a sense of ownership and pride in their new identity, rather than trying to seek acceptance into the preexisting racial groups.

As it turns out, monoethnic Asian Americans have been doing something like this for many generations, as they reconcile and negotiate their own identities as both Asian and American. In this sense, we might say that multiracial Americans are now going through the same process that Asian Americans have been going through for years. In other words, monoethnic Asian Americans and multiracial Americans share a common process of actively shaping their identities through combining elements from diverse cultures can help these communities connect with one other and bridge cultural differences.

As the incidence of interracial marriage and by implication, numbers of multiracial Asian Americans continues to increase, multiracial Asian Americans have the opportunity to both **assert their own unique experiences and characteristics** while also participating in the larger Asian American community and mainstream American society in general. In the process of doing so, multiracial Asian Americans are likely to play a central role in the demographic, political, and cultural evolution of a diversifying American society.

Anti-Asian Racism & Violence

Ever since the first Asians arrived in America, there has been anti-Asian racism. This includes prejudice and acts of discrimination. For more than 200 years, Asian Americans have been denied equal rights, subjected to harassment and hostility, had their rights revoked and imprisoned for no justifiable reason, physically attacked, and murdered.

Ethnic Competition Leads to Violence

As the section on Asian American history discussed, numerous acts of discrimination against Chinese immigrants culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. For the first and so far only time in American history, an entire ethnic group was singled out and forbidden to step foot on American soil. Although this was not the first such anti-Asian incident, it symbolizes the legacy of racism directed against our community.

It was followed by numerous denials of justice against Chinese and Japanese immigrants seeking to claim equal treatment to land ownership, citizenship, and other rights in state and federal court in the early 1900s. Many times, Asians were not even allowed to testify in court. Perhaps the most infamous episode of anti-Asian racism was the unjustified imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II -- done solely on the basis of their ethnic ancestry.

One may think that as the Asian American population becomes larger and more integrated into the mainstream American social and political institutions that incidents of anti-Asian racism would occur less often. In fact, the opposite has been true. The last 20 years or so has seen Asian Americans become the fastest-growing targets for hate crimes and violence.

It seems that whenever there are problems in American society, political or economic, there always seems to be the need for a **scapegoat** -- someone or a group of people who is/are singled out, unjustifiably blamed, and targeted with severe hostility. Combined with the cultural stereotype of Asian Americans as quiet, weak, and powerless, more and more Asian Americans are victimized, solely on the basis of being an Asian American.



Figure 2.7.2.9: "EM_ark13960t1ck18s1t_001" (CC PDM 1.0; jonathanhgrossman)

License to Commit Murder = \$3,700

Perhaps the most graphic and shocking incident that illustrates this process was the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982. Vincent was beaten to death by two white men (Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz) who called him a "jap" (even though he was Chinese American) and blamed him and Japanese automakers for the current recession and the fact that they were about to lose their jobs. After a brief scuffle inside a local bar/night club, Vincent tried to run for his life until he was cornered nearby, held down by Nitz while Ebens repeatedly smashed his skull and bludgeoned him to death with a baseball bat.

The equally tragic part of this murder were how Vincent's murderers were handled by the criminal justice system. First, instead of being put on trial for second degree murder (intentionally killing someone but without premeditation), the prosecutor instead negotiated a plea bargain for reduced charges of manslaughter (accidentally killing someone). Second, the judge in the case sentenced each man to only two years probation and a \$3,700 fine -- absolutely no jail time at all.

The judge defended these sentences by stating that his job was to fit the punishment not just to the crime, but also to the perpetrators. In this case, as he argued, both Ebens and Nitz had no prior criminal record and were both employed at the time of the incident. Therefore, the judge reasoned that neither man represented a threat to society. However, others had a different interpretation of the light sentences. They argued that what the judge was basically saying was that as long as you have no prior criminal record and have a job, you could buy a license to commit murder for \$3,700.

This verdict and sentence outraged the entire Asian American community in the Detroit area and all around the country. Soon, several organizations formed a multi-racial coalition to demand justice for the murder of Vincent Chin. They persuaded the U.S. Justice Department to charge the two men with violating Vincent Chin's civil rights. They organized rallies and protests, circulated petitions, and kept the issue in the media spotlight. As one Asian American pointed out, "You can kill a dog and get 30 days in jail, 90 days for a traffic ticket."

In a second trial, the Justice Department convicted Ebens (the one who actually swung the bat) of violating Vincent's civil rights and he was sentenced to 25 years in prison. Nitz (the one who held Vincent down) was acquitted. However, these verdicts were thrown out on appeal due to a technicality and a new trial was ordered by a federal appeals court. However, because of "overwhelming publicity" about the case, the new trial was moved all the way to Cincinnati, Ohio.

At this retrial, whose jury consisted almost entirely of white blue-collar men, both men were acquitted of all charges. Mrs. Chin did manage to win a civil suit against Ebens and Nitz for \$1.5 million but received very little of that money, since Ebens stopped making payments in 1989. Mrs. Chin eventually became so distraught over these incidents of injustice that she left the U.S. and moved back to China. To this day, neither man has served any jail time for murdering Vincent Chin and [only recently has Ebens expressed regret for his actions.](#)

As many scholars argue, the events surrounding Vincent Chin's murder and the acquittal of his killer sadly represents another example of how Asian Americans are seen as not being "real" Americans and therefore worthy of the same rights and privileges that so many other Americans take for granted. Further, the lenient treatment that his killers received echoes similar incidents in the late 1800s in which Chinese miners were not allowed to testify against whites who attacked them or murdered their friends. In other words, Vincent's murder was another example of how the life of an Asian American is systematically devalued in relation to that of a "real" American.

The Formation of Solidarity

Although justice was not served in this case, Vincent's murder galvanized the entire Asian American community like no other incident before it. As an example of **pluralism/multiculturalism**, it resulted in the formation of numerous Asian American community organizations and coalitions whose purpose was to monitor how Asian Americans were treated and to mobilize any and all resources available to fight for justice. (See section 9.5 for more on the importance of **pan-Asianism**) Asian Americans saw firsthand how anti-Asian prejudice and hostility operated, both at the personal physical level and at the institutional level.

Since then, groups have documented numerous incidents of hate crimes committed against Asian Americans. NAPALC's 1999 Audit of Violence Against Asian Pacific Americans points out that there was a 13% increase of reported anti-Asian incidents between 1998 and 1999. It found that South Asians were the most targeted among Asian Americans and that vandalism was the most common form of anti-Asian discrimination. This is reinforced by recent anti-Asian vandalism at Stanford University that included such threats as "rape all oriental bitches," "kill all gooks," and "I'm a real white american."

Similar incidents and anti-Asian threats have also occurred and continue to occur at college campuses all around the country. What makes the situation worse are the apathetic, half-hearted, and even insensitive responses on the part of the authorities, in this case university officials. Even in rare instances when they admit that racial tensions are a problem on their campus, university leaders are slow to respond appropriately. Administrators consistently fight efforts to mandate classes on multiculturalism for all students even though research shows that these classes promote increased understanding and respect among students.

Secondly, they resist students' efforts to promote or even establish Asian American and other racial/ethnic studies programs. This is despite the fact that at almost all major universities around the country, it's common for Asian American students to comprise 15%, 25%, or even 50% of their students (i.e., U.C. Irvine). Students at Wellesley College, regarded as one of the elite women's colleges in the country, recently planned to go on a hunger strike to demand that their administration fulfill its earlier promises of strengthening its Asian Americans studies program. At the last minute, Wellesley officials gave into the students' demands.

Incidents of anti-Asian intimidation and physical attacks are sickening by themselves. They are often made worse when the authorities in charge don't take the appropriate actions to address them.

The Definition of Cruel and Unusual Punishment

The recent case of Wen Ho Lee further symbolizes not just how authorities can be not just insensitive to Asian Americans but also outright hostile to us as well. Dr. Lee was working as a research scientist at the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory on military missile systems. In the midst of national hysteria about nuclear secrets being passed onto China in 1999, Dr. Lee was arrested and charged with 59 counts of mishandling classified information.

His arrest was one thing. But again, the most outrageous part of the story was how he was subsequently treated by the "criminal justice" system. Dr. Lee was denied bail, kept in solitary confinement, and forced to wear leg shackles and chains for nine months. Keep in mind that he was never charged with espionage -- just mishandling classified documents. All the while, the U.S. Justice Department struggled to build a case against him.

Finally, in September 2000, just two days before they were forced to produce documents to support their case against him, the government dropped all but one of those 59 charges against him. This was also after everyone learned that an FBI agent provided false testimony about Dr. Lee in the initial investigation. Dr. Lee was finally released after pleading guilty to one count of mishandling computer data. At his release hearing, the presiding judge in the case took the unprecedented step of apologizing to Dr. Lee:

I sincerely apologize to you, Doctor Lee, for the unfair manner in which you were held in custody by the executive branch. They have embarrassed our entire nation and each of us who is a citizen of it.

The world-renowned *New York Times* also issued an official apology to its readers regarding its coverage of Dr. Lee's situation. The *Times* admitted that they did not do the proper research and fact finding when they first investigated the story and that they were wrong in presuming Dr. Lee was guilty and wrong for helping to convict him in the court of media sensationalism and public opinion. Finally, in August 2001, the Justice Department released a report that criticized the Energy Department for providing inaccurate, incomplete, and misleading information to the FBI and the FBI for failing to investigate and verify that information in its case against Wen Ho Lee.

Dr. Lee's case is yet another example of government-sanctioned **scapegoating** and **racial profiling** -- singling out someone to take the blame for some overexaggerated problem just because of their race or ethnicity. Sadly, it is a continuation of a pattern of anti-Asian racism that continues to target our community, based again on the two predominant stereotypes against us -- that we're all the same and that we're all foreigners and therefore, not American.

Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Redux: The COVID-19 Situation

In early 2020, reports started circulating about a new infectious respiratory disease that seems to have originated in Wuhan, China. Similar in nature to previous "Severe acute respiratory syndromes," this strain eventually became known as COVID-19 (for "Coronavirus Disease 2019"), also referred to as the "Coronavirus." Eventually, COVID-19 became a pandemic that has spread around the world and as of June 2020, there has been almost 7 million cases reported across 188 countries, resulting in more than 400,000 deaths.



Figure 2.7.2.10: Wuhan: huMan. (CC PDM 1.0; mockba1_1999 (William Sutherland) via [ipernity](#))

The COVID-19 pandemic has also resulted in widespread racist and xenophobic rhetoric (such as using terms like "Chinese virus," "Wuhan virus," or "Kung-flu"), along with mis/disinformation, and conspiracy theories spread through various media outlets. In turn, these have led to suspicion, hostility, hate, and even violence against anyone perceived to be Chinese or more generally, Asian, Pacific Islander and/or Asian American. From March of 2020-March of 2021 there were over 3,000 self-reported instances of anti-Asian violence including stabbings, beatings, verbal harassment, bullying and being spit on. Of course being spit on is offensive enough, but during a global pandemic that spreads mostly through droplets, it can also be deadly (Lee and Huang, 2021). These hateful acts have forced Asian Americans into a constant state of hyper-awareness and vigilance when they are in public, taking a huge emotional toll. According to Jennifer Lee and Tiffany Huang (2021), the 2020 Asian American Voter Survey indicated that more than three out of four Asian Americans are concerned about harassment, discrimination, and hate crimes due to COVID-19.

Sadly, these forms of anti-Asian prejudice and discrimination are part of a longer history of racist and xenophobic "Yellow Peril" stereotypes that associate Asians, especially Chinese, and Asian Americans with disease and more generally, being economic, cultural, and/or physical threats to U.S. society. These forms of ignorance and bigotry have been targeted at people of Asian descent in the U.S. for over 150 years. They flare up whenever the U.S. faces any kind of crisis that involves China or some other Asian country, and are exacerbated by political leaders who seek to scapegoat Asians and/or Asian Americans as a way to

misdirect anxiety during such times and whose actions implicitly or explicitly embolden acts of anti-Asian hate.

Of course, such incidents of anti-Asian hate are connected to all forms of structural racism and other examples of inequality and injustice. These incidents have also shattered the optimism that many Asian Americans had that U.S. society was making progress in reducing racism and moving toward greater inclusion and equity (optimistically symbolized by the growing popularity and success of such Asian- and Asian American-centered media/cultural products such as *Crazy Rich Asians* or K-Pop/BTS, etc.). Instead, these examples of anti-Asian discrimination have illuminated how Asian Americans are still considered as "perpetual foreigners" and that our fight for cultural citizenship (i.e. not just legal rights, but full and complete integration and equity into the fundamental fabric of U.S. society, from its social institutions down to everyday interpersonal interactions) continues. A recent video by Angela Nguyen posted on social media has called attention to this issue which mainstream U.S. press has largely ignore - which resulted in more recent coverage.

Interactive Content

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this Interactive Content online](#)



Video 2.7.2.11: Asian American Communities Organize Against Rise in Hate Crimes, Say More Policing is Not the Answer. (Close-captioning and other YouTube settings will appear once the video starts.) (Fair Use; [Democracy Now!](#) via [YouTube](#))

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2.7.3: Intersectionality

Women and Gender Issues

Where Do Women Fit In?

Asian America has masked a series of internal tensions. In order to produce a sense of racial solidarity, Asian American activists framed social injustices in terms of race, veiling other competing social categories such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality. The relative absence of gender as a lens for Asian American activism and resistance throughout the 1970s until the present should therefore be read as neither an indication of the absence of gender inequality nor of the disengagement of Asian American women from issues of social justice.

Many Asian American activists (including some of the authors in this book) refute the label "feminist" although their work pays special attention to the experiences of women. Sometimes this feeling reflects a fear of alienating men -- a consequence that seems inevitable if men are unable to own up to their gender privilege. At other times, the antipathy towards feminism reflects the cultural insensitivity and racism of white, European feminists.

Dragon Ladies: A Brief History

Empress Tsu-hsi ruled China from 1898 to 1908 from the Dragon Throne. The New York Times described her as "the wicked witch of the East, a reptilian dragon lady who had arranged the poisoning, strangling, beheading, or forced suicide of anyone who had ever challenged her autocratic rule." The shadow of the Dragon Lady -- with her cruel, perverse, and inhuman ways -- continued to darken encounters between Asian women and the West they flocked to for refuge.

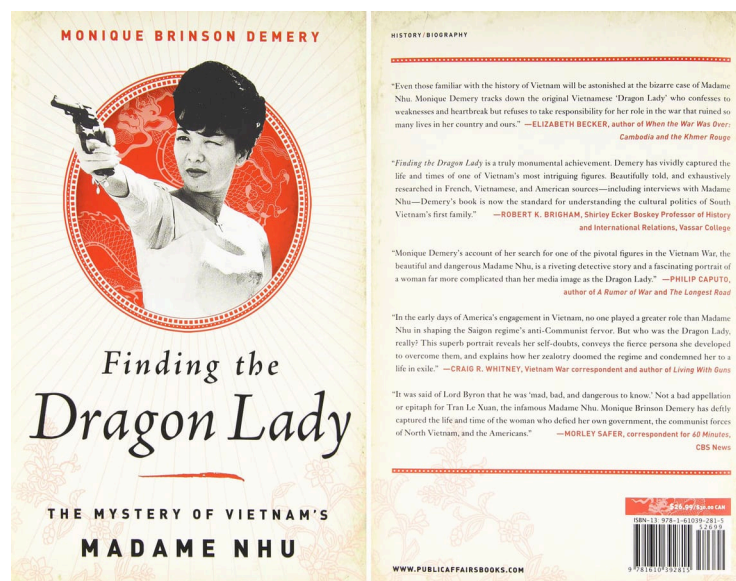


Figure 2.7.3.1: "Finding the Dragon Lady: The Mystery of Vietnam's Madame Nhu - Monique Brinson Demery" (CC BY 2.0; manhhai via Flickr)

Far from being predatory, many of the first Asian women to come to the U.S. in the mid-1800s were disadvantaged Chinese women, who were tricked, kidnapped, or smuggled into the country to serve the predominantly male Chinese community as prostitutes. The impression that all Asian women were prostitutes, born at that time, "colored the public perception of, attitude toward, and action against all Chinese women for almost a century," writes historian Sucheng Chan.

Police and legislators singled out Chinese women for special restrictions "not so much because they were prostitutes as such (since there were also many white prostitutes around) but because -- as Chinese -- they allegedly brought in especially virulent strains of venereal diseases, introduced opium addiction, and enticed white boys into a life of sin," Chan also writes. Chinese women who were not prostitutes ended up bearing the brunt of the Chinese exclusion laws that passed in the late 1800s.

During these years, Japanese immigration stepped up, and with it, a reactionary anti-Japanese movement joined established anti-Chinese sentiment. During the early 1900s, Japanese numbered less than 3 percent of the total population in California, but nevertheless encountered virulent and sometimes violent racism. The "picture brides" from Japan who emigrated to join their husbands in the U.S. were, to racist Californians, "another example of Oriental treachery," according to historian Roger Daniels.

It bears noting that despite the fact that they weren't in the country in large numbers, Asian women shouldered much of the cost of subsidizing Asian men's labor. U.S. employers didn't have to pay Asian men as much as other laborers who had families to support, since Asian women in Asian bore the costs of rearing children and taking care of the older generation.

Asian women who did emigrate here before the 1960s were also usually employed as cheap labor. In the pre-World War II years, close to half of all Japanese American women were employed as servants or laundresses in the San Francisco area. The World War II internment of Japanese Americans made them especially easy to exploit: they had lost their homes, possessions, and savings when forcibly interned at the camps. Yet, in order to leave, they had to prove they had jobs and homes. U.S. government officials thoughtfully arranged for their employment by fielding requests, most of which were for servants.

Immigration Characteristics

Issues concerning immigration affect many aspects of the Asian American community. This is understandable since almost two-thirds of all Asian Americans are foreign-born. Before trying to examine the many controversies regarding the benefits or costs of immigration, we first need to examine the characteristics of the immigrant population, Asian and otherwise.

The Immigrant and U.S. Born Populations

The data in the following table was calculated using the 2000 Census 1% Public Use Microdata Samples, and they compare different immigrant groups (based on their home country area) with each other and with all those who are either U.S.-born or foreign-born in the U.S. on different measures of socioeconomic achievement. You can click on a column heading to sort up or down. You can also read the detailed description of the [methodology and terminology](#) used to create the statistics.

The statistics include immigrants from all countries, not just those from Asia. According to the 2000 Census, the immigrant/foreign-born population of the U.S. was just about 28,910,800. Of these, 5.5% were Black, 25.9% were Asian, 46.4% were Hispanic/Latino, and 22.1% were white. The statistics below represent sound research but different statistics can be used to support both sides of an issue. So you can choose to agree with my conclusions or not.

We should first understand that immigrating to another country is not an easy thing to do. It almost always involves making elaborate preparations and costs a lot of money. Many times it also means giving up personal relationships at home (at least temporarily, if not permanently) and learning a new language and culture. The point is, not everyone who wants to immigrate actually does. In fact, those who are very poor rarely immigrate -- they just don't have the resources. Those who do immigrate tend to be from their country's middle and professional classes.

This point is illustrated by the results from the table, which compares various socioeconomic characteristics between U.S.-born and immigrant groups by their home country area. To view the full-size table of statistics, click on Table 9.3.2. Once the table appears, you can click on a column heading to sort up or down. You can also read the detailed description of the [methodology and terminology](#) used to create the statistics.

