

**SESSION TWO:**  
**DIVIDE AND CONQUER:**  
**THE CHALLENGES**  
**OF MULTIRACIAL POLITICS**

**COMMUNITIES ORGANIZING**  
**AGAINST ANTI-ASIAN VIOLENCE**

ERIC TANG\*

To begin, I think it is vital that we acknowledge the need for scholarship that elevates a discussion of race as a primary, if not *the* primary, terrain upon which power, politics, and culture are contested in U.S. society. In these shamelessly colorblind times, we all benefit from scholarship that places race front and center. Here, of course, I am thinking of “race” as shorthand, useful for telling a broader story that spans multiple differences, including gender, immigration status, and sexuality. For example, I am meditating on the ways in which contemporary capitalism compels the sweatshop labor of Asian and Latina women by drawing upon a combination of “difference”; a high-tech, punitive INS police state; centuries-old patriarchal practices; sexual violence (namely rape); and pseudo-science (the nimble finger and interminable patience of Third World women which make tedious sweatshop labor a “perfect fit”). All of this, taken together, is “Race” to me. So while I will explore some questions and offer critiques based on my reading of chapters four and seven of *The Miner’s Canary*, I want first to underscore the importance of Race writings at this particular moment, despite some serious differences over how we might theoretically and strategically understand race politics at the dawn of a new century.

American apartheid runs deep, yet there are many powerful forces hell-bent on eliminating “Race” as a concept altogether. By introducing the term “Political Race,” Guinier and Torres fight to keep the discussion alive and kicking; this is an important goal that I share, and I want to acknowledge that from the outset.

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## I. CHOICES

After reading chapters four and seven—the former focusing on how subordinate groups may recast power dynamics that serve to undermine their initial goals, the latter a discussion of the degrees of Latina identification/nonidentification with blackness and whiteness—it struck me that the articles are largely concerned with the “racial choices” made by organized race-based groups and coalitions, and particularly their core leadership. The evidence the authors use is indeed drawn from a set of choices made by those who can and do participate in power politics, or in some function of civic life—community boards, school leadership teams, and so on. What troubled me about this choice of evidence is that it assumed (maybe even universalized?) the political experience. The “political” in *Political Race* is defined by a particular, and at times narrow, moment in time and cultural logic. It is characterized by terms such as “social-change strategists.”<sup>1</sup> I asked myself, “Who are these folks? What do they look like? Why are they important to me?” In other words, the authors assume the political world that matters—electoral politics and civic society—in which people lead political lives, and winners and losers are made each day. But I want to suggest that in order to explore the very real possibility of building multiracial coalitions, and to locate the generative force of these important efforts, it is vital that we travel beyond the choices provided for us by Al Sharpton and Fernando Ferrer. There are other agents out there who I find far more interesting, and who, in the long run, prove more important to the future of building multiracial alliances.

As a community organizer who has been working with Southeast Asian refugee youth and immigrant welfare moms for the past seven years, I have come to realize that there are many political worlds in the urban setting. These worlds, however, should not be mistaken for parallel universes. In other words, they are not detached from the world in which civic power, in the form of resources, punitive policies, and democratic law, is negotiated. They are alternative political spaces, and what goes on in them eventually makes an impact on the world orchestrated by City Hall, the mayor, big business, and the like. The difference lies in how they engage the culture of power politics, the terms of access and exclusion they face, and the decisions they make in order to remain politically effective despite overwhelming exclusion.

To be more specific, I am thinking about the Vietnamese and Cambodian women of the Bronx who have been forced to participate in the city’s “workfare” program in exchange for their welfare check. Workfare is an unambiguously punitive program aimed at discouraging welfare participation through unreasonable and harsh labor for the Parks and Sanitation departments. Anti-workfare coalitions involving unions, advocacy groups, and civil rights groups

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1. LANI GUINIER & GERALD TORRES, *THE MINER’S CANARY: ENLISTING RACE, RESISTING POWER, TRANSFORMING DEMOCRACY* 128 (2002).

have come together over the years to decide on a realistic alternative to workfare. This has involved forced educational programs, kinder and gentler work sites that provide gloves during the winter, and supervisors who have clocked several hours of sexual-harassment training. All of this was to be for the benefit of poor women who were targets of punitive welfare reform. But when I asked the workfare moms in our community for their opinion of this liberal agenda, they were not interested in any of it. Their collective demand was for no forced workfare, no forced educational program—no forced programs whatsoever. They wanted to keep their welfare and determine for themselves the terms of their daily work and education.

Clearly, the demand for the immediate abolition of workfare would have effectively removed these women from any coalition; even if coalition members agreed in theory with these women, the demand was not within the parameters of political reality. Those gatekeeping this “reality” suggested that we work in a long-term coalition effort for reform or even to chip away slowly at workfare, eventually bringing forth its complete end.

And here is where the power politics Guinier and Torres describe in chapter four becomes relevant: If we want an end to workfare, the suggestion is that we participate in “politics-for-real,” where one (or more) of the three zero-sum power plays Guinier and Torres identify can take shape: “power-over”; control of the agenda and the rules of the game; and manipulation of the subordinate by creating illusory opportunities. Guinier and Torres critique these modes of power and call for race-based organizations to avoid them. Advocates of affirmative action should not be seduced by the immediate “power-over” of black and brown faces in high places. The oppressed must find ways to unearth the very terms of the game itself. We must be cautious of ritualized, false participation disguised as democracy. I agree with all of this.

Here I want to return to the workfare moms. They all decided not to participate in politics-for-real. They chose instead an alternative path that would also steer them clear of the three power pitfalls. Deciding not to participate was not necessarily motivated by an inherent knowledge of the dangerous power. In other words, their choice did not necessarily “pass through” the authors’ critique of re-inscribing hierarchal power, engendered, as it were, by always being on the outside looking in. There are other political worlds to pass through.

## II. THE PRESENCE OF ALTERNATIVE CITIZENSHIP

Not too long ago, Aimé Césaire, poet and anti-colonial freedom fighter of Martinique, put forth the notion of *présence africaine*—black presence—in an effort to describe the cultural condition of the New World. Not the “black condition” within the New World, but the condition of the New World itself. By offering us *présence*, he was describing a particular way of understanding the time, culture, sense of justice, needs, and desires of the majority of New World inhabitants who arrived by way of transatlantic bondage. But white supremacist

slavery alone does not dictate the terms of this presence. As Cedric Robinson, author of *Black Marxism*,<sup>2</sup> reminds us, black folks in the New World may indeed be a contradiction of capitalism, but they are much more than that too. *Présence* means the alternative to time, progress, oppressive power, and cultures of domination that presently structure the New World. (And it should be noted that there is more than just one *présence*.) But presence doesn't have to be reactive. It can subsist without "passing through" the fire. I'm thinking now of the way in which we love our race without having to always bring white-supremacist racism along to remind us of our love. So too, we can have an alternative race politics that doesn't always pass through the pitfalls of the three dominant power plays.

Bringing the point back to Guinier and Torres, I am suggesting that we can make "good" political choices, particularly racial choices, without passing through the dangers of whiteness rewards and black exceptionalism that Guinier and Torres discuss in chapter seven. Our political actions cannot and should not be interpreted by how we either fail or succeed in navigating our way around that particular zero-sum game.

I will conclude by returning to the Southeast Asian workfare workers. These women decided that their demand for immediate abolition of workfare was a legitimate one, and they wanted to work on it in the present, not as part of a ten-year liberal agenda. They decided to create a program of their own, one that would technically meet city work requirements, but allow them to carry on with the work they were already doing prior to the introduction of punitive workfare: care giving, cooking, and light garment work. Without venturing into details, suffice it to say that the women created a childcare cooperative, a food cooperative, and a sewing cooperative. With some administrative maneuvering, they were able to have the hours spent at the cooperatives approved as workfare hours. They kept their welfare check while sustaining their ability to choose work, taking the "forced" out of "forced work programs." For these women, fighting for enfranchisement in the real political world was not the wisest choice. Instead, they scripted their own form of political participation; at the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, we have tentatively termed this "alternative citizenship." Here, they made political choices that they believed would improve their collective situation while also weakening the broader punitive welfare state.

