Left or Right of the Color Line?

Asian Americans and the Racial Justice Movement

CHANGELAB *Strategy, Research & Vision for Racial Justice*   www.changelabinfo.com

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Terms and Definitions

Race is a political idea that classifies humanity into false categories in order to justify white supremacy. Race was used to resolve the fundamental contradiction between founding American ideas like freedom and equality on the one hand, and the use of slavery, genocide, and the exploitation of non-European people to build the U.S. economy and political structure on the other. Racial categories and their assigned traits shift over time and geography. They are defined not by science, but by laws, culture, ideas, and practices. Racism is the cumulative impact over time of systems and institutions that have used race to perpetuate white supremacy. Racial politics is the exploitation of race through political means either to reproduce or to challenge the status quo.

White Supremacy is the ideology that supports racism. According to Native scholar Andrea Smith, white supremacy relies on various interconnected forms of racial logic that justify systems of capitalism, colonization, and war. The logic of slavery, the idea that Black people are inherently slaveable, supports the system of capitalism by treating Black bodies as property. The logic of genocide supports the system of colonization, mandating the disappearance of indigenous peoples in order to make way for non-indigenous settlerism. The logic of Orientalism supports the system of war by viewing certain people and nations as permanent threats to the project of Western empire. Peoples of color are both oppressed by white supremacy, and are participants in it.

Asian American is a term that was embraced by activists in the 1960s as an alternative to the term "Oriental." The Orient is a concept born of Western imperialism, and Orientalism is a worldview that justifies the subjugation and exploitation of non-Western people, their land, and their resources. Orientalism views the Orient as inferior, exotic, and threatening. Activists chose the term Asian American as a rejection of colonization, war, and racism. Historian Yuji Ichioka is widely credited with popularizing the term. As a demographic category, the Asian American population has grown and diversified over the last 50 years as a result of 1965 immigration laws that ended restrictions on Asian immigration to the United States. The 2010 Census listed the following largest Asian American ethnic groups: Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, Thai, Lao, Taiwanese, Bangladeshi, and Burmese. API is an acronym that stands for Asian and Pacific Islander. People use this term to explicitly acknowledge that Pacific Islanders are different from Asians, but also to be inclusive of Pacific Islanders in a broader political coalition. NHPI is an acronym for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, which emerged to signify the unique political conditions of Native Hawaiians. AMEMSA stands for Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian, and emerged post-9/11 to distinguish these communities for their extraordinary experiences of oppression through alleged anti-terrorism measures. Some organizations identify their constituencies using some combination of these acronyms, such as NHPI/AMEMSA/AA.

American Empire is the long project of expanding and strengthening the reach of U.S. political, cultural, and economic domination and control in the world. Historically and today, white supremacy has been at the center of the American imperial project. From slavery and genocide to the ongoing exploitation of peoples of color both within the United States and throughout the Global South, U.S. elites have used race as a lever to advance their interests at the expense of democracy and human rights.

Today, American Empire takes the form of neoliberalism, an idea that argues that the best way to advance human wellbeing is through strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. Neoliberalism argues that the role of the state is to create these conditions by setting up military, police, and legal structures that guarantee, by force if necessary, the free functioning of markets. Neoliberalism views labor protections, environmental regulations, welfare programs, and protective trade tariffs as barriers to human progress. Its goal is to deregulate and privatize public resources such as land, water, education, and healthcare in order to create new markets where they didn't exist before. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has become the dominant way of understanding, living in, and thinking about the world. Because of the legacy of racism, communities of color have borne the brunt of neoliberalism's damage.

Sectors of the U.S. Right Active in the Year 2012

There is much overlap and sectors are not mutually exclusive. Methodologies range from cautious moderation, to militant activism, to insurgency, to violence. Right-wing populist, apocalyptic, and conspiracist styles can be found in several sectors. Forms of oppression—racism, xenophobia, sexism, heterosexism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, Arabophobia, nativism, ableism, etc.—vary in each sector.

CONSERVATIVE RIGHT

SECULAR RIGHT

Secular Conservatism (Generic) – Share to some degree basic conservative, "Free Market,"& "Judeo-Christian traditional values," but not categorized here as part of another sector.

Corporate Internationalism (Neoliberals) – Nations should control the flow of people across borders, but not the flow of goods, capital, and profit. Called the "Rockefeller Republicans" in the 1960s. Supports globalization on behalf of transnational corporate interests.

Business Nationalism – Multinational corporations erode national sovereignty; nations should enforce borders for people, but also for goods, capital, and profit through trade restrictions. Enlists grassroots allies from Patriot Movement. Anti-Globalists. Generally protectionist and isolationist.

Economic Libertarianism – The state disrupts the perfect harmony of the free market system. Modern democracy is essentially congruent with capitalism. Small government.

National Security Militarism – Support U.S. military supremacy and unilateral use of force to protect perceived US national security interests around the world. A major component of Cold War anti-communism, now updated and in shaky alliance with Neoconservatives.

Neoconservatism – The egalitarian social liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s undermined the national consensus. Intellectual oligarchies and political institutions preserve democracy from mob rule. The United States has the right to intervene with military force to protect its perceived interests anywhere in the world. Suspicious of Islam, sometimes Islamophobic.

RELIGIOUS RIGHT

Religious Conservatism – Play by the rules of a pluralist civil society. Mostly Christians, with handful of conservative Jews, Muslims, Hindus and other people of faith. Moral traditionalists. Cultural and social conservatives. Sometimes critical of Christian Right.

The sectors above this line tend to accept the rules of pluralist civil society and PRA calls them part of the "Conservative Right."

The sectors below this line tend to reject the rules of pluralist civil society and PRA calls them part of the "Hard Right."

Christian Nationalism (Christian Right: Soft Dominionists) – Biblically defined immorality and sin breed chaos and anarchy. America's greatness as God's chosen land has been undermined by liberal secular humanists, feminists, and homosexuals. Purists want litmus tests for issues of abortion, tolerance of gays and lesbians, and prayer in schools. Often a form of Right-Wing Populism.

Christian Theocracy (Christian Right: Hard Dominionists) – Christian men are ordained by God to run society. Eurocentric version of Christianity based on early Calvinism. Intrinsically Christian ethnocentric, treating non-Christians as second-class citizens, and therefore implicitly antisemitic. Includes Christian Reconstructionism and other theocratic theologies. Elitist.

HARD RIGHT

XENOPHOBIC RIGHT

Patriot Movement (Forms of Right-Wing Populism: Tea Parties, Town Hall Protests, Armed Citizens Militias) – Parasitic liberal elites control the government, media, and banks. Blames societal problems on scapegoats below them on the socio-economic ladder who are portrayed as lazy, sinful, or subversive. Fears government plans tyranny to enforce collectivism and globalism, perhaps as part of a One World Government or New World Order. Americanist. Often supports Business Nationalism due to its isolationist emphasis. Anti-Globalist, yet supports unilateralist national security militarism.

Paleoconservatism – Ultra-conservatives and reactionaries. Natural financial oligarchies preserve the republic against democratic mob rule. Usually nativist (White Nationalism), sometimes antisemitic or Christian nationalist. Elitist emphasis similar to the intellectual conservative revolution wing of European New Right. Often libertarian.

White Nationalism (White Racial Nationalists) – Alien cultures make democracy impossible. Cultural Supremacists argue different races can adopt the dominant (White) culture; Biological Racists argue the immutable integrity of culture, race, and nation. Segregationists want distinct enclaves, Separatists want distinct nations. Americanist. "Tribalist" emphasis echoes racial-nationalist wing of the European New Right. Often a form of Right-Wing Populism.

Ultra Right (Sometimes called Far Right or Extreme Right) – Militant forms of insurgent revolutionary right ideology and separatist ethnocentric nationalism. Reject pluralist democracy for an organic oligarchy that unites the homogeneous Volkish nation. Conspiracist views of power are overwhelmingly antisemitic. Home to overt neofascists and neonazis. Ku Klux Klan, Christian Identity, Creativity Movement , National Socialist Movement, National Alliance. Often uses Right-Wing Populist rhetoric.

Exploring the Racial Position of Asian Americans

> "In certain contexts, it'll be different… But I'm saying, philosophically, where it counts, we're in the middle. We are the brokers… We are the folks that are on the fence that can go either way… We can go nationalist and move to the right, and eventually all become Michelle Malkins, or we can throw our lot in to the left, and become partners, become coalition builders, become leaders of a new majority that's about progressive values. And that's what I'm hoping that we do."

—Jeff Chang, CultureStr/ke

The forecast that peoples of color in the United States will outnumber whites sometime in the next 30 years is a contested one, but clearly, non-whites are now the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. In this context, ChangeLab formed last year as a new research institute to explore how racial politics might shift as a result, especially in light of today's purported "post-racialism." Are the projected demographic changes necessarily a good thing for the racial justice movement? Will there be more pressure for certain peoples of color to identify politically with whites? What is required to build authentic racial solidarity among communities of color in this shifting environment?

With these questions in mind, ChangeLab developed a strategic focus on Asian American racial identity. Our first research project began in May 2011. We conducted in-depth interviews with 82 prominent Asian American organizers, leaders, intellectuals, and artists working in the racial justice field throughout the United States. We also talked to five non-Asian American racial justice leaders doing promising work that cuts across all communities of color. Together these informants represent some of the strongest, most influential racial justice efforts taking place across the country today. We asked them a series of 12 questions about Asian American racial identity, Asian American attitudes toward other peoples of color, promising approaches to racial justice work, and gaps and challenges in the field. All interviews were confidential, and each one lasted about an hour. Please see the last section of this report for details on our methodology. This is the first of several reports on our findings. It focuses on how Asian Americans view race and other peoples of color, what influences that, and how this affects the potential for multiracial organizing.

The title of this report is intentionally provocative. It reflects what we heard. Many participants expressed deep concerns over what they perceive to be Asian American complicity in white supremacy, and specifically in the denigration of Blackness, through acceptance and reinforcement of the model minority myth. They described an urgent need to acknowledge this, and to come up with strategic interventions. There is a sense that something critical has been missing from conversations about Asian Americans and race – an acknowledgement that the modern construction and manipulation of Asian American identity was intended to undermine both Black liberation and broader social movements challenging racism and imperialism. Despite an explosion of antiracism trainings in recent decades, our participants told us that that today's racial justice movement suffers from a lack of analysis and practice to deal with this reality.

There is one notable absence in this report. We began this study using the term "API," intending to include Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. However, halfway through the project, it became clear that one central tension in the field is the existence of many self-described Asian

and Pacific Islander organizations (using acronyms like API, AAPI, NHPI/AA, etc.) that are not, in fact, grounded in Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander constituencies. This is not to say that these efforts are not guided by good intentions. But in our opinion, including Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in this research would have reinforced the marginalization that they routinely experience in Asian American-dominated spaces. For this reason, we decided to focus on Asian American and not NHPI participants. We do note in this report what people said about Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Also, many participants used the term "Asian American" and "API" interchangeably in their responses, which is reflected in quotes throughout this document. Exploring racial justice work from Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander perspectives would greatly benefit the field, and merits a study of its own.

Finally, we would like to say a word about the personal reasons behind this project. As Asian Americans ourselves, we each have different gender identities, class backgrounds, and ethnic roots, but we share a common worldview – the belief that racism is among the most powerful forces driving social inequality within the United States and globally. Having come of age in the '70s and '80s, we spent decades working in the social justice sector during a time of widespread backlash against liberalism and the left, and particularly against the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. Today this backlash has created deep confusion among most Americans about race. Asian Americans are no exception. We formed ChangeLab to explore not just who Asian Americans are, but how we operate, whether consciously or not, in the realm of race politics. Our goal is to inspire new ways of thinking, and new strategies, to transcend the barriers that stand in the way of authentic multiracial solidarity among communities of color.

We believe that Asian American politics cannot advance without a deeper political analysis, one that takes into account white supremacy in all of its manifestations. We hope that this report will help spark the conversations needed to build that analysis. Acts of Asian American complicity, no matter how prevalent, are symptoms of a deeper problem. They certainly do not reflect the full spectrum of Asian American politics. There is a strong legacy of Asian American commitment to racial justice, but it is threatened by an ongoing reticence to acknowledge the incentives that white supremacy offers for Asian American collusion, and how Asian Americans have responded. The spiritual and political costs of this silence for all people struggling for racial liberation are too great to ignore.

—Soya Jung and Scot Nakagawa
Senior Partners, ChangeLab

Summary Findings

In order to better understand the racial position of Asian Americans, and how Asian American identity functions in the realm of racial politics, ChangeLab conducted in-depth, confidential interviews with 82 Asian American organizers, leaders, intellectuals, and artists working in the racial justice field throughout the United States. We also talked to five non-Asian American racial justice leaders doing promising work that cuts across all communities of color. Our informants represent some of the strongest, most influential racial justice efforts taking place across the country today, including some of the most prominent Asian American organizations. We asked a series of questions about Asian American racial identity, Asian American attitudes toward other peoples of color, approaches to racial justice work, and gaps and challenges in the field. Following is a summary of our initial findings.

This is a time of great racial confusion, with divergent views of what justice means.

There is a lack of clarity about what racial justice means in this political moment. The problems of structural racism are dense and vast, yet rather than pushing for transformative change, most efforts today seek to protect the gains of the Civil Rights Movement against rightwing attack. The prevailing framework of liberal multiculturalism limits the political terrain for fighting back to questions of representation. This leaves underlying structural problems unchallenged, or worse, reinforced. In this environment, Asian American organizations face pressure to elbow for political clout in a zero-sum game of racial inclusion. Some argue that advocating for the rights of Asian Americans constitutes a racial justice strategy, regardless of the impact on other communities. Others believe that there can be no justice for Asian Americans without justice for all peoples of color.

Many Asian Americans don't think about race.

The dominant view among our participants is that Asian Americans do not think about race at all. Many attributed this to the racial position of Asian Americans, and to how the political right has manipulated ideas about Asian Americans. There is a belief that in particular, those Asian Americans with class privilege have internalized the model minority myth along with the notion of American individualism. Some noted how harmful this was to Asian Americans who have no resources to identify and address their own experiences of racial discrimination, and no understanding of the roots of anti-Asian hostility. Many participants said that low-wage Asian American workers have the highest level of race consciousness.

Asian Americans have internalized a sense of racial superiority.

People told us that at the same time that Asian Americans do not think about race generally, they have also internalized a sense of superiority over other peoples of color, particularly Black people. Interviewees attributed this to structural forces that reinforce pejorative ideas of blackness, and positive ideas of whiteness, along with the prevalence of the model minority myth, which casts Asian Americans as "honorary whites" and encourages a sense of racial pride.

Asian American racial attitudes impede solidarity with other peoples of color.

Internalized racial superiority among many Asian Americans hinders efforts to build multiracial solidarity with other peoples of color. In general, participants said that Asian Americans tend to hold negative ideas of Black people and Latinos, and do not think about Native Americans at all.

There was once a strong progressive Asian American movement, but it went off track.

Several participants lamented that the term "Asian American" or "API" no longer signifies a set of progressive political ideas as it once did in the '60s and '70s. The Asian American movement once espoused strong antiracist and anti-imperialist values. However, rapid growth and ethnic diversification post-1965 drove Asian American leaders to prioritize service delivery over movement building, and also led to a set of increasingly diverse political experiences within the Asian American or API coalition. Data disaggregation became the battle cry among Asian American civil rights leaders in order to advocate for the needs of particular ethnic subgroups and to compete successfully for service dollars. While necessary, this left larger issues of social change unaddressed, and deepened divisions between Asian Americans and other peoples of color.

"Asian American" serves less as a political identity than as a demographic category.

On the question of Asian American identity, participants expressed concern that the Asian American construct represented an awkward coalition of ethnic subgroups, and not a racial group with shared experiences and political interests. People said that deep disparities in power and access within the Asian American or API coalition created too much fragmentation to allow for meaningful political unity. Particularly since 9/11, certain South Asian and Muslim communities have faced a level of targeting and alienation that has driven them to organize outside of the Asian American or API construct. In addition, many progressive Asian Americans hesitate to identify as Asian American, because of political disagreements with the most dominant expressions of Asian American identity.

Various factors contribute to whether people identify as Asian American.

Those who do identify as Asian American tend to be younger, later generation, or living in geographic areas where there is no single, dominant Asian ethnic subgroup. Some described how the media and technology served as a way for isolated Asian Americans to find a sense of identification with one another.

Racial justice activists believe that organizing around Asian American identity would only be strategic if it were progressive and race-conscious.

