The University of California, Santa Barbara

Narratives of Assimilation for Non-White Immigrants in California, 1980s and 1990s

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I. Introduction

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) agency's mission statement once read, "USCIS secures America's promise as a nation of immigrants."[1] While "nation of immigrants" has since been dropped from a revised version of the official mission statement, this epithet is nevertheless used with pride by many Americans to this day. The historical narrative of the United States as a "melting pot" of an assimilated group of races, ethnicities, and cultures has triumphed for centuries. Assimilation into the United States melting pot is popularly associated with the act of the government Americanizing predominantly white, European ethnic groups in the early 20th century, mainly in the northeast region of the country. However, throughout history and in modern times, the state of California is recognized as one of the more diverse states, if not the most diverse, with a long history of immigration from multitudes of racial and ethnic groups. Therefore, California has been the site of assimilation processes similar to those associated with the concept of Americanization. Nonetheless, there is a disparity between the broader "melting pot" narrative of the United States and what is considered the plural society of California.

The difference might stem from how Americans have viewed different types of immigrants throughout history. Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco explains how immigration in the United States is often thought of as a comparative exercise between the "'new immigration' versus what, for lack of a better term, we might call the "mythico-historic" record. This is a record in which equal parts of fact, myth, and fantasy combine to produce a powerful cultural narrative along the following lines: poor but hard working European peasants, pulling

[1] Richard Gonzales, "America No Longer a 'Nation Of Immigrants,' USCIS Says," *NPR*, February 22, 2018.

themselves up by their bootstraps, willingly gave up their counterproductive old-world views, values, and languages—if not their accents!—to become prosperous, proud, and loyal Americans."[2] If the endurance of the cultural melting pot narrative relies on the romanticized view of working class white European immigrants successfully assimilating to American life in the northeast, how do more recent, mainly non-European immigrants in California compare? After all, while nearly 90 percent of immigrants before 1950 were either European or Canadian, the most recent wave is made up of 50 percent Latin American immigrants and 27 percent Asian immigrants.[3]

This thesis seeks to answer several questions regarding the assimilation of immigrants in California. Firstly, what factors determine the successful integration of immigrants into a society, i.e. language, mannerisms, and appearance? And for that matter—who defines what successful means? How do assimilation processes take place within different racial groups, and how are these groups compared to each other? How has state and federal immigration policy interacted with these processes over time? Overall, how does the narrative of assimilation in California differ from that of the traditional melting pot in America?

A. Scope

The scope of this project examines only a short time period of a long history of immigration in California, and furthermore, only profiles a select few out of numerous groups of immigrants significant to the history of the state, in an attempt to answer the questions laid out.

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[2] Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco, "Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Assimilation but Were Afraid to Ask," *Daedalus* 129, no. 4 Fall (2000) 7.
[3] Suárez-Orozco, 1.

The first chapter of this thesis examines Asian immigrants and Asian Americans in 1980s Southern California, mainly featuring the voices of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans from a controversial 1983 *TIME Magazine* issue and a public hearing in Los Angeles in the same year. The second chapter examines Proposition 187 for its impact on Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in the 1990s, and covers a brief history of Mexican immigration history in California. Both chapters profile immigration in its fourth wave, popularly cited as beginning in 1965 and continuing today, although sources differ.[4] Immigration in California can be divided into a wave model with four distinct influxes of immigrants: the first wave of immigrants who arrived immediately after the founding of the U.S.; the second wave of immigrants in the mid-19th century; the third wave between 1880 and 1924 (the year that the Immigration Act that introduced quotas for each race immigrating to the U.S.); and the fourth wave beginning in 1965 after the quota system was lifted, and continuing through today.[5] Although this thesis will focus on one short time period, at appropriate times it is important to consider the longer history of the racial groups that are the focus of this project.

It would be impossible to profile every significant group of immigrants in California's history within the limits of this thesis. However, the groups selected to be the focus of this thesis will hopefully cover a variety of experiences, since the history of Mexican, Japanese, Korean and Chinese immigrants in California varies so much across groups. For example, while by the 1980s Korean, Japanese, and Chinese immigrants and Americans could all be classified as "Asian Americans," their individual histories vary. In fact, this term was not even used until the civil

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[4] For the purposes of this thesis, I will be using this wave model.
[5] William A.V. Clark, *The California Cauldron: Immigration and the Fortunes of Local Communities* (New York: The Guilford Press,1998) 18-19.

rights movements of the 1960s. Mexican immigrants and Americans also have a differentiated history, as California today was once part of Mexico. The Mexican Cession in 1848 left an entire population of Mexicans in California, whose racialization by American institutions would impact Mexican immigrant narratives for years to come.

Furthermore, the goal of this thesis is not to generalize the experience of all immigrants in California, or all immigrants of every group discussed. Rather, the argument examines popular narratives surrounding the assimilation of these groups, from both inside and outside perspectives.

B. Historiography

Immigration history is a field overflowing with a variety of literature. Monographs and case studies, examinations of policy, assimilation theory, economic impact reports and more all examine the issue of immigration from different perspectives. As it stands, immigration history has mainly been portrayed through monographs, focusing on one specific ethnic group in one small area, in this case usually one city or region of California, or focusing on one ethnic group's history in the entire state. Historian John Bodnar described immigration history as a field that "had been dominated by ethnic boundaries and immigrant community studies."[6] Although this thesis seeks to compare multiple groups who had different experiences assimilating throughout California, monographs are not in this case a "boundary," and in fact very useful in creating an understanding.

[6] John Bodnar, "'The Transplanted': International Dimensions: Response'" *Social Science History*, 12, No. 3 (1988) 265.

Natalia Molina's *How Race is Made in America* is a monograph detailing Mexican immigration history from 1924 to 1965. It predominantly focused on how Mexicans were racialized in a way that deemed them "inassimilable" to American culture by the United States government and the public over time.[7] In *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America,* Eiichiro Azuma gave a comprehensive overview of Japanese immigrants of the Issei generation, not just in California but in the entire United States. Azuma paid particular attention to an overarching theme of how the Issei forged two identities, both national and regional, a concept called transnationalism.[8] Within monographs such as Molina's and Azuma's, there are instances of comparison with other immigrant groups, so it is not true to say that that literature does not exist. This thesis seeks to contribute to those comparisons within the context of cultural assimilation in the United States, and how different racial groups were assigned different narratives by outside forces, but also shared similar experiences and faced similar discrimination.

Since California holds a reputation of diversity and that of being generally welcoming to immigrants, there is a subset of literature dedicated solely to the state's immigration history. William A.V. Clark wrote *The California Cauldron*: *Immigration and the Fortunes of Local Communities* under the pretense of this reputation, focusing on the impact of pluralism on the social fabric in the years to come after its publication. In *California Cauldron*, Clark discussed the idea of assimilation versus separation. According to immigration scholarship, emphasizing multiculturalism over assimilation and the melting pot would, potentially negatively, impact

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[7] Natalia Molina, *How Race is Made in America: Immigration, Citizenship, and the Historical Power of Racial Scripts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014) 96.
[8] Eiichiro Azuma, *Between Two Empires: Race, History, and Transnationalism in Japanese America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 188.

Californian society, specifically its social fabric and shared culture.[9] Furthermore, the book discusses the experience of immigrants in California, their reasons for immigrating, their economic impact, immigration policy, and the myriad of terms associated with and contained under the umbrella of assimilation, which will be discussed later in the terminology section of this thesis.

Additionally, policies such as the Immigration Act (1924), the Hart-Cellar Immigration Act (1965), the Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986), and Proposition 187 (1994) are agents in the assimilation process and have been examined thoroughly by academia for their impact on immigration and their reflection of contemporary attitudes regarding the issue. Many works dive deep into the language, intentions, and impacts of immigration policy and how these issues are often tied to the economy. This thesis will utilize arguments presented about Proposition 187 as it relates to assimilation expectations and institutional barriers for Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.

Another important genre of literature that exists in this field is the study of assimilation, in theory and in practice with actual immigrants throughout history. A 1943 report from the Community Analysis Section of the War Relocation Authority about the assimilation of the Nisei generation of Japanese Americans defines the term as "the acquisition of the culture traits of a particular society by people of foreign origin or parentage."[10] Documents like these revealed the expectations Americans have for immigrants as they are incorporated into society, and what factors determine them as successfully integrated into that society, or even able to do so in the

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[9] Clark, T*he California Cauldron: Immigration and the Fortunes of Local Communities,* 138.
[10] War Relocation Authority Community Analysis Section, "Community Analysis Report No. 6: Nisei Assimilation," July 21, 1943, 2.

first place. The WRA report listed material culture and manners, language, religion, ideals and ambitions as "evidences of assimilation."[11]

As mentioned earlier, in *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Assimilation but Were Afraid to Ask* Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozco outlines another school of thought of what assimilation actually entails, and how different racial groups throughout time periods will have this ideal inflicted upon them unequally. Scholarship on assimilation theory is important for this thesis because the meaning of assimilation, its plausibility, the factors that lead to its achievement, and the necessity of it at all, is not universally agreed upon.

