LGBTQ America
A THEME STUDY OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, and QUEER HISTORY

Edited by Megan E. Springate
LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History is a publication of the National Park Foundation and the National Park Service.

We are very grateful for the generous support of the Gill Foundation, which has made this publication possible.

The views and conclusions contained in the essays are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of the U.S. Government. Mention of trade names or commercial products does not constitute their endorsement by the U.S. Government.

© 2016 National Park Foundation
Washington, DC

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or reproduced without permission from the publishers.

Links (URLs) to websites referenced in this document were accurate at the time of publication.
Although scholars of LGBTQ history have generally been inclusive of women, the working classes, and gender-nonconforming people, the narrative that is found in mainstream media and that many people think of when they think of LGBTQ history is overwhelmingly white, middle-class, male, and has been focused on urban communities. While these are important histories, they do not present a full picture of LGBTQ history. To include other communities, we asked the authors to look beyond the more well-known stories. Inclusion within each chapter, however, isn’t enough to describe the geographic, economic, legal, and other cultural factors that shaped these diverse histories. Therefore, we commissioned chapters providing broad historical contexts for two spirit, transgender, Latino/a, African American Pacific Islander, and bisexual communities. These chapters, read in concert with the chapter on intersectionality, serve as examples of rich, multi-faceted narrative within a fuller history of the United States.
On July 1, 2015 the Respect After Death Act (California Assembly Bill 1577) took effect in California enabling transgender people to record their chosen gender on their death certificates. At least three Asian queers stood at the center of the passage of this bill. When Chinese and Polish American Christopher Lee who identified as a transgender man killed himself in 2012, the coroner listed him as female on his death certificate. Troubled by their friend's misgendering, Chinese Mexican Chino Scott-Chung, also a transgender man, brought the death certificate to the attention of the Transgender Law Center, which initiated and lobbied for the passage of AB 1577. Three years later, Japanese American Kris Hayashi stood at the helm of the Transgender Law Center as its executive
director when the organization celebrated the passage of the bill. Yet when CBS reported on the victory, they lauded Masen Davis as the organization’s executive director. A statement from Davis, rather than Hayashi, evocatively defined the historic moment, “It brings us one significant step closer to making sure that all transgender people are able to live – and die – authentically in accordance with who they really are.”

Notably, Asian Pacific Americans have also played central roles in what many political scientists mark as the two most important issues in gay politics of the twenty-first century—the repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” and the fight for marriage equality. Korean American Dan Choi embodied the movement to repeal “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” when he came out on the Rachel Maddow Show in 2009 and a year later handcuffed himself to the White House fence in protest of the law that disallowed gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military (Figure 1). Stuart Gaffney, whose mother is Chinese American, was one of

---


4 “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” is formally known as Department of Defense Directive 1304.26. It was issued on December 21, 1993 and was in effect from February 28, 1994 through September 20, 2011.

5 A West Point graduate, an Arabic linguist, and an Iraq war veteran, Choi remains dishonorably discharged from the military even though “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” has been repealed. He handcuffed
several plaintiffs in the 2008 lawsuit that held that California’s ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Gaffney would invoke the legal ban on interracial marriage and how it affected his own parents’ white and Asian union in advocating for marriage equality. Despite these and many more instances of queer Asian Pacific American (APA) activism and engagement, their existence remains largely invisible.

Structural operations of homophobia and racism have diminished if not erased the significance of queer APA genders and sexualities. Foundational writings in Asian American studies explicitly derided same-sex sexuality in the 1970s establishing a less than queer friendly beginning to the movement and the field. Whiteness in queer studies too, has stunted the growth of publications on the queer APA experience. In fact, the professional field of history for nearly a century perceived sexuality broadly as a private matter and not worthy of intellectual inquiry. In the midst of forces that deny the existence of LGBTQ Asians and Pacific Islanders in history however, queer intimacies most certainly existed in even the earliest APA communities in the United States. And, since the 1980s queer Asian Pacific Americans have become increasingly “out and proud,” engaging in activism at the intersection of race, gender, himself to the White House fence on April 20, 2010. The White House is located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC. It was designated an NHL on December 19, 1960. Maria Streshinsky, “Dan Choi,” Atlantic Monthly 306, no. 4 (November 2010): 88; Gabriel Arana, “The Passion of Dan Choi,” The American Prospect: Longform, February 9, 2014, accessed July 23, 2015, http://prospect.org/article/passion-dan-choi.


7 I use the term Asian Pacific Americans to signal people who are in the United States who come from or have ancestors from Asia or the Pacific Islands. Because of the history of APA migration, the queers documented here before 1965 are largely Chinese and Japanese. I include in a more abbreviated form Koreans, Filipinos, Indonesians, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, Okinawan, Samoan, and Indian activism mostly after 1965.


and sexuality. APA queers have often occupied the leading wave of social transformation within the Asian Pacific American community.

Early Queer APA History

Likely, countless queers came to America during the first wave of Asian migration in the nineteenth century. Historians though have rendered their stories invisible through a heteronormative recounting of history. Chinese men languished painfully in “bachelor societies” in cities such as San Francisco and New York. The miniscule number of women immigrants existed only as prostitutes to serve these men deprived of “normal” heterosexual contact. In nearly all of the existing literature, “queer” Chinese in America existed only as a discursive device in public health records and leisure culture that painted them as morally deviant in the 1860s and 1870s. Same-sex intimacies and sex acts themselves seemed completely absent in early Asian American history.

Yet, same-affairs did exist among Asians and Pacific Islanders in America or in territories later to be become part of the United States even as those engaged in these intimacies may not have had a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity. White missionaries and imperial zealots wrote often of the prevalence of same-sex intimacies in the Pacific, as they sought refuge from the stigma of their own same-sex proclivities at home. In a letter to Walt Whitman, writer Charles Warren Stoddard who had become famous for his travel logs from the 1870s described the Pacific Islands as a sexual utopia that not even “California where men are tolerably bold” could


Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific American Activism in Queer History

provide. Stoddard became disappointed when one of his young lovers from Hawaiʻi named Kahele came to San Francisco for a visit and immediately began to “sow his heterosexual oats.” Days after his arrival, Kahele deserted Stoddard to move to Los Angeles with his new Mexican wife. Pacific Islander men rendered faceless by authors who merely penned them as “savages” crucially informed how white men came to understand their sexuality through widely popular travel publications on the “South Seas.” According to literary critic Lee Wallace, Pacific Islander same-sex sexualities so powerfully informed nineteenth-century western imaginings of masculinity that “male homosexuality as we have come to understood it... was constituted in no small part through the collision with Polynesian culture.”

For the unlucky ones, the criminal court system etched their illicit activities into historical record. In the 1890s, authorities in San Francisco arrested a number of Chinese men impersonating women to attract fellow countrymen for sex work. Across the bay in Oakland, Chin Ling in 1908 dressed as a “handsome Chinese maiden of the better class” in hopes of obtaining his husband. Ten years later in downtown Sacramento, California, two South Asian men, Jamil Singh and Tara Singh, separately sought out male intimacy from two men in their late teens, one white and the other Native American. So threateningly did reports of South Asian men sexually pursuing young white men loom in the American imagination that criminal courts in the 1910s and 1920s began to blame “Oriental depravity” for promoting degeneracy among America’s transient white

---

14 Austen, Genteel Pagan, 92.
youth. Alaskan canneries at which Japanese and Chinese immigrants labored also became productive sites of business for male sex workers, most often Chinese, African American, or Portuguese in the 1920s and 1930s. Sex workers divided their earnings equally with cannery foremen who occasionally “pimped” for them. These early immigrant men and their pursuit of frequently interracial same-sex affairs sheds a different light upon existing historical narratives that presume compulsory heterosexuality and little racial mixing between Asian immigrant men.

