years in operation: 14
number of issues printed since Fall of 1996: 76
copies of issue 14.1 printed: 1, 500
issues this semester: 2
hardboiled editors, interns, and staffers who worked on this issue: 32
reasons why i love being managing editor of the only asian pacific american
publication on campus covering unrepresented and misrepresented
news and issues: infinite.

by alice tse
managing editor

in this issue...

03 The Continuing Fight for Public Education by denise wong
04 Interview with Student Regent Jesse Cheng by casey tran
05 The So-Called “Ground Zero” Mosque by margaret zhou
  Zero Ground for Nativism by leslie hamachi
06 Losing Ground by annie kim noguchi
07 Dream On? by catherine eusebio
08 Armageddon Has Come, and We’ll Be Fine by carmen ye
  Teach for Whom? by tawny tsang
09 Locked-Up and Locked Out by austin houlgate
10 Doing Away With The Idea That There Can Only Be One by crystal sitt
11 Dancing Outside the Box by steven cong
12 A Day With Jennifer Pae by kristy kim
  Taking Off The Qipao by yifan zhang
After over a year since its inception, the movement to defend public education struck again on October 7 as a team of organizers staged the first strike against the budget cuts of the academic year. The latest in a line of walkouts with dwindling student presence and support, the strike’s main actions (a noon rally on Sproul and sit-in at Doe Library) drew a crowd of about 600 to 700 people, according to the Daily Californian.

It is tempting to view October 7, an event whose turnout stands in the shadow of the 5,000 who demonstrated on September 24, as a failure. The walkout’s lack of manpower may superficially indicate that a variety of unfortunate factors have beaten this glorious burgeoning movement to death.

On the contrary, however, the October 7 protest was a success on many levels because it progressed the budget cuts discussion far beyond what we all already knew. Largely due to the initiative of students of color, more demonstrators during the walkout were exposed to the unique way in which the budget cuts, along with other institutional factors, have jeopardized the interests of students of color.

Among these educational efforts were a speech detailing the demands of Cal's Pilipino American community, which included the repeal of the 2012 Admissions Policy, institutionalized funding for AB540 students, addressing the future of the Multicultural Community Center and the declining rate of Pilipino freshman admissions, and the collapse of the ethnic studies departmental majors. Moreover, speakers from the Pilipino community expressed their support for the demands of RAZA and the Native American Recruitment and Retention Center (NARRC), including the institution of a permanent NARRC director.

These issues again materialized during the Doe sit-in, as demonstrators from REACH! Asian/Pacific Islander Academic Recruitment and Retention Center, Pilipino Academic Student Services (PASS), and the department of ethnic studies conducted small-scale teach-ins explaining the relevance of these issues to the UC budget crisis.

"This is the first time the 2012 Admissions Policy has been discussed here [in the budget cuts space]," said ethnic studies graduate student Abraham Ramirez of the spontaneous workshops. "The movement for public education is also about workers’ rights, immigrants’ rights... It's different in that we've learned from the past. We know now not to limit our movement to just symbolic protests.”

This type of dialogue contrasted sharply with that surrounding previous days of action, which hardly elaborated on the burden of budget cuts on API students. While these smaller discussions may regrettably not have been as effective as one mass teach-in, our struggles reached a broader audience, regardless of whether that expanded audience was big enough to fill Doe’s North Reading Room. It was deeply encouraging to see myriad discussions conducted small-scale teach-ins explaining the relevance of these issues to the UC budget crisis.

The resurgence of the API presence in the movement was critical, considering how hard the community has already been hit in terms of recruitment, retention, and the quality and accessibility of API-relevant classes. One of the most tangible ramifications of the fee hikes, for example, was the lowered admissions rate for Pilipino and “other Asian” applicants. For instance, one of the most touted statistics during the march was the drop in Pilipino freshman admissions rate from 3.9% to 2.6% over the course of one year.

Meanwhile on campus, classes of API-interest (such as language programs) have been cut drastically and have become increasingly difficult to get into, the tuition hikes have exacerbated retention for many API students.

“What I see is more students worried about paying for college, and even making sure their parents can stay in the same house that they grew up in,” said Annelisa Luong, REACH!’s Campus Organizing Coordinator. “Financial issues at home and here in college can be very stressful for students and detrimental to their academic performance.”

With October 7’s optimistic triumphs in mind, it is important to keep critically assessing our approach and undertake multiple forms of mobilization to ensure our voices do not fall on deaf ears. During the rally, ASUC Academic Affairs Vice President Ricardo Gomez cited a decision by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to restore $200 million to the UC budget, which his chief of staff stated was prompted by the UC demonstrations.

As indubitably beneficial as this is, however, it cannot make students compliant or reliant on striking. Various indicators, such as the press’ diminishing coverage of the walkouts and the letters of “support” from the Chancellor basically encouraging students to have fun and be safe, illustrate that these direct actions are not taken seriously and protesting has become normalized as a cute aspect of quotidian Berkeley life.

When asked about the efficacy of the walkout, fifth-year commuter student Jenalyn Sotto commented, “Since I commute and am not around the Berkeley area as much, I don’t feel as qualified to respond to these questions. I can only speak to the fact that Facebook spamming aside, the demands and issues of the rally were not that well disseminated and publicized, especially to individuals who fall outside the immediate circles of student affairs. Even the local San Francisco/Peninsula news stations weren’t able to articulate on the statewide rally itself, instead focusing on half-hearted images of folks ‘chanting’ and closing on how the protests were ‘disruptive to midterms.’ Perhaps they did more in-depth articles, but the newscast I saw was very brief.”

“I think the strikes were pretty effective because we’ve heard the governor say himself he’s changing his policy because of the protests,” said third-year Armand Cuevas. “However, they’re not effective enough because we still see injustices at the university administration level. Sure the state will give us the money, but it’s up to the UC Regents to decide what to do with it.”

But the principle to keep in mind is that the demise of affordable public education affects everybody, and the burden of fighting for our education should not just fall on the students. Considering the additional 20% increase hanging over students’ heads (to be voted on November 1), we must hold accountable the multiple levels of administration that have failed us, rather than just focusing on the Regents or on the governor’s office.

Moreover, we must communicate our story to a broader audience beyond those in higher education.

Through multitudinous actions like publicizing Cal’s API community’s struggles in hometownethnic media and raising awareness about ballot initiatives like Proposition 25, which would repeal 1978’s Proposition 13 and address the budget gridlock, we must mobilize our parents and communities back home to pressure state legislature and demand accountability from Sacramento, as we demand accountability from UC administration. Through lobbying, voting, or direct action, however, it is most important that we keep fighting.
INTERVIEW WITH
STUDENT REGENT JESSE CHENG:
THE VOICE FOR UC STUDENTS

by casey tran

As UC students face a multitude of urgent issues including budget cuts, fee increases and the lack of transparency from the administration, it’s crucial to have someone who we can voice our concerns to. In the Board of Regents for the UC, the Student Regent is responsible for listening and responding directly to students. Last July, UC Irvine student Jesse Cheng was appointed to the position. As Student Regent, Cheng expresses student body concerns to the Regents and reports back to students regularly about the administration’s progress. The Student Regent communicates directly with the other Regents and UC President Mark Yudof during the six annual Regent meetings. As an Asian American Studies major and Education minor, Cheng’s perspective in dealing with educational and administrational issues is informed not only by his APA identity, but also his past years of community involvement. At heart, Cheng is a community activist and he emphasizes the importance of the Student Regent being grounded in the student community.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in New York. I grew up in both Queens and Little Italy Chicago. My mom was a research assistant from China here in the U.S. on work study. So, we bounced around a lot. We lived in Little Italy, across from Chinatown. Right before high school, we moved to San Jose because my mom wanted to be around more Asians.

