UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press

EDITED BY STEVE LOUIE AND GLENN OMATSU

Asian Americans:

THE Movement and the MOMENT

asian americans:

the Movement and the MOMENT

Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 0-934052-34-4

www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc
aascpress@aasc.ucla.edu

Grateful acknowledgment is made for permission to print the following copyrighted works in *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*—

© 2001 by Don T. Nakanishi: "Moving the Historical Moment Forward." © 2001 by Steve Louie: "When We Wanted It Done, We Did It Ourselves." © 2001 by Chris Iijima: "Pontifications on the Distinction between Grains of Sand and Yellow Pearls." © 2001 by Ryan Masaaki Yokota: "Interview with Pat Sumi." © 2001 by Warren Mar: "From Pool Halls to Building Workers' Organizations: Lessons for Today's Activists." © 2001 by Cecile Caguingin Ochoa: "Touching the Fire: A Collection of Essays from Filipina American Activists." © 2001 by Prosy Abarquez-Delacruz: "Holding a Pigeon in My Hand: How Community Organizing Succeeds or Falters." © 2001 by Carol Ojeda-Kimbrough: "The Chosen Road." © 2001 by Rose Ibanez: "Growing Up in America as a Young Filipina American during the Anti-Martial Law and Student Movement in the United States." in the United States." © 2001 by Ray Tasaki: "Wherever There Is Oppression." © 2001 by Miriam Ching Yoon Louie: "It's Never Ever Boring! Triple Jeopardy from the Korean Side."© 2001 by Nancy Hom: "Drinking Tea with Both Hands." © 2001 by Bob Hsiang: "Growing Up in Turmoil: Thoughts on the Asian American Movement."© 2001 by Gordon Lee: "Parting the Wild Horse's Mane: Asian American Images and the Asian Media Collective—A One Act Readable Play." © 2001 by Corky Lee: "Untitled Photo Essay." © 2001 by Liz Del Sol: "Finding Our Common Interests: Personal Reflections about the Asian Movement." © 2001 by Nick Nagatani: "Action Talks and Bullshit Walks": From the Founders of Yellow Brotherhood to the Present." © 2001 by Henry Der: "Roots of a Civil Rights Activist." © 2001 by Brenda Paik Sunoo: "*Song of Ariran*:" In Memory of Helen Foster Snow." © 2001 by Nym Wales and Kim San: "From the "Prologue" and "Epilogue" of *Song of Ariran* ." © 2001 by Harvey Dong: "Transforming Student Elites into Community Activists:A Legacy of Asian American Activism." © 2001 by Merilynne Hamano Quon: "Individually We Contributed, Together We Made a Difference." © 2001 by Daniel C. Tsang: "Slicing Silence: Asian Progressives Come Out." © 2001 by Beverly Kordziel: "To Be a Part of the People: The International Hotel Collective." © 2001 by Nelson Nagai: "I Come from a Yellow Seed." © 2001 by Shinya Ono: "Finding a Home Community." © 2001 by Floyd Huen: "The Advent and Origins of the Asian American Movement in the San Francisco Bay Area: A Personal Perspective." © 2001 by Tram Quang Nguyen: "Caring for the Soul of Our Community: Vietnamese Youth Activism in the 1960s and Today." © 2001 by Mori Nishida: "Serve the People." © 2001 by Glenn Omatsu: "Listening to the Small Voice Speaking the Truth: Grassroots Organizing and the Legacy of Our Movement."

EDITORS Steve Louie and Glenn K. Omatsu
PUBLISHER Russell C. Leong
UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press
GRAPHIC DESIGN/PRODUCTION Mary Uyematsu Kao
PUBLICATIONS ASSISTANT James Kyung-Jin Lee

Cover photograph:
Preparing for the sheriffs and police,
International Hotel eviction night, August 1977.
Photograph by tenant from across the street/Louie/PF

Backcover images:
Tomie Arai, B.Y. Chen, Alan Okada, James Wong, and unknown artists.

Title page image:
Protest demonstration against "energy crisis," Lower Eastside New York City, 1974.
Photograph by Mary Uyematsu Kao/*Amerasia* 15:1 (1989)

Moving the Historical Moment Forward

Don T. Nakanishi
Director and Professor
UCLA Asian American Studies Center

The Asian American Movement of the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s was a watershed event for Asian and Pacific America; an "historical moment," as the late psychologist Erik Erikson would call it, when a special convergence of historical forces and individual experiences led to extraordinary social change.

