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Lori Kido Lopez

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# The Yellow Press: Asian American Radicalism and Conflict in *Gidra*

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Lori Kido Lopez<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This article analyzes the highly politicized Asian American newspaper *Gidra* as a way of expanding our conception of ethnic media beyond mainstream publications to include radical ethnic media. In contrast to the notion that ethnic communities might shy from exposing the internal conflicts that jeopardize their own community's stability, *Gidra* demonstrates three different kinds of conflict: external conflict, internal conflict, and conflict that is produced by the paper itself. Through this exploration, the different ways that Asian American identities were created and discussed during the late 1960s and early 1970s are also assessed, as the radical contingent of the Asian American Movement used print publications to redefine what it meant to be Asian in America.

## Keywords

ethnic media, radical media, conflict, *Gidra*, Asian American identity

The Asian immigrant population in the United States has long been served by a robust assortment of ethnic newspapers. Chinese Americans have been publishing regular periodicals such as *Chinese Monthly Magazine* since 1815 (Miller, 1987), and subsequent waves of immigration from Japan, Korea, and the Philippines have also inspired native-language publications since the early part of the 20th century. Although it is difficult to compare the circulations of ethnic newspapers because they are generally too small to be members of the Audit Bureau of Circulations, it is clear that Asian-language publications are still thriving today. In 2002, one news article describing the

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<sup>1</sup>Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California, Los Angeles

## Corresponding Author:

Lori Kido Lopez, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California,  
3502 Watt Way Los Angeles, CA 90089  
Email: [LoriL@usc.edu](mailto:LoriL@usc.edu)

Asian ethnic media in California noted that there were “seven major ethnic dailies in the state [of California], 30 Vietnamese publications in Orange County, 15 Thai-language newspapers in Los Angeles . . . and 14 Filipino media outlets in the San Francisco Bay area” (Engel, 2002, p. B04). Such publications focus on a community that is largely ignored or misrepresented in other publications, communicate through languages more familiar to their readers than English, share information about local events, and specifically focus on news about the community’s country of origin.

Among these ethnic publications, there appears to be a distinction that has not yet been investigated—radical ethnic media versus mainstream ethnic media. Radical media are defined by Downing as media “that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” (Downing, 2001, p. v) and are often associated with the radical political agendas of social movements (Atton, 2002). Although the Black radical press has been researched to some extent, little work has been done that relates these overtly political publications to their more mainstream counterparts that address the same minority population. Yet radical newspapers are clearly participating in the important work of helping to define the boundaries of ethnic communities and establishing alternative identities within ethnic populations.

With regard to the ethnic media of Asian Americans, this notion of radicality is clearly relevant. The concept of an Asian American identity was itself the product of the civil rights movement, and to identify it was to rebel against the hegemonic title of Oriental, which came from the idea that Asia was east of Europe, the center of the world (Ahmed, 1996). Until the 1960s, immigrants from Asia tended to consider themselves in terms of their specific provinces or prefectures rather than as distinctly Chinese or Japanese and certainly did not identify with the broader category of Asia (Espiritu, 1992). However, during the civil rights movement, minority groups began to organize around political issues and realized the power of their collective voices. Despite their differences, Asians were being treated as one monolithic race—the “yellow race”—and if they allied themselves, they could fight together for civil liberties, equal rights, and freedom from discrimination. Such arguments are based on the fact that race itself was rejected as a social category and was seen to only have meaning in particular social and political contexts (Omi & Winant, 1994). As Zhou and Gatewood contend, the use of the term *Asian American* “assumes a political agenda for those who subscribe to it, and panethnicity remains a political identity for instrumental purposes” (Zhou & Gatewood, 2000, p. 27). Publications that originated from this political movement carried the explicit goal of voicing a perspective that had been ignored or systemically oppressed in other media.

This article investigates the radical Asian American press as a way to expand our notions of the role and function of ethnic media within minority populations. How do radical minority newspapers fit into the paradigm of the ethnic press? Furthermore, what can we learn about the sociopolitical construction of the Asian American identity from such publications? This study begins with an exploration of the way that ethnic media have been theorized with regard to conflict and, in particular, to how those conflicts shape racial identity. These theories are then examined in the context of the

different representations of conflict found by conducting a textual analysis of the articles in the Asian America newspaper *Gidra*. The articles are analyzed within the three categories of internal conflict, external conflict, and conflict that is supported and fomented from within the newspaper. Through this exploration we will also be able to see the way that Asian American identity was created and discussed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ultimately, this article argues that radical ethnic media play an important role in helping to define minority communities and explore new identities. Furthermore, the radical contingent of the Asian American movement can be seen using print publications to altogether rewrite our notions of what it means to be Asian in America.

