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Multiracial Collaborations and Coalitions

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Focusing primarily on Los Angeles, New York City, and Houston, this chapter examines contemporary grassroots efforts to establish multiracial coalitions among Asian Pacific Americans, Latinos, African Americans, and whites in communities across the United States. By studying a range of collaborative efforts, we examine race relations and politics in America's increasingly multiracial cities. These grassroots efforts provide a rich source of information and offer "lessons" on what may or may not work, facilitating policy formation and raising theoretical issues aimed at initiating and supporting cooperative relations among diverse racial groups and efforts to address urban problems.

Within the last two decades, the populations of New York City, Los Angeles, and Houston have undergone a remarkable shift. Driven by the massive growth in immigration from Asia, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, these cities have made the transition from white majority to "majority-minority" cities. At the same time, the influx of Asian Pacific Americans and Latinos has injected American cities with multiracial diversity and has complicated the dominant black/white approach to urban race relations.

Asian Pacific Americans share neighborhoods, schools, local governments, and commercial districts with a range of minority groups. For example, the majority of residents in Los Angeles' Koreatown are Latinos, and New York City's Chinatown is rapidly expanding into the Latino and African American Lower East Side. These multiracial conditions are replicated with local variations throughout the U.S. in major metropolitan communities such as: Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, and in small cities such as Garden City, Kansas, and Wausau, Wisconsin. Clearly, the increasingly diverse and complex demographics

of the U.S. demand that we examine and address the relations emerging from these changing racial dynamics.

Media attention and scholarly research have focused primarily on conflicts—such as Black-Korean struggles in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Min 1996). Receiving less attention, however, is the long history of efforts to establish cooperative efforts, such as Filipino and Mexican workers in California who created the United Farm Workers Union in 1965; Mexican American Edward Roybal who utilized an alliance of Latinos, African Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, and whites to win a Los Angeles City Council seat in 1949; and the contemporary efforts of the organization Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) in mobilizing Asian communities to build multiracial alliances to counter racist violence and police brutality in New York City.

Also, by selectively highlighting the educational and economic "success stories" of some Asian Pacific Americans, media accounts have depicted the entire group as a high achieving "model minority." The image suggests that they have overcome obstacles faced by other minorities, and this perception has hindered the development of alliances with other groups (Lee 1996). What the image overlooks are the serious issues affecting the Asian Pacific American community—such as extremely high levels of poverty, low levels of education, hate crimes, and employment discrimination—that can form the basis for alliances among minorities.

Contemporary grassroots efforts strive toward equitable policies and resource distribution within the current political framework at the local level—a departure from the social movements of the 1960s that attempted transformative social change on a national scale (Fainstein and Fainstein 1991; Omi and Winant 1994). Neighborhood groups are part of a long history of progressive efforts aimed at improving neighborhood conditions involving such issues as housing, transportation, education, crime, drugs, health care, day care, and jobs. While a focus on local com-

munity issues can be viewed as a conservative retreat from national concerns, as Robert Fisher and Peter Romanofsky (1981 xi) explain, "neighborhood organizing can also be a progressive response by city dwellers who want to control the institutions that affect their lives..." driven by the desire for "political and economic democracy." Furthermore, while our case studies of collaborative efforts occur at the local level, the conditions they address are framed by national circumstances and trends.

The New Urban Race Relations

Major economic and political trends which frame contemporary grassroots collaborations include increasing globalization of the economy and increasing competition for capital, renewed national discussion on race relations and inequality, and shifting racial policies at all levels of the government. A reversal of economic fortunes in the U.S.—from the rapidly expanding post-WWII economy and growing incomes at all levels, to the rise in international competition in the 1970s, demand for greater corporate profits, and the increasing gap between the poor and the rich—brought equally significant changes in the political climate and social policies. In the 1950s and 1960s, the U.S. government began to address practices and policies by private entities and the state itself that supported racial discrimination in such critical areas as home mortgages, voting rights, and access to public education. These legislative efforts marked a turning point in U.S. racial policies and generated positive changes, as demonstrated by the increasing numbers of minorities elected to public office and an overhaul of U.S. immigration policies (Davidson and Grofman 1994; Hing 1993; Omi and Winant 1994).

Since the 1970s, however, fiscal conservatism gained momentum and firmly established itself in the 1990s in major urban areas across the country, and the liberal economic policies of the New Deal and social reform of the Civil Rights Movement came under attack (Plotkin and

Scheuerman 1994). Major components of this transition include less state regulation of corporations in support of "free market" policies; attack on labor unions to meet the corporate demands for a more flexible work force; and continued massive public subsidies and tax cuts for corporations in exchange for uncertain benefits such as job growth, which *Time* has dubbed "corporate welfare" (Barlett and Steele 1998). In contrast to "corporation friendly" policies, "big government" is portrayed as wasteful and inefficient, resulting in cutbacks in social services and a withdrawal from government support for civil rights (Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng 1994). Major forms of discrimination embedded in society have remained untouched by government reform efforts with limited government resources allocated to enforce civil rights legislation (Massey and Denton 1993). Efforts to address discrimination have been curtailed, such as when California's voters passed Proposition 209 in 1996, ending government affirmative action programs, or attacked, such as in Houston, Texas, where a similar proposition was voted down.

These policies have had a disproportionate impact on urban ethnic communities that are more closely linked to government funding in critical areas such as housing, education, transportation, and health services. Even with an upturn in the economy in the late 1990s, the general trend in policies remains the same, as indicated by the welfare-to-work programs, which were implemented without in-depth evaluation of the long-range implications. The era of limited government and resources forms the context and conditions which frame urban problems and interracial relations as minorities experience and bear the costs of economic restructuring. These developments are too large and sweeping for single groups to address alone, underscoring the need for responses whose effectiveness hinges on multiracial collaboration.

