

*THE ASIAN AMERICAN
PERSPECTIVE at HUNTER COLLEGE*

SPRING 1988

TOWNS



EDITORIAL

Welcome reader, to our first issue of *LOTUS*. You may be asking why we need to have a school publication devoted to Asian/Asian-American perspectives. A college education goes beyond the academic boundaries of the classroom. It extends to what is taught not only by the faculty, but by the student body as well. What is learned at Hunter should, therefore, be a reflection of the College's diverse community. What this publication shall endeavor to do is to educate non-Asians as to what it means to be Asian, and to raise the consciousness of Asians in issues that are inherent to the Asian experience in America.

In the following pages, you will discover a broad spectrum of Asian perspectives. Experiences of interned Japanese Americans, Chinese from Mainland China and Amerasian children, although new to many of us, are representative of the true essence of Hunter College's Asian population. Throughout Asia, there is a long standing belief that out of the muddiest of ponds springs forth the pure white lotus. The symbol of the lotus shall be our guide in reminding us of our roots in Asia and our dedication to integrity.

Victor M. Lem
Senior Editor

Share your Asian-American experiences with the Hunter community. Lotus invites your poetry, prose, illustrations, photographs and impressions. Additions to our staff are also welcome.

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LOTUS

THE ASIAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE AT HUNTER COLLEGE
SPRING 1988

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THE ALLEGORY OF THE BEANIE

Wing Keung Chiu

When I was a boy growing up in Chinatown, there was a kid named Wiley whom I hated intensely. The substance of my hatred stemmed from his stealing my bright red beanie, which at the time, was my pride and joy. For those of you who don't know what a beanie is, it's sort of a baseball cap with propeller blades protruding from the top.

I was playing basketball at the time, and I was wearing my beanie while playing. I remember this fact expressly because, if you've ever tried to play basketball while wearing a beanie, you'd know that it's not the easiest thing in the world to do—and it's not something you'd soon forget.

I was new in the neighborhood and the kids never really accepted me until they saw that I could play basketball while wearing my bright red beanie. This trick brought me great fame, because frankly, it was a cool sight to behold. Apparently, the kid who stole my beanie thought so as well and became jealous. You see, this kid used to stand on his head and make fish faces, and this was cool also—but not as cool as playing basketball while wearing a bright red beanie.

At first he tried to tell me that I looked foolish, but I would have none of his lies. I was cool and I knew it. When he saw that I was undaunted, he became furious, and one day while I was going in for a lay-up, he grabbed my beanie and in one tremendous effort threw it over the fence.

I was crest-fallen.

"Why did you do that?!" I asked him in blind anger, forgetting the vital fact that he was six inches taller than myself and quite capable of kicking the shit out of me. When he began to raise his fists, I quickly recovered my senses and did the most logical thing that came to mind—I ran for my life.

I hid behind a hydrant for quite a long time waiting for him to leave so that I could recover my beanie. It was a very long afternoon.

When he finally did leave, I made my way to the playground where I found to my surprise that the other kids were rallying around me. Apparently Wiley had picked on the other kids as well.

To this kid Jason, Wiley had played a mean trick by telling the teacher that he had cheated on a test, the result of which Jason was kept inside after school for four straight days. This other boy named Blake told me how Wiley had taken his lunch for the past few weeks and was still stealing lunch from him. They told me that they were all pretty sick and tired of his abuse but could do nothing about it because he was bigger than all of them, and he was also the teacher's pet. Since they had been in the neighbor-

hood longer, I asked them how I could deal with Wiley.

Jason suggested that I forget the whole thing and to just be careful not to wear my beanie while playing basketball when he was around. This didn't make much sense to me because Wiley always seemed to be around, and besides, I wanted to hurt him good. Blake said that Jason's idea was stupid and suggested all these neat ways to embarrass Wiley and to make him fall down, but after a while, the ideas all seemed too wild for me. I just wanted to play basketball while wearing my beanie—nothing more, nothing less.

I was going to thank them for their support before retrieving my beanie, but by this time Blake and Jason had started arguing with each other, so I left and picked up my bright red beanie.

When I returned to the playground the next day, Wiley was there waiting for me. I had the beanie in my knapsack but was afraid to take it out. I tried playing basketball without it, but it didn't feel the same. All the while, he was watching me, ready to pounce on me if I took out my beanie.

This continued for a week until I just couldn't take it any more. One day, when I'd convinced myself that nothing else mattered, I took out my beanie, put it on the top of my head and started to play basketball—right in front of everyone's eyes. All of a sudden, Wiley came dashing toward me and snagged my beanie. When he started to throw it over the fence, I grabbed his arm and wouldn't let go. "Stop it!" I yelled. "Just let me be!"

Wiley stopped, and looked at me. I stared back. For a while I didn't hear a sound. I didn't make a move. He started tugging his arm forward, but I wouldn't budge an inch. By this time the teacher had arrived at the playground and asked us what was going on. The other kids had told her that there was trouble in the yard, and she saw that we were involved. She saw Wiley with my beanie in his hand.

You couldn't believe the temptation that rushed through my mind at that moment. Here was the chance to get Wiley back good! I looked at Wiley again, and for the life of me he seemed to be scared shitless. The other kids were yelling, "Tell her Chris! Tell her what happened!" But you know what? I couldn't do it.

"I dropped my beanie," I told the teacher. "Wiley was giving it back to me."

Blake nearly fainted. Jason started to smile, but I could see they both didn't understand.

After everyone had left the playground, Wiley came up to me and just looked at me. "Why?" he asked.

"I told you," I said, "I just want to play basketball while wearing my beanie—nothing more, nothing less."

INTERRACIAL CHILDREN

Alice N. Nash

One of the last strongholds of resistance to interracial marriage is the plaintive cry, "It really doesn't bother me, but what about the children? That's what I worry about."

Notice that these people never seek out such children to determine their feelings on the matter.

My father is a tenth-generation New England American with brown hair and green eyes. My paternal cousins have red hair and freckles. My mother is a second generation Japanese American who went to Japan for the first time in her life last summer; she grew up with Shirley Temple curls and Hostess Cupcakes and Sunday School.

Race was never a big deal in my family. My brothers and I were equally loved and spoiled by both sets of grandparents. I asked my mother once if there had been any resistance when she and my father decided to get married. (If they had lived in Virginia at the time, their marriage and my birth would have been illegal under state anti-miscigenation laws, which were not struck down until 1967 in *Loving vs Virginia*.) She replied that both families placed a higher priority on having a common set of values. My paternal grandmother always introduced my mother to people as "my daughter."

