

BACK IN 1969

*PROTESTS, YELLOW POWER, AND THE EMERGENCE
OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES*

AMY UYEMATSU



PHOTO BY MARY UYEMATSU

Amy Uyematsu at UCLA's Asian American Studies Center, c. 1970-1971.



UYEMATSU FAMILY COLLECTION

In the 1920s, this was the Uyematsu's home at the family's Star Nursery in Montebello, CA. Francis Uyematsu can be found on the left end.

ANGRY ASIAN GIRL, CIRCA THE 1960S

When I was a teen growing up in the '60s, I was already angry about the racist conditions I was experiencing in Sierra Madre and Pasadena. In those days, there was no website called Angry Asian Girls, no popular comic series like Lela Lee's *Angry Little Asian Girl*—but I sure qualified as an angry Asian girl who would soon join other angry Asian Americans in the Asian American movement.

I was born 1947 in Pasadena, California, and attended public schools in Sierra Madre and Pasadena. I am a Sansei—third-generation Japanese American (JA). Grandpa Uyematsu built a thriving nursery business based in Montebello, Manhattan Beach, and Sierra Madre. After World War II, my father, Francis, the eldest son, was expected to take over running of the business; and by the mid-1950s, Star Nurseries operated solely in Sierra Madre, where he moved our family.

Dad had grown up in Montebello and was attending the University of Chicago when the Pearl Harbor attack occurred. Both my Nisei (second-generation) parents were very Americanized—they didn't try to teach my sister Mary and me Japanese or other cultural traditions like Japanese dance. Unlike other Sansei kids, our folks never forced us to attend Japanese language school on Saturdays. And sadly, we couldn't really talk to our grandparents, with the exception of Grandpa Morita, who was one of the few Issei (first-generation) who spoke fluent English.

Much as I wish I could understand Japanese, I realize that my Nisei parents were imprisoned during World War II and probably thought it was safer for us to assimilate. Along with some 120,000 Japanese American Issei and Nisei, my mother's and father's families were sent to internment camps. My mom's side (Morita), went to Gila, Arizona; and my father's side (Uyematsu), went to Manzanar, California. Growing up, my parents were like many Nisei who spoke very little about the camps. Years later, when I was in my thirties, my mother, Elsie, told me how, as a young teen, she was sent away on a train at the Pasadena station, describing how humiliating and painful it was.

Sierra Madre, a small town nestled against the San Gabriel Mountains, was a tough place for non-whites. There were only a handful of JA and Mexican families—no African American families that I was aware of. Back in the 1950s and '60s, Sierra Madre was very conservative, with a strong John Birch Society chapter. I was used to kids calling me "Jap" and pulling up the sides of their eyes while laughing at me. My elementary school teachers wouldn't stop them from yelling out "Jap" in the classroom. There were still many who considered Japan an enemy nation which bombed Pearl Harbor, and it was common thinking that Japanese Americans, even Sansei like me, were more Japanese and foreign than American. In the sixth grade, my friend Barney Barnes and I bonded over the popular Nancy Drew detective series. How disheartened I felt when he asked me who I would have sided with during World War II.



UYEMATSU FAMILY COLLECTION
AND PASADENA CITY COLLEGE



UYEMATSU FAMILY COLLECTION

Above: In 1921, Amy's grandmother, Kuniko Uyematsu, at the family's Star Nursery. Kuniko wrote tanka poetry and was a member of a tanka club.

Above right: In 1928, Amy's father, Francis Genichiro, stands next to Amy's grandfather, Francis. Sitting on the couch in a kimono is daughter Alice, who later died of tuberculosis in her early 20s at Manzanar concentration camp.

Bottom: In 1935, Amy Uyematsu grandparents' family, with Amy's father, Francis, standing in back.



UYEMATSU FAMILY COLLECTION



UYEMATSU FAMILY COLLECTION

In 1957, Amy Uyematsu's family at home on 207 Altadena Dr. in Pasadena. From Left to Right: Sam (in a white t-shirt), Elsie Morita Uyematsu (Amy and Mary's mother), Amy, Kuniko, Marian, Francis, and young Mary.



