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‘An Activist-Scholar Project’

In the moment of Black Lives Matter, Latinx immigrant rights, Standing Rock Indigenous water rights, the #MeToo movement and other social struggles, Asian American activism remains virtually unseen.

Yet many Asian American community organizations are taking on important issues such as immigrant rights, housing and community development, labor, environmental justice, state violence, intersectional racialized gender and heteropatriarchy and international solidarity work.

A multi-campus symposium at UC Santa Barbara seeks to make visible some of the most vibrant community organizing occurring in California and beyond. Participants will look at the kind of activism taking place, what creates successful campaigns and how organizations overcome obstacles, how short-term success lead to longer-term problems and, inversely, how short-run losses lead to greater capacities for social movement organizing; and what shifts when Asian American activism becomes visible.

A collaboration among the Asian American studies departments at UC Santa Barbara and UC Davis and the Asian American Studies Center at UCLA, the symposium is slated for Thursday and Friday, Jan. 24 and 25, in the campus’s MultiCultural Center. It is open to the public, and will be live-streamed to a national audience.

The keynote speaker will be Pam Tau Lee, a founding member of the Chinese Progressive Association, the Asian Pacific Environmental Network and the Just

Transition Alliance. She will discuss “The Struggle to Abolish Environmental Racism: Asian Radical Imaginings from the Homeland to our Frontlines” at 6 p.m. Thursday, Jan. 24.

“The organizing taking place in Asian American communities today is rooted in the student and community activism that led to the establishment of the field of Asian American studies in the late 1960s,” said Diane Fujino, a professor of Asian American studies at UC Santa Barbara. She is convening the event — titled “Contemporary Asian American Activism & Intergeneration Perspectives: An Activist-Scholar Symposium” — with Robyn Rodriguez, a professor of Asian American studies at UC Davis.

“In particular, the Third World strikes at San Francisco State College and UC Berkeley,and elsewhere as well, in 1968 and 1969 produced the academic fields of ethnic studies and Asian American studies,” Fujino continued. “These are interdisciplinary fields that examine how differences of race, ethnicity and nation, as well as gender, class and sexuality shape individual experiences and societies in the United States and around the world, and how modes of power shape our understanding of race and the production of knowledge itself.”

The symposium is further designed as an activist-scholar project, one that engages both perspectives in the process of knowledge production and does so by way of egalitarian and reciprocal models of community-engaged research.

Among other speakers are Eddy Zheng, former prisoner and founding member of the Asian Prisoner Support Committee; Irma Shauf-Bajar, organizer with the Filipina women’s organization GABRIELA USA; Ga Young Chung, a doctoral student speaking on Korean undocumented immigration rights; and Karen Umemoto, director of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, discussing juvenile justice reform.

“Based on the public symposium and internal discussions, we are developing an edited volume that examines Asian American activism,” Fujino said. “Symposium speakers will contribute chapters on Asian American activism and the struggle to abolish environmental racism, undocumented immigration rights in Korean American communities, Filipina women’s reform and organizing for educational transformation, housing against the pressures of gentrification and community development and social movement building.”

More information about the symposium, including a complete schedule and list of speakers is available at http://www.asamst.ucsb.edu/news/event/369.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.