It's true that half-breeds like myself may be confused about our identity, but doesn't everyone go through that? We all have to face the perils of the outside world at some point. Some of us are fat; some of us are ugly; some of us have obnoxious personalities. Does someone who is half-Black really face more obstacles than someone who is all Black in today's society? Who's racially pure anyway? What really matters is how our self-image is formed at an early age, and that goes directly back to the family—parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

I once knew an elderly Issei woman who was not allowed to see her grandchildren because her blonde daughter-in-law didn't want the children exposed to someone who spoke broken English. I often wonder how those children feel about being half Japanese. My maternal grandmother spoke broken English, but she cooked us Japanese meals, and taught us Japanese words, and gave us pride in our Japanese heritage. Her vocabulary expanded as she kept up with all our activities; by the time she passed away at the age of 85, she was able to make jokes in English.

My brother's wife is half Haitian and half Chinese American. Both sides of her family accept her wholeheartedly, and she thinks of herself as an American with an extra "plus." When she married my brother, the waiters thought the reception was for the United Nations. *'No I told them. It's just my family'*

Interracial children do experience some conflict and confusion over their identities, but as with any children, the degree

varies with the circumstances and the individual personality. I know a woman who is half-Japanese and half-Black. Her father, a Black American GI, met and married her mother in Japan after World War II. Ostracized by the Japanese community, my friend developed a hatred of anything Japanese. On coming to New York at the age of five or six she was welcomed by her father's family. She thinks of herself as Black, but has never really formed a positive identity. The last I heard of her, she was still drifting from one job to the next, unable to find meaning in anything. Does she have a problem because she is interracial per se or because she is unable to integrate and accept her differences?

I suspect that those who object to mixed marriages on the grounds of concern for the delicate psyches of potential offspring aren't being honest with themselves. No one can predict what the course of a child's life will be. Some people choose not to have children because they worry about what the world will be like "when they grow up." Some people have children and try to make the world a better place to live in. The fact that I exist is an expression of my parents' belief that someday the barriers of race, religion and social class will cease to exist.

It's unfortunate that the families of a mixed couple may have to deal with a certain amount of "embarrassment," but if all those involved can get past their own prejudices, any children that come along will have as good a chance of growing up healthy and happy as anyone—maybe more.



ONE MULTICULTURAL MILKSHAKE

Hsiao Chiou

When Hsiao first started school at Pepperdine University in the fall of 1985, she decided it was time to put an end to what she constantly referred to as a "milkshake of cultures." It took her massive amounts of courage to see the school psychologist. She had never gone to one because her parents did not think there had been anything wrong with their daughter and she did not have enough money to see one on her own. Since the school began offering free counseling services, she decided to take advantage of the opportunity. Besides, her parents will never find out if she doesn't tell them.

Hi! I'm Hsiao. Would you like to trade places with me? It's easy! Get a blender and add the following ingredients with milk:

- 10 lbs. of peeled fresh lychees from Taiwan
(make sure you remove the seeds that are inside)
- 7 spoonfuls of "café Brasil"
- 5 ripe Japanese strawberries
- 2 Sunkist oranges from Malibu

No, you don't get diarrhea! The final product, if you let it sit for eighteen years, is a Hsiao milkshake.

My first impression of him wasn't much. I mean, he was not mega-fine, but he wasn't ugly either. He was in his thirties, kind of tall, brown eyes, brown hair, tie and trousers. Very professional looking—even his way of looking at you. Married to another psychologist. I was not as nervous as I thought I would be. I just wanted him to help me. I wanted someone, anyone, to understand and sympathize with me.

Once I was in his office, he asked me my name, and the horrible, dreadful question (the last one you would expect from a shrink), "And where are you from?"

"Outer Mongolia," I should have said, but I guess I had to be nice, "Japan," I replied, which is also kind of accurate. At the time, I kept telling myself that he wasn't as bad as he sounded.

"That's nice. What part of Japan?"

"We used to live in the suburbs of Tokyo. Recently though, we moved to the heart of the city." His office was always cold even though it was hot that fall. Air-conditioned, I guess. The room was small, orderly, and well-decorated, but everything was in dull colors. It didn't have a cozy atmosphere.

I told him I couldn't decide on a major. I wasn't sure I liked Malibu. I had plans of transferring to another school, somewhere less far from civilization with more people, buses, and cabs. San Francisco sounded kind of nice, but my parents were opposed to the idea. "Too much violence," they said.

Another thing about my parents, they can't take it that I have serious conflicts over my identity. They probably feel guilty that they haven't provided for all my needs. In any case, they refuse to talk about it by saying that I'm overly sensitive and that I will outgrow it. Baloney.

"You mentioned last time we met that you feel like a foreigner everywhere you go. Can you explain that further?"

"Do I have to?" This was only hurting me more. "I'm from Japan, but I didn't live there all my life. Isn't it sad how I've never lived in any one place for too long? I was born in Taiwan, and my parents decided to immigrate to Brazil when I was not quite three years old. I wish I could have been older so I could have prevented us from moving. Maybe not. My dad is too stubborn. I grew up with mostly Portuguese and some Taiwanese."

"For first grade my mom enrolled me in a private girls' catholic school run by old nuns. There was this one Sister—I used to hate her guts—who taught math and made kids go to the board to do problems out loud. It was humiliating if you didn't know how to find the solutions or if you did something wrong. There was no winning with her if you were not good in math"

"Sounds like you had a rough time with that Sister. Did you stay in that school for long?"

"In sixth grade I transferred to a non-parochial, co-ed school. It was a little better because, at least we didn't have to pray four times a day, but there was a lot of cheating on exams that went unnoticed in that school. I was mainly shocked that everyone there used such obscene language. Coming from a "nunnery" it took me a while to get the perverted jokes. Once I learned "the ways of the kids," I guess it became more fun. However, many teachers had trouble getting my name right and couldn't tell if I was a boy or a girl by just reading it. That was it for Brazil. We moved to Japan in December of 1981."

"How did you find Japan?"

He must have gotten his Ph.D. studying how to ask dumb questions. I couldn't believe it. "I had just finished junior high when we moved to a tiny house on the outskirts of Tokyo. I was put in an American high school near our home. The school was mainly for kids whose parents were in the army or working for the U. S. government. My dad had some influential friends working there, so I was able to go to a "base school." It was very confusing at first. Everyone, except me, spoke American English. My mom used to hire me tutors when we lived in São Paulo, but, I never took them seriously. English seemed like such pain-in-the-behind language. Again, there was a lot of profane language used and somehow, dirty jokes in English sounded nastier.

"By my senior year I was getting used to the culture shock, I had to make decisions about college in Japan vs. college in the

States. That was the first time I could really choose for myself. I wished I was given an order, just like all the times we moved from country to country. My parents did say they would feel better and safer if I stayed, but for once they didn't impose their ideas on me. I didn't make a decision until July of 1985. "So, what's new," I thought, "I'll go to the States and make moving around a lifestyle for me."

"Gee, sounds like something you would read in a novel. It must have been pretty hard for you to decide between the security of your parents and a new life, in a new environment."