Revisiting Coalition Politics

In many cities, Asian Pacific Americans are potentially an important part of multiracial collaborations; however, their incredible heterogeneity poses new challenges to coalition politics. While Asian Pacific Americans have always been characterized by the diversity of their population, since the 1965 Immigration Act, renewed and new immigration has significantly increased the complexity of the population in terms of ethnicity, class, generation in the U.S., political ideology, and country of origin (Hing 1993; Park 1998).

The heterogeneity of Asian Pacific Americans calls into question one of the most enduring assumptions since the Civil Rights Movement, that is, that the political incorporation of racial minorities is inextricably linked with their participation in liberal coalitions (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Sonenshein 1993). This assumption has been fundamental and pervasive to studies of race and power in contemporary American cities for compelling reasons. For much of America's urban history, conservative coalitions have actively and uniformly sought to exclude all racial minorities from the political process. Faced with hostility and the recalcitrance of conservative coalitions, racial minorities found a measure of political unity among themselves and worked with allies among white liberals whose political commitment included individual and procedural rights and distributive and representative justice (see Boussard 1993 and Taylor 1994).

The recent immigrants bring new multiracial complexities and challenges to the urban political process and pose daunting challenges for liberals in maintaining their traditional claim on racial minority incorporation. At the same time, racial politics gradually moved from the simplicity of white over black discrimination to the more nuanced and complex dynamics of "post-Civil Rights" politics (Omi and Winant 1994; Marable 1995). Since the 1970s, the very same political changes that the

Civil Rights Movement unleashed has opened the way for rearticulating racial politics such that charges of "reverse discrimination" now permeate American political discourse. As liberals find themselves struggling with new challenges, some conservatives have reached out for minority votes and support (Omatsu 1994; Park 1998). Whether these attempts reflect their anxiety in the face of demographic change or genuine commitment to racial inclusion, conservatives are increasingly reluctant to politically write off racial minorities, especially in large cities and diverse states where racial minority voters can shift the electoral balance. These emerging trends signal the new realities that bring into question the traditional liberal assumptions of race, power, and coalition building.

These events and our case studies suggest that participation in community politics is promoted by strong local organizations which facilitate resource development, community mobilization, leadership training, political lobbying, and serve as a basis for communication and negotiation among groups. A major concern is negotiating and establishing common issues, while recognizing that differences exist but will be put aside temporarily as the groups work toward common goals. Clearly, this is not always possible. In Los Angeles, for example, extreme conflict between Korean shopkeepers and African American customers and residents prompted the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission to initiate the Black Korean Alliance in 1986. While achieving some success in the mediation of conflict, the Los Angeles Civil Unrest of 1992 underscored the magnitude of the problems in urban centers and the limitations of efforts such as the Alliance, which was dissolved in 1992 (Chang 1993; Min 1996). Elections in multiracial communities, such as Monterey Park in Los Angeles County, demonstrate that Asian Pacific Americans, Latinos, and whites would cross-over and vote for candidates of other racial origins. At the same time, however, when offered a choice of strong candidates, and able to cast multiple votes in elections with a number of seats up for election, voters in Monterey Park demonstrated that race

continued to be the major factor as voters overwhelmingly cast their ballots in the largest number for candidates of the same race and ethnicity (Fong 1994; Horton 1995).

The fact that the Black Korean Alliance disbanded, or that coalitions fail to elect their candidates, does not necessarily signify that all meaningful work toward mediating conflict and creating alliances cannot succeed. On the contrary, the individual relationships and networks that are nurtured and supported by such struggles often live beyond their initial contact. Such attempts should be seen as part of larger, long-term efforts to address community concerns. The fact that individuals and groups are able to begin the process of dialogue and negotiation, develop an agenda to pursue jointly, and at least temporarily, work together lays the groundwork for future collaborations.

The next section offers four case studies of multiracial relations, examining the successful Houston mayoral campaign of African American Lee Brown that utilized a multiracial grassroots strategy; New York City Council redistricting and elections in Chinatown that involved discussions of Asian Pacific American/white and Asian Pacific American/Latino alliances and that met with mixed results; an effective multiracial effort to address high school violence in the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles County; and a notable international and multiracial effort to support union jobs in Los Angeles involving Latino workers, a Korean corporation, and Korean labor unions. These case studies illustrate the importance of forging common goals that transcend narrow, parochial interests, the role of building and sustaining relations among individuals and organizations that can form the basis for communication and collaborative efforts, and the critical role that organizations play as vehicles for leadership training, resource building, community mobilization, and a basis for communication and negotiation among groups.

Case Studies

A. The Lee Brown Campaign in Houston

In 1997, as Los Angeles and New York elected conservative Republicans into the City Hall to replace liberal African American mayors and as affirmative action programs were under a nationwide attack, Houston's racial politics were undergoing a defining moment. In a city with a well-earned reputation for political conservatism and white-dominance, the mayoral race pitted Robert Mosbacher, a conservative Anglo and a member of the city's famed oil elite, against Lee P. Brown, a liberal African American and the city's former Chief of Police (American Political Network 1997). Sharpening the racial overtone of the mayoral race was the bitter campaign surrounding Proposition A—inspired by California's Proposition 209—that called for the elimination of affirmative action in the city's hiring and contracting policies. The two candidates stood on opposite sides of Proposition A, with Mosbacher supporting and Brown opposing the controversial measure (Sallee 1997). In a hotly contested and closely watched race, the nation was stunned when Houston voters elected their first African American mayor and decided to uphold the city's affirmative action policy. In his victory speech, Brown vowed to lead a "new" multiracial Houston, based on politics of inclusion and economic justice (Benjaminson 1997; Bernstein 1997c). Sharing the spotlight with the mayor was a contingent of Asian Pacific Americans, most of whom were members of Asian-Americans for Lee Brown. According to the newly-elected mayor, for the first time in Houston's mayoral politics Asian Pacific Americans played a visible and a defining role in the city's mayoral campaign.

This case study examines the relationship between Asian Pacific Americans and Lee Brown's campaign. First, the case study focuses on why Brown viewed Asian Pacific American support—along with the support of Latinos—as such an important element to his overall campaign.

