



## ***My Asian American Experience<sup>1</sup>***

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I associate myself closely with the Asian American experience. Being born in America, but raised as a product of a traditional Chinese family, I feel that I have an interesting history. My upbringing can be seen as a representation of a new wave of Asian immigrants. While Asian immigrants have a long and dubious history in the United States, it is only recently that Asians have even started to become accepted in mainstream “American” culture. Being the first child born to my family in the U.S., I feel a great deal of pressure and responsibility. While some of my family members have remained in China and Taiwan, they look to my brother and I as the future, and their goals and expectations of us are very high.

In 1973, my mother immigrated to the United States. She arrived legally with the help of her older sister, Eve. She arrived with her first son, David, who was already two years old. My father was still abroad, working as a merchant marine and sailing around the world. He was the captain of his ship, a leader of a large crew of men, which transported cargo to many different regions. Upon my mother’s arrival in the U.S., he remained at this position for three

1. In loving memory of my father and my hero, Wang Teh-Feng, or Frank T. Wang

more years, and then retired from the profession and moved on to join his family in America. As new immigrants to this country, my parents struggled a great deal. Not speaking any English, they managed to survive only through personal savings, the financial support of family members back home in Taiwan, and from other relatives in the U.S. Eventually, they decided that they would use some of the capital they had to open a small grocery store in the small neighborhood of Sunnyside, Queens. The business became quite successful and in the summer of 1978 my parents’ second child was born. I was that second child. In the early stages of my life, my grandmother contributed significantly to my upbringing. My parents were always busy at the store. My brother, aunt, and baby-sitters took care of me when my grandmother went back to Taiwan.

As I grew older and more self-reliant, I came to understand how the world operated. I always used to help my dad out at the deli, and it was here where I learned a lot about the world. I observed how some people treated my father rudely, merely because he spoke English with an accent. On the other hand, I also saw how some people were very kind to my parents. They were delighted at how polite and kind my parents were and always glad to help my parents when they needed it. It was in this environment where my parents and I learned how this strange country worked. Some people tried to take advantage of us while others sought to help. There was a time when my family felt firsthand the horror of racism. One morning my father arrived at the store to open it and found graffiti all over the front gate of the store. The gate was a metal fence that covered all the glass up. There were writings all over the fence and it really defaced the value and appearance of our store. In addition, racial epithets were scattered throughout the graffiti as well. Remarks such as, “Get out chinks” and “Chinaman go home” were

quite devastating to my father. We had to spend a good deal of money to clean the graffiti and some of it was spray painted so heavily that we could not remove it at all. Eventually, the troublemakers would return and continue to deface our property. My father decided that there was no point to clean it anymore, since they would merely return to do the same again.

Another episode that I remember clearly from the past was one where an individual tried to take advantage of my family because we were Asian. While Asian Americans were always seen as a passive race who would accept whatever abuses society provided, my father stood his ground for what he believed in. One night, my father and I were closing up the store. I had been helping out by counting inventory when a drunken looking and dirty man entered the store. We had never seen this person before, which was odd because my family's business was largely a neighborhood business where most of the customers were regulars. The man went to the rear of the store, grabbed two six packs of beer and headed for the front door. My father was behind the register, but realized that this man had no intention of paying. My father cut him off before he could reach the front door. In his broken and accented English he said, "You have to pay, or no beer for you." The man tried to push my father out of the way while he said, "Get out of my way." My father then instructed me, in Chinese, to call the police. A shoving match ensued, and my father actually wrestled one of the six packs out of his hands. The other six-pack fell to the ground, causing a few bottles to shatter. The man grabbed one of the broken bottles and hit my father in the face with it. My father continued to stand his ground, unarmed, but unwilling to let this man take advantage of him. The drunken man ran off when he heard the sirens blaring from afar. Today, my father still wears a slight scar on his face as an everyday reminder of how he would not let people take advantage of my

family. The drunken man never got the beer he wanted that night, but I learned a valuable lesson about pride, principle, and determination. I was very proud of my father—who is 5'7" and 160 pounds—for standing up to that man who was 6'2" and probably 240 pounds.