## **Ethnic Media and Conflict in the Formation of Identity**

Studies of mass media have shown that print media can perform different functions in terms of conflict depending on the composition of the audience. Tichenor, Donahue, and Olien (1980) find that media in pluralistic communities tend to warn the community about conflicts and threats to the local power system so that they can be addressed and resolved, while more homogenous communities—which are most often smaller and less divided in terms of language, religion, or culture—may not want to publicize their own problems. Both types of communities stand to gain from reporting on external conflict, as this can result in an increased sense of community identity and cohesion, but usually only pluralistic communities report on internal conflict, which can reflect the community negatively or disrupt the community's stability.

Viswanath and Arora (2000) argue that ethnic communities can be both pluralistic and homogeneous, which should imply that their media can fall into either category when dealing with conflict. However, in their analysis of Asian Indian community newspapers—which reflect a pluralistic community—they found that conflicts appeared when they were of interest to readers but that the newspapers paid “relatively less attention to conflict that may threaten the local community's stability” (p. 46). As Viswanath and Arora reason, the Asian Indian community may be pluralistic in terms of caste, class, language, religion, and subculture, but within the United States they form the homogeneous Asian Indian ethnic community. This makes them act more like a homogeneous group than the plurality of their group's members may otherwise imply. Viswanath and Arora ultimately argue that ethnic media are less likely to cover controversial issues, and when they do, they do so to only discuss conflicts that do not threaten the system. Hatcher (2008) also examines the coverage of conflict in ethnic media, finding that more recent immigrant groups rarely publish stories about conflict and that more established and assimilated groups publish only a small number of such stories. Since many ethnic minority media operate under the difficult conditions of serving a small market audience and also wanting to appear as palatable to mainstream media professionals as possible, most ultimately settle into a comfortably conservative position (Cottle, 2000).

This study of *Gidra*'s frequent coverage of conflict opens a space for discussing the ways that conflict helps to shape racial identities, with ethnic media providing the groundwork for this fluid and ever-changing discourse. Within *Gidra* we can clearly see the opportunity for those who have been excluded from the public sphere to develop their own viewpoints, and in doing so, manifest a group identity where there may not have been one before. This is particularly important in the formation of racial and ethnic identities, which are constantly in flux, contextualized by the time and place in which they arise (Gandy, 1998). Such identities both constitute and are constituted by the individuals and political movements who participate in defining them. Furthermore, Riggins argues that "ethnic minority mass media need to be conceptualized as part of the larger framework of social movements" (Riggins, 1992, p. 12), since they play an important role in helping their community demand change in the social order and articulate their collective goals. This examination of *Gidra* thus connects the content of the articles to the sociohistorical context of the Asian American Movement, both in the formation of Asian American identities and way that conflict is used to solidify the community's boundaries.

### *Gidra and the Asian American Movement*

The Asian American Movement is often neglected within discussions of the tumultuous 1960s and the multitude of protests and social movements that were occurring at that time, including civil rights, opposition to the war, women's liberation, Black power, and Chicano organizing. Yet Liu, Geron, and Lai (2008) argue that examining the organized activities of Asian Americans during the 1960s and 1970s through the lens of social movement theory can help to illuminate critical moments such as the "rise of Asian American pan-ethnic consciousness, the incorporation of its constituencies, the development of new organizational formations, and the causes for its ebb" (p. 6). By the 1960s, Asians in the United States had accumulated a long list of grievances due to institutionalized racism and persecution as well as critical resources such as connections to labor movements and a cohort of engaged youth who were ready to create cross-ethnic collaborations on college campuses. In engaging these grievances and resources, students and community members were able to initiate important conversations about panethnic organizing and start to take action.

