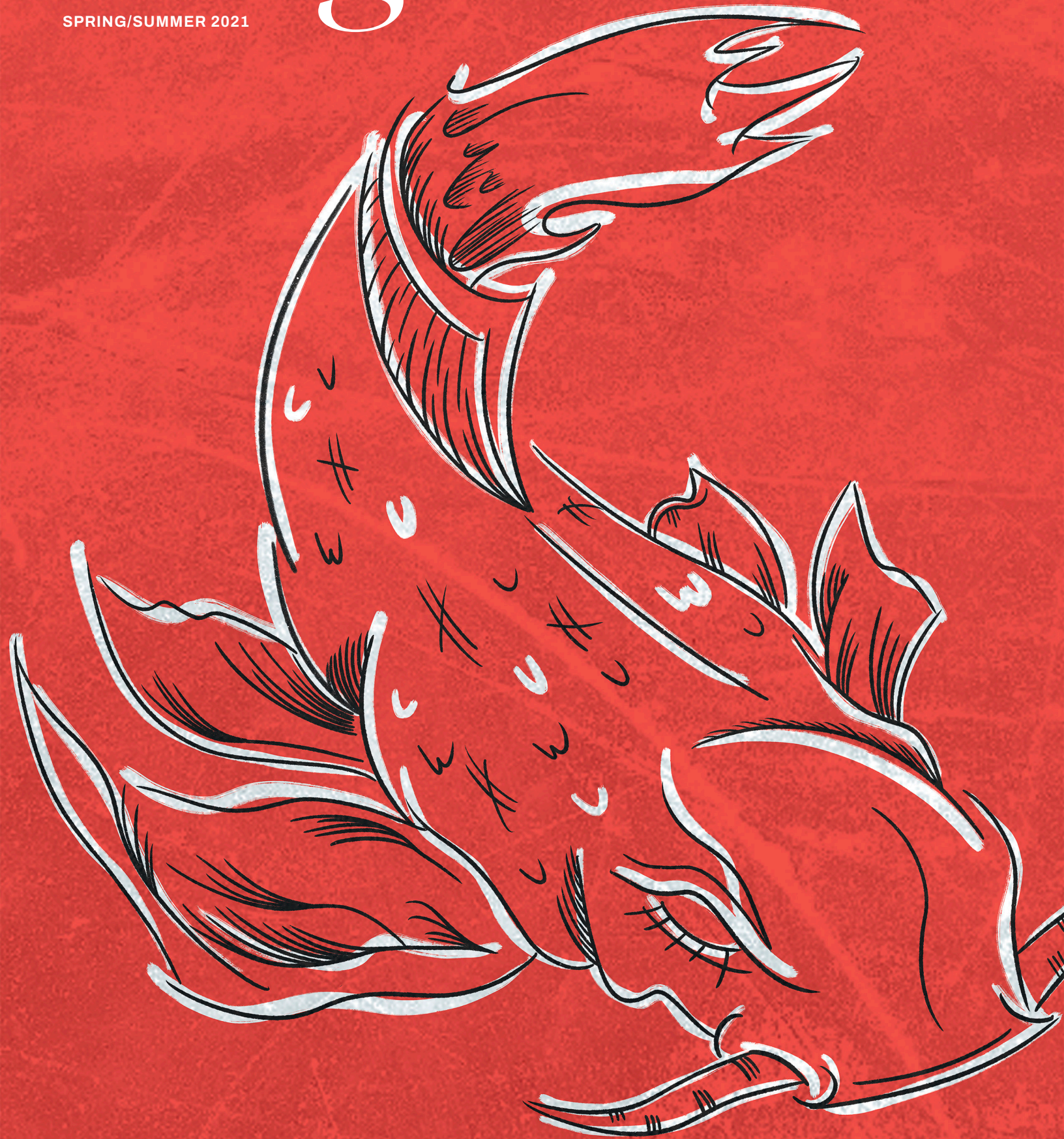


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SPRING/SUMMER 2021



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BEHIND THE COVER



◀ Our cover was independently designed by **Tony Lee Curtis** for OCA-Asian Pacific American Advocates. View his portfolio at tonyleec.com.

“The koi fish represents adversity, good luck, and perseverance. A story we all share is the struggles our parents and ancestors have gone through to give us what we have today. The lessons we’ve learned from them directly impacts our current and future lives. I hope when people see this work, they see a familiar symbol from their heritage with a modern taste to show its relevance to both our struggles and fortunes.”

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tony Lee Curtis is a graphic designer and illustrator based in Michigan. Being a Korean American, he understands the importance of uniting cultures while advocating for equality. Through positivity and creativity, he creates art to encapsulate moments we hold dear into a language we can all understand. Tony has spent the last four years collaborating with various organizations to accomplish this while donating to multiple mental health awareness programs and advocacy groups. You can find him on Instagram at [@Tonyleec_](https://www.instagram.com/Tonyleec_).



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Content was provided by **The Yappie**, a publication dedicated to tracking Asian American + Pacific Islander politics and activism. Learn more at theyappie.com.

From the Desk of..

OCA'S NATIONAL
PRESIDENT

Linda Ng



OCA'S DEPUTY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Thu Nguyen



Dear OCA Friends and Family,

As our world begins its recovery from the hardships of the past year, I continue to be inspired by our members, who tapped into their individual strengths and talents to band together in the face of crisis. I congratulate you all for rising to the challenge of organizing events and staying connected despite physical distance. As COVID-19 and the rise of anti-Asian hate threatened to divide our communities, you exercised creativity and care to make our bonds stronger than ever. I am excited to continue the successes of our virtual programming, but also look forward to resuming in-person gatherings in the fall.

As we prepare for the future, the clues and valuable lessons hidden in our past start to reappear. This issue of *IMAGE* uses the history of the AAPI community as a tool for shaping what justice, solidarity, safety, and other important values mean to us during moments of transition. I hope these narratives, spanning several generations across the OCA community, inspire you to continue doing great work in advocacy and illuminate our way forward.

Warm regards,

Linda

Dear Advocates,

By the time you receive this magazine, we have perhaps gone further backwards in this fight against COVID-19, and have returned to increased mask mandates or even capacity limits. It's a familiar sinking feeling — not long ago, we were wringing our hands at the reversals of immigration reform and women's rights to their bodies (we still are). Yet this time, the unknown of the Delta variant and all of its cousins and consequences don't feel quite as daunting as they did in February 2020. We have gone through all of this once, and we can do it again.

