The Power of Sexuality

Jennifer P. Ting

When considering Asian American studies as an intellectual and political tradition, the title of this article takes on a three-fold meaning. The power of sexuality names at once the pervasive discourse of sexuality within this tradition, the dialectical relations between that discourse and other structures of power, and the utility of the category "sexuality" for analysis. The field organizes a vast array of knowledge through sexuality. This is not a recent development; since the founding of the field, Asian Americanists have made sexuality part of the way they think and write about the way power is organized, exercised, and lived in the United States. However, while the economic, political, and social conditions of Asian America have changed over the past thirty years, the framework for thinking about sexuality has not. Today's Asian Americanists continue to think about sexuality in terms developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the writing of the Asian American movement. 1 This striking continuity is a problem for the field -- a dated yet familiar politics of sexuality is both widely available in Asian American studies and dangerously unacknowledged.

In the sense developed by feminists, queer studies scholars, and historians of sexuality, the term "sexuality" is the name of a category. 2 The things so categorized and the categorizing scheme itself vary among cultures and over time. Power operates in part by dividing the world into sexual life and non-sexual realms of life, erotic and non-erotic bodies, [End Page 65] deviant and normal desires, privileged and penalized sexual activities. 3 Although often represented as inevitable, apolitical, and transhistorical, a culture's particular organization of sexuality is constructed in and through social, political relations; so too are these relations shaped by sexuality. 4 From this point of view, the politics of sexuality are not limited to the restriction, denial, or freedom of one's sexual preferences; sexuality is thoroughly political. The parts of the body considered sexy, the behaviors considered sexual activity, the people and objects with which one performs sexual activities, the places in which sexual activities may acceptably be performed, or the impact of sexual activities on one's economic or political life -- in the culture of the United States, these aspects of sexuality are part of the social relations of production. 5 Articulated with systems of race and class, with logics of nation, and with the organization of gender, contemporary sexuality is organized to produce "the social" and to reproduce capitalist divisions of labor and profit. 6 As a category for analysis, sexuality enables a fruitful examination of the way power works and of the kinds of change imaginable.

Yet too often the word "sexuality" is used in Asian American studies as a euphemism for something else: orgasm, vaginal-penile intercourse, homosexual existence, sexual identities. Within the more rigorous framework I wish to develop, this use of the term as a euphemism or code word for any single thing naturalizes other aspects of sexuality and obscures their political work. For example, the assertion that Asian Americans don't write or talk about sexuality implies that discussions of immigration and marriage, anti-miscegenation laws, dating and socialization, prostitutes, political eunuchs, and standards of beauty are not also, to some degree, discussions of sexuality. 7 It also implies that the field's impressive research and writing about orgasms, vaginal-penile intercourse, homosexual existence, and sexual identities is, somehow, not Asian American. We can get farther by acknowledging that Asian American studies invests this category with a great deal of power when using it as problem, explanation, and metaphor than we can by considering sex as a taboo, broken by those who have it. It is time to think about the political work sexuality does and has done for the field.

This essay is part of a larger project on sexuality, writing, and racial [End Page 66] formation. It has three parts. First, I outline one possible use of the category of sexuality for Asian American studies by pointing to the unremarked abundance of writing about sexuality in the movement press. I argue that this writing was crucial to the emergence of an Asian American racial formation. Second, I describe two pieces of writing from the Asian American movement period and discuss the logic of sexuality they share. Finally, I note the continuities between movement-era writing and the way the field thinks about sexuality today in order to suggest that moving the analysis of and intervention in the power relations of sexuality in a different direction is a tactic for changing racial hegemony.

What does it mean for Asian Americanist teachers and researchers that sexuality is among the social, material relations and conditions produced by power? Among other things, such a conception of sexuality illuminates long-standing discussions on how to periodize Asian American history, particularly with respect to the 1970s and the Asian American movement. Scholars and movement participants have productively debated whether the movement can be distinguished from earlier politics by its version of panethnicity, as a new social movement containing the seeds of a later identity politics, or as an emergent sociopolitical entity. If, as these debates suggest, the Asian American movement changed something in the social and political relations possible for Asians in the United States, the analytic category of sexuality offers another approach to the question of what changed and how.

