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“A Commitment to Building Bridges”

Paul Ong

It is with some sadness that I write this Editor’s Note because it is my final one. After spending over six years with *Nexus*, initially helping establish the journal and then serving as its founding and senior editor, this issue is my last one. Over the years, I have accumulated a lengthy list of debts to those who have contributed as guest and managing editors, writers, reviewers, and members of the advisory board. I am grateful to the production staff, Mary Kao, Stephanie Santos, and Brandy Worrall-Yu, whose efforts have turned drafts into polished publications. Julia Heintz-Mackoff and Lucy Tran were enormously helpful and dedicated in their roles as the first and second managing editor. I am particularly indebted to my fellow editors, Professor Don Nakanishi and Ms. Melany Dela Cruz-Viesca. The journal would not have materialized and continued without Don’s unwavering and enthusiastic support and participation, and the journal would not have been operational without Melany’s tireless work and good humor. I am pleased to know that Professor Marjorie Kagawa-Singer will be taking over. She already has experience with the journal as a guest editor, and she will bring her own style and sensibility to the job. What everyone on the list shares in common is a commitment to building bridges between the university, AAPI communities, and the larger society. *Nexus* serves as a forum for community leaders, professionals, and scholars through its Practitioner’s Essays, Research Articles, and Resource Papers. I look forward to reading future issues.

This issue originally planned to focus on the impacts of welfare reform on AAPIs. The passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act dramatically transformed public assistance into a welfare-to-work program with time limits on benefits. Unfortunately, many have not been able to make the transition into meaningful paid employment because a lack of marketable skills, family obligations, and other barriers. AAPI recipients have faced additional difficulties because of cultural and linguistic barriers. Given the radical shift in policy regimes and resulting im-

pacts on people, we believed that devoting an issue on how AAPIs have fared would help inform decision makers and practitioners. Unfortunately, research on topic is underdeveloped, a point noted by two Resource Papers in this issue. Julian Chun-Chung Chow and his colleagues point out that despite the fact that Southeast Asians are disproportionately overrepresented among recipients who have exhausted their benefits, Southeast Asians have been understudied. Evelyn Blumenberg and her colleagues also express the same sentiments, and point out the fact that this group is often not adequately covered in evaluation research on welfare reform. While a paucity of publishable research is lamentable, it is a reality, and it is a challenge that needs to be addressed over the next few years.

The two papers on welfare reform help frame a research agenda, as well as provide useful background information. Chow et al., in "Welfare Reform and the Delivery of Welfare-to-Work Programs to AAPIs," use available statistics and reports to examine AAPI participation and their timed-out rates in California, and the numerous barriers to transitioning to work. Equally useful are their recommendations on the strategies to address AAPI needs: one-stop-shops, transitional jobs programs, providing comprehensive and family focused services. These recommendations are sensible, but there will be a need for future evaluation research on the performance and effectiveness of programs specific to assisting the AAPI population on public assistance. Blumenberg et al., in "Surveying Southeast Asian Welfare Participants," focus on the problems of conducting research on this population. They note the challenges of collecting survey data because of inadequate funding, the need to translate survey materials into multiple Asian languages, and the additional administrative overhead associated with surveying this population. They recommend that researchers build political and financial support for AAPI research, develop appropriate research designs based on group-specific characteristics, work with refugee support organizations to reach participants, and make the data available to interested scholars to maximize usefulness of data.

This issue also includes three additional publications. Chong-suk Han and Edward Echte's Research Article, "From Merging Histories to Emerging Identities," examines the efforts at Seattle's Wing Luke Asian Museum effort to promote a pan-ethnic Asian

American identity. They argue that museums can be a significant site to promote social ties and interactions among AAPIs to discover common problems and experiences. Lois M. Takahashi and Michelle G. Magalong's Resource Paper, "Building Community Capacity for Rapid Response to State Health Crises" examines how well California plans for and copes with emerging health threats. They find significant gaps in communicating with the state's large and growing immigrant population, and recommend that community-based organizations can help close the gap. In particular, they use the example of the capacity building effort around HIV / AIDS prevention in AAPI communities in Southern California. Linda Võ's Practitioner's Essay, "Whose School District Is This?" discusses the struggles by the Vietnamese American community in Orange County to reinstate a job offer to Dr. Nguyen-Lam as the school district's supervisor, a district where AAPIs comprise over a third of the student body. While the campaign fell short, it produced several key lessons, especially the need to build coalitions within the Vietnamese community and create multiracial alliances with the Latino community.

One final point is worth noting. This issue includes three papers that were supported in part by a newly established organization, the AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program (MRP) within the University of California. The MRP is a collaborative effort involving ten campuses and has over fifty faculty affiliates. Like *Nexus*, the MRP's goal is to promote applied research on policy issues affecting AAPIs. While there is no formal agreement between the journal and that organization, the editors hope that MRP affiliates will continue to submit papers to *Nexus*. I hope that there will be initiatives similar to the MRP in other parts of the country. I look forward to contribute to building bridges between the two entities, as well as with other entities, in my new role as Director of the MRP.