Can you describe yourself in three words?

Um, no. [laughs] Um, fohawk, purple, and Pokemon.

Those are interesting words. Why did you choose them?

Fohawk because all my life, I’ve never gotten a good haircut…my friends told me that the fohawk works for me though, so I like it. I’m very proud of my fohawk. Purple is my favorite color. As a child, I used to get beat up a lot because we lived in a neighborhood that was predominantly African American and Latino. So, I was the scrawny, emaciated Asian boy. I switched to blue and black for awhile because those colors are considered to be masculine. But it’s purple now. I’ve committed to my sexuality and body type. Purple is my power color. Pokemon… I feel like Pokemon is representative of our generation. It wasn’t a socioeconomic thing. Everyone in our generation knows about Pokemon, but it’s interesting because it’s interpreted so differently among Asian Americans. White people look at Pokemon as a fun, but Asian Americans look at it as oh, an Asian hero! Ash is Asian.

What do you like to do for fun?

I don’t do things for fun. My schedule is intense […] There’s so much that needs to be done in my community and for my personal growth, doing things for fun no longer seems relevant.

How did you get involved in the APA community?

I started out as a spoken word artist. In college, freshman year, I was convinced that I was going to drop out, go back to community college, get a teaching degree, and teach English. I didn’t want to get involved. My roommate was a Pilipino rapper, which is more common than what people think. He was like, we should go after the spoken word group on campus. So we went out and I did a piece called “I am so damn yellow.” It was a standard piece that I performed for Bridges. They asked me if I wanted to join their board. Bridges had a lot of connections with non-profits, so that’s how I got involved in the broader APA community.

You said that you were expecting to drop out of Irvine, go back to community college, and teach English. Why did you think that during your freshman year?

I had the overarching impression that school wasn’t for me […] I couldn’t speak Chinese and I was failing Spanish. I thought […] I would do much better being a car mechanic because at that time I used to street race. My high school was also 60 percent Asian, full of high achievers. The model minority myth sets expectations so high that it isn’t possible to fully, humanly meet them. So that’s why we have a lot of kids dropping out and failing.

What inspired you to major in Asian American Studies?

I was originally an English major, but that didn’t work out. I hate poetry […] I was tired of white authors and reading and dissecting white authors. I felt like multicultural authors weren’t as valued. One day, I accidentally walked into the wrong class. It was an Asian American Studies class. The professor was from Brooklyn and he was swearing and making large generalizing statements. He had an exercise where students came up to front of the class and the other students had to guess their ethnicity. He was like, “y’all know nothing about ethnicity.” Asian American Studies is just tangible; it’s something that you can learn and take out into the real world.

How did you become student regent?

I applied 30 minutes before the deadline. I saw a computer with the application open and I just did it. I turned it in five minutes late to the Chancellor’s office, but they were nice about it. I had a lot of support from my mentors who told me what I should say in my round of interviews. Honestly, I wasn’t expecting to get it. I don’t think I’m the best student for the job. Let’s be real, I’m not qualified to do this job.

Why do you say that?

I’m passionate about the work that [Student Regent] does. I love organizing more than lobbying. I’m really big on voter registration. But there are students that are more qualified. They have a diverse amount of experiences that they can draw on. I don’t know how to push an agenda forward or to pull strings. What does that even mean? […] Grad students are usually Student Regents because they have more experience. But I guess that no one really knows what they’re doing until they do it. I wish I had the experience of moving something forward, learning the inside of the political structure. But it’s rare that a student has done that.

What are some of the issues that are important to UC students?

Student fees and budget transparency, which is an interesting one. It’s like students accept the fact that there are going to be fees, but it’s like what are you doing with my money? There’s the Dream Act for undocumented students. Forty-nine percent of undocumented students are Asian. No one ever talks about that. Really? Fuck, man. It’s not just a Latino issue. There’s also the issue of diversity and holistic admissions, which your [UC Berkeley] campus has. There’s the Ethnic Studies curriculum, campus climate and just the ability to feel welcomed.

How do you find out the issues that students are concerned about?

Just being part of the community and keeping your eyes and ears open. I mean, as Student Regent, you have to know what’s going on in your campus.

As student regent, do you plan on taking any action regarding the 2012 admissions policy?

That one is a tough one because no one really knows the results of the policy. There are some Pacific Islander organizations that are supportive of policy. There are some organizations that are against it. I think that the process could have been more transparent, though. I think we need to take a closer look after the eligibility policy passes.
The So-Called “Ground Zero” Mosque
Hijacked by politics and media as a platform for Islamaphobia

by margaret zhou

“We must tell the terrorists in plain English, ‘No, there will not be a mosque on Ground Zero,’” asserted North Carolina’s Republican congressional candidate Renee Ellmers in her anti-mosque campaign ad. Ellmers’s fear of the mosque, as ungrounded in reality as it is, has been echoed around the nation, bringing the mosque to the forefront of the media and election debates, with no small cost to American Muslims. The construction plan for the infamous “Ground Zero mosque” was proposed to the Community Board of the Lower Manhattan area on May 26. During hours of heated debate, families of 9/11 victims voiced their offense at the idea of a mosque next to the burial ground of their loved ones. However, the proposal received 29-1 approval. In early August, the New York City Landmarks Commission also gave the mosque a green light on a constitutional basis. Protests began erupting in NYC and across the nation soon thereafter.

Actually, the phrase “Ground Zero mosque” is misleading, so much so that the Associated Press called upon its writers not to use the phrase to refer to the construction of what will actually be a 13-story community center two-and-a-half blocks north from the edge of the memorial site, and five blocks away from where the actual Twin Towers stood.

Although the center was originally going to be named “Cordoba” for Cordoba, Spain, controversy over the mosque as a “symbol” of Islamic conquest caused the owner to change the name to “Park51,” a “very New-York name for a building that can be used by all New Yorkers.” The community center will include a basketball court, multi-purpose rooms, a culinary school, and a two-story prayer space. To those who have voiced suspicions that the community center will be used as a training ground for Muslim terrorists, Keith Olbermann remarks, “What a cauldron of terrorism that will be – terrorist chefs, and terrorist point guards.” As the debate over the construction of Park51 continues, the American Families Association proposed the next step: no more building permits should be allowed to mosques, unless, of course, the congregation is willing to “publicly renounce the Qur’an.”

It’s not that the opposition to the “Ground Zero mosque” (aka Park51), or to mosques in general, is overwhelmingly destructive or harmful in itself. More alarming is that the opposition to mosques is merely a surfacing of a deep undercurrent of suspicion, paranoia and racism toward Islam communities in the U.S. today – a symptom often deemed as “Islamaphobia.”

