

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: DISSEMBLING DIVERSITIES: ON “MIDDLED”
ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN ACTIVISM AND THE
RACIALIZATION OF SOPHISTICATION

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Dissembling Diversities: On Asian Pacific American Arts Activism and the Racialization of Sophistication interrogates how contemporary Asian Pacific American (APA) arts activism and representation has been shaped by the bureaucratic administration of “diversity” after 9/11/2001. Through close readings of texts, it specifically examines Asian American representation within scripted network television programming, graphic novels and comic strips, and indie rock as iterations of panethnic activism in media advocacy, graphical storytelling, and the independent media arts. It understands these cultural forms and diversity itself through the framework of middlebrow culture, which is constituted of texts disseminated through popular culture that normalize the accumulation of cultural capital – or non-financial embodiments of class status such as education and literacy – as cultural citizenship. *Dissembling Diversities* makes evident how the elevation of these texts through discourses of “Art” and “diversity” relies on the association of cultural capital with whiteness, particularly through the racial exclusivity of their representations and through how the forms’ history of class elevation expresses a white/anti-Black divide.

Because of its dependence on cultural capital, the visibility for issues facing Asian American communities as expressed through the creation of art participates in the racialization of sophistication. In other words, deployments by APA artists and activists of traits associated with cultural sophistication – such as artistry, learnedness, worldliness, and status – can both illustrate Asian Americans’ contributions to a culture of diversity, while reinforcing other racial, sexual, and gender exclusions through class hierarchy and respectability. However, APA activism that contest the exclusivity of cultural capital can challenge these white/anti-Black class schemes. As such, *Dissembling Diversities* not only critiques APA arts activism’s complicities with the racialization of sophistication, but also examines how it can turn sophistication against itself in imagining past “diversity.”

DISSEMBLING DIVERSITIES:
ON “MIDDLED” ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN ACTIVISM
AND THE RACIALIZATION OF SOPHISTICATION

by

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For the artists, activists, organizers, scholars, and teachers
who might create the blueprints for this world anew

To Keiren, Koji, Keizo, Emiko, Megumi, and PJ,
that my work may touch your Asian American lives

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This project that I really did not want to be about me ended up being based in who I am. I have often felt an outsider to APA panethnic life. Though I attended the University of California, Irvine, a campus often hailed as the Asian American success story given its minority-majority enrollment, my upbringing through rural farm life and punk rock fantasies when Asian Americans were supposed to be suburban model minorities left me alienated from APA peers. My diversity training as a student affairs paraprofessional led to my involvement in antiracist organizing, but “whitewashed” is a term I know too well because of my Japanese American family’s post-Internment lack of a connection to a homeland. I have sometimes felt isolated and jealous of Asian Americanists at peer institutions – the highest attendance at an event while I was involved with a campus APA graduate student organization (which remains without a name due to internal debates that never resolved) was around 8, and I have had two very different relationships with the Asian American Studies Program under two very different Program Directors. I approach this project as an outsider who is nonetheless interested and invested.

Like this dissertation, these acknowledgements could maybe be half the length. Yet, like the aesthetic manipulations and capitalist abstractions critiqued throughout this study of APA arts activism, such resemblances of expertise and professional authority feel dissembling. In other words, though this dissertation is about capitalist structures, cultural hierarchy, and sophistication, these acknowledgements will be too long, too intimate, and just *unclassy*. Maybe these rambling outpourings of gratitude can disassemble the pretenses of lone geniuses ushering forth their brilliance in a vacuum that predominate discourses of the dissertating process.

In part because of the racialization of sophistication, my encounter with the academy has been at times hostile and always uneven – but I have found incredible people and communities to push me though. I have been blessed with the greatest dissertation committee. Nancy Struna, American Studies will one day require its students to read articles

about how the fierce commitment you have shown to faculty and graduate students has shaped the field. The popular myth is that I marched into Kandice Chuh's office and declared that she will love me; the first part is not far from the truth, but the reality is that Kandice's warmth and intellectual generosity immediately modeled for me what it would mean to be a colleague invested in critical solidarities. Though I am still working on appropriate execution, Sangeeta Ray taught me how to walk in a room, make your presence known, and be memorable for your charm, wit, and mind. Kandice and Sangeeta led me to minority discourse and theoretical reading practices, and forever changed my thinking. Sheri L. Parks has persistently demonstrated the necessary connection between scholarship and actual lives, and has shown me that critique can also emanate from how we conduct ourselves within the institution. Janelle Wong has been my toughest critic and most steadfast mentor; everything I know about balancing administration, teaching, research, and living, and doing it all well, comes from you. You have brought me back to Asian American Studies not once, but twice, and I hope I can repay the favor by making this return stick for good.

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When I compiled these chapters into a single work, I was struck by this dissertation's preoccupation with love in its manifold forms. Though the rush to love will neither rescue us from capital nor correct our political investments, love does provide the emotional and psychic reservoir that can make things happen. To quote a great scholar, the AMST 2008 cohort has been the best – ups to Gina Callahan for lunches and newsletters; Yujie Julie Chen, for sticking it out with me; and Portia Barker Hopkins, who coined "Doug Love." Jessica Kenyatta Walker and Paul Nezaum Saiedi have been exceptional friends who have pushed my thinking and my capacity to care; so too are Darius Bost, always one step ahead of me; and Jennie Chaplin, who makes sure I've been fed. Thanks to Kache Boyd, Kirsten

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	ix
<u>Introduction</u>	
Disassembling Diversities: On “Middled” Asian Pacific American Activism and the Racialization of Sophistication	1
<i>If It Refuses To Be The Middle: Diversity and Asian American Middleness</i>	6
<i>A Hipper Than Thou Attitude: Middlebrow Culture, Intangible Capital, and the Racialization of Sophistication</i>	18
<i>Some Very Familiar and Tired Narratives But Also New and Exciting Promises: The Terminology and Methodology of APA Arts Activism</i>	29
The APA Politics of “Art”	31
APA “Activism” in Representation	36
On <i>Disassembling Diversities</i>	40
<u>Chapter 1</u>	
<i>Missing From the American Social Fabric: Asian American Inclusion, “Culture,” and the Privatization of Diversity in Quality TV</i>	48
<i>Somebody Says Something and Somebody Else Says Something and Then We Cry: Grey’s Anatomy and the Equalizing Feeling of Difference</i>	55
<i>Spare Me the White Girl/Cultural Divide Love: Modernity, Capital, and Racialized Tradition</i>	59
<i>I Am Rising Above: “Post-Racial” Remembering and the Feeling of Blackness</i>	67
<i>Diversity Times Three: Modern Family’s Diverse Modernity and the Interior Life of Difference</i>	80
<i>Her First Word was Every Gay Father’s Worst Nightmare: “Diversity,” “Tradition,” and Personhood</i>	.82
<i>Do the Best with What I’ve Been Given: “Better People” and the Racialization of Cultural Capital</i>	92
<i>The Disturbing, but Hopeful Picture: The Asian American Justice Center’s APA Media Advocacy and the Public Life of Stereotype Critique</i>	104
<i>With Whom They Have Little Contact: On Epistemologies of Quality and Quantity</i>	106
<i>True for All Members: On Public Race and Private Sexuality</i>	112
<i>Good People Raising Their Babies Right: The Privatization of Diversity and Post-9/11/2001 Futures of Asian American Inclusion</i>	118

Chapter 2

<i>A World Without Heroes: Rehabilitating Citizenship through Melancholic Masculinity in APA Graphical Storytelling</i>	129
<i>A People with a Lot of Masks: Secret Identities and the Gendered Wounds of History</i>	137
<i>This Sort of Shadow History: Rehabilitating a History of Manhood</i>	139
<i>Your Story Here: Asian American Visibility and “Postracial” Antiracism</i>	154
<i>Real People Despite: Secret Asian Man and the Value of Diversity</i>	164
<i>A Visual Thing: The Superficial Sight of Race’s Wounding</i>	168
<i>Made in China: On SAM’s Calculus of Diversity and Feeling</i>	176
<i>Messy Humanity: Race, Status, and Desire in Adrian Tomine’s Shortcomings</i>	186
<i>GenerAsian Y: New Optics and the Bourgeois-Bohemian Critique of Critique</i>	188
<i>Certain ... Connotations: The Aesthetic Estrangement of Sexual Politics</i>	197
<i>Changing the Game: On Grassroots Racial Projects in “Art”</i>	203

Chapter 3

<i>Did You Think When I Opened My Mouth: Model Minority Racial Projects and Disassembling Independence in Asian American Indie Rock</i>	213
<i>A Country Called “Chinese”: The Racial Grammars of Asian American “Talent”</i>	221
<i>You Suck or Need to Get Better: The Sound of Model Minority Racial Projects</i>	224
<i>Everybody Has Their Place: Inhabiting “Asian American” from Above and Below</i>	234
<i>Not Stories about Race, Per Se:</i>	241
<i>To See the Light of Day: On Race-Conscious Genealogies of Independence</i>	244
<i>I Work: Sexuality, Selling Out, and the “Per Se” of Asian Americanist Critique</i>	252
<i>Beyond Talent: “Art + Community” in The Tuesday Night Project</i>	262
<i>Our Values Then Guide Our Choices and Our Actions: “Art + Community” as Legitimization</i>	265
<i>Something that is Energetic: “Art + Community” as Affective Praxis</i>	277
<i>Identify with the Struggles of Others: Indie Towards an APA Independence</i>	284
Conclusion: Disassembling Diversity	213
Epilogue: <i>But I Am Not the Revolution</i> : On Activism and Asian American Middlebrow Subjectivity	301
Works Cited	315

Introduction :: Dissembling Diversities

On “Middled” Asian Pacific American Activism and the Racialization of Sophistication

Two events pertaining to Asian American communities, one of which responded to the other in an illustrative dynamic of group agency against Asian American racialization, coincided with the genesis of this dissertation in 2012. The first was the June 19, 2012 publication of the Pew Research Center’s report, *The Rise of Asian Americans*. The 285-page report focuses on Asian Americans as “the New Immigrants” with a purpose described as “illuminating [the] story” of “the latest leading actors in this great American drama.”¹ Using primarily 2010 U.S. Census data and survey information, the report highlights this population as “the highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States,” and claims that Asian Americans “place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work and career success.”² Such citations of upward mobility and heteronormative class aspirations reiterate a newer iteration of the model minority myth by celebrating liberal migration as the instantiation of liberal equality. Liberal migration, as represented by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, structurally favored white-collar migration from Asia to sustain a capitalism that favors white bodies.³ To maintain liberal migration’s colorblind veneer, newer iterations of the model minority myth fantasize about Asian beliefs in educational attainment and household order, such as those asked after by the

¹ Pew Research Center, Preface to *The Rise of Asian Americans* (2013), “Updated Edition, April 04, 2013,” <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/04/Asian-Americans-new-preface-04-2013.pdf>.

² Pew Research Center, *The Rise of Asian Americans* (2013), 1, available online at <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/>.

³ The model minority myth is a Cold War ideological trope deployed against visible African American civil rights organizing that claimed, because of their class mobility through accommodation in spite of exclusion and incarceration, Chinese and Japanese Americans proved that systemic inequality does not exist. For more on the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, see Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U.P., 2005).

Center's surveys, to mark the inclusion of non-white bodies in capitalism as the affirmation of U.S. exceptionalism.

The Rise of Asian Americans, though unexceptional in its findings, signals how the model minority myth has become so naturalized that it registers as social fact to non-Asian Americans and Asian Americans alike. While the Cold War's politicians and media pundits propagated the model minority myth to manage the U.S.'s image, the Pew Research Center describes itself as a "nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world" through social science research.⁴ Many of the participants in the Pew Research Center's 2012 Asian American Survey reported feeling indifference as to whether racial discrimination affected their educational and career outcomes, and the report argued: "The Asian-American label itself doesn't hold much sway with Asian Americans." Both of the Pew Report's selected measures suggest that Asian Pacific American (APA) panethnic organizing is past tense by pointing to the contemporary ambivalence toward the 1960s and '70s Yellow Power movement's causes and appellation. What disappears in *The Rise of Asian Americans*' account is not only the inequality and alienation that characterizes Asian American communities, but genealogies of dissent against narratives such as the model minority.

The second event of 2012 that motivated this dissertation was the 30th anniversary of the murder of Vincent Chin, which was commemorated by Asian Pacific Americans for Progress, a national network of APAs dedicated to political action, through the June 23, 2012 "Standing Up: Then & Now" Nationwide Town Hall (stylistically abbreviated as VC30). The Town Hall was broadcast as a Google Hangout in 37 community centers in 24 states and

⁴ *Rise*, iii.

DC; the feed was also available publicly.⁵ Moderated by Phil Yu, founder of the blog Angry Asian Man and community celebrity, the panel connected Congressperson Judy Chu (CA-32), the Council on American-Islamic Relations Executive Director Zahra Billoo, OCA Executive Director Tom Hayashi, Asian American Justice Center Executive Director Mee Moua, 1Love Movement Co-Founder Mia-Lia Kiernan, and Philadelphia-based youth organizer Wei Chen to discuss the community legacies of the 1982 Vincent Chin case. Many of the speakers' initial presentations drew connections, such as between the malpractice of justice surrounding Vincent Chin's murder and the resulting campaigns for anti-hate crime legislation; between anti-Asian sentiment in U.S. politics, anti-Asian bullying, and extralegal hate crimes; and between episodes of anti-Asian state violence before and after 9/11/2001. VC30 reminded the APA community that Asian American history, founded around this dialectic of racist violence and APA community response, matters.

In this vein, after the VC30 panelists made their opening comments, Phil Yu asked a question about the Pew Report: "How can we push back when the media oversimplifies our community?" Congressperson Judy Chu responded to Yu's question, joking that, according to the report, "We are the happiest people in America."⁶ Chu's comments were summarized by her thesis statement on the Pew Report: "It presents a monolith instead of the diverse community." Citing the inability of the optimistic portrait of the Pew Report to explain the comparatively low educational attainment outcomes of Southeast Asian and Pacific Islanders as a central example, Chu contended: "We know that when we disaggregate the data, real

⁵ Google Hangout is a feature that facilitates a video conference call, and can also broadcast and record the feed. The feed is available online under username apapnational as the video, "VC 30 – 2012," at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koSaduKb8kk>.

⁶ Specifically, the report states, "They are more satisfied than the general public with their lives, finances and the direction of the country." <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/>

barriers exist.” *The Rise of Asian Americans* was amended in April 2013 to use data disaggregated by ethnicity, but manipulated that data to affirm the previous model minority findings, such as by calculating median household income without accounting for the number of workers per household – which would reflect many Asian Americans’ multigenerational and extended family households.⁷ At the end of the discussion, Chu offered: “If such a thing could happen to Vincent Chin, it could happen to anybody.” This discussion, which connected the Vincent Chin murder to *The Rise of Asian Americans*, illustrates how Asian American representations in the public sphere are haunted by model minority discourse, such as the “good life” homogenously projected by the Pew Report, and the threat of extralegal and state violence from which there is no protection, such as Vincent Chin’s death and the failed prosecution of Ronald Ebens.

However, if such a thing could happen to Vincent Chin, a trade worker in Detroit’s declining automotive industry during the 1980s’ structural realignment, then it is also possible that what happened to Vincent Chin could *not* happen to anybody. Contrary to the assertion that Asian Pacific America is constituted through diversity and not homogeneity, Chu turns back to that fundamental sameness for exigency: in the last instance, we can all be Vincent Chin. Of course, her position recognizes that income provides no shelter from racism, even given the plurality of Asian Americans’ class positions and identities that cannot be captured by a single category. Yet, this class diversity produces differential proximities to the specter of racial violence invoked by the iconography of Vincent Chin:

⁷ The amendments to the report focused less on the generally socioeconomically advantaged Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Indian American populations and included Bangladeshi, Burmese, Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, Pakistani, and Thai Americans as “U.S. Other Asians.”

some Asian Americans are made more vulnerable than others to harm, injury, and death.⁸ Indeed, Chu's takedown of the model minority myth was enabled by her education and credentials, themselves products and signifiers of capital. Aside from Congressperson Chu, the majority of the VC30 panelists were highly educated Executive Directors of nationally prominent APA organizations. Kiernan and Chen, who did not have such institutional locations and existed outside of California and the Beltway nexus, were notably allotted the least speaking time. VC30's central focus on uniting around the model minority myth and hate crimes eclipsed how the impact of Asian Americans' differential racialization, which includes the capacity to speak against this racialization, depends on financial, cultural, symbolic, and social capital.⁹ Most expansively, *Dissembling Diversities* asks: What are the conditions that enable "Asian American" as a political and cultural category to signify simultaneously the good life and harm? To begin an answer, *Dissembling Diversities* reads APA representations in media and popular arts – quality television, graphical storytelling, and indie rock, specifically – to examine how artists and producers, activist and advocacy organizations, and cultural texts negotiate Asian American racialization in this muddled space.

This introduction will contextualize *Dissembling Diversities*' three central interventions. Firstly, *Dissembling Diversities* examines representational projects under the banner of "diversity." Diversity here represents a discourse of recognition – one that, against

⁸ This dissertation thus understands racism materially as Ruth Wilson Gilmore does: as "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 28.

⁹ Even as I recognize how my own education is underwritten by the conditional privilege I have by being (East) Asian American, I do not brush off the violence that has beset Asian American communities, from the 1870s and 1880s anti-Chinese riots across the U.S. West to the Vincent Chin murder in 1982 to the anti-Arab and South Asian hate crimes after 9/11/2001 to the 2012 suicide under duress of Pvt. Danny Chen.

a consensus in Cultural Studies, I argue is of the post-globalization moment of 9/11/2001 – that makes knowing about difference a valued trait for some despite and because of differentiated life chances for others. Diversity has placed Asian Americans firmly in the middle of in its classed hierarchies of incorporative racialization, and, as such, *Dissembling Diversities* uses the lexicon of Critical Ethnic Studies and Queer of Color critique to unsettle this assimilation. Secondly, *Dissembling Diversities* addresses diversity as a middlebrow value, and makes evident the racializing hierarchies that operate through classed performances of cultural sophistication. As such, I define middlebrow culture historically, in its 1920s emergence and 1960s reemergence, and conceptually, as a product of cultural capital and symbolic capital, to illustrate how the middlebrow endures, despite not being named as such, in the U.S.’s reputedly classless culture through diversity. In this way, *Dissembling Diversities* understands class both as a structural location within capitalism, and as a self-conscious identity suggestive of that placement. Thirdly, *Dissembling Diversities* explores how classed hierarchies and diversity politics underwrite the ongoing and connected movements in APA arts activism that have enlivened panethnic identification and the possibility of social justice. I put forth theoretical and methodological considerations in conjoining “Asian Pacific American,” “Art,” and “activism.” Using the theoretical confrontation between Art and activism as a critique of institutionality and taken-for-granted perceptions, *Dissembling Diversities* holds out hope for the potential of APA arts activism specifically and panethnicity generally.

If It Refuses To Be The Middle:
Diversity and Asian American Middleness

Dissembling Diversities periodizes itself within post-9/11/2001 culture.¹⁰ Firstly, the interconnected APA activisms and representations of this study emerged chronologically after 2005, and at least one text per chapter grapples with the attacks on Manhattan and the Pentagon on 9/11/2001 and the resulting culture of terror. Secondly, *Dissembling Diversities* focuses on how APA activisms and representations negotiate diversity discourse, which I argue took on a heightened capacity to discipline through inclusion post-9/11/2001.¹¹ Jasbir Puar argues in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* that diversity post-9/11/2001 included mainstream feminism and movements for lesbian and gay assimilation within narratives of U.S. Exceptionalism to justify and disguise the racialized violence being done against phantasmic, “un-diverse” terrorist cultures – ones defined through a misogyny and homophobia projected onto an Orientalized Middle East. Evelyn Alsultany’s close readings of anti-hate crime print campaigns make clear how claims to U.S. cultural citizenship post-9/11/2001 deploy images of South Asian and Arab Americans performing class norms and heteronormativity as evidence of their worthiness for national inclusion.¹² Further, both Puar and Alsultany’s analyses address how the rejection of South and West Asian people domestically and abroad entailed the superficial, hypervisible, and uneven inclusion of racially minoritized groups to present an equality achieved through a diversity rendered exclusive to U.S. Exceptionalism.¹³ This section will thus expand on diversity as a

¹⁰ I respectfully use the full date instead of the popular parlance of “9/11” to displace the U.S. Exceptionalism that inheres in that usage. It is not the only September 11 animated by terror, such as the U.S.-backed Pinochet coup in Chile; and the racializing geopolitics attached to the popular term insist on the singularity of this event as “attacks,” as opposed to other acts of terrorism that are coded as “tragedies.”

¹¹ My use of “discourse” refers explicitly to the Foucauldian usage, referring not only to ideas and beliefs and contestations about the meaning of the term, but also how it is practiced institutionally and takes on material effects.

¹² Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke U.P., 2007), and Alsultany, “Selling American Diversity and Muslim American Nonprofit Advertising Post-9/11,” *American Quarterly* 59.3 (2007): 593-622.

¹³ To that end, it takes up the distinction that Jane Ward, through her interviews and analyses of participant observations, makes between *diversity* – “a material fact of difference” – and *diversity politics* – an ideological

cultural dominant endemic to Asian Americans' model and "middled" position within neoliberal racial schemes, in which the language of Civil Rights organizing has been absorbed to entrench further white/anti-Black racial hierarchies. In doing so, I will introduce a vocabulary for highlighting the disjuncture between Asian American racial formations, panethnicity, and racialization – the gap that animates this dissertation's viewpoint on APA arts activism.

On "Diversity"

Providing "diversity" with a history has been its own challenge: "diversity's" genesis as a term has been occluded because, as Sara Ahmed's *On Being Included: Racism and Institutional Life* illustrates, "diversity" sits too cleanly as a signifier and signified, a term often used and not often defined. As a liberal-centrist political vision, the 13 contributions in T. Elon Dancy II's collection on student affairs, *Managing Diversity: (Re)Visioning Equity on College Campuses* (2010), do not define what diversity is, but take it as both an inevitable fact of immigration and racial integration, and a buzzword to describe inclusion as liberal equality's realization. Dancy's introduction discusses diversity as "a skill to be performed well for students to succeed academically and socially,"¹⁴ and illustrates how the concept represents knowledge about social inequality that can be used to suture differentiated populations to preexisting institutional operations. Farther left on the political spectrum, Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011) explicitly critiques "neoliberal multiculturalism," or how discourses such as diversity "represent a certain set of economic policies as multicultural rights" in support of practices

project that manages difference through selective incorporation and disciplining normativity. Jane Ward, *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBT Activist Organizations* (Vanderbilt U.P., 2008), 48.

¹⁴ Dancy, 2.

and ideologies of global restructuring for free market capitalism. Diversity continues the late-20th century national doctrine of “multiculturalism,” in which ideologies of cultural pluralism merged with prevailing economic arrangements to make conditional inclusion appear as equality against exacerbating material stratifications.¹⁵ In both texts, diversity refers to histories of inequality, but without a specific reference to its own origins. This aporia of its emergence is evocative of diversity’s disassembling work, as its invocation performs a tremendous amount of affective and institutional labor that is seen as transcending its often material ineffectivity.

Christopher Newfield’s indictment of pseudointegration and the collapse of material remediation offers one specific inroad to the history of “diversity” through constitutional case law. Newfield argues: “Diversity acquired social influence not as a moderate mode in which to pursue racial equality but as an *alternative* to that pursuit.”¹⁶ Justice Lewis F. Powell’s opinion in *Board of Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) famously defended diversity apart from racial redistribution by contending that racial identification in admissions processes could only be used as a “plus factor” in choosing students – one consideration alongside “exceptional personal talents, unique work or service experience, leadership potential, maturity, demonstrated compassion, a history of overcoming disadvantage, ability to communicate with the poor, or other qualifications deemed important” to obtain what he called educational pluralism.¹⁷ Diversity had to be a

¹⁵ Melamed, *Represent and Destroy* (U. of Minnesota P., 2011), 40, 139; see also M. Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Duke U.P., 2006) and Jane Ward’s *Respectably Queer*, both of which also possess a strident critique of the institutional politics of diversity, also do not provide a history of the term inasmuch as they attend to the term’s effects through its deployment.

¹⁶ Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Harvard U. P., 2008), 113, emphasis original.

¹⁷ *Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978) at 317.

“compelling state interest,” demonstrating its quantifiable benefit (outside of confronting inequality) to be considered. This “plus factor” enfiguration, in which difference becomes identities of commensurable and apprehensible value, illustrates how diversity depends on but circulates as a discourse independent of racism and social justice.

Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s majority decision in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), which explicitly named global commerce and national security as two sites that benefit from diversity, furthered Powell’s summation of diversity as the instrumentalization of difference. To show that the University of Michigan’s race-conscious law school admission criteria did not engage in racial discrimination, O’Connor cites Professor Richard Lempert of the committee that drafted these policies to then argue: “this language did not purport to remedy past discrimination, but rather to include students who may bring to the Law School a perspective different from that of members of groups which have not been the victims of such discrimination.”¹⁸ As in *Bakke*, these admission policies were defended as educational autonomy because of this emphasis on plural perspectives over racial remediation: diversity would be a “plus factor” in the institution’s quality education. This diversity selectively incorporates difference, insofar as it increases the market value of an institution, but only views its impact as the exchange value of the perspectives of those who have experienced it for majoritarian classmates. Diversity is thus a classed value, as, in O’Connor’s majority view, it is beneficial to know about to succeed in the market and the state.¹⁹ *Dissembling Diversities* is not a neoconservative track against difference, but how diversity manipulates difference in such ways to serve white supremacy.

¹⁸ *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003), at 213.

¹⁹ To be clear, this is a glib reading of diversity admission policies; as Karen Shimakawa has suggested, such a position assumes that non-white students do not benefit from interracial contact or cross-cultural interaction.

“Middled” by Diversity

Two diverging *amicus curiae* briefs regarding *Grutter v. Bollinger* submitted by legal organizations claiming to represent Asian Americans illustrate the imagined place of Asian Americans in plus-factor diversity. One, by the Asian American Legal Foundation, supports Barbara Grutter in her case and her analogy that the admission policies discriminated not only against her, but against Asian Americans, through a “quota system.” The brief names the use of race as “odious” and “capricious” as a “proxy” that will “trammel individual rights” and reiterate anti-Asian discrimination because “diversity-based admission schemes are almost always used to exclude Asian Americans from educational institutions.”²⁰ The second, cosigned by the National Asian Pacific Bar Association, the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, the Asian Law Caucus, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center (many of which are member organizations of Asian Americans Advancing Justice, to which the Asian American Justice Center, whose media reports I read in Chapter 1, also belongs), argues that diversity represents a compelling state interest as defined in *Bakke* to benefit all students “including groups that are not explicitly targeted beneficiaries.” It also contests the plaintiff’s attempt to speak on behalf of Asian Americans because Grutter’s white privilege protects her from the interpersonal and institutional discrimination that Asian Americans experience.²¹ These contrasting briefs reflect Asian American and APA interests in affirmative action in the wake of *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2013), but both the Asian American Legal Foundation’s self-interested conservatism and the coalition’s liberal multiculturalism

²⁰ Asian American Legal Foundation, brief for the petitioners as Amicus Curiae, *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003), available online at <http://www.asianamericanlegal.com/images/grutter.pdf>.

²¹ Brief for defendants as Amici Curiae, *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.*, 539 U.S. 306 (2003), available online at http://www.advancingjustice-aajc.org/sites/aajc/files/napalc_grutter_v._bollinger_1.pdf.

illustrate how “Asian American,” “diversity,” and “benefits” become associated terms without mentions of remediation, stratification, or social justice. Such affirmative action discussions illustrate how diversity can disarticulate racial identity from racialization in ways that allow Asian Americans, as model minorities, to be manipulated as figures of white supremacy’s “post-racial” guise.

When Gary Okihiro asked “Is Yellow Black or White?” in his 1994 *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*, his answer was clearly both, due to the framing of public discussions about race in a white/non-white hierarchy’s dichotomous terms, and neither, because Asian Americans’ confrontations with hate crimes, state violence, and Orientalist constructions could not be understood in such a way. In effect, Okihiro’s *Mainstreams and Margins* was a space-clearing gesture for Asian Americans within the prevailing liberal multiculturalism, even as he maintained that Asian Americans must maintain a vigilant interracial solidarity based on shared experiences of white racism. Okihiro’s question was taken up against his intentions: the term “Black/white binary,” first codified in legal scholar Juan Perea’s essay “Ethnicity and the Constitution: Beyond the Black and White Constitution” (1995), decried how Asian Americans and Latinas/os were not receiving attention because of the focus on anti-Black racism and Black freedom struggles, and has led to an anti-Black lacunae in multiracial discussions of racism. Scholars like Sora Han and Jared Sexton have shown how the Black/white binary has been used to presume Asian American innocence in racism as also aggrieved minorities, and assume that calling Asian American immigrants (as the Pew Report does) “the new immigrant”

automatically disrupts racism.²² This coding of being “beyond” Black and white as being beyond addressing anti-Black inequality has worsened as U.S. Exceptionalism transitioned to a “post-racial” phase upon the 2008 election of an ardent celebrant of this discourse, President Barack Obama.

Nonetheless, there has always been dissensus about Asian Americans as the premature successor to the incomplete project of Black freedom. Legal scholar Mari Matsuda worried that Asian Americans’ positioning in racial hierarchy was not leading to a fuller critique of racism but enabled Asian Americans to become the new racial bourgeoisie, a group who would benefit from the continuation of white supremacy despite having a different face. As she argued in a 1990 speech to the Asian Law Caucus:

The role of the racial middle is a critical one. It can reinforce white supremacy if this middle deludes itself into thinking it can be just like white if it tries hard enough. Conversely, the middle can dismantle white supremacy if it refuses to be the middle, if it refuses to buy into racial hierarchy, if it refuses to abandon communities of Black and Brown people, choosing instead to form alliances with them.²³

Against the rise of conservative politics, anti-Black racism, and material privileges from approximating and defending arrangements that support white privilege – what James Kyung-jin Lee refers to as structural whiteness²⁴ – in Asian American communities, both Okihiro and Matsuda make evident the political and ethical need for Asian Americans to organize against white supremacy rather than benefitting from it to the detriment of others.

²² These tropes have been deployed to propagate anti-Black racism, whether as an intentional continuation of Black emiseration, as in Sexton’s work, or as a remaindered aspect of the incompleteness of antiracism, as in Han’s.

²³ Reprinted as “We Will Not Be Used,” in *Where is Your Body?: And Other Essays on Race, Gender, and the Law* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997).

²⁴ Lee, *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004.)

Indeed, Asian Americans have benefitted not only from white supremacy, but from Black freedom. Toni Morrison's essay, "On the Backs of Blacks," argues that minoritized groups, including and at times especially Asian Americans, have experienced ameliorations of Black civil rights movements while disenfranchising Black people. Morrison's essay rings true amidst the proliferations of Bobby Jindals and Michelle Malkins and Amy Chuas in the majoritarian public sphere, but occludes how APAs have used their place as the racial middle to organize against oppression and inequality across the 20th and 21st centuries. This indeterminate status of Asian Americans within racial hierarchies is the constitutive paradox of complex personhood, what I refer to as *Asian American middleness*: certain class-mobile Asian Americans are positioned to be both aggressors and allies, though their affiliations cannot be presumed.

There are two points to draw from Matsuda's language, the first being that the racial middle is positioned to be an agent of transformation. *Dissembling Diversities* explores APA panethnicity, and panethnic culture specifically, to articulate what that agency might look like. Key scholarship on APA panethnicity, such as Yen Le Espiritu's foundational *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*, Helen Zia's *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*, and Daryl Maeda's *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America*, locates the emergence of the category Asian American and its progressive affiliations in social movements of the 1960s and '70s. "Asian American" was coined by activist/historian Yuji Ichioka to unite Chinese-, Japanese-, and Filipino American communities by emphasizing Asia as the place of origin and America as the site of a common people. Challenging the hegemonic construction of the "Oriental" and the "Asiatic," social movements and affiliated cultural producers – such as the interrelated

Yellow Power movements across California, the *Gidra* student collective, and the student strikers for Ethnic Studies in San Francisco – filled “Asian American” with meaning as they contested stereotypes of passivity and perpetual foreignness, created an identity against state and structural oppression, and formed solidarity across ethnic and national lines. The category, since amended in its signifying reach to reflect the multiple ethnicities and nationalities of Asian American communities, was appropriated into the state lexicon as part of the mainstreaming of racial civil rights, and currently the category is often critiqued from within the community and from without for its flattening effects – such as when Congresswoman Chu demanded the use of ethnically disaggregated data in Pew’s *The Rise of Asian Americans* to illustrate the unevenness of Asian American incorporation.²⁵

While Espiritu and Zia insist on the special-interest organizing character of APA panethnicity, *Dissembling Diversities* holds that the entrée of Asian Americans into the public sphere through diversity politics has enabled a vibrant panethnic culture to establish itself. This panethnic culture is apparent in VC30, as the event used the iconography of Vincent Chin, whose murder Espiritu and Zia contend was the catalyst for a revival of panethnic organizing after the 1970s, as a given part of a panethnic symbolic archive. Asian American popular culture studies illustrates how many of the texts identified as critically APA confront the model minority and forever foreigner myths through creative representation. Although Asian Americans demographically express a bimodal distribution of socioeconomic resources, and though many families can trace formal and cultural citizenship centuries back, model minority and forever foreigner tropes express Asian American *racial formation*, which Michael Omi and Howard Winant canonically define as

²⁵ For more on multivalent usages of APA panethnicity, particularly its incorporation, see Soo Ah Kwon, “The Politics and Institutionalization of Panethnic Identity,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 16.2 (2013): 137-57.

“the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” through a discursive deployment of racial projects in dialogue with hegemonic relations.²⁶ Racial projects, the constitutive parts of racial formation, are an interpretation of power dynamics that enable “race” to explain a distribution of resources. As the racial middle in a national culture fascinated by consumable Otherness, APAs have used cultural texts and forms as racial projects. In doing so, they negotiate the seemingly post-political mandates of diversity, such as “coming to voice” and “sharing our culture,” and the politics of difference, demanding attention to issues facing Asian American communities and lives in remaking racial formations.

On “Middled” Relations to White Supremacy

The second issue indicated by Matsuda’s speech is that Asian American racialization, as the racial middle, is necessarily a comparative project. I follow developments in Critical Ethnic Studies in arguing that racial projects, which imply agency, intention, and stable directionalities of power, cannot sufficiently explain racialization.²⁷ Andrea Smith’s contribution to Daniel Martinez HoSang, Oneka LaBennett, and Laura Pulido’s *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (2012), “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy,” makes clear that, to address racism, what must be interrogated is the nation-state’s system of racial capitalism, settler-colonial dispossession, and war-making – what she

²⁶ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to 1990s*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 1994), 55-6.

²⁷ Scholars such as Andrea Smith, Dylan Rodriguez, Jodi Kim, and Joao Costa Vargas argue for a Critical Ethnic Studies guided by a radical antisciplinary that confronts the university as an institution with vested interests in dominant power; by situating itself within this institution, a Critical Ethnic Studies can scramble the university’s reproduction of the neoliberal capitalist subject, and can obfuscate the relations of power/knowledge that structure the university’s relation of hegemonic consent with its objects of study. My use of the term *racialization* follows Jodi Melamed’s usage: “a process that constitutes differential relations of human value and valuelessness according to specific material circumstances and geopolitical conditions while appearing to be (and being) a rationally inevitable normative system that merely sorts human beings into categories of difference.” Melamed, 2.

names as the three primary logics that organize social structures and uphold white supremacy.²⁸ Smith's attention to logics of power, as opposed to identities or cultural similarities, apprehends the mobility, flexibility, and contingency of group-differentiated outcomes as simultaneously cause and effect of racism.²⁹

Specifically, *Dissembling Diversities* engages the intimate relationship between Asian American racial projects and racialization with blackness and whiteness. Following in Okihiro and Matsuda's examples, I analyze *whiteness* and *white supremacy* to disentangle the politics of racial privilege and advantage of *Dissembling Diversities'* texts.³⁰ As texts engaged in racial projects, none of *Dissembling Diversities'* texts ever claim White Power, but *Secret Asian Man's* moralisms about how diversity means letting every reader have their own opinion or Dave Boyle's colorblind artistic vision represent complex attachments to whiteness that ultimately instantiate white supremacy. These texts seldom involve Black perspectives and experiences; they nonetheless engage in comparisons with *blackness*.³¹

Blackness is often used in racist ways – particularly in oversimplifying diverse peoples as

²⁸ Smith, in *Racial Formation in the Twenty-First Century* (UC Press, 2012), 68-9. This represents an update on her paradigm-shifting argument in *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (2006).

²⁹ This can be seen in VC30, as Congressperson Chu went on to criticize how the Pew Research Center's model minority discourse pitted the "rise" of Asian Americans against the decline of "Hispanics" – seen in measures such as proportion of the demographic ages 25 and older with bachelor's degrees and median household income. Cautious of the perception that "Latinos lag behind while Asians have made it," Congressperson Chu warned of the "resentment and the scapegoating that can result."

³⁰ Whiteness refers to constitutive contradiction of normalizing legibly white bodies as universal while materially ensuring the durability of investing material resources into ensuring this normalization. See George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (Temple U.P., 1998). White supremacy maintains white privilege, and thus refers to the cultural and structural systems that ensure differentiated outcomes that systemically favor white bodies.

³¹ *Blackness* is here defined as a discursive formation associated with but abstracted from Black bodies, histories, and lives that can be used progressively and hegemonically simultaneously. This differs but is related to *antiblackness*, or the systems that deprive Black people of equal protections by rights except for the right of death, as explained by Nicholas Brady, in "Riding with Death: Defining Anti-Blackness," *Progressive Pupil*, February 27, 2014, <http://progressivepupil.wordpress.com/2014/02/27/right-to-death-defining-anti-blackness/>. Antiblackness, as scholars including Han, Sexton, Saidiya Hartman, and Smith have noted, is based on the continued objectification, commodification, and elimination of Black people that happens through material structures such as environmental racism, resource segregation, colonization, stratified labor hierarchies, and criminalization.

symbols. However, many of these APA activist projects deploy blackness as a means of affiliation, similarity, and kinship – such as how many comics in *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology* imagine Asian American superheroes alongside Black ones to portray interracial solidarity.³² As I have illustrated, because of Asian Americans’ middled position in white/anti-Black hierarchies, the white/non-white formulation of community championed by APA panethnic culture’s symbolic archive of the Third World Liberation Front alone can no longer provide the ground for solidarity – even as both groups are manipulated and disadvantaged by white supremacy. By attending to how these affiliative racial projects do not always contest and at times facilitate racialization, *Dissembling Diversities* interrogates how these uses of blackness are implicated in *antiblackness* before it necessarily calls for interracial coalition.

A Hipper Than Thou Attitude:
Middlebrow Culture, Intangible Capital, and the Racialization of Sophistication

In keeping with O’Connor’s delineation of diversity as a skill that benefits neoliberal capitalism and the security state without addressing inequality, *Dissembling Diversities* takes “diversity” as a middlebrow value. The middlebrow came from prior categories in cultural hierarchy. Lawrence Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (1988) dates the bifurcation of “high” aesthetic culture from “low” popular culture to the 19th century, and remarks on it as a relatively recent and contested development in the U.S. This division reflected the European class tradition of estranging specific texts that would distinguish cultural elites from everyday people, and using cultural institutions to secure and reproduce this elite status. Levine makes evident that the terminology of the

³² I follow Patricia Hill Collins and capitalize Black to signify how Black people are simultaneously subjects and objects of racial discourse. I also do so to emphasize the primacy of race over liberal investments in ethnicity.

brows, which lingers in the simultaneous definitions of “culture” as sanctioned canon and “culture” as quotidian life, derive from phrenology’s scientific racism: “highbrow” and “lowbrow” naturalized the comparison between the brow structures of celebrated intellectuals, such as Shakespeare, Milton, and Dickens, and the ape as biological proof of intelligence.³³ Given the prevalent racism that associated apes with Black people, phrenology encoded blackness as inhumanity, animality, and stupidity, just as it sacralized whiteness as the basis of aesthetic creativity and thus cultural sophistication. This overlap between cultural hierarchy and racial hierarchy that manifested in cultural consumption became a way to discipline class subjects. In this section, I elaborate on the historical emergence of middlebrow culture in the U.S., highlighting the conjunction of class-based taste and racialization. However, given the invisibility of “middlebrow” as a term in critical and popular circles, I survey critical texts that engage the subject-forming processes of cultural hierarchy and aesthetic education. In doing so, I theorize sophistication, the central rubric of this analysis; its relationship to capital; and, through the middlebrow’s discriminating function, its racializing capacity.

The Segregating Power of the Middlebrow

The definitional emergence of middlebrow culture from phrenology makes evident how designations of taste are racialized and racializing. As Shelley Joan Rubin notes, U.S. middlebrow culture emerged in the 1920s as a result of industrial growth and consumer technologies. Consumer goods previously associated with class privilege became more available for purchase, and thus luxury no longer directly indicated status. Rubin makes evident how educational programs, such as making literary texts and expertise accessible to a

³³ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow* (Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1988), 222.

greater public, attempted to reinstate cultural hierarchy while making it appear democratic. Rubin does not note the backdrop of the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which restricted immigration and wrote non-European people out of citizenship to perpetuate a vision of a white nation;³⁴ she also does not acknowledge that non-white peoples did not and could not inhabit the publishing houses, universities, and print and radio cultures in which middlebrow battles over American civilization were waged, even as the northern cities where these debates took place were being transformed by the first wave of African American northern migration. Middlebrow culture can thus be understood since its founding as using class exclusions to extend state racism in everyday culture. David Savran's account of the post-World War II resurgence of middlebrow culture explicitly connects racialization and taste, as he notes the middlebrow's second wave took place amidst the violence of desegregation. As Savran argues, cultural critics' "obsession with taste thus represents an attempt to purge the social body of dangerous, seditious, and degrading cultural commodities and to educate and uplift,"³⁵ and these degrading cultural commodities were often associated with blackness. For example, Russell Lynes' *Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow* (1949) is among the many essays of this period that located jazz, which has been noted as a heterotopic site of cultural and social miscegenation in an age of extralegal racial violence, as lowbrow culture.

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984) provides a framework for understanding how taste could carry these racializing meanings. Bourdieu extends Marxist critiques of financial capital, institutionalized political economies,

³⁴ See "The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and the Reconstruction of Race in Immigration Law" in Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*.

³⁵ David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan P., 2003), 5. This post-war moment was also the period during which MidCult and middlebrow culture were named as categories (albeit derided ones).

and state investments in these arrangements to examine how these systems that construct and circulate value both reflect and create hierarchies of distinction via their internalization by class subjects. Most of Bourdieu's critique focuses on the reproduction of cultural capital through pedagogies of aesthetic culture. Cultural capital finds its expression through non-financial indicators of class status, such as literacy and education. *Distinction's* formulation of cultural capital reveals class status to be a distinct likeness of financial status, but also makes evident how what makes processes of education, training, and discipline appear so central to success is that they compel the subject's embodiment of class norms. These norms enable competitive advantage in capitalism, thus conjoining class status and class formation. Bourdieu touches upon symbolic capital, defined as the recognition value that manifests in reputation, prestige, and status – a “plus factor,” which one receives within a cultural field for possessing other forms of capital. As a normative agenda of cultural and symbolic capital, taste names how we internalize and reproduce prevailing arrangements of capital; it is simultaneously subjective and subjecting.

The Middlebrow Beyond the Middle Class

Though taste is an essential tool of middlebrow subject formation, it does not necessarily affirm middle-class status. In both David Savran and Belinda Edmonson's work, the middlebrow subdivides.³⁶ Savran follows Russell Lynes' delineation, and separates middlebrow culture into upper-middlebrows, the cultural brokers who disseminate middlebrow ideologemes, and the lower-middlebrows, who consume their products.

Edmondston addresses how middlebrow cultural consumption can be aspirational, indicating

³⁶ Indeed, as suggested by my attention to this subdivision, I depart from Bourdieu by taking in the complexity of how capital gets embodied. Contrary to *Distinction's* equation of education to pure objectification, I tend to the messiness of cultural hierarchy – which also allows for a possibility of progressive politics' agency.

a desire for upward status mobility, or authenticating, denoting a connection to non-elite status, or both.³⁷ The middlebrow is neither an ideal nor deconstructive space, but a set of constitutive contradictions of cultural hierarchy within the U.S.'s mythologies of classlessness.³⁸ Middlebrow cultural texts do not (and as the initial crises over U.S. consumer culture have indicated, historically have not) cleanly reflect middle-class purchasing power, just as the possession of middlebrow texts is not ideologically restricted to middle-class consumers. In terms of production and distribution, middlebrow culture has been understood as appropriating the ontological value imbued to "high" aesthetic culture and disseminating it through the channels of "low" mass culture. In terms of content, middlebrow culture juggles binary formulations of cultural hierarchy such as Art and commerce, substance and pleasure, and creativity and normality, not through critique, but through semblances of synthesis.³⁹ Christina Klein's *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* defines middlebrow culture through its perceived benefits of access, as Klein reads how these middlebrow texts popularized nationalist perspectives on the Cold War under the guise of learning about Asia and foreign affairs.⁴⁰ These middlebrow cultural texts tend toward pedagogies of consensus, but their producer intentions and consumer expectations of the form maneuver the austerity accorded to

³⁷ Savran, 4; Belinda Edmondson, *Caribbean Middlebrow: Leisure Culture and the Middle Class* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 5.

³⁸ Because middlebrow culture is a space of contradiction, *Disassembling Diversities* speaks of plural middlebrow cultural texts with multiple discursive effects as opposed to a singular middlebrow culture.

³⁹ As further examples, Janice Radway's *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999) demonstrates how, through the quotidian authorization, regimentation, and regulation of the Book-of-the-Month club, middlebrow culture disciplines its participants even as it operates through the networks of popular culture. Victoria Grieve's *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), the creation of middlebrow culture in the U.S. responded to the inaccessibility of the high art world by bringing the "educational, social, and economic benefits of widespread cultural access" to the spaces of daily life and quotidian citizenship to uplift and foster a self-sustaining public. Grieve 3.

⁴⁰ Klein 7-8.

aesthetic culture and the crassness associated with mass culture to appear as fact. Significant is the for-profit nature of Klein's middlebrow texts, as their pedagogies are not only instrumentalized for the social good but for the fiscal sustainability of their producers and distributors. The same balance of message and money persists in middlebrow cultural texts today; for example, no matter the intervention television writers, creators, and showrunners want to make, the vitality of their message depends on advertiser and network support.

Bringing together these works about the middlebrow, *Disassembling Diversities*' confrontation with middlebrow cultural forms and norms interrogates how national mythologies of classlessness are mobilized alongside cultural hierarchy – which exists both in aesthetic texts and their reading subjects – in the reproduction of “diverse,” and thereby complicit, subjects. Dependent on such financial purchases, middlebrow texts make presumptions of their desired audience, such as access to higher education, disposable income, and a shared center of what constitutes taste. Through this classed, cyclical relationship between the text's presumptions and the reader's attributes, middlebrow texts as a matter of form reinforce the normalcy of accumulating cultural capital as cultural citizenship.⁴¹ In this way, middlebrow cultural texts do not demarcate class status, but, like a U.S. political climate that universalizes the middle class, they address a class identity that understands itself as universal. Because of this universalization of middle-class identity within diversity, middlebrow culture conditions its consumer to want to inhabit capitalism and the nation-form – not just as a fact of life, but as a mobilization of desire. To be specific,

⁴¹ Belinda Edmondson's chapter on U.S. purchasers of Caribbean literature in *Caribbean Middlebrow* makes evident how authors, readers, and publishers alike indicate that ethnographic knowledge of authenticating Caribbean culture can be gleaned through reading. This middlebrow reading founds a cosmopolitanism that both elevates this consumer as a worldly reader, while appealing to the reader's moral beneficence conducive to global harmony.

the three middlebrow cultural forms examined in *Disassembling Diversities* elevate themselves from “low” mass culture according to uses of financial capital and deployments of symbolic capital that presume their consumer’s interest in cultural capital. For example, Chapter 1 makes no claim that only college-educated viewers can love *Grey’s Anatomy*, but interrogates the politic of diversity that creator and showrunner Shonda Rimes disseminates in her white-collar narrative universe; *Grey’s Anatomy* uses the show’s status as “quality” and its pedagogical representations of diversity, ultimately, to promote capitalism and social life as “post-racial.”

I argue that contemporary middlebrow cultural texts presume liberal equality, possessive individualism, cosmopolitan outlooks, and faith in their ethnographic veracity – the contents of a cultural citizenship of “diversity” that is sustained through classed forms. Through a recognition of these values, contemporary middlebrow texts hail their consumers as middlebrow subjects. This hailing, as Christopher Newfield observes, “generates feelings that are reparative rather than paranoid, interactive rather than competitive, open-ended rather than controlling. And the reader experiences these feelings as freedom.”⁴² This felt experience of freedom conditions the middlebrow subject to authority and disciplinary knowledges, enabling a Foucaultian docility without punishment. David Savran’s reading of the Broadway musical *Rent* and its surrounding discourses of liberal humanism makes clear how the show represents racial and sexual plurality to create an aura of authenticity that legitimizes the audience’s identity as both hip and liberal.⁴³ Like its deployments of

⁴² Newfield, “Middlebrow Reading and the Power of Feeling,” *American Quarterly* 51.4 (1999): 910-20. Newfield’s emphasis on middlebrow reading is both a focus on the consumer, as well as a byproduct of his disciplinary location in literary studies.

⁴³ This self-affirming embrace of difference is what Savran refers to as a “hipper than thou attitude,” as the audience’s contact with this coolness addresses a scarcity of status that can be deployed for its exchange value.

difference as decoration, the cast's uses of art and protest become props in the show for image and not critique, illustrating how *Rent*'s bohemian hipness forecloses imaginings of social change.⁴⁴ Difference becomes something to be consumed by a privileged reader, who gains status through this encounter but pedagogically is inculcated to feel certain ways instead of doing certain things. *Dissembling Diversities* examines how middlebrow cultural texts operate through emotive registers to make subjectivization feel like freedom, both as liberal agency and radical transformation.

Currently, the cultural citizenship of middlebrow texts align with diversity as both a domestic and global strategy of management. Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy* in particular makes evident how middlebrow cultural texts' felt encounter can be and currently is instrumentalized for global neoliberal regimes of capital accumulation. Melamed criticizes how undergraduate literary studies uses novels written by authors of color as both ethnographic accounts of Third World suffering and as universalizing affirmations of liberal freedom. Critics of the 1990s understood middlebrow cultural texts' audience as the professional-managerial class, a strata of class-mobile but subservient subjects who, from their middled position, maintain corporate capitalism – the same college-educated subjects Melamed addresses at her later moment. Melamed focuses on a specific brand of novels that hail the reader with a semblance of colorblind meritocracy that disappears the group differentiations of human value that sustain global regimes of neoliberal capitalism. The professional-managerial class becomes credentialized through such reading practices that

⁴⁴ As a passing note in *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Duke U.P., 2008) Lauren Berlant remarks that the women's culture she theorizes is also middlebrow culture because it registers the social fact of inequality but offers few solutions outside of a mainstreamed liberal feminism; middlebrow culture conditions the emotional responses of the subject as opposed to inciting that subject to structural transformation. Berlant borrows heavily from Savran in this formulation.

promote easily digestible moralisms as the key to negotiating difference.⁴⁵ *Dissembling Diversities* understands that uneven proportions of non-white populations, such as the Asian American model minority, have entered this professional-managerial class to become not only the object but the subject of its middlebrow diversity.

On Sophistication and its Racialization

I dwell on the works of Klein, Savran, and Melamed because they explicate how the interactions between the middlebrow text and their aesthetic subject manifest as appearing culturally sophisticated. Sophistication recalls the discourse of character in the 1920s when wealth was no longer a stable indicator of class; signs of savvy, erudition, and refinement became ways of expressing one's accumulated cultural capital, or the outward expression of a classy disposition. *Dissembling Diversities* frames representations and performances of traits associated with *sophistication* as expressions of cultural hierarchy. Many of these traits have already been mentioned as class-based presumptions of education, literacy, and institutional access, and the additional value accrued when this cultural capital is recognized. Sophistication also includes the appearance of learnedness with or without substance as in Melamed; the accrual of credentials and the semblance of prestige critiqued by Bourdieu; the performance of worldliness identified by Klein; the hipness and pretension critiqued by Savran. Sophisticated people are regarded as more valuable than their peers – or, having more to offer – but anyone theoretically can become sophisticated. Sophistication suggests a sociological and ontological deployment of hierarchy that nonetheless appears to be democratic and, as such, appearing sophisticated pays out as differentiating symbolic capital amidst myths of equality. *Dissembling Diversities* deploys sophistication as a rubric for

⁴⁵ Regardless of the consumer's sincerity, this engagement in learning about non-majoritarian cultures is experienced as an investment in cultural and symbolic capital.

middlebrow cultural texts, pinpointing clusters of intangible capital within them to trace them back as proxies of cultural hierarchies.

Like middle-class status itself, sophistication as an expression of added value, while appearing to be a universally accessible, discriminates along racial lines. Kevin K. Gaines' *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* explains, in the development of the post-Reconstruction Black middle class at the turn of the 20th century, anti-Black racism ensured that white and Black experiences of socioeconomic status were structurally asymmetrical in white peoples' favor. Nonetheless, ideologies about middle class status were used by the Black intelligentsia as racial uplift, to prove Black humanity against white constructions of blackness. This Black/white structural asymmetry persists, as, while middlebrow cultural texts can elevate a class privileged consumer for that consumer's benefit, privilege reflects the antiblackness that has shaped U.S. cultures of capitalism.⁴⁶ Scholarship on the Black middle class shows how, instead of the upward mobility projected by many middlebrow cultural texts to a colorblind consumer, the Black middle class, characterized by structural precarity and anxiety about downward mobility, confronts anti-Black ideologies about class status.⁴⁷ For example, the ethnographic case studies of Karyn R. Lacy's *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class* make evident how members of the Black middle class, through means such as attire, comportment, and code-switching, self-consciously deploy cultural capital to construct public appearances that confront the association of blackness with the underclass. Lacy's

⁴⁶ How this structural asymmetry is further illustrated in works such as Thomas M. Shapiro's *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality* (Oxford U.P., 2005), which examines how wealth parity persists because of the maintenance of historical white supremacy through inheritance and property transmission, and George Lipsitz' *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

⁴⁷ For further case studies, see works by Mary Patillo-McCoy, Karyn Lacy, and Benjamin P. Bowser.

Black subjects deploy cultural capital to appear middle class instead of being able to use that intangible capital to appear as more than just middle class. Though I recognize that no one is protected from actual downward mobility within speculative capitalism, the lived anxieties of the Black middle class illustrate how upward mobility and its evidentiary manifestations as sophistication are racialized as whiteness.

To reiterate, diversity has found pedagogical utility in a sanitized inclusion of Asian Americans, thus enabling APA arts activism to flourish; yet, across the representations surveyed in *Dissembling Diversities*, racial formations that middle Asian Americans, such as the model minority and docile patriot post-9/11/2001, have facilitated the uneven APA entry into middlebrow diversity's norms while supporting U.S. Exceptionalist myths of colorblind classlessness. By deploying sophistication as a sign of Asian Americans' worth, APA racial projects in middlebrow cultural texts argue for Asian American inclusion and visibility through references to cultural and symbolic capital. *Dissembling Diversities* challenges this politic of recognition to critique the *racialization of sophistication* – or, how APA arts activism can participate in antiblackness in the name of progress, inclusion, and diversity. Sophistication's deployments reference culturally legible ways of knowing class, and the middlebrow cultural forms of *Dissembling Diversities* developed their conventions within cultures of segregation; as Savran observes, post-Reconstruction racism was displaced to cultural hierarchy. *Dissembling Diversities* makes apparent how such representations that symbolize and mobilize sophistication bear traces of the ongoing history of Black disenfranchisement and stratification, and not only in terms of the group disparities in socioeconomic status that align with racial hierarchy. The social purpose of the middlebrow, to discipline managerial citizens to be conducive to capitalism's maintenance, thus functions

as a racializing animus. APA racial projects in middlebrow cultural texts, despite their political and educational intentions, differentiate between educated subjects and their social inferiors. In doing so, they mobilize class exclusions that are founded in antiblackness. By tracking these racialized class exclusions as they manifest in sophistication, *Dissembling Diversities* aims to critique APA complicity in diversity politics that have transferred white/anti-Black hierarchies to the register of class difference.

***Some Very Familiar and Tired Narratives But Also New and Exciting Promises:
The Terminology and Methodology of APA Arts Activism***

Dissembling Diversities' attention to cultural politics and their technologies of visibility is shaped by Asian American cultural studies – specifically, Asian American popular culture studies. As Nguyen and Tu argue in introducing their volume, *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (2007), both the “Asian American” and the “popular culture” of Asian American popular culture studies are not stable references but shifting processes of capital, politics, and meaning.⁴⁸ However, like popular culture studies more broadly, many early works on Asian American popular culture reinstate easy binaries such as mass culture v. grassroots cultural production, authentic v. hybrid, corporate v. community, and white v. not white. Since then, Asian American Studies' attention to popular culture has attuned its critique to the inherent complicities and contradictions of

⁴⁸ Earlier works in Asian American Studies that analyze popular cultural production, such as Darrell Hamamoto's *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation* (1994) and Robert G. Lee's *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (1999), examine how representations of Asian Americans in mass media support historically specific anti-Asian anxieties of U.S. global politics; popular culture represents the hegemonic space of the U.S. racist imaginary. The publication of Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu's *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (2007) and Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha Oren's *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture* (2005) marked a watershed moment in the genesis of Asian American popular culture studies. Indeed, in introducing the name of their collection, Nguyen and Tu explain, “popular culture holds out some very familiar and tired narratives but also new and exciting promises” (30), given how popular cultural forms have enabled Asian Americans to imagine themselves as citizens of multiple publics.

representation. Nitasha Sharma's *Hip Hop Desis: South Asian Americans, Blackness, and a Global Race Consciousness* and Wendy Hsu's dissertation on Asian Americans in indie rock examine how Asian American musicians understand their identities, performances, and politics in relation to whiteness, blackness, and the asymmetrical relations of these discourses. Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu's *The Beautiful Generation: Asian Americans and the Cultural Economy of Fashion* attends not only to the symbolic creation of Asian-ness in fashion, but also the historical conditions through which Asian and Asian American fashion designers have entered global circuits of labor, production, and consumption. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials' *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work* converses across a range of disciplinary forms to imagine memorializing state violence beyond high arts and state archives. Vincent Pham's manuscript in progress on APA film festivals and Caroline Hong's manuscript in progress on Asian American comedy locate genealogies of critique within popular forms that began in community organizing and grassroots representation. Finally, younger scholars, such as Constancio Arnaldo, Thea Quiray Tagle, and Patricia Ahn, have explored the affective connections of transnational Asian and U.S. popular cultures, as well as how these diasporic longings facilitate the circulation of capital and legitimacy.

These works make evident transformations in methodological considerations in Asian American popular culture studies. For one, resistance is not as simple as Asian Americans asserting their presence and citizenship in the face of an ignorant and forgetful whiteness. Many newer works in Asian American popular culture understand that Asian Americans, through production, consumption, and identity formation, are implicated in hierarchies of power that sustain inequalities through such quotidian acts of creation and pleasure. For

another, neither the production process nor the formal tools that Asian Americans use for representation are free of their histories and consumer expectations. Finally, “Asian American” can be understood not just a rubric for reading bodies, but a term that corporations, creators, activists, and markets alike have animated with conflicting political meanings. *Dissembling Diversities* frames its engagement with APA arts activism through middlebrow culture, given its capacity for managing contradictions. In this section, I delineate *Dissembling Diversities*’ use of the term “arts activism” both as a specific form of organizing, and as a way of yoking these tensions. In doing so, I frame *Dissembling Diversities*’ methodological concerns through relations to the aesthetic and the state of APA panethnicity.

The APA Politics of “Art”

Dissembling Diversities’ cultural forms are not properly “popular” culture given the term’s complicated and polarizing relationship to the local, the populist, the corporate, the mass, but also are not beyond debate as properly “Art” because of their dissemination through popular channels to consumer publics. Television, comic books, and pop music indeed more readily register as mass culture, but by looking to scripted network television, graphical storytelling, and indie rock, *Dissembling Diversities* examines forms and texts that actively engage discourses of quality, legitimacy, and artistic value to access rarity in contesting their status as mass culture as they make their political claims. Through these discourses of cultural elevation, the texts of *Dissembling Diversities* are, albeit to differing extents, recognized for their emphasis on American Americans’ creativity and innovation as opposed to just the fact of representation. In this way, I use the term “Art” to describe the

cultural forms and specific texts addressed in this dissertation cautiously, but I also commit to this term because of its relation to cultural hierarchy.

Disassembling Diversities' scope is not to imply that there are not APA movements within cultural forms of "high" aesthetic culture, such as Asian American cohorts in the New York and Los Angeles visual art scene and Washington, DC's Smithsonian Institution that date to the 1990s, or continued interventions by Asian American authors in the literary world that trace explicit genealogies to foundational debates from the 1970s.⁴⁹ The main barriers to middlebrow forms, unlike the "high" aesthetic forms that exist in galleries and museums and halls at an institutional remove from everyday life, are issues of choice (excepting issues of financial cost) within consumer culture. This focus is also not meant to deride APA movements within forms more aligned with mass culture, such as the "Asian American YouTube generation" and the advent of Kollaboration, a network of large, annual talent competitions in U.S. metropolitan areas that aim to launch Asian American performers into entertainment industries. Middlebrow cultural forms' discursive construction through elevation set them apart from mass culture because they engage logics of *institutionalization*.⁵⁰ Logics of institutionalization not only aim for inclusion in extant institutions, but also to transport the ideological relationships that organize institutions to other cultural fields – such as in Chapter 3, how the status of "Art" travels to fit texts and practices within cultural hierarchies.

My shorthand reference of APA movements in middlebrow cultural forms as arts activism uses the category of "Art" both to refer to a text of aesthetic creation and its

⁴⁹ *Disassembling Diversities*' revision into a manuscript will explicitly connect to the literary debates and collectives from the 1970s to the 1990s, as well as the birth of Asian American film festivals in the 1980s.

⁵⁰ Institutions can be defined as Ruth Wilson Gilmore does as "sets of hierarchical relationships (structures) that persist across time." Gilmore, 28.

attendant systems of institutional legibility. It follows in Jacques Ranciere's definition of the aesthetic in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (2010) as both a discursive framing of texts and objects, and an *a priori* expectation of sense experience that binds the individual and the community.⁵¹ "Art" thus names the relations between the particularities of a text, as well as relations between that text and its surrounding social life. To get at these networks of meaning, *Dissembling Diversities* engages in a circulated reading practice, a method popular in a cultural studies inflected by fields of difference, to attend to the meanings that a "text" has taken on through its consumption in multiple publics. It places texts in conversation with their paratexts, such as their discursive image management, advertisements, creator interviews, and critical reception in a reading method that borrows from literary criticism, media studies and film analysis, visual culture analysis, and musicology and ethnomusicology to address the particularities of each form while building an interdisciplinary conversation. The majority of *Dissembling Diversities*' 9 texts, true to Klein's definition of the production and circulation of middlebrow cultural forms, have had a recurring distribution schedule. As such, their ideological underpinnings may change over time, or express irregularities and inconsistencies. My reading strategy thus focuses on the breadth of content, to identify these texts' central diversity politic beyond exceptional moments. A limitation of this approach and its focus on duration is that, given the sheer finitude of reader interest, vision, performance, and tactility take a backseat to narrative, affect, and representation.

Dissembling Diversities does not understand art for "Art's" sake, but uses the term to denote how the text is both estranged from and participates in naturalized meanings.

⁵¹ Jacques Ranciere, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 115.

Specifically, *Dissembling Diversities*' conceptual frameworks for making visible and undoing diversity's ideological pull – resemblance, dissemblance, and disassembly – draw from post-Enlightenment thought about the aesthetic, a theoretical legacy laid by Immanuel Kant.⁵² Kant and his contributions to Enlightenment thought get taken up by Theodor Adorno in two significant ways. On the one hand, in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno considers how Art is *semblance*. Art, both as a discursive effect and ontological relation, both mediates the social world from a critical distance and accesses possible worlds beyond ideology. The aesthetic becomes central to constructing a subjectivity beyond Myth – an ideological ruse of progress first addressed in Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and its analysis of the culture industry. The culture industry, two terms thought to be in an incommensurable relation but realized as the norm, produces mass culture, which produces the mass subject, one conditioned to understand authoritarianism and profit-driven technologism as freedom. In sum, the culture industry is *dissembling*.⁵³ Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* (1970) deconstructs Kant's distinction between the frame and the work of Art as part of Kant's dissembling belief in the aesthetic object's isolation from social relations. Taking apart this formulation of Art is thus a *disassembling*,

⁵² In *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), the third of Kant's critiques of metaphysics, Kant considers the operations and significance of aesthetic judgment. While Kant believes in beauty as one of the transcendent principles of Truth necessary for Enlightenment, beauty in Kant can be read as a regulating discourse that becomes a disciplinary category of value because it seems to exist autonomously. Through the embrace of beauty, aesthetic subjects can create a *sensus communis*, or a community of sense; sense in this way both refers to ways of operating under shared grids of intelligibility, which then become the normative standards of rationality.

⁵³ Mass culture exists in distinction from works of art (though Art as a discourse has been contaminated by the pleasure and profit-driven motivations of mass culture). Given the realities of art markets, cultural institutions, and other apparatuses of the political economy of aesthetic culture, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* has been at best aspirational. However, the mass subject can be understood as a variety of the aesthetic subject, thus warning against the aesthetic as a transcendent truth.

as Derrida guides his reader through how deconstructing the sacralization of the aesthetic object is also a critique of naturalized thought.