Chinese immigrants accustomed to homosocial spaces in their homeland may have actively enjoyed all-male spaces and forged meaningful same-sex relationships as they gathered for mahjong or benevolent association events as “bachelors” in America. Without the imposition of a western lens that assumes heterosociality as the ideal, men from China, steeped in a tradition of same-sex social interaction, may not have been as deprived as more insistently heteronormative histories have declared. In fact, male gold seekers during the

---


1850s in the Southern Mines of California—including Chinese—created multiracial families of cooperation and consent as they forged new forms of cross-ethnic male intimacy. The influx of white women in the 1860s and its accompanying valorization of “civilized” families—code for white heterosexuality—would later fuel the formation of rigid racial hierarchies.23

In some cases, individuals did identify themselves as explicitly queer. In 1899, Kosen Takahashi, an illustrator for Shin Sekai 24 one of San Francisco’s earliest Japanese American newspapers, declared himself an “utmost queer Nipponese” to journalist Blanche Partington.25 Takahashi who had earlier shared kisses with fellow issei Yone Noguchi missed him sorely when Noguchi went tramping from San Francisco to Los Angeles (Figure 2).26 Noguchi, a poet in his own right who would later become better known as the father of acclaimed Asian American artist Isamu Noguchi, had struck up an affair with the aforementioned writer and one-time lover of Kahele, Charles Warren Stoddard.27 At the turn of the century, Noguchi would collect bouquets of wild flowers in California’s Oakland Hills and blow kisses to Stoddard’s “bungalow” on M Street in Washington, DC.28 When Noguchi heard that Stoddard took walks atop Telegraph Hill in

25 Sueyoshi, Queer Compulsions, 83.
27 Yone Noguchi was the father of Asian American artist Isamu Noguchi. He carved his name in Japanese into the wall of the Carmel Mission during his tramp to Los Angeles. Sueyoshi, Queer Compulsions, 54. The Carmel Mission, also known as Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, is located at 3080 Rio Road, Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. It was listed on the NRHP on October 15, 1966 and designated an NHL on October 9, 1960.
Amy Sueyoshi

San Francisco, he raced there to look for his footprints. Charles Warren Stoddard, touted as San Francisco’s first gay writer, cofounded the Bohemian Club, an elite fraternal order that former President Richard Nixon later declared in 1971 as, “the most faggy goddamned thing you could imagine with that San Francisco crowd.”29 At the same time that Noguchi was writing letters of love to Stoddard, he impregnated editor Léonie Gilmour and became engaged to journalist Ethel Armes who herself preferred relationships with women rather than men.30

Noguchi would not be the only Asian in America hobnobbing with well-known whites in queer circles long before the 1970s. Western writer Joaquin Miller particularly favored hosting Japanese “boys” whom he referred to as “brownies” as live-in domestics in his home in California’s Oakland Hills.31 Miller attracted such a following that, shortly after his death in 1913, Yone Noguchi—who had since returned to Japan—sailed back to the United States and organized a group of Japanese men to pay their respects at his home. Miller, also an active member of the San Francisco Bohemian Club, frequently declared his love of men, even as he remained married to a woman.32

29 Austen, Genteel Pagan. The Bohemian Club Clubhouse was located at the northeast corner of Post Street and Grant Avenue. Bohemian Club, Certificate of Incorporation, Constitution, By-Laws and Rules, Officers, Committees, and Members (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker Company, 1904). For Richard Nixon’s quotation see Sueyoshi, Queer Compulsions, 149.
31 Miller’s residence address is listed as “Upper Fruitvale” in the 1899 Oakland Directory. His home is located within Joaquin Miller Park at 3590 Sanborn Drive, Oakland, California. It was listed on the NRHP on October 15, 1966 and designated an NHL on December 29, 1962.
32 When Miller first met Noguchi he called him a “beautiful Japanese flower,” see Sueyoshi, Queer Compulsions.
In 1899, the same year Kosen Takahashi pined away over Yone Noguchi’s absence as he tramped to Los Angeles, Ah Yane gave birth to her first child, Margaret Chung, in Santa Barbara, California. By the 1920s, Chung would become a successful physician, the first American surgeon of Chinese descent (Figure 3). Chung, known for wearing mannish attire, drove a sleek blue sports car around San Francisco and led many of her contemporaries, including lesbian poet Elsa Gidlow, to speculate that she might be a lesbian. Gidlow actively courted Chung, drinking bootleg liquor at a local speakeasy of Chung’s choosing in San Francisco’s North Beach, an Italian community neighboring Chinatown. Later in the 1940s, Chung may have had an intimate relationship with actor Sophie Tucker as Chung hosted grand parties in her home for soldiers traveling through San Francisco during World War II. Chung served as “Mom Chung” to American soldiers by inviting them into her home while they were on leave in San Francisco. She also raised funds for the war and

34 Wu, Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards.
35 In 1942 Chung’s home was in the Telegraph Hill neighborhood of San Francisco; from 1943 to 1945 she is listed as living in what is now the Lone Mountain neighborhood, according to the city directory. Her medical practice was located at 752 Sacramento Street, in San Francisco’s Chinatown. See Polk’s Crocker-Langley San Francisco City Directory, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945 (San Francisco, CA: R. L. Polk and Co.).
Amy Sueyoshi

supported the formation of the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). In order to join the US Navy herself, Chung initiated and lobbied congressional legislation to establish the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES). Ironically, after the establishment of WAVES, government officials would never accept Chung’s application to join due to her race as well as rumors about her lesbianism unearthed by the Naval Intelligence Service. In 1943 the Professional Women’s Club of San Francisco asked Chung to resign from their membership under suspicions around her sexuality.36

Meanwhile, more than seven hundred miles away in the Utah desert, the United States government had incarcerated issei Jiro Onuma in the Topaz War Relocation Center—not for the crime of being a homosexual, but for being an “enemy alien.”37 Authorities forcibly removed Onuma and 120,000 other Japanese Americans who had made homes along the Pacific coast to desolate camps in the nation’s interior during the 1940s. Government officials claimed that Japanese living along the West Coast posed a threat to national security as the nation embarked on a war with Japan.38 Throughout his life, Onuma had collected homoerotic kitsch. And, while Japanese Americans could only bring what they could carry into the incarceration camps, Onuma made it a point to pack the patriotic 1942 “Victory Issue” of male physique magazine *Strength and Health* and a medal of completion awarded by Earle Liederman, a professional muscle man who ran a popular twelve-week mail-order bodybuilding school

36 Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards*.
37 The Topaz War Relocation Center, also known as the Central Utah Relocation Center (Topaz), was built in 1942 in Millard County, Utah. It was listed on the NRHP on January 2, 1974 and designated an NHL on March 29, 2007.
throughout the 1920s and 1930s.\textsuperscript{39} While incarcerated at Topaz, evidence suggests that Onuma had a lover named Ronald.\textsuperscript{40}

Clearly queers among Asian Americans existed in early Asian American history. As they sought out same-sex intimacies, they too contributed to the changing face and social dynamic of America. A number of them more specifically shaped American modernism, the US military, and Hollywood. Nearly all interacted with whites in unexpectedly intimate ways. They have also only recently appeared as queer or possibly queer due to the work of largely LGBTQ scholars attuned to forging a history relevant to their own lives. While many may perceive Asians in America as “closeted” in this earlier part of APA history, historians who privilege heterosexuality and whiteness more likely rendered them irrelevant and therefore invisible in America’s past.