C. Terminology and Theory

Assimilation is not as easily defined as the War Relocation Authority made it seem in 1943. Not only that, there are a plethora of pseudo-synonyms and associated phrases that fall under the umbrella term of assimilation. These terms, however, are not all equal; most come loaded with connotations that reflect attitudes in regards to immigrants and the cultures they bring to the United States. The use of these contrasting terms will be discussed in both chapters. Furthermore, the term assimilation is not generally used to describe the situation of modern immigrants. When many think of assimilation, they are imagining cultural assimilation (also commonly known as acculturation), or "the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble a dominant group or assume the values, behaviors, and beliefs of another group."[12]

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Charles Spielberger, *Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology*, (New York: Academic Press, 2004) 615.

However, what it means to "truly" assimilate has been continuously argued and is a main focus of this thesis.

Related Terms

As opposed to the melting pot, other terms might more adequately describe the cultural makeup of California. For example, pluralism imagines a society that emphasizes the separate identities of immigrants living together within it.[13] Many consider California in all of its diversity today to be a "plural" society. Similar to this are terms like multiculturalism or multiethnicism. However, the concept of pluralism can also lead to a multitude of bad connotations from other related terms. Terms such as downward acculturation, separatism, and Balkanization appear when the negative outlooks of modern immigration and assimilation processes are discussed. These terms mostly refer to what could happen (or has already happened, some argue) if assimilation does not take place. Downward acculturation was defined as a new approach to assimilation, in which instead of conforming to the melting pot, immigrants instead chose to start emphasizing their differences and distinctiveness in a way that could bring them economic success, an important factor in integrating into American life.[14] Other terms such as Balkanization and separatism are more extreme, implying that without a unified culture that immigrants must assimilate into, the social fabric can become fragmented.[15]

Multiculturalism and transnationalism are terms associated with what happens instead of total cultural assimilation, usually without the negative connotation. These terms harken back to

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[13] Clark, T*he California Cauldron: Immigration and the Fortunes of Local Communities*, 10.
[14] Clark, T*he California Cauldron: Immigration and the Fortunes of Local Communities,* 142.
[15] Ibid.

the concept of pluralism and envision societies where there does not have to be one unified culture every member is mandatorily assimilated to, but rather a variety of them that can coexist. Transnationalism, as discussed in Azuma's *Between Two Empires,* is when immigrants hold onto their past country's culture while still adapting to the ways of the new one, in this case the American culture. This idea also feeds into the plural society of multiple cultures. For the purposes of this thesis, inassimiliability and unassimilability can be used interchangeably. Inassimilability is used more frequently, but unassimilability is used in quotes throughout the first chapter, in order to honor primary sources that use this term.

Generational Approach

Some have argued that assimilation is a slow process that takes place over generations. The "three-generation phenomenon" takes place as such: the first generation learns English and adjusts to the labor market, the second generation learns English as their first language, achieves a higher level of education and socializes with both cultures, while the third generation further improves their education and economic position and fully socializes into the American culture, becoming "Americanized."[16] The idea of a generational model is that while each generation improves their position for the next one, they are simultaneously becoming further integrated into the culture. This shows how both economic success and education is viewed as a medium of assimilation and is emphasized just as much as cultural and language adaptations.

Measures of Assimilation

[16] Kevin F. McCarthy and Georges Vernez, *Immigration in a Changing Economy* (RAND: Santa Monica, 1997), 79-80.

Throughout several arguments of assimilation, many factors remain constant as measurements, or "evidence." Usually somewhere near the top of the list is learning the new culture's language, in this case English, because it leads to more opportunities in education and the workforce—other measures—that cause upward mobility. The WRA report stated that "direct evidence of the prevalence of English usage among the Nisei is seen in the fact that most Japanese language dailies in the United States had added an English language page in an effort to reach the Nisei (who were inaccessible through Japanese) by 1932."[17] Just as factors like language proficiency can be seen as commitment to assimilating, failure to achieve them can be seen as resistance, or downward acculturation.

D. Argument

Synthesizing arguments about the inflammatory June 13, 1983 issue of *TIME Magazine* and its portrayal of Asian Americans and Asian immigrants, with those about Proposition 187 and its implications for Mexican Americans and immigrants, this thesis's argument contains two main components. First, assimilation rhetoric contains several words and phrases that contain both negative (separatism, Balkanization, multiethnicism) and positive connotations (integration, acculturation, melting pot), which is in turn used by both people within and without of the assimilation processes. The same language of assimilation can be deployed in contrasting ways. Second, throughout history anti-immigration activists and assimilationists in California and the U.S. have relied on a mythic history of a romanticized past melting pot; arguments of inassimilability of certain groups of ethnic immigrants, that are recycled throughout times to suit

[17] War Relocation Authority, "Nisei Assimilation," 4.

different waves and races of immigrants; and the importance of a homogenous, shared culture in order to counteract societal collapse; in order to exclude certain groups from cultural citizenship. They do all of this while ignoring or failing to mention structural barriers to assimilation for non-white immigrants and realistic narratives of past mass acculturations.

II. **Making Salad: *TIME Magazine* and Shared Culture**

On June 13th, 1983 *TIME Magazine* released their latest issue, titled "Los Angeles: America's Uneasy New Melting Pot." The featured cover story intended to highlight the situation of California, as it dealt with a new influx of immigrants, by profiling and speaking with immigrants, second or third generation Americans, and white and black Americans in Los Angeles. The lead story of the issue, "The New Ellis Island" by Kurt Andersen and Benjamin W. Cate, set the tone for how the entire magazine and subsequent articles would cover the topic of immigration in California. In fact, the first line read: "Los Angeles is being invaded."[18]

June 13, 1984 Issue of *TIME Magazine*

[18]Kurt Andersen and Benjamin W. Cate, "The New Ellis Island," *TIME Magazine*, June 1983.

Language such as this is prominent throughout the article and the rest of the issue. Referring back to the very title of the article, "The New Ellis Island," shows another main theme of the issue; the situation of 1970s and '80s immigration in California, which was made up predominantly of non-white immigrants, being repeatedly compared to the popular, romanticized narrative of–whether this was intended or not–mostly European immigration to the United States at the turn of the 20th cenutry. California, with its coastal location and proximity to Asia and Central America, has at times been referred to as a "natural port of entry."[19] However, Andersen and Cate point out that "L.A. has no central processing facility like Ellis Island, or any Pacific Coast Statue of Liberty, no romantic symbol for every country's immigrants," the article reads.[20] The comparisons throughout the issue do not stop there. Interestingly, they are not always delivered directly from the point of view of the writers. Paul Louie, a second-generation Chinese American in Los Angeles who was interviewed for the article, said, "We do not think in American terms of a melting pot. We prefer the metaphor of a rainbow or a salad."[21]

Louie showcased four interesting ideas within this one, off-handed statement. First of all, by speaking in terms of "we" and not "I," Louie cast himself as the voice for many, and in the context of the article, gave his words the power of a group of people (whether this is Chinese-Americans, Chinese immigrants, Asian immigrants, or all immigrants in America) in order to back them up. Secondly, Louie directly rejected the sentiment of the "melting pot," as it applied to California's immigrants. Thirdly, he referred to the melting pot as an "American term." In this, he separated himself not only from other commenters of the article and the rest of

[19] Clark.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

the issue, but from other Americans in general who disavow the idea of a plural society–people who favor a strict idea of assimilation. Finally, Louie conveniently provided an alternate, arguably more diverse metaphor (or two) that could be used in place of the melting pot. The connotative difference between a salad or a rainbow and a melting pot is apparent in the context of their article. Louie did not see America as others did, as a place for everyone to boil down into one dominant culture. Instead, his view was of an amalgamation of cultures that are mixed together, but by no means homogenous.

In historic discussions of assimilation, the idea of the connection between a single, homogenous culture and the functioning of society is always present. In the case of the *TIME Magazine* article, this idea of a superior, unified culture was used to point out the growing problem of immigration of ethnic groups to California who weren't assimilating successfully, which was often portrayed as an explicit choice. The first half of this chapter discusses how the *TIME Article* used personal anecdotes of immigrants to portray Los Angeles as a city about to erupt from ongoing cultural tensions. The cover issue brought up themes of language, generational assimilation processes, cultural prejudices, infrastructure problems resulting from a rapidly growing population, and conflicts with black and white Americans in Los Angeles. Underscoring the entire issue was the impression that immigrants were forcing a seperatist society.

The second half of this chapter will discuss how similar language referring to the importance of a shared culture, is deployed in other contexts, and is not always used in a staunchly anti-immigrant context. For example, at a Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission Public Hearing entitled "Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, and

Solutions," held in order to bring awareness to violence towards Asian Americans and Asian immigrants in Los Angeles, various speakers emphasized the importance of recognizing a shared culture–pointing out similarities instead of accentuating differences to create cultural understanding. Community leaders urged Asian immigrants and Asian Americans to embrace their similarities with American culture as a remedy for the bigotry, which often manifested as violence, that they faced in the United States. This co-presence of two drastically different ways to promote a shared culture demonstrates how flexible the language of assimilation was as it was applied to debates of pluralism and racially-motivated violence in California in the 1980s.