Second, the case study goes behind the scenes to examine the politics within the Asian Pacific American community that ultimately resulted in the community's visible support of the mayor.

Since the 1970s, African American politicians have mounted a steady effort to win the mayor's seat in Houston. Motivating their effort was the profound sense of their exclusion from Houston's political and economic structure (Rodriguez 1998a). As documented in Joe Feagin's influential Free Enterprise City (1988), the pro-business elite that dominated the politics of the city consistently viewed the African American community with a combination of hostility and neglect. As the Civil Rights Movement spread throughout the nation and brought unprecedented inclusion of African Americans in other major U.S. cities, Houston remained largely unaffected. As Houston's economy boomed during the 1970s, the African American community—without much political voice—bore the brunt of massive urban renewal programs that left much of their community uprooted and destroyed (Feagin 1988). While the political will of the community was strong, African Americans, with only 35 percent of the votes, could not find a candidate that could "cross-over" and win the majority of the votes (Rodriguez 1998a; Feagin 1988).

From the mid-1970s, Houston—much like many of the major cities in the U.S.—underwent a profound demographic change that would alter the politics of the city (see Table 1). Even as white residents were leaving Houston en masse in the aftermath of the oil crash, Houston become one of the major centers of immigration (Rodriguez 1995). Houston's established Mexican American community saw a renewed and massive migration from Mexico. They were quickly joined by other immigrants from Central America who made the Latino community in Houston one of the largest in the nation. During the same time, Asians and Pacific Islanders came to Houston in massive numbers, the largest flow made up of Vietnamese refugees fleeing their war-torn country.

Other Asian immigrants flocked to Houston in search of economic opportunities (Rodriguez 1995). By 1990, Houston had the eighth largest Asian Pacific American population in the country (Shinagawa 1996). For both Latinos and Asians, their entry into Houston has not been smooth. Latinos have had to struggle with chronic occupational and residential segregation and have had a profoundly strained relationship with the city's Police Department (Rodriguez 1995). For some groups of Asian Pacific Americans, their demographic growth and economic visibility have been met with backlash, including incidents of anti-Asian violence. Nonetheless, as Houston was preparing for the 1997 election, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Pacific Americans accounted for 60 percent of the city's population (Bernstein 1997a, 1997b).

TABLE 1. POPULATION OF HOUSTON 1998 (estimated)

Race/Ethnicity	Population	Percent
African American	558,783	27%
Asian Pacific American	165,633	8%
Latino	599,581	29%
White	736,657	35%
Other	27,402	1%
Total	2,088,056	100%

Source: Compiled by Philip Law, UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, from Current Population Survey.

Given the historical experiences and contemporary realities, Lee Brown sought to build his campaign on the theme of "diversity" as a way to resist being labeled a narrow "black candidate" and as a way to acknowledge the growing racial complexity in Houston (Bernstein 1997a). From the beginning of his campaign, Brown placed reaching out

to Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans at the top of his political agenda. In this effort, Brown resisted both working through established Latino and Asian Pacific American elected leaders and appealing narrowly to well-organized business interests. Instead, he addressed the social service needs of the Asian Pacific American and the Latino communities and underscored their political exclusion from the city's political process (see Rodriguez 1998b). A close observer of the race comments:

> The major difference between Mosbacher and Brown was obvious when it came to Latinos and Asians. Mosbacher worked to win the support of elected leaders and the business groups. I guess he went after the big names and the money. By getting their support, he could also claim that he had the support of these communities. Brown went the other way. He actually talked about programs and issues that would impact these communities. Programs for social service agencies to meet the needs of the youth and the elderly was a main platform and a major winner for Asians and Latinos who felt they were shortchanged when it came to city's social services. Brown was also explicit about his plans for bringing Asians and Latinos into the political process. Using the theme of "neighborhood oriented government," he urged us to participate: not just through our leaders or with our money but with our votes and involvement (Author's interview 1998).

Another observer comments, "reaching out to Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans made Brown really stand out from previous African American candidates. When Sylvester Turner ran in 1991, Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans were completely invisible in his campaign. By reaching out to these two groups—as well as lobbying for white liberals—Brown was also sending a message to all of the Houston's voters: namely that he is not just a black candidate."(Author's interview 1998)

As the election heated up during the summer of 1997, Brown was dealt a powerful blow when two of the major Asian Pacific American and Latino political figures threw their political support behind Mosbacher. First, Martha Wong, the sole Asian Pacific American member of the City Council and an established member of the Republican Party, declared her support for Mosbacher, citing both his support for pro-business policies and his opposition to Proposition A. In making her support public, she argued that Asian Pacific Americans, as a predominantly entrepreneurial group, would stand to directly benefit from pro-business policies and that affirmative action had hurt Asian Pacific Americans access to public employment in Houston (see Mason 1998a, 1998b). In addition, Gracie Saenz, a Latina Councilwomen and a Democrat, declared her support for Mosbacher. Echoing a similar theme, Saenz cited Mosbacher's "extensive experience in business," his commitment to traditional family values, and his goal of expanding international trade with Latin America (Bernstein 1997b; Bernstein and Benjamison 1997).

Reflecting back on these two developments, a Chinese American professor at the University of Houston comments:

> If Brown did not establish his relationship to Asian Pacific Americans and Latinos from the beginning, he would have faced tremendous difficulties when these highly visible politicians turned against him. I mean, these were seen as leading spokespersons of these communities. However, by this time, Brown had built his own network of supporters—mostly with social service organizations and community organizations. This allowed him to shrug off what would have been a potentially devastating turn of events (Author's interview 1998).