"Resilience" is becoming an exhausted term to describe how it is that we are all continuing to function. Is it really "resilient" when I feel like a zombie functioning on autopilot to get through the days of the week? As immigrants/children of immigrants, resilience is certainly part of our heritage, but I now hesitate to encourage others to keep on going simply because of a trait they think they should have. Throughout 2021 thus far, I have seen us keep on going because of a need to survive, protect our loved ones, and protect democracy. I realized that at the core of "resiliency" are our instincts to love and protect.

To love and to protect are also two incredibly difficult actions. When you love, you embrace both the beauty and flaws of a person, country, or entity. When you protect, you are prepared to give any kind of resource to whom or what you're protecting. *It can be tiring to be resilient.* I want to offer you this: rather than framing your motivation to continue by your resilience, it may help to frame your motivation in terms of the love and protectiveness you have for others, and that others have for you. As we pull through the rest of 2021 and head into the unknowns of 2022, surround yourself with your village, and remember whose village you are a part of.

Warmly,

Thu

BRIEFING

Eye on Washington / In Focus / Views



◀ A woman holds a sign at a Stop AAPI Hate rally in San Jose, California. Courtesy of Jason Leung via Unsplash.

HIGHLIGHTS

Rallying Against Hate

Across the country, OCA chapters are responding to the alarming uptick in anti-Asian violence. **Page 6**

Briefing

Mobilizing Across America

This year, thousands of OCA members formed diverse coalitions to march against anti-Asian hate.



▲ Demonstrators gather as part of a rally organized by OCA Greater Cleveland. Courtesy of Phil Zhang.



▲ OCA members participate in a nationwide day of *Unity Against Hate* on May 15 at the California State Capitol. Courtesy of OCA's Sacramento chapter.

Want the full story?

View in-depth chapter highlights and photographs on our redesigned website — medium.com/image-magazine

1

NEW YORK

This spring, OCA-NY organized *No Longer Invisible: A Vigil and Gathering to Heal our Communities*. Led and designed by Asian American women, this event was a multi-racial community gathering grounded in art, healing, and solidarity for the AAPI community in NYC's Flushing. 150 community members and organizers attended this three-hour event, and artwork created by participants at the vigil and at an accompanying community workshop was displayed in a temporary exhibit at the Queens Museum. — Contributed by **Brianna Cea**

2

SACRAMENTO

In March, OCA Sacramento participated in 11 media interviews, four press conferences, three rallies, and spoke at four community events to address anti-Asian hate. On March 25, the chapter hosted *Actions Not Statements*, a virtual town hall that provided over 200 community members an opportunity to engage with local leaders. In collaboration with other groups, they also helped coordinate a rally at the steps of the California State Capitol as part of the nationwide *Unity Against Hate* day on May 15. — Contributed by **Jinky Dolar**

3

CLEVELAND

This past March, OCA Greater Cleveland organized the *Stop Asian Hate Rally* in Cleveland's AsiaTown in partnership with other AAPI organizations that included a dozen speakers and drew a crowd of 1,000 people. The multilingual event was performed in English, Mandarin (with a splash of Cantonese), and American Sign Language. Regardless if the listener understood the language or not, the passion of the speakers was clear as they communicated their outrage and sadness. — Contributed by **Lisa Wong**

4

DETROIT

On June 19, OCA Detroit hosted a Zoom webinar focused on the legacy of Vincent Chin that reached over 1,000 people from 20 states and Canada. The intergenerational panel addressed how the climate of anti-Asian bias during the early 1980s compares to that of today. Panelists also discussed the importance of pursuing multiple paths to racial justice, the significance of commemorating Vincent Chin's death on Juneteenth, and how to carry Chin's legacy forward. — Contributed by **Shenlin Chen**



Lawmakers Take Aim at the ‘Insular Cases’

A key House committee is considering denouncing a series of century-old Supreme Court rulings that continue to impact Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders living in the territories.

EYE ON WASHINGTON / By Javan Santos

DEMOCRATS ON THE HOUSE COMMITTEE on Natural Resources took aim at a series of U.S. Supreme Court rulings known as the Insular Cases, condemning precedents set by the century-old legal decisions for denying people of the U.S. territories federal funding and access to fundamental rights. The racially charged decisions argue that certain aspects of the Constitution need not apply to people living in the territories because they are of “alien races.”

Between the five territories—Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa—over 100,000 people identify as AAPI. To this day, they live with second-class status and no solution on the horizon due to the doctrine established by the Insular Cases, which continues to heavily shape legal outcomes today.

The precedent set by high court rulings has also cast a shadow over the unincorporated territories and the people who live there, contributing to long-standing inequities. The territories have no representation in the U.S. Senate and their people cannot vote for U.S. president, despite holding

American citizenship. Several federal laws, such as the territories’ Organic Acts, explicitly restrict certain rights for people in the territories.

Even though federal courts have ruled that excluding territorial residents from federal programs is unconstitutional, the U.S. Department of Justice continues to appeal the decisions in attempts to uphold the doctrine

In May, lawmakers on the House’s natural resources committee debated H.R. 279, a resolution introduced by Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D-Arizona) to “acknowledge that the Insular Cases are relics of racial views of an earlier era that have no place in our nation today; and reject the Insular Cases and their application to all present and future cases.” The measure is sponsored by four out of the five territories’ representatives, who lack voting power — but merely raising the issue is having a domino effect.

Tina Rose Muña Barnes (D), vice

speaker of the Guam legislature, introduced and passed her own resolution in support of the House measure.

“I think it is imperative that the people of Guam express their sentiments on actions taken by Congress,” Muña Barnes told *The Yappie*. “This resolution supports the efforts of Chairman Grijalva and I believe it further supports our shared goal for parity for Americans in the territories.”

Scholars who attended hearings on the federal resolution acknowledged that this is only one step of many. Congress has the plenary authority to enable rights for people living in the territories through the Territorial Clause of the U.S. Constitution, but representatives from the territories don’t have the authority to enact this type of change. “The American model of territorial governance is both colonial and anti-democratic,” said Rafeal Cox Alomar, a professor at the University of the District of Columbia.

As the House resolution moves through the legislative process, it signals a new movement, one that calls on America to confront its long-overlooked history of colonialism. ●

Javan Santos is indigenous to the Pacific Island of Guam.



Originally published by *The Yappie*

View the full story at theyappie.com.

