



## **Defeating Prop 16: Lessons Learned in Community Organizing**

By Marc Ang, President/Founder of Asian Industry B2B, Key Fighter in “No On 16” Campaign

Let me be very clear about one thing: the “No on Prop 16” effort, which ultimately defeated race based preferences in college admissions, public sector jobs and public contracting, was a resounding success, **in spite of ourselves**. What a miracle.

Conservative grassroots has always been messy, but Asian American conservatives, were unified in previous battles, such as defeating SCA-5 in 2014, the last major attempt to repeal Prop 209, which instituted merit based admissions in 1996.

Leadership means lifting people up. It means giving credit where due. It means utilizing talents of all volunteers. It means concentrating on the overarching mission and purpose, and not on any selfish egos. What may be a sign of the devolution of our society was clearly seen in the microcosm of the “No on 16” campaign.

A group that tried to fashion itself as the official campaign, has now alienated some of its key players due to poor decisions not made with a leadership mindset. Throughout the campaign, as someone initially involved with this organization, I found that they were not welcoming of volunteer efforts or sincere ways to improve operations for a better cause, opting instead to cut out those who disagreed or those who could outshine

One can only imagine what we could have accomplished without some of these unnecessary time-wasting, petty roadblocks.

In the end, through the combination of many efforts from diverse groups that individually contributed, we were able to create a groundswell that fought back against a well funded “Yes on 16” campaign where they outspent us 14:1. Our victory in the bluest of states, was a resounding one: 14 points, 57-43.

This article is to commemorate and give credit where due.

Ward Connerly, former UC Regent, who has fought at least 4 attempts to institute affirmative action in California, inspired many of us to get into the fight. Attorney Manny Klausner and Law professor Gail Heriot lent their legal knowledge to fight Prop 16. Arnold Steinberg was a mastermind in organizing a leadership group which included people outside our Asian community and to join our fight. He crafted this victory’s strategy and vetted different messaging campaigns to ultimately find the right one that hit the button of how Californians feel and moved them to vote No.

These veterans brought the wisdom to navigate internal and external forces that played a major part in derailing the opposing faction. On a limited budget, at most a mere tenth of what the opposing side had, we were able to get the word out thanks to Ying Ma’s efforts in handling the media and working with people such as myself to be one of many voices to speak intelligently on the issue and reach broader demographics.

There are many which need to be recognized. The Chinese community provided muscle and even their own funding to create grassroots-made signs all over the San Gabriel Valley, Orange County and the Bay Area, when the supposed main “No on 16” group refused to invest in signs and were more focused on staff salaries. Little recognition was given to Tony



Guan for his tireless efforts in the Bay Area, organizing countless pop-up car rallies, and Susan Gao, who organized an effective rally in Arcadia. I am proud of the rally I organized in Irvine through Asian Industry B2B, where I was able to organize Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, Caucasian and Hispanic leaders to speak as voices against Prop 16, as well as young students.

All our collective rallies drew hundreds of cars which circled around many cities beyond just the Asian communities and drew early volunteers to provide the muscle to push back on the onslaught of paid media by the “Yes on 16” campaign. Tony’s early calls for signs was a wise one and covering all Asian areas with this sign, created a strong base and foundation of Republicans, Independents and Democrats to unite.

A big credit goes to Joy Chen, my fellow board director in Asian Industry B2B, for her vision on engaging and including all racial groups. For example, recognizing the disastrous effect of Proposition 16 to black workers in the public sector, where they are overrepresented. Blacks in the public sector are among our most educated and it would be a shame if they were laid off because of Proposition 16. Joy’s vision in our social media was key in early momentum.

While great work was being done all around, I focused on engaging media in my own right and leveraged my relationships with numerous local, ethnic and national outlets from Washington Post to Fox to local CBS to Epoch Times. I want to thank many reporters for news media that leans to the left, who actually thoughtfully grappled with this issue and had spirited conversations and interviews with me, and gave me a fair voice to those opposing Prop 16 like myself.

Bob and Mei Mei Huff, previous successful leaders who fought SCA5 in 2014, rejoined us, and behind the scenes spent their own money to help fund slate mailers to access harder-to-reach audiences.

The road ahead for this issue continues, especially with the latest move by Lowell High School in San Francisco, being one of the first major formerly prestigious high schools in California, getting rid of merit based achievement in favor of race based preferences. Yale and Harvard continue with their discriminatory practices. President Biden dropped the DOJ lawsuit against Yale, enabling this destructive practice.

Critical race theory, which is going in the public schools as we speak, is also a danger and subsequently, the potential rewriting of Chinese participation in California history. Because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, it was a long struggle to even get our contributions recognized in textbooks such as the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. Therefore, this is Asian Industry B2B’s call for unity.

It is important that for a unified grassroots movement, we are discerning of those who are not as focused on the mission, but on trivial and petty matters. I strongly rebuke the actions of individuals whose egos interfered with the successful execution of key actions within a campaign. Let us move forward and fight, as diverse groups that can unite in purpose, without tearing each other down, and working with people who know how to collaborate.

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