Building Identity and Solidarity: Asian American activism of the 1960s and ‘70s.
A Library of Congress resource/user guide

Olivia Hewang
2023 Connecting Communities Digital Initiative Junior Fellow

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Introduction
In 1968, we became Asian Americans. For the first time, Asian Americans of many ethnicities joined together under a pan-ethnic and pan-Asian political identity, rejecting the racist label of “Orientals”. With its roots in the Civil Rights, Anti-Vietnam War and Black Power Movements, the Asian American movement was defined by its intersectionality. The movement featured many instances of interracial solidarity as Asian Americans aligned themselves with other Third World minority groups to resist oppression and racism in America while fighting for self-determination. Radical activist groups, many inspired by Black Power, decried American capitalism and imperialism. Artists and activists expressed themselves through alternative publications and launched the first major Asian American magazines and artist collectives.

Note on Terminology
I am purposefully using the language “Asian American” and not “Asian American Pacific Islander” in this guide because this history largely focuses on Filipino Americans (who represented the largest Asian demographic groups at the time) and Japanese and Chinese Americans. Since the 1970s, Asian America has become incredibly diverse, now representing over 20 countries of origin. And it is important to acknowledge that these extraordinarily broad groupings of “Asian American” and “AAPI” can flatten the disparities between diverse communities. These labels often center East Asians, marginalize South and Southeast Asians and lump together Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.

“Asian American” is a powerful grouping that can bring communities together, but it is also a complex label that can be exclusionary. Above all, Asian Americans are not a monolith. Cultural specificity is important.

Purpose & Scope
This guide will celebrate the work done by past generations that built up communities and affinity groups, created support systems and laid groundwork for future activism. I hope that it will inspire Asian Americans of any generation and background to connect with and place themselves within this history of activism and self-determination. And I hope today’s artists, activists and coalition builders can be inspired by a history of intersectional collaboration.

The first part of this guide, “Highlighting History”, will illuminate key moments, organizations and individuals within the Asian American movement. Each topic will be illustrated with images from both the Library and external archives. For each section, I will point to where you can discover more at the Library and at external institutions.

The second part of the guide provides tips on how to search for Asian American activism materials at the Library of Congress and provides an overview of notable collections.
Highlighting History
Third World Liberation Front Strike (1968-1969)

“We were not born Asian American but rather gave birth to ourselves as Asian Americans as a political identity to be seen and heard.” —Karen L. Ishizuka, Serve the People

Where does the term “Asian American” come from? In May of 1968, UC Berkeley students Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee originated it when they formed the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA). Ichioka and Gee wanted to unite students of Asian descent under the banner of one pan-ethnic and pan-Asian identity. Asian American was a symbol of empowerment as a self-assigned political identity that rejected the imposed label of “Orientals”. The AAPA aligned itself with other people of color as “Third World” people. Together, they resisted racial oppression in America and protested U.S. imperialism, especially the Vietnam War.

The Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) strike at San Francisco State was the longest campus strike in U.S. history, and it was driven by a coalition of Black, Latino, Asian and Native American students who demanded equal educational opportunities and ethnic studies programs. Of the six organizations that formed the TWLF — the Black Student Union, the Latin American Student Organization, the Mexican American Student Confederation, the AAPA, the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action and the Pilipino American Collegiate Endeavor — three were Asian American groups. Inspired by Black Power’s call for self-determination over racial
integration, the TWLF demanded self-determination in education. That meant faculty members and curriculum should come from within their communities.

The January 22, 1969, UC Berkeley TWLF strike began on a campus already famous for being a hotbed of New Left political activity in the 60s. The strike escalated in violence as protestors clashed violently with police, helicopters dumped teargas onto demonstrators, and California Governor Ronald Reagan threatened to call in the National Guard.

In the end, the TWLF at both SF State and Berkeley negotiated successfully with their administrations and ended their respective strikes within days of each other in March of 1969. SF State established the first School of Ethnic Studies in the nation, while Berkeley established an Ethnic Studies department.

