

Welcome to the fifth 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 it means, what it can become. We hope that some of you will also join us contributors. We encourage feedback: response 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

## What do you know about Asian Americans and Affirmative Action?

by Iris Chung, '05

The University of Michigan continued their fight for affirmative action in their admissions processes before the Sixth Court of Appeals on December 6 in Cincinnati. Considering the amount of financial support that the University and more than 80 foundations have invested, the outcome of this case is likely to have major implications on the way in which American institutions regard the issue of race. According to *Civil Rights* journalist Celeste Berry, it could be months before a ruling comes before the appeals court, but regardless of the outcome, it is probable that the case will be appealed again to the Supreme Court.

Typically stereotyped as a "model minority," Asian America has been used as a way to discredit affirmative action and its necessity. According to the Asian-Nation organization, the media also claims that Asian Americans should serve as an example for other racial or ethnic minority groups to follow in overcoming obstacles to achieve the American dream. Popular media like *Newsweek* and *60 Minutes* point out how well Asian Americans are doing in society and marvel at their "ability to overlook past experiences of prejudice and discrimination without resorting to political or violent confrontation" (Asian-Nation Organization). It is even argued that Asian Americans no longer experience any discrimination and thus no longer need public services such as bilingual education and welfare. Many statistics show, however, that Asian Americans are still targets of racial inequality and institutional discrimination. The model minority image is very much a myth, only serving to ignite antagonism between Asian Americans and other people of color in the way it regards Asian Americans as superior. It is a way for America to downplay the still thriving presence of racism in society.

It is crucial to remember that not all Asian Americans are the same. The popular view that all Asians are successful is debunked by comparing the distinct disparities in socioeconomic and educational levels within the numerous groups that racially identify as Asian American. According to a UCLA School of Urban Planning study, Pacific Islanders and South East Asians have poverty rates three times higher than those of Caucasians. Other studies show that Filipino enrollment in higher education is much closer to those of African-Americans and Latinos than the enrollment of other Asians. For every Chinese American or South Asian who obtains a college degree, the same number of Southeast Asians struggle in adapting to life in America. For example, Vietnamese Americans only have a college degree attainment rate of 16%, about one-fourth the rate for other Asian American ethnic groups. In addition, while many Korean immigrants arrive with high levels of education, many still struggle to secure well-paying jobs, due to language-barriers – thus, the only way in which many Korean small business owners make their small profit is by working 20 hours per day with no paid employees. And despite the real successes Asian Americans have achieved, Asian Americans are still significantly underrepresented in political and corporate leadership positions, locally as well as nationally.

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# Asian American Alumni Community beyond Brown

by Runa Hatti, '02

Thinking beyond Brown is a difficult task for many of us. Thinking beyond 9am class is hard enough. But hopefully at some point all of us will be leaving College Hill, and who better to guide us through that process than those who have passed through before us? With that in mind, Melody Chartier with Alumni Relations, Peggy Chang with the Venture Consortium and Dean Kisa Takesue with the Office of Student Life organized a retreat to include Asian American alumni, students, faculty, staff and administrators in a discussion as to whether the need and desire for an Asian American Alumni Council was present within the Brown Community. From February 8-9, 2002 this group of about forty people gathered and discussed the role of alumni both

on and off campus, the ways in which both students and alumni could benefit from a stronger relationship between the two, and the qualities that they would like to see embedded in such a council. The overwhelming feeling at the end of this retreat was that there is definite interest in establishing an Asian American Alumni Council in some form as a base of support for alumni, students, and as a resource for the university in general.

As a senior watching Commencement rapidly approach, it was an incredible experience to interact with these individuals who have truly taken Brown with them in the paths they have chosen, both personally and career-wise. It is easy to feel that the concept of a Brown community is one that exists only within the Van Wickel Gates. I would be lying if I were to say that this hasn't

caused me some anxiety. Participating in this retreat reinforced the extent to which the enthusiastic, innovative and motivated spirit with which we are encouraged to approach life here on campus does not end with Commencement. I know that I face many issues both on and off campus that relate directly to the fact that to some extent I identify as Asian American. Regardless however, of to what extent we may or may not claim "Asian America", I left the retreat comforted and convinced that Asian American alumni, faculty, staff and administrators are an incredible resource and system of support to us as students. In this dynamic community are empathy, concern and commitment; this group is one of which we can all take advantage without hesitation. Definitely keep your eyes open in the future for more information regarding the formation of this Council!

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## TO EACH THEIR OWN:

### *Reflecting Asian America in Written Art*

by Cynthia Der, '04

As an Asian American and, sometimes late at night, when I feel worthy of the title, a writer, I find myself wondering what possibilities are held within my words. I write because at times words can be cathartic, because finding a metaphor can be a secret pleasure. At times, simply the pursuit of beauty is enough.

