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THE NEED AND EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL POWER FOR ‘ASIAN
AMERICAN’ OR AAPI AND ITS IMPACTS TODAY: COMPARISON BETWEEN THE
BLACK POWER MOVEMENT, THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, AND THE RISE OF
ASIANS

A thesis submitted to

Regis College

The Honors Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For Graduation with Honors

by

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May 2022

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THE NEED AND EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL POWER FOR 'ASIAN AMERICAN' OR
AAPI AND ITS IMPACTS TODAY: COMPARISON BETWEEN THE BLACK POWER
MOVEMENT, THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, AND THE RISE OF ASIANS

Advisor's Name: Michael ChiangReader's Name: Lauren Hirshberg

The first known Asians arrived in the United States in the 16th century. By the mid-19th century, major waves of Asian immigrants traveled to the United States. During this time, early Asian immigrants faced racist stereotypes, discrimination, and exclusionary legislations. Inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, early Asian activists created political coalitions, redefined their identity, and gained political power. Gaining political power ensures they are incorporated into society, their needs are addressed, resources are shared equally, and meaningful influence over government policies were obtained. Through this, early Asians created their self-determined label and political coalition: 'Asian American'. Yet this label today creates issues with aggregation and the model minority myth. From this, my thesis aims to

analyze how early Asian activism worked in solidarity with African American activist, how early Asian activists used similar tactics from the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements to achieve political power, analyze the unique struggles early Asians faced in pursuit for political power, and analyze the issues of the 'Asian American' label and model minority myth today. With this, this thesis will argue that despite the achievements gained early Asian activists, Asians today still face issues with integration due to lack of visibility, the model minority myth, and the evolving issues with the label 'Asian American'. This thesis will argue how the population of 'Asian American' has increased and diversified so much today that the 'Asian American' label no longer suffice and thus must evolve to reflect what that population is today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a biochemistry major and someone who has not taken any history and English courses for four years, this thesis was an arduous yet a rewarding journey. This thesis completely put me out of my comfort zone and has, occasionally, made me shout out in frustration. Despite this, this thesis made me appreciate studying history all over again. Back in high school, I used to study history and made it my core subject. I enjoyed memorizing past events, analyzing how and why historical events occurred, examining social and political trends, and observing how often history repeats itself. Yet, this thesis' focus on Asian Americans' journey in the United States gave me the opportunity to finally learn a subject that I felt was neglected while growing up. However, I became empowered to learn this topic more due to the increased anti-Asian hate from the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, I also became empowered to write this thesis due to my own previous racist and microaggressive experiences. From hearing those say "ching chong" after an Asian accented person speaks, constantly being asked "where am I truly from", and being told that I do not suffer as a "true minority group", this is my own way of fighting back and speaking up.

Yet, I could not do this without the guidance and support from my advisor and reader Dr. Michael Chiang and Dr. Lauren Hirshberg. Without them I would not have known where to start this thesis and write as efficiently as I did. They are so incredibly patient for willing to guide a complete novice in the world of history and help her write a thesis in that field. Thus, I want to sincerely thank them for all their efforts as without them, this thesis would not exist.

I would also like to thank Regis University's Honors Program for giving me this opportunity as it is not an opportunity most undergraduates would have. It has been a long process but a process that I highly appreciate and will never forget. I would also like to thank my

friends and family who supported me throughout this process. They allowed me to ramble on and on about my thesis, peer review my thesis multiple times, and even helped me finalize my citations with me. Their contributions allowed me to persist and have been emotional anchors throughout this journey.

All in all, for everyone who's been there for me academically and/or emotionally, thank you so much.

INTRODUCTION

A 1782 homily staples itself as a sacrament to American democracy and the belief of Americanism – an idea still present today. This homily is the American “melting pot”, a metaphor for the diversification of people in the United States. Near the end of the American War of Independence, a French American writer J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur created this homily in a series of twelve letters known as *Letters from an American Farmer*. Here, he stated that all American “individuals of all nations [will be] melted into a new race of men”¹. Yet, when asked where an American man would come from and what they would look like, he responded that an American man is “either a European, or descendant of a European”². Other races, especially Asians, were not included in this homily.

In early American history, Asians faced racist stereotypes, discrimination, and exclusionary legislations as an attempt to remove Asians from American life; however, with increasing global trade came increasing immigration. Due to this, removing Asians were no longer feasible thus white nativist resorted to marginalization, segregation, and the forever foreigner treatment. These experiences created a foundation for future Asian activism, especially from the Civil Right’s and the Black Power Movement’s success. The Civil Rights and Black Power Movements utilized political power to gain massive strides for equality. Their methods inspired other minority groups to do the same, especially for Asians.

Now, there has been in-depth analysis on the impacts of the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the influence of Asians during this time. However, this thesis aims

¹ John Hector Crevecoeur, “Letters from an American Farmer: Letter III – What is An American”, *Avalon Project*, Lillian Goldman Law Liberty, 2008, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/letter_03.asp, (accessed 13 December 2021)

² Ibid.

to examine how Asian activist utilized similar tactics to African American activists to achieve liberations for themselves through political power by the creation of political coalitions, the protests and activism through civil disobedience, and the culmination of the two previous steps to create legislative changes. Yet, this thesis will argue that despite these early achievements, Asians today still face issues with integration into American life and democracy due to lack of visibility, the model minority myth, and the evolving issues with the label ‘Asian American’. To elaborate on this latter point, this thesis will argue how the population of ‘Asian American’ has increased and diversified so much today that the ‘Asian American’ label no longer suffice and thus must evolve to reflect what that population is today.

Analyzing this is significant because Asians are often ignored for being too well off; thus, dismantling the model minority myth is important as populations of Asians are exponentially increasing. In 1879, the U.S. Census Bureau reported approximately 63,000 Asians³. In the 1960s, there were 980,000 individuals identifying as Asians before the U.S. Census Bureau reported 11.9 million in 2000⁴. By 2019, this population increased to 23.2 million, and research show that this population is predicted to be the largest immigrant group in 2055 with a 213% population increase – even surpassing Hispanics by 2055. This makes Asians and Pacific Islanders one of the fastest growing populations in the United States today. Thus, not addressing the struggles this group faces marginalizes a large group in American society. However, with political influence, it guarantees that minority groups are incorporated into the overall society’s beliefs and values. The groups then become an important fabric into the overall cloth of the society and become one with a larger system. Thus, when any group is deprived of this, this

³ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population”, *Pew Research Population*, Pew Research Population, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>, (accessed 2 August 2021)

⁴ Ibid.

means that they are not actually apart of society and, at best, are ignored or, at worst, discriminated against.

Furthermore, not understanding the harmful impacts of the model minority myth causes them to be the most misunderstood and understudied racial/ethnic groups in the United States. The model minority myth does not account for the tremendous diversity and differences in socioeconomic status, access to resources, migration patterns, and immigration history between these different ethnic groups. This shows that the way Asians and Pacific Islanders are categorized obscures the disparities between each subgroup in the community. This omission and aggregation undermine the individual concerns in this community and prevents research, policy, and advocates from being implemented to help them. For such a large population in the United States, this lack of attention is concerning. Thus, studies contributing to understanding these groups and its intricacies are vital in relation to American life and democracy.

To accomplish this task, this thesis will have four sections. The first section will superficially discuss the context of the environment for Asians, primarily for the Chinese and Japanese experience. This thesis will recognize that this section and some of the following sections will leave out many Asian subgroups and Pacific Islanders as most early Asian immigrants were Chinese or Japanese. Thus, when discussing the ‘Asian experience’ or referencing “early Asians”, it will revolve around the experiences of Chinese and Japanese individuals before expanding to include Koreans, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Indian, especially since these six groups accounted for 85% of all Asian Americans as of 2019. These six large groups largely shaped the demographic, racism, and stereotypical characteristics of Asians in

early American history and today⁵. Although the Immigrant and Nationality Act of 1965 expanded immigration from other countries, these other Asian subgroups only accounted for 15% of the Asian population. This 15% consist of subgroups like Hmong, Laotian, Nepalese, Bhutanese, and Bangladeshi and their experiences often greatly different from the six largest groups above⁶. Thus, any analysis on the ‘Asian experience’ in this thesis will mainly be discussing the Chinese and Japanese experience before expanding to the Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Indian experience today.

Section two discusses African American activism during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement that helped set foundations for other minority groups to rise in political power. This section will also discuss early Asian and African solidarity during these movements specifically through Grace Lee Boggs and Yuri Kochiyama. The third section will then discuss the specific struggles of the early Asian community in the 20th century and the creation of the ‘Asian American’ label using methods. It will also discuss the model minority myth and the complexities that it causes in Asians gaining political power and redefining their new self-determined identities, especially when race in the United States is discussed in a white or black paradigm. Finally, section four will analyze the impacts created by early Asian activism in the previous section and how the initial ‘Asian American’ label fails to depict the now diverse Asian American and Pacific Islander⁷ population while exacerbating the model minority myth. This section will also argue how a new label to better reflect today’s AAPI population is needed.

⁵ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruize, “Key Facts about Asian Origin Groups in the U.S.”, *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/#:~:text=Six%20origin%20groups%20%E2%80%93%20Chinese%2C%20Indian,the%20overall%20U.S.%20Asian%20population.>, (accessed 14 June 2021)

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Will refer to this phrase as AAPI going forward

TREATMENT OF EARLY ASIANS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

The California Gold Rush of 1845 to 1855 promised wealth and riches under the ideas of manifest destiny⁸, enticing a variety of individuals. Commonly, the Gold Rush is celebrated for its ingenuity, western culture, male camaraderie, and experimentation with a new democratic government⁹. However, the Gold Rush also included the extermination of Native Americans and rife xenophobia of foreigners, especially for the Chinese. The largest groups primarily enticed by the California Gold Rush were the Chinese, making them the first large wave of Asian immigrants to arrive in the United States. Before the rush, the nationwide Chinese population was only a few hundred but after the rush, their nationwide population increased to 35,000¹⁰. Thus, the Chinese took center of their own xenophobia called the Yellow Peril that extended even pass the Gold Rush.

