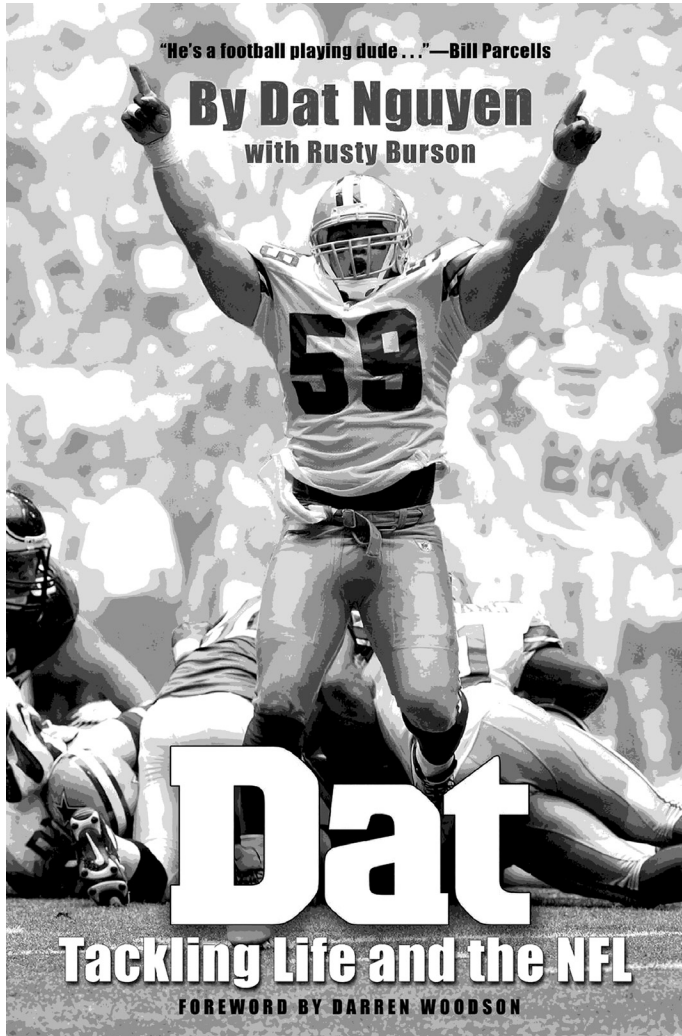


# I. Race, Gender, and Asian American Sporting Identities



Dat Nguyen is the only Vietnamese American drafted by a National Football League team. He was an All-American at Texas A & M University (1998) and an All-Pro for the Dallas Cowboys (2003).

Bookcover image: <http://www.amazon.com/Dat-Tackling-Life-NFL-Nguyen/dp/1623490634>

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Second Row: Chris Strople, Mike Williams, Curt Kimbel, Shogo Kubo  
First Row: Dennis Martinez, Tom Inouye, Bobby Piercy.

Truck company Gullwing featured two Japanese Americans in their platter of seven of their "hottest skaters," *Skateboarder Magazine*, January 1979.

## Skate and Create

### Skateboarding, Asian Pacific America, and Masculinity

Amy Sueyoshi

In the early 1980s, my oldest brother, a senior in high school, would bring home a different girl nearly every month, or so the family myth goes. They were all white women, punkers in leather jackets and ripped jeans who exuded the ultimate in cool. I thought of my brother as a rock star in his ability to attract so many edgy, beautiful women in a racial category that I knew at the age of nine was out of our family's league. As unique as I thought my brother's power of attraction to be, I learned later that numerous Asian stars rocked the stage in my brother's world of skateboarding. A community of intoxicatingly rebellious Asian and Pacific Islander men thrived during the 1970s and 1980s within a skater world almost always characterized as white, if not blatantly racist. These men's positioning becomes particularly notable during an era documented as a time of crippling emasculation for Asian American men. Skateboard magazines, interviews, and memoirs detail how API boys and men found a home and an identity in the apparently white world of skateboarding. Asian Pacific American men formed a loose fraternity of die-hard individualists, alongside whites and other people of color across broadly middle-class backgrounds. For these youth, race mattered less than their love of skating in forging friendships, even as they identified unquestionably as Asian in America. Additionally, these young men never questioned the legitimacy or constitution of their masculinity nor saw themselves as subverting a racialized superstructure of emasculation in a sport that appeared definitively manly. They sought to simply have fun and feel free

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among other youth who accepted them. API skaters who chose to “rip” instead of joining a basketball or baseball league thrived in an alternative space, distinctly anti-conformist even as it remained conventionally masculinist.

“Skate to Create” spotlights the experiences of API skaters to expose how discourses on the sport have become whitewashed. Racism within the documentation of skateboarding has erased astounding Asian Pacific American success within the sport. This erasure has notably squashed the public proliferation of robust Asian Pacific Islander masculinities in the 1970s and 1980s. The history of skateboarding, too, might take on new meaning by centering skaters of color. Expressly opposed to “groupthink,” Asian Pacific Islander skaters found belonging, perhaps curiously, in an activity with racist roots. More significantly, these API men—who American media insisted were castrated—joined hands with other men across race with ease and confidence to form a brotherhood built upon practice and skill in one of the most masculine professional sports that came to embody rebellious American manhood.<sup>1</sup>