As Keith Olbermann continues to point out in his commentary, Muslims are greater victims of terrorism in the U.S. today than non-Muslims. The May 10 attempted bombing of a plane in Jacksonville, Florida, Terry Jones’s Qur’an burning incident, and numerous similar anti-Mosque protests across the nation all stem from the ignorant and inherently racist notion that Islam is the religion of terrorists who seek to undermine the west. Even though, the legacy of the Civil Rights era has taught most of us that radical generalizations about an entire ethnic or religious group are inappropriate and often destructive, the absurdity of the generalization of Islam has somehow integrated itself into American notions of “patriotism” and is just shy of becoming mainstream.

It is interesting that, despite the widespread perception of Islam as abhorrent, the “Ground Zero mosque” issue has become so critical to both major political parties this election season. Left-leaning Democrats and news media outlets are using the issue a platform to prove their dedication to “freedom” and religious tolerance, while Republicans and right-wing fringe parties are using it to plug the heartstrings of patriotism, so sensitive to any mention of 9/11, and advertise themselves as advocates of national security.

And yet, the members of Masjid Manhattan – an Islamic Center which has been peacefully using a small basement in a lower Manhattan building as a prayer center since 1970 before the World Trade Center was even erected – have been nearly excluded from the debate altogether, and thus have been disempowered.

In an interview with Anderson Cooper, Bruce Feiler, religious scholar and author of the book “America’s Prophet,” stated that the anti-Muslim discrimination of today parallels the discrimination various immigrant and religious communities have confronted in the past two centuries of American history, and that anti-Muslim discrimination is merely part of a larger narrative of Muslims being accepted into American society.

Granted this is a possibility, we must then ask, who will turn this optimistic view of future equality into present reality? This is not the time to make excuses for apathy, but rather, to recognize the forces that propel discrimination, and stand against them as active proponents of equality.

photo courtesy of muslimmediaweek.com

ZERO GROUND FOR NATIVISM

by Leslie Hamachi

“Ground Zero mosque,” the headlines shouted across the country. Even though the Park51 Islamic Community Center is more than just a mosque, and is located two blocks away from Ground Zero where the Twin Towers once stood, that headline quickly became a catchphrase to describe the controversy. Relatives of 9/11 victims, associating the whole religion of Islam with radical Islamic terrorists, were outraged and demanded that the project be moved elsewhere. The Muslim community and their supporters stood their ground.

One would think that a nation founded on the principles of religious freedom would know better by now. But history continues to repeat itself.

Discrimination against religious or ethnic groups in America is nothing new. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, racial profiling in airports and rigorous security measures were put in place. This backlash reminds me of another attack on American soil, almost 60 years ago. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in the midst of World War II, the nasty head of American nativism and fear of foreign cultures created a social and political climate that allowed President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to pass Executive Order 9066, which told all persons of Japanese ancestry, regardless of citizenship status to evacuate to various concentration camps scattered along the West Coast.

The irrational fear generated by the bombing of Pearl Harbor made people assume that all Japanese Americans, some of whom were born in America, were Japanese spied sent to infiltrate America and launch a coordinated attack with the the Japanese Army. Community leaders, many of whom were affiliated with Japanese American churches, were rounded up and shipped off to the FBI for detainment and questioning.

More specifically relevant to the current-day situation, groups such as the Anti-Asian Association and the Asian Exclusion Association launched campaigns to prevent the construction of Japanese churches on American soil by designating the land for white Americans.

What this all boils down to is the political pressure to scapegoat with a “them vs. us” kind of mentality. FDR was faced by a political climate where he, as the American president, was pressured to act big to send the world a message. Was he unfairly infringing upon my grandparents and great grandparents’ civil liberties when he sent them away to internment camps? Yes, but did the rest of the nation stop him with any significant opposition? No.

Similarly, the “Ground Zero” mosque controversy erupted amid political pressure on conservative candidates over the summer, the season right before midterm elections. Curiously, I’m inclined to think that Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich’s fiery rhetoric in opposition to the Park51 project is part of a conservative plot to rally nativist sentiment and motivate people to vote. Realistically, I just wish politicians would stop turning to the most convenient divisiveness in order to get people on their side. It’s glossed over in most of the major articles I’ve read on the subject, but a little known fact is that there is already a mosque four blocks from Ground Zero. Why is the Masjid Manhattan’s location not a problem, whereas Park51’s is? In New York City, the difference of two blocks is hardly a big deal.

Politics aside, I just wish America would learn from its past mistakes. After all, the founders of the 13 original colonies initially came to America in hopes of being able to practice religious freedom. We’ve learned from anti-Catholic Irish nativism in the 1800s and elected John F. Kennedy, an Irish Catholic president in the 1960s. We’ve sent the Japanese Americans away to internment camps, targeted their religious community leaders, and tried to ban their churches in the 1940s, but apologized during the Redress movement of the 1980s. And now, America is trying to halt construction of an Islamic Community Center in 2010. Come 2050, we will most likely have come to terms with our xenophobia.

But if it really doesn’t have to happen this way. Get upset the next time your senators or your gubernatorial candidates try to motivate voters by standing on a platform of religious or racial scapegoating. Get angry the next time you read headlines faced with nativism. Let your actions tell the politicians that their actions will lose your vote, and perhaps we can move beyond sensationalized headlines and mosque controversies.

hb 14.1 October 2010 5
For three days in Sept 2009, six professors from universities across the country came together to create a plan for the future of the Ethnic Studies Department at Cal, producing an "external review report" with five recommendations for the department. The recommendations as follows (paraphrased in my own words):

1. Create a departmental vision in which the programs might be developed.
2. Restructure governance and budget within the department, either through 1) Competitive Ethnic Studies as the central major while keeping Asian American Studies, Native American Studies, and Chicano Studies regardless of the number of majors they serve or 2) A single Ethnic Studies major with concentrations in Asian American Studies, Native American Studies, and Chicano Studies.
3. Make a critical examination of grad student admissions; offer more financial packages.
4. Hire new faculty.
5. Review the organizational structure and management of the Ethnic Studies Library.

All of these recommendations are worthy of being discussed individually, and many include potentially valuable suggestions for the direction of the department.

In past weeks, though, discussions around the external review report have mainly centered on one part of one recommendation -- the proposal to create a single Ethnic Studies major with concentrations in Asian American Studies (AAS), Native American Studies (NAS), and Chicano Studies (CS). Currently, these are four separate majors.

Professor Elaine Kim, coordinator of the Asian American Studies Program, comments in a response to the External Review Report about the seemingly "grand leap" from the "tentative" conclusions in the External Review Report to the discussion among faculty of restructuring into one major with concentrations. She cautions against simply continuing the process without "thoroughly assessing its potential benefits."