This use of European aesthetic philosophy begs the question of how Asian Americans can be understood through discourses that have been critiqued for their naturalized sexism and racism. As Lisa Lowe's "Intimacy of Four Continents" (2006) makes apparent, Enlightenment thought, which structures our understandings of rights, liberty, and freedom – and beauty – emerged from the global division of racialized labor.⁵⁴ The way these texts of 18th and 19th century aesthetic philosophy partition reason through racialized geopolitics, not only through projections onto Asian-ness but also onto blackness, make these texts appropriate for understanding the interconnections and structuring exclusions of racialization, Art, and subjectivity. Just as *Dissembling Diversities* interrogates how contemporary Asian American entanglements with class racialize according to historical white/anti-Black hierarchies, *Dissembling Diversities* uses aesthetic philosophy to examine how designations of human value are tied into this racializing scheme of global partition that underwrites liberal democracy. In other words, as I have suggested, "Art" is not a pure category, but it is also not an empty signifier. It is because of this tension, one managed through middlebrow cultural dynamics, that I trace the relationship of "Art" to sophistication while also using it to refer to acts of creation.

⁵⁴ Lowe's essay is included in Laura Ann Stoler's *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Duke U.P., 2006). As critical race philosophers have identified, post-Enlightenment philosophy more widely has a race problem. da Silva's *Toward a Global Idea of Race* examines how Enlightenment enfigurations of "humanity" have depended on projections of racial difference as a threat that must either disappear, through means such as assimilation, or be destroyed, often through actual conquest and genocide. The Oriental exists in distinction from the human, in a same but fundamentally different way that the African opposes the human. For example, Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* deploys the Oriental as the figure that exists outside of aesthetic culture, and the threat to German civilization. Across Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's lectures on aesthetics and philosophy, the Oriental East is a site of lawlessness and irrational spirituality.

APA “Activism” in Representation

In examining representations that have been instrumentalized to make claims and analyses on behalf of Asian American communities, *Dissembling Diversities* uses the term “activism” as cautiously as it does “Art.” Nancy Fraser’s *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* distinguishes weak from strong publics to gauge the efficacy of social movements, as weak publics address public opinion in civil society, while strong publics tackle state activity; middlebrow texts call into being a public on the weaker side, as *Dissembling Diversities*’ texts depart from radical calls for redistribution as much as representations themselves are limited to the aesthetic text and its subject.⁵⁵ Yet, I understand representation as both a portrait of symbolic meanings and as a proxy for social relations.⁵⁶ In its interdisciplinary emphasis on culture, *Dissembling Diversities* uses the term “activism” to name a relation between a text and its producers and consumers: firstly, that the social life of the text informed by past and present social movements and community organizing; and secondly, that the actors involved understand the text as disrupting and not reiterating hegemonic and naturalized representations of race, racism, and racialization. I use “activism” to describe processes and energies in and around a text that aspire to racial justice, as opposed to deploying it as my personal value judgment about a text’s efficacy.

What *Dissembling Diversities* also takes from Asian American popular culture studies is an attention to the production, reception, circulation, and stated political intentions of the aesthetic text alongside its content and form. As Mimi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Tu argue,

⁵⁵ This diagnosis of middlebrow culture as a weak public is drawn from Lauren Berlant, as she argues in a parallel case in *The Female Complaint* that the texts of U.S. women’s culture are inherently middlebrow texts; they operate in an affirmative mode dedicated to changing the minds of readers and viewers in private life.

⁵⁶ This formulation is taken from Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in Carey Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: U. of Illinois P., 1988), 271-313.

critical APA representation needs to be understood as an outgrowth of the Asian American movements of the late 1960s to the mid-70s. As Daryl J. Maeda's methodological attention on Yellow Power's expressive cultures makes apparent, these social movements also sought a place in the collective imaginary in ways that refused the limiting terms of cultural citizenship within the racial state.⁵⁷ Because of these continued racialized limitations on cultural citizenship and its vexed relation to white supremacy, APA representations and activism can provide an analysis of Asian Americans within the racial state as a continuation of the spirit of panethnic organizing.

This mythos of community grassroots organizing has perhaps been the animus of Asian American Studies, as well as the continued emphasis on APA activism and representation in the arts. The APA designation itself is a misnomer, as none of the objects of this dissertation actually consider the colonized subjects of U.S. militarism who constitute the "Pacific Islander" of the panethnic naming.⁵⁸ This disappearance of the "P" is not just an issue of *Dissembling Diversities*' texts, but a symptom of APA panethnicity as a whole. Though discomforted by the panethnic category's appropriation and elision of indigenous peoples, I make a methodological choice to maintain this term to discuss contemporary deployments of panethnicity. "Asian Pacific America" names a specific geography of texts that follows the spatial strongholds of the APA national community, as one of *Dissembling*

⁵⁷ The organizing placed under the umbrella of the Asian American movement is, of course, not so schematic. Some individuals and factions adopted more radical politics. As documented by social movement scholars such as Laura Pulido, Maeda, and Keith Osajima, Asian American radicals stood against the war in Viet Nam and worked in solidarity with other communities of color for the end of the racist state, while other Asian American organizers wanted assimilation and class mobility.

⁵⁸ This issue has also been addressed in the works of J. Kehaulani Kauanui, such as in her chapter, "Asian American Studies and the 'Pacific Question,'" in *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 123-42, and in the 1/10/2004 group letter from her account against a proposition to change the name of the Association for Asian American Studies to the Association for Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies.

Diversities' methodological shortcomings is that its texts originate in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City, and, to a lesser extent, Washington, DC. Throughout *Dissembling Diversities*, I use "APA" in distinction from "Asian American": I use "Asian American" to describe demographic, eugenic, bodily, and racial labels, and "APA" to signify the political energies of social movements and aspirations to justice. The flexibility of the panethnic term enables it to place multiple scales in conversation, from the individual representation to local communities and organizations to actors on the national scale. Both of these terms differ from "Asian Americanist critique," which I use to refer to the critical theory that has emerged from Asian American Studies in and out of the classroom – the key difference being the relationship of Asian Americanist critique to an institutional location.

Because of these methodological considerations, *Dissembling Diversities* follows APA panethnicity as a political category that arts activism and representation disseminates to multiple publics. *Dissembling Diversities*' focus on APA activism and representation in the arts addresses a form of dissenting cultural citizenship that has become a hegemonic script in its ascent into the public sphere, and as such one of *Dissembling Diversities*' key themes is the mainstreaming of Asian Americanist critique. It is not my wish that Asian Americanist critique should maintain its critical energy by always being underground (this dissembling understanding of independence is addressed in Chapter 3), and the superficial analysis of pointing out where APA arts activism is or is not really Asian Americanist critique is a game of pot shots. Instead, *Dissembling Diversities* is interested in the aesthetic construction of panethnic representation in dialogue with the liberal mandates of the public sphere. As Kandice Chuh contends, "Asian American" can be a deconstructive and deconstructed term that calls for self-reflection about the aims of Asian American Studies (and organizing and

representation). *Disassembling Diversities* follows Chuh in conceiving of Asian American Studies as a subjectless discourse, demanding not the invention of the ideal APA subject but attention to the dialectical motions between APA community agency and the processes of Asian American racialization that get shorthanded in the term's deployments. In these ways, Asian Pacific America is subjective (as a term that diagnoses how representation becomes legible as activist), subjection (as a mode of disciplining agents into a specific grid of intelligibility), and post-subjection (as a name for liberatory possibilities).

The denotations and connotations of "APA" and racialization within diversity invite the act of reading, and so *Disassembling Diversities* understands the panethnic and racial term "Asian Pacific American" as variously metaphor, analogy, metonym, paradox, and synecdoche. By reading and not assuming the designation's meaning, *Disassembling Diversities* responds to the disciplining of Asian American Studies – what Kandice Chuh has noted in *imagine otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (2003) as a generational shift between the foundational scholarship of Asian American Studies and the succeeding decades of its institutional establishment. Asian American cultural studies in the post-9/11/2001 moment reflected on how it came to be legible as a legitimized interdiscipline; *Disassembling Diversities* extends this attention on how Asian American Studies became visible and legible to the arts activism that operates in conversation with the academic enterprise.⁵⁹ However, I

⁵⁹ Kandice Chuh's *imagine otherwise* (Duke U.P., 2003) through legal and literary archives reads Asian American representation to demand more than inclusion in a nation-state that depends on citizenship as a technology of violence. In light of the incorporation of APA activism into the public sphere and the political economy, Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (Oxford U.P., 2002) examines Asian American critical practices as ethnic entrepreneurship to argue against the presumption that Asian Americans are always-already critical. Mark Chiang's *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies: Autonomy and Representation in the University* (NYU P., 2009) reads Asian American texts as allegories of cultural capital to examine the tensions between "the academy" and "the community" as ontological spaces, and appeals to the Third World Liberation Front's 1968 student strike at San Francisco State University to recreate the university anew.

tread with the awareness that Asian American Studies is a field of study that is not fully available, as many arguments for the establishment of Asian American Studies programs, such as at Rutgers University, Duke University, and the University of Pennsylvania must depend on the available terms of diversity and academic legitimacy to secure their significance. Indeed, just as the university is a central site for the propagation of middlebrow diversity, the university too is a key organizing space for Asian Americanist critique. *Dissembling Diversities* interrogates how Asian American Studies comes to matter using these frameworks through my own location within American Studies, and critiques Asian American Studies' en-disciplined methodology, in which the presence of Asian American bodies provides meaning for the field. By focusing on middlebrow cultural texts, *Dissembling Diversities* enters from a space of middleness: neither entirely elite nor subaltern, the middlebrow reflects complicity and embedded social relations as readily as contestation.

On *Dissembling Diversities*

Dissembling Diversities offers a challenge to Asian American cultural studies specifically and Ethnic Studies generally by focusing on the mediating function of sophistication and “Art,” as well as the racializing relations of these categories to class, to challenge the sacralization of “art” and “activism” as pure praxis. Each of *Dissembling Diversities*' three core chapters reads three texts to gauge APA movements in a specific form of media, the belles lettres, and entertainment – collected under the banner of “arts activism” to interrogate the politics of the aesthetic and the aesthetics of politics. Each text is simultaneously singular in its representations and activism, while suggestive of a contemporary APA movement in a cultural form. I understand *Dissembling Diversities*'

texts as panethnic political and cultural representation through one of two ways. Many of these texts announce themselves as APA through their self-naming, distribution, circulation, and reception. For example, the media reports of the civil rights organization the Asian American Justice Center and the programs of volunteer arts organization Tuesday Night Project perform very different functions, but both understand themselves as serving Asian American communities with specific missions toward social justice. One text in each chapter does not associate itself with these movements but is hailed as such by scholars, critics, and commentators as being part of those APA cultural movements. Adrian Tomine's graphic novel *Shortcomings* (read in Chapter 2) is suggestive of this imposed labeling: Tomine disassociates himself from having any political vision even as his work is identified in literary criticism and undergraduate syllabi as representing Asian American lives. In this way, each reading places a text in dialogue with the discussions and contexts that surround it, tending to how these texts and paratexts deploy sophistication to make claims about Asian American alienation, invisibility, and misrecognition. I analyze how this sophistication references cultural and symbolic capital to make it legible, and enacts a racial project that racializes Asian Americans in proximity to whiteness and in distinction from blackness through class. I then suggest how these APA racial projects symptomatize how, even if they proclaim affiliation with Black freedom struggles, contemporary APA activism can too easily rely on the general exclusions and specific antiblackness of diversity politics for Asian Americans' group value.

Given its methods of close reading, *Dissembling Diversities*, despite its at times polemical vantage points on literacy as cultural capital, remains attached to the imaginative possibilities of reading against the grain. As authors such as Priya Kandaswamy, Roderick

Ferguson, Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, David Eng, and Laura Kang argue, racial formations operate through gender-specific expressions that normalize forms of sexuality through classed codes. Because of these co-constructions of race, gender, sexuality, and class that render diversity an inherently unstable discourse, these analyses explore the contradictions that queer the terms of sophistication – though I do not explicitly name it as queer.⁶⁰

Theorists such as Ferguson, Eng, Jane Ward, and Elizabeth Freeman suggest that queerness offers a method for denaturalizing the classed mandates and orderings of capital; as Jane Ward stylistically contends, queerness is unclassy. *Disassembling Diversities* takes up a queer of color optic, following Grace Hong and Ferguson's *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (2011), to name those points of “strangeness” that destabilize the common sense of racialization. Given diversity's thrust towards making difference a private and personal matter through normative sexualities and citizenships, *Disassembling Diversities* reads its 9 texts with a clear eye towards how sex, the private sphere, sexual identity, and desire are tamed and disciplined by sophistication in order to disassemble diversity's dissemblances. As part of its disassembling use of a queer of color optic, *Disassembling Diversities* reads the coercive affect of representations; a limitation of this method is its emphasis on the aesthetic and social text over the spontaneity of a truly ethnographic approach to embodied knowledge.

Each chapter makes three core arguments that take individual shapes in each chapter and thematically build across the dissertation. The first argument addresses how APA arts activisms and representations manipulate the racializing cultural hierarchies facilitated by middlebrow cultural texts. Through handlings of content, form, production, and audience,

⁶⁰ In doing so, I am less interested in identifying bodies that engage in same-sex practices, and disarticulate the inassimilable impulses of antinormative queerness from its association with gay and lesbian identity.

Asian Americans become aligned with class mobility and racial respectability through elevating performances of cultural sophistication. The second critiques how diversity politics project social change onto the private sphere and personhood, disassembling class restrictions and sexual normativity as an intersubjective universality. Because of this emphasis on personhood, affect, emotion, and feeling become central to how diversity politics interpellate middlebrow subjects. The third interrogates representations of the racialization of Asian Americans through co-constructions of class in relation to whiteness and blackness in APA arts activism. Though many of these representations maintain the power relations and objectifications that sustain antiblackness, a central contention of *Dissembling Diversities* is the capacity of “Art” to disassemble diversity’s dissembling portrayals of social and political life.

Chapter 1, “*Missing from the American Social Fabric*,” examines two scripted television shows known for quality representations of diversity, *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005-present) and *Modern Family* (2009-present), alongside the primetime television reports of the Asian American Justice Center, a national civil rights organization. Through these specific cases, this chapter examines APA activism in the media, which imagines appropriating the power of an industry-dominated field of cultural production using mainstream diversity politics to legitimize Asian American visibility. Both *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Modern Family* are programs noted for their Asian American inclusion, and the discourses surrounding them celebrate these shows as “quality television,” which taps them into the genre’s tradition of emotionally disciplining its viewer. The deployment of Asian American characters in both *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Modern Family*’s sentimental politics illustrate that tacit inclusion through love and the family supports an educated worldview; meanwhile, confrontations with

racism, especially when done by Black characters, is shown as inappropriate for supporting everyday diversity, illustrating how diversity's antiblackness forecloses structural change for emotional edification. I show how this celebration of the private sphere and personal opinion is also reflected in the Asian American Justice Center's reports, which rely on tropes of sexuality and the private sphere to separate "good" from "bad" images of Asian Americans in primetime. Through readings of Asian American interracial intimacies, the chapter interrogates how this moral economy of diversity in the Asian American Justice Center's reports specifically and APA media advocacy generally attaches itself to racializing mythologies of liberal humanism.

Chapter 2, "A World Without Heroes," reads through comic book anthology *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology* (2009), comic strip *Secret Asian Man: the Daily Days* (2009), and the graphic novel *Shortcomings* (2007) to explicate how these texts, as tentpoles of the self-named APA graphical storytelling movement, challenge anti-Asian ignorance. Taking up the Secret Identities Universe's claims about writing Asian Americans into the Americana of the superhero tradition, this chapter refuses the assumption that APA representation which emerges from grassroots and alternative efforts is automatically anti-hierarchical. *Secret Identities* repeats nationalist binaries of good citizens and evil minorities in the same way graphical stories have been used against Asian Americans; for example, the collection features comics in which Asian Americans fight visually grotesque terrorists until they respect transcendent values of freedom and equality even as these same comics critique World War II caricatures of Japanese men. The gender politics of *Secret Identities*' grand narratives of superhero inclusion also appear in *Secret Asian Man* and *Shortcomings*' depictions of everyday Asian American masculinity. While

respecting *Secret Asian Man* and *Shortcomings*' analyses of gendered racism, Chapter 2 interrogates how these texts use heteromascularity and sexual desirability as rubrics of middle-class citizenship. As such, by reading representations of Black characters and comparative myths of racial masculinity, I illustrate how this strategy of claiming middle-class citizenship not only relies on misogyny to become legible, but an antiblackness that is suggested through its classed expectations.

Chapter 3, "*Did You Think When I Opened My Mouth*," makes race visible in indie rock, a genre of music whose predominantly white producers and fans have used blackness to fantasize about escaping capitalism even as they decry Black cultural production for being enamored with capital. By identifying the discursive and institutional dependencies in this avowedly independent genre, this chapter interrogates activism that attempts to opt out of racialization while holding onto the idea of independence. This chapter develops a genealogy of Asian American indie rock, a response to the racialized imaginings of U.S. indie rock's predecessors in 1960s counterculture, that begins with folk trio A Grain of Sand; it then uses this precedent to study three Asian American projects that critique indie's whiteness. Born in Chinese's album *CompilAsian* (2006) and director Dave Boyle's 2011 and 2012 music film collaborations with guitarist Goh Nakamura both claim a space for Asian Americans in indie rock by identifying how the category of "talent" has been racialized. However, to gain Asian Americans recognition as creative artists, both projects place an Asian American claim on status markers like "cool," "authenticity," and "universality," which participate in the appropriations of blackness that animate indie culture. Keeping the idea of independence championed by *CompilAsian* and Dave Boyle's films but rejecting the racialized class elevation associated with it, the chapter examines how Los

Angeles arts organization The Tuesday Night Project creates a space for artistic expression and community that educates about anti-Asian and anti-Black racism by negotiating the classed distinction of indie culture and “Art” in the neoliberal city.

The epilogue of this dissertation, “*But I Am Not the Revolution*,” briefly visits debates about the relationship between Asian American peoples, APA activism, and the university through a reading of Karen Tei Yamashita’s interconnected collection of novellas *I-Hotel* (2010). Despite being a “high” and aesthetically difficult literary text, *I-Hotel*, which narrates Yellow Power movement activism in 1960s to 1970s San Francisco with a partial fealty to oral histories and Asian American Studies archives, participates in middlebrow desires. For one, the novella collection seeks authentication as a living history in its explicit pedagogy of speaking to the descendants of the Yellow Power movement. For another, it challenges the university as a site of activism, and envision the university undergraduate student – the middlebrow subject par excellence, given the interpellating force of diversity – as the inheritor of Asian Americanist critique and APA activism. Taking up *Dissembling Diversities*’ graduated critique of institutionality and its publics, this reading of *I-Hotel* imagines a critical literacy that, while not free of its relation to cultural capital and sophistication, can offer a realist negotiation of what it means to critique capitalism while surviving and creating within it.

This literacy, indeed, represents the possibilities of APA arts activism. For this reason, reflecting the methodological relationship of *Dissembling Diversities* to the act of reading, I corral these artistic and activist objects, perspectives, images, and practices as interdisciplinary “texts.” This dissertation thus places the cultural critic within the complicit space of the structures they seek to disrupt. In other words, critique itself exemplifies the

bind of inviting a challenge staged through a mode of reading based in cultural and symbolic capital. For example, this dissertation is both an outgrowth of my relationship to APA arts activist communities, and my acceptance of graduate study's credentializing protocols. With this in mind, the critical literacy practiced throughout *Disassembling Diversities* resembles what Barbara Tomlinson and George Lipsitz conceptualize as an American Studies work of accompaniment: an act of working together with APA arts activists through strategic solidarities and departures that also invites the reader to participate.⁶¹ Through the aesthetic disassemblies within arts activism and socially conscious Asian American representations, *Disassembling Diversities* reads alongside artists and activists to expand on the critical reading practices of middlebrow texts in which capital is turned against its accumulative impulse. Through its identifications of the normative resemblances and aesthetic dissemblances of arts activism, particularly as facilitated by sophistication, *Disassembling Diversities* uses the conceptual language of academic thought to interject something specific to this specialized mode of thinking into the process of cultural creation. I struggle to engage readings that already exist within these texts – countering the authoritative and indeed authoritarian impulse of the critic and working as an ensemble to reimagine APA arts activism.

⁶¹ As Tomlinson and Lipsitz explain in their invocation of accompaniment as both a travel and a musical metaphor, “In accompaniment there are times when it will be wise to work together and times when it will be wise to remain apart. Yet accompaniment allows disagreements to be seen as evidence of problems yet to be solved, discussions yet to be conducted, understandings yet to be developed“ (11). American Studies as Accompaniment,” *American Quarterly* 65.1 (2013): 9-13. Many thanks to Mary Corbin Sies for this reference.

Chapter 1 :: Missing from the American Social Fabric
Asian American Inclusion, “Culture,” and the Privatization of Diversity in Quality TV

Critics of mass culture fare like *Teen Mom* and *The Real Housewives* franchises have marked television as a sign of humanity’s end. Yet, according to cultural commentators, the 2010s have christened a new Golden Age of Television; specific programs are spoken of as “art” for their complexity, difficulty, aesthetic freedom, and pedagogical potential. While cultural criticism has located television between mass culture and Art, TV has served a much clearer purpose in Asian American Studies: Orinary works in Asian American popular culture studies critiqued TV programs for distorting uses of Asians and Asian Americans as a prop, foil, or object.⁶² Writing in the 1980s and 1990s, these authors could not see TV as a site of struggle because Asian Americans were (and still are) underrepresented in creative and production processes, and lacked substantial acting roles. Scholarship on comedian Margaret Cho’s short-lived *All-American Girl* (1994) – a show often regarded as the first Asian American sitcom – highlights how ABC’s demands for legible Asian difference, especially of intergenerational “cultural” conflict, disrupted Cho’s vision.⁶³ This denial of her creative agency precluded the possibility of counterhegemonic representation; Cho in her stand-up acts has commented on the network’s overbearing influence on that show. APA activists, such as the Asian American Justice Center media reports discussed in this chapter, have identified how the exclusions that Asian Americans experience, seen in the forever

⁶² Daryl Hamamoto and Robert G. Lee illustrate how Asian and Asian American characters appear in shows ranging from *M.A.S.H.* (1972-1983) to *21 Jump Street* (1987-1991) to serve as ideological figures that ease the tensions of imperialism and racism on the white protagonists.

⁶³ See for example Sarah Moon Cassinelli, “If we are Asian, then are we funny?” Margaret Cho’s *All-American Girl* as the First (and Last?) Asian American Sitcom,” *Studies in American Humor* 3.17 (2008): 131-144.

foreigner myth but also in incidences of hate crimes, are fueled by such representations that normalize the object status of Asian bodies.

But would these power arrangements change if Asian Americans could express agency in television's industry-dominated forms? The paradigm has shifted for Asian American representation on scripted primetime television, even when not written by Asian Americans and even when institutionally managed by major networks. I lovingly watch Ken Jeong, who portrayed the Fu Manchu buffoon Mr. Chow in the fratboy hit *The Hangover* (2009), play Señor Benjamin Chang, the gang's Chinese American Spanish instructor, on the critical darling *Community* (2009-present). Prominent Asian American supporting characters have appeared on network programming as varied as medical mystery procedural *House* (2004-12), mockumentary *Parks and Recreation* (2008-present), action-thriller *Marvel's Agents of SHIELD* (2013-present), and musical/comedy *Glee* (2009-present), just as John Cho of the iconic *Harold and Kumar* Asian American stoner buddy-movie franchise has established himself as a TV actor and writer Mindy Kaling premiered the second Asian American sitcom, *The Mindy Project* (2012-present), to moderate acclaim. These shows are considered to varying extents "quality television," which refers not only to their production value, but also their aesthetic innovations and "teachable moments." Whereas the liberal multiculturalism of mid-to-late 20th century television furthered Asian/Americans' disenfranchisement, today's neoliberal diversity invests in the "humanity" of Asian American characters, and even evokes nuggets of common experiences through their backstories. It feels like Asian Americanist critique has finally gone public, as such shows are celebrated in venues like the Asian American popular culture publication *Hyphen Magazine* and feminist blog *Jezebel* as part of a cultural current that can remediate long-

standing misrepresentations of Asian American people. However, this chapter contends that this recognition, in its sole focus on “good” and “bad” representations, misrecognizes how Asian American characters become central to the racializing dramas of diversity politics.

By focusing on three sites that include Asian Americans in representations of diversity on scripted network television, this chapter asks: What space do Asian Americans occupy in the mainstreaming of diversity through quality TV, and what does this suggest about how Asian American bodies get valued in relation to other racialized bodies? This chapter reads the medical-soap *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005-present) and family mockumentary *Modern Family* (2009-present), two generically and stylistically distinct shows that are celebrated for their multiracial and sexually diverse casts of characters, and for their narration of diversity issues in their storylines – often through deployments of stereotype critique. My readings of these shows decentralize the prominent Asian American characters and instead center marginal Asian American extras to focus on the comparative ideologemes of these narratives. This chapter reads in conversation with its critique of “quality” and “diversity” the Asian American Justice Center’s (AAJC) two reports on Asian Americans in primetime television, *Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time: Lights, Camera, and Little Action* (2005) and *Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time: Setting the Stage* (2006) – the latter of which names *Grey’s Anatomy* as an exemplar of Asian American representation, as comprehensive articulations of the stakes of APA media advocacy. This chapter illustrates the ethical foreclosures that occur when diversity becomes the animating frame of racial representation and activist response, particularly when it perpetuates the racialization of sophistication as social progress.

To do so, this chapter makes three arguments. Firstly, the discourse of “quality” that defines quality television becomes in part defined by diversity. Through this conjunction, the middlebrow viewer becomes subject to diversity just as the diverse subject seeks out middlebrow edification. Secondly, this quality television uses the form’s characteristic interpellating sentimentality as both an emotional politic and social pedagogy to narrate the private sphere, specifically love and family, as key to social change. This scripting occurs through representations of characters’ interior life, which appeal to a human universalism – *we are all equal because we feel this same way* – that makes social structures, political action, and public discussion disappear. The TV shows of this chapter are notable for their multiracial inclusions, yet their Asian American and Latina/o characters, “middled” between a white liberalism and blackness, become defined by contradistinctions of “culture,” which stands for past-turning racialized difference, and “modernity,” signified through class. This emotional binary individualizes demands for assimilation to whiteness as crises of character; Asian Americans become aligned with representations of education specifically and class markers generally, as opposed to their Latina/o counterparts, to imagine the displacement of this racializing binary through personal responsibility. As such, thirdly, the Asian American representation of both the shows and the AAJC’s media advocacy envision quality television as articulating Asian American representation’s potential to disrupt the racial commonsense. However, this disruption depends on a middlebrow diversity politic that creates dissembling analogies between Asian American identity and incommensurable subject positions. These comparisons reiterate anti-Black racism in their dependence on Black bodies and voices as symbols and not subjects. To tie these three arguments together, I focus on the *privatization of diversity*, or how “diversity’s” representation of private personhood in the “post-racial”

moment is deployed as an affective form of management that translates moralisms about “diversity” into cultural and symbolic capital for a quality subject in ways that maintain white/anti-Black hierarchies.⁶⁴

In defining quality television, the central form of this chapter, Robert J. Thompson states that it is, in part, “defined by what it is not,”⁶⁵ suggesting how “quality” names a negative relation to an identifiable norm. John Caughie contends that “quality television is actually a ‘middle-brow’ term”; the genre’s inflection as “quality” poaches from artistic conventions but is limited in how much acclaim it can accumulate by the medium’s function as profit-driven entertainment.⁶⁶ Robert J. Thompson’s *Television’s Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER* (1996), which documents how the rise of cable networks in the 1980s and the resulting multiplication of viewer markets enabled “quality television’s” emergence, defines the genre through twelve criteria, including the introductory provocation. His criteria slide across quality as an issue of production, aesthetic value, critical reception, and the viewer, as “quality” attaches both to aesthetic objects and aesthetic subjects.⁶⁷ Thompson’s assessment of quality is mirrored by Jimmie L. Reeves, Marc C. Rogers, and

⁶⁴ This privatization of diversity is similar to what David L. Eng in *The Feeling of Kinship* (Duke U.P., 2010) calls the “racialization of intimacy,” but I depart from Eng in his argument that the racialization of intimacy as whiteness conceals the capitalist and political manipulations that shape the private sphere. Instead, I argue that the privatization of diversity makes clear how the private sphere is the celebrated space of capitalism and politics.

⁶⁵ Thompson, *Television’s Second Golden Age* (Syracuse University Press, 1997), 12.

⁶⁶ As Jane Feuer historicizes in Janet McCabe and Kim Akass’s collection, *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond* (2007), quality television was preceded by 1950s anthology teleplays, whose creators sought to be associated with film’s seriousness and not serialized television’s frivolity. Feuer is another pioneer of critical discourse about quality television. McCabe and Akass, *Quality TV* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 146, 150.

⁶⁷ For Sarah Cardwell, quality television differs from “good” television. Quality TV expresses high production value; innovative visual, narrative, and aural style; and complicated and topical content; good television is of individual opinion and enjoyment. McCabe and Akass, 21, 26. Thompson, like Robin Nelson, reminds that quality TV did not develop on premium cable’s exclusive fringes to then migrate to broadcast television in a top-down model of innovation, but emerged from increased production values and technological development. *Ibid.*, xviii, 42.

Michael M. Epstein's analysis of external institutional evaluations, such as Emmy Awards, Peabody Awards, and FCC fines. In their view, quality is discursively produced by "brute economics," such as ratings and revenue; "cultural currency," such as critical acclaim and perceptions of a program's value, and the "'aura' of quality" attached to a brand based on this perception of additional worth.⁶⁸ The discourse of quality hails a quality subject, who values accolades, image, and that status-making "aura," and transacts cultural and symbolic capital between the quality object and the quality subject through legible signifiers of distinction.

However, beyond issues of distinction, quality television has been defined by its social pedagogies. Thompson's tenth criteria explains that quality television, in gaining its cultural traction, tends to address "controversial" subject matter, which he then clarifies by quoting Jane Feuer: "Quality TV is liberal TV" – which summarizes the politics of quality discourse.⁶⁹ Ashley Sayeau analyzes representations of feminism and women's rights on television programs through the framework of quality television to argue for the overlap between quality TV and feminist TV. Specifically, she reads *Maude*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Designing Women*, three shows about class-mobile white women whose selection demonstrates the white liberal feminism that enables quality TV's relevance; in essence, the quality subject interpellated by this (liberal) feminist TV is hailed by its diversity politics. Television critic Alan Sepinwall's *The Revolution Was Televised: The Cops, Crooks, Slingers, and Slayers Who Changed TV Drama Forever* (2010), like several of *Quality TV's* contributors, uses the premium channel Home Box Office's (HBO) 1996-2009 slogan, "It's

⁶⁸ Ibid, 94-5. See also Maire Messenger Davies' definition of quality as an institutional discourse – one "associated with tradition, education, literariness and upward social mobility," as well as Feuer's argument that the second Golden Age of Television enabled the medium to be associated with "Art." Ibid., 176, 146.

⁶⁹ Thompson, 16.

not TV. It's HBO.”, as an epistemology.⁷⁰ While HBO, in ways that broadcast channels do not, has a reputation for allowing aesthetic agency and creativity conducive to quality television, HBO's premium channel status and its associated costs inevitably links quality to limitations on access. Though his purpose is to recognize those shows that have innovated and indeed elevated audience expectations of hour-long programming, fewer than half of Sepinwall's ten shows bill non-tokenizing, multiracial casts, and only one of those showcases an actor of color as a protagonist.⁷¹ As the racial exclusions of Sayeau and Sepinwall's accounts of quality's transgressive potential illustrate, the liberal politics of quality TV depend on a capital-wielding subject, presumed to be white, who is generalized as universal. If diversity is propagated through quality TV, diversity constructs aesthetic hierarchies of worth that elevate quality subjects above their lowbrow counterparts – which include those racial Others whose exclusion is a byproduct of what allows quality to signify.

The scholarly literature suggests that the form instrumentalizes the feelings of the quality subject as political action through the narrative complexity and character depth that require viewer identification. This identification participates in cultural genealogies of feeling that make evident how liberalism is not incidental, but central to quality television's impact. As Rebecca Wanzo's *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised: African American Women and Sentimental Political Storytelling* argues, the use of sentimentality as social awareness dates to 19th century anti-slavery novels that narrativized the suffering slave's

⁷⁰ Sepinwall analyzes shows from the late 1990s to the present across broadcast, cable, and premium channels, and evokes of how discussions of quality TV seem to cite the same shows: *The Sopranos*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Deadwood*, *The Shield*, *24*, *Lost*, *Friday Night Lights*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Mad Men*, and *Breaking Bad*.

⁷¹ I keep this terminology vague. Do *Deadwood* and *24* count for their respective inclusion of people of color as comic relief and anti-American antagonists? That one lead actor is *Battlestar: Galactica*'s Edward James Olmos, who is either racially passing or elevated to the “post-racial” universal through his white-skin appearance.

body and the (white) witness' response to it; these provided the reader with both an emotional impetus for social change and a pedagogical model of right action.⁷² Wanzo defines sentimentality as “texts that represent history, events, people, and/or conflicts in simplistic emotional binaries, are designed to produce tears to joyful wistfulness in the consumer, and represent emotion in a way that is far from the complexity of how affect works in ‘reality.’”⁷³ Sentimental politics teach people how to relate to one another through the manipulative oversimplification of the aggrieved subject into the suffering object. Wanzo delineates five conventions of sympathy: first, progress narratives that place injustice in the past, which, second, delegitimizes claims to “real” pain; third, suffering hierarchies that privilege the white woman’s body and value other experiences based on how they resemble that subject location; fourth, the homogenization of suffering; and fifth, proffering therapeutic or emotional intimacy with someone of greater structural advantage as change.⁷⁴ Sentimentality’s liberal logic is premised on the privileged citizen’s capacity to feel suffering, and draws individuals to identify with group experiences based on semantic equivalencies and emotional legibilities. Sentimentality, while aspiring to action, exists as a private transaction between the text and its reader, and disassembles tears as public action and social change. This chapter uses sentimentality to understand the racializing emotional politics that take place within this conjunction of “quality” and “diversity.”

***Somebody Says Something and Somebody Else Says Something and Then We Cry:
Grey’s Anatomy and the Equalizing Feeling of Difference***

⁷² Rebecca Wanzo, *The Suffering Will Not Be Televised: African American Women and Sentimental Political Storytelling* (Albany: State U. of New York P., 2009), 3. Many thanks to Jessica Kenyatta Walker’s review of Wanzo’s text for helping me assess these issues.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

ABC's *Grey's Anatomy*, an hour-long prime time medical soap that premiered in March 2005 represents a paradigmatic sentimental text that also approaches many definitions of quality. Now in its eleventh season of neck-breaking plot twists and feelings galore,⁷⁵ *Grey's Anatomy* takes place at Seattle Grace Hospital – later renamed Seattle Grace/Mercy West Hospital after a Season 6 merger with another area hospital, then renamed the Grey Sloan Memorial Hospital after the lead doctors purchase the flailing hospital in Season 9. The show focalizes Dr. Meredith Grey, played by white actor Ellen Pompeo, the daughter of a famous surgeon who carries on her legacy. Each episode of *Grey's Anatomy* follows a general structure: Dr. Grey begins with a voiceover on the nature of medicine, professionalism, or love; the episode weaves together multiple subplots based in patient cases both outlandish and traumatic, from which the surgeons learn a valuable lesson that crosses from their work life to their private life; and the episode ends with Dr. Grey continuing her framing pontification to an ironic effect. Creator Shonda Rhimes and her actors of color, namely Sandra Oh, Sara Ramirez, and Chandra Wilson, have been recognized by both critical circles and media advocacy groups, garnering Emmy nominations and wins, Screen Actors Guild Awards, Golden Globes, NAACP Image Awards, and recognition from the National Council of La Raza and the Imagen Foundation. In this way, *Grey's* has been recognized as quality, first, for its ability to approximate the highest standards of art and drama, and, second, for its spirit of substantial inclusion. In numerous interviews, Rhimes has described her “race-blind” casting, for which she did not specify an actor’s race, as central to her stance against television’s naturalized racism; she saw this as a meritocratic

⁷⁵ In a metacritical joke in the Season 8 finale, Dr. Calliope “Callie” Torres, who has worked as an orthopedic surgeon at Seattle Grace/Mercy West since Season 2, rattles off in quick succession to the Season 6 cast additions the personal and professional catastrophes that have befallen her over her time at the hospital to their amazement.

process that enabled diversity, such as the inclusion of Sandra Oh as Asian American Dr. Cristina Yang.⁷⁶

However, as Amy Long points out, *Grey's* makes racial bodies visible as institutionalized and structural racism disappear. The show's formal conventions as an interwoven melodrama comparatively values its differentially raced, gendered, and sexualized characters' stories to shape an episode's emotional or moral arc through false equivalencies.⁷⁷ For example, in *Grey's* pilot, the newly acquainted Dr. Meredith Grey and Dr. Cristina Yang begin as competitors; Dr. Yang angles for attention from her superiors, while Dr. Grey deals with having sex with a man revealed to be her attending (and future husband) Dr. Derek Shepherd (white actor Patrick Dempsey). When Dr. Shepherd selects Meredith for a hands-on surgical experience, Cristina shouts at her: "I don't get picked for surgeries because I slept with someone, and I didn't get into med school because of my mother." As Long attests, Dr. Yang is not wrong; Meredith's career trajectory has been facilitated by structural racial privilege, resulting in wealth accumulation and legacy prestige, and gender normativity. When Cristina sees Dr. Grey succeed, she apologizes somewhat: "We don't have to do the thing where somebody says something and somebody else says something and then we cry." With that, the two are best friends. Long's analysis reminds that such narratives of post-civil rights intimacy eclipse how white supremacy, racial privilege, gender disparities, and access operate in *Grey's* background.

My reading of *Grey's*, however, pays attention to the foreground, tracking the ideological work of Asian American inclusion in the series' fights and apologies,

⁷⁶ See, for example, "Oprah Interviews Shonda Rhimes," *O Magazine* (December 2006), available online at <http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprah-Interviews-Greys-Anatomy-Creator-Shonda-Rhimes>.

⁷⁷ Amy Long, "Diagnosing Drama: *Grey's Anatomy*, Blind Casting, and the Politics of Representation," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44.5 (2011), 1027.

comparisons that resolve in tears, and sentimental desires. Taking Rhimes' stated awareness of racism seriously, Rhimes' political vision in *Grey's* explores the limitations of antiracism within "post-racialism." For example, in Season 1, Episode 2, Dr. Isobel Stevens (white actor Katherine Heigl) is frustrated by an Asian patient, Mrs. Liu, who only speaks Cantonese. After a cluster of efforts, Dr. Stevens asks Dr. Yang to translate, which Dr. Yang refuses, saying incredulously: "... I grew up in Beverly Hills; the only Chinese I know is from Mr. Chow's menu. Besides, I'm Korean." The Asian American character narrates a now common-sense moment of interracial misrecognition, and the viewer participates in this pedagogical moment. As argued in *Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time: Setting the Stage*, the 2006 media research report by the Asian American Justice Center (discussed later in this chapter), Dr. Yang "repeatedly displays both her intellectual skills on the job and a range of emotions involving personal issues," leading the report to conclude: "Her character is not simply a 'token Asian' in the workplace" (2006, 17). Through her inclusion, Dr. Cristina Yang has set a new standard for the merging of "diversity" and "quality."

While Dr. Yang's critique has become so mainstreamed that it can go without comment on a network show, an exclusive focus on such exceptional moments produces a reading strategy unable to track the ideological work that this "diversity" performs. As Dr. Stevens' subplot continues, she follows the shuffling Mrs. Liu out in the rain to the hospital dumpster to find a younger Asian woman with a laceration on her forehead. Dr. Stevens realizes that Mrs. Liu and her companion, an immigrant without documentation, work in a factory at which a piece of machinery injured them, and Dr. Stevens smuggles supplies out to the dumpster to stitch wounds in secret. Procedure complete, Stevens watches the two Asian women disappear into the rainy night, and the beautiful, white doctor realizes her own self-

worth by going against hospital protocol to heal someone. Dr. Stevens eventually realizes that she and Mrs. Liu are just two women looking for help. “Diversity” becomes a skill of self-improvement, as the viewer identifies with Dr. Stevens’ defiance as altruism in a situation analogized to that of her subaltern patients. By tending to the sentimental calculus surrounding Asian Americans in quality narrations of diversity, my reading of *Grey’s* follows Dr. Cristina Yang’s exceptional Asian American multiculturalism in relation to those who, as suggested in her encounter with Dr. Stevens, would otherwise be defined by “cultural” difference. In doing so, this section engages the racial precarity that disappears in “diversity’s” equalizing sentimentality and the reliance of its associated language of “culture” on private personhood as the site of social change.

Spare Me the White Girl/Cultural Divide Love: Modernity, Capital, and Racialized Tradition

While *Grey’s* is noted for colorblind universalism, the fifth episode of the second season, “Bring the Pain,” both features culturally specific conflict with the medical enterprise as a patient-of-the-week subplot and establishes plot points that shape the characters for seasons to come.⁷⁸ In the sixth scene, the viewer is introduced to Anna Chue (portrayed by Michelle Krusiec of the iconic Asian American film *About Face* (2005)), a young Asian American woman with unbearable back pain. Her parents enter, her father scolding her for not calling them. Dr. Shepherd shares the diagnosis: Anna has tumor in the spinal canal; recommends immediate surgery to avoid paralysis. She, in spite of her legal adulthood, follows her father’s order to decline surgery. To Dr. Shepherd’s protest, Anna says, “I’m Hmong and my father is the elder. If he says I go home, I go home,” as the series’

⁷⁸ These iconic moments include Dr. O’Malley’s open-heart surgery while trapped in an elevator, leading to his nickname, and Dr. Grey’s “Pick me. Choose me. Love me” speech to Dr. Shepherd that repeats across the series.

“impossible decision” leitmotif plays in the background. The scene cuts to Meredith and Derek ascending a stairwell, as he says, “Hmong? Let’s find out what that means. Contact social services. Get somebody down here – talk to them.” Calling Anna’s discharge “insane,” Derek’s trepidation about what “Hmong” means becomes the emotional struggle and the teachable moment of this subplot – which asks the viewer to overlook how his immediate response to non-white “culture” is state intervention. When the narrative returns to Anna, Dr. Grey explains to Anna the procedure for a discharge against medical advice and offers: “I know this is ... new and confusing. I called a social worker and she’s willing to come to talk to you–” Anna cuts her off: “Spare me your white girl/cultural divide love. I grew up down the street from here: I play in a band, I went to UDub; I get it. My father doesn’t. He says no, it’s no.” The first two sentences of Krusiec’s portrayal express the irritation of constantly explaining cultural difference. Anna has confronted her doctor for her primitivizing Orientalism, and, through citations not only of her local upbringing but also her education and her suggested subcultural cool, provides evidence that she exceeds Dr. Grey’s essentialist expectation. While Anna disappears into the series’ catalogue of patients, her peripheral role makes evident how the figure of the daughter defined by “culture” and “tradition” enacts an emotional politic through mainstream feminist tropes of vulnerability, social reproduction, and choice that uses class signifiers to resolve ethnic “culture,” as a stand-in for racial difference, with a whiteness understood as universal modernity. In this section, I explore the “culture”/“modernity” binary that the class-mobile Chue family performs, and examine its transposition to the central character – Latina, not Asian American – whose emotional arc is defined by it.

While Dr. Grey encounters Anna's multiculturalism in a teachable moment, Dr. Shepherd's interaction with the Chue family makes evident the class mobility that enables this pluralism. In the second scene of Act III, Derek wanders outside in the rain to find Mr. Chue smoking a cigar under an umbrella. Dr. Shepherd presses him on his refusal of treatment, and Mr. Chue explains resignedly that Anna needs a shaman to restore her soul to survive the surgery. The doctor, with a renewed optimism, chimes, "You could've told me that." Chue, in slight disbelief, asks: "Why? So you can call me a fool?" Shepherd explains: "I respect that you have traditions that I can't understand. But you're standing beside me in a \$3,000 suit, so I also know that you respect the fact that I'm telling you: Anna needs a surgery in the next 24 hours if she's gonna continue to walk." Derek reads Mr. Chue as embodying the tension between a modernity marked by luxury items and a cultural epistemology of difference that is inscrutable and past-turning. While his consumer sophistication marks him in proximity to whiteness, Mr. Chue is all too aware of the cultural devaluation that comes from majoritarian institutional agents such as Dr. Shepherd. Though the expense of the suit and the performance of the cigar, which one can presume is similarly fine, do not reflect middle-class expenses, Dr. Shepherd uses these symbols as their ideological meeting ground not only for them, but for the viewer. Mr. Chue's distrust of the diverse white doctor marks him as unnecessarily prejudiced as ostensibly Dr. Shepherd becomes this storyline's hero and beacon of tolerance; he uses the hospital's resources to heli-lift a shaman from 500 miles away to placate the insular, "traditional" family.

While Derek emerges as the agent of "diversity," the episode's melodramatic equalizing makes Meredith its pedagogical subject. The final scene of Act IV begins with Dr. Grey before the ritual, checking in on Anna; she tells her doctor to watch for "The

moment it happens” as the shaman enters the room with the Chue family. The narrative returns to the ritual in Act V, during which images of the shaman, wearing a headdress and lighting a fire, alternate with images of the family standing around Anna’s bed while Derek and Meredith watch from the hallway without a hint of irony. The ritual then intercuts scenes of the episode’s variegated plotlines against the subdued sounds of “Don’t Forget Me” by Way Out West; the tenuto pleas of its chorus, “Don’t forget me / Don’t regret me / Don’t suspect me / Don’t neglect me,” align the Chue family’s performance of spiritual Otherness to the episode’s stories about trust, pain, and relief. Anna’s eyelids flutter through gentle wisps of smoke as she makes eye contact with Meredith in the moment “it” happened from their earlier dialogue; the camera work invites the viewer to watch and consume this spectacle alongside the white doctors. Moved by Anna’s ritual, Meredith confronts Derek with her feelings about their then-off-again relationship in a speech that becomes iconic to the show’s emotional universe – her logic being that she is trusting Dr. Shepherd as her “family” as Anna did hers.⁷⁹ The white doctors’ contact with the Chue’s multiculturalism manifests as the supposedly universal affective relation of trust that is emblemized by the nuclear family. Sophisticated modernity mechanically saves Anna’s life, but tradition, existing out of time, fills it with irrational and emotive meaning. However, these constructions do not meet as equals: while cultural diversity is an intangible value added to modernity’s whiteness, tradition will die – literally, in terms of Anna’s tumorous Asian body – without modernity’s forward progress. This diversity scheme’s subject is interpellated through a sentimental logic that apprehends diversity as supplementary to modernity; this subject is hailed by class identity signifiers and not the rhetoric of “culture,” indicating, in

⁷⁹ To the dedicated *Grey’s* fan, I am talking about the series’ “Pick me. Choose me. Love me” plea.

this deployment of class specificity as commonality, the middlebrow dynamic of this “post-racial” politic.

These racialized generational conflicts, coded as an irrational, past-turning spirituality and a class mobile, future-looking modernity, unfold using the other *Grey’s* character defined by “cultural” difference, Dr. Callie Torres, played by Latina actor Sara Ramirez. In Season 3, she elopes with another doctor, male, in a Vegas wedding, and the breakdown of this marriage leads to the brief introduction of her father, Carlos Torres (played by Hector Elizondo, lead actor from the co-pioneer series of the medical drama genre, *Chicago Hope* (1994-2000)). Elizondo plays the character with a slight accent, suggesting his racializing relationship to “tradition.” He returns in Season 5, incensed by his daughter’s divorce and the revelation that she now dates women, to force his daughter to leave Seattle for reformation; Dr. Torres is disowned, not only emotionally from the family, but financially from the trust fund that has enabled her career and standard of living. He reappears in Season 6 under the guise of reconciling with Callie, but he is accompanied by a Catholic priest to, as she puts it, “pray the gay away.”

In this way, sexual identity represents a modernity incongruous to cultural “tradition.” Callie’s Season 6 fight with her father reaches an emotional climax when her girlfriend, Dr. Arizona Robbins (played by white actor Jessica Capshaw), approaches him following a Bible-quoting shouting match between father and daughter. She explains that her name comes from the *U.S.S. Arizona*, a tribute to her grandfather, who died in the bombing of Pearl Harbor. With the revelatory leitmotif in the background, Arizona explains in a gently lit close-up: “I was raised to be a good man in a storm, raised to love my country, love my family, protect the things I love.” Her monologue shares her story of her father, Colonel

Daniel Robbins of the United States Marine Corps, learning of her sexual orientation: “he said he had only one question. I was prepared for, ‘How fast can you get the hell out of my house?’ But instead, it was, ‘Are you still who I raised you to be?’” She continues: “My father believes in country the way you believe in God. My father is not a man who bends, but he bent for me because I’m his daughter.” Arizona convinces Carlos to reconcile with his daughter by drawing comparisons between his religious conservatism and the religiosity of the nation; Arizona’s appeals to duty and fealty imbue Callie’s sexuality with a respectability because of their alignment not only with normativity but with the sense of obligation that animates patriotic ideologemes. After Arizona gives a similar speech to Callie, father and daughter make up; she promises a wedding and grandkids. They seal the deal with a hug, and after a crack about vegetarianism, Carlos mutters: “I feel very old.” Happiness sutures the temporal gap between Carlos’ “old” religious ways and the “newness” of Callie’s sexuality. The viewer is hailed through a homonormative logic through which the white, successful lesbian articulates her resemblance of the ideal citizen. Indeed, Arizona and her military family represent a legacy of patriotic whiteness which Torres and her family must resemble for their inclusion in happiness. The good feelings that resolve this filial conflict, scripted as the disjuncture of race and sexuality and understood as the pedagogy of diversity, bridge by rendering difference superfluous to the affective core of filial relation.

This peace is short-lived, as Carlos comes back with Callie’s mother Maria Torres in tow for Season 7’s “White Wedding,” an episode explicitly planned by Rhimes and her lead writers to champion same-sex marriage.⁸⁰ After a traumatic season for the couple, Callie and

⁸⁰ See for example Lesley Goldberg, “Callie and Arizona Will Say ‘I Do’ I May on *Grey’s Anatomy*, *AfterEllen on Logo Online*, April 1, 2011, <http://www.afterellen.com/callie-and-arizona-will-say-i-do-in-may-on-greys-anatomy/04/2011/>. In *Grey Matter*, a blog attached to the ABC network’s subsite for *Grey’s Anatomy* that featured postings from the show’s creative team, series writer Stacy McKee responds to a reporter question

Arizona decide to get married. Living in Washington State, where same-sex marriage was not recognized at the time of airing, the two characters have jumped through multiple hoops to arrange a ceremony. “White Wedding” begins with the introduction of Callie’s parents to Arizona’s parents, and the reintroduction of Callie’s mother to Callie’s life after her earlier disownment in a culture clash narrative: both sets of parents are confused by their children and by each other. Callie fights with her mother, which causes Maria to stammer homophobic judgments about her daughter’s life under the guise of Catholicism, and she leaves with Callie’s father.⁸¹ The wedding preparation continues with predictable obstacles, such as the priest being unable to attend. Callie panics, cries, and is consoled by her bridesmaid Dr. Miranda Bailey, played by Black actor Chandra Wilson. Callie laments that her wedding is not “real,” but Dr. Bailey gives a speech to Callie in a medium close-up shot; with the camera trained on her optimistic emoting from Callie’s point of view, the viewer is included by extension: “You do not need the law, or a priest or your mother to make your wedding real.” Her monologue goes on to locate the metaphysical idea of church and God in the heart, and continues:

Your church just hasn’t caught up to God yet. Your mother ... she hasn’t caught up to God yet. And, by the way, she may not ever. And that’s okay. If you are willing to stand up in front of your friends and family and God and commit yourself to another human being, to give of yourself and that kind of partnership for better or worse, in sickness or in health? I mean, that is a marriage, that is real.

about “White Wedding” and its same-sex union, “Are you worried at all about making such a bold statement?”, in a blog post that declares, “Are you kidding me? *NO*. [...] Not exactly re-investing the wheel here, people. But, I guess, to some people, it is.” McKee, “Stacy McKee on ‘White Wedding,’” *Grey Matter: From the Writers of Grey’s Anatomy*, May 5, 2011, <http://www.greyswriters.com/2011/05/stacy-mckee-on-white-wedding.html>.

⁸¹ By this point, Callie has had a child with her best friend, Dr. Mark Sloan, as a result of a brief fling but has resumed dating Arizona.

By redescribing marriage as an aesthetic framing of mutual devotion, Miranda remarks on marriage through its capacity to resemble the transcendent divine. Miranda uses the language of arrested and progressive temporalities to designate love as the arrival point of race, sexuality, religion, and, as implied by the extratextual moment, citizenship. She goes on to joke about her divorce as evidence of the “realness” of heterosexual marriage.

Bailey’s emotional meditation on marriage as personal affect equalizes Callie and Arizona’s marriage with the counterposing marriage of the episode, Derek and Meredith’s. Spurned on in part by Callie and Arizona’s ceremony but compelled to do so to adopt African orphan infant Zola, Derek and Meredith decide to legitimize their seven-ish year, obstacle-ridden romance by getting married. Shoring up the emotional legitimacy and ritualistic performance of Callie and Arizona’s same-sex wedding ceremony, complete with flowers, guests, and white dresses, against the legal ceremony, in which Derek and Meredith rush spur-of-the-moment from the hospital in formal but ordinary attire to see a justice of the peace in a poorly lit chamber, *Grey’s* champions Arizona and Callie’s wedding as the “real” one through its resemblance of that gendered heteronormative image – though the viewer understands both through frames of “true love.” The material adornments that prove the spiritual truth of Callie and Arizona’s marriage illustrate how the performance of this respectability is classed. Further, marriage as pure love disassembles the significance of the scene: while Callie and Arizona end up married by Miranda, Derek and Meredith end up married by the state.

The visual play of the real and not-real disappears the material property relations embedded in state recognition, such as the parental rights for which Derek and Meredith have gotten married, in diversity’s emotional politics of love. At the episode’s denouement at

Arizona and Callie's reception, Meredith's voiceover monologue begins to sum up the episode: "We find happiness in unexpected places. We find our way back to the things that matter the most." Mr. Torres, in full formal attire, has come back to his daughter's wedding reception. He apologizes to Callie in a tear-filled moment as Meredith's voiceover concludes, and they dance. The legitimacy of Callie's same-sex marriage is validated by her father abandoning his sense of racialized tradition and coming over to his daughter's modern happiness – one symbolized in a wedding that, through its very newness, outshines the trappings of both racialized and heterosexual "tradition." Callie's father/daughter dance is overlaid onto a scene of Derek dancing with his potential daughter; while the affective investment in love sutures differences over sexual orientation for one couple, love bridges race and nationality in the other. As I have argued by tracing this sentimental binary of racialized "culture" against class-mobile "modernity," *Grey's* diversity politic deploys sophistication and respectability, represented through class-specific signifiers, to construct a progress narrative in which one moves away from "culture" to diversity. Characters are given access to the equalizing symbolic capital of the universal through representations of love, which then allows emotional outpouring to appear to the viewer as social change.

I Am Rising Above: "Post-Racial" Remembering and the Feeling of Blackness

It is significant that Dr. Miranda Bailey, the series' strong Black woman, mediates Callie's cultural conflict. Given that "culture" in the cultural/modernity binary is racialized as Asian and Latino but scripted as a progress narrative, "culture" enables a teachable moment, but race must be overcome. *Grey's* season-long narrative arcs are punctuated by "disaster episodes" during each season's sweeps, in which the doctors face landmark pressures, tragedies, and heartaches that all connect to an environmental or human-caused

disaster. “The Time Warp,” the Season 6, Episode 15 flashback episode, which aired during February 2010 sweeps, and “Crash Into Me,” the Season 4 two-parter of Episodes 9 and 10 that aired at the tail end of November 2007 sweeps, narrate institutional and interpersonal racism. The strategic placement of these episodes imply that the disaster here is racial bias, and suggests these episodes’ centrality to Rhimes’ creative project in their airing during periods of heightened advertiser and viewer scrutiny. Even as *Grey’s* represents Black struggles against institutionalized racism, *Grey’s*, as I show in the readings that follow, uses its form and its division of the public and the private to occlude Black freedom by recognizing racism only through the interiorizing tenor of melodrama. As such, *Grey’s* confrontation with racism actively forgets the struggles for racial representation that have enabled the show to receive its acclaim – what Hiram Perez calls an “organized forgetting”⁸² – through its emotional directives that privilege possessive individualism as the basis for recognizing “diversity” and its cultural capital. In other words, in this section, I follow these two “disaster” episodes to examine how the blackness of two key characters is positioned in relation to “modernity,” through “The Time Warp,” and culture, in “Crash Into Me,” to highlight the subordinated position of racial consciousness within diversity.

Through its retroactive storytelling, “The Time Warp’s” emotional catharsis promotes strategic attachments to memories of civil rights reforms through its commensurable comparisons. Originally airing on February 18, 2010, “The Time Warp” begins with a teaser that overlays the voice of the former Chief of Surgery and recently fired Dr. Richard Webber (played by Black actor James Pickens), discussing mutual influence and impact, onto scenes

⁸² Perez, “How to Rehabilitate a Mulatto: The Iconography of Tiger Woods,” in *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, edited by Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren (NYU Press, 2005), 222-246.

of Dr. Torres and Dr. Bailey preparing to give speeches.⁸³ Act I begins with the new Chief of Surgery, Dr. Shepherd, reinstating the hospital's lecture series; he asks Dr. Webber to join Dr. Torres and Dr. Bailey as the three speakers for the event, and the episode unfolds through intercutting scenes of flashbacks and the narrative present in the lecture hall, using voiceovers to connect the two timeframes through these three protagonists. Dr. Webber takes the viewer back to 1982, recreated through characteristically bright interior décor, gender-specific costuming, and the decade's pop songs. The final scene of Act I, when Dr. Webber begins his lecture, visualizes a young Dr. Webber surrounded by a white cohort of male doctors. The viewer is introduced to the plotline's patient, who is obscured by a woman doctor's turned back. One of the doctors, male, gallantly remarks: "This is no job for a nurse." The doctor snaps back, "You know very well I'm not a nurse." Webber's beginning narration of Act II identifies her as Dr. Ellis Grey, in which he explains: "The late Dr. Ellis Grey was a groundbreaker. A lion. She was the best this hospital – most hospitals – had ever seen. But back then, she was known as Sugar. Or Nurse. Or nothing at all." Unlike every doctor in the narrative present and the long-time viewer, these doctors in 1982 do not recognize the value of Dr. Ellis Grey. This A-story's medical mystery is quickly solved, as Dr. Grey and Dr. Webber work together to realize that the patient has GRID – "gay-related immune deficiency," the term used in that year to describe AIDS; the real drama is in dealing with the patient and this hostile workplace.

Throughout the episode, depictions of Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey remind the viewer that 1982 is a time hostile to difference. The viewer's introduction to Dr. Webber's attending surgeon entails his banter with a white, male resident about golfing as he acknowledges his

⁸³ Dr. Webber's narration of the opening voiceover marks a change from the show's usual form, in which it is Meredith's role to pontificate on the nature of love and medicine.

father's financial influence and status. This scene immediately precedes the introduction of Dr. Grey, who confronts the condescension of naturalized sexism in the hospital. This dialogue of institutionalized class advantage and blatant sexism match the uniform whiteness of the staff to contrast Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey, as true bearers of surgical skill and medical knowledge, against the inherited privilege of their colleagues. When the doctors suggest to the patient that he could have GRID, he demands to be discharged. As Dr. Grey reminds him that he needs antibiotic treatment, he shouts: "I'll get the antibiotics elsewhere. From real doctors." The camera focuses on Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey as he shouts this, to remind of their illegitimate status as Black and woman in the hospital. At the conclusion of Act III, which skips months ahead, the young Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey are paged to the emergency room. When they meet their attending, he and the white male surgeons around him are covering their mouths with surgical masks; "Handle it," he barks at them. Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey are not given masks in the process, suggesting that their health is not prioritized as highly as the white male surgeons. They find that their patient checked back into hospital care, his pale face marked by Kaposi's sarcoma, as he sobs an apology. In its rememberings of the 1980s, racial and gender difference, whose disruptions of the normalized discriminations of the workplace are made visible through their bodies, come into contact with a deathliness represented by sexual difference.

By metaphorizing sexual difference as an open secret, placing it in visual and narrative proximity to racial and gender difference, and framing it through identitarian logics, "The Time Warp" hails the middlebrow subject of diversity through moral binaries of toleration. Act III begins in the narrative present of the lecture hall as Dr. Webber contextualizes the case: "This was early 1982. We hadn't seen a case in Washington State.

Ever. San Francisco only had 5 cases. We didn't know what it was, and, because it was isolated to the gay community, the government wasn't funding research." He uses the terminology, "the gay community," to identify men who have sex with men as a constituency, implicating the medical enterprise as not serving their well-being, and recalling the institutionalized stigma attached to GRID as the "gay plague" of the 1980s. When the storyline returns to Dr. Webber's flashback in the second scene of Act IV, Dr. Webber asks how to proceed as Webber, Grey, and their attending examine the patient's scans; the attending replies, "Quite frankly, nothing: I wouldn't operate. This patient's a lost cause. He's got GRID." Dr. Grey corrects him: "It's called AIDS ... now." The attending continues his order to refuse care. Dr. Webber quickly fires back: "We took an oath! We're supposed to be healers!" Dr. Grey's awareness of AIDS and Dr. Webber's concern for his duty mark them as good, sensitive doctors, as opposed to the attending's decision to resign the patient to death. With *Grey's* "impossible decision" leitmotif in the background, the attending hisses back: "10 years ago you wouldn't even be allowed in this program. Don't you dare tell me what kind of oath we take." The attending makes clear his disdain for the institutional shifts of civil rights workplace reforms, lashing out against the incorporation of diversity, represented not only by this patient, but by Dr. Webber's body. In the next scene, as Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey explain the treatment plan, the patient, aware that the rest of the hospital staff except the two doctors he previously devalued has turned him into a shameful spectacle, tearfully shares his fears of being outed as gay. Throughout these confrontations with the discriminatory institution, diversity manifests as a capacity to care, which remarks on the dedication and skill of the doctors of difference and implies the moral and practical goodness that can proliferate via inclusion.

Just as his human value is remarked on as mattering in spite of his infection, the viewer sees their worth as surgeons in spite of (and therefore auxiliary to) their difference. In the Act V finale of Dr. Webber's storyline, Dr. Webber explains in the narrative present that their patient eventually checked back into the hospital with pneumonia, and he instructs his audience to remember the Physician's Code. The scene fades between young Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey with the patient on either side of his bed in his hospital room, and present-day Dr. Webber holding up his hand and reciting: "I will not let considerations of age, disease, disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, race, political affiliation, nationality, sexual orientation, social standing, or any other factor to intervene between my duty and my patient." The flashback fade-ins stylistically overlap for emotive impact, calling the viewer in through truly sentimental logics. The camera cuts to a close-up of Grey when present-day Webber says "gender," and similarly cuts to a close-up of young Webber for "race"; they join hands when present-day Webber says "political affiliation," and the camera at "sexual orientation" shoots a close-up of patient's face. The patient reaches out to Grey's hand, joining the three with both doctors looking at their patient. Grey looks up at Dr. Webber at "duty"; upon saying "patient" the flatline of his heart monitor buzzes audibly. Dr. Webber in the present completes the oath: "I will maintain the utmost respect for human life. I will not use my medical knowledge to violate human rights and civil liberties even under threat. I make these promises solemnly, freely, and upon my honor." Present-day Dr. Webber receives a standing ovation. Like the audience of the narrative present, the viewer throughout "The Time Warp" is called upon to understand Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey as courageous, and apprehend the distastefulness of the white doctors not only as the norm, but as the expectation. Rendering Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey exceptional in their service and in

their struggles exemplifies the disciplining progress narratives of sentimental politics by purporting a dissembling pastness of their interlocking oppressions.

Through this intercutting display, *Grey's* stitches human rights, civil liberties, and expressions of love together; contrasting the hostile work environment, one overtly racist and sexist, that Webber faces in 1982, the scene of the AIDS patient's deathbed suggests that sympathy can ameliorate inequality – even as the episode, through its indictments of research, employment practices, and abuses of power, make evident that oppression is more than matters of the heart. The resolution of Dr. Webber and Dr. Grey's storyline is a fight about being open about their extramarital affair, one implied through "The Time Warp's" portrayal of inequality to be based in their shared experience. Medical consultant Zoanne Clack's posting to the *Grey Matter* blog confirms as such: "There was nothing that could keep [Dr. Webber and Dr. Ellis Grey] apart, and a patient like this, an outcast himself, could only pull them even closer together. And, as one of the crew members put it, what a cool way to tackle racism, sexism, and homophobia in one fell swoop!"⁸⁴ The A-story formally shapes Bailey's B-story and Torres' C-story with a through-line about "privilege," a strategic collapsing of structural advantage and subjective arrogance, which can be overcome by changing one's attitude about medicine and the workplace.⁸⁵ Through the tenor of diversity,

⁸⁴ Clack, "Zoanne Clack on 'The Time Warp,'" *Grey Matter: From the Writers of Grey's Anatomy*, February 18, 2010, <http://www.greyswriters.com/2010/02/zoanne-clack-on-the-time-warp.html>.