But the final question, of course, is what any of this has to do with multiracial alliance building. I parenthetically suggested above that there is more than one *présence*. The Southeast Asian workfare workers made choices based on their particular presence as refugees-turned-immigrants who were inserted into U.S. urban poverty. They were responding to a particular set of historical circumstances, transforming cultural conditions, needs, and desires. As they scripted their plan of action, some noted how strikingly similar their situation was to that of other Third World and African American women

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2. CEDRIC J. ROBINSON, *BLACK MARXISM* (2000).

workfare workers. Alternative citizenship extends to all those for whom the choice of politics-for-real is ineffective. And this is not simply based on having been excluded by racism, sexism, and other systems.

Creating an alternative space to “do politics” is a strategic move also. I imagine a movement of women developing alternative economic projects in their own communities—and entering each other’s particular *présences* in the process—as a very dangerous political act. It is dangerous in two ways. First, it grounds multiracial alliances in a set of concrete concerns over the meaning of work, time, needs, desires, and self-determination. Second, it challenges the myth of the universal effectiveness of the electoral and formal civic realm of politics, where the social change strategist broods over the dilemma of being both outsider and insider, excluded and included.

#### EDITED TRANSCRIPTION OF ERIC TANG’S SPOKEN REMARKS<sup>†</sup>

I want to underscore the importance of race writings during *this* period—race writings. We live in a really terribly colorblind period and we’ve seen that only grow in the past five or six years, particularly with the election of Bush Jr. and his cabinet. We see this type of multiracial colorblindness to the point that it became cliché. We were all kind of like, “Uh. Elaine Chao.” when she was selected for Secretary of Labor. But in books like *The Miner’s Canary*, we have people who are putting out not just another smart analysis of race but really throwing something out there that tries to challenge a moment hell bent on colorblindness. And I think that is really important.

In this piece I ask rhetorically, “Who are social change strategists and why do I care about them? What do they look like? How are they?” I guess I am a social change strategist. I’ve worked at CAAAV doing organizing models and thinking through campaigns that are race-based for about seven years. I also caught myself saying things this past week, like “The united front for racial justice is going to be hard to build.” Or meditating on how often, how deep, and with what frequency we can rely on reliable allies versus unreliable allies. Then I go home and have dinner with my mom and she says, “I never raised you to speak like this.” She didn’t, so I guess in many ways I am a social change strategist for better or for worse. The question is: What kind?

One of the questions I want to raise is: What are the different types of social change strategists that are out there and who are we talking about in particular? More particularly, what kind of social change strategists are we talking about and what kind of multiracial coalition are they invested in? In *The Miner’s*

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<sup>†</sup> Edited transcription of spoken remarks from symposium at New York University School of Law, Feb. 1, 2002.

*Canary*, there is a particular type of multiracial coalition being evoked, and it is one that we can assess based on the examples.

One of the key examples (which I thought was really good) was how the analysis around the coalition that Fernando Ferrer was trying to build in his mayoral campaign. The kind of electoral muscling, the electoral negotiation that was happening with Al Sharpton to win over the black vote. This was a very obvious but also a very compelling example with a lot to work with. I thought the analysis was a strong one but I wasn't sure if those examples drawn for electoral politics, in New York in particular, or even some of the examples drawn from more local-based political activity—what I'll call "political activity in the civic life," community school boards, and so on—if that was necessarily where you would find the raw material for building multiracial coalitions. What I mean by raw material is: What are the set of needs, desires, activities that people engage in in order to decide to build multiracial coalitions? Where can we find the raw material or origin moment for multiracial coalitions? I want to talk a little bit about where and how.

CAAAB is part of this group called the Coalition Against Police Brutality that started in 1995. Why? Because we saw the numbers of police murders in a number of different communities—it was the year Yong Xin Huang was shot in the back of the head by a police officer, Steven Mizrahi, in a Chinese community in Brooklyn; it was the year Anthony Baez was choked to death by a police officer, Francis Livoti; it was the year we saw the murder of Anibal Calderon; it was the year after we saw the murders of Hilton Vega and Anthony Rosario. A lot of murders. The Giuliani administration racked them up in that particular year and we all came together because there was this common desire to see these police officers prosecuted. Communities felt we needed a sense of justice, not because we were invested in the criminal justice system but because we felt that if the community couldn't get justice in 1995, justice really had no future. That was the political stake.

But then as we worked together on a number of different projects and our issues extended beyond the scope of police brutality—because it's never just about this one act or this one murder, it's really about communities that are led to live lives of surveillance, detention, and policing in general—we began to realize that our political unity extended far beyond this one issue. I want to talk about this in terms of the type of citizenship/citizenry that we felt among each other. There was a type of citizenry that we felt with each other that went something like this: A lot of people that we worked with were folks that were victims of police brutality but had no rights that the state was bound to respect—a welfare mom from Chinatown was brutalized by a police officer; she won her case, she got a settlement, but all that money had to go back to the city. Why? Because she was formally on welfare, and if you are on welfare, all that money belongs to the state. There was a young person who was on parole who was brutalized by the police. He couldn't report the brutal attack because it put him in a place that he might have violated his parole and then he would have to go

back to jail for five years. There are young people who are coming out of prison, who don't have even the right to vote, to make a CCRV (Civilian Complaint Review Board) meaningful to them because they're ex-cons.

These were all folks who were not citizens by virtue of their common location. It wasn't just about race politics in the formal sense of who can negotiate for power resources and punitive policy; it was about a common location of exclusion, a common citizenry scripted by their common relationship not just to the state but a number of different institutions. From there, we began to cultivate a politics of alternative citizenship where we were not necessarily invested in one political sphere or one set of politics—electoral politics, community school boards, or even our local union. We were interested in developing a set of politics that was based on needs and desires that had emerged from that particular location. Another example is based on some southeast Asian workfare moms that we worked with and how they challenged punitive workfare, not by going into electoral politics or by changing policy, but by developing their own alternative space, their alternative multiracial politics in the form of their own institution. I think that's where we have to look for the raw material which might provide for multiracial coalitions and not necessarily in politics for real as I described in my written piece. Thank you.

## CALIFORNIANS FOR JUSTICE

MIMI HO\*

In *The Miner's Canary*, Guinier and Torres use the metaphor of miners carrying a canary into a mine to alert the miners of danger. If the canary collapsed, it was a sign that there were noxious gases. They liken people of color to this canary, and propose that the distress of people of color threatens us all. They reach the conclusion that we need a more systemic critique of race. They also introduce the term "political race" to cover three elements: 1) a "diagnostic function" of signaling a need for a more systemic critique of racism, as opposed to an individual centered, nationalist critique, 2) an "aspirational goal" of moving towards collective action based on race, and 3) to "jumpstart an activist project."

I'd like to use the example of Californians for Justice to explore these concepts.

### CALIFORNIANS FOR JUSTICE: A "POLITICAL RACE" PROJECT?

In the Western part of the country, and in particular in California, the initiative system has pushed progressives into the electoral arena and forced a discussion of race. In 1994, Proposition 187—an initiative that sought to block the children of undocumented immigrants from public health facilities and schools—became a particularly xenophobic attack on immigrants. Progressives were slammed by this initiative and frustrated by the compromising messages of the mainstream "NO on 187" campaign. The mainstream "NO on 187" campaigns' message that "Proposition 187 went too far" essentially condoned the basic sentiment and point that those brown people are the problem. Soon there was news that another initiative, Proposition 209, deceptively named the California Civil Rights Initiative despite the fact that it sought to eliminate affirmative action, was about to get on the ballot.

Californians for Justice was established with a vision to take these racist initiatives head on and to build progressive infrastructure to advance racial justice in the electoral and other arenas. CFJ did not embark on this electoral campaign because of some belief that affirmative action was the ultimate strategy for dismantling institutional racism. As Guinier and Torres point out, placing token people of color in power does nothing to change institutions or power relations. Instead, CFJ saw that behind the attack on affirmative action

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was part of a much broader, dangerous Right-wing strategy to push a regressive notion of colorblindness into society. And CFJ wanted to reframe what “civic participation” or “citizenship” could be.

