No Stadium in Chinatown: Community Mobilization in an Ethnic Enclave

Sheena Nahm
University of Pennsylvania

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No Stadium in Chinatown: Community Mobilization in an Ethnic Enclave

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NO STADIUM IN CHINATOWN: COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IN AN ETHNIC ENCLAVE

By
Sheena Nahm

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic communities in urban neighborhoods have a complex history. From the creation of enclaves like Philadelphia’s Chinatown to their growth and expansion decades later, the residents of an ethnic enclave must continually deal with issues of racial discrimination and political mobilization. Asian Americans specifically must also deal with stereotypes like the model minority myth and the reification of ethnicity. To better understand these issues, the controversy concerning the construction of a baseball stadium at 12th and Vine Streets was examined. Data was collected from personal interviews, newsletters, and written statements. General theories and history were also analyzed from secondary sources. From this broad range of sources, a double pronged theory explaining the presence of ethnic enclaves in cities was formed. This theory proposes that ethnic communities were created as a result of discriminatory policy. They were maintained through community building and mobilization.
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I. Introduction: EthniCITY

Toronto is the best city. And it’s not just because I live there. I’ve lived in tons of other cities too that I’ve liked, but Toronto is beautiful. And the city is so culturally diverse. Not just diverse as in Chinatown and Little Tokyo, but diverse as a city. People don’t separate into their own ethnic cliques. It’s diverse but united.

Early on in the semester, as I was beginning to explore the theories, history and cultural issues of ethnic enclaves in urban neighborhoods, I overheard this conversation at a nearby table in Starbucks. This young man, roughly 20 years old and most likely a fellow undergraduate student, was telling a friend about his home city. There was nothing blatantly offensive about a person taking pride in his home city or the way he praised cultural diversity. However, in this brief monologue, I began to understand some of the underlying ideologies and misunderstandings that many people have with regards to ethnicity and the city. What does ethnicity mean? What is the difference between building a community and isolationism? What makes a “good neighborhood or city” and who determines which areas should be hailed and praised while others are decisively ignored or quarantined?

I decided to focus specifically on the Asian and Asian American aspects of ethnicity and ethnic neighborhoods for several reasons. Asian immigration has exponentially increased in the United States in the past few decades, and led to the creation of Chinatowns, Koreatowns, and the like in many metropolitan areas.

Furthermore, Asian Americans deal with complex issues of race. In addition to negative labels or prejudices, Asian Americans deal with the model minority stereotype,
racism in a fine veneer of praise. I explore these issues on a general level as well as specifically looking at the Chinatown community in Philadelphia.

During the debate surrounding the proposed construction of a Phillies baseball stadium in the Chinatown area, a history of discrimination and development policy surfaced. After identifying what led to the creation, as well as what has maintained this particular ethnic enclave in Philadelphia, I further explored the issues of grassroots organizing. How does a minority group represent itself to other city residents? How do those residents and city officials view the community? How do individuals who are not given a voice in political and economical matters that affect their daily lives mobilize to speak out against injustice?

II. Methodology

Any attempt to understand the formation and maintenance of an ethnic enclave requires a historical understanding of discrimination against minorities, specifically immigrants. Historical and secondary literature concerning general theories of ethnicity and urban neighborhoods were studied.

Additionally, several sources of information concerning the stadium debate were collected and analyzed. For example, I analyzed the different perceptions of what Chinatown is, and how its boundaries are defined. This led to the comparison of boundaries and its juxtaposition on one map (FIGURE 1A and 1B). Also, in order to study the Chinatown community in Philadelphia, I interviewed political activists and volunteers. I also collected flyers and newsletters from various organizations whose
headquarters are located in Chinatown. This provided a diverse pool of expression, in oral and written form. I analyzed transcripts from interviews and published statements in order to understand the way a local community expresses its sentiments. Newsletters were aimed at strengthening the internal unity, while flyers called for activism and empathy from members external to the Asian American community.

The written form can be a crucial way an immigrant group presents a powerful voice. Oftentimes, immigrants feel intimidated by the language barrier that often hinders mobilization and empowerment. In many cases the people are not fluent in English. Even for those who have a sufficient grasp of grammar and vocabulary, the slightest accent may deter outsiders from taking their message seriously. This is particularly important because the political groups in Chinatown sought to voice their opinions not only to city officials but also to non-Asian residents of Philadelphia.

The two main sources of newsletters and flyers were PCDC (Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation) and AAU (Asian Americans United). PCDC is a non-profit grassroots organization committed to housing and economic development for the Chinatown community. It has been working in this area for 33 years. AAU is a group that represents the Asian American community, and works towards establishing its political voice in Philadelphia.

The majority of the flyers focus on six key reasons why these groups oppose the building of the stadium at 12th and Vine Streets. The debate surrounding the proposal to build a baseball stadium for the Phillies in Chinatown illustrates how a minority community finds its voice by uniting the community from within and gaining aid from outsiders. The flyers focus on several key issues. They are as follows: (1) $685 million is
too much to spend on one stadium. This stadium will be the most expensive stadium in the nation. (2) Philadelphia has major financial obligations that are being sidelined for this stadium deal. (3) This stadium will cost Philadelphia taxpayers and put your money in the hands of multimillionaire team owners. (4) A stadium in Chinatown will cause irreparable harm to an important growing neighborhood, which has already borne the brunt of too many government projects. (5) Traffic and parking snarl most of Center City. (6) There are other less costly sites with many development benefits.