MORITA FAMILY COLLECTION (ABOVE AND BELOW)

Above: In 1942, the Morita family stood in front of their J. Morita Store at 70 N. Pasadena Ave. the day before they left for incarceration. From left to right, mother Reiko, youngest Helen, 2nd son Richard, Elsie (age 15), oldest William (who just returned from Berkeley), and father Jiro. The family lived in the two-story building behind, to the left of the photo. Jiro did not believe they would be evacuated, as this was America. A White neighbor persuaded Jiro to let him run the store but he gave up after a few months. The store was closed. The Moritas continued to make mortgage payments from the Army pay of their sons. The family went to Tulare Assembly Center and Gila River Camp.

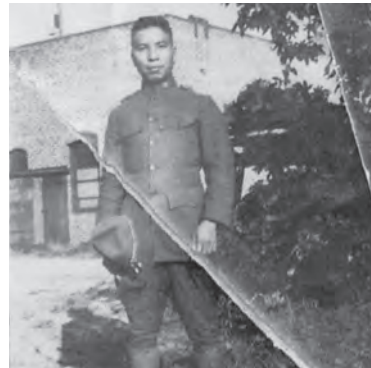
At right: Upon return from camp and Nebraska, the family returned to Pasadena Avenue in the 1940s. Reiko had a stroke but recovered.





MORITA FAMILY COLLECTION (ABOVE AND BELOW)

Above: Amy Uyematsu; her son, Chris Tachiki; and mother, Elsie Morita Uyematsu are seen with Morita family members around the Mishima Plaza plaque in Pasadena. Left to right: Dr. Ron Matsunaga, Bill Morita, Mark Matsunaga, Helen Morita Matsunaga, Reiko Morita. Behind are Marsha Matsunaga, Laura Matsunaga, and Jed Matsunaga.



Middle: From Throop College, Jiro Morita served in World War I. As a veteran, he became a naturalized citizen in 1936 and purchased his home and store.

Bottom: Jiro and Richard Morita left Gila River to work for a family, 1943. Jiro did gardening and Reiko did housework. The brothers came to visit before going overseas with the 442nd RCT I Company. Bill and Dick were roommates with Francis Uyematsu while attending University of Nebraska. Dr. Richard Morita is Professor Emeritus of Microbiology and Oceanography at Oregon State University Corvallis.



A couple of other incidents really stand out. Our first home in Sierra Madre was a rental house on Mariposa Avenue. The Jewish neighbors who lived a few doors down across the street had a cross burned on their front lawn. When my parents decided to build their own home on the Star Nursery property bordering Fairview Avenue, the surrounding neighbors circulated a petition to prevent my parents from doing so. While the petition failed, this act reflected the hostile racial climate of where I grew up.

In junior high, several of the girls I used to pal around with dropped me and acted like they didn't know me. In ninth grade, I had a drama teacher who bluntly told me not to try out for the school play (presumably because I was Asian and all the roles were given to white students). By the time I attended Pasadena High School, I felt angry and isolated. Our mother was aware that my sister and I couldn't have a normal social life like other teen-aged girls. She drove us on Sundays to the Japanese Presbyterian Church located in East Pasadena so we could meet other Sansei and have a bit of a social life (Sunday school and basement church socials).

One of my *hakujin* (white) friends told me a popular Sierra Madre teen was interested in taking me out, but wouldn't because I was Japanese. I did get asked out by a high school classmate in tenth grade, not realizing that he was Jewish and probably also facing prejudice from others. All I recall of that date were the stares we got. Four years later, when I took a freshman English class at UCLA, I wrote about that horrible dance experience and how stigmatized I felt by people whom I thought were my friends.

As a senior at Pasadena High School, I took a civics class where I tried to talk about the World War II internment camps and how my parents and grandparents were "relocated" to Manzanar and Gila. Not one of my fellow students believed me. In the '60s, the camps were still not covered in U.S. history books. I think my teacher tried to support me, but I felt the sting of rejection from classmates who knew me. Years later, I was glad when the history books began to include the camps, and now with two grandsons, it's even more gratifying to have them tell me they're celebrating Nisei hero Fred Korematsu in a fourth-grade play at their San Francisco elementary school.