There is a sense that to the degree that an Asian American consciousness exists, it is not very

progressive and not very racialized. People expressed tremendous ambivalence over whether organizing around Asian American identity would be strategic for the racial justice movement. Some feared that it would do more harm than good, because it would reinforce ideas of Asian American exceptionalism. Others said that it would be timely to do so now, because the post-1965 waves of immigration had created new opportunities to forge a strong, progressive, antiracist identity that could push back against the more reactionary tendencies within Asian American communities.

Building multiracial solidarity demands deep political education among Asian Americans to counter the structural forces that encourage complicity in white supremacy. There is a need to move away from assimilation and toward a model of power sharing.

Participants told us that building a base of Asian Americans who could act as strong allies to other peoples of color demanded organizing, and political education in particular, to counter mainstream messages about race. Specific examples of such work included organizations working in low-income neighborhoods or with low-wage workers, using storytelling, relationship building, and honest dialogue. There is also a sense that because of how Asian Americans have been racialized, the conscious rejection of relative race privilege would be a powerful refutation of white supremacy.

The Road to an Era of Racial Confusion

"We live in racial history."

—Racial Formation Rules: Continuity, Instability, and Change,
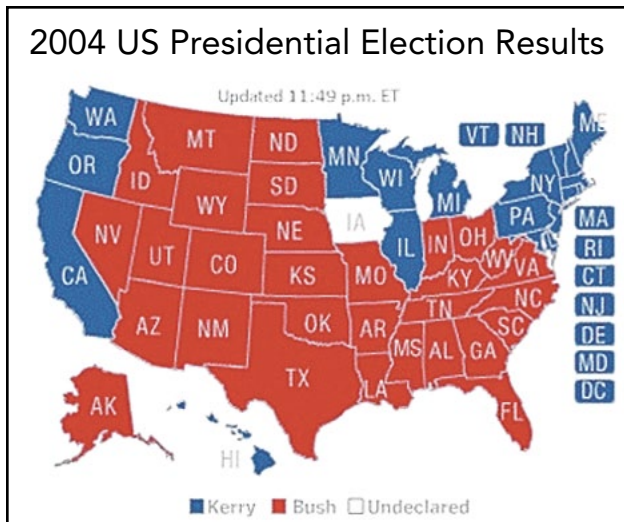 by Michael Omi and Howard Winant

This simple statement expresses the kernel of structural racism theory, that the present is a construction of the past. The centuries-long history of race is embedded into the beliefs, systems, institutions, and relationships that shape our daily lives. For racial justice advocates, the task is a difficult one – to interpret history and cast light on the accrued injuries of racism, and then to popularize that interpretation.

Particularly since the election of Barack Obama as the first Black U.S. president, racial justice advocates have had to grapple endlessly with the myth of a "post-racial" society. The common belief is that the Civil Rights Movement achieved racial equality, so race no longer matters. Most Americans think of racism as individual acts of racial hatred or hostility, or as explicitly exclusionary laws and policies – relics from a pre-Civil Rights Movement era. Challenging this idea requires a historical explanation to show how white supremacy has been built into the fabric of the U.S. economy, political systems, and culture such that it requires no intention or explicitness.

Racial justice is also threatened by an idea too often embraced by those on the left, the notion of America as a land of immigrants and equal opportunity, a place where hard work and assimilation into a liberal, multicultural society is the sole key to prosperity. Organizations on the left often use this rhetoric as a matter of political pragmatism (as in language about "the American Dream"), but the reality is that it serves to keep the structures supporting white supremacy in place. Both colorblindness and the assimilation narrative assume that the ultimate goal of racial justice is equal access to existing structures, rather than structural transformation.

Pushing back against these dominant narratives requires shining a bright light on the centrality of two main processes through which the United States was established: African slavery and the genocide of indigenous peoples. The prevailing (and mistaken) view is that these processes are part of a bygone era whose wrongs have been righted (or in the case of Native Americans, no longer matter). The grease on the wheels of this misconception is the belief in American exceptionalism, of the United States as a beacon of freedom, equality, and democracy in the world.

In reality, what makes the United States exceptional is the long history of resistance and resiliency among peoples of color who have struggled against American Empire and white supremacy, from the days of Manifest Destiny to today's state of permanent war. Such resiliency lives on today in efforts to dismantle, or merely survive, the accumulated by-products of slavery, genocide, and imperialism.

13

2004 US Presidential Election Results

Pre-Civil War Free vs. Slave States

■ FREE STATES AND TERRITORIES
■ SLAVE STATES
■ TERRITORIES OPEN TO SLAVERY

Today's U.S. political system reflects the history of slavery and racism in the United States. Red states generally mirror former slave states and territories open to slavery, while blue states generally mirror free states and territories. *Image from PolitiComments.com*

This section attempts to explain how we arrived at the current state of racial confusion and movement fragmentation. Where did the fictitious assumptions of colorblindness and post-racialism come from? How did the model minority myth, and other ideas that impede multiracial solidarity, come about? It would take entire books to answer these questions fully, but sketching out an alternative historical framework for thinking about race could yield the deeper analysis needed to sharpen how the racial justice movement operates, and in particular, how Asian Americans engage in racial justice work.

The Roots of American Empire

Omi and Winant have written that "race and empire walk hand in hand." Too often, expressions of Asian American identity over-emphasize immigration as the central process in defining Asian American history, ignoring imperialism as a driving force behind the migration, displacement, and marginalization of Asian populations. As historian Gary Okihiro writes:

Asians, it must be remembered, did not come to America; Americans went to Asia. Asians, it must be remembered, did not come to take the wealth of America; Americans went to take the wealth of Asia. Asians, it must be remembered, did not come to conquer and colonize America; Americans went to conquer and colonize Asia. And the matter of the 'when and where' of Asian American history is located therein.

The U.S. South is a more useful starting point for the story of Asians in America than immigration narratives that focus on the West Coast. As early as 1762, Filipino "Manilamen" arrived in Louisiana seeking to escape the brutality of Spanish colonialism, long before Chinese immigrants arrived in California in search of "Gold Mountain." Asians worked sugar plantations in the Caribbean and Louisiana during the early to mid-19th Century as "coolies," laboring and resisting alongside African slaves.

Historian Moon-ho Jung has researched the history of coolies during the era of Emancipation, and specifically how their presence in the South and in the Caribbean had lasting implications

for the meaning of race and nation. Southern planters used coolies, seen as cheap and "colored" alternatives to free Black labor, to depress wages and discipline Black workers. Because coolies could not vote, Southern Democrats viewed them as less of a threat than Blacks, who tended to vote Republican. Viewing history through the lens of imperialism allows such stories of how central slavery has been to the historical experiences of Asian Americans, and to the formation of the United States as a nation, to emerge.

Chinese indentured servant ("Coolie") being whipped aboard ship. *Harper's Magazine, 1864. Public Domain.*

The linkages between Asian American history and the struggle of indigenous Americans also become clearer. Thomas Jefferson declared in 1813: "The confirmed brutalization, if not the extermination of this race in our America, is therefore to form an additional chapter in the English history of the same colored man in Asia… and wherever else Anglo-mercantile cupidity can find a two-penny interest in deluging the earth with human blood." Throughout the 19th Century, the racist logic of Manifest Destiny was used to justify both the genocide of Native Americans and the colonization of Asia and the Pacific, as well as the annexation of Texas and parts of Mexico. These strategies were seen as necessary for, in the words of Andrew Jackson, "extending the territories of freedom." Jackson, the U.S. president whose face appears on every $20 bill, was responsible for the forced removal of more than 40,000 Native Americans during his presidency, in order to open up 25 million acres in the U.S. South to white settlement, in the name of freedom. Removal resulted not only in countless deaths, but also in devastating cultural, political, and spiritual loss, the impacts of which Native Americans continue to experience.

Manifest Destiny was the precursor to today's U.S. foreign policy line, which claims that America's exceptional role is to spread democracy and freedom throughout the world. Following the annexation of the Philippines and Hawaii in 1898, then-President Theodore Roosevelt declared: "Of course our whole national history has been one of expansion… That the barbarians recede or are conquered… is due solely to the power of the mighty civilized races… which by their expansion are gradually bringing peace into the red wastes where the barbarian people of the world hold sway." While less racially explicit, the roots of this worldview are echoed in the words of a more recent U.S. president, George W. Bush, speaking on the war in Iraq: "Freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. And as the greatest power on earth we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom."

American Empire today is no longer justified through explicit assertions of "the white man's burden," but through coded language about freedom, democracy, and security. This is the outgrowth of global and domestic political shifts that changed the meaning of race post-WWII, and of rightwing movements that have exploited racial politics to their advantage.
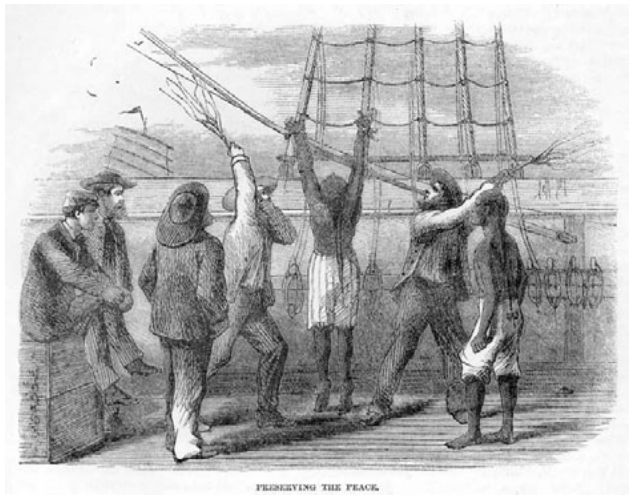
WWII and the Neoliberal Backlash

The end of WWII and the defeat of Nazism delegitimized fascism. The U.S. Civil Rights Movement then ended legally codified racism. The "burden" of American Empire today is not, and cannot legitimately be, explicitly about white supremacy. Instead, it is about the need to defend and spread American values throughout the world. But the result is no less racialized, and no less brutal. The defense and spread of American power now takes the form of neoliberalism. It is a worldview that emerged after WWII as a strategy to restore and maintain class power. Neoliberalism began as a backlash against the WWII-era belief that the state had an obligation to ensure economic recovery (for whites) through public investments in welfare, education, and healthcare, and through certain compromises between capital and labor. Neoliberalism demands a strong, unfettered private sector and the military power to protect it.

While the end of WWII symbolically signaled Western liberalism's victory over fascism, the United States continued to embody a fundamental hypocrisy through its rhetoric of freedom and democracy on the one hand, and its brutal policies of racial segregation on the other. Federal programs served to benefit poor and working-class whites, not peoples of color. Still, white class elites viewed liberal economic policies as a threat to their power. The share of national income taken by the top 1% of earners fell from 16% before WWII to less than half of that at the end of the war, and stayed there for 30 years. The threat intensified when growth collapsed and the share of wealth by the top 1% plunged from 35% in 1965 to 20% in 1975.

Race served as a handy tool in the neoliberal backlash to free capital from the constraints of government. The backlash took hold in the United States under President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, and worked remarkably well. The ratio of median worker compensation to CEO salaries soared from 30:1 in 1970 to 500:1 in 2000. Neoliberal rhetoric exploits ideals like human dignity and freedom as "the central values of civilization." It argues that fascism, dictatorship, and communism threaten these values by undermining individual freedom. It does not explicitly use race as a rationale, but exploits racist beliefs to achieve its ends. Because the legacy of racism has made peoples of color more vulnerable to disinvestments in the public sector, the neoliberal agenda has damaged communities of color early and disproportionately.

The neoliberal agenda has used race as a lever to dismantle programs like AFDC, which was originally designed to help poor white women out of poverty. In his 1976 presidential campaign, Reagan fabricated a story about a Black "welfare queen" whose criminal gaming of the public benefits system was making her rich at America's expense. The image was outlandish, but effective: "She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over $150,000." Despite the fact that the majority of people who benefit from welfare programs have always been white women, this iconic image has survived for more than 30 years, serving to equate public assistance programs with the alleged immorality and criminality of Black women.

Neoliberal thought has since shaped the policies of both Republicans and Democrats, with leaders in both parties arguing that the private sector is key to the common good and that the role of the state is to liberate it, by force if necessary. Although the word "neoliberalism" is not

part of people's day-to-day conversations, its ideas have become so entrenched that they are now seen as "common sense."

Racial Backlash and the Ascendancy of the Political Right

Just as neoliberalism was a backlash against the post-WWII decline of the 1%, the rise of the modern political right was a backlash against the Civil Rights Movement. Understanding the ascendancy of the right over the last 40 years reveals how racial politics have shaped current economic, social and political conditions.

Ku Klux Klan members supporting Barry Goldwater's campaign for the presidential nomination at the Republican National Convention, San Francisco, California, as an African American man pushes signs back: 12 July 1964. *Photo: Warren K Leffler, Universal History Archive/UIG/The Bridgeman Art Library*

The Civil Rights Movement never fully realized racial equality, but the important gains it achieved fueled white resentment over a perceived loss of racial status. This sentiment formed the basis for the Republican Southern Strategy, which exploited racial resentment to lure white Democratic voters in the South into the Republican Party. Republican strategists entered into a long-term base-building project to unite downwardly mobile white Southerners with Christian Evangelicals around an agenda that attacked peoples of color, women, and LGBT people. Their strategy was to equate the civil rights of Blacks in particular with the backsliding of white middle-class America. Ironically, their agenda also included neoliberal attacks on the very anti-poverty programs that had helped poor and middle-class whites after WWII. They won support for this by equating government programs with civil rights, secular liberalism, and Communism. Republican strategists successfully used race to build the rightwing coalition we see today, illustrating the power of white supremacy to mobilize whites against their own class interests.

Of course, racism is not limited to the Republican Party. Not long ago, the Democratic Party was home to Southern white supremacists, those who defended slavery and Jim Crow. The party catered to that base and betrayed Black civil rights leaders during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Against the backdrop of deadly clashes over voting rights, President Johnson and other Democratic leaders refused to seat the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation at the 1964 national convention – a delegation elected by disenfranchised Black voters and white allies. This helped to animate the Black Power movement, which emerged from an understanding that fighting racism would require new strategies that went beyond party politics.

The Model Minority Myth and the Criminalization of Blackness

The idea of Asian American uplift, of the ability to "rise" through hard work and intelligence, emerged amid the Black Power and other radical social movements of the 1960s. The New York Times article, "Success Story, Japanese American Style," first brought the concept of the model minority into popular consciousness in 1966. In it, author William Petersen lauds the hard work

and values that prevented Japanese Americans from being a "problem minority." Against the backdrop of the 1965 Watts Rebellion the year before, the thinly veiled implication was that Blacks, and in particular, Black political resistance, were the real problem.

At the same time, conservative elites fabricated a rampant U.S. crime problem to justify state repression of social movements, and in particular, the Black Power movement. Both Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon ran campaigns in 1964 and 1968, respectively, on "law and order" platforms that conflated race with crime. Public polls from that time show that most Americans did not see crime as a top concern, and distinguished crime from the racial problems that fueled social protest. But the right successfully manipulated public opinion through the media and political rhetoric, constructing a moral panic over crime and welfare that hinged on ideas of Blackness. In the words of scholar Naomi Murukawa, "The U.S. did not confront a crime problem that was then racialized[;] it confronted a race problem that was then criminalized." It was in this context that the model minority myth emerged, casting Asian Americans as law-abiding and hardworking, and implicitly enforcing the permanent criminalization of Blackness.

Today, the "tough on crime" approach has ensnared other communities of color with its ever-expanding net – using language like "illegal immigrants," "criminal aliens," and "terrorists." The expanded ability of the state to arrest, imprison, deport, and kill peoples of color within and beyond U.S. borders lies in the manipulation of racialized ideas, and is rooted in the criminalization of Blackness.

Arrest during the Watts Rebellion in 1965. Over the span of six days, Black residents frustrated with long-standing police brutality faced off against hundreds of L.A. police officers and 16,000 National Guard members. *Photo: Ed Palumbo, World-Telegram*

The Civil Rights Movement ended explicit state-sponsored racism, which allowed the United States to assert its legitimacy as a leader of freedom and democracy abroad. As with the idea of a model minority, if America is a model nation, then there must also be "problem" nations. In this way, American exceptionalism, and its opposition in the form of "rogue" or "terrorist" nations, justifies expanded U.S. military projects in the name of security. The criminalization of Blackness is a precursor to the criminalization of entire nation-states and religions.

