

THREE

1968: WHAT'S IN THE NAME "ASIAN AMERICAN"?

What's in a name? In Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*, the name does not matter as much as the quality of someone or something. But, for Asian Americans in 1968, the ability to call oneself Asian American was meaningful. To name oneself Asian American was to confront the racism and violence that had relegated Asian Americans as second-class citizens. To name oneself Asian American was an act of historical agency—the ability to make choices and, in doing so, to make history.

Many Americans take for granted the existence of Asian American identity. Yet, before Asian American became a category that one could check off in a box, or a heritage that Americans could celebrate in the US government-designated month of May, it was a radical consciousness that emerged in the late 1960s as part of the Asian American Movement. It signified a political sensibility that valued solidarity with Black, Chicano, and American Indian social justice movements in the United States and with revolutionary movements throughout the world.

While much of the Asian American Movement was new, Black and Asian American solidarity was not. The 1968 Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front strike at San Francisco State College is part of a longer history of mutual support. This history challenges contemporary narratives that continue to pit Black and Asian Americans against one another.

The Asian American Movement's wide-ranging agenda led to many civic, cultural, and educational innovations. One of these innovations was the establishment of ethnic studies and Asian American studies in universities and colleges across the United States. Yet the struggle for Asian American studies in higher education and the K-12 curriculum continues.

NEW NAME, NEW STRATEGY

The contemporary general definition of "Asian Americans" signifies Americans of Asian ancestry. However, the name "Asian American" hasn't always been with us. It was born of defiance and a radical imagination in the late 1960s. In 1968, UC Berkeley graduate students Emma Gee and Yuji Ichioka coined the term "Asian American" when they founded the Asian American Political Alliance in Berkeley.¹ An anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, Third World political organization, the Asian American Political Alliance fought for self-determination and liberation for Asian Americans.²

The name "Asian American" was a rejection of externally imposed categories of identity, such as the popular usage of "Oriental." Although some organizations of this period continued to use "Oriental" in their names, the term became increasingly outdated and smacked of Asian Americans' perpetual foreignness and their objectification as vases and rugs. It also recalled scholar Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, and its binary depiction of the East as primitive, static, and despotic, in contrast to the West's superiority, dynamism, and democracy.³ Other seemingly affectionate names, such as the reference to Filipinos as "little brown brothers," infantilized them and reflected the unequal colonial relationship between the United States and the Philippines. Racial slurs—"chink," "Jap," "gook"—dehumanized Asian Americans. To call oneself "Asian American" defied these pejorative labels and claimed an American presence literally on one's own terms.

To be "Asian American" was also to claim a new collective vision. It imagined anew the relationship among diverse individuals of Asian ancestry by bringing them together under a broader Asian American identity. The breadth of this identity was a break from the past. Previously,

Asians in the United States primarily identified with their national origin or ethnic group, or even more specifically a particular Asian region, province, or hometown, or with their extended family or clan. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the first mass migrations of Chinese came from various districts of the coastal province of Guangdong in the Pearl River Delta. Pioneering Japanese emigrated from various prefectures such as Hiroshima, while Asian Indians hailed primarily from the region of Punjab. Language also divided them. As the largest group of detainees on Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, Chinese migrants carved poems written in Cantonese on the walls to express their disdain and despair. In the late 1920s, pioneering Filipino migrants spoke several languages including Ilocano, Visayan, and Tagalog.

Furthermore, an earlier strategy by Asian groups to counter anti-Asian hostility and attempt to gain acceptance in the United States was to distinguish themselves from one another. As they arrived in larger numbers in the late nineteenth century, Japanese immigrants did not want to be treated with the hostility and violence that the Chinese had suffered before them. Many of them also felt racially distinct and superior to other Asian groups such as Chinese and Filipinos. During this period, Japan was ascending as a world power with an Asian empire of its own. Japanese immigrants made conscious efforts to differentiate themselves from the Chinese through visible cultural markers, such as their clothing, and through public discourse in newspaper editorials.⁴

Yet, in the 1922 Supreme Court case *Ozawa v. United States*, the Supreme Court ruled that Japanese immigrants, or Issei, were ineligible for US citizenship. Takao Ozawa was born in Kanagawa, Japan, on June 15, 1875, and immigrated to San Francisco in 1894. He became fluent in English and practiced Christianity. Ozawa insisted that he was an American based on his industriousness and personal beliefs.