Entering UCLA in 1965, and so angry at white racism, I purposely avoided getting to know *hakujin* students, who were the majority. This included my freshman roommate, Fern Weatherwax, who was always kind to me, but by the spring semester I moved back home. While I had also been accepted at USC, Cal Berkeley, and UC Santa Barbara, my main reason for choosing UCLA was that it had the largest JA student population. In the mid-'60s, there were still very few minorities on the UCLA campus, and most of us "Orientals" (the accepted term at that time) were Sansei.

In the summer of 1965, right before I started at UCLA, the Watts Riots occurred. I vaguely remember watching the riots on my family's black-and-white television, but in those first two years of college I was much more interested in finding the social life I never got in high school. I joined Theta Kappa Phi, one of the two Oriental sororities, and spent more time on sorority activities than my classes and homework. My grades were just average, spending hours at Powell Library, along with many other JAs, looking for cute guys and unable to concentrate on my books. It's kind of a miracle I didn't flunk out—especially being a math major, and one of the few girls enrolled in predominantly white male courses. I recall UCLA having all sorts of political speakers at Meyerhoff Park, which I would pass every day on my way to class. I also remember seeing students picketing a campus bungalow that was connected to Dow Industries, the chemical firm supplying napalm to the U.S. Armed Forces in Vietnam.



MORITA FAMILY COLLECTION

Amy's maternal grandparents, Jiro and Reiko Morita, came to Pasadena High School in 1963 as part of the Mishima Sister-City program, in which Jiro was very active. Mishima Mayor Tazio Hasegawa of Japan visited the campus as part of the Sister City exchange.



COURTESY OF AMY UYEMATSU

In 1970, the Center's Asian American Studies class, taught by Franklin Odo, used a two-volume mimeographed reader, "Asians in America."

THE UCLA CLASS THAT FINALLY SPOKE TO ME

1968 and 1969 were transformative years for many of us. There were major widespread events in '68 that sadly included the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy. Violent protests broke out at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. At the Mexico City Summer Olympics, American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos gave the Black Power (Human Rights) salute during the medals ceremony. On our UCLA campus, two Black Panther students, John Huggins and Bunchy Carter, were shot to death. At San Francisco State, the Third World Liberation Front, a coalition of mainly non-white students, led a massive strike lasting five months.

There were stirrings of political activity among Asian Americans at UCLA and other West Coast colleges. Locally, there was a 1968 conference called, "Are You Curious Yellow?" hosted by the student group Sansei Concern, and I'm pretty certain I attended some of these early meetings of Asian American students wanting to come together and "do something." Political concerns around racism and the Vietnam War were speaking to me and my involvement in the sorority tapered off.

By the spring of '69, during my last undergraduate semester at UCLA, I signed up for two transformative courses, "Orientals in America" and "Ethnic and Status Groups in America." "Orientals in America" radically changed—even saved—my life. Taught by political activist and JA history scholar Yuji Ichioka, it was the first and only class at UCLA that was actually relevant to me. It was called "Orientals in America" because at that time the term "Asian American" was only beginning to take hold—and interestingly, it is Yuji who was given credit for coining the term. "Orientals in America" was one of the first Asian American ethnic studies courses offered anywhere.

Attending Yuji's class was incredibly exciting for both UCLA students and people from off-campus, hungry for discussion of Asian American issues. Without any textbooks, weekly sessions consisted of lectures, guest speakers, panels, and discussion groups. I remember the lecture hall being really crowded—maybe standing room only. Each time we met, the room was charged with energy, an undeniable feeling that we were waking up, not just individually, but also as a group of young people ready to make change.

It was also a lucky circumstance that I enrolled in Sam Farber's sociology course, "Ethnic and Status Groups in America." Years later, I learned that Farber was a Marxist from Cuba. Of course, I didn't know this at the time. Farber had us read *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* by Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton. Reading that book along with taking Yuji's class was a perfect pairing for me because it enabled me to see what was going on in the Black Power movement and gain a better understanding of our own particular experience within the broader context of America's persistent racism against all non-white groups.