### Scholarship on Skateboarding

Geographers, sociologists, and other skateboarding specialists have frequently documented skating as a fringe sport of demonstrative irreverence against authority and institutions. Iain Borden describes skateboarding as “counter cultural,” a totalizing way of being with its own aesthetics, language, music, and even junk food that rejects normative American values. According to Borden, skaters are proud to subscribe to a single binary choice, “skate or be stupid.”<sup>2</sup> Scholars working at the intersection of race and gender have more significantly challenged these pervasive romanticized views of skateboarding-as-rebellion by characterizing the sport as a site of reactionary whiteness. Media critic Emily Chivers Yochim placed skateboarding’s beginnings in the conformist middle America of the 1950s. As California experienced an unprecedented growth in populations of people of color, whites perceived them as threatening to their well-being. Skateboarding’s birth from quiet and spacious suburban streets marked it as a leisure activity specifically for whites who preferred to be away from crowded urban neighborhoods increasingly populated by Asians, Latinos, and African Americans. It symbolized a “more carefree time when streets were safe and children could go out alone.” Skateboarding’s roots in surfing from the Pacific Islands and Hawai’i even became deracialized as teenagers viewed it as merely an exotic edge to the

defiant sport. According to Yochim, the skate life as a cultural movement became a site of young white men “reveling in adolescent humor” and “mocking dominant norms of masculinity, all the while maintaining its power at the expense of women, people of color, homosexuals, and working class whites.”<sup>3</sup>

More recent scholarship further underscores skateboarding’s neoconservative underpinnings. Kinesiologist Kyle Kusz outlined how skateboarding’s rise in popularity as an extreme sport was a reaction from white men against the entry of African American athletes into professional sports. The celebration of extreme sports as “hearty, pioneering, and masculinizing” in fact expressed white desires to “recenter white masculinity” within mainstream sports culture and, therefore, American national identity. Extreme sportsmen and their “insatiable appetite” for risk and adventure became the contemporary “American frontiersmen,” heroic (white) men living in a modern jungle filled with new dangers and challenges.<sup>4</sup>

Skateboarding’s inextricable relationship to punk rock further reinforced its relationship to white supremacy, according to Konstatin Butz. “White males” who comprise the primary participants of both skateboarding and skate punk culture embraced music that appropriated “minority” discourse as they grew anxious about losing their own hegemonic status. Butz noted that the leading skateboarding magazine *Thrasher* fueled sales by promoting their “Skate and Destroy” slogan through destructive and militaristic characters aimed at appealing to white, suburban middle-class adolescents. *Thrasher* aligned with other productions of popular culture as well as governmental discourse that marketed exaggerated white masculinity as a backlash against civil rights and feminism during the 1980s. Curry Malott and Milagros Peña have also asserted that racist and misogynist elements of punk rock culture are inseparable from skateboarding in their study on the rise of anti-racist and feminist punk rock.<sup>5</sup> Within these narratives in which skateboarding becomes inextricably linked to neo-conservatism, Asians and Pacific Islanders, along with women, queers, and other people of color, can appear only as objects of hate, rather than as actual skaters, even in an America growing increasingly brown.

### Skateboarding and Asian Pacific America

In Asian America, skateboarding has appeared as a lighthearted recreational pursuit or an activity associated with whites. In



1985, Carl Yamamoto, a dancer and the artistic director of the San Diego Dance Theater, incorporated a childhood scene of trying to learn how to skateboard and failing in his "InnovAsian" dance concert. Nisei Week organizers in 1987 also programmed a skateboarding demonstration in their annual Japanese American festival in Los Angeles. On a more serious note, a racial attack on the Cal Poly Pomona campus two years later against an Asian woman by a "white student on a skateboard" became one of several lightning rods for the implementation of anti-harassment policies at a number of institutions, including Stanford University and Emory University. Skater Jimmy Lam in the 1980s fielded questions from other Asian Americans in San Francisco who asked why he engaged in something "white." Lam, who at the time did not associate skateboarding with any race thought to himself, "that's who I am, and I'm not white."<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1990s, the Asian American community has more actively raised the visibility of Asian American skaters. In 1994 Kenneth Li profiled a number of professional skaters in *A Magazine*, such as Japanese American and Native Hawaiian Christian Hosoi, Filipino American Willy Santos, and Chinese Vietnamese American Kien Lieu, also known as the "Donger."<sup>7</sup> A year later Caldecott Medal winner and Asian American illustrator Allen Say published a children's picture book titled *Stranger in the Mirror* in which a disrespectful boy Sam is saved only through riding a skateboard after being rude to his grandfather.<sup>8</sup> Yet, even in the midst of this increasing incorporation of skateboarding as part of Asian American popular culture, Vietnamese American Huy Lee, a junior at University of Washington, Seattle, in 1996 noted that, "a lot of Asians view it as a white sport."<sup>9</sup>

Not until the 2000s would skateboarding appear more explicitly as an unquestionable part of Asian American popular culture. In 2001, *Giant Robot*, considered to be the arbiter of "cool" Asian American consumer culture, teamed up with renowned Asian American filmmaker Renee Tajima-Peña to create a video titled *Skate Manzanar*. Though Asian Pacific Americans had already been skating for at least three decades, this collaboration to produce a skateboard documentary at Manzanar, a Japanese American concentration camp during World War II, would more definitively mark the sport as a part of Asian America.<sup>10</sup> In a further act of validation, acclaimed comedian, actress, and Asian American icon Margaret Cho remarked in the *Los Angeles Times*, "To go and skate Manzanar is such a brilliant thing. . .to take a

horrible, painful memory and reclaim it by skating it is so punk rock—it's so cool."<sup>11</sup> Tajima-Peña, however, would have a less celebratory interpretation of her own video. While she acknowledged popular conceptions of skateboarding as an outsider sport that violates the sanctity of corporate or public places, she noted, "At Manzanar, the irreverence of skateboarding is no match for the violations of history."<sup>12</sup> In 2009, *Skate Manzanar* would go on exhibit at the Japanese American National Museum, in perhaps the most formal act of legitimating skateboarding in Asian American culture.<sup>13</sup> *Giant Robot* would additionally solicit the creators of the popular Uglydoll, David Horvath and Sun-Min Kim, as well as graffiti artist David Choe to create graphic designs on skateboards to be sold as Asian American art. Despite the central role skateboarding has come to take on in the Asian American hipster scene, scholarship on skateboarding continues to render Asian Americans and other people of color virtually absent.