My parents never had to teach me about racism and discrimination. I just picked it up for myself in the real world. Based on my experience, I knew not to prejudge people. While some were bigots, others were open-minded, kind, and helpful. The color of their skin never determined what kind they were. Unfortunately, racism towards Asians is still prevalent today, even on my very own college campus. There was a recent incident in a dormitory where members of the wrestling team allegedly shouted racial slurs at a group of Korean students. As the Koreans replied to the wrestlers, a fight ensued. The result was one of the Korean students ended up in the hospital with a fractured skull. While this incident is still under investigation and all the facts have not yet been revealed, it appears to be a race-related crime. If these incidents can occur on a campus of higher education, how can we prevent it from occurring throughout normal everyday society? University life is supposed to be a life where people are better educated and less ignorant. If this ignorance still exists in institutions of higher education, can we really say that racism has been curtailed at all? Recently, there have been many protests and demonstrations of solidarity by the Asian American/minority student community against the university administration for trying to keep this incident quiet and not imposing swift justice on the perpetrators. When university wrestlers are involved, the issue becomes quite political, especially with the Athletic program's proposed move to NCAA Division I athletics still in the air. This may very well be another example of the Asian American community being seen as an apathetic and

pushover community, who are unwilling to voice their opinion over such an incident. Fortunately, the community has come together and will stand strong, until all the facts and details of this case are known and publicized, and the perpetrators are punished justifiably.<sup>1</sup>

Being the product of a traditional Chinese family, I learned a great deal about respect and the importance of family and ancestry. These values have always been a part of Chinese culture. Chinese historian Sucheng Chan writes,

Adolescence was the most painful period in the lives of Chinese Americans because several processes were occurring simultaneously. According to Erikson, adolescents often go through psychosocial “moratorium,” during which they set aside many other concerns as they attempt to resolve their “identity crises.” Adolescence was the period when Chinese Americans became the most self-conscious about being pulled in opposite directions by “Chinese” and “American” cultures. Their identity crises manifested mainly as a cultural conflict, so rebelling against their parents was synonymous with rejecting Chinese culture” (Wong 138).

While Chan described the issues faced by young Chinese Americans in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, I feel that I faced a similar conflict. While I wanted to maintain my Chinese culture on one hand, the environment I was raised in was predominantly an “American” culture. During this period of adoles-

cence I refused to speak Chinese in the house, and I adamantly refused when my mother wanted me to attend Chinese school. The way things were in school and around the neighborhood, it was just not ‘cool’ to be Chinese. Naturally, I fit in with the other adolescents from school and the neighborhood. Some of my friends were also of other ethnic descent. However, I was too embarrassed to have friends come over to my house in fear that they would see a traditional Chinese household and laugh at me. At my home, customs had to be adhered to, such as taking off shoes and eating with chopsticks. I managed to push away as much Chinese culture as possible during my early adolescent years. I wanted to be ‘American.’ Today, I wish I could have taken the Chinese lessons that my mother urged me to take. I am proud to be of Chinese heritage, but also embarrassed that I cannot read or write the language that my people speak.

Through my upbringing, the one thing I am most grateful for is that I learned the importance of respect. While being an individual is important and leads to independence, respect is a quality that can supplement individuality. I once felt that respect should be a value that was left back in ancient times, but I now realize the importance of the value. Acknowledging the importance of the value of respect allowed me to learn many things and keep an open mind to other people. This is something that many individuals today lack. Some people are set on their one-track ways and never keep their minds open to new ideas. These ideas can come from people younger or older than you. The fact that some people may seem old-fashioned and out of date does not mean that they do not have some wisdom that they can impart on you. One thing I learned was anyone, regardless of age, sex, or color can have something valuable to teach. In order to have such valuable lessons taught to you, you must show respect.

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1.[Editor’s note: This article was written in Spring 2000. Subsequent to mass protests by students on the B.U. campus, the university administration moved to discipline and/or dismiss the perpetrators of the racial incident referred to above.]

My mother was a firm believer in teaching her children the same way her parents had taught her. She was the middle child of three children, and my grandfather was a very strict, traditional Chinese parent. He demanded respect and obedience from his children and anything less would not be tolerated. One experience I will never forget is a summer I spent in Taiwan. I had just completed the eighth grade and was becoming quite a rambunctious teenager. I started to disobey my mother often, and occasionally act rebellious merely for the sake of acting rebellious. I believe that one of the main reasons my family and I vacationed in Taiwan was for me to learn respect and the importance of family and elders. There were other reasons as well, such as my mother wishing to see her family, but this lesson was probably one of the underlying motivations behind the trip.

