Identity Politics and Cultural Placemaking:
The Americanization of Portsmouth Square

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Abstract

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This thesis considers Portsmouth Square as a pivotal space of shifting American and Chinese American cultural identities since the mid-19th century in order to examine its transformations over time, within the spaces of the park, as well as through dialogue with the municipality, residents outside of Chinatown, and the local community. Through a survey of historical images and urban interventions in this space, this thesis identifies three eras of change to construct a unique perspective of San Francisco's Chinatown, Portsmouth Square, and the lasting impact of Chinese Exclusion. Through the examination of legislation and simultaneous spatial change, the significance and impact of law upon identity formation and placemaking is revealed. The first section (1846-1906) establishes Portsmouth Square as a critical site of American-ness in California, as well as its role in the larger narrative of Chinese Exclusion. The second section (1948-1970) follows Portsmouth Square through a new period of Americanization, characterized by modernity and assimilation efforts. The final section (1987-2010) reveals a new acknowledgement of local identity groups, while taking into account the impact of tourism-based development on the space. The shifting spatial forms of Portsmouth Square reflect temporal changes in the way American-ness is presented and enacted, as well as the development of the Chinese American identity through claiming and occupying the space as a community. The narrative of Chinese immigration and the formation of the Chinese American identity as distinct from both Chinese and American is essential not only to the historical understanding of Portsmouth Square, and Chinatown, but also to holistically understanding what it means to be Chinese American. This historical approach reveals the power of space in the development of cultural identity, as well as the reciprocal power of identity in shaping space.

Contents

Dedication

To the unseen founders of San Francisco whose efforts remain unrecognized. To the immigrants who participated in the creation of this city, yet were overlooked when history was written and preserved. And to those who continue to shape the urban fabric of the city each and every day, and who strive for a more accurate, equitable, and honest retelling of San Francisco's history. Thank you for the work you have done, are doing, and continue to do – I hope that one day it shall be recognized.

Acknowledgements

As this year long journey comes to a close, I feel incredibly grateful for the many individuals who provided me endless support throughout this process. Although there is no way to thank them all adequately here, this truly would not have been possible without each and every one of them.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my professor Catherine Elisabeth Covey who guided me through every stage of my thesis, and from whom I have learned the significance of research in the field of Architecture. I would also like to thank David Eifler and Sine Huang Jensen for their incredible insight that has proven essential throughout the research process.

I am truly grateful for the countless friends who supported me throughout, and who listened to the many iterations of my ideas with kindness and patience. I am especially thankful for Tatum and Anushe, who tirelessly edited my thesis, and provided tremendous support over the past year.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, who have always led by example and instilled in me a passion for research, and without whom I may have never written this thesis.

List of Illustrations

Introduction

Figure 1: Robert Louis Stevenson Monument, Portsmouth Square

"To be honest, to be kind—to earn a little and to spend a little less, to make upon the whole a family happier for his presence, to renounce when that shall be necessary and not be embittered, to keep a few friends but these without capitulation—above all, on the same grim condition, to keep friends with himself—here is a task for all that a man has of fortitude and delicacy." (Robert Louis Stevenson, Across the Plains)

This passage, or rather, code of conduct for humanity, is emblazoned across the Robert Louis Stevenson monument in Portsmouth Square, an important cultural space in San Francisco's Chinatown. Dedicated in 1897, this California memorial is one of the oldest elements of the square, and while it has moved from the center of the square to the edge, it remains an essential element of the space. Stevenson, an American author, lived on nearby Bush street for many years, and often spent time in Portsmouth Square, observing passersby and writing[1]. In a space like Portsmouth Square, the birthplace of San Francisco in the story of America, there are many such histories to be remembered, yet some are chosen and memorialized, while others remain invisible. Mason's "memory site"

[1] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916.," n.d.

framework models this phenomenon as well, as the creation of memory infrastructure hinges on "including select figures in the pantheon of civil patriotism … and excluding others"[2]. However, the physical display of dominant histories is often more subtle than a memorial with a name on it, and the planners, landscape architects, authors, photographers, artists, and more often than not, citizens who create, represent, and utilize the space continuously are forgotten.

Stevenson is careful to acknowledge personal differences, asking that readers pursue his code "without capitulation," or rather, without abandoning their personal beliefs. Not only does Stevenson argue that we all live for the same purpose, but also that we should remain loyal to our identities. The invisible histories of Portsmouth Square, those enacted "without capitulation," make up the missing pieces of the story. This piece aims to recreate and analyze the spatial history of Portsmouth Square, woven by the unseen creators and inhabitants, and examines the intersection of identity and space through its changing designs, uses, and surrounding neighborhood.

Portsmouth Square, a designated California Historical Landmark, is located in San Francisco, California, and was the site at which Captain Montgomery docked the USS Portsmouth in 1846[3]. Montgomery claimed the area, at the

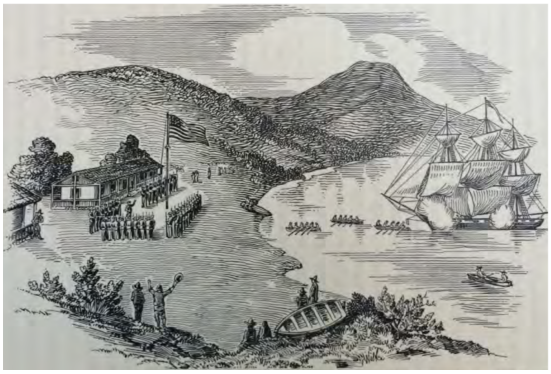

Figure 2: The USS Portsmouth docks at Portsmouth Square and the U.S. Flag is raised for the first time in California

[2] Randall Mason, "Memory Sites: Buildings, Parks, Events," in *The Once and Future New York: Historic Preservation and the Modern City* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttsg15.4.
[3] "Chinatown Resource Guide: The Story of Chinatown" (KQUD, n.d.).

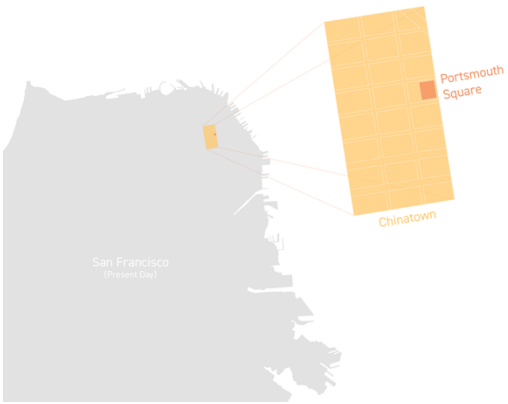

Figure 3: Portsmouth Square, situated within present day San Francisco.

time a part of Mexican Yerba Buena[4], for the United States and raised the first American flag in San Francisco at this location, establishing the city as a part of the United States[5]. Although California was not admitted to the Union until 1850, settlers developed the city with Portsmouth Square at the center, including elements such as a Customs house, active port, and schoolhouse, all located within the square[6]. In 1848, the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill was also announced in Portsmouth Square, as it had already begun to function as an active town hall. As the Gold Rush began, the port of San Francisco became increasingly active, bringing in goods and immigrant workers. Chinese immigrants arrived in large numbers, and quickly opened businesses in the area surrounding Portsmouth Square to serve the increasing number of miners and supporting workers, providing services such as laundromats, drugstores, health stores, and restaurants[7]. As an established part of Chinatown, this area retains a majority population of Chinese Americans today.

Figure 4: Alleyway in San Francisco Chinatown

[4] Barbara L. Voss, "Spanish-Colonial San Francisco," in *The Archaeology of Ethnogenesis: Race and Sexuality in Colonial San Francisco* (University of California Press, 2008), 41–49, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pp52b.8.
[5] "Chinatown Resource Guide: The Story of Chinatown."
[6] "Chinatown Resource Guide: The Story of Chinatown."
[7] "Chinatown Resource Guide: The Story of Chinatown."

Prior to 1850, Portsmouth Square was a dirt area, unplanted and unmaintained by the locals, however, in 1850 it was transformed using popular urban renewal practices, creating an open, centralized plan with green space and minimal seating[8]. Meanwhile, Chinese immigrants had begun creating public spaces of their own, mostly restricted to alleyways, while also participating in the tourism industry to support themselves[9]. These distinctly Chinese fringe spaces were considered "dangerous" and "authentic" and were seen as a spectacle for tourists to visit[10]. San Francisco began to pour money into this industry, as Chinatown quickly became the most popular tourist destination in the city[11].

Figure 5: "Pacific Chivalry"

Figure 6: "A Statue for our Harbor"

The conception of the Chinese immigrant identity within the context of America is multifaceted – hinging on labor, socioeconomic roles, legal status and recognition, and outsider perception. California was the first state to add an Asian race option on their

[8] Michael DeGregorio, "Workshop 1 Site History Poster" (San Francisco, CA, n.d.), https://sfrecpark.org/1166/Portsmouth-Square-Improvement-Project.
[9] Raymond W. Rast, "The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco's Chinatown, 1882-1917," *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (February 2007): 29–60.
[10] Rast.
[11] Rast.

census, first appearing as "Chinese" in 1860[12]. This delineation of Chinese identity acknowledged the presence of Chinese immigrants in California, however, also contributed to the future creation of the Asian American identity, blending all Asian Americans together under the Chinese identity group. In 1860, there were 2,719 recorded "Chinese," compared to 52,866 "White," 1,176 "Free Colored," and 41 "Indian" in San Francisco county[13]. By 1870, the number of "Chinese" in San Francisco county had grown to 12,030 individuals, compared to 136,059 "White," 1,330 "Free Colored," and 54 "Indian," placing Chinese immigrants as the fastest growing racial group from 1860 to 1870[14]. Concurrently, anti-Chinese sentiment grew as well, as demonstrated through media such as "Pacific Chivalry" . The imminent restrictive immigration acts only fueled this expression against Chinese immigration, as depicted by "A statue for our harbor," among other cartoons.