Table 2.7.3.2: Socioeconomic characteristics of immigrant groups by home country area. (Courtesy of [Asian Nation](#))

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Immigrant Groups by Home Country Area

Numbers are in percentages, except for income
Click on a column heading to sort up or down

	Not Proficient in English	Less Than High School	College Degree	Advanced Degree	High Skill Occupation	Married, Spouse Present	Homeowner	Median Personal Income	Median Family Income	Living in Poverty	Public Assistance
All U.S.-Born	0.6	17.5	23.1	2.6	19.8	60.8	74.8	\$22,100	\$46,000	11.7	1.8
All Immigrants	30.5	39.1	23.3	4.2	20.2	62.1	55.7	\$15,600	\$42,000	17.0	2.6
Asia & Pacific Islands	23.4	21.2	42.5	6.8	34.3	67.9	60.2	\$20,600	\$56,800	12.4	2.4
Africa	7.6	12.1	43.8	8.2	29.1	58.7	44.1	\$20,000	\$45,005	15.7	2.6
Europe, Russia, & Canada	11.5	23.2	28.9	5.8	27.5	64.9	69.7	\$26,000	\$49,015	10.9	1.7
Latin & South America and Caribbean	44.0	57.4	9.1	1.9	8.0	58.0	47.7	\$15,600	\$42,400	22.3	3.0

The results show that immigrants as a group actually have a slightly higher college degree attainment rate and a much higher rate of having an advanced degree (medical, law, or doctorate) than do the U.S.-born. On both measures, immigrants from Africa actually have the highest educational achievement rates and they also have the lowest rate of having less than a high school education. African immigrants are also most likely to be in the labor market.

Therefore, it's clear that immigrants from Africa tend to come from their country's elite classes. In contrast, the statistics point out that immigrants from Latin and South America and from the Caribbean have the lowest educational attainment rates. We can probably surmise from this that they are more likely to be from rural or working class backgrounds. As another example of this implication, immigrants from Latin/South America and the Caribbean have the lowest median personal (per capita) income, as well as the highest rates of living in poverty and receiving public assistance.

In addition, they have the lowest rates of being married with spouse present, working in a high skill (executive, professional, technical, or upper management) occupation and the lowest media socioeconomic index (SEI) score, a measure of occupational prestige. However, these statistics do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that immigrants from Latin/South America and the Caribbean are a drain on the U.S. economy or that they consume more benefits than they contribute. For a discussion of that issue, be sure to read the article on [the impacts of immigration](#).

Other Groups and Their Levels of Success

In regard to other immigrant groups, the statistics above show that immigrants from Asia and Pacific Islands compare quite favorably to other immigrants and to the U.S.-born as well. However, there also seems to be a much wider spread of characteristics among Asian immigrants. In other words, there seems to be many who are more likely to be from rural or working class backgrounds (and therefore have lower socioeconomic attainment rates), along with many other Asian immigrants from middle class and professional backgrounds who have very high attainment rates.

For example, Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants have a much rate of not being proficient in English than do the U.S.-born (which is understandable since English is a foreign language to most Asians) and they also have a higher rate of less than high school completion than do the U.S.-born. On the other hand, Asian & Pacific Islander immigrants have a median personal (per capita) income comparable to the U.S.-born, along with a much higher median family income. They also have higher rates of having a college degree, an advanced degree, and working at a high skill occupation than do the U.S.-born.



Figure 2.7.3.3: Citizenship ceremony, 1960. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Oregon Nikkei Legacy Center via Flickr)

Similarly, immigrants from Europe, Russia, and Canada tend to have socioeconomic attainment levels that are very comparable to that for the U.S.-born and in several categories, outperform them as well. These include higher rates of having a college degree, an advanced degree, working in a high skill occupation, and most notably, the highest median personal (per capita) income of all groups in the table. Interestingly, they also have the lowest rate of being in the labor market, which may suggest that many are retired but rather affluent as well.

Overall, all of these socioeconomic measures and statistics comparing immigrants to the U.S.-born population suggest that in most cases, both groups are relatively close to the other. But again, these numbers can be used to support both sides of the immigration debate -- that immigrants are not achieving as well as the U.S.-born and vice-versa. However, it does seem clear that these statistics do not support the stereotype of immigrants as being chronically unemployed, in poverty, and on public assistance. They do suggest that just like any other social group in the U.S., there is a lot of diversity within each group and that we as a society should be careful about making sweeping generalizations about all members of a particular group.

Religion, Spirituality & Faith

Among the more traditional elements of Asian American culture, religion, spirituality, and faith have always been important to Asian American communities, as they were for many generations before them. But within the diversity of the Asian American community, so too comes diversity in our religious beliefs and practices.

Which Religion is the Most Popular?

One of the first questions to examine is, which religions or faith traditions are the most popular among Asian Americans and among each of the different Asian ethnic groups? Unfortunately, nationally representative and reliable statistics are difficult to find. There are few studies or data that would answer these questions conclusively, particularly ones that break down religious affiliation among different Asian ethnic groups.

Table 2.7.3.4: American Religious Identification Survey 1990-2008: Asian Americans. (Data from the [ARIS](#))

American Religious Identification Survey 1990-2008: Asian Americans			
	1990	2001	2008
None/Agnostic	16%	22%	27%
Eastern Religions	8%	22%	21%

American Religious Identification Survey 1990-2008: Asian Americans			
Catholic	27%	20%	17%
Other Christian			
<i>Christian Generic</i>	13%	11%	10%
<i>Mainline Christian</i>	11%	6%	6%
<i>Baptist</i>	9%	4%	3%
<i>Pentecostal & Protestant</i>	3%	2%	2%
<i>Mormon</i>	2%	0%	0%
Muslim	3%	8%	8%
New Religious Movements	2%	1%	2%
Jewish	1%	0%	0%
Don't Know/ Declined to Answer	4%	5%	5%

Nonetheless, there are some statistics that give a general picture of religious affiliation within the Asian American community. One of the largest, most up to date, and most comprehensive sources is the [American Religious Identification Survey \(ARIS\)](#), conducted by researchers at Trinity College (CT). The ARIS was first conducted in 1990, again in 2000, and the most recent wave was completed in 2008. The 2008 study includes data from a large, nationally representative sample of 54,461 U.S. adults in the 48 contiguous states.

The following Table 9.3.5 is taken from the [ARIS 2008 report](#). The results show that while no religion can claim a majority of followers in the Asian American community, as of 2008, those who claim no religious affiliation are the largest group. In fact, this group has grown significantly since the first ARIS study in 1990 and its percentage in 2008 (27%) among Asian American is the largest of all the major racial ethnic groups in the study (whites are second with 16% claiming no religious affiliation). The second-largest religious group among Asian Americans are "Eastern Religions" that include Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Baha'i, Shintoist, Zoroastrian, and Sikh. These Eastern Religions saw a dramatic increase from 1990 to 2001, then leveled off in 2008. Catholics are the third-largest group at 17% in 2008, with their proportions declining notably from 27% in 1990.

Table 2.7.3.5: Pew Research Institute, Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008: Asian Americans. (Used with permission; Religious Landscape Study. Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (2020))

		2008
Christian		45%
	<i>Protestant</i>	27%
	Evangelical	17%
	Mainline	9%
	Historically Black	< 0.5%
	<i>Catholic</i>	17%
	<i>Mormon</i>	1%
	<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	< 0.5%
	<i>Orthodox</i>	< 0.5%
	<i>Other Christian</i>	< 0.5%
Eastern & Other Religions		30%
	<i>Hindu</i>	14%
	<i>Buddhist</i>	9%
	<i>Muslim</i>	4%
	<i>Other World Religions</i>	2%
	<i>Other Faiths</i>	1%
	<i>Jewish</i>	< 0.5%
Unaffiliated		23%
	<i>Secular Unaffiliated</i>	11%
	<i>Religious Unaffiliated</i>	5%
	<i>Agnostic</i>	4%
	<i>Atheist</i>	3%
	<i>Don't Know/Refused</i>	2%

The category of "Christian Generic" (comprising those who identified as Christian, Protestant, Evangelical/ Born Again Christian, Born Again, Fundamentalist, Independent Christian, Missionary Alliance Church, and Non-Denominational Christian) is the fourth-largest group at 10% in 2008. Other Christian and Protestant denominations are listed below that. The results show that in 2008, Muslims represented 8% of the Asian American population (up from 3% in 1990) and "New Religious Movements" (comprising those who identified as Scientology, New Age, Eckankar, Spiritualist, Unitarian-Universalist, Deist, Wiccan, Pagan, Druid, Indian

Religion, Santeria, and Rastafarian) claiming 2% in 2008.

These results are largely confirmed by a second comprehensive survey of religious identification taken in 2008, the [U.S. Religious Landscape Survey](#) (1.2 MB), a national survey of over 35,000 respondents conducted by the [Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life](#).

In contrast to the ARIS 2008 report, the USLRS methodology sometimes includes the same denomination with separate categories (i.e., Baptists can be both "Evangelical" and "Mainline") -- please check page 12 and Appendix 2 of the USLRS report for the exact categorizations and their detailed explanation of their methodology. The data shown here is for Asian American respondents only and is taken from page 40 of their report.

Again the data show that Christian faiths and denominations claim the highest percentage of followers among Asian Americans, with Eastern Religions and unaffiliated responses also claiming large numbers of respondents. Interesting, once the unique faiths within the "Eastern Religions" category are expanded, we see that Hinduism is the most popular eastern faith among Asian Americans (due largely to the large size of the Indian American population), with Buddhism second.

Unfortunately, neither the ARIS nor the USLRS studies break the religious affiliation down to specific Asian ethnic groups. For that matter, I have yet to find any research that does. So to try to measure the size of religions within each ethnic group, we can look at the proportions for different religions within that Asian country. Although it's not completely accurate, it's a generally safe assumption that the religious proportions within an Asian country are similar to that within its community in the U.S., since the majority of Asian Americans are foreign-born, as stated in the [2000 CIA World Factbook](#):

- Bangladesh: Muslim 88.3%, Hindu 10.5%, other 1.2%
- India: Hindu 80%, Muslim 14%, Christian 2.4%, Sikh 2%, Buddhist 0.7%, Jains 0.5%, other 0.4%
- Philippines: Roman Catholic 83%, Protestant 9%, Muslim 5%, Buddhist and other 3%
- Japan: observe both Shinto and Buddhist 84%, other 16% (including Christian 0.7%)
- South Korea: Christian 49%, Buddhist 47%, Confucianist 3%, Shamanist, Chondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way), and other 1%

Again, these stats are imperfect because as China and Viet Nam are both officially atheist countries, there are no statistics on the proportions of religions in each country.



Figure 2.7.3.6: Indian/Filipino wedding. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Ron Tamondong via Flickr)

How Religion, Spirituality, and Faith Help

Ultimately, as there is so much diversity in the Asian American population in so many ways, so too this applies to our religions and practices of spirituality and faith. But they all share the commonality of helping Asian Americans adjust to life in the U.S. and all the issues that surround what it means to be an Asian American.

As several social scientists point out, these various forms of spirituality and faith help Asian Americans to deal with the upheavals of immigration, adapting to a new country, and other difficult personal and social transformations by providing a safe and comfortable environment in which immigrants can socialize, share information, and assist each other. In this process, religious traditions can help in the process of forming Asian immigrant communities by giving specific Asian ethnic groups another source of solidarity, in addition to their common ethnicity, on which to build relationships and cooperation. In fact, history shows that numerous churches and religious organizations played very important roles in helping immigrants from China, Japan, the Philippines, South Asia, and Korea adjust to life in the U.S.

Also, the secular functions of religion are just as, if not even more important in helping Asian Americans in their everyday lives. Specifically, many churches, temples, and other religious organizations provide their members with important and useful services around practical, everyday matters such as translation assistance. Other practical examples include information and assistance on issues relating to education, employment, housing, health care, business and financial advice, legal advice, marriage counseling, and dealing with their Americanized children, etc. As such, many churches are almost like social service agencies in terms of the ways in which they help Asian Americans in practical, day-to-day matters.

Other scholars and studies show that churches can also provide social status and prestige for their members. As one example sociologist Pyong Gap Min describes that since many Korean immigrants face underemployment due to their lack of English fluency once they immigrate to the U.S. (especially if they come from educated and professional backgrounds in Korea), they often feel ashamed, embarrassed, or alienated as they adjust to their lower status level in the U.S. Within their church however, many Korean immigrants find a sense of status through official positions inside the church. These can include being assistant ministers, education directors, unordained associate pastors, elders, deacons, and committee chairs, etc.

Finally, as Bankston and Zhou point out in their study of the New Orleans Vietnamese community, religion can play a significant part in affecting a young Asian American's ethnic identity. The Catholic churches in the Vietnamese section of the city helped to keep young Vietnamese Americans integrated within the larger community. Those youngsters who attended church and participated in religious activities more were more likely to do well in school and to [stay out of trouble](#).

Of course, religion, spirituality, and faith is only one part of this adaptation and socialization process and it interacts with many other factors in affecting how an Asian immigrant adjusts to his/her new life in the U.S. Nonetheless, its power is undeniable. For hundreds of generations in the past, it has bonded communities and been the basis for many people's lives. Even with changes in culture, physical location, and social institutions, its effect lives on.

Young, Gay, and APA

Asian Americans who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) frequently face a double or even triple jeopardy -- being targets of prejudice and discrimination because of their ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The following is an article entitled "Young, Gay, and APA," originally published in the July 17, 1999 issue of AsianWeek Magazine, written by Joyce Nishioka. It captures many of the obstacles and challenges that LGBT Asian Americans go through as they search for acceptance and happiness with the multiple forms of their personal identities.

Double Jeopardy

Nineteen-year-old Eric Aquino remembers a day not that long ago when he knelt down to tie his shoe during P.E. class. He looked up to find a boy towering over him, saying, "That's where you belong" and making a comment about oral sex. "People teased me because they perceived me as a gay, fag queer," he remembers. "What could I do but ignore it? One thing I always did was ignore it."

While feelings of rejection and questions about "being normal" haunt most adolescents, they often hit harder at those who are minorities, either racial or sexual. And too often, those are the kids who get the least support. A 1989 study from the Department of Health and Human Services found that a gay teen who comes out to his or her parents faced about a 50-50 chance of being rejected and 1 in 4 had to leave home. Ten years later, a study in The Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine found that gay and bisexual teens are more than three times as likely to attempt suicide as other youths.

Surveys indicate that 80 percent of gay students do not feel safe in schools, and one poll by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed 1 in 13 high school students had been attacked or harassed because they were perceived to be homosexual. Nationwide, 18 percent of all gay students are physically injured to the point they require medical treatment, and they are seven times as likely as their straight peers to be threatened with a weapon at school, according to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight



Figure 2.7.3.7: Gay Asian Pacific Support Network. (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0; Akasha Yi via Flickr)

Protecting homosexual Asian teens from discrimination requires double-duty measures, advocates say. Ofie Virtucio, a coordinator for AQUA, San Francisco's only citywide organization for gay Asian American teenagers (now known as the API Wellness Center), maintains that they are especially likely to be closeted and ignored. "Asians are the model minorities," she says, describing a common stereotype. "They can't be gay or at risk; they don't commit suicide or self-mutilate." In reality, Kim says, "There are many API youths in the California public school system who are gay or perceived as being gay and face angry discrimination and harassment. And there is nothing to adequately protect them."

As Kwok and thousands of others might attest, to be young, gay and APA is to simultaneously confront the ugly specters of barriers and discrimination that come with being gay in America and those that come with being Asian in America. "With the anti-Asian sentiment, students are harassed more for being Asian because it's more visible than sexuality," says San Francisco school district counselor Crystal Jang.

The Closet is a Lonely Place to Live

"People don't think there are API gays and lesbians," Virtucio says. "There is hardly any research, and no money goes to them." Consequently, no one knows precisely how many of San Francisco's Asian American children are gay. But if the often quoted figure of 10 percent of a population holds, the figure could exceed 1,300 in the public junior high and high schools alone. Asian American students, says Jang, account for about 90 percent of the kids she sees through the district's Support Services for Sexual Minorities Youth Program. Though there are more support groups for gay youths than ever before, Virtucio said many Asian American teens find it difficult to fit in. Nor do they have any role models. This decade's most noted gays and lesbians -- actresses Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche, Ambassador James Hormel and former Wisconsin congressman Steve Gunderson, Migden and Kuehl -- are all white, and so is society's perception of gay America.

"They can't go to programs for queer gay youths when no one speaks their language," Virtucio says. "How can they be understood when they talk about their close-knit family they can never come out to? They need to see people like them. Even if it's just serving rice, they need something familiar so they could [relate] and feel like they could be part of this community," says Virtucio, who touts her four-year-old group as "a channel to come out." In the summer, 20 to 30 teens -- half of whom are immigrants -- go to AQUA's weekly drop-in sessions. Though the group initially attracted mostly college-age men, most of its members today are younger, and half are female. At a recent get-together, the girls seemed much less vocal than boys, and though several young men agreed to be interviewed, no girls did. Jang explains that girls are more likely than boys to refrain from expressing their sexuality, possibly because of the shame they think they may bring on themselves and their families. One girl, she recalled, fell in love with her godsister and wanted to tell her, but she was afraid that if she did, everyone in Chinatown would find out.

For both genders, though, coming out to family and friends is a huge issue, one that Virtucio says cannot be put off indefinitely. "Parents want to know," she said, adding that many AQUA members have told her that they suspected that their parents knew

about their sexuality long before their children would admit it to themselves. Mothers, she said, might ask daughters questions like, "Why do you dress that way? Wear a skirt." Or they might tell their sons, "Don't walk like that." At the same time, she said, cultural pressures to put the family first or to hide one's feelings often convince Asian and Asian American youth to internalize their sexuality. Each family member often is expected to fill an explicit role. For example, she explained, a Filipina, particularly the first-born daughter, "is supposed to take care of the family, and get married and have kids." A first-born Chinese son, she added, "can never be gay. He is supposed to extend the family name."

Desmond Kwok says his parents accept his sexual orientation -- though they don't necessarily support him emotionally. He acknowledges an ongoing "starvation for love" that he blames on his parents. Both have been distant, he says, especially his father, a businessman who lives in Chicago. Kwok says he found support for coming out not from his family, but from a gang he was in two years ago. "They were really cool with it, and it boosted my confidence in the whole coming-out process," he said. "They'd say, 'If someone has a grudge against you for being gay, we're there for you. We'll kick their asses.' "

Now, Kwok dates "older" Asian and Asian American men -- at least 19 -- because few come out before then, he says. He admits that he has tried to find boyfriends over the Internet, at bars and cafes, "the worst places to meet a good boyfriend. A graduate of the School of the Arts, a magnet academy, Kwok said he intends to continue his work as an advocate for gay Asian and Asian American teens. Yet even now he cannot rid "the feeling of being alone -- being around people who really love you, but still knowing they are heterosexual. They'll be with their girlfriends or boyfriends, and here I am all alone, sitting around, boo-hoo, no boyfriend."

'Straight' Into Isolation, 'Out' Into Happiness

Eric Aquino never had such peer support growing up in Vallejo, Calif., and especially in junior high school. "I felt alone," Aquino said. He avoided his locker, where the popular kids hung out, and instead took long, circuitous paths to classes to dodge their cruel comments. "A good day for me was being able to walk down the hall without having anyone ask, 'Are you gay? Do you suck dick?'" His grades fell. "I would be late to class and wouldn't bring my books," he explained. "I couldn't concentrate. I looked at the clock until it was 3 o'clock and time to go."

Aquino's high school years were both the happiest and one of the most depressing times of his life. He joined marching band and had friends for the first time, but he also started feeling that he was, in fact, gay. "Friends were important to me because I never had any, but they didn't know me for what I was," he said. Aquino thought perhaps he should wait until he was 18 to come out, so that if his parents rejected him, he could run away. He also considered living in the closet and spent much of his time thinking of ways to keep his secret. "I thought of different alternatives, other options. Like, I'll get married and have kids, [then divorce] and be a single parent, and my parents would just think I never found love again."