At two department meetings in September, students assessed the potential benefits, or rather, lack thereof, of a single major with concentrations. At the first meeting on Sept. 22 with the chair of Ethnic Studies, Tom Biolsi, students spoke out against the collapsing of AAS, NAS, and CS into one major. In response to observations that the recommendations are to save money, Dean Hesse stressed that the "[external] review [report] began and was completed before the budget cuts and are budget neutral recommendations" and shouldn't be thought of as cost-saving. While Dean Hesse maintained that she had no opinion on the recommendations, she emphasized her "commitment" to Ethnic Studies. She was quick, however, to correct students and faculty who used the word "collapse" to describe the recommendation. "No one is talking about 'collapsing' programs," she said. "Language matters."

Indeed, language does matter, and in this case, unfortunately "collapse" seems to be a very fitting word for what would happen if AAS, NAS, and CS were to become one comparative Ethnic Studies major. Creating one major with three concentrations from four existing programs is not simply restructuring, or streamlining, or re-envisioning. It's collapsing, and if the programs were to collapse and become "concentrations" within one major, they would lack the potential to grow in new directions (i.e. the new diaspora focus within AAS). Distinct histories and students would not be represented if they are just "concentrations," and students and faculty would find it difficult to continue to serve our complex communities. We need to expand our programs, not shrink.

UC Berkeley, the second-oldest Ethnic Studies Department in the nation and a flagship campus in multiculturalism, doesn't have a College of Ethnic Studies like at CSUSF. Our AAS program is not a department, like at UC Davis, nor does it have anywhere near UCLA's 38 AAS professors (we have the equivalent of four full time AAS professors). Collapsing AAS, NAS, and CS into one major would be a major step backwards from our progression towards a stronger Ethnic Studies department.

While the department may require administrative improvements, collapsing into one major is far too drastic a solution. Even within the External Review Report itself, multiple solutions are suggested in order to deal with the issue.

Interviews with Chair Biolsi and Dean Hesse

After hearing student concerns, Chair Biolsi admitted to "having second thoughts about the single major idea" in a later interview with hardboiled. He stated that faculty needs to "take very seriously the kinds of concerns that students have expressed." According to Chair Biolsi, if the Ethnic Studies Department faculty agree that a single major isn't a good idea, the faculty will just "leave it at that." However, if more than five or six of the twelve faculty support collapsing the programs into one major, there will be discussion and a vote. This process will most likely take place in Spring 2011.

In an interview with hardboiled, Dean Hesse stated that the recommendations are a "normal, regular, scheduled process" to "ensure efficiency and better coordination." She stated that she has no opinion about restructuring the department. Instead, her priority is that department resources are used effectively towards the needs of students, not the issue of "whether students really want to have a degree that says I majored in Asian American Studies."

Regarding the collapsing of the programs, she remarked that "if you're planning separately, you're not getting good coordination...and most of the recommendations are about better coordination." She continued, "We want to make sure we get the best bang for our students' buck, that students are getting good courses, and that it's well coordinated and well run. We all share the same goals to ensure the visibility and complexity of Ethnic Studies..."

I wholeheartedly agree that the goals of visibility and complexity are important. However, I fear that collapsing AAS, NAS, and CS into one major would only serve to simplify and make invisible many of the issues present in our majors and our communities.

If the recommendations are budget-neutral, though, why collapse anything if it is not necessary? So, what does this mean for the majors within the department of Ethnic Studies? What does this mean for the rest of us?

Whether you're a major in the program or not, these recommendations have implications for you. The Ethnic Studies department provides an education shaped by the needs of our communities and to collapse it would effect not what goes on your diploma when you graduate, but also the kind of education available to us as members of the APA community. The Department of Ethnic Studies and its four programs offer a space for communities to engage with the university and provides students with a relevant education through the study and articulation of power, history, difference, and progress. We need to protect this.

There are still three meetings with the department this semester. A decision has not been reached yet about any of the recommendations, therefore we must continue to be vigilant in making our voices heard. It is crucial that we ask hard questions of the Ethnic Studies faculty, the administration and ourselves about what we want our university to look like. I urge you to remain critical of the lack of transparency in many of the decisions that affect our education and to help protect our programs and the Department of Ethnic Studies.
by catherine eusebio

Clad in caps and gowns, dozens of college students and recent graduates rallied outside of Senator Dianne Feinstein’s office in San Francisco only to be disappointed by politics as usual. On Sept. 21, in a 56 to 43 vote, Democrats fell short of the 60 votes needed to overcome a Republican filibuster on a defense appropriations bill that would have been used to move the DREAM Act forward.

The DREAM Act – otherwise known as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act – would have provided a pathway to legalizaton for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. under the age of 16. To obtain permanent legal residency, beneficiaries of the proposed legislation must graduate from high school and either enroll in college or serve two years in the armed forces.

For the 65,000 undocumented students that graduate from high school every year and the thousands of others in college, it is shameful that the DREAM Act has yet to be enacted. Without legal status, opportunities are slim for immigrants brought here illegally as children. Despite being raised as an “American,” the precarious legal limbo prevents them from fully participating in American society in terms of employment, college admissions, and financial aid. Once a person is here illegally, there is no feasible method of readjustment. Those over the age of 18 who wish to undergo the legal process of acquiring citizenship must leave the country and are subsequently banned from re-entry for 10 years.

Mario Lio, a UC Berkeley alumnus who was brought to the U.S. as a child without documentation, explained, “I graduated from the engineering department of UC Berkeley last spring. I applied to graduate school last year. I took the GRE. I had letters of recommendations. I even got accepted into some programs. However, I will not be attending graduate school because I was not eligible to receive financial aid or a fellowship.”

Yet, some still oppose the DREAM Act, repeating the same arguments ad nauseam.

One fear is that passage of the Act will encourage more illegal immigration. However, it is doubtful that immigrants arrive to the U.S. well-versed in the technicalities of the law, and it is unlikely that immigrants cast their fortunes based on expectations of what the laws will look like 10 years down the road. It is also important to note that illegal immigration has always existed. Just because it will continue under the Act is not reason enough to reject the Act.

Opponents of the Act also assert that it is an expression of “amnesty.” Punishment should ensue for lawbreakers, not rewards. Americans value justice, and rightfully so. We pride ourselves on the fairness of the judicial system. We cheer when child molesters, rapists, and murderers are placed behind bars and express disgust when obvious suspect like O.J. Simpson escape punishment. However, in the case of these “illegal” immigrants, it is important to first assess who in fact is breaking the law. The beneficiaries of the DREAM Act are limited to those who immigrated as children, meaning that their parents’ actions caused them to break the law. It was broken not out of their own consent or knowledge. Therefore, the Act is not amnesty because the beneficiaries are not those who are directly responsible.

As Bob Dane of the Federation for American Immigration Reform says, opposing the act is not a form of punishment, but rather, “We’re merely not rewarding them for illegal actions of their parents.” In this case, the absence of the “reward” is the same as punishment. Forgoing the passage of the Act based on the parents’ unlawful actions denies the children the right to pursue life, liberty, and happiness. It causes harm and strips an innocent third party of equal opportunities.

