

College of Humanities Research Fellow Application

Academic Year 2012-2013

Name: Clement Lai

Rank: Assistant Professor

Department: Asian American Studies

**Title of Proposal: "The Difference That Difference Makes: Uncovering California's
Multiracial Past, Living California's Multiracial Future"**

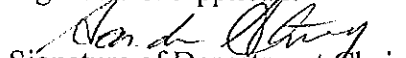
**Additional Budget: See attached supplemental form. Requesting \$5,000 for conference
travel, research travel, transcription assistance, and equipment**

Semester Fellowship to Be Held: Fall 2012

Abstract/Project Summary: Over the course of the fellowship semester I will complete the revisions for my book on the different outcomes for neighboring Japanese Americans and African Americans in the Fillmore District, which was redeveloped after World War II. I will also conduct qualitative, interview and archival-based research for my next research project on California's historic multiracial and multiethnic neighborhoods, like Boyle Heights and the Central Avenue corridor in Los Angeles.


Signature of Applicant

1/20/2012
Date


Signature of Department Chair

1/20/2012
Date

Committee Evaluation:

Date

Committee Recommendation:

Date

Committee Member Signatures:

Date

Objectives

Our students live a multiracial present and increasingly multiracial future. As California becomes majority non-White, political leaders will have to grapple with policy issues that encompass and affect multiple racialized communities. This raises the question: how do policy makers take this difference into account when they fashion policy under such diverse circumstances? In other words, what difference does this difference make? Because many of California's rural areas, such as Isleton, California, in the Sacramento Delta, and urban neighborhoods, like Los Angeles's Boyle Heights neighborhood or San Francisco's Fillmore District, historically were multiracial and multiethnic due to class inequality and segregation, policy makers and private interests in California have already confronted (not always successfully) the implications of this radical diversity. My research project for the College of Humanities Research Fellow Program during the Fall 2012 semester examines one such policy, urban renewal, in order to understand the importance of multiple non-White groups on policy making and on community-level political mobilization. The diverse past and the messy outcomes of a policy like urban renewal, then, might shed contemporary light on the question of difference, policy, and local politics.

Over the course of the Research Fellow semester I plan 1) to complete the revisions for my book manuscript, *Between Blight and a New World: Urban Renewal and the Multiracial Neighborhood*, which examines redevelopment's differential impact on African Americans and Japanese Americans in San Francisco's Fillmore District, and 2) to continue archival and interview-based research on my next major research project on historic multiracial neighborhoods in Southern California. Under the auspices of the College of Humanities Faculty Fellows Program, this Spring 2012 Semester I will be submitting my book proposal to academic

presses that have a shared interest in Ethnic Studies and in Urban Studies. A number of these presses have expressed interest in my book in the past so I am anticipating having the manuscript contracted. I want to devote my Fall 2012 semester to any remaining revisions that I have to complete on my book. Thus, the College of Humanities Research Fellow Program would allow me to build on my Faculty Fellow semester and devote invaluable time to finishing my book.

Briefly, my book focuses on the impact of federal and local urban renewal policy on San Francisco's Fillmore District and examines why there were different outcomes for the neighborhood's African American and Japanese American communities, even though members of both groups were segregated into this neighborhood through a combination of public policy like restrictive covenants or private practices like redlining. While displacement of residents, businesses and institutions were felt in both racialized communities, over the course of four decades following the Second World War, redevelopment's outcomes were not the same for these two communities, e.g. a Japanese (not Japanese American) themed mall was built in the Japantown portion of the Fillmore but no similar structure was built in African American identified portion of the district. Instead the language of 'urban blight' became associated increasingly with the neighborhood's African Americans. My book examines the reasons for these differential results and argues, using the work of political scientist Claire Kim (1999, 2001), that redevelopment elites differentially positioned Japanese Americans and their spaces from African Americans and their spaces. In other words conceptions of space along with postwar Orientalism played key roles in these differential outcomes. My analysis particularly examines the language used to justify redevelopment and the urban renewal process itself, using archived Redevelopment Agency professional reports and meeting minutes. At the same time, I analyze how this differential racial positioning influenced the mobilization strategies of four

community-based groups (two largely African American and two largely Japanese American) that organized to cooperate with or resist urban renewal in their neighborhood. This second part of my book relies heavily on forty-five oral histories that I conducted with former and current community leaders, activists, residents, and business-owners in both communities. The research, then, for my books is complete. I need only complete my revisions after getting my book under contract.

