

STOMPING GROUNDS:
THE EFFECTS & AFFECTS OF YOUTH ACTIVISM
IN SAN FRANCISCO CHINATOWN

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

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Master of Arts

In

Asian American Studies

by

Kathlyn Marie Quan

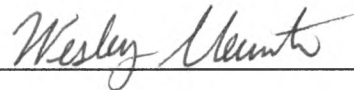
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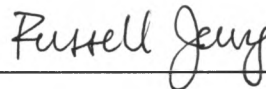
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Stomping Grounds: The Effects & Affects of Youth Activism in San Francisco Chinatown* by Kathlyn Marie Quan, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University.



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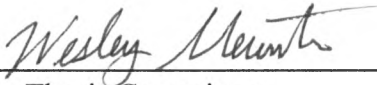
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Kathlyn Marie Quan
San Francisco, California
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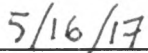
Stomping Grounds: Exploring the Effect and Affect of San Francisco Chinatown Youth Activism is a multimedia culmination project focused on bringing relevancy to Chinatown as a social laboratory during the Asian American Movement (1968-1974). Set in the formation years, youth groups used the arguable 15-block setting as a stomping ground for production, experimentation, and activism. The results not only created social programs and opportunities for residents and students, but also became an atmosphere for reclaiming identity and vision.

Today, this energy captivates a new audience, inspiring action and discussion. Through a series of digital projections, posters, and photography, *Stomping Grounds* captures a younger generation eager to explore the political identity of Asian America. The vibrant San Francisco Chinatown of the Asian American Movement never left, but rather, continues to transform through peoples and communities.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

DEDICATED TO:

Katherine Au-Young Lam (1935-)
Paul Kai-Bo Lam (1928-)
Fannie Quock Quan (1927-2017)
James Hok Gim Quan (1925-2005)

for

knowing that you don't need
to be a doctor or a lawyer to save lives.

PROLOGUE

The year is 1939. A boat takes off from a small village in Guangdong Province. A girl with big eyes and a quiet voice is on board. She has memorized a book of facts about a life she's never lived. When she arrives to the United States, she'll find herself behind bars for two weeks before stepping onto soil that boasts of gold and freedom.

In 1949, a plane arrives somewhere in the middle of nowhere. After running from the Japanese through Gwai Lum Mountains, a lanky boy steps out, shields his eyes, and chuckles. What a funny name 'Kansas' is! A few years later, his involvement in the Chinese Buddhist Club will get him blacklisted by the FBI and their fear of the yellow peril.

Come 1969, a boy comes out of school and sees a crowd of teenagers and lo gung shouting and chanting. As the year goes by, the crowd grows bigger and bigger, stopping traffic for blocks. They hold signs in both Chinese and English, crying for mobilization. Twenty five years later, he marries a headstrong woman freckled in California sun who shares the same passion of giving. Together, they continue this call for change.

The year is 1998. A car parks in front of a red brick building and out steps a young girl. She is wearing a blue dress her Popo sewed and a pair of worn out sneakers handed down from older cousins. The bell rings and she sprints to a line of children who look just like her. She's nearly a head shorter than everyone else and what she doesn't know is that despite all the milk she drinks, her height will never quite catch up.

I stand before you as a product of the Movement

and this stomping ground is holy ground.

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Photography by Kem Lee and Steve Louie
Courtesy of the Asian American Studies Collections
Ethnic Studies Library
University of California, Berkeley

Photography unknown
Courtesy of Alan S. Wong Collections

“We are an unique creature, the Chinese-American. There is nothing quite like us on earth. We are fortunate to inherit the best of both worlds, the contemplative East and the kinetic West. There are some 200,000 of us living in the United States with more coming each day from the Orient since the liberalization of immigration laws of 1965.”

- East/West Newspaper Mission Statement
January 1, 1967

INTRODUCTION

In October 2016, a familiar tale surfaced from Twitter. Michael Luo, an editor from the *New York Times*, recounted a moment, furthering a conversation with an open letter to a seemingly well to do woman who screamed “Go back fucking China” to his family.¹ His story with his seven year old in the moments after proved to be even more heartbreaking as they kept asking, ‘Why did she say “Go back to China?” We’re not from China.’ In the months to come, his #thisis2016 would push hundreds of stories into the spotlight as students, activists, and scholars recalled their own memories of displacement, discrimination, and stereotypes. However, the feeling of not belonging in the United States is no stranger for those of Asian American categorization.

From its creation, the term “Asian American” was not only a label, but a political statement – or as Jeff Chang called it, “It was fight you were picking with the world.”¹ The label was a marker that you did not belong to one continent versus another, but rather, you were a product of both and the title itself became a source of pride. Today, the term has been adopted by the census, comprising of 5% of the American population. Encompassing numerous languages, nationalities, borders, peoples, immigration waves, and histories, the term often causes more disputes than actions of solidarity. Even so, the population is consistently falling between the cracks of the white and black landscape of the United States. Often synonymous with “foreign,” learning the political implications and story behind the label “Asian America” become more relevant as a new generation of leaders step forth.

On April 7, 2017, a group of students and faculty at San Francisco State University hosted a community event called *Stomping Grounds: A Celebration of Asian American Identity*. Showcasing photographs from Asian American activism from 1960s-1970s in San Francisco Chinatown as well as other art installations, the event aimed to

¹ Chang, 2016: xi.

highlight the relevance and energy of the past and put a contemporary twist on it. As an event, the goal was to bring generations of students, scholars, and activists (and/or artists) together for an evening of storytelling and celebration. However, as a culminating project, the aim was a bit more specific. I hope *Stomping Grounds* also transformed the mainstream idea of Chinatown as a rigid and conservative setting to a dynamic, safe haven for experimentation, production, and innovation as well as illustrate the origins and legacy of “Asian American” identity. With the Asian American Movement² in mind, attendees were encouraged to think about the need for political and social action in the present.

Stomping Grounds as an event and as a title came together slowly. As a closeted fan of puns, it seemed imperative that the title for the event should contain the humor or “inspirasian” as my own personality. However, no matter how much I tried to make it work, the historical representation and meaning never seemed to fit. When it did, often it lost the kind of punch I was looking for. Stomping grounds as a term first appeared when I spoke to Francis Wong.² He talked about the significance of Chinatown as an ethnic and conservative enclave, trapped in the modern time. San Francisco’s Chinatown distinguishes itself for visitors with pagoda roofs, cheap souvenir stores, tai chi elders, and red lanterns that hang all year long. With an erhu singing distinctly through Grant Street, it is not difficult to what he means. However, he proceeded to explain his own interpretation of Chinatown as an area open to experimentation, innovation, and activism. For many of youth in the 60s and 70s, Chinatown served as a playground, a renaissance, a stomping ground where Asian Americans were able to learn about their histories in a way traditional education did not provide.

Even after Ethnic Studies classes began in universities and colleges, the evolving importance of Chinatown as a stomping ground became imperative through those looking

² Francis Wong is an American jazz saxophonist, flutist, and erhu player. He worked with Jon Jang and Fred Ho during the Asian American jazz movement and helped found Asian Improv aRts in 1987.

for a narrative to call their own. For my mother and aunties at UCLA, they became involved in the Asian Educational Project (AEP) during the 80s. AEP's mission and goal continued a trend of giving back to one's community as a way to reclaim identity. Through my own journey at Ithaca College, my involvement with the Asian American Alliance (AAA) became a form of expression, friendship, and family. Through programs like AAA and AEP, Asian American Studies as a field challenges academic institutions as not only something for "education's sake," but rather, a way of service and a way of life.

This culminating project not only aims to break the narrative of Chinatown as a conservative and rigid ethnic enclave, but also continue a dialogue about the energy and legacy of the Asian American Movement. Instead, as a setting and atmosphere, the fifteen-block area represents the diverse interests and social innovations to define and reclaim identity. The energetic Chinatown of the Asian American Movement never left, but rather, continues to transform through peoples and communities. This installation focuses on a general overview on the intersections and interactions amongst issues such as housing rights and gender equality, the photography challenges us to understand familiar dilemmas between recorded history, identity, and memory. With the archival collection leading the way, *Stomping Grounds* serves as interpretation and a dedication for a history worth telling.

Stomping Grounds is divided into three components: *Before Gold Became Yellow: Chinese American Youth Activism during the Asian American Movement*, *Uprooted: Rights to the City*, and *Becoming: A Photography Project*. *Before Gold Became Yellow* is a collection of archival photographs taken during the Asian American Movement in San Francisco Chinatown. The photographs specifically parallel many issues we are currently facing, such as housing rights, anti-war demonstrations, and immigration policies. Inspired by Kearny Street Workshop's silkscreen posters, *Uprooted* challenges students to think about issues within their communities. Through realization, they are then able to

comprehend their ability to create and enact change. *Becoming* is only the beginning of national photography project as it challenges participants to show their own understanding of what it means to be Asian American.

The projections, posters, and photography invite visitors to look at identity formation and history through different approaches. Each component of the event aims to demonstrate Asian American history and community as relevant, diverse, and socially innovative. *Stomping Grounds* reflect some “growing pains” amongst Asian American experience and advocacy, including loss of language, student organizing, and the strains between academia and community. My hope for this project is to use art to represent and illustrate the complexities and parallels of Asian American identity then and now.

LITERATURE REVIEW/THEORY

The Asian American Movement has increasingly become a focus of interest to Asian American academia, but still lacks public interest and accessibility in its literature, scholarship, as well as accessible formats for the general public. In 1974, the first dean of the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, James Hirabayashi called for the integration between people and research as communities continue to be exploited as objects in the name of data. He states: “Any value judgment of what is good for the community must arise from the people’s own understanding of themselves and their lives.”³ Much like Hirabayashi’s argument, art is a medium that should be used to enact agency, understanding, and embrace otherness. With intellectual discourse, works have the ability to not only make a statement, but to create worlds of empathy, adversity, and solidarity. During the Movement, pieces were not simply for the sake of being made, but rather, everything from its creation and planning to its finishing touches allowed artists and viewers to embrace the message easily and carry it forth. I argue this literature review includes community artists and activists as scholars.

William Wei’s *The Asian American Movement* (1993) was the first book to introduce the Movement as an academic field of study. His study includes community-based groups such as New York City’s Basement Workshop, an umbrella organization for those working in community arts, pointing to sectarianism as their demise. While Wei cuts through the Movement’s romanticization, he ultimately portrays it in a cloud of cynicism, ignoring much of the impact of the arts within the era. The book continues to gather much criticism as Wei deemed this era as “essentially a middle class reform movement” a few sentences into the introduction.⁴ Since then, the handful of works use theoretical frameworks to dismantle and deconstruct not only Wei’s introduction to the Movement, but also challenge a general understanding of American history.

³ Hirabayashi, 1974

⁴ Wei, 1993: 1.

