

Welcome to the fourth issue of VISIONS, a newsletter for the Asian American community at Brown University. For those of you who are new to Brown, we would like to take a moment to say hello and offer a few words about what we hope this newsletter can accomplish. Although the VISIONS staff and contributors are all affiliated in some ways to Brown University, we are a diverse group. In our diversity, we reflect the different communities that now make up Asian America as a whole. We hope this newsletter will serve as a forum to offer visions of what that diversity means, what it can become. We hope that some of you will also join us as contributors. We encourage feedback: responses to articles, ideas for future topics, and so forth. Finally, we hope that this newsletter, in its own modest way, can help all of us gain clarity: to see each other, to see ourselves – to offer Visions for Asian America.

Kisa Takesue

Acting Associate Dean of Student Life
and the Visions Staff

Ideals and Community: Activism through Art

by *Wei Fang, '98*

When I reflect on the current confusion of my mid twenties, what comforts me most is the thought that the basic ideals that I came to Brown with and developed at Brown are still in tact.

In the fall of '94, I arrived on campus with a few meaningful experiences in the arts and in teaching under my belt. These experiences led me to pursue concentrations with both the Visual Arts and Education departments. I MPC-ed my sophomore year, a rich experience that enveloped me in the folds of campus and third world activism, and which helped me explore the connection between the arts, education and social change. After Brown, I continued to explore this connection privately through my own art-making, and publicly in academia, as a graduate student at Harvard's Graduate School of Education.

Well, academia turned out to be a little too disconnected for me and, after years in New England, I was ready to go home. So, I returned to the West Coast and landed in a seemingly ideal job as a museum educator at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, where I still work. But before long, I realized the working world is not all it's cut out to be. While I was learning a good deal and happy to be as involved with arts education as I was, a critical piece was missing from my work. So, like any good Brown graduate, I looked for volunteer opportunities that would help fulfill this need.

Through my work in the Bay Area arts community, I got to know Nancy Hom, the Executive Director of Kearny Street Workshop (KSW), a small, local non-profit whose mission is to produce and present art that enriches and empowers Asian Pacific-American communities. KSW has been around for almost thirty years and serves artists of all generations. Nancy pulled me into the mix of KSW-Next, the younger, emerging artists arm of KSW. And, after one very collegiate meeting (crowded room, junk food on the table, late at night), I had unwittingly become the point-person of the visual arts curatorial committee for APAture, KSW's annual showcase of young and emerging APA artists.

APAture is one of the nation's largest gatherings of young APA artists. It is an annual festival, taking place in late September, that presents the work of literary, film/video, performing, and visual artists on the most welcoming terms. It consists of a gallery show, film and video screenings, community panel discussions, performances, zine tables, and many, many volunteers from the community. Participating artists include those with MFAs, those who work at their craft full time, as well as those who pursue their art in the after-hours of the workday. The artists are pulled through an open-call for submission and are chosen by curatorial committees in each major category.

The experience of producing APAture brought me full-circle, back to some of the basic reasons I got involved with arts education. Through APAture, I reconnected with my local APA community in a

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envisioning and building a stronger asian american community

VISIONS Staff

Making a Difference Off the Hill

by Karen Wei, '04 and Alison Lee, '02

Looking for something socially minded and service oriented in the APA community to do away from Brown's campus? Here are some organizations doing work with APA communities in Rhode Island. They would all love to hear from you.

South East Asian Mentoring Program (SEAM)

A Swearer Center Program
25 George Street, Providence
Email: Susan_P_Wong@Brown.edu
Stephen_Chen@Brown.edu

SEAM works with the Socio-Economic Development Center for South East Asians to develop academic skills in Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese youth. Teams of Brown students work at Bridgeham and Bishop Middle Schools, providing individual and group tutoring, and weekly workshops focused on issues such as identity, racism, and community building.

Genesis Center

620 Potters Avenue, Providence
Phone: 401.781.6110 (Sandra Shean)

The Genesis Center is an ESOL school assisting South East Asian, Latino and Eastern European refugee and immigrant adult learners. Genesis also provides day care for the children of its students – many of whom are new to the U.S. ESOL tutors, child care

assistants, and computer tutors are needed daily, especially in the morning, during the school year. Volunteers are also needed to assist with special events in the areas of public relations, marketing, word processing and writing.

Indo-Chinese Advocacy Program

791 Potters Avenue, Providence
Phone: 941.1248

The Indo-Chinese Advocacy Program is a Big Brother/Big Sister program for South-east Asian volunteers. Volunteers are paired up with children of the same nationality to develop a safe and nurturing relationship with them. Volunteers must be over 18 and must be of Indo-Chinese descent.

CREDE Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence

<http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/Reports/3.2doc1.html>

The project addresses the role of Community-Based Organization (CBO)-School Relationships in enhancing Southeast Asian

student achievement. It targets the academic achievement of Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong and Vietnamese students in Rhode Island schools.