A. Shared Culture as a Sign of Success or Failure of Assimilation

Another article that contributed to the *TIME Magazine* cover story, "Against a Confusion of Tongues" by William A. Henry, III, referenced the same salad metaphor in comparison to the melting pot, albeit not as positively as Louie did. This article deals with the issue of bilingual education for immigrant children. As discussed earlier, the ability to comprehend and speak English is a popular measure of assimilation for immigrants. In fact, as recently as 2019 the English Unity Act aimed to establish "English as the official language of the United States" and included "testing English as part of the naturalization process."[22] This article argued that bilingual education, while popularly supported by leaders of different ethnic communities, was not necessarily useful; in fact it could actually be harmful to the American social fabric. In arguing this, the author played upon popular and negatively connotated assimilation rhetoric. "A new bilingualism and biculturalism is being promulgated that would deliberately fragment the

[22] U.S. Congress, House, *English Unity Act of 2019*, HR 997, 116th Congress, Introduced in House February 6, 2019, https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/997

nation into separate, unassimilated groups," Henry claimed.[23] The bilingual movement was part of a larger push to preserve ethnic ties to the immigrants' home country over that of the dominant American culture: "the new metaphor is not the melting pot but the salad bowl, with each element distinct."[24] Henry is saying essentially the same thing that Louie did in the other article, but within the different context, the mention of "distinct" elements is almost a warning, and not a celebration.

The entire article was tinged with an element of warning about the impact immigrants will have on American society and culture if they continue down the path of anti-assimilation. "The rise of a large group, detached from the main population by language and custom, could affect the social stability of the country," Henry wrote.[25] However, the author deployed the idea of separatism in Los Angeles not only as a threat to the American melting pot, but as an insult to the success of the idea. As immigrants come to Los Angeles and hold onto components of their old culture, such as their language, they are "belittling the all-embracing culture that America had embodied for the world," Henry argues.[26] In this way, pluralism became the villain of the article.

Aside from critiques from those outside of the immigrant community, there were also subsequent recurrences of self-reflexive ideas of immigration, assimilation, and, broadly, what it means to be an American in this article. This was especially true in the case of immigrant or second-generation parents talking about their childrens' lives and cultures. When asked about their vision for their children, the people interviewed for the article had a wide range of views.

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[23] William A. Henry, III, "A Confusion of Tongues," *TIME Magazine*, June 1983.
[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid.
[26]Ibid.

The opinions showcased in this article, however, were overwhelmingly in support and accepting of their children assimilating to American culture. “They are not Koreans,” South Korean immigrant Hun Yum said of his two children, “their parents are Koreans.”[27] Yum’s take could be considered on the far extreme side of the assimilation continuum compared to his counterparts who were also interviewed for the piece. Others had milder takes: “I want to teach this child to learn Japanese,” said second-generation Japanese Los Angeles Resident, Warren Furutani of his children.[28] Furutani wanted his children “to learn the [Japanese] customs and yet still be [Americans].”[29]

Both Yum and Furutani’s statements, whether knowingly or not, call on a generational model of assimilation, wherein children born of immigrants in America are better assimilated than the original immigrants. More importantly, referencing this way of thinking shows they think positively of the generational assimilation process, and aren’t forcing a pluralism in the state like the article is claiming. Their viewpoints refute Henry’s argument of an increasingly separate society taking hold in Los Angeles. Neither Yum and Furutani could be classified as anti-assimilationists or separatists if they are accepting of their childrens’ inevitable status as Americans. Another Japanese immigrant living in Los Angeles, Kazuhiko Yamaguchi, took this viewpoint one step further: “I'm not worried about the ‘Americanization’ of my two children. They were born here, and their styles are different.”[30] Yum, Furutani, and Yamaguchi did not see the acculturation of their children as a defeat to their, or their parents’ in Furutani’s case, culture.

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[27]“The New Ellis Island.”
[28]Ibid.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.

The authors' decision to incorporate these quotes into a cover story claiming Los Angeles as "an uneasy melting pot " seemed counter productive to the picture they were trying to paint, of a fractured state whose fault lines were actually foreign cultures that were increasing in presence daily. However, "The New Ellis Island," actually went on to showcase how, despite the acceptance of some parents about the Americanization of their children, not all immigrants shared this idea, or even felt positively about the idea of leaving most of their old culture behind in favor of acculturating to a homogenous, American one.

In profiling people with these beliefs, Andersen and Cate aimed to point to the problem of separatism: "Indeed, many of the new arrivals cling to their ethnic identity, preserving their customs and language, nurturing old prejudices, (the Japanese look down on Koreans), developing new ones (Koreans look down on blacks and chicanos)..."[31] In this view, immigrants in Los Angeles in the 1980s were causing conflict in multiple ways; they not only wish to preserve their home country's culture over the dominant, American one, therefore causing tension with other ethnic groups, but in doing so are also bringing inherent prejudices to America that will strain the social fabric further. The authors suggested a compelling argument in these cover story articles; assimilating to American culture, with learning English as an example of one way to do this, would lead to a more harmonious society. One benefit of this would be the shedding of existing cultural prejudices, which makes a more harmonious society, as groups can coexist in peace without an old culture's prejudice interrupting an American culture that encourages diversity. Andersen, Cate, and Henry argued the contradictory notion that a society that was actively compelling it's newcomers to release their old cultural ties, in order to absorb

[31]Ibid.

new ones. This way, they would fully be part of a diverse melting pot, where their old culture's prejudices are not welcome.

Furthermore, the cover story explored what would happen, and what had already begun to happen, if immigrants continued to refuse acculturation. This theme of impending doom caused by conflict, stemming from immigrants' lack of effort to assimilate to an American culture, is prominent throughout "The New Ellis Island." This conflict is profiled as manifesting in many different relationships: second and third generation Americans and recently arrived immigrants, African-Americans and immigrants, and immigrants and other immigrants of a different ethnic group: "L.A. has for decades had solid, stable populations of hybrid Angelenos–Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans and so on. They do not always know what to make of the newcomers. And many L.A. blacks simply feel besieged, resentful."[32] This specific sentiment would be echoed later in history, during the South Central Riots of the 1990s, that has been pointed to as "natural outburst" and the failure of a multiethnic society.[33]

The article also played on tensions between different generations and races of immigrants. Those "who made the trip earlier," or second-generation ethnic Americans and beyond, are quoted as calling on the same pro-assimilation language potentially used against their predecessors, or even themselves, when they first arrived: '[Koreans] cannot learn the language, their food smells and they cannot express themselves.'"[34] The article does not clarify the ethnicity of who exactly said this, only that they were a fellow immigrant or subsequent generation of one. However, whoever said it is referring back to popular assimilation rhetoric

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[32] Ibid.
[33] McCarthy and Vernez, *Immigration in a Changing Economy,* iii.
[34] "The New Ellis Island."

centered around the act of speaking English competently as a measure of acculturation. Furthermore, the article continually references the disdain Los Angeles based Japanese Americans had for South Korean immigrants in the 1980s, an example of the old culture prejudices that are disrupting the social fabric of California. Once again, prejudice between ethnic groups was used as a sign that the L.A. melting pot was not actually melting. Sometimes, this prejudice was even within the same ethnic group, but cast from one generation to the next. "Nisei, or U.S.-born Japanese, are embarassed by Japanese nationals who speak no English; newly arrived Japanese, in turn, are wary of L.A.'s native sansei (third generation) and yonsei (fourth)."[35]

The June 1983 issue of *TIME Magazine* depicted Los Angeles as a city about to implode–not just culturally, but physically–if it did not solve its separatism problem, and whether that burden fell on the immigrants is unclear. Dean Harvey Perloff of the University of California, Los Angeles's school of architecture and urban planning claimed the city was on the eve of disaster in the wake of this new influx of immigrants. "Streets are breaking up. Water mains are breaking up. Bridges are crumbling," said Perloff. "The day of reckoning is going to happen so fast that it's going to make people's heads whirl."[36] It is not a fair assessment to claim Perloff was blaming immigrants for underfunded urban planning projects. However, the choice to include Perloff's perspective in the article that is generally accusing new coming ethnic immigrants and earlier generations of immigrants of disrupting the city's culture was a calculated choice. The article does not mention Americans from other states moving to L.A. as part of the impetus for a collapse. The authors added to the tumultuous scene created by ethnic conflict of

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

unassimilated immigrant groups by choosing to include information about the city's failing infrastructure.

This doomsday rhetoric is part of an entire issue of a nationally syndicated, widely revered American magazine that bemoaned the circumstance of Los Angeles as it struggled to find a unified culture. This lack of homogeneity caused by immigrants who were not assimilating (such as Louie, believer of salads and not of melting pots), in the eyes of the issue's authors, was the cause of this tumultuous atmosphere. Older generations of immigrants disparaging newcomers, within and without of their ethnicity, bilingual schools discouraging English acquisition, and conflict with other Americans were an example of how a salad could never be a melting pot. The solution was simple: one shared culture. But more specifically, an American culture.