No duh! Are all shrinks like this?

The counseling sessions lasted for almost three months. Dr. Lowe could not understand nor could he help me deal with my ethnicity. Maybe he just thought that it wasn't as important or as confusing as it was to me because he kept saying I was very Americanized and that I definitely had no language barriers, as in the case of many foreign students.

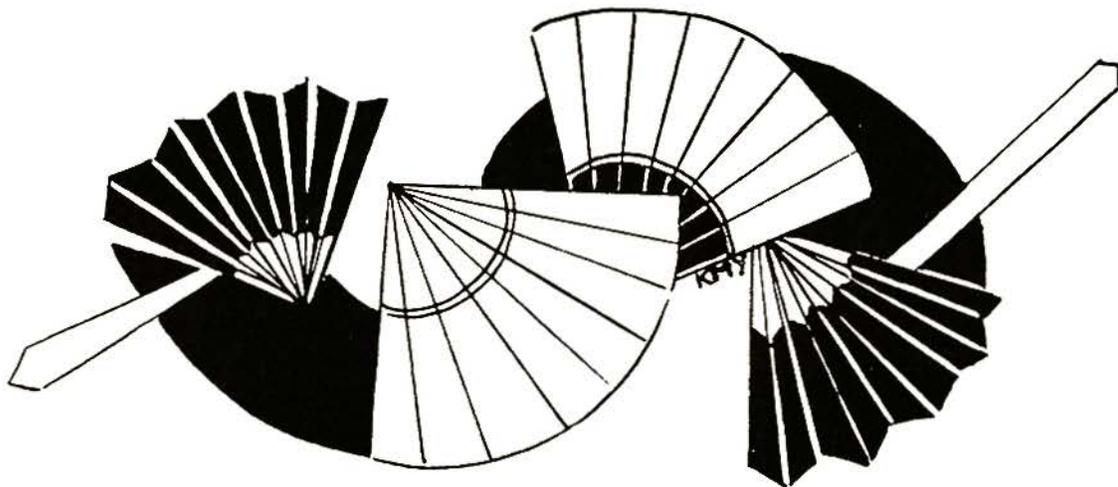
The popular idea that only first generation immigrants suffer from culture shock is a myth. Even those who are born in the United States might experience some type of ponderance on their ethnicity. Although they might consider themselves to be true Americans by right of birth, others might not view them as such.

As the Asian American walks down the street, he is told to "go back to China." He is constantly asked where he is really from because, since he is not white, he is surely not from Malibu or Cape Cod, much less be American.

The Asian American is caught in the middle with the conflict of clashing cultures. He has always considered the United States his home and himself an "American"; yet, he is not treated as an American because he is not born blonde with blue eyes.

Where are the counselors and psychologists when their help is most needed? They are in their offices treating every patient from their American point of view, without realizing that America is as diverse as every non-Caucasian patient that walks in for help. This is what made me quit counseling sessions and furthermore, vow never to step into a shrink's office again.

The general public does not understand nor does it accept non-Caucasians as an integral part of America, and the burden of educating the general public is on the minorities. However, counselors and psychologists, who are professionally trained to handle problems of the mind, should at least address problems with adjustment or the search for one's identity as real or serious issues. If psychologists are to ever counsel their patients effectively, they would have to learn to counsel from a truly "American" point of view, both Caucasian and non-Caucasian.



LOST PEARL, LOST PROMISES

I go to the golden mountain,
 Leaving my home, an island
 Within a land so vast
 Of happy valleys
 And glorious peaks named for queens.
 I leave my city, her lanterns
 And dragon boat races in the harbor.
 I leave a pearl for a mountain of gold.

Here is my new home, an island
 Within a land so vast
 Of housing projects
 And gargantuan towers named for no one.
 I've arrived in a city, with flashing lights
 And yellow taxis racing through the streets.
 I see no mountain. I see no gold.

I lie awake in my bed,
 My island, within this foreign land
 Squeezing my eyes shut, suppressing the noise of subways
 And the stench of elevators.
 I release, only when the sweet scents
 And warmth of my forsaken pearl returns.
 I float.
 I weep.

Victor Lem



LOVES AWRY

Confusion
 Lines of grey,
 lines azure.
 The soft pulsing
 of your being
 against mine.
 Strangely familiar,
 compelling emotion.
 Have we met...
 before?
 Millennia
 lives ago.
 Why can love,
 not love,
 as it does?

M. Lee

RE-THINKING BEAUTY ON NON-WHITE TERMS

Kelly Nishimura

There's a story about a girl named Pecola Breedlove written by Toni Morrison titled *The Bluest Eye*. Pecola is black, and she is ugly, according to white-American standards of beauty. She's shy, sensitive and longs to be loved by her family and the rest of the world. All her life Pecola has been alienated and ignored, the victim of racism and a scapegoat for blacks humiliated by white society.

Pecola believes, however, that her suffering would be relieved if only she were beautiful—if only she had blue eyes. As tragic as her life is, her longing for blue eyes is in itself very painful. She will never have blue eyes, and as a child growing up in the '40s, she will never know that so much beauty lies in the blackness she already possesses.

The awareness that "Black is beautiful" came in the sixties and helped African-Americans appreciate their black skin and features. However, white standards of beauty still dominate in our society and sadly, in others as well.

The criteria we use to judge beauty is learned. We are conditioned from day one to believe that "good looks" belong to the blonde, blue-eyed and busty and the tall, dark and handsome. We are taught this by the Barbie and Ken dolls we played with, by Snow White and Cinderella, by Cheryl Tiegs, Don Johnson and Rob Lowe, by Duran Duran and MTV. Advertisements, television and the movies work on our subconscious and reinforce these beauty standards in our conscious minds. Beauty is a big business raking in mega bucks for the fashion and cosmetic industries, Hollywood and plastic surgeons.

A friend of mine said her Japanese-American professor teaching an American Studies class on Japanese-Americans said Japanese-American girls go for white guys because they like the white look; but did the professor go on to explain why that preference exists? Did he make it clear that he was generalizing and that it is not a pre-determined act that these girls are not destined to behave this way from birth?

I resented the professor's comment on a personal level because not only is he miseducating his students, he's hurting my ego (something I hope to eliminate before I'm forty). I don't want people to think that I'm one of those white-boy loving girls. My boyfriend is white and I like him *despite* the fact. I like him not for his blue eyes and his six-foot bod but for, among other things, his encouragement of my appreciation for my Asian culture, my Asian looks and my Asian body.

It is important to understand that when non-whites admire beauty, that admiration is based on white standards that have been taught. It is not human nature that causes us to find tall, blue-eyed men and blonde, busty women particularly appealing.