Reasons 1,2,3,5 and 6 deal with the fiscal and logistical pitfalls of the stadium and sports tourism in general. These are points that PCDC and AAU used to suggest that the proposal was not an effective strategy for the city as a whole. Therefore these reasons were expected to appeal to people external to the Chinatown community. Issue 4 addresses the ways the stadium would place a burden on the neighborhood, specifically its residents and business owners. This issue will be dealt with separately because of the multiple layers involving perceptions of ethnic enclaves and stereotypes.

III. Creation and Maintenance of Chinatown

Before exploring the history of discrimination against Chinese Americans and how it led to the development of Chinatown, it is important to first understand what defines an ethnic group and what defines a ghetto.

Detailed studies of residential patterns in American cities indicate that the concept of the ethnic ghetto—defined as a neighborhood with a population predominantly of a single ethnic group—needs to be reexamined. While an ethnic group sometimes dominated by a block, it seldom constituted even half the population of a particular neighborhood in Philadelphia... In short, ethnicity cannot be defined in terms of stable residence in homogeneous ghettos. Instead, a concept
of the ghetto is needed which takes account of the perception that parts of the city "belonged" to particular ethnic groups, even though most members of the ethnic group may not have lived there... An ethnic group, then, can perhaps best be defined by two characteristics. One is a sense of common values and belonging, usually involving a common place of origin, common past experiences, similar region, or shared language. A second characteristic is the intimate social interaction of its members (Haller 1973: 280).

Shared experiences unite people of similar ethnic backgrounds. Yet, immigrants are often accused of separating themselves from the rest of the world and not joining the larger community. They are labeled resistors to achieving the "unity" produced by the giant "melting pot" of America.

A. Top-Down Creation

Isolationism is often an excuse for racism because it infers a large degree of determination. It suggests that the ethnic community chose to separate itself from the rest of the city, and therefore deserves to be denied the right to participate in the political realm. Minority groups then become outsiders to the decision-making processes that affect the very neighborhood in which they live and work.

This is ironic if one considers the factors that led to the creation and development of ethnic enclaves. Policies of discrimination against immigrants excluded Asian Americans from certain types of employment or residency in "nice" neighborhoods. Naturally, these policies discriminate against the same minority group. As a result, the group is forced to live in less affluent neighborhoods with other victims of discrimination. The policies represent the top-down aspect of ethnic enclaves. Policies from the top, such as the federal government, trickle down to the minority class and force
them together into the same neighborhood. However, it should be emphasized that this only explains the creation of the enclave. A bottom-up foundation of community organizing maintains the vitality of the ethnic neighborhood. Therefore, the top-down and bottom-up aspects of the development and maintenance of ethnic enclaves are equally important. Together they form a double-pronged theory that explains the presence of ethnic enclaves in cities.

During the early nineteenth century, many Chinese men immigrated to the United States alone. They could afford to risk the long and uncertain journey because of a credit-ticket system.

In this system, a broker loaned money to an emigrant to pay for the voyage, and the emigrant in turn paid off the loan plus interest out of earnings made in the new country. Many emigrants also borrowed from their kinsfolk for the trans-Pacific journey (Tong 2000: 25).

Most of the early sojourners were male for several reasons. Economically it was more practical for the payment of one passenger. The male would go ahead and secure a place for himself and the rest of his family before they immigrated. Single women were not encouraged to leave China for America, not only because of the dangers of a risky journey but because traditional gender roles did not encourage families to invest money for their daughters’ futures.

Patriarchal cultural values, rooted in the hierarchically oriented Confucian ideology, dictated that women be subordinated to men and confined to the domestic realm. Single women did not engage in unaccompanied travel to distant places and married women remained at home. The “thrice obeying” dictates of Confucianism deemed that women should obey their fathers at home, their husbands after marriage, and their eldest sons when widowed (Tong 2000: 26).

As a result women remained in mainland China while men paved the way. The few women who immigrated usually came as a result of being sold into prostitution.
Most Asian immigrants arrived at two ports of entry. On the West Coast, immigrants were processed at the Pacific Mail Steamship Company wharf and later Angel Island in San Francisco. Others arrived in the New York City via Castle Garden and later Ellis Island. In the early years of immigration, ethnic groups lived apart from Anglo Americans but were not noticed because they did not threaten the dominance of the ruling majority. However during the era of rapid industrialization during the late 1800s (especially 1873 to 1878), competition for residential space and employment increased. The huge waves of immigration led to an anti-Asian movement in the second half of the nineteenth century, which peaked in the latter years of the century.

Economic competition naturally meant some groups would be excluded from the American dream. Disillusioned workers had to find a scapegoat: a reason for their unemployment.

White workers were told that Chinese competition drove wages down and forced wives of poor white men into prostitution...The “Negroization” of the Chinese reached a high point when a magazine cartoon depicted them as a bloodsucking vampire with slanted eyes, a pigtail, dark skin, and thick lips. White workers made the identification even more explicit when they referred to the Chinese as “nagurs” (Takaki 1979: 217, 219).

These negative stereotypes set the Chinese apart from the white majority. It labeled them as dangerous and inferior.