The strike not only succeeded in kickstarting ethnic studies in America, it also set the stage for affirmative action programs. By 1978, the activities of the movement generated at least 14 ethnic studies programs at U.S. universities. The strike also inspired a generation of young Asian American activists who would carry the core values of Third World Liberation and coalitional organizing with them into the future.

More at the Library

- American Archive of Public Broadcasting AAPI Collection
- Black studies at San Francisco State : Clarence Thomas interviewed by Mike Traugott (1969)

“discuss[es] the development of the Black Studies department and the activities of the BSU at San Francisco State College.”

- Say Brother; Black Power on University Campuses: discusses the 1969 student takeover of Ford Hall at Brandeis University, an action inspired by the SF State protests

External Resources

- Roz Payne Sixties Archive: archive of films, underground press, photos, graphics and more from the 1960s. “This project is for educational purposes and all materials are put forth under the fair use doctrine.” (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0)
  - Notable photo collections include the Huey Newton Trial in Oakland and Eldridge Cleaver Controversy at UC-Berkeley
- This UC Berkeley LibGuide points to great resources on TWLF at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State University. Highlights: interviews with activists from the AAPA Oral History Project and TWLF protest audio recordings from the H.K. Yuen Social Movement Archive
- SF State College Strike Collection *note that photos by Nacio Jan Brown and Terry Schmitt require permission to use
- The Berkeley Revolution A digital archive of the East Bay’s transformation in the late-1960s & 1970s: Timeline of TWLF protests at UC Berkeley accompanied by primary sources
“Yellow Peril Supports Black Power”: Afro-Asian Solidarity

The African Americans who fought for equal rights during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement undeniably laid the groundwork for the liberation movements and “ethnic consciousness” movements of the late 60s and 70s. Many early Asian American activists got their start in the Civil Rights Movement, including legendary activists Yuri Kochiyama and Grace Lee Boggs: two women who would champion both African American and Asian American rights through their lifetime.

The Asian American revolutionary organization most closely associated with Black Power was the Red Guard Party (RGP), which would later merge with the I Wor Kuen (IWK). The RGP emerged from San Francisco Chinatown, where residents suffered extreme poverty and a lack of social services. The Leways were a group of Chinatown youths who were harassed by the police and marginalized by the Chinatown business elite. The Leways organized under the guidance of Black Panthers Bobby Seale and David Hilliard who studied leftist political theory with them, and encouraged them to brand themselves as the Red Guard Party to invoke Mao Ze Dong's Red Guards. The RGP thus became the “Chinese American analog to the Panthers, calling police ‘pigs’, feeding hungry people in the neighborhood, and demanding justice for ‘yellow’ people” (Maeda, Rethinking the Asian American Movement). Meanwhile, in New York’s Chinatown the IWK undertook similar efforts: they ran community health clinics and political education programs, claimed Yellow Power and aligned

Figure 2. Supporters outside Oakland Courthouse
themselves with Black Power. In 1971, the RGP and IWK merged into the national I Wor Kuen, becoming the first national Asian American revolutionary organization.

The phrase, “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power”, first appeared in the iconic image of Richard Aoki (who was a Black Panther before he joined the AAPA) holding a sign at a 1969 Free Huey rally in support of imprisoned Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton. The phrase “Yellow Peril Supports Black Power” became popularized again in 2020 during the nationwide Black Lives Matter to show support and solidarity with the BLM movement.

