

# THE STATE OF ETHNIC STUDIES

ASIAN & LATINO LABOR ACTIVISM ✦ THE NAACP AT 90 ✦ FUNK MUSIC & BLACK POWER

RACE  
CULTURE  
ACTION

# ColorLines

Summer, 1999 ■ \$2.95 US/\$3.95 Canada

**Images of South Africa  
In the Wake of Revolution**

**Anti-Arab Racism & US Foreign Policy**

**The U.K. Debates Race**

Hold until July 15, 1999





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This issue of *ColorLines* features a special section on Ethnic Studies.

Black, Native American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, and Asian American Studies were born thirty years ago. They were the product of massive, often violent, protest movements by students of color, including myself, throughout the country. Never before had students of color come into the leadership of the movement of college students. And never before had the study of race, racism, and peoples of color reached institutional status in U.S. universities.

Now thirty years have passed. How has Ethnic Studies survived? What current struggles for Ethnic Studies are students undertaking? And what are some of the issues and problems facing it today?

I try to address some of these questions in my article in this issue. José Calderon interviews one of the most influential figures in Chicano Studies, the great author and teacher Rodolfo Acuña, to get his take on some of the controversies in Chicano Studies, today's Chicano movement, and his own political development.

Jacqueline Keeler brings quite a different perspective to Ethnic Studies, discussing how Native American studies "is, by necessity, an act of self-preservation, a path of grieving, and a recovery of self" for many Indians.

And Julia Curry Rodríguez, Karleen Pendleton Jiménez, and Horacio Roque Ramírez discuss one of the most important shortcomings—and sources of vitality—in Ethnic Studies, namely the treatment and role of feminists and queers.

Also featured in this issue of *ColorLines* are three articles about international issues. Lamis Andoni, a renowned Palestinian journalist, exposes the crude anti-Arab racism that animates U.S. policy toward Iraq and Palestine. Gary Wiltshire discusses how the murder of Black Londoner Stephen Lawrence has set off a public debate about the tremendous rise in racist violence in the United Kingdom. And Tim McKee and Anne Blackshaw share their perceptions of changing race relations in South Africa in a photo essay.

This issue also contains two articles about the role of people of color in the attempt to revitalize the U.S. labor movement. Fernando Gapasin, one of the key figures in developing the Union Cities concept, discusses organizing efforts by Latino immigrant workers and the strategy of social movement unionism. Linelle Mogado writes about Asian labor activism and the work of the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA).

—Bob Wing

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RACE  
CULTURE  
ACTION

# ColorLines

Volume 2 ■ Number 2 ■ Summer 1999

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## Contributors

**Lalo Alcaraz**, "La Cucaracha." Lalo is an editorial cartoonist and political satirist based in Los Angeles. His strip, "La Cucaracha" ([www.lacucaracha.com](http://www.lacucaracha.com)), appears in the *LA Weekly*, and other publications.

**Lamis Andoni**, "Justifiable Deaths' Anti-Arab Racism and U.S. Foreign Policy." Lamis is a Jordanian journalist of Palestinian origin who covers the Arab world for the *Jordan Times*, the *Financial Times of London*, and the *Washington Post*. In 1994, Israel banned her from reporting in the Palestinian territories.

**Anne Blackshaw**, "Hanging on a Sunrise: South Africa in the Wake of Revolution." Anne works as a photographer and community activist. She is the photographer for *No More Strangers Now: Young Voices from a New South Africa* and is currently at work on a new book about young people.

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He spent 13 years as a community organizer and activist in the Chicano movement in Northern Colorado before receiving his doctorate in sociology from UCLA.

**Julia Curry Rodríguez**, "We are Women, Feminists, and Queers—Are We Ethnic Studies?" Julia holds a Ph.D. in sociology and is a research associate at the Chicano/Latino Policy Project at U.C. Berkeley. Her research area is immigrant women and children.

**Fernando Gapasin**, "Beyond the Wage Fight: Social Movement Unionism and Latino Immigrant Workers." Fernando is on the faculty at the Center for Labor Research and Education at UCLA and is past Secretary-Treasurer of the Santa Clara Central Labor Council. He was a key researcher for the AFL-CIO's Union City Program.

**Clarence Lusane**, "Which Way Forward: The NAACP at 90." Clarence is assistant professor of political science in the School of International Service at American University. His most recent book

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**Tim McKee**, "Hanging on a Sunrise: South Africa in the Wake of Revolution." Tim works for the Mutual Assistance Network of Del Paso Heights, a community-based non-profit in Sacramento. He is the author of *No More Strangers Now: Young Voices from a New South Africa* and is currently at work on a new book about young people.

**Linelle Mogado**, "From the Bottom Up: The New Asian Pacific Islander Labor Activists." Linelle is a former organizer with the Pilipino Workers Center of Southern California and recently completed an internship with the journal *Labor Notes* in Detroit. Linelle's writings have appeared in many Canadian publications and the anthology, *Expressions: A Celebration of Voice*.

**Karleen Pendleton Jiménez**, "We are Women, Feminists, and Queers—Are We Ethnic Studies?" Karleen is a Chicana lesbian writer who is self-exiled in Canada. She is the founder of the award winning Queer Players in San

Diego. She is seeking a publisher for her last novel, *Not Everyone Turns Pink Under the Sun*, and is at work on two more novels.

**Horacio Roque Ramírez**, "We Are Women, Feminists, and Queers—Are We Ethnic Studies?" Horacio is a doctoral candidate in Ethnic Studies at U.C. Berkeley and a lecturer at San Jose State University. His research focuses on queer/Latino(a) communities in San Francisco.

**Rickey Vincent**, "Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of The One." Rick teaches at the Black Studies Department in San Francisco State University. He also broadcasts "The History of Funk" Fridays on KPFA radio in Berkeley.

**Gary Wiltshire**, "Call Me a Bungling Incompetent—But Never a Racist' The United Kingdom Debates Racism." Gary is a consultant and writer based in England. He works exclusively in the non-profit sector and focuses mainly on organizational development and fundraising issues.

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I really like *ColorLines*, especially the last issue (Spring, 1999). But I also have a few suggestions.

To me, the article on Korean sex workers by Alexandra Suh, and to a lesser extent, the article on domestic violence organizing by Rinku Sen, are what I like the best in *ColorLines*. These articles are a little off the beaten path, and give a new lens from which to view the world. Talk about the seamy side of U.S. militarism! I also really like the article on Basquiat by Geoffrey Jacques.

On the other hand, I thought the special section on race and education was more solid than it was fresh or new. I understand that

this is important—where else but *ColorLines* can I find a special section on race and education with solid reporting and progressive politics? I hate to be picky, but I was still hoping for a little bit more. The article on vouchers came close, but I think it would have been more gripping if it included more (interesting) detail about the actual situation and cast of characters in Milwaukee.

I also think that *ColorLines* needs some regular columnists. Why don't you see if some of your great authors would be willing to do this? The only reason I ever read the *Nation* is to find out what Patricia Williams' has to say.

Last, what happened to the sports reporting? I really

liked that and think there are many stories that never make it into print except in a magazine like *ColorLines*.

Keep up the good work (but make some changes, too).

Juan Román  
Bronx, New York

### Write Us

**Submission Guidelines**  
We welcome letters to the editor. Letters must include the writer's name and contact information. We reserve the right to edit letters that we publish.

### ColorLines

Letters to the Editor  
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## Classified

### PARENT ORGANIZER / COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

**Mission:** The Alliance Organizing Project is a city-wide grassroots parent organization that is dedicated to building power for parents in Philadelphia. **Position Description:** Work to mobilize parents, organize direct action events, and empower parents to have real decision making power in school system policies. **Qualifications:** Candidates should have a minimum of one to two years experience organizing experience with an education reform organization, community organization, labor union, or political organization. **Salary:** Alliance offers a starting salary of \$30,000 plus full benefits. **To apply:** Send a cover letter and resume via fax to: Alliance Organizing Project, attention Silvana Mazzella, at (215) 625-9116

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The Community Coalition is a nonprofit organization that addresses problems associated with substance abuse by serving as a vehicle of social and political involvement for the people of South Los Angeles. The Community Coalition will conduct a grass-roots membership drive this spring to recruit hundreds of new members to join the organization as dues paying members.

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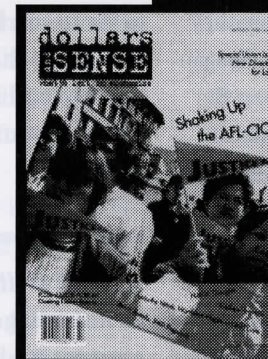
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## RaceFile

by Melia Franklin,  
ColorLines staff

### YWCA's Japantown Land Grab

A February 19 candlelight vigil commemorating the internment of the Japanese during WWII in San Francisco's Japantown turned into a noisy rally in protest of the YWCA. In a decidedly un-Christian move, the YWCA has been trying for the past three years to sell off the historic Japantown YWCA, which it has held in trust for a group of first-generation Japanese women since 1921.

The YWCA is, in effect, trying to steal a building worth over \$1.5 million from San Francisco's Japanese community. Because of California's Anti-Alien Initiative of 1921 (the Alien Land Law), which banned Japanese immigrants from owning or leasing land, the women from Japantown churches who raised the money for the site asked the YWCA to hold the land on their behalf until they could legally take title.

However, the YWCA put the building on the market in 1996, then withdrew the listing amid a storm of community protest. It has also threatened to close the site's programs for preschoolers and adolescent girls.

The Alien Land Law was declared unconstitutional in 1952, but the YWCA seems dead-set on applying its racist principles today. A

group of Japantown churches have filed suit against the YWCA to try to get it to release the deed to its rightful owners. The YWCA has responded with a flurry of technical reasons why the churches don't have a claim. For an organization whose motto is "working to empower women and eliminate racism," the YWCA is doing neither.

### Civil Rights for the Right

Tired of the American Civil Liberties Union's "leftward tilt"? How about the American Civil Rights Union? But before you sign up, you should know that the new ACRU opposes gun control, environmentally sound policies—and not surprisingly—racial equality. Equality under the law, it says, is a principle that "has been broadly undermined in American life today through racial quotas and preferences and other race conscious policies." Its policy board includes former Reagan cabinet members Robert B. Carleson and Edwin Meese III, arch-conservative Judge Robert Bork, and conservatives-of-color James Q. Wilson, Linda Chavez, and Joseph Perkins.

### Denny's Gives Racism the 'Grand Slam'

"Noticing a person's color doesn't make you a racist," intones a young black announcer in one of a series

of "anti-bias" advertisements paid for by Denny's restaurant chain. "Acting like it matters does." Of course, that's been Denny's big problem. If you're a person of color and come in for a "Grand Slam" breakfast special, you're likely to be given the bum's rush.

Denny's has had many such incidents over the past several years, including a highly publicized case in which Denny's managers harassed and refused service to a group of African Americans who just happened to be secret service agents. Denny's paid \$45.7 million five years ago to settle a discrimination suit brought by black customers, and has been the site of numerous racist incidents since then. The ads, which cost Denny's \$2 million, are aimed at changing the attitudes of Denny's 50,000 employees. Says David Magulies, a Dallas-based consultant to the chain: "It's to say to this huge, diverse work force that things have changed and if you haven't changed, you don't need to be here."

### By the Numbers

■ According to a recent government study, Native Americans are victims of violent crime at a rate that is twice the national average. And, contrary to all other groups, 70 percent of those committing violent crimes against Indians are of a dif-

ferent race. Whites commit 60 percent of these crimes.

■ About 1.4 million African American men—13 percent of the black adult male population in the U.S.—can't vote because they have been convicted of a crime, according to a study by Human Rights Watch. While most states allow ex-cons to vote after they have completed their parole or probation, 14 states prohibit ex-offenders from voting even after they have completed their sentences. In Florida, 1 in 3 black men are locked out of the voting booth because of past felony convictions.

■ In the two years since Congress passed the Illegal Immigration and Reform Responsibility Act, which granted the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) broad new powers, 300,000 immigrants have been deported. That's more than double the number of people deported in the two years prior to the new law. The INS is now the largest federal law enforcement agency, with more than 15,000 gun-toting officers authorized to make arrests. It's bigger than the FBI, the Bureau of Prisons, or the Drug Enforcement Administration. As INS spokesman Russell Bergeron Jr. puts it: "We apprehend and take into custody more people than any other agency in the world." **RACE**

# Which Way Forward?

## The NAACP at 90

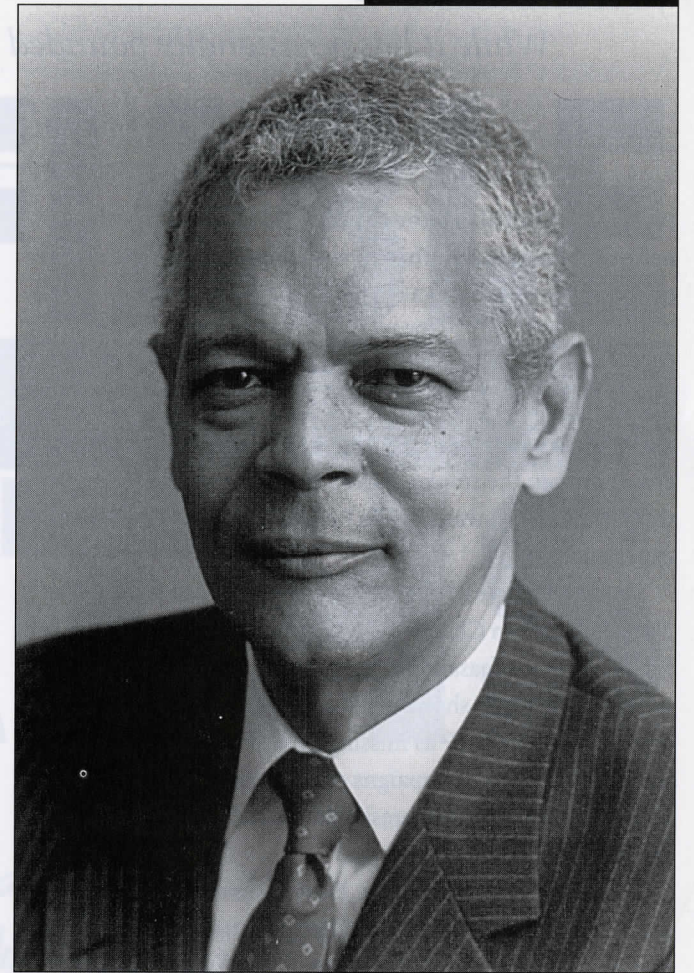
Can a resurgent NAACP meet the challenges of the coming millennium?

Clarence Lusane looks at the new NAACP.

Nine decades ago, the great scholar W.E.B. Du Bois and the nation's leading black and white liberals had a dream. They believed that they could construct a multi-racial, progressive organization that would be a permanent fighting machine on behalf of the African American community. They called that organization the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

This year, on its 90th anniversary, the NAACP has much to celebrate and perhaps much more to feel anxious about. Few organizations dedicated to social change can claim to have survived the relentless challenges from within and without that the NAACP has confronted. At the same time, the organization's historical goal of integration has little political resonance today and it is hesitant to address the political implications of widening class divisions among African Americans.

Clarence Lusane is assistant professor of political science at American University. His most recent book is *Race in the Global Era: African Americans at the Millennium*.



NAACP board chair, progressive stalwart Julian Bond, leads the organization into its tenth decade. Photo courtesy of Southern Regional Council.

Few remember that, for most of its history, the NAACP was considered an outlaw organization. Prior to the black urban uprisings of the 1960s, southern racists and J. Edgar Hoover's FBI viewed the NAACP as the most dangerous black group in the country. Members were beaten or killed; others were threatened with job loss. The offices of the NAACP were raided and bombed. The organization was accused of being communist-inspired (if not communist-controlled)—ironic, given the anti-communist posture of its leadership—and was banned in many southern states.

Yet, the NAACP did not flinch. With thousands of members in hundreds of chapters, the NAACP was on the front line of the struggle to end racial violence and American Apartheid. It successfully fought battle after battle against Jim Crow segregation, culminating in the historic 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision that effectively moved the nation into the modern social era. The *Brown* decision will be remembered as one of the most significant Supreme Court rulings of the 20th century.

The NAACP's efforts made the nation not only more



*While it has occasionally pounded its chest, the NAACP has produced no sustained analysis and criticism of Clinton's policies.*

racially free, but also more democratic. It was one of the few national organizations that allowed white anti-racists an opportunity to work in a cross-racial environment.

