

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE MIDWEST: AN ORGANIZATIONAL  
HISTORY OF PROGRAM BUILDING, 1970–2010

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Stephanie Thanh Xuân Nguyễn

To my father, Cường Phúc Nguyễn,  
who taught me that history is personal

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## Preface

I first learned about Asian American Studies (AAS) at an academic panel at the Asian Culture Center at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). I do not remember the topic, but I remember chatting with Dr. Jennifer Lee after the lecture. Dr. Lee offered to do an independent study with me because IUB did not have a graduate minor in AAS. As a second-year master's student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs program, this independent study was the first time in my life when I learned about AAS and the Asian American political identity.

Growing up in a suburb of Maryland, I had friends who looked like me and others who did not. We did not, however, know how to talk about ethnicity and race. My father, a Vietnamese refugee, taught me our family history, which is rooted in poverty, war, and constant migration. Our family history had stemmed first from southern China, then to North Vietnam, then to South Vietnam during the Indochina War, and then to the US after the fall of Saigon. However, he did not have the language to talk about the difficulty he experienced trying to learn English, working at the hospital as a technician, and taking more than twenty years to recertify as a pharmacist in the US.

Although I did not grow up in the Midwest, I went to school here and here is where I discovered my Asian American consciousness (like several of my oral history interviewees will talk about in chapter four). In college, I became involved with Asian American student organizations, and my racial identity broadened from an ethnic-based identity to a pan-ethnic one. It was in my master's program when I took Dr. Lee's independent study in AAS and Dr. Dina Okamoto's Race and Ethnic Relations course in sociology, where I learned this language of politics and advocacy. It was in these courses when my Asian American consciousness grew into

a political identity. I finally could find the language and the frameworks to describe me and my family's racial experience in the US.

These Midwestern experiences in my undergraduate and master's program are what compelled me to write a term paper about the history of IUB's AAS program in Dr. Andrea Walton's History of Higher Education course. What drew me to the story of AAS at IUB was Asian American agency: Asian American students, faculty, and staff members who enacted change at their university to make it better for future community members. When I finished the paper, I felt the story was larger than I could fit into twenty pages. Dr. Walton encouraged me to submit the paper to an academic conference at which one discussant verified my realization. "You could learn a lot from how others describe ethnic studies for other different groups—to do a proper historiography you need to read more literature, and not just that on Asian Americans." That piece of advice came at the right time.

In an extraordinary bit of serendipity, I was taking Dr. Alex McCormick's Higher Education Administration and Organizational Theory course, during which Dr. McCormick invited Dr. Fabio Rojas as a guest speaker. In class, Dr. Rojas talked about his journey to studying Black Studies. His questions about Black Studies were like mine. How did AAS organize in the university? What challenges did students, faculty, and staff members face? What opportunities did they encounter? Most importantly, he talked about Black agency in changing higher education institutions. It was his framing on agency that propelled me to read his book, *From Black Power to Black Studies*, and stumble into his office hours with many questions.<sup>1</sup>

I learned an important sociological lesson after taking Dr. Rojas's Archival Methods and Social Theory courses. AAS at IUB would not be here without the help of regional and national

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<sup>1</sup> Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

forces. This lesson was further cemented as I expanded my archival search to other Big Ten universities like University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Northwestern University. I kept seeing the same names of senior scholars like Dr. Gary Okihiro and Dr. Evelyn Hu-DeHart, who visited these Midwestern campuses to promote the field's intellectual importance. Students and faculty members from various Midwestern universities shared their AAS proposals, course syllabi, and curricular materials with each other. As I read proposals, I found the arguments were similar. This hunch was further confirmed when I discovered the 2009 *Journal of Asian American Studies* Special Issue on the Midwest. The evidence was compelling that AAS was a regional and national story.<sup>2</sup>

Another lesson I learned while writing the story of AAS in the Midwest was to remain open about methodology. To be clear, I was not a historian before my doctoral studies. In fact, I entered into coursework intending to be a qualitative researcher. But the story of AAS in the Midwest taught me that the research question often dictates the methodology. Because AAS is an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary field, Sucheng Chan contended that scholars take on an additional burden to find the boundaries of their scholarship. "By trying to deal with too many concerns from various disciplines simultaneously, we may encounter difficulties when we try to set the parameters of our studies," Chan argued.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, I struggled mightily when writing the dissertation proposal and setting the boundaries of my literature review. Was this study a social science study or a history? Dr. Walton and Dr. Rojas helped me to define the boundaries of my study by asking me pointed questions about what I wanted to know. I kept returning to the simple question I had posed earlier in my studies: How did AAS organize in the university? While

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<sup>2</sup> Pawan Dhingra, "Introduction to the *Journal of Asian American Studies* Special Issue on the Midwest," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009): 239–246.

<sup>3</sup> Sucheng Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies: The Politics of Teaching and Program Building* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 25.

writing the literature review, I had gotten lost and listened to others. Amid all that noise, I needed to listen to myself.

While enjoying a once in a lifetime opportunity to work for IU's Bicentennial celebrations, I learned to trust myself and found that digging around in the archives suited my innate interests. I enjoyed the detective work and the creativity of trying to understand how universities and colleges made decisions. I kept seeing another recurring theme as I figured out how universities and colleges enacted change over time; in several primary sources and oral histories, Asian Americans at the Big Ten universities repeatedly brought up their frustrations that they were not seen as underrepresented minorities. Even to this day, this argument is still used at IUB.

Dr. Walton and Dr. Ellen Wu insisted that I forefront affirmative action in the dissertation. Initially, it was a topic I was not comfortable with pursuing because of the history, the vast literature, and the legalese required to understand such a complicated and politically rife issue. Two things convinced me to do a detour from my main historical narrative and pursue this research thread for the dissertation. First, Asian American scholars continually face this topic, especially with the recent rise of conservative activists like Edward Blum and Asian American organizations that have framed Asian Americans as victims of affirmative action. This argument, as Dr. Wu contended in her book, *The Color of Success*, continues to frame Asian Americans as a "racial group distinct from the white majority, but lauded as well assimilated upwardly mobile, politically non-threatening, and *definitively not-black*."<sup>4</sup> Affirmative action has been a tool (albeit an imperfect one) to improve access to higher education. Yet, these governmental and legal

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 2.

interventions are still needed continue to open access to elite places like universities and colleges. Thus, I needed to know it to defend it.

Second, the argument that Asian Americans are not underrepresented minorities has always troubled me because it minimized Asian Americans into dichotomous categories: Asian Americans were either considered underrepresented minorities or not. The administrative discussion of Asian Americans ended there and did not discuss this racial group in other aspects, like sense of belonging, identity development, or cultural competency—skills that I had explored in college. Dr. Sharon Lee and Dr. Wu had done the hard work of figuring out why this perception had happened at UIUC and UW-Madison, respectively. I wanted to understand how IUB had arrived at this logic.<sup>5</sup>

Looking into how IUB formed its affirmative action program was a two-month detour. It was frustrating trying to track down sources, piece together timelines, and understand definitions and policies. But as Dr. Tim Cain advised me: Sometimes, you have to take a detour to understand things for yourself. The detour helped me rewrite chapters two and four, and more importantly, it helped me understand the larger story of AAS in the Midwest. The history was not just about Asian Americans but the story of how campus constituents perceived and responded to issues of race differently. This narrative circles back to a prominent theory that I had learned in Dr. Okamoto's Race and Ethnic Relations course. Race is a social construction, according to Michael Omi and Howard Winant's seminal work *Racial Formation in the United States*.<sup>6</sup> I would like to add to Dr. Cain's piece of advice: Sometimes, you have to take an uncomfortable

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<sup>5</sup> Sharon S. Lee, *An Unseen and Unheard Minority: Asian American Students at the University of Illinois* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022); Ellen Wu, "Overrepresentation: Asian Americans and the Conundrums of Statistical Mirroring," in *Difference without Domination: Pursuing Justice in Diverse Democracies*, eds. Danielle Allen and Rohini Somanathan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 189–225.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

detour to understand the bigger story because that is what your gut, your sources, and your committee members are telling you. It helped me grow as a person and as a researcher.

At the defense, Dr. Wu said, “You were the best person to write this history. I couldn’t have imagined anyone else.” When I heard her say that, I was taken aback. It was high praise from the one person who lived through the entire process of establishing AAS at IUB as an undergraduate student activist, a founding faculty member, and then as the program director. Her comment motivated me to reflect on how I chose this topic for personal and professional reasons. Personally, I felt compelled to write a history in which Asians and Asian Americans are actors of change, rather than being treated as numbers, background figures, or exoticized research subjects. Professionally, I am motivated to make the research process more transparent. Other scholars have shared their struggles and lessons during their graduate studies, and I thank them for being honest with me. So, I share a little bit of my own journey and summarize what I have learned. Pick a topic that motivates you during the fun parts of research (like traveling to archives). But also pick a topic that you can endure even during the repetitive, mundane, and even maddening parts of research (like organizing hundreds of photos and trying to make sense of them). Be open to methodology, research questions, and feedback. Seriously, do not do it alone; ask for help. Listen to your gut, convictions, sources, and your committee members.

I also believe in luck. The people who took a chance on me, the experiences I got, the people I met, and the feedback I got have led me toward the history of AAS in the Midwest. At the conclusion of writing this dissertation, the one thing I know for sure: I chose this topic, and this topic chose me.

Stephanie Thanh Xuân Nguyễn

ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES IN THE MIDWEST: AN ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY OF  
PROGRAM BUILDING, 1970–2010

This dissertation examines how students, faculty, and staff members (whom I call advocates), justified and established distinct Asian American Studies (AAS) programs at the Big Ten research universities and colleges in the Committee for Institutional Cooperation for Asian American Studies Consortium between 1970 to 2010. I am inspired by Fabio Rojas’s sociological study on how the Black Studies movement became a stable academic discipline at postsecondary organizations. I use his conceptual framework to understand how Midwestern advocates organized their programs based on changes that occurred at the national, regional, and field levels. Using a blend of archival resources and oral history interviews, I trace the debates, arguments, and actions of Midwestern advocates in their efforts to strengthen program building and promote AAS as a rigorous academic discipline at Big Ten universities and colleges. I argue that these advocates pushed the field of AAS in new directions by decentering it from dominant ideas of West Coast program building and intellectual history. They reimagined AAS teaching and scholarship around Midwestern Asian American communities, perspectives, and experiences. Through this reimagination, they promoted the Midwest as a “regional center,” a hub of knowledge and teaching to compete with AAS programs that were created in California during the 1960s social movements.<sup>7</sup> Yet, in their efforts to strengthen Midwestern AAS programs, they pushed the field further away from its core values, created during the 1960s social movements, of challenging inequitable practices in higher education while advocating for marginalized

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<sup>7</sup> Franklin Odo coined the term “regional center,” and is quoted in Stephen H. Sumida, “East of California: Points of Origin in Asian American Studies,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 1998): 85–86, n.7.

communities. Called deradicalization, Midwestern advocates minimized arguments that were deemed too political and reframed AAS as a teaching and research contribution to the academy.

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## Abbreviations

AAA	Asian American Association of Indiana University Bloomington
AAS	Asian American Studies
AAAB	Asian American Advisory Board of Northwestern University
AAAS	Association for Asian American Studies
AIS	American Indian Studies at University of California Los Angeles
AAPI	Asian American Pacific Islander
AASI	Asian American Studies Initiative at University of Minnesota Twin Cities
ACC	Asian Culture Center at Indiana University Bloomington
AACC	Asian American Cultural Center at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
APASt	Asian/Pacific American Studies Program at University of Michigan
ASAM	Asian American Studies Program at University of Illinois at Chicago
BFC	Bloomington Faculty Council of Indiana University Bloomington
BSU	Black Student Union at Indiana University Bloomington
CIC-AASC	Committee for Institutional Cooperation for Asian American Studies Consortium
EOCC	East of California Caucus
HEW	US Department of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare
IDS	<i>Indiana Daily Student</i>
IU	Indiana University System
IUB	Indiana University Bloomington
IPS	Indianapolis Public School System
IUSA	Indiana University Student Association
JACL	Japanese American Citizens League
KKK	Ku Klux Klan
MAASU	Midwest Asian American Student Union
PAWA	Pacific and Asian Women's Alliance of University of Wisconsin-Madison
SFSC	San Francisco State College
SFSU	San Francisco State University

UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
UIC	University of Illinois at Chicago
UIUC	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
UMass Boston	University of Massachusetts Boston
UW-Madison	University of Wisconsin-Madison
WSU	Washington State University

## Chapter One: Introduction

Twenty representatives from eleven universities and colleges within the Committee for Institutional Cooperation (CIC) met at the University of Illinois–Urbana Champaign (UIUC) on November 12, 2000. The meeting was the first of its kind for students, faculty, and staff members who had been working to establish Asian American Studies (AAS) at their Midwestern campuses. In decade prior, such programs had expanded rapidly within the Big Ten Academic Alliance. University of Michigan and University of Wisconsin-Madison had pioneered the first Midwestern AAS programs, in 1989 and 1991 respectively. Bolstered by student activism in the 1990s, newly minted programs were established at The Ohio State University in 1997, Northwestern in 1999, and UIUC in 2000.<sup>1</sup>

Even with this initial expansion, advocates at the 2000 CIC meeting began to share the difficulties of organizing AAS in the Midwest. There were the commonplace organizational challenges of establishing a program, such as navigating university bureaucracy, gaining administrative support, and finding funding. In addition, there were challenges distinctive to the region and the time. Historian Erika Lee coined the term “Midwestern racial landscape” to describe a layer of racial difficulties that Asian Americanists in the region had faced since they began building programs in the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup> This landscape was comprised of several sociopolitical challenges, including demographics, cultural, and historical factors, that made it more difficult to convince university administrators about the need for AAS at their home universities.

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<sup>1</sup> George Yu and Sharon S. Lee, eds., *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting* (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies, 2001). Copy available in Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” the Asian Culture Center Archives, Bloomington, IN.

<sup>2</sup> Erika Lee, “Asian American Studies in the Midwest: New Questions, Approaches, and Communities,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009): 252.

Advocates took another crucial step that helped facilitate the organizational and intellectual rise of AAS in the Midwest. Participants at the 2000 CIC meeting compiled and shared program proposals that described new ways to argue for AAS at their home universities. They shared lessons about how to navigate university bureaucracy to find administrative support and funding. This sharing of strategies and resources helped several universities create their own AAS programs later in the 2000s. Advocates at the 2000 CIC meeting began to re-imagine ways to shift the field away from its California-centric scholarship and curriculum. The 2000 CIC meeting inspired the formation of the Committee for Institutional Cooperation for Asian American Studies Consortium (CIC-AASC), which was a research collaborative created in 2006 that facilitated organizational and intellectual opportunities among the (then) thirteen Big Ten research universities. Through campus and regional efforts, advocates helped establish the Midwest as an area of significant research and curriculum within the field of AAS.

This dissertation examines how students, faculty, and staff members (whom I call advocates), justified and established distinct AAS programs at research universities in the Big Ten Academic Alliance. This history begins in 1970 when Asian American students began to demand AAS programs at their Big Ten universities and colleges. Because AAS program-building is dependent on organizational context, I offer an in-depth case study of how advocates built a distinct AAS program at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). The history ends in 2010 when the CIC-AASC folded into the Association for Asian American Studies, the professional organization for the field.

I am inspired by Fabio Rojas's sociological study on how the Black Studies movement became a stable academic discipline at postsecondary organizations. I use his conceptual framework to understand how Midwestern advocates organized their AAS programs based on

changes that occurred at the national, regional, and field levels. Using a blend of archival resources and oral history interviews, I engage in three research questions. First, how did students, faculty, and staff members at Midwestern research universities justify AAS programs in response to changes in the national racial discourse, regional racial landscape, and the field of AAS? Second, how did Midwestern advocates organize their AAS programs in response to these changes? Third, how did students, faculty, and staff members at IUB adapt their justification for AAS in response to the university's distinct racial politics and funding priorities?<sup>3</sup>

In this history, I trace the debates, arguments, and actions of advocates in their efforts to strengthen program building and promote AAS as a rigorous academic discipline at Big Ten universities and colleges. This dissertation addresses interrelated issues of how racial framing, racial politics, and organizational context can influence curricular change at universities and colleges. I argue that these advocates pushed the field of AAS in new directions by decentering it from dominant ideas of West Coast program-building and intellectual history. Midwestern advocates, however, pushed the field further away from its core values, created during the 1960s social movements, of challenging inequitable practices in higher education while advocating for marginalized communities. This history illustrates the concept of deradicalization, where Midwestern advocates minimized arguments that were deemed too political and reframed AAS as a teaching and research contribution to their universities and colleges.

In the first half of the dissertation, I examine how Midwestern advocates altered how they justified and organized AAS because of national, regional, and field-wide changes that happened after the 1960s social movements to the end of the multiculturalism era in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In this study, I use the term social movements as the convergence of the

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<sup>3</sup> Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and ethnic studies protests that occurred on campuses nationwide in the late 1960s. These social movements sought to disrupt the normal state of affairs within higher education organizations and to start the process of responding to activists' demands. Starting in the late 1970s, Midwestern advocates contended with national racial politics that began to frame Asian Americans as a "model minority."<sup>4</sup> This stereotype suggests Asian Americans are doing well demographically and academically at US college campuses and, therefore, do not need additional campus attention or resources. Universities and colleges amplified this stereotype as they began implementing affirmative action programs in the late 1960s and fought legal challenges to their admissions policies in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

National issues were important, but regional and organizational context influenced how Midwestern advocates built their AAS programs. In addition to the national racial narrative, Midwestern advocates contended with the Midwestern racial landscape that embodied deeply rooted cultural assumptions of race and varying postsecondary interpretations of federal affirmative action policies over three decades. They realized that this model-minority framing weakened the justification for AAS to represent the growing number of Asian Americans at their Midwestern campuses. Midwestern advocates increased AAS's chances to institutionalize in the region by reframing it from a demographic project to an intellectual contribution to their college campuses. They also increased AAS's chances to be seen as a serious academic discipline by shaping programs around their campus's distinct racial politics and characteristics, such as student demographics and research priorities. Advocates debated alternative organizational

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<sup>4</sup> Sharon S. Lee, "The De-Minoritization of Asian Americans," *Asian American Law Journal* 15, no 129 (2008): 129-152.

<sup>5</sup> Fabio Rojas, "Social Movements and Universities," in *Organizing Higher Education*, ed. Michael Bastedo (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 256-277.

models and established programs that best served their campus constituents and their locale. As they built programs that best fit their campuses, advocates formed the CIC-AASC to further strengthen program-building and to reimagine AAS scholarship and teaching materials to reflect Midwestern Asian American history, experiences, and communities. As a result, faculty and staff members created a Midwest “regional center,” which is a hub of knowledge that decenters the field away from its California-centric teaching and scholarship.<sup>6</sup>

In the second half of the dissertation, chapters four and five, I examine these national and field-level changes through the case study of IUB. What makes IUB distinct from other Midwestern campuses is the interplay between campus characteristics and organizational politics that began to shape how AAS institutionalized and subsequently deradicalized on campus. I illustrate how advocates reframed their arguments for AAS as campus discussions of race evolved from the 1970s to the 1990s. Campus officials introduced the idea of Asian Americans as not “not underrepresented” minorities because of local interpretations of affirmative action guidelines from the 1970s to the late 1980s.<sup>7</sup> In response to campus racial politics, student advocates broadened their argument for an approach to AAS that would benefit all students, not just Asian Americans. Faculty and staff members further expanded the justification for AAS as an intellectual contribution to the university to receive access to resources such as funding and faculty lines. They argued that IUB needed a program to remain competitive among its Big Ten peers and boost IUB’s reputation as a leader in international and area studies. They created a distinct interdisciplinary program based on the university’s existing resources, organizational

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<sup>6</sup> Quote by Franklin Odo, who coined the term “regional center,” and is quoted in Stephen H. Sumida, “East of California: Points of Origin in Asian American Studies,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 1998), 85–86, n.7.

<sup>7</sup> Bloomington Faculty Council minutes, November 19, 1985, accessed October 27, 2016 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1985-11-19>

structure, and funding priorities. Their actions, though not intentional, further contributed to the trend of deradicalization in the field of AAS.

### **Terminology, Key Terms, and Definitions**

In their 1994 book *Racial Formation in the United States*, Michael Omi and Howard Winant argued that race is a social construction. For this dissertation, I adopt their theory and acknowledge that racial categories, terms, and concepts have changed over time. In my narrative, I use contemporary terms like “Latinx,” “Chicanx,” and “Filipinx” to be inclusive of all gender identities. In my narrative, I also use the term “Black” as a standard racial reference although I do recognize the changing racial labels connected to the African American and Black diasporic communities. To maintain the historical context, I use terms that Midwestern campus constituents used at the time (e.g. Latino/a, Chicano/a, or Afro-American) when referring to titles, program names, or direct quotes. I do recognize that these historical terms are considered harmful in today’s context. For example, advocates at IUB used the term “third-world countries” in administrative discussions, documents, and conversations of the day. Although I use “third-world countries” in my dissertation, I do acknowledge that this term is outdated and there are more inclusive terms employed today.<sup>8</sup>

To help with readability and clarity, I list and define key terms that appear frequently in this study.

**Asian Americans:** This term is a racial category that encompasses several ethnic Asian groups from East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean), South Asian (e.g., India and

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994); Cristobal Salinas Jr. and Adele Lozano, “Mapping and Recontextualizing the Evolution of the Term *Latinx*: An Environmental Scanning in Higher Education,” *Journal of Latinos and Education* 18, no. 4 (2019): 302-315; Tom W. Smith, “Changing Racial Labels: From ‘Colored’ To ‘Negro’ To ‘Black’ To ‘African American’,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 496–51.

Pakistan), Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodian, Hmong, Laotian, and Vietnamese), and Filipinx backgrounds. Although the US federal government categorizes Pacific Islanders as part of the Asian American racial category, I do not include Pacific Islanders (e.g., Chamorros, Guamanian, and Native Hawaiians) in this study because their histories, culture, and social issues are vastly different from those of Asian ethnic groups. Including Pacific Islanders in this study would perpetuate the misconception that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders share similar group characteristics and educational outcomes. However, for historical integrity, I use terms like “Asian Pacific Americans” in the dissertation if a university or college used such terms to refer to their Asian American population or a specific academic unit at that time. For example, I use the term “Asian/Pacific American Studies Program” when referring to University of Michigan’s AAS academic unit.<sup>9</sup>

Although I do not include Pacific Islanders in this dissertation, I do acknowledge the historical motivations in combining Asian Americans with Pacific Islanders to gain electoral power and social services funding. I also do recognize that this broad and heterogenous category of “Asian American” is shaped by the politics of pan-Asian coalition and the historical events of the time. For example, since the 1970s, community activists have argued for Filipinx Americans to be separated from the Asian American classification because of their growing population in the US and their different ethnic, social, political, and economic needs compared to East Asian ethnic groups. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, AAS scholars have argued for the inclusion of Arab, Middle Eastern, and Muslim Americans in the Asian American category. Kent Ono argued that the increase of racial incidents and violence against

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<sup>9</sup> Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), xvii, 17; Vicente M. Diaz “To ‘P’ or Not to ‘P’?”: Marking the Territory Between Pacific Islander and Asian American Studies.” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7, no. 3 (2004): 183–208.

Muslim, Middle Eastern, and South Asian Americans post-9/11 is similar to the historical injustices against Asian Americans, like Japanese and Chinese Americans during World War II, who were seen as “potential terrorists.”<sup>10</sup> However, within the last two decades, advocacy groups have lobbied for the separation of ethnic groups from Central Asian and Middle Eastern regions in the upcoming 2030 US Census.<sup>11</sup>

**Asian American Studies (AAS):** A multidisciplinary field that examines the identity, belonging, and power from the perspective of Americans with Asian, Pacific Islander, and Asian/Pacific diasporic histories, communities, and cultures. AAS emerged from the 1960s and 1970s civil rights and Third World Liberation movements when students and faculty demanded inclusion of minority perspectives within higher education curriculum. It is, inherently, a part of a larger field of ethnic studies. Four decades since its birth, AAS has grown as a distinct academic discipline and a potent site of critique. Today, AAS focuses on teaching and conducting research to solve issues of inequity and injustice in the globalizing world of the twenty-first century through different approaches in the arts, humanities, and social and behavioral sciences.<sup>12</sup>

**Core Values:** The principles in which advocates founded the field of ethnic studies during the 1960s and 1970s social movements. The founding values of ethnic studies originated from the Black Power Movement, which promoted Black-oriented education. This educational

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<sup>10</sup> Kent A. Ono, “Asian American Studies After 9/11,” in *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, 2nd ed., eds. Cameron McCarthy, Warren Crichlow, Greg Dimitriadis, and Nadine Dolby (New York: Routledge, 2005), 443.

<sup>11</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992): 53–81, 82–111; Hansi Lo Wang, “Next U.S. Census Will Have New Boxes for ‘Middle Eastern or North African,’” *National Public Radio*, March 24, 2024, accessed on June 30, 2025 from <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/28/1237218459/census-race-categories-ethnicity-middle-east-north-africa>

<sup>12</sup> Shirley Hune, “Opening of the American Mind: The Role of Asian American Studies,” in *The Asian American Educational Experience*, eds. Don T. Nakanishi and Tina Yamano Nishida (New York: Routledge, 1995), 322; Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ, and K. Scott Wong, eds., *Keywords for Asian American Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 1.

approach posited that universities and colleges should produce knowledge that reflected and helped transform difficult economic, political, and social realities of working-class communities of color. Adapting this Black-oriented approach, ethnic studies proponents aimed to “make education more democratic” by centering the experiences of people of color into the practices, curriculum, and scholarship of the university.<sup>13</sup> Advocates believed that courses in ethnic studies should address concerns of communities of color and to prepare students for careers in community activist work. University service and research should help address social and economic issues of communities of color rather than advancing knowledge for prestige and gain.<sup>14</sup>

**Deradicalization:** The process by which ethnic studies and ethnic-specific disciplines reformulate themselves into race-neutral enterprises by stripping themselves of their political roots, values, and goals. Scholars observed that deradicalization often is a consequence of ethnic studies becoming a permanent part of university structures and academic culture.<sup>15</sup>

**Diaspora:** Since the rise of diasporic and transnational studies in the late twentieth century, there is substantial debate over the definition of this term. I adopt the definition provided by political scientist Jonathan Grossman, who argues that “diaspora is a transnational community whose members (or their ancestors) emigrated or were dispersed from their original

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<sup>13</sup> Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, “Asian American Studies and Institutional Politics,” in *Asian Pacific Americans and the US Southwest*, eds. Thomas K. Nakayama and C. F. Yoshioka (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1997), 25.

<sup>14</sup> Jason M. Ferreira, “All Power to the People: A Comparative History of Third World Radicalism in San Francisco, 1968–1974,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2003), 26–29; Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “The History, Development, and Future of Ethnic Studies,” *Phi Delta Kappa International* 75, no. 1 (Sept. 1993): 51–52; Jesse M. Vazquez, “The Co-opting of Ethnic Studies in the American University: A Critical View,” *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* 11, no. 1 (January 1988): 24–25.

<sup>15</sup> Erin F. Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values of Ethnic Studies: Exploring Efforts to Advance the Organizational Stability of American Indian and Asian American Studies,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2009), 42–44; Fabio Rojas, “Activism and the Academy: Lessons from the Rise of Ethnic Studies,” in *Professors and Their Politics*, eds. Neil Gross and Solon Simmons (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 251.

homeland but remain oriented to it and preserve a group identity.”<sup>16</sup> In the field of AAS, diaspora remains a fluid concept that acknowledges the sociopolitical relationships and broader history of Asian and Pacific Islander communities who have navigated their way around the world and established themselves in the United States.<sup>17</sup>

**Ethnic Studies:** A multidisciplinary field of study that examines the history, culture, and social organization of American racial and ethnic groups. It is a multidisciplinary field that encompasses the knowledge base and methodologies from the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences. Since its birth during the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic studies has driven structural and curricular changes at postsecondary organizations nationwide to include the perspectives of excluded and marginalized groups into the male and Euro-centered canon. Because of its politicized roots, the field has had to face (and continues to face) ethnocentrism, backlash, hostility, and even violence.<sup>18</sup>

**Intellectual Legitimacy:** The process of seeking academic respect through measures such as promoting tenure-track faculty, publishing in academic journals, and obtaining external grant funding. Scholars also use the term “academic legitimacy.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Grossman, “Toward a Definition of Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 8 (2019): 1263-1282.

<sup>17</sup> Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Diaspora,” in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, eds. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ, and K. Scott Wong (New York: New York University Press, 2015): 49-54.

<sup>18</sup> Gretchen M. Bataille, Miguel A. Carranza, and Laurie Lisa, *Ethnic Studies in the United States: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), vii, ix; Philip Q. Yang, *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 3-17.

<sup>19</sup> Alan K. Colón, “Critical issues in Black Studies: A Selective Analysis,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 53, no. 3 (1984), 273; Jo Ann Cunningham, “Black Studies Programs: Reasons for their Success and Non-Success from Inception to the Present,” *National Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 1 (March 1991): 32-36; Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values,” 150, 155, 158; Mario L. Small, “Departmental Conditions and the Emergence of New Disciplines: Two Cases in the Legitimation of African-American Studies,” *Theory and Society* 28, no. 5 (Oct. 1999): 666.

**Institutionalization:** The process in which a smaller programmatic unit, such as ethnic studies, becomes an increasingly integrated into the structure of the university. This unit acquires institutionalization through measures of organizational stability and intellectual legitimacy.<sup>20</sup>

**Midwest:** This study uses the term “Midwest” to refer to the experiences of the eleven research-intensive universities that had membership in the CIC (currently known as the Big Ten Academic Alliance) between 1970 to 2010. Herman B Wells, IUB’s president at the time, founded the CIC in 1958 to share resources among several public and private research-intensive universities located in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Eleven universities were members of the CIC when AAS advocates first met in 2000: University of Chicago, University of Illinois at Chicago, UIUC, IUB, University of Iowa, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, Purdue University, and University of Wisconsin-Madison. For this dissertation, I narrow the definition of the Midwest to these eleven member organizations because of the direct impact of the CIC-AASC in helping AAS advocates build individual programs at their campuses (see chapter three). I do acknowledge that AAS program-building and intellectual work occurred at other Midwestern public and private higher education organizations that were located outside of the CIC-AASC.<sup>21</sup>

**Mobilization:** The first phase of Fabio Rojas’s movement-induced organizational change model that is characterized as a stage of direct action. In this phase, the aggrieved party identifies an issue; mobilizes and forms links between other groups; and engages in conflict with

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<sup>20</sup> Terry. N. Clark, “Institutionalization of Innovations in Higher Education: Four Models,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (Jun. 1968): 1; Barbara K. Curry, *Instituting Enduring Innovations: Achieving Continuity of Change in Higher Education*, ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No.7 (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education, 1992), 6–7; R. Danforth Ross, “The Institutionalization of Academic Innovation: Two Models,” *Sociology of Education* 49, no. 2 (Apr. 1976): 148.

<sup>21</sup> James H. Capshew, *Herman B Wells: The Promise of the American University* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 262; Yu and Lee, eds., *The State of AAS*.

organizational decision-makers. Mobilization can jumpstart organizational change, but it does not guarantee that an innovation will become a routine part of the organization.<sup>22</sup>

**Organizational Stability:** The degree to which a smaller programmatic unit, such as ethnic studies, becomes “anchored” to the structure and operational procedures of the university.<sup>23</sup> Scholars have determined there are several measures that signify how much an ethnic studies unit has stabilized within the university: the relative strength of a particular model (e.g., department, interdisciplinary program, or research center); human resources (number of affiliated and/or tenure-track faculty as well as support staff); strong or weak leadership; course enrollment; and degree-granting power and production.<sup>24</sup>

**Radical:** The promotion of several transformative practices that countered White and paternalistic traditions of higher education. Inspired by the Black Panthers and their ideas of Black-oriented education, ethnic studies proponents advocated for more representation of people of color, women, and the working class within the university curriculum. Ethnic studies proponents prioritized scholarship and service that helped solve social problems in underserved communities rather than advancing academic or financial prestige for the university. They also advocated for university governance to become community-centered, which allowed students and community members to control their educational agenda, design their own programs, and evaluate their instructors.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast, critics of ethnic studies have used the term “radical” to describe the founding and the principles of ethnic studies as controversial. Government officials, the American media,

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<sup>22</sup> Rojas, *From Black Power*, 15–16.

<sup>23</sup> Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values,” 5.

<sup>24</sup> Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur, *Student Activism and Curricular Change in Higher Education* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 154; Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values,” 85–87, 299.

<sup>25</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Future of Ethnic Studies,” 51–52; Ferreira, “All Power to the People,” 27–29; Ibram H. Rogers, “The Black Campus Movement and the Institutionalization of Black Studies, 1965–1970,” *Journal of African American Studies* 16, no. 1 (2012): 21–40.

Board of Trustees representatives, and college administrators perceived the 1968–69 protests for ethnic studies as an attempt to undermine administrative authority and de-stabilize the university power structure. In the 1980s and the 1990s, neoconservative critics like Dinesh D’Souza and Thomas Sowell accused ethnic studies scholars of promoting ethnic perspectives at the expense of national unity and a common culture. In his book *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus*, D’Souza critiqued the term “political correctness” by arguing that ethnic studies was a political project that “displaced and diluted” the core curriculum of the American academy.<sup>26</sup>

**Stabilization:** The second phase of Fabio Rojas’s movement-induced organizational change model. This phase determines how well an innovation, such as ethnic studies, can integrate into the university’s structure and culture. The stabilization phase has three sub-stages: generating program alternatives; establishing a new program; and accommodating and defending change.<sup>27</sup>

**Social movement:** A group or collective that undertakes organized contention around some sort of common goal. Scholars suggest that social movements may seek to disrupt the normal state of affairs within an organization and to start the process of responding to activists’ demands. Within the history of higher education, social movements have been a major source of organizational change at universities and colleges. Some social movements sought small changes, such as very specific policy changes like adding a single course to the curriculum. Others, like those in the 1960s and 1970s, demanded whole-scale curricular and structural

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<sup>26</sup> Quote in Dinesh D’Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 5; The President’s Commission on Campus Unrest, *The Report of the President’s Commission on Campus Unrest* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1970); William H. Orrick, *Shut it Down!: A College in Crisis: San Francisco State College, October 1968–April 1969* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1969).

<sup>27</sup> Rojas, *From Black Power*, 15–16.

change within the higher education system. In this study, I use the term “social movement” to refer to the convergence of the civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and ethnic studies protests that occurred on campuses nationwide in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>28</sup>

**Race and Ethnicity:** As this study focuses on the American social construction of race, I clarify the difference between *race* and *ethnicity*. Race is a category that is constructed by perceptions of physical differences and social meanings from American historical, economic, political, and legal influences. Ethnicity is a related concept that is based largely on social, historical, and cultural attributes that unify members of an ethnic group and provide a collective identity for members to self-identify. The key difference between race and ethnicity is the internal versus external categorization. Race is defined by the perception of others while ethnicity is self-categorization to a group.<sup>29</sup>

### **Literature Review, Interrelated Issues, and Situating the Argument**

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that centers on race, curricular change, the organization of AAS, and Asian American communities in the Midwest. I address several interrelated problems scholars have debated since the creation of these identity-based fields. First, I address attempts to minimize race in higher education. Second, I address the marginalization of ethnic studies, which is an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary field of study that examines ethnic groups and their interrelations within the North American context. According to Philip Q. Yang, AAS is a sub-field within ethnic studies, and it examines identity, belonging, and power from the perspective of Americans with Asian and Asian/Pacific diasporic

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<sup>28</sup> Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur, “Social Movements in Organizations,” *Sociology Compass* 2, no. 3 (2008): 1014-1030; Hayagreeva Rao, Calvin Morrill, and Mayer N. Zald, “Power Plays: How Social Movements and Collective Action Create New Organizational Forms,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 22 (January 1, 2000): 237-81; Rojas, “Social Movements and Universities,” 256-277.

<sup>29</sup> Ancheta, *Race, Rights*, 17-18; Espiritu, *Asian American Panethnicity*, 1-6; Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 54-55.

communities. Third, I address deradicalization that remains a core issue in ethnic studies and AAS. Finally, I focus on the direct call to expand the field of AAS to include marginalized populations, geographic areas, and topics. Because of these interrelated issues, I aim to speak to three bodies of literature: higher education, ethnic studies, and AAS.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Higher Education***

Often-taught survey histories of American higher education—Frederick Rudolph’s *American College and University* and John Thelin’s *A History of American Higher Education*, for example—do not center race in the formation of curricular development. Classic works, such as Frederick Rudolph’s *Curriculum* and Arthur Levine’s *Handbook of Undergraduate Curriculum* (both commissioned by the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education), offered varying levels of insight into race on campus at the time of their original publication. In his 1977 book *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636*, Rudolph outlines how federal and state interventions, intellectual trends, student tastes, foundation fads, and current events have shaped the curriculum’s evolution from classical studies during the time of the colonial college to competence-based curricula during the 1970s. In *The Handbook of Undergraduate Curriculum*, Levine outlined the historical debates on how to best educate the American citizen through the role, the structure, contents, and philosophies on the higher education. These classic surveys on curricular change are outdated in their discussion of how the university curriculum has and continues to be politicized.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Yang, *Ethnic Studies*, 12–13.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Levine, *The Handbook on Undergraduate Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978); Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1989); Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990); John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

Rudolph and Levine wrote these Carnegie-commissioned histories in the aftermath of the 1960s social movements and in the early implementation of ethnic studies programs at universities and colleges. The epicenter of the movement for ethnic studies occurred at San Francisco State College (SFSC) during the 1968–69 Third World Strike. Students and community activists clashed with college administrators to instigate structural and curricular change that “privilege the perspectives of non-white people,” according to Daryl J. Maeda.<sup>32</sup> The protestors sought to transform the three main functions of a university by democratizing teaching, research, and community engagement. They argued that the university curriculum should include courses and topics on women, people of color, and the working class. Furthermore, they believed that academic research should help address social and economic problems of marginalized communities rather than advancing knowledge for prestige and financial gain. Finally, university governance should be community-centered, which would allow students and community members to control their educational agenda, design their own programs, and evaluate their instructors. These three tenants have become the core values of ethnic studies and AAS.<sup>33</sup>

The strike at SFSC inspired similarly disruptive protests across college campuses. As *The New York Times* reported on May 11, 1969, more than forty-two universities and colleges hurriedly implemented ethnic studies programs to appease student protestors and restore campus order. As some scholars have argued, many ethnic studies programs were established in response to political appeasement rather than for academic reasons. Ethnic studies advocates claimed that college administrators made temporary commitments either to restore campus peace or because

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<sup>32</sup> Daryl J. Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 51.

<sup>33</sup> Ferreira, “All Power to the People”; Ramon A. Gutierrez, “Ethnic Studies: Its Evolution in American Colleges and Universities,” in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David T. Goldberg (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 157–167.

they believed that ethnic studies was a fad that would eventually disappear. This potent mix of the unique historical circumstances, political exigencies, and hurried implementation created tense relationships between universities and ethnic studies programs.<sup>34</sup>

Because of this disruptive and hurried start to ethnic studies, Levine and Rudolph's discussion of race and ethnic studies was incomplete. Levine did not mention historical or recent proposals of curricular change focused on racial inclusion. Rudolph, in contrast, did acknowledge the individual and organizational importance of the introduction of Black Studies and Women Studies into the university curriculum. The inclusion of Black Studies had boosted "the psychological needs of an accelerating enrollment of black students" at predominantly White universities and colleges.<sup>35</sup> The inclusion of Black Studies also admitted "the degree to which the curriculum had ignored or denied the cultural and historical meaning for blacks and Western culture of the legacy of racism, slavery, and colonialism." For women's studies, the inclusion in the curriculum was "to welcome women into curricular equality with men: Women are the subject."<sup>36</sup> Rudolph, however, minimized the movement's political and organizational influence: "The student movement of the 1960s wrought no great transformation either in the curriculum or in the lecture system. The movement, whatever its source, was not an attack on the curriculum or on instruction as such. For the student leaders it was often a search for political power within the university."<sup>37</sup> Rudolph's interpretation was inaccurate. Since the late 1970s

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<sup>34</sup> "Colleges Step Up Changes in Bid to Avert Disruption," *New York Times*, May 11, 1969, as cited in Ibram H. Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 147; Alexander Downs, *Cornell '69, Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 165–191, 269–296; Wilson Record, "Some Implications of the Black Studies Movement for Higher Education in the 1970s," *The Journal of Higher Education* 44, no. 3 (Mar. 1973): 191–216.

<sup>35</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 265.

<sup>36</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 265.

<sup>37</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 270.

when Levine and Rudolph published their histories, scholars have demonstrated how race has influenced the university curriculum, scholarship, and structure.

Much of the literature on the history of higher education has focused on the Black experience at universities and colleges. Stefan Bradley explored how Black student activists between the 1940s and the 1960s fought against White institutional racism that propagated within admissions and housing policies at the eight Ivy League universities and colleges. Similarly, Joy Ann Williamson's *Black Power on Campus* centered on Black student protestors in the 1960s who helped establish educational reform at UIUC. Most recently, Marybeth Gasman and Levon T. Esters have articulated the multi-faceted influence of historically Black colleges and universities in fostering Black identity, advancing Black scholars and leaders, and strengthening community and economic development through philanthropic support. Linda M. Perkins focused on Black women's experiences at White and Black universities and colleges in northern states between the post-Civil War era to the 1960s. Black women students, administrators, and professors helped expand educational opportunities for all African Americans by challenging traditional notions of gender.<sup>38</sup>

There is a growing body of literature that widens the lens of race by centering on the experiences of Latinx and Asian Americans and how they have instigated intellectual or organizational change. Victoria-María MacDonald and Benjamin Polk Hoffman have examined how Chicano scholars from the late 1960s through the 1980s challenged the Ford Foundation in its attempts to remove identity politics from the new discipline of Chicano history. MacDonald

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<sup>38</sup> Stefan M. Bradley, *Upending the Ivory Tower: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Ivy League* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Marybeth Gasman and Levon T. Esters, *HBCU: The Power of Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2024); Linda Perkins, *To Advance the Race: Black Women's Higher Education from the Antebellum Era to the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024); Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power On Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965-75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

and Hoffman demonstrate how Chicano scholars exerted significant self-agency by negotiating with the private foundation to center core principles of the Chicano movement in academic scholarship. Sharon S. Lee and Jin Chang centered on the experiences of Asian American college students who instigated organizational change at their universities and colleges. Lee, for example, demonstrated how Asian American students mobilized to challenge the model minority framing and to create culturally supportive resources, such as a cultural center and AAS program, at UIUC. Similarly, Chang's dissertation examined how Asian American students formed a pan-ethnic racial identity because of shared experiences of invisibility and hypervisibility at the University of Iowa. Their pan-ethnic identity inspired them to push for more Asian American faculty members, AAS courses, and a cultural space on campus. Altogether, these studies privileged the perspectives and self-agency of Latinx and Asian Americans who challenged how higher education institutions racially framed them.<sup>39</sup>

Another subset of work demonstrates how debates on racial issues, such as desegregation and affirmative action, have reshaped how universities and colleges perceive race. Joy Ann Williamson-Lott, for example, examined how debates on desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s transitioned White and Black southern campuses from organizations that upheld strict racial hierarchy into academic centers that rewarded independent thinking. Eddie R. Cole demonstrated how Black and White college presidents actively, although discreetly, shaped desegregation and affirmative action policies to benefit their campuses between the 1940s through the 1960s.

Sociologist Dana Takagi traced how discourse about Asian American students, especially the

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<sup>39</sup> Jin Chang, "'Am I Invisible?' Asian American Activism at the University of Iowa from 1998–2008," (PhD Diss., University of Iowa, 2025); Victoria-Maria MacDonald and Benjamin Polk Hoffman, "'Compromising La Causa?': The Ford Foundation and Chicano Intellectual Nationalism in the Creation of Chicano History, 1963-1977," *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (May 2012): 251–281; Sharon S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority: Asian American Students at the University of Illinois* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022).

model minority stereotype, was a crucial reason why universities and colleges eliminated the language of “race-exclusive” affirmative action policies and switched to class-based admissions preferences.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, a strand of work underscored how racial attitudes have influenced practices, such as the tenure hiring process, in higher education. Historian James Anderson insisted that universities and colleges manifest racial beliefs in their organizational culture, structure, and behavior. Racial beliefs, he contended, can be couched in processes as small as polite objections in daily interactions to larger systems like organizational policies, procedures, and structure. Anderson illustrated how, after World War II, Northern White universities effectively excluded African American scholars from tenure-track positions by covert racism and upholding racially discriminatory practices not prescribed by law. White faculty members used nonracist justifications, such as hiring requirements, to explain why they did not select Black faculty candidates over their White peers. Marybeth Gasman contended that subversive biases in the tenure hiring and promotion processes continue into the modern era. Using a mixed study approach, she found that faculty search committees can revert back to “old patterns” of implicit bias when hiring women or faculty of color.<sup>41</sup> One such example of implicit bias is when members of search committees continue to use gender-biased language or perpetuate stereotypes when writing letters of recommendations for candidates.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Quote in Dana Y. Takagi, *The Retreat from Race: Asian-American Admissions and Racial Politics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 171; Eddie R. Cole, *The Campus Color Line: College Presidents and the Struggle for Black Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Joy Ann Williamson-Lott, *Jim Crow Campus: Higher Education and the Struggle for a New Southern Social Order* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018).

<sup>41</sup> Marybeth Gasman, *Doing the Right Thing: How Colleges and Universities Can Undo Systematic Racism in Faculty Hiring* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 182.

<sup>42</sup> James Anderson, “Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy during the Immediate Post–World War II Era,” *History of Education Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Summer, 1993): 151–175.

My study shares a common cause with these studies of American higher education and with fields that emerged from the 1960s social movements. I aim to centralize race in the study of higher education by focusing on the experiences of Asian Americans who instigated curricular change. The history of AAS in the Midwest offers a regional story of how advocates aimed to uphold a core value of ethnic studies: represent and increase the visibility of Asian Americans in the university curriculum and scholarship. As they began to build their programs, Midwestern advocates contended with a national racial narrative that framed Asian Americans as model minorities. Universities and colleges amplified this stereotype as they began implementing affirmative action programs in the late 1960s and fought legal challenges to their admissions policies in the 1970s and 1980s. This study reveals how Midwestern advocates actively responded and adapted to this model minority framing at the regional and campus levels. Students, faculty, and staff members had to reframe arguments to justify the need for AAS at their Midwestern universities. They minimized the argument for AAS as a need to represent the increasing number of Asian Americans on their Midwestern campuses. Instead, they emphasized arguments for AAS that benefited the university through its mission to educate all students, not just Asian Americans, and to advance cutting-edge research to remain competitive in the higher education marketplace.

### ***The Institutionalization of Ethnic Studies***

Within the literature on the organization of ethnic studies, I contribute to the debate on how best to establish programs to ensure their long-term survival at universities and colleges. I considered how Midwestern advocates responded to the problem of marginalization by debating, proposing, and creating a new way to organize AAS based on the regional and campus context. In my study, I find that Midwestern advocates understood that the departmental model was best for

organizational stability. However, Midwestern advocates opted to create interdisciplinary programs because of the organizational context and racial politics in the region and on their campuses. They combated their marginalization by justifying AAS's intellectual contribution to their universities and colleges. Kent Ono, the former UIUC AAS program director, defined the intellectual contribution as AAS's potential to garner more academic attention to their Midwestern universities by creating theoretical and critical research agendas, building scholarly activities (like postdoctoral fellowships), and showcasing faculty members' research expertise.<sup>43</sup>

The marginalization of ethnic studies stemmed from the historical and tense relationship between ethnic studies and the university. In the first two decades of its existence, ethnic studies proponents contended that university administrators and faculty members marginalized ethnic studies through various financial, organizational, and political conflicts. During the financial retrenchment of higher education of the 1970s, ethnic studies scholars spent most of their time and energy in budgetary battles with administrators, according to a 1978 survey of fourteen AAS programs conducted by Don Nakanishi and Russell Leong. Mike Murase claimed that administrators hesitated to finance "innovative and experimental 'fringe' [ethnic studies] programs."<sup>44</sup> Some advocates reported competing with traditional departments for student enrollment and funding. Some ethnic studies units claimed that traditional academic departments refused to include or cross-list ethnic studies courses. This tactic lowered student enrollment and canceled courses that resulted in less funding for ethnic studies courses. Tenure-track faculty in ethnic studies, who were hired in the 1970s and reached tenure review in the 1980s, engaged in contentious tenure battles with traditional disciplines, who held promotion authority over ethnic

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<sup>43</sup> Kent Ono, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, June 16, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 1:12:25, in Salt Lake City, UT (copy in author's possession).

<sup>44</sup> Mike Murase, "Ethnic Studies and Higher Education of Asian Americans," in *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America*, ed. Emma Gee (Los Angeles: Asian American Studies Center, University of California, 1976), 134.

studies' interdisciplinary appointments. The most notable tenure battle involved the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and Asian Americanist Don Nakanishi, who finally won tenure after three years of appeals. He and his legal team convinced senior administrators to recognize the significance of his research on Asian American electoral politics and anti-Asian quotas in affirmative action programs.<sup>45</sup>

Starting in the late 1980s, ethnic studies proponents argued that these recurring financial, organizational, and promotion issues culminated in a systematic pattern of marginalization. Ethnic studies lacked autonomy, organizational stability, and political clout on their campuses and in the academy. Advocates began to conduct studies on how programs could become a permanent part of the university, a process called institutionalization. A key reason ethnic studies units engaged in the process of institutionalization was to counter marginalization within their universities and academia. When universities withheld resources and academic respect, ethnic studies units pursued various strategies to integrate itself into the operational procedures and structures of their universities. Studies suggested that institutionalization is a two-part equation: Ethnic studies needed to attain organizational and intellectual legitimacy to survive long-term at their universities and in academia.<sup>46</sup>

One strand of scholarly work examined institutionalization through organizational stability, defined as the degree to which a smaller academic unit becomes “anchored” to the university’s structure and operational procedure.<sup>47</sup> Consisting of single and multiple sites, case

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<sup>45</sup> Robert L. Harris Jr., Darlene Clark Hine, and Nellie McKay, *Three Essays: Black Studies in the United States* (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1990), 17; Don T. Nakanishi, “Why I Fought,” *Amerasia Journal* 16, no. 1 (1990): 139–158; Russell Thornton, “American Indian Studies as an Academic Discipline,” *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 5, no. 3 (Fall, 1977): 1–15; Otis L. Scott, “Ethnic Studies Past and Present: Towards Shaping the Future,” *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* 11, no. 1 (1988): 37–45.

<sup>46</sup> Harris, Hine, and McKay, *Three Essays*, 17; Clara Sue Kidwell, “American Indian Studies: Intellectual Navel Gazing or Academic Discipline?” *American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 2; Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values,” 141.

<sup>47</sup> Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing Values,” 5.

studies examined how ethnic studies units had advanced organizational stability through measures such as the relative strength of a particular model (e.g., department, interdisciplinary program, or research center); human resources (number of affiliated and/or tenure-track faculty as well as support staff); strong or weak program leadership; course enrollment; and degree-granting power and production. These case studies also offered measures of non-success that can deter the growth of an ethnic studies unit. Mitchell Chang, for example, argued that weak administrative commitment, inadequate program leadership, and constraints on faculty hiring deterred the growth of an Asian Pacific American Studies program at an unidentified West Coast private university. Similarly, Jo Cunningham surveyed seven Black Studies programs and departments at colleges and universities in New Jersey. She found that the variables that increased Black Studies' organizational stability were a strong administrative commitment to Black Studies, consistent funding, and steady student enrollment. By identifying favorable and unfavorable conditions, scholars hoped to systematically address issues of survival—such as a lack of finances and difficulty hiring and promoting tenure-track faculty—that plagued ethnic studies since its inception.<sup>48</sup>

Several of these studies argued that the departmental model was one of the strongest indicators of organizational stability. In case studies of Black and Hispanic studies in different US regions, scholars found that departments possessed a higher degree of organizational security than programs. For example, Kim Nelson Pryor conducted a case study of Chicano/Hispanic Studies programs and departments at seven public research universities in Texas. She found that

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<sup>48</sup> Mitchell J. Chang, "Expansion and its Discontent: The Formation of Asian American Studies Programs in the 1990s," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 2, no. 2 (June 1999): 181–206; Alan K. Colón, "Critical Issues in Black Studies: A Selective Analysis," *The Journal of Negro Education* 53, no. 3 (1984): 268–277; Jo Ann Cunningham, "Black Studies Programs: Reasons for their Success and Non-Success from Inception to the Present," *National Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 1 (March 1991): 19–41; Kimura-Walsh, "Balancing the Values," 85–87, 299.

departments, compared to interdisciplinary programs, had greater access to funding, tenure-track lines, autonomy over tenure promotion, and staffing. Similarly, Rojas examined three Black Studies programs and departments at urban universities: the University of Chicago, University of Illinois Chicago (UIC), and Harvard University. He argued that the departmental models at Harvard and UIC protected Black Studies from cuts to funding and resources during times of financial retrenchment. Its status as a department allowed Black Studies to keep a consistent program budget and have some claim over discretionary funds.<sup>49</sup>

Some proponents argued that it was not always possible to obtain departmental status because of the influence of organizational context and regional differences. They advocated for the “mainstream” model, in which ethnic studies would become an interdisciplinary field, located physically and philosophically within traditional disciplines.<sup>50</sup> In her 1990 report to the Ford Foundation, Nellie McKay observed that the battle for resources was often intensified for Black studies units located at Midwest research universities because of their geographic isolation from communities of color. Pedro Cabán observed that Midwest universities often set up Latino/a Studies programs instead of individual units focused on Chicano/a or Puerto Rican Studies. He argued that this organizational trend reflected a broader Latino-based research agenda to gain academic respect within mainstream academia in the 1990s. Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur conducted a comparative case study of six, unnamed AAS programs at universities and colleges in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and West Coast. Her study underscored the importance of organizational context, such as the university’s mission and culture, in establishing AAS. She argued that universities and colleges with an organizational

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<sup>49</sup> Pryor, “Power and Place,” 505–520; Rojas, *From Black Power*, 113–116.

<sup>50</sup> Lee C. Lee and Gary Y. Okihiro, “Cornell University,” in *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro (Ithaca: Asian American Studies Program at Cornell University, 1992), 23.

mission that embraced interdisciplinary studies and administrative openness are more likely to adopt an AAS program.<sup>51</sup>

The second subset of work focused on how ethnic studies institutionalized through intellectual legitimacy, defined as seeking academic respect through measures like promoting tenure-track faculty, publishing in academic journals, and obtaining external grant funding.

Within this area, scholars have argued that intellectual legitimacy is the key to the longevity of ethnic studies units and the field. These studies suggested that organizational stability, particularly departmentalization, does not guarantee full acceptance into academia.

Administrators and faculty in other disciplines may tolerate ethnic studies as a structural part of the university, yet they did not perceive ethnic studies as a legitimate field of study.<sup>52</sup>

To counter this image of “poor-quality” scholarship and non-rigorous curricular standards, scholars have examined how ethnic studies institutionalized through intellectual legitimacy.<sup>53</sup> Mario Small argued that organizational stability was not enough to counter Black studies’ marginalization in academia. Instead, Black studies departments received more resources and respect when they brought value to the university, specifically in the form of research potential and production. He illustrated the importance of intellectual legitimacy in his case studies of Black studies departments at Harvard and Temple universities. Despite their departmental status, administrators considered eliminating Black studies at Harvard and Temple because of insufficient course enrollment, tenure-track recruitment, and mismanagement. Black

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<sup>51</sup> Nellie McKay, “Black Studies in the Midwest,” in *Three Essays: Black Studies in the United States* by Robert L. Harris Jr., Darlene Clark Hine, and Nellie McKay, (New York: The Ford Foundation): 26–29; Pedro A. Cabán, “Moving from the Margins to Where? Three Decades of Latino/a Studies,” *Latino Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003): 5–35; Arthur, *Student Activism and Curricular Change*.

<sup>52</sup> Colón, “Critical Issues in Black Studies,” 273–275; Cunningham, “Black Studies Programs,” 32–36; Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values,” 150, 155, 158; Mario L. Small, “Departmental Conditions and the Emergence of New Disciplines: Two Cases in the Legitimation of African-American Studies,” *Theory and Society* 28, no. 5 (1999): 659–707.

<sup>53</sup> Small, “Conditions of Departmental Success,” 689.

studies survived because the newly hired department chairs focused on gaining academic prestige. Dr. Molefe Asante at Temple, for example, garnered academic respect for Black studies by creating the nation's first Africology MA/PhD program. By expanding degree-granting power, Asante ensured a larger departmental budget that attracted, retained, and promoted tenure-track faculty members. The graduate training program boosted graduate student enrollment to Temple and elevated Black studies to an autonomous discipline, considered more prestigious, rather than an interdisciplinary field of study. At Harvard, Dr. Henry Louis Gates Jr. advanced the department's reputation by recruiting senior-level faculty, strengthening the department's scholarship through traditional methodologies, and by publishing in both academic journals and mainstream media. Asante and Gates' strategic efforts suggest that traditional measures of intellectual legitimacy—degree-granting power, promotion of tenure-track faculty, and publications—helped institutionalize Black studies more than measures of organizational stability.

Some scholars argued that ethnic studies began to resemble other traditional fields through structures that symbolized intellectual legitimacy. Ethnic studies, for example, had a growing national network of scholars, professional organizations—such as the Association of Ethnic Studies—and peer-reviewed academic journals dedicated to topics on ethnic studies and ethnic-specific fields. The ethnic studies professoriate commonly possessed doctoral degrees, indicating the highest degree of professional training in research and teaching. Other scholars argued that ethnic studies institutionalized by adapting to academia's research priorities of theoretical advancement and knowledge generation. Scholars who examined the ideological struggles of AAS, Chicano/a, and Latino/a scholarship from 1968 to the 1980s observe that the empirical sophistication dominated over the community-centered perspective. Cabán and Soldatenko contended that, in its formative years, Chicanx scholarship critiqued the foundations

of mainstream inquiry. This critical perspective implicated the university as a crucial component of overarching structure of racial and class oppression. Yet, from 1975 through the 1990s, Chicana scholars prioritized an empirical approach because it legitimized Chicana Studies in academia. This approach focused on defining unique methods, forming sophisticated theoretical frameworks, and generating new knowledge for the university. For some departments and programs, this empirical approach to research helped promote their tenure-track faculty, attract resources, and attain academic respect at their universities.<sup>54</sup>

Mark Chiang and Glenn Omatsu observed a similar trend in the field of Asian American Studies. Anthologies produced in the early 1970s stressed the relationship between radical social theory and radical practice for the Asian American community. By the 1980s and 1990s, theoretical and empirical scholarship proliferated with no corresponding growth in research focused on Asian American communities. Examining the evolution of AAS scholarship, Chiang argues that scholars canonized books, such as *Dictee* by performance artist Theresa Cha, because they demonstrated technical difficulty and intellectual rigor. Publishing such highly educated texts allowed AAS scholars to claim that their field had matured intellectually while helping the field gain more intellectual legitimacy in the academy.<sup>55</sup>

These studies on the institutionalization of ethnic studies suggested two key points. First, ethnic studies must bring research prestige to the university to gain more organizational stability and access to resources. Second, the more ethnic studies institutionalized, the more ethnic studies must shed its radical roots and align with the university structure and culture. This process is

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<sup>54</sup> Cabán, “Three Decades of Latino/a Studies,” 5–35; Michael Soldatenko, *Chicano Studies: The Genesis of the Discipline* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> Mark Chiang, *The Cultural Capital of Asian American Studies* (New York: The New York University Press, 2009); Glenn Omatsu, “1994 Annual Selected Bibliography: Asian American Studies and the Crisis of Practice,” *Amerasia Journal* 20, no. 3 (1994): 119–210; Rojas, “Activism and the Academy,” 243–266.

called deradicalization and it remains a core issue within ethnic studies and AAS, which I will explore in the next section.

### ***Deradicalization and Regional Studies in AAS***

This dissertation expands on these regional observations and offers a nuanced discussion about the organization of AAS. Midwestern advocates contributed to the debate in ethnic studies and AAS by building programs that best fit their organizational context. Some advocates established interdisciplinary programs because autonomous departments were not possible, given the racial beliefs of Asian Americans at the time, distinct campus histories, structures, and student demographics. Midwestern advocates, then, created distinct AAS programs that best served their student populations and adapted to their university's mission, structure, and research priorities. Some Midwestern advocates adopted this regional model and shaped their courses and research to highlight the distinct Asian ethnic populations living in their state and locale.<sup>56</sup> Advocates at IUB, for example, justified a program based on the campus's history to be a leader in international studies since the post–World War II era. The local and regional stories suggest that one-size does not fit all in the organization of ethnic studies. Organizational and regional context mattered.

By adapting programs to their campus contexts, Midwestern advocates contributed to a concerning trend in ethnic studies: deradicalization. This issue stemmed from ethnic studies and AAS's quest to gain organizational stability and intellectual legitimacy at their campuses and in the academy, as I outlined in the section above. These two points underscore the distinct conundrum that AAS had and continue to debate to this day. How can AAS balance its need to

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<sup>56</sup> Peter N. Kiang, "New Wave: Developing Asian American Studies on the East Coast," in Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu, eds., *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 47.

survive in academia while pushing universities and colleges to make research, teaching, and service inclusive of marginalized populations?<sup>57</sup>

The literature on deradicalization is vast and opinions fall across a wide spectrum. A subset of scholars contended that ethnic studies should continue along its path towards permanent acceptance in academia. They advocated for ethnic studies' longevity in academia and that the curriculum and scholarship should not be politicized. Instead, ethnic studies should strive toward a scientific and an objective lens in teaching and scholarship. De-politicizing ethnic studies would help it escape its marginalized position in academia while increasing its access to resources, status, and organizational stability in the university. In contrast, some scholars pushed for the field to recommit to the democratization of higher education while concentrating on research, teaching, and service toward marginalized communities. If ethnic studies continued toward institutionalization, it would run the risk of "accommodation and assimilation" into mainstream academia.<sup>58</sup> Scholars feared the field would lose many of the oppositional voices that challenged inequitable practices in higher education while advocating for marginalized communities of color. Left unchecked, ethnic studies would reproduce and legitimize those inequitable practices like the inhumane treatment of marginalized communities for the sake of scientific objectivity, theoretical advancement, publishing, and profit.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hu-DeHart, "Future of Ethnic Studies," 50-54; Jesse M. Vazquez, "The Co-opting of Ethnic Studies in the American University: A Critical View," *Explorations in Ethnic Studies* 11, no. 1 (January 1988): 23-36; Yang, *Ethnic Studies*.

