Introduction
Through “Our” Eyes: Asian/Pacific Islander American Women’s History
Shirley Hune

There is a great need for an anthology of recent scholarship on Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history that both centers women and reinterprets their lives through “our” eyes—the viewpoints of the participants themselves and the critical perspectives of scholars of women’s history. In this book, we reframe history about Asian/Pacific Islander American women by considering them as historical agents actively engaged in determining their lives and those of their families, communities, and larger entities, albeit within multiple and complex constraints. As such, Asian/Pacific Islander American Women recognizes the “simultaneity of oppression and resistance” as a “qualitative difference” in the lives of women of color.

This anthology goes beyond simply contesting male-centered or other privileged analyses of women’s lives to present new knowledge and fresh perspectives for both teaching and advancing research. Its purpose is twofold. We are concerned about the absence of curriculum materials on the history of Asian/Pacific Islander American women. Collections of literary writings, criticisms, and contemporary studies are available, but anthologies devoted to historical studies are woefully lacking. Furthermore, much of the new research on Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history remains inaccessible to the classroom, being scattered in monographs, book chapters, journal articles, and unpublished dissertations. This book can serve as a major text in Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s courses and as an additional resource in Asian American and Asian/Pacific American Studies, Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies, American Studies, and U.S. history courses.

We also seek to advance research and scholarship by bringing together in one volume some of the best new works in Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history. We have been excited by research that focuses on the women’s lives and viewpoints and that gives them voice. Such an approach transforms epistemology—what we know and how we know it—and how we do history. Fresh perspectives, innovative methodologies, and newfound and underutilized sources are contributing original findings and alternative interpretations about Asian/Pacific Islander American women. To better understand how this anthology both is innovative and fills a gap, I briefly assess the
current limitations and the common approaches to teaching and scholarly writing on their history to date.

The Difference That Asian/Pacific American Studies and Women's Studies Make and Their Limitations

What do we know about Asian/Pacific Islander American women in history? How do we know what we know about them? And in what ways did our knowledge about their lives, aspirations, choices, and contributions change over the last three decades of the twentieth century? Since the early 1970s, new interdisciplinary fields of study have challenged the omission, invisibility, and misrepresentation of women and of racial and ethnic minority groups in all disciplines, especially history. Asian American Studies, for example, has sought to recover and reclaim Asian Americans, and to a lesser extent Pacific Islander Americans, from the margins of history and to envision a new history of their presence, goals, and activities in the United States and other homelands. Similarly, Women's Studies has sought to transform historical knowledge and practice by centering women's viewpoints and experiences. Both fields have questioned traditional interpretations and methodologies; promoted alternative approaches, such as oral history; identified additional and often undervalued sources, including personal journals and community newspapers; and encouraged new research topics. They also have embedded their analyses in structures of power and linked historical inquiry to social change. In short, epistemological concerns have been and continue to be central issues of Asian/Pacific American Studies and Women's Studies.

The contemporary struggles to make Asian/Pacific Islander American women visible, to give them voice, and to acknowledge their role in community and nation building are an outgrowth of the establishment of Asian/Pacific American Studies and Women's Studies on U.S. campuses after 1969. Nevertheless, numerous scholars have commented on the extent to which women of color are marginalized in history (and other fields). Both Asian American Studies and Women's Studies have illuminated aspects of Asian/Pacific Islander American women's lives, yet these fields are not without their shortcomings. In Asian American Studies, race is the organizing category and the master narrative remains male-centered. Hence the historical significance of women is rendered invisible when their lives, interests, and activities are subsumed within or considered to be the same as those of men. And given the predominance of scholars in the field with Asian American interests, examination of the perspectives, voices, and history of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander American women is rare indeed.

Women's Studies, by contrast, centers women and features gender as the category of difference. But as critiques by feminist scholars of color have demonstrated, Women's Studies has yet to shift from its dominant paradigm of white leisured middle-class women's aspirations, ideologies, and experiences to one that more fully encompasses the complexity and differences that race, class, sexuality, religion, national origin, citizenship status, and other categories bring to women's everyday lives. Here, too, Asian/Pacific Islander American women are marginalized. At best their lived realities...
with their particular power relationships and intersections are hidden or homogenized within the larger category of women generally or women of color specifically.

Given the current limitations in these two fields, can a focus on Asian/Pacific Islander American women make a difference in teaching and scholarly work about their historical significance and contributions?

The Asian American Women’s Survey Course and Scholarly Production

Nancy Kim has documented the evolution of the general survey course on Asian American Women (the most common title) from 1970 to 1998. As Asian/Pacific Islander American women resisted (alongside male counterparts) their exclusion from full participation in U.S. society and demanded curriculum change and access to higher education, they argued for a course of their own. History, contemporary issues, and women’s activism are the three major areas of the course.3

Asian American women’s courses, Kim noted, are generally initiated and housed in Asian American Studies rather than in Women’s Studies. The first known women’s course was taught at the University of California at Berkeley in 1970. Today, only a few campuses regularly offer more than one course on Asian American women and gender issues related to Asian Americans; more campuses offer a single general women’s course, and often only occasionally. Nonetheless, the women’s course, Kim concludes, is a case study in transformative education. It challenges traditional offerings by legitimating a new curriculum and empowering students and faculty of color. It is also often a site for developing an Asian American feminist pedagogy whereby the traditional hierarchical teacher-centered classroom is converted into a more democratic student-centered one, and knowledge is applied “through collective processes” to serve the community and change social inequities.4