In addition to the white-yellow separation that occurred, “positive” stereotypes like the model minority myth set the Chinese apart from other racial minorities. This led to a black-yellow separation, by pitting minority against minority.

While the Chinese were “Negroized,” they were also assigned qualities which distinguished them from blacks in important ways. They were viewed as “intelligent,” not “ignorant and brutish” like blacks; they would make “dexterous cotton-pickers, never bungling ones.” “Quiet” and “peaceful,” they were not
given to “excessive hilarity”; they made “excellent houseservants,” occasionally “sullen but never stupid” (Takaki 1979: 219).

These “positive” stereotypes seemingly showered praise upon Asian Americans, but in reality it resulted in division from other minorities. When Asian Americans were set above blacks by whites, a cause for resentment was established. Thus, Asian Americans could not be equals with whites, or gain the support of other minority groups.

As resentment and racism increased, patriotism and assimilation became important factors in determining who was allowed in certain unions or housing complexes.

The American national identity’s ability to hold the republic together— one rooted in abstract democratic ideals— was called into question. An aggressive movement to force a homogeneous, national identity rooted in Anglo-Saxon culture soon emerged, and certain ethnic groups, the Chinese included, were deemed unassimilable (Tong 2000: 31).

As a result, California state law declared that Chinese immigrants needed to provide evidence that they were “good people.” Furthermore, the law also required a monetary tax for each ship passenger who was considered to be “a non-citizen, pauper, lunatic, handicapped person, or prostitute” (Tong 2000: 35).

Many of the first examples of discrimination occurred in California because of the huge immigrant population that existed there. Similar cases also occurred in Philadelphia, but it is important to examine the general trends of racism on a national level.

In 1854 People v. Hall declared Chinese American, Native American, and African American testimony invalid against Caucasians. This decision was justified by the notion that people of color were inferior. Other statutes were equally racist but more indirect. They did not address Chinese specifically but imposed restrictions on businesses that
were mostly Chinese owned or managed. There are too many laws and cases of direct and indirect discrimination to describe in depth, but a brief synopsis is included in TABLE 1.

Such exclusion laws were responsible for the rapid decline of the Chinese population in the United States. Eventually, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964. This new law sought to redeem past acts of racial discrimination.

Since the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1924 National Origins Act, immigration from Asia had been severely restricted. In the wake of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, moral consistency compelled lawmakers to remove those discriminatory barriers (Takaki 1979: 302).

However, by this time, Asian immigrant enclaves had already formed.

### B. Bottom-Up Maintenance

While discrimination policy and racism isolated minorities into ethnic neighborhoods, the benefits of the homogenous neighborhood kept the enclave together.

In order for the neighborhood to survive and thrive, there must be bottom-up factors. In this phase, the ethnic group chooses to remain in a particular neighborhood because of the positive socioeconomic advantages.

Neighbor relations should be positive; no benefits, but many social and emotional costs, result from life in an atmosphere of mutual dislike or coolness… Likewise, no residential area should be so heterogeneous in its population make-up that it prevents anyone from finding friends within that area; nor should it be so homogeneous that residents socialize only on their own block (Gans 1968: 161).

Gans goes on to delineate four major advantages of heterogeneous populations. They are paraphrased as follow:
1. It adds variety and demographic "balance."
2. It promotes tolerance of social and cultural differences.
3. It provides a broadening educational influence on children.
4. It encourages exposure to alternative ways of life (Gans 1968:167).

The location of Chinatown in Philadelphia allows the community to benefit from the homogeneous as well as the heterogeneous characteristics. There is a large Asian immigrant population in the immediate vicinity. This allows families to relate to people with common backgrounds and experiences. Furthermore, the area is also considered to be a part of Center City. It is close enough to other neighborhoods to benefit from heterogeneous populations as well.

IV. Forms of Resistance

Minorities find strength in being able to empathize with one another. As a result, living in the same enclave can lead to a united form of resistance against a majority. In general, minority groups respond to discrimination in four major ways. They are delineated in TABLE 2.

According to M. Kurokawa, minority resistance can be classified according to two major questions. Firstly, does the group accept or reject their inferior image, given to them by the majority group? Secondly, is the group willing to play a segregated role? If a group accepts both, they become fully submissive. If they reject the negative stereotype but accept their segregation from the majority, they react to racism via avoidance. If they accept the inferior status but reject the segregated role they withdraw into their own zone. Avoidance and withdrawal can have similar results. Integration with the society at large comes only when both the role and the inferior status are rejected. This means that the
minority group continues to make its presence known in society as a whole, but on their own terms. They remain Asian but also become fully American. Thus, they become Asian American.

However, integration can be difficult. On one hand, they know they are being unjustly treated and need to voice their opposition. However, such a move might inflame the majority’s already burning hatred. Asian American activism would then be used as evidence for the disloyalty and anti-patriotism, thus perpetuating the stereotype of the forever foreigner. Power struggles between the majority and minority further heighten during phases of urban renewal.

Chinatown is a prime example of this struggle. Historically, Chinatowns began as bounded areas where immigrants found acceptance. Yet, because they were low-income residential areas, many people engaging in illegal activities also found refuge there. They became prime locations for opium smoking, gambling and prostitution. Then, key events led to the revamping of Chinatown images across the nation. The Bingham Ordinance of San Francisco proposed the relocation of Chinatown and the usage of the area for a commercial district made up of slaughterhouses and factories. The proposal was rejected on the grounds of racial segregation and unconstitutionality.