At 40: Asian American Studies at San Francisco State (2009) reflects on the department's forty-year history within its chapter in San Francisco's academia and community. In firsthand accounts, Russell Jeung and Lorraine Dong speak to institutionalization and its continuous effects through Asian American Studies as a field. On one hand, academe can be incredibly empowering when embedding community service learning (CSL) as an integral part of the curriculum as demonstrated through Jeung's "The Fourth Decade of Community Service Learning at Asian American Studies San Francisco State University." However, on the other hand, the history between Asian American Studies and the Chinese Historical Society of America (CHSA) through Dong's "AAS and CHSA: An Attempt to Merge Town and Gown" speaks to an ongoing struggle between the "professional" and the "hands-on or grassroots" efforts. While this does not mean to belittle the impact of CHSA's mission and values, it speaks to larger social issues of limitations, legitimacy, and institutional recognition.

Asian Community Center Archive Group's *Stand Up: An Archive Collection of the Bay Area Asian American Movement (1968-1974)* (2009) is a selected compilation of UC Berkeley's Asian American Political Alliance, Wei Min She, and Asian Community Center newspaper archives. Pam Lee's graphic states: "Once again It's time to Sing Along with City Hall! Just Follow the Bouncing Ball" with musical chords in shape of a wrecking ball crashing into the International Hotel. On the side of the building, there is the Chinatown playground clubhouse with a family and children watching the destruction in progress.⁵ While an illustration, not only does the drawing create an accessibility to those who are illiterate, but it also speaks about the simplicity of the matter. One does not need to know much about the issue to know that displacement does not and cannot serve families. Similarly, a 1968 SF State Strike Committee pamphlet displays Power to the People with a fist emerging from the San Francisco State College administration. Surrounding the drawing are the words "On Strike/Shut It Down". Due to its newspaper

⁵ Lee, 2009: 36.

compilation, these pieces display agency, giving power to people unable to read or speak English.

The ability to transfer academic scholarship into a tangible history product proves to be difficult as it is often presented as “new” material for viewers. Despite the diversity in Movement art that allow for an enriching exhibition, it has not been until recently that the Chinese American Museum (CAM) has picked up the material. In January 2017 in Los Angeles, CAM introduced their latest exhibition, *Roots: Asian American Movements in Los Angeles 1968-80s* as a Movement-based narrative in LA. *Roots* is quite the ambitious exhibit. Welcomed by a wall that asks museumgoers, “What does being Asian American mean to you?”, the content focuses on the Movement’s impact in Los Angeles. Each wall spoke briefly to the services and actions in Chinatown, Koreatown, Little Tokyo, and Manilatown. The brightly colored newspapers, posters, and bold words popped off the walls, giving platform for the content to shine. The art and message was quite something within itself. However, the exhibition’s attempt at balancing the many layers of the era falls a little flat because of its need to appeal to mass audiences while telling the many stories of radicalization.⁶ As activists, we must create a foundation for sustainability and as seen in CAM and CHSA, the struggle of monetary worth becomes apparent. Yet, our need for survival must not collide with our beliefs and agency.

Michael Liu’s *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism* and Karen Ishizuka’s *Serve the People* use social and political movement theory⁷ to push the Movement into the forefront. In the whirlwind of national events, attitudes, and histories through numerous interviews, archives, and academic scholarship, they highlight the implications of arts and culture during times of resistance. As Ishizuka says, “[These cultural productions] were not just the *means* of representation, they were makers of

⁶ In *LA Times*, Frank Shyong states that the CAM exhibition “argued” the identity of a political Asian American formation. However, “argue” also implies the contemporary apolitical definition of the term. The creation of an Asian America solidified a place of belonging and self-acceptance in a country built on racism, exclusion, and exploitation. Therefore, the term is inherently political.

⁷ Liu cites the Richard Flacks’ definition of social movement as a “collective efforts by socially and politically subordinated people to challenge the conditions and assumptions of their lives.”

meaning.” With iconic posters, songs, literature, newspapers, political cartoons, and film, a generation of multimedia artists emerged from the shadows. Their inspiration and motivation for joining the Movement served site of intellectual discussion and engagement for activism.

Countering Wei’s theoretical framework of class reform, these artists engage in intellectual and community discourse, questioning our everyday decisions and making room for improvement to create a more just world for all. Fred Ho’s *Legacy to Liberation: Politics & Culture of Revolutionary Asian Pacific America* (2000) and Steve Louie and Glenn Omatsu’s *The Movement and the Moment* (2001) highlight and emphasize the numerous perspectives of artists and arts within the Movement. Ho explains that Richard Hamasaki and Peggy Myo-Young Choy’s work demonstrate and encompass cultural and revolutionary purposes. Richard Hamasaki’s radical poem, *Guerilla Writers* challenges “Western” approaches amongst those who communicate and the forms chosen to communicate: “golden rules of english? conspiracies of languages?” while Choy reclaims not only the appropriated Asian imagery in dance, but rather she “talked stories” with other Asian American women choreographers creating the literal movement in the later wave of the Movement. Meanwhile identity and activism come in different forms and ways. Through “Pontifications on the Distinction between Grains of Sand and Yellow Pearls,” Chris Iijima speaks to his musical experience with Joanne Miyamoto and Charlie Chin. He explains his work as reflecting the events and activities that were occurring during the era, feeding into the “cumulative political and ideological acts of many different Asian American contesting subordination in many different ways” – rather than trying to embody a particular definition of Asian American identity.⁸ Nancy Hom’s “Drinking Tea with Both Hands” recalls the Movement’s spirit as an act of solidarity. One was there to serve others and she describes collective art as “not part of [her] vocabulary.” Giving up that “image of [herself] as a lone visionary and opening up

⁸ Iijima, 2001: 4.

to another was a difficult process,” but necessary to feel and understand what the Movement stood for.⁹ Rather than seeing an identity being lost, Hom sees identities gained. Through the diversity of perspectives in art and understanding of the Asian American identity, the Movement embodied the need for accessible language regarding service for others.

As we look towards today’s intersection of art and activism, we gain voice to critique the institutions and social expectations. With different terms about art and activism, the most common expressions include intellectual activism, social engagement, and activism. However, all practices find commonality in their interpretation of shedding light towards deconstructing our relationship and understanding of activism. This includes what, when, and where art is acceptable and unacceptable. The conversation most commonly lies between art and institution as place, form, and action. Specifically artists of color continue to draw frustrations about institutionalized cultural appropriation and legitimacy as exemplified through works from Scott Tsuchitani and Angel Trazo. Their work not only resists becoming a simple wallflower of a painting, but much like the Movement art, they’re bold. They stand out and they make a statement. Their ability to then point out the hypocrisy of “multiculturalism” is noteworthy and that’s what *Stomping Grounds* hopes to learn from these exemplary pieces.

Scott Tsuchitani’s most notable works are his 2004 critiques on the San Francisco’s Asian Art Museum, using “humor, storytelling, and playing with cultural symbol and stereotype” to create awareness and conversation.¹⁰ The museum’s primary 1959 collection, started and donated by Chicago industrialist, Avery Brundage, speaks to European colonialism and continuous imperialism in Asian countries. Due to the marketing for its *Geisha* and *Samurai* exhibitions in 2004 and 2009, Tsuchitani’s art

⁹ Hom, 2001: 103.

¹⁰ Tsuchitani, Scott. “Scott Tsuchitani Artist Statement.” Asian American Arts Centre, Asian American Arts Centre, 2005.

parodies the museum's "marveling of the East." "Faux Geisha" looks towards the exoticism and fetishism of the geisha practice in American culture while "Lord It's the Samurai: Myth + Militarism + Man-Boy Love" parodies the Asian Art Museum's marketing and visuals as means to exhibit both cultural appropriation and appropriate the "legitimacy of the academe." Its emphasis in nontraditional dialogue amongst individuals include a website for informing and speaking about the problems in which the Asian Art Museum perpetuated through their exhibition. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere states, "Dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution... It must be accountable to them, must speak frankly to them of its achievements, its mistakes, its miscalculations, and its difficulties."¹¹ It is through conversation and education that Tsuchitani blurs lines between the art and the intellect as being a single entity with many translations.

Meanwhile, Angel Trazo's senior thesis includes two graphic works, "Notes and Doodles" and "Where Are You From: Short Stories About Being Asian in America." Her blog "Asians in Solidarity" gathered an interesting discussion in the comments about the privilege of people of color and institution when she talked about her experience after not being chosen for Honors in her art department. After feeling invalidated by her professors, she was prompted to then vandalize her own piece with comments such as WHAT COUNTS AS ART and THIS INSTITUTION WAS NOT MADE FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME. One viewer explained why they felt "triggered" and "offended" by the post as it was "disrespectful" and an "appropriation of colonialism to fit and advance [her] personal narrative."¹² While the reasoning for vandalizing may have been due to the denial of an award, the conversation about institutionalized art is very relevant and needed to be furthered amongst scholars as well as artists. It was the Movement that brought many artists together to create a community and due to the policy and migration,

¹¹ Friere, 1968: 128.

¹² Trazo, Angel. "Dear Colgate Art & Art History Department." *Asians in Solidarity*. *Asians in Solidarity*, 2017.

our communities have dispersed throughout the world. These artists display agency as individuals, giving hope that we may one day be able to recreate such vibrancy within our own artistic community.

Stomping Grounds aims to be a socially engaged installation, giving a critical interpretation of an era in time while embracing and harnessing art as a way to question and engage imagination and resistance. The more multimedia productions that the Movement at the forefront, the more room there will be to make mistakes and allow for different perspectives to be seen, to be heard, and to be discussed. However, much like Hirabayashi's call, any work of art or academic standards requires the input and collectivity of the community. It is only then do legacies of the Movement continue and advance.

METHODOLOGY

The *Before Gold Became Yellow* photographs are from the collections of Alan S. Wong, Steve Louie, and Kem Lee. There were only a few criteria in the picking of photos that ultimately became the *Before Gold Became Yellow* showing: (a) the picture/subject matter was taken between the years 1968-1974; (b) the picture must represent a particular issue/concern in which the Movement fought for or against; (c) their location is within San Francisco Chinatown; (d) a digital copy must be available for projection purposes. Through these criteria, although a few strayed from one or two points, I then selected seventeen diverse photographs to represent the Movement. Through this selection, *Before Gold Became Yellow* encompasses issues from gender roles and representation to the Vietnam War, from the International Hotel to citizenship, as well as multiple rallies and marches that took place during the six-year span.

The photos then allowed me to converse with different participants of the Movement in an informal and comfortable setting. Also known as photo elicitation or “photo interviewing,” this methodology uses photographs in research interview. Developed by photographer and researcher, John Collier in the 1950s, he and his team used the method as means to examine how families adapted amongst ethnically different groups of peoples. The success of this method allowed interviewees to obtain information as “precise and at times even encyclopedic.”¹³ Likewise, through anthropology as well as cultural studies, photo elicitation allows observers to respond selectively as they record what they may consider significant. Representing moments of time and space, photographs show a limited perspective, often seen as “culturally unfamiliar circumstances.”¹⁴ They become a wealth of information through numerous perspectives concerning social, cultural, technical, processes, and events. The importance of what is

¹³ Harper, Douglas. “Talking about Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation.” *Visual Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2002, pp. 13–26.