⁸⁵ Torres's C-story pivots on Dr. Webber's accusation that her "privilege has made [her] arrogant," as he believes her structural protection from precarity, symbolized by her trust-fund upbringing, drove her to make promises about fixing the mangled skeletal structure of her despairing patient's brown Third World body. Bailey, who in flashbacks of her first year as Mandy is portrayed in distinction to her strong, sassy persona, occupies the B-story, in which she is bullied by her white attending. Her storyline narrates her struggle to be, in Dr. Webber's words, a "shark" and not a "minnow," and climaxes in confronting her attending. She rationalizes in her Act IV retreat to the neighboring bar that she "was raised to be polite." Given that Dr. Webber is the only other non-white doctor in her storyline, this performance of respectability takes on a racial tenor, but is never examined as an enforcement of comportment within this institutionalized space of white privilege; it is instead regarded as a personal failing.

the critical language of post-civil rights culture evokes feelings that equalize asymmetries of power through tears and love for self-improvement.

Similarly taking up this progress narrative through its use of Black bodies, “Crash Into Me” deploys the past tense of racism to equalize vertical hierarchies of power. The episode begins with a “Previously on *Grey’s Anatomy*” recap that commences by reminding the viewer of Dr. Miranda Bailey’s promotion to Chief Resident. Her speech to her colleagues at Seattle Grace becomes a voiceover for a montage of the hospital’s steamiest couples: “Things are gonna be different from here on in. Your love lives, your hopes and dreams, your little things that make you who you are have no place in my hospital.” The recap ends with a scene from a previous episode, in which Bailey hands her husband, who is convalescing from a car accident, their newborn son. The recap implicates Dr. Bailey’s personal life in what follows despite her proclamations to the separation of public and private life. As in her relationship with privilege in “The Time Warp,” her role in “Crash Into Me” is defined by her racialized and gendered body even as the narrative dissembles those points of definition.

Through the location of oppression in the past and as private and external, Dr. Bailey is left with no recourse for the specificities of anti-Black racism. The dramatic arc of “Crash Into Me” begins at the end of the teaser with the high-speed collision of one ambulance into another. The ensemble of doctors split their attention between five patients from the ambulance crash and another patient already waiting for surgery. Dr. Bailey’s arc sits in the B-story of both episodes as she tends to one of the paramedics from the accident, Shane (played by guest star Gale Howard); he initially refuses treatment from her and asks to be treated by a male doctor. She retrieves Dr. Webber, and the paramedic rolls away on his

hospital bed and stammers another request for a different doctor. Webber says, nearly snarling: “You mean you want a white doctor.” Bailey looks confused; Dr. Webber hisses: “I have paramedics hanging upside down. Can you handle ... this,” as he dismisses himself. Dr. Bailey, eyes fluttering, sourly says, “Yes, sir, I can.” The hospital’s two Black doctors have encountered bald racism; as the staging and dialogue suggests, their drama is to survive Shane’s assault on their being – one portrayed as distasteful as it is disruptive. Racism is here portrayed as a private moral issue; it is normalized as disgusting, but also portrayed as an unactionable offense on its own.

After an Act II joke in which Dr. Bailey retrieves Dr. Yang as a doctor who is not Black, Shane insists on having a white doctor in the operating room. Following up on Shane’s request, Dr. Bailey asks Chief of Surgery, Dr. Shepherd if she can take Dr. O’Malley (played by T.R. Knight) off of his service to placate the racist paramedic. He consents and reminds her: “you’re well within your rights to pass this to someone else.” Dr. Bailey’s responds: “Well, that would make me like him!” Chief Shepherd’s invocations of rights makes evident that the affront of the white supremacist patient to the Black doctors is a moral transgression amounting to injury. Dr. Bailey’s refusal equalizes Shane’s overt attack on her being to her response to his hate; unlike Dr. Webber, she as a Black person does not walk away from the patient, which attests to her moral fortitude. Act IV ends with Dr. Bailey in the operating room, preparing to operate on Shane with Dr. O’Malley at her side. She raises her hands slightly to the air with her eyes closed; with Soulsavers’ gospel-inflected indie folk track “Revival” ringing loudly in the background, Bailey explains to Dr. O’Malley that she is “calling on Jesus.” As she supplicates, the camera does a slow zoom-in from medium-long shot to a close-up; it cuts to Bailey’s hands as her scalpel cuts through a swastika tattoo

across Shane's abdomen – the bodily sign of his moral turpitude. The religious overtones of her prayers and supplications that animate her B-story illustrate how Dr. Bailey's encounter with racism is scripted as private evil gone public, and the remedy appears as the disavowal of racism's affective power and the histories to which it refers via personal responsibility.

When the narrative revisits Shane later in Act IV of the second episode, he is conscious and receiving postoperative care from Dr. O'Malley. Dr. O'Malley informs him that he is on his way to recovery as he applies iodine to what remains of Shane's swastika tattoo, which was damaged in a subtle revenge scheme between Dr. Bailey and Dr. O'Malley. Shane complains about Dr. Bailey's treatment, and proceeds to ask about his Black partner, who he has not seen since the accident. Dr. O'Malley is skeptical, so Shane retorts: "Look, I'm not the devil, okay? I'm just a guy with a belief system." He explains that his Black partner is a fine coworker, but "[...] if she wanted to marry my brother, then we'd have a problem with that, so would a lot of people. I'm not much different than most of the people that you know." While the paramedic has spent his conscious moments trying to find an ally, he has consistently been denied because of "diversity"; he imagines Dr. O'Malley to be a sympathetic ear as the white doctor in the room who supposedly prevented Dr. Bailey from killing him on the table. Dr. O'Malley responds:

"Well, Dr. Bailey did save your life today. A Black woman saved your life at a very personal cost. So maybe the next time you're looking at your tattoo and you're thinking how much better all us white guys are than everyone else, you think about that well. Because – between you and me – if I were alone in that O.R., you'd probably be dead right now. And, uh, since we're sharing belief systems, I believe if you were dead, the world would be a better place."

Shane looks shocked as O'Malley smirks at the conclusion of his confession. Dr. O'Malley speaks the repressed feelings of Dr. Bailey, and, by extension, the revenge fantasy of the liberal viewer. Unlike Dr. Bailey, who has struggled to "rise above" the lowliness of interpersonal hate, Dr. O'Malley takes pleasure in meting out judgments. His race is both visible and yet disappears as the two men appear to meet as equals. His articulation of the revenge fantasy takes on the appearance of both sympathy for Dr. Bailey and disinterested judgment on Shane's place in the public sphere. His white masculinity accords this moment with the symbolic capital of "diversity" – he is the "good" white man, while Dr. Bailey's response to Shane's racism is coded as self-interest. Because of this property relation of race, in which Dr. Bailey is seen as protecting herself and Dr. O'Malley is seen as protecting someone else, diversity's antiracism makes evident how organizing and redress are dissembled as self-entitlement. Through the presumption of equalization, *Grey's* makes antiracism resemble racism.

While the conscientious white man gets to pretend godliness, Dr. Yang, as the multicultural Asian American daughter, iterates the unbalanced scales of "post-racial" morality and the boundary line between the public and the private that has been upheld throughout "Crash Into Me." Shane's immediate response to Dr. Yang in Act II is, "Oh, come on. Are you kidding?"; Dr. Yang's racialized body has become a prop within this white/anti-Black hierarchical scheme. Though he recognizes Dr. Yang as racially different, he reveals to her the swastika tattoo across his abdomen that he hid from Dr. Bailey and Dr. Webber; he views Dr. Yang as safe, and he lacks the knowledge to recognize her as also impacted by his worldview. In Act III, she mutters to Shane's protest of her treatment, "... it's not like we're in a concentration camp or anything." It seems like she too feels as Dr.

Bailey feels, and the humor of this moment depends on the viewer recognizing the Holocaust as an exceptional moment wrought by the exceptional racism Shane represents. In trying to get off of Dr. Bailey's service and back onto her mentor's surgeries, Dr. Yang interrogates Bailey: "Why? You don't need me! ... He has a swastika on his abdomen. A giant black swastika? My stepfather's parents died in Auschwitz." Dr. Bailey assumes that Dr. Yang, as a fellow person of color, will join her in solidarity, and "[...] we will consider ourselves having risen above." Dr. Yang has not experienced the racist's ire directly through her Asian-ness, as her non-white though not-Black body served as the buffer that revealed the racist's neo-Nazi affiliations; she has nonetheless felt its impact through her adopted Jewish identity as directly as Dr. Bailey.⁸⁶ It is, however, through this Jewish-ness, a matter of "culture," that she is incorporated into this scheme. This is rendered separate from her racialized body, which is what Bailey reads as the basis of affinity.

Though the episode depends on the viewer making affective connections between white racism and the lives of people of color, its resolution pedagogically uses these connections as the basis for turning Dr. Bailey's vigilance into a contradiction. As Dr. Bailey's storyline resolves in Act IV of the second episode in the scrub room, Dr. Yang confronts her: "You know, I rose above too today." Dr. Bailey agrees, but Yang continues: "You were having a hard day, you were busy rising above: so was I, which is why I haven't said anything. But now the day is over and I'm done." Dr. Bailey is shocked when Dr. Yang's tone becomes apparent. Thoughtful piano music plays in the background as Dr. Yang explains: "What you did? Pulling me off of Hahn's surgery was an abuse of power. You needed help, okay. But you used me. Because of the color of my skin? I mean, you

⁸⁶ The viewer is reminded in this episode that Dr. Yang was adopted by her Jewish stepfather in her first-generation Korean American mother's remarriage after her birth father's death.

compromised the quality of my education, because of my color? I resent it.” Yang walks away as Bailey begins to choke up on tears. This exchange between doctors literalizes the portentous ending to Meredith’s monologue that coincides with the conclusion of this scene: “At the end of the day, the reality is nothing like we hoped. The reality is, at the end of the day, more often than not, turned inside out and upside down.” The narrative structure marks Dr. Bailey’s survival tactic as inside out and upside down: in her recognition of anti-Black racism, Dr. Bailey has too participated in a racism defined only as essentialist expectation. On the one hand, this moment highlights the non-equivalence of Asian and Black identities. In her practice of self-possession, she is seen dispossessing Dr. Yang. On the other hand, this non-equivalence is presumed to scramble of Black and white racial dramas through the fact of Asian American presence.

The explicit stakes of this confrontation hinge on the “quality” of Dr. Yang’s education – or, in other words, that her cultural capital, persistently envisioned in “The Time Warp” as existing independent of difference, has been compromised by the recognition of her race. There is no one to comfort Dr. Bailey; the “diversity” lesson draws affective equivalencies between Shane and Dr. Bailey, thus erasing the historical inequalities of power that trigger Dr. Bailey’s animus. This animus, however, is still incorporated into the commonsense of the episode. Dr. Bailey’s blackness emerges as a feeling that threatens a “diverse” public sphere because of its very nature as public. Dr. Yang’s logic, as well as the resolution itself, is dissembling, as racism in *Grey’s* only goes skin deep. Yang’s multiculturalism as Asian but not-culturally Asian has enabled her to forget that white supremacy hurts by exceeding the scripting of her body; this displaces the history of systemic hate that through Shane becomes indexed as private opinion. This in turn depicts Dr.

Webber and Dr. Bailey, the Black doctors, as being stuck monoculturally in a past when racism mattered, while Dr. O'Malley gets to claim Dr. Bailey's moral victory in his final exchange with the paramedic because of his embrace of liberal multiculturalism.

Though diversity in *Grey's* is made evident as a value that contributes to the public good, it is also made extremely private. Diversity, envisioned as ensuring the care of patients and the maintenance of a normative personal life, is an accumulation of cultural capital and is not to be acted upon. In other words, diversity becomes a skill that suggests a sophistication of character and conduct. As seen in these recurrent evocations of racial blackness in comparison to racialized non-Black "culture," Black subjectivity is located as a matter of the past within *Grey's* sentimental progress narratives that reckon with the persistence of racism, but nonetheless understand racialization as unremarkable in the present. Indeed, in rushing to multiracialism and sexual orientation as the central issues in its pedagogy of toleration, the racial vulnerabilities of blackness become exacerbated within "post-racial" diversity. Given race's separation from a hermetically sealed "culture," the recognition of race apart from identity and heritage within *Grey's* diversity politics is projected as equivalent to the bodily taxonomies of white supremacy. As I have argued, in other words, the sentimental binary of "culture" and "modernity" forces a temporal dimension, both in its invocation of a progress narrative and in its emplotments of race, class, and sexuality, that ejects blackness specifically and racial consciousness generally in its celebration of multiracial and sexual inclusion.

Diversity Times Three:
***Modern Family's* Diverse Modernity and the Interior Life of Difference**

Though differing in form and execution, *Modern Family* as one of the remaining broad sitcoms in the TV landscape takes up what groups such as the AAJC find so appealing

about *Grey's Anatomy*. *Modern Family*, unlike *Grey's*, does not feature “very-special” episodes about racism, but incorporates “diversity” and its disciplining moralisms into its plotlines. As such my reading of *Modern Family*, as in my analysis of *Grey's*, attends to the emotional beats of specific episodes – particularly those about racial and sexual “diversity” – to attend to how intimacy in the private sphere of “diversity” contributes to its classed differentiations. ABC’s *Modern Family*, a half-hour mockumentary sitcom which premiered in September 2009 and is now in its fifth season, follows three branches of the multigenerational Pritchett family: senior patriarch Jay Pritchett, his Columbian wife Gloria, and her child, Manuel “Manny” Delgado, and, as of the fourth season, their newborn son Fulgencio Joseph Pritchett; Jay’s adult daughter Claire, her husband Phil Dunphy, and their three children: Haley, Alex, and Luke; and Jay’s adult son Mitchell, his partner Cameron, and their adopted, Vietnamese infant-turned-toddler Lily.

Created by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd, *Modern Family*’s single-camera format alternates between filming unfolding events and talking-head interviews with family members. Each episode stitches together dilemmas across the three branches of the family tree with a thematic relationship and emotional resonance between the A-, B-, and C-stories.⁸⁷ The show is known for its ratings, which typically lead in the timeslot’s 18-49 demographic. The mockumentary sitcom, like *Grey's Anatomy*, has been recognized by institutions of “excellence” like the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences and the George Foster Peabody Awards; advocacy groups such as the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) have listed the show among those with “outstanding images” that provide “fair, accurate and inclusive representations of the LGBT community and the issues

⁸⁷ In its first season, episodes were framed by a talking-head interview turned into a voiceover that delivered the sentimental moral of the episode. The explicitness of this format has since been abandoned.

that affect their lives.”⁸⁸ What makes the Pritchetts particularly “modern” is the racial, national, and sexual diversity that continuously remarks on shifts in the nuclear family and the nation while maintaining an upper-middle-class, white normative center – what I call “diverse modernity” to mark the conditional inclusion enabled by the interpellating time of the “modern” and, as per the show’s title, the dynamics of the Pritchett family. In other words, in this section, I examine how *Modern Family* extends the “culture”/“modernity” binary of *Grey’s Anatomy*, even while changing the emotional expression from tears to laughter, to illustrate the consistency of “quality” television’s diversity politics. Such deployments of visible plurality that sustain the Pritchetts’ white normativity racialize those defined in opposition this diverse modernity, who often threaten to challenge the co-constructing racial, class, and sexual privilege that sustain *Modern Family*’s narrative universe, as un-“modern” subjects via sentimentality’s progress narratives.

Her First Word was Every Gay Father’s Worst Nightmare: “Diversity,” “Tradition,” and Personhood

The show, while perhaps lacking the life-or-death gravitas of *Grey’s Anatomy*, has been recognized for its portrayals of cultural and sexual diversity, earning awards such as the Humanitas Prize – an award that since 1974 has celebrated film and television programs which “affirm the dignity of the human person, explore the meaning of life, enlighten the use of human freedom and reveal to each person our common humanity.” Indeed, this institutional discourse of “quality” occasions a tracing of what dimensions of personhood and identity amount to such humanity. Administered by the 501(c)3 The Human Family Educational and Cultural Institute, the Humanitas Prize connects media arts to second-order

⁸⁸ Megan Townsend, “*Modern Family*, *Beginners* Among GLAAD Media Award Recipients in Los Angeles,” April 21, 2012, <http://www.glaad.org/blog/modern-family-beginners-among-glaad-media-award-recipients-los-angeles>.

human rights, and recognizes these forms' pedagogical potential for disseminating "humanity." Co-executive producer and writer Abraham Higginbotham received the 2011 award, then the second Humanitas for the show, for Season 2's second episode "The Kiss"⁸⁹ – an episode that responded to the charge that Mitchell, portrayed by openly gay actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson, and Cam have not been filmed having open displays of affection. The episode's narrative, set in motion by confrontations from partners and scheming between brother and sister, explains that Mitchell and Cam have not kissed in public because Mitchell and Claire were taught not to be expressive by Jay. The episode's subplots converge in the final act at a family dinner at Jay and Gloria's house, where the dramatic tension transfers from Mitchell and Cam to Mitchell and Jay. The multigenerational family confronts Jay; this conflict, the family argues, must be resolved by Jay publicly displaying his affection for his son. After the dramatic staging of Jay and Mitchell's father and son kiss, complete with grimacing and muttering, Mitchell and Cam kiss for the first time in *Modern Family's* run but only in the blurred background of the scene. Gloria's ending voiceover lectures the audience about the multiple meanings of a kiss, and thus the numerous forms of intimacy in the Pritchett/Dunphy/Pritchett families. The narrative submerges the politics of the same-sex kiss within the private history of the family to bury even the latent queerness of the homonormative Pritchetts as a matter of interior life.

This emphasis on interiority, which here is used as a way to mediate difference through a semblance of shared humanity, illustrates how the stress on private personhood

⁸⁹ This information was provided in the 2011 Humanitas Prize Finalists press release, accessed on July 31, 2013 at <http://www.humanitasprize.org/PressReleases/2011%20HUMANITAS%20Prize%20Finalists%20Press%20Release.pdf>. After the launch of the organization's new site, this document is no longer available. In 2010, co-creators and lead writers Steve Levitan and Christopher Lloyd received the Humanitas award for *Modern Family's* pilot episode in a tie with Showtime's *Nurse Jackie*, and the show has swept the 30 Minute Winners category every year since.

necessarily occludes the necessity of social justice beyond diversity politics. The progressiveness symbolized through inclusion in the Pritchett's Los Angeles is tempered through the existence of its racialized exterior, such as the stark contrasts between Gloria and Manny's current lot in life and their previous lives in Colombia – a central recurring joke of the series. Indeed, *Modern Family* is often included in progress narratives, such as in a March 8, 2012 *New York Times* article in which the show generally and Cam's rather caricature-like portrayal serve as signs of gay acceptance. As the author argues, "What complaint there has been has focused on how sexless the relationship between the two men is [...] But I'd rather chasteness be the problem than the kind of hypersexual, shallowly hedonistic image of gay men presented in so many television shows and movies past." He goes on to write, "*Modern Family* endows us with a sort of comic banality. It's an odd kind of progress. But it's progress nonetheless."⁹⁰ Sofia Vergara even affirms as such in a *Huffington Post* article about *Modern Family*'s 2010 GLSEN Respect Award, as the article writes that "acceptance of gays and lesbians in the Latin community 'is very hard, because it's very taboo, [Vergara] explained. 'The Latin community is a very Catholic community,' [...] 'So, it's always a problem for people to accept it, and they live in denial for many years, the parents, and prefer not to address the problem.'"⁹¹ I do not hold Vergara accountable for telling an interviewer what he wanted to hear. Yet, this narrative of homophobic Latinas and Latinos buttresses the story of Jesse Tyler Ferguson's struggle growing up gay in America. This award was given in the wake of 2010's spate of gay youth suicides, and thus the

⁹⁰ Frank Bruni, "ABC's Gay Wednesdays," March 8, 2012, http://bruni.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/abcs-gay-wednesdays/?_php=true&_type=blogs&r=0. This was included as an Op-Ed piece.

⁹¹ Mike Cidoni, "Modern Family' Honored for Portrayal of Diverse America," *Huff Post Entertainment*, December 9, 2010, updated May 25, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/10/09/modern-family-honored-for_n_756835.html.

recognition of Ferguson's own survival of anti-gay bullying sacralizes gay and lesbian acceptance as the pinnacle of true diversity. Racism and sexism take a backseat to the suffering of the white gay man. *Modern Family*'s sentimental equivalencies between race, class, and sexuality use these "old" axes of difference to bolster the "newness" of sexuality, but, as Vergara's interview suggests, sexuality is rendered exceptional because of its ideological location within interior life.

In this section, I interrogate this joining of "diversity" and "modernity" by focusing on a side character in *Modern Family*, Dr. Miura, who recurs in the show's sixth broadcast episode (aired out of order, as its production code and DVD listing mark it as the second in the series), "Run for Your Wife," and the sixteenth episode, "Fears." She serves as a screen onto which the characters and by extension the viewer can project anxieties about racial inclusion, white normativity, and the racialization of time without granting that agency to the adopted daughter of the gay white couple, whose interior life is upheld as diversity. *Modern Family*, stylistically omitting the laugh-tracks of multiple camera comedies, depends on the viewer agreeing with the straight-man character's reaction to arrive at a consensus of what is the norm and what transgresses that norm. The camera's omnipresence as a silent character in the series facilitates viewer identification, as a character's momentary but direct glance during a comical exchange or situation disciplines the viewer into understanding who is in the right. The humor based in Dr. Miura's symbolic Asian difference depends on the viewer's *a priori* relationship to an aesthetic of diversity, as Dr. Miura is herself treated as an object of Asian-ness to be read by Mitchell, Cam, and the viewer, and not as a dynamic subject herself. Yet, Dr. Miura's object status is markedly different from the conventions of Orientalized objecthood – signaling a change in Asian American representation in

mainstream media, while also rendering the normalized reading strategies of stereotype critique insufficient for apprehending racialization.

“Run for Your Wife” focuses on Manny’s, Alex’s, Haley’s, and Luke’s first day of school; the episode begins with Phil and Claire getting their kids ready. Claire reminds Haley about her appointment with a driving instructor. Most of the episode follows Phil and Claire’s A-story, as Phil suspects that Claire, a stay-at-home mother, might be suffering from empty nest syndrome; she is not and is bothered by Phil’s hovering. Jay and Gloria’s C-story follows their plan to spend their new free time at the country club now that Manny has started the school year. Loading up their car, Gloria finds out that, when Jay dropped off Manny at school, he coerced Manny into not wearing a poncho like he had planned. Meanwhile, in the B-story, Mitchell bumps Lily’s head; he and Cam rush their new daughter Lily to a pediatrician, Dr. Miura, played by Suzy Nakamura, as the plotline explores their anxieties of being new parents. “Fears,” the sixteenth episode, begins with each family member in talking-head sharing a greatest fear. The scene transitions to the Dunphy household, in which Haley is panicking about her behind-the-wheel examination. Claire tries to convince Alex to go to her school dance, while Phil and Luke plan an exploration under the family house. The narrative switches to Cam and Mitchell, who are cleaning up their house. Mitchell finds a doll, which Cam explains Lily loves. They share in a talking-head interview that they have invited Dr. Miura over for brunch. Jay and Gloria meanwhile learn that Manny intends to miss a classmate’s party at an amusement park because of a fear of rollercoasters. Phil and Claire’s narrative branches out, with Phil realizing his claustrophobia while Claire and Alex go with Haley to the Department of Motor Vehicles. “Fears” serves as a continuation of “Run for Your Wife,” bringing together Mitchell and Cam’s contact with

Dr. Miura's Asian difference; Manny, Jay, and Gloria learning to live as a family unit; and Haley's driver's education as through-lines in a narrative of diversity in the private sphere that subsumes difference to the affective time of "modernity."

"Run for Your Wife" and its introduction of Dr. Miura makes evident *Modern Family's* investment in a liberal claim to inclusive representation. In an Act II scene of Mitchell and Cam's storyline that takes them to a doctor's office, the doctor examines Lily's head after a playtime accident. The two dads stand by nervously as she does so; making small talk, Cam offers, "You'll be pleased to know that Mitchell and I intend on raising Lily with influences from her Asian heritage." She responds, "That is ... fantastic," in a sour tone. Cam goes on to list hanging "Asian" art in Lily's room and feeding her pho when she gets older as signs of his commitment to cultural immersion. Cam asks, "Am I pronouncing that right? It's a soup." She retorts, "I don't know. I'm from Denver. We don't have a lot of ... pho ... there." Her tired expression and her annoyed delivery indicate that the white man's foreign object is foreign to her as well. The scene asks the viewer to understand that Cam has collapsed race into citizenship. After giving the dads a reassuring diagnosis and preparing to leave Lily's patient room, Cameron bows to her. She sighs, "Denver ..." as she exits; Mitchell rolls his eyes at him. Dr. Miura's function in the narrative is instructional, as she exposes Cam's earnest presumption of "cultural" difference as presumptuous. Dr. Miura critiques stereotypes to make Cam, who is characterized as a Midwestern farm boy, the butt of the joke; the humor of her reprimands depend on the acknowledgement, embodied in Mitchell's eye roll, of her inclusion in U.S. culture despite her bodily difference. That these quips are presented as commonplace depends on a viewer, hailed as the quality viewer, who accepts the naturalization of liberal stereotype critique.

The punchline of essentialist expectation and liberal critique introduced in “Run For Your Wife” and thematized throughout the series recurs in Dr. Miura’s second appearance in “Fears.” During their first talking-head of Act I, Mitchell and Cam explain that they invited Dr. Miura for brunch to get on her good side, partially because of the events of “Run for Your Wife.” Cam adds that Dr. Miura is “a very nice Asian lady.” Mitchell interjects “irrelevant” as Cam says “Asian,” performing an unseeing of Dr. Miura’s race as the correct response to diversity. However, *Modern Family* exposes the limit of this “irrelevance” through discursive plays of surfaces and depths. During brunch in Act II, Lily speaks her first word, “mama,” while being held by Dr. Miura. Cam blurts out, “You know it’s because you’re Asian, right?” He responds to Mitchell’s reproach by asking, “Am I just supposed to ignore the giant panda in the room?” Dr. Miura gently says: “pandas are from China and ... it doesn’t matter.” The humor of this punchline is doubled, as it both continues Dr. Miura’s running gag of correcting ignorance of intra-Asian differences while quelling that gag by recognizing the emotional stakes of this scenario. Dr. Miura’s retreat from her reprimands contributes to making Mitchell’s colorblindness secondary to this conflict about how belonging is embodied, as Cam and Mitchell proceed to express anxieties about Lily identifying with her Asian-ness. Mitchell’s shared panic over Lily’s first word reveals that difference’s “irrelevance” is conditional; this section’s title quotes Mitchell’s talking-head interview in which he explains the ensuing theatrics. Indeed, Mitchell’s inclusion in this panic over Lily’s identification, as the diverse subject, validates the racialized tenor of the conflict over their daughter’s affiliation. Back in scene, Mitchell suggests that Dr. Miura must remind Lily of her orphanage in Vietnam: “Suddenly you come in with all of your ... Asian-ness ... and breasts, and womb ... lady bits ... and it all just comes rushing back to

her.” Mitchell, who has thus far unseen race as part of liberal “tolerance,” speaks of gendered racial difference through biology; “Asian-ness,” along with breasts, wombs, and other “lady bits,” in Mitchell’s reasoning, induce an embodied memory for Lily, suggesting the permanence of difference that exists through gendered biologies as something that exists beneath sight.

The primordial understanding of identity presented in “Fears” unfixes its biological determinism through the show’s sentimental diverse modernity. As she leaves brunch in “Fears,” Dr. Miura explains to the worried parents:

I had a very complicated relationship with my mother. She was born in Japan, crazy, traditional. She didn’t want me to become a doctor, she wanted me to marry and have kids. But my father—we would talk and he would actually listen to what I wanted. Anyway, what I’m trying to say is ... having a mother isn’t always what it’s cracked up to be. And, if you ask me, having two fathers who care as much as you do makes Lily the luckiest little girl in the world.

Dr. Miura explains her unhappiness with the gendered expectations that her mother put on her through distinctly nationalized language and dismissed as nonsensical. Dr. Miura’s mother’s “traditional” Japan is stuck in a time “before.”⁹² Dr. Miura’s father brings her into diverse modernity by liberating her from her mother’s un-“modern” gender expectations; her reward for being saved is her profession, what looks to be a luxury car, and the implied “freedom” that both signify. In other words, the trappings of class privilege are suggested as expressions of her inner desire and the liberating alternative to “traditional” daughterhood in an iteration of liberal feminism. Mitchell and Cam, as per Dr. Miura’s well wishes, offer

⁹² This projection of a national elsewhere inheres in the show’s imagining of Colombia as preceding “modernity.”

their Asian daughter diverse modernity's promise: the expression of interiority without pre-
"modern" restrictions based on identity – a trope that becomes gendered through the
feminized figure of the mother as a compliment to the dads. Dr. Miura's liberal
representation of race, and in effect gender, as "irrelevant" buttresses the whiteness they offer
Lily through adoption, suburbia, and love. Modern time, privileged place, and good feeling
become scripted as luckiness and not as the embeddedness of racialized class privilege in the
imagining of "the good life."

"Fears" resolution, which unites the two Dunphy storylines with the Pritchetts,
illustrates the teleological coercion of diverse modernity, as the narratives centralize each
parent's fear as an obstacle to overcome. The denouement begins with Phil's meditation on
fear, chance, and growth as a voiceover laid onto a montage. Part of this montage focuses on
Cam and Mitchell putting Lily to bed as Phil narrates, "I mean, things don't always work
out." Phil's voice pauses as Cam finds the doll from the exposition on the floor. As he picks
it up, the doll says, "Mommy." Cam and Mitchell embrace as Mitchell quietly exclaims,
"The doll says mommy!" Phil's voiceover resumes: "but you gotta love it when they do."
Mitchell and Cam's fear of difference having depth is "worked out," as Lily's first word
mimed a lost doll and was not an agential effort to replace a lost mother. The force of
Mitchell and Cam's love recalls Mimi Nguyen's analysis of the "gift of freedom" within
strategies of liberal empire: given the gift of diverse modernity, Lily must render "diversity"
private – to internalize Mitchell's unseeing and unspeaking ethic in exchange for class
privilege and kinship, banishing difference even out of interiority.⁹³ The sentimentality of

⁹³ Indeed, this is also the lesson gleaned from the Season 2 episode, "Two Monkeys and a Panda," in which Cam, joined in the end by Mitchell, writes Lily a children's book about her transnational, transracial adoption; or, stated differently, attempts to control the narrative of Lily's identity by insisting that the true love of the

Modern Family stakes out personhood as the ultimate site of diversity, as its politics of representation narrativize convergences and divergences that return to the feelings of the characters and the private sphere of the family in the last instance.

Yoking together racial difference with school dances, driver's licenses, enclosed spaces, and rollercoasters, the episode's sentimental logic imagines race as just another obstacle to progressive "modern" time and self-improvement, and the middlebrow viewer is invited to participate by feeling alongside them, championing a sense of apolitical diversity through performances of plurality that ultimately reveal *Modern Family*'s indebtedness to upholding heteromasculine whiteness – what Mimi Nguyen calls the "possessive investment in diversity."⁹⁴ Rather than a road to an enlightened policy, the possessive investment in diversity disassembles the mediation of apparatuses of representation, or, those means through which we learn about "culture" as difference. The Pritchetts are founded on a legal impossibility: adoption news organizations make clear that Vietnam does not allow same-sex couples to adopt. My point is not that televised narratives should resemble ethnographic truth to their viewers, but that *Modern Family*'s relentless sentimentality and disciplining of the private sphere is haunted by the social conditions of difference that exceed the constraints of diversity. Indeed, Lily is characterized as having come from an orphanage, a fact that gestures to but never names the aftermath of the war in Vietnam. Using Vietnam as a reference point for lost children, as Jodi Kim recognizes, recalls U.S. imperialism as a symbol of violence, but domesticates that accusation through the figure of the orphan; in other words, the intimacy that the white American parents offer their transnational and

"monkeys" is what makes their family work – and not the considerable racial privilege of their stance on racial identity.

⁹⁴ Nguyen, discussant response to my presentation at the Cultural Studies Association 2012 meeting in San Diego.

transracial child is seen as a true gift within a middle-class mindset that envisions suburban heteronormativity as the definition of the “good life.”

The possessive investment in diversity thrives when the private sphere is analytically severed from the public beyond the narrative. As with the Asian and Latino characters in *Grey’s Anatomy* who are similarly defined by clashes of racialized “culture” and a “modernity” of capitalism, Dr. Miura becomes a prop whose embrace of diverse modernity is made pedagogical. Her specific use within *Modern Family* hails a middlebrow viewer through celebrations of the white and class-mobile same-sex couple as the universal relation of love – which then comparatively ejects “culture” from sentimental progress narratives as the premodern remainder of bodily surfaces. In other words, as I have suggested, *Modern Family* evokes a diversity politic animated by a liberal humanism that recognizes difference only to erase it – even as the specificity of these differences, such as the phantasms of Asia that surround Lily’s incorporation into the white family, gestures to the underwriting excesses of diversity. As illustrated in the characterization of Lily beyond “culture” and “modernity,” attending to racialization beyond false equivalences can disassemble the middlebrow hailing of diversity politics.

Do the Best with What I’ve Been Given: “Better People” and the Racialization of Cultural Capital

In spite of the show’s imaginative falsehoods, claims about *Modern Family*’s value make evident how the show belongs to a pedagogical project of “diversity” by wrapping diversity into its very nature as quality. As a telling example, prominent *HuffPost TV* blogger Dr. Ryan Vaughan, PhD (no seriously)’s November 10, 2010 article illustrates the social value accorded to *Modern Family*’s diverse modernity. In his article, he bemoans the

transition from the “family sitcom” in the 70s and 80s to the “urban sitcom” in the 90s.⁹⁵ He correlates this shift in programming to “the family” ceasing to exist as a demographic, thus addressing changes in the cultural work of networks and their advertising time. In this view, while the financial function of television has not changed, its social function as a disciplining locus of consumption has. Vaughan realizes the merits of watching *Modern Family* with his son:

Contrary to when I was a kid, 10-year-olds need to be exposed to these ideas [like sexual orientation, love, and sexuality], because they are so prevalent in our culture. Do I want my son to shape his opinions about homosexuality through interactions with his friends at school and who knows what kinds of ignorance they bring with it? No, I want to be there to answer his questions and provide insight that will make him into a better person. What better way to do that than by using *Modern Family* as a conduit to tolerance? Alright, "conduit to tolerance" might be a little too much, but my point remains.⁹⁶

Bemoaning the specific “modernity” referenced by *Modern Family*, Vaughan references “diversity” as something both prevalently new and newly prevalent, as he uses his childhood to generalize what he sees as a cultural shift but really may be the mainstream unveiling of the privilege accorded to his social location. For Vaughan, the show offers the opportunity to make his son “into a better person,” defined against the threatening “ignorance” of his son’s peers.

⁹⁵ For “family sitcoms,” he lists programs such as *The Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*, *Roseanne*, and *Who's the Boss?*, in which most of the narrative took place within the domestic spaces of the heterosexual nuclear family. The “urban sitcom” is exemplified by *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, *Will & Grace*, *Cheers*, and *Frasier*, in which the focus transitions to adult social, work, and romantic escapades.

⁹⁶ Dr. Ryan Vaughan, PhD (no, seriously), “Modern Family, It’s Right There in the Title,” *HuffPost TV*, November 3, 2010, <http://www.aol.com/2010/11/03/modern-family-its-right-there-in-the-title/>.

Vaughan's time marking of sexuality as "new" places Vaughan as a "modern" subject, one who must bring others into the modernity through tolerance – a program of "good" people. Vaughan imagines engaging tolerance through intimate discussions with his son, speaking of "diversity" and its privatization: for him, the best teaching moments happen in the controlled privacy of the home, and the loss of "family sitcoms" as proxies for this conversation renders his son susceptible to a dangerous public. As quickly as Vaughan imagines the value of the show as a "conduit to tolerance," his "alright" dismisses it. The pleasure of *Modern Family* might be pedagogical, but lacks the educational credentials to matter – see the skepticism he attaches to his moniker as a television critic, despite his employment as a celebrated adjunct instructor at Binghamton University. Vaughan engages in a middlebrow politic: presuming partitions of leisure time and normative family values that evoke and signal class status, cultural texts like *Modern Family* participate in a program of self-improvement in which "better people" are a differentiated commodity. While "diversity" serves as the language of inclusion within the class privilege of the Pritchett family, Vaughan's invocation of the language of quality and his implied remove from the "tolerance" he seeks to promote suggests how education serves as a technology of differentiation, just as it appears as part of a moral imperative. Stated differently, just as how *Grey's Anatomy* uses a sentimental diversity politic to interpellate "quality" viewers, *Modern Family*'s humor hails "better people" through a liberal humanism while also engaging in a pedagogy that elevates these "better people" as middlebrow subjects who can thrive in diversity.

Though racial difference is actively disavowed, *Modern Family*'s humor racializes education and respectability using cultural capital and its relationship to the successful

capitalist to regulate the intimate embrace of modernity. This is made evident through small quips, such as Cam's joke about Future Lily's message "from her stripper pole" in the second season's nineteenth episode, "Someone to Watch Over Lily," when Gloria gets Lily's ears pierced at an early age, as well as Mitchell's anxious "Leave it to the gays to raise the only underachieving Asian in America" that drives their B-story in the second season's fifth episode, "Unplugged," which propels Mitch and Cam's quest to get Lily a spot in the best preschool to start her prestige-ridden educational track. In both jokes, projections of Lily's future failures express anxieties about her failure to embody respectability presently. Told through race-coded dilemmas of the private sphere, images of Lily falling short of "the good life" emerge from Mitchell and Cameron's anxieties about transmitting the material benefits of their classed racial privilege. However, this connection between racial difference and "the good life" is rarely told through Lily; instead, the racialization of cultural capital takes place through other racially marked characters. As argued in the previous section, Dr. Miura comes to represent not only education, but also a worldliness that both contradicts and supplements that intelligence. In this section, by reading peripheral characters who evoke and deploy these two distinct forms of cultural capital, I follow how the humor substantiates whiteness, while diversity conceals its racial coding.

Sanjay Patel, overachiever Alex's eighth grade class rival, is never seen, but is mentioned recurrently throughout the second season, and, as Alex frets about how he will impact her class ranking and future college applications, Sanjay's symbolic work expresses the racial resentment attendant to diverse modernity through cultural capital. His presence weighs heavily in "Our Children, Ourselves" (S2E12), which begins as Claire worries about Alex's intense studying for an upcoming test; early in Act I, the concerned mother tells her

daughter to take a break, to which Alex responds: “Sanjay Patel’s not taking a break.” Alex comes home at the beginning of Act II to inform her parents that she received the second-highest score behind Sanjay. Phil consoles her, referring to Sanjay with the feminine pronoun; Alex snaps: “Sanjay is a very common Indian boy’s name. There are, like, millions of them!” Phil’s lack of intercultural awareness, highlighted as the punchline of Alex’s globalism, is coded as generalized buffoonery; his ignorance of diversity is symptomatic of the anxiety that drives the Dunphy’s parental drama. When Claire and Phil reassure her that the second-highest score is also commendable, Alex matter-of-factly says, “Sanjay’s dad’s a surgeon and his mom’s a professor; I can’t compete with that! I’ll just have to do the best with what I’ve been given.” Claire spends the rest of the scene fretting about the truth of Alex’s insult. Alex’s insult takes the Patels’ specialized professions and educational credentials as indicators of the quality of Sanjay’s home environment. Alex blames her parents for her inadequacies, measured solely through grades and their exchange value for maintaining class status; yet, given how quickly Sanjay is misrecognized as a cultural outsider who threatens the white suburban heroine, he haunts as the remainder of diverse modernity, that which interrupts the certainty of white families’ class maintenance.

The rest of “Our Children, Ourselves” engages in a racializing project of contrasting the caring though provincial white parents to the cosmopolitan parents of color. Claire buys into Alex’s argument, even as she and Phil leave to watch *Croctopus* – a spoof of the SyFy network’s notorious disaster-schlockfests. In Act III, at the movie theater, Claire and Phil bump into the Patel patriarch and matriarch. They speak in accents that are distinctly British and slightly colored by a Hindi undertone; not only do their occupations come with high status, their voices evoke British imagery of erudition, and their raced bodies suggest model

minority status – though this specific combination of signifiers suggests a colonial afterlife. The Patels announce to the Dunphys that they are going to watch a French film, and Claire feels guilty into watching the film as well, as the French film represents, in Claire’s words, “intellectual curiosity.” Claire hopes that the aesthetic pedagogy of world cinema will impart a worldliness worthy of her daughter’s future success. The scene progresses until it cuts between Claire looking miserable in the French film’s sparsely populated theater and Phil having a great time in a packed room of spectators wearing 3-D glasses. The high aesthetic, while representing intellectual curiosity, also presents an unreal boredom. Afterward, Phil finds Claire asleep in her theater; Phil reassures Claire amidst her self-flagellating that the two of them are smart people, and they exit to the theater lobby to find Mr. Patel unable to work the parking validation machine. Claire smirks and smugly validates his ticket. Phil and Claire walk away chuckling with an affected pretension in their voices. The humor of the joke involves Phil and Claire bullying the kind and cordial doctor, as the narrative excuses Phil’s rush to pleasure over Art by privileging this display of the Dunphys’ functional knowledge over Mr. Patel’s high-minded pretense. Though the subsequent slapstick gag in which Phil and Claire simultaneously run into non-opening doors with a sign reading “Not An Exit” serves as divine punishment for their comeuppance, Phil and Claire’s story resolves itself by remaining skeptical of erudition attached to Asian bodies. Indeed, contrary to Dr. Miura’s role in affirming the value added to whiteness through diversity, Mr. Patel and his son, in threatening the preeminence of whiteness, are identified as lacking the pleasure that sustains the Dunphys to dehumanize the Patel’s mastery of cultural capital.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ The differential racialization expressed in *Modern Family* between East and South Asian Americans, as seen in the contrast between Dr. Miura and Dr. Patel, may very well express the geopolitical binary of model minority/terrorist within that animates post-9/11/2001 conditional inclusion.

Claire and Phil's anxiety and class resentment disappears as Alex is named valedictorian despite consistently coming in second to Sanjay Patel because, as Alex explains away in Act I of Season 2's penultimate episode, he was injured by his battle robot. Sanjay's precociousness has felled him and, in his place, Alex gives a heartfelt and hopeful graduation speech that allows the Dunphy heroine her time to shine. Though earned through no achievement of her own, it is nonetheless understood as the result of her hard work and celebrated as a season-ending emotional win for the family and the viewer. Though the Dunphys' rivalry with the Patels suggests that too much intelligence without the heart that the white family possesses can lead to harm, *Modern Family* engages a comparative racialization that balances education and love as appropriate investments, as seen in the contrast between erudite Asian bodies and Gloria's fiery Latinidad. Gloria's ex-husband and Manny's birth father, Javier Delgado (played with an accent and rugged machismo by Benjamin Bratt), makes his third series appearance in "Flip Flop" (S4E20) in the B-story, which takes place at Jay's house. Jay and Gloria host Javier and "his latest bimbo" for dinner to conclude his weekend visit with Manny. Gloria skeptically asks Javier upon his arrival: "Who is it this time? A cocktail waitress? A boatshow model? A stripper?" A comparatively plain and bespectacled woman wearing a blouse underneath a black sweater responds, "No, then I could make real money. I'm just a PhD." The viewer meets Trish, whom Manny clearly idolizes because of his oddball esoteric pursuits.

Gloria feels excluded by Trish and Manny's shared sense of cultural sophistication, as expressed through art, food, and shared cultural references. Act I and Act II proceed with Trish discussing and making casual jokes about art, theater, and literature to Manny, Javier, and Jay's delight – and to Gloria's ire. In the final scene of Act II, having retreated to the

kitchen, Gloria reveals to Jay her clearly evident jealousy. Gloria is not viewed as unintelligent per se, but her inability to play Charades with the rest of the characters is not fully assigned to cultural difference; the slips of tongue and missing frames of reference that routinely characterize the viewer's humorous experience of Gloria are not shared by Javier. Though she represents the same strata of cultural capital so doubted in "Our Children, Ourselves," Trish's white femininity routes that capital in opposition to Gloria's embodied Latinidad to a vertically racializing effect.

After Gloria expresses her alienation, Jay assures her that Javier will not commit to such a woman – especially given his (perhaps racialized) reputation as a womanizer. However, Javier enters the kitchen to explain that he plans to propose to Trish. Act III opens with Javier proposing to Trish in front of Jay, Manny, and Gloria – only for the scene to end with Trish giving Javier back his ring as she runs upstairs. The camera focuses on Gloria who, with a shocked expression, watches Javier leave and makes eye contact with the camera; her surprise connects sympathetically to the viewer. When the camera returns to this storyline with Javier knocking on a closed door, Trish turns him away from the other side, and Gloria offers to help. The camera cuts to a quick talking head with her, in which she reveals her intentions: "Help her go, 'Adios!'", as she waves at the camera. Javier, expressing how he has been shaped by the violence of *Modern Family's* imagined Colombia, agrees to let Gloria coax Trish out, but also threatens, in complete even-temper, that he is going to break down the door and burn the house down; the viewer is called to laugh, particularly as Jay calls even-keeled requests from off-screen not to destroy his property. Gloria enters the room and counsels Trish: "Listen. I would be the first person to understand that you're having second thoughts about marrying Javier." Gloria comically lists Javier's faults, such

as drinking, gambling, and womanizing, but Trish rebuffs her until Trish admits: “No, it’s you.” Gloria’s face and her dumbfounded response express her shock. Gloria’s turn from sabotage to surprise imagines that, despite their differences, the insecurities of these two women provide common meeting ground.

The narrative resolution invites the viewer to understand harmony emerging from Gloria’s recognition of this equivalence, even as the two women’s relation to the same man is incommensurable. Trish and Gloria’s confrontation continues through alternating camera angles that change with the dialogue to capture either Trish’s face or Gloria’s face but not both, giving the appearance of rapid intensity. Trish continues: “How can I compete with you? All Manny talks about is how he’s got the world’s greatest mom! And I know Javier regrets losing you!” Gloria’s shock soon turns to smugness, as she almost smiles in response to this news. Trish’s tone escalates: “Oh, believe me, he does! And who could blame him? I mean, look at you! Who has a body like that?” Gloria’s camera cuts to a medium-long shot, capturing Vergara’s hourglass figure as evidence and affirmation of Trish’s insecurities. Trish’s confession turns into a rant as she grows increasingly shrill and Gloria loses all traces of her smugness; Trish dwells on Gloria’s figure, cooking ability, and sexual prowess as the basis of Gloria’s merit and Trish’s deficiencies. Gesticulating wildly and speaking with sarcastic flair, Trish ends by nearly yelling, “And I will never, ever live up to the great Glooria!” The camera cuts to Gloria, who smiles, stretches out her arms, and exclaims, “Welcome to the family!” before fully embracing Trish; this storyline ends with the image of Trish’s face over Gloria’s shoulder looking confused. This sentimental equation does not compute: Gloria’s insecurities are founded in Trish’s excesses of cultural capital, while Trish’s are based in Gloria’s gendered objecthood. Gloria’s insecurities of her obsolescence

are not in her capacity as a mother, but as a companion. As with Dr. Miura, the traditional mother gets consigned to the home, where the “modern” Trish feels her shortcomings. The liberal humanism of the narrative resolution affirms racialized sexism as it disappears amidst the primacy of feeling, allowing the quality viewer of diversity to ignore the privilege that they too experience in securing a tradition/modernity binary.

As I have suggested, *Modern Family*'s mapping of who can rightfully master education and love along the lines of racial difference suggests how, while Asian Americans can possess cultural capital, unlike their Latina/o counterparts, sentimental relations that inevitably uphold whiteness invite social harmony. This is also true of the setting: The Pritchetts' Southern California is filled with white, Latino, and Asian American people, yet *Modern Family*'s Los Angeles, celebrated by critics like *Slate Magazine*'s Andy Bowers as “surprisingly real” in its reputedly middle-class portrayal,⁹⁸ absents African American and Black people. While African American and Black-identified people make up nearly 8% of Southern California's “real” landscape, this demographic only scarcely inhabits the affluent neighborhoods of *Modern Family*'s West Los Angeles.⁹⁹ There is only one remaining recurring Black character: Cam and Mitchell's sharply dressed friend Longinus who, true to racialized sexual scripts, performs an effete sassy blackness and only appears in Cam and Mitchell's cadre of gay male friends. A handful of Black characters have cycled through in

⁹⁸ He writes: “None of the main characters works in the entertainment industry. Two of the three familiars are portrayed as middle class, and Jay's wealth comes not from Hollywood or hedge funds, but from a closet company. The city is not presented as a dystopian hellscape, a gang-riddled slum, or a hedonistic lotus land just begging for its earth-shaking, flame-engulfed comeuppance from a disgusted God. It's just a place where normal Americans lead normal lives, albeit one with better weather.” Bowers, “The Surprisingly Real Los Angeles of *Modern Family*,” *Slate Magazine*, March 13, 2014, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2014/03/13/modern_family_s_los_angeles_geography_is_more_accurate_than_you_think.html.

⁹⁹ “Los Angeles,” *BlackDemographics.com*, accessed May 31, 2014, <http://blackdemographics.com/cities-2/los-angeles/>.

one- or two-episode occurrences, such as comedian Kevin Hart as Phil's neighbor and (apparently short-lived) friend Andre in Season 3. With less than 10 minutes of screen time across two episodes, he is introduced in a talking-head tag with Phil as "an orthopedic surgeon, handy with tools, and a great guy to hang out with. Plus, he's a badass Black man who gives me extra street cred. That's his joke." The camera zooms out to show Andre sitting next to Phil, grinning. Phil continues: "He's my brotha' from a different motha'." Andre stops grinning and asks: "What's that?" Andre's contribution to the punchline is to affirm a ghetto blackness with his "extra street cred," even as his occupation and residence suggest otherwise. In both instances, blackness is authenticating for white characters, even as the Black characters who symbolically do this work are class mobile in ways that would make them inassimilable to these white expectations.

However, the paucity of Black bodies in *Modern Family's* narrative universe highlights the affective work that blackness performs, even as Black people are excluded from sophistication. The authenticating role of blackness contributes to the multivalent racialization of cultural capital, as expressed in "Unplugged," the episode in which Cam and Mitchell fear for Lily's educational achievement and scheme to get their daughter into Billingsley Academy, a preschool Claire calls "[v]ery hoity-toity." Act II finds Cam and Mitchell awaiting an interview with the principal of the school. As they stew in the waiting room, the receptionist, portrayed by a Black actress, comforts the two clearly nervous dads: "Gay adoptive parents with a minority baby? Sugars, you can get into any school you want." Both Cam and Mitchell are surprised by this reassurance. The receptionist continues: "You didn't know that? Yeah! All these schools like to brag about their diversity. Well, you're diversity times three. You're in demand! You're like Jimmy Buffet tickets to these hybrid-

driving straight white folks.” Her sassy demeanor, made legible through Southern affectations, gives legitimacy to a culture that values diversity through her inclusion; however, her flippant joke also trivializes that value. The appearance of difference becomes translated as the symbolic capital that will expose Lily to the credentials of the Academy. The receptionist’s understanding of “diversity times three” both expresses and ironizes the bureaucratic administration of intersectionality specifically and diversity generally.

Indeed, even as her Black voice offers an ironic critique of how diversity is practiced by “hybrid-driving straight white folks” – those of heteronormative privilege – her Black body legitimizes this joke. Though the writers are majority white, the ventriloquism performed in this punchline uses her body to enunciate the critique of diversity as symbolic capital. Cam responds, “I hear that, girl!”, and, with a sour look on her face and the energy drained from her voice, mutters, “. . . yeah.” Her sudden coldness disciplines Cam and by extension the viewer: the opportunism she identifies is not racist, but his minstrel performance of Black scripts is. This dilemma of diversity as both, but not simultaneously, opportunity and discipline sets up the escalation of Cam and Mitchell’s Billingsley interview as the dads try to perform layer upon layer of identity to add to their cache – which ends in Cam doing a Robin Williams-esque caricature of the wise Indian trope to claim Native ancestry. Cam and Mitchell’s performance of diversity, and the ease with which it escalates as the two feel threatened about much diversity they portray upon meeting a lesbian couple also interviewing with the principal, recalls Rebecca Wanzo’s critique of compassion politics: “a major ethical problem with using sympathy and compassion as the primary mechanism for political change is that sentimental politics depends on the cultural feelings of

those in power, and the disempowered must depend on patronage.”¹⁰⁰ The scene with the principal narrates the need to recognize sentimentality as a power dynamic, as the principal, like the quality viewer of these television programs, maintains unequal access to power by naturalizing the performance of diversity to gain access to exclusive institutions.

What *Modern Family* makes apparent through its racial plurality in relation to its representations of education is how the racialization of sophistication allows the show to express the whiteness that holds its affective core – as made evident through scenes of racial anxiety, resentment, and delegitimization – without appearing overtly racist. Through deployments of diverse modernity in opposition to un-modern “culture” and “tradition,” class mobility and cultural hierarchy are racialized as Asian while their antithesis is Latino; both racializations are viewed as unsustainable without heart, which is racialized as whiteness, coalesced in the nuclear family, and authenticated through contacts with blackness. This multivalent multiracialism that collects around class and “post-racial” harmony mirrors the same sentimental manipulations of *Grey’s Anatomy*. As I have argued, *Modern Family*’s disciplining use of straight-man characters hails the quality viewer through its joining of emotionality and diversity politics. This pedagogical center reflects the same diversity politics of *Grey’s Anatomy*, in which proximities to whiteness are celebrated as having objective viewpoints on the persistence of racism.

The Disturbing, but Hopeful Picture: The Asian American Justice Center’s APA Media Advocacy and the Public Life of Stereotype Critique

As *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Modern Family* illustrate, representations of diversity alone cannot sufficiently displace racism on television if they do not reckon with the ideological work of “quality” in social pedagogies. The Asian American Justice Center (AAJC),

¹⁰⁰ Wanzo, 229.

formerly known as the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, is an APA civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1991, the group describes itself as “one of the nation’s leading experts on issues of importance to the Asian American community.” Among its many projects, the AAJC from 2002 to 2010 advocated for Asian American media representation by publishing annual report cards of Asian American inclusion in front of and behind the cameras of the major television networks with accompanying statements. Given the dearth of non-white faces on television and in production, the networks failed year after year, especially in light of each network’s Asian American representation in proportion to the national population. In 2005 and 2006, the AAJC commissioned and published extensive research reports, respectively titled *Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time: Lights, Camera, and Little Action* and *Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time: Setting the Stage*, in conjunction with the UCLA Asian American Studies Center. Though much has changed in Asian American representation on television since the 2006 publication,¹⁰¹ the AAJC’s claims about representation on television, especially in their focus on scripted television, reflect APA media advocacy generally, while representing comprehensive articulations of taken-for-granted claims about diversity and the media. In this section, I turn to these reports to theorize the relationship between the diversity politic propagated in “quality” television and the desired outcome of a diversity-based program of media advocacy for inclusion.

Both the 2005 and 2006 reports argue that media should express a positivist truth about Asian Americans and race relations to a general public. The 2005 report argues that

¹⁰¹ As another example, CBS, which was consistently chastised in these efforts for having zero APA representation, airs the hour-long crime drama *Hawai’i Five-O*, which features numerous Asian American characters.

primetime television can illustrate Asian American language diversity, ranging from the use of non-English languages, accented English, and accentless English (2005, 14), just as the 2006 report contends that Asian-origin names can provide viewers with insights into Asian American characters' backgrounds beyond the represented narrative (2006, 11). These suggestions call for a connection between the racialized body and the interior life of the character for television to act as diversity education. To quote the 2005 report:

Studies have discovered that people tend to rely on characterizations from film and television to formulate beliefs about groups to which they do not belong and with whom they may be less familiar. Consequently, representations of APIAs on prime time television programs may impact the perception and treatment of APIAs in real life (2005, 3).

The 2006 report repeats the spirit of this claim in arguing, "The public tends to rely on characterizations from the media to formulate beliefs about racial groups with whom they have little contact." (2006, 3). In absence of lived situations of interracial contact, television serves as a proxy for interracial contact that forms the basis of ethical relations. Repeated by corporate-sponsored media, media activists, and everyday people alike, these significance claims about television imbue the form with pedagogical power. TV is seen as mediating social life, and thus this substitutive function of television shapes the AAJC's claims about Asian American visibility. As my reading of these two reports illustrates, the diversity politic exercised by the AAJC is understood as a political education that nonetheless justifies itself through market logic.

With Whom They Have Little Contact: On Epistemologies of Quality and Quantity

Given the substitutive role of TV, the AAJC understands representation on television generally and scripted programming specifically as symbolizing national belonging. Both the 2005 and the 2006 report critique “missed opportunity programs” – a term that refers to shows set in cities of high Asian American populations, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York, that do not include Asian American characters. These “missed opportunities” matter because “APIAs are missing from the American social fabric, not even seen as neighbors or friends of families” (2005, 10). The language of the missed opportunity references the demographic and narrative feasibility for Asian American inclusion, a resemblance of the “real.” The invisibility addressed in the report reflects Herman Gray’s observation that, because of television’s pervasiveness in everyday life, and its role to convey standardized news and entertainment across national markets, the caricatures and absences of the television landscape translate into the felt boundaries of the nation. However, as seen in the AAJC’s claims about Asian American inclusion on television beyond presence, the ideological functions of inclusion and exclusion identified by the AAJC become a pedagogical project of visibility that looks like antiracism, but indeed dissemble antiracism as a free market ideology. In addressing this transformation of communities into markets, this section also considers the haunting of this diversity politic by preceding campaigns for respectability-based racial uplift.

The AAJC’s two reports specifically address Asian American representation and not the normalization of whiteness generally, suggesting the structures of racism on television that quantitative advocacy alone cannot dismantle. In analyzing Missed Opportunity Programs, the 2005 report implicates shows that feature actors and creators of color: “Interestingly, many of these shows are ‘ethnic’ shows with racially/ethnically homogenous

casts of Latinos (*The George Lopez Show*) or African Americans (*The Bernie Mac Show*, *All of Us*, *Girlfriends*, and *Second Time Around*). However, the APIA community is blaringly absent” (2005, 8). The “interestingly” turns on other people of color for participating in what the AAJC diagnoses as Asian American invisibility. The 2005 and 2006 reports’ analysis of Asian American visibility compared to other racial groups makes evident an economy that underwrites minority visibility, as the dramatic language of “blaringly” indicts these shows for also not including Asian Americans, without using that same indignant tone for white-led shows of majoritarian casts. The 2005 report argues: “While regular characters portrayed by whites and African Americans are overrepresented compared to their population percentages, Latino (at 4.7%) and APIA (at 2.7%) actors are represented below their population percentages of 13.3% and 4.4%, respectively” (2005, 5).¹⁰² Calculating the paucity of Asian American representation against greater numbers of white and Black actors on television, the report’s emphasis on quantification disregards the segregation of Black actors and characters to specific channels, programs, and roles. This comparison conflates the quantity of shows starring people of color with the general quality of the non-inclusion of Asian Americans.

The AAJC’s reports, in its juggling of arguments about quantity and quality, recall the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) protest of *The Amos ‘n’ Andy Show* (1951-53), a television show that began as a radio show in 1928, and was inspired by the minstrelsy of the vaudeville tradition. After the show premiered in June 1951, a resolution was adopted at the NAACP convention in Atlanta to protest the show’s sponsors and promoters:

"Why the Amos 'n' Andy TV Show Should Be Taken Off the Air"

¹⁰² The 2006 report follows up on this argument to reaffirm the findings, numerically comparing Latino and APIA figures against white characters (2006, 5). In this calculation, blackness becomes a non-statement.

NAACP Bulletin, August 15, 1951

1. It tends to strengthen the conclusion among uninformed and prejudiced people that Negroes are inferior, lazy, dumb, and dishonest.
2. Every character in this one and only TV show with an all Negro cast is either a clown or a crook.
3. Negro doctors are shown as quacks and thieves.
4. Negro lawyers are shown as slippery cowards, ignorant of their profession and without ethics.
5. Negro Women are shown as cackling, screaming shrews, in big mouthed close-ups, using street slang, just short of vulgarity.
6. All Negroes are shown as dodging work of any kind.
7. Millions of white Americans see this Amos 'n' Andy picture of Negroes and think the entire race is the same.¹⁰³

As journalist Kelefa Sanneh contends, “the NAACP is conflating an argument about the quantity of black television programming with an argument about its quality.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the NAACP rests its claims against *Amos 'n' Andy* on two quantitative figures: that of the white audience, and that of Black portrayals of African Americans. The quality of these representations is measured through an approximation of sophistication – seen in Black industriousness, intelligence, and etiquette – in spite of their racial difference. In this combination of quality and quantity, the NAACP disarticulates Black people from denigrated projections of blackness through a moral binary that we can contemporarily understand as

¹⁰³ Text of the August 15, 1951 NAACP bulletin is available at <http://www.amosandy.com/Review%20Articles/naacp.htm> – ignore the attached bullshit commentary.

¹⁰⁴ Kelefa Sanneh, “Black in the Box: In Defense of African American Television,” *Transition* 10.4 (2001), 40.

good diversity/bad difference, and attempts to mobilize the force of the political economy to enforce this distinction.

The NAACP sought to make known African Americans' capacity to assimilate into the class norms of white supremacy by demanding images that reflected their proficiency and respectability. As scholars Christina Acham, Donald Bogle, and Allison Joyce Perlman argue, the NAACP protest of *The Amos 'n' Andy Show* reflected the anxieties of the Black middle-class, who believed that the program would too easily play into anti-Black expectations and preclude the embrace of Black racial uplift by white society.¹⁰⁵ The NAACP not only makes visible the race of the primary audience, but also names its animating quality: "uninformed and prejudiced people" whose attitudes are not only described as hate, but as a lack of knowledge. The significance claims the AAJC makes about TV as a proxy suggest that the audience of network Asian American representation is not Asian American, and is subjected to representational logics of quality and quantity without that cultural capital named by the NAACP to think otherwise.

The resonances in the definition of quality representation between the NAACP campaign and the AAJC reports suggest the epistemological impasse that racialized class has presented for media advocacy. Given what Herman Gray calls the "national mood" of what could be said or thought about acceptable difference, only shows taking assimilationist,

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Acham's *Revolution Televised*, Bogle's *Prime Time Blues*, and Perlman's "Reforming the Wasteland." In Bogle's words: "For a generation eager to prove itself just as 'qualified,' just as 'educated,' and just as 'middle-class' as white America, [...] These characters were clearly burdened with their ethnicity and not ready to assimilate culturally" (34). The quality imagined by the NAACP bulletin contrasts with that of the show; perhaps as a reflection of an effort to include African American audiences, the television adaptation of the radio show used African American actors, hired veteran performer Flournoy Miller as a set consultant, and represented all of the main characters as upwardly mobile – see Acham, 21. Nonetheless, the epistemological conflation of quantity and quality that has animated the activist critique of racial imagery prioritizes the epistemology of the image over the agency of the viewer, as seen in the NAACP's explicit language of who the audience is.

pluralist, or multiculturalist stances – each of which expresses the hegemonic common sense of race and racism – could survive on major network television.¹⁰⁶ In other words, how race sells to a liberal audience requires buying into a certain assimilatory or reformist visions of racialization. The durability of the NAACP’s strategy, of conflating quality representation, quantity of representation, and the quality of viewer as expressed through money, has shaped how the AAJC approaches the significance of Asian American inclusion on television. True to the norms of Asian American stereotype critique, the model minority myth is addressed in both reports as a predominant mystification. However, the 2006 report implies that, to a certain extent, it materially is not. In concluding the report, the researchers argue that, “given that Asian Americans spend \$397 billion annually, with a projected increase of 47% by 2010, networks would do well to take this growing audience into consideration” (2006, 18). Asian American representation matters because Asian American capital will follow. This claim of significance transforms the AAJC’s constituency into a market, illustrating the simultaneity of what Gray calls the semiotic economy of meaning-making and the political economy of money-making, as well as how the construction of quality traverses multiple forms of capital.

Tracing this fundamental contradiction, of not being model minorities while also being model subjects of consumer capitalism, makes evident the middling of APAs in class schemes; financial capital secures representations of racialized cultural capital and the symbolic power of inclusion. The quality viewer of quality television, it is argued, should be expanded to also consider Asian Americans, who possess the financial capital to make them

¹⁰⁶ Gray identifies how the rise of Black family sitcoms in the 1980s, such as *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*, took place alongside the rise of shows cited by *Quality TV*, including *Murphy Brown* and *Designing Women*, as representations of difference enabled by the centrality of the family. Gray correlates how Bill Cosby’s depiction of the African American middle-class family underwrote NBC’s quality television programming, and remains a cultural legacy in the representation of Black life, which illustrates colliding logics of “quality.” Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (U. of Minnesota P., 2004).

worthy of having their cultural capital recognized, and to accrue symbolic capital by participating in quality television. Indeed, what underwrites the exclusive focus on scripted programming is being not only in these imaginative worlds, but the cultural capital of the form. The subheading for this analysis in the 2005 report, “Effective Programs = Effective Rankings for Networks,” makes clear this suggested connection between quality television, the quality subject, and Asian American inclusion. The reports ask the reader, race aside, to recognize the injustice of Asian Americans not being recognized in scripted television not only through a sentimental logic of verisimilitude, but through a capitalist logic based in the market worth of Asian Americans. In other words, diversity hails a quality viewer, who is presumed to be of class status, to further the financial functions of television while appearing as social change. As I have suggested, this understanding of social change conflates measurements of quantity and quality that illustrates how diversity substitutes class for race while nonetheless racializing human life.