The Limitations of Asian American Victimhood

By and large, Asian American critiques of the model minority myth have not reflected this historical understanding. In criticizing the framing of the Pew Research Center's recent report, "The Rise of Asian Americans," Esther Wang of CAAAV is a lone voice in pointing out that since the backlash against Black civil rights struggles of the

'60s and '70s, "the model minority myth has been one of the pillars of colorblind racism." More often, Asian American leaders have stressed that the myth masks the real needs of the most vulnerable Asian American sub-populations and fosters anti-Asian sentiment. While true, such responses miss the political mark. The idea of a model minority implies that there are "bad minorities" – people who fail to succeed because they lack the correct values, work ethic, and intelligence.

This absence of critical analysis was not always true. There was a strong and militant Asian American movement that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, motivated by issues like the Vietnam War, the need for ethnic studies programs that were grounded in grassroots communities, and longstanding poverty in neighborhoods like San Francisco's Chinatown, Japantown, and Manilatown. Three events in the Bay Area marked the beginning of this movement: the 1968 formation of the Asian American Political Alliance, the 1968 and 1969 Third World Liberation Strikes at San Francisco State University and UC Berkeley, respectively, and the first eviction notice received by low-income tenants at the International Hotel in 1968. The Civil Rights and the Black Power movements, as well as revolutionary movements throughout the Third World, profoundly influenced large numbers of Asian Americans, leading them to question the nature of U.S. democracy. The idea of Third World liberation implied political unity based on parallel colonial and racial experiences of peoples of color throughout U.S. history – including Native American genocide, the African slave trade, the colonization of Chicanos in the Southwest, and the exclusion of Asian immigration.

The relative absence of this critique among Asian American organizations today can be explained in part by the general decline of radical U.S. movements during the 1970s, and a related shift in priorities from political change to service delivery. The "we suffer from racism too" response reflects real structural pressures that drive competition over scarce resources. Community-based organizations are pushed to prove that their constituents are in need in order to secure funding. But such responses fall short of addressing the myth's real damage, the idea that racial barriers can be transcended through good behavior. As a pillar of colorblind racism, the model minority myth supports a worldview that denigrates peoples of color and keeps white supremacy in place, to our collective detriment.

We live in racial history. The African slave trade, the policy of genocide against indigenous Americans, and the racialization of Asian Americans as the model minority are interconnected threads of American Empire, spun on the looms of white supremacy. The massive growth of the U.S. prison industrial complex from the 1980s forward, today's record rates of incarceration and deportation, and the unprecedented attainment of the United States as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world" reflect the endurance of structural racism via neoliberal projects and rightwing agendas. Assertions of Asian American identity must take this into account. The racial justice movement has yet to create a shared worldview and language to contest white supremacy in its current form, and to organize across broad segments of dispossessed people toward a vision of liberation.

Andrea Smith's article, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy" offers one useful way to think about white supremacy, as a kind of three-legged stool. She describes three interconnected forms of racist logic: slavery/capitalism, genocide/capitalism, and Orientalism/war. She also explains how straight, white male values are the building blocks of white supremacy – the wood from which the stool is made. These values, advanced through rightwing

Christian ideas of family and nation, impose and maintain the social hierarchies that allow white supremacy to endure. Smith aptly critiques the tendency of activists of color to come together around assertions of "shared victimhood," which imply that racial oppressions are all the same. Instead, she says, we must examine history in order to acknowledge and reject the incentives for complicity that white supremacy offers to all peoples of color.

Divergent Views of Justice

Our interviews reflected the racial confusion of this political moment. Savvy organizers understand that the problems of structural racism are dense and vast, and are frustrated that most racial justice efforts today are defensive ones. Rather than pushing for transformative change, they aim to protect the limited gains of the Civil Rights Movement against rightwing attack. Rightwing framing dominates popular ideas of race today, leading a growing number of people believe that, to the extent that racial unfairness exists, whites, and not peoples of color, are the victims. In comparison, the mainstream view is that the United States is a colorblind, egalitarian, and multicultural nation, even as deep racial disparities persist. For communities of color, this limits the terrain for fighting back to questions of representation, leaving underlying structural problems unchallenged, or worse, reinforced. One obstacle facing Asian American organizations stems from the pressure to elbow for political clout in a zero-sum game of racial inclusion.

One person described the problem this way:

"The pull of this kind of inclusion, disparity framework is actually a little bit sinister, because if you say, 'Hey, I want to start an API formation here,' the prevailing framework and discourse is, 'Okay, so what you should do then is get all the data and examples you can that demonstrate your uniqueness, your singularity, how your experiences are particular.' …It draws you into a framework that doesn't allow you to raise other questions… That's a main, main challenge is this broader framework of multiculturalism… When [an API organization] says… 'we're the fastest growing minority group,' I understand on the one hand that's an effort to say, 'Look, we need to get resources and we need to be politically taken seriously,' but implicit in that is a suggestion like, 'We're here… Black concerns were important, but now there's a new kid in town.' …It's an effort to assert what seems like a racial justice lens, but actually is quite counterproductive."

On questions of strategy, there are deep divisions even within some of the foremost racial justice organizations. One racial justice leader talked about her own institution, saying, "We're a 24-person team, and you could talk to 12 people who would say, 'Oh the American Dream, that's a perfect way to frame the racial debate, how people have been blocked from the dream and how the dream gets distorted… And then the other 12 would say, 'Oh the American Dream, why would you ever invest in repeating such a regressive, exceptionalizing idea about Americans?'"

This person went on to describe the challenges she saw in doing racial justice work with Asian American communities: "People have been beaten into submission on race in general and think that it is a discussion that will get them into trouble… Part of the reason API people avoid it is that they can see the way Blacks and Latinos are positioned… and they don't

want that, so they'll do something different and hope for a different outcome... Those are the two big ones: a lot of pressure not to talk about it, and then a lot of pressure to disassociate from Blacks and Latinos."

For those who do tackle race explicitly, the sheer enormity of structural racism obscures what racial justice strategies should entail. One movement leader asked, "Is a win getting racial equity impact statements passed with legislation? Is a win changing the composition of leadership bodies so that they're more representative of people of color...? When we start looking at race from a more structural lens, what it takes to win becomes much bigger... I think it's complicated."

In San Diego, undocumented immigrants await deportation to Mexico. The number of immigrants deported by the United States doubled between 2001 and 2011, to almost 400,000 in fiscal 2012. *Photo: European Pressphoto Agency*

Others criticized the limits of legal and policy strategies: "The public policy debates are the end debates," said one organizer. "By the time you get to the point where... folks are looking at this stuff as a bill in committee somewhere, all of the other options have been completely torn off the table."

Regarding racial justice work in Asian American communities, one participant asked, "What is the goal of our organizing? Is it representation? Is it just to have a seat at the table so there's an Asian mayor or something? Or is it that we actually are really part of this larger... movement that is calling for progressive transformation structurally?"

All of these quotes reflect the main challenge that we heard, the need for Asian American racial justice advocates to engage in serious political analysis and strategizing. There is a desire to break free of the impasse created by the narrow framework of liberal multiculturalism and the limited impacts of policy advocacy. Without this, organizers have little room to move. Asian American communities that have few alternatives to mainstream ideas about race remain susceptible to regressive racial politics and to unconsciously participate in the oppression of other peoples of color.

How do Asian Americans Think About Race?

I n the interviews for this report, we asked people how Asian Americans think about race, and whether we should work to build a more unified Asian American identity. Most responses acknowledged the structural and systemic forces that shaped Asian American ideas about race – including the model minority myth and its implicit messages about whiteness and Blackness, racial stereotypes in the media, U.S. imperialism and the globalization of racist ideas, funding, government systems, and community organizations and leadership.

They Don't.

It is significant that about one-third of respondents said that Asian Americans do not think about race at all. Some said this was because of the weakness of Asian American racial identity especially among first-generation immigrants and refugees, but others attributed it to the racial position of Asian Americans, especially those with class privilege, which encouraged the embrace of American individualism. Some noted how harmful this was to Asian Americans who often had no resources to identify and address their own experiences of racial discrimination, and no understanding of the roots of anti-Asian hostility.

In general, this quote from one national racial justice leader aptly sums up what we heard:

"If they have some level of class privilege, then I think many have bought into the model minority idea without doing much scrutiny into the policies that have either helped us become the 'model minority,' or that [have] prevented some of [us] from achieving that sort of economic success… Without a lot of scrutiny, it's very easy to buy into American individualism, the notion that 'I have what I have because I worked very hard to get it, to earn it.' So I think many don't think about [race] at all, or think of themselves as exceptions to the American racial arrangement.

And then, people that do think about it fall into two categories. The larger category is people who are aware of discrimination being directed at them, but who think of racism as individual, intentional, and obvious. And then a much smaller set of people, but growing – and maybe surprisingly robust given how little support there is for API communities to go in this direction – people who think of racism as systemic and institutional, like we do."

The model minority myth was a strong theme. People described how it at once reinforced the concept of Asians as a race, and also encouraged "colorblindness" by implying that one can transcend racial barriers through merit. By this logic, peoples of color who do not succeed in the United States are "bad minorities" who deserve their fate. Many people said that the acceptance of the model minority myth often led Asian Americans not to think about race, while also encouraging a sense of relative racial superiority.

"A lot of people don't have access to their own history," said one participant, an Asian American organizer in the South. "That contributes to the lack of understanding of the role

that Asian Americans have had in the racial hierarchy in the United States. I think a lot of second-generation folks kind of see us as being brand new, or see [our] experience as... not really connected to how other people of color are treated in this country. They just don't have the historical reference for it." Another interviewee said, "We think a lot of the stuff that the mainstream culture wants us to think. I think the Asian community broadly speaking has drank a lot of the Kool-Aid."

Some felt that those Asian Americans who were the most race-conscious tended to be low-wage workers who do not fit into the model minority stereotype. "So Indian and Pakistani taxi drivers in New York, Asian guest workers... hotel and service industry workers, I think that their worker centers and unions, as well as their workplaces offer real opportunities for solidarity between themselves and Latinos and African Americans," said one organizer. "Their workplaces really clearly show the racial hierarchy of this country... Low-wage workers, have, I would say, the highest consciousness about race."

This Aug. 31, 1987 cover of *Time* magazine reflects the endurance of the model minority myth, which first emerged in 1966. *Cover Credit: Ted Thai*

Similarly another person said, "I think honestly the API community is more to the right or center than other communities of color, particularly Black and Latino communities in the U.S., around the issue of race... Some of that has to do with the class makeup of who's in the country... the waves of professionals and upper-class folks coming in." This person contrasted that segment of the community to working-class Asians, who, he said, "have a greater identity as people of color... than middle-class Asian communities."

Another person said that Asian American communities were no different than other communities, and that building antiracist consciousness was just hard to do. "Like in all communities, there is mixed consciousness, some people are more keyed into the sort of economic manifestation of racism, so they might see it more as a class issue than a race issue, but really when you start to talk to them and peel back the layers, then it all starts to come together... For Asians, I think that... being racial as a model minority... creates some level of confusion... because it has class-based implications."

One Black participant said, "I hate to generalize but the consciousness about race seems lower to me... I don't think that people want to think about race as a factor for why things aren't working." She also cited immigration as a possible disincentive for critiquing U.S. structures and systems. "There's so many different pieces... how race has or hasn't been brought up in the culture... wanting to leave those things behind and be really positive about what the United States is, and... [seeing] examples of people getting ahead in America because they work hard," she said. "I don't know... But I definitely find it hard to have a discussion about structural racism... more so with Asians than with either Africans or Latinos."

One person said that it was difficult for Asian Americans to name race, because it was not as ingrained into their consciousness as it was for other peoples of color. "I was never trained to

identify racism. I was also confused on how to deal with it," he said. "There isn't this long history of us training ourselves, from when we're children, to learn how to deal with race the way there is with Black folks, and to a lesser degree with Latinos."

He went on to say, "I think every Asian American person feels race I just don't think they realize they do, because they sort of relate race to their migration status... or cultural status or their religion status... For example a lot of the stuff that happens against Muslim folks is very much tied to race but it really occupies, politically, a religious lens, because that's the organizational capacity that they can use to fight against a lot of the racism they're experiencing."

He also cited the trauma that certain Asian immigrants and refugees experienced as a result of political repression in their home countries, saying, "For folks who immigrated from places where there's dictatorships or military control, they may have actually had a fairly political life back home and that's why they fled, and so there's a lot of trauma still, and the idea of being involved politically is scary, and that includes speaking out about race and racism."

Asian American Racial Superiority

Many participants critiqued the model minority myth as a strategy to denigrate Blackness and distance Asian Americans from other peoples of color, in service to white supremacy. Those who shared this view said that the enticement for Asian Americans to become complicit in this strategy was often effective. As one person put it, "We've been set apart from other communities of color, and we may perpetuate that subconsciously as like, 'We're superior.' "

One organizer said that such complicity reflects a learned understanding of the value of whiteness and anti-Black racism. "It's not always so insidious," he said. "Some of it is simply you're a new immigrant here... You want to survive this structure... Even if you don't have the language for it, you understand there's a disparity between white people and Black people... If you want to align yourself with that measure of success in that hierarchy, it means buying into this idea that we should dehumanize Black people and play into that oppression."

Another participant similarly said, "I think that there's a long history of all groups, people of color and whites, buying into the prevailing racialist ideas, and I think APIs are not immune to that... There's a longstanding idea that the way you become American is [to] learn to hate Black people. That's what immigrants learn when they come to the U.S... There's an inherent animosity, but I think that's part of the racial fabric of the country."

Several organizers talked about how the model myth was created, for what purpose, and the impacts that it had on racial justice work. One organizer said simply, "Our communities have been used." She explained how the model minority myth was part of a strategy to suppress radical social movements during the '60s. "It's not a coincidence that... while the U.S. government was targeting grassroots organizing by Native American, Black and Latino people, that is when barriers to immigration... got lifted, so they could skim off the top elite in our home countries and then point to our communities as the model... It's very smart policy in an insidious way... Our communities still have work to do... to make conscious choices to not play into those divisive dynamics, and to understand how we actually hurt ourselves [when we do]."

One person recalled his own experience in the education system, saying, "We're taught things

about ourselves… I was tracked into advanced classes… I had no business being in these advanced math classes. I don't remember when I got put into that, in elementary school or something… I was extremely not prepared… I was not doing well in them and was feeling bad… but also not really questioning it… We're encouraged to accept this model minority, to take pride… that we're better than other people."

The strongest critiques of Asian American complicity came from Asian Americans themselves. Many are fighting alongside Black and Latino organizers in racial justice campaigns, and feel frustrated with the anti-Black sentiments that they encounter in their own ethnic communities. One organizer in the Midwest said outright, "I mean, Asians are racist… I don't think that they think very highly of African Americans. I think that they largely think what they're told about them, which is that they're criminals, they're undeserving, they try and feed off the system, they don't work hard, they're scary, all of those different kinds of things… It's messed up." An organizer based in the South lamented, "I know people who… it's kind of like how they first start to understand themselves as Asian Americans… through the model minority myth, but they don't really understand how it places us in conflict with other people of color."

Several people talked about the implicit conditions placed on model minority status, and the impact of racialized ideas, regardless of their basis in truth. One Black racial justice leader put it this way:

"The larger structure has not been as… unforgiving of Asian populations, provided that they 'behave themselves.' [That] might mean not getting too involved in the political process, accepting the role of the junior partner… It's always contingent upon certain tacit agreements… It is the imagination that Asians, specifically Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans and maybe more recently Korean Americans, behave properly… oftentimes used in opposition to African Americans, and more recently maybe Latinos… They haven't taken into account Laotian Americans, or Vietnamese Americans, and Hmong Americans, but 'Asian' sort of sweeps them all up… They study hard, they work hard, they're good at math, they're good engineers, they're not too loud [and] they don't riot. This is obviously not true. But in a sense that doesn't matter, because what we imagine, or how we organize stories, need not have very much relationship to the way things really are."

Implications for Racial Justice

Participants described how Asian American ideas and attitudes about race affected racial justice organizing. One activist said, "It's… harder for us to work in solidarity with Latino and Black folks because… we're positioned as like, 'Hey, see, if you just work hard enough and don't expect government handouts or whatever, you could be just like these folks." She added, "The more APIs buy into [the model minority myth] themselves, the harder it is to build… racial solidarity."

