ORIGINS

PEOPLE, TIME, PLACE, DREAMS

MALCOLM COLLIER & DANIEL PHIL GONZALES

PHOTO BY NACIO JAN BROWN

Two days after Bloody Tuesday, faith-based leaders and community members joined over 2,000 students marching across 19th Avenue on December 5, 1968. As San Francisco police responded with violence and arrests, an officer choke-holds Ecumenical House director Rev. Gerry Pedersen after he comes to the aid of students who appealed for non-violence.

Asian American Studies at San Francisco State was the product of efforts by Asian American students, faculty, and community members to effectively address pressing academic and community issues. Although our backgrounds and motivations were varied, we shared common concerns and goals. As participants in the development of this first curricular program of its kind, our purpose here is to present a retrospective on the origins of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State.

Beyond the influences of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s, and concurrent domestic and international movements, the founders of Asian American Studies had personal experiences with particular forms of racial and ethnic antagonism, restriction, and exclusion suffered by Asian American communities. While we had similar perceptions of inequities in American society, our ethnic and class origins were diverse, and so were our motivations. Adherence to a single, sanctioned political paradigm was not a requirement for participation in our activities, but a critical awareness of the contradictions of America, and a deep concern for the practical needs of Asian American communities, were expected from all involved.

A SEARCH FOR EQUITY

The development of a Third World perspective that recognized relationship among race, class, and access to political power led Asian American student organizations to form alliances with each other and with other Third World groups, assisted by some faculty and community leaders. These alliances were intended to address pressing community issues, provide mutual aid, and increase community-centered political power. The most immediate motivating factor was a broad frustration with academe because of its racial and class inequities, and its gross irrelevance to the needs of Third World students and their communities.

Most of us—then students—involved in the creation of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State began our formal education in U.S. schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a time of ultra-conservative sociopolitical conformity associated with the Cold War and McCarthy era. For Asian Americans and "non-whites," there were extreme pressures to assimilate toward the idealized white Anglo-Saxon Protestant cultural model. In the 1960s, the influence of the Civil Rights movement and the growth of the so-called counterculture began to weaken the social rigidity that marked the 1950s. When we arrived at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) in the mid- to late 1960s, we found a campus awash in a ferment of experimentation and new ideas. However, like most of our earlier formal schooling, the existing college curriculum was largely disconnected from the lives of our families and communities.

At San Francisco State, we met others from our communities and engaged in discussions about our social, economic, and cultural circumstances with a depth that we had never done

before. At the core of these discussions was a developing articulation of the needs and desires of our communities that we were both witnesses to and participants in.

We were becoming aware that existing institutions did not effectively meet these needs and desires. We shared a hope—soon frustration—that higher education would provide us with increased knowledge to address issues important to our communities. As we learned to describe our circumstances, hopes, and expectations, we searched the college for language courses, history classes, literature classes, and courses in different branches of the social sciences for content and meaning relevant to our experience.

We found little.

We found no Pilipino language course; Mandarin classes, but no Cantonese classes; and literature courses that did not include readings from Asia, let alone anything written by or about Chinese, Japanese, or Filipinos in America. Asian studies provided little that informed Asian American students about our places of ancestral origin. Whatever our varied backgrounds, even our limited knowledge of our own family stories, made us aware that THERE MUST BE HISTORIES of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans in the United States, though we usually lacked detailed knowledge of these histories. We found that courses in the History Department contained little regarding Asians in America.

Those of us with interests in social work and teaching knew from our own observations that there were few Asian Americans in those fields. We envisioned using our college educations to become trained professionals, equipped with the skills necessary to address the issues of our communities. The hard reality was that even these programs—ostensibly designed to prepare students for real world circumstances—had virtually no awareness of our communities, nor did they provide the knowledge that we so much desired. There was an absence of even the most fundamental reference to the existence of Asian Americans from the general curriculum, just as it had been missing in our earlier schooling.

In blunt contradiction to the daily recited pledge that described the United States as "one nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all," formal education at all levels presented students from cultural minority groups with extremely limited access to information about either their historical, or contemporary, circumstances. Apparently, our histories, cultures, and communities were not part of the American "all?" White students were provided multiple opportunities to obtain knowledge about their place in American history, culture, and society—but we were not. As our understanding of the extent of these omissions grew, so did our feelings of exclusion. This was an obvious violation of the principles of democracy that we were taught as children and adolescents, and that we wanted to believe.

Beyond the issue of equity, there was also the pragmatic question of how can a society that claims to be democratic and pluralistic, operate as such, if the full range of its sociocultural character is not recognized and addressed? The evidence presented in our academic setting pointed away from "liberty and justice for all," and toward cultural dismissal and racialized restriction instead.

We felt the college should do better.

ASIAN COMMUNITY CENTER ARCHIVES

PHOTO BY MALCOLM COLLIER

By 1968 youth in Chinatown and other immigrant communities were growing and faced a lack of educational and employment opportunities. They began demanding better housing, schools, healthcare, family support, and a political voice, over the objections of the much older Chinatown community leaders.

COMMUNITIES

Our desire for change was, ultimately, shaped by our community circumstances. A variety of historical realities and new trends were shaping our communities in the late 1960s.

Starting in the late 1950s and accelerating through the 1960s, Chinese American families were moving out of San Francisco Chinatown and into other neighborhoods at a steadily increasing rate. Many of these families were comprised of second generation parents with third generation children, but some were also families formed by the arrival of wives and children after the war. These migrations were also related to the gradual opening up of public sector employment to Asian Americans and others in the same time period, as well as to the decline in legalized housing discrimination. Yet even as some long-term residents moved out, new immigrants moved into Chinatown in ever larger numbers, which led to a rapid increase in the numbers of new immigrant children in local schools and on the streets.

The pressures brought by the growing population began to expand Chinatown to the west and the north. New immigrants were joining some students' mothers in the sewing factories unknown to Chinatown outsiders—and new immigrant-owned businesses were opening up on Stockton Street. Immigrant youth were joining existing street organizations or forming their own peer groups that were often misidentified as gangs. By 1968, immigration had major impacts on Chinatown: housing shortages, increased traffic congestion, new businesses, crowded schools, the need for more jobs, youth and family problems, and health concerns to name just a few. The old, familiar Chinatown struggle for survival took on new dimensions, in part because they were going unaddressed by both traditional Chinatown organizations and government agencies.