True for All Members: On Public Race and Private Sexuality

The question of quantity and quality’s audience implicates how racial equity is imagined through liberal media advocacy. The AAJC reports tend to the relation of race and nation as communicated through how taxonomies of genre speak to audience expectations. The 2005 report’s specific take on these stakes is evident: “Given that situational comedies generally feature family and domestic settings, the invisibility of APIA actors in this genre may contribute to an image that APIAs do not represent the ‘American family’ (2005, 4).¹⁰⁷ Through this absence in the half-hour sitcom, which symbolizes the private sphere, the AAJC remarks on inclusion in domesticity as the extension of cultural citizenship; briefly, the

¹⁰⁷ Indeed, this matters because “characters shown in their home are more likely to be identified with by audiences” (2006, 14).

family is the nation. Without this quality of interiority, which is literalized through interior spaces, Asian American characters are perceived as lacking the capacity to hold a narrative. The report provides a supplementary finding: “APIA actors are featured only in one-hour television dramas” (2005, 10). This segmentation of Asian American representation to one-hour television dramas, which generally focus on the workplace, is also a finding of the 2006 report. In their quantification of the 2004 and 2005 television programs of the reports’ sample, Asian bodies only exist in the public sphere, and their interracial sociality is restricted to the instrumental operations of the workplace. The AAJC’s claims about the limitations of representing the public sphere suggest that the realm of private life and imagined nationhood is viewed as central to representations of complex personhood, and understands this personhood as social change; this section tends to Asian Americans’ relationship to this complex personhood, and how it participates in the racialization of human value addressed in the previous reading.

The AAJC’s analysis of these workplace dramas reflects how cultural capital has become the province of Asian American representation, suggesting the intervention personhood can offer the public image of the model minority myth. Both the 2005 and the 2006 reports feature an analysis of “Occupations & Status,” and both reports identify that the scant crew of Asian American characters all hold advanced degrees. Though not defined in either report, status takes shape in the 2005 report as intelligence, educational credentials, and positions of authority and responsibility; the 2006 report only addresses status as a specialized occupation. Against this homogenizing representation of Asian Americans as capital, the AAJC’s 2006 report includes a short reading of the medical drama *ER*, and its Asian diasporic characters Jing-Mei, portrayed by Ming-Na, and Dr. Neela Rasgotra, played

by Parminder Nagra. The report commends a discussion that Jing-Mei has with a colleague about caring for father, and an episode in which Neela's emotional trauma from a patient death leads her to quit the show's Chicago hospital, because "glimpses into their personal lives add to the complexity of these APIA characters that go beyond 'model minority' stereotypes" (2005, 16).¹⁰⁸ Representations of public spaces of work are seen as promotions of model minority stereotypes in distinction to the complexity that can only manifest in private life. As in *Modern Family*, character complexity, which is laid out as a realm "beyond" the stereotype, finds representation as a hierarchical relationship between the surface appearances of the public sphere and a depth of psychic and personal life that is understood as transsubjective. Yet, these representations, like their public counterparts, express class norms channeled through family and desire, and, true to the middlebrow resolutions of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Modern Family*, the free personhood projected onto interiority is conditioned by forms of discipline that are made to disappear.

Given the inability of the private sphere to subvert the class anxieties that structure the model minority myth, this oppositional association between interiority and the stereotype suggests how advocacy imagines stereotype critique in the public sphere. The two reports shift their tone between the years in addressing the association between the public lives of Asian American characters and the model minority narrative. The 2005 report argues, "Though some racial stereotypes may imply a 'positive' characteristic about a group, these are still inherently problematic because they generalize attributes of some members of the group and assume they are true for all members" (2005, 12). The critique of these portrayals

¹⁰⁸ Remarking on changes in television between the 2005 and the 2006 report, the AAJC team notes that Asian Americans have also started to be included in sitcoms. As they argue, however: "While the new APIA presence on sitcoms is to be applauded, all three APIA sitcom regulars are peripheral characters to the central characters, contrasted to their non-APIA counterparts who are all family members or close friends" (2006, 10).

is also a critique simultaneously of the model minority myth, as well as uncritical praises of the model minority myth that allow positive/negative moralisms to occlude its racializing functions. The 2006 report instead states: “Americans spend the bulk of their days working. Identifying the occupations of characters in a program not only increases their multidimensionality by revealing their status and background, but also offers a glimpse into their everyday lives” (2006, 12). The 2006 claim, unlike its 2005 counterpart, takes up liberal humanism, focusing on representations of the workplace as approximations of social reality that can present the façade of Asian American humanity. As in the NAACP reports, this representation of work can also serve as a claim to respectability and group worthiness, using the terms of class to address racial inequality. Both reports go on to the same findings and conclusion, identifying the clustering of APA representation in workplace dramas, and contend that the absence of Asian Americans in other genres supports the model minority myth through omission. Whereas the NAACP report argued against representations that showed African Americans as incompetent contributors to public life, the AAJC reports argue for representations that portray Asian Americans as having complex interior lives – an identification of the differential racialization of sophistication, as representations of racialized class holds contrasting stakes across racial lines.

The AAJC’s qualitative intervention into the scant quantitative representation of Asian Americans on primetime scripted television recognize those formal mechanisms that prevent viewer identification with an Asian American character. For these AAJC researchers, the issue is less about the statistical enumeration of representation, but the centrality of that character to a show’s narrative universe. To that end, the AAJC 2005 uses close reading methods to emphasize the significance of sexuality not only for quality

representation, but to facilitate non-Asian American identification with Asian American characters as the means of social transformation. For example, the 2005 report recognizes Lane from *Gilmore Girls*, who is “actively pursuing a personal relationship.” Keiko Avena’s portrayal of Lane contests the stock image of the model minority sidekick because “these personal dimensions give ‘Lane’s’ character far more depth and potential for growth in future storylines” (2005, 16). The correlation between sexuality and depth, or the ability to approximate subjectivity, enables the recognition of Asian Americans as human, a theoretical construction willed so deeply by these reports. The AAJC analysis asks for Asian American inclusion within a universality of sexuality, in which the specificity of her sexual orientation and identity are subsumed into the vagueness of liberal humanism. Race comes to designate the public appearance, but sexuality signifies the human depth in us all: here, (hetero)sexuality (notably, with a white man) names intersubjective connection.

Diversity, through logics of sympathy, thus enables learning the ability to understand the interior life of the different through these points of comparative interior sameness. The 2005 report’s third close reading, of ABC’s *Lost*, references two exchanges between survivors on *Lost*’s deserted island in which they speak of the two characters who speak only Korean. The AAJC’s researchers are critical of their misidentification as Chinese and Japanese, noting:

[...] race is utilized as a marker; despite character idiosyncrasies, Korean race/ethnicity clearly demarcates the couple from the rest of the group. Moreover, these incorrect references as Chinese and Japanese by white males demonstrate the problem of ethnic homogenization which implies that all APIAs are the same, disregarding the diversity and complexity of the APIA community. Only Sayid, a

Middle Eastern character played by an APIA actor, correctly identifies the couple as Korean (2005, 17).

The first sentence criticizes Jin and Sun's categorization as Korean, as the ethnoracial marker flattens their interiority, or "character idiosyncrasies," into a group identity. Across the second and third sentence, the report implicates the whiteness of the others as why Jin and Sun face ethnic-turned-racial misrecognition. The third sentence suggests that Sayid, because he is non-white, possesses the sensitivity to recognize the interior dignity of the Korean characters through their appropriate recognition. The viewer must recognize that characters such as Sayid are correct, thus giving diversity a moral value attributed to good people, while also ensuring that critique remains a surface gesture that can be conducted through interaction; his representation of a correction serves as a substitute for the viewer's experience of liberal dialogue.

By focusing on insignificant moments that represent liberal stereotype critique, the report naturalizes the liberal politic of speaking out, or enacting a diversity politic through teachable moments. However, in this modeling of right action that calls upon a sentimental politic of knowing better, race's significance gets buried in personal dignity as opposed to alignments of power. As the AAJC reports on media diversity in quality television make apparent, while multiple races are represented, the mobility of racialization has made its implied devaluation more flexible through the bifurcation of private selfhood and public interaction. The AAJC reports make evident the multiple definitions of inclusion that circulate in the transaction between television and its viewer: the quantity of representation, the quality of representation, and the quality of viewer who learns from these representations. As in *Grey's Anatomy* and *Modern Family*, the quality of representation is measured not only

through screen time, but through the capacity of an Asian American representation to approximate a universality implied by upward class mobility and sexual normativity. This universality is framed and enacted through whiteness, illustrating the co-construction of race, class, and sexuality within the merging of diversity politics and quality discourses. Further, the quality subject is constructed through performances of sophistication, which are deployed as evidence of racial respectability that then uphold the ideological centrality of white supremacy albeit with a visual difference.

Good People Raising Their Babies Right: The Privatization of Diversity and Post-9/11/2001 Futures of Asian American Inclusion

Asian Americans and progressive media outlets alike are looking forward to promises of Asian American protagonists on the Fall 2014 schedule, specifically on broadcast television in primetime, which has been known to be resistant to diversity. This inclusion would appear to make good on the AAJC's calls for representational remediation, and further how shows like *Grey's Anatomy* and *Modern Family* have normalized Asian Americans within diversity. Grace Park and Daniel Dae Kim will continue their prominent culturally specific roles in CBS's 2010 reboot of the Hawai'i-based police procedural *Hawaii Five-0*, just as Chloe Bennett and Ming Na will jump into their colorblind roles on ABC's *Marvel's Agents of SHIELD* and Lucy Liu, once the "Dragon Lady" of the 1990s, will resume her post-racial, post-feminist turn as the reimagined Dr. (Jane) Watson in CBS's Sherlock Holmes adaptation *Elementary*; Hannah Simone will carry on as former fashion model Cece Parekh on FOX's early-thirty-something ensemble sitcom *The New Girl* in a comedy block alongside the third season of Mindy Kaling's *The Mindy Project*. It is such visibility that the AAJC hoped for when its 2006 report diagnosed the "disturbing, but hopeful picture" of television's possibilities. Kat Chow's May 13, 2014 "You'll Be Seeing More Asian-

Americans on Network TV This Fall,” posted to NPR’s *Code Switch*, highlights five new shows for the upcoming scripted television season with prominent Asian American actors, characters, and directors to illustrate how “diversity is becoming an increasingly important strategy for networks to latch onto.”¹⁰⁹ As has been argued throughout this chapter, diversity politics become a strategy, as in Chow’s insinuation that networks are finding the appearance of progress valuable, to naturalize diversity’s market logic.

The five shows that Chow introduces do not feature just any Asian American. In the upcoming season, John Cho and his *Harold and Kumar* partner (and on-again, off-again Obama staffer) Kal Penn will be back in primetime, alongside action star Maggie Q; Justin Lin, director of the film of an Asian American generation *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2004) and the later iterations of the notably multiracial *Fast and the Furious* franchise, will be directing a crime drama; and celebrity chef Eddie Huang’s memoir has been adapted as *Fresh Off the Boat*, a single-camera, coming-of-age comedy which is being hailed in the Asian American blogosphere as the next great Asian American sitcom.¹¹⁰ These shows fall into Chow’s loose periodizing, in which she connects 1976’s *Mr. T and Tina*, a spinoff of *Welcome Back, Kotter* starring Pat Morita that lasted 5 episodes, to Cho’s *All-American Girl*, to this current moment. Chow promotes a progress narrative, but resists celebrating it as such through quotations from Media Studies scholar Shilpa Dave (whose work is quoted throughout the dissertation). Dave asks: “Are Asian-Americans [sic] being used as ethnically ambiguous –

¹⁰⁹ Kat Chow, “You’ll Be Seeing More Asian-Americans on Network TV This Fall,” *Code Switch: Frontiers of Race, Culture, and Ethnicity*, May 13, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2014/05/13/311908833/youll-be-seeing-more-asian-americans-on-network-tv-this-fall>.

¹¹⁰ Of the several contentions I have with this claim include that Mindy Kaling is erased when *Fresh Off the Boat* is called the “second Asian American sitcom” in places such as *Hyphen Magazine* and *Angry Asian Man*. Sure, *The Mindy Project* is generally race-blind, as her only expressions of racial consciousness are deployed ironically or sarcastically in an otherwise white, upper-middle class Manhattan. But is she being erased for her plotlines, for her gender, or for her South Asian American identity?

that way it's sort of the safe way at looking at racial difference [...] Or is it that they're being put in these really interesting roles?" Chow immediately moves to explain that "Dave means roles that make the characters' race and ethnicities and cultures an important part of their lives," contrasting this identitarian awareness against television's prevailing colorblindness. However, this emphasis on "culture" as identity, expressed in all three sites of this chapter, has been used to promote "post-racial"ism specifically through the conflation of race, ethnicity, and culture. This flattening consigns difference to the interior life of the characters and expels race to the realm of the "irrelevant" by consigning "culture" to the past; "culture" becomes racialized as irrational and counterproductive against a "modernity" of racial and sexual diversity. While the "culture"/"modernity" binary reveals itself to be a superficial racializing device, this chronotope finds its deployment in both the television shows and the AAJC's reports as evocative of where character complexity, a mainstay of "quality" television," overlaps with a pedagogy of diversity education.

As this chapter has illustrated against celebrants such as Chow, the symbolic use of love, the family, and sexual identity as universal against the particularity of race is a fiction that invites a class discipline that racializes. Firstly, the use of cultural sophistication as evidence of a modernity defined through its diversity but upholding whiteness as its ideological center invites the racializing hierarchies of the middlebrow. This is seen in *Grey's* as displays of class that signify universal progress; in *Modern Family* through racialized deployments of education as cultural capital; and in the AAJC's claims for Asian American inclusion in the category of the quality viewer. Secondly, the emotional beats and social relevance that define a show as quality hail a middlebrow viewer, whose mastery of diversity politics becomes a sign of their own value as a normative cultural citizen. As seen

in this chapter's readings of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Modern Family*, the affective dramas that develop because of questions about racial and sexual inclusion entail sentimental binaries that manipulate the viewer and rely on class hierarchies for their resolution. Finally, in this chapter, questions of self-determination have been examined not only through the AAJC's analyses, but also through the sincere allyship of Shonda Rhimes, Steve Levitan, and Christopher Lloyd. Though *Grey's* and *Modern Family* express the naturalization of liberal stereotype critique as right action, the means through which they identify the specificities of Asian American racialization in relation to blackness reiterate an antiblackness at the intersection of race and class, such as the disparagement of a critical Black subjectivity in *Grey's* or the authenticating role of white/Black proximities in *Modern Family*.

Given the top-down movement of representation that characterizes scripted network television, this chapter has located resistance, or the possibility of disassembling diversity's emotional moralisms, in reading against the sentimental narratives of diversity politics and locating their inapplicability to social life. Such readings contest the privatizing thrust of diversity and its teleological mythologies of social change. Via some cosmic alignment, Sandra Oh and her character Dr. Cristina Yang departed *Grey's Anatomy* in this dissertation's last revision stages; by way of conclusion, I dwell on how Dr. Yang's dramatic departure from the series makes evident the stakes of critiquing the conjunction of "quality" and "diversity" through the interruption of "terror." The extended teaser of "Fear (Of the Unknown)," the second half of her two-part May 15, 2014 final episode which also served as the Season 10 finale, begins with Dr. Yang hastily dressing in the trailer of her then-off-again partner, current Chief of Staff Dr. Owen Hunt, after a final sexual tryst. Her voiceover narrates Cristina's thoughts on the future: "You know people say, *Who knows? I could get hit*

by a bus tomorrow! That seems pretty far-fetched ... until you have a friend who got hit by a bus. The point is, you never know what kind of day is coming.” The rumination serves not only as one of multiple callbacks to the disasters the original cast has survived over 10 seasons, but also as the basis for the episode’s sentimental politic. Cristina also realizes that, among the many things she has to do before saying goodbye to Seattle and the Grey Sloan Memorial Hospital, she has to go to the mall to get a cell phone charger before she dashes out at the end of the scene. In the teaser’s third scene, in the hospital’s trauma ward, Dr. April Kepner (played by Sarah Drew) anxiously reveals to her supervisor Dr. Hunt that she is pregnant, but intends to work until the last possible day. Dr. Hunt’s congratulations are cut short by the interruption of the Channel 8 News, which announces an explosion at the mall. As Dr. Hunt and Dr. Kepner bark orders to prepare the trauma center, the camera zooms in on the televised image of the Channel 8 anchorwoman, which grows increasingly grainy to highlight the screen’s mediating function, as she states: “What we’re all wondering is: is this an act of terrorism?” The teaser ends as the word “terrorism” echoes through the white title screen, which then fills with a collage of images of Dr. Cristina Yang. This episode’s reading of terror as the “unknown” suggests how the privatization of diversity can only lead to a dismantling of the consciousness necessary for social change.

Terror persists as an affective metaphor of the future, fitting of the formal demands of a season finale, but also as a material discourse of the moment. Act I begins as Dr. Hunt nervously speaks at a press conference outside the hospital doors; he holds a central storyline as he tries to maintain order amidst terrorism scares, but like the dedicated viewer he becomes increasingly panicked about Cristina’s whereabouts (the viewer breathes a sigh of relief as she pops in unscathed at the end of Act I). Dr. Hunt is immediately flagged by two

Homeland Security agents over ominous tones and a noisy background filled with murmurs, crashes, sirens, and bodies working, waiting, and incapacitated. The third scene finds Dr. Grey in a subplot, tending to a dark-skinned patient while is questioned aggressively by one of these Homeland Security agents, who replays security footage of the patient with his backpack-toting friend. As the agent demands to know the whereabouts of the backpack's owner, the patient passes out from internal injuries; Dr. Grey spends Act I, II, and III confronting Homeland Security and advocating for her patient's right to treatment. The Channel 8 broadcast becomes diegetic, as surgical mask-wearing reporters beam in from Grey Sloan Memorial through Acts II and III to speculate on threat levels, the possibility of biological warfare, and dirty bombs; Dr. Hunt, out of his concern for Dr. Yang and his hospital, confronts one of these reporters on-camera for "scaring people for no reason." These scenes intrude on the first half of the episode's plots and subplots of patient care, acting out the accelerated emotions and frenetic tempos of the culture of terror.

Through this invocation of terror and terrorism, "Fear, Of the Unknown" critiques post-9/11 productions of crisis. As Dr. Grey continues to work on her racialized South Asian/Arab American patient in Act III, the supervising Homeland Security agent receives a phone call and dismisses himself. Incensed, Dr. Grey demands: "Don't you think you owe him an apology?" The agent responds: "Ma'am, you have a hard job of keeping people alive. I do too." Homeland Security leaves the hospital, and the Channel 8 broadcast explains that the explosion at the Seattle mall was caused by a gas leak: "Fears of a terrorist attack were unfounded." Through the interjections of explosion footage, burned and lacerated bodies, the Channel 8's sensationalist reportage, and Homeland Security agents circulating around the unconscious brown body, "Fear, Of the Unknown" manipulates traumatic memories of

9/11/2001 and the iconography of the brown terrorist body to suggest, as the Homeland Security agent, who notably is Black, tells Dr. Grey: “The situation has changed.” Like Homeland Security and the Channel 8 news, however, this patient and his symbolically racialized body disappear without consequence from the second half of the episode. Posing Dr. Yang’s East Asian body against this patient’s brown body as possible victim and agent of terrorism and the Homeland Security agent’s Black body as state power evokes their differential racialization in the post-9/11/2001 moment; the lack of consequence for the patient’s misrecognition as a terrorist amidst this multiracialism affirms the banal necessity of racist exclusion that persists for the otherwise diverse middlebrow audience.

“Fear, Of the Unknown” uses its central metaphor of uncertain futures to propel its pedagogical project. Act IV opens with Dr. Catherine Avery (played by African American acting legend Debbie Allen), who has come to town to interrogate her son and daughter-in-law about their pregnancy but has jumped into the hospital’s service, collecting items from a medical supply closet; there, she finds Dr. Kepner, her daughter-in-law, crying. Though Dr. Avery assures Dr. Kepner that the explosion was not an act of terror, Dr. Kepner sputters: “But that’s what we thought. We live in a world where that’s the first thing that crosses our minds [...] I can’t raise a child in a world where they could die getting new shoes!” Continuing about her business, Dr. Avery calmly responds with a story about her and her father eating in a diner in Texas, “in a town so small it’s probably forgot its own name,” in the 1960s. She recounts her father’s racist harassment by “some ignorant young men,” and her father’s steeled reaction to this intimidation. Dr. Avery explains that the harassers eventually moved on because “He wasn’t afraid. So they didn’t have any power!” Dr. Avery displaces terror from a structural effect (and affect) of war-making to a personal feeling,

simultaneously acknowledging its racializing character while also rendering that secondary to individual response. She then extols, direct to camera with the quiet, thoughtful leitmotif playing in the background:

April, there's always gonna be stupid people. There's always gonna be accidents!

But that's not what stops us: it's the fear. Now if you told me on that day in 1960 that

I would have the job I have today, the child I have, I would have laughed – it seemed

beyond impossible. But this is the way the world changes, sweetheart! Good people

raising their babies right!

This teary-eyed sentiment that bonds Dr. Kepner and her intimidating mother-in-law disappears the culture of terror and the state apparatus of intimidation that breeds it. The analogical deployment of the desegregating South constructs a progress narrative as a self-congratulation that resembles social change, attaching itself to the heroism associated with 1950s and '60s African American civil rights movements in the “post-racial” narrative. However, this analogy dissembles these social movements and engaged theorizing as private decisions and intergenerational transmission. This posing of “good people” against “stupid people” – the [white] young men of Dr. Avery’s account, whose race must be assumed based on context and not stated outright as part of her own membership as a “good person” – collapses quality into diversity into intellect, and thereby participates in the racialization of sophistication. Dr. Avery’s middlebrow sentiment presumes consensus with Dr. Kepner, and, by extension, the viewer who feels alongside her; through this imagining of desegregation as a moral virtue of personal character – an illustration of the affirmations critiqued throughout this chapter, all parties elevate themselves as “good people” against the specter of stupidity.

This pedagogical moralism of teaching away ignorance not only becomes a device for sending off Dr. Yang to her brightly lit cardiovascular research institute in Switzerland, but also to express the diversity that underwrites “Fear, Of the Unknown” and its logical limitations. In Act V, Dr. Kepner runs into her husband; she shares her reassurance that “our baby will be fine” as the two recite the elder Dr. Avery’s truism. Dr. Yang’s concluding voiceover collapses the characters’ personal dramas into the national drama confronted in episode’s first half as she opines: “Sometimes the future changes quickly and completely, and we are left with the choice of what to do next. We can choose to be afraid of it. We can stand there trembling, not moving, assuming the worst that can happen. Or, we step forward into the unknown and assume that it will be brilliant.” The front end of the episode confronts the ineffectuality of War on Terror tactics, from the presumptions of terror, the sensationalized speculation, and the racialization of perpetration. Dr. Yang’s concluding monologue could be used against the suspicious readings of this chapter to embrace Asian American inclusion on television. However, returning to the civil rights narrative that motivates Dr. Avery’s speech that later scaffolds Dr. Yang’s optimistic futurity: in the War on Terror U.S., who are the “stupid people” against whom “the world changes with good people raising their babies right?”

The tenuous reference of this parallel suggests how the schematics of diversity, read retroactively into the father and daughter tale, presume a dissembling transhistorical moral value while disassembling under the weight of its easy equivalencies. The “stupid people” are not the Department of Homeland Security, as the DHS agent is given a moment of empathy in his final interaction with Dr. Grey. That DHS was the only character to speak of racial suspicion, so there is no equivalent of Dr. Avery’s white tormentors, and, given his

Black body, the overtness of his state-sanctioned racism is softened as national security over racist persecution. Such a deployment of blackness within multiracial representation illustrates the analogic use of blackness within sentimental diversity that has been critiqued throughout this chapter, as it appears both in *Grey's Anatomy* and *Modern Family* to buttress a caring whiteness. In this vein, though Dr. Kepner, the audience of Dr. Avery's touching tale, is also white with a rural upbringing, she is qualified as one of the good white people who will change the world, as expressed in her thriving in *Grey's* multiracial and sexually plural universe. Dr. Grey's suspect/patient may very well have been raised right by good people, but his care was obstructed by an agent of the state; he receives no redress let alone a second look as his injured body becomes an aesthetic object for the quality viewer of diversity, suggesting how such sentimental schemes represent the primacy of feeling over a pedagogy of social change.

So, are the "stupid people" us, who believe that change, and indeed social justice, takes more than heterosexual reproduction? As has been argued throughout this chapter, though socially conscious Asian American representation and APA arts activism in media can reimagine Asian American visibility and hegemonic understandings of difference, the turn to diversity politics occludes more than it illuminates by translating everything into "good" and "bad." Resistance is not just about getting more Asian Americans as producers and writers and creators, though that is an important step towards group agency. It is parochial to insist that activist communities no longer look to quality television, given its singular combination of pervasiveness and cultural elevation, to teach the world about difference. It is, however, to use quality television to understand how remedying Asian American visibility through deployments of cultural capital has been used to further Black

entrenchment. The intervention might be to reframe media activism, not for inclusion in liberal humanism, but for a restructuring of what “diversity” matters matter and for whom – an awareness of how diversity has been privatized as a moral asset in the racialization of sophistication. This would call for a reading strategy that would challenge Asian American intimacies not as a sign of progress but as an invitation of racial power. Activist interventions would not just appeal to creators and writers, but would disrupt such moral hailings and their abusive demands on viewer responses. The next chapter tests what such interventions might resemble, but also cautions against too quick of a rush towards a dissembling grassroots.

Chapter 2 :: A World Without Heroes: Rehabilitating Citizenship through Melancholic Masculinity in APA Graphical Storytelling

Comic art developed throughout the 20th century as a form lodged between entertainment and art. The introduction of comic strips, in distinction from political satire cartoons, facilitated a competition for readership revenue between Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* at the end of the 19th century with Pulitzer's 1895 publication of Richard F. Outcault's *The Yellow Kid*, and Outcault's 1896 defection to *New York Journal* to create another strip, *Hogan's Alley*.¹¹¹ Paul Lopes' *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book* details how comic books' first national appearance was as mass-produced entertainment for children in 1934.¹¹² Though comic books were targeted by 1950s Cold War panics, the 1970s saw comic books' earlier audiences, then grown, establish cornerstones of fandom: fanzines, fan organizations, comic book collecting, and the comic book convention. As Lopes and Charles Hatfield note, the term "graphic novel" came into prominence in the late 1970s by veteran cartoonist Will Eisner, who wanted to market his book-length projects to a general readership over comics' niche audience; the term by the mid-80s catered to the "self-conscious, relatively affluent, and eager for belated recognition of the comic book as 'art'" audience of the direct market.¹¹³ The 1980s saw the transformation of comic book distribution, as the comic book store became the site of the direct sales and distribution; meanwhile, an artistic counterculture was revived in the alternative comix movement.

¹¹¹ Howard, "A Brief History of the Black Comic Strip: Past and Present," in Howard and Ronald L. Jackson II, eds., *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 12.

¹¹² Lopes, *Demanding Respect: The Evolution of the American Comic Book* (Temple U. P., 2009), 1. Philosopher David Carrier remarks that the mass culture reading practice readers take to comics, as being "understood immediately by everyone," is a historical legacy of this perception of lacking value. Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (Penn State University Press, 2000), 103.

¹¹³ Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature* (University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 29.

The cultural forms of and around drawn representation – the comic strip, the comic book, the graphic novel, and the comic convention – have been united under the term “graphical storytelling.”¹¹⁴ Since the turn of the 21st century, graphical storytelling has been both elevated and mainstreamed: the San Diego Comic-Con International shifted from being one of the first consumer-led comic book conventions in 1970 to being an entertainment-industry blowout of TV, movies, video games, and comics; the Book Industry Study Group now recognizes “graphic novel” as an official category; movies based in the DC and Marvel comic book universes gross billions of dollars worldwide; literary studies and K-12 classrooms increasingly read graphic novels as museums and galleries invite graphical storytelling exhibitions; and, as evidenced in cultural sites from Urban Outfitters to *Portlandia*, comic books now symbolize subcultural cool.

As illustrated by scholarship by Robert G. Lee and Mel Chen, as well as public interventions such as the NYU Asian/Pacific/American Institute and the NYU Fales Library & Special Collections traveling exhibition *Martels & Monsters: Unmasking Asian Images in U.S. Comics, 1942-1986* (2013), graphical storytelling has also been used to caricature Asian Americans using an all-too-familiar archive of images and narratives about enemy aliens, seductresses, and inhuman masterminds. Against these anti-Asian caricatures, 2009 saw two related flashpoints in Asian American graphical storytelling: the publication of *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology* and the inaugural Asian American Comic Convention (AACC) on July 11, 2009 at the Museum of Chinese in America in New York City, both of which were spearheaded by the SIUniverse, a name under which *Secret Identities*’ editors continue to operate. As *Secret Identities* and the AACC argue, Asian

¹¹⁴ “Graphic storytelling” is a smoother term, but I use “graphical storytelling” and “APA graphical storytelling movement” because of their deployment in describing the impact of the 2009 Asian American ComiCon.

American presence, and even Asian Americanist critique, in graphical storytelling as producers and consumers is not new. The influx of scholarship on Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* (2006) and Adrian Tomine's *Shortcomings* (2007) indicate the increased legibility of the Asian American graphic novel. These authors are not one-off wonders, as Yang's award-winning *American Born Chinese* is the third of his six works, and Adrian Tomine, whose *Shortcomings* first appeared in his *Optic Nerve* series, has compiled other *Optic Nerve* issues into collection form. Yang and Tomine join Derek Kirk Kim, who is known for *Same Difference & Other Stories* (2004); Fred Chao, creator of the *Johnny Hiro* series (as the tagline goes: "Half Asian, All Hero"); and Tak Toyoshima of the formerly syndicated *Secret Asian Man* comic (2007-2009) as significant Asian Americans in graphical storytelling, whose work, under the banner of an APA graphical storytelling movement, joins that of accomplished comic industry veterans like Greg Pak and Larry Hama. While Asian American contributions to graphical storytelling are not new, the gathering of the divergent styles and perspectives of these artists under the panethnic rubric and its associated politics is.

This chapter examines three texts from this emergent panethnic tradition to ask: What are the strategies around diversity through which the APA graphical storytelling movement constructs a panethnic iconography that responds to racist caricature, and how is this shaped by the particularities of the graphic form? This chapter reads *Secret Identities* and the previously syndicated comic strip *Secret Asian Man*, which was named by the SIUniverse as a movement text, to examine both their Asian Americanist critique, and their self-conscious location between "art" and "product." It turns to *Shortcomings*, a graphic novel that has not been celebrated by the SIUniverse but has been read as such by literary criticism, to highlight

how the legibility of APA graphical storytelling as a category is underscored by the symbolic cache of its institutional incorporation. The chapter ends with thoughts about the APA graphical storytelling movement as it continues. While the previous chapter focused on APA activism that imagine Asian Americans occupying an industry hostile to Asian American representation, this chapter considers a contrasting dynamic: instead of seeking entry into processes by which a select few create cultural products to be consumed by millions, an APA graphical storytelling movement envisions the popularization of grassroots cultural production. This rhetoric deployed by *Secret Identities* and its creators, the SIUniverse, of movement-building through cultural production is not new, as the Combined Asian Resources Project (CARP) of the Yellow Power 1970s established an Asian American literary history through similar efforts of collecting contemporary artists, recuperating neglected works, and setting a politicized agenda for creations of the panethnic category.¹¹⁵ While the establishment of an APA graphical storytelling movement, like the impetus behind an Asian American literary history, has given coherence to a collection of works that are imagined as confronting racial invisibility, the movement, like its literary predecessor, neglects the inequalities it naturalizes in its rush to Asian American representation.

What sets the APA graphical storytelling movement apart from its literary predecessor are the dynamics of its visual form – not only the logics of iconology and recognition, but the umbrella form’s uncertain place in cultural hierarchy. This chapter makes three arguments that tend to how this formal context informs its content. Firstly, the APA graphical storytelling movement, in marking the model minority myth as the target of Asian Americanist critique, draws Asian Americans into rarified categories from which they

¹¹⁵ *Disassembling Diversities*’ manuscript will begin with CARP’s skirmishes about Asian American literary history and their middlebrow dynamics as the epistemological and historical foundation of APA arts activism.

have been denied, such as citizenship, national metanarrative, and artistic acclaim. These claims for belated racial respect occur alongside demands to legitimize the form itself, illustrating how APA cultural politics and U.S. graphical storytelling have been similarly shaped as middled formations by Cold War class dramas. Because of this confluence of representational claims, formal conventions, belated critical acclaim, and financial means of the audience, graphical storytelling skews towards middlebrow status – a discourse and a source of capital secured by Asian American literary criticism, which I address directly in my readings. Secondly, I read how the APA graphical storytelling movement inserts Asian American men into the subject matter of U.S. traditions, including superheroism, homosocial friendships, and heterosexual romance – a diversity politic of inclusion within the form’s emotional fabric and its Americana. By relying on these individualizing thematic conventions of inner turmoil and personal conflict, the racialized citizenship theorized by the APA graphical storytelling movement is gendered masculine and normalized as heterosexual. Throughout, I analyze *melancholic masculinity*, a politically conscious masculinity imagined as irreparably wounded by Asian American racialization and anti-Asian racism, to highlight the ethical possibilities enabled and foreclosed by this gendering and its associated affects of outrage and grief. Beyond being remedied by women and gay voices, the APA graphical storytelling movement is necessarily heteropatriarchal. Thirdly, though texts of the APA graphical storytelling movement often understand themselves in solidarity with other people of color, their invocations of blackness dissemble the objectification of Black experiences and bodies as commonality. This chapter highlights the incommensurability of diversity, as a renewed cultural citizenship, and antiracist critique.

The cultural politics of the APA graphical storytelling movement depend upon graphical storytelling's location between mass culture and Art – a position exemplified by the specific history of comic books and its surrounding debates of value and deviance, and the “mainstream” and the “underground” in popular culture. Paul Lopes details how after *Famous Funnies* hit the newsstands in 1934, followed by the first appearance of Superman in 1939,¹¹⁶ comic books were mass print commodities until 1955. In that year, the industry was besieged by the Cold War fervor that in the previous year brought forth the U.S. Senate Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency and the publication of Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*. The Comics Magazine Association of America implemented a system of industrial self-censorship, the Comics Code, as an alternative to government regulation. Because of the Subcommittee and Wertham's explicit focus on the figure of the child, who was named as comic books' primary consumer and the victim of its visual grammars, the Comics Code banned violence and gore in crime and horror genres specifically, and sexual innuendo. Graphical storytelling languished until the 1960s because of falling sales in the formerly lucrative genres of crime and horror, and escalating competition from children's television. In that decade, the underground comix movement transitioned the audience of comic books from children to adults through changes in content; these adult comics were published locally and not sold at the newsstand, pioneering what would later become the direct market model until the movement was dismantled by obscenity laws in 1973. The flourishing of the form that has taken place since then leads to Hatfield's summary of graphical storytelling, “between the punk and the curator,” which embodies the subversive and minoritized connotations of the form's middleness.¹¹⁷ In other words,

¹¹⁶ Lopes, 1, 11.

¹¹⁷ Hatfield, xii.

graphical storytelling's self-conscious deployment of this history of marginalization enlivens the middlebrow cultural dynamics associated with its content and consumption.

The image of APA graphical storytelling's producer, consumer, and subject as an Asian American nerd, as invoked in all three texts of this chapter, illustrates the afterlife of the Cold War racial politics of the model minority myth.¹¹⁸ As explained in *Dissembling Diversities*'s introduction, the model minority myth began post-World War II to explain away the claims of racial social movements while justifying international market expansion and the upward distribution of resources in the post-1965 world order. Jodi Kim's *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* locates this ideological invention alongside the global restructurings facilitated by the triangulation of the Cold War between the "First World" of U.S.-led global capitalism, the "Second World" of Communist threat, and the Oriental frontier of "Red Asia." The model minority myth not only served as a racial panacea within U.S. borders; it also went global as warfare and imperialism transformed non-aligned and enemy Asian nation-states into junior allies. Jodi Kim speaks of this politic as a gendered racial rehabilitation, a domestication and feminization of difference enabled by the simultaneity of nuclear warfare, the internment and relocation of domestic racial others, and the occupation of defeated Japan. The model minority and the junior ally are depicted as emasculated and feminized figures to make U.S. liberalism, bearing a violence rendered masculine, appear both consensual and necessary through some naturalized misogyny. The Asian American nerd is devalued simultaneously by racial hierarchy and by the status that surrounds his beloved comic book, yet both devaluations underestimate his class mobility

¹¹⁸ This is not a central point of the readings that follow, but the protagonists of both *Secret Asian Man* and *Shortcomings* self-identify as nerds, and the editors of the SIUniverse each reference their social outcast upbringing as racialized nerds in explaining their motivations behind the collection.

and consumer power, and suggested in this reclamation of the model minority image, and the resentment he carries about his racialized feminization.

Through these twinned Cold War impacts, the APA graphical storytelling movement understands its texts as especially transparent yet subversive in their form, and as having a specific connection with an Asian American audience. This assumed transparency between the image, the text, and the reader is central to the cognitive turn of graphical studies, the form's prevailing frame of criticism laid out by graphical artist Scott McCloud and championed by Derek Parker Royal.¹¹⁹ The classical text of comic studies, McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art Form* (1993), argues that represented graphical figures serve as conduits for the reader/viewer's affective identification, which links the experience of looking to looking as another. According to McCloud, as the abstraction of the figure increases, so too does the viewer's ability to inhabit this narrative universe; as particularity increases, this empathetic relationship decreases. What goes unremarked is how this move towards abstraction as universality, dubbed by Derek Royal as the "paradoxical effect of ethnic representation in comics,"¹²⁰ normalizes white masculinity as empathy – not only in the presumption that white men are comic's majority consumer, but also in McCloud and his adherents' validation of stereotypes for their legibility. McCloud takes up psychoanalytic reading methods to argue that the stereotype complies represents a visual shortcut for the reader's perception, assuming that the partitions of identification that ensue from such shortcuts are detached from the political forces behind stereotypes in the first

¹¹⁹ This assumed transparency can also be read in claims like those of the Asian American ComiCon (addressed in this chapter's conclusion) and Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L. Jackson's introduction to *Black Comics* that children's relationship to dominant iconography fashions deeply sedimented attitudes about identity and difference.

¹²⁰ Royal, "Drawing Attention to Cultural Diversity," in *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives*, 69.

instance. McCloud's analysis of this identification uses an analytical language of "beauty" and "art" to suggest how the symbolic capital of "Art" presumes universality. Given how McCloud's account suggests the collusion of whiteness and class norms within sight itself, APA graphical storytelling must negotiate inclusion in reader identification within vision's affective processes. As such, this chapter tracks how graphical storytelling's combinations of picture and text call forth emotional response, for which figures, and to what end. This expansion of reader identification indicates the aesthetic innovation of the APA graphical storytelling movement that accompanies the political intervention of its content – which I take up to address the reader/character relations of graphical storytelling's pedagogy.

A People with a Lot of Masks: Secret Identities and the Gendered Wounds of History

Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology, which was published in April 2009 by The New Press, was edited by the team of the SI Universe: author Jeff Yang, independent comics creator Jerry Ma, comics education specialist Keith Chow, and actor Parry Shen, and features such a project to expand the aesthetic and political contours of graphical storytelling. The anthology features 26 short comics, each of which bring together an Asian American name in entertainment with an Asian American comic artist to conceive of an original Asian American superhero. The four editors further address their intervention in the "What is *Secret Identities*" documentary, a promotional video by the SI Universe. As Ma explains in the documentary, "there's a specific message...that we as Asian Americans need to be the hero every once in a while."¹²¹ Ma observes a representational gap within graphical storytelling: with the exception of recent examples, such as side members of the *X-Men* and Greg Pak's Amadeus Cho of *The Incredible Hulk*, Asian Americans have not been

¹²¹ SI Universe, "What Is *SECRET IDENTITIES*?" Documentary," September 7, 2009. Accessed October 15, 2012 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lRVG1nw7fI>.

canonical comic book heroes. As such, the majority of the collection's black-and-white comics are drawn in a representational realism evocative of the DC/Marvel tradition to insert Asian Americans stylistically into it. The collection's comics are organized into six thematic sections, each with an imaginative yet didactic introduction that uses comic book representations to expound on how the exclusion and denigration of Asian Americans has been normalized.

The "What is *Secret Identities*" documentary addresses the collection's six themes, emphasizing the collection's value as a tool for educating the public about Asian Americans' experiences. I find *Secret Identities*' intervention laudable, as the collection itself proclaims the modest intention of making everyday life more livable by creating proxies for Asian American identification and publicizing Asian American presence in U.S. culture and history. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials' "Drawing from Resistance: Folklore, Race, and *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology*" highlights how the collection continues a genealogy of Yellow Power critique by joining exposés of the racist contradictions of the U.S. national narrative with APA artists' responses to comic books' racist archives.¹²² Her readings capture the collection's progressive possibilities, most notably in the complex intertextual play between individual comics, historical images, U.S. popular culture's racist archives, and literary allusions, perhaps even beyond what the editors envision. Though the collection's collaborative nature invites a range of political viewpoints, *Secret Identities* sends a consistent message through shared representational strategies: Asian

¹²² She concludes that, "[t]hrough a mix of satire, caricature, and serious critique, *Secret Identities* destabilizes dominant U.S. ethno-racial logics, redolent in past/present stereotypical constructions [...]. Equally important, the collection gestures toward an alternative Asian American folklore that critically attends to transnational origin stories of immigration linked to identity politics, civil rights, war, and nation-building." Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, "Drawing from Resistance," *Amerasia Journal* 39:2 (2013): 2-24.

Americans have been rendered invisible and, when visible, effeminate and foreign. This section is a counterpoint to Schlund-Vials' extrapolations as I read the collection against the grain. Firstly, I do so through a queer of color optic, engaging, like Schlund-Vials, the collection's attachment to History and nationalist comic book traditions; however, in my reading, I interrogate how *Secret Identities'* superhero iconography includes Asian American men in a dissembling patriotism, to then critique how this inclusive yet gendered nationalist diversity is positioned as rehabilitating Asian American manhood. Secondly, I read the collection through a relational scope, to illustrate how its performances of Asian/Black solidarity enact its activist ethos, but I locate these performances within the white/anti-Black racial hierarchies that have underpinned *Secret Identities'* nationalist narratives.

This Sort of Shadow History: Rehabilitating a History of Manhood

As the impetus for *Secret Identities'* creation, of Asian Americans needing to be the hero, suggests, the lack of Asian American icons has engendered a desire to fill that absence in a naturalized logic of representation: to have a cultural icon that looks like you is to be politically represented. Explaining his motivations in the "What is *Secret Identities'*" documentary, author Jeff Yang states: "I—and I think a lot of other people—grew up in a world, to a certain extent, without heroes. At least, not Asian American heroes." Yang explains that this inclusion is even more important for Asian Americans "because we are culturally seen as that silent group, that group that is too easily ignored." Yang's estimation jumps from the individual to the group to insist that Asian American invisibility in bipartisan politics is sustained by Asian American exclusion from mainstream popular culture and vice versa. Reappropriating this silence as agency, *Secret Identities* compares Asian Americans'

unheard voice to the superhero trope of hiding one's identity. The introduction to *Secret Identities* sets up the collection's key premise:

What if we told you a tale about a quiet, unassuming guy with black hair and thick glasses? He's an immigrant, who's done his best to fit in to a world that isn't his—one very different from the land of his birth. He's got a hidden side to himself that he can't quite bring himself to show, not even to the popular girl he's got a huge crush on. If only she knew who he really was—what he could really do—she'd be amazed, he thinks. If only she knew. If only everyone knew...

For many Asian Americans, this chronicle is a familiar one, because many of us lived it. But this also happens to be the story of a mild-mannered reporter named Clark Kent, better known to the world by his alter ego: Superman.¹²³

In this metaphor of the Asian American as superhero, the editors render the Asian American's gender and sexuality unremarkable as he is assumed to be male and straight. He desires the girl of others' affections to demonstrate his masculinity to others, but also to fulfill his own sexual lack. Our protagonist "can't quite bring himself to show" the "hidden side to himself" that would prove his manhood, even as that "hidden side" would mark him as a desirable subject – a legibility that, dependent on the "popular girl" being amazed, requires her objectification.

Like Clark Kent, the racializing markers of this figure are his black hair and his thick glasses; our surrogate narrator is a Clark Kent-esque Asian (American) man who appears in many of *Secret Identities'* section introductions to embody this metaphor. His story is framed by his alien status, recalling the immigrant narrative of un-belonging that has been

¹²³ SI Universe, "About," *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology*, accessed October 15, 2012 at <http://www.secretidentities.org/Site/About.html>.

central to Asian American letters, but also suggesting a literariness in its self-conscious nods to the U.S. comic book tradition and a specific diversity politic that views internal struggle as the sole register of racialization. These multiple overlaps illustrate how *Secret Identities* is not only underwritten by prior APA arts activisms, but by the racialization of sophistication and the projections of diversity on interior life. This introductory framing scaffolds *Secret Identities*' articulations of gendering, desire, and wounding through comic book iconography to illustrate how APA responses to Asian American racialization are conditioned by a violence that continues to hurt. In this section, I tend to the manipulations of cultural and symbolic capital in *Secret Identities*' citations of Yellow Power and panethnic archives. By highlighting the differential functions of masculinity and femininity in the collection's pedagogy, I also begin to theorize melancholic masculinity and its claim on Americana through diversity.

In introducing the fourth section, "Many Masks," *Secret Identities* uses the superhero metaphor of the mask and its implied doubleness to explore hegemonic anti-Asian racial tropes.¹²⁴ The one-page comic finds our Clark Kent-esque Asian American with a stack of books and his laptop in the University of California, Los Angeles' Asian American Studies Reading Room; he reflects on the nature of masks, both as obfuscation and empowerment, as he continues his interior monologue: "... Since we first set foot on these **shores**, made to play the part of the '**forever foreigner**,' the '**yellow peril**,' the invading, unassimilable **horde** .../... hidden behind identical **slanted eyes** and **geisha makeup** by others' ignorance..." (*SI* 128, all emphases in original).¹²⁵ These two panels of text coincide with

¹²⁴ Schlund-Vials' intertextual reading notes how "Many Masks" references African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask" (1896). However, the next section critiques such comparisons.

¹²⁵ Throughout the chapter, I maintain the source texts' typography, which regularly uses bolded words for affective and stylistic emphasis, without edits of my own.

drawn images like Dr. Seuss' Orientalized caricature of General Hideki Tojo, a pamphlet depicting the U.S. military's World War II comparison of Chinese to Japanese faces, and a "yellow peril" cartoon to suggest the historical durability of representational racism; the narrator designates ignorance as their cause. The next panel features *Time Magazine's* August 31, 1987 cover on "The New Whiz Kids," a story on Asian American educational attainment that reestablished the model minority myth for a new decade, with the narrator's musing that Asian Americans have been rendered "**exotic, other, not quite human...**" The juxtaposition of the model minority image and the text decrying racial mythologies indicates that this supposed sign of Asian American inclusion, the veneer of socioeconomic attainment and ascribed class aspiration, racializes.¹²⁶ Situated alongside the caricatures of the previous panels as an extension of earlier dehumanizations as a horde, the model minority myth presupposes insurmountable difference as part of a continuous strategy of ejecting Asian Americans from national definition.¹²⁷

This introduction emphasizes self-representation as agency and correction against these distorting visions. The narrator continues in the next frame by explaining, "Those **old masks**—imposed by **others**, reinforced by the weight of historical **repetition**—have, over time, **obscured** and **distorted** our identity." The solution, as the narrator proposes, is to fit "These **new masks**, which we choose for **ourselves**" will "reveal who we **really are** beneath." The solution for the "ignorance" of racist archives is an agenda of self-determination imagined through metaphors of voice and grassroots cultural production. As Schlund-Vials argues, *Secret Identities'* rhetoric of masks borrows from Amy Uyematsu's foundational essay, "The

¹²⁶ However, this dynamic contrasts that of other racial groups who experience racism through their a priori exclusion from such classed tropes.

¹²⁷ Kandice Chuh, "Transnationalism and Its Pasts," *Public Culture* 9.1 (1996): 93-112.

Emergence of Yellow Power in America” (1969), which critiques an Asian American “identity crisis” that causes Asian Americans to mask their phenotypical difference to resemble white beauty standards and their heritage, subjectivity, and personhood to approximate whiteness.¹²⁸ *Secret Identities* identifies how the anti-Asian stereotypes that our protagonists confront in the collection creates an imposed genealogy of definition that disappears Asian American personhood disappears. The panel includes a scribble of Amadeus Cho and *Secret Identities*, suggesting that these images, created by Asian Americans, will rehabilitate Asian American identity and allow Asian Americans a political voice. His argument is for the centrality of self-representation, not only as a counter-archive, but as a model of folding Asian American faces into the national fabric.

It is no coincidence that our Clark Kent-esque narrator makes these observations at UCLA, an institution with one of the largest Asian American Studies programs in one of the stronghold metropolises of APA community life. After visually and textually making this setting evident, the second panel of the comic visualizes a stack of books with titles on their spines.¹²⁹ Collecting a book list suitable for an introduction to Asian American Studies, *Secret Identities* cites one of the field’s most recognized institutional centers and a stack of its texts to imply a learned familiarity with Asian Americanist critique. Indeed, Anne Cong-Huyen and Caroline Kyungah Hong see the pedagogical value in how *Secret Identities*’ critique of stock imagery of model minorities, effeminate men, Dragon Ladies, and Susie Wongs registers anti-Asian racism at the state level, such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act

¹²⁸ Schlund-Vials, 9-11.

¹²⁹ The specific titles are Ronald Takaki’s multiethnic Asian American history *Strangers from a Different Shore* (1998); Robert G. Lee’s *Orientalism* (1999), on coercive representations of Asian/Americans in U.S. popular culture; Helen Zia’s history of APA political movements, *Asian American Dreams* (2001); and Frank Yu’s collection of essays on Asian Americans in law, history, and popular culture, *Yellow* (2003).

and the war in Viet Nam.¹³⁰ While Schlund-Vials locates this scene as a self-conscious affiliation with Yellow Power, I read this citational practice as performing intellectual legitimacy. The intimidating appearance of the books and the narrator's solitary presence in the archive suggest the remove of this knowledge from quotidian life. In this framing, Asian American Studies is located in the ivory tower, and must be brought back to the public sphere through representations like Amadeus Cho and *Secret Identities*. What goes unremarked is how the status of both Asian American Studies and our Clark Kent-esque Asian American enables access to this institution and its knowledge; this normalizes the racialization of sophistication addressed in the previous chapter, in which Asian Americans become symbols of cultural capital. This simultaneous citation and suspicion of academia views scholarly knowledge as both valuable and undemocratic, interrogating how Asian Americans' cultural capital is plotted at a distance from functional knowledge.

Though this scene evokes the legitimization associated with research, this representation of research at last gone public articulates the middlebrow scripting of *Secret Identities* as better positioned to educate because of its middled place. "Shadow History," a section of the anthology described as "stories inspired by actual events pertaining to Asian Americans," features the Asian American historical metanarrative as a backdrop; it includes Chinese American contributions to the Transcontinental Railroad, Japanese American internment, and the murder of Vincent Chin. As Jeff Yang explains in the "What is *Secret Identities*?" documentary:

¹³⁰ This co-authored chapter represents the first academic examination of this text. Anne Cong-Huyen and Caroline Kyungah Hong, "Teaching Asian American Graphic Narratives in a 'Post-Race' Era," in *Teaching Comics and Graphic Narratives*, 80-93.

Two of the things that we're doing in the book: we're taking history as it actually occurred and layering this other filter over it...this sort of shadow history, using the lens of superheroes to illuminate issues – real issues that sometimes get overlooked when talked about in...normal historical terms.¹³¹

The SIUniverse's supplemental discussion guide, available at http://www.secretidentities.org/Site/Teacher_Guide_1a.html, provides context for “Shadow History's” entries and asks leading discussion questions to facilitate comics education. The SIUniverse moves between the discussion guide and the “Shadow History” to stitch together iconic events of Asian American history and the mythos of the superhero in remarking on Asian Americans' exceptional role in the U.S. nation-building project. The illegibility of this Shadow History creates an injurious invisibility within the officialized and institutionally accepted record of the past that, for the SIUniverse, results in the splitting of the Asian American subject, as Yang further explains: “Second thing: We are taking the experience of Asian Americans – we are people with a lot of masks [...] a lot of identities that are both [...] external facing and internal facing with a gap between the two and [...] using the metaphor of the superhero to really explore that part of ourselves.” This outward-facing dynamic of masks is evident in the collection's multiple confrontations of the damage caused by prevailing representations of Asian/Americans, and rehabilitates this injury by making private hurt public knowledge.

Against readings of *Secret Identities'* progressive genealogy, I read the internal-facing dynamic as racial melancholia, in which this masking is a story that needs to be told

¹³¹ SI Universe, “What Is *SECRET IDENTITIES?*” Documentary,” September 7, 2009. Accessed October 15, 2012 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lRVG1nw7fI>.

over and over: we are not model minorities.¹³² As Anne Anlin Cheng explains in her reading of Freud, the Asian American subject as the racial melancholic “eats” and “chokes” on the lost object of national inclusion, denying that the object is lost while ensuring that the object will never return, amidst national culture’s melancholic relationship to Asian American racialization; the Asian American subject desires a legibility as a proper citizen that cannot happen unless the national narrative that makes inclusion desirable collapses under its racial contradictions.¹³³ As its list of historical moments suggests, “Shadow History” and the *Secret Identities* discussion guide focus on the structurally masculinized conditions of physical labor and U.S. military service – a celebration of contributions men make to the nation-state through their bodies to demonstrate that Asian Americans are not the model minority but model citizenship for the majority.

This masculinization of national history dovetails with the expectations of *Secret Identities*’ form and genre: Given how comic book superheroes like Captain America and G.I. Joe were used over the long duree of the Cold War to buttress patriotic masculinities, and given *Secret Identities*’ stylistic and stated emulation of these figures, these laboring bodies exemplify Asian American manhood to effect its rehabilitation as a nationalist manhood, or to comment on how interpersonal racism obstructs that inclusion. Jeff Yang and Francis Tai’s superhero narration of the murder of Vincent Chin, “Taking Back Troy,”¹³⁴ performs such an imagining of inclusion and violence. In the historical record, on June 23, 1982 in Highland Park, Michigan, Ronald Ebens directed racist slurs at Chin at a strip club

¹³² This formulation comes from Daniel Kim’s reading of melancholic narratives in *Writing Manhood in Black and Yellow: Ralph Ellison, Frank Chin, and the Literary Politics of Identity* (Duke University Press, 2005).

¹³³ Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 8-10.

¹³⁴ This event was addressed in the dissertation introduction and in Helen Zia’s activist *Asian American Dreams* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) as a flashpoint event in politicizing the panethnic APA community.

during Chin's bachelor party, causing Chin and Ebens to fight and be escorted out of the club; Ebens proceeded to hunt down Chin and bludgeon him to death with a baseball bat. In "Taking Back Troy," Victor Yee, amateur superhero, is inducted into a league of superheroes; he and his friends attend a superhero fight to celebrate, where he encounters Sam Creeder, or Ebens imagined as a superhero-hating drunk. Yee and his crew stop Creeder and his friend from shouting sexist remarks at the fighting woman, which leads Yee to challenge Creeder to a man-to-man fist fight. Yee fights to defend a woman's honor as opposed to his own, which under patriarchal mores adds a respectability to Yee that erases the decadence associated with Chin's bachelor party. This simultaneous chauvinism and desexualization redirects the reader's aggression toward Ebens' indefensible character – which takes place by manipulating sexism in a normative morality that is deployed as though there would need to be an argument as to Yee-as-Chin's life value.

As in Chin's murder, Creeder slams Yee with a baseball bat, and what remains the same in the comic and the historical telling is how the injustice in the final frame: Creeder/Ebens' punishment did not fit the (hate) crime. Juxtaposed to an image of Yee's hand and superhero mask in a pool of blood that occupies most of the frame is a panel that reads: "Epilogue: Sam Creeder pleaded '**not guilty**' to the **murder** of **Victor Yee**, arguing '**pre-emptive self-defense**' against someone he **assumed** had **powers**. He was sentenced to just **three years** and a fine of **\$3000**. He remains **free** to this day" (*SI* 183). This epilogue performs sarcasm, as Creeder's defense is presented as preposterous, and sincerity, as the consequences seem disproportional to the loss of Chin's life. *Secret Identities*' focus on Ebens as the hateful individual the state must punish to serve the nation overshadows Judge Charles Kaufman's maldistribution of state justice on March 18, 1983, when he sentenced

Ebens to three years of probation and \$3,780 for fines and court costs in a plea bargain; in “Taking Back Troy,” the sentencing is an insult on top of Yee’s fatal injury. This focus on hate as an aberration, such as in “Taking Back Troy’s” narration of Ebens with Kaufman as an afterthought, transforms hate from a structural effect to intention, inscribing protection championed by APA political activism for groups targeted by legal and extralegal violence as punishment for wrongdoers.¹³⁵ Reflecting the processes that ensure the sentimental progress narratives of the previous chapter, the state, like the superhero of *Secret Identities*’ wounded racial masculinity, is viewed as bringing the legitimate violence of juridical justice, as opposed to the “hate” of illegitimate violence and disreputable intention.¹³⁶

Through this individualization of hate and the elevation of the state, *Secret Identities* contends that Asian American men should live as American men because they are willing to die for a freedom premised on debilitating labor and war-making. This melancholic claim structures the symbolic pathos of the first section introduction, “War and Remembrance.” In it, our Clark Kent-esque protagonist explores the Japanese American National Museum, whose signature architecture is drawn in the first frame, with an older Japanese American man. After the second, third, and fourth panels narrate Japanese American internment, the fifth and sixth panels return to this older man as he explains why he chose to serve in World War II: “to make sure that our **love** for this country... / ...could never be **questioned** again” (*SI* 24). In the sixth panel, the two men dwell at gallery portraits of Norman Mineta and Sen. Daniel Inouye, two of the first Asian Americans in Congress, as he further explains that his

¹³⁵ While Zia’s *Asian American Dreams* also participates in this scapegoating, her account approaches how the rebirth of APA panethnicity arose from disappointment in the court for what the evidence suggested was racially motivated murder. While the APA political activism focused on this maldistribution of justice, its cultural memory has focused on Ebens as the central perpetrator.

¹³⁶ For more on the freedom arbitrated by state violence, see Chandan Reddy, *Freedom With Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the U.S. State* (Durham, NC: Duke U.P., 2011).

service is about “**standing** up for what’s **right**.” For him, the sacred idea of the nation as moral embodies the idea of justice. The final panel reveals that this older man has a prosthetic hook as evidence of his wartime sacrifice – a bodily payment that emblemizes the price of his inclusion in History, and a metonym for how Asian American men have been damaged in proving their worth. Whereas Kenji, the amputee veteran of John Okada’s canonical novel *No-No Boy* (1976), questions his military service as assimilation’s debt paid in bodies, *Secret Identities* imbues its veteran’s lost hand with a religious meaning: there is no question to be asked about war because his injury, which symbolizes his faith in the idea of the nation, forecloses any doubt.¹³⁷ In this way, “Shadow History” complies with an American Exceptionalism that proactively legitimates and reactively legitimizes racialized violence in exchange for cultural citizenship, and pushes its diversity politic to its logical limit by viewing inclusion as a matter of personal faith against all odds.

Within these stories that suture superhero masculinity to Asian American history, women are generally absent from the collection except in the section “Girl Power,” a bracketed inclusion of Asian American women. The section is introduced in a stylistic and thematic break from the other sections; whereas our Clark Kent-esque Asian American moves through artist Chi-Yun Lau’s scenes of greyscale realism, “Girl Power” is introduced using more abstract figures. In a wordless, 20-panel page written and drawn by Kripa Joshi, our heroine first compares her body to “Ultra Girl,” a commercial image that idealizes hegemonic womanhood, with a frown; Ultra Girl is thin and statuesque, while our heroine is full-bodied. As she contemplates the difference between her reflection and the advertised

¹³⁷ For more on *No-No Boy* and Asian American injury, which forms the basis for this observation, see James Lee, “Elegies of Social Life: The Wounded Asian American,” *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion* 3. 2.7 (2012).

image, our heroine stops a crime in progress by squashing and thus incapacitating the male assailant. Our heroine is recognized as a “real hero” (*SI* 99), in distinction from the ultimately fictitious Ultra Girl. The realness of her heroism is not detached from her body, as her superheroism disassembles Ultra Girl’s commercial image and the approval it has garnered through feminized ideologemes of body image and bodily discipline; indeed, the teaching guide recognizes this story as thematizing gender-specific body image issues and resultant mental health crises.¹³⁸ This embrace of the gendered body contrasts the portrayal of the collection’s male protagonists, whose worth is measured by how their bodies disappear to resemble masculinized notions of service and valor.

If masculine superheroism in “Shadow History” sacrifices the personal body for the body politic, superheroism in “Girl Power” reclaims the feminized Asian American body against the gendering of History. Though the women of “Girl Power” appear to exist outside of both History and history, June, protagonist of author Jimmy Aquino and artist Erwin Haya’s “Sampler,” wears a shirt that reads, “I Suck at Math” – a slogan popularized by socially-conscious APA vendor Blacklava. “Sampler” begins as June’s bike is stolen from the front of her family’s business, a garment cleaning and repair business specializing in superhero costumes. This incident leads her to grumble, “Crimefighters’ like **The Emblem** are in Upper Troy, rescuing spoiled **heiresses** from **paparazzi**. Only time he comes down here is when he needs a **quick press**.” The teacher’s guide locates this, evocative of “The **social** and **economic divides** that separate residents of **ethnic enclaves** from the

¹³⁸ The Teaching Guide states: “Eating disorders are just the tip of the iceberg: **15.9%** of U.S.-born Asian American women have **contemplated suicide** in their lifetime, exceeding the national estimate of **13.5%** for all Americans; lifetime estimates of **suicide attempts** are also higher among U.S-born Asian-American women than the general population, **6.29%** versus **4.6%**.” *Secret Identities* Discussion Guide, accessed August 23, 2014, http://secretidentities.org/Site/Teacher_Guide_1c.html.

‘mainstream’ [...] which can lead to **civic isolation**,” as the backdrop for “Sampler.” The action of “Sampler” reaches its climax when June stops her family’s superhero costume dry cleaning business from being burgled by sampling superhero costumes, which grants her their wearer’s powers. The comic does not locate June’s battle with robbers within an Asian American “Shadow History,” but, through the adornments of her body, locate her within an APA panethnic consciousness.

June’s shirt does not readily translate to the gatekeeping of the official historical record, but draws attention to what gets privileged as politically urgent about the gendered wounds of race. Though the teaching guide emphasizes the insularity of ethnic enclaves and the uneven distribution of state services, important but inconsequential to “Sampler” is that June’s brother left her to repair and tailor costumes at the shop alone late at night; he appears again on the final page watching TV, none the wiser, when June gets home after fighting off her assailants. This framing reminds of the differentiated vulnerabilities of their gender-specific labor. June’s assailants address her as “**Suzie Wong**” (SI 109) when they break in, an archetype of Asian female compliance that contrasts the APA slogan emblazoned across her torso; as June hurls both punches and one-liners at her would-be assailants, she incapacitates them with a fire hydrant and announces, “I’m sure your new cellmate **Bubba** will be **happy** to help you out of those **wet clothes** (SI 112).” The gay joke zinger registers as witty justice, as her actions seem like she has emasculated them for their attempt to violate her property and possibly her body; she speaks of this through insinuations of homosexuality and submission. “Sampler’s” appropriation of mid-fight banter, evocative of Batman and the DC tradition, uses the language of homosexualized feminization to signify injury and

vulnerability, suggesting the naturalization of heteromascularity both in this narrative tradition and the reader who recognizes this homage.

“Supergrrrls,” illustrator and punk Hellen Jo’s page-long and text-heavy reflection piece, affirms the implicit gender bias that animates these expectations. Her analysis fills two chains of bubbles, both originating from a messy-haired woman with a bullring piercing in the bottom-right corner. In the first, an autobiographical reflection, Jo critiques how women are excluded from superhero fame, and commends Jaime Hernandez’ comic book series *Love & Rockets* (1982-1996) for featuring Daphne “Daffy” Matsumoto, described as “an Asian American teen who stumbles into the **punk scene**, bleaches her hair, and makes new mohawked friends. / Eventually, though, she sheds her punk ways, goes on to UCLA, and becomes an **optometrist**” (SI 126). While it would seem that being written out of a key text of the 1980s alternative comics movement would stereotype Asian American women as too class-obsessed to hang out in the Hernandez brothers’ Chicana-centric punk world, Jo describes Daffy’s trajectory as “an **eerily accurate** representation of many suburban Asian American girls.” Jo continues: “In high school, we tried to look like **punks** and **goths**, to seem **tougher** to our families, our friends, and ourselves. But having lived **sheltered lives**, we realize it’s just a **costume**, and grow out of it.” Jo remarks on what Rey Chow calls “coercive mimeticism,” or how minoritized individuals internalize hegemonic scripts associated with their identities to give legible meaning to their being-in-difference, such as being an Asian American daughter in the suburbs of her class-aspirational parent in light of the model minority myth.¹³⁹ Given the class privilege associated with suburban upbringings that shelters its subjects from the material grit and symbolic marginality of underground

¹³⁹ Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2002), 107.

subcultures, Jo bemoans how Asian American daughters like Daffy buy into model minority lifestyles and their upward class mobility.

Jo's analysis would then reflect Yang's overarching analysis of dissecting "inward-facing" masks, as she then discusses that the appeal of superheroes is that "they **never** grow out of their costumes." In the second chain of text bubbles, Jo presents The Brazen Raisin, a rather sloppily costumed superhero in a tee, tights, and a checkered cape, who "defends **harried students** from the overbearing expectations of **well-meaning parents** ... holding off mom and dad while **Johnny** and **Janie** explore interests outside the realm of **S.A.T. testing**, whether that be **brain surgery** or **comic book** illustration." Rather than saying Asian Americans can never be authentically punk or goth, Jo identifies the function of costume, of estranging its wearer from blending in, as its the real meaning. As seen in what Jo delineates as "outside the realm of S.A.T. testing," the costume estranges the model minority subjectivity of the first chain, even if the positivist desires named in the second chain of text bubbles can be as esteemed and class mobile as becoming a brain surgeon.