What's in the name "American"? Ozawa wrote: "In name Benedict Arnold was an American, but at heart he was a traitor. In name I am not an American, but at heart I am a true American."⁵ The Supreme Court ruled otherwise because Ozawa was not white. Its decision upheld the 1790 Nationality Act that limited citizenship by naturalization to "free white persons." Ultimately, Ozawa's honesty and hard work could not

overcome his Asian-ness. Race mattered. The court's decision enabled the exclusion of Japanese immigrants from the United States after the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, which barred persons who were ineligible for US citizenship.

During World War II, when Japanese Americans on the West Coast were forcibly assembled and incarcerated in internment camps, Chinese, Korean, and Filipino Americans wore buttons identifying themselves. "I am Chinese" (or Korean or Filipino) was a short phrase that signaled what they were not. They were *not* Japanese Americans who were deemed enemies in their own country after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Nevertheless, these buttons could not completely prevent the anti-Japanese racial harassment and violence directed at them.

By the 1960s, it had become clear that this "but we're not that other Asian group" strategy could only go so far. The contrasting strategy of Asian groups coming together to fight back and demand justice is what scholar Yén Lê Espiritu calls Asian American "panethnicity." Changing demographics facilitated a panethnic approach. Before World War II, Asian Americans spoke different languages. But by 1940, the US-born population of Chinese and Japanese Americans outnumbered the immigrant generation for the first time.⁶ In the postwar years, increasing intergroup communication and contact also came from the breaking down of some economic and residential barriers. College campuses became a primary site for Asian American interaction. Among this new generation, Asian national differences and the old-world tensions that often accompanied them became less important.

The civil rights movement had exposed them to racial injustice. During Pat Sumi's visit to the American South with friends involved in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the courage of young Black Americans to face the Ku Klux Klan at demonstrations made a deep impression on her. It galvanized her own activism, which included working on voter registration efforts in the South, antiwar organizing with GIs, and participating in the Eldridge Cleaver Delegation of antiwar Americans to North Korea, North Vietnam, and China.⁷

The Black Power movement, its substance and style of community-centered and confrontational politics, became a major source of inspiration.

In a 1969 essay, Amy Uyematsu described the emerging Asian American movement as an expression of "yellow power" and a direct outgrowth of the Black Power movement.⁸ The Bay Area revolutionary group known as the Red Guard Party, founded that same year, modeled itself on the Black Panthers. They wore berets and armbands, created their own "10-Point Program" and serve-the-people initiatives such as a Free Breakfast program, and denounced police brutality in Chinatown. As Chinatown youth, they experienced joblessness and were increasingly targeted by the police. Alex Hing, one of its founders, recalled:

A handful of us were closely following the Black Panther Party. They were arming themselves, and they were talking politics. At the time, we felt an extreme urgency because police were killing people, putting us in jail. My cousin was handcuffed and beaten to death in prison. People think this doesn't happen to Chinese people, nah. This was why armed self-defense wasn't just rhetoric, some macho thing we thought was cool. This is what we were facing.⁹

A global dimension—the idea of being part of the Third World majority—informed an empowering paradigm shift. In 1968, the Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE), a new student organization at San Francisco State College, declared: "So we have decided to fuse ourselves with the masses of Third World people, which are the majority of the world's people, to create, through struggle, a new humanity, a new humanism, a New World Consciousness, and within that context collectively control our own destinies."¹⁰ Liberation and self-determination at home and abroad were major objectives. A racist society, silence, and neutrality, the major obstacles.

Activists added a transnational, Asian American racial dimension to the antiwar movement because they recognized that other Americans would not be able to tell them apart from the Vietnamese communist enemy whom the US military dehumanized as "gooks." Some Asian American soldiers became antiwar activists after suffering firsthand this affront of being lumped together with North Vietnamese soldiers. Their superior officers used them as examples of what the enemy looked like, telling

non-Asian American recruits, "We kill people who look like him!"¹¹ Such racist abuse fueled their fears of being killed by fellow soldiers or being left behind by medevac teams. The horror of witnessing and participating in violence against people who bore a resemblance to their own families also took a psychological toll.