For sure, Asian Pacific Americans have played a central role in skateboarding since its revival in the 1970s and 1980s, a fact never forgotten among many old timers in the community. On Saturday, July 19, 2014, close to a hundred surfers, many of whom bore evidence of more than thirty years in the skateboarding community, paddled out along Venice Pier in Southern California to memorialize the passing of Shogo Kubo. As one of the original Z-Boys, the Zephyr skateboard team that supposedly changed the face of skateboarding to "cool" through its smooth, surfer-inspired style, Kubo had been a pioneering force in skateboard history.<sup>14</sup> He had moved to Santa Monica, California in 1971 from Japan at the age of 12, speaking only Japanese. He had difficulty adjusting, not really developing the confidence to converse in English until three years later. Surfing and other sports, however, helped things go "smoother." And within a handful of years, Kubo would gain national fame as a skateboarder with "sublime style." In 1979, *Skateboarder* in an eight-page interview had heralded him as a "top pro."<sup>15</sup>

Skateboarding magazines, in fact, featured Asian Americans prominently in a number of issues in the late 1970s. In October 1977, just two years before *Skateboarder* featured Kubo, Tom "Wally" Inouye appeared on the cover of the magazine teetering on the inside edge of a massive concrete pipe. "Did he make it? . . . look inside," the magazine teased. Seventy-six pages later, a sequence of three photographs showed Inouye in orange kneepads



Tom "Wally" Inouye at old Upland Pipeline Skatepark in 1977, *Skateboarder Magazine*, September 1977.

and a yellow t-shirt skating out without a hitch. In the same issue, 16-year-old Darren Ho appeared under the column "Who's Hot" as an up-and-coming "Hawaiian Sizzler." As Ho came off the plane to visit the continental U.S. for his first time, three Z-Boys including Kubo greeted him, and proceeded with the usual "Dogtown style howzit," shredding down the escalators, skating in between the passengers, and "causing general skate havoc throughout the baggage claim area." Ho, stunned by the Z-Boys' aggressive skate style, supposedly responded with just one comment, "This is really different. I know I am going to have to adjust."<sup>16</sup> In this scene of public disruption, notably two of the four skaters, or half of the group, were Asian Pacific Islander.



Moreover, Asian Pacific Americans, many of them of mixed heritage, dominated skateboarding competitions through the 1980s. Skaters such as Christian Hosoi, Tom Inouye, Steve Caballero, and Lester Kasai, all of Japanese ancestry, consistently placed in the top five, often wrangling for pole position with Tony Hawk, who would later become the most commercially famous skater. Professional skateboarder Jeff Pang noted that Asian American skaters in fact “rule[d]” with their “super-cool, lingoized, secret-handshake” style of contemporary skateboarding. Pang remembers Asian American skaters were some of the “most consistent and stylish skateboarders.”<sup>17</sup>

*A. Magazine’s* Kenneth Li counted hundreds of Asian American professional skaters in the 1990s who collectively comprised a significant twenty percent of registered members of the National Skateboarding Association. The proportion of Asian Pacific Islanders in professional skateboarding nearly matched the proportion of API undergraduate students at University of California, Davis as well as University of California, San Diego during a time when Asians only made up three percent of the national population.<sup>18</sup> With such a significant proportion of Asians and Pacific Islander skaters, their participation signals more than just the marginal presence of a group of masochistic, self-hating Asian Americans who engaged in what many skateboarding scholars have documented as a white supremacist sport. Indeed, Asian “overrepresentation” in skateboarding might signal a different kind of “model minority” than the image that conservatives extracted from college campuses to pit Asians against other people of color.<sup>19</sup>

### A Place for Asian Pacific Americans

While the early history of skateboarding in the 1950s may certainly be infused with racism and reactionary whiteness, Asian American skaters for the most part remember the skating community as one of racial tolerance where different people could come together and be judged purely for their skating ability. Wallace Sueyoshi remembers being drawn to skaters because they seemed less judgmental about race. “In the 1970s rock’n’roll was a white person thing and all the other people had to listen to soul music or disco.” He remembers also being asked if he liked low-rider or high-rider cars. Sueyoshi—who leaned more towards rock, a genre synonymous with whites, and liked low-riders, cars associated with Chicanos—hung out with ease among

his skater friends who cared little about his apparently inconsistent cultural tastes. Additionally, the families and friends of the white skaters he befriended in the late 1960s told Sueyoshi on more than one occasion to be proud of his heritage. When Sueyoshi attended a family picnic of his friend Phillip Bright, who lived around the corner from 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue and Noriega Street in San Francisco, one of his grandfather's friends called out to him, "Don't let these racist people in the neighborhood bring you down. I was in the war, but I soon appreciated the Japanese fighting spirit along with the culture." According to Sueyoshi, inclusion in the skating community would be dictated by your skill rather than your skin color: "If you can skate, then you can skate and that's cool, if you can't skate, then leave."<sup>20</sup>

Judi Oyama and Kent Uyehara both remember the skating community as "colorblind." Oyama remembers not having faced racism from skaters, even when she traveled to a competition in North Carolina, a state she had imagined as racist, while, in her daily life in California, a stranger on the street from time to time would yell out "Jap" to her in Santa Cruz County. Kent Uyehara too never felt minimized as an Asian male during the 1980s despite being "small." Uyehara, as a teenager, had grown his father's sporting goods store by incorporating skateboarding paraphernalia. Uyehara recalled that even the white surfer "jocks" at San Diego State University, the school he attended at the time, appreciated and recognized his success.<sup>21</sup>

