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“Whose School District is This?”

Vietnamese Americans and Coalitional Politics in Orange County, California

Linda Trinh Võ

Abstract

This essay discusses important lessons for community organizing based on the efforts by members of the Vietnamese American community in Orange County to have their voices heard in the decision-making process at the school district level. I document their struggle to reinstate Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam, an experienced educator who is fluent in English, Vietnamese, Spanish, and French, as superintendent of the Westminster School District (WSD) when her job offer was retracted without justification by the school board one week after she was hired. In this majority-minority school district, with Latinos at 38 percent and Asian Americans at 37 percent, she would have been the first Vietnamese American superintendent of a public school in the country. I examine how community leaders organized multiethnic and multiracial coalitions, engaged in collective protest, and focused their activities on electoral politics. The conflict revolves around which teachers are hired and promoted and who controls the content of the curriculum; yet ultimately, the Nguyen-Lam controversy represents the struggle over the allocation of public school resources and political power in a racially diverse school district. Key lessons can be learned from these events, especially the challenges of building coalitions within the Vietnamese community and creating multiracial alliances with the Latino community, which can inform future coalition efforts by refugee and immigrant populations.

Introduction

In fall 2006, Republican congressional candidate Tan Nguyen made national headlines regarding a letter he mailed to 14,000 Latino residents in Orange County, California. The mailer implied that immigrants who vote in a federal election are committing

a crime that could result in jail time and deportation. It was intended to discourage voters from showing up on Election Day to vote for the Democratic Latina incumbent.¹ This intimidation of voters damaged fragile relations between the Vietnamese and Latino community; however, months earlier the groups had formed a strong grassroots alliance that was not covered by the national media. In contrast to this divisive incident was the coalition between Vietnamese and Latinos in their struggle to reinstate Dr. Kim Oanh Nguyen-Lam as superintendent of the Westminster School District (WSD) when her job offer was retracted a week later. The main organizers of the coalition were younger generation Vietnamese Americans, who joined forces with first generation Vietnamese as well as Latinos leaders, and this event became a pivotal turning point for the community, which is still in its formative years of building multiracial coalitions. In this essay, I focus on the events in this case and the lessons that can be learned from this coalition effort, examining this from the perspective of the Vietnamese American community.

At the June 15, 2006 rally protesting her firing, Nguyen-Lam declared in her speech to supporters:

Westminster School District has had a long history of blatant discrimination and unfair practice toward students and parents of diverse backgrounds. Some board members and teachers group put their special interests before student's learning and well-being. They forgot that they are public servants—they pushed aside students, parents, and community's wishes and concerns. Well, we are here today to tell our district that they can no longer behave like this. We are here to demand Fairness and Respect.

She then gave the full speech in Vietnamese and Spanish to a multiracial audience of Asians, Latinos, and Whites of various generations. In a city with a predominantly Asian and Latino population, Nguyen-Lam's appointment would have made her the first Vietnamese American Superintendent in the county. In the final tabulation, the two board members who supported her hiring are Latino and the three who voted against her appointment are White. The conflict revolves around which teachers are hired and promoted and who controls the content of the curriculum; yet ultimately, the Nguyen-Lam controversy represents the struggle

over the allocation of public school resources and political power in a racially diverse school district, which is occurring against the larger backdrop of an anti-immigrant climate in the state and nation (Kiang, 1996).

Orange County, known for being a politically conservative bastion, is prominently situated in the national immigration debates. Jim Gilchrist, founder of the Minutemen Project, a notorious anti-immigrant organization started in 2004, resides in Aliso Viejo, and when he ran as an Independent for the 48th Congressional District, he actually received 25 percent of the votes in the run-off election.² Additionally, the Costa Mesa city council, along with the mayor, is infamous for being one of the first cities to allow local police to act as immigration agents. Like other parts of California and the nation, the county, with over three million residents, has seen major demographic transformations, with Whites making up 48 percent of the population, Hispanics 32 percent, Asians 16 percent, and Blacks 2 percent according to the U.S. Census. Contrary to the image of the county as predominantly affluent, the U.S. Census reports 10 percent of its residents living below the poverty level, comparable to 13 percent at the state level. In Westminster, 30 percent of the population is foreign-born and 41 percent speaks a language other than English at home—both statistics are higher than the state level (State and County QuickFacts).

Although Asian Americans and Latinos have much in common as predominantly immigrant communities who share overlapping residential, commercial, and social spaces, forging coalitions is a fragile process, given the heterogeneity of the group. At the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, waves of refugees came to the county, attracted by the availability of jobs, schools, social services, and sunshine, creating the largest Vietnamese population in the diaspora with thousands of businesses, growing from a miniscule population to over 150,000, with many in surrounding counties too (Võ, forthcoming). The Latino population has a long history in the region, with many recent immigrants from Mexico, and although they reside and have commercial centers in various parts of the county, more than 875,000 are concentrated in the central part of the county. In both groups, key community leaders are taking responsibility for building multiracial connections, while other leaders overtly and covertly work against these collaborations, preferring to organize only for their own group interest. One

of the main reasons both groups chose to leave their homeland and start life anew is for their children to have better educational opportunities in America. Even if they have limited education themselves, they understand its importance to their children, especially if they want to advance in this country, so at the K-12 educational level, educational equity is a potential issue that can sustain collective mobilization. While studies on Asian American collective action at the national and local levels have analyzed circumstances in which coalitions have formed, less studied is the construction of cross-racial alliances between predominantly immigrant and refugee groups in the contemporary period (De Genova, 2006; Espiritu, 1996; Okamoto, 2006; Vō, 2004).

Arguably, this is less about identity politics than it is about issue-based politics that drive seemingly diverse communities together to form ad hoc coalitions as well as more formally intervening in the electoral process. Ethnic group participation in electoral politics does not occur in a vacuum, but often is motivated by ethnic candidates or by ethnic issues (Lien, 2001). Since 2000, I have been a participant-observer involved in a number of local organizations and groups that focus on Vietnamese American, Asian American, and multiracial agendas, providing me with opportunities to understand the interconnections and disconnections between these entities.³ This essay focuses on understanding why and how new groups, particularly refugees, are mobilizing and also entering new terrain by forging coalitions with Latinos, who are predominantly immigrants. This case demonstrates the challenges of coalition building within the Vietnamese American community, which means bridging intergenerational and ideological differences while also redirecting their limited resources from homeland politics to local politics. It illustrates that it is possible for Vietnamese Americans to form alliances with Latinos, but even when they represent the demographic majority, they must be strategic in acquiring political representation and not underestimate the powerful entities that are unwelcoming of newcomers and resistant to reform.