Soon afterwards, the area was threatened again by the damage of the 1906 earthquake. In order to convince city officials to spare Chinatown and stop labeling it as a ghetto, Chinese business owners capitalized on Orientalism, the growing American fetish for the exotic. Storefronts with pagoda like facades were built. Gift shops and restaurants were specifically marketed to attract white consumers and tourists. This gilded exterior created a front stage for tourists and visitors that reified ethnicity and
made it acceptable to the majority.

During the early 1800s, what is presently known as Philadelphia’s Chinatown was mostly inhabited by the British. By the middle of the century, the British presence was replaced by Irish and German immigrants. After this wave of immigration, the area experienced a darker period from 1870 to 1890 during which the neighborhood became notorious for its burlesque theaters and seedy atmosphere.

The first Chinese occupied this area along with the German/Italian wave of immigrants.

Church records indicate that the Chinese occupation in this area began as early as 1845. In 1870, when there were approximately 13 Chinese living here, Lee Fong opened the first laundry at 913 Race Street. A decade later his cousin opened the first restaurant, Mei Hsiang Lou, on the floor above the laundry. With the influx of more immigrants into this area, laundries, restaurants, and eventually grocery stores began to be opened by Chinese. By 1890 this section of Center City was inhabited by approximately seven hundred Chinese and it became widely known as Philadelphia’s Chinatown (PCDC, Philadelphia’s Chinatown 2000).

Since then, several community organizations have formed to support the needs of the exponentially increasing population. Cultural groups ranged from the Chinese Benevolent Association to Hip Sing. Religious organizations provided spiritual support as well as social and recreational space. Among the organizations were Chinese Christian Church and Center, Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church and School and the Chinese Gospel Church. These groups internally strengthened the community.

However, in 1966, an urban renewal project threatened to build the Vine Street Expressway on top of Holy Redeemer Church and School. Chinatown needed an organization to represent the community against attack. An ad hoc committee called the Committee for the Advancement and Preservation of the Chinese Community was formed. This group eventually incorporated in 1969 and became what is presently known
as PCDC. The mission of this group is to “preserve, protect and promote Chinatown as a viable ethnic residential and business community” (PCDC, History of Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation 2000). Some of PCDC’s contributions to the neighborhood are listed below:

- Sponsored/developed three housing projects (Mei Wah Yuen, Wing Wah Yuen, On Lok House) as part of the Chinatown Urban Renewal Plan. This totaled 137 residential and 8 commercial units.
- Developed Gim San Plaza (28 apartments and 14 commercial units)
- Developed the Chinatown Friendship Gate
- Initiated the passage of Bill 429 which established Chinatown as a Special Zoning District

Chinatown today serves its 3,500 residents along with an additional 250,000 Asian Americans in the Delaware Valley. For both groups, Chinatown remains a vibrant community that serves as:

...a cultural center where tradition and culture are preserved and ethnic identity perpetuated, a marketplace for Chinese food and other Asian products, a meeting place for friends and relatives, and a home for newly arrived immigrants. Chinatown now consists of over 50 restaurants, 15 grocery stores, as well as coffee and gift shops, beauty salons, book stores and bakeries. The Chinatown that was once a ghetto by necessity is now a cohesive community by choice (PCDC, Philadelphia’s Chinatown 2000).

V. Stadium Example

The reification of Chinatown in Philadelphia years ago may have helped outsiders to accept the Asian American community and their neighborhood for a short period of time. The acceptance was only temporary because the underlying racism was merely sugar coated with patronizing consumerism. To outsiders, Chinatown became strictly defined by the gilded areas and excluded less glamorous residential areas. History
repeated itself in 2000, more than a century after the height of anti-immigration laws. Mayor John Street’s Administration proposed the construction of a new baseball stadium in Chinatown, claiming that the space was a blighted area and not actually a part of the “real” Chinatown.

The local community resented their domain being labeled by outsiders as blighted areas. When areas are labeled “urban blight,” they are resented by the rest of the residents because of the blemish they place on city’s image. Director of Communications for Mayor John F. Street Luz Cardenas stated:

If we have a Center City stadium, the Mayor feels that we could put it in an area where we could really help to rejuvenate an entire neighborhood… If you’ve seen the 12th and Vine site, you’ve seen all the blight and all the drug-dealing and all the stuff that goes on there. So, there’s a lot to be done with that community. And a stadium would bring stability to it (Gottesman 2000).

The term “blight” induces the image of an area that is beyond repair and often creates the perception that wiping out such areas is an appropriate strategy. Money that could be invested towards development in that area is diverted to funds that plan to clear away the “decayed land” and build an entirely different foundation.

Bruce Crawley, Chairman of the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau, stated:

We see the ability to improve what is now essentially a blighted area. It is not in Chinatown. The blueprint of the proposed “Chinatown stadium” is not in Chinatown at all. It is adjacent to Chinatown. It is adjacent to a number of things. This has been a misnomer (Gottesman 2000).