<sup>58</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s," *Cultural Critique*, no. 14 (Winter 1989), 185.

<sup>59</sup> Patrick C. Morris, "Native American Studies: A Personal Overview," *Wicazo Sa Review* 2, no. 2 (1986): 15; Chalsa Loo and Don Mar, "Research and Asian Americans: Social Change or Empty Prize?" *Amerasia Journal* 12, no. 2 (1985-1986), 88-91; Omatsu, "1994 Annual Selected Bibliography," 119-210; Michael Omi, "It Just Ain't the Sixties No More: The Contemporary Dilemmas of Asian American Studies," in Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu, eds., *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 31-36; Scott, "Ethnic Studies Past and Present," 40-41; Michael Soldatenko, "Radicalism in Higher Education: How Chicano Studies Joined the Curriculum," in *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education*, ed. Eric Margolis (New York: Routledge, 2001), 193-232; Vazquez, "Co-opting of Ethnic Studies," 23-24; Yang, *Ethnic Studies*, 275-276.

In her dissertation, Kimura-Walsh argued that university processes and procedures that guide departments often pushed ethnic studies to deradicalize. In her analyses of the departments of AAS and American Indian Studies (AIS) at UCLA and San Francisco State University (SFSU), Kimura-Walsh observed that university-wide tenure-track appointment policies pressured the departments of AAS and AIS to hire and promote faculty members who prioritized research production over instructors focused on community-engaged teaching and service.<sup>60</sup> University policies on departmental governance policies further diminished egalitarian principles of decision-making processes by requiring departments of AIS and AAS to adopt by-laws that granted voting power to tenure-track faculty with no voting rights given to students, staff, or local community members. Her study suggested that the more these ethnic studies institutionalized at their universities, the more likely they aligned with the structure, procedures, and priorities of higher education.<sup>61</sup>

In this study, I find that the debate on deradicalization is further complicated when faced with the daily challenges of building and sustaining a program. Campus histories are necessary to show how deradicalization unfolds differently at each campus because of its distinct organizational history, structure, and politics. The story of IUB offers a glimpse into the tensions between AAS's activist roots and the pressures of academic life. Following similar mobilization efforts at other Midwestern universities, student activists at IUB demanded an AAS program to combat the racial isolation of growing up in predominantly White spaces in the Midwest. Student activists widened their argument for AAS after a rise in racial incidents against communities of color and in the face of prevailing racial beliefs about Asian Americans on campus. They saw AAS as an educational tool to teach all students, not just Asian Americans, about racial justice.

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<sup>60</sup> Kimura-Walsh, "Balancing the Values," 207–8, 210, 252.

<sup>61</sup> Kimura-Walsh, "Balancing the Values," 207–10, 217–22, 252.

Faculty and staff members, who took over the process to establish the program, did acknowledge the transformative power of AAS as a teaching tool. Yet, they began to promote AAS as an academically serious discipline to receive access to resources such as funding and faculty lines. The experience of AAS faculty and staff advocates underscores how the complexities of navigating university bureaucracy and academic culture can slowly distance advocates away from the core values of ethnic studies.

Finally, this dissertation adopts a new approach in the organization of AAS by reconceptualizing the field around regional centers of teaching and knowledge.<sup>62</sup> Franklin Odo, an ethnic studies scholar, coined this term to decentralize the field away from its California-centric dominance. These regional centers are developed around geographic areas with major Asian American communities, such as Hawai‘i or the East Coast, or around scholarly achievements or creative solutions to field-wide issues. Stephen H. Sumida expanded on Odo’s organizational framework and argues that the field needs multiple regional centers to include more narratives, experiences, and perspectives of various Asian ethnic groups in the US and Asian diaspora in North and South America as well as the Caribbean. Multiple regional centers will encourage scholars to expand teaching and scholarship from defining the Asian American identity to analyzing and dismantling inequitable racial structures. Such an intellectual shift can contribute to the longevity of the field in academia while still maintaining the core values of ethnic studies.<sup>63</sup>

The field of AAS emerged from the 1968–69 Third World Strikes at SFSC. Faculty members and student advocates created the first AAS programs in 1969 at SFSC and the University of California Berkeley. By 1978, Don Nakanishi and Russell Leong identified that ten

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<sup>62</sup> Quote in Sumida, “East of California,” 85–86, n. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Sumida, “East of California,” 95.

of the fourteen of AAS programs were located in the California State University system and the University of California system. Naturally, these California-based programs and departments developed teaching materials and research around Asian American communities that had immigrated, lived, and worked in the state since the eighteenth century. California programs produced the field's first textbooks, such as UCLA's Asian American Research Center, which published *Roots: An Asian American Reader* in 1973 and *Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America* in 1976. These programs created rich archival databases and began to define the methodological and philosophical boundaries of the new discipline. Senior scholars like Sucheng Chan and Elaine Kim were the first on the academic frontline to fight for resources and academic respect for budding AAS programs. The California programs, indeed, had a significant influence in shaping the organization, teaching, and scholarship of AAS.<sup>64</sup>

Sumida argued that the California-centric lens has stunted the intellectual growth of AAS teaching and scholarship. The dominance of the "California paradigm" has ignored evidence of Asian American communities who have been in the US since long before the migration of Chinese immigrants to work during the California Gold Rush between the 1840s and 1850s. He cites, for example, Filipino Cajuns who descended from Filipino sailors who arrived on the shores of Louisiana in 1763. "Working with evidence of Asian/Pacific American history and culture of the South and Midwest reveals certain limitations of a Californic [*sic*] paradigm," Sumida continues.<sup>65</sup> The California paradigm has created a sense of exceptionalism that regards the "region to have *exceptional* conditions and qualities that empower it in the field."<sup>66</sup>

California lays claim to a proportionally large number of Asian Americans and to being the first

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<sup>64</sup> Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 21–26; Nakanishi and Leong, "Toward the Second Decade," 1–19; William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 135–137.

<sup>65</sup> Sumida, "East of California," 86.

<sup>66</sup> Sumida, "East of California," 86.

multicultural state. Scholars must question these claims by looking at “competing paradigms and a wealth of data” that exists in places to the east of California. Regional analyses will resist centrism in the field while reconceptualizing AAS around “many centers, many points of origin and departure.”<sup>67</sup>

This dissertation joins the growing scholarship that focuses on building AAS around regional centers. Regional studies focus on the influence of geographic location on racial identity development. In 2015, Sook Wilkinson and Victor Jew were the first scholars to chart an edited volume of *Asian Americans in Michigan* that began to articulate Asian American racial formation in the Midwest. Monica Trieu expanded Sook and Jew’s study by examining 1.5 and second-generation Asian Americans from several Midwestern states to articulate a regional racial identity. Chan further contributed a comparative understanding of racial formation by interviewing Asian American colleges students from the Midwest, South, and Northeast. Together, these studies offer an important understanding on how Asians and Asian Americans form their understanding of race through interactions in social spaces, like schools and workplaces, located in their regions.<sup>68</sup>

Another subset of work redefined Asian Americans identity around geographical context. Pawan Dhingra complicated the Asian American identity by inserting the experiences of Indian Americans who own motels in Ohio into the immigrant adaptation model. Leslie Bow argues that Asian Americans in the South disrupted the Black–White racial narrative during the Jim Crow era. Philip Cheng, similarly, argued to include Asian immigrant experiences into the Asian

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<sup>67</sup> Sumida, “East of California,” 86.

<sup>68</sup> Jason Chan, “‘Being Asian American Is a Lot Different Here’: Influences of Geography on Racial Identity,” *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 7 (Oct. 2017): 1001–1007; Monica M. Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility: Asian Americans in the Midwest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023); Sook Wilkinson and Victor Jew, eds., *Asian Americans in Michigan* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015).

American identity by examining the first Chinese students who attended the University of Florida in the early twentieth century.<sup>69</sup>

A third group of studies focuses on how college students are motivated by their experiences of racial isolation to politically mobilize. Sharon S. Lee showed how Asian American students at UIUC organized to fight against their invisibility in campus discussions of race. Their activism led to the establishment of an AAS program in 1999 and the Asian American Cultural Center in 2005. Similarly, Jin Chang showed how Asian American students at the University of Iowa responded to their racial isolation by forming pan-ethnic student organizations that helped establish the Asian Pacific Culture Center in 2003. Finally, Corinne Kodama and authors interviewed thirteen Asian American student leaders to understand why they created the Midwest Asian American Student Union, a regional intercollegiate organization founded in 1989. Students established this regional organization because they felt their Midwestern campuses did not have enough culturally supportive resources, such as a culture center or an AAS program, to support their racial development. These studies underscore the importance of racially supportive spaces, such as student organizations and intercollegiate conferences, that can help students process their racial isolation, strengthen their racial development, and empower them toward political activism.<sup>70</sup>

These studies on regionalism are critical in locating Asian Americans outside California, amplifying their contributions to Asian American history, and redefining the Asian American identity around geographic context. They, however, focus on understanding the social and

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<sup>69</sup> Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (New York: New York University, 2010); Phillip Cheng, "Examining the Permeability of Exempt Classes of the Chinese Exclusion Act," (MA Thesis, San Francisco State University, 2019); Pawan Dhingra, *Life Behind the Lobby: Indian American Motel Owners and the American Dream* (Redwood: Stanford University Press, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> Chang, "'Am I Invisible?"; Corinne M. Kodama, OiYan A. Poon, Lester J. Manzano, and Ester U. Sihite, "Geographic Constructions of Race: The Midwest Asian American Students Union," *Journal of College Student Development* 58, no. 6 (2017): 872–890; Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority*.

cultural aspects of regionalism, specifically one's racial identity formation with the cultural and social values that are embedded within the region. I extend on this concept of regionalism through the angle of race and organizations. Advocates attempted to articulate the Midwestern racial landscape that made organizing AAS distinct compared to other regions. Advocates identified that factors, like geographical isolation to communities of color, could intensify common challenges to building AAS that afflicted many programs in the field. Midwest programs, for example, had difficulty recruiting faculty members because many campuses were far away from communities of color. Nevertheless, Midwestern advocates found creative solutions to these common problems. One creative solution was the creation of the CIC-AASC, which reduced feelings of geographic isolation. Their creative solutions resulted in amplifying the Midwest as a regional center in the field. Continuing efforts of Midwestern advocates, this dissertation aims to reconceptualize the field around multiple centers of teaching and knowledge.

### **Conceptual Framework**

I use Fabio Rojas's organizational model of how social movements impact organizations to understand how advocates mobilized for AAS in the Midwest. In his book *From Black Power to Black Studies*, Rojas applied this model by analyzing the evolution of Black studies, which started as a social movement in the twentieth century and evolved to a contemporary, interdisciplinary academic field. Rojas suggested a six-stage model that examines how members in an organization collaborate to adopt and sustain organizational change over time. For simplicity, I condense his model into two phases: mobilization and stabilization (see Table 1).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Rojas, *From Black Power*, 16.

Table 1. A Model of How Social Movements Change Bureaucracies

Phase	Stage	Examples from the History of Black Studies
Mobilization	1) Identifying a social problem, developing the grievance	Black culture is excluded from higher education; militancy is needed for progress
	2) Mobilizing for a cause; rise of movement groups; forming links between organizational clients and groups outside the organization	Rise of civil rights movement; Black nationalist groups and Black student associations are created; links forged between Black students, nationalists, and civil rights groups
	3) Conflict within the organization	Organized Black students stage protests
	4) Generating alternatives	Proposals for programs, departments, think tanks, and autonomous Black studies colleges
Stabilization	5) Establishing new institutions; competition among alternatives	The creation of Black studies programs and departments; other forms do not survive
	6) Accommodation, defending change, and staffing new organizations; attracting external support; new occupational group formation	Nationalism attenuated, professors recruited from other disciplines, and departments defended

Adapted from Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power*, 16.

Mobilization is a stage of direct action. In this phase, the aggrieved party identifies an issue, mobilizes and forms links between other groups, and engages in conflict with organizational decision-makers. In the example of Black studies, Black college students

organized to demand new courses, faculty appointments, and instructional programs at American universities and colleges. Once conflict subsides, actors enter the stabilization phase. They debate and generate alternative organizational models, compete and choose a model, then accommodate and defend this new model. As campus protest subsided, Black students and faculty members debated and proposed new ways to organize Black studies in the academy: Black-oriented colleges, interdisciplinary programs, degree-granting departments, and research centers. The models that survived were those that resonated with the priorities, values, and culture of academia. Models that failed, such as community-oriented or nationalist Black studies programs, were those that were incompatible with the teaching and research priorities of academia.<sup>72</sup>

There are other organizational change theories that have captured our understanding of how academic innovation enters universities and colleges. Most notably, Barbara Curry explained how universities and colleges incorporate organizational change in a three-stage model: mobilization, implementation, and institutionalization. These theoretical models, however, do not consider the internal and external political dynamics that can shape new academic programs. I use Rojas's organizational model because it centered on the political process of establishing ethnic studies. Moreover, the field of ethnic studies was founded on and continues to be political in nature. Other models cited political dynamics as one of many variables in shaping new academic disciplines. The field of ethnic studies was founded on and continues to be political in nature. Rojas's organizational model focused on the significant effect of internal and external pressures in the formation of ethnic studies. It provided a systematic lens on how internal university politics as well as federal, state, and philanthropic intervention can

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<sup>72</sup> Rojas, *From Black Power*, 1–22.

help or hinder the long-term survival of ethnic studies programs. I use his framework to understand how AAS advocates mobilized and confronted their universities and colleges to create new courses, hire faculty members, and establish programs. I also used it to understand how Midwestern advocates generated alternative organizational models, mainly the regional model, to create distinct AAS programs on their campuses.<sup>73</sup>

### **Methodology**

In this dissertation, I use a blend of published resources, archival collections, and oral histories to answer three interrelated research questions. First, how did students, faculty, and staff at Midwestern research universities justify AAS programs in response to changes in the national racial discourse, regional racial landscape, and the field of AAS? Second, how did Midwestern advocates organize their AAS programs in response to these changes? Third, how did students, faculty, and staff members at IUB adapt their justification for AAS in response to the university's distinct racial politics and funding priorities? I reconstruct national and regional debates using secondary resources such as journal articles, books, book chapters, and anthologies written by Asian American scholars and practitioners. At times, I treat secondary resources as primary documents because they provided context on crucial debates at key moments in the history of AAS.

I consult two types of archival sources to create the regional history of AAS in the Midwest: university archival collections and personal collections. I consult four archival collections at Northwestern University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), UIUC, and IUB. These primary resources helped me create a regional history of AAS in the

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<sup>73</sup> Curry, *Instituting Enduring Innovations*, 8; Bataille, Carranza, and Lisa, *Ethnic Studies*, ix; Rojas, *From Black Power*, 205–226.

Midwest. These primary resources illuminated the debates, arguments, strategies, and decisions of advocates who mobilized and built AAS at their campuses. I found these archival collections using keywords such as Asian American Studies, Asian American activism, Asian American students, and Asian American student organizations. I also asked university archivists to help identify collections focused on AAS, Asian American student activism, or issues on race.

While consulting these university archives, I realized that most of these collections focused on student organizations and student activism. These collections are helpful in understanding the mobilization phase of Rojas's framework. For example, the Records of the Asian American Studies Program at Northwestern mostly focused on how Asian American students identified a social problem, mobilized for a cause, and engaged with conflict with university officials to demand an AAS program. Documents included student petitions, letters of support from faculty members, compiled newspaper articles, program proposals, and press releases from Asian American student organizations. The Records of the Asian American Studies Program also had material focused on the beginning stages of program building, such as generating alternatives, per Rojas's framework. Such documents included proposed course syllabi and committee meeting minutes of the College of Arts and Sciences Curricular Policies Committee. These documents clarified how student activists engaged in conflict with their universities to generate alternatives on how to organize AAS. However, these materials did not provide insight on the stabilization phase of Rojas's framework. This phase of program-building examines how faculty and staff members established AAS, such as finding funding, hiring program directors, and creating an AAS curriculum.

One challenge I had to reconcile was locating primary documents that focused on the stabilization phase. These documents included program funding proposals, hiring materials,

committee meeting minutes, and correspondences to administrators. I found that documents related to hiring, funding, and organizing AAS are often held by faculty and staff members who take over the process of establishing AAS after student mobilization. University archives rely on faculty and staff members to donate their materials. As a result, some university archival collections had more documents focused on stabilization than others. For example, university archivists at UW-Madison directed me to the papers of James Moy, a faculty member in the theater and drama department and one of the founding members of the AAS program. His collection had documents that provided more insight into how advocates organized AAS through the College of Letters and Sciences and hired the first program director (Dr. Amy Ling). His documents included program proposals, hiring materials, conference and event plans, meeting minutes, correspondences to administrators, and newspaper clippings about organizing AAS.

At UIUC, I faced a similar situation, in which most of the primary documents focused on student activism, with some insight on how faculty advocates began to organize AAS. I consulted collections housed at the Archival Research Center and the Asian American Cultural Center. At the Archival Research Center, I consulted the records of Student Affairs, Office of the Dean of Students, and the Director of Registered Student Organizations, 1924–2009. This collection held documents by Yuki Llewelyn, an assistant dean in the Dean of Student's Office, and Dr. Clark Cunningham, an anthropology professor, who were instrumental in building AAS at UIUC. The collection held documents that ranged in topic from Asian American student organizations to the first AAS courses Dr. Cunningham taught in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. It also included documents pertaining to the first meeting of the East of California Caucus, which met at Cornell University. Documents included campus profiles of East Coast and Midwestern universities and colleges that attended the first meeting in September 1990. The

Asian American Cultural Center held collections focused on Asian American student organizations and the building of the cultural center. These documents included meeting minutes, agendas, newsletters, student and conference event plans, photographs, and newspaper clippings. While these collections helped understand the mobilization phase, I did not find documents that provided more insight on the stabilization phase in which faculty and staff members debated how to organize AAS, hire faculty members, and find funding.

Because university archival collections focused on the mobilization phase, I relied on personal collections from program directors to understand faculty and staff members' debates, decisions, and actions to organize AAS. I identified key figures in the regional history of AAS and IUB's campus history based on my literature review and recommendations from staff members at the campus culture centers. I found contact information on university websites and contacted individuals asking for permission to consult their personal collections.

I consulted papers held by Dr. Kent Ono (2002–2007 AAS program director at UIUC and now at the University of Utah), Dr. Angela Pao (2002–2006 chair of the AAS Committee at IUB), and Dr. Ellen Wu (2015–2020 AAS program director at IUB). I also conducted oral history interviews with Dr. Ono and Dr. Josephine Lee (University of Minnesota Twin Cities) who helped organize the CIC-AASC. These personal collections included documents that were not available at university archives and were crucial in understanding the debates, decisions, and actions of AAS advocates to create distinct programs at their respective campuses. Documents in personal collections included program proposals, course approvals, program policies, hiring materials, meeting minutes, newspaper clippings, financial and budgetary records, organizational charts, conference speeches, and other documents related to building and maintaining a program.

Email correspondences between program directors and administrators ranged from topics about funding opportunities, proposal planning, and policies regarding faculty hires.

Dr. Ono and Dr. Lee's personal collections also included documents about establishing the CIC-AASC, including a funding proposal, conference planning, meeting minutes, and campus profiles of each CIC university. These CIC-AASC campus profiles provided a regional overview of what advocates were doing to build AAS at their universities at that given time. For example, the CIC-AASC published campus profiles in 2000, 2006, and 2008. These campus profiles were helpful to see progress in program building over time yet did not provide details on how AAS advocates debated and decided to organize programs that best suit their university.

Finally, I supplement primary documents with sixteen oral history interviews that were conducted between 2016 and 2024. Three of those interviews were with Midwestern AAS scholars, Josephine Lee and Kent Ono, who established the CIC-AASC. Thirteen of the interviews captured the narratives of alums, staff members, and former program directors who were involved in establishing the AAS program at IUB. I identified interviewees using secondary literature, primary documents, and campus referrals. While conducting my literature review, I identified key figures using published sources like the 2009 Special Issue on the Midwest published in the *Journal of Asian American Studies*. I also identified interviewees using primary documents such as program proposals or committee meeting minutes. Finally, IUB staff and faculty members helped me locate and contact these interviewees.

Oral history was well suited for this study because it allowed key figures to fill in missing historical information and perspectives that were not captured in the archival records. This approach added crucial dimensions, such as interviewees' personal experiences; memories of events; attitudes, values, and beliefs; and opinions and perspectives. Furthermore, oral histories

enabled interviewees to reflect on historical moments while connecting them to larger issues in AAS and in higher education. The study was approved by IUB's Institutional Review Board and interviewees signed an informed consent form prior to their interview (see Appendix A). I created two interview protocols based on Fabio Rojas's framework. One protocol addressed the experiences of student activists who mobilized for AAS. The second protocol focused on the experiences of faculty and staff members who helped establish AAS on campus (see Appendix B). These oral history interviews were semi-structured to adapt questions to context while comparing themes across interviewees. These interviews lasted approximately sixty minutes, were audio-recorded, and conducted in-person in campus offices or via phone call. All oral history recordings were professionally transcribed verbatim.<sup>74</sup>

### **Site Selection and Justification**

Regional history provides a helpful overview of what Midwestern advocates debated and experienced at various times between 1970 and 2010. Yet it does not illuminate the organizational racial politics and context that influence how advocates built programs distinct to their campuses. I chose IUB as a case study for theoretical and practical reasons. Conceptually, IUB followed a path outlined by Rojas's model. Like other universities in the CIC-AASC, IUB experienced Asian American student protest. Students identified similar social problems to those their peers had voiced at other Midwestern campuses. They demanded AAS to combat their racial isolation growing up in predominantly White spaces and reduce anti-Asian sentiment. IUB students mobilized for a cause and engaged in conflict with the university. But what makes the IUB case study distinct is the influence of campus racial politics, particularly with the

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<sup>74</sup> Patricia Leavy, *Oral History: Understanding Qualitative Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9–10, 17.

implementation of affirmative action. Federal directives of the 1960s and the 1970s left the interpretation of affirmative action guidelines to universities and colleges based on organizational context and local demographics. At IUB, Asian American students were seen as “overrepresented” minorities based on campus and state Asian American demographics.<sup>75</sup>

IUB faculty and staff members took over program-building after students negotiated with university officials to create an Asian Culture Center and hire a director, who was instrumental in organizing an AAS committee. Faculty and staff members continued a similar path to the one outlined by Rojas’s model of institutionalization. They debated ways to organize AAS and worked toward establishing an interdisciplinary program at IUB. They faced similar problems that other young programs experienced like the difficulty of hiring a senior AAS scholar. What makes IUB a distinct case study is how advocates created a unique program based on existing resources, organizational structure, and funding priorities. The IUB case study illustrates program-building at the ground-level. It articulates the debates, decisions, and actions of AAS advocates and senior-level administrators in building AAS as an interdisciplinary program that aligned with the College of Arts and Science’s priority to be an international leader in area and regional studies.

In addition, IUB is a unique case study because advocates built a race-based program located in one of most politically conservative states within the CIC-AASC. As Erika Lee observed, state and campus politics are one of the layers within the Midwestern racial landscape that can influence AAS program building. The challenge, Lee argued, is to articulate how racial and campus politics have altered the teaching, community, and “the very definition of ‘Asian American’ itself.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Linda Yung, “Incredible Minorities,” *Kiosk*, December 1994, 28, Ellen Wu personal collection.

<sup>76</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 252.

Eight of the eleven members of the CIC-AASC were in states that leaned liberal, while IUB was one of the three located in conservative leaning states at that time (see Table 2). Historian James H. Madison wrote that the state of Indiana has always “leaned Republican” even as a “vigorous two-party state.”<sup>77</sup> Since 1900, Indiana residents have voted predominantly for Republican presidential candidates in all but five elections when they have voted for a Democratic candidate, according to Ballotpedia. Indiana voters would support the abolishment of slavery in the 1850s yet allow the Ku Klux Klan to influence state politics in the 1920s, according to Madison. The state swung left with the 1933 election of Governor Paul V. McNutt, who heralded in liberal economic policies like the New Deal relief and welfare programs. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, the state would swing decidedly left or right by electing fairly conservative (like 1946 US Senator William E. Jenner who was a national spokesperson for right-wing causes) or openly liberal officials (like 1962 US Senator Birch Bayh who had a very progressive voting record in Washington DC during his three terms) to state and federal positions. Yet, by the late 1970s, Indiana voters had become and remained more conservative in response to federal and state economic policies, declining loyalty to political parties, while also seeing an increase in independent party voters.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 305.

<sup>78</sup> Ballotpedia, “Presidential Voting History by State,” accessed on May 5, 2025 from [https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential\\_voting\\_history\\_by\\_state#Presidential\\_voting\\_history\\_by\\_state\\_1900-2024](https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential_voting_history_by_state#Presidential_voting_history_by_state_1900-2024); Madison, *The Indiana Way*, 208–229, 288–317; Ralph D. Gray, “Political Issues,” in *Indiana History: A Book of Readings*, ed. Ralph D. Gray (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 390–392; Madison, *The Indiana Way*, 194-196, 288-295.

Table 2. Historical Summary of AAS Programs within the CIC-AASC

University Name	Year of Establishment <sup>a</sup>	Program Type as of 2010 <sup>a</sup>	Presidential Voting History by State, 1972–2012 <sup>c</sup>
University of Michigan	1989 (Originally housed in the American Cultures Interdisciplinary Program)	Interdisciplinary program housed in the Department of American Cultures in College of Literature, Science, and the Arts	Swing
University of Wisconsin-Madison	1991	Interdisciplinary program in the College of Letters and Sciences	Democratic
The Ohio State University	1997 (Originally housed in Department of Comparative Studies in the College of Humanities)	Interdisciplinary program in the College of Arts and Sciences	Republican
Northwestern University	1999	Interdisciplinary program in Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences	Democratic
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	2000	Interdisciplinary program in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences	Democratic
University of Minnesota Twin Cities	2004	Interdisciplinary program within American Studies in the College of Liberal Arts	Democratic
Michigan State University	2004	Interdisciplinary program in the College of Social Science	Democratic
Indiana University Bloomington	2008	Interdisciplinary program in the College of Arts and Sciences	Republican
University of Illinois Chicago	2010 <sup>b</sup>	Interdisciplinary program in the College of Liberal Arts <sup>b</sup>	Democratic

Table 2 Continued

University Name	Year of Establishment <sup>a</sup>	Program Type as of 2010 <sup>a</sup>	Presidential Voting History by State from 1972–2012 <sup>c</sup>
Purdue University	None	None	Republican
Pennsylvania State University	None	None	Democratic
University of Iowa	None	None	Swing
University of Chicago	None	None	Democratic

*Note:* Voting trends are calculated from 1972 to 2012, which is the timeframe of this dissertation. The designation of “Democratic” or “Republican” was determined by which party had greater number of wins over the other (e.g., Democratic wins > Republican wins). Swing states were determined when the number of Democratic and Republican wins were tied or near a tie. Iowa, for example, had five Republican wins and six Democratic wins from 1972 to 2012.

<sup>a</sup> George Yu and Sharon S. Lee, eds., *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting* (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies, 2001). Copy available in Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” the Asian Culture Center Archives, Bloomington, Indiana (hereafter ACC Archives); Yolanda Zepeda, ed., *CIC Asian American Studies: Campus Profiles, 2009* (Champaign: Committee on Institutional Cooperation, 2009). Copy of available in Box AAST, Folder, “AAS-CIC Jan 16, 2009,” ACC Archives.

<sup>b</sup> Asian American Studies (ASAM), “The Asian American Movement at UIC from 1991 to 2008,” accessed on May 5, 2025 from <https://glas.uic.edu/about/program-milestones/asian-american-studies-asam/>

<sup>c</sup> Ballotpedia, “Presidential Voting History by State,” accessed on May 5, 2025 from [https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential\\_voting\\_history\\_by\\_state#Presidential\\_voting\\_history\\_by\\_state,\\_1900-2024](https://ballotpedia.org/Presidential_voting_history_by_state#Presidential_voting_history_by_state,_1900-2024)

This recent Republican dominance in Indiana state politics has led to a more conservative lean in higher education policy and appointments. For example, the Governor of Indiana holds the authority to appoint six of the nine members of the Board of Trustees of the Indiana University system. As a result, the IU Board of Trustees has had a conservative skew because the Republican party has dominated the Governor’s position since 2005, according to the National

Governor's Association. The Board of Trustees, in turn, holds decision-making power to approve tenure promotions, budgets, and the strategic direction of the university. The IUB case study identifies how campus politics influenced advocates' decisions and strategies to organize an AAS program. For example, IUB advocates broadened educational and intellectual arguments to make AAS more appealing to a campus population that was predominantly White and had binary, Black-White perceptions of race.<sup>79</sup>

Practically, I chose IUB because it was a research-intensive university within the CIC-AASC. Students, faculty, and staff members have mobilized and built AAS programs at all types of university and college campuses, according to Maeda. I, however, focused on AAS programs at research-intensive universities because these resource-rich organizations are more likely to establish and sustain ethnic studies programs, according to Nella Van Dyke. I chose IUB because it was a member of the CIC-AASC from 2000 to 2010. Advocates formed this regional network to help expand AAS within the Big Ten academic alliance. Because I live here, I had access to key participants, personal papers, and familiar with its program and university context. I recreated IUB's narrative using archival collections at IUB's archives and the ACC. I supplemented my analysis with fifteen 60-minute oral history interviews of involved alums, faculty members, and staff members. These interviews offered rich reflections on the progress and setbacks of program building that was missing in the archival work.<sup>80</sup>

I employed several sources in creating the campus history of AAS at IUB. I developed the student narrative in chapter four using articles written in the campus newspaper—*The*

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<sup>79</sup> E. Lee, "AAS in the Midwest," 252; National Governor's Association, "Indiana Former Governors," accessed on May 7, 2025 from <https://www.nga.org/former-governors/indiana/>.

<sup>80</sup> Maeda, *Rethinking the Asian American Movement*, 27–51; Nella Van Dyke, "Crossing Movement Boundaries: Factors that Facilitate Coalition Protest by American College Students, 1930–1990," *Social Problems* 50, no. 2 (2003): 226–250.

*Indiana Daily Student*—and the Indiana University Student Association Records at IUB archives. These sources provided insight on students’ perspectives on racial isolation on campus and why they wanted an AAS program. The Indiana University Student Association Records included documents focused on creating Asian American student organizations and collaborating with the student government to elevate Asian American concerns to senior-level administrators. The collection contained student government resolutions, funding requests, proposals to establish the Asian Culture Center, and Asian American affairs events.

Three sources offered an administrative perspective on the implementation of affirmative action and funding priorities at IUB: the Office of Affirmative Action records, the Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC) digital archives, and the minutes of the IU Board of Trustees. The Office of Affirmative Action records are housed at IUB archives and included documents on how IUB established and implemented its affirmative action plan from the early 1970s through the 1990s. This collection helped frame how affirmative action officials and university committees interpreted federal guidelines to create an affirmative action plan tailored to the university’s structure, context, and issues. It was also helpful in understanding how university officials discussed and framed race through the context of affirmative action. The BFC archives are available online, and provide detailed meeting minutes for the BFC, who created policies and programs to improve retention of faculty and student of colors. The BFC archives were helpful in creating the campus history related to policies and programs related to IUB’s affirmative action plan. They were also helpful in understanding how senior-level administrators and campus definitions of “disadvantaged,” “underrepresented,” and “targeted” minorities. The IU Board of Trustees minutes are also available online and offered perspectives on funding priorities of the IU system.

Finally, the collection at the Asian Culture Center focused on faculty and staff members of the AAS Committee, who helped establish IUB's AAS program. This collection contained documents related to program approval such as funding requests, budget proposals, meeting minutes, hiring material, university policies, and email correspondences from AAS committee members to senior-level administrators, including the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. This collection was helpful in exploring the debates, decisions, and actions of the AAS Committee and senior-level administrators when establishing a stand-alone, interdisciplinary program.

### ***Positionality and Data Analysis***

Historical analysis relies on the interpretation of multiple sources to study a historical process. Historians construct their own interpretations about the past by consulting multiple sources and listening to many voices. The nature of history is predicated upon how the scholar interprets historical events or processes. Thus, I briefly describe my positionality relative to this study.<sup>81</sup>

I was born into the Vietnamese diaspora, and I primarily identify with the Asian American racial group. Thus, I embody a racial identity as an Asian American woman who is ethnically Vietnamese. As a person of color in America, I understand and have experienced race, racism, and prejudice through my racial and ethnic identities. I cannot speak for other marginalized communities and represent their racial experiences, but I am deeply committed to studying issues of race in American universities and colleges.

My identities motivated my research questions, how I interpreted historical sources, and how I analyzed historical events and processes. My racial and ethnic identities, for example, have helped to quickly build rapport with interviewees while conducting oral history interviews.

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<sup>81</sup> Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 69–87.

My identities could also have led me to make assumptions about their experiences that I tried to mitigate by asking clarifying questions. In archival research, my identities have helped understand the experiences and claims of AAS advocates. However, my identities could have led me to “overvalue eyewitness accounts” while dismissing other campus voices.<sup>82</sup> To mitigate this bias in this study, I triangulated AAS advocates’ claims through media sources like newspaper articles and administrative collections like the IU Board of Trustee minutes, the BFC minutes, and the Office of Affirmative Action records.

I used document-based historical methods to analyze primary resources. For each archival collection, I organized documents chronologically. When consulting these primary documents, I considered issues of artifact authenticity, author intent, and trustworthiness using guidelines outlined by historians Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier. Because of the volume of primary resources in any one collection, I skimmed the documents and marked which documents that I would read more closely. I had two criteria for selecting which documents to further analyze: 1) key moments that helped me reconstruct the regional or campus history; and 2) key ideas, arguments, and meanings that helped me understand how Midwestern advocates framed AAS. In the first level of analysis, I constructed timelines of the regional history of AAS and the campus history of IUB’s AAS program. These timelines helped provide historical context, observe changes in AAS advocates’ framing over time, and make connections to larger issues in higher education. In the second level of analysis, I wrote analytical research memos to note themes and patterns in AAS advocates’ arguments, actions, and strategies to establish AAS. I also noted possible links between AAS advocates’ efforts with Rojas’s framework and my literature review.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 65.

<sup>83</sup> Howell and Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources*, 60–68.

I conducted and analyzed the sixteen oral histories by reading transcripts, marking quotes that helped comprehend the historical narrative, and assigning codes to quotes based on Rojas's framework (e.g., identifying a social problem). I also made notes regarding areas where I needed further clarification and engaged in member-checking, in which I asked interviewees to clarify or provide context for quotes. In the second reading of the transcript, I wrote analytical research memos in which I pulled out relevant quotes from the transcript, summarized key historical events, expanded on interviewees' arguments, and connected to Rojas's framework and my literature review.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Chapter Descriptions***

Framed by Rojas's model, the chapters in this dissertation outline how Midwestern advocates mobilized around a social issue and generated ways to organize AAS. Chapters two and three examine AAS in the Midwest in the national and regional context, respectively. Chapters four and five examine campus-based experiences of program building. I examine how students, faculty, and staff members at IUB established an AAS program from 1987 to 2009. I specifically look at how students mobilized to justify an AAS program at IUB. I continue the arc and explore how faculty and staff members justified and built a distinct AAS program based on its campus history, structure, and politics.

In chapter two, I examine how students, faculty, and staff advocates shifted their rationale for AAS because of campus interpretations of federal affirmative action guidelines beginning in the early 1970s. These racial narratives suggested that Asian Americans became demographically "overrepresented," and thus created a stigma that this racial group did not need additional

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<sup>84</sup> Leavy, *Oral History*, 67–94.

university support.<sup>85</sup> I argue that advocates de-emphasized the critical mass argument that calls for universities and colleges to establish AAS to represent the growing presence of Asian Americans on campus. Instead, Midwestern advocates emphasized the educational contribution of AAS. In the early 1970s, advocates desired AAS to counter racial isolation in the Midwest. Yet, in the post-affirmative action era, advocates broadened the educational argument for AAS to dispel this stigma, widen limited understandings of race, and educate all students about the changing and complex notions of American identity.

In chapter three, I explore how faculty and staff members strengthened program-building at Big Ten universities and colleges from 1990 to 2010. Advocates aimed to increase AAS's chances to institutionalize in the region by reframing it as an intellectual project rather than a demographic one. With different campus interpretations of affirmative action, advocates minimized the argument for AAS based on the growing number of Asian Americans on campus. Instead, they justified AAS based on its research contributions to their Midwestern universities and the academy. They recognized that institutional politics and campus characteristics, such as student demographics and research priorities, influenced the size and scope of AAS programs. Advocates debated and chose organizational models that best fit their campuses while boosting AAS's intellectual legitimacy. They also formed the CIC-AASC, a regional network that helped reconceptualize the field around multiple regional centers of knowledge.

In chapter four, I examine how distinct institutional racial politics can influence how Asian American students argued for AAS at IUB. This case study delves further into how student activists argued for an AAS program from 1987 to 1999. Like other students at Midwestern

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<sup>85</sup> Ellen Wu, "Overrepresentation: Asian Americans and the Conundrums of Statistical Mirroring," in *Difference without Domination: Pursuing Justice in Diverse Democracies*, eds. Danielle Allen and Rohini Somanathan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 189–225.

campuses, they first desired an AAS program to combat the racial isolation of growing up in predominantly White spaces. They continued to widen the educational argument as campus discussions of race evolved from the late 1960s to the 1990s. I interweave this local story of IUB with the campus history of racial politics to show how organizational context matters in discussions of race. I focus on the implementation of affirmative action at IUB because the federal government left universities and colleges to interpret guidelines based on organizational context and local demographics. Asian American students broadened their argument for AAS in response to campus perceptions of Asian Americans as “overrepresented minorities” and student activist claims of being seen as model minorities.

In chapter five, I continue the IUB case study through the perspectives and experiences of faculty and staff members who argued for the intellectual need for AAS at IUB from 1999 to 2008. This chapter illustrates what program building looks on the ground, including the debates, negotiations, and trade-offs on how to best organize AAS at an individual campus. I argue that advocates created a distinct program based on the organizational strengths and limitations at IUB. Advocates successfully argued for the intellectual need for AAS by connecting it to the university’s priority of becoming a national leader in international studies. They received funding and faculty lines in exchange for broadening the scope of AAS from a domestic study of Asians in the US to an international study of the Asian diaspora. However, the case demonstrates that deradicalization is more complicated than is suggested in ethnic studies and AAS literature. Campus processes like a program review can cause AAS to gradually deradicalize by expecting advocates to demonstrate AAS’s ability to boost the university’s academic reputation through external funding and accomplishments.

## **Chapter Two: Mobilizing for Asian American Studies in the Midwest and the Widening of the Educational Mission, 1970-2000**

At the 1987 annual meeting of the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS), Peter Kiang, Professor of Education at University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston), declared a “new wave” of AAS program building that had emerged on the East Coast.<sup>1</sup> This renewed interest in AAS, I argue, started with activism that emerged in the Midwest in the early 1970s and led to the establishment of the very first programs in the Midwest, at University of Michigan and University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison) in 1989 and 1991, respectively. Demand for AAS in the Midwest reflected a national movement that emerged in regions “East of California,” a term that Gary Y. Okihiro coined to represent universities and colleges located outside of California that needed a forum to discuss issues of building programs in different regions.<sup>2</sup>

The demand for AAS was no longer limited to areas and schools in states, like those on the West Coast, with high concentrations of Asian Americans. Instead, this new wave of AAS program building, which lasted until the late 2000s, emerged in colleges and universities that had a smaller proportion of Asian Americans in the student body compared to organizations on the West Coast. Midwestern advocates wanted AAS programs to explore their Asian American identity and instill racial pride, especially to counter their racial isolation at predominantly White

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<sup>1</sup> Peter N. Kiang, “New Wave: Developing Asian American Studies on the East Coast,” in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu, (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1988), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Quote in Gary Y. Okihiro, “Statement of Purpose,” *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies Cornell Symposium on Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro and Lee C. Lee (Ithaca: Cornell University Asian American Studies Program, 1992), i-iii. Hard copy of symposium proceedings, Series 41/2/40 Registered Organizations Director's Files 1924-2009, Box 10, Folder “Asian American Studies: East of California Conference, 1990-94,” Student Life and Culture Archives at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL; Stephen H. Sumida, “East of California: Points of Origin in Asian American Studies,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 1998), 84, n. 7.

universities and colleges. They aspired to include Asian American history and experiences into the university structure and curriculum.

Midwestern advocates realized the argument for critical mass had weakened when they began to mobilize for AAS. The critical mass arguments suggest that universities and colleges should establish AAS programs because of the demographic explosion of Asian Americans in the US, thanks to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965. Midwestern advocates faced distinct challenges at the national and regional level. Nationally, universities and colleges began to see Asian Americans as a racial minority that no longer needed campus support because of the introduction of affirmative action policies in 1964 with the passing of the Civil Rights Act. Over time, most Midwestern universities and colleges saw Asian Americans as “overrepresented” minorities because their total student enrollment numbers exceeded the total Asian population of the state.<sup>3</sup> Regionally, Asian Americans were subjected to deeply rooted beliefs that race was a Black-White issue. Asian Americans, then, felt invisible in discussions of race at their Midwestern campuses. Asian Americans in the Midwest thus experienced a double framing in which they were seen as demographically overrepresented yet remained invisible in discussions of race.

This paradox underscored the challenges of establishing AAS in the Midwest. In this chapter, I examine how students, faculty, and staff members began to shift how they justified AAS to university officials. I use Fabio Rojas’s framework to understand how advocates identified a social problem, mobilized around a unifying cause, and engaged in conflict within their organization. I argue that Midwestern advocates widened the educational scope of AAS

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen Wu, “Overrepresentation: Asian Americans and the Conundrums of Statistical Mirroring,” in *Difference without Domination: Pursuing Justice in Diverse Democracies*, eds. Danielle Allen and Rohini Somanathan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020): 189–225.

because of campus interpretations of federal affirmative action guidelines beginning in the early 1970s. In the early 1970s, advocates desired AAS to counter their feelings of racial isolation in the Midwest. Yet, in the post-affirmative action era, advocates realized that the critical mass argument had weakened. Campus discourse suggested that Asian Americans had become demographically overrepresented and thus, created a stigma that this racial group did not need additional university support. They de-emphasized the critical mass argument and broadened the educational scope for AAS. AAS was still needed to empower Asian American students yet, more importantly, it was needed to educate all students about the complex and changing racial conceptions of American identity.

### **The Erosion of the Critical Mass Argument**

When advocates argued for AAS during the Third World Strike of 1968–69, they demanded the creation of academic programs that represented the demographic boom of Asian Americans in the US. As Sucheng Chan argued, “Asian Pacific Studies is defined first and foremost by the *population* that forms the very foundation of our academic expertise, as well as of our social communities.”<sup>4</sup> The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which eliminated racial quotas from Asian countries, and America’s involvement in the Southeast Asian wars brought in an influx of Asian immigrants and refugees. According to the US Census, the total Asian American population had doubled from 1.5 million in 1970 to 3.7 million in 1980, increasing the total percentage of Asian Americans from 1.9 to 2.9 percent. By 1980, over four hundred thousand Southeast Asian refugees had resettled in the US, adding to the 3.7 million persons of Asian ancestry living in the US, according to the 1980 US Census.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sucheng Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies: The Politics of Teaching and Program Building* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 28.

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of the Census, “We the Americans: Asians,” [Report no. WE-3] (Washington DC: US Department of Commerce, 1993), accessed on May 14, 2021 from <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1993/dec/we->

The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act also contributed to a greater number of Asian Americans enrolling in higher education organizations starting in the late 1970s. In a 1991 research brief, Eugenia Escueta and Eileen O'Brien reported that the number of Asian Americans across US higher education organizations rose from 198,000 in 1976 to 497,000 in 1988. The overall representation of Asian Americans in higher education had grown from 2 percent in 1976 to 4 percent in 1988. Shirley Hune contended that this growth of Asian Americans on college campuses signaled that this racial group had become an integral part of cultural, academic, and social life of American higher education organizations. Proponents who had established the first AAS programs in the country used the increase of Asian American populations on college campuses to justify the need for an academic program. In a 1974 grant proposal for University of California Berkeley's AAS program, Chan reported that 15 percent of students reported being of Asian ancestry. Fourteen years later, almost a fifth of Berkeley's undergraduate population was of Asian ancestry. "The demographic fact dictates a special urgency to meet the education needs—at all levels of education—of Asian Americans," Chan argued.<sup>6</sup>

Pointing to these demographics, advocates justified the growth of the field nationally based on the "critical mass argument."<sup>7</sup> This justification, according to Chan, contended that universities and colleges needed AAS to represent the growing Asian American population in the US and at college campuses. Advocates leveraged the critical mass argument to demand more "relevant" courses and research that represented the history, culture, and contributions of Asian

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[03.html](#), 1; Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 63-80; Shirley Hune, "Demographics and Diversity of Asian American College Students," *New Directions for Student Services* 2002, no. 97 (Spring 2002): 11–20.

<sup>6</sup> Quote in Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 4, 65; Hune, "Demographics and Diversity," 11–20; Eugenia Escueta and Eileen O'Brien, "Asian Americans in Higher Education: Trends and Issues," *Research Briefs* 2, no. 4 (1991): 1–12.

<sup>7</sup> Erika Lee, "Asian American Studies in the Midwest: New Questions, Approaches, and Communities," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 252. Scholars like Stephen H. Sumida also use the "demographic strength argument" interchangeably with the critical mass argument, see his article "East of California," 83–97.

Americans in US society.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, advocates justified the need for AAS to solve deeply rooted social problems that afflicted local Asian American communities close to college campuses. The initial vision of the field was to bridge the academic and activist sides of AAS. The academic side would generate policy and community-oriented research while teaching students to channel their skills back to Asian American communities. The activist side would create innovative student community projects that provided services to the Asian American community.<sup>9</sup>

Within a decade since its founding 1968–69, AAS progressed from “experimental” courses to offering “permanent” courses of degree programs in the University of California system, the California State University system, University of Washington, University of Hawai‘i, City College of New York, and University of Colorado.<sup>10</sup> By 1978, ten of the fourteen campuses in Don Nakanishi and Russell Leong’s survey reported having an undergraduate degree program. Advocates, however, faced two major changes in the national landscape that would alter how advocates would “justify their existence to the [Asian American] community as well as the academy.”<sup>11</sup>

First, the financial retrenchment of the 1970s stoked debates in the field on the trade-offs between its core values and its survival in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape. Starting in 1973, the US spiraled into an economic crisis that forced many universities and colleges to fulfill their teaching, research, and service roles with less resources. AAS

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties No More: The Contemporary Dilemmas of Asian American Studies,” in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 32.

<sup>9</sup> Quote in John M. Liu, “Asian American Studies and the Disciplining of Ethnic Studies,” in *Frontiers of Asian American Studies: Writing Research, and Commentary*, eds. Gail M. Nomura, Russell Endo, Stephen H. Sumida, and Russell C. Leong (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989), 279; Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 9–20; Shilpa Davé et al., “De-Privileging Positions: Indian Americans, South Asian Americans, and the Politics of Asian American Studies,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000): 84–85.

<sup>10</sup> Don T. Nakanishi and Russell Leong, “Toward the Second Decade: A National Survey of Asian American Studies Programs in 1978,” *Amerasia Journal* 5, no. 1 (1978): 5.

<sup>11</sup> William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 134.

advocates reported that they faced hostility from administrators about budget restrictions and competed with traditional disciplines for limited resources. The financial strain, in turn, forced AAS advocates to brainstorm strategies on how to boost student enrollment and generate income.<sup>12</sup>

One popular strategy included creating a major and/or minor in AAS that would enhance the credibility and status of programs. Another strategy was to make AAS courses part of the university's general education requirement. Some advocates argued that this strategy would boost course enrollment while capitalizing on the trend to liberalize the university curriculum. For example, the AAS program at California State University Long Beach reported in a 1978 survey, "our program's survival is a matter of student enrollments. Any decrease of our enrollments can become a downward spiraling process....Hence program and curricula improvements aimed at sustaining enrollments are essential for our continued operation."<sup>13</sup>

These curricular strategies did help AAS programs weather the financial crises of the 1970s and 1980s, yet they sparked internal debate on "the politics of survival."<sup>14</sup> Advocates had to decide which constituents to serve with limited resources and staff. Most decided to focus on the academic audience: teaching students, generating theoretical scholarship, publishing in academic venues, and attaining tenure promotion. Their choice stemmed from the desire to survive long-term in academia while improving the legitimacy of AAS. As a result, most programs de-prioritized the activist side of AAS, limiting connections with Asian American community groups and reducing community action research. The financial retrenchment of

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<sup>12</sup> John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 319; Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 132–161.

<sup>13</sup> Quote in Nakanishi and Leong, "Towards the Second Decade," 3; Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 7–20.

<sup>14</sup> Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 141.

higher education, then, chipped away at the critical mass argument by refocusing the field on issues of organizational survival rather than bridging teaching, research, and service to local communities. Raymond Lou reported that the economic recession, declining college student enrollment, and shifting student interest to majors in the fields of applied technology and business resulted in budget cuts for all social sciences and humanities programs in the California State University system. “Asian American studies programs were cut along with other programs. However, larger departments began to accuse Asian American studies and other small programs of usurping resources that were, according to them, rightfully theirs,” Lou expressed. “This attack on the curriculum and credibility of Asian American studies was the basic issue of competition for scarce resources.”<sup>15</sup>

Second, AAS advocates could no longer justify having AAS represent the increasing number of Asian Americans in higher education because of the growing legal and public debates on affirmative action programs. Beginning in the 1970s, the political rhetoric surrounding affirmative action in college admissions reduced Asian Americans to a simple narrative. Asian Americans were doing well demographically and academically on college campuses, and they seemingly did not need additional campus protections or support. Starting with the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, American society began shaping this narrative by using the model minority image, a “positive stereotype” that suggests that Asian Americans have transcended racial discrimination through cultural values of hard work, education, and socioeconomic

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<sup>15</sup> Quote in Raymond Lou, “‘Unknown Jerome’: Asian American Studies in the California State University System,” in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 26; Lane Ryo Hirabayashi and Marilyn C. Alquizola, “Asian American Studies: Re-Evaluating for the 1990s,” in *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s*, ed. Karin Aguilar-San Juan (Boston: South End Press, 1994), 354–55; Nakanishi and Leong, “Towards the Second Decade,” 12–16; Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties,” 32–33.

success.<sup>16</sup> This simple narrative, then, altered how university officials viewed Asian Americans in the 1980s and beyond. Asian Americans were no longer viewed as underrepresented minorities because of quantifiable measures of educational success, such as group parity and individual academic achievement. This statistical lens suggested Asian Americans do not need additional campus protections or resources, such as an AAS program, because they had “made it” in American higher education.<sup>17</sup>

Federal legislators introduced the concept of affirmative action in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Under Title VI of the 1964 Act, universities and colleges needed to implement affirmative action policies to hire underrepresented minorities and women on its staff and faculty bodies to continue to receive federal money. The issue, according to historian Ellen Wu, was that federal policymakers provided vague definitions and guidelines on who counted as an “underrepresented minority.”<sup>18</sup> Because of these vague guidelines, Joy Ann Williamson argued, universities and colleges often relied on the Black-White dichotomy to interpret who would qualify as an underrepresented minority. Campus-based affirmative action programs, like those at University of Illinois Urbana Champaign (UIUC), often conflated “minority” and “disadvantaged” with “African Americans” in campus definitions of underrepresented minority.<sup>19</sup> This Black-White binary often omitted other racial groups like Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian Americans from campus-based affirmative action policies.

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<sup>16</sup> Yoon K. Pak, “Historical Overview of the Model Minority Concept,” in *Asian Americans in Higher Education: Charting New Realities*, eds. Yoon K. Pak, Dina C. Maramba, and Xavier J. Hernandez, *Association for the Study of Higher Education* 40, no. 1 (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2014), 13.

<sup>17</sup> Quote in Sharon S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority: Asian American Students at the University of Illinois* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022), 19; Dana Y. Takagi, *The Retreat from Race: Asian American Admissions and Racial Politics*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 21–56; Wu, “Overrepresentation,” 190–194.

<sup>18</sup> Wu, “Overrepresentation,” 191.

<sup>19</sup> Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power on Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965–75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 56.

Scholars point to the concept of parity, another amorphous federal guideline, that stoked debates on whether Asian Americans counted as an underrepresented minority. Parity was a quantitative way to determine “underrepresentation” using percentages of women and racial minorities that were actually represented in a determined pool and those available for employment.<sup>20</sup> University officials and policymakers, then, wielded this concept of parity by inserting Asian Americans into the Black-White discussion while amplifying the model minority stereotype. According to historian Yoon K. Pak, Asian Americans have been racially and politically positioned along the Black-White binary as a model minority since Reconstruction when American popular culture lauded Chinese immigrants for their hard work and obedience compared to freed Black slaves and Irish immigrants in the North. Asian Americans have traveled back and forth on this Black-White binary based on American racial sentiment at the time. Historian Ellen Wu contends that in the early twentieth century, Whites deemed ethnic Chinese and Japanese as “definitely not White” because of their status as unassimilable aliens during US enactment of Asiatic Exclusion policies.<sup>21</sup> Post-World War II, Asian Americans were then shifted back to “definitely not Black” when William Petersen popularized the model minority image in his January 9, 1966 *New York Times Magazine* article.<sup>22</sup> He argued that Japanese Americans had attained educational and socioeconomic success despite several oppressive government measures including their internment during World War II. Like Petersen, influential policymakers in charge of enforcing affirmative action began touting Asian Americans

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<sup>20</sup> Office of the Vice President Indiana University Bloomington, “Bloomington Campus Affirmative Action Plan,” *Campus Report*, Oct. 19, 1977, C549 Indiana University Office of Affirmative Action records, Box 1, Folder, “Affirmative Action Plan—Miscellaneous, 1974-1979,” Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, Indiana, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Ellen Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Quote in Wu, *The Color of Success*, 2; William Petersen, “Success Story, Japanese-American Style,” *The New York Times Magazine*, January 9, 1966, 180-191 accessed on February 4, 2025 from <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1966/01/09/356013502.html?pageNumber=180>

as an example of a racial group that defied quantitative indicators of parity. Asian Americans often had higher rates of socioeconomic wellbeing and educational attainment despite their lower numbers in national employment pools and a history of anti-Asian racism. Their ability to defy quantitative measures of parity, in turn, pitted Asian Americans against other racial groups for defying structural and historical barriers.<sup>23</sup>

Sharon S. Lee argued that the 1978 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* decision was when American society applied statistical parity in college admissions and further amplified the image of Asian Americans as model minorities. Allan Bakke, a White male, claimed that he was rejected from the University of California, Davis medical school because of affirmative action admission slots for minority candidates. The Supreme Court struck down racial quotas in admissions, yet it affirmed the use of race and ethnicity as a factor in university admissions. Although the ruling did not focus on Asian Americans, the Supreme Court introduced the idea (in the footnotes, ironically) that Asian Americans no longer needed affirmative action protection because they were doing very well academically in higher education. The Justices observed that Asian Americans applicants to UC Davis medical school had higher entrance exam scores and grade point averages than those of their White peers. The *Bakke* case amplified the model minority stereotype by introducing the idea that, because of their academic achievement and high admission rate through regular processes, Asian Americans had outgrown affirmative action.<sup>24</sup>

As the field of AAS entered its second decade of its existence in the 1980s, America's focus on affirmative action intensified. Beginning in the early 1980s, Asian American professors,

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<sup>23</sup> Pak, "Historical Overview of the Model Minority Concept," 13; Wu, "Overrepresented," 190–194.

<sup>24</sup> Claire Jean Kim, "Are Asians the New Blacks?" *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 15, no. 2 (2018): 217–244; Sharon S. Lee, "The De-Minoritization of Asian Americans," *Asian American Law Journal* 15, no. 129 (2008): 129–152; Takagi, *The Retreat from Race*, 58–61.

students, and activists charged that highly selective universities and colleges were admitting Asian Americans at a lower rate than White applicants. Administrators at Harvard, Brown, Stanford, Princeton, and in the University of California (UC) system denied these claims of admission discrimination, citing statistics that incoming Asian American students had higher high school GPAs and standardized test scores than their White peers. The UC system, for example, stopped considering Asian Americans eligible for special admissions consideration in 1984. UC President David P. Gardner defended the change in admissions policy in a December 1, 1986 *Associated Press* article. He claimed that Asian Americans made up 20 percent of the system's undergraduate enrollment yet were only 6 percent of California's population. "Asian students have been so successful they have become over-represented at the university," he stated.<sup>25</sup> Like *Bakke*, Gardner's claim that Asian Americans were overrepresented fortified the image of the model minority by unfairly placing high academic standards on Asian applicants compared to their White peers. His claim also upheld the statistical lens that Asian Americans no longer needed campus support via special admissions consideration because they were demographically and academically successful on college campuses.<sup>26</sup>

The statistical lens clouded the argument for critical mass in the 1978 *Spokane Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) vs. Washington State University (WSU)* legal case. According to Stephen H. Sumida, the WSU case marked a "departure from the California model."<sup>27</sup> It illustrated that universities with "minor" Asian American populations could not rely on the

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Scot-Blair, "Ethnic Imbalance Shifts at UC," *San Diego Union*, December 1, 1986, A1 as cited in S. Lee, *Unseen Unheard Minority*, 22; Takagi, *The Retreat from Race*, 43-46; 51-56; & 84-108.

<sup>26</sup> Don T. Nakanishi, "A Quota: On Excellence? The Asian American Admissions Debate," *Change* 21, no. 6 (1989): 38-47; S. Lee, *Unseen Unheard Minority*, 20-22.

<sup>27</sup> Sumida, "East of California," 85-86, n. 8.

critical mass argument to justify AAS.<sup>28</sup> Rather, advocates needed to emphasize the teaching and intellectual reasons to build AAS programs.

In 1978, five students at WSU and the Spokane chapter of the JACL sued the university to establish an AAS program. JACL accused WSU administrators of violating Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act that required educational organizations that received federal funding to use that money in a non-discriminatory way. The lawsuit argued that the university had promised to create an AAS program in 1973 yet failed to make permanent commitments to establish the program. Denying the creation of an AAS program constituted discrimination because the university had already established three other ethnic studies units—Native American, Black, and Chicano Studies programs. JACL had previously filed a complaint with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, to investigate claims of Asian American discrimination. According to Dale Minami, JACL’s attorney, the government agency did not conduct a formal investigation of the complaint, interview Asian American students, or press WSU officials for documentation. OCR ruled that the university was under no legal obligation to provide an AAS program and concluded that WSU had committed no violations of Title VI of the 1964 Act. In a policy memo, OCR investigators stated, “It is not within the purview of this office to dictate to the recipient (WSU) what should or should not be included in the curriculum of the institution.”<sup>29</sup> JACL filed the lawsuit in federal court to force WSU officials to negotiate. JACL and the university settled the suit out of court and established

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<sup>28</sup> Stephen H. Sumida, “Discovering the Historical Legacies of Asian American Pioneers in Eastern Washington,” *International Examiner*, May 21, 1986, 6.

<sup>29</sup> “Will WSU Provide Asian American Studies? Civil Rights Office Rules Against JACL Complaint,” *International Examiner*, May 31, 1979, 11.

the Asian/Pacific American program in 1981 with the hiring of two full-time tenure-track faculty members, Stephen H. Sumida (English) and Gail M. Nomura (History).<sup>30</sup>

In Sumida's view, the *Spokane JACL v. WSU* case signaled that the critical mass argument was no longer effective in arguing for an AAS program for campuses with "minor" Asian American populations.<sup>31</sup> The civil case illustrated that OCR, which oversaw federal laws against discrimination, could not hold universities and colleges accountable for renege promises to AAS. Instead, litigation was needed as JACL refused to drop the lawsuit unless WSU officials demonstrated good faith efforts to establish AAS. The civil case also "marked a departure from the California model" because, like with the Midwestern students in the 1970s, it introduced the idea that AAS must be justified for the benefit of all students and not just for the benefit of Asian Americans: "our audience cannot be merely the four or five hundred Asian American students on campus, but must be the fifteen or sixteen thousand others who need most to learn something from and about us and therefore about our country," Sumida contended in a 1986 *International Examiner* newspaper article. "Unless we can show how Asian American studies matter here, at the border of Idaho and all points east, Asian American studies will remain a 'minority' concern, for a 'minority' audience."<sup>32</sup>

Sumida articulated the educational contribution of AAS. Universities and colleges should have AAS programs to teach the concept of American pluralism: "At Washington State University and some other widely-spread institutions East of California, the demographic argument for Asian American studies has been turned around to assert that, demographically

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<sup>30</sup> Randy Okimoto, "JACL to File Discrimination Lawsuit Against WSU," *International Examiner*, September, 30 1978, 3; "Civil Rights Office to Complete Finding on JACL Complaint Next Month," *International Examiner*, December 31, 1978, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Sumida, "East of California," 97, n. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Sumida, "Asian American Pioneers in Eastern Washington," 6.

regarded, a curriculum in Asian American studies is not only for Asian American students there but for all students, in the interests of studying the United States comprehensively.”<sup>33</sup> This educational argument aligned with the growing trend in higher education, starting in the 1970s and peaking in the 1990s, to broaden the core curriculum by including histories, cultures, and literature of women and non-White communities. It was in this intellectual trend in which Asian Americans students shifted their justifications from critical mass to one focused on pluralism. Asian American students, as a result, widened the educational purpose of AAS from empowering Asian American students to the purpose of educating non-Asian students about racial justice. This widening of the educational mission of AAS, as Sumida contended, challenged the dominant assumption of the field. AAS can no longer be seen as a field just for Asian Americans. Rather, AAS was needed to connect be part of America’s democratic efforts to educate college students on American diversity.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Midwest Racial Landscape**

When advocates began to mobilize for AAS, they began to recognize regional differences in program building. Historian Erika Lee observed, “From the very beginning, Asian Americanists in the Midwest and on the East Coast recognized the sociopolitical contexts shaping the development of these new programs were dramatically different from those that helped form California programs in the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>35</sup> She continued, explaining that those new programs faced “distinct academic landscapes and new challenges to institutionalization.”<sup>36</sup> Advocates working in Middle America contended with the “Midwestern racial landscape.”<sup>37</sup> This

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<sup>33</sup> Sumida, “East of California,” 85, n. 8

<sup>34</sup> Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 117–133; Sumida, “East of California,” 97, n. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Erika Lee, “Asian American Studies in the Midwest: New Questions, Approaches, and Communities,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 249.

