

# “Dismantling Invisibility:” The Making of Asian and Pacific Islander Community During the AIDS Pandemic

Asher Willis

History

The University of North Carolina Asheville  
One University Heights  
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Sarah Judson

## Abstract

The AIDS pandemic landed a devastating blow to the LGBTQ community during the 80s and early 90s. Organizations like ACT UP, created to combat the disease, focused on helping their white membership, leaving minorities like Asians and Pacific Islanders (API) to fend for themselves. As a direct effect of a lack of visibility and representation, the API community rallied together to define what community meant to them. This thesis explores multiple organizations, created by and for APIs, to build social, medical, and artistic visibility for a group that felt invisible. While looking at the lasting scars of AIDS alongside the pillars of activism, this area of scholarship has long since been dominated by ACT UP and other white-centric histories. Stories of protest and social gatherings shine brightly through GAPIMNY. Artists boldly take a stand for their visibility in Godzilla. Members of APICHA work to keep their community alive as the government deems them ‘other’. These stories and their visibility remain at the forefront of this thesis as we explore self-made community activism.

In the early 1980s a new disease began to appear in gay white men of New York City. Purple lesions formed on the deteriorating bodies of these once-healthy young men. The AIDS pandemic claimed and continues to claim countless lives, crossing borders and oceans to reach new victims. AIDS does not care about the color of your skin, only the mark it leaves upon it. In the 1980s ACT UP attempted to rise to the challenge of supporting the LGBTQ community through the AIDS pandemic. ACT UP and its demonstrations allowed voices to rise up against anti-gay media, though many of these voices were white. ACT UP stifled minority voices, pushing them into the background as white members marched forward. ACT UP failed to support minority

groups, and this is one of many reasons the group crumbled from the inside out. The Asian Pacific Islander or API community needed to advocate on behalf of itself.

The creation of groups such as the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS and Gay Asian Pacific Islander Men of New York demonstrates the API community's desire to advocate on their behalf. The creation of Godzilla, an Asian art organization and its subsequent work on AIDS-related topics showcases the importance of art in the wider conversation of API visibility and representation. Asian American and Pacific Islander activism during the AIDS epidemic took place within these community-based organizations rather than larger mainstream organizations such as ACT UP, due to racism, barriers in language, fetishization, and a lack of kinship. By creating their own organizations, the Queer API community gained visibility and representation through the creation of kinship, the spreading of AIDS educational materials in API languages, and demonstrations as shown through the "Miss Saigon" protests.

The academic study of the AIDS pandemic overlooks the API community and its contributions. Scholarship in this area focuses on subjects related to the medical side of the disease, global activism, and group organization and protest within America. Victoria Harden's science-focused *AIDS at 30: A History* focuses on the creation of therapeutic drugs and their subsequent trials.<sup>1</sup> Warner Greene's "A History of AIDS: Looking Back to See Ahead" in the *European Journal of Immunology* continues the medical conversation into HIV's classification, the ups and downs of medical trials, and projects such as highly active antiretroviral therapy or HAART.<sup>2</sup> While both cover similar areas of medical history, Greene touches on the stigma of assumed lifestyle choices that led to LGBTQ individuals having a higher predisposition to contracting the disease.

Scholarship surrounding HIV/AIDS expands globally, measuring different levels of organizational success. *Politics in the Corridor of the Dying: AIDS Activism and Global Health Governance* by Jennifer Chen seeks to uncover the role that AIDS activism has played in global governance.<sup>3</sup> She accomplishes this by looking at drug applications pushed through the World Trade Organization, a neo-liberal approach to medical care. Theodore Powers utilizes interviews with reshaped South African anti-apartheid organizations now serving the LGBTQ community in his piece *Sustaining Life: Aids Activism in South Africa*.<sup>4</sup> His focus pertains to organizational structure rather than individuals within these organizations to discuss the structure needed for activism.

Pulling back from the global stage of activism, scholarship surrounding American AIDS activism remains an ever-growing pool of knowledge. Reactions to the epidemic differ depending on where in the country one focuses their research. For example, author John Luce focuses solely on the response to the pandemic in San Francisco in "A Strange New Disease in San Francisco: A Brief History of the City and its Response to HIV/AIDS Epidemic" in *Annals of American Thoracic Society*.<sup>5</sup> He argues that the

---

<sup>1</sup> Victoria A. Harden, *AIDS at 30: A History* (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012), 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> Warner C. Greene, "A History of Aids: Looking Back to See Ahead," *European Journal of Immunology* 37, no. 1 (October 2007): 6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eji.200737441>

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Chan, *Politics in the Corridor of Dying: AIDS Activism and Global Health Governance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Powers, *Sustaining Life: AIDS Activism in South Africa* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> John M Luce, "A Strange New Disease in San Francisco: A Brief History of the City and its Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic," *Annals of the American Thoracic Society* 10, no. 2 (2013): 143-147.

prevalence of the gay movement within San Francisco propelled the city into becoming the country's leader in AIDS care. Literature focused in New York City focuses largely on ACT UP. *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York 1987-1993*, by Sara Shulman, works to debunk numerous claims surrounding ACT UP members and victimhood.<sup>6</sup> As a former member of the organization, Shulman presents a focus bias when discussing the racial makeup of the group and which ACT UP events are the most important to tell its story. Abigail Halci chooses to focus on the actual organization of ACT UP and how a difference of opinion regarding its goals led to its downfall in her work "AIDS, Anger, and Activism: ACT UP as a Social Movement Organization" in *Waves of Protest*.<sup>7</sup>

Sources coming directly from the API community through dissertations and survey data provide the broader picture of the treatment of this minority group within the larger LGBTQ community. Adrian Hay Ding Leun uses an ethnographic approach, interviewing Queer Asian men to focus on the dual identity of being Queer and Asian in his dissertation *Being Gay and Asian: The Journey to Finding a Voice in New York City*.<sup>8</sup> Winter C Han uses similar methods in his work *Geisha of a Different Kind*, which focuses on attraction within the Queer community, arguing that Asian men are either glossed over completely or fetishized.<sup>9</sup>

API scholarship focuses not only on the LGBTQ community but also on the wider issue of medical acceptance. Hyun Lee's *The M&M Paradox* showcases discrimination as a main theme as it explains the medical underserving of the API community.<sup>10</sup> Using medical policies as evidence, Lee argues that the Model Minority myth is to blame for the underserving of the API community. Alain Dang and Mandy Hu use community-gathered data from the 2004 NY Queer API Legacy Conference to make claims similar to Lee's in their work *Asian Pacific American Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender People: A Community Portrait*.<sup>11</sup>

Each of these sources provides a foundation of academic study surrounding the AIDS epidemic and the portrayal of the API community both inside and outside of the LGBTQ community. However, this foundation is full of holes. Important API organizations are ignored and glossed over, leaving an empty narrative. I strive to fill these holes in scholarship and prove that these smaller organizations excelled outside of a homophobic API community and a racist LGBTQ one.