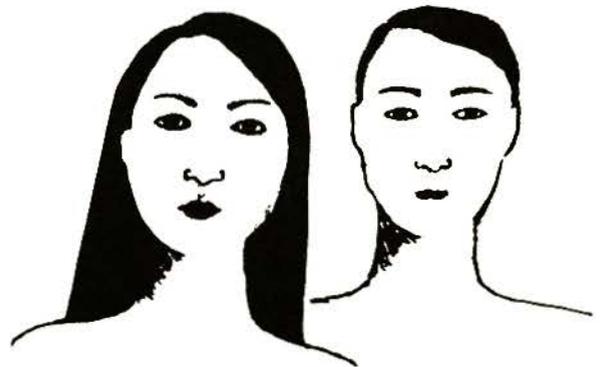
Having grown up in America, I have been conditioned to

evaluate beauty using white standards, but I have also been conditioned by the Asian/minority community in Hawaii where I grew up. I can judge beauty using other standards in addition to the white ones. I know that these "Hawaii" standards are learned and not products of human nature because they are not used elsewhere in America. They were cultivated in Hawaii and remain unique to Hawaii.

A couple of hundred years ago, the Hawaiians saw beauty in large, heavy-set women. Members of certain African tribes put discs in their mouths to stretch their lips to create a beauty that appeals to them. The Japanese used to think that exposing the back of the neck was a turn-on. We may laugh at these standards of beauty and sexual appeal, thinking they are funny and strange, but someday people may laugh at America's lust for big tits. (A friend of mine said he can't understand why people find large breasts appealing; "sacks of fat" he calls them).

As Asian-Americans, we have to reject not only the white standards of beauty but whites' ideas of *Asian* beauty. We shouldn't merely throw out our white Barbie dolls and replace them with the Japanese Barbies, which are molded by narrow, white definitions of Asian women. We must learn to appreciate our Asian faces and bodies, which come in many different shapes and sizes, on our own terms.

Toni Morrison writes that physical beauty is "probably the most destructive idea in the history of human thought." Someday, in an ideal world, no standards for beauty will exist. Awareness that standards of beauty are learned and not pre-determined in the womb should inspire us to try to unlearn them and more importantly not pass them on to future generations.



TRACING THE REDRESS/ REPARATIONS MOVEMENT

Linda Asato

Forty-five years ago, over 110,000 Japanese Americans on the West Coast were rounded up and taken to remote concentration camps in the U. S. without any reason or proper warning, except that it was a wartime military necessity, persons of Japanese ancestry—from babies to grandmothers—were tagged and labeled spies and saboteurs (although no evidence of this has ever been proven).

Although the camps were supposed to protect the internees, all Japanese Americans were treated as prisoners as they stood beneath armed guard towers, with rifles pointed at them. For nearly three years, the American government imprisoned the Japanese Americans in camps surrounded by barbed wire, resembling a nightmare of Nazi Germany.

There were hundreds of horror stories describing families being torn apart, extreme living conditions, psychological pain, humility, death, loneliness, and of course, billions of dollars of economic loss. Equally horrifying were the post-war experiences as people set out to rebuild their shattered lives, mostly from scratch, in a virtually anti-Japanese climate. Many had their property stolen and faced discrimination in housing and employment. While some were fortunate in that they were helped by post-war inflation and labor shortages, others never regained momentum and stayed impoverished, dependent on their children.

In the 1960's a new Asian American movement was developing that was inspired by the Black Civil Rights movement and the black power movements. Many of these Asian Americans were third generation Japanese Americans—children of the internees that had come of age.

In Asian American Studies classes, won through the third World student strikes of the 1960's, students learned about the camps as part of a long history of racism against the Japanese and Asian Americans. Turning anger into action, the first student and community pilgrimages into the camps took place in 1969. Since then numerous pilgrimages have inspired thousands of Japanese Americans to reclaim their identity and heritage.

The young Asian American movement demanded nothing less than justice, equality and respect and the camps issue became a rallying cry. This new generation of activism also had a deep impact on the older generations.

Momentum for redress built throughout the 1970's. In 1978, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) passed a resolution calling for a \$25,000 compensation for each internee. In 1979, the National Council for Japanese American Redress (NCJAR), which is pursuing a class action redress suit, was founded. In 1980, the National Council for Redress and Reparations (NCR) was formed, bringing together grass roots support, students, churches and many other groups active in pilgrimages

and commemorations. The Committee to Reverse the Japanese American Wartime Cases, which led the appeals of the Korematsu and Yasui cases, also initiated at this time.

In 1980, Congress established a commission to investigate the history of the camps. Insuring that the community's voice be heard then became the primary objective of the movement. In the summer of 1981, public hearings were held all across the nation, bringing together thousands of Japanese Americans to testify on the conditions and the losses caused by the internment experience. After nearly 40 years of silence, Japanese Americans came forward from all walks of life to openly speak about their camp experiences.

Through being active in the movement, I learned a great deal about the true history of Japanese and Asian Americans in this country. I began to realize that my experiences as an Asian American were inseparable from the history and struggles of my community—Why did I feel guilty when December 7, "Pearl Harbor Day" came every year? Why am I and other Asians blamed for US unemployment and "Japan stealing jobs"? Why has the history of Japanese Americans during WWII not been told? The answers to these questions are related to our history and to the way our communities have historically been treated. These lessons taught me that I was not the only one who felt "guilty" or who felt singled out, but that Asian Americans are still being scapegoated for society's inequalities and are made to feel guilty about our community's accomplishments.

Learning about the realities Asians must face today has taught me much about myself as an Asian woman. It has taught me to root myself in the rich history and contributions of our communities and to respect the struggles of the many generations and nationalities of Asian people in the US. The struggle for Redress and Reparations for Japanese Americans is an important issue for all our communities. It means a struggle to ensure that the true history of people of color is taught in our school systems; it means that ignorance can no longer be used as an excuse for racism or anti-Asian sentiment; it means that Asians and people of color can stand with pride in our communities and our accomplishments.

Recently the Redress/Reparations movement has made significant progress toward its goals. On September 17, 1987, the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 442, the "Civil Liberties Act of 1987", which recommends a public apology from the US government to Japanese Americans for their incarceration during WWII. It also recommends that an educational fund be set up and that compensation of \$20,000 be made to each surviving internee. A similar resolution was passed by the Senate.





In this solemn hour we pledge our fullest cooperation to you, Mr. President, and to our country. There cannot be any question. There must be no doubt. We, in our hearts, are Americans—loyal to America. We must prove that to all of you.

Telegram to President Roosevelt, Dec. 7, 1941, from Japanese American Citizens League.

I'm for catching every Japanese in America, Alaska, and Hawaii now and putting them in concentration camps. ...Damn them! Let's get rid of them now!

Congressman John Rankin, Congressional Record, Feb 19, 1942



The Japanese race is an enemy race...