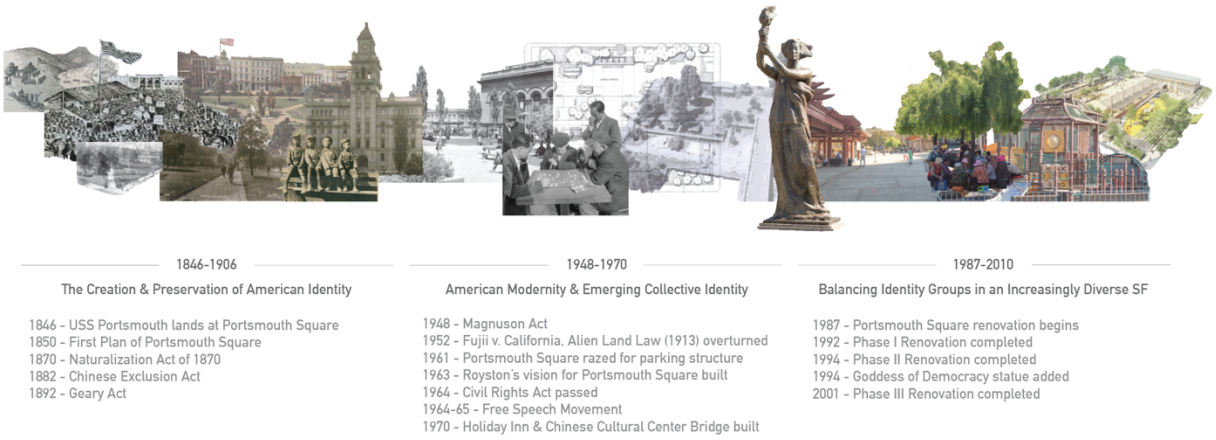

Figure 7: A spatial and legislative timeline of Portsmouth Square and Chinese Exclusion.

As immigration increased through the mid-19th century, American federal policy reacted by imposing strict immigration and naturalization laws. The Naturalization Act of

[12] "The Asian Population: 2010," 2010 Census Briefs (United States Census Bureau, March 2012), https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/decennial-publications.2010.html.
[13] "1860 Census: Population of the United States" (United States Census Bureau, 1864), https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html.
[14] "1870 Census: Volume 1. The Statistics of the Population of the United States" (United States Census Bureau, 1872), https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1872/dec/1870a.html.

Figure 8: 1906 - Portsmouth Square as a temporary shelter post-earthquake

Figure 9: 1906 - Portsmouth Square as a temporary shelter post-earthquake

1870 barred all non-white or black residents from becoming citizens, further othering the Chinese immigrants of the city, justifying their exclusion from society and exploitation of their culture, and forcing them into poor living conditions. This process became more targeted with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which stopped all Chinese immigration, calling out laborers and workers as an undesirable immigrant class[15]. This was further enforced by the Geary Act of 1892, which mandated that all Chinese immigrants, no matter how they entered the country, carry identification papers with them in order to prove their legal status[16]. The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 leveled society in some ways, and Portsmouth Square became a space of refuge for many who had lost their homes, White, Chinese, or otherwise. From this point on, San Francisco was propelled into an era of battling identities, culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

After the end of World War II, the Magnuson Act was passed, repealing the Chinese Exclusion Act and allowing for limited immigration of Chinese Americans[17]. Furthermore,

[15] "Chinese Exclusion Act," Pub. L. No. Chapter 126 (1882).
[16] Kelly Lytle Hernández, *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771–1965* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469631196_hernandez.
[17] "Seventy Eighth Congress. Chapter 344. "An Act to Repeal the Chinese Exclusion Acts, to Establish Quotas, and for Other p," n.d.

in 1952, Fujii v. California overturned the Alien Land Law, allowing Chinese Americans to own land, although they continued to face racist land practices for many years. The Financial District began to expand in size, and shared an edge with Portsmouth Square, causing conflict between developers in both neighborhoods[18]. In 1961, Portsmouth Square was razed to the ground to accommodate the construction of an underground parking structure, allowing for a completely new design[19]. Simultaneously, a large lot across the street, previously housing a court and county jail, was vacated[20]. Robert Royston designed a new vision for Portsmouth Square, heavily inspired by contemporary landscape architecture, which was completed in 1963[21]. In 1970, a Holiday Inn was completed in the vacant lot across the street[22]. The sizable, brutalist structure cast a large shadow across the square, however provided space for the Chinese Culture Center and a bridge connecting the center to the square. In the midst of this era of change for the spatiality of Portsmouth Square, demonstrations and community organizing during the Civil Rights and Free Speech movements greatly affected the younger, American-born Chinese American population, who then utilized the space for activism.

Seventeen years later in 1987, renovations for Portsmouth Square began again, including a new elevator pavilion, public restrooms, playgrounds, and a clubhouse, completed in three phases (1992, 1994, 2001)[23]. In 1994, the Goddess of Democracy Statue

[18] "The Decade Past And The Decade To Come" (San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, n.d.), Him Mark Lai Papers.
[19] DeGregorio, "Workshop 1 Site History Poster."
[20] "County Jail No. 1 – 1915 to 1961," Eras in SFSD History (The SFSD History Research Project, n.d.), http://www.sfsdhistory.com/eras/county-jail-no.-1-1915-to-1961.
[21] DeGregorio, "Workshop 1 Site History Poster."
[22] "The Decade Past And The Decade To Come."
[23] DeGregorio, "Workshop 1 Site History Poster."

Figure 10: 1990 - Reenactment of the first raising of the U.S. flag

was added to Portsmouth Square, a nod to Chinese history, as well as America's love for democracy[24]. During the 1990s, White American and Chinese American culture overlapped and, in a way, contradicted one another in their occupation of this space. While the city hosted a reenactment of the first American flag being raised in Portsmouth Square in 1990, including a ceremony led by the marines, they also encouraged night markets in the same space, created by the local Chinese American community, that were extremely popular among San Francisco residents[25]. Today, many Chinese Americans continue to utilize the space to play cards, Chinese chess, read the newspaper, enjoy Chinese performances, exercise, and spend time with friends. Many of these activities take place using makeshift seating and gathering spaces, often prompting residents to bring buckets and crates to sit on, or to use the playground as exercise equipment.

In 2014, the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department, with the cooperation of local city planners and architects, began the redevelopment process for Portsmouth Square, heavily involving input and feedback from the local community[26]. As a result, the new plans are based upon the expressed needs of local residents, and, for the first time, are representative of the Asian American voice. The contract for the redevelopment project

[24] "Goddess of Democracy: Symbol of Democracy Around the Globe," *National Endowment for Democracy*, n.d., https://www.ned.org/democracy-award/goddess-of-democracy-symbol-of-democracy-around-the-globe/.
[25] Ryan Kim, "Night Market Reminds Many of Lands Left Behind," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 3, 2001, Him Mark Lai Papers.
[26] DeGregorio, "Workshop 1 Site History Poster."

was awarded in 2016, and the process continues to move forward.

This thesis focuses on three eras of change for Portsmouth Square, primarily based on the overlap between legislation and design changes. The first era, 1846-1906, is characterized by the admittance of California into the Union, the Naturalization Act of 1870, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, and the Geary Act of 1892, as well as the first design for Portsmouth Square, initially executed in 1850 and continuously adapted since. The second era, 1948-1970, was a period of great cultural change, including the Magnuson Act, overturning of the Alien Land Law, Civil Rights Movement, and Free Speech Movement, mirrored by Royston's radically different plan for Portsmouth Square. The final era, 1987-2010, lacks monumental legislation, however, is characterized by the 2009 California legislature's acknowledgement and apology for Chinese Exclusion, as well as several phases of design changes[27].

The process of Americanization is woven throughout the narrative of Portsmouth Square. Although Americanization efforts were formalized in 1915 by the federal government and were focused around spreading American language and culture to immigrants, this thesis applies the concept of Americanization to readings of space[28]. The Americanization movement relied on individual understanding of what it meant to be American, however, this definition continues to change over time, and at any given point may be contested[29]. When applied to space, Americanization translates to a continual process of evolution towards the ever-changing definition of America. By this framework,

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[27] Ling Woo Liu, "California Apologizes to Chinese Americans," *Time*, July 22, 2009, http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1911981,00.html.
[28] Howard C. Hill, "The Americanization Movement," *American Journal of Sociology, The University of Chicago Press* 24, no. 6 (May 1919): 609–42.
[29] Dorothee Schneider, "Americanization," in *Crossing Borders* (Harvard University Press, 2011), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24hk99.8.

the American identity, and the group of individuals who are able to claim it, also continues to change. According to President Roosevelt, "there is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism," (1915), however, there was yet to be a path to citizenship for Chinese immigrants, along with many other racial groups, excluding them from becoming American, and leaving them in an undefined, untethered state[30]. Until 1943, when the Magnuson Act was passed, Asian Americans as a whole were subject to exclusion from rights enjoyed by American citizens, legally including White, Black, and Latin Americans who were born in the U.S. or entered legally.

As a primary historical site within San Francisco, Portsmouth Square, and the surrounding neighborhood, have frequently been represented by artists, photographers, cartographers, newspapers, and other forms of media. This paper relies primarily on archival images to construct a unique perspective of San Francisco's Chinatown, Portsmouth Square, and the lasting impact of Chinese Exclusion. Artists and other media creators are able to carefully include and eliminate certain elements of a subject, therefore revealing their own biases, an essential part of understanding the dominant viewpoints of the time. This methodology also separates this piece from existing literature.