While API skaters generally felt accepted, the skate world was hardly immune from larger structural prejudices around race, as well as nationality and gender. Jimmy Lam, who immigrated with his family to the United States in 1980 from Hong Kong, remembers facing the most discrimination from a handful of Chinese American students rather than whites in the San Francisco public schools. One Asian American skater who lived in Lam's neighborhood told him, "go back to where you came from" in the late 1980s. Notably, Lam, along with Uyehara and an African American skater from San Francisco Jovontae Turner, all recounted moments of racism from white skaters outside of California.<sup>22</sup> As a woman in a man's world of skateboarding, Oyama recounted the clearest incidents of discrimination. So often had Oyama been mistaken for Peggy Oki, the one other Japanese American woman professional skater from the 1970s, that she has joked with a friend about getting a t-shirt with the imprint "I'm not Peggy." In her early decades of skating

as well, sponsors often overlooked her because she did not fit the “blonde, surfer ideal” even as she took home trophies from countless competitions—no matter that the original surfer from the Pacific Islands more likely looked similar to Oyama than the golden-haired “California girl.” Oyama also made a deliberate decision to move towards timed competitions such as slalom or speed skating rather than place her fate in the hands of partial judges who would subjectively score her performance in areas such as pool skating. Still, she insists that in the world of skating, she, as an Asian woman, could actually aspire to become a professional and be featured in skateboarding magazines as previous skaters like Peggy Oki had.<sup>23</sup>

### Unfazed by Castration

While Jimmy Lam claimed that skateboarding did nothing for his sex appeal, other skaters such as Christian Hosoi became elevated to god-like status in the 1980s, so much so that he adopted the nickname “Christ” for one of his aerials where he took to the air with his arms out to the side, his body in the shape of a cross. Hosoi, perhaps the most famous Asian Pacific American skateboarder, pulled in \$350,000 annually in the mid-1980s through endorsements and the sale of his Hosoi skateboard decks during a time when the average salary for a National Basketball Association player hovered at \$300,000. Celebrities such as River Phoenix, the Beastie Boys, and Ice-T made up his circle of friends. Hosoi remembered, “I could have anything I wanted, do whatever I wanted,” which included “girls, cars, and drugs.” While most teenagers sat in a high school classroom, Hosoi’s typical day consisted of skating along the Venice Beach boardwalk and lying on the beach with “a bikini-clad girl or two.” Hosoi’s long-time rival Tony Hawk noted that he needed skateboarding to make him attractive to women, unlike Hosoi, for whom skateboarding just amplified his already charismatic and compelling masculinity to ridiculous heights. So popular had Hosoi grown in his manly appeal that at vertical skate competitions white women would cheer hysterically for him when he walked on to the ramp and in the next moment boo and hiss with equal fervor when Hawk appeared. At a young age, Hosoi reached what he perceived as the apex of “money, sex, power,” which he described as “the bottom line for a man.” He wore his hair long and donned hot pink shirts with no concern that rivals such as Hawk mistook him for a girl. Hosoi declared, “I don’t care what people think, and I

won't cut my hair for them or anyone else, no matter what they say. They'll find out soon enough that I'm a boy, when I smoke them in all the contests."<sup>24</sup>

Aside from the "full rock-star life" experienced by Hosoi, other Asian American skaters also appeared to have no shortage of women or a masculine sense of themselves.<sup>25</sup> Steve Caballero also remembered that "I had the girls, the money, and the fame. I had it all." Even Lam—who exclaimed, "we're a bunch of sweaty skate rats, who's attracted to that?"—had a girlfriend in high school in the 1980s. Kent Uyehara, who at one point weighed just over 90 pounds, also noted that girls frequently approached him but he "didn't know what to do." He attributed not having a girlfriend to his Japanese shyness, rather than emasculating media images.<sup>26</sup>

Confident and well-respected Asian male skaters in the 1970s and 1980s become particularly noteworthy when these very same decades are often cited as the height of Asian American emasculation in movies, television, and popular culture broadly. The servile houseboy character Hop Sing from the television series *Bonanza* and an asexual, nerdy foreign exchange student Long Duk Dong in *Sixteen Candles* became icons of Asian masculine impotence. Cultural theorist Celine Parreñas Shimizu detailed how Asian America negotiated pervasive Hollywood film representations of Asian American men as asexual, effeminate, or queer. In *Slanted Screen*, a documentary on Asian American men in film, comedian Bobby Lee described representations of Asian American masculinity in the 1980s as particularly "shameful." Skater Judi Oyama remembers feeling embarrassed about Hop Sing and Long Duk Dong since they embodied the "typical stereotype." Though she appreciated actors such as Mako Iwamatsu and George Takei for the more assertive roles they played, it would not be until Keanu Reeves appeared on screen, when she looked upon Asian men as "attractive." So powerfully has the 1984 image of Long Duk Dong shaped Asian American masculinity that, even 26 years after the "Donger" debuted in *Sixteen Candles*, a blog post by Geeky Asian Guy in 2010 still invoked the asexual exchange student in an entry that discussed the struggles of Asian American men asserting themselves as attractive to white America.<sup>27</sup>

For many API men skaters who looked up to Shogo Kubo, Lester Kasai, and Christian Hosoi as role models, however, Hop Sing and Long Duk Dong did not impact their sense of themselves nor their romantic realities. Kent Uyehara remembers Ho-



Photograph by Miller

Shogo Kubo at old Marina Del Rey Skatepark in 1979,  
*Skateboarder Magazine*, May 1979.

soi and the crowds of white women who screamed after him at each competition during the 1980s. Though Uyehara knew that Hosoi's amplified sex appeal was unique even among professional skaters, he did not think that Long Duk Dong even remotely represented how others viewed him. Uyehara was a Japanese American skater immersed in a "manly" sport in which he could see his own image amongst the top competitors. So "manly" did skateboarding appear that people typically assumed that "women don't skate."<sup>28</sup> API skaters never felt emasculated growing up in the 1970s and 1980s. Sueyoshi remembered *Sixteen Candles* as a "stupid, Hollywood movie" that meant nothing to him. Lam, who may have the most similar history to the fictional character Long Duk Dong solely because he was not born in the United States, also felt the character had little impact on him.