In this way, the women of *Secret Identities* reveal how the Asian American home is a site of racial power, though as feminist scholars such as Rachel C. Lee and erin Khue Ninh remind, Asian American domestic life and its inflection by model minority pressures have not been acknowledged within (masculinized) Asian American "political" agendas. This reading has illustrated how *Secret Identities* intervenes in graphical storytelling traditions and in discourses of Asian American racialization through elegant intertextual references to argue for the place of Asian Americans within nationalist iconography, citizenship, and History. However, as I have argued in turning to "Girl Power," this counter-History is necessarily masculine and heterosexual because of the frameworks into which it inserts Asian American

men's contributions to the nation-state; it is also melancholic because of how it diagnoses Asian American men as injured by their exclusion. By exposing how their conditional inclusion in the nation as model daughters is wounding, the women of the collection imagine other ways of belonging to politics outside of the fundamental disposability of racialized citizenship, signaling the coercive mimeticism inherent in melancholic masculinity.

Your Story Here: Asian American Visibility and "Postracial" Antiracism

The collection begins with a six-panel prologue that begins our Clark Kent-esque protagonist's journey through Asian American superherodom with a Black woman, who in the third panel gestures to newspapers reading: "Collapses," "Economy Worst Since 1929," "Suicide Bomber Kills 14," "Hunger Worst Ever," and "Panic" (SI 14). These headlines situate the Clark Kent-esque protagonist in the national mood of crisis from the 2008-2009 U.S. recession and the War on Terror. In the fourth panel she gestures to heroic portraits of an African American civil rights tradition, one that includes Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman. The fifth panel shows that Black woman holding up a newspaper reading: "Why We Need Heroes," with an empty space that reads "Your Story Here" and a photo box that reads "Your Picture Goes Here." Such scenes of Black and Asian American proximity signal interracial cooperation; here, the African American civil rights tradition is deployed to mobilize Asian Americans via analogy. However, as this section will make evident, this Black/Asian analogy objectifies blackness through bridging metaphors that collect remaindered anti-Black racism in their imagining of Asian American inclusion.

One of *Secret Identities'* section introductions, "When Worlds Collide," written by Keith Chow and illustrated by Chi-Yun Lau, uses the superhero metaphor to reframe the plurality of Asian American communities as panethnic solidarity. This eight-panel comic

begins with an older Asian woman speaking to our Clark Kent-esque protagonist. In the second frame, she shows him a photograph of a helicopter fleeing an explosion: she is a refugee, and the teacher's guide identifies her picture as from the fall of Saigon. The following panels each featuring another Asian American in the middle of telling his or her experience of racialization: an immigrant who the teacher's guide identifies as an undocumented Chinese immigrant rescued from the crashed *Golden Venture*; a transnational adoptee; a Sikh man; a Muslim woman; and a youth. The Sikh man shares: "And yet I'm constantly reminded that I'm **different** —that I don't **belong**—that I'm an '**alien**'; the fifth narrator, who wears a hijab, adds, "...which is why I wear **this**: to preserve a special part of my **heritage**, but also to shield an important part of my **identity**, something I **can't** share openly with the **rest** of the world" (*SI* 79). While the Sikh man remarks on his externalization from U.S. cultural citizenship, she protects her identity from the discriminatory public sphere as an act of selfhood. Their inclusion alongside these other narrators connects the post-9/11 racialization of religion to a racializing genealogy of war-making in Asia. However, the comic leaves this analysis, as the seventh frame features a youth who says, "Sometimes it makes me so **angry**, I just want to **scream** ...". This youth's anger emphasizes how his misrecognition causes him pain. The final frame of the comic brings together all of the narrators over the text: "**Deep inside**, I often think, 'if only they knew who I **really** am ... what I could really **do** ... / ... They'd be **amazed**.'" The youth domesticates how the other narrators have experienced war by dissembling it as individualized racial grief. "When Worlds Collide" thus expands the legible contours of Asian America through its narrators, but then contracts the structural analysis of war and APA panethnicity by remaining attached to a positivist Asian American identity that remains

a secret. This secrecy returns to the racial melancholia of the earlier reading, in which the recognition of the racial subject's frustration is viewed as both symptom of the need for social change and, as per diversity politics' location of social change in the private sphere, the sign of transformation itself.

In this panethnic identity that allows anger to act as the critique of the war-making racial state, the nation is presumed innocent of its founding violence, as made evident in Greg Pak's comic "The Citizen." The comic begins as President Obama calls for Citizen's release from the cryogenic prison where he, formerly Sergeant Franklin D. Murakawa of the Arizona National Guard, has been held for attacking the former President (though Obama explains that Citizen was arresting him for war crimes – a joke about Former President Bush). Citizen, mistrusting of Obama's intentions, argues that he fights on behalf of "the **country**, not the **government**" (SI 58). This disarticulation poses the moral certitude of the nation against the fallibility of the state. Upon Citizen's release and greeting by the President, Citizen does not believe that Obama is the President because "You're **black**." Obama responds, "And I'm pushing universal health care" (SI 58). The punchline of this joke presumes that racism is an individual's possessive investment in privilege akin to opposing the health of others. The juxtaposition of their racialized bodies, of Citizen as the descendent of Japanese American war relocation and Obama as the inheritor of slavery's afterlife, selectively remembers their shared group histories of state violence to imagine a national future in which Citizen and Obama are heroes. Through President Obama's body, as well as his confrontation of selfish individualism, Citizen can see incarceration and slavery as aberrations and not instruments of statecraft.

As the 6-page comic continues, “The Citizen’s” antagonists come to define an absolute exterior to the “diversity” scheme of Citizen and Obama’s Asian/Black affiliation. President Obama explains that he wants to take on Citizen as freelance protection to survive a conspiracy to assassinate Black politicians and pop stars in plane accidents. While at first skeptical, Citizen springs into action to help Obama combat the perpetrators of these hate crimes: a flock of Nazi gremlins. Bearing swastikas on their jetpacks, these Nazi gremlins symbolize the moral depravity of systematized racism – one that is essentialized as distinctly inhumane, as opposed to the accidents of U.S. statecraft.¹⁴⁰ They attack the President, and thus, in Obama’s words, “the fundamental principles of **liberty** and **equality** that our country so often **fails** and yet so valiantly **strives** to achieve with each generation” (SI 60). Citizen and Obama fight off these Nazi gremlins as the President proclaims the American Exceptionalist narrative of liberty.¹⁴¹ Obama’s and Citizens’ bodies serve as evidence and proof of liberal inclusion, even as Citizen and Obama’s racialization registers how liberalism rose through racist exclusion and subjection.¹⁴² Such visions of symbolic deviants like Nazi gremlins as the true racists disassembles racialized statecraft’s conditions of racial death – those same conditions gestured toward in “When Worlds Collide,” and the same affective redirects addressed in the previous chapter’s critique of sentimental progress narratives – as moral and not structural effects.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ This representation of an outside to U.S. liberalism replicates how comic books have defined difference as deviance as a matter of form, such as in the Cold War representations of Communists and Red Asia explored in the traveling exhibition, *Marvels & Monsters: Unmasking Asian Images in U.S. Comics, 1942-1986*. In other words, the U.S. nation can only be goodness if there is a racial badness.

¹⁴¹ For more on diversity and American Exceptionalism, see Evelyn Alsultany, “Selling American Diversity and Muslim American Identity Through Non-Profit Advertising Post-9/11,” *American Quarterly* 59.3 (2007): 593-622.

¹⁴² This racialization of U.S. liberalism is further explained in Colleen Lye, *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton U.P., 2005).

¹⁴³ As the discussion guide explains, “During the 1930s and 1940s, also known as the ‘Golden Age’ of comic books, it was common to see heroes such as Superman and Captain America battling Nazis alongside the

That Citizen argues that he fights on behalf of “the **country**, not the **government**” (SI 58), reflects the unconditional innocence of the nation, as well as the teacher’s guide’s claim that Citizen represents “an interesting confluence in American history: The **Asian American soldier of conscience**.”¹⁴⁴ The discussion guide’s lesson plan uses the term “soldiers of conscience,” which it defines as “military men who have chosen to **speak out about misconduct** or to **refuse orders** they consider breaches of moral or ethical code,” to yoke the respected status of military service to the transcendent value of U.S. nationalism. The fifth question of the lesson makes its explicit post-9/11/2001 inflection: “Compare and contrast the treatment of Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor to the treatment of Arab and Muslim Americans in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001.” The question reaches for parallels about infringements of civil rights and liberties. While the discussion guide makes evident that Asian Americans have special experience with rights, the verbiage of the first question of “The Citizen’s” discussion guide reflects where the collection locates justice: “From the details present in the story, what can you infer about Murakawa’s character?” As in the collection’s understanding of “hate,” the collection’s deployments of character evince the contiguity of Asian American rehabilitation to the self-correcting telos of the nation. The editors connect their discussion of “The Citizen” and Asian American soldiers of conscience to the comic “9066,” in which a Japanese American superhero

Allies.” In this historical estimation, the “Golden Age” of comic books opposes “freedom” to the Third Reich Nazi regime, which becomes scripted as the fixed object of disgust. This backdrop of the “Golden Age” animates “Heroes Without a Country,” which reimagines the 442nd Regiment as a cadre of Japanese Americans with special powers. As part of their covert rescue mission, in which they are reviled as enemy aliens, they infiltrate a Nazi concentration camp - a place not just of torture and genocide, but also of inhuman science experiments to create the perfect Nazi army. While “Heroes Without a Country” makes evident the effect of racializing state violence, it also valorizes service to a greater entity, such as the “nation” of the nation-state, as the possibility of rehabilitation and redemption. SI Universe, “Teaching *Secret Identities*,” *Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology*, accessed June 1, 2013, http://secretidentities.org/Site/Teacher_Guide_2a.html.

¹⁴⁴ Discussion Guide, http://secretidentities.org/Site/Teacher_Guide_4a.html.

surrenders himself to relocation and incarceration alongside the Japanese American population in 1942 and becomes disenchanted with the national narrative. The comic represents “a meditation on the fragility of civil rights and liberties in a time of fear and uncertainty, and the injustice of judging character based solely on race, ethnicity, national origin or ancestry.”¹⁴⁵ The latter part of this statement defines justice in opposition to racialization, and “9066,” in keeping with this configuration of justice, names the Executive Order signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to legitimize Japanese American internment.¹⁴⁶ This binary dynamic of justice and racialization comes with a third: character. Character here represents the individuated aspect of the self that exists apart from racialization – character, which, as argued in the introduction to *Dissembling Diversities*, has been central in displacing class identity from structure to lifestyle. Character constitutes the possibility that there are indeed spies among us – just not based on race, ethnicity, or nationality. In this way, *Secret Identities* makes its post-9/11/2001 diversity politics evident: while justice has been maldistributed for Asian Americans, it exists in the nation-frame.

Through this conjunction of racialization and character, *Secret Identities*, uses its theory of a panethnic identity of grief from “When Worlds Collide” to maintain a hierarchical affiliation with blackness in which blackness represents something akin to pure racialization. Naeem Mohaiemen and Glenn Urieta’s comic, “No Exit,” follows two Muslim street preachers who possess divine powers, Enayet and Rahman, in the Piscataway Federal Jail in 1941. Locating these men as members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim sect, “a revivalist

¹⁴⁵ Discussion Guide, http://secretidentities.org/Site/Teacher_Guide_1a.html.

¹⁴⁶ The comic follows a Japanese American superhero who realizes: “The **truth** is it’s not what you **do** that matters, but what you **look** like. / I was a **hero** once. **Now** I’m just another **Jap**” (*SI* 28). While the comic rejects the meritocratic terms its protagonist accepts as fact, *Secret Identities*’ dependency on legitimated violence does not.

branch of Islam whose overseas missionary activities began as early as the 1920s,” and characterizing them as “inspired by the historical missions to the U.S. of **Indian Muslim preachers**” the *Secret Identities* teaching guide explains the comic’s significance to Asian American history:

Enayet and Rahmat are inspired by **actual historical figures**: Their real-life counterparts were held in jail for a year, and only released after agreeing to purge some concepts from their tracts. After their release, they found strong hostility toward their proselytizing from white Christian churches, leading them to turn their attention to the **black neighborhoods** of Chicago and other urban northeast areas—opening the way for African American **embrace of Islam**.¹⁴⁷

The *Secret Identities* discussion guide writes Asian America into the galvanization of Black freedom struggles through the restricted entry of Islam through figures like Enayet and Rahmat, and creates a racial bridge between Asian exclusion and Black urban disenfranchisement. Yet, in the comic, Enayet bemoans their imprisonment in a clearly racist culture: “We are **Negros** to them” (*SI* 89). Enayet grows incensed about this misrecognition, because these Muslim men are not Black, and therefore undeserving of this reference to a devalued category of being.¹⁴⁸ The racial bridge merely serves as point of departure for this narrative about preventing the denigration represented by blackness from sticking, which is, on the one hand, a reflection of historical (and indeed contemporary) interracial tensions, as a turn to Asian/Black affiliation is generally historicized as a 1960s to 70s invention that is explicitly leftist. Enayet dissolves the cell bars and tries to escape, but Rahman incapacitates

¹⁴⁷ Discussion Guide, http://www.secretidentities.org/Site/Teacher_Guide_3b.html.

¹⁴⁸ The teaching guide explains that the racial slur used in South Africa, kaffir, also signified the religious slur, infidel, to illustrate further the violence of Enayet and Rahman’s racial hailing by giving it cultural specificity. Ibid.

him and reseals the cell. He says: “We wait for **justice**. **Talking**, not **acting**. **Sharing**, not **taking**.” (SI 92). Rahman’s demonstration of their racial assimilability, their evidence of being not-Black, is to prove they are not criminals but respectable potential citizens by enduring their holding. Rahman holds faith in the self-correction of the nation and thus the apparatuses of state justice. On the other hand, this racial bridge characterizes the collection’s post-9/11/2001 politic, since, even as the teacher’s guide makes an Asian American connection to Black Power, it states: “It is important to note that Ahmadiyya believers were proponents of the **peaceful nature of Islam** and **rejected violence** as a tool for its spread.” Such a qualification responds directly to the religious persecution of Islam by conservative America and mass media frenzies, but evokes the popular memory of Black Panthers as anti-statist violence to disassociate from it.¹⁴⁹ “No Exit” replicates “When Worlds Collide’s” logic of expansion and retraction by invoking Asian Americans’ proximity to blackness only to rebuke and not deconstruct the devaluation of those coordinates.

Nonetheless, these coordinates leverage blackness’s visibility as a political strategy, as seen in the comic “Drawing Steel.” “Drawing Steel,” a narration of Chinese American contributions to the Transcontinental Railroad, begins with Pardee, an East Coast investor in charge of Chinese laborers, and Creeder, a railroad foreman who heads a crew of Irish labor. The two pit their men against each other in a series of physical contests. Representing Pardee is Jimson, a muscled Chinese monk, later revealed to be a fire creature from the “Far West of China,” who easily beats Creeder’s men. Later that night, Jimson is abducted by Creeder, who tries to kill both Jimson and Pardee’s Black boy/assistant, Jack. Jimson helps

¹⁴⁹ American Studies scholar Johnathan Valdez disagrees with this reading, as Rahmat’s final words are: “We will wait for them / to see the light.” He contends that Rahmat’s response exceeds the Asian/Black analogy I locate here. I disagree with this reading because of the teacher’s guide’s delicate dance between Black Power and the centrality of state civility, but I acknowledge it nonetheless.

Jack escape, and the two end up in an incomplete mountain tunnel, challenged by Creeder to beat his men in digging out. Jimson single-handedly breaks through the layers of rock and saves Creeder's men, who have accidentally unleashed a flood from an underground reservoir into their passageway. The final page suggests that the two flee Pardee and Creeder's service, and Jack reveals to Jimson that his real name is John Henry. Jimson prophetically responds to John Henry's lament that the two did not actually win Creeder's race: "**You** will. When you're older" (SI 22). "Drawing Steel" inserts an Asian American presence into the American folk tale of John Henry, the iconic African American freeman who according to the tall tale beat a steam-powered engine in a steel-driving race. The homosocial, interracial relationship attaches Asian American presence onto a deracialized African American narrative, as his free blackness has been incorporated into the folktale as emblematic of an American ethic. This Asian/Black contact symbolized by Jimson and John Henry sutures the masculinity of both technological mobility and mastery of the natural as evoked in the tall tale to Asian American representation, imagining affiliation and intimacy with the labor movement and Civil Rights through this icon.

This contradictory positioning of Asian Americans as sharing blackness' disruptive potential without its criminality, as also aggrieved minorities but seeking distinction from blackness, underwrites *Secret Identities*' APA political intervention. Returning to *Secret Identities*' prologue, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Harriet Tubman are represented in drawn renderings of iconic photographs alongside John F. Kennedy and Jackie Robinson. The inclusion of JFK frames acts such as his 1961 State of the Union Address and Executive Order 10925 not as compromises with Black freedom but as its enactment; this representation of rights transitions from radical visions of Black freedom to inclusion in the

nation-state. The exhibition's political figures sit half-sized on both sides of the installation's largest portrait, one of Jackie Robinson swinging the bat. The focus on this heroic image of Americana assumes inclusion in popular culture as racism's remediation, as rights are positioned as coming from recognition. Such a causal relation vaporizes antiracist social movements into liberal ideals of acceptance and progress narratives.

In its use of blackness to signify a freedom that has already been achieved via visibility, *Secret Identities* replicates "post-race" racism by using Black bodies as symbols of agency. The prologue's installation is laid out beneath a quotation by Benjamin Disraeli, the 19th century British Conservative author and politician: "To believe in the heroic makes heroes." This citational curation abstracts an idea of heroism that occludes the intellectual traditions of Black freedom. The Black woman's body guides our Clark Kent-esque protagonist through African American inclusion in the nation-state, sacralized through its framing in the gallery. This scene simultaneously makes claims to rights through content, while legitimizing those claims through pretenses of respectability in presentation. The symbolic labor this Black woman performs contradictorily calls APAs to action by suggesting that African American civil rights is History – just as it is the insufficient history of fulfilling the Exceptional ideals proclaimed by Greg Pak's Obama. In other words, this scene disassembles structural and cultural proximities to whiteness as freedom. Recognizing Black freedom struggles apart from but also in opposition to this installation's affirmation of statecraft can disassemble these mirages of "post-racial" equality.

To respond to the call for "Why We Need Heroes" in Asian American cultural politics is not to envision ourselves as the sequential successors of civil rights within "diversity"; the Asian/Black analogies and partnerships drawn throughout *Secret Identities*, I

have argued, pose a parasitical relation both to categories of rarification and to narratives of civil rights. As this reading has illustrated, the displacement of graphical storytelling's racializing Americana is to address how the very terms, representations, and politics of Asian American inclusion can reify antiblackness under the semblance of bridging if they lose sight of the racial state. This section has dwelled on the vision of formal and cultural citizenship deployed in *Secret Identities* to read against the progressive hailing of the comic collection in its self-conscious affiliation with Asian Americanist critique. As named in the previous chapter as a strategy of APA arts activism, *Secret Identities* does this work by imagining analogies with African American civil rights movements – which, alongside its citations of Yellow Power, perform the intellectual sophistication of the collection. Such analogies build the visual basis for an expanded identification with Asian American cultural politics through these invocations. However, bringing together this chapter's two critical perspectives on the collection, *Secret Identities*, in its intervention into patriotic narratives of nationalist legitimacy, attempts to rehabilitate Asian American masculinity, not only through analogies to blackness, but through instantiations of misogyny. This gender exclusivity, facilitated by the narrative conventions of the comic book and historical metanarratives, underwrite the melancholic claims of Asian American exclusion as exemplified by *Secret Identities* that inevitably call for inclusion in heteropatriarchy.

Real People Despite: Secret Asian Man and the Value of Diversity

Comic artist Tak Toyoshima's contribution to *Secret Identities*, "S.A.M. Meets Larry Hama," expresses how the cultural politics of Toyoshima's comic strip align with that of the collection, and evokes diversity's knotting of race and racism in a quotidian manifestation of *Secret Identities'* otherwise grand diversity dramas. He – illustrated as Osamu "Sam"

Takahashi, the protagonist of his formerly syndicated strip *Secret Asian Man* – stops at a park bench on which veteran comic artist Larry Hama, known for his work on *G.I. Joe* and the Marvel universe, is sitting. Sam/Toyoshima is wearing a *G.I. Joe* sweatshirt, and Hama is reading the comics section of a newspaper, and the page-long comic commences as they recognize each other and converse about Asian American representation. In the fifth panel, Sam/Toyoshima explains his purpose in *Secret Asian Man*: “I want to get more Asian characters out there. We need more Asian faces written by Asians” (SI 23). Sam/Toyoshima declares an agenda of Asian American self-determination in both representation and its production. Hama rebuts him in the next panel: “Yes, but you tread on dangerous ground if you posit that only Asians can write or draw Asian characters. The knife cuts both ways. / Look at **Kazuo Ishiguro!**”, holding Japanese Anglo Ishiguro’s Man Booker Prize winner, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), as evidence not being limited to depicting characters of the same identity or ethnicity. Hama’s deployment of Ishiguro to rebut Sam/Toyoshima’s claim enacts a dissembling equivalence: Sam/Toyoshima’s cultural-as-political representation is depicted the same as Hama’s claim of identity as property, or an essentializing insistence on the body of the creator as validating representation’s meaning. This conflation, endemic to diversity politics, locates particularity nebulously between body and personhood, not as a structural effect, but as an ontological distraction.

Nevertheless, “S.A.M. Meets Larry Hama” claims a race-conscious stance, one invited from within diversity but constrained by its understanding of value. In the seventh panel, against a backdrop of a celebratory crowd with signs reading “RACISM is DEAD,” “BIGOTRY is so 2007,” and “This is the DAWNING of the age of OBAMA,” Sam/Toyoshima contends: “Some say we are moving beyond race issues, but I don’t buy it.

Things are progressing, but there's still a lot more work to be done." Toyoshima locates his critique against "post-racialism," even as the previous panel's stance on representation, which envisions race as an epistemological and aesthetic limitation, makes apparent its molding by this zeitgeist. In the eighth panel, Hama responds: "I think the breakthrough will be evident when we can have an Asian male comedian covering the same ground as Margaret Cho." Margaret Cho is envisioned as an acceptable Asian American representation for a mainstream (white) audience because her gender reflects the feminization of Asian American racialization, which leads Hama to suggest Asian American manhood as the horizon of inclusion. Such an indictment of Cho glosses her often antinormative routines to essentialize her as a woman replacing a man, which suggests the melancholic masculinity of his analysis. In the ninth panel, Sam/Toyoshima states that "Today's audience is very savvy. They can smell forced diversity a mile away." Hama responds: "Not if you make the characters be real people despite their fantastic circumstances." Sam/Toyoshima's "forced diversity" refers to an improper balance of pedagogical impetus and aesthetic autonomy, a public good that can nonetheless feel coercive. The diagnostic of this "forced diversity" is "savvy," using the language of intelligence as a screen for the standards of whiteness against which diversity is judged, indicating how sophistication racializes. The remediation for this "forced diversity" is the separation of "race issues" from "real people," which imagines access to complex personhood that exists (perhaps only) apart from diversity. Bringing the multiple terms of their debate together, diversity is a negative value attached to personhood and the body, while also being a value subtracted from personhood. Sam/Toyoshima and Hama collapse diversity into difference, rendering race an overdetermining category and, like the television shows of the previous chapter, celebrating a supposedly universal humanism.

As with this contribution, *Secret Asian Man* attends to the relationship between subjectivity and iconography through critiques of corporate media, the bureaucracy of formal identity, and the everyday politics of racial identity. *Secret Asian Man*, which first began as an independent comic in 1999, was syndicated as a daily comic strip by United Feature Syndicate from July 16, 2007 to September 27, 2009. As Tasha G. Oren argues in her reading of *SAM*'s pre-syndicated iteration, the strip is a "bridging text" that brings a minoritarian perspective to the majoritarian space of the funnies while still privileging humor as entertainment over humor as analysis.¹⁵⁰ I instead focus on *SAM* in syndication to address Asian American representation in the mainstream press, as opposed to *Secret Identities*' independent publication and *SAM*'s earlier limited distribution.¹⁵¹ Toyoshima's preface for his collection of syndicated comic strips, *Secret Asian Man: The Daily Days* (2009), suggests that the transition from independent publication to syndication affected the content of the strip: "In [the comic's] weekly format I could curse, use racial slurs, even show a little skin. Now with a daily audience, none of these were allowed. I was even asked to not show *SAM* drinking and to have him stay away from talking about politics of religion. It made me wonder if anyone had read my earlier strips" (*SAM* 5). Toyoshima references the standards of respectability to which he finds himself obliging, a legacy of the Comics Code and its self-imposed censorship that lives on as internalized industry standards. In spite of these newfound limitations, Toyoshima explains: "I saw the endless possibilities of what a daily strip offered: introducing an Asian American main character to a huge mainstream audience." For Toyoshima, this opportunity offered Asian American visibility as a pedagogy

¹⁵⁰ Tasha G. Oren, "Secret Asian Man: Angry Asians and the Politics of Cultural Visibility," in *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, edited by Shilpa Dave, LeiLani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 337-359.

¹⁵¹ This period also coincides with the publication of the *Secret Identities* anthology.

of diversity. I use Toyoshima's contribution to *Secret Identities* to read *Secret Asian Man*, as it highlights his understanding of identity as private property and racism as a bad investment on that property value. Even though Toyoshima aimed to normalize Asian American inclusion by asserting a presence of difference in the funnies, Toyoshima's racial project within diversity specifically and the comic strip's bridging function generally flatten "race" to being a sensory difference while calculating racism as a feeling that subtracts value in ways that evoke the contradictions of "post-racial" antiracism, even within APA racial projects.

A Visual Thing: The Superficial Sight of Race's Wounding

While, as Oren identifies, *SAM*'s early pre-syndication strips use Sam as the strip's exclusive character as a mouthpiece for Toyoshima, his syndicated strips include an expanded cast of characters. Sam is married to white Marie, and together they have a five-year-old son Shin. When Sam is not at home with Marie and Shin, he is either at work at a publication or hanging out with a combination of his Black best friend Charlie, his son's white kindergarten teacher Richie (described in "The Cast" introduction as "the one white guy at the Million Man March" whose "militant political correctness has a tendency to offend") (*SAM* 6), and his nay-saying Asian American cousin Simon (introduced as "[h]ot-headed and impulsive" and with a "temper and constant scowl"). Contrary to McCloud's insistence that abstract figures facilitate identification, the racial particularity of Toyoshima's characters refuses an allegorical or generalizing reading of any of them, and the strips generally invite the reader to identify with Sam (who, in distinction from Richie and Simon's introductions, is described as "an incurable dreamer who is fascinated by what makes us all tick"), Charlie ("soft-spoken" and "in search of the next big thing"), or, in her less frequent

appearances, Marie (who “is to SAM [sic] what gravity is to all of us). Toyoshima’s drawn renderings are central to his pedagogical project. Lacking distinct facial features outside of eyes, mouths, and hair (or lack of hair), Toyoshima’s inscribing of race through the body appropriates the generalizing visual language of stereotypes. Sam and Charlie – as a short, yellow man with a bowl cut and a large, bulky, muscular, bald, dark brown man, respectively – are reworkings of racial stereotypes. In this way, this section reads across *Secret Asian Man* to consider how this iconographic appropriation and the strip’s use of humor shape the form and content of Toyoshima’s intervention. Though *Secret Asian Man*’s use of this archive intervenes in the visual grammars of representation, the punchlines consistently presume a middlebrow reader for whom difference is only skin deep and thus organize their analysis through a diversity politic of character.

Through this identification with the particularized protagonist, *Secret Asian Man*, especially in first year of its syndication, educates the reader about the Asian Americans and quotidian racism.¹⁵² In an August 25, 2007 single-panel weekly that depicts Sam embracing her and staring into her eyes, a slightly taller white woman tells him “Oh Sam, I’d love to prove to you how **grateful** I am that you saved me from those **robot ninjas**... / ...But the **Hollywood producers** say Americans aren’t interested in Asian men as romantic heroes” (*SAM* 17). This critique of corporate media becomes a consistent theme throughout. For example, in celebration of Halloween in an October 28, 2007 weekly, the gang shows off their Halloween costumes, leaving Simon, who is the only cast member not dressed, to ask for plastic wrap so that he can dress as “a statement on the media’s portrayal of the Asian

¹⁵² On August 31, 2007 in a special strip on Wat Misaka, the first person of color and the first person of Asian descent to play in the NBA in 1946 (*SAM* 19). On January 21, 2008, *SAM* addresses the symbolic racism and semantic nonsense of xenophobia T-shirts (*SAM* 60); on December 7, 2007, *SAM* takes on the “race-neutral” language of TSA racial profiling (*SAM* 47).

American male” as “the invisible man” (*SAM* 36).¹⁵³ In both of these strips, Toyoshima aims at corporate-controlled media production for perpetuating a racial common sense that excludes Asian Americans. Incorporating his politics into the punchline, Toyoshima invites a middlebrow reading strategy and hails a diverse subject through laughter. However, as seen in these two strips, where *SAM* feels racism most deeply is in the misrecognition of Asian Americans in hegemonic masculinity.

Toyoshima draws attention to this conjunction of vision and visibility in ways that complicates McCloud’s scale of the abstract and the particular by enabling the reader to see racism as visually ingrained. One of the strategies through which *SAM* thematizes this critique is by engaging the relational racialization that both Sam and Charlie experience, such as in a 6-panel October 7, 2007 weekly in which Sam and Charlie decide to make a home movie. Charlie decides that he will be the hero and Sam will be his assailant; Sam protests, first in the fourth panel by asking, “[...] are you trying to avoid **supporting a racial stereotype?**”, and second in the fifth panel by declaring, “Asians need heroes too!” The final panel shows two onlookers who witness Sam and Charlie in the background fighting over Charlie’s camera, as one tells the other, whose facial expression reads distress, to call 911 because “That **huge black thug** just stole that **poor tourist’s camera!**” (*SAM* 30). What ends as a scuffle between friends began as a friendly effort to make a “positive” representation, but is seen in an injurious way: stereotypes already preset the racial grammars, in which Sam is written as harmless and foreign, and Charlie threatening and criminal, through which the onlookers read them. Toyoshima’s humor implicates the racializing gaze and its assumptions. Challenging McCloud’s assessment of the innocence of

¹⁵³ The strip’s obligatory protest of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*’s casting (*SAM* 184 - 3/29/09) also falls into this thematic preoccupation.

abstraction and identification, this weekly illustrates how the act of looking abstracts visual evidence to make it fit ideological expectations. Toyoshima's deployments of bodies in his humor's pedagogy of diversity highlight the remaindered violence of the racist archive that inheres in the sight of difference.

Isolating race as sensorial, *SAM* indicts racial hailing as a violence of looking. *SAM*'s two premier strips begin at an "AA" meeting, an acronym for Asian American. At this meeting in the strip's first daily from July 16, 2007, Sam recounts the first time his racial difference "was pointed out to me": as illustrated as a flashback in the third panel, another kid in a sandbox pointed and told him, "You look like the **delivery guy**" (*SAM* 6). Beginning with this self-recognition, a literal rewriting of Frantz Fanon's "Look, a Negro!", *SAM* situates identification as interpellation. The inferiority implied in this hailing manifests through a class relationship of client and service worker with feminizing undertones of domestic labor and submission. As Daniel Kim argues in his reading of Fanon, "white men look at black men in much the same way that men look at women – as bodies whose alterity is signaled by the wounds of castration they bear."¹⁵⁴ The body of racial difference exists as wounded because the spectacle of its deviation from whiteness draws the racializing gaze by its very difference from the visual norm. Homosocial racial difference for the white man energizes a dominating relation with the Black man analogous to how the misogynist and heterosexual gaze objectifies the (white) woman. As depicted in *SAM*, the act of being looked at makes him recognize his own otherness, and Sam's recollection of this incident in an "AA" meeting, which is not revealed until the final panel to refer to "Asian American," at once draws its humor from the acronymic pun, while also addressing the commonplace

¹⁵⁴ *Manhood in Black and Yellow*, 5. Italics removed from original quotation.

legibility of this racial hailing. Sam calls this in the second panel his “**AA condition**,” an analogy to injury, but this hurt also entails his similarity to a service worker. In this way, his awareness of his body’s alterity wounds him through gendered implications of racial difference that manifest through class misrecognition.

Secret Asian Man’s critique of racism depends on this mediation of capital, as racism results in the misrecognition of an interior character defined by class. In a November 11, 2007 3-panel daily, Sam on the subway is sitting next to a white man who is staring at a Black man, wearing a durag and headphones, scribbling on a sketch pad. The white man says to Sam in the second panel: “Probably practicing his **gang graffiti**. Once a criminal, always a criminal” (*SAM* 38). The final frame changes its visual angle from that the white man to the Black man to reveal that he is sketching a lily in elegant detail. Through the Black man’s art-making, this strip indicts how the white man assumes blackness as criminality. Both through the depiction of his skill and his choice of object, the Black man’s still life symbolizes his inner sensitivity: he is not a criminal because he is an artist, and exempt from that devalued status via his sophistication. Similarly, in a single-panel daily from November 16, 2007, Sam, winking directly at the reader, says: “Howdy pardner. / Y’all heard Texas is the latest state to have a **majority minority?** / Bet that gets some of y’all cowpokes **chaps in a bunch.**” (*SAM* 41). Next to Sam is a white man wearing a bolo tie who responds: “Actually, no. / And we don’t all speak that way, you **degenerate.**” This comic implicates metropolitan projections onto the South of an overtly racist white underclass. The bolo tie’s refutation of Sam’s joke brings to light misconceptions not only through the content of his response but its presentation. He uses accent-less American Standard English and an erudite vocabulary to insult Sam right back, deploying the sophistication of his inner

character as evidence that Texas would not be hostile to people of color. Across these strips, performances of sophistication confront racialized presumptions that are read on bodily surfaces. Yet, this class identity equalizes racial difference between the Black artist and the white bolo tie, and their sophistication counters their association with racialized and perhaps unclassy hypermasculinity through a politic of elevation. In *SAM*, race is only skin deep, viewing racism as a problem of mismatched value between surface impressions and interior life. *SAM*'s diversity politics, given their focus on private personhood, presume the sameness of character in everyone that is best approximated through class resemblances.

Within this individualized sociality, the felt experience of the aggrieved individual within interpersonal politics becomes the central scale of change. A ten-panel April 27, 2008 weekly begins as Sam refers to a guy as “Black” to Richie and Charlie in pointing out his sneakers. In the fourth panel, Richie insists: “Join the 21st century, Sam. **African American**” (*SAM* 88). Sam turns to Charlie and asks, “I call you ‘Black’. Does that offend you, Charlie?” Charlie affirms that it does not, and in the sixth and seventh panel, Sam says, “Gimme a break. It’s more patronizing to use some label just for the sake of being PC. / Especially since I don’t mean any offense.” The graphic of the seventh panel shifts from depicting addressor and addressee to a headshot of Sam speaking directly to the reader. This image, with the shading of the background highlighting Sam’s face, locates him as the moral center, as opposed to Richie’s claim: “You have to be sensitive to those who *might* be offended.” Richie, characterized as the “PC” one, states the interpersonal corrective of impact over intention; the punchline delegitimizes it, joking that under Richie’s logic, any identity marker, such as “a mind-reading Gypsy” (who is around the corner) can be construed as offensive. This scenario abstracts identity politics from structural racism such that only

intentional demonstrations of poor character that are legible as offensive, and proven to be as such, are offensive. In this juridical logic of innocence, a false accusation of offensiveness represents a misuse of feeling in diversity's affective economy, suggesting that, in *SAM*, liberal equality has already seen its completion and now must be managed.

Following in this management, Toyoshima insists on the plurality of the people labeled "Asian American," and a recurring theme of the strip's pedagogy is the disarticulation of race, ethnicity, and nationality.¹⁵⁵ However, in a February 1, 2009 weekly, as Sam marvels at "a multi-racial president," Charlie calls President Obama "Black"; Toyoshima uses Charlie to speak a racial comparison that exposes the limitations of the feeling-based politics of eschewing categorization. Against Sam's protests, Charlie enters a teaching moment complete with charts, references the "One Drop Rule," and uses Tiger Woods' popular racial classification, placed against a graphic of a eugenic breakdown of his ethnic heritages, as exemplary of this logic. However, this revelation leads Charlie to declare race "a visual thing" in response to Sam's protests that the "One Drop Rule" "doesn't [...] apply to Asians" (*SAM* 168).¹⁵⁶ Charlie undercuts Sam's insistence on identity being constituted of alchemical mixtures of biology and heritage by restoring a history to taxonomies of classification. Charlie reaches back to the visual legacy of slavery through

¹⁵⁵ As the father of a multiracial child, Sam complicates terms as a recurring theme of his strip, such as in a January 20, 2008 weekly in which Sam converses with an elderly white woman on a park bench. The elderly woman, looking at Shin on a playground and remarking to Sam, "Your son is beautiful," asks, "What is he?" She clarifies: "He looks part Asian." She runs through a set of terms—"mixed-race," "hapa," "biracial," and "half-breed"—with Sam rebuffing each of them through explanations such as "Some people consider that term **offensive**, as if he isn't pure." She grows visibly distressed, but the weekly ends in the ninth panel with the two settling on the then-Census designation of "Other" (*SAM* 60). *SAM* critiques the contractions of Asian American racialization by carving out a space in which disentangling vocabularies matters. However, this semantic politics renders the strategic essentialism of group identity and community claims impossible by turning its discursive basis of commonality into nonsense, aligning multiraciality to whiteness by understanding racial mixing as the solution to structural racism.

¹⁵⁶ Elsewhere, race is essentialized as "color" (see 2/9/08; 8/9/08; and 10/1/08), also emphasizing the visual.

which blackness is read on the body, shifting the terms of self-identification to interpellation. To be misrecognized due to illegibility, such as expressed in Sam's son's post-racial multiraciality, expresses differential racialization because Black people have been forced into legibility through the visual grammars of racism. This recognition of slavery in sight – the sight unseen in the “post-racial” – reckons with the traumas of history that inhere in seeing, ultimately questioning how the cultural inclusion associated with the proper recognition of identities on sight may relate to the entrenchment of racism. While many of this dissertation's readings have focused on how APA comparisons to blackness can reinstate antiblackness, Toyoshima's art activism here locates that antiblackness as a teachable moment.

Yet even in this critical pedagogical moment, *SAM*'s epistemological isolation of race on the skin brings together the Fanonian wounding of racial sight with *SAM*'s insistence on interiority to necessarily stigmatize organizing against material inequalities as reinscribing race. When Richie is elected to his school district's “diversity board” in a week-long story arc from November 10 to 14, 2008,¹⁵⁷ as the all-white with one token Black diversity board brainstorms in a November 13 daily the “[t]ask of diversifying our schools,” the token Black member chimes in, “Affirmative action is the answer!” In the board's discussion of “affirmative action,” white Richie argues that he was affirmative action's “victim.” In the subsequent November 14, 2008 daily, when the savvy token Black member of the diversity board champions that the racial minority student of Richie's counterpoint was given access to a good education, Richie shares that that student of color “then dropped out senior year” (*SAM* 145). The Black board member's argument that affirmative action can redistribute the

¹⁵⁷ Notably, this arc kicks off on November 10, 2008 in a daily in which Sam points out to Richie how all members of the diversity board, except for Black man, are white men.

exclusivity of cultural capital is rebutted by Richie as a wasted opportunity. The joke is not Richie's white victimhood, but the irony of increased educational access as squandered potential. Affirmative action becomes scripted as institutionalized unfairness, and the token Black man its unthinking pawn. That the token Black suggests and defends the now-reviled affirmative action suggests that *SAM* understands it as a self-possessive opportunism akin to "racial preferential treatment."¹⁵⁸

In this sense, *SAM* regards the recognition of race itself, as a discursive sign, as what must be rehabilitated for the recognition of full personhood. As I have argued, this is made evident through how *SAM*'s critique of racialization focuses on the Fanonian wound, or how the violence of sight injures the raced body. *SAM*'s critique of this bodily racialization is to argue for the sophistication of character – which evokes both the same construction of interiority from *Secret Identities* and the semblance of democracy that animates the term in the first instance. Against its intentions, *SAM*'s rebuttal of a politic of redistribution makes evident how racial difference is expressed through class; nevertheless, these readings have shown how *SAM* contradictorily argues for an unseeing of race even as it explicitly refuses the "post-racial." In this way, racism in *SAM* subtracts from the ontology of value that *SAM* continues to imagine through its language of the aesthetic and personhood.

Made in China: On SAM's Calculus of Diversity and Feeling

The preceding reading has illustrated how the strip locates race somewhere between sight and self-identification. Because of this understanding, antiracism in *SAM*'s narrative universe negotiates the value added and subtracted by an additive diversity. A consistent theme in *SAM* is Toyoshima's burden of representation as a minoritized subject working

¹⁵⁸ See strips from 7/18/07 and 8/5/07.

within the majoritarian political economy of cultural production. In two multi-day story arcs, one from August 27 to 29, 2007 and one from December 17 to 19, 2007, Toyoshima self-reflexively deliberates on writing an Asian American comic. In an August 28, 2007 daily that finds Sam and Charlie just walking and talking, Sam shares a meta-analysis about, in Charlie's words, the "**big burden**" of "[d]rawing the only **Asian American** daily comic strip in **the country**": "I want to make a **good strip**, not just an **Asian** one" (SAM 19).¹⁵⁹

Toyoshima makes apparent his effort to reconcile the aesthetic and affective pleasure of a "good strip" with the identitarian and educational value of an "Asian one," but the placement of the "just" suggests that the value of diversity is worth less than an aesthetic appeal that, through its race-coding, exceeds community boundaries. Dependent on financial transactions as a syndicated comic strip, *SAM*'s commercial success outweighs its educational value. But, given how Toyoshima's meditation ends with a joke about *The Lord of the Rings*, *SAM* aims to achieve both of those goals through its appearance of talent and wit; the strip's sophistication is imagined as the facilitating link between majoritarian and minoritarian value.

However, as *SAM*'s run continues, *SAM* makes evident the hardship that Toyoshima experiences from the failure of this imagined connection between aesthetic value and diversity to actualize. As Sam explains to Simon in the second and third panels of a July 25, 2009 weekly that finds the two discussing the strip over a game of basketball: "I've been trying to get some press but I keep getting no response. / I'm showing my artwork at galleries, national Asian museums, contributing to books and speaking at colleges about Asian issues. But it's not good enough" (SAM 214). According to this weekly, *SAM* has not

¹⁵⁹ As per Toyoshima/Sam's conversation with Larry Hama, community self-determination is worth less than aesthetic creation.

translated for Toyoshima into the financial support implied by the “press” – a synecdoche for mass culture publication industries. Nonetheless, as Sam’s list of publication, exhibition, and speaking engagements makes evident, *SAM* has accrued immense symbolic capital as aesthetic canon and diversity representation, as illustrated in its inclusion in art galleries and ethnic community museums; the conjunction of aesthetic value and diversity that Sam had remarked upon in the August 28, 2007 daily had come to fruition as cultural capital, as Sam/Toyoshima has become viewed as a spokesperson of the APA community. The unprofitability of this venture in spite of these credentials reflects how *SAM* has been taken up as a middlebrow cultural text in spite of its aspirations to be something else because of his own Asian American identification. Sam’s complaints about *SAM* critiques diversity as a value subtracted from an ability to accrue other forms of capital.¹⁶⁰ While the previous section addressed representations of sophistication, this section focuses on Sam/Toyoshima’s meditation on the comic strip. Given how the preceding reading illustrated how class is viewed as an alternative and perhaps better lens for understanding interiority than race, this section dwells on *SAM*’s understanding of the relationship between capital and identity – one

¹⁶⁰ As the basketball game between Sam and Simon continues, Sam complains: “I just have a nagging feeling. / The media uses the ethnic angle all the time. / The first Black president, the first Latino Supreme Court Justice, the first Jewish rapper ... / But somehow Asians get no love.” It is difficult to discern if, in the final instance, Sam’s statement about this racially biased cause is Toyoshima’s ultimate statement about Asian American exclusion or is one of Toyoshima’s many musings about Asian American disadvantage. However, it is apparent that Toyoshima understands his bodily racialization as detracting from his capacity to be accepted by a majoritarian public. Toyoshima self-reflexively comments on this binary in a weekly from December 16, 2007. This strip takes place in Sam’s workplace at which he is the art director (much like Toyoshima); the first through third panels involve Sam and a colleague examining possible cover art for their publication. Though his coworker describes all the samples as “pretty **choice**,” he hesitates over Sam’s choice of cover art after Sam tells him the name of the artist: “4 out of your last 7 covers were drawn by **Asian artists**. / People might think you have a **racial agenda**.” Sam points out that his editor does not comment when he runs white cover artists. His editor returns: “they thought you were a **self-loathing Asian**. Much more acceptable” (*SAM* 50). Though Sam thinks he is pointing out a contradiction, the editor’s retort both serves as the humor and the analysis of how his choices are read through his body.

with contradictions that illustrate the limitations of expressing antiessentialist critique through diversity politics.

SAM understands diversity's subtraction of value as based in the cultural systems of Asian American racialization, as *SAM* participates in mainstream media outlets to criticize its effect on racial visibility. For example, this critique animates a two-week-long story arc in which Sam creates *Little Kim*,¹⁶¹ a children's show that Sam first pitches to his wife in a June 23, 2008 strip, which features the eponymous Little Kim: "an average American boy. He loves school, plays soccer and is a whiz at Chang-Gi" (*SAM* 104). Little Kim envisions an Asian American identity, essentialized as hybrid subjects by virtue of commonality (soccer) meeting difference (Chang-Gi), to revalue these symbolic mathematics from national excess to cultural hybridity. However, in the June 25 daily, a local program director meets with Sam to reject *Little Kim*, explaining that "We already **have** an Asian kids show," gesturing at a poster for *Love Lee: The Siamese Cat*. Though Sam protests that Love Lee lives in ancient China while Little Kim lives in Dayton, Ohio – a spatial expression that resists the conflation of Asia and Asian America, she explains: "We only depict **authentic** Asians" (*SAM* 105).¹⁶² What privileges *Love Lee* over *Little Kim* is its illusion of "authenticity," which is not substantiated by a simultaneous claim to verisimilitude. For the program director, the narrowness of Korean American identity is in part created by the cosmopolitan exotica of an

¹⁶¹ At this point, Sam has already attempted in a previous story arc from October 15 to October 18, 2007 to become the new Brawny paper towel mascot to give product icons "a **multi-culti** shake up" (*SAM* 32 - 10/15/07), in which he is ultimately told by a casting executive that he is "too Asian" for Brawny and "too American" for soy sauce; Sam and Marie have also expressed repeated anxiety over how their multiracial son Shin will come to know racial identity and racial difference through contact with media images and interpersonal interactions. See strips from 7/28/07, 8/15/07, and 9/7/07; see also 1/17/08 and 1/31/08.

¹⁶² This elision of the racial minority for the sexy transnational is also recalls the difference between what Sau-Ling Wong dubbed "Asians from Asia" and "Asians in America." Wong, Sau-Ling C., "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads," *Amerasia Journal* 21.1-2 (1995): 1-27.

imaginary Asia, as implied by the Orientalist font of Love Lee's advertisement and its rhetorical appeals. In the June 26 daily, an angered Sam has returned home and vents to Marie, who offers the justification that network executives "don't care about cultural nuances—just the bottom line." The "bottom line" to which Marie refers, the show's marketability, or cultural legibility: *Love Lee* falls into normalized expectations of Asian racialization by existing geographically in a cultural not-here while offering an atmosphere of difference for a majoritarian audience to consume. In Marie's estimation, this is opposed to "cultural nuances" – a term that obfuscates Orientalism's occlusion of Little Kim and, by extension, Asian America's cultural vitality. *SAM* draws attention to how cultural exotica is viewed as profitable while racialized personhood is illegible, recalling the critique made in *Secret Identities* about Asian American personhood and representing the middled place of Asian American identities between racialization and citizenship.

SAM's awareness of racism as symbolic dispossession, when posed against its critique of diversity as a modification of human value, creates a contradiction that the strip cannot resolve. In a four-panel May 27, 2009 strip, Simon's new activist girlfriend Grace thanks him in the first and second panels for helping her put up fliers by explaining that Simon is "supporting [his] culture" and "spreading the word about racial injustice in the Asian American community." Simon goes on to agree with Grace in the third panel, noting: "it feels good demanding to be treated equally by pointing out how we're different" (*SAM* 201). The strip ends with the two confused as they hear their politics aloud. The joke depends on Toyoshima's equations of equality and difference; given that Simon and Grace announce themselves as addressing "racial injustice," that they would be "pointing out how we're different" locates racial injustice at a psychic level, where group patterns of

maldistributed justice come second to individual identifications. For Simon and Grace, their activism possesses as little material significance as “pointing out how we’re different”; their own class privilege as university students engaged in flyering shields them from recognizing otherwise, and the reader is hailed in agreement for laughs. Taking seriously *SAM*’s avowed commitment to race-conscious education while being invested in post-racial progress narratives, Simon and Grace’s question about their activist racial project illustrates *SAM*’s zones of non-articulation between APA racial projects and Asian American racialization, or how, as illustrated in the previous chapter and this chapter’s reading of *Secret Identities*, diversity politics reveal their fault lines.

The lack of depth ascribed to race in *SAM*’s logic leads to a middled understanding of Asian American identity between symbolic oppression and self-positioning – an understanding based in how possessive individualism, or the arguably middlebrow value that the individual owns themselves, derives from capitalist logics of property. A nine-panel February 3, 2008 weekly begins Charlie, Sam, and Simon share a pizza as Charlie laments that “Asians get a raw deal in the movies.” In the second panel, Simon protests Charlie’s right to speak on the issue because “[y]ou’re not Asian”; in the sixth panel, he relents, but puts forth the claim: “Fine, you can sympathize, but it doesn’t mean you **understand**” (*SAM* 64). The strip ends with Charlie and Simon bickering, as Sam’s intervening but unanswered question from the third panel, “Should people only be allowed to talk about their own race?” lingers in the air. On Simon’s side, racial grievance, such as the “raw deal” that Asians get in the movies, becomes a property value of his identification. Legal scholars led by Cheryl Y. Harris have remarked on how whiteness becomes property to be defended for its material value; within *SAM*’s diversity, identity politics extend this property logic, as expressed in

Simon's language of entitlements and ownership, and his affective logic of wounding regulates relations of ownership and trespass.¹⁶³ Yet, as the bickering illustrates, these boundary demarcations come without cost, as Charlie's analysis becomes an opinion to be shared; Simon's racial devaluation hurts, but is so far removed from their everyday lives that it is just another discussion over pizza. Indeed, the punchline of the weekly is Sam, muttering over Charlie and Simon bickering, "I should film this and sell it to Spike Lee," as a statement referencing the Asian/Black conflicts Lee first portrayed in his comedy-drama film *Do the Right Thing* (1989).

SAM's diversity politics of propertied self-possession, addressed in this weekly as a dissembling affect, underwrites its scenes of differential racialization. Sam converses with Charlie on the topic of genealogy in a week-long narrative arc from March 24 to 29, 2008. On March 24, Sam asks Charlie about his family tree; upon finding out that Charlie's grandfather "was born in South Carolina," Sam asks, in a panel that captures a medium-shot portrait of him for intimacy: "Are you the descendent of a slave?" He mentions watching a program about African American celebrities' genealogies – in the vein of PBS's *African American Lives* (2006) or *Oprah's Roots* (2007) – and shares his amazement that so many trace their heritage to slavery; he, however, invokes Charlie's ire for suggesting that slavery makes Sam more "jealous" than "depressed" (SAM 78). As per Sam on March 26, slavery invokes a history of nationalist belonging that his post-1965 immigrant parents lack, as "stories about families that rose from slavery to success are so inspiring."¹⁶⁴ Charlie reminds Sam that tales of African Americans overcoming struggle find their basis in blackness as

¹⁶³ Such a vision joins the earlier weekly on the juridical logic of offense.

¹⁶⁴ Slavery as an abjected belonging repeats reappears in Richie's month-long story arc from December 2008 to January 2009, in which he is revealed to be South African (from colonizers) and claims slavery as his own trauma.

property (“Hey, at least you can trace [your family] beyond a loading dock”). African Americans have overcome in this liberal narrative only by taking as given their historical definition as not-human. Despite *Secret Identities*’ and *SAM*’s investment in African American history a progress narrative, the strip’s acknowledgement that racial identification works differently across racial lines would appear to disassemble the property logic of “diversity”; only certain bodies, like Asian Americans, are “diverse,” while others remain “property.” However, this pedagogical moment about difference does not rebut Sam’s misgivings about national belonging: the difference between Sam and Charlie’s perspectives becomes yet another nugget of diversity’s pluralism, as Charlie spends March 27 and 28 reassuring Sam that his family’s history in Japan have fascinating moments. That the Black man has to perform this affective labor suggests how notions of heritage are projected onto blackness, even as the sight of difference is maligned as the source of racism. Indeed, *SAM* expresses the multivalence of blackness, as Sam and Charlie’s discussions across this strip and the “One Drop Rule” strip of the previous section characterize slavery as both gift and curse.

Yet, in its deployment of propertied self-possession as a political strategy, *SAM* suggests that diversity’s affective economies can mystify through their support of American Exceptionalism. A 12-panel, image-based weekly from April 13, 2008 visually narrates an Asian man’s immigration to America. The comic begins with a man who holds a flyer that reads “America” and “jobs” with an image of the Statue of Liberty. This man tearfully bids farewell to his family and rides a ship to America, in which the first thing he sees is the Statue of Liberty. He works as a dishwasher and, walking by a souvenir shop, sees a miniature replica of the Statue of Liberty. He imagines his daughter holding that statuette

and sends it to her; she receives it with tears in her eyes, her mother looking on and also crying. The weekly ends by revealing the backside of the statuette, which reads: “Made in China.” The weekly shows the irony of a familiar immigrant narrative within global capitalism: the man comes to the U.S. as part of a racialized underclass of service industry labor; his legal status is questionable, as he arrives by boat in a liberal U.S. immigration system that privileges those with access to flight. The racialized underclass he joins in the U.S. parallels the global racialized underclass of the outsourcing of manufacturing that produced the iconic statuette. “Made in China” references the global systems of labor extraction that have enabled the U.S.’s post-Cold War rise to global hegemony, and the racialized dispossession of U.S. labor regimes that devalue the father’s and the daughter’s home life. Thus, “Made in China” ironizes the conditions that enable the diversity celebrated in American Exceptionalist icons such as the Statue of Liberty by revealing them to be commodifiable affects based in abstracted racialized labor. This critical moment in *SAM* illustrates the capacity of APA arts activism to disassemble the a-historicity of diversity.

While this reading of *SAM* has focused on how Toyoshima identifies Asian American manhood as the site of wounding via gendered racial formations through a calculus of diversity, and read those moments in which the strip critiques Exceptionalist diversity, it offers little by way of rehabilitating this manhood outside of making race disappear. In a nine-panel August 13, 2009 weekly that responds to images such as Jiverly Wong’s April 3, 2009 shooting at the Binghamton, New York American Civic Association and Seung-Hui Cho of the April 16, 2007 Virginia Tech Massacre (and became all the more salient to this Marylander in 2012 with Alex Song), Sam, reading Simon’s campus newspaper, says to Simon: “Another Asian gunman on a college campus?” Simon responds: “Sweet.” The

second frame is a head-on portrait of Sam, in which he asks, “Excuse me?” Simon proffers that “at least they’re changing the perception of the harmless Asian American male” (*SAM* 230). For Simon, racialized (hetero)masculinity finds its remediation in the image of the terrorist, whose wielding of extralegal violence offers an Asian American manhood not suppressed by feminizing racial formations.

The respectable option in this weekly is Sam’s domesticated masculinity, in which he passes judgment on Simon’s diatribe in a way that upholds the post-9/11/2001 security state as a matter of acceptable citizenship. Across these panels, Sam’s facial expression appears agitated, and he is disgusted by Simon’s position until Simon is detained by campus police. As Simon is tackled from behind in the seventh panel by a campus security officer he accuses of racial profiling in the eighth; Sam in the final frame wishes Simon: “Good luck with your threatening image in jail!” This resolution contrasts the illegitimate violence of the racial terrorist with the legitimate violence of the racial state, recalling the partition of moral violence presented in *Secret Identities*. However, given how *SAM* understands itself as speaking to a culturally literate subject of diversity, the lack of alternatives to the racializing nation-state as the final arbiter of value sustains Asian American manhood’s melancholic relation to inclusion as the script of proper citizenship – lest we end up as Simon does. As these readings of *SAM* have argued, *SAM* reduces race to sight itself and understands racism as a detraction from the inherent value of personhood – a humanism that is fundamentally classed because of its borrowings from liberal theories about property, and a construction based in performances of character and sophistication. Through *SAM*’s navigations of sight, value, and activism, Toyoshima makes evident how middlebrow culture’s tendency toward consensus creates paradoxes about antiracism’s political possibilities.

Messy Humanity: Race, Status, and Desire in Adrian Tomine's Shortcomings

Though the APA graphical storytelling movement, as illustrated specifically in this chapter by *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man*, has worked to rehabilitate Asian American manhood as a means of counterhegemonic image production, Adrian Tomine's *Shortcomings*, a compilation of issues 9 through 11 of his alternative comics series *Optic Nerve*, has not been explicitly named in this movement by its architects. *Shortcomings*, following this serializing, consists of three chapters. Chapter I of *Shortcomings* begins with Ben and his Japanese American girlfriend Miko Hayashi's declining romance in Berkeley, California. Ben finds consolation in his best friend, Korean American graduate student Alice Kim, who the narrative announces as a lesbian. After a sequence of fights, Miko accepts an internship with an APA film institute in New York City. At the end of the chapter, his girlfriend departed for the other coast, Ben calls his young coworker Autumn. Chapter II begins with Ben at Autumn's concert/art performance. As he reveals later to Alice, he is interested in Autumn. Ben and Miko speak occasionally over the phone, but mostly end up fighting. After striking out with both Autumn and Miko, Alice takes Ben to a "dyke party." While there, Ben meets Sasha, a white bisexual woman. Ben eventually sleeps with Sasha; Alice meanwhile gets expelled from her institution and moves to New York City. Sasha breaks up with Ben; the chapter ends with Alice telling Ben that he must come to New York. Chapter III begins with a sequence of images of Miko in a fashion studio; Ben and Alice are shocked. Ben tries to bond with Meredith, Alice's host turned girlfriend. Ben tries to visit Miko at her internship to realize that she does not work there; Ben and Alice instead spot Miko with a new boyfriend. Ben eventually confronts Miko, leading to their final breakup. Alice announces that she is quitting graduate school and moving in with Meredith

permanently. The women with whom he has surrounded himself gone and his former life in ruins, the graphic novel ends with Ben on a plane returning to Berkeley nonetheless.

Optic Nerve is a significant text in the history of the graphical auteur, whose artistry and creativity define him apart from the mass producer of comic books and strips; at the same time, but at a remove from his placement in the alternative comics movement, Asian Americanist critics have noted how Adrian Tomine includes Asian American characters in *Optic Nerve*'s slacker ennui and urban hipness.¹⁶⁵ *Optic Nerve* was published by Toronto-based Drawn and Quarterly, a central press of the alternative comics movement. Despite Tomine's status as an artist who is Asian American, and despite his use of Asian American characters receiving increased attention in Asian American Studies, Tomine evades categorization as an APA artist. *Shortcomings* expresses a middlebrow politics in its uptake as alternative and Asian American, producing sophistication from the former to foreclose the latter. *Shortcomings* centers Ben Tanaka, who Pulitzer Prize-winning author and outspoken critic of racism Junot Diaz describes in a review as "not your average comic book protagonist: he's crabby, negative, self-absorbed, uber-critical, slack-a-riffic and for someone who is strenuously 'race-blind,' has a pernicious hankering for whitegirls [sic]."¹⁶⁶ However, the antihero Ben vocalizes the clearest critique of racism in a narrative that stacks against him, as the cast of characters argue against the presence of racism in Ben's sexual escapades. *Shortcomings* is a difficult text to assimilate into a reading of resistance, as his analysis appears to express Diaz's diagnosis of Ben's narcissistic pessimism. I engage this antiheroic status of *Shortcomings* through a circulated reading of the graphic novel with its reception by

¹⁶⁵ See Lopes and Jean-Paul Gabilliet for the first part; see Sandra Oh, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Hye Su Park, and Jared Gardner in *(Teaching Graphic Narratives)* for more on the second.

¹⁶⁶ Junot Diaz, review of *Shortcomings*, by Adrian Tomine. *Publishers Weekly* 254:38 (9/24/2007), 42.

scholars, critics, and artists. In doing so, this section turns to *Shortcomings*, at the outskirts of the APA graphical storytelling movement, to seek something aside from diversity politics and an alternative lens for seeing Asian American representations made in that framework beyond affirmations of a wounded identity. Reading its too-convenient resolution alongside its refusal to engage in a critical racial project, the graphic novel's entanglement with "race-blindness" can be read against its grain to unfix the rubric of melancholic masculinity that has guided the movement's middlebrow dynamics.¹⁶⁷

GenerAsian Y: New Optics and the Bourgeois-Bohemian Critique of Critique

Given the graphic novel's refusal of Asian Americanist critique, many reviews of *Shortcomings* funnel its politics into liberal humanism. *New Statesman* reviewer Yo Zushi offers that "*Shortcomings* is a novel that restores a sense of humanity to people who are otherwise consistently stereotyped,"¹⁶⁸ focusing on how Ben struggles with "[s]exual stereotyping" both himself and in his relationships with women. *Shortcomings* invites such preoccupation with a racial/human binary, as first addressed in *Shortcomings*' opening pages: based on Ben's cold reception of the Asian American film festival she helped organize, Miko argues that he is "ashamed to be Asian." Ben corrects her statement, as, if Asian American affiliation is used to shield cultural production from aesthetic evaluation, then he is "ashamed to be **human**" (SC 13). Though his appeal to shared humanity appears to reference a greater point of commonality, as *Shortcomings* proceeds, it becomes evident that Ben is hyperaware of the sexual politics of racial difference to which the graphic novel's title alludes. As Junot

¹⁶⁷ My methodological attention to these reviews understands them, with the exception of Song's book-length monograph, to be engaged in a middlebrow politic. Whether a professional scholar, critic, or artist, these reviews are by design about exposing cultural texts to a larger audience through the act of translation; using their authority and credibility, each review author is tasked with highlighting what makes a text immediately valuable.

¹⁶⁸ Zushi, "Alternative universe," review of *Shortcomings*, by Adrian Tomine, *New Statesman*, September 6, 2007, <http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2007/09/adrian-tomine-shortcomings-ben>.

Diaz argues in his review of *Shortcomings*: “Tomine’s no dummy: he keeps the ‘issues’ secondary to his characters’ messy humanity and gains incredible thematic resonance from this subordination.”¹⁶⁹ Ben’s reliance on the “human” as an alternative to what he sees as shameless deployments of “racial” particularity reflects how, in these different reviews, humanity at once refers to the characters’ self-interested interior life, as expressed through the romances and sexual conflicts of the graphic novel, while also gesturing to a transcendent collectivity that can make interpersonal racism inevitably disappear. Though Diaz’s assessment in particular makes evident that sexuality in *Shortcomings* founds the epistemological chasm between race “issues” and “messy humanity,” this section reads how *Shortcomings* locates politics and desire against the graphic novel’s humanist reception to examine how Tomine’s intervention may very well be to identify how APA representational politics cannot confront Asian American racialization.

These reviewers read *Shortcomings*’ resolution as one fitting of Ben’s outspoken disassociation from racial particularity. As Chapter III proceeds to *Shortcomings*’ conclusion, Miko chooses to stay with “mixed-race” (white) Asia-phile Leon over Ben; as Alice’s New York host suggests, “it’s possible that this guy could be in love with Miko regardless of race. / And vice-versa” (SC 94). Many reviews highlight the hypocrisy of Ben’s hypocritical attitude towards Miko’s Chapter III relationship with Leon given his own pornographic collection of white college girls as revealed in Chapter I. Miko’s choice to leave Ben for Leon becomes the realization of Miko’s accusation that Ben is “pathologically afraid of change” (SC 102). The final page of *Shortcomings* illustrates the scenery outside of Ben’s departing plane from New York to Berkeley changing while, from panel to panel, he

¹⁶⁹ Diaz.

remains still. Scholars Jared Gardner and Hye Su Park, in readings framed by cognitive and psychoanalytic approaches to the image, insist that these final panels allow readers to “fill in” how Ben may be processing Chapter III’s events. However, the agency that the cognitive reading of *Shortcomings* grants the reader in interpreting the final page is not a freedom invited by the text. The cognitive approach’s recuperation of this text encourages an affective freedom built upon the constraints of the Asian American protagonist, whose awareness of gendered racialization keeps him melancholically stuck. This assessment shields desire from analysis, and, as Judith Butler argues, elides how sexual subjectivity represents power’s most intimate terrain – a “post-racial” move that views the private sphere, as per diversity politics, as a space of the post-political.