B. Shared Culture as Pluralism

The *TIME Magazine* issue was not published without criticism. Furthermore, its inflammatory portrayal of the immigrant situation in Los Angeles to a national audience had an impact on the communities it profiled. In November of the same year the *TIME* cover was released, several Asian American community leaders spoke out about the story at a public hearing for "Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, Solutions," held by the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission. The hearing featured a variety of viewpoints about the racism faced by Asian immigrants and Asian Americans in L.A., the entire state of California, and the United States as a whole. Ultimately, the Commission's goal was to use the

hearing as a way to generate solutions to the growing problem. Often, this solution manifested as the idea of a shared culture.

Tong Soo Chung, President of the Korean American Coalition, was among one of the speakers at the hearing who discussed the June issue of *TIME Magazine* and its negative implications. Chung believed one of the *TIME* articles, "The New Ellis Island," portrayed Korean immigrants as determined to abstain from learning English.[37] By not taking the time to learn English, it could be interpreted that Koreans were therefore refusing to fully assimilate to American culture (a common sentiment that will be examined further in the next chapter). Chung was most likely referring to the quote from Hun Yum, who said: "Money is our first priority. We have to work first, and then we have time to learn the language. Or our children will."[38] While Cate and Andersen clarified that Yum did not outright refuse to learn English, rather just did not prioritize it among other assumably more pressing issues his family faced (such as financial security that required long working hours), Chung and others from the hearing agreed that this portrayal was harmful to the national image of Korean immigrants and Korean Americans.

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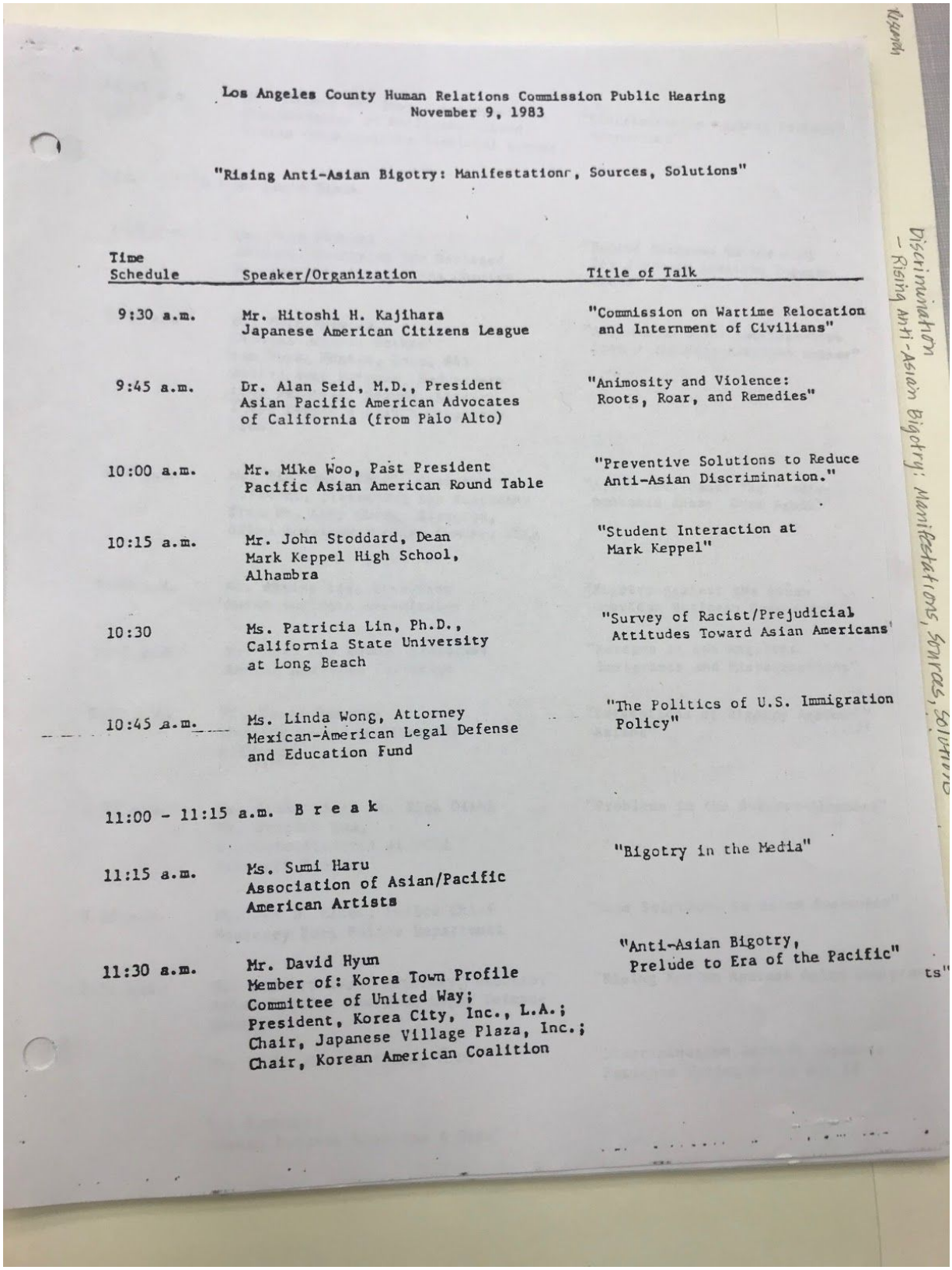
[37] Tong Soo Chung, "Koreans in Los Angeles: Immigrants and Misperceptions," Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, Solutions.
[38] "The New Ellis Island."

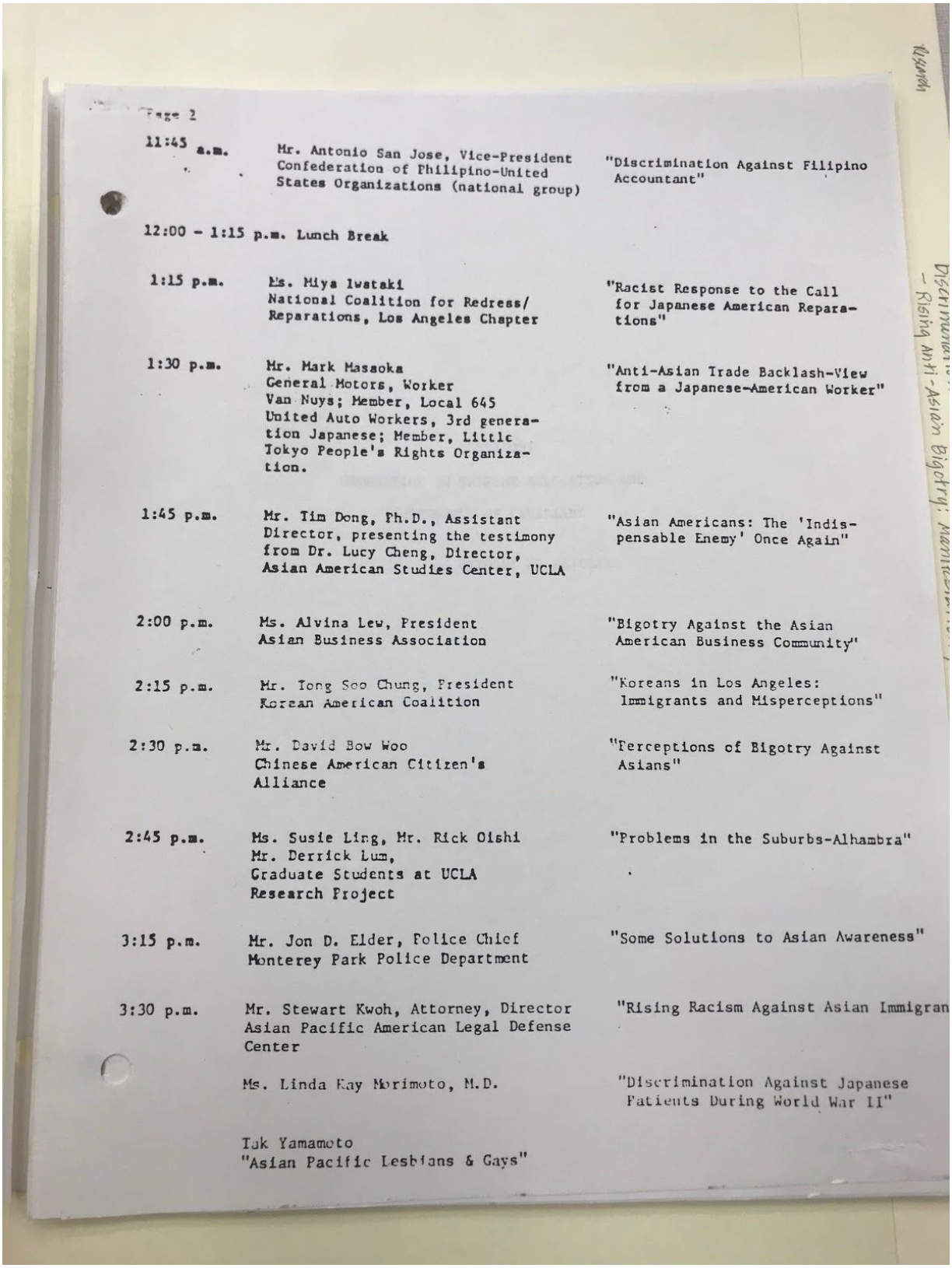


Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission Public Hearing
November 9, 1983

"Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, Solutions"

Time Schedule	Speaker/Organization	Title of Talk
9:30 a.m.	Mr. Hitoshi H. Kajihara Japanese American Citizens League	"Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians"
9:45 a.m.	Dr. Alan Seid, M.D., President Asian Pacific American Advocates of California (from Palo Alto)	"Animosity and Violence: Roots, Roar, and Remedies"
10:00 a.m.	Mr. Mike Woo, Past President Pacific Asian American Round Table	"Preventive Solutions to Reduce Anti-Asian Discrimination."
10:15 a.m.	Mr. John Stoddard, Dean Mark Keppel High School, Alhambra	"Student Interaction at Mark Keppel"
10:30	Ms. Patricia Lin, Ph.D., California State University at Long Beach	"Survey of Racist/Prejudicial Attitudes Toward Asian Americans"
10:45 a.m.	Ms. Linda Wong, Attorney Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund	"The Politics of U.S. Immigration Policy"
11:00 - 11:15 a.m.	B r e a k	
11:15 a.m.	Ms. Sumi Haru Association of Asian/Pacific American Artists	"Bigotry in the Media"
11:30 a.m.	Mr. David Hyun Member of: Korea Town Profile Committee of United Way; President, Korea City, Inc., L.A.; Chair, Japanese Village Plaza, Inc.; Chair, Korean American Coalition	"Anti-Asian Bigotry, Prelude to Era of the Pacific"

Speaking Schedule for L.A. County Human Relations Commission Public Hearing: "Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, and Solutions" (Page 1 of 2)



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11:45 a.m.	Mr. Antonio San Jose, Vice-President Confederation of Philipino-United States Organizations (national group)	"Discrimination Against Filipino Accountant"
12:00 - 1:15 p.m. Lunch Break		
1:15 p.m.	Ms. Miya Iwataki National Coalition for Redress/ Reparations, Los Angeles Chapter	"Racist Response to the Call for Japanese American Reparations"
1:30 p.m.	Mr. Mark Masaoka General Motors, Worker Van Nuys; Member, Local 645 United Auto Workers, 3rd generation Japanese; Member, Little Tokyo People's Rights Organization.	"Anti-Asian Trade Backlash-View from a Japanese-American Worker"
1:45 p.m.	Mr. Tim Dong, Ph.D., Assistant Director, presenting the testimony from Dr. Lucy Cheng, Director, Asian American Studies Center, UCLA	"Asian Americans: The 'Indispensable Enemy' Once Again"
2:00 p.m.	Ms. Alvina Lew, President Asian Business Association	"Bigotry Against the Asian American Business Community"
2:15 p.m.	Mr. Tong Soo Chung, President Korean American Coalition	"Koreans in Los Angeles: Immigrants and Misperceptions"
2:30 p.m.	Mr. David Bow Woo Chinese American Citizen's Alliance	"Perceptions of Bigotry Against Asians"
2:45 p.m.	Ms. Susie Ling, Mr. Rick Oishi Mr. Derrick Lum, Graduate Students at UCLA Research Project	"Problems in the Suburbs-Alhambra"
3:15 p.m.	Mr. Jon D. Elder, Police Chief Monterey Park Police Department	"Some Solutions to Asian Awareness"
3:30 p.m.	Mr. Stewart Kwoh, Attorney, Director Asian Pacific American Legal Defense Center	"Rising Racism Against Asian Immigran
	Ms. Linda Kay Morimoto, M.D.	"Discrimination Against Japanese Patients During World War II"
	Tak Yamamoto "Asian Pacific Lesbians & Gays"	

Speaking Schedule for L.A. County Human Relations Commission Public Hearing: "Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, and Solutions" (Page 2 of 2)

Another speaker, Dr. Alan L. Seid, President of the Asian Pacific American Advocates of California, also spoke about the article at the hearing. According to Seid, the *TIME* article "used derogatory language and heightened intergroup tensions," and was an example of the mainstream media's use of scare tactics when it came to covering immigrants in the United States.[39] Seid saw articles such as "The New Ellis Island" and "A Confusion of Tongues" and other news articles as vehicles of harmful assimilationist rhetoric that incited not only misunderstanding and prejudice against immigrants who supposedly can't even be bothered to learn English, let alone contribute to a society, but also in the worst cases, actual physical violence.

Both Chung and Seid's criticisms of *TIME Magazine* were presented against a backdrop that brought awareness to the growing occurrences of racist acts of violence towards Asian-Americans, and hypothesized the causes and solutions for the pressing issue. The speakers at the hearing discussed high-profile instances of violence and hate crimes against Asian-Americans. For example, speakers discussed the defacement of 71 Japanese tombstones at a cemetary in Fresno, California,[40] and the heavily publicized murder of Vincent Chin in Detroit, Michigan.[41] The speakers categorized malicious press, such as "Los Angeles: America's Uneasy New Melting Pot" as a form of violence. It was not just the *TIME* article, either. Seid cited several instances of derogatory headlines, such as "Koreans Invade Silicon Valley" in an undated

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[39] Alan L. Seid, "Anti-Asian Animosity and Violence: Roots, Roar, and Remedies," Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, Solutions, 13.
[40] Ibid, 13.
[41] Vincent Chin was a Chinese American man who was murdered on June 19, 1982 by two white men in Detroit, Michigan. Chin, assumed by the men to be Japanese, was beaten to death by the two men, who were employees recently laid off in the automotive industry. The murder is cited to be due to the growing resentment of Asians in Detroit over the competition of Japanese-imported car models and their impact on the American automotive industry. The hate crime and the sentencing of the two perpetrators made national news, and was a critical event for national Asian American civil rights movements.

issue of the *San Jose Mercury News* as contributors to this issue.[42] For example, the use of the word "invasion," also seen in "The New Ellis Island," has a negative connotation that plays on popular historical stereotypes of Asian immigrants to the United States, similar to how Perloff blamed immigrants for disaster regarding Los Angeles's infrastructure. Assistant Director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, Tim Dong, presented the testimony of Dr. Lucie Cheng, the program director, regarding the magazine issue's use of words such as this perpetuate myths of the "yellow horde" and unassimilability: "the maintenance of the [myths] is exemplified by the sensationalistic writings about Asian Pacific immigration such as the *TIME Magazine* Cover article of last June."[43]

The contemporary violence of the 1980s could be traced back to these myths with deep historical roots for earlier generations of Asian immigrants to America. According to Cheng, the idea of Asians as "unassimilable" came about as a self-fulfilling prophecy when, historically, Asian Pacific immigrants' different customs, languages, and physical features landed them social and legal restrictions in American society.[44] As was apparent with the publication of the immigration issue of *TIME Magazine*, these myths prevailed to have an impact on later generations of Asian immigrants, and even second or third generation Asian-Americans. "The New Ellis Island" was a clear indicator that bigotry of the present could play on rhetoric of the past, recycling these themes to be applied to any group of immigrants in any given time period.

The fact that this magazine cover story was mentioned multiple times at this forum exhibits the direct connection between these misperceptions about Asians and violent acts

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[42] Seid, "Anti-Asian Animosity and Violence: Roots, Roar, and Remedies," 14.
[43] Lucie Cheng, "Asian Pacific Americans: The 'Indispensable Enemy' Once Again," Rising Anti-Asian Bigotry: Manifestations, Sources, Solutions, 2.
[44] Ibid, 3.

perpetrated against them. The media, such as *TIME Magazine,* has a prolific role in this connection, as it "focuses on differences in cultural practices and values leaving readers or viewers with the impression that 'strange and threatening foreigners are among us' rather than 'new Americans with potentially enriching characteristics and life styles are residing in our community,'" Dr. Alan L. Seid said.[45]

It's important to note that another important cause of the influx of violence against Asian Americans and immigrants was attributed to the state of the American and Californian economy in the 1980s. Seid pointed to the "national economic recession resulting in A) massive lay-offs, high unemployment, and pervasive public feeling of financial insecurity and B) intensification of fierce competition for diminished job openings" as a catalyst for pre-existing racism and intolerance of cultural diversity to manifest once again.[46] Although it is at times stronger when combined with economic factors, the idea of an intolerance to a plural society as a cause of bigotry is still important in historical discussions of the importance of assimilation, such as this L.A. County Hearing.

However, the speakers at the hearing pointed out how throughout history, this disdain of cultural diversity has not extended equally to every immigrant culture. Echoing Cheng's statements of the myth of Asian "unassimilability," Dr. Seid also pointed to how the perception of Asian immigrants of a different type that are less likely to fully assimilate has been a source of the increase in violence. Dr. Seid cited that the "large influx of new arrivals with non-caucasian physical features, different cultural practices and non-western languages from

[45] Seid, "Anti-Asian Animosity and Violence: Roots, Roar, and Remedies," 5-6.
[46] Ibid, 3.

