Tidal Notes:

A Critical Oral History of Asian and Asian/American Student Organizing at Barnard College and Columbia University, 1990s/2020s

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"What are you going to do for the Movement?" an
Asian American sister of the Maoist persuasion wanted to know.
"I am going to write a history of the Movement," was my spontaneous reply.
William Wei

All water has perfect memory and is trying to get back to where it was.
Toni Morrison

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Preface: Tide

1. a fit or opportune time: opportunity
2. something that fluctuates like the tides of the sea
3. a powerful surge of feeling or trend of events
4. obsolete: a space of time: period

Note

1. to notice or observe with care
2. a brief record of facts, topics, or thoughts, written down as an aid to memory
3. a single tone of definite pitch made by a musical instrument or the human voice
4. notice or pay particular attention to (something)

My name is Solby Lim. I am a queer diasporic Korean woman living on unceded Lenape land, a land known for its hills: an island. A land surrounded by water, with beautiful tides. I graduated from Barnard College in 2022, where I wrote my thesis on the cultural history of North Korean-Third World internationalism and solidarity found in Korean and US-based magazines and newspapers during the 1960s and 70s. I was a History and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies major. I worked as an intern for Barnard's Communications department; I was not an undergraduate student organizer.

I note where I am coming from because it gives shape to this project. I am an Asian/American Barnard alum and Columbia graduate student, researching and exploring the experiences of my Asian/American peers, how they gather and be together on this campus. I note my personal stakes in this project, this project rooted in youth organizing. "Historians are not scholars outside of history. The passage of time shapes who becomes scholars and their ways of understanding the past," Asian American scholar Judy Tsu-chun Wu states.[1] Oral history is my attempt at organizing, understanding how students

[1] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Living History: Encountering the Recent Asian American Past," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 5, no. 1 (2019), 101.

build community and imagine a better world by witnessing and remembering their lives with care.

I make note (observe, with care) at a time, a space of time, of a powerful surge of feeling and events, when student organizing is most urgent and boisterous and powerful. *Tidal Notes* is my form of hearing, noticing with care, the human voices of struggle and community-building. This project is an archive of witness to the chants, the deliberations, the mourning, the demands for humanity and collective liberation.

Acronym Soup: A Guide for Your Knowledge

The acronyms below are organizations either currently or previously active at Barnard/Columbia, and may be mentioned by narrators in their excerpted transcripts throughout.

AAA: Asian American Alliance

APAHM: Asian Pacific American Heritage Month club

AWC: Asian Women's Coalition

BADdies: Barnard's Asian Diaspora

CCIS: Consortium for Critical Interdisciplinary Studies

CSC: Chinese Students Council

CSER: Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race

CSER SAB: Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race Student Advisory Board

CUAD: Columbia University Apartheid Divest coalition

JVP: Jewish Voices for Peace

KSA: Korean Students Association

Q&A: Queer and Asian club

SJP: Students for Justice in Palestine

TASA: Taiwanese American Students Association

VSA: Vietnamese Students Association

Introduction: These Tidal Notes

Duan '23: *It's so important for people, or the students on this campus, to keep learning the histories that came before them and know that they existed in context, and also know how to organize and like, build community and negotiate with the admin."*

Tidal Notes: A Critical Oral History of Asian and Asian/American Student Organizing at Barnard College/Columbia University, 1990s/2020s is an oral history project gathering the lived experiences of past and current student organizers, advocates, and activists at Barnard College and Columbia University. Narrators are and were students involved in varied forms of organizing work on campus, including identity-based organizations such as Vietnamese Students Association (VSA), multi-ethnic and political organizations such as Asian American Alliance (AAA), and student petition committees such as the Asian American Diasporic Studies advisory board at Barnard. In their oral histories, narrators shared their experiences with getting involved in student organizations, different goals and purposes of organizing events on campus, challenges and benefits of institutional university support, the socio-cultural-political landscape of organizing and students, their hopes for community-building, and much more.

Like their organizing work, these narrators hail from varied backgrounds, identities, and disciplines. A majority of these narrators will graduate sometime between 2024-27, with one narrator having graduated in 2023 and two narrators having graduated from Barnard/Columbia in 1991 and 1994. The groups represented by these narrators include:

Past

- Asian Women's Coalition
    - DAAWN
- United Minorities Board

Current

- Asian American Alliance (AAA)
- Asian Pacific American Heritage Month club (APAHM)
- AZINE
- Barnard's Asian Diaspora club (BADdies)
- Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race's Student Advisory Board (CSER SAB)
- Kappa Phi Lambda
- Liga Filipina
- Queer and Asian club (Q&A)
- Vietnamese Students Association

Their differing positions towards and ties with being Asian, Asian/American, and Asian diasporic speak to a thriving yet complex picture of what it means to be Asian in America, the ever-changing index of terms and names available to claim, or reclaim. This oral history project is an experiment in remembering, archiving, and curating Asian and Asian/American history, time, and space. This project is a starting space for Barnard/Columbia students and community members to explore Asian/American student organizing, discourse, and what oral history can do for students in archiving and remembering their contributions, their experiences. I pursue *Tidal Notes* as an attempt to witness these student organizers and their memories, what notes they sing, their grievances, their joys, their dreams. Witnessing is work; oral history is our form of record and exchange.

In *Tidal Notes,* I practice a literary and analytical way of writing developed by Christina Sharpe in her monumental script *Ordinary Notes,* where Sharpe writes in short essay forms and notations– brief records of facts– on Black existence, memory, her mother and family, the sacrifice of remembering, beauty and terror. There are 248 notes spanning 359 pages, each reflection feeding into and washing over each other. Notes as observations of memory. Notes as records of care. Sharpe writes poetically about Black life, and thus, her own life. She makes note of very personal reflections on her relationship with her mother, her childhood memories, her visceral and intimate remembering of her visit to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. In Note 181

Regard, Sharpe writes, "Regard is a habit of care. It is appreciation and esteem. It is the right of repair."[2] I write *Tidal Notes* with regard to Sharpe and her ordinary notes, in hopes of considering how her critical style of reflection can inspire writings of Asian/American history and life. Moreover, Sharpe's development of observation with esteem makes possible a meaningful way of writing for oral historians to reflect alongside and witness their narrators, rather than speak over them.

In doing so, I reflect on the reality that I write in the footsteps of a lengthy, complex history of Black and Asian political-cultural solidarity, as well as a lengthy, complex history of exploitation and mis-appropriation of Black diasporic culture by way of language, concepts, and life by Asian and non-Black people. I write and do oral history work to disrupt the cannibalistic exploitation of Black diasporic writing and thought. I write and witness to appreciate, historicize, and tend to the connections between Black and Asian and Arab and Latin American diasporic life in the United States, re-affirming linkages between our histories, visions, and struggles.

Tidal Notes begins with the past: Documents 1.0 and 1.1 historicize Asian/American student organizing and provide reading guides for those who have taken the time and energy to read this project to understand the scope of this oral history project and what kinds of socio-political, cultural discourses the narrators in this project participate in as students developing Asian/American politics and consciousness at Barnard and Columbia. Notes 1.2 through 2.5 begin to introduce narrators through their oral history and explore the importance of witnessing student organizers and what oral history offers to the pursuit of remembering, interpreting, and preserving Asian/American knowledge, stories, and storytellers. Notes 3.0-3.8 witness the multiple dimensions of Asian/American student organizing that narrators brought up in their oral histories, starting with the kinds of actions students organize and ending with the politics of

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[2] Christina Sharpe, Ordinary Notes (Macmillan: South Korea, 2023), 256.

multiracial and pan-ethnic coalition-building that characterizes Asian/American advocacy. Notes 4.0 through 4.3 explores why Asian/American students organize and the intimate meanings of advocacy work for narrators. Notes 5.0 through 5.2 delve into narrators' felt experiences and how affect shapes student organizing. Notes 6-6.1 understands the speculative work of Asian/American organizing, the interweaving of past, present, and future students in advocacy work on campus, and Notes 7-7.2 reckon with how current students are thinking about solidarity as they organize. 8-8.01 are the last notes and accompanying memo that reflect on these narrators and the immense knowledge they have built through their memories and voices. Collages 2.5, 4.2, 5.1, 6.1, and 7.2 are made by me and address the relevant written notes through visual expression. Oral history as a methodology encourages student narrators to be what artist and oral historian Nyssa Chow describes as the "first interpreters of their experiences."[3] As an oral historian, my power lies in my capacity to listen, to hear who is speaking, what is being spoken and unspoken about and why and when. I submit Tidal Notes as an experiment between constructing history, re-encountering the archival, written reflection and interpretation, and practicing oral history in pursuit of affirming and remembering Asian/American student organizing at Barnard and Columbia.

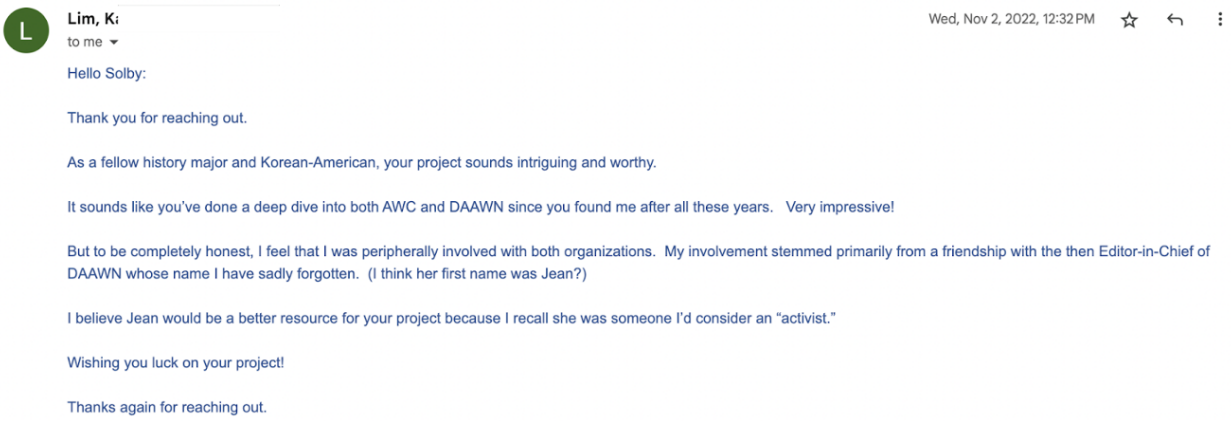
0.1 Memo to You from Me: Developing Tidal Notes and Oral History Narrators

This oral history project grew out of the archives. Barnard and Columbia house various archives of students including collections of yearbooks and photos donated by alumni, as well as archives of publications like the major student-run newspaper *Columbia Spectator,* a digitized collection published in collaboration with the Columbia University Libraries that contains full issues beginning in 1877 through 2012. Each archive tells its own stories of how students lived at Barnard/Columbia and captures the zeitgeist of different eras. The archives gave vital presence to the history and struggles of

[3] Nyssa Chow, "Listening for Embodied Knowledge: An Approach to the Oral History Interview," (virtual workshop for Columbia Oral History Master of Arts' 2023-24 Public Training Workshop series, November 11, 2023).

Asian/American students, the smiling faces in group photos and marching crowds in rallies, but the documents left me seeking more from those who had left their memories and presence in these archives. I began my narrator search by researching the names I came across in various news clippings and photographs and seeing if they were active in the Barnard/Columbia alumni network or if they had current email addresses. I initially sought out potential narrators who had graduated from Barnard/Columbia during the 1980s and 90s, hoping to find alum who could speak to the existing archival materials documenting the rich history of student organizing and activism of this past era. I hoped to do oral histories with people who could re-activate the news clippings and art and photos with their memories, their experiences organizing protests to establish Ethnic Studies at Columbia or speak-out sessions discussing misogyny towards Asian women on campus. Thus, I framed this project to potential narrators as an oral history of Asian/American student activism, researching alums whose names were recorded in *Spectator* articles and club yearbook photos and emailing them in hopes of finding people to talk to: to put a perspective to these unclaimed, archived memories.

Finding alum proved very difficult. I received bounced back emails, non-responses, and most notably, declined invitations. Out of the 30-plus alum I reached out to, a handful responded with interest in the project but also a conviction that they had not been so involved with the clubs I mentioned or with organizing on campus. A few mentioned that they wouldn't have considered themselves activists and felt that they couldn't contribute to the project in that way. I followed up with the alum who responded this way by explaining that I was seeking to speak with any Asian/American alum about their experiences as students, and attempting to understand the scope of Asian/American student life at Barnard and Columbia, but I did not end up getting any more replies.


Lim, K
to me
Wed, Nov 2, 2022, 12:32 PM

Hello Solby:

Thank you for reaching out.

As a fellow history major and Korean-American, your project sounds intriguing and worthy.

It sounds like you've done a deep dive into both AWC and DAAWN since you found me after all these years. Very impressive!

But to be completely honest, I feel that I was peripherally involved with both organizations. My involvement stemmed primarily from a friendship with the then Editor-in-Chief of DAAWN whose name I have sadly forgotten. (I think her first name was Jean?)

I believe Jean would be a better resource for your project because I recall she was someone I'd consider an "activist."

Wishing you luck on your project!

Thanks again for reaching out.

Figure 1. Screengrab of an email I received from an alum I reached out to as a potential narrator. November 2 2022.

These alums brought to my attention the framing of student activism and how I was applying it to those I reached out to. They reminded me that activism is a loaded term, politically and socially charged to mean drastically different understandings to different people. I got a sense that for these alumni, the term was perhaps heavy-handed, and that their perceptions of their involvement in clubs or organizations did not align with their perceptions of what activism means or should look like. I changed the description of this project to an oral history of Asian/American student life to try more inclusive language and avoid such responses to the activism phrase. This ended up confusing some people I invited and led to a particularly frustrating phone call, where every attempt I made to be as specific and broad in my project scope was questioned needlessly by a potential narrator. I got a sense that they had never wanted to be interviewed and didn't know how to say so, and instead dismissed the focus on student activism as well as the broadening out of the project to student life as their way of saying no. They did not offer amendments or suggestions, not that I demanded or expected any, and ended the call saying I should look up other people and ask them. At that moment, I felt particularly disheartened and wondered if this was the right scope for the project. I took this conversation to heart, maybe a little too much to heart, and debriefed it with my classmates, expressing my concern and frustration with how the project was progressing. In one of the first Fieldwork classes at OHMA, students are asked to answer the question of why their work matters as part of developing their thesis project. Why does this matter? I felt like I was failing to answer this important query. I continued to search alum databases and research contact information for names I had found in the archives, but the search for potential narrators was not working. At this stage, I was able to do oral history interviews with two alumni, a Barnard alum who graduated in 1993 and a Columbia alum who graduated in 1991. Our rich conversations encouraged me to keep searching for narrators.

Sometime in the fall of 2022, I came across the Instagram page for Barnard's Asian Diaspora, or BADdies, a newly formed Asian student organization and one of two Asian-focused clubs recognized by Barnard (the other is the Asian-interest Kappa Phi Lambda sorority). I was overjoyed at this new group and curious about the status of other organizations on campus. What was the scenery of Asian/American student organizing now, in this current present? What can I witness and learn from listening to students now? And more importantly, what do students have to say?

I realized there was a current tide of Asian/American student organizing gaining momentum, rich with insights into the afterlives of '90s-era Asian/American organizing and new horizons and demands of students today. I pivoted the narrator scope of this

Figure 2. Screengrab of Barnard Asian Diaspora's first public post. November 1, 2022.

project in hopes of putting current students in conversation with alum. I began to reach out to students, beginning with Barnard BADdies co-founder Aurelia Tan and students involved in clubs such as Asian American Alliance (AAA), Columbia's Vietnamese Students' Association, Columbia Queer and Asian, and specific action-based groups such as the committee to create an Asian Diasporic Studies program at Barnard. As part of this thesis, I spoke with ten students across eight different organizations at Barnard and Columbia. I was also able to do oral history interviews with two alum who graduated in the 90s.

Tidal Notes is in no way a comprehensive or even half-complete understanding of Asian/American student organizing, for the 2020s or the 1990s. I failed in my desire to speak with a more level balance of current student and alum narrators, but this failure challenged me to turn towards current students of the 2020s and how they speak, how they carry on or expand upon their predecessors' work on Asian/American issues or how they seek different motivations. The uneven demographic of narrator voices represents a record of my attempt at retroactive explorations of student activisms and comparative oral history work. In lieu of more alum voices, I turn to the archives, the records of past students, to speak with and engage the oral histories of current students and the two alum I spoke with.

These narrators give much presence. Presence as creating record, memory outside of their own, and stories of Asian/American student organizing. They also give presence in re-activating the archive, the traces of past organizing that take the forms of news clippings, illustrations, poems.

1.0 Document: A Guide to Situating Student Organizing History and the Roots of Asian/American

Julie Wu '25: *If you look at some of the first Asian American Ethnic Studies programs that students protested for in California, like decades ago. I mean, we still talk about those protests today.*

Solby Lim: *Yes. Absolutely.*

Julie: *And I think that any effort led by students and faculty will have an impact. And what I'm hoping is, if you know, if a program is not created by the time I graduate, then I'll still be able to be a part of the community and the group of students that will take that work and keep going with it. But yeah, I mean it's a collective effort. And just because you graduate from Barnard doesn't mean, as you're living proof, that*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Julie: *Doesn't mean, that, you know, you suddenly disappear off the face of the earth. [Laughs]*

Solby: *[Laughs] Right.*

Julie: *And we can always come back and make your own little impact.*

Julie Wu is a junior at Barnard College majoring in psychology. She leads a student-led committee that has petitioned to start an Asian Diasporic Studies program at Barnard. Here, Julie was responding to my question of whether students like her who are organizing for institutional change were impacted by the reality that they may not see the changes they are fighting for happen during their time as students. She reminded me of the history of the 1960s-era Asian American Movement and the historical struggle for Ethnic Studies as a way of understanding the lasting impact and afterlife of student organizing and considering advocacy as a process, not an outcome. I remember feeling so excited by Julie's invocation of this history, a past that led me to this project and doing oral history with her: a full circle moment.

Julie's remarks reveal the importance of education and historical consciousness for student organizers, in that learning history is not just something learned in the classroom but an instrument of advocacy and organizing for change. By knowing what was done before them and how the process of social change was made, students understand the dynamics of organizing and what works as well as what can be done better. Returning to the past furthers activism in the present. In this document, I continue Julie's return to the roots of "Asian American" and explore the historical development of Asian American identity, consciousness, and politics as a spirited history of grassroots student organizing. Student-led activism and protests were vital to the formation of "Asian American" as a recognizable concept and way of understanding self and collective identity for Asians in the United States beginning in the late 1960s and onwards. Although the history of Asians in the United States runs much deeper than this era, the term "Asian American" as it is discussed and utilized today was spoken into existence at the University of California, Berkeley in 1968, by none other than a graduate student. East Asian Studies student Yuji Ichioka and fellow graduate student and activist Emma Gee coined the term "Asian American" by creating the Asian American Political Alliance at UC Berkeley, the first political organization in the US uniting Asian students of different ethnicities together under the term "Asian American."[4] Ichioka taught a seminar titled "Orientals in America," the first Asian American Studies class at UCLA in 1969 and went on to become a professor and the associate director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, the largest and longest-running Asian American university-based research centers in the US.[5] Ichioka was an instrumental figure in developing and elucidating the ideas, visions, and values of his newly co-minted term Asian American, and his experiences are crucial for understanding the political, social, and cultural context within which Asian American emerged as a desirable recognition of identity. His

[4] Brian Niiya, "Yuji Ichioka," *Densho Encyclopedia,* June 25 2012.
[5] Nina Wallace, "Yellow Power: The Origins of Asian America," *Densho*, May 28 2017; Cheryl Cheng, "How a student newspaper became the 'voice of the Asian American experience,'" *UCLA Newsroom*, July 22, 2021

intellectual and organizing work spoke to the structural oppression and racial violence he and thousands of other Japanese people experienced during World War 2; Ichioka was born in 1936 and subsequently incarcerated at the Tanforan Assembly Center and Topaz War Relocation Center as a child, under Executive Order 9066 and its forced relocation and internment of all Japanese residents on the West Coast beginning in 1942.[6] Ichioka graduated from UCLA in 1962 with a degree in History and entered graduate school at Columbia to study Chinese history, but dropped out of his program in 1963. After working with juvenile youth in New York and a trip to Japan, Ichioka entered the Master's program in East Asian Studies at UC Berkeley in 1967.[7]

At the same time, in the same spaces, other Asian students were pursuing ways to explore and cultivate the freshly-formed notion of Asian American consciousness. In the spring of 1969, five undergraduate UCLA students each pitched in $100 for ink and printing supplies to create *Gidra*, a "Monthly [publication] of the Asian American Community."[8] The publication was originally proposed as a university-sponsored community magazine by the students, but after the UCLA administration's requirements for full editorial control, among other conditions the students found unacceptable, these undergrads decided to pool their personal funds to start what would become the "voice of the Asian American experience."[9]

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[6] Niiya, "Yuji Ichioka," *Densho Encyclopedia,* June 25 2012.
[7] Niiya, "Yuji Ichioka," *Densho Encyclopedia,* June 25 2012.
[8] Cheryl Cheng, "How a student newspaper became the 'voice of the Asian American experience,'" *UCLA Newsroom*, July 22 2021.
[9] Cheng, "How a student newspaper became the 'voice of the Asian American experience,'" *UCLA Newsroom*, July 22 2021.

Necessary But Not Sufficient

YELLOW POWER!

By Larry Kubota

"Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blow, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress."

Frederick Douglas

In Los Angeles in 1871, a mob of a thousand persons marched into the Chinese section, seized victims, overpowered the officers of the law and hanged at least 22 Chinese men, women, and children. No attempt was made to bring these people to justice.

Asian American history is filled with innumerable racist incidents. Some are overt, such as the one given above. Others are covert—psychological oppression, educational deprivation, and economic exploitation—and are equally destructive.

Looking back into the past, it is incredible that we have taken so long to confront this problem of racism. We are relegated to second-class citizenship, and adding insult upon injury, we are told to be thankful for our blessings.

We tried only the tactic of adaptation. We responded to our treatment with an "Oriental" smile and a polite "thank you."

Asian Pride

Today, however, is the dawn of a new era. We have finally reached the limits of our tolerance and have begun to explore a new alternative. Asian Americans have rediscovered their spirit and pride and are becoming a force to be reckoned with. In San Francisco, San Mateo, Los Angeles, and elsewhere, yellow people are fighting side by side with other Third World people for reform in society, and in particular, the educational system.

This is a new role for the Asian American. It is a rejection of the passive Oriental stereotype and symbolizes the birth of a new Asian—one who will recognize and deal with injustices. The shout of Yellow Power, symbolic of our new direction, is reverberating in the quiet corridors of the Asian community.

"Asian parents push their children to 'make it,' not realizing that when the process is complete, children may reject their parents."

Yellow Power is symbolic of the type of rapid social change occurring today which no group or individual can ignore. It is apparent, however, that many of us do not understand the meaning of Yellow Power and its relationship to the changes currently taking place in American Society.

Yellow Power means that we as Asian Americans are seeking greater control over the direction of our lives. It also expresses a determination to effect constructive changes in the larger society. It is not a call for Asians to move out of the mainstream of American life, but instead it says that we should be able to dictate some of the terms of entry into that mainstream.

"Yellow Power is a call for Asian Americans to end the silence that has condemned us to suffer in this racist society."

* U.S.A., 1942: 110,000 Japanese-Americans are imprisoned in concentration camps without trial.

* U. S. Congress, 1965: Oklahoma Congressman Jed Johnson proposes mass sterilization of the Japanese in the concentration camps.

* Los Angeles, 1969: The Council of Oriental Organizations is ousted from a meeting of the Concerned Citizens for Community Colleges—the Los Angeles version of the White Citizen's Council. The reason given for the ouster is that the Oriental community is "politically irrelevant."

The foregoing clearly illustrait the outrageous and frequently violent acts perpetrated against Asian-Americans by this so-called democratic society. It should be remembered that in America, all people of color have suffered as much or more. The condition of people of color in America is one of helplessness and powerlessness.

Yellow Power is a call to reject our past and present condition of powerlessness. When we attain a position of power in this society, we can have more control over our lives and begin to determine our own destiny. This is the second reason for Yellow Power.

White-washed Asians

Traditionally, yellow people have spent a great deal of time observing the behavior and mannerisms of white people. We have tried to act like them, speak like them, look like them, and be like them in every way. We have even been willing to sacrifice family relationships to emulate whites. For example, Asian parents push their children to "make it," not realizing that when the process is complete, children may reject their parents. The children feel ashamed of their parents because their parents do not measure up to the white standards that they have been told to hold supreme.

It is time we understood that white people cannot be taken as models. More than anyone else, it is they who are in dire need of reevaluating their standards and values. It is they who have been guilty of bigotry and hypocrisy. It is they who have created a country where racism is rampant.

The white youth of today are learning that George Washington, the father of our country, was a slave owner. They are ashamed as they watch the heroes of their fathers on television killing Indians, enslaving Black men, colonializing brown men, and demeaning Yellow men, all in an effort to sustain the myth of White supremacy.

We must recognize, as Eldridge Cleaver suggests, that it is among the White youth of the world that the greatest change is taking place. It is they who feel the pain of finding their inherited heroes turned into villians. In the world revolution now under way, the heroes are no longer people who are white. Today the heroes are Eldridge Cleaver, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara.

(Continued on page 4)

Some have asked why do we need Yellow Power? There are three basic reasons. First, Yellow Power must develop for the self-preservation of yellow people in America. Second, it must develop so that we can determine our own destiny. And third, it must develop so that Asian Americans can contribute to the creation of a truly humanistic society.

To answer the question regarding the necessity of Yellow Power for our self-preservation, let us review a few events in our history, some of which are cited by Dr. Harry H. L. Kitano in his book, The Japanese in the United States:

* Rock Springs, Wyoming, 1885: 29 Chinese are murdered, their homes destroyed and their belongings scattered, because the Chinese were perceived as economic threats.

Figure 3. Larry Kubota, "Yellow Power!" April 1969. Gidra Vol. 1 No. 1 (inaugural issue).

Gidra quickly gained traction amongst students and the local community for its multi-faceted approach to nurturing radical leftist Asian American discourse; every monthly issue featured on-the-ground interviews and local news reporting, critical and historical essays, punkish illustrations, political cartoons, and other literary-visual materials. The community magazine was a prime example of how "historically, Asian American cultural production has sought to establish a collective, pan-ethnic voice and presence in mainstream American culture, challenging both the exclusion of Asian Americans from mass media and stereotypical representation."[10] The area of intellectual and artistic ground that *Gidra* covered was cosmic; the seeming endlessness of *Gidra's* coverage spoke to the excitement and volume of emerging, critical perspectives of Asian Americans and their place in the world.

[10] Jolivette Mecenas, "Beyond 'Asian American' and Back: Coalitional Rhetoric in Print and New Media" in *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*, edited by Luming Mao and Morris Young (University of Colorado 2008), 199.

Mike Murase, one of the five *Gidra* founders said in an interview that "at UCLA, we had the ability to think about who we are as Asians, how we fit into society and where we come from… Asian students on campus really took an interest in exploring their own history and their communities' history."[11] Through *Gidra,* students and community members articulated their narratives on their own terms and "built their own spaces where they could practice new forms of literacy, write about key issues affecting the Asian American community, connect their struggles to international and Third World liberation movements, and control the written representation of Asian American consciousness and politics. None of this was possible within the curricular and pedagogical constraints of traditional university writing classes…"[12] It is fitting that the new basis of collective identity, community politics, and way of speaking about the self and others embodied in "Asian American" ushered in new forms of Asian/American writing and thought like *Gidra*. The Asian American identity became a fundamental paradigm shift in the way Asians in America understood themselves and each other and were understood by others, a direct oppositional response to the dehumanizing rhetoric and un-recognition of personhood that characterized the term "Oriental."

Figure 4. Alan Ohashi, Photo of the Thai Binh and Van Troi Anti-Imperialist Youth Brigades burning an Imperial Japanese Army flag at the August 1972 Nisei Week Parade in Los Angeles, cover of Gidra Volume 4 No. 9.

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[11] Cheng, "How a student newspaper became the 'voice of the Asian American experience."

[12] Katherine H. Lee, "'Organizing Wherever Your Feet Land': Reconceptualizing Writing and Writing Instruction in the Legacy of Asian American Activism" in *Contemporary Asian American Activism: Building Movements for Liberation*, edited by Diane C. Fujino and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022), 203.

BC may change name of department to modernize

By Elizabeth Reza
and Jessica Shaw
Spectator Staff Writers

Members of the Barnard College Committee on Instruction (COI) will discuss changing the name of the Department of Oriental Studies to the Department of Asian and Middle East Cultures, according to Barnard Dean of Faculty Robert McCaughey.

''There is concern about, what is to be sure, a historically dated title, and in the minds of many people, a titling that bespeaks an imperial age presumably behind us,'' McCaughey said.

Changing the name of the department also reflects the similarity between the Columbia departments of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Middle East Languages and Cultures, according to Milbank Professor of Oriental Studies Barbara Stoller Miller.

The new department name better characterizes the courses available and the approaches taken in the

See *Change*, p. 5

Figure 5. An example of the shift away from "Oriental" at Barnard. Elizabeth Reza and Jessica Shaw, "BC may change name of department to modernize." November 20 1990. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXIV.

Asian American historian Paul Spickard argues that "two experiences prepared the ground for the formation of a panethnic Asian American identity: European Americans' Orientalism and propinquity among Asian American peoples."[13]Asian American and underlying desires for such a term of self and collective identification came in direct response to the existing racist, colonialist vernacular and attitudes used in the United States, and the larger Western world, in particular the use of Oriental ascribed to different Asian and Arab communities. "Oriental" was a derogatory label that named an organized collection of beliefs about racialized divisions of the world and constructed notions of perceived difference to subjugate and dehumanize groups of people, thus producing justifications for colonial domination and exploitation of such groups. Orientalist logic provides a political vision of humanizing/de-humanizing and engaging with people based on racial hierarchy. Thus, "people as utterly unlike one another as Egyptians, Koreans, Bengalis, and Vietnamese somehow were melded together into a single, faceless mass in the White imagination—even while Vietnamese, Bengalis, Koreans, and Egyptians did not see one another as part of the same group at all."[14] Asian American, as pronounced by Ichioka and Gee and subsequent thousands of Asians in America, emerged as a radical oppositional response to the white colonialist logic and imagination of Orientalism.

[13] Paul Spickard, "Whither the Asian American Coalition?" *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (2007), 587.

[14] Spickard, "Whither the Asian American Coalition?" 588.

Where Orientalism foreclosed notions of humanity and agency towards Asian and Arab people, Asian American identity burst open possibilities of autonomy, reclaimed identity, and ways of recognizing self and others through anti-oppressive politics. Asian American also put forth understandings of pan-ethnic identity and collective liberation and activism. Pan-ethnic consciousness across Asian communities made way for notions of multiracial solidarity and community-building; it is crucial for understanding this Asian American history to recognize how many Asian American student organizers and community activists were inspired by and subsequently sought solidarity with Black American students and activist collectives. The Black Panther Party, which had established itself in Oakland in 1966 and included many student organizers, was one such group that leftist Asian Americans sought to align themselves with.[15] For Asian American students like the *Gidra* founders who organized against racism, imperialist warfare, and other oppressions, the Black Panthers stood close in political and geographic proximity, a radical militant group of Black activists and organizers fighting systems of oppression and exploitation for self-determination and improving the livelihood of their communities. *Gidra* co-founder Mike Murase reflected on nurturing solidarity between racially oppressed groups in a second-generation Japanese American oral history project, remembering that

> "Asian Americans, growing up in that, that era, there you know we identified a lot, for example on the Westside here, since most of the neighborhoods were Black or Asian, our high school friends were Blacks and Asians. And we identified with, you know, our brothers and sisters in the African American community and the movement. A lot of people who grew up on the Eastside, they related more to the Chicanos, but again, you know we developed bonds, with peoples that who were our neighbors, and learned from each other about our own histories, and each other's histories and I think we found that, we had a lot in common and ...the kinds of things that we want to accomplish to build a better world. We were all shared by all of us."[16]

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[15] William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 35.

[16] Mike Murase, "Common Cause: Interview with Mike Murase" by Kris Kuromitsu and John Esaki, *Discover Nikkei*, 29 September 2011.

The affinities and exchanges between Asian American, Black, and other activists and organizers of color coalesced in tangible manifestations of coalition and inter-community work, and students continued to lead radical coalition-building work and organizing to protest systemic oppression. Most famously at San Francisco State College, Asian American students joined Black, Chicanx, Indigenous, and other students of color in a historic five-month strike for self-determination, an end to racism and oppression, and the creation of Ethnic Studies programs that would teach critical histories of oppression and colonization from 1968-69, the longest student strike in US history.[17] This radical coalition of students named themselves the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), with their strikes capturing the attention of and inspiring hundreds of other students across the country to organize for multiracial self-determination on their campuses. UC Berkeley students followed suit in 1969, creating the multiracial coalition third world Liberation Front (twLF) to "demand that the University acknowledge the histories of communities of color as vital scholarship through the creation of a Third World College…"[18] The twLF engaged in a three-month strike, which resulted in the establishment of the Department of Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley.

Ichioka and Gee's Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) was another collective that motivated students to create their own chapters; one of the groups part of the 1968-69 TWLF strikes was the San Francisco State branch of the AAPA, whose leaders had met at a meeting of the first AAPA at UC Berkeley.[19] In October 1969, the *Columbia Spectator* reported that a newly formed AAPA demonstrated at an anti-war moratorium protests against the Vietnam War on campus, demanding the East Asian Institute address concerns of Asian American students who reported being harassed because they "do not conform to the humble image of the Oriental" and by "anti-

[17] Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 50.
[18] "Third World Liberation Front Research Initiative," *UC Berkeley Center for Race and Gender.*
[19] Maeda, *Chains of Babylon,* 52

Communist" professors and that Columbia's social sciences departments hire more Asian American instructors, amongst other demands.[20] Opposition to the Vietnam War and US militarism was a key rallying issue for newly realized Asian Americans, as well as an issue of solidarity between Asian Americans and Black Power, Indigenous, Chicana, and anti-imperialist movements. In his seminal survey of Asian American history *The Asian American Movement*, historian William Wei observed that "Asian Americans participated in the civil rights, New Left, women's liberation, antiwar, and other movements organized to change the country. But it was mainly the antiwar movement that brought them together psychologically and politically, making them aware of their "Asianness," their membership in a pan-Asian community, and the need for an Asian American Movement."[21]

Academic institutions were not the only public spaces where Asian/American consciousness and culture were being developed; ethnic community spaces like San Francisco's Chinatown saw local Asian American organizers, inspired by the Black civil rights movement, focus their efforts on improving the welfare and living conditions for working-class, vulnerable youth in the area.[22] A group of young Chinese American adults started Leway, shorthand for "legitimate ways" in Chinatown, which became a community self-help group for "juvenile delinquents," offering a few recreational and job support programs, as well as help with college applications.[23] Asian immigrants and their children saw universities and colleges as possibilities forsocial and communal advancement , and as such, these institutions became vital seedbeds for the emergence and development of pan-ethnic identity and politics named as Asian American.