Before discussing my methodology for my research project, I want to explain the other objective I would like to complete during the Fall 2012 Research Fellow Program semester. My work on the Fillmore made me realize how unique these working-class, multiethnic, and multiracial communities are, e.g. the most memorable moment I had while interviewing research subjects about urban renewal was when a Japanese American pharmacist told me that the Fillmore's diverse residents treated each other like they were family and that he recalled non-Japanese dancing in the streets during the Oban Festival. Stories like these made me want to start a project that focused more directly on similar multiracial communities. In 2008, as a postdoctoral fellow at UCLA, I began qualitative research on these communities. My goal for this project centered on collecting oral histories of everyday life that focused on interracial interaction and on perceptions of neighborhood change (e.g. due to suburbanization). Over the course of the next academic year I want to continue this research project and collect oral histories so that I can build a picture of everyday life in historic multiracial California. What is interesting is that these stories reveal moments of conflict but also moments of cooperation. The shared geography and intersecting histories of groups and individuals in these neighborhoods formed the basis for a potential politics of recognition (Gilmore 2002). It is no small wonder that progressive activists of color who joined "Third World" movements in the 1960s and 1970s, like

the Asian American Movement that helped found Asian American Studies at many universities, come out of this diverse milieu. A number of my interviews, then, will be conducted with participants in these progressive movements and with their extended family members. While the bulk of my time in the Fall 2012 semester will be devoted to my book, I will also collect a limited number of interviews for my next project.

Ultimately, I believe these stories of past diversity will help us think through our contemporary multiracial present and future. In addition, my research makes a significant contribution to the growing body of humanities and social scientific research on multiracial race relations. Previously this research has examined the history (cf. Wild [2005]; Kurashige [2008], Varzally [2008]; Shah [2012]) or the politics (cf. Kim [2001]) of these diverse relations, but very little of this literature, except for Pulido (2006), utilizes a spatial or geographical perspective. My work, then, adds this key perspective to this literature.

Methodology

My research is qualitative-based and utilizes both archival research and interviews. My interviews are open-ended, lasting as long as two hours, and they are conducted in a conversational format covering several topically grouped questions that are shared with research subjects prior to an interview. I recorded the interviews in digital format directly to laptop or to a compact flash card on a dedicated audio recorder. The interviews were subsequently transcribed and stored in a locked filing cabinet. For my book, interviewees included residents of the Fillmore, community-leaders, merchants, redevelopment officials, and institutional leaders, who I identified through the public record or through the snowball method. The archival material was readily available at area libraries, at local historical societies, and in the archives of

local institutions. These materials including meeting minutes, flyers, newspapers, professional reports, and maps.

My research project on multiracial neighborhood employs a similar methodology and will rely on archival research, including transcripts of interviews conducted in the 1980s at the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, and on open-ended interviews. I find my interviewees through the public record, through the snowball method, and through existing contacts, especially within Los Angeles's progressive communities of color. I am in contact with activists on a fairly regular basis given my participation in community-based work in the Los Angeles area. I plan to record these interviews with a digital audio recorder, but I would also like to record them on HD video if the interviewee grants permission.

Anticipated Outcomes

The chief outcome of my Research Fellow semester will be the publication of my manuscript. This objective is readily achievable because I will be building upon momentum from my Spring 2012 semester as a College of Humanities Faculty Fellow. A College of Humanities Research Fellow Program award in Fall 2012, thus, would provide invaluable time for me to complete my manuscript for publication. At the same time, the Research Fellow Program would allow me to continue making headway on material for my historic multiracial neighborhoods project. I hope to turn this research into material for articles in Asian American Studies, geography, urban studies, or history journals and also plan on sharing my findings at geography or ethnic studies/American Studies conferences. Ultimately, I believe my research sheds light on the question of the meaning and implications of dense diversity for California and elsewhere. They make a contribution as well to literature on racialization outside of a Black-White model of race relations.