While Saenz's support for Mosbacher was countered with declared support for Brown from various established Latino politicians and the influ-

ential Tejano Democrats, members of the Asian Pacific American community found themselves scrambling to organize and declare their support for Brown (Bernstein 1997b). To provide a public platform for declaring their support, Asian-Americans for Lee Brown was created in October, 1997. Made up of a cross-section of Asian Pacific American community activists, social service organizations, and business groups, Asian-Americans for Lee Brown directly opposed Martha Wong (Asian-Americans for Lee Brown 1997). A Korean American community activist comments:

> The creation of Asian-Americans for Lee Brown was a major turning point for the Asian Pacific American community in Houston. On the one hand, the community showed that there is considerable political diversity within the Asian Pacific American community—that we are not just all conservative or that our politics is simply based on the interest of small businesses. On the other hand, Asian Pacific Americans showed that we have matured politically. Even though Martha Wong was, by far, the most influential politician in our community, we showed that our politics can take us beyond just one person. Just as important, we showed that we would not use a single issue to test a candidate. While Martha tried to use the affirmative action issue to pit us against African Americans, those of us who supported Brown felt that his platform, overall, was much better for us (Author's interview 1998).

During the runoff campaign, Brown relied heavily on the endorsement from Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans to rally support from these two communities and to send an unequivocal message that his political appeal was not just limited to the African American community (Benjaminson 1997). In the end, Brown won the runoff by 16,000 votes out of 300,000 total cast, securing 95 percent of the African American

vote, 26 percent of the White vote, and running even in both Latino and Asian Pacific American communities (Bernstein 1997c). Addressing the diversity of Brown's support, Alan Bernstein of The Houston Chronicle reported that Brown won this election with an "ethnic medley with black chorus" (Bernstein 1997d).

B. Redistricting in New York City

In 1989, prompted by lawsuits charging racial discrimination and violation of the U.S. Constitution, the New York City Charter was amended to increase the number of city council districts from 35 to 51, a change intended to improve the political representation of minorities. Working from 1990 to 1991, a Districting Commission held a series of public hearings and crafted new council districts.

In the 1991 city council elections following redistricting, Asian Pacific American candidates failed in their attempt to become the representative of the Chinatown district, which contained the city's largest concentration of Asian Pacific Americans. In contrast, the number of African Americans and Latinos on the council increased dramatically from 26 to 41 percent (from 9 to 21), raising the question of why the districting process apparently worked for those two groups, but failed for Asian Pacific Americans.

Asian Pacific Americans agreed that Chinatown should be kept intact within a district and criticized past redistricting efforts which fragmented the community and diluted their electoral strength (Chong 1990; Fung 1990; Lam, N. 1990). Developing criteria to define Chinatown, studies presented to the Districting Commission focused on population, housing, schools, social services, employment, industry, organizations, and commercial enterprises. The "core of Chinatown" was contained in 8 contiguous census tracts (6, 8, 16, 18, 25, 27, 29, 41), and Asian Pacific Americans constituted over 70 percent of the area's population (New York Chinatown History Project 1990; Fung 1991; Koo 1990a).

Chinatown, located in Lower Manhattan, occupies prime real estate, a few blocks north of City Hall, with Wall Street and the World Trade Center a short distance to the south. The increasingly popular residential and entertainment districts, Soho and Tribeca, lay to the west, inhabited primarily by whites, while the Lower East Side borders on the east with large numbers of Latinos and some African Americans.

Before the release of the 1990 Census data, community members estimated that Chinatown contained from 100,000 to 150,000 inhabitants based on the number of housing units and average occupancy, a population sufficient to create an Asian Pacific American majority district. However, the release of the official census data revealed the impossibility of that solution. With a city population of 7,322,564, each of the 51 districts would require a population of approximately 143,579 (as compared to 212,000 with 35 districts) and the census counted only 62,895 in the eight tracts containing Chinatown, falling far short of the district requirement. The Census undercount of Chinatown's population and the decision to increase the number of districts to 51, rather than to the minimum of 60 recommended by community groups (Fung 1991), perhaps had minimal individual effects, yet they added to the overall political barriers faced by Asian Pacific Americans.

Community activists agreed on the general boundaries of Chinatown and the goal of keeping it intact within one council district. The fundamental issue which divided community activists centered on the decision over what areas should be added to Chinatown to meet the minimum population requirement. Two competing plans emerged in the debate over the relationship between race and political representation, offering contrasting alternatives for Chinatown and its relation to the predominately Puerto Rican neighborhood to the north and east and the white areas to the west and south.

Members of Asian Americans For Equality (AAFE), a social service provider, led the effort for a district based on descriptive repre-

sentation (Pitkin 1967) and the historic opportunity to elect an Asian Pacific American. They characterized redistricting and the upcoming election jointly as a pivotal moment when the history of political exclusion nationally and locally—at that time, an Asian Pacific American had never been elected to the city council or citywide office—could be reversed. As city council candidate and AAFE member Margaret Chin (1990) explained in a presentation to the Districting Commission, "It is the opportunity for real representation for communities that have too long been under represented." With this in mind, AAFE (Koo 1990b, 4) proposed that the core of Chinatown should be joined with areas to the west, stating that "Asian candidates have done better than white candidates in the area west of the core, where one would assume white candidates with a liberal agenda would traditionally be at their best." They ruled out the areas to the east of Chinatown because their data analysis showed that Asian Pacific American candidates did poorly in local elections.

A variety of community activists and organizations—such as the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), Community Service Society, and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF)—focused on the needs and interests of the low-income and working-class residents as compared to the middle-class district proposed by AAFE. Recognizing that no single ethnic or racial group in the area was large enough to constitute 50 percent or more of a district, residents formed an organization, Lower East Siders for a Multi-Racial District, which proposed a plan that would create a majority Latino, Asian Pacific American, and African American district (Chan 1991). The plan proposed a district with a "minority-majority" population, incorporated the bulk of their communities, and considered population growth trends. Elaine Chan (1991)—a member of the Multi-Racial District organization and coordinator for the Lower East Side Joint Planning Council, a housing advocacy group—stressed the long history of multiracial activism in the area and how that defined and reinforced a

tightly knit political community. She argued that "Asians, Latinos, and African Americans have had a historic working relationship on issues of common concern: housing, health care, immigration, day care, bilingual education, affordable commercial space, job training, and general quality of life issues." Chan also refuted the assumption that Latinos would not vote for Asian Pacific Americans, noting that Latinos supported two Asian Pacific American candidates in the 1987 judicial race (Ohnuma 1991).