In the 1960s and 1970s, radical activists—from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to the Black Panther Party—emerged, and many thought the NAACP was too conciliatory and conservative to lead the black community in the post-segregation era. Yet, when the smoke of the 1960s cleared, the NAACP was left standing, wounded to be sure, but mature and war-experienced.

The 1980s and early 1990s were anything but rosy for the NAACP. The Ben Chavis leadership fiasco and ineptitude and high-profile malfeasance by some board members rocked the organization. Polls showed that many African Americans perceived the NAACP as missing in action on the critical political issues and campaigns of the period, from Jesse Jackson's sprints for the presidential nomination to resisting the government's war on drugs.

Fast forward to the present. Having survived embarrassing scandals and replaced the old administration, the NAACP is now enjoying a debt-free resurgence, a growth in membership, a new and respected leadership at all levels, and a cozy relationship with President Clinton and the Democratic Party. Indeed, the swearing-in ceremony of Kweisi Mfume to head the NAACP took place at the Department of Justice. The legitimizing of the NAACP demonstrates a political strength that few institutions dedicated to social change ever achieve. But this renewal also may mean that the organization is too close to those in power.

The NAACP, and other black leaders, have been reluctant to take the Clinton administration to task for its compromising stances on issues like crime or welfare. While it has occasionally pounded its chest, the NAACP has produced no sustained analysis and criticism of Clinton's policies that promise much, deliver little, and smell suspiciously like something from an Arkansas cow patch. It has shown no independent political initiative.

Perhaps this is too much to expect of the organization. Yet, in the past, the NAACP's board of directors included the nation's foremost scholars, political leaders, and activists of all colors. It also produced a wide range of groundbreaking studies. Neither of these dimensions characterize today's NAACP.

Compared to the past, the issues of the 1990s are much more complex and demanding—ranging from the crisis of AIDS, to the growing imprisonment of blacks and Latinos, to

the ravages of economic globalization. All of these issues and more are banging on the door of the NAACP.

Internally, the organization is debating whether it should be engaged in issues that impact only or primarily African Americans or whether to widen its focus. A debate over coalition politics has surfaced in the pages of *The Crisis*, the NAACP's news magazine. The NAACP board chair, the progressive and nearly legendary Julian Bond, argues for supporting the struggles of others, and against those who call for a retreat to a black-first, if not black-only, strategy. That some of the NAACP's black middle-class base should resist coalition politics is not surprising. Surveys show that middle-class African Americans have historically been more nationalist than working class and poor blacks.

The NAACP is also struggling with the question of who is "colored"—especially since some mixed-raced individuals now resist the "one-drop" rule that places anyone with any black heritage only in the African American racial box. The NAACP was in the middle of the political debate over whether the 2000 Census should have included the category "multiracial." While arguing correctly that inclusion of the category would dilute African American political power regarding reapportionment and distribution of federal aid, the issue of mixed-raced politics will not go away and remains on the agenda for now and the future.

Also, the growth of "black" communities in the United States from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa makes the concept of "African American" too restrictive for some.

Finally, and maybe most important, gender issues demand as high a priority as any issue facing the African American community and the nation as a whole. But nothing resembling a feminist consciousness can be discerned from the political projects and discourse of the NAACP leadership. These emerging concerns will only grow in importance in the coming years and will require a rethinking of present political vision, strategy, and agenda on the part of civil rights and black organizations.

An institution as resilient as the NAACP is not going to go away soon. Reports of its death are greatly exaggerated. But it must become more than an appendage—albeit a progressive one—of the Democratic Party. If it is to rise to the challenges of the moment and those yet unknown, the NAACP must reposition itself to the left of Clintonism and grapple with the complex and difficult issue of 21st century coalition politics. **RACE**

# JUSTIFIABLE

*Anti-Arab Racism and U.S. Foreign Policy*

# DEATHS

*Renowned Arab journalist  
Lamis Andoni argues  
that U.S. policy toward  
the Arab world is  
driven by racism.*

In an interview with "CBS Sixty Minutes," U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was asked if the death of more than 5,000 Iraqi children per month as a result of the U.S. embargo of Iraq was justifiable. Without hesitating, Secretary Albright answered "yes."

Vice President Al Gore's first public act when he went to Palestine in 1995 was to praise the creation of the

Palestinian State Security Court as "an important step forward in helping to build confidence for the peace process." Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch both call for the dismantling of the court, which, they say, denies due process of law to the Palestinians.

Recently, the U.S. and Israel were the only countries that voted against a United Nations resolution to hold an international meeting to force Israel and other countries to adhere to the 1949 Fourth Geneva convention that protects people and land under occupation.

These and other U.S. policies toward Iraq, Palestine, and the rest of the Arab world display a pattern of total disregard for the Arab

people's national, civil, and human rights—indeed, for their very humanity. Such disregard serves the U.S. desire to impose its idea of "stability" and "peace"—code words for preserving U.S. interests—upon the Arab people.

## **No Rights a Westerner Need Respect**

It is naive to assume that the U.S. would value human rights and democratic values over the quest for domination and expansion of world markets. However, the flagrant nature of official American indifference to human lives and suffering in many countries of the developing world goes deeper than that.

Lamis Andoni is a Jordanian journalist of Palestinian origins who has covered the Arab world for *The Jordan Times*, *The Financial Times* of London, the *Washington Post* and the *Christian Science Monitor*.



In the case of the Arab world, U.S. policy is a particularly lethal combination of control and contempt. The U.S. prizes the region's oil and strategic geopolitical location. It values and protects Israeli supremacy. It supports and rewards Arab leaders who go against the will of their own people. The U.S. sanctions systematic human rights violations when they serve its own perceived interests.

The U.S. has made it utterly clear that, in the pursuit of its interests in the Middle East, the peoples of the region simply

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## In the case of the Arab world, U.S. policy is a particularly lethal combination of control and contempt.

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do not count. The underlying assumption of U.S. policy is that Arabs do not comprehend "western values," and therefore human rights, equality, and freedom do not apply. In conversations with American officials and news makers, I am often told that it is unrealistic and idealistic to expect solutions that are based on freedom and equality for the problems of the region. Marvin Kalb, a prominent analyst at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, told me that these values "are not applicable" to the Arab world.

The U.S. often cites the absence of democracy in the Arab states to justify U.S. policies in the region. Such arguments are disingenuous.

First, most of these governments are backed by the U.S. government, which frequently encourages them to curb popular opposition, especially because that opposition is usually directed at U.S. policies in the region. Secondly, this argument ignores the struggle of the Arab people against repression and for freedom. The huge number of political detainees in Arab jails is a testament to this ongoing struggle, a struggle that has never been recognized, let alone supported, by the U.S. government.

The view that only westerners understand and cherish freedom, equality, and dignified life is part of the dehumanization of the Arab people that sanitizes U.S. actions and policies. This nakedly racist attitude is unquestioned and even perpetuated by the U.S. media that uncritically echo the official justifications for U.S. policies in Iraq and Palestine.

### Sanctioning Death in Iraq

This same racism underpins current U.S. policies in Iraq. The eight years of U.S. sanctions are usually defended as necessary to check Saddam Hussein's aggression against his neighbors and his own people. At the same time, U.S. officials contend that Iraq still poses a military threat to its neighbors. But if the sanctions have failed to stem the "Iraqi threat," why maintain them? Even if the sanctions had produced any "success," which is doubtful, the question is—at what price to the Arab people? The U.S. government and media never even feel the need to pose this question, because the lives of Arabs do not count.

Last October, Dennis Halliday, the Chief UN Relief Coordinator for Iraq and former Assistant Secretary of the UN, quit his post in protest of the continued sanctions. In his letter of resignation, he stated: "I can find no legitimate justification for sustaining economic sanctions under these circumstances. To do so in my view is to disregard the high principle of the United Nations' Charter, the Convention of Human Rights, the very moral leadership and the credibility of the United Nations itself."

Later, Mr. Halliday drew a bleak picture of how sanctions have deprived the Iraqis of adequate nutritional intake, balanced diet, electrical power, and potable water—causing widespread death of children and malnutrition. According to the World Health Organization, between six and seven thousand children under five years old die each month as a result of the sanctions. Halliday believes the real number could be much higher because in rural areas many deaths are never recorded.

Since January of this year, the situation has been aggravated by the daily U.S. and British bombing of Iraq—which the U.S. press has felt free to ignore. Many power stations, telecommunications systems, and civilian buildings have been targeted and destroyed. In January, the raids caused a three-day disruption of an oil pipeline that Iraq needs to honor the UN-authorized oil-for-food agreement. According to the United Nations, the bombing has already deprived Iraq of \$600 million in oil revenues that would have been used to buy food and medicine.

But Secretary Albright never questions whether the deaths are worth it. To the Arab world, her words are reminiscent of colonial days. Albright is sending the message that the U.S. will stop at nothing, not even the mass murder of Arab children, to assert its control of the region and its oil resources.

### Israeli Humans vs. Palestinian Terrorists?

In the Palestine peace process, U.S. racism presents itself in continuous double standards and bias in favor of Israel and against the Palestinians.

Above all, anti-Arab racism finds expression in the hundreds of billions of dollars the U.S. has given to ensure Israeli military superiority in the region, despite decades of Israeli use of murderous force against the Palestinians and other Arabs. The U.S. doesn't even care that Israel has illegally developed a nuclear weapons capability. Meanwhile, the U.S. government and media use the smallest and most defensive military action by the Palestinians as proof that Arabs are nothing but terrorists. In the racist mind, "Arab" and "terrorist" are inextricably intertwined.

At the start of the Oslo peace process, the U.S. restated that one of its main goals is to guarantee and maintain the strategic military superiority of Israel. This goal undermines the possibility of a just peace since the power balance basically determines the outcome of the negotiations.

When it comes to land, the double standard is clear. According to the U.S. government, the Palestinians, who have lived in Palestine for hundreds of years, have no rights, while the 20th century Israeli settler colonialists are recognized as the rightful owners. Even with the peace process underway, the U.S. still guarantees Israel the right to unilaterally determine the timing and the size of lands it will retain or give back to the Palestinians. At the same time, it gives Israel the green light to continue expropriating additional Palestinian lands.

To add insult to injury, the U.S. now supports Israeli demands that the Palestinian Authority guarantee Israeli security as a condition for the continuation of the peace process. Emboldened by this support, Israel now demands that the Palestinian Authority ban any "negative references" to Israel in the Palestinian media and academic curricula! Backed by the U.S., Israel feels free to deny basic freedom of expression to the Palestinians, and to force them to rewrite the history of Israeli dispossession of their own homelands.

By pressuring the Palestinian Authority to suppress its own people, the U.S. and Israel suggest that Palestinians have no rights even in their own homeland. This racist disdain is further amplified by the U.S. description of repression of Palestinians as "confidence building measures" to guarantee the security of Israeli citizens. At the same time, the U.S. refuses to demand that the Israelis extend the same

kind of assurances and protections to the Palestinians, who remain the target of Israeli army harassment, shooting, demolition of homes, and expropriations of lands.

Nor will the U.S. allow the Palestinians recourse to the United Nations or international law to assert their basic human rights. The U.S. continues to block the Palestinians from invoking international laws, the United Nations' Charter, and/or international human rights conventions to claim their rights at the negotiating table. From the outset of the peace talks, the U.S. has opposed Arab demands that Israel be obligated to implement UN resolutions or abide by international law, thereby leaving the Palestinians at the mercy of the Israeli military.

This position coincides with the broader U.S. denial of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, which is a right guaranteed by the United Nations Charter—to which, of course, the U.S. was a founding signatory.

These and many other myopic U.S. policies are creating wide resentment and hatred among Arabs that could disrupt the very stability that the U.S. is supposedly trying to achieve. Most Arab governments are trying to keep their

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## Secretary Albright is sending the message that the U.S. will stop at nothing, not even the mass murder of Arab children, to assert its control of the region.

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people under tight control to prevent an outburst. They enhance security and ban gatherings every time the U.S. bombs Iraq or any other Arab target.

But by showing such contempt for the Arab people, the U.S. is further fomenting a tension that could erupt in its face. Every time I go back to Amman or to Jerusalem, I sense the simmering anti-U.S. tension. Violence will surely take the place of dialogue if the U.S. continues to insist on imposing its racist dictates through its military supremacy in the region. **RACE**



## Police brutality is forcing England to confront its understanding of racism and what to do about it. Gary Wiltshire examines the debate.

**B**lack Londoner Stephen Lawrence was stabbed to death at a bus stop in front of friends in 1993. When the police arrived, they made a cursory check to see if he was breathing, then concentrated their attention on questioning the eye-witnesses, who were also black. The police were convinced that Stephen was the victim of a black gang-related fight. The witnesses said Lawrence was attacked by white youths. The police refused to listen, left Stephen to bleed to death, and the white murderers escaped. Now, the UK government has issued a report about the incident that is inflaming public debate about race. The

# "Call me a bungling incompetent BUT NEVER A RACIST"

## The United Kingdom Debates Racism

product of the indomitable persistence of Stephen Lawrence's parents, the report analyzes the collective failure of the London police force in this case. Lawrence's parents, backed by much of the black community, turned the incident into a public indictment of racism in the police force.

The UK has chronically failed to pursue racist crime. Since the Lawrence murder, there have been at least 20 other racist murders and few convictions. Government figures identify 13,151 racist incidents in the last twelve months alone. Other surveys suggest a much higher figure. The simple act of setting up a Racial and Violent Crimes Task Force in September, 1998 resulted in a 68 percent rise in notified racial offenses within six months.

Despite the rise in racist crime, there is little legal redress. The only piece of specifically anti-racist legislation in the UK, the 1976 Race Relations Act, does not even apply to the police or other public services.

*Gary Wiltshire is a consultant and writer based in England who was born and raised in the community in which Stephen Lawrence was murdered.*

The senior black Member of Parliament, Bernie Grant, has called the response to the Lawrence report "the last chance for British society to tackle racism and push for racial equality. The black community is giving British society a last chance." The two-year-old Labour Party government of Tony Blair is touting its determination to solve the problem.

### Public Debate over Racism

The Lawrence report has fueled a public debate over what racism is, and what British society and institutions like the police need to do to eliminate it. The current furor centers on the Lawrence report's statement that: "The conclusions to be drawn from all the evidence in connection with [this] racist murder are clear. The investigation was marred by a combination of professional incompetence, institutional racism, and a failure of leadership by senior officers."

The phrase "institutional racism" is the source of the uproar. Sir Paul Condon, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police (the head of the police force in London), announced he would accept the conclusions of the report only if the definition of "racism" in the UK were changed. The previous working notion of "racism" dates from a 1982 report on a series of riots sparked by police brutality and defined it as intentional actions motivated by overt racial bigotry.

So, by placing the word "institutional" in front of this understanding of "racism," the Lawrence report opened the entire police department to charges of conscious racial prejudices and actions, and to strong corrective measures. Hence Sir Paul's protests.

### Blame all, Blame No One?

In response to Sir Paul, Sir William MacPherson, author of the Lawrence report, issued the following definition of institutional racism: "Institutional Racism consists of the collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, atti-

tudes, and behavior which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people."

Although acknowledging "institutional racism" may some day prove a blessing to the fight for racial justice in the UK, in the current context it is being used to let the police department off the hook. The idea that any racism involved was "unwitting" means that neither the department as a whole nor any individuals can be held accountable. Sir Paul is willing to be labeled bungling, incompetent, ignorant, and unwittingly racist, so long as no one loses their job. The message MacPherson seems to be sending is: "You can keep your job—just go to diversity training."

Indeed Sir Paul did so, with the fulsome praise of the Blair government for his commitment to "stamping out racism."

What the police, in responding to the Lawrence report, are unwilling to deal with is that their racism was part of, and amplified, their incompetence.

The slow response of the police on the night of the murder allowed the killers to get away and the immediate evidence to dissipate. The police then waited days before arresting the white thugs identified by an eyewitness. There was evidence that one of the investigating officers had a connection to a suspect's father and worked with him to cover up the incident.

Eventually, because the police devalued Lawrence's life and failed to collect the damning evidence, the two young suspects brought to public trial were released and all charges were dropped. The victim's parents then brought a private suit against the two boys and three other accomplices. It was this private trial that, despite resistance, lying, and cover-ups by the police, revealed the unlawful death and the racist role of the police in the injustice and finally led to the commissioning of the Lawrence report.

Denouncing institutional racism is unquestionably a good thing, especially in this age of conservatism. But holding institutions and people accountable for it is quite another. It is such accountability that most UK black organizations demand.