#### LEADING WITH RACE: LESSONS FROM THE CALIFORNIA INITIATIVE WARS

A key point that Californians for Justice tried to drive home is that we cannot try to avoid talking about race. Conventional electoral consultants, particularly the liberal ones, tell us to avoid talking about race because it is divisive and scares off the likely voters—read middle-class white voters between the ages of thirty and sixty-five. However, Californians for Justice’s analysis concluded differently: by avoiding tackling race and racism head on, you lose both the long term and short term fights. In the long run, you cede ground and you promote racist framings of the issues. The centrist messages of most of the NO on Proposition 21 campaigns was some variation of “Proposition 21 goes too far.” This automatically concedes that there is a problem. By saying that Proposition 209 goes too far, the message is that affirmative action is problematic, that there are indeed “unfair advantages” to women and people of color; but also contained in that message is the assertion that complete elimination of the programs was too excessive. It was during the “NO on 209” campaign that Clinton made his infamous recommendation for affirmative action policy: “mend it, don’t end it,” a statement about as righteous and effective as his “don’t ask, don’t tell” mantra for gays and lesbians in the military.

By avoiding a race frame, and therefore avoiding targeting people of color and encouraging them to vote in California, you lose even the immediate electoral fight. California’s people of color are, as of the 2000 census, just about the majority. However, people of color are not the majority of the electorate. The project of Californians for Justice was to increase the turnout of people of color to harness this potential power. In 1994, people of color made up only 19% of California’s electorate, but jumped to 27% in the 1996 elections and up to 32% in the June 1998 election, unheard of in an election primary.

Our strategy was to go to people of color, low-income people, and young people—people who we wanted to build as our organization’s membership and people who more likely would vote our way—and turn them out to vote. Conventional elections go to the likely voter—again read: middle-class white people between the ages of thirty and sixty-five; ideally we would like to turn them our way as well. The problem here is that the persuasion needed for to get the white community on board is too large to win.

For example, the mainstream “NO on 209” campaign tried to capture the white women’s vote. But they did so by avoiding race, and concentrating solely on persuading white women that sexism exists and that as a result, they are rightful beneficiaries of affirmative action. However, on the whole, white women did not see themselves as benefiting from affirmative action. Instead, they saw affirmative action as an unfair “quota” to let unqualified people of

color into positions that they or their white brothers or husbands should have gotten. In the end, the final vote was 52% “yes” to eliminating affirmative action to 48% “no,” a very close election. By not confronting race and by not proactively framing a campaign around racial and gender justice, the mainstream “NO on 209” campaign made a huge miscalculation for both the short term electoral win, and in the long term, left us with a far more compromised racial terrain.

Californians for Justice’s strategy was to target our electoral field work in low-income communities of color, to build a grassroots organization that led with race, to emphasize that racism and sexism still very much exist in our institutions, and to show that together, we can organize to fight this and other initiatives, and build a movement for the long term.

#### ORGANIZING A GRASSROOTS BASE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

A central goal of Californians for Justice was to build a permanent mass-based racial justice infrastructure out of the electoral fight. Certainly, trying to defeat Proposition 209 was a central goal; however, CFJ was clear that an essential outcome of the election was an organization that had a diverse membership of low-income people, people of color, and young people who shared a vision for racial justice and the capacity to organize.

As we know, electoral politics is dominated by big money and paid TV advertisements. But a field campaign—the work of going door-to-door in a precinct, the work of phoning to get out the vote—can be a great opportunity to build a progressive mass-based organization. Elections, as shallow as they can be, provide an excellent opportunity to organize thousands of people. Especially in a high visibility initiative campaign, people may be aware of the issues and be open to someone knocking at their door or calling them by phone. Furthermore, in a time-urgent situation, where the stakes on civil rights are high, many people come out to help with the actual organizing work. Through the “NO on 209” campaign, CFJ engaged 5000 volunteers and worked in 1250 precincts across California to make at least 100,000 voter contacts.

With an eye on building permanent grassroots infrastructure, there are several ways in which CFJ’s campaign differed from traditional electoral campaigns:

- CFJ targeted precincts in low-income communities of color. Traditional election strategy, as mentioned above, gives up on the idea that people of color are an important base to be mobilized in the electoral arena. However, with the shift in California’s demographics and in demographics across the country, even the Republicans now are targeting people of color. Organizing a progressive, multiracial electoral force is both an opportunity as well as an imperative given the encroaching right-wing forces. The Republican, as well as the

Democratic, pursuit of the Latino vote can very easily spiral into nationalism and the temptation to splinter off on their own.

- CFJ developed a leadership track, with skills and political analysis training. CFJ recruited precinct captains to be in charge of identifying the “NO on 209” votes and turning them out on election day. These precinct captains received rigorous organizing training, became the heart of the potential leadership, and allowed CFJ to promote the leadership of targeted constituents. CFJ also conducted political trainings to explicitly develop a vision for racial justice that pointed to white supremacy and deeply incorporated a vision for how justice based on class, gender, and sexual orientation is linked to everyone’s liberation.

- CFJ involved people who may not be able to vote—non-citizens, undocumented folks, youth under eighteen. The electoral system is a major bastion of institutional racism. From official literacy tests back in the day to today’s de facto literacy tests, our elections are wrought with barriers to people of color, low-income people, and young people. Californians for Justice emphasized participation in elections not as a “duty” of a good citizen, but rather as an act of opposition. CFJ engaged non-citizens in the work of going door-to-door, in training, and even in top staff positions. Young people as young as nine-year-olds phoned precincts, with their feet dangling, not even reaching the ground.

- CFJ was consciously multiracial as a strategy for building broader, long term gains. CFJ was established with a firm belief that building a multiracial organization was essential for moving a broad racial justice agenda during and after the election. The work of building a multiracial campaign and organization allows people of very diverse backgrounds to build relationships and common ground, to challenge each other, and realize that although our interests may vary at points, in the end they are fundamentally intertwined.

#### ELECTIONS, POLITICS, AND POWER

Many of us who are involved in elections were backed into doing them because we felt like we had no choice. We realized we could not allow the Right to continue using the initiative system as a tool to move a racist, regressive agenda. In addition, elections are a rare time when politicians actually pay some attention to what their constituents think of them, and making elections an opportunity to get issues on politician’s radar screens if one shouts loudly and strategically enough.

But most importantly, elections are a tool. They can leverage other types of power. If an organization can show that it has the ability to mobilize voters,

even if those voters only make up a few percentage points of the total vote, she can garner some attention. This attention then can translate to power in other arenas, perhaps in a legislative campaign or in a direct action accountability session with a key decision maker. Ultimately, however, the power must come from people on the ground who have the belief that their daily lives must be changed, and from their fighting spirit to hold their politicians accountable.

Many organizations and movements have exhausted themselves with fighting electoral campaigns. And many have lost touch with their vision to hold politicians accountable and to maintain outside strategies as well as insider strategies. So when do we engage in elections? I think that an important question we must ask ourselves is: if we engage in this election, will the election outcomes put us in a stronger position to advance a mass-based, people of color-led racial justice movement? If the election does not engage a broad base of people, then capacity is not built. And if an election message compromises core political messages, it is not worth engaging in. Electoral organizing must be a tool for building power, for maintaining accountability, for moving an agenda. They are a means, not an end.

#### ON ZERO-SUM POWER AND COLLECTIVE POWER

*The Miner's Canary* says that power is not just "power over" something. Guinier and Torres advocate for a "post-modern power" that can be exercised by those who create it within groups. But in my view, both of these premises are flawed. First, this conception of power is not a post-modern notion of power, it's actually a time-honored notion that people-power can win.

