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Cyborgs for Environmental Justice: East Asian American Stories from the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

Lisa Ng

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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CYBORGS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: EAST ASIAN AMERICAN STORIES FROM
THE 1991 PEOPLE OF COLOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

by

LISA YONG CHIU NG

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

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Lisa Yong Chiu Ng

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal
Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

Kenneth Gould

Thesis Advisor

Date

Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

Executive Officer

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Cyborgs for Environmental Justice: East Asian American Stories from the
1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

by
Lisa Yong Chiu Ng

Advisor: Kenneth Gould

The goal of this paper is threefold: to serve as an oral history archive of the East Asian American experience at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to analyze the role of East Asian Americans in the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM), and to fill an ideological and political vacuum that exists in East Asian American communities. This work analyses the experiences of East Asian Americans who were present at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit--an event scholars have attributed to igniting the EJM. The paper argues that East Asian Americans act as “Cyborgs”—both as their ascribed racializations under systems of White Supremacy and as posited in Donna Haraway’s influential *Cyborg Manifesto* — to use the technologies conceptualized in Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed* to gain autonomy and liberation from various systems of oppression. The East Asian American cyborgs present at the 1991 Summit embody Haraway’s cyborgian values by complicating infrastructures of oppression with their mere existence, organizing and empowering their communities, and utilizing their proximity to power to be effective allies to other communities engaged in struggles for environmental justice. This work is written in three chapters: Chapter 1: Cyborgian Pasts and Present presents the historical and theoretical framework of the Cyborg – both in the Harawayian sense and the racialized sense in relation to East Asian bodies - in addition to providing historical context of the Asian American movement and the Environmental Movement; Chapter 2: Planning Cyborgian Futures: Stories from the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit describes the events of the Summit as told by the attendees; and Chapter 3: Building Cyborgian Futures: Methodology and Practice describes how the Cyborgian East Asian American attendees of the conference use Sandoval’s technologies to build a more environmentally just world for all communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Oh, so you’re a bumblebee!”

“What? A Bumblebee?”

“Yeah, an Asian American who grew up in a majority Black neighborhood!”

- Dialogue between Pamela Chiang and me

Growing up, I always thought I was so lucky to live next to a cloud making machine. Every morning on the way to school, I would watch the machine puff out what I thought were the clouds of New York City. Unfortunately, it was not until several years later during the Northeast blackout of 2003 that I learned that my beloved cloud making machine was a power plant! Ah, imagine the dismay when I discovered that the clouds were not just clouds, but plumes of smoke from the incineration of natural gas.

As a second generation Chinese American and a first generation bumblebee, my parents have always framed education as the path from poverty to prosperity. Throughout my life, school has consistently served as a personal respite for social, economic, and cultural turmoil occurring both inside and outside my ever-changing definition of home. In the classroom, my only responsibility was to learn. For that and several other reasons, the classroom served as an alternative to reality during my formative years. Although I spent most of my formative years surrounded by other people of color, there were few educators who truly understood my lived experience. The education environments I passed through decontextualized the various identities I

held from the systems that created them. This made it easy for me to be one person in the classroom, and a different person elsewhere. Once I started to consciously apply what I learned in school to the lived experiences of myself, my family, and my communities, I felt free for the first time in my life. I learned that it is not a coincidence that I live next to a machine that manufactures clouds - I live next to a cloud making machine because I am a person of color on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale who lives in public housing. Systems of both racism and capitalism consistently deem communities of color undeserving of safe environments through which we are able to live, work, and play. Environmental issues make these invisible systems tangible, and there is power in the ability to name the systems that are causing us harm. For that reason, I believe in the environmental movement's potential to be the vanguard movement in the dismantling of these ubiquitous infrastructures of oppression.

In my coursework throughout CUNY, I learned of the systems that produce unlivable environments for various communities of color. I learned stories of communities of color who overwhelmingly face a disproportionate amount of environmental burdens on a local, national, and global scale. I learned of their resilience and their resistance. As someone who spent much of her life interacting with the socioeconomically challenged ethnic enclaves of New York City, I connected deeply with several aspects of these narratives. However, I noticed something missing. Where were the Asian American narratives in the canon of environmental activism? Why are their narratives not showing up in our education, and how can we work to amend that?

In fact, in my studies, I found that Asian American stories, voices, and communities are underrepresented in narratives regarding social movements. This issue is especially pertinent in the struggles for environmental justice. Despite personally knowing many of the Asian American

activists and organizers who helped to create the environmental justice movement as we know it today, I discovered that their stories were nowhere to be found in lessons being taught outside of Asian American community oriented spaces. After a series of informal conversations with friends and family who identify as Asian American and are active in the environmental justice movement, this project was born. To us, the importance of sharing these stories is twofold: we can actively combat the stereotypical narrative(s) imposed on Asian peoples and educate Asians/Asian Americans on their political histories. How can we build a future together when we do not properly know our histories?

I dedicate this project to all those fighting for environmental justice. I dedicate this project to the Asian Americans who are hesitant to get involved politically because they do not personally know of any Asians who have done so. I dedicate this project to all those interested in learning more about the intersection between East Asian Americana and the environmental movement. Furthermore, I owe the completion of this project to so many people outside myself - I carry eternal gratitude for the kindness of those who encouraged and guided my curious spirit, made and continue to make room for me in their lives, and who have guided me through my various bouts of anxiety, doubt, and straight up stubbornness.

To begin, I would like to thank Dr. Kenneth Gould, who allowed me the flexibility to pursue my academic interests throughout CUNY. Thank you for believing in me, challenging me, and reminding me to breathe. Next, I would like to thank the Asian American activists who have been and are continuing to fight for liberation from the various systems of oppression that threaten our communities. Your commitments to justice for all is truly inspiring. To Charles Lee, Lily Lee, Pam Tau Lee, Pamela Chiang, Miya Yoshitani, and Peggy Saika - thank you for taking time out of

your day to talk to me about your experience at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. I am honored to have received your wisdom and guidance. To all the Seeding Change Fellows of 2017 - thank you for creating a home for me everywhere you are. It is because of you all that I am not afraid to begin a life outside of New York City. To my NYCAASC family - thank you for allowing me to explore what it means to be Asian American. Thank you for sharing your Asian Americana with me. To my coworkers at both CityTech and REI - thank you for motivating me and encouraging me to finish this project with endless memes and check-in texts. To my mom, dad, and brother, thank you for reminding me why I do this work. Last but not least (and in no particular order) - thank you to Linda L., Yuni C., Claire C., Chester T., Curtis H., Em H., Irene S., Neelima D., Safanah S., Jake L., Mike L., Jonathan Y., Eddie C., Aian M., and to all my peers in the Interactive Technology and Pedagogy program at the CUNY Graduate Center and at the CUNY Building Performance Lab for your unwavering support, love, encouragement, and curiosity for the past several years. I love you! I am so lucky to be able to build a future with each and every one of you.

With that, I am excited to share *Cyborgs for Environmental Justice: East Asian American Stories from the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit* with everyone. If there is anyone who would like to contact me regarding this project or anything about environmentalism, Asian Americana, or even The Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit that took place in 2002, feel free to email me at lisa.ng@berkeley.edu with your thoughts, questions, and concerns. Enjoy!

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INTRODUCTION

“In those days (1960s), the late MLK came to Louisville. Arm to arm we marched down the street. [...] One day when we were out demonstrating, we were all arrested. By the way, we used to sing ‘We shall overcome’ and there was a second verse, black and white together. Our friends always made sure it was ‘black and white, yellow together.’ There is always a yellow in there because we are doing it together’. Once after spending a night in jail, I came back to my office and found a dish of jelly beans. There were some black jelly beans; there were some white jelly beans; and one yellow jelly bean. There are not many Asians in these movements, but there was at least one yellow jelly bean among the black and the white, because all of us were together.”

Syngman Rhee, Presbyterian Minister

People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, October 21st, 1991

“That the past is ahead, in front of us, is a conception of time that helps us retain our memories and to be aware of its presents. What is behind us [the future] cannot be seen and is liable to be forgotten readily. What is ahead of us [the past] cannot be forgotten so readily or ignored, for it is in front of our minds' eyes, always reminding us of its presence. The past is alive in us, so in more than a metaphorical sense the dead are alive - we are our history.”

Epeli Hau'ofa, Writer and Anthropologist

When asked to describe the characteristics of an ‘Asian American Environmentalist’, the answers run the gamut - ‘Crunchy’ Asians who only wear Birkenstocks and Patagonia always bothering people to recycle; camp, climb, hike too much; work at a non-profit whose mission is to protect the environment. When asked to name ‘Asian American activists’, the first names that often come up are Grace Lee Boggs and/or Yuri Kochiyama. However, when asked to name ‘Asian American environmental activists’, one often receives nothing more than a blank stare accompanied with several ‘um’s and the occasional ‘hmm. I don’t know!’

Despite the growing abundance of social consciousness and academic literature in the fields of both Environmental Justice Studies and Asian American Studies, relatively little has been written and shared explicitly about the specific role of Asian Americans in the Environmental Justice Movement. In acknowledging this gap in the literature, editors of the academic journal AAPI Nexus: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Policy, Practice, and Community dedicated a special issue on the topic titled “Asian American and Pacific Islander: Environmentalism: Expansions, Connections, and Social Change” in Fall of 2013. In this issue, Asian American scholars and activists cited, researched, and shared the roles and the narratives of various AAPI communities in the fight for environmental justice. It is no secret that Asian Americans communities, especially when they inhabit roles that conflict with the model minority narratives imposed on them, are understudied. However, it is quite egregious that despite being extremely active in the environmental justice movement, the role of Asian Americans in the movement have not been shared beyond the immediate communities in which they took place.

The goal of this work is threefold: to serve as an oral history archive of the East Asian American experience at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to analyze

the role of East Asian Americans in the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM), and to fill an ideological and political vacuum that exists in specifically East Asian American communities. This work exists as part of a larger ideological goal of mine: to stem the tide against the growing wave of neoconservatism in East Asian American communities through education. In 2000, Glenn Omatsu writes “Unlike African Americans, most APA today have yet to articulate the ‘particularities’ of issues affecting our communities, either these be the debate over affirmative action, the controversy regarding multiculturalism, or the very definition of priorities in American society” (Omatsu 2000, 51). This is an ideological vacuum that if the progressives do not fill, both neoconservatives and mainstream conservatives will fill (51), which is exactly what has happened - “beginning in the 1980s, there was a political vacuum in the Chinese community where the grassroots left used to be, which the Right has been only too happy to fill” (Kong et al 2018). A common adage amongst those in the fight for Ethnic Studies is “Know History, Know Self. No History, No Self”. This saying is derived from José Rizal’s quote - “He who does not know how to look back at where he came from will never get to his destination”. By learning, knowing, and sharing the rich history of activism and community organizing in various Asian American communities, we can return to place where Asian Americans prioritize community empowerment over individual empowerment.

The scope of analysis for this project is limited to East Asian Americans who were present at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. To understand the role of Asian Americans in the Environmental Justice Movement (commonly abbreviated as EJM), I wanted to begin my analysis at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit - an event that many scholars have attributed to igniting the EJM. I chose to focus on this conference because although this event is considered to be integral to the environmental justice movement, Asian

Americans present have not been written about beyond a name drop. How Asian Americans interacted with each other and other folks is indicative of the environmental justice movement as a whole because this was where the leaders converged to decide the future of the movement. My list of potential interviewees was limited by the scope of my network, as well as the availability of those who were interested in being interviewed. Because the conference happened almost three decades ago in 1991 before the widespread use of personal computing and email correspondence, many folks have lost touch. Over the span of two months, I interviewed five people - one in Washington DC, three in the San Francisco Bay Area, and one via the video conferencing application Zoom. I had a preliminary conversation with Pam Tau Lee about the project, and while she was not available to be interviewed, she generously connected me with several folks and sent over a speech she made that outlined her contributions to the EJM. Because I was only able to interview East Asian American identifying folks, this analysis will only cover the role of East Asian Americans in the EJM. This work is interdisciplinary in nature, and will be drawing on the work of scholars in the fields of Environmental Sociology, Political Science, Ethnic Studies, and Donna Haraway (whose work transcends disciplines).

In discussions of Asian America / Asian Pacific America, the East Asian experience is often overrepresented and overshadows the experience of those who do not identify as East Asian. It is important to acknowledge that the category Asian America / Asian Pacific America includes a diverse set of lived experiences, and it is often reductive to use the term Asian America / Asian Pacific America when referring specifically to East Asian America. To avoid perpetuating East Asian hegemony in discussions of Asian Americanness, I will be using the term East Asian American (EAA) to refer to the interviewees and their narratives. However, when referring to Asian Americans, many interviewees use the term 'API - Asian Pacific Islander' or 'APIA - Asian

Pacific Islander American'. To honor their analysis of the various social movements discussed, I will not be changing the term API or APIA in their quotes to EAA. To read more on discussion of racialization and Asian Americanness, please see Chapter 1.

Through the analysis of the narratives of the East Asian American experience at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, I argue that the role of EAA is to be a Cyborg - as posited by Donna Haraway in the influential *Cyborg Manifesto* - in the EJM engaging in the struggle for liberation with the steps outlined in Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* by complicating various infrastructures of oppression with our mere existence, organizing and empowering our communities, and utilizing our proximity to power to be effective allies to communities that require us to be so. In Chapter 1: Cyborgian Pasts and Presents, I will introduce the framework of analysis - the Cyborg and its tools - , discuss the contexts under which the overall Asian American movement and the environmental movement have developed, and examine the Cyborgian characteristics of both movements and how they might be integral to the success of the movement. In Chapter 2: Building Cyborgian Futures: 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (referred to as the Summit), I will be contextualizing the importance of the Summit within both the larger environmental movement and the Asian American movement, sharing the narratives of the East Asian American attendees, and discussing the importance of the conference in EAA participation in the EJM. In Chapter 3, Building Cyborgian Futures: Methodology and Practice, I will be examining the work of the EAA in the EJM through the framework of Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*, which was written to theorize how cyborgs are able to gain autonomy from and under various systems of oppression.

CHAPTER 1: CYBORGIAN PASTS AND PRESENT

‘Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing tools to mark the world that marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities.

In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture.

We have all been colonized by those origin myths.’

Donna Haraway

The Cyborg Manifesto, 1991

In this chapter, I will be introducing the concept of a cyborg as conceptualized by Donna Haraway, how it relates to the racialization of Asian bodies in the United States, and how it relates to the birth of the environmental justice movement in reaction to the mainstream environmental movement at the time. Jones and Jones (2017) writes about the merit of envisioning racialized humans as cyborgs - “envisioning racialized humans as cyborgs stimulates creative exploration of alternative social and political possibilities. We note, further, the power of that vision to explain lived realities of racialized humans. For example, theorizing people of color as cyborgs helps to explain their unequal or oppressive treatment, because cyborgs themselves are often de-humanized, treated as less than fully human, or conceptualized as threats to established social order” (5). Luckily for us, there is no need to theorize people of color as cyborgs because Asians and Latinx folks are already racialized as machines under the system of White Supremacy (Chun 2013) (Rhee 2016). The same system of White Supremacy is one that racializes Black and Brown bodies as

‘animal’, with White bodies being the only ones being worthy of being considered ‘human’. Haraway’s Cyborg was “created to transcend systems of racism, sexism, and capitalism by destabilizing borders between ‘self and other, autonomous organism and deterministic machine” (Haraway 1991, 163).