¹⁴ Collier, Malcolm. “Photographic Exploration of Social and Cultural Experience.” *Viewpoints: Visual Anthropologists at Work*, edited by Mary Strong and Laena Wilder, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, 2009.

seen and not seen are “decisions, both conscious and unconscious, of the photographer regarding subject, framing, focus, exposure, and especially choice of the moment.”¹⁵

Malcolm Collier adds the relationship between viewer and picture as the viewer too sees the photographs through their own experience and knowledge, sometimes changing its context.

For *Stomping Grounds*, the plan was to have the event outdoors. We were going to use projectors and shine the photographs through the fourth floor of San Francisco State University’s College of Ethnic Studies building so that it may be visible to anyone who passed. Locating the event outside also allowed for the photographs to be shown publicly. When these conversations are accessible to all, they create safe havens for understanding, nostalgia, and empathy. These are all qualities that are needed to be impactful towards and for the community. Unfortunately due to heavy weather, it was moved inside the building in a small office space. While cozy amongst the many people who came to support, four walls and a door deemed it a private event, which within itself became a barrier. However, amongst those who attended, the photographs tapped into nostalgia of an older generation and hope for the younger generation.

¹⁵ Collier, 2009: 19.

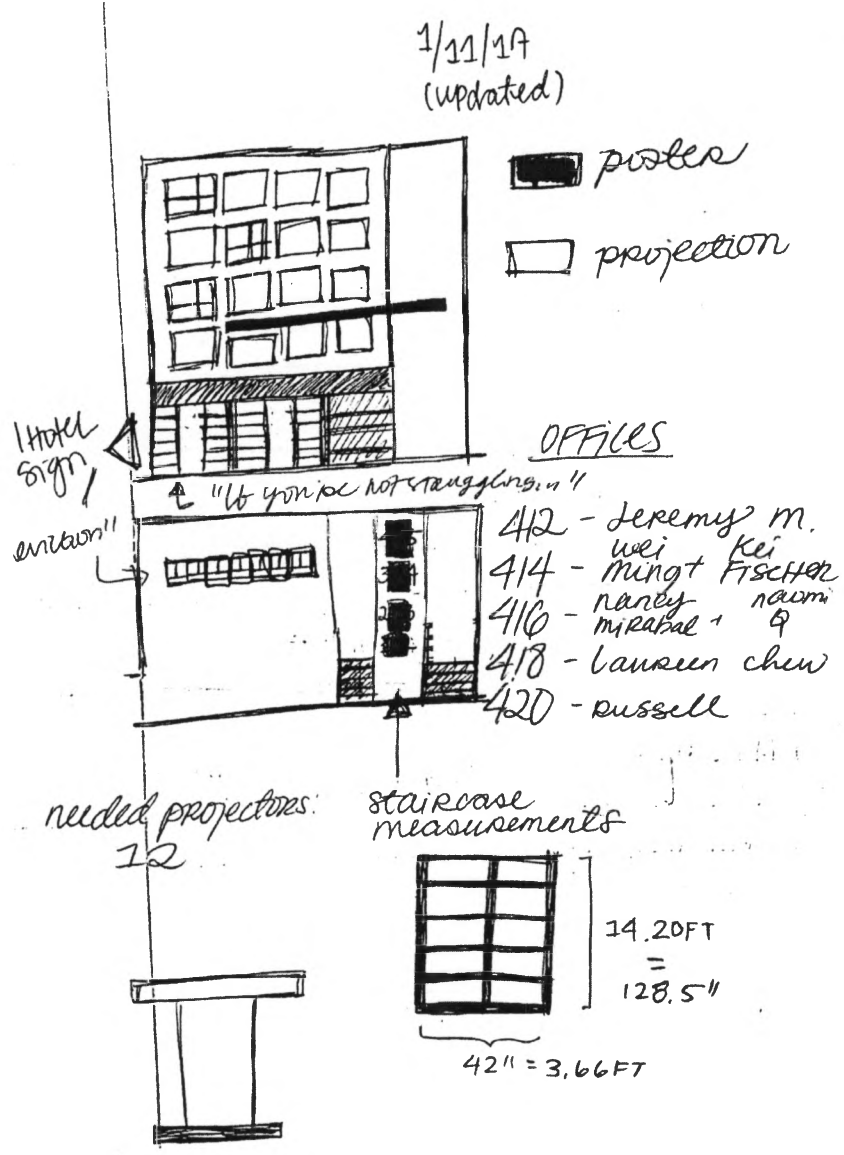


Figure 4.01 These were the original plans for *Stomping Grounds*. However, due to fire hazards, bad weather, and a number other obstacles, the plans were modified accordingly

BEFORE GOLD BECAME YELLOW

The stories of fear and hatred predating the Asian American Movement can be told through centuries of policy and resistance. However, Chinese American history does not begin with the railroads, but rather, it predates the creation of the United States. The tea from the Boston Tea Party originated from China while upon arrival in Jamestown, one passenger was Chinese. Through policies such as the Naturalization Act of 1790, declaring naturalization for “free white persons” “good moral,” and later, the Naturalization Act of 1870 allowing persons of African descent to be naturalized, it becomes clear Asians fell through the cracks as they do not identify as white nor black. As “aliens,” they were denied basic human rights. In 1882, Congress passed two immigration laws: (a) head tax on every immigrant; (b) restricted admission and banned naturalized citizenship for Chinese. While the Chinese Exclusion Act lasted until 1943, it did not become effective until 1965. It also created models of discrimination towards other minority groups. The Chinese Exclusion Act proceeded to legalize discrimination towards those unwelcomed – namely, the Chinese, but even then, the ban would later extended to Japanese, Filipinos, and more.

Unlike Ellis Island’s view of the Statue of Liberty as a warm welcome to incoming immigrants, the interrogation and trials of Angel Island proved otherwise. Yet, such oppression only gave way to the cleverest of resistance. After the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, fires destroyed thousands of immigration papers. Chinese came flooding in, claiming citizenship and creating paper families (“paper names”) so that those in China would too have opportunities in Gum Saan (Gold Mountain). As Angel Island officials grew aware of this practice, the interrogations grew to be tougher, questioning about family history, relationships, and everyday life in home villages as it should be “common knowledge to all parties.”¹⁶ These interrogations were only subjected to Chinese immigrants. However, despite the attempts to keep immigrants out, there were

¹⁶ Lee, 2014: 85.

numerous ways the Chinese rebelled. Simply their perseverance was enough to make white officials quake.

Chinese Americans remained “marginalized from the mainstream society well into the 20th century,” confined to Chinatown ghettos and an ethnic economy.¹⁷ Excluded from society, Chinatown became known for its mystery, exotic otherness. Decorated in pagoda roofs and remnants of the Orient, works like Arnold Genthe¹⁸ only continued to perpetuate it as a land stuck in time and space. Imagine, the photographs suggest, the East residing in American cities in glory of all its uncivilized traditions. *Annals of San Francisco* describes the “Chinaman” as “only a little superior to the negro, and by others as somewhat inferior... those who have mingled familiarly with ‘celestials’ have commonly felt before long an uncontrollable sort of loathing against them.”¹⁹ Because many of their economic conditions did not allow for them to return back to China, men found employment working in laundry, restaurants, and stores. For the poorest and most unfortunate, their rooms were underground cellars where “scarcely a single ray of light or breath of pure, fresh air ever penetrates.”²⁰ However, the wealthiest of the Chinese stood amongst the Chinese Six Companies, later known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association in San Francisco. Consisting of six of the most powerful families, they became an informal, but “encompassing power structure... [acting] as the unofficial ambassadors of China.”²¹

The American and Chinese alliance during WWII brought Chinese American momentary relief and acceptance as the government proceeded to incarcerate and displace thousands of Japanese Americans through the nation. This allowed many Chinese to move out of Chinatown and settle into the city. Yet, peace for the Chinese American community was short lived as the Cold War, the Chinese Civil War, and

¹⁷ Ngai, 2013: 202.

¹⁸ Ramos, Andrew J. “Picturing Chinatown: Technology, Ideology, and Containment in Arnold Genthe’s Photographs of Old Chinatown.”

¹⁹ Soulé, Gihon, and Nisbet, *The Annals of San Francisco*, 378.

²⁰ Chang, 2003: 78.

²¹ Chang, 2003: 78.

McCathyism gave way to new waves of discrimination. Each brought devastating results to different pockets of Chinatown as the government began interrogating every immigration paper, many in which began unraveling decades old paper stories. With no support from the Six Companies as they were occupied in keeping up with the war in China, the Chinese had no one to turn to. The results led to a decade of investigation, silence, and distrust within Chinatown. However, with change in the administration, an influx of refugees from Hong Kong entered the United States in the early 1960s. With the Immigration Act of 1965, the quota that previously limited 105 Chinese from worldwide was lifted. The power of the Six Companies began to fall as a new generation of Chinese Americans stepped up to the plate.

This transitioned the Asian American community into a new era and that's where *Before Gold Became Yellow* picks up from.



Figure 5.02 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Kem Lee, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. The march on August 17, 1968 was the first organized Chinatown demonstration to weave social justice activism with student activism. George Woo was vital in shaping the face of youth activism. Bridging community and students, he challenged students to be concerned about the community conditions and issue, stating the formation of an Asian American identity without action within the community was only a form of 'mental masturbation.' Influenced by Mao Ze Dong, the motto "SERVE THE PEOPLE" helped Asian Americans carry forth a sense of giving back to the community. The demonstration brought together many groups of people as they addressed the many neglected issues such as affordable housing, employment, health care, and youth programs, through signs such as "Chinatown is a Ghetto" and "Tourists out of Chinatown."