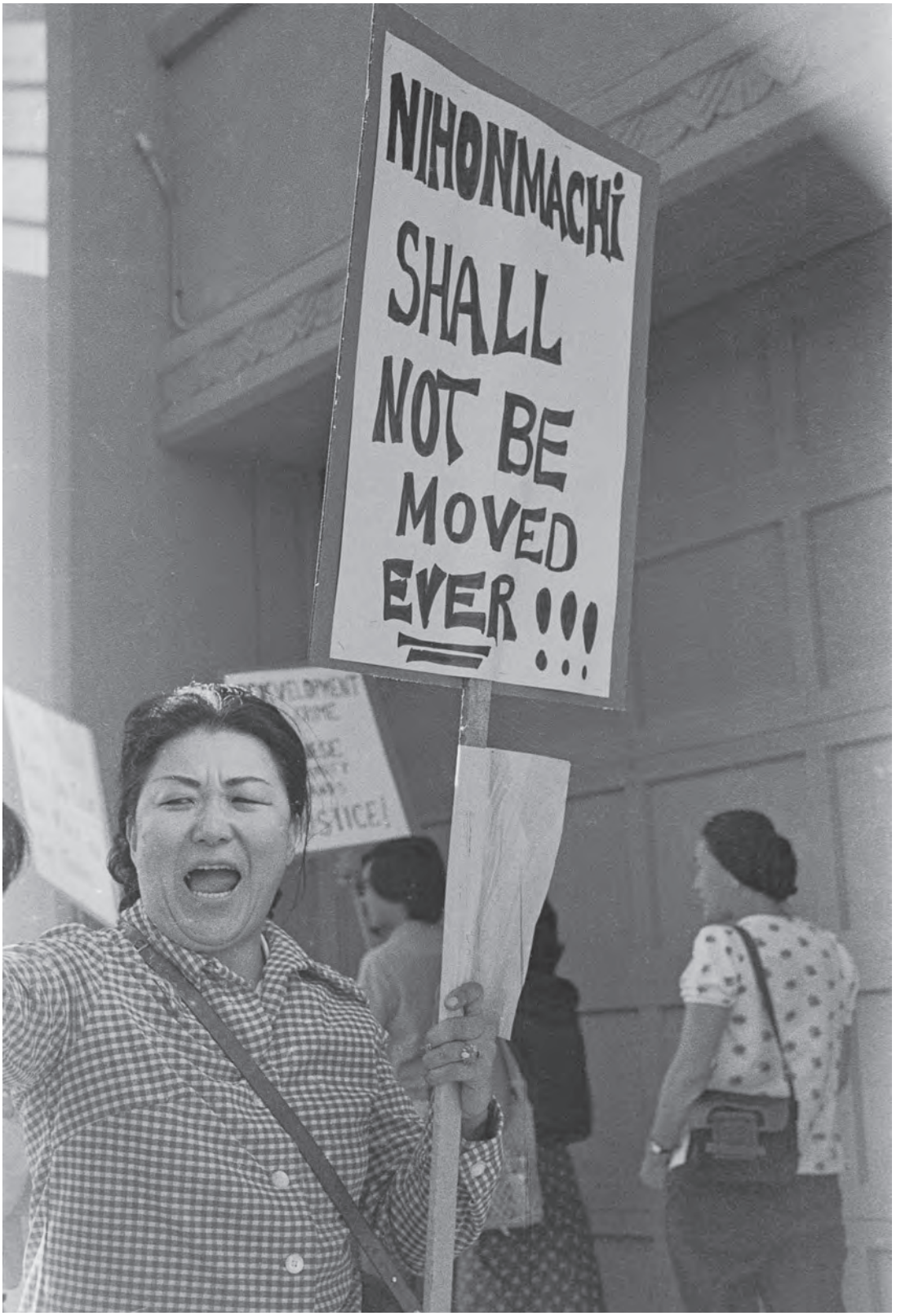
Concurrently, political tensions festered below the surface of the community. Chinese American students were very much aware of familial fears of the immigration authorities. They knew that their family names were often changed and false. They knew that there was tremendous danger to being labeled "communist" and that silence, not protest, was a virtue.

What history lay behind these fears?

The structure of the Chinese American community had been long dominated by conservative elements that suppressed progressive movements; however, their often crude tactics were losing their effectiveness by the mid-'60s. These conservative elements had declining influence on both the families that were moving out and the new immigrants moving in. Their inability to address the changing needs undermined their power. The federal "War on Poverty" was starting to bring money into the community that could provide needed services as well as new bases of power. These resources from outside further weakened the old power structure that was politically disinclined, as well as poorly prepared, to make use of these new opportunities. The new generation of college-educated Chinese Americans, both American-born and immigrant, began to take social service roles in Chinatown. By 1968, they were agitating for wider response to the pressing needs of Chinatown, and would later provide some of the community support for the student strike at San Francisco State.

Certain issues were affecting all three of the city's larger local Asian American communities. In the mid- and late 1950s, the San Francisco business and political elite spawned a major redevelopment plan that targeted the Fillmore District, a heavily Black populated area, an older Japanese American community, and Central City where there was a large and growing Filipino American population.

While the core area of Chinatown successfully resisted redevelopment, powerful corporate interests threatened encroachment of Chinatown and Manilatown on Kearney Street. The



UNITY ARCHIVE PROJECT

200 persons rally with the Committee Against Nihonmachi Evictions (CANE) to protest a high rise hotel development by Japan's Kintetsu Corporation and San Francisco's Redevelopment Agency which threatened to displace many low-income Japanese Americans and small businesses in 1974. Like the I-Hotel tenants, CANE successfully mobilized thousands of people and forcibly occupied several buildings slated for destruction to protect their community.

PHOTO BY ERIC MAR

Two hundred Filipino students, faculty, staff, and community members, along with lead artists James Garcia and Christina Carpio, unveiled the Filipino Community Mural in 2003 at SF State University's Cesar Chavez Student Center.

expanding financial district endangered low income housing and small businesses at the precise moment when the need for more housing and community-based businesses was growing. Single-room-occupancy (SRO) housing in those communities, including the International Hotel (I-Hotel), which housed both Filipino and Chinese American residents, was inadequate for the large families arriving from the Philippines as a result of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Cellar Act).

While Chinatown expanded north and west to accommodate new arrivals, new immigrants from the Philippines concentrated heavily in the Central City/South of Market and the Inner Mission District. By the late 1960s, the area had become a very visible and dynamic Filipino community with issues that paralleled those of Chinatown. The City's redevelopment project very quickly razed buildings that included SRO hotels and four- and six-unit flats.