Alan Gartner (1993, 67), Districting Commission Executive Director, maintained that the commission members believed that the majority of the Asian Pacific American community favored separating Asian Pacific Americans and Latinos so that the two groups would not compete against one another. By joining Chinatown with areas to the west, Gartner (1993, 67-68) explained, "Ultimately, the Districting Commission opted to craft a district designed to offer the only opportunity in the city to the Asian-American community to elect a candidate of its choice." However, according to Judith Reed (1992, 777), General Counsel to the Districting Commission, others affiliated with the commission believed that public testimony clearly favored a multiracial district, contradicting Gartner's interpretation of events. The history of combining minority populations in the U.S. is mixed, with groups both voting as a bloc and against one another (Ancheta and Imahara 1993; Guinier 1991; Saito 1998).

The districting plans joined Chinatown with areas to the west and created District 1 in which Asian Pacific Americans were the largest group at 39.2 percent, slightly ahead of whites at 37.2 percent, as shown in Table 2. However, in terms of registered voters, whites clearly dominated the district with 61.5 percent as compared to 14.2 for Asian Pacific Americans. Lower voter registration rates for Asian Pacific Americans and Latinos may have offered a relative advantage for Chinatown if it were linked to the Lower East Side where Latinos also show a dropoff in registered voters as compared to population as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL DISTRICT 1 AND 2

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of: District Population	Voting Age Population	Registered Voters (estimated)
DISTRICT 1 (Population: 137,930)			
African American	5.8	5.8	8.8
Asian Pacific American	39.2	37.9	14.2
Latino	17.4	15.3	15.5
White	37.2	40.7	61.5
DISTRICT 2 (Population: 151,883)			
African American	8.0	7.3	8.1
Asian Pacific American	7.1	7.0	2.3
Latino	25.2	20.8	18.4
White	59.3	64.5	71.3

Source: New York Districting Commission (July 26, 1991) letter to the Department of Justice. Percentages are rounded.

From the perspective of many Asian Pacific Americans, District 1 was inextricably linked with Asian Americans For Equality (AAFE) and its council candidate, Margaret Chin. AAFE has provided a range of community services, such as building and renovating affordable housing, providing information and training to small business owners, and enforcing tenant rights. Despite its indisputable progressive and community roots, critics of AAFE charged that it had become a developer intent on following its own agenda, and unilaterally putting forth its redistricting plan reinforced that image (Jacobs 1997). AAFE's support in 1982

for Chinatown garment subcontractors against workers and charges that it used a subcontractor that paid below minimum wages reinforced the view that the organization had strayed from its original mission (Lagnado 1991). Kathryn Freed, Chin's main opponent and eventual winner, was an attorney with a history of working for tenants' rights and affordable housing. Freed adopted the platform of the Asian American Union for Political Action—whose members included supporters of the multiracial district—and its emphasis on jobs and housing and received the organization's endorsement.

While racial minorities have forged alliances with white liberals to gain political incorporation, the driving force of such coalitions—the convergence of interests—did not frame District 1 events. Chin was unable to gain crucial West Side support, and major Democratic clubs and representatives backed Freed. The influential Soho Alliance argued that "Problems on the West Side—overdevelopment, the waterfront, the West Side Highway, loft laws, historic districts...have little in common with Chinatown community's woes, such as the need for affordable housing, jobs and education programs" (Hester 1991, p. 10). The rapid growth of Chinatown received little campaign attention, although the preservation of Little Italy—currently surrounded by an expanding Chinatown—continues as a major dividing issue.

While Asian Pacific American descriptive representation was not served in District 1, Freed's efforts to gain Asian Pacific American backing and her support of working class issues transcended narrowly defined racial politics and demonstrated the importance of building a larger, more inclusive base and platform which included Chinatown concerns. In addition, Chinatown was kept intact and not fragmented among different districts, a major goal supported by AAFE and the multiracial district advocates. Chin's loss demonstrated the need to rebuild and reinforce political relations. While white voters had supported Asian Pacific American candidates in previous local elections, Chin's campaign had

apparently not laid the groundwork necessary to gain the endorsement of key community leaders and failed to generate compelling issues to win the support of a majority of voters. However, Freed's election was not a complete victory for backers of the multiracial district since a major concern that drove their plans was the preservation and reinforcement of the political community generated from the history of alliances in the Chinatown/Lower East Side region. Those two areas were divided into Districts 1 and 2, fragmenting the community. Adding to the complexity of political representation, Puerto Rican Antonio Pagan was elected in District 2, serving descriptive representation. Pagan championed community safety, Puerto Rican empowerment, and his work promoting affordable housing, while his detractors argued that his efforts were intended to support the interests of real estate developers (Ferguson 1993; Morales 1991). The struggle over nationalist concerns versus multiracial alliances is also a key issue in the next case study on high school violence.

C. The Multi-Cultural Community Association and the Alhambra School District

The issue of high school violence in the San Gabriel Valley of Los Angeles County offers an illustration of how community members address the political, economic, and cultural implications of rapid growth among Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans. Located fifteen minutes by freeway east of downtown Los Angeles, the region is undergoing dramatic demographic changes due to international and domestic migration. Primarily white in the 1950s, the region now has Latinos as the largest group. Asian immigration, led by ethnic Chinese but also including significant numbers of Vietnamese, Koreans, and other groups, has led to a large and rapidly growing Asian Pacific American presence, adding to the native-born Japanese American and Chinese American population which began entering the region in the 1950s and 1960s. Latinos are the most

powerful politically at the regional level, holding all higher elected offices in 1998. The San Gabriel Valley is the center of the largest Chinese ethnic economy in the nation in terms of the number of ethnically owned businesses.