## Proud to Be Asian

Notably, these skaters for whom negative media representations seemed irrelevant also chose not to socialize exclusively with Asian Americans in 1970s and 1980s. In both high school and college, when social groups of foreign-born versus American-born Asians proliferated in the San Francisco Bay Area, Sueyoshi, Uye-hara, and Lam “hung out” in multi-racial groups of students with Latinos and African Americans, as well as Asians and whites.<sup>29</sup>

Still, Asian Pacific Islander skaters strongly identified as Asian American even as they chose to not socialize in all-Asian circles. Christian Hosoi, who strove to be “Bruce Lee on wheels,” held up shin-Issei Shogo Kubo as his “original skate hero.” Both Hosoi and Uye-hara, who saw many professional skaters as “Japanese like me,” believed it was “normal” to be a skater. Oyama too annually attended the Monterey Obon, a Japanese American summer festival, to eat chicken teriyaki, watch bon odori, and view the flower arrangement exhibit for which her aunt Joanne Nishi played a critical role as an ikebana instructor.<sup>30</sup> When Sueyoshi heard about Tom Inouye showing up at the grand opening of various skate parks in the late 1970s he thought to himself, “Who is this *nihonjin* who is ripping on everyone.” After he missed the opportunity to see both Kubo and Inouye at a 1978 pool contest in Newark, California because a promised ride failed to show up, Sueyoshi was “pissed.”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, not once did Asian Pacific Islander skaters ever think that skateboarding was a world in which they did not belong. As Hosoi and Inouye became established in the skateboarding world, both mentored a significant number of Asian Pacific Islander and other skaters of color.<sup>32</sup> Even Jimmy Lam, who did not necessarily see himself in Asian Pacific Islander professional skaters such as Christian Hosoi, still strongly identified as “Asian” and “skater,” and knew that he was a part of a very small community in the 1980s.<sup>33</sup> As recently as 2002, when fellow Z-Boy Jay Adams interviewed Shogo Kubo and asked him if people ever thought teammate Peggy Oki was his sister, Kubo answered, “Fuck you. No. Nobody has ever asked me that.” When Jay prodded him more with, “Are you sure?” Kubo retorted, “Maybe you, asshole.”<sup>34</sup> These early skaters remained unforgivingly secure in their Asian identities, refusing to tolerate racial idiocy even in the form of a joke from an old friend. In fact, many consistently declared only their Asian heritage to the public even if they were of mixed backgrounds from other communities of color.<sup>35</sup>

## Skateboarding as Brown

Decentering whiteness within skateboarding reveals new insights not just about the sport, but also lesser-heard voices on Asian American history and masculinity. While Iain Borden has summarized skateboarding culture as ideologically “reject[ing] work, the family, and normative American values,” in fact Asian American skaters of the 1970s and 1980s refer to how much “work” is revered and respected in skating. To them, the “art” of skateboarding requires “practice” and “persistence,” and skaters support each other in mastering tricks developed along an individual style. Unlike conventional team sports such as baseball and basketball, the sense of competition is about a skater doing his or her best rather than being the best player on the team.<sup>36</sup>

Asian Pacific American skaters too remained close to their families rather than “rejecting” them. During the 1970s Steve Caballero’s mother drove him to the skate park every weekend and waited for him in the parking lot until he came out. When skate parks began closing across California due to insurance and licensing issues, Caballero’s mother allowed him to build a ramp in the backyard. Hosoi’s father took a job at the local skate park so his son could skate there anytime. Sueyoshi also recounts family road trips from San Francisco to Los Angeles to attend skate competitions.<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, none of the API skaters felt like outsiders or rebels going against American normative values even as they still identified themselves as different from the mainstream. Jimmy Lam, who didn’t want to be “part of the herd,” described himself as having “pretty typical values.” Kent Uyehara viewed the skating community as likely not so different ideologically from the mainstream. Moreover, the prominence of skaters mixed with Kanaka Maoli, Chamorro, Samoan, or Uchinanchu heritage reveals how early skateboarding serves a productive site where Pacific Islanders centrally comprised what might be superficially seen only as Asian American history.<sup>38</sup>

In the twenty-first century, however, mainstream representations of skateboarding continue to depict Asians as marginal if not non-existent, silencing Asian Pacific Islanders from its history and therefore rendering API skaters invisible even within Asian American Studies. The award-winning documentary *Dogtown and Z-Boys* and the later fictionalized account *Lords of Dogtown*, respectively, minimized and then completely erased the participation of Asian Americans Jeff Ho, Shogo Kubo, and Peg-