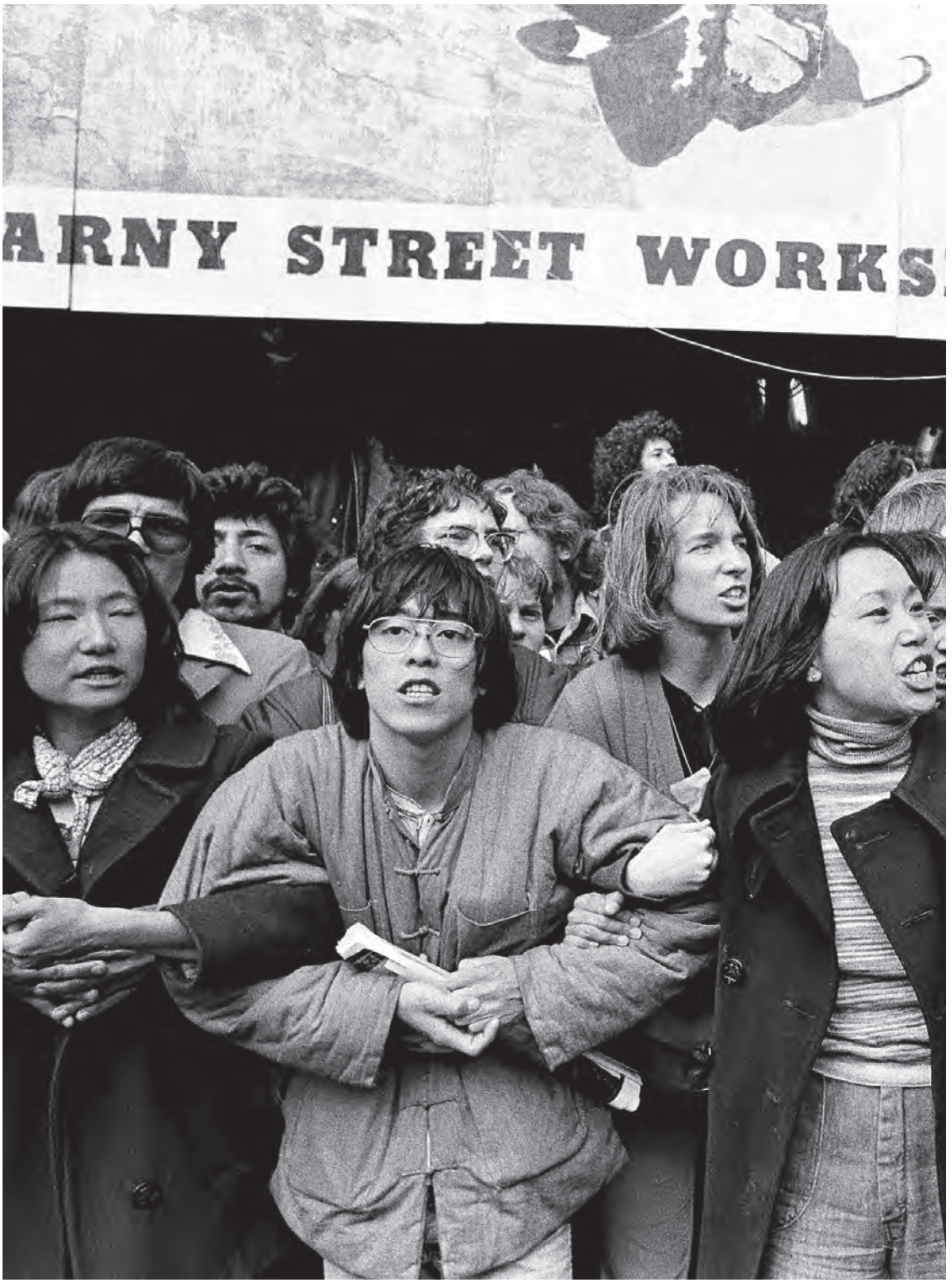
This sweeping demolition affected the Kearny Street population most directly, decimating the Filipino manong/bachelor community within a few years. The symbolic center of this change was the I-Hotel, located on Kearney, between Jackson and Washington Streets, on the eastern border of Chinatown.

Filipino American students, whose political consciousness had been wakened by the Civil Rights and anti-war movements, and the struggles of farm, hotel, and restaurant workers, turned their energy to the plight of the manongs of Kearny Street and the needs of the recent immigrants residing in Central City. These activities further encouraged student interest in Filipino American history. Manongs and manangs told stories from the 1920s and 1930s about work in the fields of Hawai'i, California, and Washington, and the canneries of Alaska, as well as those about their service in the U.S. military during World War II. The students heard accounts of their elders' experiences with prejudice and how they responded. They learned about union organizing, and about making good times from bad ones.

The same forces that threatened Chinese and Filipino American communities were at work in Japantown as well, which was still recovering from the damages of wartime relocation to American concentration camps. Redevelopment demolition in the Fillmore was in full swing in 1968, displacing Japantown residents along with the Black community. Combined together with the movement of many Japanese American families into the Richmond District and outlying suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s, the City's redevelopment process raised major questions about the future of the Japanese American community in San Francisco. Would it survive?

These circumstances also raised questions among younger Japanese Americans about their history in America. In particular, they were beginning to seek complete discussion of the World War II internment that many of their families had endured. Questions about the camps were met with silence or terse dismissals by the generations that experienced them. Why? Many Sansei (third-generation) Japanese Americans were frustrated by the lack of meaningful responses and looked for additional sources about their Japanese American history.

On a certain level, the Asian American students of the time were following in the footsteps of their own parents and communities. When Chinese and Filipino American men worked hard and long enough to raise the funds to bring wives and families from Asia after World War II, they were laying a very emphatic claim to a permanent place in America. However conservative some of their politics, they knew about the struggles of their predecessors, as well as their own. They were asserting their rights and challenging the old order by establishing families, seeking new avenues of employment, and moving into neighborhoods where racial covenants meant to exclude them. They too were concerned with equity and inclusion. Some went further by forming and joining labor unions, and taking public stances on community issues. Seen in the context of this dynamic, it is not at all surprising that many of their children would be concerned and active as well.