The impact and significance of law upon identity formation and placemaking is revealed through the examination of legislation and simultaneous spatial change. As a pivotal space of shifting American and Chinese American cultural identities, Portsmouth Square has been transformed through relationships that take place within the park and the dialogue with outside forces, such as municipality, residents outside of Chinatown, and the local community. A study of urban interventions and representations of the square during

[30] Schneider.

three eras of change reveals the shifting ideals of those in power; from the first presentation of American-ness in California and erasure of Chinese immigration (1846-1906), striving for modernity and assimilation (1948-1970), and embracing tourism opportunities while balancing local identity groups (1987-2010). The shifting forms of Portsmouth Square reflect temporal changes in the way that American-ness is presented and enacted, as well as the development of the Asian American identity through claiming and occupying the space as a community.

1846-1906: The Creation & Preservation of American Identity

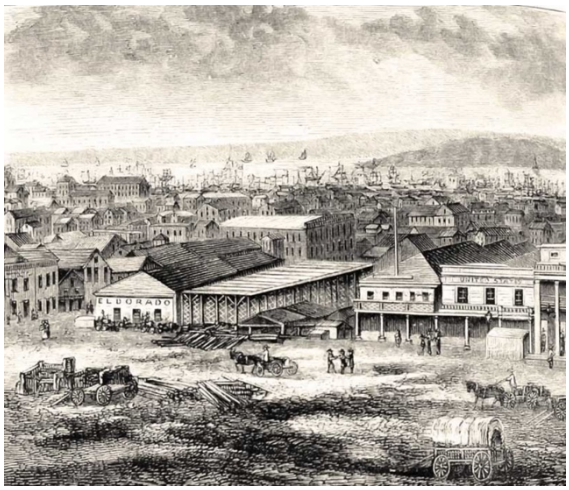

Figure 11: 1852 - Portsmouth Square remains undeveloped

Figure 12: 1905 - Portsmouth Square's radial design

The California Gold Rush of 1849 attracted a plethora of diverse labor into the Bay Area from all across the world, not only expanding the market in California, but also prompting urban growth in San Francisco. Given the increase in trade occurring at the time, the Port of San Francisco was busy and growing, attracting increasing numbers of tradesmen and laborers. During this time, Chinese immigrants were one of the largest racial groups to migrate to America in search of wealth and opportunity, and as they arrived, they began to settle around Portsmouth Square, the social and economic heart of the city[31]. They opened businesses such as street-side laundries, medical shops, and other general supply stores to respond to the needs of the growing mining population, and thereby began contributing to the local economy[32]. At first, Portsmouth Square remained undeveloped, however, over time underwent several spatial iterations as the surrounding blocks increased in density, resulting in a radially designed, planted space, followed by the addition of gates and monuments.

[31] "1870 Census: Volume 1. The Statistics of the Population of the United States."
[32] "Chinatown Resource Guide: The Story of Chinatown."

Prior to the Gold Rush, and subsequent arrival of immigrant groups, Portsmouth Square had served as a medium through which locals enacted American identity, which, at the time, was restricted to primarily White individuals. In the years leading up to California's statehood, this was particularly important. In the decades following the Gold Rush, characterized by Chinese Exclusion, the two dominant identity groups struggled to coexist as a cohesive "public," an experience expressed through the design and use of Portsmouth Square. As a space of American patriotism and celebration, Portsmouth Square embodied the traditional American identity prior to the influx of Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush. As Chinese immigrants settled around the port of San Francisco, their social relationships and activities began to manifest in the public space, as visible through photographs and the creation of alleyways. The city and its residents pushed back by imposing a socially constricting, Western design, effectively barring Chinese American identity from Portsmouth Square, empowered and reinforced by the Chinese Exclusion Act.

American-ness

California, as a territory, transferred hands several times before entering the United States, however, in 1850 many residents of San Francisco were eager to join the Union, as demonstrated by the widely attended celebrations of California statehood. California officially entered the Union on September 9, 1850, however, they had been displaying American sovereignty for years. From as early as 1846, there was an American flag flying in Portsmouth Square, serving not only as a signifier of local aspirations, but also a symbol

for foreign ships approaching the port[33]. Among the first available depictions of Portsmouth Square's early development, the flag remains constant, while the surroundings continue to change as the population of San Francisco grew[34]. Over time, the square became a space for celebration of political figures and achievements, further embedding a distinctly American identity into the space. This identity was only strengthened by the California Gold Rush (1848) which attracted a wide variety of immigrants from America and abroad for decades after. Despite being a dynamic space, shifting with the increasing immigration from foreign countries, specifically China, the distinct Californian American identity persisted, perhaps even stronger than before[35]. Portsmouth Square embodied American-ness and allowed for the

Figure 13: 1850 - California enters the Union and the community celebrates in Portsmouth Square.

Figure 14: 1851 - California's first Independence Day celebration after being admitted to the Union.

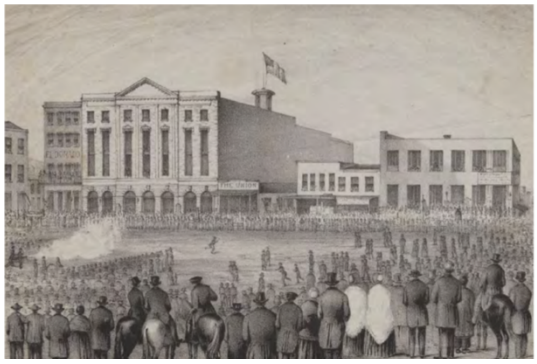

Figure 15: 1852 - Celebration of George Washington's Birthday.

[33] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.
[34] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.
[35] "1870 Census: Volume 1. The Statistics of the Population of the United States."

enactment and reproduction of an exclusive, American culture dominated by Western ideals.

As the original port of San Francisco, Portsmouth Square, with its quintessential American flag, served as the heart of American social and commercial life in the Bay in the 1850s, establishing itself as a critical site at the intersection of identity and space. Portsmouth Square was a particularly prominent site as it served both as a landmark for the residents of San Francisco, as well as a port for foreign ships, therefore, occupying a uniquely visible and influential space . Aside from the prominence of the American flag, the square also held the most important buildings in San Francisco at the time, including the Post Office, the first School House, and the Customs House, affirming and reinforcing its value as the social and commercial center of the early city[36].

Portsmouth Square served as a site for many public celebrations, such as California entering the Union and the first July 4th Independence Day celebration, marking itself as a distinctly American space. Given the prominence of Portsmouth Square in the lives of San Francisco's residents, it comes as no surprise that it was further utilized in order to enact state-related celebrations. Depictions of California entering the Union, Independence Day, and George Washington's birthday celebrations, show hundreds of engaged residents in the square, as well as flags, horses, carriages, marching bands, and even floats[37]. Walter J.

[36] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.
[37] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.

Thompson, a writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, later looked back at these moments as the peak of Portsmouth Square, prior to the immigration of Chinese laborers[38].

> "Patriotism went up to 120 degrees or more every Fourth of July in the plaza, beginning with 1850. That occasion was a kind of doubleheader. Not only did the American Eagle scream from the platform where the flower of the flock of local orators assembled, but the citizens were called upon to participate in another ceremony that of dedicating a new Liberty Pole in place of the one Captain Montgomery had used in his flag-raising ceremony."[39]

Through this description of Independence Day, Thompson demonstrates the role that Portsmouth Square served in creating a space for public congregation and celebration, and the way in which Portsmouth Square contributed to the creation and affirmation of American identity.

Urban Renewal

As the wealth of San Francisco grew with the Gold Rush and a rapidly rising population, investment in the built environment also increased. More permanent buildings began appearing around Portsmouth Square, and the blocks surrounding the square filled with businesses, many Chinese-owned, in order to support the growing mining community. Prior to the 1850s, Portsmouth Square lacked a formal design, and served more as a flexible cultural space and commercial center[40]. However, while Haussmann transformed the urban fabric of Paris with "urban renewal" – an attempt to rid the city of low-income residents, cramped roads, and unfinished spaces – the city of San Francisco simultaneously built over the dirt square with a new, centralized design. The first planned and executed design of Portsmouth Square, first documented in an 1853 illustration, refers back to urban

[38] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916."
[39] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916."
[40] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916."

renewal ideals and prioritizes aesthetics over social interaction and relationships[41]. The imposition of a western inspired design continued the erasure of Chinese American identity, regardless of their presence in and around the square.

Figure 16: 1865 - Portsmouth Square's radial design

Figure 17: 1855 - Radially designed Portsmouth Square with iron gates.

The first plan for Portsmouth Square consisted of a radial design with few benches, many paths, and an iron gate, clearly indicating that this public space was not one to linger in, but rather a monument to modernity and a nod to urban renewal. The square, once a center for life and congregation, quickly shifted to an aesthetically beautiful monument with little function for the residents. While it maintained its flag, and monuments were added around the square, it no longer held, nor invited, the same level of engagement with the public. Photographs of picnics and passersby in the space reflect the open and orderly aesthetic, meant for short visits and walks, tailored to the social norms of the time. This change occurred at the same time as the shift in the identity of the public, as Chinese immigrants began to settle around Portsmouth Square in increasing numbers, undeniably marking the area as Chinese. Thus, while Chinese businesses dominated much of the

[41] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.

surrounding neighborhood, the design of Portsmouth Square continued to characterize the space as American[42].