More at the Library
  - Civil Rights in America: A Resource Guide
  - Civil Rights History Project

External Resources
  - View an issue of I Wor Kuen’s community newspaper Getting Together online at San Diego State University Library
  - “May 19th Project” is a campaign to promote solidarity within Asian and Pacific Island communities and beyond. Named after the birth date shared by activist and Nisei incarceree Yuri Kochiyama and civil rights activist Malcolm X”.
  - “The Counterculturalists: Alex Hing”: an interview with RGP leader Alex Hing by the Asian American Writers Workshop (AAWW)
  - “Contemporary Black/Asian Solidarity” from CrossCulturalSolidarity.com

Figure 3. Collage of historical and present-day Afro-Asian solidarity
The Delano Grape Strike: Filipino and Mexican Farmworkers Unite

The “manongs” were an early generation of Filipino-Americans who came to the U.S. in the 1920s and 30s. “Manong” is an Ilocano term of respect for elders that means “older brother.” As colonial subjects of the U.S., Filipinos were the sole exception to the anti-Asian Immigration Act of 1924, so the manongs were brought over to replace Japanese immigrants as agricultural laborers in California.

By the 1960s, the manongs were aging farmworkers who suffered under poor wages, poor working conditions, and a lack of labor protections. On September 7, 1965, Filipino grape workers in Delano, California began the historic Delano Grape Strike. Led by activist Larry Itliong and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), the Filipinos demanded better wages and the right to unionize. In response, the farmers brought in Mexican strikebreakers in an attempt to pit the Filipinos against the Mexicans, but Itliong soon convinced activist Cesar Chavez to get the Mexicans to join the Filipinos on strike. Chavez and Dolores Huerta had founded the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in 1962, rallying Chicano farmworkers under the slogan of “Viva La Causa”. Together, they became the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).

Figure 4. Filipino lettuce field laborer, 1939 (top). 1973 Grape Strike (bottom).
Based out of Filipino Hall in Delano, the Mexicans and Filipinos ate together, organized together, and picketed together. Over the next 5 years, UFWOC would raise awareness for the farmworkers’ plight until their cause became internationally known — their achievements included a nationwide grape consumer boycott and a march to the California state capitol of Sacramento. In 1970, UFWOC signed major labor contracts with grape growers, achieving landmark rights for farmworkers.

At their Forty Acres headquarters in Delano, UFWOC built the Paolo Agbayani Retirement Village for the aging manongs. Due to discriminatory laws that not only restricted the immigration of Filipino women but also prohibited interracial marriage between Filipino men and white women, many manongs were never able to marry and so depended on community support. Agbayani Village was built by the hands of multi-ethnic volunteers, including college students, and members of Asian American community organizations like the Filipino Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong (KDP) and IWK.

Although Itliong and fellow activist Philip Vera Cruz would later resign from UFWOC over differences with union leadership (Itliong felt Filipino voices were not being heard and Vera Cruz disagreed with Chavez’s support for the Marcos dictatorship), they continued to play a crucial role in the West Coast labor movement. Today, Cesar Chavez is well remembered as a legendary Chicano civil rights leader but the story of Larry Itliong, Philip Vera Cruz, and the manongs has fallen into obscurity.

*Figure 5. The Manongs join the picket line during the 1973 Grape Strike (top). UCLA volunteers work on roof construction at Agbayani Village (bottom).*
More at the Library

- Dorothea Lange’s photos in the Farm Security Administration Photograph Collection document Filipino farmworkers in California in the 1930s. Search “Filipino” and Location: California. *copyright note: photos taken by federal government employees generally fall in the public domain
- 1962: United Farm Workers Union - A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States. This Library resource guide focuses on the Latinx perspective of the UFW strikes and highlights more Library resources.

Deep Cuts

- The Library holds photos and records of the Agbayani Retirement Village, including floor plans, because it was designated by the Historic American Buildings Survey
- You can trace Itliong’s early career in West Coast labor unions using the Chronicling America tool. This is a campaign ad from the July 2, 1954 issue of Filipino Forum in Seattle. "Unfortunately, Chronicling America only goes up to 1963, a few years short of the beginning of the Asian American movement.