Using 9/11 as an example, one South Asian activist cited the need to be aware of such lack of solidarity. "If we don't have the backs of Black and Latino people who are criminalized and targeted by our institutions, it was oftentimes other people of color who were committing violence against us after 9/11. It's one thing for us to point the finger and be so angry about it, but I think we have to ask ourselves, well where were *we* all these years, in moments of what

should have been solidarity? We were often playing into oppression if not directly oppressing those same communities. I think that's a serious barrier to promoting true social justice."

Another organizer reflected on a series of assaults by Black youth against Chinese residents in Oakland in April of 2010, and the challenge of managing the backlash absent a race analysis:

"All they want to see is like, 'our people were victimized by another group of people and we want to do something about it.' And 'do something about it' is not educating the community about [Black] suffering or their historical oppression… understanding their lack of resources and lack of equality… All they look at is, 'I am a victim and I don't want to be a victim.' So not being a victim [means having] tougher laws, locking these people up and giving the police more money… It is that dynamic and that kind of thinking that in our community that really put [us] at risk… Those types of things need to be addressed in the API community… Without that, we will continue to do a disservice to our own community, and a disservice to other communities."

One organizer said that mainstream views of Asian Americans as the model minority often bred distrust in progressive movements. "I don't think that we're always looked at as an ally," he said. "If you look at progressive Asian candidates, [they are] still looked at with skepticism, like, can an Asian be progressive? Are we even able to? I definitely think that that's there… when in fact the Asian, API community has… in terms of social movements and activism, a very rich, vibrant history, but [it's] not talked about."

A few people said that Asian Americans in fact did understand race, and saw it as a basis for organizing, although many of these responses focused on organizing around Asian American-specific interests, rather than forging multiracial alliances. These comments revealed the current confusion over what racial justice work means. One person said that of the Asian American organizations she knew, race was a central part of their analysis, but her understanding of racial

> " I feel there is such a diverse variety of experiences and the only ones that get recorded are the ones of Asian American shopkeepers in Black communities or folks who get picked on… It's so hard to pin that down because our community is so diverse and so disparate. There's a way that Cambodians from Lowell, Mass., identify with the Black community, and then there's a way that Koreans in LA interact with the Black community, and there's a way that Bangladeshis in the Lower East Side projects that interact with the Black community… so it's really hard to quantify that. Even when researchers try to, I feel it really is often a caricature of what's really going on… I think there's a lot of confusion around it. Even with my parents… My father is pretty racist, but when he talks about the Obama election he really feels personally proud. Like…very racially proud that Obama won, on a very personal level. I feel like none of the studies I've really seen really capture that stuff that's crazy in our community. "

justice work was specific. "It seems to be pretty ingrained in their work, and they think about race in the sense of… ensuring equal access and opportunity for Asian Americans to social resources." Another person similarly said that Asian Americans came together racially to fight for a shared civil rights agenda. "I think that there is certainly an understanding that our identity as AAPI is… one in which we can organize together… It is a way in which we can find commonalities between our different communities, and be able to organize together to assert specific rights."

Many people said that younger, later generations of Asian Americans were more likely to have progressive ideas about race. Other identity-based reasons for feeling isolated, like sexual orientation for example, appear to make it more likely for people to think more critically about race politics.

One Black interviewee said that because Asian Americans were the only group of color with access to model minority status, it presented them with a choice of whether to view proximity to whiteness as a good or a bad thing. "While I think on one hand it is a granting of privilege… it is also an affirmation of place, an affirmation that you are not as good as the doctor, the classic backhanded compliment," he said. "The challenge in it is whether the API community chooses to… hold that as a positive ultimately, or a negative."

> " I might have a very different experience than a lot of other API folks. Being in the military and coming from a military family, we were never around a whole lot of Filipinos… There were enough Filipinos for us to have a network of family and friends, but it was always in proximity with whomever else was on the base, and that was a lot of other people of color and some white folks too. So I grew up in a very poly-cultural setting that was also being reflected in the media that I was ingesting. Being into American pop music of the '80s, whatever that was – Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna and also hip hop music, and mashing it all together, finding out my Black friends and my white friends, my Latino friends all listened to the same thing, and we never thought much about it. That's my experience…
>
> Come to find out that it's not the same as a lot of others, and it changes from one place to another. I get down to [a city where] there's lots of Filipinos, lots. But historically a lot of these large Filipino communities also bordered the Black community. So there's a higher chance that I'll have a conversation with a Filipino person who's comfortable around African Americans. Then I'll go to a place in the South where the small Filipino community got beat up by Black folks all the time. They have their own perceptions. There's the class difference too. I found that a lot of working class Filipinos, they may still have racial stereotypes and prejudices, but practically speaking they actually have Black neighbors and friends over… and there's inter-marrying, whereas more upper-middle class, there's the privilege to keep your distance from whoever you want to keep your distance from. That's where I hear a lot of the more combative racism… It's different across the board. So it's hard to say if there's any one reaction. "

What do Asian Americans Think of Other Peoples of Color?

In general, there was a sense that Asian Americans had internalized negative stereotypes about Blacks and Latinos in particular, and took pride in the model minority myth, even if they did not think explicitly about race in their daily lives. On the question of Native Americans, the overwhelming sense was that Asian Americans did not think about them at all.

Ideas of Blackness

More than half of the people we interviewed said that Asian Americans exhibited a significant amount of anti-Black racism. Participants frequently mentioned the legacy of colonization when talking about Asian Americans attitudes toward Black people. One movement leader said:

"The experience of race in America is not just defined by… what people experience when they come to the U.S. There's also this history of colonization in our countries of origin [that] has messages embedded in it about African Americans. When you then… transplant individuals from these communities… they're bringing with them the understanding of African American and African communities that comes from a colonizer's framework… That seed is planted in an American soil and grows up in American racism."

Similarly, one South Asian organizer said, "There is a level of dehumanization that exists there… not only in the United States. In our Diaspora at least, you see it everywhere that there's been colonialism, like the same dynamics played out between Blacks and South Asian people in South Africa because of a hierarchy that British people set up."

The issue of colorism in Asian countries of origin also came up frequently. "I think that Indians, South Asians, have a lot of stereotypes and racism against African Americans… I think they're bought into this mainstream perception that Black people are somehow bad, which I find so odd, because we have some of the darkest people in the world in India," said one interviewee, noting, "Skin color is a big factor in India, culturally. I think it has transferred over to the United States."

We also heard several examples of how racial tensions between refugees and Black people within the United States were exacerbated by longstanding inequities:

"One of the big things that we looked at in the early or mid '80s was the changing demographics in what has been predominately low-income African American communities… Then the entry especially of refugees from… Southeast Asian countries… created tensions… African Americans who have been in segregated and poor communities for generations now see an infusion of Asian communities, and that we're getting free, increasing subsidies from the federal government. So there was the perception, both real and kind of imagined… of preferential treatment of the refugees, while longtime residents were not given the same kind of attention."

One academic said, "In my experience, it's quite serious… It partly… has to do with… the rite of passage issue, that you come to a setting where [Black people are] the 'other side of the track'

group. And we sure don't want to be on the other side of the track. We've got enough problems of our own, so we don't want to identify with that. Why would we?"

One organizer talked about the idea of "hyper-assimilating" to achieve the American Dream, saying that often, new immigrants "will do whatever they can to take on the ideas of white folks to the extent that they begin to become racist."

Several people described the impact of racial messages in the U.S. media. "I think, what does my mom think?" mused one person. "My mom is an immigrant… She believes what the media portrays… that Black folks are violent. They are violent and they are destructive and that they are dangerous, and you shouldn't be around them." She then described how this attitude was not limited to the older immigrant generation. "My cousins joke, and they're young folks; they're like my age. They're like, 'Oh, you get shot yet?' It's like really? It's not funny." Another person said, "A lot of South Asians… not all of them of course, but generally speaking… it's along the lines of what the media has been teaching us to believe, which is African Americans are no good."

People also described how the power of structural forces like the media trumped real-life experiences. One organizer said, "Some of it's based on actual experience… They ride the bus with [Black] folks and feel like they're rude, or they've been spit on… or they've been mugged or been jumped by young Black teenagers. So they have really negative, really strong feelings about the Black community… And then you have folks who have had very little exposure, but still… think they're dangerous, probably criminals." This organizer said that in most cases, her organization's members acknowledge that making generalizations about Black people is irrational. "But then [they] go ahead and generalize… 'Yeah, that lady who came to our meeting was nice. But still, they don't discipline their kids, they don't control their kids, they don't care about school, they're rude.' …I think [Black people are] definitely the racial group that APIs have the greatest tension with."

One Black leader in the racial justice movement described how the model minority myth, propagated by whites, impacts Black perceptions of Asian Americans. "Certainly Blacks generally have the impression that Asians are as hostile to Blacks as are whites… The way that white people privilege Asians, as they discriminate at the same time, mind you… can sometimes be part of the animosity that gets created, and that Blacks hold on to," she said. "I even have a white neighbor… who was trying to tell me how one school in our neighborhood was better… because it had a higher Asian population, and 'those people care about education'… which, as you can imagine, would breed a lot of resentment."

Some people said that tensions and conflicts between Asian Americans and Blacks were not as bad as most people believed them to be. A related theme was that among progressive Asian Americans there was a sense of allyship and connection to African Americans. "There's a part of that… national dialogue as framed up by white people, either purposely promoting the idea that there's differences between Asians and other folks… or actually for whatever reason imagining it to be," said one Black racial justice leader. "I do think there is overt racism within all communities of color. In my analysis I would make the distinction, I would still characterize that as internalized racism, but nonetheless there is some pretty strong bias."

Participants also referenced historical connections between African American and Asian American struggles. "Even just the notion of an Asian American community, the change in the immigration law in 1965, only came about because African Americans had been fighting for

civil rights," said one person. "So from a progressive political component of the Asian American community, definitely there's a kinship and... an understanding." Another interviewee said, "It's not just that there's racism. I think there's a lot of connection. There is a segment of Asian Americans who are connected to the other racial justice movements, right? ...I think at certain moments in history, there've always been ties and connections."

Often, people qualified their statements about Asian American views of Black people, saying that it depended on factors like ethnicity, class, political orientation, and geographic proximity. However, there was a sense that regardless of these variables, some level of anti-Black sentiment persisted. "The experiences of Asians and Pacific Islanders with African Americans has been, on an experiential basis, very different," said one longtime organizer. "What is similar, though, is a perception or a pejorative association with the idea of Blackness in all of those communities... So even though... you may not be seeing a Black person in your everyday life... ideologically, you associate Blackness with something that's pejorative."

Latinos

Responses were fairly split on Asian American views of Latinos – that there is a kinship and connection between the two communities, and that there is in fact no solidarity and at times outright anti-Latino sentiment. Here, there was a clear generational difference. Among those who said there was a lack of solidarity, 9 out of 10 were under the age of 40. There was also a geographical difference. People who said that Asian Americans and Latinos shared a common immigration experience were more likely to be from the East Coast, while those who said there was no solidarity tended to be from the West Coast. Finally, there was a notable ethnic divide: Those who said solidarity existed between the two groups tended to be East Asian, while those who said there was no solidarity tended to be South Asian.

Even those who said there was some sense of kinship between Asian Americans and Latinos said so with significant qualifiers. A few participants said things like, "I think Asian American and Latino groups now come together on immigration issues, and have always come together in other respects." But the dominant message that came across was more measured, as in this quote: "It's a little more positive, but I won't say it is completely positive... more positive than the image that they have of Black people."

In discussing joint work among Asian Americans and Latinos on immigrant rights, there were tensions embedded in people's responses. "There is a conversation around [immigration] being a strong universalizing issue, but a sense of frustration because... the frame around immigration... people feel like it has been around Latino immigrants," said one person. Another person said that the struggle for immigrant rights was an opportunity to reduce anti-Brown bias, saying, "We are able to make a lot of connections that are more easier, more clear for certain folks who have been more resistant to allying with Brown communities or Latino communities... Hopefully that does... decrease the level of prejudice and stereotypes."

One person described the problem with emphasizing refugee status as somehow exceptional in comparison to the experiences of other immigrants, particularly undocumented Mexicans. "The negative side in our community is that people are like, 'Well, we're refugees, not immigrants. We were forced here. We didn't come here illegally.' All that kind of stuff," he said. "There's still a lot of individualism... The legacy is that we don't have much cultivation and mentorship, particularly

for young people, around… a more positive racial identity."

In addition to immigration, one person cited the common history of agricultural labor among some Latinos and the Japanese American community. "I think within the rural communities, because of that interaction, there's not a degree of racism between Hispanics and Japanese Americans as you might find with African Americans and Japanese Americans."

On the negative side, a strong subtheme was that Latinos were seen as the "bad" immigrants, compared to Asians: "All of us are always as susceptible to buying into ideas but also practices about racial hierarchy. So, I think you can see anti-Latino politics even among API immigrants who say, 'We're the good ones, we have good families, we follow the rules, they are the ones that break the law.'" Someone else said, "I think a lot of… Asian American folks think [Latinos are] all Mexicans, they're all crossing the border illegally and they're not contributing to society; they just sit on the corners with the taco trucks and drink beer and get wasted all the time. So there is definitely that stereotype."

One immigrant rights leader specifically described the challenge of dispelling the idea among South Asians that undocumented immigration was the reason for delays in processing H-1B visas. "I think… a lot of Indians and South Asians have bought into the illegal immigrant story," she said. Another South Asian organizer said, "I think that there's unfortunately not a shared sense of immigration inequity across Latino and Asian communities that there should be… Some of that exists and… we're all working toward that… We need to do more, both in the Latino community as well as in the Asian community."

One organizer in California said, "In this region Latinos are very much dubbed violent gang-members… The imagery that you get here [is] of folks breaking laws, crossing the borders… hoards coming in even though the majority of this used to be Mexico," she said. "Koreans [have told] us, 'Maybe it's not so bad if Latinos wouldn't just be having kids all the time…' They'll just be blaming each other versus blaming the system… That definitely resides inside the Asian community [here]."

A few people referenced the ethnic diversity of the Latino population, noting that the prevailing perception among Asian Americans was that all Latinos were Mexican: "I only laugh because I have a friend who is a day worker organizer… and we always talk about how… with the Vietnamese Americans, it was always, 'All Latinos are just Mexicans.' For the Latino individuals… it was always, 'Yeah, all the Asian people are Chinese.' …Sometimes it's hard to… get people to understand the different struggles that happen within the racial group in itself."

Another person talked specifically about hostilities between Puerto Ricans and South Asians in New York. "It is very unique to New York City that Black and Puerto Rican folks cross-identify very closely for the most part. People would always say that… they would receive a lot more shit from Puerto Ricans than they would from Black folks. That's confirmed from the stuff I saw on the ground," he said. He went on to describe his organizing experiences post-9/11: "[Before 9/11] I was never afraid of people of color spaces, ever… and I actually had to start carrying a knife for my own protection… which was weird for me… I was far more watching my back… because of the looks I was getting from Latino folks and a lot of Black folks."

Some interviewees cited examples of how stereotypes of Latinos endured among Asian

Americans despite similarities, frequent contact, or proximity. "My aunt employs Latinos," said one person. "But sometimes they can still have some really racist views... One of my other aunts voted for Arnold Schwarzenegger because he was very anti-immigrant... I think that is so [fascinating]... because she herself was an immigrant." Likewise, another person said that, despite the fact that many Asian and Latino immigrants came to the United States during the same time period, "there are stereotypes and racially charged images associated with how those communities see one another." Someone else talked about the class stereotypes that some Asian Americans held regarding Latinos: "There's always a stereotype around like, 'Yeah, they're here to do the jobs that people don't want... They're great hard workers, [but] they're not going to be doctors or lawyers.' ...I think there is kind of like a class association with Latino folks, the same way that poor and Black go together, too."

On this question, once again, some said that attitudes depended on factors like geography, ethnicity, and generation. One person gave the example of how different the ethnic demographics were in Flushing and Queens in New York City. "I just think it's really specific to geography and where you form your consciousness." Similarly, another person said, "I think it depends on what particular ethnic community you're talking about... In communities that are closer to the service industries where you have a strong base of Latinos... while there's a lot more contact, [it] is deeply segregated and very racialized... I think there are some tensions around Asian... employers that play out... where Asian folks are bringing all of the assumptions that come up around Black and Brown folks, and a strong preference for Asian hires."

On the topic of generational difference, someone said, "I think if you're talking to a 16-year-old in an urban area you'd get a very different answer than talking to a professional working person in the suburbs who has the gate around and five alarms. It's all geographical in that context, or generational, and also again [about] socio-economic background."