Yet, it is precisely through *Shortcomings*’ embrace of sexuality as independent of power that *Shortcomings* takes on value to sociological framings of the text. Literary critic Viet Thanh Nguyen, in an *American Book Review* review with the stated agenda of placing Tomine in the Asian American literary canon, Nguyen diagnoses “Generasian Y,” which he defines as “those young Asian Americans who grew up well aware of Asian American issues and regard Asian American identity as one of only many possible identities they can slip on.”¹⁷⁰ GenerAsian Y, in other words, entered adulthood alongside the visibility of APA politics, while finding themselves unevenly identifying with this political affiliation, illustrating how the saturation of diversity has enabled the mainstreaming and denuding of Asian Americanist critique in the public sphere. Nguyen’s GenerAsian Y joins other intellectual efforts, such as Min Hyoung Song’s naming of Tomine as one of the “Children of 1965” who have benefitted from Yellow Power organizing but disassociate their art from

¹⁷⁰ Nguyen, “Masticating Adrian Tomine,” review of *Sleepwalk and Other Stories* and *32 Stories*, by Adrian Tomine, *American Book Review* 31.1 (2009): 12.

such affiliation, to rehabilitate Tomine's representation of Asian American identity as politically productive through its sociological veracity.¹⁷¹

Though Ben, Miko, and Alice are all Asian American-identified, any semblance of panethnic solidarity passes with Chapter I's Asian American DigiFest, a community art festival that Miko co-organizes but serves as a device to introduce the reader to Ben and Miko's antagonisms. The clearest instance of an Asian American community is a hostile space: in Chapter I, Alice takes Ben to her parents' Korean church to pose as her boyfriend/beard. There, Ben marvels at "all these Asians" (SC 26), while Alice and her parents speak in Korean to one another. In the dialogue, written in hangul, Alice's parents whisper about Ben's ethnicity; Alice screams that she is ashamed of them for talking about Ben in front of him, though Ben leaves none the wiser.¹⁷² Ben, a domestically born, monolingual Asian American, is alien to the congregation of first-generation Korean Americans, and his experience contests an assumption of community between Asians. Ben finds himself alienated along these same linguistic lines in Chapter III, when he encounters Miko and Leon speaking Japanese to one another on the subway in dialogue bubbles populated by kanji, hiragana, and katakana. Tomine refutes racial similarity's equation to community by outlining the plastic but rigid boundaries posed by plural languages. If Asian American identity is "one of only many possible identities," Tomine demonstrates how inclusion for these members of GenerAsian Y can be foreclosed along differentiating cleavages within heterogeneous Asian American communities.

Emphasizing the insufficient explanatory power of racial attachments, *Shortcomings* poses APA identity against the experiences GenerAsian Y. Ben, still reeling from his fight

¹⁷¹ See Song, *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* (Duke U. P., 2013).

¹⁷² Special thanks to Chang Won Lee for his translation work.

the night before with Miko after the Asian American Digi-Fest, has lunch with Alice. Venting his frustrations, he asks: “What am I supposed to do ... put on some charade and act like my judgment is just as clouded as hers?” / “I mean, she didn’t give a shit about any of this community ... political ... **whatever** when I met her” (SC 14). Ben’s struggle to find the words to describe Miko’s volunteerism is suggestive, as both “community” and “political” reflect a clouded judgment to Ben; her affiliations register as fraudulent and superficial, as Ben’s flippant comment reflects pessimism about the usefulness of either form in addressing racialization or racism.¹⁷³ The internship that Miko supposedly takes at the fictional Asian-American Independent Film Institute in New York City turns out in Chapter II never to have existed, but, given the status accorded to the organization by its name and location alone, the reader is betrayed in the same way as Ben. Because of her involvement in the Asian American Digi-Fest, her Chapter I about this internship appears to the reader as a great opportunity, and Ben’s indignant response to Miko’s announcement that she is leaving supports his characterization as self-centered.¹⁷⁴ Miko’s community involvement becomes a marker of prestige which possesses a symbolic capital that appears as a purity of character in an alibi for her own self-interest. As a member of GenerAsian Y, Miko illustrates how the moral character ascribed to community involvement can disguise selfishness as selflessness.

In the same way, Alice’s characterization as a Women’s Studies Ph.D. student, also a mark of community and political investments, is lampooned by the text. Alice’s arrested progress on her degree serves as an excuse for her womanizing ways, as it allows her

¹⁷³ This skepticism is further evinced by Junot Diaz, who in his review cautions the extent to which Miko can be read as a political figure: “[...] Miko (alas and tragically) is an Asian-American community activist of the moderate variety.”

¹⁷⁴ Ben is critical of how the organization’s notoriety is in part because of its location in Manhattan – interrogating the symbolic capital of the area’s cosmopolitan reputation and the cultural capital of its creative industries.

invitations to lesbian-friendly parties hosted by colleagues and students. The reader never learns why Alice pursues Women's Studies; the reader does know, however, that Alice admits that "when I'm really honest with myself," her parents are the "only one reason why [she's] even still in school" (SC 89). The PhD itself is deployed as a status marker that is meant to placate her parents' aspirations for class mobility, and Women's Studies gynocentric world (at least, the kind imagined through pop culture fantasies of bra-burning) becomes a sexual feeding ground that hides under its pretenses of prestige. Both Miko and Alice's relation to social critique, understood as success stories of the Civil Rights moment, lose their credibility because their institutional legibility possesses a semblance of social value that *Shortcomings* exposes as insubstantial. As *Shortcomings* approaches its conclusion, Miko appears to have given up her investments in APA cultural creation, as her reason to stay in New York is to be with Leon; Alice finds love and freedom by refusing the wishes of her demanding immigrant parents. The reading practices of getting unstuck, as presented in the cognitive approach, or of ethnographic documentary, as seen in the literary sociology, thus means leaving racial community and social critique behind. Across Miko and Alice's investments in status is an implied identification of Asian Americanist critique's institutional sophistication. *Shortcomings* poses an argument against the intellectual resources and political cache deployed by *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man*, as well as the symbolic value accrued to Asian American cultural capital addressed in Chapter 1. Indeed, posing Alice as a counterpoint to Ben's antiheroism would necessarily imply that her racial rehabilitation of giving up model minority pursuits is the heroic narrative.

I dwell on Alice's relationship to the interdiscipline Women's Studies to pose its substance as a critique of sexual politics against the reputed transcendence of love; instead of

the binary of Ben's melancholic masculinity and rejection and Alice's freedom through romance, *Women's Studies* represents a third way. For example, Nguyen's characterization of GenerAsian Y as being "well aware of Asian American issues" is apparent when Alice warns Ben about entering "'neutered Asian friend' territory" (SC 46) when it comes to his burgeoning relationship with Autumn. And, even as he dissociates from the effects of racism, Ben is indignant as he recounts a joke he was told in a Chapter II chat with Alice about the size of Asian penises that begins with, "What's the main difference between Asian men and Caucasian men?" (SC 57). Alice's, and *Shortcomings*'s, inability to understand *Women's Studies* as an analysis of how Ben's sexual insecurities are more than antiheroic egocentrism evokes the continued need for social critique beyond demonstrating Ben's "true" masculinity. Following the abnegated political presence of *Women's Studies*, *Shortcomings* identifies status as an accumulation of symbolic capital that operates in and out of the narrative. Such status is central to the bourgeois-bohemian lifestyles that get normalized in *Shortcomings*. Ben, Miko, Alice, Leon, and Meredith all seem to get by, though money remains an issue: Ben and Alice's stays in New York are facilitated by couch-surfing, and what in part compels Ben to travel to New York is the closure of the movie theater at which he works. Their pursuits are not worried about ameliorating this financial strain – Miko moves for a temporary internship, Alice possesses no real source of income, and Leon's trendy boutique, where Alice and Ben discover Miko's photos, has only one slightly unkempt employee (SC 78-9) – but secure their place as the creative class.

In this way, *Shortcomings* locates itself as a truer "Art," one not concerned with its own symbolic status. *Shortcomings*'s first page zooms in on an Asian American film about a fortune cookie-making grandfather and his granddaughter, who receives the message, "Your

love life will be happy and harmonious” (SC 9), in a fortune cookie he makes her; with this fortune cookie, the generational divide between immigrant grandfather and native-born granddaughter has been bridged. The graphic novel’s popular reception has focused on this scene, with several reviewers referring to it as “a skilfully [sic] executed parody of the Asian-American narrative”¹⁷⁵ and, according to Jim Windolf of *The New York Times*, “just another piece of high-minded, low-budget hokum.”¹⁷⁶ These reviews evince hostility towards the “Asian American narrative,” or the highly-visible coming-of-age narratives associated with Asian Americans’ emergence in the public sphere – literary critic Sandra Oh notes that the film’s protagonist resembles Maxine Hong Kingston, author of Asian American intergenerational conflict novels and canonical cornerstones such as *The Woman Warrior* (1975) and *China Men* (1980). This film’s characterization as “high-minded, low-budget hokum” suggests that the “Asian American narrative” points both to the margins of political representation, speaking for a racial community, and cultural production, existing outside of the entertainment industry’s financing options. The “Asian American narrative” is defined by its excess of sincerity and lack of innovation with concomitant identity tropes that are simultaneously generic: iconographic, yet clichéd.

Ben’s displeasure when he watches this film at the beginning of Chapter I is mirrored by the visible discomfort he displays when he attends Autumn’s concert/art performance at the beginning of Chapter II. Chapter II’s exposition begins with panels replete with the visualization of noise; Ben’s jaw is slightly dropped.¹⁷⁷ Ben’s displeasure in both scenes is

¹⁷⁵ Zushi.

¹⁷⁶ Windolf, “Asian Confusion,” review of *Shortcomings*, by Adrian Tomine, *The New York Times*, November 11, 2007, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/11/books/review/Windolf-t.html>.

¹⁷⁷ Though commenting on the filmic sequence that begins Chapter I is a trend across the reviews, less is said about how this representation of the “Asian American narrative” participates in a consistent trend of art than is said about mocking the intergenerational narrative. Reviewer Ben Hamamoto brings together these two scenes of art-making to argue that “Tomine is dismantling the alternative with these pages and again signaling

used as a surrogate of Tomine's own awareness. *Shortcomings*, the alternative to the "Asian American narrative," strives to communicate experiences outside of that genre's framing expectations. *Shortcomings* seeks to be the alternative to Autumn's amorphous performance, refusing her performance art's pretense. Through these scenes of art-making, *Shortcomings* recognizes and refuses the legibility of "Art" to locate itself outside of these forms' disciplining embrace: for the "Asian American narrative," its recognizable and knowable value as diversity; for Autumn's "performance," the intellectual hierarchies of the avant-garde. *Shortcomings* understands itself as an alternative to the alternative, as the alternative has become too preoccupied with its own cultural currency and legitimization. In this way, *Shortcomings* deploys a sophistication that understands itself as authenticity amidst the capital-driven world of art-making.

This focus on *Shortcomings*' rejection of "Art" thus opens a reading of the graphic novel beyond the documentarian mode, as the scene of "art" that begins Chapter III – six panels that depict disparate images of Miko – extends the graphic novel's suspicion of "Art" and the value assigned to its legibility. The second page of the chapter reveals that these images are photographs that Ben and Alice are viewing in Leon's boutique. These photographs become a plot point, as they both reveal to Ben that Miko has known Leon intimately even when Ben and Miko were living together in Berkeley, and become the reader's introduction to Leon. Miko, drawn with additional detail that emphasizes her hair and her face, is portrayed with intimacy, as Miko appears in the graphic novel with a short ponytail as opposed to these photographs in which her hair is down. These stylization and placement of these photographs estrange Miko's sexuality in a narrative that visually and

something about what his own art strives to avoid being." This review has since been removed from online access.

narratively focalizes Ben. *Shortcomings*' strange depiction asks the reader/viewer to consider a counterfocalization in which the women of Ben's romantic entanglements are allowed to be read with the same complexity as the antihero himself; after all, Miko and Autumn's relationship to "Art" is something that escapes Ben's perspective and thus is rendered unknowable when thought through his perspective alone.

Indeed, the "post-racial" reading ignores how Tomine's women can take on an agency that, in his illicit misogyny, extends beyond his view – an unruly feminism that disappears in readings of the racial/human binary in *Shortcomings*. This section has taken Asian American literary criticism to task, as its focus on Ben's position on race and political engagement attempts to universalize his perspective to the silencing of the women in this masculinist text. I then extended *Shortcomings*' stance against status through a feminist lens – one that restores subjecthood to these women characters while also identifying their embeddedness in discourses of cultural capital – to offer an alternative reading of the graphic novel that, contrary to the pedagogies of *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man*, does not rehabilitate why Ben feels the way he does. As I argue in the next section, this refusal of rehabilitation can offer an undoing of the melancholic masculinity that animates the APA graphical storytelling movement without relying on diversity politics and "post-racial" progress narratives.

Certain ... Connotations: The Aesthetic Estrangement of Sexual Politics

Against the melancholic masculinity promoted in *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man*, in which the recognition of Asian American manhood serves as the sign of inclusion, focusing on the lost possibilities of feminist intervention in *Shortcomings* makes evident the

performativity of melancholic masculinity.¹⁷⁸ Taking up Meredith’s suggestion that Ben’s attraction to white women is “a sublimated form of assimilation” (SC 92), racialized desire can be understood as a performance that continually restages itself psychically to ensure the lost object of inclusion never returns. While the previous reading explored an alternative approach that shifted critical attention away from critique as complaint, this section is interested in the reading within the dominant reading – one that can reframe the superficial gestures of diversity. Taking desire as performative opens up the text beyond the cognitive approach, which invites only learning from Ben’s mistakes, and beyond the sociological approach documents *Shortcomings* as indicative of experienced realities by invigorating the political critique it appears to foreclose in connecting the cast’s individual experiences to systems of power. By recognizing how *Shortcomings* locates itself as the alternative to the alternative but inevitably restages melancholia’s scene of choking, I read *Shortcomings* in terms of what Crystal Parikh calls “wanting otherwise”¹⁷⁹: recognizing how the “human” of liberal humanism is not a given, but a continuous social project that exposes its own vulnerabilities and anxieties.

By wanting otherwise in Ben’s search to name an alternative to racism, *Shortcomings* allows a recognition of vulnerability as a condition of the liberal “human.” Despite how deeply he has been affected by the sexual life of racism, Ben, in reference to his disdain for Miko’s Asian American Digifest, insists to Alice: “Maybe I’d care more if I ever felt like I’d been the victim of some kind of...discrimination or something” (SC 15). Processing his

¹⁷⁸ In spite of *Shortcomings* and *Optic Nerve*’s awareness of the affective life of racialization, quoted in more than one review is a criticism that Tomine received in a letter, which he republished in a 2001 issue of *Optic Nerve*: “I have a challenge for you: write a story about beekeeping. Create characters who are interested in something other than themselves.” This inward turn is suggestive of GenerAsian Y, but the accusation that Tomine’s characters are persistently interested in themselves indicates the scale and scope of what intervention *Shortcomings* can make.

¹⁷⁹ Parikh, “Being Well: The Right to Health in Asian American Literature,” *Amerasia* 39.1 (2013), 38.

statement, Alice posits Ben as the opposite of an old college acquaintance who “blamed all his problems on racism” (SC 16). Ben goes on to name a supposed alternative to that college acquaintance’s perspective; in his own view, Ben experienced social alienation growing up because he was “a nerd with a bad personality with no social skills” (SC 15). Both scholarly works and reviews about *Shortcomings* focus on this conversation, either to name the possibility of “getting over” race by focusing on personality, or to insist that this conversation captures Ben’s incorrect understanding of race’s social dynamics by trying to name an alternative. In effect, these reading practices attempt other iterations of the racial/human binary.¹⁸⁰ By understanding this discussion as a way of wanting otherwise, these alternate explanations of “bad personality” and “no social skills” name bad investments on social capital – a trade intimately connected to the poor payouts of race. In effect, like the symbolic work of Alice’s Women’s Studies PhD, readings of *Shortcomings* would understand gendered racialization beyond the nameable instances of racism by focusing on how racialization is fundamental to the sociality that Ben finds compromised by having a “bad personality” and “no social skills.” In other words, wanting otherwise would push against the exclusive focus on interiority that has been privileged by the texts of this dissertation.

Locating resistance outside of the explicit naming of racism, counterfocalizing Sasha, Ben’s white, bisexual romantic interest in Chapter II makes evident the stakes of treating *Shortcomings*’ women as more than objects on Ben’s quest of self-actualization. Reviewers dismiss her as the sexual object that Ben uses to work out his own insecurities and is read as

¹⁸⁰ See Park for the former and Oh for the latter.

a symbol of his desire for whiteness.¹⁸¹ While *Shortcomings* invites this reading, even the most critical reviewer does not comment much on the role of misogyny in this Asian American representation. Certainly, the *Shortcomings* of the title evince the anxiety that Ben experiences about whether or not Sasha would be “size conscious” (SC 56) – Ben’s psychic buying into sexual mythologies of Asian emasculation via the myth of the small penis. True to the projects of gendered racial rehabilitation examined throughout this chapter, Ben’s critique is measured by his phallus – a sexual iteration of the possessive individualism examined earlier in this chapter.

Addressing how these representational myths about the male Asian body come from histories of racial sexual politics of gender that date to antimiscegenation myths of the U.S. 19th century restores a memory of racialization that cannot be confronted by the individualizing politics of Tomine’s *GenerAsian Y*.¹⁸² The small Asian penis signifies within the relational racialization of sexual anatomy against the bestial Black penis, both of which are deemed insufficient and indeed dangerous to the propriety assigned to white virility. Miko even remarks as such when, confronting Ben about his white college girl fantasy pornography, she asks: “How would you like it if I was obsessed with pictures of big, muscular African-American men?” Her question asks after miscegenation anxieties, marking Ben, as a man of color, and his desire for white women as analogous to her desiring Black men. However, this analogy does not entirely map onto prevalent anxieties of interracial sex unless her desire for Black men depends on an enduring racist notion that reduces Black men

¹⁸¹ Indeed, Jolie A. Sheffer’s 2014 analysis of the graphic novel, in which she focuses on Tomine’s thematization of the pornographic gaze in writing white woman/man of color intimacy, makes excellent points about how white women in *Shortcomings* serve as status symbols of Ben’s (and by extension Tomine’s) conquest of white women as racial inclusion, but it reduces Sasha to the manifestation of Ben’s pornographic fantasies. Sheffer, “The Optics of Interracial Sexuality in Adrian Tomine’s *Shortcomings* and Sherman Alexie’s *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*,” *College Literature* 41.1 (2014): 119-148.

¹⁸² See works by Robert G. Lee, Kandice Chuh, Mel Chen, and Viet Thanh Nguyen.

to a hypermasculine bestiality, or if she collapses herself into a category of womanhood marked as white to capture post-Reconstruction anxieties about Black freedmen having sex with (white) women. Ben rebuts her comparative question about miscegenation anxieties by spouting: “Yeah, right ... you reach for your pepper-spray the minute you see a black guy walking towards you on the street!” (SC 29). In a narrative that is entirely white and Asian American, Miko’s slippery analogy is suggestive of the antiblackness that Ben identifies, which simultaneously motivates and reflects the absence of Black men. Though *Shortcomings* disavows the existence of community and organized programs for change, racial difference in this narrative is experienced through vulnerabilities brought to relief through interracial desire. When Ben notes in his conversation with Alice and Meredith that an Asian man/white woman relationship “has certain ... connotations” (SC 91) without giving the same attention to his own sexual entanglements, Meredith turns the scrutinizing lens back on him. She uses the language of subconscious assimilation, namely his fetishizing of Asian man/white woman intimacy, to turn his sexual escapades into a psychic racial drama. Yet, to claim Ben’s heteromascularity itself as racial critique is to participate in a sexist reading practice; we find our penises, but through the gendered systems of racialization that make desire seem so natural.

To read *Shortcomings* as wanting otherwise, to want something more of the alternative to the alternative than Meredith’s armchair psychoanalysis, would queer the desire for Asian American heteromascularity. This queerness is evident in Ben’s sexual activity with Sasha in Chapter II. Their bedroom encounter registers as a second virginity, as he, shaking, tells her: “It’s just ... this is the first time I’ve ever been with...” (SC 64). Though Sasha says she understands, it is unclear as to whether she is referring to Ben’s first time

having sex with a white woman or having sex in general. The haunting presence of Women's Studies pushes against reading Sasha's reassurance as a racial emasculation, as Ben's conquest to sleep with a white woman requires her objecthood to make meaning out of it. Similarly, when Sasha breaks up with Ben as Chapter II reaches its conclusion, she refuses to explain why she is leaving by saying: "I could be totally, brutally honest about why I'm doing this, but I'm going to restrain myself because I'm not sure you'd ever recover" (SC 72). Though it is clear that Ben's ego is at risk, it is unclear as to whether she thinks Ben will not recover from his rejection by a white woman or by a bisexual woman, presumably for other women. Sasha's bisexual identity lends itself to a homophobic reading practice, as an attempt to explain Sasha's ominous words as conflating Ben's masculinity with womanhood in general, or as a negation of his racial masculinity, oversimplifies the unknowability of Sasha's sexuality in the final instance as representing a tease or a whore. The reader cannot know what Sasha means except through a suspicion of her whiteness, which intersects with a misogynist practice of blaming the woman.

Counterfocalizing Sasha queers normalized readings of desire in *Shortcomings* and makes good on its promise of differing from the reviled "Asian American narrative" that *Shortcomings* reputedly rejects by diagnosing racial self-loathing as ethically unproductive. That functional queerness about Sasha's role in the narrative disappears when she is only read as the white love-object of Asian American Studies' literary uptake of psychoanalysis, and when her entanglement with Ben is read only as her own racial fetish. Ben's failed sexual conquests would be read in relation to his concluding gaze out the window which, instead of ushering in a "post-racial" GenerAsian Y, might be read as an embrace of future possibility because it expresses an exhaustion with continuously restaging the scene of loss.

Though *Shortcomings* cannot imagine another way of being outside of sexual conquest, Ben's being stuck as the world changes around him points to the melancholic aims of heteromascuine racial projects.

Making visible the haunting presence of Women's Studies and racial comparison offers a recuperation of *Shortcomings* from its "post-racial" prophecy by demonstrating how the progress narrative into which Asian American literary criticism attempts to place Ben is itself stuck. This section's reading of the troubling graphic novel has sought an alternative to a reading strategy that rehabilitates its gender politics – themselves evocative both of the APA graphical storytelling movement's gendering, but also a pernicious understanding of Asian American racialization. Contra *Shortcomings*'s suggested interpretation of its ending, centering Sasha and this failure to really know race and sexuality offers agency by suggesting that a personhood free of subjectivity, such as a future in which Ben would not be stuck, exists somewhere apart from the fictions of interiority, transcendent love, and an apolitical stance on desire. By posing itself as the alternative to the alternative, as I have argued, *Shortcomings* positions itself to critique the normalization of status that animates its bourgeois-bohemian narrative universe, as well as the middlebrow reader. Thinking against the middlebrow reader's expectation and the APA graphical storytelling movement's appropriation of the form, *Shortcomings* offers no pedagogy about diversity except that which a reading practice committed to enacting gendered racial rehabilitations, such as the racial projects seen in *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man*, extracts through its masculinism.

Changing the Game: On Grassroots Racial Projects in "Art"

This chapter has looked to the APA graphical storytelling movement to caution against practices that call for the insertion of Asian American presence into categories and institutions of legitimization. Since the drafting of this chapter, the APA graphical storytelling movement has continued to produce. Just as the launch of *Secret Identities* was celebrated by the Asian American ComiCon in 2009, the October 2012 release of the sequel from SIUniverse, *Shattered: The Asian American Comics Anthology*, was christened in March 2013 by Beyond the Bad & the Ugly: Stereotypes and Asian American Pop Culture – A Summit. The collection maintains its predecessor’s collaborative format, pairing a story designer with an artist to conceive of an original short comic; many of the contributors are the same, but new names have been added to the roster. Nevertheless, many of these contributors, such as comic book writer and artist Greg Pak and graphic novelist Gene Luen Yang, perhaps emboldened by the cultural legibility granted through the APA graphical storytelling movement, have had their works of self-conscious Asian American representation increase in prominence. As the SIUniverse press release for *Shattered* explains, in distinction from its predecessor, which “focused on the conventions of superhero comics,” *Shattered* “expands its horizon to include edgier genres, from hard-boiled pulp to horror, adventure, fantasy and science fiction.”¹⁸³ Many of these genres recall the Cold War anxieties about comic books that instantiated the Comics Code. The aura of subversive geekery that emerges from that history animates *Shattered*’s intervention, as the press release continues: “Using this darker range of hues, *Shattered* seeks to subvert – to shatter – the hidebound stereotypes that have obscured the Asian image since the earliest days of

¹⁸³ “About *Shattered: The Asian American Comics Anthology*,” *SI Universe: Home of Secret Identities and Shattered*, accessed August 23, 2014, http://siuniverse.org/?page_id=321.

immigration: the stoic brute, the prodigious brain, the exotic temptress, the inscrutable alien, the devious manipulator.”

These five figures were first addressed in *Secret Identities* as legacies of early-20th century anti-Asian sentiment in journalism, film, and policy that migrated to the visual archives of comic books. These five stock characters become the organizing rubrics of *Shattered*'s five chapters. The five anti-Asian caricatures are joined by three others – the Lotus Blossom, the Kamikaze, and the Guru – for the NYU Asian/Pacific/American Institute and the NYU Fales Library & Special Collections traveling exhibition *Marvels & Monsters: Unmasking Asian Images in U.S. Comics, 1942-1986* (2013). Both the day-long event and the museum exhibition were organized by Jeff Yang of the SIUniverse, who has become an Asian American celebrity as he responds to episodes of anti-Asian racism through his *The Wall Street Journal* blog, *Tao Jones*. Each of these texts – the anthology, the day-long summit discussions, and the exhibition – merits attention for their critical possibilities, but also the ideologies and exclusions they reiterate. My purpose is to illustrate that the APA graphical storytelling movement continues, both in terms of sheer cultural production by Asian American artists and in terms of this art activism's heightened visibility. By way of conclusion, I want to touch briefly on some of their textures, focusing on the *Beyond the Bad & the Ugly* symposium in exploring its foregone conclusions when it comes to Asian Americans and representation within diversity, to reiterate the pervasiveness of inclusion's dependency on intangible capital and the melancholic masculinity that has underwritten this chapter's three texts.

Across these SIUniverse productions is the language of unmasking, revelation, and disguised personhood, which, as I have suggested, is indicative of how the APA graphical

storytelling movement imagines itself within the cultural politics of the form. Beyond the Bad & the Ugly, stylistically shortened as BTBATU, was held on March 23, 2013 at the Japanese American National Museum in Los Angeles, California. BTBATU took the shape of a day-long conference, with invited panelists speaking to the audience from a central stage. Bringing together a variety of authors, academics, community organizers, filmmakers, actors, performers, and other cultural producers, the day-long event proceeded in 10 panels. With an emphasis on APA bloggers as interventions that use the means of mass culture to foment popular dissent through entertainment, BTBATU celebrates the ethos of grassroots cultural production through which the SIUniverse understands itself operating. As part of SIUniverse's educational outreach efforts, the day's panels have been recorded as YouTube videos at <http://siuniverse.org/>.

Many of the panels, perhaps given that they are stacked with entertainers, are filled with jokes, jabs, and pop culture references that deploy the language of diversity politics as a response to symbolic racism. In the summit's hilarious and energetic yet easily opening plenary session, "Is This Stereotype Really Necessary?", one moment evokes one of this chapter's central critiques. The session, moderated by SIUniverse member Keith Chow, brought together actor Parvesh Cheena, poet Beau Sia, blogger Andrew Ti, blogger Jen Wang, and graphic novelist Gene Yang to talk about stereotypes. When asked about a popular culture text that made them aware of anti-Asian stereotypes, Gene Luen Yang started the discussion by mentioning John Hughes' *Sixteen Candles* (1984), and how Long Duk Dong colored his high school experience. Jen Wang spoke second, also citing the movie. Yang interrupted in protest: "It didn't haunt you!" Wang retorted: "Just because I don't have a penis didn't mean that stereotype didn't affect me." It is a small moment, but it also recalls

how women are naturalized in this cultural politic as an addendum because racism's damage is coded as emasculating. This can also be seen in the panel's inclusion of JT Tran, a dating consultant geared toward Asian American men – a gendering taken to its conclusion with the inclusion of Keni Styles, Thai British straight porn actor, in a later panel on Asian American sexuality.¹⁸⁴ There is no woman of a similar occupation in the program, and, indeed, both the AACC and BTBATU have disproportionately low representation by women. Jen Wang's comment makes evident that this demographic representation is matched by epistemological limitations, as suggested by this chapter's readings of *Secret Identities*, *Secret Asian Man*, and *Shortcomings*: Because racism is experienced as a bar to heteromascularity, counterhegemonic activity is envisioned as a rehabilitation of Asian American masculinity to enable inclusion in such categories. This chapter has confronted literary and cultural studies' uptakes of these texts specifically, as practices associated with and granting symbolic capital, to draw attention to the ethical foreclosures of their focus on manhood when they are discussed solely through the celebratory mode.

In similar aside comments in “Is This Stereotype Really Necessary?”, the panelists deploy Asian American identity in distinction from blackness. Being asked to name media representations that confronted anti-Asian stereotypes, a few of the panelists agreed on Steve Yuen's character from AMC's post-apocalyptic drama *The Walking Dead* (2010-present). Jen Wang contested race-conscious media critics' view that the show represents a “post-racial world” because Yuen portrays an “all angry Asian man” who “has hot sex.” Implied here is the gendered racial formation confronted by the three texts of this chapter, of Asian American men as emasculated, feminized, weak, and unsexual. As she jokes amidst

¹⁸⁴ I am aware that panelists alone do not make a panel, but I find it particularly suggestive that a porn star credited as the first Asian straight pornography actor in the U.S. should take on such mainstream significance.

audience laughter, Wang adds, “Everyone has to die for the Asian man to rise up.” Chow adds: “And there cannot be more than two Black people at a time in a zombie apocalypse.” Within this exchange is an analysis of how this racial project operates within “post-racial”ism, as measured in Chow’s sarcasm about the quantity of Black bodies. Chow’s quip glances at *The Walking Dead* in a way akin how this chapter has read to the comparisons in *Secret Identities*, in which Black bodies express interracial affiliation, and *Secret Asian Man*, which incorporates the Black best friend Charlie as a conduit for racial analysis. As also expressed in Wang and Chow’s exchange, this Black inclusion in APA racial projects serves to buttress Asian American masculinity.

This first casual mention of Black bodies leads to a more concerted discussion of Asian/Black interracialism. Towards the end of the panel, Chow gets to the analytical meat of the session by asking: “How are you subverting or shattering stereotypes?” JT Tran, who has been largely silent to this point, discussed his dating consulting service for men. He spoke of “the internalized racism” of his clients, but also the anti-Asian bias that they experience in their on-site consultations, such as when “[p]eople get upset when we’re talking to white girls or Black girls”; he muses: “Stereotypes are not theoretical; they’re what I live every day.” Andrew Ti followed up: “The dynamics of race are very much Black and white. I get called Black by people every day who don’t read up on who I am.” He discussed the political significance of Asian Americans having a voice in conversations about race, both “among people of color and among American society.” These casual references to Asian Americans’ dissimilarity from whiteness and blackness mirror those interrogated in this chapter. In *Secret Identities*, Black bodies are included for coalition, but are also essentialized as the figures of antiracist complaint just as blackness is deployed as what

Asian American identity defines itself against. For *Secret Asian Man*, Charlie's Black voice of reason facilitates teachable moments because readers can presume the truthfulness of words emerging from a Black mouth, even as *SAM* proposes a politic of multiracial mixing to be truly "post-racial." *Shortcomings*' brief mention of blackness makes evident how Black masculinity is overvalued in racist imaginings of interracial sexuality, just as it is feared as criminality.¹⁸⁵ These Asian/Black analogies locate Asian American racialization in relation to blackness, but do so by clamoring for the distancing of Asian American racial formations from antiblackness. Such claims that APA racial projects make for visibility illustrate the constraints of diversity politics, as recognizing race beyond Black and white in this model can consolidate material and symbolic power into a not-Black/Black hierarchy.

In this chapter's readings of APA graphical storytelling movement specifically, as its use of the form marks the convergence between Asian American model minority racial formations and the subversive nerdiness accorded to the form itself, but also of APA racial projects that seek to reevaluate Asian American masculinity generally, the Asian/Black analogy is matched by an Asian American masculinity/femininity antonym. Though this masculinity/femininity antonym is not spoken through overtly sexist tones, it is formed in a misogyny that is viewed as the only option for proving Asian American manhood for inclusion in cultural citizenship. This drive for inclusion expresses a class value of respectability, which is also made evident in the exhibition *Marvels & Monsters*. After the eight wall mountings that examine the exhibit's central archetypes through a wall text analysis and a collection of reproduced comic book images, the exhibit concludes with a

¹⁸⁵ Yet, as in the previous chapter, South Asian American actor Parvesh Cheena remarked on how inclusion through model minority caricatures differs for South Asians, which, as he notes in discussing their impact on his lived experiences, "changed after 9/11."

mounting that reads, “Beyond Stereotypes.” It begins by summarizing: “The images presented in this exhibition are largely negative ones – a reality that reflects the timeframe of the collection itself, which gathers comics published between 1942, when America was in the heat of war with Japan, and 1986 – before the great influx of Asians and Asian Americans into the industry [...]” The periodizing of this exhibition, while reflecting the collection at NYU with which Jeff Yang was working, evokes the melancholic politic outlined in this chapter – of seeking inclusion in narratives of cultural distinction, such as History, through examinations of exclusion. However, the text then continues to describe “positive depictions and laudably progressive storylines,” uniformly Asian American men who serves as heroes or sidekicks, to locate the symbolic territory beyond caricature through the moral schemes of “diversity”: stereotypes are bad, and heroism is good.

As this chapter has made evident, the androcentric cultural field of graphical storytelling necessarily means that this heroism is based in a heteromascularity that is naturalized as the means of inclusion. For *Secret Identities*, this melancholic masculinity by which Asian American men are understood as both excluded and feminized is remedied through tales of national service and labor; the recognition of these contributions serves the collection’s APA racial project in proving the masculinity that Asian American men have expressed in their occluded contributions to the national narrative. In *Secret Asian Man*, Asian American inclusion in the privileges of heteromascularity is persistently envisioned as the goal of racial critique. The sexual politics of *Shortcomings*, though the creator and narrative dissociate from organized critique, offer no alternative to the emasculation of its protagonist’s Asian American masculinity, which becomes the punching bag for the several women who populate his narrative universe. Across these three texts, the desire for a

recognized masculinity performs a culturally psychic function of generating anxiety and outrage over how this feminization indexes Asian American (men)'s marginality or exclusion from cultural inclusion. The stock figures examined in *Shattered* and *Monsters & Marvels* suggests that sexuality becomes central to how Asian Americans are expelled from national inclusion. However, the whiteness associated with this misogynist vision never speaks its name, as it is understood as the means of universal identification that McCloud notes has guided the science of graphical storytelling.

The language of stereotypes that guides the anthology, the event, and the exhibition corrals their imaginative possibilities. The BTBATU panel and the exhibition cannot locate a space "beyond" stereotypes, as the uptake of this psychological vocabulary constrains the discussion to diversity's moral binaries. Even in spite of the insights about Asian American history and comparative racialization made in *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man*, the analysis of Asian American racialization necessarily becomes reduced to consumable nuggets about "good" and "bad" representation as part of a middlebrow pedagogy. In this vein, *Marvels & Monsters*, as in the "Is this Stereotype Really Necessary?" panel, ends with appeals to liberal humanism. The exhibit concludes with an extended pop quote by Greg Pak, which includes:

I'm not looking for Asian American characters to be positive – I just want them to be human. Because humans are flawed and crazy and capable of amazing acts of heroism and terrible acts of villainy, and that's what makes us compelling. If you go out there as a writer and say, 'I'm going to create a role model,' you're going to create a boring character – it's as bad as creating a stereotype.

His words resonate with the solutions proffered in the previous chapter's texts. Pak's assessment suggests the necessity across media forms for APA racial projects, as the sheer quantity and multiplicity of representations would better reflect Asian American plurality. Yet, Pak's delineation of Asian American inclusion in liberal humanism suggests that, even in the inverted model of production between quality television and the insurgent vision of a graphical storytelling movement, similar if not the same dynamics of racialization linger in representation. Beyond the personhood for which Pak calls, the APA graphical storytelling movement's attachment to categories, forms, and narratives that legitimize Asian Americans and graphical storytelling maintains a middlebrow politic of respectability. The next chapter thus looks to the side of the grassroots to explore the possibilities of the alternative.

Chapter 3 :: *Did You Think When I Opened My Mouth*
Model Minority Racial Projects and Disassembling Independence in
Asian American Indie Rock

Indie rock's singer/songwriter image defaults to racial whiteness even as it appears as a democratic identity, exemplifying the simultaneous invisibility and disavowal of race within indie specifically and rock music generally. The form's racialized legacy can be seen in U.S.-based indie anthropologist Wendy Fonarow's column for *The Guardian*, "Ask the Indie Professor," in which she, a key scholar in the study of indie rock, responds to user questions about the music's history, style, political aspirations, and influence to share her work with *The Guardian*'s public. In a January 4, 2011 article about the question: "Why are there so few non-white artists in indie?"¹⁸⁶, she admits that in the U.K., non-white artists, like the audience, represent roughly 1-2% of participants. However, she writes: "It's interesting that there isn't a similar ethnic scrutiny of hip-hop or country. Or for that matter, why Balinese gamelan music is disproportionately popular with Balinese people?" Her skeptical comment dodges the reader's question about the exclusions of whiteness by claiming indie rock as an "ethnic" production. As Asianness can only be evoked through the "traditional" performances of gamelan, Fonarow's musical equalization renders Asians foreign to sonic modernity. Illustrated here, Asian American entry into indie rock represents a racial triangulation: Asian Americans are seen as fundamentally not belonging to a field underwritten by a white/anti-Black hierarchy.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Wendy Fonarow, "Ask the indie professor: Why are there so many white indie bands?" *The Guardian*, January 4, 2011, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2011/jan/04/ask-indie-professor>.

¹⁸⁷ See Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27 (1999): 105-138.

Asian Americans have made strides in the U.S. music scene in the 21st century, in large part due to user-generated online content. The emergence of the Asian American YouTube generation, whose members include Kina Grannis, David Choi, AJ Rafael, and Sam Tsui, illustrates how Asian Americans have sidestepped the recording industry as producers and consumers. The advent of social media has enabled the growth of the APA arts movement, but as Christine Balance reminds, APAs have been particularly “viral”: APAs have used means of independent production and dissemination long before the technology of social media, and thus, though APA arts have taken advantage of social media, social media did not make APA arts movements. As *Hyphen Magazine*’s 2006 issue on Asian Americans in music makes apparent, Asian Americans have been active in many genres, particularly hip hop and rock, for decades – even in highly visible and popular groups, such as James Iha’s guitar work in 1990s powerhouse The Smashing Pumpkins, and in influential groups, like the 1990s Filipino American band Versus that has been credited with founding formations of indie sound. My concern is less with addressing APA invisibility and more with the racial power that must be bartered for visibility. While the previous chapter interrogated APA models of grassroots cultural production, this chapter examines practices and representations that yearn for freedom from mass culture. Taking up indie rock, a form that imagines political and aesthetic existence outside of capitalism’s regimentation and monotony, this chapter examines the promises of the form alongside promises of panethnic organizing to envision possibilities that have not been completely assimilated into capitalism’s maintenance.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ This chapter responds to Wendy Hsu’s important dissertation: whereas Hsu focuses on the Asian American subject trapped between black and white in indie rock’s racialized classing, I attend to the politics of race and indie rock apart from how performers feel. Wendy Hsu’s dissertation on Asian/American indie rock musicians identifies the projections of blackness that animate indie’s intellectual history, taking up the perspectives of

By focusing on three sites of art-making that thematize independence in their racial projects, this chapter asks: What strategies do APAs use to confront the gatekeeping conventions of the musical marketplace – a process that is as cultural as it is financial given the racialized dismissal of APAs as viable artists, and how can this confrontational independence, one seeking an alternative to inclusion, facilitate APA arts activism? This chapter begins with Born in Chinese’s Asian American indie rock compilation album *CompilAsian* (2007), first examining its artists’ self-fashioning in relation to Asian American ethnomusicology and then reading songs from the album itself. It then reads the films of director Dave Boyle’s incomplete music film trilogy with indie guitarist Goh Nakamura, *Surrogate Valentine* (2011) and *Daylight Savings* (2012), tending to scenes of Goh’s art-making and indie cred. Though Boyle and Nakamura disassociate themselves from APA claims about representation, the films and their soundtracks identify the racialization of indie. The chapter then studies the politics of the L.A.-based APA volunteer arts organization Tuesday Night Project. These three sites express race-conscious strategies of collaborative creative labor, and, though this consciousness takes dissimilar forms, each recall indie rock’s juggling act of status and independence. While indie’s identification with the fringe and alternative refuses the financial capital associated with music and entertainment industries, it garners its status as “Art” through this refusal.

While this chapter reads an album, two films, and an arts space, what unifies these texts of differing forms is their use of sound and deployments of indie conventions. Reading these projects of Asian American indie rock as theoretical acts of independence, this chapter

popular critics Sasha Frere-Jones and Carl Wilson. Opposing the two, Hsu combines Frere-Jones’ argument that indie has erased its Black influences with Wilson’s contention that racism in indie has been displaced to classed hierarchies. Hsu, “Redefining Asian America: Cultural Politics, Aesthetics, and Social Networks of Independent Rock Musicians.” PhD diss., University of Virginia, 2011, 40-1.

makes three arguments. Firstly, given the mainstreaming of indie and its absorption into the racializing cultural hierarchy introduced later in this introductory section, the independence evoked by these APA arts activism appears as a subcultural hipness that manifests as a discourse of value. This chapter attends to the manipulations of cultural and symbolic capital in “Art” discourse that distinguish indie from pop music and spaces and their associated conventions. Secondly, indie rock’s myths of artistic genius and aesthetic autonomy lend themselves to a diversity politic based in the private sphere, as racial difference is understood as one of the knotted ideologies that overdetermine the experiences of creation and listening. By using the pretenses associated with art-making to indicate a personhood outside of racial formation, the artists studied in this chapter deploy a middlebrow paradox of using class-based identity markers to access music’s supposedly unmediated universality. Thirdly, because of how indie rock specifically and popular music generally has emerged from exploitative normalizations of white/anti-Black hierarchies, the category of “talent” so central to the aesthetic judgment of indie is fundamentally racialized through the language of class. Asian American indie rock participates in the racialization of sophistication through its negotiations of how whiteness has been marked as artfulness and blackness gets deployed as massified capital – an instantiation of antiblackness that ejects Black artists from indie’s “Art” even as the form was founded on parasitic appropriations of blackness. However, Asian American indie rock can invigorate a productive independence that creates spaces apart from vertical models of capitalism against indie’s diversity politic of “post-racial” opting out.

Dissimilar from the forms of previous chapters, this appropriation is underwriting and only becomes evident in ruptures in indie’s appearance of independence. What these three

sites do identify is the mainstreaming of Asian Americanist critique, which, to contrasting ideological effects, is envisioned in an at-times supplementary, at-times antagonistic relation to Asian American indie rock. The chapter focuses on *model minority racial projects*, or how Asian American artists turn to the model minority myth to extract the cultural capital associated with it in relation to indie rock norms of image, status, prestige, and skill to redeploy it as evidence of their inclusion in “Art.” These model minority racial projects express how the terms of Asian Americans’ inclusion in indie brings to light the middlebrow conventions and dynamics that animate alternative status. This chapter follows through on these projects’ politics of independence that exist in relation to but in distinction from indie’s pretenses and conventions and the model minority racial projects launched in response to them.

Returning to the racialization of indie, Fonarow’s response illustrates how the white/anti-Black hierarchy is endemic to the form of indie rock in two mutually racializing ways. Firstly, as Matthew Bannister argues, the spirit of indie rock in the U.S. maintains white 1960s folk revival projections of “folk” and “authenticity” in which blackness functioned “as a kind of symbolic marginality, which allow[ed] young whites to imagine themselves as an oppressed minority.”¹⁸⁹ This fantasy facilitated white identification with abjected blackness to enable an opting out of postwar U.S. capitalism without addressing the white privilege that made this marginality merely symbolic. This imagining is evident in the works of two of U.S. indie’s major influences: Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind,” his 1962 anthem in which he borrows from the slave song “No More Auction Block” to ask about peace, war, and freedom; and Joni Mitchell’s 1976 to 1982 Black hipster persona Art

¹⁸⁹ Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 34.

Nouveau, for which she donned a pimp suit and blackface to negotiate rock's sexism in an analogy of (white) woman and Black (man).¹⁹⁰ Indie can indeed be seen as the province of whites when such objectification of Black people remains in view, even as Dylan and Mitchell deploy these imaginings of blackness for progressive causes – a parallel of how the APA graphical storytelling movement iterates an antiblackness in its symbolic uses of blackness.

Secondly, Fonarow's defensive maneuvers illustrate how cultural capital is racialized and racializes through this white/anti-Black hierarchy. Fonarow shifts her evasion from ethnicity to class as she muses: "The aesthetics of indie: the longing for a golden age, the melancholy, poverty chic, and the overall values of simplicity, autonomy and austerity. This may not be appealing to immigrant or marginalised groups who have already experienced poverty and experience genuine outsidership as a social class." Though her turn to class evokes the British culture wars, Fonarow cites Cristal, Louboutins, Prada, and diamond grills as the idealized commodities that hip hop loves and indie loathes. She poses the perceived opulence of the MC, envisioned through these racialized markers, against the asceticism and aestheticism of the indie band. Indeed, indie rock has since the 1970s taken up the art attitudes of "high" culture through intellectualism, distance, asceticism, and refinement.¹⁹¹ Much of this elevation consciously identified musical forms associated with the Black diaspora, such as dance and rap, as "low," commercialized, mass culture. Critic Kelefa Sanneh's October 31, 2004 takedown of rock criticism, in which he identifies "rockism," or a

¹⁹⁰ See Murray Leeder, "Haunting and Minstrelsy in Bob Dylan's *Masked and Anonymous*," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 40.4 (2012): 181-191, and Miles Parks Grier, "The Only Black Man at the Party: Joni Mitchell Enters the Rock Canon," *Genders* 56 (2012), available at http://www.genders.org/g56/g56_grier.html.

¹⁹¹ Fonarow, *Empire of Dirt: The Aesthetics and Rituals of British Indie Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), 58-60; Bannister, 37-40.

dogmatic elevation of rock music over other musical forms, reflects the racialization of rock's place in cultural hierarchies: "could it really be a coincidence that rockist complaints often pit straight white men against the rest of the world? Like the anti-disco backlash of 25 years ago, the current rockist consensus seems to reflect not just an idea of how music should be made but also an idea about who should be making it."¹⁹² Fonarow, like the critics Sanneh indicts, compares (white) artistic value against (Black) financial value to reiterate high/low cultural boundaries – a racialization of sophistication.

In this way, indie rock's dual positioning, as an alternative and elevated aesthetic form, depends on racist projections of blackness as both an escape route and a trap of capital. Thus, Asian American entry into indie rock entails being muddled in these classings that express whiteness. Against these classed plays of white/anti-Black hierarchy, folk trio A Grain of Sand, made up of Chris Kando Iijima, Nobuko JoAnne Miyamoto, and William "Charlie" Chin, founds a genealogy of Asian American indie rock – one that seeks an alternative to hegemonic culture, but also one that contests indie culture's racialized spirit so evoked in Fonarow's response. The group's 1973 self-entitled album, *A Grain of Sand: Music for the Struggle By Asians in America*, is credited as the first musical work of a panethnic consciousness. As Daryl J. Maeda argues, Grain of Sand did not just seek to foster racial pride and cultural nationalism; their songs, written amidst their community organizing experience in the 1970s, articulated the antiracist and anti-imperialist dimensions of the emergent Asian American identity and its affiliation with progressive politics.¹⁹³ For example, the anthemic "We Are the Children" connects episodes of migrant labor

¹⁹² Kelefa Sanneh, "The Rap Against Rockism," *The New York Times*, October 31, 2004, accessed December 15, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/31/arts/music/31sann.html>.

¹⁹³ Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota, 2009), 141.

exploitation, incarceration, and war as the unifying conditions of Asian American identity. “Imperialism is Another Word for Hunger” makes evident that their music sought to educate their audience about the everyday impacts of systemic oppression.¹⁹⁴ Their songs actively support Yellow Power ideologies of APA panethnic organizing and self-determination, but also make clear how Yellow Power as an idea and as a movement was developed alongside the struggles of other groups of color. A Grain of Sand created music to use Asian Americans’ middled and outsider status to develop affinities outside of white supremacy, such as “Somos Asiaticos (We are Asians),” which they note communicated to Puerto Rican Spanish-speaking communities in New York City about shared experiences of oppression to build a Third World Movement base. This deployment of difference that emerges from experiences of organizing can provide an alternative to the fantasies of interracialism visited throughout this dissertation.

Taking up A Grain of Sand’s album liner, an essay that is part Marxist theorizing and part APA political manifesto, as a framework, I understand Asian American indie rock as a negotiation of racializing capital, creative labor, and agency. To the pure artist, the liner rejects the assumption of art as apolitical, as this supposed neutrality naturalizes ideology. The group identifies how an artist’s commercialist motivations, like fame and prestige, reflect the capitalist hierarchies that oppress in the first place. They write: “To assume one will be able to function under that control and retain the integrity and freedom necessary to grow politically and personally is naïve and one must question whether it is the politics or the ‘name’ that has priority.” The album liner brackets “Art” with quotation marks and

¹⁹⁴ Album liner, 1973, available online at http://media.smithsonianfolkways.org/liner_notes/paredon/PAR01020.pdf. Thanks to Theo S. Gonzalves for this resource.

capitalization to note “Art’s” construction through hierarchies of value, and its resultant estrangement from other cultural fields. This chapter deploys this stylization to recall A Grain of Sand’s analysis: recognition within “Art” is perceived as universal to dissemble how “Art” is built on inequality. But, to the activist, they argue against the use of music as propaganda and refuse to collapse the aesthetic into ideology: “Music has the power to touch; at the same time it can move people collectively while striking some emotion deep within an individual.” In their account, music can create an emotional resonance in the listener that is individualized yet collectivizing – an affective openness that could be harnessed for APA movement organizing, and a dissenting use of emotion politics as opposed to their resolutionist deployments of the previous two chapters. A Grain of Sand worked through “Art” and its capital while critiquing its disciplining effects; they manipulated “Art’s” capacity to entrench its participants in the middle of cultural hierarchy to generate a middling sense of agency. It is this manipulation, and not capitulation, that motivates the possibilities of the APA indie rock projects that follow.

***A Country Called “Chinese”*: The Racial Grammars of Asian American “Talent”**

Part of indie rock’s political appeal is its search for networks of production and distribution apart from the institutionalized practices of recording labels and deals – a practice that mirrors A Grain of Sand’s critique of “Art” and its institutionalization. One result of such processes is *CompilAsian: A Collection of Asian American Music*, a 12-track collection of Asian American rock musicians. The album represents the sole recording by the independent Asian American label, Born in Chinese, and was released on March 13, 2007. Born in Chinese founder Eugene Song explains that his label’s name comes from a question he was asked by an instructor in a college English class:

The instructor, a visiting professor from who-knows-where, assigned us a book of poetry by an Asian Pacific American poet. During the class discussion, the professor introduced the idea that the poet's cultural background had a profound influence on her work. Then, turning to me, she said, "Well, you would understand, Eugene ... Because you were born in Chinese, right?"¹⁹⁵

Confused, angered, disappointed, and amused by this quotidian racism, Song found that, as he shared this story, such misrecognition was a common Asian American experience – a reiteration of the “forever foreigner” narrative that 1960s and ‘70s Asian American cultural nationalism sought to displace. Song repurposed this question, ironizing its casual ignorance, to capture the politics of his label; Song appropriates the glaring phrase to turn injury into an identity-building opportunity. *CompilAsian* is one of two APA rock compilation albums – the second being *Wok and Roll* (2008) by the Houston-based Itchy Korean Records – to emerge as a material artifact through the establishment of a label during the early moments of user-generated content's dominance in the musical marketplace, yet after the 1990s establishment and proliferation of APA arts organizations such as the ones discussed later in this chapter. The discourse surrounding this album reflects the continuities between Asian American music in A Grain of Sand's 1970s and *CompilAsian*'s 2000s, but illustrates changes in the racial landscape that have redefined the intervention that it makes.

¹⁹⁵ “About Us,” Born in Chinese, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://borninchinese.wordpress.com/about/>.

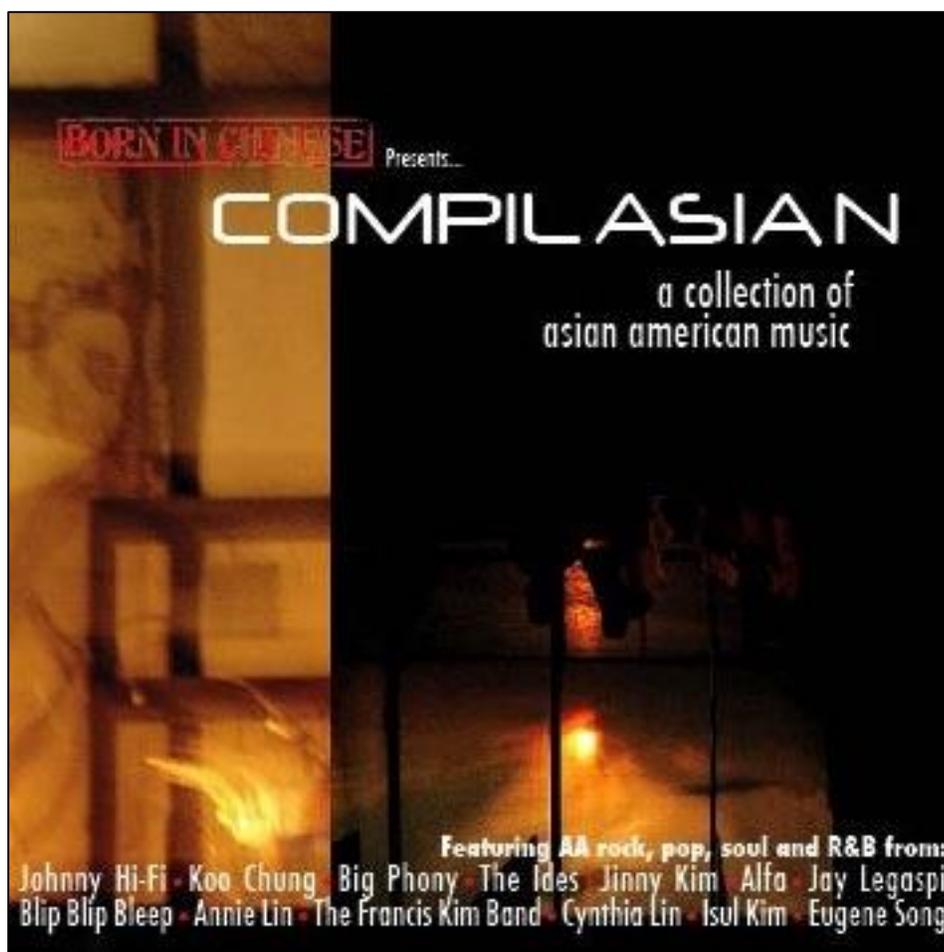


Figure 1. *CompilAsian* cover art. *Courtesy of Eugene Song.*

Bringing together Song’s New York City network of Asian American musicians, the album features Asian American singers and songwriters, and Asian American-fronted bands performing rock, folk, and power pop. Song explains in the album’s press release that *CompilAsian* has a pedagogical intent: “By helping to promote and expose these amazing APA musicians, I hope to do my part to spread knowledge and APA art in the hopes that one day, no one will ever be so uninformed as to think that having black hair and almond-shaped eyes means I was born in a country called ‘Chinese.’” Song understands *CompilAsian* as a teaching tool and a political intervention in indie rock because it normalizes the image of the

Asian American musician. Though a handful of its tracks reference artist identities and experiences, *CompilAsian* does not consistently foreground social critique in its lyrics. As suggested in the press release, Song does not see the album as speaking to activists, but to a musical public unfamiliar with Asian Americans. To explore this album's pedagogy, I methodologically treat the compilation album as a network, inviting connections between multiple artists to exceed the views of a single one in animating the album as an artifact of APA arts activism. Specifically, this reading focuses on singer/songwriter Isul Kim, but also connects statements by Johnny Hi-Fi, Big Phony, and The Ides, and mentions of Cynthia Lin and Annie Lin to Eugene Song's vision. This reading first tracks how these musicians self-identify as artists while negotiating the racialized ideologies that circulate around popular music, which tends to rely on their disassociation from racial community; it then examines how and where some of *CompilAsian*'s artists locate Asian Americanist critique amidst the avowed insignificance of race. Bringing these seven artists into conversation makes evident that, even as *CompilAsian* participates in A Grain of Sand's legacy by using music as an organizing tool, its eschewal of counterpublic analysis makes evident that the album locates its intervention is the reevaluation of Asian American musicians' skill as cultural capital, to then allow these musicians inclusion within "Art's" symbolic capital.

You Suck or Need to Get Better: The Sound of Model Minority Racial Projects

CompilAsian is one of numerous alternatives that Asian Americans have constructed to participate in the musical marketplace amidst their racial exclusion. Former singer/songwriter Annie Lin organized the Asian American Songwriter Showcase, a national tour of Asian American indie rockers, from 2001 to 2003. Similarly, Eric Hsu, lead singer of Johnny Hi-Fi, coordinated the Asian Rock Fest as an annual event; the first show was held in

May 2004, with eight East Coast bands in Manhattan, and the most recent was in July 2012, featuring seven acts at the La Pena Cultural Center in Berkeley, California. As Hsu explains in a *Hyphen Magazine* interview with Terry Park, the Asian Rock Fest “reflects the discrimination Hsu has faced as an Asian American musician in a predominantly white rock scene.”¹⁹⁶ In Hsu’s words: “Back in the ‘90s and 2000s, when you wanted a gig, you have to submit your press kit with a photo, and as soon as people saw that Johnny Hi-Fi was an Asian-fronted band, they ruled us out.” His experiences suggest how image, including racial identification, mediates the partition between “Art” and nonsense. This section explores this partition, spotlighting how *CompilAsian* artists Hsu, Isul Kim, and Big Phony negotiate their racialized image through plays with cultural and symbolic capital in interviews and artist statements. Though Hsu’s negotiation of Asian American racialization, as with *CompilAsian*’s other artists, uses conventions of independence and indie rock, these reactive APA racial projects suggest how aesthetic creation is envisioned as the alternative to racial subjectivity amidst the mainstreaming of Asian Americanist critique.

This imagining of aesthetic creation as independence from race while using the conventions of Asian Americanist critique is apparent in Hsu’s vision of the Asian Rock Fest. Reflecting on organizing the first Asian Rock Fest soon after its 2004 execution, Hsu stated: “Overcoming stereotypes is the biggest hurdle. When the concept of Asian Rock Fest was first born, most music venues did not even bother to respond with their refusal to host the event.”¹⁹⁷ Hsu’s experiences make evident how Asian American creative labor is

¹⁹⁶ Terry K. Park, “The Niceguy Rockstar: Eric Hsu of Johnny Hi-Fi Plays Hyphen Generations 25/10 Party,” *Hyphen: Asian America Unabridged*, June 20, 2012, <http://www.hyphenmagazine.com/blog/archive/2012/06/niceguy-rockstar-eric-hsu-johnny-hi-fi-plays-hyphen-generations-2510-party>.

¹⁹⁷ “Asian Rock Fest 2004: Asian American Rock Music Comes of Age.” Originally posted at *Asians in America*, retrieved from *Coyote Music*, August 13, 2004,

devalued because it does not fit the racialization of rock music. Hsu credits the “Asian booking agent” of the venue for the 2004 Asian Rock Fest, Piano’s Nightclub, for being able “to see the potential and merit of this event.” Implied in Hsu’s assessment is a racial kinship based in an embodied recognition of exclusion. Looking back in his 2012 interview, he shares, “I knew there were some good Asian American rock bands, but I didn’t want us to be fighting these small battles separately. So I wanted to bring us all together.” The Asian Rock Fest both created a community between Asian American musicians and presented a united front against the rock image’s hegemonic rejection of Asian Americans. While he founded the Asian Rock Fest specifically to address this devaluation, Hsu evinces an anxiety about these terms of racial visibility: “our goal is never to become the biggest Asian American band – we just want everyone to relate to our songs.”¹⁹⁸ Though Hsu’s scene of racial kinship between the original booking agent and the other bands of the Asian Rock Fest suggests a shared awareness of Asian American racialization, the purpose of forming an Asian American rock community is its absorption into the rock aesthetic. Hsu’s APA racial projects suggest that all bodies can do equally profitable creative labor through their aesthetic production, locating the panethnic politic in rehabilitating the devaluating link between Asian American racialization and image’s symbolic capital. The recognition of Asian American musicians’ skill in spite of their racialization presumes a universality to which such recognition-based APA projects attempt to access – a strategy akin to the diversity politics of the previous two chapters, but one that privileges “Art” over personhood as the equalizer of difference.

<http://www.coyotemusic.com/publications/detail/asian-rock-fest-2004-asian-american-rock-music-comes-of-age/>. Information about the most recent Asian Rock Fest is available at <http://www.asianrockfest.com/>.

¹⁹⁸ Park.

Manifesting a shared desire for that end, *CompilAsian*'s individual artists qualify their art-making in ways similar to Hsu, primarily using the category of "talent." As Oliver Wang reminds in his analysis of Asian American MCs, Asian American musicians have been measured through an abstract notion of talent, "an ill-defined and ambiguous concept most often deployed after the fact (i.e, success supposedly confirms the existence of talent, yet not every talented artist is successful)."¹⁹⁹ Talent as an idea justifies a corporate meritocracy of visibility, as it here evaluates the speculated ability to accrue financial capital in lieu of demonstrated skill. As Wang illustrates, APAs are seen as alien to popular music and thus are seen as unprofitable, which is cyclically perpetuated through APAs' invisibility in the music scene. Talent in the abstract not only conceals, but accounts for the *a priori* exclusion of APAs from having their skill seen as cultural capital; it preserves this exclusion by refusing to recognize APAs due to their lack of this symbolic capital. APAs' confrontation with "talent" is thus a racial project.

The category of talent, at once appearing as a democratic standard of merit but revealing its racializing capital, has animated Asian American ethnomusicology as a theoretical venture.²⁰⁰ Deborah Wong, in her seminal *Speak it Louder: Asian Americans Making Music*, argues:

[...] asking whether there 'is' such a thing as Asian American music has never struck me as the most useful question to pursue; I don't think it deserves a lot of attention because I think it's dangerously close to asking whether there is such a thing as an

¹⁹⁹ Oliver Wang, "Rapping and Repping Asian: Race, Authenticity, and the Asian American MC," in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Tu eds. (Durham: Duke U.P., 2007), 36.

²⁰⁰ To be clear, Asian American ethnomusicology is not legible as a subdiscipline. Within ethnomusicology, Asian Americanists push against the disciplinary and (disciplining) separation of "Asian" music from "American" music.

Asian American, i.e., an American who's Asian. It also diverts attention and scholarly energy into defending the idea rather than getting on with the more important work of showing what it is and how it functions.²⁰¹

Though Wong evades liberal multicultural identity politics by focusing on performance, she glosses Asian American music's epistemological existence while presuming its ontological value. "Asian American music" here, as an already-accepted cultural fact, secures meaning through a turn back to the demographic lumping of the Asian American category. Asian American ethnomusicology, with its predominant attention to hip hop, funk, and jazz, has skirted the ramifications of this ambivalence for political subjectivity by focusing on how APAs have understood themselves as a minoritized collectivity akin to African Americans; for example, Kevin Fellez, Deborah Wong, and Nitasha Sharma each interview jazz musicians and MCs who self-consciously affiliate with blackness, Black struggles, and cross-racial communities through the material linkages of their spaces and forms with racial difference.²⁰² Wong's focus on activism renders the music itself secondary to the bodies producing it which, while importantly elaborating on these public interventions' stereotype critique, supports the perceived universality of music-making as put forth by Hsu. In forms less aligned and even counterposed to racial analysis and counterhegemonic cultural

²⁰¹ Wong, *Speak It Louder* (Routledge, 2004), 13.

²⁰² Wong builds on the inquiries of Joseph J.C. Lam and Oliver Wang. Lam's 1999 article mobilizes "Asian American music" as a rubric to read "the ideals of Asian America and the polarities of Asia and America; the music spectrums of structural and performative attributes and meanings; the historical-social parameters for deciphering spectrums of Asian American positions and experiences embedded in the music" (44). Oliver Wang's 2001 article periodizes Asian American music in its "pre-panethnic" moment before a collective identity (1950-70), the Asian American movement (1970-1990), and the influence of liberal multiculturalism (1990 to Wang's moment of writing). Though Wang's account aligns "Asian American music" with APA social movements, his periodization aligns liberal multiculturalism with Asian American ambivalence; he recognizes diversity before Asian Americanist critique, suggesting that the political exigency of panethnic culture ended with post-1965 immigration. See Lam, "Embracing 'Asian American Music' as an Heuristic Device," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 2.1 (1999): 29-60, and Wang, "Between the Notes: Finding Asian America in Popular Music," *American Music* 19.4 (2001): 439-465.

production, such as indie rock, this assumed universality of music dissembles a form's symbolic association with whiteness as coincidence, recalling not only Wendy Fonarow's scripting of indie rock as simultaneously ethnically white and universal, but the discourses of "quality" and "History" visited in the preceding chapters.

Because of this contradictory racialization as white and deracialization as universal given its elevated place in cultural hierarchy, indie rock and its racial exclusions can be understood through Asian American studies of classical music. Though Asian Americans have pursued cultural capital through the rarified form of classical music, Asian American ethnomusicology interrogates how their performances have been racialized as lacking "expression" – a term evocative of symbolic capital. Hsu, in addressing the stereotypes Asian American rockers face, mentions in his 2004 interview classical music as the preeminent musical form in which Asian Americans are visible. He criticizes classical music as pedigree, as he argues, "My main goal is to help showcasing Asian musicians who stepped out of the stereotypical box of classical music, and into the world of rock music. I believe it is more than difficult to pick up an electric guitar and a distortion pedal when you have parents breathing down your neck about medical school and violin practices."²⁰³ Grace Wang's "Interlopers in the Realm of High Culture: 'Music Moms' and the Performance of Asian and Asian American Identities" examines how the construction of the Asian "music mom," the disciplinarian parent mentioned by Hsu and endemic to a strain of class-maintaining and class-mobile parenting critiqued in *Secret Identities*, transacts classical music's association with high "Art" into class subjectivities: "discipline, diligence, and persistence – qualities viewed as translating, not coincidentally, into high academic

²⁰³ Park.

achievements.”²⁰⁴ Wang’s interviews with Asian American music students illustrates how, because of how the grab of cultural and symbolic capital is racialized, Asian difference is seen in excess of white success; Asians “work too hard” such that Wang’s interviewees share that “sounding Asian” becomes a value judgment about how “Art” falls away from skill – evocative of Chapter 1’s examination of how Asian Americans become symbols of cultural capital to then be dismissed as lacking the heart to make that cultural capital meaningful.