And second, I believe that at some level, power most definitely is "power over" something. I agree that we cannot just frame our issues as win-lose or "zero-sum;" however it would be very misleading to say that we can develop win-win solutions. Racial justice, economic justice, gender justice all will benefit the majority of people, and we should frame our campaigns in a way that recognizes that.

Most of us have a broad self interest in the liberation of others. However, the reason we are in the predicament that we are in today is exactly because there are incredibly strong interests that benefit from the status quo. There will be, and must be, losers in order for justice to be met—albeit a tiny set of losers. Yet those who will lose are a strong, rich, powerful set of beneficiaries from the current arrangements of power, hierarchy and ideologies, each of whom is currently tied to many of us due to the places where our self-interests overlap. I agree that much of our project is getting most of us to realign ourselves away from those elite beneficiaries and instead to each other.

I agree with Guinier and Torres that we cannot approach our work assuming that there is a fixed amount of racial justice to go around which narrow nationalist interests must fight over. I do believe that as we build racial justice, we will benefit far more people than we hurt. My point here, however, is that

just as there actually are elite beneficiaries of the racial and gender hierarchy and from the current distribution of wealth, as we build racial justice and dismantle institutions of privilege, those privileged interests will have to concede power. We may perceive that as win-win, but the CEOs who get taken down most certainly will not.

## RACE AS A POLITICAL CONSTRUCT

J. PHILLIP THOMPSON\*

*The Miner's Canary* makes a timely and invaluable contribution to political discourse in the U.S. Guinier and Torres's "political race" concept is a grounded theory of race that identifies the necessity of disconnecting racial discourse both from sterile biological definitions of race and from notions of racial identity isolated from structures of domination. The idea that race in the U.S. is primarily a *political* construct—rooted in hierarchies of power, as opposed to, say, a yearning for the restoration of a black culture without white interference—is an important concept that warrants a great deal of further inquiry and discussion.

Unlike many colonized nations, African Americans did not have a preexisting unified culture and society before subjugation in the U.S. Thus, the black struggle for freedom, unlike anticolonial struggles, was not a restoration project for control of an old national homeland or for the right to speak a native language. Instead the black struggle has been a reconstruction project, a project aimed at making the U.S. a more democratic nation by overcoming its slave roots. One of the advantages of a reconstruction over a restoration focus, it seems to me, is that reconstruction of democracy, by its very nature, involves engagement and persuasion of non-African American U.S. citizens and groups.

*The Miner's Canary* rightly points out that the black struggle in the U.S. traditionally has not been racially exclusive, and that the concept of political race is not meant to exclude whites from joining a movement. However, much more could be said about why this conception of politics connects to particularities of slavery and apartheid in the U.S., as opposed to the politics of many former colonies around the world. To this end, I would like to add some comments about another aspect of political development that connects to the history of slavery and apartheid in the U.S.—the connection between economic resources and political power.

African Americans have little experience with economic self-management, and live in a country where control of economic resources has enormous political significance. We in New York have just seen a billionaire win a mayoral election by spending more than \$70 million of his own money. In other words, there is clearly a close connection between political voice and money. The question this raises for me is: Where is the money to fuel the kind of broad

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grassroots political participation that *The Miner's Canary* advocates supposed to come from? A. Philip Randolph once said, "Where you get your money is also where you get your ideas." A serious discussion of political participation among low-income people needs to consider the fact that much of the organizational infrastructure in low-income communities is funded through government grants or foundations that put limits on political activity. In addition to corporate and government funding of low-income community infrastructure, many leading civil rights groups are dependent on corporate donations as well. If there is to be an independent politics, where is the independent source of financing?

To address the question of resources, a good place to begin might be to map out the assets available to poor and minority communities and to give some thought to their current use. One of the assets of communities like Harlem (or Peopletown in Atlanta, or Roxbury, Massachusetts) is land. Years of community activism in Harlem to reduce crime, clean up vacant lots, remove graffiti, get kids in after-school programs, and build affordable housing for the homeless finally have had an effect. Harlem is now an attractive neighborhood for investment. However, real estate speculation has driven up the cost of housing in Harlem, as well as real estate taxes, putting pressure to leave on the low-income people who fought to rebuild the community. Is the reward for community activism among poor people in Harlem the joy of having upper-middle income people (including blacks) come into the neighborhood while they are forced out? Aren't there ways in which low-income residents can reap the benefits from increased real estate values in communities like Harlem? If low-income people owned property in Harlem and could finance its development, not only would the financial pressure on them to leave the neighborhood be alleviated, but a source of funding for their local activism might be provided.

This raises the question, of course, of where low-income people in communities like Harlem turn to get funding to purchase property in neighborhoods they are working to improve, which returns us to the issue of asset mapping as well. Trade unions are among the most wealthy of low-income organizations. New York City has minority trade union locals with hundreds of thousands of members and tens of *billions* in pension investments. The people being priced out of their neighborhoods include many members of these same trade unions. It seems to me that some thought should be given to how some of these local trade unions might partner with community organizations to develop community-owned revenue-generating projects, such as land development in conjunction with neighborhood organizing. This type of arrangement potentially could provide a source of financing for community activism independent of government, corporate, or foundation grants.

Another approach might be to organize consumer cooperatives in low-income neighborhoods for bulk purchasing of telecommunications services (phone, internet, etc.) and energy products. Low-income and minority communities spend enormous amounts of money in the market to purchase these services. A portion of the money that co-op members save from bulk purchasing

could be retained by the cooperative association (of community organizers and residents) to support further organizing and activism.

The ideas above are merely suggestive—I did not mention the insurance industry and many other assets available to low-income communities—and most are not new. Linking organizing to control over “social” assets is one of the ideas that inspired the labor movement in the beginning. Yet for some reason—I am not sure why—co-ops and other forms of collective economic organizing are rarely pursued by community activists nowadays. The connection between collective economic organizing and political power, despite the obvious example of trade unions, seems to have been lost in the world of community organizing. My own view is that increases in political participation among the poor will not be sustainable in this country without serious attention to these issues and new forms of economic organizing.



## BROADENING THE COALITION

UNA KIM\*

I grew up washing dishes in the small kitchen of my parents' Korean restaurant in Tucson, Arizona. From my corner behind the sink, I used to watch the two of them as they cooked, cleaned, and managed the restaurant fourteen hours a day, seven days a week, with the help of only a couple of waitresses, my siblings and myself. More than fifteen years later, I sat in the same kitchen reading the chapters of *The Miner's Canary* during my holiday break, contemplating the ideas of Professors Guinier and Torres. As I again watched my parents do the same work, I continued to struggle with theories of race and social change, theories which are frequently discussed in academia, but inaccessible to my parents. For the hundredth time I asked myself, "How can race and social change theories, like the ones in this book, yield practical results for people like my parents?"

My parents are Asian Americans—their experiences of marginalization do not fit into the black-white binary which is "at the heart of" political race.<sup>3</sup> Their experiences in the United States are not unlike those of other numerous non-white, non-English speaking immigrants. My parents could only get the lowest-paying manual labor jobs, regardless of the skills and education they already had. Like other Asian Americans—whether immigrants like my parents or fourth generation American-born citizens of Asian descent—my parents were treated as outsiders who could never quite "fit-in" as Americans. They and their children were regarded as perpetual foreigners who, though gentle and meek, could not be trusted or promoted. They were entirely un-"American": their language was funny, their accents ridiculous, their food stinky, their women exotic, their men effeminate and weak.

These experiences of race do not fit into black or white, despite Professors Guinier and Torres's pronouncement that "[m]any people today view Asians . . . as lying on the white end of the racial spectrum."<sup>4</sup> One cannot measure the racial

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3. GUINIER & TORRES, *supra* note 1, at 14. Numerous scholars, activists and writers have written (and continue to write) upon this topic with far more skill and eloquence than I do here. I attempt to briefly address this important issue because it needs to be a part of this discussion. I hope other participants do so as well. A recently published book by Howard University Law School Professor Frank H. Wu provides a comprehensive discussion, as well as an exhaustive reference list, of other works on the role of Asian Americans in the "color line." See FRANK H. WU, *YELLOW: RACE IN AMERICA BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE* (2002).