I arrived in Taiwan in early July, and it was unbearably hot and tremendously humid. Although the weather was so hot in Taiwan that summer, it was a rule in my grandfather's house that only he decides when to turn the air conditioner on. Although the family could certainly afford to pay a high electric bill, it is common for Chinese households to conserve as much as possible, including the electric bill. While I begged and pleaded with my mother to have the air conditioner on, she refused, saying that only my grandfather could decide if the air conditioner is turned on. Due to my fear of my grandfather, I went to speak with my grandmother about the temperature situation. My grandmother asked me why I made such a fuss about the air conditioner. She said that my grandfather does not turn the air conditioner on very much because he is very old and cannot bear the colder temperatures. My grandparents were accustomed to the heat of Taiwan, and the air-conditioner was only necessary on particularly humid days. I realized that I was thinking only of myself, and that the needs and concerns of my

grandparents were being ignored by my selfish thoughts.

I learned a great deal about respect that summer. When family friends came to visit, they always brought gifts and good wishes. Visitors came almost every other day. I also learned a lot about my grandfather's history. He was a famous general, a military leader under the command of Chinese Nationalist hero Chiang Kai-Shek. Needless to say, my grandfather was very well respected. However, when visitors came by, my grandfather never boasted about his former accomplishments or the accomplishments of his children. Instead, he always asked about how his friends were and commended them on how well they were doing. I expected to hear many war stories that summer, and not surprisingly, I did. However, all the stories my grandfather told were about heroics that others accomplished, and he told these stories while those friends were visiting. When my grandfather told these stories, not only did his own face light up, but I could see those of my grandfather's friends glowing. My grandfather was someone who taught me a valuable lesson in humility. While he demonstrated the utmost humility, he was treated with nothing less than pure respect.

I learned a valuable lesson about the importance of humility from my grandfather. I never really understood the benefits of humility very well. Deikman defines humility as, "the acceptance of the possibility that someone else can teach you something you do not already know, especially about yourself. Conversely, pride and arrogance close the doors of the mind. Thus, in the process of mystical development, for which a teacher is necessary, humility is a functional necessity" (Deikman 81). My mother was a valuable teacher in my lessons about humility, and my grandfather was someone who taught me a great deal about myself. My mother once told me a story about two children who both succeeded while they were young. These children were at

the top of their class academically, athletically, socially, and in all personality traits. While one of the children would boast and always bask in the attention, the other would acknowledge his success, but tended to shy away from the attention and merely go back to doing the work he had to do. While one child craved and starved for attention, the other was simply diligent and hard working. In the future, the first child went on to become just another laborer of society, while the quiet, shy, diligent student went on to become a hero to the Chinese government. This story was the tale of Dr. Sun Yet Sen, a famous Chinese hero and the first president of Taiwan, the People's Republic of China. The moral of the story was that humility is the best route to gain success. My mother told many Chinese stories, some of which may be myths, but this story I took to heart. I have tried my best to remain humble and never be satisfied with my accomplishments. My mother constantly warns me of the dangers of complacency. She wants me to always strive to succeed and never stop learning. Hopefully, by remaining humble, one day I can become a well-respected member of society as well.

Respect is something that the first Asians in America were definitely not treated with. Brought to this country mostly as hired labor, Americans never wanted Asian immigrants to remain in this country. The first Asians immigrants were brought here on labor contracts and were expected to leave as soon as their work was done. The most famous Asian immigration experience was the importation of Chinese laborers for the building of the transcontinental railroad. In this case, thousands of Chinese laborers were brought to this country as cheap labor. The reason was that the Chinese laborers would accept extremely low wages while many U.S. citizens would not. There was no other way that the railroad companies could find such abundant and cheap labor. The Chinese workers came here because of the many accounts they

heard of America being a "Mountain of Gold." Unfortunately for many, they came to this country to face the harsh reality of racism, discrimination, poor working conditions, and very low pay. As Asian American immigration progressed, U.S. xenophobia took hold of the nation, as the Congress passed anti-immigration acts that were specifically designed to limit and prevent Asian immigration. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was one example that exemplified how deep these anti-foreign sentiments were. The U.S. seemed to lose sight of the fact that this nation was built by immigrants and that we have no more right to this land than any other immigrants.