External Resources

- Welga Project Digital Archive and Repository (UC Davis Bulosan Center). "The Welga Digital Archives makes digital version of collections accessible for educational and research purposes only"
- This primary source set/teaching guide from the Digital Public Library: The United Farm Workers and the Delano Grape Strike
- Farmworker Movement Documentation Project - Primary source accounts by the UFW volunteers from the UC San Diego Library
- Stream Delano Manongs, a documentary episode from PBS
- Watch MANONG (1978) from the Visual Communications Archive

Figure 6. Campaign Ad clipped from Filipino Forum
The Fight to Save the International Hotel 1968-1977

The fight to save the International Hotel was a 9-year coalitional struggle of activists who battled urban redevelopers’ attempts to bulldoze the International Hotel, which bordered Chinatown and Manilatown in San Francisco, California. The I-Hotel not only served as affordable housing for elderly Filipino and Chinese men, it was also a rich cultural hub at the core of Asian American activism in the San Francisco Bay Area. The I-Hotel’s basement was shared by key radical organizations like the I-Hotel Tenants Association, Kearny Street Workshop (the oldest Asian American arts organization), the KDP, and the IWK. It was also an intergenerational space where young activists could hear stories from elders who were veteran labor organizers.

These silkscreen posters from the Library represent the iconic art form of 60s poster art. Silkscreen printing presented a low-cost method for production, removing barriers often experienced by groups seeking mass production of print media. This method allowed for rapid production and distribution of the poster art. Kearny Street Workshop, founded at the I-Hotel, was especially prolific in producing poster art for the Asian American movement.

The I-Hotel was originally set to be demolished in 1968 to build a parking lot in its place, but anti-eviction activists managed to stave off eviction for almost a decade, reviving the neglected building in the process. In the early morning of August 4, 1977, thousands of protestors...
tipped off about the impending eviction, formed a human chain around the I-Hotel to make a last stand, chanting “Stop the Eviction! We Won't Move!” and singing protest songs. Nevertheless, the riot police brutally broke through the 3,000-person barricade and the sheriff’s deputies broke down the barricaded doors with sledgehammers and finally evicted the last 150 elderly tenants. The I-Hotel was razed. Despite this ending, the story of the I-Hotel remains a testament to the Asian American movement’s ability to build coalitions and organize effectively.

More at the Library

- Search for mentions of the I-Hotel in underground newspapers in Independent Voices, an open access database of alternative press on JSTOR
  - This image to the right is the cover of the Aug. 5, 1977 issue of Berkeley Barb.

Figure 8. Above, housing rights posters from the San Francisco Poster Brigade, 1977.

Figure 9. Right, front page of the Berkeley Barb depicting the eviction.
Artist Collectives and Radical Publications

“You can’t just have a leaflet. You can’t just have a demonstration. The art gives flesh and blood to the politics.” – Nobuko Miyamoto, singer

Alongside Asian American political identity, Asian American culture rose up in the 1960s and 70s. Community-based arts organizations “melded cultural expression with social activism,” (Maeda, Rethinking the Asian American Movement). These spaces allowed explorations of Asian American identity, political commentary, and community engagement.

The most significant artist collective on the East Coast was the Basement Workshop, founded by students in New York City’s Chinatown in 1970 and active until 1986. Basement fostered visual arts and music and engaged the community through educational programs and art workshops. In 1972, Basement published Yellow Pearl, a hugely significant anthology of Asian American arts and culture that included music by the Asian American folk trio, Chris Kando Iijima, Joanne Nobuko Miyamoto, and William “Charlie” Chin. The trio created the first album of Asian American music called A Grain of Sand (1973), which featured songs narrating activist messages. Basement would prove to be highly influential: its members would go on to found the Museum of Chinese in America, Asian CineVision, and the Asian American Arts Centre. The Basement Workshop became the East Coast counterpart to the highly influential West Coast Kearny Street Workshop.

Figure 10. Collage of artworks by Basement Workshop artists Nina Kuo, Arlan Huang, Colin Lee, and William Jung (clockwise from left top).
Across the country, Asian Americans expressed themselves through magazines, newspapers, literary anthologies, poetry, theatre, dance and more. *Gidra*, an independent newspaper started by UCLA students in 1969, became the revolutionary voice of the Asian American movement with its sharp political commentary and striking visuals. Visual Communications was the first Asian American media arts organization, founded by UCLA students in 1970 with the goal of representing their heritage and history through film, video, and media. Additionally, radical organizations each produced their own publications, for example, IWK’s *Getting Together*, a bilingual newspaper on NYC Chinatown’s socio-economic problems.