Momming During the Pandemic

FIRST PERSON / By Yvonne So

MOMMING DURING THE PANDEMIC takes on a new definition. On good days, it's a circus level juggling act that's wobbly at times, but ultimately comes together. On a bad day, I'm publicly shamed in front of a Google Classroom of kindergarteners as my son unmutes his mic and declares: "My mom yells at me and says I stress her out!"

I am, in fact, stressed out. I'm one mom trying to manage the lives, and now schooling, of three boys while navigating a society that feels more pernicious, socially unjust, and divided. It is widely noted that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders face a "twin pandemic." While our nation emerges from the darkest grips of COVID-19, the racist assault on my community continues to spread and mutate this virus of hate.

When national media reported the COVID-19 virus originated in Wuhan, China, I braced myself, as I had in every other period of my life, for the racism, scape-goating and foreigner labeling that would inevitably ensue. I grew up outside New York City in the 1980s, a time when our nation was fraught with anti-Japanese sentiment. Being heckled as a "Jap" was commonplace, as was people slanting their eyes and bucking their teeth at me like they were somehow serving as my mirror. In 1992, Yoshihiro Hattori, a Japanese exchange student, was gunned to death in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for knocking on the wrong house. My sons know not to sneak up on people, even neighbors, because Yoshi's death casts a long shadow.

I am Chinese American, and my great-grandfather was part of the first wave of Chinese immigration to Western Canada. I am also a modern reminder of how our country's exclusionary laws, enacted 150 years ago, have consequences. My sons are the first generation of Americans in my family, even though we have roots in North America since the late 1800s.

I write this as my sons sleep. They've turned in their day's assignments, my house is uncharacteristically quiet, and I'm finally in the office alone. I type with the hope that the feelings in my heart translate to a voice that awakens compassion in others. Maybe if my words are impactful enough, maybe if I appeal to our shared humanity, you will care. And yet this has been my battle throughout my life. Maybe if I build enough bridges, someone will want to cross them. Maybe. ●

Yvonne So is the Board Chair of OCA's Greater Phoenix chapter.



Photography by Kathleen Dreier — Published as part of “Voices of Race,” a portrait series dedicated to amplifying the voices of BIPOC communities. ▼





A Year of Tragedy

What's driving the violence against Asian Americans?

COMMENTARY / By Tsiwen Law

A FEW WEEKS AGO, A YOUNG MAN WAS captured on video knocking down three elderly Asians in Oakland, California's Chinatown. Those attacks came on the heels of an 84-year-old Thai gentleman getting knocked down and killed during his daily walk in San Francisco, and a Filipino elder being slashed in the face while on a New York City Subway. In its statement about anti-Asian violence, the Philadelphia Mayor's Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs announced: "Unfortunately, even here in Philadelphia, there have been verbal and physical attacks, as well as other displays of

racism, directed at Asian Americans. In 2020, the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations (PCHR) received 28 reports of acts of hate against members of the AAPI community—19 were confirmed as incidents of hate or bias, representing 34 percent of the 56 total hate or bias incidents confirmed by the agency."

Even after President Donald Trump, with his repeated references to the "China Virus," has left office, the stigma of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners remains." Two erroneous assumptions flow from being stereotyped. First, that we are not entitled to the protections of the U.S. Constitution or federal civil rights laws, and second, that we are responsible for the acts or omissions of Asian countries to which our ethnicity is assigned.

The first assumption is unfounded, and Asians have had to serve time behind bars to vindicate those rights. As the U.S. Supreme Court recognized in *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* (1886), all persons are protected by the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Whether Asian Americans are citizens or not, we are persons entitled to constitutional protections. In *U.S. v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898), the Supreme Court recognized that persons of Chinese descent born in the U.S. acquired citizenship under the birthright citizenship provision of the 14th Amendment.

The second assumption derives from the discredited stereotype that we are citizens of Asian countries, regardless of our Asian ethnicity. In *Korematsu v. U.S.* (1944), the Supreme Court ascribed dual citizenship to 120,000 Japanese Americans as justification for their evacuation into internment camps. Implicit here is that Asians are all the same, regardless of the country to which our ethnicity is ascribed. We saw this with the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, who was blamed for high unemployment in Detroit resulting from the importation of Toyota, Honda,

▲ Illustration by Mahina Martinson, the Spring 2021 Communications Intern at OCA National Center.

and Nissan cars. Mr. Chin was neither of Japanese descent nor employed by any Japanese manufacturer. His killers, Ron Ebens and Michael Nitz, never served any jail time for their acts. Now we see Vietnamese, Cambodians, Filipinos, and other non-Chinese Asians being killed or attacked for the “Wuhan Flu” or the “China Virus.”

Perpetrators of violence and murder against Asians who go unpunished have longstanding precedent in the California Supreme Court. Justice Hugh Murray’s opinion in *People v. George Hall* (1854) held that Chinese witnesses could not testify against George Hall for the murder of Ling Sing because the Chinese were “Indians.” Under California’s Criminal Procedure Act of April 16th, 1850, “[n]o Black or Mulatto person, or Indian, shall be allowed to give evidence in favor of, or against a white man.”

Even though Chinese persons were not mentioned in the Act, Chief Justice Murray went beyond the text of the law to include Chinese witnesses: “...the name of Indian, from the time of Columbus to the present day, has been used to designate, not alone the North American Indians, but the whole of the Mongolian race...” George Hall walked free despite three Chinese witnesses to his crime.

Only 17 years later, following a white mob riot in Los Angeles’ Chinatown, America witnessed the largest mass lynching in U.S. history. The white mob lynched 17 Chinese persons and knifed another two to death. Eight members of the mob were convicted and sentenced to two to six years in prison. Upon appeal, the California Supreme Court reversed the convictions and set all eight men free. The perpetual foreigner myth has reinforced the belief that people who commit violence against Asian Americans will not be held to account by the law.

The origin of this perpetual foreigner history is the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court held that African American slaves had no rights that the white man was bound to respect, even if they had been freed. The

▼
DIGITS

6,603

incidents were reported to Stop AAPI Hate between March 19, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

Naturalization Act of 1790 limited eligibility for citizenship to “free, white persons.” Justice Roger Taney interpreted that to mean “that citizenship at that time was perfectly understood to be confined to the white race.” After the Civil War and the passage of the 14th Amendment, African Americans acquired the right to citizenship by birth and the amendment of the 1790 Naturalization Act to include persons of “African nativity and descent.” Mexican Americans acquired the right to citizenship through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo after the Mexican-American War. Asians inherited the “free white person” bar to naturalization until 1952 with the passage of the McCarran-Walter Act. Asian American history is intimately tied to Dred Scott’s experience of fighting white supremacy. What is seldom raised is that Chinese persons served in the Union Army during the Civil War to defeat the Confederacy and end slavery.

