



Opening the American: Mind and Body: The Role of Asian American Studies

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Source: *Change*, Vol. 21, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 1989), pp. 56-60, 62-63

Published by: Heldref Publications

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40164762>

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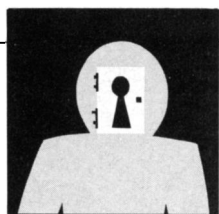
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OPENING THE AMERICAN MIND AND BODY

THE ROLE OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

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This fall, Asian American studies entered its third decade in higher education. After suffering some decline and loss of institutional support a number of years ago, it has experienced a renewed interest among students and scholars in the late 1980s and can now be reckoned as a national phenomenon and an accepted part of university life.

The Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) has doubled its membership over the past three years. Over 500 scholars, students, policymakers, creative artists, and community organization members attended this year's AAAS Conference held in June at Hunter College. They came to New York from as far away as Hawaii and Canada to serve on some 50 panels covering a full range of topics on Asian

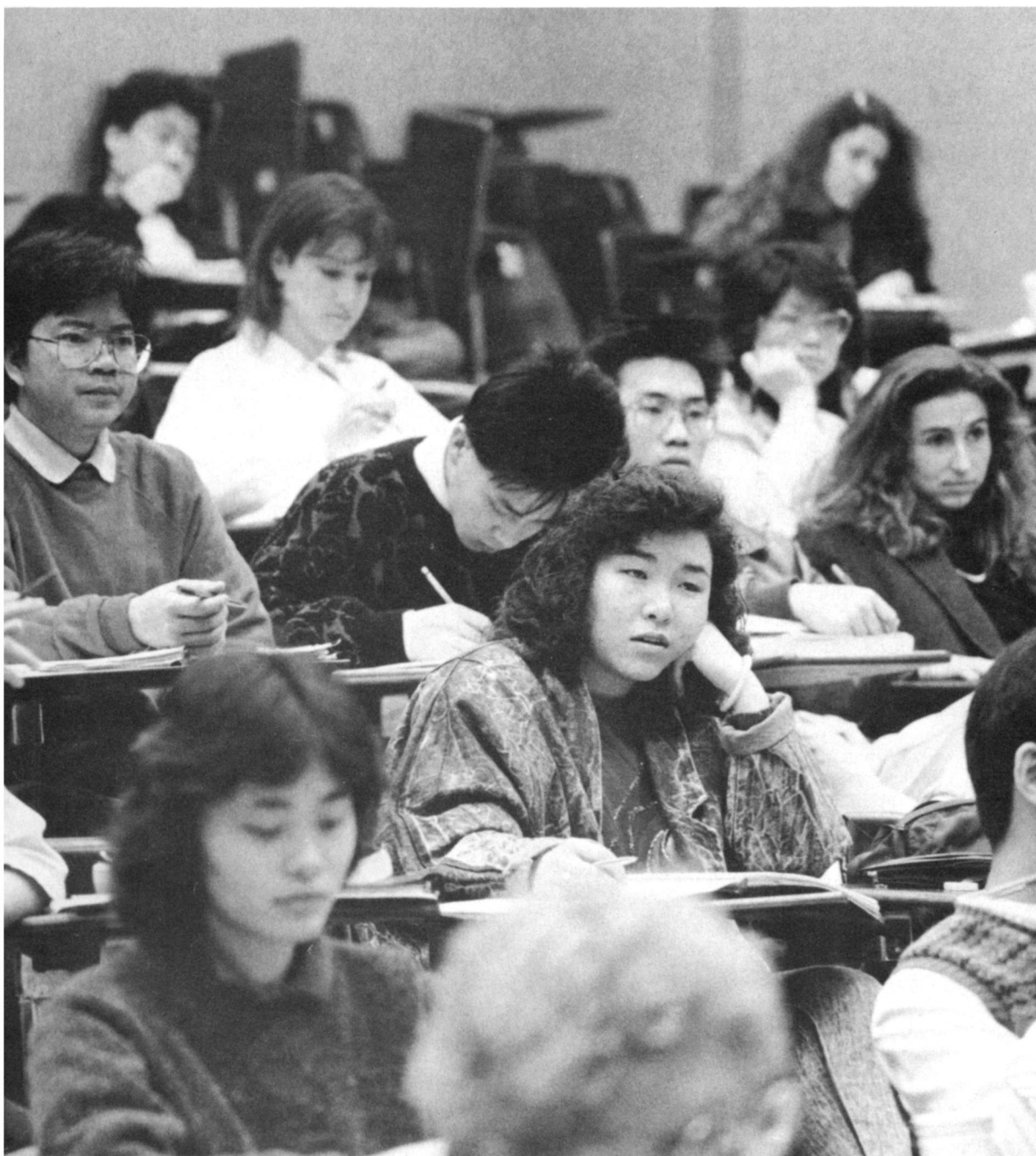
SHIRLEY HUNE is professor of educational foundations at Hunter College, CUNY and president of the Association for Asian American Studies.