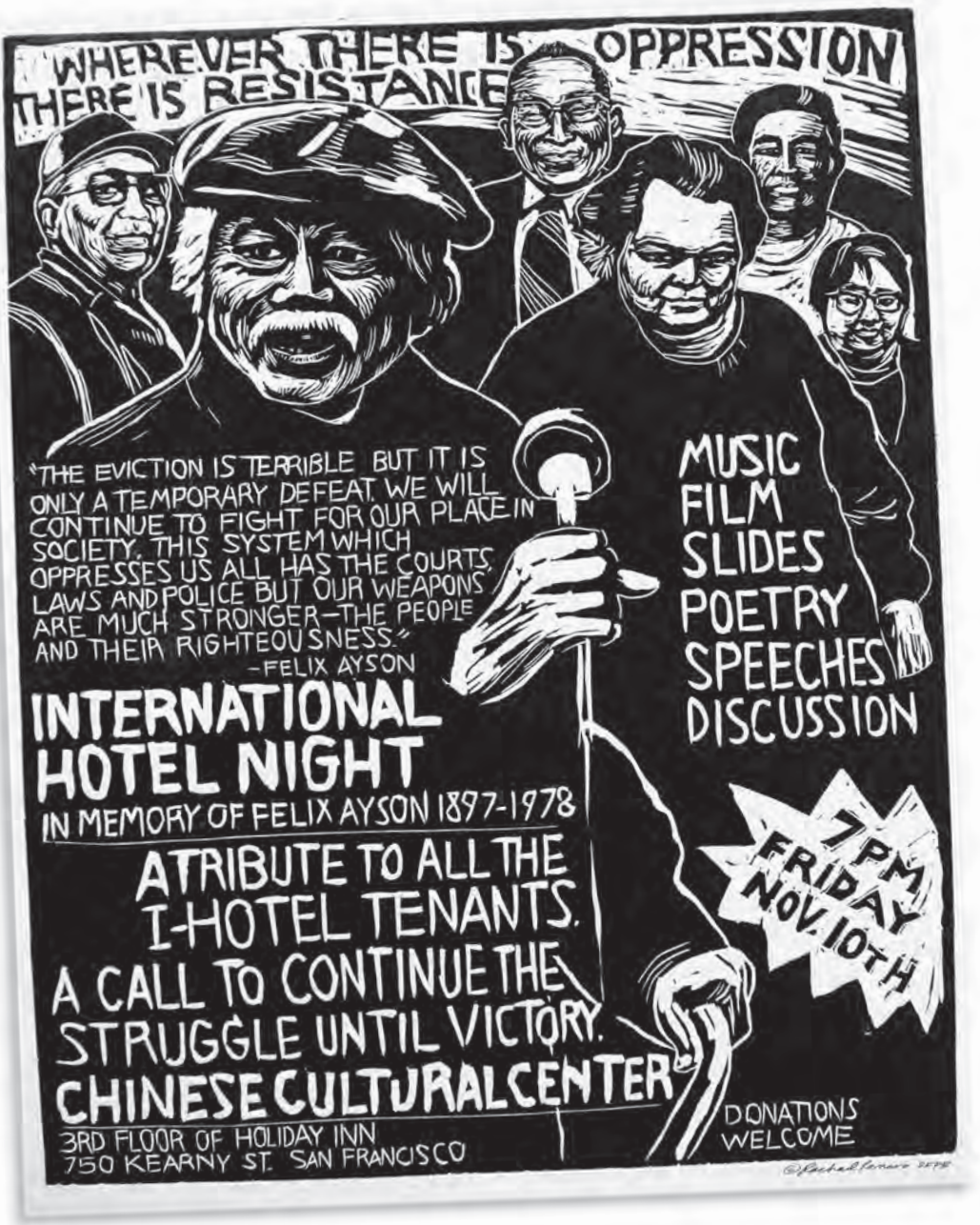


Students and youth linked arms with allies from throughout San Francisco on August 4, 1977, to defend the I-Hotel tenants from evictions after nearly ten years of resistance. Organizers like Pam Tau Lee (center) who grew up in a Chinatown SRO (single room occupancy hotel) several blocks away used their knowledge and skills to improve housing, employment, and environmental health and safety conditions in their communities.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FUJIMOTO

After the strike, students from SF State and other campuses joined artists, labor organizers, and other communities facing evictions in Chinatown, Manilatown, and Japantown. Over the next decade, some joined revolutionary organizations while others formed new grass-roots community groups like Kearny Street Workshop, Chinese Progressive Association, Asian Community Center, and nonprofits like Chinatown Community Development Center.

ARTWORK BY RACHAEL ROMERO, SF POSTER BRIGADE, 1977



ARTWORK BY RACHAEL ROMERO, SF POSTER BRIGADE, 1978

International Hotel Night, 1978. Woodcut print by Rachael Romero. SF State students formed new arts organizations like Kearny Street Workshop to inspire, unite, and "serve the people!" They were part of a new Asian American "cultural revolution" that helped shape community consciousness to build respect for our cultures, languages and historical struggles.

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

In conversation, we discovered that our questions, and growing anger, were collective matters, not simply individual issues. This realization led to the formation of new activist student groups rooted in, but extending beyond ethnic community experiences.

Three Asian American student organizations formed in 1967 and 1968: the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA, 1967), Philippine (later Pilipino) American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE, 1967), and Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA, 1968). The Alliance had a largely, but not exclusively, Japanese American membership at San Francisco State. Unlike preexisting student groups, these were politically-charged organizations.

Most of the Chinese American students in ICSA were second generation: born in the United States, the children of families formed by the arrival of wives from China, and who sometimes were accompanied by older children. These wives joined their husbands who had come earlier, often twenty years or more, usually as "paper sons." Some ICSA members, however, were third, fourth, and even fifth or more generation Chinese Americans. Some were born in China, having come to San Francisco in the 1950s.

Despite these generational differences, almost all ICSA members had longtime family connections to America, either directly or through a history of split families. This variation of the extended family structure occurred when two or more generations of fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers had lived much of their lives in America while their wives and children were forced to remain in China due to restrictive U.S. immigration laws. Through these multigenerational connections, ICSA members had a basic awareness of a longer Chinese American history in America, although usually a limited specific knowledge of it.

Most ICSA members were local, and many lived in San Francisco Chinatown for all or most of their lives. Several came from small towns in northern California with very old Chinese American histories like Isleton, Weaverville, and Marysville. Most had parents who worked in sewing factories, restaurants, and small stores, or ran small businesses. Only a few had parents with better paying jobs in mainstream employment. All were the first generation in their families to attend college, most were working their way through school, and many living at home in their local community.

PACE members had somewhat similar backgrounds: most were children of men with earlier histories in the United States who, because of changes in immigration laws in 1946 and their U.S. military veteran status, were able to bring their wives from the Philippines and start families after World War II. In 1968, there was a near even distribution of PACE members born in the Philippines and those who were second generation. Many had fathers or other relatives who belonged to the manong generation—men who arrived between 1899 and 1935.

Like their Chinese American counterparts, PACE members too had an awareness of the earlier Filipino American bachelor society experience. Most were also working their way through college and from well-established Filipino American communities throughout Northern California, ranging from Salinas Valley in the south to Stockton and Central Valley in the east. Their activism was informed by the farm labor movement which was started by groups with Filipino leaders and majority members (the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee), who were later joined by the better-known Mexican American union (the National Farm Workers Association), to form the United Farm Workers of America (UFW). Students were

also intensely curious about the colonial history of the Philippines, and the impact of America's relatively recent colonial control on Philippine and Filipino American culture and society.

AAPA was mainly, though not entirely, a Japanese American organization. Unlike PACE and ICSA, most AAPA members were Sansei with family backgrounds of more varied socio-economic status, and almost all of their families had experiences with the World War II American concentration camps. They didn't have as many older members as PACE or ICSA, but like the others, AAPA members were largely from Northern California and had community concerns that reflected their backgrounds. Their somewhat more Americanized backgrounds, and more differentiated social origins, may partially explain why the Japanese American students—sometimes individually, sometimes collectively—took slightly different positions from the other Asian ethnic organizations. AAPA members seemed often more ideologically grounded and more likely to espouse a pan-ethnic Asian American perspective than the other groups.

COURTESY OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, SFSU

In 1969, SF State Asian American Political Alliance leader Penny Nakatsu and others not only played a critical role in the strike, but also helped build the Asian American Studies Department as a new pan-Asian political force connecting the campus with their communities.