The term “blight” strips away power from the residents of such an area, because “blighted” areas are not often thought of as residential places belonging to a community.
Nacine Supinsky, a local business owner, criticized stadium supporters and Mayor Street for proposing Chinatown as the construction site for a new baseball stadium. She said, “He sited this area of 12th and Vine in particular because he determined that it’s a blighted area. Across on Vine Street, there are people working and living... It is a thriving community that’s been in development” (Supinsky 2000).

Co-owner and husband, Rob Barrish added, “Given time, it will develop on its own. They’ve been trying to develop condos or apartments, and housing” (Barrish 2000). There are several key sites in this area that are utilized by the Chinatown community. Ming Wah Yuen, for example, is a 51 unit mixed income residential housing project for middle to low-income home-buyers that was built in 1998. These options make it feasible for Asian immigrants to settle near other families that are going through similar hardships. The economic benefits of housing projects are thus combined with the social advantages of immigrants supporting one another through a critical transitional period. PCDC’s efforts to build housing projects serves as an example of their dedication to expanding Chinatown.

Furthermore, PCDC plans for Chinatown North Phase II is underway for a development of 11 units of mixed residential and community space. Also, PCDC begins updating an Urban Design Plan for Chinatown North and plans for acquisition of a site for the Chinatown Community Center (PCDC, Philadelphia’s Chinatown 2000).

Also on 9th and Vine, K-6 children attend Holy Redeemer Catholic School. From the outside, the school looks like a typical elementary school with a playground and brick wall. There is no indication that it is a “Chinese” school but at three o’clock every weekday afternoon, steady streams of Asian children flow out of the school gates.
Nearby the school, there are currently 4000 residents, 100 businesses, three Christian churches, and two Buddhist temples.

This description leads the outsider to picture a beautiful area glowing with cultural diversity and immigrant bliss. The truth however is far more complex. The area between 9th and 12th on Race and Arch Streets is lined with restaurants and businesses that outsiders enjoy visiting. The area adds to the “cultural color” of Philadelphia. The neon signs have Chinese characters below the English words, and shopkeepers display porcelain statues in their windows. These are typical markers of ethnic enclaves. However, a city’s cultural diversity is not limited to its “cultural color.” While “cultural color” is restricted to traditional decorations and symbols the tourist expects from certain ethnic groups, cultural diversity must also include the people behind the facades. Therefore the back regions, which include housing projects and schools, are just as important to the cultural diversity of a city. However, they are rarely aesthetically pleasing or identifiable and often dismissed as outside of the “culturally colorful” portion of the city.

Herein lies the difficulty of the geographical and social definition of Chinatown and its boundaries. Pro-stadium groups claimed that 12th and Vine is not technically in Chinatown. In response, residents and business owners hung banners and posted flyers in the their shop windows with bold faced letters declaring, NO STADIUM IN CHINATOWN. Those who supported the Chinatown stadium proposal could not understand why the Chinese community was so upset because 12th and Vine appeared to be a block of brown dingy buildings, far away from the brightly colored architecture of the Friendship Gate (FIGURE 2A) and other typical markers (FIGURE 2B) of
Philadelphia’s Chinatown. These markers are popular tourist sites and recognized by the city. In particular the Friendship Gate is “a symbol of the cultural exchange and friendship between Philadelphia and its sister city, Tianjin, China. The gate was part of a port agreement between the two cities signed in Tianjin in November, 1982. It was installed and dedicated in January, 1984” (www.gophila.com/itineraries [listed under Chinatown Itineraries]).

The blocks of land on Vine Street between 9th and 12th streets certainly do not appear to be a part of Chinatown. However, the “back region” of tourist locales rarely fit the preconceived notions of what the site should look like. Dean MacCannell states:

As yet unexplored is the function of back regions- their mere existence intimating their possible violation- in sustaining the common-sense polarity of social life: the putative “intimate and real” as against “show.” This division into front and back supports the popular beliefs regarding the relationship of truth to intimacy (MacCannell 1999: 94).

In the case of Philadelphia’s Chinatown, the back region may be violated in a different way. Rather than being overcrowded with tourists, back regions may be entirely dismissed as nonexistent. If the back region of a tourist site is an unacceptable reality to the tourist then those who profit from the tourism industry will declare the region as an area peripheral to the core site. What lies in the periphery can then be labeled “urban blight,” an area that can easily be uprooted and changed without considering the fact that a community lives in this back region.

MacCannell further describes the tourist as a person who often desires to penetrate the back region in his or her quest for authenticity. However, this definition of a back region must be further expanded because not all back regions are desirable to the tourist. There are two types of back regions, the “acceptable” and the “unacceptable.”
Chinatown’s front region can include the storefronts and sit-down areas of restaurants. In addition to this front region, specialty tours provide access to the “acceptable back regions.” Two examples are the Chinatown Tour and the Joseph Poon Wokking Tour. The first tour includes a visit to a Chinese deli and pastry shop. Visitors can also view the making of “authentic” Chinese medicine. The Joseph Poon Wokking Tour “includes everything from the flash of a Chinese jewelry shop to pop entertainment. But on this tour, what lures most is the food prepared by Poon” (www.gophila.com [listed under Itineraries: Ethnic & Religious Tours]). Joseph Poon is a local restaurant owner and chef. Shop and kitchen tours emphasize elements of Chinese heritage and culture, which are valid and significant parts of the community’s pride.

