A PROPOSAL FOR A PERMANENT TEACHING APPOINTMENT IN ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES

A. What is Asian-American Studies?

Asian people have lived in the United States for over a hundred and thirty years. Asians in America have come from a variety of peoples and social settings in Asia. Their experience in the United States however has transcended these differences and provided them a unifying historical motif. This unique social experience has largely gone unstudied by students of either the "Great Traditions" of either East Asia or America. Asian-American studies is rooted in this historical experience and takes as its object of inquiry the history, social development, economy, politics and culture of Asian people in America.

The Asian experience in America is a unique prism through which American society and culture can be examined. At one level, the experience of Asians in America has had a major influence on America's relations with Asian countries. The American image of Asians in America has not been simply a "close-up" cultural image of Asian countries. On the one hand, the role America has played in Asia has influenced America's image of Asians in America; on the other hand, American images of Asian-Americans has played, in its turn, an important role in creating America's image of Asia. At
the same time, the treatment of Asians in America has greatly influenced Asian images of the United States (e.g., the abrogation of the 1908 Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan in 1924 greatly strengthened the hand of militarist in Japan in the late 1920's and provided fertile ground for and ideology of expansion couched in terms of a struggle against racism).

At another level, the experience of Asians in America is reflective of the ongoing evolution of the idea of America itself. While America is traditionally viewed as having defined itself in contradistinction to Europe, it has to a large extent, particularly at the level of mass culture, also defined itself in contradistinction to Asia. (For example, the exclusion of Asian labor from the United States was the single issue upon which American labor in the West was able to become organized and to a large extent the ideals of American labor were consciously drawn in contradistinction to the characteristics attributed to Asians in America.)

In a more contemporary vein, the social problems which now confront Asian-American communities and are only now being revealed belie much of America's mythology about itself as a "melting pot" society. A close understanding of Asian experience in America, often held to be the most "successful" experience of non-White peoples in America, is important in
understanding to what extent actual upward mobility has occurred, to what extent "assimilation" has occurred, and at what social, cultural and psychological cost.

Asian-American studies, therefore, is not of limited interest but rather an important area in which new conceptual tools can be developed in the humanities and social sciences with important implications for the study of America.

B. Why Asian-American Studies at Brown?

Asian-American studies will fill a gap in the current curriculum in which no attention is paid to the experience of Asians in American society. The College has long recognized the importance of extending its offerings in non-traditional studies in order both to achieve a position of leadership in educational innovation and to provide its students with the best possible preparation for dealing with a rapidly changing world. To that end, Brown has taken important steps in the direction of non-Western studies, for example, in the Department of Comparative Literature and through the securing of Japanese student exchange programs, as well as in East Asian Studies. An Asian American Studies program, however,
would provide a unique vantage point from which the American experience could be examined from a non-Western point of view. In turn, it would illuminate the social, cultural, and intellectual experience of third world people and its contribution to the development and formation of America.

Not only would Asian-American studies be a new area of inquiry within the Brown curriculum, it would bring with it new modes of inquiry. This might include, for example, the use of oral history and autobiography in the study of community or family history, the study of "A__" in the Asian-English idiom. Asian American studies would necessarily explore and develop non-traditional methodologies and conceptual tools.

(insert 1)

Asian-American studies will strengthen current programs in the new curriculum. Asian-American studies will strengthen Brown's curriculum in non-traditional areas of study and put Brown in the forefront of the development of Asian-American studies in the Ivies and on the East Coast. Asian-American studies can help bring together Brown's programs in East Asian studies and American Civilization studies; this has been the case on other campuses where Asian-American studies have been established, such as UCLA, and U.C. Davis where joint teaching and research projects have been
undertaken in history, sociology and literature.

Asian-American studies will help promote a healthy multicultural student community at Brown. Not only is cross-cultural communication on a social, extra-curricular level important to the school's well-being, but it is just as important that cross-cultural exchange takes place in the curriculum as well.

In the 1960's and 1970's, minority student groups secured a concrete commitment from the University for their continued presence at Brown. Asian-American studies would extend this commitment into the academic and curricular realm. By establishing Asian-American studies, the University would affirm that not only have Asian-Americans a place at Brown, but that Asian-Americans have played and continue to play an important and unique role in the creation of America.

Another important consideration in the area of developing a well-balanced student body is that courses in Asian-American studies can and have acted as an important introduction to the humanities and social sciences for many students whose primary interests are in the physical sciences and/or mathematics, for those who have felt some initial insecurity or disinterest in taking course in Brown's more traditionally oriented programs
in the humanities or social sciences.

It may be noted that Asian-American studies is now represented in the new curriculum by Special Themes and Topics 10. While ST-10 has been very successful in stimulating students' intellectual interest in the area of Asian-American studies, the College offers no further opportunity to pursue such studies in an organized fashion. Putting a course such as ST-10 on a permanent basis would not only lend stability to the course but would also facilitate its integration with other course of studies and/or concentration programs. Yet, as it is now constituted, ST-10 faces two serious problems: instability and isolation. The course is unstable because it is taught by two graduate students who will soon be exiting from the University and who are pressed by the central obligation of completing their own course of study. The future of this course has therefore always been in some doubt and this has caused some anxiety and confusion among students when arranging their schedules.


The University must commit itself to making an initial two year appointment at the rank of assistant professor or its equivalent, to teach an introductory survey course on the Asian experience in America and a
course on Asians in America in the discipline of his specialty. In addition to these teaching duties the appointment will require the planning and development of an Asian-American curriculum at Brown. This will require over the period of two years, firstly, the assessment of the particular needs and interests of the student community at Brown; and secondly, the assessment of the institutional direction of the University, particularly in the areas of international, multicultural, and non-traditional studies; thirdly, the assessment of the directions, and structural weakness and strength of the various Asian-American studies programs across the country and their applicability to the above mentioned evaluations; Fourthly, the design of a plan which integrates Asian-American studies with the current academic program at Brown; fifthly, the discovery and pursuit of both internal and external sources of funding specific to Asian-American funding.

D. Qualifications:

Candidates should have a demonstrated commitment to Asian-American studies and training in History, Politics, sociology, Economics and/or languages and literature on the doctoral level.

Insert 1. Therefore in both area and mode of inquiry Asian American studies
would provide a valuable counterpoint to Brown's curriculum. It will help promote both insight into the American experience and new tools with which to examine that experience and insight into the experience of the world that America has tried to shape in its own image.