Although reading the Asian American movement in concert with other social movements can help us better understand the roots of their organizing, pointing out the differences can also shed light on the uniqueness of the Asian American community. As Fujino (2008) finds, the Asian American movement is different from the Civil Rights movement in that it promoted collective leadership rather than individual leaders, emphasized the power of self-sustaining institutions rather than policy change or government reliance, and focused on local struggles and transnational linkages rather than national organizations. Although Maeda (2009) disagrees that Asian American organizing was cohesive or uniform enough to be accorded movement status, he similarly characterizes Asian American activism within a Third-World liberation activities

seeking out self-determination, rather than Civil Rights frameworks seeking integration. He also points to important collaborations between the Asian American Red Guard Party and the Black Panthers as indicative of discourses of antiimperialism and antiracism. This focus on antiimperialism can be connected to Asian American struggles against imperialism abroad and anti-Vietnam War movements. As he argues, “Articulating the racial commonality between Vietnamese people and Asian ethnics in the United States connected the prosecution of the war in Southeast Asia to the exploitation and oppression of Asians in the United States as dual effects of U.S. imperialism” (p. 99).

As one of the first Asian American radical newspapers, *Gidra* served an integral role in the formation of the Asian American movement by putting these critical debates and arguments into writing and then circulating them throughout the community. The monthly newspaper, published between 1969 and 1974, was founded by five students from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and addressed issues “from an activist, antiestablishment, youthful viewpoint” (Kitano, 1987, p. 192). Both in intention and in content, the paper can be seen to embody the political struggle that Downing marks as the trademark of radical media. Although the founding members of *Gidra*’s staff were all UCLA students, they decided to publish outside of the college using their own personal funds after UCLA denied their proposal for a community newspaper. In an early editorial, *Gidra*’s founders articulated their mission statement:

*Gidra* was created to stimulate and inspire members of the Asian American community to vocalize their feelings and thoughts. Many, perhaps Asian Americans included, have come to the conclusion that Asian Americans don’t have feelings or thoughts. But we feel that the very existence of a publication like *Gidra* belies the stereotype of the Asian American as a taciturn, unfeeling, and unresponsive individual. (“Cincip is coming—July 27!!,” 1969a; “Editorial,” 1969c)

The paper was printed regularly each month, ranging from 4 pages during the first year of publication to up to 20 pages in its last issues. Its contents included news and opinion articles, community feedback, and artistic content such as photographs, poetry, cartoons, and drawings. As *Library Journal* summarized in 1971, “*Gidra* . . . effectively voices this new consciousness among Amerasians, simultaneously uncovering a century of wrongs committed by the white majority and enunciating a determination to make the future at once different and better than the past” (*Gidra Monthly of the Asian American Community*, 1971, n.p.).

In its first year, *Gidra* had a run of around 8,000 copies, with most subscribers hailing from Los Angeles and other parts of southern California, and it is estimated that many individual copies were shared with multiple readers (Wei, 1993). Although this number may seem small in comparison to other ethnic publications, it is large for a minority publication run by a college-aged volunteer staff. Furthermore, we must remember that the notion that Asian Americans comprised a community with anything

in common at all was still being developed and solidified at this time. Although there were a number of other publications focusing on pan-Asian issues, including the *Asian American Political Alliance Newspaper* based in Berkeley, I Wor Kuen's *Getting Together* from New York's Chinatown, and *Asian Americans for Action* in New York, *Gidra* was one of the most well known and widely circulated. There were also some publications directed to specific ethnic communities, such as the Japanese American newspapers *Crossroads* and *Pacific Citizen* or the Chinese American *Wei Min*. Despite the fact that *Gidra*'s staff was also largely Japanese American, and remained relatively ethnically homogenous for all 5 years of publication, *Gidra* was among the first newspapers to definitively address a cross-cultural panethnic Asian American audience. Since the Asian American movement was largely based out of college campuses, *Gidra*'s youthful staff prioritized issues and activities of the movement to a much higher degree than any other newspaper. This unique voice and subject matter may have contributed to its success beyond the confines of the UCLA-centric, college-aged audience.