Background on Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam

At the time of the controversy, Nguyen-Lam was forty-six-years old and a divorced mother, with one son in high school and another in the U.S. military. She is the Associate Director for the

Center for Language Minority Education and Research (CLMER) at California State University, Long Beach (CSU-Long Beach), with a twenty-one person staff. She is a Project Director of multimillion dollar grants that promote educational equity for racial and linguistic minorities, such as designing and evaluating curricula programs, instructional strategies for English-language learners, teacher preparation programs, and technology integration (Center for Language Minority Education and Research, 2007). She has been teaching since the age of twenty, working directly with students from preschool to high school as a classroom teacher, bilingual teacher, resource teacher, and mentor teacher throughout Southern California. At the local level, she helped school districts to institutionalize Vietnamese Language Programs and facilitated teacher training for more than 300 Vietnamese heritage language teachers. Nguyen-Lam was involved with multiethnic groups, such as being a member of the Latino Educational Attainment Council, the Rio Hondo Area Latino Educational Council (RHALEC), and the Cambodian Community Association of Long Beach and Santa Ana. In 2004, she received a Congressional Award for Community Service in Orange County and was named Little Saigon Community Person of the Year.

Nguyen-Lam came from a privileged background with five sisters and two brothers. Her father was a career officer with the Republic of Vietnam and was also the mayor of DaNang, one of the largest cities in Vietnam. In Vietnam, she originally attended a French Catholic school, but was inspired to know more about her heritage, so she begged her parents to switch her to a Vietnamese school, where she struggled at first since she could not read or write in Vietnamese. When she was fifteen years old, her family became refugees and arrived in America where she attended high school and was the only Asian American student. She experienced social and linguistic isolation, going for days without speaking to anyone at school:

I came to this country at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 as a non-English-speaking high school student. Our family resettled in a small suburban town outside of Denver. I experienced a major cultural shock and language barrier that left an indelible mark on me. I believe this first experience created a deep sense of empathy in me with students (especially adolescents) who experience not only cultural and linguistic

barriers but also a sense of loneliness that is very traumatic. . . I remember the feeling of being invisible and voiceless because I couldn't understand anything that was going on around me. I had zero English, so the spoken words around me were just pure noise. . . My first report card was straight Fs. It brought on shame and depression (Bui, 2006).

After six months, she was transferred to a Newcomer Center for school where the teachers had experience working with immigrant children from all over the world who were English learners, and she thrived. They moved to California in 1976, where her family pooled resources with other refugees to operate a convenience market in an economically depressed part of Huntington Beach, but closed the business after a year because it was unprofitable (Nguyen-Lam, 2005).

Nguyen-Lam sees herself as an "accidental teacher," and was a psychology major at CSU-Long Beach when her counselors advised her to try teaching, so she volunteered as a bilingual teacher's aide. She worked with the most challenging children, including those who not only experienced linguistic isolation, but had also been traumatized by the violence of war and escape or those who resided in low-income, crime-ridden neighborhoods. One student who had a major impact on her was Rithy, a Cambodian survivor, who witnessed his father and brother being captured and decapitated when they were escaping the country through the jungle. His behavioral problems were left undiagnosed at school, but by simply speaking to his mother, she realized he was experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, which was ignored by other teachers (Nguyen-Lam, 2005).⁴ She was able to assist in finding him some counseling. She realized that given her personal experiences, she was able to understand the experiences of children often neglected by the educational system, so she pursued graduate school with the intent of working with immigrant and refugee children. Spanish became the fourth language she acquired and she explains:

I strongly believe in bilingual education because children are capable of learning not just two, but three, four. . . languages around them and when you learn another language, it's like having a different way of looking at the world. . . it allows you to be more flexible in your thinking (Nguyen, 2005).

She also recognizes that given the diversity of California, it is important for the educational system to prepare students to communicate across cultures and being bilingual or multilingual is beneficial in a global economy.

Nguyen-Lam notes the importance of understanding why immigrant or refugee parents often are uninvolved with their child's education or in school activities. In those early years, her father worked as a custodian, dishwasher, and gas station attendant, while her mother worked as a seamstress, so they were dealing with their own with cultural and economic readjustment. She explains:

My parents struggled to make a living in the first years in the U.S. They never had time to provide educational support except to remind us to study hard. They never did attend any school activities. That did not make them bad parents or "don't care about education" as many teachers tend to think when they don't see parents on campus (Bui, 2006).

Fortunately, her father spoke English and had previously been in the United States for military training, so it helped the family tremendously that he could translate in these transitional years. However, in many cases, refugee or immigrant parents speak no or minimal English, with some having very limited education, so they are unfamiliar with U.S. educational policies and are uncomfortable attending school events or meetings with the teachers. Teachers and administrators criticize these inattentive parents and parents complain that teachers are disrespectful or rude and lack patience when the parents attempt to communicate in English or question policies.

Through her professional contacts and community activities, Nguyen-Lam was familiar with the miscommunication occurring between the educational system and the community. She began outreach campaigns by using the Vietnamese print and radio media to inform parents about educational policies and provide advice on how to become involved with their children's education. Helen Doan, a fifty-one-year-old immigrant, moved from Westminster to Garden Grove, where she felt the schools were better for her children, and she listens to Nguyen-Lam weekly Vietnamese language radio program targeted for Vietnamese immigrants. Doan elaborates:

She [Nguyen-Lam] understands two cultures. . . She has the great love for students and children. She's dedicated. . . I've learned a lot from her that I would not have known otherwise because I don't speak English. . . She really motivates me to get involved in my children's education (Iran, 2006).

Nguyen-Lam also became aware that the bilingual and bicultural teachers she trained were not being hired in the schools with high minority concentrations and found their bilingual and bicultural skills devalued. In one incident, she notes a bilingual teacher's aide being chided by another teacher for helping Vietnamese American children write Mother's Day cards, a class project, in Vietnamese and the aide was reprimanded when she objected to the administration about the incident.