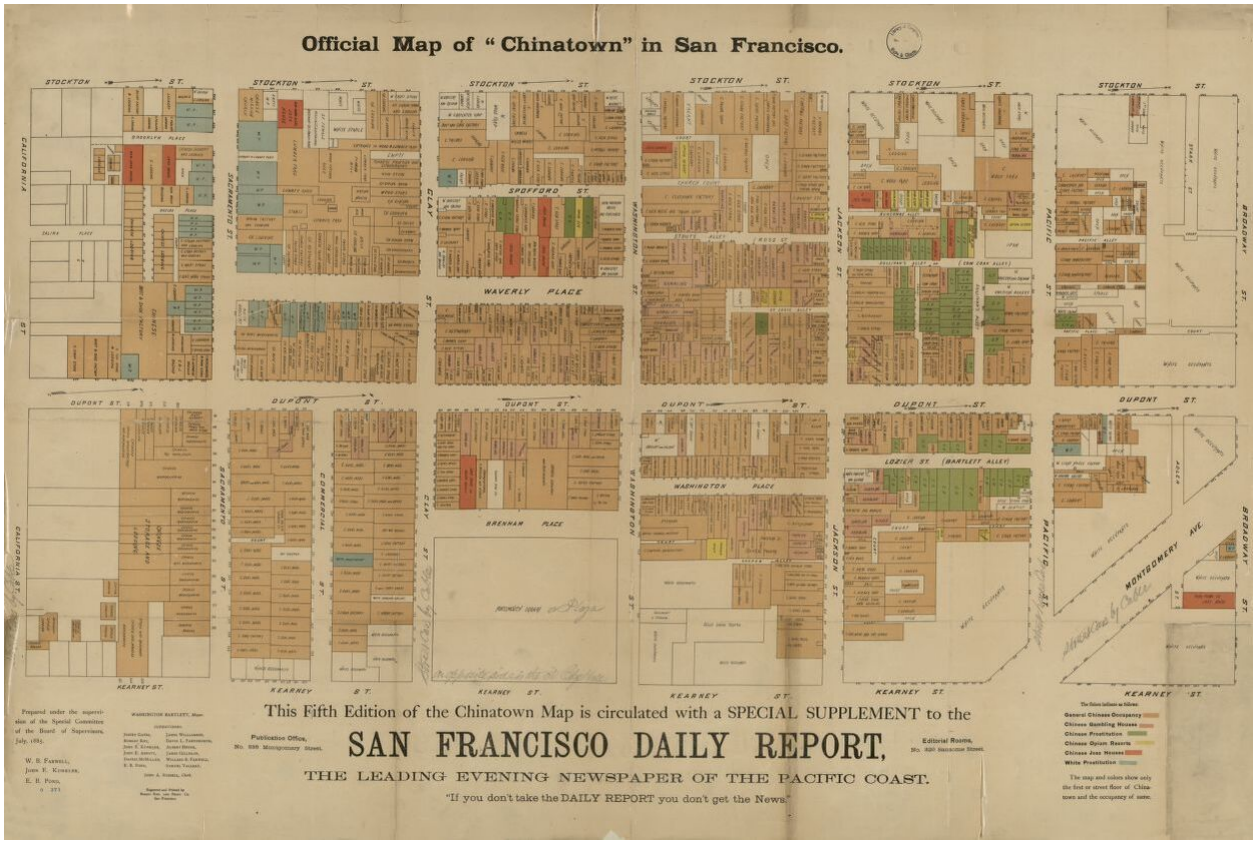

Figure 18: 1885 - Farwell, Kunkler, and Pond's "Chinatown Map," color coded for race of occupant and use.

By 1885, established alleyways became essential parts of Chinese American life, which were characterized by the blending of public and private space and appropriation of the sidewalk as a public space. Thus, while Chinese American vendors and social life were forced into alleyways and below ground shops, Portsmouth Square provided a large open space with limited ability to foster social interaction. This segregation of space was not coincidental whatsoever and was even documented in the San Francisco Daily Report's Chinatown Map[43]. The map is color coded: tan for Chinese-owned businesses and white for

[42] "Chinatown Resource Guide: The Story of Chinatown."
[43] W. B. Farwell, John E. Kunkler, and E. B. Pond, *Official Map of "Chinatown" In San Francisco* (San Francisco Daily Report, 1885).

White-owned businesses – Portsmouth Square is clearly colored white, while surrounded on three sides by almost exclusively Chinese-owned businesses[44]. Each alleyway shown on the map is lined with exclusively Chinese businesses, with each storefront incredibly skinny to fit as many as possible due to limited space. These alleyways served as the heart of Chinese American life, while Portsmouth Square and other "public" spaces were clearly designated for White Americans.

Policy & Representation

Immigrants to the United States faced strict policy restrictions throughout the 1800s, however, Chinese Americans were the first to be subject to specific and targeted policies. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred Chinese immigration, particularly that of laborers, who were mentioned specifically in the language of the act[45]. The Geary Act of 1892 further exacerbated Chinese Exclusion by requiring all Chinese Americans to carry residency papers to prove their legal existence, marking the first time in American history that an individual's presence was considered illegal[46]. Although anti-Chinese sentiment had been brewing amongst White Americans in San Francisco for decades, these policies federally justified the inequitable treatment of Chinese Americans until 1943. In the representations of Portsmouth Square at the time, Chinese Americans are rarely pictured, other than the occasional stereotypical depiction, complemented by anti-Chinese propaganda that was spread beyond San Francisco. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 empowered designers, artists, and writers to ostracize or completely omit Chinese American presence in representations of Portsmouth Square, just as they were in San

[44] Farwell, Kunkler, and Pond.
[45] Chinese Exclusion Act.
[46] Hernández, *City of Inmates*.

Francisco as a whole. When pictured, Chinese Americans were portrayed as caricatures of Chinese culture through a Western lens.

The San Francisco Daily Report's Chinatown Map physically colors the buildings of Chinatown based on the business owners' race and business type, creating a colored barrier demarcating White space and Chinese space[47]. This map was also the fifth edition and a special supplement, indicating that this was a popular and well-read supplement to the paper. The coloring of Portsmouth Square as white shows the designation of the square as a distinctly White space. Already defined as a space of American identity, the square remained exclusive to those able to claim American identity. As Chinese immigrants were unable to become American citizens, they could not be viewed as truly American, and remained unable to participate in the American identity enacted in the square. This map only reinforced the beliefs of White San Francisco residents at the time; whose "racialized perceptions and spatialized fears of density, disease, vice, and violence made Chinatown the target of intensified hostility"[48]. Through the creation and promotion of materials such as the San Francisco Daily Report's Chinatown Map, artists and writers were able to depict Chinatown "as a bounded quarter that contained the culture of the authentic 'other'" and promote the idea of Chinatown as clearly separate from the rest of San Francisco[49].

Residents of San Francisco were able to verbalize their ostracization of Chinese Americans due to the Chinese Exclusion Act and blamed the downfall of Portsmouth Square on Chinese immigrants, reflecting the propaganda that was being distributed positioning

[47] Farwell, Kunkler, and Pond, "Official Map of 'Chinatown' In San Francisco."
[48] Rast, "The Cultural Politics of Tourism in San Francisco's Chinatown, 1882-1917."
[49] Rast.

Chinese Americans as immoral and untrustworthy. Walter J. Thompson described the effect of Chinese immigration on Portsmouth Square in 1916:

> "Strange lettering appeared on signs over new industries—lettering that looked like the labels on packs of firecrackers; strange voices spoke in a jargon that was not understandable; there was no ring or vim in the shuffling footsteps on the pave; faces were cadaverous and yellow, and—well, maybe it was the Chinese after all. Frankly, it was rough on the old plaza…Shabby and bedraggled, the old plaza had become the companion of the outcast and the degraded ones of the city."[50]

Walter Thompson described the "blight" caused by the influx of Chinese Americans and the ways in which Portsmouth Square changed as they immigrated and settled around the square. He went so far as to call the Chinese immigrants "cadaverous and yellow,"[51] similar to the use of color as a signifier of race in the San Francisco Daily Report's Map[52]. As Chinese Americans began to inhabit Portsmouth Square alongside White Americans, Thompson aligned his description of the park with his opinion of Chinese Americans – "outcast" and "degraded" – drawing a direct parallel between space and identity[53].

Cartoons and posters were distributed broadly portraying Chinese Americans as outsiders who were immoral and undeserving. An 1897 illustration of the installation of a new monument in Portsmouth Square was the first to depict Chinese Americans in these civic celebrations[54]. However, the Chinese American man depicted follows the strict stereotypes of Chinese features and is clearly an outsider in the situation. Other

[50] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916."
[51] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916."
[52] Farwell, Kunkler, and Pond, "Official Map of 'Chinatown' In San Francisco."
[53] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916."
[54] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.

representations of Chinese immigrants arriving in San Francisco depict them as taking over the city, bringing with them "disease," "immorality," and "filth." By positioning Chinese immigrants as menacing and greedy, artists were able to convince the greater public to further distance themselves from the Chinese American community.

Figure 19: 1897 - Illustration of the dedication of the Robert Louis Stevenson monument. A Chinese man is shown towards the bottom of the image, on the outskirts of the celebration.

Analysis

Patriotism, including the preservation and creation of "memory sites," overwrites the history of nondominant identity groups, such as Chinese Americans. The subjects that were chosen for monumentalization in Portsmouth Square reflects the viewpoints of those in power in San Francisco during this era. The further preservation of these events through drawings and photographs not only speaks to the importance of these events and their prominence in collective memory, but also ensures the persistence of these events in the memory of future populations. The designation of valuable public space as meant for dominant American culture forced Chinese American social life to the periphery. However, the same Chinese culture was appropriated for Western tourism, a critical element of San Francisco's economic prosperity. City officials, designers, and planners carefully drew the boundaries of Chinese space, as it was convenient and profitable for them. In the case of Portsmouth Square, the space was clearly preserved as a White American space. While exclusion is a multifaceted process, it is inherently spatial – the Chinese Exclusion Act barred Chinese immigration to U.S. land. This process, while established through legal

language, physically manifested through cartoons, maps, and other imagery.