Today, we take for granted the enduring legacy of the Movement's innovative strategies, vision, and accomplishments, be it the idea of pan-Asian Pacific American unity and collective action, the founding of a multitude of community-based organizations from Boston to Los Angeles, or redress for the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment seeks to capture the visions and voices of the Asian American Movement, to share its profound historical lessons, and to launch a sustained examination by scholars, students, and activists on its significance to Asian Pacific Americans in today's multiracial America.

The book is the first of its kind to document, with twenty-five original essays and with hundreds of archival images and documents, the Asian American Movement from the interlinked vantage points of history and culture, politics and community, race and ethnicity, and generation and gender.

Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment is a unique creative collective act in many respects, bringing together voices representing at least four generations of Asian American activists during the past fifty years. It is truly a book about America—and the relationship of Asian Americans with activists—African American, Native American, Puerto Rican, Vietnamese and other Asian groups, together with activists of all political stripes and including gay and lesbian Asian activists as well.

Intended to reach across and to speak to all generations, *The Movement and the Moment* is not a dry timeline or summary of events, or a

political tract or ideological polemic—but rather, an intimate, insiders' view of the historical, political, and cultural conditions within and outside of the U.S. that dramatically shaped the consciousness of Asian Americans during the period 1965-1985.

The implications of "the movement and the moment" do not end in the latter decades of the twentieth century however, for the Asian American Movement, as I see it, is a history in progress and "in the making" by the daughters and sons of those who were initially involved in the struggles and goals of the Movement.

As an educator and as a social activist who, from my early days at Yale University helped to found and publish the Center's scholarly journal, *Amerasia Journal*, I would have not envisioned such a rich and comprehensive project thirty years ago. The book thus reflects the scholarly development of Asian American Studies at UCLA and its continuous linkages with those activists in the community who dared to imagine, seek, and work towards a more just society.

The book utilizes extensive archives and collections developed by the Center and located at UCLA, including: the collection of the Asian American Studies Center Reading Room headed by Marjorie Lee, the Steve Louie Asian American Movement Archives, Yuri Kochiyama Collection, Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) Collection, and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center Movement Photo Files.

The UCLA Asian American Studies Center was established during 1969-70 as a result of a collective student, faculty, alumni, and community movement. Through its programs in research, undergraduate and graduate teaching and degree programs, publications, library and archival work, and student/community projects, the Center has pursued its original mission, and has sought to enrich and inform not only the UCLA community, but also an array of broader audiences and sectors in the state, the nation, and internationally. Today the Asian American Studies Center is one of four ethnic studies centers at UCLA and one of the oldest and largest programs in the nation.

Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment is part of a series of publishing "firsts" of the Center since its inception, including *Roots*, *Letters in Exile*, *Counterpoint*, *Moving the Image*, and *Asian American Sexualities*—together with the *Amerasia Journal*. These publications have examined and critiqued the Asian and Pacific American experience through radical historical scholarship, new literary, media and film analyses, feminist, gay, and lesbian perspectives, and comparative racial and ethnic frameworks. (See the Center's website

Together,
we can move
the historical
moment—
forward to
a new time,
forward to
a new place.

(www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc) for a complete listing of UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press books).

The editors of *The Movement and the Moment*, Glenn Omatsu and Steve Louie, hope that this collection will inspire others to undertake the task of developing more discussion, classes, and books on the Movement—its legacies, its lessons, and its future. They desire that this book provoke students, educators, and scholars across multiracial and multicultural communities to formulate their own ideas around the present historical moment.

It is fitting that the book was edited, designed, and produced by activists/teachers and cultural workers Glenn Omatsu, Steve Louie, and Mary Kao, who themselves exemplify the aspirations and spirit of the Asian American Movement.

I believe that *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment* will add to the critical dialogue around social change that we collectively began more than thirty years ago. What we have learned from the Asian American Movement—and the historical moment—can continuously be transformed into acts of social justice and expression for all peoples.

Together, we can move the historical moment—forward to a new time, forward to a new place.

—Los Angeles, June 2001

Acknowledgements

Making the Book Happen

It was a *collective* effort putting this book together.