It is important to study *Gidra* for a number of reasons. First, its centrality as "the journalistic arm of the movement" (Wei, 1993, p. 103) coupled with its circulation across the entire West Coast meant that it documented and propagated a great deal of information about Asian American activism. Since the period of action in the 1960s and 1970s was particularly formative for the Asian American movement, it is important to investigate how messages were constructed and conveyed during that time so that we can have a sense of how the community was being shaped. Furthermore, we can begin to understand why such publications gained political power, contributing to the construction of multiple discursive spheres in the absence of political processes that might have recognized their community's unique voices and needs. Studies of the Black press in the United States demonstrate the important work that publications like *Gidra* can perform. As Vogel (2001) claims, "The black press redefined class, restaged race and nationhood, and reset the terms of public conversation" (p. 1). As with other radical publications, it is important to study publications like *Gidra* that are "truly grassroots in nature . . . [providing] a venue in which members of an oppressed minority group spoke with a strong and vibrant voice" (Streitmatter, 2001, pp. 229-230). If radical newspapers are participating in such meaningful discussions about their communities, they deserve a closer investigation that reaches beyond our current conception of mainstream ethnic media. Since *Gidra* falls squarely into this category of radical ethnic press, the category of Asian American radical press deserves inclusion in discussions of the American radical tradition.

Wei identifies two phases for *Gidra*—the first phase, which lasted for at least the first year, "focused on the Movement, the issue of identity, and Asian American Studies programs" (Wei, 1993, p. 107), and the second phase, which began in its second year, shifted toward "the antiwar movement, countercultural lifestyles, and international perspectives" (Wei, 1993, p. 109). The first phase began the process of developing a unique voice and arena for *Gidra*, which included creating and participating in a great deal of conflict. As is stated in the first-year anniversary edition of



*Gidra*, “It has been a hectic year of conflict and change—and of conflict without change. There have been clashes, technological and ideological, resolved and unresolved” (Bear, 1970, p. 10). Because this article is focusing on issues of conflict and identity, issues published in the first 2 years are the main focus of this textual analysis. Each issue was read from cover to cover for full immersion in the general themes and the flow of the publication as it progressed from month to month. Specific articles were then selected for closer examination so that patterns and meanings could be understood in depth.

## Shared Identity Through External Conflict

In many ways, *Gidra* can be seen to produce an Asian American community through political advocacy and response to outside threats or coverage of “external conflict.” One of the most prominent examples of an external conflict that served to shape the identity of the community was the Japanese American internment. Despite the fact that the internment occurred over two decades before *Gidra*’s first issue was published, *Gidra*’s writers tackled the issue in a significantly new way. As Spickard (2009) notes, most writing about the internment up until the 1970s took on the somewhat sanitized perspective of the War Relocation Authority and the Japanese American Citizens League and “would have us forget about the bad parts and concentrate on the theme of people acting nobly under pressure” (p. 194). But from the pages of *Gidra* and the voices of activists and academics such as Gary Okiihiro, Michi Weglyn, and the Asian American Political Alliance, we see the beginning of a new conversation about internment—one where Japanese Americans possess agency and the possibility for resistance and the painful injustice of the internment is foregrounded. Articles in *Gidra* told the story of the internment to educate readers about the consequences of failing to stand up for communities that were being unjustly targeted. One article described a family’s hardships during the war, concluding with a plea to consider democracy as something that must be upheld particularly during times of crisis, as it is “our moral duty to work against forces of repression in our daily lives” (Fujimoto, 1969, p. 8). Another article headlined, “Ask Not What Your Country Can Do For You . . .,” put a personal face on the story of internment, describing the bleak scene as a man and his family arrived at the camps (Woo, 1969). Although the article is narrative and emotionally compelling, the headline’s connection to President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address offers a critique of the larger injustice of being a prisoner in one’s own country. Other articles that referenced the internment called for new actions against the U.S. government. In “Hoover’s Yellow Peril: An Open Letter to J. Edgar Hoover,” Japanese Americans cited their experiences during World War II as reasons for their current disdain for Hoover’s remarks against Chinese Americans! (Enomoto, 1969). Although the internment initially only affected Japanese Americans, these articles shaped the experience in such a way that the entire Asian American population was drawn together in their desire to avoid future wrongs. Beyond creating a new perspective on the experiences of Japanese Americans, these



articles extend a warning to the entire Asian American community about the dangers of being perceived as an outsider by White Americans.