These experiences encouraged Nguyen-Lam to run for the Garden Grove Unified School District (GGUSD) trustee position so she could improve communication between teachers and parents, increase the number of bilingual teaching and administrative staff, make the curriculum more inclusive, and create policies attuned to the diversity of the student population.⁵ In the 2004 election, KimOanh Nguyen-Lam and Trung Nguyen joined Lan Nguyen, who was elected in 2002, on the GGUSD board, resulting in Vietnamese Americans (all unrelated) comprising the majority of the five-member board. Even though they were in elected positions, Nguyen-Lam comments:

Not many Asian Americans entered the field of education; even fewer rose to the rank of administrators. Up until now, there has never been any Vietnamese American in any significant leadership role in the public education system across the U.S.—not even one Viet Am in principalship anywhere in the American K-12 schools (Bui, 2006).

The Westminster School District

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the city of Westminster has a population of over 88,000 with a racial make up that is 46 percent White, 38 percent Asian, 22 percent Hispanic/Latino, 1 percent African American, .6 percent Native American, .5 percent Pacific Islander, and 10 percent other. In Westminster, 31 percent are Vietnamese with 21 percent in neighboring Garden Grove, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. The WSD district covers the cities of Westminster, Garden Grove, Midway City, and parts of

Huntington Beach. The district has a general fund of \$70 million to support twelve elementary, two middle, and one kindergarten–eighth grade schools, with 600 certified employee and 600 classified positions. One of the most diverse districts in Orange County, this is a majority-minority school district with Latinos at 38 percent and Asian Americans at 37 percent and Whites making up the third largest group at 17 percent. There are 494 teachers in the district, with the majority being White, at 77 percent, Asian American teachers at 13 percent, and Latino teachers at 7 percent (California Department of Education).

In Westminster, 57 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home, and surrounding cities reporting even higher numbers, with Garden Grove at 59 percent and Santa Ana at 80 percent (State and County QuickFacts). Nearly half of the students in the WSD are English-learners, and the largest groups of English language learners are those whose first language is Spanish at 2,521 (51.7 percent) and Vietnamese at 2,071 (42.5 percent) (California Department of Education). Many parents do not speak English or have limited English-speaking abilities, and additionally, many are from low-income families with 63 percent in the district qualifying for free or reduced price meals (California Department of Education). Contrary to the “model minority” image of Asian Americans as academically high achievers, the children in the district have a similar socioeconomic profile to their Latino counterparts. This poses immense challenges for city services, including school districts, which served a largely homogenous population just thirty years ago.

Previously, the WSD captured national headlines not for its educational accomplishments, but for its “discriminatory” policies. In 2003, the district nearly lost \$40 million in annual state and federal funding, two-thirds of the entire district budget, when it refused to adopt a state-mandated anti-discrimination policy that allowed school employees and students to define their own gender. The policy was intended to protect those who may not conform to gender norms from harassment and discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender, and out of 1,425 school districts in the state, only WSD refused. Claiming it contradicted their fundamentalist Christian beliefs, Judy Ahrens (who opposed Nguyen-Lam’s hiring), Blossie Marquez (who backed hiring Nguyen-Lam), and Helena Rutkowski refused to approve the

policy, with Jim Reed and Jo-Ann Purcell (both who did not support Nguyen-Lam) contesting them. After a four-month standstill, the board approved compromise language and avoided losing the fund. Later, parents and teachers launched a recall campaign, but failed to unseat Ahrens and Marquez, with Rutkowski losing her seat in the next election and replaced by Sergio Contreras.

The Hiring and Firing of a Superintendent

After being employed for a year, WSD Superintendent Sheri Loewenstein resigned in 2005, apparently because of “difficult relations” with the trustees, becoming one of four high-ranking administrators to quit in a year. The board, comprised of two Latinos and three Whites, hired Interim Supervisor Dr. Mel Lopez and contracted with the search firm, International Group, Inc., to hire a replacement Superintendent. The firm yielded fifteen applicants, seven of whom were selected for the first rounds of interviews, with three finalists, including Nguyen-Lam, being interviewed a second time. On Tuesday, May 23, 2006 the Westminster School board voted 4 to 1, with trustee Jo-Ann Purcell, a retired teacher, as the lone dissenter, to hire Nguyen-Lam.⁶ Afterwards, Nguyen-Lam was informed by the board president, the search committee president, and the interim Superintendent that she would be hired for the three-year position. The WSD subsequently made formal announcements to district employees and sent out press releases in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, and Nguyen-Lam resigned from her position at CSU-Long Beach. Nguyen-Lam’s supporters celebrated as her hiring was publicized in the mainstream and ethnic media (Leal, 2006). On Tuesday, May 30, trustees Judy Ahrens, a tutor, and James Reed, a clinical laboratory scientist, changed their minds and called a special meeting to switch their votes. Trustees Sergio Contreras and Blossie Marquez kept their original votes, so now with a 3 to 2 majority against the hire, the board then withdrew their offer.

The board members never provided a clear explanation, other than indicating that Nguyen-Lam lacked principal or superintendent experience, and therefore, did not have the required qualifications for the job. Dr. Robert Aguilar, president of International Group Inc., was shocked that the council revoked the vote and stated, “All of her references were very strong . . . She’s an excellent candidate. She’s very qualified” (Tran, 2006). Michael Matsuda,

an Anaheim Union High School District educator and California Curriculum and Instructional Materials Commissioner, countered the remarks by board members, particularly Jo-Ann Purcell's, that Nguyen-Lam did not have enough experience to become Superintendent because she had never served as a school principal:

. . .over 20 percent of our nation's public school Superintendents did not previously work as a principal or lower-level Superintendent. . .The top two educators in California, State Superintendent Jack O'Connell and Secretary of Education Alan Bersin, never had experience as a principal or site administrator before assuming education administrative positions. In fact, Secretary Bersin, an attorney by training, never taught in the classroom prior to becoming the Superintendent for the San Diego schools (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006a).

Matsuda, a core member of the coalition, is from a Japanese American family which has been in Orange County for three generations and had been interned during World War II. He has been involved in Vietnamese American community politics for more than a decade and he expressed his reaction to the second vote:

It broke my heart to see so many parents who had such high hopes for their children in having a Superintendent who could speak English, Spanish and Vietnamese; someone who, for the first time, understood their challenges, someone who would listen. . .It is a very sad day for me because I have been such a proud member of my teacher's union (API Democrat listserv).