Philippine president Ferdinand Marcos's backing of US military actions in Vietnam and American presidents' continuing support of the Marcos regime, despite his dictatorial ambitions, motivated some Filipino American activists to work toward Philippine democracy as well as freedom from American racism. After Marcos declared martial law in the Philippines in 1972, they participated in various anti-martial law organizations in the United States.¹² One of these organizations was the KDP (Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino, or Union of Democratic Filipinos). Founded in 1973, it was a revolutionary organization that advocated a "dual-line" program, calling for a national democratic movement in the Philippines and the establishment of socialism in the United States.¹³

From the late 1960s to the 1980s, the Asian American Movement was a social justice movement whose major aims were wide-ranging and ambitious. They included community-centered service programs, the humane representation of Asian Americans in arts and culture, and justice for victims of anti-Asian violence and Japanese American internment. Some of the movement's most impactful events included the protests against the eviction of Filipino and Chinese elders in San Francisco's International Hotel that was part of an "urban renewal" strategy to satisfy big developer interests in the 1960s and 1970s; the creation of Asian American activist publications, posters, and albums; campaigns for justice for victims of anti-Asian violence; and the Redress movement for former Japanese American internees.

Although it would take time—decades even—numerous contributions emerged from the ideas, actions, and sacrifices of these activists. These include the publication of *Gidra* magazine (1969–74) and *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (1971); the 1973 album release of *A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle of Asians in America*; the creation of the Asian American nonprofit organization American Citizens for Justice in response to the 1982 killing of Vincent Chin; the passage of the

1988 Civil Liberties Act that granted redress for surviving internees and a formal presidential apology; and, in 2010, a new International Hotel Manilatown Center in San Francisco.¹⁴

Like other social movements of the period, a major challenge was internal dissent within and across various groups. Revolutionary groups competed against one another. Activists within specific organizations disagreed over tactics and goals. Coalitions were built, but they were also fragile. Although the movement attempted to unite Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans, who made up the three dominant Asian ethnic groups of the period, Filipinos felt marginalized by terms like “yellow power” and participated in Brown Asian caucuses at various Asian American national and regional conferences, such as the National Conference on Asian-American Mental Health in 1972.¹⁵

Sexism and homophobia challenged the centrality of race and racism in the movement. In a 1971 skit written and performed by women activists, the character “Sister” poses the question “What do you think of women’s liberation?” “Brother 1” seems to support it, but then says: “Right on! Let’s put it on a stencil and run it off for the conference. Here, sister, can you type it up (hands it to her without waiting for her to answer).”¹⁶ Daniel C. Tsang came out at the 1974 Third World People’s Solidarity Conference in Ann Arbor. He was active in gay and Asian groups but felt a sense of isolation in both. The gay groups were primarily white, and some Asian Americans were homophobic.¹⁷

Still, the similar experiences of anti-Asian violence, labor exploitation, and social discrimination created common ground. The study of history would occupy a special place in Asian American studies because it illuminated that these similarities existed over time. Activists’ belief in the value of Asian American history and their critique of its erasure helped to unite them. As Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) veteran Jeffrey Thomas Leong explained:

What happened was that we in AAPA and other folks identified the lack of historical accuracy in the courses we were taking, how the Japanese internment was not even in the history books, how discrimination against Asian Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans also

was not in the history books. So we made it a high priority on our agenda to make changes within university and high school curriculum to include courses that covered those subjects.¹⁸

At stake was their very humanity. Steve Wong, a fellow AAPA veteran, lamented:

So much of Asian American history is not available in any kind of format. . . . Young people growing up, or even as I was growing up, we knew very little about our own background, our contributions, not only within the context of the United States, but internationally. And the struggles that we had to go through in order to be recognized in any kind of way that we too are human beings, that we have potential to do things that other people can do.¹⁹

Confronting histories of anti-Asian racism was difficult, but it was a first step toward healing and empowerment. Before he joined the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP) in the 1970s, Abe Ignacio had experienced so much racial taunting that he became ashamed of his Filipino heritage and wished he were white. His mindset shifted after taking an Asian American history class during his senior year of high school and reading *America Is in the Heart* by Carlos Bulosan, about the hardships of Filipino migrant laborers in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁰ This knowledge enabled Ignacio to understand the long history of racial injustice and helped him rebuild his self-esteem.

Such revelations reflect the heart of a beloved quote among Filipino American history advocates: “No history, no self. Know history, know self.” This aphorism is based on an interpretation and translation of a famous quote by Philippine national hero Jose Rizal: “He who does not know how to look back at where he came from will never get to his destination.”²¹

The significance of a relevant curriculum that featured the histories as well as contemporary issues of people of color contributed to galvanizing a student coalition at San Francisco State College in 1968 to demand ethnic studies.