---

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Shulman, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993* (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> Abigail Halci, "AIDS, Anger, and Activism: ACT UP as a Social Movement Organization," in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Hay Ding Leung, *Being Gay and Asian: The Journey to Finding a Voice in New York City* (PhD diss., The New School, 2016), 2-6.

<sup>9</sup> Winter C. Han, *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America*, (NYC: NYU Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Hyun S. Lee, "The M&M Paradox: How the Seemingly Positive Model Minority Myth Inhibits Asian American Communities Within the HIV/AIDS Epidemic" (Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Georgetown University, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Dang, A. & Hu, M. (2005). *Asian Pacific American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People: A Community Portrait*. A report from New York's Queer Asian Pacific Legacy Conference, 2004. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.

In June 1981 the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* documented the first case of AIDS in the United States, soon followed by many others.<sup>12</sup> David France recounts picking up a newspaper in July of 1981, and reading the headline “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals.”<sup>13</sup> The disease became known as “Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome” in 1982 by the CDC, categorized by violet-colored lesions appearing on the body known as Kaposi’s syndrome, along with significant weight loss and a decline in the patient’s T-cells. Death from AIDS comes from a secondary illness such as a cold or pneumonia attacking the body’s destroyed immune system. An AIDS diagnosis in the 1980s was a death sentence.<sup>14</sup>

The United States government showed very little concern towards those contracting the disease in the early days. In many cases, the government became hostile towards the infected. For example, Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina pushed the Helms AIDS amendments on numerous congressional bills with the intention to bar Congress from spending money on AIDS informational material since he deemed it pornographic and homosexual.<sup>15</sup> In the 1990s, activists picked up their banners and slogans, meeting the government head-on. Organizations like ACT UP put pressure on federal health agencies to be more active and push through more drugs and drug trials for people with AIDS or PWAs. Organizational activism turned victims into champions of their own lives.

In 1987 dozens of scared and angry queer people, with and without AIDS, met together in the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center to hear Larry Kramer speak on AIDS. With the crowd’s full attention, Kramer started his speech with “If my speech tonight doesn’t scare the shit out of you, we’re in trouble.”<sup>16</sup> The meeting’s purpose was obvious to everyone in attendance: they needed to direct their anger towards something tangible, something the Gay Men’s Health Association was glossing over. A few meetings later the group donned the name AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT UP.

At its formation, ACT UP represented a small number of predominantly white and privileged men. These numbers quickly grew following the group’s first Wall Street protest, a direct attack on drug companies making a large profit from hiked-up prices of the life-saving drug AZT. Following this demonstration and the arrest of 17 ACT UP protesters, the FDA shortened the approval time of HIV/AIDS-fighting drugs.<sup>17</sup> ACT UP and its members found themselves firmly planted in the media’s gaze; they just needed to do something with it. Riding on the success of their first protest and its media attention, ACT UP continued to turn their anger into action with numerous protests. They set their attention on the FDA and their drug trials<sup>18</sup> and Cardinal O’Connor with

---

<sup>12</sup> John J. Chin, , ManChui Leung, Lina Sheth, and Therese R. Rodriguez, “Let’s Not Ignore a Growing HIV Problem for Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S.,” *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 84, no. 5 (2007): 642-643.

<sup>13</sup> David France, *How to Survive a Plague* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), 13.

<sup>14</sup> France, *How to Survive*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Gostin, *The AIDS Pandemic: Complacency, Injustice, and Unfulfilled Expectations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), xxii.

<sup>16</sup> France, *How to Survive*, 250.

<sup>17</sup> France, *How to Survive*, 253-255.

<sup>18</sup> ACT UP held a large protest on October 11, 1988 that shut down the FDA building followed by a letter writing campaign to explain to the workers impacted why they did it. This protest marks the beginning of ACT UP heavily

his anti-condom narrative.<sup>19</sup> ACT UP pushed itself, becoming a powerhouse of AIDS activism, but did that power extend toward the minority groups within it? ACT UP claimed to provide support and visibility to the LGBTQ community during the AIDS pandemic, yet in actuality, minority groups fell off to the wayside when it came to the group's attention.

Looking at the API community within the organization, member Ming Ma recounted in an interview that "I think there were very few Asian Pacific Islanders in ACT UP at the time. And given the size of ACT UP - really, you're talking about a handful."<sup>20</sup> This handful of API individuals formed the Asian and Pacific Islander Caucus of ACT UP/New York, becoming officially listed as a caucus on Nov 19, 1990.<sup>21</sup> The API caucus focused on education and language barriers in place of protests and drug trials. Their manifesto laid out this focus very clearly,

Confronted with language and cultural barriers, the fears of deportation, lack of affordable health care and drug treatment, no guarantee of anonymity, and no information about AIDS, Asian and Pacific islanders infected with HIV do not seek help and are not counted. When we do, help is often not available.<sup>22</sup>

The sentiments expressed in their manifesto showcase the wider range of issues that minority groups face, specifically the API community dealt with a lack of visibility from both the government and their communities, barriers in language, and sexualization.

While fighting back against the effects of the AIDS pandemic, the API community faced several additional challenges not shared by the wider LGBTQ community. Language was a key factor in the failure of information dissemination into minority communities during this crisis. This lack of life-saving information left many sexually active API members, queer or straight, at a much greater risk of contracting the virus. These documents were mainly printed in English.<sup>23</sup> Printing and distribution in languages other than English was possible, as shown by a pamphlet created for the residents of the Bowery surrounding AIDS support, however many of the organizations creating this document did not see it as a priority.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the focus remained on educating white audiences rather than minority groups, showcasing the lack of visibility and representation within the API community even with ACT UP.

---

pre planning its movements and training its members in civil disobedience present in the New Members Handbook. France, *How to Survive*, 325-330.

<sup>19</sup> ACT UP organized a "die in" to protest Cardinal O'Connor's preaching against the use of condoms and the importance of sexual education. The die-in saw ACT UP members silently rising from their pews and falling to the floor in the church as if dead. A silence broken by protestor Micheal Petrelis shouting "Why are you killing us? You're killing us! Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" France, *How to Survive*, 392 - 393.