### Political Roots of Racism

If the police are escaping accountability in this controversy, they are doing so with the complicity of the Blair government.

First, when the Lawrence report was leaked to the press,

the Blair government got an injunction against release of the details of the report, fearing the matter would get out of its control. The government has agreed to include the police within the Race Relations Act, but says it cannot produce the necessary legislation for at least three years. In the meantime, the government proposes to combat racism in the police force by sending undercover black police officers into the force to detect racist comments among their colleagues.

In London, 20 percent of the population is black, mostly from Africa or the West Indies, or Asian, mainly from the Indian sub-continent, yet 97 percent of police officers are white. The police are formally accountable only to



*This police recruitment poster reads: "Do you see a policeman chasing a criminal? Or a policeman harassing an innocent person? Wrong both times. It's two police officers ... and it's a good illustration of why we're looking for more recruits from ethnic minorities." Photo by Allan Clear, Impact Visuals.*

Parliament. But institutional racism in the police force is matched by the disempowerment of racial and ethnic minorities in Parliament.

There are 3.4 million black, Asian, or minority ethnic people in Britain, yet the first black Member of Parliament (MP) was not elected until 1987. Today, out of 651 MPs, only 5 are black. Yet the Blair government tells the people to continue to place their trust in people in high places and, as is traditional in the UK, most of the public apparently does. But as Benjamin Zephaniah, the black British poet said, "it's no good knowing people in high places if they are not your friends." **RACE**

*The full report on Stephen Lawrence's murder is at <http://www.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/4262.htm>*



# On the Wrong Side

## Chinese Americans Win Anti-Diversity Settlement—and Lose in the End

A small group of Chinese Americans forced San Francisco's public schools to roll back twenty years of racial integration. Jeff Chang looks at the racial politics of Lowell High School.

By all accounts, San Francisco's Lowell High School is one of the nation's top public high schools. To many, especially Asian Americans, attending the highly competitive magnet school is a symbol of achievement and a source of pride. "I thought my daughter could get a quality education and be challenged," says Jean Ishibashi, the parent of a Japanese-Chicana Lowell student.

More important, Lowell—the state's top feeder school into the University of California system—is seen as a door to that increasingly scarce resource—access to elite universities. The school has long been the site of bitterly contested battles over educational access.

In February, a small group of Chinese Americans, supported by anti-affirmative action right-wingers, won a settlement in a lawsuit over Lowell's admissions policies—overturning three decades of integration efforts in San Francisco's schools. As a result, 50 percent fewer blacks and Latinos will enter Lowell next year—including only a handful of black males in an entering freshman class of over 600.

Asian American and other critics call the group's efforts narrow, selfish, and hypocritical—and bound to inflame racial tensions. "Chinese Americans are being used as a proxy of anti-affirmative action and anti-integration viewpoints, which ultimately increase discrimination against our community," says Diane Chin of Chinese for Affirmative Action. "This case is a tremendous setback for coalition politics," says Henry Der, the California State Deputy Superintendent of Education Equity, Access, and Support.

### Chinese Americans Swing Right

Lowell admits most of its students based on grades and test scores, but since a 1983 federal consent decree, Lowell has also had to ensure integration of its student body. The consent decree—the result of a lawsuit filed by the NAACP—

allowed no single ethnic group to constitute more than 45 percent of the student body at neighborhood schools, and 40 percent at magnet schools, and required each San Francisco school to enroll students from at least four of nine defined ethnic/racial groups.

"The plan represented our best thinking at the time," says Albert Cheng, who oversaw integration efforts for the San Francisco Unified School District through the early '80s. "We knew that if we did not desegregate Lowell High School, the school would have been dominantly Asian and white."

But in 1992, some Chinese American parents began to argue that the consent decree discriminated against them because it capped Chinese enrollments, thereby forcing them to have higher grades and test scores than whites in order to be admitted to Lowell. Some began to discuss suing the school district. But Asian American civil rights organizations—who could see that Lowell was already over 50 percent ethnic Chinese and 70 percent Asian American—worried that it could be fodder for affirmative action opponents.

Instead, the parents found a sympathetic hearing from Asian conservatives, especially the Chinese American Democratic Club—a group which, interestingly, also works to increase minority affirmative action in government contracts. The Asian American Legal Foundation was formed in part to support the parents' lawsuit, which was filed in 1994. Ward Connerly trumpeted the plight of the Lowell plaintiffs as he stumped for anti-affirmative action Proposition 209 in 1996.

In February, lawyers for the parents and the NAACP unveiled an eleventh-hour settlement which overturned the sixteen-year-old consent decree and ended San Francisco's use of racial considerations in student assignment. When the settlement was announced, Amy Chang of the Legal Foundation crowed, "The era of racial bean-counting is over." Roland Quan of the Chinese American Democratic Club was even more triumphal. "This is a solution," he said, with little apparent irony, "for the 21st Century."

### From Anti-Asian Quotas to Anti-Affirmative Action Sentiments

The settlement was also characterized as "an end to racial quotas" and a victory for Asian Americans. But the origin of the fight against anti-Asian quotas goes back to battles during the 1980s between liberal elite university leaders and Asian American progressives.

By 1984, Asian American progressives noticed anti-Asian quotas at many elite universities, including those with strong pro-affirmative action leadership—such as Ira Michael Heyman's Berkeley, Derek Bok's Harvard, and Bill Bowen's Princeton. After white alumni began to complain about increasingly diverse campuses, university leaders seemed to cap Asian admissions at no more than 20 percent of the student body.

Led by Berkeley professor Ling-chi Wang, Asian American progressives pressured these universities to review their policies. Audits at Brown, Stanford, Harvard, and U.C. Berkeley later confirmed that campus officials made secretive decisions that negatively impacted Asians' chances of being admitted. Asian admits were required to have higher test and grade scores than whites, giving whites a distinct advantage in a supposedly open competition for admission. (Not surprisingly, after the audits were made public, Asian admissions usually leaped.)

But liberal pro-affirmative action officials would not acknowledge that they were trying to prop up white admissions. Instead, they characterized the admissions process as a battle between Asian Americans and other students of color. As then-Chancellor Ira Michael Heyman insisted, if Berkeley were to accommodate more Asian Americans, it would have to admit fewer African Americans and Latinos.

Wang was chilled by this line. Berkeley officials, he realized, would sacrifice affirmative action before allowing white enrollments to drop further. Worse, these liberals were forcing Asian American parents to view affirmative action for blacks and Latinos as counter to their own interests.

"The most important thing we learned is that when we push Asian American issues we have to be conscious about the issues of other minorities as well. We tried hard to make sure that we were not in any way undermining the University's commitment to affirmative action," he says. "But with the Lowell situation, the people who pushed for the lawsuit really did not have that kind of consciousness. They only see themselves as discriminated against."

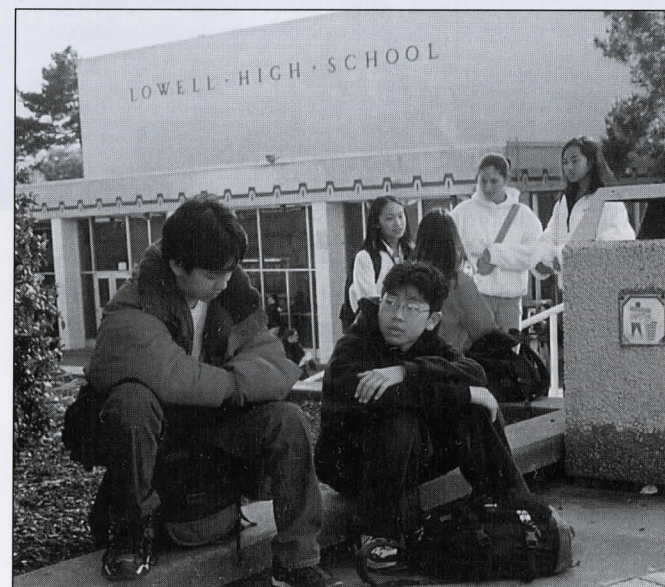
At the time of the 1983 consent decree, African American students were the largest ethnic group in the San Francisco school district, and the most racially isolated. Now Chinese Americans are the largest ethnic group, making up a quarter

of the district—and over half of Lowell High. "When you have a situation like that, you are bound to antagonize racially the whites and the blacks alike. They will say, 'Well, when is it enough for you guys?'" says Wang. "What about the thousands of kids in the other fifteen high schools who are getting nothing?"

### Funding Problems and Race Proxies

Carol Kocivar, president of the San Francisco PTA, laments her city's education funding: "We don't have the basic resources for kids in schools. You name it, we don't have it." But because of the settlement, \$37 million in federal desegregation funds—12 percent of the school district's budget—could disappear by 2003. Diane Chin, director of Chinese for Affirmative Action, argues: "The end of the consent decree may make it easier for middle-class Chinese children to attend Lowell, but the rest of the school district will have far fewer resources to address the educational needs of low-income, disadvantaged children."

The Lowell settlement comes at a time when racial resegregation in public schools is returning to pre-integration era levels. At 27 of San Francisco's 107 public schools, one ethnic group predominates, exceeding the consent decree's limit of 45 percent of the school's population. Most of these racially



San Francisco's Lowell High School is over 50% Chinese American and 70% Asian American, yet Chinese parents recently sued to end court-ordered desegregation. Photo by Kahlil Jacobs-Fantauzzi.

segregated schools are not desirable magnet schools, but underfunded schools in segregated neighborhoods. But because of the settlement, the district can no longer collect mandatory information about students' racial backgrounds—



data that is necessary to determine the extent of segregation.

Many privately predict that Lowell may soon become almost all Chinese. Even Kocivar, who sits on the Lowell admissions board, is pessimistic. While Latinos make up 20 percent and African Americans make up 18 percent of the city's public school population, Kocivar notes that

tant," says Michael Harris of the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights, one of the lawyers who helped negotiate the settlement.

But when the University of California did the same thing, African American and Latino enrollments at the highly competitive Berkeley campus dropped by half. School officials confirm that a similar drop will occur at Lowell next year. "You can't

is the harm that was done to Patrick Wong?" asks Der.

The greatest irony, Der believes, is that a Lowell education may actually reduce the chances of stellar students to move on to elite colleges. Although Lowell's student body is among the best in the state, research done by Rowena Robles, Kyung-Hwan Mo, and Mariam Araujo shows that at least 43 percent of

be concentrating their target at Lowell. The target is other schools, where the vast majority of Asians are," says Ling-chi Wang. Der feels the Chinese American "obsession" with Lowell—and the lawsuit and settlement that have been the result of it—reflect badly on the entire Asian American community. To him, these sentiments are short-sighted and selfish.

Some Chinese American

Chinese American parents argued that they were forced to have higher grades and test scores than whites. But Asian civil rights organizations worried that the case could be fodder for affirmative action opponents

Lowell's applicant pool last year was only 7 percent Latino, and less than 4 percent African American. She says, "Unless we use indicia that's going to pick up more minority students, we will continue to grapple with lower numbers of underrepresented minorities at the school."

San Francisco Unified School District is now proposing to substitute geographic and economic class considerations as proxies for race. "The District is free to give any kind of preference it wants to poor students, or students who live in public housing or use Section 8. Under the new plan that the District is now developing, I believe these types of things will be much more impor-

resolve racial discrimination without racial considerations," says Francis Calpultura, co-director of the Center for Third World Organizing.

#### Settlement Doesn't Solve The Problem

While the Lowell lawsuit has been settled, the underlying problems remain. "None of the three plaintiffs ever proved that they were discriminated against. In fact, I don't believe that they had a case," says Henry Der. Only one of the student plaintiffs, Patrick Wong, was actually turned down by Lowell. Wong was admitted to Abraham Lincoln High School, and went on to excel at the University of California at Irvine. "What

Lowell's class of 2000 has a GPA of 3.0 or less. These students may not even attain minimum University of California standards of eligibility. The result is a school whose culture is defined by intense competition and high stress.

Tram Vo-Kumamoto's parents pushed her to attend Lowell. "I was one of those students who excelled in middle school and did not excel at Lowell. I had college counselors that told me I couldn't go anywhere," she says. Vo-Kumamoto went to City College of San Francisco and then transferred to U.C. Berkeley. Parents say cheating, truancy, and depression are endemic problems at Lowell.

"Asian parents should not

parents have often behaved "as if students of other racial backgrounds cannot or do not deserve to benefit from a Lowell education," says Der. He worries the plaintiffs' success will fuel growing Chinese American intolerance against other minorities, especially blacks.

"What is really sad about just cramming a few more Chinese [into Lowell]—who may, in fact, not end up at Berkeley or Harvard or Stanford—is that all the low-income Asians will not have the benefit of consent decree support," says Der. "The Chinese American Democratic Club does not care about those students. They only care about their own students and that's what this is all about." **RACE**

# Educate to Liberate!

## Multiculturalism and The Struggle For Ethnic Studies

Now that multiculturalism is in vogue, should Ethnic Studies declare victory? ColorLines editor Bob Wing looks at the struggles that have shaped thirty years of Ethnic Studies.

*Photo courtesy of The Daily Californian.*

Thirty years ago, students of color at San Francisco State College called a strike demanding a Third World College. The authorities deployed up to ten thousand armed men almost every day for more than two months to crush the Third World strike, but the students prevailed—and Ethnic Studies was born. Similar battles erupted at Berkeley, Columbia, Cornell, and other white universities throughout the country.

Despite almost constant attacks by hostile politicians, administrators, and academics over the last three decades, Ethnic Studies has endured. As one of the few spoils of student wars that has been institutionalized, Ethnic Studies today probably occupies a more prominent place in U.S. aca-

*Bob Wing is editor of ColorLines. He participated in the Third World strike which led to the founding of Ethnic Studies at U.C. Berkeley in 1969 and later taught in that department. Research assistance was supplied by Ryan Pintado-Vertner and Impact Research.*

dem and intellectual life than at any time in history.

But the years of struggle have also taken their toll. Lodged within white universities and bereft of powerful social movements, Ethnic Studies has increasingly submitted to academia's elitist rules, rewards, and punishments.

How has Ethnic Studies survived? What remains of its original mission? What struggles shape Ethnic Studies today?

#### "No More Sambos!"

I was a wide-eyed seventeen-year-old freshman when I joined the Third World strike at U.C. Berkeley in January of 1969. There were few students of color on campus then, and whites exercised a virtual monopoly on the truth. W.E.B. Du Bois, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Baldwin had no place in the university pantheon. The theory that slavery had turned all blacks into Sambos was wildly popular in the history department.

I was drawn to the activists of color, many fresh from civil



rights and anti-Vietnam War battlegrounds. Inspired by groups like the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, and the Young Lords, students of color took the lead in critiquing universities as elitist institutions complicit with the system of white supremacy at home and abroad.

The Ethnic Studies movement had several goals. Activists of color saw Ethnic Studies as part of an attempt to transform the racist educational system from the ground up. Standing for unity among peoples of color, they demanded an education relevant to struggles for racial justice at home and abroad and for programs that would serve as powerful bases for launching and supporting student and community organizing. They wanted programs that would engage in pioneering, interdisciplinary scholarship for and by people of color. And they fought for autonomy to set their own educational standards, hire and fire faculty, and to admit students. They envisioned that the programs would be controlled by students and community, along with the faculty.

It was this radical agenda that authorities across the country feared, to the point of massive armed intervention.



Nonetheless, by 1971, students had won Black Studies programs at over 500 schools and got nearly 1,300 schools to offer at least one Ethnic Studies course. For many, it was the first time education seemed relevant and empowering. Ethnic Studies saved Charles Jackson, who first discovered it at San Mateo Junior College in the early seventies. "Ethnic Studies made sense out of my life and motivated me to graduate," says Jackson, now a successful optometrist.

However, by 1972, the ongoing resistance of administrators, politicians, and conservative intellectuals were joining together into a powerful counter-attack. They castigated Ethnic Studies as balkanized bastions of self-imposed isolation for students of color, shoddy scholarship, and unqualified professors. They succeeded in purging radicals, and shutting down infant programs. By the time I started working in Ethnic Studies in 1974, only 200 such programs remained.

#### Multiculturalism of Varying Hues

Ethnic Studies suffered further attacks in the Reagan years, but the tide began to turn at the end

of the 1980s. The demographic growth of peoples of color far outpaced whites. By 1980, the number of blacks in college reached 1.1 million, up from 75,000 in 1953. Between 1976 and 1993, the number of Asian American college students grew from 198,000 to 724,000. By 1993, 1 million Latinos attended college.