There were also many articles in *Gidra* that document current discrimination against Asian Americans. One of the most prominent news stories in 1969 was of the trial of Dr. Thomas T. Noguchi, who was fired from his position as coroner of Los Angeles County. He was accused of “mental instability and excessive use of pills” (Hayashi, 1970, p. 9), but Asian Americans took up the issue as race-based discrimination and supported him both emotionally and financially. Prominent members of the community from the group Japanese United in Search for Truth issued a statement with the plea: “We who share Dr. Noguchi’s ethnic background are greatly distressed about the repercussions of this case. If this can happen to a man of Japanese ancestry who had attained this high position, what effect will it have on other Japanese Americans in government service?” (“Noguchi Receives Support,” 1969, p. 2). A story about the trial appeared in every single issue of *Gidra* until it was resolved, with Noguchi being cleared and reinstated. This story is among the many examples of how *Gidra*’s writers labored to recast individual incidents within the framework of collective racial discrimination, bringing community members together to stand alongside each other and support a collective cause.

There were many other stories about the problems that the Asian American community faced more generally, such as the conditions of San Francisco’s Chinatown. The article disputed the negative treatment that Chinatown received in the *San Francisco Examiner*, confirming that the community was indeed suffering from a number of ills: Those living in the Chinatown had 3 times the death rate of tuberculosis, poorer wages, and working conditions, significantly less education, higher unemployment, more substandard housing, and higher population density than other areas of the city (Lum, 1969). Many articles on “yellow power” also describe societal problems such as the myth of Asian American success, the lack of Asian American political power, and the burden of serving as society’s “middleman” as catalysts for a united movement of Asian Americans working together for change (Uyematsu, 1969). Together these stories show some of the problems that the community is facing with the intention of bringing everyone together to support each other and combat the problems. As one columnist states, “These are only some of the problems confronting Orientals of which most are not even aware of . . . Now is the time to become involved. Let us act now!” (Wu, 1969, p. 16). Despite the differences that Asian Americans may face in specific instances, they all suffer from these same issues, and the solutions to these problems can only be found in solidarity.

## Internal Conflict Displays Divisions

In contrast to theories claiming that minority papers do not discuss internal conflict, *Gidra* consistently places conflicts between different factions of the Asian American community front and center. Even as early as the second issue we see internal conflict taking up two thirds of *Gidra*’s front page. In May 1969, side-by-side stories detail a

battle at the national Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) convention between Dr. Samuel Ichiye Hayakawa, President of San Francisco State College, and Asian American college students. In the first article, headlined “S.I. rips *Gidra*,” Hayakawa is quoted in his address to JACL members as denouncing *Gidra* as “errant nonsense” and praising the success of Chinatowns and Japanese American voters. In the second article, entitled “Pigs, Pickets & A Banana,” a student protest outside of the convention is described. An image shows four students holding signs with messages like, “Hayakawa is NOT our leader,” a clear message that Hayakawa’s Asian ancestry did not mark him as a member of their political movement. Inside the issue, an editorial from the *Gidra* staff further explains why the students are so incensed by Hayakawa’s remarks: He praised the Asian American community for its appeal to tourists and visitors, whereas the reality is that Chinatowns and *Nihonmachi*s (Japantowns) are suffering from tuberculosis, high population density, mental illness, substandard housing, and playgrounds being turned into parking lots (*Gidra* Staff, May 1969).

Maeda’s (2009) discussion of Hayakawa in *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* can help us to better understand the complexity of what was happening at this event and the way that *Gidra* wrote about it. As Maeda argues, Hayakawa was not simply opposed to the radicalism of the younger generation. Rather, in his own academic work as a semanticist, he had developed his own ideas about the roots of oppression and how society could become more equal. He believed that it was assumptions within language that gave people preconceptions about the inferiority of certain races and that, if we could recognize “fallacious patterns of thought, whites would logically and inevitably begin to eradicate racism” (p. 46). Despite the obvious problem that Japanese Americans were not being treated as equal citizens in the United States and even that his own position as college president was continually marked by racialized discourse, Hayakawa’s remained firm in his position that Asian Americans were just like any other American and they had no need to differentiate themselves by making trouble on college campuses.

We can see that the conflict in these articles represents two paradigms of thought on race—Hayakawa and the JACL represent those who believe that Asian Americans are successful and assimilated members of society, whereas *Gidra*’s writers represent those who argue that Asian Americans are oppressed and suffering. Although conservatives like Hayakawa are clearly not the targeted audience for *Gidra*—particularly given Hayakawa’s stated condemnations of the publication—since they do belong to the larger Asian American community that the publication was helping to construct, the conflict between these two factions of the community is important to investigate. Furthermore, debates between progressive and conservative Asian Americans about issues such as assimilation and social justice form the very core of the community’s identity, as compared to other ethnic communities that form around shared culture, language, or religion. The argument being made by community newspapers like *Gidra* is that these two factions are engaged in these debates because they are all members of the Asian American community and need to figure out what that means. This conflict and others begin to illustrate the diversity within the umbrella term of *Asian American*,

as well as the difficulties in creating a stable, unified identity for this group of previously disassociated individuals.