Our identity as Asian Americans was rapidly changing. The "Black is beautiful" and "I'm Black and I'm proud" messages resonated deeply with our own changing self-image and self-acceptance as Asian Americans. We were tired of being called "Jap," "Chink," and "Gook." Some of us who'd fought in the Armed Forces were scared of being shot by our fellow soldiers, whose racism against the Viet Cong was generalized to all Asians. Even within the American

ASIAN WOMEN IN AMERICA



THE DOUBLE BURDEN

There is a unique quality of Third World women's movements that has not been significantly covered by current white women's courses or movements. This course, "Asian Women in American," proposes a new view. As Asian American women, our roles and positions are in large part defined by American perceptions and stereotypes as well as by remnants of East Asian culture that have been carried to America. In this course, we hope to generate a new perspective applicable to other non-white women as well.

CED 186 SPRING
1973

PREREQUISITE: A PREVIOUS ASIAN
CED CLASS OR SPECIAL INTEREST

Tu Th. 3:30 ~ 4:30 BUNCHE 2173

Th Evenings 7:30 ~ 9:30 IN THE
COMMUNITY

INSTRUCTOR - MAY CHEN

I.D. # 93226 , EXAM CODE 16

COURTESY OF UCLA ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER COLLECTIONS

anti-war movement, our Asian American contingents were sometimes not taken as seriously. There seemed to be little awareness of the fact that the racism we faced as Asian Americans had strong connections to how Americans viewed the Vietnamese they were bombing. We were tired of being linked to immigrant hordes and the “yellow peril” exclusion policies our parents and grandparents endured. We were fed up with being characterized as silent and meek.

My long-held personal rage was finally finding a home, and my girlhood experiences could now be understood within the history of racist policies and attitudes toward Asians in America. We were finally examining our pasts and ongoing conditions in our communities from our own point of view. Instead of being either ignored completely in the history books or seeing our images grossly stereotyped and distorted by the majority culture, we were determined to uncover our true stories, to learn what really happened, and to articulate an Asian American perspective. I don't think I was alone in feeling that Yuji's “Orientals in America” class was truly life-changing.

OUR DEMAND FOR YELLOW POWER

For my final term paper in both “Orientals in America” and “Ethnic and Status Groups in America,” I wrote a long essay entitled “The Emergence of Yellow Power in America.” Looking back, I realize what an ambitious endeavor it was. Who was I, an undergraduate math major with little background in history and political science, attempting to write a paper with such a title? But perhaps this also reflects the tenor of the times. We knew we were fighting against racial injustice, and we felt swept into something much bigger than any one person.

The movement newspaper *Gidra* emerged in April 1969. Its inaugural issue included a short article by Larry Kubota entitled “Yellow Power.” When I collected research for my term paper, I used Larry's article along with Alan Nishio's “The Oriental as ‘Middleman Minority,’” Carmichael and Hamilton's *Black Power*, William Petersen's 1966 *New York Times* article, “Success Story, Japanese American Style,” and 1960 U.S. Census data. Back in those days, students would normally go to the library card catalog to find books and articles addressing their topic. There was little available on my topic so I used whatever sources I could find—this was long before students could do research online and simply Google the subject they were writing about.

I saw the emerging Asian American/Yellow Power movement as part of the ongoing civil rights struggles which had begun in the 1950s. We were inspired by Black activists such as the Black Panthers, Angela Davis, and Malcolm X. We also saw our young movement joining international ones against colonialism and imperialism. Many of us were reading Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, where he advocated that colonized people in the Third World (Asia, Africa, Latin America) needed to rise up and gain independence.

We rejected the image of Asian Americans as a “model minority”—something which we are still fighting against fifty years later. Additionally, we refuted the stereotype of Asian Americans as quiet and passive—just look at our history and see how we've stood up and spoken out. One great example are the No-No Boys at Heart Mountain Concentration Camp, who went to jail for refusing to answer questions about their so-called loyalty while they and their families were imprisoned behind barbed wire by the U.S. government.

Student activist Mike Murase included my term paper in the October '69 issue of *Gidra*. A few weeks later, part one of the essay got published in the *L.A. Free Press*. Philip Huang, who was Acting Director of the newly formed Asian American Studies Center (AASC), hired me that same month to join the staff as a research assistant. I guess my writing was decent enough



PHOTO BY MARY UYEMATSU

Amy went on a cross-country road trip in 1973 with her sister Mary and their friend Lynn Yamashiro Taise. They visited Asian American movement people in Denver, Chicago, Detroit, and New York City. On the bookshelf are copies of Roots: An Asian American Reader and Asian Women.

for him to think I might be able to do research and writing for the Center.