**External Resources**

- View all issues of seminal magazine [Gidra, in Densho online archives](https://densho.org/online-archives/gidra/)
- [Independent Voices](https://www.independentvoices.org/) holds many underground publications by campus radicals, Black Power and more
  - Highlights: [Berkeley Barb](https://www.library.berkeley.edu/about/briefHistory_Barb.html), a major countercultural underground newspaper that covered Berkeley, California from 1965 to 1980. *Aion*, the first Asian American literary magazine. "Without Ceremony", a special anthology issue of *IKON* magazine created by Asian Women United. (All three publications fall under [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/))
- Watch [We Are The Children](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0B4Hh4LW7E) sung by Chris Iijima & Nobuko Miyamoto

- [Kearny Street Workshop archives — Calisphere](https://calisphere.org/) (from UC Santa Barbara)
- Basement Workshop
- Visual Communications
  - [Visual Communications Archive](https://www VisualCommunicationsArchive.org/) at California Revealed (a California State Library Initiative)
  - [VC Connect](https://www.vcconnect.com/): archive of films on Vimeo
    - *Claiming A Voice: The Visual Communications Story* “chronicles the twenty-year history of the first arts group dedicated to productions by and about Asian Pacific Americans.”
    - [Asian Americans Against Vietnam War](https://kpw.org/): *Gidra* founder and anti-war activist Mike Murase discusses Asian American demonstrations
Research Guidance

For Artists and Activists

As we saw with the examples of IWK’s community programs, the construction of Agbayani Retirement Village, and the I-Hotel struggle, the mission of “Serve the People,” especially low-income communities, was central to the Asian American movement.

- Goal = draw inspiration from the past and encourage coalition building
- Considerations
  - How can you co-create with community members of today and artists and activists of the past?
  - Context is important! How do you portray communities that you are not a part of with respect and recognition?

Tips on searching the Library for Asian American materials

Be specific! Specific ethnic groups, organizations, locations and individuals’ names can quickly pinpoint resources

- For example, “Basement Workshop”, “International Hotel”, “Manilatown”, “Larry Itliong”
- Note that the I-Hotel posters were tagged “Chinese Americans” and “Filipino Americans” but not “Asian Americans”
- Tagging policy: Searching for things created by Asian Americans can be tricky as the Library usually does not tag by the creator’s ethnicity (this is true for the Basement Workshop artworks)

Figure 11. Artwork by Chinese American artist Monyee Chau, 2020
Collections for the 1960s-70s

- See the Yanker Poster Collection for anti-Vietnam war posters, civil rights posters, Third Worldist posters and more.
  - Ex: this Chinese propaganda poster titled “Resolutely support the anti-imperialist struggles of the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.”
  - Rights “May be restricted” but all items in the collection have been fully reviewed by a reference librarian
- The American Archive of Public Broadcasting has more videos on Asian American identity in the 60s-70s in their AAPI Collection
  - Asian American women vs. the women’s movement
  - Say Brother; Affirmative Action or Discrimination
  - The First Amendment; Minorities in the Media
  - Voter’s Pipeline; the New Settlers - SE Asians
- There are three major photojournalism collections for the 1960s-70s period: the New York World-Telegram & Sun Newspaper (covers 1920s to 1967), the U.S. News & World Report Magazine (mostly covers 1952 to 1986) and LOOK Magazine (mostly covers 1952 to 1971).
  - Example: these U.S. News photos of Mexican grape pickers, include a photo of Cesar Chavez talking with grape boycott leaders.