The three organizations saw themselves as community focused, and not just simply traditional campus student groups. Prior to the 1968 Third World Liberation Front Strike, ICSA was primarily engaged in a variety of social service endeavors. These included academic tutoring programs, social and recreational work with youth groups, and issue-based community advocacy intended to draw attention to needs in public housing and the development of more social services in Chinatown. Consequently, many ICSA members were more involved with the community service element of the organization than with on-campus activities. AAPA members were developing community-based activities related to redevelopment and issues associated with wartime internment, and also involved in disseminating the very new concept of *Asian American*.

PACE was actively supporting the I-Hotel resistance to eviction that began in 1968, advocated for community opposition to the destructive effects of business-oriented development, and encouraged intergenerational political activism and organized youth groups. Some PACE members developed a critical perspective of the Philippine government, particularly the Marcos administration—well before the 1972 declaration of Martial Law—when the Marcos family enjoyed tremendous popularity in the Philippines and among Filipino communities the world over. When anti-Marcos critics, including some members of PACE, began to voice their criticisms publicly, they were labeled communist-inspired radicals by the conservative leadership elite of their own ethnic community.

Community activism had substantial formative influences on all three student organizations, which, despite the overlay of ideological rhetoric, were shaped by the pragmatic needs and immediate issues of their respective communities. ICSA, PACE, and AAPA members tended to identify as community people who were going to college, and not college students returning to the community. This shared self-concept would continue to affect the operating values and direction of their activism.

IDEOLOGY

The public language of those involved in the strike, including many from the Asian American student groups, was often phrased in the ideological style of the time, with references to Mao Zedong, Frantz Fanon, and Malcolm X. This language, together with the radical nature of some of their demands, masked the actual diversity of political perspectives within each of the three Asian American student groups. There existed a shared Third World perspective: an identification of racism as a major problem in American society and a strong emphasis on development of social consciousness, but the ideological modalities expressed by the student organizations differed.

The demand for an Asian American Studies program with Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese American components reflected an element of cultural nationalism that was largely driven by the desire for more knowledge about their own communities that had been previously denied to them. This produced a clear anti-assimilation perspective, which conflicted not only with the pressures to acculturate in the United States, but also with universalistic tendencies within Marxism that promise superficial recognition of cultural minorities while limiting their access to power. Asian American ideological perspectives were correspondingly complex.

Some members of the three groups saw themselves as revolutionaries, influenced by international Marxism or domestic militant socialist groups. Others were inspired by the Civil Rights Movement and related traditions, by political movements in Asia, by local activism around issues affecting their own communities, or by their family's values.

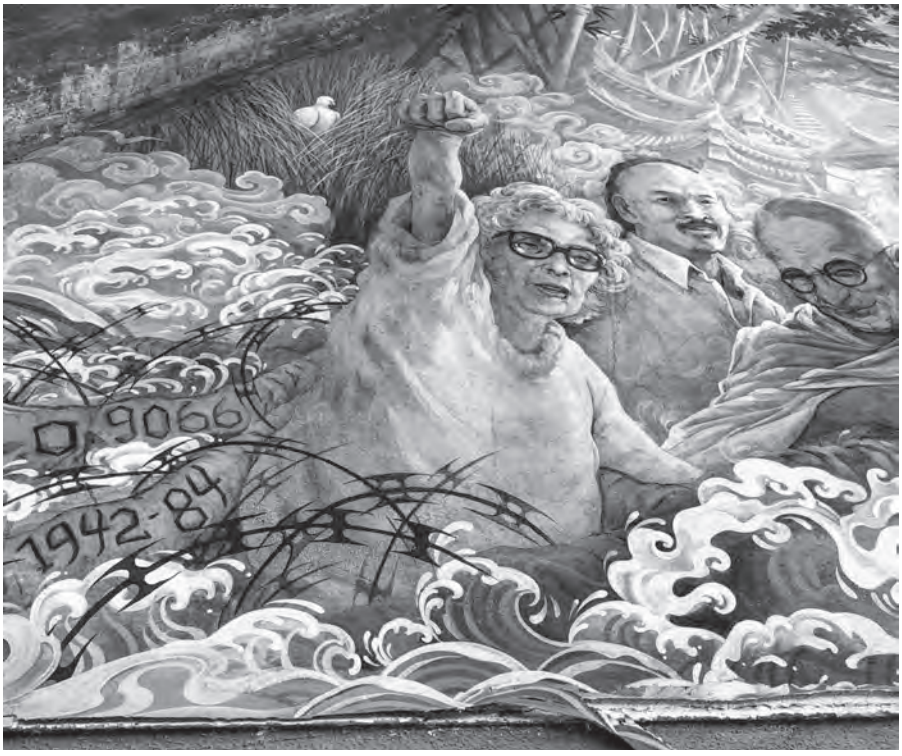
None of the three groups forced a strict orthodoxy on their members, but instead tolerated a range of eclectic personal political perspectives. The core standard for each was a commitment to community and to the particular goals of the organizations. At San Francisco State, whatever the rhetoric, the reality was that the dominant ideological perspective was idealistic, democratic pragmatism.

THE CAMPUS

San Francisco State College of the late 1960s was a place where traditional, academic practice was constantly questioned. In addition to the Civil Rights movement, the counterculture challenged both conventional standards of behavior and concepts of knowledge. By 1968, the anti-war movement was gaining strong momentum. The world-renowned Experimental College has been oft-cited as the most evident expression of this ferment. Proponents saw the Experimental College as an officially sanctioned venue for innovative teaching methods, and for the presentation of content that was not in the standard curriculum. While the College was primarily concerned with the alternative educational interests of the white cultural majority, it was also the setting where a few courses that clearly served as precursors to ethnic studies were first offered. Equally important, the Experimental College established precedents for university recognition of new areas of study, and the legitimacy of providing funding and academic credit for such offerings.

The campus was primarily a teaching institution: faculty tended to see teaching as their primary activity. Asian American and Third World activists saw several major deficiencies among these positives. Despite a few classes on aspects of Black and other ethnic experiences in the Experimental College, the openness of the campus to experimentation on subjects of interest to white students and faculty greatly contrasted with the general lack of attention to content related to American Indians, Asian Americans, Blacks, Latinos, or Mexican Americans.

Additionally, the Black student population, which approached 12 percent in the late



PHOTOS BY ERIC MAR

Muralist David Cho, with Albert Yip, worked with the pan-Asian student organizations at SF State to design the Asian & Pacific Islander Mural, dedicated April 30, 2004, at the Cesar Chavez Student Center.

The artists and community salute not only leaders but also Asian American resistance organizations and movements: Japanese American Redress and Reparations, the Third World Student Strike at SF State, Chinatown's Red Guard Party, and the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan.

PHOTO BY NACIO JAN BROWN

The SF State student leaders quickly built support from diverse grassroots community, labor, and workers rights organizations. The Community Strike Support Coalition included the Pacific Heights ad hoc committee Supporting SF State Strike, SF State American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 1352, San Jose State College AFT Local 1362 and Japanese Americans Concerned Supporting Striking Students.