Americans and Pacific Islanders, with disciplinary contributions from history, social science, law, education, literature, communication, and the arts. This is a remarkable achievement for the field that was begun only 20 years ago by students in social protest. Even so, its contributions to pedagogy and scholarship remain under-recognized and under-supported.

What is Asian American studies? It is the documentation and interpretation of the history, identity, social formation, contributions, and contemporary concerns of Asian and Pacific Americans and their communities. Its activities of research, teaching, and curriculum development relate to the experience of Asian and Pacific peoples in America. While thoroughly academic in its approaches, Asian American studies is also strongly committed to a focus on community issues and social problems.

BY SHIRLEY HUNE





Asian American scholars envision that their teaching and research will play a role in countering cultural domination of the existing Euro-American knowledge base taught in American colleges — in short, Asian American studies seeks to “democratize” higher education.

(Photo above by Rick Gerharter/City College of San Francisco and photo to right, Ken P. Ruinard/San Jose State University)

Asian American studies was born out of the Third World strike of 1968-69 at San Francisco State College and similar events at other institutions, as minority students and white supporters marched, picketed, and took over university buildings to demand ethnic studies programs and open admissions. Its beginnings were an extension of wider protests of the time—Civil Rights, Black Power, Women's Liberation, Anti-War, La Raza, Native American Movement, and so on. Asian Americans, too, came to question American values and institutions.

The war in Vietnam had a particular impact on many Asian Americans, recalling for them earlier and present atrocities done to Asians in America and Asians in Asia. Power relations were changing internationally, especially with the emergence of newly independent Third World countries, some as a result of wars of national liberation, and many advocating alternative forms

of social organization, such as the Chinese revolution. American social reformers condemned racism and sexism at home and imperialism and militarism abroad; they sought to create a more socially just and egalitarian nation. To construct a new society, higher education was one institution that had to be changed. Many Asian Americans shared this vision.

The ethnic and women's studies movements begun in the late '60s demanded that university curricula reflect and respond to the diversity of American society, especially racial minorities, women, and the working class. Higher education's organization and course content, it was argued, reflected the power relations of U.S. society in which white males govern hierarchically, Western culture is superior, American values and interests are considered universal, and a Eurocentric view of the world prevails. Asian Americans found themselves selectively represented, closed out of deci-

sion making, and nowhere to be seen in the canon.

This backdrop is important because it tells a story of the political, not just academic, origins of ethnic and women's studies. The universities' response in general was to incorporate these programs as forms of *compensatory* education, an aspect of affirmative action. This view lives on but limits the significance of these "new" studies.

Asian American studies should be seen as part of a social movement for educational reform. It is more than "compensatory" or a convenient way to help Asian American students learn their own history and to increase the representation of Asian American students, faculty, and administrators on campuses. Asian American studies is part of an effort to *change* education in all its facets, with an emphasis on making it more equitable, inclusive, and open to alternative perspectives.

Beyond curriculum change, the field

Asian/Pacific Islander Student Groups

Students on the Move

The first Asian/Pacific Islander student groups started in the '60s, inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Throughout the '70s and '80s, Asian/Pacific Islander groups continued to grow and have become more diverse in response to the rapid growth of various Asian/Pacific Islander nationalities. Student groups help address social, cultural, community, academic and political needs of Asian/Pacific Islander students on campuses predominantly on the East and West Coasts. The following lists the major networks and student organizations throughout the country.