However, the second back region is also a significant aspect of life in Chinatown. This region includes the housing projects, dingy apartment complexes, school, and stores that are located several blocks away on Vine Street. However, this back region represents a different kind of authenticity. It is not a representation of authentic Chinese culture; rather it is the reality of the life of an Asian immigrant living in America.

Tourists love visiting Chinatown because it reflects the Asian heritage of the community, while simultaneously serving as a model of the American dream. Asian Americans have been successful in finding a place in the American city, while preserving their cultural roots. In the “unacceptable back region,” however, one sees the housing projects and apartments that immigrant families occupy before climbing up the American socioeconomic ladder. Not every immigrant arrives in America with the white picket fence and suburban house waiting. The hardships of an immigrant life as well as racial segregation make this “unacceptable back region” of Chinatown even more important for
members because it provides shelter and community. Yet, for tourists and outsiders this region is a reality too harsh to be confronted, and one that beneficiaries of the tourist industry would rather replace with a tourist bubble.

Nacine Supinsky stresses the vitality of the “unacceptable back region” and its equal importance in comparison to the front region or the “acceptable back regions.” She says, “They don’t consider that Chinatown can encompass... a daycare, where people live. That’s Chinatown. It’s not just where Chinese restaurants are: where you can get an eggroll” (Supinsky 2000). The back region is excluded from the tourist bubble and “consequently the city center belongs to the affluent visitors rather than to the residents, resulting in the exclusion of working-class residents from the core” (Fainstein and Gladstone 1999: 23).

Ethnic minorities are also excluded from this discourse. The exclusion of the local community from negotiations concerning development in their neighborhood pushes residents to create their own publicity, on their own terms. This often involves flyers or demonstrations. After the Chinatown stadium proposal was publicly released, Chinatown residents expressed their resentment. They felt that their neighborhood had been systematically targeted.

Reverend Thomas Betz of Holy Redeemer submitted a statement to the Stadium Site Committee and Mayor Street’s Transition Team. He wrote:

The people of the Chinatown community were surprised to read in the newspaper on April 11 that the preferred site for the new Phillies stadium was... just to the north of the heart of Chinatown and one block west of Holy Redeemer Chinese Catholic Church and School. We were even more surprised to learn that a public hearing was scheduled for the following day, April 12. Nevertheless, citizens of Chinatown came to the hearing to express our opposition... If the decision is made in the first week of May, the Chinatown community will have had only 3-4
weeks of notice and no real opportunity for dialogue before a decision affecting the fate of the community was made.

This statement emphasized the community’s shock at the city’s lack of consultation. The neighborhood was not notified or alerted before hand but found out along with the rest of Philadelphia. The Chinatown community referred to an equal environmental protection order issued in 1994. President Clinton issued an executive order that acknowledged that government renewal projects often target minority communities. “The federal government and courts maintain that all communities are entitled to equal protection when it comes to the location of environmental hazards. The hazards inherent in the location of a stadium include noise, litter, traffic and crime” (PCDC, Press Release 2000).

In the past the city had promised that the construction of the Vine Street Expressway, Independence Mall, the Gallery, and the Convention Center would not harm the local community. Yet these sites have created boundaries for expansion and development. One PCDC flyer stated:

> For the last 30 years, government projects have put a noose around Chinatown… We are a neighborhood of families, working people, small businesses, churches, and community institutions, not just tourist shops. The City says Chinatown should be happy that “people will be hungry and want to eat in our restaurants.” We would be happy if the City stopped stereotyping us and treated us as citizens (PCDC, untitled flyer 2000).

These stereotypes of Chinatown as an area that could be taken advantage of were further reinforced by the model minority myth that is usually associated with Asian Americans. The model minority typecast began in 1970 when the published Census informed the American public that the Chinese had higher levels of education than the average minority.
As a result, sociologists like Nathan Glazer stated that Chinese should not qualify for affirmative action programs because they had no problems with immigrant adjustments. Other economists and sociologists used Glazer’s Census interpretation as a springboard to claim that no minority had a right to complain or be given public assistance (Kwong 1987: 58). The model minority stereotype was manipulated to suggest that hard work overcame any social barriers and the free market motivated this type of work ethic. It was a misrepresentation of the complex problems of immigrants and racial minorities in America, and concluded that minorities had no reason to ask for special requests or complain. The stereotype was used to silence minorities with a stern rebuke to simply work harder. Kwong writes, “On the one hand, the Chinese were considered to be docile, law-abiding, hardworking, steeped in Confucian traditions (whatever that means). This was the world of Charlie Chan, as portrayed by film star Warner Oland” (Kwong 1987: 58). This docile characterization of Chinese Americans then extended to describe the entire Pan Asian American community.

It is often assumed that Asian Americans will not complain or speak out even when their rights are being violated. Betz writes:

The Spring Garden neighborhood is opposed to the site in their neighborhood and so the City of Philadelphia decides that it cannot build there. The Chinatown community which is arguably larger and more densely developed than the Spring Garden community is also opposed. The Chinatown community is told that we just have to accept it and live with it. The City is treating [sic] the Asian minority differently than its African American and white American communities. Because the Asian community lacks the political power of the other ethnic and racial communities it is seen as an easy mark for unwanted projects (Betz 2000).