Immanuel Wallerstein addresses issue concerning capitalism and racism in his book *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization* (1996). He discusses how the ethnicization of the world work-force has led to three main consequences that have affected the world economy. He states that immigration was made possible by economic factors,

Under the pressure of changing economic conditions, all that was required to change work-force allocation was for some enterprising individuals to take the lead in geographical or occupational re-settlement, and to be rewarded for it; this promptly exerted a natural 'pull' on other members of the ethnic group to transfer their locations in the world-economy" (Wallerstein 77)

This is discussed by Wallerstein as the first consequence of the ethnicization of the world work-force. The second consequence discussed is that the socialization in occupational tasks would be done within the framework of ethnically-defined households and not at the cost of employers. The third consequence discussed is what Wallerstein calls "one of the most signifi-

cant pillars of historical capitalism, institutional racism” (Wallerstein 78). Wallerstein argues that racism is not about ‘strangers.’ Instead, he argues that racism is an ideological justification for the hierarchization of the work-force and its highly unequal distributions of reward. Basically, Wallerstein frames racism as an economic result of capitalism. He states,

Racism has served as an overall ideology justifying inequality. But it has been much more. It has served to socialize groups into their own role in the economy. The attitudes inculcated (the prejudices, the overtly discriminatory behavior in everyday life) served to establish the framework of appropriate and legitimate behavior for oneself and for others in one’s own household and ethnic group. Racism, just like sexism, functioned as a self-suppressive ideology, fashioning expectations and limiting them” (Wallerstein 79).

Wallerstein argues that racism is of great importance to the construction and reproduction of appropriate work forces. This is precisely what Chinese Americans were initially seen as, merely cheap labor.

The racism that Chinese American immigrants experienced was just one example of the institution of racism. Racism has a very long and dubious history within society. Especially in western society, racism has actually been quite predominant and still exists today. Racism is an institution that has been subjected to habitualization. As Berger and Luckmann state, “All human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which, *ipso facto*, is apprehended by its performer as that pattern. Habitualization further implies that the action in question may

be performed again in the future in the same manner with economical effort” (Berger & Luckmann 53). Racism has been so common in history that it has become a habit and people are accustomed to discriminating against and stereotyping other ethnicities. There is no way to point out where in history racism began; however, in United States history, racism can be seen from the very outset. The American Indians, the original inhabitants of this land, were cajoled and forced out of the land they lived on. They were seen as ‘uncivilized’ people, merely because their fashions and traditions were different from the Europeans.’ After the Europeans eliminated the American Indians and turned them into a virtual non-factor, exploitation of another race became predominant.

Slavery was often called ‘The Peculiar Institution.’ One of the most vital events in American history, the enslavement of Africans, lasted from early 1700’s until the Reconstruction Period of the mid 1850’s. This was a societal institution that arose due to the habitualization of racism as well as the need for cheap labor. As Berger and Luckmann state,

Institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution. What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also the actors in institutions. The typifications of habitualized actions that constitute institutions are always shared ones. They are available to all members of the social group in question, and the institution itself typifies individual actors as well as individual actions (Berger & Luckmann 54).

This institution arose because it was accepted within the social group of colonial America. Even though the leaders at this time acknowledged the importance of fair and equal rights, they owned slaves themselves. Thomas Jefferson, a famous American leader, who is known in history as the author of the Declaration of Independence—which stated that ‘All men are created equal’—was a slave-owner himself. Slavery as an institution was simply so commonly accepted at the time, it was a pattern of conduct. Berger and Luckmann point out,

Institutions further imply historicity and control. Reciprocal typifications of actions are built up in the course of a shared history. They cannot be created instantaneously. Institutions always have a history, of which they are products. It is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced. Institutions also, by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible” (Berger & Luckmann 55).

Racism is an institution that not only has a history, but serves as a foundation for the continuation of racism. The enslavement of Africans eventually leads to poor treatment of other immigrants and foreign people. The Asian experience can be linked to the experiences of racism through slavery.

By 1870, there were over 63,000 Chinese in the United States and the majority of the population resided in California. Initially treated rather well, eventually the Chinese became no longer welcome. In

May 1852, the California legislature passed a foreign miners' license tax. This type of racially motivated ordinance was not unique; the purpose was quite transparent. It was aimed at the Chinese and required any foreign miner who did not desire to become a citizen to pay a tax of three dollars per month. While the Chinese did in fact want to gain citizenship, they had been rendered ineligible for citizenship by the 1790 federal law that reserved naturalized citizenship to ‘white’ persons (Takaki 79).