The foundation was laid in a working group that convened after a few of us met serendipitously at a UCLA student conference, "Serve the People," in mid-1998. Belvin Louie, Miriam Ching Louie, Greg Morozumi, Helen Toribio, Bob Wing, Eric Mar, Glenn Omatsu, and I successfully resisted nostalgia; Jung-hee Choi, Eric Tang, Sun Lee, and Dylan Rodriquez provided needed perspective from today's activists. It was proposal-by-tag-team — depending on who could be there, we shared meals, laughter, and intense discussion, and hammered out a book proposal that could bring alive the broad character, stories, and legacy of the Movement through the eyes of its participants. Helen and Miriam were especially active in suggesting and seeking out contributors. Jung-hee's commitment and organizational skills moved us from concept through proposal to start-up.

UCLA's Asian American Studies Center expressed an early interest in the book; Professor Don Nakanishi, the Center's Director, and Professor Russell Leong, *Amerasia Journal* editor and head of UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, encouraged us to submit a proposal, and generously supported this project at every step of the way. They understood what we were trying to do from their own participation in the Movement. Russell joined us actively to help shape the effort. His ideas and insight expanded our horizons on how to make the proposal's visions real on paper.

As we started searching for people who were willing to contribute, the enthusiasm of the authors was contagious. Unseen but never far from anyone's minds, the community was a driving force for them, as well as for everyone who gave time and energy to this project, or supported us in some way. In the course of working on this book, I heard it over and over: if we can help sum up the Movement in a small way, we should do so, and return greater knowledge about our experiences to the community.

In particular, Chris Iijima, Pam Tau Lee, Harvey Dong, Gordon Lee, and Merilynne Hamano Quon provided great criticism, encouraging our efforts at different times during the entire project. My daughter, Joelle,

and her friends gave especially valuable feedback. Everyone's comments made a difference, even if I didn't always want to hear it.

As the articles started coming in, we needed to find visual materials — Movement artifacts. Marji Lee, Coordinator of UCLA's Asian American Studies Center Reading Room, and Judy Soo Hoo, Assistant Coordinator, gave freely of their knowledge and time about what was available and where to look in their collection of archives (and never tired of the questions). From UCLA Special Collections of the Charles Young Research Library, we thank librarian Anne Caiger for helping us gain access to three recently acquired research archives in the Asian American Movement Collection: the Yuri Kochiyama Collection, the Ang Katipunan Collection, and the Steve Louie Archive. Among the many other people who gave us materials, Shoshana Arai shared her sister Nikki's photo files with us, Bob Hsiang searched his files for photographs not only for his narrative but for others, and Isago Isao Tanaka brought out his album that included previously unpublished photographs.

Mary Uyematsu Kao, Publications Manager of UCLA Asian American Studies Center Press, was our Graphics Editor. She drew on her experience and own Movement background to design the book (including the cover), and to organize the day-to-day processes that turned stacks of text and hundreds of images into a book. Technology wizard Tam Nguyen gave us the means to move large files electronically, so the work could move efficiently without killing so many trees. As Mary started producing chapter layouts and moved production forward, we started to document sources. In part, this meant finding and crediting the people whose individual work appears here.

Jim Lee pored through original sources to make sure citations were accurate, and kept metadata on the articles and images organized and up-to-date. We wanted to find everyone we could identify; many works were simply unsigned (as was also customary during that period). But with considerable help from Arlan Huang, Tomie Arai, Alan Okada, Larry Hama, John Yue, Lincoln Cushing, Greg Morozumi, Leland Wong, Rich Wada, Nancy Hom, Harold Adler, Patty Wada, Doug Norberg, Sandy Maeshiro, and Elizabeth Martinez, we were able to peel back the years.

The artists and photographers we found came mainly from the Asian American Movement, of course. But we also used images that reflect important influences on the Asian American Movement by other movements, such as the civil rights, black power, and anti-war movements. As we located and asked people for their permission, it became very clear that values from the movements of thirty and more years ago not only survive, they have much in common with each other.

People like Elda Riverón, Jeff Blankfort, Lisa Lyons, Emory Douglas, Art Silverman, Doug Wachter, Roger Asay, Danny Lyon, and Clayton B. Sampson saw no walls between what they did and the Asian American Movement. This was reflected not only in the work they did then, but the spirit in which they gave it for this book today.

Co-editor Glenn Omatsu's editing experience heightened my confidence that we could actually fulfill the vision for the book. His suggestions and observations on how we would transform ideas and the wealth of stories and materials into a book were invaluable. But it was our shared experiences and common understandings about the Movement over more than thirty years that made it easy to work together, and have fun doing it.