Broadly, the Yellow Peril refers to the fear of Asians in the western world. In early American history, the Yellow Peril perpetuated the belief that Chinese immigrants would invade their lands, disrupt their core values in democracy, and stall technological innovation. Anything that went against western norms were condemned. Chinese minors worked in abusive environments along with discriminatory legislations like the Foreign Miner's Tax that would discourage businesses from hiring the Chinese to work in their mines. Chinese laborers that were not miners commonly took jobs in laundry and food preparations – jobs often delegated to women, causing them to be ridiculed. In newspapers, Chinese men were demonized for stealing

⁸ Manifest Destiny is the belief that the United States was God's gift to Protestant Americans and that it was the Protestants duty to expand westward and spread democracy and capitalism

⁹ Mae Ngai, "Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience", *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

¹⁰ Karen L. Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (London, Verso, 2018), 18

white women for marriage to create mixed-raced children, defiling the white European standard¹¹.

Some politicians utilized the Yellow Peril to gain political power. For example, California Governor John Bigler faced reelection in 1852. Tapping into the resentment against the Chinese, Bigler declared that the Chinese were a race of heathens and slaves invading the state and threatening free producers¹². His speech resonated amongst white workers and with their support, Bigler not only won reelection but also passed legislation barring Chinese immigrants from living in their districts and participating in their local elections. California Representative Horace F. Page also utilized the Yellow Peril to guarantee his reelection and increase his political influence. Page would be responsible for passing the Page Act of 1875 which blocked Chinese women from entering the United States due to the racist belief that all eastern women were diseased, immoral prostitutes and would threaten the “white values, lives, and future”¹³. This drastically dropped the female Chinese population, preventing Chinese immigrants from having children as any children born in the United States would be granted citizenships thus giving them the same equal privileges as their white counterparts. Both politicians tapped into the anti-Chinese resentment, offered theories on why the Chinese were responsible for their woes, and utilized white laborer’s resentment to gain political power¹⁴.

¹¹ Mae Ngai, “Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience”, *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 15 March 2021)

¹² John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, “Yellow Peril: 19th Century Scapegoating”, *Asian American Writers’ Workshop*, <https://aaww.org/yellow-peril-scapegoating/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

¹³ Olivia B. Waxman and Paulina Cachero, “11 Moments from Asian American History That You Should Know” *Time*, Time, <https://time.com/5956943/aapi-history-milestones/>, (accessed 20 June 2021)

¹⁴ Mae Ngai, “Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience”, *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

Despite these politician's claims that all Chinese immigrants were laborers taking white nativist's jobs, early Chinese immigrants voluntarily immigrated and were not indentured servants. Poor Chinese individuals could not afford to immigrate, and rich Chinese individuals did not need to; thus, those that immigrated were laborers, tradespeople, mechanics, or teachers¹⁵. Even so, due to the racist stereotypes that the Chinese were poor and uncivilized, politicians like Bigler perpetuated the belief that all Chinese immigrants were "coolies...being sent here under contract...at nominal wages"¹⁶. This type of rhetoric was commonly used when the British used cheap Indian laborers after the abolishment of slavery, associating Chinese immigrants to that stereotype too¹⁷. With the stereotype, Chinese immigrants became seen as an infinitive pool of cheap laborers because they were unassimilable and coolies.¹⁸

Being seen as cheap laborers equated to Chinese immigrants' lives being seen as disposable, meaning they were forced to take unwanted and dangerous work for low pay. Many became miners, farmers, factory workers, and fishermen, but the most prominent example of this is the Transcontinental Railroad. More than 10,000 Chinese immigrants were contracted to build the Transcontinental Railroad, and approximately 1,200 Chinese immigrants were killed from the dangerous working conditions from accidental explosions, frequent avalanches, and freezing temperatures on top of physically abusive supervisors¹⁹. Ironically, the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad increased transportation of cheap goods, causing wages to fall and

¹⁵ Mae Ngai, "Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience", *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Nadja Sayej, "Forgotten by Society – How Chinese Migrants Built the Transcontinental Railroad", *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/jul/18/forgotten-by-society-how-chinese-migrants-built-the-transcontinental-railroad#:~:text=From%201863%20and%201869%2C%20roughly,given%20accommodation%20in%20train%20cars>, (accessed 20 May 2021)

unemployment to increase. This became a nationwide economic depression that made jobs less available, forcing white laborers to compete for the same low-paying and undesirable jobs that was usually designated for the Chinese. This led to anger and resentment, causing white groups to protest with chants like “They’re taking away our jobs!” and to pressure politicians to curve Chinese immigrants harder, resulting in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882²⁰.

The Chinese Exclusion Act barred Chinese laborers from entering the United States and prevented them from becoming naturalized citizens. This cemented that the Chinese were racially inferior and could not be controlled by a “despotic master”²¹. From this act, Chinese immigration went from 39,500 in 1882 to only 10 in 1887²². This act extended every ten years with the United States Supreme Court invoking national security to justify this law through *Chae Ching Ping v. U.S.* in 1889²³. Invoking national security to justify racist or discriminatory legislation would be a common thread in American history.

By the 1880s with increasing anti-Chinese sentiments, Chinese immigrants also became primary targets for racially motivated violence. In 1871, 500 white people attacked, robbed, mutilated, murdered, and hung nineteen Chinese immigrants in Old Chinatown in Los Angeles, California after hearing a rumor that a white policemen and rancher was killed by a rival Chinese

²⁰ “First Arrivals, First Reactions”, *US Hours of Representatives: History, Art & Archives*, <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/APA/Historical-Essays/Exclusion-and-Empire/First-Arrivals/>, (accessed 2 May 2021)

²¹ Mae Ngai, “Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience”, *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

²² “Asian Americans Then and Now”, *Center for Global Education*, Asia Society, <https://asiasociety.org/education/asian-americans-then-and-now>, (accessed 5 May 2021)

²³ Chae Chan Ping was a Chinese laborer who lived in San Francisco for over 12 years. He would later visit China and ensured to get a certificate guaranteeing his return to the United States when his visit was over. One week before his arrival, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, annulling his certificate. Chin attempted to appeal the decision.

group²⁴. On September 2, 1885, the Rock Springs Massacre occurred in Wyoming where 28 Chinese immigrants were killed and 15 were injured. On May 27 to 28, 1887, the Hells Canyon Massacre occurred where seven white horse thieves ambushed a group of Chinese miners along the Snake River in Oregon, murdered 34 Chinese men, and mutilated their bodies before dumping their bodies in the river.²⁵ None of the perpetrators faced any judicial consequences.

These Chinese discriminatory laws eventually extended to other Asians where lumping different Asian subgroups into a single racial category began. This extension came from increasing American colonialism and global trade. Global trade became integral in the American economy but with more global integration, migration follows. Migration extended beyond Chinese to Filipino, Indian, and more, but the Japanese became the second largest wave to immigrate to the United States. Initially, the United States welcomed Japanese immigrants as they viewed Japan as an ally to expand their footprint in the Pacific but, like the Chinese, increasing Japanese immigration arriving caused them to receive the same brunt of resentment.

With increasing Japanese immigrations and decreasing Chinese immigration, Japanese individuals became the new center for the Yellow Peril. In the late 20th century, anti-Japanese sentiment culminated into an organization called the Asiatic Exclusion League²⁶. The AEL consisted of white laborers leaders and European immigrants who claim that Asian immigrants, specifically Chinese and Japanese immigrants, prevented them from obtaining a job, maintaining their homes, and achieving a middle-class life²⁷. Thus, they advocated America to be a white

²⁴ “Asian American Milestones: Timeline”, *History*, A&E Television Networks, <https://history.com/topics/immigration/asian-american-timeline>, (accessed 9 June 2021)

²⁵ “Asian American Milestones: Timeline”, *History*, A&E Television Networks, <https://history.com/topics/immigration/asian-american-timeline>, (accessed 9 June 2021)

²⁶ Will refer to this phrase as AEL going forward

²⁷ Emily Anderson, “Anti-Japanese Movement”, *Anti-Japanese Exclusion Movement: Densho Encyclopedia*, Washington State University, https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Anti-Japanese_exclusion_movement/, (accessed 26 May 2021)

man's country and called for prohibition of all Asian immigration. Like Bigler and Page, the AEL tapped into a nativist's audience, provided solutions to their problems, and garnered support to gain political influence; this caused them to become one of the strongest drivers in American politics against early Asians. They condemned industries that utilized Japanese immigrants, segregated Asian students from white schools, and attempted to make all Californian labor and civic organizations prohibit Asian participation. Their most prominent influence would be extending Chinese Exclusions Act to include Koreans and Japanese and passing the San Francisco Board of Education Segregation Order²⁸.

Early Asians, specifically Chinese and Japanese, in early American history faced racist attacks, protests, exclusion, and discrimination that were backed by the United States Supreme Court. During this time, the race paradigm was black or white, there was no set distinction on where early Asians stood. In some states or cities, they were considered 'white' but in other states, they were considered 'black'. With *Ozawa v. United States* and *Bhagat Singh Thind v. United States*, they were legally categorized as not white, extending their exclusion of an affirmed race-based classification. While this excluded Asians from American democracy and life, it did not eliminate them. In consequence, states made efforts to ensure their subordination and marginalization from preventing early Asians marrying outside their race, attending white schools, testifying in court, owning land, holding economical licenses, and buying real estate²⁹. This is reminiscent of Jim Crow segregation. Both Jim Crow and Asian exclusion racially managed these groups and relied on rhetoric like "aliens ineligible for citizenship" and "separate

²⁸ In October 1906, the San Francisco Board of Education announced that they would exclude all Japanese and Korean students from public schools have them segregated in Oriental schools that were established for Chinese students two decades prior

²⁹ Mae Ngai, "Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience", *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

but equal”. For early Asians, the belief that they were not true citizens regardless of birthright created the perception of foreign loyalty, infamously leading to Japanese Americans being seen as an “enemy race” regardless of if they were born in the United States or not. They would eventually be placed in incarceration camps during World War II from Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066³⁰.

World War II forced the United States to change their policy around early Asians. During the war, Asians were seen as enemies, especially after Pearl Harbor. After Pearl Harbor, those of Japanese descents were perceived as “public dangers” and put into internment camps despite 70,000 out of 112,000 interned being American citizens³¹. Those interned lost their homes, farms, businesses, and most of their belongings³². It would not be until the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 lead by Kochiyama that any recognition or reparations were given to those interned. Yet, after the war, Asians were seen as potential allies in the Pacific during the Cold War.