From Gidra's front-page article, "Yellow Prostitution," 8 to Bridge’s special issue on women (1978) sexuality saturates this writing. 9 Although we tend to think of the Asian American movement press primarily in terms of writing about racial and/or class politics, it was not unusual for these newspapers, magazines, journals, and books to write about sexual desire, to use sexual metaphors in their anti-imperialist and anti-racist analysis, to celebrate sexual activity and the flaunting of bourgeois mores, and to denounce sexual exploitation. In this writing, emasculation was used as a metaphor for Asian American men's oppression, while prostitution at once literalized Asian American women's oppression and symbolized the oppression of all Asian Americans. In addition to countercultural [End Page 67] critiques of the "bourgeois" institutions of marriage and its nuclear family, the movement press published hundreds of pages of writing that celebrated Asian American heterosexual romance, courtship, and monogamy. And despite Gidra's and Bridge’s articles and editorials on a range of controversial issues (including busing and school desegregation, drug use among Asian Americans, and the anti-war movement), for each serial the single article which provoked the largest response in the "letters to the editor" column dealt with interracial couples. Movement writing about sexuality forms an extensive discourse, readily available across a range of publications, geographic regions, and political factions. What is all this writing about sexuality doing in the Asian American movement press? Or better -- what is it doing to and for the emergence of Asian America?

Given the differences among movement serials, it is striking that they could agree on anything. Yet they agreed that sexuality was important enough to write about. And they agreed that all Asians in the United States had interests, oppressions, and experiences in common. However contentious the debate over the defining features, conditions, and futures of Asian America, few readers and writers seriously rebutted its
existence. Most skeptics wrote that "Asian American" was flawed in its failure to account for certain ethnic groups, but their argument acknowledged the existence of such a category. "Is There Such a Group?" in letters and reviews that appeared in movement serials assumed there was indeed such a category, but that it was flawed to the extent that it did not adequately account for certain ethnic groups. Letters expressing doubt that Asian ethnic groups in the United States could ally together emphasized historical conflicts between Asian nations. This writing had the effect of calling for a conceptualization of Asian America which could account for conflict as well as affiliation among Asians in the United States. Even as the rejection of precursors' descriptions of and prescriptions for Asian America became more distinct, its claims to be writing about and on behalf of (a single) Asian America became more powerful.  

Of course, I am not arguing that simply writing the phrase "Asian America" called this formation into being through the magic of language. Rather, I am pointing out that movement writing was involved in the project of Asian American racial formation. Arguing against a model in which racial categories are first constituted and then assigned social meanings and political status, Omori and Winant urge a dynamic view of racial projects. For them, racial meanings are an integral part of the hegemonic order's "unstable equilibrium." Thus the struggle to change racial meanings is at once a particular struggle for which the hegemony can accommodate and a counter-hegemonic challenge: the Asian American movement press did not end racial hierarchy in the United States, but its insistence that Asians in the United States should control their own racial meanings did indeed change the order of rule. Asian American movement writing about sexuality associated certain meanings with an emergent racial category. Let me suggest that in doing so, it contributed to changes in racial categorization itself. And at the level of cultural logic (of race, of sexuality) the power of sexuality was brought to bear on Asian American racial formation.

Celestials, Orientals, and other racial formations had sexuality. That is, their bodies, desires, and pleasures were organized and made meaningful within specific social, political relations. But during the movement period, a new way to thinking about sexuality and race emerged in the Asian American movement press. This discourse of sexuality helped to distinguish the logic and meanings of "Asian American."  

To advance my point that sexuality is more than a shared language, set of topics, or common set of metaphors and symbols in Asian American movement writing, I have deliberately chosen two markedly dissimilar examples. Stanley and Derald Sue's 1971 article from Amerasian Journal, "Chinese-American Personality and Mental Health," and the untitled 1969 article from Gidra on "Sex and the Asian American" belong to different genres and address different audiences.  The serials from which they are drawn had separate visions of what the Asian American movement was and what it meant to participate in it. Yet, as I will show, both pieces of writing present sexuality according to a single logic. These two articles make good examples because they are quite ordinary ways of writing about sexuality. They are not exemplary in the sense of outstanding or unusual. [End Page 69]  

The thesis of Sue and Sue's article does not concern sexuality. The authors relate Chinese American mental health and "personality" problems to the effects of racism in their controversial argument that Chinese Americans need therapy to realize healthy levels of "pride" and "self-esteem." (p. 44) Yet sexuality is very much part of the article. Early in the article the notion of institutional racism is illustrated by, among other things, the fact that "in the past, laws in some states prevented Chinese from marrying Caucasians." (p. 37) This choice of examples is neither incidental nor unimportant. Race, desire, and coupling haunt the descriptions and case studies in which Sue and Sue propose three Chinese American "typological characters" and their problems.  

For Sue and Sue, Chinese American personality is developed "within the interplay of forces such as parental upbringing, the clash between Chinese and Western values, and racism." (p. 36); they propose three typological characters distinguished by their attitudes toward these three forces. The Traditionalist conforms to parental, "Chinese values" of hard work, family pride, and filial duty. "He" does not acknowledge racism, "since he has been taught by his parents that success is possible with hard work" and that, conversely, failure results from his own flaws. (p. 38) The authors note that "eventual obligations as father and husband may be secondary to his duty to parents" (p. 38), and indeed there is no mention of courtship, dating, or sexual activity in the case study of Traditionalist John C.  

In contrast, the description of the Marginal Man begins and ends with dating and the erotic zones of the body. This second typological character rejects "traditional" Chinese values of his parents:

We believe that the Marginal Man finds his self worth defined in terms of acceptance by Caucasians. For the Chinese male, the number of Caucasian friends he has and such things as his ability to speak without an accent are sources of pride. He may feel contemptuous of Chinese girls who are "short legged" and "flat chested" when compared to Caucasian girls. (p. 40)  

On one hand, this passage presents the Marginal Man's pride and sense of self-worth as requiring his adoption of standards of beauty accepted by Caucasians. On the other hand, his contempt for Chinese girls, juxtaposed [End Page 70] with his refusal to find Chinese things desirable is a form of internalized racism. The following paragraph hammers away at both points. The authors summarize an early version of Melford Weiss's argument that Chinese American girls believe Chinese American boys to be "inhibited, passive, lacking in sexual attractiveness," and -- more to the point -- undesirable dates: "the highly Westernized female begins to expect her boyfriends to behave boldly and aggressively. Because the Chinese male is perceived to lack these "desirable traits," many of the Chinese females begin to date outside their own race." (p. 40) Sue and Sue then move on to a discussion of what they call "racial self hatred," which concludes with the example of the Marginal Man "dissuaded with his own physical characteristics," including his "lack of a 'manly' physique." (p. 41)  

The accompanying case study deals with Janet T., a young Chinese American woman with a long-standing pattern of dating White men. Janet has been thinking about suicide after her last boyfriend broke up with her under pressure from his parents. Once again interracial desire is a symptom of the Marginal Man's inability to love and value herself:

The break-up of her last torrid love affair made her realize that she was Chinese and not fully accepted by all segments of society. At first she vehemently and bitterly denounced the Chinese present dilemma. Later much of her hostility was turned inward against herself. Feeling alienated from her own subculture and not fully accepted by American society, she experienced an identity crisis. This resulted in feelings of worthlessness and depression. It was at this point that Janet came for therapy. (p. 41, emphasis in original)  

The Sues' rhetoric here makes their argument. Janet's "torrid love affair" may seem out of keeping with the social scientific tone and style of the article. Yet this language successfully represents her dating and love life as part of a general mental health problem well before the passage reveals her depression. Likewise, the redundancy of the phrase "turned inward against herself" emphasizes the Marginal Man's problem.  

The Sues are quick to point out that internalized racism is not Janet T.'s only problem. Her lack of vehement and bitter hostility towards her ex-boyfriend and his parents is as marked as the reality of the individual [End Page 71] and institutional racism they represent. The Marginal Man, Sue and Sue conclude, "cannot admit widespread racism since to do so would be to say that he aspires to join a racist society." (p. 42) They develop even this general observation through a discussion of Chinese American desire for Caucasians. Their Marginal Man persists in such desire, dismissing any rejection and disapproval he experiences which do not "change his desire to assimilate." (p. 42) Here the desire for White partners is equivalent to and interchangeable with the desire to be like Whites.

The final typological character Sue and Sue propose is the Asian American. For "him," self-esteem "cannot be attained if his behaviors are completely determined by his parents or by society." (p. 42) In the course of forming his own values, the Asian American rejects both parental and
Western values (and, by extension, the Traditionalist and the Marginal Man). However, Sue and Sue point out the conflict between this rejection and the Asian American's belief that -- like poverty, racism, and juvenile delinquency -- the Marginal Man is a product of a racist society in desperate need of change. Although this general description does not appear to involve sexuality, the case study that supports it does. Gale K. has "not fully resolved guilt feelings concerning the recent death of his father." (p. 43) Sue and Sue note that as a teenager, Gale "did not confine his social life to other Chinese Americans," causing his parents to fear that "they would lose their only son should he marry a Caucasian." (p. 43) One year after his father disowned his older sister for her marriage to a White man, Gale became involved in the Third World strike at the University of California, Berkeley. This activism lead to his own conflict with his father, although his parents "were especially happy to see him dating other Asian girls and volunteering his time to help tutor educationally deprived children in Chinatown." (p. 43) Here syntax renders dating patterns equivalent with and parallel to community service. In the terms of the case study, both dating and volunteering are evidence that Gale finds something desirable and valuable about Chinese Americans.

My second example of sexuality in Asian American movement writing is a short, untitled article from Gidra about one of UCLA's "experimental [End Page 72]college" courses. It is a strikingly dense document; rather than attempting to describe or summarize its complex deployment of sexuality, as I have done with Sue and Sue's essay, I quote this less-known piece at length.

A class called "Sex and the Asian American" has been established to explore the confusions and anxieties encountered by young people concerning their feelings of sexuality. The class . . . is open to all interested Asians . . .

One factor which contributed to the creation of the class was the failure of Asian American parents to provide adequate, realistic, and current sex information. The result of this failure is that some Asian high school girls have had their second abortions, while many have had pregnancies in secret.

The lectures, films, discussions, guest lecturers, and readings will focus on every aspect of sex. The use of sex to exploit and manipulate in the areas of economics, politics, social relationships, and contracts, the destructiveness of various myths and hypocrisies dealing with sex are among the topics to be discussed.

A major goal will be to provide an environment where serious questions concerning sex can be asked and explored openly. Hopefully, individuals will thereby learn to deal and cope with changing morals, values, and the opening up of censorship in society. Another goal will be to investigate specific problems concerning Asian Americans as a particular and unique ethnic group.

We must accept sex as a basic human-biological need (such as food, shelter, and clothing) and place it in its proper perspective in the full range of human experience. This acceptance is necessary to close the present generation gap in the area of sex education and is important for the prevention of a future generation gap. (p. 14)

I want to draw particular attention to a few points before moving on to discuss the logic it shares with Sue and Sue -- and indeed with most Asian American movement writing about sexuality.