Literary critic Andrew Leong has proposed an “epistemology of the pocket” as opposed to queer theorist Eve Sedgwick’s “epistemology of the closet” for those in America unable to afford their own room with a closet. Leong describes the pocket as a smaller space that “due to its proximity to the body, ought to be more ‘private,’ but because of its placement on the body, is subject to public view.” It accommodates only partial concealment, since “you can hide a body in a closet but not in a pocket.” Leong added, “For propertied, Anglo-American men with rooms of their own, the closet might be an appropriate figure for the possession of a hidden identity. The pocket might be more fitting for the countless others with more precarious relationships to individual property and identity: colonized peoples who have had their property taken from them; people who have been treated as property; aliens ineligible for citizenship; migrant workers....”\textsuperscript{41} For queer Asians who sought to keep their desires private particularly before


the rise of a nationally visible LGBTQ movement, Leong’s pocket serves as a useful metaphor for their all-too-small shelter which more likely exposed rather than concealed their indiscretions from their contemporaries.

Being “out” would always be complicated for APA as for other queers of color. Political scientist Cathy Cohen has detailed how, in the late twentieth century, gay African Americans have also been out in less public ways to not risk losing their ethnic communities in racist America. APAs too would not have felt at liberty to be out in a society that already villainized and marginalized them for their race. Ironically, even when obviously queer Asians such as Yone Noguchi and Margaret Chung initiated significant action alongside history-making whites, their activities still remain barely visible in history.

Radicalism on the Rise

In the mid-1950s when Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the first lesbian civil and political rights group in the United States formed, Filipina Rose Bamberger played a crucial role in gathering a handful of women including Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon who would later become known as the founders. Bamberger invited a group of six women including Martin and Lyon to join her and her partner Rosemary Sliepen for drinks and dinner at their home in San Francisco on Friday, September 21, 1955. A second planning meeting took place on October 5 again at Bamberger’s home, at which time the group decided that she along with her partner Sliepen would bring fried chicken to the first official DOB meeting to be held two weeks later. Yet, the purpose of DOB—a secret group of women gathered for private events versus a public organization pushing for political reform—divided the group. Bamberger left DOB in early 1956, refusing to be a part of an organization that hoped to welcome men and


heterosexual women working publicly towards legislative changes. No doubt, an outward facing DOB would increase the possibility that her own lesbianism would become more public.44

Bamberger had reason to protect herself from instability that public knowledge of her sexuality might bring. During the 1950s she had a different job nearly every year as a machine operator, brush maker, or factory worker and additionally changed residences at least five times. Without job security and little residential stability, the consequences of coming out for Bamberger would have likely been unfathomable to bear.45 Ironically, as DOB grew during the 1950s, a number of the officers including Phyllis Lyon, one of the original founders who pushed for the group to be more public, in fact used pseudonyms in their newsletter called The Ladder to protect their identities.46

Ten years after Bamberger left the group, Chinese American Crystal Jang attended a few San Francisco DOB meetings in search of other lesbians and still found the group, as well as the lesbian bars she frequented, to be “all white.” When she turned to leftist groups working for Third World liberation, the broader Asian American movement seemed “very male.”47 Jang would not be alone in her sense of alienation. Activist Gil Mangaoang described himself as being in state of “schizophrenia” during the 1970s, trapped between his involvement in a homophobic Asian American political community and his intimate life in a racist LGBTQ community.48 He matriculated into the City College of San Francisco in 1970 after being discharged from the US Airforce. On campus Mangaoang joined the Filipino Club, became an officer on the student council, and worked with other student groups of color to establish an ethnic studies

44 Gallo, Different Daughters, 8.
45 Polk’s San Francisco City Directories, 1950-1959 (San Francisco, CA: R. L. Polk and Co.)
46 Gallo, Different Daughters, 31.
Amy Sueyoshi

program. He and other student activists negotiated with the administration to ensure that courses in Filipino history and Tagalog be included in the curricula. Gil Mangaoang, impatient for change within the college, soon after began doing volunteer work at the International Hotel (I-Hotel), a low-income residence hotel at the corner of Jackson and Kearny Streets in San Francisco, which housed many manong or elderly Filipino men. It stood as the last bastion of the San Francisco’s Manilatown before the city tore it down in 1979 as part of urban renewal.

Countless other Asian gay and lesbian activists and writers such as Daniel Tseng, Kitty Tsui, and Helen Zia have reported on how people of color and queer progressive spaces remained unable to accommodate queer people of color in the 1970s. In 1974, at the Third World People’s Solidarity Conference in Ann Arbor, Tseng vividly remembers a group of largely African Americans growing angry over antigay sentiments expressed at the podium by “otherwise radical leaders.” The most incendiary comments ironically came from Angela Davis who mocked founding father George Washington for his “sissy shoes” decades before she would come out. The rise of the Asian American movement as well, owed much of its ideological origins to Marxist-Leninist-Maoist beliefs that devalued same-sex sexuality as a product of bourgeois decadence and

50 The International Hotel was home to thousands of seasonal Asian laborers in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly Filipinos. It was added to the NRHP on June 15, 1977.
51 The demolition took place despite a fight that began in 1968 and continued for more than a decade between the residents of the hotel and the city. See Estella Habal, San Francisco’s International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino American Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007).
believed homosexuality would be eliminated with the eventual demise of capitalism.\textsuperscript{54}

Still, APA queers remained committed to social justice and forged their own paths for community engagement. In the 1960s, Crystal Jang and her women friends began a petition at the City College of San Francisco calling for women students on campus to be allowed to wear pants and successfully changed the dress code. On their way to and from City College and their homes in Chinatown, they also defiantly rode cable cars hanging off the side when the law still mandated women to sit safely inside.\textsuperscript{55} In 1978, Jang publicly spoke against the Briggs Initiative to a news reporter who interviewed her at her workplace, the schoolyard of Benjamin Franklin Middle School.\textsuperscript{56} The Briggs Initiative would have legalized the firing of all LGBTQ teachers and those who supported them.\textsuperscript{57} When she appeared in the local newspapers as a result, she became one of the faces of the anti-Briggs Initiative movement, participating in a rally with the United Educators of San Francisco even as she feared losing her job.\textsuperscript{58} For Jang, self-acceptance of her same-sex desires came through her investigations in the stacks at the public library. In 1960 at the North Beach branch, Jang, still an eighth grader, read about the Kinsey Scale just seven years after sexologist Alfred Kinsey published \textit{Sexual Behavior in the Human Female}.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{54} Wat, \textit{The Making of a Gay Asian Community}, 93.
\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Crystal Jang, conducted by author, January 31, 2012, San Francisco, California.
\textsuperscript{56} Ocean Campus, the main campus of the City College of San Francisco, is located at 50 Phelan Avenue, San Francisco, California. In May 1965, Mona Hutchin, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, more formally challenged the unofficial ban against women standing on the “outside step” of cable cars. Associated Press, “Women Start Riding ‘Outside Step’ of Frisco’s Old Dinky Cable Cars,” \textit{Ocala Star Banner}, May 13, 1965, 8.
\textsuperscript{58} Interview with Crystal Jang, conducted by author, January 31, 2012, San Francisco, California; Crystal Jang, e-mail message to author, October 17, 2015.
Gil Mangaoang too forged a space where he could be both queer and Asian in his activism for social change. Through his work at the I-Hotel, Mangaoang became a member of the Kalayaan Collective, and would become one of the early members of Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP), memorialized as the first revolutionary Filipino nationalist group in the United States. Headquartered in Oakland, California, KDP appeared to be the only organization within the Asian American movement that accepted queer members. At least ten lesbians and two gay men comprised the membership and leadership of the organization.\(^{60}\)