As a result, the discriminatory laws like the Chinese Exclusion Act were repealed; however, the government replaced them with other legislation that made immigration from Asian countries limited. For instance, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 allowed Japanese and Filipino residents to become naturalized, seemingly dismantling the discriminatory barrier for early Asians³³. However, this act also only allowed 1% of each Asians’ population from

³⁰ “FDR Orders Japanese Americans into Internment Camps”, *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, [https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/fdr-signs-executive-order-9066#:~:text=On%20February%2019%2C%201942%2C%20President,vaguely%20identified%20as%20military%20areas.,\(accessed 24 March 2022\)](https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/fdr-signs-executive-order-9066#:~:text=On%20February%2019%2C%201942%2C%20President,vaguely%20identified%20as%20military%20areas.,(accessed%2024%20March%202022))

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Japanese-American Incarceration during World War II”, *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation#background>, (accessed 22 March 2022)

³³ Karen L. Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (London, Verso, 2018), 20

1920 to immigrate to the United States. This attitude of “friend today, enemies tomorrow” would be common in American history and would repeat itself later in the Vietnam War³⁴.

The Cold War made the United States seek allies in the Pacific. Historian Ellen Wu states this provided an ideological space for Asians to ‘prove’ their loyalty to the United States³⁵. In fact, they promoted beliefs that Asians were docile, good workers, and good students thus are model citizens. Furthermore, there were increasing number of early Asians now serving in the American military. This resulted in the community becoming the center of new flattering stories³⁶. Across the nation in the 1950s and 1960s, journalist lauded Asians in their local communities for being hard-working, well-behaved, and upwardly mobile. This belief was then utilized to deny other minority groups, specifically African Americans and Hispanics, any aid as it brought up the question: if Asians can do it, why can’t they? This belief is called the model minority myth.

In 1966, sociologist William Peterson first articulated the model minority myth in *New York Times Magazine*³⁷. He wrote that AAPI achieved all their successes “by their own almost totally unaided effort”, implying that it was solely through early Asian’s hard work that they “progressed” and overcome everything American society thrown at them³⁸. Peterson used this to call African Americans “problem minorities” who rightfully earned the prejudices against them

³⁴ Karen L. Ishizuka, “Looking like the Enemy: Political Enemy & the Vietnam War”, *Pacific Council on International Policy*, Pacific Council on International Policy, <https://www.pacificcouncil.org/newsroom/looking-pa>

³⁵ Mae Ngai, “Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience”, *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

³⁶ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 46

³⁷ Erin Blakemore, “The Asian American ‘Model Minority’ Myth Masks A History of Discriminations”, *Culture*, National Geographic, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/asian-american-model-minority-myth-masks-history-discrimination>, (accessed 3 January 2022)

³⁸ Ibid.

as they do not work hard enough as Asians. This put minority groups in conflict with each other, especially for opportunities and services offered in the United States. This divided minority groups and prevented solidarity. This myth still exists and has evolved.

In the 1970s, the model minority myth evolved to reframe Asians as a political and social tool against other disadvantaged minority groups creating a racial equality insurgence³⁹. An associate journalist professor from the University of Colorado Angie Chung, who conducts research specializing in race and identity, stated this evolution emerged as the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement gained steam. Chung states that white Americans were alarmed by the insurgence of minority group's protesting for their civil rights⁴⁰. Articles like Peterson depict how the model minority gave easy reasoning to call African Americans "problem minorities" and downplay the impact of racist and discrimination experiences by African Americans and provided an excuse on why the American government should not provide any meaningful or social services to these marginalized groups⁴¹. This model minority myth also created a hierarchical system between minority groups and by putting these groups in a hierarchal system, it puts these groups in competition with one another to divide individuals and minority groups from coming into solidarity⁴².

Even with the model minority myth, this did not stop the racist attacks or stereotypical labels against early Asians. Afro-British sociologist Stuart Hall states that for racism to remain

³⁹ Erin Blakemore, "The Asian American 'Model Minority' Myth Masks A History of Discriminations", *Culture*, National Geographic, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/asian-american-model-minority-myth-masks-history-discrimination>, (accessed 3 January 2022)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 66

⁴² Sarah-Soonling Blackburn, "What Is the Model Minority Myth?", *Learning for Justice*, learningforjustice.org/magazine/what-is-the-model-minority-myth, (accessed 24 April 2021)

potent, it must continually be reproduced⁴³. Dehumanization, discriminatory treatment, and stereotypical labels persisted. For instance, the perception of Asian women evolved from being prostitutes to being exotic, subservient, and always available – an idea that emerged from America’s long history of prostitution of Asian women to American servicemen⁴⁴.

This section only superficially discusses the context of the environment early Asians had to experience in American history. I recognize that many groups are not mentioned. However, many studies have been written in-depth about different Asian and Pacific Islander experiences during this same time. What this thesis attempts to do in this section is to just briefly provide context on the political, social, and financial barriers that barred Asians, specifically Chinese and Japanese, from American life and democracy as one lens of an Asian experience. This context shows that through discriminatory legislation, unfair judicial precedent, and racist stereotypes, early Asians could not integrate in the United States. This would set a foundation and need for Asian progression in American history especially through political influence and representation.

Political influence and representation translate into power as it ensures the community’s needs are heard; yet, no successful method to do this occurred until the Black Power Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the anti-war movement during Vietnam War. During this time, influential black rights activists Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X depicted effective methods to combat racism, discrimination, and segregation. This would inspire many minority groups in their own pursuit for equality. For early Asians, they were inspired to reserve their culture, shed racist labels, and forge their own identity to finally and fully integrated into

⁴³ Mae Ngai, “Racism Has Always Been Part of the Asian American Experience”, *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/04/we-are-constantly-reproducing-anti-asian-racism/618647/>, (accessed 13 March 2022)

⁴⁴ Ibid.

American life and democracy. One of the most influential ways early Asians learned to do this was to gain meaningful political influence to ensure resources are shared equally and worthwhile decision-making power regarding government policies are gained.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENTS AND BLACK POWER MOVEMENT COMPARISON

Without political representation, minority groups are barred from integrating with American beliefs and values. Without this, these groups are excluded, attacked, or discriminated against. Attempts to overcome this before occurred, but no critical achievements were accomplished until the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. The Civil Rights Movement relied on using financial and social pressure to force institutions and governments to implement change while the Black Power Movement utilized the belief of self-determination to achieve civil rights immediately. The Black Power Movement believed in being self-sufficient and taking their rights for themselves instead of using cooperative methods. Black Power Movement activists emphasized racial pride, creation of black politics, and black cultural institutions. Regardless, both movements began as a struggle for African American justice and equality with the following goals: to end racial segregation and discrimination, to secure legal recognition, to gain federal protections of their rights, and to ensure that their rights will be recognized under constitutional and federal law. These critical achievements dismantled barriers to voting rights, increased voter registration within minorities, ended segregation, and made it illegal to discriminate based on racial, ethnic, religious, or gender affiliations.

The way African Americans gained these achievements can be analyzed in a variety of ways, but this thesis will analyze it through three steps: the creation of political coalitions, the protests and activism through civil disobedience, and the culmination of the two previous steps to create legislative change. These tactics were so successful that it inspired other groups, especially minority groups, to work in solidarity with African American activists and create their own movement later on, especially for Asians.

Jim Crow discrimination were not isolated to African Americans as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Indian Americans faced similar barriers like African Americans in their pursuit for civil and human rights⁴⁵. Although not black, early Asians were also not considered white and thus similarly experienced school segregation, anti-miscegenation laws, discriminatory business practices, and more⁴⁶. Early Asians attempted to establish them to counteract this treatment but were not able to accomplish this alone. Thus, during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, many Asian activists worked in solidarity with African Americans. They did this by participating in their coalitions, protesting alongside them, and creating legislative change that would positively impact all minority groups. This solidarity would not only progress these movements but also set us a foundation for an Asian movement later. While there were many Asian activists, this thesis will focus on two of the most prominent female Asian activists Grace Lee Boggs and Yuri Kochiyama.

Boggs was a Chinese American civil right and labor activists born by two Chinese immigrants⁴⁷. She drew from everyday struggles and believed in creating change herself than simply pressuring the government or larger institutions to implement change⁴⁸. Moreover, she believed in the power of solidarity as she stated that positive change can be created if people of diverse groups worked together⁴⁹. Through this, she worked closely with the Black Power

⁴⁵ “A Different Shade of Justice by Stephanie Hinnershit”, *University of North Carolina Press*, University of North Carolina Press, <https://uncpress.org/book/9781469633695/a-different-shade-of-justice/>, (accessed 19 March 2022)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Grace Lee Boggs”, *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/people/grace-lee-boggs.htm#:~:text=Grace%20Lee%20Boggs%20was%20a,met%20her%20husband%2C%20James%20Boggs.>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁴⁸ Kat Chow, “Grace Lee Boggs, Activists and American Revolutionary, Turns 100”, *NPR*, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/06/27/417175523/grace-lee-boggs-activist-and-american-revolutionary-turns-100>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁴⁹ “Grace Lee Boggs”, *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/people/grace-lee-boggs.htm#:~:text=Grace%20Lee%20Boggs%20was%20a,met%20her%20husband%2C%20James%20Boggs.>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

Movement, joined their political coalitions, participated in their protest, and create legislative change for all minority groups. This would contribute to setting a foundation for a later Asian movement.

Boggs became involved in activism when she passed by a group protesting inadequate living conditions, especially for low-income African Americans⁵⁰. This closely resembled Boggs' living situation at the time. Despite having a PhD in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College, employers refused to hire Boggs due to her gender and race; some businesses even had signs stating "We don't hire Orientals" – a universal experience between minority groups⁵¹. She eventually got a job at the University of Chicago's philosophy library where she was paid \$10 per week. Due to her pay being so low, she lived in a rat-infested basement to get free rent. From this, Boggs joined coalitions of grassroots organizations for tenant's and worker's rights, marking the first time she connected with the African American community⁵². From this, she joined protests and other civil rights events in support of African Americans.