Gen. John DeWitt, Commander, Western Defense Command & 4th U. S. Army

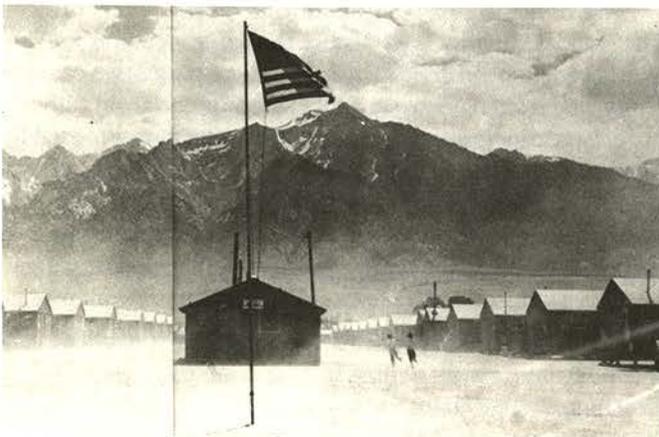


NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy, I hereby authorize and direct Secretary of War, and the Military Commanders whom he may from time to time designate, whenever he or any designated Commander deems such action necessary or desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he or the appropriate Military Commander may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War or the appropriate Military Commander may impose in his discretion...

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
The White House
February 19, 1942

We're charged with wanting to get rid of the Japs for selfish reasons. We might as well be honest. We do. It's a question of whether the white man lives on the Pacific Coast or the brown men. They came into this valley to work, and they stayed to take over.

*Austin Anson, Managing Secretary
 Crower-Shipper Vegetable Association of
 Central California, quoted in The
 Saturday Evening Post, May 9, 1942.*



All photos and quotes from *Executive Order 9066*,
 The MIT Press, 1972.

ASIAN AMERICANS WORKING TOGETHER

Margaret M. Chin

There have been many changes in the Asian-American student movement over the past ten years since ECASU was founded, the most significant of which is the increasing number of Asian-Americans that are going to college. It is no magical coincidence that last year's ECASU conference at Boston University attracted over 500 students.

The increase in the numbers of Asian-American students attending institutions of higher learning came as the result of much hard work. This is not easy for ECASU members to understand, nor is the Civil Rights era of the '60s or the anti-war era of the '70s. It was at that time that Third World students demanded access to higher education, thus opening the doors for Asian-Americans to go to college today.

When the first Asian student organizations (ASOs) developed, students brought to campuses an awareness of a people striving for equality and justice. These ASOs put on educational programs on our history, while their social and cultural programs brought us together. They affirmed our sense of identity and our pride in being Asian-American. Nowhere else on campus could people learn about our collective history in America or even share our feelings and connections to the larger society as Asian-Americans.

With the increase in the number of Asian-Americans in college, the ethnic composition of the student population changed as well. Because of the liberal immigration laws of 1965 and because of the Vietnam War, many Asian groups, such as the Vietnamese, Cambodians, Chinese, Koreans, East Indians, have settled in America. Today about half of the Asian-American students on the East Coast are American born, and half are immigrants.

So what does this mean to organizers of ASOs?

Historically, Chinese American students have dominated ASOs. The first clubs to develop were Chinese student organizations that formed to address social and cultural issues. Here, American and foreign-born Chinese could meet and share ideas about their mutual heritage.

Today, these clubs continue to serve Chinese students by linking students' current lives to their cultural roots. Korean, Japanese, Southeast Asian, East Indian, and Filipino clubs have also been formed to serve the social and cultural needs of their respective memberships.

In addition, there are Asian American student organizations (AASOs) that seek to address the pan-Asian concerns: educational and political issues as well as social and cultural ones. AASOs thus support the development of anti-racial harassment policies and of Asian-American studies, besides sponsoring

cultural weeks and social events.

To be truly pan-Asian, however, AASOs need to attract members from all Asian groups. This means publicizing the events of the other organizations. It does not mean dropping concerns such as racial harassment and Asian-American studies; rather, AASOs need to stress why it is important for all the Asian groups to work together. Every organization should be seen as another source of strength for the minority student movement. With the press watching Asians as the "model minority," we especially need to keep on our toes.

At school as well as on the streets, no matter what nationality you are, an Asian-American is an Asian-American. These issues will affect all of us. Our common history links us together and allows us to make a stand. This is the basis for us to work together for a common goal.

Realistically, at any college, ASOs can come together to face an issue or support an event. But the only way this can happen is if all of the groups recognize one another and support one another's activities.

For example, I know that many of the AASOs are dominated by Chinese Americans. This is natural because Chinese Americans make up about 50% of the Asian American student population on the East Coast. But I think that as the AASOs start supporting the ASOs and the issues that concern individual nationalities, such as the development of bilingual classes and the improvement of financial aid availability, we'll start to see more student of those nationalities participating in the AASOs.

In turn, the different nationality clubs should support the AASOs. When an AASO is working to fight campus racism, or organizing to obtain Asian-American studies, we have to make an effort to try to explain why it is important to support these issues and to show how they affect everyone. For example, racism is directed at any of us who look Asian, and that means all of us, immigrant or fourth generation American.

We have tried for Third World unity, but it is very difficult. The "Model Minority Myth" is used to divide us, and as we Third World people stand divided, we are not as strong as we could be. Unity would strengthen our fight against financial aid cutbacks, our efforts to increase minority faculty and our moves to establish more support systems to help minority students finish college.

Today, during these conservative times, we really need to stick together. If we do not communicate among ourselves and if we do not gather all the organizations in mutual support, we leave ourselves vulnerable for attack. Yes, it is hard to work together but as we try harder, we grow stronger as we learn about each other.

LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES AS A CHINESE

You-Hua Xu

In my opinion, most Americans are accustomed to seeing Chinese since a large number of Asians from Taiwan and Hong Kong live in this country. Much of what Americans learn about the Chinese is acquired through their associations with the people from Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, most Americans know and understand little about the Chinese from Mainland China.

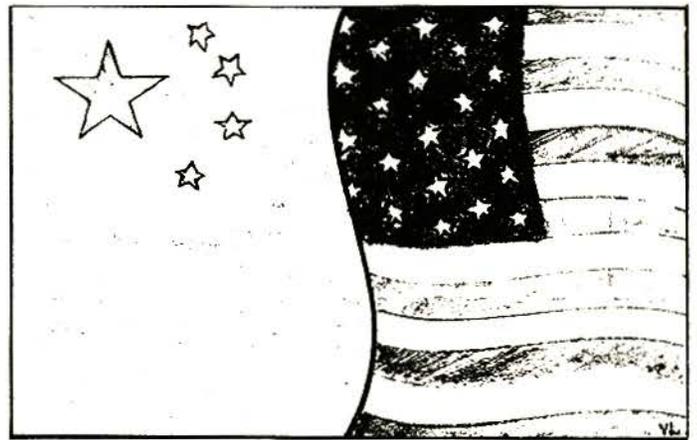
I'm from Canton, a province in Southern China. I remember the first day I attended an ESL class upon arriving in the United States. It was at the California International University. The teacher, a middle-aged woman, asked me what part of China I was from. When I answered, she rolled her eyes around in wonder and embarrassment because she had little knowledge about Canton, or where it was located. Canton is one of the most important provinces in China, comparable to places like New York or San Francisco. In my native country, most people know several big cities in the United States. It surprised me that she, as an international university teacher, didn't know Canton.