The creation and preservation of American identity, bolstered by Chinese Exclusion, created a dominant historical narrative for Portsmouth Square. The legacy of prominent American events and individuals was preserved while the contributions of Chinese Americans were pushed to the side. Chinese immigrants were viewed as un-American, as defined by The Naturalization Act of 1870, contributing to the formation of the Chinese American identity as one of perpetual alienation[55]. Remaining evidence of placemaking processes carried out by Chinese immigrants remain as captured through a White lens, for the purposes of tourism and the process of othering Chinese immigrants, further contributing to the formation of the Chinese American identity. Until Chinese Americans were given the ability to immigrate and become citizens, their spatial exclusion from ownership and use of public space continued, and their contributions to American society were overlooked, as they continued to occupy a distinctly un-American identity. The preservation of the American identity in Portsmouth Square hinged on the ability to exclude Chinese Americans from San Francisco's legacy, and therefore the American and Chinese American identities were situated in opposition to one another.

[55] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Duke University Press, 1996).

1948 - 1970: American Modernity & Emerging Collective Identity

Royston's 1960s design for Portsmouth Square transformed it from a centralized monument to American-ness, to a transitional, intersectional space, as the interface between the established Chinatown and the growing Financial District. Mirrored by the changing surroundings, including the new high-rise hotel and removal of the county jail, Royston's design reflected planners striving for a new version of American modernity. In the process, Chinese Americans, now allowed to legally immigrate to the US after the Magnuson Act repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act, began to utilize Portsmouth Square for social and cultural events, including activism and protests. This era, characterized by culturally inclusive and progressive policy, and movements, such as the passing of the Magnuson Act, repeal of the Alien Land Law, enactment of the Civil Rights Act, and Free Speech Movement, represents a shift in the logic of Portsmouth Square's design, and the battle for representation and power between America and its immigrants. This period of change in Portsmouth Square, reflecting the changing dynamics between Chinese Americans and White Americans, between Chinatown and the Financial District, extends up to the present, and continues to define the Square, its ever-shifting design, and purpose.

A New Portsmouth Square

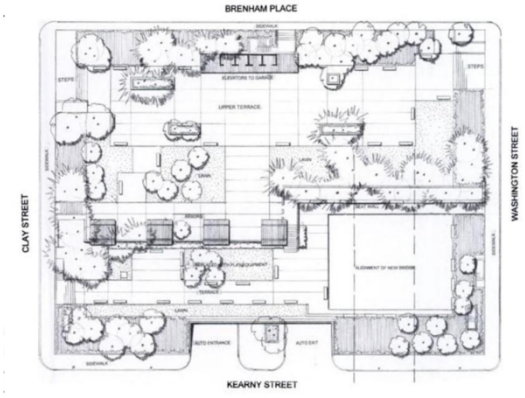

Figure 20: Royston's plan for Portsmouth Square

Figure 21: 1964 - Royston's vision for Portsmouth Square is realized.

Royston's design for Portsmouth Square was reflective of popular urban planning practices at the time, and although it was coupled with the removal of other particularly American elements, it reinforced the concept of modernism. Portsmouth Square's new design echoed those of other contemporary parks and plazas and reconstructed the modern American identity for San Francisco residents. Urban renewal is a perpetual process and continues to reappear in American city and regional planning practices. Robert Royston's Portsmouth Square, the first project for his new landscape architecture firm RHAA, was not only a major project for Royston's firm and used as a testament to his skill, but also a seemingly blank canvas upon which to create the new ideal for American modernity in San Francisco[56]. The construction of an underground parking garage left the entire site blank for Royston's molding. The only traces of the old Portsmouth Square in his new design was the retention of original monuments. With the changing design for the square and growing Financial District, the square's surroundings also changed rapidly. Royston's Portsmouth Square was both a product of, as well as a seed of change within its surroundings. The multi-level design, remnants of which are left today, featured seating areas, green space, and playgrounds, augmented by the addition of a bridge connecting the square with the Chinese Cultural

Figure 22: Aerial view of Portsmouth Square with the pedestrian bridge connecting the square to the Holiday Inn.

[56] "RHAA History," Practice (Royston, Hanamoto, Alley & Abey, n.d.), http://www.rhaa.com/index.php/practice/history.

and Trade Center located in the adjacent Holiday Inn[57].

The Interface between Chinatown & the Financial District

In order to accommodate the underground parking garage, the new multi-level design for Portsmouth Square strayed away from the monumental characteristics of the previous centrally designed space. As a reaction to the emerging Financial District, Royston's design specifically addressed Portsmouth Square's position as the interface between Chinese Americans and White Americans, and balanced the two. While the 1850's design for Portsmouth Square created a distinctly monumental space with a clear emphasis on the center, Royston's decentralization of the plan effectively removed the monumental qualities, trading them for the creation of an "intersectional" space between Chinatown and the emerging Financial District.

Figure 23: 1961 - The construction of the Portsmouth Square parking garage required fully excavating the existing square.

Figure 24: Royston's design in construction atop the Portsmouth Square garage.

The centralized plan for Portsmouth Square, first developed in the 1850s and maintained through 1960, underwent several changes, including the addition of wider pathways and the introduction of a central monument, all contributing elements to its

[57] "Osmundson, Theodore. Roof Gardens: History, Design, and Construction. New York, NY: Norton, 1999.," n.d.

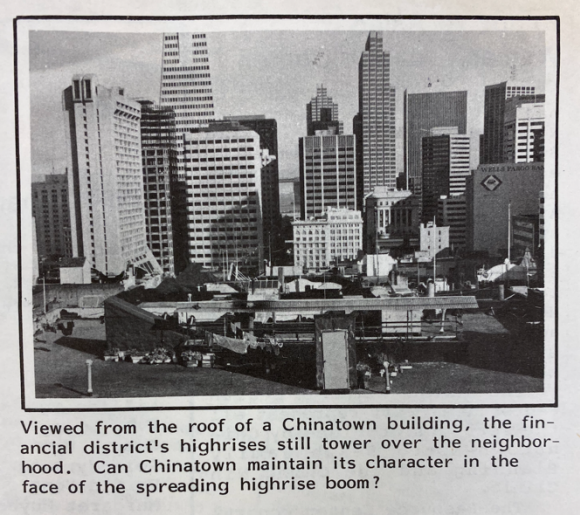

Figure 25: Image of Portsmouth Square along the backdrop of the emerging Financial District.

monumentalization[58]. By 1960, the symbols of American-ness in San Francisco had changed – the cityscape was no longer composed of small businesses, horse and carriages, and a predominantly White population. The city was now home to towering office buildings and hotels, cars and vehicle infrastructure, and a widely diverse population, including a growing Chinese American population. The Portsmouth Square parking garage was likely created to meet the demands of the growing number of jobs in the Financial District, which more than doubled between 1965 and 1982, as well as of the large number of tourists visiting Chinatown[59]. The addition of this underground parking structure required the destruction of the historic Portsmouth Square, and the city of San Francisco prioritized the garage over retaining its authenticity.

Robert Royston designed a multi-level square to sit atop the garage. The center of Portsmouth Square was once marked by not only the American Flag but also a monument to Robert Louis Stevenson, Scottish author of Treasure Island[60]. With Royston's new design, the center of Portsmouth Square seemingly disappears. In demolishing the previous square to incorporate an underground parking garage, Royston developed a multi-level public

[58] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.
[59] Brian J. Godfrey, "Urban Development and Redevelopment in San Francisco," *Geographical Review* 87, no. 3 (July 1997): 309–33, https://doi.org/DOI: 10.2307/216033.
[60] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.

space that dissolves the idea of a "center," and replaces it with distributed seating, plantings, and eventually playgrounds. The inclusion of alternative seating, the bridge to the Chinese Cultural Center, and playgrounds, detracts from the center of the square, no longer marked by a flag or monument. The creation of two levels is also decentralizing to the plan, arguably creating two centers. The division of space takes away from the overall monumentality of the square, however, creates more seating and opportunity for pedestrian use. The lack of symmetry creates almost opposing spaces that lack harmony yet attract users. The eclectic palette of textures and colors is somehow more approachable and flexible than the rigid design of the previous iteration.

The 1960s Portsmouth Square lacks an apparent pattern – in fact, the design creates four distinctly different spaces with no central area to connect them – the upper level, the lower level towards the south, the bridge, and the disconnected lower level towards the north, cut off by the bridge. The visible patterns lie in the seating and later use of playgrounds to somewhat connect the upper and lower levels. Royston's Portsmouth Square lacks a clear center, no longer reaffirming its role as an American monument, yet, serving, or attempting to serve, a broader range of publics. With several options for seating, a connection to the Chinese Cultural Center, and playgrounds, Royston turns what used to be a purely distinctive monumental space into an attempt to engage with several identity groups, including those of different ages and cultural backgrounds. In the process, Portsmouth Square begins to lose its monumental status. The monuments previously located within the park, including the Robert Louis Stevenson monument, are moved to the peripheries to make room for open central spaces. Although the central seating is important to the function of the space, and makes it more inhabitable for local

communities, it also loses its appeal as an important site of San Francisco history. Attempts to gain back a centrally engaging element were made later by the city with the introduction of the pagoda-inspired structure at the mouth of the bridge, as well as the Goddess of Democracy Statue remembering the Tiananmen Square Massacre, both added in the 1990s, and located in the center of the upper level. However, neither of these additions recreate the feeling of a "monumental space."

The parking garage beneath Portsmouth Square, a symbol of both technological growth and shifting publics, was coupled with other spatial changes, reflective of the quickly changing local population. The Holiday Inn, placed on the site of the old Hall of Justice and local jail, represents the shifting nature of spatial representations of "American-ness" – a courthouse and jail no longer represented American modernity, but major hotels did. The Hall of Justice sat across from the northeast corner of Portsmouth Square, originally developed at the time of Portsmouth Square's conception, as an important indicator of American-ness and belonging for California to present to the rest of the United States. This original building was destroyed in the earthquake and fire of 1906 but was quickly rebuilt by 1912[61].

Figure 26: 1906 - Crowd watches the original Hall of Justice burn in the 1906 fire from Portsmouth Square.