Those who oppose the DREAM Act also claim “illegal is illegal.” Regardless of whether someone indirectly broke the law, the law must be respected and punishment must ensue – no ifs, ands, or buts. Because of such dutiful commitment to delivering what is just or what is fair – a blanket rule to punish all those perceived to be lawbreakers in all circumstances – humanity is often lost in the process, along with any critical examination of the causes that motivate so many to break the law and enter the U.S. illegally in the first place. Behind the broad term “illegal immigrant,” it is easy to dole out the judgments and punishments. But when we realize the economic and physical hardship these families endured and sought to deliver their children from by immigrating, it becomes much more difficult to cast blame and to withhold rights. The difficulty in characterizing immigrants as “illegal” increases immensely when one looks at the situation from the historical perspective of American intervention in the Mexican and South American economy. Measures such as NAFTA, which effectively forced Mexican and South American farmers out of the market and motivated their immigration to the only profiling agricultural industry—the U.S. From this perspective, the U.S. can be recognized as a power structure that sucks in cheap labor from collapsing foreign economies and then denies basic educational and civil rights to the exact people they are exploiting.

And yet, debate over the DREAM Act has even come from within immigrant rights groups. Faced with structural barriers to higher education, some will find serving in the military as their only option. Some undocumented immigrants would potentially be forced to risk their lives on the front lines of war for the promise of citizenship. The policy effectively indicates “Either you put your life on the line or you can’t legally live in America.” Not even American citizens are confined to this ultimatum. In the end, individuals are pressured to decide whether citizenship comes at too high a price.

In wake of the DREAM Act’s recent obstruction, the future remains unclear. While some senators favor introducing it as a stand-alone bill, others are unwilling to separate it from comprehensive immigration reform, requiring first that borders be secured.

What is clear is that the immigrant youth movement is growing every year, establishing a more vocal, national presence as politicians forestall the discussion of reform.
In the past year, the University of California has been shaken to its core. Walk-outs and demonstrations sound alongside the thunderous ground christened with grassroots victories. Acts of hate and intolerance make it clear that classifying our society as post-racial* is a delusion. Now the future of diversity in the university is at stake, as the Regents prepare to enact a set of admissions policies that students predict the UC is closing its doors to those who cannot afford it.

According to Ling Chi Wang, Professor Emeritus of Ethnic Studies, the new admissions policies represent the biggest overhauling change in admissions since the Master Plan was implemented in 1960.* The Master Plan, created to ensure quality and affordable higher education for California residents, established the very criteria admissions officers used to evaluate my application. Yet it was only adopted after three years of public hearings.

Perhaps what is most formidable about the new policies, then, is the underhanded way in which the UC passed them. In February 2009, UC President Mark Yudof presented a set of admissions policies to the Regents, who approved them without any public discussion from the communities that stand to be most impacted, namely low-income people of color. They face these changes:

Proponents of these changes assert that they will greatly expand the eligible applicant pool and promote fairness by offering “a comprehensive review” and expanding opportunity to excellent students who attend under-resourced schools. Yet the new criteria only seem to pose difficulties for students from such schools. For example, the majority of a-g courses must now be completed in three years of public hearings.

Perhaps what is most formidable about the new policies, then, is the underhanded way in which the UC passed them. In February 2009, UC President Mark Yudof presented a set of admissions policies to the Regents, who approved them without any public discussion from the communities that stand to be most impacted, namely low-income people of color. They face these changes:

Proponents of these changes assert that they will greatly expand the eligible applicant pool and promote fairness by offering “a comprehensive review” and expanding opportunity to excellent students who attend under-resourced schools. Yet the new criteria only seem to pose difficulties for students from such schools. For example, the majority of a-g courses must now be completed in three years of public hearings.

Perhaps what is most formidable about the new policies, then, is the underhanded way in which the UC passed them. In February 2009, UC President Mark Yudof presented a set of admissions policies to the Regents, who approved them without any public discussion from the communities that stand to be most impacted, namely low-income people of color. They face these changes:

Proponents of these changes assert that they will greatly expand the eligible applicant pool and promote fairness by offering “a comprehensive review” and expanding opportunity to excellent students who attend under-resourced schools. Yet the new criteria only seem to pose difficulties for students from such schools. For example, the majority of a-g courses must now be completed in three years of public hearings.

Perhaps what is most formidable about the new policies, then, is the underhanded way in which the UC passed them. In February 2009, UC President Mark Yudof presented a set of admissions policies to the Regents, who approved them without any public discussion from the communities that stand to be most impacted, namely low-income people of color. They face these changes:

Proponents of these changes assert that they will greatly expand the eligible applicant pool and promote fairness by offering “a comprehensive review” and expanding opportunity to excellent students who attend under-resourced schools. Yet the new criteria only seem to pose difficulties for students from such schools. For example, the majority of a-g courses must now be completed in three years of public hearings.

Perhaps what is most formidable about the new policies, then, is the underhanded way in which the UC passed them. In February 2009, UC President Mark Yudof presented a set of admissions policies to the Regents, who approved them without any public discussion from the communities that stand to be most impacted, namely low-income people of color. They face these changes:

Proponents of these changes assert that they will greatly expand the eligible applicant pool and promote fairness by offering “a comprehensive review” and expanding opportunity to excellent students who attend under-resourced schools. Yet the new criteria only seem to pose difficulties for students from such schools. For example, the majority of a-g courses must now be completed in three years of public hearings.

Perhaps what is most formidable about the new policies, then, is the underhanded way in which the UC passed them. In February 2009, UC President Mark Yudof presented a set of admissions policies to the Regents, who approved them without any public discussion from the communities that stand to be most impacted, namely low-income people of color. They face these changes:

Proponents of these changes assert that they will greatly expand the eligible applicant pool and promote fairness by offering “a comprehensive review” and expanding opportunity to excellent students who attend under-resourced schools. Yet the new criteria only seem to pose difficulties for students from such schools. For example, the majority of a-g courses must now be completed in three years of public hearings.
On Oct. 8, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) proudly announced that it had deported more undocumented immigrants in the 2010 fiscal year than any other in U.S. history. With nearly 400,000 official deportations, this policy shift towards border enforcement and policing immigrant communities seems indicative of a broader political shift.

The first California gubernatorial debate between Republican candidate Meg Whitman and Democratic candidate Jerry Brown revealed that the two shared at least one political conviction. When questioned about their stance on immigration, both candidates echoed the need to strengthen U.S. borders in order to halt further undocumented immigration. Whitman also stressed the need to conduct workplace raids, and eliminate sanctuary city policies in an effort to purge the state of its undocumented population.

The stance of California’s two major gubernatorial candidates reflects the simplification of the immigration debate on both the state and federal levels. Whitman, Brown and other politicians continue to reduce the process of immigration -- specifically, undocumented immigration -- to a discourse that categorizes immigrants as either legal or illegal.

Policies that emphasize increased border enforcement conflate the issue of illegal immigration with the Southwest border. The logic of border enforcement and wall building scapegoats Mexican and Latin American immigrants and assigns a racial understanding to the idea of the illegal immigrant.

Targeting Latinos through political discourse and public policy creates an inaccurate and reductive understanding of immigration flows into the U.S. Scapegoating does not just unfairly target one community, it fundamentally excludes other communities from the discussion and makes their particular persecution and resistance invisible.