<sup>20</sup> Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interview by the ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003, 8.

<sup>21</sup> ACT UP Calendar, Week of October 29th 1990, MSS.518, Box 1, Folder 6, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>22</sup> Manifesto: Caucus of Asian and Pacific Islander AIDS Activists, MSS.518, Box 1, Folder 1, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>23</sup> Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interview by the ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003. 17.

<sup>24</sup> Bowery Residents' Committee Adult Health Care, TAM.675, Box 4, Folder 12, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library.

Visibility was a consistent problem faced by the API community both inside and outside of the LGBTQ community. This manifested itself in a lack of information making its way into their communities since there was a lack of effort from predominantly white publishing groups and organizations. *How to Survive a Plague* recounts activist Micheal Callens' crusade into the bathhouses during the height of the pandemic.<sup>25</sup> His purpose was to see what information had been posted in each bathhouse, and in doing so he noticed a distinctive difference in the number of white men compared to minorities. Callens specifically cites "eight blacks, five Latinos, two Asians and five whites."<sup>26</sup> He posited that the higher number of minority groups reflected little effort was made in reaching those communities through AIDS education. Where the bathhouses fell flat for white men, they had other avenues to receive the information that was flooding into their community. Minorities had no such fail-safe. Callens wrote that this "made sense given that the *New York Native*<sup>27</sup> mostly ignored people of color and GHMC's safe sex literature mostly depicted Caucasians."<sup>28</sup> Not only did the API community have to fight to have literature about condoms translated into a language they could read, but they also needed to fight to have enough visibility for these larger organizations to share information with them that white men got by default.

A lack of educational material, coupled with the majority of the first victims of the pandemic being white men, led many to believe they simply couldn't get sick. This myth was perpetuated by a lack of government data surrounding the API community and this disease because until 1988 the government simply placed them in the "other" category.<sup>29</sup> This creates a serious issue surrounding the aforementioned visibility. If the government does not have a large enough amount of data regarding the API community, when they ask for government assistance there isn't anything backing up their claims, thus leaving them less likely to receive the aid they need. Lacking statistics, many in the community began to believe that Asians simply couldn't get AIDS and therefore needed to take no precautions. Accurate statistics would reveal that 486 API's were already infected, not with HIV, but with AIDS.

Community is the biggest factor in furthering a group's visibility while creating a supportive space for people to be themselves. For API men such a space was hard to find during this time. Racism within the LGBTQ community and homophobia in the Asian community pushed activists to create their own communities. Activist Gil Mangaoang described himself as "being in a state of 'schizophrenia' during the 1970s, trapped between his involvement in a homophobic Asian American political community

---

<sup>25</sup> Gay bathhouses acted as a sanctuary for queer men to relax, though they quickly became a safer alternative for sexual activities. In NYC the majority of these bathhouses were located away from heavily API populated areas. As it became apparent AIDS was spread through sexual contact, many bath houses began to close, while others posted information about the disease and offered condoms. In some cases men were more likely to receive AIDS information at the bathhouse. As he toured bathhouses Callens noticed that there was little to no information put up in many of them. France, *How to Survive*, 156.

<sup>26</sup> France, *How to Survive*, 156.

<sup>27</sup> A bi-weekly gay newspaper containing high quality reporting and recent AIDS updates, which began in 1980. New York Native records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

<sup>28</sup> France, *How to Survive*, 156.

<sup>29</sup> *A Magazine* Spring 1991, 19, Box 1, Folder Art Groups for Lesbian and Gay Artists, Wayne Steinman Papers, The LGBT Community Center National History Archive Repository, NY.

and his intimate life in a racist LGBTQ community.”<sup>30</sup> Before the creation of Queer API community, men would have to choose between two communities, neither a perfect choice.

Many API men chose to stay within the perceived safety of the closet for fear of alienation or having to choose between being Asian or Queer. If a man chose the Asian community, coming out or being outed would be seen as a shame on the family, possibly cutting them off from their family and that community support. Choosing the LGBTQ community wasn't any easier as many large organizations have serious racism problems manifesting in a lack of support for minorities.<sup>31</sup> Asian men were sometimes mentioned in newsletters or advertising materials to paint an inclusive image of an organization. This leads to the tokenization of Asian men, another serious issue keeping Asian men from Queer spaces.

API men needed organizations made for them and by them to combat the sexualization and fetishization of Asian men. “Rice Queens” were a prominent issue in the creation of so-called “API spaces.” “Rice Queen” refers to a demographic made up mainly of older white men who preferred Asian lovers who they viewed as “subservient, exotic ‘bottoms.’”<sup>32</sup> Rice queens saw the API community as men who should be taught how to enjoy sex. Asian men must look to them to be shown what community means in the LGBTQ community. This created a predatory power imbalance in the relationship, leaving the Asian man dependent on his white partner.

Organizations like Asians and Friends - New York were created by these rice queens. AFNY created a space that left many feeling exploited.<sup>33</sup> AFNY claimed to offer a space for API men when in reality it catered to white clientele, including their leadership. AFNY found itself at odds with Queer API organizations on more than one occasion. For example, they were removed from the People of Color Contingent in NY's Pride parade due to their leadership team remaining largely white.<sup>34</sup> This created the need for API spaces to be more selective, harder to find, and mainly, if not completely, API.

The API community faced the daunting enemy of the US government as they worked to create community spaces. As the pandemic worsened and weighed down the American healthcare system, the CDC issued quarantine laws for people coming into the country. The CDC began testing those coming into the country for HIV, turning away those who were positive. If that person was coming into the country for medical treatment they were still turned away.<sup>35</sup> This extended to those applying for green cards

---

<sup>30</sup> Amy Sueyoshi, “Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific American Activism in Queer History,” in *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, ed. Megan E. Springate (Washington DC: National Park Foundation and the National Park Service, 2016), 16.

<sup>31</sup> Hay Ding Adrian Leung, “Being Gay and Asian: The Journey to Finding a Voice in New York City” (PhD diss., The New School University, NYC, 2016), , ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Busting Stereotypes in the Gay Community, GAPIMNY, Box 3 Folders 1-3, Papers. The LGBT Community Center National History Archive Repository, NY.

<sup>33</sup> Leung, “Being Gay and Asian: “,166.

<sup>34</sup> A&F News Forum, July 1993, American Federation of Teachers, A&F (3 of 3), Papers. The LGBT Community Center National History Archive Repository, NY.