The Chinese in California initially began as miners and people who were searching for gold. However, an important area of industrial employment arose that was filled by Chinese laborers, the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad. As Ronald Takaki notes, “Within two years, 12,000 Chinese were employed by the Central Pacific Railroad, representing over 90 percent of the entire work force. The savings derived from the employment of Chinese rather than white workers were enormous” (Takaki 85). The Chinese laborers suffered from harsh working conditions and were unable to fight for any decent labor rights. Eventually, the railroad was completed, and the Chinese were released from their employment. As Takaki notes,

For Crocker and other employers of Chinese labor, the Chinese would be allowed to enter and work temporarily, then return to their homeland while others would come here as replacements. The Chinese would be used to service the labor needs of America's industry without threatening the racial homogeneity of the country's citizenry. The migrant workers would be inducted into a labor-supply process that would move labor between China and the United States in a circular pattern. Anti-Chinese laws, economic exploitation, and racial antagonism would

assist in this process, compelling the Chinese to leave America after a limited period of employment. They would remain 'strangers' (Takaki 100).

The Chinese were used as temporary labor, and the U.S. desired that they would return to their homeland—they were never supposed to remain here in this country. The demands of white capitalists for a colonized labor force and the "ethnic antagonism" of white workers as well as an ideology defining America as a homogenous white society forced the Chinese to become 'strangers.'

This was not the only example of discrimination that Asian Americans faced. In San Francisco, California, Chinese Americans opened up many businesses that were hand laundries. While the Chinese immigrants began to corner the market for hand laundries and place other laundries out of business, an ordinance was passed that demanded that all laundries opened up less than ten years ago needed to complete an application for a license. This ordinance was racially motivated, designed to place Chinese laundry owners out of business. The legislators calculated that ten years ago, there were no laundries in operation that were Chinese owned. This was not the only racially-motivated regulation imposed on Chinese Americans. It was also required that all hand laundries that were operated in wooden tenements be subject to strict fire regulations. While most hand laundries would not pass these examinations, officials tended to only enforce this code against Chinese-owned laundries. This selective enforcement of the law was against the Constitution. A Chinese laundry owner named Yick Wo, brought a case before the U.S. Supreme Court regarding these regulations. In a famous case called *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, Yick Wo lost and the court found in favor of the fire regulations law. Through the Chinese Exclusion Acts

and the treatment other Chinese immigrants of California received, the institution of racism was continued.

The history of Asians in this country only gets worse from there. Not only are Chinese discriminated against and disallowed to immigrate into the country, but also during World War II the entire West Coast population of Japanese-Americans were rounded up and placed into internment camps. Ronald Takaki writes,

Under General DeWitt's command, the military ordered a curfew for all enemy aliens and all persons of Japanese ancestry and posted orders for evacuation: "Pursuant to the provisions of Civilian Exclusion Order No. 27, this Headquarters, dated April 30, 1942, all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated to the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P.W.T., Thursday May 7, 1942." The evacuees were instructed to bring their bedding, toilet articles, extra clothing and utensils" (Takaki 392)

Even American citizens, people of Japanese ancestry who were born in this country, were taken away from their own homes, unfairly dispossessed of their property, and locked up behind bars like caged animals. During the period of Japanese internment, the United States Census Bureau, for the one and only time in history, violated its own confidentiality code and released the information they had to military personnel. While many people today believe in the confidentiality of the U.S. Census, it has broken citizens' and non-citizens' trust before. It may very well happen again. Even the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed a decision (*Korematsu vs. United States*, 1946) that made it legal to institute internment camps on Japanese American citizens. This episode in American history

is largely ignored in many textbooks and historical journals. Sometimes it even appears as if the U.S. would like to ignore the fact that it committed such injustices to people who were their own citizens. This event in history needs to be openly discussed and people need to be educated on how this came to be. Hopefully, Americans can learn from their past mistakes, and the example of the Japanese internment can serve to teach a lesson. U.S. should not respond to situations in this way and in no way has the right to imprison a group of people merely on the basis of ethnicity.

Today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are new problems facing the Asian American community. Many Asian Americans feel a loss of cultural identity as they slowly assimilate into mainstream American culture, but discover that they are still widely unaccepted by the Caucasian America. There is a backlash against Asians because of the success they are experiencing within this country.