As the police headquarters moved back to the newly constructed Hall of Justice, the city also developed the new county jail directly adjacent to the police headquarters, which

[61] "County Jail No. 1 – 1915 to 1961."

opened a few years later[62]. Just one year before Royston's Portsmouth Square was completed, the police department, criminal courts, and county jail were moved out of the financial district, and the neighborhood was left with a vacant lot, soon bought and developed as a Holiday Inn, a large, brutalist structure that casts a shadow over the square. Included in the Holiday Inn is a space for the Chinese Cultural and Trade Center, "which will bridge Chinatown and the Financial District and hopes to bridge East and West" according to the San Francisco Chronicle[63]. In this statement, Moskowitz intimately ties Chinatown to Eastern culture and the Financial District to the West, excluding Chinese Americans from the development of the Financial District and its wealth[64]. He also simplifies the relationship between Chinese Americans and White Americans to the relationship between Chinatown and the Financial District, ignoring the very recent history of Chinese exclusion from immigration, naturalization, and land ownership, as well as conflating Chinese Americans with Chinatown, an artificially created space that represents a caricature of Chinese identity. The hotel serves as a reflection of shifting priorities of San Francisco as an American city, as well as the shifting symbolism of American-ness, both constantly adapting and performing modernity.

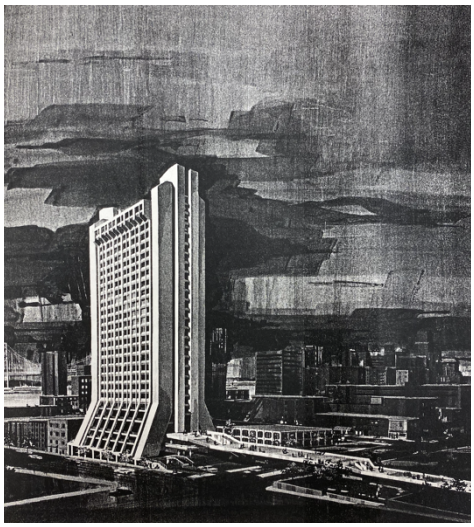

Figure 27: Rendering of the Holiday Inn and bridge connecting it to Portsmouth Square.

[62] "County Jail No. 1 – 1915 to 1961."
[63] "The Decade Past And The Decade To Come."
[64] "The Decade Past And The Decade To Come."

Chinese American Activism & Engagement

Royston's Portsmouth Square created space for limited communal engagement among the Chinese American community and served as a community space and public center for local residents, including being a space for Chinese activism. Xiangqi, also known as Chinese Chess, was a popular activity that brought communities of Chinese American men of all ages together in Portsmouth Square, and continues to do so today. By collecting in groups, playing this game, and gambling, Chinese Americans adapted to their surroundings in San Francisco to express and enact their cultural identity. Given that Chinese Americans were excluded from most photographs and drawings at the time, it is difficult to determine with certainty all the ways in which they utilized and engaged with Portsmouth Square; however, images of Chinese Americans inhabiting the space began appearing after Royston's redevelopment. Photographs of groups of Chinese American men of all ages playing Xiangqi are available dating back to

Figure 28: 1968 – Chinese American men play Xiangqi in Portsmouth Square

Figure 29: 1972 – San Francisco Examiner article features Chinese American men playing Xiangqi in Portsmouth Square

Figure 30: 1974 - Chinese American men and children utilizing the covered seating area to play Xiangqi in Portsmouth Square

1968, even published in the Examiner in 1972[65]. The inclusion of tables and seating in Royston's design allowed for Chinese Americans to inhabit the space and utilize it for enacting their own culture. Outside of Xiangqi, the Chinese American community also utilized Portsmouth Square as a space for celebration, attracting not only Chinese Americans, but tourists and visitors as well.

After the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964, a monumental victory shared by Chinese American activists, Chinese Americans in San Francisco began to participate in activism regularly. Portsmouth Square served as a space for the broader Chinese American community, beyond just Chinatown residents, to collect and participate in activism and advocate for their communities. Chinese American students from nearby universities sparked many of the activism movements that took place in and around Portsmouth Square. A public conference and forum called the "Chinatown Open Forum" took place in San Francisco, Chinatown in 1968, and focused on the "major problems of Chinatown"[66]. This forum "set precedence for future demonstrations" and "led to the formation of a group called Concerned Chinese for Action and Change (CCAC)" who led a "series of press conferences, town hall meetings at Portsmouth Square, and active participation at all meetings"[67]. Not only was Portsmouth Square a part of Chinatown, a fabricated representation of Chinese identity, it also served as a space for distinctly Chinese American identity to be enacted, as shown through the use of its open, central space for town halls

[65] Ken Wong, "S.F.'s Chinese Sojourner Became a Family Man," *S.F. Examiner*, August 30, 1972, Him Mark Lai Papers.
[66] "Wang, L. Ling-Chi. 'Chinatown in Transition.' Amerasia Journal 33, No. 1 (2007): 31–48. Doi:10.17953/Amer.33.1.324611612," n.d.
[67] "Wang, L. Ling-Chi. 'Chinatown in Transition.' Amerasia Journal 33, No. 1 (2007): 31–48. Doi:10.17953/Amer.33.1.324611612."

and other collective meetings.

As the county jail and Hall of Justice were relocated, Chinese Americans participated in the rhetoric surrounding the repurposing of the historic Hall of Justice building, once a tool of oppression used against them, before it was torn down to make space for the Holiday Inn[68]. The Hall of Justice, along with its courts and jail, embodied the power of the U.S. and state government, as well as local police, once targeting Chinese Americans for their existence in the United States. Although the Magnuson Act repealed Chinese Exclusion, Chinese Americans continued to face racism from other citizens as well as the police. After the police department and courts had moved to their new site, many investors and interest groups proposed various repurposing projects for the buildings, including the Chinese American community: "The politically emerging Chinese community proposed converting the old Hall into a Chinese Cultural Center and history museum"[69]. The repurposing of the Hall of Justice as a Chinese American community space would have made physical the supposed legislative inclusion of Chinese immigrants in American society; however, the redevelopment agency chose to award the site to a group interested in building a hotel[70]. As a site historically linked to creating and reproducing American-ness, the construction of a hotel symbolizes the emphasis on tourism, industry, and financial development in San

Figure 31: The rebuilt Hall of Justice and county jail of San Francisco. This site was later occupied by the Holiday Inn.

[68] "County Jail No. 1 – 1915 to 1961."
[69] "County Jail No. 1 – 1915 to 1961."
[70] "County Jail No. 1 – 1915 to 1961."

Francisco at the time, as well as the prioritization of White American ideals over Chinese American goals.

Analysis

As the Financial District continued to grow, Portsmouth Square took on the role of mediating the relationship between the two opposing spaces. Royston's vision for Portsmouth Square, along with the incorporation of the underground garage, served as a signpost for a new era of Chinatown, its surroundings, and its role within the larger process of Americanization. Quite literally, the choice to add a garage physically overwrote the previous iteration of Portsmouth Square, and the history embedded within it. The demolition of Portsmouth Square for the inclusion of a parking garage, as well as Royston's designs, operate within the narrative of Americanization – they acted to further the vision of Portsmouth Square and its surroundings towards contemporary America, keeping up with the automotive boom as well as the growing Financial District. The garage served as a catalyst for the new design, and directly serves the Financial District and tourism industries even though it is placed within the bounds of Chinatown. Public space began to shift in meaning, now hinging on the inhabitants to form the public, and catering to their needs such as seating and other elements of engagement. The bridge physically connects Portsmouth Square and the Financial District, and the underground garage serves those employed in the Financial District as well as tourists. During this era, the square's design reached outward, serving the surrounding neighborhoods and tourists, as opposed to the users of the square. As a project of Americanization, occurring at a critical moment, the design reproduced the restrictive idea of what it means to be American, and who is being served by public projects, contrary to the progressive laws.

Progressive legislature, though somewhat minimally impactful in the design of Portsmouth Square, empowered the Chinese American community to claim ownership of their space through inhabiting and utilizing the square as a community building tool to redefine the Chinese American identity in San Francisco. Portsmouth Square served as a malleable space within which Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans alike were able to enact their identities through cultural activities, activism, and celebration, much like the role the previous iteration served for early Americans in San Francisco in becoming part of the public.

This era marked the development and enactment of the Chinese American identity, particularly as one distinct from Chinese identity, enabled by law and expressed through space. Americanization in San Francisco during this time simultaneously encompassed visible forms of modernity, such as increased automotive ownership, the growth of the Financial District, and progressive political activism and legislation. Portsmouth Square, yet again, became a tool through which the goals of multiple stakeholders were carried out, resulting in varied cultural expression through the space. The legalization of Chinese immigration and naturalization, though limited, allowed Chinese Americans to participate in American activism movements, as well as their own, with newfound freedom. While Royston's square did not directly address the specific needs of the Chinese American community, nor were they able to provide input on the design, the combination of its flexibility and a new Chinese American participation in community engagement allowed Chinese Americans to create their own cultural space, and fully engage in the process of placemaking, thereby creating and defining a new era of Chinese American identity and public space.

1987 - 2010: Balancing Identity Groups in an Increasingly Diverse San Francisco

Portsmouth Square, an ever-evolving space of cultural and political identity, continues to shift and change far beyond the legal acceptance of Asian immigrants into American citizenship, land ownership, and equal rights. In 1987, a new redevelopment plan was implemented, consisting of adding a public restroom and elevator pavilion in 1992, a new interface between the upper and lower levels in 1994, and a redesigned lower level to accommodate the bridge and its shadow in 2001[71]. This set of improvements is focused upon user experience of the space and providing public amenities, however, still maintains a lens of Americanization through the choice of monuments and community events. However, this version of Americanization differs from before – it is the manifestation of a culture learning and stretching to assimilate immigrants within its preexisting patriotism, and working to find a balance between what is American and what is Asian American, and how, perhaps, they may be one and the same.