Since 2002, the U.S. has deported more than 200 Cambodian American refugees to Cambodia, with five being deported as recent as the beginning of this September. The ongoing process of deportation is the result of legislation enacted in 1996 and a nominally bilateral repatriation agreement between the U.S. and Cambodia.

Two pieces of legislation -- the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) -- expanded the definition of aggravated felonies, as well as instituting a mandatory detention and deportation policy for non-citizens that have committed certain criminal offenses.

The legislation that made deportation mandatory was also retroactive, and the 2002 repatriation treaty allowed for the detention of convicted Cambodian Americans that had already served their time well before either policy was enacted. All of the Cambodian American refugees detained and deported under these laws entered the U.S. and lived here as legal permanent residents, but their status as “non-citizens” made them subject to a harsher set of consequences for their past actions.

Individuals deported entered and lived in the U.S. legally as refugees and legal permanent residents. Many grew up in the U.S. their whole adult life, and have no recollection of the country they are being deported to.

In a 1958 Supreme Court case, Chief Justice Earl Warren asserted, “Citizenship is man’s basic right for it is nothing less than the right to have rights.” The continued detention and deportation of Cambodian Americans constitutes an unequal level of punishment imposed on a community defined by their national origin and citizenship status.

Mandatory detention and deportation of legal permanent residents with criminal records reveals the ways that individuals and groups can be arbitrarily made to shift between legal residents and illegal -- qualified for detention and deportation. Prior to the passage of the IIRIRA in 1996, courts were allowed to review immigration and deportation cases, and could make exceptions based on the personal history of the defendant and the nature of their crimes. Now, even individuals that committed seemingly innocuous offenses are being sentenced to deportation.

Caught up in the initial surge of deportations of Cambodian Americans, Sor Vann was deported in August of 2002. Vann was first convicted of indecent exposure for urinating in public and then sentenced to probation. Vann was arrested again for urinating in public and convicted of violating his probation. This parole violation constituted an aggravated felony charge, and led to Vann’s detention and deportation under the provisions of the IIRIRA.

The lack of discretion in individual cases is underscored by an assumption of the criminality of the migrant and shows how arbitrary it is for a legal permanent resident to become undesirably and illegal.

ICE identifies itself as the “largest investigative agency in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS),” which indicates the importance assigned to it by the federal government. ICE’s role as a part of the DHS essentially situates the immigrant as a national threat. Politicians such as Whitman and Brown scapegoat certain communities in order to establish a political platform.

The lack of discretion in individual cases is underscored by an assumption of the criminality of the migrant and shows how arbitrary it is for a legal permanent resident to become undesirably and illegal.

ICE identifies itself as the “largest investigative agency in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS),” which indicates the importance assigned to it by the federal government. ICE’s role as a part of the DHS essentially situates the immigrant as a national threat. Politicians such as Whitman and Brown scapegoat certain communities in order to establish a political platform.

Vann’s case is not uncommon among those detained and deported by ICE. ICE’s Oct. 8 press release proudly announced that of the nearly 400,000 people deported, “more than 195,000 were convicted of crimes, including murder, sex offenses and drug violations.” This type of language continues to criminalize the immigrant, specifically highlighting the most violent of crimes that people commit. These rhetorical strategies are specifically employed to create paranoia and anti-immigrant sentiment, and justify the drastic total increase in deportations over the past years.

However, the discourse ICE uses to justify its record level seemingly belies some of their own statistics. The DHS itself notes that of 128,345 people deported due to criminal activity in 2009, 29.6 percent were deported for “dangerous drug activity”, “15.9% for traffic offenses”, and “15.4% for immigration offenses” (a mere total of 60.9 percent). Sexual assaults in comparison, constituted 2.2 percent of offenses for criminal deportees in 2009.

“Comprehensive immigration reform” is a political buzzword that has been tossed around by both major political parties, but it does not seem any closer to realization -- especially in a post-SB1070 landscape. The White House has been demonstrating a conflicted stance toward immigration. Obama pledged to support the passage of the federal DREAM Act, but ICE detention and deportation are higher under this administration than ever before.

The case of Vann and other unjustly detained people indicates a severe problem in the way immigration policy is being set and enforced. Every person is a culprit that faces the same drastic consequences, despite the individual nature of their character and crimes.

However, on August 20, 2010, the DHS issued a memo that would dismiss about 17,000 deportation cases of people whom had citizenship applications pending approval by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. This is a step in the right direction, but also reflective of how clogged our system is, and the deliberate status of non-citizens in the U.S. If citizenship is “nothing less than the right to have rights,” these rights were not even guaranteed for individuals legally applying for citizenship.

Further, even people that have entered and lived in the country legally are at risk of more severe punishment than those that are citizens. If the federal government role is to protect the civil rights of its population, it is imperative that they fulfill the promise of comprehensive reform, and recognize the equal rights of non-citizens and the undocumented.

It is crucial to understand the growing concern over immigration, and the effect it has on our communities. The increase of detention and deportation as a method to combat unauthorized immigration has a huge impact on the Asian Pacific American community, but their persecution is less visible due to political rhetoric that focuses xenophobia and animosity on Latinos and the Southwest border.

ICE apprehensions of undocumented Chinese immigrants rose 33 percent from 2008 to 2009. A report by the DHS estimates that the Philippines, India, China and Korea are among the top 10 national origins of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. These reports, as well as the particular persecution of Cambodian Americans, show that APA communities are targeted by immigration enforcement.

Immigrants, documented or undocumented, are a particularly vulnerable community and are legally persecuted in a fundamentally unjust way. Immigrant rights are an issue of social justice; they draw directly into the U.S.’s constitutional promise of equal rights, due process and basic compassion.

The discrimination and persecution of immigrants cuts across racial and ethnic lines. It affects all of our communities, albeit in different ways. To be locked up and shut out of the place you grew up in, to be punished disproportionately simply because of the happenstance of your birth, to be marginalized based on your race, national origin or citizenship status; these are issues, among many others, that should inform and inspire critical resistance and desire for social change in our communities.

[Image: photo courtesy of newsandimages.com]

Caught up in the initial surge of deportations of Cambodian Americans, Sor Vann was deported in August of 2002.
Jeremy Lin shoots the hoops in confronting racialization

Jeremy Lin goes for the drive in a close game against UConn.

Jeremy Lin goes for the drive in a close game against UConn.

Jeremy Lin shoots the hoops in confronting racialization

Jeremy Lin goes for the drive in a close game against UConn.

Jeremy Lin shoots the hoops in confronting racialization

Jeremy Lin goes for the drive in a close game against UConn.

Jeremy Lin shoots the hoops in confronting racialization

Jeremy Lin goes for the drive in a close game against UConn.
Asian Americans in the dance community find success on their own terms

“Hawaii, New York, New Orleans, New Jersey, [Philadelphia], Dallas, Houston, Vancouver,” said Matt Nguyen, also known as “Dumbo” of the hip hop dance group Poreotics, naming the places he has performed at since winning MTV’s America’s Best Dance Crew (ABDC).

Asian Americans compose only five percent of the nation’s population, and most of them live on the West Coast. It is incredible that a group of Asian Americans could venture into parts of America where Asian Americans have a very limited presence and draw any sort of crowd at all. That is exactly what the Poreotics have achieved.

The lack of Asian American representation is compounded by industries like Hollywood that commonly neglect the active presence of Asian Americans in the hip hop dance community. Movies like “Step Up 3” only feature two Asian American dancers, and earlier dance films, such as “Breakin'” (1984) and “Wild Style” (1983), did not showcase any Asian American dancers. Such casting decisions hint at the industry’s unspoken racial phobia of Asian Americans in major roles. It is obviously detrimental to the progress of the Asian American image in the media if representation itself cannot be obtained.

“Honestly, in my experience, [Asian Americans] around me have always loved dance,” said Myron Marten, one of the coordinators for World of Dance (WOD). “I think seeing it on Youtube, newspapers, and television [made] everyone think it’s now just happening for Asian Americans, but I think it’s been around for a while.”

Asian Americans are a very active part of the dance community, as exemplified by the fact that the Poreotics and the Main Stacks, Berkeley’s first and only competitive hip hop dance team, are scheduled to perform at the upcoming hip hop festival, WOD San Francisco 2010, in Vallejo, CA. WOD is two and a half years old and has venues across the nation.

Events such as WOD expose the prevalence of Asian Americans in the hip hop dance community, allowing groups to gain exposure based purely on talent. The industry, on the other hand, can cap the number of Asian Americans in a certain film or television show. Asian Americans have always been skilled enough to have a large presence in the hip hop dance scene, but they’ve never had the opportunity to showcase their talent in the wider pop culture due to industry barriers. With the popularization of such events, Asian Americans no longer need the industry to give them any limelight because they can seek it for themselves.

“Well for ABDC, you can’t just stop a team from coming in because they have seven Asians. You won’t stop somebody from joining your team just because they’re a specific color, and I think in that sense hip hop dance is colorblind. But I don’t know if I can say the same thing for the industry,” said Denise Chan, one of the executive directors of Main Stacks.

“I started dancing when I was young, and I started with ballet and Chinese folk dance. I went to a hip hop show when I was in high school and I was like, ‘Dude, I want to be on stage, and I want to do that.’ It was just a sense of independence. If you go to any collegiate hip hop team nowadays, you’ll see Asians in it.”

Hip hop is appealing to Asian American youths because it represents freedom and it’s different from what is expected of the “model minority.” Asian Americans are not expected to excel in areas such as dance or art and are only expected to pursue economically viable careers such as that of a doctor or an engineer. However, that’s far from true. Dance is a very real dream for many Asian Americans, who rarely had the chance to appear on television as dancers until now.

“There’s a lot of [Filipino] dancers, but when you step into the industry world, Asians aren’t that big,” said Nguyen. “A lot of people who do America’s Best Dance Crew are street dancers. They’re not industry.”

The industry, or popular media, does not have the right to ignore the racial dynamics of hip hop dance. While it’s convenient to view American society as a dichotomy between black and white, it’s also necessary to acknowledge the presence of other groups as well.

Mainstream media needs to accurately portray the diversity of America so that Americans may attain a better gauge for the racial dynamics of this nation. A perspective that is actually inclusive of the Asian American community would allow broader representation of society as a whole.

“From commercials to acting to television, we were in the background back then,” said Marten. “I think the industry wanted that certain look. But times have changed, and there is no certain look. It’s diversity that’s needed.”

Earlier this year, there were rumors circulating through the internet that Randy Jackson, executive producer of ABDC, was going to place a cap on the amount of Asian Americans who could be on the show. “That ridiculous rumor has since been proven false. While this rumor reveals the unrest of some towards Asian Americans, it is also a clear testament to the growth of Asian Americans in the media and hip hop dance community.

More Asian Americans in the limelight can only result in more success for the community. Most stereotypes originate from media misrepresentation of Asian Americans as only nerds, therefore self-representation is necessary to bandage the ills of that misconception. Self-representation is happening because Asian Americans have managed to flourish independently from the industry through mediums such as ABDC, WOD, or Youtube.

“As examples of these ‘atypical’ Asian Americans become more common, people would start believing [in them]. It includes people who would identify with them like other Asian Americans. And if you can identify with someone and you can see them succeed at anything, then you’re going to believe in yourself more,” said Ramon Bistiana, the other executive director of Main Stacks.

As Asian Americans, it is our duty to support those artists who choose to pursue different paths because they are in essence pioneers. The WOD event will take place from 3 p.m. to midnight on Nov. 13 at the Solano Fairgrounds. Main Stacks is also hosting their first dance competition on Nov. 14 in Hayward’s Chabot College Center from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Asian Americans have long endured the mainstream media’s exclusion of their presence in the hip hop dance community through a lack of representation in film and television. Their endurance can only be attributed to the fact that attention isn’t as much of a priority as enjoying the act of dance itself.

“Just do what makes you happy,” said Nguyen. “Always be yourself, and do what you love.”

“You won’t stop somebody from joining your team just because they’re a specific color, and I think in that sense hip hop dance is colorblind”
A Day with Jennifer Pae: Understanding An API Political Candidate for November 2010

by kristy kim

I hear good news that four Korean Americans in their 20s and 30s are running in the upcoming California municipal election on Nov. 2: Jane Kim in San Francisco, Jennifer Pae in Oakland, Potan Gee in Fullerton and Jerry Kong in Buena Park.

Unlike their parents who were hard working middle-class immigrants that had no choice but to work all day to support their family, these second-generation Korean American candidates are able to actively participate in social work. Moreover, they hope to represent all Americas beyond the Korean and Asian communities in the near future.

A few weeks ago, Pae (29) visited the UC Berkeley campus and met hardboiled. As the only Asian American candidate running for Oakland city council, Pae is motivated to work hard. She knew exactly what she wanted to achieve: regional economic development and regional security.

Last Sunday, I visited Pae’s campaign office in Oakland. When I walked into the office, Jennifer was busy planning her election campaign. She was about to leave to meet absentee voters in her election district. Campaign staffers and I accompanied her.

First Jennifer and I met a couple who just moved to Oakland a few days ago. It was still early so they looked like they had just woken up. Jennifer asked them what issues concerned them the most.

“We recently moved here. So far, our biggest concern is public safety. Oh, the other day, I heard gun shots,” said the man. Jennifer explained how she would increase the budget for security and improve the management of these funds. Later on, we met a mother from Vietnam who said, “Next year my first daughter will enter elementary school. I hope she adapts well. I need various after school programs which will keep her busy. I don’t want my kid to waste time in front of the TV!”

Most people in Oakland are seriously worried about maintaining the public order. Specifically, parents in District 2 confront two big issues: neighborhood safety and the education of their children.

On the way back to the office, I asked Jennifer, “Is there any special reason why you are so strongly attached to this district?” She replied without any hesitation, “I am really captivated by the uniqueness of Oakland. This area has a great diversity, ethnically and economically.”

My visit to Oakland ran much longer than I had initially expected because everyone we visited and their stories were so interesting that I could not bear to leave early.

Finally, when we went back to the office after our four hour door knocking campaign, Jennifer’s mother and younger sister came into the office. They are helping my campaign by contacting Korean voters,” said Jennifer.