It is not a question of which racial group suffered more or where you fall on the color chart. According to Justice Murray in *People v. Hall*, the Chinese belonged to “the more degraded tribes of the (Indo-Mongolian) species.” The question is what have you done to raise awareness about the history behind the racist events we experience today and to change the laws and conditions that have enabled hate crimes. Baked into the tariff war started by the previous administration, the anti-China rhetoric—whether for election campaigns or for the ostracism of Chinese American scientists—continues to fuel the foreigner stereotype and encourage more violence. The absence of Asian American and Ethnic Studies in our schools directly contributes to what outwardly appears as random violence against Asian Americans. If Asian American lives matter, then our history in the United States belongs in the school books. ●

Tsiwen Law is an attorney, adjunct lecturer of Asian American legal history, and past governor-at-large of the Pennsylvania Bar Association.

Briefing

Far East, Deep South

How African Americans and Chinese immigrants forged a community in the Delta generations ago.

By Larissa Lam

SIX YEARS AGO, I TOOK A FATEFUL TRIP to Mississippi with my husband, Baldwin Chiu, and his family in search of his grandfather's gravesite. As a Chinese American growing up in Diamond Bar, I had never ventured into the Deep South before this trip.

What started out as a family vacation turned into an excavation of the hidden history of not just my husband's family, but of Chinese families in the segregated South. These discoveries greatly changed my perspective on the historical role of Asians in America.

There's a lot of pain associated with the South. Slavery, the Civil War and segregation. These moments in history are always framed in Black and white. When Baldwin first told me that his paternal grandfather and also his great-grandfather were buried in Mississippi, I thought they would be the only Chinese in that cemetery.

Baldwin knew very little about his father's side of the family because my father-in-law, Charles Chiu, grew up in China without his father. Little did I know that generations of Chinese lived





◀ **K.C. Lou in Pace, Mississippi in the early 1940s.** Courtesy of the Chiu family; this story was originally published by the *Los Angeles Times*.

and died in the South. Their stories have rarely been told and were excluded from the history books I read in school.

Our quest to learn more about Baldwin's family led us to the Mississippi Delta Chinese Heritage Museum in Cleveland, Miss. I was surprised to find a whole museum dedicated to the history of Chinese Americans in the middle of Mississippi.

I had no idea that there had been a significant Chinese community in that state, one also subjected to many of the Jim Crow laws used to oppress the Black community. I met Chinese Americans who, as children, were barred from attending white public schools because of their race and were sent to a one-room school for Chinese children only, with just one teacher instructing all grades from first to 12th.

I eventually found myself in the small town of Pace, where Baldwin's family grocery store was once located, and which remains a town with a majority Black population. Like Black families in the South in the pre-civil rights era, Chinese families could not live in white neighborhoods.

Chinese immigrants were initially brought to the Mississippi Delta after the Civil War to supplement plantation labor. By the early 1900s, many Chinese lived and worked in family-run grocery stores in predominantly Black neighborhoods in farming towns like Pace. Most of their Black neighbors worked as sharecroppers.

In Pace, we were introduced to the mayor, Levon Jackson, who welcomed us into his house for some barbecued ribs he cooked himself. Mayor Jackson also introduced us to other town residents and the long, rich history of the Black and Asian communities in the Delta.

Many of the older Black residents, who lived through Jim Crow, told us

that they preferred to shop at Chinese grocery stores because they were treated with respect. They could walk through the front door with dignity and not be relegated to a separate "colored" entrance. Some told me that Chinese grocery stores, like the one Baldwin's family ran, offered goods at a lower price and extended credit to sharecroppers who were paid only once or twice a year.

The Chinese and Black families had a shared experience because both were pushed to the margins of society and had to figure out ways to survive together in a white society.

Among my father-in-law's old family photos, we had seen one of a smiling African American man. For a long time, we weren't able to confirm his identity, but it was clear his photo was a treasured keepsake. Recently, we learned that the man's name was Hosey Collins and that he lived in Pace. We heard from other residents that he helped out at Baldwin's family store. We also learned that Baldwin's grandfather, K.C. Lou, in turn, helped out at Hosey's farm. There was a real and strong friendship between these men.

There are lessons we can learn from every chapter of history, even the dark ones. This is just one example of shared history between communities. There are many more stories that haven't been written about but have been experienced by those who lived it. In the Mississippi Delta nearly a century ago, bonds of community were formed among unlikely neighbors. We should remember those bonds so we can improve the world we live in today. ●

Larissa Lam is the director and co-producer, with her husband, Baldwin Chiu, of the documentary "Far East Deep South." The film premiered on "America ReFramed" on the World Channel on May 4.



Michelle Wu is Throwing Out the Rules of Politics

The Taiwanese American Boston mayoral candidate has her eyes set on overhauling city government.

By Shawna Chen

W

WHEN I FIRST MOVED ACROSS THE COUNTRY to attend college in Massachusetts, there was a certain quality in the air I couldn't pinpoint. I could feel it everywhere in Boston, in the street names, the statues and memorials, the things people talked about, the stress on names and lineage and schooling.

It was only after I read Danzy Senna's memoir "Where Did You Sleep Last Night?" that I put a word to it: aristocratic.

Boston is known for its gatekeeping. Just last year, *Boston Magazine* reported that Boston ranks 15th for segregation among the U.S.'s 51 greater metropolitan areas with large Black populations. No woman or person of color has ever been elected to the office, and city leadership tends to mostly favor whiteness.

The city is changing though—and fast. Over the last generation, the Greater Boston region has seen a "major shift," according to *WBUR News*, with an uptick in the number of people of color calling Boston home.

Black and Latinx Americans now comprise 25.2% and 19.8%, respectively, of the city's population. Native Americans and Pacific Islanders account for a little under 1%, and 5.3% of the city identify as two or more races.

Asian Americans, the U.S.'s fastest growing racial group, make up 9.7% of

the city—higher than the proportion of Asians at the national level (roughly 6%).

But Boston itself remains highly siloed. People frequently reject non-Boston natives in elections, and regularly challenge their claims to the city. It's a refrain that's familiar to Asian Americans like Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu: You're a foreigner. You don't belong here. You're not one of us.