<sup>35</sup> ACT UP held a protest at Ellis Island in order to bring attention to these new laws. Many flyers were put out to not only promote the demonstration, but to inform the Queer community about what these laws were really doing.

or citizenship after living and working in the US for years.<sup>36</sup> Such actions done with the intent to protect the country and its medical care created serious issues, even AFNY writes “To impose HIV testing on foreigners will cause many of these to avoid legalization and medical care until they are seriously ill and cannot avoid it any longer.”<sup>37</sup> API men avoided forming a visible community as the fear of arrest and deportation for attending a meeting or rally grew. Visible communities also ran the risk of being outed to their families. For these communities, everything seemed to be against them, and not even the newest, angriest, and fastest-growing organization provided much help. After all, ACT UP wasn’t immune to these problems.

Ming Ma and other APIs within ACT UP had joined the organization with a desire to make changes for the betterment of their community. Ma recounted, “But, I think going to ACT UP allowed me to transform that personal anger into something that was collective, into something that - to actually, get off your ass and do something about it.”<sup>38</sup> The API caucus focused on tackling the language discrepancy present in AIDS educational materials, creating the documents their community desperately needed on their own.<sup>39</sup> They carried out a zap action<sup>40</sup> on the New York AIDS Hotline, requesting information in multiple different API languages. Only one woman on the hotline even spoke Chinese, indicating that API language was not a priority to AIDS-fighting organizations.<sup>41</sup> While the API caucus worked to move education into their community, ACT UP died around them.

Within ACT UP divisions had formed, further exacerbated by the creation of Tell It To Act Up or TITA. Meetings where democracy decided all became clouded with rumors and animosity created by Bill Dobbs’s introduction of TITA.<sup>42</sup> TITA acted as an anonymous outlet for ACT UP members to express ideas and opinions anonymously rather than bringing them straight to the meeting floor. However, its main use quickly turned to discussing issues members had with one another or the organization itself. This does not mean that TITA provided nothing but rumors and gossip, the publication created a way for smaller groups to promote themselves and their actions. The API caucus’ AIDS hotline zap was promoted through TITA along with the instructions for what participants needed to do. The API caucus utilized TITA to promote their very existence, asking people to spread the word and tell their friends about the group.

While TITA provided publicity for smaller groups, it quickly became a vessel of anger directed toward other members. The API community wasn’t safe from this anger. A message, angry that the group did not include West African and Haitian languages in

---

Ellis Island Reopens; The Borders Remain Closed, MSS.518, Box 1, Folder 9, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>36</sup> France, *How to Survive*, 186.

<sup>37</sup> Busting Stereotypes in the Gay Community, TAM.675, Box 2, Folder 33, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>38</sup> Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interview by the ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interview by the ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003. 21.

<sup>40</sup> Zap actions were events or demonstrations planned to take place before the next Monday night ACT UP meeting. Their purpose was a quick gathering of people. ACT UP New Members Handbook, MSS. 518, Box 1, Folder 10, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>41</sup> TITA, October 29, 1990, MSS.518, Box 1, Folder 6, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>42</sup> France, *How to Survive*, 412.



their phone zap, provides an example of the anger coming to the surface of ACT UP.<sup>43</sup> Though the message received a sass-filled response from Ming Ma, TITA had shifted from something that was once positive to something used to bring others down. TITA became a disaster for ACT UP, exposing divisions, racism, and identity politics within the group.

Rising tensions coincided with people of color taking a look around the room and realizing how few of them there really were. In his interview, Ming Ma recounted “I think there was a general perception in the community that ACT UP was a white organization.”<sup>44</sup> ACT UP didn’t do much to dispel that sort of thinking, instead creating an atmosphere that made people of color uncomfortable to speak their opinions. One writes in TITA, “So once again I will ask, ‘Where are the people of color? Why aren’t our issues discussed?’ There are lots and gay and lesbians of color who are my friends but they refuse to come until they feel more comfortable,”<sup>45</sup> Not only was ACT UP being perceived as a largely white organization, but they dismissed discussions surrounding race. A person of color wouldn’t be inclined to join a group, especially a predominately white group if their issues are not going to feel heard or listened to. By 1992 racism and infighting became too much and many left Act Ap for the newly formed treatment action group or TAG.

ACT UP provided a necessary foundation for many future LGBTQ groups to learn from, even with its issues. While doing so it showcased the need for the API community to build its own resources and create a visible community. There wasn’t the mix of being gay and Asian within that group that many wanted; there wasn’t a sense of community that some needed. Leung describes the struggle, writing, “...LGBT-identified POC often find it difficult to locate themselves within the community and the movement, and have to carve out a niche for their existence.”<sup>46</sup> The Queer Asian community needed to build its niche, and that started with tackling healthcare.

Asian Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS or APICHA was an organization created to combat the growing health concerns within the API community. APICHA was founded in 1989 after its organizing members attended the People of Color AIDS conference, a meeting also attended by the API Caucus.<sup>47</sup> Organizing members included familiar names such as Ming Ma and Ken Chu, who were active in other areas of their community. Ma was a member of ACT UP, and Chu a future founding member of Godzilla. In 1992 APICHA received its first government grant from the U.S. Conference of Mayors that allowed them to begin their work at educating the community through outreach programs and educational materials.

APICHA created a number of programs that helped to benefit the API community and those suffering from the effects of AIDS within it. The Bridge Project offered a

---

<sup>43</sup> TITA, October 29, 1990, MSS.518, Box 1, Folder 6, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York. & TITA, November 6, 1990, MSS.518, Box 1, Folder 6, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>44</sup> Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interview by the ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003. 26.

<sup>45</sup> TITA, September 17, 1990, MSS.518, Box 1, Folder 6, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>46</sup> Leung, “Being Gay and Asian:”, 19.

<sup>47</sup> History of APICHA. *APICHA*. Archives from original 2010.

language service for the community within partnered hospitals.<sup>48</sup> The project sought to break down the barriers of language that keep many APIs in the dark concerning their medical care by partnering them with a bilingual case worker. This program was effective in doing just that, as differences between language groups in education came down significantly.<sup>49</sup> The program, Permission Space, offered a supportive space for men who didn't identify as gay but had contracted AIDS, allowing for some of the anti-gay stigmatization to be removed. APICHA also worked within the community to create volunteer and youth programs to fill in needs where they arose. APICHA also made sure to attend numerous other organizations' events to supply their attendees with up-to-date AIDS informational and educational materials.