Works cited

- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. 2002. Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference: Notes on Racism and Geography. *The Professional Geographer* 54 15-24.
- Kim, Claire Jean. 1999. The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans. *Politics and Society* 27 (1): 105-38.
- Kim, Claire Jean. 2002. *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Kurashige, Scott. 2008. *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles*. Princeton, N.J. ; Woodstock: Princeton University Press.
- Pulido, Laura. 2006. *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shah, Nayan. 2011. *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Varzally, Allison. 2008. *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines, 1925-1955*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wild, H. Mark. 2005. *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Budget

HD Digital video camera	\$2,000
Conference travel to American Studies (including airfare, registration, & hotel)	\$1,500
Travel to meet interviewees and to go to archives	\$400
Media (compact flash and SD cards)	\$200
External microphone for audio recording	\$400
Transcription assistance	\$500
Total	\$5,000

CLEMENT K. LAI

Assistant Professor
Department of Asian American Studies
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Jerome Richfield 340
Northridge, CA 91330-8251

EDUCATION

Ph.D. Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley, December 2006

Areas of expertise: race and space; comparative race studies; social theory;
social movements and the state; spatial theory and the city; property

M.A. Geography, University of California, Berkeley, 1997

B.A. Asian Studies, Pomona College, Claremont, CA, 1991

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor, Department of Asian American Studies, California State
University, Northridge, Fall 2011 – Present

Assistant Professor, Department of City and Regional Planning and Asian
American Studies Program, Cornell University, Fall 2006 – Spring 2011

Visiting Scholar/Postdoctoral Fellow and Visiting Assistant Professor, Institute of
American Cultures and Asian American Studies Center, University of
California, Los Angeles, Fall 2008-Spring 2009

PAPERS PUBLISHED

“Bibliography on Race and Ethnicity in California,” Prepared for Geography
50AC, Fall 1996 (With Professor Richard Walker)

“Between Blight and a New World: Urban Renewal, Political Mobilization, and
the Production of Spatial Scale,” 2006. Working paper, Institute for the
Study of Social Change, University of California, Berkeley

Book review on Jason Hackworth’s (2007) *The Neoliberal City: Governance,
Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*. Cornell University
Press. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Spring 2008

“The Racial Triangulation of Space: Japanese Americans and African Americans
in the Urban Renewal of the Multiracial Fillmore District,” *The Annals of*

the Association of American Geographers v. 102, n. 1, (January 2012), 151-170. Current status: Published.

“Saving Japantown, ‘Serving the People’: The Scalar Politics of the Asian American Movement,” Paper submitted to *Society and Space*. Current status: Accepted

PAPERS SUBMITTED

“‘Totally Oriental’: The Japanese Cultural and Trade Center and the Orientalized Production of Space in Post-Second World War San Francisco,” Paper submitted to *Journal of Asian American Studies*. Current status: Revise and resubmit

“Seeing Race: Asian Americans and Urban Renewal,” Paper submitted to *Journal of Planning History*. Current status: Revise and resubmit

Chapter co-written with Kelly Fong for Oxford University Press anthology on race and historical archaeology

“Comments on Japanese and Japanese American Racialization,” Paper submitted to Conference Proceedings October 2012, UCLA-Kyoto University

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

California State University, Northridge, Instructor, Fall 2011 – Present
Race, Racism and Critical Thinking, Fall 2011 – Present
Asian American Politics and the Law, Fall 2011 – Present