<sup>36</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 252.

<sup>37</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 252.

distinct academic landscape, according to Lee, encompassed layers of the national political climate, student demographics, and regional as well as campus-level racial politics. These complex layers, then, have shaped how advocates in the Midwest mobilized and organized programs. “[T]he challenge of the Midwestern racial landscape is a pressing one that shapes everything from racial and ethnic politics and institution building to teaching, community outreach, and the very definition of ‘Asian American’ itself,” Lee contended.<sup>38</sup>

This lack of critical mass, according to Lee, encompassed two challenges. One challenge for Midwestern Asian Americans was living in a region where they may not be considered a critical mass of the population. Demographically, the population of Asian Americans in the Midwest have grown dramatically thanks to the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. According to 2002 US Census working paper by Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, the number of Asian Americans was 125,808, comprising 0.2 percent of the total Midwest population in 1970. Within a decade, the number more than tripled to 435,391, comprising 0.7 percent of the total Midwest of population. By 1990, the number of Asian Americans grew to 755,403, making up 1.3 percent of the Midwest population.<sup>39</sup> Even with this increase, Asian Americans in the Midwest were not visible demographically compared to regions (such as the East and West Coast) that have larger proportions of Asian Americans. According to the 2000 Census, of the total 11.9 million Asians in the US, 49 percent lived in the West, 20 percent in the Northeast, 19 percent in the South, and 12 percent in the Midwest.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 252.

<sup>39</sup> Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Table 3: Midwest (North Central) Region-Race and Hispanic Origin: 1880 to 1990,” *Population Division: Historical Census Statistics of Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin*, US Census Bureau, September 13, 2002, Working Paper Series no. 56, 21, accessed on February 7, 2025 from <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.html>

<sup>40</sup> Bureau of the Census, *The Asian Population: 2000*, prepared by the Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistical Division, Publication No. CRKBR/01-16 (Washington, DC, February 2002), <https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf>, 1.

The second challenge is the predominance of the Black-White binary that often excluded Asian Americans in regional discussions of race. “Not only are Asian Americans not as visible demographically, they are not readily included in racial discussions in general,” Lee argued.<sup>41</sup> In her seminal article on racial positioning, Claire Jean Kim traced how Asian Americans have been racially positioned in relation to Blacks and Whites in response to labor, political, and social movements. She argued that White opinionmakers, such as politicians and scholars, have controlled the Black-White racial narrative since the 1850s. This narrative suggested that Asian Americans are superior to Blacks but inferior to Whites. Simultaneously, Asian Americans were ostracized as foreign relative to White and Blacks. She argued that after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, White opinionmakers exploited this narrative by insisting Asian Americans were model minorities who had transcended racial oppression without any assistance. The model minority stereotype, Kim posited, works in tandem with discourse that suggests Blacks have failed because of their own deficiencies rather than structural barriers and racial discrimination.<sup>42</sup>

Pawan Dhingra and Monica Trieu extended this argument by insisting that Whiteness is centered within the region’s cultural values, history, and racial politics. Dhingra explained that there is a “presumed white racial homogeneity of the area, in particular the nonurban sections that suggest a simple, wholesome way of life.”<sup>43</sup> When immigrants entered this cultural framework, they disrupted this presumed “romanticization” of the Midwestern way of life.<sup>44</sup> Trieu added that space reflects and influences existing unequal power relations, including those in race. She argued that the region of the Midwest is a physical and symbolic representation of

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<sup>41</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 252.

<sup>42</sup> Claire Jean Kim, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (1999): 105–138.

<sup>43</sup> Pawan Dhingra, “Introduction to the Journal of Asian American Studies Special Issue on the Midwest,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 240.

<sup>44</sup> Dhingra, “Introduction,” 240.

the making and remaking of race. The presumed Whiteness in the region attempts to assert power by shaping the narrative of how Asian Americans do not fit into the “White American culture,” described as White, rural, conservative, Christian, and wholesome.<sup>45</sup>

Often this Midwestern racial narrative does not see Asian Americans as part of the region’s cultural history despite having a long history and presence since the mid-1800s. Chinese and Japanese immigrants arrived in states like Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio as early as the 1850s. Filipinos attended Midwestern schools under the 1903 Pensionado Act and stayed to work in the US Post–World War II, South and East Asian students took advantage of American diplomacy to obtain graduate degrees in the Midwest. Asian Americans, however, continue to feel “ignored” and “invisible” because they are omitted from the region’s history, cultural values, and discussions on race.<sup>46</sup>

As early as 1971, Asian American students demanded AAS because of pervasive feelings of “alienation,” “invisibility,” and “isolation.”<sup>47</sup> In studies of racial formation in the Midwest, this notion of invisibility is a common experience of Asian Americans who grew up and/or attended school in the region. These studies underscored how Asian Americans must define and form their racial identity in relation to White history, cultural norms, and spaces. What makes racial formation distinct in the Midwest is that Asian Americans are subjected to a national and regional framing. Midwestern Asian Americans are subjected to the national racial framing of Asian Americans as model minorities. Midwestern Asian Americans are also subjected to a regional framing in which race is defined by Whiteness. Thus, Asian Americans often feel a

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<sup>45</sup> Monica Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility: Asian Americans in the Midwest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility*, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Wu, “Overrepresentation,” 197; Jin Chang, “‘Am I Invisible?’ Asian American Activism at the University of Iowa from 1998-2008,” (PhD Diss., University of Iowa, 2025).

double marginalization. They do not belong in the national and regional conversations around race.<sup>48</sup>

It was these feelings of double marginalization in which Midwestern Asian Americans began to mobilize for AAS. They desired an AAS program to counter feelings of racial isolation that they experienced in predominantly White classrooms. In 1971, members of the Asian American Alliance, an undergraduate student organization, at UIUC in 1971 began hosting social gatherings to discuss their blossoming Asian American identity and their concerns about navigating a predominantly White campus. “I remember going to [an Alliance] meeting, and someone said, ‘Look around your classes—are there other people that look like you?’” Debbie Shikami Ikeda, an elementary education undergraduate and UIUC Alliance member, recalled in her oral history. “And it dawned on me that there weren’t...In fact, I remember looking around the classroom, and it was all White people!”<sup>49</sup> From these social gatherings, members of the Alliance approached Professors Bill MacDonald of Asian Studies and Clark Cunningham of Anthropology to sponsor AAS courses in 1972 and 1973. The Alliance at UIUC proposed a formal AAS program in February 1973 to include Asian Americans in the university curriculum. “The university has an obligation to provide an opportunity for the educational growth of its students,” the Alliance wrote in the proposal. “This obligation can be fulfilled by offering appropriate educational programs.”<sup>50</sup> Although there was student demand, there simply was not enough critical mass of professors to spearhead efforts to pursue a permanent program at the

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<sup>48</sup> Chang, “‘Am I Invisible?’”; Barbara W. Lee, “‘Ambassadors’ in the Heartland: Asian American Racial and Regional Identity Formations in Michigan,” in *Asian Americans in Michigan*, ed. Sook Wilkinson and Victor Jew (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 70–98; Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility*.

<sup>49</sup> Quote from Debbie Shikami Ikeda, interview by Sharon S. Lee, June 6, 2009 in Fremont, California, in S. Lee, *Unseen and Unheard Minority*, 48; Oberlin Asian American Alliance, “Perspective on the Movement,” in Rice Paper Collective, *Rice Paper* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1974), 63, Folder: Midwest History, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Cultural Center Archives (hereafter AACC Archives), Urbana, IL; Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 29–30.

<sup>50</sup> S. Lee, *Unseen and Unheard*, 45.

time. Nevertheless, UIUC students established this desire for AAS and would inspire the next generation of advocates in the 1990s.<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, students at University of Michigan and UW-Madison desired an AAS program because they wanted a space for self-exploration and empowerment. Much like the advocates of the 1960s, they reported having little to no opportunities in high school or at the university to explore the Asian American history, culture, and racial identity. A special problem that Asian Americans faced in the Midwest was “growing up isolated from other Asian Americans. As a result, they don’t know how to relate to each other,” said Karen Mori in *The University Record*, Michigan’s student newspaper.<sup>52</sup> In 1973, Asian Americans founded East Wind, a political student organization at the University of Michigan, to address the lack of Asian American resources on campus, specifically the “lack of an Asian American Studies courses in the University Curriculum.”<sup>53</sup> They wanted such a program to understand “questions about Asian American identity, history and stereotypes.”<sup>54</sup> Later in the fall, members of East Wind organized their own AAS course titled, “The Asian American Experience,”<sup>55</sup> where they invited guest

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<sup>51</sup> S. Lee, *Unseen and Unheard*, 44–46; Rice Paper Collective, *Rice Paper* 1, no. 1, (Summer 1974), 6, AACC Archives.

<sup>52</sup> University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, “Asian Americans: Programs, Progress,” *University Record*, July 6, 1976, accessed on February 17, 2025 from Activism, Organizing, and Leadership Within U-M Asian American + Pacific Islander Communities and Space, [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/uaao1ic/x-uaao0143/uaao0143\\_0001](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/uaao1ic/x-uaao0143/uaao0143_0001)

<sup>53</sup> University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, “History of University of Michigan’s Asian American Movement,” no date, accessed on February 17, 2025 from Activism, Organizing, and Leadership Within U-M Asian American + Pacific Islander Communities and Space, [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/uaao1ic/x-uaao0151/uaao0151\\_0001](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/uaao1ic/x-uaao0151/uaao0151_0001), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Linda Wan, “History of the Asian American Association,” no date, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, accessed on February 17, 2025 from Activism, Organizing, and Leadership Within U-M Asian American + Pacific Islander Communities and Space, [https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/uaao1ic/x-uaao0152/uaao0152\\_0001](https://quod.lib.umich.edu/u/uaao1ic/x-uaao0152/uaao0152_0001), 3.

<sup>55</sup> Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 33.

speakers with expertise in Asian American political issues to understand their growing racial consciousness.<sup>56</sup>

At UW-Madison, Asian American students formed an informal study group in spring 1973. Like students at Michigan, they wanted a space “to educate ourselves about the experiences [of] fellow Asians,” and focus on topics of “identity [and] personal experiences” growing up in the Midwest.<sup>57</sup> These topics were not covered in their university courses, and more importantly, students believed they were “prerequisites for developing a commitment to the Asian American community.”<sup>58</sup> However, without faculty guidance, students dissolved the UW-Madison study group because of the lack of goals and interest, while those at Michigan had relied on guest speakers to teach on unfamiliar topics. These one-time courses underscored the need for faculty leadership and training to continue to regularly offer AAS topics.<sup>59</sup>

These experimental courses, nevertheless, inspired advocates to push for permanent programs at their universities and colleges. Asian American students organized two Midwestern Asian American Conferences in Chicago and Madison, Wisconsin in April and September 1974, respectively. The regional conferences brought together students from Bowling Green University, UIUC, the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota, Oberlin College, UW-Madison, and Wayne State University. At these regional conferences, students aimed to network and brainstorm solutions on several issues like defining a regional Asian American identity and organizing on campuses. Conference participants named AAS as a main priority and discussed how to establish programs at their Midwestern universities and colleges. “How do we

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<sup>56</sup> University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, “History of University of Michigan’s Asian American Movement,” 1.

<sup>57</sup> “Group History: Madison,” *Rice Paper* (Summer 1974), 5, AACC Archives.

<sup>58</sup> Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> “Group History: Madison,” *Rice Paper* (Summer 1974), 5-6, AACC Archives.

set up Asian American studies and programs?” Carol Izumi, a conference participant, reported in the first issue of *Rice Paper*, which was a Midwest Asian American magazine produced by the UW-Madison Asian Student Union. “How do we use the existing resources of institutions we attend for the benefit of Asian Americans?”<sup>60</sup> Conference attendees discussed teaching matters such as who would teach these courses, what type of content and perspectives would be taught in these courses, and how to encourage resource sharing of bibliographies and resources relevant to AAS.

In subsequent *Rice Paper* issues, students and faculty members shared course titles, publications, research materials, and resource centers pertaining to AAS. “Asian People, the University of Colorado at Boulder has seven courses on the books, five to be offered this year, and [two] faculty, myself in Sociology, and Alex Kuo in English,” Professor of Sociology Russell Endo wrote in the Yellow Pages of the 1974 edition of *Rice Paper*.<sup>61</sup> Students and faculty members shared these resources with the intent of requesting their universities to build formal AAS programs. Yet, as they began to engage with campus officials, Midwestern advocates quickly realized that they could not argue for AAS to simply represent and include Asian Americans in the university curriculum. They needed to demonstrate that AAS would refute stereotypes and expand limited notions of race.

### **AAS to Expand the Black-White Binary**

Beginning in the 1970s, AAS advocates encountered an emerging challenge in organizing for AAS in the Midwest: the predominance of the Black-White narrative in the context of affirmative action. Like all US universities and colleges, Midwestern campuses began to

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<sup>60</sup> Carol Izumi, “‘Getting Beyond Identity’: The Fall Midwest Asian American Conference,” *Rice Paper* (Summer 1974), 31, Folder: Midwest History, AACC Archives.

<sup>61</sup> Russell Endo, “Yellow Pages: A-A Studies,” *Rice Paper* (Summer 1974), 67, AACC Archives; “Resources” in Rice Paper Collective, *Rice Paper* 2, no. 2 (1976), 36-38, Folder: Midwest History, AACC Archives.

interpret federal guidelines on affirmative action. One specific guideline was calculating parity to determine which racial groups were proportionally underrepresented in the campus population compared to total state populations. This rule of proportional logic determined who would be considered an “underrepresented minority” and, therefore, eligible for affirmative action programming, such as targeted recruitment, admissions, scholarships, as well as counseling and tutoring services. The issue with statistical parity, as Sharon Lee argued, was that Midwestern campuses never considered Asian Americans as “underrepresented along measures of admission and retention.”<sup>62</sup> Asian Americans were seen as model minorities that were demographically “overrepresented” on campus and, therefore, did not need additional university support.<sup>63</sup> Asian Americans, in turn, felt “invisible” in discussions of race at their universities and colleges.<sup>64</sup>

Because of affirmative action, Asian Americans experienced a paradox in which they were subjected to a national and regional frame. The national frame subjected Midwestern Asian Americans to the widely held model minority stereotype. The regional frame subjected Asian Americans to the Black-White binary that dominated campus discussions of race. This double framing, then, minimized the argument to build AAS based on the demographic presence of Asian Americans at Midwestern campuses. Thus, advocates began to shift how they justified AAS on campus. They still wanted AAS to instill racial pride and to increase their sense of belonging on campus. Yet, because of the campus discourse on affirmative action, they widened their argument for AAS to broaden limited understandings of race.

Starting in 1973, graduate student Donna S. Tamanaha and the Asian Union mobilized to counter UW-Madison’s interpretation of Asian Americans under definitions of

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<sup>62</sup> S. Lee, *Unseen Unheard Minority*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Wu, “Overrepresentation,” 192.

<sup>64</sup> S. Lee, *Unseen Unheard Minority*, 32.

underrepresentation. The campus movement at UW-Madison illustrated how campus discussions of affirmative action began to shape perceptions of Asian Americans as model minorities.

Tamanaha and the Asian Union had contacted Chancellor H. Edwin Young to ask why Asian Americans were not included in UW-Madison's affirmative action programs. The Office of the Chancellor claimed that Asian Americans were not considered an "ethnic minority" because the Affirmative Action office had compared campus and local Asian American populations.<sup>65</sup> In 1974, Asian Americans comprised 0.5 percent of the total student body of 34,866. However, Asian Americans made up 0.7 percent in Dane County, where UW-Madison was located. Campus officials interpreted Asian Americans as an "overutilized" minority group because there were more Asian Americans at UW-Madison compared to those available in the local population. Asian Americans, then, were not considered an underutilized racial group under federal guidelines of affirmative action and, therefore, not eligible for UW-Madison's affirmative action programs and policies.<sup>66</sup>

Tamanaha and the Asian Union protested the university's interpretation by asking the local JACL and US congressperson Patsy T. Mink to intervene on their behalf. Mink, along with her congressional colleagues Wisconsin Senator Henry S. Ruess and Representative Robert W. Kastenmeier, contacted Chancellor Young and President John C. Weaver to persuade the university to reconsider Asian Americans' minority status. Both UW administrators ensured their congressional representatives that Asian Americans were, indeed, eligible for financial aid, tailored counseling, and undergraduate degree completion programs for minority students. However, administrators claimed that Asian Americans were not seen as a group who needed

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<sup>65</sup> Donna S. Tamanaha to Patsy Mink, February 10, 1974, Folder 10, Box 673, Mink Papers, University of Wisconsin-Madison (UWM) Archives, Madison, WI as cited in Wu, "Overrepresentation," 194.

<sup>66</sup> Wu, "Overrepresentation," 195.

“remedial assistance.”<sup>67</sup> The university contended that there was little economic or educational evidence that Asian Americans “have not suffered the same deprivations as many Blacks, Chicanos, and Native Americans.”<sup>68</sup> President Weaver acknowledged the Asian Union’s demands. Yet, the university determined that Asian Americans were not a “necessary or appropriate” racial group to target under affirmative since there was with little statistical evidence and limited funding.<sup>69</sup>

Tamanaha and the Asian Union, again, denounced the university’s decision to exclude them from the “underrepresented minority” category. They claimed that the university’s decision-making was based on one-dimensional stereotypes like the model minority. “The University’s analysis of racism is purely statistical, it doesn’t get at the real problem,” Jack Tchen, an Asian Union member, said.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, they were worried that the “overutilized” label would ignore the “real needs” of Asian American students.<sup>71</sup> The Asian Union members articulated several needs such as increased sense of belonging and access to minority-targeted recruitment, admissions, scholarships, financial aid, and counseling. They also demanded the teaching of “Asian studies,” to help them “make education more responsible to so-called minorities.”<sup>72</sup> The Asian Union’s argument for AAS was another step toward de-emphasizing the

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<sup>67</sup> Edwin Young to Patsy Mink, February 28, 1974, Folder 10, Box 673, Mink papers, UWM as cited in Wu, “Overrepresentation,” 197.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen H. Sumida and Gail M. Nomura, “University of Michigan,” in *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro (Ithaca: Cornell University Asian American Studies Program, 1992): 146.

<sup>69</sup> John C. Weaver to Robert W. Kastenmeier, March 18, 1974, Edwin Young Papers, Series 4/21/1, Chancellor Edwin Young, General Subject Files, Box 143, Folder Minority Students, General, UWM as cited in Wu, “Overrepresented,” 197.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Ellen Haskett, “Outreach for Asian Students,” *Daily Cardinal*, September 27, 1974, 1–2 as cited in Wu, “Overrepresented,” 197.

<sup>71</sup> Haskett, “Outreach for Asian Students,” 1 as cited in Wu, “Overrepresented,” 197.

<sup>72</sup> Patsy T. Mink to Edwin Young, February 25, 1974, Folder 10, Box 673, Mink Papers, UWM as cited in Wu, “Overrepresented,” 194.

critical mass argument. They asserted that an AAS program would address Asian Americans' diverse needs and to help the campus see them beyond a statistical typecasting.

Advocates at the University of Michigan and Ohio State University continued this shift away from the critical mass argument by justifying AAS to refute the model minority stereotype that had gained a foothold in campus discussions on race. Like UW-Madison, Michigan and Ohio State officials began to categorize Asian Americans as overrepresented on their campuses and thus, amplifying campus perceptions of the model minority stereotype. In a 1991 East of California report, Sumida and Nomura, who had moved from WSU to the University of Michigan in 1990, reported on how students felt excluded from affirmative action programs and discussions of minority programs, such as scholarships and admissions, because they were “adequately represented.”<sup>73</sup> In 1991, there were 2,395 Asian American students on campus, constituting 6.9 percent of the total 34,611 student body. They were the largest racial group on campus, after Black students at 6.6 percent, Latinx students at 2.9 percent, and Native American students at 0.4 percent. Felicisima C. Serafica and Barbara M. Newman reported that students at Ohio State, too, felt frustrated on how the university's use of parity categorically removed them from minority programming. According to students, the university administration had “excluded Asian/Pacific Americans from the Minority Scholarship Program because they were no longer, an under-represented group” because the proportion of Asian Americans in the student body was greater than their group's state population.<sup>74</sup> In 1990, Asian American students represented 2.77 percent of the total student population state's flagship university while Asian Americans only comprised of 0.8 percent of the state's population.

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<sup>73</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 145-46.

<sup>74</sup> Felicisima C. Serafica and Barbara M. Newman, “Ohio State University,” in *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro (Ithaca: Cornell University Asian American Studies Program, 1992), 51.

However, Michigan and Ohio State advocates claimed that administration inconsistently applied these affirmative action policies across different schools and ethnic groups. This inconsistent application not only caused confusion but underscored how administrators could change standards for who they would consider as an underrepresented minority based on the different situations and schools. Michigan's graduate school, for example, included Asian Americans in its Summer Research Opportunities Program, designed to boost minority student interest in academic research across the Big Ten. In contrast, AAS advocates were baffled that central administration did not "divulge data regarding numbers and percentages of students by race, ethnicity, and department unless the investigator has obtained access through the federal Freedom of Information Act."<sup>75</sup> This secrecy left students, faculty, and staff members to question the "assumptions and biases" of how central administration applied affirmative action policies across campus.<sup>76</sup> Students at Ohio State also believed that the "University's affirmative action policies and programs are not being uniformly applied to all ethnic minority groups."<sup>77</sup> Students perceived this inconsistency as an indication that the university did not adequately take into account the diversity in ethnic groups, socioeconomic status, and immigration histories within the Asian/Pacific American classification. Serafina and Newman reported that the administration's failure to see the heterogeneous diversity of Asian Americans at Ohio State, then, suggests that the administration views "Asian/Pacific Americans as a 'model' minority group."<sup>78</sup>

Students at Michigan and Ohio State desired to have an AAS program "to combat the model minority myth and get the University to acknowledge Asian American concern and

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<sup>75</sup> Sumida and Nomura, "University of Michigan," 143.

<sup>76</sup> Sumida and Nomura, "University of Michigan," 146.

<sup>77</sup> Serafica and Newman, "Ohio State University," 52.

<sup>78</sup> Serafica and Newman, "Ohio State University," 52.

issues.”<sup>79</sup> Particularly at Ohio State, students contended that the university’s curriculum did not reflect its commitment to affirmative action. Serafina and Newman reported that several multicultural courses were listed in the course bulletin yet, in the course descriptions, “the African American experience can be heavily emphasized while only cursory treatment is given to the experiences of other ethnic minority groups.”<sup>80</sup> This Black-White treatment of the curriculum suggests that “the University seems to equate minority concerns only with African American concerns with little attention paid to Asian American, Latino/Latina, and American Indian concerns.”<sup>81</sup> Serafina and Newman explained that AAS courses, particularly those integrated in the university’s general education course requirements, would be a way to expand this limited perception of race on campus. “Such a course would expose all students from all ethnic groups, majority as well as minority, to the Asian/Pacific Islander experience, create better understanding and hopefully, contribute toward improve race relations [on campus].”<sup>82</sup>

Advocates at UIUC attempted to build an AAS program to continue to expand this Black-White binary on campus. Starting in 1990, Clark Cunningham, a professor of anthropology, and Yuki Llewellyn, assistant dean of students and director of registered organizations, helped students to advocate for the program. Cunningham and Llewellyn reported that UIUC administration did not recognize Asian Americans as minority in terms of special services, educational opportunities, scholarship funding, and job opportunities.<sup>83</sup> According to Sharon Lee, administration did not consider Asian Americans under definitions of underrepresentation starting in 1968 when UIUC established a Special Educational Opportunity Program “to recruit

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<sup>79</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 146.

<sup>80</sup> Serafica and Newman, “Ohio State University,” 52.

<sup>81</sup> Serafica and Newman, “Ohio State University,” 49.

<sup>82</sup> Serafica and Newman, “Ohio State University,” 53.

<sup>83</sup> Yuki Llewellyn and Clark Cunningham, “University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,” in *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro (Ithaca: Cornell University Asian American Studies Program, 1992): 131.

more disadvantaged students, particularly Blacks, to campus.”<sup>84</sup> The program was open to all racial minorities; however, the university did not identify Asian Americans as a racial group to recruit because program goals focused on Black students. By the 1980s, UIUC administration further justified their interpretations of underrepresentation now using federal guidelines. Again, using parity, Asian Americans at UIUC were not considered underrepresented minorities because their campus proportions were larger than the state populations. In fall 1990, the Asian–Pacific Islander population was 2,552 or 9.7 percent of the total student population of 26,455, while the total Asian American population in Illinois was 2.5 percent, according to the 1990 US Census. Lee contends that this statistical rationale reinforced the stigma that, because of overrepresentation, Asian Americans did not need additional university support or resources.<sup>85</sup>

Students, according to Cunningham and Llewellyn, were concerned that campus perceived them to be a model minority because of their overrepresentation on campus. Cunningham and Llewellyn added that this perception has ignored that there were “Asian Americans who desperately need the kind of assistance given by the University to African American and Hispanic students.”<sup>86</sup> Cunningham, who had taught one of the first AAS courses, understood how meaningful culturally supportive resources would be for students. Just like students in the 1970s, Asian American students in 1990 wanted AAS to gain knowledge about the Asian American identity and culture. Yet, what had changed from the 1970s was that the university began using quantitative measures to justify and reiterate limited notions of race. In 1990, students insisted that AAS, in addition to instilling ethnic pride, was needed to combat this “lack of cultural awareness” on campus.<sup>87</sup> “There is a need for a curriculum in Asian American

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<sup>84</sup> Williamson, *Black Power on Campus*, 57.

<sup>85</sup> S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority*, 27–30, 56–59.

<sup>86</sup> Llewellyn and Cunningham, “University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,” 131.

<sup>87</sup> Llewellyn and Cunningham, “University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,” 131.

history/experience, not only for Asian/Asian American students, but for others as well,” Cunningham and Llewellyn argued. “Students feel that only by learning and understanding another culture can you begin to appreciate it and become sensitive to their issues and concerns.”<sup>88</sup>

Bolstered by growing student interest, Cunningham and Llewellyn developed a rudimentary AAS curriculum by gathering materials from faculty members, like Peter Kiang at University of Massachusetts Boston, who had researched, taught, or worked with Asian American students. In 1992, Cunningham offered the first AAS course since 1971 called, “Asian American Experiences” under the sociology/anthropology course designation. Some students who had taken Cunningham’s course considered it a pivotal part of their undergraduate experience and inspired them to write the proposal for an Asian American cultural center. Between 1992 and 1999, Cunningham built a critical mass of tenured faculty members who taught AAS courses and believed in creating a permanent program. Lee credits Cunningham and several tenured faculty members with leveraging administrators to consider an academic program. In 1996, the faculty formed an Asian American Studies Committee at the suggestion of Associate Provost David Liu and obtained two faculty positions in AAS within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. By 1997, George Yu, who was the director of the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, stepped in to chair the AAS Committee and worked to establish a program in 1999.<sup>89</sup>

Lee does not elaborate on how faculty members justified the need for an academic program to senior-level administrators and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. She does contend that students and faculty members argued for AAS to recenter race by challenging the

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<sup>88</sup> Llewellyn and Cunningham, “University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,” 131.

<sup>89</sup> S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority*, 100–105, 111–113.

Black-White discourse that had dominated issues of race since 1968 with the introduction of the minority programs. The campus movement for AAS critiqued “the university’s framing of minority issues along statistical representation.”<sup>90</sup> This interpretation continued to “idealize Asian Americans as model minorities” while imposing a Black-White binary of race that minimized the diverse needs, such as cultural and financial, of Asian American students.<sup>91</sup>

The movement at UIUC and at other Midwestern schools also illustrated how advocates began to expand the educational scope of AAS. Like the 1960s, advocates wanted AAS to explore their Asian American identities, especially in a racially isolating region. Yet, the introduction of affirmative action at their campuses had rendered Asian Americans as an “overrepresented” minority at their Midwestern campuses. “The demographic argument for establishing Asian American Studies—that the numbers of Asian Americans in the local or statewide population warrant the existence of programs—needs to be questioned,” Sumida and Nomura argued in their profile for the University of Michigan. Midwestern advocates needed to expand their justification for AAS to encompass “intellectual and pedagogical bases” to establish programs at their campuses.<sup>92</sup> The campus movements for AAS minimized critical mass while justifying AAS as an educational tool to educate the campus, not just Asian Americans, about the Asian American community and their holistic needs.

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<sup>90</sup> S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority*, 116.

<sup>91</sup> Augusto Espiritu, “Planting Roots: Asian American Studies in the Midwest,” *CUNY Forum* 2, no. 1 (2014): 17–22.

<sup>92</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 12.

## AAS for the Benefit of All Students

AAS advocates, along with many marginalized communities, experienced the “winter of civil rights” between the 1970s and the 1990s.<sup>93</sup> Starting in the early 1970s, American popular media covered the rise of anti-immigrant attitudes stemming from the influx of post-1965 immigrants and refugees, deteriorating US economic conditions, and increasing competition between American and Japanese corporations. News outlets captured images of American politicians and labor unions smashing Japanese-made cars, reigniting nineteenth-century fears of Asians as economic and social threats. This anti-Japanese fervor culminated with the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin, who was beaten to death by two White men who allegedly mistook the Chinese American engineer as a person of Japanese descent. Between the 1980s and 1990s, the Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush presidencies exacerbated American racial tensions by rolling back 1960s civil rights policies and stressing Black tropes like the “welfare queen,” violent crime offenders, or drug dealers.<sup>94</sup> At the apex of the 1980s admission controversies, Asian Americans across the US reported heightened resentment from White students who accused them as “damn curve raisers” on grade scales or “taking over” colleges and universities.<sup>95</sup> This conservative backlash against racial minorities exploded in 1992 with the beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles police and the destruction of the city’s Korea Town.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Glenn Omatsu, “The ‘Four Prisons and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s,’” in *Asian American Studies Now: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jean Yu-Wen Shen and Thomas Chen (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 309.

<sup>94</sup> Dawn Marie Dow, “Negotiating ‘The Welfare Queen’ and ‘The Strong Black Woman’: African American Middle-Class Mothers’ Work and Family Perspectives,” *Sociological Perspectives* 58, no.1 (2015): 39.

<sup>95</sup> Takagi, *The Retreat from Race*, 60, 61.

<sup>96</sup> Michael Liu, Kim Geron, and Tracy Lai, *The Snake Dance of Asian American Activism: Community, Vision, and Power* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 46–49, 123–24; Pei-Te Lien, *Making of Asian America Through Political Participation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 53–56; Omatsu, “The ‘Four Prisons,’” 307–309; Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 150.

The mounting racial tensions in America incited AAS advocates at UW-Madison, along with others at college campuses across the nation, to mobilize for racial justice. Called the “movement for multiculturalism,” they protested the rise of racial incidents that made them feel like campus was inhospitable for racial minorities.<sup>97</sup> They demanded administrators to implement programs and policies, such as creating a multicultural center, to improve access for students and faculty of color on campus. In the movement, one popular measure was requiring all undergraduate students to take at least one ethnic studies course as part of their general education. Since the early 1980s, several campuses across the US had instituted the requirement after years of heated and even divisive debates on including non-Western works into the university curriculum.<sup>98</sup>

I examine UW-Madison specifically in this section because it was one of the first programs to be created in the Midwest. Other Midwestern advocates looked to UW-Madison and its proposal to justify AAS at their campuses. Moreover, there are in-depth secondary resources, such as David Yamane’s book *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, that offer a broad perspective on how the movement for multiculturalism influenced ethnic studies at UW-Madison. The UW-Madison case highlights how AAS advocates collaborated with other communities of color to institute an ethnic studies requirement. This multiracial collaboration helped AAS advocates to widen AAS’s justification to fit the racial politics of the time. In the formal program proposal, AAS advocates UW-Madison minimized the critical mass argument and emphasized AAS’s educational contribution to the academy. This educational argument

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<sup>97</sup> David Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>98</sup> James A. Banks, “Multicultural Education: Historical Development, Dimensions, and Practice,” in *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, 1st ed., ed. James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 3–24.

suggested that AAS courses would benefit all students, not just Asian American students, to improve race relations on campus. Advocates broadened the focus of AAS because administrators like Chancellor Donna Shalala were attuned to the university's "lack of pluralism and ethnic diversity," according to a February 1988 report published by the Office of the Chancellor.<sup>99</sup>

In 1985, Peggy Choy organized the Pacific and Asian Women's Alliance (PAWA) at UW-Madison, because campus lacked an Asian American organization with an activist approach. Choy, then a staff member at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and now a professor of dance at UW-Madison, founded PAWA to increase Asian American political activism on campus and support community organizations that advocated for Black, Indigenous, and women's rights. She recruited graduate students Mimi Kim (sociology) and Wendy Ho (English) as well as community members Donna Chen (Wisconsin Women's Council) and Jan Miyasaki (program coordinator for nutritional sciences). One of their goals was to create an AAS program because the campus had "no Asian American consciousness at all."<sup>100</sup> In the first two years of PAWA, the women collaborated with several activist groups to advocate for the rights of women and people of color. This community network, in turn, helped PAWA find funding to host Asian American awareness events, such as a film festival, that promoted the possibility of an AAS program on campus.<sup>101</sup>

PAWA's advocacy in "the Fiji Incident" helped pave the way for AAS at UW-Madison. The Phi Gamma Delta fraternity (known on campus as the "Fijis") hosted a "Fiji island" party on

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<sup>99</sup> Quote in Office of the Chancellor for University of Wisconsin-Madison, "The Madison Plan," University of Wisconsin-Madison, "The Madison Plan," February 9, 1988, James Moy Papers, Box 1, Folder "Madison Plan 1988," University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives [hereafter UW-Madison Archives], Madison, WI; Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 26–46.

<sup>100</sup> Peggy Choy, interview by Lori K. Lopez, July 12, 2022, video and transcript, 56 mins, 48 secs, accessed on May 24, 2023 from <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/about/our-stories/>

<sup>101</sup> Choy, interview.

May 2, 1987, where they prominently displayed a 15-foot caricature of a black “native” with a bone through its nose.<sup>102</sup> The racial incident ignited already tense race relations that had been simmering since the beginning of the academic year. Members of the Black Student Union had claimed that “rampant” racism—both deliberate and unintentional—existed on campus.<sup>103</sup> PAWA joined Black and Chicanx Americans to protest the fraternity’s downplaying of the effigy by claiming the caricature was “Filipino” and not “Black.”<sup>104</sup> “We were outraged,” Choy remembered. “And at that point, it was the right time in a way for solidarity and collectivity to occur.”<sup>105</sup> The university suspended the fraternity; however, protestors felt frustrated with the “indifference of the administration to the needs of the minority students.”<sup>106</sup> PAWA joined several minority student organizations to form the Minority Coalition, which demanded the administration take measures to improve the conditions for the students of color on campus. The Minority Coalition helped write the Holley Committee Report, named after the chair Charles Holley, that outlined six measures to improve conditions for students of color on campus.<sup>107</sup>

An important recommendation was establishing an ethnic studies requirement in which all undergraduate students must take at least one ethnic studies course before graduation. UW-Madison’s Minority Coalition recommendation aligned with several universities and colleges across the nation who had established this ethnic studies requirement recently. In fall 1987, the UC Berkeley faculty senate had recently added an “American Cultures” course to the university’s list of graduation requirement, after six years of student activism and divisive debate

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<sup>102</sup> Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 30.

<sup>103</sup> Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 31.

<sup>104</sup> University of Wisconsin-Madison, “Asian American Studies: Our History,” accessed May 24, 2023 from <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/about/ourhistory/>

<sup>105</sup> Choy, interview.

<sup>106</sup> *Boricua! Baletin de Union Puertorriqueña* 1, no. 1 (July 1987) as cited in Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 34.

<sup>107</sup> Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 26–46.

on campus. The curricular trend stemmed from students, faculty, and administrators who wanted to defuse racial tensions and conflicts on campus. According to Philip Altbach, 250 college campuses reported over 200 racial clashes between White and non-White students between 1986 and 1988. White students and racial minorities often clashed over racist slurs, threats, caricatures, and property damage. Students of color believed that ethnic studies courses would reduce the amount of racism they encountered on campus. White students who supported this requirement wanted to be better prepared to work and live in a multicultural society. Liberal faculty members felt that universities and colleges must promote cultural diversity. Administrators hoped that the requirement would reduce the number of racial incidents on campus.<sup>108</sup>

Choy, Miyasaki, Ho, and Victor Jew, a history graduate student, actively contributed to researching and writing the ethnic studies requirement recommendation for the Holley Committee Report during the summer and fall of 1987. Choy, Miyasaki, and Jew credit their time with the Minority Coalition in shaping how they began to justify the AAS proposal in 1988. Campus discussions on the ethnic studies course requirement helped expand AAS to include education for all students, not just Asian Americans. AAS, in tandem with other ethnic studies programs, would fight campus racism by educating all students about harmful stereotypes, exposing them to the experiences of racial minorities, while increasing recruitment of minority faculty and students. Choy acknowledged that taking only three credits of ethnic studies was not enough to eradicate racism. However, she believed that such a requirement would help students at least understand how other people thought, felt, and lived. The final recommendation in the

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<sup>108</sup> Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 135; Philip G. Altbach, "The Racial Dilemma in American Higher Education," in *The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education*, eds. Philip G. Altbach and Kofi Lomotey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 7; Alan K. Colón, "Race Relations on Campus: An Administrative Perspective," in *The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education*, eds. Philip G. Altbach and Kofi Lomotey (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 69.

Holley Committee Report underscored her point: all courses would “reflect the minority experience and the minority point of view.”<sup>109</sup> In her 2023 oral history, Miyasaki recalls that the committee members all cared about instigating the ethnic studies requirement because it “advanced the need to respond to stereotypes and hate” on campus.<sup>110</sup>

The Holley Committee Report also helped open the possibility of creating an AAS program on campus by asking the university to commit more resources to strengthen ethnic studies programs on campus. According to the Minority Coalition, existing programs like Chicano and Native American Studies were “totally ignored by the university and thereby left shamefully underdeveloped.”<sup>111</sup> Unlike the Department of Afro-American Studies, which was founded in 1969, these ethnic studies programs lacked departmental status, full-time faculty lines, and offered no regular courses. Moreover, there were no programs in AAS or Puerto Rican Studies. PAWA did not get a lot of “intangibles,” (such as funding or resources) out of the Holley Committee Report, according to Miyasaki.<sup>112</sup> However, the Asian American community built a network of community groups who would later support AAS. “That’s the significance because that was what the entire Asian American Studies program was built on the fact that we came out with an ethnic studies requirement,” Miyasaki explained.<sup>113</sup>

According to Choy, Associate Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs Phillip Certain was open and receptive to the ethnic studies requirement. He held multiple public debates and listened to students’ concerns about the state of race relations and ethnic studies. With his help, the Office of the Chancellor published the Madison Plan in February 1988, which committed the

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<sup>109</sup> Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 39.

<sup>110</sup> Jan Miyasaki, interview by Lori K. Lopez, February 17, 2023, video and transcript, 1:26:28, accessed on May 24, 2023 from <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/about/our-stories/>

<sup>111</sup> Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 38–39.

<sup>112</sup> Miyasaki, interview.

<sup>113</sup> Miyasaki, interview; Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 38–39.

university to an ethnic studies course requirement for graduation. The College of Letters and Science faculty senate adopted the three-credit ethnic studies education requirement in April 1988, and the university followed suit in 1994. Vice-Chancellor Certain and the new Chancellor Donna Shalala (who had started at UW-Madison in December 1987) did not act immediately upon the Holley Committee Report's recommendation to create an AAS program. Starting in spring 1988, Choy and Ho wrote the proposal for an AAS program. Professor Jim Moy (Theater), and graduate students Peter Chen (Chemistry), Lon Kurashige (History), and Jew contributed to the proposal. PAWA allied with the Asian American Student Union (an undergraduate student organization), and submitted the proposal under the name of the Asian Coalition to Chancellor Shalala in November 1988.<sup>114</sup>

Miyasaki noted that administrators like Chancellor Shalala were receptive to the idea of a program because they “perceived our work as part of a larger movement” for multiracial equity.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, in the written proposal, the Asian Coalition reflected language in campus discussions for an ethnic studies requirement. Advocates argued for AAS for its educational value in the teaching of race. “Commensurate with the forthcoming ethnic studies requirement, Asian American Studies will not only introduce students on this campus to the Asian American experience, but will challenge them to think critically about the past and present impact of race, nationality, and cultural difference in American society.”<sup>116</sup>

Advocates did acknowledge the importance of AAS to represent Asian American students, the largest racial minority group on campus at 2.2 percent of the student enrollment.

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<sup>114</sup> Yamane, *Student Movements for Multiculturalism*, 37–44; University of Wisconsin-Madison, “Asian American Studies: Our History,” accessed May 24, 2023 from <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/about/ourhistory/>

<sup>115</sup> Miyasaki, interview.

<sup>116</sup> The Asian Coalition, “Proposal to Establish an Asian American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison,” James Moy Papers, Box 1, Folder, “Madison Plan: Asian Am Program,” UW-Madison Archives, 5.

“Asian American Studies will allow Asian American students to learn about and reclaim their histories and culture by having their experiences accurately reflected and represented in the curriculum.”<sup>117</sup> Advocates, however, minimized the critical mass argument. “Demographics, however, are neither the only nor the most important criterion by which to measure the significance of Asian Americans to American society,” the Asian Coalition stated.<sup>118</sup> Instead, they insisted that AAS would “significantly broaden” Black and White racial conceptions of American history and theories of race. “Our understanding of race and ethnicity in American history will remain incomplete at best, and perhaps flawed, if scholars leave unattended the study of Asians in American.”<sup>119</sup> Advocates cited examples of Asian Americans, such as Supreme Court cases of *Yick Wo vs. Hopkins* (1886) and of *Chi Bak Kan vs. United States* (1893), who had challenged Black and White notions of American birthright, immigration, and naturalization.

In addition to the proposal, Choy and Miyasaki credited the community network in helping institute AAS at UW-Madison. “So many people supported the birth of Asian American Studies,” Miyasaki said, recalling prominent scholars like Black Studies scholar Nellie McKay, who vouched for AAS to Chancellor Shalala. Student organizations like the Asian American Student Union collected signatures for a petition representing the demand for AAS courses. Senators for the Wisconsin Student Association, UW-Madison’s student government, unanimously passed a bill supporting the Asian Coalition’s proposal for AAS. Community support for the proposal came from the Wisconsin Organization for Asian Americans, the Association of Filipinos of Dane County, and the Association of Indians in America, and Japanese American veterans from Chicago. “No matter what people’s differences were, they all

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<sup>117</sup> The Asian Coalition, “Proposal to Establish AAS,” 5.

<sup>118</sup> The Asian Coalition, “Proposal to Establish AAS,” 2.

<sup>119</sup> The Asian Coalition, “Proposal to Establish AAS,” 5.

showed up to support Asian American Studies because they had an investment in it,” Miyasaki explained.<sup>120</sup>

Chancellor Shalala, Dean of the College of Letters and Sciences David Cronon, and Associate Vice-Chancellor Certain were receptive to the Asian Coalition’s AAS proposal. “It’s very exciting,” Certain said in a June 1989 *Capital Times* article. “The UW-Madison has a great potential for playing a significant role in the Midwest, and this program will complement very nicely other programs in departments such as Asian studies, history, political science, sociology, education, and literature.”<sup>121</sup> By June 1989, Chancellor Shalala authorized \$40,000 to start AAS and hire a full-time senior faculty member as program director. Three years later, UW-Madison hired Amy Ling, professor of English, as AAS’s first director.<sup>122</sup>

Advocates in the Midwest identified an emerging social problem, according to Rojas’s framework, in which they recognized their feelings of racial isolation at predominantly White campuses. In the early 1970s, they organized for AAS to counter their racial isolation. By the mid-1970s, they realized that the critical mass argument was not effective at their campuses because of the model minority stereotype, the Black-White binary, and policies on affirmative action and statistical parity. These racial narratives suggested that Asian Americans did not need additional university support. Midwestern advocates argued that Asian Americans just like other student groups on campus, have distinct academic, cultural, racial, and social needs. They shifted their justification for AAS to dispel campus perceptions of Asian Americans as model and

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<sup>120</sup> Sande Shamash, “WSA Reacts Asian American Studies Supported,” 1988 Dec. 2, *The Daily Cardinal*, Asian American Studies Department Subject File, UW-Madison Archives, Madison, WI.

<sup>121</sup> Jacob Stockinger, “Asian-US Studies get OK at UW,” 1989 June 12, *Capital Times*, Asian American Studies Department Subject File, UW-Madison Archives, Madison, WI.

<sup>122</sup> University of Wisconsin-Madison, “Asian American Studies: Our History,” accessed May 24, 2023 from <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/about/ourhistory/>

overrepresented minorities. By the late 1980s, the justification for AAS widened from empowering Asian Americans to one focused on educating all students about racial justice.

AAS advocates mobilizing at their Midwestern campuses demonstrated a turning point for the field. As Sumida and Nomura argued, Midwestern advocates began to question the “assumptions and models established in California.”<sup>123</sup> Specifically, they questioned the critical mass argument that suggested “that the numbers of Asian Americans in the local or statewide population” could “warrant the existence of programs.”<sup>124</sup> They began to expand the conversation in the field from one focused on demographics to one focused on the educational and intellectual contributions of AAS. Their questioning of the California model also led to larger conversations about how to create a Midwestern identity within the field. In the next chapter, I examine how Midwestern advocates responded to changes in the field and began to implement alternative models that best accounted for regional challenges yet brought innovative solutions to common issues in program building.

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<sup>123</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 12.

<sup>124</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 12.

### **Chapter Three: Identity Crisis, New Organizational Models, and the Rise of the Midwest Regional Center, 1990-2010**

“I want to encourage you to brainstorm with me, think big, think of what Asian American studies can be, the new locations where it should be found, the happenstance and exciting convergences of bodies, knowledge, and resources,” Kent Ono (Communications) said to the crowd of graduate students on March 4, 2006. Members of the Asian Pacific American Graduate Student Organization at University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC) had organized a conference to discuss the role of AAS at Midwestern universities and colleges. “We need to think of new conceptions of what Asian American studies is and can be,” Ono argued.<sup>1</sup> He explained that the field had changed significantly since the late 1980s with emerging intellectual trends and the changing demographics of the Asian American population.

One of the greatest intellectual needs, Ono elaborated, was “area studies within Asian American studies.”<sup>2</sup> The field needed to expand itself beyond the state lines of California and explore areas such as the American Southwest, Rocky Mountains, South, Midwest, Eastern Seaboard, as well as Canada and Latin America. He argued that knowledge production in the regional areas has occurred disparately. Scholars like Leslie Bow had taken the American South as a focus, and Ono challenged the graduate students (and scholars in the field) to expand AAS in the Midwest. “For those of us in the Midwest, we need to understand the role of Asian American studies in Midwest [*sic*] to document the lives of those living in [the] Midwest,” Ono stated.<sup>3</sup> He believed that the region and other areas had the potential to “redefine” the field around new hubs

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<sup>1</sup> Kent A. Ono, “New Locations: The Always Emerging—Never Fixed Center of Asian American Studies,” March 4, 2006, Speech given at Graduate Student Conference, Urbana, IL, Kent Ono personal collection, Salt Lake City, Utah, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ono, “New Locations,” 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ono, “New Locations,” 14–15.

of knowledge and teaching.<sup>4</sup> These new locations could open scholars to new theoretical frameworks, teaching materials, and service opportunities that could help the field remain relevant at the start of the twenty-first century.

Ono alluded to several intellectual and organizational issues that the field had debated since the late 1970s. The political and funding battles of the 1970s between new AAS programs and higher education organizations had forced scholars to confront the role of AAS. How could AAS survive long-term at universities and colleges while balancing its responsibilities to the broader Asian American community? The activists of the 1960s envisioned a radical approach to education in which the university expanded its curriculum to include ethnic studies; opened admission processes; gave the community control of the curriculum; and redirected university resources toward social justice. AAS scholars, however, became so preoccupied with survival that the field began to drift away from its original vision. According to Glenn Omatsu, the field was facing a “crisis of practice,” in which scholars either needed to reconnect to its original vision or to redefine the mission of the field toward the realities of academia.<sup>5</sup>

Amid this crisis of practice, advocates like Ono addressed questions of AAS’s mission and organization in the context of the Midwest. Program building in the Midwest followed Fabio Rojas’s model of institutionalization. Midwestern advocates mobilized around three social problems they faced while building programs starting in the late 1980s. First, they realized that their Midwestern campuses had different affirmative action policies regarding Asian Americans. The erratic interpretation of Asian Americans as underrepresented minorities had weakened the

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<sup>4</sup> Ono, “New Locations,” 12.

<sup>5</sup> Glenn Omatsu, “1994 Annual Selected Bibliography: Asian American Studies and the Crisis of Practice,” *Amerasia Journal* 20, no. 3 (1994), 121.

justification for AAS to represent the growing number of Asian Americans on campus.<sup>6</sup> Second, these distinct organizational politics and context had shaped the structure and outcomes of AAS program building. Finally, advocates recognized the need to form a regional network to help build programs and regionalize scholarship. When building programs, they debated and generated alternative models to organize AAS such as the comparative approach to race and ethnicity as well as the regional model, which takes into consideration the strengths and limitations of their individual campuses.<sup>7</sup>

In this chapter, I examine how Midwestern faculty and staff members strengthened program building at Big Ten universities and colleges from the establishment of the first programs in 1990 to the end of the Committee on Institutional Cooperation Asian American Studies Consortium (CIC-AASC) regional network in 2010. I argue that Asian Americans increased AAS's chances to institutionalize in the region by reframing it from a demographic to an intellectual project. With different campus interpretations of affirmative action, Midwestern advocates asked, "How do Asian Americanists research, teach, and build programs in a region where Asian Americans may not be a critical mass of the population?"<sup>8</sup> When justifying AAS at Midwestern campuses, advocates minimized the critical mass argument while emphasizing AAS's intellectual contributions to universities and colleges. They realized that institutional politics and campus characteristics, such as student demographics and research priorities, influenced how they built AAS at their Midwestern universities. Advocates debated and chose

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<sup>6</sup> Rocio Davis, John Park, Vickie Chou, and Richard Lim, "University of Illinois, Chicago," in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, "APA Studies Program," Asian Culture Center Archives (hereafter the ACC Archives), Bloomington, IN, 8.

<sup>7</sup> Peter N. Kiang, "New Wave: Developing Asian American Studies on the East Coast," in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1988), 47.

<sup>8</sup> Erika Lee, "Asian American Studies in the Midwest: New Questions, Approaches, and Communities," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009): 252.

organizational models that increased AAS's chances to institutionalize and be seen as a rigorous academic discipline. As they built programs that best fit their campuses, advocates formed the CIC-AASC to further strengthen program building and to reimagine AAS scholarship and teaching materials to reflect Midwestern Asian American history, experiences, and communities. As a result, faculty and staff members created a Midwest regional center, which is a hub of knowledge that decenters the field away from its California-centric teaching and scholarship. In their efforts to strengthen AAS in the Midwest, advocates may have contributed to the field's continued shift away from its core values toward acceptance in academia.

### **Identity Crisis**

Starting in the late 1980s, scholars in the field acknowledged that AAS had professionalized as an academic discipline. According to Kent Ono, there was a significant increase in the number of Asian American scholars, students, publications, and programs nationally. The field had educated two generations of scholars who had published on diverse topics and reached a wide academic audience. Professional associations in various disciplines had included an increasing number of panels on Asian American topics at their annual conferences. At least half a dozen academic presses had published book series on Asian Americans. In 1999, scholars founded *The Journal of Asian American Studies*, which became one of the field's top publication venues. The Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) had grown from a small number of attendees to hundreds of members attending and presenting on diverse topics at the annual meetings. AAS had scored a victory in terms of executive leadership with the first Asian American chancellors in the University of California (UC) system Chiang-lin Tien, a Chinese American mechanical engineer, who became the executive vice chancellor for UC Irvine and Henry Yang, also an engineer, who became chancellor UC Santa Barbara. Finally, the number of programs had grown

and some had achieved departmental status. Between 1990 and 1998, the number of AAS programs either listed as independent units or housed within an academic department like American Studies, had nearly doubled, from 19 to 37, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.<sup>9</sup> According to another 1996 survey, Gretchen M. Bataille, Miguel A. Carranza, and Laurie Lisa counted 41 AAS programs, five of which had reached department status or were part of an ethnic studies department.<sup>10</sup>

The professionalization of the field was a sign that AAS had matured from its “adolescence” during the 1960s social movements.<sup>11</sup> However, several scholars argued that professionalization meant that AAS was adopting the traditional values, practices, and standards of academia the 1960s activists had eschewed. The field was facing a crisis over “the definition of what Asian American studies is or should be.”<sup>12</sup> The issue, as Michael Omi explained, was the increasing disconnect between the academic and activist sides of AAS. He cited the “depoliticization” of AAS for this disconnect.<sup>13</sup> Depoliticization, also known as deradicalization, was when ethnic studies scholarship and curriculum were stripped of the political values that characterized AAS research of the 1960, according to Omi. William Wei expanded that the 1960s advocates at San Francisco State College (SFSC) aimed to revolutionize academia by bridging

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<sup>9</sup> Gretchen M. Bataille, Miguel A. Carranza, and Laurie Lisa, *Ethnic Studies in the United States: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996); Mary Crystal Cage, “More Colleges Add Classes on Asian-American History, Culture,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 31, 1999, accessed on January 12, 2021 from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/more-colleges-add-classes-on-asian-american-history-culture/>

<sup>10</sup> Cage, “More Colleges Add Classes”; Chan, *Asian America: An Interpretative History*, 181–185; Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 151, 176; Omatsu, “1994 Annual Selected Bibliography,” 119–210; Kent A. Ono, “Asian American Studies in its Second Phase,” *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass*, ed. Kent A. Ono (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 1–14.

<sup>11</sup> Chalsa Loo, “The ‘Middle-Aging’ of Asian American Studies,” in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Seattle: Washington State University Press, 1988), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties No More: The Contemporary Dilemmas of Asian American Studies,” in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. in Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 33.

<sup>13</sup> Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties,” 34.

AAS teaching and research to serve the Asian American community. AAS courses aimed to empower students by instilling ethnic pride and increasing political advocacy. Faculty members would apply their research to improve social problems in Asian American communities. Lane Ryo Hirabayashi and Marilyn Alquizola added that the 1960s activists at SFSC aimed for AAS programs to be organizationally autonomous. Faculty members, students, and community activists would have full control of their curriculum, hiring policies, and freedom from traditional academic criteria.<sup>14</sup>

The field began to move away from its “revolutionary vision that education should serve people” because of the process of institutionalization.<sup>15</sup> According to Erin Kimura-Walsh, institutionalization is the process of academic programs, like AAS, becoming permanent parts of the university. She argued that ethnic studies, including AAS, became embedded into the university by acquiring measures of organizational stability. These measures included the length of time in which ethnic studies had been established at the university; the presence of faculty who have been trained in ethnic studies; and the degree to which ethnic studies had been integrated into the larger university curriculum.<sup>16</sup>

Omi argued that institutionalization was necessary for AAS programs to survive the 1970s, a decade marred by financial retrenchment and political infighting. Universities and colleges became more fiscally conservative, forcing academic programs to compete for resources while justifying for their existence. Within AAS, scholars and practitioners fought about the best ways to survive at their universities. Some proposed creating a major to serve a selected group of

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<sup>14</sup> William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993): 141-144.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Kiang, “Asian American Studies: Moving into the Third Decade,” *Gidra: 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, 1990, 43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.29566116>

<sup>16</sup> Erin Fukiko Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values of Ethnic Studies and Academe: Exploring Efforts to Advance the Organizational Stability of American Indian and Asian American Studies,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2009): 4.

committed students and teach them about the issues and needs of the Asian American community. Others proposed to jump on the multicultural curricular trend and offer AAS courses as part of the general education requirement. AAS would provide all students, not just Asian Americans, a comprehensive overview of Asian American experience under the concept of American pluralism.<sup>17</sup>

In the second decade of AAS's existence, four studies confirmed that the more AAS institutionalized at their universities, the more AAS became like mainstream academic disciplines. First, Lane Ryo Hirabayashi and Marilyn C. Alquizola conducted a case study of SFSC's AAS program, which was situated within the only autonomous School of Ethnic Studies in the US. They found that daily bureaucratic work in academia had "systematically eroded" AAS's organizational autonomy.<sup>18</sup> Faculty members spent more time teaching large AAS survey courses that fulfilled the general education requirement and less time teaching more focused AAS courses that addressed the issues and needs of the Asian American community. Administrators became "full-time bureaucrats" who spent a significant amount of their time dealing with program management and politics.<sup>19</sup> "This institutionalization, in turn, produced a faculty that became like other university faculties who believe the contributions of community-based and student critics were usually well-intentioned but fundamentally unpragmatic or misinformed," Hirabayashi and Alquizola contended.<sup>20</sup> The AAS program at SFSC, then, had become "academically colonized."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lane Ryo Hirabayashi and Marilyn C. Alquizola, "Asian American Studies: Re-Evaluating for the 1990s," in Karin Aguilar-San Juan, ed., *The State of Asian America: Activism and Resistance in the 1990s* (Boston: South End Press, 1994): 351-364; Omi, "It Just Ain't the Sixties No More," 33.

<sup>18</sup> Hirabayashi and Alquizola, "Asian American Studies," 352.

<sup>19</sup> Hirabayashi and Alquizola, "Asian American Studies," 359.

<sup>20</sup> Hirabayashi and Alquizola, "Asian American Studies," 359.

<sup>21</sup> Hirabayashi and Alquizola, "Asian American Studies," 352.

The second study was Russell Endo and William Wei's qualitative survey in which they interviewed over 50 faculty, staff, and student leaders associated with 20 AAS programs mostly located on the West Coast. Endo and Wei evaluated changes in course enrollment, course content, and community involvement. Their interviewees confirmed that most existing AAS programs had chosen to pursue the general education requirements path and, as a result, gained a greater degree of institutionalization at their campuses. Most AAS programs had achieved greater institutionalization by accumulating a core group of permanent faculty members, setting standard curricula, offering an undergraduate minor or major in AAS, and integrating AAS courses into general education requirements. With greater institutionalization, most AAS programs had gained more visibility, credibility, and intellectual legitimacy at their respective campuses. They also had increased access to resources and course enrollments.<sup>22</sup>

The third study was Chalsa Loo's examination of the three common models of AAS: the interdisciplinary program, the department, and the "one-person" program.<sup>23</sup> She argued that a negative consequence of institutionalization was that AAS programs were more resistant to change and innovation. She observed that program directors and faculty members had lost the passion, vitality, and creativity of the 1960s because they remained preoccupied with academic survival and intellectual legitimacy. AAS faculty members in ethnic studies departments may have had more autonomy over its budget, faculty appointments, and tenure promotion standards. However, AAS faculty members had become more "self-absorbed" in protecting the department

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<sup>22</sup> Russell Endo, "Future Priorities for Asian American Studies Programs," paper presented at the East Coast Asian Scholars Conference, October 24-26, 1986, Ithaca, NY, 6-7, ERIC Database; Russell Endo and William Wei, "On the Development of Asian American Studies Programs," in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman: Washington State University Press; 1988), 5-15; Hirabayashi and Alquizola, "Asian American Studies," 351-364.

<sup>23</sup> Loo, "The 'Middle-Aging' of AAS," 18.

from outsiders and publishing theoretical rather than community-oriented research.<sup>24</sup> AAS advocates directing interdisciplinary programs, the most common model, struggled with lack of control because their programs relied on traditional departments for joint appointments, course offerings, and tenure promotion standards. This “structural weakness” often left program directors with little control over faculty resources, a “haphazard” sampling of AAS courses, and an inability to build a coherent and intellectually challenging program.<sup>25</sup> A lone faculty member directing a “one-person” AAS program might experience powerlessness because of minimal staff, resources, and political power to effect changes or build a program.<sup>26</sup>

Laird Harrison added a fourth model, which is the research center. This model aimed to produce sound and quality scholarship for the field, yet still lacked autonomy. University of California Los Angeles’ (UCLA) Asian American Studies Center, which was the benchmark of this model, aimed to be the definitive source for AAS research, collecting an archive of 2500 books, 3500 pamphlets, newsletters, and articles, as well as 25 AAS periodicals in 1988. UCLA’s Center, however, lacked autonomy because it had no independent faculty. Instead, it depended on other departments to appoint and promote faculty members, a power struggle that resulted in political scientist Don Nakanishi’s three-year tenure battle. Nakanishi was denied tenure in 1987 because his research on Asian voter registration, purportedly, was outside the traditional research in education.<sup>27</sup>

Endo and Wei articulated several issues advocates had expressed in their interviews about the future direction of AAS. One concern was redesigning or adding new courses to better

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<sup>24</sup> Hirabayashi and Alquizola, “Asian American Studies,” 360.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Monaghan, “A New Momentum in Asian-American Studies,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 2, 1999, accessed on February 28, 2018 from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-New-Momentu-in/1667>

<sup>26</sup> Loo, “The ‘Middle-Aging,’” 21.