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[20] Cyndi Reinhart, "Asian Institute Cleared on Charges," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, 21 October 1969; Columbia Asian American Political Alliance, "Researching the Research: Letter to the Editor," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, 23 October 1969.

[21] Wei, *The Asian American Movement,* 16.

[22] Wei, *The Asian American Movement,* 35.

[23] Wei, *The Asian American Movement,* 35.

In a reflective essay on his career titled "A Historian by Happenstance," Ichioka noted that "unlike most professional historians, I did not become a historian through the conventional process of completing a Ph.D. program in history at an established university. True, at one time, I had aspired to be a historian of modern China, but I quickly divested myself of this idea when I dropped out of Columbia University in 1963 after less than a year in graduate school… I came upon my interest in Asian-American history much later in life through force of circumstances within the context of the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam War movements."[24] Ichioka directs his attention towards Asian American history and its particular situation in movements of grassroots organizing by marginalized groups. Studying activism bonds with and energizes the study of Asian American history.

Ichioka ends his 2000 essay with a critical note on Asian American studies at the turn of the twenty-first century. He reflects that "most of us who established the initial programs in Asian American Studies began with the political agenda of critiquing American society and of promoting and advancing the welfare of Asian-Americans within it. I fail to see how postmodern cultural studies relate to these purposes. Try as I might, I find myself unable to comprehend most of the studies because they are written in such arcane language. I ask myself, if I cannot understand them, how can the vast majority of ordinary educated people who live outside of university circles understand them? It seems to me Asian American Studies is now producing cultural studies decipherable to only a handful of ivory tower academics. In this sense, our field has gone astray. "[25] Ichioka makes note of his belief "in the oldtime practice of doing narrative history, of telling a story in ordinary language based on substantive research in primary sources. Such are the views of this Asian American historian who entered the historical profession by happenstance and who still insists on practicing the craft in his "old-

[24] Yuji Ichioka, "A Historian by Happenstance," *Amerasia Journal* 26 no.1 (2000), 33.
[25] Ichioka, "A Historian by Happenstance," 48-49.

fashioned" way."[26] He finds the most meaning in "ordinary language" for historians and academics, speaking to his valuing of the accessible, the spoken, the telling of a story. For Ichioka, Asian American Studies started as a knowledge creating change for the people, and it was the grassroots efforts to critically examine American society and build Asian/American knowledge and history between ordinary people that made this academic discipline a worthy endeavor. The purpose of Asian American studies was to cultivate exchanges of knowledge, stories, and awareness between Asian/Americans. Given his preferences to interview people for research and interview those most socially marginalized, I wonder what his attitudes were towards oral history. I wonder if he knew how clearly his belief in practicing narrative history and "telling a story in ordinary language" spoke to the imagination and work of oral history.

"Telling a story in ordinary language" was a primary reason why *Gidra* resonated and continues to resonate with the project of Asian American politics, culture, and organizing in our current present. The meticulous local and international reporting, political commentary essays and illustrations, art, and poetry were such clear, unadulterated manifestations of Asian/American voice, on-the-ground perspectives from the organizers and students who were on the frontlines of Third World and liberationist activism. Literary and cultural production nurtured a radical, grassroots Asian American discourse where Asian/Americans could critically and sincerely reflect, debate, and find community through writing and making art without concern of institutional censorship or dilution of their voices, their demands for a better and more just world.

Ichioka and Wei, *Gidra*, the makers and witnesses of the birth of "Asian American", remind us that oral history practices have always been a part of creating, remembering, and building the progression of Asian American politics, history, and culture, and that students have always stood at the forefront of demanding and

[26] Ichioka, "A Historian by Happenstance," 49.

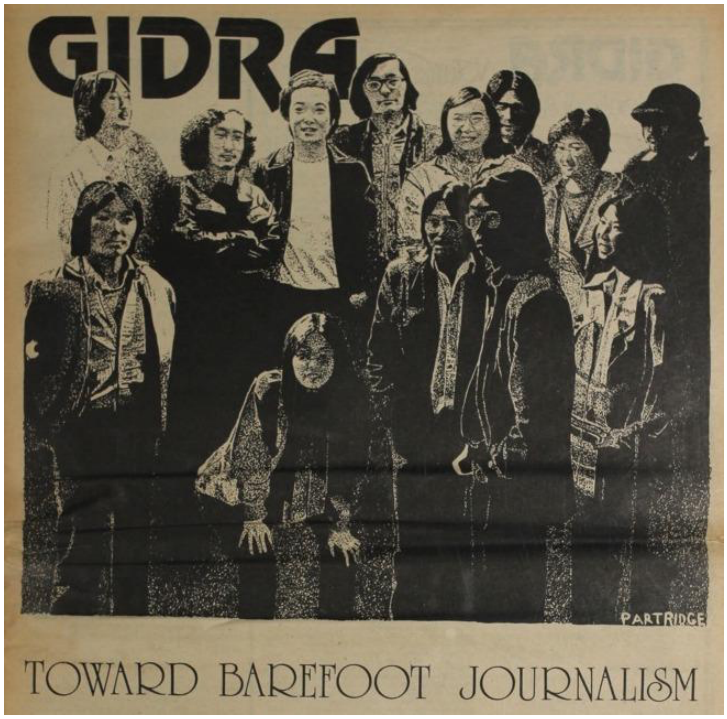

Figure 6. Cover of Gidra's final issue in April 1974, titled "Towards Barefoot Journalism." Gidra Vol. 6 No. 4.

determining Asian American knowledge and politics. This project makes me reflect on Ichioka's life, his tenuous relationship with academia, his work in fundamentally changing the dynamics of how Asian people in this country recognize themselves and each other as a grad student. He and his peers remind me that this project is not entirely my narrators' and mine; our work speaks in the storied footsteps of our Asian American elders, their student lives, their radical organizing work in pursuit of building self-determination and a better world for their communities.

1.1 Document: A Historical Glimpse into Asian/American Student Organizing at Columbia

Where do Columbia and Barnard students fall in this 1960s-70s landscape of radical student organizing and protest? This document moves from the Californian roots of "Asian American" and interconnected Third World Liberation Front movements to the opposite coast in New York, taking a glimpse into the anti-imperialist, pan-ethnic, and multiracial coalition-building movements being led by students at Barnard and Columbia. This era, 1968 in particular, witnessed a flourishing assemblage of radical anti-war and pro-liberation activism on campus as students organized in opposition to the Vietnam War, anti-black racism and white supremacy, and the US empire.

Although the late 1960s was a pivotal time of student organizing, the 1990s also became an era flush with coalition-building and student protest for a more specific focus: the movement to establish Ethnic Studies at Columbia. Both Barnard and Columbia students had publicly vocalized their demands for Ethnic Studies to university administration long before this era, inspired by movements like the Third World Liberation Front strikes of the 1960s, however they began taking more explicit action during the 1990s. They also reflected the tides of other Asian/American and students of color who were protesting the deteriorating conditions of already existing Ethnic Studies programs across the country. UC Berkeley students re-mobilized in 1999 in response to the "demise of Ethnic Studies," where their program faced "severe budget cuts, curricular changes, institutional neglect, and state legislation," among other factors.[27]

1996 marked a watershed year for Barnard and Columbia student activism dedicated to creating Ethnic Studies programs, as students organized a plethora of sit-ins, rallies, vigils, and other public demonstrations documented by student and local

[27] Jennie M. Luna, "1999 twLF at UC Berkeley: An Intergenerational Struggle for Ethnic Studies," *Ethnic Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (2019), 1 and 4.

publications. The most direct reporting and record of Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies protests comes from the *Columbia Daily Spectator* archives, often shortened to *Spectator* or *Spec*, the student-led newspaper at Barnard/Columbia.

DAILY COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

FOUNDED 1877

VOL. CXX—NO. 17 NEW YORK, N.Y., WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 1996 FIFTEEN CENTS

Ethnic studies advocates storm deans' office

Students, administrators to meet next Tuesday

By SANDRA P. ANGULO and ADRIENNE CARTER
Spectator Staff Writers

Students occupied Dean of Columbia College Austin Quigley's office for almost three hours yesterday to protest the lack of ethnic studies in the University's undergraduate curriculum.

Student protest continued throughout the afternoon and evening with a speak-out in front of Hamilton Hall, a vigil at St. Paul's Chapel, and a final meeting between the administrators and students at a Columbia College Student Council-sponsored town meeting.

After more than 30 students rallied outside Hamilton at 11 a.m. in support of Latino and Asian American studies, Sharod Baker, CC '96, led the demonstrators into Quigley's office, where students discussed issues concerning proposed Ethnic Studies programs with Quigley and Associate Dean of Columbia College Kathryn Yatrakis.

Deliberations between students and administrators continued for over 45 minutes.

Jané Bai, a Ph.D. candidate in English and Comparative Literature and one of the spokespersons for the ethnic studies demonstrators, announced an outline of the students' demands, including the establishment of Asian American and Latino Studies programs, a search for four tenure-track professors in both programs, the strengthening of the Institute for Research in African American Studies, and the expansion of the Core Curriculum to include more Asian, Native American, and African literature, music, art and philosophy.

"We're not leaving until these demands are met," Bai said. Quigley responded that he could not make curricular

PHOTO EDITOR—KARON UNGER

THE STUDENTS UNITED: Ethnic studies advocates gathered in front of Hamilton Hall for a speak out.

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Figure 7. Sandra P. Angulo and Adrienne Carter, "Ethnic studies advocates storm deans' office." February 7 1996, Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXX No. 17.

February 7, 1996: the *Columbia Spectator* reported that dozens of students rallied and occupied the office of then-Dean of Columbia College Austin Quigly to protest the absence of Ethnic Studies and demand the "establishment of Asian American and Latino Studies programs, a search for four tenure-track professors in both programs, the strengthening of the Institute for Research in African American Studies, and the expansion of the Core Curriculum to include more Asian, Native American, and African literature, music, art and philosophy."[28] These were the determined demands of the student demonstrators, illustrating the rhetoric of multiracial coalition-building and politics of solidarity developed during the Asian American movement of the 1960s and 70s. The sit-in at Dean Quigly's office led to regular meetings between the Committee for Ethnic Studies and university administrators. A week after the strike, six student members of the Ad Hoc

[28]Sandra P. Angulo and Adrienne Carter, "Ethnic studies advocates storm deans' office Students, administrators to meet next Tuesday," *Columbia Spectator*, 7 February 1996.

Committee for Asian American and Latino Studies met with administrative officials, including then-University President George Rupp.[29]

DAILY
UMBIA SPECTATOR
FOUNDED 1877

NEW YORK, N.Y., TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 1996 FIFTEEN CENTS

Four students go on hunger strike

Ethnic studies advocates hold candlelight vigil

By SANDRA P. ANGULO
Spectator Staff Writer

Protesting the administration's "unwillingness to meet student demands for an ethnic studies department," four students announced yesterday afternoon that they will participate in a hunger strike until immediate action is taken to meet their demands.

Despite the inclement weather, more than 40 members and supporters of the Committee for Ethnic Studies and the Core Curriculum gathered for a candlelight vigil last night at the sundial to support the fasting students.

The four students on strike, Marcel Agueros, CC '96, Michael Maldonado, CC '96, Heather Starr, BC '96, and Joaquim Ochoa, a first-year student at Teachers College, who are presently staying in a tent on South Lawn, said they plan to fast "as long as it takes" until the administration fulfills its commitment to implement Asian American and Latino Studies programs.

Although members of the Committee for Ethnic Studies have met with administrators regularly as a result of the sit-in the committee staged in early February, the student activists said they feel the administration has been too slow in searching for faculty members, passing curriculum decisions, and deciding where to house the ethnic studies programs.

Agueros said his decision to participate in the hunger strike is due to his frustration with the administration's hesitancy to act on ethnic studies programs.

"Personally, I have this feeling of frustration that I could leave

Continued to p. 7

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR—DAMON WINTER
Jennifer Duran, CC '97, hands out candles to ethnic studies advocates participating in last night's candlelight vigil.

Figure 8. Sandra P. Angulo, "Four students go on hunger strike Ethnic studies advocates hold candlelight vigil." April 2 1996. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXX No. 46.

April 2 1996: Columbia College seniors Marcel Agueros and Michael Maldonado, Barnard College senior Heather Starr BC '96, and first-year Teachers College student Joaquin Ochoa began a hunger strike in protest of the university administration's "unwillingness to meet student demands for an ethnic studies department."[30] Following the hunger strike announcement, 40 students gathered in a candlelight vigil to support the four students on strike, criticizing the lack of action taken by university officials despite weeks of meeting with student advocates and demonstrating the continued passions of and struggles for Ethnic Studies student advocates. Columbia College sophomore Andre Morales, who attended the vigil, observed that "It's quite obvious that dealings with the administration have been a lot of rhetoric, as evidenced by the fact that we still don't have anything down on paper. We needed a concentrated show of our dedication, because we want to make progress; the strike had to go on and we had to make this stand now."[31] The hunger strike galvanized larger community protests in support of the students as well as the struggle for Ethnic Studies. The hunger strike was one of many organized actions that Barnard/Columbia student organizers shared with

[29]Sandra P. Angulo, "Rupp meets with ethnic studies six," *Columbia Spectator*, 14 February 1996.
[30]Sandra P. Angulo, "Over 200 rally for ethnic studies work,' *Columbia Spectator*, 4 April 1996.
[31] Sandra P. Angulo, "Over 200 rally for ethnic studies work,' *Columbia Spectator*, 4 April 1996.

students from other universities. The third world Liberation Front protests of 1999 at UC Berkeley included a hunger strike, sit-ins, and disruptive protests focused on occupying buildings.[32] They too felt the "urgency for change" and understood "that power lies in the hands of students working in solidarity with faculty and community members who know their his/herstories and contemporary realities."[33] The capacity for progress and change lay in the actions of students from varying identities, clubs, and backgrounds organizing together and expressing their resolute determination. The extraordinary mosaic of students reflected the reality that Ethnic Studies wove together multiple fields, including Asian American Studies, Latino Studies, Indigenous and Native American Studies, and other comparative race and ethnic studies programs. It was the collective efforts of students and community members that galvanized the efforts to establish or save Ethnic Studies at Columbia, UC Berkeley, and other institutions.

April 4, 1996: Over 200 students and outside community members held a rally on the main campus, with representatives from City College's Student Liberation Action Movement, the Committee against Asian American Violence (CAAAV), and the National Congress of Puerto Rican Rights speaking at the gathering and encouraging students to "keep struggling" for Ethnic Studies.[34]

DAILY COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

FOUNDED 1877

VOL CXX—NO. 48 NEW YORK, N.Y., THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 1996 FIFTEEN CENTS

Over 200 rally for ethnic studies work

By SANDRA P. ANGULO
Spectator Staff Writer

The third day of the four-student ethnic studies hunger strike was marked by a citywide rally supporting ethnic studies at the sundial yesterday afternoon.

More than 200 students and community members gathered for the rally in support of the "struggle for ethnic studies," which was sponsored by the Community for Ethnic Studies and the Core Curriculum.

Speakers from community organizations such as City College's Student Liberation Action Movement, the Committee against Asian American Violence (CAAV), and the National Congress of Puerto Rican Rights joined student activists in challenging the crowd to "keep struggling" for the cause of ethnic studies.

Othniel Harris, CC '98, opened the rally by explaining how the University's refusal to acknowledge ethnic studies as a valid field of academic discourse is to blame for the hunger strike.

"Those four students are on strike, willing to hurt their own bodies, because Columbia University is hurting them," Harris said to the crowd.

Harris also said the administration's suggestion of creating an American studies program is unacceptable.

Administrators and students have disagreed.

"As the Ithe ethnic studies manifesto] says, the movement of the University has been 'short-sighted and naive,'" Harris said. "An American studies department studies immigrants to the United States, and this is not what ethnic studies is about. Ethnic studies must be housed in a department."

Ethnic studies has been the fastest-growing academic area at the university level and the most productive field of student interest, according to Harris.

"For the administration to say ethnic studies is invalid is wrong," Harris said.

Harris added that the committee also seeks to restructure the Core Curriculum to include non-European works as well as the "Western canon."

"We are forced at this University into taking a curriculum that supports racism and white supremacy," he said. "We're not asking for revisionist history; we're asking for the truth to be taught, and Columbia doesn't want to teach the truth, because it doesn't want the status quo to change."

Vice President of the Black Students' Organization (BSO) Dawan Cornish, CC '98, told the audience

Continued to p. 7

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR—RAMON WINTER
WE GOT THE GREEN LIGHT: Othniel Harris, CC '98, led a march across Broadway in support of ethnic studies, effectively shutting down the thoroughfare.

Figure 9. Sandra P. Angulo, "Over 200 rally for ethnic studies work." April 4 1996. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXX No. 48.

[32] Luna, "1999 twLF at UC Berkeley," 15.
[33] Luna, "1999 twLF at UC Berkeley," 15.
[34] Angulo, "Over 200 rally for ethnic studies work,' *Columbia Spectator*, 4 April 1996.

DAILY COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

FOUNDED 1877

VOL CXX—NO. 52 NEW YORK, N.Y., WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 1996 FIFTEEN CENTS

Ethnic studies advocates take over Low

125 people still occupying Low Library Rotunda this morning

By SPECTATOR STAFF

As of 4:30 this morning, 100 demonstrators demanding the creation of an ethnic studies department continued to occupy Low Library.

The demonstrators stormed Low Rotunda yesterday afternoon following a planned "mass rally" held at the Sundial at 4:00 p.m.

Throughout the afternoon and into the evening, a seesawing standoff evolved between ethnic studies advocates—who insisted upon immediate action in response to their demands—and administrators.

Protesters—resisting threats of arrest, expulsion, and other disciplinary action—repeatedly refused to give up what they considered to be their primary bargaining tool: a large numerical presence in the Rotunda.

The takeover led to a meeting with administrators, a support rally of 100 additional protesters held outside the guarded doors of Low, and a scuffle between protesters and security.

One student, who suffered an asthma attack during the shoving match, was rushed by Columbia Area Volunteer Ambulance (CAVA) to St. Luke's hospital.

Security then retreated from the second floor of Low and protesters were left in control of the building, where they remain.

The events of yesterday transpired as follows:

4:00 p.m. rally

The protest began at the Sundial, where ethnic studies supporter Elbert Garcia, CC '97, told the nearly 200 demonstrators in attendance to move the protest to the Low Library steps "in order to get a better view of things."

On Low Steps, Garcia addressed supporters with a message of frustration with University President George Rupp for not mentioning the hunger strikers in his letter to Jane Bai, a

Continued to p. 10

Local 2110 returns to picket lines

By LISA TOLIN

Spectator Staff Writer

Members of Barnard Local Union 2110 of

PHOTO EDITOR—SHARON NIKFARJAM

Students struggled with security staff as protestors fought to keep the Low Library doors open so that supporters would be free to come and go.

Figure 10. Spectator Staff, "Ethnic studies advocates take over Low." April 10 1996. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXX No. 52.

April 9, 1996: Over 100 students stormed Low Library Rotunda and held a mass afternoon rally at the Sundial, then returned to occupy Low Library throughout the evening and into the morning of April 10, occupying the building for over 14 hours. Scores of New York Police Department officers, called in by university officials, stormed the library with campus security officers in an attempt to disperse students, but retreated after a student was injured. The occupation of Low Library ended the next day, with Spec reporting over 300 demonstrators having gathered to conclude their takeover of Low.

VOL CXX—NO. 53 NEW YORK, N.Y., THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 1996 FIFTEEN CENTS

Police storm Low, 22 students arrested

Protesters charged with criminal trespassing but later released

By The SPECTATOR STAFF

Following the overnight takeover of Low Library, the struggle for an ethnic studies department erupted again yesterday morning with the arrest of 22 ethnic studies advocates, who were charged with criminal trespassing, released, and now await a May 13 trial date.

After storming Low Library, protesters occupied the building for more than 14 hours and blockaded the five entrances to Low Library to prevent University employees from entering.

The 22 arrested protesters were charged with criminal trespassing and fire code violations for their actions.

Presidential Delegate and Director of the Columbia Scholastic Press Association Edmund Sullivan said he is unsure if the University will press charges against the arrested protesters. However, he said all protesters who can be identified will be "punished to the fullest extent permissible under University Rules of Conduct."

Sullivan said letters have been sent to 74 students about the University charges that will be leveled against them for their involvement in the occupation, while 14 more letters will be sent out tomorrow.

"We'll just keep adding more and more [protesters to the list of those being charged]," Sullivan said.

Sullivan added that some of the charges against the students are "serious" and will require a hearing while others are "simple" and will require only clean's discipline.

"In some cases, there are multiple charges levied against individual students," Sullivan said.

According to Katherine Mack, CC '97 and one of the students who was arrested, if the students are not arrested again within the next six months, the misdemeanor charges will be dropped from their records.

Overnight Takeover

In the early hours of the morning while most of the campus slept, approximately 125 ethnic studies advocates continued their stand in support of a department with their overnight takeover of Low Library.

"We feel strongly that everyone should stay here. We have been waiting for this. The moment's not going to come again," hunger striker Marcel Agueros, CC '96, said. "I don't know if we're going to win, that's not a guarantee."

During the takeover, security guards remained in full force and cameras were set up by security guards above the entrance in the rotunda to film the protesters. Additionally, Head of Security George Smartt and Director of Investigations Jim Lynch remained in the building throughout the night.

Students also had free access in and out of Low and to a campus phone.

While many protesters slept for a few hours through the night, others in the building planned a course of

Continued to p. 4

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR—HAMON WINTER

The NYPD attempted to clear student supporters who attempted to blockade the police wagons that were carrying away the 22 arrested students at 11:30 a.m. yesterday.

Rally ends with 300 protesters in Butler

By SANDRA P. ANGULO and ADRIENNE CARTER

Spectator Staff Writers

After a day of demonstrations, 22 student arrests, and student-led press conferences, more than 300 protesters regrouped at the sundial last night to support the creation of an ethnic studies department, eventually parading into Butler Library for a mass rally to discuss the day's events.

Darius Jamal Van Sluytman, CC '96, led the rally by stressing the importance of the "ethnic studies learning" and asked the audience to observe a moment of silence in honor of the 22 arrested students and the three hunger strikers, Van Sluytman told the crowd that the 22 arrests were proof of the administration's failure to meet the student activists' demands.

"The administration has basically said to 22 students that they have no right to be here," he said. "To tell a student that they can't come here and learn the truth is a contradiction."

Vice President of the Black Student organizer announced that the protesters should form a line and surround Low Library to disturb the University Lecture hosted by Professor of Art and Archeology Stephen Murray.

"We need to make sure that we disrupt this event but in an orderly manner" the student organizer said. "Don't get me wrong. We're going to be loud, but if Columbia looks bad that's good, and if we look bad that isn't good."

Chanting "What do we want? Ethnic Studies! When do we want it? Now!" the crowd marched around Low Library, linked arms and circled around the building while yelling "Fight, fight, fight! Ethnic studies is our right!"

Approximately 20 minutes after the protesters began chanting, the crowd was led to Butler Library by ethnic studies organizers.

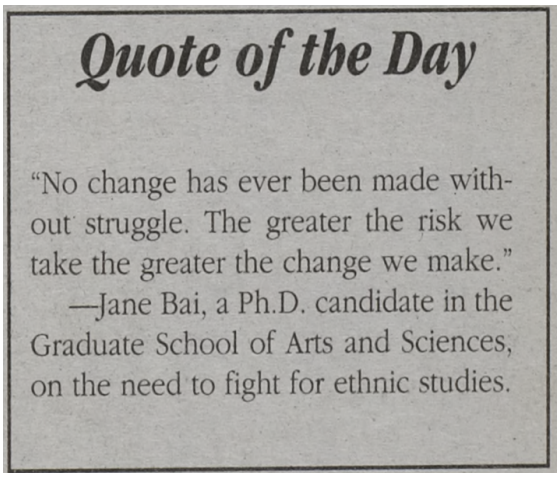
Continued to p. 5

Figure 11. Sandra P. Angulo and Adrienne Carter, Rally ends with 300 protesters in Butler. April 11 1996, Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXX No. 53.

It took three years for the university administration to respond to student demands for Ethnic Studies in a tangible manner; on February 8, 1999, the Center for Race and Ethnicity introduced its "Latino, Asian-American, and African-American Studies programs" to the community in its opening reception held in John Jay Lounge.[35] This is not to say students sat back between 1996 and 1999; many more protests and organized actions filled each semester preceding the establishment of CSER, and the fight to departmentalize the center continues today. I write this document to register Barnard/Columbia students as organizers and prime actors in the history of Asian American politics, activisms, and culture, alongside their peers across the country. To enter these students into the conversation on how students developed Asian American as a social term, a legible identity, a claiming of self and collective recognition on their own terms. In doing so, I lay the historical and intellectual groundwork for *Tidal Notes*, these oral histories, and these narrators and their organizing work now. This project is but one glimpse into the rich, storied ecosystem of Asian/American student organizing, past and present, at Barnard and Columbia.

[35] Yojairy Sanchez, "Center Holds Reception To Promote Ethnic Studies," *Columbia Spectator*, 17 February 1999.

1.2 Notes on Students and Student Organizing



Quote of the Day

"No change has ever been made without struggle. The greater the risk we take the greater the change we make."
—Jane Bai, a Ph.D. candidate in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, on the need to fight for ethnic studies.

Figure 12. Quote from Jane Sung E Bai, a leading student organizer in the fight for Ethnic Studies at Columbia during the 1990s. March 20 1996. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXX No. 37.

How do you remember student organizers? How do you witness their organizing work in meaningful ways? Archives like the *Columbia Spectator's* house a substantial repository of written reports, interviews, and photos documenting student organizers and their work. Published works such as *A Time to Stir: Columbia '68* presents self-described "firsthand testimonies" from alumni and community members who participated in the 1968 protests on campus, whereas *Up Against the Ivy Wall: A History of the Columbia Crisis* develops a history of the 1968 protests from the perspectives of the *Spectator's* student journalists and researchers who labored to cover and report on their peer organizers. Columbia's Center for Oral History interviewed over 80 community members of varying affiliations for their Columbia Crisis of 1968 project. The importance and presence of interviews across these sources, of people turning to each other to ask about and witness the work they have done, considers how oral history practice aids in remembering and interpreting the past, present, and future of student organizing.

In recounting his experiences teaching as one of the only Asian American history specialists at the University of Michigan, scholar Scott Kurashige notes how he utilized oral history as a pedagogical practice for empowering students in the process of learning

about their ethnic histories. Kurashige and his class studied three Asian immigrant narratives examining histories of imperialist occupation and communist revolution, narratives that drew from oral history work students of the class conducted with their parents.[36] Upon reflection, he recognized how his students and their oral histories "place them at the frontiers of scholarly research," so that they "come to appreciate how histories of marginal subjects stretch the boundaries of knowledge production. My goal is for students to see themselves as history makers—possessing the power both to write and to change the course of history."[37] Kurashige's reflections center around the use of oral history narratives of students' families as a crucial form of pedagogy for his course. These oral histories encouraged students' critical analyses of Asian American history and personal consciousness around the importance of political activism to the historical development of the concept of "Asian American" and other related issues. He reveals the pedagogical and creative possibilities for students to explore oral history as a critical form of Asian American historical knowledge and a way of developing analytical narratives of Asian American history. A critical oral history approach builds knowledge through the practice of witnessing, witnessing the experiences of student organizers and contextualizing the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions under which many students are disempowered by bureaucratic and other institutional structures of the university.

[36] Scott Kurashige,,"Exposing the Price of Ignorance: Teaching Asian American History in Michigan," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007), 1178.
[37] Kurashige,"Exposing the Price of Ignorance," 1178.

Spectator Publishing Co. NEW YORK, N.Y., TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 1996 FIFTEEN CENTS

Four students go on hunger strike

Agueros said his decision to participate in the hunger strike is due to his frustration with the administration's hesitancy to act on ethnic studies programs.

"Personally, I have this feeling of frustration that I could leave without seeing significant change, and I think they [the administration] were counting on the fact that a lot of us are graduating," Agueros said. "The administration can afford to think in terms of the future, and clearly something had to be done to translate our sense of frustration into something that they could recognize."

ASSOCIATE PHOTO EDITOR—DAMON WINTER
Jennifer Duran, CC '97, hands out candles to ethnic studies advocates participating in last night's candlelight vigil.

Figure 13. Sandra P. Angulo, "Four students go on hunger strike Ethnic studies advocates hold candlelight vigil." April 2 1996. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXX No. 46.

Marcel Agueros '96 *[One of the student participants in the 1996 Hunger Strike for Ethnic Studies]: Personally, I have this feeling of frustration that I could leave without seeing significant change, and I think they [the administration] were counting on the fact that a lot of us are graduating. The administration can afford to think in terms of the future, and clearly something had to be done to translate our sense of frustration into something they could recognize.*

Dana Wu '91: *I think bureaucrats in, in administration are gonna say Well, you know, these rabble rousers, these students are gonna graduate. They're gonna leave, [so] we'll just placate them until they go away.*

Fiona Cho '24: *But when we graduate, we don't mean anything to them right. So they have like, all the resources at their disposal. They have time on their side. Yeah. The odds are against us, but they've always been against us. And yet student movements have continued to push for the things that they want to happen on campus.*

Dana Wu was one of two alumni narrators I spoke with; she was president of the Asian Women's Coalition and president of the Asian Student Union as a senior during the 1990-91 school year. Fiona Cho is a senior at Barnard involved in the Center for Study of Ethnicity and Race's Student Advisory Board (CSER SAB) and the Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (APAHM) club. As a member of CSER SAB, she is part of the collective efforts to departmentalize the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and

Race, the umbrella-like center that was established out of the 1996 student protests, including the hunger strike, for Ethnic Studies at Columbia. However, CSER is a space that the university has continued to deny full powers of an official academic department. Fiona speaks of the seeming disposability of students organizing to make change combined with their waning time on campus. Both Dana and Fiona's observations speak to those made by Marcel Aguero, one of the four students who went on a hunger strike for Ethnic Studies, camped out in the center of campus in 1996, one of the pivotal organized actions taken by students that year. Aguero, like Dana and Fiona, was a senior when he organized on campus; he too noted the pressed time for students in protesting against an institution that was depending on that very time to run out, for students to leave by graduating. These student organizers held and hold acute awareness of institutional opposition to student-led change, how the university takes action through inaction because it is *counting on the fact that a lot of us are graduating*, because *we don't mean anything to them* after students graduate. From the student's perspective, the default administrative response to student-driven change for Ethnic Studies is to not respond, to simply *placate them until they go away.* The proximity between Marcel, Dana's, and Fiona's words, two students fighting the same fight for Ethnic Studies 27 years apart, illustrates how generations of students may face the same attitudes, behaviors, and (in)actions of an institution across decades. At the same time, Fiona notes the persistence of student organizing despite significant institutional challenges and the sustenance of students' visions for change in their communities. *And yet student movements have continued to push for the things that they want to happen on campus,* and for Marcel, that push meant *translat[ing] our sense of frustration into something they could recognize.* Students hold the power and capacity to disrupt forces of oppression in numerous ways, protesting and raising awareness and knowledge of specific social issues, for example. Thus, it is important to understand the processes through which students gather and decide to take action. It is important to listen to and witness the students who organize in their respective communities and their experiences, their stories.

2.0 Notes On Oral History and Witnessing Asian/American Student Organizing

Oral history considers memory as work, an intentional and complex process of retrieving, re-experiencing, interpreting, and reflecting on one's lived experiences. Furthermore, oral history reflects on memory work as legitimate forms of knowledge and information. Asian American scholar Gary Okihiro writes that "oral history is not only a tool or method for recovering history; it also is a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written."[38] Okihiro, who is also the founding director of CSER, notes a particular orientation of oral history towards those marginalized peoples, those who may not wield or possess socio-political economic power and their experiences. Oral histories with student narrators offer new models of understanding for Asian American history and organizing. Oral history becomes a possibility and space of knowledge production for Asian/American pedagogy and politics by exploring individual, interpersonal, and interstitial memory as knowledge production. There is a particular quality, allure, to the spoken and speaking that presents itself as a meaningful mode of critical knowledge formation and accumulation. Oral history tends to the spoken, hearing and witnessing its presence, its felt absence.

Moreover, oral history confronts the invisibilization of Asian and Asian/American students by bearing witness to their stories, their troubles, their imaginations, their lived experiences. Asian/American oral history explores students' roles in making and interpreting Asian/American history and socio-cultural political discourse. Oral history is a meaningful methodological and sensorial practice and way to gather narratives and knowledge because it tends to the process of listening, witnessing, hearing, speaking; both the story and its teller. There is a particular emphasis on care,

[38] Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History: A Reconnaissance into Method and Theory," *The Oral History Review* 9 (1981), 40.

caring for stories and their speakers that seek to treat narratives, and thus knowledge, as living processes, less item and more being.

Duan '23: *Sorry, I lost your question. [Laughs]oh, yeah. But I guess people do the work now out of care for the people around them, and then the people afterwards because you can see yourselves in those [future] students. This campus could be a different place. And I think that is true. Like a lot of the things, a lot of the benefits that we have now or changes that we've seen on this campus, have been a result of student advocacy.*

Solby Lim: *Right.*

Duan: *It's not like we're powerless against larger forces or institutions. It's just incremental change and we just do what we can. But because we're present at this moment, we're witness to things and we can actually take action. Yeah, it's not like we're powerless.*

Duan, who is a leader of the Asian American creative collective AZINE, speaks of witnessing. Their witnessing is tied to time and presence, *because we're present at this moment.* The act of witnessing in oral history is important to note because it goes beyond simply being there and recording someone's story. Witnessing requires attention, hearing, and spirit, an exchange between two or more people. Oral history is a meaningful form of witnessing for students in particular who may feel powerless or that they cannot make change. Oral history situates students as agents and makers of the fabric of Asian and Asian/American student organizing at Barnard/Columbia, and understands how grassroot student organizing develops from individual students to groups and organizations, as well as the struggles of the process of maintaining and sustaining such collective presence on campus, issues of institutional recognition and representation, funding, and fostering community-building. Oral history, as Okihiro writes, "rewrite(s) our history to capture the human spirit of the people, to see how ethnic minorities solved or failed to solve particular problems, how they advanced or resisted change, how they made or failed to make better lives for themselves and their children. In short, oral history proposes nothing less than the writing of a people's history, liberated from myths and imbued with

humanity."[39] To speak is to remember. To listen is to create. Oral history as memory and liberation.

Okihiro considers oral history as a form of political agency, holding space for both the successes and failures of narrators, in storytelling. By attuning to the experiences of Asian/American student organizers at Barnard/Columbia, this project explores how students' agency can be maintained in writing critical histories of their experiences and work. I draw upon oral historian Linda Shopes and her approach to conceptualizing community-based history projects "around a historical problem or issue with contemporary resonance (or maybe a contemporary issue with historical resonance) rather than a series of life history interviews. What historical problem has defined a community, and how can this problem be explored through specific questions that connect it to individual lived experience?"[40] This methodological framing is useful for exploring the collectivity of student organizing work while continuously tying back to individual experiences.

[39] Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History: A Reconnaissance into Method and Theory," *The Oral History Review* 9 (1981), 42.
[40] Linda Shopes, "Community Oral History: Where We Have Been, Where We Are Going." *Oral History* 43 (no. 1 2015), 101.