One organizer commented on the differences in relations between Asian Americans and Blacks, and between Latinos and Blacks. "I think everybody is defined somehow between whiteness and Blackness in this country," she said. "I think Asians in particular have this... visceral sense that they're going to lose something if they... associate with Black people. They're going to lose their white card, or they're going to lose the little bit of access that they have... I think Latinos... have... more lived experience with African Americans... One is oftentimes pushing the other out of different communities. They have gang wars and turf issues and are oftentimes fighting for similar kinds of jobs... But... I think they have a little bit of a shared experience to know what it's like to be 'public enemy No. 1' in different contexts... It doesn't mean that they like each other, but I think there's a little bit more of an association there."

Native Americans

A large majority of those who responded to this question said that Asian Americans didn't think about Native Americans at all. These individuals were mostly 40 years old or younger. Almost half of the interviewees who expressed this viewpoint also demonstrated some knowledge of the historical struggles of Native Americans, and a few people talked specifically about similarities among Native Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Several people theorized that Asian Americans were unaware of Native American communities and their issues because they had little or no interaction with Native American communities. Some participants simply

responded with, "I have no clue," or, "That rarely comes up."

One person said, "I think today's generation looks back and understands the injustice that was done to Native Americans, but the interaction between our community and the Native American community has been very minimal with a couple of exceptions." This person, who was over 40, referenced the Poston and Gila River internment camps in Arizona that were built on tribal reservations, and the relations between Japanese Americans and Native Americans there. Another person said, "When we talk about indigenous people, it's like Native Hawaiians or folks [who] are Pacific Islander or certain indigenous groups within Asia. But… in terms of Native Americans in this country… I don't think I've really ever talked about it in API organizing space."

Linkages between Native Americans and Pacific Islanders came up a few times, although many of these responses also acknowledged that Pacific Islanders were so often overlooked

The Gila River Relocation Center was a 15,000 acre internment camp that opened on the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona in 1942, against the wishes of the local Native American community. The camp held over 13,000 Japanese American inmates, most of whom were from California. *Photo: Stewart, Francis, War Relocation Authority photographer, US National Archives and Records Administration*

within the Asian American construct that such connections didn't translate into a broader awareness of Native Americans among Asian Americans. "I think that where that conversation, I hope, would be happening more, is with PI communities and communities that are struggling for sovereignty," said one interviewee. "But I think that again, that conversation is so marginal within the API community that it's just not happening." Another participant said, "I think with the Pacific Islander community, there's definitely more awareness because of similar struggles, similar health outcomes, similar experiences. But with the Asian American community, there is very, very little discussion about Native American issues."

Some participants noted how profoundly Native Americans had been marginalized within the United States generally. "I think a lot of stuff is like, 'Really, they exist?' " said one person. Another person said, "The conversations around Native Americans [are] absent… So while African Americans are placed on a specific scale, I just don't… think that Native Americans are even a part of… understanding… the make up of this country."

One organizer said, "Usually it's got to be us talking about indigenous nations and their struggles… Native lands in Arizona and what's happening with mining or the tar sands… in Canada. That needs to be prompted, versus [APIs] experiencing and thinking about Native folks on a day in and day out." Another organizer working on redistricting said, "We're actively working… to make sure we can give them more opportunities for representation… We definitely want to build bridges and have relationships with folks… I think there's a lot more that could happen but we try to work with them when we see issues that are common."

Three responses differed from the main theme that Asian Americans were largely unaware of Native Americans and their issues. However, they were still very cautious in their answers, saying that Native Americans were often left out of peoples of color organizing spaces. "I think Native Americans are… one group that is often left out of discussions with people of color," said one. "I think that's because of… colonization and them having their own land and community that is removed from that of everybody else. Except for here… we have an urban Native American community, but with that, the interaction between Native American and API isn't really readily visible." Another person was slightly more optimistic: "In this particular city… there's a very present Native community and there's a lot of people my age… that are… not just Filipino, but part Japanese, part Native American… There might be stereotypes and prejudices held within our community… but underneath that I think people see a kinship."

Where are Asian Americans Positioned in the Racial Order?

Related to Asian American views on race, we wanted to dig deeper on how people viewed the racial position of Asian Americans in relation to other people of color. We asked participants if they believed there was a racial hierarchy in the United States. If they said yes, we asked where Asian Americans fit into that hierarchy. Generally, people who said there was a racial hierarchy felt that Asian Americans occupied the "middle ground" within it, although there were differences based on countries of origin, religion, language and class.

Almost everyone said that a racial hierarchy exists, although there was disagreement about what the hierarchy looks like. Many said that it was fluid, depending on factors like class and color. The few people who didn't say outright that a hierarchy existed conceded that groups of color were racialized differently, with disparate access to power and resources. For example, one said that the hierarchy was perceived and not real, but added, "Perception can be very effective in terms of leveraging resources or taking away resources."

As a subgroup, Southeast Asians were the least represented in our cohort, so it is notable that over half of them who answered this question talked about colorism in relationship to hierarchy. One Hmong interviewee said, "I think [the hierarchy] is along skin color lines… The lighter skin color you are, and the more male-oriented you are, the more privileged you are… [Asian Americans are] in the gray area, and within… that gray area, skin color politics come in to play and class comes into play." Another Hmong participant who said that lighter skin came with greater privilege added, "It's unearned… The darker the skin color, the less you are seen in terms of your worth or your value, and even your contribution."

Beyond Southeast Asians, several people who talked about colorism said it was rooted in certain countries of origin. One East Asian person said, "Within most Asian cultures, there's a culture in terms of the whiteness of your skin being deemed more attractive and desirable than less white… Then when you come to the U.S., it very much fits into the Black/white paradigm."

Some pointed out that colorism in fact crossed racial lines. One labor organizer talked about how pronounced colorism was in the service industry. "The lighter the skin of the individual, the more likely they are to be able to be able to work in the front of the house, move up the ladder… So lighter skinned Latino or Black or even more Western-looking Asian Americans will be able to obtain front of the house jobs, particularly if they speak English with an American accent."

One South Asian service provider talked about colorism in the context of other factors contributing to one's racial position, saying, "A lot of it depends on class and immigration status and documents… You get privileged for being light-skinned… but I think it really just depends on the other pieces… that can impact the hierarchy." Another person said, "It's all these layers that complicate things… There's a hierarchy of money, education, family status, color, the national origin. All those things matter."

One person described the hierarchy as a continuum between whiteness and Blackness, but differentiated between actual skin color and the idea of white vs. Black: "How close are you to white = better, and how close are you to Black = bad. That continuum, if you think about it in functional terms instead of in phenotypical terms, actually even applies to people who are

phenotypically Black. They can be closer to the image of whites, and one can imagine [some] whites being closer to the image of Blacks."

There was a widely held perception that in general, Asian Americans were near the top of the racial order. One person's response summed up this theme: "It's like we're honorary whites, or right beneath white folks in the hierarchy." Other responses provided more context, often citing the model minority myth as a big factor in defining the racial order. One said, "There's this perception that Asian Americans in particular are better off than other people of color... meaning their income levels are higher, their education level is higher... There's this usage of Asian American... statistics... to put down other people of color, and highlight Asian Americans are just like white people."

There was a strong subtheme of global politics and U.S. foreign interests as factors in shaping ideas about Asian Americans. One teacher said, "It was no accident that Asians during the Cold War period, during Vietnam, during a time when communism was spreading in Asia, and the

Asians can refuse to be the racial wedge:

" I think that we… can play many different sides of the racial spectrum when we want to… I've experienced that a lot. I think particularly young Asian women are incredibly racially mobile… I can go into Black spaces, I can go into Latino spaces, I can go into white spaces, I can go into Asian spaces with a certain level of ease that nobody else could… I don't think that it's necessarily like a coincidence that a lot of coalitions are run by young Asian women. I don't know if it's explicitly because people recognize that, or because of… stereotypes that people have about young Asian women…

I see Asian people exploiting the racial hierarchy for opportunities that I think other people of color should have access to that I think is problematic. I see that in the academic world, I see it in the higher level of the nonprofit world, I see it in the foundation world, in the academic world, in the political world… that we can be the people of color without being the people of color, and we take advantages of those opportunities and play that role for people.

But I think that we can also be that bridge and stand in solidarity with other people of color, which I feel like we saw some in the redistricting process. That was very hopeful for me… I feel like this Chinatown group had a choice: they could go try and side with the Legislature, sell out and get what they wanted, or they could try and side with us, and… see other people get what they wanted, too. And they chose to side with us… We won like 80% of what we wanted… I would say, honestly… even though we had a really effective Black-Brown coalition, I don't know if we necessarily would have gotten quite the [same] legitimacy had we not had the Asians. I think they were looking for Asians to be that wedge. "

U.S. really needed to promote capitalism in the region, that there were four or five countries that were chosen and were subsidized to develop as successful, capitalist enterprises, including Taiwan and South Korea… They were allowed to be able to grow their economies, and grow their infrastructure… And the parallel to that was the way in which Asians were allowed to have access to certain kinds of education… It was a very intentional creation of the model minority myth that was based off of the same exact interests… that were creating the welfare queen myth… It just looked very different."

Many people talked about how different Asian Americans were positioned differently in terms of racial privilege and power, and said that aggregated data obscured these disparities, making it difficult to advocate for the needs of less privileged subgroups. One Southeast Asian participant said, "If you just look at Census data, then Asian Americans are doing fairly well. You know, high-earning, highly educated. But if you disaggregate the data or you go to regions where there are newer refugee groups… that picture is much more different… Generally, I would say Asian Americans are often invisible, because the Census numbers look like Asian Americans are doing really well."

One person said that Asian Americans were positioned somewhere in the middle to the bottom of the hierarchy, depending on "which group and the tone of the skin color." He added, "That middle piece doesn't get talked about often. We only talk [about] white people or we talk about Black people or we talk about Brown people, which is Latino… Asian Americans become invisible in that spectrum 'cause they're only focusing on Black and the white."

A few people believe that in the world of progressive politics or social justice work, Asian Americans often fell to the bottom of the hierarchy. One political consultant said that growing up in the Midwest, he experienced a racial order that placed Asians at the top, with Black people below them, and then Latinos at the bottom. But he argued that it was different within the social justice arena: "It's probably reversed… Latinos are more accepted and the organizing histories are more respected, perhaps tied with or followed by African Americans, and then Asians."

Another participant also argued that Black people had more influence and power than Asian Americans in activist spaces. "Black people end up having a lot more social clout… Their voices get more weight in any kind of discussions around race or racial justice," she said. "They take up a lot of space but don't necessarily have as nuanced understanding around racism that gets directed to the API people, or the way that white supremacy and xenophobia play out… in API communities… I think that has everything to do with… the disparity around visibility that still exists." Similarly, someone else said, "I think when it comes to power and voice, I would say that Asians would think that they're below [African Americans]… They would say that Blacks know how to work the system better, or that they get more privileges because they're Black. So I feel like some of that comes out."

Others talked about how, in terms of who gets to be American, the hierarchy looks different. One national leader said that despite the model minority myth, Asians in particular are racialized as foreigners and have a harder time than Blacks in being accepted as Americans. "I think Asians hold a very interesting place, because… they're seen as the model minority, and yet if you look at most polling around racial attitudes of racial groups to each other, whites feel more comfortable with Blacks than they do with Asians," she said. She went on to say that factors like religion and language played a large role in anti-Asian racism. "[It's] more on the scale of… the fact that

Asians may not be Christian, that Asians speak a language that is not Latin-based, that Asians have customs that are characterized… as being barbaric or less refined or too exotic… African Americans, people understand… They are most likely to be more quickly accepted as American than even, let's say me, who's fourth generation… So, it's a complex relationship."

This person went on to address the question of how Asians, as well as Latinos, would choose to identify racially, as U.S. demographics continued to shift away from a white majority. "I think that Asians like Latinos could be… like the Irish… Will they hang with other people of color, or will some of them choose to try to hang with whites?" she asked. "I think the only thing that's actually stopping some of that is because the whites don't want them to hang with them." She summed up the complexity of considering Asian Americans in the racial hierarchy saying, "We are in positions of power and we are the most vulnerable. It's both."

Likewise, one Black participant said, "Are we talking about individual acts of discrimination or are we talking about access to institutions? …The reality is that Asians most certainly represent 'the other.' If we were to have a conversation tomorrow about… who are the folks most likely to be interned or kicked out of this country, Black people would actually be at the bottom of that list… You could even make the argument that the top tier would be Arabs, Latinos and sort of Asians broadly… It really is specific to the way in which we are talking about how race plays."

Another Black participant said that the model minority myth created a level of privilege, but that it ultimately only benefited whites. "Asians most certainly [have] been… that middle ground for our concept of race in the United States, the idea that certain races can actually transcend… the racial fault line… It reinforces this idea that certain people of color are incapable of the same kind of intellectual capability as white folk, and certain folks are… It also reinforces another key idea… It's another way of saying, 'You're okay by us, so don't cause me grief at the end of the day…' this idea of the buffer that exists between the dominant group, white folks, and the darker group beneath them. The only folks that ultimately benefit from it are white folks."

One Sikh organizer talked about the importance of religion and class: "This is a really good question… Religion has a huge part to play in [the racial hierarchy] these days… So it is hard to… categorize where the overall community lies… Muslims fall a lot lower than other AAPI communities that don't look South Asian or look like Muslims… I think that also some communities can be further up the hierarchy than other communities because class plays a factor… There are so many contexts."

"I think Asian Americans sometimes have a level of racial privilege," said another interviewee. "I mean there is a racial hierarchy. Maybe more appropriately, there is a colortocracy. And certain groups are at the bottom and certain groups are privileged more than others. Whether we like that or not… that's just true… It is through political engagement, it is through discrimination, getting hurt, that things change."

"We lost something." How the Asian American Movement Went Off Track

Several participants lamented that the term "Asian American" or "API" no longer signified a set of progressive political ideas as it once did in the '60s and '70s. Changing immigration patterns post-1965 was a big theme; in particular, people described how rapid growth and ethnic diversification drove Asian American leaders to prioritize service delivery over movement building. Data disaggregation became the battle cry among Asian American civil rights leaders, in order to shine a light on the needs of particular ethnic subgroups and compete successfully for service dollars. While necessary, this left larger issues of social change unaddressed, and deepened divisions between Asian Americans and other racial groups.

"Twenty or 30 years ago to say 'I'm API' [had] a political commitment that [came] with it," said one academic. "I think today... that doesn't imply a certain kind of politics... What does it mean when one counts oneself as API? ...Is it a political identity? Do we think it's a cultural identity? Do we think it's a biological identity somehow? ...Those questions are all way messier than people may want to acknowledge, because to acknowledge them seems to be questioning the very basis of, like, why do we have API organizations?"

Likewise, one executive director questioned the relevance of Asian American as a racial identity. "I mean do we really share common experiences and common histories and common concerns? Are we really building political power?" she wondered. "We've really strayed from the initial work and rhetoric that started to occur when the API movement was being shaped and formed... I think we lost something, you know? ...It's just kind of a feeling like we might not be on the right track."

One longtime organizer talked about how unaware most people were of the radical formations and struggles of the Asian American movement of the late '60s. "Now we're getting emails from people in Arizona who are fighting to preserve ethnic studies. They're under attack and they don't have a reference point to what it even took to get ethnic studies started in the first place," she said. "There seems to be a real break in political continuity – and continuity of understanding race in particular... The politics or the founding principles might be different... There's a greater prevalence of agencies, 501(c)3s, and that's [what] people connect to. And they're going to have a different set of principles and histories."

Ironically, several people talked about losing the political values of the early Asian American

Richard Aoki was an early member of the Black Panther Party who provided firearms and training for the Party's citizen patrols in Oakland. There have been recent allegations that he was working as an FBI informant, though some activists dispute this and continue to defend his legacy as an icon of Black-Asian racial solidarity. *Photo: Nikki Arai, courtesy of Shoshana Arai*

movement, which led to the creation of ethnic studies, while at the same time, some people cynically described Asian American identity as an elite construct that gets formed in college settings. One South Asian academic said, "If you've been to college in the last 30 years you have had a unifying experience of [being] Asian American. You have belonged to [an Asian American club], you have gone to Asian American conferences, you have read Gary Okihiro, you have had a certain common set of experiences as Asian American middle-class people in colleges. But that's different from somebody who migrated from Punjab and drives a taxi, somebody who came from Vietnam and is a fisherperson. There's no unity."

Another person, also South Asian, said, "The API identity, from everything I've seen… is a very collegiate identity. Folks can call it something different if they want. I'm saying this as a person who was the president of an API club in college for two years. It's something that's very constructed in a college setting."