The Alhambra School District draws the bulk of its students from a cluster of cities—Alhambra, Monterey Park, Rosemead, and San Gabriel—which, according to the 1990 Census, collectively was 1.2 percent African American, 41.4 percent Asian Pacific American, 36.6 percent Latino, 20.1 percent white. Ranging in size from 37,000 to 82,000, the four cities are characterized more by mixed rather than segregated neighborhoods. Reflecting the relative youth of Asian Pacific Americans and their higher school-age population as compared to whites, the 9,700 high school students in the district are 51 percent Asian Pacific American, 38 percent Latino, 1 percent African American, and about 10 percent white (Alhambra School District 1990). This complex economic and political mix frames race relations in the region.

By the early 1990s, racial violence in local high schools, growing conflict among parents along racial lines as they struggled to resolve student issues, and the unresponsiveness of the Alhambra School Board prompted concerned residents to reconcile their differences and join together to force the school board to act. The local chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Chinese American Parents and Teachers Association of Southern California (Chinese American PTA), which was based in the San Gabriel Valley, established the Multi-Cultural Community Association to end the fragmentation of parents' efforts along racial lines and persuade the school board to implement policies to alleviate racial conflict.

In the mid-1980s, a fight involving Asian Pacific Americans, Latinos, and whites resulted in a non-fatal stabbing of a Chinese student. In 1991, two more fights involving Latinos, whites, and Asian Pacific Americans were reported. When parents expressed their concerns before

the school board, some white members of the board dismissed the fights with explanations of "youthful hormones" and "boys will be boys." The five-member board was comprised of one Mexican American, one Chinese American, and three whites, although support for issues did not necessarily follow racial lines in the long and complex deliberations that followed. Latino parents were also very concerned about the tracking of Latino students into non-college preparatory classes and the dismally low percentage of Latino, as compared to Asian Pacific American, students who completed courses required for college eligibility (Calderon 1995).

The members of the Chinese American PTA did not agree with the board members' explanation of the student problems. In a letter to the board they stated that "...racial conflicts led to the stabbing of a Chinese student at Alhambra High School" and in 1991 at San Gabriel High School, "Two Chinese students were victims of an unprovoked beating by a group of Latino students on campus" (CAPTASC 1991). After the 1991 fight, 225 Asian Pacific American students signed a letter describing some of the forms of harassment faced by Chinese students at San Gabriel High School—which was 42 percent Asian Pacific American, 44 percent Latino, with the remainder primarily white (Alhambra School District 1990)—and sent it to the Board of Education.

The Chinese American PTA was established in 1979. The group's history was explained during a discussion involving white, Latino, and Asian Pacific American residents who had gathered during the coalition building process around the issue of school violence. A member explained that Chinese American parents created the organization because the school-based PTAs did not meet the unique needs of the Chinese immigrant parents who included many who did not speak English and were unfamiliar with even the most basic practices of U.S. schools, such as report cards. The school district's refusal to use translators at the PTA meetings demonstrated an unwillingness to recognize the concerns of the new immigrants and created a need for an organization

which could deal with crucial education issues and involve parents in matters dealing with the safety and well-being of their children. Asian Pacific American parent groups have also been created in other Southern California communities with large immigrant populations, such as a Chinese group in Arcadia, Korean and Chinese groups in Cerritos, and a Korean group in Fullerton (Seo 1996).

At the same time that the Chinese PTA was lobbying the Alhambra School Board, members of LULAC were also attending school board meetings, requesting that the school district address conflict in the schools. Tension between the Asian Pacific American and Latino parents was exacerbated by the school board's reluctance to deal with conflict on the school campuses and the attempts of some board members to shift responsibility from the schools to the parents and to pit Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans against one another. According to Jose Calderon (1995), one of the founders of the multiracial coalition that emerged from the struggle, the initially antagonistic relationship between Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans was primarily due to the misconceptions each group had about the other. Latinos wrongly assumed that the Chinese PTA could use the large amounts of capital controlled by Asian Pacific American entrepreneurs in the region, giving them much greater access to local politicians and attorneys. Although there was a strong Latino middle-class population, it was composed primarily of salaried professionals who believed that they did not have access to the same level of resources as Asian Pacific Americans. On the other hand, Asian Pacific Americans incorrectly believed that since most of the local politicians were Latino, Latinos had greater political influence over members of the school board.

Calderon, representing LULAC, and Marina Tse, a Chinese immigrant woman and the president of the Chinese PTA, worked with a number of other individuals to try to overcome the "narrow nationalist" aims of each group and combine the two to form one organization

(Calderon 1995). Rather than combatants on opposite sides of a "racial" issue, Calderon and Tse stressed that as parents with children in the same schools, they should be united by the larger goal of seeking quality education in the school system where complex problems based on economic and demographic restructuring, class differences, cultural misunderstanding, and race were grossly oversimplified as racial conflict.

Calderon and LULAC had a long history of coalition building, demonstrated by LULAC's numerous meetings with the West San Gabriel Valley Asian Pacific Democratic Club and Calderon's involvement in multiracial politics in Monterey Park. His credibility among Latinos, Asian Pacific Americans, and whites as a person who was genuinely concerned about the issues of all groups was crucial as members of the different organizations worked to look beyond the immediate issue concerning campus violence to the larger issues involving quality of education and conflict management. The Los Angeles Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center also contributed legal aid for the students involved in the fights and mediation to help settle disputes among the parents. These individuals and organizations worked over a number of months and formed the Multi-Ethnic Task Force, later called the Multi-Cultural Community Association, and were successful in changing the school district's policy of handling conflict after the fact through containment and punishment, to instituting prevention programs which addressed the roots of the conflict.