2.1 Notes on On Listening/Witnessing/Hearing

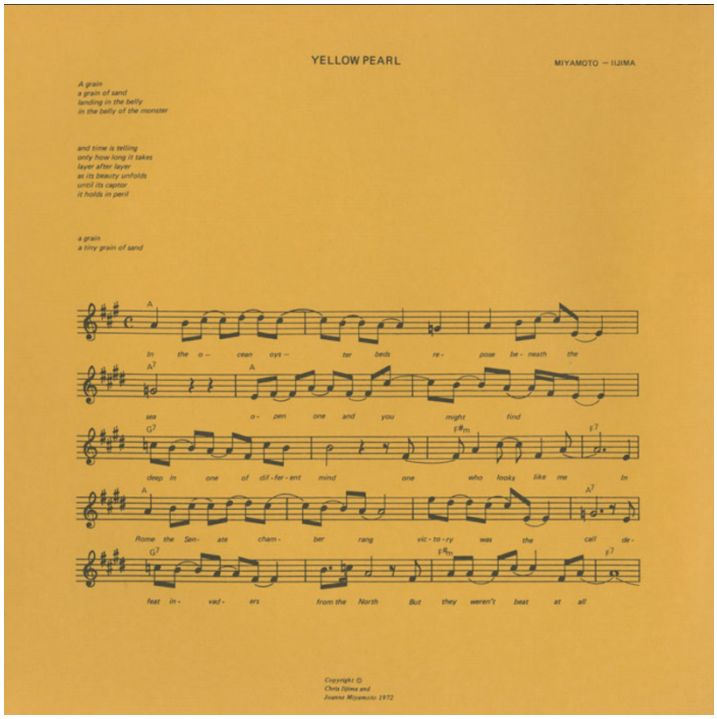


Figure 14. Music and lyrics for "Yellow Pearl" by Chris Iijima and Nobuko Miyamoto, 1973. Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

There is something about hearing the sung declarations, the spoken notes, that lends itself to the project of witnessing. The act of listening to one's voice is of particular interest in witnessing and understanding and historicizing the narratives of oppressed communities, those who have been silenced but made to appear as voiceless. Existing academic and community scholarship on embodiment in oral history practice understands how doing and transcribing oral history involves "body-to-body communication," observed by oral historian Nien Yuen Cheng in "Flesh and Blood Archives": Embodying the Oral History Transcript."[41] Narrators and oral historians lend not only their memories, but also their bodies and voices to each other in the process of oral history; we get on the

[41] Nien Yuan Cheng, ""Flesh and Blood Archives": Embodying the Oral History Transcript," *Oral History Review* 45, no. 1 (2018), 127.

train, walk, move to a specific space to meet, we use our voices and facial expressions to tell stories and reflect on our experiences together. Oral historian Jeff Friedman observes that "voice, an important symbolic trope of oral history, is, first and foremost, produced by the body– indeed, is of the body– and meaningful embodiment is reflected in changes in volume and pitch, the complexities of timbre and tone…"[42]

Oral historians like Friedman and Cheng assert that these bodily aspects of knowledge and exchange are the bedrock of the process of creating oral history, rather than supplemental details. Cheng notes that "one's body is an *assemblage* of corporeal knowledge that is accrued over one's life history. This knowledge can come in the form of skills and practices (driving a car, dancing hip-hop, throwing a ball), experiences (personal trauma, climbing a mountain, traveling), and even habits (fidgeting, smoking, crossing one's legs when sitting down)."[43] An oral history approach to voice and speaking considers how voices bear knowledge and are themselves forms of knowledge and communication. Yet oral history is far from the only expression of voice and speaking or spoken narrative, nor is the co-constructed interview the only form of oral history. Ngāti Porou oral historian Nepia Mahuika notes that in Native worlds, "you breathe in the stories, sing the songs, speak the language, and soak in the politics and protocols. If you pay attention in these spaces, oral history is all around you, evident in the people, art, traditions, environments, and genealogies that speak to inherited experiences."[44] Indigenous practices of oral history consider how every facet of our lived experiences, our songs, our art, our chants, hold meaningful knowledge and understandings about our communities and histories. Indigenous oral history understands how the process of telling stories, understanding and preserving history is a way of personal and collective life. These practices affirm the knowledges and ways of living

[42] Friedman, Jeff. "Oral History, Hermeneutics, and Embodiment." *The Oral History Review* 41, no. 2 (2014), 291.
[43] Cheng, ""Flesh and Blood Archives," 128.
[44] Nepia, Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press 2019), 1.

carried by the vocal and verbal, the spoken, the depths of voice. I note Mahuika's and other Indigenous oral history approaches in order to challenge where I listen for Asian/American history and experience. Indigenous oral history scholarship broadens how and in what forms Asian/American knowledge, stories, and life are spoken and made vocal.

Figure 15. Arlan Huang and Karl Matsuda, Album cover for A Grain of Sand, 1973. Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

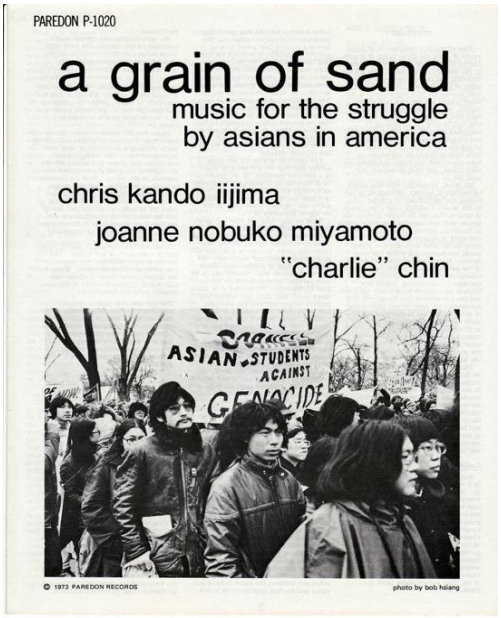


Figure 16. Album liner notes for A Grain of Sand with a photograph of Bob Hsiang of a 1972 anti-war demonstration at Cornell University. Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

A Grain of Sand was the first documented Asian American band and the name of their debut album, a 12-song record weaving together American folk, soul, jazz and spoken word recitations.[45] After meeting in 1969 at an Asian Americans for Action organizational meeting in California, artist-activists Nobuko JoAnne Miyamoto and Chris Kando Iijima performed their first song at a Japanese American Citizens League meeting

[45] Sojin Kim, "A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America," *Smithsonian Folkways Magazine,* May 2011.

in support of protesting the Vietnam War.[46] 1969 was also the year Iijima graduated from Columbia College, where he participated in the 1968 protests against the Vietnam War.[47] Miyamoto and Iijima met William "Charlie" Chin a year later in New York, where the newly formed trio performed at a conference at Pace College for new Asian American community groups, student organizations, and activists.[48] The trio spent the next few years performing everywhere from college campuses to protest rallies to Buddhist temples before recording, writing, and releasing *A Grain of Sand* in 1973. I came across this album, an incredible archive of Asian/American music, organizing, and memory while researching 1960s Asian American history. "Yellow Pearl," the first song, begins with a spoken recitation by singer Nobuko Miyamoto:

A grain
A tiny grain of sand
Landing in the belly,
In the belly of the monster
And time is telling only how long it takes,
Layer after layer
As its beauty unfolds
Until its captor it holds in peril
A grain
A tiny of grain of sand

The lyrics spell a beautiful narrative ode to the radical, grassroots history of Asian American organizing which Miyamoto, Iijima, and Chin belonged to, the community-led protests against the Vietnam War and US militarism, police brutality, systemic racism, the erasure of Asian Americans from American public life and history. The metaphor of sand, a substance made up of not one but thousands of grains, speaks of the interconnectedness of Asians in America, the collective actions of Asian Americans organizing for self-determination and liberation from structures of oppression. "Yellow

[46] Kim, "A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America."
[47] Leila Fujimori, "Chris Iijima/1948-2006: UH law professor was Asian-American activist," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin;* Patricia Wakida "Chris Iijima," *Densho Encyclopedia*, 22 January 2014.
[48] Kim, "A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America."

Pearl" and the album it belongs to speak to Mahuika's observation of the expressions of Indigenous oral history, in that "proverbs such as this were often recited in songs, within which genealogies and sayings intermingled to tell the story."[49]Charlie Chin reflected on the trio's meeting fondly, remembering "I'm at the conference, and all the things they are talking about—Asian Americans, how history impacts us, how we have been apologetic about being Asian. And there's been this hanging question for me, ever since I had taught Appalachian 5-string banjo at a folk music camp, 'Where is my history? Where is my culture?' So I go on with them. And I'm listening—I have never heard this stuff before. This is amazing. So the first time I ever hear them play, I'm playing with them."[50] Through the spoken and sung expressions of music and Asian/American lyric, Chin relocates his sense of history and culture. He asks, *where is my history? Where is my culture?' So I go on with them. And I'm listening—I have never heard this stuff before*, revealing that when he listened to Miyamoto and Iijima, he was not only listening to the melody and rhythm, but also Third World history, the history of Asians in America reclaiming their agency as Asian Americans etched into the lyrics. The spoken and sung notes in *A Grain of Sand* record Asian American memory and history.

Haudenosaunee artist and scholar Rosy Simas Dewadošyö' reflects that Indigenous "oratory speech, oral storytelling and recitation… that share stories and histories from memory recur to be remembered and shared. This cultural practice is a complete intersensorial experience that works to embed meaning into the listener on a physical, spiritual and intellectual level."[51] Chin's reflections speak to the power of oral storytelling as a physical, spiritual, and intellectual seeding of meaning onto a listener. He had *never heard this stuff before. This is amazing. So the first time I ever hear them play, I'm playing with them;* Miyamoto and Iijima's vocal performance of Asian/American

[49] Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition*, 7.
[50] Kim, "A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle by Asians in America."
[51] Simas, Rosy. "The Body Is an Archive: Collective Memory, Ancestral Knowledge, Culture and History" in *Music, Dance and the Archive*, edited by Amanda Harris, Linda Barwick, and Jakelin Troy, 84.

narrative and history was the answer to his *hanging questions* of finding history and culture, Asian/American recognition, it moved him so much so that he ends up *playing with them.*

What knowledge and information can be recognized from oral history work? In turn, what kinds of information can an oral history approach to embodied knowledge recognize in creative oral expressions? The sound of an organizer's soft inflections and passionate ramblings and careful pauses, an activist-singer's tender notes and proud beltings, a narrator's weaving together of different languages, are interconnected expressions of knowledge rooted in our bodies. Voice is a part of our body and selves. Our voice holds; voice as self and collective archive. In our voice and throats, we hold knowledge, loss, our family line, the homelands and people that created us. On our tongues, we hold the shapes of our histories.

*I invite you to listen to A Grain of Sand's "Yellow Pearl" before you read or as you re-read this note, and listen to the album as you witness *Tidal Notes*: https://shorturl.at/fhvET

2.2 Notes On Oral History and the Transcript

Fiona Cho '24: *I have to say whenever I'm in conversation, whether it's academic or whatever, I will jump from topic to topic [laughs]*

Solby Lim: *Oh my gosh same, same here. [Laughs] Absolutely same.*

Fiona: *[Laughs] So, sorry if it's not making any sense, [laughs]*

Solby: *No no, it makes total sense. And I also do the exact same thing [laughs]*

Fiona: *[Laughs] Okay, perfect.*

Solby: *But like, everything's connected. I feel like, they're just, everything threads through, so,*

Fiona: *It's a little jumbled, which is the way I feel about most of it, but hopefully there's a lot of connections between everything.*

Solby: *Absolutely.*

My oral history with Fiona was one of the longest interviews for this project, coming in at around two hours and fifty minutes. Throughout the oral history, she would take a pause from what she was speaking about to remind me of the waning time or check in with me about the recording. Her tone shifted in these asides addressed to me, her interviewer, less like she was responding to a question and more like she was taking a breath from responding. The way Fiona took these pauses in between her explanations of and experiences with organizing made me feel as if we were having two separate but simultaneous conversations, one oriented towards an official record and the other towards something else, quiet and brief notes of self-awareness that her conversation with me was being recorded and documented, that her words would take on a life of their own after the interview. Does this come across enough in the transcript? Would Fiona's verbal details, her multiple affects, our multiple conversations, come across fully if I shared all seventy pages of Fiona's transcript?

The oral history transcript stands in relation to but also independent of the interview recording, our experiences of the interview, and the narrators themselves. It is a form of oral histories, a document, that has been edited and translated the recorded spoken word to a written print. Transcripts and the transcription process have long been known as integral aspects of institutional oral history methodology in the United States. When Allan Nevins established Columbia's Oral History Research Office (OHRO) in 1948, "the transcript reigned supreme… Transcripts ensured the preservation of the interview. At Columbia, transcripts became the sole document of the interview."[52] These sentiments remain relevant in contemporary explorations of oral history and what oral history makes or creates, however there are equally relevant critical discourses on producing transcripts and understanding what is gained, lost, re-configured by transcribing oral history.

Producing an oral history transcript is a complex process of collaboration, editing, and translating dependent on the goals and desires of the oral historians and narrators involved. Some perspectives in the field remain critical of editing oral histories in favor of readability, concision, or clarity. Oral historian Susan Emily Allen notes that "oral history is "You know, you know. It *is* "And this and that and that." It *is* "Well, let me see, I think... no, it must have been… I can't ... just a minute," and so forth. Oral history is what comes out of people's mouths, and it has to be captured accurately on paper…"[53] Allen places editing in opposition to capturing a narrator's words accurately, arguing that "you violate the integrity of the interviewee… you violate the integrity of the medium… What is on the tape is what was actually said. It is history already written on the wind, and if you feel any responsibility to the truth, you must see that the original content gets

[52] Alexander Freund, "From.Wav to.Txt: Why We Still Need Transcripts in the Digital Age," *Oral History* 45, no. 1 (2017), 33.
[53] Susan Emily Allen, "Resisting the Editorial Ego: Editing Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 10 (1982), 35.

onto the transcript."[54] Allen's assertions that the editing of certain speech violates the integrity or originality of a narrator's spoken oral history is a recurrent concern in conversations on how to approach the oral history transcript. Oral historian Raphael Samuel makes a similar case of the transcript as an unavoidable violation of a narrator's flow or structure of speaking: "the very process by which speech is made to sound consecutive is also bound, in some degree, to violate its original integrity… "[55] In this way, the transcript can be understood as a site of failure. The written, printed word of these oral histories cannot fully capture the different colors of narrators' voices, the rhythms of their silences and ramblings and articulations.

Yet the possible violations and failures of the transcript do not negate the validity of the process of transcribing oral history. Other important perspectives consider the transcription process, including editing, as part of the work of oral history. Transcripts become documents of oral history related to but distinct from audio recordings and other materials such as fieldnotes. Scholar Carl Wilmsen notes that "oral history is not just what happens during the interview, however. Rather, it is comprised of the lengthy process of researching, interviewing, transcribing, editing, and preparing the transcript for deposit in an archive, and in many cases, returning again later to the archive to make corrections in those transcript[s]."[56]

Aurelia Tan '25: *I don't have personal experience with this, so I am not the person to ask. But from what I've heard– so this is like, all hearsay– e-board applications [for Asian American Alliance] are notoriously so hard. It is so hard to get on the e-board. It's mostly connections and stuff like that. And that's why the [board] is East Asian. And it's like, it's not really representative of all the people here.*

•

Aurelia Tan '25: *Honestly I think I've said some things that probably should not have been on the record.*

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[54] Allen, "Resisting the Editorial Ego," 35.
[55] Raphael Samuel, "Perils of the Transcript," *Oral History* 1, no. 2 (1972), 19.
[56] Carl Wilmsen, "For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (2001), 65.

Solby Lim: *[Laughs]*

Aurelia: *So, whoever's looking at this [record] in the future, sorry [laughs]. But whatever, whatever, I just, I have no filter. Also, I'm hungry. So I have no filter.*

I note Aurelia' use of *hearsay* and how it reflects her heightened awareness of her words, voice, and experiences being recorded and preserved for someone other than herself to witness. *Hearsay*, a term used in a court of law, a place of record. She marks the transcript with her awareness of it. Aurelia also appeals directly to the imagined listener at the end of our conversation, naming the third (and fourth and so on) person present in our oral history: the external listener, you the reader. Narrators' awareness affects what they say and choose not to speak on in the oral history. They take the matter of recording oral history, the audio and written transcript forms, seriously. The presence of the record(s) affects what and how narrators speak. Narrators like Fiona and Aurelia make their awareness of the oral history record very clear; others are less explicit in naming their awareness. Thus, narrators curate the production of the written transcript. As narrators, they have the agency to decide what of their oral history makes it into the transcript, whether it is everything they said or if some of their words are not included. Although they were not the ones physically typing out the transcript, they hold authority in what it says, what the transcript includes of the oral history, if the transcript is an attempt at covering everything spoken in the oral history or if it is a more guarded version of the oral history. Transcripts become what Wilmsen describes as "jointly produced interpretations of past events in which the social relation and political context of the interview, and memory converge in every production stage--from initial research all the way through to editing and narrator review--to mediate the meaning that it ultimately produced."[57] Transcription as a jointly-produced process of interpretation makes ongoing consent between narrator and interviewer a vital part of the oral history process. I used

[57] Carl Wilmsen, "For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (2001), 84.

Google Drive to help practice an ethics of collaboration with narrators in writing the consent forms and transcripts. I wanted the consent forms and transcripts to become live documents that could be revised or questioned in any form and at any point in time by narrators, so that collaboration and consent in this project was an active process rather than a single exchange.

My approach to transcription shifted over the course of writing this project. I tried to include every single word spoken in the recordings in my initial drafts of the excerpted quotes to reduce the "violation" of narrator "integrity" as scholars Susan Allen and Raphael Samuel describe. I also tried to indicate verbal pauses with commas to try and express the rhythm of narrators' ways of speaking through punctuation. However, I wondered if this form of transcription was accessible and readable to people other than myself and whether my familiarity with the transcription as editor and interviewer was clouding my decision-making. I became concerned that readers would have to spend more time trying to simply read the transcription rather than understanding the narrator's words. I needed to answer an important query posed by oral historian Alessandro Portelli:"There is no all-purpose transcript… The same applies to editing: Is it intended to reproduce as carefully as possible the actual sounds of the spoken word or to make the spoken word accessible to readers through the written medium?"[58] I realized the purpose most fitting for the excerpted transcripts here was towards the latter of Portelli's question: making the spoken word accessible to readers. In doing so, I accepted that these transcriptions would not reproduce the "actual sounds of the spoken word" as diligently for the purpose of accessibility and edited out many of "likes" and "ums," and used commas only for their original purpose.[59] I still tried to limit the degree of "violation" but

[58] Alessandro Portelli, The Battle of Valle Giulia: The Art of Dialogue in Oral History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 15. Quoted in Elinor A. Mazé, "The Uneasy Page: Transcribing and Editing Oral History" in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology* edited by Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, with the assistance of Leslie Roy Ballard (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 250.
[59] Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 15.

prioritized the readability of the transcription so that outside viewers could focus on understanding the meaning of narrators' words.

I also made other stylistic choices to focus on creating an accessible, written record of what narrators said. For the purposes of *Tidal Notes*, transcript excerpts that have a dot (•) indicate a part of the oral history that was cut for concision and readability. Dash lines,

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like the one above, indicate where I have placed at least two different oral histories in conversation together to compare or explore differences in similar themes, experiences, or ideas expressed by narrators. All transcript excerpts are italicized, and quotes I incorporate into my writing are also in italics. Lyrics from *A Grain of Sand* are the other text that I italicize throughout *Tidal Notes.* I treat these transcripts as careful articulations of the oral history interviews I conducted, what Wilmsen names as "social texts" where our oral histories can be witnessed and experienced by people other than the narrators and myself.[60] In creating the transcript as an accessible expression of these interviews, I acknowledge the reality that the transcribing and editing process ends up making certain dimensions of the oral histories unavailable to an outside reader, such as a wholistic portrait of a narrator's train of thought or the progression of their voice, how it might crescendo at some points and become hushed at others.

The oral history transcript holds particular importance for this project, as *Tidal Notes* seeks to disrupt the bloated gap of documentation of Asian/American student organizing at Barnard/Columbia with notes of oral history, narrative, and re-activated archival materials. Despite his critical descriptions of the transcription process, Samuel makes a case for transcripts to be made and archived so that they may live on in the present future, as "historians in the future will bring fresh interests to bear upon the

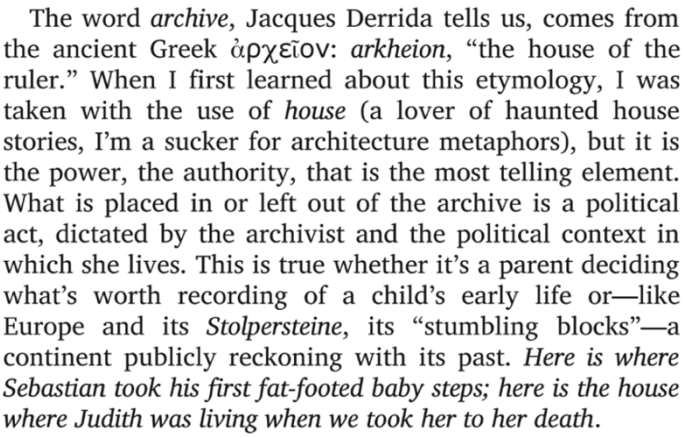
[60] Wilmsen, "For the Record," 66.

materials we collect; they will be asking different questions and seeking different answer."[61]Transcripts and their presence, their accessibility are particularly necessary in the context of the amnesiac forces of the institutions we work within. Narrators also desire and find meaning in leaving a record; everyone interviewed agreed to archiving their materials with the Barnard Archives so that their knowledge and experiences are preserved for themselves and the community to engage with. There are many contexts and experiences which may not be able to be remembered or documented with oral history; these stories are not one of them. These students, past and current, are here; they have something to say. The transcript offers another dimension and possibility for witnessing their experiences and exploring multiple interpretations and understandings of student organizing on individual and collective levels.

The transcripts here leave traces for future communities: recorded presence, a reminder that students spoke and had something to say. Transcription as a way to avoid the terrible annihilation of forgetting. To practice oral history as witness to memory and record.

[61] Samuel, "Perils of the Transcript,"

2.3 Notes On Oral History and Archiving Asian/American



The word *archive*, Jacques Derrida tells us, comes from the ancient Greek ἀρχεῖον: *arkheion*, "the house of the ruler." When I first learned about this etymology, I was taken with the use of *house* (a lover of haunted house stories, I'm a sucker for architecture metaphors), but it is the power, the authority, that is the most telling element. What is placed in or left out of the archive is a political act, dictated by the archivist and the political context in which she lives. This is true whether it's a parent deciding what's worth recording of a child's early life or—like Europe and its *Stolpersteine*, its "stumbling blocks"—a continent publicly reckoning with its past. *Here is where Sebastian took his first fat-footed baby steps; here is the house where Judith was living when we took her to her death.*

Figure 17. Opening quote from Carmen Maria Machado's memoir In the Dream House (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press), 2019.

Solby Lim: *So I'm in awe of all the work that's being done. And [considering] all the things that go into [event planning], I already feel exhausted [even] thinking about, [laughs] every single thing that goes into an event. But yeah, if you have any lingering thoughts or things you want to say?*

Kathleen Phuong Thuy Hoang '25: *I'm just grateful for the space to talk about it.*

William Diep '25: *Yes.*

Kathleen: *I feel like we haven't– this brings [up] a lot of good points. Like, I feel like we need to have a board discussion about some of these things that we talked about, like where we want [to go], what our goals are, what our long term goals are, what we need to be thinking about politically. Because I honestly think that it's an important conversation to have. Like, moving forward, this gives me a lot to think about. So I'm just grateful for that.*

William: *Agreed. I'm really thankful for you for reaching out in the first place for us to actually like, talk about it. Because I feel that we have not talked about, like, I agree, we have not talked about this. I haven't, I haven't even talked to myself about this.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

William: *And I talk to myself a lot.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

William: *So I feel like this space, actually talking about VSA, it's like, Wow, this is what we do well, this is what we can do better. This is what we haven't done yet. And I feel like now this is making me realize we actually got to have a board, we have to have multiple board discussions about [group] structure. Also like what's our mission, what's our values,*

Kathleen: *Mm.*

William: *What's our vision, what are our goals, what's our structure, so yeah.*

Archive
arkheion: house of the ruler

Oral historians ask and witness what histories, knowledges, and experiences narrators carry, what their voices hold. In the act of witnessing, the oral history interview takes on volume, an area where stories and information areis communicated. Is oral history a space? Does it have a body, an archive? My oral history with Kathleen Phuong Thuy Hoang and William Diep brought up the connection between speaking and space, and the intentional space we created for each other in this oral history. Kathleen and William are leading members of Columbia's Vietnamese Students Association (VSA), a club they are helping to revive after a period of inaction. They were also my first multi-narrator oral history. Space is a recurring theme throughout their and other oral histories, as many of these student organizers spoke about wanting to create supportive, fun, or safe spaces for each other on campus. Though towards the end of our conversation, Kathleen and William remarked on a different kind of space, their oral history interview as a space *to talk about it*, *what we do well, what we can do better*, their visions, values, goals. Oral history, for these narrators, offered a space for reflection and processing of their organizing, re-assessments and realizations of what it is they want for their student group: a space to hold all of these *important conversations.*

I transcribed and recorded these oral histories and collaged to archive them, make them into a space. I imagined *Tidal Notes* as an oral history archive of remembrance and witnessing of stories and histories deliberately forgotten. Writers, historians, and artists think often about the spatiality of the archive, how what is included, and left out, reveals the mechanics of power that govern archives. Archive is both governed by and a source of authority, agency. Oral historian Ellen D. Swain makes the case for more collaboration and exchange between oral history and archival work. Swain observes that "oral history will have an important documentary role in the twenty-first century as more and more information, crucial to historical understanding, is disseminated over electronic media… For instance, college students at the turn of the twentieth century maintained elaborate scrapbooks and diaries and corresponded with friends and family on mailed stationery. Their counterparts in 2003 maintain elaborate Web pages, record their thoughts and activities on blogs (Web-logs), and correspond through e-mail. Oral history, as well as Web-based documentation strategies, will be critical for understanding student experience in the coming decades."[62] Critical perspectives on archives rightfully articulate how institutions, universities, museums, state-sponsored organizations, continue the violence of colonial and imperial conquest and oppression through representations of dispossessed and historically oppressed communities, as well as choose what to and what not to include in an archive. How do the relations of power that govern an archive shift when a community creates an archive? What are the possibilities of agency and autonomy, if any, for archives made by and for marginalized communities?

Archivist and public historian Michelle Caswell argues that community-based archives "serve as an alternative venue for communities to make collective decisions

[62] Ellen D. Swain, "Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the Twenty-First Century," *The American Archivist* 66, no. 1 (2003), 49.

about what is of enduring value to them and to control the means through which stories about their past are constructed. These are archives for the people, by the people…"[63] Caswell is the co-founder of the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), the largest independent archive of South Asian American history with a collection of over 1,800 digitized materials. These archives were created out of the socio-cultural and political context of absence of a community in mainstream, traditional archives, a context of "symbolic annihilation" where oppressed groups "are absent, grossly under-represented, maligned, or trivialized" in public discourse and culture.[64] Ethnic Studies scholar Grace I. Yeh, who created the Re/Collecting Project as an Ethnic Studies memory project based in California, notes that archival "participation from the community hinges on the recognition that the community's stories have not been well documented and on a desire to make its experiences known."[65] Community-based archives are spaces that emerge out of a specific socio-politico-cultural context of constructed absence and un-recognition of specific communities and people with shared histories or identities. The desire to make a community's experiences known, as Yeh writes, drove narrator Fiona and her peers to plan a digital archive for the fight for Ethnic Studies at Columbia:

Fiona Cho '24: *Because as a student who's only here for a set number of years, I'm gonna graduate and take with me all these things I know. And then [future students] are going to have to start afresh each year. And the institution really capitalizes on that. They really try to like, utilize that to their advantage, the fact that students graduate and [that] it's hard to rebuild every single year. But we're trying to counter that through a variety of strategies.*

And I guess that leads to the second thing I've learned, which is activism doesn't always have to be visible. And this is just something that I'm realizing more and more this year, especially as we're reorienting our goals. So CSER SAB [Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race Student Advisory Board], a lot of people know it as that club that does those protests and rallies in the name of ethnic studies. But right now, we're actually

[63] Michelle Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History: Community Archives and the Fight Against Symbolic Annihilation," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 4 (2014), 31-2.
[64] Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History, 27.
[65] Grace I Yeh, "The Re/Collecting Project and Rethinking Archives and Archival Practice," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1, no. 2 (2015), 32.

focused on a very different project. We're building the digital archive as I mentioned. And that involves a journal for ethnic studies. That involves the podcast, that involves video projects, any sort of student work that's dedicated to ethnic studies. So that's gonna make sure we have a tangible legacy left even after the seniors graduate each year.

Solby Lim: *Yeah, that's amazing.*

Fiona: *Thank you. And it was our professor's idea, our advisor Bahia Mona. She's amazing. She's the associate director of CSER.*

•

She knows what the institution does, how it operates. So her advice was [that] this year, [we] build a tangible legacy. [We should] build something, build an archive that generations of Columbia students will be able to see and be able to learn from. That's what we're doing. So maybe in the spring we will have a rally, but right now we're more so prioritizing a less visible form of activism, in a sense. But I feel like art is such a valuable form of activism, or writing. So that's what we're kind of centering right now.

Fiona builds upon Caswell and Yeh's contextualization of absence and "symbolic annihilation" that community-based archives develop in opposition to, understanding how within educational institutions specifically, the lack of resources for remembering and collective histories of student organizing forces incoming students to have to *rebuild every single year.* Student organizers face particularly difficult challenges with archiving their experiences because of the reality of their constant turnover, their short-lived time in their student communities. Institutions depend on this reality, *utilize that to their advantage, the fact that students graduate,* as Fiona observes, to equally disrupt the rhythm and flow of student organizing work and resist student-driven demands for change. Caswell identifies five key principles clustered around community archives: "broad *participation* in all or most aspects of archival collecting from appraisal to description to outreach; shared ongoing *stewardship* of cultural heritage between the archival organization and the larger community it represents; *multiplicity* of voices and formats, including those not traditionally found in mainstream archives such as ephemera and artifacts; positioning archival collecting as a form of *activism* and ongoing *reflexivity* about the shifting nature of community and identity."[66] I note the methodological

[66] Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History, 31.

proximities between the process of oral history work and Caswell's defining aspects of community-based archives, the collaborative nature of stewardship and story collection, the focus on hearing voice, the orientation towards witnessing those voices and materials that have been historically excluded from US public memory and institutional archives.

Moreover, I draw from Caswell's work because she speaks on the possibility, a realized possibility for her and SAADA, for archiving to be a practice of the activist work of finding and building community, exploring self and collective identity. Caswell notes that "with every high-resolution file we save on multiple servers, we are helping young South Asian Americans find their place in society. And with every press of the scan button, we win one small battle against the symbolic annihilation of South Asian Americans in archives."[67]

Solby Lim: *I think you're absolutely right in that the university, like, depends on students being here and then leaving and then just forgetting [their contributions]. And then having that cycle continue until the end of time [laughs]. But [the archive project] is such a tangible way to counteract that and actually create something.*

Fiona Cho '24: *Mm. Yeah, and what you're doing too. That's why I was like, This is so important, what you're doing.*

Solby: *Mhm. I feel like that's exactly why I wanted to pursue this [oral history project]. And making sure that this kind of history, this kind of work is not forgotten. And that it's remembered by every student that comes after us. I feel like it's just as meaningful and an important part of activism as the rallies and the protests and the more public-facing [actions].*

Fiona: *Right. I feel like they're both meaningful in different ways. But this [form of activism] is really important in the sense that we don't want anything to be forgotten. And we want to preserve a lot of our current knowledges, and make sure that whoever comes here next will have access to that. [This] is something that we're really trying to get up and running because it hasn't been done before by CSER SAB.*

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[67] Caswell, "Seeing Yourself in History, 37.

Grassroot, community archives make a critical claim in the discourse of the value and purpose of archives in recognizing oppressed communities, understanding the connection between public-facing archival representation with the fundamental self and collective affirmation that we too, exist, that we have a "place in society" that is meaningful and worth remembering. Scholarship on community archives and archives themselves teach me to consider how oral histories with student organizers preserve Asian/American memory and experiences, and how oral histories could embody the dimensions of community-based archives by locating Asian/American students as architects of Asian/American history and community.

2.4 Notes On Archiving as/with Oral History and Ephemera

Considering oral history as archive also brings into question what records of an oral history archive are, what they look like. The materiality of *Tidal Notes* takes the forms of transcripts and narrator consent agreements, but also archived photos, journals, and student publications of Asian/American student organizing in the 90s that speak and are spoken to by these oral histories and their narrators in the present 2020s. *Tidal Notes* is a patchwork archive, reaching across existing collections such as the Columbia Spectator Archive, the university's student run newspaper, and various yearbook and student journal materials housed in the Barnard Archives. I return to where I started, in these archives.

LGBTQ+ scholar David Reichard explores how oral history can create meaningful interpretations of ephemera materials such as flyers and newsletters and reveal the importance of exploring such materials to understand histories of queer and other political organizing in his article, "Animating Ephemera through Oral History: Interpreting Visual Traces of California Gay College Student Organizing from the 1970s." Reichard argues that "using oral history to animate ephemera is especially important for understanding a transient group of people like students, particularly gay and lesbian students. With these materials sometimes being the only self-generated written record of their activities on campus, oral history becomes the most available and accessible way to triangulate personal recollections and memories (through oral history) and trace archival evidence (flyers, posters, newsletters, and short-lived newspapers) with "official" records generated by university officials."[68] Asian American historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu holds a similar appreciation for such materials, writing that "letters, diaries, newspaper clippings—these material objects are physical and literary manifestations that allow me to reimagine and relive the past… These traces of history

[68] David A. Reichard, "Animating Ephemera through Oral History: Interpreting Visual Traces of California Gay College Student Organizing from the 1970s," *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 1 (2012), 39.

are particularly precious, given the past and current efforts to erase the political power and very presence of nonnormative subjects from the U.S. polity."[69] Reichard's and Wu's scholarship encourages the exploration of oral history to re-imagine and re-enliven archived ephemera on historical Asian/American student organizing, making tangible the connections between Asian/American past and present students at Barnard and Columbia.

Asian women discuss media stereotypes

By Arlene Waldman

"Something about an Oriental Female I adore."

This Village Voice personal helped spark a Ferris Booth Hall rap session, led by the Asian Women's Coalition (AWC), that focused on the "Asian fetish."

Twenty-five students discussed stereotypes facing Asian-American women during the forum led by AWC President Dana Wu.

Group members condemned many of the images they said the media uses to describe Asian women: quiet, shy, smiling, obedient, passive, polite, mystical, and stoic.

"I'm not saying this about all Asian men on campus, but some of them dictate roles for women," said Ellen Chu, CC '91, who is the literary and art director of Dialogue About Asian Women's News (DAAWN).

"It's not just Asian men, lots of people who aren't Asian have stereotypes of us as well," said AWC Treasurer Amy Sueyoshi, BC '93.

The coalition will help find ways for students to voice their frustrations and solve the problem of stereotypes, which is one of the biggest issues facing female Asian students, according to Wu.

