

Linda Trinh Võ, *Mobilizing an Asian American Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

Why have Asian Americans been largely unsuccessful at political mobilization within their communities? Linda Trinh Võ studies grassroots activism within organizations in San Diego “to contest misconceptions about Asian Americans as apathetic and apolitical” (p. 240). She succeeds on this count by describing the (sometimes literal) ground gained by Asian American coalitions. Over the last three decades, recent immigrants and multi-generational Asian Americans have gradually rejected male-dominated, single-ethnic organizations for gender-balanced pan-Asian associations, transforming the urban political landscape and their own identities in the process.

As a site for studying the mobilization of Asian Americans, San Diego is unique from the usual cities studied by virtue of its lack of residential segregation in single-ethnic enclaves (p. 32). Võ describes the San Diego metropolitan area’s suburbanized Asian American community as a “spatially unbounded network” that must overcome geographic dispersion as well as tensions based on country of origin, ethnic subgroup, length of tenure, class, and gender roles. Rather than focusing on the occasional divisiveness of these challenges, she emphasizes instances of cooperation. When mobilization has succeeded, it has been helped by the symbolic unity of the Asian American label.

Võ begins her analysis in Chapter 2 by tracing the history of settlement in San Diego and then proceeds to analyze the organizational contexts of mobilization efforts. In Chapter 3, she studies the evolution of the Union of Pan Asian Communities (UPAC), a grassroots social service organization that serves impoverished Asian immigrants ignored by mainstream organizations. Chapter 4 describes efforts to respond to discrimination in the local media, while Chapter 5 investigates the economic development generated by the thriving Asian Business Association (ABA). Despite the impressive achievements of UPAC and ABA, Asian Americans in San Diego have had more limited gains in the political arena, with some success in gaining key appointments but far less traction in redistricting and electing Asian Americans to office.

Shockingly, no Asian American has held a major elected office in San Diego since the 1960s, in part, Võ claims, because individuals claiming to represent such a diverse group have to navigate “internal factions and inevitable criticism by other Asian ethnics” (p. 163). This is illustrated most effectively in Chapter 6 in an analysis of the barriers faced by a Filipina candidate in a city council primary campaign in 1993. The lack of solidarity in the electoral arena in San Diego illustrates the fragility of Asian American coalitions, and Võ’s blaming a dearth of political experience and limited opportunity structure does not provide much insight into how Asian Americans might overcome these obstacles in the future.

However, Chapter 7, on the designation of a multi-ethnic Asian-themed historic district downtown, yields a much more optimistic perspective on the potential strengths of Asian American coalition-building in the city. Despite their repeated marginalization by the redevelopment corporation, Asian Americans won substantive representation in decision-making, with overwhelming support from the City Council. To accomplish this, a small group of former residents, mainly of Chinese ancestry, shared authority on committees with other ethnic groups and reached out to new immigrants and to foreign investors with no connection to the area. At a moment when “transnational identity” is a facile term du jour for migrants with attachments to multiple places, Võ’s analysis of how San Diego’s very diverse Asian population has constructed “solidarities of difference” reveals both subtlety and nuance. Chapter 8 describes how personal experiences led activists in San Diego to configure uniquely relevant single-ethnic, pan-Asian, and American identities.

A book that tries to address so many aspects of mobilization over such an extended period is necessarily more focused on description than on causal argument. The claim that Asian-American organizations provided an avenue to broader political engagement on the individual level does not entirely counter the fact that both UPAC and ABA became far less politicized as they became more established in the larger San Diego community. Although it attempts to link individual identity politics and large-scale institutional processes, the book is strongest when V \ddot{o} describes the internal strategies of the organizations she observed through her fieldwork. This book provides a valuable contribution to the understanding of pan-ethnic coalitions and suburban ethnic populations too often understudied because of their perceived quiescence. Chapter 7, on the history of San Diego's Asian Pacific Thematic Historic District, should be of particular interest to the readers of this journal and would be a fantastic addition for courses addressing racial and ethnic politics in urban redevelopment.

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Nick Devas with Philip Amis, Jo Beall, Ursula Grant, Diana Miltin, Fiona Nunan, and Carole Rakodi, *Urban Governance, Voice and Poverty in the Developing World* (London: Earthscan, 2004).

This edited volume provides a broad survey of issues related to the relationship between urban governance and poverty in 10 cities: Ahmedabad, India; Bangalore, India; Cebu City, The Philippines; Colombo, Sri Lanka; Johannesburg, South Africa; Kumasi, Ghana; Mombasa, Kenya; Recife, Brazil; Santiago, Chile; and Visakhapatnam, India. Each chapter reviews existing debates, highlights areas of disagreement, and adds to these debates with examples from the cities studied. The volume is a useful text for students of urban studies, development studies, urban planning, and public policy.

The first two chapters highlight the growing significance of urban poverty and the increased importance for urban governance globally, summarize how urban governance and poverty have previously been treated in the literature, and define basic terms related to urban poverty (e.g., absolute poverty, relative poverty, Lorenz curve, and Gini index) and governance. An opportunity was missed here to provide a more nuanced discussion of ongoing debates surrounding the conceptualization and measurement of urban poverty. Examples of omissions include Sen's (1999) conceptualization of poverty as capability deprivation and the growing body of work on social exclusion. Devas, however, does deserve credit for broadly conceptualizing urban governance beyond city government to include a wider array of formal and informal interactions and relationships.

Next, the commonly presumed link between urban economic growth and poverty reduction is critically examined. Chapter 3 asks: "Do the poor benefit from urban economic growth and if so, how?" The findings are inconclusive. The author states at the chapter's end that ". . . there is no automatic correlation between economic growth and poverty trends, either positive or negative" (p. 51). Chapter 4 provides a basic description of livelihood strategies used by the urban poor to survive in the present as