On the East Coast, bar patrons at New York City’s Stonewall Inn in 1969 fought back against police harassment, marking what many historians cite as the beginning of the gay rights movement. Yet, three years earlier in 1966 in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District, sex worker and activist Tamara Ching of Native Hawaiian, Chinese, and German descent fought back against police harassment with other street queens at Compton’s Cafeteria. The twenty-four hour restaurant on the corner of Turk and Taylor streets had attracted a regular late-night crowd of drag queens, hustlers, and runaway teens. One weekend night in August, the management called the police to expel a particularly noisy crowd of queens lingering too long at one table while spending little money. When a police officer grabbed the arm of one of the queens to drag her away, an insurrection ensued. Dishware and silverware flew through the air, tables and chairs were upended, and patrons pushed the police out into the street. The Compton’s Cafeteria revolt in which Ching and other queens participated, initiated new transgender advocacy programs within the San Francisco Police Department and the city’s Department of Public Health.\(^{61}\)

---

\(^{60}\) Gil Mangaoang, “From the 1970s to the 1990s,” 103-109; Trinity Ann Ordona, “Coming Out Together: An Ethnohistory of the Asian and Pacific Islander Queer Women’s and Transgendered People’s Movement of San Francisco,” PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 2000. The KDP National Headquarters was located at 4704 Shattuck Avenue in Oakland in the 1970s and moved to 526 Thirty-Second Street in Oakland in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, the office moved to 3600 Lincoln Way in Oakland. Trinity Ordone, e-mail message to author, December 16, 2015.

\(^{61}\) Susan Stryker, Transgender History (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 63-66, 74, 75. The uprising at Compton’s Cafeteria, 101 Taylor Street, San Francisco was the first known militant action by LGBTQ
In the wake of Stonewall too, queers in New York and soon after across the nation organized to form the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) to demand sexual liberation for all people. As GLF branches popped up across the country, Japanese American Kiyoshi Kuromiya cofounded the Gay Liberation Front–Philadelphia on May 29, 1970 when a group of approximately fifty people met at Gazoo, a gay collective at 230 South Street.62

In the arts as well, Asian lesbians took to the stage in the form of a feminist Asian women’s performance group in 1979 called Unbound Feet. Kitty Tsui, Merle Woo, and Canyon Sam formed three of the six women. Their very presence as performers proved radical due to the fact that few, if any, Asian American women appeared on stage at the time.63 Tsui and Sam had previously met at Asian American Feminists, an Asian women’s rap group initiated two years earlier by Doreena Wong and Canyon Sam.64

Unbound Feet’s first show took place at the James Moore Oakland Museum Theater and proved to be immediately successful. As the group continued to perform over the next two years, audiences of up to six hundred flocked to their shows. While the performances of Tsui, Sam, and Woo did not address lesbianism, the program explicitly stated their sexuality. Unbound Feet thus exposed prominently and without shame the people against police harassment. The building is a contributing resource to the Uptown Tenderloin Historic District, added to the NRHP on February 5, 2009.


64 Members of Asian American Feminists would share food and talk about racism and sexism in a group of nearly all queer Asian women. The first session of Asian American Feminists took place in Sam’s Castro neighborhood San Francisco apartment, see Ordona, “Coming Out Together,” 128-132; Canyon Sam, e-mail message to author, November 24, 2015.
real existence of lesbians within the Asian American community and drew a significant Asian lesbian following.\textsuperscript{65}

After performances, women crowded into the home of Zee Wong which became a popular gathering place and for meeting lesbians of color generally. Wong, a master of party planning with a wide network, later initiated a series of Asian lesbian potlucks in which large groups of women would gather to share food and build community for the first time. Wong simultaneously began organizing multiracial BBQs. While the potlucks took place in Wong’s home, the BBQs ironically convened at Joaquin Miller Park, a public space upon which Joaquin Miller, the lover of “brownies,” had hosted countless young Japanese men in his home. By 1982 Wong had over seventy women on her list of people to invite. A year later, Lisa Chun who had earlier in 1978 cofounded Asian Women, an Oakland-based nonpolitical support group for Asian lesbians, combined her list of contacts with Wong’s and the number of APIs grew to 112.\textsuperscript{66}

In 1981, Unbound Feet would disband over one member Merle Woo’s grievance against University of California, Berkeley’s refusal to renew her contract as a lecturer in Asian American Studies. Woo hoped Unbound Feet would publicly support her position when she

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{Unbound_Feet_Three_1981.pdf}
\caption{Unbound Feet Three, 1981. Left to right: Nellie Wong, Kitty Tsui, Merle Woo. Photo by Cathy Cade, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{65} Ordona, “Coming Out Together,” 134-135.
charged that the university had discriminated against her as a lesbian and
for her radical political ideology.67 The group, unable to come to an
agreement on whether they should make a public statement, splintered.
Half of the members stood opposed to using Unbound Feet as a platform
for workplace grievances that would put them in direct conflict with the
Asian American community. Four years later in 1985 when three of the
original members regrouped as Unbound Feet Three, they more actively
brought lesbian content to the stage (Figure 4).68

In the same year that Unbound Feet, in its original grouping, drew
audiences to their radical performances, queer Asians from across the
nation gathered in Washington, DC, at the first National Third World
Lesbian and Gay Conference. The conference, organized by the National
Coalition of Black Gays, took place at Howard University in October
1979.69 According to poet Michiyo Cornell, the meeting was “the first time
in the history of the American hemisphere that Asian American gay men
and lesbians joined to form a network of support.”70 Cornell, who would
later change her last name to Fukaya, would go on to organize Vermont’s
first queer pride celebration called “Lesbian and Gay Pride” in 1983.71

Asian lesbian and bisexual women organized the first West Coast Asian
Pacific Lesbian Retreat in Sonoma, California in 1987 drawing eighty
people, mostly from the San Francisco Bay Area. Five months later in
October, fifty Asian lesbian and gay men from across the nation gathered
to form the first Asian contingent at the 1987 March on Washington for