Kim found that the women’s course gained acceptance in mainstream academia over time. She identifies three phases: experimentation, 1970–1975; institutionalization, 1976–1989; and professionalization, 1990 onward. In phase 1, it was primarily graduate students and staff who taught the course, on a temporary basis. In phase 2, the course was offered on a regular basis, generally taught by full-time faculty, and gained institutional legitimacy with the support and growth of Women’s Studies. By phase 3, undergraduate students could take the women’s course as part of their general education requirement, and tenure-track faculty recruited specifically for their expertise in Ethnic Studies and Women’s Studies were training graduate students in different disciplines on women’s topics in Asian American Studies.5

The growth in research, scholarship, and curriculum materials on Asian/Pacific Islander American women parallels these phases of the women’s course. In the experimental phase, very few written materials were available for the classroom. Women college students produced booklets of reading materials by combining historical research; personal reflections; interviews with mothers, grandmothers, and noted women activists; and editorials about women’s conditions in the United States and the Third World.6 Roots and Counterpoint, two influential readers adopted in the first Asian
American Studies courses in the 1970s, featured only a few articles on women, and the volumes in no way centered women’s experiences and perspectives.7

Through the 1980s and institutionalization, the women’s course utilized ethnic-specific autobiographies, biographies, and novels to explore historical experiences and social science articles to cover contemporary issues.8 Kim identifies the publication of Making Waves in 1989 as the beginning of the professionalization of Asian American women’s studies. It was adopted as a text in most of the women’s courses in the 1990s.9

From the 1990s on, there has been an outpouring of works about Asian/Pacific Islander American women. Collectively, they are addressing the shortcomings of Asian American Studies and Women’s Studies outlined above. The range of genres, including memoirs, life stories, biographies, histories, ethnographies, literary critiques, literary works, and social science and cultural studies, reflects the interdisciplinary training of the authors. Some of the writings, often as monographs, focus on one individual or on an ethnic-specific group. Others are collections of pan-ethnic writings on an array of topics in a disciplinary or multidisciplinary reader, anthology, or special journal issue.10 In short, the scholarly production of Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s writings is vibrant, multifaceted, and multidisciplinary, but historical anthologies are hard to find. This brings us to the second aspect of the purpose of Asian/Pacific Islander American Women—to showcase new research that reframes them as active subjects of history.

**Historicizing Women**

How does this anthology fit into the larger project of reconstructing history generally and Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history specifically? How has the framework of U.S. history changed and been changed by the inclusion of Asian/Pacific Islander American women? In what ways have they been included in history, and how has a particular approach influenced what we know about them?

A number of scholars have noted the limited scholarship on Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history, and some have offered alternative proposals to address women’s absence and misrepresentation.11 It is not within the scope of this introduction to provide a full historiography here. What follows is a brief discussion of common approaches to the study of Asian/Pacific Islander American women—painted with very broad brush strokes—and some of the strengths and weaknesses of these historical frameworks. How are Asian/Pacific Islander American women constructed historically?

**Historical Frameworks12**

*Making Women Invisible.* In this long-standing historical framework, Asian/Pacific Islander American women are omitted or absent in historical writings in spite of their lived realities. A focus on men’s immigration, men’s labor, and men’s politics that fails to acknowledge women’s immigration, women’s work, and their activities and organizations, which are concomitant, are a few examples. Hence one learns very little about Asian/Pacific Islander American women in history when they are rendered invisible.
Discovering Women. A few individual women (e.g., Queen Lili‘uokalani) are identified in this framework. Limited categories of women (e.g., picture brides, garment workers) and specific aspects of their lives are also made visible. These women are frequently nameless, however. More important, in uncovering the presence of Asian/Pacific Islander American women, the dominant narrative of a male-centered history prevails. And too often the discovered women are viewed as exceptions, anomalies, or problems—in other words, “deviants” from traditionally defined womanhood.

Marginalizing Women. In this framework, the presence, roles, and contributions of Asian/Pacific Islander American women cannot be dismissed, however, their history is treated as interesting but less important. Thus women are added to the main story but confined to its margins, sometimes figuratively in sidebars and special features of textbooks. At best, their history is considered tangential to the master narrative and its concerns. Consequently, the women enter history primarily in the context of the main narrative and lack significance in their own right. Incomplete and distorted in their representation, Asian/Pacific Islander American women remain the “other.”

During the last two decades, many scholars have been engaged in moving marginalized groups to the center of their fields of study. Their efforts have been both welcomed and challenged. Some feminist scholars, for example, have argued that one cannot simply add women into the knowledge mix, stir, and hope to adequately reconstruct history (or other disciplines). They call for new approaches. We too find the conceptual framework of centering women to be complex and ask, how are Asian/Pacific Islander American women being centered in history, and through whose eyes? At least three distinct frameworks have been deployed so far.

Centering Women (but within Traditional Parameters). When Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history is moved from the margins to the center, it can still be considered through a dominant lens, such as a male lens or a white feminist lens. These lenses tend to recreate parameters of what is important and valued that continue to misrepresent Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s lives in spite of their being centered. For example, the women’s experiences as workers and in families cannot be adequately explained within male definitions of work or white middle-class women’s dichotomy of public and private domains. Nor are the social networks and activities of Asian/Pacific Islander American women in support of community building fully acknowledged and respected using this construction.