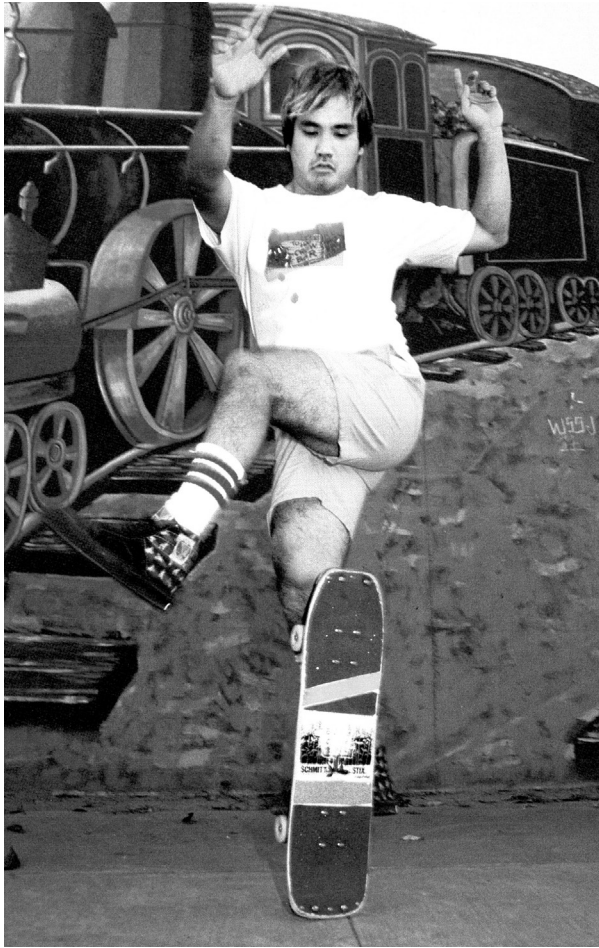
gy Oki from the original Z-Boys.<sup>39</sup> Ho's marginal role in these representations becomes particularly conspicuous since the team grew out of his surf shop, which was called Jeff Ho. Peggy Oki, who rode with 11 other members, would not only be the only woman on the team, but also was the one Z-Boy to take home a first-place trophy at the 1975 Del Mar Nationals.<sup>40</sup> Jay Adams had recruited her to join the team when he spotted her skating just one year earlier on Bicknell Hill in Venice, California. Oki remembered the Z-Boys saying, "she skates, she rips, let's put her on the team."<sup>41</sup> In 2012, the Skateboarding Hall of Fame and Museum inducted Peggy Oki as an honoree.<sup>42</sup>

Both Shogo Kubo and Jeff Ho appear very much aware of their marginalization in skateboarding history and memory. When former teammate Adams interviewed Kubo about his thoughts about the documentary, movie, and later book that came out on Dogtown, he hesitantly expressed his unhappiness around his lack of representation. Kubo noted with a chuckle, "There are a lot of good shots. . .but they should have put more of me in there." Regarding the movie, Kubo commented more seriously, "I wish I was in more of it, but it felt good."<sup>43</sup> Jeff Ho declared his displeasure more explicitly in how the founding of his surf/skate shop had been misrepresented, with him as one co-founder among three:

Okay this is the real story. I bought the shop. It was my money. I financed it. Those guys want to take credit for it. That's not right. And they've done it, and all the articles, all the movies, all that crap. Everybody is taking credit for stuff that I did, and it doesn't sit right with me.

Ho had begun skating in the 1950s and had worked in Phil Castagnola's Select Surf Shop. Ho later bought the store from Castagnola in the early 1970s to turn it into his own shop, before he had met Skip Engblom and Craig Stecyk, the two who would later claim on film and in print to be co-founders with Ho.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, societal structures that privilege whites over other people of color in not just the recounting of the past, but also in the production of culture, would literally erase the significance of Asians and Pacific Islanders in skateboarding history.

In reality, Asian and Pacific Islander men, as well as a handful of African Americans and a greater number of Latinos, had a significant presence in the supposedly white world of skateboarding. As early as 1971, African American Rick "Bongo" Mitchell was



Wallace Sueyoshi in downtown San Jose, c. 1988.

Courtesy of Frankie Shea, photographer

skating the “Vermont Drop” in Gardena, California with Cyrus Ho. By 1979, Bongo would become so big that *Skateboarder* would dedicate six pages of their May 1979 issue to an interview with him and use him as a model to promote their products. “If you skate hot and want to look and feel cool like Bongo, give the new *Skateboarder Magazine* sleeveless T and Cap a try.”<sup>45</sup> In northern California, Jovontae Turner would attract attention from sponsors in the late 1980s, put together the first team from Kent Uyehara’s

skate shop FTC, and landed the cover of *Thrasher Magazine* in September 1992.<sup>46</sup> As Richard Lapchick wrote for ESPN, original Z-Boys Stacey Peralta and Tony Alva in the 1970s were both Mexican American. The two of them would later go on to open now legendary skateboard companies, Alva Skates and Powell-Peralta. Alva and Peralta would additionally sponsor teams and support other skaters of Mexican descent such as Mark Gonzales and Chicano skater Tommy Guerrero. In fact, the skate blog “I Skate, Therefore I Am” claims that the iconic skull or *calavera* that served as a logo for Peralta’s team Bones Brigade originated from Latinos such as Ray “Bones” Rodriguez, Jesse Martinez, Steve Alba, Micke Alba, Eddie Elguera, and Steve Caballero who critically shaped the sport in California. According to “I Skate Therefore I Am,” “cholos and pachucos have influenced everything in Southern California from Low Riders to skateboarders.” Conversely, skateboarding scholars such as Kyle Kusz have been more critical of white skater culture as appropriating iconography to project a “cool” image of multiculturalism.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

When cast through the lens of skaters of color, current understandings of skateboarding and the origins of its resurgence as an act of neoconservative, white supremacist rebellion might more accurately be characterized as a multi-racial movement in which young men from the broader middle class forged individualism and technical excellence outside of conventional norms of success and respectability. While sociologist Michael Lorr argues that skateboarding has been co-opted and mainstreamed through its incorporation into a X Games culture and lost its critique of government, an analysis that centralizes actors of color reveals how skateboarding in the twenty-first century, as urban and of color, may in fact have had a sharper political edge since the 1970s. Indeed, Borden notes that skateboarding in the 1980s had increasingly “gone back” to inner-city cores of urban areas, with Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco as “major concentrations of skate activity.”<sup>48</sup> A return to cities as central to skateboarding culture suggests a different origin and therefore social meaning to skateboarding—perhaps one that incisively points to a rolling towards rather than a running away from race, with youth of color gathering to skate together. A skateboarding core located in “minority majority” cities, urban areas in which whites comprise the numerical minority, certainly



points to the central role of men of color in the skate revolution of the past four decades. Not until 2013 did Matthew Atencio and Becky Beal acknowledge that “minority racial masculinities are actually closely connected with urban skateboarding history,” though they painted a darker picture of their involvement by underscoring the market’s exploitation of masculinities of color as a commodity in the skateboarding industry.<sup>49</sup>