These students used their increased numbers to revive the Ethnic Studies movement. "The 'diversity movement' built off the momentum of the Rainbow Coalition and the anti-apartheid movements of the mid-1980s," says former student leader Sumi Cho, now a law professor at DePaul University. "Students demanded the establishment of new Ethnic Studies programs and organized to make Ethnic Studies courses a requirement for college graduation."

Ethnic Studies scholars simultaneously seized on these demographic shifts to push for ideological shifts. Multiculturalism of varying political hues came into vogue. Progressive versions recognized the historical contributions of peoples of color to U.S. society and culture, and emphasized ongoing racism. White liberals and moderates, including many university administrators, utilized the idea of

multiculturalism to obscure racism and to promote tokenism in a new guise. Then there is corporate multiculturalism, which uses elements of ethnic culture and images of people of color as marketing devices and replaces anti-racism with management diversity training.

In the last two decades, students and Ethnic Studies scholars have clearly had a substantial impact. Today, 700 colleges in this country have some kind of Ethnic Studies program. Despite a powerful counterattack by academic conservatives against any kind of multiculturalism or "political correctness," no institution of higher learning today can claim elite academic status unless it has an African American Studies program.

But the autonomy and self-determination that Ethnic Studies originally sought have been elusive at best. To fend off attacks from more conservative forces, Ethnic Studyists must often try to ally with white politicians, administrators, and academics who are committed to some kind of multiculturalism. There are opportunities in this alliance, but significant dangers as well, as the experience of U.C. Berkeley and Harvard show.



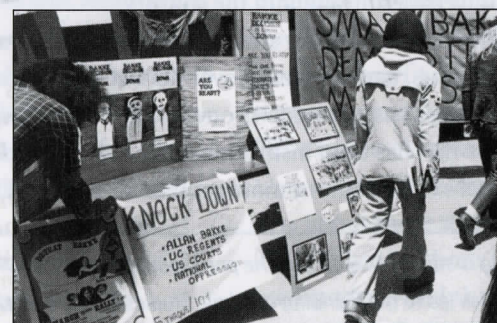
*Students organize against the anti-affirmative action Bakke vs. U.C. case. Conservatives and universities roll back the gains of students of color.*

*High school students take to the streets and confront the conservative reaction against immigrants, affirmative action, bilingual education, and Ethnic Studies.*

## 1968–1969

*Students of color around the country fight for educational self-determination. Ethnic Studies is established.*

## 1978



## 1989

*Students sit in for diversity. Demographic change and renewed activism drive the push for new programs, graduation requirements, and affirmative action.*

## 1997



*Photos courtesy of the Daily Californian and Kahlil Jacobs-Fantauzzi.*



**Activists saw  
Ethnic Studies  
as an attempt  
to transform  
the racist  
educational  
system from  
the ground up.**

**The Corporatization of Multiculturalism**

Columbia's Manning Marable notes that the Ford Foundation joined with Harvard in an effort spanning more than a decade to shape African American Studies at Harvard, and nationally, in their own liberal multiculturalist image. Ford began to underwrite the Harvard program in the early 1980s. Then it funded a comprehensive survey of Black Studies around the country by Harvard's Nathan Huggins and a follow up in the late 1980s.

Among other things, these surveys were used to guide Ford money to African American programs that were dominated, Marable says, by "inclusionists who always assumed that blacks had to succeed in the context of white institutions and Euro-American standards." Radical feminists, Afrocentrists, Marxists, and others, he argues, were left to fend for themselves.

By 1991, says Marable, Ford, Harvard, and their allies had won. "This is currently represented most dramatically with the national celebrity extended to literary scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and the African-American Studies program at Harvard," writes Marable in *Race & Reason* (1997-98). Gates has parlayed support from Harvard and Ford into prestige and big money by recruiting renowned faculty like Cornel West, William Julius Wilson, and Lani Guinier, and hatching major projects like Encarta Africana with Microsoft Corporation.

The Microsoft/Harvard venture is symptomatic of the tremendous impact corporate multiculturalism is having on people of color and Ethnic Studies. Marable says: "The corporations began to seize upon elements of African-American and Latino popular culture, stripping them of their most militant and creative elements and repackaging them for a mass consumer market." At its worst, Ethnic Studies is the intellectual reflection of corporate multiculturalism in the university setting.

The Harvard experience shows that support from white liberal multiculturalists can sometimes help promote Ethnic Studies. But

it also shows that such support often comes with political and ideological costs.

**The Limits of Liberal Multiculturalism**

Meanwhile, U.C. Berkeley's avowedly pro-affirmative action and pro-multiculturalist administration is undermining what has been perhaps the most prestigious united Ethnic Studies program in the country. The administration has refused to allow the program to replace four retiring faculty, and a number of other faculty are set to retire soon.

Moreover, Ethnic Studies offers only half as many courses on race as do other departments. And, with the demise of affirmative action, there are fewer students of color to enroll in Ethnic Studies classes. Since its peak of 400 in the early 1990s, the number of Ethnic Studies majors has dropped by half.

Ethnic Studies chairperson Ling-chi Wang, one of the founders of the program in 1969, is blunt: "I truly believe without a serious change, Ethnic Studies [at Berkeley] will die within the decade."

To stem the bleeding, Wang, backed by African American Studies Department chairperson Percy Hintzen, put forward a controversial proposal to merge Ethnic Studies and African American Studies into American Studies, the equivalent of an academic hostile takeover.

Many Ethnic Studies and African American Studies faculty and students oppose the proposal and want to retain departmental autonomy. But before a debate could fully develop, the university administration simply declared that it would entertain no such merger. Apparently, the administration was not about to voluntarily allow the creation of an expanded Ethnic Studies, even under a new name. Despite its multiculturalist pretensions, U.C. Berkeley is now the site of both the death of affirmative action and the strangulation of Ethnic Studies.

**Losing the Mission**

However, not all the shortcomings of Ethnic Studies can be attributed to the influence of white administrators or funders.

Many argue that Ethnic Studies has moved away from its radical founding premises. As Dylan Rodriguez, an Ethnic Studies graduate student at U.C. Berkeley, observes: "Student activists have struggled for Ethnic Studies, but institutional survival has taken precedence over its original radical mission."

In the early days, many Ethnic Studies programs initiated and supported innovative community organizing projects like cooperative garment factories, farmworker organizing, and fights for low-income housing. Early Ethnic Studies was also a dynamic organizing base for the movements against the Vietnam War and for Puerto Rican independence.

But today, as Miriam Jiménez Román of El Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College notes: "Very few faculty have an interest or ability to do community studies, and even fewer are involved in community activism." Manning Marable adds, "There is a chasm between the most influential scholarship produced by Ethnic Studies and the social movements and ethnic constituencies which gave rise to such programs."

Ethnic Studies has also generally reproduced society's gender and sexuality hierarchies. Even today, as Lisa Lowe of the University of California at San Diego observes: "Gays and lesbians are doing some of the most exciting activist work in people of color communities, but that hasn't been reflected in Ethnic Studies programs."

Abdul Alkalimat, the former president of the National Conference of Black Studies, believes: "The main problem in Ethnic Studies is elitism. The vertical model of higher education creates a hierarchical pecking order between programs, scholars, and between teachers and students."

Glenn Omatsu who teaches at all three levels of California's college sys-

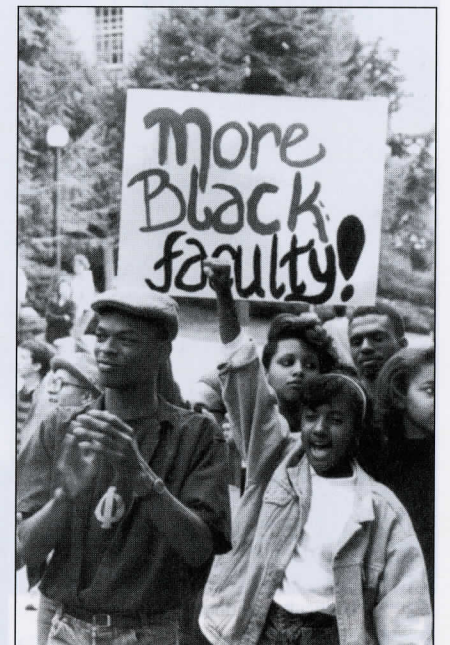
tem—UCLA, California State University, Northridge, and Pasadena City College—says: "Ethnic Studies is losing its original mission of fighting for the transformation of the entire educational system, empowering students, and connecting with community struggles. Ethnic Studies has increasingly narrowed its agenda to surviving at elite private colleges and flagship state universities."

Ethnic Studies has developed an uncertain relationship to student organizing. For many faculty, Ethnic Studies is now a career, not a crusade. Few programs incorporate students in their governing, planning, or teaching processes, even though student struggles were key in the formation of almost all Ethnic Studies programs and student participation was one of its founding principles. University of Minnesota student Anne Martinez observes, "It has been my experience that very few faculty or staff members can or will go out on a limb for much of anything."

**Students Continue To Fight**

Whatever the shortcomings of Ethnic Studies, the most politically active college students of color still pin their hopes on Ethnic Studies as a focal point of radical educational change.

In recent years, students of color have led mass protests, sit-ins, and hunger strikes at the universities in Washington, Maryland, Princeton, Indiana, and elsewhere. Some actions have been defensive: protesting unfilled faculty positions, budget cuts, tuition hikes, the end of affirmative action, attempts to end remedial education, and the firing of popular teachers. Other battles have been offensive: fighting for the establishment of new Ethnic Studies programs, for recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color, for gay-lesbian-bisexual support centers.



*Student and faculty diversity movements are intimately linked with the history of Ethnic Studies Berkeley protest in the late 80's.*



**No university can  
claim elite status  
unless it has an  
African American  
Studies program.**

In 1995, during a month of heated protest, nine students and a professor at UCLA launched a dramatic, life-threatening 14-day hunger strike, galvanizing widespread attention to the underfunding of Chicano Studies. They succeeded in forcing the administration to establish the Cesar Chavez Chicano Studies Center.

In 1996, Columbia students organized the largest protests on that campus since the Vietnam War. They occupied a building and staged a 14-day hunger strike, demanding that Latino and Asian American Studies be created to complement the existing African American Studies center. Senior Antonio Garcia said: "Students had no choice but to take their education in their own hands. We have been miseducated and lied to from the very first time we stepped into a classroom." A few faculty were hired, but the struggle there continues.

And student protests at Rutgers in 1995 culmi-

nated in the takeover of the basketball court at half-time of a televised game. The demands of the United Student Coalition were reminiscent of the 1960s: resignation of the president, rollback of tuition from \$4,500 to \$1,350 per semester; elimination of SAT scores from admission requirements; restructuring the Board of Governors to a democratically elected board that reflects the student population; and inclusion of minority and women's studies programs as part of the university's core curriculum.

Dylan Rodriguez, one of the organizers of the thirty-year Ethnic Studies commemoration at Berkeley, is part of the new generation of radicals. "Ethnic Studies is what I do. It can be the best thing at the university," he says. "But it is sometimes incredibly frustrating to try to do 'radical' intellectual work, teaching, or organizing in Ethnic Studies, because it is so tied into the rules of the corporate university. The future of Ethnic Studies will depend on the willingness of community members, students, and teachers to work together to create new forms of resistance to university elitism, and new ways to democratize knowledge." **RACE**

**IDENTITY STRUGGLES**

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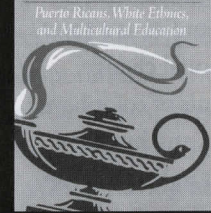
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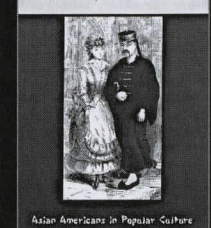
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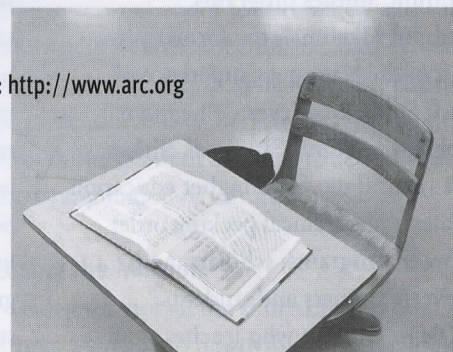
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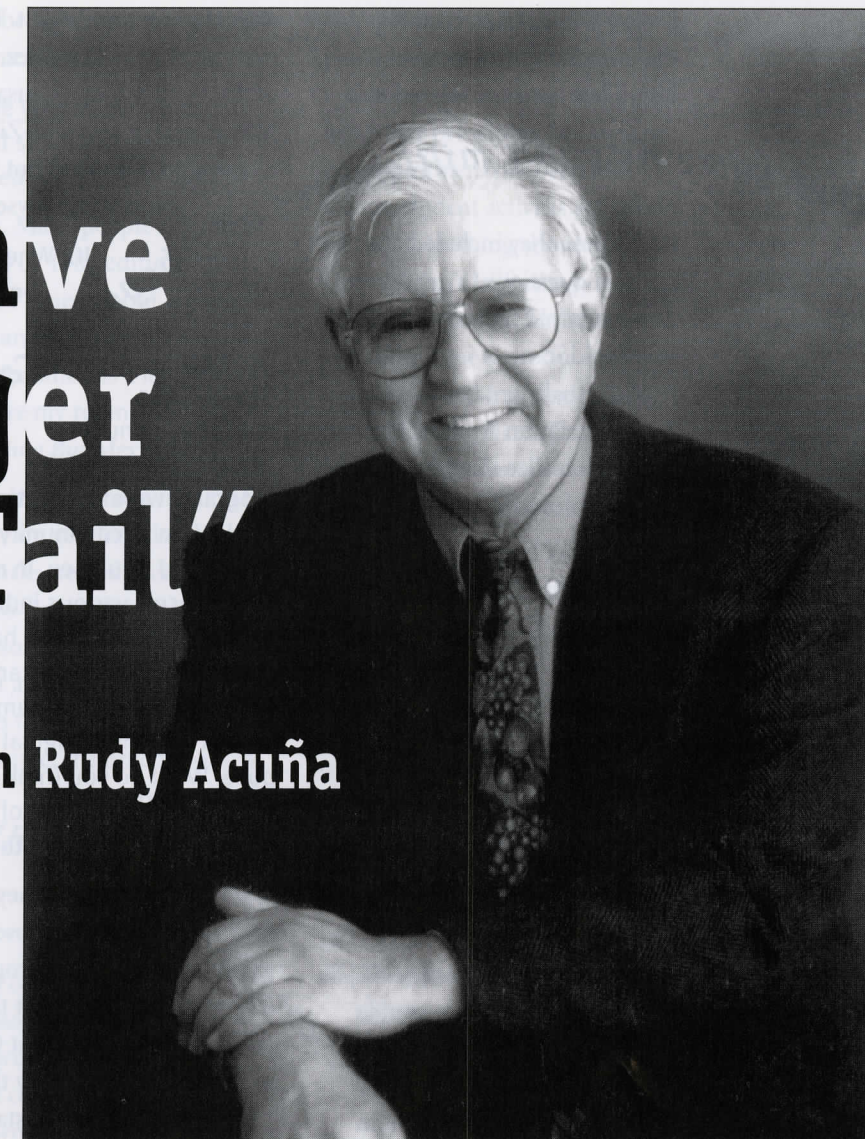
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# "We Have the Tiger by the Tail"

## An Interview with Rudy Acuña

by José Calderon



*Rodolfo "Rudy" Acuña is professor of Chicano Studies at California State University, Northridge, where he was the founding chair of what is today the largest Ethnic Studies department in the U.S.*

He is the author of the renowned *Occupied America*, as well as *The Sonoran Strongman*, *Community Under Siege*, *Anything but Mexican*, and *Sometimes There is No Other Side: Chicanos and the Myth of Equality*. Rudy recently finished the fourth edi-

*José Calderon is associate professor of sociology and Chicano Studies at Pitzer College.*

tion of *Occupied America* and is currently writing *When the Moment Comes*, a book about Mexican farmers/miners/ cotton pickers from Chihuahua.

**José Calderon:** Rudy, how did you first get involved with the movement and when did you first begin to write as a means of advocacy?

**Rudy Acuña:** I got involved in the movement about 1961. I married quite young, went to college, got my teaching credential, and taught in junior high school and then high school. I got involved with the Latin American Civic Association, whose main purpose was to promote better education for

Chicanos. I received my Ph.D. in 1968, while working in a community college. I also wrote a high school text and two elementary school books.