—Compiled by August Espiritu
UCLA

Asian/Pacific Islander Student Union (APSU) Campuses

The Asian/Pacific Islander Student Union (APSU) was founded in 1978 as a result of protests against the Bakke Decision. Since then, APSU has held a yearly conference, which this year drew over 800 students from over 40 campuses throughout California. Together with other students of color, APSU has been active in addressing educational rights and community issues and also provides a forum for cultural and social exchange among various campuses.

Asian/Pacific Islander Student Union
c/o 505 Eshleman Hall
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720
(415) 642-6728

Asian Student Union
505 Eshleman Hall
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley, CA 94720
(415) 642-6728

Asian Student Union
San Francisco State University
1600 Holloway Ave.
San Francisco, CA 94132
(415) 642-1431

Asian American Students Association
Stanford University
c/o Asian American Activities Center
P.O. Box 9456
Stanford, CA 94309
(415) 723-3681

Asian/Pacific Islander Student Alliance
c/o Redwood Bldg.
University of California, Santa Cruz
1156 High Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95064
(408) 459-8757

APSU Chapter
Santa Clara University
Benson Center ASSCU Office,
Box #69
Santa Clara, CA 95053
(408) 554-4926

Asian Student Union Hiyas Pilipino
California State University, Los Angeles
c/o Student Union
5151 State University Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90032
(818) 288-8351

Asian Students Intercultural Association
East Los Angeles College
c/o Associated Students
1301 Brooklyn Ave.
Monterey Park, CA 91754

Samahang Pilipino Nikkei Student Union Asian Pacific Coalition
3232 Campbell Hall
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA 90024
(213) 825-7184

Asian Pacific Student Association
University of California, San Diego
San Diego, CA 92093
(619) 534-2048

ABC Samahan
San Diego State University
San Diego, CA 92132-0763
(619) 594-4739

East Coast Asian Student Union (ECASU) Campuses

The East Coast Asian Student Union (ECASU) was founded in 1969, the oldest Asian/Pacific Islander network in the country. It has been active in addressing issues around education and community struggles on the East Coast. Last year's ECASU Conference held at Hunter College in New York City, drew nearly 1,000 Asian students. ECASU publishes an annual magazine, *Spirit*, which highlights essays, poetry and short stories of Asian/Pacific American students.

East Coast Asian Student Union (ECASU)
27 Beach St. #3A
Boston, MA 02111

Asian Student Association
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA 02167

Asian Student Union
Boston University
Boston, MA 02215

has made contributions to pedagogy, research methodology, scholarship, ethics, and critical analysis. It is *transformative* in that Asian American studies looks to both a restructuring of education and an expansion of knowledge. Asian American scholars envision that their teaching and research will play a role in countering the cultural domination of the existing Euro-American knowledge base taught in American colleges; they hope to produce the kind of scholarship and students capable of resolving injustices and creating a more equitable society. In short, Asian American studies seeks to *democratize* higher education.

Higher education is currently paying new attention to Asian American studies. This interest is due in large part to the recent, dramatic increase in Asian American student enrollment at colleges and universities nationwide. Asian American scholars welcome that interest, but point also to needs and condi-

tions quite different from those that gave initial rise to their field.

One such condition comes from the growth and remarkable diversity of Asian American communities, a circumstance that raises complex scholarly agendas. Needs of the newer immigrants and refugees (Koreans, South Asians, Southeast Asians) are woefully unmet. On another flank, Asian American studies faculty have had to keep a wary eye on this decade's retreat from support for social programs and group rights and the consequent opposition to affirmative action, ethnic studies, and bilingual education programs. The rise of anti-Asian violence (and racial violence in general) on college campuses and within the larger society also raises issues that demand inquiry. On still another front, the economic and strategic importance of the Pacific Rim to the United States has led to the creation of another new field—Pacific Rim area studies—engendering mixed feelings

among Asian American scholars as to its purpose. These and other issues, even as they bring attention to the field, present its practitioners with a swelling agenda.