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> It's funny. I talk about this experience a lot when I do race trainings. I talk about how I started my racial identity as an Indian, and at some point, I decided and understood that I wasn't just Indian. I wanted to be South Asian. I wanted to identify with all of my brothers and sisters in the South Asian Diaspora and on the South Asian continent… That meant politically that I was aligning myself with Pakistani, Nepali, Sri Lankan, that I was saying that we share an experience that crosses our religion and national origin boundaries. And then the decision to… choose to identify as API is my attempt to build solidarity with the East Asian and Pacific Islander communities.
>
> But I think it's really hard. I think the identity invisibilizes many, many differences that our communities experience. I've been in places where other people of color tell me that I'm not Asian… I don't even think… [APIs see] the South Asian community as part of the API community… As much as I love it and love the history of the term and what [it] is trying to accomplish… it is a really serious challenge to have a term that then makes so below the surface the experiences of the individual ethnicities within it.
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Is "Asian American" a Census Category or a Political Identity?

We asked people whether racial justice advocates should work to build a unified Asian American identity. Responses reflected a concern that the Asian American construct, as a coalition of ethnic subgroups, did not in fact constitute a racial group in terms of shared racial experiences and political interests. One Black participant put it this way: "Race is not a color idea. It's not a cultural idea. It's not a language idea. It is a political idea. The racial designation, in my mind, that makes the most sense is what do you hold in most common with other folks... For Pacific Islanders their issue is fundamentally more linked to sovereignty than [to] some idea of language or cultural barriers or... individual acts of discrimination... Those differences are part of the reason why I would not think of API as a cohesive... community."

One South Asian academic said, "The reason you have something called a Black community is that there were a series of social and political events that united a community. One of them, of course, is the experience of enslavement, the other is the great migration and the other might be the long Civil Rights Movement. These are monumental events that shape a community." This person went on to suggest that racial identity was more than a Census category, that the ethnicity of groups that get included matters less than what shared experiences they have. "You have a word like 'Black,' which has emotional resonance. It's not a bureaucratic [term]... Communities form through not who [they are], but what [they] share or what [their] experiences are. In the world of Asian America the tangible experiences are so disparate. Since 1965, there has not been one common set of experiences."

Another participant described the notion of "linked fate" as a measure of racial affiliation. He said, "Among African Americans it's the highest... Someone who's solidly middle class will say that regardless of my own individual experiences, the fate of Black people in America... my fate is closely intertwined with that." Citing the relative weakness of this sentiment among Asian Americans, he said, "The identity... how it's lived in the real world, it's much less coherent... Does an Indian American medical professional or software engineer identify in the same way with, like, a Pakistani immigrant taxi driver or a, you know, Laotian woman on welfare? Do they think their fates are linked? I don't."

Others echoed the sense that the Asian American category emphasized ethnic inclusion over political interests. "I feel there's been a big rift of identification between South Asians and Asian Americans," said one. "API identity.... [has] been really harmful to... understanding the way race has changed... Arab, South Asian, Muslim identity... That is the way people are organizing to fight back." Similarly, another South Asian activist said, "Post-9/11, I was on a real tirade around how Indians are just not Asians anymore... We're Arabs, and that's it."

This sentiment was common among South Asians, while notably one East Asian interviewee had a starkly different and more positive view of the impacts of 9/11 on Asian American identity. "There was a decision made on 9/11 by South Asians and Asians – are South Asians Asians or not?" he said. "And I think that the decision was made that they are... You might be discriminated [against] for different reasons, but the basis is still shared: 'You're not Anglo, your religions are not Christian, you dress funny, we don't know if you're really loyal, we don't know if you ever will be loyal.' And so I think people came together and... and have really worked

together very much collectively."

People also talked about ethnic, religious, class and political differences that made South Asian identity challenging. "As a Pakistani, what does that even mean?" asked one person. "There are not a lot of Pakistanis out there in the U.S. You will find more Indian folks… So it's a choice I made (to identify as South Asian)… But also with all the stuff that's happened in Pakistan, I've gone back to thinking, I don't know if it's necessarily the best thing, because there's so much Islamophobia within the Indian community… It's a little bit back and forth… depending on… what you are trying to achieve… Does it make sense to build solidarity? Where does it make sense to want to represent your own community?"

Hate crimes against Muslims are at their highest levels since 2001. The most recent FBI data indicates that from 2009 to 2010, hate crimes against Muslims in the United States soared by a staggering 42 percent.

Power and Fragmentation Within the Asian American or API Construct

Several people alluded to the uneven distribution of power and access within the Asian American or API category. There was a sense that East Asians, especially those with class privilege, dominated. One person said plainly, "That complex will remain… dominated by the East Asian triangle in terms of its leadership, in terms of its concerns, in terms of its worldview, in terms of its positioning in the U.S." When we asked whether it would be useful to work toward a more unified Asian American identity, this person said "yes" but cautioned, "One would have to explore that category very big time, which I'm not sure people are ready to do."

Several people noted that because Pacific Islanders were routinely marginalized, the term "API" was in fact disingenuous. Although we used the term "API" in the question, participants either did not talk about Pacific Islanders at all, or talked about their tokenization or how the Asian American designation masked the disparities and unique struggles that they faced. One service provider said, "When we talk about API, 'Oh, we provide services for API.' But the majority of people we service [are] Asian. Pacific Islanders… have such a small population and sometimes they're being neglected… Everyone always says APIs, but… nobody is really focusing on the PIs." Likewise, one young cultural worker said, "I don't know of any organizations that are genuinely working with Pacific Islanders that identify as API."

One artist from the West Coast told a story about how, after creating an Asian American student commission on campus, Pacific Islanders decided to establish their own organization. He felt conflicted about it, but used it as a way to illustrate the importance of questioning and revisiting the meaning of the Asian American category. "Numbers do mean a lot…. So if you take a whole one-third of the people away from this base… then you do lose a little bit of your political base and power," he said. "At the same time… if they were to continue within this group where they're marginalized, then they may be… basically sacrificing their own identity and issues for what was increasingly being seen as a myth of the API community… That's just one example of how… the term 'API' and what that means politically, can both be useful in a moment, but also needs to be challenged and renewed and revisited over and over again."

One national leader said her organization was actively struggling to be more inclusive of Pacific islanders. "We are consciously moving in the direction of saying we're the AA/NH/PI/MASA community… So politically we consent to being one community, but internally and culturally, because we are so very distinctive from one another… at times it's hard." This person broke down the stark differences in issues and struggles between Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. She reflected on the history of the API category in the U.S. Census, and said that while Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were now two separate Census groups, there was still a close relationship between them. "It's very much a family relationship of sort of being responsible for each other."

Another person, also from the West Coast, described a campaign where Pacific Islanders organized to elect a Japanese American candidate, saying, "I think it was the first PI electoral voting coalition that was ever created formally down here… They knew that he was an ally and

that he would support the community and understand the community… There's definitely space and opportunities to connect."

People also talked about other subgroups that were marginalized within the Asian American category, including Southeast Asians and South Asians. "The struggle [is] defined more by how people perceive themselves in the broader culture, and whether they perceive themselves as inside or outside it," said one person. "I think a lot of APIs, particularly lighter skinned APIs, feel like they're part of it. And the darker your skin, the further outside of it you feel. So I think that's one of the biggest struggles of pan-Asian culture on a very deep level."

Comments about Southeast Asians in particular were closely related to issues of class, and to the effects of the model minority myth. One longtime organizer said, "Filipinos, we're just the second poor cousins in the API construct, so I never really identified as API, frankly." Another said that Southeast Asians felt inferior to East Asians – "that within the Asian group, they are less… than the Chinese, the Japanese, the Koreans, and other groups… [who] are the model minority."

One academic talked about how the Asian American category obscured patterns of deep poverty in certain subgroups. "I don't think that [most people] think about the vast majority of Asians who are working poor in urban areas," he said. "There's also… the Cambodian refugee community… and it's like generations upon generations of poverty… There's just a total lack of visibility of that reality."

One young organizer in the Midwest talked about the tensions between settled generations of Asian Americans and newer refugee communities, saying that more highly educated and successful Asian Americans dominated political leadership. "You have Asians that come with Master's and Ph.D.s and move directly to the suburbs and start their own businesses, and then you have the Asians that come in as refugees with very little," she said. "I think that while we… have a good recognition of the less affluent Asians, the politics are still, in terms of the leadership… largely the mainstream Asian group."

On the topic of South Asians, one person reflected on why she had started to distance herself from the term Asian American or API in recent years. She recalled growing up with Asian immigrants, and reaching for an Asian identity in response to the racism she experienced. "We were little kids, but in a reaction to the racism from the white folks in the town, there was very much the sense of, 'Well, we have sameness. We're all under this umbrella of Asian.' And there weren't enough Korean or Japanese or Chinese or South Asians… to stick to your own kind… so it was sort of like a solidarity out of necessity."

But things changed after 9/11, and she now identifies more with certain Central Asian and African people. "The way that [I], and others that look like me, get racialized is just fundamentally changed… I don't see that going back, ever, frankly - at least not in our lifetimes… I'm never mistaken for Korean or Chinese or Japanese or even Laotian," she said. "I have some questions for 'our movement'… What is the utility of this umbrella term that has been put on us by white people and white institutions? And does it really serve our organizing purposes, and does it really reflect our reality as we experience it?"

Regarding relations between Asians and other peoples of color, another organizer on the East

Coast said, "We do a lot of political ed. For a lot of our members, it is the American Dream that you come here, you work, and if you make money, then you'll be treated well. If you don't, it doesn't matter what race you are, it's really about… your class… So I feel like there's a lot of that that we have to challenge." She went on to say that people's actual experiences with other peoples of color also created challenges. "A lot of our members have pretty rough experiences with race, especially with the Black community… so then there isn't a lot of positive experiences with other groups of color… It's really kind of easy to stick to the model minority myth and the impression that if we can just get out of this neighborhood… then we'll be okay… Those are… a lot of the things that we have to challenge."

Cambodian refugees in Philadelphia protest unjust deportations. In 1996, President Clinton enacted a new immigration law that vastly expanded the definition of deportable "criminal aliens", made the definition retroactive, and eliminated judicial review. Since then, hundreds of young Cambodian men who entered the U.S. as small children fleeing the Khmer Rouge have been deported. *Photo by Vyreak Sovann, The Global Mail*

In addition to first-generation immigrants, some people said that Asian Americans with class privilege were more likely to buy into the model minority myth. "They're kind of proud of that," said one person. "A lot of people don't have access to their own history around Asian Americans in this country… I think that contributes to the lack of understanding of the role that Asian Americans have had… in the racial hierarchy." This person went on to say that class privilege often got in the way of building a race analysis. "There are a lot of second-generation folks… because probably of their class background, they have had access to higher education or been able to become professionals, and I think through that process, they actually don't really develop that strong of a race analysis," she said. "That is a little bit of a missed opportunity… the model minority kids who are going to keep thinking that they deserved all this stuff, because, you know, we're just better, when it's not really true."

Others talked about how the model minority myth benefited certain Asian Americans while leaving others behind. This came up particularly around access to higher education. "While some of us have this model minority image in our head and try to live up to that, a lot just… don't have those resources available, and they get left out and left behind," said one interviewee. "I know in California in the UC system especially, there is no chance of being Asian and getting affirmative action, which is kind of sad… because not all Asians come from the same kind of background or countries or class. So that is really a problem." Another person similarly said that the use of an overarching racial category made it possible for people to argue that all Asian Americans were well represented in higher education. "You could make an argument for [that] if we're all grouped under this one identity, under this one label. [But] what Asian groups are [in the UC system]? It wasn't Cambodians, it wasn't Laotians," he said.

One person, an academic, said that the model minority myth bound those who accepted it to certain "tacit agreements" in exchange for privileged racial status. "You don't have the same kind of churning and dislocation necessarily with middle-class Asians and middle-class whites. In that sense, the larger structure has not been as… how do I say this…unforgiving of Asian populations,

provided that they behave themselves... [which] might mean not getting too involved in the political process, accepting the role of the junior partner."

He also talked about the unconscious ways that people accepted racialized roles and ideas, and that Asians were no exception. "In the United States, [race has] played an essential role in the construction of institutions and meanings that we inhabit largely unconsciously. And Asians are no different than other groups," he said. "Why is it that half the world is Asian and until recently, 3% of the United States is Asian? That's a result of policy and deciding that Asians could not immigrate or be naturalized in the United States largely until the 1960s... The population base is a result of racialized policies... The number of Asians in the country, let alone their position... is a racialized phenomenon."

Does Anyone Identify as Asian American?

Participants told us that age and immigrant generation were large factors in whether Asian Americans identify with each other racially. There was a sense that younger and later generation Asian Americans were more likely to do so, especially if they had some experience with political work. "We come from countries where there's a lot of tension with other countries," said one organizer. "But here… when folks see that there's a chance to really make a difference… then they start to see… more power in connecting and aligning with each other."

Some said that language was a main reason why younger Asian Americans identified more with one another than their older, first-generation counterparts. "We have… over hundreds of… countries and each one must have a different language… But fortunately in the younger generation… may be speaking English, so then maybe more can communicate, overlap together," said one person. "The first generation of immigrants… they all stay in their own community."

People said that the increased visibility of Asian Americans in the media along with the accessibility of technology helped to create a sense of connection among younger Asian Americans. One artist and activist noted the shift in his own lifetime. "I think growing up as someone who identifies as Asian in the '80s and '90s… and not seeing yourself except for a Bruce Lee here, or the B-Boy crew there, your radar is on. It beeps," he said. "Whereas now… maybe there's less of an inclination to deny who you are… You see the best boxer in the world is a Filipino dude, an Asian dude. You're probably now more likely to be like, 'Yeah, he's me and I'm him… There's a lot more information both good and bad, just traveling everywhere… [It's] something that someone younger than me… might take for granted, but… I remember the experience of, 'Oh shit, there's other Asian people who listen to Hip Hop in other cities!' … Now, with very little effort… The question of whether or not you even exist, I think, is already answered."

Another big factor was geography – where Asian American ethnic groups did not have critical mass, people were more likely to identify across ethnic lines and sometimes also racial lines. "Because there isn't a large concentration of just one ethnic group, you identify as Asian Pacific Islander American… because otherwise, there just wouldn't be enough numbers to really work towards anything," said one organizer. "I found myself kind of identifying a lot more as a person of color when I was working… outside of the Vietnamese American community because you don't have a large Asian American movement [there]."

Another organizer described how there was no particularly dominant API ethnic group in his state, which created opportunities for pan-API coalition building. "I mean, definitely the East Asian community has been here the longest, has the most sort of access and wealth, and so occupy sort of that economic top tier. But politically, we're all basically pretty invisible… Our communities themselves barely know who they are. And that's one of the things that we're doing… is just continuing to deliver the message about who our community is, that we need to take… responsibility for speaking out for ourselves." Still, he talked about how ethnic identity remained important even within coalition efforts, saying, "There's a lot of sensitivities… We did a big thing with 800 APIs and it was really important to call out each of the individual communities and to call out each of the individual languages."

Participants in metropolitan areas with large Asian American populations affirmed that having critical mass within individual ethnic groups made it harder to bring folks together across ethnic lines. Particularly people in New York talked about the lack of strong Asian American organizations. "There aren't strong API organizations in major cities. There just aren't," said one. "Who is poised in New York City to mobilize across Asian communities when something happens to one community? There isn't anybody unless they're a political leader... You might have community centers; you certainly have individual Asian societies, which don't get involved with politics or organizing, just cultural stuff... I can't point to... even one organization that is a... political group. So there's a gap."

Another interviewee said, "The dominant frame still... is really monocultural, meaning I identify as a Chinese person here in Chinatown, or coming from a particular area of China... There's a lot more ethnically identified or geographically identified formations than there are... racial formations."

Not surprisingly, in California, there was a greater sense of Asian American identity. "The Bay Area? ...It's this progressive bubble and it's a hotbed of a lot of activism... I don't think we're winning more than the other people are just because we're here, but you do have... a progressive culture and history," said one organizer. She went on to say that outside of California, Asian American organizations tended to be national. "I don't necessarily think there's this strong, unified, progressive social movement, unfortunately... There are pockets definitely across the country."

Is It Strategic to Organize and Resist as Asian Americans?

