



YELLOW POWER



DURING THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 1970S, THE BLACK PANTHERS ROSE TO THE BATTLEFRONT FOR THE OPPRESSED PEOPLE IN AMERICA. MANY ASIAN AMERICANS WERE RIGHT THERE, TOO.

The Panthers set the stage in the late 1960s and were the unofficial leadership for the American revolt against The Man. A lot of people probably have no idea that this movement included Asian Americans that supported, joined, and participated with Black Panther-inspired groups. Yes, Asian Americans were badass and fought oppression in the forms of drugs, racism, and injustice.

Inevitably, some of you will say "But you forgot this..." or "This isn't true," but we don't care, so don't waste your time telling us what we missed. We wrote about what we thought was accessible and interesting. We did the best we could with the people who responded to our inquiries. And then there are those Yellow Chickenshit Charlies who held back or wouldn't respond at all. You know who you are, and we're sure your ex-movement group will thank you for being a pussy.

In our quest to make sense of this period, we interviewed a bunch of people who participated in various organizations from LA to Seattle to New York who were part of the worldwide movement during this turbulent and exciting period of protest in America. Most of the people we talked to said that the Yellow Power Movement ended when the Black Panthers were split in the early 1970s. The end of the Vietnam War was also cited as an end to the massive protest, but most of the individuals we met are still active and waiting for the next big revolt so they can kick The Establishment's ass.

To our knowledge, this is the biggest, fattest, and most informative collection of articles written in a non-academic magazine about this topic. But take it for what it is—a series of interviews that describe a bigger story of movement and revolution around the world. The individuals aren't as important as the entire picture. If you're an Asian American, a history buff, or a person who gives a shit about society, then these pages are for you.



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Right: Lee Lew-Lee is for the proletariat, but he looks like a million bucks. (Photo: MW) Video images were liberated from his video, *All Power to the People! The Black Panther Part and Beyond*. Below: Lew-Lee chills in Oregon (Photo courtesy of Lee Lew-Lee)



GORDON PARKS
Life Magazine Photo Journalist ('49-'71)



KATHLEEN CLEAVER
Black Panther Party
Central Committee ('67-'71)



LEONARD PELTIER
American Indian Movement



DR. MICHAEL McCARTY
Black Panther Party ('69-'71)
Acupuncture Doctor



SAFIYA ALSTON BUKHARI
Black Panther Party ('69-'71)
BLA ('72-'74)



YELLOW PANTHER



Mao 5 X 2 Ché 0 MLK 3

BY ANY MEANS LEE LEW-LEE

by Martin Wong



66 Giant Robot

LEE LEW-LEE is a Chinese-Jamaican who would rather talk about how his grandparents were scholars in China than say what it was like to interview Geronimo Pratt, Leonard Peltier, and Mumia Abu-Jamal in prison.

Likewise, he would rather recount how the I Wor Kuen and Young Lords teamed up to resuscitate New York's Gueveneur Hospital than describe meetings with Jackie Robinson, Haile Selassie, and the Dalai Lama. After several lengthy discussions with Eric and me, the LA-based filmmaker took me to his secret book source and provided more contacts than I'll ever be able to dial. Lee's humble, generous, and playful personality belies the fact that he belonged to radical Asian Power groups as well as the Black Panther Party, and is a fierce revolutionary to this day.

KING COMMIE

I had a scholarship to go to the Cathedral of St. John the Divine choir school. When I was in the eighth grade, Dr. King came and gave his first anti-war speech. I was one of three students chosen to meet him and he was very kind. Then he sat opposite me in the cathedral. He was staring at me. At first I thought I was imagining it. Then I looked around and noticed that I was the only person of color up in the choir on that side of the cathedral. When he gave the sermon, he began talking about the Vietnam War.

Basically he asked, "How can we ask for civil rights in this country when we deny other people their human rights?" That was a profound statement in 1967. The whole cathedral was silent, and then in about 30 seconds there were 5,000 people crying. I've never seen 5,000 people cry again, even to this day.

I thought to myself, "This is a dangerous thing to say; they're going to kill him." And of course, a year and two months later, he was killed. I think it was a month after the sermon that he

nize, to bring all these different groups together. I would tell the IWK what the Panthers were doing in Harlem and what the Young Lords were doing in East Harlem. I spent a lot of time with the Young Lords.