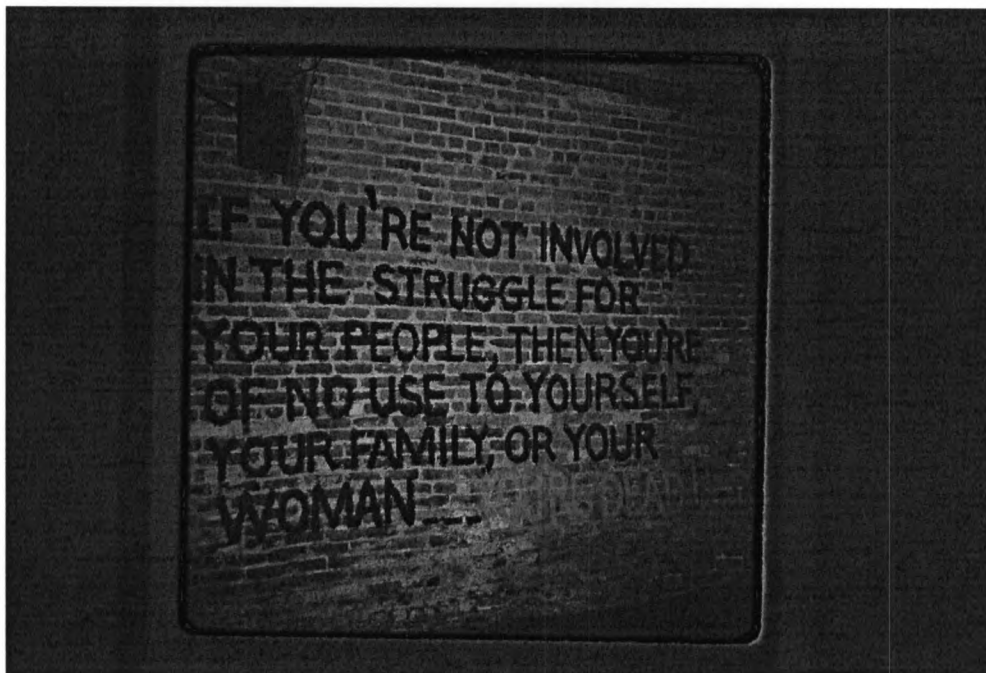


Figure 5.03 San Francisco, CA. Photography unknown, Courtesy of Alan Wong. In a Chinatown basement run by Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), the quote reflects a youthful, but militant perspective towards one's responsibility to his community. In the photograph, "You" assumes to a heterosexual male point of view as being responsible for his community, declaring others to do the same. While known as a Movement of diverse interests and perspectives, much of the scholarship on the Movement reflect a heavily masculine dominated point of view. Asian men have historically and continue to be emasculated by mainstream media. One's ability to assert himself as a masculine and respected is disrupting this representation.



Figure 5.04 Dolores Park, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. The Vietnam War had been ongoing since November of 1955, but as Karen Ishizuka states, “It is no accident that Asian America was born at the peak of the Vietnam War.” For many Asian Americans who opposed the war, they found collective identity with the Vietnamese. Mainstream outlets focused on American imperialism while others highlighted its racist undertones – especially when Kwame Ture, also known as Stokely Carmichael, defined the draft as “white people sending black people to make war on yellow people to defend the land they stole from red people.”

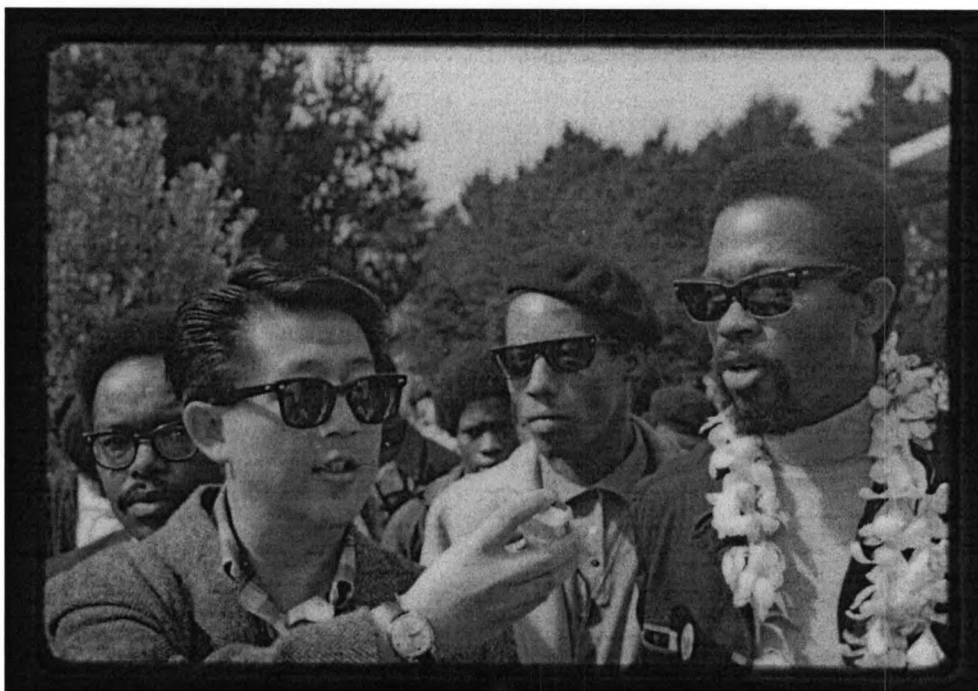


Figure 5.05 San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA. Photography unknown, Courtesy of Alan Wong. Pictured above are community leader and minister, Alan Wong and Black Panther Party's Eldridge Cleaver. *At 40* is a compilation of "direct, unfiltered" journeys from founding members, "joined by those who followed" in their own words of SFSU student strikers. They recall the aspirations of the 1968 student strikers, many in which soon formed the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). The TWLF was a coalition of six student organizations (in alphabetical order): the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), the Black Student Union (BSU), the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC), and the Philippine (now Pilipino) American Collegiate Endeavor (PACE). Not only did these student organizations fight for a curriculum that represented marginalized communities, but they also found community service and discovering their own roots as part of decolonizing and liberation. Lasting from November 1968 to March 1969, strikers were met with police violence, hospitalization, and arrests. However, it inspired UC Berkeley and other schools to demand their own schools/departments for Ethnic Studies. Today, the strike is recognized as one of the longest student strikes in US history. In 2018, the College of Ethnic Studies will be celebrating its 50th anniversary.



Figure 5.06 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography unknown, Courtesy of Alan Wong. While many youth groups recognized sexism as a problem in their communities, changing attitudes proved to be much more difficult task within itself. With little focus on women and the Movement, the narratives from different anthologies point to the importance of the numerous roles they addressed and played. Wei Min She's Jeannie Dere learns of her own power as she understands what it means to "take on the women's question" while Nellie Wong talks about the internal and external social issues faced in Chinese American women's writing group, Unbound Feet. The Repeat Offenders' "So Long, Susie Wong" sings: "So long/So long Susie Wong/ Good-bye to geisha gazes/Good-bye to eastern phrases". Today, womxn's oppression continues to fight in form of policy, social structure and expectations, media, etc.



Figure 5.07 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. The photograph takes place in front of CACA at an anti-Vietnam War demonstration. Most notable are the picket signs. The combination of Chinese and English signs challenges the common misconception of “East/West” culture clash. Rather it suggests both identities can coexist together as “Asian American.” Maeda furthers the argument as the posters reconfirm “their own identities as racialized people.”¹ The significance of language also served as barriers between generations and communities. As such, it spoke to the discrimination against non-English speakers through “US citizens of various government policies,” therefore furthering bilingual education and acceptance as revolutionary tools.



Figure 5.08 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. Pictured is speaker and resident, Frankie de los Reyes. The International Hotel was a ten year struggle, best known for its incredible fight for housing and human rights. In the late 1960s, landowner Milton Meyer and Company, headed by Walter Shorenstein) called for the eviction of the I-Hotel. In 1973, the hotel was sold to Supasit Mahaguna and the Four Seas Investment Corporation, an overseas Thai company. The tenants were primarily made up of Filipino manong and Chinese elders. At the time, Justin Herman, the executive direction of the San Fran Redevelopment Agency stated, "This land is too valuable to permit poor people to park on it." This attitude continues to embody the city's idea of "urban renewal" and gentrification. As such, the fight for the I-Hotel became one of the longest-running urban campaigns in the post-1960s era, bringing out thousands of people to protest. During its last months, Asian American groups and supporters from nationwide came out, building human barricades to prevent police from posting eviction notices as well as forced eviction of tenants. Their plans and actions were as if they were "getting ready for war," says Terry Bautista. At 3am on August 4, 1977, the police came in at full force, using sledgehammers to break doors down and drag tenants out of their homes. The International Hotel Tenants Association (IHTA)'s Emil de Guzman recalls in *Roots of Justice*, "A lot of the manongs didn't really live much longer. It's like hearts were broken." The I-Hotel's preservation now continues to occupy San Francisco's politics as it represents low-income housing, the rights of elderly and people of color, and even the slogan "people rights over property rights." It symbolizes the very heart of the Movement as does its legacy of strength, resistance, and community.



Figure 5.09 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography unknown, Courtesy of Alan Wong. The photograph shows Lauren Chew and family friend as she helps him register to vote. The relationship between voting and citizenship tie close together. In *Impossible Subjects*, Mai Ngai recognizes the historical significance of citizenship, referencing ‘alien citizenship’ as an “aspect of Asiatic exclusion that naturalized citizenship.” However, for Asian Americans born in the United States, birthright citizenship held other benefits such as the right to own land, be present, vote and yet, still be denied the right to be considered an “American citizen” as the two (Asian and American) were “mutually exclusive concepts.” Citizenship is represented through one’s ability to participate and “have voice” in American politics. Likewise, this sentiment was echoed in 2016 when #IAmAsianAmerican cited only 36 percent Asian American millennials vote. Factors still remain the same as NPR reports that while Asian Americans are the fastest growing immigrant group in the United States, they are “rarely polled,” remain “somewhat of a political enigma,” and “least likely to vote”¹ to due numerous languages and media sources.



Figure 5.010 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. Known as the Tiao Yu Tai Movement in 1971, the issue brought thousands of overseas Chinese professionals and students from US college campuses into a global and transnational state of activism. The movement stirred many protests against Japan's colonization of eight fishing islands called Tiao Yu Tai, 120 miles from Taiwan and 240 miles from Okinawa. Historically Chinese territory until Japan's invasion in 1894, they were returned to China after WWII. Due to the proximity to Taiwan, they fell under Taiwan's rule. However, in 1968 with the discovery of sub sea oil fields within the region, Japan began to claim the islands as their own territory. Endorsed by the US to "return" the islands back to Japan, the plan sparked large Chinese student protests in nationwide as well as in Hong Kong and Canada. Eventually, many students who were involved in the Tai Yu Tai Movement also helped start Asian Community Center on Kearny Street in 1971.



Figure 5.11 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography unknown, Courtesy of Alan Wong. Founded in 1966, Self Help for the Elderly was one of the many social service organizations that emerged during President John's War on Poverty. Many students recalled their experiences of Self Help during its formative years as being crucial to their understanding of intergenerational relationships. In 2016, the organization celebrated 50 years of serving the community. Today, Self Help continues to provide job training, hot meals, social services, and housing and citizenship assistance to seniors. Their bilingual community centers have expanded from San Francisco Chinatown to other locations in San Francisco and San Mateo.