CTWO (Center for Third World Organizing)

<http://www.ctwo.org>

The Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO, pronounced "C-2") is a racial justice organization dedicated to building a social justice movement led by people of color. CTWO is a 20-year-old training and resource center that promotes and sustains direct action organizing in communities of color in the United States. CTWO's programs include training of new and experienced organizers, including the well-known Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program (MAAP); establishing model multi-racial community organizations; and building an active network of organizations and activists of color to achieve racial justice in its fullest dimensions.

South Asian Women's Collective

By Tara Ramchandani, '04

I have a vivid memory of a meeting in the informal lounge of the TWC last spring. Gathered there, on couches, chairs, the floor, 20-30 women of color, the energy that filled the room was charged. What I keep going back to from that evening is something one of the women said: "I identify primarily as a woman of color, not solely as a woman and not solely as a person of color, I cannot separate the two." I have mulled this thought over in my head, dissected it, embraced it, cast it away, yet I cannot separate it from myself. But there is something else that I remember from that meeting – South Asian Women did not make up a representative portion of that group.

As South Asian women we are taught to be the bearers of culture: we are responsible for our husbands, sons, fathers. There is often no denying that we are South Asian. Yet it is very infrequent that we stop to talk, listen, cry, and laugh together as women, to acknowledge that perhaps our experience is a different one, that being a woman is inextricably linked to the color of our skin and that we cannot isolate the two. In recent years there has been a flooding of media images of

South Asian women, mehndi is seen everywhere, South Asian prints and bindis as symbols of beauty. Our existence is portrayed to be exotic and otherworldly, yet the South Asian women I know struggle just as all women do.

The goal of the South Asian Women's Collective (SAWC) this year is to create a safe space where we can begin to form a community. SAWC is an environment where conversations can begin, barriers can be broken down, and where we can be comfortable in our own skin while continuing to push our boundaries. SAWC is still in its beginning stages this year, which leaves us with the opportunity to define and redefine. Divides form easily, and this campus is no exception. SAWC provides us with a means of creating a web between upper-class women and under-class women, South Asian women and other communities of women (and men) here at Brown, as well as linking ourselves to the world outside. Perhaps through SAWC we can begin to step outside of our boxes without the fear of losing ourselves.

SAWC has yet to set a regular schedule; but if you're interested in more information, don't hesitate to contact them at Tara_Ramchandi@brown.edu

THIS MUST NOT BE: South Asians Targeted after Terror Attacks

by *Rushabh Modi, '04*

Evil has attacked America – twice. The first attack Americans know all too well. The second attack, however, is an internal one – Americans versus Americans. Caught in a tragic case of mistaken identity, South Asians of the Sikh faith, with their distinctive turbans, have been prime targets for hurting and angry Americans believing them to be would-be Islamic extremists and terrorists. These “towel heads,” as they are so often distastefully called, have been ostracized, harassed, and even killed because of their dark skin color.

According to Amnesty International, 200 separate acts of violence against Sikhs have already occurred. Recent polls conducted by CNN, the Washington Post and other news organizations indicate a strong percentage of Americans – anywhere from 32% to 57% – favor profiling Arabs and South Asians. A Sikh man in Arizona was killed with his murderer simply because he supposedly looked like a terrorist.

These facts prove the age-old aphorism:
the first casualty of war is truth.
These facts are a shame on America.
These facts must change.

The reasons are obvious enough why these attitudes should not be perpetuated, but in case they aren't, let me sum them briefly: we cannot become the evil and hatred we seek to defeat. If this does happen, then the terrorists will have truly won and we will give legitimacy to Osama Bin Laden's claim that America is indeed waging a war against Muslims, Arabs and all “Middle-Easterners.”

This must not be because it makes no sense. We did not start assailing young white males after Timothy McVeigh killed over a 100 people in Oklahoma City. We do not now suspect all middle age mothers of acting like Melinda Yates and drowning their children. To do so would be neither rational nor just. We as Americans are better than that. So why does the scenario change when someone with a darker skin color and a funny name is put in the same position?

Here on campus, a specific security meeting was convened for communities of color, including, among other organizations, the South Asian Students' Association (SASA) and the Brown Muslim Students' Association (BMSA). The purpose of the meeting was to specifically address the recent rise in the persecution and harassment against those whose skin shines a bit darker.

The fact that this meeting was even necessary indicates how we have already heaped tragedy upon more tragedy. Irrespective of the attacks on the 11th, people ought not be attacked because of their skin color. I was under the impression that we as a country were learning that lesson given our troubling history with slavery and racism. Perhaps not. We seemed to have forgotten that the immorality of ethnic profiling and prejudice and hate is not race-specific.

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time out with jennet: One Perspective on the Khmer Community on the South Side

by *Alison Lee, '02*

Jennet Sambour, '03, is a second generation Khmer (kuh-mai) American whose parents immigrated to the United States via refugee camps in Thailand. She speaks as a member of the Providence Khmer community, but not as a representative of the entire community.

Q: There is a sizable Khmer population in Providence. What's the history behind the community?