Although Haraway’s Cyborg is only one of many theories in the field of posthumanism, which envisions the future as composed by beings that are beyond human, it is by far the most influential as its concept continues to excite and invigorate scholars in all fields (Jones and Jones 2017) (Rhee 2016) (Paur 2012). In a cyborg, “the dichotomies between mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine, public and private, nature and culture, men and women, primitive and civilized are all in question ideologically” (Haraway 1991, 163). Simply put, the cyborg transcends all boundaries and adheres to none. Of the three main sets of boundaries that cyborgs transcend - human and animal, human and machine, physical and nonphysical - I will be focusing on the boundaries between human/machine/animal and its colonial past.

Creating Americana: Understanding Systems of Racialization

In order to truly understand the characteristics of a cyborg and the potential of the cyborg to build a world beyond various systems of oppression, one must understand the various systems that created the categories that the cyborg transcends. To truly comprehend the different ways in which different peoples are allowed to navigate through various communities, one must understand how they are racialized, and what these racializations both allow and expect these bodies to do. Sylvia Wynter argues that the concept of the ‘human’ as a racialized subject was used to distinguish European settlers from the ‘subhuman’ or ‘animalistic’ Africans and Native Americans in order to justify slavery, colonialism, and genocide (Wynter 2003). Wendy Chun, in *Race and/as*

Technology: or, How to Do Things to Race, she argues that while White people are posited as human at the expense of Black and Brown bodies who are racialized as animals, Asians are racialized as machines (Chun 2011). In Margaret Rhee's *In Search of My Robot: Race, Technology, and the Asian American Body*, she traces the historical background behind the racialization of various peoples and focuses on how "the robot in particular as a primary locus of racialization for Asian Americans" (Rhee 2016). Rhee writes "The human/animal distinction has been central to Euro-American modernity's conceptualization of race. As a mechanism, race is inherently imbricated in the shifting demarcations between human, animal, and machine. In demarcating the boundaries of the human, the machine - like the animal - prompts a comparative racial analysis. While the animal functioned as a mechanism for justifying slavery and objecthood for indigenous and Black people, the machine has largely been utilized in the service of Asian racialization and subjugation" (Rhee 2016).

The racialization of Black/Brown folks as animals and Asians as machines is driven by White Supremacy - the belief that only White bodies deserve to be marked as 'human', which has been a central tenet in the history of the United States. Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant write "a cursory glance at American history reveals that far from being colorblind, the US has always been an extremely race-conscious nation. From the very inception of the republic to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location in the labor market, and indeed one's sense of identity" (Omi and Winant 2015, 8). The socially constructed process of racialization - "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified group" (Omi and Winant 2015, 13) - can and does have an affect on the quality of the environment in which various communities live, work, and play. In addition, "racism is not a fixed structure; society's notions about race are not static and immutable, nor has the state been built on

an unchanging exclusion of all racialized peoples. Rather, legal institutions function as flexible apparatuses of racialization and gendering in response to the material conditions of different historical moments” (Lowe 1996, 22). When thinking about how the racialization of different people shape their lived experiences, it is important to remember the systems that racialize and oppress different groups work in tandem with one another, and that the historical subjugation of various communities of color still occur today.

Andrea Smith’s *Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy* creates a framework through which to discuss the various aspects White Supremacy plagues our lives: through genocide/colonialism, slavery/capitalism, and orientalism/war, which directly affects Indigenous/Native communities, Black communities, and Asian communities in the United States, respectively. In order for the US to exist as a nation, “Indigenous peoples must disappear. In fact, they must always be disappearing, in order to allow non-indigenous people rightful claim over this land. Through this logic of genocide, non-Native peoples then become the rightful inheritors of all that was indigenous - land, resources, indigenous spirituality, or culture” (Smith 2006, 68). Beyond this, “in this logic of white supremacy, Blackness becomes equated with slavability. The forms of slavery may change - whether it is through the formal system of slavery, sharecropping, or through the current prison-industrial complex- the logic itself has remained consistent. This logic is the anchor of capitalism. [...] This racial hierarchy tells people that as long as you are not Black, you have the opportunity to escape the commodification of capitalism. This helps people who are not Black to accept their lot in life, because they can feel that at least they are not at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy” (Smith 2006, 67). The construction of the United States not only requires the genocide of Indigenous folks and the enslavement of Black folks, but also the abjection of Asian peoples - “Orientalism was defined by Edward Said as the process of the west defining itself as a

superior civilization by constructing itself in opposition to an ‘exotic’ but inferior ‘orient’. The logic of Orientalism marks certain peoples or nations as inferior and as posing a constant threat to the well-being of empire. These people are still seen as ‘civilizations’- they are not property or ‘disappeared’ - however, they will always be imaged as permanent foreign threats to empire” (Smith 2006, 68). It is White Supremacy that perpetuates the continued genocide of Indigenous folks, oppression of Black folks, and the abjection of Asian folks.

White Supremacy’s affect on various ethnic groups can be visualized in Claire Jean Kim’s theory of Racial Triangulation (1999), which can be seen below:

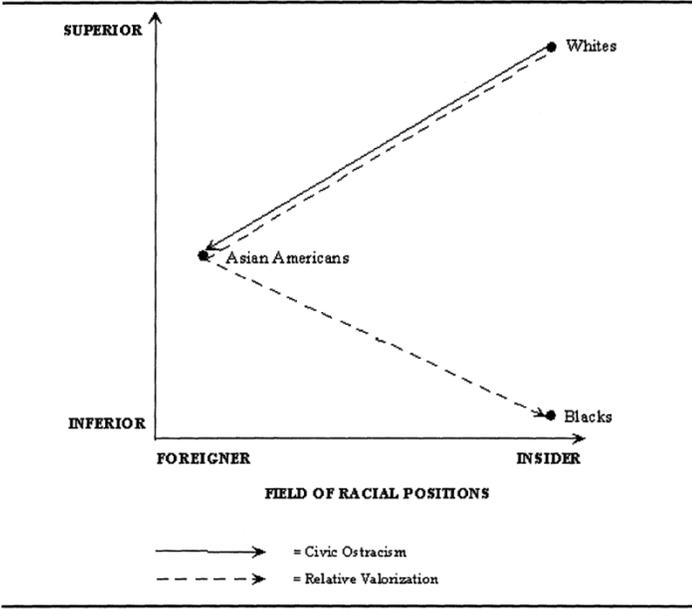


Figure 1: Claire Jean Kim's theory of Racial Triangulation (1994)

Kim created this framework to discuss the relationship between the racialization of Asian Americans and the Black/White binary because ‘Asians Americans have not been racialized in a vacuum, isolated from other groups; to the contrary, Asian Americans have been racialized relative

to and through interaction with Whites and Blacks” (Kim 1999, 106). In this framework, White people are considered to be both superior and insiders, Black people are considered to be inferior but also insiders, whereas Asians are considered to be in between White folks and Black folks in terms of superiority but are considered to be outsiders. Kim writes ‘perhaps the most striking feature of the racial triangulation of Asian Americans is its historical persistence’ (Kim 1999, 107). This work traces the history of Asian American abjection in two eras: pre-1965 and post-1965. In 1965, the implementation of the Immigration and Naturalization Act repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Asian Exclusion Act of 1924. Kim writes that prior to 1965, Asian American ostracism was explicit and driven by Yellow Peril, the belief that East Asians are dangerous to the well being of the Western nation. However, Asian American ostracism post-1965 is coded and driven by the Model Minority Myth - the belief that Asian Americans are “a model minority whose cultural values of diligence, family solidarity, respect for education, and self sufficiency have propelled it to noble success” (Kim 1999, 118). It is important to note the Model Minority Myth was popularized in the 1960s, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, to specifically refer to Japanese Americans, who are East Asian Americans. Its first recorded usage was in a New York Times magazine article titled “Success Story, Japanese-American Style” in 1966, the same year that the phrase “Black Power” entered the mainstream (Kim 1999, 119). The author of the article, William Petersen argued that “Japanese Americans have succeeded relative to problem minorities such as Blacks because they hold “Tokugawa” values (diligence, frugality, and achievement orientation) that link them with the ‘alien’ culture of Japan,” despite the fact that the Japanese American population at the time composed mainly of native born Japanese Americans” (Kim 1999, 119). To the other minorities, “the clear implication is that Blacks would do well to dispense with political agitation and demand making and follow the example of the Model Minority” (Kim 1999, 119). Furthermore, the Model Minority Myth suggests that East Asian

Americans are too busy pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and getting ahead to worry about the political climate, “echoing the old trope of Asian American apoliticalness” (Kim 1999, 118).

In addition to Kim’s original framework, Smith’s three pillars of White Supremacy, as well as the colonial racializations of White people as humans, Asian people as machines, and Black people as animals could also be mapped onto this chart.

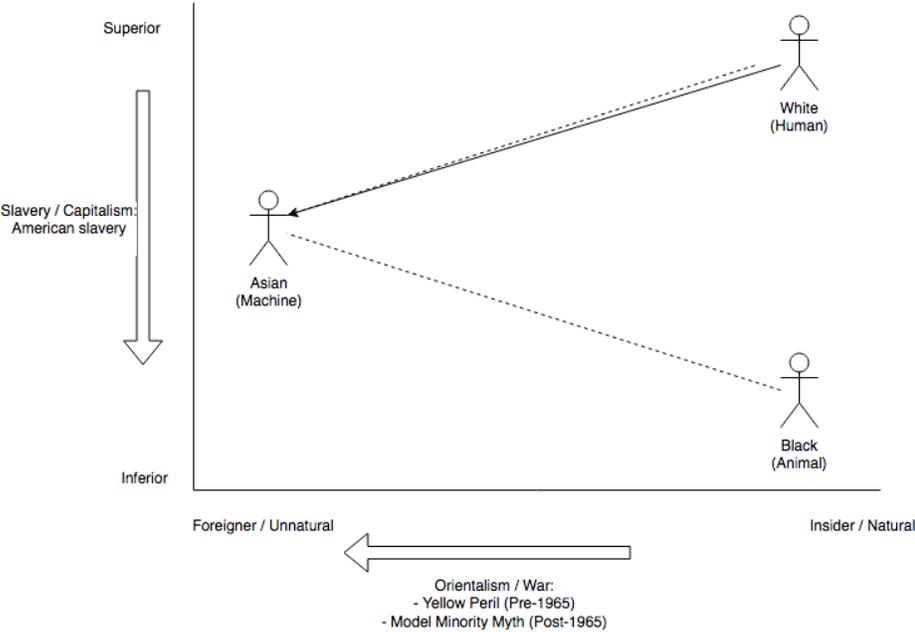


Figure 2: Claire Jean Kim's Theory of Racial Triangulation contextualized with systems of White Supremacy

In order to truly comprehend the extent to which Asians have been racialized as machines, one must understand that the very concept of Asian Americanness as a whole has been defined by the relationship of the Asian body to both the construction of the American nation and to capitalism. In Lisa Lowe’s seminal work *Immigrant Acts*, she writes that “the project of imagining the nation as homogenous requires the orientalist construction of cultures and geographies from which Asian immigrants come as fundamentally ‘foreign’ origins antipathetic to the modern American society that ‘discover’, ‘welcomes’, and ‘domesticates’ them” (Lowe 1996, 5). Unlike

African slaves, Asians were encouraged to immigrate to the States because they were seen as cheap labor, and therefore only valued due to the lack of value assigned to their labor. Lowe argues that as capital deals with the constant systemic crisis of declining profits, capital seeks out cheaper factors of production, especially labor. From the early 1800s to the start of World War II, “the recruitment of Asian immigrant labor was motivated by the imperative to bring cheaper labor into the still developing capitalist economy: Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino laborers were fundamental to the building of the railroads, the agricultural economy, and the textile and service industries. [...] Capital in the 1880s utilized racialized divisions among laborers to maximize its profits” (Lowe 1996, 14). Asians were literally recruited to the United States to work and were consistently denied the ability to create a life for themselves outside of laboring. They were denied the ability to gain citizenship, own land, vote, until the twentieth century because “the conditions, choices, and expressions of Asian Americans have been significantly determined by the US state through the apparatus of immigration laws and policies, through the enfranchisement denied or extended to immigrant individuals and communities” (Lowe 1996, 7). Furthermore, after the emancipation of slaves, “southern political and economic elites sought cheap labor to work their plantations and railroads and facilitate the reassertion of White dominance over Blacks following the Civil War” (Kim 1999, 111). However, the combination of both the abundance of Asian labor and Japan’s rise in international power led to the rise of xenophobic sentiment amongst White people - “the same putative unassimilability that once endeared Chinese immigrants to White employers became, in the hands of anti-Chinese organizers, grounds for exclusionary legislation. After all, the ‘fixed’ and ‘changeless’ cultural-racial nature of Chinese immigrants meant not only that they constituted ‘an indigestible mass in the community’ but that they also represented the frontline of threatened ‘Asiatic’ economic and military takeover” (Kim 1999, 112). Thus came the Asian Exclusion Acts of both 1882 and 1924. Unfortunately for the anti-Chinese organizers at the time, it is not possible

to separate the labor from the body performing the labor. Like a machine, Asian bodies are not inherently valued - only valued for their labor and their economic contribution. Lowe writes “The material contradictions of the national economy and the political state are expressed in the legal exclusion, disenfranchisement, and restricted enfranchisement of Asian immigrants and that culture is the material site of struggle in which active links are made between signifying practices and social structure” (Lowe 1996, 22). Through laws of exclusion and disenfranchisement, Asians as machines “were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man’s dream. Only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream” (Haraway 1991, 151).

The implementation of the 1965 Immigration Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, changed the landscape of Asian America as we know it. Although several scholars attribute the implementation of the act that opened our borders to the Civil Rights Movement, Lowe has another perspective: once again, the United States opened immigration because it needed cheap labor to compete in the global capitalist economy. With the growth of export-oriented economies developing in both Asia and Latin America in the postwar era, “the capital imperative came into greater contradiction with the political imperative of the US nation state. One required economic internationalism to expand labor and capital, to secure raw materials and consumer markets [...], the other required consolidation of a strong, hegemonic nation state in order to regular the terms of that post-war economic internationalism” (Lowe 1996, 16). Since then, US capital moved to both Asia and Latin America to produce goods with cheaper labor. Furthermore, because the 1965 Act opened immigration, domestic labor supplies were renewed. “Since 1965, the profile of Asian immigration has consisted of low-wage, service sector workers as well as ‘proletarianized’ white-collar professionals, a group which supplies laborers for services and manufacturing and which

furnishes a technically trained labor force that serves as one form of ‘variable capital’ investment in the US economy” (Lowe 1996, 16).

In Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*, she states that “women of color are the preferred labor force for the science-based industries [...] Young Korean women in electronics assembly are recruited from high schools, educated for the integrated circuit. Literacy, especially in English, distinguishes the ‘cheap’ female labor so attractive to the multination[al corporation]s” (174). Not only are young Korean women recruited to work in toxic environments, other populations of vulnerable immigrant Asian and Latinx women are as well. Flora Chu, a legal advocate for Asian women working in the toxic factories in Silicon Valley, shares her experiences with sociologists Lisa Park and David Pellow in *The Silicon Valley of Dreams* - “Many Asians form an underclass that works in the low-paying high-hazard jobs under constant threat that they might lose their meager paycheck. They are constantly exposed to chemicals that can permanently disable them. Employers hire Asians into these jobs because they perceive that Asians are a docile workforce willing to perform monotonous repetitive duties without complaints” (Park and Pellow 2002, 116). Young Shin, leader of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, makes a similar comment at the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit - “Tens of thousands of Asian / Asian American women work in the electronic assembly plants of California’s Silicon Valley. Asian women- particularly immigrants - are sought out for this work because of a stereotypical view by plant owners that they will be submissive, that they won’t ‘rock the boat’. [...] employers seek a vulnerable segments of the population now target AsAm women to labor in bad conditions’ (Proceedings 1991, 283). Immigrant women are expected to labor under hazardous conditions because their supervisors prioritize the bottom line over their workers. Much like their immigrant predecessors nearly two centuries ago, these immigrants are only valued for their labor and their

contribution to the economy. Much like their predecessors, Asians today continue to be racialized as machines.

Creation of Asian Americana

Contrary to the stereotypes imposed on Asians by systems of racialization, Asian laborers have a long history of resistance in the Americas dating back to the first Chinese workers railroad strike in 1867. In fact, the creation of the term ‘Asian American’ is a form of resistance in of itself. During the Third World Liberation Front strikes, students of UC Berkeley’s Asian American Political Alliance created the term ‘Asian American’ as a diverse collective of East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian folks in 1968 to push back against the term ‘Oriental’, a word that has been used to otherize Asians since the foundation of the country (Maeda 2012). Moreover, “The grouping ‘Asian American’ is not a natural or static category; it is a socially constructed unity, a situationally specific position, assumed for political reasons. It is ‘strategic’ in the sense of a ‘strategic use of a positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest. The concept of ‘strategic essentialism’ suggests that it is possible to utilize specific signifiers of racialized ethnic identity, such as ‘Asian American’, for the purpose of contesting and disrupting the discourses that exclude Asian Americans, while simultaneously revealing the internal contradictions and the slippages of ‘Asian American’ so as to insure that such essentialisms will not be reproduced and proliferated by the very apparatuses that we seek to disempower” (Lowe 1996, 82).

Simply put, the term ‘Asian American’ is a political entity in of itself. Inspired by the term ‘African American’, it was created in response to the power structures that abjected Asian bodies and racialized them as machines. Inspired by the Cultural Revolution happening concurrently in China at the time, Asian American activists dubbed the 1960s the ‘Era of Cultural Revolution in

Asian Americana’ (Omatsu 2000, 50). Students, activists, and residents all joined to fight for Ethnic Studies, fair housing for all, amongst a host of other demands, Inspired by other social movements, Asian American activists created a slogan that consistently appeared at rallies - “the people, and the people alone, are the motive force in the making of world history”. Omatsu writes “Activists adapted the slogan to the tasks of community building, historical rooting, and creating new values” (Omatsu 2000, 51).

However, following the global recession of the early 1970s and the growth of the non-profit industrial complex in the 1980s, “liberation movements did not disappear, but a major focus of their activity shifted to issues of day to day survival” from liberation from various systems of oppression (Omatsu 2000, 37). The 1980s and 1990s saw a shift in who is being empowered in the Asian American movement - ‘in the 1960s and 1970s, activists focused on the community - power to the people, the most disenfranchised of the community, such as low-income workers, youth, former prisoners and addicts, senior citizens, tenants, and small business people’, but from 1980 onward, ‘young professionals altered the political terrain by creating new political advocacy groups and leadership trainings’ to empower the individual instead of the collective or the most disenfranchised members of their community (Omatsu 2000, 42). Activists in the Asian American community now confront an interesting scenario where everyone regardless of political alignment - conservatives, neoconservatives, radical, liberals - all coexist in the realm of Asian Americanness. However, even with the growth of the embrace of the Asian American identity, “we have not seen a corresponding growth in consciousness of what it means to be an Asian American” (Omatsu 2000, 51). Now the challenge is this - How do we build an Asian American movement across our varying identities and political alignments?

Since its very inception in 1968, Asian Americana has been a diverse space for all those who identify as Asian to build community with one another and to build multiracial coalitions across racial divides with those who have been disenfranchised by various systems of White Supremacy. As discussed prior, the realm of Asian America continues to be influenced by White Supremacy via domestic and international law. Omatsu argues that the Asian American movement, in its varying conceptions, really begins with the opening of our borders in 1965. Similarly, Lowe conceptualizes the formation of Asian America as we recognize it to be today as the result of two differing waves of immigration: immigration encouraged by the necessity of cheap labor in the United States (the Chinese railroad workers, and Japanese and Filipino farmers), and immigration as the result of US imperialism and war (refugees from the Korean, Vietnam, and Cambodian wars). Knowing the diversity in experience of Asian Americans, is it possible to build a sustainable Asian American movement that acknowledges all our differences and builds on our similarities moving forward?

Constructing American Environmentalism: Preservation / Conservation to Liberation

Like the Asian American movement, the environmental movement as we understand it today as developed both in conjunction with systems of White Supremacy: Colonialism, Capitalism, and Orientalism. Again, similar to the Asian American movement, the environmental movement can be understood as a series of waves that impact the development of one another. Historian Mark Dowie writes “American environmental history, can be divided into three waves. The first began with the conservationist / preservationist impulse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and coincided with the closing of the frontier. The second wave came in the brief era of environmental legislation that began in the mid-1960s and was abruptly halted by

the Reagan administration in the 1980s. The third wave, a relatively fruitless and hopefully brief attempt to find a harmonious ('win-win') conciliation between conservative environmentalists and corporate polluters, is with us as we approach the mid 1990s." (Dowie 1995, 3). Dowie believes that the current wave of environmentalism - the fourth wave of environmentalism, which is led by a majority of women of color engaging in grassroots organizing - will be the movement that brings us to a future where we can coexist with our natural environment.

Unlike the Asian American movement, "the essential activism of environmentalism has thus differed significantly from other American social movements" because "none of the founders or early adherents were enslaved, disadvantaged, dispossessed, or discriminated against" - the environmental movement in the United States was founded by primarily upper to middle class White Anglo Saxon Protestants, and would remain this way until the late twentieth century (Dowie 1994, 3). It is common belief that the first wave of environmentalism (as defined by Dowie) began in reaction to the industrial revolution in the at the turn of the twentieth century. The United States, an idyllic country that was created by settlers as this pastoral dreamland, was in danger of being ruined by increasing industrialization and urbanization. Early settler Americans, inspired by thinkers of the Enlightenment era, "created a world view that desacralized nature and provided ideological fuel for the industrial revolution" (Dowie 1995, 12). Unlike the Indigenous communities of the Americas, settler Americans understood nature and wilderness as a place to be protected from the vices of human society. Nature and wilderness in one place, human society in the other. To protect the wilderness from the impurities of increasingly industrial human society, a group of environmentalists lobbied the US government to create the Bureau of Land Management as well as the National Parks System.

Although the creation of the National Park System is lauded as one of the environmental movement's greatest accomplishments at the time, it is important to acknowledge the racist origins of the National Parks Movement. Native Americans were removed from their homelands to create these wilderness havens for "primarily prosperous white men, a mixture of hikers, campers, mountain climbers, hunters, and fishermen who looked to the wilderness as a place of recreation and refreshment from urban pursuits" (Dowie 1995, 2). Several of the early environmental groups, such as the Sierra Club, as well as several of the National Parks were created as a haven for White people only (Dowie 1995) (Merchant 2003). Indigenous folks were racialized as being unclean animals who were not adequate to care for the pristine lands they inhabited ([Merchant 2003](#)).

Gifford Pinchot, one of the leaders of the conservation movement, was a delegate to the International Eugenics Congress in 1912 and 1921, and also served as a member of the American Eugenics Society starting in 1925 for a decade ([NYer article](#)). John Muir, environmentalist and co-founder of the Sierra Club, often wrote disparagingly about the Native peoples he saw on his hikes - in *My First Summer in the Sierra*, he often equated Indigenous folks to unclean animals. To describe his various encounters with Native Americans, he writes "A strangely dirty and irregular life these dark-eyes dark-haired, half-happy savages lead in this clean wilderness [...] To prefer the society of squirrels and woodchucks to that of our own species must surely be unnatural" (Muir 1911, 205). Furthermore, the "frontier mentality and an early version of Manifest Destiny combined to create a wasteful, rapacious culture opposed by few and encouraged by our most revered forefathers" (Dowie 1995, 12). Rooted in ideals of White Supremacy, both the expansion of this iteration of environmentalism combined with the ideology of Manifest Destiny helped to justify the genocide of Native Americans at the time. This version of environmentalism would persist until the late twentieth century with the development of the Environmental Justice Movement.

Similar to the first wave of environmentalism, the second and third wave Dowie describes are also ruled by an elite class of White Americans. The second wave of environmentalism is marked by a series of legislative victories, whereas the third wave is defined by the growth of nonprofit involvement in the movement. Since its foundation, the environmental movement has had a close relationship with the US government. By the 1960s, the main job of the environmentalist was to “wrestle with corporate and government officials over legal subsidies and regulatory standards” (Dowie 31). Through much lobbying, a series of laws centering the protection of the environment were passed by president Nixon, launching the ‘Environmental Decade’ (1970 - 1980) of the twentieth century. In that decade, both the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Council for Environmental Quality were created. Various acts such as the Clean Air Act (1970), Clean Water Act (1974), the Endangered Species Act (1973), and the Superfund Act (1980) were implemented in this decade to prevent further harm to the environment by industry. However, the environmentalists at the time failed to realize the limitations of lobbying the government - “congress is far more willing to limit than to eliminate, more prone to regulate than to prohibit, more likely to moderate than to forbid the excesses of industrial production” (Dowie 1994, 60). In the 1980s, much like the Asian American movement, the environmental movement saw a growth in the number of nonprofits becoming involved in the movement. Instead of focusing on the issues that are causing pollution, organizations “continued a 1970s trend toward adding programs and expanding staffs, spent more effort and resources on developing entrepreneurial and organizational enhancement skills than on environmental issues” (Dowie 1994, 61). Environmental nonprofits focused primarily on fundraising. The money raised was subsequently used on further lobbying and fundraising to preserve and protect the natural environment - “In 1992, the [...] EPA learned that the mainstream groups highest priorities were ecosystems, environmental education, and environmental laws and legislation. Their lowest

priorities were toxic wastes, human health, and technology” (Dowie 1994, 32). The mainstream environmental movement had become relatively ineffective because they “had acquired an addiction they couldn’t kick - access to power, [...] abiding trust in legislated mandates, faith in the effectiveness of the lobby, and reliance on ephemeral voting blocks to mitigate social and political problems” (Dowie 1994, 73). People who “hesitated to join social or political movements that required direct contact with the dispossessed had found a perfect home in the environmental movement” (Dowie 1994, 3). In summation, the mainstream environmental movement, led by ‘genteel, white, and very polite’ professionals is not adequately equipped to prevent further environmental degradation.

The growth of the fourth wave of environmentalism changed the landscape of the environmental movement. While the first three waves of environmentalism were dominated by upper to middle class white folks, the fourth wave is led by people of color and encompasses a variety of communities. The fourth wave “has no defining quality beyond its enormous diversity of organizations, ideologies, and issues [...]. Environmental equity, that safe phrase used by EPA officials anxious to avoid the j-word (justice) will gain real meaning as rich and poor, white and nonwhite, mainstream and grassroot realize that all living and toiling in the same environment (Dowie 1994, 207). Like many, Dowie is hopeful that this new wave of environmentalism will lead to real change - “it will become the heart of a new American environmental movement. As it builds, the polite, ineffectual white gentleman’s club that defined American environmentalism for almost a hundred years will either shrink into historical irrelevance or become an effective but equal player in the new movement. After so many decades of polite activism, the movement is becoming appropriately rude [...] by adopting new, wider strategies and a democratic ethos, it will prevail” (Dowie 1994, 8). The fourth wave of environmentalism is often referred to as the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM).

In 1987, organizers, researchers, and activists from the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ) released a report titled *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States: A National Report on the Racial and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Communities with Hazardous Waste Sites*. The release of this report ignited the EJM. It showed that race, not class, was the primary determinant in siting of polluting environmental hazards - three out of five of the largest commercial waste landfills, 40% of the nation's garbage, were located in African American and Hispanic communities. Furthermore, 60% of all Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans were living in communities with toxic waste sites. For this reason, environmentalism means something very different to a person of color than it does to a member of the traditional environmental movement. After the report was released, members of the UCC-CRJ organized the First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. This three day conference in Washington DC marked the true beginning of the EJM. Dana Alston, one of the leaders of the EJM, addressed attendees of the 1991 People of Color Environmental Summit by saying this - "for people of color, the environment is woven into an overall framework and understanding of social, racial, and economic justice. The definitions that emerge from the movement for environmental justice are deeply rooted in culture and spirituality and encompasses all aspects of daily life - where we live, work, and play" (Dowie, 1994, 151). Most importantly, Ben Chavis of the UCC-CRJ introduced the concept of Environmental Racism at this time. Environmental Racism is defined as "racial discrimination based in environmental policymaking, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the environmental movement" (Bullard 1994, 278). Environmental racism dictates that non-white people "don't have the complexion for protection" (Bullard 1994, 281).

Since the foundation of the EJM, the environmental movement is on its way to becoming ‘multiracial, multiethnic, multiclass, and multicultural’ (Dowie 1994, 207), just like the Asian American movement was prior to the 1980s. Although the two movements developed in different ways, both have been and continue to be influenced by systems of White Supremacy. In the EJM, both animal and machine have formed coalitions to abolish the systems that have racialized them as so. What makes White Supremacy so challenging to abolish is its ubiquitous but invisible presence. As mentioned prior, the Model Minority Myth as it refers to East Asians has been used as a tool to prevent communities of color from forming solidarity with one another. To resist becoming a perpetrator of racism, capitalism, and more, East Asian American, in particular, need to figure out how to use our racialization to the advantage of all the communities we stand in solidarity with. Haraway, in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, writes “if we learn how to read these webs of power and social life, we might learn new couplings, new coalitions. [...] The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive the diaspora” (Haraway 1991, 170). The goal is to extinguish the systems that have segregated our communities by race, class, gender, and more. To beat these systems of oppression, one must understand how different communities are racialized, how that racialization affects the way they move through the world, and how to build coalitions using differences instead of despite them. The organizers of the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit created a space for people of color to do just that.

CHAPTER 2: PLANNING CYBORGIAN FUTURES: STORIES FROM THE 1991 PEOPLE OF COLOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

“We are here. We are united. We are strong. We are one! We have come together speaking out of our cultural diversity to our common oppression, as many members of one family - Asians and Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders and Pacific Americans, Native Peoples and Alaskans, Latinos and Canadians, Latin Americans and Central Americans, Africans and African Americans. In our collective unity, there is great strength. We have come together around many issues in many lands to unleash the power of our united will in a common struggle for a new environmental movement - a movement to eradicate environmental racism and bring into being true social justice and self-determination.

As peoples of color, we have not chosen our struggles; they have chosen us. We suffer disproportionate victimization by environmental degradation and a host of other forms of social, economic, and political violence. We have no choice but to come together to overcome our common barriers and resist our foes. Only in the diversity of our oppression are we able to clearly see the pervasive pattern of genocidal environmental racism. We gathered to speak for ourselves and to define the issues in our own way.”

A Call to Action - The First People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit

Adopted October 27th, 1991

The 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, which took place from October 24th to October 27th, 1991 in Washington DC, was a pivotal moment in American environmental history. The Summit was envisioned by members of UCC-CRJ as “a vehicle which,

as had been accomplished earlier by the Toxic Wastes and Race report with respect to issues of race and the environment, would change the terms of debate on the nature of the environmental movement” (Proceedings viii). The main organizers of the conference composed of Charles Lee, Ben Chavis, Dana Alston of the Panos Institute, Pat Bryant of the Gulf Coast Tenants Organization, Robert Bullard of UC Riverside, and Richard Moore of the Southwest Organizing Project. In addition to this main group of organizers, a National Advisory Committee of 112 people were formed to assist in organizing the programming. (Proceedings viii). Furthermore, because “the Summit was designed so that people of color grassroots activist leaders would have a forum that was truly their own”, attendees were divided into Delegates, Participants, and Observers. To truly ensure everyone would have equal access to the space they were creating, “the Commission was able to provide travel for nearly two-thirds of the 300 delegates attending” (Proceedings viii). What sets this conference apart from other meetings in the environmental movements was its emphasis on the grassroots and its emphasis on local communities. Regarding the conference, Peggy Saika, a member of the National Advisory Committee says “it was a space for several days that forced you to think about what I needed to do. What was, for each of us to kind of look in the mirror and say what do I do with this? To be able to go back to the organizations that we were a part of” (Saika). To guide the work organizers were doing in their communities, delegates and participants left the Summit with a set of principles to guide their work - the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice list the various demands of communities of color, from the abolition of military presence in their homelands to a safe working environment.

The delegates and participants showed the leaders of the mainstream environmental movement that people of color do indeed care about environmental issues, challenged the main environmental leaders of the Group of 10 (G-10), and sparked a true multiracial movement for

justice. On the first day, approximately 300 delegates from the fifty states, Puerto Rico, the Marshall Islands, Central America, and Canada met to create an agenda for the three day conference. None of them were White. On the second day, they were joined by 250 representatives from civil rights, community development, religious, public health, and mainstream environmental organizations. (Lee). The Summit composed of plenaries, performances, caucus time, a rally at the US capitol, and participatory workshops sorted by region, strategy, and policy. Attendance at the Summit composed of organizers, participants, and observers.

Observers, who were mostly White folks from the first three waves of environmentalism, were not allowed to participate in any activity - only allowed to watch. Regarding the conference, Bullard writes “The movement for EJ in communities of color is alive and well all across the US. The movement has matured and can no longer be pushed aside or ghettoized. It is mainstream. EJ activists and academics alike are joining forces to form a much stronger, action-oriented movement” (Bullard 1994, 299). For many scholars and activists, the Summit marked the official beginning of a multiracial, multicultural movement that we know as the Environmental Justice Movement. However, this does not mean that people of color did not suffer from environmental issues before 1991. Charles Lee, a Chinese-American who served as one of the main organizers of the conference, says that environmental racism is best understood with historical context - “the long history of oppression and exploitation of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans. This has taken the form of genocide, chattel slavery, indentured servitude, and racial discrimination in employment, housing, and practically all aspects of life in the US. We suffer today from this remnant of this sordid history, as well as from new and institutionalized forms of racism” (Bullard 1994, 286).

Significance of the Conference

The Summit is often referred to as the true start of the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM). Because the Summit was attended by a diversity of varying communities, it serves as a microcosm of the current EJM. The conference challenged the power of the G-10 through the power of coalition building, but also revealed various conflicts and fissures in the movement. Unlike the previous waves of environmentalism, the EJM was led by people who are living through various systems of oppression. The mere existence of the EJM is a threat to the existing relatively apolitical, polite, and White environmental movement because attendees of the Summit were able to determine how various systems of oppression operate cohesively, and how said systems harm the environment and various communities of color. Pamela Chiang, an attendee of the Summit, states: “our targets at that time were the EPA because of unequal enforcement of rules, the military because of the contamination and the atrocities they were committing both before and after military actions, and the white environmental groups for their ineffectiveness” (Chiang). Of the conference, Pam Tau Lee shares:

“The Summit would also challenge mainstream organizations, who at the time was focused on the damage to wildlife, plant life, melting ice caps, global warming, to include the work to abolish environmental racism into their scope and mission of their organizations. For those of us attending the Summit, it was not an either or, it was both and we urged the mainstream organizations to align with us on this point and to bring on environmental justice representatives to their staff and boards. [...] “The Summit launched the movement for EJ and called for the world to protect ecology and to learn to live in balance with Mother Earth, to call out the role of racial monopoly capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism. It calls for building power for the grassroots to seek and act for themselves, self-determination, sovereignty, and to promote economic alternatives. It calls

on us to challenge the fossil fuel industry, government, and military with a demand to move away from dirty energy and war, to abolish environmental racism, and restore and protect the environment.” (Lee)

The Summit was a radical shift from traditional notions of environmentalism not just because of the content and characteristics of attendees, but because of how it was funded. Major foundations and environmental organizations were encouraged to fund the conference, but they were only invited as observers, not participants. Peggy Saika, a member of the planning committee shares the process:

“it was really political around the observers. We get a couple of the big environs (environmental groups) there, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council. That was major because when you think about a lot of the global environmental organizations, they owned land, they owned real estate. They have endowments. It's an amazing, they really are mainly about conservation. If you're an observer, the environs were people from like Greenpeace, and the advocacy organizations and Foundations were from places like the Environmental Defense Fund. So are grant writers from the government as well as a few Nonprofit organizations. All of these folks were observers. The people that were like considered core were all practitioners represented movement organizations. So that was really huge in of itself - to ask people to fund this thing and then to say when you come, you're an observer. So that means you don't have any voting rights and, and all of that. When you think about it, that's pretty bold. (Saika)

To beat the systems White Supremacy has put into place, different communities need to form community and solidarity with one another. The EJM is the first truly rainbow movement - a movement that encompasses all ethnicities and how people are racialized. Pamela Chiang says

“The EJM is the first real rainbow movement - Elizabeth Betita Martinez, a Latina organizer with SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), said that the EJM did a special thing: we, in the EJM are pushing beyond the Black White bimodal framework. Fundamentally, this is the first that I know of in this country that is the first real rainbow movement” (Chiang). From the very beginning, this has been a multiracial movement. The ability to transcend the limitations placed onto communities via capitalism require coordination from various ethnic groups. When recruiting people to attend the conference, Charles Lee, Director of Research at UCC’s Commission for Racial Justice at the time, said that “there was a very conscious attempt to portray the work and the issues as being multiracial and multicultural. So that was a very positive thing about the EJM. The tensions between the different racial groups were unfortunate, but the overall thrust of the EJM that emerged was very multiracial and multicultural and that was a very positive thing” (Lee).

In a space that had “different original ethnic groups, different generational groups, people who were faced with really different types of environmental justice issues and different historical pieces” disagreements and tension between groups is to be expected because “in the EJM, we didn’t cultivate a shared analysis together, we were just thrown together to do stuff. the fissures start to reveal themselves. the class differences, not just what they were paid and how they lived, but just how they saw the world” (Yoshitani)(Chiang). Similarly, Charles Lee agrees -

“When there isn’t one group, that should be expected right? There isn’t one platform and there are a lot of different groups working on different issues. At any point, you’ve got to prioritize. But it’s hard because the movement has decentralized where people speak for themselves and where only certain issues are important, it’s hard to do that. So there’s tension. What exactly is the EJM? I think there’s a movement, I don’t think there’s a movement in the same sense people thought it was going to be, and their vision of it very different. There are a lot of diverse parts of it and there’s a

certain amount of fragmentation. People could be talking to each other more, people could be coordinating more. And people may be and I may be not as aware as some of that and that's fine too. But I do think there's a little bit of alignment of people and I think some of the tension arises from people not talking to each other" (Lee).

When asked about the biggest points of contention, interviewees mentioned two different issues, both of which are influenced by how different communities have been racialized. It is important to note that the systems of racialization that shape our lived experiences depend on the erasure of Indigenous Americans. Thus, the first main issue brought up during the conference was the prioritization of Indigenous Americans in the EJM. Throughout the Proceedings of the conference, various indigenous folks emphasize the importance in acknowledging the original inhabitants of the land. In the drafting process of the 17 Principles of Environmental Justice, the phrase "people of color of the United States" was changed to "people of color in the United States" due to a concern raised by a Native American delegate (Proceedings 58). Furthermore, "it was a struggle in the drafting of the 17 principles. Indigenous people had to keep hammering it into our heads, the primacy of indigenous communities. It was serious learning for people," recalls Pamela Chiang. Miya Yoshitani, a member of the drafting committee, recalls conversations well into the early morning regarding the Principles of Environmental Justice -

"Some of the particular ones that I remember like the one that talks about native sovereignty issues and talks about the special relationship between Native Americans and the US government through treaties: Number 11. That one, we talked about that one a lot. [...] It just drew out like that's why some of this was so complicated because some of the solutions can be actual, can be contradictory to some of the other ones. When talking about whose rights and sovereignty

and whose identity and whose issues are lifted up, is it at the expense of somebody else? Those were some of the main things that we were trying to balance” (Yoshitani).

Another point of contention was rooted in the future of the movement - should there be a national organization fighting for environmental justice, or should the movement remain grassroots? According to Pamela Chiang, there was a push from Ben Chavis, leader from UCC-CRJ, for there to be the formation of a national organization dedicated to organizing against issues of environmental injustice. However, Tom Goldtooth, Richard Moore, Gail Small, and other leaders who were loosely a part of networks and formations were like “no, we gotta keep this decentralized. The EJM came about and was birthed from autonomous grassroots organizations - some super scrappy, some deeply experienced, but we’ve gotta keep it decentralized at the grassroots. Once we nationalize, we will lose momentum” (Chiang). Today, there are many community organizations that fight for environmental justice, but there is not a national organization that fights for environmental justice on a national scale.

Memories from the Conference

Despite the tensions at the conference, what people remembered most was how inspiring the space was. Everyone there “earned the importance of study and worked to put what we studied into practice. When we made mistakes, we learned from them, when we got tired or disappointed, we helped lift each other up. But most importantly we were grounded in the love and unity of all peoples” (Lee). For the most part, people were most excited to learn about the different struggles and triumphs other communities went through - Miya Yoshitani, current Executive Director of APEN, says “I was surprised at how much attention there was just within different communities of

color about representation and about different ways of talking about environmental justice. I think mostly was really generative and coming from where I came from, I just didn't ... my eyes were, my mind was blown because there was so much movement history there that I just had no idea. I was really eye opening experience” (Yoshitani). Peggy Saika felt a similar sentiment during her time at the Summit - “That’s the excitement, you learn more about each other. You're more in unity over that what binds you together. There's so much more that binds us together, than that divides us, so to me it's a part of movement building and that, that it's the practice, not the theoretical side of it, how do you apply our history, our, our best thinking, our live knowledge? How do you apply it to practice? It was important” (Saika). Even decades later, some of the folks who met at the Summit are still in touch. When Dana Alston passed away in 2010,

“Someone local in San Francisco organized a memorial gathering for her and people had flown in from different parts of the West for this event. And it was a little mini reunion of a subset of people from the summit. And this is years, years, years, years later. And you know, we were hugging and crying and then everybody got a chance to go around the room and say something about Dana and what she meant to all of us and there was a huge percentage of people who said, "And I met her at the summit, I met all of you at the summit and we're all still close and we're collaborating."

- Interview with Lily Lee

To guide the struggle for environmental justice on the grassroots level, participants returned to their home communities with the 17 guiding Principles of Environmental Justice.¹

¹ The Principles of Environmental Justice can be located in the Appendix of this work.

Stories from the Summit

Despite the fact that the conference highlighted the beginning of a multiracial movement towards environmental, economic, and racial justice that imagined a world free from oppressive systems of racialization, the racialization of East Asians in particular affected the way they navigated the space. In this chapter, I will be sharing the narratives from the conference of five East Asian attendees - Charles Lee, Lily Lee, Pam Tau Lee, Peggy Saika, Miya Yoshitani, and Pamela Chiang - analyzing the importance of the conference to the EJM based on their narratives, as well as discuss what the roles are of an East Asian American presenting person in various social movements.

Charles Lee

Charles Lee is currently the senior policy advisor for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Office for Environmental Justice. He was one of the main organizers of the Summit. As a researcher for the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice, he helped to write the seminal 1987 Toxic Wastes and Race report that drew national attention to the issue of environmental racism. He first got involved with the EJM after he "went down to Warren County to show solidarity and was really captivated by the whole thing". Afterwards, he "ran into Charles Cobb and other people from the UCC Commission for Racial Justice. They decided to start a project looking at toxic waste, race, income. They asked me to run it, so that's when I started all that work that began to make it a national issue like the study, and the summit, and more" (Lee). When asked about the conference, Charles stated "Pulling together a meeting like that was a big deal. When they [UCC] asked me if I was interested in trying to pull together [the conference] I jokingly went, 'no'. That's a lot of work. A lot of it has to do with making sure there was resources. I think I raised over \$400,000 for this

thing. Three quarters of it was spent in scholarships”. The main goal of the conference was to “Show that the EJM was thriving and that People of Color are involved with environmental issues. A lot of civil rights groups at the time didn’t think the environment had anything to do with their issues. When we [UCC] went to meetings about the environment, we were often the only people of color there”. To recruit people to attend the conference, Charles and other members of UCC “cast a wide net and many folks came. I had gone around the country looking for people, just people that were beginning to organize around environmental issues. People like Hazel Johnson in Chicago, and Richard Moore in Albuquerque. At the point where this thing started to get known, people came out. People came. That’s how.’ ‘With the first People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, it wasn’t conceived with AAPIs being any special focus. When we did our work at the Commission for Racial Justice around environmental injustice, it was really multiracial, multicultural because it was a really multiracial and multicultural issue. AAPIs didn’t rise to the surface a lot.’ ‘We didn’t go out and seek them [attendees], per se. The People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit really became a magnet. It surfaced a lot of things among a lot of people for AAPIs. A lot of things like APEN (Asian Pacific Environmental Network), which is probably the most impactful AAPI environmental organization really grew out of that.”

As one of the main organizers of the Summit, his experience as an Asian American at the conference differed greatly from the experience of other East Asian Americans that were interviewed for this project. While most folks were acutely aware of the lack of Asian American representation and felt the need to represent Asian Americanness in their participation, Charles stated that “I didn’t see myself as being Asian as anything other than the fact that I happen to be Asian”, and that he “did not try to represent AAPIs”. In reflecting upon the conference, he

acknowledges the lack of Asian American representation was an oversight. In the introduction of the Proceedings of the Summit, Charles writes:

“Lastly, as an Asian American, I felt the lack of Asian Pacific perspectives on environmental justice especially glaring. This was alluded to several times by other Asian American delegates. Here, too, I think that this is an area waiting for further development and self-definition. The Summit did allow us to touch upon a few of the social, historical, environmental, and geo-political realities of Asian Pacific peoples.”

- Proceedings of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit
(October 24th - 27th, 1991)

When asked about how the conference shaped his career, he acknowledged that the conference created a strong network of those who were passionate about environmental justice. Furthermore, for Charles, the conference further cemented the idea that the fight for environmental justice will always be a grassroots process - “It was a really big theme of the conference, and a big theme of the work now. Although the movement is pretty fragmented now, there is still a lot of activity” (Lee). In addition, the conference literally created Charles’ current job - the 1991 Summit inspired Executive Order 12898, which created the Office of Environmental Justice at the EPA, where Charles has worked for the past several decades.

Lily Lee

Lily Lee currently serves as a project manager for the Superfund division of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Region 9 in San Francisco. In 1991, she was a graduate student at UC Berkeley and was invited as a “part of Nindakin - people of color for the

environment, which was a student volunteer group at UC Berkeley”. According to Lily and several other interviewed folks, Nindakin was a group active in the 1990s where students “did different activities that we thought would support and promote environmental justice locally, like attending a rally in Kettleman City in 1991” (Lee). She was introduced to the realm of environmental justice after a lunchtime talk with Luke Cole about environmental justice, who later became her advisor at Berkeley. That talk “was perfect for me because before that I had been active in social justice, anti-racism, and feminist work as an undergraduate. I had a physics degree and I wanted to save the world using science because I wasn't sure how to do that. I also didn't want to leave behind social justice because it was also important. And so to find this way to connect those two passions, protecting the environment, using my science background and fighting over for better health and a voice for people of color, that's how I got involved in environmental justice.”

Although Lily was not involved in any of the committees or working groups of the conference, she did help to start a youth caucus -

“We started a new caucus because while we were there people were starting caucuses and I met other young people. I think it was Ludovic Blain and Michael Dorsey [...] We met one another at the conference and decided to start a youth caucus”. Furthermore, after noticing there was little Asian American representation at the conference, “a group of us said “Hey, well we should make sure to try to do something about that.” So then we went to Pam Tau Lee and asked her to please talk about Asian American environmental injustice issues if she had the opportunity. She was going to be on a panel discussion. She said, “Oh, of course.” And she did. I remember Pam Tau Lee with her pinwheel. She had a pinwheel as part of her panel. I thought it had something to do with the Chinese traditional way to interact with the spirits in some way, which I had never heard of before” (Lee).

Lily's attendance at the conference solidified her commitment to environmental justice. At the Summit, she met "Richard Moore in the elevator and introduced myself and asked him, "Hey, I have this job offer from the US Environmental Protection Agency, but I don't know if I should instead be considering working at the grassroots level for a nonprofit instead." He encouraged her to work at the EPA because "we need brothers and sisters everywhere to be promoting environmental justice and that I would have opportunities for influence within the USEPA that would be different from the opportunities in nonprofit groups". After meeting one another years later, Moore approaches her and asks "Do you remember that elevator conversation we had?". He told her that he regularly tells that story while giving other talks with young people. He was encouraging other young people everywhere to try to influence all different kinds of organizations." As Lily advanced in her career at the EPA, she stayed in touch with some of the folks she met at the conference and was able to collaborate with them - "within the US EPA, I discovered that there was an Asian Pacific American Council, Hispanic Advisory Council. It was organizations of employees of color, Blacks in Government, but there was also an organization that would be for Native Americans, employees within the agency. In general, those organizations had not necessarily been working together that much, but they were starting to because they didn't want it to be divided and conquered. They didn't want for people to be pitting one ethnic group against another ethnic group in a zero sum game." In addition, she has experience "strongly advocating for us [EPA] to also work on environmental justice issues. I worked with the other organizations craft a joint set of recommendations for EPA environmental justice policy. We all contributed and we all signed and represented this as our group joint recommendations. I was very proud of the fact that we did that across ethnic groups" (Lee).

Pam Tau Lee

Pam Tau Lee is currently the chairperson at the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, an active board member of the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) in San Francisco, and one of the co-founders CPA, Asian Pacific Labor Alliance, APEN (Asian Pacific Environmental Network), and the Just Transition Alliance. In 1991, Pam was working as a researcher at UC Berkeley's Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, "where I was able to utilize my previous experience as a community and labor organizer". One day, Pam "received a call from Dana Alston at the Panos Institute who had asked if I had heard of the upcoming People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. I replied "no." Two weeks, later we met. Dana took the time to tell me about Cancer Alley and Warren County, the Bikini Islands, and Native ancestral lands; places that were targets of environmental racism. But she affirmed that where there was oppression, there is resistance and she described how the local communities organized and fought back. She explained that there was a growing movement to abolish these conditions and that movement would be launched at the upcoming People of Color Environmental Summit. Dana invited me to be a member of the planning committee."

At the conference, she was invited to speak about workplace hazards - she states "I am proud an Asian was asked to address this issue as the workplace environment is so much a part of our people's day to day struggle" (Lee). As a result of her work at the Center for Occupational and Environmental Health at UC Berkeley, she was asked to submit a paper to the Summit that focused on workers of color and to facilitate the policy group workshop on Occupational Health and Safety issues. Because "workers of color throughout the world and in the US are consistently employed in the dirtiest and most dangerous jobs, they suffer a disproportionately high rate of illness, injury, and death" (Proceedings 1991,196). For example - "Semiconductor workers, predominantly Asian

and Latina immigrant women, experience occupational illness at three times the rate of workers in general manufacturing. Illness includes damage to the central nervous system and possibly the reproductive system as a result of using dangerous solvents to clean electronic components, as well as exposure to other chemicals” (Proceedings 1991, 196). The lens of analysis Pam brought to the conference resulted in the implementation of the eighth principle of environmental justice: “Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free of environmental hazards”.

Because Lee is a racially ambiguous surname, Charles Lee, Lily Lee, and Pam Tau Lee were referred to as the three Asian Lee’s. Furthermore, Pam, like several other interviewees, assumed Charles Lee from the UCC Commission for Racial Justice was Black until she met him in person. Like others, the Summit changed her life because after the Summit, she began seeing the effects of capitalism on an international scale. Most of her work prior to 1991 - involvement in the Third World Liberation Strike, the I Wor Kuen which then merged with the August 29th movement and the Congress for African Peoples to become the League for Revolutionary Struggle - was focused on local and at most, national issues.

Peggy Saika

Peggy Saika is currently the Executive Director of Common Counsel Foundation, an organization based in Oakland that “advances equity and environmental health through a combination of direct grantmaking and strategic philanthropic advising for independent foundations and donors” (website). Peggy, along with Pam Tau Lee, was one of the main founders of APEN. She was invited to be a part of the conference as a social worker with the Asian Law

Caucus, the first Asian American civil rights organization in the United States. At the time, the Asian Law Caucus was known for their work against hate violence towards Asians, not just Vincent Chin. They were “trying to create a national network of people struggling against violence against Asians” (Saika). In that work, Peggy became acquainted with Ben Chavis and various members of the UCC Commission for Racial Justice and learn of “their legacy within the context of the African American community”. Afterwards, “they invited us to participate on the planning leading up to the summit. That was the introduction into looking and thinking about Asian Americans in environmental justice. I'll say that at that time I very much was entering into it, through a health and the environment lens. Also realizing that for many of our immigrant and refugee communities that they were living, in areas that were heavily contaminated or nearby and they really were a part of what we're talking about impacted communities.”

At the Summit, Peggy facilitated the Regional Group Workshops from the Pacific Northwest. When asked about her experience at the workshops, she has no recollection other than the notes listed in the Proceedings of the conference. However, as a part of the Asian Law Caucus, she was invited to be a member of the Summit’s planning committee - she does recall a particularly inspiring story, even three decades its initial occurrence:

“Ben Chavis, who just had such a long history [of advocating for Civil Rights], we were meeting at the summit, I think it was like 1:00, 1:15 in the morning. I remember he got up and he said I know it's late. I know it's late, but we're right on time. That stayed with me through the whole time because there was so many things that went into both the planning, the thinking, the political perspective, who would be invited, what would be your contexts in which you were both invited but participating and how were you going to be able to participate? All those kinds of things- there was struggle over all of that. It was the first time that there was ever going to be a coming together

of such a group. It was amazing, those meetings, those days were long and hard and challenging and stressful, but probably the most inspirational time any of us would have spent together.

Although Peggy has little recollection of what occurred at the Summit, she was able to dictate how the Summit shaped her later work. After seeing the lack of Asian American presence at the Summit, several Asian American women who were present got together to imagine what an Asian American face in the environmental movement might look like. The conference “launched so many things for us, not just APEN but, I think our perspective on research, our perspective about how do we document, impact and then push that into, organizing methodologies, how are we in different places struggling both against the mainstream environmental movement, struggling against the way our government is structured and actually did not include any of the issues that we were discussing at the summit. How do we build a consciousness within the API community about what environmental justice even meant? It was really formidable in terms of thinking about, APEN as a formation.” For Peggy and many others, the conference sparked a new beginning for the role of Asian Americans in the EJM. Peggy shares “I never stopped, a lot of us never stopped meeting or planning or thinking together locally. I think that, while we were there the exciting thing was really being able to learn about each other’s communities and how what was so in common. Of course, issues around racism and economic exploitation and economic vulnerability. The other part of it was really about what were the differences. Differences that divide but given cultural, historical, the construct of different communities to be able to learn about each other in the most positive sense of the word, was, was really exciting”.

After the conference, “for the Asian Americans that were there, we were called to respond to the mandate about creating an API face within the movement. That really meant developing both the visibility and the participation, the leadership and the grounding of Asian Americans and

Pacific Islanders and native Hawaiians. [...] All of us who were co-founders. I always say that APEN is different in many ways, but that it was born out of the environmental justice movement. I think that, at its core, it's about asking the questions about who makes policy decisions about impacted communities, who makes them and, policy decisions and also, decisions about where resources are allocated” (Saika). Because Peggy had experience working with lawyers in non profits, she was the one primarily in charge of setting up APEN as a 501c3 (Saika).

Like Pam Tau Lee, Peggy initially thought Charles was African American. Even decades later, she recalls the moment she found out that he was Asian American “we're talking on the phone, and then he said something about Chinatown, San Francisco or something and I, then all of a sudden, as he said a couple of things, I'm like, are you Asian American? And he goes, yes, he starts laughing I said come on. This has to have been Charles Lee, at the Commission for racial justice” (Saika).

Miya Yoshitani

Miya Yoshitani is the current Executive Director of the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN). As a student at the University of Illinois, she took part in the Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC), which was the largest national student network for those interested in environmental issues. While she was canvassing for Greenpeace in Chicago one summer, she was introduced to the fight for environmental justice. Community members were organizing against the construction of an incinerator on the South Side of Chicago. There, she met a woman named Hazel Johnson who was organizing the housing project she lived in called Altgeld Gardens. Through this campaign, “That was the first time I made that connection between racism and pollution and how that sort of like these other inequalities that were clearly all part of why

people were being poisoned in their neighborhood” (Yoshitani). While at SEAC, she was often one of the few students of color who was always trying to talk more about environmental justice “and how to be more directly in relationship with community organizations” as students. Through her work at SEAC, she was introduced to Dana Alston, who invited her to attend the Summit and ultimately to be on the Drafting Committee of the Principles of Environmental Justice (Yoshitani).

When asked about her experience at the conference, Miya says “I had no idea what it was going to be like. I was completely unprepared. [...] I just kind of showed up with my backpack. Such a young student thing to do and someone else was nice enough to let me sleep on their floor.” (Yoshitani). She believes that she ended up on the Drafting Committee “purely by mistake, by happenstance”. She discusses further -

“Basically they were sort of drafting people to be on the committee at the start of the conference and there was another young woman, Kikanza Ramsey, who was working at the labor communities strategy center in LA. She and I were teaming up and sort of getting to know each other and I think they had asked us both to be like youth representatives on the drafting committee. Also because I ticked off a whole bunch of other boxes because I was from the Midwest because I was a youth and because I was Asian American, they're like we need your perspective. I was sort of a uniquely situated person to sit on the committee. I filled a lot of categories. That's how I ended up in those late night meetings where we talked for hours and hours about every single aspect of every second” (Yoshitani)

In addition to being a part of the Drafting Committee of the Principles of Environmental Justice, Miya was a part of the Asian American caucus at the Summit. It was not until the

formation of this caucus that many Asian Americans who were present, including Miya, that Asian American presence was lacking at the Summit for a variety of reasons:

“We had a meeting with Asian Americans and from my memory, there were 12 people there. It was a pretty small group and the majority of those folks were from California and most of them were from the Bay Area too. Some of them were students like Pamela and Vivian. Some were organizers and people who would come out of other forms of organizations like worker organizations or immigrant worker organizations or ... Peggy had come out of a domestic violence work and I think she started out as a social worker. One of the things that happened in that conversation was the spark of the ideas that eventually became APEN, but just an acknowledgement that we had so much work to do. [...] It wasn't so much like we have to have Asian American representation in the environmental justice movement which we did think we needed, but also an acknowledgement of the lack of organizing that was being done on a community level in our communities. That was a huge, huge gap and how another way that Asian Americans were just sort of being invisibilized and that because of other things like model minority myth and other things people just weren't seeing what was happening in Asian American communities” (Yoshitani).

As a young Asian American member of the Drafting Committee, Miya “definitely felt like there was a certain amount of pressure to show up just to be seen, to be seen as an Asian American” (Yoshitani). She attributes that necessity to be seen as an Asian American to be part of why she “stayed in touch with Peggy and some of the other folks and kept in contact about the early discussions about APEN before it actually became a real organization.” Regarding her motivating for staying involved in the movement, she says “in my heart, I so much wanted to be able to represent not just my own - I'm an Asian American as an individual - but an organized Asian American communities and communities who were facing the same set of integrated

challenges and problems that these other communities were facing. At the conference, our presence was important because we also needed to show that Asian Americans are affected by environmental injustice and that we are organizing” (Yoshitani).

Pamela Chiang

Pamela Chiang is currently a consultant and coach based in Montana. She was a founder of APEN, and helped to create the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (SNEEJ) prior to becoming a consultant. Like Lily Lee, Pamela was invited to the Summit as a member of Nindakin: students of color for environmental justice at Berkeley. This was a group that was formed in 1990 whose goal was “to center student of color learning and organizing in support of grassroots community organizing around environmental justice in communities of color” (Chiang). Nindakin was composed of students who were “in the ivory tower and interested in taking our education and putting it to use” (Chiang).

As an Asian American youth at the Summit, Pamela was hyper aware of the lack of Asian Americans in the space. She shares a story from the demonstration on Capitol Hill on the last day of the Summit:

“We did a march during the summit to Capitol Hill. I remember marching alongside some parts of the indigenous contingent. [...] We were on the steps with the classic scene with the bullhorn and people taking turns saying something, like these typical beautiful rally type things that don't change things, but are important in a different way. All these people speak and they are so eloquent! Then someone goes ‘QUICK! WE NEED AN ASIAN!’ and someone grabs me and goes ‘Pamela go up there!’ So there I went! Got thrown up there and said some stuff. ‘We are here in solidarity and we also need to acknowledge the unique EJ issues in our various communities of color. I think it was

well intentioned. [...] It was so funny when they were like ‘let’s get an Asian up here’. It was well intentioned but in some aspects it meant that all Asians are replaceable. They didn't say let’s get Pam up here, but they said let’s get an Asian up here! I didn't feel like the right person. I mean, who the hell was I? I was a 20 year old college student” (Chiang).