Then I got involved with the Southern California Social Science Council that was promoting the inductive and case study approach to teaching and research. Max Rafferty, who was the State Superintendent of Schools, claimed we were using a communist methodology.

I was very involved in teacher training during the early 1960s. Everywhere I spoke, teachers asked the same question: are there any materials for Mexican children? There were none, so



When some Hispanic millionaires also began to call for brown power, I realized we

I wrote three children's books that focused on culture and conflict. They were considered radical

because they included a series of questions to get the students involved in thinking about solutions. Some of my children's books actually got banned by the Texas Education Agency. This made me realize the furor that books can cause.

JC: This was before you wrote *Occupied America*?

RA: Yes. Having the benefit of this experience, I decided to pull no punches in *Occupied America*, and to write directly for Chicanas/Chicanos. I was very angry when I wrote *Occupied America*. After having been arrested in the Chicano Vietnam War Moratorium, I was very cynical about this country. At one time, I thought we could change everything through the civil rights movement, but my experience in the Moratorium brought home that nothing was going to change in this country without a big fight.

JC: Did you advance the idea that the Southwest was an occupied nation, a nation of Aztlan?

RA: Actually, I never used the concept of Aztlan. I always thought that there was a danger with the concept of Aztlan, that it could be taken as some sort of Chicano Zionism. I thought that Zionism was wrong and I didn't want to perpetuate the same thing among Chicanos. Of course, I understand how different people use it in different

ways that are not Zionist. For example, Corky Gonzalez, leader of the Denver-based Crusade for Justice, used it in a non-Zionist way. But, I decided not to use the concept myself.

JC: When the book

*Occupied America* was published, a number of Chicano Studies programs were connecting curriculum to community issues and struggles. In recent conferences, various individuals in our communities have proposed that our Chicana and Chicano Studies programs are not serving their original purpose. What do you think of this? What is the state of Chicana and Chicano Studies?

RA: I don't think that they are fully serving their purpose, but each Chicano Studies program is different. I helped to put the program together here at CSUN in 1969. But it was really the students who sacrificed to start the program. We had 350 students scheduled to come in the Fall of 1969 and we wanted to ensure that they would not flunk out. Our students wanted to feel a pride in being Mexican, in having pride in themselves. Identity politics is important, but Chicano Studies has to go beyond that. Many of these students were never taught to read and write. To fulfill these needs, we set up a curriculum with the lower division courses focusing on identity and skills and the upper division focusing more on content. We made workshops available to students who are having difficulties in reading and

writing. In addition to identifying with their history and community, we have to set up libraries, teach our students how to read and write, and prepare them with skills that allow them to have a choice.

JC: As you know, there has been a long-standing political and theoretical tension between Mexicanos and Chicanos, between Mexican immigrants and Mexicans born in the U.S. What is your view of this issue and how is it playing out today?

RA: Well, for me it is a non-issue. My mother and father were Mexicans. My wife is a Mexican. Most of the people who I've had long-term relationships with have had Mexican accents. That's why I feel comfortable with them. What we have to avoid is developing a nasty pecking order, saying that "I have [immigration] papers and you don't" or that "I was born here and you weren't." Capitalism socially constructs this type of hierarchical culture and we have to fight it.

JC: Today, there are many different Latino nationalities in the U.S. What do you think are the prospects for building a pan-Latino movement?

RA: I think that it is going to be very difficult. There are different classes among the various Latino groups. There are also various shades of color. Some hide their darkness and others benefit from their lighter color. On the other hand, we have commonalities.

Unlike the different Asian nationalities, we have a common language in Spanish. Latinos can unite around common issues.

JC: You recently hired a Latino to teach Central American issues in your Chicano Studies Department. Can you discuss why this was done and what it means for the future of your department?

RA: We hired a Nicaraguan and we also have an Associate Dean who is Puerto Rican. In our department, we have 19 full-time positions and about 25 part-time positions. We have an awful lot of Central American students here and they have a high drop-out rate. It wouldn't be right for us to turn our backs to

them by saying, "we have ours and you are going to have to get your own." That would be a very narrow and selfish viewpoint that does not look to the future.

JC: In addition to Chicana and Chicano Studies being more inclusive of other Latino groups, one of the most important trends in Chicana and Chicano Studies is the development of Feminist and Gay and Lesbian Studies. What do you think of this and how has it been incorporated in your department?

RA: Similar to Central Americans, if we don't incorporate gays and lesbians into the curriculum, they will break away. In recent years, I have seen many lesbian scholars take the lead in formulating scholarship. They are clearly out there and

should be represented in our departments and programs.

JC: Have your views also evolved since you wrote *Occupied America* in 1968?

RA: Yes. Many people still cite my 1972 or 1981 editions of *Occupied America*, but my views have changed a lot since then. My 1988 edition is a lot different, as are my recent books such as *Anything But Mexican*.

My recent books have included a lot more on gender. Also, my early works treated race simply as a Euro-American disease. My recent works look at how we brought a memory of racialized issues to the U.S. from Mexico. For example, the practice of separating people according to their color

was part of Spanish colonization. Also, my early works primarily focused on internal colonialism and called for brown power. They weren't about liberation. However, when some Hispanic millionaires also began to call for brown power, I realized we hadn't thought this out. What we need is a transformation of the whole society.

JC: What do you see as key issues facing Chicanos today?

RA: We presently have more Chicanos and Chicanas in political office than at any time in our history. Individually, they are good people with good intentions. However, because of the rules, they also see that they have to compromise or be defeated. The rules are established to prevent a transformation of society

that will help the masses of people. In this context, good people with radical ideas often compromise their principles. My greatest disappointment has been that former student activists get elected and do nothing about the University of California system or the California State Universities. They fear these powerful institutions could frustrate their election to future offices. The same is true with alliances our politicians have made with people like Mayor Richard Riordan who has worked very hard to co-opt progressive agendas while buying computers for minority children. He is a good machine politician who does not have the interest of our community in mind.

JC: What is our future in politics?

RA: We have the tiger by the tail. Term limits have led to the election of more Chicana and Chicano politicians, but at the same time they are preventing us from developing an agenda that

promotes the politics of transformation.

The rules are established to control us, not to empower us. Latino politicians, like other progressive politicians, have become political migrants because of term limits. Dr. Ernesto Galarza used to say that a people on the move do not form roots. It was almost impossible to organize migrants. There had to be a rooting process. It is this lack of rooting that concerns me about Chicano politics. **RACE**

hadn't thought this out. What we need is a transformation of the whole society.



## Are We Ethnic Studies?

by Julia Curry Rodríguez, Karleen Pendleton Jiménez,  
and Horacio Roque Ramírez

What would Ethnic Studies be if there were no feminists, women, or queers?

In its early years, Ethnic Studies, no matter how radical, required adherence to heterosexual norms. Polite silence and hidden innuendo, in the best of circumstances, kept queers from explicit presence. Feminists and queers were scorned for supposedly focusing on the “macho,” rather than the racial and class structures of U.S. society.

Still, women and queer courses are rarely part of the core of Ethnic Studies majors, even though they are often the most popular. They are usually taken with caution—caution because they are often uncomfortable. They challenge the status quo from within. These courses are often seen as more demanding because they require reflection and examination of contradictions within our own fields.

But feminists and queers participated in the building of Ethnic Studies from the beginning. Often their names are forgotten. Some pioneer women withdrew from academia. Others left due to fractured interpersonal relationships. Yet other women were erased because their work was usurped by some man who later claimed to have been the one who made things happen. And many women, feminists, and queers themselves adopted the practices of the status quo to survive. They learned to use “the ways of the master.”

### Key Contributions

Who would dare deny the contributions of feminists and queer scholars of color to Ethnic Studies today? They are among the

pillars of Ethnic Studies: Audre Lorde, Joy Harjo, Angela Davis, Cherrie Moraga, Elaine Kim, Miranda Davies, bell hooks, Trinh Minh-Ha, June Jordan, Barbara Smith, Norma Alarcón, Nellie Wong, Rosa Torruellas, Paula Gunn Allen, Iris Blanco, Lucie Cheng, Margarita Melville, Aida Hurtado, Bonnie Thornton Dill, Adelaida Del Castillo, Zora Neale Hurston, the Combahee River Collective, Judy Yung, and Luana Ross. The scholarship and teaching of women and queers form a basic ingredient in the survival and the renewal of Ethnic Studies.

That they could weave in their contributions from the very beginning is rather amazing, for one of the tenets of Ethnic Studies is to name only the “positive” aspects of our cultures and to deny the “negative.” In our quest to battle the negative images constantly shoved down everyone’s throats by the mainstream, we often romanticized ourselves into a singular world where all racial and ethnic people conformed to one pattern of existence. We are all one, and we all have the same world views. These inclinations have often led to unrealistic, unhappy, generic ethnic models that nobody can live up to. Difference was suspect, often not tolerated at all.

Fortunately, women and queer scholars recognized that our scholarship would only be useful if we were willing to dig into the complex and contradictory cores of our experiences. The classic example is the edited anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, published in 1981. Still unsurpassed for its breadth and depth of political and theoretical visions, *This Bridge* brought together the work of dozens of women of color who were sick and tired of simplistic and shallow talk about “liberation.”

Enough of the one paradigm! It is not just capitalism, or only colonialism, or only racism, or patriarchy and sexism, or homophobia that oppress us. All of these factors, alone and as they intersect, often in not so obvious ways, affect our communities. Contrary to the common practice of writing

*Julia Curry Rodríguez is a research associate at U.C. Berkeley. Karleen Pendleton Jiménez is a novelist and founder of the award-winning Queer Players in San Diego. Horacio Roque Ramírez is a lecturer at San Jose State University.*

about one group at a time, *This Bridge* relied upon many voices to address the most important issues of our times.

### Intimate Solutions

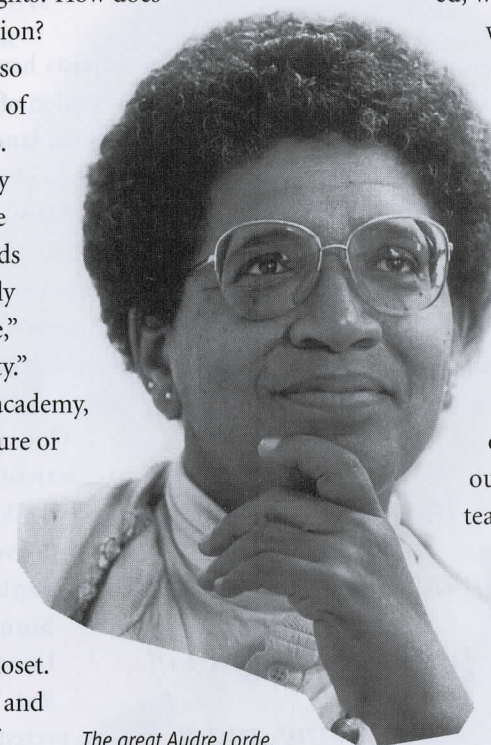
Where do we look for solutions? Queers and feminists of color have told us to first look within, to examine who we are, how we relate to social privileges and rewards based on race, gender, class, and sexuality. When did we begin to think that our privileges were our rights? How does this disfigure our struggle for liberation?

Queer and feminist scholarship also makes us realize that intimate forms of exploitation maintain the status quo. These “intimate” forms are not easily seen in public. They take place in the home, in the bedroom, among friends and colleagues and neighbors, usually disguised under the rhetoric of “love,” “professional rules,” and “community.” Sometimes this is also found in the academy, when it is explained who “wins” tenure or other securities. Forms of sexual abuse and harassment, especially among family members, colleagues, and friends, are intimately and insidiously oppressive, almost always hidden—kept secret, in the closet.

Just as we must go into the streets and challenge police repression, abuse of immigrant communities, and denial of women’s rights over their bodies, we must also expose our individual contributions to racism, sexism, and homophobia. We cannot just “choose” to solve one form of exploitation over the others. Even in Ethnic Studies departments, where our project is about liberation, we exist within the domain of the master’s household. Academia prescribes the rewards, and we derive our status from these sources.

Many queer men of color have also contributed immensely to Ethnic Studies. Queer men reminded all men that gender is something everyone has, not just women. With poetry, prose, films, and plays, men like Essex Hemphill, Marlon Riggs, Martin Manalansang, and Luis Alfaro tackled the business of masculinity, of sexual oppression among men in the family and outside of it, of white men’s sexual colonization of bodies of color.

**We must expose our individual contributions to racism, sexism, and homophobia. We cannot just “choose” to solve one form of exploitation over the others.**



The great Audre Lorde.  
Photo ©1987 Joan E. Biren, courtesy  
Firebrand Books.

we encourage the edge of the straight woman who chisels away at the so-called traditional patterns of heterosexual, passive female models? If, as Cherrie Moraga once suggested, we must make families “from scratch,” then we cannot expect anything less for building

our racial collegial communities: they are never a “given,” or “naturally” formed. And queer men and women are part of the mix. Always, at every level.

Every member of our communities is part of the solution at all times.

Feminists and queer racial and ethnic scholars have forced all of us to make use of all of the corners of our existences and our experiences to cast the widest web of our realities in our lives, in our studies, in our teaching.

Ironically, the most useful queer and feminist work is often produced outside the academy. Why are critical thinkers like Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Linda Burnham, and Elizabeth Martinez outside of the academy? Often they leave the academy of their own accord, unwilling to succumb to the constraints of elitist stratification. But they are often pushed out both by their own in Ethnic Studies and by the wider university power structures. Their perspective is too angry to fit. They are the unsociable, *las locas*!

The painful outsider position to which queers and feminists have been relegated has also provided us a much clearer perspective from which to examine the inside. This is extremely useful when working within a field which specifically chronicles histories of resisting exclusion. We keep Ethnic Studies on its toes. We insist that the scholarship be more honest and inclusive. We challenge, we disrupt, AND we also build/nurture. We make no excuses. Not surprisingly, our scholarship, our pictures, and our slogans are often much more desirable than we who imagine these! **RACE**

### How Do We Rear Our Young?

How does Ethnic Studies scholarship and pedagogy rear its young? Specifically, how do we nurture the hungers of our gay men, our young dykes? How do



# ENCOURAGEMENT FROM MY ANCESTORS

## Native American Studies Today

by Jacqueline Keeler

When I was growing up, my parents had an American Indian library that included *God Is Red, We Speak You Listen, Custer Died For Your Sins, Dakota Texts, Speaking of Indians, Conquering the Mighty Sioux*, and, of course, *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*. All of these books, except the last one, were written by members of my father's Dakota Sioux family. But I must admit I never read any of them until I took my first Native American Studies class at Dartmouth College in 1990.

Today, there are 75 Native American Studies programs across the United States and Canada. In the 1960s, when African American activists began pushing for an academic voice, American Indians were one of many minority groups that followed their lead.

Before that, the study of American Indians was controlled by white anthropologists and archaeologists. They were biased by Eurocentrism, as exemplified by Lewis Morgan, who spent his career developing a classification system that would show the "social evolution from promiscuity, through the Malayan systems, to the American Indian clan systems, and, with the development of individual property ownership and inheritance, to the modern European systems."

Even today, writes Susan Miller (Seminole) of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in *American Indian Quarterly*, "[w]hen the topic is tribes, historians are apt to apply a separate standard licensing themselves to suspend the rules that govern scholarly procedure. Then they 'imagine' the tribes for their own amusement and because they can sell the product. They evaluate each other's images, reward their favorites, and pitch those to readers of history."

Over the past thirty years, American Indian scholars and

community activists have changed the focus of study from the racist classification of "primitive peoples" to the realms of Indian Federal Law, land and water rights issues, religious freedom, grave and cultural artifact repatriation, education, the welfare of children, health care, energy and economic development, literature and poetry, art, and language preservation. These studies more accurately represent the concerns of Native American communities, whose land base and cultural integrity are still under constant threat of elimination and expropriation.

One of the demands of American Indian activists during the 18-month occupation of Alcatraz in 1969 was for an "Indian university" "It would be a place," explained Vine Deloria, Jr., (Lakota Sioux) professor of history at the University of Colorado-Boulder in *God Is Red*, "where history would not be interpreted so as to justify a program of systematically extinguishing the country's original inhabitants, but rather a place where a true history of the inner relationships of various cultures would be created." The number of such tribal colleges has grown from one in 1966 to 32 today.