Figure 12. Artwork from Southeast Asian artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya’s “I Still Believe In Our City” public art campaign
- Rights vary by collection and photographer. US News staff photographers’ photos have no known restrictions (names listed [here](#)), while the *LOOK* collection is mostly restricted.

- **U.S. Newspaper Directory** (Chronicling America)
  - The Directory is very useful for identifying which newspapers were published when and where, and it tells you where to locate them in libraries across the country. *Unfortunately most newspapers will be on microfilm and not digitized.*
  - The Directory is searchable by “Language” or “Ethnicity Press,” and can be limited by place and date as well.
  - I used the Directory to search for Asian American revolutionary newspapers and I found [one digitized issue of *Kalayaan*](#) (published by the KDP) from San Diego State University.

- More on Asian American civil rights: the Library has particularly robust resources on Japanese American incarceration in internment camps during WWII. See [Japanese-American Internment Camp Newspapers, 1942 to 1946](#) and [Ansel Adams's Photographs of Japanese-American Internment at Manzanar](#).

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**Collections on Modern-Day Asian American Activism:**

- Posts from Thai and Indonesian American artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya’s “I Still Believe In Our City” public art campaign
- [Protests Against Racism Web Archive](#)
- [South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)](#)
- [Flickr Commons "COVID-19: American Experience"](#). See the newly released batch of 500 free use photos in P&P [here](#).
Glossary of terms

Language is always evolving from generation to generation and some terms are only familiar to those within ethnic communities. Here are some key words that may be helpful in searching archives for Asian Americans in the 60s and 70s.

**Third World**: Asian American activists organized with other “Third World people” who were racially and economically marginalized in America. Internationally, “Third Worldist” ideology represented solidarity between decolonized nations. As a present-day term, it represents economic underdevelopment and may be offensive.

**“Oriental”, “Mongoloid”, “Yellow”, “Asiatic”**: outdated historical terms historically used to refer to Asians (usually East Asians) by Westerners.

**The Orient, Far East**: historical terms for Asia, an incredibly vast region that is still difficult to strictly define today.

**“coolie”, “gook”**: Racist language historically used in political cartoons, writing, laws, etc. in the Euro-centric Western world. These terms also appear in Asian American publications as a part of commentary of a form of reclamation.

**Yellow Peril**: Refers to the Western fear of a horde of Oriental savages that would rise from the East and invade the Euro-centric Western world. It was first popularized by this political cartoon published in 1895. Read more here.

**Yellow Power**: A rallying cry that in the late 1960s, inspired by the Black Power movement. However it has been critiqued as exclusionary to some Asian Americans, including South Asians and Southeast Asians.

**Filipino, Pilipino**: terms used interchangeably for the people and language of the Philippines. Pinoy is also used to refer to the people.

**Manong**: an early generation of Filipino men who came to the U.S. in the 1920s and 30s. Many worked as farmworkers and never married.

**Issei, Nisei, Sansei, Yonsei**: Distinct terms for each generation of Japanese Americans

**Taishanese**: An early group of Chinese immigrants from the district of Taishan in Guangdong province in southern China. As the first Chinese Americans, the Taishanese were railroad builders, laundrymen, and restaurant workers who shaped early Chinatowns.

**Model minority myth**: the myth reinforces white supremacy by pitting minority groups against each other when it stereotypes Asian Americans as docile, model citizens and uplifts them as symbols of meritocracy.
Conclusion

The Asian American movement awoke Asian American identity, but it was also at times fraught with interethnic and generational differences, conflicts of class and gender, and disagreements in political ideology. I highly recommend reading this AAWW article or this academic article to learn more about where the movement ended up and where it is going next.

Asian American is an ever-evolving identity that each generation defines for ourselves. We have new challenges to face, including but not limited to, the model minority myth, xenophobia post 9/11 and post COVID-19, lack of political representation, and attitudes of anti-Blackness in our communities.

This is an imperfect history. This guide is intended to be representative not comprehensive, and it is above all, intended to inspire.

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Bibliography


**Image Credits**


All collages created by Olivia Hewang