This same racialized disarticulation appears in Mari Yoshihara’s interviews with classical instrumentalists and opera performers in *Musicians from a Different Shore*, who express a conflict of race and symbolic capital in spite of their cultural capital. On the one hand, they internalize music’s perceived universality, which is a discursive effect of Western modernity and its romantic genealogies of the aesthetic. On the other hand, the audience presumes their inauthenticity as classical musicians based on race. These musicians are in effect ejected from the modernity that shapes their perspective by a primitivizing Orientalism – the same racialized response evoked in Fonarow’s view on music. Grace Wang and Yoshihara’s work illustrates the racialization of sophistication, as classical music’s perceived rigor is consistent with discourses of Asian labor, but Asian bodies cannot accumulate its intangible capital because of how their racialization ejects them from classical music’s aura of acclaim.

I dwell on developments in cultural studies of Asian/Americans in classical music to suggest that Asian Americans’ limited visibility within the category of “talent” depends on the capital signified by deployments of the model minority myth. Singer/songwriter Isul Kim negotiates her public image through these racial politics of “talent.” In a 2006 interview with

²⁰⁴ Wang, “Interlopers in High Culture,” *American Quarterly* 61.4 (2009), 894.

AA-Profiler, an Asian American entertainment blog, she explains that her parents have always viewed her music career as a “hobby”: “look, they’ve got a daughter who went to Harvard and initially embarked on a career in nonprofit and NGO work, and now she spends half of her day collecting tips performing at Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco.”²⁰⁵ Kim identifies her Ivy League education and her casual source of income as a mismatch, and locates her parents’ anxieties as evidence of this. Her emphatic “look” suggests that Kim too understands how her current employment contradicts her pedigree’s cultural capital, and hails her interviewer as also sharing this judgment. This becomes evidence of her dedication to her craft, which exceeds her earlier white-collar ambitions, thus granting her symbolic capital as an artist through this refusal.

Kim thus engages in a model minority racial project, one that confronts the racialization of “talent” through the available terms of the model minority myth. She continues by explaining that, despite their reservations, her parents nonetheless support her music career: “They have listened to the EP and as always they enjoy the music, but sometimes I think they still secretly hope that I’ll eventually become a concert pianist and opera singer.” Kim’s declaration of her parents’ support confronts racialized narratives of the restrictive Asian American family, such as the one presented by Hsu in terms of the Asian Rock Fest. Yet, in line with the discourse of the model minority family, she suspects that her parents still wish for a more legible performance of class. Kim’s imagined transition from rocker/songwriter to pianist/opera singer is an upward move to “high” aesthetic culture – a pursuit that compensates her, if not financially, then culturally, through her ascendance of

²⁰⁵ Notably, *AA-Risings* is an outgrowth of 1990s efforts to pursue independent music production, as detailed in Deborah Wong’s *Speak It Louder*. “A-Profiler: Isul Kim,” *AA-Risings*: da entertainment resource about Asian Pacific Americans, accessed August 1, 2013, <http://www.aarising.com/aprofiler/isulkim.htm>.

cultural hierarchy. Kim's parents see her as a model minority who is not – a strategy that claims independence through an embrace of the model minority image, as opposed to the refusals of the model minority icon interrogated in the previous chapter through which the APA graphical storytelling movement sought inclusion.

As Kim's interview illustrates, she constructs herself as an artist because she has foregone the "good life" of her educational pedigree by existing outside of salaried labor and extant cultural hierarchy. She instead has focused on developing her musical acumen, making herself symbolically known as indie by opting out of the expected payoffs of her education. She is indeed a model minority, as demonstrated by the cultural capital of her credentials, but her vexed relationship to being recognized as such makes her racialized body intelligible through the model minority image. She counters this racialized script and appropriates its cultural capital to explain why the symbolic capital of artistry should be redistributed to include her specifically and Asian Americans more widely. However, Kim's model minority racial project identifies art-making as her escape from capitalism's drudgeries, which recalls how folk revival also attempted to do this through projections of abjected blackness: some can choose not to use their degrees as a sign of their liberation, while others are still systemically denied those credentials as a group-differentiated outcome. In this negotiation of the restrictions placed on Asian American "talent," Kim's model minority racial project illustrates how Asian Americans' entry into indie rock replicates a racialized projection of independence – one that confuses freedom with limited life choices. Kim's vexed performance of model minority cultural capital demonstrates how Asian Americans are muddled within racialized cultural hierarchies: While Kim's opting out appears to be colorblind, and indeed affiliated with a blackness that exists outside of

capitalism's limitations, the class privilege associated with such a refusal recenters whiteness and locates her Asian American body in its proximity.

Such deployments of model minority racial projects illustrate the constraints of their independence, as their negotiations of the model minority myth neither deconstructs nor displaces it. In response to the question, "Do you feel being Asian makes it harder to break into the American music industry?" in a *Club Zen* interview, *CompilAsian* artist Big Phony responds: "I think there are [...] valid points to discuss if you are actually talented at what you do, but if you aren't, the reason why it's hard for you to break through is not because you're Asian, it's because you suck or need to get better. Figure that out first and don't blame the color of your skin."²⁰⁶ His appeals to "talent" as a universalized standard invokes meritocratic myths of celebrity, which themselves articulate American Exceptionalist ideals of bootstraps as the means of fulfilling aspirations for capitalist accumulation. Racialization in Big Phony's account manifests only as image, and the critique of that racialization is enfigured as a self-serving appropriation of civil rights language. The superficiality accorded to critique is here suggestive of a middlebrow vision that privileges sophistication as an entry point into universal inclusion.

Big Phony locates Asian American visibility in "Art" as a deviation from model minority expectations. When asked, "What are your thoughts on the future of Asian artists in the American music industry?", Big Phony answers: "The growing number of Asian artists out there is a sign that Asian-Americans are more comfortable with taking chances on different artistic paths such as music or acting, which normally aren't expected of them. The more people that try the better chance there is we'll see a greater Asian-American presence in

²⁰⁶ "Interview: Big Phony (Robert Choy)," *ClubZen.com: The #1 Asian Nightlife & Entertainment Community*, December 10, 2007, http://www.clubzen.com/feature/feature_view.php?id=15.

the ‘mainstream.’ Big Phony’s explication of this visibility as a matter of “taking chances” enacts a model minority racial project by naming the pursuit of “talent” as a refusal of the model minority “good life.” That exclusion based on Asian American racialization is spoken through narratives of Asian technocratic labor, which are haunted by the specter of model minority parenting practices, suggests the individualizing politics of “personal responsibility” endemic to the neoliberal cultural moment and its diversity politic. Indeed, one of the services that *CompilAsian* singer/songwriter Cynthia Lin advertised during her 2011 visit to the University of Maryland for APA Heritage Month was a personal consultation on how to tell your (Asian/American) parents about your desire to pursue a creative career.

While such model minority racial projects do not disavow the racializing role that image plays in the exclusion and invisibility of Asian Americans in indie rock specifically and popular music generally, they hold that role secondary to individual choice. As I have illustrated, these race-conscious artists negotiate their racialization within a genre understood as white through a turn to “Art” as an equalizing category – contrary to A Grain of Sand’s critique of “Art’s” disembling capital, but also evocative of music’s professionalization. Suggestive of a middlebrow politic of diversity, the primary factor of Asian Americans’ exclusion is located in an Asian American’s failure to practice possessive individualism and pursue art as a career – to the occlusion of how this racialization is a discursive effect of how the Asian body is persistently envisioned as white-collar labor. Should that Asian American artist succeed, the resultant amelioration of racial image through that Asian American’s visibility is seen as a plus factor to the supposedly universal subjectivity granted through “Art” discourse.

Everybody Has Their Place: Inhabiting “Asian American” from Above and Below

With the previous section's analysis of model minority racial projects in view, *CompilAsian* presents a paradox of contemporary arrangements of panethnicity: It and its artists deploy rhetoric that draws from genealogies of Asian Americanist critique as a self-centered critique of Asian Americans' exclusion from conceptions of universality. Though discussions of race surround *CompilAsian*, both in its race-conscious vision and in its artists' image-making, only two of its twelve tracks reflects an Asian Americanist critique. Indeed, all twelve tracks feature the lyrical conventions of indie rock, as they overall focus on love both unrequired and not, and scenes of fulfillment and longing. Yet, it is through the combination of the lyrical and the sonic that these two tracks, by Isul Kim and The Ides, give *CompilAsian* its intervening thrust. Literalizing the confluence between indie rock and the interior life of the artist, I argue that *CompilAsian* offers an understanding of imagining a race-conscious independence from diversity's demands for essentialized difference as well as "Art's" colorblind universalism.



Figure 2. Image of Isul Kim from June 27, 2006.
Courtesy of photographer Sherman Mui.

As in her negotiations of the model minority image, Isul Kim's use of her musical artistry reflects the changed conditions of Asian Americanist critique, as seen in Kim's contribution to *CompilAsian*, "This Fever." The song intertextually references Peggy Lee's "You Give Me Fever," evoking scenes of smoky jazz clubs with its syncopated blues beats. The song's opening verse challenges a lover, the implied addressee of her lyric: "Never asked you to love a rainbow / never asked you to learn a foreign tongue / but if you're going to keep up this attitude / well, my Eastern Proclamation has just begun." Through tropes of color and language difference, these lines suggest the narrator's deviation from the bodily norm by making visible the contrasting presence of whiteness. They also implicate the toxic fascination of her subject with that deviance. Kim satirizes the sexualized, embodied trope of the fever, both the subjective heat of passion and the "Yellow Fever" of interracial intimacy as pathological fetish.

True to indie's political vision, "This Fever" attempts to imagine a space of independence in light of this awareness. Throughout, the narrator repeats a probing question: "When you look into my eyes / do you see a slant or do you really look inside?" Kim appropriates the sedimented associations of Peggy Lee's source text – untamable desire and its embodied affects – and uses them to confront the sexualized and gendered scripts that structure the sight of Asian American womanhood. Her awareness of these gendered racial grammars reproduces the antiracist poetics that have become the motivating language of Asian Americanist critique. However, her wish for her addressee to "really look inside," beyond the scripting of her body, yearns for a universal ontology that makes race external to subjectivity – a colorblind fiction. This externalization of race suggests how Kim's

awareness of gendered racial grammars uses indie rock's intangible capital to leverage APA agency. Joining her first verse's stereotype critique, Kim's second verse asks, in pointed, marcato tones: "Did you think when I opened my mouth / that a sound like this would come out?" Her lyrics implicate her addressee as understanding her body as symbolically alien, and as such refuse their abstraction from this material fact of difference. Though her narrator acknowledges that, with her "midnight hair" and her "almond eyes," she looks different, she literalizes multiculturalism's promise of coming to voice while remarking on the impossibility of that voice being heard apart from how her body is read.

Though her lyrics ultimately wish for freedom through a recognition of her personhood, this imagined universality represents her confrontation with the racialization of "talent." Returning to her *AA-Risings* interview, Kim explains that her favorite performance memory occurred at a local show when "I could see [the audience] perk up their ears and think, 'What the f*ck?'" when they saw this Asian chick get up on stage." Because of the lack of resemblance between "Asian American" and "indie rock," Kim understood the lowered expectations of her audience. This experience of proving the crowd wrong evokes the disjuncture between the white/Black binary that racializes talent through its intangible capital, and the body of the Asian American performer. And yet, despite Kim's race-conscious lyrics, her question, "Did you think when I opened my mouth / that a sound like this would come out?", marks out as the song's only corrective the inclusion of Asian American bodies within the listener's racial frames. "This Fever," in keeping with *CompilAsian*'s ultimately middling critique, does not repudiate the whiteness of indie rock, but it also does not forget that racial power underwrites our existence in racialized bodies.

In this same way, “Two Separate Pictures,” begins from this space of personhood as the other *CompilAsian* track featuring Asian Americanist critique. In their *MTV News* profile, Andrew Choi, the lead singer of the now-defunct rock ensemble The Ides, explains why the band does not identify as “Asian American”: “It just makes us seem like we’re just a bunch of foreigners trying to make it in another country [...] We don’t want to be viewed in that kind of way. In the end, we would like to be viewed as artists, just like anyone else.” Choi poses the racializing imposition of “Asian American” against a self-identification as “artist,” privileging the denotations of skill and connotations of status that come with “Art.” However, the band does not disassociate itself from a political orientation; in this same story, The Ides member Peter Paik explains that the band’s name is taken from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, stating: “what we want to draw from that [is that] there are a lot of urgent needs and causes out there.”²⁰⁷ The Ides supported Liberty in North Korea (LiNK), a national organization dedicated to North Korean refugee rights and advocacy for the end of North Korean human rights violations. Refusing “Asian American” as a category imposed from without, The Ides register how “Asian American” – a term born of social movement organizing – has been incorporated into taxonomies of liberal multiculturalism, such as in MTV’s deployment, through an Orientalizing tenor that racializes Asian Americans not only apart from national belonging, but also indie’s art-making. The Ides’ contest an insistence that its players’ racial particularity overdetermines their politics, as made evident by the surprise implied by MTV’s story subtitle, “Not Just Asian-American.” The Ides express an APA agency by recognizing the politicizing dimensions of music-making while exhibiting a

²⁰⁷ “The Ides: Not Just Asian-American,” *MTV News*, September 27, 2006, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1541829/ides-not-just-asian-american.jhtml>. The profile has since been removed from MTV’s site.

wariness of how that becomes essentialized through diversity's accounting practices. While this tactic does replicate the appearance of the "post-racial" guises of the previous chapter, The Ides' practiced awareness of inequality sets them apart from the privatizing and individualizing outcomes of diversity politics interrogated throughout this dissertation.

The Ides' contribution to *CompilAsian*, "Two Separate Pictures," expresses an APA politic beneath this will to categorize. The song fades in with a high top over an unintelligible recording, like the sound of a news broadcast phased out by cacophonous noise. The short first verse begins with the narrator's lyrical meditation on a nagging problem. This exposition leads into the chorus, in which this problem develops a shape. The narrator asks:

Does it really matter if it's so far away
then why should I care
if you're calling out for me
crying out for me
to give you something to believe in
So what if your life is not like the one I got
everybody has their place

Speaking to a figure defined by an uncanny similarity, one that threatens to bleed into the narrator's reality, the song's narrator insists on the title's "Two Separate Pictures" to mark the separation of the singing "I" from the second-person subject. The narrator is distressed by images that originate from an elsewhere "6,900 miles away" – roughly the distance from New York to the Korean peninsula. Though he reminds himself of this remoteness, the narrator's thoughts of banishment and exorcism are interrupted by the song's break, in which

he rants: “Don’t call me brother, don’t say you’re my sister / I can’t do nothing for you we’re in two separate pictures / and so what if we’re the same colored eyes, skin, hair / why should I care? / I’m over here, you’re over there.” These words pick up intensity as the melody bounces between two tones that refuse resolution. In the same way, the narrator is haunted by affiliations that he denies by insisting on their spatial difference, but this kinship refuses to be refused.

The narrator speaks to the apparitions of the Korean diaspora; his own privilege of living in the imperial center of the U.S. plagues him with imagined horrors on the other side of the partition. To paraphrase Jodi Kim’s theorizing of the Korean War, the narrator of “Two Separate Pictures” cannot forget the diasporic memory that has been excised from national history. The Ides’ contribution to *CompilAsian* serves as a ghostly reminder of the war and its processes of expulsion that make “Asian American” not a neutral categorization but the remainder of violence. The lyrical nature of this critique across “Two Separate Pictures” and “This Fever” informs *CompilAsian*’s overall intervention. Both songs begin by narrating crises of personhood, true to indie rock’s lyrical tropes and expectations of expressing interior monologues and personal affects. Yet, against the individualizing diversity politics critiqued throughout this dissertation, as “Two Separate Pictures” makes visible the ghostly outlines of diaspora and “This Fever” indicts racialized sexual fetishes, their Asian American narrators’ expanses of interiority are in fact shaped by the subjective particularities of racialization.

Inhabiting the overlap between middlebrow cultural dynamics and diversity politics through the conventions of indie, *CompilAsian*’s Asian American indie rock as a form of arts activism can be read as brushing against indie’s possessive individualism to understand the

racialized zone of private personhood as a public issue. Given how many of *CompilAsian*'s artists self-narrate through model minority racial projects, indicating their awareness of racialization beyond self-identification, I argue that the other ten tracks of *CompilAsian* do not offer a contrasting relationship to racial critique but a complementary one. For example, Johnny Hi-Fi's mid-tempo love ballad "This is the Song" or Cynthia Lin's lackadaisical and light-hearted "Skipping in NYC" would read not as denials of racialization's impact in favor of a universal personhood, but as expressions that exist alongside awarenesses of race. In this way, making good on *CompilAsian*'s stated politics as more than a gimmick, the album can be understood as using the lyrical and stylistic conventions of indie to carve out an independence that does not accept Asian American racialization as overdetermining these artists' relationship to craft or personhood – the constructed conflict addressed in the preceding two chapters as endemic to middlebrow understandings of difference. Instead, in keeping with A Grain of Sand's vision, it offers a meditation on how racial politics can exist alongside "Art" without music becoming solely instrumentalized in a pedagogy of feeling that does not stop its critique with the self-satisfaction of the middlebrow listener.

Not Stories about Race, Per Se:

Dave Boyle, Goh Nakamura, and the Adaptation of Asian American Difference

Against the stated awareness of *Born in Chinese* and *CompilAsian*, the two completed films of indie film director Dave Boyle's trilogy with indie rocker and guitarist Goh Nakamura, *Surrogate Valentine* (2011) and *Daylight Savings* (2012), do not announce themselves as APA art. In a feature on *Daylight Savings*, Nicole Stempak, writer for Asian American media blog *Dumpling Magazine*, quotes Boyle as he explains that these films are "not stories about race, per se." Stempak states: "The films tell more universal stories about family relationships and the difficulty balancing a career with a personal life. They just

happen to star several Asian actors.”²⁰⁸ The discourse around these films, like Stempak’s, vocalize the ancillary coincidence of Asian American identification in ways that recall *CompilAsian*’s artist statements. Boyle explains that, despite the high number of Asian American actors and characters in his oeuvre, he “hasn’t thought too much about the fine line between portraying characters and portraying culture”: “They’re all, personality wise, very very different from each other. I hope that my characters are unique enough that no audience member could ever mistake them for a stereotype or some kind of lazy sort of shorthand writing.” Boyle envisions race, spoken through the language of culture, as an ontological limitation placed on Asian Americans’ personhood; he instead strives to depict the heterogeneity of “personality.” I turn to these films not only because of their ironic attitude toward racial identity and community; they also imperfectly insert Asian Americans into indie, an “Art” imagined independent of difference, to claim access to a universality existing in the aesthetic.

This evasion of race and racism cannot be attributed to Boyle’s white identity alone. Nakamura, in an interview with *Dumpling*, accepts that racial difference has impacted some of his fellow Asian American musicians, only to surmise: “But overall, it’s pretty colorblind, you know.”²⁰⁹ Nakamura poses this colorblindness of sound against the visibility of race, which his colleagues have experienced in the acting audition process. Both artists explain race away through internal dynamics of interiority: Boyle through the largeness of “personality” against the smallness of “race,” and Nakamura through the largeness of sound

²⁰⁸ Nicole Stempak, “Director’s Black and White Film Full of Color: A hearty Mormon handshake and a cast of Asian Americans,” *Dumpling Magazine*, April 10, 2012, accessed October 29, 2012, <http://www.dumplingmag.com/2012/04/directors-black-and-white-film-full-of-color/>.

²⁰⁹ Justin McCraw, “*Daylight Savings*: Sex, Asians and Rock & Roll,” *Dumpling Magazine*, accessed October 29, 2012, <http://www.dumplingmag.com/2012/04/daylight-savings-sex-asians-and-rock-and-roll/>.

against the pigeonholing capacity of sight. I methodologically turn to these films not only because of their deliberately multimedia presentation of Asian American indie rock, but also their imperfect insertion of Asian American presence in indie symbolism and their ironic attitude toward racial community. I accept the secondary role of race in Boyle's statement that these films are not "about race, per se" by reading those moments within and around the text in which Asian American racialization erupts in the reputedly indie lifestyle of art-making.

In both films, Nakamura is a San Francisco-based Japanese American indie guitarist/singer-songwriter playing protagonist Goh, a fictionalized version of himself.²¹⁰ The first film, *Surrogate Valentine* (2011, abbreviated as *SV*), centers on Goh and his rising music career – a career that receives a sudden kickstart when he receives an offer to have his music recorded and produced for a reduced fee. Though Nakamura ekes out a living through guitar lessons, merchandise from his intimate performances, and freelance music work, he scores what seems like a simple money-making opportunity from his filmmaker friend Amy: he must teach self-involved and notably white actor Danny Turner (Chad Stoops) how to play guitar in a week. Instead of learning the guitar, Danny instead invites himself onto Goh's tour from San Francisco to Seattle to Los Angeles. Along the way, the two men become friends as Goh makes music and pines after Rachel (Lynn Chen), an Asian American childhood friend and love interest. What takes place is adapted by Amy into her film-within-a-film with Danny acting as Goh. The second film, *Daylight Savings* (2012, abbreviated as *DS*), begins after Nakamura has "sold out" by scoring the soundtrack of a national television commercial and gets broken up with by his girlfriend, "The Professor" Erika. Joined by his

²¹⁰ I use Goh to refer to his character and Nakamura to refer to his musical career.

cousin Mike for another epic roadtrip, Goh travels from San Francisco to San Juan Bautista to Las Vegas to Los Angeles in pursuit of fame and, again, the possibility of romance with Yea-Ming Chen – who, like Nakamura, is a guitarist/singer-songwriter in the Bay Area-based band DreamDate playing a fictionalized version of herself. Firstly, in my readings, I examine the context of the films’ emergence, focusing on the model minority racial project enacted by Boyle and Nakamura that negotiates both indie culture’s image and the films’ combatted existence within APA culture. Secondly, I read how the plot of both films emphasize the romance narrative, enacting Boyle’s wish for a universal personhood defined through sexuality, against the concurrent storyline of Goh’s career, as told through his tour experiences and Amy’s film-within-a-film adaptation, which visualizes Nakamura’s Asian body as racially out of place within indie’s symbolic capital. Boyle and Nakamura’s films, while tending toward a “post-racial” stance on representation, can be understood through their negotiations of APA cultural politics’ visibility and the intangible capital of indie cred as enacting a discursive ethic of independence that offers an alternative to withdrawing from the political exigencies of APA representation.

To See the Light of Day: On Race-Conscious Genealogies of Independence

Both *Surrogate Valentine* and *Daylight Savings* feature a visual style that evokes the indie image of music-making genius, being shot in black and white. Firstly, the style reflects the films’ DIY shoestring budgets: as co-screenplay writer Joel Clark explains on *Surrogate Valentine*’s commentary, “We were shooting on, like, obsolete equipment.” As such, the black and white imaging “takes out some of that nasty digitalyness” from the mismatch between the crew’s low equipment quality and the high digital film quality requirements. *Surrogate Valentine*’s commentary by Clark, Boyle, and Nakamura is filled with quips and

explanations of their money-saving tactics, such as including footage filmed at Nakamura's shows instead of staging a scene and using friends as extras and set contributors. Secondly, the style is aesthetic: as Clark explained during a Q&A session at the 2011 DC APA Film Festival following a *Surrogate Valentine* screening, it recalls a genealogy of guitar rock films such as Richard Lester's *A Hard Day's Night* (1964), a comedy starring and featuring the music of The Beatles, and D.A. Pennebaker's influential documentary based on footage from Bob Dylan's 1965 concert tour, *Dont Look Back* (1967). As Joseph Morgenstern's review of *Dont Look Back* iconically argued, "'Don't Look Back' is really about fame and how it menaces art, about the press and how it categorizes, bowdlerizes, sterilizes, universalizes or conventionalizes an original like Dylan into something it can dimly understand."²¹¹

Following the same on-tour narrative of both films to boot, Dave Boyle's films borrow from this genre's symbolic capital through its intertextual reference; he inserts Goh Nakamura, albeit fictionally, into those same heights of artistic iconicity. In both of these ways, as Morgenstern claims of *Dont Look Back*, Boyle and his crew use indie as a material and aesthetic practice to imagine an unmediated "Art" as an alternative to celebrity, image, and marketing. This section thus explores *Surrogate Valentine* and *Daylight Savings*' relationship to "Art" both in and alongside the text, arguing that its privileging of "Art" over the secondary status of Asian American illustrates a model minority project that inhabits the strain of capital associated with art-making and racialized as not-Asian.

Alongside the aestheticized visual style of these films' on-the-road genre enables an omnipresent but submerged racial register. This claim to an Asian American aesthetic notoriety through an artistic ethos suspicious of music's absorption into capital enacts a

²¹¹ Joseph Morgenstern, "Face in the Crowd," review of *Dont Look Back*, directed by P.A. Pennebaker, *Newsweek*, August 21, 1967, 65.

model minority racial project, not explicitly through Asian American racial formation, but by illustrating the model minority's proximity to whiteness. Despite the size of the Black population in each of the cities of Goh's tour, every character and extra in both films is either white or Asian; this includes the real-time scenes of Nakamura's performances. Black presence is erased not only from the indie scene, echoing how indie rock in the U.S. has been founded on the embrace, abjection, and disavowal of blackness through this racial segregation of taste. Black people have also been erased from Goh's from West Coast tour stops, suggesting the possible impact of Boyle and Nakamura's colorblind universalism – including that Boyle's politic of Asian American “post-racial” inclusion alongside white people occludes other interracial diversities. The black and white contrast of these films at times takes this colorblindness to its visual conclusion by flattening the difference of skin and hair tone between many of the white and Asian American actors. The erasure of such phenotypes would depend on lighting techniques specifically designed for paler skin tones. How this stylization's erasure of white and Asian skin tones depends on the absence of Black skin suggests how these Asian/white coalitions are not a critical interracialism, but a resemblance to a whiteness that goes unmarked – one that recalls the haunting status of blackness within indie rock as a whole, and one that suggests how the model minority racial project of inserting Nakamura into aesthetic notoriety sustains that haunting.

Though Boyle and Nakamura privilege art-making as the primary lens through which their work should be read, the context of both films' emergence suggest how the presence of APA arts communities and activism has enabled them to take on this status in the first instance. *DS* premiered at South By Southwest (SXSW), the renowned annual arts festival in Austin, Texas, that showcases the best in indie, underground, and DIY film, music, and new

media. *DS*'s premiere at such a prestigious venue is touted in the film's packaging and advertising. Both *DS* and *SV* were screened at the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival, the Vancouver Asian Film Festival, the San Diego Asian Film Festival, the DC Asian Pacific American Film Festival, the Asian Film Festival of Dallas, the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, and the Chicago-based Foundation for Asian American Independent Media.²¹² These film festivals provide a space for "Asian American film," defined with varying ranges of broadness based on each festival's mission and submissions. As the work of Jun Okada and Vincent Pham illustrate, some of these sites, such as the L.A. and Chicago festivals, are nationally known for their APA taste-making capacities. Actress Lynn Chen explains in an interview at the San Diego Asian Film Festival that these events are important because "They help foster an audience for movies that might not be able to see the light of day"²¹³ – a statement that also includes *SV* and *DS*, both of which were released straight to DVD after these Asian American film festivals. In this way, while *DS*'s premiere at SXSW has garnered credentials and image for the film, Boyle's passage through the APA film circuit provided them with an audience. The films have thus depended on panethnic communities and APA arts activism for their financial viability, even as their packaging associates them with indie name-dropping.

In *DS*, The San Juan Bautista Film Festival that Amy cajoles Goh into attending on her film's behalf casts suspicion on the spaces through which Boyle has received the most attention. Once Goh and Mike arrive in San Juan Bautista, someone breaks into their car and steals Goh's possessions, including his clothes and his guitar. The exterior shot of the

²¹² "Surrogate Valentine: Movie," Facebook fan page, accessed August 24, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/surrogatevalentine>.

²¹³ Asian Cinema Foundation. *YouTube* video, 2011, accessed February 1, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGEXTA8u0mM>. The video has since been taken down.

Granada Theater, the venue of the San Juan Bautista Film Festival, takes on a rundown appearance against the bright lighting and black-and-white shooting of the scene; the movie theater is largely empty, with maybe six people in attendance. Someone walks out of Amy's film during the screening and, upon the film's completion, the applause is sparse. Goh and Mike take the stage as the film festival facilitates a Q&A, at which an audience member says, "I really like your use of the color red in the movie, and I was wondering if you could tell me the significance ...". The scene invites a skeptical response as, for as far as the viewer can tell, there is no red to be seen. The question trails off into a background of sonic cacophony; the camera turns its attention to Goh, who sees the man he believes stole his clothes, and the sound makes audible his rising anger. Mike, who presumably is watching Amy's film for the first time, fields the question as Goh seethes. The question is rendered so inconsequential that it is neither worth hearing nor answering substantially. The San Juan Bautista Film Festival in *DS* at which Amy's film is screened is portrayed both as laughably unpopular and unduly pretentious. This scene of "Art" contrasts Goh's multiple scenes of music-making in the films (discussed in the next section), all of which possess an emotional sincerity in their diegetic inclusion. Boyle's films portray Goh's art as an unmediated aesthetic experience, yet also a more authentic sophistication, as opposed to the esoteric hipness and performances of "Art" snobbery invited by such sites as the film festival.

The films' disavowal of race and racism does not include an elision of racial community, as *SV* and *DS* are populated by APA artists and their works. Independent filmmaker Patrick Epino, whose media works such as *Mr. Sadman* (2009) and *Awesome Asian Bad Guys* (2014) have earned him titles and L.A.-based fellowships, appears alongside Amy in *SV*, and is listed by name during the credits of Amy's film in *DS*. Graphic novelist

Derek Kirk Kim appears as an extra in both films and provides the drawn décor of *SV*, most notably by creating the intentionally grotesque T-shirt design that the groupie-esque Valerie makes of Goh's likeness and by creating the artwork that hangs in the background of Goh and Rachel's hangout date in the Giant Robot-affiliated gallery, Giant Robot 2 (stylistically referred to as GR2). Given that Epino and Kim can also arguably be characterized as figures who understand themselves as artists primarily and Asian American coincidentally, these marginal cameos not only of their person but of their art-making processes showcase Asian American members of a scene that represents an artistic underground. Boyle's films highlight communities of Asian American artists such as Nakamura who exist alongside Los Angeles and San Francisco's APA art activists who, like the films themselves, receive recognition value because of their closeness to APA art movements, but whose art-making, exhibited here as Epino's self-referential creative humor and Kim's comic art aesthetic, is their salient affiliation – a strategy consistent with the image management of *CompilAsian's* artists, as addressed in the previous reading.

As part of this network of artists, Giant Robot's inclusion in *SV* and *DS* captures the symbolic marginality of this underground. The GR2 provides the multicultural and cool setting of a romantic hangout between Goh and Rachel in *SV*, and Goh's Giant Robot T-shirt becomes a central object of *DS's* plot. These are outgrowths of *Giant Robot* the magazine, which ran from 1994 to 2011. *Giant Robot* does not claim an overt antiracist stance, but fashions an alternative ethos through a mixture of subcultural identity and a marginalized cosmopolitanism.²¹⁴ *Giant Robot* first originating as a DIY zine, personally assembled by

²¹⁴ Giant Robot began online retailing in the late 1990s. It then opened brick-and-mortar stores in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York that also featured Asian American artists, and even had an associated restaurant GR/eats to enter L.A.'s foodie culture – at least until slowly closing down its brick-and-mortar enterprises from 2009 to 2011, which coincided with the final issue of *Giant Robot* as a publication.

founder Eric Nakamura, that focused on Asian and Asian American film and music alongside developments in Asian pop culture. *Giant Robot* became a symbol to an Asian American generation coming of age amidst the U.S. mainstreaming of punk rock – a period concomitant with the GenerAsian Y of the previous chapter. Though *Giant Robot* has been credited with starting the careers of many Asian American visual artists by circulating their work, especially with the 2003 opening of GR2, Nakamura self-consciously notes how this elevation “was infused with DIY and punk rock ethics.”²¹⁵ The artists collected for the exhibition *SuperAwesome: Art and Giant Robot* (2014), Giant Robot’s 20-year retrospective at the Oakland Museum of California, all note how, like *Giant Robot*, their craft defied the conventions of the high “Art” world; GR2, as one of the first art spaces accepting of the hand-drawn illustrations that fill punk zines, facilitated this challenge.



²¹⁵ Eric Nakamura, *SuperAwesome: art and giant robot* (Oakland Museum of California, 2014), 7. Thanks to Thea Quiray Tagle, who visited and documented *SuperAwesome* at the Oakland Museum of California on my behalf.

Figures 3 and 4. Exterior and interior view of Giant Robot 2 in Little Osaka, Los Angeles. *Photos by author, 2014.*

Eric Nakamura's merging of punk with "Art" to result in belated critical acclaim provides a model to understand the multiple contexts of Asian American community and "Art" that exist within and outside of Boyle's films. The GR2 and the Giant Robot Store, a brick-and-mortar store selling artist wares and Giant Robot merchandise, are located in West L.A. on Sawtelle Boulevard in "Little Osaka," a former ethnic enclave now known for its trendy, upscale bars and restaurants. Little Osaka takes on a spatial meaning through affluence, not only because of its commerce and its adjacent location to UCLA and Westwood, but with hipness – in distinction from the Little Tokyo neighborhood (discussed later in this chapter) that has become known as panethnic history and community. Eric Nakamura is becoming increasingly visible within APA cultural institutions such as the Japanese American National Museum – both as an invited curator for the pop art and new media of Giant Robot's Biennale, but also as a community figure deserving inclusion in their oral history archive. Though he narrates his racial alienation as an initial motivation, he makes clear his primary indebtedness to an underground spirit.

Much in this way, Boyle and Goh's vision of independence becomes associated with aspirations of a diverse but irreverent cool based in a status that disassociates from its own symbolic worth. Both *Surrogate Valentine* and *Daylight Savings* seek the insertion of Asian American Goh Nakamura into indie iconography – a strategy that mirrors those addressed in the previous chapter. This inclusion without critique in Boyle's films' nostalgic coloration visualizes the haunting presence of blackness within indie's taken-for-granted whiteness. By

tending to the settings that Boyle's films depict and in which they circulate, this section has made evident the interconnection of this institutionalized "Art" with cultural legibility. Yet, once inhabiting that iconography, the films locate Asian American identification and the unnecessary pretense associated with the institutionalization of "Art" as ancillary to the truer art that Nakamura represents, as illustrated in the preceding reading. In this way, the films identify sophistication as an aesthetic and creative space that, while underwritten by capitalism, cannot be corralled completely by structure.

I Work: Sexuality, Selling Out, and the "Per Se" of Asian Americanist Critique

When read through Boyle's artistic vision of "personality," Goh's Asian American inclusion in indie does not naturalize his body, but remarks on the inescapability of racialization. As this section's introductory reading of Stempak's story on Boyle makes evident, *SV* and *DS*'s plots bring together Goh's pursuits of love and career, which strike the viewer as simultaneously "universal" and "post-racial." However, the impossibility of valuing Goh's body in these films illustrates how race represents the remainder of private personhood's supposed transcendence. In *SV*, Goh, preparing to have sex with his groupie Valerie, pulls up his shirt, and draws circles around both of his nipples and a smile across his stomach. He is shown to be pudgy with uneven patches of body hair and, in *DS*, his cousin draws attention to his thinning hairline. When this scene is recreated in Amy's film adaptation, Danny performs this moment with a hipster swagger, enabled not only by the magic of make-up and costuming, but through his masculinized whiteness: fuller chest hair, clearer muscle tone, and dialogue that captures the optimism of making love ("gotta stay righteous"). Both moments are played for laughs: Goh appearance is unsettling and grotesque, and incites Valerie's laughter; Danny's performance more clearly approximates

sexual desirability, evincing a chuckle through how much more easily this moment connects. This intended laughter renders one man an asexual object and the other a sexual subject. The dramatic tension that drives *SV*'s romantic pursuit of Rachel in part stems from Nakamura's inability to resemble the white beauty standards Danny represents, and the narrative suggests that Valerie, in eagerly having sex with Goh, does so because of her infatuation with him as a figure and not a person.²¹⁶ As suggested by this adaptation, Boyle's films, despite their pretenses of universality through a narrative focus on Goh's career and romances, express the impossibility of any such premature universalism. This section is thus preoccupied with the process of adaptation – both made evident through a reading of the creation of Amy's film-within-a-film, and the inclusion of real Nakamura and Yea-Ming Chen's music in the narrative universe of Boyle's oeuvre. In doing so, it illustrates how the seemingly “universal” plot elements of career and romance express the racialization of talent and the racial exclusions that underwrite indie's image management.

The adaptation of Goh's pudgy Asian body into Danny's toned white body suggests the racialized subtext that underwrites indie's fantasy of independence. Towards the end of *SV*, Goh sputters an explanation to Rachel that the romantic narrative of Amy's film (which has not yet been seen) is inspired by the two of them. Following a disappointing movie date and a silent brunch, Rachel leaves Goh's apartment, presumably for the last time. He runs after her and invites her to go on tour with him to Seattle; stunned, Rachel says, “I work ... I can't.” He tries to convince her, but she explains: “I can't call in sick for four days.” Rachel

²¹⁶ As she saunters about her kitchen, Valerie asks Goh if he sang a song about her at that night's concert; he instead explains that the song was a “political song” about Scooter Libby and his 2005 indictment for leaking information about CIA officer Valerie Plame Wilson. Though Goh intends no malice in correcting her, Valerie appears to be a little dim, having misread a commentary about global politics; this demonstrates her lack of sophistication.

is not swept off her feet by Goh's spontaneous invitation and logistically finds it nonsensical. She is represented as caught up in her white-collar realities, including the regimentation of time that distinguishes her formal labor from his casual creative labor, but the thought of Goh canceling his tour never crosses the dialogue. The film's romanticization of Goh's creative labor attributes moral value, as Rachel's protests to Goh's spontaneity are framed as disappointing and not as sensible. *SV* ends with Goh waiting outside Rachel's apartment, lacking a resolution as to whether or not she will give up her job to pursue a freedom represented by love and life on the road. In this way, *SV* elevates an indie lifestyle above that of white-collar capitalism to mark an alternative, as opposed to the consent expressed by the previous chapter's melancholic masculinities, to Asian Americans' model minority inclusion.

When Amy's film is finally screened in *DS*, the camera focuses on Goh's face as he cocks his eyebrow upon seeing just how much Amy's film has rewritten his experience: not only are the characters inspired by Goh and Rachel represented by white actors, Danny kisses the female lead at the end of the film. While both Goh and Danny's character are hipster guitarists, Rachel and the leading woman express the trappings of contrasting lifestyles: Rachel appears smartly dressed in her long skirts, pleated blouses, and fitted trench coat as a cosmopolitan professional; the leading woman of Amy's film wears shredded leggings and vintage tops – a look not associated with salaried capital. The visual distinction between Rachel and her counterpart carries the subtext of racialization, as Rachel's attachment to her class aspirations are expressed on her body, in distinction from Goh and his hipster kin. Rachel's appearance most closely matches that of Bradley (played by Parry Shen of the *SIUniverse*), the perpetually Bluetooth-wearing, status-conscious man Rachel dates earlier in *SV*, who appears in trim polo shirts, well-fitted jeans, and neatly styled hair. Though his

racialization goes unremarked, it does appear, given the adaptation of Asian to white bodies in Amy's film, that Bradley represents the model minority of consumer capitalism; in this way, Rachel's choice to stay or go at the end of *SV* depends on whether or not she will choose to opt out of these norms and trust that everything will work in her favor. However, the adaptation of the docile, whimsical woman indulges a heteronormative fantasy based in a neobohebian independence saturated by a white privilege that Asian bodies can approximate but not replicate. Stated otherwise, *Surrogate Valentine* exposes two manifestations of class – one of differentiating pretense, addressed in the previous section, and another of model minority inclusion – as falsehoods in contrast to Goh's "Art."

While Danny's racebent representation of Goh in Amy's film deploys sexuality to express the racialization of indie, Goh's creative labor supplies Danny's indie appearance with the necessary cultural capital to maintain that status' symbolic capital.²¹⁷ After shooting her adaptation, Amy calls on Goh as she edits the footage. Danny's performance of the Nakamura song of the film's title, "Surrogate Valentine," in Amy's adaptation is the only scene that the viewer witnesses of the film-within-a-film in *SV*. As Amy grumbles, Danny's rendition of "Surrogate Valentine" is awful – the singing does not register as song and the guitar is barely strummed at all. The scene of watching Danny's performance, during which the camera takes Goh's first-person perspective to include the viewer, features footage with a still focus on Danny in the center of the frame – a visual parallel to his flat sound. As the climax of the film-within-a-film's romance narrative, Danny's failure to make music causes the heteronormative fantasy it enacts to break down; *SV* presents it as laughable that the

²¹⁷ Racebending is an activist term that refers to changing the race or ethnicity of a character, historically associated with practices like blackface and yellowface. The term is further defined by Racebending, an activist media organization: <http://www.racebending.com/v4/about/what-is-racebending/>.

hipster leading woman would kiss Danny after his song. Amy has Goh sing over Danny's performance. The *SV* camera focuses in on Goh in the soundbooth as he watches Danny on a laptop, and performs a flawless rendition of the song in perfect time with Danny's mouth motions. The *SV* camera dwells on Goh's performance of "Surrogate Valentine," the scene lasting a full minute of the 70-minute film, asking for viewer identification with Goh as talented but unappreciated.

What plays on the laptop for Goh's performance has been highly edited, indicating how Asian American talent executes the emotive register of this scene of whiteness's fantasies in Amy's adaptation. Danny still looks ridiculous: he contorts his mouth, holds the frets incorrectly, and positions his acoustic guitar at impossible angles to mimic a metal god. But, in the playback, the camera appears to move its focus around Danny's performance and includes a shot of the leading woman warmly smiling to the camera as he performs; the edited view creates the impression that Danny and the leading woman are gliding in a circle around the camera. The edited view coordinates the sway of Danny's body posture with the ascending and descending swells of tones and drifting *andantino* tempo of "Surrogate Valentine's" syncopated chorus. The use of Amy and Goh's artistic techniques create an energy where previously there was none by stylistically harmonizing image, sound, motion, and time. Though the scene emphasizes the now-seamless moment Goh's talent has enabled, enacting "Surrogate Valentine's" lyrics about a second chance at making good on unrequited love, it also accentuates how the racialized but highly skilled creative labor of these Asian Americans necessarily disappears. Reminiscent of Julie Dash's critique of race in entertainment in *Illusions* (1983), the popular white actor elevates the marketability of Amy's indie film about indie rock, but alienates the skilled creative labor that conditions this

possibility. The completion of Amy’s film makes visible how the racialization of “talent” enables the sight of racial difference to disarticulate the recognition of “Art” from skill that Goh and Amy so obviously possess but cannot profit from on their own. In other words, *Surrogate Valentine*, as per its intentions, illustrates the illegibility of Goh’s pure “Art” within representational regimes defined by difference – which includes the cultural hierarchy of “Art”; however, against its desire, its use of adaptation expresses how the universality of “Art” within diversity is rendered impossible. Yet, the labor that goes into Amy’s film makes evident that they possess a sophistication as an effect of their relation to art-making’s place, but this sophistication suggests a productivity that exceeds its role of legitimizing their place in cultural hierarchy.



Figure 5. Goh Nakamura performing at the DC Asian Pacific American Film Fest after the October 6, 2012 screening of *Daylight Savings*. Photography: Wayne You Huang. *Courtesy of DC APA Film Fest.*

Following this recognition, though Nakamura plays a fictionalized version of himself, Nakamura’s creativity and skill take center stage in Boyle’s films. Nakamura wrote and performed six of the nine credited songs of *SV*, and five of the eleven credited tracks of *DS*. Three *DS* tracks were recorded by Yea-Ming Chen and DreamDate, and one song by

Nakamura's now-defunct Bay Area collaboration, *The Invisible Castles*, recurs in both films. *SV* and *DS* feature diegetic scenes of Goh performing at small venues, including the aforementioned *SV* scene filmed at a Nakamura show. Both films roll credits alongside the visual and acoustic backdrop of Nakamura filmed at a three-quarter profile, giving the viewer the sightline of an audience member at an intimate venue as he performs with just his guitar and a microphone; this representation has taken on a social life, as Nakamura's most recent tour featured songs from the compiled soundtrack album, *Motion from the Music Picture* (2012). The films' soundtracks serve as evidence that Goh/Nakamura clearly is skilled, contrary to the racialization of talent, and attributes Goh's (and technically Nakamura's) mainstream invisibility to a combination of chance and his personal choice to pursue his craft unfettered by industry demands.

Latent in the films' narrative is the tension of Goh avoiding being a "sell out" while striving to make money for his craft – a conflict between his artistic identity and the will to accumulate financial capital. In *SV*, Goh's tour is bookended by an offer from Dave Margolis, a character based on the acclaimed music producer of the same name, to allow Goh a studio recording session at a greatly reduced cost. Goh's chance to impress Margolis is his chance to make it as an indie rocker who no longer suffers the financial strain of independence. Dave recants this chance when Goh, having reached out to an out-of-practice former bandmate to play percussion, ends up having a rehearsal instead of recordable tracks. Faced with this broken deal, the camera tracks just steps in front of Goh as he storms out of the studio, using the dead-on central focus and the kinetic energy it produces to visualize his anger and frustration in this affecting moment. In *DS*, Goh is working out the logistics of a national tour, which would offer more fans and cash than his regional tours. When his hand

gets slammed in a car door during the hunt for the thief in San Juan Bautista, and he eventually finds his way to the hospital; his hand is broken. As the doctor shares the diagnosis, the camera maintains a long shot with a central focus on Goh, who maintains a forlorn face in perfect stillness as the hospital moves around him to portray his deep disappointment. Both of these opportunities to share the talent that he portrays in the film with a greater public are treated with an emotional intensity greater than his multiple romantic letdowns. The viewer is interpellated by feeling alongside Goh, as the real heartache is his obscurity, in a pedagogy that asks for an alternative to Goh's limited options.

The aural evidence of Goh's/Nakamura's talent renders scenes of Goh's failure to launch a financially sustainable career in music illogical, his confrontations with agents of the music industry capture Nakamura's illegibility within the symbolic racialization of indie. While on tour in *SV*, he meets with Mark, a red-faced, Seattle-based distributor, who tells Goh: "People come up here and play their shit all the time; doesn't mean they sell product." Though Goh tries to reason and bargain with Mark, his efforts are unsuccessful until Danny shows up and woos Mark. Star-struck, Mark spends the day with Danny, talking in his living room, shooting rifles, and hanging out in his hot tub, as Goh waits in irritation and boredom for hours until he receives Danny's text message that Mark has changed his mind. Goh's entrance into the musical marketplace is not enabled by the talent that these films spotlight. Mark is only wooed by Danny, whose internalization of his white privilege allows him not to recognize his own lack of artistic skill. *SV* shows Mark to be a person of institutional power who cannot recognize skill. The subordinated narrative of creative labor in *SV*, which continues in *DS*, critiques the capriciousness of musical capitalism, as Goh comes up against the fundamentally racialized exclusions of these musical gatekeeping processes. Goh's

refusal to participate in these superficial machinations expresses the integrity born of his indie cred, and suggests an ethical agency of independence that exists outside of its entanglements with symbolic capital.

Both films depend on this indie cred to locate Goh as the moral center, against the financial promise and symbolic threat of Goh breaking out of obscurity on terms other than that of his skill. *SV* and *DS* are named after Nakamura's songs, which perform cultural work in their respective installments. "Surrogate Valentine" brings the fantasy of Amy's film together while also providing an urtext for Goh's pursuit of Rachel. "Daylight Savings," however, is first introduced to the viewer as a jingle in a national commercial campaign for Relatrix, a fictional antidepressant. Goh is highly critical of his song becoming a jingle, referring to the process as "selling out" when he gripes about the sacrifices he made for Erika; the same is true for Nakamura. In a SXSW interview, the interviewer asks: "You've actually said that the song 'Daylight Savings' was a really serious thing for you, but now as the title of the film and one of its driving plot points as your character's claim to fame in a hokey drug commercial you loathe, has your mental association with it changed?" Nakamura responds: "There was some issue with calling this 'Daylight Savings' because it was a really personal song about my uncle and it's kind of about death. I didn't feel like it fit the movie that much, but putting it in the context of that Relatrix [...] commercial does now. And first, I thought the song's ruined. I'm never going to want to play this song again."²¹⁸ Relatrix's commercial recalls those of Prozac, featuring a montage of images indicating melancholy –

²¹⁸ Stephen Saito, "SXSW '12 Interview: Goh Nakamura and Dave Boyle Spring Ahead with 'Daylight Savings'," *The Moveable Fest*, accessed July 1, 2014, http://moveablefest.com/moveable_fest/2012/03/daylight-savings-goh-nakamura-dave-boyle-interview.html

sighing, slouching, and bad lighting – transitioning to another signifying happiness, including laughing, playing, and brightness.

Relatrix serves in *DS* as a symbol of affective intensity related to his dilemma of careerism. Most immediately, the meaning behind “Daylight Savings” loses its potency as the song becomes pure feeling, signifying nothing in the Relatrix commercial in the same way that the commercial promises an actually deadening cheerfulness. Goh and Erika laugh over the Relatrix and what it represents, even as Goh inevitably regrets selling “Daylights Savings” for a paycheck he feels compelled to get to settle down with his girlfriend. Because Erika’s appearances bookend *DS*, the viewer does not experience her, and she thus appears as superficial and safe. Yea-Ming, his other *DS* romantic pairing, shares that she takes Relatrix when Goh tries to make a joke of the commercial campaign so the two can laugh together. Her condition symbolizes her affective expansiveness, as the conversation in which she shares this information with Goh precedes a scene in which Yea-Ming performs in a Las Vegas venue; recalling myths of the aesthetic genius, the seriousness of her craft is paralleled by her psychic depth. Unlike Rachel from *SV* or Erika, Yea-Ming would appear to understand the necessary sacrifices and emotional wildness of an art-making independence that has been focalized through Goh.

DS cuts to credits with Goh forced to make a choice between reconciling with Erika, the language professor who wants a normative partner, or dating Yea-Ming, the indie rocker who gets why his indie cred matters. As I have suggested throughout this reading of Boyle’s two completed films, there is necessarily a racial subtext here because of Goh’s continuous confrontations with his illegibility as an indie rocker. Will he become the model minority of a domesticating capitalism, or will he remain the drifting artist of independent life? I have

challenged Boyle's assessment that his films are "not stories about race, per se" by taking that equivocation literally, examining how race functions alongside the films' more manifest plots. As I have argued, Boyle and Nakamura use the hypervisibility of Nakamura's racialization to negotiate the circulation and status of their art between indie culture's notoriety and APA arts activism's legibility in a model minority racial project that trades on the recognition value of Asian American identification. However, by untangling the layers of class identity, capitalism, and symbolic capital that mediate Goh's authenticating indie cred in *SV* and *DS*, I have drawn attention to the difficult autonomy of an art that exists apart from its recognition as "Art." This act and political commitment to creation, a staple of Asian American indie rock as a form of arts activism, can imagine an independence from its absorption into a purely abstracting capitalism.

Beyond Talent: "Art + Community" in The Tuesday Night Project

Volunteer community arts organization Tuesday Night Project (TNP) manifests indie culture's DIY spirit of art-making, organizing programs throughout southern California with the mission of "Art + Community" – a mission that defines TNP's project of reflecting and generating APA identity through cultural production, and enacting the political commitment to creation addressed in *SV* and *DS*. As with *CompilAsian*, this political identity is underwritten by intangible capital; however, much like Boyle's films, this organization deploys a discourse of "Art" to imagine an identity founded in independence. TNP was founded in 1999 as a "bottom-up" effort to revitalize Los Angeles' Little Tokyo Historic District by creating a local space for Asian American artists at the Aratani Courtyard of the Union Center for the Arts. These efforts persist as their flagship series, Tuesday Night Café (TNC), which is held on the first and third Tuesday evening each month of the April to

October performance season. Each TNC show is a multidisciplinary program, showcasing featured and open mic performers in spoken word poetry; stand-up comedy; rock, hip hop, folk, and other genres; short film screenings; and performance art, to go with onsite vendors and a visual artist who creates during the show.²¹⁹ TNP provides a live stream of shows held at the Aratani Courtyard at <http://www.tuesdaynightproject.org/>. However, despite the range of acts and participation that TNC invites, TNP remains firmly invested in DIY practices and the disarticulation of community art from payment – an activation of indie rock’s aesthetic principles.



Figure 6. Tuesday Night Café promotional banner for the fifteenth season in 2013. Photography: Dustin Hamano. Design: Byron Dote and Candace Kita. *Courtesy of the Tuesday Night Project.*

What sets TNP apart from a liberal recognition politic is how it maneuvers these colliding forms of capital in a political vision of independence that brings together the indie

²¹⁹ While TNC is a multidisciplinary program, what drew my methodological attention to this organization and this space is the prevalence of indie rock performances. For example, the line-up for J-Town Summer Sessions, a TNP community benefit for those affected by the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, featured performances by singer/songwriters Lindsey Yung, Connie Lim, Jane Lui, and Dawen; guitarist/composer Shin Kawasaki, joined by the MidTones; and rock outfit Andrew Figueroa Chiang and the Blazing Rays of the Sun. Materially, this emphasis on indie rock reflects the mobility and spontaneity encouraged by A Grain of Sand’s sparse instrumentation. Politically, however, this emphasis on indie rock reflects TNP’s inspirations by a DIY ethic, a locally centered sense of community, and an celebration of aesthetic autonomy.

conventions examined across this chapter and the originary visions of APA panethnic identity. This analysis of “Art + Community” is based on TNC shows from the thirteenth through fifteenth seasons in 2011, 2012, and 2013; my 2012 interview with former TNC host Johneric Concordia; and a 2012 conversation with TNP founder and now-former TNC Curator Traci Kato-Kiriyama, who also invited long-time TNP supporter R. Scott Okamoto and now-TNC Curator Sean Miura. TNP’s most poetic analysts speak directly to Asian American experiences and anti-Asian racism, such as Kato-Kiriyama’s poetry or Concordia’s spoken word and performances with his band, The Fighting Cocks. TNP, despite not having national name recognition like some of *Dissembling Diversities*’ other texts, has been a central location on an APA arts itinerary: Alfa and Johnny Hi-Fi of *CompilAsian* have both performed on TNP’s stage; Goh Nakamura is a recurring featured artist; and Nobuko JoAnne Miyamoto of A Grain of Sand can often be found in attendance or sharing her arts-based organizing as a featured performer. My interest is in how the intentions and maintenance of the space facilitate APA presence and Asian Americanist critique. TNP’s ability to give voice to such critics corroborates TNP’s statement of purpose, which explains:

TN Project’s purpose is to build a space for people to connect through the artistic expression of the API [Asian Pacific Islander] and L.A. communities and to provide time for cultural, social, and political awareness with opportunities for involvement, collaboration, real relationship-building and action.²²⁰

TNP’s call to awareness and action signals the creation of a counterpublic that can contribute to progressive politics. TNP’s emphasis on social connection tangibly networks a

²²⁰“About,” Tuesday Night Project, accessed January 15, 2013, <http://www.tuesdaynightproject.org/about/>.

community through regular interaction. TNP thus participates in community organizing using art as edification and entertainment, and creates a space of alternative values.

As Johneric Concordia explained, TNP's "Art + Community" emerges from Mao Zedong's thoughts on form, function, and the cultural revolution – a praxis shaped by the intellectual legacy of Maoist cultural politics in the U.S., which finds its local origins in 1960s and 70s Asian American left organizing in L.A.²²¹ Seeking to create a platform for members of local communities to speak, TNP's mission locates its purpose of art-making in its fostering of connections between community members. However, the discourse of art-making frames TNP's intentions by accessing the elevation of "artistic expression" as cultural capital and the rarity of this status as symbolic capital. TNP's deployment of "art" and "expression" discourses serve as channels for intangible capital; instead of dissent, which can appear polarizing, there is art. The implied universalism of "Art" and its classed connotations create an air of respectability, which enacts the intentionality of the space by legitimizing the local APA community. As such, the first section explores how the space is structured by the capital its alternative status repudiates – a departure from A Grain of Sand's critique of "Art's" dissembling uses of intangible capital. However, the second section follows on the vision of independence as imagined in Boyle and Nakamura's films, one that emerges from within such hierarchies but exceeds their restraints. TNP's community organizing self-consciously uses "Art + Community" to index "Art's" immaterial value and gentrification in L.A. as related discourses of racialized displacement.

Our Values Then Guide Our Choices and Our Actions: "Art + Community" as Legitimization

²²¹ See, for example, Andrew Ross, "Mao Zedong's Impact on Cultural Politics in the West," *Cultural Politics* 1.1 (2005): 5-22, and Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006).

This implication in capital does not invalidate TNP's intervention, as TNP promotes a middled agency within these conditions. TNP is uninterested in financial accumulation, devoting most of its earnings from its annual fundraisers to equipment maintenance and transportation expenses; all staff members work on a volunteer basis, and all performers are compensated by having a venue to sell their merchandise and plug their creative endeavors. However, the material discourse of "Art" and its attendant associations with capital serves as the basis of TNP's model minority racial project; in this way, this section explores the implication of "Art" within the capitalist management of urban space by historicizing Little Tokyo, its relation to APA activism, and its institutionalization. TNP co-founder Traci Kato-Kiriyama explained that her inspiration came from her participation in the late '90s in organizing Art Attack, an annual performance showcase, to respond to the mutual feeling of Kato-Kiriyama and other youth community organizers: "Man, J-Town's dead!" Noting the decreased activity in Little Tokyo, they assessed the need to make what Kato-Kiriyama referred to as an "API scene." To address this, Art Attack, as TNP would later do, organized a showcase of local artists and performers to establish a social calendar and inviting spaces that would anchor an APA community's group identity in the ethnic enclave, as it had been decades before, and revive the neighborhood's financial viability. Gentrification scholars such as Arlene Davila and Justin Maher illustrate how the bringing in of "Art" to urban neighborhoods increases the cool factor, which invites the tangible capital that enables imposed redevelopment.²²² Against this displacement, TNP's creation of APA art and an API scene uses these systems of value production to demonstrate how Asian American

²²² Arlene Davila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); Justin Thomas Maher, "The Capital of Diversity: Difference, Development, and Placemaking in Washington, D.C.," (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2011).

ownership of the space is itself valuable. As part of the May 15, 2012 TNC, Kato-Kiriyama and TNP honored Bill Watanabe of the Little Tokyo Service Center, TNP's fiscal receiver. In his recognition speech, Watanabe referred to TNP as "grassroots community development" that "helped make Little Tokyo a little more hip." His reference to TNP as grassroots community development recognizes that, though its methods may mirror top-down urban planning, such as bringing in the tourist money of non-residents, TNP makes sure that long-standing businesses and organizations have a voice in how the community will develop and for whom. TNP thus serves an anti-gentrification agenda by facilitating the circulation of capital throughout Little Tokyo, finding ways to live in capitalism without mastering it and recalling the spirit of independence that has animated the texts of this chapter.



Figure 7. The Aratani Courtyard, which hosts 100 to 200 attendees for any given TNC. *Photograph taken by author.*

These community preservation efforts can be read as adapting the legacy of APA activism that has sustained Little Tokyo to the structural realignment of Los Angeles as a global city. Bounded by Los Angeles Street, Alameda Street, 1st Street, and 3rd Street, Little Tokyo is one of the remaining three Japantowns in the U.S., and remains even as L.A. continues to invite redevelopment throughout its Downtown. The Little Tokyo Service Center was founded in 1979 as a multipurpose social service center as an outgrowth of the 1960s and '70s Yellow Power activism in L.A. that fought the city's attempts to erase its

disavowed history of racial segregation through transnational investments.²²³ Laura Pulido, James Kyung-Jin Lee, and Scott Kurashige have noted that Little Tokyo's survival throughout L.A.'s entrée into global capitalism is due to APA organizing like that of LTSC's founding – organizing that also became the material basis of a politicized, panethnic APA identity in the region.²²⁴ Kato-Kiryama explained that her desire to organize TNP came from her earlier work with ACTION! – an acronym for a youth organization, Asian Pacific Islander Collective To Initiate Opportunities Now! This led to the first Art Attack at the Search to Involve Pilipino Americans (SIPA), the community center at the nation's largest non-profit organization serving Filipino American communities, in what is now recognized as Historic Filipinotown.²²⁵ Johneric Concordia narrated his involvement with TNP, which began during TNP's fourth season, by beginning with his community organizing through East/West Community Partnership (now People's Community Organization for Reform and Empowerment). East/West Community Partnership was a project of the Asian American Drug Abuse Program – itself a formal outgrowth of 1970s Asian American organizing²²⁶ – that aimed to facilitate youth community organizers' ability to identify and define issues taking place in their communities, but also connected these organizers to each other in fostering solidarity. As seen in Kato-Kiryama and Concordia's inroads to TNP, their arts

²²³ This struggle is detailed in Jim H. Matsuoka's "Little Tokyo, Searching the Past and Analyzing the Future," in *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1971), 322-334.

²²⁴ Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (University of California Press, 2006); James Kyung-jin Lee, *Urban Triage: Race and the Fictions of Multiculturalism* (U. of Minnesota P., 2004); Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

²²⁵ Search to Involve Pilipino Americans: Health, Economic & Social Service Programs that Enhance Our Quality of Life, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.sipa-online.org/>.

²²⁶ AADAP is the first organization to address drug abuse in Asian American communities with its establishment in 1972. For more, see "AADAP: People Need People," Asian American Drug Abuse Prevention, Inc., accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.aadapinc.org/>.

activism emerges from their self-conscious and institutional affiliations with genealogies of L.A.'s Asian American left.

More than a space for art-making, TNP energizes an APA subject through this legacy of APA social movement organizing. Kato-Kiriyama's affiliation with Asian American Studies is evocative of TNP's connection to the concurrent formalization of a national APA community. Kato-Kiriyama described ACTION! as:

[...] a group that had gotten together for ED – educational discussions. We would read MLM – we would read Marx, Lenin, Maoist articles, we would discuss things like that. We would meet a lot. We were very inspired by the *Gidra* collective and learning about the Asian American movement – definitely an article that we introduced to people if they hadn't read it already was Glenn Omatsu's "The Four Prisons."

ACTION's educational discussions, a term that references 1960s and '70s countercultural pedagogies, draw from the intellectual history of APA social movements.²²⁷ As seen in Kato-Kiriyama's citation of Omatsu's essay on Yellow Power, a staple in *Introduction to Asian American Studies* courses, ACTION!'s inspiration by the Marxist intellectual traditions that enlivened Yellow Power movement culture speaks of the field's continued relevance in a politicizing APA culture. She also took inspiration from *Gidra*, the 1969 to 1974 collective founded by five Asian American students at the University of California, Los Angeles that published key writings of the Yellow Power student movement – also suggesting the

²²⁷ Kato-Kiriyama's narrative of politicization included actually meeting Glenn Omatsu, who still teaches Asian American Studies around the Southern California region, leads a variety of college programs, and continues his career of activism that began with the San Francisco State student strike of 1968.

symbolic power of student politicization for youth organizing.²²⁸ ACTION's extracurricular use of Asian Americanist critique signals the dialectic of accessibility and canonicity that has animated not only Asian American Studies' entry into the university, but also spaces like TNP that narrate themselves in relation to the field's knowledge production and social engagement.

However, Kato-Kiriyama's reflection on her organizing experience also suggests how institutionalization has come to resemble the purpose of dissent. Kato-Kiriyama drew inspiration for TNP from her experiences as a student organizer at California State University, Fullerton, where she participated in the student movement to found an Asian American Studies program. She shared, "we had it pretty easy at that point, because of all the work that had been done decades before, right, at UCLA and SF State? We were part of the growing consciousness that led us to a school that was aware that there was this thing called Ethnic Studies and Asian American Studies." Kato-Kiriyama's comment suggests that, by that point in the mid-90s, the mainstreaming of Asian American Studies, both in the proliferation of its critique and its name-recognition, enabled the relative ease with which the campus would establish the program. Kato-Kiriyama explained that the student organizing for Asian American Studies coincided with that of faculty organizers, who were unaware of the explicit student interest. The growing consciousness that Kato-Kiriyama references thus took place in two separate forms: the faculty's administrative assessment, and the students' popular demand – of a consciousness posed from above through formal education versus one that emerges from below that finds its refinement through intellectual practice. Though

²²⁸ More about the history of *Gidra* is available at Yoshimi Kawashima, "GIDRA: The Voice of the Asian American Movement," *Discover Nikkei*, January 12, 2012, <http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/journal/2012/1/12/gidra/>.