Southeast Asian and other Asian countries over the last 10 years" had been an impetus for intolerance of a multiethnic society.[47]

This brought to light another sentiment common throughout the hearing, the disadvantages Asian-Americans faced when it came to the process of assimilation. Myths of the "yellow horde" and "unassimilability" had a stronghold in perceptions of the newest wave of Asian immigrants in California, as was apparent in the *TIME* cover story. However, while some pointed to this perception of glaring dissimilarities between contemporary Asian immigrants in California and, for example, those of a previous, European wave as a catalyst for the atmosphere of violence and hatred, Cheng testified that "instant acculturation has never occurred for any American group."[48] In likening newer immigrant groups with those that are more historically romanticized, Cheng was building on the old idea of the melting pot. While at times wrought with ideas of cultural erasure and shedding identity, playing into the idea of the American melting pot could still serve a purpose in this case–preventing violence.

Although Asian immigrants brought different languages, customs, and cultures to California that portrayed them as harder to integrate into society, these same fears were once prevalent about other groups of immigrants. Tong Soo Chung expressed ideas similar to Cheng's, bolstering the idea of the continuation of a melting pot. He urged Americans to "truly believe that this is a nation of immigrants and that how early a particular ethnic group arrived in America is a matter of no consequence: that every immigrant has as much a right to be in the United States of America as any other immigrant and American citizen."[49] Not only should

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Cheng, "Asian Pacific Americans: The 'Indispensable Enemy' Once Again," 3.
[49] Chung, "Koreans in Los Angeles: Immigrants and Misperceptions," 8.

immigrants of different national origins be treated the same way, but so should immigrants who came to the United States at different times. These "remedies" to violence as Seid called them, could be achieved through "stressing commonalities of new arrivals with previous immigrant Americans."

When hypothesizing specific solutions to this growing trend of violence, Chung, Seid, and Cheng all emphasized the importance of creating cultural understanding between Asians and other Americans. Seid described this process as symbiotic, with not only Americans being more understanding of Asian cultures, but also Asian-Americans incorporating themselves into society more fully.[50] However, while underscoring this entire idea, Seid yearned for a "systematic and continuous emphasis that the U.S. is a pluralistic society built by numerous diverse immigrant groups" and a "celebration of pluralism," similar to Louie from "The New Ellis Island."[51] In Seid's view, a shared understanding of each other's cultures and pluralism could coexist in Los Angeles.

Pluralism, in the case of this hearing, became a positive ideal that should be celebrated by all Americans, in order to build a more diverse and understanding society. In "The New Ellis Island" and "A Confusion of Tongues," the appearance of a plural society would ultimately lead to a tumultuous, separated citizen body; it would be a metaphorical slap in the face to the earlier years of the melting pot. However, the speakers at the L.A. County Human Relations Commission actually saw the idea of a plural, multiethnic society as a celebration of the "nation of immigrants" ideal. Dr. Seid suggested a "systematic and continuous emphasis that the U.S. is a pluralistic society built by numerous diverse immigrant groups" as a remedy to racially

[50] Seid, "Anti-Asian Animosity and Violence: Roots, Roar, and Remedies," 16.
[51] Ibid.

motivated violence. This intense debate over the state of shared culture in California demonstrated that people have different ideas of what that should look like. In this way, the language of the melting pot was deployed in starkly contrasting ways.

III. Voluntarism, Inassimilability, and Proposition 187

In "Assimilation Revisited"–an essay presented in 1985 by Renato Rosaldo of Stanford University's anthropology department at the National Association for Chicano Studies Annual Conference–Rosaldo broke down prevailing meanings of assimilation by examining its historiography. Presented at a symposium entitled "Toward New Perspectives on Chicanos and Assimilation," Rosaldo's paper theorized that assimilation, as it pertained to non-white immigrants at the time, was a concept with two main components. His two components were cultural assimilation, which mainly reflected popular meanings of assimilation such as acculturation and linguistics, versus structural assimilation, which referred to "equal opportunity, capacity of minorities to enter any valuable position in dominant society" and "social availability of opportunities," for immigrants, according to Rosaldo.[52]

While Rosaldo's concept of cultural assimilation is perhaps the most well-understood meaning for the term, his examination of structural assimilation is more complicated. This kind of assimilation, as it was presented by Rosaldo, involves more than just the agency and will of the person being assimilated (in this case, the immigrant to the U.S.). It ropes in the state as well, and casts them as the assimilating agent. This concept complicates the already complex narrative of assimilation for immigrants in California, and raises questions such as who is ultimately "responsible" for the assimilation process, the immigrants or the institutions? How does a state achieve this? How do they prevent it?

The debate surrounding Proposition 187, introduced in 1994, and the implications it had for Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans in California is an apt case study for trying to

[52] Renato Rosaldo, "Assimilation Revisited," 1.

answer these questions. Nicknamed the "Save Our State Initiative" (S.O.S.), Proposition 187 encompassed a handful of policies related to the status of undocumented immigrants. The initiative aimed to take away access to public services from undocumented immigrants. However, the debate surrounding Proposition 187 had a distinct cultural impact, in that it brought the idea of assimilation to a homogenous, American culture to the forefront of immigration policy and issues, therein marrying this concept to other factors like economic pressure and the impact of population growth. In fact, respondents for Robin Dale Jacobson's *The New Nativism*: *Proposition and the Debate over Immigration* claimed Proposition 187 was a "tool either to coerce assimilation, to remove the unassimilable, or at least to question the cultural citizenship of problem immigrants."[53] So although Proposition 187 seems to be a standard immigration policy, ignoring the implications of the policy itself and its surrounding debate for the question of assimilation in America is a disservice. For supporters of Proposition 187, attacks on undocumented immigrants from all races and cultures were common rhetoric. However, this chapter will explore how in the context of Proposition 187, Mexican culture especially came into question, and how their presence in California during the fourth wave of immigration, specifically the 1990s, was portrayed as a physical and cultural invasion.[54] Furthermore, the unusual history of Mexican immigration to California–to be discussed later in this chapter–compared to that of other groups to California, adds another layer of complexity to this debate.

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[53] Robin Dale Jacobson, *The New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate over Immigration*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 100.

[54] The Fourth Wave of Immigration to the United States, according to some popular models, began approximately after 1965 and continues today.

This chapter will explore how this historic demonization of a culture and race, while relevant to the discussion of the proposition rhetoric, did not happen overnight, and did not exist exclusively in the context of support for Proposition 187, which was meant to impact Mexican immigrants in the 1990s. Anti-immigrant activists in support of the proposition worked to portray Mexican culture as uncivilized and Mexicans as inassimilable in order to justify their initiative, but this rhetoric had already been used throughout history. The situation of Proposition 187 shows how, similar to the "yellow horde" myth discussed by Asian American community leaders at the L.A. County Human Relations Commission public hearing in the previous chapter, narratives of inassimilability are recycled and applied to multiple generations over time, constantly being redeployed to suit different agendas.

A. Rosaldo's Argument

To further "revisit" assimilation at the aforementioned conference, Rosaldo examined the major themes of previous assimilation studies, and how those themes contributed to a problematic historiography tinged with racism, misplaced agency, and primitivism. Primitivism is the tendency for assimilation studies to discuss how an immigrant to the United States would keep their "old culture" alive in their children; in other words, how much of it will they pass down? Not only is it common in academia, but in popular public discussions of cultural assimilation. In the 1983 *TIME Magazine* issue mentioned in chapter one, this question of how much of the old culture should the children carry with them was met with a range of answers, from parents who saw their kids as Americans only, to those who were optimistic about finding a balance between their culture and the American one. These conversations, whether intentionally

or not, contributed to what Rosaldo described as primitivism, which "regards culture as a relic, an inert heirloom handed down wholecloth."[55] Rosaldo's critique of primitivism in assimilation studies showcased how it could limit the perceived ability of immigrants to assimilate. When culture is viewed as something handed down by relatives "wholecloth," it might be harder to imagine negotiating a balance between that culture and a new one, which jeopardizes cultural hegemony that is central to assimilation rhetoric.

This negotiation brings into question the different agents in the assimilation process, the immigrants and the state and its structures, and how much control they have in the process. Rosaldo's idea of structural assimilation as a main component of the entire process was compounded by his discussion of how assimilation studies had historically emphasized the agency of the immigrant and their personal responsibility to assimilate. This concept in which Rosaldo described the concept of voluntarism:

> "Voluntarism suggests that the assimilation process, both its successes and failures, involve formally free choices within a socially given opportunity structure. The notion, in other words, is that a society presents its members (or at any rate a structural segment of its members) with a specific set of options."[56]

Subscribing to voluntarism puts the burden of assimilation onto the individual outside of the dominant culture. In a situation where a lack of assimilation is causing tensions, such as L.A.'s "uneasy melting pot," voluntarism essentially takes the pressure off of the structures, institutions, and people of the state that are active in this process as well. While emphasizing voluntarism was prevalent in the assimilation historiography, Rosaldo noted that this was not

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[55] Rosaldo, 2.
[56] Rosaldo, 11.

true of all assimilation studies leading up to this point. Rosaldo also mentioned a 1981 assimilation essay by Douglas Massey, who questioned whether or not the United States could handle assimilating this newest influx of immigrants. In this way, Massey names the state as the assimilating agent. "It is as if the nation were an organism attempting to absorb an unpalatable element newly entered in its environment," Rosaldo said.[57] Although Massey's claim seems to push the responsibility of assimilation back onto the state, the negative connotations suggest it is still the immigrants' fault that they are not assimilating, by being "unpalatable" and therefore difficult to fully absorb into the dominant culture.