For any coalition, they best gained political influence by organizing mass acts of civil resistance like boycotts, marches, voter registration drives, and sit-ins to create crisis situations in institutions, businesses, and/or federal, state, and local governments. Due to the efficient organization and resources that were available from forming these coalitions, these protests translated into meaningful political influence to create impactful change – often through legislative measures. For Boggs, she became involved in the 1941 March on Washington which was organized by an African American unionist A. Philip Randolph to protest discrimination in

⁵⁰ "Grace Lee Boggs", *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/people/grace-lee-boggs.htm#:~:text=Grace%20Lee%20Boggs%20was%20a,met%20her%20husband%2C%20James%20Boggs.> , (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

military and wartime manufacturing⁵³. Marches gained influence by capturing the nation's attention and publicly declaring their message. It is a way for an individual to publicly and explicitly share where they lie on an issue. Working in solidarity with these African American activists showed that this was not a one-race issue and firmly placed Boggs and other minority groups' activists along with their movement. This method proved to be successful as before the march could occur, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 where it banned discrimination in the United States' defense industry and was an essential step toward desegregation⁵⁴. This catalyzed Boggs into activism as it showed the impact of community organization. Now, while many marches were successful, protestors were met with deadly violence. Even so, these acts of violence would be nationally televised, causing hundreds of ministers, priests, rabbis, and social activists – black, white, Hispanics, and Asians – to also join and become supporters.

With every Civil Rights and Black Power Movements' success, early Asians became more involved in activism. For Boggs, she became a central member of the Johnson-Forest Tendency⁵⁵ and became the editor for *Correspondence* which supported worker-centered revolution where she met her husband James Boggs⁵⁶. With her husband, they became one of Detroit's best-known activists by writing works like the *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, a review on the principal methods in revolutions through Asia, and *Living for a Change*, an autobiography of her life transcending class and racial barriers and how she

⁵³ “Grace Lee Boggs”, *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/people/grace-lee-boggs.htm#:~:text=Grace%20Lee%20Boggs%20was%20a,met%20her%20husband%2C%20James%20Boggs.> , (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ This refers to a Marxist and socialist party in the United States

⁵⁶ “Grace Lee Boggs”, *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/people/grace-lee-boggs.htm#:~:text=Grace%20Lee%20Boggs%20was%20a,met%20her%20husband%2C%20James%20Boggs.> , (accessed 20 March 2022)

believed society can be bettered⁵⁷. Their home eventually becomes the headquarters of the Boggs Center to Nurture Community which supports activism and grassroots organizations on a local and national scale with prominent African American activist Malcolm X staying at their home⁵⁸. Here, Boggs even tried to convince Malcom X to run for the United States senate in 1962⁵⁹. From supporting the poor, the hungry, and other revolutionaries, Boggs work in solidarity to support the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements. This would set a foundation of Asians becoming more involved in American politics to later define who they are as a minority group.

Today, Boggs' long-term impacts was cofounding Detroit Summer, a community-based youth empowerment and engagement program to improve the community⁶⁰. This taps into Boggs' belief in making groups work together to not only better the community but promote positive feelings for society. Furthermore, Boggs wrote weekly in the *Michigan Citizen* promoting civic reform before establishing the James and Grace Lee Boggs Schools, a community-based charter school with a curriculum focused on Detroit⁶¹. Boggs core belief was on the power of a diverse community coming together to make positive change. With Boggs' similar experience with low-income African Americans, she joined radical left political coalitions, supported African Americans in their protests, and created both political and social change by making their home a hub of activism. This progressed early Asians in the United States that through solidarity as it introduced Asians into America's political and social

⁵⁷ Kat Chow, "Grace Lee Boggs, Activists and American Revolutionary, Turns 100", *NPR*, NPR, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/06/27/417175523/grace-lee-boggs-activist-and-american-revolutionary-turns-100>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁵⁸ "Grace Lee Boggs", *National Park Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.nps.gov/people/grace-lee-boggs.htm#:~:text=Grace%20Lee%20Boggs%20was%20a,met%20her%20husband%2C%20James%20Boggs.>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

landscape and set out a foundation for Asians to set their own individual movement. While working in solidarity benefited all minority groups, each individual minority group had to individualize and create their own movement to combat their own unique struggles. For early Asians, they also faced their own unique struggles, and it was through activists like Boggs that Asians later created their own movement.

Yuri Kochiyama was another female Asian activist who imbued herself in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. She was born in San Pedro, California by two Japanese immigrants and lived comfortably in a predominantly white neighborhood⁶². However, after World War II, things changed. Her father, who right after surgery, was arrested and detained before dying one day after being released⁶³. Furthermore, due to executive Order 9066⁶⁴, Kochiyama and her family spent three years at an internment camp in Jerome, Arkansas⁶⁵. This depicted the anti-Asian and second-class treatment in the United States – an experience also felt by African Americans and other racial groups. These experiences made Kochiyama more aware of government abuses.

Kochiyama moved to Harlem, New York City with her husband Bill Kochiyama where they lived in a racially mixed public housing project with Asian, white, Hispanic, and Black

⁶² Barbara Maranzani, “Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X’s Boundary-Breaking Friendship”, *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, <https://www.biography.com/news/yuri-kochiyama-malcolm-x-friendship>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁶³ “May 19, 1921: Yuri Kochiyama Born”, *Zinn Education Project*, Zinn Education Project, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/yuri-kochiyama-was-born/>, (accessed 21 March 2022)

⁶⁴ This authorized those of Japanese descent to be put into internment camps as they were deemed a threat to national security

⁶⁵ Barbara Maranzani, “Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X’s Boundary-Breaking Friendship”, *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, <https://www.biography.com/news/yuri-kochiyama-malcolm-x-friendship>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

neighbors⁶⁶. Here, they participated in many Asian, Black, and Third World movements for civil and human rights, ethnic studies, and anti-war movements during the Vietnam. Furthermore, they joined many African American coalitions like the Young Lords⁶⁷, the Harlem Community for Self Defense⁶⁸, and the Congress of Racial Equality⁶⁹. Political coalition translates into having political influence as it ensures that all resources are shared equally, meaningful decision-making power for government policies are gained, and proper ownership of land, property, or more are acquired. For African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement, the most influential organizations were the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People⁷⁰, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee⁷¹, and the Southern Christian Leadership⁷².

Kochiyama joined CORE which was founded by a group of Chicago students to improve race relations and end discriminatory policies. CORE focused on job discrimination, housing discrimination, employment discrimination, and discriminatory voting barriers. CORE protested by coordinating aid and support with sit-ins, voter projects, and freedom rides in collaboration with the SCLC and the SNCC⁷³. Kochiyama joined CORE in these protests, especially for sit-ins to protest racism and inequality. Sit-ins were a type of boycott. Generally, boycotts are non-violent and intentional withdrawal of participation or purchase of white-owned or/and discriminatory businesses. This withdrawal exhibited power by showing the financial and social

⁶⁶ Barbara Maranzani, "Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X's Boundary-Breaking Friendship", *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, <https://www.biography.com/news/yuri-kochiyama-malcolm-x-friendship>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁶⁷ The Young Lords was a Puerto Rican civil rights and community organization that used the same model as the Black Panther Party

⁶⁸ This organization utilized the spirit of self-determination, pride, a social consciousness, and a commitment to political activism during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s

⁶⁹ Will refer to this phrase as CORE going forward

⁷⁰ Will refer to this phrase as NAACP going forward

⁷¹ Will refer to this phrase as SNCC going forward

⁷² Will refer to this phrase as SCLC going forward

⁷³ "Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)", *The Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute*, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/congress-racial-equality-core>, (accessed 2 February 2022)

ramifications of businesses, governments, and other institutions when minorities are excluded. This effectively conveyed how integrated these racial minorities are in American life and encouraged minorities further to fight for the civil rights. CORE's most prominent sit-ins would be the 1960 Greensboro Sit-in⁷⁴ and the 1964 St. Augustine Protest⁷⁵ where they used economic and social pressure to politically pressure businesses to desegregate public places. These types of protests not only highlighted the discriminatory policies and thus garnered more support but also created meaningful legislative change for equal treatment.

Along with supporting African American civil rights groups, Kochiyama also had a close friendship with Malcom X. She met Malcom X after being detained in a 1963 Brooklyn rally protesting unjust hiring practices⁷⁶. Here, she confronted Malcolm X's opposition to racial segregation; from this, a deep friendship was created. This friendship depicts the multi-racial cooperation of the Civil Rights Movement and the broader fight against racial injustice domestically and abroad. From this friendship, Kochiyama attended Malcolm X's school program and created a political alliance with him by joining his Organization for Afro-American Unity, an organization to work for racial justice and human rights⁷⁷. Kochiyama credited Malcolm X for changing her world view, and Kochiyama impacted Malcom X with how he shifted away from 'any means necessary' to more peaceful resolutions⁷⁸.

⁷⁴ This was a non-violent protest in Greensboro, North Carolina where activists sat at a lunch counter and refused to leave after being denied service. This protest culminated into businesses in Woolworth to end racial segregation

⁷⁵ This protest was against segregation laws in the South. This protest drew media attention as activists were arrested and were violent assaulted. This culminated into desegregation in the south.

⁷⁶ Barbara Maranzani, "Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X's Boundary-Breaking Friendship", *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, <https://www.biography.com/news/yuri-kochiyama-malcolm-x-friendship>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

While Kochiyama joined African American activism, Malcolm X supported the Asian movement when he discussed about racism and American imperialism to Japanese survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – members of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki World Peace Study Mission⁷⁹. At this point, Kochiyama's apartment became the center of Black nationalist and other left-leaning groups where prominent guests would stay like activist Angela Davis⁸⁰, poet Amiri Baraka⁸¹, and Afeni Shakur^{82,83}. Thus, Kochiyama organized a reception of atomic bomb survivors with Malcolm X. Here, Malcolm X stated how they have “been scarred by the atom bomb...and the bomb that hit us was racism”⁸⁴. About Vietnam, he stated that “the struggle of Vietnam is the struggle of the whole Third World: the struggle against colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism”⁸⁵. Malcolm X connected colonialism and peace with the Black freedom struggle, substantiating the belief that the African American struggle were like the early Asian struggle.