BLACK AND ASIAN AMERICAN SOLIDARITY

November 6, 1968, at San Francisco State College was a watershed moment in United States history. It marked the beginning of the Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) student strike, an action that would last five months and become the longest college strike in US history.²² The TWLF was a multiracial alliance of Black, Asian American, Latino, and American Indian students who demanded institutional change. Its constituent organizations included the Black Student Union, Latin American Student Organization, Mexican American Student Coalition, Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor, Asian American Political Alliance, and Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action.²³ Their activism led to the establishment of the College of Ethnic Studies.

The 1968 TWLF strike was not the first time that Blacks and Asian Americans had expressed solidarity with one another. Rather, this historical event is part of a long history of mutual support between these two groups that spans over 150 years. This support took shape in many forms including advocacy for immigration, union organizing, friendship in times of national crisis, and activism for civil rights.

Tragically, this history is not well known because both groups have been pitted against one another, an egregious example of which is the way that news stories in the late 1960s and early 1970s presented Asian Americans as model minorities at the expense of Blacks. In 1966, a *U.S. News & World Report* story titled "Success Story of One Minority Group in U.S." depicted Chinese and "other Orientals" as successful immigrants who suffered prejudice, but who did not complain, achieving success through hard work alone.²⁴ This seemingly positive branding was set in contrast to Black Americans, who were used as the example of an unsuccessful minority who protested hardship and relied on the government for help.

Asian American studies scholars have long argued that the model minority is a harmful stereotype, emphasizing that one of its most pernicious impacts is its construction of a Black and Asian American divide. Yet the association of Asian Americans as docile, model minorities persists, as does the perception of Black and Asian American enmity.

We can learn lessons from histories of Black and Asian American solidarity. A working time line could begin in 1869. By the time that abolitionist leader, orator, and author Frederick Douglass delivered his lecture titled "Our Composite Nationality" in Boston in December of that year, the movement to disenfranchise the Chinese was underway. In 1854, the California Supreme Court case *People v. Hall* had ruled that Chinese testimony against whites was inadmissible in court because the Chinese were an inferior race incapable of participating in "our Government."²⁵ Frederick Douglass made his support for Chinese immigration clear:

I have said that the Chinese will come, and have given some reasons why we may expect them in very large numbers in no very distant future. Do you ask if I would favor such immigrations? I answer, *I would*. "Would you admit them as witnesses in our courts of law?" *I would*. Would you have them naturalized, and have them invested with all the rights of American citizenship? *I would*. Would you allow them to vote? *I would*. Would you allow them to hold office? *I would*.²⁶

Douglass urged Americans to settle such matters with higher principles and not selfishness. "There are such things in the world as human rights," he reminded listeners. One of them was the right of migration, which belonged to all races, including the Chinese.

In 1899, a twenty-one-year-old Buffalo Soldier named David Fagen defected from the US Army during the Philippine-American War in support of Philippine revolutionaries, who had declared their independence initially from Spain and, subsequently, the United States. He became a guerrilla leader of such renown that Filipino soldiers called him "Général Fagen."²⁷ Fagen had been part of the six segregated regiments of Black soldiers who were sent to fight in the Philippines. While some Black soldiers believed that fighting alongside non-Black Americans and demonstrating their loyalty would improve their situation in the United States—where Blacks were being routinely lynched in front of white mobs—at least one dozen Black soldiers fought on the side of the Filipinos. Black newspapers published letters from soldiers in the Philippines, such as Sergeant

John Galloway, who foreshadowed their interwoven fates: "The future of the Filipino, I fear, is that of the Negro in the South."²⁸

Filipino and Black solidarity reemerged in the United States in the form of labor organizing in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1925, trade unionist A. Philip Randolph and the Pullman porters organized and founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. In the classic divide-and-conquer strategy, the Pullman Company hired Filipino train car attendants to disparage Black workers. Although the Brotherhood initially vilified Filipino "scabs," historian Barbara M. Posadas has found that its policy shifted to recognize the common plight of minority workers.²⁹ The Brotherhood welcomed Filipinos as members, declaring: "The only security of the Filipinos as well as the Negro Pullman porter is organizing as one common union."³⁰ Yet, recruiting Filipino attendants to join the union was a challenge. Some Filipinos rejected union membership as damaging and preferred to work with white society, while others doubted the Brotherhood's ability and commitment to protect Filipino jobs. The integration and leadership of Filipinos in the union made a difference. Attendant Cipriano Samonte understood the need for organizing after having migrated from the Philippines to Hawai'i and enduring harsh labor conditions on sugar plantations. Samonte led the organizing drive of the Filipino workers in Chicago, meeting with Filipinos on payday to talk about the importance of the union. After years of struggle, the Brotherhood was recognized as the union representing workers at the Pullman Company, signing its first contract in 1937. Samonte spent more than twenty-five years with the union, serving on the executive board of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters' Chicago division and its grievance committee.³¹

In times of national crisis, the seemingly ordinary gesture of friendship becomes extraordinary. Soon after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States declared war on Japan. In February 1942, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, which resulted in the internment of about 120,000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast. They included Takashi Hoshizaki, who was detained at Pomona Assembly Center located on the Los Angeles Fairgrounds, about thirty miles east of downtown Los Angeles. Hoshizaki recalled a moment of joy and respite at the assembly center when his Black neighbors, the

Marshalls, traveled all the way to see him and his family, albeit through a fence, and to bring them apple pie à la mode. The Marshalls had a catering business and, decades later, Hoshizaki recalled with delight how they had skillfully baked the apple pie so as to create space between the crust and apple filling for the ice cream. "It was a real pleasure," Hoshizaki said.³²

Hoshizaki was subsequently incarcerated at Heart Mountain internment camp in Wyoming, where civil rights, antiwar, gay liberation, and AIDS activist Kiyoshi Kuromiya was born in 1943. In the 1960s, Kuromiya participated in restaurant sit-ins in Maryland to protest those establishments that refused to serve Blacks and was brutally beaten by Alabama state troopers in Selma as he was leading a group of high school students in a march to the state capitol building in Montgomery.³³ Kuromiya developed a close friendship with Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and his family. After King was assassinated in 1968, he helped care for King's children at the family's home.³⁴

In 1948, Cecilia Suyat needed a job to support herself in New York City after having moved away from her Filipino family and her childhood home in Hawai'i. Suyat recalled that when she went to the employment office, "the clerk, she saw my dark skin, and she sent me to the national office of the NAACP."³⁵ Suyat became the secretary for Gloster B. Current, deputy executive director of the NAACP. She traveled to various cities where she attended conferences and took minutes. Like her fellow NAACP workers, she experienced being turned away from hotels, and credited local people who took them in: "We stayed in their private homes, and they fed us and treated us like kings."³⁶ Suyat played a role in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, typing and re-typing the NAACP's legal briefs over a four-year period as it honed its arguments for the landmark case that ended legal segregation in public schools. In 1955, she married Thurgood Marshall, then a civil rights lawyer and widower, who in 1967 would become the first African American Supreme Court justice. They remained married until his death in 1993. In a 2013 oral history interview for the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress's Civil Rights History Project, Suyat Marshall repeatedly described her work at

the NAACP as a “blessing.” It taught her about racial injustice in the United States and the hard work it took to end it. She reflected, “And as I look back today, we’ve come a long way. But we still have a ways to go.”³⁷

The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Grace Lee Boggs was a long-standing activist, author, and philosopher, who worked as a tenant organizer in Chicago before marrying James Boggs—a Black autoworker, writer, and radical activist—and moving to Detroit in 1953.³⁸ Together, they participated in the major social justice movements of the twentieth century for Black freedom, and dedicated themselves to workers’, women’s, and Asian American rights, antiwar campaigns, and environmental issues. In 1992, they helped found Detroit Summer, a community transformation program for youth that focused on planting community gardens, painting public murals, and holding intergenerational and peer dialogues. Grace Lee Boggs attributed her optimism to her participation in collective action. A centenarian, she continued to contemplate and write about revolutionary politics later in life, emphasizing the historical significance of Black resistance: “And I think it’s very, very important that folks understand how much this country was founded on the enslavement of blacks, and how the resistance of blacks to that enslavement has been the spark plug for so many important developments.”³⁹

After moving to Harlem in 1960, human rights activist Yuri Kochiyama met Malcolm X, and their friendship transformed both of them. She was moved by his calls for Black liberation and began working with Black nationalist organizations in Harlem. As the FBI and police surveilled and repressed Black activists, Kochiyama dedicated herself to supporting political prisoners, “providing non-stop letter writing—often at two or three in the morning,” and linking the plight of imprisoned political activists to her own internment in Jerome, Arkansas, during World War II.⁴⁰ In 1964, Malcolm X visited the Kochiyamas to meet Japanese *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors) and journalists on a world peace tour. He also sent the Kochiyamas postcards from his travels to Africa and other parts of the world. One of them, mailed from Kuwait on September 27, 1964, read: “Still trying to travel and broaden my scope since I’ve learned what a mess can be made by narrow-minded people. Bro. Malcolm X.”⁴¹