Centering Women as Objects of History. In this framework, Asian/Pacific Islander American women are viewed as historical subjects in their own right but interpreted as objects of history. They may be health care workers, community activists, or military brides, for example, but the women are seen primarily as victims or passive actors caught up in history and societal change. One learns more about their multiple oppressions and the larger social forces and power structures that subordinate women than about what women thought or how they responded. Themes of patriarchy, racism, and class exploitation are common. While a form of women’s history, this historical
framework can still silence Asian/Pacific Islander American women and ignore their perspectives and resistance. Women may be centered in history, but they remain in the background and diminished.

**Centering Women as Active Subjects of History.** Asian/Pacific Islander American women are viewed as active participants in history and agents of social change, negotiating complex structures of power. Viewing health care workers, community activists, and military brides as subjects rather than as objects produces a different history when the women’s aspirations, voices, activities, and actions are acknowledged. In this framework, women’s lives are dynamic, complicated, and multifaceted. Their contributions to family, community, and society; their social and cultural formations and activities; and the simultaneity of their subordination and resistance to multiple forms of oppression, among other aspects, are acknowledged. It can be argued that in this framework the women’s lives are conceptualized as Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history. The women are no longer simply in history; they are centered with agency and in the foreground. The chapters in this anthology support and advance this framework.

**Engendering Women.** Some work is beginning in the area of reconstructing Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history as gendered. For example, attention is given to changing gender roles and ideologies in households when women work outside the home or when men lose their privileged place in society. Such a framework is important in uncovering hidden histories of both women’s and men’s lives and for analyzing the constructions of femininity and masculinity. A limitation of this framework, however, is the lack of systematic and substantive historical evidence of Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s and men’s lived realities upon which gender analyses can be made. We view the works in this book and others as providing new evidence for examining the ways in which women’s and men’s lives and histories are gendered and how gender roles change over time and in specific situations and eras.

These historical frameworks suggest there are many ways in which Asian/Pacific Islander American women can be (mis)represented in history. Some might interpret the frameworks presented here as stages in which one moves from exclusion to fuller inclusion. We are not making that argument here. Instead we introduce these frameworks to enlist readers in considering how specific approaches to the study of history inform Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history. Most important, full inclusion without changing the paradigm of how Asian/Pacific Islander American women are included perpetuates an incomplete and distorted history of their lives.

Spatial frameworks also have entered the historical discourse, and the boundaries of women’s history are being extended. The lived realities of Asian/Pacific Islander American women are everywhere—private and public spheres; local, regional, national, and global arenas; and in between. As the goal of reconstructing history is beyond the scope of both this introduction and this book, our intention here is to suggest the challenges rather than to be comprehensive or prescriptive. In such a framework for the future,
U.S. history must be reconceptualized, engendered, and transformed; hence a new synthesis that fully integrates all histories, including Asian/Pacific Islander American women's history. And this new whole would incorporate the perspectives of its many participants in their multiple spaces; especially those whose visions and voices have been heretofore suppressed.

**The Contents of This Anthology**

This anthology adopts as its framework viewing Asian/Pacific Islander American women as historical subjects with agency and resistance, actively negotiating intricate hierarchies of power including gender, race, class, sexuality, generation, language, religion, community, nation, and the global division of labor in the United States and elsewhere. By incorporating the women's perspectives and voices and those of critical scholars, we uncover a new history of Asian/Pacific Islander American women that is more complex, nuanced, and partakes of more numerous locations—institutionally and spatially—than generally understood.

*Asian/Pacific Islander American Women* covers a broad terrain geographically and temporally, from Hawai‘i in the pre-Western contact period and Asian states prior to large-scale emigration to the Americas, to Guam, the Philippines, and the U.S. continent at the end of the twentieth century. We conceptualize and locate Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history within larger and more dimensions than previously conceived and consider how social forces and changes in their own communities impact on women’s lives as well. The spaces that Asian/Pacific Islander American women occupy, negotiate, and seek to transform are various, from the local to the global and from the cultural to the political, and always include the economic sphere. Readers will note the large extent to which many women’s lives and activities are transnational and blur private and public domains, from the ordinary and everyday to the state house.

Collectively, the authors present new findings about Asian/Pacific Islander American women, including recent immigrant and refugee groups to the United States and understudied groups. There are chapters on women from the following groups, in alphabetical order: Cambodian, Chamorro, Chinese, Filipino, Hmong, Indian, Japanese, Korean, Native Hawaiian, and Vietnamese Americans. Many works are ethnic-specific; some are pan-ethnic.

This anthology also includes a wide range of women’s experiences—as immigrants, military brides, refugees, American-born, lesbians, organizers, low-income workers, professionals, entertainers, beauty contestants, wives, mothers, teenagers, leaders, grassroots activists, and other groupings and situations. Many chapters examine women’s lives in historical eras previously neglected in Asian/Pacific American Studies. Other chapters shed new light on topics and periods considered well-covered by scholars. Still others contest existing historical interpretations of Asian/Pacific Islander American women, assess methodological approaches, and provide additional resources about the women. The authors integrate women’s experiences within broader topics such as gender, race, historiography, cultural formations, war, colonialism, transnational...
migration, globalization, social activism, resistance, and others. They also provide fresh analyses of women's everyday lives and give them historical significance.

The chapters are original, that is, previously unpublished, works prepared specifically for this anthology. There were other exciting new studies that could not be included given the limitations of space. Nor does the anthology seek to be comprehensive in the coverage of groups, eras, and topics. Other omissions were due to the unavailability at this time of new studies of women from particular ethnic groups and in specific time periods.