At that point, the poem is entirely mine. Until someone else reads it, and then the poem becomes less a piece of me and more of an idea that someone can hold in his hands. Once the piece is read, how much is still mine? The sentiment behind the piece will always be clear to me, but is left for interpretation by the reader. It is at this point that the definition of the words "Asian American writer" comes into question.

If I write about my Chinese heritage or draw on cultural events to tell a story, does that make my piece "Asian American"? If my poem incorporates dragons or bound feet or double happinesses or any other motif traditionally seen as exotic and Asian, does that make me an Asian American writer? What if my poem uses the idea of jazz music as a catalyst for waking? Then, if the poem were "read blind" by someone who did not know my ethnic background, how would the reader know it was "Asian American"? Is it the reader's ignorance or awareness that shapes the parameters of the piece, or is it the writer's personal approach towards identity and writing that determines the fundamental nature of the piece?

On the definition of ethnically-backed works, playwright David Henry Hwang writes, "Those of us who identify our work as 'Asian American' are, in effect, inviting members of the community to judge whether or not our vision reflects their *own* experience." Those who identify as Asian American invite their peers to look for common experiences and ideas. Without these commonalities, would bonds between people ever be formed as easily? Writing is categorized as being "Asian American" or "African American" and others because it is easier for the reader to get into a piece if there are certain expected cultural norms.

I believe that it is the writer who determines the nature of his work, just as it is each of us that determines our identity. I was raised by Chinese parents and I hold a lot of pride in my cultural heritage – yet as my time here at Brown continues, my friends keep telling me that I'm "the least Asian" they know. I don't spend a lot of time with all-Asian groups; I don't really participate in campus-wide Asian activities. But if you ask me how I identify myself, I would answer, "As a Chinese American." When I write, I write from my own perspective, a point of view that undoubtedly has been shaped by my heritage. Poetry is always molded by personal experiences. A writer puts forth some words, and the world is free to interpret as it will, according to its own perspectives. The truth will always live in the piece and the poet- and that is the enduring essence.

## APA Summer Intership Opportunities

by Alison Lee, '02

With summer fast approaching, some of us may find ourselves still without something to do. Taking up action with Asian American issues interest you? Here's a good place to start looking...

### LEAP: Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics, Inc.

Internship with the Leadership in Action program, which is designed to develop emerging leaders with practical leadership skills and the opportunity to gain hands-on experience working in APA community organizations. Located in Southern California.

Specifics: 8-week program, \$2000 stipend, deadline: March 15, 2002  
Contacts: 213 485 1422 or [www.leap.org](http://www.leap.org) for an application

### Organization of Chinese Americans Internship Program

The internship seeks to cultivate leadership among APA youth. Learn firsthand about issues and policy that affect APAs, visit Congressional offices, meet with Representatives and other Federal officials. The four main placements are: the OCA National Office, Federal agencies, Capitol Hill and Asian Avenue.

Specifics: 10-week internship, \$2000 stipend, deadline: March 25, 2002

Contacts: 202 223 5500 or [www.oceanatl.org](http://www.oceanatl.org)

### Evelyn Dubrow/UNITE! Fellowship at APALA

Internship in Washington D.C. with the opportunity to work closely with community and labor leaders on important immigration, labor and civil rights issues with the Asian Pacific American Alliance (APALA).

Specifics: 10-week program, \$3000 stipend, deadline: April 30, 2002

Contacts: Jin Sook Lee at 202 842 1263 or [apala@apala.org](mailto:apala@apala.org) or [www.apala.org](http://www.apala.org)

### The White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Summer Internships

The group coordinates the efforts of federal agencies and members of the President's Advisory Commission to improve the health and well-being of underserved APAs in the United States. A wide variety of projects are available, ranging from policy development and research to public relations and event planning.

Contacts: 310 443 2492 or [www.aapi.gov](http://www.aapi.gov)

### National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium

Nonprofit organization in Washington D.C. that advocates the legal and civil rights of the APAs in the United States through public policy development, public education, advocacy and litigation. Various internship opportunities exist in at the organization in the general, legal, communications, fundraising and community outreach areas.

Specifics: Applications accepted year round

Contacts: 202 296 2300 or [www.napalc.org](http://www.napalc.org)

For an extensive listing of national APA organizations go to [www.capal.org/apanationalorgs.htm](http://www.capal.org/apanationalorgs.htm)

## INSTRUCTIONS ON THE WRAPPER

by Doreen Wang, '05

Hold them gently between your fingers  
Let them sit, comfortably, firmly  
Feel their light weight, their precarious cosmic balance  
Molding to the shape of your hand.

It may seem awkward at first, inconceivable even...

That these two smooth long sticks  
Can bury into a rounded bowl of detailed porcelain  
And emerge with an equally explicit flower bed  
Of little petals of white rice.  
The way the abundant scattering of pearly, grainy droplets hang on,  
The way they can stay snug between two slim wooden bookends  
Long enough to reverently transport into the warm open cavern of your red mouth-  
Without tiny tears spilling out, left behind, falling down like  
Large drops of sticky typhoon rain on an overheated gray summer day.