In February 1965, when Malcolm X was assassinated at the Audubon Ballroom in Manhattan, Yuri Kochiyama was there. She had been in the audience waiting to hear him address the Organization of Afro-American Unity, which he had recently founded. After the burst of gunfire, she rushed to the stage, cradled his head on her lap, pleading with him to stay alive. Although a photograph of Kochiyama comforting Malcolm X was published in *Life* magazine, there was no mention of her by name, and only in recent years has there been mention of an Asian American in attendance at Malcolm’s final speech.⁴²

Black and Asian American solidarity existed well before the TWLF strike at San Francisco State College in 1968. As this brief history shows, some of these examples of mutual support continued after the 1960s, weaving together personal and collective time lines, and overlapping in ways that may surprise us because we never knew about them. In May 2021, a survey commissioned by the nonprofit organization LAAUNCH (Leading Asian Americans to Unite for Change) found that 42 percent of people in the US could not name one well-known Asian American. Not one Asian American name.⁴³

What’s in the names: Frederick Douglass, David Fagen, Cipriano Samonte, Takashi Hoshizaki, the Marshalls, Kiyoshi Kuromiya, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Cecilia Suyat Marshall, Thurgood Marshall, Grace Lee Boggs, James Boggs, Yuri Kochiyama, Malcolm X? Histories of Black and Asian American solidarity that many of us did not know. Histories that we could not know because we never learned about them.

As a result, we find ourselves grappling with one-dimensional, tired and tiring stories that emphasize the animosity between us. In the age of COVID-19, we bear witness to the intense circulation of videos and images of Blacks committing violence against Asian Americans on social media, creating the notion that the surges in anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents are primarily a problem of Black-on-Asian violence. But, like the model minority, this too is a myth.

The University of Michigan’s Virulent Hate Project, led by historian Melissa May Borja, analyzes news media to research trends in anti-Asian racism and Asian American activism. In a report on anti-Asian racism in 2020, Borja and researcher Jacob Gibson found that the majority of the

offenders were identified as male and white.⁴⁴ In political scientist Janelle Wong's analysis of official crime statistics and previously published studies of anti-Asian hate crimes and incidents, she concludes that "the racist kind of tropes that come along with [the media coverage]—especially that it's predominantly Black people attacking Asian Americans who are elderly—there's not really an empirical basis in that."⁴⁵

This is not to say that no tensions exist between these groups. They do. Nor that we should not have difficult conversations about the hostilities between us. We should. But what if the history about our communities' solidarity had been circulated with the same frequency and intensity? What if the examples of solidarity that emerged after the 1992 Los Angeles Riots among Blacks, Asian Americans, and Latinos had become common knowledge?

On April 29, 1992, the acquittals of a group of mostly white police officers who had been charged with the excessive beating of Black motorist Rodney King sparked civil unrest in Los Angeles. The bulk of the rioting in South Central Los Angeles took place in Koreatown. It resulted in the looting and destroying of more than 2,200 Korean businesses and \$400 million in damages.⁴⁶ What Koreans call *Sa-i-gu*, or April 29, increased the public's awareness of Korean immigrants in the United States. Yet, it was an awareness primarily filtered through news media that accentuated Korean-Black interracial conflict.

In 2017, twenty-five years after the LA Riots, Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Rev. Mark Whitlock, pastor of Christ Our Redeemer A.M.E. (COR) Church in Orange County, California, and Rev. Hyepin Im, president of Korean Churches for Community Development, coauthored an editorial rejecting the myths and prejudices that had divided their communities. Instead, they highlighted their friendship and the potential of working together: "Twenty-five years later, we choose to look back by celebrating all that we've accomplished since. We can get along. We can end biased policing. We can create jobs. We can end violence. We can see."⁴⁷

The spirit of solidarity lives on in the Black Lives Matter movement. While Asian Americans have participated in public protests that typically take center stage in news media, their activism has also taken place

behind the scenes in the more intimate space of family conversations. Letters for Black Lives "began as a group of Asian Americans and Canadians writing an intergenerational letter to voice their support for the Black community." Their letters constitute a set of crowdsourced, multilingual, and culturally aware resources that create space for dialogue about racial justice, police violence, and anti-Blackness in Asian American families and communities.⁴⁸