Figure 5.12 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography unknown, Courtesy of Alan Wong. San Francisco State University's Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA) were actively involved in the community, working to create and better social services in Chinatown. This photograph is located outside of Donaldina Cameron House. The posters reflect attitudes towards institutions, government, and mainstream society. The posters (left to right - show SFSU president SI Hayakawa, Ronald Reagan, and SF Chinatown leader, George Woo. "Yellow Peril" signage shows students' ability to turn a negative stereotype into political satire. Participants within the pictures (left to right) include Galileo High School students and San Francisco State College (later University) students, Dick Tom, Mason Wong, and Lauren Chew.



Figure 5.13 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. The photograph pictures a childcare area serving for two Chinatown strikes (the Great American Sewing Co. and Lee Mah electronics). However, men were not usually seen around childcare. In 1973, only 10 percent of Chinatown's toddlers were receiving any childcare services. Children with mothers who worked in sewing factories recall growing up by their mothers' side. However, founded in 1975, Kai Ming Head Start was one of the lead childcare programs to stress bilingual and bicultural education. The provided services aimed to meet low-income emotional, social, health, nutritional, and educational needs. Today, Kai Ming continues to serve as model for the numerous bicultural programs nationwide.



Figure 5.14 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photographed by: Kem Lee, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. Asian Americans were inspired and influenced from many sources including: (a) civil rights movements; (b) Black nationalism/power movements (Black Panthers, Malcolm X, etc); (c) overseas leaders (Mao Ze Dong, Ho Chi Minh, and other Asian leftists); (d) the larger Third World movements and ongoing decolonization and liberation movements (Franz Fanon, Karl Marx, etc); and (e) activists within their own histories, communities and families. While these influences were powerful, it was the efforts of those who chained themselves to their rooms during the International Hotel eviction, who attended and shouted rallies with picket signs, who volunteered at elderly and youth services – who dared to call themselves Asian American. These were the people who created and breathed life into the Movement and to this day, their legacy continues to live on.

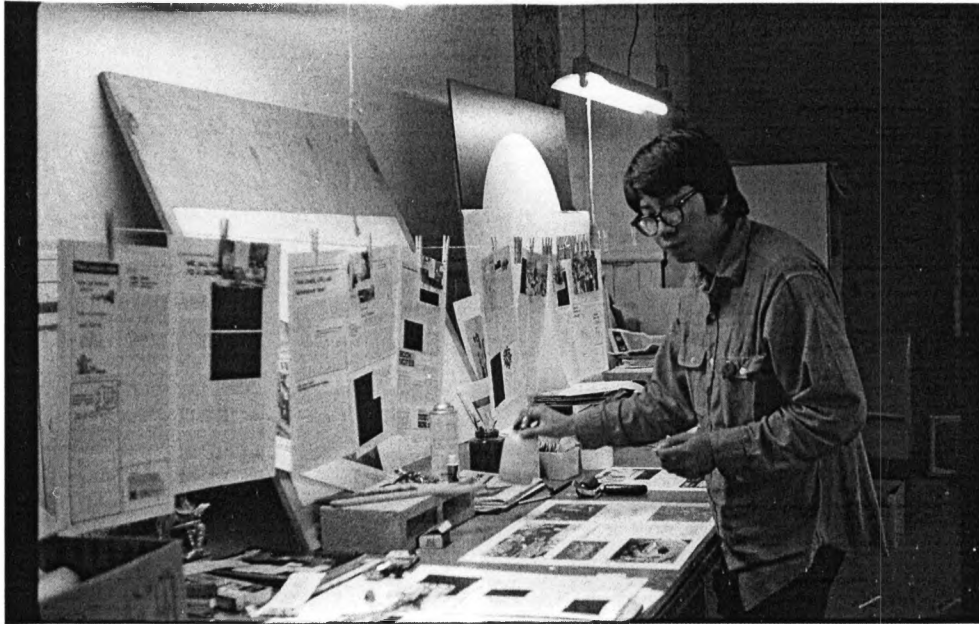


Figure 5.15 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. Pictured is Steve Yip working on *Wei Min Bao*. Mainstream news outlets often were inaccessible to Asian Americans due to language barriers and did not reflect people of color experiences. However, community members soon filled the need for alternative news sources with student and community newspapers. Wei Min She's *Wei Min Bao*, I Wor Kuen's *Getting Together*, and Red Guard Party's *Red Guard Community Newspaper* covered the Movement and their activism in San Francisco while *East West Newspaper* covered the activities taking place around Chinatown. Other presses included *Gidra* in Los Angeles, *Amerasia* in Los Angeles, and *Bridge* in New York City. Each outlet worked hard to provide multiple perspectives of events, rallies, and issues surrounding Asian American communities with bilingual translation, literary arts, and occasionally a witty, political illustration.



Figure 5.16 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. "Our fight is the fight of all garment workers. While we slave for pennies, the manufacturers make dollars off of us. Our fight is the fight to get rid of sweatshop conditions. We don't want Chinatown or any other community to be used as a haven for cheap labor by employers. They think we have no rights as human beings or workers. Therefore, we are standing up and fighting for our rights and the rights of all workers," a Jung Sai leaflet proclaims. Matched with multilingual slogans such like "If you're not afraid, join us. If you are afraid, this isn't the place for you," the Jung Sai Strike continues to represent one of many struggles against the exploitation of the working class. Its name in Cantonese means "Jung" as Chinese 中 and "Sai" meaning West 西, its factory name was meant to symbolically embody the cooperation between east and west, ultimately creating the "Great Chinese American" (GCA). However, for workers, Jung Sai represented the need for job security, better working conditions, higher wages, and unions. From July 1974 to spring 1975, they rallied against Espirit de Corp, one of the largest garment manufacturers on the West Coast. The company used Jung Sai along with 20 other contract shops in San Francisco Chinatown, 25 in the Bay Area (including Oakland Chinatown), and another "subsidiary" in the Mission district. They also had shops in Sacramento, New York, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and India. During the Jung Sai strikes, the workers were met with intense police harassment and arrests on the picket line. In Wei Min's newspaper, Doug Tompkins, President of the firm, was described as "a 'hip' long hair employer built his empire off the backs of immigrant women workers in the US and Third World workers overseas." One woman spoke of the horrendous treatment during her time at Jung Sai, stating it nearly drove her to suicide. The photograph shows the Jung Sai garment workers and supporters rallying in 1974 at Portsmouth Square.

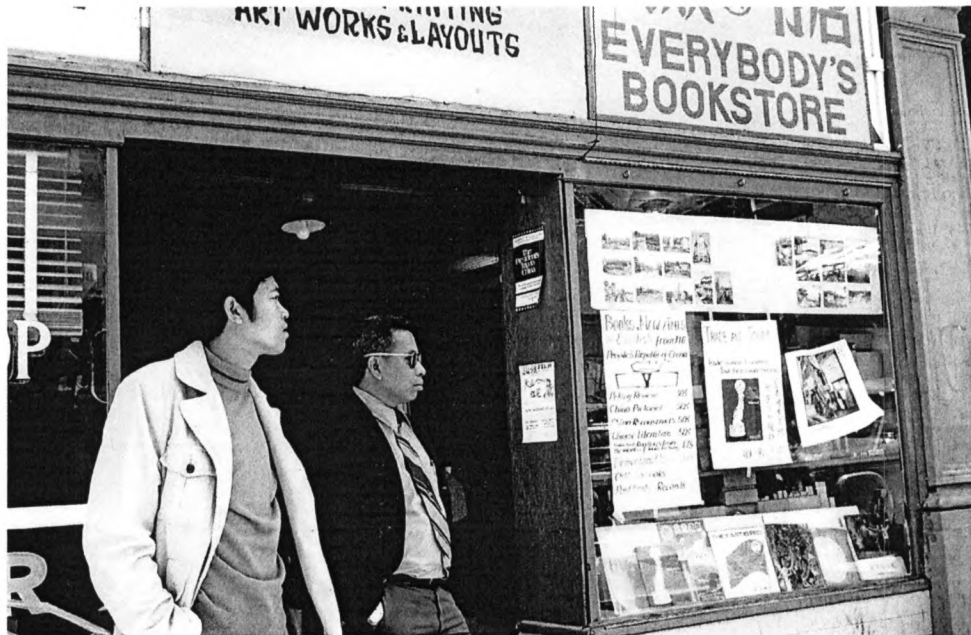


Figure 5.17 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography by Steve Louie, Courtesy of UC Berkeley, Ethnic Studies Library. Harvey Dong recalls, “In a late-night brain-storming session among friends at one student’s apartment in Berkeley, the idea emerged for a bookstore in the San Francisco Chinatown-Manilatown community.” As the nation’s first Asian American bookstore, Everybody’s Bookstore served as a nonprofit, self-sufficient project, made possible by community support. Founded by members of UC Berkeley’s AAPA as well as people involved in the Third World Liberation Front strike, the bookstore aimed to provide education about Asian and Asian American history and social change. Opened on January 1, 1970, Everybody’s Bookstore made material from the People Republic of China available in Chinatown. Due to conservative influence, many of the books were censored in Chinatown, only made available at China Books located in the Mission. The selection of books were listed and arranged under topics included China, Asian Americans, minority struggles in the United States, the Third World, labor history, community organization, and educational change.

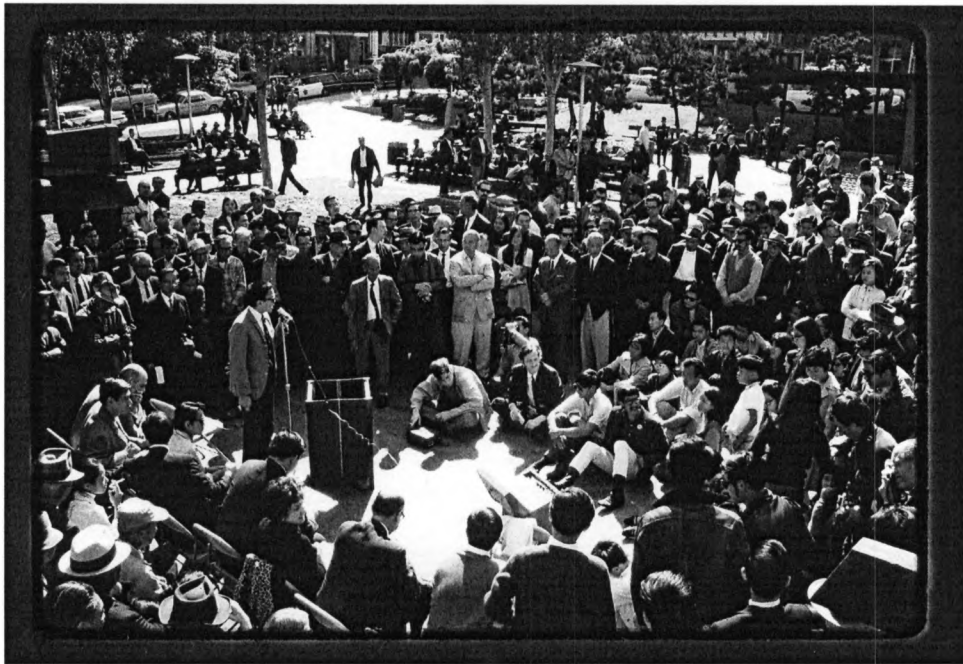


Figure 5.18 Chinatown, San Francisco, CA. Photography unknown, Courtesy of Alan Wong. Speaker, Ling Chi Wang, addresses a crowd of students and community members in Portsmouth Square. Jeff Chang describes Ling-Chi Wang as “bespectacled and serious, an authentic Chinatown renegade who, along with his barricade, storming comrades in arms, had stood up to the American war machine, the Six Companies, and Kuomintang. He had the mind and the aloof men of a master strategist.” In the front row shows San Francisco State College’s AAPA, Neil Gotanda and ICSA’s Alfred Wong. This photograph is speculated to be a rally against poverty; however, it is uncertain as Portsmouth Square also served as an open space for many rallies.