Kinkead also comments, “Most people in Chinatown have endured so many hardships abroad that they are willing to accept many more to build up economic freedom for the first time in their lives” (Kinkead 1992: 21). However, much of this old school of thought
is being challenged now that second and third generation Asian Americans are speaking out.

The members of these generations were born and raised in America. As a result this new generation can speak English fluently and deal with bureaucracy better. Their links to the past and present, to Asia and to America, allow them to be bridges between two worlds. "In other words, they function as middlemen, who help the Chinese participate in the resource distribution of the larger society" (Wong 1982: 98). The emergence of this new class of culture brokers signifies tremendous potential for local empowerment and expression.

For example, on May 19th nearly 1500 people marched and demonstrated in the streets of Philadelphia to voice their opposition to the Stadium proposal. Another newsletter called for a business shutdown and group march to City Hall on June 8th from 2 to 4 pm. "The movement is called ‘lights out’ and signifies what will eventually happen to the businesses of Chinatown if the Stadium is built" (PCDC, News Connection 2000). These visible outcries expressed the community's united voice, declaring that they had a right to protect their social space and domain. This was their home and world, and not some easily expendable area of “urban blight.” In a pamphlet entitled “Street’s Vision,” Albert Lee writes:

I have lived in Chinatown all my life. I feel my neighborhood is threatened and therefore, I must take action. A few years back, the federal government had an idea to build a prison behind Holy Redeemer. That committee believed that the prison was well maintained and secured and that Chinatown residents would have nothing to fear. Everyone in Chinatown banded together to fight a common cause. “NO PRISON NEAR OUR SCHOOL!” was being chanted by hundreds of Chinatown residents from months until the committee finally moved the location elsewhere... If Mayor Street truly believes that 12th and Vine is the best location for a new stadium, then so be it. He is entitled to his own opinion. However, I am also entitled to mine. NO STADIUM IN CHINATOWN (Lee 2000).
VI. Proposal Recall: Chinatown’s Celebration and Victory

On November 13, Mayor John Street’s administration recalled the proposal, and announced that they will now target an area in South Philadelphia. He stated:

We couldn’t get where I wanted to be... After we reviewed everything concerning this location, I concluded in my own mind to change to the sports complex [at another site in South Philadelphia]. I would have been doing something less than representing the best interests of the citizens of this city if I were unwilling to give this plan (sports complex) a chance. It provides a great opportunity and protects the interests of our citizens (Gottesman 2000).

He remained tight-lipped about the withdrawal of the Chinatown proposal but explained that it was for several reasons.

In response, activist groups claim that their efforts helped defend the Asian American community and their local space. Flyers were posted on telephone booths and in store windows. They were written in both Chinese and English and read:

Dear Friends, Neighbors, Businesses and Residents of Chinatown,
The mayor announced today, at the 3:00 pm press conference, that Chinatown is no longer a proposed site for the stadium. The stadium is not going to be built at the 12th and Vine site. We’d like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who supported our cause and volunteered their time in our fight to save Chinatown. The date of celebration will be announced at a later time. Again, we thank everybody for your time, effort, and support (PCDC, untitled sign 2000).

The flyer signifies the manner in which the local community united to form one voice in opposition to tourism development at the cost of their social space. The flyer also addresses friends, which indicates the emphasis on maintaining allies outside of their community.

By quoting economists, PCDC and AAU take an academic stand against the construction of a stadium, whereas arguments that specifically addressed issues like stereotypes of urban blight and minorities may not be as identifiable to non-Asian
Americans living in wealthier suburbs of Philadelphia. To prevent the dismissal of the stadium issue as “not in my backyard” PCDC and AAU utilized rhetoric that appealed to the concerns of groups outside of their own community. Senior Vice President of the Convention Center Authority, Ahmeenah Young writes:

There’s only so much in the pot... Clearly, we cannot do both, go after stadiums and expansion [of the Convention Center], when you add in the state of the schools. There have to be some priorities... when people are pressed they need room nights more than a stadium (Young 2000).

While the Chinatown community does not fully support the idea of Convention Center expansion the notion of limited funds and the importance of placing education high on the city’s list of priorities provides a convincing argument to draw support from taxpayers living outside of Chinatown. In fact, many non-Asians were members of the Stadium Out of Chinatown Committee. Rob Barrish explains, “It’s clearly a city wide issue. People in Rittenhouse Square are paying for it. So I think...that crossover had to occur”(Barrish 2000). Publicity raised awareness by appealing to their economic interests as well as stressing that they could not afford to dismiss the Stadium issue as “not in my backyard.” Chinatown committees were able to add political clout and power to their objections. Cultural and ethnic problems with urban tourism mobilized the Chinatown residents and business owners. However, in order to receive support from outside citizens of Philadelphia, economic dilemmas in sports tourism were also emphasized.

The response to the stadium proposal in Chinatown was a massive effort that required unity. The efforts to voice their opposition to the stadium addressed the problematic nature of tourism development as a means of urban renewal. Arguments against sports tourism were general tools the community used in its outcry. More
importantly, the group effort served as a powerful reminder that it is possible for a local community to create its own discourse even if they are not initially consulted. However, the empowerment necessary to create their own discourse often requires the help of outside empathy and involves more than merely addressing the specific consequences of constructing the new tourist site. They must first challenge the greater issue of incorrect perceptions of urban blight and what defines a community’s space. While the “unacceptable back region” may remain unpleasant for the tourists it remains a real region to a community that refuses to have their homes dismissed as places of urban blight.