Rosaldo's argument about agency in the process of assimilation, and especially voluntarism, as it relates to assimilation to American culture, is a relevant framework to this thesis. In anti-immigrant rhetoric from almost any time period, some form of voluntarism is prominent. Furthermore, how voluntarism mingles with the idea of "inassimilability" raises the bar even higher (and more out of reach) for what is considered successful assimilation. Previously, I discussed the idea that *TIME Magazine* portrayed Asian Americans as not willing to fully assimilate to American culture because they did not want to learn English; they do not choose to spend time learning a new language in such a way that could help them contribute to society, so they do not want to be American. Another example of how voluntarism is deployed onto non-white immigrants, and in this case especially Mexican immigrants, is the process of obtaining citizenship for undocumented immigrants.

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[57] Rosaldo, 3.

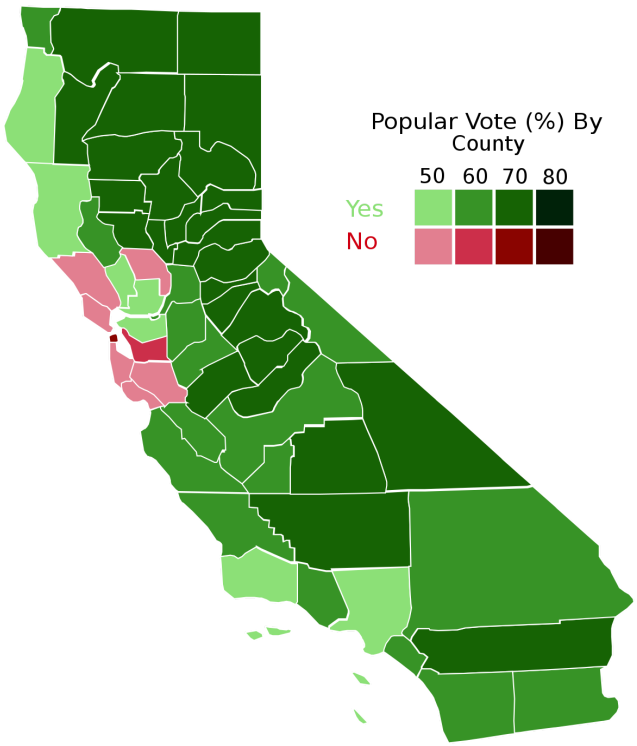
B. Proposition 187

During the early 1990s, when the U.S. had just taken in its third large influx, or wave, of immigrants, California's melting pot was metaphorically on the brink of boiling over. In particular, the economic situation of the state compounded anti-immigrant rhetoric, as California faced its worst recession since the Great Depression.[58] As Californians faced job losses and financial crises, immigrants were blamed; the popularity of Proposition 187 when it was introduced in 1993 proved that. However, while the initiative had roots in economic woes, assimilation and culture was an important part of the conversation. The very title and abbreviation of the proposition (Save Our State and S.O.S.) reveals that its authors are perpetuating a sense of looming danger about the situation of immigration in California, similar to views expressed about Los Angeles infrastructure in the *TIME Magazine* article. Repeatedly, the idea of an undermined, hegemonic culture being overtaken by foreign, immigrant ones is exaggerated in anti-immigration rhetoric.

The most controversial policies of Proposition 187 were the statutes that suggested denying social services (such as healthcare, public education, and more) to undocumented immigrants, and mandating public social service officials who worked for these institutions to report any immigrant who the offical knew was–or suspected to be–undocumented.[59] Proposition 187 was strictly political and even economical at its core, focused on preventing illegal immigration and its strain on public resources. However, the arguments in favor of the

[58] Bill Ong Hing, "Contextualizing Immigration" in *To Be An American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation* (New York; London: NYU Press, 1997), 108.
[59] Jacobson, xiii.

proposition were overwhelmingly cultural at times, bringing to the forefront of immigration politics the relationship between citizenship, culture, race, and assimilation.



Proposition 187 Voter Map by County

Although it is complicated to delineate a clear link between assimilation and citizenship, there is a clear connection between the two concepts when it comes to how Proposition 187's supporters advocated for their initiative. Supporters such as Barbara Coe, a member of the California Coalition for Immigration Reform, would accuse immigrants who did not immediately obtain their citizenship of refusing to acculturate to American society: "these people do not come to assimilate or contribute to our society. We're talking about the undermining of our laws, our

language, our culture, our history."[60] Coe's language generalizes and assumes the intentions of all undocumented immigrants, an essential act when using voluntarism ideology in rhetoric. To Coe and other S.O.S. supporters like her, it was the personal responsibility of undocumented immigrants in California to obtain their citizenship. Put simply, any undocumented immigrants who failed to go through the process of becoming a citizen were deliberately refusing to assimilate. In this way, citizenship is, like language, used as a measure of how successfully an immigrant has assimilated.

Although many supporters of Proposition 187 that targeted Mexican immigrants specifically would claim these assimilation expectations, such as citizenship, were race-neutral–in that it didn't matter which immigrants were coming, they all needed to assimilate to the dominant American culture–much of their argument relied on existing racial schemas about Mexicanness and cultural invasion in the United States.[61] The race-neutral argument does not need to specify what culture ought to be assimilated to, what language ought to be learned, or what values ought to be shared; it relies solely on the belief that a society cannot function as a mixture of several cultures, but rather needs to be united around one. It isn't that the cultures immigrants bring into California are inferior to the American one, they just simply need to be forgotten in the interest of a homogeneity, according to this explanation. However, supporters of S.O.S. did not refrain from racializing arguments, especially those opposed to Mexican immigration.

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[60] Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 33.
[61] Jacobson, 90.

In Robin Dale Jacobson's *The New Nativism: Proposition 187 and the Debate over Immigration*, Jacobson argues that Mexican culture was seen as "a particular threat because of its perceived power and because of its failure to have the appropriate values."[62] Mexican culture was deemed unable to mesh with American culture because of its failure to have certain values, such as individualism. In many ways, Mexican culture was equated with uncivilization in Proposition 187 campaigns. Anti-immigration activists pointed to how Mexican immigrants typically lived in smaller houses with less rooms, but with more people, as a "tribal" act, one that lacked the individualistic values Americans were supposed to celebrate.[63] In fact, Mexican culture was actually seen as a hindrance that made its immigrants unable to contribute to a society with different values, or even function well in one.[64] Individualism, coincidentally, is central to the idea of voluntarism. In theory, if an immigrant came to California and chose to assimilate to American culture by acts such as learning English, obtaining citizenship, and adapting new values, this is an individualistic act that serves to improve the life of its actor. Since Mexican culture was not seen as individualistic like American culture was, that could be another reason Mexican immigrants were deemed unable to assimilate. The initiative intended to therefore curb the influence of this culture, Jacobson argues: "By focusing on the undocumented and excluding both the undocumented and their children from schools, the measure would alter the ability of these immigrants to threaten the culture through their failure to assimilate to educational and linguistic norms."[65]

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[62] Jacobson, 94.
[63] Jacobson, 94.
[64] Jacobson, 100.
[65] Jacobson, 100.

Another prominent issue in campaigns in support of S.O.S. was the concept of allegiance. Many viewed Mexican immigrants who did not readily assimilate to their standards as disloyal to the United States, including an unnamed supporter who reacted to Mexico not sending troops to support American military campaigns post-9/11: "They don't want to assimilate, they don't want to learn our language, they don't want to become citizens because they don't want to fight for this country; they've already made that statement."[66] National allegiance has historically rewarded races with positive narratives and inclusion in cultural citizenship. For example, interned Japanese-Americans who enlisted during World War II were constructed as military heroes, which fed into the enduring idea of the "model minority."[67] Publicly voiced concerns such as this served to further undermine the idea of a race-neutral assimilation standard, especially when generalizing not only an entire race, but also seeing the actions of the Mexican government as reflections of the individual motives of immigrants. Due to cultural discrepancies in values, Mexican culture was repeatedly demonized during the fourth wave of immigration. Rather than a culture that could be easily shed in favor of accepting the American one, it became seen as a threatening force of cultural invasion.[68]

Just as with language, voluntarism rhetoric is again suggesting that if an immigrant does not *choose* to obtain their citizenship, they are refusing to assimilate to American culture. In fact, undocumentation made it even easier for anti-immigration activists to exclude Mexicans from "cultural citizenship," since their original culture was deemed uncivilized and therefore unable to

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[66] Jacobson, 97.
[67] T. Fujitani, "Go for Broke, the Movie: Japanese American Soldiers in U.S. National, Military, and Racial Discourses" in *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2001) 244.
[68] Jacobson, 98.

be reconciled with a superior American one.[69] Although Proposition 187 was deemed unconstitutional after being passed in 1994, and was mainly focused with policies that would prevent undocumented immigrants' access to public services, American views of assimilation were heavily tied into the debate and the background for the initiative itself. Not only did it place heavy importance on the culture of an undocumented immigrant as a measure of whether or not they deserve public assistance, the proposition and its supporters also supported the idea that immigrants shoulder most of the responsibility in their process of assimilation. This idea that successfully assimilating is entirely a choice of free-will, when there are obstacles to measures such as obtaining citizenship, learning the language, and adapting one's values, the argument is ignoring the other culpable party in this nuanced equation, which is the state.