4. GUINIER & TORRES, *supra* note 1, at 248.

experiences of Asians in America under a black-white color spectrum. The role of race in the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, the Dr. Wen Ho Lee incident, and the anti-Asian concepts of “Yellow Peril” and “Asian Invasion” fit nowhere into this black-white binary. By focusing on race only as black and white, Asian American and all other non-black and white experiences become invalid; others can participate only on the periphery.

In late September, the *New York Times* published an article on widespread racial profiling and hate crimes targeting Arab, Muslim, and Southeast Asian Americans following September 11. Interviews with New Yorkers revealed that many African Americans, themselves long-time victims of racial profiling, condoned and even approved of racial profiling in the name of anti-terrorism.<sup>5</sup> This is just one illustration of the fact that being an ethnic/racial minority does not make one immune from internalizing harmful stereotypes about other minority groups.

The role of the media and popular culture in fueling and perpetuating the tension between ethnic/racial minorities must be addressed, and the different kinds of racism against all groups acknowledged as pervasive and divisive. The L.A. riots are only one painful reminder of the practice of racism and racialization among Asian Americans, African Americans and Latinos:

Although members of the working class, regardless of race, may have common problems, working together to resolve these problems is not by itself a successful way of eliminating race-based tensions within groups. In order to achieve social change, a “new, twenty-first-century way of talking” about the “distinctly American challenge” of racialized identities requires us to look beyond the black-white binary of race in America, particularly in light of the increasing numbers of non-black persons of color in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> The dominant power hierarchy is first based on a white and non-white/non-American spectrum. Hierarchies within the non-white/non-American categories are based on color as well as culture, and these hierarchies are what often fuel interracial tensions and “pit potential allies against one another.”<sup>7</sup>

By examining the experiences of Asian Americans and other Americans categorized and even *raced* in ways which clearly fall outside of the current racial binary, we can gain a better understanding of the divide-and-conquer strategy of third dimension “power-over.” Expanding meanings of race to include the roles of non-black people of color, and more generally immigrants, is essential to a critique of the meta-narrative established by those in power.

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5. Sam Howe Verhovek, *Americans Give in to Racial Profiling*, N.Y. TIMES, Sept. 23, 2001, at A1.

6. GUINIER & TORRES, *supra* note 1, at 11. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the Asian Pacific American population in the U.S. reached eleven million in 2000. It is estimated that this figure will be twenty million by 2020. LEADERSHIP EDUCATION FOR ASIAN PACIFICS, INC., ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN DEMOGRAPHIC, LABOR AND INCOME FACTS (2001), at <http://www.leap.org/docs/APAfactcard0301.pdf>.

7. GUINIER & TORRES, *supra* note 1, at 130.

## SECOND- AND THIRD-DIMENSION RULES FOR THE IMMIGRANT

For Asians and other non-white, non-English speaking immigrants, what Professors Guinier and Torres call the second-dimension power structure poses unique barriers to advancement. The rules to “win” the game—to obtain power and advancement—require the ability to speak and write English. Access to health benefits, legal assistance, education, voting, and other critical rights and services require proficiency in English. The existing language assistance for few (obtained only after much struggle and too much time) is completely inadequate.<sup>8</sup> Learning English is simply not an option for most immigrant blue-collar workers, even after they have lived in the U.S. for decades—their need to work and support their families leaves them with neither the time nor energy such a task would require.

In the third dimension, the dominant meta-narrative’s image of a successful American is not only raced white, but also cultured American. Language, religion, food, eating habits, dress, music, leisure activities, mannerisms, sense of aesthetics, household composition, family dynamics, and a sense of individuality are among the factors which define “the successful American.” Immigrants must shed their language, values, clothes, habits and accents as quickly as possible and assimilate. They must accept what Professors Guinier and Torres call the “racial bribe” if their children are to succeed. Indeed, many immigrants have tried, but found that regardless of how “American” they think they are, the color of their skin, shapes of their eyes, last names, and America’s political and historical relationship with certain parts of the world impose obstacles which very few will be able to overcome and even if they do, it is at a high cost. For Asian Americans, the cost is acceptance and perpetuation of the “model minority” myth.

The “successful American” must not only embrace American culture, she must also leave her foreign culture and race behind her without looking back. Only those who fully embrace all aspects of the meta-narrative will be fully embraced by those in power. The “model minority” in the eyes of America is an Asian American who has completely conformed to this ideal of the “successful American.” For example, take the new Secretary of Labor, Chinese American Elaine Chao. Embraced by the new administration, she is touted as the perfect proof that America is indeed a meritocracy and that hard work is the only thing that keeps people of color down. Elaine Chao is, as Andrew Chin put it, the “poster child for the ‘model minority’ myth.”<sup>9</sup> Chao is a successful American,

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8. For example, monitoring by the National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium (NAPALC) and its affiliates has revealed that local Board of Elections and Registrars consistently fail to fully comply with the language assistance provisions (Section 203) of the Voting Rights Act. Additionally, health care providers and government offices and agencies often do not provide the language assistance they are required to by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

9. Andrew Chin, *Elaine Chao: Poster Child for the “Model Minority” Myth*, available at <http://www.modelminority.com/politics/chao.htm>.

and she thinks as the meta-narrative says a successful American should think: she believes that opportunities have not been denied to people of color; they have been passed up by them because of a failure to work hard. According to the narrative, all minorities can and should be like her: hard-working, non-resistant, quick to assimilate.

The model minority myth, a well-anchored story, has become a valuable tool in subverting multiracial coalitions and downplaying the impact of racial discrimination against Asian Americans and other people of color. This myth is used to divide along racial lines by using the Asian American as the "good" minority who is better than the other "problem" minorities. And in turn, it tells Asian Americans that if they want to succeed, they must follow Chao's example: put their noses to the grindstone and keep out of trouble—that is, stay away from the other minority troublemakers, the African Americans and Latinos. The myth establishes a divisive hierarchy among racial minority groups, supports the myth of meritocracy, and eclipses the existence of poverty among and discrimination against Asian Americans.<sup>10</sup>

A competing meta-narrative must be created which dispels such myths and reveals all the factors which constitute the dominant power structure. One way to create this would be to make education a part of the movement. Multiracial coalitions built around specific community objectives should go beyond recognizing the existence of larger-than-race inequities that require multiracial collaboration. They should also strive to dispel permanently the racial stereotypes and myths that each group may internalize, revealing these stereotypes as supporting columns to the same meta-narrative which works against all of them. Communities need to engage in a continuing dialogue about their experiences, made possible by language assistance, that involves both adults and their children; in other words, the dialogue must involve the ones who will lead the coalitions in the future.

#### BROADENING THE COALITION: COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS AND WHITE-COLLAR PEOPLE OF COLOR

As I mentioned before, my parents are small business owners who have poor English skills and work long hours in isolation from other blue-collar people of color. They have neither the time nor resources to read and digest various social theories on race and race/power relations in the United States. My parents, like many others, are in a situation where they cannot easily become part of a coalition around workplace issues. Although they are disadvantaged by the existing dimensions of power, they cannot participate meaningfully in the political race project without the initiative of someone who reaches out to them

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10. For an excellent on-line primer on the history and background of the model minority myth, visit <http://www.modelminority.com/history/primer.htm>.

in their own language, and who is sympathetic to their constraints of time and financial resources.

Often it is the second-generation immigrant who has the education, the interactions with other minority groups, and the language and cultural skills to reach out to people like my parents and facilitate their participation. However, parental pressure and societal expectation steer most second-generation immigrants into white-collar professions. Once there, many accept the “racial bribe”—they disassociate themselves from their class and ethnic roots and attempt to “blend in” with the others. They lose the contact and presence, and often end up lacking the skills and willingness to work within working-class communities. Yet as professionals of color hit the glass ceiling in their various professions, they often realize that they have much in common with their working class counterparts. It is my (highly ambitious, but nonetheless realistic) hope that professionals of color will create spaces within their workplaces to talk about this glass ceiling. Some will recall their parents’ similar experiences in blue collar work, and will recognize that their struggles are the same. And finally, hopefully, they will respond to the community organizations who have been calling out to them for support.