The IWK was like the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, and the Red Guards. It was a Maoist organization run by two engineers from Mainland China, Yu Han and Yu Men. They were the best ideologists because they were here in the United States doing graduate work. They

I knew the Red Book better than anybody. I spent two years reading it. I also read Marx, Stalin, and Hegel. In the Panther Party there was really very little time to read. The Panthers were basically a daily grind.

There were no part-time Panthers. You couldn't just join. You had six months on probation, gradually getting initiated deeper and deeper into the party. The things I remember the most clearly were the different programs we had, especially the breakfast program and anti-drug program.

The IWK or the Red Guard would defend the Asian community if the racists wanted to take people of Asian descent to concentration camps.

offered himself as a peace candidate to stop the Vietnam War. In fact, the day after the sermon, all the New York newspapers labelled him, "King Commie," and you could see the campaign to demonize him.

When Dr. King died, I was in school in upstate New York. I saw the reaction of the white kids there and the reaction of the people in the community. There was a riot. I dropped out of school and joined the movement. I'd already been going to movement things for a year and a half before that, but after Dr. King was killed, I joined the Ahmed Evans Defense Committee. Ahmed Evans was a political prisoner in Milwaukee, a brother in the ghetto who dared shoot back at the Klan. So we got together a defense committee.

ASIAN-AMERICAN ACTION

When I was 16, I joined the Asian Americans for Action (AAA) in the end of 1968 and the I Wor Kuen (IWK) in 1969. When I was going back and forth from school I would go to meetings. It was not uncommon to belong to more than one organization.

Taking a cue from Yuri Kochiyama and being a multi-racial person, I tried to help people orga-

decided that these poor kids in Chinatown didn't know how to organize, so we studied the Red Book a lot.

On the East Coast, we knew about Alex Hing and the Red Guards. The IWK was patterned after the Red Guards. It was one-upsmanship. They were the Red Guards. But what was the IWK? The Boxer Rebellion. You can't get better than that. The movements were very connected. The real problem was that we didn't have fax machines. We sent letters, but many times the letters were intercepted, so people got in airplanes.

THE PANTHER DAILY GRIND

I started becoming involved with the Panther Party in June 1969, when I dropped out of school. I got closer and closer to the Panther Party and joined in December 1969. When I joined the Panther Party, I talked to Athena Shakur and Bashir Saunders. I told Bashir I had been in these other organizations and could I be a contact between the Harlem Branch of the Panther Party and the IWK and AAA. For a little while, I tried to do that, but I got totally subsumed by all the things I had to do with the Panther Party.

We had a health complex in the South Bronx on Boston Road. We had free clothing, a free food program, all these things. Most importantly, we went door-to-door, organizing strikes, things like that from 5 o'clock in the morning.

The Panthers stopped wearing the black beret and leather jacket in the end of 1968. People think that went on and on, and it didn't. We stopped that because it made it easy for people to infiltrate. That all stopped before the Panther 21, I think. I came in after the Panther 21.

The good thing about the Panther Party was that it brought the idea of socialism. Let's look at this (Mao's) revolutionary ideology from China and bring it into the African context. And then take it into the American context, understanding that we are colonized as people of color in the ghettos of America. Chinatown is a ghetto. IWK said the same thing.

So we began to look at neocolonialism, Marxism, Ho Chi Minh, and these different ideologies and how to bring them together in the context of the United States. For example, if Mao had his barefoot doctors, we would have our barefoot doctors and our health centers. We didn't believe in Western anything, so if you were going to be a barefoot doctor, you were

FISTS OF RIGHTEOUS HARMONY by Martin Wong

With the Western powers jamming their collective tongues down China's throat and the Manchu Ch'ing dynasty shackling up in the Forbidden City in 1895, a secret society of patriots formed and called themselves *I Wor Kuen*—the *Fists of Righteous Harmony*. This group of red-turban-wearing martial artists became known to foreigners as the Boxers.

The IWK's initial goal was to run the Ch'ings and the Westerners out of China, but the Empress Dowager convinced them to focus on the gweilo influence. Christian missionaries, Chinese converts, and foreigners in general were sought out and beaten down by the Boxers, who cast magic spells to protect themselves from bullets and gain support from spirit soldiers.

Foreign diplomats and businesspeople fended off attacks for two months after the Boxers took over Peking. When the Empress Dowager's promise to dispel the rebellion proved empty, the Imperialist forces of Europe and America proceeded to crush both the Boxers and the Ch'ing rulers. Then they pillaged the capital city and created an economic and political gang-bang that would last until the Communists seized control of China after World War II.