It's also important to acknowledge what's not in this anthology. We concentrated on showing the broad range of ideas and experiences in the Movement. But clearly, there are more stories, and ways of showing them, than can fit in any one book. Many of you we talked to as this anthology took shape had great ideas about other ways to tell more stories about the Movement. We urge you to pursue them and enrich the historical record.

I now understand why people thank their significant others on projects like this. Mary and I met in the Movement, and she supported the project, even though I drove her nuts by being grumpy, dopey, and sleepy. My children, Joelle and Brian, gave me valuable insights about how their generation views issues that the Movement cared about, even when they didn't always know it.

It was a privilege.

Steve Louie
San Francisco
June, 2001

"Free Huey" Black Panther Party rally, Oakland 1968.

When We Wanted It Done, We Did It Ourselves

I have to admit, AzN PrYde kind of caught me off guard. Do a web search, and you can see it for yourself. I'm so far out of that demographic that I could cause my fifteen-year-old son serious embarrassment if I put up an AzN webpage and picked up a Honda Civic to trick out. :-) Don't get me wrong. There're parts of AzN PrYde (think fashion, hip-hop, and car culture wrapped around Asian-ness) that look like fun. But I've also noticed elements of fierce racist thinking. (Note to parents: DON'T automatically assume the worst if you see the spelling around!)

The extreme nationalism worries me. One of the hallmarks of the Asian American Movement was to "unite all who can be united," whether that was within the Asian community or with other communities, especially people of color. This occurred because the Movement saw the glass as half-full, not half-empty; we emphasized our similarities, not our differences, in order to build a new consciousness of who we are and what we stand for. I invite you to see how strongly these ideas are reflected throughout this anthology.

Jonathan Jackson's funeral, "Power salute" of respect, Oakland 1970.

Today, even as we continue to battle racial injustice and politics that pit people against each other, consciousness about race and nationality has become more strongly influenced by the "glass is half-empty" philosophy. Political careers and commercial empires can be built appealing to racial and nationalistic ideas, precisely because it is important to be vigilant about racism. A poll done earlier this year showed sizeable negativity towards Asian Americans. One of its findings: 32 percent still think Chinese Americans are more loyal to China than the U.S. (and 20 percent weren't sure). The poll's exposure of animosities towards Asian Americans was subsequently confirmed by the hostilities revealed in the media towards Chinese Americans after an American spy plane made an emergency landing in China.

But in being vigilant, is the glass half-full or half-empty? In big urban areas where Asian populations are especially large, middle school

youth pick up the "my Asian brothers and sisters" beat. But there's no rhythm and there's no soul — it doesn't reach out.

There's more "us" or "us-first" consciousness in Asian communities than at any time in our American history, sometimes even in supposedly progressive organizations. Somewhere along the line, "unite all who can be united" became "watch out for yourself because no one else will." But as society moves into a future where "majority" and "minority" may mean things very different than they have, what kind of society do we want and whose interests should prevail? Lessons from the Asian American Movement may have more relevance than anyone thought when this anthology project first got started nearly three years ago.

"Free Huey" Black Panther Party rally, Oakland 1968.

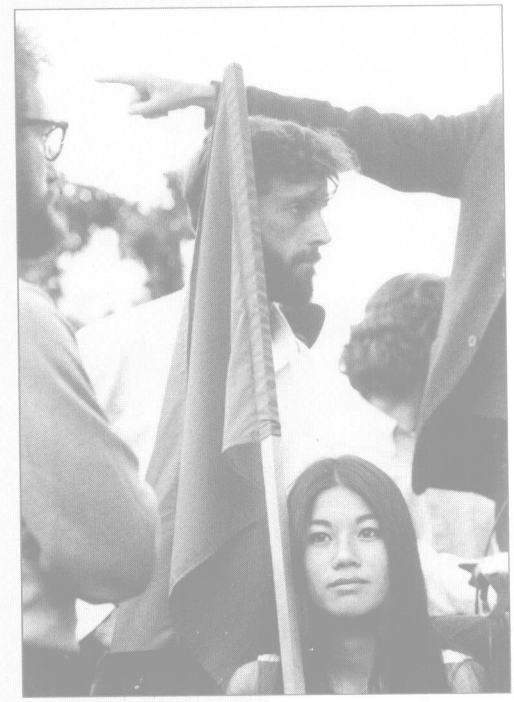
In the late Sixties, the same kinds of questions were being asked because of what preceded us. We saw sit-ins become a common tactic to protest race discrimination at lunch counters and auto dealerships. Police batons, dogs, and water cannons were the common response. The Berlin Wall was built. Civil rights confrontations escalated. Armed federal authorities forced school desegregation. White-escalated violence against blacks soared. Black churches were bombed; children died. The Civil Rights Act was passed. Weeks later, four civil rights workers were killed. John Glenn went into space for the first time. African nations across the continent declared their independence from colonialism. Cold War tensions with the then-Soviet Union rose with the abortive U.S. government-backed Bay of Pigs invasion and the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba.