The majority of Pamela’s life work has been influenced by her experience at the conference. When she returned to Berkeley after the conference, she and a few other students created a course about environmental justice that deliberately placed both students of color and white students in 15 week internships with various community organizations fighting for environmental and economic justice. Furthermore, they would hold teach-ins and invite people from the community to talk about their experiences organizing. After she graduated from Berkeley, she went on to help build out APEN, the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice, and the Indigenous Environmental Network. After working alongside various communities of color for years, she currently works as a consultant based in Montana, where she engages in sustainable agricultural practices as a rancher. When speaking about the motivation for her work, she shares:

“Personally, part of the reason I do the work I do now - emotional intelligence, group intelligence, train and guide ppl, organizations, and movements on how to work through difference and difficulty in a transformational way - is because we were not properly equipped back then [in the 1990s] in how to work these differences out effectively. It did get personal for some people, even beyond the API group. You know the adage don't take the political personal, but it did get personal. We were not properly equipped in tapping into our proper selves. It was a hot mess movement. by 1996, a lot has happened but we didn't have a sustaining power. Part of it I feel is because of the fissures and the divisions between the different organizations, networks, and

relationships between them. That's why I'm on a mission to equip as many leaders, institutions, and sectors with these skills as possible - We have to get over ourselves and into each other" (Chiang).

Role of East Asian Americans in the Environmental Justice Movement

The role of the East Asian American in the EJM has been defined, since the very beginning, by the lack of both activity and representation in the overall EJM. The experiences of the East Asian Americans interviewed at the Summit was deeply shaped by the lack of Asian Americans at the conference. Several of the people interviewed for this project felt it:

Charles Lee: Upon reflecting on the Summit, Charles writes "as an Asian American, I felt the lack of Asian Pacific perspectives on environmental justice especially glaring. This was alluded to several times by other Asian American delegates. Here, too, I think that this is an area waiting for further development and self-definition. The Summit did allow us to touch upon a few of the social, historical, environmental, and geo-political realities of AP peoples. [...] Syngman Rhee touched upon the social realities of Asians on the continental US with his how famous tale of the 'yellow jelly bean'. Perhaps nothing spoke more eloquently to the experiences of Asians in the US." (Proceedings xi)

Lily Lee: "I remembered that we had realized that a lot of the speakers and that there wasn't very much Asian American representation or Pacific islander representation at the conference itself. [...] I did find it disappointing not to have pre-planned Asian American visible presence as far as the discourse. But then everyone was super welcoming of when we wanted to see if we could add that and that felt good and I guess it made me realize, 'Oh, well we need to speak up for ourselves more

and tell the stories of Asian Americans more and highlight those issues and that this is a place that would welcome that.” (Lee)

Pamela Chiang: “What was striking was like yeah, where were the APIs? There were no speakers. Young Shin (Executive Director of Asian Immigrant Women Advocates) did speak at one point, and I was like yeah finally, somebody. At one point during the plenary I marched up to the microphone and said something. I don't remember exactly what I said but I think it was in the Proceedings. That was me! I was 21”. According to the Proceedings from the conference, this is what Pamela said in reference to the lack of Asian Americans in the space -

‘I really feel that Asian Americans and Pacific Asians are being thrown together in one basket. And I really feel that there is such diversity in our peoples. I am really asking in a way a question: “What is Asian?” And I ask among that Asian people here, and among all of us. Do we really know? And do we know all the different kinds of problems in Asian immigrant and Asian American communities? My heart is beating fast because I am frustrated, but I am excited as I bring this to the floor. I really think that we need to understand what Asian people are in this country and their different backgrounds. We have the Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Laotians, Vietnamese, Hmong, and many more. And we cannot just be thrown by the wayside. And the Native Hawaiian and Native Pacific Island issues are so important because these people are being continually exploited through American colonization. But there is continual immigration going on in this country. While it may appear that there is limited environmental organizing in Asian immigrant and AsAm communities, that is not to say environmental problems do not exist. There are people here from Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, Pam Tau Lee, who can tell you about the statistics of working in the semiconductors. The problems are there. And I am researching why

it is hard to organize these communities. (Later, announcement was made of the formation of an Asian American caucus)” (Proceedings, 43).

Miya Yoshitani: “Surprising of course was the fact there were so few Asian Americans there. I think that's something that I was pretty used to in other arenas, and I just was kind of surprised that there were so few both leaders and organizations representing Asian Americans [at the Summit].

We basically had a Caucus meeting of Asian Americans and at this time - I think that the Pacific Islanders had their own thing. We had a meeting with Asian Americans and from my memory, there were 12 people there. [...] It wasn't so much like we have to have Asian American representation in the environmental justice movement which we did think we needed, but also an acknowledgement of the lack of organizing that was being done on a community level in our communities. That was a huge, huge gap and how another way that Asian Americans were just sort of being invisibilized and that because of other things like model minority myth and other things people just weren't seeing what was happening in Asian American communities.”

Based on the analysis of the oral histories shared in these interviews, it is clear that the role of East Asian Americans in the movement is to 1) complicate existing frameworks of analysis with our existence, 2) organize and empower our own communities, and 3) use our proximity to power to be effective allies to communities that need it. It is important to outline the role both East Asians and other ethnic groups East Asians are generally grouped with because “for Asians, as recent as 2001, even I as an Asian person repping APEN [as a delegate to the UN Conference in Racism and Xenophobia discussing environmental justice], there are some people who still did not recognize that API communities had issues to bring to the table. And that was just like ‘Oh Geez’” (Chiang).

Complicating Existing Frameworks

One of the roles of East Asian Americans in the movement is to complicate existing frameworks of analysis. Under systems of White Supremacy in the United States, Asians (particularly East Asians) and other non-white or non-black people are racialized as other. However, it is important to acknowledge that even in those fighting against various systems of oppression, they are not free from the indoctrination of White Supremacist values or racializations. In Pamela Chiang's interview, she mentions quote from Elizabeth Betita Martinez, a Latina member of SNCC, an organization well known for being both Black and White. As a Latina in the organization, she pushed the unit of analysis beyond a black/white framework to make it a true rainbow movement. The presence of Native, Asian, Pacific Island, Latinx people in the EJM make it a true rainbow movement. "That is a lot of proud of, and that is a ton to do. it's all there, and so complicated when you throw us Asians into it. From a place of shared experience, we have a shared purpose. How do we move people from difference to common cause? it's not easy. every sector has its own version" (Chiang).

In addition to complicating existing frameworks of racialization, EAA activists also expanded the environmental justice framework to beyond toxics to include the workplace and the living environment. Under the framework of environmental justice, everyone, regardless of race, class, gender, deserves a safe space to live, work, and play in a healthy environment. "As APIs, we needed to put it in our context and I think that has been our greatest contribution, to expand it beyond the toxics frame [...] For Korean electronics workers, as AIWA (Asian Immigrant Women Advocates) educated us, EJ issues is about high miscarriage rates because they are exposed to toxics. That's an EJ issue" (Pamela Chiang interview). Young Hi Shin of AIWA was present at the Summit and shared the environmental concerns relevant to Asian women -

“Most immigrant women, at one time or another in their journey to American life, worked in the hotel, garment, or restaurant industries. Women over 35 usually spend 10 to 30 years of their lives in these industries. The majority are Asian immigrant women who work in the labor intensive, lowest paid jobs, such as room cleaners, sewers, menders of uniforms and waitresses. The concentration of Asian immigrant women work force in these industries is no accident. These industries employ Asian immigrant women because our cheap labor and a total lack of marketable opportunity in this society. Being immigrants and women, and a racial minority, systematically and institutionally put us at the very bottom end of these industries and put us in very unhealthy and unsafe working conditions. [...] Most important, in order to achieve environmental justice for low-income, limited English speaking immigrant women at our workplace, we need the support from and be a part of progressive, broader, inclusive environmental movements, like we have seen in the last one and a half days, which includes workplace issues along with other environmental issues. Only doing so, we can start changing the practices and the policies of the industries, government, and the environmental movement. Safe and healthy working environment, where we breathe for 10 to 20 hours a day is a must. We need jobs which do not slowly and permanently disable or kills us ” (Proceedings 97-8)

Another way Asians complicate existing frameworks of analysis is encouraging thinkers of the EJM to scale up their analysis from a national scale to an international scale. As capital scales up, it is important for our social movements to also scale up. As mentioned earlier in this work, the presence and the racialization of Asian peoples is influenced by both domestic and foreign policy. It is well known that the Korean peninsula has been ravaged by American occupation. Thus, “in speaking about EJ, we feel that Korean participation is crucial, because just as people of color in the US have suffered the most from the environmental abuses, we must not forget that

internationally it is the people of the Third World who are subjected to the most dangerous and grave consequences of the environmental destruction” (Proceedings 71). In addition, we need to recognize the struggles of our communities abroad because systems of White Supremacy, capitalism, and colonial are global systems of oppression. Hundreds of mostly Asian women workers for AXT, a company that specializes in producing semiconductors based on Fremont, California, were poisoned by Gallium Arsenide, a chemical known to cause birth defects, cancer, and more. According to Pam Tau Lee, “the company did not provide training to these workers in a way that the workers could understand, no gloves, masks, eye protection, or working showers to decontaminate after their shifts” (Lee). After being fined by California’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration, AXT “ignored these charges, laid off workers and moved to Beijing! Even more outrageous is that workers from the Fremont plant were sent to Beijing to train workers to do they job they once had and were fired upon their return” (Lee). Pam goes on further to say “to achieve environmental justice for the Asian community, it is mandatory to create power for Asian immigrant workers to be able to think and act like a majority [instead of a minority]” (Lee).

Organizing Our Communities: Creating APEN

East Asian women present at the Summit - Pam Tau Lee, Peggy Saika, Pamela Chiang, Miya Yoshitani, and Vivian Chang are often credited with the foundation of APEN as a community organization (Kim and Matsuoka 2013). Pamela and Miya both met as youth at the Summit, and “we just hit it off” (Pamela interview). They were both mentored by Pam and Peggy, respectively, after the Summit and recruited to cultivate the development of the organization. When referring to their mentors, both Pamela and Miya attribute their involvement in APEN to the guidance of Pam and Peggy:

“Pam Tau Lee’s greatest, most consistent ways in which she shows up is the cultivation of young people. When I found her, she was like a mentor to me! She did spend a lot of time with me as we co-created APEN and so did others. I was in my 20s and we were working with people who were my age now. We were working side by side making it happen, struggling and experimenting. It was obvious that there weren't enough APIs [in the EJM] and we went did and something” (Chiang).

“In my heart, I so much wanted to be able to represent not just my own, I'm an Asian American as an individual, but an organized Asian American communities and communities who were facing the same set of integrated challenges and problems that these other communities were facing. [...] That's part of why I eventually, I stayed in touch with Peggy and some of the other folks and kept in contact about the early discussions about APEN before it actually became a real organization and why I was so drawn to come - apart from the fact that Peggy's extremely persuasive, she basically talked me into moving across the country - and work for APEN” (Yoshitani)

Two years after the Summit, in 1993, APEN officially opened its doors. Pamela shares her recollections about the beginning of the organization - “literally right after the summit, I remember coming back and sitting in the San Francisco foundation offices. Jack Chin was given some staff time to work on this and we started conceiving of APEN” (Pamela interview). However, just as is the case with any form of building networks, there are often conflicting ideals. Pamela recalls -

“Although we realized our racial ethnic identity as APIs, it's not an automatic shared analysis. Just because we share an identity frame, doesn't mean we actually have shared analysis. What are our shared analysis of the state of things and the approach and strategies in which we make change? In the formation of APEN, in our early years, we had struggles with the steering committee, I was working on building the Southwest network, the sister network. I was on the steering committee for

the start of APEN in 1991, and in 1993 when we opened our doors. Soon, it became apparent over time that we didn't see change and the theory of change similar and we struggled. One would say, let's take a youth development approach. while others were like 'We gotta organize a campaign. Our first campaign was in 1999 - Chevron explosion. Up until then, we were doing education and youth work, but we weren't really confronting power. It is just important to draw that out, just because we are Asian, doesn't mean that we see how change should happen the same way. '99 was the turning point of APEN getting into real direct organizing" (Chiang).

As mentioned earlier, APEN, "probably the biggest and most impactful AAPI and environmental organization" grew out of the experiences of the Asian Americans who were present at the conference (Lee). According to Miya, "at the conference, I felt like our presence was important because we also needed to show that Asian Americans are affected by environmental injustice and that we are organizing. We are doing work and we want to be both part of the broader movement and we also want to be seen by other institutions" (Yoshitani). APEN was conceptualized to be a network of East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islanders working alongside one another fighting for environmental justice, modeled after various networks such as the Indigenous Environmental Network and the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice. We, as Asian Americans, owe it to both our current and future, domestic and international communities to create a safer future for everyone. Peggy shares some insightful thoughts:

"The struggle for different communities of color within the construct of America is ongoing. It's not static, but our [Asian American] history here is much longer now. It's not static. Meaning now, in some of our communities we are several generations out in terms of origin. [...] That if we've walked a certain road, why would we want others to be able to suffer and be exploited in the same

way? To me, that challenge is deeper and stronger for the communities and the people that are here. [...] We as a country create refugee migration. We create the chaos in other countries. Whether you were brought as slaves or low wage workers or exploited in so many ways, under capitalism and what we do in other countries, then we have to be really cognizant of that. I felt a sense of responsibility that, I was fortunate enough to be there. while it's important to be there, it's more like what do you do with it? Then you put all of that in some like life experience. that was it. I think to me, it accelerated my own thinking about what I wanted to do next. What was important? How do we keep deepening our analysis? All the information from folks that were there integrated into how we think, the behavior in the practice, and what we're trying to do in the API context” (Saika).

Holding these thoughts after the Summit, Peggy and several other women who were present at the Summit including Pam Tau Lee, Pamela Chiang, and Miya Yoshitani “convened to address critical questions in their communities - How do we inject an environmental injustice perspective into the AAPI community? How do we bring an AAPI perspective into the environmental movement? How could the EJM contribute to a stronger AAPI voice in influencing the decisions that impact their families and their communities?” (Kim and Matsuoka 2013, 141). APEN was born out of the environmental justice movement and “for the Asian Americans that were there, we were called to respond to the mandate about creating an API face within the movement. That really meant developing both the visibility and participation, the leadership, and the grounding of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in our lived realities. At its core, it's about asking the questions about who makes policy decisions that impact communities and also decisions about where resources are allocated” (Saika).

Developing a network of Asian Pacific Americans in the EJM was and continues to be a herculean task. APEN’s goal “was to not just to create a formation but be able to work and apply

these principles to what we were building” (Saika). The founders of APEN were very aware that “part of the DNA of APEN itself is that we're part of a broader movement and that we can't win without each other. That work or organizing on a community level always has to be connected to the movement” (Yoshitani). Because the systems that are causing environmental injustices are invisible globalized systems, those being harmed need to be able to scale up our analysis -

“We were often fighting multinational corporations that just were operating in a completely coordinated way from their point of view, but we had no idea that we were all related in that way. Having a summit be able to help create that more cohesive picture and build those relationships for people really helped connect people and inspire a new network and inspire a whole bunch of new organizing that kind of continues to this day [...] Our power is certainly in how we speak for ourselves, use our own voices, and organize our own communities, but it also is completely dependent on our relationships to each other and an ability to align forces and be able to move a much broader front of political issues” (Yoshitani)

“We need to recognize that our communities need to be seen and be in solidarity; We are a part of this fabric too. In my perception, we all understood that it was never just about API formation - it was always centered in the context of building a multiracial movement. At least that's from my record. It wasn't about being our own interest, or being apologetic, or trying to debunk the model minority myth. We need to anchor what is true and expand it. [...] APEN realized that if we build a network, there is just not enough of us to build a force, we just have to pivot to build our own organizing. It took us a few years before we did community organizing. I would really define community organizing in this way, as inspired by Anthony Thigpenn. Community organizing is building politically conscious organizing power through base building by recruiting and developing members, developing leadership skills, and shifting power through campaigns.” (Chiang)

Due to the lack of Asian Americans at the Summit, the Asian Americans who were present at the Summit took it upon themselves to create APEN to serve as a frontline for Asian Pacific Americans suffering from environmental injustices, to be a space for people to learn about the struggles Asian Pacific Americans face, and to exist within a larger network of activist networks led by various communities of color. APEN is currently still thriving in the Bay Area today and serves as a model for organizations that aim to engage in multilingual organizing, empower their base, and fight for environmental and economic justice in their communities.