67 After a two-year legal battle, in 1984, the University of California, Berkeley reached a settlement
with Woo of $73,584 and two years’ reinstatement. See Stewart, Positive Image, 115.
68 Ordona, “Coming Out Together,” 136-137. Unbound Feet Three comprised of Kitty Tsui, Nellie Wong,
and Merle Woo performed on Friday, October 16 at La Peña Cultural Center. Margaret Krouskoff,
“Unbound Feet Three,” Off Our Backs 11, no. 11 (December 31, 1985): 25. La Peña Cultural Center is
located at 3105 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley, California.
69 Tseng, “Slicing Silence,” 231. Howard University is located at 2400 Sixth Street NW, Washington,
DC.
70 Michiyo Cornell, “Living in Asian America,” in Leong, Asian American Sexualities, 83. See also
Gwendolyn Shervington, ed., A Fire is Burning, It is in Me: The Life and Writings of Michiyo Fukaya
71 Shervington, A Fire is Burning, It is in Me, 145; Chuck Stewart, ed., Proud Heritage: People, Issues,
and Documents of the LGBT Experience (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015), 1208.
Gay Rights on the National Mall. As a national network of Asian lesbians solidified, the Asian/Pacific Lesbian Network (APLN) sponsored their first national retreat titled “Coming Together, Moving Forward” in Santa Cruz, California September 1-4, 1989. The event drew over 140 API lesbians from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{72} For Asian lesbians, the 1980s marked a time of momentous community building. A burgeoning network of individuals created newsletters, held potlucks, and formed softball teams, coalescing into what sociologist Karin Aguilar-San Juan characterized as a “movement.”\textsuperscript{73}

What might be the first Asian American lesbian newsletter, \textit{Phoenix Rising}, began in the mid-1980s, its title referring to these women’s resilience and beauty, rising out of the ashes that racism, sexism, and homophobia might otherwise leave behind.\textsuperscript{74} Their mailing list at one point counted eighty-seven women.\textsuperscript{75} For Helen Zia, who as a community organizer hid her lesbianism, \textit{Phoenix Rising} served as a lifeline while she lived in New Jersey, a vibrant symbol of how her all her identities as a woman, Asian, and lesbian could coexist.\textsuperscript{76}

Unbound Feet also laid the groundwork for Kitty Tsui to publish her poetry four years later in 1983.\textsuperscript{77} Her book, \textit{The Words of a Woman Who Breathes Fire}, has inspired countless queer Asian women across two


\textsuperscript{73} Karin Aguilar-San Juan, “Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians,” \textit{Signs} 18, no. 4 (Summer 1993): 37.

\textsuperscript{74} For additional details on community discussions on the naming of the newsletter see Ordona, “Coming Out Together,” 151-153. \textit{Phoenix Rising} maintained a post office box in Oakland for correspondence and met in people’s homes.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Phoenix Rising} mailing list, Private Collection of Crystal Jang.

\textsuperscript{76} Helen Zia, \textit{Asian American Dreams}; Interview with Helen Zia, conducted by the author, November 16, 2013, San Francisco, California. In New Jersey, Helen Zia lived in an apartment in downtown Jersey City. Helen Zia, e-mail message to author, December 7, 2015. Zia currently resides in Oakland, California.

\textsuperscript{77} Interview with Kitty Tsui, conducted by author, December 21, 2014, Long Beach, California; Ordona, “Coming Out Together,” 134-135.
decades.\textsuperscript{78} Tsui’s work offered, in the words of Aguilar-San Juan, “an image of a ‘proud, defiant, no bullshit woman, the dyke we all wanted to be.’”\textsuperscript{79} While Kitty Tsui was the first Chinese American lesbian to come out with a book, Korean American Willyce Kim broke significant ground as the first published Asian American lesbian with \textit{Eating Artichokes}, printed by the Woman’s Press Collective nine years earlier in 1972.\textsuperscript{80} In the 1980s, however, more than a handful of poets and writers including Merle Woo and Chea Villanueva began publishing their own single-authored books—a trend that continued into the 1990s.\textsuperscript{81} In addition to publishing with established feminist publishers like Firebrand Books, the Women’s Press Collective, and Spinsters Ink, queer writers of color also initiated their own printing houses, including Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, founded in 1980 by Black lesbians Barbara Smith and Audre Lorde.\textsuperscript{82}

Tsui, known not just for her poetry, additionally took up bodybuilding and won bronze in 1986 and gold in 1990 at Gay Games I and II, held respectively in San Francisco and Vancouver. Her muscled body also prominently appeared in the renegade lesbian erotica magazine \textit{On Our}


\textsuperscript{79} Aguilar-San Juan, “Landmarks in Literature by Asian American Lesbians,” 936.


Backs in 1988 and 1990, as well as in New York City’s Village Voice (Figure 5).\textsuperscript{83} Tsui may have been the first Asian lesbian to appear on the cover of both publications. In 1995, she published *Breathless*, a book of SM erotica in which sex mingled with fermented bean curd, beef tendons, and bitter melon. Tsui created intense scenes of pleasure, pain, and Chinese food, and won the Firecracker Alternative Book (FAB) Award for *Breathless* in 1996.\textsuperscript{84} The fact that Tsui wrote of explicitly desiring Asian lesbians became content worth noting to a white lesbian community.\textsuperscript{85}

During the 1980s, many queer Asians sought to find each other. In New York City, two mixed heritage Asians, Katherine Hall and Chea Villanueva, formed Asian Lesbians of the East Coast in 1983.\textsuperscript{86} In Los Angeles, queer Asian American activists formed Asian Pacific Lesbians and Gays (A/PLG) in 1980, the first organization of its kind in Southern California (Figure 6).\textsuperscript{87} The group would later become over run with “rice

\textsuperscript{83} *On Our Backs* was located at 526 Castro Street in San Francisco. See *On Our Backs* 5, no. 1 (Summer 1988); *On Our Backs* 7, no. 2 (November-December 1990).


\textsuperscript{87} A/PLG was established in the home of Morris Kight in Los Angeles. An early gay rights activist, Kight cofounded the Los Angeles branch of the Gay Liberation Front, the Stonewall Democratic Club, and the Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center of L.A., now known as the Los Angeles LGBT Center. Well known for his “love” of Asians, Kight initiated the formation of A/PLG due to concern that his Asian partner Roy Z. would not have Asian friends and would not have community after the older Kight passed. Karen Ocamb, “Morris Kight, 1919-2003,” *The Advocate* 884 (March 2003): 16; Wat, *The
queens”—a term used to describe white men interested in relationships with Asians based largely on their ethnicity.\textsuperscript{88} Four years later in 1984, Steve Lew and Prescott Chow formed the Gay Asian Rap Group (GARP) in Long Beach, California. Though GARP did not initially form in direct response to the A/PLGs internal divisions—debates around whether it should be a space that nurtures gay Asian leadership or serve primarily as a social network for white men to meet Asian men, early members of GARP organized the group to avoid what they perceived as mistakes in A/PLG. As more gay API men within A/PLG defected to GARP, the two organizations became distinctly different. GARP would later become the Gay Asian Pacific Support Network (GAPSN) in 1989 to create a space specifically for API men.\textsuperscript{89} David Hong hosted many of the meetings in his home in West Hollywood. Monthly rap sessions took place at the Chinatown Service Center Annex in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{90}

Queer South Asians contributed significantly to the explosion of queer API community groups in the 1980s. In 1985 and 1986, queer South Asians first in Brooklyn, New York, and then second in the San Francisco


\textsuperscript{88} Wat, \textit{The Making of a Gay Asian Community}.

\textsuperscript{89} Wat, \textit{The Making of a Gay Asian Community}, 166-167. Chow and Lew later moved back to the San Francisco Bay area, where they helped to form important Asian Pacific Islander groups for gay men, including Gay Asian Pacific Islanders (GAPA) and the GAPA Community HIV Project (GCHP).