Another prominent conflict internal to the Asian American community occurred around the publishing of Bill Hosokawa's book, *Nisei: The Quiet Americans*. Tani writes in a *Gidra* article that the book's title is "slanted and stereotyped" (Tani, 1969, p. 6) and most certainly does not represent all Nisei, or second-generation Japanese Americans. Her article cites other prominent Asian Americans who have also registered complaints against the book's title and then reprints a series of letters between herself and those involved with the book. The article is another example of conflict between assimilationist or integrationist Asian Americans and those who reject such logic. In November 1969, Tani again comes out against Hosokawa's book, publishing a set of correspondences between herself and the National president of the JACL. Although other ethnic media may be afraid or hesitant to "wash their dirty laundry in the press" (Viswanath & Arora, 2000, p. 46) for fear of disrupting community stability, *Gidra* is clearly neither. The JACL represented the well-established stronghold of the community, and Tani represented the new face of activist youth striving to bring together Asian Americans as an oppositional, antiestablishment identity.

Outside of these overt conflicts that threaten to tear apart the community, there is yet another conflict ever present in the pages of *Gidra*—between Asian Americans who support the Yellow Power movement and those who do not. A cartoon drawn for the September 1969 issue clearly sums up the issue: A character labeled "The Oriental Community" is covering its eyes and using "blind faith lotion" to protect itself from the burn of a blistering sun, labeled "Awareness of Movement." The opinion of *Gidra's* staffers is eminently visible not only in this cartoon but also in the various editorials, opinions pieces, and feature articles throughout the publication. In an article on a strike at UCLA, one writer claims, "The apathy shown by the Asian American community following the May 5th strike at UCLA was a most frustrating and disappointing experience" (Yoshinaga, 1970, p. 2). But the problem goes deeper than the fact that community members do not turn out for a strike or show their support for radical action. Members of the community are further criticized for their lack of understanding and awareness and their poor conception of the movement's goals. "Yellow Power" is invoked in a number of articles that seek a call to action. Uyematsu writes in her article with the headline, "The Emergence of Yellow Power," that "Asian Americas have formed an uneasy alliance with white Americans to keep the blacks down. They close their eyes to the latent white racism toward them which has never changed" (Uyematsu, 1969, p. 8). An opinion piece in November 1969 berates even the staff of *Gidra* for not being political enough, making the accusation that after graduating from college they would give up their activism and that "the whole Asian-American history is but a struggle to get from the position of the oppressed to that of the OPPRESSOR" (Li, 1969, p. 5). These types of attacks and provocations are in clear opposition to theories suggesting that ethnic media downplay internal conflict for the sake of promoting community stability.

Beyond simply contradicting earlier research on ethnic media, these divisions and conflicts between the different segments of the Asian Americans community also help us to understand some of the different ways of looking at assimilation and its impact on identity. For the first-generation immigrants and older members of the community, many of whom experienced internment during World War II or arrived in the United States prior to the passing of the 1965 Immigrant Act, simply living in the United States and going about their daily lives was an accomplishment. To them, assimilating to U.S. society meant finally being allowed to live their lives as they pleased without anyone making a fuss. In Yoo's exploration of second-generation Japanese Americans in *Growing Up Nisei*, he documents both the effects of racism on the community and some of their responses. In terms of identity, Yoo argues that many Japanese Americans had a conflicted relationship with Whiteness, with one woman admitting that "many Nisei wished that they were white or at least envied white people because of the power and access that such status could confirm" (Yoo, 2000, p. 166). The last thing that many members of this generation want to do is call more attention to themselves; it was preferable to strive to blend in and through their good behavior, be rewarded by being treated just like everyone else.