Community organizers and organizations potentially are in a place to play the central role of transforming individual participation into strong coalitions, as they are often the ones who not only have the necessary skills and understanding, but also the presence and community trust needed to inspire participation. However, as though the community organizer’s task were not demanding enough, building such participation into a cross-racial coalition is a formidable task. Studies on the 2000 census data show that despite growing ethnic diversity, neighborhoods across the nation continue to be segregated; opportunities for multiracial neighborhood and church-based coalitions are few and far between.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, without broader participation and support from non-working class minorities, community organizations (already stretched to their limits) may be too overwhelmed, understaffed and underfunded to build the strength, momentum and size necessary for real change.

Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) in New York City, where I worked as a legal intern, is like most other not-for-profit public interest organizations—the short supply of funds and staff makes it possible for only the most urgent projects to be addressed at any given moment. Often, important community outreach projects which the staff want to pursue are forced onto the back burner so that the staff attorneys can address more pressing, time-sensitive issues, like incidences of anti-Asian violence, unfair labor practices, and egregious violations of the Voting Rights Act during national elections.

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11. Eric Schmitt, *Analysis of Census Finds Segregation Along With Diversity*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 4, 2001, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/04/national/04CENS.html>.

One project pursued by AALDEF was the Youth Leadership Project, which sought to build a coalition among youth organizations from different Asian American communities to discuss and find solutions for the disturbingly common problem of racial profiling in the NYPD's enforcement of truancy laws. (Following September 11, AALDEF's efforts have been diverted away from the Youth Leadership Project and other similar projects in order to address the urgent need of Asian Americans who have been the victims of hate crimes committed in the name of anti-terrorism and vengeance.) Racial and class tensions between the groups, as well as language and cultural barriers often led to suspicion and distrust, making such a coalition difficult. My Chinese American supervisor faced suspicion when she approached Korean youth organizers. They said to her, "You're Chinese. Why do you want to help us? What are you going to get out of it?" The organizers' attitudes reflected a weariness of the common phenomenon of groups creating ethnic hierarchies within racial communities to then distinguish themselves as better. The Korean organizers may have thought that Chinese Americans, as earlier immigrants, and thus "more established" Asian Americans, were out to take advantage of them. Or the Korean organizers may have internalized the widespread view in America that the Chinese are untrustworthy.

As a Korean American, I used my ethnicity and language skills, as well as working class background, to gain access to the Korean organizers as an audience. After an hour of explaining in Korean the goals of the Youth Leadership Project and AALDEF, one particular organization wished to immediately work with AALDEF in other endeavors as well. I was neither more convincing nor more eloquent than my supervisor. However, I was a Korean American like them, came from a similar class background as they did, and I spoke to them in the language most comfortable to them. I was an insider.

Although the interracial tensions between different Asian American communities are different from the interracial tensions between African American, Latino and Asian groups, the issues of trust, language and cultural sensitivity, and insider/outsider access are similar. The Youth Leadership Project can be envisioned as a project that would eventually involve a coalition between all victims of racial profiling. Individuals who are accepted as insiders of a particular racial or class group can help bridge the racial divides that have long posed impediments to cross-racial organizing.

There are numerous issues which Asian Americans face, and which AALDEF addresses, that could be used as the starting point for multiracial coalitions with other race-based advocacy groups. There is an urgent need for projects dedicated to cross-racial and cross-cultural coalition building, for a space where the political race project can begin to take roots as a long-term coalition that is forged across not only race, but across neighborhood, work and class lines as well. Such coalitions should begin by bringing existing race- and class-based community groups together to build cross-racial projects around common issues.

Only then does the white-collar person of color committed to social change begin to factor in. These professionals are often in a position to provide the funding and the work that community organizations need. Numerous bilingual second-generation immigrants, like me, have enjoyed the benefits of an elite education and are about to enter the professional workforce. Many of my peers will be young professional African Americans. Many of us are from working-class backgrounds and have both the class and cultural sensitivities that make it easier for us to be perceived as “insiders” to certain communities.

There is a sizeable population of white-collar people of color who can offer needed manpower to help bridge racial and class divides. Those who are willing should work with community organizations in multiracial, coalition-building projects as the project contact person for a particular community group. In a sense, they could be the liaison between the community organizer and the community group (as I was between AALDEF and the Korean youth group), playing a temporary role as facilitator while the community group makes the necessary connections with, and gains trust in, the organizers. Instead of only working *for* the disadvantaged minorities (in the form of pro bono work *for* individual cases, for example), white-collar people of color can thus work *with* those folks by becoming an integral part of coalition building.

## QUESTIONS FROM THE AUDIENCE

Q: Good morning. I'm an assistant council at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), and I just wanted to cite an example of a coalition effort that LDF is involved in and that I think is fairly successful. LDF, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF), the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF), the Community Service Society of New York, the DuBois Bunche Center for Public Policy at Medgar Evers College/City University of New York, the Center for Law and Social Justice, and numerous other individuals and local organizations are involved in the New York Voting Rights Consortium.

What I think is really significant about this consortium is that it's based on political participation and voting rights. It's based on advancing those rights on behalf of minority communities. The reason that it's unique and such a success is because those are areas where it is known that minority communities are often seen as combatants, as fighting over small slices of the pie. But what we've done to try to get out of that typical paradigm is to agree to disagree on certain efforts, to recognize that we are still going to represent our individual constituencies, but on the issues on which we can come together and on which we can present a united front, we will. And we think that we are able to gain so much more by doing that.

We covered the last primary and general elections in New York by doing various phone banks. We all have strong ties with our respective communities, and we come together with more than a century of experience in the area of voter rights and redistricting, but we think we are able to accomplish so much more by pooling our resources both on the funding front and in terms of intellectual capacity by working together on these issues.

So I do think there are models out there that can be used and followed. That's not to say that you don't face inherent struggles, but I think all too often we try to solve every single problem in these consortiums where if we just limit the number of issues we are trying to come together on, and we push forth on that limited agenda, we can achieve a lot.

Q: Hi. I am a publisher of a magazine called Residents' Journal, which is written by public housing residents in Chicago. Our readership is 80% African American women with young children and their incomes are extremely low. One-third survive on an income of \$5000 a year or less; another third live off an income of between \$5000 and \$10,000 a year; and another 15% or so live off an income between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a year.

I make that point because I'd like to refer to Harold Washington's election. Harold Washington initially did not want to run for mayor of Chicago. He had to be convinced by the community to do so and to eventually run his successful campaign. Harold Washington cited the moment that he went into the Robert



Taylor Homes and spoke to the residents there as the moment he felt he needed to run for mayor. That was the moment that he felt convinced that there was a purpose to his very difficult campaign and the very difficult political process of becoming mayor. He knew there was going to be a fight, he knew that he was going to have to fight the entrenched interests, and he knew that it was going to be a fight that could take his life—a lot of people think it did take his life in the end.

I say this to emphasize that as we talk about building a mass multiracial movement, we need to remember that it's those folks who have the most to gain from this kind of movement, and it's those folks that should be the leaders of this kind of movement. It's very easy for folks like myself and many of the people here who have good educations and a lot of privileges to think that we should be the ones who are in charge, but I want to emphasize that it is folks like the public housing residents who will bring the fresh ideas and the fresh strategies and policies which are necessary to make a movement for change successful. (Applause.)

Q: I'm a student at the Wagner School of Public Service at N.Y.U. The U.S. Constitution creates a political system, a plurality system, winner-takes-all, that favors big interests. George Washington wasn't particularly fond of political parties and it turns out today, there are only two parties. Major interests undermine the fight for social justice and political participation of people who don't have as much power in society.

GERALD TORRES: The Constitution doesn't establish winner-take-all elections as the general electoral norm. The idea of winner-take-all elections and geographic districting as the way representatives are elected were systems that we created. But when you start to discuss moving away from that system, people react as though you're asking them to change something that is fundamentally engrained in our self-definition as a democracy. Well, it's not.