What forms does Asian American studies take in higher education today? It can be as small and limited as a course or two on the history and contemporary concerns of Asian Americans, taught by visiting faculty from traditional departments, perhaps with the sponsorship of students or an experimental program (this is typical of Ivy League schools, like Yale). A standard, fuller model is that of a relatively permanent and distinct teaching unit with its own faculty (some with joint appointments) offering credits toward a minor or, in a few cases, a major (this one finds at San Francisco State, in the UC system, and at the Universities of Hawaii and Washington).

Asian American Students Association
Box 2922
Brandels University
Waltham, MA 02254

Asian American Students Association
Brown University
c/o P.O. Box 5628
Providence, RI 02912

Asian American Association: Harvard-Radcliffe
c/o Dean of Students, U. Hall #4
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138

Asian Student Association
Smith College
Northampton, MA 01063

Asian Students Club
Tufts University, c/o Asian House
17 Latin Way
Medford, MA 02155

Asian American Student Association
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
388 Student Union
Amherst, MA 01003

Asian American Society
University of Massachusetts, Boston
Harbor Campus
Boston, MA 02125

Asian Association
Wellesley College
Wellesley, MA 02181

Asian Students Club
Student Center
Baruch College
37 E. 22nd St.
New York, NY 10010

Asian Students Union
Columbia University
206 Ferris Booth Hall
New York, NY 10027

Asian Students Association
c/o Student Life
Borough of Manhattan Community College
New York, NY 10013

Asian American Coalition
Cornell University
Willard Straight Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

China Circle
Georgetown University
307 ICC
Washington, DC 20057

Asian Student Association
Duke University
Durham, NC 27706

Asian/Pacific Students Alliance
Hunter College
c/o Student Government Day Session
Hunter North Room 121
New York, NY 10021

Asia Society
Asian Cultural Union
Chinese Students Society
Chinese Mei Society
New York University
566 La Guardia Pl. Ste 814
New York, NY 10003

Asian Alliance International Center
University of Pennsylvania
3708 Chestnut St.
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Asian Student Club
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Asian American Student Association
Princeton University
Third World Center
86 Olden St.
Princeton, NJ 08544

Asian Students Union
Queens College
154-45 Melbourne Ave.
Student Union Box 108
Flushing, NY 11365

Asian American Association
University of Rochester
Ruth Merrill Center
Wilson Commons
Rochester, NY 14627

Asian Student Union
SUNY
Binghamton, NY 13901

Asian American Student Union
Wesleyan University
Box 1372
Middletown, CT 06547

Asian American Students Association
Yale University
Box 1981, Yale Station
New Haven, CT 06520

Midwest

Midwest Asian/Pacific Student Organization Network
c/o Asian American Alliance
Oberlin College
Oberlin, OH 44074

Asian Student Coalition
University of Michigan
(313) 763-9044

Asian American Association
University of Michigan
905 Church St., #6
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Oberlin College
Asian American Alliance Office
Wilder Hall, Box 3
Oberlin, OH 44074
(216) 775-8464

Asian Student Club
Northwestern University
Evanston, Illinois 60201

Pacific Northwest

Asian American Students
c/o Associated Students
543-9242 Student Union Building
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195

Asian Pacific American Student Committee
c/o Asian Pacific American Counseling Center
Washington State University
Pullman, WA 99164-5130
(509) 335-1986

Increasingly, Asian American studies services the entire college or university by providing courses that meet general education requirements.

Organizationally, some Asian American studies units remain separate entities, while others operate within ethnic studies or comparative cultures units (the latter is true at Washington State, Colorado, and UC-Irvine); and a few institutions combine Asian American studies with Asian studies (e.g., City College of CUNY, California State at Long Beach). To date, UCLA offers the only M.A. degree in Asian American studies; UC-Berkeley has the only Ph.D. program in ethnic studies with a concentration in Asian American studies. Until the formation of the Asian American Center at Queens College, CUNY in 1987, UCLA had the sole research center devoted to Asian Americans (it was founded in 1969).