San Francisco State Strike 1968.

Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. Months later, John Kennedy was assassinated. Immigration laws restricting Asian country's quotas were lifted. The Free Speech Movement erupted at UC Berkeley. The U.S. government started sending troops to Vietnam, and swiftly escalated its involvement. Malcolm X was assassinated. The Black Panther Party was organized in California. The anti-draft and anti-war movement spread in the United States and in dozens of other countries. Women questioned traditional roles and attitudes. "Orientals" were held up as "model minorities." Martin Luther King was assassinated. Third World Liberation Front strikes heated up campuses, first at San Francisco State College and then at UC Berkeley.

Small wonder we questioned who we were, where we stood, and what we should do as we came of age.

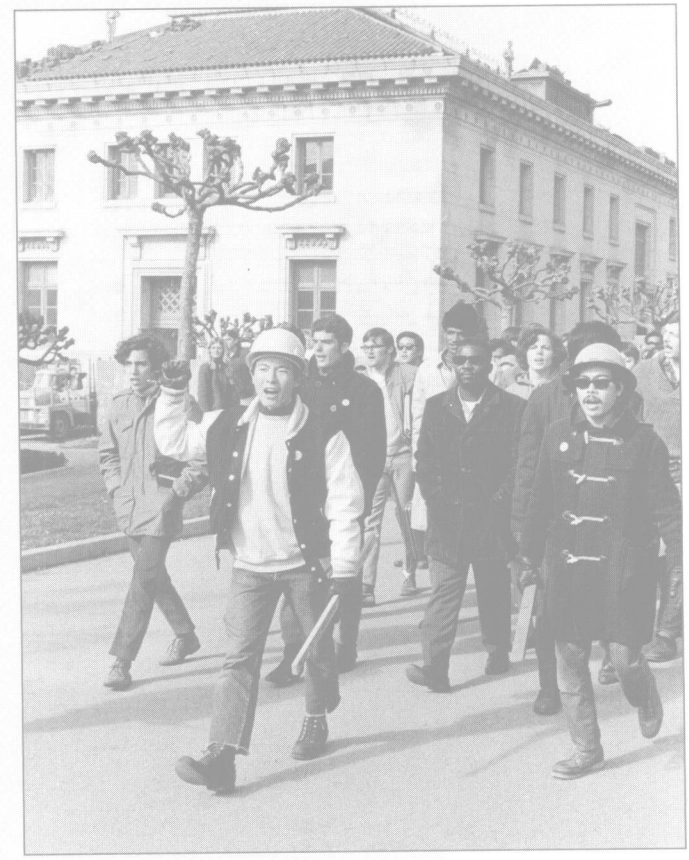
Conventional wisdom now portrays that period in American history as suffering from divisiveness and its mass movements as chaotic, disorderly, and unruly. But this anthology's stories affirm another analysis: minorities infused new vitality and strength into American society with struggles that opposed the inhumanity of discrimination and oppression of anyone different from "the majority." It is not surprising, but it is fitting that America's racial minorities rose to demand the best from humanity and nothing less.



San Francisco State Strike 1968.

From the beginning of this project, we sought to tell the story of the Asian American Movement from the point of view of its participants, who came from a variety of backgrounds and went on to varied lives. These are folks who were in the Movement's trenches, the people without whom there would be no Movement. Their ideas and perspectives crossed many lines in the political spectrum – but broad as the Movement was, we still challenged the status quo in the community and society as a whole, and were radical and controversial.

In telling this story, it's important to point out that the Movement's visions aren't isolated. In the late Sixties, our closest brothers and sisters were in the black, Chicano, and Native American movements. But struggles against oppressive conditions are not ours alone. Oppression wears many masks — ask people in Ireland, ask workers, ask people who are gay and lesbian, ask women, or ask minority nationalities *of every color* in countries around the globe. The Movement's lessons and legacies are important because they come from our direct experiences — but we share them with many, many others.