Right now in Austin, for instance, we have an at-large system. What the at-large system allows us to do in minority communities are things that we couldn't do if you had single-member districts because of the way the districts would have to be drawn and who would do the drawing. Texas gained enough population for two additional congressional seats recently. Virtually the entire increase in the Texas population is due to the growth of the Latino community. Nonetheless, Latinos lost two districts in the decennial redistricting. But the idea that districts and winner-take-all elections are essential to democracy could not be farther from the truth, and we need to confront that issue.

MIMI HO: I think this last question points to a concept that we all have to take into account—electoral racism. This is an example of where we have to use a race lens, because it can bring people into the argument who wouldn't

normally care about the really boring and confusing things around electoral forum and campaign finance. For example, instead of talking about the electoral college system as the morass of stuff that it is, we should be talking about it as something that disenfranchises the Black vote. The electoral system was set up to give power to slave-owning states back in the day. Almost half of African Americans currently living in the U.S. live in the South. In this last election, their votes were nullified by the electoral system. We need to frame things as electoral racism not just as electoral reform because otherwise, it's not going to pull people in. That's where this book is really important in putting out there that we have to lead with a race lens to get our folks involved.

Q: Good Morning. I'm with the Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF). I just wanted to dovetail [the woman from NAACP's] comment about a multiracial, multiethnic coalition around voting rights. We struggle toward that and it's very effective, but the question is: Do multiracial coalitions like the consortium get the media attention, the funding, the support they need to sustain the work that they do? I would argue that as we struggle to come to consensus and make sure that the coalition represents all our interests, some other organization which is not multiracial, which is not even made up of people of color, is advocating on the issues that affect us. And those people are saying, "The people of color, they're just all messed up. Let's just do it for them." There's this constant battle of the white knight in shining armor coming to save people of color. As we struggle toward the creation of a multiracial coalition, why are they the ones that are getting the attention? They are the ones being focused on, they are the ones getting the funding.

My other comment relates to identity politics and identity politics organizing versus interest organizing and the interest that we have as progressives. I'm going to use the redistricting example from a case we filed around Sunset Park, which is a mixed Asian and Latino district—mostly Latino, with a small plurality of Asian Americans. When AALDEF joined with the Puerto Rican LDF to defend the constitutionality of that district against right-wingers coming in from another part of the country, Asian Americans argued that our interests as immigrants were very well represented by a Latina in office who's much better on issues of immigration, language access, poverty, education and health care. The question is: How do we look to our communities who still are based in identity politics-organizing and move the focus to interest issues where we may have very similar interests and similar concerns? Let's figure out how we get those represented.

The last thing I want to comment on is the role of community lawyering. I appreciate that the panel is looking at organizing and the work that needs to be done, but as we are in a law school, what is the work lawyers can do to complement and further amplify the work that community organizers do? My bias is that we need more organizers, not lawyers, and some lawyers should do

more organizing, but could y'all comment on what that means. What is a method of exploring that relationship so that it's not in competition but so that we have complimentary strategies?

ERIC TANG: I can try to respond to the first question. I think you raise a really important point about the media attention or the kind of representation that we have around building multiracial coalitions. I hear a lot in funders' meetings about how certain communities of color don't come together. And it might be true on one level, but I think it's also a really tired and not so rigorous analysis that they're doing. I want to confirm the fact that multiracial coalitions do exist. But you're right, it never gets covered.

I think the question is: Who are we asking to cover it? The *New York Times*? The *Washington Post*? Or do we turn the question on ourselves in terms of how we engage in the politics of culture, how we want to represent multiracial coalitions. It's not just about the meeting, the document, the issue platform. It's also about representation and how we bring that out on the community level. And I don't think we do enough of that to really create a presence.

So there's a couple of things I want to say. Some of us watched Mike Bloomberg play a race campaign, but he did this with the media; it wasn't really about votes. We were chillin' in some barber shop up by Fordham, just watching our favorite telenovelas—you know you all do that on any given afternoon during lunch (laughter)—and he comes on Channel 47. "Me llamo Mike Bloomberg. I want to be your mayor." (Laughter.) Everyone just dropped everything and was like, "Woah, this guy is speaking Spanish," and that was representation. These guys, they're undocumented Dominicanos, they can't vote, but it meant something to them, and it was powerful. I realized at that point that we're too invested sometimes in the issue area coalition. We don't look at the broader political and cultural representation that all this is ensconced in, and we lose, and we wonder why the *New York Times* didn't cover it. That's point A.

Point B is that there's a question of solidarity that is missing from some of this discussion. Even the worst media picks up on solidarity that isn't just about issue areas. Can we as Black/Latino/Asian-Pacific American communities pick up on issues that we're not really involved with? Can a Boricua community say, "We're not undocumented, we're a colony of the U.S. but, hey, we're down with amnesty for undocumented immigrants," and then put that out there in full force? That's the difference between multiracial coalitions thirty years ago and today: Chicano workers with U.F.W. doing a strike not based on wages and healthcare and hours, but against the U.S. invasion of Vietnam. *That's* solidarity and that gets media attention because it represents something different. Not zero-sum political gains, but solidarity which goes a long way in building a movement.

That's something that's missing. Unless we can represent that in our politics, why would we want the *New York Times* to cover just a coalition

meeting between Blacks, Latinos and Asians? It's not very sexy. It's not very exciting. We need to do more in terms of representation and solidarity if we want the kind of multiracial politics that we're all talking about. (Applause.)

J. PHILLIP THOMPSON: During the last mayoral election in New York, we saw a multiracial solidarity coalition come together around the candidacy of Fernando Ferrer and the media did not depict it as such. Ferrer historically was more of a centrist candidate and after the last census, a lot of folks who were thinking about the campaign realized that New York City is 65% Black, Latin and Asian. For Ferrer, it was a liberating thing because he certainly realized that he didn't have to swallow his values in order to try and get conservative or moderate white voters in order to win. The numbers suggested that Ferrer could win with 15% of white Democratic voters, part of the white left. So he decided that he was really going to run this campaign on issues of class, of poor people. And the vast majority of poor people in New York are Latino or Black, but they're not all Latino or Black.

On the other hand, Mark Green, who historically has been on the left, more or less, moved to the right. He campaigned with Bill Bratton, who was Giuliani's police commissioner who set up these squads that strip-searched 50,000 people on misdemeanors like traffic violations, for example. Not a progressive.

Ferrer said we're two cities: one rich, one not rich. Mark Green said that's a divisive slogan. Ferrer said if we're going to rebuild New York, let's rebuild the Bronx; let's not just talk about rebuilding Wall Street near the Trade Center. Green opposed that. White progressives at *The Nation* magazine supported Mark Green, who was running against the program that *The Nation* and white progressives put in place historically. Ferrer was running on their program. But the media, all three major dailies, endorsed Green. It seemed as though a Puerto Rican couldn't possibly lead a multiracial coalition. If it was headed by a Puerto Rican, it had to be a race thing, it had to be narrow. It couldn't be substantive. And that's how it was covered in the press.

However, for those who were in the campaign, it was a very exciting moment. Even though he lost in the primary—barely and even that's contestable—the spirit coming out of the campaign was and is very positive because, for the first time in decades, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, African Americans, others, some unions—white unions—came together around issues of common concern in a strong sense of solidarity, even much more so than during the Dinkins campaign ten years ago. That's a very positive thing. It wasn't treated as such by the media. But that goes back to the comments earlier that the media isn't really capable of covering the kinds of politics that this book is advocating and that we're talking about here.

MARSHALL GANZ\* (MODERATOR): We're going to need to conclude this session, so please pose your questions briefly, and then we'll go through the panelists and give them each a chance to respond.

Q: I'm a first-year law student here at N.Y.U. My question is related to the international dimension and how that affects the type of multiracial, multiethnic politics and coalition-building you're talking about. It seems that there's a lot of transformative potential if you're looking at things such as Pan-Africanism or the United Nations Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. But on the other hand, there are complications and troubling situations, whether it's the campaigns against terrorism or the financial trade and aid dimensions. I was wondering what role you see for these international issues in multiethnic, multiracial politics.