Thinking Sociologically

Once LGBTQ Asian Americans come out of the closet, do they find more support and acceptance within the mainstream LGBTQ community? Many do, but unfortunately, anti-Asian racism among the predominantly white LGBTQ community still exists. Joseph Erbentraut's article ["Gay Anti-Asian Prejudice Thrives On the Internet"](#) and Gay.net's article ["Gay Racism Comes Out"](#) provide insight into the challenges that LGBTQ Asian Americans face with regards to acceptance in the larger LGBTQ community. How are LGBTQ Asian Americans treated in the LGBTQ community in your city?

Ofiee Virtucio, 21, can relate to the feeling of isolation. "Maybe it's the feeling where you know you're Asian but sometimes in situations you're embarrassed to be," she said. "That's where I was for a long time. Of course I was lonely." When she was 13 and still in the Philippines, she recalls, her mother asked her, "Tomboy ca ba?" -- are you gay? She looked me in the eyes; she was worried," Virtucio said. "I said, 'No!' " She wishes that her mom had replied, "Whatever you are, it's OK. I still love you, Ofie." " Two years later, the family came to the United States. "I had to be white in a month," she recalled. "When I started talking, I had an American accent that I could use, so I could make friends," she said. "During senior year, I was in denial being Filipino and didn't talk about being gay. Most importantly, I had to get friends. I had to get to know what America is all about. I had to survive."

She recalled: "I was trying to be straight but didn't want to have sex. I didn't want a man's penis in me." Though she had a boyfriend in high school, she secretly had crushes on girls, especially the teenage lesbians who were "out." At the same time, she recalls, she "couldn't relate. They were more 'we're-here-we're-queer' ... I knew I was gay, but I thought, 'I'm not like that.' It made me think I could never be like that." So, she said, "When my friends would talk about cute guys, I would jump into the conversation. I thought, 'OK, I have to do this right now,' so I'd say things like, 'Oh, he's so cute.' "Then when I would go home, I'd be like ... oh," said Virtucio, covering her eyes with her palms. "It hurts. It really, really hurts."

Virtucio finally acknowledged her sexuality during her college years, "the happiest time in my life." At age 18, she found her first girlfriend and experienced her first kiss, but it took many more years before she felt truly comfortable about being a lesbian. "I knew it was going to be a hard life," she said. "I thought, 'How am I going to tell my siblings? How am I going to get a job? Am I going to be constrained to having only gay friends? What are people going to think of me? I thought people would know now -- just because I know I'm gay -- that they'll just see it.'"

Virtucio never had the opportunity to come out to her mother, who passed away when she was 15. But in college, she did tell her father. She remembers he was in the garden watering plants when he asked her, out of the blue, whether her girlfriend was more than a friend. Startled, Virtucio says she denied it, but later that day, she opened the door to his bedroom and said it was true. They took a walk on the beach after that. "He told me whatever made me happy was fine," Virtucio recalls. "My father used to be mean to my mom, pot-bellied, chauvinistic," she says. "But for some reason he found it in his heart to understand. That moment was amazing for me. I thought if my dad could understand, I really don't care what the world thinks. I'm just going to be the person I am."

Contributors and Attributions

- Tsuhako, Joy. (Cerritos College)
- Gutierrez, Erika. (Santiago Canyon College)
- [Asian Nation](#) (Le) (CC BY-NC-ND) adapted with permission

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2.7.4: Social Institutions

Education

In a lot of ways, Asian Americans have done remarkably well in achieving "the American dream" of getting a good education, working at a good job, and earning a good living. So much so that the image many have of Asian Americans is that we are the "model minority" -- a bright, shining example of hard work and patience whose example other people of colors should follow (Wu, 2018). However, the practical reality is slightly more complicated than that.

Statistics Don't Lie . . . Do They?

Once in a great while, statistics don't lie. It is true that in many ways, Asian Americans have done very well socially and economically. The data in Table 9.4.1 was calculated using the 2000 Census Public Use Microdata Samples, then comparing the major racial/ethnic groups among different measures of what sociologists call "socioeconomic achievement."

Table 2.7.4.1: Socioeconomic characteristics by racial groups. (Courtesy of [Asian Nation](#))

Socioeconomic Characteristics by Racial/Ethnic and Asian Ethnic Groups											
Numbers are in percentages, except for income Click on a column heading to sort up or down											
	Not Proficient in English	Less Than High School	College Degree	Advanced Degree	High Skill Occupation	Married, Spouse Present	Homeowner	Median Personal Income	Median Family Income	Living in Poverty	Public Assistance
Whites	0.7	15.3	25.3	3.0	21.4	64.5	78.2	\$23,640	\$48,500	9.4	1.3
Blacks	0.8	29.1	13.6	1.2	12.3	38.0	54.4	\$16,300	\$33,300	24.9	4.5
Latinos/Hispanics	30.3	48.5	9.9	1.6	9.6	56.3	52.4	\$14,400	\$36,000	21.4	3.5
Native American Indians	2.6	27.4	10.8	0.9	11.9	50.2	64.2	\$14,500	\$32,240	25.1	6.1
Indians	8.4	12.6	64.4	12.5	51.6	74.9	56.8	\$26,000	\$69,470	8.2	0.9
Cambodian, Hmong, or Laotian	44.3	52.7	9.2	0.4	9.8	66.6	53.3	\$16,000	\$43,850	22.5	9.9
Chinese	31.3	23.6	46.3	8.5	41.9	67.1	65.7	\$20,000	\$58,300	13.1	1.8
Filipinos	7.0	13.1	42.8	4.3	29.7	62.7	67.6	\$23,000	\$65,400	6.9	1.6
Japanese	10.0	9.5	40.8	4.6	32.0	60.7	70.8	\$26,000	\$61,630	8.6	0.9
Koreans	32.9	13.8	43.6	5.6	27.0	69.0	51.9	\$16,300	\$48,500	15.5	1.6
Pacific Islanders	7.1	21.7	13.6	1.6	13.8	61.4	48.1	\$19,100	\$50,000	16.7	4.4
Vietnamese	40.4	37.8	13.8	2.5	22.6	61.2	60.0	\$16,000	\$51,500	13.8	4.8

These numbers tell you that among the five major racial/ethnic groups in the U.S., Asian Americans have the highest college degree attainment rate, rates of having an advanced degree (professional or Ph.D.), median family income, being in the labor force, rate of working in a "high skill" occupation (executive, professional, technical, or upper management), and median Socioeconomic Index (SEI) score that measures occupational prestige. Yes, in these categories, Asians even outperform whites. Asian Americans seem to have done so well that magazines such as Newsweek and respected television shows such as 60 Minutes proclaim us to be the "model minority."

Many people go even further and argue that since Asian Americans are doing so well, we no longer experience any discrimination and that Asian Americans no longer need public services such as bilingual education, government documents in multiple languages, and welfare. Further, using the first stereotype of Asian Americans, many just assume that all Asian Americans are successful and that none of us are struggling.

On the surface, it may sound rather benign and even flattering to be described in those terms. However, we need to take a much closer look at these numbers. As we will see, many other statistics show that Asian Americans are still the targets of racial inequality and institutional discrimination and that the model minority image is a myth.

When Good Numbers Go Bad

Again, we need to remember that not all Asian Americans are the same. For every Chinese American or South Asian who has a college degree, the same number of Southeast Asians are still struggling to adapt to their lives in the U.S. For example, as shown in the tables in the [Socioeconomic Statistics & Demographics](#) article, Vietnamese Americans only have a college degree attainment rate of 20%, less than half the rate for other Asian American ethnic groups. The rates for Laotians, Cambodians, and Hmong are even lower at less than 10% (Ty, 2017).

The results show that as a whole Asian American families have higher median incomes than white families. However, this is because in most cases, the typical Asian American family tends to have more members who are working than the typical white family. It's not unusual for an Asian American family to have four, five, or more members working. A more telling statistic is median personal income (also known as per capita income). The results above show that Asian Americans still trail whites on this very important measure.

"Success" May Only Be Skin-Deep

Another telling statistic is how much more money a person earns with each additional year of schooling completed, or what sociologists call "returns on education." One of the first in-depth studies that looked at per capita income between Asian Americans and other racial/ethnic groups came from Robert Jiobu and is cited in *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* by Sucheng Chan. Using this measure, research consistently shows that for each additional year of education attained, whites earn another \$522.

That is, beyond a high school degree, a white with 4 more years of education (equivalent to a college degree) can expect to earn \$2088 per year in salary. In contrast, returns on each additional year of education for a Japanese American is only \$438. For a Chinese American, it's \$320. For Blacks, it's even worse at only \$284. What this means is that basically, a typical Asian American has to get more years of education just to make the same amount of money that a typical white makes with less education.

Recent research from scholars such as Timothy Fong (2020), Roderick Harrison, and Paul Ong, to name just a few, continues to confirm these findings that controlling for other variables, Asian Americans still earn less money than whites with virtually equal qualifications. Once again, for each statistic that suggests everything is picture-perfect for Asian Americans, there is another that proves otherwise.

As another example, in California, almost 40% of all Vietnamese refugees are on public assistance and in Minnesota and Wisconsin, an equal number of Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians also receive public assistance. Another example is that of many Korean immigrants who come to the U.S. with very high levels of education. But for various reasons (i.e., not being fluent in English), many are not able to get decent jobs that pay well. Therefore, they are forced to work as janitors, waiters, busboys, or [go into business for themselves](#) to survive. The only reason why many Korean small business owners are able to make a small profit is that they have no paid employees and work 20 hours a day.

Always Check Below the Surface

Another point is that even despite the real successes we've achieved, Asian Americans are still significantly underrepresented in positions of political leadership at the local, regional, state, and federal levels (despite the successes of a few individuals such as Norman Mineta and Elaine Chao) -- just like Blacks, Latinos, and American Indians. In the corporate world, Asian Americans are underrepresented as CEOs, board members, and high-level supervisors -- just like Blacks, Latinos, and American Indians.



Figure 2.7.4.2: Chinese Miner Statue. (CC BY-SA 2.0; Nick Ares via Flickr)

This is not to say that there aren't Asians Americans out there who are quite successful and have essentially achieved the American dream. As their [socioeconomic attainment levels](#) clearly illustrate for example, Asian Indians consistently outperform not only other Asian ethnic groups but whites in several achievement measures, sometimes by a large margin. And of course, you'll find plenty of examples of Asian Americans who are quite affluent and successful, and as Asian Americans, we should rightly feel proud of these examples of success.

The point is that just because many Asian Americans have "made it," it does not mean that all Asian Americans have made it. In many ways, Asian Americans are still the targets of much prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. For instance, the persistent belief that "all Asians are smart" puts a tremendous amount of pressure on many Asian Americans. Many, particularly Southeast Asians, are not able to conform to this unrealistic expectation and in fact, have the [highest high school dropout rates](#) in the country (Chou, 2008).

Asian Americans are also increasingly becoming the targets of [hate crimes](#). In fact, research shows that Asian Americans are the fastest growing victims of hate crimes in the U.S. Asian Indians and other successful Asian Americans may have extraordinary levels of socioeconomic achievement but it's very unlikely that many of them will say that they no longer experience discrimination because of their Asian ethnicity.

Ultimately, the process of achieving socioeconomic success among Asian Americans is very complex. There are many examples of affluence and prosperity within the Asian American population but in many ways, we still face the same types of racism, social inequality, and institutional discrimination that other groups of color face. Therefore, the image that the entire Asian American community is the "model minority" is a myth.

The Economy

Work, employment, and occupational mobility have been prominent features of the history of Asian American communities ever since they first arrived in the U.S. In fact, the fundamental reason why the majority of Asians first immigrated to America was to find work and earning a living to support themselves and their families. To this day, work remains an important part of life for Asian Americans and the reason why so many Asians continue to immigrate to the U.S.

Self-Employment Then and Now

In the early era of Asian American history, the [Gold Rush](#) was one of the strongest pull factors that led many Chinese to come to the U.S. to find their fortune and return home rich and wealthy. In addition, many Chinese (and later other Asian groups as well) also came to Hawai'i as contract laborers to work in sugarcane plantations. On the mainland, Chinese also worked as small merchants, domestics, farmers, grocers, and starting in 1865, as railroad workers on the famous Transcontinental Railroad project.

However, the anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese nativist movement of the late 1800s, best represented by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, forced the Chinese to retreat into their own isolated communities as a matter of survival. Inside these early Chinatowns, the tradition of small business ownership developed as many Chinese provided services to other Chinese and increasingly, to non-Chinese, such as restaurants, laundry, and merchandise retailers.

The phenomenon of self-employment has been a prominent mode of work for many Asian Americans, starting with the first Asian immigrants into the U.S. and continuing through today. The [1965 Immigration and Nationality Act](#) led to the immigration of millions of Asians into the U.S. and also resulted in the growth of Asian ethnic enclaves in numerous metropolitan areas around the U.S. These two developments have led to a resurgence of self-employment among many Asian Americans.

Scholars have described four general reasons why Asian Americans are likely to become self-employed, all of which can overlap with each other. These theories are described in more detail in the article on [Asian Small Businesses](#). Briefly summarized, they include:

- Labor market discrimination: becoming self-employed in order to avoid having to settle for lower-status or lower-paying jobs in the conventional labor market.
- Ethnic resources: either having "cultural" characteristics that facilitate entrepreneurship or relying on family and relatives for cheap labor and/or co-ethnics for patronage.
- Structural opportunities: openings within certain economic sectors, markets, or industries that offer easy entry but also include high risks of failure.
- Class resources: attaining education, training and experience, and/or financial capital in order to enter self-employment.

These tensions have led to numerous incidents of hostility, most famously represented by the extensive burning of Korean-owned businesses in the Los Angeles riots of 1992. In response, many Asian small business owners have made concerted efforts to address these complaints and reach out more to their communities in order to improve relations.

Adapting to Deindustrialization

While a large proportion of Asian Americans are self-employed, most are conventional employees in the U.S. labor market. The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act finally made it illegal to discriminate against someone based on race or ethnicity, which removed legal barriers to employment opportunities for Asian Americans. Reflecting the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity of the Asian American population, contemporary Asian Americans also have different employment and occupational mobility patterns as well.

Social scientists have described how the American economy has undergone **deindustrialization** in the last few decades, from an economy based on manufacturing to one centered around technological innovation, information management, and services. Within this context, many scholars also note that the U.S. labor is becoming increasingly polarized. That is, there has been an expansion in the number of jobs at the top, within "information-intensive" sectors, and that require high levels of education and job skills and that pay very well -- jobs that many Asian Americans have successfully landed.

At the same time, there has also been a proliferation of jobs at the bottom that are relatively low-paying, unstable, and require little education or skills. However, the middle layer of skilled manufacturing and blue collar jobs has generally been shrinking, thereby leading to this stratified labor market. At the low end of the labor market, many Asian Americans share much in common with early Chinese laborers in that they possess little formal skills and English fluency. As a result, they have little choice but to work in relatively low-paying unstable service sector jobs, many located inside traditional urban Asian ethnic enclaves.

To illustrate these patterns, using data from the 2000 Census 5% PUMS, Table 9.4.3 presents distributions of occupational categories for different racial/ethnic and Asian groups (employed, ages 25-64).

Table 2.7.4.3: Distribution of occupational categories, by racial/ethnic and Asian groups. (Courtesy of [Asian Nation](#))

Distributions of Occupational Categories, by Racial/Ethnic and Asian Groups

Numbers are in percentages
Click on a column heading to sort up or down

	Executive & Senior Management	Computer, Scientific, & Engineering	Legal & Financial Services	Medical/ Healthcare Professionals	Education, Media, & Social Services	Sales, Operations, & Support	Skilled Blue-Collar	Manual Svcs., Farming, & Military
Whites	11.7	5.2	4.1	5.2	10.5	29.4	26.4	8.4
Blacks	5.5	2.7	2.6	4.3	8.7	31.3	30.5	13.8
Latinos/Hispanics	5.4	2.2	1.9	2.2	6.2	24.2	37.0	20.5
Native American Indians	6.8	2.5	2.1	3.1	9.0	26.3	33.6	16.1
Indians	11.1	25.8	4.9	11.8	6.6	22.5	12.4	4.8
Cambodian, Hmong, or Laotian	3.3	4.2	1.4	1.6	4.7	18.7	53.6	12.7
Chinese	10.9	19.9	6.2	5.5	8.6	23.2	14.4	12.7
Filipinos	5.5	7.1	5.0	15.7	4.7	31.7	17.9	12.7
Japanese	14.7	10.3	6.2	5.5	13.6	30.7	11.3	8.9
Koreans	10.8	7.0	4.5	6.2	10.1	31.0	17.9	12.8
Pacific Islanders	6.0	3.6	2.2	3.0	5.6	32.7	30.9	16.0
Vietnamese	4.2	12.0	2.9	3.9	4.2	18.1	37.0	17.8

The results indicate that for most racial/ethnic and Asian groups, the largest proportion within each group are concentrated in either the "Sales, Operations, and Support" or "Skilled Blue Collar" occupational categories. On the other hand, the lowest proportions within most groups are found in the "Legal and Financial Services" occupations.

Other notable findings are that, of all the racial/ethnic groups in the table, Asian Indians have the highest proportion in the "Computer, Scientific, & Engineering" occupations. Also, Chinese and Japanese share the highest proportion among all groups in the "Legal and Financial Services" occupations. Filipinos have the highest proportion of those in the "Medical/ Healthcare Professionals" categories while Japanese have the highest proportion in the "Education, Media, & Community Services" occupations.

In general, the results again confirm that, at least in terms of occupational attainment, Asian Indians as a group seem to have attained the most prestigious jobs. In addition, Chinese are well-represented in the computer, scientific, and engineering fields, Filipinos have a significant level of representation among medical professionals, and Japanese enjoy a relatively high level of representation as executives and upper management. Conversely, employed Cambodians/Hmong/Laotians and Vietnamese tend to be more working class, as shown by their higher representations in the skilled blue collar occupations.

Persistent Glass Ceiling Barriers

As the statistics show, many Asian Americans have attained skilled, prestigious, and relatively high-paying professional jobs. At the same time, many still face numerous challenges in their work environments. For example, although Asian Americans have the highest rates of having a college (43% of all adults between 25 and 64) or a law, medicine, or doctorate degree (6.5% of all adults between 25 and 64), they only have the second highest median personal (per capita) income behind that for white workers.

That is, within many occupations, Asian Americans are still paid less than whites, despite having the same educational credentials and years of job experiences. In addition, numerous studies continue to point out that Asian Americans are still underrepresented as senior executives in large publicly-owned corporations.

Many scholars point out that the relative lack of Asian Americans within the most prestigious occupations is due to the continuing presence of **glass ceiling** barriers within the workplace, meaning that one's success hits an invisible barrier. There are several glass ceiling mechanisms that affect Asian Americans. The first is that many companies consciously or unconsciously bypass Asian Americans when it comes to recruiting for and outreaching to future executives. This may be based on the implicit assumption that Asian Americans do not fit their picture of a future executive or corporate leader.



Figure 2.7.4.4: Discussions with members of the Asian-American business community at the Eden Center in Falls Church-at Falls Church, VA. (CC PDM 1.0; U.S. Senator Tim Kaine via Flickr)

A second glass ceiling mechanism occurs when Asian Americans have a hard time penetrating the old boys network (social connections experienced by elite men) in many occupational environments. Research consistently shows that it is in these informal social networks that valuable mentoring takes place, along with an exchange of important career information. In this case, Asian Americans are hurt by the persistently stereotype that all Asians are foreigners or outsiders.

Third is the phenomenon of "institutional tracking" in which Asian Americans are confined to only professional and technical jobs. While these jobs may pay well up to a certain point, many are dead end jobs that do not have promotion ladders or career tracks that lead up to supervisory or executive positions. Many Asian Americans are restricted to working in these "white collar sweatshops" because their supervisors may feel that they are not interested in managerial, supervisory, or executive positions.

Similarly, many Asian American professionals are alleged to lack the language, communication, or leadership skills required for promotion. In other words, the belief is that while Asian Americans are skilled at technical aspects of certain occupations, they may not have the "soft skills" related to personality, attitude, and behavior that would give them a competitive edge when it comes to moving up into senior leadership positions. Within this context, Asian American workers may be subject to biased and subjective standards of evaluating their work performance.

Achievement in the New Millennium

Despite the challenges that Asian American workers continue to face, they continue to use hard work and employment to attain socioeconomic mobility through numerous boom and bust cycles of the American economy. In the process, many Asian Americans have achieved impressive occupational successes and are poised to become prominent members of their respective industries.

Initially achieving success only to be driven into relative isolation, Asian Americans have persevered, adapted, and taken innovative strategies on their way toward achieving socioeconomic mobility. Reflecting the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Asian American population, employment patterns among workers range from unskilled service sector employees to highly-educated and highly-skilled professionals. Regardless of type of work, Asian Americans continue to further contribute to the strength and vitality of America's economy and culture.

The Family

One of the most public manifestations of race is the choice of one's partner or spouse. This very individual and personal aspect can sometimes produce a lot of public discussion. Studies consistently show that Asian Americans have some of the highest "intermarriage" (also known as "outmarriage") rates among racial/ethnic minorities -- marrying someone else outside of their own ethnic group. But as always, there's more to the story than just the headline.

The Public and Private Sides of Ethnicity

Whether it's dating or marrying someone of a different race, interracial relationships are not a new phenomenon among Asian Americans. When the first Filipino and Chinese workers came to the U.S. in the 1700s and 1800s, they were almost exclusively men. A few of them eventually married women in the U.S. who were not Asian. However, many people soon saw Asian intermarriage with whites as a threat to American society. Therefore, anti-miscegenation laws (discussed earlier in [Chapter 1.4](#)) were passed that prohibited Asians from marrying whites.

Table 2.7.4.5: Marriage Patterns for Six Largest Asian American Ethnic Groups (2010) (Updated Nov. 2011). (Data courtesy of [Asian Nation](#))

**Marriage Patterns for Six Largest
Asian American Ethnic Groups (2010)**
(Updated Nov. 2011)

	All Spouses	USR + USR or FR	USR + USR Only
Men			
Asian Indian	92.5	76.9	62.4
Other Asian	1.5	4.2	4.5
white	4.3	13.3	25.6
Black	0.3	0.9	0.7
Hispanic/Latino	0.8	2.5	3.5
Multiracial & All Others	0.6	2.1	3.4
Population Size (x1000)	701.6	62.1	32.1
Women			
Asian Indian	92.9	70.6	52.0
Other Asian	0.9	1.9	2.9
white	4.7	22.6	37.8
Black	0.5	1.8	2.8
Hispanic/Latino	0.4	1.4	2.1
Multiracial & All Others	0.7	1.7	2.4
Population Size (x1000)	691.6	68.3	39.2
Men			
Chinese	88.8	63.9	53.6
Other Asian	4.8	12.9	14.8
white	5.2	19.2	26.5
Black	0.1	0.1	0.2
Hispanic/Latino	0.7	2.1	2.6
Multiracial & All Others	0.5	1.7	2.3
Population Size (x1000)	707.0	140.8	96.8

Women			
Chinese	79.9	52.4	46.1
Other Asian	3.5	9.9	10.4
white	14.5	31.9	37.7
Black	0.3	0.7	0.7
Hispanic/Latino	0.9	2.8	2.8
Multiracial & All Others	0.8	2.3	2.4
Population Size (x1000)	777.9	138.5	112.6
Men			
Filipino	85.1	54.2	42.1
Other Asian	2.6	7.1	7.9
white	7.9	24.0	31.8
Black	0.2	1.0	1.4
Hispanic/Latino	2.8	9.0	11.0
Multiracial & All Others	1.4	4.7	5.8
Population Size (x1000)	440.8	99.2	71.3
Women			
Filipino	61.6	36.7	29.1
Other Asian	2.6	6.2	6.4
white	27.0	37.2	42.7
Black	2.6	4.0	4.4
Hispanic/Latino	3.7	8.1	8.5
Multiracial & All Others	2.6	7.8	8.9
Population Size (x1000)	608.7	121.0	102.2
	All Spouses	USR + USR or FR	USR + USR Only
Men			

Japanese	62.8	54.5	53.8
Other Asian	11.5	14.2	12.2
white	18.8	22.8	25.1
Blacks	0.2	0.3	0.3
Hispanic/Latino	3.3	3.8	3.6
Multiracial & All Others	3.5	4.5	4.9
Population Size (x1000)	151.1	104.7	91.2
Women			
Japanese	44.4	48.9	49.3
Other Asian	8.0	12.2	11.0
white	38.1	29.4	29.9
Black	2.1	0.7	0.8
Hispanic/Latino	3.2	3.7	3.9
Multiracial & All Others	4.1	5.1	5.2
Population Size (x1000)	212.6	104.3	99.7
Men			
Korean	90.4	61.1	44.8
Other Asian	2.9	10.4	13.0
white	5.3	23.1	34.6
Black	0.2	0.8	1.2
Hispanic/Latino	0.9	3.7	5.3
Multiracial & All Others	0.4	0.7	1.1
Population Size (x1000)	265.4	47.8	30.2
Women			
Korean	68.1	35.4	24.1
Other Asian	3.6	9.2	9.8
white	24.4	48.4	57.7
Black	1.4	1.6	1.9
Hispanic/Latino	1.3	2.7	3.3
Multiracial & All Others	1.2	2.7	3.3
Population Size (x1000)	351.5	72.6	58.4

Men			
Vietnamese	92.6	71.0	59.0
Other Asian	3.4	11.9	13.7
white	2.8	13.1	21.9
Black	0.0	0.2	0.4
Hispanic/Latino	0.5	2.6	3.3
Multiracial & All Others	0.6	1.3	1.6
Population Size (x1000)	299.7	44.9	26.8
Women			
Vietnamese	84.6	56.3	40.6
Other Asian	4.2	11.1	12.2
white	9.4	28.7	41.3
Black	0.2	0.5	0.5
Hispanic/Latino	0.9	2.9	4.5
Multiracial & All Others	0.7	0.5	0.8
Population Size (x1000)	323.6	54.4	35.0
USR = U.S.-Raised (1.5 generation or higher) FR = Foreign-Raised (1st generation) "USR + USR or FR" = Spouse 1 is U.S.-Raised while Spouse 2 can be U.S.-Raised or Foreign-Raised "USR + USR Only" = Both spouses are U.S.-Raised Methodology used to tabulate these statistics			

History shows that these anti-miscegenation laws were very common in the U.S. They were first passed in the 1600s to prevent freed Black slaves from marrying whites and the biracial children of white slave owners and African slaves from inheriting property. It was not until 1967, during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the *Loving v. Virginia* case that [such laws were unconstitutional](#). At that time, 38 states in the U.S. had formal laws on their books that prohibited non-whites from marrying whites. As such, one could argue that it's only been in recent years that interracial marriages have become common in American society (Wong, 2015).

Of course, anti-miscegenation laws were part of a larger anti-Asian movement that eventually led to the Page Law of 1875 that effectively almost eliminated Chinese women from immigrating to the U.S., the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, and other restrictive regulations. These laws actually made the situation worse because Asian men were no longer able to bring their wives over to the U.S. So in a way, those who wanted to become married had no other choice but to socialize with non-Asians (Pascoe, 2010).

After World War II however, the gender dynamics of this interracial process flip-flopped. U.S. servicemen who fought and were stationed overseas in Asian countries began coming home with Asian "war brides." Data show that from 1945 into the 1970s, thousands of young women from China, Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and later Viet Nam came to the U.S. as war brides each year. Further, after the passage of the [1965 Immigration Act](#), many of these Asian war brides eventually helped to expand the Asian American community by sponsoring their family and other relatives to immigrate to the U.S. (Koshy, 2005).

These days, Asian Americans in interracial relationships are very common. One of the best research articles on this topic is a study conducted by Shinagawa and Pang entitled "Asian American Panethnicity and Inter-marriage," reprinted in the highly

recommended Asian Americans: Experiences and Perspectives. Similar in structure to their study, J.J. Huang and C.N. Le have analyzed data from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) to construct the following table on marriage patterns among Asian Americans.

How to Read and Understand the Table

Using data from the 2010 Census (updated Nov. 2011), the table shows the percentage of the six largest Asian ethnic groups who are married either **endogamously** (within their ethnic group), to another Asian (outside their ethnic group), or to someone who is white, Black, Hispanic/Latino, or someone who is Mixed-Race/Multiracial, by husbands and wives. The other major component of the table is that it presents different numbers depending on which statistical model is used.

That is, the specific numbers for each ethnic group vary depending on how you measure "intermarriage." The different models are:

- All Spouses: This model include all marriages that involve at least one Asian American. The benefit of this approach is that you get a complete picture of all marriages involving Asian Americans. The drawback is that since most married Asian Americans are immigrants, many of them got married in their home countries before immigrating to the U.S. -- i.e., they came to the U.S. already married.
- USR + USR or FR: USR stands for "U.S.-Raised," or those who are either born in the U.S. (the 2nd generation or higher) or came to the U.S. at age 13 or younger (the '1.5 generation'), while FR stands for "Foreign-Raised," the 1st generation (those who came to the U.S. at age 14 or older). In this model, the 'subject' spouse (either the man or the woman) is USR, but his/her spouse can be either USR or FR. This model narrows down the sample somewhat by trying to exclude those who were already married when they arrived in the U.S.
- USR + USR Only: This model includes only marriages in which both spouses are U.S.-raised. This has the advantage of including only those who were raised and socialized within American society and its racial dynamics. It is this U.S.-raised population that best represents young Asian Americans, since they are the ones who have the most exposure to prevailing American cultural images and media. The drawback of this model is that by focusing exclusively on the U.S.-raised (who only represent about one quarter of all marriages involving Asian Americans), it may overemphasize and "over-highlight" instances of outmarriage among Asian Americans.

These three models are presented to you the reader to give you the opportunity to decide for yourself which model best represents the "true" picture of marriage among Asian Americans. You should understand that each model has its strengths and weaknesses and as you can see, each produces some very different numbers. If you would like to read about the exact procedure J.J. Huang and C.N. Le used to calculate these numbers, visit the [Statistical Methodology](#) page.

These are certainly a lot of numbers to consider and as mentioned above, each model presents a different proportion. Nonetheless, what these stats tell us is that generally speaking, across all three models (calculated by using the admittedly unscientific method of averaging the proportions across all three models to emphasize the last two models), these are the Asian ethnic groups are most or least likely to have each kind of spouse:

Men/Husbands -- Most / Least Likely to Have a(n) __ Wife:

- Endogamous -- Most: Asian Indian / Least: Japanese
- Other Asian (Pan-Asian) -- Most: Japanese / Least: Asian Indian
 - White -- Most: Japanese / Least: Vietnamese
 - Black -- Most: Filipinos / Least: Chinese
- Hispanic/Latino -- Most: Filipinos / Least: Chinese
- Multiracial or Other -- Most: Japanese / Least: Koreans

Women/Wives -- Most / Least Likely to Have a(n) __ Husband:

- Endogamous -- Most: Asian Indian / Least: Filipinos/Koreans (tied)
- Other Asian (Pan-Asian) -- Most: Japanese / Least: Asian Indians
 - White -- Most: Korean / Least: Asian Indian
 - Black -- Most: Filipinos / Least: Vietnamese
- Hispanic/Latino -- Most: Filipinos / Least: Asian Indian
- Multiracial or Other -- Most: Filipinos / Least: Vietnamese

Recent Trends and Developments

The numbers presented above only represent a 'cross sectional' look at racial/ethnic marriage patterns involving Asian Americans. In other words, they only represent a 'snapshot' look using the latest data from 2010. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that such marriage patterns have evolved and changed over time. In order to get a closer look at recent trends, we can compare these numbers to [data from the 2006 Census](#).

In comparing the 2010 data to the 2006 numbers, there are a few notable trends we can observe:

- Consistently, rates of marriages involving Asian Americans and whites have declined. Specifically, among those marriages in which both spouses are U.S.-raised, for five of the six Asian American ethnic groups, the rates of interracial marriage to a white spouse for both men and women have declined from 2006 to 2010. Among men/husbands, the largest decline involved Asian Indians and Koreans. For women/wives, the largest decline was for Filipinos and Koreans.
- The only exceptions to this trend of declining rates of white-Asian marriages were for Asian Indian women/wives (whose rate slightly increased from 2006 to 2010) and for both Vietnamese men/husbands and women/wives. For Vietnamese men, their rates of marriage to a white wife increased from 15.0% to 21.9% while for Vietnamese women, their rate for having a white husband jumped from 28.3% to 41.3%.
- Strangely, the sample population sizes for U.S.-raised married Vietnamese American men and women have declined from 2006 to 2010. For example, in 2006, there were about 40,500 and 45,200 U.S.-raised Vietnamese men and women respectively who were married. In 2010, those numbers declined to 26,795 and 34,998. Some possible explanations are that many who were married in 2006 got divorced, U.S.-raised Vietnamese men and women are delaying getting married, and/or many U.S.-raised Vietnamese have changed their ethnic identity to some other ethnic group, such as Chinese or Hmong.
- In contrast to the declining rates of Asian-white marriages, the rates for Pan-Asian/Other Asian marriages have increased notably from 2006 to 2010 (having a spouse of a different Asian ethnicity). This increase was almost universal across all six ethnic groups and for both genders (the only exception was for Filipino women). Among U.S.-raised men/husbands, Vietnamese Americans experienced the biggest increases in having a pan-Asian spouse -- from 5.8% in 2006 to 13.7% in 2010 for men and from 7.8% to 12.2% for women/wives.

Now that we have a general picture of what the marriage rates are for all members of each of these six Asian American ethnic groups, on the next page we will take a more specific look at [only those Asian Americans who grew up in the U.S.](#) and are therefore most likely to have been socialized within the context of U.S. racial landscape and intergroup relations -- the U.S.-born and those who immigrated to the U.S. as children.

The Government

Getting Into the Arena Early

Even back in the late 1800s, Asians mobilized their resources to lobby for equal rights and access to economic, land, and occupational opportunities that they were being denied. Up through the 1920s, over 1,000 lawsuits were filed in state and federal courts by Asian Americans seeking to receive their proper legal rights. During this time, Asian Americans also organized boycotts, circulated petitions, conducted letter-writing campaigns, published newspapers and magazines promoting their cause, and formed coalitions with several non-Asian organizations.

These activities demonstrate that Asian Americans are not always quiet, modest, and reluctant to "cause trouble." The Asian American community has a clear sense of justice, as illustrated by their collective mobilization to fight for justice regarding Vincent Chin's murder. To that end, many Asian Americans have tried to participate in the political arena, in one form or another.



Figure 2.7.4.6: Buddha Statue. (CC BY-SA 2.0; William Cho via Flickr)

One of the easiest way to participate is to donate money to candidates or political parties. Such was the case back in 1996 when the Democratic Party was raising funds for President Clinton's reelection. As the nation soon learned, the Democrats were accused of illegally accepting money from foreigners. The media and soon Congressional Republicans identified these foreigners as Asian and accused them of trying to influence U.S. policy to the benefit of their Asian countries and businesses. They were accused of trying to "buy" influence with the President.

Thereafter, the Democrats were forced to return a substantial portion of those campaign contributions. Any donor who had an Asian name or who was suspected of having connections to Asian businesses overseas most likely had their contributions returned. Soon after that, Congressional committees began a series of high-profile and public investigations, centering on the now-famous "fundraising" event at a southern California Buddhist temple attended by Al Gore. Ultimately, several Asian Americans entered plea bargains or were convicted of channeling foreign contributions to the Democratic Party.

Stereotypes and Hypocrisy Go Hand in Hand

First we should realize that it is legal for permanent residents who are not yet U.S. citizens to donate money. Second, it is legal for U.S. subsidiaries of foreign corporations to donate money if they only donate funds that were earned in the U.S. Further, anyone can donate if the money goes to a political party rather than an individual politician. Finally, it's interesting why nobody ever accuses Canadian and European corporations of trying to buy influence with the U.S. government, even though their contributions are several times that from Asian companies.



Figure 2.7.4.7: "Arrival of U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Elaine Chao." (CC PDM 1.0; U.S. Embassy, The Hague)

But the most disturbing part of this episode was once again, the entire Asian American community was singled out and publicly vilified for the wrongdoings of just a handful of people. Many politicians and other social commentators were screaming that Asian foreigners were trying to "buy the white House." Asian Americans were again accused of being deceitful, un-American, and secretly loyal to only Asian countries and businesses.

It is one thing to punish individuals who have actually broken laws. But it is another to then generalize suspicions and stereotypes to an entire group of people. All Asian Americans are affected by this prejudice and racial profiling -- Republican or Democratic, liberal or conservative. Unfortunately, that was exactly what happened to Asian American in this episode. Sad to say, it will probably not be the last.

The Leaders and Trailblazers

Nonetheless, several Asian Americans past and present have defied these cultural and institutional barriers (including perceptions that Asians aren't capable of being leaders) and have successfully represented not just the Asian American community but their entire multi-racial constituency. The first national Asian American political leaders came from Hawai'i and were able to parlay their broad base of supporters to win seats in the U.S. House of Representative and Senate in the 1950s.

The first mainland Asian American to become a member of the U.S. House of Representatives was Dalip Singh Saund, a South Asian farmer (with a Ph.D. degree) from central California. The first mainland Senator was the ultra-conservative S.I. Hayakawa from California, former President of San Francisco State University. More recently, the most prominent Asian American politicians include:

- Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawai'i
- Former U.S. Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Bill Lann Lee
- Governor of the state of Washington Gary Locke, the first Asian American governor outside of Hawai'i
 - Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao
 - Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta

Secretary Mineta is the only Democrat serving in President Bush's cabinet and was the first Asian American cabinet Secretary, appointed by former President Clinton to lead the Department of Commerce in 2000. In fact, President Bush has named the more Asian Americans to top federal positions than any other President.

However, Elaine Chao symbolizes a constant dilemma for the Asian American community. On the one hand, most of us are very proud that she is the first Asian American woman to be a cabinet Secretary. She hopefully represents the growing political power of the Asian American community and a sign that perhaps both political parties will not take us for granted any longer. On the other hand, she's a Republican whereas about two-thirds of all Asian Americans who are registered to vote are Democrats.

Therefore, many of us have to weigh the costs and benefits of supporting her as an Asian American versus our dislike for Republican policies and ideology. In the end, as Martin Luther King so eloquently stated, individuals must be judged on the content of their character and what they do -- not on the color of their skin or their ethnicity.

Having said that however, we must recognize and appreciate the diversity within the Asian American community. This includes differences in terms of ethnicity, age, educational attainment, income, languages and English proficiency, and in this case, political views. In this sense, Secretary Chao, along with Secretary Mineta and all other Asian American politicians serving our country at all levels, deserve our thanks and support.

The Future is Now

These days, as the size of the Asian American population continues to grow, so do the number of Asian Americans entering the political arena and public service. The latest people such as California Democrat Mike Honda and Louisiana Republican Bobby Jindal, who recently lost a close race to be Governor of Louisiana. We are also witnessing many Asian Americans entering politics at the local level, especially in areas where Asian Americans constitute an increasingly large portion of the population. These include many suburban areas in southern and [northern California](#).