UC Berkeley, Third World Strike, 1969.

Individually, the stories in this anthology are complex. They weave the experiences and emotions of race, gender, nationalism, class, and history into rich accounts of a handful of years. They tell you what it was like to live at the time, to deal politically and personally with the challenges society threw at us. Most are narratives; a few are essays. A one-act play waits for you to be seated; poetry dances with sentences. The writers will make you smile, chuckle, and laugh; they'll make you clench your jaw, nod your head, shake your head, and, yes, bring tears to your eyes. You'll share observation, revelation, jubilation, anger, despair, sorrow, quiet insight, happiness, and

Sather Gate, UC Berkeley, Third World Strike 1969.

the exhilaration from being part of something that was bigger than any one of us.

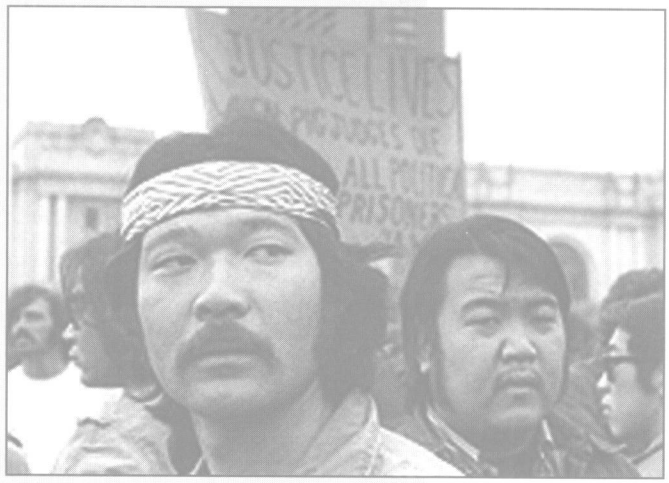
Collectively, these stories chronicle the rise of the Movement at the point when it became a moment in history. They explore the nature of the relationship between movements and society. They point to the relationship between movements and the individual, and the importance of understanding how changes in people and society have a symbiotic relationship. They paint detailed strokes about how the Movement burst on the scene and how people's involvement changed their lives.

The visual record is no less compelling. Photographs captured moments. Graphics and drawings got us thinking. Leaflets and flyers rallied support. Newspapers reported new angles. Newsletters shared accomplishments. Posters inspired and ridiculed. Cartoons made a point. Lyrics and rhetoric spoke to our soul and emotions. (And a great rib recipe will make your mouth water!). What's here is barely a fraction of what's out there in garages, on bookshelves, and in closets. It's all culture from the street, created in the basements, storefronts, and living rooms of the community, not the boardrooms and plush offices that tower high above the street in glass-and-concrete canyons.

Rebellious and defiant, we were out to make society serve the needs of the people, and that included us. We would not be ignored, passed by, put down, or stereotyped. Even the name "Oriental," just like "Negro," became offensive

because it evoked all the negative aspects of an era we wanted to be done with. Profoundly influenced by the struggle of black people — and by people like Martin Luther King, Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, Bobby Seale, Huey P. Newton, and Leonard Peltier — we stood proudly alongside black, Chicano and Native American brothers and sisters in countless marches, strikes, and protests. The Movement struck a huge chord among the young people because we stood for doing things differently. We rejected the idea that a society that clearly had no interest in our well-being should define our social, political, and cultural life and needs.

Determined to change this, our vision included reform, immediate needs, revolution, and what the future should be. "Serve the people" became a rallying cry. We fought for, and forged, ethnic studies. To meet pressing community needs, we set up medical clinics, free breakfast programs, draft counseling, community advocacy groups, nutrition, children and youth programs, childcare, food giveaways, regular movie showings, senior drop-in centers, language and tutoring classes, and arts programs because those services were scarce in those days. To better understand what society needed to become and help ourselves change, we read and studied Franz Fanon, Marx, Lenin, and Mao, and debated dialectics. Because we shouldn't wait for the future to start making changes, we started women's groups and took on women's issues within our organizations.