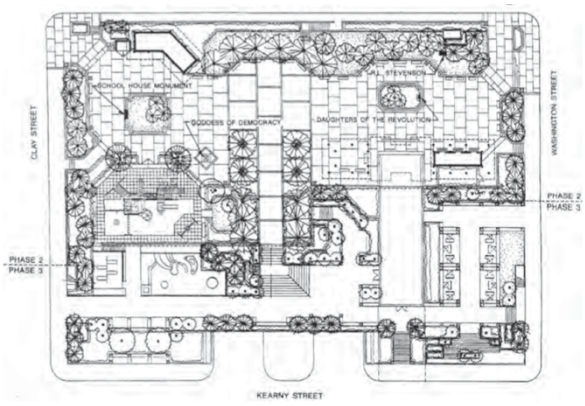

Figure 32: 1991 - Plan for Portsmouth Square

Cyclical histories & Reenactment

Although the recent decades have been a time of growth for Portsmouth Square in regards to the identities which it embodies and the type of space it creates, it remains a Historical Landmark for the state of California due to its significance as the birthplace of San Francisco, the site of the first public school building in the Bay Area, the announcement of gold found at Sutter's Mill, and various commemoration ceremonies for presidents and

[71] DeGregorio, "Workshop 1 Site History Poster."

officials[72]. In 1990, the raising of the first US flag in San Francisco was reenacted in Portsmouth Square by actors in 19th century military uniforms playing the fife and drum (see Figure 10). The Empress of China building stood behind the reenactment, as well as Chinese inspired architecture. This display of American pride not only reinforces the patriotism and continued Americanization of Portsmouth Square, it also reminds the Chinatown community of their place as subordinate to U.S. cultural needs.

Of the many recent photos of Portsmouth Square, this reenactment is the only one where White Americans are pictured in the majority. Portsmouth Square and the surrounding areas are often viewed as Chinese space; however, this reenactment attracted a different crowd. The act of reenacting history, in and of itself, establishes certain historical moments as the dominant, remembered history, while other events lose significance in our collective memories. Through this reenactment, the organizers were able to solidify the raising of the U.S. flag as a crucial moment in San Francisco's history, and quite literally overshadow the Chinese American community that currently inhabits the space. Missing from the historical memory reproduced in the space are events such as the passing of the Magnuson Act, the overturning of the Alien Land Law, and the Civil Rights Act, which reinstated naturalization and human rights to Chinese Americans, who make up a large portion of the surrounding neighborhood population.

The monuments that were once prominently showcased in the center of Portsmouth Square have been maintained throughout structural changes over the past few decades. Although they have been shifted to less central locations, their continuing presence is indicative of a desire to hold on to a pre-Chinatown Portsmouth Square. The most

[72] "Thompson, Walter J. 'The Evolution of Portsmouth Square.' San Francisco Chronicle, 29 Oct. 1916."

prominent of the monuments honors the first public school building, developed in Portsmouth Square in 1847[73]. This school, however, was only accessible to wealthy White American families and their children and excluded Chinese Americans. Notably, the monument was designated well before Chinese Americans had equal access to education. Today, this monument stands not only as a reminder of Chinese Exclusion in its complete lack of acknowledgement for those who were unable to attend the school but is also reminiscent of a time where a monument to such an institution would be created. Today designers are much more conscientious regarding the historical implications of remembered sites. Similar historical and cultural monuments are present in other cities' prominent public spaces – given their placement, these monuments function as "public artworks" that "[reinforce] dominant canons of civic patriotism"[74]. Although a monument itself is not a violent act, it is a representation of a time period when Chinese Americans, the primary group utilizing the space today, were unable to take part in American society and institutions, glorifying the exclusive contributions of White Americans in the early development of San Francisco.

Integration & Representations of Chinese Culture

Asian American identities, as well as overall American identity, are not only continuously being shaped and transformed, but are fluid and overlapping, changing from individual to individual. Therefore, the task of creating a distinctly Chinese American space is challenging and potentially unattainable. The representations of Chinese culture in Portsmouth Square, only implemented in the last few decades, stray so far from Chinese

[73] "Chinatown Resource Guide: The Story of Chinatown."
[74] Mason, "Memory Sites: Buildings, Parks, Events."

American identity that they no longer represent Chinese culture or even Asian American culture. Instead, these representations are a depiction of China through the American lens and utilize motifs and symbols to further Americanization. Although elements such as the Goddess of Democracy statue, the short-lived night market, and the pavilion addition to Portsmouth Square encode distinctly Chinese imagery into the landscape, they simultaneously function as a form of embedding American ideals and beliefs into the space and upon the people.

Figure 33: 2019 - Goddess of Democracy statue in Portsmouth Square

While the Goddess of Democracy statue represents an acknowledgement of contemporary Chinese culture, it is still a method of reinforcing American support for democratic political systems and is symbolic of continued anti-Chinese sentiment. The Goddess of Democracy statue, originally created by civilians during the Tiananmen Square Protests (1989), whose destruction by the Chinese government was viewed by many on international television, serves as an international symbol for democracy and activism, and has been recreated in several locations, many of which are within the U.S.[75]. The form has even been adopted by the National Democratic Institute for their annual democracy awards[76]. In 1994, a Goddess of Democracy statue was installed in Portsmouth Square as a symbol of Chinese culture[77].

[75] Oscar Holland, "How Tiananmen Square's 'Goddess of Democracy' Became a Symbol of Defiance," *CNN Style*, June 3, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/style/article/tiananmen-square-goddess-of-democracy/index.html.
[76] Holland.
[77] "Goddess of Democracy: Symbol of Democracy Around the Globe."

Although this represented perhaps the first physical acknowledgement of Chinese identity in Portsmouth Square, it also illuminates anti-Chinese government sentiments. As a symbol of Chinese dissatisfaction with their government, which was followed by a massacre of civilians by the military and the destruction of the original statue, the Goddess of Democracy has become synonymous with both democratic movements and anti-Chinese government sentiment. Therefore, the placement of the Goddess of Democracy statue in Portsmouth Square presents democratic ideals along with anti-Chinese government views – not necessarily functioning as a means of inclusion, but rather, a way in which to reinforce American political and social beliefs. The decision to locate this statue within Chinatown conflates Chinese identity with Chinese American identity, which at this point may overlap but are not necessarily synonymous with one another.

Night markets are an essential part of Chinese culture, particularly in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and their recreation serves several different interest groups[78]. In San Francisco, these night markets address both tourists and visitors, as well as being financially and socially attractive for Chinatown residents. Night markets have taken place every so often in Portsmouth Square over the past few decades, fluctuating in their occurrences (the last time they were on a regular schedule was in

Night market reminds many of lands left behind

MARKET
From Page A13

"These days people don't have to come to Chinatown unless there's something special. Well, this is something special."

Many nearby restaurant owners report increased business since the night market began. Albert Chang, co-owner of Grand Palace Restaurant one block from Portsmouth Square, said Saturday nights used to be quiet in Chinatown.

"Now you're seeing a lot more people when we have the night market," said Chang. "It definitely helps business."

The night market also has benefited many local merchants, who normally close up shop or experience sluggish sales on Saturday nights. Kenny Lee, who runs Harbor City Gift Shop near Fisherman's Wharf, said he makes an additional $500 to $800 a week selling his products at the night market.

"It's a good chance to sell my stuff," said Lee.

For the throngs that course through the narrow aisles, the market is a rare opportunity to bargain. The vending booths feature everything from jade Buddhas, resin statues and Chinese artwork to clothes, watches and toys.

"How about $15?" asked Liza Remolador, about a Nintendo game. "C'mon, give me a deal for this one."

"That's already a cheap price," insisted Lewis Sita, who eventually sold the game for $20.

Remolador, a 14-year-old from

Organizers hope the market, patterned after those in Asia, will attract visitors to Chinatown after dark.

Francisco teacher. "It's kind of surreal. It's like a fair or carnival in the middle of all these tall buildings."

One largely missing component of the night market is food. While most marketplaces in Asia offer an array of choices from meats to sweets, there is only one food booth at Portsmouth Square.

Lee said the lack of food vendors is the result of strict health regulations and a desire to not compete with the surrounding restaurants. The market's lone

singers and Chinese opera performances.

Fong Chung Pak, 68, said he would go to sleep early on Saturday nights if it weren't for the night market and its entertainment.

"They have Cantonese opera and that's what I like," said Fong, a retired grocery worker living in Chinatown. "I also pick up music CDs. It's more convenient here and it's cheaper."

Lee said about half the customers at the market come from San

Francisco, with others driving in from San Jose and Sacramento. He said he'd like to see the market expand to include nearby Walter U. Lum Place.

For now, however, Lee is glad to bring a slice of Asia to San Francisco.

"It's just like at home," said Lee. "You don't have to go back to see this night market. You can see it here."

E-mail Reem Kim at dkim@sfchronicle.com.

The Transamerica Pyramid and other skyscrapers loom behind the night market in Chinatown's Portsmouth Square

Figure 34: 2001 - San Francisco Chronicle article entitled "Night market reminds many of lands left behind."

[78] Venise Wagner, "Fair Brings Back Chinatown's Night: Market Fair Draws Hundreds During Typically Slow Time," *S.F. Examiner*, October 17, 1999, Him Mark Lai Papers.

BAY AREA
AND CALIFORNIA

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 3, 2001

Chinatown's night market

For Asian immigrants who remember bustling Hong Kong, it's like a trip to their past

"Good luck" cats, said by some to bring wealth, looked out from one of the stalls at the night market.

Musical entertainment is part of the attraction of the Chinatown night market, held in San Francisco's Portsmouth Square.

By Kurt Kim
Chronicle Staff Writer

"Now you're seeing a lot more people when we have the night market."
Albert Chang, co-owner of Grand Palace Restaurant, a block away

Leanne Lee of San Francisco and Tina Roldam of Los Angeles looked over jewelry at one of the stalls.