<sup>27</sup> Larry Gordon, “Tempest Over Tenure at UCLA: Professor’s Fight for Permanent Position Raises Racial Issue,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 20, 1988, D1; Laird Harrison, “Ethnic Studies on the Rise, Part II: Asian American Studies Reaches a Cross Roads,” *Asian Week*, May 22, 1987, 12.

accommodate the needs and interests of new ethnic Asian groups, such as Southeast Asians and South Indians, who had immigrated because of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act and US involvement in the Southeast Asian wars of the 1960s. AAS courses needed to adapt to this changing ethnic make-up because some Asian immigrants had limited English language skills and had difficulty adjusting to American cultural norms.<sup>28</sup>

The second concern was AAS advocates felt they worked in isolation from each other. According to Endo and Wei, program directors had “spent an inordinate amount of time and energy fighting against a wide variety of administrative constraints and cutbacks.”<sup>29</sup> As a result, program directors reported that they struggled to expand program visibility that would increase course enrollment and access to organizational sources of power and funding. They had little time to create mechanisms of program evaluation, like student input and community outreach, to improve courses, programming, and requirements for undergraduate minors. They spent little to no time exchanging programmatic ideas or solutions to common problems with their counterparts at other campuses. Individual programs, particularly very small units, had little or no access to resources or support on program administration, course and curriculum development, research, and administrative skills training. Endo and Wei recommended that the AAAS, the professional organization of the field, should create regional organizational networks to reduce programmatic isolation and share ideas on program management, course development, and research collaborations.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Endo and Wei reported that AAS programs had minimized or severed their relationships with community groups over the past two decades. According to Hirabayashi and

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<sup>28</sup> Endo and Wei, “Development of AAS Programs,” 11.

<sup>29</sup> Endo and Wei, “Development of AAS Programs,” 8.

<sup>30</sup> Endo and Wei, “Development of AAS Programs,” 9–10; Loo, “The ‘Middle-Aging,’” 16-23.

Alquizola, activists in the 1960s had envisioned that AAS would sponsor community organizations, conduct community classes and programs, or conduct research for the betterment of Asian American communities. This community element fought against “elitist” notions of knowledge for personal aggrandizement while holding AAS programs accountable for social change.<sup>31</sup> This decline in community involvement meant that program directors and faculty members had become insular, according to Loo. They focused more on legitimatizing AAS at universities and colleges through tenure promotion and publications and less on effecting social change in Asian American communities.<sup>32</sup>

These individual-level struggles and the community-academic split culminated in a field-wide identity crisis. “After 20 years, [AAS programs] have yet to formulate a clear and common mission,” Harrison declared in a 1987 *Asian Week* article.<sup>33</sup> Scholars challenged the field to generate new ways to organize programs, conduct research, and teach courses. These new ideas had the potential to revitalize the field either to recommit to the original vision or to reinterpret the founding core values to meet the contemporary needs of the university and the Asian American population.<sup>34</sup> Midwestern advocates stepped up to this challenge by jumpstarting a new wave of program building beginning in the third decade of its existence. They justified AAS based on the intellectual contributions, organized programs based on local context, generated Midwestern-focused scholarship, and formed a Midwestern regional network. Through this intellectual activity, advocates began to reimagine the field around a Midwest regional center.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Shirley Hune, “Opening of the American Mind: The Role of Asian American Studies,” in *The Asian American Educational Experience*, eds. Don T. Nakanishi and Tina Yamano Nishida, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 325.

<sup>32</sup> Hirabayashi and Alquizola, “Re-evaluating for the 1990s,” 356-57; Loo, “The ‘Middle-Aging,’” 16-23; Chalsa Loo and Don Mar, “Research and Asian Americans: Social Change or Empty Prize?” *Amerasia* 12, no. 2 (1985-1986): 85-93; Wei, *The Asian American Movement*, 135-141.

<sup>33</sup> Harrison, “Ethnic Studies on the Rise, Part II,” 12.

<sup>34</sup> Hirabayashi and Alquizola, “Asian American Studies,” 360.

<sup>35</sup> Hu-DeHart, “Future of Ethnic Studies,” 54; Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties,” 35;

## Strengthening AAS in the Midwest

The state of the field remained at the forefront of discussion as Midwestern advocates gathered at UIUC for the CIC-AASC meeting in November 2000.

“The idea for the meeting derived from the rapid development and growth of the field in the Midwest during the last decade,” George Yu wrote in introductory letter of the meeting proceedings.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the rise of AAS in the Midwest was rapid. UW-Madison and Michigan formed in 1990 and 1991, respectively. Ohio State University had established a minor in 1997 within a comparative ethnic studies program. Most recently, Northwestern and UIUC had established AAS programs in 1999 and 2000, respectively. Faculty and staff members at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB), University of Minnesota Twin Cities, Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, University of Illinois Chicago, and University of Chicago were mobilizing to establish AAS in 2000. “Much of the development has proceeded independently and separately, according to the individual needs of each campus,” Yu wrote. “However, this does not rule out the sharing of experiences and issues. We can learn from each other’s successes and mistakes.”<sup>37</sup>

At the meeting, representatives shared experiences of how they built their programs, challenges, and potential opportunities to strengthen AAS in the Midwest. Advocates noticed that they faced similar challenges: Navigating campus perceptions that AAS was not a serious discipline; difficulty hiring senior-level AAS scholars, who could guide nascent programs and act as program director; heavy administrative duties for junior faculty members; and traversing

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<sup>36</sup> George T. Yu, “Welcome Letter,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Josephine Lee, “Bridging the Big Twelve: The Committee on Institutional Cooperation Asian American Studies Consortium,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009): 276.

bureaucracy to create certificate, minor, or degree offerings. “These challenges are not unique to CIC universities or to schools located in the Midwest,” Josephine Lee (English) stated in a 2009 article in the *Journal of Asian American Studies* special issue on the Midwest. “Rather, they are familiar to many who are trying to grow Asian American studies programs with limited resources.”<sup>38</sup>

When CIC-AASC representatives conveyed their campus experiences, they began to articulate what made AAS in the Midwest distinct compared to other regions. According to Erika Lee, it was “the unique state, local, and university politics [that] have resulted in different processes of program building in the Midwest.”<sup>39</sup> Affirmative action was one of the biggest challenges representatives discussed at the CIC-AASC 2000 meeting. Advocates realized that Midwestern universities had different interpretations of statistical parity, which determined which campus populations were categorized as underrepresented, by comparing the proportions of the campus population with the local population.<sup>40</sup> For example, in the 2001 report on the CIC-AASC, six of the eleven member universities reported that campus officials did not consider Asian Americans underrepresented minorities. University of Illinois Chicago had the largest proportion of Asian Americans at 23 percent of the student body, followed by UIUC at 13.2 percent, Northwestern at 13 percent, Michigan at 11 percent, and IUB at 3.2 percent.<sup>41</sup> University of Chicago did not report a percentage but claimed Asian Americans were not considered underrepresented. Two schools categorized Asian Americans as underrepresented. Purdue

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<sup>38</sup> Yu, “Welcome Letter,” 1.

<sup>39</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 250.

<sup>40</sup> Davis, Park, Chou, and Lim, “University of Illinois, Chicago,” 8.

<sup>41</sup> IUB did not report the percentage of Asian Americans compared to the total student body, so I calculated the percentage of the Asian American student population using student enrollment data by race in the 2000–2001 *IU Factbook*. Office of the Registrar, “Total Student Headcount by Campus, Ethnic Group, and Sex First Semester, 2000–01,” *Indiana University Factbook*, December 2000, Reference Files, Folder, “Enrollment: 2000,” 5, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, IN.

University reported that the campus officials in their Diversity Resource Office considered Asian Americans, who comprised of 2.9 percent of the total student body, as a minority population.<sup>42</sup> According to the Office of the Chancellor, UW-Madison considered Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders to be “traditionally under-represented,” according to a February 1988 report published by the Office of the Chancellor.<sup>43</sup> The inconsistent interpretation of statistical parity suggested how AAS in the Midwest was, according to Lee, “very much rooted in specific local and institutional contexts.”<sup>44</sup>

From the proceeding, the CIC-AASC representatives realized two ideas that could potentially strengthen program building at their universities and in the region. First, Midwestern advocates could not rely on the critical mass argument to justify AAS on their campuses. They needed to pivot and justify AAS based on its intellectual merits to universities and colleges. Ji-Yeon Yuh, director of AAS at Northwestern University, suggested that the 1995 hunger strike at the university was a time when student activists were unable to “rely on demographic” arguments to establish AAS.<sup>45</sup> Student activists and administrators disagreed on how to organize AAS at Northwestern. Student activists, who went on an eighteen-day hunger strike, demanded an independent program to represent the growing number of Asian Americans on campus and in the US. “At Northwestern University, the number had grown from 12% in the 1991–1992

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<sup>42</sup> Susan Muchshima Moynihan and Rebecca L. Wong, “Purdue University,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Office of the Chancellor, “The Madison Plan,” February 9, 1988, Box 1, Folder, “Madison Plan 1988,” James Moy Papers, University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, WI, 8.

<sup>44</sup> Quote in E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 251; Edward Ou De Almeida, “University of Chicago,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 5–6.

<sup>45</sup> Ji-Yeon Yuh to Erika Lee, email correspondence, January 22, 2009 as cited in E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 254.

academic year to 18% in the 1994–1995 academic year. There are more Asians on this campus than all the other minorities on campus combined,” they had argued in their 200-page proposal. They added that AAS courses were necessary to teach graduates about Asian American cultures and issues on campus and in the workforce. “With the increasing numbers [*sic*] of Asian Americans in the public and private sector, graduates will need this knowledge to compete for jobs. Many institutions across the country have met this challenge of diversity by instituting Asian American Studies programs,” they contended.<sup>46</sup> In an April 13, 1995 *Chicago Tribune* article, student advocates further claimed that “the lack of an Asian-American studies program discriminates because Northwestern offers programs in women’s, Jewish, and African American studies.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Asian Americans deserved a stand-alone program to rectify this exclusion.

Campus officials acknowledged students’ demand for AAS but wanted to integrate courses into existing structures and curricular offerings. “We’ve never rejected the idea of changes in the curriculum to reflect the Asian American experience,” said Vice President of University Relations Kenneth Wildes. “But there’s a proper way to consider change in the curriculum.”<sup>48</sup> According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the university had added courses in Korean language instruction and a pilot course on the history of Asian Americans since 1850. The administration had planned to ask faculty members in the College of Arts and Letters to develop more AAS courses and to integrate them into departmental offerings. In a February 3, 1995 article in *The Daily Northwestern*, university President Henry Bienan expressed his concerns about the cost and demand to sustain an independent program with two joint tenure-track faculty

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<sup>46</sup> Asian American Advisory Board [AAAB], “Proposal to Establish an Asian American Studies Program at Northwestern University,” Box 1, Folder 2, “Founding Documents 1, 1993-1999,” Series 11/3/301 Records of the Asian American Studies Program, 1993-2012, Northwestern University Archives [hereafter NU Archives], Evanston, IL, 2.

<sup>47</sup> Melita Marie Garza, “Asian-Americans Rally,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 13, 1995, 2.

<sup>48</sup> Garza, “Asian-Americans Rally,” 3.

appointments, staffing, and a full-time director. “The study of ethnicity is extremely viable and very interesting,” Bienen said in a May 3, 1995 article in *The Daily Northwestern*. “I don’t know if it’s wise, though, to create a lot of hyphenated studies.” Bienen added that he would be willing to create interdisciplinary programs that would combine classes in different departments into one program of studies. “I don’t think it strengthens programs to hive them off,” he explained.<sup>49</sup>

Students, however, disagreed with this structure because it would allow the university to remove AAS courses due to lack of interest. “These classes have no permanence and can be eliminated from the curriculum in a year,” student activists argued in a May 20, 1995 press release. “After all of our efforts, this is what AAAB is still fighting for: permanence and institutionalization. We will not stop until we are assured that Asian American Studies is something that becomes a permanent part of Northwestern’s undergraduate curriculum,” they said, adding that they demanded the university commit to stable funding, permanent tenure-track hires, and a full-time director.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, students achieved their goal for an independent program as the university hired Yuh to be the first director of AAS four years later. Analysis of how the university created an independent program rather than an integrated one needs in-depth archival work and available for future research.

Yuh reflected on the progression of AAS at Northwestern and argued that the Northwestern strike was an opportunity for the field to reimagine itself beyond critical mass. “It should not matter whether there are zero Asian Americans or tens of thousands of Asian Americans in the region or enrolled at the school. Every institution should offer Asian American

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<sup>49</sup> Meghan Hoyer, “Bienen Addresses AAAB Proposal,” *The Daily Northwestern*, May 3, 1995, copy in Box 1, Folder 1, “Hungry: A Guide to the AAAB 1995 Hunger Strike, 1995,” Series 11/3/301 Records of the Asian American Studies Program, 1993-2012, NU Archives, 64.

<sup>50</sup> Press Release from the Asian American Advisory Board, May 20, 1995, Box 1, Folder 2, “Founding Documents 1, 1993-1999,” Series 11/3/301 Records of the Asian American Studies Program, 1993-2012, NU Archives, 1.

Studies because of its intellectual importance,” Yuh contended. “How we articulate that importance is key to the future growth and direction of the field.”<sup>51</sup>

Yuh joined the other Midwestern advocates who posed about the future of AAS in the Midwest, “How do we research, teach, and build programs in a region where Asian Americans may not be a critical mass of the population?”<sup>52</sup> At the 2000 CIC-AASC meeting, Midwestern advocates agreed that, moving forward, they needed to minimize the demographic argument while emphasizing these intellectual justifications for AAS in the Midwest. Starting at that meeting, Midwestern advocates began to articulate AAS as a necessary research function to their universities and colleges. Erika Lee argued that the University of Minnesota’s proposal for AAS was successful because “it provided an intellectual rationale that spoke both to the viability of the field and the University of Minnesota resources and demographics.”<sup>53</sup> In the University of Minnesota’s 2003 proposal, advocates discussed how AAS research would be central to contemporary topics of empire, citizenship, immigration, and race. AAS would further foster creative activity among the social sciences and humanities to interrogate the social construction of race in the American and global political economy. Finally, AAS would elevate the University of Minnesota nationally and internationally by creating a hub to showcase faculty expertise and distinct Asian ethnic communities, such as the Hmong refugee resettlement, which provided Minnesota with the second largest Hmong population in the US.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ji-Yeon Yuh to Erika Lee, email correspondence, January 22, 2009 as cited in E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 254.

<sup>52</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 252.

<sup>53</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 255.

<sup>54</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 255.

## Organizing AAS in the Midwest

The second idea that emerged from the CIC-AASC 2000 meeting was organizing AAS programs in the Midwest based on distinct campus characteristics and local demographics. With a pulse on field-wide debates, Midwestern advocates understood that obtaining departmental status was ideal for increasing AAS's autonomy, control, and intellectual legitimacy. However, this model was not feasible because of institutional politics, operating budget, access to resources, and organizational structure. Midwestern advocates decided it was better to establish AAS than to not have a program at all. "In my mind the most pressing need is to get a program up and running," said Ralph Rodriguez (English) from Pennsylvania State University.<sup>55</sup> He further explained the difficulty in finding funding and hiring faculty in various humanities departments. Thus, when establishing programs, Midwestern advocates then organized AAS based on what was best for their campuses. Some Midwestern advocates integrated AAS into existing departments such as American cultures. Others built programs as stand-alone, interdisciplinary units with a specialized research focus.

Starting in the late 1980s, scholars in the field debated how to combat AAS's marginalization at universities and colleges while maintaining its 1960s original vision to bridge the activist and academic sides of the field. A group of scholars proposed that, ideally, AAS should merge with other ethnic studies units to become a department to signify its standing as an independent and serious academic discipline. Becoming a part of an ethnic studies department would also help AAS to increase its autonomy, self-governance, and intellectual legitimacy. Another group of scholars pushed for AAS to remain a stand-alone program, separate from other

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<sup>55</sup> Ralph E. Rodriguez, "Pennsylvania State University," in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting* eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies, 2001), 27. Copy available in Box AAST, Folder, "APA Studies Program," ACC Archives.

ethnic studies units. They proposed a “regional model” that formed AAS programs based on the particular strengths and limitations of each campus.<sup>56</sup> This model also employed strategies to incorporate AAS into “mainstream” aspects of university life—curricula, research, and service.<sup>57</sup>

The movement for multiculturalism encouraged scholars to recast AAS through a wider lens, comparing the experiences of Asian Americans with those of other racial groups and the Asian diaspora. They argued that AAS could not stand alone as an independent discipline because it lacked a unifying body of theories and methodology. Moreover, AAS remained marginalized in academia because of its multidisciplinary nature, drawing scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds such as history, sociology, law, and others. S. Frank Miyamoto believed that, ideally, AAS should “upgrad[e] to departmental status” by combining with African American, Latinx, Native American studies programs.<sup>58</sup> As part of an ethnic studies department, AAS would have control over hiring tenure-track faculty, establish tenure promotion standards, and set the curriculum with little interference from mainstream disciplines. If departmental status was not available, AAS could merge with others to be a comparative, interdisciplinary program focused on race and ethnicity. Standing with other ethnic studies units, AAS would transcend campus perceptions of a field with “second-rate scholars” that focused solely on Asian Americans research.<sup>59</sup> AAS scholarship would be enriched through a comparative approach of

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<sup>56</sup> Kiang, “New Wave,” 47.

<sup>57</sup> Lee C. Lee & Gary Y. Okihiro, “Cornell University,” in *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies Cornell Symposium on Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro (Ithaca: Cornell University Asian American Studies Program, 1992), 23.

<sup>58</sup> S. Frank Miyamoto, “Is Asian American Studies a Discipline?” in *Frontiers of Asian American Studies: Writing, Research, and Commentary*, eds. Gail M. Nomura, Russell Endo, Stephen H. Sumida, and Russell C. Leong (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989), 287.

<sup>59</sup> John M. Liu, “Asian American Studies and the Disciplining of Ethnic Studies,” in *Frontiers of Asian American Studies: Writing, Research, and Commentary*, eds. Gail M. Nomura, Russell Endo, Stephen H. Sumida, and Russell C. Leong (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1989), 272.

race by using “divergent experiences” to collectively tackle pervasive issues of institutional racism.<sup>60</sup>

Some Midwestern advocates have argued that seeking departmental status was not possible for many campuses because of the time and labor required as well as distinct campus structure and politics. Amy Ling, the first program director at University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), believed in the comparative ethnic studies approach to construct interrelated ideas of community, literature, arts, politics, and public policy. However, she described how little time she had to institutionalize a program let alone upgrade AAS to become a department. When Ling first arrived in fall 1991, she wanted to bring “attention to Asian American Studies in the Midwest,” and envisioned UW-Madison as a national hub for AAS, according to Michael Thornton who was a member of the advisory committee for AAS.<sup>61</sup> Despite her vision, the AAS program was “not institutionalized” in the early 1990s, according to Thornton.<sup>62</sup> In a 1995 book chapter in *ReViewing Asian America: Locating Diversity*, Ling suggested that AAS was a one-woman interdisciplinary program. “With only one person officially in the Asian American Studies Program at present, I cannot hope to cover all bases,” she wrote.<sup>63</sup> She had taught most of the AAS courses, attempted to recruit students to take courses, organized academic events to create community, and wrestled to justify AAS’s existence among school-wide budget cuts in 1992.

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<sup>60</sup> Quote in Liu, “Disciplining of Ethnic Studies,” 276; Miyamoto, “Is Asian American Studies a Discipline?” 284–290; Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties,” 35.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Thornton, interview by Lori Lopez, November 4, 2022, video and transcript, 60 mins, 01 sec., accessed on May 23, 2023 from <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/about/our-stories/>

<sup>62</sup> Thornton, interview.

<sup>63</sup> Amy Ling, “The State of Asian American Studies in Wisconsin,” in *ReViewing Asian America: Locating Diversity*, eds. Wendy L. Ng, Soo-Young Chin, James S. Moy, and Gary Y. Okihiro (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1995), 205.

By her fourth year as the program director, Ling realized that campus contexts and politics made it difficult for her to even institutionalize AAS. “I have learned the hard way, administrative support without faculty support will not bring about desired results,” Ling contended. Senior-level administrators like Chancellor Donna Shalala and The Dean of the College of Arts and Letters had funded AAS and given her two joint faculty appointments. However, mainstream departments had rejected her joint faculty picks annually for “vague explanations” ranging from not being a good fit for the unit to the candidates’ scholarship not being high on the priority list.<sup>64</sup> Administrators may “rubber stamp” faculty hires but Ling observed that mainstream departments controlled the hiring, retention, and promotion of ethnic studies scholars. By 1995, she still had not filled the two joint appointments and concluded that “the success of any Ethnic Studies program then boils down to the prevailing institutional attitude of administrators *and* faculty.”<sup>65</sup> In 1999, Ling passed away from cancer and Thornton took over as director of the program.

University of Michigan and Ohio State University took a comparative ethnic studies approach to structuring AAS, although they were not able to develop a department. At the University of Michigan, Stephen H. Sumida (English) and Gail M. Nomura (History) pushed to integrate the new Asian/Pacific American Studies program (APASt) into the Program for American Culture because it was where their faculty lines were housed. They understood that a departmental model would be desirable but would “take a much longer campaign by many more people with much more power than at present,” Sumida argued in the 1991 East of California report.<sup>66</sup> Sumida and Nomura cited additional organizational advantages to integrating APASt

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<sup>64</sup> Ling, “AAS in Wisconsin,” 196.

<sup>65</sup> Ling, “AAS in Wisconsin,” 197–198

<sup>66</sup> Stephen H. Sumida and Gail M. Nomura, “University of Michigan,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University

with American Culture. Structurally, American Culture was a multidisciplinary program drawing from faculty from many departments. This arrangement would ensure faculty members from many disciplines would teach APASt courses regularly and reduce the teaching burden on the two APASt specialists. The multidisciplinary structure would also connect APASt with other faculty members focused on ethnic studies. This model would further prevent APASt faculty members from intellectual isolation, particularly with the university being a “decentralized” organization.<sup>67</sup> For these reasons, housing APASt in American Culture would ensure its organizational longevity.

At Ohio State, Judy Wu (History) and Steve Yao (English) had established AAS within a comparative ethnic studies program in 1997. AAS was housed under the Division of Comparative Studies, and it focused on a “comparative aspect with other Ethnic Studies programs” to innovate the field of AAS.<sup>68</sup> Yu and Yao worked with other ethnic studies faculty members to hire four tenure-track faculty (including an Asian American specialist in literature), organize campus-wide diversity programming, and develop a major in Comparative Ethnic and American Studies. “This tactic of coalition has been effective,” Yu and Yao wrote, adding that the comparative approach has helped relieved some of the administrative burden in establishing a stand-alone program.<sup>69</sup>

Peter Kiang at University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) and Lee C. Lee at Cornell University considered the political and intellectual climate of an organization when

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of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 152.

<sup>67</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 151.

<sup>68</sup> Judy Wu and Steve Yao, “Ohio State University,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 24.

<sup>69</sup> Wu and Yao, “Ohio State University,” 25.

developing a new way to organize AAS. Called the “regional model,” advocates created stand-alone AAS programs that leaned into the strengths and limitations of the campus and locality.<sup>70</sup> The idea that campus politics and organizational context can shape AAS program size and scope is not new. When building AAS at UC Berkeley between 1969 and 1974, Sucheng Chan recognized that organizational context mattered in shaping the mission and structure of AAS. “Local conditions differ on the campuses where Asian/Pacific American studies programs exist,” Chan stated. “No monolithic pattern can be applicable to all programs.”<sup>71</sup> In their 1978 national survey of fourteen AAS units, Don Nakanishi and Russell Leong observed that each program had evolved differently because of “unique campus conditions” such as operating budget, available faculty and staff, and specialized research projects.<sup>72</sup> In a 2011 study, Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur compared six unnamed AAS programs across the US. She found that AAS program scope and size were shaped by campus characteristics including the university mission, governance, administrative leadership, student demographics, available research collections, and faculty expertise.<sup>73</sup>

Kiang and Lee developed the regional model beginning in the late 1980s to serve their local and campus communities while increasing AAS’s chances to institutionalize at their campuses. Kiang embraced UMB’s locality by shaping its AAS program to reflect its distinct Asian student demographics and the university’s educational mission to serve minority, immigrant, working-class students. At UMB, over 90 percent of Asian Americans students taking

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<sup>70</sup> Kiang, “New Wave,” 47.

<sup>71</sup> Sucheng Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studie: The Politics of Teaching and Program Building* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>72</sup> Don T. Nakanishi and Russell Leong, “Toward the Second Decade: A National Survey of Asian American Studies Programs in 1978,” *Amerasia Journal* 5, no. 1 (1978): 16.

<sup>73</sup> Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur, *Student Activism and Curricular Change in Higher Education* (Burlington: Ashgate Publication Company, 2011), 133–158.

AAS courses were recent Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, and ethnic Chinese refugees and immigrants. Students felt that the AAS materials were too West Coast-oriented and desired readings that introduced them to the local Asian communities and immigration history. Kiang, then, reshaped AAS courses and research projects to make them more historically and socially relatable to the refugee and immigrant demographics of the Boston area. To increase community involvement, Kiang established the Center for Asian American Studies that offered students and community members in the Boston metropolis area services like tutoring and counseling, as well as research and training assistance for community needs in public policy.<sup>74</sup>

At Cornell, Lee and the six founding faculty members formed an interdisciplinary AAS program in July 1987 that capitalized on the university's tradition of faculty and graduate research. In the 1991 East of California report, Felicisima C. Serafica and Barbara M. Newman from Ohio State University had coined the term "the Cornell model," to differentiate program building outside of California.<sup>75</sup> According to Lee, these strategies were meant to "mainstream" AAS by infusing it into existing university structures such as courses and faculty research.<sup>76</sup> When developing AAS courses, they faced the challenge of having no existing faculty members with disciplinary training or research in AAS. Cornell advocates focused their \$100,000 budget toward a course development grant that funded four faculty members to incorporate Asian American topics into courses in human ecology, human studies, and history. The grant program helped history professor Mary Beth Norton incorporate material on the internment of Japanese Americans into her existing course titled "American Constitutional Development." "I am a firm believer that Asian American Studies should be mainstreamed because I think it would reach

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<sup>74</sup> Kiang, "New Wave," 49.

<sup>75</sup> Serafina and Newman, "Ohio State University," 53.

<sup>76</sup> Lee and Okihiro, "Cornell University," 23.

people who don't want to have anything to do with it," Lee said in a 1987 *Asian Week* article.<sup>77</sup> "Anyone who is interested in studying American history should be confronted with Asian American issues."<sup>78</sup> Asian American students at Cornell, most of whom grew up in East Coast suburbs, expressed that they had little exposure to Asian American communities and the pan-ethnic identity. As a result, Lee focused much of her time forming "Asian American consciousness and community" by involving students in AAS programming.<sup>79</sup> She formed a student committee that consisted of representatives from nine ethnic Asian student organizations to plan symposia, guest lectures, and film viewings.

By developing the regional model, Kiang and Lee proved to be intellectual entrepreneurs. Although some of their strategies were not new, such as incorporating AAS content into existing courses, they effectively adapted them to the strengths and limitations of their campuses. As a result, Kiang and Lee differentiated their programs from other AAS programs in the US. These new organizational models also had a potential to "reinvigorate the field" by creating new teaching and research materials with a regional emphasis, forming new bonds with nearby Asian ethnic populations, and integrating AAS into the "mainstream" of universities and colleges.<sup>80</sup>

Some Midwestern advocates championed the regional model when building their programs. At UIUC, George Yu and the advisory committee established AAS as an interdisciplinary program yet held a "non-traditional arrangement" with the university.<sup>81</sup> In 1997, the AAS Committee had appointed Yu because of his "administrative savviness," a skill he had developed as the chair of the Department for East Asian Studies, according to Clark

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<sup>77</sup> Harrison, "Ethnic Studies on the Rise, Part II," 12.

<sup>78</sup> Lee and Okihiro, "Cornell University," 23.

<sup>79</sup> Lee and Okihiro, "Cornell University," 26.

<sup>80</sup> Kiang, "New Wave," 49.

<sup>81</sup> Email correspondence from Sharon Lee to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, November 30, 2000, Box AAST, Folder, "CIC Meeting Nov. 12, 2000," ACC Archives.

Cunningham, who was a member of the committee.<sup>82</sup> Yu knew who in the UIUC administration to ask for resources and had negotiated for six tenure-track faculty positions. When Ono was hired to be AAS's permanent director in 2002, he found the arrangement "shocking" because it was rare in academia for the College of Arts and Letters to allot that many faculty appointments for one academic unit.<sup>83</sup> The arrangement gave AAS full autonomy and control. Instead of sharing the faculty lines with traditional departments, the AAS program retained full control of six faculty lines that could be lent out to other academic units when hiring an Asian Americanist. The traditional department could hire an AAS specialist with one hundred percent of their faculty line in their department, yet AAS would fully fund the line. The agreement between AAS and the department also stipulated that AAS would have "equal say" in tenure and promotion of the Asian Americanist.<sup>84</sup> The first six hires, then, were critical in establishing UIUC's program as a "comprehensive Asian American Studies program," according to Ono. What made AAS at UIUC comprehensive was that faculty members came from diverse disciplines such as literature, anthropology, educational policy studies, history, sociology, and theater. When Ono took over as director, the program had a "clearer definition" of its intellectual mission. Faculty members had expertise on critical race, gender and sexuality, and class inequities, thus creating a research agenda and course offerings with a "critical orientation."<sup>85</sup>

As director from 2002 to 2007, Ono focused his efforts in building AAS's "intellectual mission."<sup>86</sup> Before coming to UIUC, he had helped build the AAS program at UC Davis, where he had developed the administrative skill to navigate bureaucracy and understand how

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<sup>82</sup> Clark Cunningham, phone conversation with author, November 8, 2019. I was unable to reach George Yu for an oral history to understand how he negotiated with UIUC administration for six tenure-track lines.

<sup>83</sup> Kent Ono, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, June 16, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 1:12:25, in Salt Lake City, UT (copy in author's possession).

<sup>84</sup> Lee to Castillo-Cullather, November 30, 2000.

<sup>85</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>86</sup> Ono, interview.

institutional politics could shape AAS. “[T]he way things got done at UC Davis in Asian American studies was by student protest,” Ono explained. “The way things got done at the University of Illinois was not by student protest for the most part, but meetings with administrators.”<sup>87</sup> According to Ono, UIUC administration saw student protest as “anti-intellectual.”<sup>88</sup> He believed it was crucial that AAS at UIUC had “to be driven by intellectual and scholarly concerns, and its goals have to be research oriented,” Ono explained.<sup>89</sup> Thus, he focused program funding toward building intellectual activities such as expanding its postdoctoral research fellowship, hosting academic conferences, and foregrounding AAS’s research agenda toward “the scholarly” and “the analytical.”<sup>90</sup>

Advocates at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities created an interdisciplinary program that embraced the locality and the faculty expertise. Several faculty members from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Carolyn Nayematsu, the director of the Asian Pacific Learning Resource Center, formed the Asian American Studies Initiative (AASI) to build AAS at Minnesota. Originally, AASI considered creating a research center that would support faculty members. Yet, they decided to organize AAS as an interdisciplinary program because of the faculty members’ strong research profiles and teaching records, according to Josephine Lee, a faculty member of AASI and the first director. She added that faculty members’ expertise “would give [AAS] more visibility,” at the university and within the field of AAS.<sup>91</sup> What made AAS at Minnesota unique, according to Lee, was the bridge between student demographics and faculty members who conducted research on local Asian ethnic communities. One unique student

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<sup>87</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>88</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>89</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>90</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>91</sup> J. Lee, interview 54:46.

population at Minnesota were Asian adoptees. Minnesota had a few faculty members, like psychologists Richard Lee and Kathy Cho, who conducted research on Asian adoption. Faculty expertise, then, “was a ready-made reason that...bridged both faculty research interests and teaching interests,” Lee explained. This bridge, then, created a “uniquely tailored” program that served its student demographics and its local Asian community.<sup>92</sup>

The advantages of an interdisciplinary program at Minnesota, according to Lee, was bringing together a core group of “people who were really invested in Asian American research and furthering the field.” Organizationally, however, AAS had no full-time faculty appointments and often relied on other departments for funding and course enrollment. As an interdisciplinary program, AAS did not have to go through the process of an academic program review that was tied to budget requests. As a result, AAS could not request additional funding or resources. When AAS needed funding for programming or staffing, faculty members often had to “cobble together” money from different departments.<sup>93</sup> During times of budget cuts, Lee admitted that relationships with other departments sometimes got “tense.”<sup>94</sup> Departments also became “protective of their instructors” and courses when the university switched to a “resource model” in which course enrollments were tracked as a source of revenue. This practice made it “tricky” for faculty members to teach AAS courses while balancing those in their home department.<sup>95</sup> Despite these challenges, according to Lee, the program is recognized in the field for its “regional focus” and its ability to do “so much with so little.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> J. Lee, interview, 54:46.

<sup>93</sup> J. Lee, interview, 54:46.

<sup>94</sup> J. Lee, interview, 54:46.

<sup>95</sup> J. Lee, interview, 54:46.

<sup>96</sup> J. Lee, interview, 54:46.

As advocates organized at Midwestern universities, it was clear that programs ranged in terms of size, autonomy, scope, and agenda. They acknowledged that campus characteristics and institutional politics, especially varying interpretations of affirmative action, had influenced how they built AAS at their universities. Midwestern advocates realized that they needed to build programs “where Asian Americans do not constitute a critical mass.”<sup>97</sup> They debated and chose models that best ensured AAS’s chances to institutionalize and be seen as a rigorous academic discipline. They built AAS around iterations of alternative models, such as the comparative approach to race and ethnicity and the regional approach that was becoming popular at the time. As they began developing courses and teaching students, faculty members recognized that the Asian America of the 1980s and beyond looked markedly different from the Asian America of the late 1960s. Midwestern advocates insisted that the field should acknowledge this new reality by re-centering its curriculum, research, and community involvement to include Asian American communities east of California.<sup>98</sup>

### **The Midwest Regional Center Reimagines AAS Scholarship**

By the late 1980s, Asian American communities were experiencing more class stratification, suburban flight, and urban redevelopment, according to Pei-Te Lien. Demographically, the racial category had become more diverse with the vast influx of new immigrant and refugee Asian groups. There were more mixed-race Asian Americans in the US, and there was greater awareness of the Asian diaspora and the Asian American queer communities. Broad social and political changes, like affirmative action and immigration policies, further transformed,

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<sup>97</sup> George Yu and Sharon S. Lee, “Discussion/Future Directions,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 34.

<sup>98</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 252.

destroyed, or even reformed the Chinese and Japanese communities that had arrived in the early eighteenth century on the West Coast. In their 1985–1986 survey of AAS programs, Endo and Wei concluded that the field had not updated its curriculum, educational materials, and scholarship to reflect these drastic changes in the Asian American population. Sucheng Chan emphasized, “[W]hen the composition of our people changes it is our responsibility to document and elucidate the dynamics of our own history as it is being made.”<sup>99</sup>

Much like the issue of institutionalization, scholars debated how the field and individual programs could better serve this new Asian America. “We need a coherent, unifying vision in order to avoid a ‘smorgasbord’ approach to Asian American studies curriculum,” Omi contended.<sup>100</sup> The demographic shift and the field’s identity crisis marked a shift in the field’s intellectual direction. As Ono argued in the edited anthology, *Asian American Studies After Critical Mass*, the field had transitioned into a second phase of intellectual inquiry that attempted to “decenter” AAS scholarship.<sup>101</sup> Scholars in the second phase began challenging established foundational theories, immigration models, and history books that privileged the experiences of East Asian Americans—particularly Japanese and Chinese American communities on the West Coast and Hawai‘i. They also began examining the experiences of marginalized communities within the Asian American and Pacific Islander group and beyond the American borders. Scholars aimed to expand AAS scholarship to include perspectives of American and diasporic queer, mixed-race, as well as Pacific Islander and Native Hawaiian communities.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Quote in Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 28; Peter N. Kiang, “Bringing It All Back Home: New Views of Asian American Studies and the Community,” in *Frontiers of Asian American Studies*, eds. Gail M. Nomura, Russell Endo, Stephen S. Sumida, Russell C. Leong (Pullman: Washington State Press, 1988), 305–314; Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties,” 31–35; Pei-Te Lien, *Making of Asian America Through Political Participation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 42–82.

<sup>100</sup> Omi, “It Just Ain’t the Sixties No More,” 33.

<sup>101</sup> Ono, *After Critical Mass*, 1.

<sup>102</sup> Omatsu, “1994 Annual Selected Bibliography,” 119–126; Ono, *After Critical Mass*, 1–16.

Within this second wave of intellectualism, some Midwestern advocates argued that AAS should reorient itself away from its California origins. Most notably was Sumida who argued that the field needed to interrogate “notions of centrality of the West Coast in Asian American studies.”<sup>103</sup> Since the inception of the field, this California-centric lens assumed that the state is the origin of Asian American identity, history, culture, and political power. In contrast, it minimized the diverse narratives, histories, cultures, immigration, and experiences of Asian Americans in other US regions and in the Asian diasporas. Another consequence was that models of immigration, acculturation, identity, and citizenship are developed around East Asian American experiences in California and applied to all Asian ethnic groups in the US. This dominant lens led to the misconception that post-1965 Asian immigrant and refugee experiences are like those to Asian ethnic groups that have historical and cultural roots in America before 1965. He challenged scholars to expand AAS scholarship to include histories, experiences, and Asian American communities “East of California.” According to Okihiro, the term had aimed to address several intellectual tensions in the field and to introduce the idea of a “competition to establish a new center somewhere else” than California.<sup>104</sup> East of California, Sumida elucidated, also suggested that “there are of not one but many centers, many points of origin and departure, for narratives that constitute the field.”<sup>105</sup>

The shifting intellectual direction of the field encouraged several scholars to call for a stronger organizational network to support newer programs at schools east of California. Endo and Wei had suggested that a strong network of AAS programs would promote “an extensive

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<sup>103</sup> Stephen H. Sumida, “East of California: Points of Origins in Asian American Studies,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 1 (February 1998): 85.

<sup>104</sup> Sumida, “East of California,” 85–86, n. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Sumida, “East of California,” 85–86.

exchange and evaluation of programmatic ideas or the resolution of common problems.”<sup>106</sup> In their 1991 campus profile of University of Michigan’s AAS program, Sumida and Nomura elaborated in the distinct racial politics that Midwestern programs had experienced. “We need a concerted effort by the Association for Asian American Studies and other established Asian Americans programs to provide assistance to groups in the Midwest struggling to establish Asian American studies in a region that does not even recognize this population’s presence and significance.”<sup>107</sup> The purpose of a regional network, they continued, could help solve common organizational issues like limited resources and intellectual isolation. The regional network could assist in sharing curricular materials, reading lists, samples of successful program proposals, and lists of people available for consultations. It also could transform the intellectual direction of the field by redesigning AAS curriculum, educational materials, and scholarship to better accommodate for more Asian ethnic perspectives.<sup>108</sup>

Driven by these larger intellectual and organizational goals, Okihiro and Lee C. Lee had hosted a conference that addressed how to institutionalize AAS, develop regional-specific scholarship, and support individuals and AAS programs from schools east of California. In September 1991, representatives from twenty-three colleges and universities gathered at Cornell University for the inaugural East of California Caucus (EOCC), a group under the AAAS. Since 1991, the EOCC has met biannually at various campuses and at the AAAS’ annual conference. By 2002, the EOCC included sixty-four member organizations.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Endo and Wei, “Development of AAS Programs,” 11.

<sup>107</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 154.

<sup>108</sup> Kiang, “Bringing It All Back Home,” 305–314; Kiang, “New Wave,” 49.

<sup>109</sup> “National Identity and the ‘Homeland,’” 2002 East of California Annual Meeting Program (November 7–9): University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, Urbana, IL. Program book located in Box AAST, Folder “Outside of BL Campus,” ACC Archives; E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 250.

Midwestern advocates joined with those on the East Coast in challenging the California-centric lens. According to George Yu, advocates had discussed the possibility of “strengthening networks in the field of Asian American Studies among the Big Ten universities.”<sup>110</sup> At the CIC-AASC 2000 meeting, advocates imagined a space where they could discuss and problem-solve organizational and intellectual issues. The network would also facilitate joint ventures to address common problems such as mentoring graduate students or sharing syllabi to “assert the validity of other Big Ten school curriculum in Asian American Studies.”<sup>111</sup> When representatives met again in 2006, they recognized the need to formalize a network that could strengthen AAS research, teaching, and programming in the Midwest. Judy Wu at Ohio State, Ono at UIUC, and Josephine Lee at Minnesota wrote the proposal and sought funding from each member university. In his 2022 oral history interview, Ono recalled how representatives from each member university collaborated to “come up with a rationale that helped everybody and all the deans of liberal arts and sciences across the Big Ten and the University of Chicago to be willing to give money to help facilitate the development of the [CIC-AASC].”<sup>112</sup> In 2007, the CIC Deans of Liberal Arts and Sciences funded the CIC-AASC for three years to encourage program building and collaborative programming.<sup>113</sup>

The significance of the CIC-AASC was twofold. First, it had a direct impact on the growth of AAS at schools in the Midwest. The EOCC and the CIC-AASC became a necessary social network for advocates who were working in relative isolation from each other. Advocates

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<sup>110</sup> George Yu and Sharon Lee, “Asian American Studies in the Big Ten,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, “APA Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Yu and Lee, “Discussion/Future Directions,” 34.

<sup>112</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>113</sup> Josephine Lee, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 15, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 1:07:36, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author’s possession); J. Lee, “Bridging the Big Twelve,” 275–284; Yu, “Welcome Letter,” 3.

hosted conferences and bi-annual meetings where advocates met to discuss practical matters on program development. Discussions at the 1991 EOCC meeting, for example, focused on identifying strategies to navigate around common administrative and political barriers. EOCC representatives shared successful tactics to implementing AAS at their schools such as depending on highly skilled faculty and staff members who knew campus politics, forming faculty/staff associations to push AAS through bureaucratic procedures, or galvanizing external groups to pressure administrators. Similarly, the CIC-AASC allowed advocates, who were trying their best to put a course or program together, to swap successful proposals and syllabi, and connect to program directors who had successfully created AAS programs.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to connecting advocates, the regional networks created formal channels to share resources that empowered individuals to build programs on their campuses. In 2008, the CIC-AASC hosted the “Leadership Institute on Asian American Studies” where individuals learned techniques to support their program building such as writing a successful proposal as well as designing and approving courses. The Leadership Institute also trained advocates in administrative navigation, skills that faculty members or graduate students rarely learned in their academic training. The Institute, for example, featured guest speakers like Steven Rosenstone, the Vice President for Scholarly and Cultural Affairs at University of Minnesota Twin Cities, who discussed how to ask senior-level administrators for funding or resources. This training program helped advocates “skip steps” in the bureaucratic process of program approval while reducing faculty and staff burnout that often accompanied the process of program building.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Tom Fujita, “East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies’ Conference at Cornell University, 13–15 September 1991,” *Asian American Student Voice* 5, no. 1, Fall 1991, 2 in *Activism, Organizing, and Leadership within U-M Asian American + Pacific Islander Communities and Space*, University of Michigan Library, accessed on September 27, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.33816748>; J. Lee, “Bridging the Big Twelve,” 275–284; J. Lee interview, 1:07:36.

<sup>115</sup> J. Lee, interview, 1:07:36; University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, “CIC-AASC Leadership Institute Agenda,” September 18-19, 2008 (copy in author’s possession).

These channels for sharing resources also helped institutionalize AAS at individual campuses by lending a sense of legitimacy. The EOCC and the CIC-AASC compiled and published campus profiles of members organizations that described the state of AAS at each campus. These annual publications listed course content, staff contacts, and strategies that advocates used to establish AAS at their schools. According to Lee, these publications lent a sense of legitimacy because “people could take those profiles to their administrative leaders and say, ‘Look, this is what's going on at other schools. Can we build that here?’”<sup>116</sup> Given the newness of AAS at many member organizations, Lee and Ono conducted site visits to each campus. At these site visits, Lee and Ono served as consultants by helping AAS advocates identify distinct campus structure, resources, and student constituencies to create a “uniquely tailored” AAS program.<sup>117</sup> They also met with senior-level administrators to bring “administrative attention” to AAS. By serving as an “outside voice,” Lee and Ono helped elevate the efforts of AAS advocates from “informal conversations” to that of a “much more formal institutional request.”<sup>118</sup> These site visits helped senior administrators contextualize that advocates’ efforts were part a larger movement to build AAS programs among peer universities. This strategy of peer benchmarking further helped senior administrators understand why students, faculty, and staff advocates were asking for funding and tenure-track lines to build AAS at their campus.<sup>119</sup>

Second, these regional networks transformed the field by establishing “regional centers” of knowledge and teaching.<sup>120</sup> Franklin Odo coined the term as a “notion of competition” in

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<sup>116</sup> J. Lee interview, 1:07:36.

<sup>117</sup> J. Lee interview, 1:07:36.

<sup>118</sup> J. Lee interview, 1:07:36.

<sup>119</sup> J. Lee interview, 1:07:36; Ono, interview.

<sup>120</sup> Quote in Sumida, “East of California,” 85–86, n. 7.

which new hubs of knowledge and teaching were established outside of California. These regional centers are constructed around geographic areas with major Asian American communities, such as Hawai'i or the East Coast, or around scholarly achievements or creative solutions to field-wide issues.<sup>121</sup> Sumida elaborated that the field needed to have multiple centers of knowledge to represent the narratives, experiences, and perspectives of various Asian ethnic groups in the US and in the Asian diaspora located in North and South American as well as the Caribbean. By recognizing multiple regional centers of knowledge, advocates could shift AAS scholarship from questions about identity, such as which groups are categorized as the "Asian American," to questions about structural analyses of power.<sup>122</sup>

When analyzing structures of power, Sumida referred to it in terms of US-Asia relations and Asian responses to Western systems of empire. However, his argument can be applied to this new direction of AAS scholarship. Ono explained that the regional networks created "intellectual foment and fervent" within the field. He added, "It was a pivotal point in the field, when people were theorizing, 'Well, what if Asian Americans aren't actually the center of, of the study?'"<sup>123</sup> He continued that scholars east of California have helped the field grow by expanding the scope of study from the Asian American experience to critiquing broader systemic issues like discrimination, globalization, or colonialism. "Many California schools [became] locked into their histories from civil rights, protest orientation, and community focus," Ono explained. "That history affected their ability to reimagine [AAS scholarship]." Scholars situated at Midwest and East Coast schools "became absolutely critical to this re-imagining of what Asian American Studies was during this pivotal, transitional period."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Quote in Sumida, "East of California," 85–86, n. 7; E. Lee, "AAS in the Midwest," 250.

<sup>122</sup> Sumida, "East of California," 95.

<sup>123</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>124</sup> Ono, interview.

Within the EOCC and the CIC-AASC, advocates developed new regional centers of knowledge and teaching in the Midwest and East Coast by creating intellectual spaces that fostered this broader view of AAS scholarship. Advocates organized conferences that explored new ways to approach topics like citizenship and sexuality through regional or global lens. Participants at the 2002 EOCC conference, for example, explored the topic of Asian American identity through the experiences of Midwest Asian American families, Chinese adoptees, and Korean immigrant mothers. Scholars at the 2006 EOCC conference explored how the Midwest was a regional center of knowledge by researching less-studied yet prominent communities in the region such as Filipinx, South Indian, Southeast Asian, and Arab Americans. “Papers on less-studied communities directly confront the theoretical formation of AAS as primarily focused on Chinese and Japanese Americans,” Martin Joseph Ponce from Ohio State and Anita Mannur at Denison University wrote in the conference proposal. “At another level, conference papers on topics like gender, sexuality, diaspora, and citizenship, emphasize the internal diversity of Asian Americans,” while challenging the stereotype that all Asians are “the same.”<sup>125</sup>

Advocates in the EOCC and the CIC-AASC hosted faculty retreats and manuscript workshops that helped turn conference papers into publishable manuscripts. The CIC-AASC faculty retreats, for example, matched professors, who had works in progress, with readers in similar areas of study to provide mentorship and critical feedback. In October 2008, Eric Hayot (Comparative Literature and Asian Studies) and Tina Chen (English) co-hosted a research workshop at Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) with the CIC-AASC. Scholars attending

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<sup>125</sup> Martin Joseph Ponce and Anita Mannur, “2006 East of California Conference: Sites of Asian American Studies Proposal,” 7 in Box AAST, Folder, “Outside of BL. Campus,” ACC Archives; East of California Caucus, “2002 East of California Annual meeting and Junior/Senior Faculty Retreats: National Identity and the ‘Homeland,’” University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL, November 7-9, 2002, Box AAST, Folder “Outside of BL. Campus,” ACC Archives, 13; East of California Caucus, “East of California 2006: ‘Sites of Asian American Studies,’” November 3-4, 2006, The Ohio State University and Denison University, Columbus, OH, 3.

the workshop were able to share their manuscripts in progress among faculty members and graduate students. These intellectual spaces, Erika Lee and Sumida contended, had helped the field move away from its California origins. Moreover, the EOCC and the CIC-AASC helped recognize other US regions and global areas in the Atlantic, the Caribbean, the mid-Pacific, and Latin America as legitimate sites of AAS scholarship.<sup>126</sup>

These regional networks also transformed the field by redesigning AAS courses to accommodate students and Asian American communities outside of California. Endo and Wei concluded that redesigning courses was a pressing priority for the field as most AAS content had not kept pace with the drastic changes in the US Asian American population. As Midwestern scholars introduced new courses, they realized that students had difficulty connecting with readings and course materials that focused on California, Hawai‘i, and the West Coast. “The exclusion of the Midwest in Asian American studies is conspicuous to our students,” Sumida and Nomura contended in the 1991 EOCC report. “We need to develop teaching materials relevant to this region since so much of Asian American textbooks and media materials are dominated by the California experience.”<sup>127</sup>

Redesigning courses encouraged both students and faculty members to conduct research on “untapped” sources of information.<sup>128</sup> This pedagogical exercise, in turn, created new knowledge and further opportunities to create a regional hub of distinct AAS research. Dr.

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<sup>126</sup> Josephine Lee and Kent Ono, “Summary: Proposal for CIC-Asian American Studies Consortium,” October 2, 2007, Box AAST, Folder “CIC-AASC Binder,” ACC Archives, 6; East of California Caucus, “2002 East of California Retreats,” 13; East of California Caucus, “East of California 2006,” 3; Josephine Lee, “Asian American Studies Consortium Director’s Update,” November 12, 2008, Box AAST, Folder “AAS-CIC Jan. 16, 2009,” ACC Archives, 3.

<sup>127</sup> Sumida and Nomura, “University of Michigan,” 154.

<sup>128</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 257.

Nomura at Michigan created an undergraduate seminar titled “The Asian American Midwest.”<sup>129</sup> In the course, Nomura encouraged students to conduct original research on Asian American groups who had lived in the Detroit area since the nineteenth century. Other faculty members tapped into local archives or populations to reconfigure their AAS courses to reflect their students’ backgrounds. At Minnesota, Erika Lee updated readings and course material to include the experiences and histories of Chinese Americans and Korean adoptees from Minnesota, two of the largest populations enrolled in her courses. Lee also created new units covering the Southeast Asian wars and Hmong refugees, another large population in the state. Because there were few resources written by Hmong Americans, Lee drew course material from local oral history collections, ethnographic studies, newspapers, and nonprofit organization reports. In her Asian American literature course at Minnesota, Josephine Lee often added work created by local artists, musicians, and writers to celebrate the vibrant (and well-funded) art scene of Minnesota. “There are a lot of writers that I teach who live within five miles of me, and these are people who have national reputations,” Lee said.<sup>130</sup>

Localizing courses was well worth the time and effort. At Minnesota, it had served as a recruiting tool, especially if the curriculum reflected the experiences of students enrolled in AAS courses. Students and faculty members, who were interested in studying a distinct concentration like Hmong studies, could be drawn to study at Minnesota because of the strength of its curriculum.<sup>131</sup> It could have also turned “our classrooms into laboratories of new knowledge and new perspectives on the Asian American experience,” Erika Lee added. “Some of the most

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<sup>129</sup> Gail Nomura, “Asian American Studies at U-M,” *Asian American Student Voice* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1991), 3 in *Activism, Organizing, and Leadership within U-M Asian American + Pacific Islander Communities and Space*, University of Michigan Library, accessed on July 5, 2023 from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/community.33816748>

<sup>130</sup> J. Lee, interview, 54:46.

<sup>131</sup> Endo and Wei, “Development of AAS Programs,” 11; E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 259.

innovative pedagogy occurs when students become researchers themselves.”<sup>132</sup> Some archival collections had stemmed from faculty and student oral history collection projects, including the University of Michigan’s Filipino American Oral History Project of [the State of] Michigan and two archival projects related to Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans living in Detroit. Inspired by the CIC-AASC meetings, Kevin Kumashiro (Education) created the Digital Storytelling Workshop at Ohio State University. Kumashiro had aimed to develop an archive of five-minute digital narratives that could introduce AAS research projects and community work to instructors and the general public.<sup>133</sup>

Inspired by individual efforts to redesign AAS courses, the CIC-AASC created collaborative programming to address to the intellectual isolation that graduate students faced on individual campuses. Some campuses had undergraduate minors, degrees, and certificate programs. However, there were no independent graduate degree programs at any Midwestern university. Graduate students at Penn State and Purdue University reported few if any Asian Americanist faculty members who could guide them in writing a dissertation focused on AAS. Regardless of these challenges, graduate student interest in AAS remained strong. At the University of Chicago, English doctoral student Edward Ou De Almeida reported a small and concentrated effort among graduate students to organize intellectual activities, such as a speaker series and workshops, that promoted AAS on campus. American Studies doctoral student Susan Muchshima Moynihan and staff members at Purdue described plans to host political and

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<sup>132</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 259.

<sup>133</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 258–260; J. Lee interview, 54:46; J. Lee, “Director’s Update,” 4–5.

academic events to raise awareness about AAS, collaborate with existing academic departments, and establish stronger ties with undergraduate Asian ethnic student organizations.<sup>134</sup>

Of its several goals, the CIC-AASC aimed to mentor and train graduate students who studied in traditional departments like Psychology, sociology, English, and History. Furthermore, the CIC-AASC wanted to nurture graduate student research and teaching. In December 2005, the CIC Deans of Liberal Arts had established CourseShare, a systematic way to share specialized and low-enrollment courses in less commonly taught languages as well as cultural and area studies. Between 2007 and 2009, Josephine Lee, Ono, Wu, and Erika Lee offered five online courses on Asian American topics such as literature, theater, history, and mixed-race Asian Americans through CourseShare. CourseShare was particularly effective in mentoring graduate students, especially those who wanted to take an AAS course and to find faculty members with knowledge on AAS. “We used [CourseShare] for Asian American studies graduate seminars because what we were finding was that most of these places had programs which did not include their own graduate program,” Josephine Lee said in a 2022 oral history. CourseShare helped some graduate students “who had trouble finding a committee where more than one faculty member knows what AAS is.”<sup>135</sup>

By 2010, funding for the CIC-AASC ended. The regional network, along with the EOCC, folded into the AAAS when Josephine Lee became the President of the association. “It was more of a goal of supporting each of the institutions in the way that they might need. And so, I felt like that was a good time to pass it on to the association,” Lee explained.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, these

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<sup>134</sup> J. Lee, “Bridging the Big Twelve,” 276–278; J. Lee and Ono, “Summary: Proposal for CIC-Asian American Studies Consortium,” 3; Moynihan, “Purdue University,” 28–30; Ou De Almeida, “University of Chicago,” 5–6; Rodriguez, “Pennsylvania State University,” 26–27.

<sup>135</sup> J. Lee, interview, 1:07:36; J. Lee, “Bridging the Big Twelve,” 275–284; “CIC CourseShare: Opportunities for Collaboration,” ca. February 2007 and “CIC Asian American Studies Consortium: Course Share” handouts in Box AAST, Folder “CIC Meeting Feb 8/2007,” ACC Archives; J. Lee, “Director’s Update,” 2.

<sup>136</sup> J. Lee, interview, 1:07:36.

regional networks fostered intellectual circles that helped build regional centers of knowledge outside of California. Ono reflected that these regional networks had “created energy [and] excitement,” among scholars. The intellectual direction of the field was “greatly enhanced by the work that was done by the CIC” and individual campuses.<sup>137</sup> “The Midwest became absolutely critical to this re-imagining of what Asian American Studies was during this pivotal, transitional period,” Ono concluded.<sup>138</sup> These regional networks also helped institutionalize AAS at individual campuses, particularly those who did not yet have a program. They created a social network to share resources, train advocates in administrative skills, and lend a sense of legitimacy. Furthermore, they challenged the very foundations of the field by forming regional centers in the Midwest and East Coast. Advocates in the EOCC and the CIC-AASC pushed intellectual boundaries by broadening the scope of AAS scholarship, redesigning courses, and innovating collaborative programming.

In 2009, historian Erika Lee articulated that advocates had reframed and established AAS programs at Midwestern campuses “*not* based on demographics but on the intellectual mission and viability of the field.”<sup>139</sup> By reframing AAS from a demographic to an intellectual project, Midwestern advocates helped articulate the study of Asian Americans as a necessary research function for the university. They wanted to increase AAS’s organizational stability by creating distinct AAS programs at their universities. They developed courses and research projects around distinct student demographics and research priorities to increase AAS’s visibility at their universities and in the region. They created a regional network to further boost AAS’s intellectual legitimacy within Big Ten universities and colleges.

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<sup>137</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>138</sup> Ono, interview.

<sup>139</sup> E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 254.

Midwestern advocates, however, may have contributed to the field's shift away from its core values toward organizational stability at universities and colleges. Their efforts to strengthen AAS at individual campuses and in the region began to prioritize research over community service. Ono argued that AAS has remained "both in and outside of the academy."<sup>140</sup> Asian Americanists, along with those in ethnic and gender studies, often "face the uncomfortable dilemma to deprioritize service in order to make career advancements."<sup>141</sup> At UW-Madison, Thornton observed that jointly appointed faculty members often had to navigate research priorities between ethnic studies and their mainstream departments. "No matter how supportive [your mainstream departments] are...there's still some kind of question to why you're spending so much time in ethnic studies," Thornton expressed, noting his research affiliations with Afro-American Studies, AAS, and sociology. "So that's a real problem...for junior faculty members because how do they balance that? How do you prove yourself to both?"<sup>142</sup> Ono remained optimistic about the field's position at Midwestern universities, arguing, "Asian American studies has been and continues to need to be partially independent of the mainstream academy, even as it also, simultaneously, central to the larger academic mission."<sup>143</sup> Asian Americanists in the region and the field need to continually engage with academic "colonialism in the process of attempting to create new, innovative, and anti-colonialist paradigms."<sup>144</sup>

As scholars wrestled with the future of the field, Midwestern advocates at individual campuses grappled with how to argue and establish for AAS programs beyond critical mass. In the next chapter, I narrow my focus and examine these national and field-level changes through a

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<sup>140</sup> Ono, "New Locations," 4.

<sup>141</sup> Ono, "New Locations," 7.

<sup>142</sup> Thornton, interview.

<sup>143</sup> Ono, "New Locations," 4.

<sup>144</sup> Ono, "New Locations," 4.

case study of IUB. I chose IUB because advocates followed a typical path toward institutionalization according to Rojas's framework. Like their peers across the Midwest, Asian Americans students demanded AAS to counter their racial isolation, increase their sense of belonging on campus, and educate non-Asian Americans about pervasive Asian pervasive stereotypes. They worked with multiracial student organizations and engaged in conflict with administrators to demand a cultural center and AAS program. What makes IUB distinct from other Midwestern campuses, however, is the interplay between campus characteristics and organizational politics that began to shape how AAS institutionalized and, subsequently, deradicalized on campus.

## Chapter Four: The Educational Mission of AAS: Asian American Student Activism at Indiana University Bloomington, 1987-1998

Nestled in the rolling hills of south-central Indiana, Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) is the flagship campus within the Indiana University system that includes eight regional campuses. According IUB scholars, the university has remained demographically and culturally White since its establishment as the state of Indiana's seminary in 1820. It has struggled to enroll, retain, and support students and faculty of color in its history. According to Angel C. Nathan, it would be almost sixty years after its founding for IUB to enroll its first Black students: Harvey Young from Indianapolis in 1882 and Carrie Parker in 1898. Since the early twentieth century, the growing population of international and Black students have expressed feelings of racial isolation and demanded culturally supportive resources to increase their sense of belonging.<sup>1</sup>

The story of AAS at IUB looked remarkably similar to the conditions at other Big Ten campuses, according to the historiography of Asian Americans at Midwestern campuses and to Fabio Rojas's institutionalization model. The first Asian students, mostly from foreign countries, did not arrive in Bloomington until the early twentieth century, with small numbers enrolled throughout the century. For example, in December 1929, the *Indiana Daily Student* (IDS) reported fourteen international students on the Bloomington campus, nine of whom came from the Philippines, Korea, Hawai'i, and Japan in December 1929. Enrollment of Asian students remained small until after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, which allowed a greater

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<sup>1</sup> James Capshew, *Herman B Wells: The Promise of the American University* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 165–177; Eric Langowski, "Education Denied: Indiana University's Japanese American Ban, 1942 to 1945," *Indiana Magazine of History* 115, no. 2 (June 2019): 65–115; Angel Cassandra Nathan, "Resilient Beauty: The Story of Nancy Streets, 1959 Miss Indiana University," in *Women at Indiana University: 150 Years of Experiences and Contributions*, ed. Andrea Walton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 105–130; Mary Ann Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland: The Sixties at Indiana University* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 115–134.

number of Asian students and professionals to come to the US (and thus Indiana) for education and employment. The Asian American student population grew in demographic strength at IUB starting in the late 1980s. As more Asian Americans arrived on campus, they felt racially isolated at a predominantly White campus. They described their racial isolation as having few culturally supportive spaces (such as culture centers or AAS programs) on campus to process their experiences growing up in predominantly White spaces in the Midwest. Graduate students taught one-time experimental courses that empowered undergraduates toward a pan-ethnic and political identity. Student activists mobilized under a unifying cause to protest the lack of culturally supportive resources. As they engaged in conflict and negotiations with administrators, Asian American students faced challenges like ignorance, prejudice, and even racial violence that had occurred on predominantly White, Midwestern campuses. They wanted permanent courses to reduce anti-Asian sentiment and to educate campus constituents about the ethnic diversity of this monolithic Asian racial category.<sup>2</sup>

What differs from the Midwestern narrative was the interplay of racial politics in the history of the state and in IUB's campus history. Across campus history, IUB constituents grappled with national issues of race like others within the social network of American higher education organizations. Campus constituents responded to these issues, such as the 1960s civil rights movement, within the context of the university and the state. IUB scholars, however, often described the university's approach to race-based policies as "complicated" and often a "contradiction."<sup>3</sup> One such historic moment was when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the 1965 Executive Order 11246, which mandated government contractors, including universities and colleges, to prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, religion, or national origin. The

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<sup>2</sup> "14 Foreign Students on University Roster," *Indiana Daily Student*, November 25, 1929, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland*, 2; Langowski, "Education Denied," 98.

federal directive did not specifically pertain to Asian Americans at the time. Over time, the federal directive left universities and colleges to interpret affirmative action guidelines based on their organizational context and local demographics, according to historian Ellen Wu. This local interpretation, intertwined with campus history of race, is what makes IUB a distinct case study.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I explore how Asian American students widened the educational argument for an AAS program as campus discussions of race evolved from the late 1960s to the 1990s. I interweave this local story of IUB with the campus history of racial politics, particularly with affirmative action. I argue that Asian American student community had to broaden the educational argument for AAS in response to campus racial politics. At first, their argument had focused on AAS courses to help Asian Americans process their racial experiences and identities growing up in predominantly White spaces in the Midwest. With the increase of racial incidents on campus, they broadened the educational justification to teach the campus community about Asian American issues while reducing anti-Asian sentiment. They further expanded their argument in hopes of countering campus perceptions of Asian Americans as “overrepresented” minorities.<sup>5</sup> This statistical image of Asian Americans had solidified when campus officials interpreted affirmative action guidelines in the early 1970s to programs to address faculty and student retention issues by the late 1980s.