That rhetoric has dominated discourse when considering who can and should lead the city, and it's usually directed at people of color.

"When I first ran for City Council in 2013, I was told over and over again that I would likely lose, and for reasons beyond my control: I was too young, not born in Boston, Asian American, female," Wu wrote in an opinion for the *Boston Globe* last year.

When she was elected, she became the first Asian American woman and the first person of Taiwanese descent to serve on the council. From January 2016 to January 2018, she led the council—its first woman of color president and only the third woman to ever hold the position in its 106-year history. In 2018, she was one of six finalists honored as an EMILY's List "Rising Star" and later ranked No. 31 in *Boston Magazine's* "The 100 Most Influential People in Boston" list.

She is backed by big names, from national players like Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) and AAPI Victory Fund to the fiery New York state lawmaker Yuh-Line Niou (D), who sang her praises when I mentioned I had spoken with Wu.

Wu's supporters argue that she is what Boston needs in this current moment. The racism that drove the 1903 Boston Immigration Raids—immigration officials arrested at least 234

Chinese Americans, the vast majority of whom were in Boston legally—has reared its ugly head yet again.

Among Boston's nearly 700,000 residents, anti-Asian hate crimes jumped 60% in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the same period last year. Local Asian Americans have been spat at, had their tires slashed, encountered slurs including the familiar "Go back to your country," reported assault, struggled with business losses, ran into anti-Asian graffiti, and more.

Admittedly, the odds are against Wu. She was born in Chicago. She's running against five well known candidates. And she's attempting to claim a position very rarely afforded to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI), who make up just 0.9% of elected leaders in the U.S.

Because she knows all this, she was one of the first to launch her campaign last year. It was important for her to be "deeply embedded" in the community and help strengthen the civic infrastructure to last "way beyond Election Day 2021," she tells me. Her platform is one of "redefining what's possible" and running a "joyful community base that lifts up every neighborhood in our city along the way."

When we meet for the first time on Zoom, it's late September. She's seated in what looks like a home office. As we talk, her two young sons burst into the room, chattering with excitement. She lets them play around a bit before calmly explaining that Mommy is on a call and needs them to be quiet. The boys, both under 10 years of age, quickly nod and leave. A fellow *Yappie* editor remarks on how cute they are.

Wu laughs it off but admits some apprehension about explaining this period of life to them. While reading a picture book, her three year old had asked why the characters weren't

wearing masks outside. “It hits me once in a while,” she says.

She gives off an air of quiet resolve when we speak, putting thought and care into her words. This isn’t an overly idealistic candidate who sweeps past the minutia to appeal to voters with big dreams and rosy language. Beneath her veneer of composure is a history that sharpened her understanding of the world from an early age. The at-first-glance model minority disappears when you glimpse her tenacity, one that rose from the ashes amid an intimate relationship with the systems that make up government.

“ASIAN HYPHEN AMERICAN”

Wu was born on the South Side of Chicago in 1985. Her parents immigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan the year prior. Her first language was Mandarin Chinese.

As the oldest of three, she bore the invisible labor of tending to her parents in a country that demeaned them.

“It always felt like two separate identities, the Asian hyphen American,” she said. “It was like there was a wall between them.”

She had the classic lunchbox moment, one millions of Asian Americans know: “I remember very vividly being little and bringing my lunch to school and taking out what was my to-die-for treats from home, whether it was pig ears or dried seaweed, and the reactions of my classmates just hurt, down to my core.”

It forced her to learn early on how to code switch: knowing what foods she could and couldn’t bring to school, altering how she talked about her activities at home, figuring out how to respond when friends came over and made fun of her parents’ accents.

When she was around five years old,

“MY MOM HAD A SENSE THAT... THERE ARE ALWAYS THESE BARRIERS UP FOR CERTAIN GROUPS OF PEOPLE. THAT’S ALWAYS BEEN HOW I UNDERSTOOD THE WORLD AND NAVIGATE IT.”

her mother signed her up for what’s known as a “manners” class.

“I don’t even know how she found it—she wasn’t fluent in English—but I was with all these big kids, and you had to learn how to use the different order of all the forks and cups and bread and some soup,” she said. “It was such a discordant experience compared to just eating at home, which was every night, you know, a bowl of rice, chopsticks, and the various dishes that my parents would make.”

She didn’t have to use that kind of silverware setup until she was in college—a predominantly white, elite setting. But Wu says her mom knew that Wu would have to do more than speak English to succeed in America. She would need to feel comfortable among gatekeeping WASPs who held the key to access and opportunity.

“My mom had a sense that ... there are always these barriers up for certain groups of people,” she said. “That’s always been core to how I understand the world and navigate it.”

Her family moved at least four times, mainly in the Midwest where her high school class consisted of over 600 students—but “only a handful” of Asian Americans.

After earning recognition as the U.S. Presidential Scholar from Illinois, she graduated as class valedictorian and moved to the Boston area to attend Harvard, where she regularly made time to serve her elders.

“I would come to Chinatown every single weekend as a student—take the Red Line over the Charles River—and teach classes to seniors in Chinatown who were seeking to become naturalized U.S. citizens,” she told *Commonwealth Magazine* last year. “That was my home away from home.”

After class, some of the seniors ►



◀ **The candidate to watch:** Michelle Wu has pulled ahead in Boston's mayoral race and dominates among Asian American voters, according to a June poll by Suffolk University and the *Boston Globe*.

would approach her with letters—like an overdue electric bill, sometimes—and ask who they should call. “It’s all connected when you realize there are so many resources around. The point of our government in such a well-resourced city is to provide that support, and yet the disconnect when people most need that help is huge,” she noted.

ATLAS HOLDING THE WORLD

Wu was around 23 when her mother began to struggle with a mental health crisis that forced her to raise her two younger sisters and become a long-term caregiver.

“I found her outside in the cold rain, standing in the driveway with an umbrella in one hand and a rolling suitcase in the other, waiting to be picked up by an unidentified driver for a secret meeting. ‘You’re not my daughter anymore, and I’m not your mother,’ she insisted, as I begged her to come inside. She pushed back my hair to check for the mole on my right cheek, just in case, because apparently if ‘The Program’ were to create an android of me, they would forget that little detail.

“It began as paranoia, a feeling that she was being watched and monitored by an entity that seemed similar to the military of her childhood in Taiwan after the war. But as she stopped eating and sleeping, she started calling 911 in the middle of the night to report cries for help that no one else could hear. Most days she believed that school was canceled and rarely left her bedroom, as my sisters, then 10 and 16 years-old, cooked their own meals and woke each other up to catch the bus.”