This question revealed deep conflicts and confusion, and it demands much more debate and discussion among racial justice organizers. There was a fairly even split between those who said "yes" we should work to build a unified API identity, and those who said "no," "maybe," or "I don't know." Among those who said that we should, one-third had significant qualifiers, sometimes contradicting their initial answer. Even those working at API organizations expressed doubts. One person said, "I don't know if I would say yes to that. I mean, I've spent my 20 years doing so, but I don't know." Another person simply said, "I don't even know what 'API' means."

One academic said:

"This is a question of how movements operate… I think there's more material political strength and significance in this collective identity as communities of color in the U.S… In the United Kingdom, 'Black' is more of a political term than an actual racial or phenotypical term, and so South Asians have historically identified as Black… In the API world it is so disparate and there are so few coherent social processes that unite people… I don't think will be successful."

Another person noted that the question was timely, given how recently Asian Americans had started to organize themselves politically. "Ours is a young movement," she said. "Even if you traced back to the ways in which Asian Americans were expressing themselves, their political power, their political will at the turn of the 20th century, which did happen, it wasn't a movement until the '60s… So now is the time for us to… really invest in thinking about what the movement could look like… in the future. I feel like we… just are never able to take the time to think about these sorts of questions."

We heard a strong desire for more conversation to interrogate how Asian American identity played out negatively in race politics, and what interventions were needed to develop stronger antiracist values to counter that. One activist said, "Even if we don't end up as one kind of shared identity… for… Asians in general to be aware of how they're racialized… is important, so that hopefully… we don't get played as bad as we are right now, against ourselves and other groups."

Some said that to the extent that an Asian American identity existed, it was not progressive. These participants critiqued what they described as a kind of race-nationalism among some Asian American formations and leaders. There was a concern that without clear progressive values, embracing an Asian American identity ran the risk of reinforcing more reactionary tendencies within certain Asian American communities, and deepening tensions between Asian Americans and other peoples of color, particularly Black people.

"Oftentimes within API organizations… the mindset is very nationalist or API-focused, and can often play into the divisions by race and geographic area," said one organizer. Another person talked specifically about anti-Blackness, saying, "To the extent that many sections are privileged financially, educationally, professionally – not all, not all, but many sections… there's still a pride that, 'Hey, we are hard-working, we get things done, we're not on the dole,

we don't sleep on the streets, we're not beggars out there.' " Someone else said, "It might be more important and interesting to complicate the API identity, because I think there is a unified identity; it's just not very progressive and not very racialized."

One interviewee criticized tendencies among some Asian American leaders to push Asian American unity while glossing over the real racial tensions that existed with other peoples of color. "I think there's lots of ways where tough questions are simply being evaded in order to meet the short-term notion that we're trying to find some basis of unity," he said. "I just do not think those are racial justice spaces. Or if they are, then I think someone like Bobby Jindal has every right to claim that he's doing racial justice work… I don't quite get the line that says, well he's not… but when we're fighting to keep Lowell open to Asian Americans, that's somehow okay. Or we are saying, 'We're the new minority in town, so look at us now.' "

Another person said, "I actually think there is a need to break down the myth of the API identity… because it's used as a category to justify a racial hierarchy and a [model] minority myth." Similarly, another participant said, "I don't think that we will advance or succeed or win with only an Asian American identity. We need to build power and unity among all people of color because we have a common challenge, which is white privilege and structural racism."

Some respondents went so far as to say it would be "dangerous" to focus on Asian American identity. Among those who expressed this sentiment the most strongly, one said, "Particularly given the positioning of the Asian Pacific community in the U.S., it would be a very dangerous road to go on… It will lend the community more to distrust from what otherwise would be natural allies."

Some explicitly said that continuing to focus on Asian American identity would reinforce anti-Black racism. "I think it's easier for Asians to choose a reactionary identity," he said. "Especially educated, more middle-class Asians benefit greatly from the current structure… There's a great fear out there of 'Okay, if we identify with Blacks and Latinos, do we become like them? Does having a more progressive, racial justice Asian identity, does it help Blacks and Latinos? Or does it just hurt us?'…I've heard people say Asians associate with whiteness… and sometimes I feel like… it's more a disassociation from Blackness."

There is a strong sense that the Asian American category needs to be explored more deeply before investing resources into building Asian American political unity. One concern was the ongoing problem of defining Asian American-ness – who it includes, and who gets left out – and the difficulty of shifting that. "The Vietnamese community has organized well in a few cliques, places where they have a critical mass. But I think a lot of other minority groups within the API community sort of get left behind," said one person. "I don't know how much willingness there is among more established immigrant API groups to… embrace those other communities."

Another concern was the purpose of building Asian American unity. Some said that Asian American organizing would be strategic only if it focused on moving people in a more progressive direction on race. "There's a really particular segment of organizations that do use the API framework," said one. "The question is what could they use to step up their political game… to… navigate this moment of political confusion [that]… all people of color are experiencing, and… get over some of the nationalist shit that I think pulls them right? …If those two things happened, we'd be in a really good place… Dealing with anti-Black racism specifically is always

important, and then to some extent anti-immigrant stuff."

One organizer said that understanding how the myth worked in the context of racial politics was critical to his own political development. "It really struck me, thinking about how… one group… the African American population in this country, has been really despised, and then one group [has been] elevated or raised on this pedestal by the dominant society… It was really impactful to name that, to be able to articulate that."

There is a tension between the need for such organizing and political education with the broader goal of building multiracial alliances. "Does it even make sense for an API race-identified… national organization anymore?" asked one national leader. "On the one hand I say, 'Yes, they're absolutely is a need for that…' At the same time… what do we give up by convening… APIs separately from [a national housing campaign], or not combining efforts and merging with [a national economic development organization]? …How do we knit back together so that there is a broader multiracial power that we can have collectively?"

Some people said that issue-based organizing held the greatest promise for multiracial solidarity. One organizer said, "Identity-based organizing from my experience with working with API communities hasn't really worked. It has just caused a lot more tension… feeling like people are

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Voting patterns: How reaching for power leads to distancing from Blackness

" One person described how in certain geographic areas, smaller numbers of Asian American voters can create incentives to align politically with whites, and not with other communities of color, in an effort to build political power:

Asian Americans, for the large part in the Midwest and the South… have not made up the voting majority nor have they been in enough strategic alignment with the African American community to influence a slate… That fact means that Asian Americans end up being filler in white districts, and it leads to all sorts of incentives to align yourself more with… white interests, and less with African American and Latino communities and interests. It also limits you to feeling like you have to make a choice. You end up being in a kind of polarized world… Numbers, strength in numbers, and voting significance often ends up leading to attitudes about race that you wouldn't think would arise from those factors, but they do.

If you had a 45% Asian congressional district, that Asian population may be much more willing and much less scared of aligning itself with issues of education reform and the preservation of public housing. …Numbers spread out over many congressional districts leads to… more pressure on each of those small clusters to just be able to have access to power instead of having power. It leads to politics in which people are distancing themselves from others whom they perceive to be liabilities or losing. That's just human math. "

forcing identities onto people who might not identify as such… What [people] face everyday and their hardships… are… around housing, around jobs, around access to higher education or incarceration or immigration… Organizing around issues… is more effective and useful than having this college bull session conversation about like, 'What does a unified identity really look like? What does pan-Asian really mean or Asian American?'"

Another person said, "The big questions that are in front of us… are the economy, immigration, multiculturalism… I don't see why strengthening Asian Pacific identity… what does that help? …The economy calls for a class coalition, immigration calls for an anti-nativist coalition, and multicultural issues calls for a non-parochial, non-nativist coalition… That will be more difficult, that will be more slippery, but that will be more productive."

Yes, We Should Organize Ourselves as Asian Americans.

There were some participants who said that Asian American unity was needed in order to exert political influence on issues that mattered to Asian American communities. "Having a unified API identity is extremely helpful," said one advocate. "When we are… fighting for an issue, for example school bullying… we can say that as Asian Americans we represent this amount of your constituency, and I think for policies at the Washington, D.C., level that's very helpful." Someone else stated, "If there isn't some sort of political alignment among API communities, you become in many ways less and less relevant to the political structure."

There was also a sense that Asian American identity was simply inevitable, because mainstream U.S. society lumped all Asians together. "I don't know if we have another choice," said one. "Whether or not we want to actually build an API movement, basically how race works in this country, we're are all the same. We're always going to be clumped together… You will always all be seen as perpetual foreigners, potential threats… The only, the best choice is to respond as an Asian Americans."

One person said, "In the U.S. particularly, there's such a phenotypical identification with race that it's unavoidable… There's never that you don't know that you're Asian." Another recalled hearing a Japanese American elected official talk, someone who was very progressive: "He's like, 'I don't care if you eat pancit or chow mein or yakisoba or chap chae or pad thai, the white folks in the dominant society look at that and it's all noodles.' …I think he was trying to point to some kind of unifying message around, can this umbrella label that was proscribed to us, can that be used as a unifying tool for change? I see both sides to that," he said. "Honestly, the jury is still kind of out to me in terms of the usefulness."

How Can Asian Americans Build Solidarity With Other Peoples of Color?

Participants told us that building a base of Asian Americans who could act as strong allies to other peoples of color demanded organizing, and political education in particular, to counter mainstream messages about race. Specific examples of such work included organizations working in low-income neighborhoods or with low-wage workers, using storytelling, relationship building, and honest dialogue.

One artist and activist said, "Some people come in having had no conversations about race, but knowing that… racism is something bad, and we should just not think about race at all… There's a whole lot of national pride in different organizations, whether it's Chinese pride or Cambodian pride. But it's kind of like, 'Forget everybody else. We're the shit.' …And then generally, the staff or whoever has to do pushing around multiracial unity, but then also contextualizing our experiences within U.S. history."

Another person said that there should be greater investment in teaching younger people about race. "I actually sometimes find that the older generations [who have] been through the Civil Rights Movement, for example, still get it… [They] still know that the struggle's not over," she said. "For younger generation folks, there's just not as many opportunities… It's not so much about generation as it is just who has had access to opportunities to talk about racial justice… Nobody funds that work anymore."

Oakland, California. *Photo by Roz Payne, 1969*

Another person said that teaching people about U.S. imperialism offered opportunities for solidarity. "I know that folks can understand the issue of race from an anti-imperialist perspective, and I've seen people change their view." He described the transformation of his organization's Asian American immigrant members after visiting the U.S.-Mexico border and engaging in deep dialogue about immigration. "Two years ago… when we talked about immigration and… what was going on with ICE, it was not a pretty scene. People were saying… 'We've been waiting for my cousin or my sister to come over for 15 years and why should other people who came here, broke the law, get a chance to cut in front of me?' " he recalled. "That has changed… If you were to get a copy of the latest newsletter… you'll see the same people… being able to explain… issues of migration and safety, the economics of it and the racism involved."

One Southeast Asian organizer said that certain older Asian immigrant and refugee communities still carried Cold War era political views and fears that got in the way of organizing. "Anything seeming that's it challenging the government is seen as if it's Communist," she said, adding, "In some ways you're not clear if than the apprehension to get involved has to do with us leading on race, or has to do with us leading around challenging the system." But she went on to describe how her organization has dealt with racial prejudices among their Asian American members. "Trying to raise awareness has been really powerful – teaching about… who in mainstream society is viewed as criminal, and really taking that back to the post-slavery era and Black codes, and… the structural ways of then who's criminalized," she said.

Moving from assimilation to power sharing.

"The workers we've organized… that were from Asia… are in different places in thinking about race. Many of them, before they come to the U.S., haven't really thought about race in the sense of political identity. So, in other words, they wouldn't on arrival declare themselves to be people of color or… in the same category as Latinos or African Americans. I think they certainly think quite a bit about color, and they anticipate discrimination and challenge when they come to the U.S. I think they also have an analysis that it's because they're Asian… In other words, it's not because they're Indian nor Chinese or Filipino. Asian as an identity category makes some extent of sense to them, and… it is not just language… It is about color and how I look, basically. So, I think that's a starting place…

Through their membership in our organization, obviously they start to think about race, because we get them to start thinking about race. And in our work… because of the realities of the guest worker program, that's a huge opportunity for us to talk about where did the guest worker program come from, the history of race, the history of the South, the legacy of slavery… the 13th Amendment, and other things. So, that's an opportunity for us to link people back to our racial history in this country, and also link them with African Americans here, both African American families and workers as well as African American civil rights and labor leaders… I think our Asian members do start thinking about race and very much start to understand their place in our racial hierarchy… and thinking about ways to transform it… For example, the workers who end up staying, many of them wind up having a personal mission that has moved well beyond just assimilation, and has ended up at a kind of integration that is about power sharing. And I think that is because of their membership with us, you know? I don't think that would have happened by itself.

It's worth mentioning also that a lot of Asians do come to the United States with a very keen anti-Black sentiment, and also feeling that their counterparts are going to be white, and in a sense, coming to America is shorthand for coming to white America… One of the ways we overcome that is by facilitating their relationships with African Americans and Latinos and that does earn enough good will to translate into a re-thinking of their original assumption."

Another organizer described political education efforts following the assaults on Chinese Americans by Black youth in Oakland. "We had this whole… issue of… safety and people getting beat up and killed… [Our members] were like, 'why were [Black people] like that, they're so loud and they're very mean to us.' " Her organization asked its allies in a neighboring Black community to come speak to their members:

"We set it up so that [they] knew that they were going to hear questions that could be offensive and queries that might really make them uncomfortable… They said, 'That's fine.' There was a discussion and people asked them about the youth and the drugs and the violence and how people are relating to each other on the buses or on the streets… At the end it was very, very, very powerful. There was kind of a relationship built there, an ability to have a conversation in an environment that was safe, and people's perceptions really changed," she said. "I think one of the things that [our members] did not understand was… the history in the lives of African Americans and how that cycle of oppression – the profiling, the exclusion from jobs, the situation with the families, the impact of poverty, the history of slavery, all of these – how that was not that far off along. And how… it's not like every generation is a new generation, there's baggage that people, communities have to work through… I think there was an understanding of that."

One writer and academic mentioned an Asian American youth organization in Oakland as an example of racial justice work that did not reinforce the model minority myth. "Oakland's working class Asians are in many ways racialized as Black," he noted. "The kind of model minority stuff isn't quite available to them… The work [this organization does] around education justice… they don't just kind of carve out this exceptional API identity." He went on to say that while the organization was founded by Asian American activists, it had a multiracial base. "That's an interesting case of racial justice work done in the name of Asian Americans that says… 'There's no way you [can] get what we might consider justice for Asian American students [here] and not think about Latinos and African Americans.' " ∎

Asian Americans are in a powerful position to affect racial justice.

66 The API community has a lot of influence and is a significant percentage of the population. To be backing racial equity issues, it would be huge… Being the "model minority" places you in a role in which your moral authority on the issue of race carries huge weight… In the Black community, this idea of passing, that history… what it meant was that if you were a person that could pass and chose actually to identify as a Black person, the moral weight of that was huge. It was actually a repudiation of supremacy. In that way I think the API community could play a really critical role and does, but in fundamentally owning that, could play a really critical role in thinking about the entire race debate. 99

The Politics of Our Participants

We asked a set of questions to understand how our interviewees approached issues of race. We wanted to know not only what they thought, but also where their analytical frameworks came from.

The vast majority of people talked about race as a construct. Most people described it as a means of justifying social, political, and economic hierarchies. Many comments reflected two closely related themes, that race was a means of controlling power, and that the United States was an inherently racist society. "We're taught that the United States is a country that is democratic for all," one person said. "But really it's a country that was built on racism and white supremacy. And the reason why the United States is even a global superpower is because of that history."

The relationship between race and imperialism was a common theme. One academic and activist explained that race was created to resolve Western contradictions between Enlightenment values of freedom and equality on the one hand, and the oppression of peoples of color on the other, by asserting that only whites had the right to freedom and equality:

"Here is [Europe]… finding new political modalities and economic modalities of existence, which have to do with some notions of equality, some notions of representation, some notions of liberty. And at the same time, you are now starting to interact with this 'other,' as it were, and how do you reconcile that? …By constructing the modern notion of race – that the gifts that are ours, they're ours and not the other's. Because the other is different."

Only one person, a Southeast Asian advocate, defined race as a biological category. She said, "I just don't really know why it is that I don't have a clear sense of what race means, actually… I have a good sense of ethnic identification, but not racial identification… It really doesn't resonate for me."