D. Organizing Beyond Race and Nation: The Los Angeles Hilton Case

While the above three case studies have examined multiracial coalitions in traditional political settings, this case study examines a coalition building effort in an economic setting. On October 28, 1994, the employees of the Los Angeles Hilton and Towers—one of the largest hotels in Downtown Los Angeles catering to mainstream conventioneers

and tourists—received a notification from the Hilton Hotel International that they would lose their union contracts on New Year's Day, 1995. The owner of the building, Hanjin International, failed to come to terms with Hilton Hotel Corporation over renewing the terms of the two-year old management contract and decided to manage the Los Angeles Hilton itself (Silverstein 1994; Los Angeles Hilton and Towers 1994). As the first order of business, Hanjin International decided to cut labor costs by terminating the union contract between Hilton and the 575 mostly Latino employees who were represented by Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) Local 11, one of the most visible and activist labor unions in the city. Coming only two-and-a-half years after the devastating Los Angeles Civil Unrest, this event had all of the trappings of yet another volatile racial conflict, this time pitting a large and powerful Korean corporation against a small but activist Latino labor union. Given the potential for a bitter and divisive fight, the incident received almost immediate media coverage and the city braced for another racially charged incident (Silverstein 1994; Kang 1994; Garcia-Irigoyen 1994).

Hanjin International's venture into Los Angeles' real estate market came at the tail end of a decade-long Asian buying spree of high-profile properties. The Japanese began the trend during the mid-1980s with high profile purchases, including the Rockefeller Center in New York and the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles. Even though the commercial real estate market was taking a steep downturn during this time, Asian investors, flush with cash from their booming economies, acquired numerous buildings throughout the country. As a late comer, Korean companies joined others from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Indonesia and bought some of the major buildings in Los Angeles (Cho 1992).

In purchasing the Los Angeles Hilton, Hanjin Group—the fifth largest Korean conglomerate of which Hanjin International is a wholly owned subsidiary—sought to add American real estate to its massive

multinational business interests that included shipping, construction, energy, and, its crown jewel, the Korean Air Lines. Hanjin Group's purchase also reflected its own sense of economic vulnerability in South Korea. With growing democratic changes and the ensuing labor militancy of South Korean workers, Hanjin Group was no longer protected by the pro-growth policies of the South Korean government that had previously banned independent labor unions (Kim 1997). Indeed, their purchase of Los Angeles Hilton coincided with one of the largest labor struggles in South Korean history when workers from Hanjin Shipping Company successfully formed an independent labor union in 1992. The Los Angeles Hilton and Towers seemed far removed from the politics of South Korean labor relations. Despite their high hopes, Hanjin Group saw its investment in Hilton drop precipitously as the Los Angeles tourist industry became devastated in the aftermath of the civil unrest of 1992. With its investment shrinking by the day, Hanjin Group, through Hanjin International, decided to take over the management of the hotel and cut costs by eliminating the unionized workers.

Most of the Latino workers in Hilton were represented by Local 11, led by Maria Elena Dorazo, who has a well-earned reputation for innovative and principled organizing in the city (Cho 1992). Fearing that the event could become a racially-charged incident in a city that saw too many racially divisive conflicts, she called on Roy Hong, the Executive Director of Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) and a former consultant for Local 11, to help with the case. She had called on KIWA a couple of years earlier when Local 11 and KIWA successfully worked together to iron out a new contract for the workers at the nearby Koreana Hotel (Cho 1992). With KIWA's involvement, Local 11 hoped to defuse the racial dimension of the Hilton campaign as well as utilize KIWA's two sets of ties—its connections to the Korean American community and to the labor movement in South Korea—that could directly bear on the success of the Hilton campaign. KIWA immediately signed on as a full and open partner in the organizing campaign.

Almost immediately, the coalition between the Latino Local 11 and the Korean American KIWA brought increased visibility to the campaign. To a city that was wracked with racial division, the coalition between the two organizations won political support from mainstream political institutions. In particular, the Los Angeles City Council, at the urging of four of its most progressive members—Rita Walters, Jackie Goldberg, Mike Hernandez and Mark Ridley-Thomas—used the Hilton campaign as a forum to discuss the city's race relations and to protest the loss of unionized jobs (Los Angeles City Council 1997). After celebrating this important example of multiracial coalition in a divided city, the City Council urged Hanjin International to renew the labor contract with the workers. The public and visible support of the City Council brought added attention from others, including the media (Kang 1994; Garcia-Irigoyen 1994). In this way, one very real resource for the campaign was the coalition itself: by crossing the racial line, the campaign won important political support and visibility.

In addition, KIWA used the Korean American ethnic media to rally support from the Korean American community. In particular, KIWA exploited the conglomerate nature of Hanjin Group as it went after the most visible and vulnerable part of the Hanjin Group's presence in Los Angeles—the Korean Air Lines that is dependent on the Korean American traveling public. In campaign flyers and in Korea Times editorials, KIWA implored Korean Americans to boycott Korean Air Lines to punish Hanjin Group for its bad corporate citizenship and signed on numerous social service and religious organizations, including the Korean Methodist Church and the Korean American Interagency Council (an umbrella organization of Korean American social service agencies), to commit to a boycott (Kang 1994; Local 11 1994a, 1994b). Indeed, one of the major actions that the campaign undertook was at the Thomas Bradley International Terminal at the Los Angeles Airport where members of KIWA and the supporters of Local 11 distributed a

flyer that was addressed to the customers of Korean Air Line, asking the question "what will happen to 500 Hilton workers when the new year comes?" (Local 11 1994d). Coming at the height of the travel season, the campaign effectively put tremendous economic pressure on Korean Air Lines, and, in turn, the Hanjin Group.

It is critical to note that the involvement of KIWA was essential in applying this economic pressure. By going after Korean Air Lines, the campaign had effectively mounted a "secondary boycott"—an activity that Local 11 as a labor union is strictly forbidden to engage in under the Section 8 (b)(4)(i) of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). However, KIWA, as a nonprofit "worker's advocate organization",was able to mount a secondary boycott of the Hanjin Group (Wong 1992).