When I said that Americans don't understand the Chinese very much, I was not referring to the obvious language barrier. Overcoming the Chinese/English language barrier is easy compared with understanding the people of China. Many Americans remain ignorant of the situations the Chinese had to face in Mainland China.

In my reading class a few weeks ago, my teacher asked me, with a pleasant smile on his face, "Can you tell us what the Cultural Revolution in your country was about?" I felt like I had been shot. His question was insensitive enough, but his amused expression really hurt me. The Cultural Revolution was a heavy page in the book of Chinese modern history, laden with blood and tears. It started in 1966 and lasted till 1979. During these thirteen years, the Chinese people fought crazily with each other. China's economy fell sharply and higher education was stopped completely (some colleges were closed for ten years!).

A whole generation of young people wasted their youth in blind fighting. Families were torn apart, many lives were lost, and the whole country almost collapsed. It was one long nightmare for the Chinese. When we woke up, we realized that we had been lied to and misled. We gave up our youth, our blood, and our lives to destroy, with our very own hands, the things that we loved dearly.

Can you imagine what we must have felt? The entire country's spirit collapsed. A great number of people couldn't face the cruel reality of what they had done. Others have been slowly rising from the depths of pain in the ten years that have passed. We have tried to look back in cool review to examine the



causes of the insanity that reigned over that period of Chinese history. Through this retrospect, we have begun to change our beliefs, in hopes of reforming the country. Today, the people of China have improved living conditions and the country itself has grown stronger.

Although these reforms came as an indirect result of the Cultural Revolution, we cannot forget the tremendous price of blood and tears that we have had to pay. That period of history is like an old wound in Chinese hearts. Whenever you touch it, the heart still feels pain. For some, the wounds would bleed again. So how could I respond to my teacher's smile? If someone were to cheerfully ask an American woman whose son was killed in the Vietnam War, "Can you tell us about the Vietnam War?" how do you suppose she would react?

However, my reading teacher can't be held completely responsible for his insensitive question. Since modern China had been closed from the rest of the world until President Nixon's visit in 1972, little is known about my native country. In addition, although there has been more and more news reported out of China to the United States, rarely are general backgrounds on Chinese history included in the journalists' reports.

Since many aspects of China and her history are unfamiliar to the American public, as Chinese living in the United States, we should introduce our native country to Americans. We came to this country not only to understand Americans, but to have Americans understand us also. Through friendships based on understanding, we can act as bridges connecting Western and Eastern cultural exchange and promote a better understanding between our two countries.

In my opinion, most Americans are open-minded and would like to understand us. The problem is that many Chinese are reluctant to talk about themselves. In American schools, many Chinese students are regarded as being good at math and involved in some science programs. However, they are often quiet and avoid many social activities. This is a very unbalanced situation. Some Chinese complain that their teachers and classmates do not understand them. If you don't open yourselves up, how can other people understand you? So, let's put some weights on the other side of the balance!



Photo by Winnie Lem ©1960

DESPAIR FROM DOVES' EYES

Wah Hon Lem

"Yes, I understand," said my mother into the telephone. "Of course, the children's safety comes first," she continued and added, "You'll let us know then" and "Thank you." She cradled the receiver. For several moments afterwards, she stood there with her hands resting on the telephone without saying a word. Her eyes seemed to search the space in front of them, as they did whenever she came across a word Mr. Siu had given her whose meaning she had forgotten.

Mr. Siu came to our house twice a week to teach my mother Japanese. He never objected to my sitting in as he taught. Several months earlier, when the lessons first began, he said that I could remain by my mother's side through the lesson as long as I promised not to interrupt or ask questions. I never did.

Sometimes though, when the material in the lessons grew tedious, as a diversion I would try to mimic the intense look on my mother's face as she struggled with the material. I'd pay particular attention to imitating the concentration in her eyes. When she and Mr. Siu noticed, they'd laugh and my mother would scold me lightly for disturbing their work. However, Mr. Siu would always defend me by saying, "That's quite all right. I'm glad she is here to keep our lessons from becoming tiresome or monotonous." Mr. Siu had stopped coming two weeks ago.

"Momma?" I said softly. She didn't respond. I tried again, only louder this time. "Momma, what's wrong?" She looked startled when she heard me, as though she had forgotten anyone else was in the room.

She turned to me and replied sharply, "Oh, nothing's wrong. Nothing at all, Wai Fon." Her eyes seemed to drift back to that searching look again. After a moment, she said in her usual, deliberate manner, "That was the school. You won't have to attend classes tomorrow."

"Well, that's good news," I said with relief. I expected her to reproach me, as she had in the past, for sounding so happy about missing school. Only this time, she said nothing. She just stared at me expressionlessly.

I fidgeted in my seat. "If I don't have to go to school tomorrow, and there's nothing wrong, then that's great news...isn't it?" I asked meekly. Still nothing. For one interminable moment, the room seemed thick with a blanket of silence. My apprehension grew when I looked into her eyes again. Gone from them was all the strength I've grown accustomed to seeing. All that remained was despair.

"What could Momma be so disturbed over?" I asked myself. I wished father would come home soon. I broke the silence. "Momma, what-" Before I could go on, tears emerged from the corners of her eyes.

I'd never seen my mother cry before. I used to wonder if she

had ever cried. She once told me that tears were the heart's blood and that her heart would never bleed while father and I were near. After that, I could never imagine my mother with tears. I was too bewildered to utter a sound as she rushed over and hugged me. All the confusion I had felt grew into concern.

She sobbed as she said, "Yes Wai Fon. there's nothing to worry about." And she added, "It is good news." She embraced me tighter and suddenly, I was crying too.

We sat there holding each other, sobbing quietly on each other's shoulders until my mother slowly drew back. Patting the tears from her cheeks with her palms, she stood up and kept her back to me as she composed herself.

I was about to dry my eyes with the sleeves of my dress, but decided instead to use the palms of my hands as mother did. I didn't think she would notice, but she had always reminded me to treat my school uniforms with care and I didn't want to give her more to be upset over.

I really couldn't care less about the clothes they made us wear for the winter session. They were always dull colored and made of materials that made me itch. The only thing I liked about the uniform was the school crest sewn over my breast pocket. It was a red and gold patch with a white dove holding an olive branch in the middle.

