

**THE ROLE OF ASIAN AMERICANS
IN THE RACIAL JUSTICE
MOVEMENT**

TADAIMA SEATTLE ED

February 24, 2013

www.changelabinfo.org

WHO IS TADAIMA SEATTLE?



Tadaima is a radical Japanese American community that redefines our connection to each other and our homelands, wherever they may be. We center and hold ourselves accountable to folks who are multiracial, queer, transgender, gender non-conforming, have varying abilities, and/or have varying economic status, whether 1st or 50th generation. We educate ourselves about radical resistance movements effecting Japanese communities in the U.S. and globally.

By intentionally organizing with Japanese Americans, People of Color, and international communities, we recognize a fluid spectrum of identities and seek folks who have ever thought about Japanese American organizing but then decided, “that’s not me.”

This is you.

This is us.

Okaeri (Welcome home).



WHY DOES TADAIMA THINK THIS IS AN IMPORTANT DISCUSSION?



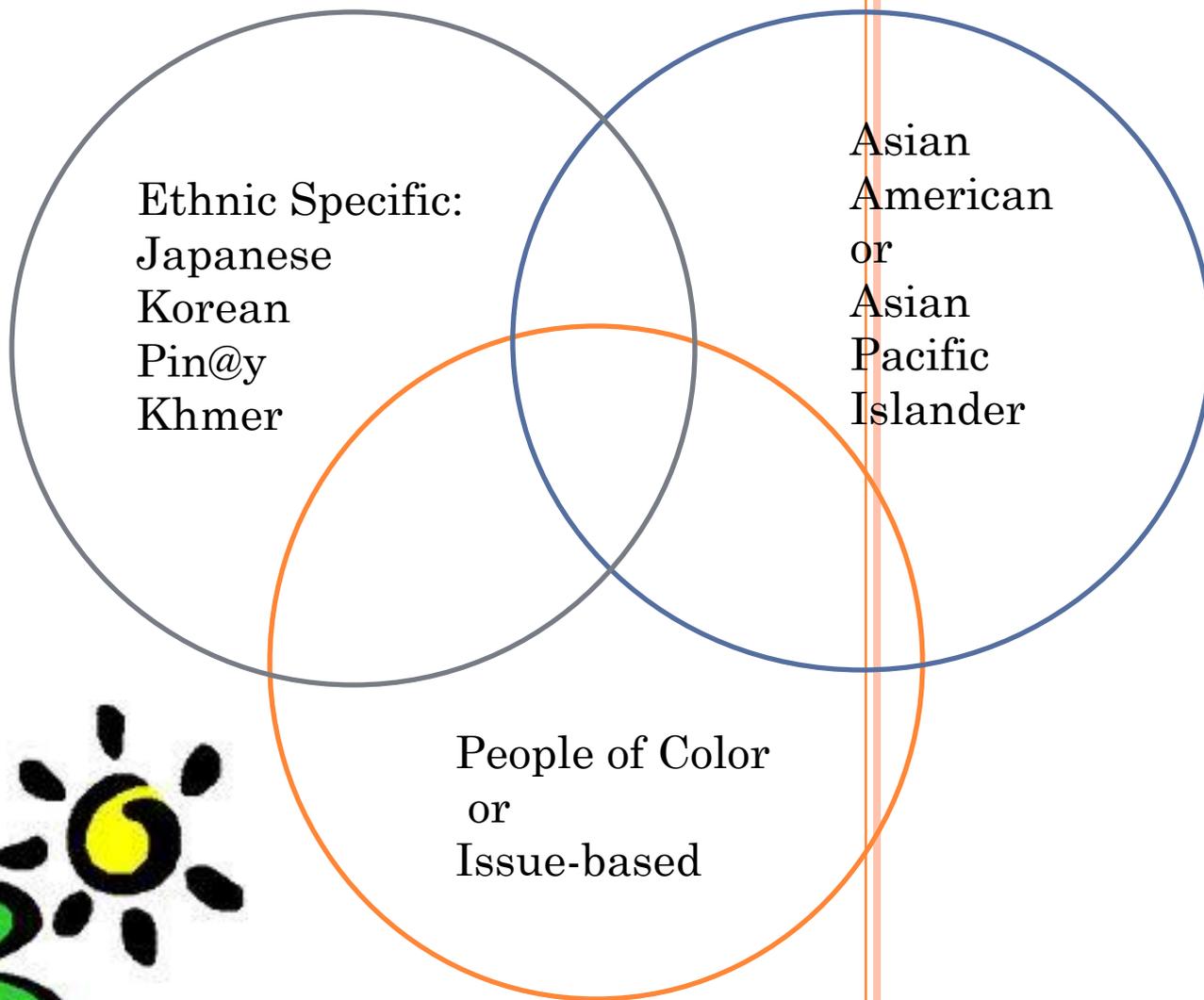
- Privilege
- Power
- Commitment to community and coalition work
- (W)holistic approach to organizing
- Also...
 - We love changelab
 - We love EDs