APICHA acted as the medical side of a number of organizations created by the API community at this time to meet their needs. Many of its members such as Ming Ma came to the organization from ACT UP's API caucus, wanting to make a tangible difference in their community. Their work spreading educational materials and creating programs to help with the language disparities did just that. APICHA has since rebranded itself as a medical community center, offering medical services to the community at large, not just AIDS patients.<sup>50</sup> This rebranding allows them to continue to serve their community in a hands-on fashion.

The API community still lacked an organization with a focus on the social side of being queer, a gap that the Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York were happy to fill. In 1990, John Chin, Don Kao, and John Manzon created GAPIMNY on a retreat in the Catskills of New York.<sup>51</sup> In the same year, the group debuted itself at the 1990 Lesbian and Gay Heritage of Pride parade. Their mission statement reads, "The mission of Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York is to provide a safe place for gay, bisexual, and questioning men and transgendered people of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage."<sup>52</sup> GAPIMNY was created to be a safe social group, tasked with fostering community for those API members who were queer. It was the first of its kind in the northeast. Members had a space to discover what it meant to be queer and API without brushing one identity to the side. While the group had some white members, once a month Asian-only meetings and events allowed the group to focus on the visibility and representation of its API membership. API men discussed political concerns and educational issues surrounding the AIDS pandemic.<sup>53</sup>

By 1994 GAPIMNY began to look different from previous years as the organization took on more structure. The previous two years saw a serious decrease in membership as the question of who could make decisions regarding the direction and

---

<sup>48</sup> John J. Chin, , Ezer Kang, Jennifer Haejin Kim, John Martinez, and Haftan Eckholdt, "Serving Asians and Pacific Islanders with HIV/AIDS: Challenges and Lessons Learned," *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 17, no. 4 (2006): 910-927.

<sup>49</sup> Chin, John J., Ezer Kang, Jennifer Haejin Kim, John Martinez, and Haftan Eckholdt, "Serving Asians and Pacific Islanders with HIV/AIDS: Challenges and Lessons Learned." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 17, no.4 (November 2006): 910-927.

<sup>50</sup> History of APICHA. *APICHA*. Archives from original 2010.

<sup>51</sup> GAPIMNY 15th Anniversary Celebration, 2005, TAM.675, Box 1, Folder 1, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>52</sup> PersuAsian: Queer Asian Pacific Legacy, Summer 2004, TAM.663, Box 1, Folder 1, Pauline Park Papers, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>53</sup> Leung, "Being Gay and Asian:", 140.

purpose of the organization hung over its head. In 1994 a group consisting of Jerome Zorrilla, Curtis Chin, Chung To, Kin Tam, Lam Duc Kim, Rand Lao, and Julio Chan-Sanchez drafted the GAPIMNY bylaws.<sup>54</sup> The bylaws covered organizational structure and decision-making. This left little room for the questions that had brought things to a standstill years prior. Simultaneously GAPIMNY received the North Star Grant to organize the Rice Conference, a gathering directed towards the Queer API community inside and outside of NYC. GAPIMNY was now on track to start making a substantial difference in the NYC API LGBTQ community.

GAPIMNY's activism accomplishments, outside creating queer spaces, fall into three categories; the spreading of AIDS information, receiving of grants, and the Rice Conference. GAPIMNY utilized the production of a bi-monthly newsletter to spread AIDS information into the community. Pandemic updates sat printed next to community events. A 1998 issue of the newspaper depicted topless and posed Asian men surrounded by safe sex and health information, combating the idea that sex education had to be stuffy and boring. GAPIMNY pushed the idea that sex education could be hot, in turn pushing the idea that safe sex too could be just as hot and fun. The page itself refers to barebacking and its dangers with phrases like, "Barebacking is a selfish, shallow excuse for people who are hell-bent on destroying themselves. While doing this, barebackers will, unfortunately, take others down with them."<sup>55</sup> Unsafe sex is putting people's life at risk, reflected in the harsh language used to describe someone who would willingly not wear a condom. GAPIMNY wants their members to be careful and aware, and in doing so fill in that education gap between whites and minorities. A November 1999 issue details the pushing of APIs into the stereotype of the model minority in terms of health, education, and economics. By bringing this up GAPIMNY is directly attacking the idea that API individuals cannot get AIDS, supported by the section titled "Are API's at risk for HIV?"<sup>56</sup> GAPIMNY says they are, just like everyone else is.

Though a new organization, GAPIMNY found itself on the receiving end of a number of different grants and awards, such as a \$1000 grant from the GCHP National Program in San Francisco. GCHP's grant allowed smaller organizations to help combat the spread of AIDS through the education of their specific communities.<sup>57</sup> These grants also serve as proof that GAPIMNY was helping to create a space of visibility and representation for API, a space seen and supported financially. The organization also received fiscal sponsorship from APICHA in 1995 for the purpose of spreading educational information such as flyers and pamphlets within the community.<sup>58</sup> These grants provided GAPIMNY the unique opportunity to support their community and keep

---

<sup>54</sup> GAPIMNY 15th Anniversary Celebration, 2005, TAM.675, Box 1, Folder 1, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>55</sup> GAPIMNY News, June 1998, TAM.663, Box 1, Folder 2, Pauline Park Papers Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>56</sup> GAPIMNY News, November 1999, TAM.663, Box 1, Folder 2, Pauline Park Papers Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>57</sup> GAPIMNY, Summer 1994, TAM.675, Box 2, Folder 28, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>58</sup> GAPIMNY 15th Anniversary Celebration, 2005, TAM.675, Box 1, Folder 1, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

them safe with outside financial backing. However, bigger things were on the way for GAPIMNY.

In 1994 GAPIMNY hosted its biggest and most impactful event yet, the Rice Conference. The conference allowed APIs to network with one another while learning about some of the issues facing their community as a whole. This feat was possible thanks to the North Star Foundation, a group focused on giving money to minority groups of color for events, running their organizations, and creating educational materials. The one-day event took place on June 27, 1994, the day before the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots and other pride events.<sup>59</sup> A handmade book details the events and schedule for the conference, bound in a traditional Japanese style. It greets attendees, “We hope you leave richer and more fulfilled as a person from the experiences and laughter you have shared with others at the conference as well as the events of Stonewall 25.”<sup>60</sup> The conference saw an attendance of over 100 people, not just based in New York.<sup>61</sup> A survey sent out by GAPIMNY asked not only where people were coming from, but how people felt about the event, and received an overwhelmingly positive response. The conference would be the first of many, providing a space for API visibility, discussions of their lives, and a place to meet new people while attending workshops aimed at their community.