### **The Indiana Paradox: State and University Racial Politics**

The path toward AAS at IUB is best understood within the historical context of the state of Indiana’s and the university’s complicated history with race. Part of the Midwest geographic region, the state of Indiana is located at “The Crossroads of America,” tucked between the Ohio

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen Wu, “Overrepresentation: Asian Americans and the Conundrums of Statistical Mirroring,” *Difference without Domination: Pursuing Justice in Diverse Democracies*, eds. Danielle Allen and Rohini Somanathan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020): 189–225.

<sup>5</sup> Linda Yung, “Incredible Minorities,” *Kiosk*, December 1994, 28, Ellen Wu personal collection.

River and Lake Michigan. The state's motto suggests an image of bucolic farmlands, small towns, and hardy, humble people. This presumed romanticism has incorporated Indiana, along with other Midwestern states, into this classic image of the American heartland, according to historian Howard H. Peckham. Yet, like other states in the Midwest, this romanticized Indiana often masks a history marred with contradictions and tensions in state and racial politics. Underneath the romantic image of the state, Indiana's approach to race appeared contradictory across time.<sup>6</sup>

Indigenous peoples, like the Delaware, Miami, and Potawatomi, have lived on the lands of Indiana since 8000 BCE. By the 1650s, French settlers began to occupy the southwest region of the state with their African slaves. Settlers from European descent began to arrive shortly thereafter, migrating from the upper slave states of the American South and from the eastern colonies in hopes of claiming a parcel of farmland for their own. These White settlers, according to Peckham, forged not only a new life but a distinct "Hoosier character."<sup>7</sup> By the time of the Civil War, Peckham argued, the white Indianan (also known as Hoosiers) identified as "self-reliant, self-assured, attached to the land, and used to hard work."<sup>8</sup> James H. Madison contended that the "dominant Indiana way" is "a tradition of individual freedom and responsibility, of intense interest in politics, of wariness of government...and an attachment to small-town and rural values of community identification and pride."<sup>9</sup> However, historian Ralph D. Gray added, White Hoosiers were also known for their "contrary patterns" in concerns to race and

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<sup>6</sup> Howard H. Peckham, *Indiana: A Bicentennial View* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company for the American Association for State and Local History, 1978), 187–195.

<sup>7</sup> Peckham, *Indiana*, 187.

<sup>8</sup> Peckham, *Indiana*, 187.

<sup>9</sup> James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), xiv.

foreigners.<sup>10</sup> They simultaneously “detested slavery, Negroes, [and] state indebtedness.”<sup>11</sup> They were also “mildly suspicious of Catholics, foreigners, public schools, and government interference in local affairs.”<sup>12</sup>

This image of the Indiana Hoosier—rural, conservative, and patriotic—has endured because of the amalgamation of geographic location, state politics, and racial history. Historians posit that the state’s remoteness from the American coasts has placed a conservative lean on state and racial politics. Because of its geographic isolation, its people often concentrated on domestic problems more often than international affairs. Some of its residents and state politicians (among them the outspoken US Senator William E. Jenner, who strongly supported Joseph McCarthy and McCarthyism during his tenure from 1947 to 1959) have expressed some of the “strongest isolationist sentiment in the nation,” often upholding views that embody “one-hundred-percent Americanism.”<sup>13</sup> Indiana’s location near Kentucky, one of the upper slave states, has contributed to a persistent southern culture. According to the 1850 US Census, the state’s population was demographically more southern than the other four Midwestern territories formed by the 1787 Northwest Ordinance. Forty-four percent of the Indiana population was White southern-born settlers, with Illinois at 38 percent, and an average of 28.3 percent for the Northwest Territory (which included the territories of Ohio, Michigan, and Minnesota). Although slavery was prohibited in the territories of the Northwest Ordinance, Hoosiers remained split on the topic. Hoosiers with family ties to the southern states remained sympathetic to slavery and slaveholders. Quaker settlers, who lived near the eastern and southeastern border to Ohio,

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<sup>10</sup> Ralph D. Gray, “Contrary Patterns in Territorial Life,” in *Indiana History: A Book of Readings*, ed. Ralph D. Gray (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 61.

<sup>11</sup> Peckham, *A Bicentennial View*, 187.

<sup>12</sup> Peckham, *A Bicentennial View*, 188.

<sup>13</sup> William E. Wilson, “Indiana: The Land and the People,” in *Indiana History*, 5.

opposed slavery and even created safe havens for fugitive slaves. In the 1920s, Indiana had one of the largest factions of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), with nearly half a million members.

According to historian John Bartlow Martin, Indiana was “fertile ground” for the KKK because it fed on the boredom of the small towns and the xenophobic and racial fears of the White, Protestant, and highly nativistic population of the state.<sup>14</sup> The KKK gained political control of the state, funding many of the local electoral seats including the Governor of Indiana and the mayor of Indianapolis.<sup>15</sup>

Its distinct location, bordering the US South yet distant from the coasts, has influenced the Indiana’s paradoxical approach to racial politics. In Native American matters, officials like the first governor of the Territory of Indiana, William Henry Harrison, were tasked to keep the peace with the Indigenous peoples while obtaining statehood, which required encroaching on Indigenous lands to reach the minimum population to make the territory of Indiana into a federally-recognized state. From 1800 to 1812, Harrison, along with the federal government, drove out Indigenous peoples through a series of treaties, illegal seizures of land, and the War of 1812. During the same time, the territorial government of Indiana passed an act that allowed indentured servitude of Black people in the territory of Indiana. This act lasted only five years but the Indiana legislature clearly did not see prohibition of slavery, according to sixth clause of the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, as absolute. By 1816, the Indiana legislature pivoted in the matter of slavery by including a clause in the state constitution that prohibited slavery. However, historian Emma Lou Thornbrough pointed out that in the same state constitution, only White

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<sup>14</sup> John Bartlow Martin, *Indiana, An Interpretation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1992), 184.

<sup>15</sup> John D. Barnhardt, “The Impact of the Civil War on Indiana,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 57, no. 3 (September 1961): 185–224; Peter T. Harstad, “Indiana: A New Perspective,” in *Indiana History: A Book of Readings*, ed. Ralph D. Gray (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): 8–14; Madison, *The Indiana Way*, 20–54; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana Before 1900: A Study of a Minority* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1957), 114–118.

men could vote and “persons with as little of one-fourth Negro blood” could not testify in court in any case involving a White person.<sup>16</sup>

Thornbrough, along with historian Richard Pierce, contended that state politicians and legal authorities had also applied this contrarian approach to educational racial politics from 1816, when Indiana gained statehood, until the late 1970s, with legal challenges to desegregation. Before the Civil War, the state denied Black children any schooling at public expense. In 1869, the Indiana General Assembly permitted separate and racially segregated common schools for Black and White students. By 1877, the state legislature allowed Black students to attend public schools with White students if a community could not maintain a separate, racially segregated one. In practice, however, many townships continued to maintain separate and inferior schools for Black children, until the state repealed desegregation in 1949. Even with this mandate, efforts to desegregate public schools remained slow over the next two decades, until the Department of Justice, with continued protest by the Black community, investigated discriminatory practices within Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). The 1968 legal case of *United States vs. Board of School Commissioners of Indianapolis* found IPS guilty of continuing to operate a segregated school system and ordered IPS to enact interdistrict desegregation to prevent White flight from city to suburban schools.<sup>17</sup>

IUB practiced a similar contradictory pattern in matters of race from its founding in 1820 to the 1960s civil rights movement. The reception of the first students of color depended on administrators and the racial sentiments of the time. IUB was first established as the State of

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<sup>16</sup> Quote in Emma Lou Thornbrough, “African Americans,” in *Peopling in Indiana: The Ethnic Experience*, eds. Robert M. Taylor Jr. and Connie A. McBirney (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1996), 12–13; Gray, “Contrary Patterns in Territorial Life,” 61–62.

<sup>17</sup> Frank D. Aquila, *Race Equity in Education: The History of Desegregation 1849–1979* (Bloomington: Indiana University School of Education, 1980), 77–84; Richard B. Pierce, *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 26–55; Thornbrough, *Negro in Indiana*, 391–396.

Indiana's seminary, located in southwest Indiana. By 1828, the university was renamed Indiana College. The university's charter had no exclusionary clause for gender or race, although it would not be until after the Civil War when the first Black students enrolled at IUB. The first Black male, Harvey Young, an Indianapolis native, enrolled in 1882 and the first Black woman, Carrie Parker from Clinton, Indiana, enrolled in 1898. Compared to many state universities, the first Black students did not experience the type of heated public controversy because IUB's demographics continued to reflect the male-dominated and nearly all White student body, according to Angel C. Nathan. Administrators like Vice President Theophilus Wylie recognized the significance of Young's enrollment, writing in an August 20, 1882 journal entry that Young "is well recommended has a good appearance - Intelligent & neat - will be a pioneer colored student in the College - Hope he will do well."<sup>18</sup> Young attended IUB for two years and did not obtain a degree from IUB. He returned to Indianapolis to become a teacher in the IPS system. Similarly, Parker never obtained a degree from IUB and discontinued her studies after falling ill at the end of her first year. She expressed that she had not "been made to feel her color much" during her time as an IUB student.<sup>19</sup>

Around the same time Young and Parker attended IUB as the first Black students, racist ideologies percolated on campus. Notably, IUB President David Starr Jordan openly held ableist, sexist, and racist ideas, including the belief that the Black race was inferior and the least intelligent race. As a Zoology professor, he lectured on European ideas of eugenics he had learned from his mentors at Cornell University, where he received his doctoral training. It is

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<sup>18</sup> Carey Beam, "What You Don't Know About IU's First African-American Student," *200: The Bicentennial Magazine* 1, no. 2, (August 2018), 17, accessed on March 9, 2025 from [https://issuu.com/iubicentennial/docs/2018\\_2\\_nd\\_printing\\_bicentennial\\_mag](https://issuu.com/iubicentennial/docs/2018_2_nd_printing_bicentennial_mag)

<sup>19</sup> Quote in Carrie Parker Taylor Eaton, "Race Prejudice and Me," unpublished memoir (unpaginated), circa 1940s, as cited in Dina M. Kellems, "Pioneering Students of Color," in *Women at Indiana University*, ed. Andrea Walton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 71; Nathan, "Resilient Beauty," 108–110.

unknown if Jordan enforced his eugenicist ideals as IUB president from 1884 to 1891. Later in his career, however, he lobbied for the legalization of forced sterilization in California through his service affiliations, including as vice president of the International Eugenics Congress in 1912 and a member of the Board of Trustees for the Human Betterment Foundation in 1928.<sup>20</sup>

Near the end of the nineteenth century, IUB entered a phase of historical milestones in which the first students of color graduated from the university. Ten years after Parker's enrollment, Marcellus Neal from Greenfield, Indiana, became the first Black man to graduate from IUB, with a BA in Mathematics in 1895. Two years later, the first Latina, Linda Henrietta José completed a degree in Biology. In 1910, the first Latino, Lucio Rivera of Indianapolis, graduated with an MD from IU's School of Medicine. Elmer Burritt Bryan, a professor of Education and Psychology, formed diplomatic connections to the Philippines and, under the Pensionados Act, helped bring seven students from the Philippines to attend the IUB Law School from 1907 to 1909. It is hard to glean the totality of these students' racial experiences based on available archival records like the university's yearbook, *The Arbutus*. Yet, they list their involvement in student organizations and some provide quotes describing their time on campus. *The Arbutus*, for example, recorded the first Asian undergraduate from Japan, Hero Ichinomiya, who listed himself as the vice president of the senior class of 1903. In the 1903 yearbook, he wrote that he had chosen IUB for its reputation, rural location, and lack of a large Japanese population. "American air can be found in all the atmosphere where creature can penetrate," he elaborated on his experience at IUB, "her influence her wonderful power the wonderful nation which I name, has full of wealth."<sup>21</sup> In 1919, Frances Marshall became the first Black woman to

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<sup>20</sup> Edward Burns, *David Starr Jordan: Prophet of Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953); Katherine Montana, "The Problematic Legacy of David Starr Jordan," California Academy of Sciences website, accessed on March 9, 2025 from <https://www.calacademy.org/scientists/library/the-problematic-legacy-of-david-starr-jordan>;

<sup>21</sup> *Arbutus* (1903), Indiana University, 194–96 as cited in Langowski, "Education Denied," 73, n. 25.

receive an IU degree in English and a teaching certificate, and Maria Mercedes Manosalva from Chile became the second Latina to earn a BA in education from IUB. In 1982, Marshall told the *Indiana Daily Student* (IDS) that her race was not a concern during her time at IUB. “I never worried about being a woman going to school. I never worried about being Black going to school. I just went on with what I had to do.”<sup>22</sup> She remarked that White students were pleasant, although she observed that White and Black students did not intermingle.<sup>23</sup>

As the first students of color enrolled at IUB, President William Lowe Bryan modernized the university through the creation of several professional schools including the schools of Medicine, Education, Business, Music, and Dentistry. When it came to the welfare of Black students, however, he and his administration did not pay much attention to their needs, according to historian Mary Ann Wynkoop. IUB admitted students regardless of their race during Bryan’s presidency (1902–1937). Yet in 1920–21, there were only nineteen Black students enrolled at the IUB and Indianapolis campuses, which had a combined total student body of 4,218. This low enrollment underscored emerging problems that afflicted IUB and a majority of predominantly White campuses in the Midwest: opening access for students of color and university practices in racial division. From the early to the mid-twentieth century, IUB had a “system of segregation as rigid as any Jim Crow society in the Deep South,” according to historian James Capshew.<sup>24</sup> When the first all-male and all-female residential halls opened in 1924 and 1925, Black students were barred from living with White students in on campus housing and continued to live off-campus in boardinghouses or with families until the end of campus segregation in 1949. They

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<sup>22</sup> Carmen Lee, “First IU Black Woman Graduate Recalls Her Struggles, Rewards,” *Indiana Daily Student*, February 23, 1982 as cited in Kellems, “Pioneering Students of Color,” 74-75.

<sup>23</sup> Nathan, “Resilient Beauty,” 105–130; James Albert Woodburn, *Higher Education in Indiana* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Education, 1891), 74–101.

<sup>24</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, 131.

were also barred from participating in ROTC, the university band, and in some honorary and professional societies within university departments. They were restricted from using the Indiana Memorial Union, attending campus dances, and taking part in some social programs.<sup>25</sup>

When Herman B Wells became IUB president in 1937, he bucked the “Midwest tradition of isolationism.”<sup>26</sup> According to his biographer James Capshew, Wells opened the university toward international affairs and nationwide efforts to desegregate American universities and colleges. His educational philosophy was motivated by “an unshakeable belief that education was key to human development.”<sup>27</sup> He applied this educational philosophy in desegregating IUB. He believed that racial segregation hindered Black students’ academic and social experiences on campus, according to Wynkoop. Starting in the early years of his presidency, Wells working together with other White, purportedly progressive IUB administrators, perhaps most notably Dean of Women Kate Hevner Mueller, to desegregate university facilities and housing “quietly and without fanfare.”<sup>28</sup> His efforts made IUB a more racially tolerant university compared to other universities in the Midwest during the Jim Crow era.<sup>29</sup>

Also done quietly and without fanfare was the banned admission of nine Japanese American students from 1942 to 1946. IUB joined many other universities and colleges in the Midwest and in the US in restricting Japanese American access to higher education after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Eric Langowski argues that Wells, the Board of Trustees, and Director of Admissions Frank Elliott often cloaked the exclusionary policy by citing limitations on out-of-state students or decisions based on military necessity. President of the Board of Trustees Ora L.

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<sup>25</sup> Nathan, “Resilient Beauty,” 110–112; Thornbrough, “African Americans,” 21, 29–30; Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland*, 118.

<sup>26</sup> Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland*, 116.

<sup>27</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, 129.

<sup>28</sup> Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland*, 116–118.

<sup>29</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, 129–131; Nathan, “Resilient Beauty,” 110–112.

Wildermuth was overt in his reasoning for the admissions ban, expressing that the Germans or Italians “are Aryans and can be assimilated but the Japanese can’t—they are different racially.”<sup>30</sup> Wells’s attitude to the ban, in contrast, was characterized more by his inaction rather than overt racism. Langowski argues that Wells contradicted his educational philosophy of opening access to all students because he had succumbed to a combination of university bureaucracy, military pressure, and nationwide anti-Japanese sentiment.<sup>31</sup>

When IUB emerged from World War II, Wells and his administration began to reorient the university from a “provincial” to a world-class institution.<sup>32</sup> As it headed into the second half of the twentieth century, IUB began to see an increase of Asian Americans, as well as other students of color, on campus. As their presence grew at the university, Asian American students realized that the university lacked culturally supportive resources for them. Starting in the late 1980s, Asian American students mobilized to fight against their racial isolation and to expand campus’s black and white perception of race.

### **AAS for Racial Isolation, 1987–1993**

Starting in the late 1980s, Asian American students initially wanted an AAS program to help them process experiences of racial isolation growing up in the Midwest and as students attending a predominantly White campus. They argued for AAS as a way “to support and self-educate Asian Americans” by helping them understand their racial experiences growing up in predominantly White spaces in the Midwest.<sup>33</sup> Graduate students offered one-time courses in

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<sup>30</sup> Japanese Student Admission, Board of Trustees Transcript, May 10, 1942, C213 Indiana University President’s Office Records, 1937–1962, Box 324, Folder, “Japanese Students, 1941–1942,” Indiana University Archives (hereafter IU Archives), Bloomington, IN as cited in Langowski, “Education Denied,” 80.

<sup>31</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, 129-131; Langowski, “Education Denied,” 105–108; Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland*, 116.

<sup>32</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, xvi.

<sup>33</sup> Asian American Association [AAA] and others, “Proposal to Establish an Asian American Advocate Dean and an Asian American Culture Center at Indiana-University-Bloomington,” July 19, 1996, C234 Indiana University Student Association records, 1953-2018, Box 24, Folder, “Asian-American Affairs,” IU Archives, 10.

AAS within a residential hall's experimental learning curriculum. These experimental courses became spaces in which Asian American students gained the confidence and the advocacy skills to protest racial incidents against Asians and Asian Americans. These racial incidents, in turn, convinced Asian Americans to expand the argument for AAS to "to educate the University and local community about the histories, cultures, and current struggles of Asian Americans."<sup>34</sup>

In fall of 1986, David Chih (BA '90, PhD '01) transferred to IUB from Washington University in St. Louis. He was born and raised in Bloomington, Indiana, and knew campus well since his father, Yu-Ju Chih, had founded and taught in the East Asian Languages and Literature program since 1961. As a rising sophomore, Chih still felt that the campus was "small and disconnected."<sup>35</sup> According to Chih, one problem was that students who were born in the US with Asian heritage did not have central spaces to meet and socialize with other Asian Americans while exploring questions about their racial identity. Another problem was that students of color had expressed that racial isolation was a pervasive social problem at IUB, which is a predominantly White campus. Racial isolation, according to Kim Park Nelson, is an implicit form of racism that prevents Asian Americans from having any exposure to cultural experiences or connections to a racial community. This racial isolation, then, inspired students to create a pan-ethnic Asian organization, like the Asian American Association, and one-time AAS courses to explore questions about their Asian American identity, which is a complex concept that embodies a racial and political aspect. It was within these spaces where students argued for AAS

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<sup>34</sup> AAA and others, "Proposal to Establish," 10.

<sup>35</sup> David Chih, interview with Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, August 3, 2018 digital recording and transcript, 52:32, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author's possession).

as a part of the IUB curriculum and as an avenue through which to they could process the racial isolation they felt growing up and as students on the IUB campus.<sup>36</sup>

The year he enrolled at IUB, Chih was one of 533 of Asian Americans on campus, comprising 1.6 percent of the campus population of 32,417. About decade earlier in fall of 1975, there were only 161 Asian Americans, comprising 0.5 percent of the total student body of 32,651. IUB, like other Midwestern campuses, experienced an explosion of Asian American college student enrollment thanks to the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, which eliminated Asiatic exclusionary policies that had been in place since the late nineteenth century. Before the 1965 Act, Asians in Indiana had a small demographic presence because of Indiana's remoteness from the American coasts and US Asiatic exclusion acts that made family reunification difficult.<sup>37</sup>

These state and national forces, then, shaped the educational history of Asian Americans at Indiana universities and colleges. Currently, no such historiography exists in published sources. Thus, I provide a brief history that is loosely shaped around frameworks developed by Michael Hevel, Heidi Jaeckle, Sharon S. Lee, and Monica Trieu. The historiography of Asian Americans in Indiana higher education is shaped through two periods. First, the pre-World War II era in which Asian students from China, Japan, and the Philippines attended American universities and colleges. Second, the post-World War II era that ushered in more liberal

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<sup>36</sup> "Yu-Ju Chih," *The News-Gazette* obituary, May 27, 2016, accessed on May 21, 2023 from [https://www.news-gazette.com/obituaries/archive/yu-ju-chih/article\\_6c5be835-2440-5f99-9801-57bd667568ed.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/obituaries/archive/yu-ju-chih/article_6c5be835-2440-5f99-9801-57bd667568ed.html); Kim Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>37</sup> I calculated the percentage of IUB Asian American student population using student enrollment data by race in the 1975–76 and 1985–86 *IU Factbooks*. Office of the Registrar, "Total Student Headcount by Campus, Ethnic Group, and Sex First Semester, 1975–76," *Indiana University Factbook*, December 1975, Reference Files, Folder, "Enrollment: 1975," 5, Indiana University Archives [hereafter IU Archives], Bloomington, IN; University Budget Office, "Total Student Headcount Enrollment by Campus, Ethnic Group, and Sex Fall Semester, 1985–86," Reference Files, Folder, "Fact books 1983–1985," 29, IU Archives.

American policies to admit more international Asian students, which in turn created a larger second-generation of Asians, who were born and raised in the US.<sup>38</sup>

Asians have a long history in Indiana with Chinese and Japanese immigrants settling in the Hoosier State since the 1870s. Asian Americans, who were the children of Asian immigrants, did not have a large presence at IUB until the late 1980s because of Indiana's remote location and national immigration policies. Since the 1870s, the state of Indiana has had a relatively low proportion of Asians and other new immigrants compared to the US coasts. Indiana's remote location made it difficult for Asian immigrants, who came in from the East and West Coast ports of entry, to reach the Hoosier state. Mirroring national immigration patterns, the earliest and largest Asian settlers in Indiana were Chinese and Japanese immigrants from 1870 to 1910. According to the Dillingham report on US immigration, eighteen Japanese immigrants chose to settle in Indiana out of the 66,590 immigrants from around the world who reported their final destination as Indiana during 1899 to 1910. The first US Census of 1880 recorded thirteen persons of Chinese descent and five of Japanese descent living in Indiana. These Asian residents tended to be secondary migrants, immigrants who resided in other states before moving to Indiana to open up small businesses, like laundries and restaurants, or to pursue higher education.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Michael S. Hevel and Heidi A. Jaeckle, "Trends in the Historiography of American College Student Life," in *Rethinking Campus Life: New Perspectives on the History of College Students in the United States*, eds. Christine A. Ogren and Marc A. Vanverbeke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 11–36; Sharon S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority: Asian American Students at the University of Illinois* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022), 9–23; Monica M. Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility: Asian Americans in the Midwest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023), 19–45.

<sup>39</sup> Justin H. Libby, "Japanese," in *Peopling in Indiana: The Ethnic Experience*, eds. Robert M. Taylor Jr. and Connie A. McBirney (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1996), 298–313; R. Keith Schoppa, "Chinese," in *Peopling in Indiana*, eds. Robert M. Taylor Jr. and Connie A. McBirney (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1996), 86–105.

Records of Asian students attending secondary and postsecondary schools in Indiana are inconsistent and often rely on biographical sketches from newspaper sources. In September 1909, the IPS counted only three foreign-born Chinese in its records of schoolchildren. The records, however, did not include Chinese who were born in Indianapolis, so the count may be underestimated. In the late nineteenth century, the governments of Korea, Japan, and the Philippines sponsored students to study at American colleges and universities. Students were expected to master English, learn Western medical and technological advances, and return to their home countries to advance national development. Indiana newspapers recorded the first Asian international students to attend Indiana universities and colleges. *The Indianapolis Sentinel* on July 23, 1905 identified three Japanese students, Kikijirio Nagai, Shun Suzuki, and Maysama Hondu, who were working their way through Wabash College. *The Indianapolis Star* on August 28, 1906 documented Atsumi Motokichi and Inomata Tadasu, who were relatives of Japanese military officers and diplomats. Motokichi and Tadasu were students at Defiance College in Ohio but were working as common laborers for the Western Interurban Company in Kokomo during their summer break. The 1903 Pensionado Act brought fifty-three Filipino men to study at Indiana universities and colleges, particularly IUB and Purdue University, in 1917. When the US stopped subsidizing the pensionados program in the 1920s, the number of Filipino students enrolled in Indiana colleges dropped to 17: nine at Purdue, four at Tri-State College in Angola, three at IU, and one at the University of Notre Dame.<sup>40</sup>

Between 1910 and the end of World War II in 1945, restrictive immigration policies like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1907–1908 Japanese Gentleman’s Agreement

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<sup>40</sup> James A. Baldwin, “Peoples of the Pacific,” in *Peopling in Indiana: The Ethnic Experience*, eds. Robert M. Taylor Jr. and Connie A. McBirney (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1996): 420–433; Libby, “Japanese,” 299.

contributed to a significant decline in the Asian population in Indiana. From 1910 to 1940, the number of Chinese immigrants in Indiana dropped from 273 to 208. The number of Japanese immigrants in Indiana plummeted from 81 in 1920 to 29 in 1940. These Asiatic exclusionary laws, which targeted the entry of Asian laborers, did not allow women to accompany the first wave of Chinese and Japanese immigrants. This stringent policy prevented Asian men to marry and establish a family. Out of the twenty-nine Japanese in Indiana in 1940, there were only twenty Nisei or American-born Japanese living in Indiana, according to historian Justin Libby. There are also few records of second-generation Chinese who attended secondary and postsecondary schools in Indiana. Journalist Ernie Hernandez of *The Post-Tribune* recorded Herbert Lee Herbert Lee, the son of laundryman Dong Ming Lee, as the first Chinese American graduate of Froebel High School in Gary, Indiana, in 1931. A 1949 *Indianapolis Star Magazine* article highlighted a biographical sketch of Lung E. Hui, who was the first-born Chinese American in the city of Indianapolis. The daughter of a laundry owner and gift shop owner, Lung attended DePauw University (date unknown) and returned to Indianapolis. Lung married and had a daughter, Cordelia Hui, who attended St. Mary's of the Woods in Terre Haute, Indiana, as an undergraduate and was working toward a master's degree in law at Indiana University in 1949.<sup>41</sup>

Indiana expanded economic and educational opportunities for Asian immigrants at the end of World War II, leading to a dramatic increase in Asian American college enrollment by the late 1980s. In the name of diplomacy, the US backtracked its Asiatic exclusion policies to show the world an image of cultural and national unity after World War II. The American federal government established a more liberal policy on international students and allowed a larger

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<sup>41</sup> Nancy Nakano Conner, "From Internment to Indiana: Japanese Americans, the War Relocation Authority, the Disciples of Christ, and Citizen Committees in Indianapolis," *Indiana Magazine of History* 102, no. 2 (2006): 89–116; Ernie Hernandez, *Ethnics in Northwest Indiana* (Gary: Post-Tribune, 1984), 100.

number of students from Korea, China, and Taiwan to study at American colleges and universities. The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act also promoted the recruitment of skilled and professional personnel. Asian graduate students enrolled at Purdue University, University of Notre Dame, and IUB hoping to fill the need for doctors, engineers, and scientists in the US. At Purdue, student enrollment from the People's Republic of China (PRC) jumped from 149 in 1985 to 409 in 1991, while students from Taiwan increased from 231 to 344 in the same time. At Notre Dame, Chinese student enrollment from the PRC increased from three in 1970 to 113 in 1991, while Taiwanese student enrollment had a modest gain from 13 to 24. At IUB, there were only sixty-six Taiwanese graduate students in 1970. By 1991, there were 206 students from Taiwan and 295 students from the PRC. IUB had the largest Korean and Korean American student population of all the colleges and universities in Indiana, attracting several hundred in total from the late 1960s to the late 1980s.<sup>42</sup>

Many of these post-1965 immigrants settled in the US and were allowed to bring over spouses, children, and their extended family through the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. Demographically, Asian immigrant families contributed to an "Asian American baby boom" that resulted in 107,366 Asian Americans in colleges and universities by 1970.<sup>43</sup> According to the US Census, the Indiana population of Asian and Pacific Islanders jumped from 6,892 to 20,557 from 1970 to 1980.<sup>44</sup>

In September 1989, Chih and approximately ten other students founded the Asian American Association (AAA, formerly known as the Asian American Student Association). At

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<sup>42</sup> Schoppa, "Chinese," 101; Elisabeth E. Orr, "Koreans," in *Peopling in Indiana: The Ethnic Experience*, eds. Robert M. Taylor Jr. and Connie A. McBirney (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1996), 342.

<sup>43</sup> William Wei, *The Asian American Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Table 29: Indiana-Race and Hispanic Origin: 1880 to 1990," *Population Division: Historical Census Statistics of Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, US Census Bureau* September 13, 2002, Working Paper Series no. 56, 47, accessed on February 7, 2025 from <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2002/demo/POP-twps0056.html>

the first meeting, they established an Asian American political agenda that students would pursue from 1989 to 1998, when the university finally established a cultural center for Asian Americans. They desired an Asian American culture center where they could meet others who shared an Asian heritage like them. They wanted the IUB administration to appoint an Asian American advocacy dean, who would represent the Asian American constituency within university decision-making channels. Finally, they wanted an AAS program where they could learn about Asian American history and racial identity. Chih admitted that the agenda was ambitious, yet he believed in creating a foundation of political advocacy in beginning AAA. “There’s some power in creating this kind of student group for and by Asian Americans,” Chih said, adding that AAA symbolized a special moment in time in which students began organizing for AAS.<sup>45</sup>

When they established this political agenda, Asian American students argued for AAS as a way to process the racial isolation they experienced growing up. Chih, for example, wanted an academic space where he could meet others who shared his interests in his Chinese heritage, social justice, and American identity politics. Joon Park (BA '98), who was AAA president 1996–97, said he wanted a space to help him explore his “Asian American consciousness.”<sup>46</sup> He described this consciousness as having the confidence to be “comfortable in your own skin.”<sup>47</sup> Park said joining AAA helped him learn about a broader racial identity that was “not defined by an Asian kid in this predominantly White area or defined by a Korean person with another group of Korean people.”<sup>48</sup> Park, who was born in South Korea, grew up in the a predominantly White

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<sup>45</sup> Quote in Chih, interview; Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, “‘Little Steps of Courage Forward’: How Asian American Women Leaders Fought for Culturally Supportive Spaces at Indiana University Bloomington,” in *Women at Indiana University: 150 Years of Experiences and Contributions*, ed. Andrea Walton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 131–152.

<sup>46</sup> Joon Park, interview with Stephanie T. X. Nguyen, October 26, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 43:04, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author’s possession).

<sup>47</sup> Park, interview, October 26, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Park, interview, October 26, 2018.

suburb of Chicago. At his high school, he felt defined as one of the ten Asian American students in a class of 400 predominantly White students. He also did not feel like he fit in with his Korean Presbyterian church, a tight-knit community bound by cultural Korean and religious values. AAA helped him meet others who experienced this type racial isolation in which they did not fit into the White or ethnic-specific population.<sup>49</sup>

Jules Lin (BS '95) and Khai (married name Yang) Truong (BA '97) had an even more isolating experience growing up in Indiana. Lin grew up in Warsaw, Indiana, during a time where there were only four Asian families among the 15,000 predominantly White residents. His family had moved to Warsaw from Chicago after his father, a Taiwanese immigrant, obtained a permanent position as a surgeon at the local hospital. Before IUB, the only time he had been exposed to a larger community of Asian Americans was during a summer talent development camp at Northwestern University. For Lin, the experience was “a social, eye-opener” because he loved “being around people that are very much like me and our families are very much like each other.”<sup>50</sup> The experience helped him find AAA and a larger community of Asian Americans at IUB when he entered as a first-year student. “[AAA] was a group that you felt at home with and that you can relate to and had the same experiences that I had [growing up],” Lin said.<sup>51</sup>

Truong had a similar experience growing up in Mooresville, Indiana where her family was resettled in the late 1980s after escaping Vietnam as boat refugees. Being an immigrant had always been a central part of her identity. Yet, growing up in a small Indiana town, she struggled to find a balance between her dual identities as an American and as an Asian. She recalled a vivid

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<sup>49</sup> Park, interview, October 26, 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Jules Lin, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, October 26, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 48:25, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author's possession).

<sup>51</sup> Lin, interview.

memory in which she was “too Asian.”<sup>52</sup> As a six-year-old, she wore donated clothes from the Catholic church while watching White girls jumping rope on the playground. That memory underscored how much she longed to be accepted as an American. Throughout secondary school, she adapted to the American culture by studying and making good grades. However, she recalled, “My classmates didn’t really ask me a lot of questions about who I was or like what I am or where I’m from.”<sup>53</sup> At home, she struggled to connect with her Asian identity since her parents thought she was “too American.”<sup>54</sup> When she joined AAA in college, it was where she could finally begin to embrace her dual identities as an Asian and as an American.

IUB students’ racial experiences are common among those who also grew up in predominantly White spaces in the Midwest. Scholars have articulated two types of racial isolation that Asian Americans have experienced while living in geographically isolating regions like the Midwest. Monica Trieu examined the experiences of 1.5 and second-generation Asian Americans in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Trieu found that those who grew up in predominantly White social spaces in the Midwest formed a distinct Midwestern racial identity. She described Midwestern Asian American experiences as shared experiences of being keenly aware of one’s race in White social spaces, such as schools and churches. Sharon S. Lee extended Trieu’s study by contending that Asian Americans, who experience racial isolation, form a distinct Midwestern racial identity when they enter college. In

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<sup>52</sup> Khai Yang, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, October 19, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 55:04, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author’s possession).

<sup>53</sup> Yang, interview.

<sup>54</sup> Quote in Yang, interview; Joyce Lam, host, “ACC’s 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition,” Hearabouts: Asian American Midwest Radio, October 18, 2018, Bloomington, Indiana, 28 mins., 57 secs., <https://wfhb.org/news-public-affairs/hearabouts-asian-american-midwest-radio-20th-anniversary-edition/>; Khai Yang, “Amp It Up: Making a Difference in the Workplace and the Community by Being You,” Asian Culture Center Anniversary Symposium lecture, October 12, 2018, Bloomington, Indiana (field notes in author’s possession). Thanks to the IU’s Bicentennial celebrations that brought back graduates to campus, I had to the opportunity to meet and conduct oral history interviews with Yang and several other Asian American IU alums.

her historical study of Asian Americans at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Lee described this Midwestern racial identity as the desire to find a larger Asian American community than what they experienced in secondary schools. When students entered UIUC, they were “shocked” to find Asians of all ethnicities that shared common experiences of growing up as one of the only Asian Americans at their school and experiencing feelings of being “different” from their White peers.<sup>55</sup> Lee added that these race-specific spaces, like Asian American student organizations, also evoked a “racial awakening” among Asian American college students, who could better articulate the racial isolation they experienced growing up and attending schools in homogenously White communities.<sup>56</sup>

Jin Chang insisted that racial isolation had inspired advocates toward pan-ethnic mobilization. They analyzed oral histories of Asian American undergraduate and graduate students and found that Asian Americans felt “invisible” because there were “so few Asian people” at the University of Iowa.<sup>57</sup> This lack of demographic presence created a campus perception that Asian Americans were international students, thus perpetuating the perpetual foreigner stereotype, according to Susan Hwang who was a doctoral student at the university. According to Hwang, this pervasive image suggested that US-born Asians are assumed to be foreigners regardless of their American upbringing, schooling, and socialization. “There was generally a sense of feeling like you weren’t treated like a full-on American citizen, like we were treated like, obviously you must be a foreigner,” she said.<sup>58</sup> Students combated this type of racial

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<sup>55</sup> S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority*, 119; Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility*, 46–63.

<sup>56</sup> S. Lee, *An Unseen Unheard Minority*, 119.

<sup>57</sup> Jin Chang, “‘Am I Invisible?’ Asian American Activism at the University of Iowa from 1998–2008,” (PhD Diss., University of Iowa, 2025), 101.

<sup>58</sup> Susan Hwang, interview by Jin Chang, *No Longer Invisible: Asian American Oral Histories at the University of Iowa*, September 18, 2021 as cited in Chang, “‘Am I Invisible?’” 103.

isolation by forming pan-ethnic student organizations to reclaim their visibility on a campus that felt “so white.”<sup>59</sup>

Spaces like AAA were a precursor to a formal AAS program but were not enough to teach students how to contextualize their racial isolation.<sup>60</sup> Sophomore Chiung-Hu Hwang and senior Ed Lee explained in a September 8, 1989 article in the IDS that Asian American students wanted an Asian American Culture Center and AAS courses to understand how to navigate new racial dynamics that they encountered at IUB. Two weeks into Hwang’s first year at IUB in 1988, someone driving by shouted racial slurs at her while walking on campus. She had never encountered racism before IUB, although she was the only Asian American at her high school. Ed Lee, who grew up in northwestern Indiana, said he often experienced racial attacks from various ethnic groups at home and at IUB. The first AAA members argued that these cultural resources, including an AAS program, could help them stand up for their rights on campus and in society.<sup>61</sup>

Graduate students Vincent Gotera (MFA ’89, PhD ’92) and Yuko Kurahashi (PhD ’96) offered experimental courses in AAS in spring 1989 and fall 1993, respectively. Gotera and Kurahashi taught these one-time courses through the Collins Living-Learning Center, a residential hall which pioneered the experimental learning curriculum that became popular in the 1960s. For the first time in IUB’s history, undergraduate students—both Asian Americans and non-Asians—spent a semester dedicated to the literature, history, and experiences of Asian

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<sup>59</sup> Chang, ““Am I Invisible?”” 101.

<sup>60</sup> I calculated the percentage of IUB Asian American student population using student enrollment data by race in the 1975–76 and 1985–86 *IU Factbooks*. Office of the Registrar, “Total Student Headcount by Campus, Ethnic Group, and Sex First Semester, 1975-76,” *Indiana University Factbook*, December 1975, Reference Files, Folder, “Enrollment: 1975,” IU Archives, 5; University Budget Office, “Total Student Headcount Enrollment by Campus, Ethnic Group, and Sex Fall Semester, 1985–86,” Reference Files, Folder, “Fact books 1983–1985,” IU Archives, 29.

<sup>61</sup> Chih, interview.

Americans. For Asian American advocates, these courses helped them frame AAS as an educational tool in understanding their civil liberties how to enact change at the local level.<sup>62</sup>

In the course description in the Collins catalog, Gotera boldly declared that his Collins course, “Asian American Life and Literature,” would be “possibly a pioneering step to an Asian American Studies program at I.U.”<sup>63</sup> Born in San Francisco, Gotera identified as a Filipino who grew up in California and the Philippines. His diasporic childhood shaped his interest in teaching the Asian American experience through literature and poetry. It also helped him realize that IUB only offered courses focused on the history, culture, and experiences of East Asian countries like China and Korea. Gotera had taught an AAS course through the English department in spring 1988, but he believed that the experimental learning curriculum at Collins would be a great place to expand his AAS course to reach a broader audience and to introduce Asian American identity politics into the IUB curriculum, albeit temporarily.<sup>64</sup>

Since 1972, Collins was an innovative space where experimental and even political ideas could be introduced. The living-learning center developed its experimental curriculum during the era of educational reform in the 1960s and 1970s. Activists of the 1960s social movements demanded more student input in the university curriculum and to incorporate topics that were not taught in mainstream disciplines. By the 1970s, universities and colleges proposed and tested out new organizational structures like curriculum proposals that incorporated radical approaches to general education and experimental colleges, such as University of California Los Angeles’s Experimental College, that were student-run and funded. At Collins, the experimental learning

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<sup>62</sup> Vincent Gotera, email correspondence to author, October 2, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Ezra S. Simon, “Collins Living Learning Center Indiana University Bloomington: The History of Curriculum Development, 1972–1993,” C580 Indiana University Collins Living-Learning Center records, 1924–2023, Box 14, Folder “A History of Curriculum Development, 1972-1993,” IU Archives, 67.

<sup>64</sup> Vincent Gotera, email correspondence to author, October 2, 2018.

curriculum aimed to be a “student-centered learning approach.”<sup>65</sup> Student instructors could teach topics they could not teach in their mainstream departments. Collins also allowed undergraduate students to explore academic fields and interests that they might not have otherwise encountered in the available university curriculum.<sup>66</sup>

Although Gotera only taught the course once, he affirmed the need for regular AAS courses to politicize students. Students needed an academic program to learn about the shared history of oppression among Asian ethnic groups in the US; the origins of pervasive Asian stereotypes like the perpetual foreigner; and the people and groups who championed for Asian American civil liberties. Gotera recalled three members of AAA who had learned how to advocate for themselves and their larger communities. “David Chih, Steven Yee, and Mona Wu told me that they had first been politicized about Asian American issues in my Collins course,” Gotera remarked. “So quite literally, that Collins course *was* a ‘pioneering step to an Asian American Studies program at IU.’”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Chih said that Gotera’s AAS course was “revolutionary.”<sup>68</sup> For the first time in his undergraduate studies, he had an instructor who had the expertise to help him “deconstruct racism, power, and colonialism,” intertwined in American history and society.<sup>69</sup>

Four years later, Kurahashi taught the campus’s second-ever documented AAS course, titled “Images and Voices of ‘Others’: The Immigrant Experience and Asian-Americans.”<sup>70</sup> Her time as a doctoral student did not overlap with Gotera, but she introduced similar political ideas

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<sup>65</sup> Simon, “The History of Curriculum Development,” 3.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur Levine, *The Handbook on Undergraduate Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), 285–328; Arthur Levine, *Why Innovation Fails: The Institutionalization and Termination of Innovation in Higher Education* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1980).

<sup>67</sup> Vincent Gotera, email correspondence to author, September 11, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Chih, interview.

<sup>69</sup> Chih, interview.

<sup>70</sup> Simon, “The History of Curriculum Development,” 79.

to several AAA members in her AAS course. Born in Tokyo, Kurahashi came to IUB to pursue doctoral studies in theater. Kurahashi framed her AAS course based on a Black Drama course taught by Dr. Winona Lee Fletcher, who introduced African American history and culture through theater. The course deeply moved Kurahashi because Fletcher interweaved teaching content with her personal stories about growing up in the American South. Using Fletcher's reflective framework, Kurahashi encouraged her students in the AAS course to keep a journal or scrapbook while they learned about the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and the 1982 murder of Vincent Chin. According to Kurahashi, her IUB students were "very hungry" to take her course because they were not exposed to these injustices against Asian Americans in mainstream university courses.<sup>71</sup> She vividly remembered several of her students crying when the class watched the documentary *Come See Paradise*, about Japanese American incarceration during World War II. Seeing such injustices helped advocates, like Truong who was a first-year student at the time, to realize the importance of having regular AAS courses at the university. "I had this awakening," Truong said in her 2018 oral history. "[I]t really made me think about what we could do to change that experience so that the resources are available [for future students]."<sup>72</sup>

By teaching course content that was relevant to Asian American students, Gotera and Kurahashi instilled in their students a sense of racial justice and empowered them toward political advocacy. IUB advocates joined their peers at other Midwestern campuses who had taken experimental courses and discovered the need for a formal program. In the 1970s, students at University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison), and UIUC had

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<sup>71</sup> Yuko Kurahashi, interview with Stephanie T. X. Nguyen, August 10, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 44:07, in Bloomington, Indiana, (copy in author's possession).

<sup>72</sup> Yang, interview.

established the first experimental courses, according to the Summer 1974 *Rice Paper* newsletter and Sharon S. Lee's history of Asian American student activism at UIUC. In the Northwestern University AAS proposal, students reported that they had organized six full-credit seminars focused on Asian American issues between 1992 and 1995. Students who had taken these experimental courses at Michigan, Northwestern, UW-Madison, and UIUC experienced a similar racial awakening that inspired them to demand a formal program. This racial awakening inspired IUB advocates to begin shaping the educational arguments for AAS. A program was needed on campus to teach students about America's racial structure and how to enact change within it.<sup>73</sup>

Gotera's AAS course, indeed, had politicized Mona Wu. In spring 1989, the same semester she was taking Gotera's course, Wu and several AAA members began to broaden the justification for AAS to educate the campus community about racial ignorance, prejudice, discrimination, and even racial violence against Asians and Asian Americans. Asian American students felt a "certain degree of alienation" on campus because of reported and unreported incidents of bias, discrimination, and racial violence.<sup>74</sup> Some students like senior Phil Sung felt "frightened by the subtle forms of racism" on campus such as the use of racial slurs and insensitive comments about Asian Americans as "foreigners."<sup>75</sup> The Asian American community argued that existing culturally supportive resources were insufficient in helping them understand the racial dynamics they experienced on campus. Moreover, Asian American students needed a formal AAS program to help them navigate "cultural differences" that prevented them from

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<sup>73</sup> Asian American Advisory Board [AAAB], "Proposal to Establish an Asian American Studies Program at Northwestern University," Box 1, Folder 2, "Founding Documents 1, 1993-1999," Series 11/3/301 Records of the Asian American Studies Program, Northwestern University Archives, Evanston, IL, 8; Kurahashi, interview; S. Lee, *Unseen and Unheard*, 44-46; Rice Paper Collective, *Rice Paper* 1, no. 1, (Summer 1974), 6, Folder, "Midwest History," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Cultural Center Archives, Urbana, IL.

<sup>74</sup> Elissa Milenky, "Asian Americans Asking IU for Dean," *Indiana Daily Student*, February 22, 1991, 3.

<sup>75</sup> Milenky, "Asian Americans Asking IU for Dean," 3.

reporting racial incidents and seeking help.<sup>76</sup> Two racial incidents that involved Asian and Asian American students further convinced AAA to pursue culturally supportive resources to educate the entire campus community against racial ignorance.

On February 14, 1990, two IU police officers allegedly violated the civil rights of Asian male students after a white woman was reportedly assaulted by an Asian male in the laundry room of the Redbud Hill Graduate Student Family Housing. The Asian American community claimed that IU police officers had obtained a list of the resident's names and asked residents' whose names "looked" Asian to disrobe to look for traces of blood.<sup>77</sup> Several of the Asian male residents, who felt frightened and humiliated, had little knowledge of the English language and were not aware of their rights to refuse police examination. Wu and AAA members demanded the IUB administration and police department to apologize for racial profiling. The IU police department issued an official apology in December 1990 after several months of lobbying by AAA and the IU Student Association (IUSA), the university's student government. Chief of Police George Huntington explained that the two officers did not follow "the correct procedure" and admitted that there was "some form of harassment of Asian students."<sup>78</sup> Students like senior Steven Yee were satisfied with the apology. Wu, however, claimed that having a senior-level administrator to represent the Asian American population would have helped them understand their civil rights. "We want someone in the administration, a constant who doesn't have to go through the red tape," she said.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Elissa Milenky, "IUPD Apologizes for Insensitivity in 'Redbud Incident,'" *Indiana Daily Student*, December 3, 1990, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Mona Wu and Joe Chen, "Asian Rights," March 8, 1990, C234 Indiana University Student Association records, Box 16, Folder, "Asian Rights 1990," IU Archives, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Milenky, "IUPD Apologizes," 1.

<sup>79</sup> Milenky, "IUPD Apologizes," 1; Milenky, "Asian Americans Asking IU for Dean," 3; Wu and Chen, "Asian Rights," 2-3.

The second incident occurred on July 25, 1990, when two white teenagers pushed David Jung, a Bloomington resident and IUB student, off his bike and called him a “fuckin’ chink.”<sup>80</sup> One assailant began hitting him while the other circled around them, brandishing a knife. Following the attack, Jung reported the incident to the Racial Incident Team in the office of the Dean of Students and to the Monroe County legal authorities. He was traumatized by the racial incident. Jung felt that having an Asian American administrator would have helped him process the racial incident and find the university resources to help him ease his fears. He did not feel comfortable telling his parents about the attack because he felt they did not understand American racism. Jung also did not feel compelled to go to the deans of Afro-American or Latino Affairs because they did not understand his background as an immigrant whose family experienced deeply-trenched racism in China.<sup>81</sup>

These racial incidents spurred Mona Wu to run for AAA president in 1990. She dedicated her presidency to writing a formal proposal for an Asian American advocacy dean, culture center, and AAS courses. She formed a small team of two unnamed AAA members to conduct preliminary research for the proposal. They distributed surveys to Asian American students, gathered demographic statistics, and even garnered an endorsement from IUSA to demonstrate the large interest for Asian American cultural services. She met with senior-level administrators to consider their request: Vice President and Chancellor of IUB Kenneth Gros Louis, Dean of Afro-American Affairs Herman Hudson, and Dean of Latino Affairs Alberto Torchinsky. The IUB administrators recommended Wu and her team approach the Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC). Around April 1991, Wu and AAA members presented their request to the Affirmative

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<sup>80</sup> Mike Kelsey, “What Price Hatred: Racism Poses Huge Costs to Both Individuals,” *Bloomington Monthly*, September 1990, 15.

<sup>81</sup> Milenky, “Asian Americans Asking IU for Dean,” 3.

Action Committee, which screened the feasibility of campus requests about minority affairs before presenting them to the Faculty Council. Of their several demands, one of their requests included more AAS courses.<sup>82</sup>

In their presentation to the Affirmative Action Committee, Wu and AAA members argued that IUB needed AAS courses to teach Asian Americans about their civil rights. Racial incidents against Asian Americans were also on the rise with three reported cases in fall 1989 and jumping to nine by spring 1991. However, these totals remain underreported because AAA members did not know how to report acts of racism on campus partly because of bureaucratic processes at IUB. “Racial incidents happen to many Asian Americans, but often go unreported because they do not have a familiar figure of representation,” David Jung wrote in the February 1991 IUSA Senate resolution.<sup>83</sup> Other Asian American students, like those involved in the Redbud Hill incident, were unaware of their civil rights. Wu and AAA members contended that an AAS program would have informed those involved in the Redbud Hill incident of their right to refuse police examination. Moreover, an AAS program could reverse this “tradition of political inactivity and passiveness,” within the Asian American community.<sup>84</sup> Phil Nguyen, the Director of Minority Affairs in IUSA, elaborated that AAS courses would reduce the community’s political antipathy while teaching others about Asian American stereotypes and historical injustices. “The solution to discrimination problems against Asian Americans is education and awareness,” he wrote in a May 18, 1991 IUSA agenda. “Asians for too long have endured hardships and have overcome them without speaking out about the wrongness of these hardships,” Nguyen said referring to the

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<sup>82</sup> Milenky, “Asian Americans Asking for Dean,” 3; Yung, “Incredible Minorities,” 29.

<sup>83</sup> Mona Wu, David Jung, and others, “Senate Resolution No. 91-2-8: Resolution to Endorse the Proposal for an Asian American Advocate Dean at IU-Bloomington,” February 8, 1991, C234 Indiana University Student Association records, Box 8, Folder “1990–1991,” IU Archives, 2.

<sup>84</sup> Wu, Jung, and others, “Senate Resolution No. 91-2-8,” 2.

model minority stereotype and the perpetual foreigner stereotype that led to the 1987 murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit, Michigan.<sup>85</sup> Nguyen, Wu, and AAA believed that AAS courses would be a safe space in which Asian Americans could learn how to advocate for themselves while gaining “self-discovery and pride in their heritage.”<sup>86</sup>

Wu and AAA members further expanded the educational argument for AAS to reduce discrimination and ignorance, especially on a campus in which Asian Americans and other campus communities felt unsafe. Since the mid-twentieth century, Black and Latinx students had mobilized to protest their perceptions of a “chilly campus climate.”<sup>87</sup> Amid the backdrop of the nationwide civil rights movement, Black students agitated for culturally supportive resources because of their treatment as “second-class citizens.”<sup>88</sup> Even with Wells’s efforts to desegregate campus, Black students felt “highly visible and conscious of their separateness” in classrooms that were mostly White students and faculty members.<sup>89</sup> They wanted a Black cultural center to escape the increasing racist remarks and threats on campus and in the city of Bloomington, which had an active KKK chapter. Black students also demanded the university institute minority-specific recruiting and admissions programs to improve retention of Black students and faculty members. In 1968, there were fewer than ten Black faculty members on campus and no Black senior-level administrators. Black students comprised about 2 percent of the IU student body, which was approximately 26,000 in 1968. However, Black students were more likely than

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<sup>85</sup> Phil Nguyen, “Asian American Agenda,” May 18, 1991, C234 Indiana University Student Association records, Box 71, Folder “Asian American Concerns, 1991–92,” IU Archives, 5.

<sup>86</sup> Quote in Wu, Jung, and others, “Senate Resolution No. 91-2-8,” 1; Valerie Bott, “Dean Urges Asians to Beat Discrimination,” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 8, 1989, 3; Kelsey, “What Price Hatred”; Mona Wu, Joe Chen, and Denise Jackson, “Senate Resolution No. 90-4-3: Asian Rights,” April 3, 1990, C234 Indiana University Student Association records, Box 8, Folder, “1990–1991,” IU Archives.

<sup>87</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, 165.

<sup>88</sup> Dawn Knight, *Race and Football in America: The Life and Legacy of George Taliaferro* (Bloomington: Red Lightning Books, 2019), 207.

<sup>89</sup> Wynkoop, *Dissent in the Heartland*, 119.

Whites to drop out of school. Finally, Black activists wanted a Black Studies program to correct historical distortions of the Black community as deficient and inferior. In spring of 1968, the IU administration approved the Black Studies program and appointed Herman Hudson as the first dean of Afro-American Affairs.<sup>90</sup>

During the 1970s, Latinx students successfully lobbied university administration to create the Office of Latino Affairs and the Chicano-Riqueño Studies in 1976. They argued for their own culturally supportive resources because of their distinct “history of invisibility.”<sup>91</sup> Latinx students felt invisible because of their demographically small presence on campus. According to a 1977 proposal to establish the Office of the Dean for Latino Affairs, there were approximately 150 Latinx students on campus, comprising about 0.5 percent of the total student body. Like Black students, Latinx students felt alone in predominantly White classrooms. Latinx students articulated this distinct racial isolation after notable a racial incident that occurred in fall of 1972. Two Latinx students, Luis Padilla and José Guadiano, filed a complaint with the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, claiming that an associate instructor called them a derogatory name, “morochos,” in a Spanish language course.<sup>92</sup> When department officials allegedly dismissed their complaint, Padilla and Guadiano demanded IU President John Ryan investigate the incident and claims of “endemic” patterns of racial insensitivity on campus. In a committee report to President Ryan on April 2, 1973, George Taliaferro and John B. Joyner concluded that the

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<sup>90</sup> Herman Hudson, “The Black Studies Program: Strategy and Structure,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 41, no. 4 (Autumn, 1972): 294-298; “Vice President-Bloomington Fall Seminar 1979,” C549 Indiana University Office of Affirmative Action records, Box 1, Folder “Affirmative Action Plan-Miscellaneous 1974-1979,” IU Archives, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Ebelia Hernández and Merylou Rodriguez, “The History of the First Latina Sorority at IU: Established During an Era of Student Activism,” in *Women at Indiana University: 150 Years of Experiences and Contributions*, ed. Andrea Walton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 155.

<sup>92</sup> George Taliaferro and John B. Joyner, “Report of Grievance Filed by Students Luis Padilla and José Guadiano Against the Indiana University Spanish and Portuguese Department,” April 3, 1973, C187 Special Assistant to the President’s Records, Box 1, Folder “Latino Affairs, 1972-1979,” IU Archives, 1; “Report on the Situation of US/Latino Affairs at Indiana University and Proposal for the Establishment of the Office of the Dean for Latino Affairs,” April 5, 1977, C187, Box 1, Folder “Latino Affairs, 1972-1979,” IU Archives, 6.

university lacked existing structures for Latino students to deal with the “incipient racism in the classroom.”<sup>93</sup> Taliaferro and Joyner recommended six measures that increased recruitment of Latinx students and faculty members to targeted social and academic services.<sup>94</sup>

Even with the creation of these culturally supportive resources on campus, the IUB campus was not immune to the nationwide upswing of racial incidents at college campuses during the 1980s. In 1988, the Black Student Union (BSU) charged President Thomas Ehrlich and senior-level administrators to create a system to clearly report racial incidents after three unidentified White students beat a Black undergraduate behind Foster Quadrangle in April 1988. By fall 1988, the Dean of Students Office established the Racial Incidents Team that, for the first time, consistently published statistics of racial incidents. From September 1988 to June 1989, they recorded fifty-one racial incidents ranging from racial slurs and physical attacks to fraternities promoting negative stereotypes through themed parties. By spring 1989, the number of reported racial incidents rose to eighty-four. Dean of Students Michael Gordon said that he was not shocked by the number of racial incidents on campus. “These statistics are consistent with the types of cases and proportions I have dealt with for years,” he said in a September 7, 1989 IDS article. “All colleges have to deal with racism, but we are not as bad off as many because we have admitted there is a problem.”<sup>95</sup>

IUB students, however, wrote about how they felt unsafe on campus. “When people with different skin color are afraid to go home from the library at night because of threats from white students, something is wrong,” sophomore Marianne Melfald wrote on October 24, 1989 in the

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<sup>93</sup> Taliaferro and Joyner, “Report of Grievance,” 1.

<sup>94</sup> Taliaferro and Joyner, “Report of Grievance,” 9–10.

<sup>95</sup> Christy Powell, “Administrators Not Surprised by Racial Incident Report,” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 7, 1989, 1.

IDS.<sup>96</sup> Beginning fall of 1989, IUB students had joined the movement for multiculturalism that had swept college campuses including UW-Madison's 1988 proposal for ethnic studies and proposal for AAS in 1989. Several student organizations, IUSA, and the Residence Hall Association had proposed the university require students, faculty, and staff to take courses on cultural and racial sensitivity after another string of racial incidents occurred on campus and at other universities. At IUB, Augustine Konneh, a Liberian graduate student, was physically and verbally attacked three separate times during the 1988–1989 academic year. At the University of Mississippi, a fraternity painted the bodies of two White pledges with racial slurs in September 1989. At Purdue University, vandals spray painted derogatory words and slashed the tires of a Black student in October 1989.<sup>97</sup>

In front of the Affirmative Action Committee, Wu and AAA members argued that AAS courses would support this campus-wide proposal to prevent racism and ignorance through education. "The University's purpose is to educate it[s] students through academic and social experiences," Wu wrote in the February 1991 IUSA Senate resolution. She continued that AAS courses would encourage the entire campus community to learn and "take pride in" the Asian American culture while promoting "Indiana University's non-discriminatory image and policies."<sup>98</sup>

The Affirmative Action Committee of the BFC recommended that Wu and AAA write a proposal outlining the concerns of the Asian American student community and forward them to the appropriate administrators. Wu and AAA, however, never submitted a formal proposal

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<sup>96</sup> Marianne Melfald, "Fight Racism at IU," Jordan River Forum, *Indiana Daily Student*, October 24, 1989, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Christy Powell, "Purdue Racial Incident Investigated," *Indiana Daily Student*, October 31, 1989, 1, 8; Ellen Wu, email correspondence to Pam Freeman, December 7, 1994, Ellen Wu personal collection.

<sup>98</sup> Quote in Wu, Jung, and others, "Senate Resolution No. 91-2-8," 3; Christy Powell, "Anti-Racism Rally Draws Crowd of 500," *Indiana Daily Student*, October 31, 1989, 1, 8; Powell, "Purdue Racial Incident," 1, 8; E. Wu to Freeman, December 7, 1994.

because there was not enough support beyond AAA. In a 1994 interview with *Kiosk* magazine, Wu explained, “The reason is that I did not feel the rest of the Asian-American population were going to support us.”<sup>99</sup> Wu’s surveys did not demonstrate a strong desire from a large number of Asian American students for an AAS program. Gros Louis also confirmed Wu’s observation in an email correspondence to AAA leader Ellen Wu on November 30, 1994. “There was no strong push from the Asian-American Association at that time for the establishment of the [advocacy dean] office,” he said.<sup>100</sup>

Gros Louis also added that the university was facing a “significant budget problem,” which further convinced the BFC to not recommend AAA move forward with a formal proposal.<sup>101</sup> “For a variety, of reasons, most of them financial, the recommendations were not to move forward with the proposal,” Gros Louis said. “[T]he year the proposal was made was the first year when the state appropriation to the Bloomington campus decreased.”<sup>102</sup> A February 4, 1991 IDS article verified Chancellor Gros Louis’s claim. In spring 1991, the state government had cut the university’s funding by 75 percent, leaving only \$5 million to keep up IU facilities. This drastic cut in higher education funding stemmed from a 21 percent decrease in corporate tax income and 5 percent decrease in state sales tax during previous fiscal year. According to the IDS, this lack of tax income left the state of Indiana with \$250 million less in revenue, forcing the Indiana General Assembly to consider significant cuts in higher educational budget proposals.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Yung, “Incredible Minorities,” 29.