Cornell University, Instructor, Fall 2006 – May 2011
Introduction to Asian American Studies, Spring 2008
Race, Space, and Place, Spring 2007, Spring 2008, Fall 2009, Fall 2010
Property, Gentrification, and Displacement, Fall 2007
Asian American Politics and Public Policy, Spring 2007, Spring 2010
The Asian American Urban Experience, Fall 2006, Fall 2007, Fall 2009
First-year Writing Seminar, Property and Expropriation, Spring 2010
Asian Americans and the Third World Movement, Spring 2011
Property and Expropriation, Spring 2011

University of California, Los Angeles, Instructor, Fall Quarter 2008
Race, Space, and Place

University of California, Berkeley, Graduate Student Instructor, Department of Ethnic Studies, Fall 1999 – Spring 2006
Introduction to Asian American Studies
Politics, Public Policy, and Asian American Communities
Racism and the Law

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Collecting data and oral histories of mid-20th century multiracial Los Angeles, Cornell University and UCLA, Fall 2006 to Present

Collecting data on Japanese Village and Deer Park, an ethnic-themed tourist attraction in late 1960s Orange County, California, Fall 2007 – Present

Collecting data on race and changing property relations and definitions of property, Cornell University, Fall 2006 – Present

University of California, Berkeley, Institute for the Study of Social Change, Graduate Field Research Training Program, Predoctoral Traineeship, Spring 2003, Fall 2003-Spring 2004

PAPERS DELIVERED

“Commentary on Japanese American/Japanese Racialization,” UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, October 2011

“Saving Urban Planning from Itself: Critical Reflections on Ethnic Studies and Urban Planning,” Critical Ethnic Studies Conference, Riverside, CA, March 2011

“Scaling the Urban Crisis,” Planners Network Conference, San Francisco, CA, June 2010

“Saving Japantown, Serving the People: the Scalar Politics of the Asian American Movement,” Association of American Geographers Conference, Washington, DC, April 2010

“Glocal Intersections and Planning,” Roundtable presentation for Planners of Color Interest Group Panel, Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, Arlington, VA, October 2009

“The Pursuit of Happiness? The Racial Politics of Property in the Mid-20th Century Multiracial Neighborhood,” Talk delivered for Institute of American Cultures, University of California, Los Angeles, December 2008

“Reconsidering Community Participation in a Multiracial Setting,” Paper delivered for Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning – Association of European Schools of Planning Joint Conference, Chicago, IL, July 2008

“Asian American Ethnic Enclaves: Development, Solidarity, and Struggle,” Paper Delivered for East Coast Asian American Student Union Conference, Cornell University. February 2008

- “Racial Positioning and Planning,” Paper delivered for Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, Milwaukee, WI, October 2007
- “Fall of the Fillmore District: Racial Positioning and Redevelopment,” Paper delivered for Association of Asian American Studies, New York, NY, April 2007
- “Thinking through Race and Space Relationally,” Paper delivered for Association of American Geographers, San Francisco, CA, April 2007
- “The Best of East and West: Racial Triangulation and the San Francisco’s Japan Center,” Paper delivered for Association of Asian American Studies, Atlanta, GA, March 2006
- “When Gilbert and Sullivan Came to Town: The Japanese Cultural and Trade Center and the Orientalization of Space,” Paper delivered for Association of American Geographers, Chicago, IL, March 2006
- “There’s a Transnational Corporation in My Backyard! The Imagineering of the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center in San Francisco,” Paper delivered for the Center for Race and Gender, November 2004
- “Between Blight and a New World: Urban Renewal, Political Mobilization, and the Production of Spatial Scale,” The New Metropolis: Social Change in California’s Cities Conference, Boalt Hall School of Law, University of California, Berkeley, April 2004
- “Perdition’s Sledgehammer: Urban Renewal, Social Mobilization, and the Production of Space in the Western Addition,” Asian American Studies 197: Conceptualizing Asian/American Spaces Seminar, Scripps College, Claremont, CA, March 2003

HONORS

California State University, Northridge, College of Humanities Faculty Fellow, Spring 2012

Institute of American Cultures Postdoctoral Fellowship, UCLA, 2008-2009

REFERENCES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST