

## **Proposal Summary.**

### **Title**

A Critical Historiography of Racialized Policymaking: The Case of the 1960 California Master Plan

### **Abstract**

Focusing on the development and reception of the California Master Plan, this critical historiography situates the Plan within contemporary scholarship on racialized policymaking and the student activism catalyzed in its wake. Starting with Asian American students, we argue that coalitional activism directly resulted from the Plan's racial politics.

### **Proposal Text**

#### Objectives of Inquiry:

In a recent chapter of *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*, Rodriguez and colleagues (2022) argue that “much of the public policy scholarship on higher education remains ahistorical with regard to the long-standing legacy of racial colonialism and omits the ways contemporary manifestations of racialized power exist in everyday policymaking” (p. 521). In this paper, we respond to these concerns by offering a critical historiography of the California Master Plan in the 1960s using approaches from historical sociology to guide our analysis of primary archival data and accompanying secondary literature (Schrag, 2021; Skopcol, 1979). How does focusing on everyday actors' (students, faculty, and staff) grassroots responses to the Master Plan's development, implementation, and evaluation help us discern the racialization of state-level educational policymaking? Our focus on these perspectives is purposeful given their scant attention in extant scholarship. Indeed, contemporary accounts teeter on hagiographic retellings of a plan revered “as the blueprint for modern public higher education,” with claims that “in its day, it stood out for its ambition and audacity, so celebrated that its chief architect became a minor celebrity” (Fischer, 2018). Such selective retellings fail to consider higher education's entanglements with historical legacies of racial-colonial violence. As Rodriguez and colleagues (2022) suggest, these narrative omissions produce “what Saidiya Hartman calls the ‘violence of abstraction’ (Saunders, 2008),” which can be countered by “explicitly naming these histories as well the breadth and depth of their implications” (p. 522).

#### Conceptual Framing:

Conceptualizing the development of the California Master Plan through a racialized policymaking framework follows sociologist Victor Ray's (2019) assertion that organizations, such as universities, are not “race-neutral bureaucratic structures” (p. 26). Through this frame, we explore how universities “magnify the power and depth of racial projects and are a primary terrain of racial contestation,” by “reinforcing, challenging, or altering racial meanings” (p. 30). Alongside this conceptual framing, our racially-attuned historical reappraisal of the California Master Plan asserts that such considerations are not solely the province of contemporary policy-making scholarship;

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rather, a retrospective attentiveness to these dynamics assists educational scholars in recognizing the mutability of these racialized processes over time.

#### Methodology:

This project is derived from a broader archival study, funded by the Spencer Foundation, of public postsecondary education in the United States (1957-present) focusing on institutional responses to racialized anti-Asian animus. Our methodological approach heeds Theda Skocpol's (1979) observation that "historical sociology can actually speak more meaningfully to real-life concerns than narrowly-defined empiricist studies," precisely because the outcomes of historical analyses offer "possibilities for how past patterns and alternative trajectories might be relevant, or irrelevant, for present choices" (p. 5). For this paper, we consulted digitized primary sources (e.g. student newspapers, contemporary institutional reports) and relevant secondary literature (published after 1960 and to the present day) that offered accounts on the California Master Plan's development and reception. An included Appendix (below cited References) lists the primary and secondary sources consulted to date.

#### Retelling the Historiographies of the California Master Plan:

Historiographies of the Master Plan orient issues of access around economic disparities with little attention to how these imbricate with ethnoracial disparities (e.g., Douglass, 2000; Marginson, 2015). Marginson (2016) most explicitly mentions the relevance of ethnoracial inequities in the context of arguing against race-based admission standards in favor of income-based standards; he is concerned that "income diversity" would be weakened if schools focused on recruiting for racial and ethnic diversity instead of strictly focusing on income diversity (p. 155). Douglass (2000), in his epochal review of the California Master Plan, keeps racial and ethnic considerations at the periphery, only mentioning them in passing a handful of times. While the changing demographics of California are cited, from its being 92% White in 1960 to 38% White in 2015 (Callan, 2012; Oxendine, 2017), the role of the California Master Plan in reinforcing racial disparities and segregation remain largely under examined. More contemporary scholarship has begun to situate the California Master Plan and its impact within a racialized context (e.g., Baker, 2019; Baker, et al., 2023; Umemoto, 2016).

Much scholarship on the California Master Plan has a curious lacunae reflected in the Plan itself: race and ethnicity. This scholarly gap is evident within the genesis of the Master Plan, when both the designers and imagined beneficiaries of public higher education were assumed to be White. Kerr summarizes that: "The vision overall was that we should have an "aristocracy of talent," as seen by Thomas Jefferson, and a democracy of the educated at one and the same time; and this vision became a substantial reality." (Kerr, 1991, p. 366). Kerr's perspective reflects a crucial tension—between the consolidation of elites on UC campuses and the opening of the doors of higher education to the masses—and also the ghost of racist ideology which continues to haunt the American educational project. Unsurprisingly, communities of color, particularly students, galvanized to resist and overturn the de facto racism inherent in the Master Plan (Higgins, 2023).