As the campaign reached a fever pitch with direct action in Los Angeles, including picketing and civil disobedience, KIWA relied on its international ties with South Korean labor unions to pressure Hanjin International to settle (Sierra 1994; McDonnell 1994). In November 1997 KIWA hosted a fact-finding visit by Nam Sang Oh—a reporter from The Korea Labor News, based in Seoul, Korea. With close consultation with KIWA and Local 11, The Korea Labor News published numerous stories regarding the Hilton campaign in Korea (Author's interview 1998). On the heels of this publicity, Committee for the Struggle to Reinstate Hanjin Dismissed Workers was formed in Korea under the leadership of Kyong Ho An, a veteran of Hanjin labor strikes. Citing both the class-based solidarity with Latino workers in Los Angeles and the long-term self-interest of preventing Hanjin Group from exporting unionized Korean jobs to unorganized workers abroad, the Committee threatened the Hanjin Group with sympathy strikes and actions in Korea (Author's interview 1998). In this sudden transnational move, Hanjin Group faced the real prospect of its multi-million dollar problem in Los Angeles growing into a multi-billion dollar problem in its own backyard.

With mounting pressures from all sides, Hanjin International decided to settle with Local 11 on January 6, 1995. In the settlement, Hanjin agreed to renew the labor contract with Local 11 and to rehire all of the workers with their seniority firmly in place (Kang 1995; Los Angeles Times 1995). At a time when labor unions had been in full retreat nationwide, Local 11 won an important victory for its 575 workers against what had initially appeared to be impossible odds. Moreover, the Hilton campaign provides important lessons and possibilities for multiracial coalition building, including coalition building beyond the nation.

CONCLUSION: Lessons from the Case Studies

Our analysis suggests a number of lessons regarding multiracial coalitions and collaborations. First, racial coalitions emerge most strongly when groups are able to set aside short-term, group-specific benefits to address more fundamental issues that can bring progressive social change. In the Alhambra School District, Asian Pacific Americans and Latinos transformed the initial issue of school violence into a broader discussion of inclusive participation, conflict resolution, and tracking of minority students. Most importantly, Asian Pacific Americans and Latinos mobilized collectively to bring accountability to the school district and to improve the quality of education for all students. Likewise, in the Los Angeles Hilton case, Local 11 and KIWA worked together under the common vision of maintaining union jobs that pay a living wage and provide basic benefits. The fact that Local 11 and KIWA was able to recruit Korean labor unions to their campaign stands as a hopeful sign that coalition building on the part of labor can cross national boundaries in this era of transnational capital.

Second, in an ironic twist, successful multiracial coalition building must resist narrow race-based politics, while clearly recognizing the importance of race in society. In the Houston case, Lee Brown con-

sciously resisted the label of "the black candidate." Instead, from the very beginning of his candidacy, he consciously reached out to Asian Pacific Americans, Latinos, and liberal whites, consistently promising a more inclusive and responsive leadership. Members of the Asian Pacific American community had to also go beyond its narrow racial politics to support Lee Brown: a segment of the community broke ranks with City Councilwoman Martha Wong when she endorsed Robert Mosbacher. As a member of Asian-Americans for Lee Brown states, "it was more important for the community to be divided and be true to itself, than united just for the sake of unity" (Author's interview 1998). The New York City Chinatown case illustrates that voters work within a constantly changing set of conditions and suggests that AAFE—whose well-run campaign for establishing district boundaries was a success—may have counted too heavily on past electoral victories for their candidate, Margaret Chin, without sufficiently working to re-establish support in the heavily white community west of Chinatown for AAFE's redistricting plans and Chin's city council race. While the Multi-Racial District group did not succeed in their efforts to create a Chinatown/Lower East Side district, Kathryn Freed worked to establish a multiracial base and adopted their platform in District 1.

Third, building alliances also underscores the importance of building and sustaining relations among individuals and organizations that can promote collaborative efforts. Jose Calderon's history of supporting alliances among Asian Pacific Americans, Latinos, and whites in the San Gabriel Valley proved essential with the issue of school violence; and the previous efforts between KIWA and HERE, and Roy Hong and Maria Elena Durazo, paved the way for joint action on the Hilton labor issue. A history of working together, constructing networks, and building trust can help lay the foundation as new concerns emerge. Organizations play a key role in this process, forming an institutional base from which individuals can meet.

Fourth, ethnic specific organizations, rather than generating divisiveness in society (Schlesinger Jr. 1991) as the Alhambra School District case study demonstrated, serve as vehicles for community mobilization, leadership training, resource building, and an effective basis for communication and negotiation among various community groups. Funding for these groups is paramount, and such organizations as Asian Americans For Equality, Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates, Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and the Chinese American Parents and Teachers Association of Southern California play crucial roles in fostering grassroots participation. Funding—including private foundations and from the various levels of government—can be problematic, however, if the allocation of funds is used to suppress critical views about government policy and/or social issues among community groups (Mollenkopf 1992). Local community groups—such as the Multi-Cultural Community Association in the San Gabriel Valley and the Multi-Racial District group in New York City—often arise to face particular issues, and disband once their goals are met. However, even though community organizations come and go, the working relationships that such organizations nurture and support are meaningful because the same individuals often play key leadership roles in different organizations over time in a particular region, maintaining relationships between diverse segments of the community.

Finally, there are important structural impediments—such as the accuracy of the census and number of districts—to political participation and coalition building. Broader participation is necessary for Asian Pacific Americans, especially in the area of electoral politics. As a way of electing representatives, single member districts have been very effective for large populations of hypersegregated African Americans and whites, but in the case of New York City and much of the U.S., the more dispersed populations—including large numbers of non-citizens—of Asian Pacific Americans make such districts problematical. Suggestions for

alternative election systems need to be considered, such as cumulative voting, in which voters can cast as many votes as there are open seats and can strategically use those votes by spreading them among the candidates or using all of their votes on one candidate (Guinier 1994; Reed 1992).

The emerging theme of the new millennium is the complexity and heterogeneity of U.S. minorities in contrast to the broad overlap of class and racial positions of America's earlier history. This diversity is the challenge for coalitions as different class positions, unbalanced levels of resources and power, and dissimilar immediate material interests potentially impede coalition formation.

* * *

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