<sup>100</sup> Ellen Wu, email correspondence to Chancellor Kenneth Gros Louis, November 30, 1994, Ellen Wu personal collection. There is no relation between Mona Wu and Ellen Wu.

<sup>101</sup> E. Wu to Gros Louis, November 30, 1994.

<sup>102</sup> E. Wu to Gros Louis, November 30, 1994.

<sup>103</sup> Jay Judge, “IU Trustees Hear Discussion of Possible State Budget Cuts,” *Indiana Daily Student*, February 4, 1991, 3.

Moreover, IUB administrators were facing considerable pressure from its accrediting agency and the Eli Lilly Foundation to consolidate its minority services. In an April 3, 1991 meeting, Latinx students met with Gros Louis to express their concerns about the consolidation of the Advocacy Dean offices. The meeting minutes, written by Latinx students, mentioned that IUB's accrediting body, the National Central Evaluating Agency, was concerned the duplication of services, such as the Advocacy Dean Offices and cultural centers, would decrease efforts to recruit, enroll, retain, and graduate Black and Latinx students. In the 1990–1991 academic year, Dean of Students Michael Gordon and Assistant Dean Pam Freeman had applied and won a \$1.1 million grant from the Eli Lilly Foundation to develop mentoring programs to increase minority student retention. However, the Eli Lilly Foundation had stipulations on how the grant would be administered. The meeting minutes further explained, “[Gros Louis] mentioned that the Lilly Foundation will not give the University any money for minority programs because they feel that we do not have our offices coordinated enough.” Furthermore, “The Foundation does not want any kind of segregation, and they prefer if [the Black Cultural Center or Latino Cultural Centers] not isolate ourselves from the rest of the community.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, within this context of budget constraints and external pressures, Chancellor Gros Louis and several BFC committees expressed to AAA members that it was not the appropriate time to invest in new facilities and programs like AAS.<sup>105</sup>

Although their campaign was unsuccessful, Wu and AAA's yearlong movement broadened how students framed the mission of AAS as a teaching tool. AAS would teach Asian American students to advocate for themselves, especially during a time when marginalized

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<sup>104</sup> Minutes from Meeting with Vice President Gros Louis, April 23, 1991, C245 Indiana University Latino Cultural Center records, Box 3, Folder “Subject Files: Students United Against Consolidation (SUAC) 1987-1991,” IU Archives, 2.

<sup>105</sup> Judge, “IU Trustees Hear,” 3.

communities felt unsafe on campus. AAS also would benefit all students by teaching non-Asian Americans about stereotypes in hopes of reducing racial incidents on campus. Wu's yearlong campaign also suggests the importance of having an AAS program to have a group of faculty and staff members who could serve as role models and administrative liaisons to the university, especially when students did not know how to navigate the campus "bureaucratic red tape" to seek justice.<sup>106</sup>

### **AAS to Expand the Campus Perceptions of Race, 1993-1997**

Starting in fall of 1993, AAA executive members envisioned "something bigger" for the student organization.<sup>107</sup> At that time, AAA leadership consisted of Christine Hsu, Sue (married name Lin) Leung, Jules Lin, Khai (Yang) Truong, Ellen Wu, William Yang, and Linda Yung. They believed that the student organization needed to be more politically active, especially in campus discussions of race. As undergraduates, they had noticed Asian Americans' exclusion from campus programs to fund, retain, and matriculate students of color. Their frustrations propelled them to shift AAA from a social organization to one focused on political organizing. They also broadened the argument for AAS because they were frustrated with campus perceptions of Asian Americans as statistically overrepresented minorities. They believed having an academic program, instead of one-time courses and student-led programming, would symbolize their racial inclusion in the discourse and expand campus definitions of minorities.<sup>108</sup>

IUB administrators acknowledged their struggles to increase the participation of people of color amid a nationwide decline in minority enrollment starting in 1980. "Across the nation, it's just grim, and Indiana University does not differ much from that trend," Carolyn Calloway-

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<sup>106</sup> Nguyen, "Asian American Agenda," 2.

<sup>107</sup> Lin, interview.

<sup>108</sup> Quote in Yung, "Incredible Minorities," 26; Yang, interview.

Thomas, the chair of the Affirmative Action Committee for the BFC said in a March 1, 1988 BFC meeting.<sup>109</sup> In the state of Indiana, the total student enrollment in higher education had increased by 21 percent from 1979–80 through 1988–89. Yet, in the same period, Black student enrollment had declined by 1 percent and Hispanic enrollment remained virtually unchanged, according to a February 19, 1991 BFC meeting. At IUB, minority enrollment suffered a similar decline. Black student enrollment had dropped from 5.74 percent in 1981 to 4.01 percent by 1988. Latinx student enrollment barely increased from 1.15 percent in 1983 to 1.16 percent in 1988. Meanwhile, Native American student enrollment at 0.10 percent had no change from 1980 to 1988, according to an April 7, 1987, BFC meeting. Administrators and faculty members on the BFC found that students of color at IUB had failed to persist because the lack of funding, social support, and racial acceptance. The Office of Admissions, for example, had “indicated that Indiana University was not able to attract more talented minorities because of insufficient funding...such as fellowships, grants, and so forth,” Calloway-Thomas reported in a March 24, 1987 meeting. Minority students did not see college as an option because “the most visible roadblock is money,” she added.<sup>110</sup>

Starting in the late 1980s, campus administrators and the BFC devised several initiatives to better fund, retain, and matriculate students of color to supplement IUB’s portfolio of college access programs. Amid the student activism of the late 1960s, administrators established college access programs, such as Groups and TRIO summer bridge programs, to increase access to low-income and first-generation college students. According to Shanalee Gallimore, the GROUPS

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<sup>109</sup> Bloomington Faculty Council Minutes (BFC), February 19, 1991, accessed on October 9, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1991-02-19>; BFC Minutes, March 1, 1988, accessed on March 18, 2025 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1988-03-01>

<sup>110</sup> Quote in BFC Minutes, March 24, 1987, accessed on October 9, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1987-03-24>; BFC Minutes, April 7, 1987, accessed on October 9, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1987-04-07>; BFC Minutes, March 1, 1988, accessed on March 18, 2025 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1988-03-01>; BFC Minutes, February 19, 1991.

program had helped recruit highly qualified students each year starting with forty-three students in 1968 and 300 students by 2018. “We have many things to be proud of in our minority student efforts, but the subcommittees of [the BFC] have rightly pointed out that we need to do more,” Chancellor Gros Louis said in a February 19, 1991, BFC meeting.<sup>111</sup> On April 7, 1987, the BFC created the Minority Achievers Program to attract and fund talented undergraduate students of color. In spring of 1991, the university initiated the Hoosier Plan, a multicampus initiative to address the retention and graduation rates for students of color. Student affairs administrators applied for and were awarded a 1992 Lilly Endowment grant that created several racial sensitivity programs including the Faculty and Staff for Student Excellence program that paired Black and Latinx freshman with faculty and staff mentors, according to an IDS article on August 12, 1994.<sup>112</sup>

Asian American students commended the administration’s efforts to improve the campus climate. Yet, they became frustrated with their exclusion in the student newspaper and administrative discussions of minority enrollment and retention issues. In a series of opinion pieces and letters to the editors during summer and fall of 1994, Asian Americans claimed that campus discussions on race misused the term “minority,” implying that the definition comprised of all five American racial groups. AAA leaders Ellen Wu, William Yang, and Christine Hsu provided an example of this misuse in an IDS article about the mentoring program that was funded by the 1992 Lilly Endowment Grant. “Although we understand that the mentor [*sic*] program is targeted to African-American and Latino students, the use of the word ‘minority’ is

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<sup>111</sup> BFC Minutes, February 19, 1991.

<sup>112</sup> Anne Binback, “Minority Freshmen Get Boost from Mentoring Program,” *Indiana Daily Student*, August 12, 1994, A12; BFC Minutes, April 7, 1987; BFC Minutes, February 19, 1991; Shanalee S. Gallimore, “Setting the Stage for Change: The Groups Scholars Program at Indiana University,” *Journal of the Student Personnel Association at Indiana University 2017-2018* (2018): 103–115.

misleading,” they wrote to the IDS on July 14, 1994. “It implies that this program is all-encompassing—not only for African Americans and Latinos, but for Asian, Asian American, and Native American students as well.”<sup>113</sup> They pointed out that past coverage in the IDS about minority enrollment, retention, and programs referred to minorities in terms of Black and Latinx student groups while leaving out any “mention of the Asian, Asian American, and Native American population.”<sup>114</sup> Although Asian Americans acknowledged that these minority programs supported Black and Latinx student groups, they argued for campus discussions to expand their definition of minorities. “Ever since I came to IU three years ago, I’ve had a difficult time defining what the word minority actually means to people on the IU campus,” Maki Fukasaku, a junior and a columnist for the IDS wrote in an opinion piece on September 3, 1994. “Somehow I get the impression that the majority of people automatically expect the minority issue to be a problem only between blacks and whites.”<sup>115</sup>

Curious about why Asian Americans remained invisible from campus racial discussions and minority programs, Linda Yung, a junior, interviewed administrators involved with minority affairs in a December 1994 piece in the student magazine *Kiosk*. According to administrators she had interviewed, Asian Americans had become “proportionally overrepresented” as compared to the Asian population in the state of Indiana.<sup>116</sup> When writing the Hoosier Plan, Dean of the University Libraries James Neal explained that the steering committee compared Asian American student enrollment figures to the 1990 census data on the total Asian population of the state. In the 1990 Census, Asian Americans accounted for 0.7 percent of the population in

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<sup>113</sup> Ellen D. Wu, William Yang, and Christine Hsu, “Daily Student Misrepresents, Ignores Asian American Students in Coverage,” *Indiana Daily Student*, July 14, 1994, 7.

<sup>114</sup> Wu, Yang, and Hsu, “Daily Student Misrepresents,” 7.

<sup>115</sup> Maki Fukasaku, “Students Must Expand Their Definition of ‘Minority,’” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 13, 1994, 12.

<sup>116</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 28.

Indiana, but Asian Americans at IUB constituted 2.6 percent of the total student population in 1994. “The issue was [*sic*], if you looked at the Asian-American student population at the IU Bloomington campus, the representation was seen as high based on the percentage of Asians in the state,” Neal said. “It was not an area where the University needed to attract more students.”<sup>117</sup>

Shirley Boardman, the director of IU’s Affirmative Action Office, further explained IUB had no official definition for minorities. Instead, it allowed individual minority programs at IUB to determine what constituted as a minority group. However, most minority programs at IUB followed a general definition. “Predominantly, the underrepresented sectors are African-Americans, Hispanics, as well as Native Americans because they were underrepresented in areas like enrollment, retention, and matriculation,” Boardman said, adding, “Asian-American students are not underrepresented in most disciplines at Indiana University as compared to their representation in the state and national level.”<sup>118</sup> According to Boardman, IUB did not target Asian Americans as underrepresented minorities because they tended to have higher academic rankings, SAT scores, and graduation rates compared to other racial groups on a national scale and at IUB. Because of Asian Americans’ overrepresentation in enrollment and retention rates, “the administration has made few considerations beyond the cold statistics,” Yung wrote. This statistical and monolithic perception of Asian Americans, Yung argued, left Asian Americans with no institutional support systems, like an AAS program, to address their social, cultural, and racial needs.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 28.

<sup>118</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 27.

<sup>119</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 27.

Asian American students in the mid-1990s began to unearth IUB's murky use of the term "minority." In the arc of the university's history of race, administrators and the BFC have established three definitions of minority: disadvantaged, underrepresented, and targeted. Although these terms are distinct and shaped by the circumstances of the time, IUB campus constituents often have conflated these three definitions of "minority." IUB was not alone in using these three terms interchangeably. UIUC, like at other Midwestern campuses, grappled with determining who was eligible for recruitment and retention programs for communities of color. In Sharon S. Lee's examination of affirmative action at UIUC, she contended that campus officials who followed these federal guidelines on equal opportunity never considered Asian Americans in these three definitions of minorities. In my analysis of IUB's racial politics, I found a similar administrative perspective. IUB administrators did not intend to exclude Asian Americans from affirmative action policies and programs. Rather, they followed the federal guidelines laid out by government agencies. Yet, by following these guidelines, IUB administrators began to see race through quantitative measures of underrepresentation such as demographic percentages and retention data.<sup>120</sup>

Paul Brest and Miranda Oshige argued that the term "disadvantaged student" stemmed from national legislation, like the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965, that framed equal opportunities in education and employment to correct injustices against Black Americans.<sup>121</sup> In her examination of the Black power movement at UIUC, historian Joy Ann Williamson added that campus officials initially created affirmative action programs that targeted Black students because of intense pressure from the Black student

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<sup>120</sup> S. Lee, *Unseen Unheard Minority*, 47-49, 56-59, 76-79, 97-100.

<sup>121</sup> Paul Brest and Miranda Oshige, "Affirmative Action for Whom?" *Stanford Law Review* 47, no. 5 (May 1995): 855-900.

movement, the federal government, the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to rectify past racial injustices. UIUC administrators never restricted affirmative action to Black students but often shifted between labels such as minority students, disadvantaged students, and African American students. IUB adopted similar murky language when they established the GROUPS Program for first-generation college students and the TRIO summer bridge programs in the late 1960s. Although eligibility remained open to all racial groups, administrators intended these programs to improve access for “the Negroes of Indiana,” thus, conflating the term “disadvantaged minorities” with Blacks.<sup>122</sup>

The second definition, “underrepresented minorities” arose in the early 1970s when IUB wrote and implemented its affirmative action program. In my analysis of IUB’s affirmative action implementation, campus officials did not intend to exclude Asian Americans from definitions of “underrepresented minority.”<sup>123</sup> They followed and interpreted federal guidelines established by President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Executive Order 11246 in 1965 and Order No. 4 issued by US Department of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) in February 1970. To access federal research grants, universities and colleges needed to write and maintain an affirmative action plan. “If public institutions don’t comply, they get no federal money. It’s as simple as that,” George Taliaferro, IU’s affirmative action coordinator for IU President John Ryan, said in a December 14, 1973 IDS article.<sup>124</sup>

Between 1972 and 1974, IUB senior-levels administrators, several university committees, department chairs, and school deans established a campus affirmative action plan outlining

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<sup>122</sup> Quote in Gallimore, “Setting the Stage,” 107; Joy Ann Williamson, *Black Power On Campus: The University of Illinois, 1965–75* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 56–57.

<sup>123</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 27.

<sup>124</sup> Barb Olenyik, “Affirmative Action Plan Readied for Ryan’s Okay,” *Indiana Daily Student*, Dec. 14, 1973, 14. Copy in Reference Files, Folder, “Affirmative Action, Office of, Clippings,” IU Archives.

academic appointments and student policies. Discourse on affirmative action at IUB, along lines similar to those Williamson described in her case study of UIUC's affirmative action program, applied to faculty appointments and extended to student admissions policies, practices, and programs. Campus discourse at IUB particularly focused on the federal definition of "underutilization" (also known as underrepresentation) that was framed as "having fewer minorities or women in a particular job classification than would reasonably be expected by their availability."<sup>125</sup> In IUB's 1974 affirmative action plan, all hiring units needed to conduct underutilization analyses for women and each of HEW's designated minority group, which included "Black, Spanish Surnamed (Latino), American Indian, and Asian American."<sup>126</sup> The goal of calculating underrepresentation, according to IUB's affirmative action plan, was "achieving parity with the highest applicable percentage in the potential employee pools."<sup>127</sup> The Vice President of Bloomington Campus, Robert O'Neill, further expressed the importance of calculating underrepresentation in a 1977 special report on affirmative action. "A crucial objective of affirmative action at the University and Campus levels is to correct such situations by establishing parity between actual representation of minorities and women and those available for employment."<sup>128</sup> Parity was defined as "a representation in which the percentages of women

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<sup>125</sup> Office of Federal Contract Compliance, "Affirmative Action Programs of Government Nonconstruction Contractors," in Executive Order No. 11246: Equal Employment Opportunity—Government Contractors and Subcontractors (February 8, 1973), 2161. Copy in Affirmative Action Plan (Draft), Feb. 18, 1974, C549 Indiana University Office of Affirmative Action records, Box 1, Folder, "Affirmative Action Plan (Draft), 1974 (Pt.1), 2-18-74."

<sup>126</sup> In 1974, the HEW's definition of Asian American included "persons of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or Filipino descent or whose appearance reveals East Asian or Polynesian origins (but not Pakistani and East Indians, who are classified along with all persons of Indo-European descent as White)." "Indiana University Affirmative Action Plan," June 29, 1974, Reference Files, Folder, "Affirmative Action, Office of, Plans & Reports (1 of 2)," IU Archives, I-3; Williamson, *Black Power on Campus*, 56–57.

<sup>127</sup> "Implementation Document for Academic Appointments Section of Affirmative Action Plan," in IU Affirmative Action Plan, June 29, 1974, Reference Files, Folder, "Affirmative Action, Office of, Plans & Reports (1 of 2)," IU Archives, A4.

<sup>128</sup> Office of the Vice President Indiana University Bloomington, "Bloomington Campus Affirmative Action Plan," *Campus Report*, Oct. 19, 1977, C549 Indiana University Office of Affirmative Action records, Box 1, Folder, "Affirmative Action Plan—Miscellaneous, 1974-1979," IU Archives, 4.

and minority persons available in the pool are equal to the percentages of women and minority persons on the faculty.”<sup>129</sup>

Starting in the early 1980s, IUB campus officials began to apply this rule of underrepresentation to Asian Americans in policies and programs related to faculty appointments and retention. As they interpreted the rule of underrepresentation, faculty members on the BFC did not consider Asian American faculty members eligible for underrepresented minority programs. For example, in a 1985 BFC meeting, members deliberated parameters for a program to improve the retention of women and minorities in tenure-track appointments. According to the meeting minutes, the Affirmative Action Committee of the BFC determined eligibility using data, such as rank and race, from departments and programs to determine underrepresentation of women and minorities. “For the purpose of this proposal, ‘minority’ means ‘Black, Latino, and American Indian.’ ‘Latino’ includes ‘Chicano,’ ‘Cuban,’ ‘Mexican-American,’ and ‘Puerto Rican,’” the Affirmative Action Committee reported.<sup>130</sup> The BFC discussed this faculty retention program until November 19, 1985 when a BFC member asked the chair of the Affirmative Action Committee, Dolores Schroeder, why Asian Americans were not included in the list of minorities in the faculty retention program. Schroeder explained that that the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission of the federal government had identified five groups in the minority designation. Yet, “as a group of people, they are not under-represented on this campus. Therefore, it is questionable even on legal grounds whether we could take special means to recruit them. For this reason, we did not include them in that proposal,” Schroeder said.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Office of the Vice President Indiana University Bloomington, “Bloomington Campus Affirmative Action Plan,” 6.

<sup>130</sup> BFC Minutes, April 16, 1985, accessed on March 19, 2025 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1985-04-16>

<sup>131</sup> BFC Minutes, November 19, 1985, accessed October 27, 2016 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1985-11-19>

According to historian John Thelin, discourse on affirmative action initially applied to faculty appointments. Campuses, including IUB, began to extend federal guidelines to student admissions policies, practices, and programs during the 1980s minority enrollment decline. Starting in February 1987, IUB administrators and the BFC established programs to improve recruitment and retention of graduate students and academically talented undergraduate students. In these discussions, they devised a third term, “targeted minorities.” The BFC meeting minutes from the 1970s to the 1990s do not offer a clear definition of the term. In Yung’s 1994 *Kiosk* article, Dean of Latino Affairs Alberto Torchinsky implied that it meant IUB would invest resources, such as to scholarship programs, to recruit and retain certain underrepresented minorities.<sup>132</sup>

The Affirmative Action Committee of the BFC began to define targeted minorities through a program called the Minority Achievers Program. In February 7, 1987, the committee introduced the proposal to the BFC to address the “disturbing” decline of Black and Latinx students nationally and on campus that had started in 1975.<sup>133</sup> The program would aim for a “target population” by offering stipends to high school students with high academic potential.<sup>134</sup> The Affirmative Action Committee determined eligibility using the rule of underrepresentation. “Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans on the Bloomington campus are underrepresented relative to their proportion among the pool of potential undergraduates,” according to the program proposal on February 4, 1987.<sup>135</sup> The program proposal does not specify how the

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<sup>132</sup> John Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 347–348; Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 27.

<sup>133</sup> BFC Minutes, March 24, 1987, accessed on March 19, 2025 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1987-03-24>

<sup>134</sup> BFC Minutes, March 24, 1987.

<sup>135</sup> Affirmative Action Committee to Bloomington Faculty Council, Proposal for a Merit Program for Minority Achievers, February 4, 1987, 1–4, accessed on July 7, 2025 from <https://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/bfc/view?docId=B36-1987>

Affirmative Action Committee calculated underrepresentation. In a BFC meeting on February 7, 1989, two years after the university established the Minority Achievers Program, Calloway-Thomas expanded on why Asian Americans were not included definition of targeted minorities. “The Affirmative Action Officer (I think with the authority of this body) has determined that three definite groups shall comprised [sic] the minority category,” she said, referring to Marcia Donnerstein who oversaw IUB’s federal compliance to affirmative action and who provided data on enrollment, retention, and matriculation to the Affirmative Action Committee during the 1980s. “Those three ethnic groups are Hispanic, Native American, and African-Americans; that’s why Asian Americans are not included in the program.”<sup>136</sup> Chancellor Gros Louis added, “I think the rationale at the time the Council agreed to that, for the Minority Recruitment Program (for faculty)...and Minority Achievers Program (for students) was that Asian Americans are over-represented in terms of the pool both at the faculty level and the student level.”<sup>137</sup> Herman Hudson, the director of the Minority Achievers Program, further articulated in Yung’s *Kiosk* article, “The Asian students that get into Indiana University, and even the Asian students in high school, seem to be doing very well academically. Therefore, they, on the whole, do not need any special assistance as a group.”<sup>138</sup>

The IUB racial politics surrounding the vague definitions of “minority” underscore the frustration and confusion that IUB Asian American students and those at other Midwestern campuses felt during the 1990s. Since 1974, IUB officials have reported and included minority statistics in enrollment reports to remain compliant with 1970s federal guidelines in disaggregating student enrollment by race. However, the federal guidelines of affirmative action

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<sup>136</sup> BFC Minutes, February 7, 1989, accessed on October 9, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1989-02-07>.

<sup>137</sup> BFC Minutes, February 7, 1989.

<sup>138</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 26.

also left the interpretation of Asian Americans as a minority to individual universities and colleges. In a February 7, 1989, BFC meeting, Gros Louis acknowledged that other universities and colleges had different interpretations of Asian Americans based on student demographics and local populations. “[T]here are institutions who do include Asian Americans in their figures for minority students.”<sup>139</sup> Indeed, Midwestern universities, like the UW-Madison, have included Southeast Asian Americans in their college access and affirmative action programs based on local interpretations of underrepresentation using student demographics and state populations.<sup>140</sup> At IUB, individual campus units and minority programs continued to follow a general guideline that Asian Americans are not considered an underrepresented minority based on quantitative measures. Because of their status as an “overrepresented minority,” IUB administrators do not target them in minority admission, retention, and matriculation programs.<sup>141</sup>

Students at IUB in the mid-1990s interpreted their exclusion from the term “minority” as a perpetuation of the model minority myth. They felt that IUB administrators were holding them to this one-dimensional image that Asian Americans were doing well academically based on their high proportion of college attendance. “By saying that Asians are overrepresented, by saying we don’t have any problems, by generalizing all of us as ‘the model minority,’ they’re ignoring some of the problems that do exist,” said Lin in the 1994 *Kiosk* piece.<sup>142</sup> In addition, administrators fortified this one-dimensional image of Asian Americans by lumping them with Asian

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<sup>139</sup> BFC Minutes, February 7, 1989.

<sup>140</sup> The Office of the Registrar at the UW-Madison defined Southeast Asians as a “student who is a US citizen, permanent resident, or refugee of Laotian, Cambodian, or Vietnamese heritage and came to the US prior to the end of the Vietnam war or is descended from such a person. [This definition is] used to identify South East Asian students for campus diversity initiatives,” according to an email correspondence with the author and Reporting Services, Office of the Registrar on May 21, 2021.

<sup>141</sup> Quote in Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 26; The Office of the Chancellor for University of Wisconsin-Madison, “The Madison Plan,” February 9, 1988, James Moy Papers, Box 1, Folder “Madison Plan 1988,” University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, WI, 8.

<sup>142</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 28.

international students. Lin claimed that administrators assumed that Asian Americans did not need a separate AAS program because they had access to Asian resources on campus such as the East Asian Languages and Cultures department and the Leo R. Dowling International Center, which served as a cultural center for international students including Asian international students. Although Asian Americans had strong collaborative ties to the Asian international student community dating back to the early 1990s, Lin said that lumping Asian Americans with Asian international students together ignored the racial discrimination that American-born Asians experienced growing up in the US and at IUB.<sup>143</sup>

These two misconceptions motivated AAA student leaders to widen the educational argument for AAS. IUB should have a program to address racial isolation, but it was crucial to have AAS educate the campus about Asian Americans as a diverse racial group with needs beyond academics. They shaped their arguments by creating more politically driven programming that expanded campus perceptions of Asian Americans. From fall 1993 to spring 1996, student leaders organized signature events such as the Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month and the Midwest Asian American Student Union (MAASU) regional conference, to flip campus perceptions of Asian Americans as a racial group defined by “graduation rates” to one defined by diverse cultural, social, and racial needs.<sup>144</sup> The 1993–1994 AAA Executive Board collaborated with ten ethnic Asian student groups, such as the Korean American Student Association and the Vietnamese Student Association, to host the first Heritage Month in January 1994 to challenge campus perceptions that Asian Americans were model minorities. “We wanted to create something that would attract people to learn about our heritage, know who we were,

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<sup>143</sup> Lin, interview; Danett Pratt, “AAA Enhances Awareness and Education for Students,” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 14, 1994, 2.

<sup>144</sup> Nicole Lee, interview by Stephanie T. X. Nguyen, November 9, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 1:17:10, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author’s possession).

and some of the issues we faced,” Lin said in his oral history. The AAPI Heritage Month, which included events like a pan-ethnic food festival and discussion panels about Asian American experiences of racism, addressed the need for an AAS program that would continue to educate the campus community about the bigotry, racism, and ignorance that Asian Americans faced on campus.<sup>145</sup>

In 1995, Nicole Lee (BS ‘96) led a team to place and win the bid to host the MAASU conference, an intercollegiate regional event focused on Midwest Asian American political activism. During April 4-6, 1996, eight IUB Asian student groups collaborated to host nearly 400 Asian American students across the Big Ten universities. Lee was motivated to bring MAASU to IUB because of how administrators viewed Asian Americans. “You count us as minorities when it comes to diversity numbers, but there’s not funding for us,” Lee said in her oral history, adding this lack of culturally supportive resources felt hurtful to the Asian American community. Lee believed the purpose of student-led programming, like MAASU, “was to change the way how Asian Americans were viewed.”<sup>146</sup> She argued that student-led programming would show campus administrators the educational and cultural value of an AAS program on campus. “There’s a lot of awareness raising for a lot of students in the Midwest, especially if you didn’t grow up in place with a large concentration of Asian Americans,” Lee said in her oral history, adding that an AAS program was needed for “identity building” and grappling with the “tension between wanting to honor your [Asian] culture, but also forging your own path as an Asian American.”<sup>147</sup> She believed an AAS program was needed to show the campus about the diversity of thought, culture, and ethnicities within the Asian American racial classification. “We’re not

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<sup>145</sup> Lin, interview; Michelle Magat, “IU Asian Americans Speak Out,” *Indiana Daily Student*, January 31, 1994, 2; Nguyen, ““Little Steps of Courage,”” 138–140.

<sup>146</sup> N. Lee, interview.

<sup>147</sup> N. Lee, interview.

just these quiet, very studious kids that hang out at the library and eat dumplings,” Lee said in her oral history. “We’re diverse...we’re diverse in thought, diverse in personalities, and diverse in culture.”<sup>148</sup>

IUB students believed that student-led programming helped bring campus attention to the Asian American student population and their distinct and racial and cultural needs. For example, according to a January 24, 1994 IDS article, the 1994 AAPI Heritage Month brought in 2,000 attendees well over AAA’s initial estimate of 800. The next year, the Asian American community hosted a second AAPI Heritage Month that also brought in approximately 2,000 attendees. “While our endeavors have been successful, there is no permanence in the Asian American community here,” AAA student leaders Truong, Yung, and Wu argued on a March 5, 1995 presentation to IUB’s Minority Enhancement Council, who oversaw the Hoosier Plan. “Every four years students graduate. The leadership changes from year to year...We lack faculty support,” they continued, implying that it was difficult to sustain educational programming with student turnover. Student leaders argued for permanent Asian American resources like an AAS program to help them gain representation at the administrative and faculty levels. “Many of our problems and issues may not be known by educators and administrators,” they said. “This is crucial because Asian Americans are the fastest growing minority population in the US and here at IU.”<sup>149</sup> IUB needed an AAS program that would represent Asian American student concerns within decision-making channels. It was crucial especially to deal with racial isolation on a campus that had a student enrollment of 90 percent White students.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> N. Lee, interview; Editorial Board, “Tip of the Cap to MAASU,” *Indiana Daily Student*, April 10, 1996, 7.

<sup>149</sup> Ellen D. Wu and Linda Yung, “Presentation to Indiana University Minority Enhancement Council: Asian Americans at Indiana University,” March 5 1995, Ellen Wu personal collection.

<sup>150</sup> Lam, host, “ACC’s 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition”; Michelle Magat and Yvette Kolb, “Asian Food Tasting Draws Massive Turnout,” *Indiana Daily Student*, January 24, 1994, 3.

As Lee observed in her oral history, the issues of racial isolation and affirmative action at IUB connected Asian American students “to the larger national conversation around Asian American activism.”<sup>151</sup> Indeed, IUB’s student activism joined the struggle for culturally supportive resources in the Midwest with the onset of the Northwestern hunger strike. On April 12, 1995, thirteen Asian American students at the Northwestern University engaged in an eighteen-day hunger strike after the university administration rejected their 200-page proposal to establish an AAS program. The Northwestern hunger strike heightened the sense of urgency for AAS at IUB. “There were kids my age who were choosing not to eat until their souls were fed with a program that would allow them to learn about their own culture,” Lee said in her oral history.<sup>152</sup> As elected chair of MAASU in 1995, Lee and several AAA members had organized a day of fasting, letter writing, and a candlelight vigil to support the Northwestern strikers. The strike energized Asian Americans at IUB, as well as a dozen student groups at Midwestern and East Coast universities, to unify around a common goal of gaining an AAS program. “It was a distinct period of time where we wanted a seat at the table,” Lee said, adding that Asian American students were willing initiate a conversation with administrators, rather than wait to be invited, about having an AAS program.<sup>153</sup>

Asian American students at IUB shaped their arguments for AAS based on their racial isolation and campus discussions on affirmative action. They desired culturally supportive resources to counter their geographic isolation they experienced in secondary and postsecondary experiences. They justified AAS to expand campus perceptions of Asian Americans through a statistical lens to a more holistic view of their racial and cultural needs. Their experiences are

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<sup>151</sup> N. Lee, interview.

<sup>152</sup> N. Lee, interview.

<sup>153</sup> Quote in N. Lee, interview; Linda Yung, “Students Join Nationwide Effort: Asian Americans Look to Universities for Culture Studies Program,” *Indiana Daily Student*, April 27, 1995, 10.

keeping with Monica Trieu's qualitative examination of Midwestern Asian Americans. She found that those who grew up in the Midwest tended to experience a national and regional racial framing. In the national framing, Midwestern Asian Americans were racialized through widely held stereotypes such as images of the model minority and the perpetual foreigner. In the regional lens, Midwestern Asian Americans shaped their perceptions of identity and belonging through individual-level interactions such as racial incidents and slurs. In this study, Asian Americans at IUB were subjected to this national framing when IUB officials began to see their racial group through a statistical lens and thus, perpetuated the model minority stereotype. They also contended with their racial isolation at IUB, which was shaped by their interactions with racial incidents, the lack of culturally supportive resources, and exclusion from minority programs.<sup>154</sup>

This campus discourse surrounding affirmative action convinced Joon Park to further broaden the argument for AAS when he found a funding opportunity during the summer of 1995. Park had just been elected President of AAA, and he chose to stay on campus to work, take summer courses, and plan AAA's next steps. As an undergraduate, he found a social and racial home in AAA, a place where he could embrace his Korean heritage and American upbringing. He also had honed his political awareness by observing his predecessors (including Lin, Truong, Wu, Hsu, and Lee), who had shifted AAA's mission from social to a more politically motivated organization.<sup>155</sup>

While scrolling on the school's intranet, Park stumbled upon the Strategic Directions Charter grant, which gave \$50,000 to an academic initiative that would drive the university's mission of as a research institution. The Strategic Directions Charter was a university system

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<sup>154</sup> Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility*, 1–18.

<sup>155</sup> Park, interview, October 26, 2018.

competition to fund academic and administrative activities that addressed emerging trends in higher education. While reading the grant guidelines, Park realized a major goal of the Strategic Directions Charter was to “ensure that Indiana University reflects the diversity of American society and support the achievements of minorities in all aspects of university life.”<sup>156</sup> He also realized there was no language that barred students from submitting proposals. Park decided to take a chance and apply.<sup>157</sup>

Park attributed his participation in AAA and his growing Asian American consciousness as motivations for him to draft a proposal to establish an Asian American cultural center and appoint an Asian American advocacy dean. “I didn’t necessarily think it was going to go anywhere,” Park said in his oral history. He admitted that submitting a student-written proposal to a university-wide competition was a fine line between “bravery and idiocy.”<sup>158</sup> Yet, he saw the opportunity to honor the student leaders who had tried to lobby for Asian American cultural resources before him.

Park spent his nights at the university library drafting the forty-page proposal while working a part-time job at the mall selling shoes. In his oral history, Park explained that he had consulted proposals written by advocates at UIUC, Northwestern, and Michigan. He had obtained these proposals by searching the intranet at the time and built IUB’s proposal using a similar outline. He paraphrased and cited sections from the Northwestern and UIUC proposals. Specifically, he cited the “significance section of the Asian American experience” from the 1995

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<sup>156</sup> Quote in AAA and others, “Proposal to Establish,” 5.

<sup>157</sup> Agenda Committee to Bloomington Faculty Council, “UFC and UFC Committees Tackling the Strategic Directions Charter Draft,” September 11, 1995, accessed on September 30, 2024 from <https://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/bfc/view?docId=B04-1996>; Long-Range Planning Committee to Bloomington Faculty Council, “Circular B06-1997: A Vision for Indiana University Bloomington: Strategic Priorities,” April 19, 1996, accessed on September 30, 2024 from <https://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/bfc/view?docId=B06-1997>.

<sup>158</sup> Park, interview, October 26, 2018.

Northwestern proposal for AAS.<sup>159</sup> He also adapted the mission statement, organizational structure, and staffing requests IUB's cultural center using "similar structural formations" from UIUC's proposal to establish a cultural center.<sup>160</sup> The proposal did not focus on creating an AAS program. Rather, he prioritized establishing a cultural center first since he understood the importance of having a physical space for Asian Americans to gather and to feel comfortable being themselves.

When drafting the proposal for the cultural center, he reiterated the two educational arguments that he found in Mona Wu's research in 1990. First, IUB needed these cultural resources to "self-educate the Asian American and general campus community about the history, culture, and current struggles of Asian Americans."<sup>161</sup> Second, campus needed "Asian American awareness programs...to educate the University community on various ethnic issues to promote understanding of Asian Americans in order to prevent racism."<sup>162</sup>

Park's core argument, however, took a more intellectual route than previous justifications of racial development and reducing anti-Asian racism. According to his oral history, Park's core argument focused on the "reeducation" of the American university curriculum.<sup>163</sup> In his 1996 proposal for the ACC, he wrote: "The most important criterion of this proposal is neither the changing multi-ethnic demographics of the United States nor the documented or countless undocumented events of racial discrimination. It is, however, to understand, with a broader spectrum, race and ethnicity in America."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> AAA and others, "Proposal to Establish," 8, n. 5.

<sup>160</sup> AAA and others, "Proposal to Establish," 9.

<sup>161</sup> AAA and others, "Proposal to Establish," 13.

<sup>162</sup> AAA and others, "Proposal to Establish," 13.

<sup>163</sup> Park, interview, October 26, 2018.

<sup>164</sup> AAA and others, "Proposal to Establish," 6.

He had shaped this intellectual rationale based on works written by senior AAS scholars. “My belief (rooted in the works of Elaine Kim, Ronald Takaki, and Edward Said) was that misrepresentation of [Asian Pacific Americans] in the US was driven by both historical, literary, and media where Asians were always ‘other/outside,’” Park recalled.<sup>165</sup> As a Comparative Literature major, he had read Takaki’s *Strangers from a Different Shore*, Said’s *Orientalism*, and Kim’s *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context*. Shaped by these works, he believed that Asian Americans should reframe the dominant narrative in American history, which often treated Asian immigrants as unassimilable foreigners. As AAS scholars had taught him, American history was a collection of immigrant histories, and Asian immigrants held the same claim to American history as other groups who were often taught about in the US education system. Asian American resources, then, were needed on campus to “systematically weave in the contribution of Asian Americans into American history, American literature, and American media.”<sup>166</sup>

These works also convinced Park to avoid what he had called “the affirmative action argument.”<sup>167</sup> When consulting proposals from UIUC, Northwestern and Michigan, Park said that what he found “controversial” was trying to justify affirmative action for Asian Americans to be demographically represented on these Midwestern campuses.<sup>168</sup> “The argument about Asian Americans as an underrepresented minority in the UIUC proposal was that Asians are a growing demographic; hence [Asian Americans] need campus resources similar to other minorities that benefit from affirmative action,” Park explained. “However, if your argument is based on

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<sup>165</sup> Joon Park, email correspondence with author, September 24, 2024.

<sup>166</sup> Joon Park, email correspondence with author, September 24, 2024; Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1989).

<sup>167</sup> Joon Park, email correspondence with author, September 24, 2024.

<sup>168</sup> Park, interview, October 26, 2018.

representation using population studies then it doesn't make sense."<sup>169</sup> He further elaborated that it would have been difficult to convince IUB administrators to categorize Asian Americans as underrepresented minorities because of statistical parity as stipulated in federal guidelines. Universities and colleges calculated underrepresentation by comparing Asian American student demographics to state and national populations of Asian Americans. Asian Americans would not be considered underrepresented if administrators factored in other measures like the national average of educational attainment and socioeconomic status. "Therefore, I found it hard to use those points as part of an argument to create an Asian American Studies program or an [Asian Culture Center]," Park said.<sup>170</sup>

Park's risk-taking succeeded. At the end of January 1997, the Strategic Directions Charter awarded him \$50,000 to establish the cultural center. In the university-wide competition, he was the only student to receive the grant. Several days earlier, Chancellor Gros Louis had awarded Park and the Asian American community an additional \$50,000 for a total of \$100,000 to establish the Asian Culture Center (ACC). Park credited the grassroots efforts of the Student Coalition, a multiracial advocacy group that had formed in spring of 1996, for helping the Asian American community win the additional \$50,000 of funding. AAA, the BSU, Latino Unidos of IU, and the Asian Student Union had founded the Student Coalition in 1996 because the university had failed to meet the demands of marginalized students on campus, according to a January 21, 1997, IDS article. The Student Coalition had demanded more permanent funding for the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Supportive Services Office; creating a Latino Studies Department; expanding the Office of Diversity Programs; and hiring more non-White and women faculty. On January 20, 1997, Park and several co-founders of the Student Coalition

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<sup>169</sup> Joon Park, email correspondence with author, September 24, 2024.

<sup>170</sup> Joon Park, email correspondence with author, September 24, 2024.

organized a two-day teach-in and a march to Bryan Hall, IUB's senior administration building. Nearly 1,000 students from thirty student organizations camped outside IU's senior administration building while Park and the six co-founders negotiated with Chancellor Gros Louis to secure permanent funding and staff lines for the ACC.<sup>171</sup>

Park remained involved in the founding of the ACC from 1997 to 1998. He served on the committee to locate a physical building and hire staff members. The request for an Asian American advocacy dean, however, failed because of the restructuring of the Afro-American and Latino Advocacy Offices into the Office of the Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. In 1998, the Asian American community finally received a permanent director, Melanie Castillo-Cullather, more than a decade after David Chih first advocated for an Asian American administrator. With Castillo-Cullather, the Asian American community could now create a permanent pathway to an AAS program.<sup>172</sup>

By examining how students argued for AAS at IUB, my analysis suggests that they initially saw the mission of AAS as a self-education tool. Students formed their arguments based on their racial encounters—both positive and negative—at IUB. They envisioned an academic program that would teach them how to understand their racial isolation in the Midwest and engage with emerging questions of racial identity. Students wanted to understand their liminal position between the Asian diaspora (in which their parents grew up) and their American upbringing. Students also wanted to understand Asian Americans' position in American race relations. Many of them grew up in predominantly White communities that did not teach them

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<sup>171</sup> Michael Barnard and Jennifer Emily, "'Students United Will Never Be Defeated'; Results of Protest to be Discussed at BFC Meeting," *Indiana Daily Student*, January 21, 1997, 1, 8; Olivia Clarke, "Living Up to the Dream: Protest Organizers Want to Revolutionize IU," *Indiana Daily Student*, January 20, 1997, 1, 8; Park, interview.

<sup>172</sup> Paul Gillespie, "Asian Center Opens Its Doors," *Indiana Daily Student*, October 5, 1998, 1, 8; Charlie Nelms and others, "20/20: A Vision for Achieving Equity and Excellence at IU-Bloomington," Bloomington Faculty Council Minutes, accessed on December 1, 2016 from <http://web.archive.org/web/20000914201153/http://www.indiana.edu/~blcampus/20-20.htm>.

how to advocate for themselves in the face of racial ignorance discrimination. They desired a curriculum that could connect their personal racial growth to a pan-ethnic political awareness. Gaining Asian American consciousness would empower them to enact change on campus and for the larger Asian American community.

The historical narrative also suggests that Asian Americans at IUB, much like their peers at other Midwestern universities, widened their arguments based on the evolution of campus racial politics. With the rise of racial incidents on campus from the late 1980s to early 1990s, Asian Americans needed such a program to promote understanding of Asian Americans to reduce racial incidents.<sup>173</sup> By the mid-1990s, students broadened the educational argument to justify AAS as a way to expand this statistical image of Asian Americans as “overrepresented” minorities.<sup>174</sup> They believed regular AAS offerings would challenge these narrow perceptions of race that had evolved starting in the late 1960s with the creation of programs for “disadvantaged students.” When forming these programs, campus officials often conflated the term “disadvantaged,” “minority,” and Black students.<sup>175</sup> Campus perceptions of race further narrowed to quantitative measures of “underrepresented minorities” and “targeted” minorities when IUB officials wrote and implemented their affirmative action plan starting in the early 1970s and established faculty and student recruitment and retention programs in the 1980s.<sup>176</sup>

Students at IUB began the process of institutionalization for AAS. In the next phase, faculty and staff members took steps to establish the program. Faculty and staff members would write the proposal, find the funding, structure the curriculum, and hire its first faculty members. In the next chapter, I explore how faculty and staff members argued for an AAS program and

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<sup>173</sup> AAA and others, “Proposal to Establish,” 13.

<sup>174</sup> Yung, “Incredible Minorities,” 28.

<sup>175</sup> Gallimore, “Setting the Stage,” 106.

<sup>176</sup> Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” 27; BFC minutes, March 24, 1987.

how their framing differed from the perspective of students. Whereas students believed in the educational mission of AAS, faculty and staff members believed in the intellectual mission of the program.

## **Chapter Five: The Intellectual Argument for AAS: Faculty and Staff Advocacy at Indiana University Bloomington, 1999-2008**

The murder of incoming Indiana University Bloomington (IUB) graduate student Won-Joon Yoon on July 4, 1999, changed everything for Melanie Castillo-Cullather. Seven months prior, the university had appointed her as the first director of the Asian Culture Center (ACC). During her first six months, Castillo-Cullather and her team of eight student workers met with student organizations to decide what initiatives to prioritize. Students wanted an AAS program in addition to fulfilling several other needs through cultural programming, mental health services, and language tutoring. Yoon's death, however, catapulted the need for an academic program to combat the racial violence that had rocked Bloomington and the Midwest.

Yoon, who was twenty-six at the time, had just finished his master's degree in economics at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois. He moved to Bloomington a week prior to starting his doctoral studies in the Economics department at IUB. On Independence Day, Yoon was standing outside the Korean United Methodist Church chatting with fellow congregants. While waiting for Sunday services to start, Benjamin Nathaniel Smith drove by the church, located across the street from campus, and fired four shots toward the group of congregants. Two shots hit Yoon in the back, killing him about an hour later.

Smith, a twenty-one-year-old former IUB student and a known White supremacist, had killed Rick Brydsong, Northwestern's first Black men's basketball coach, and injured nine others in a three-day shooting spree across Illinois and Indiana prior to killing Yoon. He was a founding member of a neo-Nazi hate group. In the summer of 1998, Smith met with Dean of Students Dick McKaig after receiving complaints about distributing racist and hate-filled leaflets at IUB. During his shooting rampage, Smith targeted victims from religious and racial minority groups—

six Orthodox Jewish men in West Rogers Park, Illinois; Byrdsong in Skokie, IL; two Asian American men in Northbrook, IL; a Black minister in Decatur, IL; and six Asian Americans at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). The shooting spree ended when Smith died by suicide late in the evening of July 4.<sup>1</sup>

“[T]he ACC was thrust into a space that personally, I wasn’t prepared,” Castillo-Cullather said in a 2018 podcast. “We grew overnight and realized that we cannot anymore confine ourselves to doing things on campus, that we have to do things in the community.”<sup>2</sup> After Yoon’s death, she recognized the need for an AAS program to raise awareness and advocate for Asian Americans. Castillo-Cullather met with Vice President and Chancellor of Bloomington Kenneth Gros Louis to seek advice on how to create a program. He advised her to form an interested group of professors and submit a proposal to the College of Arts and Sciences (hereafter known as The College). The College would be a good home for an AAS program, Gros Louis reasoned, because other ethnic and gender studies programs were historically housed there. Starting in fall 1999, Castillo-Cullather began recruiting faculty members from diverse disciplines to create an Asian American Studies steering committee (hereafter known as the AAS Committee), which was instrumental in establishing the program.

This chapter explores how faculty and staff advocates on the AAS Committee argued the intellectual need for AAS at IUB from fall of 1999 until fall of 2008, when the university officially established the program. I examine the beginning stage of stabilization in Fabio Rojas’s

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<sup>1</sup> Abby Malala, “No Hate Speech. No Hate Crimes. Not in Our Town. Not Anywhere,” *Indiana Daily Student*, published online on June 30, 2019, accessed on October 11, 2024 from <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2019/06/no-hate-speech-no-hate-crimes-not-in-our-town-not-anywhere>; “20 Years After Slaying of Won-Joon Yoon, Prayers to End Violence Still Going Up,” *The Herald-Times*, July 4, 2019, accessed on October 15, 2019 from <https://www.heraldtimesonline.com/story/news/crime/2019/07/04/20-years-after-slaying-of-won-joon-yoon-prayers-to-end-violence-still-going-up/46646717/>

<sup>2</sup> Kathryn de la Rosa, host, “Founding the Asian Culture Center,” Voices from the IU Bicentennial, February 21, 2018, Bloomington, Indiana, podcast, 9 mins., 29 secs., <https://blogs.iu.edu/bicentennialblogs/2018/02/21/founding-the-asian-culture-center/>

model of institutionalization when faculty and staff members generated alternatives on how to structure AAS based on student demands, existing university resources, and intellectual trends at that time. Ultimately, AAS advocates decided to pursue an interdisciplinary program that was mapped to one of the university's strategic priorities of internationalizing teaching and research. This case study illustrates how advocates shaped an AAS program based on the strengths and limitations of the IUB campus. They established a regional model that emphasized an international aspect.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of the regional history of AAS, I provide insight into what program building looks like at individual campuses. Advocates at IUB understood that a departmental model was optimal in the field of AAS. Yet, they also understood the opportunities available to them, such as funding and guidance from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, that best supported the creation of a stand-alone, interdisciplinary program. They also experienced common struggles that advocates within the Committee on Institutional Cooperation Asian American Studies Consortium (CIC-AASC) had outlined in the campus profiles published in 2000. Even with strong administrative support by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, AAS advocates had difficulty finding consistent funding, hiring senior AAS scholars to direct the fledging program, and heavy administrative responsibilities for junior faculty members. These struggles are not a regional one but part of the field's struggles to grow AAS programs with limited resources in higher education.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter N. Kiang, "New Wave: Developing Asian American Studies on the East Coast," in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1988), 43–50.

<sup>4</sup> George Yu and Sharon S. Lee, eds., *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting* Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies, 2001). Copy in Box AAST, Folder, "APA Studies Program," Asian Culture Center Archives (hereafter the ACC Archives), Bloomington, IN, 34.

I argue that staff and faculty advocates acknowledged student activists' demands to establish an AAS program for demographic representation. The AAS Committee, however, aimed to promote AAS as an academically serious discipline to receive access to resources such as funding and faculty lines. They justified an AAS program at IUB based on its intellectual contribution to The College and to the university. The AAS Committee argued for a program to keep up with intellectual trends, increase The College's reputation as a leader in international and area studies, and to remain competitive in the higher education marketplace. The AAS Committee successfully obtained faculty lines by expanding its intellectual scope from the study of US immigrant groups to the study of Asian Americans with global connections to Asian diasporic communities. The young program, however, struggled to hire a permanent program director who could grow AAS's intellectual engagement at IUB and among Big Ten universities. The College recognized AAS's intellectual potential yet determined that the program had not accomplished its promise to boost the academic reputation of the university.

### **The Program Proposal and Interdisciplinary Regional Model, Fall 1999–Spring 2002**

Thanks to Chancellor Gros Louis, Castillo-Cullather had a general direction on how to establish an AAS program. Yet, she needed to understand how other AAS advocates created their programs in the Midwest. Castillo-Cullather attended the first gathering of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten (later known as the CIC-AASC) on November 12, 2000, at UIUC. Faculty and staff advocates from Midwestern state universities gathered to discuss the future of AAS in the Midwest. The main topic of discussion focused on how to argue for AAS at Midwestern universities. CIC-AASC advocates acknowledged that Asian American student populations had grown at all their institutions. However, they recognized that the demographic argument was not enough to justify AAS when the racial landscape looked drastically different since the inception

of AAS in the 1960s. Moreover, CIC-AASC advocates understood the currency that increasingly fueled the decisions of universities and colleges: academic reputation. The business of higher education, now, was to remain competitive among regional and national peers by keeping up with the intellectual trends and producing cutting-edge research.<sup>5</sup>

Diasporic and transnational studies had become popular in the late twentieth century because of new patterns of immigration and the rise of globalization in American economic, social, and politics. On the national level, cutting-edge research in the humanities and social sciences began to update assumptions on immigration models that took account of this “new world order.”<sup>6</sup> Migration was no longer a unidirectional, assimilationist model but a flow between countries in response to global exchanges of capital, commodities, culture, politics, and information. In the field of AAS, scholars were producing new works that incorporated diasporic studies by rethinking standard topics, such as Asian American politics or AAS’s relationship with Asian Studies, with an international lens.<sup>7</sup>

The demographic changes of the US Asian American population in the 1980s and 1990s had prompted scholars to re-examine past AAS research, literature, and methodologies. The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act had brought in more Asian immigrants to the US. With the introduction of modern technology and travel, these Asian immigrants and their second-generation offspring maintained social, economic, and political ties to their home countries. This new intellectual trend expanded the geographical boundaries of AAS to examine the separation between Asians and Asian Americans. CIC-AASC advocates agreed to prioritize AAS’s

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<sup>5</sup> Yu and Lee, eds., *The State of AAS*.

<sup>6</sup> Asian American Studies Committee, “Proposal for an Asian American Studies Program at Indiana University Bloomington,” November 5, 2001, Box AAST, Folder, “American Studies Program,” ACC Archives, 4 (hereafter known as AASC, “Proposal for AAS at IUB.”)

<sup>7</sup> Kent A. Ono, “Asian American Studies After 9/11,” in *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, 2nd ed., eds. Cameron McCarthy, Warren Crichlow, Greg Dimitriadis, and Nadine Dolby (New York: Routledge, 2005): 439–451.

intellectual contributions to the academy over demographic representation. This regional narrative, in turn, shaped how IUB advocates would frame its arguments for an AAS program.<sup>8</sup>

After the conference, Castillo-Cullather relayed this regional narrative to the newly formed AAS Committee, which consisted of instructors and faculty members who had taught AAS courses in their home departments. Castillo-Cullather first contacted Indermohan Virk, a lecturer in sociology, and Angela Pao, an associate professor in Comparative Literature. Virk was a recent graduate student from University of North Carolina Chapel-Hill and had taught an AAS course in IUB's sociology department based on her thesis on Asian Americans and inter-ethnic marriages. Pao had taught a rotating special topics course titled "Studies in Comparative Literature: Literature of the Asian Diaspora." Castillo-Cullather later recruited Purnima Bose (English), Michael Robinson (History and East Asian Languages and Cultures), David Takeuchi (sociology), and Radhika Parameswaran (Journalism).<sup>9</sup>

Between fall of 2000 and spring of 2001, the AAS Committee debated two important components to include in their program proposal, which they agreed to submit to the dean of The College by fall 2001. Virk, being the most familiar with the AAS literature, volunteered to draft the proposal with help from Pao in the summer of 2001. First, the AAS Committee debated how to structure and argue for AAS as a serious field of study. The ideological questions that guided their debate centered around "how to represent the entire American experience in all of its diversity."<sup>10</sup> Joon Park had posed the same question in his 1996 proposal for the ACC, and now, faculty and staff advocates debated on how best to systematically weave Asian Americans into

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<sup>8</sup> Angela Pao to Kumble Subbaswamy and Sharon Brehm, "New Paradigms in Asian American Studies," Box AAST, Folder, "AAS Colloquium 2002-2003," ACC Archives; Josephine Lee, "Bridging the Big Twelve: The Committee on Institutional Cooperation Asian American Studies Consortium," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009): 275-284.

<sup>9</sup> AASC, "IU Proposal for AASP," 1.

<sup>10</sup> Indermohan Virk, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 6, 2024, digital recording and transcript, 49:15, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author's possession).

the university curriculum. The AAS Committee offered different ideas to organize AAS. One approach was seeking departmental status, a model that the founding universities, San Francisco State University (SFSU) and University of California Berkeley (UC Berkeley), had achieved. AAS Committee members understood that this model was ideal within the field of AAS. Departmental status had protected AAS faculty members at SFSU and UC Berkeley from marginalization by ensuring autonomy over AAS faculty tenure promotion, budget, and curriculum. Robinson and Takeuchi, however, argued that there simply were not enough faculty members or student demand to justify a department. “For the IU Administration, this [need] amounts to whether students will be registered and whether [AAS] will generate income,” Takeuchi said. “My sense is that the current administration would be reluctant to commit to a department.”<sup>11</sup>

Another model the AAS Committee considered was integrating AAS into humanities, social science, science departments, as well as professional schools. “I would almost prefer that universities and people in history departments or across the campus teaching that [ethnic studies] be integral to all instruction in higher ed[ucation],” Virk said in her 2024 oral history.<sup>12</sup> She and Bose had believed that professors in traditional and professional disciplines would conduct research and design their courses to cover issues pertaining to the American experience while recognizing the ethnic and racial differentiation in the US. This model, Virk admitted, was idealistic and not structurally feasible at the time. The integration of ethnic studies into the

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<sup>11</sup> David Takeuchi to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, “Big Favor,” November 10, 2000, Box AAST, Folder, “CIC-Meeting—Nov. 12, 2000,” ACC Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Virk, interview.

university fabric would have required an overhaul of its curriculum, departmental structure, and paradigmatic shift in academia itself.<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, the AAS Committee chose to pursue a stand-alone interdisciplinary program because it was the most popular model at the height of the multiculturalism era. Student activists across the US in the 1990s had demanded separate ethnic studies programs—Asian American Black, Latinx, and Native American—to represent their racial groups and experiences. Some of the pioneering AAS programs in the Midwest, like UW-Madison and University of Michigan, had organized as interdisciplinary programs. Most recently, Northwestern University and UIUC had structured AAS as an interdisciplinary program in 1999. “In light of the fact that universities were making the decision to have specialized ethnic studies or an umbrella ethnic studies program, we felt that at the moment that’s what we needed to do,” Virk explained.<sup>14</sup> Bose, however, did not support a stand-alone AAS program. “I’m very ambivalent about the idea of an ‘Asian American Studies’ program because of my unease with the institutionalization of area studies, ethnic studies, and women’s studies programs historically,” Bose said in an email to Castillo-Cullather on November 22, 2000. “My uneasiness with ethnic and women’s studies programs resides in the perception that these programs...exist as ‘tokens’ institutionally and allow individual departments to neglect developing these areas internally,” she added.<sup>15</sup> Robinson raised a similar warning. He wanted to prevent AAS from being seen as a “sop to campus constituencies,” alluding to previous initiatives at IUB in which area and ethnic studies programs were enacted as a conciliatory gesture yet with no intention for reform.<sup>16</sup> Despite these

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<sup>13</sup> Purnima Bose to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, “Big Favor,” November 22, 2000, Box AAST, Folder, “CIC-Meeting—Nov. 12, 2000,” ACC Archives.

<sup>14</sup> Virk, interview.

<sup>15</sup> Bose to Castillo-Cullather, “Big Favor,” November 22, 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Robinson to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, “Big Favor,” November 9, 2000, Box AAST, Folder, “CIC-Meeting—Nov. 12, 2000,” ACC Archives.

objections, the AAS Committee could not ignore the regional and national movement for separate ethnic studies programs. Robinson believed there should be a program to compete with Midwestern peers. “[AAS at IUB] would also be a good thing to have when IU is out competing for good Asian American students who might want to come here from Chicago,” Robinson said in an email to Castillo-Cullather on November 9, 2000. “Univ[ersity of Illinois] has such a program and a much larger cohort of Asian Am[ericans].” Virk added, “These trends do have an effect,” referring to the very first AAS programs at Big Ten universities—Wisconsin and Michigan—also had adopted the interdisciplinary model after universities on the East and West Coast had developed them in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Members of the committee, then, believed the best way to structure AAS for its survival at IUB was to follow the higher education trend of the time and what their Midwestern peers had done.<sup>17</sup>

Second, the AAS Committee debated what arguments to include in their written proposal. The committee members did acknowledge Asian American students’ demands for an AAS program. IUB should have a program to recognize the growing numbers of Asian American students on campus and to represent their experience in the curriculum. The AAS Committee, however, agreed that the proposal should align with the regional narrative that Midwestern AAS advocates had discussed at the November 2000 CIC-AASC meeting. In an early outline of the proposal, committee members insisted that “the argument for AAS to be made not on [the] basis of demographics alone but on basis of substantive reasons.”<sup>18</sup> This regional narrative guided how the AAS Committee would frame their arguments. They must prioritize intellectual contribution to the academy over demographic representation to show that AAS is a legitimate field of study.

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<sup>17</sup> AASC, “IU Proposal for AASP”; Kiang, “New Wave,” 43–50.

<sup>18</sup> AAS Committee, “Indiana University Proposal to Institute an Asian American Studies Program [Draft],” ca. Fall 2000, Box AAST, Folder, “CIC-Meeting—Nov. 12, 2000,” ACC Archives.

The AAS Committee, however, reshaped this narrative to fit IUB's organizational context. They devised arguments that appealed to IUB's mission to be seen as a leading and global research university, especially among its Big Ten peers.<sup>19</sup>

One argument the AAS Committee pushed to include in the proposal was for expanding AAS's scope to include diasporic and transnational studies. The AAS Committee members reasoned that it was important to respond to "compelling intellectual forces in the academy" that have radically altered perspectives in American immigration and globalization.<sup>20</sup> Kent Ono had argued that the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, tested the intellectual boundaries of the field of AAS. The ensuing racism against Arab, Muslim, and South Indian Americans post-9/11 forced AAS scholars recognize its internal privileges. One historical privilege was that AAS scholarship continued to focus on the experiences, histories, and perspectives of East Asian communities in California. In turn, this privilege ignored other Asian ethnic groups that have long existed in the US, like Filipinx communities. The events of 9/11 also underscored the interdependence of global politics, capital, labor, and economy. According to Ono, the field's professional organization, the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS), came "face to face with its own historical and continuing relationship to US colonization, imperialism, [and] exploitation."<sup>21</sup>

For the IUB AAS Committee members, it was imperative that AAS be connected to these larger intellectual trends. Pao, Bose, and Robinson aimed to highlight AAS as a crucial perspective in understanding US international relations, particularly with Asian nations. Bose reported that Dean Kumble R. Subbaswamy was moving The College's funding and strategic

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<sup>19</sup> AASC, "Proposal for AAS at IUB"; Virk, interview.

<sup>20</sup> AASC, "Proposal for AAS at IUB," 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ono, "AAS After 9/11," 442.

priorities toward creating an interdisciplinary International Studies degree. Pao, who served on the AAAS book award committee, added that scholars across the US were producing new works that incorporated diasporic studies and the university should follow suit. “It marks IU as provincial not to be involved in this developing field, especially when there is interest in developing a global studies major,” Pao said.<sup>22</sup> Robinson added that the Committee should include “transnational connections” into AAS’s intellectual content because these “issues and questions have dominated Asian American studies [and] are located at the very forefront of changing disciplinary methods and knowledge.”<sup>23</sup> Bose agreed especially since “Asian immigration is inextricably tied to US foreign policy.”<sup>24</sup>

The second argument focused on the need for AAS to maintain IUB’s status as a leading research university. Committee members emphasized that IUB needed to remain competitive among its Midwestern and national peers who had established AAS programs with a focus on diasporic studies. “Most major universities have moved in this direction in the past decade,” Virk contended. “We need an institutional representation for this new area of research and teaching to keep up with the trends in higher education.”<sup>25</sup> Virk and Pao had painstakingly listed in the proposal’s appendix more than forty-four US universities that had established an AAS program since the late 1960s. These universities and colleges, which included IUB’s six Big Ten competitors, contributed to the inclusion of Asian Americans in the curriculum while advancing research in numerous academic journals. “These developments signify recognition of the intellectual place of AAS in the academy,” the AAS Committee argued in the final proposal.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Pao to Castillo-Cullather, “Big Favor,” November 9, 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson to Castillo-Cullather, “Big Favor,” November 9, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Bose to Castillo-Cullather, “Big Favor,” November 22, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Indermohan Virk to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, November 9, 2000, Box AAST, Folder, “CIC-Meeting—Nov. 12, 2000,” ACC Archives.