Within the pages of the aforementioned handmade book was the workshop schedule for Rice, workshops on a variety of topics including AIDS. These workshops included “AIDS in the Sex Industry,” “Sex in the Age of AIDS,” and “HIV and Dating.”<sup>62</sup> “AIDS in the Sex Industry” was led by Randy and Nate Teerajjanapongs. Randy was an HIV+ escort while Nate worked to fight the spread of aids in Thailand’s bar boy and girl population.<sup>63</sup> This workshop provided a look into how the sex industry within and outside of the country combated the spread of AIDS. “Sex in the Age of AIDS” focuses on a group discussion on people’s views of ‘safe sex’ and if they were actually protecting themselves correctly. This workshop was led by Vince Crisostomo, the leader of *Love Like This Theater* in San Francisco, and Jerome D. Zorrilla, the project coordinator for APICHA<sup>64</sup>. With both men’s knowledge and experience in teaching safe sex, a strong conversation on the subject was expected. The final panel, “HIV/AIDS and Dating,” focuses on a Q&A with a panel of people surrounding what it’s like dating with HIV/AIDS or dating someone who may be positive.<sup>65</sup> These workshops provide those in attendance with different AIDS educational resources while also showcasing the ties that GAPIMNY had created within its own community. People from all over helped create and facilitate these panels, helping to educate their community.<sup>66</sup>

GAPIMNY served not only as a social group for the API community in New York City but as a political advocate for visibility in the wider API community too. Hay Ding

---

<sup>59</sup> Rice: A Conference Hosted by GAPIMNY, Summer 1994, TAM.675, Box 2, Folder 28, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>60</sup> Rice: A Conference Hosted by GAPIMNY, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>61</sup> GAPIMNY, Summer 1994, TAM.675, Box 2, Folder 28, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>62</sup> Rice: A Conference Hosted by GAPIMNY, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>63</sup> Rice: A Conference Hosted by GAPIMNY, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>64</sup> Rice: A Conference Hosted by GAPIMNY, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>65</sup> Rice: A Conference Hosted by GAPIMNY, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>66</sup> Rice: A Conference Hosted by GAPIMNY, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

Adrian Leung, a current GAPIMNY member, writes, “Despite all its shortcomings at times, there is a dedicated group of volunteers, who are more than generous in contributing their energy and time to this mission of telling the world who these API LGBT men are and how they experience the world...”<sup>67</sup> GAPIMNY still functions as a support organization today, working with groups like the LGBTQ Center of New York to hold racism workshops and APICHA to help talk about mental health issues that affect the community. GAPIMNY offers its community a safe place for support and community while also pointing them in the direction of professionals who can help move them forward. Where ACT UP failed at proving a kinship and visibility amongst its API members GAPIMNY picked up the pieces and ran with them to create a strong organization fighting for AAPI visibility and against the issues facing their community.

Art and artists hold an important place within any political movement, from the creation of posters and slogans to exhibits depicting struggle and visibility. The AIDS pandemic is no different. In March 1987, the first posters depicting a pink inverted triangle alongside the bolded words SILENCE = DEATH began to crop up around New York City.<sup>68</sup> The posters quickly became a rallying cry for the Queer community. An operation of six men quietly pasting paper to brick in the dead of night progressed to pink triangles worn loud and proud on the shirts of ACT UP protesters on the steps of the FDA.<sup>69</sup> The pink triangle, a polarizing image once used to identify Queer men during the holocaust, became a massive image in the Queer movement, its inversion showcasing AIDS victim's transition from victims to champions. Art quickly became intertwined as a political image to bring people into the cause, proving its importance within the visibility struggle for the AIDS movement itself.

Art helps organizations push hard to have conversations in mainstream media; it puts these ideas in front of people who may otherwise have never considered them. The New Museum of Contemporary Art invited ACT UP and the Silence = Death Project, as the posters became known, to submit pieces for an exhibition. ACT UP's own API caucus members were predominantly artists themselves, leading to a display in Chinatown dubbed “Art In General.” This display was a multimedia installation that showed viewers explicit HIV/AIDS information while utilizing traditional Chinese iconography to get the point across to the viewer.<sup>70</sup> Art is a tangible way for the API community to express not only AIDS information to their community but how they cope with that community's homophobia as Queer men.

On July 25, 1990, an unofficial gathering of Asian artists marked the beginning of a new organization, created by and for the Asian art world<sup>71</sup>. This group quickly adopted the name Godzilla: Asian American Art Network. The original group, consisting of Ken Chu, Bing Lee, and Margo Machida, gathered together in Machida's studio to discuss the possibility of creating an artist institution that worked to not only support Asian artists

---

<sup>67</sup> Leung, “Being Gay and Asian:”, 190.

<sup>68</sup> Tara Burk, “Let the Record show: Mapping Queer Art and Activism in New York City, 1986–1995.” PhD diss., (City University of New York, NYC, 2015), 53.

<sup>69</sup> Tara Burk, “Let the Record show: Mapping Queer Art and Activism in New York City, 1986–1995.” PhD diss., (City University of New York, NYC, 2015), 53.

<sup>70</sup> A Magazine Spring 1991, 19, Box 1, Folder Art Groups for Lesbian and Gay Artists, Wayne Steinman Papers, The LGBT Community Center National History Archive Repository, NY.

<sup>71</sup> Howie Chen, ed., *Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network* (Saline, MI: Mc Naughton & Gunn, 2021), 60-61.

but to push their work into New York's focus.<sup>72</sup> Chu brought up the importance of the organization staying within the control of artists, keeping a certain number of the board artists, following the example set by the Western Project for the Arts.<sup>73</sup> A largely artist centered board allowed for the maintaining of creative freedom.

Following the first meeting, the group expanded, and more artists were eager to include their voices in the conversation. By the next meeting, the group's discussion turned to getting the word out about their organization in an effective manner. A newsletter with an exhibition to accompany it became the leading idea. The exhibition would help prevent prospective members from assuming the newsletter was simply junk mail.<sup>74</sup> By September of 1990, Godzilla had an official mission statement to accompany its name. Early drafts of the statement read, "We are Asian Americans concerned with documenting and supporting Asian American contemporary visual artists through monthly meetings, publications, and exhibitions."<sup>75</sup> Thus a group was created to fill the artistic gap left by other organizations. They wanted to support local artists and that meant supporting the communities that these artists belonged to and created for, such as in the case of Ken Chu, a member of the LGBTQ community.

The creation of art, while an intimate process, provides an artist the ability to provide visibility and proper representation to a community. Most of Godzilla's work surrounding AIDS came from or had something to do with Ken Chu, one of the founding members of the organization. Chu had a connection not only with the API caucus but he also donated art for ACT UP's art auction and helped to create APICHA. Ken Chu's connection to the API community prior to the creation of Godzilla shines through his works surrounding AIDS in the years prior.<sup>76</sup> In 1988 Chu created a piece entitled 'Meanwhile, Somewhere in Chinatown' depicting a Chinese American father handing his drag-wearing son a condom.<sup>77</sup> The piece works to show the impact of AIDS on the Asian American community while also pointing to important conversations that were not happening at the time. A father would not be talking to his son about sex or having safe sex, and as previously discussed, the idea of coming out or discussing having AIDS within a family is shameful. These factors and the visual elements of the piece show that artwork can be helpful in bringing those conversations into a community.

After the creation of Godzilla, Ken Chu set his sights on the creation and planning of an exhibition. In 1991 the Pacific Islander AID Project was unveiled, a project centering on spreading information not only about the pandemic itself but also about the cultural taboos surrounding conversations about the disease.<sup>78</sup> Chu's exhibition proposal discussed how they not only had to fight taboos through their artwork, but Queer API men needed to fight against the government to keep from becoming completely invisible.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 60-61.

<sup>73</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 60-61.

<sup>74</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 87-88.

<sup>75</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 70.

<sup>76</sup> ACT UP Auction for Action, December 2, 1990, Box 1, Folder 1, MSS. 518, Box 1, Folder 10, Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York.

<sup>77</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 76-78

<sup>78</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 125.

<sup>79</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 125.

The exhibition itself was successful in its message. It showcased the fact that there were Queer members of the API community and they were fighting for their very lives against a government that didn't see them and a disease that wanted them dead. Upon entering the exhibition, the viewer was greeted by a dedication written by Chu to Win Ng. Ng was another artist within the community who had recently passed away from AIDS. Chu printed the dedication in the Godzilla newsletter, reading in part, "My awareness as a gay Asian American sprouted from that first conversation and later, Win was the first to encourage me to enter into visual arts."<sup>80</sup> It was a powerful dedication to a lost friend as viewers entered the exhibition surrounding the very disease that took his life.

Ken Chu wasn't the only member of Godzilla to create works surrounding the AIDS epidemic or even to try to bring attention to Queer Artists. Want ads for Queer Artists popped up in the newsletter from organizations like Visual AID at numerous points throughout Godzilla's life, seeking to include API artists in the fight against AIDS.<sup>81</sup> Another exhibition titled "Dismantling Invisibility" looked to draw the public's attention to the AIDS crisis was promoted in Godzilla's newsletter. In a letter to APICHA, Ken Chu writes about this exhibition, "Artists and writers have proven to be resourceful conduits into their communities."<sup>82</sup> After all, these artists were a part of this community, they knew the taboos surrounding sexual education and disease, and they used these to further the point of why this conversation was so important to have. Artist Glenn Itzutsu wrote a memo explaining how his life had been after coming out as not only gay but HIV+ to his family. He discussed his struggles to find a support group for HIV+ Asian men, and how his family refused to talk about it.<sup>83</sup> This memo was enlarged on a wall at the entrance of the exhibition, allowing those who entered to understand the gravity of the subject matter.

During its short eleven year life, Godzilla provided a place for artists to come together and express themselves through their art while also supporting each other in activism. Their work to bring together AIDS awareness in a visual manner that not many could ignore, helped bring the conversation into the API community. These exhibitions partnered with organizations such as APICHA to make sure that the correct education was available to those who needed it.<sup>84</sup> These sorts of exhibitions likely would not have taken place had it not been for Godzilla bringing these artists together into one space. Godzilla as an organization balanced activism and artistry until its eventual disbanding in 2001.

In 1991 different groups along the spectrum of Queer API activism converged together to protest the opening of *Miss Saigon*, a protest showcasing the strength of API visibility and representation. Based on the 1904 opera *Madama Butterfly*, *Miss Saigon* follows the story of a doomed romance between a US soldier and a Vietnamese prostitute.<sup>85</sup> Released over ten years after the end of the Vietnam war, Lambda Legal Defense chose the production for a fundraiser event. The selection of this show horrified

---

<sup>80</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 128.

<sup>81</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 85.

<sup>82</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 126-127.

<sup>83</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 130-131.

<sup>84</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 125.

<sup>85</sup> The Heat is On Miss Saigon, TAM.675, Box 2, Folder 4, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, NY.

the Queer API and API communities alike given the increase in Anti-Asian hate. While the musical itself already pushed limits, production cast Caucasian Actor Jonathan Pryce to play a Eurasian Pimp. In previous productions in England, he had gone so far as to tape his eyes and wear yellow stage makeup for this role.<sup>86</sup> This actor selection not only took a leading role away from Asian actors, but Pryce's use of yellow face greatly angered the API community with its stereotypical nature and misrepresentation of Asians.

As news of the production spread, the API community began to work against it. Two pre-established API groups, GAPIMNY and Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOE), sponsored a forum to discuss the show and ended up working together throughout the rest of the protest.<sup>87</sup> They brought their concerns to Lambda, who claimed that they needed the money, tickets were selling, and they promised they would do good things for the LGBTQ community with the money. White members of the LGBTQ community turned their backs on the protest, with June Chan of ALOEC writing, "None of us will forget the heated discussions, the awful feeling of realizing that many in our own community do not want to hear about racist oppression and even worse, will do nothing to stop it from perpetuating."<sup>88</sup> The Queer API community found itself embroiled in a fight for visibility with their own community, one they weren't backing down from.

Ming Ma fondly recounts in "The Heat is on *Miss Saigon*," "What was really amazing was that this was one of the first grassroots protest movements that was spearheaded by lesbian and gay Asian Pacific Islanders... So there's that sort of - we like to joke that that's our Stonewall."<sup>89</sup> "The Heat is on *Miss Saigon*," as it became coined, focused on the Queer API community's fight for proper representation and the combining of API community forces. Their protests brought the confrontational style of ACT UP, as noted by ALOEC member Yoko Yoshikawa, "There was an in-your-face, no-shit style to our confrontations and organizing that had always been a characteristic of ACT UP."<sup>90</sup> Many members of the organizations present had begun their activism journeys within the meetings of ACT UP. The API Caucus had focused on education and community building rather than protest, but now within their own community-built organizations they focused outwardly on loudly fighting for their own visibility. Godzilla's leaders implored their members to show up, writing, "Why hasn't Godzilla been making more of a presence in the protests against *Miss Saigon*?"<sup>91</sup> and further remarking that they were losing out on the opportunity to build community within the API community through protest. "The Heat is on *Miss Saigon*" marks the first time that the LGBTQ API community was pushed out by a racist LGBTQ community and instead of walking away, they pushed back with banners and slogans.