It is in these times and under these conditions where I have developed. While I do feel a great deal of pressure to succeed, at the same time I welcome the challenge and eagerly learn as much knowledge as possible in school, before I enter the real world. Being the product of traditional Chinese parents, I was expected to become a doctor. However, my personality and learning pattern led me to another path. I am currently applying to law school for the fall of 2000. At times, the pressure of a family at home and abroad to succeed can seem overwhelming; however, from a different point of view, I strive to succeed for myself and myself alone. I want to impact the world in my own ways.

One of the ways I managed to impact my own personal community of college students was through cultural performance. One of the accomplishments in my life that I am most proud of is my performance in the cultural show "China Night." I always felt a desire to be an actor at mock

trials in high school. When playing an attorney I always felt like being one. I never participated in any major theater productions until the spring of 1999. This was my first experience with "China Night." "China Night" is an annual cultural showcase where Binghamton University students produce, direct, act, dance, and sing to a Chinese cultural theme. In 1998, I auditioned for a supporting role and was selected. It took a great deal of hard work, even for the secondary role that I was playing. However, I discovered that I enjoyed acting very much. It was something I had to work hard at, but I had fun doing it as well. The show was a success and I was able to meet many people that I still come into contact with today. It was an exhilarating experience. This year for "China Night 2000," I took on a larger role. In a play designed for six major roles, I play one of the six lead characters. With many more lines to learn and a lot more pressure, it was quite a daunting task.

For two straight weeks, we had four hour rehearsals. We worked very hard for a short period of time. I was very nervous before the show started. However, I tried to stay as calm as possible. I tried to ease my tensions by helping other ease theirs. Being an 'experienced' China Night actor, I told my fellow cast members, "Don't worry. This is all going to turn out great." The show went on and I felt it was successful. It was very rewarding to look out at the theater after the show was over and reflect. Four years in this school went by very quickly. I was very glad that I was able to make some kind of a lasting impact. Participating in "China Night," a cultural production that shows pride in our heritage, was a very rewarding experience. It was all hard work, but in the end, most definitely worth every bit of effort. When these four years of Binghamton University education come to an end, it will really not be the classroom lectures that I remember. I won't really recall how many essays or papers I

handed in, or how many A's and B's I got. I will remember the extra-curricular activities that I participated in. We are all students in pursuit of higher education; however, when it comes down to it, the bottom line is that we all go to school to learn about ourselves.

Acting in "China Night" helped me learn a lot about myself. I learned that I have the confidence to perform, and succeed under pressure. I used to have a fear of performing in front of large audiences, but I feel that I am slowly conquering that obstacle. "China Night" taught me how to be assertive, to reach for goals that I did not believe I could achieve, and to have fun while doing it. If there is anywhere in this University that I feel I have left a small mark, it would be through the two "China Night" performances that I was involved in. These are the types of experiences all students should have.

As I approach graduation from this institution of higher education, I look forward to the future because it appears to be bright. As the philosopher Gurdjieff would say, "Every human being is born with the same right and ability to develop—but some are more likely to do it than others" (Speeth 52). I have developed into a more secure, confident, and knowledgeable person through my college experience. The surroundings have been very helpful to learning. According to Gurdjieff in Speeth's words,

Each person grows up surrounded by influences coming from sources of conscious origin, outside of ordinary life. These influences from above (or from an inner circle of humanity) begin to collect within an individual and eventually, if there are enough of them, develop sufficient mass, so to speak, to affect orientation, to produce a feeling of need for self-development or at least a vague discontent. The

values and goals of everyday life then become a context for a search, a hankering after a certain kind of reading, a growing inclination to be with people who are also concerned with such things (Speeth 53)

I may not be after the esoteric knowledge consuming Gurdjieff's life, but I feel that I have the vague discontent discussed by Gurdjieff. I do not know if I fully comprehend what discontent that is; however, I do desire to learn more. I realize that I am not wise, and for the most part I remain ignorant, but I do feel that I have achieved some level of self-development.

