The Asian American Studies Program at UW-Madison proudly presents

REDEFINING RACE
ASIAN AMERICAN PANETHNICITY AND SHIFTING ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

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6191 HELEN C. WHITE

This research provides insights about the conditions and mechanisms that encourage distinct ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups to widen their boundaries to generate a new, collective identity – a concept and process referred to as panethnicity. It traces the complex evolution of "Asian American" as a panethnic label and identity from 1970 to the present, and emphasizes that panethnicity is a deliberate social achievement negotiated by group members, rather than an organic and inevitable process. Complicating assimilation and racialization frameworks, this research elaborates upon (1) how local conditions help to generate a collective identity and status across ethnic groups and (2) how ethnic boundaries are layered and even complementary. Moving beyond past research, Professor Okamoto tests hypotheses about the local conditions shaping dynamics within and between groups that heighten group boundaries and encourage group members to organize as part of a larger collective group. In this talk, Professor Okamoto focuses on an analysis of ethnic and panethnic organizing efforts, and argues that the emergence of a panethnic identity depended, somewhat paradoxically, on different groups organizing along distinct ethnic lines to gain recognition and rights from the larger society. In particular, ethnic organizations provided the foundation necessary to build solidarity within different Asian-origin communities, and ethnic leaders and community members who created inclusive narratives and advocated for policies that benefited groups beyond their own were key actors in generating panethnicity. The results suggest that despite political opportunities, access to resources, and intergroup competition, groups must not only be structured in a way that they can interact, build trust, and share commonalities before organizing upon a panethnic identity, but group narratives must be deployed for panethnicity to be sustained.