The AIDS epidemic entered the LGBTQ community leaving death and pain in its wake. ACT UP rose to its feet first, pushing back against the government while acting

---

<sup>86</sup> Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interview by the ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003.13-14.

<sup>87</sup> ALOEC stands for Asian Lesbians of the East Coast, a queer women's organization formed in 1984. The group acted as an avenue for lesbians to share their art and relate to one another, similar to GAPIMNY.

<sup>88</sup> Tigress Press, Public Policy & Government Relations, Box 3, Folder "Asian Women FYI", The LGBT Community Center National History Archive Repository, NY.

<sup>89</sup> Ming-Yuen S. Ma, interview by the ACT UP Oral History Project, January 15, 2003. 14.

<sup>90</sup> The Heat is On *Miss Saigon*, TAM.675, Box 2, Folder 4, GAPIMNY Records, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, NY.

<sup>91</sup> Chen, ed., *Godzilla*, 96-98.



as a sort of shield to allow other community-centered organizations to build themselves up. While this was admirable, and ACT UP succeeded in so much of its activism, it failed at maintaining a relationship with its own membership. This Queer powerhouse of an organization left its API members stranded. Outside of ACT UP they remained closeted and uninformed of the risks AIDS posed. Despite this, and a government more than willing to overlook the numbers of AIDS patients within the community, APIs created organizations to give themselves the community and the support they needed.

GAPIMNY formed out of a desire for gay and Asian men to have a place where they were free to be authentically themselves. APICHA made its debut to educate their community of the dangers posed by AIDS and to provide the healthcare they so desperately needed. Godzilla allowed artists to spread messages of safe sex while pushing visibility and proper representation in their work. ALOEC provided much-needed visibility to an overlooked API lesbian population. All of these groups came together and propped up one another to push back against AIDS and a lack of representation, as seen in “The Heat is on Miss Saigon.” The Queer API movement is still new, as Hay Leung notes: “The API LGBT movement is still in its infancy stage, despite groups like GAPIMNY having been around for more than two decades.”<sup>92</sup> There is more work needed for proper visibility and representation of this community, but the groups discussed in this paper have provided a strong foundation for more to be done.

---

<sup>92</sup> Hay Ding Adrian Leung, “Being Gay and Asian: The Journey to Finding a Voice in New York City” (PhD diss., The New School University, NYC, 2016), , ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. 318.

## Primary Source Bibliography

### Books

Chen, Howie, ed. *Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network*. Saline, MI: Mc Naughton & Gunn, 2021.

France, David. *How to Survive a Plague*. New York: Penguin Random Publishing House LLC, 2016.

### Collections

Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) Periodicals collection, 1962-1994. Papers. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

GAPIMNY Records. Papers. Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, NY.

Godzilla Asian American Art Network Archive. Papers. Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, NY.

Organization Files. Papers. The LGBT Community Center National History Archive Repository, NY.

New York Native records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Thom Fogarty Collection on ACT UP and AIDS Research. Papers. Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, NY.

Wayne Steinmen Papers. Papers. The LGBT Community Center National History Archive Repository, NY.

### Oral Histories

Ma, Ming-Yuen S. Interview by ACT UP Oral History Project. January 15, 2003.

<https://www.actuporalhistory.org/numerical-interviews/007-ming-yuen-s-ma>.

### Video

*Not Just Passing Through*. Produced by Catherine Gund, Polly Thistlewaite, Dolores Perez, Jean Carlomusto. 1994. 55 min. <https://archive.org/details/NotJustPassingThrough>.

### Websites

History of APICHA. *APICHA*. Archives from original 2010.

## Secondary Source Bibliography

Chan, Jennifer. *Politics in the Corridor of Dying: AIDS Activism and Global Health Governance*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015.

Chin, John J., ManChui Leung, Lina Sheth, and Therese R. Rodriguez. "Let's Not Ignore a Growing HIV Problem for Asians and Pacific Islanders in the U.S." *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 84, no. 5 (September 2007).

Chin, John J., Ezer Kang, Jennifer Haejin Kim, John Martinez, and Haftan Eckholdt. "Serving Asians and Pacific Islanders with HIV/AIDS: Challenges and Lessons Learned." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 17, no.4 (November 2006): 910-927. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/206210>

Burk, Tara. "Let the Record show: Mapping Queer Art and Activism in New York City, 1986–1995." PhD diss., City University of New York, NYC, 2015. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Dang, A. & Hu, M. (2005). Asian Pacific American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People: A Community Portrait. A report from New York's Queer Asian Pacific Legacy Conference, 2004. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.

Greene, Warner C. "A History of AIDS: Looking Back to See Ahead." *European Journal of Immunology* 37, no. 1 (October 2007): 94-102. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eji.200737441>

Gostin, Lawrence. *The AIDS Pandemic: Complacency, Injustice, and Unfulfilled Expectations*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Halci, Abigail. "AIDS, Anger, and Activism: ACT UP as a Social Movement Organization." in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, edited by Jo Freeman and Victoria Johnson, 135-150. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999.

Han, C. Winter. *Geisha of a Different Kind: Race and Sexuality in Gaysian America*. NYC: NYU Press, 2015.

Harden, Victoria A. *AIDS at 30: A History*. Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2012.

Lee, Hyun S. "The M&M Paradox: How the Seemingly Positive Model Minority Myth Inhibits Asian American Communities Within the HIV/AIDS Epidemic". Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Georgetown University, DC, 2017.

Leung, Hay Ding Adrian. "Being Gay and Asian: The Journey to Finding a Voice in New York City." PhD diss., The New School, New York, 2016. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global

Luce, John M. "A Strange New Disease in San Francisco: A Brief History of the City and its Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic." *Annals of the American Thoracic Society* 10, no. 2 (04, 2013): 143-147.

Powers, Theodore. *Sustaining Life: AIDS Activism in South Africa*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 2020.

Schulman, Sarah. *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993*. NYC: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Publishers, 2021.

Sueyoshi, Amy. "Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific American Activism in Queer History." In *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, edited by Megan E. Springate, 11-1 - 11-38. National Park Foundation and the National Park Service, 2016

Vaid, Urvashi. "Still Ain't Satisfied: The Limits of Equality." *The American Prospect*, April 30, 2012. <https://prospect.org/civil-rights/still-ain-t-satisfied-limits-equality/> .