Nguyen-Lam supporters argued that these accusations were baseless and fueled by racism and partisan politics. There was speculation by her supporters that she was fired because she would challenge the status quo, such as hiring more bilingual or minority teachers and administrators. She defended herself against the accusations that she would give preferential treatment, "But I would've never changed things overnight . . . These are changes that occur gradually and in the right fashion. I would never hire an unqualified teacher just because he or she could speak two languages" (Bharath, 2006a). In response to rumors that board members were pressured to change their votes by the Westminster Teachers Association (WTA), the union president, Janet Brubaker publicly stated that teachers are "never for or against any candidate" (Bharath, 2006a).

However, one of the crucial points that the coalition tried to publicize to the media and the community is the amount of money the WTA spent on the elections of Jim Reed and Jo-Ann Purcell, two members who “changed” their votes, saying that they felt pressure from other board members to support Nguyen-Lam at first, but then had second thoughts. According to the Orange County Registrars’ office, in their 2002 campaigns, Jim Reed raised a total of \$11,310 with \$10,888 (96 percent) of the contributions given by the WTA, and Jo-Ann Purcell raised \$16,644 with \$13,706 (82 percent) donated by the WTA. The coalition press release stated:

Jim Reed, who changed his vote and voted against hiring Doctor Nguyen-Lam, received the union’s full endorsement. Is this because Doctor Nguyen-Lam would have challenged union cronyism, demand financial accountability and, for once, place children’s needs above the union’s greed? (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006b).⁷

At the time, the teachers union had not received a cost-of-living wage in three years and had been working without a contract, and when the district declared an impasse in their contentious contract negotiations, the state was brought in to mediate contract discussions.

After the decision to hire her became public, apparently Vietnamese American opponents informed school board members that she supposedly had Communist associations, encouraging board members to rescind the offer or deal with the negative consequences from the Vietnamese community. Sources informed the coalition that a local city council member who had contacted WSD board members was quoted as stating, “I would not want her to indoctrinate my children with her liberal thinking. . . I disagree with her on many things.” These behind-the-scenes maneuverings were leaked to her supporters, who began to establish an informal coalition declaring, “We have word that political opponents were conducting a whisper campaign critical of Nguyen-Lam’s liberal politics, essentially of being a ‘left wing gay-loving, baby killing communist.’”

Nguyen-Lam was forced to go on the defensive, sending the following message to supporters:

Just two years ago, I was elected to the GGUSD School Board by over 30,000 people from a community that is similar and as conservative as Westminster. I’m sure a number of them had

checked me out thoroughly, trying to dig up whatever negatives they could find to discredit me. If I have any communist bend I would not have been supported by a very anti-communist Vietnamese American community of Orange County. How could any mature adult believe in one anonymous person or source over thousands [of] other citizens? If board members have questions about my stance or integrity, please ask my fellow board members, Superintendent and staff in GGUSD. They will learn how I impact students positively through my policy and decision making as a board member. I have no control over what is on the web or what people say or think about me (Nguyen-Lam, 2006a).

Bob Jones, an Anglo-American who teaches citizenship classes to Orange County Vietnamese immigrants and who was a former diplomat who met with Nguyen-Lam's father regularly when he was mayor of DaNang, spoke at rallies on her behalf when she ran for GGUSD comments, "KimOanh is too liberal for the right wing, too progressive for the unions, and too "ethnic" for both!" Even though Nguyen-Lam and her supporters attempted to provide correctives to the unproven accusations generated by people with political motives, the rumors had done their damage. One week after she was hired, Nguyen-Lam was informed on May 30, 2006 that the board had retracted its offer for her to become the next WSD Superintendent.

Organizing a Protest

A group of supporters organized a press conference to announce the rally and to strategically garner media attention to the issue, which would later prove to be effective since this was covered by the print and television media, both ethnic and mainstream. Attorney Daniel Do-Khanh became a spokesperson for what would become the "Keep Our Voice, Keep KimOanh Coalition" stated his motivation to get involved in this cause, "The injustice that Dr. Nguyen-Lam experienced is only a microcosm of the injustice that many children and parents in the Westminster School District have experienced for years" (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006b).⁸ He, along with some of the other core organizers, had been involved in the struggle for Asian American Studies at the University of California, Irvine in the early 1990s. Lupe Fisher, co-chairwoman of the coalition and longtime educa-

tor in the WSD became an outspoken critic of the board's decision questioning their judgment, "Why did you do it? Why do you not support the most respected, the most distinguished, the most qualified candidate?" (Martindale and Bharath, 2006). Mental health services chief for the county and community activist, Xuyen "Susie" Dong-Matsuda, who came to the United States by herself as a refugee at age seventeen states:

The hiring of Dr. Nguyen-Lam was met with high enthusiasm from parents, students, as well as community and education leaders. Citizens and community leaders were shocked to hear of her rejection, and were outraged to read in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Orange County Register* that Board Member Jo-Ann Purcell said Nguyen-Lam did not have enough experience.

A small, but active group of Vietnamese who rallied around her when she faced a tough election to the GGUSD in 2004 came to her defense again.

On the evening of Thursday, June 15, 2006, more than 300 members of the community and the media occupied the parking lot and grassy areas around the Westminster School District Central Administration building, where the board meeting was to be held. Television crews from mainstream, Latino, and Vietnamese stations were there to capture the events. The diverse crowd, which was mainly Vietnamese, gathered as American flags and placards with a range of hand-painted messages were passed out: "Let Our Voices Be Heard," "Dr. KimOanh Supports Our Children," "Respect Our Community," "Justice Will Prevail," "Stop Playing Politics With Our Children," "Rehire KimOanh," and "Today We Rally, Tomorrow We Vote." Her supporters made brief speeches at the makeshift podium, including Sylvia Mendez, before Nguyen-Lam gave her speech to the cheering crowd. Afterwards, protesters stayed in the parking lot greeting friends and acquaintances, reflecting the social networks formed in the community, with many waiting to take their turn to walk through the meeting room, while the media and supporters had an opportunity to talk to Nguyen-Lam. In contrast to the boisterous crowd outside, the atmosphere inside the packed boardroom was solemn and formal. The eighty-seat boardroom quickly filled to capacity as board members listened to approximately ninety minutes of public testimony in support of rehiring Nguyen-Lam. Since supporters were speaking at the lectern, protesters were silent as



Dr. KimOanh Nguyen-Lam (third from left) with her supporters being interviewed by a reporter from Saigon TV at the protest on June 15, 2006.

Photo by Linda T. Võ

they filed through the boardroom with their placards as they were ushered by police to keep the line moving.