On the national level, several Asian American organizations have recently formed a coalition to develop a comprehensive policy platform. Their goal is to encourage political leaders in general and presidential candidates in particular to treat Asian Americans with the same level of attention and respect that they do other racial/ethnic constituents, such as Blacks, Latinos, and Jews. As part of this effort, political action committees such as the 80-20 Initiative are trying to mobilize a powerful Asian American bloc vote by casting 80% of Asian American ballots for the candidate that they will endorse later in the year.

Interestingly, as Asian Americans become more common among civic and political leaders (similar to what's happening with many predominantly Latino/Hispanic areas around the country), they still face subtle charges that they are somehow "taking over," implying that they have some sinister or evil master plan for world domination. Ironically, many long-time white residents in these localities where Asian Americans are increasingly prominent now feel that they're being excluded from full civic participation and are made to feel like outsiders.

Many observers point out that these complaints are only inevitable and temporary frictions that occur when the balance of power begins to shift from one group to another. It will nonetheless be interesting to see how the landscape of political power at different levels in the U.S. evolves as our society continues to become increasing multicultural and racially/ethnically diverse .

Contributors and Attributions

- Tsuhako, Joy. (Cerritos College)
- Gutierrez, Erika. (Santiago Canyon College).
- [Asian Nation](#) (Le) (CC BY-NC-ND) adapted with permission

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2.7.5: Social Change and Resistance

AAPI Activism

Though the model minority stereotype implies that Asian Americans are non-confrontational and have not struggled against inequality and oppression, there is a long history of activism amongst Asian American communities. One pattern noted earlier is that of the formation of Asian American ethnic enclaves. These became the central gathering spaces for Asian American activists in the 1960s. Following World War II, Asian American enclaves, which are predominantly near urban centers, faced displacement by corporate interests and local governments through the enactment of "redevelopment zones." Not unlike the contemporary struggles against **gentrification** (the process of changing a neighborhood to become more affluent and white) happening in predominantly communities of color today, local governments exercised eminent domain which resulted in the forcing out of residents and small businesses to make way for capital investment, especially in downtown areas in big cities across the country such as San Francisco, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Los Angeles. This displacement of the poor, elderly, and working class immigrants helped give rise to the Asian American Movement (AAM) (Liu & Geron, 2008). Though the AAM would become most known for its opposition to the Vietnam War, its anti-imperialist advocacy, and organizing for racial justice to support other communities of color, the first issues it organized around related to the needs of the enclaves' working class residents such as the implementation of service programs and the protection of affordable housing. As Liu & Geron note, "In casting much of its lot with the interests of these communities and the residential population of workers, shopkeepers, street youth, and elderly, the Asian American Movement built, educated, and significantly defined itself" (2008, p. 23).

Saving the I-Hotel

One significant campaign against the dispersal and destruction of an Asian American ethnic enclave was the campaign to save the International Hotel in the Manilatown District of San Francisco. In the 1960s as the Financial District expanded, the Manilatown, which was home to many Filipino farm workers, merchant marines and service workers, was threatened by "higher use" development. The International Hotel, which housed mostly elderly Filipino and Chinese residents, was slated to be demolished in order to build a multi-level parking lot. What ensued was a nine-year long anti-eviction campaign supported by widespread student and community grassroots support (Dong, 2010). Such groups included affordable housing advocates, gay and lesbian activists, trade unions, women, and other progressive groups (Soloman, 1998). After initial efforts to delay the eviction, the building which already functioned as a de facto community center expanded to include a flourishing movement center for local grassroots organizations, arts and cultural groups, and a bookstore. In addition to preventing evictions, The International Hotel Tenants Association and its allies demanded the preservation of low-cost housing (Liu & Geron, 2008). In 1977, the campaign culminated in an eviction that enlisted "the deployment of over 400 riot police, mounted patrols, anti-sniper units and fire ladder trucks in a 3:00 AM eviction raid" (Dong, 2010, p. 5). Following the eviction and demolition in 1979, thanks to the activists efforts, Mayor Dianne Feinstein established the International Hotel Citizens Advisory Committee (IHCAC) to ensure that low-cost housing would be built on-site. Check out this [interview with the IHCAC](#) from 2016 to learn more about this story.

Pan-Asianism & Black Power

Beyond the enclave-based organizing efforts, what differentiated the AAM from previous Asian American activists was its emphasis on **pan-Asianism** which is an ideology that promotes the political and economic unity and cooperation of Asian peoples. In fact, one of AAM's notable achievements is the creation of the term "Asian American" which includes the myriad Asian ethnic groups who have migrated to the United States. While the recognition of Asian Americans as a group has its value for political organizing efforts and as a label of self-determination, as has been discussed in other parts of this chapter, it can also reinforce the stereotype that all Asians are the same. Though the identity of "Asian American" is rarely self-ascribed (people tend to say they are "Japanese American," "Korean American," "Thai," etc.) the term, coined by Berkeley students Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, was originally inspired by the Black Power Movement and as a way to unite Japanese, Chinese and Filipino American students on campus under the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) formed in 1968 (Maeda, 2016). The pan-Asian ideology also included a transnational solidarity with people of color around the world impacted by U.S. neo-imperialism. Similarly, on the East Coast, two leftist Nisei (second-generation Japanese) women, Kazu Iijima and Minn Masuda, saw the anti-racist and anti-imperialist values promoted by Black Power as the antidote to the pro-assimilationist sentiment that developed in the Japanese

American community following their experiences with being interned in concentration camps during World War II (Maeda, 2016).



Figure 2.7.5.1: An issue of The Black Panther. (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; Steve Rhodes via Flickr)

Asian Women's Organizing

Another similarity between the Black Power and the AAM was the sidelining of women's issues and the lack of women in leadership positions. Though the fundamental concerns of social justice, equity and human rights are just as much women's issues as they are men's issues, the patriarchal cultural dynamics often pushed Asian women's concerns to auxiliary groups. The change in immigration laws facilitated the migration of highly educated and affluent Asian immigrants after 1965 also gave rise to the formation of large, primarily middle-class East Asian women's organizations. These groups received more support from conservative and mainstream institutions since they focused on education and service projects rather than the radical, leftist organizing found in the AAM. This distinction contributed to the perpetuation of the model minority myth by implying that, "there was a 'good' minority in tacit opposition to the 'bad' minorities -- African Americans and Latinos" (Shah, 1997).

Not only were Asian women sidelined in the AAM, but they were have also been marginalized in the women's movement. Mitsuye Yamada, author of "Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism," writes about the disappointment and invisibility many Asian Pacific American women have felt towards the women's movement. Issues important to Euro American feminists have not always included issues important to and perspectives of Asian Pacific American women. Yamada examines that women of color are often made to feel they have to choose between ethnicity and gender, and she argues the two are not at war with each other, so Asian Pacific American women should not have to choose one or the other. Barbara Ryan, author of *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement*, quotes Yamada:

Asian Pacific American women will not speak out to say what we have on our minds until we feel secure within ourselves that this is our home too, and until our white sisters indicate by their actions that they want to join us in our struggle because it is theirs also...We need to raise our voices a little more, even as they say to us 'This is so uncharacteristic of you.' To fully recognize our own invisibility is to finally be on the path towards visibility.

Millennial Amanda Nguyen, a civil rights activist and founder of RISE, a non-profit organization protecting the rights of sexual assault victims, has raised her voice to call attention to and make visible the violence against the AAPI community. Nguyen exercised her agency through her Instagram social media post in February 2021 which attracted more than 3 million views within 24 hours. In her post, she called out the anti-Asian backlash and increase of hate crimes (150% increase nationwide!) affecting AAPI communities in the U.S in 2020 and 2021, which has been virtually ignored by the mainstream press. In turn, Nguyen's activism has caused the mainstream media to cover Nguyen's plea for voices and issues of the AAPI community to be raised.

Interactive Content

This interactive element is not available in this format. Visit the link or scan the QR code to access it online.

[View this Interactive Content online](#)



Video 2.7.5.2: Activist Amanda Nguyen on recent spike in anti-Asian hate crimes: "We are dying to be heard." (Close-captioning and other settings will appear once the video starts.) (Fair Use; CBS News via [CBS News.com](https://www.cbsnews.com))

Asian American Activism Today

As more recent immigration laws have again added complexity to the Asian American population by bringing less educated, working class or poor Asian immigrants to the U.S., we have also seen the rise of neoliberal globalization policies such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) that favor corporate interests and deregulation. These changes mean that those new migrants and the majority of Asian workers globally, especially women, are laboring under substandard working conditions and being compelled to compete for the most debasing, lowest-paying jobs. This state of affairs has mobilized activists in a reinvigorated labor movement that is international and spans industries. A new generation of activists that are putting poor immigrant and refugee Asian women at the forefront of organizing efforts with a global and intersectional lens is rising up.

One such organization is Khmer Girls in Action (KGA), which is located in central Long Beach, California which is home to the largest population of Cambodians outside of Southeast Asia. KGA's mission is, "to build a progressive and sustainable Long Beach community that works for gender, racial and economic justice led by Southeast Asian young women" (Khmer Girls in Action). This youth-led organization partners with other community groups on campaigns such as Long Beach Invest in Youth to survey residents in order to identify what resources and programs are needed for their community to thrive. Through their campaign efforts, they highlighted the disparities in local public spending on youth programs compared to youth arrests (\$204 to \$10,500 respectively). Though their focus is to support the Cambodian community, the coalitions they form with other groups and the issues they work on undoubtedly serve to benefit other marginalized communities as well.

Another organization that KGA has partnered with is the Filipino Migrant Center which serves the South Bay cities of California. According to their mission statement, they are "are a Filipino immigrant-led organization who aims to educate, organize, and mobilize low-income, working class Filipino families" (Filipino Migrant Center). One of their notable campaigns is the "Stop Labor Trafficking! Stop Forced Migration!" campaign. According to the Philippine Department of Labor (2015), over 6,092 Filipinos leave the Philippines everyday in search of work in over 200 countries. The Filipino Migrant Center has successfully assisted over 50 Filipino migrant workers who faced abusive and exploitative conditions revealing the international impact of Asian and Pacific Islander activism in the United States. As unfettered global and racial capitalism rages on, such organizations will continue to serve a vital role in protecting workers both in the United States and abroad.

Did you know?

Many native Hawaiians resist being labeled "American" as they feel their islands were stolen from them and that the overthrow of the last Hawaiian ruler Queen Lili'uokalani and the ensuing annexation were illegal. There is an ongoing fight for Hawaiian sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance. Sovereignty advocates have attributed problems plaguing native communities including homelessness, poverty, economic marginalization, and the erosion of native traditions to the lack of native governance and political self-determination (Trask, 2000).

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Video 2.7.5.3: "Act of War - The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation" (Close-captioning and other settings will appear once the video starts.) (Fair Use; SQUEEZZIE #RAKOUM MHA BENI SAF via [YouTube](#))

Key Takeaways

- Asian Americans are diverse and all have different push and pull factors that brought them to the United States
- Pacific Islanders are indigenous to their homelands and can be understood as colonized peoples.
- Asian Americans have often formed ethnic enclaves which provide economic opportunities and entry points to U.S. society for immigrants.
- The U.S. has a long history of discrimination and othering Asian Americans as the "yellow peril" and that continues to be reflected in COVID-19 related hate crimes.
- The model minority myth is a stereotype and is reductive of the diverse experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.
- Religious affiliation has helped immigrant Asian Americans adjust to life in the U.S.
- LGBTQ+ Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders face double minority status and can feel isolated in their experience.
- Many Asian Americans who arrived as refugees continue to rely on public assistance, highlighting the need to recognize the diversity in Asian American experiences.
- Asian Americans have some of the highest rates of marrying someone else outside of their own ethnic group among racial/ethnic minorities.

- There is a long history of Asian American and Pacific Islander resistance to oppression in and by the U.S. as well as movements of multiracial solidarity.

Contributors and Attributions

- Tsuhako, Joy. (Cerritos College)
- Gutierrez, Erika. (Santiago Canyon College)

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2.8: Why Asian American Studies Matter

Interactive Content

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3: HMONG AMERICANS

Who are the Hmong?

The Hmong are an ethnic group who trace their ancestry to China's southern provinces and live in the mountain regions in Laos, Thailand, and other neighboring countries. It is often said that the Hmong do not have a country of their own because of their long history of migration since the 1800's.

Hmong culture relies on a strong clan and kinship system. There are 18 clans in the Hmong culture: Chang/Cha, Cheng, Chue, Fang, Her, Hang, Khang, Kong, Kue, Lee/Ly, Lor, Moua, Pha, Thao, Vang, Vue, Xiong, and Yang.

Untold History

"One day, I was reading on the Vietnam War and noticed that the Hmong weren't anywhere. Just like the American history books I read all through college and all through high school – "Hmong" wasn't mentioned anywhere. And yet, I knew that war was responsible for us being here, and that it killed two-thirds of the people I belong to. People are still dying in the jungles of Laos, remnants of this fight. In the process of writing this book, I learned that that wars don't end." - Kao Kalia Yang author of *The Latecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* (2008)

The Secret War

During the Cold War, the United States, promoting itself as a democratic country, fought to prevent the global spread of communism. U.S. president Dwight D. Eisenhower sent military advisors to South Vietnam following the nation's split into a Communist North Vietnam and pro-West South Vietnam. The United States held the **Domino Theory** belief that if one country fell to communist rule, other Asian countries would follow.

United States military involvement in the **Vietnam War** (1955-1975) led to a multi-front battle field where the U.S. aimed to stop the spread of communism in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy authorized the recruitment of Hmong and other minority groups such as Mien, Khmu, and Kha by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to participate in covert military operations known as the **Secret War** in Laos. The war had to be secret because it violated the Geneva Accords agreement that Laos would be a neutral nation free from foreign troops.

From 1961 to 1975, the CIA recruited over 30,000 Hmong young men and boys as soldiers. Some soldiers were as young as 10 years old. They received military training from Thai military officers under the direction of American advisors. Under **General Vang Pao**, a major general of the Royal Lao Army, Hmong guerilla fighters blocked supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, ambushed the communist Viet Cong, and rescued American pilots who had been shot down in Laos.

In 1973, the Paris Peace Accords were signed to end the Vietnam War. When American forces withdrew from Southeast Asia following the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, the **Pathet Lao** communist party gained power in Laos and began to kill Hmong people for having assisted America. Many Hmong fled Laos due to their fear of being executed for having helped America.

Hmong Refugees and Resettlement

The deaths of many men and young boys, destruction of villages, and immense fear of persecution led many Hmong to flee Laos as refugees. The United Nations defines **refugees** as people who are forced to flee their home countries due to a fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

In May 1975, American officials planned to airlift military personnel and family out of Long Cheng. Military personnel and hundreds of civilians fought for a place on the aircrafts. People threw their children inside the plane before struggling to get onboard themselves. In total, 2,500 Hmong from Long Cheng were airlifts, compared to the nearly 130,000 Vietnamese who left by helicopter after the Fall of Saigon.

While some military personnel were evacuated by air, the majority of refugees escaped by foot. Their perilous journeys toward Thailand involved escaping through the jungle and crossing the **Mekong River**. If leaving by small boat, families took few belongings and tried to hide signs of escape. In *Hmong: A Graphic History*, Vicky Lyfoung explains that her mother and grandmother made it appear as if they were going on a grocery shopping trip in Thailand when they took the small boat that helped them escape across the Mekong river.



File:Hmong_Cultural_Center_Museum-12.jpg

Figure 3.1: Hmong traditional attire. Photo from the Hmong Cultural Center Museum in Minnesota.

In Thailand, Hmong stayed in refugee camps such as Ban Vinai camp before they could find passage abroad. **Hmong story cloths** were invented in the 1970's in refugee camps and became a way of making money by selling these textiles abroad as well as sharing history. Story cloths often depict journeys of migration and resettlement that refugees experienced.

From 1975 to 1992, more than 100,000 Hmong crossed to Thailand. Many Hmong resettled in European and Western countries including Australia, France, Canada, and the United States.

Hmong in Sacramento

United States was a popular destination for Hmong refugees who were able to migrate through the Indochina Migration and Refugee Act beginning in 1975 and later the expanded **Refugee Act of 1980**. The State Department gave resettlement contracts to volunteer agencies such as churches who were willing to sponsor a family and where jobs were available. Once Hmong communities were established in cities such as St. Paul, Minnesota, secondary migrations took place where initially dispersed Hmong refugees settled together and rebuilt communities in America. California was a popular secondary migration site due to its job opportunities, welfare benefits, comfortable climate, and growing Hmong communities. Today, the majority of Hmong live in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

Sacramento County has the third largest Hmong population in the United States, numbering approximately 32,000. The first Hmong person to come to Sacramento, was Robert By Khang, who arrived in 1976 and became Sacramento's first Hmong resettlement specialist.

Hmong people faced several hardships upon arrival to America. Many Hmong did not know English and largely came from agrarian backgrounds, making it difficult to transition to English-speaking and urban environments. Hmong refugees also experienced undiagnosed PTSD, depression, and other mental health conditions due to the violence of war. In addition, Hmong often moved into affordable neighborhoods such as Meadowview in south Sacramento, which experienced high gang activity and heavy policing in the 1980's. Hmong youth were often profiled as gangsters and incarcerated, whether or not they had actually committed a crime; this phenomenon of **policing** was seen among Southeast Asian youth in low-income neighborhoods across the United States.

Despite these obstacles, the Hmong community made strides in Sacramento. Hmong people have established small businesses

largely in areas such as Florin-Mack Road in south Sacramento and across the county. Numerous community organizations support the Hmong community and uplift Hmong culture. At Sacramento City College, a Hmong American student founded the **Hope Opportunity Program for Education (H.O.P.E.)** which fosters a culture of higher education with in the Hmong community.

Notable Hmong people in Sacramento County include **Mai Vang**, a Councilmember representing District 8 and the and the first Asian American woman and first person of Hmong descent elected to the body. She co-founded **Hmong Innovating Politics (HIP)** which strengthens the power of disenfranchised communities. **Steven Ly** was the mayor of Elk Grove (2016-2020) and the first Hmong American mayor in the United States. **Macy Yang** is the publisher and founder of **The Hmong Daily News**, which she started in 2020 in order to shed light on important news issues pertinent to Sacramento's Hmong community.

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3.1: Hmong Americans in Sacramento

3.1: Hmong Americans in Sacramento

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4: INTERSECTIONALITY AND WOMEN OF COLOR FEMINISM

By Kay Fischer

Learning Objectives

- Analyze the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the context of United States institutions;
- Critically evaluate forms of difference and identities impacted by hierarchy and interlocking systems of power as related to race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, religion, national origin, and immigration status;
- Compare and contrast the ways women of color, and queer and trans people of color engage in resisting interlocking systems of power.

4.1: Introduction

4.2: What is Intersectionality?

4.3: Intersectionality and Third World Feminism

4.4: Transformational Liberation through Love

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4.1: Introduction

Importance of Intersectionality

The first time I came across the term, “UndocuQueer,” I was moved by the work of visual artist, [Julio Salgado](#). Salgado is queer and undocumented and as an artist and activist based out of the Bay Area and Los Angeles, his work represents the diverse narratives of a community that fall along the intersections of immigration status and [LGTBQIA](#) (Lesbian Gay Transgender Bisexual Queer/Questioning Intersex Asexual/Ally), or [Queer](#) identity, which represent any sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender. [Intersectionality](#) is the study of multiple or intersecting social identities that people carry with them. For example, how racial/ethnic identity intersects with gender identity, sexuality, class background, etc. to shape the experiences of women of color. Furthermore, intersectionality examines the intersecting structures of power (such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism) that limit, marginalize, or oppress people based on race, class, gender, gender identity, immigration status, national origin, sexual orientation, language, religion, spirituality, ability, tribal citizenship, sovereignty, age, and other notable markers of difference. Such intersecting oppressions might extend to an institutional level, interpersonal level (between individuals) or an internalized level (i.e. believing racist and sexist stereotypes about self-worth).