Kato-Kiriyama explained that this gap resolved itself in the CSUF case, this disconnect between the faculty and students reflects how these relationships to Asian American Studies are shaped by their positions' relation to cultural capital within the university system, suggesting the ethical crisis that currently animates debates about Asian American Studies' institutionalization against the demands of its activist roots – a dilemma about the field and its critique that has recurred throughout the texts of this dissertation.²²⁹

The formalization of Asian American Studies also coincides with similar instances of institutionalization within Asian American organizing, as suggested in Little Tokyo by the mobilization of the strategies of gentrification as activism, shaped by Asian American racial formation and property's relationship to capital. Lee illustrates how Little Tokyo became packaged as a tourist destination and a commercial investment at the behest of APA community organizations just as Asian Americans ascended racialized material hierarchies as model minorities and the Third World Left declined. Evidenced by the high-rise condominiums that continue to rise around the neighborhood's perimeter, such as the Sakura Crossing Apartments by Equity Residential and the Little Tokyo Lofts, and leasing advertisements by regional real estate investment brokers like the Kaufman Commercial Group and multinational agencies like Kuwata Associates, the neighborhood's ethnic packaging for cosmopolitan appeal has facilitated the city's real estate-based gentrification. Little Tokyo's multiracial history, including its transformation into the African American enclave Bronzeville, a segregated neighborhood predominantly of westward migrants who settled into abandoned buildings to avoid racist covenants during Japanese American

²²⁹ Indeed, when I first sat down with Kato-Kiriyama, Okamoto, and Miura, they each expressed their own analysis about the strained relationship between Asian American Studies and APA spaces like TNP. This shared hesitation suggests a public awareness of Asian American Studies' institutionalization and its academic capitalism.

internment, goes forgotten. In this regard, Scott Kurashige details the episodes of Black/Japanese American cooperation emblemized by the coexistence of Bronzeville and Little Tokyo upon Japanese Americans' return to Los Angeles – a proximity that was not collapsed by Black/Asian antagonisms, but by city planners' tactics of demolition and eviction.²³⁰ As suggested in the confluence of how local community organizers and public art and community history projects sponsored by the Los Angeles Redevelopment Agency (CRA/LA) narrate Little Tokyo as a specifically Japanese American-cum-Asian American place, a discursive strategy of identity recognition draws attention from the spatial politics of racial segregation.²³¹ TNP and other Little Tokyo organizations' use of these discourses of home-making and historic preservation for their affective and symbolic leverage to avoid being erased by the city's redevelopment can be understood as participating in the dispossession of other groups seen less favorably by city management. As addressed throughout this dissertation, this strategy enacts racial hierarchy through Asian American claims to visibility in cultural hierarchy.

This issue of packaging community also registers in TNP's self-conscious relationship to professionalization. Johneric Concordia, in describing "Art + Community," explained: "You've got Asian kids from the Midwest who've never dealt with other Asians – who decided to come to L.A. to hit it big: we are their starting point." In Concordia's account, Asian Americans begin their path to fame at a TNC, a motivation expressed

²³⁰ Kurashige. See in particular "Bronzeville and Little Tokyo."

²³¹ A prime example of this narration is evident in the November 2005 *Little Tokyo Planning & Design Guidelines*, co-authored by the Little Tokyo Community Council (LTCC) and the Mayor's Little Tokyo Community Development Advisory Committee. The Joint Task Force narrates the neighborhood's multiracial history as a microcosm of Los Angeles specifically and the U.S. generally until marking Japanese American settlement in 1904; upon Japanese American internment, Little Tokyo "became a virtual ghost [town] in a matter of months" (8), occluding this sharing of space entirely. The document is available online at http://www.crala.org/internet-site/Projects/Little_Tokyo/upload/LTCDACApprovedGuidelines.pdf.

repeatedly by many open mic performers. Concordia makes evident that the conjunction of “Art + Community” is imagined not only in relation to racial identity, but also in relation to L.A.’s entertainment industries. However, TNP offers more than the professionalization of “hitting it big”; Concordia suggests that it also socializes these newcomers by making art together as a starting point for bringing them into TNP’s scene. TNP maintains its staff on a volunteer basis and avoids formalizing as a 501c3. As Kato-Kiriyama explained, TNP seeks to maintain the autonomy of its operations through this anti-institutional identity. As she expressed to the crowd throughout the 2013 season, which has since become part of TNP’s mythology, Kato-Kiriyama turned down a lucrative sponsorship from McDonald’s in order to ensure that TNP participants, organizers, and supporters would maintain control of how and why the space operates. TNP thus negotiates its legitimacy through a circumvention of capitalist norms to buttress the organization’s underground ethos while also serving as a recruitment base for community formation.

Even as TNP maintains an anti-institutional identity, its sponsorship by the Little Tokyo Service Center reflects the professionalization of Yellow Power, the transformation of activism into a career and the incorporation of its critical energies through institutionalization. Remarking on TNP’s development over his years of involvement, Concordia added, “... it’s a stewardship now [...] a crazy responsibility – because now I’m a ‘sir.’” The language of “sir” engages in honorific scripts of respectability. His use of “stewardship” designates a gatekeeping function that, in his account, TNP now performs. This awareness of stewardship is precisely the concern at the heart of Kato-Kiriyama’s refusal of McDonald’s support, as TNP’s visibility has given the organization authority in determining the future directions of the local APA community. As TNP co-curator Sean

Miura claimed in opening the series' fifteenth season in April 2013, TNP is one of the oldest APA performance venues.²³² This longevity has become a selling point for the space, which translates the organization's survival into a status marker – a laudable accumulation of symbolic capital akin to TNC's rising recognition as one of Downtown L.A.'s best-rated free nightlife sites on the user-generated review site Yelp! The utility of the space becomes measured by its ability to garner fame and attention, a facilitation of capital which runs counter to the anticapitalist politic that motivated the APA organizing against gentrification that TNP cites as its genealogical predecessors. TNP exists in the contradiction of seeking independence from the official forms of recognition that threaten its intervention, while understanding that its intervention has already been assimilated into the marketplace – an awareness of the dynamics of race-conscious organizing and “Art” that have organize this chapter.

TNP's praxis of “Art + Community” suggests how the organization uses this visibility within consumer capitalism as part of its discursive politic. Kato-Kiryama explained that TNP's choice of partners and affiliates reflects “Art + Community”:

Those things [like partnerships] guide our values; our values then guide our choices and our actions. So then, if we value building relationships with people, which is how I have been taught for many years to define community organizing, then of course we're going to want to find good people in every sector.

In Kato-Kiryama's formulation, political orientations to “community” can exceed those to wealth and accumulation. “Community” names an emotional investment, one that cannot be measured financially but comparatively values social capital over financial capital. In line

²³² I was asked by TNP to verify this, and I could not find any still-extant organizations doing the same work for a longer period of time.

with TNP's definition of community organizing, TNC gives time between performers' sets for groups and organizations to speak to the audience. By the 2013 season, this had become an established segment, the Community Spotlight. In the 2012 season, this segment actively became a venue for Chinatown Community for Equitable Development (CCED), an anti-gentrification league out of L.A.'s nearby Chinatown. The CCED educated about the potential harms of a proposed Wal-Mart, and generated support for their efforts by critiquing Wal-Mart's questionable labor practices and impact on locally owned business.²³³ TNP's solidarity with Chinatown focuses on how consumer agency can maintain the community's spatial autonomy at the subjective level. These organizations explain this distinction through community discourse, which uses social capital to imbue designated forms of financial exchange with community discourse's emotive register. In other words, community discourse makes social networks feel more valuable, regulating the capitalist subjectivity of those hailed by the discourse through their emotional ties to the idea of community and mobilizing affect beyond the middlebrow subject management addressed most specifically in Chapter 1.

The CCED's rhetorical practices of community and autonomy, even in light of and because of their material inefficacy, register the contemporary urgency of APA political subjectivity. This contradiction is explained by James Lee as the specifically Asian American choice between thriving in capitalism or striving for minoritized solidarities, given Asian Americans' middled place in the political economy.²³⁴ Literalizing the operations of "Art + Community," this reading has examined TNP's connection to discourses of capital,

²³³ More information available at <http://www.ccedla.org/>. Indeed, as their feed shows, the Wal-Mart had its grand opening on September 19, 2013. The CCED continues on as a labor rights organization, though their activity has appeared to have died down after this protest campaign.

²³⁴ Lee, 82-3.

but also how TNP leverages those connections for purposes beyond accumulation – one iteration of the independence imagined by indie rock. Indeed, this section has dwelled in the multiple layers of Asian American choice that surround TNP in the legitimized status of APA organizing, the local history projects that surround it, and the pro-capital politics that animate dissent currently.

Something that is Energetic: “Art + Community” as Affective Praxis

Inhabiting the tension of what Roderick Ferguson refers to as the conflict between “vernacular insurgency” and “institutional desires,”²³⁵ TNP necessarily routes performances of APA community through extant cultural hierarchies, using discourses of “Art” and “activism” for their recognition value. This reading thus far has interrogated how TNP’s function as a space reflects the coinciding and intersecting processes of institutionalization that place critical agendas, such as an anti-gentrification politic, in relation with capital. However, Kato-Kiriyama seemed aware of this in our conversation, as she rebuffed a claim that a skilled performer is all that is needed for social change: “But I think it’s also beyond talent, right? Because I think that our intention is bringing out somewhat of a rawness, you know, realness and an honesty. We beg of that in the space, and it’s something that is energetic more than explicitly read on a website.” Kato-Kiriyama evokes her experiential understanding of what Oliver Wang and *CompilAsian* have identified as the dissembling contradiction of “talent” as a racialized category that at once appears to be universal by posing “rawness” and “realness” as alternatives to “talent.” In this section, I turn to TNP’s practices and Kato-Kiriyama’s motivations behind them in order to read TNP as a theory of

²³⁵ These phrases are taken from his wonderful commentary on my presentation at the Cultural Studies Association 2013 meeting in Chicago, Illinois. For more, see Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

the affective power of art-making. I argue that TNP can be understood as using the resources of capital to imagine and proliferate a felt tendency toward independence conducive to sustaining an APA community.

Furthering her counterposing of “talent” and “rawness,” Kato-Kiriyama contrasted the indie rock ensemble, Andrew Figueroa Chiang and the Blazing Rays of the Sun, against the freestyling hip hop artist SKIM – both of whom are crowd favorites and regular featured TNP performers. With his skinny ties and fashionable suits, Andrew Figueroa Chiang has become known for his polished performance, quirky demeanor, and tight arrangements; SKIM, on the other hand, has become known for her unpredictable sets, extemporaneous flows, and jam session approach. As Kato-Kiriyama explained, “talent,” expressed by Figueroa Chiang, is the ability to replicate an audience’s aesthetic expectations; this exists in a range to “rawness,” as illustrated by SKIM, who appears to access subjectivity through her self-conscious refusal of the constructedness of staged performances. “Talent” reveals its dissembling dimensions, while “rawness” offers an immediacy that can disassemble the machinations of aesthetic expectation; “talent” can offer Asian Americans inclusion through intangible capital, while “rawness” can denaturalize that same capital. TNP strategically plays with how Asian Americans are muddled within the racialization of “talent” and makes evident the democratic possibilities of rawness – a praxis of aesthetic independence that recalls A Grain of Sand’s critique that takes advantage of “Art’s” visibility through a negotiation of cultural and symbolic capital.

The rhetorical practices of community and autonomy illustrated in TNP’s aesthetic practices and political campaigns suggest how TNP’s community organizing can represent a self-reflexive development of taste. Pierre Bourdieu argues that taste is based in subjective

preferences that indicate how taste-making institutions interpellate consumers as subjects of intangible capital. As such, taste represents how subjects embody the cultural hierarchies of value that maintain commodity production.²³⁶ TNP works through the same value designations of taste in creating a public performance space that uses “Art” as a legitimizing producer of “community,” incorporating its artist selection and community partnerships into its agenda of awareness building and audience education. Both the 2011 and 2012 seasons involved a women-centered show, an LGBTQ show, and a Filipino American show, each of which spotlighted non-profit organizations and cultural organizations; the 2012 season included collaborations with the L.A. branch of South Asians for Justice and the Orange County-based, Vietnamese American-centered performance group, Common Ground. TNC also features performances by locally based race-conscious arts programs of varying levels of recognition and acclaim.²³⁷ TNP shared the stage with these organizations, inviting them to the Aratani Courtyard to promote their programs with TNP’s regular audience. Through these collaborations, TNP spends its status’ symbolic capital to highlight their invited “talent’s” cultural capital in redistributing its intangible capital, creating the energetic quality of the space named by Kato-Kiriyama – an exchange of value that does not guarantee profit but could nonetheless be an investment in a political program. TNP’s community organizing through “Art + Community” suggests how capital can be reappropriated to create alternative taste – an embodiment of capital that directs its subject away from commodity production and toward community development.

²³⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

²³⁷ These organizations include Cold Tofu, self-described as “the nation’s premier Asian American comedy improv and sketch group”; forWord, a spoken word arts collective; and the youth program members of Sessions LA, a music writing and DJing community development program. TNC hosts featurettes for shows by Visual Communications and the East/West Players, as well as teaser previews for the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival and FilAmARTS for their annual festivals.

This formulation of APA empowerment through consumerism is captured by LT Roots, a youth-based volunteer organization with the mission of marketing Little Tokyo to a college-aged and young professional clientele. Through pub crawls, restaurant hangouts, and festival attendance, which are featured TNC announcements because of many younger staff's membership in LT Roots, the organization invites monied non-residents to directed forms of capitalist exchange, but these transactions are spoken of as community building – not just through the social capital of networking, but the affective resonance of belonging. This paradox between LT Roots' announced politics and its material practices indexes the gap between the radical socialist politics and subjectivities of Yellow Power against the pro-capitalist politics of APA panethnicity within neoliberalism. However, this paradox resolves itself, as attending to the energetic dynamics of "Art + Community" allows for a vision of APA community organizing that does not yearn to return to Yellow Power or deny the ubiquity of capital. As Concordia shared, his dedication to TNP comes from "a debt of gratitude for what the community has done for me." This language of debt, while suggestive of the neoliberal objectification of personhood, is also the language that marks belonging. Concordia's recognition of impact moves beyond humanitarian charity models of affective debt by refusing neoliberalism's fictions of the self-made subject; his debt of gratitude is not a price to be paid, but functions like TNP itself: it registers the prevailing conditions of capital to then turn against that will to accumulate.

TNP's arts activism can be best understood as this development of an alternative taste culture that sustains a critical subjectivity through and in the spirit of APA cultural production. True, much of TNP's analysis begins with class-privileged claims about Asian American invisibility as injury – both generally, such as when invited performers speak of

identity crises, or in specific instances, such as in the latter half of the 2012 season when TNP garnered support for nation-wide campaigns against the racist casting practices of La Jolla Playhouse's *The Nightingale*.²³⁸ However, beginning with the class-mobile Asian American subject, TNP seeks to incite moments of political consciousness through "Art," such as in its anti-corporate gentrification agenda; its inclusion of more left-leaning organization such as The Association of Filipinas, Feminists Fighting Imperialism, Re-feudalization, and Marginalization (AF3IRM); and its featuring of work related to social justice organizing, such as *Freedom Harvest*, a play by The Coalition to End Sheriff Violence in Los Angeles Jails. As made evident in the October 1, 2013 "J-Town Show," during which each performer and speaker, including Miyamoto of A Grain of Sand, narrated their personal connection to the neighborhood, the process of finding a political connection can be as pedagogical as its content. Indeed, in my conversations with Kato-Kiriyama, Concordia, and Miura, they narrated how they each came into social justice orientation – and all of their stories originated in recognitions of Asian Americans' parallel minoritizations, which they have sought to proliferate as a pedagogy through TNC's programs.²³⁹ By working through commonly held ideas of Asian American injury to engage its audience beyond being aggrieved by model minority status, TNP can be understood as resignifying

²³⁸ For more on this event, see Ken Choy, "La Jolla's 'Nightingale' Doesn't Sing and Apology Doesn't Sway Many APIAs," *Hyphen Magazine*, July 26, 2012, <http://www.hyphenmagazine.com/blog/archive/2012/07/la-jollas-nightingale-doesnt-sing-and-apology-doesnt-sway-many-apias>.

²³⁹ Kato-Kiriyama identified California Proposition 187 (1994), which sought to prohibit undocumented immigrants access to state services, as the historical context her involvement in community organizing. Concordia likewise noted the influence of the 1992 Los Angeles riots on his politicization specifically and the direction of Los Angeles-based APA organizing generally. Both of these moments representation flashpoint moments in the APA '90s, revivifying APA cultural politics with cross-racial solidarity. Kato-Kiriyama's involvement through the arts has created continuities between these critical energies and the 21st century, as TNP's succeeding curator Scott Miura remembers first encountering her during a Japanese American community pilgrimage to the Manzanar National Historic Site; as he recounts, during this event, she and a colleague performed a dramatic piece that connected the civil rights violations of 9/11/2001 to those of Japanese American internment.

what the hurt of racism means in the fostering of a political independence, offering an alternative strategy to the melancholic cultural politics of Chapter 2.

It is this way of contesting neoliberal enclosure, both the city's continuous gentrification and Asian American model minority subjectivity, through the register of affect that TNP brings to relief the contradictions of Asian American structural and cultural racialization outside of racial grievance. For example, the August 7, 2012 show, "Envisioning Ourselves," was a prescheduled collaboration with South Asians for Justice that took place after the August 5, 2012 shooting at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin in Oak Creek. This tragedy was referenced by several of the performers before their sets. As Ami Patel of South Asians for Justice explained in her 2012 "Keep TN Free!" testimonial, she felt "a need for our community to pick up the pieces and be unashamed as our radically authentic selves."²⁴⁰ The folks at TNP understood our needs, and working together, we infused the evening with a sense of collective healing." Taking up the idea of rawness referenced in Kato-Kiryama's binary of "talent" and "rawness," the show inaugurated a working-through of group trauma through the transparency accorded to artistic expression. Patel's assessment of healing, in distinction from the melancholic masculinities of the previous chapter, is not about a resolution of the traumatized subject to the productivity of capital or the nation-state. Through memorializations, expressions of rage and grief, and critiques of post-9/11/2001 racialization, the show provided a group venue for debriefing that did not linger in decadent egocentrism and did not require iterations of U.S. exceptionalism. During the show, Kato-Kiryama, representing Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress, shared a statement from the

²⁴⁰ "Keep TN Free!" is TNP's annual month-long fundraising drive. In the 2012 season, TNP asked staff, volunteers, performers, and audience members to provide testimonials as to why the organization is a worthwhile cause; I also provided some words as to my analysis of the space and its enactments of Art + Community. The 2012 materials have been archived at <http://keptnfree.wordpress.com/>.

organization: “Japanese Americans understand what it means to be the ... targets of prejudice.” She urged the crowd to think of “solidarity work as social justice work.” Kato-Kiryama’s statement reminds of historical moments of loss and violence that give “race” meaning beyond a diversity politic. Entering through the affective registers of trauma understand racism outside of the past tense, the meaning of TNP and South Asians for Justice’s analysis articulates enduring sources of minoritization just as the sensation of the event creates the grounds for a panethnic identity based in critical energy. Outside of symbols and moralisms about the logical basis for an APA panethnic identity, one that would inevitably recapitulate the oversimplifications and elisions of diversity politics, this critical energy feels like the basis of an independence from white supremacist culture.

Though the performances and causes promoted at these TNCs may unevenly express an Asian Americanist critique that seeks a place outside of its capital, TNP disassembles the dissemblances of capital and creates a critical solidarity apart from its articulable dimensions. Reflecting on why she and the rest of TNP did not cancel their show on Tuesday, 9/11/2001, Kato-Kiryama shared to the audience: “I am reminded ... as we come together that we react and we fight by our power to create ... And we fight by our power to build ... What better way to build than to come together?” Indeed, Kato-Kiryama in interviews and in speaking to the TNC audience argues for the political need to create alongside critique. Working through arts activism, the political process of building and cultural process of aesthetic creation inaugurates a sociality that recalls the precarity of racial difference and refuses the palliatives of diversity; it leaves in its place is a restorative sense of what a social justice community might resemble.

This reading of TNP began by interrogating the conditions of its emergence, such as the formalization of the Yellow Power critique that inspires it, institutionalization of Asian American Studies, and the legitimization of “Art” and “community” that connect aesthetic creation to top-down redevelopment discourses. It has also focused on those moments when TNP proliferates awareness of social justice causes as an engaged pedagogy that works through its middled place in L.A.’s cultural scene to continue the genealogy of APA social movements that inspired its founding. However, by examining its intangible yet sensible operations as a space, this analysis of TNP has attempted to describe how it activates an independence conducive to social justice agendas beyond the song lyrics and spoken words on stage. This energetic dynamic is something that Kato-Kiryama recognizes, as she regularly encouraged people to keep coming back to the embodied space to experience a feeling of community that politically pushes against the coercive use of emotions that have been addressed throughout this dissertation, as well as their fictions about an equality that has yet to be achieved.

Identify with the Struggles of Others: Indie Towards an APA Independence

Given multiple factors that the musicians and activists of this chapter have discussed, including the influence of user-generated digital media on the music marketplace, the necessity of financial patronage to make art, and the dissolution of art collectives amidst the privatization of space in the neoliberal metropolis, Asian American indie rock continues, while APA independence might not. Grace Wang’s as-of-yet unpublished interview-heavy scholarship with the Asian American YouTube Generation expresses the apolitical attitude and colorblind aspirations with which these singers approach their artistry; meanwhile, the independently produced panethnic compilation album and its race-conscious collaborative

labor may have seen its twilight alongside the technology of the CD itself. Asian Americans may still remain symbolically alien as indie and rockers, but Asian Americans' relationship to the material effects of art-making discourses is evident; for example, discussions of gentrification have noted that displacing populations are not only white, but also class-mobile Asian Americans. TNP is one of several APA arts spaces and open mics across the U.S., now joined in a network not only with Common Ground in Orange County, but also Sunday Jump in L.A.'s Historic Filipinotown, GoRAMA! in Oakland, California, and the now-defunct local operation, Sulu D.C., among others. TNP has changed its mission slightly in its current transition period, as Kato-Kiryama and Concordia have both left their positions in the organization while still remaining involved. Meanwhile, through prominent artists like Karen O of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and emerging artists like TNP darlings Run River North, who as of 2013 have been signed with the Nettwerk Music Group and are currently on a national tour, Asian Americans continue to make room for diversity in the indie image – just not necessarily with the productive politics addressed in this chapter.

Throughout, the Asian American and APA musicians of this chapter have confronted how “talent” has been racialized through a white/Black lens through model minority projects, or strategic negotiations of the cultural and symbolic capital associated with model minority racialization to fit the expected image of indie. This chapter has critiqued the dissembling independence of the indie image by identifying, against its pretenses of authenticity and freedom, its formation through the credentials associated with indie rock's mythologies of “Art” and their attendant status. Indeed, this chapter has traced the disciplining function of taste, while also expanding on critical redeployments and resignifications of taste and its relationship to extant hierarchies. This chapter has also analyzed how, in the same way that

the disarticulation of “Art” from image depends on projecting the aesthetic as universal, identity and romance have served as placeholders for an authenticity that exceeds or disrupts the imposed limitations of Asian American racialization. Such a classed dynamic appears around *CompilAsian* in its artists’ efforts to disarticulate their “Art” from Asian American racialization, relying on the model minority myth’s implicit capital to garner distinction from their Asian American peers. Dave Boyle’s *Surrogate Valentine* and *Daylight Savings* maneuver the visibility accorded to the indie image and to APA panethnic culture to fashion their entry into genealogies of rock notoriety. However, in attempt to access a “post-racial” universality by narrating Goh’s career and romantic hardships, both films illustrate the underwriting role of race within intersections of class and sexuality. This dissembling disaggregation of race from class also appears in the material and discursive contexts that surround TNP’s place in neoliberal L.A. and the ascendancy of multigenerational East Asian Americans in diversity and its cultural marketplace. As I have suggested throughout, these variegated plays with class identity and capital are underwritten by the white/anti-Black hierarchies that have shaped indie rock’s genealogies and their transformation into contemporary discourses of gentrification.

Against the complete association of Asian Americans with capital through the model minority image, this chapter has also considered how their fraught relationship to indie conventions can imagined an independence that facilitates the entry of an APA politic into art-making. In *CompilAsian*, this begins by reframing race-consciousness not as ancillary to being Asian American specifically and a person of color generally in indie’s cultural forms, but central to the privileged category of personhood. For Boyle’s films, this imagining of independence takes place through the pulling apart of marketability, “talent,” “Art,” and skill

– the fourth category representing that which is not entirely assimilable to status and image. Rather than imagining a theoretical existence outside of capitalism as neoliberal arrangements materially erase communities in the process, TNP’s resistive potential enlivens the affective spirit of indie in spite of the actual impossibility of independence from capital. This stance takes advantage of the multiculturalist dictums of “coming to voice” without concealing structural manipulations of class and capital. Such independence from the white supremacist culture of capital lends itself to an APA politic, as the late Chris Iijima of *A Grain of Sand* explains in “Pontifications on the Distinction between Grains of Sand and Yellow Pearls” (2001) that Asian American identity:

[...] was created as an organizing tool to mobilize Asians to participate in the progressive movements of times. It was as much a mechanism to identify with one another as to identify with the struggles of others whether it was African Americans or Asians overseas, and that it was less a marker of what one was and more a marker of what one believed. That it has now become synonymous with ‘pride in one’s ethnic heritage’ is a complete evisceration of what it was originally and what it was meant to be.²⁴¹

Iijima’s stance on APA identity makes evident that panethnic APA identity is not another consumable of the marketplace of identities and cultures, even as its exact definitional contours are not easily enunciable. Such a panethnic APA identity as the basis of mobilization requires a vigilant affiliation with other minoritized groups, refusing to be a given category, but a matter of beliefs and values. It is, in fact, a struggle for independence that begins with the APA subject.

²⁴¹ Steven G. Louie and Glenn K. Omatsu, eds. *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* (UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, 2001), 7.

It is my contention that this political and affective orientation toward independence is central to the unlinking of APA panethnicity from diversity politics. The difference in register is evident in Kollaboration, a non-profit organization that identifies itself as a national movement. The organization and its regional iterations deserve much fuller attention for their agentic negotiations of capital, but, by way of conclusion, I want to touch briefly on what sets the APA acts of collaborative creative labor in this chapter apart from Kollaboration, which has become arguably one of the most visible vehicles of Asian American representation in music. Since its founding in 2000 by comedian Paul “PK” Kim in Los Angeles, Kollaboration has developed a network of panethnic organizations across the U.S. and Canada to “discover, empower, and connect AAPI artists and leaders to promote diversity representation in media.” Now based in 13 cities as of 2014, including Washington D.C., Kollaboration brings together Asian American performers in pop music and dance for annual regional talent competitions and showcases. As the Kollaboration website explains: “With increasing recognition of the Kollaboration name, Kollaboration is now expanding into marketing and artist management ventures in both the Asian American market as well as the general market.”²⁴² Kollaboration’s statement about its growth and impact makes evident that this showcasing has aimed to acquire Asian Americans equal valuation in capital while also promoting the Kollaboration brand as a business venture.

To be clear, I do not begrudge the organizers of Kollaboration or the artists who find it a useful platform; I have attended most all of the Kollaboration DC shows and find them quite entertaining. Yet, unlike the plays within art discourse of this chapter’s sites, Kollaboration makes very clear its primary investment in market value. For the

²⁴² “About,” Kollaboration: Empowerment Through Entertainment, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://kollaboration.org/>.

Kollaboration DC show, local amateur performers audition for a spot in the talent competition, while more established acts are invited for exhibition performances; celebrities from in the national Asian American community are invited to act as judges and MC, while an Asian pop outfit serves as the evening's headliner. On the evening of the annual event, a large audience is offered merchandise from corporate and local sponsors. The winner of the talent competition wins a cash prize and a professionally produced YouTube video to showcase their talent in hopes of launching their career, and well-received amateur acts, usually high school or college students, are kept in mind for a gig when Kollaboration DC is asked to attend a local event or cultural festival. All of this is fine, and, as a graduate student, I am sympathetic to anyone who has an undying desire to create. However, the mainstream visibility and market production to which Kollaboration aspires cannot become the only goal of arts activism. The headquarters of Kollaboration explains its loftier goals:

Kollaboration's current mission and mantra is, "Empowerment through Entertainment." In addition to encouraging the diverse talents of API youth, Kollaboration seeks to empower (1) API youth by providing them with a creative outlet and leadership training that serves as an alternative to gang-activity and delinquency for those at-risk, (2) API families by offering a platform for communication that bridges the gap between 1st generation parents and latter generation youth and (3) the API community at large, by raising awareness for other critical community issues and NGOs.

In Kollaboration's vision, entertainment-based labor, and its aspirations for mainstream compensation via U.S. mythologies of fame and prestige, can rehabilitate pathologized group behaviors: specifically, at-risk activity, intergenerational conflict, and a lack of group

identity.²⁴³ Kollaboration's core philosophy of empowerment through entertainment envisions Asian Americans' inclusion within culture industries as transforming their racially denigrated status through their productive laborers. The funneling of Asian American talent into the culture industry instrumentalizes APA identity for profitability, as the panethnic banner under which it flies yearns for capitalism to be colorblind for Asian Americans while normalizing the differential valuations that sustain capitalism. The danger of Kollaboration's wish for incorporation is that the language of social justice comes to refer to the extraction of labor from Asian American bodies and the exchange of capital from Asian American communities; we must want something more than to be the "diverse" model minorities of all facets of neoliberalism.

In our conversation, both Miura and Kato-Kiriyama agreed that TNP was not and will not become Kollaboration, which they understood in terms of its scale and its production value. While they recognized Kollaboration's intentions of mainstream publicity – Asian Americans breaking into the racialized constraints of "talent" – both agreed that the intimacy and regularity of TNC, which I have suggested are key to its counterpublic formation, could not be sustained by Kollaboration. In effect, they posed Kollaboration and TNP as two contrasting understandings of "art" and "community." Kollaboration, with its focus on guiding Asian Americans into the entertainment industry, enfigures "community" as a market and "art" as a form of recognition measured through its salability. TNP, which brings APAs into local communities and engages in public education as affective ownership, takes "art" as a legitimizing mode that facilitates the development of alternative values. The difference

²⁴³ There is much to be said here, about the particularities of the Asian American second generation within a global city that gave birth to the original Kollaboration in LA, as well as the model minority parenting practices that were specifically named in the previous chapter.

between these two organizations exists in the tension between institutionality and intentionality – how “art” ultimately serves “community.” In “Making Space, Making Noise: Locating Asian American Resistance in the Festival,” Deborah Wong works through many of the same preoccupations of this chapter by reading the 16th Annual Asian Pacific American Heritage Festival in New York City. Though she recognizes the critical positions taken by individual performers, she muses: “a pan-Asian American community is something that can only exist fleetingly, in the context of the one-day annual festival.”²⁴⁴ She understands critique as a layer underneath the multicultural veneer of the festival itself to argue that panethnic APA identity is as ephemeral as the moment of listening itself. However, as the sites examined in this chapter have suggested, the development of an alternative taste based in panethnic culture could sustain this panethnic identity beyond the temporality of the single event. This indicates the capacity for “Art” not only to mark a liberal visibility within institutional logics, but also to create new visibilities beyond the given.

“Art + Community” allows for a vision of APA community organizing that does not yearn to return to the era of Yellow Power, but also opens up APA identification beyond a celebration of ethnic difference for cultural consumption. As I have argued, the image of indie is one based on racialized projections of blackness that buttresses whiteness through the languages of art-making and freedom. Instead of Asian American inclusion in a mass public that participates in this racialization, these projects of independence can develop an APA counterpublic that acknowledges the need to work through what inclusion and incorporation may dissemble in ways that Yellow Power could not presage – but only if attuned to the appropriations of blackness that historically have been a subtext for seeking the alternative.

²⁴⁴ Wong, 131.

This attention to relational racialization in Asian American indie rock is both specific to indie rock as a form, but also has implications for APA political subjectivity between whiteness and anti-blackness. As these artists, organizers, and activists have made apparent, APA panethnic culture offers a blueprint for APAs to negotiate our variegated middlings toward a vision in which “Art + Community” equals a social justice agenda.

Conclusion :: Disassembling Diversity

By reading texts, *Disassembling Diversities* has surveyed interconnected contemporary movements for representation in entertainment, media, and the arts. Centralizing vibrant APA activism across genre, medium, and form, *Disassembling Diversities* has focused on three forms that it understands as middlebrow – ones paradoxically egalitarian in their material accessibility but exclusive in intellectual content. In doing so, this project has interrogated the collusion of the racial visibilities created through APA arts activism with a classed diversity politics of the post-9/11/2001 moment: Asian Americans have seen a limited and conditional inclusion in cultural representation and the felt boundaries of the nation, the mainstream, and normality; yet, this is because of the association of Asian Americans with cultural capital and upward mobility that gives capitalism a new, “diverse” face, and the ascendancy of “diversity” as the value of learning about these diverse faces to sustain white supremacy while appearing as progress.

Disassembling Diversities has addressed three political visions of cultural production in the public sphere: through scripted network television, the top-down model of culture industries; in the APA graphical storytelling movement, insurgent counter-representation; and in Asian American indie rock, a semblance of independence from majoritarian avenues of production and distribution. Chapter 1 brought together the organizing and reading strategies of the two reports of the Asian American Justice Center, and two shows celebrated as “quality” representations of diversity – *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Modern Family*. I traced the ideological work of the racialized language of “culture,” particularly against a class-aspirational language of “modernity,” and critiqued how sexuality sutures the two to sentimental effect. Chapter 2 looked in and out of the self-named APA graphical storytelling

movement and how it has fashioned its relevance through the twinned degradations of Asian American racial formations and the graphical form. I identified how the diversity efforts to insert Asian Americans into the Americana of the form did not displace, but reinforced the racial and gender exclusions of the U.S. graphical storytelling tradition – which, when done by Asian American representations, evokes questions about the visibilities of APA cultural politics. Chapter 3 drew together three projects of Asian American indie rock, attending to how Asian American artists fashioned their image and their representational politics; this quandary was shaped by the form’s emphasis on individuality and interiority, and its association with a colorblind whiteness. I theorized the felt possibilities of community and art by centering their imaginings of the alternative while critiquing their use of the classed, and at times dispossessing, pretenses of the indie scene. Although each form inflects APA self-definition through its particularities, the points of contact between APA arts activism and preeminent diversity politics remain the same. These overlaps have enabled Asian Americans an unrealized legibility, as learning about Asian Americans aligns with a cultural citizenship of “diversity.” However, this revaluation of Asian Americans has occurred through comparisons and occlusions based in antiblackness.

Firstly, *Dissembling Diversities* has used middlebrow culture as a framework to focus on how cultural producers and consumers seek to elevate the status of their cultural forms and texts through discourses of aesthetic legitimacy. In doing so, I also illustrated how APA arts activism in these forms is shaped by racializing hierarchies that, evocative of a greater issue of diversity politics, speaks its valuation through the language of class. Chapter 1’s analysis of APA media advocacy and Asian American representation in quality television interrogated “quality” as a discourse, which both names a specific programming genre and a

relation to value-producing institutions. Quality discourse depends on and interpellates a quality subject, who gains this status by exercising refinement and curiosity through consumption. This same self-conscious intake has animated antiracist media advocacy, as suggested by the Asian American Justice Center's extended reports. Chapter 2 explored how the APA graphical storytelling movement takes up consumer choice as a sign of worthiness. Firstly, this respectability appears in the content of two key texts from the APA graphical storytelling movement, *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man*, which uplift the status of Asian American history by illustrating its resemblance to the metanarratives of History; secondly, it takes place in how the subcultural value of graphical stories, which since become acknowledged as both "Art" and literature, shapes the critique of the chapter's texts. Chapter 3's study of self-conscious deployments of indie rock tracks the alignment of "Art" with an unmarked class identity that presumes its superiority in being both between and neither popular culture and the avant-garde, which then inflects any APA activism therein. Though the chapter begins by reading *CompilAsian* as where image corrals cultural production, it ends with the Tuesday Night Project to consider how identitarian image management conditions the cultural landscapes of everyday life. Although none of the texts of *Disassembling Diversities* announce themselves as middlebrow, their manipulations of value-granting discourses and their construction of enlightened subjects through taste illustrate how cultural citizenship as a technology of differentiation has been shaped by the legacies of middlebrow culture.

Secondly, in using the middlebrow to analyze a politically liberal class-mobile citizenship, *Disassembling Diversities* has identified "diversity" as a classed discourse that, because of the confluence of the militarization of everyday life in post-9/11/2001 culture and

the racism that gets encoded as progress in “post-racialism,” consigns social change to the private sphere and understands feeling as change. Chapter 1 analyzed *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Modern Family* as generically distinct examples of quality television, in which quality is in part garnered by resembling mandates about racial and sexual toleration – particularly using sentimental progress narratives in which tears and laughter serve as proxies for social change. The pedagogical logic of these texts not by APAs connect to the AAJC’s reports in using subjective feeling as both the symptom and outcome of diversity education. Chapter 2 furthers this critique by illustrating the overlap between diversity politics and a line of APA visibility based in how anti-Asian racism has injured Asian American men. By locating structural inequalities in the racially aggrieved (male) subject, the APA graphical storytelling movement individualizes hurt to call attention to Asian American anger but encounters difficulty in identifying antiracism beyond getting over that anger. Chapter 3 collapses the refuge that Asian American artists and activists have found in reputedly colorblind universalisms, such aesthetic categories like “talent” and “Art.” Though *CompilAsian*, the films of Dave Boyle with Goh Nakamura, and the Tuesday Night Project identify how “talent” is racialized to exclude Asian bodies, the TNP indicates how this revaluation recalls the capitalist discourses that contribute to racial disenfranchisement. Throughout, *Dissembling Diversities* has refused such representations of the family, interiority, and intimacy as the basis of social change by deploying a queer of color reading method that makes evident how, against fantasies of deregulation and meritocracy and harmony, the private sphere’s separation from the public is rendered through the ghosted intersection of race, class, and sexuality that appears as privacy.

To that end, *Dissembling Diversities* has addressed the role of cultural sophistication as a multivalent performance and discourse that shapes APA antiracist discourses through narratives of class mobility and elevation. But, thirdly, *Dissembling Diversities* has also identified the layers of antiblackness expressed in such discourses of class as both a historical remainder of cultural hierarchy and suggestive of Asian Americans' middled place as the model minority of diversity. Chapter 1's representations of Asian Americans as educated and as symbols of white-collar education within racially plural but white-centric television shows simultaneously obfuscate and reify Orientalist tropes of "tradition" and "modernity." This binary of restrictive "tradition" and class-mobile and sexually open "modernity" is not only defined in relation to the whiteness represented by sentimentality, but by an abjected blackness that gets ejected from these emotional schemes, leaving Black subjectivity no agentic space within these diversity politics. Chapter 2 read graphical stories written by Asian Americans that deployed comparisons with blackness alongside their entanglements with respectability, literacy, and worthiness. For the two texts of the APA graphical storytelling movement, these representations were signs of affiliation with the cultural legibility of Black civil rights, as well as with ongoing Black freedom struggles. Yet, in their primary goal of rehabilitating Asian American visibility, *Secret Identities* and *Secret Asian Man* share with *Shortcomings*, a text marked external to this movement, an antiblackness that reiterates the time markers of the previous chapter: Asian Americans are inscribed as later on a timeline, whether of racism or progress narratives, than Black people. Chapter 3 began with a historical look at how the liberal whiteness of indie rock is formed through projections of blackness, both in an identification with a symbolic marginality of existing outside of capitalism and the maligning of Black cultural production as the mass culture against which

indie becomes “Art.” The chapter also began with the race-conscious counterpoint offered by the 1970s Yellow Power folk group A Grain of Sand. It then traced how Asian American racial projects that seek a place within cultural fields of “Art” defined by white/anti-Black racial hierarchies, particularly U.S. musical iconography and the redevelopment of urban centers through culture, use the model minority image and its association with cultural capital in ways that manipulate but may not disrupt the ideological and discursive structures that make class identity racially exclusive.

In these multiple ways, *Dissembling Diversities* has shown the middled place of Asian American identity and community, as well as APA activism, in the contemporary moment. Firstly, Asian Americans are middled within white/anti-Black racial hierarchies, and, secondly, structural and ideological deployments of these white/anti-Black schemes have mobilized the model minority myth to identify Asian Americans as evidence and outcomes of Black illegitimacy. Asian Americans have sought shelter in whiteness through class mobility and colorblindness, self-consciously affiliated with Black civil rights and with communities of color, and been structurally and ideologically aligned with white people as not-Black. Simply put, understanding APA arts activism in these middlebrow cultural forms makes evident how Asian Americans have been middled by class. Thirdly, APA activism in the arts is not exempt from histories of form and cultural legitimization, which archive racialized class exclusions. Fourthly, the analysis of that activism grapples with genealogies of Asian Americanist critique as much as “post-racial” diversity politics. Ultimately at stake in *Dissembling Diversities* is the place – or rather, lack of place – of Asian Americanist critique in the majoritarian public sphere.

It is because of these multiple middlings that *Dissembling Diversities* has taken on Asian American cultural studies while being indebted to the field's interdisciplinary and socially-minded critique. While recognizing how Asian American cultural studies highlights and legitimizes APA arts activism, *Dissembling Diversities* grew from my dissatisfaction with an academic politic of visibility. Though I have focused on citing, extending, and applying APA activist reading practices, each core chapter of *Dissembling Diversities* writes from a perspective that confronts common reading strategies. In light of readings that critique stereotypes of Asian Americans with a wish for Asian American lead characters and discussions of diversity, Chapter 1 analyzed shows with prominent Asian American characters to consider their relationally racializing role in multiracial universes, and to tend to the discursive functions of Orientalism and a white-centric multiculturalism that persist behind a prominent Asian face. Chapter 2 directly addressed the role of Asian American literary studies in picking up the APA graphical storytelling movement as a rubric, and how the need for legible Asian American conflict was leading to single-issue readings that naturalized more than it addressed. By turning to graphical stories, I argued, Asian American literary criticism was performing an aspirational middlebrow purpose for its hip readers and an authenticating middlebrow function for itself. Chapter 3 emerged from the emptying of popular music, as Asian American ethnomusicologists and cultural theorists too easily presume the transparency of performance and the disruptive potential of Asian/American bodies. By attending to form, I considered how race functions in popular music beyond claiming solidarity through hip hop, instead turning to forms and styles racialized as white. Given this concern for relational racialization, intersectionality, and form, *Dissembling*

Diversities has hoped to invigorate Asian American cultural studies beyond what Elda Tsou and Susie Pak have called the methodological “givenness” of the Asian/American body.

Focusing not only on nationally recognized organizations but also citing alternative pop and news media outlets, museum and digital curations, scholarly publications, and local ventures, *Disassembling Diversities* has tracked the necessary compromises made in refashioning Asian Americanist critique for majoritarian audiences. Yet, though *Disassembling Diversities* has been heavy on analysis, it has also illustrated the possibility of disassembling the disassembling overlays of diversity politics onto APA activism and Asian Americanist critique. In Chapter 1, this appeared as following sentimental progress narratives to their logical conclusion, minding the linkages between private diversity and public terror, to bring to relief how social change gets foreclosed in this emphasis on feeling and patronage. In Chapter 2, this took shape as a reading strategy that refused individual hurt as the expression of inequality to make visible the co-constructions of difference occluded in this rush to rehabilitating personhood. In Chapter 3, this became evident in a discursive strategy that links an embodied and emplaced ethics of community to the pursuit of Art. In these ways, *Disassembling Diversities* has held onto the political possibilities of a critical literacy – one shaped not only through individual acts of reading but also through collective acts of creation and critique. As an act of accompaniment, *Disassembling Diversities* has extended and reformed activist reading practices, while also acknowledging the incompleteness and ruptural potential of Asian Americans’ middled space in racialized class hierarchies. As I have argued throughout, this begins by disarticulating APA arts activism from the preemptive celebrations of “post-racial,” post-9/11/2001 diversity.

Epilogue :: *But I Am Not the Revolution*
On Activism and Asian American Middlebrow Subjectivity

When this project began, I was committed to unraveling a recurring trope in my encounters with APA activism: an academic/community divide, in which the community was presumed pure, authentic, political, and necessary, while the academic superfluous, obfuscating, self-congratulating. There was only room for policy, campaigning, press releases, and consumerism, and not culture, critique, speculation, imagination, and pedagogy. For example, on December 20, 2011, literary critic and poet Timothy Yu ruminated on his personal blog: “Has Asian American Studies Failed?”²⁴⁵ As he explains in the wake of the *New York Times*’ apologist take on Japanese American internment, and the *Wall Street Journal*’s publication of Amy Chua’s “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior”: “In both cases, what’s misleading in the pieces could easily have been avoided if the authors had ever taken Asian American Studies 101. Or if even the most basic elements of Asian American studies had filtered out into mainstream American consciousness.” Yu meditates on the specialization of Asian American Studies, asking: “how, if at all, is that scholarship reaching readers outside the field?” Yu’s thoughts ask after where knowledge is produced, through what venues, and for what audiences in a reflection on the field’s professionalization. Yet, he seems to measure efficacy through popularization; Yu celebrates journalists and bloggers, and argues for the field’s alliances with professional and public figures. At stake in both the blog and the resulting 2012 forum in *The Journal of Asian American Studies* about the post is the place of Asian American Studies in the majoritarian public sphere and the subjectivity of

²⁴⁵ Yu, “Has Asian American Studies Failed?”, *tympan* blog, December 20, 2011, <http://tympan.blogspot.com/2011/12/has-asian-american-studies-failed.html>. See also his response to comments and discussions on Facebook and this posting: “Has Asian American Studies Failed? Continued.” *tympan*, December 29, 2011, http://tympan.blogspot.com/2011/12/has-asian-american-studies-failed_29.html.

the presumably college-educated public called into being through curriculum, scholarship, news media, and the arts. By way of conclusion, minding the university student as the middlebrow subject central to such debates about the study of difference and produced through the power relations of credentializing institutions, *Dissembling Diversities* perhaps can remind its reader never to take the university and its political potential for granted.

In other words, though the university has been a central to the maintenance of racial stratification as class differentiation, I remain invested in how the university can proliferate critique through a socially engaged American Studies education that applies the critical tools of theory to awaken students' political and ethical imaginations. I turn to Karen Tei Yamashita's *I-Hotel* (2010) as an example of such an application, though the novel enacts a middlebrow desire: what Amanda Dykema suggests to be the paradoxical wish for authentication in an official archive that also critiques the institutionalizing processes of associated with such legitimization. *I-Hotel* is a historical epic of ten interconnected novellas. Each novella narrates a single year from 1968, the year of the student strikes for Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University, to 1977, when the International Hotel, the last remains of Manilatown against racialized redevelopment schemes and a home to many Asian American and specifically Filipino bachelors and elders, was forcibly evicted. *I-Hotel* unpacks what now is shorthand as the "Asian American movement," locating its characters within the San Francisco Bay Area, but drawing connections to spaces including Russia, Tiananmen Square, occupied territories of Japan, and Manila. Each novella's epigraph is a diagram of an unfolded box, the top panel noting the year and a key event, moving down to name the setting, the central characters, and the novella's unifying idea. This framing literalizes Yamashita's interest in "the complex architecture of a time, a movement, a hotel,

and its people” (610) built on the diversity of agendas, programs, campaigns, beliefs, and values that constituted the moment, while gesturing to the limitations of the page in representing this material reality. I do not consider *I-Hotel* a middlebrow text, as its experimentations with form and historical and philosophical archives require much from the reader. Many of the characters have historical inspirations, such as noted Asian American Black Panther Richard Aoki as Mo Akagi and troubadour Nobuko Miyamoto of *A Grain of Sand* (who also appears in Chapter 3) as Aiko of *Yellow Pearl*, who exist in a convergence of events, places, and texts that all informed the *I-Hotel* as a material and symbolic space. Yet, *I-Hotel* explores the relationship of the public university to community organizing in the creation of a middlebrow activist subject, illustrating how the Asian American movement has been formed through proximities of APA identity and Asian American Studies to systems of cultural capital.

In keeping with the historical moment, *I-Hotel* acknowledges the student activism that energized Yellow Power organizing without celebrating college as an exclusion-free space. The first novella’s second section, “Language in Reaction,” begins by literalizing what it calls textbook examples of semantics by using the column-based typographic layout of mass-produced history textbooks with a list of discussion questions at the end to narrate the incitement of student protests for Ethnic Studies.²⁴⁶ The novella’s first four pages compare Institution A, or the University of California, Berkeley, to Institution B, or San Francisco State University. Institution A “considered itself a center of research and a factory for knowledge” (18), while Institution B “considered itself a teaching college, a middling

²⁴⁶ In *I-Hotel*, this form leads to the novella’s exploration of S.I. Hayakawa, San Francisco State’s appointed President and tokenized figurehead of color, but my interest is in the classed registers documented in this narration.

institution in a tiered system” that “was part of the Master Plan,” “a great train system chugging students along predetermined tracks” (19-20). The “Master Plan” referenced here is the California Master Plan for Higher Education of 1960, which was developed by a team appointed by the Regents of the University of California and the State Board of Education. The Master Plan promised access to higher education for all, and sought to graduate greater numbers of students at a minimum per-student cost by eliminating “redundancies” through the arrangement of the University of California campuses, the California State University campuses, and community colleges into a single system. What “Language in Reaction” points to is how this alignment created a hierarchy, as The Master Plan created an institutional caste-like system through degrees; as the text indicates, Institution A and Institution B exist in a prestige differential, defined by Institution A’s pursuit of knowledge against Institution B’s characterization as “middling.”

This prestige differential shapes how the students became politicized, even as the disinterested climates of both institutions were infiltrated by Black freedom agitation. The textbook lesson continues by explaining that, at Institution A, “a famous black author and leader of a black organization came to teach at the university,” and incites the students to protest by shouting, “Fuck the Governor!” (19); by contrast, at Institution B, “a black instructor [...] who was also a leader of a black organization” excites the students by arguing that “*Institution B was a nigger-producing factory and called upon students to Pick up the Gun! to defend themselves against a cracker administration*” (20, italics original). At A, the Black body is an outsider invited into the prestigious institution because of his own legitimacy as a cultural producer; he incites the students in the abstract against the identifiable arrangements of power represented by the governor. At B, he is already of the

second-tier institution, and analyzes how white supremacy manifests as structural inequality directly through the Master Plan. These contrasts reflect the implicit racialization of Institution A's knowledge production, as opposed to Institution B's labor training, facilitated through the segregation of California's youth into "predetermined tracks."²⁴⁷ *I-Hotel's* suggestion of how these students are racialized, which then shapes their relationship to protest and their proximities to Black bodies, illustrates how the university system and its class-aspirational credentializing has (and continues to) exacerbated pre-existing inequalities by ensuring their future maintenance via a dissembling meritocracy.

Though *I-Hotel* brings the relation of the public university to Asian American student activism to the foreground, both as a rehearsal and a reimagining, *I-Hotel* also marks how such class differentials impact activism's efficacy using Ria Ishii (no relation) in the sixth novella, "Int'l Hotel."²⁴⁸ The second section of the novella begins with the narrator meditating on philosophy and activism: "Something inside the mind tells you that your thinking can be powerful. But then, the thinking has got to be put into practice, and how many middle-class activists checked into factories to see what it's like to work?" (383). The narrator indicts these middle-class activists as not comprehending the material conditions they organize against. However, the narrator forecloses the possibility of these student activists knowing that experience because of how their positions as "thinkers" with such access to cultural capital already places them at a structural remove. Ria thus becomes an exceptional figure, as "[...] technically, Ria could sew; socially, she could organize; and

²⁴⁷ However, it is also worth noting as a way of considering *Dissembling Diversities'* ultimate ambivalence about diversity politics that both UC Berkeley and San Francisco State are public institutions, as opposed to Stanford University, which even today finds it difficult to maintain Ethnic Studies on campus.

²⁴⁸ The title of each novella, which she also refers to as hotels to get at the parallel, intersecting, and diverging trajectories of her characters, riffs on the words International Hotel and its colloquial name I-Hotel to suggest the multiple valences that existed within the I-Hotel as a symbol and meeting place of Asian American organizing.

theoretically, Ria could think political economics” (384). On behalf of student organizers from UC Berkeley, she infiltrates a garment factory and tries to agitate its Chinese immigrant workers. As an alternative to the oppressive conditions of their factory labor, Ria founds the I-Hotel Cooperative Garment Factory, and this section of the novella follows the tensions Ria inhabits in this process.

The Cooperative reimagines the power hierarchies that guide manual labor by producing Mao jackets after the style catches on in organizing circles – a metaphor of the countercultural cache accorded to their activism. Ria and a factory worker, Mrs. Lee, initially produce the Mao jackets to provide the capital to purchase sewing machines and pay the rent on a fixer-upper space at the I-Hotel. The narrator explains how, with this start-up capital and a team of both students and experienced workers, the sight of profits in the accounting books felt rewarding to the Co-op members in ways that threatened their anticapitalist aspirations. However, because of the arrangement of labor and profit in Ria’s facility, “in this case, the thrill was collective, for the first time sewing ladies who had nothing had something: ownership and responsibility. Of course, at first, only Ria and the students felt that way, and in some respects, because they were proving what the books said about cooperative efforts” (386). The narrator first affirms the empowering effects of the cooperative structure, then retreats from that affirmation; the narrator notes how this experience validates the students’ thinking, showing their labor as a kind of ethnographic slumming that reinforces their legitimacy. As such, “the sewing ladies had to realize the inexperience of youth.” Though the students understand themselves as taking a vanguardist position on labor, the immigrant women they imagine serving are skeptical, beyond an age-based invalidation, of what the students can achieve. This experiential gap between the

Chinese laborers and the Asian American organizers highlights how the students' performances of denigrated labor reveal their comparative class privilege. Though they share experiences of racialization, the commonality of their experiences is refracted through their relationship not only to capitalism but to the cultural hierarchy enacted through education.

Ria's mediation of labor hierarchies, emerging from this middled space within capitalism, questions the purist but also abstract vision proffered by other activists in *I-Hotel*.

As Ria establishes the I-Hotel Cooperative Garment Factory:

Olivia Wang marched downstairs from her offices in the I-Hotel and got in Ria's face, as she was often known to do. "So you're organizing a cooperative, but you need to make sure you aren't replicating capitalist models."

Ria argued back, "Of course we're replicating capitalist models. How are we supposed to pay ourselves? Do you have a better plan?"

"I saw that Mao jacket you designed. You're creating bourgeois fashion."

"Yeah, and we're turning Maoism into an exotic commodity."

"That's right. And that's because you don't have a clear line."

In this confrontation, Olivia does not answer Ria's question, "How are we supposed to pay ourselves?," even as everything she says has a theoretical basis. Olivia's commitment to theory offers only a negative critique that appears as grandstanding against the narrative investment in Ria's organizing. Ria responds: "Believe me, I struggle with this every day, but it's not like textbook Lenin" (388). Though Olivia's invocation of the line, or the "mass line" as it is called in Mao Tse Tung's writings, calls for aligning leadership with the consciousness of the masses represented by the factory workers,²⁴⁹ Ria suggests the

²⁴⁹ See for example, Mao Tse Tung, "11. The Mass Line," *Marxists.org*, accessed August 15, 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch11.htm>.

deconstruction of Olivia's idealism. Ria does not hold up what she does as a pure activism, but confronts the difficulty of figuring out her place as a community organizer who is at a fundamental remove from the women she represents.

To that end, Ria develops educational programs at the Cooperative as part of her mission for immigrant rights. The narrator describes a scene in which Ria gives a lesson to the garment workers in the English language. She writes on the chalkboard, "*referendum, recall, initiative, civil rights*" as a lesson about "American history," and "*market, price, renegotiate, percentage, cheap, stingy*," for "garment business." Both lists begin with descriptive terms and gradually progress to conceptual terms. The "American history" list envisions a political consciousness based in the procedures of formal democracy, and thus centers these Chinese women as symbolic figures of reform. The "garment business" vocabulary introduces the women with capitalism, with "renegotiate" and "percentage" pointing to strategies of union organizing, but only insofar as to make a critique of market logic within the value designations of the market itself. "Civil rights" sits alongside "cheap" and "stingy" as categories of political consciousness in this space of labor. Ria's extension of her knowledge to these women provides them with a language that familiarizes them with the systems of political and economic inequality that overdetermine their experiences, redistributing cultural capital as a means for them to survive everyday conditions.

This scene of education leads to an empowerment, but it is also one that does not sustain the consciousness called for by Olivia's deployment of a "clear line." A meditation on the word "cheap" leads Mrs. Lee to confront Ria. Mrs. Lee encourages Ria to focus on her education and explains that the Chinese workers have started an independent childcare service; they will be leaving the employ of the Co-op to, as Ria and the other students had

wished for them, take control of their labor. Yet, against their wishes, this self-empowerment does not sustain their activist vision. Mrs. Lee adds: “I know what you think, but I am not the revolution” (391). Though the “textbook Lenin” (and Marx and Mao) that Ria had referenced in her confrontation with Olivia may have led her to believe that the factory women’s empowerment would incite the transformation of oppressive structures and sustain the student activists’ movement, the factory women instead advocate for their upwardly class-mobile desires. Mrs. Lee corrects Ria’s thinking and insists on “a new way” in the U.S. as opposed to looking to China, as Ria has done by fetishizing her employees as the subaltern to be saved. This “new way” is not only about liberal class arrangements, as Mrs. Lee’s encouragement for Ria to focus on her college education and her own decision to leave the Co-op’s community spirit might suggest. In declaring that she “is not the revolution,” Mrs. Lee not only foregrounds their intergenerational class difference, but also disassembles the romance that Ria and other student activists have invested in Mrs. Lee and her compatriots as abbreviations of revolution.

The title of the novella itself, “Int’l Hotel,” suggests the role of abbreviations, both as a typographical shorthand but also as a cognitive shortcut that possesses more symbolic than referential value.²⁵⁰ Though the I-Hotel Cooperative Garment Factory is one of the many counterhegemonic aspirations that *I-Hotel* archives through narration, Ria’s narrative, like the imaginative works of APA arts activism surveyed in this dissertation, illustrates the insufficiency of abbreviating the revolution. The novella’s first section follows an Asian American cohort, which includes Ria at the American Indian Movement’s occupation of

²⁵⁰ The novella is set in 1973, and the six-sided diagram of the “hotel” that serves as the epigraph of the novella identifies the catalyzing event is “Bruce Lee dies” (373), but the action hero, martial artist, and Asian American icon is never named over the course of the five-part novella.

Alcatraz. As Catherine Fung argues, this point of entry stakes out a space for an interracial solidarity between Asian and indigenous peoples that does not equalize their subject positions, but metaphorizes how their plural differences can inform one another in their struggles for social justice. This development politicizes the Asian American attendees, who then try to carry their knowledge of intersecting struggles beyond this moment of interracial contact.²⁵¹ Through Mrs. Lee, Ria encounters the incommensurability of her aesthetic objectification of the subaltern with social reality; yet, like the APA arts activism of *Dissembling Diversities*, this aestheticization can spread politicizing affect in spite and because of its ultimate insufficiency to incite a revolution.

If *Dissembling Diversities* began in 2012 with the Pew Research Center's *The Rise of Asian Americans* and VC30's commemoration of Vincent Chin's murder, it ends in 2014 with the backlash against U.S. academic organizations in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and the escalating, militarizing violence in Ferguson, Missouri against protests over anti-Black police brutality and the murder of Michael Brown. *Dissembling Diversities* started its trajectory in corporate-controlled media images and responses to those portrayals and ended by considering the discourses through which APA arts activists inhabit the city to locate how the racialization of sophistication, as an aspect of the critical literacy for which *Dissembling Diversities* argues, can provide a method for interrogating how Asian American bodies move through space.

In a truly self-centered way, *Dissembling Diversities* interrogates my present circumstances. After an encouraging but contract-less run at the academic job market, I moved with a friend to Baltimore, where I hoped to land an administrative job at Johns

²⁵¹ The veracity of this event is debated, as Catherine Fung corroborates it with writings in *Gidra* about Asian/Native solidarities, but Sarah Moon Casinelli argues that it is a fiction.

Hopkins. We ended up in a high-rise in Charles Center, constructed in the mid-1960s as an early site of the city's redevelopment strategies, south of Mt. Vernon, a gentrified cultural district that is increasingly white and Asian American as a result of a multi-decade plan to draw yuppie settlement. Sure, I love my neighborhood's coffee houses, art galleries, and local breweries – but these represent how the racialization of sophistication manifests as appearances of a deracialized “Art” that racialize through class. I quickly grew unnerved by my white, middle-class Black, and Asian American neighbors, oftentimes part of the Hopkins network, who freely participate in a white supremacist panic discourse about “crime” – racialized as Black not only symbolically, but materially through the ongoing surveillance and murder of the city's Black youth through police violence.²⁵² When I walk my neighborhood's streets alone at night, I often get followed by officers on Segways because, in my sneakers and button-ups, I look like another Asian American yuppie; of course, it is assumed, I would prefer police presence (terror) to (Black) criminals. I have been folded into white supremacy because of the saturation of the model minority myth, but I have also made that myth into a reality by accepting that invitation.

This move coincided with the final revisions of this dissertation, which remained incomplete for weeks. It was mostly due to a bout of burnout, but, amidst the interconnected regimes of state terrorism and the growing civil unrest about the proven disposability of Black lives, which has culminated in Ferguson, this study of APA arts activism felt useless. Even the Visiting Lecturer position with which I have been entrusted, teaching Asian American history and Asian American media, began to feel superficial. Though I stand with

²⁵² For example, see Tracey Halvorsen's unapologetic blog posting that received national circulation: “Baltimore City, You're Breaking My Heart.: This is why people leave,” February 7, 2014, <https://medium.com/@TraceyHalvorsen/baltimore-city-youre-breaking-my-heart-1873a505ce2a>.

BDS, I imagine that my research and teaching receive the institution's same limited support as any project read as "diversity" – there is no "Ishii Affair" on the horizon. In sum, I was *I-Hotel's* Ria, whom I had read months ago as symbolizing the structural impossibilities of a student-led APA activism to displace white supremacy because of its conditioning by class hierarchy.

To commit my energy to something more productive than Asian American-cum-white guilt, I participated in the local rally and protest march on August 14, 2014, which was spearheaded by the Baltimore People's Power Assembly and the Baltimore Bloc. We marched from the District Courthouse to the Police Station and through the tourist-laden Downtown. Leaders from the People's Power Assembly shook my hand specifically and thanked me for coming; it was a welcoming gesture, but I was also being hailed as a sympathetic outsider. The rally's participants were mostly Black people with many white people, but I felt a spiritual relief in seeing more and more Asian Americans showing up. We were not many, but, this, for me, is what it entails to contest the racialization of sophistication: APA solidarity with social justice struggles means seeking a different visibility. In a city like Baltimore, so animated by white/anti-Black racist dynamics, it is easy to claim that there is no space for Asian Americans and make the three ethical fallacies most challenged by *Dissembling Diversities*.²⁵³ To settle in as an Asian American amidst white privilege, and go to trivia night instead. To claim preemptively that Asian American and Black suffering is analogical, while occluding how I am present because of model minority settlement. To argue that all injuries are equal, as has been done by some liberal

²⁵³ This ongoing discussion thread epitomizes this hostility: "Is Baltimore an asian friendly town?", *City-Data.com*, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.city-data.com/forum/baltimore/519187-baltimore-asian-friendly-town.html>.

Asian American organizations aligned with American Zionist groups against the Association for Asian American Studies' support of BDS. APA solidarity means being vulnerable to being wrong, like Ria, but trying anyway by using our model minority status to make life more livable across the board. Many like Ria and me have to choose consciously to do this, which is conditioned by our own structural proximity to white privilege, and cannot be disappeared into facile people of color identifications.²⁵⁴ But we have to show up.

These are small gestures that are symbolic at best. Local activists have insisted on the primacy of historical remembering, as Black freedom in Baltimore requires a vigilant insistence on recuperating political prisoners, police murders of Black youth, and the benevolent violence of city policy from “post-racial” forgetting. While I agree, I also want to push against the almost a priori validity accorded to the counter-archive. In certain discussions, “History” can become a positivist catch-all category, one presumed to be the cure to hegemony's ills; as *Dissembling Diversities* has shown, even the counter-archive, insurgent grassroots, and counter-memory can be deployed to exclusionary ends.

Dissembling Diversities thus insists on a critical literacy to accompany these rememberings, to interpret how the insurrectionist past enters public discourse. What narrative is being put forth? What is its pedagogy – how does it present itself to refashion the aesthetic subject of “post-racial” diversity or, furthermore, the open carry white supremacist? This is why *Dissembling Diversities* holds onto APA arts activism: Because it provides the imaginative blueprints with which to understand Asian Americans' middled place at the intersection of

²⁵⁴ This critique is not generated solely through my privileged space in academia, just as awareness of the racial realignment of Asian Americans is not a theoretical exercise. On the final day of revisions, *Al Jazeera America*'s Julia Carrie Wong joined an increasing number of public APAs drawing attention to how model minority collusions sustain white supremacy. See Wong, “The complicity cost of racial inclusion,” *Al Jazeera America*, August 24, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/8/asian-americans-racecomplicitymodelminority.html>.

race and class. To know that I resemble Ria, but also have the intellectual, and indeed literary, tools to disassemble that positioning and cautiously theorize how else it could be.

Though I have dwelled on APA arts activism as a site in which such negotiations take place through the classed entanglements of pleasure, pedagogy, and the discourse of “Art,” the introduction and this epilogue’s turn to non-artistic productions of APA activism illustrates how *Disassembling Diversities* ultimately finds resistance in a critical literacy that understands how a counterpublic’s legibility necessarily involves its incorporation.

Disassembling Diversities asks us to inhabit institutionalized ways of being – including identity, community, and activism – in ethical ways, with eyes to the logical structures of the text. It is my truest hope that APA arts activism continues, yet it is also my wish for the APA community that we learn to disentangle representation from resistance before celebrating visibility as the meaning of antiracist struggle. Holding the good life and premature death in constant tension, an Asian Pacific America that understands itself relationally, and not as an exception or a paradigm, can conceptually and, indeed, politically lead us to a critique that can chip away at the neoliberal regimes that cause misery and, in the words of Crystal Parikh, want otherwise than inclusion within diversity.

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