This recognition meant that the problems of African Americans were the problems of Asians and vice versa, tapping into the mentality that racism and discrimination is not just one group's problem but everyone's problem. This solidarity gained early Asians political influence as it created coalitions to organize mass events of civil disobedience all over the nation from different groups. For instance, Kochiyama founded the Asian Americans for Action – a

⁷⁹ “May 19, 1921: Yuri Kochiyama Born”, *Zinn Education Project*, Zinn Education Project, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/yuri-kochiyama-was-born/>, (accessed 21 March 2022)

⁸⁰ She was an American political activist, philosopher, and scholar that supported the Black Panther Party.

⁸¹ He was the founder and chairman of the Congress of African People – an organization that promoted black nationalism and radicalism.

⁸² An American political activist and member of the Black Panther Party promoting liberation for African Americans

⁸³ Barbara Maranzani, “Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X's Boundary-Breaking Friendship”, *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, <https://www.biography.com/news/yuri-kochiyama-malcolm-x-friendship>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

coalition created to link with the struggle for Black liberations. To this, she stated that “racism has placed all ethnic peoples in similar positions of oppression, poverty, and marginalization”⁸⁶. This depicts how the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement aided early Asians in setting a foundation for their own political movement that when their time does arrive, they not only have support from other civil rights organizations but other racial groups too. Furthermore, the movement’s successful method would be instrumental in how early Asians eventually decide to direct their own movement.

Kochiyama’s most impactful legislation created in solidarity with other civil rights organizations was the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. Here, Kochiyama fought for the recognition and reparations from the United States government on the detainment of the Japanese during World War II. Ultimately, she was successful, and the act culminated in a presidential apology and a \$20,000 payment for every surviving detainee⁸⁷. Beyond that, Kochiyama worked in solidarity with many other groups like African American, Puerto Rican, Native American, Asians, and white political prisoners⁸⁸. In 1977, Kochiyama joined a Puerto Rican group that took over the Statue of Liberty to draw attention to struggle of Puerto Rican independence⁸⁹. Using methods like creating one’s own political coalitions, joining protests, and creating impactful legislative change, Kochiyama set up a standard of cultivating relationship to bridge people and movements together. Through this, it set a foundation of solidarity for early Asian

⁸⁶ “May 19, 1921: Yuri Kochiyama Born”, *Zinn Education Project*, Zinn Education Project, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/yuri-kochiyama-was-born/>, (accessed 21 March 2022)

⁸⁷ Barbara Maranzani, “Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X’s Boundary-Breaking Friendship”, *Biography.com*, A&E Networks Television, <https://www.biography.com/news/yuri-kochiyama-malcolm-x-friendship>, (accessed 20 March 2022)

⁸⁸ “May 19, 1921: Yuri Kochiyama Born”, *Zinn Education Project*, Zinn Education Project, <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/yuri-kochiyama-was-born/>, (accessed 21 March 2022)

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

activists to define what their identity would be and where Asians would choose to belong in American society.

The two steps of creating a political coalition and organizing protest through civil disobedience created meaningful legislative changes, especially with solidarity between other racial groups. Through this, other meaningful legislative changes passed like the *Brown v. Board of Education*⁹⁰, the 1956 United Supreme Court Case⁹¹, the Civil Rights Act of 1964⁹², and the Voting Rights Act of 1965⁹³. These legislative changes would be instrumental in outlawing racial segregation and unequal voter registration requirements. These types of results would be some of the defining moments during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and are instrumental in maintaining equality between minorities today.

In solidarity between African Americans and other racial groups created meaningful change by creating political coalitions, organizing events, and utilizing the impacts of these events to create legislative and societal changes. This ensured that resources were shared equally, meaningful decision-making power would be given regarding government policies, and ownership of property were guaranteed. Understanding these foundations are vital in understanding how other minority groups were inspired to build their own movement, especially with the ideology of self-determination, racial pride, creation of racial politics, and preservation of racial values. This solidarity would set up a later Asian movement to shed their discriminatory labels, utilize their financial and social tools, create political change, and make their own self-

⁹⁰ Was a United States Court ruling that stated racial segregation in public schools violated the 14th amendment thus desegregating public schools throughout the nation

⁹¹ Ordered that segregation in public places were illegal

⁹² Made it illegal to discriminate individuals based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin for public accommodations, many southern states, and establishments would not comply

⁹³ Outlawed discriminatory voting practices used in southern countries to bar minority groups from voting

defined identity. While many minority groups had similar paths, early Asians had the unique struggles with the model minority myth, the Vietnam War, and eventually the need for a new and reflective self-defining label.

RISE OF THE ‘ASIAN AMERICAN’ LABEL

Stereotypical labels, racist attacks, and exclusionary and discriminatory laws prevented Asians from integrating into American life and democracy. Eventually, the successes from the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement created a foundation for other minority groups to rise and create their own movement by outlawing discrimination in public places, eliminating barriers for voter registration, and expanding federal protections for civil rights. This encouraged other minority groups to create their own political coalitions, protests, and meaningful societal and legislative changes that matched their racial and cultural value.

With the path for equality and integration trailblazed for them, the ways minority groups could undertake this task were numerous. For early Asians, their solidarity with African Americans during the Civil Right and Black Power Movements introduced them into the American political landscape and society. Furthermore, early Asians utilized the Black Power Movement’s ideology of self-determination, racial pride, and racial values to shed themselves of their prescribed labels, create their own self-defined identity, gain recognition, and implement change that most resonated with them⁹⁴. While this struggle was like that of many other minority groups, Asians had the unique struggle of combating the model minority myth and anti-Asian xenophobia from the Vietnam War.

As a brief recap, the model minority myth caused Asians to be seen as hard-working, well-behaved, and upwardly mobile. By the peak of the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement, the model minority myth reframed early Asians as a political and social tool against other disadvantaged minority groups to downplay racism and put minority groups in competition

⁹⁴ Olivia B. Waxman and Paulina Cachero, “11 Moments from Asian American History That You Should Know” *Time*, Time, <https://time.com/5956943/aapi-history-milestones/>, (accessed 20 June 2021)

with one another. This served to divide individuals and minority groups from coming into solidarity⁹⁵. This myth still exists today and is still used to disenfranchise other minorities and minimize what Asians Americans and Pacific Islanders face today; however, to reduce redundancy, the intricacies of this myth will be elaborated in the next section.

During the Vietnam war, anti-Asian xenophobia exploded. *Gidra: The Monthly of the Asian American Experience*, one of the most circulated Asian newspapers during the 1970s, depicts a white officer ordering an Asian American to “Kill that gook, you gook!” while pointing a gun at another member of AAPI descent⁹⁶. This cartoon showed the one of major early Asian experiences during this time: living in a country at war killing enemies that looked like them and being viewed as the enemy regardless of if they were born in the United States or not. Vietnam War veteran Norman Nakamura wrote about the racist attitudes condoned in the military and the military actions against the Vietnamese people where Vietnamese people and Asian veterans were not seen as people but “only gooks”⁹⁷. The 1976 Winter Soldier Investigation revealed more disturbing information about the treatment of early Asians in the military with marine Mike Nakayama testifying that his drill instructor told him to stand up and turn around to “show what a gook looked like” during basic training⁹⁸. This increased anti-war sentiments which were bolstered when the dehumanization of the Vietnamese people would be televised for the first

⁹⁵ Sarah-Soonling Blackburn, “What Is the Model Minority Myth?”, *Learning for Justice*, learningforjustice.org/magazine/what-is-the-model-minority-myth/, (accessed 24 April 2021)

⁹⁶ Karen L. Ishizuka, “Looking like the Enemy: Political Enemy & the Vietnam War”, *Pacific Council on International Policy*, Pacific Council on International Policy, <https://www.pacificcouncil.org/newsroom/looking-enemy-political-identity-vietnam-war/>, (accessed 3 July 2021)

⁹⁷ Karen L. Ishizuka, “Looking like the Enemy: Political Enemy & the Vietnam War”, *Pacific Council on International Policy*, Pacific Council on International Policy, <https://www.pacificcouncil.org/newsroom/looking-enemy-political-identity-vietnam-war/>, (accessed 3 July 2021)

⁹⁸ Ibid.

time in American history. These unique early Asian struggles resonated with many early Asian activists which spurred them to create a new self-determined identity under ‘Asian American’.

Young early Asian activist based their self-determined identity from their own unique experiences as a racial minority⁹⁹. During the 1960s, early Asian activists believed that most Asians experienced similar barriers in American society and thus had common interests. A professor of Asian-American studies at University of Colorado Boulder and author of *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* Daryl Maeda stated that Asians, specifically Chinese and Japanese, had a shared history of immigration, labor exploitation, racism, and a political agenda to pushback against stereotypical labels. These common experiences created a pan-Asian identity between groups that initially did not have any commonality¹⁰⁰. This identity promoted solidarity and interrelationships which could overcome the cultural difference and historical animosities between subgroups¹⁰¹. This increased membership for the new label, increased visibility for the label’s subgroups and united these them to fight for equality and social justice not only for themselves but also for others¹⁰². For early Asians, a new label gave them advantages and gave the power to determine what this new identity would mean and who it would include. This unifying label come to be known as ‘Asian American’¹⁰³.

⁹⁹ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 46

¹⁰⁰ Cady Lang, “After 50 Years of ‘Asian American’, Advocates Say the Term Is ‘More Essential Than Ever’”, *NBCNews.com*, NBC Universal News Groups, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/after-50-years-asian-american-advocates-say-term-more-essential-n875601>, (accessed 28 May 2021)

¹⁰¹ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 46

¹⁰² Cady Lang, “After 50 Years of ‘Asian American’, Advocates Say the Term Is ‘More Essential Than Ever’”, *NBCNews.com*, NBC Universal News Groups, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/after-50-years-asian-american-advocates-say-term-more-essential-n875601>, (accessed 28 May 2021)

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

In 1968, Emma Gee and Yukji Ichioka coined the term ‘Asian American’. They drew inspiration from the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, and the anti-war movement¹⁰⁴. Gee and Ichioka created these labels to adequately include those of early Asian subgroups and to efficiently unite subgroups linguistically in their fight for greater equality¹⁰⁵. To do this, they collaborated with Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino activists to unify these early Asians from different subgroups¹⁰⁶. This created a significant political coalition called the Asian American Political Alliance¹⁰⁷.