One of the more forceful works of Salgado’s that I have used in my classroom is a poster titled “Illegal Faggots For the Destruction of Borders.” The first image you may notice is a shirtless brown-skinned man with sunglasses flipping us off with both hands. He’s standing in front of what could be inferred as a fence that’s part of the U.S./Mexico border; a desolate desert landscape is beyond the metal fence/border. On the fence is taped a tank top that’s labeled *maricón* - a derogatory Spanish term for gay people - a translation for the word “faggot.” And then lining the poster on the left is a poem which reads: “When your body is queer and brown/ they will want to build fences around you/ choose a side/ brown or queer/ but borders are not natural to us/ we are both moon and sun/ we are everything in between/ you can not divide land and you can not make me choose/ I am manifestation that all borders will fall.”

In [a blog interview](#) where you can check out the poster I referenced earlier, Salgado shared that he uses humor to address xenophobia in his art. He was once called “an illegal faggot” and his poster was a response to this comment (Barrón, 2017). With talent and wit, Salgado eviscerated hateful comments and created artwork with an important message about intersectionality, the invalidation of national borders, the falsehood of manifest destiny, colonialism, and landtheft, and of the surveillance and criminalization of the very human act of migration.

This chapter on intersectionality will expand on the origin of this framing, recognizing the legacy of intellectual work produced by Black feminists and women of color feminist writers and activists. It will highlight how women and queer people of color have emerged through the interlocking channels of power and oppression with the audacity to organize for social transformation and envision a future for themselves without sexism, violence, war, or institutional control over our racialized and gendered bodies. First, we’ll review the concept of intersectionality and examine earlier works by women of color or Third World feminists. Then the chapter will apply an intersectionality lens on two areas: reproductive justice and self-love.

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4.2: What is Intersectionality?

Embracing Our Whole Selves

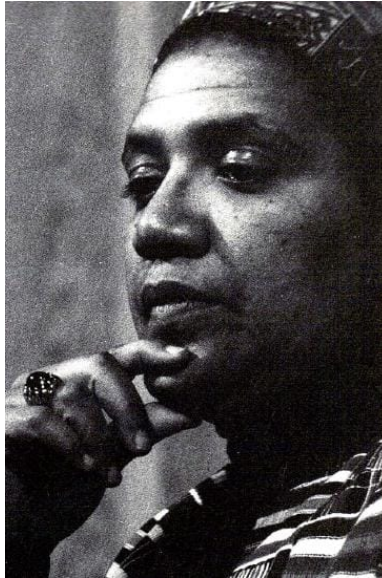


Figure 4.2.1: Feminist and poet, Audre Lorde in 1980. (Licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#); Photo by K. Kendall)

Writer, Audre Lorde (Figure 4.2.1), a self-described “black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet,” also wrote about intersectionality. In her paper “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Redefining Difference” (1980), Lorde explained how the Western framing of society was limited to understanding human differences in simplistic, hierarchical, and binary oppositions: good/bad, superior/inferior, dominant/subordinate, etc. As someone whose intersectional identities left her “defined as other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong,” (1998, p. 144) Lorde explains how this practice of othering stems from an idea she calls the **mythical norm**. The mythical norm is the standardization of “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure” people, and anyone who falls outside of this so-called “norm” is othered (p. 116). Lorde explained that she is, “constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of [her]self and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live” (p. 120). Intersectionality is a process of identifying and embracing *all* aspects of one’s identity, and Lorde emphasizes how this practice allows us to fully see one another’s humanity, as there is strength in diversity and difference. As a Black and Queer feminist who’s faced marginalization in white feminist spaces, Lorde proclaims her identity, stating: “Now we must recognize differences among women who are our equals, neither inferior nor superior, and devise ways to use each other’s difference to enrich our visions and our joint struggles” (p. 122). Meaning, such divisive othering, and old divisions, patterns, or frames are limited and will never lead toward the liberation of oppressed peoples.

If we are to dispense old frames that exclude our experiences, what are new frames we can apply that will center the experiences of UndocuQueer people, Trans refugees, and **women of color**, or cis and trans women who are not racialized as white, including Black, Arab, Asian, Chicana/x, Indigenous, Latina/x, Pacific Islander, and mixed race women, for example? A chapter on intersectionality in this *Introduction to Ethnic Studies* textbook is paramount to addressing questions around liberation and interlocking systems of power as they pertain to race and ethnicity, yes, but also class, gender, *and* sexuality. If we don’t apply an intersectionality lens to understanding police violence, for example, we’ll miss the fact that Black women are just as impacted as Black men. Without an intersectionality lens, we wouldn’t be able to understand the ways in which Julio Salgado and other UndocuQueers experience the intersection of migration and sexuality. Without an intersectionality framing, we wouldn’t be able to recognize the way that Audre Lorde, as a Black lesbian feminist, would be marginalized in white middle class feminist spaces for being Black, and Black feminist spaces, for being a lesbian.

The Framing of Intersectionality



Figure 4.2.2: A Say Her Name print to raise funds for the global art sale Printmakers Against Racism fundraiser. (Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0; by Desiree Aspiras)

The term intersectionality is largely recognized as being coined in 1989 by professor of law, Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw. In Dr. Crenshaw's 2016 TED talk, "[The urgency of intersectionality](#)," she conducted an exercise with her audience about people killed by the police. The majority recognized the names of Black men, including Eric Garner, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice and Freddie Gray. But when she began to read aloud the names of African American *women* who were killed by police, including Michelle Cusseaux, Tanisha Anderson, and Meagan Hockaday, most of the audience members didn't know these names. All were African Americans killed by police, and only gender separated the second set of names. Crenshaw points out that Black women have "slipped through our consciousness because there were no frames for us to see them....But it doesn't have to be this way" (Crenshaw, 2016).

Crenshaw introduces the frame that is lacking: intersectionality. She tells the story of Emma DeGraffenreid: an African American woman whose claim of race and gender discrimination against a local car manufacturing plant was dismissed. Seeking better employment for her family, she applied for a job and was not hired, and Ms. DeGraffenreid believed she wasn't hired because she was a Black woman. The argument used by the judge for dismissing her suit was that the employer did hire African Americans and the employer did hire women. What wasn't pointed out was that typically men were hired for industrial positions and only white women were hired for secretarial or front-office work. The courts were unable to recognize a type of double discrimination that Emma DeGraffenreid faced. Instead, they refused to allow Ms. DeGraffenreid to put two causes of action together, as the judge believed that she would have preferential treatment. Crenshaw asked,

Why wasn't the real unfairness law's refusal to protect African-American women simply because their experiences weren't exactly the same as white women and African-American men? Rather than broadening the frame to include African-American women, the court simply tossed their case completely out of court (Crenshaw, 2016).

Years later Crenshaw developed a frame to help us recognize Ms. DeGraffenreid's challenge, one that would allow judges to see and understand her story. Crenshaw developed the term intersectionality - using an analogy of an intersection: one road representing a workforce structured by race, the other road by gender. Ms. DeGraffenreid, as a Black woman, was positioned where these roads overlapped, simultaneously experiencing gender and racial discrimination. African American women, and other women of color, and other socially marginalized people, face discrimination and challenges as a result of intersectionality: intersections of race and gender, homophobia, transphobia, immigration status, religious bias, and more, to create unique challenges. Intersectionality is a framing to help us raise our consciousness around the ways that oppressive social systems interlock and shape our lives. As Dr. Crenshaw connects back to the issue of Black women killed by police, she explains that intersectionality "expos[es] the tragic circumstances under which African American women die" (Crenshaw, 2016).

In Figure 4.2.3, I illustrate Crenshaw's analogy of an intersection into overlapping lines that represent the intersectionality of structural oppression. One line represents "sexism and patriarchy," which intersects with "racism and white supremacy." Those lines all overlap with other forms of oppression including: nativism, classism/capitalism, ableism, transphobia/cisheteropatriarchy, and homophobia/heteropatriarchy. In Figure 4.2.4, I created another graphic to represent intersecting social identities. One

line representing our gender or gender identity, another our racial/ethnic identity. These overlap with citizenship/nationality, socioeconomic class, physical or mental ability, and sexuality.

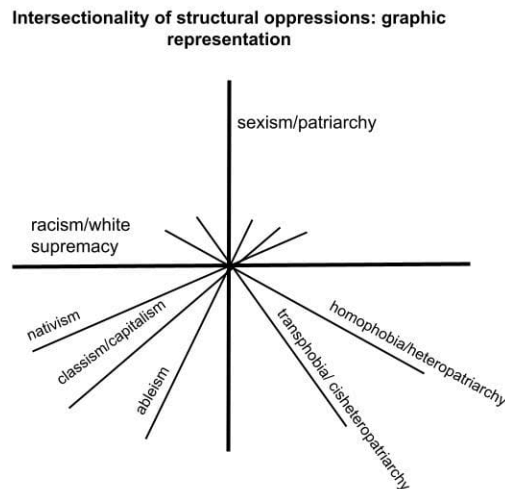


Figure 4.2.3: Intersectionality of Structural Oppressions: Graphic Representation. (Licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#); by Kay Fischer)

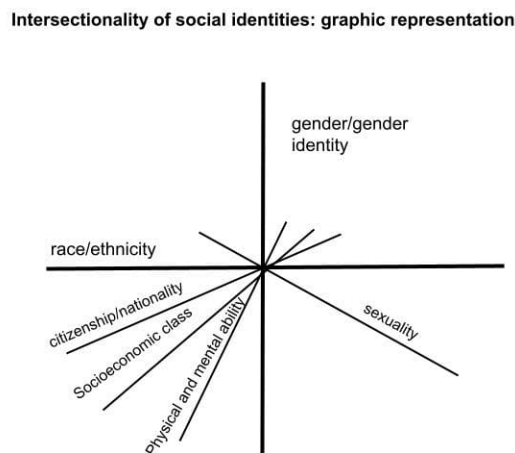


Figure 4.2.4: Intersectionality of Social Identities: Graphic Representation. (Licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#); by Kay Fischer)

On the point of police violence, one of the co-founders of #BlackLivesMatter, Alicia Garza, wrote in a contribution to *The Feminist Wire* titled “[A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement](#)”:

Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes....Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement (Garza, 2014).

Garza calls attention to the ways in which state-sanctioned violence is uniquely burdened by Black women, poor Black people, incarcerated Black people, Queer and Trans Black people, undocumented Black people, and Black people with disabilities. This is another important call for applying the intersectional framing, especially as #BlackLivesMatter has turned into one of the largest global movements for social change of our time.

Women and Trans Women of Color of 1960s - 80s Liberation Movements:

Although Crenshaw is credited with coming up with the term intersectionality, it's important to recognize the long legacy of intellectual work produced by women of color who identified this concept decades earlier before the term was coined and popularly applied. According to Sociologists Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge who wrote a book on intersectionality, women of color who participated in social movements of the 1960s to '80s met “the challenges of colonialism, racism, sexism, militarism, and capitalist exploitation” (2016, p. 64) and because they were impacted by more than one of these systems of power, they applied foundational concepts of intersectionality in their work.

The movements of the '60s and '70s embraced a racial consciousness, rejecting generations of Eurocentric and colonial ideas of white supremacy and racial hierarchy. While rooted in nationalist framing, these culturally and racially based organizations also began to build coalitions and solidarity with other groups, addressing methods of dismantling the status quo and advocating for basic access to power for disenfranchised communities. While women of color were leaders and members of these movements, sexism, heterosexism, and male chauvinism prevailed and women and LGBTQ members faced abuse and marginalization. Divisions were also prevalent in the women's movement and gay liberation movement of the time, especially when led by middle-class white women and cisgender gay white women and men, who reinforced racism or simply ignored the voices of women of color and LGBTQ people of color. Frustrated by the limitations of male-centric nationalist organizations and white-led women's and gay liberation organizations, Black feminists created their own groups, and published their own ideas around intersectionality and dismantling racism and sexism “using the epithet ‘black feminist’” (Collins and Bilge, 2016, p. 65).

Sidebar: Marsha P. Johnson (1945 - 1992) and Sylvia Rivera (1951 - 2002) - Trans Activists



Figure 4.2.5: Marsha P. Johnson, Joseph Ratanski, and Sylvia Rivera march in the 1973 Gay Pride Parade in NYC. (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0; by Gary LeGault)

Marsha “Pay-it-no-mind” Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were best friends. Although largely uncredited for their activism in the mainstream until fairly recently, both were fearless leaders for gay and trans rights before terminology like “transgender” or LGBTQ existed. They advocated for Queer people, the homeless, poor people, and sex workers. Both participated in the Stonewall Uprising (1969) and Gay Liberation Front. Together, they founded STAR - Street Transvestite (later Transgender) Action Revolutions. STAR provided shelter for homeless LGBTQ youth of color, many of whom got into sex work in order to survive.

Marsha was from New Jersey and Sylvia was born in the Bronx, New York. As trans women of color (Marsha was Black, Sylvia was Puerto Rican and Venezuelan) they faced discrimination from white middle-class gay communities. Marsha was well known on Christopher Street in New York for her colorful and flamboyant outfits, typically including flowers and fruits on her head. She was unabashedly herself and famous for her generosity, standing up for the most vulnerable of our society and serving as a drag mother. Sylvia was often bullied for her interest in feminine makeup and fashion, leaving her home at only 10 years old. She expressed her gender identity in multiple ways including effeminate boy/male, “half-sister,” transvestite, drag queen, street queen, and transgender (Aue, 2019, pp. 74-76; Morris and Keller, 2021, pp. 742 - 744).

As sex workers who didn't conform to gender binaries, and often homeless, both Marsha and Sylvia faced violence and harassment from clients, police, and bystanders and were arrested multiple times. They also struggled with mental illness and substance abuse. Marsha later became an AIDS activist, sharing that she was HIV positive in an interview in 1992. Marsha's body was found floating in the Hudson River that same year. The police ruled it a suicide, but many of her friends suspected that Marsha was murdered (Aue, 2019, pp. 74-76; Pierceson, 2020, pp. 227-228). Sylvia died at the age 51 due to kidney cancer (Morris and Keller, 2021, pp. 742 - 744).

Both Marsha and Sylvia demanded the inclusion of trans people and gender identity in the mainstream gay liberation movement. At the 1973 Pride March, they were told to march in the back with all drag queens, so that gays who were "more palatable" could be presented prominently, but they refused to be shut out of a movement they fought for and marched ahead anyway. Sylvia was heckled while speaking on a stage at Washington Square Park, calling out white middle class marchers for their discrimination of trans people of color, who frequently were jailed and beaten, yet never acknowledged. In her now widely recognized speech, named [Sylvia's "Y'all Better Quiet Down" speech](#), she testifies to the violence she's faced and yells, "I believe in gay power, I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights" ([LoveTapesCollective](#), 2019). She invites marchers to visit the STAR office, where people are "trying to do something for all of us, and not men and women that belong to a white middle-class club—and that's what you all belong to! REVOLUTION NOW! GAY POWER!" (Morris and Keller, 2021, pp. 742 - 744; Keller and Morris, 2021, pp. 466-467; [LoveTapesCollective](#), 2019).

Collins and Bilge wrote:

African American women understood that addressing the oppression they faced could not be solved by race-only, or class-only or gender-only or sexuality-only frameworks. Thus early statements of intersectionality permeated black feminist intellectual production because other women of colour developed similar sensibilities and because the social context of social movement activism provided venues for working on these ideas (Collins 2000) (2016, pp. 65-66).

One such important piece of document that articulated this political and intellectual perspective was the Combahee River Collective (CRC)'s "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977). This collective of black feminists lesbians were deeply entrenched in racial justice and gender justice movements. Collins and Bilge point out that earlier texts had been written about the concept of intersectionality, such as the 1970 volume *The Black Woman* edited by Toni Cade Bambara, Frances Beal's essay, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1969), and abolitionist and feminist, Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman" speech (1849) which is noted as "a benchmark for intersectional sensibilities" (2016, p. 68). However, these contributions are often overlooked, as the writers didn't have as large an audience as the CRC, nor the context of social movement organizing. By the time CRC developed, there was a larger network of black feminist activism which helped propel the CRC's statement to a wider audience.

The statement starts out by affirming the collective's commitment "to struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression" which they named as interlocking systems of oppression (Smith, 2000, p. 264). They recognized the long trajectory of Black women resistance, and although not all would identify as feminists, the CRC pointed out how daily interactions with oppressive forces led Black women to develop a political ideology rooted in antiracism and antisexism (p. 265).

Embracing self-love and self-value, the CRC saw the importance of identity politics and that only Black women could liberate themselves. They rejected Queenhood and simply asked to be seen as full human beings. They explicitly named the framing of intersectionality, writing, "We also find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives, they are most often experienced simultaneously" (Smith, 2000, p. 267). They connected intersecting identities with interlocking systems of power, stating, "...the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy" (pp. 267-268).

In addition to highlighting their political philosophies, the CRC statement chiefly pointed out the challenges faced by Black lesbian feminist intellectuals and activists, such as meeting multiple forms of oppression at once (racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism), leading to psychological stresses and feelings of isolation, but also less material access to political power and resources. Still, they maintained the power of this positionality, writing, "We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (p. 270). See also "[Black Feminism](#)" under Chapter 3.

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4.3: Intersectionality and Third World Feminism

Centering Women of Color

Once we understand the relevance of an intersectionality framing, we need to also understand why the term feminism or the mainstream women's movement alone might be insufficient when addressing specific challenges and oppressions experienced by women of color. Author and Creative Writing Professor, Susan Muaddi Darraj described the challenges she faced when confronted with “a brand of white feminism” that she felt didn't represent her experiences as an Arab American. Upon learning about Betty Friedan's work, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in graduate school, Muaddi Darraj felt that the woes of the housewife spoke to a specific race and class privilege of white middle class women that didn't represent her experiences. The assumption around the **heteropatriarchal** nuclear family model where the husband in the heterosexual marriage financially supported the household contrasted deeply with her own family, where her mother assumed housekeeping duties in addition to working full-time for their family business (2019, p. 286).

She further elaborated that she disliked how “this version of feminism” viewed women like her as veiled oppressed women from the Middle East, an “orientalist cliché,” who needed rescuing by the supposed “assertive, liberated” western women. Pointing out the hypocrisy in such notions, Muaddi Darraj stated, “They wanted to save them from the burden of their families and religion but not from the war, hunger, unemployment, political persecution, and oppression that marked their daily lives and that left them with only their families and religion as sole sources of comfort” (2019, pp. 287 - 288). She added that Arab women were simultaneously exoticized and “othered,” being asked if she knew how to belly dance and often mistaken as Muslim, even though she is Christian (p. 293).



Figure 4.3.1: Algerian revolutionary, Djamila Bouhired. (CC BY-SA 4.0; Hijazilanai via Wikimedia Commons)

So, Muaddi Darraj went in search for *her* feminism, pointing out that Arab culture was “a jungle of patriarchal pitfalls,” but also how she felt that her culture never stood in her way. In fact she found feminism in her culture, as evidenced by the stories her father told her about Djamila Bouhired (Figure 4.3.1), an Algerian revolutionary who resisted French colonialism. This was a common story he heard growing up in Palestine. She learned about Muslim women who saw no contradictions between feminism and Islam, such as the Muslim Sisters (Ikhwat al-muslimat) in the West Bank who believe that Islam gave women their full rights, but that the religion was corrupted by men to suit their patriarchal agenda (2019, p. 294).

Inspired by the works of Black feminists and other women of color feminists who “had the courage to carve a feminism of their own out of the monolithic block that was generally accepted as ‘feminism’” (p. 295), Muaddi Darraj began developing her own feminist voice, reflecting that “It required no great sacrifice of my Arab heritage, no shame at my close ties to my family, and no compromise of my own needs” (p. 299).