REFLECTIONS:
Creating our own Stomping Grounds

Today, “Make America Great Again” represents a class of people who hold power, continuously using their privilege as way to elevate their own status, thought, and lifestyle. Their actions through legislation impact and oppress those of differing genders, religions, races, sexualities, and economics. The comparisons between the 1960s and 1970s then become striking. Protests regarding immigration quotas, gender rights, voters’ registration, and military increase are evident within the archival photographs.

Stomping Grounds was prepared as a multimedia event to showcase the parallels between the peak of the Asian American Movement (1968-1974) and now. The ability to interact, talk, breathe, and live amongst our own histories is such a privilege and that’s what I wanted for students to gain from this event. I wanted viewers to not only learn from the generations before and after them, but understand that our strengths as a community is when people are able to understand and appreciate the effort and measures people took to make sure others could live better. *Stomping Grounds* was comprised of three components: *Before Gold Became Yellow*, *Uprooted*, and *Becoming*.

Before Gold Became Yellow: Chinese American Activism During the Asian American Movement is a cohesive collection of archival photographs focused on the Chinese American youth activism during what can be argued as the peak of the Asian American Movement, 1968-1974. Much of the collection belongs to Alan Wong, Kem Lee, and Steve Louie. They display a general overview of interdisciplinary community needs including housing rights, gender rights, anti-Vietnam War efforts, and interracial relations. However, these selected photographs primarily represent the San Francisco Chinese American Chinatown involvement.

Uprooted: Rights to the City were a series of hand drawn student posters. Ranging from all ages, students were encouraged to think of contemporary problems and their relationship to identity and society. Whether they be global, local, or personal, the posters reflected numerous issues including bullying, climate change, healthcare, and

assimilation. They aimed to parallel Kearny Street Workshop silkscreen posters done during the 1960s-1970s.

Becoming is a photography collection from participants around the United States, asking participants to take five photographs of people/items/places they believe influenced their decision to “become” Asian American. The photographs were shown together as a collage of “becoming” and how even nearly fifty years after its creation, the term is just as relevant and needed as ever.

Our project team comprised of two faculty members (Professor Valerie Soe, Professor Wesley Ueunten), one staff member (Vernon Piccinotti), three undergraduates (Carmen Liu, Jeremy Curimao, Vivian Pham-Nguyen), and one graduate student (myself). I worked closely with the team, meeting with everyone individually, averaging to about a check-in per person a week.

Professor Soe and Professor Ueunten served as advisors to the project, making sure the event was on track and giving pieces of advice when needed. They volunteered students and contacts for different parts of history and event planning. As Information and Technology Consultant, Vernon Piccinotti worked to ensure the securing and safety of the projectors and audio/visual components. Finally, each undergraduate student was in charge of particular tasks regarding the event. Vivian led marketing and social media, working to create press releases and make contacts with other organizations when needed. Carmen worked with me for outreach as well as graphic design for the poster. Jeremy undertook projection elements, working together to create and correlate the slideshow with the historical photographs.

Our efforts include a website, Facebook page, and AsAm news feature.

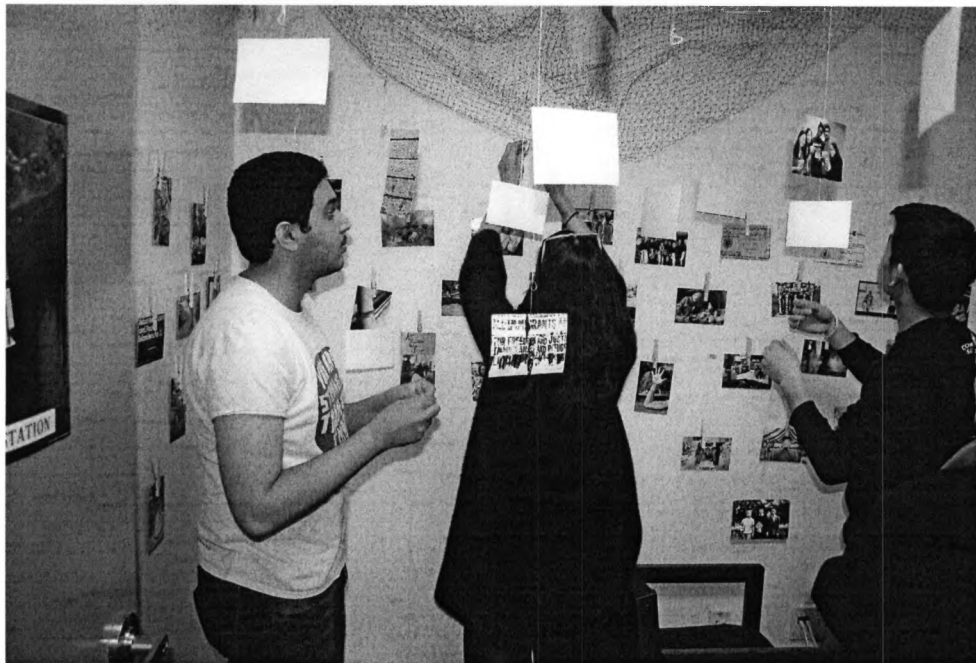


Figure 6.1 Photography by Kelvin Quan. Volunteers preparing *Becoming: A Photography Project*.

Figure 6.2 Photography by Kelvin Quan. “Everybody’s Library” serves as a tribute to the first Asian American bookstore, Everybody’s Bookstore that was located on Kearny Street at the Asian Community Center.

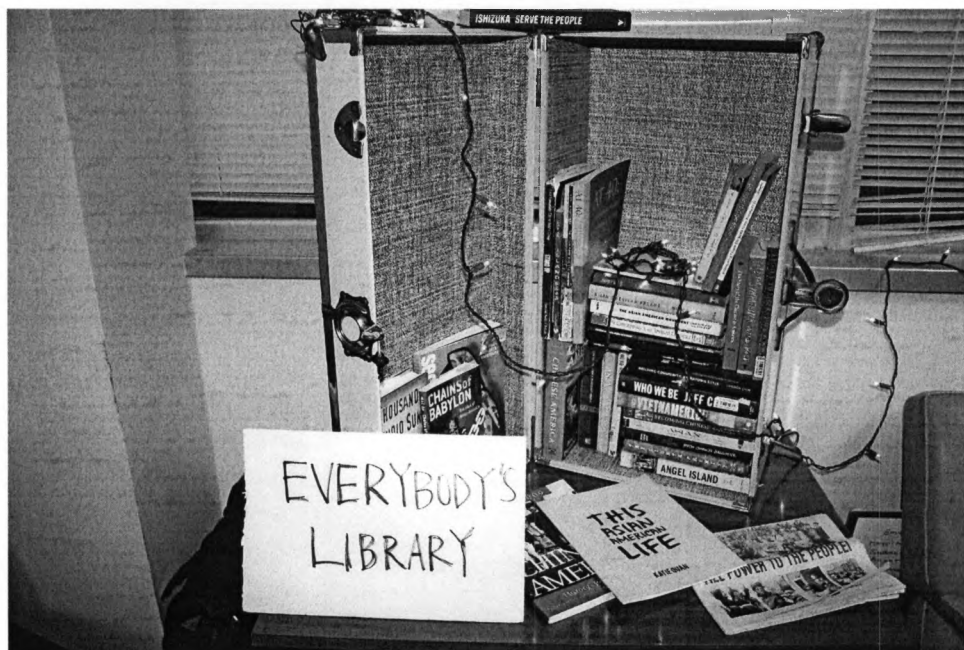




Figure 6.3 Photographed by Kelvin Quan. Friends and family came in large numbers.

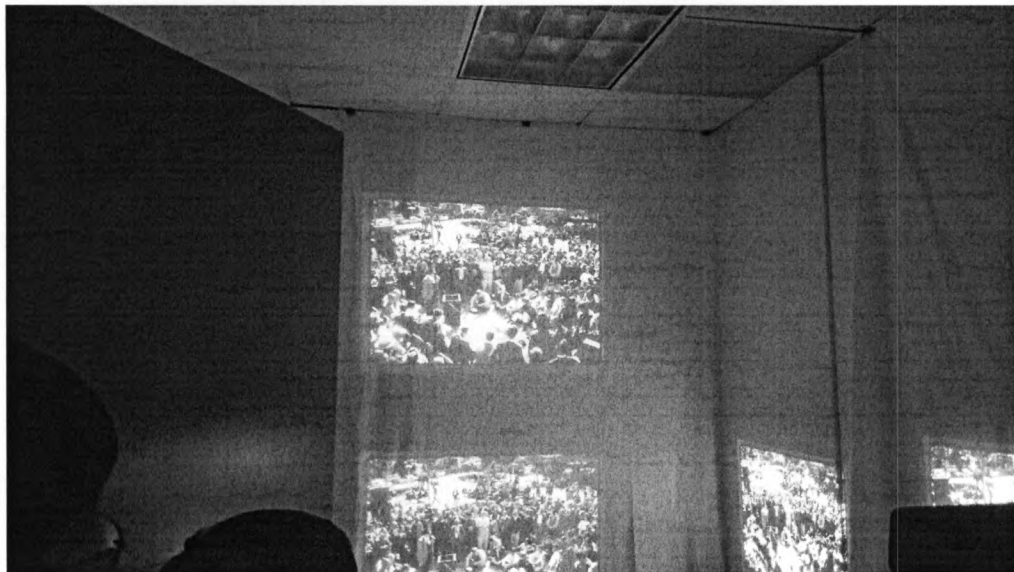
Figure 6.4 Photography by Kelvin Quan. As pictured, Members of numerous communities and organizations including Square & Circle Club, San Francisco Hepatitis B Free, and Good Medicine Films came out to support.





Figure 6.5 Photography by Emmanuel Soto. Professor Wesley Ueunten and legendary jazz musician, Francis Wong jam out together.