### Scholarship From Within

In the 1970s, very few American Indians had the academic degrees required by universities to head up the fledgling Native American Studies programs. American Indians who worked in college guidance programs were recruited, but many had little or no academic background. The lack of published works by and about American Indians often resulted in the usage of materials that denigrated American Indians.

Jacqueline Keeler is a Navajo/Yankton Dakota Sioux writer based in the San Francisco Bay Area and a member of the ColorLines staff.

"A lot of Indians, attempting to get degrees, adapted these viewpoints," Vine Deloria, Jr. recalls.

However, this soon changed. Paula Gunn Allen remembers her experience in 1982: "I was at UCLA on a grant and my idea was to do a comprehensive anthology of Native American women's poetry. After I counted 200 American Indian women in print, I gave up. By then you couldn't do American Indian poetry and do it justice, there were just too many poets."

*Waterlily*, by my great-great aunt Ella Deloria, was also on my Native American literature reading list at Dartmouth. After languishing in manuscript form for nearly 50 years, this detailed ethnographic novel of Lakota Sioux life in the early 1800s, before the destruction of the buffalo and the reservation period, was published by the University of Nebraska. With the advent of Native American Studies and the new demand for scholarly American Indian research, my great-great aunt was finally getting the recognition she had been denied during her life.

Yet, some Native elders are reluctant to pass on their knowledge. "As 'insiders,' how much cultural information will they [Native scholars] be willing to divulge and under what circumstances?" asks Theodore Jojola (Isleta), Director of Native American Studies at the University of New Mexico.

My great-great aunt Ella, despite her desire to record the stories of her elders, also took very seriously the responsibility that came with that knowledge. As her nephew Vine Deloria, Jr. relates in the introduction to her book *Speaking of Indians*, "Ella knew many things from the very olden times. I tried one time to get her to talk about these things, but she got very angry and told me that these things were so precious to the old people that my generation would not

appreciate them and should not know them. They should not be talked about by people who cannot understand, she argued, and so when she died an immense body of knowledge went with her."

Native American Studies is now thirty years old. But how well have Native American Studies programs across the country fulfilled their original vision? Vine Deloria, Jr. believes that the primary goal has been sidestepped: "There ought to be some theoretical framework that explains ... Indian culture in academic studies or the relationship between Indians and the world."

Paula Gunn Allen is more positive: "We've come all this way, to a point where Mary Churchill can develop a Cherokee critical approach. It's just staggering."

American Indian scholarship is, by necessity, an act of self-preservation—whether it is fighting for tribal water rights or putting a pow-wow into a poem. It is also an act of coming to terms with an extremely brutal recent past where the things that our peoples held so dear were lost. It is both a path of grieving and a recovery of self.

As my *uncle* (grandmother) Ella wrote in *Waterlily*: "It was so merciless, so unfair. Feeling sorry for herself, she wailed aloud.

In the customary way, she addressed all her dead relatives in turn, her parents, brothers, aunts, and uncles, ending with the for-

lorn question no one can answer, 'Where have you gone? Where have you gone?'"

Upon returning home from Dartmouth, my Navajo mother wanted me to have an Enemy Way ceremony, because I had been living among our enemies and needed to be cleansed. I was lucky though—while studying in the ivy halls of my "enemies," I found words of encouragement left for me by my ancestors. **RACE**



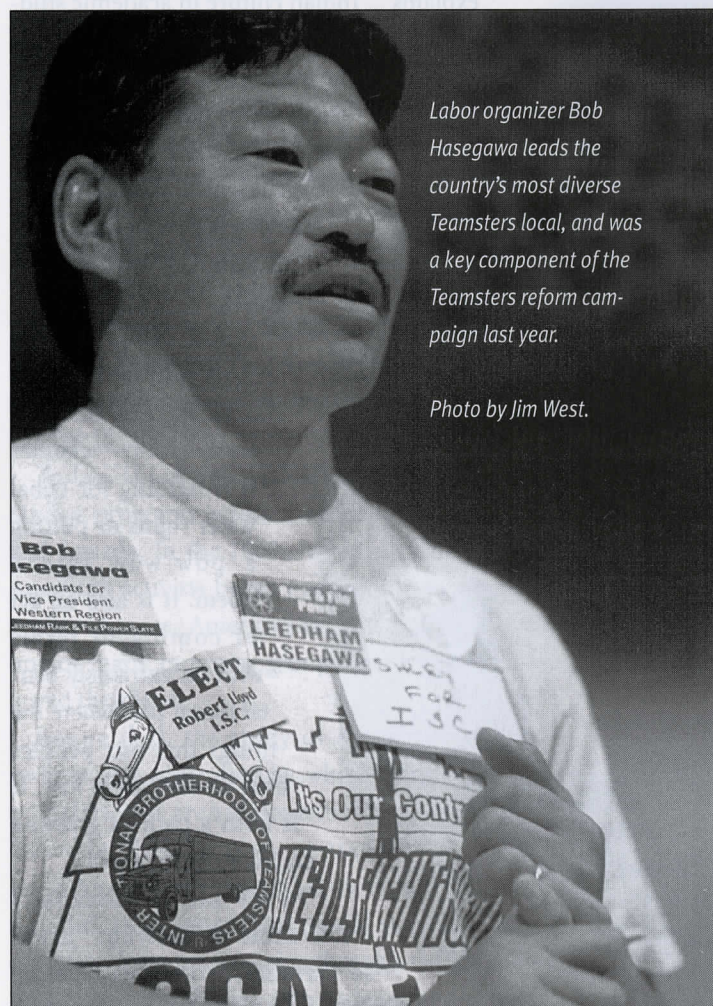
The late American Indian linguist Ella Cara Deloria, *Lakota Sioux*, in 1946. Photo courtesy of the Deloria family, Dakota Indian Foundation.



# FROM THE BOTTOM UP

**"If you're going to speak Vietnamese, just go back to Vietnam. This is America."**

These were the words of welcome food processing worker Ho Lai got from his boss as he deboned chicken at a Campbell's Soup plant in Nebraska. It was early 1976, and



Labor organizer Bob Hasegawa leads the country's most diverse Teamsters local, and was a key component of the Teamsters reform campaign last year.

Photo by Jim West.

Lai had recently been forced to leave his family and three children behind in war-torn Vietnam. Like many immigrants, Lai spoke no English.

The boss' harassment worsened when Lai suffered a gash to his hand. The union that represented the plant's 500 mostly white workers offered no help. So Lai took it on himself to find out what could be done. He went to the

Linelle Mogado is a former organizer with the Pilipino Workers Center of Southern California who recently interned with the journal *Labor Notes* in Detroit.

library, and discovered labor law and unions. He began to stand up to his boss. His co-workers noticed, and soon asked him to represent them as their shop steward.

"Are you crazy? I can barely speak English!" I said. But they pushed me and believed in me, so I agreed. To have my co-workers relying on me made me work harder. That's how I learned English," Lai said.

Lai spent almost eight years as shop steward. For the last 12, he has crisscrossed the western states organizing Asian immigrant workers for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). Now, Lai is a UFCW International Representative.

## "No Asians Allowed"

Today, half a million Asians in the U.S. are union members. However, they have not always been welcomed or even acknowledged by the U.S. labor movement.

In the late 1800s, many white working class leaders fought to exclude Asians from their workplaces and unions, and from the country as a whole—and even incited union members to racist violence and lynchings. In the 1980s, and more recently with the financial crisis in Asia, nationalism in American unions fueled anti-Japanese and anti-Asian attitudes, campaigns, and even violence.

Nonetheless, Asian Pacific Islanders have been key to building worker militancy in the agricultural fields, the canneries, and in longshore work over the past 100 years. Today, Asian Pacific Islanders are especially active in the garment workers union, UNITE!, in SEIU (Service Employees International Union), and Lai's union, the UFCW. Other unions with a growing Asian Pacific Islander membership include the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE).

## Building Power From the Bottom Up

For some Asian Pacific Islanders, getting elected to union office was the result of organizing to reform their unions and make them into more effective, democratic institutions.

Bob Hasegawa holds the top office at Teamsters Local 174 in Seattle. Now in his third term as Secretary-Treasurer, Hasegawa was elected by a membership of

## The New Asian Pacific Islander Labor Activism

**With a half million Asian Pacific Islanders already in unions, Linelle Mogado gets inside the successes of their rising activism—and examines the coming battles.**

6,600 mostly white, male truck drivers. His local has been successful in using member-to-member organizing and short, strategic strikes to set industry-wide standards. And, under Hasegawa's leadership, the elected leadership and hired staff of the local has become the most diverse in its history.

"We're trying to build union power from the bottom up as opposed to from the top down," says Hasegawa.

A Sansei, or third-generation Japanese American, Hasegawa grew up in Seattle's inner-city, raised by parents who were interned during WWII. When he began work at United Parcel Service in the early 1970s, Hasegawa found that, in order to represent the workers' interests, his shop steward had to fight the union as well as the company.

Hasegawa's experience with the 1960s civil rights movement taught him that "the only real way to fight back is through collective action"—so he became involved with Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). "TDU is the only national organization to promote democracy in our union, which is so strategic in the nation," says Hasegawa. "It's just not good enough to have union people with good hearts all over the country if they're disconnected. You need to be organized."

In last year's international election, he ran on reformer Tom Leedham's "Rank and File Power" slate, the most diverse in the union's history. They took on Jimmy Hoffa, Jr.'s big name and even bigger bank account. Hoffa Jr. outspent Leedham \$5 million to \$250,000, had five years on the campaign trail to Leedham's six months, and the support of 90 percent of local

union officials in this election. Yet, Hoffa won only 54.5 percent of the vote, compared to a solid 39.3 percent for the "Rank and File Power" slate. Hoffa may have won the election, but the results show that the Teamster reform movement is alive and well.

## "Who Is This Robert Guy, Anyway?"

Like Hasegawa, kitchen worker Meizhu Lui also came to lead her AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) local through union reform work. Lui, a second-generation Chinese American, says it was her "own experience of feeling excluded from the union, both as an Asian and as a woman, that made me more able

of Order. Union meetings instead became a mix of union business, educational guest speakers, and open discussion with an easily amendable agenda.

"I wanted to make it easy for people to get their issues out," she explains. "You need some order, but you don't necessarily need Robert's Rules of Order," she adds. "Who is this Robert guy anyway?"

Activists like Lai, Hasegawa, and Lui often meet each other through the seven-year old Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA). APALA is an activist organization that focuses on organizing. It was formed by labor activists and organizers, many of them radical veterans of the '60s and '70s. It has worked to build a civil rights agen-

**Hasegawa found that, in order to represent the workers' interests, his shop steward had to fight the union as well as the company.**

—and more dedicated to—figuring out ways people could become more involved."

She and co-workers, mostly women and people of color at Boston City Hospital, took on the white, male union leadership, creating a multiracial rank-and-file reform caucus. The caucus pushed for newsletters to be translated into different languages and for affirmative action. They got the union to fight racism in health care and to support democracy movements in workers' home countries.

In 1986, Lui became president of Local 1489 and threw out Robert's Rules

da for Asian Pacific Islanders, to forge partnerships with other AFL-CIO constituency groups, and to build more Asian Pacific Islander leadership within the labor movement. APALA's executive board is one of the most ethnically diverse in the AFL-CIO and in Asian Pacific Islander organizations nationally, and APALA consciously strives for turnover in the leadership to ensure democracy and promote leadership development.

Kent Wong, APALA's founding president, reports progress. "We went from fewer than ten Asian American union organizers across the country in 1992



to close to a hundred today," says Wong, who is also the director of the Center for Labor Research and Education at UCLA.

#### APALA: Radical Reformers or Tireless Tokens?

Even with its successes, many still question how independent APALA should be—or can be—from the AFL-CIO. Should it be a vehicle for Asian Pacific Islanders to reform their unions into more democratic institutions? Or is APALA simply pushing for Asian tokens to rubber-stamp the AFL-CIO leadership's agenda?

For instance, does APALA do enough to confront the barriers that Asian Pacific Islanders still face within their unions? As Lui puts it: "Even the union movement has glass ceilings. I didn't find it easy or even possible to get up into higher levels within AFSCME." That, she says, is one of the reasons she left union work to become a community organizer.

Katie Quan, an APALA founding vice president who was an international vice president of UNITE! until April 1998, admits that establishing autonomy from the AFL-CIO is difficult. "Since we're almost entirely funded by the AFL-CIO, APALA is very sensitive to what happens in the AFL-CIO," she says. However, she believes, "The AFL-CIO needs APALA as an example of what can be done in the long run."

Wong agrees and believes that, since the election of John Sweeney as AFL-CIO President in 1995, the AFL-CIO has made "a major allocation of resources toward organizing and promotes a much more progressive social justice agenda." Instead of viewing autonomy from the AFL-CIO as a benefit, he believes APALA should play an active role in promoting change within the AFL-CIO.

However, Ray Quan (no relation to Katie Quan), a vice-president of SEIU Local 790 in San Francisco, is not so sure. Quan is vice president of his

APALA chapter and a mechanic for the Bay Area Rapid Transit system.

"If APALA is going to become anything more than a minority spokesperson for the AFL-CIO," says Quan, "I think it's got to ask itself a lot of hard questions." Quan is concerned about APALA gaining an independent political voice, becoming more involved in community issues, and fighting for rank-and-file democracy. For example, he feels that, in California, "APALA could have fought harder to put the fight against anti-union Proposition 226 and anti-bilingual education Proposition 227 together, but we dropped the ball and missed a chance to forge a real link between labor and the community."

Still, Ray Quan remains optimistic: "I do hope APALA can be a voice for reform. The struggle for people of color to have an equal voice in their unions must go hand in hand with democratizing unions." **ACTION**

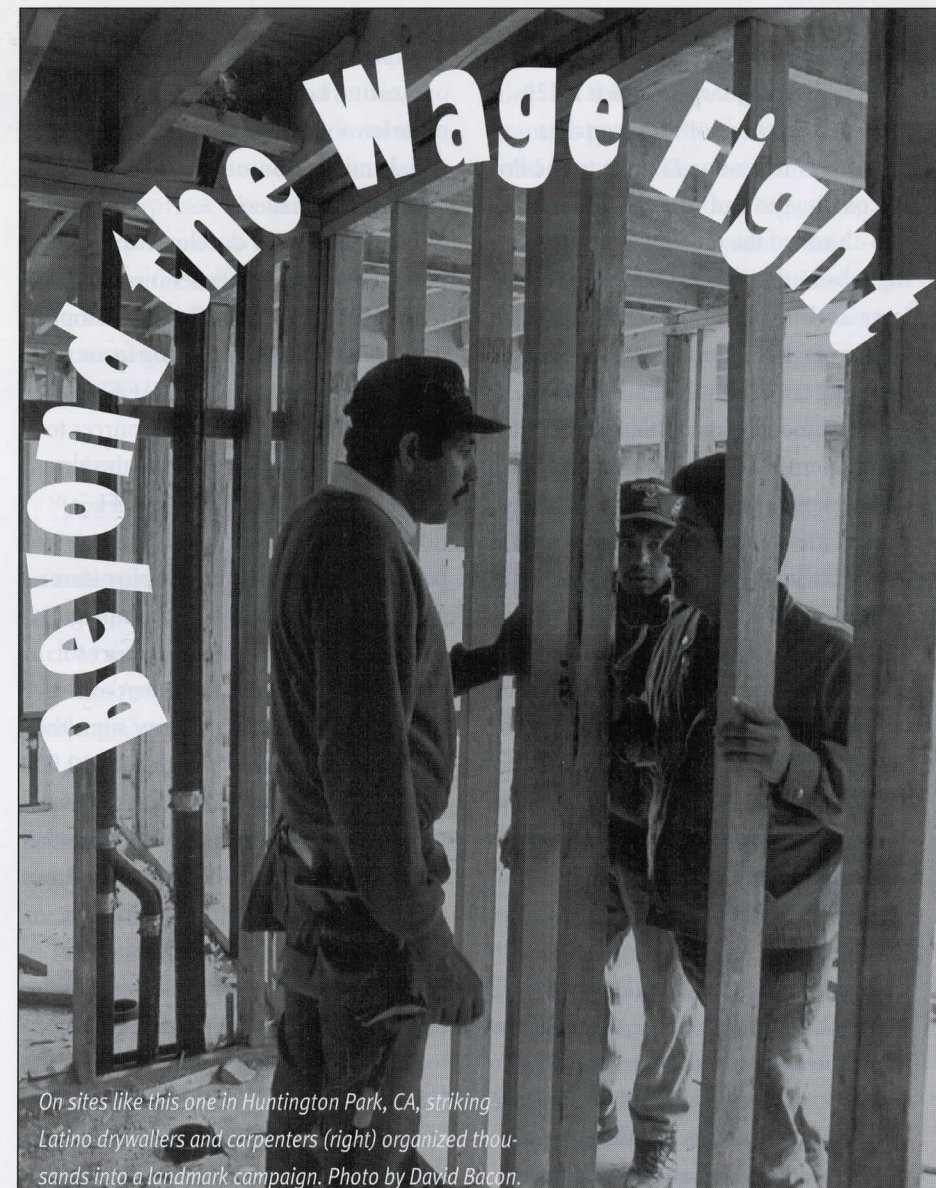
*[The Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance can be contacted at 202-842-1263.]*

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*On sites like this one in Huntington Park, CA, striking Latino drywallers and carpenters (right) organized thousands into a landmark campaign. Photo by David Bacon.*

### Fernando Gapasin examines how Latinos reshape and rejuvenate traditional labor organizing.

**U**nder John Sweeney's "New Voice" leadership, the AFL-CIO is giving new emphasis to organizing, diversity, coalition building, and political empowerment. That the AFL-CIO would loudly oppose anti-immigrant Propositions 187, 209, and 227 in California is but one indicator that it

believes the immigrant community will play a major role in the union movement's rejuvenation.