PHOTO BY NACIO JAN BROWN

Philippine American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE) and TWLF leader Robert "Bob" G. Ilumin addresses the December 5, 1968, mass rally as Dr. Juan Martinez stands by.

1950s and early 1960s, had declined to under 4 percent by 1965. The number of U.S.-born or schooled Latino students was very small, and certain groups of Asian American students were also underrepresented. Third World student groups began to examine course titles, content, and the admissions process—interests that would lead to the first major confrontation with San Francisco State administration.

EOP AND THE PRELUDE TO THE STRIKE

Higher education in California was governed by a statewide Master Plan for Higher Education. This template defined a three-part structure for higher education: the University of California (UC) system, the California State College (CSU) system, and the community college system. The plan held very positive aspects, not the least of which was a substantial philosophical and financial commitment to the idea that higher education should be available to anyone who wanted it. Adversely, it created a hierarchical structure, with the UC system on top and community colleges at the bottom. We came to the conclusion that the plan fostered maintenance of a social class system in which many Black and other minority students were being shunted into community colleges and often dead-ending there.

Through our research, we discovered a category called Special Admissions. Special Admits were students who did not meet standard grade point average and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) score requirements but were admitted on the basis of special qualifications—most frequently athletic abilities. It occurred to us that, if there could be special admissions for good athletes, why couldn't there be special admissions for students who come from underrepresented communities—especially when their lack of full academic qualifications was often the result of schools being poorly funded and operated?

Asian American student groups joined other Third World student organizations to form the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). The TWLF pushed for expanded special admissions for minority students and the provision of associated support programs for such students to succeed academically. Buoyed by federal funding via the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, similar programs were being proposed nationwide as Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP).

College administration dragged its feet on these requests and student groups organized a major sit-in of the campus president's office in late spring of 1968. This was the first-ever coordinated effort by the TWLF and provided a training ground for the later strike. The end result, after some confrontations with police, was the establishment of a campus EOP, including expansions in special admissions and a variety of special classes, tutoring, and support services for new EOP admits in the fall of 1968.

THE STRIKE

From our perspective, the strike, though an important element, was only one part of the origins of Asian American Studies (AAS). The glamour and excitement associated with periods of open conflict like the strike often obscure the reality that any new vision only becomes successful with subsequent implementation, and involves long and arduous effort. Dwelling too long on the strike might tend to obscure the importance of what followed. It is not the purpose of this essay to recapitulate the history of the strike but rather to clarify its character and describe its impact on the subsequent development of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State. To that end, we will address selected aspects of that crucial moment in the origin of AAS and other units in Ethnic Studies on the campus. It should be understood that

COURTESY OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, SFSU

The Third World Strike created new relationships and alliances as it brought together Chinese American community leaders like Alan Wong and African Americans like Black Panther Party Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver.

TWLF SF STATE COLLEGE STUDENT DEMANDS

1. That a School of Ethnic Studies for the ethnic groups involved in the Third World be set up with the students in each particular ethnic organizations having the authority and control of the hiring and retention of any faculty member, director, and administrator, as well as the curriculum in a specific area of study.

2. That 50 faculty positions be appropriated to the School of Ethnic Studies, 20 would be for the Black Studies Program.

3. That in the Spring semester, the College fulfill its commitment to the non-white students by admitting those that apply.

4. That in the Fall of 1969, all applications of non-white students be accepted.

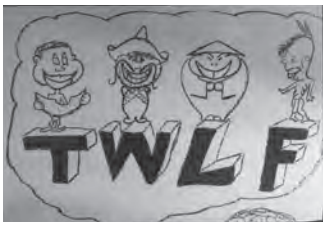
5. That George Murray and any other faculty person chosen by non-white people as their teacher be retained in their position.

(George Murray was an English Department lecturer who was dismissed for his participation in the Black Panther Party. SF State Strike Committee: On Strike: Shut It Down. 1968. p.3.)

the strike was a chaotic affair, and the logic and order of its history is most often a much later reconstruction.

As the fall term opened in 1968, the skeleton of an agenda shared among the student organizations in the TWLF directly addressed the deficiencies of San Francisco State. The immediate triggers of the strike were disputes over treatment of Black lecturers, including English instructor George Mason Murray, working in support programs for EOP students. The Black Student Union (BSU) and TWLF quickly articulated a wider range of issues that reflected the collective anger caused by the inability of the institution to deal with the needs of minority students and communities. These concerns were presented as a series of demands, ten from the BSU and five from the TWLF.

The most important of these demands was the creation of a School of Ethnic Studies for all of the ethnic groups involved in the Third World Liberation Front, and that it be set up with the students in each particular ethnic organization having the authority and control of the hiring and retention of any faculty member, director, or administrator, as well as the curriculum in a specific area of study. At that time, a "school" was a separate academic administrative unit within the larger San Francisco State College. What was being sought was the establishment of an academic unit with a substantial degree of autonomy over its internal processes. This demand for a free-standing school flowed from the TWLF's core principle of self-determination. More importantly, the demand demonstrated that TWLF member groups understood the need for as much independence as they could acquire within the larger college structure. Ultimately, a partial agreement to this demand by the administration made the development of Ethnic Studies programs, especially Asian American Studies, unique in comparison to related efforts at other colleges and universities.