<sup>26</sup> AASC, “IU Proposal for AASP,” 8.

Thus, the university must develop “an Asian American Studies program of a quality and nature consistent with Indiana University’s mission and history as a leading research institution.”<sup>27</sup>

The AAS Committee, indeed, struck at IUB’s historical mission to remain in lockstep with its peer organizations—Universities of Michigan, UIUC, and UW-Madison. It is useful to consider the debates of the AAS committee within the context of IUB’s history to be perceived as a world-class university. IUB in its first century of existence could not compete with the elite institutions on the East Coast (Harvard, Cornell, and Johns Hopkins). According to historian James Capshew, in its first several decades since its establishment in 1820, IUB remained one of the smallest and poorest colleges among the western frontier of settlement. It lacked accumulated prestige, endowed wealth, and a research-oriented faculty. IUB presidents and chancellors, nevertheless, were driven to improve the university’s status among its Midwestern peers. David Starr Jordan, IU’s first non-clerical president, who was shaped by his scientific training at Cornell University, tinkered with ways to improve IU’s research reputation with limited financial resources. He added science and modern languages to modernize IU’s classics curriculum; required faculty to have an advanced doctoral degree; and populated the faculty with talented and loyal alums to put “Bloomington on the map.”<sup>28</sup>

William Lowe Bryan, a psychology professor and IU’s tenth president, modernized the university’s academic profile by establishing the Graduate School in 1904 followed by professional schools in Education (1908), Commerce and Finance (1920), and Music (1921). He justified the funding and the creation of the special schools to the Indiana General Assembly and the Board of Trustees to remain competitive with its Midwestern peers. “Wisconsin has made her

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<sup>27</sup> AASC, “IU Proposal for AASP,” 9.

<sup>28</sup> James H. Capshew, *Herman B Wells: The Promise of the American University* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 3.

University a center of national enlightenment. Michigan has done the same. Missouri is determined to do the same. Illinois, which was toward the rear, last year gave \$50,000 for the establishment of a graduate school,” Bryan said in his 1908 Commencement address. “This is my appeal. Stop the year long [*sic*] procession of men who go from us to make the glory and strength of other States.”<sup>29</sup>

Herman B Wells, IUB’s eleventh president, idolized Bryan and adopted his mentor’s aspirations to expand IUB’s intellectual influence in American society and in the world. Wells devised IUB’s renaissance even before the onset of World War II, the event that elevated IUB’s visibility and funding in America’s fight for democracy. His vision of IUB contributed to its “meteoric rise in reputation” by internationalizing its student body as well as its curricular and extracurricular offerings, restructuring its faculty toward research, and constructing world-class cultural and academic facilities on campus.<sup>30</sup> Chancellor Gros Louis, a mentee of Wells, carried on Wells’s vision of IUB’s potential to become the top-ranked public university in the Midwest. During his time as Bloomington Chancellor, Gros Louis aspired to increase its *US News and World Report* ranking from top ten to top three public university within the Big Ten in the next decade.<sup>31</sup>

The AAS Committee built its final argument based on IUB’s historical ambitions to become a world-class research university. AAS would contribute to IUB’s teaching mission in promoting diversity in the US and abroad. They argued that AAS would make “an essential contribution to the University’s mission in offering its students an educational experience” that

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<sup>29</sup> Manfred Wolfe Deputy, “The Philosophical Ideas and Related Achievements of William Lowe Bryan,” (PhD diss., Indiana University Bloomington, 1947), Chapter VIII, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, 169.

<sup>31</sup> Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC) Minutes, January 21, 1997, accessed on October 24, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1997-01-21>

promoted pluralism, tolerance, and cultural diversity, which they would encounter in the American workplace and society.<sup>32</sup> AAS would further complement the courses already offered in Afro-American Studies, Latino Studies, and Chicano-Riqueño Studies by teaching “our future citizens to think critically about the impact of race, nationality, and cultural differences in the US society.”<sup>33</sup> Introducing AAS into the university curriculum would teach all students, not just Asian Americans, that America’s racial history was more than just Black-White relations. Regular AAS courses, the AAS Committee argued, would further combat Asian American stereotypes by expanding the American racial narrative “beyond the simplistic ‘model minority’ and ‘perpetual foreigner’ positions currently in place.”<sup>34</sup> All IUB students would learn about the central place Asian Americans, like other racial groups, held in shaping American literature, politics, economy, and legal debates on naturalization and citizenship. AAS, with its intellectual expansion into diasporic and transnational studies, would also contribute to IUB and The College’s goal of educating students to understand the increasingly global society in which they lived.<sup>35</sup>

The last argument in the AAS Committee’s proposal aligned most closely to the demands of student activists in the 1990s. Committee members argued that all students would benefit from AAS, from learning about the contributions of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans to the American society while combatting stereotypes and anti-Asian hate like that which had killed Won-Joon Yoon. Students also remained at the forefront when the AAS Committee debated how to structure of the program. Faculty and staff advocates pursued an interdisciplinary program because IUB students wanted a stand-alone program to represent their demographic growth and

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<sup>32</sup> AASC, “Proposal for AAS at IUB,” 9.

<sup>33</sup> AASC, “Proposal for AAS at IUB,” 8.

<sup>34</sup> AASC, “Proposal for AAS at IUB,” 5.

<sup>35</sup> AASC, “Proposal for AAS at IUB,” 9; Virk, interview.

presence at the university. Moreover, the AAS Committee could not ignore the multicultural movement that had swept across universities and colleges in the 1990s. “[S]tudents were asking for this across the United States...because [they] wanted a representation of their experience,” Virk explained. “At the time, that was the trend in higher education, and we [the AAS Committee] were going with that.”<sup>36</sup>

While students demanded a program for demographic representation, faculty and staff advocates aimed to legitimize AAS as a serious discipline. Two of the three arguments in the AAS Committee’s proposal justified a program for IUB to remain competitive among their Midwestern peers and to maintain its status as a leading research university. Students wanted courses that spoke to the Asian American racial experience in the US context. Faculty and staff advocates, in contrast, widened the scope of the program to include emerging intellectual trends, namely diasporic and transnational studies. By aligning its proposal to larger discussions in academe, the AAS Committee appealed to the “intellectual project that would benefit the larger university,” a strategy that the advocates in the CIC-AASC used when justifying AAS at their own Midwestern state universities.<sup>37</sup> Faculty and staff advocates, then, framed AAS as a function of academic reputation. IUB, being a research-intensive university, needed a program to remain on the cutting edge of research. Faculty and staff advocates could not ignore the intellectual trends that were leading AAS and The College toward a funding opportunity, called the Commitment to Excellence Tuition Plan, that would allow the budding program to obtain new faculty lines.

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<sup>36</sup> Virk, interview.

<sup>37</sup> Erika Lee, “Asian American Studies in the Midwest: New Questions, Approaches, and Communities,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009), 253.

### **The Search for Funding, Tenure-Track Lines, and a Program Director, 2002-2006**

This phase in IUB's journey toward institutionalization underscores the common struggles that Midwestern AAS advocates faced when building programs. The AAS Committee had strong administrative support within the College of Arts and Letters. Dean Kumble Subbaswamy had believed in the educational and intellectual value of AAS as an academic discipline. It could teach students about the increasingly multiracial society while growing The College's portfolio of ethnic studies and area studies programs. More importantly, he helped the AAS Committee connect to funding opportunities that were crucial in obtaining limited resources, like faculty lines. Even with Subbaswamy's administrative savviness, AAS advocates still faced common challenges that others had experienced while building AAS in the Midwest, including finding consistent funding and hiring an external AAS scholar to direct the new program. As Josephine Lee argued, these challenges are not unique to programs in the Midwest but part of the field-wide struggles of trying to grow AAS programs with limited resources.<sup>38</sup>

Dean Subbaswamy understood the importance of strategic timing. He had honed these skills after almost a decade as an "accidental administrator" in academia.<sup>39</sup> After graduating from IUB with a PhD in Physics in 1976, Subbaswamy had risen from an assistant professor at University of Kentucky in 1978 to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at University of Miami by 1997. His physics training had also taught him how to craft a convincing narrative by collecting evidence and to build a case to convince campus stakeholders to accept change. When he returned to his alma mater as the dean of The College in 2000, the AAS Committee

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<sup>38</sup> Josephine Lee, "Bridging the Big Twelve: The Committee on Institutional Cooperation Asian American Studies Consortium," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (2009): 275–284.

<sup>39</sup> Lucy A. Leske, host, "An 'Accidental Administrator' Builds Momentum for Change: Kumble Subbaswamy," Impactful Leaders Podcast, Oak Brook, Illinois, posted on October 15, 2024, 37 mins., 56 secs., <https://wittkieffer-impactful-leaders-podcast.podbean.com/e/impactful-leaders-podcast-kumble-subbaswamy/>

approached him to fund its proposal development. In an email to Dean Subbaswamy, Castillo-Cullather argued that he should fund AAS because the program would be housed in The College. Financial support, in any amount, would indicate The College's buy-in. Subbaswamy gave the AAS Committee an additional \$5,000, matching Vice President Gros Louis and Vice President of Student Development and Diversity Charlie Nelms's contributions. Dean Subbaswamy, according to Pao, remained central the AAS Committee's efforts to establish the program until he left IUB to become provost of the University of Kentucky in 2006.<sup>40</sup>

Subbaswamy read the proposal after the AAS Committee submitted it on November 5, 2001. Being an Indian immigrant himself, he understood why IUB needed an AAS program to differentiate between the experiences of Asians in the US and those in Asian countries. "He really wanted to help and support us," said Pao, who became the chair of the AAS Committee at that time. Virk added that the AAS Committee was "very heartened" by Subbaswamy's response at a follow-up meeting with the Dean. "We made our case, we presented him with a copy of the proposal, and he asked very good questions, seemed very open-minded, seemed very receptive," she said. The AAS Committee also met with the newly appointed university provost, Sharon Brehm, who did not seem as receptive as Subbaswamy. "We felt that we weren't quite communicating well with her because we were talking about Asian American [students], and we were trying to differentiate between Asian Americans and Asian students on campus," said Virk in her oral history. "Somehow she was having a really hard time with that [differentiation]."<sup>41</sup> According to Pao, several program chairs could not understand the difference between AAS and the East Asian Studies program on campus. "It's something we ran into very quickly with talking

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<sup>40</sup> Indiana University Office of the President, "Kumble R. Subbaswamy," University Honors and Awards, accessed on October 28, 2024 from <https://honorsandawards.iu.edu/awards/honoree/3895.html>

<sup>41</sup> Virk, interview.

to heads and chairs of programs and even the provost,” Pao said in her oral history interview. “They didn’t understand why we were trying to start an Asian American Studies program when we had an Asian studies program.”<sup>42</sup>

Administrative responses about AAS from Provost Brehm or program chairs remain unknown based on searches in the IDS and archival sources at IUB. In their oral histories, Virk and Pao suspected that Chancellor Brehm’s confusion could have been attributed to her onset of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease (Brehm passed away in 2018). According to a December 4, 2007, IDS article, student leaders remembered Provost Brehm for her diversity-oriented measures during her tenure as chancellor of the Bloomington campus. Brehm was particularly known for her work to educate the campus about the 1933 Thomas Hart Benton murals, which were installed in a Woodburn Hall classroom. (The mural, depicting Indiana history, stirred controversy for its images of a Ku Klux Klan rally and cross burning.) Brehm also established the One Diversity Fund that helped display more multicultural art around campus with the goal of educating the campus on race relations. Her actions to support campus diversity initiatives suggest that she was aware of students’ perceptions of the university as a culturally White organization.<sup>43</sup>

From his administrative experience, Subbaswamy knew it would take time to craft a convincing case to campus stakeholders, especially those who had access to funding. He advised the AAS Committee to wait until the fall 2002 semester to submit the proposal through the College’s program approval process. Delaying formal consideration for the proposal, he

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<sup>42</sup> Angela Pao, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 17, 2016, digital recording and transcript, 55:41, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author’s possession).

<sup>43</sup> Jackie Corgan, “Students Reflect on Chancellor Brehm’s Resignation,” *Indiana Daily Student*, December 3, 2007 accessed on March 25, 2025 from <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2007/12/students-reflect-on-chancellor-brehms-resignation>; Benjamin Derrick, “BSU Unsatisfied with Mural Aftermath,” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 3, 2004, accessed on March 25, 2025 from <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2004/09/bsu-unsatisfied-with-mural-aftermath>.

reasoned, would increase the AAS Committee's chances of finding more funding for the program while making AAS more attractive to the campus community.<sup>44</sup>

Subbaswamy initially advised the Committee to seek funding based on the argument that AAS would serve the campus's mission to prepare all students for a multicultural education. Although AAS would be housed in The College, the AAS Committee should ask other schools (like Education, Public and Environmental Sciences, Journalism, and Business) for funding. Subbaswamy reasoned that AAS, as an interdisciplinary discipline, would serve their students by preparing them to work in a multiracial society. He also recommended the AAS Committee apply to the Chancellor's Fund, arguing that AAS would serve the campus's mission to foster diversity. To be more competitive for the Chancellor's Fund, he advised the AAS Committee to demonstrate strong campus support for AAS and submit written results around March when the Chancellor's Office began discussions about the university process.<sup>45</sup>

Following the Dean's recommendation, the AAS Committee worked with Asian American Association President Chris Sinclair and Caroline Shin (Education, Counseling, and Psychology), a doctoral student and ACC graduate assistant, to collect petitions and letters of support from racially diverse student organizations. From October 2001 to March 2002 AAS advocates hosted mass meetings and gathered student signatures and quotes on the impact of AAS courses for undergraduates and graduates. They also collected letters of support from the

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<sup>44</sup> Kumble R. Subbaswamy to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, "Asian American Studies," February 16, 2001, Box AAST, Folder, "AAS Program Planning Committee," ACC Archives; Angela Pao to Melanie Castillo-Cullather and Indermohan Virk, "Chancellor Brehm," March 19, 2002, Angela Pao personal collection; Pao, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Shin to AAS Committee, "Meeting with Subbaswamy," November 17, 2001, Angela Pao personal collection; Angela Pao to Melanie Castillo-Cullather and Indermohan Virk, "Chancellor Brehm," March 19, 2002, Angela Pao personal collection.

Black Student Union, Latino Unidos of IU, and the Board of Directors of the IU Asian American Association.<sup>46</sup>

The AAS Committee, however, could not secure more funding even with written support letters and student petitions. Under IUB's Responsibility-Centered Management financial model, the Chancellor and deans believed The College had sole responsibility for developing the program. Subbaswamy, however, remained unfazed with the lack of funding. He believed there still was time in the 2002–2003 academic year to generate campus interest in AAS. He allowed the AAS Committee to submit the proposal to The College's Policy Committee and the Committee for Undergraduate Education for program approval in the upcoming academic year.<sup>47</sup>

Subbaswamy also encouraged the AAS Committee to continue to build intellectual interest around AAS. In spring 2002, the dean authorized \$10,000 to fund a yearlong colloquium called "New Paradigms in AAS," to continue to build intellectual interest around AAS. The yearlong lecture series would introduce AAS to students, thereby generating course enrollment, while making it attractive to other programs and departments. Inviting prominent AAS speakers in the field and from Midwest universities also demonstrated that elite and peer universities had already institutionalized AAS. "There is a growing interest and thirst for knowledge about the study of Asian American experience, culture, and history among students in many campuses," Castillo-Cullather said in the IDS.<sup>48</sup> Virk added that the colloquium would further legitimize

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<sup>46</sup> Melanie Castillo-Cullather to AAS Committee, "Copies and Dinner," November 9, 2001, Angela Pao personal collection; Chris Sinclair to Asian American Association, "Really, Really Important Survey!" November 15, 2001, Angela Pao personal collection; Caroline Shin to Asian American graduate students, "Proposal for Asian American Studies at IU," October 10, 2001, Box AAST, Folder, "AAS Program Planning Committee," ACC Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Pao to Castillo-Cullather and Virk, "Chancellor Brehm," March 19, 2002; Angela Pao to Sharon S. Brehm, "Asian American Proposal," March 24, 2002, Box AAST, Folder "AAS Colloquium," ACC Archives; Letter from Gerardo M. Gonzalez to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, February 26, 2001, Box AAST, Folder, "AAS Program Planning Committee," ACC Archives; "CFO Describes How IU Develops Its Budget, Recommends Tuition Increases," *News at IU*, June 14, 2019 accessed on March 25, 2025 from <https://news.iu.edu/live/news/26108-from-the-desk-cfo-describes-how-iu-develops-its>.

<sup>48</sup> Maura Halpern, "Speech Addresses Asian-American Studies," *Indiana Daily Student*, September 23, 2002, 2.

AAS's place at IUB and in American society, which was increasingly becoming more multiracial and multi-ethnic. "The foundation of an Asian-American Studies program would signify recognition of the increasing intellectual place of AAS in the academy, and its growing vitality as a separate field of study," Virk said.<sup>49</sup> While waiting for program approval from The College, the AAS Committee spent the summer of 2002 planning for the colloquium. Castillo-Cullather, Pao, and Virk invited AAS senior scholars like Gary Okihiro (Columbia), Nancy Abelmann (UIUC), Martin F. Manalansan (UIUC), and Lavina Shankar (Bates College) to come to IUB and present their research.<sup>50</sup>

As the colloquium kicked off on September 20, 2002, Subbaswamy had discovered over the summer an upcoming funding opportunity through the Office of the Chancellor, the "Commitment Toward Excellence." Championed by President Myles Brand, this new initiative was launched to help keep IU competitive among public universities in the US. Brand, with the support of the eight regional chancellors, proposed a new student enrollment fee that would generate nearly \$42 million in revenue over the next five years. He reasoned that a tuition hike was necessary even when the university had secured additional revenue from private sources including a \$105 million grant from the Lilly Endowment to attract new faculty to the IU School of Medicine. In the twenty-five years prior, state appropriations to IU had continued to decline while costs to operate a research-intensive university had risen. "These are investments in excellence," Brand reported to the IU Board of Trustees, citing that the new fee would fund over one hundred new faculty positions in various academic fields to develop a more robust intellectual environment, lower the student-to-faculty ratio, and increase the value of the IU

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<sup>49</sup> Halpern, "Speech Addresses Asian-American Studies," 2.

<sup>50</sup> AAS Committee, "New Paradigms in Asian American Studies: A Colloquium Series," Brochure, 2002-2003, Box AAST, Folder, "AAS Colloquium 2002-2003," ACC Archives; Halpern, "Speech Addresses Asian-American Studies," 2.

degree.<sup>51</sup> The Commitment to Excellence Fund “is about building a stronger and more competitive university,” the IU president emphasized.<sup>52</sup>

In their June 21, 2002 meeting, the IU Board of Trustees approved the Commitment to Excellence Tuition plan and allowed the regional chancellors to determine how to use the funds. From the summer to the fall of 2002, Chancellor Brehm convened a strategic planning committee who identified five academic priorities that would help IUB serve the future needs of the state of Indiana and the nation: life sciences; applied sciences and information technology; interdisciplinary initiatives involving the liberal arts; the arts; and international programs and curricula. The strategic planning committee also outlined the review process to fund proposals that closely aligned with these academic priorities that would propel IUB toward becoming “the premier” research university in the nation.<sup>53</sup>

Subbaswamy believed that the AAS Committee could receive tenure-track lines through the Commitment to Excellence Fund if The College could package AAS into a larger proposal aimed toward interdisciplinary and international initiatives. In September 2002, Subbaswamy and his executive team organized department and program chairs from units housed in The College to draft a proposal called, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World: At Home and Abroad” (hereafter referred to as the Two-Thirds World proposal). The college-wide drafting committee strategically chose the term “Two-Thirds World” for its funding proposal because it represented the two-thirds of the world’s population that lived or emigrated from third world countries. The proposal requested funds to hire new faculty, create a BA in international studies,

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<sup>51</sup> IU Board of Trustees Minutes, June 21, 2002, accessed on October 30, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/iubot/2002-06-21>

<sup>52</sup> IU Board of Trustees Minutes, June 21, 2002, 1.

<sup>53</sup> IU Board of Trustees Minutes, January 31, 2003, accessed on October 30, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/iubot/2003-01-31>

start a global-focused living-learning center, and increase the number of courses pertaining to diversity and diasporic communities of the US.<sup>54</sup>

Historically, area studies and ethnic studies remained separate disciplines at IUB because of their intellectual focus and the circumstances under which they were formed. Area studies at IUB emerged during the Cold War era to study regions considered critical to national security. The field trained specialists in the languages, cultures, and politics of different countries while seeking designation as a National Resource Center for the federal government through Title VI funding in the National Defense Education Act of 1958. In the higher education marketplace, IUB had been considered an “international leader” in area studies because of the wide variety of foreign languages available, the strength of its curriculum, and near continuous funding of its Title VI Centers since 1958.<sup>55</sup> Ethnic studies, in contrast, emerged in response to the racial unrest in the US during the 1960s. In 1969, IUB institutionalized Afro-American Studies, and the department set precedent in education and research in addressing the racial inequities in American society. Ethnic studies, however, remained siloed organizationally and marginalized intellectually at the university.<sup>56</sup>

Subbaswamy remained sensitive to these historical and intellectual distinctions. Yet, he saw the Commitment to Excellence Fund as an opportunity to further his vision of internationalizing The College’s curriculum and faculty body. The Commitment to Excellence Fund would also increase the schools’ academic reputation by securing more funding through Title VI and other international grants. Subbaswamy and his executive team charged the college-

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<sup>54</sup> Kumble R. Subbaswamy, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World: At Home and Abroad,” 2003 Commitment to Excellence Proposal, ca. fall 2002, Angela Pao personal collection, 4. Copy of Two-Third Worlds proposal also available in Box AAST, Folder “Two-Third Worlds Proposal Meeting,” ACC Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Subbaswamy, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World,” 2.

<sup>56</sup> Capshew, *Herman B Wells*, 274–75; Herman Hudson, “The Black Studies Program: Strategy and Structure,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 41, no. 4 (1972): 294–298; Subbaswamy, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World,” 3–4.

wide drafting committee that the Two-Thirds World proposal needed to align with the “international programs and curricula” academic priority outlined in the Commitment to Excellence Fund.<sup>57</sup>

This international approach, then, dictated how The College’s drafting committee wrote the Two-Third Worlds proposal. The drafting committee comprised of program directors and chairs from twenty-one departments and programs in area studies, ethnic studies, and social science and humanities. When writing the proposal, this interdisciplinary committee packaged area studies and ethnic studies together to increase its chances in receiving the Commitment to Excellence Funds. The drafting committee argued that this separatist view of area and ethnic studies was outdated. “In a more interconnected (“globalized”) world, there are limits to thinking in terms of separate nations or regions,” the committee wrote.<sup>58</sup> They further argued that the geopolitical climate had changed drastically since the founding of these two disciplines. Flows of capital, migration, culture, and even violent conflicts have transcended borders. “[T]o remain competitive and maintain our prominence in the field of international studies, we must also focus attention on linkages between different world regions and on the political economy of world order,” the committee contended.<sup>59</sup> Transnationalism was the new way of the world, and there was an urgent need for more faculty who could research and teach it. The College needed new faculty in emerging areas of national importance, such as the Middle East and South Asia, to

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<sup>57</sup> Angela Pao to Indermohan Virk and Melanie Castillo-Cullather, “Important!!!” September 12, 2002, Folder, “AAS Colloquium 2002-2003, Box AAST, ACC Archives; Subbaswamy, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World,” 2, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Subbaswamy, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World,” 4.

<sup>59</sup> Subbaswamy, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World,” 4.

obtain more Title VI funding, build more National Resource Centers, and enhance IUB's competitive edge in international studies.<sup>60</sup>

The Two-Thirds World proposal, as a result, widened the AAS Committee's intellectual argument from a domestic focus to a global one. Pao collaborated with John Stanfield and Jorge Chapa, the chairs of the Department of African American and African Diasporas Studies and the Program for Latino Studies, respectively, to draft strategic planning statements to be included in the Two-Third Worlds proposal. Pao, Stanfield, and Chapa initially drafted a statement titled, "New Directions in American Studies Proposal" that dealt only with US ethnic studies.<sup>61</sup> However, the drafting committee rejected Pao, Stanfield, and Chapa's statement as it was too "American studies" focused and did not articulate the priority for international curricula named in the Commitment to Excellence Fund.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the committee was careful "to keep the focus on the intellectual/academic issues rather than naming specific depart[ments] & programs," when drafting the Two-Thirds World proposal.<sup>63</sup> The drafting committee incorporated Pao, Stanfield, and Chapa's American-centric statement into the Two-Thirds World proposal by emphasizing the direct relation between area studies and ethnic studies at IUB. The drafting committee further accentuated this strategy by discussing IUB's Afro-American Studies Department, which changed its name around 2003 to African American and African Diasporas Studies "to reflect the rising importance of international connections in the study of the African experience in the United States."<sup>64</sup> With the name change, the department had broadened its

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<sup>60</sup> IU Board of Trustees Minutes, May 9, 2003, accessed on November 1, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/iubot/2003-05-09>; Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World," 2, 5, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Angela Pao to Indermohan Virk and Melanie Castillo-Cullather, "Two-Thirds World Meeting Summary," June 25, 2003, Box AAST, Folder, "Two-Thirds World Meeting," ACC Archives.

<sup>62</sup> Pao to Virk and Castillo-Cullather, "Two-Thirds World Meeting Summary," June 25, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Pao to Virk and Castillo-Cullather, "Important!!!" September 16, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World," 4.

curriculum to take advantage of new developments in the field and forge ties with area studies, such as African Studies Program and the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Keeping the focus broadly on the intellectual trends, rather than on ethnic studies units alone, would increase The College's chances of receiving the Commitment to Excellence funding.<sup>65</sup>

In the Two-Thirds World proposal, Pao discussed AAS through this broad, international context. Asian Americans, along with other US minority groups, were re-packaged as "third world immigrant groups in the US."<sup>66</sup> AAS would expand its intellectual lens from a domestic to an international focus by examining American historical events, such as the explosion of the US Asian American population, in relation to economic and political changes in third-world countries. New hires in AAS would be experts in "cross-cutting issues," such as immigration and acculturation, that affected third-world diasporic communities in the US.<sup>67</sup> Teaching and research would re-examine AAS topics, like literature and identity, through this widened community lens of the third world diaspora to remain at "the cutting edge" of intellectual trends.<sup>68</sup> The Two-Thirds World proposal, then, transformed AAS from a study of Asian Americans in the US into a "transnational phenomena."<sup>69</sup>

The strategy of combining ethnic studies with area studies proved successful. In June 2003, the Office of the Chancellor awarded The College an estimated three million dollars from The Commitment to Excellence Funds over a span of five years. The funding granted The College twenty-five new faculty tenure-track lines while giving the AAS Committee three full-time faculty lines with specialties in diasporic and immigrant issues. The three lines included two

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<sup>65</sup> Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World," 6-7; Pao to Virk and Castillo-Cullather, "Important!!!" September 12-17, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> IU Board of Trustees Minutes, May 9, 2003; Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World."

<sup>67</sup> Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World," 4.

<sup>68</sup> Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World," 5.

<sup>69</sup> Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World," 2, 3.

appointments in East Asian and one in South Asian diaspora to be hired over a three-year period and would form the core of the new AAS program. At the same time The College drafted the Two-Thirds World proposal, the College's Policy Committee and Committee for Undergraduate Education approved the creation of the AAS program.<sup>70</sup>

On May 9, 2003, Subbaswamy promised the Board of Trustees that The College would fulfill its goals to boost the university's reputation as an international leader of area studies. "The expected outcomes include an increase in reputation, as measured by grants awarded by the US Department of Education," he reiterated. "This sort of the international measure, if you will, of how important and how good our international studies and regional studies programs are."<sup>71</sup> He reiterated the two measures that would hold The College and its programs, departments, and research centers accountable to the university: "The impact of this proposal on the academic reputation of IUB will be assessed by: a) success in maintaining and increasing extramural sources of support for area and international studies; and b) rankings (where available) and periodic external reviews and of those departments and programs most closely affiliated with area studies and ethnic studies."<sup>72</sup> It was these two measures—obtaining external funding and national rankings—that The College used to conduct AAS's program review in 2008 and determine if AAS would become an official unit in the school.

With program approval and with funding secured, Subbaswamy underscored the importance of fulfilling The Commitment to Excellence funding priorities by hiring faculty members with diasporic and international specialties. According to October 7, 2003, email

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<sup>70</sup> Pao to Virk and Castillo-Cullather, "Two-Thirds World Meeting Summary," June 25, 2003; The College Policy Committee Minutes, September 2002, Box AAST, Folder, ACC Archives; Linda E. Smith to Angela Pao and Indermohan Virk, "Proposal for an Asian American Studies Program at IUB," Box AAST, Folder, "AAS Program Planning Committee," ACC Archives.

<sup>71</sup> IU Board of Trustees Minutes, May 9, 2003.

<sup>72</sup> Subbaswamy, "Understanding the 'Two-Thirds' World," 8.

correspondence and the Two-Third Worlds proposal, Pao collaborated with Stanfield, Chapa, and faculty members from the East Asian Studies Center and India Studies Program to develop parameters for hiring diasporic specialists. Subbaswamy was adamant that the diasporic hires would have research and teaching experience in “cross-cutting and comparative issues as well as in connections to the points of origin.”<sup>73</sup> He expected these new hires to be interdisciplinary appointments sharing lines with their disciplinary departments and with area and/or ethnic studies. “The funding is project driven, not department driven,” Subbaswamy directed.<sup>74</sup> He also underscored the importance of hiring new faculty members who would continue to diversify the faculty body. According to an email from Subbaswamy to all program and department chairs, The College was “under moral and ethical obligation to pay considerable attention to diversity,” regarding hiring new faculty under the guidelines of IUB’s affirmative action plan.<sup>75</sup>

Pao and the AAS Committee launched a nationwide search for an AAS senior scholar starting in September 2004. True to Subbaswamy’s parameters, the director position would be a tenured joint appointment between AAS and the appropriate disciplinary department. The director would, preferably, have a substantial record of innovative scholarship particularly in “Asian Pacific American communities and immigration in a trans-Pacific, transnational or diasporic context,” as expected in the Two-Thirds World proposal.<sup>76</sup>

More importantly, the AAS Committee understood the importance of hiring a senior scholar to organizationally stabilize a young program while reimagining AAS scholarship around

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<sup>73</sup> Angela Pao to Indermohan Virk and Melanie Castillo-Cullather, “CTE funding from Two-Thirds World,” June 25, 2003, Box AAST, Folder, “Two-Thirds World Meeting,” ACC Archives.

<sup>74</sup> Pao to Virk and Castillo-Cullather, “CTE Funding for Two-Thirds World,” June 25, 2003.

<sup>75</sup> Quote in Pao to Virk and Castillo-Cullather, “CTE Funding for Two-Thirds World,” June 25, 2003; Angela Pao to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, “Diasporic Hires,” October 7, 2003, Box AAST, Folder, “Asian American Studies Program,” ACC Archives; Subbaswamy, “Understanding the ‘Two-Thirds’ World,” 7.

<sup>76</sup> Job Posting to Association for Asian American Studies Community [Yahoo Groups], “Job: Full or Associate Prof./Program Director, Indiana University-Bloomington,” September 17, 2004, Angela Pao personal collection; Copy also available in Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

Indiana and Midwestern Asian American communities. The AAS Committee desired a candidate with a strong record of academic leadership to help IUB's young program become successful organizationally and intellectually at the university and in the field. Having a senior scholar at the helm of the program would increase the chances of AAS's organizational establishment at IUB. A senior scholar would create a strong cadre of core faculty and take on the administrative burden to manage an interdisciplinary program, which required much collaboration with other academic units. They would provide mentorship to junior scholars to achieve tenure and promotion while leveraging professional connections to the field of AAS. Moreover, a senior scholar with honed administrative skills could shepherd the program through approval processes as well as negotiate for funding and resources. Finally, a visionary director would help IUB gain an intellectual reputation in the field by creating a unique program that would represent Indiana's distinct Asian American communities and issues. A director that strategically shaped AAS's curricular and intellectual activities would draw more students and scholars to IUB to study its distinct offerings.<sup>77</sup>

Early in spring 2005, the Committee brought in four finalists for campus visits. The candidates possessed what Subbaswamy and the AAS Committee specified: extensive publishing records with a focus on Asian diasporic studies; administrative experience either in an AAS program or their disciplinary departments; and excellent teaching records. The AAS Committee offered the director position to two finalists. The 2004–2005 search for a director, however, failed as both candidates declined IUB's offer and remained at their universities with re-

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<sup>77</sup> Pao, interview; Angela Pao, email correspondence to author, November 20, 2024.

negotiated terms. “It was hard to get someone senior to leave their own university to come to a place where there were no faculty teaching AAS courses,” Pao summarized.<sup>78</sup>

Disappointed but not deterred, the AAS Committee launched a second director search, with the same parameters, the following academic year. The second director search also failed. The candidate the AAS Committee had wanted had already accepted an AAS program director position elsewhere. IUB’s struggles to hire a senior scholar echoed the same issue that plagued the field of AAS since its inception. There were not enough senior scholars to direct AAS programs. Young units, such as IUB’s, were forced to take on the significant demands of establishing a new program while sacrificing what mattered most in academia—building an intellectual identity and reputation. This administrative burden on budding programs, thus, perpetuated a cycle of marginalization in the field of AAS.<sup>79</sup>

Pao stepped down as chair of the AAS Committee in spring 2006, citing administrative burnout. While chairing the AAS Committee, she had simultaneously juggled her administrative duties in her home department as the Director of Graduate Studies for Comparative Literature since 2003. At the same time, The College lost its leader. In fall 2006, Subbaswamy became Provost at the University of Kentucky, where he had earned tenure as a physics professor and had served as department chair. Subbaswamy took the position after losing a bid to become the Chancellor for the Bloomington campus after Brehm resigned in October 2003. After a two-year vacancy and a ten-month search, IU President Adam Herbert had decided against hiring any of the three finalists—thereby passing over Subbaswamy, who was the most popular and public candidate. Herbert’s alleged snub of Subbaswamy, in addition to other mounting criticisms on

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<sup>78</sup> AAS Committee, “Over a Cup of Tea—Asian American Studies at IU,” September 26, 2007, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

<sup>79</sup> I do not name or include identifying information of the candidates to protect their privacy. Yu and Lee, eds., *The State of AAS*.

the restructuring of the university, incensed the IUB faculty body to pass a two-thirds vote of no confidence and demanded the IU Board of Trustees to conduct a special review of his presidency.<sup>80</sup>

Subbaswamy's departure left a large administrative void for the AAS Committee, who was still reeling from the two failed director searches. Subbaswamy had championed AAS and ethnic studies at all levels of the university. He had advocated their educational and intellectual value at faculty committee meetings and with senior-level administrators. Using his administrative savviness, he made the program approval process easier for the AAS Committee. He funded AAS's intellectual activities to generate campus demand despite budget constraints in The College. He helped AAS secure tenure-track lines by encouraging collaboration between area and ethnic studies, two fields that were once disparate and separate. "He really was an ideal academic administrator, combining vision and pragmatism with an understanding of both human nature and institutional structures," Pao explained. "We really do owe the creation of the Asian American Studies program to his vision and material support."<sup>81</sup>

### **The Program Review and Proving AAS's Intellectual Legitimacy, 2007-2008**

In this period, the AAS Committee at IUB faced two other challenges that also afflicted young Midwestern units. With the failure to find a senior AAS director, existing faculty members needed to step in to serve as program director or to help with administrative responsibilities. Some of the affiliate AAS faculty members were only junior professors, and they took on heavy service and administrative burdens, including creating new courses and conducting a program

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<sup>80</sup> Quote in Pao, interview; Peter Stevenson, "News Analysis: How a Failed Chancellor Search Led to the Quest for Herbert's Successor," *Indiana Daily Student*, July 1, 2007, accessed on November 20, 2024 from <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2007/07/news-analysis-how-a-failed-chancellor-search-led-to-the-quest-for-herberts-successor>.

<sup>81</sup> Angela Pao, email message to author, November 14, 2024.

review. AAS Committee members faced another challenge in justifying AAS's existence to The College to gain official program status. In a program review, they needed to demonstrate a record of the research and teaching accomplishments. The program review, in turn, marked a shift toward deradicalization in which The College tied funding and organizational stability to intellectual production.

IUB was not alone in trying to prove AAS's intellectual legitimacy to their universities. Scholars at other Midwestern campuses, like Northwestern University and UIUC, tried to justify AAS within their campuses. In the 2001 CIC-AASC report, Ji-Yeon Yuh wrote, "The main challenge is to establish the Asian American Studies Program as a critical component of academic life." She outlined attempts to improve AAS's visibility on campus, adding, "In an attempt to convince the administration of the seriousness of intellectual work done in AAS, key speakers have been invited to speak on campus."<sup>82</sup> Augusto Espiritu (History, AAS) described a similar experience at UIUC. Even when AAS had achieved departmental status in 2012, Espiritu noted that "hardly anyone pays attention to what this department has thus far accomplished, and the fact that on a national basis it has become one of the leading Asian American Studies institutions, especially in theoretical and cultural research in the humanities." Espiritu added that the department's thirteen core faculty members in 2014 had received national and international acclaim for their publications, such as book prizes in professional organizations. Regardless, the AAS faculty members' "accomplishments are compared to long-established departments and their accomplishments" such as membership in prestigious national academies of science,

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<sup>82</sup> Ji-Yeon Yuh, "Northwestern University," in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, ed. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), Box AAST, Folder, "APA Studies Program," ACC Archives, 22–23.

Pulitzer and Noble Prizes, or science and technology grants.<sup>83</sup> These regional struggles underscored AAS's cycle to be recognized at their campuses and suggest the larger issue of AAS's continued marginalization in the academy.

Before leaving for his new position at University of Kentucky, Subbaswamy gave the AAS Committee at IUB their "farewell gift."<sup>84</sup> He approved the search for two junior track faculty lines, which would be fully-housed in History and sociology. The Committee, as a result, pivoted their search to hire junior tenure-track faculty members using the diasporic lines from the 2002 Two-Thirds World proposal. From fall 2006 to spring 2007, the AAS Committee hired Jennifer C. Lee in sociology and Ellen D. Wu in History. Although not under the 2002 Two-Third World funding, the university that year hired two additional Asian American specialists, Karen Inouye in American Studies and Denise Cruz in English. Three of these hires, with the exception of Cruz, remain on IUB's faculty as of the 2024–2025 academic year. The cluster of junior hires, according to Pao, were excellent hires and fulfilled the aim of the Two-Thirds World proposal. Their research and teaching experiences were diverse and reflected The College's interest in Asian diasporic and transnational studies.<sup>85</sup>

The College also selected a new Dean in January 2007. IUB had appointed Bennett Bertenthal, a psychology and neuroscience professor from the University of Chicago, who aligned with IU President Herbert's desire to expand IU and The College as a research enterprise. The AAS Committee, however, remained leaderless entering the fall semester of 2007. The lack of leadership meant a slow-down or even a complete stop on the many administrative tasks needed to grow the program. In their first meeting with the new dean, the AAS Committee

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<sup>83</sup> Augusto Espiritu, "Planting Roots: Asian American Studies in the Midwest," *CUNY Forum* 2, no. 1 (2014), 19.

<sup>84</sup> Angela Pao, email correspondence to author, November 14, 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Pao, interview.

recounted their hiring stalemates to Bertenthal, who seemed supportive of the situation, according to AAS Committee meeting notes on September 28, 2007. He agreed with the AAS Committee to appoint an interim director, preferably someone who was a senior scholar at IUB, to protect the new junior faculty members from the heavy administrative work required to build the program. “It would be very difficult, even impossible, for an untenured junior professor who had to satisfy all the requirements of her department to get tenure to have to handle all this,” Pao explained.<sup>86</sup> The AAS Committee decided to ask Joan Pong Linton to serve as the interim director for the next two to three years until the program was firmly established.<sup>87</sup>

Pong Linton did not have training, teaching, or research experience in AAS. Born in Hong Kong, then a British colony, she grew up studying English literature, which she pursued in the US for postsecondary education. She had taught and researched on nineteenth century English literature ever since her master’s program at Kansas State University and doctoral program at Stanford University. Nevertheless, she agreed to step in as interim director because she had tenure in IUB’s English Department and some administrative experience, including serving on The College’s Policy Committee. She also understood the necessity of protecting the new junior hires from the bureaucratic processes related to program-building, like seeking funding, designing the curriculum, and approving courses. Because AAS was an interdisciplinary program with limited funding, Pong Linton would also need to collaborate with other programs

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<sup>86</sup> Indiana University, “IU Establishes new Asian American Studies Program,” News Release, September 25, 2008 accessed October 20, 2016 from <http://newsinfo.iu.edu/news/page/print/8877.html>; Angela Pao, email correspondence to author, November 20, 2024.

<sup>87</sup> Chris Freiberg and Warren Christopher Freiberg, “University of Chicago Professor Picked to Head COAS,” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 4, 2006 accessed on December 2, 2024 from <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2006/09/university-of-chicago-professor-picked-to-head-coas>; AAS Committee, “Meeting with Dean Bennett Bertenthal,” September 28, 2007, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

and departments to host academic programming like guest lectures and conferences that would drive student enrollment.<sup>88</sup>

Pong Linton accepted the interim director position in November 2007. With consultation from the AAS Committee, she prioritized her time toward proposing an AAS undergraduate minor in The College. In early spring 2008, the AAS Committee and Pong Linton brainstormed next steps to get the undergraduate minor approved. They were also planning ways to publicize AAS courses with a luncheon for academic advisers and with a speaker series in fall 2008 in coordination with the tenth anniversary of the ACC's opening. These plans, however, came to a halt when Pong Linton received an email from Annie Lang, Associate Dean of Research at The College, asking to meet with the Committee about the progress of the AAS program. "It seems that there many have been some misunderstanding about exactly what that status is and what steps need to be taken for it to continue to develop," Lang wrote.<sup>89</sup>

Meeting with Lang in early April 2008, the AAS Committee and Pong Linton discovered that The College could not locate Subbaswamy's "paper trail" in which he approved the program and its funding.<sup>90</sup> Lang and the AAS Committee eventually found funding transactions dating back to 2002 to prove the status of the program. Yet, the misunderstanding triggered concerns from the Dean's Office about the lack of progress with AAS. Lang, then, suggested that the AAS Committee undergo a program review in the last few weeks of the spring semester. Pong Linton

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<sup>88</sup> Joan Pong Linton, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 10, 2016, digital recording and transcript, 42:15, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author's possession); Angela Pao, email correspondence to author, November 20, 2024.

<sup>89</sup> Quote in Joan Pong Linton to Angela Pao and Melanie Castillo-Cullather, "Today's Meeting," April 8, 2008, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives; Joan Pong Linton to Bennett Bertenthal, "Asian American Studies Undergraduate Minor," November 28, 2007, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

<sup>90</sup> Joan Pong Linton to AAS Faculty Affiliates, "Update on Asian American Studies and Program Review," April 9, 2008, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

assured Lang that the program review would be “a means for the College officially to acknowledge Asian American Studies, so we can move forward with building the program.”<sup>91</sup>

The program review was becoming a standard procedure in The College. Since the early 2000s, the Dean’s Office and top administrators at IUB felt pressure to conduct periodic reviews in light of declining state appropriations as well as increasing pressure from the IU Board of Trustees and the Indiana Higher Education Commission to cut “obsolete” programs to make way for new ones.<sup>92</sup> Established interdisciplinary programs or research centers housed in The College underwent a three- to five-year evaluation to review goals and accomplishments. Emergent programs, like AAS, needed to go through a formal application and evaluation process before being established. The periodic review, then, determined whether new or existing academic programs or research centers had enough student interest as well as research output to justify its existence.<sup>93</sup>

The College required the AAS Committee to produce a performance report outlining the program’s goals, accomplishments, and plans related to teaching and research. Most importantly, faculty and staff advocates needed to demonstrate how AAS had and would contribute “to the academic reputation of the College” as well as to the academy through research, teaching, and creative activity.<sup>94</sup> Pong Linton emphasized the urgency of completing the report by the April 25 deadline to the twelve AAS affiliate faculty members and AAS Committee. “The program review

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<sup>91</sup> Joan Pong Linton to Annie Lang, “Asian American Studies Program Review,” April 15, 2008, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

<sup>92</sup> IU Board of Trustees Minutes, May 9, 2003.

<sup>93</sup> The College of Arts and Sciences, “College Centers and Programs Establishment and Review,” ca. October 10, 2007, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives; The College of Arts and Sciences, “Guidelines for Conducting Internal College Reviews of Interdepartmental Programs,” October 4, 2007, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

<sup>94</sup> The College, “Guidelines for Internal College Reviews,” October 4, 2007.

is essential to our proposing the undergrad minor in the fall [of 2008] and to future funding of the AAS program,” Pong Linton implored.<sup>95</sup>

Some AAS faculty members surmised that the program review would hold The College and the university accountable to the promises made by past administrators like Subbaswamy and Chancellors Kenneth Gros Louis and Sharon Brehm. “[W]e are operating in a new environment with little institutional memory,” Yvette Alex-Assensoh (Political Science), an AAS affiliate faculty member, said while alluding to Subbaswamy and Bertenthal’s transitions, which resulted in the confusion of AAS’s status as an approved program. It was also unknown if top administrators, like IU’s new president Michael McRobbie and Provost Karen Hanson, could possibly renege on Subbaswamy’s, Gros Louis’s, and Brehm’s promises. “The president, [the College of Arts and Sciences] dean and provost, as much as they mean very well in every way, are all new in their positions,” Alex-Assensoh added.<sup>96</sup> Ellen Wu agreed, stating that the program review as “an opportunity for to put pressure on the administration to hire a permanent director sooner rather than later.”<sup>97</sup>

In two short weeks, the AAS Committee and its affiliate faculty members compiled and submitted a twenty-seven-page report to the Dean’s Office and the program review committee, which consisted of three department chairs in The College. In detail, the AAS Committee underscored AAS’s teaching and research contributions to The College as well as outlined their five-year plan to expand their curricular offerings and faculty research. The report emphasized, despite not being an official program, that AAS affiliate faculty members had taught a diverse

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<sup>95</sup> Joan Pong Linton to AAS Faculty Affiliates, “Update on Asian American Studies and Program Review,” April 9, 2008, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

<sup>96</sup> Yvette Alex-Assensoh to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, Joan Pong Linton, and Angela Pao, “AAS Program Review—Urgent Message,” April 11, 2008, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives.

<sup>97</sup> Quote in Ellen Wu to Melanie Castillo-Cullather, Joan Pong Linton, and Angela Pao, ca. April 10, 2008, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives; The College, “College Centers and Programs Establishment and Review,” ca. October 10, 2007.

range of topics from domestic Asian American issues to the Asian diasporic communities since 1999. In their first year, the four junior faculty members had significantly expanded AAS course offerings by enrolling 129 new students across IUB's eight Schools and Colleges. The AAS Committee also promoted the possibility of team-taught, multi-unit courses with American Studies, Latino Studies, and African American and African Diaspora Studies. This portfolio of new and existing AAS courses had contributed to The College's strategic initiatives to expand its International and Global Studies. The proposed AAS minor would promote the university's goal to promote diversity while fulfilling the campus-wide General Education and Cultures Studies requirement for graduation.<sup>98</sup>

The AAS Committee also argued that AAS had and would continue to prioritize faculty scholarship to The College and the academy. The AAS Committee described how past academic programming, such as the 2002–2003 Colloquium series, had boosted IUB's academic reputation among its Midwestern state university peers. The AAS Committee would continue to organize academic conferences and guest speaker series starting in fall 2008 to further develop faculty scholarship while boosting The College's visibility. "We envision these activities as benefiting not exclusively the faculty, but also undergraduate and graduate students, as well as contributing to scholarship within the university and to its academic reputation regionally, nationally, and internationally," the AAS Committee summarized in the report.<sup>99</sup>

The AAS Committee contended that their participation in the newly formed CIC-AASC aimed to boost IUB's academic reputation among their regional peers. Formed in February 2006, the CIC-AASC aspired to redefine AAS teaching and scholarship by centering on Midwestern

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<sup>98</sup> Joan Pong Linton, Angela Pao, and Melanie Castillo-Cullather, "IU Asian American Studies Program Performance Report: 2002-Spring 2008," April 28, 2008, Box AAST, no folder, ACC Archives, 1–6, 19.

<sup>99</sup> Pong Linton, Pao, and Castillo-Cullather, "IU AAS Performance Report," i.

Asian American communities, cultures, and histories. Castillo-Cullather and AAS faculty members attended three of the CIC-AASC meetings in the 2006–2007 to help develop collaborative structures, such as sharing AAS courses and research development workshops, that would “build a coalition that can challenge California universities such as Berkeley or UCLA for resources and leadership.”<sup>100</sup> These collaborative structures aimed to attract the best faculty and graduate students to Midwestern campuses, which have not been successful in retaining top recruits. The consortium model also helped IUB build a distinctive AAS program through campus site visits. The AAS Committee hosted the director of the CIC-AASC, Josephine Lee, in November 2007. During her visit, Lee met with top administrators like Provost Karen Hanson to reiterate IUB’s potential to be a “strong, vibrant program” because of the twelve affiliate faculty members with expertise in transnational and diasporic studies.<sup>101</sup>

Finally, the AAS Committee committed a third of the performance report to listing faculty publications, book awards, conference presentations, book manuscripts in review with publishers, grant funding, and service awards to national professional organizations. The ten pages of faculty accomplishments were “vital to the success of the [program] review” to demonstrate AAS’s significance to academic scholarship and to boost The College’s academic reputation.<sup>102</sup>

On June 6, 2008, the program review committee determined that the AAS Committee had justified the program’s intellectual potential. “Our conclusion is that the AASP[rogram] represents an academically significant initiative that is today of even greater potential value to the College and campus than was the case at its inception,” the three members of the program

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<sup>100</sup> Lee, Ono, and Wu, “Proposal for CIC Asian American Studies Consortium,” March 19, 2007, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Pong Linton, Pao, and Castillo-Cullather, “IU AAS Performance Report,” i.

<sup>102</sup> Quote in Pong Linton to AAS Faculty Affiliates, “Update on Asian American Studies and Program Review,” April 9, 2008; Pong Linton, Pao, and Castillo-Cullather, “IU AAS Performance Report,” 3–13.

review committee wrote.<sup>103</sup> Bob Eno (East Asian Languages and Cultures), Tom Gieryn (sociology), and Greg Waller (Communication and Culture) commended the AAS Committee for building the scope of the program around the rapid emergence of transnational and diasporic studies. “However, the [AAS] Program has not yet coalesced in a way that has allowed this potential value to be realized,” the program review committee explained.<sup>104</sup> The AAS Committee had not accomplished its original goal, as stipulated in the 2002–2003 Two-Third Worlds proposal: to enable IUB to become a leader in the study of transnational and diasporic studies. The AAS Committee had not demonstrated their ability to obtain external funding or produce rankings to demonstrate its national and international reputation. According to the performance review, the accomplishments of the AAS program had largely been confined to campus-level events like speaker series, identifying existing AAS courses, initiating a small number of new courses, and “considerable research output of individual colleagues associated with the program.”<sup>105</sup>

The program review committee concluded that the main challenge was AAS’s interdisciplinary status that had led to a lack of leadership. Compared to their Big Ten peers, AAS’s progress had stalled because there was no senior scholar dedicated fully to building the “intellectual capacity” of the program. “[M]any campuses, including most in the CIC, had established Asian-American Studies programs,” Eno, Gieryn, and Waller explained. “Bloomington’s failure to develop in this way seemed a puzzling gap, given its high profile in international and area studies.”<sup>106</sup> The senior faculty members who had chaired the AAS

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<sup>103</sup> Bob Eno, Tom Gieryn, and Greg Waller to Bennett Bertenthal, “Review of Asian American Studies Program,” June 9, 2008, Box AAST, Folder “AAS Review & Approval Letters 2008,” ACC Archives, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Eno, Gieryn, and Waller, “Review of AAS Program,” 1.

<sup>105</sup> Eno, Gieryn, and Waller, “Review of AAS Program,” 1.

<sup>106</sup> Eno, Gieryn, and Waller, “Review of AAS Program,” 1.

Committee had major commitments in their home departments, which limited the support they could lend to building a coherent program. The junior hires also had full-time-equivalent appointments primarily in their home departments. As a result, their efforts with teaching, research, and tenure promotion were more aligned with their home disciplines rather than building AAS. Eno, Gieryn, and Waller, as current department chairs in The College, understood the difficulties of prioritizing competing interests and sympathized with the two failed searches. They recommended The College renew the search for an AAS senior program director in the 2008–2009 academic year. Eno, Gieryn, and Waller also recognized that AAS was in a vulnerable and challenging phase in program building. AAS needed a senior director who had the time to deal with setbacks related to curricular development, personnel issues, and negotiations with senior-level administrators. More importantly, the young program needed an established scholar who could elevate AAS’s “intellectual engagement” among campus programs and departments, its peers in the Big Ten, and in the academy.<sup>107</sup>

The program review committee advised the AAS Committee and its affiliate faculty to proactively seek out potential candidates for a senior director. Eno, Gieryn, and Waller also recommended modest support to fund AAS’s speaker series, minor development, and an interim director salary in the next year. “If there is no successful hire in 2008–09, the reasons for the failure will need to be explored and a reassessment of the future of the AASP will have to be made,” the program review committee warned, adding that without a permanent director, “it is unlikely a strong AASP can emerge.”<sup>108</sup>

Despite the program review committee’s recommendation, The College granted AAS’s program approval in fall 2008. The AAS Committee announced the program’s official status at

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<sup>107</sup> Eno, Gieryn, and Waller, “Review of AAS Program,” 2.

<sup>108</sup> Eno, Gieryn, and Waller, “Review of AAS Program,” 2.

the tenth anniversary of the opening of the ACC on October 9, 2008. A year later, Pong Linton launched the AAS undergraduate minor. The AAS Committee had accomplished what it aimed to do since 2001. Faculty and staff advocates had fulfilled its goal of making a compelling case for AAS at IUB.

Their story also illustrated the first idea Midwestern advocates had discussed at the CIC-AASC meeting in November 2000. “One of the fundamental ways in which Asian American studies has gained a foothold in Midwestern institutions has been to frame the arguments for Asian American studies...*not* on demographics but on the intellectual mission and viability of the field,” Erika Lee argued.<sup>109</sup> In their 2001 proposal, the AAS Committee at IUB acknowledged the educational argument for AAS that student activists had used in the 1990s. IUB needed AAS to represent the growing number of Asian Americans and to teach all students about the growing complexity of American race and ethnicity. Faculty and staff advocates, however, prioritized intellectual arguments over demographic representation. They appealed to IUB’s mission to be seen as a modern and global university by insisting on the need for AAS to keep up with intellectual trends and their peers.<sup>110</sup>

In the 2002 Two-Thirds World proposal, the AAS Committee continued to frame AAS as a function of academic reputation to receive funding and resources. AAS, along with African American and African Diaspora Studies and Latino Studies, connected ethnic studies to area studies scholarship to be included in the Two-Third Worlds funding proposal. The AAS Committee reframed AAS as a transnational phenomenon of third-world Asian immigrant

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<sup>109</sup> E. Lee, “Asian American Studies in the Midwest,” 255.

<sup>110</sup> Alyssa Goldman, “Conference Reflects on Asian American Studies Obstacles,” *Indiana Daily Student*, September 27, 2009, accessed on December 13, 2024 from <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2009/09/conference-reflects-on-asian-american-studies-obstacles>; Indiana University, “IU Establishes new Asian American Studies Program.”

communities rather than a study of US minority groups. By repackaging AAS, the Committee received three tenure-track lines in exchange for helping The College boost its status as a leader in international and area studies.

In a 2008 program review, The College commended the AAS Committee for justifying the need for AAS. The program review, however, illustrated the common challenges that young, Midwestern programs faced. One of underlying issues was the lack of consistent senior leadership. The young program had failed two searches for a permanent program director. It was important to have an established senior scholar to shape the program toward this diasporic and transnational route while growing AAS's intellectual engagement on campus and in the academy. Pao, Pong Linton, the AAS Committee and its affiliate faculty members stepped in to build the program as best they could. The existing affiliate and new junior faculty members, as a result, took on more administrative responsibilities in AAS and in their home departments. This double duty, as the program review committee concluded, affected AAS's ability to fully reflect its intellectual promise in teaching, research, and community outreach. The College had invested resources and funding into AAS, but it had not yet demonstrated its ability to boost the academic reputation of the university. IUB's performance review also illustrated signs of deradicalization. To obtain official program status and consistent funding, The College required AAS to demonstrate its ability to boost the school's academic reputation. Teaching records and publication records were not enough to demonstrate AAS's intellectual legitimacy. As outlined in the Two-Thirds World proposal in 2003, AAS at IUB needed to obtain external funding and produce rankings or external reviews to illustrate how it would boost The College's reputation.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Subbaswamy, "Two-Thirds World Proposal," 8.

IUB's struggles to hire a senior faculty member and the interdisciplinary status of its affiliate members connected to a larger issue within AAS. The field continues to be marginalized because faculty members split their time and responsibilities between AAS and mainstream disciplines. This split means less time to increase AAS's organizational stability, like finding additional sources of funding or obtaining departmental status. It also means less time toward reconnecting with AAS's original 1960s vision, including forming relationships with local communities and forming community programs to address social problems.

Despite these challenges, IUB's journey toward institutionalization demonstrates the second idea proposed by Midwestern advocates at the CIC-AASC at the 2000 meeting. Advocates should create programs based on their campus's strengths, limitations, and opportunities. The AAS Committee at IUB understood the importance of creating a departmental model to retain authority and control. Like other Midwestern faculty members, they decided it was better to establish AAS than not to have a program at all. They analyzed the limitations of the IUB campus, which included not having enough faculty members or student enrollment to sustain a department. They capitalized on the strong administrative support and funding opportunities available to them. AAS advocates established an interdisciplinary program because of students' desire to have a stand-alone program. Moreover, advocates capitalized on IUB's strengths, such as existing faculty member expertise and access to the Two-Third Worlds funding, to create a distinct program that combined AAS with Asian diasporic studies. widened the scope of the program from a domestic study of Asians in the US to Asian Americans and their relationship to the Asian diaspora. The AAS Committee had contributed to the regional efforts to strengthen program building in the Midwest.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This history ends at 2010 as the Committee for Asian American Studies (CIC-AASC) folded into the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS). Program-building in the Midwest continued to evolve and adapt to changes at the national, regional, and local levels. At Indiana University Bloomington (IUB), Dr. Vivian Nun Halloran (English), who served second program director from 2010 to 2014, helped the AAS program by expanding its course offerings, securing the program's first physical office space, and writing governance documents. Under Dr. Ellen Wu, who served as director from 2014 to 2019, the AAS program grew its portfolio of intellectual programming, establishing the AAS Research Symposium and the Asian/Pacific American Film Series in collaboration with IU Cinema in 2012. In 2019–2020, the program, with funding from the IU Office of the Bicentennial, celebrated its tenth anniversary by creating a timeline to document advocates' efforts to organize and build AAS at IUB.<sup>1</sup>

Programs at other Midwestern campuses continued to mature organizationally while creating their distinct intellectual identities. Advocates at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) worked to become the first Midwestern university to obtain departmental status for AAS in 2012. According to Augusto Espiritu, who was program director after Kent Ono, UIUC's department had "become one of the leading AAS institutions especially in theoretical and cultural research in the humanities."<sup>2</sup> Faculty members Yoon K. Pak (Education, AAS) and Sharon S. Lee (Education) were instrumental in creating the professional development series for the Teaching Equitable Asian American Community History (TEAACH) Act, which

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<sup>1</sup> Vivian Nun Halloran, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, July 20, 2024, digital recording and transcript, 59:11, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author's possession); Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, Zackary Hegarty, and Ellen Wu, "Program Building, 1999–2000," *Past, Present, and Future: A Timeline of Asian American Studies at Indiana University*, accessed on April 9, 2025 from <https://aast200.sitehost.iu.edu/program-building.html>; Ellen D. Wu, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, June 23, 2024, digital recording and transcript, 51:34, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author's possession).

<sup>2</sup> Augusto Espiritu, "Planting Roots: Asian American Studies in the Midwest," *CUNY Forum* 2, no. 1 (2014), 19.

the Illinois Board of Education passed in April 2021 to ensure secondary students in the state could learn about the contributions of Asian Americans to American society.<sup>3</sup> In 2023, the AAS program celebrated its thirtieth anniversary at University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW-Madison). Program director Lori Lopez (Communication Arts) and several founding members organized the Asian American Studies History Project, which collected oral histories and archival documents to commemorate the program's history.<sup>4</sup>

Along with this growing body of AAS commemorative projects, this dissertation worked to capture the debates and efforts of students, faculty, and staff members who built AAS programs at Big Ten universities and colleges. I examined how advocates justified and organized Midwestern AAS programs in response to national, regional, and local discussions of race. I argued that Midwestern advocates increased AAS's chances to institutionalize by reframing AAS from a demographic to an intellectual project. They also pushed the field of AAS in new directions by reimagining programs and scholarship around Midwestern Asian American communities and experiences. Through this reimagination, advocates defined and promoted the Midwest as a "regional center," which is a hub of knowledge and teaching that competed with AAS programs in California.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation aimed to begin capturing the history of AAS in the Midwest. There are further opportunities for creating a broader organizational history that includes more experiences, perspectives, and efforts of advocates at universities and colleges in the Midwest and in other US regions.

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<sup>3</sup> University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, "Teaching Equitable Asian American Community History," accessed on April 9, 2025 from <https://teaach.education.illinois.edu/>

<sup>4</sup> University of Wisconsin-Madison, "About Asian American Studies: Our Stories," accessed on April 9, 2025 from <https://asianamerican.wisc.edu/about/our-stories/>

<sup>5</sup> Stephen H. Sumida, "East of California: Points of Origin in Asian American Studies," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 1, no. 1 (Feb. 1998), 85–86, n. 7.