In the second essay of this introductory section, Gail Nomura explains the complexity of (self-)definitions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans and how these definitions have changed over time. As a general context for the chapters, she also considers how the two groups have come to be linked together, sometimes tenuously, and how we came to choose *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women* for the anthology’s title.

The greater part of *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women* consists of eight sections, each organized around a particular topic. Common themes—family, identity, work, community, gender roles, cultural production, and women's struggle for dignity and their resistance against subordination—permeate and link the sections. Parts 1 and 8 are critical overviews of historiography and bibliographic and video documentary materials on Asian/Pacific Islander American women, respectively. Parts 2 through 7 proceed somewhat chronologically. Some works could just as well appear in other sections, given their multiple themes.

**Part 1: Re-envisioning Women’s History**

Part 1 focuses on historiography. Its three chapters challenge long-standing historical and social constructions of Asian/Pacific Islander American women, namely, how the dominant “Western” and male-centered historical literature has interpreted them as “other,” whether exotic, Orientalized, or simply invisible. The authors also propose new interpretations of Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s lives, roles, and status in their communities and the larger society, based on new research that assesses their lived realities as strong and purposeful women.

Davianna McGregor contests the tourist-based imagery of Native Hawaiian women and constructs a forceful spiritual self-image that invokes female cosmic forces and “chieflly women” as genealogical ancestors to inspire modern Hawaiian women in their leadership roles. Kathleen Uno critiques the impact of Orientalism on Asian family studies, which also distorts images of Asian American women and households. Using revisionist writings, she finds Asian families less patriarchal than previously conceived and women’s status far more complex. Within the context of global capitalism and local economies, Sucheta Mazumdar reinterprets why Chinese and Indian women did not emigrate in the nineteenth century, a long-standing and perplexing question—they were needed as laborers in their homelands—and considers the effect of men’s absence on women’s sexual, social, and economic lives.
Part 2: Revisiting Immigrant Wives and Picture Brides

The dominant historical narrative of Asian American women during the late nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century focuses on their immigration to the United States as picture brides and wives, where they are often seen as adjuncts of men. Only recently have we begun to view this period through the eyes of the women themselves and of feminist scholars. By focusing on women’s agency and survival strategies—identified through new archival resources and oral history—the authors in Part 2 uncover a more complex history of immigrant Asian women in this period, albeit within the confines of gender inequity in their households, ethnic communities, and U.S. society.

Three studies, two in this section and the third in Part 3, deal with the Angel Island immigration station, but each offers something unique. Erika Lee demonstrates how the Chinese exclusion laws created additional barriers for her grandmother and other Chinese immigrant women and how women’s resiliency and strategies sought to overcome these barriers. Jennifer Gee examines Angel Island as a site of gendered gatekeeping and compares the different treatment of Chinese and Japanese immigrant women at the station according to racial, class, and gender ideologies of U.S. society. In documenting the activities and organizations of early Korean women in Hawai‘i, Lili Kim uncovers their role in community and nation building and challenges the male-centered view of community support for the Korean independence movement. Together these three chapters suggest new ways of thinking about gendered immigration patterns, policies, and community organizing. They also document the multiple ways in which women have challenged their unequal treatment and succeeded.

Part 3: Recovering Women’s History through Oral History and Journal Writing

Traditional historical methodologies, with their attention to big events and standard practices of documentation, tend to silence “ordinary” people, especially indigenous, rural, immigrant, and minority women. If “official” history is socially constructed and an interpretation, how can “ordinary” women tell their stories and have them heard and legitimated? The two chapters in Part 3 give attention to methodologies—oral history and journal writing—that can empower women by granting them a voice in the writing of Asian / Pacific Islander American women’s history. Both methodologies provide new terrain for doing research and can yield rich historical details and first-hand observations whereby women, as historical subjects, become knowledge producers. Like “traditional” approaches to doing history, these approaches are not without challenges, including the skill, encouragement, and sensitivity of mediators and facilitators.

Oral history, an innovative tool of Ethnic Studies, Women’s Studies, and contemporary social history, seeks to capture the life story or recollections of an individual
through interviews. Judy Yung contrasts the state of the practice of oral history in the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s in revealing the struggles and triumphs of Lee Puey You, who came through Angel Island, and argues for the value of a feminist consciousness and an ethnic sensibility in reclaiming women’s lives. Journal writing is another vehicle that allows the subjects themselves to interpret their lives and to specify what is significant for them. Gail Nomura identifies Filipina American journal writing as one such historical resource and outlines the process and techniques developed by Dorothy Laigo Cordova. Using the journal writings of Filipina Americans, she explores their powerful role in recovering personal and community history and examines the tool as an opportunity for ordinary women to document their daily life experiences and contribute to the historical record.

**Part 4: Contesting Cultural Formations and Practices, Constructing New “Hybrid” Lives**

Part 4 focuses on the first half of the twentieth century, an understudied period in Asian/Pacific American Studies. It also gives attention to American-born Asian and Native Hawaiian women and continues a theme of cultural and social production. The four chapters address the role of girls and women in contesting cultural formations and practices within and outside their ethnic communities to create new ones of their own. By blending ethnic and mainstream ways of being and doing, girls and women are actively engaged in flexing gendered ideologies and practices to expand their opportunities and shape new “hybrid” lives for themselves.