The result of this massive attempt to organize and unite the internal and external community led to victory. PCDC representative Gerard Pescatore remarked:

Everybody was very happy. There were a couple different celebrations, a lot of thanks that went out, but really a big sigh of relief. And at the same time a sense of pressure now to really make known that it’s been made clear that we have plans for Chinatown, and now organizations, the city, and the community really wants to see what we can do. We focused all our efforts on the stadium issue and now that we’re finished with that, we really have to focus on what our mission really is, because through this recognition we see the potential for development in Chinatown (Pescatore 2000).

The pattern of encroachment may recycle in several months or years, with a new urban renewal project and the need to find an “appropriate” location. However, the Chinatown community is learning to join together and rally support for the protection and development of their neighborhood.
VI. Conclusion

In the 1900s the government was able to enforce a top-down policy that led to the creation of ethnic enclaves in urban neighborhoods. Much of the racism back then was not countered because immigrants had few tools with which they could retaliate. In the stadium example, a new top-down public works project was proposed. However, the bottom-up maintenance of Chinatown in the past century had allowed the community to feel a sense of internal pride. With the aid of community groups, the people and friends of Chinatown were able to mobilize. Political activism gave the group a sense of empowerment, and encouraged people to speak up in a situation where they had been denied a voice. This bottom-up internal strength that has maintained the vitality of the ethnic enclave thus became the principal weapon in warding off a new top-down policy.

Mobilization allowed the Chinatown community to reeducate the mayoral staff as well as other outsiders that later became allies. They spoke out through flyers, rallies, and protests in order to present their perspective about urban space and a minority’s relationship to the city as a whole.

Early immigrants individually did not have the power to reject the inferior status and segregation forced upon them. However, once the community was formed, political and community groups allowed these individuals to unite. The unity allowed the group to reject stereotypes and represent their community, on their own terms.
VII. Resources Cited

Primary sources:


Secondary sources (Books):

Secondary sources (journals):


Secondary sources (online):

1. www.gophila.com (Itineraries: Chinatown and Ethnic & Religious Tours)
2. www.yahoo.com (maps)
VIII. FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURE 1 A: Map of Chinatown (from Mapquest at www.yahoo.com). The red star at 1000 Race Street signifies the center of Chinatown for both outsiders and residents.

FIGURE 1 B: Boundaries of Chinatown. The area shaded in blue is considered to encompass all of Chinatown, according to PCDC. According to the Chinatown itinerary from www.gophila.com the area shaded in red symbolizes the boundaries of Chinatown as defined by most tourists.
FIGURE 2 A: The Friendship Gate. This area is a trademark of Chinatown’s front region.

FIGURE 2 B: The Chinese Cultural Center. The Center is another colorful part of Chinatown that is recognized by outsiders.
FIGURE 3 A: Holy Redeemer Church. The church and school sits adjacent to the proposed site for stadium construction. Proponents of the stadium claimed this area was not actually Chinatown. This is the ignored back region of an ethnic enclave.

FIGURE 3 B: Blight. Stadium proponents labeled these back regions as examples of urban blight. PCDC had been planning for northward expansion in these areas.
TABLE 1: Discrimination policies. This is by no means an exhaustive presentation of acts of discrimination. It is intended to provide a mere glimpse at some of the acts that led to the seclusion of Chinatown and the rest of the Anglo-Saxon community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ordinance</th>
<th>When</th>
<th>What it really meant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cubic air law in San Francisco forced residences to have at least 50 cubic feet of air per person</td>
<td>Later half of 1800s</td>
<td>Implied that Chinese were dirty and lived in overcrowded residences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair of male prisoners in San Francisco had to be cut to one inch in length maximum</td>
<td>Later half of 1800s</td>
<td>Cutting the queue disgraced male Chinese immigrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidewalk ordinance prohibited use of poles to carry loads on the sidewalk in San Francisco</td>
<td>Later half of 1800s</td>
<td>Limited Chinese peddlers from selling wares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing requirements became more strict for vegetable peddlers in Los Angeles</td>
<td>Later half of 1800s</td>
<td>Many vegetable peddlers were Chinese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry riot: mobs lit San Francisco laundries on fire during a three day riot</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>Chinese owned the majority of laundries in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School discrimination</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Schools for the colored, separation of races</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document from the California constitutional convention</td>
<td>1878-1879</td>
<td>Prohibited corporations from employing Chinese, also called for the expulsion of Chinese from cities or segregation to bounded areas, no right to vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Exclusion Act (federal Congress)</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Suspended the entry of Chinese laborers for 10 years; although Chinese who arrived in the US before November 17, 1880 could remain provided they had “proper” documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott Act</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Prohibition of all Chinese laborers from entering the US, even those who arrived before 1880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geary Act</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Chinese laborers had to register for certificate of residence, or they would be arrested or deported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2: Forms of Resistance (Kurokawa 1970: 60).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segregated Role</th>
<th>Accepted</th>
<th>Rejected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepted</td>
<td>submission</td>
<td>avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td>withdrawal</td>
<td>integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>