- In certain contexts, it'll be different... but I'm saying, philosophically, where it counts, we're in the middle. We are the brokers... We are the folks that are on the fence that can go either way... We can go the nationalist and move to the right and eventually all become Michelle Malkins, or we can throw our lot in to the left, and become partners, become coalition builders, become leaders of a new majority that's about progressive values. And that's what I'm hoping we'll do.

- Jeff Chang





HOW DO WE ORGANIZE?



RACIAL JUSTICE WORK

- One of the important questions we have to ask ourselves, is what we organize for?
 - How will we know we have “achieved” justice?
- What does “Justice” look like to us?
 - As individuals?
 - As orgs?



“ASIAN AMERICAN”

THE STUDY:

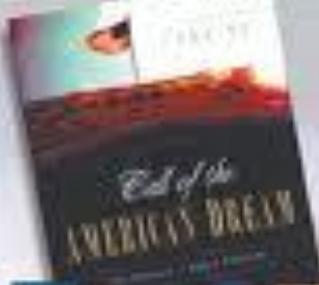
- How has this term been used?
- Who is Asian American?
 - Now vs. historically
 - Popular definition vs. politicized definition
- More importantly, is it still useful in the way we are doing racial justice work?

“What is the utility of this umbrella terms that has been put on us by white people and white institutions? And does it really serve our organizing purposes and does it really reflect our reality as we experience it?”



THEMES

- The American Dream
- The Model Minority



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- What is it?
- How do we know?
- Who can achieve it?
 - Through what means?



What impact does the American Dream have on
American communities?

What role does it play in the interactions between Asian
American communities and other People of Color
Communities



THE MODEL MINORITY

- What is it?
- How does it relate to the way that most Asian Americans participate politically?
- How does this idea impede solidarity with other People of Color?
 - Breeding distrust in mainstream movements through the condemnation of liberatory movements
 - “We suffer from racism too”
 - “Choice” to see whiteness as good or bad



WHITE SUPREMACY



Andrea Smith's article: Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy

“Smith aptly critiques the tendency of activists of color to come together around assertions of “shared victimhood,” which imply that racial oppressions are all the same. Instead, she says we must examine history in order to acknowledge and reject the incentives for complicity that white supremacy offers to all peoples of color” (p. 19)

THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT

○ *“There is a sense that something critical is missing about Asian Americans and race- an acknowledgement that the modern construction and manipulation of Asian American identity was intended to undermine both Black liberation and broader social movements challenging racism and imperialism” (p.1)*

- Is there an Asian American Movement?
 - Should there be?
 - What would we need for this to happen?
- Is there a set of shared progressive ideals that is relevant in today’s political arena?
 - Political disaggregation vs. Social Change



POLITICAL POTENTIAL

- Is “Asian American” today a political identity or a demographic category?
- Could it still be useful in some areas?
 - Studies found that the term is used more often in places where there is no dominant Asian ethnic subgroup



WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Organizing within community to develop a progressive race analysis and shared values among Asian Americans

- Carry on as we are with the risk of reinforcing more reactionary tendencies within communities

- Work with POC and issue-based orgs to ally ourselves as individuals instead of a community

- Focus on addressing racial tensions between Asian Americans and other POCs (specifically Black folks)

IN DEFENSE OF ASIAN AMERICA

- “Asian American” label needed to influence legislative change and power
- “I don’t know if we have a choice”
 - Asians lumped together as foreign and potential threats to the US
- Phenotypical identification with race



ASSIMILATION VS POWER SHARING MODEL

BUILDING MULTIRACIAL SOLIDARITY DEMANDS DEEP POLITICAL EDUCATION TO COUNTER THE DAILY STRUCTURES THAT REINFORCE WHITE SUPREMACY

- Building an API base of strong allies to other POCs
 - Political education
 - Issue-based organizing
 - US Imperialism
 - Story-telling
 - Relationship building
 - Honest dialogue
- Conscious rejection of race privilege
 - Working with youth
 - Intentional and transparent organizing practices
 - Other ideas?