In the alternative yet still uber-masculine sport of skateboarding, where style became central in displays of technical skill, the success of Asian American men goes directly against pervasive tropes of emasculation that Asian Americanists document as dominating American consciousness in the 1970s and 1980s. It is not just the existence of Asian and Pacific Islander men, but rather their achievement in a masculine sport with a vast influence on mainstream popular culture second only to hip-hop that stands as notable. Their success goes directly against ongoing discourse on how Asian American men experienced their lives in the face of effeminizing media images. These skaters who chose “fun” and “freedom” never felt castrated as Asian Pacific American men.<sup>50</sup> As API skateboarders in the 1970s and 1980s skated and created space and identity for themselves, their work would largely be forgotten in not just a wash of whiteness, but also by an academic compulsion to fixate on discrimination and deficiency rather than acts of alternative empowerment. No doubt, Asian Pacific American skaters ripped and shredded their way to impress masses of whites, typically considered neoconservative, in what promoters of extreme sports would later market as the “final frontier” of American athletics.

## Notes

Special thanks to my brother Wallace Sueyoshi for his assistance with this article. This essay is dedicated to him.

1. For more on the racial castration of Asian American men, see David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
2. Iain Borden, “Speaking the City: Skateboarding Subculture and Recompositions of the Urban Realm,” *Research in Urban Sociology* 5 (2000): 139.
3. Emily Chivers Yochim, *Skate Life: Re-Imagining White Masculinity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010): 28, 32-33, 112. For more on California’s decreasing white population, see Dale Maharidge, *The Coming White Minority: California, Multiculturalism, and America’s Future* (New York: Vintage, 1999): 4. Even Sean Brayton, with his more sympathetic approach to skater whiteness, argued that skateboarding “repudiates middle class white-

ness only to replace it with a rejuvenated heteromascularity that is often informed by a black other." Sean Brayton, "'Black-Lash': Revisiting the 'White Negro' Through Skateboarding," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 22:3 (2005): 357.

4. Kyle Kusz, *Revolt of the White Athlete: Race, Media, and the Emergence of Extreme Athletes in America* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007): 9, 71.
5. Konstantin Butz, *Grinding California: Culture and Corporeality in American Skate Punk* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012): 38, 123, 171; Curry Malott and Milagros Peña, *Punk Rocker's Revolution: A Pedagogy of Race, Class, and Gender* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004): 24-29, 61-54.
6. Mayumi Tsutakawa, "'Finesse and Sophistication,' 'InnovAsian' Dance Concert: A Milestone in Asian Cultural Development," *International Examiner*, December 4, 1985: 7; Alvina Lew, "Nisei Week," *Asian Week*, August 28, 1987: 16; Judith A. Lyons, "Alleged Racial Attack at Cal Poly Pomona," *Asian Week*, March 17, 1989: 3; Lyons, "Universities Consider Anti-Harassment Rules," *Asian Week*, May 12, 1989: 32; Jimmy Lam, Interview, San Francisco, CA, July 27, 2014. All interviews were conducted with the author of this article, unless otherwise noted.
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8. Sam woke up as an old man after making disparaging comments about his grandfather. When his classmates and sibling ridicule him for his old man appearance, Sam escapes through riding a skateboard. As he rattles down the street with his board, he forgets that he is "old" and laughs with joy. His classmates clap and cheer him on when he coasts through his playground doing kick flips and rail slides. As he falls asleep that night he realizes, "Pretty good for an old man. But what's the difference? Who cares what I look like?" The next morning, Sam wakes up as a young boy again, redeemed by the freedom he finds and the lessons he learns through skateboarding. Allen Say, *Stranger in the Mirror* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995).
9. Christine Lam, "Skateboarding: Getting the 'Good Pop'," *Northwest Asian Weekly*, September 6, 1996: 4.
10. Renee Tajima-Peña, dir., *Skate Manzanar* DVD (Los Angeles, 2001). For more on *Giant Robot*, see Calvin Reid, "Giant Robot Takes New York," *Publishers Weekly*, September 19, 2005: 10; Randy Kennedy, "Asian-American Trendsetting on a Shoestring," *New York Times*, July 5, 2004. For more on Renee Tajima-Peña, see M. Rosalind Sagara, "Political Filmmaking: Talking with Renee Tajima-Peña," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30:1/2 (Spring 2002): 178-188.
11. Peter Noah, "Giant Robot Magazine: Asian Pop Culture with an Attitude," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1997, available online at: [http://articles.latimes.com/1997-04-09/news/ls-46724\\_1\\_asian-american-pop-culture](http://articles.latimes.com/1997-04-09/news/ls-46724_1_asian-american-pop-culture).
12. Renee Tajima-Peña, "Skate Manzanar Synopsis," email to author, August 15, 2014; Nancy Russell, "'Super Awesome Art and Giant Robot' Take Over Oakland Museum," *International Examiner*, June 4, 2014: 13.
13. Eric Nakamura, "Opening Tomorrow: Crossings: 10 Views of camp exhibit opens at Japanese American National Museum—APRIL 2 THROUGH JUNE

