

Asian Americans

Step 1 Read about Asian Americans' struggle for civil rights in Section 5, and complete the Reading Notes for this group.

Step 2 Read the excerpt below.

Step 3 Complete your Station Notes for this group by copying two sentences from the "Yellow Power!" article.

- One must more fully explain what changes Asian American activists were fighting for. Draw a line connecting this quotation to your "Changes Wanted" notes.
- The other must more fully explain what actions this group used to achieve change. Draw a line connecting this quotation to your "How Achieved" notes.

At least one quotation must come from the placard.

In 1969, the first issue of the newspaper Gidra was published by a group of Asian American students. The students organized to change the status of Asian Americans in society. They called for Asian studies programs in colleges, the development of a united Asian American community, and improvement in the social status of women. They also wanted an end to racism, especially the negative stereotyping of Asians in the media. In the following excerpt from a Gidra article, writer Larry Kubota explains the meaning of Yellow Power. More of the article can be read on the placard.

Excerpt from "Yellow Power!" by Larry Kubota

Yellow Power must become a revolutionary force and align itself with the oppressed people of the Third World. Only by changing society in total can Asians and other alienated people survive and determine their own destinies.

However, there is one thing that must never be forgotten: Yellow Power must not be used to obtain a larger piece of an "action" that is degrading and unhumanistic. In a land that preaches democracy but practices oligarchy and where people are separated into favored "establishment" and culturally deprived and alienated mass, fundamental changes in the social order are called for.

Yellow Power is a call for all Asian Americans to end the silence that has condemned us to suffer in this racist society and to unite with our Black, Brown and Red brothers of the Third World for survival, self-determination, and the creation of a more humanistic society.

Asian Americans

Necessary But Not Sufficient

YELLOW POWER!

By Larry Kubota

"Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blow, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress."

Frederick Douglas

In Los Angeles in 1871, a mob of a thousand persons marched into the Chinese section, seized victims, overpowered the officers of the law and hanged at least 22 Chinese men, women, and children. No attempt was made to bring these people to justice.

Asian American history is filled with innumerable racist incidents. Some are overt, such as the one given above. Others are covert—psychological oppression, educational deprivation, and economic exploitation—and are equally destructive.

Looking back into the past, it is incredible that we have taken so long to confront this problem of racism. We are relegated to second-class citizenship, and adding insult upon injury, we are told to be thankful for our blessings.

We tried only the tactic of adaptation. We responded to our treatment with an "Oriental" smile and a polite "thank you."

Asian Pride

Today, however, is the dawn of a new era. We have finally reached the limits of our tolerance and have begun to explore a new alternative. Asian Americans have rediscovered their spirit and pride and are becoming a force to be reckoned with. In San Francisco, San Mateo, Los Angeles, and elsewhere, yellow people are fighting side by side with other Third World people for reform in society, and in particular, the educational system.

This is a new role for the Asian American. It is a rejection of the passive Oriental stereotype and symbolizes the birth of a new Asian—one who will recognize and deal with injustices. The shout of Yellow Power, symbolic of our new direction, is reverberating in the quiet corridors of the Asian community.

"Asian parents push their children to 'make it,' not realizing that when the process is complete, children may reject their parents."

Yellow Power is symbolic of the type of rapid social change occurring today which no group or individual can ignore. It is apparent, however, that many of us do not understand the meaning of Yellow Power and its relationship to the changes currently taking place in American Society.

Yellow Power means that we as Asian Americans are seeking greater control over the direction of our lives. It also expresses a determination to effect constructive changes in the larger society. It is not a call for Asians to move out of the mainstream of American life, but instead it says that we should be able to dictate some of the terms of entry into that mainstream.



Some have asked why do we need Yellow Power? There are three basic reasons. First, Yellow Power must develop for the self-preservation of yellow people in America. Second, it must develop so that we can determine our own destiny. And third, it must develop so that Asian Americans can contribute to the creation of a truly humanistic society.

To answer the question regarding the necessity of Yellow Power for our self-preservation, let us review a few events in our history, some of which are cited by Dr. Harry H. L. Kitano in his book, The Japanese in the United States:

- Rock Springs, Wyoming, 1885: 29 Chinese are murdered, their homes destroyed and their belongings scattered, because the Chinese were perceived as economic threats.

"Yellow Power is a call for Asian Americans to end the silence that has condemned us to suffer in this racist society."

- U.S.A., 1942: 110,000 Japanese-Americans are imprisoned in concentration camps without trial.
- U. S. Congress, 1945: Oklahoma Congressman Jed Johnson proposes mass sterilization of the Japanese in the concentration camps.
- Los Angeles, 1969: The Council of Oriental Organizations is ousted from a meeting of the Concerned Citizens for Community Colleges—the Los Angeles version of the White Citizen's Council. The reason given for the ouster is that the Oriental community is "politically irrelevant."

The foregoing clearly illustrate the outrageous and frequently violent acts perpetrated against Asian-Americans by this so-called democratic society. It should be remembered that in America, all people of color have suffered as much or more. The condition of people of color in America is one of helplessness and powerlessness.

Yellow Power is a call to reject our past and present condition of powerlessness. When we attain a position of power in this society, we can have more control over our lives and begin to determine our own destiny. This is the second reason for Yellow Power.

White-washed Asians

Traditionally, yellow people have spent a great deal of time observing the behavior and mannerisms of white people. We have tried to act like them, speak like them, look like them, and be like them in every way. We have even been willing to sacrifice family relationships to emulate whites. For example, Asian parents push their children to "make it," not realizing that when the process is complete, children may reject their parents. The children feel ashamed of their parents because their parents do not measure up to the white standards that they have been told to hold supreme.

It is time we understood that white people cannot be taken as models. More than anyone else, it is they who are in dire need of reevaluating their standards and values. It is they who have been guilty of bigotry and hypocrisy. It is they who have created a country where racism is rampant.

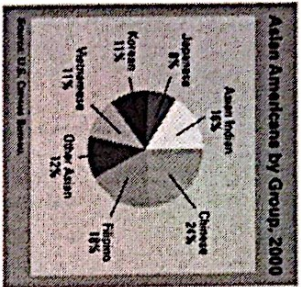
The white youth of today are learning that George Washington, the father of our country, was a slave owner. They are ashamed as they watch the heroes of their fathers on television killing Indians, enslaving Black men, colonizing Brown men, and demeaning Yellow men, all in an effort to sustain the myth of White supremacy.

We must recognize, as Bridge-Cleaver suggests, that it is among the White youth of the world that the greatest change is taking place. It is they who feel the pain of finding their inherited heroes turned into villains. In the world revolution now under way, the heroes are no longer people who are white. Today the heroes are Bridge-Cleaver, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Mao Tse Tung, Che Guevara.

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Asian Americans Raise Their Voices



Asian Americans also joined the broad movement for civil rights in the 1960s. In fact, the farmworkers' strike against California grape growers was launched by Asian American activists. Larry Iltong, one of the leaders of a largely Filipino farmworkers' union, played a key role in this strike. He and other Filipino activists also helped form the United Farm Workers. They were part of a growing movement for Asian American rights.

The "Model Minority"

Like Latinos, Asian Americans are a diverse group. They have ties by birth or culture to the countries of eastern and southern Asia. Asian groups with a longstanding history in the United States include Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, and Koreans. Starting in the 1870s, the U.S. government set limits on Asian immigration. The Immigration Act of 1965 removed those limits, and the number of Asian immigrants increased greatly. In recent decades, people from such countries as India, Vietnam, and Cambodia have added even more diversity to the Asian American population.



Asian Americans received favorable treatment.

The perceived success of Asian Americans was only partly true. Although data from 1980 show that many Asian Americans earned salaries higher than the national average, more than half lived in just three states: New York, California, and Hawaii. These states have a very high cost of living, a measure that includes the price of food, housing, and other essentials. People had to earn more to live in those states. Also, many Asian American households include several adult wage earners, a fact that was reflected in higher family incomes.

Furthermore, although many Asian Americans had attended college and entered professions, others had not. Many Asian immigrants had low-paying jobs, limited English language skills, and little education. Like other minorities, they faced discrimination because they were not white.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, many Asian Americans thrived in the United States. They were sometimes called the "model minority" because they were seen as working hard and succeeding without protesting or making demands. Some people even pointed to their progress as proof that ethnic differences were no barrier to success in American society. But these arguments, along with the "model minority" label, aroused resentment among other minorities, who sometimes felt that

College Students Unite to Be Heard

Asian American students began to call for equal rights in the 1960s. On some college campuses, Asian American students organized a political movement. Their stated aim was to end racial oppression "through the power of a consolidated yellow people." Yellow Power became their slogan. In 1968 and 1969, Asian American students at San Francisco State University and the University of California at Berkeley helped organize student strikes. They wanted more minority participation in university affairs. They also called for academic programs that focused on ethnic and racial issues. At the time, minority perspectives played little role in university education.

Their efforts succeeded. In 1969, San Francisco State started the country's first school of ethnic studies. Between 1968 and 1973, many other colleges and universities also set up Asian American studies programs.

These new programs had a great impact on students. Helen Zia, a Chinese American, recalled, "In college, I learned that I was an Asian American. I learned that I didn't have to call myself Oriental like a rug. It was like a light bulb going off." What Zia and many others learned about their heritage gave them a new understanding of their identity and rights in American society.



Fighting for Internment

Reparations

One key battle for Asian American rights focused on Japanese American internment during World War II. Executive Order 9066 had forced many into internment camps, and the Supreme Court's 1944 ruling in *Korematsu v. United States* had upheld the order. Thirty years later, many people began to demand reparations for this historic injustice.

In the 1970s, a younger generation of Japanese Americans inspired by the Black Power movement spoke out against the discrimination their families had suffered. In 1978, a group in Seattle held the first Day of Remembrance. They shared family stories and discussed the hardships of internment. One organizer described the event as a "way to reclaim our past and make it our own." The Day of Remembrance is now observed in other cities, too.

Meanwhile, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), which was formed in 1929 to defend the rights of Japanese Americans, sought legal remedy. In 1978, it began to pursue compensation for the suffering in the internment camps. In 1988, Congress finally apologized for the internment. It also authorized payment of \$20,000 to each survivor. Although the sum was relatively small compared to individual losses, this official response helped to make up for a historic wrong.