Third World Feminism

Feeling alienated by mainstream, white, or western feminism seems to be a common experience for many women of color. They often don't see themselves reflected in the people who purport to represent all women, but instead often erase or ignore most who don't fit their narratives. This was even experienced by a Latina professor of Women's Studies and Chicano/Latino Studies at CSU Long Beach, Dr. Maythee Rojas. In the prologue of her book, *Women of Color and Feminism* (2009), Rojas states how the project of feminism is to center women's stories, but "often the generic 'women' has meant white women" (p. ix) and so it's not surprising that many women of color don't gravitate toward feminism. Rojas even admits that she has a hard time identifying herself as a feminist at times, since "as a Latina from a working-class background whose family and friends are still largely removed from the academic world, I often feel the tension that the word raises when it is brought up" (p. ix).

This is perhaps why in addition to understanding intersectionality, we need to be familiar with **Third World Feminism**. According to author and Professor Emeritus of History, Dominican University, Cheryl Johnson-Odim, there is an added element of racism and imperialism in addition to gender and class oppression, that needs to be applied when understanding struggles by Third World women. "The term *Third World* is frequently applied in two ways: to refer to 'underdeveloped'/overexploited geopolitical entities, i.e., countries, regions, and even continents; and to refer to oppressed nationalities from these world areas who are now resident in 'developed' First World countries" (1991, p. 314). Both groups of Third World women feel marginalized under this "feminist terrain as an almost singularly antisexist struggle" while ignoring how sexism overlaps with oppressions tied to class, race, and empire (p. 315).



Figure 4.3.2: Author, novelist, poet, and activist, Alice Walker in 2012. In 1983, she became the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel, *The Color Purple*. (CC BY-NC-SA 2.0; The American Library Association via Flickr)

Johnson-Odim noted how such narrow definitions of feminism have led to some women of color electing to use a term other than feminist. For example, African American author, Alice Walker (Figure 4.3.2) preferred using the phrase **womanist** to describe "a Black feminist or feminist of color" (1991, p. 315) whose priorities laid with the entire community, both male and female. Such a term stressed the sentiment amongst Third World women that their feminist struggles were not separate from the struggles against racism and economic exploitation that their communities shared (p. 315). See also "[Sidebar: Black Womanism](#)" in Chapter 3.

The 1970s was a time when international feminist movements began to take shape, as women in Asian, Africa, and Latin America were emerging against colonialism and women of color in the United States were coming out of the civil rights movement. This was a time of applying social justice solutions to addressing racism, classism and imperialism, along with sexism. While many women who emerged from the civil rights movement were involved in antiracism, this didn't prevent them from experiencing racism within the women's movement in the U.S., nor was there much emphasis on the role of racism in the oppression of all women.

Third World women in the west often ended up organizing separately from white women due to the racism they experienced. Gloria Joseph, who organized with Black women across the African Diaspora, pointed out how "black women have as much in

common, in terms of their oppression, with black men as they do with white women” (Johnson-Odim, 1991, p. 318). There was a particular way that Black women were constructed in the slaveocracy that justified the violent oppression they experienced, and such ideas are still around today. And despite the slave system resulting in work by poor whites “nearly superfluous except to help police the black labor force,” instead of working to end slavery, poor whites aligned themselves to the white masters and desired opportunities for themselves to benefit off slavery. Johnson-Odim argued that some Black American women suspected the same with the white women’s movement, translating women’s interest to “the desire of a few white women to enter the corporate boardroom” (p. 319). This would only result in benefiting only a select few, and mostly women with access to race and class privilege.

Johnson-Odim further points out how a feminist movement that solely focuses on the advancement of the most privileged class of women will never dismantle larger systems that continually rely on the exploitation of nations and people with less power. She writes how focusing only on “women’s rights” will never result in larger changes. If women from western societies accomplish some sense of equality with men through legal and moral changes in patriarchal systems without simultaneous challenges to racist and classist systems, this will ultimately undermine the success of a movement for *all* women. Also important to add that any “economic surplus in the West is often directly related to oppression in the Third World” (1991, p. 320).

As First World women advance toward equality in the workplace or labor in the home, the “second shift” of housework are not picked up by men. Instead, they become dependent on labor from Black women, Indigenous women, women of color, and immigrant women largely from developing nations, who often are separated from their own families, paid poorly and work in highly exploitative and vulnerable positions. Filomina Clarice Steady, Professor Emerita of Africana Studies from Wellesley College wrote in 1985 that such a type of feminism will only help women “be seen as partners in oppression and as having the potential of becoming primary oppressors themselves” (Johnson-Odim, 1991, p. 321). Alternatively, Steady calls for an intersectional approach to not only dismantling sexism, but also larger systems of economic and political inequality that lead to a relationship of economic dependency and internal colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Asia, and economically impoverished areas of the United States.

Additionally, paternalistic attitudes of western feminism often mistakenly portray women of the Third World as oppressed by “an indigenous patriarchy,” and act as though egalitarian relationships between men and women were brought over from western societies. Muaddi Darraj’s essay addressed this very hypocrisy when discussing how white women would see all Arab women as oppressed by Islam or Arabic culture. In fact, it could be argued that the opposite is true, as severe patriarchal values were often imposed on many cultures along with European colonialism. Ultimately, the point is that aspects outside of gender play a major role in the oppression of Third World women and that struggles remain “exacerbated by Western patriarchy, racism, and exploitation” (Johnson-Odim, 1991, p. 321).

Many Third World Feminist call for a movement that works to dismantle systems that oppress all women, including racism, sexism, classism, and imperialism. Johnson-Odim calls for First World women to confront racism in their own communities and struggle against the complicity of the First World in oppressing Third World women. While all women might share experiences of sexism, that doesn’t mean that a more privileged group of women can’t oppress other women. Third World feminism requires a decentering of the “colonial lens” and calls for a broad base of feminists to recognize the importance of respecting different cultures and “agree that women in various places are perfectly capable of having their own voice” (1991, p. 325).

Chicana Feminism and *Mestiza* Consciousness

Chicana feminist consciousness has also brought forward the role of Chicanas in organized resistance and crafting “spaces of liberation.” Chicanas were on the frontlines of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and '70s, creating their own “Chicana praxis of resistance,” organizing within the margins, challenging the intersections of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, and colonialism (Espinoza, Cotera, Blackwell, 2018, p. 1). Take for example, critical feminist thinkers like Yolanda Broyles-González who challenged the minimization of women’s role in Teatro Campesino (p. 8). Or the work of Chela Sandoval, Professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies, UC Santa Barbara, who “articulated a flexible oppositional consciousness” from which women of color negotiated their identities as they worked “within and between multiple movements to combat oppression” (p. 15).

Chicana feminist writings are grounded in intersectionality, the editors of *Chicana Feminisms* writing, “Our guiding metaphor for Chicana feminist writing expands on Anzaldúa’s notion of Chicanas’ bodies as bocacalles. Literally, bocacalle translates as an intersection where two streets cross one another” (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Nájera-Ramírez, and Zavella, 2003, p. 2). But the editors further explain that bocacalle also translates to “mouth/street,” thereby eliciting a picture of women shouting in the streets, demanding to be heard. Chicana feminists have asserted their analysis of power dynamics in relation to their locations, based on diverse class, racial, sexual, linguistic, and nationality backgrounds. Still, there are common structural locations that women of Mexican origin share in the United States, including being predominantly working class, disproportionately poor, and

a majority not experiencing social or economic mobility despite being in the U.S. for several generations. Chicanas are targets of racist schools, concentrated in segregated job markets such as in agriculture or garment manufacturing, and facing exploitative work dynamics including low pay and poor conditions (p. 3).

A Chicana feminist point of view is also “rooted in Mexican history,” located at the intersection of colonialism, violence, discrimination, and racial and class hierarchies, “against the backdrop of Catholicism and language repression, especially toward indigenous peoples (Castañeda 1993; González 1999)” (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Nájera-Ramírez, and Zavella, 2003, p. 4). Furthermore, Mexicanas and Chicanas are impacted by 20th and 21st century neoliberal practices of free trade and the politics of globalization with the passage of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), opening up trade restrictions that lead to major displacement and migration (p. 4). They point out how overlapping histories of Mexico and the United States lead to Chicanas having a transnational point of view, recognizing the border as a “site of convergence, conflict, and creativity” (pp. 4-5).



Figure 4.3.3: Chicana feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa (1990). (Licensed under CC BY 2.0; Photo by K. Kendall)

Chicana feminists offer various theoretical insights, marking a “consciousness of resistance to the repression of language and culture, a recognition of a ‘third space’ located within intersecting structures of power in which women construct claims to human agency,” such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s (Figure 4.3.3) *mestizaje* and “borderlands” (Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Nájera-Ramírez, and Zavella, 2003, p. 5). In Anzaldúa’s canonical work, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987; 1999), she locates the mestiza in a hybrid identity of indigenous, Spanish, and African ancestry, giving voice to people who live between worlds and are in “perpetual transition,” writing, “To live in the Borderlands means you...

are neither *hispana india negra española*
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
 caught in the crossfire between camps
 while carrying all five races on your back
 not knowing which side to turn to, run from (p. 216).

Anzaldúa also writes,

the world is not a safe place to live in....Alienated from her mother culture, “alien” in the dominant culture, the woman of color does not feel safe within the inner life of her Self....caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits....My Chicana identity is grounded in the Indian woman’s history of resistance....Like *La Llorona*, the Indian woman’s only means of protest was wailing (pp. 42 - 43).

Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminists have called forward an erased history, that of *Malinali Tenepat*, or *Malintzin*, or *La Malinche*,

or *Dona Marina*, transforming her from “traitor to heroine.” Sold into slavery as a child, then given to Spanish conquistador, Hernán Cortés, Malintzin is portrayed as a powerful woman who worked on behalf of various Indigenous tribes other than the Aztecs, a “mediator between languages, races, and cultures” (*Exploring borderlands*, 2003). Chicana feminists questioned who she’s actually betrayed, as she was enslaved and sold off as a child. Maria Herrera Sobek, Chicana/o Studies, UC Santa Barbara, stated, “In redefining *La Malinche*, the Chicanas are redefining themselves also, and redefining themselves in their own terms to put the record straight” (*Exploring borderlands*, 2003, 21:58 - 22:49). Anzaldúa calls out the patriarchal interpretation of *La Malinche*, the word, *La Chingada*, meaning the fucked one, stating, “She has become the bad word that passes a dozen times a day from the lips of Chicanos. Whore, prostitute, the woman who sold out her people to the Spaniards are epithets Chicanos spit out with contempt” (1987; 1999, p. 44). Anzaldúa argues that the bigger betrayal is in “making us believe that the Indian woman in us is the betrayer” (p. 44).

In the chapter, “La conciencia de la mestiza/Towards a New Consciousness,” Anzaldúa (1987; 1999) challenges the constructions of borders and difference, uncovering a power of being in between. The New *Mestiza* consciousness is one that recognizes the fluidity of culture and position, claiming, “Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically” (p. 101). She embraces “a tolerance for contradictions,” as the *mestiza* consciousness establishes a new way of thinking in this world, a way toward a future that dismantles old and harmful archetypes rooted in patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy, continuing, “A Massive uprooting of dualistic thinking...the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war” (p. 102).

She proclaims the importance of *mestizas* to support one another in order to challenge patriarchy, emphasizing

As long as woman is put down, the Indian and the Black in all of us is put down. The struggle of the *mestiza* is above all a feminist one. As long as *los hombres* think they have to *chingar mujeres* and each other to be men, as long as men are taught that they are superior and therefore culturally favored over *la mujer*...there can be no real healing of our psyches” (Anzaldúa, 1987; 1999, p. 106).

Anzaldúa (1987; 1999) also specifies that “The *mestizo* and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose,” as Queer people of color have often had to have more knowledge of other cultures, have experienced more injustices, “survived them despite all odds,” and have always been at the front and center of “all liberation struggles.” She writes, “People, listen to what your *jotería* is saying” (p. 107). Anzaldúa connects this new consciousness back to the land, writing that Chicanas and Chicanos have always tended to the land, and that...

This land was Mexican once

was Indian always

and is,

And will be again (p. 113).

See also "[Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x/e Feminism](#)" under Chapter 6.

Pinayism

Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies (San Francisco State) professor, Dr. Allyson Tintiangco-Cubales defines a very specific application of intersectionality in what she’s named **pinaysism**: “a radical pinay sisterhood that connects the global, local, and personal stories of Pinay struggle, survival, service, sisterhood, and strength to mentally, physically, politically, and spiritually uplift ourselves” (1995). She clarifies that *pinayism* is not simply a “Filipino version of feminism or womanism” but that it instead draws from various philosophies and examines the complexity of where race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality intersect (2005, pp. 139 - 141). First, of the use of the term “Pinay,” Tintiangco-Cubales cites the late Historian of Filipinx American history (San Francisco State), Dr. Dawn Mabalon, who identified the use of the terms Pinay and Pinoy of the 1920s and '30s as an identity localized in the United States (p. 140). However, Pinayism also tries to insert “a forum to make connections to the issues of Filipinas and Filipinos in diaspora” recognizing how the issues impacting Pinays are borderless. Tintiangco-Cubales explains that “Pinays who live in the United States are affected by the situations of Pinays in the Philippines, Australia, Canada, Kuwait, Japan, and around the world” (p. 140 - 142).

Another important aspect of pinayism is that it’s an “impetus for change.” Tintiangco-Cubales writes:

Rejecting white feminism, where women fight with men for equality, Pinayists must take steps to include Pinoys in the fight against sexism by making connections to issues such as classism and neocolonialism....neocolonialism is a system that maintains unequal relations of power on economic, political, and ideological levels in a postcolonial period. Profound relationships exist among sexism, classism, and neocolonialism (2005, p. 142).

On that note, Tintiangco-Cubales and Professor of Asian American Studies, CSU East Bay, Dr. Jocyl Sacramento co-write an article titled "Practicing Pinayist Pedagogy," where they explain how after fourteen years, "Pinayism has become a praxis asserting a transformative and transgressive agency that combines theory, practice, and personal reflection" (Tintiangco-Cubales and Sacramento, 2009, p. 179). As a praxis, which builds on Paulo Friere's idea of students becoming agents of social change themselves, a methodology of applying theory to practice, pinayism is about action. Specifically, a pinayist praxis is the process and production of addressing issues related to Pinay struggles, service and sisterhood and a method of implementing change through "decolonization, humanization, self-determination, and relationship building, ultimately moving toward liberation" (pp. 179 - 180). At the core of this praxis is Pinayist studies, which offers counternarratives on Filipina women's stories, histories and contemporary experiences.

Next, participants uncover specific challenges (personal or community-based), and pursue a plan of action around resisting oppression and making a commitment to social justice. For example, Tintiangco-Cubales discussed when a young participant shared that her aunt was a mail-ordered bride and asked what she should do. She shared her story with Tintiangco-Cubales who could only suggest that she talk to her family about it and gave her names of supportive organizations. She learned later that this particular Pinay became an activist for women's rights, last seeing her at a protest in front of the Philippine Consulate, urging the government to stop the trafficking of women and children. Tintiangco-Cubales wrote that, "She humanized Pinayism for me. She also gave me hope" (Tintiangco-Cubales and Sacramento, 2009, p. 182).

In practice, pinayism offers both the teacher and the student a type of "mutual humanization" as that relationship is reciprocal and not hierarchical. The space turns into a place of "transformational resistance" and liberation for Pinays and Pinayists, ultimately cultivating a powerful healing space for all (Tintiangco-Cubales and Sacramento, 2009, pp. 180-181). Rooted in the context of the history of feminism, womanism, and third world/women of color studies, Pinayism also creates a space for hope, as it's not about male-bashing, and all genders are encouraged to participate. The transformative moment happens when the Pinayist educator's classroom turns into a space for hope and a place to call home (p. 185).

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4.4: Transformational Liberation through Love

Love as a Way Forward



Figure 4.4.1: bell hooks at the New School in 2014. (Licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0; by Alex Lozupone (Tduk))

When I think of love as a transformational concept, I go back to the work of activist, feminist, and prolific writer, bell hooks (Figure 4.4.1). In one of her best selling books, *All About Love: New Visions* (2001), hooks reflected on her personal experience with love, writing that “it was love’s absence that let me know how much love mattered” (ix). She called to attention the simultaneous obsession our society has around being desired and “finding” love, but also our repulsion from having any honest discussions about love. All around her she heard that lovelessness was the norm. She wrote *All About Love* as a call to return to love so that we can “let our hearts speak” (xi).

In her book *Women of Color and Feminism* (2009), Dr. Maythee Rojas also projected the importance of love, explaining, “love is what provides a way forward for women of color” (p. 135). In fact, the concept of self-love and self-care is rooted in writings by radical women of color, many finding that self-love is a matter of survival in a toxic white supremacist, imperialist, capitalist, heteropatriarchy that seems to reserve the most hateful acts of violence and abuse towards women of color, particularly poor women of color, and Queer and Trans people of color. If we accept this lovelessness, we’ll only continue toward demise; it’s up to each of us to love ourselves and each other in order to thrive and continue fighting for a world that embraces love and embraces our differences.

At times it can be disheartening to learn about violent injustices and overwhelming to comprehend how oppression may have impacted our lives. However, applying an intersectional lens can also help us uncover the power of resilience amongst oppressed communities. This can be especially true in the ways that we find love in ourselves, for our ancestors, our culture, and our communities. This starts by breaking through the damaging messages and practices, stemming from the legacies of settler-colonialism, imperialism, wars, slavery, and genocide. Ethnic Studies allows us to see that we absolutely can unravel the traumas that we inherit. And an intersectional framing can help us to see and value the ways that love is often the connecting theme across stories of struggle and survival.



Figure 4.4.2: Chicana author and feminist Cherrie Moraga on Jan 1, 2000. (Licensed under CC BY 2.0; by Natália Otto)

When human beings are marginalized, it is tremendously validating and empowering to find others who understand our experiences. This lends the possibility of finding love in a community. An example of finding community and love through written work is the groundbreaking publication of the first edition of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (Figure 4.4.2) in 1981. The book represented a vanguard of written work that intersected race, gender, class and sexuality, unfailingly transforming feminism in the United States. Rojas explained how the anthology expressed pain and anger, but also joy, holding a promise of building bridges. Moraga wrote of the book,

To come to see each other as sisters. This is not a given. I keep wanting to repeat over and over again, the pain and shock of difference, the joy of commonness, the exhilaration of meeting through incredible odds against it (as cited in Rojas, 2009, p. 29).

Rojas emphasizes how Moraga's excitement cannot be overstated, as many of the contributors, including Moraga and Anzaldúa, were lesbians of color, often isolated and marginalized within their families and also among women of color feminist spaces.

Dismantling the status quo can be daunting, and Rojas argues that while there are concrete structures to take down in order to advance social justice and equality, "there is also an emotional repairing that must take place" tied to the damage that generations of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty can inflict on our self-esteem and sense of self-worth. She writes: "Not loving others is one of the most effective ways to ensure divisions and internal conflict. Not loving ourselves warrants our annihilation" (2009, p. 137).

bell hooks wrote that "when we can see ourselves as we truly are and accept ourselves, we build the necessary foundation for self-love" (2001, p. 53), but that this assertion can be confusing, especially if we were socialized to see ourselves as "unlovable." She continues that while it may be helpful to reflect on our childhood to understand how one's sense of identity was shaped, we can get stuck holding onto grief and pain and place blame on others. hooks promotes the importance of the next stage of self-love, which includes "actively introducing into our lives constructive life-affirming thought patterns and behavior" (p. 55). This includes thinking critically about ourselves and our society: to live consciously. This means acceptance of ourselves and taking responsibility in all areas of our lives. This does not mean denying the reality of oppressive systems like racism, classism, homophobia, and sexism, nor preventing discrimination from happening. Instead, accepting ourselves and taking responsibility means "we can choose how we respond to acts of injustice" (p. 57). hooks emphasizes how taking responsibility can lead to reclaiming agency over our lives and help center our well-being.