The AAPA became the first primarily Asian national grassroots organization which unified different subgroups together¹⁰⁸. The common experiences of the forever foreigner, the feelings of being unsafe in their birth country, and other discriminatory experiences united early Asian subgroups to create a political agenda to achieve equality, anti-racism, and anti-imperialistic policies. Two years after the label’s creation, there were at least forty grassroots organizations, four newspapers, and ten student and community conferences flying the Asian American flag¹⁰⁹. Even today, the ‘Asian American’ label persists.

Through the AAPA, Gee and Ichioka created a political coalition – a primary method that was used during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movement. Through this, the AAPA gained more membership, visibility, and influence. Yet, it was through working in solidarity with others

¹⁰⁴ Cady Lang, “After 50 Years of ‘Asian American’, Advocates Say the Term Is ‘More Essential Than Ever’”, *NBCNews.com*, NBC Universal News Groups, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/after-50-years-asian-american-advocates-say-term-more-essential-n875601>, (accessed 28 May 2021)

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 47

¹⁰⁷ Will refer to this phrase as AAPA going forward

¹⁰⁸ Josie Chen, “Move Together”, *ArcGIS Story Maps*, Esri, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/911719eed41a4d5a9229f5a3ec3ea4d2>, (accessed 12 April 2021)

¹⁰⁹ Nina Wallace, “Yellow Power: The Origins of Asian American”, *Densho*, Densho, <https://densho.org/catalyst/asian-american-movement/>, (accessed 14 August 2021)

that this influence created meaningful change. One of the most prominent coalitions AAPA worked in solidarity with was the Third World Liberation Front¹¹⁰. The TWLF was a multi-ethnic coalition of students that included the Latin American Student Organization, the Black Student Union, the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action, and Mexican American Student Confederation, the Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor, and the Native American Student Union¹¹¹. All these ethnic groups experienced similar discrimination in college admission, lack of representation in faculty, and lack of ethnic studies. Through solidarity, they increased membership and thus wielded great political power¹¹². Through this political power, the TWLF launched one of the longest student strikes in American history. On the San Francisco State University and the University of California Berkeley, California Governor Ronald Reagan even declared a “state of extreme emergency” in reaction to these protests¹¹³. This strike forced universities to hire and give full tenure to professors of color, to accept more student of color, and to create the nation’s first ethnic studies department¹¹⁴. Furthermore, these changes eventually spread to other campuses nationwide, primarily due to fear of campus’ having strikes of their own¹¹⁵.

For early Asians, the TWLF catapulted the AAPA and other Asian organizations in the political landscape. Through this, they gained increased visibility in the educational space, ensuring that future generations would be exposed to multicultural and multiracial studies. This

¹¹⁰ Will refer to this phrase as TWLF going forward

¹¹¹ Olivia B. Waxman and Paulina Cachero, “11 Moments from Asian American History That You Should Know” *Time*, Time, <https://time.com/5956943/aapi-history-milestones/>, (accessed 20 June 2021)

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Nina Wallace, “Yellow Power: The Origins of Asian American”, *Densho*, Densho, <https://densho.org/catalyst/asian-american-movement/>, (accessed 14 August 2021)

¹¹⁴ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

exposure increased tolerance of different perspectives and educated many on the discriminatory, racist, and stereotypical treatment of minority groups. This slow but long-term process creates meaningful societal change today in treatment of future minority groups. Furthermore, this began the dismantlement of the model minority myth as it shattered the belief that all early Asians were docile, quiet, and model citizens. Their participation redefined themselves against these stereotypes and helped cement them under a new identity. Through this new identity, they fought against injustice, maintained their own values, and created political change for complete integration.

Beyond academia, the influence of early Asians in the political landscape expanded with the formation of political organizations like the Asian Law Caucus, Asian Pacific Legal Center, Asian American Institute, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, National Asian Pacific Bar Association, and the Asian American Justice Center. These political organizations provided legal services, education programs, community initiatives, and advocacy for most Asian subgroups and some Pacific Islanders¹¹⁶. Each organization worked independently in their local community but collaborated with each other to set national policies in affirmative action, voting rights, census, and language rights¹¹⁷. For instance, coalitions of these political organization worked together to provide legal aid to Filipino workers who had lost their jobs because of their accents while also providing legal services to tenants in places like Little Tokyos, Chinatowns, and Manillatowns who were forced to relocate¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁶ Nina Wallace, "Yellow Power: The Origins of Asian American", *Densho*, Densho, <https://densho.org/catalyst/asian-american-movement/>, (accessed 14 August 2021)

¹¹⁷ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 48

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Despite early Asian activism broadly increasing nationwide, there was no unifying theme that early Asian activists fought under. For instance, areas with higher population of Asians like New York, and Illinois protested issues that mainly impacted their local area. However, in more rural area, Asian activism looked different. In comparison to the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements, the south became the nucleus of African American activism primarily due to both the significant number of discriminatory policies and amount of African American living in the south. From here, African American activism spread nationwide under a unifying theme. For instance, African American activists fought to end segregation and discrimination and promote equality regardless of if the protests occurred in Alabama or New York. In comparison, early Asian activists lacked a universal theme that all Asians can unite around. This was until the death of Vincent Chin – an event that defined early Asians’ place in the United States¹¹⁹ .

Context is necessary to thoroughly understand the circumstance of Chin’s death. Chin lived in Detroit, Michigan which was America’s automotive manufacturing capital. Yet, by the 1980s, Detroit’s automotive industry declined as Japanese automotive imports penetrated the American market¹²⁰. In consequence, massive layoffs occurred which many workers blamed on the Japanese. From this, many laid off workers purposely vandalized any Asian owned businesses, creating immense racial tension¹²¹. In 1982, a Chinese American named Vincent Chin and his friends chose to celebrate his upcoming wedding at a strip club in Detroit¹²². At this

¹¹⁹ Sonia Rao, “The Term ‘Asian American’ Was Meant to Create a Collective Identity. What does that Mean in 2018?”, *The Washington Post*, WP Company, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-term-asian-american-was-meant-to-create-a-collective-identity-is-it-necessary-in-2018/2018/07/27/c30e7eb0-8e90-11e8-b769-e3ff17f0689_story.html, (accessed 8 December 2021)

¹²⁰ Becky Little, “How the 1982 Murder of Vincent Chin Ignited a Push for Asian American Rights”, *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, <https://www.history.com/news/vincent-chin-murder-asian-american-rights>, (accessed 7 October 2021)

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

same strip club, Ronald Ebens and Micheal Nitz were present. Ronald Ebens is a plant superintendent for Chrysler, and Micael Nitz was a recently laid-off autoworker. Both noticed Chin and threw racial slurs at him and said things like, “It’s because of you motherf***ers that we’re out of work”¹²³. Eventually, a fight broke out and Ebens grabbed a baseball bat, chased Chin, and beat him to death. His four hundred wedding guests attended his funeral instead¹²⁴.

Despite Chin’s death initially not gaining national coverage, many Asians in Detroit knew race played a factor. It was not until the sentencing of Ebens and Nitz nine months later that Chin’s death reached national coverage¹²⁵. Both Ebens and Nitz were only found guilty of manslaughter and received a \$3,000 fine, \$780 in court costs, and three years’ probation¹²⁶. They did not receive any prison time. Furthermore, Ebens’ and Nitz’s judge Charles Kaufman stated that “these aren’t the kind of men you send to jail...you don’t make the punishment fit the crime, you make the punishment fit the criminal”¹²⁷. This shocked all Detroit residents especially since 60% of Detroit’s residents were African American and frequently received harsher punishments for lesser crimes. For Asian residents in Detroit, they essentially saw it a cheap license to kill early Asians¹²⁸.

This marked a turning point as most Asians nationwide resonated with how Chin, despite being Chinese American, was killed for “looking” Japanese. This touched on the experience that

¹²³ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

¹²⁴ Becky Little, “How the 1982 Murder of Vincent Chin Ignited a Push for Asian American Rights”, *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, <https://www.history.com/news/vincent-chin-murder-asian-american-rights>, (accessed 7 October 2021)

¹²⁵ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

¹²⁶ Becky Little, “How the 1982 Murder of Vincent Chin Ignited a Push for Asian American Rights”, *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, <https://www.history.com/news/vincent-chin-murder-asian-american-rights>, (accessed 7 October 2021)

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

since all Asian “look the same”, they “are the same”. From Chin’s death, almost all Asians realized that if this could happen to him, then it could happen to any of them. Since early American history, early Asians hoped to obtain the American dream by keeping a low profile. With Chin’s death, this dream shattered, and they realized that nothing would change on its own. This banded many Asian subgroups together as Chin’s death proved that if one of them was in danger, they were all in danger¹²⁹. This marked a turning point and inspired all Asians nationwide to come together in solidarity more fiercely.

Angry phone calls, letters, and media inquiries flooded Kaufman, challenging his decision¹³⁰. Numerous Civil Rights and Asian organization came together, creating one of the largest Asian gatherings since Chinese war relief effort in the 1930s¹³¹. This coalition included from the Greater Detroit Taiwanese Association, the Japanese American Citizens League, the Korean Society of Greater Detroit, and the Filipino American Community Council¹³². Yet, one of the most prominent organizations created from Chin’s death was the American Citizens for Justice¹³³¹³⁴.

The ACJ believed that Asians had been given less than equal treatment from the American judicial and governmental systems. To combat this, they believed cooperative efforts

¹²⁹ Sonia Rao, “The Term ‘Asian American’ Was Meant to Create a Collective Identity. What does that Mean in 2018?”, *The Washington Post*, WP Company, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-term-asian-american-was-meant-to-create-a-collective-identity-is-it-necessary-in-2018/2018/07/27/c30e7eb0-8e90-11e8-b769-e3fff17f0689_story.html, (accessed 8 December 2021)

¹³⁰ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

¹³¹ This effort was to raised funds for the Chinese people during the time of nation crisis.

¹³² Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

¹³³ Will refer to this phrase ACJ as ACJ going foward

¹³⁴ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

could progress society to provide equal treatment to all of America's citizens¹³⁵. For Chin's death, the ACJ petitioned the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate Chin's murder as a civil rights violation and were supported by other organizations like the NAACP, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the Detroit Roundtable of Christians and Jews, and political leaders like U.S. Representative John Conyers. The atrocity of Chin's death went beyond ethnic, color, and religious lines¹³⁶. Furthermore, this marked the first time Asians entered a federal civil rights case, recognizing them as a protected class¹³⁷.

With Chin's death, the ACJ and early Asians had to choose between pursuing a federal case or a civil rights case. Pursuing a federal case in Chin's death meant denying a racial component in his death; however, choosing to pursue his death as a civil rights case would acknowledge a racial component and meant that early Asians classified themselves on the 'black' side of America's white-black race paradigm¹³⁸. Ever since early American history, Asians struggled to find their place in America's black and white paradigm, going from being seen as black or white on a state-by-state basis to being seen as neither white nor black via the model minority myth by the 1970s. By choosing to make this civil rights case, it meant early Asians classified themselves as 'black', marking them as a protected class and thus gaining the associated federal protections.

This momentous decision garnered national and international support. Abroad, international groups offered financial support. Domestically, families of other hate crimes

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

¹³⁷ Becky Little, "How the 1982 Murder of Vincent Chin Ignited a Push for Asian American Rights", *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, <https://www.history.com/news/vincent-chin-murder-asian-american-rights>, (accessed 7 October 2021)

¹³⁸ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

victims supported their mission. For instance, the family of Steven Harvey, an African American musician killed by white nativist in Kansas City, came to ACJ meetings in support of their case¹³⁹. By including race in Chin's case, it pledged mutual support between early Asians and other groups like African American and Hispanics. Overall, the immense solidarity between early Asians and other groups forced Ebens and Nitz to be re-trialed. From this retrial, Ebens and Nitz were charged for violating Chin's civil rights. In the civil suit, Nitz had to pay the Chin family \$50,000 over ten years and Ebens had to pay \$1.5 million¹⁴⁰.

Chin's death was one of the biggest steps for early Asian solidarity and integration. It definitively placed Asians as a protected class, gaining them the same protections that other minority groups had on a federal level. This guaranteed them federal protection and opportunities. Moreover, the federal government began to track anti-Asian hate crimes which built public awareness of racial hostility against them, counteracting the belief that Asians did not experience any racial prejudice or discrimination¹⁴¹. This encouraged early Asians to speak out against anti-Asian hate and support early Asian coalitions to combat Asian injustices and violence.

Early Asians made substantial steps on integration in American life and democracy. With this integration, many political injustices against early them were overturned. For instance, the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 passed where Congress recognized the "grave injustice" against those

¹³⁹ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000)

¹⁴⁰ Becky Little, "How the 1982 Murder of Vincent Chin Ignited a Push for Asian American Rights", *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, <https://www.history.com/news/vincent-chin-murder-asian-american-rights>, (accessed 7 October 2021)

¹⁴¹ Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 78

of Japanese descent during World War II¹⁴². The Supreme Court's decision against Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu, and Minoru Yasui that implemented curfew against minority groups, forced Japanese relocation in internment camps, marked Japanese detention as a “military necessity” were overturned¹⁴³. Yet, the most influential legislation passed for early Asians was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that abolished the restrictive national-origin quota system for Asians¹⁴⁴. This drastically increased the amount and diversity of Asian Americans in the United States. This act increased population of ‘Asians’ from 0.5% in the 19th century to 7% today¹⁴⁵. Accepting Asian immigrants without restriction finally allowed them to create families and become a staple part of American life and democracy. These changes depict how early Asians’ grievances were heard and thus addressed. However, with increased number and demographics of the ‘Asian American’ label began to change. Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, individuals from Mongolia, Bhutan, and Laos could now legally immigrate in large numbers. While these groups were easily adopted under the umbrella term ‘Asian America’, groups like Polynesian and Samoan were not. These smaller subgroups thus felt marginalized and overlooked. To combat this, the label ‘Asian American’ had to change to be more inclusive and encompassing of this new population.

¹⁴² Yamato, “Civil Liberties Act of 1988”, *Densho Encyclopedia*, Densho Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civil%20Liberties%20Act%20of%201988/>, (accessed 5 June 2021)

¹⁴³ Yamato, “Civil Liberties Act of 1988”, *Densho Encyclopedia*, Densho Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Civil%20Liberties%20Act%20of%201988/>, (accessed 5 June 2021)

¹⁴⁴ Karen L. Ishizuka, *Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties* (London, Verso, 2018), 18

¹⁴⁵ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population”, *Pew Research Population*, Pew Research Population, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>, (accessed 2 August 2021)

THE NEED FOR A NEW LABEL

As stated, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1968 drastically changed the ‘Asian’ population. Before the act in 1879, only 63,000 Asians were documented by the U.S. Census¹⁴⁶. By 2000, this number rose to 11.9 million to 23.2 million by 2019¹⁴⁷. This increased immigration of people coming from more regions of Asia and even islands in the Pacific, causing the label ‘Asian American’ to inadequately represent all these backgrounds. Executive director of the Province Youth Student Movement and Cambodian refugee Sarath Suong expressed that the ‘Asian American’ label made him othered and rejected as ‘Asian Americans’ were often depicted as southeast Asian¹⁴⁸. To combat this, the ‘Asian American’ label changed to be more inclusive to these now diversified group; this label is now Asian American and Pacific Islander¹⁴⁹. Yet, this inclusive label faces the issue of lumping *all* Asian and Pacific Islanders subgroups together despite the existence of distinct cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic differences between them¹⁵⁰. Sociologist Dana Okamoto stated that this broad label homogenizes large groups and erases the independent identity that people who fall under it may have. To clarify, the more inclusive AAPI label obscures the distinct cultures, traditions, and languages for groups under this label. Furthermore, it masks the diverse experience each subgroup has in the

¹⁴⁶ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population”, *Pew Research Population*, Pew Research Population, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>, (accessed 2 August 2021)

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Cady Lang, “After 50 Years of ‘Asian American’, Advocates Say the Term Is ‘More Essential Than Ever’”, *NBCNews.com*, NBC Universal News Groups, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/after-50-years-asian-american-advocates-say-term-more-essential-n875601>, (accessed 28 May 2021)

¹⁴⁹ Will use AAPI from now on to include Pacific Islanders in this labeling problem

¹⁵⁰ Sonia Rao, “The Term ‘Asian American’ Was Meant to Create a Collective Identity. What does that Mean in 2018?”, *The Washington Post*, WP Company, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/the-term-asian-american-was-meant-to-create-a-collective-identity-is-it-necessary-in-2018/2018/07/27/c30e7eb0-8e90-11e8-b769-e3fff17f0689_story.html, (accessed 8 December 2021)

United States. What was initially intended as a label for solidarity has turned into something that reduces visibility of those who fall under AAPI and perpetuates the model minority myth.

Today, the lumping of all subgroups under the AAPI label makes the model minority myth seem true by supporting the belief that AAPI do better economically and academically than any other minority groups within the United States. In addition, the model minority myth defaults AAPI as an outsider, continuing the forever foreigner treatment. To begin, let's discuss how the lumping of AAPI together supports the belief that they do better economically than other minority groups. When taken as a whole, AAPI are technically one of the most financially well-off in America. In 2019, the average annual household income for Americans was \$61,800¹⁵¹. For AAPI in that same year, the annual household income was \$85,000, reinforcing the model minority myth¹⁵². Yet, when separating the data based on their ethnic subgroups, a large spectrum of average household income is observed. For instance, Burmese Americans make an annual household income of \$44,000 and Koreans made \$53,000 in 2019. Yet, in the same year, Asian Indians made an annual household income of \$119,000 and Filipino Americans made an annual household income of \$90,400. This shows how Burmese and Korean Americans likely have different access to resources or financial opportunities than Asian Indians and Filipino Americans. Due to this, Burmese and Korean American should gain more aid but because they are aggregated together with more prosperous group. This masks the different experiences between AAPI subgroups, reduces visibility for subgroups that need aid, and cements the model minority myth as true.

¹⁵¹ "Fact Sheets: Asian American Archives", *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/collection/asians-in-the-united-states/>, (accessed 13 December 2021)

¹⁵² Ibid.

Another aspect of today's model minority myth is that AAPI are more academically successful. To measure this, let's analyze how likely AAPI are to get a bachelor's degree. In 2019, 33% of Americans the 25 had a bachelor's degree in comparison to 54% of AAPI in the same age range¹⁵³. Superficially, this statistic supports the model minority myth. Yet when disaggregating the data, large disparities are shown. For example, Asian Indians have the highest rate of achieving a bachelor's degree at 75% of those 25 or older holding one, Bhutanese Americans 25 and older only achieve a bachelor's degree at a rate of 15%¹⁵⁴. This shows how these two groups experience different opportunities and access to education. Yet, they are both treated equally because they are lumped together under the AAPI label, ignoring the different experiences the subgroups and making it more difficult for smaller and more marginalized subgroups to get aid. This shows how aggregating all AAPI subgroups into one category flattens out their distinct experiences, opportunities, and access to resources in the United States thus allowing certain subgroup's disparities to be overlooked.

These two examples alone show how each AAPI subgroup does not have the same financial, political, or social opportunities. Yet, because these subgroups are lumped together under the model minority myth, many assume that all subgroups are doing well and thus require minimal government intervention. There are organizations that try and circumvent this belief, but the prevalence of the model minority myth creates an atmosphere where lesser-known AAPI have reduced visibility. This reduced visibility is exacerbated because when AAPI are visible, they are often defaulted into an immigrant narrative where they came to the United States to

¹⁵³ "Fact Sheets: Asian American Archives", *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, Pew Research Center, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/collection/asians-in-the-united-states/>, (accessed 13 December 2021)

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

achieve the American dream¹⁵⁵. However, the population of Asians has changed since the 1970s, and have different identities, experiences, and desires today. Yet, this default assumes that this large community shares one dominant experience, overlooking newly arrived immigrants, undocumented immigrants, refugees, and those of low socioeconomic status. This is an issue of both the model minority myth and how the AAPI label falls short.