Indeed, when the union movement recently scored the biggest single organizing victory in the U.S. since 1937, winning the right to represent 80,000 Los Angeles home care workers, the workers were mostly Latina and African American women.

But the trade union movement has a checkered history of dealing with workers of color. Traditional business unionism emphasizes the narrow economic interest of the most stable, higher-paid workers who are overwhelmingly white. And the AFL-CIO has never seriously challenged racism among white union members. Indeed, it has often promoted it.

However, recent successes in organizing Latino immigrant workers, both inside and outside the trade union movement, are giving rise to a "social movement unionism" that may promote greater social justice for immigrant workers. These efforts still face an uphill struggle within the AFL-CIO, and may not survive even under Sweeney's pro-organizing agenda.

#### Drywallers Organize

Drywall hanger Jesus Gomez felt cheated out of pay by a drywall contractor. He went from job site to job site talking to other drywallers and discovered that hundreds of them were from his native village of El Maquey, in Mexico. These immigrant workers started their campaign independent of the labor movement, but became the core of an organizing drive that reinvigorated the entire Southern California District of Carpenters.

The workers went on strike in 1992 and gained that rarest of results: complete victory. The union gained 3,000 new members and started taking on immigrant issues, like fighting Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) raids.

The California Immigrant Workers Association (CIWA) played a vital role

*Fernando Gapasin is a faculty member at the Center for Labor Research and Education and Chicano Studies at UCLA, and past Secretary Treasurer of the Santa Clara Central Labor Council.*



in the drywallers' campaign. An experimental project started by the AFL-CIO in 1989, CIWA's mission was to link the union movement to immigrant (primarily Latino) communities. It was staffed by seasoned veterans of Latino community organizing who were also familiar with immigration law and the labor movement.

CIWA mobilized lawyers to help fight the INS and got unions and community groups like Orange County-based Hermandad Mexicana Nacional to support the drywallers with donations of food and other necessities. It defended arrested strikers and helped pull off creative actions like blocking the freeway in protest of INS raids. CIWA also played a key role in researching and filing the Fair Labor Standards Act lawsuits that were central to the drywallers' victory.

This potent combination of community, legal, and workplace organizing forms one of the cornerstones of social movement unionism, but CIWA itself did not survive. Despite its success, the national AFL-CIO opted to terminate the program in 1996. It was apparently not ready for such an innovative organization within its ranks.

#### **Coordinated Labor and Community Strategies**

The Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project (LAMAP) was another rich experience in the development of immigrant worker organizing and social movement unionism. In 1992, Peter Olney and other veteran organizers initiated LAMAP in conjunction with, but independent of, unions. They envisioned LAMAP as a community development strategy that could bridge multi-ethnic communities, incorporate the expertise and prestige of universities, and harness the organizing power of unions.

LAMAP chose the Alameda Corridor as its organizing target. This is a 120-square-mile corridor that stretches from downtown Los Angeles to the Port of Los Angeles and contains almost two-thirds of the 650,000 manufacturing jobs in the city. LAMAP pioneered large-scale, multi-union labor organizing drives that targeted whole industries rather than individual shops. It also designed a large-scale community component that included English as a second language (ESL) and citizenship classes, and mobilized college students to volunteer in the campaign.

However, LAMAP, like CIWA, died for lack of union support. Despite high praise from several international unions and acknowledgment from John Sweeney that LAMAP was a "model" for organizing, the unions would not support an "outside" entity like LAMAP, and it was forced to shut down in January 1998.

#### **Challenging Entrenched Leadership**

Another obstacle in the union movement is that entrenched, often white, union leaders are frequently unwilling to provide full access, let alone real political power, to Latino immigrants.

The Service Employees Industrial Union's (SEIU) successful Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles in the early 1990s was a case in point. Through the campaign, immigrants, many of whom were politicized in the struggles for democracy in Latin America, moved rapidly to replace the incumbent SEIU local leadership. They won a majority of the seats on the union executive board. But then a power struggle erupted between the new board majority and the incumbent elected officials. After attempts at mediation, the International SEIU placed the local union into trusteeship and assumed control of the union.

Experiences like these indicate that organizing Latino immigrant workers often involves direct collisions with the racial and anti-immigrant bias of established union leaders.

However, recent developments at the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO) (LACFL) offer some hope of progress. While still currying favor with the Democratic Party, the LACFL has allocated 30 percent of its resources to organizing and hired some of the key people from LAMAP. The LACFL is now a hub of major organizing campaigns in industries that employ immigrants. The most dramatic campaign is the SEIU's recent successful effort to organize 80,000 home care workers—the biggest organizing victory since the United Auto Workers organized 112,000 workers at General Motors in 1937.

The SEIU's campaign to organize the home care workers, 90 percent of whom are minority and immigrant women, lasted eleven years. Organizers made 30,000 home visits to win the support of the highly dispersed workers. They had to convince the state legislature to pass legislation creating county authorities to "employ" the home care workers, who formerly were considered independent contractors.

"I believe the history books will show that their triumph today will play as important a role in American history as the mass organizing drives of the 1930s," AFL-CIO President Sweeney declared. SEIU President Andy Stern sees the victory as starting to "give the labor movement a face that's the face of today's work force. If this labor movement is going to see a resurgence, it will bring in the hundreds of thousands of women and immigrant service sector workers who were [formerly] left behind."

This may be so, but the AFL-CIO is still stuck on "strategic organizing,"

which focuses on industries that cannot run away to avoid unionization, such as public sector or service industries. The flexibility of some manufacturing enterprises, like garment factories, to export jobs to non-union locations scares the hell out of unions. Where does this leave immigrant workers who are concentrated in such industries?

#### **Immigrant Workers Centers**

Stepping into this gap in Los Angeles and throughout the country is an independent immigrant workers social movement. Workers centers such as the Korean Immigrant Workers Association, the Pilipino Workers Committee, the Association of Latin American Gardeners of Los Angeles, the Day Laborer Organizing Project, the Domestic Workers Project, and the Garment Workers Coalition are at this core of this movement.

These groups are specifically dedicated to the organization and empowerment of immigrant workers in some of the most exploited occupations in the U.S.—garment, restaurant, day labor, and high tech manufacturing workers. For instance, the Day Laborers Organizing Project has mobilized hundreds of day laborers against anti-immigrant police harassment and local laws that limit their ability to solicit work. As Victor Narro of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights says: "Immigrant workers are creating their own movement and creating their own union."

Unlike most unions, the workers centers understand that the economic interests of immigrant workers are intimately tied to their social, cultural, and political interests. Immigrant workers face barriers not simply as workers, but on the basis of language, race, citizenship status, and immigra-

tion status. The workers centers recognize that the struggle of Latino immigrants is profoundly political and cultural in nature. They see community, workplace, and political organizing as inextricably linked. Unlike most unions, they do not differentiate between democratic political issues in the community and the struggle for democratic rights on the shop floor.

Although the experiences of immigrant workers centers has been at the forefront of immigrant worker organizing and the development of social movement unionism, they lack the resources to organize on a truly large scale.

#### **Toward Social Movement Unionism**

By themselves, neither the union movement or the immigrant workers movement has the capacity to successfully organize the millions of Latino immigrant workers. Without a strong push by progressives within the union movement and effective immigrant worker organizing outside of the union movement, it is unlikely that the AFL-CIO will make immigrant organizing a central focus.

Embracing social movement unionism is key to successful organizing. At bottom, social movement unionism presents the possibility for the development of a strategic relationship between the union movement and other social movements of people of color, immigrants, women, and gays/lesbians—between the fight for economic and other democratic rights.

Will the AFL-CIO embrace such a radical strategy? That remains to be seen, but it had better move in this direction or it will miss a crucial opportunity to strengthen the labor movement and put itself at the head of a powerful social movement of immigrants. **ACTION**

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# HANGING ON A SUNRISE South Africa in the Wake of Revolution

BY

Tim McKee AND Anne Blackshaw

PHOTOS by Anne Blackshaw

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Five years after the African National Congress and Nelson Mandela were elected to power, South Africa remains a nation at the crossroads. Scratch the surface and you will find the handiwork of decades of apartheid. The shadows are murky and the contradictions dizzying. Most black South Africans have experienced few tangible economic improvements in their lives. Many still toil in the white man's homes or the white man's mines, and many still live in racially segregated townships and attend

impoverished schools. The average rate of unemployment hovers at 40 percent, reaching as high as 84 percent in some townships.

Mandela's government, with its essentially centrist approach to nation building, has its critics. Even the ANC's long-time strategic partners—the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions—have criticized the government for not redistributing resources more quickly or systematically. But most blacks,

*Many black South Africans still live in informal settlements lacking running water, electricity and telephones. Although Mandela's government has brought clean water to 3 million people, electricity to 2 million homes, and telephones to 1.3 million people, he still says they have fallen well short of their redevelopment goals.*

Tim McKee is the author of *No More Strangers Now: Young Voices from a New South Africa*. Anne Blackshaw is the photographer of *No More Strangers Now: Young Voices from a New South Africa*.



*Connie Mamalatjie, like over a million other black women in South Africa, works as a domestic worker for a white family. She lives with her twin daughters, Khutso and Kabelo, behind her employer's house while the rest of her family remains in the rural area she calls home.*



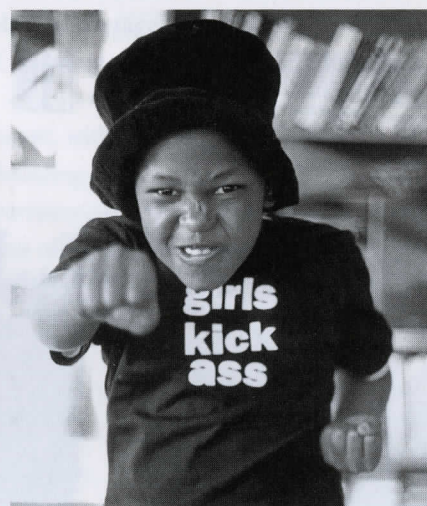
**IN CAPE TOWN, THESE GROUPS OF BOYS STILL LIVE IN VASTLY DIFFERENT WORLDS.**

Indians, and coloureds support Mandela's transition process, despite the slow pace of change. For South Africa's black citizens, the progress of their country is a complex tapestry, interwoven with the scars of the past and dreams for the future. It encompasses profound hopes and fears, an extraordinary desire for reconciliation, and the faith that the future contains far more opportunities for the next generation.

But with South Africa's severe contradictions come deep ironies. Perhaps the greatest is that bitterness shows its ugliest face in the elegant homes of white suburbia, not in the overcrowded townships. Although some whites embrace change, far more refuse to throw their faith into a reconciliation and redistribution process that diminishes their power and influence and that demands a recognition of the privilege their skin color still brings.



Seventeen-year-old Lebagang Maile, far right, as President of the Congress of South African Students, works the streets as he organizes youth in his native black Johannesburg township of Alexandra. "Today we are living in a society which is democratic, and this means that the role of the activist has changed," Lebo says. "To advance our democratic gains, we must take up the challenge of nation building. Personally I forgive whites for what they did, and, in fact, I am prepared to work with them. But the question is, are whites recognizing us or welcoming us as their brothers?"



While her mother Connie, cleans the white employer's house and cares for their children, ten-year-old Khutso attends a nearby multiracial public school that under apartheid was reserved for whites only. When she grows up, Khutso says, she is going to be a teacher

For many older black South Africans, voting in a democratic election was the culmination of years of struggle and a goal many thought they wouldn't reach in their lifetimes. Many of this generation are now looking to the country's young people to build a new nation.

Four armed men robbed a bank in Jules Street, Malvern, of R50 00 yesterday morning.

Three robbers held up staff at Pages in Springs on Monday afternoon and fled with an undisclosed amount of money

A 32-year-old man shot dead an alleged car thief as he was trying to steal his car on the corner of

Two armed men robbed a 73-year-old

early yesterday

woman of her car and jewellery in Roosevelt Street morning. The men fled in her white Mazda 626, reg-10tze and Quartz streets in Hillbrow yesterday

Instead, whites have kept political energies steered towards issues they perceive themselves to be at the center of. Nowhere is this more evident than in the way white South Africans view the country's crime problem. The white-dominated media keeps crime hype at hysterical levels, and Nelson Mandela feels he must placate white fears and threats of expatriation. Whites in South Africa seem to need to be coddled, reassured, and convinced that their fortunes and families are safe in South Africa.

Never mind that the majority of crime in South Africa is committed against non-whites. These crimes receive scant attention, garner no headlines, and mobilize few rallies. The ANC tries to contextualize the crime issue, responding that the apartheid regime was one of the most murderous and repressive and that its police force was trained more to squelch political

opposition than to fight crime. But the ANC government is not immune; they've beefed up punitive measures such as mandatory minimum sentencing and the elimination of bail, an ominous parallel to our own misguided and draconian attempts to stem crime here in the U.S.

But even these hard-line measures are not enough to appease whites. Many point to the crime rate and the government's struggle with curbing it as proof that this "experiment with democracy" isn't working. Many talk of leaving crime-ridden South Africa, taking their expertise and capital with them. It seems that, for many whites, reconciliation means simply not leaving the country.

In spite of the self-imposed isolation of many whites, blacks are eager to embrace the new. Apparently, most black South Africans feel that even

though they may see few obvious changes in their own lives, the changing opportunities for their children are a profound victory. The struggle for justice and compassion, many will tell you, was always for the children. For these young South Africans, the hardest work and the greatest potential lie ahead. They must find a way to translate the larger political and legal changes that democracy has brought into a society that reflects daily dignity and true equality.

Whites have a long way to travel on this road. They must hold themselves accountable to apartheid and its remaining legacies today. This is the promise of truth and reconciliation: that accountability is crucial to relearning. That forgiveness is essential to growth. That pain is necessary for healing. That humans can be forgiven only if they never forget. **CULTURE**



On a cold winter morning, a Coloured woman leans against her shack in Vrygrond, one of the oldest squatter camps in Cape Town.



(Stereo)

## FUNK AND BLACK PROTEST: RECOVERING A POST BLACK POWER ERA



**George Clinton (l) entertains students in Rick Vincent's class at San Francisco State.**

When I was a youngster, enjoying the funky sounds from KDIA, Oakland's black-owned radio station, I was often told by elders that my favorite music was silly and not really black music—Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, John Coltrane, *they* were the epitome of black musicians.

But as a high school graduate in 1979, I relished the fact that I would forever have my year associated with the 1970s. I firmly felt that the period I had just gone through was the Golden Age of Dance Music, as Soul and Funk had turned into relentless groove music that spoke to a people's vision of liberation—even if that liberation was only going to take place on the dance floor.

Yet nobody spoke of the 70s and Funk with the same reverence held for the 60s and Soul Music. Where were the cultural commentators—the Amiri Barakas and Nikki Giovanni—who wrote with such reverence for Soul and Rhythm and Blues? Didn't anyone else hear the echoes of the Black Revolution in such dancefloor terrorism as "Rigor

**Soul and Funk spoke to a people's vision of liberation—even if that liberation was only going to take place on the dancefloor.**

who don't read and won't integrate; and the urbane, college-bred African American, who lives in white neighborhoods, plays jazz, reads Terri McMillan, and invests in stocks. These stereotypes can be perpetuated because an important historical link is missing—the musical remnants from the black power era that endured the whitewashing of disco music and maintained an integrated yet *very black* consciousness through the decades.