At the end of my Yellow Power term paper, I included three poems I'd written during the course. I was undergoing so much personal change that an essay alone could not convey all the emotions I felt. I must admit I was more excited by Mike Murase's August '69 publication of those poems than my essay, never imagining that I would continue to write poetry the next five decades that followed. The pages of *Gidra* were filled with poetry and art by young activists, making *Gidra* all the more important in documenting the Asian American (AA) movement. For my own evolution as a writer, those monthly printed poems in *Gidra*, as well as the early political poetry I was reading by Lawson Inada, Janice Mirikitani, Nikki Giovanni, and others, were inspirations. Asian American themes continue to be a primary impetus in my work; and I even venture to say that anger and a "yellow power" mentality fueled the writing of my first book, *30 Miles from J-Town*, and are still expressed in my poems today.

EARLY DAYS IN ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

The ethnic studies programs, which began in the late 1960s, were the result of many college campus struggles, primarily organized and led by determined minority students. In the fall of 1969, four research units opened at UCLA—the Asian American Studies Center (AASC), the American Indian Studies Center, the Bunche Center for African American Studies, and the Chicano Studies Research Center. With limited budgets and resources, each center wanted to offer ethnic studies courses and produce publications that reflected the true histories and ongoing issues of our respective communities. Being able to fight inequities through education would prove to be thrilling, challenging, and fulfilling.

I joined the AASC staff about a month or two after it opened. My mother Elsie was the Center's very first staff member. According to my mom, the committee that chose her was impressed by the fact she'd read the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*—a book most other Nisei had not. In those early years, students would hang out at the Center and enjoyed talking with my mom, who was likely close in age to their own parents.

Prior to being employed by the Center, I had actually applied to IBM for a computer-related job. Computers were just beginning to take hold, and my father had urged me to pursue math because he saw such a future in computers. Attitudes toward women then, even more if you were also non-white, were backward. Women's liberation had not yet made gains on the job front. I passed the first few rounds of the math aptitude testing. But when interviewed by a male IBM recruiter, I was asked questions that aren't legal now—like, wouldn't I rather stay at home as a wife and mother? Needless to say, I wasn't hired.

In retrospect, I'm glad the computer job didn't materialize and that I was asked to join the AASC staff. The AA movement was just beginning to blossom, and I consider myself lucky to have been right in the midst of early ethnic studies. My own political activism, spurred on by the racist experiences I had growing up, could keep developing and be expressed in a variety of roles I played at the Center—in curriculum (as both a teaching assistant and later a co-instructor), in research, and in publication.

Since this was an entirely new field with no precedents, we had enormous freedom. At the time, I didn't realize what a rare opportunity this was to create. We were pretty much inventing our roles and programs as we went along. There was an idealism, purpose, and willingness to work long hours, knowing we were fighting racial inequality and improving how Asian Americans are viewed and treated. The idea of self-determination was highly valued in the movement, with Asian American studies providing one way we could redefine and empower ourselves.

My new boss, Alan Nishio, was just a few years older than me. When I was given specific tasks, I was often completely on my own to figure things out. For example, my first research

assignment was to discuss the need for continuing the recruitment of Pilipino students for UCLA's High Potential (Hi Pot) program. I used data from the 1960 Census, L.A. County Commission on Human Relations, and the Los Angeles Unified School District, resulting in a report, "The Filipino in the Hi Potential Program." In those days, we didn't have the arsenal of scholars like we now have now in Asian American studies, so we had to do all our own investigating.

Eddie Wong, another research assistant, and I were teaching assistants (TA) for Franklin Odo's introductory class, "Asian American Experience." We were hired part-time, both of us still students. Being a TA was super exciting for me. None of us were "experts" so we could discuss and debate topics freely and passionately. There was a lot of collaboration between Franklin and the students in deciding on guest speakers, films, and community panels as we planned courses that had never been taught before. When Franklin developed a class linking U.S. policy in Asia to how we are treated here, he asked students to assist him with research and writing up the class proposal. These challenging, and what we considered vitally important, tasks, were done collectively and often with a credentialed person (someone with a master's or doctorate degree) working closely with activist students.

Decision making at the Center was also done collectively and was deliberately set up to **not** be top-down authoritarian. There was a strong commitment to serve our Asian American student population, and early on, that became a major issue. We had a Coordinating Committee that consisted of the Center director, along with reps from each Center program (curriculum, resource development/publications, student-community programs, and administrative support). One of the biggest Center "struggles" I witnessed was over the hiring of the Student Community Programs coordinator. Those of us on the student "side" packed the meeting where the two major candidates spoke at. We were determined to have the more progressive candidate be selected. AA activists, both on and off campus, wanted to make sure the AASC didn't become an irrelevant academic institution with weak or no ties to our students and local communities.

BEFORE XEROX MACHINES AND COMPUTERS

When Franklin taught that intro course, we had no formal textbook. There simply weren't books at the time that covered the topics we wanted, so we gave our students a two-volume mimeographed reader that was stapled together. Students today probably have never heard of the term "mimeograph." When we needed to have many copies of a page or article, we used an inexpensive duplicating device that forced ink through a stencil onto paper. It was commonly used in offices and also by school teachers. I still have copies of "A Reader on Asians in America." The title page carries the date October 1970, and in Franklin Odo's "Preface" the text is called "experimental." It contained an eclectic, wide-ranging assortment of articles from various books and newspapers (primarily *Gidra*). We included scholarly pieces (such as Alex Saxton's "Race and the House of Labor"), along with controversial work (like Dinora Gil's "Yellow Prostitution" and Ron Tanaka's "I Hate My Wife for Her Flat, Yellow Face"). We even required students to read work by well-known political writers, such as Noam Chomsky and Jean-Paul Sartre, in order to deepen their perspectives of the war in Indochina.

Sometime in 1970, Alan Nishio appointed me to be publications coordinator, with the initial task of producing a book for Asian American studies classes. Our editorial committee consisted of Franklin Odo, Eddie Wong, Buck Wong, and myself (previously Amy Tachiki). We used the mimeographed readers as a starting point and brainstormed about additional content for the three sections: "Identity," "History," and "Community." Our book was going to include docu-

ments from the movement, such as I Wor Kuen's "12 Point Program and Platform," and interviews with Philip Vera Cruz, Pat Sumi, and other key Asian American political figures. This early phase of planning content and doing interviews was the most enjoyable for me. In the "Identity" section I was in charge of, we added poems by published authors like Lawson Fusao Inada and Al Robles, as well as undergrad students like Violet Rabaya and Marie Chung.

Once we agreed on content, the time-consuming production phase began. First, we had to type up the text. Besides myself, I think we hired several students to use IBM Selectric typewriters and, if memory serves me, we corrected mistakes with liquid white-out and made duplicate copies using carbon paper. After the text was typed up, our design team pasted up the copy and laid out each page—something that computer desktop publishing has made so much faster and simpler. The designers were Kathy Glascock (an off-campus Sansei artist a few years older than the rest of us), along with three UCLA students—my sister Mary Uyematsu, Eddie's sister Donna Wong, and photographer Bob Nakamura.

The book went to press in 1971 and was called *Roots: An Asian American Reader*. I believe that Eddie or Franklin came up with the title. Our book, and *Asian Women*, published the same year by a UC Berkeley women's collective, were the only two Asian American studies books available. For several years, they were the standard texts used in Asian American studies classes. After so much work and effort was put into the making of *Roots*, I don't remember there being too much feedback. Years later, I learned that *Roots* has sold around 50,000 copies and had ten to 12 printings, which was good to know.

THE LITTLE RED BOOK AND STUDENT ORGANIZING

While I was on staff at the AASC, I was also a member of the Asian American Student Alliance (AASA). From 1970 to 1972, I was a graduate student in education and working toward a master's degree along with a teaching credential. I spent most of my time however doing Center-related tasks and attending political meetings and rallies. I often skipped my graduate classes, but I was still conscientious enough to turn in the final required papers. What surprised me was how my liberal professors, even giving me good grades when, instead of focusing on the course topics, I turned in essays on my anti-war involvement and the unique perspective of Asian Americans. I saved one of those papers, and am still amused by my writing on "Asian Mobilization against the War" and my name beneath the title.

I think there have been several iterations of AASA at UCLA. Looking back at the AASA minutes I still have from 1972, I can see how much our members wanted to share our strong anti-war beliefs with other AA students on campus. We also tried to have study groups where we could read and discuss what was then termed Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought. Many of us carried Mao's book of quotations (the *Little Red Book*), and in our minutes, it is evident that we were influenced by his thoughts on "criticism/self-criticism." It was typical for AA movement organizations, like AASA, to talk about strengths and weaknesses, evaluating our group efforts, while also being self-critical of our individual roles.

Besides study groups, the AASA put out a newsletter and offered film screenings and discussions, mainly focused on the war. Perhaps the biggest AASA event I helped with was a program called "Put Your Foot in Your Mouth." The line-up included conga players, Kasamahan dancers, and the popular movement trio Chris Iijima, Joanne Miyamoto (now Nobuko), and Charlie Chin. Proceeds from the event were given to a group called "AMMO Vietnamese Supply Drive." One of our continuing concerns (and sometimes frustrations) was our ability to bring in larger numbers of AA students on campus.



PHOTO BY MARY UYEMATSU, 1973

Asian Americans for Action, with out-of-town visitors, summer of 1973. Sitting from left: Visiting feminist from Japan, Mitzi Sawada, Amy [Tachiki] Uyematsu, Lynn [Yamashiro] Taise; standing from left: Elsie [Uyematsu] Osajima, Yuri Kochiyama, Min Matsuda, and Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga.

ANTI-WAR PROTESTS I WILL NEVER FORGET

There were thousands of protests, rallies, and sit-ins during the 1960s and '70s. The causes ranged from civil rights to women's liberation, ethnic studies to gay rights, and demonstrations were against the war in Vietnam. In my own experiences, there were two protests that are seared into memory.

One protest was at UCLA in the early '70s. Thousands of students were gathered on the grassy lawns between the boys' and girls' gyms to hear anti-war speeches. What stood out in my mind weren't the speeches, but the chaos and panic of the crowd afterwards fleeing in every direction when the police had come on campus. Many of us were worried because of previous rallies where the LAPD SWAT Team had used force against protestors. I ran towards Campbell Hall, where I worked. Just outside, I saw a cop hitting a young Latino student. Though he was curled in a fetal position on the ground, the cop wouldn't stop bashing him with his baton.

The second protest I'll always remember was in the summer of 1973. My sister Mary, friend Lynn Yamashiro (now Taise), and I had traveled cross country and were staying in New York City. We went to an anti-war march in Times Square. Shortly into the march, the NYPD's mounted police were rushing toward us to break up the crowd. Everyone started running, and I wasn't fast enough to escape into a restaurant or business, like others. One cop on horseback came after me. Even though I was crouching against a storefront, he still rode his horse right up to me and then had the horse rise up on its hind legs and kick me. Fortunately, I wasn't injured and was able to get to the subway. Years later, I learned that this particular policeman had the reputation of being a bully.

Also memorable about that cross-country trip was meeting members of Asian Americans for Action, including several Nisei women activists like Mary (Yuri) Kochiyama and Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga. We attended a Chinatown Health Fair on Mott Street organized by students and volunteer doctors (similar health programs were being offered by movement groups on both coasts). One night I went to the Apollo Theater in Harlem to hear singer/poet Gil Scott-Heron, who I already knew from his song, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised." In cities like Chicago, D.C., and Denver, we met and stayed with other young Asian American movement activists. In those days we would crash at movement contact's apartments, even those we were meeting for the very first time.

THE RAUCOUS, INSPIRATIONAL, UNSTOPPABLE REVOLUTIONARY '60S

While it's a little hard to accept the fact that I'm a 70-year-old "baby boomer," I feel incredibly lucky to have been young during the '60s and consider the 1960s and '70s one of the most important political and social periods of American history.

On the political front, it was easy to get involved and become an activist with so much occurring daily, both nationally and internationally. The early '60s civil rights struggles in the South had mushroomed into all sorts of minority resistance groups, ranging from Black Power groups like the Black Panthers to the Brown Berets, Young Lords Party, Asian American Political Alliance, and American Indian Movement. Anti-war and free speech movements were widespread at universities; environmental, women's rights and gay liberation groups were springing up; and the New Left was emerging with a definite socialist and Marxist-Leninist perspective. We were affected by the revolutions and socialist movements occurring outside our borders, often inspired by the freedom struggles occurring in the Third World.