Q: I'm a professor at Rutgers-Newark Law School. My question is along the divide and conquer line, whether perhaps there is yet another tactic that is on the horizon to divide our communities and prevent us from launching effective coalitions: the seductive quality of colorblindness for communities of color themselves; the idea that to be raceless is a more ideal status. As a brief example, I would point to the great media attention that was placed on the census decision to allow multiple box-checking to the race question. The coverage of it implied that this decision would move us away from a race-focused society to one where individuals can be so much freer and not limited to one box, not limited by race. For me, that's a very Latin American paradigm, but I was wondering the extent to which the panelists also perceive that as another fractionating mechanism.

Q: I'm also from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. For our panelists who are students and wanted us to think about the obstacles and the potential for multicultural organizing on college campuses, on law school campuses, I want to provide the example of an organization called the United Law Students of Color Counsel at the University of Pennsylvania Law School

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\* Marshall Ganz grew up in Bakersfield, California, and entered Harvard College in fall 1960. He left before graduating to volunteer in the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project. He became a SNCC field secretary and, in the fall of 1965, joined Cesar Chavez to help organize the United Farm Workers union. During his sixteen years there, he learned union, community, issue and political organizing, became Organizing Director, and then served as a national officer for eight years. Convinced techniques alone could not bring people back into the electoral process and to deepen his intellectual understanding of this challenge, in 1991 he returned to Harvard College after a twenty-eight year leave of absence, completed undergraduate work in history and government, graduating *magna cum laude* in June 1992. He continued his studies at the Kennedy School, where he was awarded an MPA in June 1993. Since 1994 he has taught organizing at the Kennedy School and in the Sociology Department at Harvard where earned his Ph.D. in 2000. He researches leadership, organization, and strategy in social movements and civic associations and their role in American public life. He is a lecturer in Public Policy at the Kennedy School.

and the struggles that organization has gone through to really forge a multiracial coalition, the obstacles that it faced. Many Black students who traditionally enjoyed power in plurality were not willing to give that up in order to forge their multiracial coalition.

Q: Hello. I'm from LAMBDA Legal Defense and Education Fund. I'm working with the marriage project, and all the lawyers at headquarters are white men and women, and the two lawyers I work with directly are white men. There's always this talk of people of color outreach, people of color outreach, we need people to know about the marriage project and the fight for the right of same-sex couples to marry. It's placed in my hands as the woman of color in the team to figure out how to do that outreach. Someone mentioned that whole "white knight in shining armor" thing and I just wanted to get some advice from people about how we can do this work as a predominately white organization without having the white knight in shining armor thing, without being paternalistic. How can we really collaborate with other organizations of color in fighting for these issues?

PROFESSOR GANZ: Thank you. We're going to give everybody a minute or so here to respond to all these questions, wrap up all thoughts.

PROFESSOR THOMPSON: I want to go back to the public housing question. I think that a lot of this talk is pipe dreams unless we can figure out where to get the resources to organize with folks like Public Housing Residence. There are great opportunities to do that. HUD is trying to sell off a lot of these buildings. In Chicago, they evicted people out of Cabrini Green, razed it, and sold the building to a developer. In New York, we're trying to organize residents to stop that and say, "Transfer ownership of this land to us, we will develop it." Then the residents will gain the rewards and use that for organizing a movement. There are models of how to do this in different movements.

Marshall Ganz writes about how involvement in different movements increases your strategic leadership capacity, and that's what we need. We only have one real model for how to organize and empower ourselves through the market: unions. There are other models. And lawyers can be very helpful in building a movement by using their skills to help people figure out how to construct those models.

PROFESSOR TORRES: All of the questions are so rich, I'm not going to address them now, because they all require considerable responses. For community lawyering, I would refer you again to the book *Louder Than Words*,<sup>12</sup> which the Advancement Project and Rockefeller Foundation published,

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12. PENDA D. HAIR, *LOUDER THAN WORDS: LAWYERS, COMMUNITIES, AND THE STRUGGLE*

because it gives you examples of community lawyering. But I think what Phil says is exactly right. One of the challenges that we face is the chance to break out of the models that imprison our imagination, and I hope that is one of the challenges we have placed in the book. Your training as a lawyer allows you to bring a set of skills to a problem; you should bring your politics from someplace else.

MR. TANG: I want to respond to the question about community lawyering and the role of the community lawyer. Obviously, the fact is that there's legislation out there and precedent set, and the way the courts decide, the way that impact litigation works impacts people's lives individually. Community lawyers can't lose sight of that. However, whatever kind of policies and rights people get out of changed precedents, out of progressive decisions, can't be implemented fully unless the community is educated on what those rights are. I believe that any kind of community lawyering can't be done without community organizing, community education, and impact litigation.

There are attorneys who are here today to get CLE credits, there are lots of students too. Most of the law students at N.Y.U. go into private law; they're going to be corporate lawyers and make a lot of money. A lot of these people are actually committed to social change and are race conscious, but for whatever reason, they've decided to choose a career in corporate law. Coming here to talk is not going to solve the problem of funding that Professor Thompson talked about. Responding to the organizations that call up for your help—and they do all the time—that's what is needed. AALDEF calls volunteers all the time to come do exit polling; many of them back out. Many of them are lawyers who say they care about the cause. That's why they reach out to AALDEF to begin with. Give money, donate time. It's great that people come to these things to talk and discuss and think about these issues, but unless you actually help out those who are down there doing all the work all the time—a lot of which we reap the benefits of—it's all just talk.

MS. HO: I want to underscore a point that Eric made about solidarity. The book expresses that we have to lead with race, but also make sure we integrate issues around class, gender, and sexual orientation. Professors Guinier and Torres stress that we see it as self-interest, but also take that leap of faith to make that first move for solidarity. The organizing work that happens on the ground is the tedious, non-glamorous stuff that actually helps build the movement. All of us, no matter what sector we're in, need to really keep an eye on the organizing and get people involved. We need to speak in a way that lets people be involved and understand what the heck we're talking about. We have to provide concrete things for people to do. Thanks.

PROFESSOR THOMPSON: I want to emphasize that there are groups doing multiracial work. Harlem Environmental Action Network: Harlem Fights Back makes it to Chinatown on almost a weekly basis to picket with Chinatown workers. West Harlem Environmental Action is trying to build a multiracial coalition nationally around environmental issues. Malcolm X Grassroots Movement in Bedford-Stuyvesant—they're an elite force involved in a lot of the multiracial coalitions in New York City. It's those politics that I think are going to really build a movement.

I want to answer the question around international politics. These very same groups were part of delegations that went to Durban, South Africa. Why? Not because they had the time or even the resources, but because they understood that at the base of their politics is this question of solidarity. That's exactly what we learned when we got there in August. We learned, "Yeah, you can have your agenda, and we see your pamphlets and your platform, but sit down and listen. We're going to talk about this issue. We're going to talk about the Palestinians, we're going to talk about the Sikhs, and you're going to put your agenda aside for a moment, just for a moment, and you're going to listen." The South Africans were brilliant in teaching us that twelve years before, when there was the second race conference, the vanguard issue was South African apartheid. So they didn't mind giving up the platform to the Palestinian anti-apartheid movement. When people asked, "Isn't this going to take away from reparations? Isn't this going to take away from this and that?" They said, "No, there needs to be a vanguard issue. We need to be in solidarity because that's what the racial justice movement is about."

That's the lesson that we learn internationally, and it's only the people from the United States, unfortunately, who kept asking these questions: "But if you promote this issue, won't that issue get eclipsed?" It was really only us. The Brazilians weren't doing it, the South Africans weren't doing it; we were doing it. I feel in some ways we're doing it here.

PROFESSOR GANZ: Cornel West said that if religion requires a leap of faith, politics requires a leap of hope. I want to thank our panelists for ending with that leap of hope. (Applause.)