Beginning in 2016, the letters in English have since been translated into twenty-six languages. A new set of letters was created in 2020 in response to demands for justice for George Floyd, Dreasjon Reed, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. Both the 2016 and 2020 sets of letters include a South Asian American edition. "Dear family and friends," begins the letter in the 2016 edition. "We need to talk." It then makes direct connections between Black and South Asian American communities:

In fact, stereotypes directly impact members of our community as well. The media shows us as foreigners with thick accents. We get called names in schools and on the streets. Airport security stops us, and some of us are profiled as terrorists because of our clothes or our religion.

Sometimes, anti-Black racism also puts us in danger. In 2015, Sureshbhai Patel came to Alabama from India to care for his grandson. He was taking a walk outside when a White neighbor called 911 to report a suspicious "skinny Black guy" on the street. The police went on to assault Mr. Patel, who spoke little English. *He was left partially paralyzed, spending months in the hospital.* The police officer was never convicted of any wrongdoing, even though the entire incident was captured on video.⁴⁹

The spirit of working toward unity lives on in the struggle to stop Asian hate. After an elderly Chinese American woman was set on fire in Brooklyn in August 2020, rapper China Mac organized They Can't Burn Us All protests. In February 2021, as attacks on Asian seniors continued to surge, he teamed up with Bay Area rapper Mistah F.A.B. to promote unity in their communities. In a joint television interview, China Mac emphasized the need for dialogue: "We're having our own conversations

within the Asian community, but there's not enough conversations being had with people of other communities, specifically with the Black community."⁵⁰ And Mistah F.A.B. acknowledged that "there are many people that stand in solidarity with us, against our adversity, and our obstacles that we fight as Black people. And here it is, our turn to show that we're in solidarity with our Asian brothers and sisters."⁵¹

The history of Black and Asian American solidarity gives us not only a lens to view the past but also a way to reimagine our future.

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES NOW

The 1968 TWLF student strike led to the establishment of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. Today, the college houses five departments that offer degrees in Africana, American Indian, Asian American, Latina/Latino, and race and resistance studies. A TWLF strike on the University of California, Berkeley campus beginning in January 1969 resulted in the creation of UC Berkeley's Department of Ethnic Studies, which consists of four undergraduate programs—comparative ethnic studies, Asian American and Asian diaspora studies, Chicana/o and Latina/o studies, and Native American studies—and a PhD program in ethnic studies.

The demand for Asian American studies, the academic discipline that examines Asian American history, culture, and contemporary issues, reverberated across the United States. It resulted in departments and programs at the Claremont Colleges; the University of Texas, Austin; University of Minnesota, Twin Cities; the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; the University of Maryland, College Park; State University of New York at Binghamton; New York University; Duke University; and other schools.

Yet, the struggle for Asian American studies in higher education continues. Although San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley recently commemorated fifty years of ethnic studies, including Asian American studies, journalist Agnes Constante reported in 2019 that Asian American studies programs can still be hard to find.⁵² According to the College Board, only twenty-five US colleges and universities offer majors in Asian American studies.

The struggle for Asian American studies in the K-12 curriculum also continues. When history curricula include aspects of Asian American history, they typically devote only a few sentences to Chinese labor on the transcontinental railroad and Japanese American internment, if at all.⁵³ In 2021, Illinois senator Ram Villivalam and Representative Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz introduced the Teaching Equitable Asian American Community History, or TEAACH, Act (HB 376). The act aims to present a more holistic picture of US history by adding Asian American history to the Illinois School Code beginning in the 2022-23 school year.⁵⁴ Legislators in New York, Connecticut, and Wisconsin have introduced similar bills.⁵⁵

These efforts stem from the urgent need to address the surge in anti-Asian hate and violence since 2020. The frequently raised question—What can we do to stop this and move forward?—typically elicits responses such as participating in bystander training and donating time and money to Asian American organizations. These actions are undoubtedly important. However, the conundrum of why this violence happens over and over again remains. A root cause is the phenomenon of not knowing Asian American history, the long-standing tragedy of anti-Asian scapegoating, and Asian American contributions to US culture, economy, and government. How can we begin to change what we don't know? How can we affirm Asian Americans as human beings if we don't even know their names?