\textsuperscript{90} David Hong’s home was located just off Santa Monica Boulevard in West Hollywood, California. The Chinatown Service Center Annex was located at 300 West Cesar E. Chavez Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. Alex Fukui, e-mail message to author, January 7, 2016.
Amy Sueyoshi

Bay Area formed two different groups, Anamika and Trikone respectively, to address the specific needs of LGBTQ people of South Asian descent from countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar (Burma), and Tibet. The two organizations would be part of a half dozen groups that emerged in the following years across North America, the United Kingdom, and India.91

Other queer Asian Pacific Americans played key roles in community organizations not specifically queer as well as queer groups not exclusively APA. Mini Liu who worked extensively in the New York-based Organization of Asian Women (OAW) and the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) pushed hard to include sexuality in the organizations’ mission and priorities. She sought to bring a more intersectional approach to existing racial justice activism.92 In San Francisco, Donna Keiko Ozawa cofounded the first and still largest queer youth organization called the Lavender Youth Recreation & Information Center (LYRIC). A dance at the Women’s Building celebrated their formation in 1988.93 In 1991, the group transitioned from an autonomous collective to a service provider with financial support from the San Francisco Mayor’s Office, and two years later purchased their permanent home at 127 Collingwood Street in the Castro District of San Francisco.94 Lia Shigemura of Okinawan and Japanese heritage too played a foundational role in establishing the Asian Women’s Shelter (AWS) in 1988 to provide services for limited and non-

Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific American Activism in Queer History

English speaking refugee and immigrant survivors of domestic violence in the San Francisco Bay Area. Two years later in 1990, AWS implemented its Lesbian Services Program to increase accessibility. From 1989 to 1992, South Asian American LGBTQ activist and attorney Urvashi Vaid served as the executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) now known as the LGBTQ Task Force. Filipina American activist Melinda Paras, former founder and national leader of the KDP, also served as the organization’s executive director from 1994 to 1996.

The 1980s simultaneously marked mass devastation for the gay male community due to the US government’s non-response to the AIDS epidemic. Populations of color found themselves in a particular public health crisis due to disparate funding for services and education as well as presumptions within their own communities that HIV/AIDS was only a “white disease.” Queer activists of color across the nation quickly organized to provide support. On the West Coast, Asian American Recovery Services (AARS) in San Francisco established the Asian AIDS Project (AAP) in 1987, the first organization to target APIs for HIV/AIDS prevention. In the same year, AARRS would call Asian American city leaders to initiate the Asian AIDS Taskforce (AAT), a group committed to mobilizing community-wide resources in the fight against AIDS. The Japanese American Cultural and Community Center of Northern California hosted these early meetings in Japan Town. The following year, the Gay

99 The Asian American Residential and Recovery Services (AARRS) project housed the Asian AIDS Project when it first began in 1987. AARRS’ office was at 2041 Hayes Street, San Francisco, California.
100 The Japanese American Cultural and Community Center of Northern California was located at 1840 Sutter Street in San Francisco. Letter from Davis Y. Ja, July 14, 1987, Folder Meeting Minutes:
Amy Sueyoshi

Asian Pacific Alliance (GAPA) implemented an informal support group for HIV-positive gay Asians later called GCHP.\textsuperscript{101} Chinese American Steve Lew, served a critical role in these early efforts as a key organizer, educator, and role model for other HIV-positive men.\textsuperscript{102} In 1990 when Vince Crisostomo left New York and traveled across the country with his Jewish boyfriend to live in San Francisco, he found community and family with GAPA, the Asian AIDS Project, and particularly Steve Lew. Crisostomo’s boyfriend who had AIDS could also access the organization’s services and AAP offered Crisostomo a job in their theater program after he had applied for seven other jobs without success.\textsuperscript{103}

Asian Pacific Americans also took formative roles in AIDS activism in other parts of the United States as well as the world. In 1989, just two years after the formation of the Asian AIDS Project in San Francisco, Kiyoshi Kuromiya who earlier formed the Philadelphia branch of Gay Liberation Front, founded Critical Path, one of the earliest and most comprehensive resources available to the public for treating AIDS.

Figure 7: George Choy. Photo courtesy of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (George Choy Papers 94-35).

\textsuperscript{101} The support group often met at the Metropolitan Community Church located at the time at 150 Eureka Street in San Francisco or people’s private homes. M. J. Talbot, e-mail message to author, November 23, 2015. The group would later grow to include women and youth and grow into what is today the Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center (A&PI Wellness Center). The center is located at 730 Polk Street, San Francisco, California. “History,” A&PI Wellness Center website, accessed August 1, 2015, http://apiwellness.org/site/history.

\textsuperscript{102} Stoller, Lessons from the Damned, 64.

\textsuperscript{103} Crisostomo had already been volunteering for AAP as a peer counselor before he was hired. Interview with Vince Crisostomo conducted by Toby Wu, November 13, 2013, San Francisco, California.
HIV. Crisostomo, who was Chamorro, would also become the first publicly out HIV-positive Pacific Islander at World AIDS Day in 1991 and become directly involved in bringing increased HIV/AIDS awareness and education to Guam. In 2000, Crisostomo would return to Guam to become the executive director for the first funded community-based organization to do AIDS work in the Pacific. GAPA board member George Choy would collaborate with OCCUR, Japan’s first gay rights group that would successfully bring a discrimination suit against the Tokyo city government in 1990 (Figure 7). In the same year, Chinese American Choy had also persuaded the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to pass Project 10, a teen youth counseling program within the San Francisco Unified School District.

AIDS organizing in the 1980s and 1990s both gathered and nurtured countless community-minded APA activists committed to promoting Asian Pacific American health and well-being in the queer and transgender communities as well as eradicating broad-based fear based on gender, sexuality, or HIV status. Tamara Ching from the Compton’s Cafeteria revolt worked as an AIDS education outreach worker for the AAP and oversaw a support group for the API transgender community for GCHP as the “God Mother of Polk [Street]” (Figure 8). Transwoman Nikki Calma, better

---


105 Interview with Vince Crisostomo, conducted by Toby Wu, November 13, 2013, San Francisco, California.


107 Choy was also a member of ACT UP and organizer for GCHP. Just two years later, in 1993, Choy died of AIDS. George Choy Papers, GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, California. The three most important prevention and service organizations for APAs at the time in Northern California were the GAPA Community HIV Project, Asian AIDS Project, and Filipino Task Force on AIDS, all run by gay or bisexual men. See Stoller, Lessons from the Damned, 66.

known as “Tita Aida,” who also worked at the Asian AIDS Project in 1990s became a community icon through her advocacy work, a host to countless fundraisers, as well as one of three women to be featured in the first API transgender public service announcement in 2008. Transman Willy Wilkinson who was active in HIV work with Inner City Community Health Outreach and served as a founding board member of GCHP would go on to become a leading transgender public health advocate in San Francisco.