“Solidarity is a duty that has real impact”

Because East Asian people are racialized to be in closer proximity to Whiteness, people who identify as East Asian are granted certain privileges that other people of color are not. This is because East Asian peoples are not seen as threatening as Black or Brown folks under the context of White Supremacy. For that reason, it is important for East Asians to use their privilege to empower communities that are not granted the same opportunities to make change. The career trajectories of the three Chinese Lees that were present at the Summit - Lily Lee, Charles Lee, and Pam Tau Lee - do just that.

When Lily was at the Summit, she met Richard Moore, founder of the SouthWest Organizing Project. After completing graduate school at UC Berkeley, she was debating on whether or not to accept a job offer from EPA Headquarters in Washington DC or working to promote environmental justice at the grassroots level. Moore ultimately persuaded her to accept the job offer at the EPA because “we need brothers and sisters everywhere to be promoting environmental justice and I would have opportunities for influence outside within the EPA that would be different from the opportunities in nonprofit groups”. (Lily Lee Interview). Throughout

the years, he has proven to be correct - in Lily's various positions at the EPA, she has been able to directly influence policy decisions and funding decisions that assist the communities most impacted by various environmental injustices. Lily has been able to utilize her privilege in a powerful but subtle manner in her work environments, which has benefited many communities of color on a national scale through the decades.

It is known by many that the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit directly influenced the creation of President Clinton's Executive Order 12898. Executive Order 12898 created the Office of Environmental Justice at the EPA headquarters, which "works to protect human health and the environment in communities overburdened by environmental pollution by integrating environmental justice into all EPA programs, policies, and activities" (website). Although several scholars (Pellow and Brulle 2005) (Pellow 2017) have critiqued the effectiveness of the institutionalization of environmental justice work, it was seen as a huge win when first created because according to Peggy, "we actually pushed every region at them before he went to work for the EPA to create an environmental justice program. To take the EPA, which is really the only enforcement agency that we have at the national level but to be able to then say that in every region you're mandated to have an environmental justice program is a huge structural change" (Peggy interview). Charles' first interaction with environmental justice started with allyship. While working in the realm of occupational safety and health, he went to Warren County to show solidarity with the folks who were organizing against the construction of a landfill in their community. There, he met various leaders from UCC-CRJ and was asked to lead a special project examining the correlation between race and environmental inequities using quantitative analytical methods due to his scientific background. That report - Toxic Wastes and Race - would go on to alter the landscape of the environmental movement forever. For decades, he has worked to promote

environmental justice across the country and continues to do so tirelessly. Had Charles not gone down to Warren County to stand in solidarity with the Black community of Warren County in 1982, the EJM would not exist in the same way today.

In addition to building solidarity with various domestic communities of color, the role of East Asian peoples is to stand in solidarity with all oppressed communities across the globe and to recognize how their communities might be perpetuating various systems of oppression. In 2017, an oil company based in China called Andes Petroleum Company was granted permission to explore for oil on the ancestral territory of the Sapara Nation in the Ecuadorian part of the Amazon. Members of the Chinese Progressive Association stepped up and supported the efforts of Sapara leader Gloria Ushiga Santi to stop the drilling and was ultimately successful in stopping the drilling. Pam Tau Lee recounts the narrative:

“We learned that Sapara leader Gloria Ushigua Santi, had attempted to deliver a letter to UN China representative requesting that Andes Petroleum not explore for oil and cancel the contract with the Ecuadorian government. Her attempt to deliver the letter failed as the staff threw the letter into the trash. Gloria would be traveling through San Francisco on her way back to Ecuador so I suggested she attempt to deliver the letter to the Chinese Consulate’s San Francisco office. Before the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA) could officially participate, it was important that the members and staff of CPA fully understand the situation and be in alignment. Meeting Gloria, we found that CPA was in full alignment in opposing exploration and drilling for oil; but it was a difficult meeting, not because of the language barrier, but because the message on the delegation banner read “China out of the Amazon.” This slogan greatly disturbed the members because it felt like an attack on Chinese people, rather than on China’s exploitation of the land. Finally, one member clarified that in actuality we were there to say “Andes Petroleum Oil Out of Ecuador.”

Once that was clear, the signage on the banner was changed and everyone was satisfied. The next day supporters assembled outside the Chinese Consulate, the Chinese press was in attendance and Gloria lead us to the door to deliver the letter. A representative came out and after learning about the situation, accepted the letter! Media coverage of the action went international in Chinese.

A few months later, a representative from the oil company met informally with Gloria's brother and announced that they are reevaluating their plan which could include not exploring for oil. The delivery of the letter made a difference. CPA is very proud of the role we played to stop oil drilling on the territory of the Sapara People proving that solidarity is a duty that has real impact.”

Based on the narratives shared in this chapter, it is clear that East Asian Americans have three roles in the EJM: 1) to complicate existing frameworks of analysis with our existence, 2) organize and empower our own communities, and 3) use our proximity to power to be effective allies to communities that need it. It is important to note these steps need to happen alongside with another, or else we risk participating and perpetuating various systems of oppression. As East Asian Americans, we need to use our proximity to power for good, to organize against the hazards that poison our communities, to chip away at the systems that dehumanize people of color, and to avoid being the model minority and being used as a racial wedge between minority groups. The very systems of White Supremacy - capitalism, colonialism, orientalism- that racialize East Asians as robotic, apolitical, and abject, are the ones that rely on the erasure of Native folks to create the racialization of Black and Brown folks as animals. They shape the environments in which we live, work, and play. To build a truly environmentally just world, we must dismantle the systems that racialize non-white people as ‘sub-human’.

To be a true ally, one must not lose their focus on the goal: liberation from White Supremacy. However, in the path towards liberation, it is important to not inadvertently perpetuate or even accelerate the harm these systems do. For the East Asians discussed in this work who participate in organizations that are not explicitly political and use their proximity to power to directly assist other communities of color, they hold the contradiction of working to dismantle the system they are participating in by institutionalizing change. There's a mindset that people of color "can't rely on the system that got us into this mess to get us out. We can't rely on solutions that maintain the capitalist status quo. Real solutions come from the front line struggles. We need to build community power to win and we need to be able to identify and expose and reject false solutions" (Lee). However, East Asian Americans described in this work have had real, positive effect on various communities of color by using their proximity to power for the benefit of communities they are not actively a part of. For East Asian Americans who do not participate in fighting for environmental justice on the grassroots level, these are the contradictions they carry. I end this chapter with some thoughts from Peggy Saika, who currently runs a philanthropic organization whose focus is to fund environmental justice campaigns:

"Going through organizing trainings and stuff like that, it provides a framework for how you see doing the work or building organizations or contributing. For me, how the EJ movement really taught me about how as a country, we need to be in movement. The distinction between trying to build a 501C3 within the context of our tax system and how you're now a part of corporate America, but remain a movement formation to be able to work with organizations. As a framework for your work in an Asian American organization - how are you in movement within the context of our community but outside of our community? How do you retain the larger vision, the framework for the decisions that you need to make, the context, framework, and analysis that you have? It's

different. I mean, if I just wanted to build, a formation that was transactional so that you could stay tax-exempt and legal and all of that stuff, that's one thing. If you see yourself as a movement formation, then how do you continue to make, build, or contribute to organizations so they are not in conflict with one another, but it creates like a pathway for you and others to be able to build in that way? What you have to do is could you keep struggling with all the contradictions of what I just described. You have to live in that space where the contradictions are meant to be there to really force you to think about your own accountability.

To me, that's what it comes back to me that I could be in a contradictory space of, a progressive philanthropic vehicle. I'll live in that contradictory space because I'm still trying to influence or capital is being invested. Unless we think we're in a revolutionary state where we're going to dismantle this economic system, which is a whole different conversation. For me, our capitalism is so evolved and so durable, I think what we - and this is not because I've given up at all - I think that the more we can work towards intervening in the wave capital's flowing on every level, then somehow we are dismantling the way it is. We're diminishing the way it is constructed. If some people believe that's a reformist, strategy or whatever, it doesn't matter. I love the differences of opinion that we can all have, but I have by what I've found my, in many ways, it's about where you keep finding and asking. For me, it is trying to be real in what exists and not asking to live in some theoretical space where it won't change the ways in which people are struggling and not living the best lives they can. It's just being really conscious of that". (Saika)

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING CYBORGIAN FUTURES: METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE

‘The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation [...] They are wary of holism, but needy for connection - they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party.’

Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto

“‘Immigrant acts’ names the agency of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans; the acts of labor, resistance, memory, and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification.”

Lisa Lowe’s Immigrant Acts

“The issue is dispersion. The task is to survive the diaspora.”

Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Manifesto

In the final chapter of this work, I will be returning to Haraway’s Cyborg theory to discuss how the East Asian American activists interviewed in this work embodies the values of the cyborg and how the creation, management, and growth of a cyborgian social movement can create an environmentally just world. Due to the fact that East Asians are racialized as foreign, apolitical,

mechanical beings under the context of White Supremacy, the role of the East Asian is to reappropriate what it means to be a cyborg using the technique outlined in Chela Sandoval's Methodology of the Oppressed. By complicating various systems of oppression with our mere existence, organizing and empowering our communities, and using our proximity to power/whiteness to be effective allies to other subjugated communities, it is clear that the East Asian Americans interviewed in this project embody Haraway's cyborg through their life's work.

To reiterate what it means to be a cyborg, we will return to the discussion of the racialization of different people of color within the human/machine/animal framework. Under systems of White Supremacy - which according to Andrea Smith, compose of systems of capitalism, orientalism, and colonialism - White people are racialized as human, but Asian people and Black people are subhuman because they are respectively racialized as machines and animals. In Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto, she discusses the three main boundaries that cyborgs transcend - human/animal, human/machine, physical/nonphysical. As the cyborg develops, it begins to exist beyond and in spite of these borders. Regarding the transcendence of the physical/nonphysical borders, she writes "modern machines are quintessentially microelectronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible [...] they are hard to see political as materially. [...] Ironically, it might be the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asian and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail whos constructed unities will guide effective oppositional strategies" (Haraway 1991, 154). Furthermore, when discussing how her iteration of the cyborg exists beyond the human/machine boundary, she writes "They [cyborgs] are wary of holism, but needy for connection - they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party. The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism" (Haraway 1991, 151).

When describing the beings that transcend the human/machine boundary, one can easily make the connection to the history of Asians in the United States. The history of Asian Americanness is inextricable with the US' history of orientalism domestically and imperialism abroad. Furthermore, the history of Asian Americanness cannot be truly understood without a critical examination of capitalism. Lisa Lowe conceptualizes the creation of Asian Americanness in two eras of immigration - pre-1965 and post-1965. Pre-1965 immigration from Asian countries (or rather, immigration prior to the first immigration exclusion acts in 1924) were driven by the necessity of cheap labor to build the infrastructure this nation still relies on. Asian immigrants arriving at the shores of the US post-1965 however, were driven to flee their countries due to American intervention causing the destabilization of their home nations in the effort to contain communism (Vietnam, Korea, Cambodia). For Asians, whose lived experiences have been shaped by racializations created by American systems of White Supremacy, they have no choice but to imagine, create, and build new worlds for themselves to survive. Poet and artist Jess X Snow writes "What is immigration if not imagination given a destination? A magic so powerful it must be banned?" (A POEM). Upon historical analysis of the racialization of Asians, a clear connection can be made between the Asian body and the cyborg - "A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. [...]

Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility" (Haraway 1991, 149).

Gaining Cyborgian Autonomy in Social Movements

Because Asians move through the world as perpetual outsiders due to the way we are racialized, Asian people maintain double consciousness - they ‘see what they do as they do it from the dominant viewpoint as well as from their own, shuttling between realities, their identities reformatting out of another third side’ (Sandoval 1991, 84). However, for East Asians, it is important for us to maintain not only a double consciousness, but a triple consciousness - our viewpoints, the dominant viewpoints, and the viewpoints of those more oppressed than we - due to the opportunities we are granted as our proximity to Whiteness and power increases. In addition to understanding how our actions are perceived by those with power in mainstream society, we need to become particularly aware of how our actions are perceived by those with less power in our societies to ensure that we do not perpetuate various systems of oppression. As Peggy said in her interview, we need to be able to hold all the contradictions in our lives and our work and be held accountable for our actions. This is how we build allyship and solidarity with one another.

Although Haraway conceptualizes a cyborg as being an individual that transcends bounds created by the various -isms plaguing our societies, Chela Sandoval outlined a methodology for cyborgs to gain autonomy under various systems of oppression, especially racial oppression. The role of the cyborg in a social movement is to successfully navigate differences, and use those differences to effectively organize their fellow cyborgs as well as their non-cyborgian comrades.

I want to introduce the concept of social movements themselves being cyborgian. For a social movement to be cyborgian, its actors need to be able to build solidarity and relationships by highlighting and celebrating differences, as opposed to in spite of them. Haraway writes “cyborg politics is the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one

code that translates all meaning perfectly. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution” (Haraway 1991, 176). A truly successful cyborgian movement is one that works across boundaries and one that is able to recruit and organize people from a variety of backgrounds, much like the EJM during its conception. A successful cyborgian social movement is one that can navigate differences, which has become particularly challenging to do. Because “power and capital no longer comes from one source, but from everywhere”, the ability to name and resist the systems that segregate people are no longer easily identified (Sandoval 1991, 78). We need to develop power horizontally by building coalitions because “the shift of capital to a transnational stage has brought about a mutation in the very structure of Western consciousness. [...] global postmodern power is increasingly figured as a force that circulates horizontally, on a lateral and flattened plane, even if many-sided, with deviations occurring at every turn” (Sandoval 1991, 72). Furthermore, coalition building needs to be continuous - ‘A vertical to horizontal shift in how power is being experienced and understood charges human relations with a strange, perverse, new shimmer of ‘equality’, which results in ever-new modes of democratically exchanged hostilities, competitions, antagonisms, and suspicions. This phenomenon appears in leftist periodicals that describe the growing frictions between oppositional activists along lines of sexual orientation, gender, race, class, nation, or other forms of ‘horizontal hostility’ (Sandoval 1991, 74). Because “power is not syntactical in nature, that is, arranged in order of meanings that ‘make sense’, insofar as power is viewed as continually regenerating, according to the contingencies necessitated by social crisis”, the oppressed constantly need to be consciously building power among their community while forming effective coalitions with other oppressed communities.

According to Sandoval's Methodology of the Oppressed, cyborgs gain autonomy from restrictive systems of racialization by engaging in these five steps:

Semiology: being able to critically engage with semiology - naming and understanding various signs and symbols present in society

Ideology: understanding how signs carry and perpetuate dominant narratives

Meta-ideaologizing / Revolutionary Exnomination: deconstructing the power structures the aforementioned signs represent and reappropriating the signs as a tactic in the fight for liberation from various systems of oppression

Differential Movements (of consciousness): using the recognized signs to build guiding principles to move forward in ways that do not replicate existing power structures.