For the younger generation of college students and activists, there is the same desire to be treated "like everyone else" and struggle to define what it means to be *American* within the context of an Asian body. As Zhou and Gatewood (2000) state, "Many second-generation Asian Americans of the 1960s and 1970s went through a period of profound confusion, feeling trapped by the ironies of being in America but not a part of it" (p. 23). However, one of the ways that this generation worked to address this confusion was directly in contrast to the methods of the older generation—they sought to articulate a sense of an Asian American consciousness. This meant admitting that they were not simply "like everyone else" but that there was something that set them apart—their ethnicity. Defining themselves around this ethnic difference and asserting what those differences meant was their own way of redefining the notion of assimilation. An additional layer to their identification as fully assimilated Americans included participating in the democratic process through actions like voting, advocating for rights that have been denied, and protesting when the system is not working as it should.

## Transracial Identity Through Produced Conflict

Another way that *Gidra* helps to foment social movement was by providing a historical investigation of Asian American activism. *Gidra*'s writers worked to combat the stereotype that Asian Americans "quietly endured the racism and oppression of American society in order to make it" by making it a policy to highlight the "long tradition of struggle, organizing, and battle to fight the exploitation and oppression Asians have encountered . . . to help recreate a sense of our history and to serve as examples of courage and exemplary action to us" (Sumi, 1970, p. 14). An important element of this impulse to document and record Asian American history could be seen

in the then-developing discipline of Asian American Studies. The process of institutionalizing Asian American Studies was long and arduous, and many pages in *Gidra* were dedicated to the various ways that students were working to advocate for such programs. Beyond the support of Asian American Studies developing on college campuses, *Gidra* staff members and editors further took it upon themselves to start their own Asian American Experimental College. The program offered free summer courses in individuals' homes on topics like Asian American social conflict, leadership and group dynamics, Chinese theatre, youth, and the movement. *Gidra* promoted the courses in numerous articles, and the contact information for the college was simply the address and phone number of "the *Gidra* House."

This struggle to give their movement a name and a discourse provided the groundwork for a third type of conflict that I would like to call "produced conflict." *Gidra* not only drew the Asian American community together through responding to external threats and displayed the community's divisions by illustrating volatile internal conflicts but also helped to instigate conflict from their own articles. In these first two kinds of conflict *Gidra* is simply describing and responding to situations in which the Asian American community is already entrenched. But there is another kind of conflict that the staff of *Gidra* attempt to grow and create on their own—conflict that models the agency and advocacy that are the foundation of the Asian American movement.

One way that articles in *Gidra* emphasize these produced conflicts through building community is by uniting across racial groups in the struggle for justice and equality. As Fujimoto states in an article on the minority group experience, "No minority community, regardless of how ghettoized or set apart, exists in isolation" (Fujimoto, 1970, p. 6). From the very first issue, articles described the actions of Asian American students who were joining up with the Third World Liberation Front to demand ethnic studies on college campuses. Asian American activists were also seen getting involved with individual issues that faced Black, Hispanic, and Native American communities. An article with the headline, "Asians Support Panthers," discussed the Asian Americans at Yale who supported Bobby Seal, National Chairman of the Black Panther Party, who was put on trial for the murder of another Panther in a move that was declared "undeniably motivated by political considerations and that [there was] some coordinated effort on the part of the federal government to suppress the activities of the Black Panther Party" (Asian American Association, 1970, p. 4). Another article in March 1970 detailed the journey that a group of Japanese Americans took to Alcatraz to show support for Native Americans in their efforts to reclaim Alcatraz as indigenous territory (Tanioka & Yamaguchi, 1970). Members of the Japanese American Citizens League felt that there was a strong relationship between their own fight to repeal The Emergency Detention Act, which had allowed for Japanese internment, and the Native American struggle to right past wrongs. Asian Americans also supported the Chicano Moratorium Committee in their antiwar demonstration in August 1970 that protested the high death rate of Chicano GIs, and *Gidra* reprinted a pamphlet that outlined the injustices against Chicanos and depicted the protest itself.

Beyond these displays of support through coverage and photographs of minority organizing that had already taken place, *Gidra* also helped to initiate and develop a number of political actions. The last page of the newspaper often contained a full-page announcement of a rally or political event that was to take place soon, inviting readers to join staff members and other members of the community in these events. In the August 1970 issue, the back page proclaimed, "Free! Soledad brothers Los Siete de la Raza. National Rally—Wednesday August 19, 12 noon—Hall of Justice, San Francisco California" and then in the next issue came the full coverage of the story of the three Black men who had unfairly been accused of murder (Soledad Committee, 1970). Other issues include full-page announcements about events like "Peace Sunday," an antiwar event at the Biltmore Bowl organized by Asian Americans for Peace, a teach-in on the Vietnam War (1971), and petitions that readers can sign for peace between Americans and Vietnamese.