Judy Tzu-Chun Wu analyzes the strategies of Dr. Margaret Chung, as she negotiated the boundaries of mainstream society and the Chinese American community to become a physician and develop her practice. The chapter discusses the complications of gender, race, class, and sexuality in Chung’s career development. From an analysis of ethnic newspapers, Valerie Matsumoto uncovers a multitude of highly visible Japanese American girls’ clubs in Los Angeles during the 1920s and 1930s and considers how their activities represented a new mix of race, gender, and generational dynamics. Shirley Jennifer Lim explores how Chinese, Japanese, and Filipina American women demonstrated their belonging and cultural citizenship as ethnic Americans by accommodating and resisting constructions of beauty, such as those in beauty magazines and contests, in the highly politicized early Cold War era. Using conceptual frameworks of foreground and underground, Amy Stillman documents the contributions of Native Hawaiian women in the creation, preservation, and transmission of Hawaiian music and the hula from the nineteenth century to the present, and in some cases, from one generation to another. These chapters open up new areas of exploration about the role of Asian/Pacific Islander American women in creating, resisting, and maintaining cultural and social formations that are gendered.
Part 5: Reshaping Lives and Communities after Militarism and War

A dominant theme in Asian/Pacific American Studies is the role of U.S. involvement—colonialism, military intervention, and wars—in Asia and the Pacific Rim and the implications of militarism and warfare and their ideologies on the lives of Asian/Pacific Islander Americans. In Asian/Pacific American Studies, much attention has been given to the World War II period and Japanese American internment and camp life. Less is known about the eras that framed this period, specifically, about how Asians and Pacific Islanders were affected by U.S. empire building of the nineteenth century and U.S. interventions during the Cold War era. The gendered dimensions of militarism and war during the last half of the twentieth century are the focus of Part 5. The three chapters investigate the impact of U.S. military involvements in Korea and Southeast Asia on different aspects of Asian American women’s lives and assess women’s initiatives in reshaping their lives and communities.

The everyday lives of Korean military brides in the United States from 1950 to 1996 are considered by Ji-Yeon Yuh, as she examines the sisterhood the women form when they create social organizations to build their own community and resist their marginalization by both U.S. society and the Korean American community. Linda Võ discusses how different groups of first-generation Vietnamese American women survived and adjusted through war, the refugee experience, and resettlement in America, and how they contribute economically to the household and ethnic community, in part, by forming their own economic opportunities and niches. Sucheng Chan considers the countries where Hmong and Cambodian women and girls came from and why they are in the United States. She analyzes the severe traumas they experienced during war and revolution, the years when they were confined in refugee camps, and their resettlement in the United States, as well as their valiant efforts to rebuild themselves, their families, and communities. The bending and extending of women’s traditional gender roles and women’s resilience in the face of cultural differences and demanding, sometimes life-threatening situations, are commonalities shared by Asian American women in this part.

Part 6: Negotiating Globalization, Work, and Motherhood

The new immigration and demographic diversity of the Asian American population, from the 1960s to the present, marks a turning point in Asian American and U.S. history. Most important, the increased presence of women, their participation in the paid labor force, and the transnational character of many households are among the factors changing traditional institutions and hierarchies of power. How do Asian/Pacific Islander American women deal with the increasing complications of work and family, especially when located beyond national boundaries? The chapters in Part 6 focus on the significance of Asian American women in the post-1960s era as they are integrated into the feminization and racialization of the workforce—the new division of labor—globally and domestically.
To explain the increased emigration of Asian women, especially Filipinas, to the United States and elsewhere, Rhacel Parreñas provides a theoretical discussion of global restructuring from the 1960s to the 1990s and discusses how it has contributed to the transmigration of Asian women as a “cheap” labor source. Xiaolan Bao examines the situation of immigrant Chinese women as garment workers in New York City in the 1970s and 1980s and describes how their dual responsibilities as workers and mothers contribute to their politicization and to demands for daycare centers from their union. Charlene Tung identifies a less-known group of recent transnationals—Filipina live-in elderly caregivers—and considers the new but still gendered ways in which the women maintain family and redefine motherhood and marriage while emigrating alone and working overseas for many years. As these chapters suggest, the challenges that women face in their multiple roles in the twenty-first century continue unabated, as does globalization.

Part 7: Challenging Community and the State: Contemporary Spaces of Struggle

Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s agency and resistance are continuing themes throughout their history and in this anthology. In Asian/Pacific American Studies, some attention has been given to women’s organizing efforts as workers or on behalf of workers. This part examines the women’s activism during the latter half of the twentieth century and highlights their efforts, in different hierarchical levels and locations, to organize collectively, to make spaces for themselves, and to struggle to be heard and have their issues represented. The four chapters suggest new areas of study pertaining to the ideologies and strategies that bind or divide women’s groups and to women’s struggles within their own communities and with larger entities (the state and its officials, for example) to determine their objectives. The role of culture in the women’s lives as they articulate and advance their rights and concerns and the blurring of the personal and the political remain constant themes.

Trinity Ordona describes collaboration and conflict among Asian lesbians in San Francisco during the 1970s and 1980s, as they sought to create a community for themselves and, in the process, laid the groundwork for the Asian/Pacific queer and trans-gendered people’s movement of today. Catherine Ceniza Choy explores the rise of Filipino nursing organizations in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, the purpose of which has been to contest the objectification and exploitation of Filipina nurses by both transnational labor recruitment agencies and U.S. nursing organizations. Madhulika Khandelwal outlines the activities of a new generation of South Asian American women in the New York City area, as they exercise leadership through feminist writings and organizations that challenge stereotypes about them and their community’s representation as a “model minority.” Vivian Loyola Dames analyzes the abortion debates in the early 1990s in Guam through the worldviews of Chamorro women and considers how their worldviews, which are not homogeneous, are intertwined with their notions of being female (womanhood), which in turn is linked to the Chamorro struggle for self-determination.
Part 8: Additional Resources

Part 8 consists of two essays that identify additional resources to support teaching and scholarly work. I provide a bibliographic essay of generally accessible published works on Asian American and Pacific Islander American women as historical subjects, grouped largely by ethnic group. Nancy Kim presents an annotated bibliography of accessible video documentaries organized around topics, each of which places Asian/Pacific Islander American women at the center or is presented from their perspective and hence is seen “in her eyes.” The chapter also provides helpful commentary for using the videos in the classroom.