What I'm referring to is, of course, the Funk: the relentless, percolating rhythm; the driving bass; the sophisticated

**Rickey Vincent, the leading historian of the Funk, says there is a black hole in history—the funky '70s—the post-black power, pre-disco era. By rediscovering the music, we might just save our soul.**

*Black Hole in the Soul*

**"You're a shining star for you to see/ What your life can truly be"  
—Earth, Wind & Fire  
"Shining Star"**

WORDS: Rickey Vincent PHOTOS: Maggie Lennon

swinging, highly arranged yet intensely improvisational, fun-loving yet deeply political, inclusive, yet defiantly black-conscious groove music spawned by James Brown and Sly and The Family Stone. Embellished by countless bands and performers since that time, Funk has since been dismissed as a minor blip on the pop culture radar.

*"We shall overcome! Where'd you get your funk from?"*

—Parliament "Bop Gun"

People who protested in the 60s with echoes of Soul Music in their ears gave up on this music once it shifted into hard-core overdrive. The bourgeois Boomer Left now drives Toyotas to Sly and the Family Stone's anthem, "Everyday People." These activists gave up on the music of the street. Nobody really paid attention once Motown fell off the charts, Michael Jackson's voice changed, Sly Stone missed his last concert, and James Brown got "too black." No one told the story. No one connected the decline of the music with the decline in the movement—and the subsequent rise of corporate black culture.

### *Those Funky Seventies*

We children of the 1970s grew up during the decade of integration—and the dissipation of a coherent black consciousness. Important black cultural upheavals, like the demise of radicalism under the FBI's destructive COINTEL-PRO program, occurred outside of the nightly news. The crushing of the movement left a void that was substituted by the appeals of pop culture: the cartoon life of Blaxploitation films like "Coffy" and "Car Wash," and white-produced television shows like "Sanford & Son" and "The Jeffersons." This avalanche of commodified culture combined with the escapist migrations of the Me Decade—black flight from the inner cities, the upsurge of intermarriage and divorce, and the spread of hardcore drugs—to fuel a decade of malaise in Black America.

*"Ain't you deep, in your semi-first class seat."*

—Funkadelic "If You Don't Like the Effects, Don't Produce the Cause"

Funk musicians themselves had been very serious about maintaining an ideology and consciousness in their music throughout the 1970s. Democracy was in the groove, and groove dictated that they reach the people on the people's terms.

When Sly & the Family Stone got on stage, dressed in the wild Bay Area hippie styles, with men and women performers, black and white performers, their driving, exhilarating

funk groove was working for everyone. The band symbolized the goals of inclusion; they literally worked as a multicultural democracy.

The massive funk bands that followed—Earth, Wind & Fire, the Isley Brothers, Rufus Featuring Chaka Khan, the Ohio Players, the Commodores, Kool & the Gang, the Average White Band, George Clinton's P-Funk—all drew on Sly's basic principles. Forged from an African spirit of rhythm and collective participation, the bands brought diverse and talented individuals together into a unified whole, celebrating diversity and forging unity. Funk was a living, working example of freedom, democracy, and integration.

**Funk was a living, working example of freedom, democracy, and integration.**

*"Music is the message that sings universal love for one and all."* —Kool and the Gang "Music Is The Message"

Kool & the Gang was one of the bands that defined blackness for my generation. While they cranked some of the hottest street funk singles of the era—"Hollywood Swinging," "Jungle Boogie," and "Funky Stuff"—they also explored a variety

of jazz and African influences. The core members converted to the Nation of Islam, and the band wrote involved spiritual numbers, subtly expanding their vision of the black experience for the listener without dogmas or speeches. Then of course, the group sold out in 1978.

They continued to release disco-pop singles through 1988, surpassing the Beatles as Billboard's "duo or group" with the most top 40 singles of all time. But the real deal was that they bowed to pressure from their Mob-connected record label, and abandoned a style they not only pioneered, but expanded. This change of heart reveals as much about the time period as any Civil Rights Commission demographic data.

While Funk began the decade as an expression of black pride and a triumphant spirit, the pop music industry sought to reduce its complexity. Finally, in 1977, "Saturday Night Fever" became the lightning rod for the musical movement known as disco, a weak imitation of Funk, and a triumph of rhythmic banality. While rock radio went to war with disco, black radio submitted to it—wiping out generations of on-

**Rickey Vincent is the author of *Funk: The Music, the People and the Rhythm of The One* (St. Martin's Press). He teaches "Black Protest Music Since the 1960s" at San Francisco State, and has broadcasted "The History of Funk" for sixteen years.**



the-air signifying. Promoters and retailers cleared out soul bins and replaced them with disco titles. Record companies dropped soul singers and funk bands that wouldn't go disco. Artists themselves were smothered by the growth of disco, and few black acts survived intact.

The soul singer Latimore put it best in 1979:

*Disc Jockey's mind so confused, can't play no rhythm and blues/ Got to keep that same old beat, wife and children got to eat/ Gets his orders from a man who don't even understand / He don't care what's on your mind, he's lookin' at dollar signs; All he know is bump-sip sip sip sip sip/ He's been discoed to death*—Latimore "Discoed To Death"

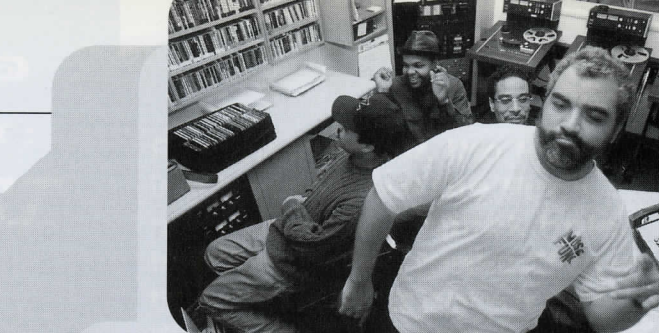
What began as white cooperation with Soul, turned into white control of disco, and finally, resulted in what Nelson George would call "the death of rhythm and blues." The loss of the music was a tough by-product of integration, but it needs to be understood as the political history of Soul.

### Getting to the One

Part of this missing history is recaptured with Brian Ward's book *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations*, one of the most thorough treatments of rhythm and blues in years. Ward, a white Londoner, argues that black popular music is an institution that gives a voice to the voiceless, makes a case for a people's values and aspirations, and is thus inherently political. He also demonstrates a point which inexplicably has been missed by so many traditional civil rights historians: the music, the musicians, and the movement thrived and lived together, influencing one another inseparably.

Ward's fascination with interracial cooperation in Soul Music gets a lot of mileage, and he is best equipped to deal with the politics of the early civil rights movement and its music. But the way he deals with the funk years is more problematic. Take Ward's treatment of James Brown's nationalism in his 1969 hit, "I Don't Want Nobody to Give me Nothin'." Brown's line, "Don't give me integration, I want true communication," was perhaps the strongest assertion of his disdain for what was passing for race relations in the black community. Meanwhile, he coined perhaps the most insightful rationale for affirmative action ever: "I don't want nobody to give me nothin'/Just open up the door/I'll get it myself!" Brown's sentiments were deeply felt in the black community and were essential to Brown's authenticity. But Ward didn't get that deep.

Ward's treatment of the Last Poets is also superficial: "They spouted a lot of nonsense about the coming of the armed struggle...and berated their brothers for not joining the uprising on 'Niggers are Scared of Revolution.'" Ward



"The History of Funk" crew tears the roof off the mothersucker.



does not seem to realize that for oppressed people, visualizing *total change* is often a basic means of initiating action on a more mundane level. He therefore implies that there is *good* protest music, and *bad* protest music. This ideological bias is the most troubling aspect of his otherwise deft and significant book.

If one looks at black music on its own terms, all of the extreme elements—urges of nationalism, violence, misogyny, and self-destruction—are channeled through a counterpoint of rhythm, soul, and spirit, in which a radicalism is essential to the whole. There is no nonsense in black music. Everything is connected to everything else, and from the earliest moments of the blues, black music has striven to return to this balance and natural order of things.

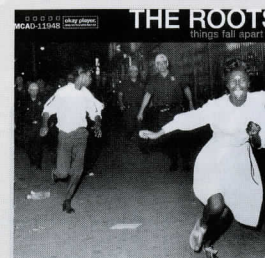
*"Everything is Everything"*

—Donny Hathaway "Everything is Everything"

The legacy of Funk and Soul is a holistic one, one that shows us that blackness, freedom, and integration are not exclusive. Take another funk exemplar, Stevie Wonder. After providing child-labor for Berry Gordy's Motown—a black-owned imitation of exploitative white-run record companies—Stevie demanded renegotiation on his 21st birthday, and earned complete creative control, a decidedly

# RACE RECORDS

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**GIL SCOTT-HERON—EVOLUTION (AND FLASHBACK)** (RCA) *Gil Scott-Heron's earliest releases features timeless rants and rave-ups, and, of course, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised".*

**DUSTY SPRINGFIELD—DUSTY IN MEMPHIS (DELUXE EDITION)** (Rhino) *Yet another re-issue of the late "White Panther's" classic take on Memphis R&B that made Aretha purr, "Grrrrrr!!"*

**VIVA MALPACHE!—LOS GREATEST HITS DE VIVA MALPACHE!** (Grita!) *LA rockeros with roots from Nicaragua to China make their debut with hummable post-punk odes to santeras, the chupacabra, and fictional Mexican wrestler Azul Atomico.* **CULTURE**

political act for someone operating without agents or family intrusions.

He then went on to produce music that soared beyond soul's standard fare to incorporate blistering commentaries on the social condition ("Big Brother," "Village Ghetto Land"), elaborately orchestrated anthems of survival ("Livin' For the City," "Black Man"), upbeat pop and joyous love songs ("Isn't She Lovely," "Golden Lady"), all with sophisticated jazz interpretations and arrangements. In short, Stevie Wonder incorporated the entirety of the black tradition, as well as many European aspects into his music, fusing together an integrated landscape of sound that affirmed a sophisticated yet street-smart African American aesthetic.

Stevie shrewdly dismissed disco, producing at its height, a tribute to Duke Ellington, "Sir Duke." In a successful tactic that merged Soul with politics, he used his 1980 album, *Hotter Than July* as a political manifesto calling on his fans to support the creation of a Martin Luther King, Jr. National

Holiday. (He also flirted with running for Mayor of Detroit—now that's Soul Power.)

Stevie's music affirmed a sophisticated black consciousness, transcending W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of a "double consciousness" by weaving western knowledge into a thriving black identity. Integration, to many black folks, meant black sophistication, not white identification. The soul and spirit were African, the setting and the status were western.

Funk is a music of traditions. These traditions—of music, of political struggle, and the spirit of freedom—were handed down to the generation of black musicians entering the 1970s. These artists had with them the triumphant spirit of the civil rights movement, the bittersweet scars of the black power era, a surprising amount of musical training, a brand new groove to work with, and a strangely enthusiastic support from major record companies. And what they did with this opportunity should be household knowledge, a source of pride, and a call to the dancefloor. **CULTURE**



# THE PRODIGAL SON: Filmmaker Tony Bui Returns to Vietnam for *Three Seasons*

Not long ago, Vietnamese American Tony Bui was just another young, independent filmmaker trying to make his mark. But now Bui has rocketed into prominence, thanks to the accolades bestowed on his feature debut, *Three Seasons*, at the Sundance Independent Film Festival. *Three Seasons* received both the judges' Jury Award and the Audience Award, plus an additional prize for cinematography.

The first American feature film ever to be completely shot within post-fall-of-Saigon Vietnam, *Three Seasons* is a deeply expressive portrait of that nation's contemporary pulse. The film refuses the white-centered Rambo redemption or soldier's apocalypse narratives. Instead, Bui tracks the stories of a struggling cyclo driver, a street urchin, a former American GI, and a headstrong young woman. These are everyday people struggling to survive the present, if often haunted by the past. Bui deftly captures an expanse of emotion as intimate as a tear and as deep as 20-year old wounds from the war.

His success is a sign that both Asian American and American independent filmmaking are expanding in definition. For 25-year-old Bui, who was born in Saigon but raised in Sunnyvale, CA, notions of home are complex configurations of emotional connection that extend beyond the traditional borders of the nation-state. Bui talks with Colorlines about the making of *Three Seasons* and his own cultural rediscovery of Vietnam.

CL: Did you know this was a good film?

TB: It's definitely surprising. When we got the acceptance for the competition at Sundance, we actually didn't know if we were going to accept it. *Three Seasons* is an American independent film, but it is in Vietnamese. We always wondered about how it would be received. After we won, every question that was posed to me was about how *Three Seasons* deepens the definition of what an "American" independent film means.

CL: Maybe people don't get sidetracked by the language issue because the film really resonates on an emotional level, regardless of linguistics.



NGUYEN NGOC HIEP (L) AND DON DUONG (R) STAR IN TONY BUI'S *THREE SEASONS*.

TB: That's what I really set out to do. People asked me which award was the most important to me, and I said it was definitely the Audience Award. I didn't want *Three Seasons* to be an exotic, small art house kind of film. I wanted a large audience to see modern-day Vietnam and the people of modern-day Vietnam as being people of today's world, and not just in terms of the past or in terms of the war. I have to tell you, I had no idea it would affect so many people the way it has.

CL: In making this film, you apparently also went through a cultural recovery by returning to your birthplace after spending the vast majority of your life growing up in California. Can you tell us about that?

TB: Just as the characters in *Three Seasons* are all searching for something in their lives, I think making this film was part of my continuous search to understand what happened to me the first time I went back to Vietnam. I was born in Saigon, and left right before the fall of Saigon, when I was two years old. I grew up in Silicon Valley. I didn't have much knowledge of my culture, and I only spoke a little Vietnamese—enough to say, "Hey mom, I'm hungry." My parents, to their credit, tried to teach us more of the language and our culture, but as kids growing up in a mainly white suburb, you tend to push that away to try to fit in. You're almost embarrassed of your past and heritage.

OLIVER WANG IS A MEMBER OF THE COLORLINES STAFF AND A GRADUATE STUDENT IN ETHNIC STUDIES AT U.C. BERKELEY.

When I was 19 years old, in 1992, I was sent back to Vietnam and that visit changed my life. I was there for two weeks and I hated every moment of it. I wanted to go back to the States. I hated the heat, the crowds, all the motorbikes, all the noise, smells, you know. After two weeks, I went home and when I landed in San Francisco, I suddenly fell into a deep depression. I still remember it very well. I had this incredible longing and I couldn't explain it because I had been so happy to leave Vietnam. I started crying in the car on the drive home. And that's how it all happened.

I then decided that I had to go back to Vietnam. I decided I had to go back to understand why I was so depressed. I couldn't shake it out of my head. Every morning I would wake up, thinking I was still in Vietnam. I could hear the women yelling, I could hear the motorbikes honking. I went back to Vietnam during the next school break I had and spent three months there. After that, I went back every six months. At first, I consciously hated everything around me, but subconsciously I began to connect with my past, my heritage, the people of

"Just as the characters in *Three Seasons* are all searching for something in their lives, I think making this film was part of my continuous search to understand what happened to me the first time I went back to Vietnam."

Vietnam, the country. Ironically, all the things I hated about Vietnam on that first visit are what I most embrace about Vietnam now. I love the heat, all the sounds, smells, textures.

CL: Do you stand out there? Are you conscious of being Vietnamese American?

TB: I definitely felt out of place during my earlier visits. That's why I think I tried so hard to understand everyone there. But my perceptions were also affected by the fact that I had no money. I had \$100 to spend for three months so I never ate in restaurants and I never stayed in hotels. So the people I hung out with, the locals, never had any money either. Those are the people I ended up focusing on in *Three Seasons*. I didn't know the businessmen, but I knew the cyclo drivers. I knew the street kids. I watched them play soccer in the rain. I got to hear their stories, their bitterness, their hopes, their ambitions, what they thought about all the changes in Vietnam. I wanted to give voice to what I had seen because these people had powerful, emotional stories. **CULTURE**

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- **Grace Chang on Workfare Workers and the INS**
- **Josh Kun on Steven Spielberg and race**
- **Makani Themba on Don Byron**

*Students and parents rally for Ethnic Studies and affirmative action in Concord, CA, 1997. Photo by Kahlil Jacobs-Fantauzzi.*

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