Figure 6.6 Photography by Emmanuel Soto. Due to unfortunate weather, the projections were not able to follow up as planned. However, the small room provided for an intimate viewing of *Before Gold Became Yellow* installation.



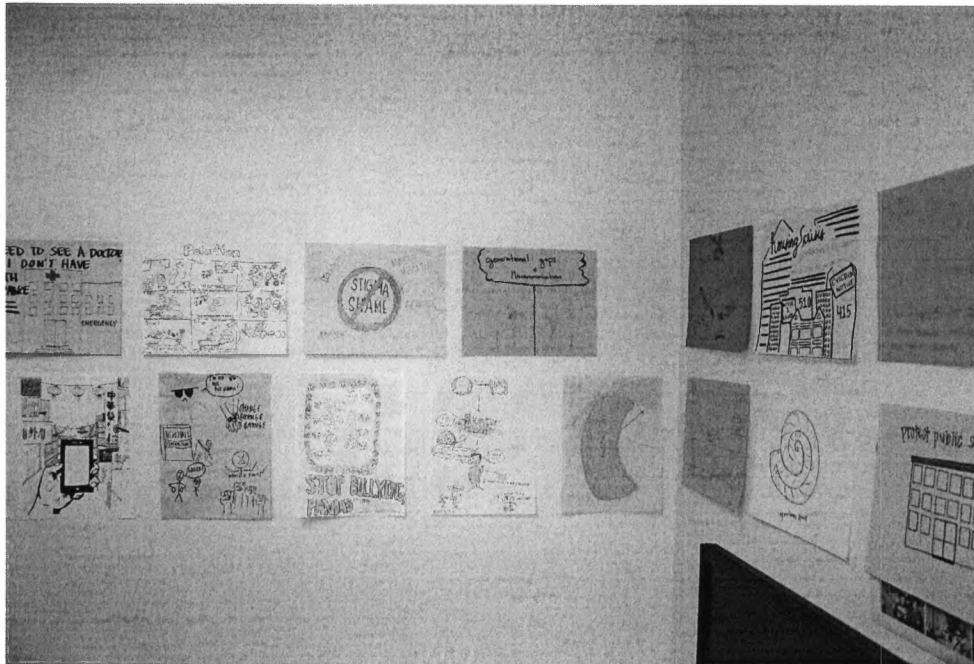
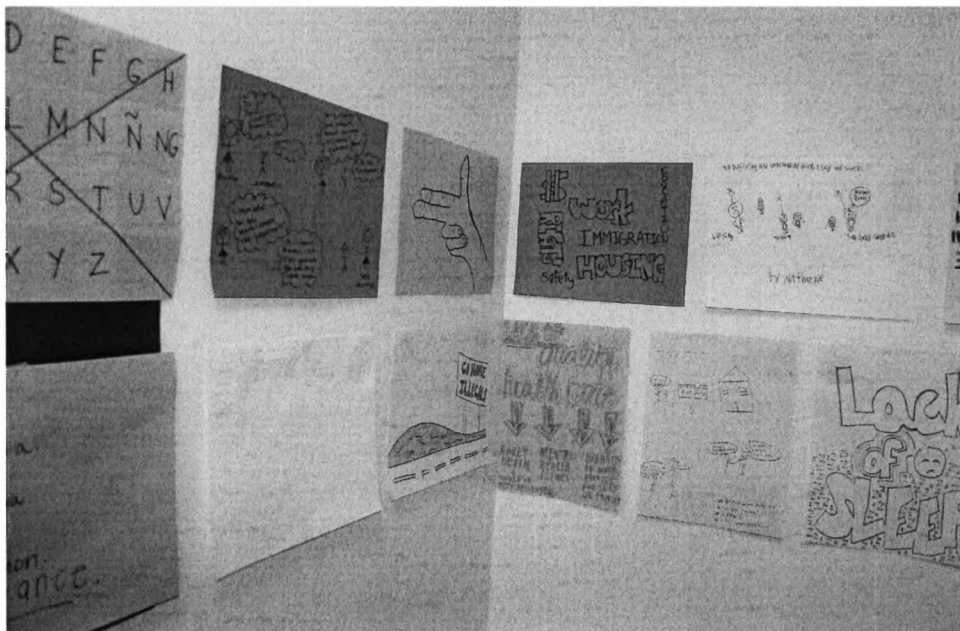


Figure 6.7 Photography by Kelvin Quan. In *Uprooted: Rights to the City*, students respond to the issues affecting their communities. Many posters displayed a deep frustration regarding current presidential administration as well as lack of resources for healthcare, housing, language, mental health, and immigrants.

Figure 6.8 Photography by Kelvin Quan. Participants included Pin@y Educational Partnerships and Growing Learning Opportunities 5th grade class from Alice Fong Yu Alternative School.



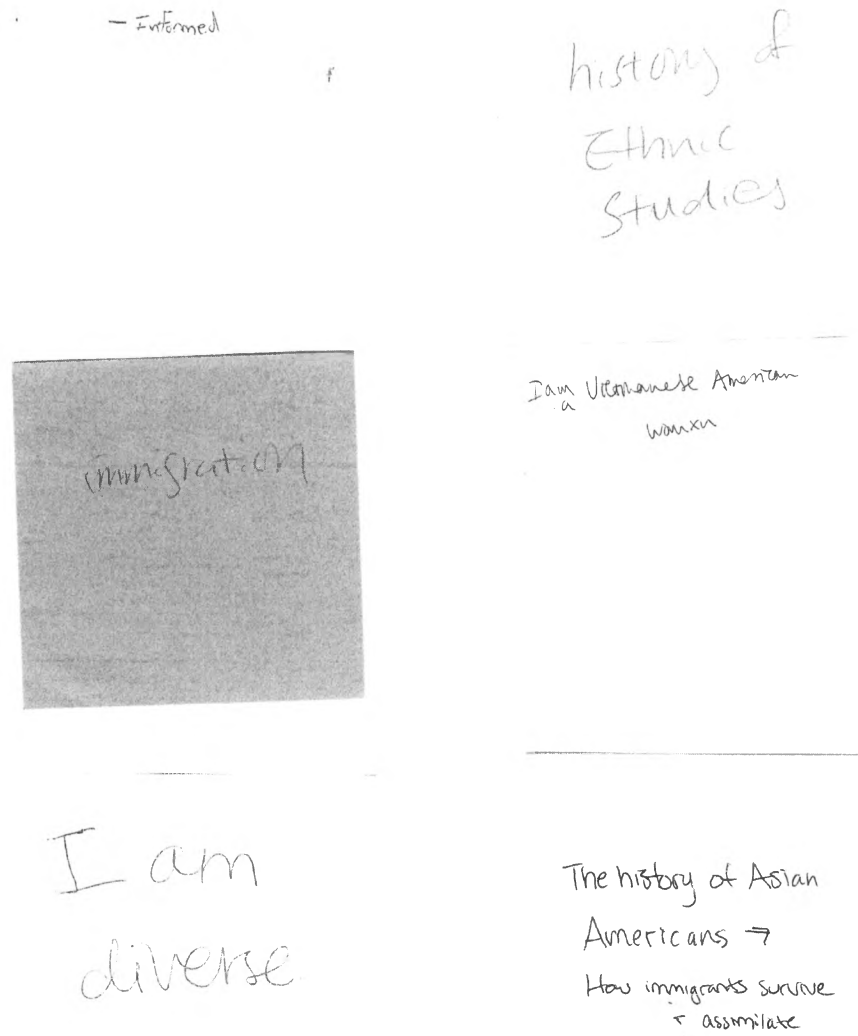


Figure 6.9 While speaking to an Asian American Studies course at UC Berkeley, the students participated in an activity that had them reflect on the class content as well as self and communal identity. Each color prompted a different question for students to respond to. Yellow: “What have you learned in this class?” Green: “I am...” and Orange: “What issues affect your community?”

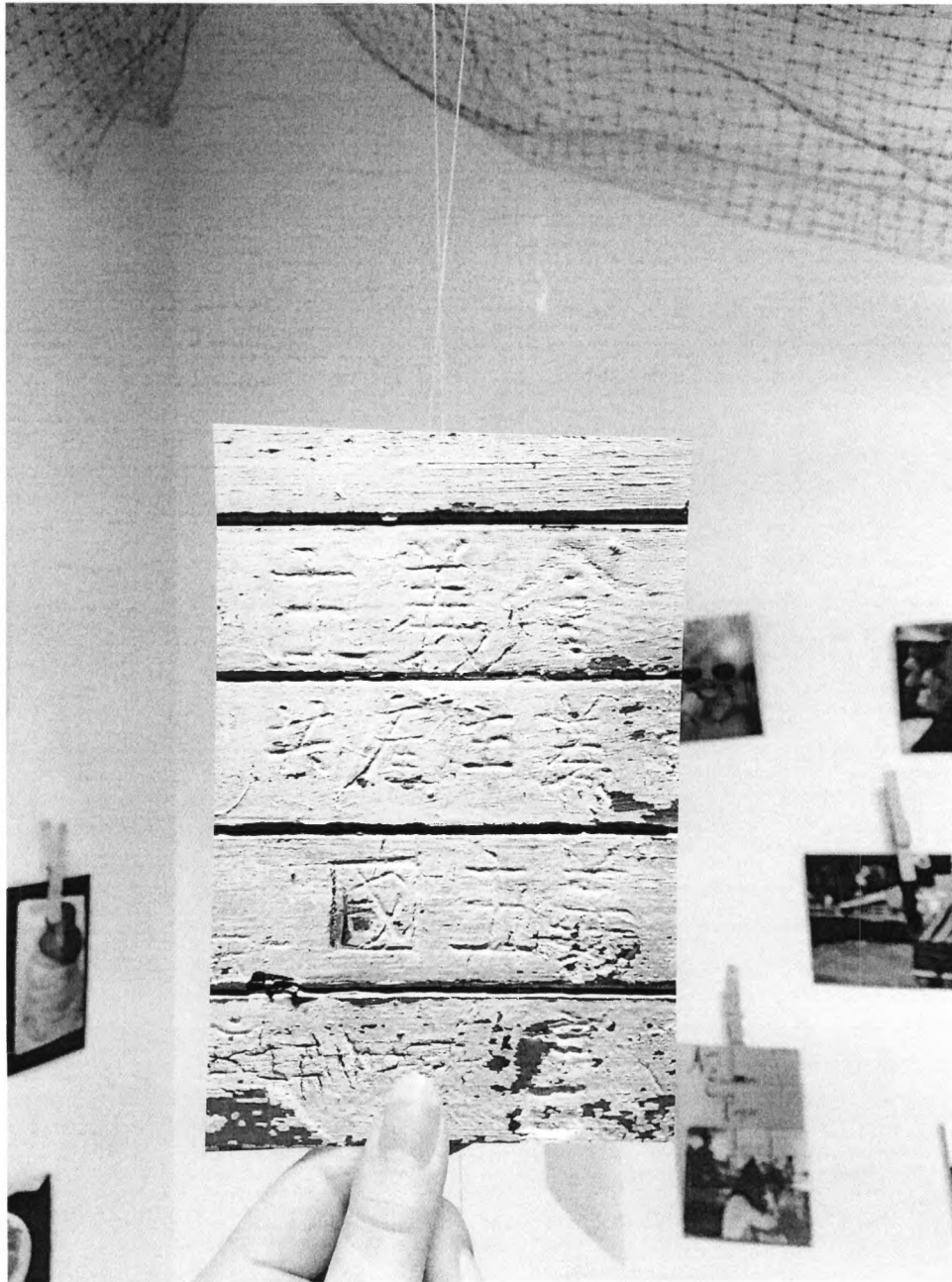


Figure 6.10 Photography by Eunjae Kim. *Becoming: The Photography Project*. Participants submitted photos from around the country including New York, Pennsylvania, and California.

DISCUSSION

Speaking our Mother Tongue

Stomping Grounds attempts to demonstrate a disruption in time, space, and language in the academic scholarship built around the Asian American Movement. My interpretation of the material is formed from my own upbringing as a product of the Movement. My family immigrated from around Southern China to the United States from the 1930s to 1950s. My father grew up in San Francisco, my mother in the suburbs of Orange. I was three years old when my own journey began. From Wah Mei School to Alice Fong Yu Alternative School, little did I know the history behind these historic bilingual Chinese American programs.²² Through high school and college, I attended private institutions that were predominantly made up of white, middle-upper class students. However, due to my parents' upbringing in service to community, my siblings and I grew up exposed to many Chinese American nonprofit organizations including Kai Ming Headstart, Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, Self Help for the Elderly, and Donaldina Cameron House.

Until attending San Francisco State University's Asian American Studies, this all seemed coincidental and rather trivial. During my third semester, I was recommended by Professor Lorraine Dong to join the Square and Circle Club where I soon learned Alice Fong Yu was one of the founders. Soon after, the coincidences slowly began to reveal themselves as moments of realization. I am who I am because of the love, support, and guidance from my community. There was an origin story to each person, each organization and they all can be traced back to the Movement.

“The majority of the students were not from Manilatown or Chinatown but most had family roots in these

²² Wah Mei School is the first Chinese American bilingual preschool in San Francisco. Alice Fong Yu Alternative School is the nation's first Chinese immersion public school.

communities. And those who grew up in the neighborhood, challenged a college education that turned away from the community. The movement was bringing them back.”

- Harvey Dong, *Standing Up!* (2008)

The power of the Movement in the 60s and 70s was its ability to bring people back to their roots and understand their own positionality in history. Similarly, *Stomping Grounds* aims to understand youth activism and community as a way to return “home” – a common theme within Asian American coming of age stories. Hopefully with this installation, we expand the conversation from Chinatown as a physical location and CoES, too, as a physical location to artistic interpretations of space, time, and language.

Space

As early as the 1960s, installation art has gained popularity into the millennium. Often occupying the entirety of a space whether it be public or private, spectators must walk through in order to grasp aspects of the art itself. Some installations can be considered site specific as the art’s concept is grounded in the physical location. Michael Lin describes installation art as a rather holistic experience, noting that as the artist must think of the location and timing of art as its context in addition to historical and symbolic content: “When we think of the duration of the exhibition as part of the work, we can begin to think of the exhibition as an event rather than a collection of objections on displace.” However, as a minority, “space” represents much more than simply an exhibition, but rather, it transforms into spaces of acceptance, of validation, and of existence.

In 1968, San Francisco State University’s College of Ethnic Studies (CoES) formed the third world Liberation Front as means to fight for their rights not only to learn and reclaim about their own narratives that had historically been excluded from American mainstream history. Often when we see “American history,” our own stories often fall

through. Yet, CoES represents a particular space where marginalized stories become the crux of American existence. Learning then embodies our own families, our communities, and ourselves. Rather than means of survival, the Movement spoke to our needs of giving back to those who gave us this privilege. Likewise, CoES continues its mission to preserve and advance the studies of ethnic studies; its history and values provide a model for emerging ethnic studies programs nationwide.

As home to the first College of Ethnic Studies in the country, San Francisco State University's location symbolizes one of the key components within *Stomping Grounds'* purpose and intent – or rather, as artist, Richard Serra states, “To remove [the work]... is to destroy the work.” Removing *Stomping Grounds* from CoES changes the meaning of the historical significance and artistry of the project. I plan to show the project elsewhere, but due to its differing location, its meaning will be altered and modified to suit its setting.

Time

If time is seen as being linear and chronological, then the 1960s-1970s was its rupture. The third world Liberation Front disrupted an Anglo-Saxon, “Westernized” education. Many youth who lived outside of Chinatown disrupted migration patterns by simply coming back. A movement created and carried through by Asians disrupted submissive and obedient stereotypes. As mainstream history has told us, these institutions were not originally made for “us.” Examples can be seen through cases such as *Tape vs Hurley* (1885) and *Lau vs. Nichols* (1974), one case fighting segregation, the other resisting a monolingual education – and case after case, we have disrupted this timeline and will do so again in the future.

As a one-night event, the timing represents the temporality of a movement and a moment. Whether it be in photograph or video, time within our own reality does not

pause for a second. To show the course of six years within one night allows us, nearly fifty years later, to understand timing as being one as both fluid and ever changing. Our abilities to reflect and understand the past affects the way we are, then, able to understand our futures. Timing is also represented through the projection work of *Before Gold Became Yellow*. During its presentation, the projections flashed sporadically, reflecting the current generation of film and media consumption as manically fast paced. In conversation with the photographs, I was fortunate to be able to talk to UC Berkeley's Asian American Studies' class. With their participation, the post-its collected demonstrated the work of a semester long course of Ethnic Studies. Through *Before Gold Became Yellow*, the projections represent the moments in which communities continue to protest for and against during the age of political unrest.

Language

Merriam-Webster defines language as “a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings.” However, through *Stomping Grounds*, the event gave language alternative forms for expansion in its definition. As dynamics and expressive language is, its accessibility through generations complicate when transcribing the complexity of the Asian American community model. As a team, we found language both a barrier and the event's greatest strength. The difficulties brought voice and action to the Movement with all its raw and youthful energy.

Because our target audiences were of three very different generations, our strategy for outreach varied in numerous ways. In a world of Google, texting, and Facebook-stalking, we surprisingly relied heavily on word of mouth marketing (both online and in person) while attempting to advertise online. We marketed primarily through Facebook sponsorships and groups. Our postcards were distributed by hand to San Francisco Asian

American community organizations such as the Chinese Historical Society of America in Chinatown, Eastwind Books at Berkeley, and various locations around Japantown. Due to my own personal connections in the Bay Area, I was incredibly fortunate to already be in touch with people from various organizations like the Square & Circle, Asian American Womens Artist Association, Alice Fong Yu Alternative School, and SF Hep B Free. When researching about the productivity of the Movement, it became increasingly apparent how far our society straddled print and digital mediums.

During the creation of *Stomping Grounds*, the English and Chinese language proved to be one of greatest difficulties to work with and around. One of my goals I hoped to achieve was providing translation for posters, the provided visuals, and the essay itself. It was important that the project have the ability and fluidity to cross between borders of Chinatown and “mainstream” America. After facing discrimination upon arrival in the United States, many immigrants discouraged their children to learn the Chinese language. Based on familial and community experience, this is supported by the general lack of bilingualism within second and third generation Chinese Americans. The inability to translate the content, too, isolated groups of people affected by and contributed to these historical moments. This issue of bilingualism is still apparent through many Chinese American companies, organizations, and groups. Much like history, through decades of immigration, language can be seen as one of the consistent factors policing who can and cannot be American. The evidence of policing is the loss of language.

However, through installation art, a reiteration of language as being an open and nonverbal medium proves to be just as effective and needed in our day in age. Due to the nature of academic discourse relating to race, current issues, and activism is overcrowded with theoretical frameworks and discussion, closing itself off to the general public. One of *Stomping Grounds*' goals was to allow discussion about Asian American political identity and history in an interactive and digestible form. The hope was to present a

different kind of understanding to the Movement. *Stomping Grounds* offered a change of perspective on how this information could be further presented to viewers unfamiliar with Asian American history.

Parallel to student organizing during the Movement, a bulk of the organizing relied heavily the focus of community and social service programs. In *At 40: Asian American Studies at San Francisco State*, Malcolm Collier and Professor Dan Gonzalez recall student group activism at San Francisco State as a “desire for action... extending beyond ethnic community experiences.”²³ While helping the community, the relationships and their impact are what really continue to define and push forth the Movement. Much like the 1960s-1970s, the established relationships and support was the beating heart of *Stomping Grounds*. Despite *Stomping Grounds* being considered a graduate student culminating project, it is just as important to note the impact on those who worked on the event. When asked what drew him to the project, Jeremy, undergraduate team member, states, “I was approached by Katie and I thought it would be a great experience to work with a graduate student. I did not expect the fact that I had a much better experience that I had originally imagined.” Through exposure to the material as well as and sometimes additional Asian American related courses/experiences, all participants whether they were viewers or worked on *Stomping Grounds* were in different stages of realization and “becoming.” The process of seeing their own positionality as one located in the Bay Area as well as in Asian/American history shed light on the numerous array of marginalized voices and stories.

The term “Asian American” has become synonymous with racial demographics and it is essential to acknowledge its radical origins. Not only is identity personal, but it is a political driving force within American culture and history. Exposure to the material is a step in the right direction, but learning and unlearning on how we see the world around us will be the next step in reclaiming ourselves as a people worth fighting for. My hope

²³ Collier, Gonzalez, 2008: page

for *Stomping Grounds* is to further all components of the project in diverse spaces and for diverse audiences. Jeremy states it best when he said that to “know your roots” was to also “understand the current problems of our present day status as Asian Americans.”²⁴ The Movement is essential in how we see ourselves in a contemporary America. To further the understanding of this era, we must tear down the walls of the ivory tower and create bridges between the intersections of academia, identity, and policy. Only when we deconstruct this privilege will we then allow for real awareness and change in and out of our communities.

²⁴ This reflects the Ethnic Studies motto: “Know History, Know Self. No History, No Self.”

“Departures and arrivals. Our poems, our graffiti. In
hardcore English syllables. Spoken in twenty-four Pacific
languages in twenty-four noodle houses. Renewed in
twenty-four Asian Pacific faces.
Twenty-four hours from now, the future will arrive.
A woman’s voice will announce: ‘Deplane.’”

- Russell Leong
Poetry Within Earshot

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“Life is not what you alone make it. Life is the input of everyone who touched your life and every experience that entered it. We are all part of one another.”

- Yuri Kochiyama

Much like the Movement, *Stomping Grounds* is a coming of age story as it is a labor of love for community, hxstories, and learning.

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