As Jennifer left for Chinatown in a hurry to meet more absentee voters, she offered a few words for hardboiled readers, “We need to be the decision maker. Let’s get involved and be the leader!”

Why do you go door knocking?
I go back to the basics because I want to listen to my voters’ voice.

What was your most embarrassing moment during the campaign?
Some people assume that I am 18 or something, actually I am totally not! They ask me, ‘Aren’t you too young for the council?’ And then I answer readily, ‘My mother was working, learning English and raising two young children by herself when she was in my age.’ It makes them quiet.

What is your most important motivation for running in this election?
Our society needs new strong leadership. I am the first one who went to college in my family. My mom raised me and my sister by herself. Lessons from my mother always motivate me to work hard.

What are your concerns for Oakland?
Education and immigration.

When did you decide to enter politics?
From my college years, I believe that I am not here today without scholarships. Education for me and my sister was totally dependent on social services, such as library and after school programs. It made me realize the importance of public policies.

Do you have a role model?
Patsy Mink. [Patsy Matsu Takemoto Mink (December 16, 1927–September 28, 2002) was an American politician from the U.S. state of Hawaii. Mink was a Japanese American and member of the Democratic Party. She was also the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.]

With one month left, what is your plan for campaigning?
Right now, it is quite intense. My opposition is more experienced than me. I will do my best to meet more people and let them realize that Oakland needs a new engine to make change.

Q&A Session with Jennifer Pae

Why do you go door knocking?
I go back to the basics because I want to listen to my voters’ voice.

What was your most embarrassing moment during the campaign?
Some people assume that I am 18 or something, actually I am totally not! They ask me, ‘Aren’t you too young for the council?’ And then I answer readily, ‘My mother was working, learning English and raising two young children by herself when she was in my age.’ It makes them quiet.

What is your most important motivation for running in this election?
Our society needs new strong leadership. I am the first one who went to college in my family. My mom raised me and my sister by herself. Lessons from my mother always motivate me to work hard.

What are your concerns for Oakland?
Education and immigration.

How do you do door knocking?
I go back to the basics because I want to listen to my voters’ voice.

What was your most embarrassing moment during the campaign?
Some people assume that I am 18 or something, actually I am totally not! They ask me, ‘Aren’t you too young for the council?’ And then I answer readily, ‘My mother was working, learning English and raising two young children by herself when she was in my age.’ It makes them quiet.

What is your most important motivation for running in this election?
Our society needs new strong leadership. I am the first one who went to college in my family. My mom raised me and my sister by herself. Lessons from my mother always motivate me to work hard.

What are your concerns for Oakland?
Education and immigration.

When did you decide to enter politics?
From my college years, I believe that I am not here today without scholarships. Education for me and my sister was totally dependent on social services, such as library and after school programs. It made me realize the importance of public policies.

Do you have a role model?
Patsy Mink. (Patsy Matsu Takemoto Mink (December 16, 1927–September 28, 2002) was an American politician from the U.S. state of Hawaii. Mink was a Japanese American and member of the Democratic Party. She was also the Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs.)

With one month left, what is your plan for campaigning?
Right now, it is quite intense. My opposition is more experienced than me. I will do my best to meet more people and let them realize that Oakland needs a new engine to make change.

Taking off the Quipao

How Chinese American designers caught the New York fashion elite by storm

by yifan zhang

New York Fashion Week took place last month, between Sept. 9 and 16. The scene was littered with models, some of whom (myself), fall fashion week showcases what designers have to offer for the coming spring and summer. Most noticeably, this year features a plethora of Asian American designers.

For instance, Vera Wang released her spring/summer 2011 collection, which she describes as a “fusion of East meets West” with Asian inspired patterns and fabrics. In addition to that, the Council of Fashion Designers of America honored three relatively new Asian American designers with awards earlier this year: Jason Wu for women’s wear, Richard Chai for men’s wear and Alexander Wang for accessory design. Although these designers are not household names, these up-and-coming stars are slowly gaining recognition within the fashion industry and the wider fashion community.

More well established designers have blazed the trail for following generations. Vera Wang is currently the most well known Asian American designer. She is already a household name, labelling everything from shoes to fragrances. She is most famous for her bridal gowns, which are featured widely in mainstream movies and television shows such as “Sex in the City.”

Anna Sui, another big name Asian American fashion designer, is known for her patchwork with the vivid colors of her fabrics creating beautiful contrasts. Sui is famous for her versatility, ranging from Victorian to Eighties punk.

Even though most of these designers are sons and daughters of successful immigrants, their lives vary from the typical “American Dream” narrative. Their personal backgrounds disprove the stereotypical immigrant narrative of rags to riches.

The life stories of Asian American designers showcase the diversity within the Chinese immigrant experience. On one end of the socioeconomic spectrum are these designers who come from upper-class immigrant backgrounds. Vera Wang epitomizes this group of designers. Her grandfather was the war minister to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. Her family fled China during the Chinese Civil War and moved to New York. They eventually settled well into their new lives in the United States. Her mother became a translator for the United Nations, while her father ran a medical company.

Vera Wang lived a very upper-class lifestyle. Her parents were able to give her a private education in New York City’s exclusive Chapin School.

Her childhood mirrors that of Vera Wang, who became an avid creator of the arts. After finishing high school, she went to Sarah Lawrence College, often ranked as the most expensive college in the nation. Her connections thereafter landed her a position at Vogue Magazine and eventually her own fashion label.

Other designers had similar, but not as extravagant, backgrounds. Jason Wu is the son of a French educated lawyer and his grandmother was a Chinese diplomat. Her family eventually settled in Detroit. Alexander Wang attended the Stevenson School, a private boarding school in Monterey County, California.

Designer Derek Lam has said that he “grew up around clothes.” His grandfather ran a factory, producing wedding dresses. His parents ran a clothing import and export business in San Francisco. His experience has helped him to navigate the fast changing Chinese American fashion scene.

Chinese Americans originated from sweatshop laborers, worked their way up to running clothing businesses, and eventually became designers.

Even though these are success stories, none of them can be defined as rags-to-riches stories. Of course, not every Asian American designer grew up in the proverbial lap of luxury. However, each designer mentioned above had a relatively comfortable childhood compared to many Chinese immigrants who were not as financially well established in either China or the United States.

Another striking characteristic of Asian American designers is that they are predominately Chinese. One possibility is that a small vanguard of successful Chinese American designers inspired the second generation of Chinese designers, which in turn inspire and support a third generation of Chinese American designers. This multiplier effect seems to not be happening in other Asian American groups because they did not have that initial group of successful fashion designers to start the trend.

Even though many Asian Americans come from working class backgrounds, a good portion of us come from financially able families who may have fallen on hard times. The success of the Asian American community is not solely due to hard work and innate intelligence; that would be an oversimplification.

The successes of the Asian American community are also due to personal perseverance, initial wealth, familial education, class structure and other factors. Wealth and success must come from a prior input of wealth and success.

We should not perpetuate the immigrant “American Dream” if it does not hold true. Assuming Asian Americans have failed to rise from the lower socioeconomic class draws people to conclude that all Asian American have a natural penchant for upward mobility: We do not.