This is years of practice, patience, and experience.  
Let your hands yellow with age.

Do not poke these instruments of fate,  
Do not jab them left and right like  
An amateur Drunken Boxer  
Rather, let them maneuver softly together,  
Let them click and swish.  
Let them collide evenly into the other side of the intricately sketched  
porcelain bowl  
So the sound clangs like a little golden gong.

Let them entwine with your fingers and into your soul.  
Grow into them and your hands  
Will grow smooth like the wooden shoots they surround.  
Apply them with imperial care and delicacy,  
With the veneration and respect due to any who have come so long  
before us,  
And in the end, you will understand why  
We love the hard bitter taste of bamboo and wood  
Nestled against the feel of soft white rice at night.

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### South Asian Students Association's Political Action Week Coming Soon

by Kaizar Campwala, '02

On April 12-13, SASA will host its annual PAW - Political Action Workshop Conference. Friday night is a Keynote followed by a Chai House. Saturday features forums examining everything from the "suspect" position of South Asians in America after 9-11 to questions of what it means to be an activist on a college campus.

This conference is open to everyone. Details will be posted at [www.brownsasa.org](http://www.brownsasa.org)

## APAs and Affirmative Action

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While it is commonly believed that affirmative action is detrimental to Asian Americans, Asian Americans benefit in many ways by using services provided by programs including the Educational Opportunity Program and Upward Bound. Affirmative action can only help, not victimize, Asian Americans. Ultimately, we must realize our future is dependent on how equal opportunities are provided for citizens of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The resolution to end affirmative action in university admissions has the potential to increase shortsightedness among Asian Americans.

While Asian American support for affirmative action is certainly not collective, it is growing. A call for affirmative action from Asian Americans extends beyond a narrow ethnic interest and reflects greater vision of a truly democratic and representative society including people of all backgrounds. It is this multi-cultural vision that encourages amity between communities of color, and rising optimism for the future.

### *Chinese American Intercollegiate Conference (CAIC) Coming to Brown!*

*by Alison Lee, '02*

From March 8-9, Brown University will be hosting the Chinese American Intercollegiate Conference. CAIC was founded in 1998 by a group of students from Harvard University to fill a void in the Chinese American college community.

The mission of the conference is to serve as a forum to educate the greater Chinese community of our past and present struggles, to redefine the role of our community, challenging our commitment to each other, the entire Asian community and beyond, and to incite an immediate mobilization for unity in political and social progress. This year's keynote speaker, Eric Tang, will speak on Saturday. In addition, CAIC will consist of several workshops led by a varied range of professionals, activists and artists. The workshops will be in the areas of Inter/Intra Racial Relations, Chinese Americans and Social Justice, as well as Arts and Pop Culture.

Registration for CAIC is now open. Visit [www.caic2002.org](http://www.caic2002.org) for more information. This is not an opportunity to be missed!

interested in contributing? suggestions? comments?  
please contact [kisa\\_takesue@brown.edu](mailto:kisa_takesue@brown.edu), 401 863 3145

## VISIONS

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VISIONS is a publication  
sponsored by the office of  
student life

## Come Talk about Asian Americans and Affirmative Action

Activist, writer, and law professor Frank H. Wu will discuss his new book, *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*, which explores current debates about discrimination, immigration, diversity, globalization, and the mixed-race movement.

### **Beyond Black and White: Civil Rights in the New Millennium**

Saturday, March 9, 2002, 4:00 p.m.  
Starr Auditorium, MacMillan Hall

Sponsored by AASA, CAIC, The Faculty Fellow and the Office of Student Life  
Funded by the Hewlett Foundation

Frank H. Wu is Associate Professor at Howard University School of Law. He is co-author of *Race, Rights, and Reparation: Law and the Japanese*, and *Beyond Self-Interest: Asian Pacific Americans Toward a Community of Justice*. Professor Wu received his law degree from Michigan and served as a teaching fellow at Stanford Law School in 1994-1995.

A few words with Professor Wu:

#### **Q: What is one thing that Asian Americans should know about affirmative action?**

Wu: Asian Americans benefit directly from civil rights laws, including affirmative action, and like all Americans, we also benefit indirectly from an inclusive America.

#### **Q: What are your thoughts on how Asian American communities should address ethnic and socio-economic differences?**

Wu: I argue that Asian Americans must be principled and pragmatic in forming coalitions that span different ethnicities. The same is true of class differences. If we stand up and speak out against racial discrimination and other forms of unfairness, we cannot practice it ourselves.

#### **Q: What have your experiences been like as an Asian American at a historically black university? What are some of the challenges and opportunities? What opportunities exist for coalition building on college campuses?**

Wu: I have found a home at Howard. It has welcomed me and supported my work. I also have grown professionally and personally. I teach at Howard because its mission, while focused historically on African Americans, is the advancement of civil rights and educational opportunities for all. I'd like to contribute my part to this crucial cause, and I've been heartened by the opportunities for bridge building.