Parents and supporters demanded an explanation for why board members overturned their decision to hire Nguyen-Lam and also scolded them for not listening to the needs of the community. Many had never spoken in front of a governing entity, so they were nervous, but they were eager to get their message across:

My name is Hong Tran. I am a parent of three children in Westminster School District grades 2, 4, and 8. I want to know for certain the reasons for Doctor Nguyen-Lam's appointment to the Superintendent position of the district and the reversal of that decision a week later. . .I hope you realize the long-lasting impact of your unwise action and dishonest words.

My name is Hoa Pham and I have one child in fourth grade in the Westminster School District. . .We thought you would be working in collaboration with us, taking into consideration our concerns and wishes. What you have done is the opposite. You disregard our voices and wishes and you allow the district to go down in shame.

There were supporters from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities who patiently waited in line to speak up to support Nguyen-Lam, with some for whom English is not their first language.

Supporter James Lam and others noted disturbing behavior by the audience in the boardroom, which were then conveyed in their press release:

During the June 15 rally, the Westminster Teachers' Union was out in force to protect their friends on the Board—Jim Reed and Jo-Ann Purcell. Wearing all black, Union bosses and their minions occupied well in advance almost all of the seats in the board meeting room, forcing community members to stand for hours in the perimeter or in the outside hallways. Community members were outraged by the behavior of the Union bosses, as they snickered at the parents and grandparents who spoke before the board. Vietnamese media present during the board meeting took note of the Westminster Teachers' Union's indifference and lack of respect for these parents, most of whom were attending a public government meeting for the very first time (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006b).

None of the board members changed their votes.

A Community of Supporters

In addition to teaching in the K-12 setting, Nguyen-Lam also taught at CSU-Long Beach, CSU-Fullerton, and the University of California, Los Angeles, as well as working with groups at other local campuses, so she had a wide network of supporters. Activists sought groups that supported Nguyen-Lam during her school board campaign, such as the Vietnamese American High School Associations (VAHSA), the Union of Vietnamese Student Associations of Southern California (UVSA), the Vietnamese Professionals Society (VPS), and the Vietnamese-American Public Affairs Committee (VPAC), along with Vietnamese language instructors in the community. Students, many of whom she taught, started an online petition "Students for Dr. Kim Oanh Nguyen-Lam" that began with the banner, "We fight against the trafficking of women and children happening on the other side of the world and it is just as important that we fight against injustice that happens in our own backyard." The reference is to Vietnamese Alliance to Combat Trafficking (VietACT), one of the most active local non-profit organizations established by younger generation Vietnam-

ese Americans, which addresses the enslavement and human trafficking of Vietnamese girls and women in Taiwan. This is a crucial point, since Vietnamese Americans, a predominantly foreign-born community, are known for engaging in homeland affairs, draining them of resources to focus on local needs, so this collective was trying to redirect this energy.

The most noticeable support came from the Latino community, but Nguyen-Lam managed to build a cross-section of support, such as from Asian American organizations like the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPI-CA) and the American Jewish Committee–Orange County chapter (AJC), which serves more than 100,000 and which were present at the rally as well. The two Latino board members, Blossie Marquez and Sergio Contreras, who have not agreed on other matters, played a crucial role in advocating on behalf of Nguyen-Lam. Marquez, a clinical counselor and WSD board president voted to hire Nguyen-Lam and were disturbed by the reversal stating:

I'm so hurt and very upset. . . This decision is very disappointing and very prejudiced. Race played an issue. . . I really feel in my heart, the entire Orange County community will benefit from having Dr. Lam. . . She'll bridge the gap. She'll really give us what the district needs (Park, 2006).

Contreras, who was born and raised in Westminster, publicly came to Nguyen-Lam's defense stating, "We have incompetent board members who are absolutely out of touch with the community they serve" (Berthelsen and Tran, 2006). He ran for election three times and won on the third try despite not having the support of the teacher's union, current board members, or mainstream politicians. Ironically, although he works for the Service Employees International Union in Los Angeles, he has been in contention with the local teachers union, which did not support his candidacy.

Latinos connected with Nguyen-Lam because of her personal experience as a refugee with a record of outreaching to the Latino community. In rallying members to attend the protest, Cris Villaseor, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) District 1 Director, sent out an electronic announcement to the members asking them to speak up and support Nguyen-Lam during the WSD meeting:

If you know her you know that she is fluent in four languages ... More Latina than some Latinos I know. You know what I mean. She is culturally aware of the community. She is a local representative, of the community and is highly qualified for the position (LULAC email, 2006).

Villaseor continues explaining, "For the first time ever every parent of the community would be able to communicate in their own language with the Superintendent of the schools." Amin David, President of Los Amigos and a longtime Latino activist who supported Nguyen-Lam when she ran for the GGUSB trustee position, declared:

We share your sincere concern for the travesty of justice done to our esteemed friend, KimOanh Nuygen-Lam, and stand ready to help mount the response against racism so blatantly alive in the board of trustees. . .In the name of our children we cannot let this go unanswered (David, 2006).

Parent Silvia Aranda, thirty-six, of Garden Grove was quoted as saying, "It's the first time we are going to have somebody that cares about our community. . .We just want somebody to help us, to encourage children to study and have higher education. Her [experience] and Spanish speaking is perfect for this position" (Tran, 2006).

One of Nguyen-Lam's most ardent supporters, who also helped her with the campaign for the GGUSD position, is Sylvia Mendez, who is a local hero. In 1944, when Mendez was eight-years-old, she, along with her siblings, were denied admission to the 17th Street School in Westminster because of their dark skin and last names and were told to attend the segregated school for Mexicans. Her father, Gonzalo, who was an immigrant from Mexico, and her mother Felicitas, who was originally from Puerto Rico, along with four other Mexican American families, led a community movement and legal battle to fight the desegregation policy. In 1947, this case ended lawful segregation in Orange County and one year later in California, seven years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that ended lawful segregation in the country.⁹ Mendez was one of the first children to attend the desegregated Westminster schools and went on to work as a nurse for thirty years. In her public speeches, including at the June rally, she connected this historic case to the contemporary case:

. . . today, for the first time since I left this district, for the first time in nearly fifty years, I am back in the Westminster School District. I am back to join you, who, like the parents who came together so many years ago at this very same district, are here to demand fairness for our children. I am here to ask the school board, "Why won't you do the right thing and hire Dr. KimOanh as your Superintendent for all the children?" This would be the fair and right thing to do. I understand how KimOanh feels and how all of our community feel, because my Mexican classmates and I too were told that we were "not qualified"—that we were not "good enough" or "smart enough," when we knew we were capable of anything.