- 21," *Giant Robot* blog, April 1, 2009, available online at: <http://www.giant-robot.com/blogs/eric/2009/04/opening-tomorrow-crossings-10-views-of.html>; "Crossings: Ten Views of America's Concentration Camps," Japanese American National Museum, available online at: <http://www.janm.org/exhibits/crossings/>.
14. "Shogo Kubo Paddle Out and Memorial Big Bowl Session," Venice Beach Photos, available online at: <http://www.venicebeachphotos.com/Skateboarding/Shogo-Kubo-Paddle-Out-And/>; Wallace Sueyoshi, email to author, July 16, 2014. For how the Z-Boys transformed skating see G. Beato, "When Skateboarding Shook the World," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2001, available online at: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/aug/24/artsfeatures3>.
  15. J. Smythe, "Skateboarder Interview: Shogo Kubo," *Skateboarder*, May 1979: 31-32.
  16. Cover of *Skateboarder*, October 1977; John Smythe, "Skateboarder Interview: Tom Inouye," *Skateboarder*, October 1977: 50-59; Lainey Adams, "Who's Hot: Darren Ho," *Skateboarder*, October 1977: 95.
  17. Cesario Montano, dir., *Rising Son: The Legend of Skateboarder Christian Hosoi* DVD (Chatsworth: Image Entertainment, 2006); Li.
  18. Li. At both UC Davis and UC San Diego Asian Pacific Islanders comprised approximately 24 percent of the undergraduate population in 1993 (University of California, *Table VIIb: Enrollment by Campus, Ethnicity, Gender, and Level, Davis*, available online at: <http://legacy-its.ucop.edu/uwnews/stat/enrollment/enr1993/93sst7b.html>; University of California, *Table VIIb: Enrollment by Campus, Ethnicity, Gender, and Level, San Diego*, available online at: <http://legacy-its.ucop.edu/uwnews/stat/enrollment/enr1993/93sst7f.html>; United States Census Bureau, *Resident Population Estimates of the United States by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: April 1, 1990 to July 1999, with Short-Term Projection to November 1, 2000*, available online at: <https://www.census.gov/population/estimates/nation/intfile3-1.txt>).
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  21. Judi Oyama, Interview, Santa Cruz, CA, September 1, 2014; Judi Oyama, email to author, June 23, 2015; Kent Uyehara, Interview, San Francisco, CA, August 18, 2014.
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23. Oyama interview; Uyehara August 18, 2014 interview.
24. Lam interview; *Rising Son*; Karl Taro Greenfeld, "Skate and Detro," *Sports Illustrated*, June 7, 2004: 66-80; Christian Hosoi, "Christian Hosoi—My Story," YouTube video, May 19, 2013, available online at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHdo7iZUfEA>; Christian Hosoi, with Chris Ahrens, *Hosoi: My Life as a Skateboarder Junkie Inmate Pastor* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012): 26.
25. For how Hosoi's life paralleled that of a "rock-star," see Greenfeld.
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27. Jeff Adachi, dir., *Slanted Screen: Asian Men in Film and Television* (2006; New York: Films Media Group, 2010); Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *Straitjacket Sexualities: Unbinding Asian American Manhoods in the Movies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012): 119; Judi Oyama, email to author, September 1, 2014.
28. Judi Oyama often felt "invisible" at the skate park, though the skaters thirty years later explained to her that they were too shy at the time to approach her. When Oyama began working at the Santa Cruz Surf and Skate Shop on 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue in Santa Cruz in the early 1980s, customers, including the mothers of young boys interested in skating, would insist on assistance from a man rather than Oyama, the professional skater (Oyama interview).
29. Uyehara August 18, 2014 interview; Kent Uyehara, Interview, San Francisco, CA, August 21, 2014; Sueyoshi interview; Lam interview.
30. Oyama interview.
31. Uyehara August 21, 2014 interview; Wallace Sueyoshi, email to author, August 11, 2014.
32. Hosoi, *Hosoi*, 22, 35, 41; *Rising Son*; Uyehara August 21, 2014 interview.
33. Lam interview.
34. Jay Adams, "Dogtown Chronicles—Shogo Kubo," *Juice: Pools, Pipes, and Punk Rock*, 2002: 37.
35. Christian Hosoi, Wallace Sueyoshi, and Steve Caballero most publicly declare only their Japanese heritage, even though all three were of mixed backgrounds.
36. Borden, 138; Uyehara; Sueyoshi interview.
37. Dan Levy, "Bones Brigade Chronicles: Steve Caballero," *Juice: Pools, Pipes, and Punk Rock*, November 1, 2012: 40; Hosoi, *Hosoi*; Sueyoshi, "My Life"; Sueyoshi interview.
38. For more on the marginalization and also inaccurate merging of Pacific Islanders with Asian Americans see J. Kehaulani Kauanui, "Asian American Studies and the 'Pacific Question'," Kent A. Ono, ed., *Asian American Studies after Critical Mass* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).
39. Stacey Peralta, dir., *Dogtown and Z-Boys* DVD (2001; Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005); Catherine Hardwicke, dir., *Lords of Dogtown* DVD (Culver City: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005). For more on the erasure, see Kusz, 122-124.

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41. Steve Olson, "Dogtown Chronicles: Peggy Oki," *Juice: Pools, Pipes, and Punk Rock*, available online at: <http://juicemagazine.com/home/dogtown-chronicles-peggy-oki/>.
42. "2012—Peggy Oki," Skateboarding Hall of Fame and Museum, available online at: <http://www.skateboardinghalloffame.org/projects/2012-peggy-oki-2/>.
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44. Marcus. Judi Oyama too noted how at a recent La Costa reunion with women skaters from the 1970s, she was omitted from the group photograph (Oyama interview).
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46. Joel Rice, "FTC Skate Shop Grew From Family Values," ESPN.com, available online at: <http://xgames.espn.go.com/skateboarding/article/7600867/san-francisco-famed-ftc-skate-shop-family-tradition;Chrome+Ball+Incident>.
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48. Borden, 138; Michael Lorr, "Skateboarding and the X-Gamer Phenomena: A Case of Subcultural Cooptation," *Humanity and Society* 29:2 (2005): 140-147.
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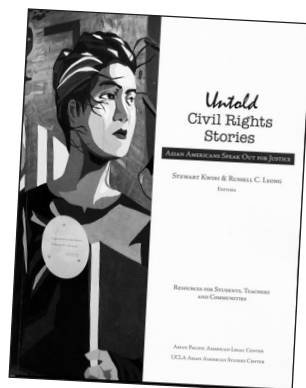
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