## **Conclusion: A New Ethnic Culture and Identity Through Conflict**

This study is limited by the focus on a single publication; during the height of the Asian American movement there were many smaller college newspapers that articulated similarly political stances, as well as established community newspapers whose more conservative viewpoints might reveal interesting aspects of the changes that the community went through during this period. However, from the pages of *Gidra* and these three different representations of conflict we can still see that there are a multitude of ways in which radical political newspapers can affect the formation of minority consciousness and identity. For Asian Americans, *Gidra* provided an outlet for expressing the unique and unheard voices of a community that was just beginning to define itself. We see a group of individuals who are rebellious and spirited, creative and critical, open to the voices of others and ready to expand. The way that this particular ethnic publication addressed its audience contributes to an expanding understanding of ethnic media, as its writers do not shy away from any kind of conflict, and use their position within the community to influence political situations and strive for empowerment. This examination also highlights the way that exposure of internal conflict can reveal the diversity of identities and ideologies within a single group. Future studies would do well to further investigate the experiences of those who lie beyond the generally college-aged, middle-class, Japanese American perspectives of *Gidra*, despite the best intentions of the staff to be inclusive of other identities.

*Gidra*'s highly political focus is clearly related to its radical orientation. This is not simply a newspaper designed for Asian American audiences but a newspaper constructed with a purpose of relating to the Asian American movement. In many ways, *Gidra* was cultural as well, as it helped to shape the new idea of what Asian American culture might be. The idea of what kind of "culture" of Asian American might be transmitted through this publication cuts to the heart of an investigation into Asian



American identity. Is Asian American culture Asian, American, or a mix of the two? When we look to a cultural studies definition, we see culture “as a way of life—encompassing ideas, attitudes, languages, practices, institutions, and structures of power—and a whole range of cultural practices: artistic forms, texts, canons, architecture, mass-produced commodities, and so forth” (Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992, p. 5). In this sense, we see many aspects of Asian American culture within the newspaper because culture itself is produced in the publication of a newspaper. *Gidra* provided a forum for Asian Americans to create texts, which not only include opinions pieces and investigative reports but also poetry, letters, recreated conversations, fiction, and personal narrative. *Gidra* also showcased photographs and works of art, including collage, cartoons, and line drawings. With regard to the more expansive notion of ideas, attitudes, institutions, and structures of power, we also see Asian Americans working to create their own culture. Omatsu (1994) argues that Asian Americans were participating in a “cultural revolution” and that their political work was cultural as well: “By witnessing and participating in the movement, they helped to shape community consciousness . . . the transformation of poets, writers and artists into cultural workers and vision makers reflected larger changes occurring in every sector of the Asian American community” (p. 29).

The different facets of Asian American identity that emerged within *Gidra*’s pages—the community shared across ethnicity and language, the strength gained from discussing the systemic ills facing Asian Americans, the flourishing artistic community and its products that expand our notion of culture—may be simply descriptive of the community, but they are also political in many ways. As Aguilar San-Juan (1994) implores, “Reducing race to a matter of identity, rather than expanding our experience of racism into a critique of U.S. society, is detrimental to our movement” (p. 8). Within these articles we begin to understand the complexity of creating a racial identity that is both nationally bounded and transnationally minded, that is dedicated to the intricacy of local struggles but aware of their global roots, and that is formative of a group identity while remaining open to collaborating with individuals from all backgrounds. By daring to push the boundaries of Asian American media into this uncharted territory, the staff at *Gidra* are able to address these ever-shifting issues of identity through a larger conversation about institutionalized racism. In doing so, they remain true to their radical political goals of opposing the systemic discrimination against their community, finding their own collective voice, and fighting for their rights in a country where their struggles are overlooked and where they remain largely invisible.

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## Note

1. The remarks in question by Hoover include the statement that Chinese immigrants “could be susceptible to recruitment either through ethnic ties or hostage situations because of relatives in Communist China” or provide “a means to send agents into our nation.” These remarks were part of his statement before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on April 17, 1969.

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## Bio

**Lori Kido Lopez** is a doctoral candidate in communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. She studies representations of race and ethnicity in the media.