Democratic: figuring out how to use these signs strategically to construct a new, more just world

For the cyborgs fighting for environmental justice on a local, national, and international scales, "the methodology of the oppressed is a set of processes, procedures, and technologies for decolonizing the imagination" (Sandoval 1991, 68). Attendees of the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit are "social actors committed egalitarian social relations, who are seeking the basis for a shared vision, an oppositional and coalitional politics, and who seek new inner and social technologies that will ensure that resistant activity not simply replicate the political formations that are linked to transnational cultural expansion, must self-consciously recognize, develop, and harness a dissident globalization" (Sandoval 1991, 71). For the East Asian attendees of the Summit, the East Asian body is the cultural sign being read, understood, and reappropriated

as a tool of resistance and liberation. Because of historical systems of racialization, it is impossible to separate a physical body from the race that society has ascribed to it.

Seminology

Although Roland Barthes is hardly understood by scholars as a theorist with an emphasis in decolonization, Sandoval frames her seminal work *Methodology of the Oppressed* through the concepts described in his 1957 work *Mythologies*. To begin, one must understand the definition of semiotics. Seminology is “the methodology that allows one to read forms of domination as ‘artifacts’ is a familiar behavior among powerless subjects, who early on learn to analyze every object under conditions of domination, especially when set in exchange with the master/colonizer in order to determine how, where, and when to construct and insert an identity that will facilitate continued existence of self and/or community” (Sandoval 1991, 85). Semiology is the process of understanding larger systems of oppression through objects, or the process of making invisible systems tangible through specific instances.

The East Asians present at the Summit were well aware of their positionality as both people of color and Asian the mainstream environmental movement and the environmental justice movement. For Charles and other members of UCC-CRJ, they were often the only people of color in meetings about the environment. As students, Miya, Pamela, and Lily were involved in efforts to explicitly involve people of color in the environmental movement on their respective campuses. When they arrived at the Summit designed for people of color, they all felt the absence of a significant Asian cohort because there were only 12 Asian American delegates. For Asians in particular, the lack of presence in various social justice spaces can be attributed to the lack of organizing in communities, but also can be attributed to the invisibilization of Asian Americans as

people who were political because of the model minority narrative appearing, even in activist spaces (Miya interview). Those who later got together to form APEN - Pam Tau Lee, Peggy Saika, Pamela Chiang, and Miya Yoshitani - saw the lack of Asians in the EJM as a sign as being reflective of both the Asian American movement and the EJM: Asian communities were not being organized to the extent of other communities in the fight for environmental justice and that the EJM in its current structure at the time perpetuated some racializations of East Asians as being interchangeable with one another and thus not valued as individual human beings, but just as a part of a miscellaneous collective.

Ideology

In order to be able to effectively utilize semiotics/signs to change the world, one must be able to understand the myths surrounding them - they must be able to understand how the dominant ideologies prevalent in society around the chosen sign has shaped the sign. The process of discovering the ideology behind a sign is particularly powerful because of its ability to make invisible systems tangible. Several things to note about ideology: its fluidity, its transparency, and its ability to make a sign meaningless. Of fluidity, Sandoval writes “Ideology can be perceived, identified, distinguished, and reproduced when necessary. [...] ideology is a pattern: indeed, it is a structured pattern of meaning, of feeling, of consciousness itself” (1991, 90). Of its transparency, Sandoval writes that ideologies are always created by larger systems, and that the ideologies themselves hide nothing about the systems from which they came - “the ingredients of its meaning are on the surface” (Sandoval 1991, 91). Of its ability to segregate a sign’s meaning from the sign itself, Sandoval writes “Ideology deprives material and historicized forms of their meanings (emptying them out, transforming them into a ‘gesture’) that a new methodology for emancipating consciousness must be founded” (1991, 95). Once the signs are understood in the context of the

ideologies of which they were conceived, the signs can be returned to a place where they are free from their positions of perpetuating various systems of oppression.

In the context of the history of the United States, Asian bodies have been racialized as abject machines against the White man, which is the only phenotype granted humanity under systems of White Supremacy. When labor was needed to construct various domestic infrastructure projects, people from Asia were brought over or incentivized to immigrate as a cheap source of labor at the turn of the 19th century. As the Asian population grew, xenophobic sentiment also grew and resulted in the implementation of explicitly racist laws to uphold the existing system of racialization that seeks to dominate and segregate people based on their constructed races. The same system that racialized Asians as foreign machines is the same one that would go onto racialize them as the 'Model Minority' - a group of peoples whose cultural values (emphasis on education and not political activities for instance) have lead them to succeed (Kim 1999) (Chun 2011). Despite the fact that the model minority myth was created by the very systems that politically left leaning activists are trying to dismantle, the belief that East Asians in particular are the model minority still exist in spaces oriented towards social justice. As late as 2001, ten years after the start of the EJM, Pamela Chiang served on the environmental justice delegation in the United Nations conference in racism and xenophobia. In that space, 'even I as an API person repping APEN, there were some people who still did not recognize that API communities had issues to bring to the table'. Even in a space that literally has the word 'xenophobia' in it, the lived experiences of Asian Americans are still not considered to be valid enough to warrant involvement in a larger social movement towards environmental justice. By truly understanding both the formation of the model minority myth in American society and how it shows up in activist spaces, East Asian Americans can better navigate the spaces they inhabit in any situation.

Meta-Ideologizing

The third technology used by cyborgs to gain autonomy under systems of racial oppression is meta-ideologizing - the act of reappropriating signs by attaching new meanings to them. In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon argues ‘that subjugated classes must fully take in (must semiotically’ read) such ‘artifacts’ and their meanings, and these artifacts are to be deconstructed in a fashion that can allow the social projection (the meta-ideologization) of new and revolutionary meaning in order not only to ensure survival for the powerless, but to induce social justice” (Sandoval 1991, 85). The act of engaging in meta-ideologizing is particularly powerful because after making the invisible systems tangible through the uncovering of the mythology of the sign, meta-ideologizing assigns new meanings to the sign that do not align with the mythology of the sign. Meta-ideologizing is “a political activity that builds on old categories of meaning in order to transform those same racialized divisions by suggesting something else, something beyond them” (Sandoval 1991, 84).

For the East Asian Americans in the EJM, their participation in the movement through their resistance and protest is challenging the stereotypes of political apathy (mythology) of the East Asian American bodies (sign). Furthermore, their existence in the EJM not only challenges the stereotypes associated with Asian-ness, but also the stereotype that people of color do not care about the environment. East Asian Americans have three roles in the EJM: 1) to complicate existing frameworks of analysis with our existence, 2) organize and empower our own communities, and 3) use our proximity to power to be effective allies to communities that need it. For EAA in the EJM, they are able to use their racialization as non threatening apolitical ‘model minority’ to disrupt social systems instead of perpetuating them. The folks interviewed in this work have spent their careers subtly moving resources to the communities that need them. Instead of

using their proximity to Whiteness to hoard resources for personal gain, the EAA participants of the Summit use their privilege as EAA to share opportunities granted to them because of their race. The act of meta-ideologizing comes in the form of solidarity and the provision of resources to communities who necessitate it. By participating in social movements locally and nationally, EAA are changing the definition of what it means to be an Asian person in the United States.

Differential Movements

The act of creating differential movements in public consciousness is to select strategically appropriate aspects of meta-ideologizing to sway public opinion in order to move power from the oppressors to the oppressed., which requires a coordinated effort to reveal the invisible systems of oppression deeply ingrained in American society. To do this,

“one voluntarily focuses on the very moves of consciousness that ideology demands of its host.

The practitioner feels the work of ideology on perception and consciousness, but then replays those moments in order to interrupt ‘the turnstile of form and meaning’ by focusing on each separately - thus interrupting the formation of identity itself as it is called upon by their movement.” (Sandoval 1991, 103).

Differential movements are guided by goals to educate and organize the public to gain autonomy from systems that create and perpetuate racial, economic, and environmental injustices. Engagement in differential movements is crucial to the abolition of White Supremacy because this is where organizers begin to educate the public. “To counteract this colonization of meaning by ideology, the practitioner must pierce through the phony nature created by ideology, by moving into and through the forms and meanings of signification in a systematic excavation that leads the consuming consciousness away from a sense of meaning as nature, toward the connections of

meaning to history” (Sandoval 1991, 103). Activists need to find ways to identify signs, use signs to understand the context under which they were created, reappropriate those signs strategically to gain power for the people, and begin to educate and organize people based on the meta-ideaology. Take an object most people know, assign new meaning to it, and use it to organize communities.

In many ways, the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit can be understood as the beginning of a differential movement in the US. The Summit gathered folks from around the country to challenge the notion that the environmental movement was only for polite, white people. For the EEA present at the Summit who created APEN, they were interested in creating APEN because there was not an existing Asian American presence in the EJM because there was not enough organizing Asian / Asian American communities. For this reason, the founders of APEN were tasked with creating an Asian American presence in the EJM. Furthermore, Asian American issues were not seen as being legitimate in the EJM - Miya said that “Asian Americans were just sort of invisibilized because of things like the model minority myth” (Yoshitani). By engaging actively in political organizing of their communities, they were defying the expectations of Asian Americans imposed by White Supremacy. By standing as allies to disenfranchised communities, the EAA of the EJM were changing minds about what it meant to be an Asian American. The creation of APEN is the cyborgs (EAA environmental justice activists) engaging in differential movements because APEN’s existence proves that there are politically active, organized Asian Americans in the EJM, challenging the stereotype that Asian Americans have nothing to contribute to the EJM because Asian communities do not experience environmental issues.

Democratic

After the process of creating differential movement has begun, it is up to the cyborg to begin engaging in democratics - the “ process of locating: a ‘zeroing in’ that gathers, drives, and orients the previous three technologies - semiotics, deconstruction, meta-ideologizing - with the intent of bringing not simple survival and justice, as in earlier times, but egalitarian social relations [...] with the aim of producing ‘love’ in a decolonizing, postmodern, post-empire world” (Sandoval 1991, 82). Simply put, the process of engaging in democratics is to deconstruct existing systems of oppression while imagining and creating a more equitable world, one that is not dictated by the oppression of various peoples. While Sandoval lists the process of creating differential movements after the process of democratics, I believe that the process of engaging in democratics should come after differential movements because more people are needed to build new societies. New societies cannot exist without new mindsets, or else there is a risk of unconsciously recreating different forms of oppression, which is not conducive to a society with egalitarian social relations.

The process of engaging in democratics is imagining and building a new future, is something Asian / Asian American communities have been doing since their arrival upon the land we now know as the United States. Lisa Lowe’s term ‘immigrant acts’ describes the democratics process well. “Immigrant acts’ names the agency of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans; the acts of labor, resistance, memory, and survival, as well as the politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification” in spite of the various immigration acts that prevented Asian communities from thriving (Lowe 1996, 9). In spite of all the different ways they have been marginalized by greater society and even within the EJM, the EAA activists interviewed in this project have worked their entire lives to build a society where those creating environmental hazards are held accountable for their actions, and where all communities, regardless of color, have a safe

place to live, work, and play. The Environmental Protection Agency, even with all its flaws, is still a government entity that can hold organizations responsible for the pollution they create. The EPA is a federal source of funding for polluted communities to have their neighborhoods cleaned. In addition to the Office of Environmental Justice at the EPA headquarters, there are offices of environmental justice across all ten regional offices. There are people in the federal government, regardless of the country's current political leadership, fighting for environmental justice all across the country. However, EAA do not have to participate in the federal government to make a tangible difference in the lived environments of communities of color. APEN, a grassroots organization based in Oakland and Richmond, has organized Asian communities across language and cultural barriers in various successful campaigns - stopping Chevron's \$1 Billion expansion project in Richmond, saving affordable housing in Oakland's Chinatown, and the passage of many statewide initiatives that ensured the continued environmental health of the state of California. The work APEN and EPA are complementary - APEN's work actively creates tangible differences in the lived environment, while the EPA's Office of Environmental Justice work seeks to preserve and enforce the strides various communities have made.

CONCLUSION

“He who does not know how to look back at where he came from will never get to his destination”

/ “Know history, know self. No history, no self”

- Jose Rizal

In the EJM, the role of the East Asian American is to exist as Haraway’s cyborg as described in the Cyborg Manifesto and to use technologies described in Sandoval’s Methodology of the Oppressed towards liberation from the systems of White Supremacy by complicating various infrastructures of oppression with our mere existence, organizing and empowering our communities, and utilizing our proximity to power to be effective allies to communities that require us to be so. Because East Asians in particular have been racialized as non-threatening and apolitical machines, East Asians are granted increased proximity to power compared to other people of color (Kim 1994). The system of racialization that racializes Asians as machines is one that cannot exist without the erasure of Indigenous Americans and the dehumanization of Black and Brown folks through their racializations as ‘savages’. Under the systems of White Supremacy, the humanity of White folks comes at the dehumanization of people of color (Wynter 2003).

The fourth wave of the environmental movement, the environmental justice movement, has the potential to free us from the expansive global systems of White Supremacy - capitalism/slavery, colonialism/genocide, and orientalism/war (Smith). At the 1991 People of Color Leadership Summit, the event many folks reference as the beginning of the environmental justice movement, people of color in the United States convened to discuss how to build a world free from environmental injustices. The purpose of the Summit was to show that people of color did care about the environment and to call out existing majority White environmental groups for their

incompetence, the Environmental Protection Agency for their unequal enforcement of the law, and the US military for the atrocities they were committing before, after, and during their actions. Attendees left the Summit with a renewed sense of inspiration and camaraderie, along with the 17 guiding Principles of Environmental Justice, which they were to take back to their communities to build power. However, the East Asian Americans who attended the conference left with a sense of disappointment - where were all the other Asian folks in the movement? Why are our issues not seen as important to some folks in the environmental justice space? With that, a group of women - Pam Tau Lee, Pamela Chiang, Miya Yoshitani, and Peggy Saika - set out to create the Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), the nation's only environmental justice organization working with Asian Pacific Island American communities. The two others interviewed for this work - Charles Lee and Lily Lee - went on to work for the Environmental Protection Agency in various capacities, effecting change on a federal level. Through the analysis of their narratives and systems of racialization present in the US, it is clear that the role of the EAA in the EJM is to pollute various systems of oppression, organize and empower our communities, and provide allyship to communities that would benefit from our allyship.

By listening to the stories shared by the interviewees and following their career trajectories, one can no longer say that Asian Americans as a whole are apolitical, obedient creatures. The history of various social movements is steeped with Asian American contributions, regardless of how it may seem at first glance. After learning, understanding, and sharing the rich history of Asian American activism in various social movements, Asian Americans often get inspired to get involved because someone that looked like them participated. After learning the stories of the East Asian American attendees of the 1991 People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, how might one expand their definition of an Asian American Environmental Justice Activist?

APPENDIX

Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, The Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

PREAMBLE

WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

- 1) Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2) Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.

- 3) Environmental Justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
- 4) Environmental Justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
- 5) Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
- 6) Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
- 7) Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
- 8) Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
- 9) Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
- 10) Environmental Justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
- 11) Environmental Justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

12) Environmental Justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13) Environmental Justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14) Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15) Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16) Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17) Environmental Justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

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