By that point, Wu’s parents had divorced. While her peers were exploring newfound independence, focusing on their careers, and expanding their social circles, she was a sister, parent, nurse, household and financial manager, teacher, and full-time worker all in one.

“I’ve been in the emergency room,” she tells me. “You know, at those emergency room hospital visits with her, and the conversations with mental health providers. The same with schools, to try to explain the situation that was happening—why my mom wouldn’t come to the parent-teacher meeting for my sisters and all the trauma that was going on at home.”

Historically, Asian Americans face a myriad of barriers to mental health care, including problems with insurance, language difficulties, and lack of cultural competency. AAPIs are the racial group least likely to seek mental health services—three times less likely than white counterparts. 73.1% of AAPI adults with a mental illness did not receive treatment in 2018, compared to 56.7% of the overall population.

That was certainly part of Wu’s experience. She didn’t have the luxury of accessing services without coming up against red tape again and again. “I’ve seen that when you most need help, structures and systems often aren’t designed to serve people who speak a different language, or are struggling with a particular issue, and the feeling of just seeing how much she has been dehumanized, you know,” she says, her voice stoic, “in those very hospital rooms and by the probably well-intentioned providers who saw her—AAPI immigrant, accent, broken English—and made all sorts of assumptions.”

“The first time my mom was hospitalized, she was forcibly sedated before I was admitted to see her. When I arrived, someone handed me a plastic bag containing her belongings: the ruined clothes that had been cut off her body with scissors. Mom told me in Mandarin that she hadn’t wanted to undress in front of a male attendant; that bag also contained the last bits of her dignity shredded up inside. But unfortunately that wouldn’t be the last time I would stay overnight with her in an ER room, waiting for a mental health bed to open up, and it wasn’t the last time I shook with anger at a system that dehumanized her.”

It’s what eventually emboldened her to pursue public service. Those painful experiences showed her it’s not just about making sure the laws on the books “say the right things” or that the right programs exist; it’s also about connecting with people when they need help and breaking down walls around language and culture.

TRYING ON POLITICS

After raising her sisters, tending to her mother, running a small family business, and “fighting city government constantly on all those fronts,” Wu began considering a career in politics.

“I had the experience of seeing ... all the many ways in which government was really the barrier rather than the force of support that it is supposed to be,” she said.

Maybe one day she would work in government and make bureaucratic procedures more efficient for other people; maybe she would serve as a chief of staff to a department head; maybe she would oversee projects involving restaurant permits.

She never thought she’d be the ►

“

You can have great ideas, and you can have all the right policy goals. But unless you're expanding who is included in the political process, you won't connect the two.”

face of the city.

Then, on her first day at Harvard Law School, she walked into class. Her contract law professor was strict—and brilliant, Wu said. At the time, she was known as Professor Elizabeth Warren.

That was all it took. By her third year in law school, she was volunteering on Warren's campaign for Senate. After graduating, she joined the campaign full time.

"I saw how much the politics really matters, too," Wu said. "You can have great ideas, and you can have all the right policy goals. But unless you're expanding who is included in the political process, you won't connect the two."

THE POWER (BURDEN) OF REPRESENTATION

Despite having one of the oldest Chinatowns in the country, Boston had only elected one Asian American to the City Council before Wu. (Sam Yoon left the city after losing the 2009 mayoral race, citing the Boston establishment as an immovable roadblock.)

She is aware of what it means to run for mayor as a Taiwanese American woman. She will always be perceived as speaking for all Asian Americans in a way Marty Walsh never had to do for white people. It's a burden she shouldn't have to shoulder, but she tells me it's given her the opportunity to bring the community to the table.

"There has been a lot of weight ... to know that I want to be representing the diversity of the AAPI community—to know that when people see me in that seat that I am there to bring our community to the table but also to make sure that people know our community is not a monolith and that there are many, many perspectives along the spectrum," she says.



In 2013, she was in Boston Chinatown during the Lunar New Year season when she realized that her campaign for City Council—her first—was larger than just her. At a family association banquet (family associations are support networks made up of families with the same last name who first came together in the early waves of immigration), a community leader pulled her aside.

"We're so excited you're running for City Council. You're gonna win," she recalls him telling her with a huge smile.

"Oh, thank you so much. I'm so grateful to have your support," she responded.

"The smile disappeared from his face," she says. "He got really serious and said, 'No, you have to win because we need you to bring honor to the association.'"

The room was filled with several hundred people. They all shared her last name. And they were all looking at her. She felt the pressure and the weight in that moment.

LOOKING THE PART

With so few AAPIs elected to gov-

ernment, many don't ever consider pursuing politics. "It's natural to just assume that you won't be included in the decision-making, much less be the decision-maker," Wu notes. That was certainly the case for her, but she also says there's a specific reason she never thought she would become an elected official.

"My parents were really intentionally trying to shield us from politics," she says.

Asian American family trees are often marked by politics, whether it's imperialism, colonialism, war, famine, corruption, genocide, displacement, or something else. "I was raised to think that politics was about making deals, or you know, something shady or borderline deceptive," Wu explains.

Here, I mention my agreement, and we laugh over the shared experience. It's not like our parents were wrong—politics was and is "shady." And yet, if our parents immigrated to the U.S. for democracy and better opportunity, shouldn't we ensure America keeps its promise by helping right the system?

That's what she's trying to do, Wu says.

Wu is, of course, an Asian American woman—traditionally underrepre-

◀ **U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Massachusetts) on Wu:** “I’ve been proud to fight alongside Michelle over the last seven years. She gets out and does the work that needs to be done to make a difference in people’s lives.”

sented in leadership and stereotyped as quiet, submissive, meek. She is also one of the council’s youngest members and a mom with two young kids, a role that automatically comes with gendered social expectations.

The leaders of the world look and act a certain way, she acknowledges—“loud, angry, extroverted or tall or male.” It’s a mold she knew she’d never fit. She doesn’t need to, she says.

“LEANING INTO THE DIALOGUE”

There’s no doubt Wu has made a name for herself in the last six years. “If you pay attention to Boston politics, four-term city councilor Michelle Wu is a familiar figure, known for her electoral prowess and her determinedly progressive politics,” *GBH News* writes.

She is intimately familiar with what it means to be the face of an oft-invisible demographic. “We’re not there when it comes to Asian Americans in office, and it is a whole ecosystem,” she tells me when we touch on political representation. “Even now, on the campaign trail, it comes up constantly: ‘Where do Asian Americans actually fit in the spectrum of communities of color and how do you actually feel about the Black Lives Matter movement?’”