Historian Marc Stein has characterized the outpouring of community engagement in response to the conservatism of the 1980s as a “renaissance.” Queer cultural productions and community activism flourished in the fight against AIDS and moral condemnation of LGBTQ people. The 1980s, however, was also a time of mounting anti-Asian sentiment and violence as the US automobile industry crumbled in the face of Japanese car manufacturers. The Vincent Chin case became a

---


112 License: CC BY 2.0. [https://www.flickr.com/photos/sfslim/8734532068](https://www.flickr.com/photos/sfslim/8734532068)
Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific American Activism in Queer History

flashpoint for organizing against Asian American violence, regardless of gender and sexual identities. On June 19, 1982 in Highland Park, Michigan, two white autoworkers with a baseball bat bludgeoned to death twenty-seven-year-old engineer Vincent Chin after hurling racial epithets at him and accusing him of taking away their jobs. Chinese American lesbian Helen Zia, who was a community organizer at the time and would later become an award-winning journalist and editor of Ms. Magazine, cofounded and led the fight for justice for Vincent Chin as the president of American Citizens for Justice (ACJ), the first explicitly Asian American grassroots community advocacy effort with a national scope. Indeed, an explosion of the Asian literary and arts culture as well as community groups in the 1980s becomes particularly notable as queer Asian Pacific Americans came together during a time of extreme socioeconomic repression, moral conservatism, and anti-Asian sentiment.

On April 6, 1991 on Broadway in New York City, queers of color, leftist Asian Americans regardless of sexual orientation of gender diversity, antiracist white gays, bisexuals, and lesbians, and the Actors’ Equity Association joined hands with Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOEC) and Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY) to protest two LGBTQ institutions’ use of Cameron Mackintosh’s musical Miss Saigon as their annual fundraiser extravaganza. ALOEC and GAPIMNY had long been in conversation with the two hosts— Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund and New York City’s Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center—to cancel their fundraiser at this musical that promoted damaging images of submissive “Orientals” and the use of yellow face in the casting.

113 While prosecutors charged the murderers Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz with second-degree murder, the father and stepson pair pleaded to manslaughter. The judge, Charles Kauffman in March 1983, sentenced the two men to a three-year probation and a fine of $3,780. A federal trial the following year determined that the murder had been a hate crime, convicting only Ebens of violating Chin’s civil rights. However, a retrial in 1987 acquitted Ebens and both men would never spend a day in jail for their crime. Robert S. Chang, Disoriented: Asian Americans, Law, and the Nation State (New York: New York University Press, 1999), See also Henry Yu and Mai Ngai eds., “The Politics of Remembering,” special issue, Amerasia Journal 28, no. 3 (2002).

114 The first community meeting that would later formally become American Citizens for Justice (ACJ) took place on March 20, 1983 at Golden Star Restaurant at 22828 Woodward Avenue in Ferndale, Michigan. The founding ACJ meeting took place on March 31, 1983 at the Detroit Chinese Welfare Council building at 3153 Cass Avenue in Detroit, Michigan. See Zia, Asian American Dreams, 64-66.
of one of the actors.\textsuperscript{115} While the fundraiser took place as scheduled, the protest marked the formation of an incredible coalition of various communities publicly denouncing racism, misogyny, and Orientalism. Organizer Yoko Yoshikawa remembers, “James Lee taped a neon pink triangle to his leather jacket, emblazoned with the words: ‘San Francisco-born Gay Man of Korean Descent.’ On any other night, he could have been bashed for that. But that night, his back was covered. Gray-haired Japanese American wives and mothers and brash young white men from Queer Nation marched side by side. Dykes in dreads, campy queens, leftists of all persuasions: we owned Broadway.”\textsuperscript{116}

Queer API publications too flourished through the 1990s. Asian Pacific Islander lesbians and bisexual women produced \textit{The Very Inside}, an anthology of over one hundred pieces edited by Sharon Lim-Hing in 1994.\textsuperscript{117} Lim-Hing began thinking about producing the book in the summer of 1990 as she walked home in Somerville, Massachusetts in defiant anticipation of the local teenagers calling her “Chink.”\textsuperscript{118} At the time, except for \textit{Between the Lines}, a short anthology of Asian American lesbian writing that was out of print and hard to obtain, Asian women’s writings had only appeared in small numbers as part of women of color anthologies or as tokens towards diversity in white anthologies.\textsuperscript{119} Lim-Hing sought to create something as large as Gloria Anzaldúa’s and Cherrie Moraga’s \textit{This Bridge Called My Back} to speak to Asian Pacific bisexual and lesbian women’s strength, beauty, creativity, and rage so that these


\textsuperscript{116} Yoshikawa, “The Heat is on Miss Saigon Coalition,” 55.


\textsuperscript{118} After arriving home, in the heat of her apartment and with the neighbor’s dog barking incessantly, Lim-Hing in her discomfort decided that Asian and Pacific Islander lesbians should have a book of their own.

\textsuperscript{119} C. Chung, A. Kim, and A. K. Lemeshewsky, \textit{Between the Lines: An Anthology by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, California} (Santa Cruz, CA: Dancing Bird Press, 1987).
women would be more than just “a blip on the graph at the intersection of ‘race’ and sexual preference, nor... the hub of triple oppressions.”

Six years later, Quang Bao and Hanya Yanagihara published *Take Out*, an anthology produced with the support of the Asian American Writer’s Workshop in New York that brought gay Asian men into a growing number of works that largely featured queer women. More artistry and less activism motivated their publication, which the editors hoped would force readers “to reevaluate [their] conceptions of gay Asian America.” The collection comprised mostly of men since the editors decided to not “worry too much about gender equity” since it was “far better to sacrifice quantity for quality.”

With the editors’ less than feminist impulse, *Take Out* might serve as the cap to a literary movement started by radical Asian lesbians thirty years earlier.

The most widely read queer API writing of the 1990s, however, was Olympic medalist Greg Louganis’ autobiography titled *Breaking the Surface* in which he publicly came out as HIV positive after nearly a decade of rumors in professional sports that he was gay. Louganis, who is of mixed Samoan and white

---

120 Lim-Hing, *The Very Inside*, Introduction.
122 Bao and Yanagihara, *Take Out*.
123 License:L CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 [https://www.flickr.com/photos/generalmills/26161871682](https://www.flickr.com/photos/generalmills/26161871682)
ancestry, endured a childhood of racial and homophobic persecution and name-calling. He went on to win four gold medals in diving—the three-meter springboard and the ten-meter platform in 1984 and 1988 (Figure 9). *Breaking the Surface* became a New York Times #1 Best Seller in 1995, initiating his public persona as a gay rights activist. As the first prominent athlete to come out as gay, Louganis faced tremendous challenges in professional sports that impacted him emotionally and lost him millions of dollars in endorsements.124

Other activists published landmark texts on not exclusively queer APAs. In 1991, mixed heritage Lani Ka`ahumanu co-edited *Bi Any Other Name* with Loraine Hutchins and the anthology has become recognized as the “Bi-ble” of the bisexual movement.125 When Ka`ahumanu and Hutchins could only submit their book in the “lesbian anthology” category of the Lambda Literary Awards, BiNet, an umbrella organization for a network of bisexual communities, protested and initiated the creation of a “bisexual” category in the book awards.126 Ka`ahumanu had long been recognized as the mother of the bisexual movement with her role in the founding of BiPOL in 1983, the first and oldest bisexual political organization.

The 1990s further marked an expansion of queer Asian American activism with the development of the Internet. A swell of South Asian queer groups formed outside of California such as SALGA in New York City, Khush in Washington, DC, Trikone in Atlanta, MASALA in Boston, as well as internationally. Online forums such as KhushList, SAGrrls, DesiDykes,


125 Ka`ahumanu was born Lani Farrell and took the last name Ka`ahumanu in 1979 at the suggestion of her mother. Trinity Ordona details Ka`ahumanu’s heritage as the following, “[her] maternal grandmother was part Native Hawaiian, her maternal grandfather was Eurasian. Her mother Minerva Helani, was born in Japan and raised in Japan and later Hawaii. Her father, a man of Irish and Polish ancestry, married her mother in Hawaii where they met.” Ordona, “Coming Out Together,” 292. See also Hutchins (this volume).