I believe in my own ability to succeed. I look forward to the future where I can be a leader to the Asian American community. "To be leaders among men" is the motto of my fraternity, and everyday I try to adhere to it. I am aware that in the future, I will most likely not change the world, but it is my goal to at least make a difference. I want to impact the world by aiding in the Asian American community. My goals are to help people society takes advantage of and to support those in need. I have been pursuing these goals through a variety of philanthropic activities. As a member of the Chinese Staff and Workers' Association I have helped organize protests for migrant New York City Chinatown workers. I have also set up fundraising events for similar organizations who seek to help the community. This past semester, I organized and conducted, on behalf of my fraternity, a successful Asian Bone Marrow Drive, typing over 200 individuals. The need for Asians to be typed as potential leukemia donors is a serious problem that the Asian community faces. Asian patients struck with leukemia have a much slimmer chance of finding a life-saving match when compared to other nationalities. Asians need to become typed and registered as potential donors. This way, patients have a

better chance for survival. I have adamantly supported this cause and it represents an activity that is very special to me. It is something that I have a passion for. If there is some place in this world that I want to make a difference, it is here. I hope that all of our efforts do not go to waste. I was extremely proud of the all of the hard work that not only I personally put in, but the effort of my fraternity brothers' in finding individuals who were willing to donate. It is through these types of activities that I can allow myself to have opportunities to impact the world.

In this paper I explored many aspects of my personal, cultural, and spiritual history. In retrospect, I see the experience of writing this essay has been an extremely rewarding one. The paper dealt with my upbringing and the history of my family as Asian American immigrants. It also dealt with ethical issues of today, such as racism and discrimination. The social construction of these institutions was examined in a global perspective as well as through my personal experience. Concluding this essay, I now feel that I have completed a significant phase of my life. As I graduate from this institution of higher learning, I am about to embark upon many new experiences. The paper, as a whole, has helped me become more self-observant while moving in that direction.

## **EPILOGUE, FEB. 2002**

Re-reading the preceding paper which I wrote during the last few months of my undergraduate education at Binghamton University was quite an enlightening and self-reflective experience. So much has happened in my life since I wrote that paper one and a half years ago. First and foremost, one of the two most influential figures in my life, my father, passed away on June 18, 2000 (Father's Day), only a few short weeks after my graduation from

Binghamton University. Secondly, I have studied one and a half years of law at Brooklyn Law School. And finally, the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup> occurred, which affected everyone's life and touches on the themes of racial discrimination, ignorance, and lack of tolerance which I discuss in the body of the paper.

The self that I wrote about in the paper is completely different from the self I am today, and re-visiting the self that I was then has reminded me ever so powerfully of where I came from and quite possibly where I am going. I believe that this experience has re-confirmed the importance of self-exploration and how useful that process can be.

Without a doubt, the most significant event in my life has been my father's passing. I learned so much from this experience that my self-exploration above would be incomplete without mention of this life-changing event. Through my father's passing, I learned so much about responsibility, but also about pain and grief, and finally about honoring loved ones and moving on with their spirit inside. My father was the foundation of our family, he was like a stone or a rock, strong-willed and dedicated to his family. Without our foundation, I sometimes felt my world would crumble, but I learned that the responsibility he carried now had to be divided and shared between my mother, my brother, and myself. I tried my best to shoulder as much of the burden as possible, and I tried to be the rock my father once was, but the pain and grief was often too much. I don't think I ever understood what it was to hurt until those sorrow-filled days. While it was a struggle to move on, I have a profound belief that my father's spirit lives on inside of me. I am driven by his spirit as well as my desire to honor his life. He suffered so much in his lifetime just to allow me the opportunity to succeed.

In the one and a half years since the birth of the preceding paper, two other

events have been very significant in my life and deserve mention. My first one and a half years of law school has been an amazing experience. I have learned so much in such a short period of time, and I think I understand the kind of work ethic necessary to succeed in this profession. And of course, the tragedy of September 11<sup>th</sup> made a strong impact on my life just as it has impacted many other lives. For three months during the summer of 1999, I worked on the 100<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. To hear that there were very few to no survivors from that 100<sup>th</sup> floor was both terrifying and devastating. Thousands of innocent lives were lost on that day, and I lost a friend as well. Paul J. Battaglia, who graduated from Binghamton University the same year as I did, worked for Marsh during the same summer I worked, and accepted full-time employment with the company. Although I never got to know Paul well, my impression was that he was a funny, genuine, and trustworthy individual. Unfortunately, I don't have any answers to the tragedy and what good we can take from it, other than the fact that our world is still a world that lives in ignorance, hate, and misunderstanding. If there is one lesson I learned, it was that everyone in the world still has a lot to learn about different people, cultures, and religions, and that such learning might start by first looking within.

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