Finally, in answer to those who asked us why we didn’t do an anthology about gender instead of women’s history: we feel that our approach to women’s history in this anthology incorporates gender as a principal category of analysis. Therefore, this book is about gender but grounded in history. We also seek to support historical research that provides the kind of substantive and empirical evidence that is lacking in many areas upon which gender analysis is currently based. The new findings in this book reveal the complexity of women’s gendered lives. Most important, there is a need for places to document the details of women’s perspectives, voices, actions, and everyday lives, which are part of the larger historical landscape. This anthology is, first and foremost, one of those spaces.

The significance of Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s history lies in its power to transform knowledge, theory, and practice. Asian/Pacific Islander American women’s lives dismantle the notion of a monocultural American experience and a single way of being and doing. Their experiences challenge Eurocentric and male-biased worldviews, as well as universalized white middle-class women’s norms, values, and ideologies. They complicate global, national, and ethnic histories by calling attention to women’s lives as sites of intersection. Their lived realities suggest new possibilities for understanding history when everyday experiences as well as elite activities and the aspirations and accomplishments of subordinate groups—in this case, Asian American and Pacific Islander American women—are valued and incorporated in community, national, and international formations.15 We hope that this anthology encourages a dialogue for conceptualizing and doing history. It is but one small step toward envisioning a new, richer, and fuller history of women that is local, global, and in between.

Notes

I especially thank Gail Nomura for her valuable assistance and comments in preparing this essay. I also thank the authors in this book for their thoughtful suggestions.

2. The vast majority of teaching programs use the name Asian American Studies; a few call themselves Asian/Pacific American Studies. I use the terms interchangeably in this introduction.


4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.


8. See Kim, “General Survey Course,” 48–49, for additional details. It should be noted that a reader of women's topics and testimonies, *Asian and Pacific American Experiences: Women’s Perspectives*, ed. Nobuya Tsuchida (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Asian/Pacific American Learning Resource Center and General College, 1982), was available but was not identified by Kim’s survey as having been adopted in the classroom in the 1980s.


13. In a related discussion, Patricia Hills Collins considers how African American women have been treated as objects of sociological knowledge. She argues that it is not until after 1970, as Black women achieve a critical mass as sociologists, that they become subjects and agents of...


15. For more details on historical significance, see Hune, *Teaching Asian American Women's History*; and Nomura, “Significant Lives.”
Introduction

On Our Terms: Definitions and Context

Gail M. Nomura

This anthology explores the experiences, consciousness, and actions of Asian American and Pacific Islander American women from the nineteenth century to the present, examining the intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, and ethnicity in their lives. Using the voices and perspectives of the women themselves, collectively these works present a new history of Asian American and Pacific Islander American women “on our terms.”

Asian American and Pacific Islander American women are diverse groups composed of peoples of many ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures who have a history with the United States. How did the terms Asian American and Pacific Islander American come into being? And who decides?

Who Are Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans?

The term Asian American generally refers to immigrants and those born in the United States of Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, Nepalese), and Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Hmong, Lao, Cambodian, Indonesian, Thai, Malaysian, Singaporean) ancestry. Some may expand the term to include peoples of Asian descent in all the Americas and define “Asian” as including peoples from the entire geographical region of Asia.

The term Pacific Islander American refers especially to indigenous peoples of Pacific Islands with a history of U.S. colonialism: the state of Hawai‘i; the organized, unincorporated territory of Guam; the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; the unorganized and unincorporated territory of American Samoa. This term may also include the indigenous citizens of the three sovereign nations that comprise the Freely Associated States (the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau [Belau]) who currently migrate to the United States and its territories or possessions under nonimmigrant status. Also, all Pacific Islander immigrants and their descendants born in the United States are included (e.g., Tahitian, Tongan, Maori, Fijian).
It must be recognized that a tension exists between legal categories and self-identity when defining an “American.” For example, permanent residents may self-identify as American and, given issues of sovereignty and struggles for self-determination, some Pacific Islander Americans in U.S. colonized territories may not self-identify as “American.”

The complexity of “Asian American” and “Pacific Islander American” is illustrated by noting the many ethnicities included in the larger subcategories of “Asian American” (e.g., Southeast Asian American) and the many different indigenous island groups encompassed by “Pacific Islander American.” The panethnic terms often obscure distinctions within these synthetic groupings. For example, the term South Asian American is often taken to mean Indian American, the most numerous ethnic group under that designation; and even the term Indian American masks, for example, regional, religious, and language distinctions. Likewise, many take “Pacific Islander American” to mean the numerically dominant subgroup “Native Hawaiian.” Further, if one interrogates a single ethnic category, such as “Chinese American,” one finds Taiwanese American and ethnic Chinese of varying national origins and sometimes multiple national journeys. Distinct ethnicities emerge even in what seems to be an unambiguously homogeneous group, as in the case of Okinawan Americans who are usually subsumed under the generic category “Japanese American.” Moreover, the boundaries and definitions of categories are contested—as in the case of Filipino Americans, who, some argue, should be included among Pacific Islander Americans since the Philippines is located on the Pacific Rim, in what is called “island” Southeast Asia. Others argue that Filipinos are better situated with Latina/os or Hispanics due to their history of Spanish colonialism. In recent times, some Native Hawaiians have sought to move to the category of Native American and, in fact, are included in pieces of congressional legislation, such as protection of ancestral graves. Adding to the inability neatly to define stable categories of classification are the growing numbers of multiracial, multiethnic peoples who trace their ancestries in part to Asia and/or the Pacific Islands.

Generational differences further complicate relations within and between these groups. For example, some Asian Americans have histories of seven or eight generations in the United States. Particularly since immigration reform in 1965 lifted many discriminatory policies and quotas against Asians, there has been a growing number of immigrants who brought their children with them, the “1.5” generation—a new phenomenon of those who were born in Asia but came as young children to the United States and acculturated rapidly. The Fall of Saigon in 1975 prompted a sudden wave of refugees from Southeast Asia. Thus, the number of Asian-born Americans in the United States more than tripled in the decade of the 1970s and nearly doubled in the decade of the 1980s, rising from 800,000 in 1970 to 5 million in 1990 and 7.2 million in 2000.¹

With this influx of new immigrants and refugees from Asia, and enhanced by immigration policies that support family reunification, the Asian American population doubled from 1,356,638 in 1970 to 3,726,440 in 1980 and nearly doubled again in the next decade, to 7,273,662 in 1990. It also shifted from a small but predominantly American-born population to one of the fastest growing racial groups in the United States, at present largely comprising immigrants. The 2000 U.S. census counted 11,898,828 Asian Americans; 51 percent (6,119,790) were women.²
More than 874,414 Pacific Islander Americans were enumerated in the 2000 U.S. census; slightly less than 50 percent (434,733) were women. Among Pacific Islander Americans one finds generational and regional differences between the indigenous island resident and the off-island Pacific Islander living away or born and raised in the continental United States.

**Negotiating Definitions, Self-Definitions**

Racial and ethnic categories are dynamic and socially and politically constructed and negotiated. The term *Asian American* arose in the 1960s in the midst of the civil rights, anti-war, anti-imperialism, women’s, and yellow power movements. Asian American activists challenged their being designated “Oriental,” as imposed on them by the dominant society. “Orient” referred to the compass direction “east” or “the East” and meant, essentially, Asia as opposed to the West (Occident, meaning Europe). And due to a long history of “Orientalism,” the terms *Orient* and *Oriental* had an exotic, inscrutable, foreign connotation that reinforced the notion of Asians in America as perpetual foreigners despite their long history in and contribution to U.S. culture and society.4 Activists contested the Eurocentric view and hegemony that designated Asia as a compass direction east of Europe, denying the region and its peoples their own integrity, and chose instead to self-identify as Asian Americans, reasoning that “Asia” designated a more neutral regional–geographical site. “Asian” was used as an adjective to modify “American.” By the late 1970s, a hyphen that often linked the terms was increasingly dropped from use, since “Asian-American” indicated two nouns in a co-equal relationship and thus implied that a person had dual identities or loyalties as Asian and American—a two-headed monster rather than a single, integrated identity.

Asian American activists thus constructed an identity and a political consciousness among peoples with diverse ethnicities, histories, religions, languages, and places of origin. This political construction and self-definition of Asian American panethnic solidarity was based on the discourse of social justice and anti-imperialism that foregrounded the political as opposed to the difficult-to-argue cultural relationships between Asian groups in the United States. By emphasizing the common subjugated positionality of Asian ethnic groups in the United States and linkages to Third World people, Asian American activists built an Asian American panethnic movement for racial justice that countered the potential separatism evoked by the previous tendencies in Asian American communities toward Americanism on the one hand and Asian nationalist politics on the other. This panethnic label was used in the political mobilization of Asian Americans to seek an end to their unequal treatment and to address issues including educational access, political representation, and media stereotyping. The discourse of Asian American panethnicity held the differences among the members in tension rather than in overt contradiction. However, as with any coalition, tensions always threaten to pull apart this alliance.5 Asian American groups have been able to work in tandem as strategically necessary to promote panethnic alliances as well as to advance ethnic group interests.
The term Pacific Islander American has come into use only in recent years. Most Pacific Islander Americans subscribe to distinct island-based indigenous identities, for example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamoru, Tongan, or Maori, rather than to a panethnic identity. Certainly, they see little in common with Asian Americans, and they see clear sociocultural and political distinctions between different islander groups. But there appears to be a growing movement to forge a pan–Pacific Islander American ethnic identity in the United States. Debbie Hippolite Wright and Paul Spickard point to the formation of formal associations and networks by academics, professionals, and students, such as the Pacific Islander Student Association at the University of Utah, which was known as the Polynesian Club until 1995, and the first National Pacific Islanders in America Conference held in May 2000 at Brigham Young University-Hawai‘i, whose conference theme was “Who Is a Pacific Islander American?”