A: In the 1980's, a good number of Khmer families settled in south Providence. Many other families followed as their friends and extended families joined them. Also, during the late eighties, the Khmer community in Lowell, Massachusetts was experiencing a period of violence – so there was a mass migration towards Providence. The Catholic Church also sponsored a lot of people to come to Providence from the refugee camps in Thailand and the Philippines. One of the principal and largest Thai refugee camps for Khmers is Khao-I-Dang, and a lot of families currently living in Providence came from this camp. There are still new families immigrating to Providence, as we speak.

Q: In your opinion, how well received is the Khmer community within the larger Providence community?

A: I would say that that on the whole, the Khmer community is more or less ignored by the greater Providence community. But while the outside community might not be that accepting or welcoming of the Khmer community, most of the Khmer community is more or less open to people from outside. If someone [not Khmer] showed interest in our community, they would probably be welcomed. And the community is definitely open to all Khmers from other communities.

Q: Are there any current community concerns or issues that you know of?

A: There are some ongoing issues that are always topics of discussion, like harnessing the welfare system better (for those that don't necessarily understand how it works) and curbing the police harassment that is prevalent in the community with young Khmer males.

Q: Is there anything that you want people to know about the Providence Khmer community?

A: A couple of things. First, I just want people to know that the Providence Khmer community is out there and growing. People should get off the hill and see what's going on outside of Brown in the surrounding community that we live in. And also, a lot of people are unaware that the Cambodian community uses Khmer to refer to themselves (it's the official language, but it is also used as a name for the people of Cambodia) instead of Cambodian because Cambodian is very English-centric. Cambodia is the English pronunciation of the French word for Cambodia (Cambodge). Not many people know that Cambodian and Khmer are used interchangeably, but that Khmer is what the people prefer.

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If we do want answers to this attack and the subsequent harassment of South Asians and Muslims, we need only focus our sights back to the past. It is hard to ignore the historical overtones that color this event. The numerous comparisons to the attack of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent internment of Japanese-Americans have many members of the South Asian and East Asian communities concerned that the events of over forty years ago might return from a dark past to re-haunt them in some form or another.

Have we not learned from the past? It should be evident enough that interning Japanese-Americans – and not German Americans mind you – was simple hatred and inhumanity exposed. Now the spectre of that evil is looming on the horizon again. The obligation on all of us is to take the lessons of history and secure freedom and simple dignity for *everyone*. Indo Americans, while having roots to their home country and different cultures, are nevertheless *American*. We're all Americans here. We all have crumbled edifices of pain-filled hearts. Now is not the time for in fighting. Understanding this fact more than flag waving will demonstrate true patriotism.

Asian American History Month 2001

New Ideas, New Direction

by Kobei Ishihara, '02

This year's Asian American History Month (AAHM) promises to unfold and expose a truly exquisite look at the many spheres, angles, and lines that define Asian America. Veena Villivalam, '02, this year's Asian American History Month Coordinator, envisions this History Month not the result of one coordinator pulling together randomly proposed events, but rather that this History Month ultimately be a community process of discovering and (re)educating ourselves about our history and culture. Through workshops on the history of Asian America, meetings with Professors, and strenuous conversations, a large diverse committee has fleshed out an exciting month of events. Topics will include cultural and food fairs, parallels in Anti-Asian and Anti-Arab sentiment, the Dalit Solidarity Movement in India, spirituality, class divisions, explorations of our cultural identities, Southeast Asian refugees, detention centers, fashion shows, third world labor, globalization, the model minority myth, Exoticism, Chinese Character Tattoo booths, the art of fortune telling, and immigration. The theme of the month is the common experience of Asians in the United States which has historically centered around State processes of immigration, but spring outward into the diverse realms of upper-class life, police brutality, Ivy League education, detention centers, cultural exclusion, working-class consciousness, and ethnic pride.

Keep your eyes out for the AAHM calendar of events coming soon. For the first time, **Southeast Asian Week** is coming to Brown during the third week of November!!

We strive to make Asian American History Month an educational opportunity for ALL Asian Americans and the larger Brown community. Please feel free to inquire about events or learn how you can help us out. Contact us at AAHM2001@brown.edu

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Art and Activism

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way that best utilized my interests and experiences. I formed alliances with and found support in other young APAs who were also interested in the junctions between the arts and social change. (Not surprisingly, there were a couple other Brown alums affiliated with APature, namely Sam Chanse '99, who also helped curate the show, and Gigi Oltavro-Hormillosa '98, a featured performer last year, and probably others who have yet to reveal themselves).

As draining as it was, I enjoyed the community activism in which I participated at Brown. It complemented my academic learning and was an important forum for me to develop a greater understanding of ideals in which I fundamentally believed. It also made me acutely aware of the richness of my community, and provided me with a concrete means of contributing to my community. For these same reasons, I continue to do this work in my post-Brown life. Balancing my community involvement with other responsibilities and commitments isn't any easier than it was to balance campus activism with a full load of classes. However, I have to say that the work *does* become increasingly more enriching and challenging.

For more information about the Kearny Street Workshop or APature, visit www.kearnystreet.org

For information about the education department of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and internships with the museums, please visit www.famsf.org