Asian American studies can be found from Hawaii to New England. Over a 20-year period, a few programs have come and gone, but most have stabilized. During the past two or three years, the field has begun to expand. West Coast institutions, especially in California where Asian American studies is well established and the Asian American student population has grown dramatically, are adding faculty positions to existing programs (e.g., at UC-Berkeley, Davis, and Santa Barbara, and at San Jose State).

New teaching units are being formed at UC-San Diego and at Stanford. Reflecting the influx of Asian immigrants to the East Coast, Asian American courses have been offered with increasing frequency at a number of colleges (e.g., Hunter, U-Mass-Boston, NYU, Haverford, and Tufts). An interesting development is that institutions located in areas lacking historic Asian American communities (although they may now have a significant number of Asian American students) are presently establishing medium-sized Asian American studies programs (e.g., Cornell, UW-Madison).

In the area of scholarship, Asian American studies is part of the "new" history, social science, literature, and education, challenging traditional assumptions, premises, sensibilities, theories, and research methods. Russell

Leong's essay in this issue mentions specific works, but here let me suggest themes. Scholars take a bottoms-up (non-elite) view of Asian American history. They retrieve a "buried past" and write national histories of the various Asian and Pacific American groups. They explore neglected areas of research, such as agricultural history, Asian American mental health, women and work. Using new, untapped sources

Asian American studies has raised the issue of cultural hegemony in course content, organizational structure, classroom management, philosophies of education, and counseling practices.

..... (e.g., Asian language newspapers, corners' reports, material culture) and methods, including oral history, Asian Americanists are finding a past formerly hidden, one that reveals their active participation in creating private and public lives and institutions and which describes a society's effort to obscure and distort their contributions. In the process, the field has contributed major findings to our understanding of labor history, economic development, women's studies, foreign policy, urban anthropology, community politics, and of race, power, and ethnicity.

In the area of social theory, research in Asian American studies has exposed existing biases (e.g., assimilationist theory) and raised serious questions about the use and misuse of statistical data (e.g., the model minority thesis). Scholars have added new understanding and empirical data to international labor migration theory, race relations (e.g., the internal colonial model, middleman minority thesis), strategies of ethnic survival (e.g., the role of entrepreneurship), resistance, racial formation, socio-psychological adaptation (e.g., re-

examining the sojourner and marginal man hypotheses), relationships between race, ethnicity, class, gender, biracial/bicultural identity, and more.

Asian American literature and literary criticism has become a central part of the comparative and ethnic literature field. Asian American writers have come forth with national best sellers and book award winners. Themes of migration, community, family, and racism permeate that literature. "Lost" works of earlier generations have been retrieved and their sociopolitical context examined.

A number of excellent textbooks in Asian American history, social sciences, and literature are now available for classroom use. Award-winning videos, films, and plays now document aspects of what it is to be Asian American.

Asian American studies closely identifies with current critical theories in education. In the classroom, Asian American studies has brought attention to institutionalized racism (e.g., tracking influenced by stereotype) and issues of class, culture, and language-bias in achievement, and cultural styles in learning and teaching. Most importantly, it has raised the issue of cultural hegemony in course content, organizational structure, classroom management, philosophies of education, and counseling practices.

Asian American studies emphasizes the empowerment of students and teachers and the crucial link between the university and the community. From its inception, Asian American studies has criticized the elitist notion of knowledge as personal property or as a thing required for its own sake, and the notion that education entails an acquisition of skills and credentials for individual aggrandizement. Teachers and researchers made a commitment to community development; students have been encouraged to participate in community activities and find careers that serve community needs. While fulfilling this role has been complicated by the demands of the academy (notably the pressures of publish or perish), the premises of Asian American studies are community service, social responsibility, and accountability.

Ultimately, Asian American studies is about opening the American educational mind and body. So it is not a surprise that *resistance* to Asian American studies persists. The resistance may come in the form of restricting Asian American student enrollment, or the hiring of faculty and administrators, or from a more general anti-Asian climate on campus; there is always the fall-back claim of "limited resources," though institutions usually manage to support that which they deem necessary.