► MARKET: Page A23 Col. 1

Figure 35: 2001 - Newspaper article describes the financial and social benefits of the night markets.

2010)[79]. At these night markets, Chinatown's business owners sell goods at booths throughout Portsmouth Square, "just like at home" according to a resident, along with participating in shows, music, dances, and other traditional forms of celebration[80]. Although the presence and functioning of the night market has been contested by restaurant owners and vendors with businesses in the area who claim it takes away from their sales, it is also a powerful form of inhabitation and appreciation for Chinese culture. This project diverges from other cultural projects in Chinatown, as it is led and executed by Chinese Americans. While the statue and landscape architect's designs are created and carried out by larger, White dominated institutions, the night market empowers the Chinatown community to create their own public spaces.

Throughout the renovation projects during this time period, designers called upon traditional Chinese architectural motifs and manipulated them in the creation of built environment elements. These elements oversimplify and caricaturize traditional Chinese architecture as opposed to meeting the needs of the local groups. The pavilion that was built in 1992 to house the new garage access elevators resembles

Figure 36: 2019 - Chinese themed pavilion in Portsmouth Square, built in 1992.

[79] Kim, "Night Market Reminds Many of Lands Left Behind."
[80] Kim, "Night Market Reminds Many of Lands Left Behind."

Figure 37: 2019 - Chinese themed children's play structure in Portsmouth Square.

traditional Chinese rooflines and beams, however, disassociates them from their original meaning and appropriates them for an inappropriate use, straying from the original Chinese sentiment.[81] The inclusion of traditional Chinese inspired architecture also refers back to the continued sentiment of connecting with Chinese Americans through traditional Chinese aesthetics, conflating their identities, when, in fact, Chinese immigrants first arrived in San Francisco in the early 1850s and may identify more as American than Chinese today.

Analysis

The contemporary design for Portsmouth Square, despite being located in a decidedly Chinese area, continues to participate in the recreation of the American identity through the preservation of specific monuments and reenactments. While the act of memorializing historical events gives meaning to the space, the methods through which this is executed glorify events that contributed to Chinese Exclusion and do not honor the history of Chinese Americans equally. Although Chinese Exclusion no longer exists as expressed through law, it lingers in the design and use of space. This era presents the first planned design elements in Portsmouth Square that directly address the Chinese heritage of the local community and give physical representation to them, however, they fit within an aesthetic, and inherently political agenda, and represent the Chinese American

[81] DeGregorio, "Workshop 1 Site History Poster."

community through a Western lens[82]. The Goddess of Democracy statue and pavilion, distinctly Chinese in aesthetics, serves the purpose of visually theming Portsmouth Square as a part of Chinatown, a spatial manifestation of democratic ideals and participating in the tourism industry. The night markets present a unique case in which Chinatown residents and business owners have utilized Portsmouth Square to recreate an important cultural event from China, similar to the reenactment of the raising of the U.S. flag, but this event engages both Chinatown locals, as well as tourists and other San Francisco residents.

Portsmouth Square, uniquely situated along the interface of Chinatown and the Financial District, continues to participate in the continual re-creation of American and Chinese American identity in San Francisco. The physical elements of the square, though shifting to acknowledge the presence of Chinese Americans, do little to illuminate the historical contributions of Chinese Americans in Portsmouth Square and represent a conflation of Chinese American and Chinese identities. Although the space and elements within the square leave room for growth in terms of appropriate recognition of each distinct identity group, cultural placemaking has been taken into the hands of the local community. The Chinatown community's perseverance and continued cultural use of the square begins to participate in the process of Americanization in a new way – a vision of America as a country of immigrants who may exist within multiple identity groups without sacrificing the right to practice culture.

[82] Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*.

Conclusion

Chinatown, historically, has consisted of a predominantly Chinese American population since the mid 1800s. Although Portsmouth Square is bordered on one side by the Financial District, mostly owned by White landowners, this neighborhood lacks major housing development, therefore, leaving Chinese Americans as the majority residential group in the greater area. Recent census data reveals that in the Portsmouth Square neighborhood the average age is 51.9 years, 87% of individuals do not speak English at home, and 78.5% are foreign born[83]. These numbers are all much higher than the surrounding neighborhoods outside of Chinatown – the local residents are older and more likely to be foreign born than their San Francisco neighbors[84].

The housing stock is also extremely limited, forcing many locals to live in residential hotels or extremely small apartments. This combined with the age of the residents, many of whom are past retirement, calls for a more immediate need for public space in which individuals can have the space to participate in leisure activities, socialize, and have access to the benefits of safe, outdoor space. Portsmouth Square fills a crucial void in the lack of housing available in Chinatown and is filled with elderly individuals playing cards and Chinese chess, participating in exercise classes, or listening to performances. It has become their community center, gym, and an extension of their home. The use of space here differs from many other popular public spaces in San Francisco, such as Dolores Park, Golden Gate Park, or Union Square, which do not necessarily provide a daily used space for locals, especially groups that may not be accepted in all spaces.

[83] "ACS 2018," Census Tract 611, San Francisco, CA (San Francisco County: Census Reporter, n.d.), https://censusreporter.org/profiles/14000US06075061100-census-tract-611-san-francisco-ca/.
[84] "ACS 2018."

In 2014 the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department, among other local constituents, participated in developing an Existing Conditions and Feasibility Report for Portsmouth Square in anticipation of a larger renovation project, the Portsmouth Square Improvement Project[85]. In 2016, they selected a team to work on the project, and since then have been holding a series of well attended community meetings with local groups. The new plans include a clubhouse for residents to participate in community events, the removal of the bridge connecting Portsmouth Square to the Chinese Cultural Center located inside the hotel across the street (which currently casts a large shadow on the northeast end of the park), increased flexible seating, a stage for performances, a workout area, an open space for exercise classes and other group events, and more accessible passageways through the square[86]. Representations are careful to show predominantly Chinese Americans in their renderings of the space, a vast difference from the historical images of Portsmouth

Figure 38: 2018 - Future plans for Portsmouth Square, including new amenities such as a clubhouse, exercise space, and increased seating.


Figure 39: 2018 - Rendering of the upper level of Portsmouth Square, including images of Chinese American residents.

[85] Cheng, Kay, Joshua Switzky, Sue Exline, Gretchen Hilyard, Cara Ruppert, and Dawn Kamalanathan. *Portsmouth Square Existing Conditions Report: San Francisco Chinatown Portsmouth Square and Vicinity*. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Planning Department, 2014.
[86] Michael DeGregorio, "Workshop 5 Presentation" (San Francisco, CA, n.d.), https://sfrecpark.org/1166/Portsmouth-Square-Improvement-Project.

Square[87]. The acknowledgement of Chinese American presence, however, only goes so far. While the community is being acknowledged through meetings, collection of input, and representation, the history of the square and its importance in defining Chinese American life is still missing. As of now, the plans include the same monuments as were previously shown, and there continues to be little acknowledgement of Chinese American history. Perhaps the representation of modern Chinese American culture is enough, and the practical and representational ability to participate in cultural placemaking is most important. However, the void in the acknowledgement of the Chinese American past still exists, of both positive and negative events, and there continues to be room to grow in the future, whether or not that means displaying their historical past in Portsmouth Square.

History is not always presented clearly or completely, and in the process of preserving some parts of history, we lose others. Portsmouth Square has a long and worn history, one which is invisible at first, second, and even third glance. Many are still unaware of the history of Chinese Americans in California and the perpetual focus on modernity continues to hide that. As a public, historically significant, and central space within San Francisco, Portsmouth Square serves as a crucial case study for the formation of identity and its expression through space. As a public space, Portsmouth Square transforms from a space which housed critical buildings and services, to a monumental space designed to prioritize aesthetics, and eventually to a user-centric space with seating and amenities. Modernity and the continually shifting definitions of what it means to be a modern American city are the primary reasoning behind the spatial changes in Portsmouth Square. Today, we are lucky this vision of American modernity includes acknowledgement of our

[87] DeGregorio.

historical wrongdoings, cultural inclusion, and community-oriented development. This does not mean exclusionary laws, viewpoints, and spatial designs do not exist; however, it demonstrates that for the first time, people are willing to talk about it, and communities are encouraged and empowered to advocate for themselves.

In 2009, California lawmakers officially apologized for their participation in Chinese Exclusion to Chinese American families who were part of the founding of California[88]. In a time of radical change for Chinese Americans, among continued racism, laws continue to shape the way that Chinese Americans are viewed. Through the power of design and space there is an opportunity to express this sentiment through the dedication of visible, public space and radical inclusion of historically marginalized groups. While the spatial and temporal history of Portsmouth Square is riddled with exclusion, it also embodies the power of community organization, perseverance, and growth, which may continue far into the future.

The narrative of Chinese immigration and the formation of the Chinese American identity as distinct from both Chinese and American is essential to not only the historical understanding of Portsmouth Square, as well as Chinatown, but also to holistically understanding what it means to be Chinese American. In fact, the narratives of Portsmouth Square and Chinese American identity are intricately intertwined. This historical narrative reveals the power of space in the development of cultural identity, as well as the reciprocal power of identity in shaping space. The enactment of new legislation may also impact identity, or what it means to belong to a certain group, and effect the development of space as well. While this paper only considers Portsmouth Square as a case study, similar

[88] Liu, "California Apologizes to Chinese Americans."

analyses could be conducted on other long-standing integral spaces within cities and may reveal different stories of identity politics and placemaking. In the coming years, Portsmouth Square will likely continue to develop, inevitably leaving behind the invisible histories of those not represented in the design process, or who suffered from historical exclusion and racial marginalization in and around this space. Although every experience may not be captured and represented with accuracy, it is the designer's responsibility to give voice to the unheard, and to carefully consider the identities which they may unknowingly be forming, changing, or impacting.

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