When it comes to Black-and-Asian tensions, Wu sees the value of “leaning into the dialogue” and making space for education. She also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the ways different communities of color do fit together.

“Even before COVID-19 had its official name but people sort of knew there was a coronavirus, you’d walk onto the subway train and everyone would immediately shift away,” she says, describing the early days of the pandemic that kicked off a yearlong spike

“I AM ONLY IN GOVERNMENT— ONLY IN POLITICS— BECAUSE I HAVE LIVED WHAT IT MEANS WHEN GOVERNMENT WORKS AND WHEN IT DOESN’T.”

in anti-Asian hate.

That led “straight into a summer of public demonstrations and national reckoning following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery.” Police continued to kill Black Americans during the pandemic in a “so-called justice system without accountability,” she said.

For her, having the hard conversations is key. White supremacy has pitted Black and Asian Americans against each other for a long, long time. But the two communities are in fact “very much intertwined.”

Wu says she is grateful for the opportunity to speak up against structural racism and oppression—on the campaign she has underscored her support for reparations for Black communities—and recognizes nothing is static. “It always requires deep reflection and continuing to challenge my own perceptions and how we keep moving the city forward together, acknowledging the harms that have been done and the need for repair,” she says.

“What I know having been on the inside now and fighting to change the system is that politics is public service,” she said. “It’s identifying, listening, and developing a vision with and from the community, and then finding the way to put the resources towards making that happen. And the culture that I was raised in, of respecting those who come before you and putting the needs of the larger community as a priority—those are the very characteristics that make for good effective public policy and effective public servants.”

THE BEAUTY IN THE MUNDANE

These days, it often feels like local politics are overlooked in favor of ▶



national and state-level issues. But for Wu, the municipality is where it's at. In local office, politicians can work directly with activists and community members pushing for change. The relationship between residents and city government feels like an authentic partnership, with residents and advocates "digging into elections" to hold candidates accountable, Wu said.

"This is the dream job," she tells me. "This is the role and the level of government in the city where we can make change today, tomorrow, the week after."

"I am only in government—only in politics—because I have lived what it means when government works and when it doesn't," she adds. "There are lots of issues that we want to solve and lots of policies that need to be put in place. But the most important foundation is people in the community feeling like they have a stake in shaping their own future ... I think it's

**"IN THIS
MOMENT, WE'VE
SEEN JUST HOW
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STATUS QUO IS."**

only possible to happen quickly at the local level because you are that close to people's daily lives."

It doesn't mean Boston's city government is perfect. Far from it, Wu says. That's what her campaign is trying to do: reimagine what's possible.

"The need is so great," she said. "In this moment we've seen just how fragile the status quo is, for communities of color in particular and the underserved and historically marginalized."

She is especially conscious of the Asian American community's continued anguish. The Atlanta shootings, in which a white man killed six Asian women, weigh heavily three months out. "The ongoing reminders of just how deep hatred, structural racism and killing of unarmed, particularly Black Americans, and now an acceleration of anti-Asian hate to the point where there is clear violence and murder—sometimes it feels like too much to bear," she said at a mid-April rally



against Asian hate.

When I ask how her mom is doing, Wu admits it's hard to tell sometimes.

"She lives with me and we have a two-family home, but it's actually really hard on her. As someone who does live with mental health challenges, it's really important for her to have her routines and to be able to go to the grocery store for fresh vegetables whenever she wants," she says. "To have those big changes has been a lot for the whole family to handle."

It's an interesting thought exercise to consider what Wu would be doing if her mother hadn't developed her mental health struggles. Would Wu have pursued politics? The pains that accompanied the experience impact her approach to governance every day.

As someone whose family struggles with a myriad of mental health issues, I tell Wu it means a lot to hear her speak candidly about her family's experience. It's such a taboo thing, both

in the U.S. and among Asian Americans in particular. She says it took her a long time to be able to talk about it without breaking down.

12 years have passed since she had to take over as head of the household. But in that first year, "I don't know if I even told my friends."

"There's a very, very small circle of folks that I even felt comfortable telling about the extreme despair and helplessness that we were feeling, largely because of stigma and shame," she says plainly. "My mom still doesn't like to talk about the issue ... She doesn't want to be labeled, you know, quote-unquote 'crazy.'"

But every time someone approaches her to convey their own mental health challenges, she remembers why she shares her story. She remembers why she's running.

When I ask her to describe her campaign in five words—and tack on "or fewer!"—she looks into the camera

as if she's in "The Office" and says jokingly, "I mean, I'm Asian, right? I follow the rules."

Counting her fingers, she comes back with: "Bold urgent leadership building community."

Wu was obviously poking fun at standard Asian stereotypes, but I can't help noticing how every step in her career has subverted the rules. The rules say only cis white men can lead the city. That she's too quiet, too young, too foreign. The rules say Asian and Black Americans are fundamentally opposed and that people can only work within the status quo. The rules say people should hang their families' mental illnesses in a dark closet. That Asians don't run for office.

She has disrupted every notion. And she's ready to disrupt some more. ●

Shawna Chen is a reporter at Axios and editorial director of *The Yappie*.

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Outside the Frame

“Just a few weeks ago, an older gentleman asked me if I knew my community was the ‘model minority.’ I knew he had no hostile intentions, but putting an entire population in this convenient little box of expectations is just disturbing to me. Not everyone has it easy and beautiful outside the frame that viewers see.”

◀ **Illustration by David Tang, a 17-year-old first-generation AAPI immigrant.**

David has interned and worked with OCA's Greater Phoenix chapter since 2019 and is currently a rising freshman at Arizona State University. In his spare time, he loves drawing and creating characters on the internet.