Much of the narrative around AAPI are run by upwardly mobile and educated individuals, creating a unique identity crisis¹⁵⁶. To clarify, those under the AAPI label when discussing political issues are primarily from middle to upper class immigrants. Yet, as established, this does not reflect the diverse and unique experience of smaller and more marginalized groups in AAPI. Due to this, there are some who denounce the use of labels such as AAPI. Jay Caspian Kang, author of the *Loneliness Americans*, states that groups should question on why they accept these political labels and if there are no other possibilities out there. Broadly, he believes that the conversation around AAPI identity should revolve around how to dismantle the intricacies of racial hierarchies and how to treat individuals equally. While Kang's arguments are valid, this thesis believes that labels like AAPI can be useful tools in the pursuit of equality if one understands that those under this label have unique and diverse experiences and that there is no one default story. Labels can make individuals feel liberated, or it can make them feel uncomfortable.

¹⁵⁵ Ashely Tjhung, "The Conundrum of Asian-Americans: A Conversation with Viet Thanh Nguyen", *Viet Thanh Nguyen*, Viet Thanh Nguyen, <https://vietnguyen.info/2018/the-conundrum-of-asian-americans-a-conversation-with-viet-thanh-nguyen>, (accessed 22 March 2022)

¹⁵⁶ Harmeet Kaur, "The Problem with the term 'Asian American,' According to Jay Caspian Kang", *CNN*, Cable News Network, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/14/us/the-loneliest-americans-jay-caspian-kang-cec/index.html>, (accessed 22 March 2022)

Of course, when a label prescribes one broad definition to its group, it creates conflict for individuals who fall under the label but cannot find themselves within it. Despite this, this thesis believes that labels can be used as “vehicles of empowerment”, especially in media¹⁵⁷. In early American media, cast members and singers were predominantly white. Over time, all minority groups saw increased representation in the entertainment industry. By October 2018, *Crazy Rich Asians* became North America’s highest-earning romantic comedy in a decade and was Hollywood’s first studio movie to star an all-Asian cast since 1993’s *Joy Luck Club*¹⁵⁸. This “vehicle of empowerment” guarantees media representation for AAPI. This is especially impactful as AAPI media representation is still minimal today. Thus, this extra representation will feel more included and increases their visibility as whole, but this exposure should come with the acknowledgement that it does not depict all the experiences of AAPI subgroups.

This dilemma goes beyond media representation but also into social and political fields. For example, controversy surrounding affirmative action has used AAPI as a social tool again to prevent giving aid to other minority groups. In the Supreme Court cases revolving around affirmative action, the Students for Fair Admissions¹⁵⁹ sued Harvard University and the University of North Carolina for discrimination against Asian American students by imposing an “Asian penalty” by either creating a subjective standard like likability, courage, and kindness, where Asian American often score lower than their white counterparts, or by giving preference to African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans¹⁶⁰. From this, the SFFA promptly

¹⁵⁷ Ashely Tjhung, “The Conundrum of Asian-Americans: A Conversation with Viet Thanh Nguyen”, *Viet Thanh Nguyen*, Viet Thanh Nguyen, <https://vietnguyen.info/2018/the-conundrum-of-asian-americans-a-conversation-with-viet-thanh-nguyen>, (accessed 22 March 2022)

¹⁵⁸ Asian American Milestones: Timeline”, *History*, A&E Television Networks, <https://history.com/topics/immigration/asian-american-timeline>, (accessed 9 June 2021)

¹⁵⁹ Will refer to this phrase as SFFA going forward

¹⁶⁰ Adam Liptak and Anemona Hartocollis, “Supreme Court Will Hear Challenge to Affirmative Action at Harvard and U.N.C”, *The New York Times*, The New York Times,

demands the Supreme Court to end affirmative action at all universities. The SFFA's argument unfairly lumps all the experiences of AAPI and uses the model minority myth to frame race-conscious admission as a detriment to all minority groups. As established, many subgroups have different access and opportunities to academic and financial resources thus affirmative action may impact each subgroup differently. This logic not only applies to AAPI subgroups but also all minority groups as well. Simply put, even if AAPI are doing "better" as a minority group, it does not mean all minority groups are also fairing better. In addition, SFFA's argument serves as a wedge between minority groups by weaponizing the model minority myth to prevent other minority groups from advancing. The SFFA superficially claim to dismantle affirmative actions for AAPI but a study in Georgetown University shows that 21% of AAPI, specifically Asian Americans, applicants would not have been admitted without affirmative action, and another 2016 study shows that removal of affirmative action would overwhelmingly benefit white students, not AAPI students¹⁶¹. This complex issue shows the intricacies and consequences of lumping up all the experiences of AAPI and how the model minority myth is weaponized to prevent the advancement of other disenfranchised groups.

These issues expand further into healthcare disparities – a prominent issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidence from the National Library of Medicine shows that in health studies, AAPI health data is often aggregated together and extrapolated to other AAPI subgroups instead of creating different health studies for specific subgroups¹⁶². To elaborate, this means that

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/24/us/politics/supreme-court-affirmative-action-harvard-unc.html>, (accessed 10 April 2022)

¹⁶¹ Tony Luong, "Experts Say Framing Affirmative Action as Anti-Asian Bias is 'Dangerous'", *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/experts-say-framing-affirmative-action-anti-asian-bias-dangerous-rcna13544>, (accessed 12 April 2022)

¹⁶² "Chandak Ghosh, "Healthy People 2010 and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders: Defining a Baseline of Information", *American Journal of public Health*, American Journal of Public Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448158/>, (accessed 22 November 2021)

when a specific subgroup showed a higher risk to a disease, instead of just applying these results to that specific AAPI subgroup, the studies apply their results to *every* AAPI subgroup. This is despite there being no evidence of the vulnerability of this disease being studied in other groups. For example, investigators in the Nihonsan Study analyzed how environmental factors impacted the rate of cardiovascular disease for Japanese men living in Japan, Hawaii, and California¹⁶³. This study showed that Japanese men generally had lower rates of cardiovascular disease than the American national average; however, these investigators extrapolated these findings to all AAPI subgroups, implying Asian Indians, Vietnamese, Chinese, and other subgroups also had lower rates of cardiovascular diseases. This is despite other health studies showing that Asian Indians and Filipino Americans have higher risk for cardiovascular disease than the national average¹⁶⁴.

Some may agree this is a minor impact, but the misunderstanding and extrapolation of data causes AAPI individuals to be inadequately treated. For instance, the FDA can recommend different doses of medication to AAPI due to studies showing one subgroup having a specific side effect when given certain medication and extrapolating this result to all AAPI subgroups. This already occurred with rosuvastatin, warfarin¹⁶⁵, clopidogrel¹⁶⁶, and carbamazepine¹⁶⁷. Here, the FDA recommends 5mg of rosuvastatin for all AAPI patients instead of 10mg because one pharmacokinetic study observed that Japanese reacted two-fold in comparison to their white

¹⁶³ “Chandak Ghosh, “Healthy People 2010 and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders: Defining a Baseline of Information”, *American Journal of public Health*, American Journal of Public Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448158/>, (accessed 22 November 2021)

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Warfarin are blood thinners that treat and prevent blood clots

¹⁶⁶ Clopidogrel are blood thinners that can prevent stroke, heart attack, and other heart problems

¹⁶⁷ Carbamazepine is an anticonvulsant that can treat seizures, nerve pain, and bipolar disorder

counterparts¹⁶⁸. Yet, there is no proof showing this reaction is also present in other AAPI subgroups. In fact, with carbamazepine, a study shows great variations in reaction with only 8-11% effectiveness in South Asians like Indians, Hong Kong Chinese, Taiwanese, and Thai and only 1-2% in North Asians like Beijing Chinese, Japanese, and Korean¹⁶⁹. This discrepancy shows how extrapolation of data causes a different treatment plan and may diminish the quality of care they would receive. Fortunately, AAPI organizations have picked up on these discrepancies and utilized their resources to make governmental change. Because of these organizations the federal government improved health data collections for AAPI with President Obama passing an executive order with a separate section in the Affordable Care Act Bill to establish a commission¹⁷⁰ to improve AAPI health, education, and economic status. This order even required all health surveys sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services to include standardized info on race, ethnicity, sex, primary language, and disability to promote disaggregation¹⁷¹.

Overall, this thesis analyzed the impacts of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movements and how they influenced early Asian activism to achieve political power and the new self-determined identity of ‘Asian American’. ‘Asian American’ originated to combat the fragmentation of disparate immigrant groups and unite Asian subgroups that felt marginalized in the United States. Even with the evolution of the new AAPI label,

¹⁶⁸ “Chandak Ghosh, “Healthy People 2010 and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders: Defining a Baseline of Information”, *American Journal of public Health*, American Journal of Public Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448158/>, (accessed 22 November 2021)

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Some of these commissions are the President’s Advisory Commission, the Federal Interagency Working Group, and the Office of the White House Initiative

¹⁷¹ “Chandak Ghosh, “Healthy People 2010 and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders: Defining a Baseline of Information”, *American Journal of public Health*, American Journal of Public Health, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448158/>, (accessed 22 November 2021)

marginalization still exists. In addition, the model minority still latches onto AAPI today, disenfranchising other minority groups and minimizing the experiences of AAPI. Yet, this thesis shows how AAPI still face issues with integration into American life and democracy due to lack of visibility, the model minority myth, and the forever foreigner treatment. Due to this, a new label is needed to reflect today's new population. Of course, referring to Kang's critiques again, the issues with the model minority myth, reduced visibility, and aggregation can arise from using such broad labels like AAPI, but this thesis advocates that AAPI need to evolve a new label for today's current time their increasing and diversifying population. However, instead of using this new label as an identity, it should be used as a tool for representation in the pursuit for equality to ensure that resources are shared equally and that meaningful influence in government policies are gained or increased. To what this label should be, this thesis cannot answer but with increased tolerance and steps towards solidarity, this thesis believes that a new label can be created as a step of mobilization for a new demographic group that critically addresses the model minority myth and the forever foreigner treatment. This new label likely will not dismantle those issues altogether but as society evolves to become more tolerant, change can occur to debunk those issues one chunk at a time and further their autonomy to address the issues of more marginalized and overlooked subgroups under the AAPI label.

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