Mendez has been trying to have this case taught in the Westminster School District, something that Nguyen-Lam publicly advocates. Ironically, Mendez has an active travel schedule raising awareness about this case in schools, universities, and community groups across the country, but she cannot do so in the district where the precedent case was set.

Perspectives on Race Relations

Nguyen-Lam is known for being on the forefront of her community to improve communication between Vietnamese and Latinos and explains her observations in Little Saigon:

One thing that bothers me a lot from my observation is many of the Vietnamese businesses, especially restaurants, employ Latino workers at the workplace and I think one of the negative things that I feel the Vietnamese community picked up is the racism from the mainstream. The way they talk to the Latinos, is very condescending, don't bother to learn their names. I hate it when I hear them calling [the employees] "amigos" and I hear that in supermarkets, and there's just not a very good relationship, and we're immigrants just like they are (Nguyen, 2005).

The Vietnamese community is no different from other Asian American business enclaves in California, which relies heavily not only on co-ethnic labor, but also on the Latino labor force for entry-level positions, and this has created perceptible tensions between groups (Abelman and Lie, 1995; Chang and Diaz-Veizades, 1999). Her involvement with the Latino immigrant communities dates back to the early 1990s when she joined CLMER and had the opportunity

to work with Latino (mainly Mexican American) educational leaders and community activists to assist schools in Los Angeles and Orange County to promote multicultural, anti-racist education. She assisted Latino, Cambodian, Filipino, Lao, Hmong, Korean, Samoan, and Vietnamese immigrant parents develop leadership skills, some whom went on to become leaders in the community. She is the exception rather than the norm, since many refugees from Vietnam are still uncomfortable with the racial diversity in their communities and are unfamiliar with U.S. ethnic histories.

As an educator, she understands how easy it is for Asians and Latinos to be unfairly pitted against one another for scarce resources, especially educational ones:

And a lot of people I work [with] in education, so often teachers compare the Latino students with the Asian [Vietnamese] students and their implication is, "If the Latino student would work as hard as the Asian student, they would make it too." But they do not take into consideration all the differences, legal, social, political aspects of the situation as refugees. [When] we came here we got a lot more support from the government, of social services in terms of networking, job training versus the other population who really didn't have any of that. So it's not fair to compare them that way (Nguyen, 2005).

Sometimes, Vietnamese Americans are portrayed as "model minorities" who have become successful despite their humble beginnings as refugees, but under other circumstances, given their high-poverty levels, they are treated like other minorities (Chan, 2006). As a result, Latinos distance themselves from a group that they feel is "privileged" and in the zero-sum game, each group wants to protect their limited gains from being encroached upon, so they hesitate to work with one another.

Since anti-Communist homeland politics has dominated the mobilization efforts of the first generation and this has been especially divisive, it is difficult to refocus the community on local concerns as well as involve the younger generation, who are often wary of political infighting. Having worked with the second and 1.5 generation extensively, Nguyen-Lam is attentive to the fact that they are newcomers to the social justice struggles in this country. In a flyer to generate attendance at the rally, she addressed "All Vietnamese American high school and college students":

It is time for all of us to break the silence of oppression, discrimination and injustice. As Vietnamese Americans, we have benefited from the struggles of African Americans, Chicanos, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other groups that started the Civil Rights Movement in this country. It is time for us to stop being the “Model Minority” and join in the cause. It will give my heart great joy to see many of our young people there because it means that you believe in and are willing to stand up for justice (Nguyen-Lam, 2006b).

Unlike their first generation parents who are hindered by linguistic barriers, younger generations of Latinos and Asians attend school together, so there are more opportunities to familiarize themselves with one another and form coalitions.

From her personal and professional experiences, Nguyen-Lam is quite aware that since many Asian and Latino refugees and immigrants are segregated into low-income, service-sector occupations, there are persistent misperceptions about their ability to perform in mainstream leadership roles. In response to comments that her decision was racially motivated, WSD board member Aherns defended her ability to work well with minorities stating:

After a year of effort and three attempts, I was able to convince our other trustees to give official recognition to our custodial workforce within our district, which consists largely of Vietnamese and Hispanic employees. . .I’m surprised, disappointed and dismayed that the race card was even used during this high-profile issue (Leung, 2006).

After reading this comment, Nguyen-Lam sent a comment to her supporters:

Judy Ahren’s response is so reflective of the prevalent WSD mentality. Vietnamese and Hispanic Americans are needed and valued as long as they remain in their place—as our custodial workforce. Judy made this statement and Judy could not see how “race” has anything to do with this! (Nguyen-Lam, 2006c).

For her, the superintendent incident is not an isolated experience, but one that reflects the apprehensions many face about the changing social, political, and economic landscape of a once homogeneous community.

Changing Political Landscapes

This event occurred against the backdrop of larger political transformations in the community. First, increasing numbers of Vietnamese Americans are running for elected positions, with twenty on the ballot in November 2006 in Orange County. They are winning elections, sometimes unexpectedly against mainstream incumbents, so now politicians of all backgrounds recognize that they have to campaign in ethnic communities, since these voters can make a major difference at the ballot box, especially in tight races. In the early stages, Vietnamese American politicians worked together closely. Nguyen-Lam was the first Vietnamese Democrat to win a local election when she was elected as a trustee of the GGUSD in 2004, against some major opposition from Vietnamese Republicans as she notes:

In our community, most of the older Vietnamese have a strong anti-communist perspective and they identify that with the Republican Party. . .I just felt the values from the Democratic Party are more aligned with my values because it supports the underserved, the voiceless, by offering social services to who need it the most. Although the School Board is a non-partisan race, the other group, the Vietnamese in the community looked at me as their opponent. I was not even aware of that. . .that they didn't want to support me (Truong, 2005).