The article's concluding lines represent sexuality in the language of humanity. Sexuality is a "basic human-biological need," which is to say instinctual and therefore natural. Like the need for food and shelter, the need for sex seems an inevitable matter of physical survival that arises [End Page 73] apart from social life. But sex is not only a biological need here; it is also part of "the full range of human experience." It is one of the experiences that make us human, that proves people all over the world and throughout time more similar than dissimilar to each other. This representation of sex in terms of "the human" renders sexuality both natural and universal. In this way, Gidra makes it appear that Asian Americans must "accept sex" in order to be fully human.

Yet in describing the two goals of the course, the open exploration of serious questions concerning sex and the investigation of Asian Americans as a particular and unique ethnic group, this article insists on a specifically Asian American relationship to sexuality. First, "the failure of Asian American parents to provide adequate, realistic, and current sex information" differentiates them from other parents, who presumably do provide such information. Second, there is no explicit mention of birth control or sexual hygiene in this article. Instead, the course description emphasizes a materialist and political analysis of sexuality. What counts as "adequate, realistic, and current sex information" is being supplemented; the questions that will illuminate the relationship between sex and the Asian American address "the use of sex to exploit and manipulate in the areas of economics, politics, social relationships and contracts."4

Here the discovery of sexuality in putatively non-sexual realms (of economic, political, and social relations) is as important as the language of exploitation and manipulation. Just as sexuality is thought to exist prior to its repression, economic, political, and social relations are thought to be entirely separate from sexuality. Other examples of writing about sexuality from this period make clear that there are no good uses of sex in the areas of economics, politics, and social relations; the eruption of sexuality where it should not be is always and only understood in this writing as bad, exploitive, and manipulative. Yet the article admits no contradiction between the specificity of Asian American sexuality -- including its fraught relations with other areas of life -- and the suggestion that sexuality is something fundamentally and universally human.

Neither this Gidra piece nor the later Sue and Sue essay originated the tropes of sexuality they use. On the contrary, some of them can be [End Page 74] traced to previous historical moments and other racial formations. Certainly the movement press did not invent the figure of the young girl imperiled by sex, who is akin to the sentimental heroine of eighteenth-century novels and nineteenth-century feminism.16 The collapse of desire for White sexual and/or romantic partners into a desire to be (like) White people dates back at least to African American novels of the Reconstruction period; sociologist Robert Park's later rearticulation the relationship between intermarriage and assimilation is also at work here.17 The parental failure to provide information and its result in impregnated young girls and multiple illegal abortions in this piece resonates with the early twentieth-century discourses of sex education and birth control.18 And the turn-of-the-century discourse of sexology informs Gidra's claim that experts will address "every aspect of sex," using progressivist pedagogy -- in addition to readings and lectures, there will be films and discussions -- to defeat prudence and foster "serious questions concerning sex." In other words, movement writing says some of the same things about sexuality that the dominant culture had been saying.

Given the mobilization of earlier discourses of sexuality, it is not surprising that both examples recapitulate the assumptions of twentieth-century heteronormativity. This hegemonic organization of sexuality does not simply differentiate between heterosexuality and homosexuality, privileging the former and punishing the latter; it also represents the homo/hetero divide as the sole political work of sexuality and as an exhaustive description. In other words, heteronormativity does far more than characterize "normal" sexuality as "opposite sex" object choice. It obscures the range of social practices categorized as sexual and makes its norms seem to affect the sexual realm of life alone. Sue and Sue's essay imagines only heterosexual desires and pairings, but heteronormativity does more in its piece than simply omit or marginalize other kinds of desire. It also secures and reconfigures the terms in which men's desire for women and women's desire for men are understood to be normal, normative, and healthy: the heterosexual assumption enables their implicit argument that race is the factor that determines the social and psychic acceptability of physical attraction and romantic love.

The Gidra example demonstrates the productive aspects of heteronormativity [End Page 75] even more fully. According to its implicit analysis, the
If sexuality shapes and is shaped by relations of power, my discussion of the work of sexuality in Asian American racial formation begins the question: what did Asian American racial formation do to sexuality? While Gidra's vague mention of “various myths and hypocrisies dealing with sex” might refer to anything, Sue and Sue's use of the interracial couples as a sign of low, unhealthy levels of self-esteem and internalized racism provides a more detailed account of specifically Asian American problems. Other problems articulated by Asian American movement writing included Asian American prostitution, the interracial couple, and anti-miscegenation laws, dating and Asian American sexual socialization, the effeminization and/or masculinization of Asian American men, and racialized standards of beauty. While some of these problems circulated before this period, movement writing changed the meanings associated with them. They were now understood as local instances of alienation under capitalism and anti-Asian racism, rather than trivial inconvenience, unpleasantness, or personal inadequacy. According to the movement's logic of race and sexuality, these problems all distorted individual Asian Americans' natural desires for heteroerotic romantic and erotic relations with other Asian Americans by making these natural desires impossible to feel, articulate, and act on. Within the terms of this logic, an Asian American sexuality liberated from the repression and distortion of racism and capitalism would be restored to the realm of “the universally human” and would therefore lose its historical and political specificity. That is, Asian American racial formation produces a logic in which Asian American sexuality is authentic (i.e., is specifically Asian American) to the degree that it is repressed and distorted.

Discussions of sexuality in Asian American studies resemble discussions of sexuality in Asian American movement writing. This resemblance is hardly surprising: students and scholars of Asian American have inherited much from the movement, including its logics of race and sexuality. These logics inform the political and intellectual traditions Asian Americanists have built and reclaimed. They continue to be the way our field thinks and naturalizes sexuality. More precisely, it limits the questions that can be asked about power and sexuality. The sexist and heteronormative tendencies of the article, as well as the assumptions about race, sex, and power that I am describing, were produced by their particular historical moment. By describing these tendencies as limitations for current scholarship, I am not condemning the movement press for failing to anticipate feminist and queer politics. Nor am I suggesting that, simply by pointing out this logic and demystifying its operations, we can enlighten the duped and undo the work sexuality has done in Asian American political and intellectual traditions. Rather, I want to begin work on logics that allow new possibilities for Asian American studies. The present historical moment is charged with economic, political, and social problems that the movement's articulation of race and sexuality cannot address in any satisfactory way. To continue to reproduce and mobilize it uncritically or unintentionally is to ignore the insights of feminism, gay liberation, and AIDS politics, even as we begin to discuss them on another level.

I have tried to model attention to the power relations of sexuality in both my argument that Asian American movement writing did political work for racial formation and my emphasis on heteronormativity. And while it would be a mistake to forget that there is movement writing about same-sex activity, sexual identities, and lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, heteronormativity is neither negated nor destabilized by that writing. On the contrary, the claim that discussions of sexuality are (or ought to be) discussions of penalized sexual identities participates in heteronormativity's work to make the homo/hetero opposition account for all of sexuality and sexual politics. We cannot overlook the repressive, oppressive uses of sex require extensive exploration, but sex qua sex is narrowly defined as potentially repressive sexual activity. Within the terms of this article, there is nothing else to know about sex. Girls and women engaged in sexual activities without partners, boys and men penalized through sexuality, violence or psychiatry or arrest as penalties for "sex" so-called, and erotic as well as pedagogical relations between generations are unimaginable in this article. It is not that they are suppressed or made signs of the un-human; they do not exist, even as possibilities. The article's heteronormative logic works by limiting our means of understanding the real and of imagining alternatives — by mystifying. It collapses "every aspect of sex" into the heterosexual activities demanded by some version of biological reproduction: the uses of sex may be structured by power, but sexuality itself is not.