In a larger sense, the resistance to Asian American studies reflects a historic debate about the purpose of American education. On one side there are those who view American education as an agent to conserve and socialize, an instrument of social control to perpetuate the culture and produce the next generation of citizens and workers. The outcome of this approach, however, is usually to maintain an existing social and economic order—and, in an American context, to devalue non-Western peoples and cultures. On the other side are people who view American education as a liberating agent, as an instrument of social change whereby the historically disadvantaged and the newcomer can obtain some measure of equity. To achieve that, curricular reform and institutional restructuring are seen as necessary. It is within the latter ranks, of course, that one finds supporters of Asian American studies and similar programs.

Resistance can be in the form of benign neglect. Too often Asian American studies is seen by university officers as a way to meet the needs or demands of a target group (Asian American students) rather than as an institutional commitment of benefit to all students, the university itself, and the society at large. The result is the occasional course, but rarely a faculty position. At these institutions, Asian American studies always hinges on the concerted efforts of an active but, by definition, transient group of motivated students to push the venture. The outcome is the non-institutionalization of Asian American studies on campuses that appear to be supportive.

Institutional resistance also exists on campuses that do have Asian American studies. Programs may not receive ade-

quate resources nor be given institutional recognition for their services. At the same time, they are expected to fulfill multiple functions beyond teaching and research, such as counseling students, participating on committees, representing the community and university, and so on. (One is all too familiar with the add-on demands made of minority faculty that are not borne by others.) Programs can become marginalized

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mental funding agencies have declared flatly that Asian Americans (with small exceptions) are ineligible for various kinds of support.

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(some would say ghettoized) but tolerated as political necessities. Some may "fail to live up to expectations" (especially for research, even if crowded out by other duties) and hence receive even less support—contributing to a vicious cycle of isolation and decline.

Resistance can also come from Asian (as opposed to Asian American) faculty on a campus, and from the "old" area studies—in this case Asian studies—which are generally well established and respected on campuses and dominated by non-Asians. These parties may feel a need to protect intellectual territory (an unfounded view, since Asian American studies sees itself more a part of American studies than Asian studies), or fear competition for university funds, and often feel discomfort with a field that links itself to other American minority groups and adopts an activist stance.

At the departmental level, resistance centers on issues of recruitment and retention of faculty. Positions assigned to Asian American studies often remain unfilled as "traditional" standards are invoked and questions related to the legitimacy of one's scholarship and teaching interests are raised, which inevitably

means that the minority and female candidate is not sufficiently qualified. Duke and the University of Wisconsin-Madison (with its "Madison Plan"), on the other hand, actively support the recruitment of women and minorities and are exceptions to the rule.

There is a terrible irony here: a pool of highly talented Asian Americans with relevant doctorates does indeed exist. But because elite universities were not looking over the years for what they had to offer, most took positions in second- and third-tier institutions, colleges where they had high teaching loads and many extra demands placed upon them. Today, they inevitably have slimmer publication records. And they are at institutions to which the elites seldom look in hiring. So it is that flagship institutions just can't seem to spot "qualified" candidates.

In addition, in an era of bottom lines and a cost-benefit view of education, institutions want assurances about outside sources of program support. Here Asian American studies is decidedly handicapped. Private foundations and key governmental funding agencies have declared flatly that Asian Americans (with small exceptions) are ineligible for various kinds of support, ranging from research funds to fellowships. Asian American objections to this—to their status as so-called "successful minorities" not requiring assistance—have not changed these policies. Thus, having been "defined out" of the funding opportunities open to other minority groups, Asian American scholars are left highly dependent on their own resources and their institutions for support.

The institutionalization of Asian American studies has its supporters. They, for the most part, originally viewed these programs as forms of compensatory education. Many now recognize, as Asian American scholars have argued, that Asian American studies speaks to an integral part of American history. There is a growing consensus about the multicultural origins of American development and an acceptance that *all* students need to know more about the ways that racial and ethnic groups, women, and different

classes participated in the shaping of the nation, including its ugly side. Concomitantly, to be a global citizen, today's graduate must be informed about the histories and cultures of other regions of the world.