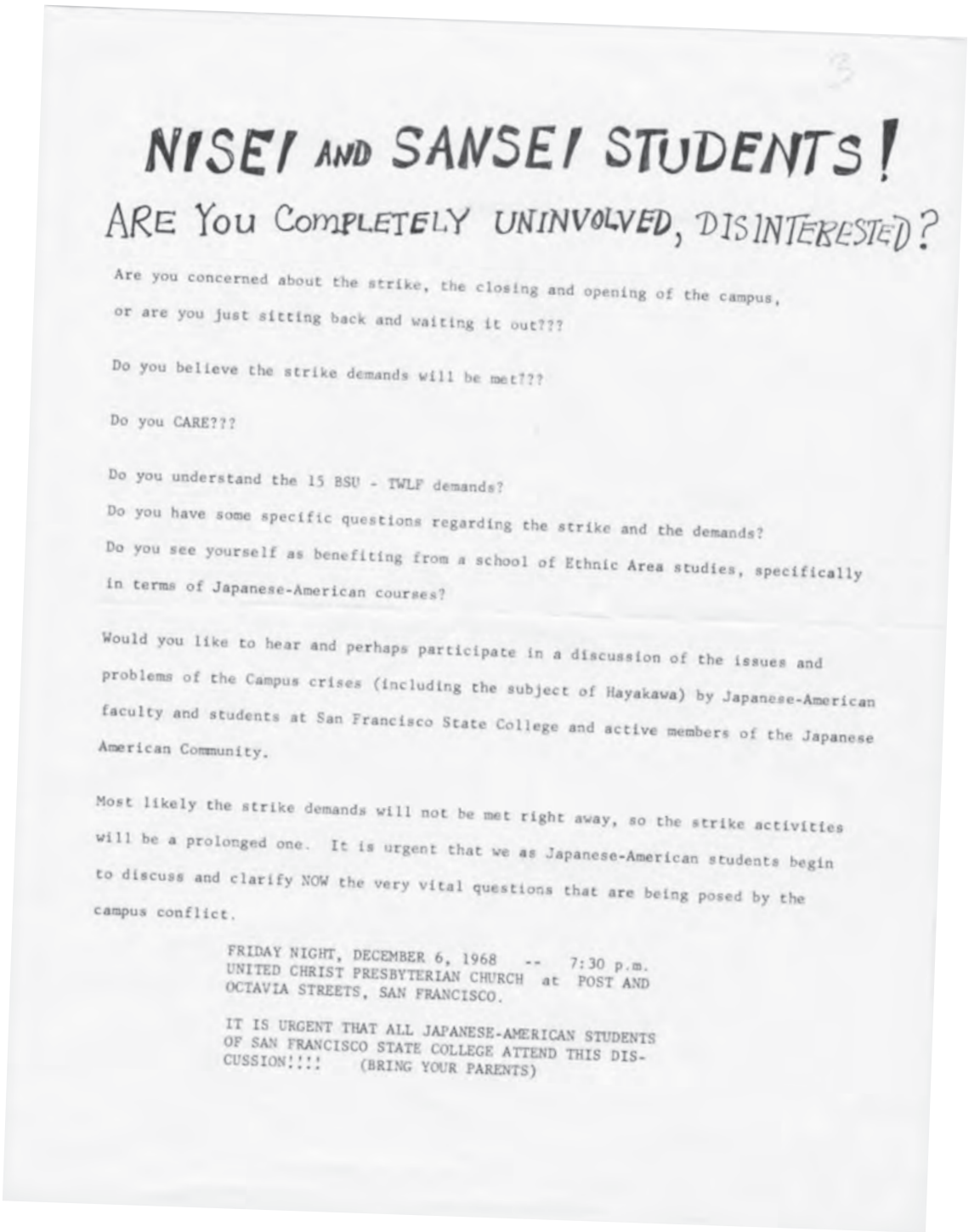
COURTESY OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, SFSU

Third World Liberation Front activists and supporters created art and images that countered the dehumanizing depictions of their communities in the mass media and U.S. culture.

The strike was not simply a confrontation between students and authority—whether the authority was in the form of campus administration or the police. On one hand, the administration repeatedly called in large numbers of police to maintain order, but on the other hand, prior to the imposition of Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa as college president, the administration also bowed to faculty pressures from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and allowed campus-wide debate on the issues. The debates included several massive convocations where the TWLF and other groups were able to present and explain their demands to overflowing audiences at San Francisco State's largest venues.

Students in the TWLF learned to detail their demands to a wide range of groups and coordinated those presentations with each other. The larger student body and faculty were thus afforded the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the issues and the players. These extended and repeated discussions drew many students, as well as a number of progressive faculty, into active participation with the strike. Some faculty participants, like James "Jim" Hirabayashi (later Dean of Ethnic Studies), believed that the participation of the teacher's union had a significant impact on the behavior of the administration, both during and after the strike, with positive results for the development of ethnic studies.

Although appropriately called the Third World Student Strike, not all Third World students supported it. For a variety of reasons, many continued to go to class and, conversely, the greater number of students who did strike and walk the picket lines were white, as were the great majority of faculty who supported the strike demands.



NISEI AND SANSEI STUDENTS!

ARE You COMPLETELY UNINVOLVED, DISINTERESTED?

Are you concerned about the strike, the closing and opening of the campus, or are you just sitting back and waiting it out???

Do you believe the strike demands will be met???

Do you CARE???

Do you understand the 15 BSU - TWLF demands?

Do you have some specific questions regarding the strike and the demands?

Do you see yourself as benefiting from a school of Ethnic Area studies, specifically in terms of Japanese-American courses?

Would you like to hear and perhaps participate in a discussion of the issues and problems of the Campus crises (including the subject of Hayakawa) by Japanese-American faculty and students at San Francisco State College and active members of the Japanese American Community.

Most likely the strike demands will not be met right away, so the strike activities will be a prolonged one. It is urgent that we as Japanese-American students begin to discuss and clarify NOW the very vital questions that are being posed by the campus conflict.

FRIDAY NIGHT, DECEMBER 6, 1968 -- 7:30 p.m.
UNITED CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH at POST AND OCTAVIA STREETS, SAN FRANCISCO.

IT IS URGENT THAT ALL JAPANESE-AMERICAN STUDENTS OF SAN FRANCISCO STATE COLLEGE ATTEND THIS DISCUSSION!!!! (BRING YOUR PARENTS)

COURTESY OF SF STATE STRIKE COLLECTION ARCHIVES

The SF State Asian American Political Alliance organized a large open community meeting on a Friday evening, December 6, 1969, a month after the start of the strike, to educate the Japantown community and broaden their base of support.

Many Bay Area communities were also very much involved. At the start of the strike, the TWLF immediately moved to seek outside support. ISCA, PACE, and AAPA held forums intended to cull support from individuals and organizations in their respective ethnic communities. Some of these meetings, especially those held in Chinatown, drew large crowds and significant press coverage. Community leaders and student strikers themselves, presented the strike to the public as being far more than a student-versus-college administration affair. Growing numbers of leading community figures began to show up on the campus picket lines. Several unions also publicly supported the strike and sent members to join the picket lines. The intent, which was successful, was to define the issues to the public in larger political terms, and to prevent the students from being isolated and vulnerable to police attacks.

The college administration and the TWLF both had many internal disagreements. Neither had full control of their supporters' actions. As the strike continued, it attracted people with agendas, ranging from political to personal, who wanted to be seen and heard. Some were confrontation groupies with little real interest in the goals of the TWLF. The resulting chaos was further aggravated by an intense and often aggressive, militaristic police presence, given encouragement from politicians, particularly San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto and California Governor Ronald Reagan.

For students and faculty, the tactical reality of the strike required the display of a unified front. The TWLF's internal unity, tactical discipline, and cooperation with elements of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were, however, real. The TWLF experience was positive in many respects, providing important practical lessons and an exciting sense of collective effort and success that many participants remember with considerable fondness, and which have continued to shape their political perspectives to the present. The camaraderie and productive interactions with people from different student groups enriched inter-group understanding and provided very valuable lessons in the building of a political movement. Collaboration among the students and community activist groups, however conflicted and imperfect, demonstrated a potential for future collective actions.

Conversely, it sometimes seemed that the operative word in Third World Liberation Front was "front"—behind which discord, mutual misperceptions, and other problems festered. As one participant, Penny Nakatsu, put it shortly after the strike, "underlying all this effort was a faith that by 'acting as if it were so' the myth (of unity) would at some imperceptible point cease to exist and merge into the realm of reality." Underlying this facade was a pattern of recurring contradictions and disunity among the groups which this participant attributed to incomplete political consciousness and an overemphasis on self-determination. Each group had its own agenda and frequently had only limited understanding of the positions of the other groups. For example, the BSU tended to see themselves as the vanguard, and consequently, did not always coordinate their activities with the rest of the TWLF, even negotiating separately for Black Studies resources during the settlement of the strike.