What is different — and therefore in a genealogical sense new — in this writing is the insistence that problems of sexuality signify Asian Americans as a single, unique ethnic group. The Gidra article assumes that through discussions of sexuality, people become conscious of their interests as Asian Americans. Sue and Sue's essay constantly offers the possibility of inappropriately raced partners as they argue from the assumption that our romantic and sexual desires reveal the truth of our self-esteem, our mental health and the personalities we learn from and against our parents. Both examples figure the relationship between desire and self in terms of knowledge revealed. Movement serials constructed Asian American sexuality to be discoverable at the United States in a way that it is not for any other people. There was considerable disagreement about whether or not grappling with these problems of sexuality required grappling with racism and capitalism. In effect, these debates affirmed the notion that the true selves and deepest desires of Asian Americans could be the common ground for dissent over political analysis, priorities, and tactics. Movement writing about sexuality thus facilitated the claim that all Asians in the United States have similar political interests and desires, social material needs, and even identities in common. The racial formation called "Asian American" emerged, in part, through the written discussion of sexuality.

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Notes

A version of this paper was given at "Thinking Power," the 1996 conference of the Association for Asian American Studies. My thanks to Mark Cooper, Bob Lee, Susette Min, Gary Y. Okihiro, Ezra Tawil, and the JAAS reader for their help.
1. The movement press influenced Asian American studies in a number of ways. In addition to early work in Asian American history, sociology, and literature, the movement press also published reports and commentary on developments in the field. Materials from movement serials have been used to teach a generation of Asian American studies students. However limited the original audience for this writing may have been, the field has made it an important primary (and secondary) source, with a new audience of academics and students.


9. Strikingly, this issue of Bridge brings together writing about women's sexuality and an elegiac poem celebrating the late Harvey Milk as "a man who loved men." See "harvey milk/iwe burn these words," by Kitty Tsui, in Bridge 6 (Winter 1978): 4.

10. Because accounts of the movement press do not acknowledge the materiality of writing, they have not noticed that it does this work. For example, William Wei's groundbreaking book clears a space to consider the movement press as having an impact on politics, but he does not entirely refute the idea that it reported on and reflected an already-existing Asian America. William Wei, The Asian American Movement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).


12. Although much Asian American history discusses particular aspects of sexuality – most often marriage, prostitution, anti-Asian rhetorics of "vice" – there is still much to be said about the organization of sexuality in earlier racial formations. Indeed, part of the power of movement writing on sexuality is its retrospective reclassification of previous formations and sexualities as Asian American. One cannot investigate the differences between Asian American and earlier sexualities without acknowledging the movement press's reorganization of sexuality.


15. For example, see the articles in the April 1973 issue of Bridge Magazine, identified on the cover as "the sex issue."


17. For the argument that African American writing about the figure of the mulatta is a strategy for imaginatively debating the possibility and desirability of various social, political relations of race, see Hazel V. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Claudia Tate, Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Anne du Cille, The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Here I am extending their ideas to account for a related figure, the miscegenous couple. Park's much-remarked "cycle of race relations," by contrast, treats intermarriage as an index of assimilation as well as a metaphor for it. Robert Ezra Park, Collected Papers of Robert Ezra Park, vol. 1, Race and Culture (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1950).

18. I am thinking here not only of Margaret Sanger's campaigns to make information on contraceptive and abortion procedures available, but also those sex education movements more explicitly tied to eugenics and conservative discourses of social hygiene. Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America (New York: Penguin, 1974).


20. Mark Cooper helped me think against the grain of Gidra's logic here and contributed the first and last items on this list.

21. This line of argument suggests that those of us who have been debating what specifies homophobia in Asian America might fruitfully change...
the focus of our inquiry; it is precisely the work heteronormativity does for Asian racial formation that constitutes the specificity of its effects in Asian America.

22. Like movement writing, Asian American studies makes sexuality both central and unacknowledged in historical explanation. See, for example, Sucheng Chan, Asian Americans: An Interpretive History (Boston: Twayne, 1991); and Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans (New York: Penguin, 1989) on bachelor societies. Asian American studies also reproduces repression as the truth of Asian American sexuality in the common claim, for example, that the stereotypes oppress by making it impossible for Asian Americans to feel and act on their natural (pre-social) desires.

23. My thinking here has been indelibly shaped by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "How to Bring Your Kids up Gay," in Fear of a Queer Planet (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 69-81.