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Early scholarship often emphasized the heroic effort of Clark Kerr in the development of the Master Plan (Douglass, 2000; Kerr, 1991; Rothblatt, 2012). More contemporary scholarship increasingly focuses on the series of political compromises and manifold actors involved in its genesis (Douglass, 2011; Marginson 2016, Oxendine, 2017). Internal compromises, between the University of California and state colleges, led to a three-partite structure of differentiated provision: the University of California would remain the only doctoral granting institution and guarantee spots for the top 12.5% of high school graduates, the state colleges would expand bachelor offerings and guarantee placements for the top 33.3%, and community colleges would expand to provide access to all other students and opportunities for transfer (Marginson, 2015; Pelfrey, 2004). External compromises, between university leadership and the state legislature and governor, led to mass public investment in higher education and more limited state oversight (Marginson, 2015).

The California Master Plan allowed for structured growth throughout the 1960s and 1970s: clearly defined roles kept mission creep at bay, college access increased, and costs stayed relatively low for student and government alike (Oxendine, 2017). Callan (2012) attests that “in 1959 and 1960, critics of the Master Plan were few,” yet an onrush of 1960s student activism followed its implementation (p. 77). Instead of expanding access to the UC system, the Master Plan reified UC’s elite status by capping enrollment which led to plummeting minority enrollments and increased demands for self-determination (Umemoto, 2016).

Alongside these policy changes, the sociopolitical landscape of the sixties animated well-documented student activism across ethnoracial groups. For Asian Americans, in particular, the 1960s marked a shift in their political consciousness across California’s public universities. Scholars provide several reasons for this shift. The Asian American population in California grew and changed due to the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, which loosened restrictions on immigration, and the influx of Southeast Asian refugees from the Vietnam War (Lee, 2015). Asian American youth were also inspired by the racial ideologies of the Civil Rights movement and grew increasingly outraged with the racism they experienced at their institutions (Umemoto, 2016).

Scholarship on Asian American activism, in particular, has largely considered how actors mobilized to subvert the identity-erasing effect of the term “Oriental” and instead unify under the umbrella of “Asian American” (Higgins, 2023; Ishizuka, 2018; Lee, 2015). Ishizuka (2018) argues that this self-identification provided Asian American students in California and beyond with a new way to understand themselves and develop an oppositional political identity. The Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at University of California, Berkeley was established in 1968, followed closely by a chapter of the same organization at San Francisco State University (Higgins, 2023; Ishizuka, 2018). As more recent scholarship suggests, these movements cannot be disentangled as part of the “anti-racist organizing that emerged to challenge the

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discriminatory impact of the California Master Plan's stringent admissions standards" (Higgins, 2023, p. 6).

The political action of Asian American students in California reached a high point in the late 1960s. The AAPA, the Intercollegiate Chinese for Social Action (ICSA), and the Philippine American College Endeavor (PACE), were particularly involved with the 1968-1969 San Francisco State College Strike (Ishizuka, 2018; Umemoto, 2016). They participated alongside Black, Chicano, Latino, and Native American students to demand an education that was relevant to their communities through Ethnic Studies, hiring and retaining minority faculty, and a change in the admissions process (Umemoto, 2016). The students opposed the outcomes of the California Master Plan, which included a net decline in minority enrollments at California's public universities (Umemoto, 2016). Umemoto (2016) traces the institutional response to students' activism. Students were met with resistance at every stage of the strike, which escalated to violence. For example, during a May 1968 sit-in President Summerskill's office, police injured ten students to the point of hospitalization and arrested 26 others. We argue, alongside other contemporary authors (Higgins, 2023) that the focus on the coalitional practices of Asian American students alongside Black, Chicano, Latino, and Native American students offers a meaningful insight into the processes wherein "group-based racial constructions are formed in relation not only to whiteness but also to other devalued and marginalized groups" (Higgins, 2023, p. 7).

The California Master Plan continues to be trumpeted as an exemplary framework for coordinated higher education policy, a role model for extending elite research university missions while expanding access to the most students possible (Altbach, 2011; Douglass, 2010; Marginson, 2015, 2016; Oxendine, 2017). The Plan was made imaginatively possible by previous generations of California Progressives normalizing the notion that all high school students should have access to a collegiate education and by post-WWII optimism (Callan, 2012; Douglass, 2000; Marginson, 2016). It was made materially possible by a proliferation of students, a willingness to fund public education, and the gathering together of political and educational leaders who saw the need for higher education expansion without duplication (Douglass, 2000; Oxendine, 2017). Focusing on the responses from student activists and other everyday actors, however, offers a more nuanced account that casts—in clearer and greater relief—the ongoing racial inequities embedded within the development of the California Master Plan itself.

### Contributions to the Field

Our critical appraisal of historiographies of the California Master Plan contributes to the field in at least two ways. Firstly, it expands upon the policymaking processes by considering the responses of actors who are often considered to be outside direct policy development practices and who are often relegated to siloed scholarship on student activism. Policymaking is recast as a shared project of all community constituents—e.g., students, alumni, neighborhood leaders—and a crucial arena of continual activism and knowledge production. This project is particularly impactful given both the ongoing

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celebration and dissemination of the California Master Plan (Altbach, 2011; Douglass, 2010; Marginson, 2015, 2016; Oxendine, 2017) and a relative lack of student and activist perspectives in the literature.

Secondly, scholarship on the gendered and racialized processes undergirding educational policymaking often focuses on federal processes (Mettler, 2019; Rodriguez et al, 2022 Rose, 2021). Our focus on California offers a meaningful contribution to this scholarship by leveraging a state-level case study, particularly one that continues to galvanize popular attention.