There were also obvious and serious gender issues. The leadership of TWLF and the public leadership of the various student organizations were overwhelmingly male, with some of the men not treating the women with respect. This led to conflict and frustrations for the women activists during the strike over the general failure to address their concerns and to recognize their full contributions.

The gains of the strike also came with substantial costs. Many strikers and some community supporters were arrested, spending varying amounts of time in jail and in court. Others were beaten by the police. One unfortunate member of ICSA was overlooked in the chaos following a day of mass arrests, and languishing in jail for weeks as his relatives refused to bail him out while the student organizations assumed he had been bailed out by relatives.

COURTESY OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, SFSU

After the strike ended March 21, 1969, Asian American students, staff, and faculty began writing curriculum, recruiting new faculty, and institutionalizing the new Asian American Studies Department (AAS) and School (now College) of Ethnic Studies. Pioneering AAS faculty depicted in the photo included social scientists, playwrights, poets and writers, psychologists, historians, educators, sociologists, social workers, and community activists.

This is just one example of the tensions with family that some members of ICSA, PACE, and AAPA experienced as they were ostracized for their activism. While the student organizations received some community support, they were also subject to extreme criticism from many other segments of their communities who encouraged the authorities in their attempts to suppress the strike by whatever means necessary. Many students, both strikers and non-strikers, lost academic progress, delaying their graduation. Male strikers ran significant risk of losing their student deferments and being drafted; some were able to regain their deferments while others had difficulty doing so.

The larger campus itself also paid a price. The Experimental College did not survive—as some striking faculty suspected that it was a specific target for defunding by the Hayakawa administration. A procedure for offering experimental courses was institutionalized, but the spirit of experimentation and alternative approaches to learning was stifled. Many strikers have commented that much of the larger, dynamic, and positive energy on campus faded after the strike. The reasons were varied, but an important factor was that the strike created schisms in many of the traditional departments between those faculty who supported the strike and those who opposed it.

SCREEN CAPTURE OF ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICAL ALLIANCE *AAPA AND ASIAN AMERICAN ACTIVISM IN THE 60'S* PANEL VIDEO. COURTESY OF COLLEGE OF ETHNIC STUDIES DIGITAL COLLECTION

TWLF Chairperson Al Wong speaks (2nd from left) with other Asian American strike leaders (from left) Mason Wong, AAS moderator Ben Kobashigawa, Betty Inouye (Matsuoka) (seated behind), Penny Nakatsu, and Rich Wada at the 40th anniversary of the strike October 29, 2008. Al Wong and Mason Wong helped build Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA) while Al Wong continued teaching in Asian American Studies and served as Associate Director of the Upward Bound program.

RELEVANCE AND LEGACY OF THE STRIKE TODAY

The goals during the strike were both simple and ambitious. On a broad scale we wanted the college to become a place in which Asian American history, culture, and communities would be accepted as legitimate areas of study at the university level. We saw this as an issue of equity. This was a dream, a push for inclusion and redefining what is American. We wanted Asian Americans to be seen as Americans, not at the price of assimilation, but through a change in the conception of America that was broader and more varied in its character. If college is intended to provide students with an understanding of their society and culture, then it should include ours. The pragmatic aspect of our dream was that we believed if Asian American students could be provided with a solid understanding of Asian American realities, past and present, that they/we would emerge both better individuals and better prepared to help provide for the needs of our communities.

We were seeking a change in the focus of the college, and of academia in general. We wanted a connection between the college and communities, believing and hoping that such connections would lead to long-term benefits for the communities and, secondarily, the college. We wanted the college to serve their communities, not to remove or rescue students from their communities.

And so, how relevant are these concerns today? In some arenas, little has changed in the intervening years. The overall content of American schooling remains as resolutely ignorant as

ever. It has regressed and tragically continues in that direction.

Neither has there been an improvement on a college level beyond the confines of Asian American studies programs. While Asian American populations have exploded and spread across the country, the pressures for assimilation are as high as ever, and the notion of who and what is genuinely American has only slightly expanded. An appropriate understanding and inclusion of Asian American issues and experiences within the curriculum of many traditional departments has remained fragmentary or shallow since 1968. Given this reality, and the fact that most students still arrive at college with little or no knowledge of Asian American history, strong, community-conscious Asian American studies programs at the college level are even more important than they were forty years ago.

On a larger stage, the goal of a more inclusive concept of American is as important today as it was then. The hostility and exclusion experienced by Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese Americans in the past is now, in a period of increased phobia and security concerns, visited on all new immigrants and many ethnic groups. While the residential, employment, and social opportunities for many Asian Americans have substantially improved since the establishment of Asian American Studies in 1969, the price of acceptance continues to be a significant degree of assimilation and a casting away of important aspects of ethnic, familial, community, and individual culture and identity.

The strike was settled on March 20, 1969, with many but not all of the TWLF's demands met. The most important success however was the creation of an independent School of Ethnic Studies that housed four separate programs: American Indian Studies, Asian American Studies, Black Studies, and La Raza Studies. As a consequence of this victory, AAS was able to establish and manage itself with more autonomy concerning curriculum and faculty hiring than most other Asian American studies programs nationwide.

Another legacy of the strike stems from the fact that three separate student groups, each primarily associated with a particular Asian ethnic community, represented Asian American interests during the strike. The AAS curriculum at San Francisco State developed strong ethnic-specific content and perspective. The internal governance structure for AAS that evolved after the strike reflected these distinct, ethnic-specific interests.

Beyond the immediate creation of the Asian American Studies program, the most important product of the strike for Asian American communities was a generation of students who participated in it and the subsequent creation of the AAS department. Their experience provided them with organizing skills, a shared commitment to community, increased political sophistication, and self-confidence. These young Asian Americans had learned that sustained, organized action could produce substantive results, and that coalition efforts—while difficult to build and maintain—can be effective and important in establishing a coherent intellectual foundation for action. Many of these students went on to become important leaders and political players in their own communities, in large part, because they were willing to challenge authority and had the discipline to move new ideas from concept to reality.

NOTE: *In addition to direct personal knowledge, this essay draws on minutes of the General Planning Group and individual planning groups, position papers, and a variety of other departmental documents. We are also indebted to communications with Jim Hirabayashi, George K. Woo, Penny Nakatsu, Jeffery Paul Chan, Bette (Inouye) Matsuoka, Laureen Chew, and Richard Wada. The views presented here, however, are those of the authors and we are solely responsible for any errors and oversights.*

PHOTO BY ERIC MAR

Hundreds of students and community supporters rallied on May 9, 2016 at San Francisco State University in support of student hunger strikers demanding adequate funding for the College of Ethnic Studies, a stop to the gentrification of the university, and the decline of the African American student population on the campus.