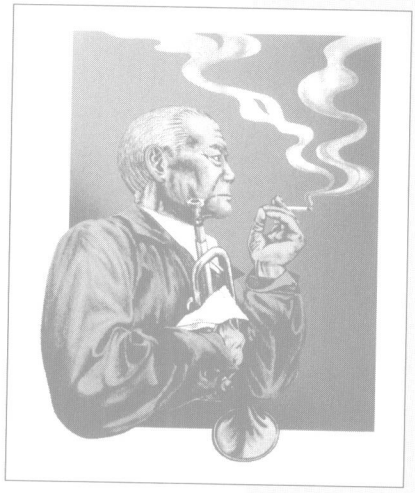


"Los Siete" rally, Oakland, San Francisco 1969.

We had an international perspective, drawing inspiration from and supporting independence and freedom movements of peoples in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, whether we wanted to help raise their standard of living, opposed colonialism, or saw imperialism as the enemy of people around the world. We opposed the war in Vietnam, whether we hated all wars, opposed genocide, or supported victory for the National Liberation Front and Ho Chi Minh. We learned from international struggles, whether we saw them as freedom movements, as countries that wanted independence, or as Marxist-Leninists who put people's needs before profit. Our heroes included Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara. We cut cane in the fields of Cuba and saw firsthand the successes of Chinese socialism.

Support for the Native American takeover of Alcatraz, 1970.

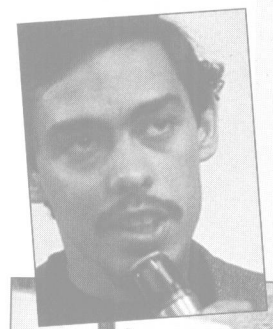
Clearly, this period lies in the past. Conventional wisdom in 2001's Asian America dismisses our radicalism as youthful excesses, and even some Movement veterans have turned their backs on the ideas they held at that time. These twenty-five writers celebrate them for reasons as varied as their backgrounds. But you won't find nostalgia here. The legacies span stories; there are personal lessons shared in each essay.



Manong Blues.
© 1979, Jim Dong/courtesy of the artist

A note: the history of Asian America is a stage with a growing cast. One or more nationalities may hold the center stage momentarily, but as decades pass, others join them. Today, we enjoy the vibrancy of Southeast and South Asian communities. In 1970, we did not. Yet, the Movement's legacies don't belong to any one nationality because they speak more to the American experience than our roots in Asia. Are the Movement's lessons and legacies too far removed from those who came later? Is the glass half-full or half-empty?

For myself personally, I don't think there was ever a time when I didn't know I was Chinese — or, to put it a different way, when I wasn't *reminded* I was Oriental. Sometimes it was violence, like having to fight my way home after school because bullies thought our family didn't belong in "their" city. Sometimes it was "mere" name-calling and taunts, as in the mid-Sixties when classmates regularly joked about playing "kill the gook" with me on one side and everyone else on the other. They laughingly said they'd give me a gun, but they'd still kill me because they were a bigger force. When the Vietnam War ended years later, I thought again about bigger forces and smaller forces when that last U.S. military helicopter left the U.S. embassy in Vietnam.



Young Lords Party spokesperson Juan Gonzalez speaks to community gathering in I Wor Kuen storefront basement, San Francisco.
© 1971, Nikki Arai

As a youngster in the Fifties, the deal was you handled discrimination with dignity. It didn't take with me. My father, a Christian minister, tried to teach me to "turn the other cheek" when confronted with indignities. I told him that doing so would only get the other side of my ass kicked. But more importantly, my folks taught me the lesson of whom to stand with. My dad eventually left the church because at that time, he felt the institution limited his ability to work on civil rights issues. I remember my mom getting angry whenever the television showed black people ("Negroes" then) being attacked by police dogs and water cannons for nothing more than demanding the civil right to sit where they wanted on the bus and eat where they wanted in restaurants.

When the Black Panther Party marched into California's legislative chambers in Sacramento with unloaded shotguns, I sure liked their attitude. I didn't think it was a coincidence that the Civil Rights Movement was followed by increased

police brutality in the black community. I thought the Panthers were right to defend it. In my first year of college, I began volunteering in a storefront in Watts, one area in Los Angeles' black community.

Around the same time, someone told me that the first issue of *Gidra*, the first radical Asian American newspaper, was in the works. I started going to meetings of the L.A. Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), and I felt like everything fell into place. These were people who put reason and structure to experiences and emotion I'd grown up with. The chip on my shoulder and the isolation and frustration I'd felt trying to fight back by myself fell away, replaced by the growing realization that racism was a social issue, amid the solidarity I felt in AAPA. Fighting back took on a whole different dimension.