Ancestral Pain Breaks

By Kaity Li Yang

The seamstress and presser warehouse
Crushed sardine Chinese immigrant refugees
Labor laws applied not —
Occasionally after homework, I came to work
My tiny five year old hands
Dropping sachet buttons on the floor
To the laughter, the roar of the women

I learned to find comfort in food
A man peddled fresh Chinese baked goods
Cream filled sweet buns filled my bitterness
As the laborers dropped my name
In favor of the more savory “fat girl” —

Mother was first chair seamstress
But the pay was no different
The price of the pastry, a silent act of full love
Her heart and stomach both full of sorrow
Neither full, neither felt enough

I am 33 years of age. Neither do I
Feel full, nor enough to say with authenticity
That I am now age 33

Mother arrived on these shores, war refugee
Age 33 (I think, anyways)
Mother arrived on these shores, starved
But accepted, as our culture dictates
— Thin is in, as has been for dynasties
My curves arrive on the scale with side eye

Mother tongue meant meager food
Around our round table
Surrounded by dilapidated walls so narrow
We sought space, our right
To occupy

Mother, obsessed with thinness
Led me to dabble in anorexia, bulimia
But no one noticed at first. How tall, how curvy, how possibly —
Fat Girl binge eats to self soothe
Fat Girl vomits food to self soothe
Fat Girl skips meals to occupy space

Ancestral pain breaks when stared down
With a spirit resilient enough to heal —
My identity repeats from Mother's
And her Mother. Mother before her.

I shed deadweight Fat Girl people pleaser
The one also never pleased with myself
And fell in love with my thighs, my breasts
Put behind hatred, traded in for celebration

Celebration of the self, space occupied
I look at my photos with joy now
My self worth is tied to my self love
And I recognize I was (and am still) lovely

Mother, Grandmother, Great Grandmother —
Emerge
Rise
We are confined no more
I love my body for every man who hated yours
Laugh in the face of every spiteful woman

I roar with the ancient dragons of my heritage
Regal, beauty unending
I soar, worth my weight in gold of full purity
Today, I savor soul nourishment and occupy
My fullness on the curvy Queen throne

The Shape of Love, Peace, and Unity

By Lily Li-Nagy

Love doesn't have a shape
She follows her own design

Love may walk in a circle
Or in a straight line

Love may trip and stumble
In fact love often will fall

But love is never alone
Love is awaiting your call

Love will help out her fellows
And anyone that is in need

Love will offer a snack
To everyone that's on love's team

Love might sometimes get angry
And even sound a bit mean

And when love gets really upset
Love must make you want to scream

But love will sort herself out
So give her a pat on the back

Or give love a break
Or give love a good laugh

Sometimes love goes out
To take a walk in the woods

Love might need time to herself
To think, and wander, and rest

But if you see love alone
Be sure to stop by and say hi

Maybe share a piece of gum
Or give love a high five

Or offer a shoulder to lean on
Or offer to give her a hug

Because that's what love would do for you

Of course she would, she is love.

A Missing Puzzle Piece

By Zeta Atoigue

My body sways with the ocean
And dances with the waves that kiss my arms
As I paddle across this ongoing blue.
For a moment, time ceases to exist
And I am hypnotized by the depths of the water.

I stare down at my murky reflection
And notice that my stressed face
Is no longer etched with tired bags,
Or pursed lips, or droopy eyes.
They are finally relaxed, as if the water
Washed away any evidence of the city
From my body.

It is an empty feeling to not have the worries
Weigh me down anymore.
I can still hear them screech and fight,
Reminding me that this peace is only temporary
But I am encased in this plastic kayak.
They cannot reach me from here.

I raise my head upwards
And let the rays of sunlight bathe me
Allow them to bleach the impurity from the mainland
And shed the thick skin made tough from twisted mouths

I am now free in my brown flesh.

My vision suddenly goes hazy
As tears and the bright light blinds me
With my sight gone
I hear all that is around me.

I hear ancient voices soothing panicked thoughts,
Thoughts that have always ran laps in my mind
And I am calmly soaking in what is being given to me.

A gift of foreign tongues that cannot be distinguished
But one that fulfills aching parts that have been starving since I've left
The island sustains the uncertainties of my identity
And has given me a new life.

Oh, how I wish I could indulge once more,
To be full of the power that the land gives me.
But for now, I must once again starve
And return to the mainland
That is always hungry for more.

Zeta Atoigue is a Summer 2021 Intern at OCA National Center.

Not Your Model Minority

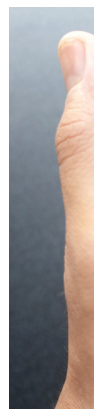
Explore works by Selina Lee, stephanie mei huang, Antonius-Tín Bui, payal kumar, and Nibha Akireddy.

By Marjorie Justine Antonio

NOT YOUR MODEL MINORITY: PANDEMIC, PROXIMITY, AND POWER is a response to the wave of anti-Asian violence surrounding the “Chinese virus” and the critical self-evaluation of Asian American positionality in the movement for Black Lives and earlier histories of Black and Asian solidarities.

In the mid-1900s, Asian Americans were labeled as the “Model Minority” for their supposed socioeconomic success in comparison to other minority groups, most notably Black Americans. Yet, how can we challenge the idea of race—commonly understood as a socially-constructed notion of difference—as an instrument of empire? Where do Asian Americans fall in relation to other minority groups as a result of larger interrelated struggles of land, labor, and empire?

The artists in this show engage and subvert assumptions affixed on the racialized and pathologized Asian body—as perpetual foreigners, consumers in the system of whiteness, newly hypervisible yet historically invisible, submissive, and displaced by U.S. imperialism and militarization—residing in the American landscape. ●



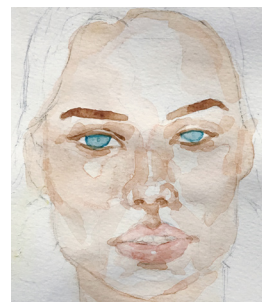
Displayed below — 1. *white vegetable i* (2020), stephanie mei huang. 2. *haanji* (2019), payal kumar. 3. *End Your Silence* (2020), Antonius-Tin Bui. 4. *Fox News in Chinese* (2020), Selina Lee. 5. *Bha* (2020), Nibha Akireddy.



Strangers During Transit

A collection of drawings and paintings inspired by ordinary life.

By Wendy Ylyza Capalad



FROM CHICAGO'S SOUTH LOOP NEIGHBORHOOD, Wendy Capalad creates images of her favorite scenes of her life and the people she loves most dearly. She found her passion for art during high school, inspired by her art teacher. She is currently a sophomore nursing student at Marquette University but still finds the time to do what she loves. ●

“During my freshman year in high school, I got really close with my art teacher, and she would tell me stories about how her and friends would draw random strangers, which is how I got started drawing and painting strangers during transit. It wasn’t until my junior year in high school when I heard the devastating news that she had passed away. That’s when I started doing pieces on the people I love most and want to hold onto — my friends and family.”

Thank You

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UNION AND LIBERTY OF THEIR COUNTRY
1861-1865



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