C. The Role of the State

In 1994, conservative politician Patrick J. Buchanan wrote an op-ed for the *Los Angeles Times* called "What Will America Be in 2050?" in which he lamented the current ability of the state to assimilate its immigrants, contingent on the actions of both the state and the immigrants themselves: "Ethnic militancy and solidarity are on the rise in the United States; the old institutions of assimilation are not doing their work as they once did; the melting pot is in need of repair.'"[70] Although Buchanan's critique includes mentions of ethnic militancy as a potential reason for the failure of immigrants to assimilate, it also contains a notion that the state is partially responsible.

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[69] Jacobson, 99.
[70] Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop, *Shifting Borders: Rhetoric, Immigration, and California's Proposition 187,* 66.

Although magazines and initiative supporters say otherwise, and Rosaldo pointed out the rampant voluntarism throughout the assimilation historiography, it is oftentimes also the state that is held responsible for what could result in a seperatist society, or an "uneasy melting pot" in California's case. For example, in Natalia Molina's monograph *How Race is Made in America*, Molina claims that it is not an immigrant's personal choice whether or not they can assimilate, but rather that in the U.S. there is a "social, political, and cultural environment that ultimately prevented Mexican Americans from ever fully integrating into U.S. society;" for example, Molina cites a script of criminality or deviance and a history of medical nativism as factors keeping Mexicans and Mexican Americans outside from assimilating to the dominant culture.[71] Molina's argument encompasses the broad history of how Mexicans were racialized in America over a long period, from the time when the state was actually part of Mexico in the mid-19th century, up to the most modern waves of immigration to states like California. Just as individual activists in Proposition 187 were perpetuating the idea that Mexican culture was inferior and Mexican immigrants and second-, third-, and so on generation Mexican Americans were inassimilable, institutions were perpetuating it, too.

As mentioned in Rosaldo's essay at the "Toward New Perspectives on Chicanos and Assimilation" symposium, assimilation historian Douglas Massey wondered how the U.S. would be able to handle assimilating its fourth wave of immigrants.[72] Was he in some way implicitly casting these newcomers as inassimilable? What classifies an immigrant group as such? Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop argue that views of immigrants changed throughout time, and "what was historically the 'arrival' of easily assimilated and familiar immigrants to the United States has

[71] Molina, 30.
[72] Rosaldo, 3.

become an invasion of aliens."[73] Historically, this script of inassimilability has been used against many immigrant groups, as Asian American community leaders described at the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission Hearing featured in chapter one. But in the situation of Mexican immigrants of the fourth wave (and others before), it is especially perplexing to see how this idea of inassimilability manifested, and reveals how important the idea of assimilation is in the immigration and citizenship debate, especially to those that are largely opposed to immigration. Once a group is cast as incapable of assimilating, for reasons that will be discussed subsequently, that belief can always be used as a justification to draft anti-immigration initiatives such as Save Our State. The stereotype of criminality and deviance is one major way Molina discusses how Mexicans and Mexican Americans were permanently cast as inassimilable, which relates to the idea of citizenship and how documentation can contribute as a measure of assimilation.[74]

Like Rosaldo, Molina examined the historiography of assimilation studies, paying particular attention to the specific genre that her own book belonged to, and what it had done for the field: "Chicana/o history was instrumental in challenging well-established immigration paradigms that embraced the dominant narrative of the United States as a nation that welcomed all immigrants and treated them equally. By challenging paradigms that viewed assimilation as a uniform, unidirectional process whereby foreign nationals become ethnic Americans, these works exposed the many structural and social barriers to political, economic and cultural integration."[75] Just as Rosaldo said, there was an imbalance in where the responsibility of

[73] Ono and Sloop, 66.
[74] Molina, 119.
[75] Molina, 18.

assimilation processes lied. Historically, many blamed the immigrants themselves for not successfully integrating, rather than examining the structures that became roadblocks in an already complicated process.

The history of Mexican immigrants and subsequent generations of Mexican Americans in California occupies a differentiated space in the narrative of assimilation, because of their unique history in the state. There had to be a concrete process that excluded them from cultural citizenship over time. What for many immigrants is a natural port of entry, was actually a home territory for Mexicans at one point. The area that is now the state of California was Mexican territory up until 1848, when the United States defeated its southern neighbor in the U.S.-Mexico War (1846-1848) and took the land in the Mexican Cession. However, although the territory no longer belonged to Mexicans, they were still present when California entered statehood.

Map of Area Taken by U.S. in the Mexican Cession, 1848

As Molina explains, because of this history, Mexicans were actually racialized over time by American institutions, a process which involved deeming generations of Mexicans and Mexican Americans to come as inherently inassimilable. Similarly to Proposition 187 supporters pointing out their unconventional living situations or lack of individualistic values, in the 1940s, the American government worked to categorize Mexicans in the labor movement as criminal, diseased, and likely to become a public charge. [76] In fact, this designation that mainly targeted labor activists actually served to make Mexican farm workers more deportable.[77] This script of deviance served to socially alienate Mexicans from American culture: "while Mexicans had long been seen as a racially inferior but generally malleable workforce, [after the 1940s] stereotypes of Mexicans as criminal, a social burden, diseased, and inassimilable intensified."[78] Beyond the activists made deportable under pretenses of disease and anarchism, nativists also saw the idea of Mexicans reproducing another generation of "unassimilable" children as a threat to American culture, and all the more reason to exclude them from citizenship.

The racialization of Mexicans over time in California, and the role of government agencies in classifying them as unassimilable through disease and criminality, demonstrates how the state shares responsibility for the process of assimilation. Despite a history of "affirmative steps" such as small gains in legal cases, "that narratives of assimilation would have us believe would entrench groups into mainstream American society, Mexican Americans continued to be seen as outsiders" according to Molina.[79] In many ways, these mid-century attitudes around immigration and assimilation of Mexican immigrants and second or third generation Mexicans

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[76] Molina,
[77] Molina, 100.
[78] Molina, 34.
[79] Molina, 34.

were a precursor for the Proposition 187 debate. Although it was deemed unconstitutional, the eventual passing of Proposition 187 shows how this othering of Mexican culture prevailed for over a century. Mexicans and Mexican Americans were not just at one point deemed inassimilable. It was a gradual process that intensified over time, but was always serving the same purpose.

Ideas of culture, assimilation, and citizenship, as shown with the case of Proposition 187, have strong connections to each other that complicate the argument of who is ultimately responsible for the process of assimilation of non-white ethnic immigrants in California. It has been shown time and again that the opposition to undocumented immigration view assimilation, through processes such as acculturation and obtaining citizenship, as personal choices for immigrants; their arguments rely heavily on voluntarism. However, throughout history when the state has been faced with large influxes of immigrants, assimilationists wonder how the state will process them. Thus, the process of assimilation is a complicated relationship with shared responsibility between the immigrant and the state. This becomes a problem, however, when the state is actively banishing groups of immigrants from assimilating, and that state's citizens are wondering why California is not a picturesque melting pot that has been so romanticized in the history of American immigration.

IV. **Conclusion**

Assimilation is a complicated, contested, and ever-evolving concept. The process has been constantly re-defined and re-prioritized throughout history, in the United States as a whole and in California, as a popular destination for immigrants, with no signs of slowing down anytime soon. While it is largely understood as a cultural process that intends to create a harmonious society, assimilation is also inherently political, and in many ways is actually working to exclude certain groups of people from this harmonious society. This thesis has argued how this is true, through discussion of the assimilation narratives for non-white immigrants in California in the late 20th century.

In 1980s Los Angeles, *TIME Magazine* painted a picture of pandemonium; there was no other solution for the "uneasy melting pot" but strict adherence to assimilation. The authors of the issue's cover story put this responsibility onto the people they profiled, the immigrants. They needed to let go of their old culture in order to indulge in a harmonious, shared, American culture, they needed to set aside time to learn English and let go of prejudices against other races. The community leaders at the L.A. County Human Relations Commission Public Hearing used similar sentiments of a shared culture in order to discuss solutions to violence against Asians. However, these leaders did not see assimilation and a creation of mutual cultural understanding as mutually exclusive. Asian culture did not have to be entirely forgotten in order for Americans to view them as assimilated, and hopefully to create a mutual understanding that decreased racist violence.

During the debate over Proposition 187, this narrative of a fractured society caused by inassimilable immigrants came back tenfold, with Mexican immigrants as the target. They were

also seen as not only unwilling to assimilate, but also inherently incompatible with American culture. This script of inassimilability had been created over time by American institutions, from the days following the Mexican Cession in 1848, all the way through the 1990s and to the present day. Again, the recycling of these narratives to suit different time periods and groups of immigrants is apparent.

The popular idea of an American melting pot does not work when people are denied access to cultural citizenship because of their perceived inability to assimilate. The process of assimilation is never-ending, the target always moving for different groups of immigrants and throughout different time periods, especially in times of economic stress. However, the historical narratives endure.

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