Among Asian American participants, when asked how they got involved in racial justice work and where their race politics came from, by far the strongest theme was college. Fully 60% of participants said that college was critical in the development of their race analysis. The only real demographic difference was that U.S.-born people were more likely to follow the college model than immigrants (67% versus 46%). Notably, only two people in the entire study – both Asian American – reported that they didn't have a Bachelor's degree. One said he got politicized in prison, and the other said he became politically conscious in high school; one was U.S.-born and the other was not. One in five of those who said college was an important factor also cited their training by the Center for Third World Organizing as a turning point in their political development.

One participant described her political awakening during the social movements of the '60s. "The Black Panthers and their arrival into Chinatown and their organizing efforts, the seeds that they planted were very powerful," she said. "The anti-war movement was going on, the international liberation movement was starting."

Black Panther supporters hold up Mao's Red Book, Oakland 1969. *Photo: Ilka Hartmann*

She recalls the struggle to protect Chinatown and Manilatown from corporate encroachment, widespread poverty, police harassment, and racial segregation. "It was just really a moment ripe for something… The Black Panthers played a wonderful, huge role. I was part of that."

For others, racial awareness developed through work exposure, a defining life event or community issue. Among these were the murder of Vincent Chin in 1982, Japanese American internment, and 9/11. "It stems from my family history," said one person. "My parents were both teenagers when they were interned during World War II… [They] were both active in the Japanese-American community, so I used to get dragged to their meetings when I was a kid." On the topic of 9/11, one person said, "Suddenly your identity… goes out the window and [you're] just another Muslim terrorist… I think that is when you start realizing that you are Brown."

People cited bullying, domestic violence, workers' rights, and gentrification as issues that spurred their activism. One interviewee talked about growing up in a working class neighborhood of peoples of color. "Police brutality was a major issue in the '90s as well as the growing prison system… I started volunteering… on mainly economic justice struggles… with a strong racial justice analysis." Citing bullying, another person described a feeling of kinship with Black identity. "I grew up South Asian but I really sort of partially identified as Black… because I was called the 'N word' a whole lot from first to eighth grade," he says. "It's sort of a cliché story, but I read The Autobiography of Malcolm X, got really into racial justice… and it went from there."

Surprisingly, although 24 of our participants were not born in the United States, only five of them said they became active because of their experiences as immigrants or refugees. One immigrant participant said. "My brother had a small garage… His house was burnt to the ground by arson, all [these] things happened." He explained that while immigrants often experience racialized incidents, many do not immediately perceive them as such. "There's no framework, if you know what I mean. Those sorts of things can seem accidental… I think most people saw it not as racism but [as] a price that you pay. Like there other rewards for sticking it out, so why be bothered?"

None of the three Black participants attributed their race politics to college. Two stated that being Black made their racial awareness inevitable. Both of these participants inherited family legacies of racial justice activism. "I was born Black in America," said one of them plainly. "Sometimes it's hard to come up an answer more specific than that." Similarly, another person said, "The short answer to that is that I don't know how I couldn't have gotten involved in racial justice work. It's very much a part of my household… Growing up with [my parents], who were both very… racially aware, it was impossible for that not to be a regular part of my conversations."

The racially motivated murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit in 1982 ignited waves of Asian American protest and activism across the United States. Chin was killed by white auto workers Ronald Evens and Michael Nitzhey, who pleaded to manslaughter and were sentenced to three years of probation and a $3,000 fine.

Of the 17 interviewees who identified as LGBQ, nearly one-third said that coming out or being involved in LBGT organizing was an important step in their political development. "I came out in a really white rural college town. And so didn't really feel that I had anything in common… with LGBT white folks," said one person. "I had recently immigrated… and didn't really think of myself as a person of color. But… finding solidarity with other folks of color who were queer is really the start of my own understanding of what it means to be a person of color living in the U.S." Another person said that both her ethnic community and ethnic-specific LGBT organizations marginalized her because of her politics. "I've always felt really out of place in the Indian, South Asian community, and then I got queer and then it was over… Even in LGBT South Asian spaces my politics was always pretty different than a lot of the people around me."

The Research Process

How did we choose the interviewees?

All the participants in this project were racial justice leaders in the continental United States who were either Asian American themselves, working primarily with Asian American communities, or working with a multiracial base that included Asian Americans. We used something called a "snowball sampling" method, which means that participants referred us to other participants from among their colleagues and acquaintances. All participants consented to participate in the study, and were assured of confidentiality. We conducted a total of 87 interviews, and then selected 57 to include in our analysis, based on ethnic diversity, age, and geography.

It is important to note that this was not a broad survey. It was a qualitative study using in-depth subjective interviews asking the opinions of a group of people who were not randomly selected. The ethnic makeup of Asian American participants closely mirrored recent Census figures, but the sample size was too small to draw definitive conclusions about any particular demographic. Also notably, all three of the non-Asian American participants were Black. This was not intentional, and certainly not meant to be representative of the Black population. We chose these participants based on their broad-based racial justice work across racial lines. Where there were stark differences in people's responses by demographic categories, we note them in the body of this report. While these differences may indicate themes worth exploring in the future, no definitive conclusions can be drawn about demographic groups based on this study.

How did we collect information?

We conducted individual interviews either over the phone or in person, all in English. On average, interviews lasted about one hour. We created a set of 12 questions that asked about racial justice analysis, strategies, challenges and opportunities. We retooled the questions slightly for non-Asian participants, but kept them to the same themes.

In addition, we asked each interviewee to fill out a short survey with demographic information: state of residence, age, race, gender, sexual orientation, income, education, religion, position, sector, issue, and number of years working in the racial justice field. As in the interviews, participants could decline to answer any question and still be included in the study.

We recorded and transcribed the interviews, checked them for accuracy, added the demographic information, and cleaned them of all personal and identifying information. We then coded the transcripts, and analyzed them for common themes and ideas.

Who were the participants? *

- Participants mirrored Census information on where Asian Americans live, with the bulk of them living and working on the East and West coasts. Twenty-three people or 40% were from the East Coast, and 24 or 42% from the West Coast. Six were from the South, and four from the Midwest.

- Thirty-four participants or 60% were 40 years old or younger, and 23 or 40% were 41 or over. The majority of people (68%) spanned a 20-year age range from 31-50.

- Ethnic representation among Asian American participants closely mirrored 2010 U.S. Census data, with Indian and Chinese Americans making up the largest groups. See Table 1 for a complete breakdown of race/ethnicity.

- Fifty people or 88% reported being cisgendered** and five said they were queer, transgender or "other." See Table 2. Thirty-five people or 61% said they were heterosexual, 17 or 30% identified as LGBQ, and four declined to answer.

- Twenty-four people (42%) were not born in the United States, and 32 (56%) were U.S.-born. All were proficient in English.

- Most participants were highly educated. Forty-two people or 74% had either a Bachelor's or a Master's degree. Five had a Ph.D. and four had a law degree. One person had HS/GED and one person had an AA. Three did not answer this question.

- A majority of participants (61%) worked in the non-profit sector, although we also talked to people from academic institutions, culture and the arts, government, media, philanthropy, social services, and unions. See Table 3. We interviewed executive directors, teachers and professors, cultural workers and artists, organizers, trainers, funders, service providers, media and communications professionals, consultants, and department or program directors/managers.

- When asked to report which issues they were addressing, participants were able to select all that applied, so the total exceeds 57. Outside of "Racial Justice," the three top issues were "Civil Rights," "Immigration," and "Economic Justice/Labor."

Of the 57 participants included in the study, only 56 filled out the demographic survey.

*** Cisgender is a term used to describe people whose gender identity, but not necessarily their gender expression, aligns with their assigned sex at birth.*

TABLE 1. RACE	
Race/Ethnicity	**Count**
Black	3
Chinese	13
Korean	2
Japanese	4
Indian	14
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	1
Hmong	3
Filipino	4
Vietnamese	3
Multiracial Asian	7
Not reporting	1
Total	**57**

TABLE 2. SEX/GENDER		
Sex	**Gender**	**Count**
Female	Feminine	30
Female	Queer	3
Male	Masculine	20
Male	Transgender	1
Male	Other	1
Female	NA	1
	Not reporting	1
	Total	**57**

TABLE 3. SECTOR	
Sector	**Count**
Academia	4
Culture/Arts	3
Government	2
Media/Communications	3
Non-Profit	35
Philanthropy	4
Social Service	2
Union	1
NA	2
Not Reported	1
Total	**57**

TABLE 4. ISSUE	
Issue	**Count**
Anti-Violence	14
Civil Rights	30
Criminal Justice Reform	11
Economic Justice/Labor	26
Education	19
Environmental Justice	10
Gender Justice	17
Health Care	9
Immigration	26
LGBTQ	16
Racial Justice	40
Reproductive Justice	9

Interview Questions:
Asian American Participants

GOAL	QUESTION
ANALYSIS **1**	1) How did you get involved in racial justice work? *Prod*: start working at a racial justice organization, work in an org without a racial justice focus, a particular event?
ANALYSIS **2**	2a) What is your understanding of how race functions in the US? And where did it come from? *Prod*: What is your race analysis? *Prod*: Tell me why you are having difficulty answering this question. 2b) Is that understanding/analysis shared throughout your organization?

<table>
<tr>
<td>2b-1) YES: How did you achieve that?

<i>Prod</i>: How was that analysis institutionalized (built and maintained)?</td>
<td>2b-2) NO: Who in your organization shares this understanding and who doesn't?

2b-2a) What are the implications of this for your work?</td>
</tr>
</table>

2c) How does your understanding of how race functions influence what strategies you use in your work?

Prod: Provide examples.

2d) How do issues like gender, sexuality, class, and ability show up in your work and how do you address them?

GOAL	QUESTION
STRATEGIES **3**	3) Do you work with API communities? *Prod*: How are APIs represented in your work?

<table>
<tr>
<td>3-1) YES: What does this work look like?

<i>Prod</i>: APIs directly within the org or work with API orgs; if orgs, which orgs? <i>Prod:</i> How are they involved in your work?</td>
<td>3-2) NO: Why not?

3-2a) Do you want to be working with API communities? And if so, what are the barriers?</td>
</tr>
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ANALYSIS **4**	4a) How do APIs think about race? (Do they know what it is, do they understand it, and how does it play out?)
	Prod: How does this play out differently among various ethnic groups within the API community?
	4b) What influences the way that APIs understand race?
	Prod: Provide specific examples where you've seen this in your work.
	4c) To what extent do APIs identify with each other as a racial group?

STRATEGIES **5**	5a) Is there a racial hierarchy?	
	5a-1) **YES**: Where are APIs positioned in the racial hierarchy?	5a-2) **NO**: Why not?
	5a-1a) Given that hierarchy, how do you think the API community is affected by racism?	
	Prod: In comparison to other communities of color?	
	5b) What do APIs think about African Americans? Latinos? Native Americans?	
	5c) What influences the way that APIs think about other communities of color (African Americans, latinos, and Native Americans).	

STRATEGIES **6**	6) Should we build a unified API identity?	
	6-1) **YES**: Why?	6-2) **NO**: Why not?
	6-1a) What are the challenges to doing so?	6-2a) What should we do instead?
	Prod: Is there a hierarchy within the API community? (What is it?)	

| STRATEGIES **7** | 7) What API communities are under-organized when it comes to racial justice? |

STRATEGIES **8**	8a) What are the most important issues right now for the API communities that you work with?
	8b) Do you approach these issues as racial justice issues?
	Prod: Why or Why not? And how?

STRATEGIES **9**	9) What kinds of messages do you believe are effective at moving APIs to support racial justice? *Prod*: Provide specific examples.
STRATEGIES **10**	10a) What are examples of effective racial justice strategies that people have used in API communities?
	10a-1) What makes them racial justice strategies?
	10b) Were they successful? Why or why not? *Prod*: What are some examples of strategies that also successfully addressed class, gender, sexuality, and ability?
GAPS AND CHALLENGES **11**	11a) What kinds of EXTERNAL/INTERNAL challenges do you/your organization face(s) in doing racial justice work? *Prod*: External - differences in power, class, gender, sexuality, ability, culture, language, religion, and immigration status; as well as historical/current conflict, the model minority myth, and right-wing messaging, political, social, economic conditions Internal: capacity challenges - for example, language capacity, technology access, etc. *Prod*: How are they affecting your work? *Prod*: How are you responding? *Prod*: Provide specific examples.
	11b) What do you need to overcome these challenges?
	11c) what opportunities do you see to advance racial justice that you can't take advantage of due to lack of capacity or resources?
END **12**	12) Do you have anything you would like to add about racial justice work in API communities?

Interview Questions:
Non-Asian American Participants

GOAL	QUESTION
ANALYSIS **1**	1) How did you get involved in racial justice work? *Prod*: start working at a racial justice organization, work in an org without a racial justice focus, a particular event?
ANALYSIS **2**	2a) What is your understanding of how race functions in the US? And where did it come from? *Prod*: What is your race analysis? *Prod*: Tell me why you are having difficulty answering this question.

2b) Is that understanding/analysis shared throughout your organization?

2b-1) **YES**: How did you achieve that? *Prod*: How was that analysis institutionalized (built and maintained)?	2b-2) **NO**: Who in your organization shares this understanding and who doesn't? 2b-2a) What are the implications of this for your work?

2c) How does your understanding of how race functions influence what strategies you use in your work?

Prod: Provide examples.

2d) How do issues like gender, sexuality, class, and ability show up in your work and how do you address them?

3

3) Do you work with API communities? How are APIs represented in your work?

3-1) **YES**: What does this work look like? (APIs directly within the org or work with API orgs; if orgs, which orgs? How are they involved in your work? 3-1a) What are the most important issues right now for the API communities that you work with? 3-1b) Do you consider these to be racial justice issues? Why or Why not? 3-1c) What have you found to be effective RJ strategies in working with API communities? What makes them effective? Do these strategies also address class, sexuality, gender, and ability? How?	3-2) **NO**: Why not? 3-2a) What do you think are the most important issues for API communities right now? 3-2b) Do you consider these to be racial justice issues? *Prod*: Why or Why not? And how? 3-2c) Do you want to be working with API communities? And if so, what are the barriers?

ANALYSIS **4**	4a) Is there a racial hierarchy?	
	4a-1) **YES**: Where are APIs positioned in the racial hierarchy?	4a-2) **NO**: Why not?
	4b) Given the hierarchy that you just described, how do you think the API community is affected by racism? *Prod*: In comparison to other communities of color?	
	4d) What is your understanding of the "model minority myth"? *Prod*: What is it, where did it come from, who does it refer to? *Prod*: How does it play out? Who does it benefit? Who does it harm?	
	4e) What do APIs think about African Americans? Latinos? Native Americans? And vice versa?	
	4f) What implications does this have for RJ movement building as a whole?	
	4g) What influences the way that APIs think about other communities of color (African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans). And vice versa?	
STRATEGIES **5**	5a) In your experience, how do APIs think about race and racism? *Prod*: systemic (structural) vs. individual	
	5b) To what extent do APIs feel solidarity with other communities of color? *Prod*: What brings you to that conclusion?	
	5c) Do you think APIs believe the racial discrimination they experience is the same as the experiences of other people of color? Why or why not?	
STRATEGIES **6**	6) Do you think about APIs as a unified racial identity?	
	6-1) **YES**: Why and who is included in that identity?	6-2) **NO**: Why not? 6-2a) What should we do instead?
	6b) Is there a hierarchy within the API community?	
	6b-1) **YES**: What makes you think so? What is it?	6b-2) **NO**: What makes you think there is not one?

| STRATEGIES 7 | 7a) Do you believe there is an API Racial Justice agenda? |
| | |

7a-1) **YES**: What is it? | 7a-2) **NO**: What leads you to this conclusion?

7b) What API communities are under-organized when it comes to racial justice?

7c) What would be possible if there were a stronger presence these communities in the RJ movement? What do you think it would take to do that?

GAPS AND CHALLENGES 8

8a) What kinds of EXTERNAL/INTERNAL challenges do you/your organization face(s) in doing racial justice work?

Prod:
External: e.g., differences in power, class, gender, sexuality, ability, culture, language, religion, & immigration status; historical +/or current conflict, model minority myth, and right-wing messaging, political/social/economic conditions.
Internal: capacity challenges – e.g., language capacity, tech access, etc.

Prod: How are they affecting your work? How are you responding?

Prod: Provide specific examples.

8b) What do you need to overcome these challenges?

8c) What opportunities do you see to advance racial justice that you can't take advantage of due to lack of capacity or resources?

END 9

9) Do you have anything you would like to add about racial justice work in API communities?

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In shaping our political framework and baseline understanding of Asian Americans and race, we read a lot of literature. Following is a partial list of some of the most influential sources:

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