However, in the superintendent controversy, some Vietnamese American politicians crossed party lines to support her. For example, Tony Lam, the first elected official in the country, who served two terms as Westminster city council member, was a staunch supporter of Nguyen-Lam, making speeches at events and talking to the media pointing out that rescinding the offer was an act of "discrimination." Republicans Trung Nguyen and Lan Nguyen, both trustees with Nguyen-Lam on the GGUSD board, supported her with Lan Nguyen publicly declaring her "as the most qualified person to lead the district," along with Garden Grove City Council Member Janet Nguyen, who attended the protest rally. In addition, other politicians came to her defense, such as Westminster Mayor Margie Rice commenting that, "This community needs someone like Dr. Nguyen-Lam. She has all the right qualifications to be in this position" (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006a). Then Orange County Supervisor Lou Correa, a

Latino Democrat, vouched for her saying, "I know KimOanh and have worked with her. Choosing her as your Superintendent is a good investment for your district" (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006a). Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, a Latina Democrat, spoke to the teacher's union on behalf of Nguyen-Lam. Both have Vietnamese American field representatives whose primary role is building relations with the Vietnamese community.

The "Keep Our Voice, Keep KimOanh Coalition" changed its name to "Our Children-Our Vote Coalition" to refocus their energy on transforming the composition of the school board members. Phu Nguyen, then president of the Vietnamese American Community of Southern California, one of the largest local organizations, and a campaign leader, explained:

These three board members [Reed, Ahrens, and Purcell] are truly out of touch with the community members who voted for them. They have lost our confidence in them. . .If they are committed to remaining indifferent to the concerns of the community, then we cannot entrust the education of our children in their hands. We are now prepared to take the next steps to ensure Reed and Ahrens are voted off in November (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006b).

In the November 2006 election, the "Our Children-Our Vote Coalition" endorsed incumbent Blossie Marquez and supported challengers retired educator Lupe Fisher, teacher Thanh Phan, and engineer Frank Tran, a write-in candidate. Noticeably, the Westminster Teachers Association endorsed their own slate of candidates: Westminster police officer David Bridgewater (6,816 votes, 15.6 percent), school district teacher Mary Mangold (6,283 votes, 14.4 percent), and school custodian Andrew Nguyen (5,367 votes, 12.3 percent), all of whom were elected. These newcomers replaced incumbents Judy Ahrens (4,767 votes, 10.9 percent) and Blossie Marquez (4,650 votes, 10.7 percent) who were defeated and Jim Reed who did not file for re-election (League of Women Voters).¹⁰ Thus, candidates supported by the coalition Lupe Fisher (5,067 votes, 11.6 percent) and Frank Tran (1,612, votes 3.7 percent), with Thanh Phan withdrawing from the election but still managing to gain votes (3,514, votes 8.1 percent), lost their bids for office. The only ones involved with the controversy still on the board are Sergio Contreras and Jo-Ann Purcell, who were not up for re-election.

This reflects the problem of protesters not being able to translate the momentum created by the coalition directly into political mobilization and the need for greater voter education.¹¹ This, in part, can be attributed to a backlash against ethnic politics and a prevalent anti-immigrant attitude, a common occurrence in other California communities as well (Saito, 1998). The focus on “race” in the district has its detractors, as noted by a White parent, “It seems to me that there are people on the board. . .who are trying to promote the Hispanic-Vietnamese agenda. That does not represent 100 percent of all the district’s students” (Bharath, 2006b).

Local races can be unpredictable with small numbers voting, so that even those with the most applicable experience are unable to win elections. Lupe Fisher, 59, a retired educator with more than twenty-six years of service to the Westminster School District, was a leader of the coalition and received contributions over \$15,220, the highest amount, but she still lost the election. She graduated from the Westminster schools, as did her children, and in her campaign literature and speeches she focused on her “local roots” as a community leader who experienced the changes in Westminster in the last forty-five years, “From agricultural fields to housing, from dirt roads to the building of the 22 Freeway and the 405 Freeway, from a small town to the diverse city it is today, Lupe knows our community.” Ironically, one of those elected, Andrew Nguyen, a thirty-seven-year-old custodian who graduated from Garden Grove High School, raised more than \$4,000 for his campaign and stated as his political qualifications being “a member of the executive board in my local California School Employees Association chapter. . .qualify me to serve our children” (Staff writer, 2006).

Conclusion

Dr. Mel Lopez, the interim superintendent, resigned after less than two months on the job, stating, “I just came to realize this is not a place that I can be effective. That’s all” (Mehta, 2006). Lopez, who taught at Chapman University and worked as a superintendent of school districts in Anaheim and Pacifica for sixteen years, became the fifth high-level administrator in the district to resign in a year. Apparently board members objected to him doing contract work for the recruitment firm seeking to replace former Superintendent Sheri Loewenstein, which resulted in the Nguyen-Lam debacle. Trustees also voted 3-2 not to renew the contract with

the recruitment firm, International Group Inc. On June 21, 2006 the trustees appointed Roberta Mahler, a former Centralia School District superintendent, to fill the interim superintendent position, then later hired Sharon Nordheim, who is White, as superintendent, without much fanfare. One of the former board members, Jim Reed, revealed during the height of the Nguyen-Lam controversy that six of the seven finalists were Latino, yet it appears none were hired in this second round.

Nguyen-Lam is moving to a higher administrative level in the CSU system, but hopes her case exposes the predicaments facing the district and community, along with raising awareness about the need for educational equity and the transformations needed to effectively govern a multicultural democracy. Represented by attorney Katrina Foley, a Costa Mesa councilwoman, the \$1 million dollar lawsuit Nguyen-Lam filed is still pending against the WSD, the board members who voted against her, and Cao Cuong, a Westminster resident, requesting compensation for damage to her reputation, in addition to immediate reinstatement and an apology. In their defense, the district claims that because Nguyen-Lam did not sign a contract, she technically was not “hired.” In an unsuccessful settlement negotiation, Nguyen-Lam requested 1) a letter of apology from the WSD that could be made public; 2) a \$100,000 scholarship fund for WSD students; and 3) the inclusion of a documentary on Latino history and film on Vietnamese Americans in the WSD teacher professional development plan.¹² The impact this incident will have on her political career when she comes up for re-election in 2008, if she chooses to run, is yet to be determined.