### Study Limitations and Further Studies

Fabio Rojas's framework suggests that program building continues once new programs are created. Program building extends into the last stage of stabilization, in which AAS programs accommodate within their individual campuses. In this phase of accommodation, AAS advocates hire staff and faculty members, attract internal and external funding, and defend AAS at their campuses and in the larger social network of universities and colleges. This history focuses on the first five stages of Rojas's framework: identifying a social problem; mobilizing for a cause; engaging in conflict with the organization; generating alternatives; and establishing new institutions. This study does not examine this stage of accommodation because it would require additional data collection and analysis to understand the challenges and opportunities of managing an AAS program. Prior studies on ethnic studies, such as Jo Ann Cunningham's survey of Black Studies departments and programs, suggest that funding and enrolling students are common challenges in managing programs and departments. Further studies can explore how AAS advocates navigated these challenges to maintain their programs.<sup>6</sup>

My single-institution case study poses another limitation. Chapters four and five articulated the distinct challenges of building AAS at IUB. The historical narrative illustrated how program building was influenced by campus racial politics. It also highlighted how advocates created a program based on the limitations and strengths of their campus. There are opportunities to further explore the organizational history and racial politics of individual campuses within the Big Ten academic alliance. For example, after the 1995 hunger strike, AAS advocates worked with The College of Arts and Sciences to create a program instead of

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<sup>6</sup> Jo Ann Cunningham, "Black Studies Programs: Reasons for their Success and Non-Success from Inception to the Present," *National Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 1 (March 1991): 19–41; Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

incorporating AAS within mainstream courses. Questions arise about why Northwestern administrators changed their position from believing that AAS should be incorporated in the mainstream to agreeing to create a stand-alone, interdisciplinary program. Another potential study is an in-depth case study on how the AAS program at UIUC progressed from an interdisciplinary program to become a department in 2012. UIUC remains the only university within the Big Ten in which AAS is a department. Within that organizational history, questions remain about why and how faculty and staff members obtained departmental status. Another possible study is understanding how deradicalization unfolds differently at each campus because of its distinct organizational history, structure, and politics.

The third limitation of this study was the focus on research-intensive universities in the Big Ten academic alliance. Studies like Kim Nelson Pryor's examination of Chicano/Hispanic programs at Texas state universities suggest that research universities tend to have more resources to sustain ethnic studies programs and departments. However, the East of California Caucus campus profiles of 1991 suggest that AAS was active on other college campuses including private liberal arts colleges and four-year master's comprehensive universities. Historian Erika Lee also acknowledged the activism and institutionalization for AAS at private liberal arts colleges in the Midwest, such as Truman State University in Missouri, Macalester College in Minnesota, and Ohio University in Ohio. Studies of AAS building at various institutional controls could offer a comparative lens to program building. One comparative study could examine the differences in program building between resource-rich research universities and non-research universities. Do resources make a difference in program building? How do organizations with fewer resources incorporate AAS into the existing university structure? Further studies can explore program building at various organizational types such as two-year

colleges versus four-year colleges or private liberal arts colleges versus public research universities.<sup>7</sup>

Using Fabio Rojas’s framework, there is an opportunity to conduct comparative studies between various ethnic studies fields. Literature from various ethnic studies fields have grappled with common challenges like being marginalized, obtaining funding, maintaining steady course enrollment, and tenure promotion denials. Yet, each field has responded differently to these challenges because of their distinct political and racial history with organizations of higher education. One such study could compare the institutionalization between Black Studies and AAS to understand similarities and different challenges to program building and scholarship.

Finally, Rojas ends his study of the institutionalization of Black Studies in 1998. Since then, there have been significant changes in American higher education that have influenced AAS programs to reorganize to survive long-term at their campuses. With the steady decline of state and federal funding as well as increased research costs, universities and colleges have shifted toward a corporate model of funding and an increase in professional degrees, according to historian John Thelin.<sup>8</sup> Existing AAS programs have considered alternative ways to reorganize in response to the corporatization of higher education. After a two-year reorganization process, the AAS program at the University of Washington merged with Afro-American Studies and the Center for Chicano Studies to become the American Ethnic Studies department in 1985. In 2016, the AAS program at University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) combined with Asian Studies to become the Global Asian Studies interdisciplinary program. The merger occurred because “the

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<sup>7</sup> Erika Lee, “Asian American Studies in the Midwest: New Questions, Approaches, and Communities,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009), 247–273; Gary Y. Okihiro and Lee C. Lee, eds., *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies Cornell Symposium on Asian American Studies* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992); Kim Nelson Pryor, “Power and Place: Understanding the Relative Presence of Diverse Disciplines,” *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 15, no. 4 (2022): 505–520.

<sup>8</sup> John Thelin, *A History of Higher Education*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 377–381.

artificial division between Asian American Studies and Asian Studies no longer makes sense in a globalized world where mobility of people, commodities and cultures has become the norm.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, UIC’s merger would produce innovative research and teaching by streamlining faculty appointments and program resources. These arguments align with the IUB case study such that the intellectual trends, like diasporic studies and globalization, and organizational efficiency, dictated the consolidation of UIC’s AAS and Asian Studies.<sup>10</sup>

A similar discussion happened at IUB. Senior-level administrators in The College of Arts and Letters brought up proposals in 2014 and in 2016 for the AAS program to consolidate with Latino Studies and Native American and Indigenous Studies to form an interdisciplinary race program, according to an oral history interview of 2015–2016 program director Dr. Jennifer C. Lee. In the 2016 draft proposal, administrators argued that The College had diminishing resources and consolidation would help ethnic studies increase the visibility of existing minor offerings, allow for new interdisciplinary undergraduate and graduate degree offerings, and improve campus research on race, ethnicity, and indigeneity.<sup>11</sup>

These re-emerging discussions to reorganize or consolidate suggest an additional phase beyond the stabilization phase in Rojas’s framework. I argue that there is mounting evidence for a post-stabilization phase in which AAS programs consider alternative ways to reorganize in response the ever-changing American higher education landscape (see Table 3). I propose additional stages in the post-stabilization phase in which AAS units engage with organizational pressures (e.g., declining funding) and standard organizational processes (e.g., campus program

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<sup>9</sup> University of Illinois Chicago, “About Global Asian Studies,” accessed on May 13, 2025 from <https://glas.uic.edu/about/>

<sup>10</sup> University of Washington, “About American Ethnic Studies Department,” accessed on May 13, 2025 from <https://aes.washington.edu/about>.

<sup>11</sup> Jennifer C. Lee, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, October 23, 2023, digital recording and transcript, 58:47, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author’s possession); Jane McLeod, “Proposal for a Program in Ethnicity, Migration, and Indigeneity,” May 2, 2016, Jennifer C. Lee personal collection, Bloomington, Indiana.

reviews) that initiate discussions on program performance. These discussions may lead to proposals to reorganize AAS under existing departments (like American Studies) or merge with existing ethnic studies units to strengthen intellectual production and organizational efficiency. Campus assessment might also recommend the elimination of ethnic studies units because of recent legal decisions as well as federal and state directives that have banned race-based programs and policies that originated from the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and President Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 Executive Order 11246 (see Implications for Higher Education below).

Table 3. A Proposed Model of How Social Movements Change Bureaucracies

Phase	Stage	Examples from the History of Black Studies and AAS
Mobilization	1) Identifying a social problem, developing the grievance	Black culture is excluded from higher education; militancy is needed for progress
	2) Mobilizing for a cause; rise of movement groups; forming links between organizational clients and groups outside the organization	Rise of civil rights movement; Black nationalist groups and Black student associations are created; links forged between Black students, nationalists, and civil rights groups
	3) Conflict within the organization	Organized Black students stage protests
	4) Generating alternatives	Proposals for programs, departments, think tanks, and autonomous Black studies colleges
Stabilization	5) Establishing new institutions; competition among alternatives	The creation of Black studies programs and departments; other forms do not survive
	6) Accommodation, defending change, and staffing new organizations; attracting external support; new occupational group formation	Nationalism attenuated, professors recruited from other disciplines, and departments defended
Post-Stabilization	7) Engaging with organizational processes and pressures	Respond to program reviews; discussions with campuses to strengthen intellectual innovation and organizational efficiency
	8) Reorganization or Consolidation	Proposals to reorganize under existing departments; merge with existing ethnic studies units; or to dissolve ethnic studies

Adapted from Rojas, *From Black Power*, 16.

## **Implications for Ethnic Studies and AAS**

This history illustrates that organizational decision-making in higher education is nuanced. Universities and colleges exist in an interconnected social network with each other and with other entities, like private philanthropic foundations and government agencies. Those who work in higher education often have an eye toward national and regional issues that can affect their individual campuses. Those in higher education must make decisions that are best for their organizations and campus constituents.

Midwestern AAS advocates faced a similar scenario. They understood the national issues affecting the field of AAS. Midwestern advocates understood the importance of obtaining departmental status to protect AAS from organizational instability and intellectual marginalization. They also possessed knowledge of how their campuses functioned and what their campuses prioritized in terms of teaching, research, and service. As a result, Midwestern advocates decided to organize AAS in ways that best suited their campus contexts. Advocates at Ohio State University decided it was best to house AAS in a comparative program in ethnic studies in the early 2000s because of a supportive coalition of ethnic studies faculty members. Meanwhile, advocates at University of Michigan considered integrating AAS within the program for American Studies because that was where their faculty lines were housed. In the case study of IUB, faculty and staff members recognized the limitations of building an AAS department. Mainly, they did not have enough existing faculty members to build and sustain a department. Thus, IUB advocates opted for an interdisciplinary program. Midwestern advocates decided it was better to have AAS in any organizational form than to not have one at all (see chapter three).

The story of AAS in the Midwest aligns with studies that suggest that program building is contextual. The most thorough study of AAS program building is Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur who conducted a comparative case study of six unnamed AAS programs at universities

and colleges in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, and West Coast. She did not use Rojas's model of institutionalization, but her study focused in the first stages of mobilization: how students and faculty members identified a social problem, mobilized for a cause, and engaged in conflict with the organization. Her findings echoed many of this study's conclusions. At four schools, students and faculty members mobilized for AAS. Programs evolved differently based on campus characteristics such as university mission, culture, and administrative openness. Two schools did not establish a program because there was no organized campaign. She concluded that activism is necessary for establishing AAS at universities and colleges. She also found that AAS is more likely to be established at universities and colleges with supportive administrators who are willing to consider input from campus constituents.<sup>12</sup>

I extend Arthur's analysis by examining the later stages of mobilization in which advocates navigate their distinct university structures and decision-making channels to establish an AAS program. When advocates interact with various parts of the university, the process further articulates the organization's values and priorities. IUB advocates had strong administrative support. Kumble Subbaswamy, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, helped connect AAS advocates to funding opportunities that were crucial in obtaining three tenure-track faculty lines. The scope of AAS broadened as AAS faculty members collaborated with others to write a funding proposal that promised to maintain IUB's history as an international leader in area studies. The mission of AAS grew from a study of Asians in the US to the study of Asian diaspora in the world. When AAS advocates engaged in this funding process, it molded the AAS program toward the university's priorities and values (see chapter five).

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<sup>12</sup> Mikaila Mariel Lemonik Arthur, *Student Activism and Curricular Change in Higher Education* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 133–158.

Another theme in this study is that the daily challenges of building and sustaining a program complicates the debate on deradicalization. Shirley Hune best articulated the core values of AAS. “Asian American studies emphasizes the empowerment of students and teachers and the crucial link between the university and the community. From its inception, Asian American studies has criticized the elitist notion of knowledge as personal property...and the notion that education entails an acquisition of skills and credentials for individual aggrandizement.”<sup>13</sup> Hune further explained that the core values of AAS emphasized community and social responsibility over the demands of academia, such as publishing, that emphasized individual gain.

Midwestern advocates often faced a similar dilemma. Evidence in my study suggests that Midwestern advocates often had to prioritize what was best for their campuses over the 1960s political mission of the field. To gain access to resources and academic respect, they needed to align to what was most valuable to their universities: teaching and research. The examples in the history of AAS in the Midwest illustrate that advocates adapted AAS toward the priorities and values of the university to access people and resources. At IUB, advocates needed to justify the intellectual need for AAS to gain support from administrators in the College of Arts and Sciences. According to Josephine Lee, advocates at University of Minnesota also justified AAS as a way to draw local and national attention to the university’s strong research profile in local Asian American populations like Korean American adoptees. At UIUC, Kent Ono emphasized

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<sup>13</sup> Shirley Hune, “Opening the American Mind and Body: The Role of Asian American Studies,” in *The Asian American Educational Experience*, eds. Don T. Nakanishi and Tina Yamano Nishida (New York: Routledge, 1995), 325.

that AAS's goals had "to be driven by intellectual and scholarly concerns" because the university's culture was "research-oriented."<sup>14</sup>

The debate on deradicalization has two sides. Some scholars like Philip Q. Yang argue that it is best for ethnic studies, including AAS, to strive toward institutionalization by obtaining departmental status and "depoliticiz[ing]" ethnic studies curriculum.<sup>15</sup> "Without scholarship and intellectual rigor, ethnic studies programs will be doomed to elimination," he argued.<sup>16</sup> Glenn Omatsu, Chalsa Loo, and Don Mar contended that AAS scholarship and programs should refocus toward community development and challenge inequitable practices in higher education. Some Midwestern advocates take a more nuanced approach.<sup>17</sup> Kent Ono expressed that AAS is "both in and outside the academy, to be both within tradition and to create new traditions, to work within disciplines as well as outside of them."<sup>18</sup> This nuanced approach to deradicalization is in keeping with Kimura-Walsh's case study of AAS and American Indian Studies (AIS) at University of California Los Angeles and San Francisco State University. She found that campus policies on faculty appointments pushed AAS and AIS departments to prioritize research over community projects. She observed that organizational processes and policies gradually push ethnic studies to align with the structure and priorities of higher education. She argued, however, that these departments "saw organizational stability as an effective way to gain legitimacy, decision-making autonomy, resources, and budget stability." She concluded that ethnic studies,

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<sup>14</sup> Quote in Kent Ono, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, June 16, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 1:12:25, in Salt Lake City, Utah (copy in author's possession); Josephine Lee, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 15, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 54:46, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author's possession).

<sup>15</sup> Philip Q. Yang, *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 277.

<sup>16</sup> Yang, *Ethnic Studies*, 276.

<sup>17</sup> Chalsa Loo and Don Mar, "Research and Asian Americans: Social Change or Empty Prize?" *Amerasia* 12, no. 2 (1985-1986): 85-93; Glenn Omatsu, "1994 Annual Selected Bibliography: Asian American Studies and the Crisis of Practice," *Amerasia Journal* 20, no. 3 (1994): 119-210.

<sup>18</sup> Kent A. Ono, "New Locations: The Always Emerging—Never Fixed Center of Asian American Studies," March 4, 2006, Speech given at Graduate Student Conference, Urbana, IL, Kent Ono personal collection, Salt Lake City, Utah, 4.

including AAS, were “currently more likely to align itself with higher education values than carve out ways to fulfill its own original goals within the institution.”<sup>19</sup>

My stance is that programs should align with the organizational context and priorities of their universities. At research universities, the priority is the production of knowledge. Thus, AAS programs at research universities should prioritize research, publishing, and updating teaching materials to incorporate new intellectual trends. According to Sucheng Chan, research is one of the tenants of AAS. Advocates must do “the actual research itself and disseminat[e] new knowledge through *publications* and other media.”<sup>20</sup> She argued that AAS scholars must develop new theories to critique theories in other academic disciplines that have excluded perspectives of people of color. AAS scholars must continue to publish to correct existing research and American public discourse that sees Asian Americans (and other marginalized groups) as “problems.”<sup>21</sup> AAS programs at teaching-intensive universities and colleges should focus on transmitting knowledge to students and community members. Advocates at this type of institution can create teaching-focused AAS programs like the one that Lee C. Lee and Gary Okihiro had established at Cornell University. These AAS programs can focus on developing service-learning courses, internship programs with community partners, or education programs that can teach local community members.<sup>22</sup>

Not all AAS programs or departments can sustain teaching, research, and community development programs simultaneously. I argue that this all-encompassing approach will prevent

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<sup>19</sup> Erin F. Kimura-Walsh, “Balancing the Values of Ethnic Studies: Exploring Efforts to Advance the Organizational Stability of American Indian and Asian American Studies,” (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2009), 252.

<sup>20</sup> Emphasis in Sucheng Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 249.

<sup>21</sup> Chan, *In Defense of Asian American Studies*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Lee C. Lee and Gary Y. Okihiro, “Cornell University,” in *East of California: New Perspectives in Asian American Studies*, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro (Ithaca: Asian American Studies Program at Cornell University, 1992), 23–29.

AAS from growing at their campuses and the field. At the 2006 meeting of the CIC-AASC, faculty and staff members had expressed limited resources and heavy administrative responsibilities often impeded in their ability to grow programs at their individual campuses. With limited resources and time, AAS programs should specialize in what their universities prioritize and value.<sup>23</sup>

A third implication is challenging the California-centric dominance in AAS teaching and scholarship. Stephen H. Sumida argued that this focus on the Asian American experience in California ignored the history, communities, and perspectives of those who have contributed to American society. Kent Ono added that this narrow focus privileged the perspectives of East Asian Americans while perpetuating issues of “internal racialization, structural inequality and unequal access to a political voice” within the field of AAS.<sup>24</sup> According to Russell Endo and William Wei, this California-centric lens prevented the field from adapting its curriculum and scholarship to remain relevant to new Asian ethnic groups who arrived after the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act.<sup>25</sup>

This dissertation is critical in locating AAS outside California by reimagining the field of AAS around multiple knowledge hubs, called regional centers. Midwestern advocates created a regional center that adapted program building, curriculum development, and scholarship to fit their local communities and campus context. I insist that Midwestern advocates found innovative solutions to field-wide issues like updating AAS scholarship and teaching to accommodate for

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<sup>23</sup> Josephine Lee, “Bridging the Big Twelve: The Committee on Institutional Cooperation Asian American Studies Consortium,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009): 275–284.

<sup>24</sup> Kent A. Ono, “Asian American Studies After 9/11,” in *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education*, 2nd ed., eds. Cameron McCarthy, Warren Crichlow, Greg Dimitriadis, and Nadine Dolby (New York: Routledge, 2005), 442.

<sup>25</sup> Russell Endo and William Wei, “On the Development of Asian American Studies Programs,” in *Reflections on Shattered Windows: Promises and Prospects for Asian American Studies*, eds. Gary Y. Okihiro, Shirley Hune, Arthur A. Hansen, and John M. Liu (Pullman: Washington State University Press; 1988): 5–15; Sumida, “East of California,” 83–100.

Asian Americans communities outside of California. Erika Lee at University of Minnesota Twin Cities, for example, reimagined AAS courses by including the experiences and histories of Chinese Americans and Korean adoptees, who were the largest populations enrolled in her courses. They established a regional network, the CIC-AASC, that strengthened program building at Big Ten universities. The CIC-AASC created an infrastructure for advocates to share ideas and resources about starting programs or navigating common challenges like mentoring graduate students.<sup>26</sup>

My argument is an extension of those who have studied racial development and political activism of Asian Americans in the Midwest. These studies articulated two types of racial isolation that are unique to the Midwest. First, Moncia Trieu argued that Asian Americans describe feeling geographically isolated because they grew up in predominantly White spaces that often framed race as a Black-White issue. Second, Sharon S. Lee contended that Asian Americans felt invisible in campus discussions of race because of administrative interpretations of affirmative action policies. These two types of racial isolation can motivate students toward political activism. Asian American college students organized to form pan-ethnic student groups, bring campus attention to Asian American racial needs, and to demand culturally supportive resources at their Midwestern campuses. Understandably, these studies focus on students because their activism was crucial in initiating demand for AAS at their Midwestern campuses. Student activism, however, is only one part of the story of AAS in the Midwest.<sup>27</sup>

I argue for a broader understanding of Asian American political activism in the Midwest. Faculty and staff members are a crucial part of the story in establishing and maintaining AAS

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<sup>26</sup> Erika Lee, “Asian American Studies in the Midwest,” *New Questions, Approaches, and Communities*, *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 3 (Oct. 2009): 247–273.

<sup>27</sup> Monica M. Trieu, *Fighting Invisibility: Asian Americans in the Midwest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023), 1–18.

programs. Their advocacy is subtle compared to students' approach to protest. Students at Midwestern campuses brought administrative attention to AAS through overt ways of protest: writing newspaper articles; building coalitions with other student groups; hosting cultural events like the Asian Pacific Islander Heritage Month; as well as organizing marches, sit-ins, and even hunger strikes. In the IUB case study, faculty and staff advocacy gained administrative support by navigating bureaucratic processes, finding funding, and aligning AAS proposals with university funding priorities. I amplify the contributions of faculty and staff members whose advocacy is not often centered in histories of Asian American political activism.

### **Implications for Higher Education**

What makes the story of AAS in the Midwest applicable to larger themes in higher education is that advocates must follow the priorities of the university if there is a chance to receive funding, resources, and organizational stability. This argument is an extension of Rojas's point in his study of the institutionalization of Black studies at four universities and colleges: University of Chicago, UIC, Harvard University, and San Francisco State College. He argued that higher education organizations resisted new ideas that challenged traditional academic standards. For example, Black student protestors demanded community-controlled Black studies programs and student participation in departmental governance. These ideas failed because it did not appeal to the priorities of their universities and colleges. The programs of Black Studies that did prevail were those that aligned with the priorities of their universities and colleges. These priorities included hiring faculty members with traditional academic credentials, training graduate students, or publishing research in academic journals.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Rojas, *From Black Power*, 215–216.

The history of AAS in the Midwest suggests a similar outcome that came from different circumstances. Advocates in the Midwest did not introduce radical ideas like community-controlled governance to their universities and colleges. Instead, the reverse happened. Universities and colleges introduced the idea that Asian Americans were “not under-represented minorities” because of campus interpretations of affirmative action.<sup>29</sup> Individual campuses used the principle of statistical parity that determined which racial groups were eligible for affirmative action programs. According to the 2001 CIC-AASC report, most universities in the Big Ten considered Asian Americans as overrepresented minorities because their campus populations far exceeded state and local numbers of Asian Americans. Because of affirmative action, Midwestern advocates found it necessary to justify AAS for its potential to advance academic research while keeping universities and colleges abreast of new intellectual trends. The history of AAS in the Midwest suggests the influence of national and regional racial politics that have shaped the direction of an academic field. Ji-Yeon Yuh had articulated that the future of AAS depended on how advocates could argue for its intellectual importance to their Midwestern universities and colleges.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, the future of AAS at IUB hinged on how advocates could adapt their intellectual justifications to fit the funding priorities of the university. In 2002, IUB prioritized academic initiatives that would boost the university’s historical reputation as an international leader in area studies. Advocates broadened the program’s scope from the study of Asians in the US to the study of the Asian diaspora. As a result, AAS advocates received three tenure-track lines to help

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<sup>29</sup> Rocio Davis, John Park, Vickie Chou, and Richard Lim, “University of Illinois, Chicago,” in *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, eds. George Yu and Sharon S. Lee (Urbana: University of Illinois Urbana Champaign Asian American Studies Program, 2001), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Ji-Yeon Yuh to Erika Lee, email correspondence, January 22, 2009 as cited in E. Lee, “AAS in the Midwest,” 254; Yu and Lee, eds., *The State of AAS*, 1–34.

establish the program. In a 2008 program review, The College of Arts and Sciences continued to hold AAS to measures of academic standards. The College recognized individual faculty members for their publishing records and obtaining book prizes. However, the program had not boosted the academic reputation of The College by obtaining external funding or demonstrating its academic influence through national rankings.

The IUB case study illustrates the dilemma that many academic disciplines are facing in the competitive marketplace of universities and colleges. Academic units that receive resources (i.e., funding and tenure-track lines) from the university must continue to generate academic prestige and additional revenue for the university. Historians John Thelin and Christopher Lucas contended that research universities are trending toward a more corporate model that reflects a business management approach to operations. Lucas argued that research universities have focused more on measurable outputs like enrollment and income to remain competitive in the academic marketplace. Thelin added that the rising costs of conducting research further pushed research universities toward this corporate model. Universities heavily invested in starting and maintaining academic programs by paying staff, establishing physical infrastructure, and acquiring equipment. Thus, research universities expected academic units to return their investment through academic prestige or external funding.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, I advance the history of higher education by centering race in the study of curricular change. Foundational texts on this subject include Frederick Rudolph's 1977 *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* and Arthur Levine's 1978 *The Handbook of Undergraduate Curriculum*. These classic histories focus on how internal actors, intellectual trends, philanthropic agencies, as well as national and state

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<sup>31</sup> Christopher Lucas, *American Higher Education: A History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 278–281; Thelin, *A History of Higher Education*, 377–381.

politicians have shaped the university curriculum since the colonial college. These surveys treat race as a topic rather than a significant factor in curricular change. Levine did not mention debates on how to integrate race into the undergraduate curriculum. Rudolph introduced Women's Studies and Afro-American Studies as tools like area studies programs whose aim was "broadening of major programs to include non-Western materials."<sup>32</sup>

Levine and Rudolph's treatment of race is markedly different from the interpretation of scholars who have examined race at universities and colleges. Altogether, these studies underscored that race can impart influence across all areas of the university from operational structure (i.e., processes and policies) to campus constituents (i.e., students, faculty, and staff members). Stefan Bradley and Linda Perkins have privileged the experiences of Black students, faculty, and administrators who called out institutional or gender biases in White and Black universities and colleges. Joy Ann Williamson-Lott and Dana Takagi have examined how debates between campus constituents and elected officials about topics, like desegregation or affirmative action, have shifted higher education discourse on racial hierarchy.<sup>33</sup>

Even with this growing foundation of race-centered scholarship, historians James Anderson and Yoon K. Pak insist that scholars need to continue to confront race and racism in educational spaces. "The challenge for historians is to demonstrate the effects of institutionalized discrimination and yet focus on the behavior of individuals within institutions," Anderson said in his 1992 presidential address to the History of Education Society. This intellectual change

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<sup>32</sup> Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc. Publishers, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> Stefan M. Bradley, *Upending the Ivory Tower: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Ivy League* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Joy Ann Williamson-Lott, *Jim Crow Campus: Higher Education and the Struggle for a New Southern Social Order* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018); Linda Perkins, *To Advance the Race: Black Women's Higher Education from the Antebellum Era to the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024); Dana Y. Takagi, *The Retreat from Race: Asian-American Admissions and Racial Politics*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

remains crucial, he argued, “to grasp how beliefs about race and ethnicity...influence the execution of standard policies and routine organizational behavior.”<sup>34</sup> Almost thirty years later, Pak made a similar call to historians of education in her 2020 presidential address in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and global protests against the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor. She argued that these national events highlighted that schools and higher education organizations were intentionally designed to be “inherently unequal institutions” and perpetuate racial hierarchies that pit communities against each other.<sup>35</sup> “What must be done better, in my humble opinion, is to question the framing of educational research that maintains a Black/Brown vs. White/Asian binary.”<sup>36</sup>

I advance a history centered on Asian Americans who challenged how Midwestern universities and colleges racially framed them. Midwestern Asian American students wanted to be seen as human rather than a racial group seen as “proportionally overrepresented” based on affirmative action statistical datapoints.<sup>37</sup> They also defied campus stereotypes of academically successful model minorities by demonstrating that Midwestern Asian American students had distinct racial and cultural needs. They expressed shared experiences of racial isolation and even racial violence that justified the need for an AAS program. This history also centers Asian American faculty and staff members who adapted how they advocated for AAS based on national and regional framings of race. Midwestern advocates de-emphasized the argument for AAS based on the growing number of Asian Americans on their campuses. This argument had weakened because universities had different interpretations of statistical parity, which determined

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<sup>34</sup> James Anderson, “Race, Meritocracy, and the American Academy during the Immediate Post-World War II Era,” *History of Education Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Summer 1993), 152–53.

<sup>35</sup> Yoon K. Pak, “‘Racist-Blind, Not Color-Blind’ by Design: Confronting Systematic Racism in Our Educational Past, Present, and Future,” *History of Education Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (May 2021), 134.

<sup>36</sup> Pak, “‘Racist-Blind, Not Color-Blind,’” 138.

<sup>37</sup> Linda Yung, “Incredible Invisible Minorities,” *Kiosk*, December 1994, 28, Ellen Wu personal collection.

which campus populations were categorized as “underrepresented” by comparing the proportions of the campus population with the local population.<sup>38</sup> Instead, Midwestern advocates strengthened the justification for AAS in the Midwest based on its intellectual merits. In the UW-Madison AAS proposal, advocates argued for the necessity of AAS to broaden the Black-White racial binary in scholarship and challenging legal interpretations of American citizenship.<sup>39</sup> Indermohan Virk, the principal writer for IUB’s proposal, commented in her oral history that the establishment of AAS in the Midwest is part of a larger examination of race in higher education. She stated: “If there is any lesson, it’s that...[the] overarching question of what is the role of higher education? What is the role, how best to discuss diversity? How are universities best served, both to do the best jobs that they can in any given field and recognize the demographic and experiential reality of the United States.”<sup>40</sup> Virk strikes at one of the ongoing debates in higher education: Does race have a place in higher education? If it does, how should universities and colleges address issues of race?

The campus history of IUB suggests that race did have a place in the university. The first students of color to enroll at IUB, mainly Black and international students, began to challenge the enduring image of Indiana as a geographically isolating and culturally White state. By the 1960s, student protestors further pushed the state of Indiana and IUB to make campus more equitable and welcoming for communities of color. Their efforts were aided by President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Executive Order 11246, which enacted Equal Employment Opportunity policies at federally funded organizations. These local and federal efforts pushed IUB to consider its stance

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<sup>38</sup> Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC) Minutes, November 19, 1985, accessed October 27, 2016 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1985-11-19>.

<sup>39</sup> The Asian Coalition, “Proposal to Establish an Asian American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison,” James Moy Papers, Box 1, Folder, “Madison Plan: Asian Am Program,” University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, Madison, WI.

<sup>40</sup> Indermohan Virk, interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 6, 2024, digital recording and transcript, 49:15, in Bloomington, Indiana (copy in author’s possession).

on race. If the university wanted to continue to receive federal funding, campus officials needed to enact an affirmative action program, according to IU's Affirmative Action Coordinator George Taliaferro in a 1973 IDS article. In a 1969 resolution, the IU Board of Trustees declared that IUB would eliminate discrimination based on race, sex, religion, and nationality by implementing a system-wide affirmative action policy. In 1974, IUB published the campus affirmative action outlining its plan to best recruit faculty and students of color. Race was an important matter from the late 1970s to the early 1990s when the Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC) debated and established supplemental programs to increase the recruitment and retention of faculty members and students of color. The BFC and campus officials invested in thousands to millions of dollars to fund initiatives like Minority Achievers Program, to recruit academically talented students of color, and the Hoosier Plan, according to the BFC meeting minutes on March 24, 1987 and March 5, 1991. From the 1960s to the 2000s, race was a central part of IUB's debates, actions, and funding.<sup>41</sup>

IUB, along with universities and colleges nationwide, must again decide whether race has a role in higher education. Since 2010, there have been federal, state, and even campus attempts to restrict or even to eliminate race from aspects of university life. On June 29, 2023, the Supreme Court struck down race as a factor in college admissions in *Students for Fair Admissions vs. Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions vs. University of North Carolina*, according to Nina Totenberg for *National Public Radio*. This decision highlighted the

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<sup>41</sup> BFC Minutes, March 24, 1987, accessed on October 9, 2024 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1987-03-24>; BFC Minutes, March 5, 1991, 19, accessed on November 8, 2018 from <https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/archives/bfc/1991-03-05>; Barb Olenyik, "Affirmative Action Plan Readied for Ryan's Okay," *Indiana Daily Student*, Dec. 14, 1973, 14. Copy in Reference Files, Folder, "Affirmative Action, Office of, Clippings," Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, IN; Office of the Vice President Indiana University Bloomington, "Bloomington Campus Affirmative Action Plan," *Campus Report*, October 19, 1977, C549 Indiana University Office of Affirmative Action records, Box 1, Folder, "Affirmative Action Plan—Miscellaneous, 1974-1979," IU Archives.

growing ideological divide among Asian Americans since 2014, when conservative activist Edward Blum amplified the historical narrative that affirmative action programs were excluding Asian Americans. Blum successfully organized conservative Asian American groups to become “Asian plaintiffs” in anti-affirmative action legal challenges.<sup>42</sup> OiYan Poon and Megan Segoshi argued that Blum’s tactics have upheld the historical image of Asian Americans as model minority victims of affirmative action, who are punished for their hard work and achievements compared to the accomplishments of African Americans and other people of color seeking admission into elite universities and colleges.<sup>43</sup>

Also in 2023, states like Texas have defunded and dismantled departments, centers, and divisions focused on race at public universities and colleges, according to *The Daily Texan* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.<sup>44</sup> State politicians like those in Florida have restricted or eliminated writers on and topics related to race, according to a February 24, 2023 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.<sup>45</sup> Following the legislative action of other states, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb signed in 2024 Senate Bill 202, which bars universities and colleges in the state from using diversity statements and replacing them with “neutrality statements” to

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<sup>42</sup> Sandhya Dirks, “Affirmative Action Divided Asian Americans and Other People of Color,” *National Public Radio*, July 2, 2023, accessed on May 12, 2025 from <https://www.npr.org/2023/07/02/1183981097/affirmative-action-asian-americans-poc>

<sup>43</sup> Quote in OiYan A. Poon and Megan S. Segoshi, “The Racial Mascot Speaks: A Critical Race Discourse Analysis of Asian Americans and Fisher vs. University of Texas,” *The Review of Higher Education* 42, no. 1 (Fall 2018), 240; Nina Totenberg, “Supreme Court Guts Affirmative Action, Effectively Ending Race-Conscious Admissions,” *National Public Radio*, June 29, 2023, accessed on May 12, 2025 from <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/29/1181138066/affirmative-action-supreme-court-decision>

<sup>44</sup> Katherine Mangan, “After DEI Ban, UT-Austin Eliminates a Division and Lays Off Its Former Diversity Staff,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 2, 2024, accessed on April 9, 2025 from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/after-dei-ban-ut-austin-eliminates-a-division-and-fires-its-former-diversity-staff>; Naina Srivastava, “Multicultural Engagement Center Closes Because of Senate Bill 17,” *The Daily Texan*, January 19, 2024 accessed on April 9, 2025 from <https://thedailytexan.com/2024/01/18/multicultural-engagement-center-closes-because-of-senate-bill-17/>.

<sup>45</sup> Francie Diep, “‘Never Seen Anything Like It’: New Bill Would Write DeSantis’s Higher-Ed Vision into Law,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 24, 2023, accessed on April 9, 2025 from <https://www.chronicle.com/article/never-seen-anything-like-it-new-bill-would-write-desantiss-higher-ed-vision-into-law>

promote “intellectual diversity.”<sup>46</sup> On January 21, 2025, the Trump administration rescinded executive orders that implemented affirmative action policies, including President Johnson’s Equal Employment Opportunity Executive Order of 1965. The Trump administration stated: “[I]nfluential institutions of American society including higher education organizations have adopted and actively use dangerous, demeaning, and immoral race- and sex-based preferences under the guise of so-called ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ . . . that violate the civil-rights laws of this Nation . . . [initiatives on DEI have] diminish[ed] the importance of individual merit, aptitude, hard work, and determination.”<sup>47</sup> These state and federal directives have stated clearly that race-based decisions does not have a place in American universities and colleges.

My stance on race aligns with the findings of this dissertation and with scholars who have examined race in higher education. Race was and remains central to university life. Race cannot be erased even with federal and state directives that attempt to eliminate it from university structure, policies, and procedures. As historian James Anderson contended, race is embedded in processes as small as the racial make-up of campus leaders whose portraits are hanging up on campus walls. Race is embedded in processes as large as reporting the racial and ethnic make-up of student, faculty, and staff members on campus. Higher education organizations can cut funding from initiatives, positions, and programs focused on race. For example, IUB campus officials cut funding from the Center for the Research of Race and Ethnicity in Society in spring 2025.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Indiana General Assembly, Senate Bill 202, accessed on April 1, 2025 from <https://iga.in.gov/legislative/2024/bills/senate/202/details>

<sup>47</sup> The White House, “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity,” January 21, 2025, accessed on April 8, 2025 from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-illegal-discrimination-and-restoring-merit-based-opportunity/>

<sup>48</sup> Samantha Camire, “Students, Faculty Decry Fund Cuts for Center for Research on Race and Ethnicity,” *Indiana Daily Student*, December 18, 2024, accessed on April 16, 2025 from <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2024/12/funds-withdrawn-center-for-research-race-ethnicity>

But racial ignorance, prejudice, discrimination, and even violence will continue to exist at American college campuses. Universities and colleges cannot eliminate race because it is part of American history, its social structure, and the composition of its people. I echo what that Midwestern AAS advocates had argued in their proposals, debates, opinion pieces in the newspapers, and with conversations with administrators. Universities and colleges remain an influential part of American society. It is their role to teach students about the American race relations. It is their role to advance scholarship that challenges boundaries of American identity, citizenship, and legal discourse. It is their role to continue progress toward racial equity at the local, regional, and national levels.

## Appendix A

### INDIANA UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR RESEARCH

#### Asian American Studies in the Midwest: An Organizational History of Program Building Oral History Interviews

Indiana University IRB Protocol #15526  
V01.06.27.2022

You are invited to participate in a research study focused the organizational history of the Asian American Studies program at Indiana University Bloomington. Scientists do research to answer important questions that might help change or improve the way we do things in the future. This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. Participants must be at least 18 years old. Please read this form, and ask any questions you have, before agreeing to be in the study.

**All research is voluntary.** You can choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind later and leave the study at any time. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits if you decide not to participate or choose to leave the study later.

#### **STUDY PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to understand how the Asian American Studies (AAS) program formed at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). Using archival research and oral history interviews, I aim to contextualize IUB's organizational history with larger efforts to establish AAS at Midwestern research universities between 1980s to 2000s. As part of this study, I will interview former program directors as well as alumni, faculty, staff, and/or community members who were involved in advocating, establishing, managing, volunteering, teaching, and/or collaborating with the AAS program at IUB. I will also interview alumni, administrators, faculty, staff, and/or community members who were involved in AAS and/or ethnic studies programs at other research universities in the Midwest.

#### **NUMBER OF PEOPLE TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:**

If you agree to participate, you will be one of approximately 50-75 who will be participating in this study.

#### **PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY**

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things:

Participants will participate in one (1) oral history interview that are a one-on-one basis. Interviews will be conducted either by phone, online (such as Zoom), or in-person (on the IUB campus, in a public space, and/or at another research university). Interviews will be audio- or video-recorded and will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. I may request a follow-up interview for clarification questions. I will arrange the interviews at a time convenient for the participants (excluding holidays). These interviews will include questions about the participant's background as well as their perceptions and experiences with the AAS program at Indiana

University Bloomington and/or at another research university in the Midwest. These interviews are not confidential.

### **RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY**

**Before agreeing to participate, please consider the risks and potential benefits of taking part in this study.** While on the study, the potential risks are:

- Potential discomfort in answering oral history interview questions
- Potential loss of confidentiality
- Potential damage to your employability
- Potential damage to your reputation

While completing this oral history interview, you may skip any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer. You may stop participating in the oral history interview at any time. I have taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. I will only publish your name and experience with your permission by signing this consent document. You may withdraw your permission at any time. More information about how I will protect your information to reduce this risk is below.

### **BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY**

If you agree to take part in this study, there will be no personal benefit to you. However, information gathered in this study may help researchers in the future, preserve history for the institution, and to educate future students, faculty/staff members, and community members.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Oral history interviews are different from most other research studies that use interviews. The identity of the participants is generally known and participation by default is not confidential. Identifying information, such as your first and last name as well as your employment status and position title, will be shared in publications about this study. After completion of this study, I will donate actual audio and video recordings to the Indiana University Archives so other researchers will have access to these oral history interviews. You may withdraw your permission at any time. You have the option to remain anonymous, and I will take the necessary steps to protect your confidentiality. You also have the option to redact information after completion of your interview. You may make these decisions after the interview and any time before the study is finalized and published.

I will have access to the audio and video recordings made. Audio and/or video recordings may be shared during publication, for educational purposes, and/or for historical preservation with Indiana University Archives.

Your personal information may be shared outside the research study if required by law. I also may need to share your research records with other groups for quality assurance or data analysis. These groups include the Indiana University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and state or federal agencies who may need to access the research records (as allowed by law). Additionally, your research information may be shared with Indiana University Archives or with other archives located at research universities within the Midwest.

**PAYMENT**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study. There is no cost to participate in the study.

**VOLUNTARY NATURE OF STUDY**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you can change your mind and decide to leave the study at any time in the future. *If you decide to withdraw, you need to contact me via email ([stenguye@iu.edu](mailto:stenguye@iu.edu)) to exclude your interview from analysis and donation to the Indiana University Archives.*

Your decision whether to participate in this oral history interview will not affect your participation in any future activities and/or any future relations you may have with the researchers or Indiana University.

**CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

**If you have questions about the study or encounter a problem with the research**, contact Stephanie Nguyen at 301-346-5919 or [stenguye@iu.edu](mailto:stenguye@iu.edu). For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or to offer input, please contact the IU Human Research Protection Program office at 800-696-2949 or at [irb@iu.edu](mailto:irb@iu.edu).

**PARTICIPANT’S CONSENT**

In consideration of all the above, I agree to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records.

**Participant’s Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant’s Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Oral History Interview Protocol for AAS Program Directors

Time of Interview:

Date:

Room:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am working on a project examining the organizational history of the Asian American Studies program at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). I aim to contextualize IUB's organizational history with larger efforts to establish AAS at Midwestern research universities between 1980s to 2000s.

I have a few questions that I would like to ask about you about your perceptions and experiences establishing and managing the AAS program at your institution. There are no right or wrong answers, just share your thoughts with me about the questions I ask you. I'll ask numerous open-ended questions.

If you are uncomfortable with any of these questions, feel free not to respond. You can also stop this interview at any time. However, I assure you that your participation in this study will remain confidential.

I would like to record these interviews, which will allow me to represent our conversation more accurately. I will also be making memos during the interview. Do I have your permission to record your responses? [If interviewee says yes, then proceed.]

Once I am finished with my dissertation, I would like to donate these oral histories to IU Archives for future researchers. Do I have your permission to donate your oral history interview? [If interviewee says yes, then proceed.]

Do you have any questions before we begin? [Pause and allow interviewee to think and respond. Do not rush the interviewee.] Ok, let's get started. **Start digital record and begin interview.**

Introduction: My name is (state interviewer's name) and today's date is (state date). To start, can you please tell me your full name, your position at the university, and academic area that you are housed.

- 1) Provide a background of your academic training, research areas, and how you arrived at [insert university name].
- 2) Provide an overview of your experience as director of AAS. Follow ups:
  - a. How was the program organized? Interdisciplinary/Stand Alone Department?
  - b. Describe the mission of the AAS program at the university. How was the research/teaching mission of AAS shaped? How has it evolved?

- c. Did people on campus oppose AAS? What arguments did AAS use to justify itself at the university?
- 3) Describe the major challenges that you faced/experienced as director of AAS. Follow ups:
  - a. Funding (Internal/External)?
  - b. Relationships with administrators?
  - c. Challenges with hiring (faculty/staff), curriculum development, service commitments?
  - d. Educational policies regarding Asian Americans?
  - e. Campus climate for people of color, university diversity initiatives?
- 4) Describe the major opportunities that you experienced as director of AAS. Follow ups:
  - a. Relationships with other ethnic studies, area studies, and/or gender/sexuality studies programs on campus?
  - b. External partnerships like community groups?
  - c. External funding?
- 5) Describe your role with the CIC AAS Consortium.
  - a. What role did the CIC AAS play in establishing AAS at [insert university]?
  - b. What kind of discussions occurred during these CIC AAS meetings? Their significance to AAS as a field?
  - c. How did these discussions redefine the field of AAS?
- 6) Compare and contrast your experience of managing, researching, and teaching AAS in the Midwest to your current experience here.
  - a. In what ways does it differ with practicing AAS in other regions? In what ways are they similar?
- 7) Is there anything else you would like to add that I did not ask in this oral history interview?
- 8) Anyone else I should talk to in regards to AAS program?

## Oral History Interview Protocol for Alumni and Community Members

Time of Interview:

Date:

Room:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am working on a project examining the organizational history of the Asian American Studies program at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). I aim to contextualize IUB's organizational history with larger efforts to establish AAS at Midwestern research universities between 1980s to 2000s.

I have a few questions that I would like to ask about you about your perceptions and experiences establishing and managing the AAS program at your institution. There are no right or wrong answers, just share your thoughts with me about the questions I ask you. I'll ask numerous open-ended questions.

If you are uncomfortable with any of these questions, feel free not to respond. You can also stop this interview at any time. However, I assure you that your participation in this study will remain confidential.

I would like to record these interviews, which will allow me to represent our conversation more accurately. I will also be making memos during the interview. Do I have your permission to record your responses? [If interviewee says yes, then proceed.]

Do you have any questions before we begin? [Pause and allow interviewee to think and respond. Do not rush the interviewee.] Ok, let's get started. **Start digital record and begin interview.**

Introduction: My name is (state interviewer's name) and today's date is (state date). To start, can you please tell me your full name, major and graduation date (if alumni), affiliation with the university (if community member).

1. Where were you born? Tell me about your family background.
2. How did you choose to attend the university (alumni)? Describe your association with the university (community member).
  - a. Alums: Did you belong to any clubs or organizations?
  - b. Alums: Did you have any leadership positions on campus? Why?
3. Describe how you got involved with establishing the Asian American Studies program at the university. Describe your role.
  - a. Describe any advocates for the program.
  - b. Describe those who opposed the program.
4. Describe the campus climate for minorities/Asian Americans during that time when establishing the AAS program.
5. Why was it important for you to have an Asian American Studies program at the university?

6. Tell me briefly about your career/life after leaving IU. How did your experience with Asian American activism at IU influence your career?
7. Is there anything else you would like to add that I did not ask in this oral history interview?

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- Yu, George and Sharon S. Lee. “Asian American Studies in the Big Ten.” In *The State of Asian American Studies in the Big Ten: A Committee on Institutional Cooperation Meeting*, edited by George Yu and Sharon S. Lee, 3. Urbana: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Asian American Studies, 2001.

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## Archival Collections

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- Asian American Studies Department Subject File. University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives. Madison, Wisconsin.
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- C234 Indiana University Student Association records, 1953-2018. Indiana University Archives. Bloomington, Indiana.
- C245 Indiana University Latino Cultural Center records, 1935-2018. Indiana University Archives. Bloomington, Indiana.
- C549 Indiana University Office of Affirmative Action records, 1972-1995. Indiana University Archives. Bloomington, Indiana.
- C580 Indiana University Collins Living-Learning Center records, 1924-2023. Indiana University Archives. Bloomington, Indiana.
- Reference Files, Folder, "Affirmative Action, Office of, Clippings." Indiana University Archives. Bloomington, Indiana.
- Reference Files, Folder, "Affirmative Action, Office of, Plans & Reports (1 of 2)." Indiana University Archives. Bloomington, Indiana.
- Reference Files, Indiana University Factbook Subject Files Folder, "Enrollment: 1975." Indiana University Archives, Bloomington, Indiana.

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Wisconsin-Madison Archives. Madison, Wisconsin.

Lee, Jennifer C. Personal collection. Bloomington, Indiana.

Ono, Kent. Personal collection. Salt Lake City, Utah.

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Student Affairs, Office of the Dean of Students, Director of Registered Student Organizations,  
1924-2009. Series 41/2/40. Student Life and Culture Archives at University of Illinois at  
Urbana-Champaign. Urbana, Illinois.

Records of the Asian American Studies Program, 1993-2012. Series 11/3/301. Northwestern  
University Archives. Evanston, Illinois.

Wu, Ellen D. Personal collection, Bloomington, Indiana.

#### Newspapers

*Asian Week* Newspaper. Ethnic NewsWatch Collection. Proquest Information and Learning.  
<https://iucan.iu.edu/catalog/9266771>

*Bloomington Monthly*. Indiana University Libraries Microfilms. Bloomington, Indiana.

*Indiana Daily Student*, 1914-2012. Indiana University Libraries Microfilms. Bloomington,  
Indiana.

*International Examiner* Newspaper. Ethnic News Watch Collection. Proquest Information and  
Learning. <https://iucan.iu.edu/catalog/9266771>

*Los Angeles Times*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times (1881-2011).  
<https://iucan.iu.edu/catalog/5717604>

## Oral History Interviews

Chih, David. Interview with Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, August 3, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 52:32. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Halloran, Vivian Nun. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, July 20, 2024, digital recording and transcript, 59:11. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Kurahashi, Yuko. Interview with Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, August 10, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 44:07. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Lee, Jennifer C. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, October 23, 2023, digital recording and transcript, 58:47. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Lee, Josephine. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 15, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 54:46. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Lee, Josephine. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 15, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 1:07:36. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Lee, Nicole. Interview by Stephanie T. X. Nguyen, November 9, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 1:17:10. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Lin, Jules. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, October 26, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 48:25. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Ono, Kent. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, June 16, 2022, digital recording and transcript, 1:12:25. Salt Lake City, Utah. Copy in author's possession.

Pao, Angela. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 17, 2016, digital recording and transcript, 55:41. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Park, Joon. Interview with Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, October 26, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 43:04. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Park, Joon. Interview with Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November, 2, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 1:25:52. Bloomington, Indiana.

Pong Linton, Joan. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 10, 2016, digital recording and transcript, 42:15. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Virk, Indermohan. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, November 6, 2024, digital recording and transcript, 49:15. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Wu, Ellen D. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, June 23, 2024, digital recording and transcript, 51:34. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

Yang, Khai. Interview by Stephanie T.X. Nguyen, October 19, 2018, digital recording and transcript, 55:04. Bloomington, Indiana. Copy in author's possession.

## CURRICULUM VITA

# STEPHANIE THANH XUÂN NGUYỄN

stenguye@iu.edu

### EDUCATION

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**PhD in Higher Education**, Minor: Sociology July 2025  
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, Advisor: Dr. Andrea Walton

**MS in Higher Education and Student Affairs** May 2014  
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

**BA in Business Administration**, Majors: Marketing & Piano Performance May 2009  
University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

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**Review of Higher Education**, Bloomington, IN July 2022 – June 2024  
*Co-Managing Editor*

- Ran daily operations for academic journal by facilitating review process for approximately 300 manuscripts per year, ensuring high-level customer service with submitting authors, and managing social media marketing
- Increased journal transparency by analyzing journal submission statistics, creating data visualization graphs, and publishing annual report, reaching an audience of 800 members for the Association for the Study of Higher Education
- Organized bi-weekly board meetings for 8 members of the editorial team and annual meeting for 30 board members to maintain reviewer standards and problem-solve field-wide issues

**University of Notre Dame Law School**, Notre Dame, IN (Remote) Sept. 2016 – Dec. 2022  
*External File Reader*

- Evaluated and recommended 600-700 applicants annually to Admissions Director to select approximately 200 members of the incoming first-year class at top 25 law school

**Balfour Scholars Pre-College Academy**, Bloomington, IN Oct. 2021 – November 2022  
*Research Assistant*

- Strengthened strategies to recruit and retain first-generation college students by collaborating on team of six to design qualitative assessment project to understand students' academic and social experiences with pre-college program
- Reduced barriers to college enrollment by interviewing 23 alums of IUB's pre-college program and articulating their indicators of success like developing network of peer mentors and introducing campus cultural resources

**Indiana University Office of the Bicentennial**, Bloomington, IN Aug. 2019 – Aug. 2020  
*Research Assistant*

- Synthesized hundreds of primary resources for several research projects by writing research memos to help campus historian prepare for upcoming book publications commemorating IU's bicentennial celebration
- Finalized book manuscript *Women of Indiana University* for publication with IU Press by copyediting and conducting citation checks for 13-chapter authors
- Served on Time Capsule campus committee by soliciting donations, collecting items, and writing justifications for object inclusion

**Indiana University Asian American Studies Program** Aug. 2019 – Nov. 2020  
*Exhibit Curator*

- Won a \$5,500 IU Bicentennial Grant to create a public-facing, digital exhibit that chronicles the history of IUB's Asian American Studies Program and celebrate major contributions of alums, faculty, and staff members
- Curated exhibit by writing and collecting primary documents, photographs, and oral histories for timeline content, see *Past, Present, and Future: A Timeline of Asian American Studies at Indiana University*: <https://aast200.sitehost.iu.edu/index.html>

**Indiana University Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life** Aug. 2018 – May 2019  
*Graduate Assistant*

- Assessed and coded 200+ compliance documents from 72 fraternities and sororities to ensure chapters have established academic standards, judicial processes, and educational programming for its members
- Improved compliance process by interviewing eight staff members, identifying common issues, and compiling feedback for senior-level administrators
- Standardized compliance criteria by constructing templates, rubrics, and a frequently asked questions report to help staff members advise chapters for next year's submission process

**IU Office of the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education** Aug. 2016 – Aug. 2018  
*Graduate Assistant*

- Consulted with the Vice Provost, university administrators, faculty, and students to synthesize IUB's organizational, budgeting, and assessment structure for the written accreditation argument
- Spearheaded assessment project to improve academic advising program by conducting 24 observations and interviews of academic advisers across 13 departments and 3 focus groups of first and second-year students
- Compiled evidence to satisfy 26 accreditation standards for IUB's 10-year re-accreditation process by conducting qualitative research, analyzing institutional data, and co-producing a 35,000-word argument

**IU Kelley School of Business Institute for International Business** Sept. 2014 – Aug. 2016  
*Program Manager for Palestinian Youth Entrepreneur Leadership Program*

- Oversaw budget and implementation of a \$300,000 U.S. Department of State entrepreneurial grant to facilitate experiential consulting course for IU MBA students, IU business faculty, Palestinian students and faculty

- Arranged long-distance communication between IU MBA students, IU business faculty, Palestinian students and faculty to ensure a conducive online MBA-level experiential consulting course and capstone project
- Arranged group travel to West Bank, Palestine with 8 IU MBAs and uphold campus liability and safety policies
- Recruited 12 Palestinian small to medium-sized businesses and identified client issues for consulting services

*Program Manager for Global Business Program*

- Directed a four-week immersive business program for 100 Middle Eastern and North African students in partnership with the Cola-Cola Company and the U.S. Department of State
- Supervised six student staff members through weekly check-ins and standardized schedules to ensure high-quality residential experience and maintain safety policies for participants
- Coordinated with over 80 plus business faculty and local entrepreneurs to deliver high-quality curriculum, guest lectures, and site visits

**IU Kelley School of Business Undergraduate Career Services Office** June 2013 – Apr. 2016  
*Graduate Intern / Part-Time Career Coach*

- Coached undergraduate international students on holistic career development while gaining proficiency with federal work authorization processes, cultural norms, and international job search strategies

**IU School of Informatics and Computing Career Services** Aug. 2012 – May 2014  
*Graduate Assistant and Instructor*

- Taught an eight-week career development course to 30-40 undergraduates by conducting mock interviews, revising résumés, and creating class activities to refine student talent in the job search process

**IU Office of the President Board of Aeons** Dec. 2012 – May 2013  
*Graduate Assistant*

- Managed a team of five to process 190 applications and arrange new member training for a student research team that informs the university president on campus-wide issues

**University of Notre Dame Undergraduate Admissions Office** July 2009 – July 2012  
*Assistant Director and Admissions Counselor*

- Directed 12-person student and staff team for three diversity visitation weekends for 200+ admitted students and successfully yielded about 60 percent annually
- Hired and trained new admissions counselors on university, application review processes, and public relations
- Developed essay questions for Notre Dame Common Application reaching 16,500 applicants
- Evaluated 500+ tour guide applications and trained 200+ campus tour guides for consistent university branding
- Shaped the incoming freshman class by evaluating applicants from Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Hawai'i, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine, successfully recruiting between 30-50 percent annually

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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- EDUC-U553: College Student and the Law, Masters Level, Teaching Assistant (TA) Spring 2019
- EDUC-C664: Higher Education Organization and Administration Doctoral Level, TA Spring 2018
- INFO-Y395: Career Development for Informatics Majors Undergraduate Level, Instructor 2012 – 2014
- S342 & AAST A300: Asian American Communities and Identities, Undergraduate Level, TA Spring 2013

## REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

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Shirley, M., Long, A., **Nguyen, S.**, Locke, L., & Wallace, K. (2024). Ensuring a Successful Transition: Understanding the Role of Pre-College Programs in Supporting Racially Underrepresented Students Early in the Access Process. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 36(2), 53-73.  
<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/fyesit/fyesit/2024/00000036/00000002/art00003>

Nguyen, S. T. (2022). “Little Steps of Courage Forward”: Asian American Women Student Leaders for Culturally Supportive Spaces. In Andrea Walton (Ed.), *Women at Indiana University: 150 Years of Experiences and Contributions*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nguyen, S. T. (2017). Asian American Pacific Islander College Choice: A Literature Review. *Indiana University Student Personnel Association Journal 2016-2017*, 50(1): 83- 94.  
<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/jiuspa/issue/view/1537>

Nguyen, S. T. (2013). Effect of Trauma Transmission: Psychosocial Development of Second-Generation Southeast Asian American College Students. *Indiana University Student Personnel Association Journal 2012-2013 Edition*, 46(1): 35-44.  
<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/jiuspa/issue/view/227>

## SELECTED REPORTS

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Nguyen, S. T., Quezada Barrera, M., Pasque, P. A., and Nelson Laird, T. F. (2023). *The Review of Higher Education 2022 – 2023 Annual Report*. <https://www.ashe.ws/rhe#Reports>

Nguyen, S. T., Quezada Barrera, M., Pasque, P. A., and Nelson Laird, T. F. (2022). *The Review of Higher Education 2021 – 2022 Annual Report*. <https://www.ashe.ws/rhe#Reports>

## CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

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Nguyen, S. T. (2024, November). Asian American Studies in the Midwest: An Organizational History, 1970-2010. In paper session at annual meeting of *The History of Education Society (HES)*, Chicago, IL.

- Nguyen, S. T. (2023, April). How Asian American Women Leaders Fought for Culturally Supportive Spaces at Indiana University Bloomington. In paper session at annual meeting of *American Educational Research Association (AERA)*, Division F. Chicago, IL.
- Walton, A., Kellams, D. M., Nathan, A. C., and **Nguyen, S. T.** (2022, October). Reflections on a University Bicentennial Project: Our Efforts to Write/Right Campus History. In panel session at annual meeting of the *Organization of Educational Historians*, Virtual Conference.
- Shirley, M., **Nguyen, S.**, Long, A., Miller, D., Locke, L., & Wallace, K. (2022, November). Planning Ahead to Jumpstart College Enrollment: Underrepresented Students' Perspectives of a Pre-College Program. In paper session at annual meeting of *The Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)*, Las Vegas, NV.
- Nguyen, S. T. (2021, April). Starting the Conversation: Ideas to Involve Graduate Students in Asian American Studies Programs. In panel session at annual meeting of the *Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS)*, Washington, DC.
- Nguyen, S. T. (2019, November). Administrators' Responses to Student Protests: A Historical Case Study of Indiana University Bloomington's 1993 "Taco Bell" Racial Incident. In paper session at annual meeting of *The History of Education Society (HES)*, Columbus, OH.
- Nguyen, S. T. (2019, April). Conditions of Success: A Historical Case Study of the Creation of Asian American Studies at Indiana University Bloomington, 1990 – 2009. In paper session at annual meeting of the *Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS)*, Madison, WI.
- Nguyen, S. T. (2018). Conditions of Success: The Asian American Studies Social Movement in the Midwest, 1990 – 2009. In paper session at annual meeting of the *American Educational Research Association (AERA)*, New York, NY.

## **SELECTED LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE ACTIVITIES**

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Student Affiliate, Center for Research on Race, Ethnicity, and Society at Indiana University	2018 – 2025
Graduate Advisor, Indiana University Asian American Association	2013 – 2025
Reviewer, Awards Committee of the IU Graduate and Professional Student Government	2020 – 2022
Member, Graduate Advisory Committee, IU Asian American Studies Program	2017 – 2021
Graduate Student Representative, IU Asian Alumni Association	2019 – 2021
Graduate Researcher, IU Department of Educational Psychology	2021
Co-Founder, President, and Secretary Higher Education Doctoral Student Association	2018 – 2020

Copyeditor, <i>The Review of Higher Education Academic Journal</i>	2018 –2019
Member, Asian Culture Center, Committee for an Asian American Thematic Floor	2018 – 2019
Member, Higher Education and Student Affairs Doctoral Program Recruitment Committee	2017 –2019
Reviewer, <i>Student Educators International Developments Journal</i>	2014 – 2018
Co-Editor-in-Chief, <i>Indiana University Student Personnel Association Academic Journal</i>	2012 – 2014
Graduate Emissary, IU Graduate School Emissaries for Graduate Student Diversity	2013 – 2014
Faculty Adviser, University of Notre Dame Hyde Park Public Speaking Seminar	2007 – 2012

## **FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS, AND HONORS**

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Indiana University Graduate School President’s Diversity Dissertation Fellowship	2024 – 2025
Indiana University Institute for Advanced Study Graduate Repository Fellowship	2022
Holmstedt Dissertation Year Fellowship, Higher Education and Student Affairs at Indiana University	2022
Indiana University Wells Graduate Fellowship (Departmental Nominee, not Awarded)	2020
August and Ann Eberle Fellowship for Higher Education and Student Affairs at Indiana University	2019
Indiana University Asian American Studies Program Research Grant	2019
Indiana University School of Education Achasa Beechler Dissertation Proposal Fellowship	2019
Center for Research of Race and Ethnicity in Society at Indiana University Bloomington Travel Award	2018
Indiana University Higher Education and Student Affairs Charlie Nelms Travel Award	2018
History of Education Society Goals 2000, Research Program at President William J. Clinton Library	2017
University of Notre Dame Cum Laude	2009
University of Notre Dame Asian Pacific Alumni Board Distinguished Student Award	2009

## **PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS**

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American Educational Research Association (AERA)  
Association of Asian American Studies (AAAS)  
Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE)  
Japanese American Citizens League (JAACL)  
History of Education Society (HES)  
Organization of Educational Historians (OEH)