

Spaces of Mobilization: The Asian American/Pacific Islander Struggle for Social Justice

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ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDERS HAVE BEEN POLITICALLY CONSTRUCTED AS AN ALIEN presence or as “forever foreigners” in U.S. culture (Lowe, 1996; Tuan, 2003; Lee, 1999). For millions of Asian and Pacific Islanders who fully identify as Americans, they are reminded repeatedly that one of their core identities is at best questioned or at worst denied (Cheryan and Monin, 2005). This image of Asians and Pacific Islanders as “forever foreigners” or as “sojourners” ideologically positions them as outsiders who do not have a stake in American society and therefore constitute the sources of moral panics and social anxieties that must be subjected to social control and regulation. Simultaneously, Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States are ideologically constructed as “model minorities” that have been well integrated into mainstream America (Osajima, 1988; Lee, 1996; Omi and Winant, 1994). This ideological construct portrays Asian and Pacific Islander Americans as passive populations that do not experience racial discrimination, violence, and social problems (Vo, 2004). However, Asians and Pacific Islanders have been deeply engaged in the struggle for social justice in America. Historically, Asians and Pacific Islanders have challenged exploitation in the workplace, unjust immigration policies, barriers to U.S. citizenship, discrimination against gays and lesbians, exclusion from labor unions, and discrimination in education and residential segregation (Chan, 1991; McClain, 1994; Omatsu, 1994; Takaki, 1989; Wong, 1994; Zia, 2000; Espiritu, 1992; Vo, 2004). Asians and Pacific Islanders have organized against domestic violence (Lin and Tan, 1994; Abraham, 2000; Rudrappa, 2004; Supriya, 2002). They have also formed social movements and coalitions with other groups in the struggle for immigration rights, affirmative action, and social justice (Scharlin and Villanueva, 1992; Kim, 2004; Yoshikawa, 1994; Saito, 1998; Geron et al., 2001; Zia, 2000; Pulido, 2006). Despite their long history of fighting for social justice, the image of Asians as model minorities renders this history

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