"We started as a gripe group, but I think we're taking a different angle this year," Wu said. "Yes, we have to face racism and sexism, but we

See *Media*, p. 5

SPECTATOR/ROMSAI BOONYASAI

THE ASIAN MYSTIQUE: Members of the Asian Women's Coalition (AWC) rapped about inaccurate media portrayals and violence against women in the home.

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

FOUNDED 1877

NEW YORK, N.Y., FRIDAY, FEB. 2, 1990

Media

continued from page one

want to go beyond that. As much as you can gripe, it comes to a point where you have to take action."

More than 40 students belong to the AWC, she added.

"Our angle is education as opposed to membership," said AWC Vice-President Han-Na Choi, CC '91. "The group must bond together because as Asian women, we must fight racism and sexism together."

Discussion topics for the group focus on issues students find relevant in their lives on and off campus, according to Wu.

"We want to show that you can bring out what goes on behind closed doors," Wu said.

The coalition plans to participate in Barnard's "Take Back the Night" program by sponsoring a speaker from the New York Asian Women's Center who will address the problems of Asian battered women and domestic violence.

Asian family violence and violence against women is a widespread problem, according to Wu.

"I think it's more of an issue now because of immigrant women and mail order brides. Also lots of refugees come and there are many stresses which face them."

Other issues for Asian women on campus stem from parental pressures, AWC members said. Chu pointed to these expectations facing some students, saying, "They don't encourage you to go into liberal arts. They want us to go into practical fields."

There are no male groups like the AWC on campus, members said.

"We want to encourage them to start their own," Sueyoshi said.

Figure 18. Arlene Waldman, "Asian women discuss media stereotypes." February 2 1990. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXIV No. 69.

Amy Sueyoshi '93: *I remember AWC, we had a session that said The Men Who Bind Our Feet, it was like, it was about Asian,*

Solby Lim: *Yeah! Yeah, I think it was that one. Yeah they wrote about that.*

Amy: *Oh it was? [laughs] Okay,*

Solby: *Yeah, yeah [laughs]*

Amy: *Oh my god, that meeting was so intense.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

[69] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Living History: Encountering the Recent Asian American Past," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 5, no. 1 (2019), 105.

Amy: *There were all these graduate students who showed up like, Asian American men [and] grad students. And I'm like, What the fuck are you doing here?*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Amy: *I mean I didn't, you know back then, I didn't swear because I was much more cheerful*
than I am now. [Laughs]

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Amy: *But I was like, What are you doing here? It was so bizarre to me. And then one of the guys, you know, there was a guy who was from China and he was like, You know, we don't bind women's feet in China. This is something that they did in royalty. [Laughs] Footbinding was a, [laughs] And then Ellen [Chu], who was the chair [of AWC] at the time, she was like, This is a metaphor. It's not literal, blah blah blah. And there was this other guy named Larry who was a grad student in physics or something. He was Asian American. He was dating Grace Chen who was in AWC with me. And he was like, he was the feminist. He was like, Well, we men, we really need to think about how we oppress women. And it's our obligation as Asian men to not oppress Asian women. [Laughs] And I was like, Whoa, Larry, he is so cool.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Amy: *He is so evolved. I wish I had a boyfriend like Larry. Like, you know what I'm saying, [laughs]*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Amy: *But also, when I was flyering for that event, I had to go– I had a boyfriend at the time. His name was Jiawei, and he had a roommate named Wes Skinner, who was a blond guy from Kansas, really smart and dropped out at Columbia. He was a philosophy major, but he had kind of a, he had an Asian fetish, right?*

Solby: *Oh.*

Amy: *So we're running around putting up these flyers that say Asian men, the men that bind our feet, right [laughs] He's a white guy. I'm an Asian woman. And he said [that] it felt so uncomfortable for him [to be] running around, putting up these posters.*

Solby: *Oh really, [laughs]*

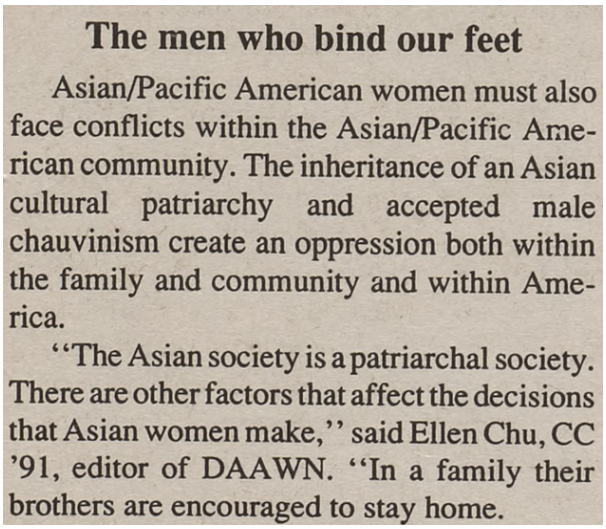
Amy: *Yeah. But he obviously didn't come to the [event]. There were just, there were a ton of Asian guy grad students there. It was called a rap session, I think, r-a-p, to chat, I think. That's what we called it or something. Asian Women's rap is what we call it. I think, I can't remember exactly. Anyway. Yeah. So that was an intense session.*

Solby: *[Laughs] So were they, did they come in like groups or? Did you notice that like, they took up a significant,*

Amy: *Yeah, they took up a lot of space.*

Solby: *They had a significant presence?*

Amy: *They came one by one. So one was a math PhD student from China. There was a lot of, there were a couple of– there were like, two people from China, basically. And they were PhD students from STEM. And then there was like, Larry, I remember Larry very vividly. And I remember the guy that was like, Foot binding is for royalty, this is a misuse of the analogy, right. [Laughs]*



The men who bind our feet

Asian/Pacific American women must also face conflicts within the Asian/Pacific American community. The inheritance of an Asian cultural patriarchy and accepted male chauvinism create an oppression both within the family and community and within America.

''The Asian society is a patriarchal society. There are other factors that affect the decisions that Asian women make,'' said Ellen Chu, CC '91, editor of DAAWN. ''In a family their brothers are encouraged to stay home.

Figure 19. Sheetal Majithia, "Forging a feminism: Asian/Pacific American women fight Suzie Wong, Dragon Lady images." April 25 1991. Columbia Daily Spectator vol. CXV no. 119.

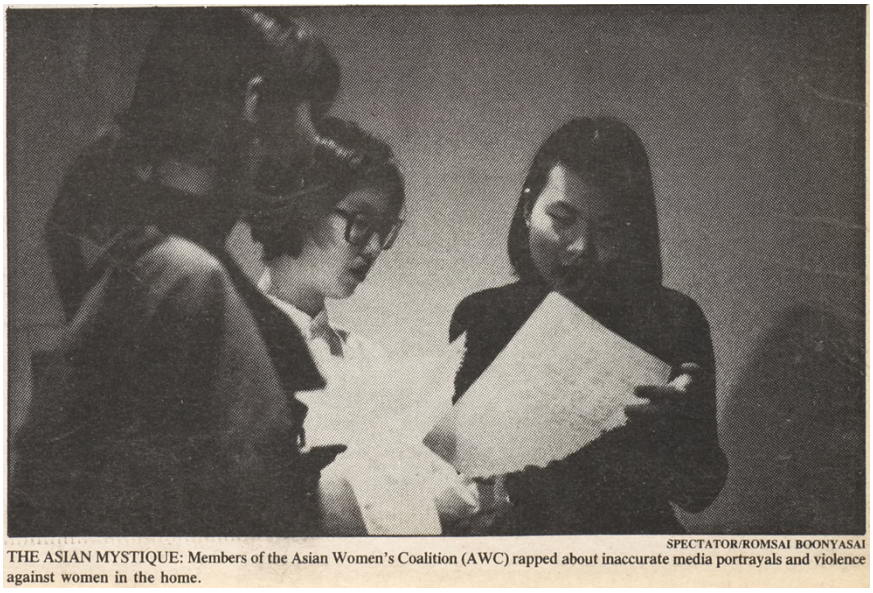
Solby: *[Laughs]*

Amy: *And then maybe there was just like two or three other guys. So it wasn't a whole drove of them. And honestly, in AWC, we were only like five women at the very most. It was Ellen [Chu], this other person, Dana Wu, Grace Chen, and myself, that's four of us. And then someone else would come in every now and then. But generally speaking, I feel like Asian women at the Barnard campus were not self-proclaimed feminists.*

Solby: *Mm.*

Amy: *Like they did not use the F word [feminist]. And so, no one wanted to really be a part of Asian Women's Coalition, which could be probably why our membership was so small. Yeah.*

Amy was a part of the Asian Women's Coalition (AWC) at Barnard, in addition to being president of the Student Activities Council and part of the United Minorities Board. Her recollections give body to the record, the very social and human interactions that went into the forum, who showed up to the discussion and what her impressions were. In the simplest sense, Amy's remembering offers insight into the intentions and intended audience of this event, something not entirely captured in the archived clipping. Her memories of seeing Asian men, graduate students attending and thinking *What the fuck are you doing here?* speaks to the unexpected audience and expected audience of Asian women students for this event. Engaging Amy's oral history and the archived record together contextualizes her surprise at the turnout of Asian men who attended the session, given that it was organized as a forum discussing racial and sexualized stereotypes focused towards Asian women. Amy's candid, buoyant voice as a narrator recalling her memories adds narrative dimension and knowledge to the archival record.



SPECTATOR/ROMSAI BOONYASAI

THE ASIAN MYSTIQUE: Members of the Asian Women's Coalition (AWC) rapped about inaccurate media portrayals and violence against women in the home.

Figure 20. Photo taken by Romsai Boonyasai of the AWC's rap session, in "Asian women discuss media stereotypes" by Arlene Waldman. February 2 1990. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXIV No. 69.

Scholar Tamara K. Hareven observes oral history as "a means of retrieving or salvaging vanishing historical information and as a way to spark community identity."[70] Oral history also serves to stir stagnant historical information, the traces of Asian/American student organizing that sit unrecognized and in archival stillness in institutional collections. Because to not be spoken about is in its own way, a form of vanishment. Oral history moves historical, archived information and records to speak with and to the present lives and work of Asian/American students. Narrators like Amy lend their experiences to bring archived news clippings and photos back to life with memory. Her oral history re-invokes ephemera from the archives contextualizing the speak-out forum hosted by Amy and the Asian Women's Coalition with her perception as an organizer and student that Asian women students *did not use the F word [feminist], Asian women at the Barnard campus were not self-proclaimed feminists.* Amy's felt experiences mark an important context for this event and its archival presence, which was that spaces for Asian women feminists were more extraordinary than commonplace, and that the experience of feminist organizing for Asian Barnard students was that of a tight-knit circle rather than a large crowd.

Oral history work is a process of critical historical return, re-recognizing how archives of student newspapers, publications, and yearbooks offer a historical assemblage of past Asian/American student life, what they organized for and how they sought to make progressive changes for the benefit of their communities. Such interdisciplinary work invites critical, multidirectional perspectives of oral history and archival practices, not valuing or idolizing one over the other and appreciating the multiplicity of truths and perceptions oral history and archival work can reveal about in a single historical event.

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[70] Tamara K. Hareven, "The Search for Generational Memory: Tribal Rites in Industrial Society," *Daedalus* 107, no. 4 (1978), 137.

Oral history work is as much a critical thinking process as it is a collage of memory, narrative, and reflective processes.

Returning to the archives does not always mean uniformity with what is archived; the differences between archived reporting of the AWC's forum and Amy's experiences organizing the event reveal the gaps between how a single event can be remembered and how it is preserved in the archives. She notes that AWC was *only like five women at the very most*, yet Dana Wu is recorded in the *Spec* article (Figure 18) as stating that "more than 40 students belong to AWC."[71] This is also a matter of oral history interpretation; perhaps Amy was speaking to the number of students who organized AWC events and Dana was speaking to the overall number of students who attended AWC events. Perhaps they really were both speaking to the same detail and made different observations. I note different speculations to demonstrate that the value of critical oral history work with the archives is not to assess and decide a singular truth, but rather to understand how oral histories invite new interpretations of historical information, interesting and worthwhile tensions and similarities to explore. In assessing the transcription process, oral historian Raphael Samuel asserts that "research can never be a once-and-for-all affair, nor is there ever a single use to which evidence can be put. Historians in the future will bring fresh interests to bear upon the materials we collect; they will be asking different questions and seeking different answers."[72]

The *Spectator* archive and its digitized collection of Asian/American historical materials exist not only as static proof of existence for the student-run newspaper and the past lives of Asian/American students, but also as forms of the past for the present and future to witness, speak, and engage with. Oral histories of current and former Asian/American students begins new dialogues with these archival materials as records

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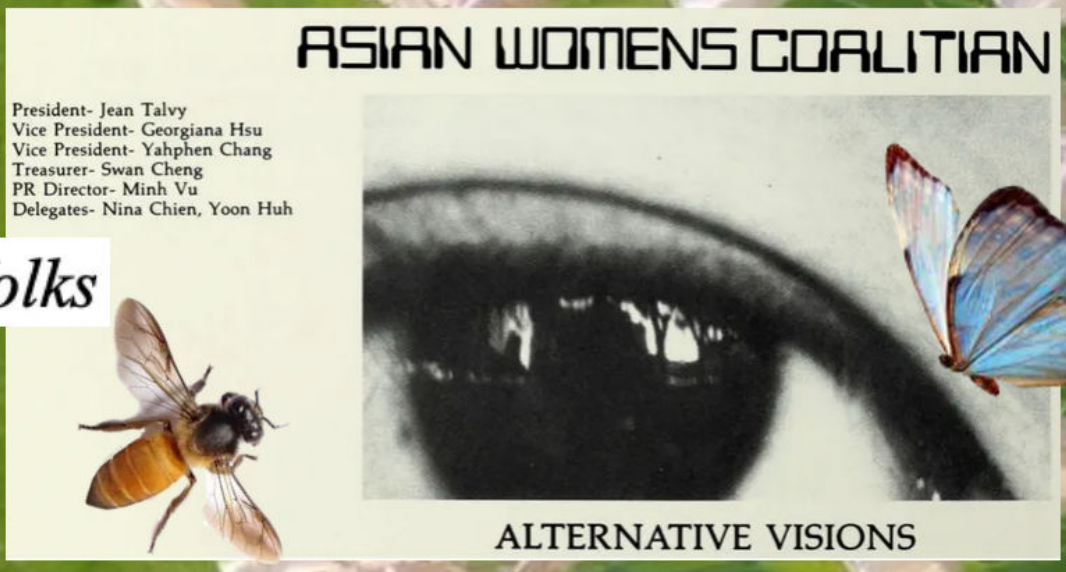
[71] Arlene Waldman, "Asian women discuss media stereotypes," *Columbia Daily Spectator* Vol. CXIV No. 69 (February 2 1990), 1 and 5.
[72] Raphael Samuel, "Perils of the Transcript," *Oral History* 1, no. 2 (1972), 22.

of their past selves, while the archival materials give historical body to current Asian/American student organizers, reminding them of their past demands, desires, ways of building community. At the same time, archived material activates the oral history process. After I referenced the *Spec* article to Amy, her memories of the AWC forum unfolded with flowing momentum. Amy sounded out her memories with delicate detail and an excited voice, and I heard her narrative recollections as if they were unfolding in front of us. Although she was a very open narrator throughout the interview, this moment of invoking the archival burst open a particularly lively and scenic stream of reflective memory led by Amy. I witnessed her witty inner voice, *I didn't swear because I was much more cheerful than I am now, I wish I had a boyfriend like Larry,* take on more presence in her recollections during this moment.

Returning to these ephemera is important because it signals a return to the roots of Asian American as a concept, movement, and history of Asian people in the United States. The existence of these publications and flyers, historical ephemera, shapes the movement of this oral history project. These students and their oral histories re-activate these clippings and poems and photos by speaking next to them, offering insight into what has changed and what has stayed the same for Asian/American students. Such oral histories also serve as connections between different and scattered publications, events, incidents. Engaging the archival record and oral histories together re-introduces historical narratives into the present and future scenes of Asian/American student organizing.



God, these folks

Amy: *We were only like five women at the very most.*
It was Ellen [Chu], this other person, Dana Wu, Grace Chen, and myself, that's four of us.
And then someone else would come in every now and then. But generally speaking,
I feel like Asian women at the Barnard campus were not self-proclaimed feminists.

n. 1. people. 2. women. 3. Asian women. 4. a coalition of Asian women. 5. the exploration of the dynamics of being a women with Asian heritages via academic, political, cultural, and social functions. 6. a group of highly motivated Asian women at Barnard College and Columbia University. 7. a coterie of Barnard College and Columbia University Asian women who put forth the magazine **DAAWN,** dialogue about Asian women's news.
adj. 1. energetic. 2. creative. 3. aware. 4. angry. 5. hopeful.
v. to be an Asian woman.

have my back.

Amy: *I joined Asian Women's*
That was like, the one place w
God, these folks have my back.
And these women were, hardcore. They were scary.
But, you know, [laughs] they were like, never smiling.
Super scary, right? But, they really were incredible women.
Yeah. Incredible women.

3.0 "Organizing Wherever Your Feet Land": Notes on the Many Articulations of Student Organizing

Dana Wu '91: *So there were people that were ready to, you know, [do the] take on the world kind of thing, [doing] protests and sit-ins and all that kind of stuff. That's not my personality. I'm more [focused on] consensus-building, where we can find and strengthen [connections between communities].*

> A lot of young people, they have these different passions around the environment and other things, and I say, wherever your feet land, you can organize. Wherever your feet land, there are other people with like minds. Come together as a group. Study together and analyze the situation and decide what needs to be done, wherever your feet land, and be that in the workplace, in your communities. - Pam Tau Lee

"Organizing wherever your feet land" was a key takeaway from Asian American environmental justice activist Pam Tau Lee's keynote address at the 2019 Contemporary Asian American Activism symposium at UC Santa Barbara.[73] Lee grew up in San Francisco's Chinatown and her organizing work in Asian American communities and on environmental justice was based on her childhood experiences of witnessing the environmental racism impacting Asian garment workers in her community.[74] She also organized with I Wor Kuen, a radical Marxist Asian American collective active in New York that emerged from the 1960s-era Asian American political movement.[75] "Organizing wherever your feet land" is a reflection of the knowledge and lessons learned from Lee's intersectional, grassroots work and an informative framework for

[73] Katherine H. Lee, "'Organizing Wherever Your Feet Land': Reconceptualizing Writing and Writing Instruction in the Legacy of Asian American Activism" in *Contemporary Asian American Activism: Building Movements for Liberation*, edited by Diane C. Fujino and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022), 201.
[74] Lee, "'Organizing Wherever Your Feet Land,' 202.
[75] Lee, "'Organizing Wherever Your Feet Land,' 201.

exploring the dynamic mosaic of Asian/American student organizing work at Barnard/Columbia.

Aurelia, the first current student narrator I spoke with and co-founder of Barnard's Asian Diasporic student group (BADdies), spoke at length about her experiences conceptualizing and organizing to create the BADdies during the fall 2022 semester. She recalled her motivations for starting the group after seeing an absence of space for Asian and Asian diasporic students at Barnard, the challenges of starting a student organization, the never-ending work behind establishing BADdie's presence in the community and gaining the status of an institution- recognized, and funded, club. Yet the organizing work Aurelia found most effective and fruitful in fostering a space for Asian diasporic community-building at Barnard was an event she organized within her role as co-chair of the Equity Committee for Barnard's Student Government Association (SGA) during the 2022-23 school year. Aurelia led the organizing of Barnard's 2023 Lunar New Year dinner, one of the first institution-supported celebrations of the Asian holiday on Barnard's campus.

Aurelia Tan '25: *I feel like if you want to talk about Asian people at Barnard, at least from my experiences on this campus, I think the hallmark has to be Lunar New Year. Last year, Lunar New Year [dinner] was something that I did on behalf of Student Government [Association] And it was actually not my idea, I'm gonna be real with you. It was Sam Rosen, [class of] 2025. I'm pretty sure it was her, because we had an application form for the Equity Committee and it was like, What events do you want to see? And one of their events was Lunar New Year. [I was] like Wow, that's a fantastic idea. So basically, I took her idea and I made it into what it is now. It had– okay I don't want to brag, but I'm doing it for the sake of the interview.*

Solby Lim: *Oh no please brag, please, [laugh]*

Aurelia: *[Laughs] I'm doing it for the sake of the interview. But [the Lunar New Year dinner] was one of, aside from the really big campus events like the Formal and Glass House Rocks and stuff like that, it was one of the biggest events on campus. It was over 200 people that showed up to our big dinner. And I had a lot of departments that had*

come and asked us What the heck, how did you get that [many] people to show up to your event?

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Aurelia: *It took like two months of planning. So we had a Chinese calligraphy workshop and we collaborated with the Design Center [for the workshop]. And the professor leading it [was the] Chinese professor [of a student on the Equity Committee]. And he, out of all the Chinese department professors, was the only one who knew how to do calligraphy. So Hai-Long Wang, he taught it, and then we had a, what did we do? Oh my god, I forgot, [laughs]*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Aurelia: *We definitely had a talk. Oh my god wait, I can just check my Instagram. Hold up, [laughs] How did I forget my own event? So embarrassing.*

Solby: *You said it was a dinner as well?*

Aurelia: *Yeah, the dinner was the biggest event. But there [were] a lot of things that went into planning it and I will, I will get into it. Alright. Oh yeah, moving festivities. So we had a big discussion about migration and migrating as Asians. And I really, I really wanted professor Dorothy Ko to do it because she's the only Asian professor. She ghosted all my emails, girl. So I was working with the DEI office and Jen Rosalez got me in touch with Nicholas Bartlett. He's the East Asian professor [at Barnard]. He's a white guy, which I was like, I was like, but he's actually really awesome. I heard very good things about [the discussion]. I couldn't attend it. But the thing is, we rented out the entire Barnard Hall auditorium. So I thought people would show up. Only five people showed up. Yeah.*

And it was a really interactive, picture-based thing that people told me [about]. They [said] it was a fantastic discussion. It's just a shame that no one got to see it. So that's something I want to work on next year. Then we had the wish wall which was actually the old [Vice President] of Equity, they told me [that] they had a wish wall [for Lunar New Year at their old school]. I was like, Oh my God, that's such a cute idea. So we had a moving wall where people could put their wishes for the new year and stuff like that. And it was just very cute, very low stakes. And it also helped to promote [the dinner] because you can see our [wall] moving all around campus.

Aurelia was not the only narrator to organize around food; Mariah Iris Ramo, a first-year involved with Liga Filipina, spoke about a dinner celebration at Barnard's

Hewitt dining hall that she was organizing at the time of our oral history for Filipino American History Month:

Mariah Iris Ramo '27: *Yeah, I really like being action-oriented because it just leads us one step closer to our goals. So what I mentioned earlier, this month is Filipino American History Month. And so I reached out to the dining hall, Hewitt dining hall and I asked them if we could celebrate Filipino American History Month. And fortunately, they got back to me and we're in the process of planning a dinner celebration at Hewitt. So our tentative date is [the] last week of October. So I'm pretty excited for that, sharing our culture and our history with other students. Yeah.*

Both Mariah and Aurelia organized their dinner events outside of the Asian-focused student groups they were out of. Although the focus of their events was on food, both narrators note the capaciousness of dinners and collective eating spaces as spaces to share *our culture and our history with other students*, as Mariah says. The dinner space, with its virtue of collectivity and shared experience, led to other modes of community-building; the Lunar New Year celebrations Aurelia organized included a calligraphy workshop, a discussion on migration, a wish wall, a collective zine reading.

Other narrators landed elsewhere. Alice Bai, internal vice president of Asian American Alliance (AAA) spoke about organizing teach-ins and informative events on campus and in Manhattan's Chinatown:

Alice Bai '25: *Last year we did a bunch of teach-ins. So we did a teach-in about, I think it was a history of Asian American politics and how Asian Americans communities started organizing. And [we] talked about some major figures in Asian American history [and] some recent history in Chinatown. And I guess like, a lot of our work, even if it's not [directly] in our events that we plan, we publicly show support for and co-sponsor a lot of things that are going on. With the CSER department for example, there was a commemoration for Private Danny Chen that happened down in Chinatown. So, we co-sponsored that and then we sent representatives to go and then we publicized that on all of our channels and stuff like that.*

Danny Chen was a Chinese American army private from New York, specifically Manhattan's Chinatown, who died by suicide in 2011 after being subjected to brutal

hazing and racist violence by his military peers.[76] His death became a highly publicized matter, demonstrating the internal forms of violence soldiers experience, as well as the unhampered violence of racism and anti-Asian sentiment present in the military. Chen's loved ones, community organizers and advocates have organized several annual vigils and public rememberings of his life and legacy; this year, the remembering took the form of a commemoration where 12 speakers read paragraphs about Chen, in service to the 12th anniversary of his death. AAA co-sponsored this event and helped to share information about the commemoration around the Barnard/Columbia campus. Alice considers such events to be part of the political aspects of AAA, actions organized to cultivate learning and discussion about Asian/American history and activism. Similarly, Duan spoke about organizing with educational and activist objectives, in particular on a teach-in about the history of student activism and the Center for Study of Ethnicity and Race (CSER), aligned with past and current CSER departmentalization efforts from students, faculty, and alumni. This event was co-hosted by CSER's Student Advisory Board and AZINE, an "Asian/American, queer, women-centered arts and zine collective" founded by Duan, in March 2023. Duan considered the CSER teach-in as a significant event for the arts and zine collective, in a similar way that Aurelia described the Lunar New Year dinner.

Solby Lim: *I wanted to ask about the events that you and AZINE [organized]?*

Duan '23: *Mhm. So last year, we did these bi-weekly workshops that turned into weekly [workshops] towards the end of the year. And we made an end-of-semester zine, kind of like a yearbook. And I think we all learned a lot through that process. But [for] the workshops, AZINE has a couple different focuses. One of them is internal, [one is] personal, and [one is] education. And learning about Asian America, your own personal histories, and how to be creative.*

•

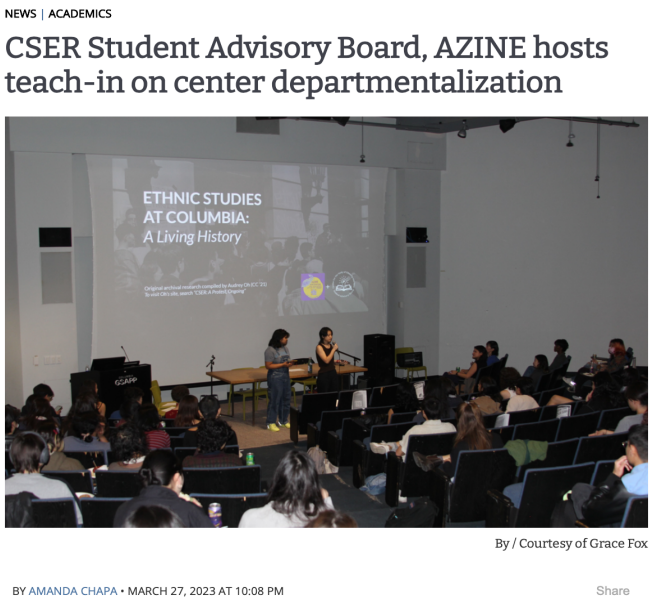
Duan: *But the major public-facing event that we had [was the teach-in]. The teach-in was in collaboration with the CSER Student Advisory Board. And Nami actually had the idea originally. [The teach-in] was something that we always wanted to do, but we*

[76] Ashley Wong and Mihir Zaveri, "Remembering Pvt. Danny Chen, at a Precarious Moment for Chinatown," *New York Times*, October 4 2021.

thought it would only be for AZINE. And then we were like, we can actually make this a public-facing event and then help CSER out because if we're gonna host a teach-in about the history of CSER and student activism, this would actually help with their departmentalization [efforts].

Solby: *Right, yeah.*

Duan: *And then the CSER Student Advisory Board hopped onto that a little, [laughs]. It was me, Nami, and then Junie from the CSER SAB, we're organizing it primarily. And the Spec article reporting is not accurate [because they] only interviewed the people who were part of the CSER SAB and not AZINE.*



NEWS | ACADEMICS

CSER Student Advisory Board, AZINE hosts teach-in on center departmentalization

By / Courtesy of Grace Fox

BY AMANDA CHAPA • MARCH 27, 2023 AT 10:08 PM Share

Figure 21. Photo taken by Grace Fox of AZINE-CSER SAB's teach-in, from "CSER Student Advisory Board, AZINE hosts teach-in on center departmentalization" by Amanda Chapa. March 27 2023, Columbia Daily Spectator.

So we weren't able to talk about [how], actually this was Nami's idea and we pulled together most of the things– it was mostly the Barnard students doing the things. Yeah no hate, but it was like, AZINE primarily organized and Junie. And then at the end we were just giving tasks out to other people.

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So the teach-in was such a hefty process, [laughs] Like contacting numerous alumni who were part of the [1996] hunger strikes, part of the original protests and asking them if they can speak. And we got a really good lineup of like, three people [laughs]. So Sung E Bai, amazing. My brain is blinking, [laughs] And then two other alumni. I'm so sorry, I mean no disrespect but I'm [not remembering].

> The teach-in was followed by a panel of three academics: Dr. Eugenia Zuroski, CC '98, associate professor of English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada; Liz Kaufman, BC '99; and Sung E Bai, founder of the Asian American Graduate Association and Chief Operating Officer at Literacy Partners. All panelists took part in the 1996 hunger strikes for the creation of an ethnic studies department. The panel was moderated by Christina Duan, BC '23, a lead organizer of AZINE, and CSER student advisory board member Karime Sanchez, CC '23.

Figure 22. Quote naming the three alumni speakers from "CSER Student Advisory Board, AZINE hosts teach-in on center departmentalization" by Amanda Chapa. March 27 2023. Columbia Daily Spectator.

Solby: *But I mean you got [the alumni to attend], they spoke at your event.*

Duan: *Yeah, they were there. They were amazing. And my one regret is, I had a video camera and I handed it to my friend to play [record], but the mic was out of battery.*

Solby: *Oh no!*

Duan: *So we didn't pick up any sound.*

Solby: *Oh my gosh.*

Duan: *And in the future, [laughs] I think that we don't think about preserving things so that they're accessible in the future. And there's so much good knowledge that came out of that talk and so much effort, and it would have been great if we were able to get that sound. And yeah, we learned so much about student organizing. A lot of it was meant for organizing in general, like how do you continue momentum? How do you, it's like politics, how do you interact with administration? How do you negotiate for what you want? And how do you even bring people in so that they're interested, so that you mentor them and then teach them things? And then they go to learn in their own right. And all that was part of the protest. All that was really relevant to all the student activists, activism things going on at that time, like [the] Red Balloon [protests].*[77]

How do we even negotiate with this administration over our own education, something that actually stands for so much within this university? Columbia is an Ivy League, quote unquote, has a reputation [of being] very prestigious, [having] lots of money, in the city

[77] Red Balloon Early Childhood Learning Center is a beloved preschool in West Harlem facing eviction by Columbia after more than 50 years in the neighborhood. Red Balloon was affiliated with Columbia, serving as an early learning center and housed in a Columbia-owned space. The crisis reignited conversations about the university's overwhelming scale of real estate in Manhattan and the gentrification struggles faced by local spaces like Red Balloon; Stephon Johnson, "Columbia Gives 50-Year-Old Preschool the Boot," *The City*, October 3 2022.

of New York City. In the city of New York. So things that we do here do have rippling effects. Yeah. And it's so important for people, or the students on this campus, to keep learning the histories that came before them, and know that they existed in context, and also know how to organize and build community and negotiate with the admins.

For Duan, the teach-in created an expansive space to reconnect with Asian/American activist history and forge connections with present grassroots struggles facing the student and local community at Barnard/Columbia. The teach-in became a space of intergenerational exchange, where alums shared their wisdom and students learned and reflected on the roots of student organizing for Ethnic Studies at Columbia, which is what made the visual no-audio recording especially precious. These narrators speak life into the multiple dimensions and manifestations of student organizing, the teach-ins and dinners and forums, the objectives of which are shaped by students' desires and backgrounds. For some, organizing is a process of critical learning and knowledge-building. For others, organizing is a way to form community ties and create a space to exist together and bond over shared experiences. Pam Tau Lee's principle of "organizing where your feet land" witnesses all of these practices as a vibrant mosaic of student advocacy rooted in individual and collective strengths, desires, and dreams. Organizing comes from our shared humanity.

*I encourage you to listen to A Grain of Sand's "Imperialism is Another Word for Hunger" before moving on: http://tinyurl.com/whereourfeetland

3.01 Memo on Listening as Collaging

> When the narrators speak, we can learn to listen *in and to* multiple dimensions—multiple registers, if you will. I argue that listening—critically consuming information—can be a complex and textured experience, in which there are many facets to feel out, many threads to pull. For example, the words that the narrators are speaking are just one thread in the experience of listening. The mental image of that future that they conjure in you is another thread. Your very breath is another. The way your body reacts to the narrators' worlds and words, another. The first thought you have upon hearing their voice, another. – Taylor Thompson [78]

In her OHMA thesis "Tell Me About That World: Speculative Archives and Black Feminist Listening Practices," Black feminist oral historian Taylor Thompson asks us to take listening seriously as a complex, embodied process of being present, attentive, and caring with her narrators. She illuminates the different dimensions of this embodied listening, this act of witnessing, to oral history that involves knowledges of the body. I want to expand upon Thompson's beautifully written exposition of listening "*in and to* multiple dimensions" of narrators, in particular the texture of listening, critically consuming information, and the many threads to pull on in oral history work. Their oral histories carry multiple textures of the past and present; narrators name Asian/American history and carry it in their recollections and thus, into this oral history project. Alice's short remark about teach-ins brought into *Tidal Notes* the life and legacy of Danny Chen, the structural anti-Asian violence built into the US nation-state, and the connections between Barnard/Columbia and local New York organizing. Duan's retelling of the CSER teach-in she led brought in the 1996 hunger strike for Ethnic Studies at Columbia, the issue of remembering and preserving student organizing (the core issue of this project), Columbia's eviction of Harlem's Red Balloon preschool and organizing efforts to keep Red Balloon in the community, the larger issues of Columbia and its gentrification of Harlem neighborhoods. Listening *in and to* multiple dimensions and textures. In the process of building a critical oral history of Asian/American student organizing, the narrators gathered an archive of Asian/American history and discourse. Narrators knit the threads between historical events and contemporary activist struggles with their memories and organizing. Oral history becomes a process of collaging Asian/American pasts and presents.

[78] Taylor Thompson, "Tell Me About That World: Speculative Archives and Black Feminist Listening Practices," Master's thesis (Columbia University, 2022).

3.1 Scenes on Laboring for Student Organizing

Amy: *But also, when I was flyering for that event, I had to go– I had a boyfriend at the time. His name was Jiawei, and he had a roommate named Wes Skinner, who was a blond guy from Kansas, really smart and dropped out at Columbia. He was a philosophy major, but he had kind of a, he had an Asian fetish, right?*

Solby: *Oh.*

Amy: *So we're running around putting up these flyers that say Asian men, the men that bind our feet, right [laughs] He's a white guy. I'm an Asian woman. And he said [that] it felt so uncomfortable for him [to be] running around, putting up these posters.*

Solby: *Oh really, [laughs]*

Amy: *Yeah. But he obviously didn't come to the [event]. There were just, there were a ton of Asian guy grad students there. It was called a rap session, I think, r-a-p, to chat, I think. That's what we called it or something. Asian Women's rap is what we call it. I think, I can't remember exactly. Anyway. Yeah. So that was an intense session.*

Solby Lim: *Can you talk about the first two events [you organized]?*

Len de la Cruz '25: *Oh, yeah. So the first event was literally, so chill. And we, [laughs] I think part of the reason why this second event wasn't as successful, was because we didn't have fliers out for it. But like, my friend and I went literally everywhere on campus, on Barnard, on Columbia, in the freshman dorms. It was kind of like, I was like, Are people gonna clock us? Because we're going down every floor.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Len: *We looked so suspicious. [Laughs] But I was like, we're doing this, we're putting it in people's faces. And yeah you know, a lot of people came. It was maybe 20 people, at least. And that was a lot, considering we had actually like, no followers [laughs]*

Solby: *Oh, on Instagram?*

Len: *Yeah. Because we're starting from scratch. And nobody uses Facebook. And there was an Instagram that had like 30 followers [but] we couldn't get the login information. I was like, just screw it, we're making a new one. Because 30 is basically zero.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Len: *And yeah, we still don't have that many, we've got 60 though, so we've doubled it.*

Solby: *Oh, okay,*

Len: *Net growth, a hundred percent growth [laughs]*

Solby: *Yes, yes, love that.*

Len: *Yeah. That's what I have to tell myself. But no, [the event] was just very much so introductions, trying to get to know people and get to know what they're interested in. And it seems like people are more interested in a social group. And like, that's what they're looking for, so that's what we're going to be for now.*

Aurelia Tan '25: *I think what made Lunar New Year dinner so successful was because of how hard I went on promotions. Like, I, I had posters everywhere on campus, I went to every single floor. I put effort into [postering], I made sure everything looked good. Everything was on theme. And I made separate posters for each individual event [of the dinner]. So I would have a little diorama up, of like, four different posters promoting all the same event. [Laughs]*

Solby Lim: *Yeah.*

Aurelia: *And I had to get like, I had to get the big posters. I printed out the, I don't remember, but I got the bigger posters. So I [could] plaster them where people would see them. And on top of that, I was lucky because, well, half lucky half not, that it was the week after shopping period. Because [students had] just came back [to campus], so there's nothing on the walls. So the only thing you'd see is Lunar New Year [posters]. Because I came during winter break just to go put them up, so it's the first thing you see. So I'm a little bit worried coming in this year because February, there's gonna be a lot [of posters]. You can see all [the] posters [already up now] and it's not even [been] a month of school yet. So I hope that things will work out. I hope my poster's big, and blegh, you know. So, figuring it out.*

Solby: *I mean, postering, that's a whole job.*

Aurelia: *Dude, postering's insane. But I'm just gonna go insane, posting it on every single social known to man, bruh. Like, we got it [at] the Design Center. We have it on every single Instagram [account we have]. We had it on mine, bro, my friends from other schools, they were like, You need to stop posting about it.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Aurelia: *Like [laughs], shut up [laughs]. But I was going so hard for it. It paid off, but still. Yeah, so I'm just excited to see how it goes.*

3.1 Notes on Laboring for Student Organizing

Solby Lim: *I mean, that's a whole job.*

Looking back at the transcripts, I realized I repeated this to five different narrators, each in response to a narrator describing how they labored to promote events, gather petition signatures, and organize mailing lists. Listening back was one thing; in reading the transcripts, I saw how these moments indicated where narrators offered glimpses into the quotidian labor required of student organizers, how seemingly minute tasks were crucial to the sustenance and success of student organizations and the work they do. I was struck by the parallels between Amy, Len, and Aurelia, and how they spoke to the timelessness of flyering as student labor. These narrators shared their experiences unprompted, as I asked them about events they had put on. The jump to discussing the labor that went behind organizing public events reveals how events, and how successful or unsuccessful they are, are remembered through the forms of labor that narrators took on. Narrators' recollections on the work they had to do before and leading up to events understands organizing as a continuous process rather than merely a series of events that students create.

I wondered why I repeated the sentence above, almost verbatim to multiple narrators. Hearing them made me consider how such tasks go unnoticed and unappreciated, as well as un-marked as actual labor. In addition to the labor of simply being a student, these narrators took on additional responsibility and work to organize for their community. Listening to lived experiences highlights the forms and details of organizing labor, what it takes and demands of students, as they seek to build community and maintain their organizations. In turn, these oral histories reveal the value of flyers to

student organizers, underscoring the archival necessity of documenting and exploring such materials. Flyers and posts are self-produced records of student organizers' hard work and reminders of what kinds of issues, events, and spaces Asian/American students were passionate about during their time on campus.

3.2 Scenes on Organizing with/against Bureaucracy

Solby Lim: *Someone else has mentioned that time was a huge challenge for them, and actually getting things processed [by admin].*

Alice Bai: *Yeah, timing is an issue. I mean, I can speak from my personal experience. So this was just a general body social [event]; we wanted to do a picnic. But the picnic was happening two days after that one Friday where it rained, and flooded all of New York.*

And so last minute, we had to get things sorted out and we had to change locations. Originally we wanted to do Butler Lawn. But then [the] Facilities [department] said, We're not comfortable with you guys hosting on Butler Lawn because it's going to be soggy. And we wanted an electrical drop to plug in a speaker. So they're like, We're not going to do that because it's going to be super wet after monumental flooding, after all this climate change-related massive flooding and rain.

Solby: *[Laughs] Right, right.*

Alice: *And I was trying to correspond with the people at EMS which is the event management service, which allows you to book space, to get our location changed and then get Facilities on board with moving to that location as well. And it was a Friday, nobody was responding to me. Obviously everybody's gonna leave the office at like 5pm. And I was texting my groups' advisor on Google Hangouts. I was like, Hello, have we gotten in contact with EMS? Have we gotten in contact with Facilities? Because it's a weekend event. So obviously, everybody's gonna be out of office all weekend and if you don't get it sorted by Friday 5pm, then you're fucked, like nothing is gonna happen. And I had to physically go to the EMS office on [the] seventh floor of Lerner [Hall] in person while my laundry was running. I was just trying to do my laundry and I ran over in my slippers and my pajamas at like, 4:59pm on Friday.*

And I went and the receptionist had already left. I was like, begging and [asking] who was the Emily that I was emailing with, [asking them] Did you guys see my email? We need to change our location. And then they're like, Okay we'll change your location, fine, because it's the end of the week. And then they called Facilities on the phone for me and [everything got resolved]. But I'm like, Why do I need to come here in-person at 5pm on a Friday and basically beg on my knees for you to push things through for my event? It's just a location change. Yeah, so obviously, that's also the downside of bureaucracy. I know it's good to plan ahead of time. But sometimes there are unforeseen circumstances, you know, and in light of these unforeseen circumstances, they're just not very cooperative when it comes to updating things, making changes last minute, and things like that.

Kathleen Hoang '25: *I feel like we're constantly in crisis mode now. Genuinely, we're meeting once a week, which I think is a little excessive, but it's necessary, because we don't have adequate funding at all for an entire year: one hundred and sixty dollars. We have like fifty bucks left, I think, for the whole year. So we're in constant crisis mode having to fundraise or think of really cheap or free things to do together, but still be active so that no one can accuse us of being inactive again.*

William Diep '25: *Right on.*

Solby Lim: *Mm. Yeah that reminds me of something that a couple other folks talked about in terms of being an institutionally recognized club and [navigating] the whole bureaucracy. Can you talk a bit about [what] that process [is like]? Is it challenging for you*

Kathleen: *I think that, no, go ahead.*

William; *No no no, you go.*

Kathleen: *I think the funding thing was a mistake on our part. And it's very unfortunate that it happened. But I wish that there was more institutional support in that way. Because it was a singular mistake that screwed us over a whole year. Like, we just misread one document and now we have one hundred and sixty bucks for a whole year. And there's nothing we can do about it. We have appealed, we have talked to so many different people, advisors, rep[resentatives] blah, blah, trying to secure funding from*

anyone, but nothing. And we're just given so little support in that way. Even though there's so much resources and funding, we are unable to– I feel like the door is locked for us. It's really, really unfortunate. And this year, it's just that funding [and] the bureaucracy, it's just so slow. We don't have time to deal with it. And so we've been doing [fundraising events] on our own that aren't prohibited. But we just have to. Like, I'm not going to let the club suffer because of one mistake.

William: *Mm.*

Kathleen: *And I'm not going to deal with the bureaucratic BS to get it done. You know what I mean? Like I don't care that we have to work outside of the walls of the institution. I think it's necessary. I don't want to let the club die.*

William: *I agree. If we're gonna have to do illegal things, we will do illegal things to keep the club alive.*

Kathleen: *Deadass.*

William: *I have a lot of feelings around institutions and Columbia as an institution, but the bureaucracy honestly has been kind of a hellhole just because I feel like they constantly say, You got to go to this meeting, you got to fill out this paperwork, you got to fill out this form. But like, when we ask for our funding, how come you don't help us out? Like, how can we fulfill all these things without you fulfilling our existence? And it's just annoying because that one mistake about funding screwed us over. I'm not going to forgive– it probably was an innocent mistake, [but] I'm not going to stop making fun of this person who literally made us lose thousands of dollars of funding. Because was it fair that we can only run on one hundred and sixty dollars for an entire year? And also like, how do you expect us to do big stuff and organize all these events with so little money? How come y'all aren't supporting us? So I feel like in terms of bureaucracy, I think navigating it has been a brutal process simply because they don't they aren't supporting us, and simply because they keep asking so much from us without giving us anything back.*

3.2 Notes on Organizing with/against the Bureaucracy

Recollections of labor connected other narrators. Alice Bai, internal vice president of Asian American Alliance (AAA), spoke of a time when she had to go directly to an administrative office and plead with them to approve a location change for a community picnic AAA was organizing. She wonders, *why do I need to come here in-person at 5pm on a Friday and basically beg on my knees for you to push things through for my event? It's just a location change.* Alice notes that *that's also the downside of bureaucracy. I know it's good to plan ahead of time. But sometimes there are unforeseen circumstances, you know, and in light of these unforeseen circumstances, they're just not very cooperative when it comes to updating things, making changes last minute.* These interactions with bureaucracy, at best a nuisance and at worst place limitations on what and how students organize.

Kathleen Hoang and William Diep, leaders of Vietnamese Students Association (VSA) related to Alice's encounters with Columbia bureaucracy. They retold a particularly frustrating circumstance where a filing error caused VSA to only receive $160 in funding for the 2023-24 school year and their efforts to appeal the error fell short, with no administrative officials willing to grant more funding. William notes that dealing with the bureaucracy *has been a brutal process simply because they don't they aren't supporting us, and simply because they keep asking so much from us without giving us anything back.* These narrators highlight how some of the most significant difficulties student organizers face end up coming from the very institution that is supposed to support students and their organizations. The reality of the sheer wealth of institutions like Columbia contrasted with the hoops the bureaucracy makes student groups go through to secure funding makes engaging with the administration that much more frustrating. Kathleen makes this point when she reflects that *even though there's so much resources and funding, we are unable to– I feel like the door is locked for us.* Her

observations illustrate how struggles over funding for student groups is not the result of a lack of resources, but a manufactured struggle of the stringent and tedious bureaucratic policies student groups must fulfill to be institutionally recognized and receive support from Columbia.

Solby Lim: *That just seems so [annoying], having to make a purchase request every time you need to get something [for a club].*

Alice Bai '26: *Even if we need to spend fifty dollars to go to H-mart to get some snacks for a meeting, we have to put in a purchase request.*

Solby: *That seems just like a lot of unnecessary, [laughs]*

Alice: *Columbia is nothing if not bureaucratic. Yeah. Most of our issues arise from bureaucracy. Yeah. I feel like the number one opp[osition] to student advocacy on campus is Columbia bureaucracy.*

Solby: *Mm.*

Alice: *Obviously, you could probably make an argument about how because they have control over all of [our] funds, they could very easily just shoot down things that they don't like on campus. Personally, I haven't had that experience. But I'm like, why do you need such a pervasive bureaucracy if not to control every aspect of student activity?*

Alice makes clear the *pervasive bureaucracy* requires student organizers to submit requests for the most minute tasks; in order to get snacks from a local grocery store, groups like AAA must submit a purchase request every time. Time is a challenge that quickly makes itself known to students involved in organizing work on campus, and the tedious elements of the bureaucratic process often add to students' labor. These narrators bring awareness to their reality of organizing to build community while also negotiating and fighting against the bureaucratic control of the university: the reality of organizing as Barnard/Columbia students while struggling against Barnard and Columbia as institutions.

3.3 Notes on Organizing for Institutional Change

Dana Wu '91: *But what I did do [as an] undergraduate [student] at Columbia was, I was part of the undergraduate recruitment committee. What we did was we got to look at the "slush pile", essentially, of applicants: people that would have gotten overlooked [otherwise]. And we got to advocate for them, you know. And the admissions process was not as crazy as it was, as it is now where you have like a 6% acceptance rate at Columbia, [laughs]. It was before the Common App [when] everything was handwritten. And people were still sending, you know, boxes of cookies to the admissions office in hopes to sweeten the pot.*

We need[ed] to make sure that some people who, again for all these bias reasons, don't get to us, don't get to the top of the pile [of applications were given a chance]. So let's give them a chance. And I was part of that committee. And so I think that was part of where I started to see where inequities [exist] and how we can institutionally respond, right? Like, this isn't fair. So there was that side of where I was getting involved.

Dana Wu, who was also involved in Asian Women's Coalition with Amy Sueyoshi and president of the Asian Students Union, reminds us of the students who organize directly with Columbia's bureaucracy. She spoke about how organizing with an undergraduate recruitment committee, which focused on making the college admissions process more equitable and advocating for marginalized applicants facing bias, allowed her to understand how institutional change could address forms of social inequity. Compared to narrators like Alice Bai who organize within the student community through dinners and teach-ins, Dana and a few other narrators in this project hold a different perspective on the value of working with institutional forces. Julie Wu, Christina Park, and Aurelia Tan lead the student committee to establish an Asian Diasporic Studies program at Barnard. The focus of this committee is to address the structural gap of having no distinct Asian American or diasporic program for students to major or minor in at Barnard, how Barnard can *institutionally respond* to this academic inequity, as Dana would say. I was curious about what narrators found meaningful about organizing for institutional change and if their insights intersected with or diverged from the insights of students organizing in clubs found meaningful about their work. How do

narrators think about the significance of having an Asian Diasporic Studies program at Barnard? Is it about community building, educating, bringing awareness to an issue?

Solby Lim: *I had one question that I really wanted to ask everyone who I talked to, in terms of, what do you hope for the work that you're doing on campus? What do you hope it to look like and come into fruition [as]? What do you think it'll provide or support current or future students to provide on campus?*

Christina Park '26: *Mm. I think that's just really, like, essential for students to know that parts of your identity and your background are not things that you should be ashamed of, and are things that are recognized on campus. I think, just the fact that there's just so many Asian students, but there's no concentration or, I mean, there's East Asian studies, sure, fine, but still I feel like there's a very different, like, there's a difference in feeling like your experiences are validated and recognized by academia. Again like I said, I know my struggles, I know my experiences, but what literature, what other things are there to support and to share with others who might not have experienced that? To educate and share that experience with people, even if I'm not the one sharing it myself, because I mean, these classes aren't just for Asian students.*

Solby: *Mm, right.*

Christina: *There are other people that we hope to share this curriculum, this concentration, with. And I think that moving forward, in the future, I just hope that– because again, if the school doesn't even recognize that, I feel like that's already sending a message to, I mean, a lot of people might not notice but, this just sends a message to Asian students. It's not invalidating per se, but [it's that] the school doesn't even recognize that part of your identity. And there are other concentrations that recognize other identities, and I just think that it's important to have this [program] to show students [that] your school does care. And there are places for you to explore different parts of your identity if you're not as connected to your identity. And I think that that's kind of the overall goal. I hope that that's our lasting impact.*

For Christina, organizing for an Asian Diasporic Studies program is rooted in a vision and desire for Barnard as an institution to recognize invisibilized Asian American students and their experiences, histories, and identities. Recognition holds multiple meanings here: validation of one's background and place in the Barnard community, acknowledgment of the particular diasporic position and history of Asian/Americans students, and understanding of Asian American students and their lived experiences. Christina speaks to the presence of programs like Asian American studies, Black or

Africana studies, Ethnic Studies, and how these academic spaces create ways of knowing, recognition, and validation for students who are part of those diasporic communities or hold diasporic identities. She finds that the value in organizing for an Asian Diasporic Studies program is for Asian/American students to feel *like your experiences are validated and recognized by, in terms of academia.* Christina also makes an interesting connection between recognition, from academia and the larger institution, and disrupting notions of shame amongst Asian American students. Christina finds it *essential for students to know that, parts of your identity and your background are not things that you should be ashamed of, and are things that are recognized on campus.* Julie finds similar importance in creating space for Asian/American students and a recognition of their presence.

Solby Lim: *What do you hope for this Asian Diasporic Studies [program] to be for Barnard's community? And what visions do you have for this [program], this space?*

Julie Wu '25: *Yeah. Well, I think one of the reasons I was frustrated in the beginning was that one, my plans for having a[n Asian American Studies] major were, [laughs] just kind of knocked off the table.*

Solby: *[Laughs] Right.*

Julie: *But two, I come from a family who all went to women's colleges, like the Seven Sisters schools, and almost half or more of the Seven Sisters [have] Asian American Studies programs. And I think that it's ludicrous that Barnard, which is considered the most selective, most prestigious, and also the only women's college that's still connected to their brother school, you know, whatever you want to call it, that they didn't have a program. And so I guess the impact that I'd like for this program to have is, on a large scale, to be a forefront leader in Asian American Studies both as an institution and also for students in general. And I would love to see the program ideally not just be run by faculty, I would like it to be something that students own. I think that the reason why we get stuck in these situations and why students feel frustrated with academia is because they're not able to have any sort of power and choice in what they're studying. And so in the long run, it would be quite amazing if students were able to form and shape the program to their liking even if it's already established, always making sure that it's constantly evolving and changing according to what student needs are.*

Although they compose a minority of the Asian/American student organizers interviewed, these narrators offer insight into working with administrative forces to create institutional change, their reasons, desires, and visions for their community, present and future. Julie, Christina, and Aurelia give voice to another dimension to Asian/American student organizing that exists outside of exclusively student spaces, speaking into existence a multifaceted image of Asian/American student organizing at Barnard/Columbia. Where some organizers understand the institution as a hindrance and a controlling bureaucracy, other students view working within the institution as possibilities for new modes of Asian/American recognition and space. By exploring different organizing perspectives towards working within institutional boundaries of Barnard/Columbia, these narrators and their oral histories reveal how overlapping objectives for community recognition, validation, and space manifest in different forms of Asian/American student organizing, or *organizing where your feet land*.[79] Asian/American student organizing is not uniform; narrators simultaneously engage in multiple fronts that intersect towards goals of creating, sustaining, and affirming Asian/American communities on Barnard and Columbia's campus.

[79] Lee, "'Organizing Wherever Your Feet Land,' 202

3.4 Scenes on Organizing as Asian/American Renaissance

Len de la Cruz '25: *So I first heard about Q&A [Columbia Queer and Asian club] actually as a freshman. I went to some events, and they had at that time, they had a buddy program. And I got matched with someone who was on the board. He still goes here so I will not be naming names. But he was, he basically dropped me and the club so like, he's still around, I see him. But he is no longer my friend. So it kind of sucked. And so that was kind of like my first [laughs] introduction.*

Solby: *Oh, okay. [Laughs]*

Len: *Terrible introduction.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Len: *And so I didn't really participate last year. And because of this really strange, strange relationship. And so only reason I actually ended up getting involved with Q&A this year is because my brother. He's one year younger than me, and he goes to Columbia.*

Solby: *Oh.*

Len: *Yeah. And he and his friend, who's also my friend from our high school, [laughs]. The current Q&A board is very like, nepo [nepotistic]*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Len: *It's the three of us plus one other person. You need four people [to form a club], but I was like, Oh my gosh, we're all from [the same place]. And back home, I was leadership of our high school's queer club and he was leadership of our high school's East Asian club. It's like, Okay, this is just messy, we're just bringing the band back together.*

Solby: *[Laughs] Yeah, you're very close, the three of you.*

Len: *'Cause Vanessa, our advisor was like, The three of you went to the same high school. It's part two, of the same shit. But last year apparently, there were a few events. But it was only maybe once or twice in the beginning and then [it] kind of dropped off.*

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And so we're like, Okay, we should have this space available. So we're rebooting it. And Vanessa, [who's also the] advisor for all the queer clubs at Columbia, was saying that she feels like the space is incredibly necessary. And she was really worried about it

because it was dying. And honestly, it's not very big. But we do have a few people who will come to every meeting, especially grad students.

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I really just want Q&A to be an established space. You know, [an] established community. I want to see familiar faces like Library.[80] *I want to see more people that come every time besides my friends. Like I've got a friend that will always come but it's also because we're good friends. [Laughs] And I'm like, if you don't come, I'm gonna cry. [Laughs]*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Len: *But it's like, you know, I want to make connections through space. Not have my prior connections come into the space. Obviously, I love that, I want my friends to come because I know that they'll also benefit from this space. But at the same time, I don't know, I want this to be a way for people to form community through shared experiences. And I hope that the people after me make the space bigger and continue with that, and maybe have hard conversations that I'm not able to facilitate that we should have about Columbia, about the world, etc. So yeah, I don't know. I think that even if there are dips– this is not going to be the only dip in Q&A's history. Like it's going to happen again. But I hope that it will always come back. And I hope that the dip doesn't go longer than a year, ever. [Laughs] I can only pray. Yeah.*

Solby Lim: *I think one question that I've been asking everyone who I talked to is– this is a very general and broad question. But thinking about [Vietnamese Students Association] and how you are sort of bringing it out of a previously inactive period. What are your hopes for VSA in the near future? And for the students who might come after you and yeah, what are you thinking about in terms of like, maybe it's a specific event or a broader goal for VSA?*

Kathleen Hoang '25: *I just want people to [think], Oh, VSA. Yeah. Yeah, VSA? Exactly like, Oh, I love VSA. I want them to come to the party tonight and be like, VSA is so fun. I really hope that tonight's party brings people into VSA [and encourages them] to come to events. I don't know, I just, I just want people to feel like they have a, it's not a physical home, but a home on campus. You know what I mean? That they can come and just be their full Viet self on campus, you know. That's all I've ever wanted. I don't even need us to advocate for [a] Vietnamese studies [program]. I don't even need us to do all that for right now. My goals are so small because the bar is so low right now. You know, we're just trying to survive and I just want us to be a cute space that people can feel safe in.*

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[80] Library is the chosen name of a graduate student who regularly attends Q&A meetings that Len spoke about earlier in the oral history.

William Diep '26: *I completely agree. Like before organizing, before advocating for this and that, we just need to be a space first. And we just need to be an organization together first. And I hope I completely agree with you, Kathleen. I feel like VSA, one of my biggest hopes is that yes, I want it to be [a] community where we want to go to VSA, where it's not like we have to go to the VSA but [that] we want to go to VSA. We want to go to the events. We want to go to the parties. I want to do that, I want to host more parties, I want to organize more events for VSA.*

3.4 Notes on Organizing as Asian/American Revival and Belonging

Narrators like Alice Bai and Mariah Iris Ramo organize in student groups that have been consistently active in the recent past, carrying on the organization's planned actions and goals into the coming school year. Julie Wu, Christina Park, and Aurelia Tan create new clubs and ways for Asian/American students to organize for institutional change. Narrators Len de la Cruz, Kathleen Hoang, and William Diep, introduce experiences of student organizing that double as acts of revival, bringing student organizations that were either inactive or dormant in recent years back into the community with updated leadership, goals, and visions for the group's place on Columbia's campus. Len, a junior, is the president of Columbia's Queer and Asian club (Q&A), a group they and their friends are bringing back after a year of waning activity and student leadership turnover. Kathleen and William are leading members of Columbia's Vietnamese Students Association (VSA), an organization that similarly dwindled in activity and presence that Kathleen, William, and the rest of VSA's student board are renewing to address the desires and needs of Vietnamese and Vietnamese American students at Columbia. Leaders of such groups face organizational challenges and create goals slightly different to student organizers who are a part of clubs that have had a more consistent, active presence at Barnard/Columbia.

For Asian/American students involved in acts of revival, organizing means re-orienting and refreshing intentional spaces of support within campus for themselves and

their peers to cultivate interpersonal connection and relate with one another, *a way for people to form community through shared experiences*, as Len notes. These spaces become *not a physical home, but like a home on campus* where students can be *their full Viet self on campus.* For Kathleen, the strongest motivation behind reviving VSA is a motivation for affirmative belonging, where students can gather and be the most authentic versions of themselves, their *full Viet self.* Kathleen reminds me that affinity spaces, and organizing these affinity spaces, are lifelines for ethnic communities to thrive, not just survive and get by, but to live and build kinship with each other in the fullest ways. Asian American scholarship on the role of social change movements to the development of Asian American communities affirm these narrators' understanding of creating Asian/American space; sociologists Adalberto Aguirre Jr. and Shoon Lio describe how "space constitutes and structures the processes that produce race, class, and identities… When activists talk about creating "safe spaces" or "hidden arbors" where oppressed people could safely voice complaints and protests, they are highlighting the importance of the socio-spatial dimensions of collective action."[81] These students value the experience of taking collective action to gather together for socio-cultural events such as parties or weekly gatherings to discuss topics or simply be together. Their desire for *established community* spaces*,* as Len describes, speaks to goals of sustaining collective action In Len's case, the hope for building *connections through space* stems from Queer and Asian's leadership as well, given the tight-knit friendships between the four board members.

When William responds to Kathleen, saying *we need to be a space first. And we just need to be an organization together first*, he emphasizes that the value of organizing for himself is the togetherness, the proximity to other students, the collective sense of community that is kinship. His vision of creating an environment where *it's not like we*

[81] Adalberto Aguirre and Shoon Lio. "Spaces of Mobilization: The Asian American/Pacific Islander Struggle for Social Justice," *Social Justice* 35, no. 2 (2008), 4.

have to go to the VSA but like, we want to go to VSA, it's like we want to go to the events, speaks to his desire to create community desire for VSA through organizing specific events and actions so that students outside of himself and the board will also want to attend and keep the momentum of VSA through passion rather than a sense of forced obligation. Listening to narrators' visions for organizations such as VSA and Q&A illuminate how organizers seek to nurture notions of Asian/American kinship through community space, as well as the desire to organize events to ensure the longevity and survival of student clubs geared towards marginalized students on campus.

When Kathleen says *I just want people to [think], Oh, VSA. Yeah. Yeah, VSA? Exactly like, Oh, I love VSA. I want them to come to the party tonight and be like, VSA is so fun.* , she speaks to the desire for these community spaces to not only exist but also be publicly known and recognized. Student organizing is also about cultivating recognition amongst students, so that if you asked any student about the Vietnamese Students Association, their response would be, "Oh, VSA? Yeah of course I know VSA," *I love VSA*, *VSA is so fun*. This desire for recognition emerges out of the important context of unknowing and an absence of ethnic community spaces for students of color. For Vietnamese American students like Kathleen and William, their desire comes out of the reality that Vietnamese students constitute a minority of the general and Asian student population at Columbia. William observes later in the oral history that

> c*hances are if you meet another Asian or Asian American person, they won't be Southeast Asian. I'm always surprised when I meet another Southeast Asian or Southeast Asian American. I'm always like, Oh, my god you're Vietnamese? Me too. You're Southeast Asian? Me too. And because the community is so small… I can't imagine there being more than 100 Vietnamese students on campus.*

By seeking recognition for their Vietnamese Students Association, organizers like Kathleen and William make Vietnamese students at Columbia known and recognized as important members of the community, as well as having a lively community of their own. They assert themselves as stakeholders of community life at Barnard/Columbia, that the

Viet students' minority status within the student community does not justify their marginalization. Student organizing is an active way of creating community presence for Asian/American students resisting forms of unrecognition and invisibility at predominantly white institutions.

3.5 Notes on Political/Social/Cultural Organizing

Before organizing, before advocating for this and that, we just need, we need to be a space first. The priority for William in reviving the Vietnamese Students Association is to create and maintain a publicly recognized community space on campus, an objective he places before *organizing* or *advocating.* William's reflections speak to the multitude of aims and goals that exist for Asian/American student groups. Other narrators identified political, social, and organizing for cultural awareness as a few major distinctions running across different organizations on campus. How do student organizers experience or think about these distinctions in creating objectives for their groups? Are there differences between political/social/cultural organizing for students?

Fiona Cho '24: *So first, I want to preface everything by saying that the two organizations are different, in the sense that CSER SAB which is the CSER Student Advisory Board, is mainly dedicated to activism. And it's the student-led effort to departmentalize CSER, or the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race at Columbia, while APAHM which is Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, is more cultural. And so the missions of the two student organizations are really different. But I feel like both have contributed to my sense of both Asian American identity and purpose, in terms of what I want to do, both in my senior year, the one year I have left here, and beyond. So starting with CSER SAB, I feel like it's really closely linked to my CSER classes. In the sense that I feel like the club is like the student group form, or counterpart to the classes that I'm taking. A lot of the issues that we tackle are the issues that we learn about in class. I want to give an example. So, our main mission is to make sure that Ethnic Studies is not just given department status on campus, but also we want to expand and legitimize Ethnic Studies.*

And then in terms of APAHM, as I said it's more of a cultural club, but it is definitely where I found community, because the club is composed, or the board of the club is composed, of people who identify as AAPI individuals. So yeah, I feel like APAHM is important in the sense that it's shaped my identity by taking into consideration the pan-Asian identity, because when we talk about the term Asian American and use that in discourse, it's often just East Asian, and that's not what pan-Asian is about. And I feel like I've learned a lot about what a pan-Asian movement and a pan-Asian collective identity looks like. And making sure that all voices are included within this broader umbrella of AAPI. So we've hosted a variety of events. Last spring, our main event was

with a South Asian drag queen, like a drag performer. And then we've also had speaker events, writing events, this writing event with Chen Chen, who's a queer Asian poet.

Solby: *I saw that, yeah yeah.*

Fiona: *Yes, that one was, one of my favorites. He's great. Yeah, I'm so glad you saw it. But, that was one that was really good. So just, fostering dialogue and cultural awareness in terms of Asian slash pan-Asian identity, is something that I've been able to develop through APAHM.*

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Fiona: *But I will say though, I feel like something that I've been grappling with is like, APAHM is cultural. And CSER SAB is activist and more political, I would say. And it's interesting because I feel like they're both really different. And I kind of have to like, switch gears when I'm in one club as opposed to the other. Like, my mission is very different. APAHM's mission is for cultural awareness. And that's very different from pushing a certain political agenda on campus. And so it is a little tricky, I would say. Or not tricky, maybe that's not the right word. But it's interesting navigating those two different spaces. Like what we do in those two spaces are very different, even if there are common themes. Yeah.*

Solby: *Yeah, no, that is really interesting. Do you, can you talk a little bit more about your experience with feeling the need to switch gears? Because you're right, it seems like– I mean, I think they do have a lot in common in terms of maybe goals or visions for campus. But I think it's also important that you point out that there are very important differences in terms of like, the agenda and how the organization wants to present themselves,*

Fiona: *Yeah, exactly.*

Solby: *To this campus. But yeah, can you talk a little bit more about switching gears and what that kind of experience is like for you?*

Fiona: *Sure. So, this isn't to throw any shade on APAHM at all. But, we're definitely not a political club. So we can't have, or we can't endorse any strong or clear political agenda or motive. So just to give an example, right now, with everything going on, [in] Israel and Palestine, we've been approached by certain student organizations,*

Solby: *APAHM has?*

Fiona: *APAHM has been approached. And this is in particular, the Students for Justice in Palestine [SJP]. SJP reached out to APAHM and was like, Hey, can you guys sign this statement and come to our protest on Thursday. And my co-president and I haven't*

discussed this in person yet, but it's not something that APAHM has ever done in the past. And I don't think it ever will. Just because of the nature of the club and the way that its mission and values have been set up. But for CSER SAB, when SJP reached out, I said, Sure, we can do that. We can help out in whatever ways we can, because it does closely align with the values of the club. So that's an example I would give as to how those two organizations are different, in terms of the way that we operate.

And, what that says about you know, our missions and goals, yeah so it's really interesting. And I guess in a certain way, then in that sense, APAHM is limiting, in terms of what we can do politically to push for certain goals or agendas regarding the AAPI community, because we can't really, mm, or we haven't ever really participated, or been involved in something as political as what SJP is doing. Meanwhile for CSER, it's like, the very core of what CSER and CSER SAB is doing, fighting against these systems of oppression. And very actively and in very visible ways engaging in this sort of activism. So, yeah I don't know, it's just very interesting. But I felt limited in certain ways and also empowered in other ways.

Fiona, a leading member of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race's Student Advisory Board (CSER SAB) and Asian Pacific American Heritage Month club (APAHM), began our oral history directly addressing the organizational differences amongst Asian/American student groups at Barnard/Columbia. She offered her perspective as a Barnard senior involved in multiple student groups and her experiences navigating differing organizational objectives, in particular how a space focused on raising cultural awareness could diverge with a space focused on doing activist political work. Looking back on the transcript, I note her use of *projects* when describing CSER SAB's work and *events* for APAHM's work in her distinctions between activist and cultural awareness organizing. Fiona's use of *events* to describe organizing in APAHM is further contextualized by Alice Bai's comment on the conditions of institutional support for student organizations:

Alice Bai '25: *But at the end of the day, it depends on the presence that your group has on campus, and how much that you actually host. The more events you put on, the more money [the administration is] going to give you.*

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Because the trajectory we're going for is like, first we want to court our general body of being like, Look how fun, come to our social [events] and make some friends here. And then [they'll] feel incentivized to come to more of our future events. And then as people

get more, you know, attenuated to, what it's like to come to a AAA event, we [can] pivot to the political. Obviously it's not like a jump scare. It's not like we're like, Surprise, now you're gonna come and learn about some politics [laughs] But it's more, it's easier to foster a sense of community first through the social and cultural side, and then move into a more political dimension.

These narrators and their organizations reveal the fluidity between political, cultural, and social organizing in their responses to emerging issues and needs impacting the university community. For many students, political actions are not foreclosed in social spaces, rather social groups form political actions in response to what is happening in the community. APAHM joined the Columbia University Apartheid Divest coalition (CUAD), a coalition revived in October 2023 consisting of over 90 student organizations and collectives across Columbia's undergraduate and graduate schools. It is important to appreciate political/social/cultural awareness organizing not as closed categories of student organizing, but as intertwined motivations and aims that groups are constantly navigating in response to student leadership and the community's needs.

3.6 Notes on Relationship-building as Organizing

Solby Lim: *I actually, yeah, I talked to a few students from VSA [Vietnamese Students Association],*

Alice Bai '25: *Okay I didn't snoop, but I saw Kathleen and William and I was like, is it Kathleen and William from VSA, [laughs] because I know who they are.*

Solby: *Oh you did? [Laughs] Did you walk past [us talking in the library]? Because we [reserved] a room [for our oral history],*

Alice: *No I literally just saw in your voice memo, it said Kathleen and William 10/13 [laughs], by accident.*

I recorded the in-person oral histories with my Zoom recorder, phone, and iPad on occasion in case anything went wrong. This seemed to be the right call, as my recorder turned off in the middle of a couple oral histories. I mentioned this to narrators to let them know my phone would also be on and recording. Alice happened to glance at the screen when I told her and saw a recording titled "Kathleen and William 10/13". We had just started talking about the funding aspect of Asian American Alliance (AAA) when she brought up her relationship with the two VSA leaders and mentioned her knowledge of VSA's recent funding struggles. She reminded me that these narrators most likely knew each other, organized and socialized in the same spaces, shared interests and backgrounds. As I spoke with more narrators, it was clear that interpersonal relationships between students were foundational to the revival and maintenance of student organizations, and that being friends, not just peers, determined the success of collaborative actions between groups. The executive boards, or e-boards, of student groups consisted of students who applied for specific leadership positions and had relevant aspirations to enact a group's goals for community-building or cultural awareness; when these students came together to lead as a board of an organization, their friendships were just as important in carrying organizational goals forward.

Solby Lim: *Are you, when you're organizing certain events or thinking about different activities, do you also have other clubs in mind? Or other collaborations that you think might be interesting or good to do?*

Christina Park '26: *Yeah, I think what we think about is like, Who do we have contact with that we could, that would actually make [an event] happen? Because if we're just going through official email accounts, that's not going to go through. It's usually [thinking], Do we have someone on the board for this? For example, one of our sisters is president of China Dance [CU China Dance club]. So if we wanted to do a dance workshop and talk more about that, it's going to happen because she's president of that organization [and] part of [Kappa Phi Lambda]. It's a lot easier that way when you actually know someone. And the same goes for TASA [Taiwanese American Students Association]. One of our sisters is [involved somehow] with TASA and so she can talk to people and say Hey, can we actually make this happen.*

I think the main issue with trying to host events with other orgs is it's not easy to communicate, because if you're just going through official Instagram accounts and [direct messaging] each other, oftentimes that's not really gonna happen. So it's usually through people. And I think [we're] pretty well connected, so we do think about things like that. I guess in my semester and my year here, I haven't seen that many collaborations with Kappas and other organizations. We're trying to change that this semester. But yeah, I think it's really based on who we know and who we think will actually want to collaborate with us.

Solby: *Mm. So like, networking,*

Christina: *Networking, mhm.*

Solby: *And knowing [people] is important, that's interesting.*

Duan, founder of AZINE makes a similar note that their *strength is knowing people;*

Duan '23: *What matters is the relations that you have with the people around you. Nothing can get done without good relations, or at least respectful, cordial relationships with the people you're working with. It's all social, right? You're working with people, there's a lot of things you have to consider. So actually being friendly with other people on campus, just meeting people, making space to have these informal connections and have things happen organically, I think that's my ideal for how to [organize]. And it doesn't have to be like, so professional or serious. We can just organize because we're here. There's a lot that can be done. It's also good to know or see people very clearly, like what do they know? What do they have connections to? What skills do they have and what can they teach? And kind of using your resources wisely, [laughs]. Mm, so it's all people power. And everyone has something to bring to the table.*

We can just organize because we're here, Duan says, because our feet landed here and there are like-minded people who want to create community together.[82] Christina and Duan's responses to the question of inter-group collaboration speak to how Asian American scholars Diane C. Fujino and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez understand that "organizing movements is ultimately about relationship building and the intimate connections between people that depend in the context of activism and struggle."[83] For Christina, networking is a form of organizing knowledge. Having interpersonal connections can determine the success of student organizing, whether collaborations between groups for events is possible and if groups can expand the scope of what actions are possible for them. Understanding the role of relationship-building in student organizing also highlights how interwoven social, political, and cultural dynamics are in Asian/American student organizing. Even if a group has a purely political or cultural awareness mission, the reality of organizing as an act of gathering people together and taking collective action necessitates social interaction.

[82] Returning to Note 3.0 and Pam Tau Lee
[83] Diane C. Fujino and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, ed. *Contemporary Asian American Activism: Building Movements for Liberation* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022), 12.

3.7 Scenes on Cliques and Organizing (Amy ‘96 and Aurelia ‘25)

Solby Lim: *Since it was a small kind of a group when you were part of the Asian Women's coalition, was that something– Was that like a club that was established before you had kind of known of it? Or was it something that kind of came together as you became a part of the group?*

Amy Sueyoshi ‘93*: Yeah, so, I know that I wasn't a founder. I know I joined after Ellen, Dana, and Grace were already there. Dana was [at] Columbia College. Ellen, I don't know if she was Columbia College or [School of] Engineering, but she was not Barnard. And then Grace was Barnard. And then I was also Barnard. And I was the youngest, Grace was one year older than me. And then Ellen and Dana, were both juniors, I think. I think Ellen could have even been a senior, but they were all [older], so I was like the young pup coming into this,*

Solby: *[laughs]*

Amy: *group. Oh, and we wanted to change the name to RAWC, Radical Asian Women's Coalition, I remember [laughs]*

Solby: *Ooh, I like that. [laughs]*

Amy: *Later, Ellen, Dana, Grace, everyone had graduated and I went to an AWC meeting, you know, [with] all these, you know, first-years and sophomores and, it just felt different. It wasn't, didn't feel the same. So I stopped going.*

Solby: *Oh, okay. So, when you were a senior you went to those meetings?*

Amy: *Yeah I went to, I don't know if I was a senior or junior, but when I was an upperclass person, I went back to AWC to see what was going on there. And it wasn't, didn't feel the same. It felt less like RAWC, it felt more like a tea party or something like you know, [laughs]*

Solby: *[laughs]*

Amy: *I don’t know [laughs] it just felt super, it wasn't, you know what I mean? It just, the vibe was not super hardcore feminist, which is fine. I think that, you know, whoever's in the group needs to make it into what they want. And by that time, I was more involved in United Minorities Board.*

Solby: *Okay,*

Amy: *UMB, which was a fantastic space. I met all these incredibly strong women of color. Carla Lemma was, I remember, the chair. She was just really empowering and incredible. Just, yeah. So I was more active in things like UMB. And, of course, you know, the many boyfriends that I had one after the other. [laughs]*

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Solby: *Did you feel that [UMB] was a bit more similar to [the AWC you had known],*

Amy: *Yeah, it was more political.*

Solby: *Oh, okay.*

Amy: *And they were definitely more, you know, racially evolved. You know, [laughs]*

Solby: *[laughs]*

Amy: *Like, they already knew that we had to build coalitions across different races, right, like KSA [Korean Students Association], CSC [Chinese Student Council], ASU [Asian Student Union], they're still really embedded in balkanization. And also, they're all about dances. It's all about, it's social, purely social. But UMB was more political. And folks were like, just nicer. You know, it wasn't like a popularity contest, you know what I mean?*

Solby: *Yeah.*

Amy: *I think there's a way in which CSC, KSA, ASU, it felt a little bit, like, Who's the prettiest? You know, like, they did a fashion show. And you had to apply and you had to put all your [body] measurements in, and– you know what I mean?*

Solby: *Oh. Okay, interesting.*

Amy: *It was just kind of, whatever. Clique-y and the usual, [laughs] the usual things that happen in high school, but just, it was happening in college. But UMB was way, way more political. There was Latinx folks, a few Asian Americans, and then Black folks. And uh, yeah, we were all organizing to do stuff. And we had an office that wasn't on campus. It was at the Intercultural Resource Center. It was on 115th Street, it was in a brownstone.*

Solby: *Mhm.*

Amy: *Yeah. And they call it, I looked it up not recently, but maybe 10 years ago or something, they don't call it UMB anymore. They call it something else. They don't call it minorities, which is good.*

***Solby**: Oh, the student group?*

***Amy:** Yeah. They changed its name.*

***Solby:** Oh okay, I see.*

***Aurelia Tan '25:** So yeah, so Lunar New Year [dinner], it was a big deal because it's open to all students, all Barnard students.*

***Solby Lim:** Right,*

***Aurelia:** Right? Because you have Chuseok, and you have like, what's the word, Mid-Autumn festival, but it's like, very specific to a country. But Lunar New Year is the most across the diaspora [holiday].*

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Obviously, there's been Lunar New Year parties before. It has to have happened with the amount of Asian students on this campus. But [those parties were] never open to the public like ours was. Because I had a friend a few weeks [ago ask] Hey, are you going to the Lunar New Year party? And I'm like, what Lunar New Year party? They're like, Oh, it's held by all the main East Asian [club] board [members]. And AAA [Asian American Alliance], they're the ones [hosting] it and I'm like, girl, I did not know this was a thing. And no one would know it's a thing. But you would see people posting about it on Instagram, [at a] fancy rooftop party in Manhattan with lion dances and everything. And it's like, that's sick.

***Solby:** Wow.*

***Aurelia:** That's– why are you not like, come on. That's so sad that not everyone knows about it, because you make it so exclusive. But it's an event dedicated to sharing warmth and, family,*

***Solby:** Millions of people celebrate [Lunar New Year].*

***Aurelia:** Like come on, it's literally a new year. Everyone celebrates New Year.*

•

***Solby:** You talked about how a lot of different departments at Barnard were helping out as well.*

***Aurelia:** Yeah.*

Solby: *Or, you asked them to. Were you thinking about all of the myriad clubs at Columbia and [asking them to help],*

Aurelia: *No. We did not want to involve the clubs at Columbia. Because well, first of all, it was a student government thing. It was completely funded by [the Barnard Student Government Association]. So– by the way, funded by the student government means that your student activities fees are directly going into it, which is why we want[ed] to make it open to all Barnard students but specifically foreign students, because it is Barnard students who're paying for it. So we did not include other clubs, mainly because the whole point we did it was because we did not find community at those clubs.*

Solby: *Mhm.*

Aurelia: *And we knew that those clubs, sometimes– I, I really do believe they do fantastic work. But as like, the Lunar New Year private gala I just told you about,*

Solby: *Right, right.*

Aurelia: *Sometimes you fail your students. And I don't want that to be a part of it, you know what I mean? So yeah, it was [a student government supported dinner]. 'Cause it was a completely free event.*

Solby: *Do you think there might be, like a gap between the e-board and their imagined like,*

Aurelia: *Yes, yes.*

Solby: *Body,*

Aurelia: *Yes, yes.*

Solby: *Or audience? And,*

Aurelia*: Yes, for sure. Cuz like, you have an e-board of 10 people and you have a mailing list of like, hundreds. It's not like, it's not their fault. You know what I mean? Like, how are you supposed to connect with people? If your club's gonna have like, office hours or whatever, who's gonna show up to your clubs' office hours? Who's gonna do that, you know what I mean? Like, it is so hard, once you get to a certain size, to be able to foster that community.*

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Solby: *Um, I talked to one of the alum [who] actually was part of the Asian Women's Coalition, the club that was at Barnard.*

Aurelia: *Oh, that was a thing?*

Solby: *Yeah, that was a thing in the 90s.*

Aurelia: *Oh, okay okay.*

Solby: *They sort of faltered out in the early 2000s, I think. But that was a five person club.*

Aurelia: *See? See? [Laughs]*

Solby: *[Laughs] Or at least like, you know, [that's what it shows] in the record, in the yearbooks and stuff.*

Aurelia: *Yeah. Yeah.*

Solby: *It was a small group. Um, and she actually describes something very similar to what you're saying in terms of, she used the word clique.*

Aurelia: *Yeah.*

Solby: *To describe the whole, like,*

Aurelia: *I think that's, like, clique-iness, is just something that I think the Asian community struggles with, especially, because you know, the model minority myth, and this, proximity to whiteness that we try to achieve. That is what plays into this cliquey-ness. Like who belongs, who's pretty, who's not, your values and whatever, who gets to be part of the "it" club, you know. And I think that's why some people just do not feel like they belong. I have a lot of Korean friends who aren't a part of KSA [Korean Students Association] because they just don't like the community there. But I have friends and Korean friends in KSA [who] will love it there. Because they found the community, you know what I mean? So different things work for everybody. And I think the best part about starting out a new club is that you're going to try to fill in those gaps. And I don't know how it's gonna end up but like, right now we have this.*

Solby: *Yeah, at the very least it's experimental.*

Aurelia: *Yeah, exactly. You can do whatever we want. Because there's no one to yell at us. Because [we] have a mailing list of like, 20 people.*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

3.7 Notes on Complications of Community-Building

How do student leaders hold community for themselves and with their larger audience? What challenges do students face when organizing for and with their communities? What happens when community-building gets messy?

Understanding and exploring the dynamics of Asian/American student organizing entails not just public-facing experiences, such as organizing a dinner and meeting Asian students, but also the more internal experiences behind the scenes, such as brainstorming and doing administrative work to put on the event. Whether a club is more social, political, or cultural in its purpose, there are complex social and interpersonal dynamics at play in every space of student organizing. In addition to exploring how organizing actually gets accomplished by students, these oral histories offer insight into the complexities of group leadership and how notions of inclusion and exclusion are formed within collective organizing.

Amy Sueyoshi was the first narrator to mention the word *clique*. Amy was one of the two alumni narrators I spoke to, a student organizer who was part of the Asian Women's Coalition at Barnard, in addition to being president of the Student Activities Council and involved with the multiracial coalition group United Minorities Board and the Asian Student Union. She used this word to describe her experiences witnessing events put on by some of the ethnicity-focused clubs, including a fashion show where students submitted their body measurements, and an aspect associated with the more social-leaning groups on campus. Amy also used *clique* to observe a contrast between the social-focused clubs and political clubs, the latter of which she was more interested in. She described the cliquey-ness as *the usual things that happen in high school, but just, it was happening in college,* as something that should stay in the past, in high school, not something happening on a college campus.

I wondered if this complicated dynamic was something that had passed or continued to exist in student organizations and made a note to ask narrators if it came up. Aurelia was the first student I spoke with after doing oral histories with alums Amy and Dana, and I was able to bring up what Amy had described in my conversation with her. Aurelia's mentioning of a Lunar New Years rooftop party for students on the executive boards of certain Asian student organizations reminded me of Amy's oral history, and I was curious to hear Aurelia's thoughts on whether the term clique could be relevant to today's organizations. I did not have to finish my question for Aurelia to pick up the term, elaborating on Amy's observation and expanding on how cliquey-ness speaks to Asian groups' struggles with fitting in with the model minority myth and *this, proximity to whiteness that we try to achieve like that, is what plays into this cliquey-ness. Like who belongs, who's pretty, who's not. Like, your values and whatever, who gets to be part of the "it" club, you know.* Aurelia's observation aligned shockingly well with Amy's notion that some groups *felt a little bit, like, you know, Who's the prettiest, you know, like, they did a fashion show.* I am struck at how Aurelia and Amy, narrators who attend(ed) Barnard decades apart and under different socio-politico-cultural environments, both critically noted evaluations of beauty as a signifier of the cliquey conditions of certain student groups. I wonder if they were compelled to observe *who's pretty, who's not/who's the prettiest,* because beauty often involves a collective, socialized effort in determining who is beautiful and who is not. There is an inherent dynamic of inclusion and exclusion at play when determining notions of prettiness, and in noting beauty, Amy and Aurelia noted how social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are present in student organizing to foster a sense of community.

Observations of cliquey-ness reveal an organizational tension between building community, connecting with others, and sustaining experiences of belonging through more closed off or private spaces. They provoke important questions for student organizers on defining what belonging and inclusivity mean in the context of their group or action and what their visions for community-building look like, whether community

means something open-ended or more bounded. I wondered whether this tension and these questions were answerable and had more questions of whether belonging for everybody was possible, if inclusivity was a desirable goal for student organizers, and what the best version of community-building would look like. Aurelia offers a different, more hopeful way of addressing such questions, noting that *different things work for everybody. And I think, the best part about starting out a new club, is that you're going to try to fill in those gaps.* She adopts a reparative outlook on cliquey-ness and the complicated inclusion/exclusion dynamic within student organizing, understanding that belonging is not a universal notion or experience and looking towards creativity to imagine new meanings of belonging and address the needs of those who still feel a lack of belonging, *to try to fill those gaps*.

3.8 Notes on Asian/American as Pan-ethnic and Multiracial Coalition-Building

Dana Wu '91: *Looking around with my friends, the people that I was involved with going, What? We don't have Ethnic Studies at Columbia. We don't have a class [where] you can study Asian American history. You can study Chinese poetry, you can study Chinese. You can study, you know, the Vietnam War in the context of protests movements and whatever that we had. But where do you have– and for that matter, Black Studies, Latino Studies, all that kind of stuff, right? So I think from my experience on the undergraduate recruitment committee and other things, you just realize like, there are stove pipes and there is a feeling like the pie isn't big enough. And if I somehow advocate for my piece of the pie, you're losing out. And I think as students, we said forget that. Like, whatever lifts the boat for all of us lifts the boat for all of us. And we started to demand Ethnic Studies.*

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So I think it was really about coalition. And AWC stands for coalition, right? Like I think we were looking across borders, you know, between what could separate us. So, whether you were South Asian, East Asian, you know, like, whatever it was, we suddenly wanted to look for what was in common and what were in multiple mutual interests. Right. So that's why I said, like, with Peter on, like, I can remember, you know, different meetings in which we weren't, we weren't just talking about one thing, you know, kind of trying to be broader.

Solby Lim: *Do you remember if the students you organized with were also other non-white students on campus?*

Dana: *I was involved with the undergraduate recruitment committee. But for sure, the minority studies stuff at that time, right, to get Ethnic Studies, definitely had to have been a broader reaching out between Asians and non-whites. Because there was just no way [to get what we wanted without reaching out].*

Amy Sueyoshi '93: *Back then I didn't really care if you were JA [Japanese American] or not. Because we were just all Asian Americans in California so it didn't matter. So that's why I wanted to be a part of UMB [United Minorities Board], because I wanted to be a part of something that was larger than just Asian[s] as well. I wanted to be a part of a group of people who had consciousness around being a racialized population.*

Dana Wu and Amy Sueyoshi both spoke of multiracial coalition-building as a key objective of their organizing as Asian/American students. For Dana, identifying commonalities and finding *multiple mutual interests* between different students of color

was a valuable way of uniting students to push for institutional change, to show Columbia administration that a significant body of students desired change to inequity in the undergraduate recruitment process, an issue Dana specifically worked on. Organizing was better together rather than working separately for related causes, because *whatever lifts the boat for all of us lifts the boat for all of us* as Dana noted. Amy found multiracial coalition-building meaningful in another way. She speaks of a desire for becoming conscious of the way students of color are racialized and organizing in spaces with people who shared this kind of awareness. Their recollections around multiracial coalition-building articulate the fluidity of Asian/American organizing and how deeply Asian/American identity connects to multiracial solidarity work and other students of color.

The array of perspectives and attitudes towards organizing as Asian/American students present in this note by Dana and Amy, as well as all the other narrators "acknowledge the instabilities of both as part of an ongoing, complex conversation in which identity is treated like an open-ended question, the answer to which is ephemeral, and the pleasure is in the pursuit."[84] Witnessing Asian/American student organizing embodies a process-oriented approach to understanding and exploring Asian/American identity as a storied, fraught, and vibrant tapestry of histories, communities, memories, and ways of recognizing the self and others.

[84] Jolivette Mecenas, "Beyond 'Asian American' and Back: Coalitional Rhetoric in Print and New Media" in *Representations: Doing Asian American Rhetoric*, edited by Luming Mao and Morris Young (University of Colorado 2008), 199.

4.0 (Un)learning Notes on the Asian/American Personal is Political

Solby Lim: *What you mentioned before about the narratives that we're taught, those are so powerful,*

Fiona Cho '24: *They are. It takes a lot to unlearn. A lot to unpack, yeah.*

Solby*: Absolutely. And frameworks like the model minority myth [are] so pervasive,*

Fiona: *Yeah. It really gets you. Even though it's so fake, [laughs]*

Solby: *Right? Like there's a reason, I feel like there's a reason that they might teach it in an Intro to Asian American Studies class, because it's so powerful. And it's really guided generations of people. But that means that it's that much more important that we actually learn about it.*

Fiona: *And still so many people believe in it, so so many people. So it's not really a simple issue at all. Some people are like, Oh, model minority myth, that's so basic and overdone. But no truly, my parents still believe in it. And it continues to guide policy and tangible political actions as well, so it's not, it's not so simple at all. Yeah.*

What are Asian/American myths, and what does student organizing have to do with it? Fiona brings our attention to the model minority myth, a myth that claims Asians as "good," passive minorities who overcame racism and discrimination to be successful assimilated immigrants in the United States in order to serve the narrative that oppression is an individual burden, not a series of structural and policy issues, and create divides between people of color in the US. Critical psychologists David Eng and Shinhee Han understand how the "model minority stereotype developed in the historical context of new immigrants and refugees from Asia under communist threat, working to sort out "good" Asian capitalists from "bad" Asian communist subjects."[85] These "good" Asian capitalists are touted as triumphant proof oppression is an individual, not systemic issue, further marginalizing specifically Black and other non-white communities, while erasing "bad" Asian communist subjects, unusable because of their "failure" to succeed and

[85] David Eng and Shinhee Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation: On the Social and Psychic Lives of Asian Americans* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 115.

cause divides between communities of color. Eng and Han note that "academic success of second-generation Asian Americans (Generation X) and their upward economic mobility [was] proof positive of the United States as a land of equal opportunity and free markets liberated from racial discrimination and distress."[86] The making of the model minority myth begins with mythologizing the Asian/American student. The student emerges as a moral threshold, determining one's value as an immigrant or the child of immigrants to the United States as a "good" Asian capitalist or invisibilizing them as a "bad" Asian communist. Kathleen Hoang and William Diep, leaders of the Vietnamese Students Association, articulate the tangible consequence of the model minority myth and its divisive logic:

Kathleen Hoang '25: *[At] Columbia, I have to fight nail and tooth for every dollar that they give me and it's so frustrating. Because they're freaking selfish. And honestly, I think that it's also because they just assume that we're well-adjusted, to be honest. Because Asian Americans as a collective can be seen as highly educated, as fairly well-off socio-economically. So [Columbia] might just think like, Why do you need the support? But for Southeast Asians who [aren't a majority population] in these [institutions], we need that extra support. But we're just lumped in with all the other Asian Americans that don't need the support as much as we do.*

William Diep '25: *One hundred percent. I'm pretty sure that leaders of the other affinity spaces, even Asian affinity spaces, are probably well off. Like I know one person who used to be the leader of one affinity space on campus, and he's got money, his family's got money. And I'm pretty sure that's the case with other leaders. But specifically for Southeast Asian students here on campus, generally, we have a lower socioeconomic status compared to other Asian and Asian American students. And I feel like we don't have– I don't know, honestly, it's probably because [other Asian Americans] have the appearance that [they] don't need [support] because [they] got money, but that's not the case for Southeast Asians.*

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I feel like if you were to survey the entire Asian and Asian American community here at Columbia, I feel like a lot of us are from high-income backgrounds. But that completely ignores so many Asian and Asian American students here on campus who are low-income or don't have wealthy parents. I feel like there's such a strong divide being Asian here on campus.

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[86] Eng and Han, *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation,* 115.

Homogenizing Asian/Americans into a monolithic group of "good" capitalist who overcame racism requires the invisibilization of low-income and working class Asian/Americans who experience systemic racism and oppression much differently than wealthy Asian/Americans. Kathleen and William aptly describe how the model minority narrative impacts certain Southeast Asian/American students, for example, noting the lack of financial aid as a result of being *lumped in with all the other Asian Americans that don't need the support as much as we do.* William makes another important observation that homogenizing Asian/American students ironically creates *a strong divide* between students of *being Asian here on campus.*

Institutions that champion the diversity of their student populations, especially students of color, but fail to deliver on the diverse needs of these students remain un-inclusive for marginalized students and reproduce the social and economic inequities they experience in the outside world within their college campuses. The model minority myth, which *continues to guide policy and tangible political actions* as Fiona notes, aids in reproducing these social and economic inequities between Asian/American students by narrativising Asian/Americans as financially successful "good" capitalists who don't need structural support such as financial aid or other resources. Narratives wield power, and realizing and unlearning harmful Asian/American narratives are just as important as creating new ones. The model minority shapes how Asian students of any generation, socio-economic status, and background are recognized and understood, as well as how students come to recognize their identity as Asian/American. *It really gets you. Even though it's so fake,* Fiona remarks. Rather than being told how to be Asian/American, students work to unlearn myths in order to develop their own ideas and values of being Asian/American, a critical consciousness of students' place in the world.

I call out the model minority myth as well because of how the anti-Black narrative of Asian minority exceptionalism betrays the pan-ethnic and multiracial Asian, Black, Indigenous, and Chicana coalition-building that nurtured the early growth of Asian

American culture, consciousness, and understanding of their place in the United States (see Note 1.0). This narrative leaves no space for the rich historical exchanges between Asian American student organizers and leftist Black political movements of the 1960s and 70s, especially the Black Panther Party as an immense inspiration for Asian/Americans in developing political, learned consciousness of interlocking systems of oppression that marginalize and exploit people of color and utilizing education to better the collective conditions of life. Asian American historian Scott Kurashige explains that "those who identified as Asian American consciously resisted the assimilationist imperatives in "model minority" ideology. As conservatives deployed images of high-achieving and politically passive Asians to discredit African American protest and rebellion, young Asian American activists turned for inspiration to the black power movement and elder radicals such as Yuri Kochiyama of Harlem and Grace Lee Boggs of Detroit."[87] The political passivity Kurashige notes is a key detail of the model minority myth, and the reason why this mythological narrative appears to benefit Asian/Americans but ends up harming and dividing in reality. By making the model minority a politically passive figure, it signals to Asian Americans and other communities of color that the only useful minority is an obedient one. The model minority myth reifies racist stereotypes of Asians as meek and passive, silent, invisible; it appears to valorize Asian Americans while silencing them through a narrative of passivity. Students are also impacted by and acutely aware of this kind of invisibility.

Solby Lim: *And you mentioned activism on campus and activist work. Would you say that, in your experience, or from your perspective, that things like helping out with the Filipino American History Month celebration dinner and APAHM and Liga Filipina, would you consider the work in those spaces to be activist work?*

Mariah Iris Ramo '27: *Yeah I think those are definitely considered activist work. Because at this time, Asian Americans are still kind of going through so many things. And people still look down upon our group despite the countless contributions we've made in shaping America. And so by just being a part of the club, and putting, or taking up space, that's a way for us to constantly show [that] we are Asian Americans and we're proud to*

[87] Kurashige,"Exposing the Price of Ignorance," 1180.

be that. And that's just the way to combat, you know, the things that are being done, harmful things that are being done or said [about Asian Americans]. So definitely, those are activisms.

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Negative things I've heard [about activists]? They're taking up too much space, they're always wanting to fight verbally, physically. They're just doing too much. That's what I've heard. But I was so frustrated when I hear[d] that because one, it's okay to take up space. Like, we need to take up space, especially– we've been oppressed for so long, this is our time to put ourselves up there. And then verbally and physically, fighting, I think people are just very, I don't know, people are probably not used [us] to being assertive, or hearing the truth or reality or other people's perspective in general.

The narrative of the model minority steamrolls over the leftist, anti-imperialist, and coalition-focused activist communities and movements that birthed the term "Asian American" and developed this multi-ethnic construction of identity as a political position, critical to and aware of the United States as an imperialist, oppressive global power and colonial project. The model minority myth betrays the history of/Asian America.

April 21, 2008 NEWS Columbia Daily Spectator

Asian American Alliance Fights Stereotypes in Annual Showcase

BY MARY KOHLMANN
Spectator Staff Writer

Over 500 gathered in Roone Arledge Auditorium Friday night for the Asian American Alliance's annual CultureSHOCK showcase, which included performances by both Columbia groups and off-campus talents, such as the hip-hop duo Magnetic North.

"The last three years of CultureSHOCK, when the crowd came, it was very quiet," AAA President Calvin Sun, CC '08, said. "This year, the entire show—I don't know if they were drunk or what—the entire floor was shouting and screaming for the entire show."

The show opened and closed with AAA-made videos exploring the event's purpose, and included a third video, a spoof called "America's Next Top Model: Minority," designed to mock stereotypes about Asian-Americans. The video's "contestants," whose antics drew rueful laughter from the audience, included Nerd Boy, Frat Boy, and Innocent Asian Girl.

"We are well aware of those stereotypes," Sun said, "and we want to show it's stupid."

With an increased South Asian presence and a broader advertising campaign, the event focused on "exposing" the Asian-American community in new ways, especially in relation to the performing arts.

"Exposure, to me, is twofold," an interviewee in the opening documentary explained. "The first part is that the community is ready to, you know, reveal the taboo issues that we normally don't talk about. And also, that it makes us more human, more natural. It kind of defies the idea of the model minority, because we're not models—we don't need to be anymore."

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Daniella Zalcman / Senior Staff Photographer

Figure 23. An example of unlearning myths. "Asian American Alliance Fights Stereotypes in Annual Showcase," by Mary Kohlmann. April 21 2008. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXXXII No. 57.

*I encourage you to listen to A Grain of Sand's "Divide and Conquer" before moving on to the next note: http://tinyurl.com/undoingmyths

4.1 Scenes on the (Student) Self and Asian/American Reflections

Solby Lim: *What role do you think melancholia plays in maybe, understanding or exploring "Asian American" and what that term might be?*

Duan '23: *Mm. Okay. I, ooh [laughs] I think at some point, to be part of the diaspora, you have to recognize that you did leave somewhere and that there was like, something that had to happen for you to be here. And I think there's a lot of history of colonialism, US imperialism, and [the US] meddling in different countries and economic circumstances that are part of that, as well as the history of Asian Americans in the United States. So I think [there] is a sense of not knowing, and I think that not knowing can lead to melancholia. It's the part of witnessing or having a, like a flinch or like a– when you encounter something that doesn't match up with your lived reality, I think there's definitely some, what's the word [laughs], some type of flinch or like, the wind is like, going out of you because it's clashing with your internal world.*

And I think it's the double consciousness, and, [laughs] you are told so many things about what Asian American is supposed to mean. And what a model minority is supposed to mean. And I think when you come across instances of discrimination, and [discomfort] within your own culture and when you don't feel like you're a good student, when you don't feel like you're a productive worker, or useful, et cetera. That creates so many feelings of discomfort and I think that's when there should be questioning about what even your identity means. And what people are telling you [who] you should be versus who you actually are. [Laughs] And I think, I kind of shy away from that, trying to define the Asian American identity. So AZINE goes by Asian slash American,

Solby: *Oh, okay.*

Duan: *For our arts and zine collective, and that's because some people are Asian but not American. And it's just a reminder that there's always the nation that is interacting with us, the people, and our histories, and [it] can't be separated from that. And there's actually a lot of pain that can lead into solidarity and a recognition [that] we are the common "enemy" or the scapegoat of the American government, the United States. We actually have much more similarity with oppressed people throughout the world than we do with white Americans, [which is who] what America wants us to be [aligned with]. But I hope that, but I don't think that's all what the Asian American identities [should be about]. It shouldn't be rooted in pain because when the enemy is gone, then who are you? What are you outside of all of this?*

And I hope, [laughs] so within AZINE, I think that's what I'm currently trying to, like, redefine where everyone is, I hope. Redefining the Asian American identity for

themselves, and not prescribing liberal [politics], and trying to choose other pathways to exist with joy and creativity and things that are not more negative. Like I think the pain can be a starting point to question things. But I hope that, I think that [it] will be more sustainable, if we tap into, we actually have so much value to glean [when we are] just ourselves.

4.1 Notes on Organizing as Asian/American Reflections and Education

Duan opens up possibilities for Asian/American organizing as a space of self and collective identity reclamation. Organizing through art and advocacy facilitates a re-configuration of how we create meaning out of the term "Asian/American": *You are told so many things about what Asian American is supposed to mean,* Duan says. Duan organizes so that AZINE provides a space to say what Asian/American means to them, to you, to us. Organizing is a deeply personal matter for students. Oftentimes, they organize for themselves as much as they do for the larger community or their peers. Organizing becomes a process of critical reflection, actualization, and learning of Asian/American identity on their own terms. By advocating for issues that matter to Asian/Americans, these students push themselves to develop their own interpretations. Duan and other narrators speak about student organizing as a process of Asian/American education, in terms of awareness, knowledge, and ways of thinking critically about identity formation and history for Asian/American students. This kind of education constitutes "the transformative power of ordinary people coming into awareness as active participants in the making of history, as change agents with the capacity to theorize complex systems of oppression in everyday terms to deconstruct state violence, interrupt intergenerational dispossession, form new societal relations, and in the words of activist-philosopher Grace Lee Boggs, "become more human human beings.""[88]

[88] May C. Fu, "POLITICAL EDUCATION AS REVOLUTIONARY PRAXIS." In *Contemporary Asian American Activism: Building Movements for Liberation*, edited by DIANE C. FUJINO and ROBYN MAGALIT RODRIGUEZ, 173-4.

What does education, organizing, and reflection have to do with each other? Fiona Cho holds a unique perspective as an organizer for the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race's Student Advisory Board (CSER SAB). This student group, whose members consist of CSER undergraduates, is tied directly to CSER, an academic center at Columbia. CSER SAB's mission statement includes that "in the founding spirit of CSER, SAB unites students to actualize the departmentalization of Columbia's ethnicity and race studies program. We seek to build a robust community and network among students, faculty, and alumni, and to bolster widespread engagement in ethnicity, race, and indigenous studies at Columbia."[89] CSER SAB's presence articulates the supportive interplay between educational learning and student activism. Fiona affirms the academic-activist connection, noting that she feels *like it's really closely linked to my CSER classes. In the sense that I feel like the club is the student group form, or counterpart to the classes that I'm taking.* SAB members like Fiona offer important insight into the intersection between advocacy and education, how student organizing shapes and is shaped by what happens in the classroom. Thus, her reflections on coursework speak to the nature of her organizing work; the Asian/American classroom provides another space to build knowledge and consciousness around identity and history.

Solby Lim: *Can I ask about [the first] CSER class you took?*

Fiona Cho '24: *So many light bulbs [went off]. I don't know if you– you've probably read all these texts, but we read Lisa Lowe.*

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Lisa Lowe, reading that text ["Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences"] for the first time. She talks about hybridity. I've never felt so seen and heard in a class. She was just– basically my whole life, I've been told [to] assimilate, [to] assimilate under whiteness. Assimilate by speaking standard English, learning all these things that will prepare [me] to go to college in America. And coming here, I feel like there was a sense of shame that I was assimilated. Especially when I would tell people [my background]. People [would be] like, Oh, where are you from? And it's like, one, I was born here [in the US] but I do like to say [that] I'm from Korea because that's where I was raised and lived basically my whole life. So when I say, Oh, I'm from Korea,

[89] Quote from CSER SAB's Linkedin profile in their "about" section.

and they respond by saying things like Oh, but your English is good. Oh, but did you go to an American school in Korea? And things like that where I'm like Oh, so they think I'm assimilated. There was a sense of shame and guilt, like I'm not Korean enough even though I say [that] I'm from Korea. And what does that say about me? Like, all these negative connotations, and associations with that.

And her ideas, Lisa Lowe's ideas, on hybridity were like, Okay you're assimilated, or you're someone who has assimilated. Well maybe that was a method of survivance [survival]. That was your way of concocting survival on your own terms. And that was just the way that you chose to cope. And obviously yes, because I assimilated, there's a lot [for me] to unlearn. And that's valid. But also, the fact that I assimilated is also valid, because how can you not when you're put under that environment? And [when] your parents drive that into you every day? Yeah. So I was like, Oh, wow [laughs]. Hybrid identity is so real. And it can't be pinned down by just a label. Or at least in my case, I would say that's why I find it tricky, finding a label for myself. Like Korean American, Korean or American. I don't know. Technically, I hold passports in both countries. Does that make me Korean American?

Lisa Lowe, a giant in critical Asian American scholarship, begins her pivotal 1991 text "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences" with a series of stories. She reflects on poems and literature by Asian American writers to develop a new understanding of "how ethnicity is imagined, practiced, [and] continued."[90] Lowe argues that "we might conceive of the making and practice of Asian American culture as nomadic, unsettled, taking place in the travel between cultural sites and in the multivocality of heterogeneous and conflicting positions."[91] It is this critical framing of Asian American identity as an unsettled process, one of hybridity, heterogeneity, and multiplicity that proved crucial for Fiona in re-interpreting her personal experiences as a Korean in America. From Lowe's scholarship, Fiona understands assimilation in a new light of *concocting survival on [her] own terms.* This is a significant change in Fiona's self-framing, as she moves from a narrative of *shame and guilt*, like she's *not Korean enough*, to the narrative of her assimilated experiences being *valid*, that *hybrid identity is so real* and *can't be pinned down by just a label.* It is no

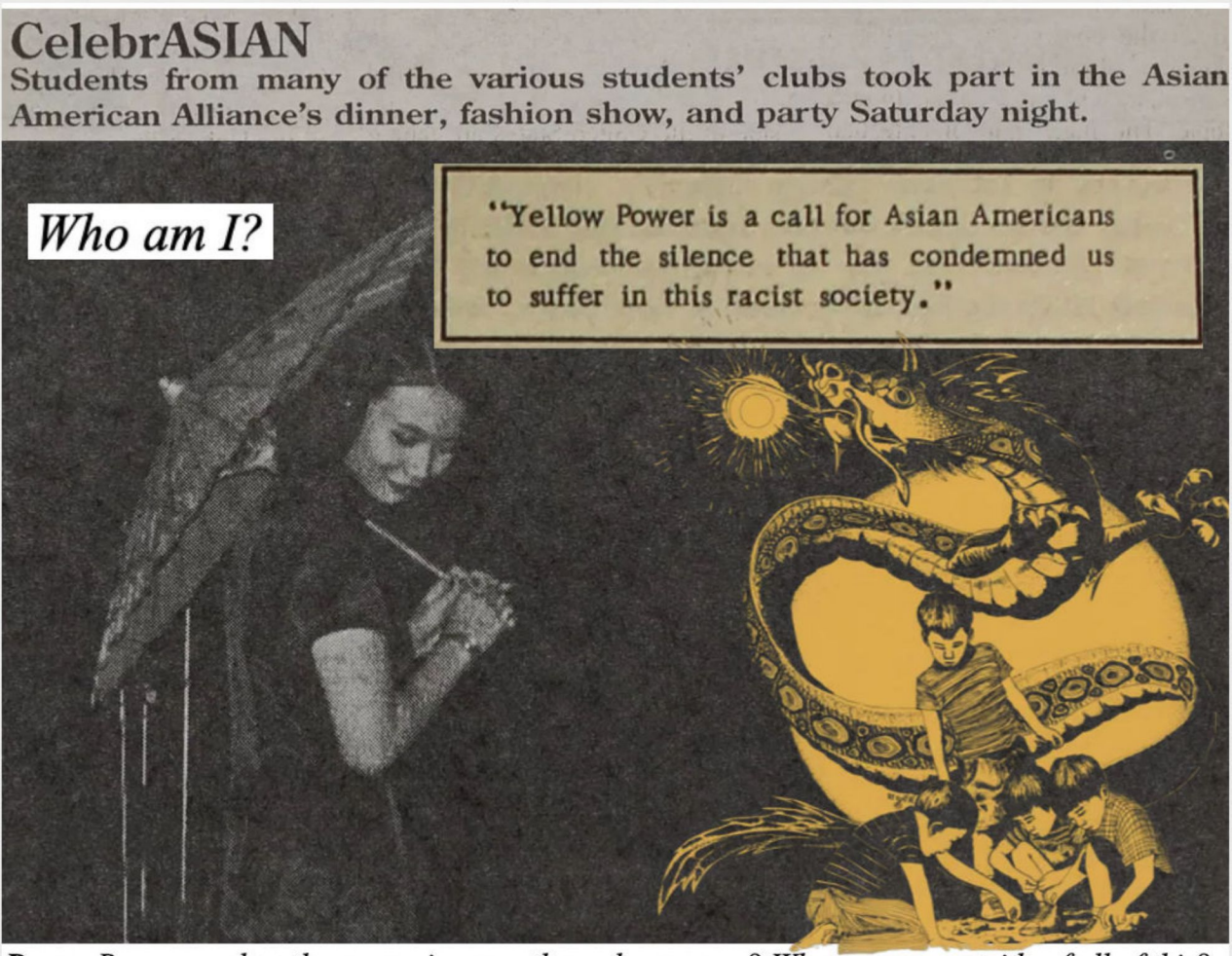
[90] Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* vol. 1 no. 1 (Spring 1991), 27.
[91] Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity," 39.

wonder she noted that she had *never felt so seen and heard in a class.* Her reflections give presence to the possibilities of education as care, that building knowledge is a process of taking care of the self and others.

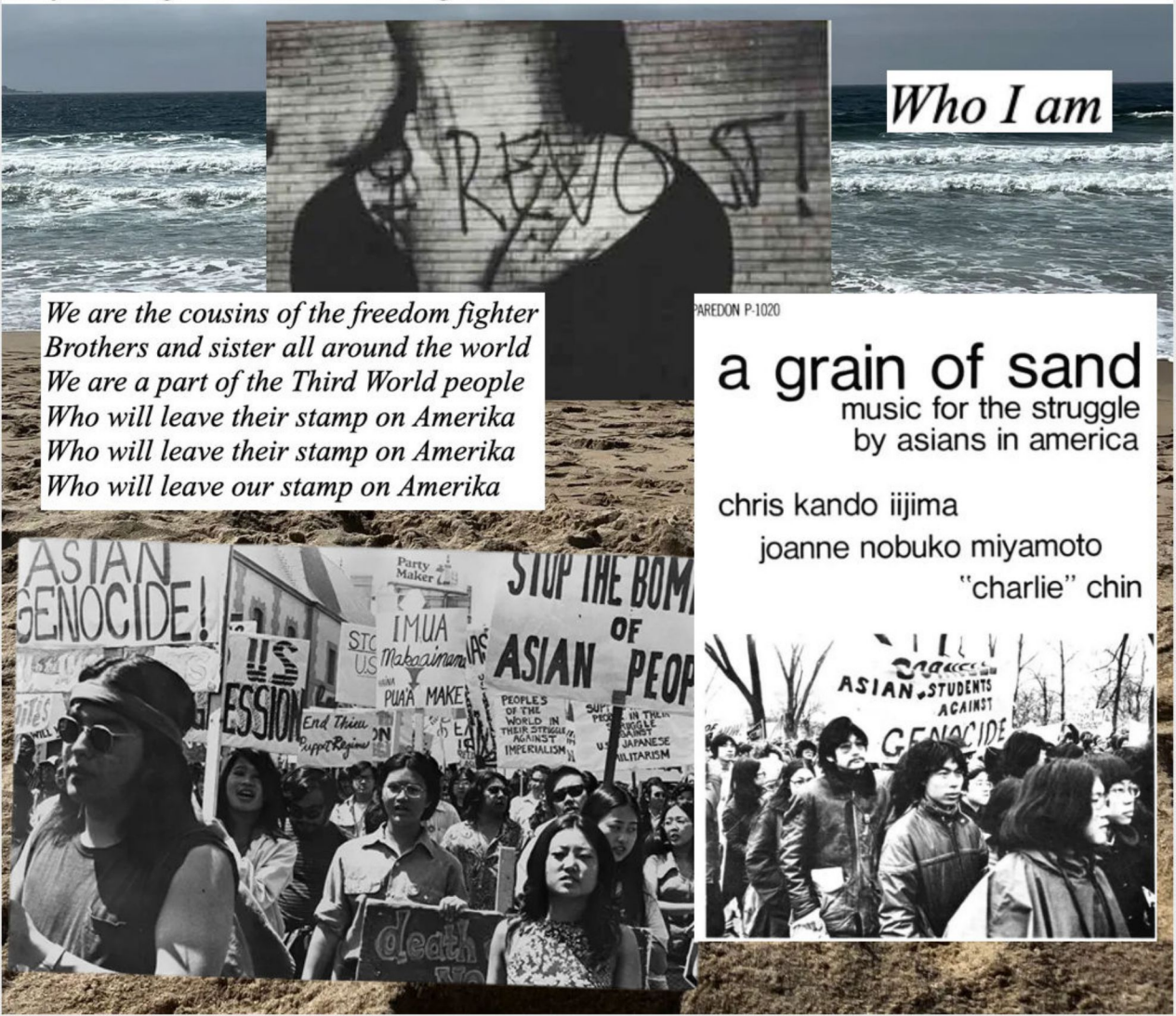
Fiona is gracious in her intimate reflections, revealing the transformative impact of Asian/American scholarship on her understandings of her experiences and place in the world. Learning and organizing around Asian/American identity means re-encountering ourselves through affirmation and a better recognition of our varied and uneven experiences. Fiona asks, *does that make me Korean American?* The Asian/American classroom encourages her to take agency in creating her own response, and that however she answers is a valid and important foray into the heterogenous makings of Asian/American identity.

*I encourage you to listen to A Grain of Sand's "Something About Me Today" after this note: http://tinyurl.com/asianamericanonourterms

I knew there was something about me today
Something different
I walked tall and looked at all things in a different way
I knew there was something about me today
I looked in the mirror and I saw me
And I didn't want to be
Any other way
Then I looked around
And I saw you
And it was the first time I knew
Who we really are



Duan: *Because, when the enemy is gone, then who are you? What are you outside of all of this? And I hope, [laughs] so within AZINE, I think that's what I'm currently trying to, like, redefine, where everyone is, I hope, redefining the Asian American identity for themselves, and not prescribing liberal [politics], and trying to choose other pathways to exist with joy and creativity and just, things that are not more negative.*



4.3 "Food for Thought or Indigestion?": Notes on Organizing the Politics of Asian/American Education

(From Note 3.8) Dana Wu '91: *Looking around with my friends, the people that I was involved with going, What? We don't have Ethnic Studies at Columbia. We don't have a class [where] you can study Asian American history. You can study Chinese poetry, you can study Chinese. You can study, you know, the Vietnam War in the context of protests movements and whatever that we had. But where do you have– and for that matter, Black Studies, Latino Studies, all that kind of stuff, right?*

Fiona's oral history gives value to the Asian/American classroom, articulating how transformative and powerful an education in critical race and ethnicity studies can be for students who desire knowledge but also a personal transformation in seeing themselves anew. An education in Asian/American history and thought can help nurture more humanizing understanding of their Asian/American subjecthood. Imagining the Asian/American classroom brings in other narrators' oral histories; let's return to Christina Park, Julie Wu, and Aurelia Tan, who organize to establish an Asian/American classroom at Barnard. We have heard Christina and Julie's notes on organizing around this cause;

Christina Park '26: *I think that's just really, like, essential for students to know that parts of your identity and your background are not things that you should be ashamed of, and are things that are recognized on campus.*

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This just sends a message to Asian students. It's not invalidating per se, but [it's that] the school doesn't even recognize that part of your identity. And there are other concentrations that recognize other identities, and I just think that it's important to have this [program] to show students [that] your school does care.

Julie Wu '25: *I guess the impact that I'd like for this program to have is, on a large scale, to be a forefront leader in Asian American Studies both as an institution and also for students in general. And I would love to see the program ideally not just be run by faculty, I would like it to be something that students own. And so in the long run, it would be quite amazing if students were able to form and shape the program to their liking even if it's already established, always making sure that it's constantly evolving and changing according to what student needs are.*

The petition for Asian Diasporic Studies at Barnard was a topic that shaped a significant part of Julie and Christina's oral histories. I didn't realize that Aurelia was involved until she brought up the petition, but her reflections went in a different direction compared to my conversations with Julie and Christina.

Aurelia Tan '25: *So Duan could definitely give you perspective on this, because there was some issues with [the petition]. There were some issues with how it's being framed. In some of my personal experiences with Asian organization, not on campus but in general, my issue is it feels like [they're] just making it open to Asian people just for the sake of having it for Asian people. But there's no critical thought behind [the organizing]. [And] I feel no solidarity with being Asian [in those spaces], I feel nothing about my identity, [if] I'm here just because I'm Asian.*

And that's not what I wanted to do with this club. And that's definitely not what I wanted for [the] Asian American Studies [program], because you are literally studying what it means to be Asian American and the history [behind the identity]. If you make [this program] just for sake of having one, then what's the point? There's nothing, there's no heart behind it. You know what I mean? So that was our biggest issue.

I also learned from Aurelia that AZINE founder Duan considered getting involved in the petition to establish Asian Diasporic Studies at Barnard but decided not to before graduating in 2023. Duan brought up this connection and echoed Aurelia's notes:

Duan '23: *I was actually interested in that too. And I was like, Wow, that'd be so great. But I was a senior, I was gonna graduate [soon]. Me and Nami were both talking and I found that, the sophomore that was trying to run it didn't have a very deep understanding of Asian American Studies or radicalism or colonialism itself. And it just seemed [to be] more surface level. And we were like, We can't do this. I don't know, I don't want to talk badly, but it's like, we were given things to do, but we were seniors in our last semester. And like, we can't do that right now. We can support and give knowledge but like, not if it's inefficient or like not if your understanding of Asian American Studies is so limited by anti-Asian hate and stuff like that. Like, I'm sure that she probably knows more but it– yes, it just didn't, we were doing the work for her.*

Solby Lim: *Mm. I feel like there's just like, so many ways that you can teach Asian American Studies and intentionality is really important.*

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What is it that an Asian American Studies program at Barnard, what do you think should be integral to a program like that?

Duan '23: *Mm. Recognizing the intersectionality of it all, like, it just didn't feel like– let me find the poster that was like, almost flyered [around campus]. They were kind of operating without knowing the history of student activism and how to organize. And I was like, I can't be under someone else right now. So I had issues with the poster or like, the way they were presenting it. And it just seemed very shallow. Because, again, the only Asian interest group that the sophomore who was organizing it was a part of was the sorority [Kappa Phi Lambda].*

Solby: *Right. So this was the flyer. [I am describing it] for the recording. The first question, Are you an Asian American at Barnard who wants to see more representation in our curriculum? Do you have ideas about how to implement Asian American content into your academics? Do you want to meet more Asian Americans like you at Barnard? So they distributed this flyer [around] campus?*

Duan: *Yeah, this is what they wanted [laughs]. It's like, okay. So part of my, I guess critique of other Asian groups on campus– or, when I was looking at things I was like, Okay, why do I feel like something's missing here, like there's some space that doesn't exist yet? I think [it's because] there's a lot of wealth privilege at Columbia and Barnard. And people aren't aware of the intersection of [their identities and privilege]. And I think that doesn't– I think the more and more privileged students that come to this campus, the less aware they are of the struggles of other people. And sometimes I feel like they don't make good activists. Yeah. Or they don't do much. I feel like they don't have a good fundamental understanding of systemic issues or oppression, or even interest in other groups for solidarity.*

Aurelia made similar comments on the mock flyer:

Aurelia Tan '25: *You should not want to support it only because you're Asian or only because other minorities have a major so why shouldn't we? I mean, yeah that's the point, but that's not [what] the meat of [the program should be about]. That's very surface level and you need to go beneath it. And I think that was Duan's biggest gripe about [the petition], because it felt very, very surface level.*

Duan and Aurelia reminded me of *Gidra's* 1973 cover issue:

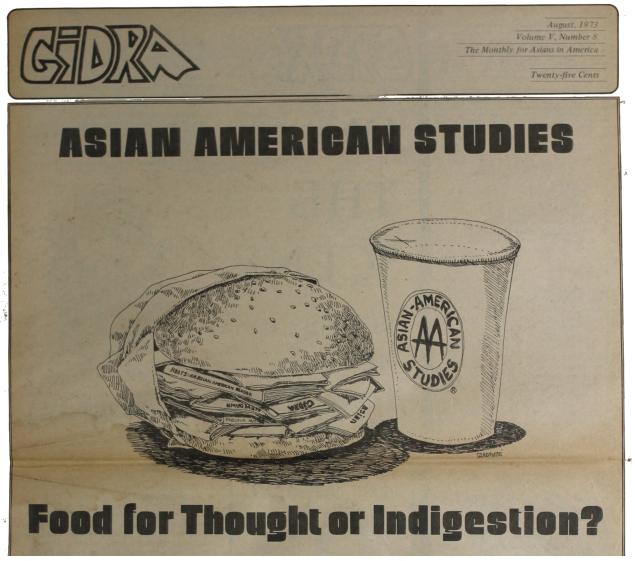


Figure 24. Takemoto. Cover image of Gidra: A Monthly for Asians in America. August 1973. Gidra Volume 5 No. 8.

"Asian American Studies: Food for Thought or Indigestion?" represents a critical inquiry into what goals and responsibilities Asian American Studies programs should be progressing towards. The intriguing illustration accompanies a reportage article on the 1973 Asian American Studies Conference in San Jose State College written by *Gidra* contributor Terri Nitta, where Nitta writes about her positive and challenging experiences attending the conference. Nitta considers whether Asian American Studies further the welfare of Asian/Americans and the issues impacting our communities, or if these programs end up falling into pits of elitism and institutional stagnation as a result of becoming academic programs tied to universities. Although Nitta posed this question in response to the specific circumstances of the 1973 conference, her inquiry speaks to the critical reflections made by Aurelia and Duan on what the purpose of an Asian Diasporic Studies program should be.

The question of whether Asian American Studies is a meaningful endeavor in discussing Asian/American issues, food for thought, or a counterproductive experience

like indigestion articulates these narrators' concerns about the representation-focused organizing efforts to establish an Asian Diasporic Studies program at Barnard. I witness Duan and Aurelia's shared concerns of the program becoming *surface level* and *shallow* as critical inquiries into Asian/American desires for recognition and representation from powerful institutions ranging from universities to governments to industries like Hollywood. Because what happens after recognition is achieved? Is Asian American Studies a means to pursue a vision or goal for Asian/Americans or is its institutionalized establishment the point of the program?

I also witness these concerns as an inquiry into the contents, details, and characteristics of an Asian Diasporic Studies at Barnard, the *meat* of the program as Aurelia says. What kinds of courses should be taught? What should be the mission of the program? What should be the goals and objectives of the program? Duan's concerns that the student organizers they met *didn't have a very deep understanding of Asian American studies or radicalism or colonialism itself* and that *they were kind of operating without knowing the history of student activism* speaks to how Duan values historicization as a mode of thinking critically about Asian/American identity. For Duan, understanding the roots of Asian American Studies programs as an academic field born out of the radical Asian/American politics and activism of the 1960s (return to Documents 1.0 and 1.1) is a key part of the value of these programs.

Witnessing the differences between how student organizers think, and possible tensions in their organizing work, reminds us of important questions we should be asking about programs like Asian American Studies, especially when current students have the opportunity to establish a new program and determine the quality of their education. Listening between these narrators encourages us to form our own interpretations; to think critically about whether Asian American Studies, or Asian Diasporic Studies in this case, should be genuine spaces for education on and intellectual growth in thinking about Asian American identity, issues, history, and culture, and not fall into becoming lip

service for universities to tout their diversity narratives, confined to the boundaries of representation politics. Or as Nitta observes, "we knew why we needed Asian American studies when we started out but now that we have established ourselves we had better make sure that we know what to do with it."[92]

[92] Teri Nitta, "Asian American Studies: Food for Thought or Indigestion? A Look at the Asian American Studies Conference in San Jose," Gidra vol. 5 no. 8 (August 1973), 6.

5.0 J is for Joy: Notes on Belonging and Affect in Asian/American Student Organizing

Solby Lim: *In terms of student advocacy and thinking about the work that students can do, can you speak about what student activism means or looks like to you?*

Julie Wu '25: *Yeah, I think personally, it's, it's creating change where you want to see change. That's a great question. [Laughs]*

Solby: *[Laughs] It's a very big [laughs] question.*

Julie: *Yeah [laughs], I understand. Yeah, I mean, I'm of course still figuring it out myself. I think, and I'm hoping for myself, that any form of advocacy, not just for Asian Americans, will always be a part of my life. And I think that a lot of people think about, you know, At the end of my life, what do I want to remember? [Laughs] And what do I want to be remembered by? And for me, that would be to have at least tried to make an impact and make a change wherever I went. Not just for myself, but for other people as well. And I, as I said a while ago, I don't think that advocacy necessarily has to have like, an accomplished goal. You know, this doesn't have to be something that is written on a plaque and then has your name under it.*

Solby: *Mm.*

Julie: *I think that a lot of advocacy is just finding the joys and making change for others and for yourself, for the communities around you. Not even necessarily society as a whole. You know, I think a lot of people put a lot of pressure on themselves to create lasting impacts for humanity. [Laughs] But I think [about] just doing what you can and what you think is feasible for yourself, and you should always enjoy it too. I would never want someone to join, you know, our executive board for example, out of obligation or out of guilt or something. Advocacy should be something that you want to pursue and find meaningfulness in.*

Julie reminded me of joy's place in organizing and advocacy work, especially for those focused on building and creating space for community. These students labor for change because they are moved to do so, because of their desires and heart to build a more caring, affirming, and supportive campus for themselves and their peers. In exploring their self-reflections on Asian/American student issues, these narrators spoke to the different affective dynamics shaping their organizing work. Student organizing opens

up care as a political act. Joy is a politics, a methodology of tending to the world through organizing and advocating. Narrators speak about how the emotional conditions of students are important for sustaining organizing work and imagining the future of student spaces. It matters what students feel and how it relates to their socio-political work. For Julie, who is involved in the efforts to create an Asian Diasporic Studies program at Barnard, joy as organizing means doing what moves you. For other narrators, joy as organizing means cultivating a sense of collective being and imagining home in student gathering.

Many of these narrators returned to belonging as a vision, an imagination of community-building they practiced by organizing. bell hooks writes that "Giving is the way we also learn how to receive. The mutual practice of giving and receiving… This is the most precious gift true love offers– the experience of knowing we always belong."[93] Belonging as how bell hooks describes an experience of knowledge, a gift of one's love and care. Joy. For some, like Kathleen, who is a co-leader of Columbia's Vietnamese Students Association, and Len, who is the co-leader of Columbia's Queer & Asian club, organizing is about belonging. They strive to nurture a sense of home for students so that they can *be their full Viet self* on campus and *form community through shared experiences.* The emphasis on connections from one student to another, of acknowledging and welcoming one's fullest self, is a tender act of love through organizing. These narrators speak to the necessity of student organizing because it brings about an experience of knowing belonging, a sense of sincere recognition amongst marginalized communities. A sense of affirmation.

[93] bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions* (HarperCollins: New York, 2001),164.

5.1 Notes on Affirmation as/in Organizing

Solby Lim: *And whether you can be supported in this space and learn and you know,*

Fiona Cho '24: *And be, truly yourself?*

Solby: *Yes, yes. Yes.*

Fiona: *Because with some people, I don't say any of this stuff.*

Solby: *Yes, absolutely. Yeah.*

Fiona: *When I told you about SJP [Students for Justice in Palestine], at first I was like, Okay, I was like, I had a feeling like I could tell you about things, [laughs]*

Solby: *[Laughs]*

Fiona: *I mean you're doing an oral history project on Asian American narrative in a nuanced way. I'm sure I can tell her but also I was like, what if?*

Solby: *That's always the question. You always have to wonder that.*

Fiona: *And it sucks. Because, first of all, these radical spaces are so few and far in between. But also even within those practical spaces, some people are not as radical as they claim. Yeah. And you're left with like, literally, like two people. [Laughs] Literally a tiny handful of people who truly support you, and the work you do. So hard.*

•

I feel like, I don't know. Um, I don't know, I just felt like I could talk about this with you,

Solby: *Oh my gosh, like, [laughs]*

Fiona: *That you have this, personal– I just felt like you understood, I don't know, all the nuances.*

Solby: *Yeah. No, yeah.*

Fiona: *Yeah. Just really easy to talk to. So I was like Okay, I think I can bring this up. Yeah.*

Solby: *[Laughs] Yeah, no, I totally, I totally relate.*

Fiona's oral history unraveled a series of connections between her and I. We were both Korean/American third culture kids, attended Westernized international schools in

Asia, and harbored complicated feelings towards being Korean/American in America and Korea. We lamented the stigma against radical and progressive leftist politics in Korea, a phenomenon backed by a history of violent, structural suppression of leftist movements and the rise of the far-right conservative Yoon Suk-yeol administration in Korea. We shared the disconnections felt in our childhood experiences in international schools, mine in Hong Kong and hers in Korea, which operate in Asia but teach (in English) within the confines of the dominant colonial narrative where Europe and the US are the center of the world's importance. I was taken aback by how deeply I related to Fiona, why our connections felt so sincere and tangible. Our agreements, the *mm*s, the *I totally relate*s made me realize the loneliness of our experiences. That experiences of being *truly yourself* were few and far in between with our peers, even family and friends. That it was easier to stay guarded and not speak, to decide *with some people, I don't say any of this stuff*. We recognized this shared loneliness, which made our affirmation feel like relief.

Fiona: *I feel like, I don't know. Um, I don't know, I just felt like I could talk about this with you,*

Solby: *Oh my gosh, like, [laughs]*

Fiona: *That you have this, personal– I just felt like you understood, I don't know, all the nuances.*

Solby: *Yeah. No, yeah.*

Fiona: *Yeah. Just really easy to talk to. So I was like Okay, I think I can bring this up. Yeah.*

Solby: *[Laughs] Yeah, no, I totally, I totally relate.*

This precious experience of affirmation. Of being seen and heard, sincerely, from another's eyes and ears. Of finding familiarity and recognition in the light that appears in another's eyes, the sweet notes that ring from another's voice. To be affirmed is to be spoken about. To remember is to affirm. What Fiona speaks toward in our latter exchange is the increasing importance of affirmation to the development of one's political

consciousness and ability to think critically about the society and world we live in, and thus a student's capacity to organize. Students organize to be together, to hold space in a collective manner. The felt experience of those who *truly support you, and the work you do,* especially when you feel affirming spaces are *few and far in between* is vital. Student organizing is a form of collective support, a political structure of care and a way to hold each other. I make note of affirmation because this particular exchange is one of humanity, of recognizing and hearing the humanity within and through each other. Affirmation is a reminder that our lives are bound up within each other, a necessary reminder for those who are engaged in organizing against processes of de-humanization. In an oral history approach to Asian/American student organizing, this affirmation is perceived and recognized as part and parcel of the process of knowledge and narrative creation. Affirmation is agency.

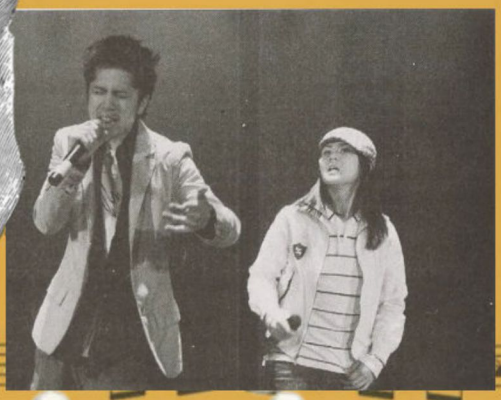
Oral history tends to affect and remembered feelings as forms of political and cultural knowledge, reflection, and information, making oral history an important methodological and archival approach for organizing history and understanding narratives of student organizers. Both our lived experiences and our memories of them are enriched with emotion; what we feel and how we remember feelings hold knowledge and desires, thoughts and interpretations of our encounters in the world. It is important to note that dominant methods of collecting and understanding history rely on the abstraction of affect, dehydrating understandings of historical events of felt experiences, and thus the memories of lived experiences. Being un-emotional, leaving one's emotions aside are seen as better and more legitimate ways of interpreting history. On the other hand, being too emotional, letting feelings into analysis, as if felt emotions and critical thinking can be so divorced, are ways to invalidate and dismiss one's perspective. Oral history tends to felt experiences, the formations and circulations of affect, witnessing emotion as critical forms of personal and interpersonal knowledge, ways of understanding.

Scholar Alistair Thomson writes that "oral historians are unique in being able to question their informants, to ask questions that might not have been imagined in the past, and to evoke recollections and understandings that were previously silenced or ignored. We enjoy the pleasures - as well as the considerable challenges - of engaging in active, human relationships in the course of our research."[94] By considering what, how, and why lived experiences are remembered, oral history takes seriously affect as ways of knowing. These oral histories with student organizers understand joy and excitement as motivating factors for collective organizing, as well as ways to sustain students through various challenges they face in organizing for an Asian diasporic studies program, for example. Narrators note passion and desires for belonging and community as organizational sustenance, affect becoming an instrument for student organizing.

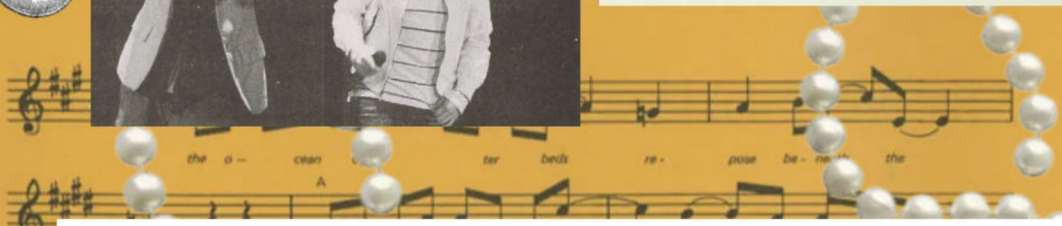
[94] Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History." *The Journal of American History* 85, (no. 2 1998), 584.

Yellow Pearl

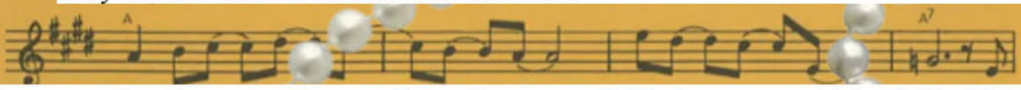
MIYAMOTO — IIJIMA



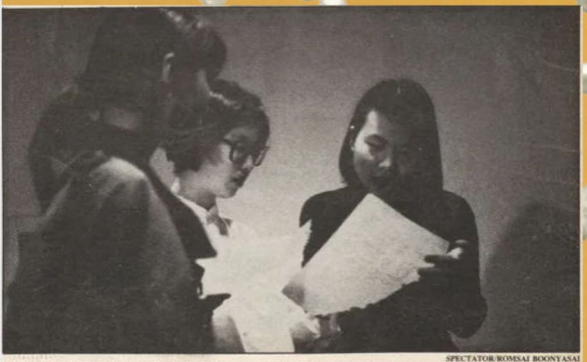
n. 1. people. 2. women. 3. Asian women. 4. a coalition of Asian women. 5. the exploration of the dynamics of being a women with Asian heritages via academic, political, cultural, and social functions. 6. a group of highly motivated Asian women at Barnard College and Columbia University. 7. a coterie of Barnard College and Columbia University Asian women who put forth the magazine **DAAWN,** dialogue about Asian women's news.
adj. 1. energetic. 2. creative. 3. aware. 4. angry. 5. hopeful.
v. to be an Asian woman.



Mariah: *I just really want future Asian Americans students to feel a sense of belonging here. I want them to no longer stop and think that they're not Asian, or not American enough, [and that] being in Barnard will help them see themselves in a better light. That they are enough here [and] anywhere else in the world, because they're very talented. They have so much to contribute to the table.*



Duan: *Because, when the enemy is gone, then who are you? What are you outside of all of this? And I hope, [laughs] so within AZINE, I think that's what I'm currently trying to, like, redefine, where everyone is, I hope, redefining the Asian American identity for themselves, and not prescribing liberal [politics], and trying to choose other pathways to exist with joy and creativity and just, things that are not more negative.*



SPECTATOR/ROMSAI BOONYASAI

THE ASIAN MYSTIQUE: Members of the Asian Women's Coalition (AWC) rapped about inaccurate media portrayals and violence against women in the home.

YELLOW PEARL

YELLOW PEARL is a collection of the creative talents of young Asian Americans. It is also an expression of an emerging consciousness of being Asian in America. We need to write about the War, Attica and our people's history. We need to express our loves, our loneliness and our dreams. Through **YELLOW PEARL** we share what we feel, what we think and what we are with our brothers and sisters.

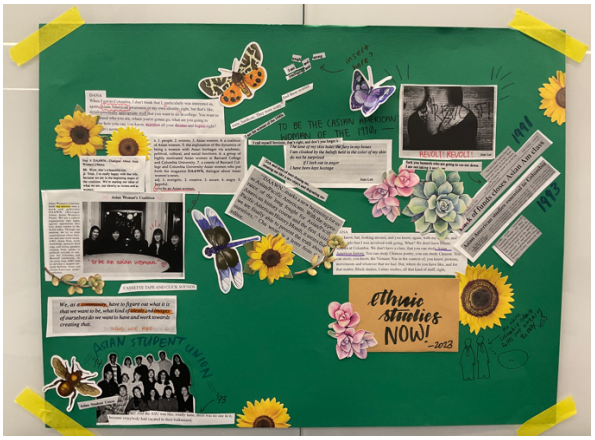
Coming together on the project we have shared ten months of relating — emotionally, politically and artistically. In the process we made efforts to re-examine our own perspectives; and we grew. In trying to project a view of ourselves as Asians in America, we found this best expressed through a clear statement against basic philosophies of exploitation and oppression — of individuals as well as nations. For many of us, the hope has been that **YELLOW PEARL**, subjective as it is, has become a part of that movement which is attempting to build a more responsive and responsible society.

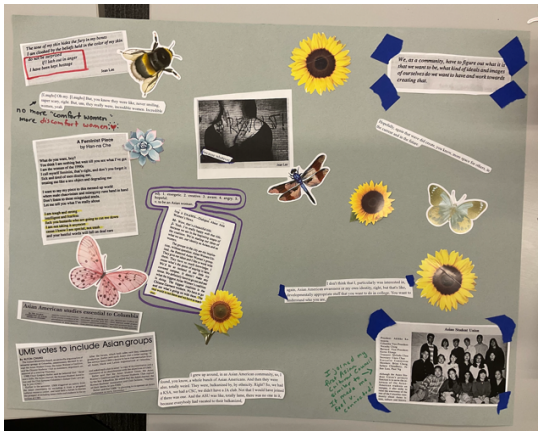
5.3 Memo to You from Me: Collaging Asian/American History

In the spring of 2023, I hosted a collaging party as part of my thesis work and my Curating Oral Histories class titled "Collaging Asian/American: A Curatorial Experiment with Oral History and Archives":

My flyer for the event

At this point, I had done oral history with Dana Wu and Amy Sueyoshi. I gathered portions of their transcripts and archived photos, illustrations, and news clippings I pulled from *Columbia Spectator* and the Barnard Archives and set out to collage with the students and community members who attended my event. We ended up making two collective collages:



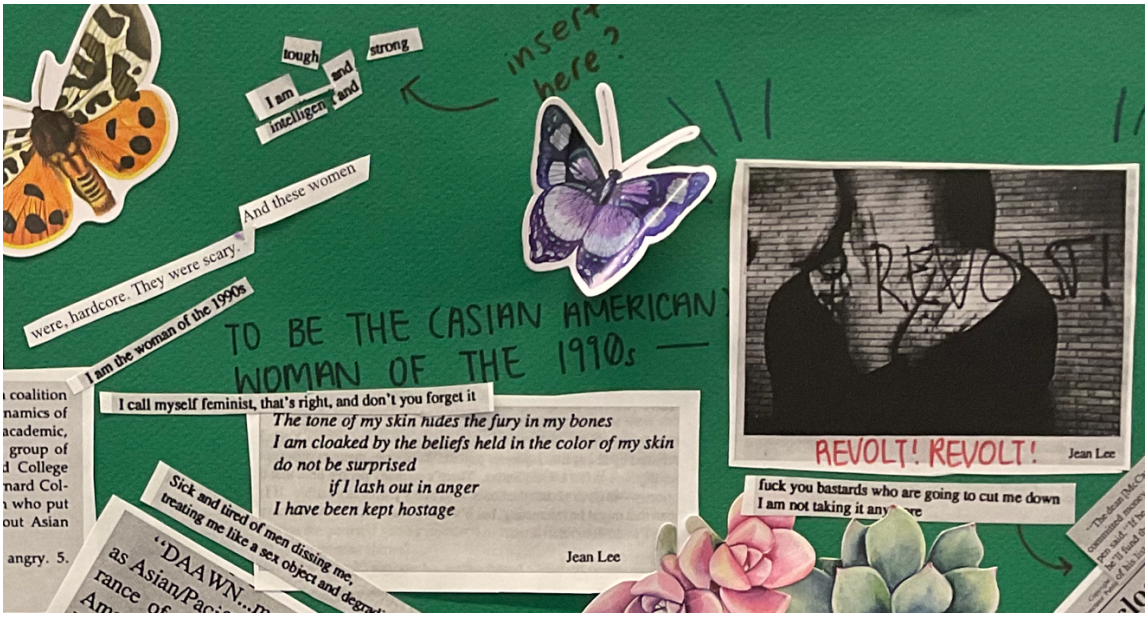


Collaging creates a canvas of connections between past students, Dana and Amy's oral histories, and current students. This art practice allowed us in the present to respond to the past, identifying what has changed and what has not and other similarities/differences between our experiences of being Asian/American at Barnard and Columbia and past Asian/American experiences. How did people witness Dana and Amy's transcripts? What quotes pulled their interest and where did they see connections between the archived records and the oral history transcript? Collaging became our embodied way of

answering these questions. Every act of gluing and placing together and drawing became interpretive acts of creating meaning out of oral history through visual art.

Collaging turned into an experimental practice of interpreting these oral histories as someone other than the narrators for the people who attended "Collaging Asian/American." For me, it was a way to express my interpretations and reflections of the oral histories as the interviewer and oral historian of *Tidal Notes* without speaking over or imposing my voice over narrators' voices. I created the collages in *Tidal Notes* as visual records of my witnessing of these narrators and their oral histories, thinking about how these oral histories engaged with each other, artistic symbols, and relevant archival text, photographs. Writing is one way to reflect on oral history work; I played with collaging as another process of thinking and engaging with narrators' voices and experiences.

Art is communication, an expression of our humanity. These collages give texture to the process of witnessing and interpreting oral history.



6.0 Notes on Speculative Student Organizing; Anticipating and Supporting the Future from the Current Present

Every step we take gets us farther from where we are
Where we've been and what we've done
Have brought us here and now
Today is only one day more
Till tomorrow afternoon,
Let's see it in together
Tonight we'll soon be through
Help me with tomorrow
I'm depending on you

– A Grain of Sand's "Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains"

Belonging and community-building are important to these narrators and what they mean by organizing on campus. As students spoke about desires for themselves and other Asian/American students to feel belonging and affirmation, I realized that they were organizing for two campuses: their current selves and the imagined future students who would take their place in as early as a year from now. By nurturing a sense of belonging on the present campus, narrators hope to pass belonging onto future selves. Speculative organizing cultivates belonging in the present and the future.

What moves these students to pick up the pieces of those before them? To re-visit and revive the bygone websites, email chains, the digital remnants of their predecessors, like new waves washing over the imprint of previous tides? For these Asian/American students, their future is always on their minds. There will always be another incoming class of first-years and graduating class of seniors, among them students curious and eager to organize. Someone will always be coming after them, whether in droves or small collectives or numbered individuals. There will always be students to fill their spaces after them and after them. Futurity is guaranteed, which makes imagination a responsibility. The future (students) become a vital motivator to pick up and revive and

re-activate and re-make current student organizing. Speculation becomes part of the necessary work of student organizing.

Julie Wu '25: *I mean, probably all students are told this, who tried to do this type of work*

•

I think [someone] had said, You know, if you tried to do this, you're not going to be able to major in the program. And I said, Oh that's fine. [Laughs] I assume that, you know, these things take time. I think as humans, we always want that sort of instant gratification and [to] really see our work laid out and have an end goal and something that we've been able to accomplish. And it sounds so cliche, but I think the real work is through the process. And being able to value the work that you've put in, maybe even if you weren't there at the finish line, you can still say that you worked very hard to pursue something that you are passionate about during the time being. So I hope that students feel that way, and that they don't feel that they're working for nothing. Because if you look at– or that their efforts will make a lasting impact. I do think that they will. And if you look at some of the first Asian American Ethnic Studies programs that students protested for in California, like, decades ago, I mean, we still talk about those protests today.

•

And I think that any effort led by students and faculty will have an impact. And what I'm hoping is, if you know, it doesn't, if a program is not created by the time I graduate, then I'll still be able to be a part of the community and the group of students that will take that work and keep going with it. But yeah, I mean it's a collective effort.

Julie gets told she won't be able to major in the program she helped organize, and she says *Oh that's fine*, and laughs gently. I observed no pause between her recalling what she was told and her response. She accepted this reality so coolly and knowingly. *Oh that's fine* meant she understood that she herself would most likely not get to enjoy the fruits of her organizing labor, an Asian Diasporic Studies program at Barnard, but it means much more. *Oh that's fine* notes her conviction in the bigger picture, that her organizing work and the labor she did, talking to students and emailing administrators and presenting at conferences, contributes and makes a difference in pushing the cause for Asian Diasporic Studies at Barnard. Within Julie's acceptance of this reality lies her recognition of the process of this kind of institutional change, and a turn towards the next wave of students, her future selves, who would be the ones to continue and enjoy the fruits of her organizing. Imagining the Asian/American future is possible because of the

past and present work being done. I return to what Duan noted earlier on learning from the recording mishap at the CSER teach-in they organized:

Duan: *And in the future, [laughs] I think that we don't think about preserving things so that they're accessible in the future. And there's so much good knowledge that came out of that talk and so much effort, and it would have been great if we were able to get that sound. And yeah, we learned so much about student organizing. A lot of it was meant for organizing in general, like how do you continue momentum? How do you, it's like politics, how do you interact with administration? How do you negotiate for what you want? And how do you even bring people in so that they're interested, so that you mentor them and then teach them things?*

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Yeah. And, it's so much, it's so important for people, or the students on this campus to keep learning the histories that came before them, and know that they existed in context, and also know how to organize and build community and negotiate with the admins. Yeah.

I hear these narrators' convictions as what Black feminist oral historian Taylor Thompson describes as "'embodied knowledge': that pull in my chest that lets me know that the love we deserve exists, if only else(where). *The only grace you can have is the grace you can imagine*. What I mean is, what we *hear before we can see*, what we are pulled towards, what we *craft*, what we imagine, matters."[95] Imagination and speculation are vital parts of student organizing work; they become necessary to building community between the waves of students rushing out just as they have flooded into campus.

Mariah Iris Ramo '27: *But I do think a lot of us are driven by what happens growing up. We all want to ensure that people now and people in the future do not have to experience the things that you've gone through.*

•

Solby Lim: *What do you hope for your work to do on this campus? And what do you hope for the next, the future Asian American students here at Barnard?*

Mariah: *Again, this is very vague. But I just really want future Asian Americans students to feel a sense of belonging here. I want them to no longer stop and think that they're not Asian, or not American enough, [and that] being in Barnard will help them see themselves in a better light. That they are enough here [and] anywhere else in the world,*

[95] Taylor Thompson, "Tell Me About That World: Speculative Archives and Black Feminist Listening Practices," Master's thesis (Columbia University, 2022).

because they're very talented. They have so much to contribute to the table. And they're not afraid to pull up a seat. So, definitely a sense of belonging.

Solby: *Mm. And I realized I just ask you that as you're in your first year, [laughs] of Barnard [laughs]*

Mariah: *Oh no, it's okay. I'll make tons of changes I'm sure, throughout [my time here].*

Solby: *I mean I hope that for yourself as well, as you're coming through Barnard.*

Mariah: *Yeah. Because in the midst of all of these activisms, we all need to take care of ourselves.*

Christina Park '26: *Mm. I think that's just really essential for students to know that parts of your identity and your background are not things that you should be ashamed of, and are things that are recognized on campus.*

•

And I think that moving forward, in the future, I just hope that– because again, if the school doesn't even recognize that, I feel like that's already sending a message to, I mean, a lot of people might not notice but, this just sends a message to Asian students. It's not invalidating per se, but [it's that] the school doesn't even recognize that part of your identity. And there are other concentrations that recognize other identities, and I just think that it's important to have this [program] to show students [that] your school does care. And there are places for you to explore different parts of your identity if you're not as connected to your identity. And I think that that's kind of the overall goal. I hope that that's our lasting impact.

Thompson notes that "our dreams do not have to be the same in order for them to be powerful or of service to a greater vision of mutual-liberation. In fact, by virtue of their difference they possess the potential to be constellated—we can draw lines between our dreams, trace the shapes the connections make, and out of those constellations we can *find doorways.*"[96] What are the shapes of these narrators' connections? Christina imagines recognition and space for Asian American students to engage with their identity in meaningful ways. Mariah imagines an affirmed Asian/American future, where students feel empowerment, not shame, that they are *not afraid to pull up a seat* to the table. She

[96] Taylor Thompson, "Tell Me About That World: Speculative Archives and Black Feminist Listening Practices," Master's thesis (Columbia University, 2022).

speculates a campus where Asian/American students feel belonging and have multiple spaces to go to build community, like Liga Filipina or APAHM, and a campus that celebrates Filipino American History Month with celebratory dinners. Julie and Fiona imagine an endowed Asian/American future, where students are equipped with their history and resources that come with institutionally supported Asian Diasporic studies and Ethnic studies departments. It is in these speculations where *Tidal Notes* listens, where the past and future collide into the present, washing over and speaking to each other.

Dana Wu '91: *I feel like the work that AWC [Asian Women's Coalition] and DAAWN [Dialogue About Asian Women's News journal] that I did was just part and parcel of all [the Ethnic Studies and anti-racist activism going on] at the time, you know. It wasn't in itself, maybe a way of fighting anything, but maybe it was just part of the overall wave [of student protest] and I hope that wave has made a difference. I hope that wave for current students now has created space to–*

Dana does not finish her sentence here. She moves onto another thought about Columbia's commitment to Ethnic Studies and does not come back to her hope. I also get caught up in her talking that I end up not asking her to continue her speculative thinking. What kinds of space does Dana hope current students have? Spaces to gather, organize, build community? She leaves me appreciating the open-endedness of her unfinished thought, and how it becomes up to us, the readers of her oral history record, to speculate on her incomplete speculations. But I also wish she had finished the end of her sentence and spoken about what kinds of spaces she speculated for current students to have as a result of 90s-era organizing work around Ethnic and Asian American Studies.

Students engage in speculative organizing, working to build community while imagining their future selves enjoying the fruits of their current labors, and endeavoring to make better changes for their future selves' future selves. Speculation and imagining are vital acts these narrators partake in because future speculation denies the nihilism, the hopelessness, the feeling that *you cannot make change.* It denies the paralysis of

hopelessness and reminds you that you are not alone or isolated. Engaging in speculative organizing work reminds of your agency, your power in this present moment. Whatever you do now will be what they carry on.

What is left behind? What do you leave behind? These students leave their memories, records of organizing and pieces of Asian/American history at Barnard and Columbia. They also hope, speculate to leave behind a sense of belonging, hope to affirm Asian/American students and affirm their existence, their stakes in this community, their voices. Organizing means to affirm the past, in the present and for the future.

*I encourage you to listen to A Grain of Sand's "Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains" before moving on: http://tinyurl.com/speculativeorganizing

where to now

Duan: *It's so important for people, or the students on this campus to keep learning the histories that came before them, and know that they existed in context, and also know how to organize and build community and negotiate with the admins. Yeah.*

Activists present also emphasized the creation of a strong and independent vision for the programs within ethnic studies and the movement itself.

Every step we take gets us farther from where we are
Where we've been and what we've done
Have brought us here and now
Today is only one day more
Till tomorrow afternoon,
Let's see it in together
Tonight we'll soon be through
Help me with tomorrow
I'm depending on you

Activists Recall Past, Have High Hopes For Future of Ethnic Studies

Julie: *And, I think that any effort led by students and faculty will have an impact. And what I'm hoping is, if you know, it doesn't, if a program is not created by the time I graduate, then I'll still be able to be a part of the community and the group of students that will take that work and keep going with it. But yeah, I mean, it's a collective effort.*

"I find it sad that we keep going back in history because I would hope people have laid a foundation for new things," said Joaquin Ochoa, a graduate of Columbia's Teacher's College and one of the activists who participated in a fifteen day hunger strike in 1996. "I think we need to take it somewhere it hasn't gone before."

7.0 THERE IS NO ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICS WITHOUT JUSTICE FOR PALESTINE: Notes on Solidarity in Asian/American Organizing

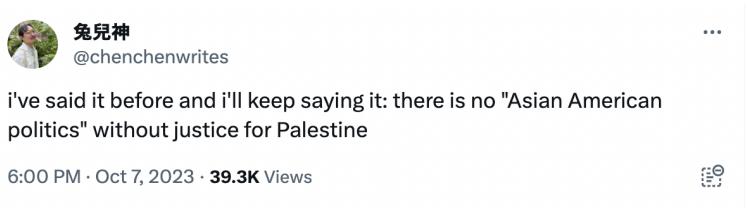

Figure 25. Screengrab of writer Chen Chen's post on X, formerly Twitter. October 7 2022.

I return to a note made by poet and writer Chen Chen, who featured as the guest speaker for APAHM's April 2023 closing ceremony address at Columbia. He writes,

"i've said it before and i'll keep saying it: there is no "Asian American politics" without justice for Palestine."

There is no Asian American politics without justice for Palestine. We are connected by our shared history, loss, dreams, struggle. Our struggles for liberation and a better, more caring and tender world are indelibly linked. Our politics is your politics. We are with you, our struggles and demands are yours too. As I spoke with narrators about organizing and different resurgences, renewals in student action on campus, this message stayed with me. I was able to ask a few narrators if they had seen this post and what their thoughts might be.

Solby Lim: *How do you feel about [Chen Chen's] statement?*

William Diep '25*: I cannot agree more. Honestly, everything that you do, I– Mm, I don't like it when people say that they're not political because everything is political.*

Solby: *Mmm.*

Kathleen Hoang '25: *Mhm. It's privileged,*

William: *It's privileged to say [that] not everything's political. Because good luck to you when your home gets invaded. Also, how as a Vietnamese person can you say that you aren't political? Because [our] existence is,*

Kathleen: *Exactly like, you know, America is political resistance. Because we are here because they were there, in our home country. We would have grown up in Vietnam if it wasn't for the war. So I just, I just, I don't know.*

We are here because they were there, in our home country. In "Taking Risks, or The Question of Palestine Solidarity and Asian American Studies," scholars Junaid Rana and Diane C. Fujino consider recent histories of solidarity actions for Palestine within Asian American fields of study. Rana and Fujino note how South Asian solidarity with Palestine is "driven by a shared colonial experience that reflects 'the loss of homes . . . [and] the shock of a life pulverized.'"[97] They also write on the Critical Filipino/Filipina Studies Collective's 2003 resolution opposing the Iraq War in 2003, connecting the US military occupation of Iraq with the Israeli occupation of Palestine, as well as on how post-9/11 peace vigils across the US forged solidarities between Japanese American communities and Muslim, Arab, and South Asian/American communities.[98] *We are here because they were there, in our home country*. Kathleen and William's remarks speak to a political Asian/American orientation towards solidarity with Palestine as a practice of connection, familiarity, shared struggle and histories. For Asian/American scholars and students, "Palestine has emerged as an important emphasis connecting scholarship to activism in the context of the US role in the global War on Terror that has reinvigorated the ethnic studies praxis of solidarity and political commitment."[99]

Duan '23: *We stand in solidarity and we must, because like, we've seen this happen again and again throughout American history where people are scapegoated and then*

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[97] Junaid Rana and Diane C. Fujino, "Taking Risks, or The Question of Palestine Solidarity and Asian American Studies," *American Quarterly* 67 (no. 4, 2015), 1029.
[98] Junaid Rana and Diane C. Fujino, "Taking Risks, or The Question of Palestine Solidarity and Asian American Studies," *American Quarterly* 67 (no. 4, 2015), 1029-30.
[99] Rana and Fujino, "Taking Risks, or The Question of Palestine Solidarity and Asian American Studies," *1027.*

the media is completely against them. And the genocide of people is excused because of who's backing it. And it's very important for us as an identity-focused-based political and creative group to be able to support people in times like these. And some of our members, or people who are part of the Asian diaspora, are Brown and Muslim also.

I got a group of AZINE people together and go [to a rally]. And that's part of why AZINE is supposed to exist as a community. You may not know about these things, so be brave enough to go to a protest on your own.

***Solby Lim**: Mhm.*

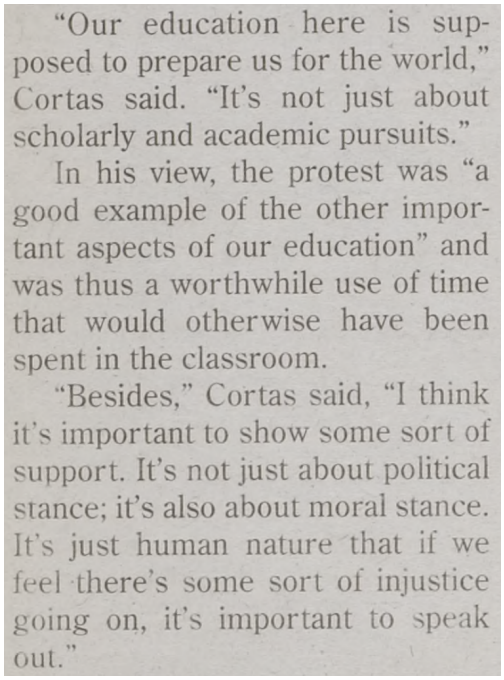
***Duan:** It's [about] using what you can to be able to support the ways that you can, like spreading information and being a body or a number [at protests]. So that other people and students, the Palestinian students, don't feel alone.*

Figure 26. Students holding the Palestinian flag and a sign that says "We are in 2002 all Palestinians." Photos taken by Samantha Luk for "Students Organize Sit-In to Support Palestinians" by Xan Nowakowski. April 18 2002. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXXVI No

Spectator records of pro-Palestinian student organizing document the necessity of inter-group collaboration in organizing rallies, protests, and people. Solidarity is not just rhetoric; solidarity is a tangible, material practice of working together, joining groups, finding connections and common ground and organizing from those connections. When I asked about VSA's decision to sign the Students for Justice in Palestine's October 9 2023 statement of solidarity, William and Kathleen noted the complexities in their collective

group deliberations, sharing concerns of individual students potentially getting doxed as a result but also wanting to make clear where VSA stood on the issue of solidarity with Palestine:

William Diep '25: *Because also Vietnamese history, everything that we saw in Palestine, everything that we saw even years ago in Afghanistan and in this country in America, they've all occurred in, in Vietnam at some point. So I feel like we do have an obligation to at least do something in regard to this situation right now.*



"Our education here is supposed to prepare us for the world," Cortas said. "It's not just about scholarly and academic pursuits."

In his view, the protest was "a good example of the other important aspects of our education" and was thus a worthwhile use of time that would otherwise have been spent in the classroom.

"Besides," Cortas said, "I think it's important to show some sort of support. It's not just about political stance; it's also about moral stance. It's just human nature that if we feel there's some sort of injustice going on, it's important to speak out."

Figure 27. Shadi Cortas quoted in "Students Organize Sit-In To Support Palestinians" by Xan Nowakowski. April 18 2002. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXXVI No. 53.

Shadi Cortas '03: ***I*** *think it's important to show some sort of support. It's not just about political stance; it's also about moral stance. It's just human nature that if we feel there's some sort of injustice going on, it's important to speak out.*

Notice how student organizers in the past and present speak to each other in their reflections. William's notes bring into conversation archived notes from Shadi Cortas '03, who was an organizer with Turath at Columbia, the campus's Arab students association. What do they bring out in each other? William feels that he and VSA *have an obligation to at least do something in regard to this situation right now.* Shadi Cortas finds it i*mportant to show some sort of support,* that if students *feel there's some sort of injustice going on, it's important to speak out.* It is about the attempt, not the result of student organizing that holds the most meaning for students. To at least do something, show some form of support, whether that be marching through campus, walking out of classes, attending a rally, is the point of organizing. The process of taking multiple actions together as a diverse and

unified collective threads together past and present formations of Asian/American student activism.

7.1 Memo on the Students Who Spiral Time November 14, 2023

Some people say history moves in a spiral, not the line we have come to expect. We travel through time in a circular trajectory, our distance increasing from an epicenter only to return again, one circle removed.

Figure 28. Ocean Vuong, On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), 27.

In my time of writing these notes, another tidal wave of student organizing gains ground on Barnard/Columbia's campus, and campuses around the world; students who oppose the genocidal Zionist campaign against and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, students who organize to gather, grieve, make change together.

OUR MISSION

Columbia University Apartheid Divest is a coalition of student organizations working toward achieving a liberated Palestine and the end of Israeli apartheid by urging Columbia to divest all economic and academic stakes in Israel. We seek an end to all interlocking systems of oppression through collective action and solidarity with oppressed people worldwide.

OUR VISION

We envision a free Palestine. We necessarily envision an entire world free from colonialism and imperialism, and from all the interrelated systems of oppression that uphold them.

Figure 29. Screengrabs of CUAD's cover image and mission statement, published on SJP's Instagram page. November 14 2023.

Columbia prides itself on being known as the protest Ivy, but forgets to mention itself as the entity students resist against. And in 30 or 50 years, Columbia may again seize upon the 2023 protests led by Palestinian students and their peers in solidarity. They may create online exhibitions, organize conferences, memorials dedicated to this current present in the future and speak of the students who faced doxing threats and violence and

suppression. They may speak of these students as brave or even revolutionary. The institution will do so without mentioning how it stood in the way of students at every turn, how Columbia stood by as Arab and Muslim students were harassed and targeted by far-right instigators, that the systemic menacing by Columbia was the reason these students had to be so brave and daring. Perhaps the institution will again engage in the opportunistic art of myth-making for financial and social gain. And it will be our responsibility to remember what they choose to willfully forget.

Figure 30. Photograph by Miriam Haskell for "Pro-Israel, Palestine Groups Rally" by Bram Alden. October 6 2000. Columbia Daily Spectator Volume CXXIV No. 101.

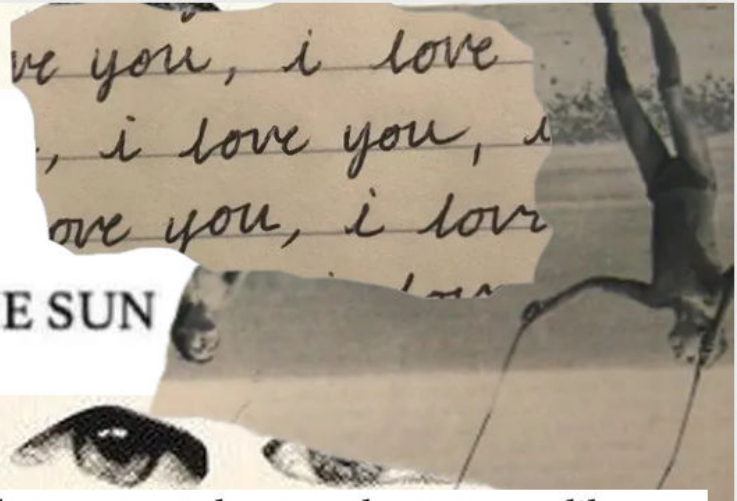
Figure 31. Photo by Ryan "Teddy" Wyche for "Do I feel safe wearing a keffiyeh?" by Safiya O'Brien. December 13 2023. Columbia Daily Spectator.

October 6, 2000. December 13, 2023.

*I encourage you to listen to A Grain of Sand's "Free the Land" while you view the next collage: http://tinyurl.com/practicing-solidarity

MAYBE YOU DO

I AM TASTING MYSELF
IN THE MOUNTAIN OF THE SUN



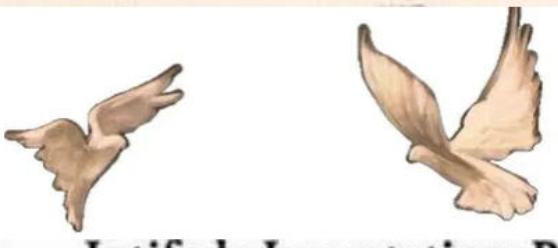
Duan: *It's [about] using what you can to be able to support the ways that you can, like spreading information and being a body or a number [at protests]. So that other people and students, the Palestinian students, don't feel alone.*

Kathleen: *We are here because they were there,*

in our home country

Duan: *We stand in solidarity*

and we must



Intifada Incantation: Poem #8 for b.b.L.
by June Jordan

I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED
GENOCIDE TO STOP
I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED AFFIRMATIVE
ACTION AND REACTION
I SAID I LOVED YOU AND I WANTED MUSIC
OUT THE WINDOWS

8.0 (Un)concluding Notes on Understanding Student Organizing

*I encourage you to listen to A Grain of Sand's "We are the Children" before reading this final note: http://tinyurl.com/understandingwhoweare

What to make of these students, their organization, their organizing work? Oral history elucidates the rich dimensions of student organizing. Even as the involved students themselves create different purposes and values for their groups, to be political or social or cultural, their recollections testify to the alive-ness of student organizing, the dynamic orientation of student groups to respond to what is happening to their communities in the moment, here and now. By attuning towards the lived experiences of students, oral history understands how Asian/American student organizing holds many depths, many truths in simultaneity. The meanings and importance of student organizing is, undoubtedly in the process, the errors, the emergencies, the learned knowledge, the surprises, the joys.

These narrators and their oral histories speak to the possibilities for student organizing in building community and belonging within an institution and nation that try hard to isolate and exclude Asian/Americans. Even with the differing aims of the student groups, whether organizers are in the midst of reviving a club and merely *want to survive* as Kathleen said, these organizers hold resolute understandings of larger, inter-collective solidarity in times of local and global crisis, when solidarity is most definitely and urgently needed. I look no further than the Columbia University Apartheid Divest coalition, where six out of the eight currently active clubs represented by the narrators I spoke with joined at the start or recently in 2023.

I returned to oral history because as a method, a practice of gathering or telling stories, oral history work supports the narrative of Asian/American student organizing on the student's terms. It gives way to the full, complex dynamism of student organizing and

advocacy, the humanity of the work and its makers. The everyday experiences of flyering and re-posting are far from frivolous; rather, these lived experiences build up the heart of student organizing, the oral history way of understanding student organizing. There is a mechanic of affirmation, of the student narrators and their tireless work, that I find priceless about the process of doing oral history. Not glorification, but affirmation, an acknowledgement of narrator agency and voice. Nobody is voiceless; everyone has minds and perspectives of their own. Oral history, when practiced with care and effort and connection, offers a building of knowledge through self-determination. The stories of history, the present, the future, can be told and understood in a way that honors the self-determination of the storytellers, the narrators.

Student oral histories offer insight into not only the social, cultural, and political formations of Asian/American identity, but also the relationship between education and Asian/American identity development. In practicing oral history here, I engage in critical remembrance and witnessing of the vibrant constellation of voices, experiences, and actions of Asian/American student organizers.

Sing a song for ourselves
We got the right to choose
We got the right to choose

We are the cousins of the freedom fighter
Brothers and sisters all around the world
We are a part of the Third World people
Who will leave their stamp on Amerika
Who will leave our stamp on Amerika
Amerika

8.01 Memo to You from Me: A Reflective Invitation

Reflecting on my classes and the thesis process, the boundless work done by my classmates and other oral historians, I continue to believe that every oral history project is meaningful and a majority of the work known as oral history compose valuable attempts at building knowledge and tending to stories through a practice of care and witnessing oriented towards justice. Since entering OHMA, I've started realizing the possibilities and details of oral history in daily life. I read about the people who throw the tons of confetti onto Times Square for the new year by hand and think what an interesting oral history that would make. I ask my dad what the Korean word for raven is, and he tells me about a time when people were in a frenzy over eating crow meat in Korea because they thought it had exceptional health benefits. I think about how every time I ask my dad what a Korean word is, he tells me a story about that word. He builds knowledge through his memories and passes it to me, and that in his own way, he practices oral history in car rides and dinner conversations.

The value and importance of our work comes from our passion for doing these oral histories. We ask and listen, witness someone else's voice because we are moved to do so. I began this project to witness the experiences and perspectives of past Asian/American students, and how they speak to our present. But our current present has a lot to say as well. The ongoing colonial crises in Palestine and intensified suppression of Palestinian and pro-Palestinian people in the US have spotlighted the forced silencing of students: an un-witnessing of their demands for collective safety and intellectual freedom for marginalized students, as well as larger demands for liberation and an end to Israel's genocide of the Palestinian people and life. These crises have demonstrated the quickness with which states and institutions move to control student voices and the narrative of student protests. They also demonstrate how students follow their hearts and minds regardless and find creative ways to combat institutional repression by organizing rallies, art protests, posters, tuition strikes, and more. It is clear that students who organize take great time, labor, and energy to make their voices known. But are they caring for themselves? How are they feeling? Are they able to process the work, the grief, the solidarity, their experiences? I created this project to ask these questions and witness their answers. To create a moment of pause between compounding waves of crises and struggle and action, and to recognize and reflect on the experiences of students and how they organize.

I invite you to witness and hold these stories. I invite you to remember the voices of those who organize to make their communities, and thus their world, a more liberated and caring place.

Acknowledgement Memo

Tidal Notes could not have been possible without an incredible constellation of people and resources: my narrators, peers, advisor, professors, family OHMA, the existing archives on Asian/American student activism.

To my parents 임상묵 and 한이경, I am always grateful. Thank you for supporting me in more ways than one through OHMA and being curious about my work, even when I would refuse to tell you what I was doing. You came here from Korea as students. I am here, as an oral historian and an Asian/American, because of you. I hope this project honors you and the many lives you have lived, your humanity.

To my 2022-23 cohort, Vy, Natalie, Amalia, Ambar, Lindsay, Jeary, Florencia, Auriana, Yu, Rattana, Aya, Karen, Robert, and Leigh, thank you for creating the classroom we shared. I am so grateful to have learned from you and your invaluable work, exchanged ideas and frustrations, and grown in a space with genuine support and care and joy. It was an honor to share classes with you and I am so excited to learn from you in the future.

To my other cohort peers and advising group, Ariel, Yuying, and Chunming, thank you for sustaining our group as a debrief space, trust circle, and place where we helped each other to develop our work. I could not have learned and realized everything I did with this project without your insights and responses. It was an honor to witness your work and I am so excited to learn from you; here's to many more dinners and friendship.

To my advisor and professor Amy Starecheski, I cannot thank you enough for the support and care you have given me throughout my time at OHMA. I remember how receptive you were in our first meeting over Zoom, even though I was rambling and ended up pursuing an entirely different subject for my thesis. I am so grateful for your guidance in this thesis process and how you supported me to the last deadlines and despite me pushing the limits of those deadlines to the very, very, very end. From you, I have learned what it means to be in community and the power of oral history to bring passionate people together to think about how to make our world a more caring and conscious and joyful place. I am excited to re-enter into OHMA as an alum and be in community for a long time.

I am eternally grateful to the brilliant and thoughtful narrators of this oral history project: Amy Sueyoshi BC'93, Dana Wu CC'91, Aurelia Tan BC'25, Christina Park BC'26, Len de la Cruz BC'25, Fiona Cho BC'23, Julie Wu BC'25, Mariah Iris Ramo BC'27, Kathleen Hoang CC'25, William Diep CC'25, Duan BC'23, and Alice Bai CC'26.

To Amy Sueyoshi, my first narrator, so gracious and funny and candid in your reflections on being at Barnard and becoming an queer Asian American historian, thank you. Our communications online were crucial to beginning my inquiry into the lives of Asian/American students at Barnard/Columbia and I am forever grateful for your conversations. To Dana Wu, I learned more than I thought was possible in our short Zoom conversation; you effortlessly weaved together personal reflections, memories, and recommendations for issues and people to talk to, and shared a harvest of knowledge with me. Thank you for your warmth and invaluable insights of your experiences. To Aurelia Tan, thank you for being so inviting and supportive in our first exchange; even though you didn't know me and my first message to you was way too long, your excitement was infectious and so affirming when I needed it the most. Thank you for your sincerity, support, and refreshing reflections on being Asian American at Barnard. To Christina Park, the first person to respond to my cold email and give me much-needed assurance in this project, thank you. I learned so much from our conversation and your personal reflections. To Len de la Cruz, thank you for lending your support even before we met in person, offering to promote my project to Q&A. I am grateful for how open and thoughtful you were in speaking with me about what it's like to lead Queer and Asian. To Fiona Cho, thank you for laughing with me and bonding over CSER classes, the good and weird of being Korean in America, radical spaces, and more. Speaking with you was a deeply affirming experience and I cannot thank you enough for truly seeing and hearing me. To Julie Wu, thank you for your wisdom and reassurance of why projects like this one matter. I am in awe of your efforts to make Barnard a better institution and your resolve in organizing. To Mariah Iris Ramo, the one and only first-year I spoke with, thank you for your optimism and graceful reflections. I have no doubt you will continue to make change and build a better community for Asian Americans and all students at Barnard/Columbia in your time here. To Kathleen Hoang, thank you for partaking in my first group oral history and showing me how rich and valuable such an exchange can be. Thank you for being so friendly and genuine in our conversation. To William Diep, who made my first group oral history an exciting and enlightening experience, thank you for your astute insights into student organizing and sharing your humor and self-reflections. To Duan, thank you for your kindness and for speaking with me about growing up Asian American for over two hours; I am so grateful for how you built knowledge and shared memories with me during our conversation. And to Alice Bai, thank you for coming to my collage workshop in 2023 and giving me a rich perspective into the politics of student organizing and what it means to be a student organizer; I am so appreciative of your work and support for this project.

As is the case with many oral history projects, these narrators are the heart of this work. Their voices and memories make possible *Tidal Notes* as a critical archive of Asian/American student organizing for the rest of us. They remember what we now witness. I thank them for their invaluable contributions to *Tidal Notes.*

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