International Women's Day, San Francisco 1971.

Slowly, my circle of friends began to change as I threw myself into Movement activities. I helped organize the first Asian group at Occidental College in Los Angeles. There were barely 60 Asian students there at the time, and they were pretty divided on whether we even needed a group. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was active on campus, the anti-war movement was in full swing, and the Black Student Union was making white students very uncomfortable with demands for funding from student body fees. Joining that mix seemed just a shade too radical for many of my peers, but a handful of us finally started a group. We successfully demanded and organized the first Asian American history class at Occidental, and were active in the Third World student coalition.

In college, although I didn't know it at the time, I started rethinking my life the deeper I got into Movement activities. I spent a year on the road meeting Movement activists throughout the country. In the San Francisco Bay Area, Boston and New York, I stayed long enough to help, and make some lifelong friends. At that time in 1970, I counted over sixty campuses with Asian American student groups, all of them homegrown. No one had gone on the road to start them; centuries of American capitalism had done that for us. Everyone had stories about their local experiences. You could already see that "bigger something" was changing our lives — right in front of us, history in the making. For the first time, Asian Americans were visibly joining en masse with black and brown people to fight racism and other forms of oppression.

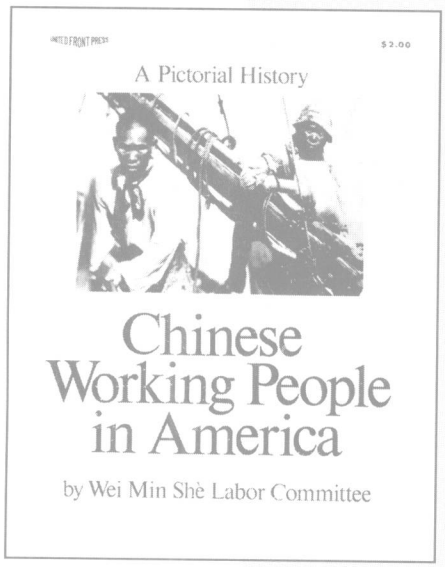
If you want knowledge,
you must take part
in the practice of
changing reality.
If you want to know
the taste of a pear,
you must change
the pear by eating
it yourself.

Mao Tse-tung
On Practice, 1937

Some of my heroes were Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai who both abandoned their class backgrounds to join the revolution in China. Throughout the years, I have had a devil of a time explaining to my in-laws, relatives in China, and friends I have made during travels to China why I admired and studied Mao. They all assumed it was because I was a patriotic, overseas Chinese. Nothing could be further from the truth. I heard about Mao's ideas from the Black Panther Party. The Panthers introduced the Red Book to the American movement, and popularized the idea of "Serve the People." On my second trip to China recently, I finally met someone who "got it right." He'd heard about my activities on Kearny Street in San Francisco's Chinatown, knew about Mao's popularity, and asked me why I liked him. Thinking we were just making conversation, I told him, "Mao talked about eating pears." He grinned, and through the translator said, "You like Mao because he showed you a different way of looking at the world?" I was astounded. He asked me how I was introduced to Mao, and when I told him, he solemnly told me, "The Panthers served the people." I nearly fell over.

Anti-war demonstration, Los Angeles City Hall, 1971. The old left in the new movement.

If Mao crystallized a different view of the world that I was struggling to learn, I still had to decide what to do with that, and how to do it. My decision to work on a truck dock unloading tractor-trailers to organize among workers of color was a political decision and something I sought, along with others I knew in the Movement. But it was much harder to shed ideas I'd grown up with about what it meant to work with my hands, and to deal with how difficult it was to organize a workers' caucus. One organization decided I should step down from a leadership body because I had some very individualistic tendencies and was not setting a good example (it's definitely a struggle to "walk the talk"). On the dock, we were working collectively. Could I learn how to lead people in making collective decisions when everyone, including myself, was accustomed to looking toward someone else for decisions?



Chinese Working People in America.

To this day, those twelve years unloading trucks were the most important days of my life (not because of the work, mind you, because it was boring-ass work doing what we were told to do). I worked with others to get organized, to deal with problems on-the-job and support community issues like the International Hotel. I learned more about respect for people as human beings, more about what people care about in their lives, and how perceptively everyday people can analyze situations and the world around them, than I have learned at any other point in my life. These experiences taught me about how to listen to what people need, instead of making assumptions, and how to act with them to get things done.