Mother had regained her composure and seated herself at father's desk. I watched as she opened the top drawer and removed several sheets of paper and an abacus. I was still bewildered over what had happened, but I resisted the urge to press her with questions. I couldn't bear to see her cry again. I decided to accept her answer, that there was nothing wrong, at least for now.

I got up from my father's easy chair and walked across to where my mother was seated. Sitting on the arm of her chair, I rested against her shoulder as she worked. She was busy writing down figures and making calculations with the abacus. It looked like some sort of shopping list, only there was something odd about it. She was ordering too much. Not only did she write down the usual meats and vegetables, but she also included a large assortment of rice and smoked food, things we already had plenty of in our kitchen pantry.

I turned my head so that my mother would not see the perplexed look on my face. I focused my attention on the opposite side of the room where the two Chinese, calligraphy scrolls my father had painted were hung. Hanging between them was a portrait of my grandfather. He passed away several years prior to my birth before my father emigrated here, to Hong Kong, from his native China. The painting was hung there as a memorial.

My mother was still working on her list and figures. I could hear the clicks the counters of the abacus made as she moved them back and forth along the rows of the frame. I took a deep breath and tried to clear the signs of worried frustration from my face before turning around.

She had already reached the bottom of her list and was looking at it carefully. When she was satisfied with her work, she lifted the abacus by its frame, allowing all the wooden counters to slide into place simultaneously with one final click.

With the list in hand, mother stood and walked out of the den with me at her heels. She opened the hall closet and pulled out a dark blue wrap.

"Are we going shopping now Momma?" I asked, trying to sound causal. She looked at me apologetically.

"I'm sorry Wai Fon, but I would rather have you stay here and wait for your father to come home." She tugged nervously at the ends of her wrap. Once again, her eyes met mine. She reached down and gently touched my cheek with her palm.

"All right Momma," I said softly, "I'll stay home." She smiled as she drew her hand away.

"Come on," she said, "You can walk me out." She reached down again and took my hand as we walked to the front door. It was only the mid-afternoon and yet the air that blew in as I opened the door felt colder than usual.

"Probably only the sea air blowing inland," I thought, since our house overlooked the ocean. My mother tightened the wrap around her and stepped through the door. She turned around to say good-bye when she noticed the dove emblem on my uniform. Her eyes stared at it for a moment before she looked up at me.

"I'll be back soon Wai Fon," she said. I stood there and watched as she descended our front steps. When she reached the tall, green hedges, I closed the door and went upstairs. From my bedroom window, I watched as she left the gate that led into the main road. She turned, as she had done so many times in the past, and looked up at me. I waved and she continued down the road.

I looked over the horizon at the ocean. The water didn't seem as blue as I was used to seeing it. It looked grey and ominous as did the sky. There were hardly any boats moving across the sea line. Only a long row of black birds could be seen flying in from the horizon.

I drew the curtains and changed out of my uniform. It wasn't really late in the day, but I felt very tired already. I lay down in bed and closed my eyes. All I could think about was the telephone call from school and the despair in my mother's eyes.

"What happened here today?" I asked myself. "Why was Momma so upset? And what about that list?"

These questions lingered in my mind and entered my dreams. My room dissolved around me and became an ocean of grey. I sat alone in a boat searching for something long forgotten from my memories. Every so often, I would encounter another boat like mine, but filled with people I did not recognize. They would ask me in Japanese, "Little girl, why are you out here? Don't you know that this is a sea of despair?" I understood what they were saying to me, but I didn't know how to answer them. They would grow tired of asking and drift away.

This seemed to continue for hours. So devoid of hope was

I that I was ready to drown myself in that grey sea. Then came a light in the distance. As it grew close, I recognized it. The light became a beautiful white dove with an olive branch cupped in its mouth. All at once, I knew this was what I had been searching for.

But then the ocean grew rough and shook the boat and thunder roared from the sky. This so frightened the dove that it dropped the olive branch it had always held and flew away.

"Wait, please!" I cried. "Don't go!" I pleaded, but it just flew deeper and deeper into the dark horizon leaving me behind. The sound of thunder grew deafening and I began to cry.

I cried even as my father and mother came into my room and tried to wake me from my nightmare.

"Wai Fon!" my father hollered.

"Wake up! We're here." said my mother.

"Momma?" I asked, still half sobbing from the dream.

"That's right Wai Fon. It's Momma and Baba," said my father.

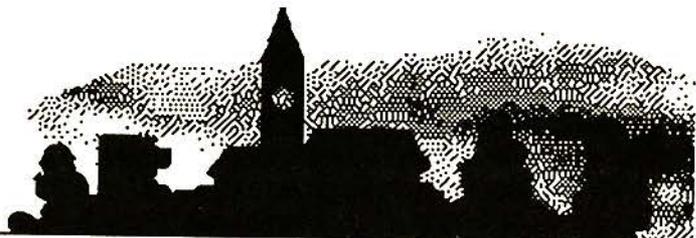
I woke me up completely. I was so happy to see my parents that I hugged them both and cried, "I'm so glad that it was all just a bad dream." I held them close to me until suddenly, I realized something was wrong. I pulled away quickly and looked into their eyes. My heart sank. All I saw in them was despair.

"Baba...Momma!" I cried pleadingly.

My father hung his head down as he said, "I wish it was only a bad dream." Before I could ask anymore, I heard the distant rumblings of the thunder from my dream. Mother began to cry. I leapt from my bed and tore open the curtains of my window. Outside, there were lights flashing and people running everywhere. Buildings in the distance were ablaze and planes roared by. The war had reached Hong Kong.



ECASU 88 Conference at Cornell



Hunter in Attendance at ECASU Spring 1988 Conference

The East Coast Asian Student Union (ECASU), founded in April 1978 in response to growing opposition to Third World students and their programs, celebrated its tenth anniversary with a Spring Conference at Cornell University, during the weekend of April 8-10, 1988. In the ten years since its inception, ECASU has become a network of Asian Student Organizations from more than 40 college campuses in the MidAtlantic and New England states. Hunter College, whose chapter of ECASU is the Asian/Pacific Students Alliance, was well represented with over 80 student participants in attendance.

The ECASU conference was a huge success. Over the course of the weekend, the organizations' achievements over its first decade were summarized and issues facing Asian Americans were examined by ECASU alumni. From the welcoming remarks of Professor Lee C. Lee, of Cornell's Asian American Studies Program, through the inspiring and insightful keynote addresses of speakers, Fred Houn and Linda Asato, to the various consciousness raising workshops, the momentum behind student activism could be felt as it drove us through the weekend's activities. Of particular relevance was the film premiere of Christine Choy and Renee Tajima's, "Who Killed Vincent Chin," a stark and revealing documentary, which examined one of the most atrocious acts of racial injustice of our time. The film was followed by a festive, dance party that gave many of the conference participants a chance to socialize and network with students from other schools. The weekend was concluded with a closing address by William Marutani and a regional meeting, which focused on the possibility of a national link-up between ECASU and its West Coast counterpart, APSU (Asian/Pacific Islander Students Union).