Asian Americans and Latinos are not a homogenous group and as they become more politically engaged, new divisions within and between groups will surface. However, forging alliances within their own groups and across racial lines remains a priority if they want to ensure diverse voices are represented in Orange County's power structure. To counter the tension from the letter by Tan Nguyen, the example at the beginning of this article, the Our Children-Our Vote Coalition again worked together announcing the “Latino, Vietnamese and Other Leaders Unite to Oppose Anti-Immigrant Campaign Letter,” press conference at Librería Martínez Books and Art Gallery in Santa Ana—a major Orange County site for political activities, especially for the Latino community. Aware how this incident could polarize Latinos and Asians, they included this state-

ment: “The Coalition and its partners are also determined that this attempt will not undermine our communities’ shared goals and experiences, and deter us from building bridges between and among our communities” (Our Children-Our Vote Coalition, 2006c).¹³ As expected, Tan Nguyen, running as a Republican, did not win the election against incumbent Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, a Latina Democrat who has been able to garner strong support from the Vietnamese American and Latino communities.

In the summer of 2007, Asian Americans joined the effort led by Latino leaders to recall Harold Martin, an Anaheim police officer who served on the Anaheim Union High School District board from 1999 until he was voted out of office in 2002, when he was appointed to this same position in 2007. During his term, he was known for his anti-immigrant statements, such as proposing “to bill the government of Mexico for educating children in this country illegally,” yet board members at the time decided to appoint him to replace a board member who had died, even though Martin ran for this position in the 2006 election and came in seventh out of a field of eight candidates. The coalition collected 5,000 signatures from registered voters in the district, double the amount needed, and Martin resigned under pressure.

As this case shows, it is at the grassroots level in which coalitions between Asian Americans and Latinos can emerge, and regardless of whether or not the outcome is successful, each effort allows individuals and groups to build networks for future mobilization and an opportunity to cultivate political leaders. Both groups include significant percentages of newcomers who are adjusting to the racial landscape of the United States and are in the initial stages of familiarizing themselves with the process of participatory democracy. Asian Americans and Latinos may share common interests and goals, but linguistic barriers as well as cultural differences and social discomfort overshadow their commonalities. They are capitalizing on their numeric majority and perceptions of ethnic solidarity; however, at the leadership level, there are still a limited number of activists who adopt the coalition model, and the ability to recruit more advocates, particularly engaging the next generation, is crucial to sustaining momentum in such mobilizational efforts. Nguyen-Lam feels fortunate to have had “the opportunity to learn from and work with professionals and activists from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds and lived experiences, but

who share a similar passion and commitment to social justice, “and remarks, “My regret is we do not have an infrastructure to maintain and continue to join forces” (Nguyen-Lam, 2007).

Vietnamese American presence is quite noticeable in public life in Orange County, and Nguyen-Lam’s position as an elected school board member reflects this; however, in some respects, they continue to be invisible or marginalized within city life. On two nights in March 2007, the city of Westminster celebrated its 50th anniversary featuring a variety of performances at the new community center, with the only “Asian” one being excerpts from the *Miss Saigon* musical with lead roles performed by non-Asian cast members from a local performing arts high school.¹⁴ Little Saigon, Orange County is the entertainment capital for Vietnamese in the diaspora, so professional talent who perform in English or Vietnamese abounds in the area. The Thursday night performances were dedicated to the Westminster School District.

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Notes

1. The 47th Congressional District includes Anaheim, Garden Grove, Santa Ana, and Fullerton with Latinos making up one third of registered voters and Asian Americans making up one fifth of registered voters.
2. According to the U.S. Census, this district is 75 percent White, 15 percent Latino, and 13 percent Asian.

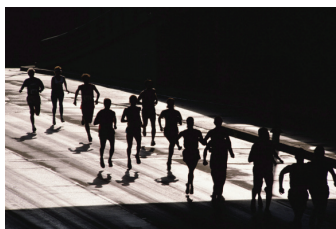
3. I have worked with the main Vietnamese American and Asian American organizers of this coalition on other causes, but played a modest role in this effort, since others who grew up and lived in this city were better positioned to intervene. I attended the press conference and rally, wrote letters of support on Nguyen-Lam's behalf to the board members, supported coalition efforts in media interviews, and encouraged college students and student organizations to get involved.
4. Rithy was walking behind them and was able to hide in the bushes to avoid being captured. Although his mother is Cambodian, she spoke some Vietnamese (but not English), so Nguyen-Lam was able to learn about Rithy's traumatic life experience from her.
5. Garden Grove borders Westminster and according to the U.S. Census has a population of 165,000 with a racial make up that is 47 percent White, 32 percent Hispanic/Latino, 31 percent Asian, 1.3 percent African American, .76 percent Native American, .65 percent Pacific Islander, and 15 percent other. The school district operates 70 schools with an average budget of \$470.5 million and covers most of Garden Grove and portions of six surrounding cities: Anaheim, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Santa Ana, Stanton, and Westminster. It includes 48,604 students with 5,000 staff members. See <<http://www.ggusd.k12.ca.us/profile.asp>>.
6. Westminster School District Board of Trustees: Blossie Marquez (President), Sergio Contreras (Vice President), Jo-Ann Purcell (Clerk), Judy Ahrens (Member), and James Reed (Member).
7. The press release accused the WSD of financial mismanagement and spending excessive expenditures on retiree benefits and deferred compensation, compared to the state average, which benefit long-tenured teachers and union bosses.
8. He was former president of the Orange County Asian American Bar Association (2003-2004).
9. When the *Mendez v. Westminster* case was appealed by the district at the 9th Circuit Courts of Appeals, the American Civil Liberties Union, American Jewish Congress, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Japanese American Citizens League filed Amicus Briefs on behalf of Mendez. See <<http://www.mendezvwestminster.com/>>.
10. Judy Ahrens, sixty-one, had been a WSD trustee since 2002, and raised \$2,224 in campaign contributions.
11. Diana Duong Mendez, another candidate listed as a public school Vietnamese community liaison, also received 3,879 votes or 8.9 percent.
12. *Para Todos Los Ninos/For All the Children* is a thirty-minute PBS Emmy award-winning documentary produced by Sandra Robbie about the Mendez v. Westminster case <<http://www.koce.org/prodMendez>>.

htm>. The feature film *Journey From the Fall* by Ham Tran is “inspired by the true stories of Vietnamese refugees who fled their land after the fall of Saigon—and those who were forced to stay behind” depicts the story of family members who settled in Orange County <<http://www.journeyfromthefall.com/>>.

13. The coalition included Los Amigos of Orange County, League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance, Vietnamese American Public Affairs Committee, Vietnamese Professionals Society, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the Asian Pacific American Legal Center.
14. See Yoshikawa (1994) for casting controversy involving Miss Saigon and protest by Asian Americans when it came to Broadway in New York City.

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