Multicultural education has grown from the demand in the late '60s for separate programs to today's emphasis on "mainstreaming" or "balancing the curriculum," with readings and courses on the formerly excluded. Increasingly, the content and perspective of ethnic and women's studies are being incorporated into wider coursework, and more institutions are adopting such courses and some aspect of global studies as part of their general requirements. This direction has been wholeheartedly supported by Asian American studies faculty, who view the education of *all* Americans on the history, problems, and aspirations of Asian and Pacific American communities as essential and necessary. Today, being culturally literate includes multicultural competency.

Asian American studies has a solid future. There has even been a debate within the field as to whether some campus programs have become so institutionalized that they have become rigid, created their own standards, and feel a need to protect their legitimacy.

Asian American studies is finding broad potential in its national and international perspectives. In the first two decades, Asian Americanists concentrated on constructing national histories of the older communities, correcting misconceptions, and defining their experiences and cultural expressions. Greater attention is now being given to research on the newer Asian and Pacific American communities and on comparative and global perspectives of the Asian diaspora (this was the theme of the 1989 national conference of the Association for Asian American Studies).

The comparative approach has much to offer in clarifying the influences of culture, social structure, and policy making, not only for the Asian American experience but for development of communities globally. The potential range of studies is unlimited: between generations, regions, men and women, new and old Asian communities, and other Asian American groups. Comparative studies with other groups of Amer-

icans, particularly racial and ethnic minorities and women, has led to links with women's studies and other ethnic studies programs. A number of scholars are looking at inter-ethnic relations, including Asian American interactions with African Americans and Hispanic Americans—studies long overdue, given that in major American cities and the state of California these three minority groups together are the new majority.

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Graduate programs in ethnic studies could have a place in preparing the next generation of minority faculty in the humanities and social sciences — people who are needed immediately.

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The global perspective of Asian American studies places any tendency to interpret the Asian American experience as American exceptionalism in a new perspective. Asian Americans become part of international history, interconnected with all human development. The large contemporary Asian emigration (both as immigrants and refugees) and its effects on the politics, economies, and social structures of receiving countries around the world is contributing to a new interest in studying Asians in the diaspora. (There are sizeable overseas Asian communities—some old, some new, some old and new—in Canada, Australia, parts of the Caribbean, Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa, and now in Britain and the Middle East.)

Cross-national studies are also underway, comparing experiences in such areas as immigration and settlement policies, racial discrimination, aging, and ethnic entrepreneurship. This global dimension, which includes relations between the country of origin and the new home country, brings with it links to international and other area studies programs, such as Asian and Latin Amer-

ican studies. These create new opportunities for joint appointments in support of scholars with broad interests.

What should come next? Comparative studies at the domestic and international level could serve as a basis for doctoral programs. Without sacrificing undergraduate teaching, ethnic studies needs to become an object of graduate-level study. Indeed, much has been made of the lack of minority doctorates and of the shortage of available faculty for the 1990s. Graduate programs in ethnic studies could have a place in preparing the next generation of minority faculty in the humanities and social sciences—people who are needed immediately.

Finally, the demographic changes in America should be apparent to all. The Asian/Pacific American presence is permanent, growing, and diverse; more and more Americans will work and live alongside Asian/Pacific Americans. Asian American studies has a practical application and fulfills a major societal need. Its courses can help prepare the teachers, social workers, health-care professionals, civil servants, and others whose responsibilities will include sizeable Asian populations. I'm led to this conclusion by the responses from my students (most of whom are non-Asian) in my "Asian Immigrants in the American Educational System" and "Ethnic Issues in Counseling" courses at Hunter College. They tell me that what they learn to understand about the racial and immigrant experience in these and related courses enhances their capabilities in multiracial and multicultural environments.

What Asian American studies cannot do is solve racism, poverty, violence, and the other inequities in American society, nor can it solve America's trade imbalance. What it can do is provide opportunities for students to learn the reasons behind such injustices, and perhaps learn to work together to address some of its consequences. It can support research on some of the nation's most critical issues, and it can work with others to transform education and humanize the university. These are reasons enough for pressing ahead. □