GayBombay, and Khushnet.com multiplied as the web become more accessible. A queer Vietnamese American support group in Southern California called Ô-Môi also took advantage of the Internet to grow significantly from its initial six members in 1995 to fifty-four members by 2000.

Organizations within the ethnic mainstream also increasingly recognized LGBTQ members within their communities. In 1990, when much of the nation feared to even breathe the same air as gay men because of the AIDS epidemic, the San Fernando, California chapter of the Japanese American Citizens’ League (JACL) elected Takenori “Tak” Yamamoto as president. Yamamoto became the first openly gay president in any chapter of the JACL and played a critical role in the organization’s endorsement of gay marriages at their national convention four years later in Salt Lake City. In 1994, as AIDS became the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four, Pine United Methodist Church in San Francisco, one of America’s earliest Japanese American churches, became the first reconciling or queer-friendly Asian American church in America. In the same year Cherry Blossom Festival organizers in San Francisco invited more than one hundred LGBTQ women and men to march in the April parade, after hearing that a similar contingent had just marched in San Francisco’s Chinese New Year’s parade in February. Vice President at Union Bank and community leader June Sugihara led the Cherry Blossom contingent declaring, "It is so very
important to recognize and support the lesbian and gay people in our Japanese American community.”

The 1990s also marked a period when more API parents publicly vocalized support of their gay, lesbian, and bisexual children. In 1990, two years after their daughter came out to them as gay, Okinawan American Harold and Ellen Kameya became actively involved in Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) as the first known Asian parents in America to publicly advocate for their gay children. They first began attending PFLAG meetings at the Westwood United Methodist Church and the two informally functioned as an API PFLAG for more than a decade as the only Asian parents they knew in PFLAG. In 2012, the Kameyas along with other API parents would more formally cofound the first API PFLAG chapter in the San Gabriel Valley. In Northern California, the API-PFLAG Family Project, later known as API Family Pride, formed in 1996. Filipina lesbian Trinity Ordona played a central role in collaboration with the API-PFLAG Family Project to produce the first documentary film of Asian parents discussing their queer children titled Coming Out, Coming Home. In 1997, Al and Jane Nakatani in collaboration with writer Molly Fumia, published Honor Thy Children, a memoir of the loss of their three sons, two of whom were gay. The oldest and youngest of the Nakatani sons died from AIDS-related illnesses and the middle son died from a gunshot wound in an altercation. The father, Al Nakatani, later attributed his middle son’s inability to walk away from the fight to his own mandate to maintain an inflexible prideful masculinity in raising him. Though the father had pushed his oldest son out of their house at the age of fifteen


when he found out he was gay, after the death of his second son, he and his wife came to actively support their youngest son in his final struggle against AIDS.\textsuperscript{134} These early works laid the groundwork for a flurry of publications and memoirs by queer APIs or their parents in the decades that followed.\textsuperscript{135}

Queer Asian America continues to grow tremendously in the twenty first century. Countless blogs from queer Asians fill the Internet expounding upon the importance of community engagement and queer empowerment. Artists and community organizations have initiated the recognition of queer and transgender APAs for their historic activism, further shedding light on their previously hidden presence. Christopher Lee, the Asian American FTM whose death certificate motivated the Respect After Death Act was


also cofounder of the San Francisco Transgender Film Festival in 1997 and was elected as the first openly transgender man to be Grand Marshal in the 2002 San Francisco Pride Parade (Figure 10). The aforementioned Tamara Ching, who revolted against police at Compton’s Cafeteria in 1966, won a number of honors including the Community Service Award from the Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club in 2006. In 2012, artist Tanya Wischerath recognized her and other transwomen activists of color in a mural along Clarion Alley in San Francisco (Figure 8). In 2013, San Francisco Pride honored retired school teacher Crystal Jang as Grand Marshal in recognition of her contributions to the LGBTQ community as the first openly gay Asian lesbian teacher within the San Francisco Unified School District. Not only had Jang first spoken out publicly against the Briggs Initiative, decades later in the early 1990s officials appointed her the middle school coordinator for the Office of Support Services for Sexual Minority Youth and Families. More recently in 2014, San Francisco AIDS activist George Choy was honored with a sidewalk plaque in the Castro District’s Rainbow Honor Walk, memorializing twenty “heroes and heroines of LGBT history.”

---

136 “Remembering Christopher Lee as Respect After Death Act Takes Effect.”
139 Interview with Crystal Jang, conducted by author, January 31, 2012, San Francisco, California; Crystal Jang, e-mail message to author, October 17, 2015.
Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu have been transforming people’s lives daily without formal recognition by teaching love, honor, and respect for indigeneity and gender diversity in classrooms, workshops, and public spaces.\textsuperscript{141}

In universities across the nation, queer and Asian student groups are cropping up. In the San Francisco Bay Area alone, four institutions of higher education—University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, and Stanford—all have student-run organizations by and for LGBTQ Asian Pacific Americans.\textsuperscript{142} More recently in 2014, the University of Pennsylvania formed its first queer and Asian student group called Penn Q&A.\textsuperscript{143} Larger numbers of APAs in California as well as perhaps a more open attitude to diverse sexualities set the stage for more robust queer APA organizing in the West than other parts of the United States.\textsuperscript{144} Most notably, a younger generation of queer APIs are taking interest in the histories of their LGBTQ predecessors. In the past three years, chapters of the queer advocacy organization API Equality in both Northern and Southern California have initiated oral history projects (the “Pioneers Project” in Los Angeles and “Dragon Fruit Project” in San Francisco) and have sponsored educational workshops on API queer

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Kumu Hina: The True Meaning of Aloha, directed by Dean Hamer and Joe Wilson (Qwaves, 2014).
\item Cal Q&A at UC Berkeley originally called CAL B GAY and Q&A at Stanford formed in the 1990s. AQUA at San Francisco State University and Q&A at San Jose State University began later in the 2000s. See Cal Q&A web page, accessed October 2, 2015, \url{http://calqa.nda.tumblr.com}; Q&A at San Jose State Tumblr page, accessed October 2, 2015, \url{http://qnasjsu.tumblr.com}; See Queer and Asian at Stanford web page, accessed October 2, 2015, \url{http://web.stanford.edu/group/queerasians/index.html}; Asians and Queers United for Awareness Twitter page, accessed October 2, 2015, \url{https://twitter.com/AQUASFSU}; Tiffany Chen, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2015; Joseph Lee, e-mail message to author, October 2, 2015.
\item Victoria, “Queer, Asian, and Proud,” South Asian Americans Leading Together (blog), October 6, 2014, \url{http://saalt.org/queer-asian-and-proud}.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
history as well as Wikipedia Hackathons. At the GLBT History Museum in San Francisco as well, the first of its kind in the nation, curators have mounted four exclusively queer APA exhibits since its opening in 2011. Queer APA organizing and community engagement has consistently occurred at the intersection of race and sexuality even as much of the mainstream LGBTQ movement attempts to erase the significance of their race and ethnicity in what many Americans believe to be a post-racial America. For these APA activists, sexual freedom, economic justice, and gender and racial equity are inextricably intertwined in their fight for a more compassionate and inclusive world.