Accompanying the tumultuous political events were immense cultural changes. Hippies and



COURTESY OF AMY UYEMATSU AND JOYCE NAKO

PAAWWW (Pacific Asian American Women Writers West) began around 1976 and was a LA-based support group of Asian American writers for over 25 years. The group included novelists, playwrights, poets, journalists, and actresses.

Front left to right: Amy Uyematsu, Akemi Kikumura Yano, Joyce Nako, Naomi Hirahara, Emma Gee, Momoko Iko

Middle row left to right: Pam Tom, Velina Houston (behind Joyce), Cecilia Manguerra Brainard, Ardis Nishikawa

Back Row left to right: Jude Narita, Fe Koons, Wanda Coleman (who wasn't a member but was good friends with members and did a reading with the group at least once), Chungmi Kim

the counterculture movement, marijuana, Woodstock, psychedelics, the Beatles (whom I saw at the Hollywood Bowl in 1964), sexual freedom, Motown, Andy Warhol and pop art, America's moon landing, on and on. Guitarist Carlos Santana describes the era this way: "The '60s were a leap in human consciousness. Mahatma Gandhi, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, Mother Teresa, they led a revolution of conscience. The Beatles, the Doors, Jimi Hendrix created revolution and evolution themes."

So when I look back at my own political transformation in the late '60s, it was almost inevitable to be swept into the "mind-blowing" and radical climate of the times. I am grateful to have been at UCLA's Asian American Studies Center right when ethnic studies was starting. How lucky we were to have the freedom to develop new classes and books. At the time, I didn't fully realize what important work we were doing. And I owe so much to the Asian American movement for helping me develop a worldview that continues to guide me and help me better understand complex political and social conditions.

It was also gratifying to be part of the anti-war struggle and actually see the war end. I am glad to see so many of today's movements—environmental, #BlackLivesMatter, the 2017 Women's March, #NoBanNoWall, the Parkland High students' #NeverAgain, among others—in this current reactionary period. When I was involved in the '60s, America was also very divided—around the war, civil rights, youth rebellion, and more. Yet the divisions and ultra-right extremism we're experiencing now in 2019 feel harsher and more dangerous. In 1974, the year my son was born, Nixon was impeached, and there were congressmen of conscience, both Democratic and Republican, who united against him. That is no longer the case. What worries many people my age is whether the gains we fought so hard for—including voting rights, affirmative action, a woman's right to an abortion—will be taken away.

As a former high school teacher, I am dismayed by what our young people aren't learning in public schools and colleges. The humanities and arts keep getting cut back, with the resulting damage to our children's ability to create and imagine. In this age of "fake news," we need to be critical, skeptical, and thorough in our information gathering—especially in this age of Google when we can go online and be bombarded by all sorts of crazy websites with biased and sometimes incredibly false claims (such as lies that the Holocaust never happened or that Sandy Hook was a hoax). For me, in order to develop a critical point of view, you need to talk a lot about the issues, observe, read, and trust your gut for what you know is true. I think it's hard for many people to be able to stand up for what they believe—even if it goes against the majority, even if it means you might get some flack or make some enemies. But to make positive change, we've gotta stand up. If there's anything at all we learned from the movement days, it is this fact: Stand up for truth and speak out against injustice. This may be the most valuable lesson I gained from my involvement, and it's a belief which I continue to adhere to.

Corny as this may sound, I still have faith in "Power to the People." Younger students in Asian American and other ethnic studies need to remember it took months and months of struggle and protest before universities allowed these programs to be created. One of my favorite slogans from marches, and still heard in today's demonstrations, is from a Chilean song used before the 1973 overthrow of the Allende regime, "¡El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!"—the people, united, will never be defeated. This was true in 1968 and 1969 when Black, Brown, Yellow, and Red students closed down San Francisco State as they led the Third World Liberation Front Strike. This is just as necessary and true today.



COURTESY OF AMY UYEMATSU

Bassist Taiji Miyagawa accompanying Amy when she gave a poetry reading for her first book, 30 Miles from J-Town, at the Japanese American National Museum in 1993.



RAUL CONTRERAS

Amy and Taiji Miyagawa at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books in 2006 for her third book, Stone Bow Prayer.