

Everyone Learning, Advancing, and Growing Together

By Sarah Nguyen

Through our class projects, I've learned the value of "shared leadership" as demonstrated from immigrant workers. Although I understood the notion of "messiah leadership," or better referred to as the Western colonial approach, was not the most effective form of leadership for lasting change, the collaboration of immigrant workers (as studied particularly in Koreatown) is the manifestation of true "shared leadership." In the collective efforts we see of Koreatown immigrant workers, we may not necessarily see standard Western leadership characteristics such as charismatic style or hegemony.

Rather, most of the immigrant workers in Koreatown cannot fully articulate themselves in English and do not physically resemble the "typical" white male, dominant figurehead. Nevertheless, when immigrant workers pool their talents, skills and resources together, they are able to create a powerful force in the form of "shared leadership" where not one person possesses all the skills or talents of success.

I definitely agree with Philip Vera Cruz's vision of leadership, where the movement and the moment must encompass the goals, values and ideals of the time in order to carry over continuously. The movement and the moment must not be about the current leader; it's true, the movement must be bigger than its leaders. For example, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, we've seen great revolutionary movements rise and sweep up the country; but these movements died as soon as its most charismatic, "messiah-like" leaders were assassinated (Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Fred

Hampton, etc.). In the case of immigrant workers fighting for just labor conditions, they are a collective force creating a lasting impact for the ones to come after them. There is not one person leading the whole pack; but rather, it is a whole pack leading. This kind of “shared leadership” is harder to dismantle because there is not one figurehead or deeply influential individual who can easily be targeted.

This approach of “shared leadership” can be applied in other areas of my everyday life such as student/community groups, jobs, etc. because it shows that everybody has potential to be a leader and that successful leadership requires the skills, efforts and contributions of a collective group — not just one person. The notion of “shared leadership” also challenges me in how I act as leader, especially when working in groups. I understand that being a leader among a group of peers is not about asserting your authority or ego over others; but rather, it is about helping your peers reach their full potential in leadership qualities, which in turn, will benefit the group as a whole.

To be quite honest, in reassessing my contributions to the group so far, I don’t think I have been doing all that I can to advance the work of everyone through “shared leadership”. It’s not as if I’ve been dominating the group at all in the form of Western colonial leadership, but I just haven’t made enough effort to realize every single group member’s existing leadership skill and the skill they want to develop throughout the class. I think I was somewhat disillusioned to thinking that “shared leadership” was “stepping back” for others to “step up”. But rather, I now understand that this is not true. I now know that in taking a modest step back, I must do all that I can to help my peers

develop their potential and skills so that they can truly “step up.” I also understand that “shared leadership” is about me learning as much as I can from my peers as well; that it should never be a one way relationship, but rather, a give-and-take relationship constantly progressing forward as everyone is learning, advancing and growing together.