Radical Self-Love



Figure 4.4.3: Sonya Renee Taylor presents at Central Washington University on February 28, 2019. (Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0; by Central Washington University)

Sonya Renee Taylor (Figure 4.4.3), poet, activist, and author, asks us to go beyond self-esteem and self-acceptance toward a concept of **radical self-love** in her book, *The Body is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love* (2018). She argues that the oppressive intersections of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, and fatphobia are manifested by our struggle to make peace with the body and that a radical self-love approach envisions “a world free from the systems of oppression that make it difficult and sometimes deadly to live in our bodies” (p. 4). When defining *radical* self-love, Taylor explains that it’s deeper and more expansive than self-confidence or self-esteem, “juicier than self-acceptance” and that “the word *radical* offers us a self-love that is the root or origin of our relationship to ourselves” (p. 6). Reminding her readers that when each of us came into this world, we weren’t ashamed of our bodies, race, gender, age, or disabilities, but through a barrage of harmful messaging from society and media that dehumanize and disparage fat bodies, Black bodies, and disabled bodies, it’s glaringly clear that something radical is needed to resist such messages. She writes that the word *radical* reminds us how our society requires drastic transformation, as the United States was built on the idea of excluding bodies outside land-owning white men (p. 7). Taylor connects radical self-love to our bodies, professing how such a perspective “demands that we see ourselves and others in the fullness of our complexities and intersections and that we work to create space for those intersections” (p. 9). Finally, that radical self-love is the foundation of radical human love and how our relationship with our bodies, “inform our relationships with others” (p. 9).

On apologizing for our bodies, Taylor shared that living in a female, Black, aging, fat body with mental illness, she was “to awaken daily to a planet that expects a certain set of apologies to already live on our tongues...traumas and resiliency of our ancestors are passed on to us molecularly. Being sorry is literally a lesson in our DNA” (2018, p. 11). For Black boys like Emmett Till, that apology could be “exacted by death sentence,” who was expected to be sorry for allegedly whistling at a white woman, his 14-year old body kidnapped, tortured, beaten, mutilated, then shot and dumped in the Tallahatchie River by a group of adult white men. Taylor points out how women are expected to apologize about the length of their skirt or how many drinks they had after a sexual assault; that disabled people were expected to apologize for their need to access; and that if one’s gender identity was different than the sex assigned at birth, and it confused strangers, an apology was expected. Our society has conditioned us be apologetic for not only having the “wrong body” but also for supposedly stirring discomfort in others, Taylor writing, “...it was in these moments that we found our heads bowed in shame, certain that our too fat, too dark, too muchness was the offense” (p. 13). She asks,

Why are we consistently apologizing for the space we inhabit? What if we all understood the inherent vastness of our humanity and therefore occupied the world without apology?...What if we made room for every body so that no one ever had to stand on someone else’s foot? How might we change our lives? How might we change the world? (p. 14).

In February of 2011, Taylor decided to post a picture of herself in a strapless corset: “I was being saucy, sexy, and silly, and I absolutely did not think a single soul besides myself would ever lay eyes on that photo” (2018, p. 15). For six months, she would revisit this photo in her cellphone, fearful of the judgment that could come if she posted it on social media. Taylor describes that “the voices of apology” would take over her brain, and she’d wonder:

Would people think I was vain? Would they fail to see the beautiful woman I saw in the image and instead simply remind me that I was too fat, too black, too queer, too woman, and no one was ever going to think that was beautiful (p. 15)?

But after being inspired by photos of plus-size model, Tara Lynn, Taylor posted her photo on Facebook with a caption that read: "In this picture, I am 230 lbs. In this picture, I have stretch mark....For this one camera flash, I am unashamed, unapologetic" (2018, p. 16). She encouraged others to share their photos, unashamed and unapologetic, and the next morning discovered over thirty photos that people posted, of varying ages, races, sizes, abilities, genders, sexual orientations. A Facebook group page titled "The Body is Not an Apology" was born. Taylor proclaims that "Being unapologetic created an opening for radical self-love" (p. 17) and when one "embraces the fullness of ourselves" (p. 17) we can love our whole selves.

Taylor (2018) critiques the perceived logic of "choice" which she argues leads to justifying judgment of bodies and difference. For example, to claim that people choose to be gay is a scapegoat for our biases and bigotries, because the logic believes if people choose to be different, then they should choose to be the way "I believe they should be." Taylor instead proposes that we ask ourselves, "Why do I need people to be the way I believe they should be?" (p. 18) and that the argument about choice is actually a projection. She also offers what she calls the Three Peaces, the key tenets to "pry us out of the mire of body judgment and shame" (p. 19):

1. Make peace with not understanding
2. Make peace with difference
3. Make peace with *your* body (pp. 18-19).

Understanding should not be a prerequisite to love, and Taylor (2018) encourages us to accept that we can't have everything figured out. In fact, when we comprehend this notion, this can lead to empathy, writing, "Not knowing is an opportunity for exploration without judgements and demands" (p. 19). On the tenet of making peace with difference, Taylor rejects the notion that "we're all the same," a type of mask that veils our own ignorance about someone else's experience, and instead of admitting it and accepting that we can't understand everything, we're prompted to minimize it and instead "homogenize it by proclaiming we are all the same" (p. 21). She applies this concept to the rhetoric of health, pointing out how hegemonic ideas of what's considered a "healthy body" can reinforce the oppressive idea that people with illnesses and disabilities have "defective bodies rather than different bodies" (p. 22). She addresses the larger issue of our society projecting "greater value, resources, and opportunities" (p. 22) to so-called "normal" bodies, ideas warped by hegemony. Taylor calls for a shift from "occasionally celebrating difference (as long as it doesn't fall too far outside the boundaries of our ideas of 'normal') to developing a difference-celebrating culture" (p. 22). On the third tenet, peace with your body, Taylor reminds us that if we believe our body should be some other body, it's likely a "reflection of your struggles with the first two Peaces" (p. 23). She emphasizes that we didn't come into this world hating our bodies, therefore what we've internalized about our bodies is learned. Not only is our internalized body shaming hurting ourselves, it hurts those around us as well. Taylor states that, "The bodies you share space with are afraid you are judging them with the same venom they have watched you use to judge yourself" (p. 24).

With these tenets, Taylor (2018) boldly reminds us that radical self-love is not impossible, nor a destination. She stresses how embracing your body is "awakening...who you have always been: the physical, spiritual, and energetic manifestation of radical self-love" (p. 58). Taylor describes this journey of dismantling body-shame practices as a map - and that radical self-love is drawing "a map back to ourselves" (p. 58).

The Hupa Coming-of-Age Dance as Decolonizing Praxis

An important aspect of transformational love is how love can be used as a mobilizing force, as noted by Rojas when discussing the work of Chicana/o Studies scholar, Chela Sandoval. In her work, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Sandoval finds that "falling in love" can be a type of "conduit" for the action needed to resist oppression. Sandoval writes, "It is love that can access and guide our theoretical and political '*movida*' [movements] - revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being" (as cited in Rojas, 2009, p. 140).

Decolonization is a process of self-love, reclamation of our heritage, and a powerful act of counterhegemony. In *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms and The Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies* (2018), Native American Studies professor, Humboldt State, [Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy](#) (Hupa, Karuk, Yurok), writes about the revitalization of the Hupa Ch'ilwa:l, or Flower Dance ceremony, a public celebration of a young woman's first menstruation, as a decolonizing praxis. Risling Baldy describes how it was her niece, Kayla, who had the first public community Ch'ilwa:l in Hoopa Valley after its absence for many generations. She was 14 and among discussions of bringing back the ceremony, some in the community were enthusiastic and others were hesitant, but Kayla thought, "...if I could be strong and I could do it, then other people who need this dance could have it too, and that was sort of an easy decision to me" (p. 131). Kayla expressed a love for herself and her culture, and by stating

that she would also do it so that other girls might have this too, she expressed a love for her community.

Risling Baldy (2018) explained that built into the Ch'ilwa:l, is "The epistemological foundation of survivance and decolonization" which "understand that every aspect of that landscape is embodied by the K'ixinay [immortal spirits], demonstrates respect and empowerment of women, insists gender equality and is grounded in Hupa feminism" (p. 126). There is an inherent sensibility of intersectional framing as decolonization is a form of feminism. Risling Baldy cites Jaimes Guerrero's call for a formation of "Native Womanism" through traditional practices that center on "women's respect and authority" (p. 127). Risling Baldy also references Native scholars who stress that decolonizing praxis and Indigenous epistemologies and cultures are a basis for healing. The Hupa ceremony of Ch'ilwa:l focuses on movement as a site for addressing trauma or "unresolved historical grief across generations" that's been carried by Native peoples. She brings up how the effects of colonization have traumatized the physical and psychological and that cultural indigenous practices can "restore balance" and focus on dismantling sexism.

The revitalization of the Ch'ilwa:l has transformed some of the inherited traumas related to "gender violence of colonization." Lois Risling, Risling Baldy's mother, remarked that the dance has encouraged men to view women in "a different light." She emphasized that,

When you dance over somebody and celebrate somebody you don't think of them just as a piece of meat or just some kind of sexual object....this ceremony definitely shows that women are important to the society and play a very important part in it (2018, pp. 143-144).

Risling Baldy adds that Native American cultural practices are proven to effectively address self-esteem, poverty, and school performance for youth, citing the work of Teresa LaFromboise who found that family and community support, along with involvement in cultural practices can lead to "resilient adaptation." Lois Risling also stated how the Flower Dance ceremony supports a young woman's development of self-worth. She said,

it tells you that you are not this piece of crap stuff that somebody can abuse and put down. You are being celebrated, as opposed to being demonized....If all of your life you've been told that you are worthless and that you're only good as a sexual partner or somebody who is being abused or beat up...that you're not worth anything...then this dance comes along and say, 'I think enough about you that I'm going to for ten days or five days...sing over you every night....That's very, very positive. That's very important, that I think you're worth that" (Risling Baldy, 2018, p. 145).

For further understanding of Risling Baldy's writing, checkout the section titled "[Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy](#)" under Chapter 4, page 4.2: "Indigenous Ways of Knowing."

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4.5: Summary/Review

Conclusion

In this chapter we learned that intersectionality is a necessary framing that recognizes how racial/ethnic identity, for example, overlaps with gender, sexuality, class, and nationality/immigration status. This shapes the reality of the most marginalized, including women of color, Queer and Trans people of color (QTPOC), poor women, immigrant women, and more. Although Crenshaw is credited with naming this framing, the understanding of intersectionality and the importance of recognizing how racism, sexism, classism, and imperialism simultaneously impact certain communities has existed for a long time, as expressed by various Black women and women of color feminists and thinkers. Such framing continues to inform movements today, including #BlackLivesMatter.

Intersectionality is central to understanding how women of color and QTPOC are violated by interlocking systems of power including white supremacy, imperialism, cisheteropatriarchy, and capitalism. For example, how reproductive actions have been controlled or limited, particularly for the most vulnerable fertile people of our society. An intersectionality framing is also paramount in allowing us to name and recognize each other's humanity, and ultimately lead us to transformational liberation. This has been achieved by generations of reproductive justice work by women of color who've resisted classist and sexist policies and practices such as the elimination of full reproductive health services, including abortions, and forced sterilization.

The work of transformational liberation is also achieved through radical self-love which demands seeing our whole selves and our whole bodies, for all its complexities. A decolonial praxis is another expression of radical love and transformational liberation, such as the revival of the Hupa Ch'ilwa:l, or Flower Dance ceremony, that focuses on a young woman's coming of age. This practice in the Hupa community of Northern California has supported healing from generations of colonial violence and sexism.

Key Terms

- **LGTBQIA:** Stands for Lesbian Gay Transgender Bisexual Queer/Questioning Intersex Asexual and Ally
- **Queer:** an identity that describes sexual and gender identities other than straight and cisgender, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.
- **Intersectionality:** The study of multiple or intersecting social identities that people carry with them, for example, how race and gender intersect to shape the experiences of women of color. Furthermore, intersectionality examines the intersecting structures of power (such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism) that limit, marginalize, or oppress people based on race, class, gender, gender identity, immigration status, sexual orientation, language, religion, ability, and other notable markers of difference.
- **The Mythical Norm:** a phrase coined by Audre Lorde representing "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure" people
- **Women of color:** Cis and trans women who are not racialized as white, including Black, Arab, Asian, Chicana, Indigenous, Latina, Pacific Islander, and mixed race women
- **Heteropatriarchy:** A combination of heterosexism and patriarchy, this term refers to the ways that define gender, masculinity and femininity in restrictive binaries that reinforce a dominant (male, straight, cis) and subordinate (female, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or not straight) relationship. It points to the normalization of these hierarchal social order that privilege cis-straight men over women and LGBTQ people. Heteropatriarchy also works in conjunction with other social hierarchies, including white supremacy, settler colonialism, and imperialism.
- **Third World Feminism:** Third world feminism points out the added elements of racism and imperialism to the gender and class oppression experienced by women from the "third world" or the "global south" and to women who come from "underdeveloped and overexploited" nations who reside in the "developed/First World." Third World feminism critiques feminist theory that only focus on the antisexist struggle while ignoring how sexism overlaps with racial, class, and colonial oppression.
- **Womanist:** Coined by authors, Alice Walker, womanist is used to describe "a Black feminist or feminist of color" whose priorities are laid with the entire community, both male and female. Such a term stressed the sentiment amongst Third World women that their feminist struggles were not separate from the struggles against racism and economic exploitation that their communities shared.
- **Pinayism:** A term coined by Asian American Studies professor, Allyson Tintinagco-Cubales, pinayism is "a radical pinay sisterhood that connects the global, local, and personal stories of Pinay struggle, survival, service, sisterhood, and strength

to mentally, physically, politically, and spiritually uplift ourselves” (1995). She clarifies that *pinayism* is not simply a “Filipino version of feminism or womanism” but that it instead draws from various philosophies and examines the complexity of where race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality intersect, and connects issues across the diaspora. See the [Pinayism website](#) for more.

- **Reproductive justice movement:** This is a women of color-led movement which applies an intersectional lens and expands the concerns beyond the limited framing of pro-choice v. pro-life. The movement offers a broader understanding of restrictions placed on reproductive actions, examining the ways oppressions related to race, gender, class, and sexuality operate simultaneously. They address access to full reproductive services, including abortion, forced sterilization and harmful reproductive restrictions placed on women of color without their consent, and access to resources that allow parents to raise children in safe and healthy environments. According to reproductive justice movement leader, Loretta Ross, reproductive justice has three primary values: the right *not* to have a child; the right to *have* a child; and the right to *parent* children in safe and healthy environments.
- **Eugenics:** This ideology is related to claims of white racial superiority and push that humans must reproduce only “the ‘best examples’ of humanity and eradicate ‘negative expressions’ of human life” (Ross and Solinger, 2017, p. 30). Genetic inferiority was blamed for larger social issues including criminality, poverty, prostitution, and mental illness, and eugenicists eagerly believed that removing supposedly inferior genes would “foster a superior human race free of these social ills.” (Rojas, 2009, p. 98). Groups considered undesirable were nonwhites, the poor, and anybody with psychological, physical, and cognitive disabilities.
- **Radical self-love:** Sonya Renee Taylor invites people affected by various forms of oppression to go beyond self-esteem and self-acceptance toward a concept of radical self-love. The concept envisions “a world free from the systems of oppression that make it difficult and sometimes deadly to live in our bodies” (2018, p. 4). It’s a type of self-love that’s rooted in our relationship to ourselves and the word *radical* reminds us that our society requires drastic transformation, as the United States was built on the idea of excluding bodies outside land-owning white men. Radical self-love is also foundational to radical human love and connection to others.

Discussion Questions

1. What framing does intersectionality provide and why do we need this framing in order to see or understand the experiences of women of color? What happens without this framing?
2. What were the main critiques of mainstream white feminism by women of color and third world women? Name two other feminist ideologies offered instead.
3. What are the ways you’ve been taught to perform gender?

Journal Prompts

1. Consider and write down your racial/and or ethnic identity. Then write down your gender (or gender identity), class/ socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and citizenship or immigration status. How have the social identities you considered impacted your experiences such as at work and education opportunities, day-to-day interaction with others, family relationships, social status, and/or access to resources like jobs, higher education, housing, etc.? For example, does your immigration status impact access to financial aid, social services, housing, jobs, etc.? Does your skin color impact how you’re treated in a store? or by police? Does your socioeconomic background inform access to high education? housing? Does your gender/gender identity influence how your coworker treats you?
2. How can learning about women of color and intersectionality help us resist oppressive systems of power that exist in our society? In answering this question, also consider at least 2 examples of resistance by women of color/third world feminists and/or social movement activists. You may also consider how this applies to your own identity or experiences, whether you identify as a “woman of color” or not.
3. Define and explain why reproductive justice is a major issue for women of color and how this is related to the history of the US controlling raced and gendered bodies. Then summarize at least 2 examples of barriers poor women of color face in particular when it comes to accessing reproductive health. Optionally, you may also connect key ideas with your own experiences around access (or lack of) to comprehensive reproductive health or how the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* may impact women of color and poor women.

Class Activities

"Doing" Gender Skits using Theater of the Oppressed

1. Self-reflection: Have students brainstorm ways they may have been implicitly or explicitly taught to "do" gender. For example, were they ever told "Boys don't cry" or "Girls can't play with trucks"? Were they conditioned to act "ladylike" or "like a man"? Have them think back to as young as they can. They may work in groups or independently.
2. Then have them consider how these moments or experiences might intersect with their race, culture, nationality, social class, sexual orientation, religion, or other markers of difference. For example, "Gay people don't exist in Korea" or "This is how Black men are supposed to act."
3. Acting out: Put students into small groups, have them share their examples and then select one example. Following the methods of Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed, direct students to act out a scenario based on an example of "doing gender" that they selected. First, have the group act out the scenario according to the student's memory.
4. Discuss: Once the scene is completed, have students discuss what they observed, how they felt, and how they might change the situation. What would they do differently? How might they alter the dialogue so that instead of the scene focusing on an oppressive action reinforcing gender standards, students can challenge gender norms and expectations?
5. Stepping in: Then have them act out the same scene again. This time though, students will be allowed to intervene and offer alternatives. They can yell "Stop" to freeze the actors in mid-action. Then that individual can step in and take over the role of the protagonist in the scene and act out a different solution.
6. For example: If students were acting out a scene where a father tells his 5-year-old son to stop crying and "act like a man," the second time around what can the father do differently? Or can another family member step in and challenge what the father tells his son in a productive way?

Reproductive Justice

This lesson can be done online or in-person.

1. Have students work in small groups to map out barriers that women of color and fertile people have historically and continue to face when it comes to reproductive issues. Have them consider examples of population control, eugenics, forced sterilization, limited access to abortion and reproductive care. They can create lists, charts, brainstorming maps, or even illustrate what they learn from sections 8.4 and 8.5 in this chapter.
2. Then have students brainstorm ways that women of color have historically led the way in the reproductive justice movement. What are they critiquing? What are they advocating?
3. Students can create a protest poster advocating for one of these changes or critiques. Or you can ask them to record a mini-presentation of what they're advocating for and upload it onto an online platform. Either way, the objective is for students to consider addressing a reproductive injustice that women of color and fertile people of color have faced or continue to face, and how to advocate for justice.
4. For example: If the issue is access to abortion services, the poster might call for the passage of state or local legislation that calls for the protection of rights to abortion services.

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