What follows are some thoughts and impressions of some Hunter College students who attended the Spring 1988 conference.

It was a good experience to attend an Asian conference. Everyone gathered together like a family. They spoke out for justice. All Asians must have equal rights with people of other colors. It was the first time that I have ever seen Asian students rise up and rally together for a common cause. Now I believe that no one can laugh or look down upon us.

Toan Pahn

We as Asians in America often find little encouragement in this country to celebrate Asian culture and recognize our heritage. The consequences are ignorance about Asian tradition, denial of our Asian identities (such as changing our names to Anglo ones and choosing to speak nothing but English), and rejection of our Asian identities in exchange for White-American ones.

The work of Asian-American scholars, writers, artists, community activists and organizations has encouraged interest in our Asian backgrounds and united Asians who share the desire to acknowledge and uphold our experiences as Asian Americans. These role models serve as inspiration to Asian-American youths and as an integral part of promoting and supporting the establishment of the Asian-American identity.

The ECASU conference brought together people who have integrated Asian culture with their careers in education, music and film, and others active in Asian affairs. Through conference activities and workshops, students met these professionals and activists and learned what inspires them, how they work and why they have been so successful.

Fred Houn, a musical artist, writer and ECASU founder, talked about his work which is greatly influenced by his Asian roots. He has composed music for Asian-American theater, leads the Asian American Arts Ensemble and also the Afro-Asian Music Ensemble. He has also published writings in many Asian-American publications and has founded the Asian American Resource of Asian American.

Filmmakers Christen Choy and Renee Tajima presented their film "Who Killed Vincent Chin?", a documentary of the events that followed the murder of Vincent Chin by two white men in Detroit. The film, contained interviews with Lily Chin, Vincent Chin's mother, who despite all her pain, spoke out against the light, slap-on-the-wrist sentences given to the defendants.

The racism involved in Chin's attack and in the judicial neglect to adequately punish the defendants is exposed through interviews with the defendants, a judge, witnesses and a woman heading a group seeking justice for Chin.

At the showing, Choy and Tajima talked and answered questions about their experiences as Asian, women filmmakers. They noted that being women was an advantage in filming some parts of "Vincent Chin" because they were seen as non-threatening and were thus able to get some footage that men probably couldn't have gotten.

It was invigorating to see fellow Asians—professionals and students—at the conference who are concerned about Asian-American issues and are actively working for progress in areas such as education and civil rights where Asians have suffered neglect and injustice.

Kelly Nishimura

I really should have brought along some more clothes. It was freezing up there. The Cornell campus is nice, but it'd be nicer in Southern California. Despite the inclement weather, I still managed to enjoy myself. The students were friendly and patient with giving directions. I enjoyed Fred Houn's speech the most and found two points he raised particularly interesting. Primarily, it is important to institute programs like Asian American Studies so as to dispel the "Model Minority Myth". Secondly, although Asian Americans may gain broader accessibility to many professions, they fall victim to the double standard that, "although Asians are good, reliable workers, they do not make for good managerial material".

Choy and Tajima's film, "Who Killed Vincent Chin," was superb and, in itself, worth the six hour bus ride to Ithaca. However, because of the tragic circumstances which the film examined, most of us were not really in the mood "to party" afterwards. I hope planning will be better at next year's conference. Yes, I will attend the next one!

Victor Lem

When I boarded the bus to the ECASU conference at Cornell, I knew that I was going to hear Asians talk about their experiences, but I really didn't know what else to expect.

The first event I attended was a workshop on Asian American art and culture. Two Asian American artists, Fred Houn and Robert Lee, spoke on their work and the realities facing Asian American artists. They were eloquent in their speeches and cheerful in their discussions on the rewards of being artists with rich, ethnic backgrounds.

It felt so good to be there and to hear positive things about expressing oneself as an Asian American. At one point, Robert Lee said that if one does not express one's feelings, then it is as if one's experiences had never existed. That statement struck me like a thunderbolt. Suddenly, I felt an urgent need to share the feelings that have been locked up inside me. Suddenly, I felt that my experiences were worth talking about.

Through the rest of the weekend, I met with more and more Asian student activists, and I became even more excited about my own identity as an Asian American. For me, the culminating point of the conference was reached at the ECASU plenary session, where some students from the University of Connecticut gave us the accounts of a racial incident they had experienced on campus.

According to the U. Conn students, they were on their way to a dance last semester. The three couples, who were all Chinese, boarded a bus and sat down. En route to the party, one of the girls felt something hit the back of her head. When she turned around, she discovered that some white football players, who were students at U. Conn as well, were spitting at her and her companions. Their backs were already covered with spit. When the Chinese students asked them to stop, the football players tried to provoke a fight with them, calling them "oriental faggots" and singing "we all live in a yellow submarine". The Chinese students, intimidated by the football players, endured the harassment for the duration of the ride. When they arrived at the dance, the football players continued tormenting them. The Chinese students requested help from the university officials present at the party. However, they only advised them to ignore the racist remarks and avoid their tormenters.

This account of racial harassment at U. Conn, filled the room with intense emotions. Someone suggested that we all sign a letter condemning the University of Connecticut for allowing such a despicable incident of racism to occur without punishing the guilty parties. A roar of support followed this proposal. It was a very emotional moment for me. I had never experienced such a feeling of "closeness" to other Asians before. I felt like part of the group, not a stranger or a freak. Tears came to my eyes when I realized that being Asian would never mean the same to me again.

Before the ECASU conference, I had always felt somewhat isolated and ashamed of being an Asian American. I am grateful to everyone there for teaching me to be proud of my ethnicity.

Tsuh-Yin Chen



BAMBOO IN YELLOWSTONE

The greys
The greys

Why no colors, only grey?

*"...and the idea was designed and conceived
by our colleagues in China,
but the final product will, indeed, be made in the USA."*

Some common western acronyms:

PCH:
Poly-Chinese Humanoid

TACO:
Typed American of Chinese Origin

BEACH:
Breath-Emitting Asiatic of Chinese Origin

You don't notice rainbows,
When you're colorblind.

-M. Lee



Ming: Any more suggestions?

Fred: How about just calling it The Asian Journal?

Everyone: Borrrriinnng.

Voice from the end of the table: How about The Hunter Dragon?!

groans fill the room

Victor: Look, the name's gotta have some credibility.

Mon Dai: I think it should symbolize our purpose.

Tsuh: How about El Progresso?

Fred: I think that's been done.

*Ming: Come on guys, let's really think about it. This is
beginning to sound like an Isuzu commercial.*

Victor: Squid!

Mon Dai: Chicken!

Tsuh: Grasshopper!

Fred: III-marrrk...

Everyone but Ming: Aaahhh, III-marrrk...

