

Text: Access, Equity, and Representation in Education

By The Asian American Education Project

Access to the histories and diverse portrayals of communities of color is extremely significant and leads to greater cross-cultural understanding, greater engagement of students of color, and better self-esteem among students of color. Throughout U.S. history, communities of color have had to fight for access and representation.

Tertiary Source:

Public education in the United States has been used both as a tool for social and economic mobility and as a tool for subjugating historically marginalized groups, from segregated schools to **Eurocentric** curriculum, to exclusionary enrollment policies. Communities of color have had to fight – often working together – for equitable access to education and to see themselves represented in classrooms and beyond.

In November 1968, students at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University, or SF State) decided to take a stand against the racial conditions of their school and announced a student strike. The Black Student Union and other student groups joined together to create the **Third World** Liberation Front to improve the education the university provided them. Among their demands was a curriculum that reflected and included their own histories and experiences, a greater representation of faculty of color, and admission policies that admitted more people of color to the university.

In January 1969, students at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) followed SF State's lead: four student groups, the Afro-American Studies Union, Mexican-American Student Confederation, Native American Students United, and Asian-American Political Alliance, joined together to demand greater opportunities for students of color to learn about their own histories and culture.

Students from both campuses were in contact with one another as early as spring of 1968. The Asian American Political Alliance – the first to publicly use the term "Asian American" – hosted an issues forum on UC Berkeley's campus that was attended by over ninety people including representatives from the Black Panther Party, Chicano Movement, and San Francisco Chinatown **activists**.

Glossary:

Eurocentric: reflecting a tendency to interpret the world in terms of European and Anglo-American values and experiences

Third World: old-fashioned term used to describe developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America

Activists: people who use or support strong actions (such as protests) in support of or opposition to a controversial issue



During this meeting, each group discussed issues related to their identity and the concept of third world unity. This idea of cross-cultural and cross-racial solidarity would be pivotal to the Third World Liberation Front's success on the SF State and UC Berkeley campuses.

At SF State, the student-led strike lasted five months, becoming the longest student strike in the history of the United States. Students of color were joined by white allies and some faculty and teaching assistants to march, organize picket lines, and conduct sit-ins.

At UC Berkeley, the strike lasted two months and students of color similarly found allies in other students and university staff. Students faced police confrontation in both strikes, with some arrested and others physically harmed.

Yet, students persevered and emerged successful. At the end of the strikes in March 1969, both universities committed to creating departments of **Ethnic Studies**. Their creation inspired universities across the United States to follow their lead and develop their own Ethnic Studies departments.

At the same time, racial identity and **consciousness** among the wider Asian American community was growing as well. With the **Black Power movement** gaining strength and visibility in the 1960s, many Asian Americans took note and began to question their positionality as well. As a result, the "Yellow Power" movement emerged, inspired by the Black Power movement.

College campuses were one space in which many Asian Americans gained racial consciousness. By 1970, over seventy campus and community groups across the United States had emerged with "Asian American" in their name. The creation of the term "Asian American" itself is significant as it was a self-determined, pan-Asian identifier that replaced the derogatory term "**Oriental**" that had previously been used to describe people of Asian descent. In addition to demanding classes that were representative and inclusive of their histories, Asian Americans began creating and sharing their own content as well in the form of self-created publications, teach-ins, and study circles.

The ethnic studies movement on university campuses supported the **multicultural education** movement in K-12 public schools. Communities of color have had to fight against **segregation** and other forms of racism. Collectively, their separate battles resulted in the establishment of multicultural education.

Ethnic Studies: an interdisciplinary study of the histories, experiences, cultures, and issues of racial-ethnic groups in the U.S.

Consciousness: the quality or state of being aware of something within oneself, especially concerning a social or political cause

Black Power Movement: revolutionary movement that emphasized racial pride, economic empowerment, and creation of political and cultural institutions

Oriental: term used to describe Asians; reinforced the idea that Asians were/are forever foreign and could



James A. Banks (born 1941), a leading pioneer of multicultural education, said that, "...other groups who considered themselves on the margins of society [particularly women and people with disabilities] began to demand that the school curriculum – and later other aspects of the school – be changed."

Starting in the 1970s, there were several responses to this demand. Textbook publishers began to include more people of color, especially African Americans. Schools were founded that centered their curriculum around the histories and experiences of Black Americans. High schools began to offer elective courses in Black history and literature. Following soon after, there have been schools, programs, and courses developed to center other cultural groups as well. Today, the fight continues as multi-racial coalitions struggle to ensure that their histories and narratives are included in school curriculums.

As the Asian American consciousness expanded, Asian Americans saw more commonalities between their own experiences and those of other oppressed communities, such as Black Americans, Latinx Americans, and Native Americans. In speaking out for their own rights and fighting for the rights of others, Asian Americans have challenged the Model Minority and Perpetual Foreigner stereotypes. They have shown that they won't be used as a **racial wedge** against other communities of color.

never become
American

**Multicultural
education:**

teaching that
incorporates the
histories and
perspectives of
people from
different cultural
backgrounds

Segregation: forced
separation based
on race

Racial Wedge: the
process of splitting
up communities of
color or pitting
them against each
other

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