Paralleling the efforts of Asian American and Pacific Islander American groups to have their interests addressed, and oftentimes in response to their challenges of being ignored in the allocation of resources, the U.S. government has sought to document more accurately the status of domestic racial and ethnic minorities and to include the Asian American and Pacific Islander population. For example, in 1977 federal agencies were notified of a new statistical policy differentiating populations by racial and ethnic categories. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued its Statistical Directive 15, which officially fused Asian American and Pacific Islander American into a statistical category by directing all federal agencies to use five racial or ethnic categories for administrative and statistical reporting: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, and Hispanic. The federal government linked the two umbrella categories “Asian” and “Pacific Islander” under one label in order to make it simpler to allocate funds and categorize people in government analyses. Consequently, OMB Directive 15 institutionalized the representation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans as an aggregate group. The 1980 and 1990 censuses thus used the category “Asian and Pacific Islanders,” though subcategories were counted and disaggregated numbers by ethnic group were reported, in large part because Asian American and Pacific Islander American groups contested and forced changes in classifications and categories. In 1997, in response to discussions with Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander American leaders, the OMB decided to disaggregate “Asian and Pacific Islander” into two separate categories: “Asian” and “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.” The 2000 census used the disaggregated “Asian” (with checkoffs for Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Other Asian) and “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” (with checkoffs for Native Hawaiian, Guamanian or Chamorro, Samoan, Other Pacific Islander) categories.

During and since the 1970s, coalitions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans formed various political, social services, community, and professional organizations and caucuses with names that included Asian/Pacific American (APA), Asian and Pacific Islander (API), Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA), and so forth. These umbrella terms pooled the power of increased numbers of people sharing some common issues and collectively brought political clout, representation, and voice to their shared agenda. While efforts at inclusivity were laudable and well intentioned,
Pacific Islander Americans were often marginalized in these expanded panethnic coalitions, and Pacific Islander Americans questioned the commitment to their specific aspirations, issues, and perspectives.\textsuperscript{10}

\textit{Asian/Pacific Islander American}

In constructing a title for this anthology that reflects both groups in its content, we deployed a slash in “Asian/Pacific Islander” to indicate clearly that “Asian” as well as “Pacific Islander” modify American women, lest some readers mistakenly take “Asian” to refer to Asia rather than to the United States. The slash separates yet brings together “Asian” and “Pacific Islander” to modify “American.” While many groups use the combination Asian/Pacific American, Asian Pacific American, or Asian and Pacific American, we use Pacific Islander American rather than Pacific American explicitly to designate the indigenous island populations in distinction from nonindigenous people residing in the Pacific who may claim to be Pacific American. Further, the term \textit{islander} is important because some readers may assume “Pacific” to include Pacific Rim countries rather than point to the interior Pacific islands. The term \textit{American} qualifies “Asian/Pacific Islander” to indicate that we are dealing with the U.S. context and not Asia and Pacific Islands outside the U.S. experience.\textsuperscript{11}

By using the title \textit{Asian/Pacific Islander American Women}, we are not suggesting that Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans are a single homogeneous group. We do not seek to subsume, obliterate, or obscure their distinctiveness but to expand research and interpretative boundaries leading to new ways of understanding a multicultural history of the United States. In this book we address the diverse histories of Asian American and Pacific Islander American women and recognize the heterogeneity within and between these politically constructed, panethnic, umbrella groupings. In short, we seek to explore the many possibilities of alliances and connections through differences as well as commonalities and shared agendas, without perpetuating or reinscribing the same hierarchies and exclusions that have sometimes marred such projects. Effective coalition building constructs a shared agenda that is a work in process, constantly negotiated, debated, and requiring continuous open dialogue to explore boundaries, frontiers, and borderlands of interactions and separations.

\textit{Asian/Pacific Islander American Women} is a step toward exploring these interactions and separations and enabling readers to begin to examine and push our theoretical constructs and interpretations beyond the analyses of single ethnic groups. The selections in this anthology present new research that explores diverse aspects of Asian American and Pacific Islander American women’s history while acknowledging shared experiences as women of color in the United States. Collectively, these works reveal the agency, resistance, and resilience of Asian American and Pacific Islander American women in all their diversity and, in the process, transform our understanding of women’s history.
I thank Davianna McGregor, Amy Stillman, Rick Bonus, Stephen H. Sumida, John Rosa, Evelyn Flores, Sucheng Chan, and Shirley Hune for their helpful comments and suggestions.


6. Although Chamorro is the more common spelling, I use the spelling Chamoru, which more accurately reflects the phonetic spelling of the original language of the indigenous people of Guam. There are many political nuances and battles that belie what seems at first glance a simple orthographic issue. Who has the power to decide the spelling of a people’s language? See also Vivian Dames, chapter 22, especially note 4, in this book.


11. The dialogue over terms and (self-)definitions is also reflected in academe, including professional organizations. In 1979 the Association for Asian/Pacific American Studies (AAPAS) was established and held its first annual conference at the University of Washington on November 6–8, 1980. AAPAS changed its name in 1982 to the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) because some Pacific Islander Americans questioned the tokenized treatment of Pacific Islander American studies in the field. This is being reversed. At its annual conference in Salt Lake City in 2002 members at the business meeting passed a resolution sponsored by the Pacific Islander Caucus of the AAAS to discuss renaming the Association to “recognize the increased focus on, participation by, and commitment to Pacific Islanders in the Association.” The resolution noted the “increased attention to the issues and concerns of Pacific Islander Americans in research, publishing, and teaching under the rubric ‘Asian American Studies’ generally . . . ” The Board of the AAAS responded to the resolution by voting to send a ballot to the general membership on a constitutional amendment to change the name of the association. The proposed name change to Association for Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies would recognize a shared academic space in ethnic studies to explore the experiences of Asian Americans and Pacific Islander Americans. See Association for Asian American Studies Newsletter, 19:3 (November 2002), 2–4.