The Boxers' skin wasn't bulletproof and their actions weren't exactly harmonious. They tended to be xenophobic and reactionary. But the IWK's cause was righteous and the activists in New York's Chinatown named themselves after them.



IWK BLACK PANTHER
GR [X] PROD: ASIAN POWER



going to learn acupuncture. If Mao had his People's Revolutionary Army, we would have our People's Revolutionary Army in the sense that the Panther Party would defend the black community against the racists. The IWK or the Red Guard would defend the Asian community if the racists wanted to take people of Asian descent to concentration camps. That was a real threat back then.

There was a lot of training. We learned how to break down rifles and guns. We learned military strategy. For example, what did Mao mean when he said that "force had to be 2-to-1?" You cannot win a shoot-out if you have less than a 2-to-1 advantage. You have to understand what a fire zone is, how to apply what Mao said in *Selected Military Writings* to the actual reality if you have to fight in the ghetto, and how to make Molotov cocktails.

HARLEM VS. CHINATOWN

One of the differences between the African community and the Asian community was that the IWK couldn't just come out and walk down the street. If you came out all the time and did a lot of propaganda, you would get into some very seri-

ous fights. A lot of people were very skilled in martial arts and at the time, the KMT was very strong in New York's Chinatown. They controlled all the family associations and they would send goons to beat you up, like the Flying Dragons, White Shadows, and people like that.

To be in the Panther Party in Harlem was much easier because they had much greater community support. You didn't have to worry about going down the street and being beaten up so much as having cops trying to kill you. Mao said, "To be effective you have to be like a fish among the people." The Panther Party was much more effective in grass-roots organizing than the IWK.

The truth is that the historic conditions did not exist at the time in Chinatowns in the United States. The United States was at war with Vietnam and here we were walking around supporting the Viet Cong. They didn't allow any Asian Americans to become citizens in 1965, and a lot of people wanted to become American citizens. A lot of people considered us to be communists and traitors. Of course, the more somebody calls you a communist, the more you want to become one.

INTERNATIONALISTS

The Black Panther Party had a political and a military wing, as did any socialist revolutionary organization of the time period. The Panther Party followed the same command structure of the liberation movements overseas. The Panther Party, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the I Wor Kuen, the Red Guard, the Young Lords, the Brown Berets, the White Panther Party, the Young Patriots—all these organizations saw themselves as part of a worldwide youth revolution. The Panther Party in particular sent people to the Middle East and to socialist countries like Cuba for training in military affairs, guerrilla warfare, and other things. This occurred around 1970. You began to see quite a few people going overseas to be trained in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Palestine, and Ireland. At that point, people were preparing for guerrilla war. Our idea was always to have a mass struggle and to organize as many people as possible to guard what we now call human rights.

Every city in the country had what they called a "Red Squad." Chicago, New York, Los Angeles—their intelligence units used to spy on anybody who was against the war in Vietnam, anyone who was talking about civil rights, affirmative action, union organizing, or student unions. It is estimated that the CIA actually had spied upon 24,000 Americans and opened 30 million pieces of mail during that time period. There was good reason to be paranoid. Sometimes people were actually assassinated.

GOING UNDERGROUND

We had a song: "Hold your heads high/Panthers marching by/We won't take no jive/Not from a regular 45/Free Huey, free Bobby/Goddamn, we gotta free Eldridge." All they had to do was arrest our leaders and the whole thing fell apart. Cult of personality was the worst thing, and it destroyed the movement. We mustn't have hero worship again.

I quit the Black Panther Party in 1970 when all the slaughter started to happen in Harlem. I went underground. Hearing the stories of how my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, and my aunt survived the Japanese Occupation taught me a lot about how to survive. It's a sad reality when you're in your own country and you haven't broken any laws. I didn't kill anybody. I didn't

THREE TAPES THE HARD WAY

by Eric Nakamura

Here are a few tapes to get you into the mindset of revolution to fight back against your oppressors. Sure, there are tons of tapes out there that might represent fighting back, but this is a great little collection that ranges from the fake and funky to the hard and real.

BLACK GESTAPO Approx. 90 min. Director Lee Frost. No name recognition on this tape like *Dolemite* or *Shaft*, but you do get a Blackploited view at how power gets corrupted. A black man, Rod Perry as General Ahmed, wants to start a Watts black army and he gets it going, but then it splinters off in a bad angle. The People's Army Group square off with cheery white racketeers who have the gambling, prostitution, and drug market cornered. The army takes over with violence and gets too fat, they get a training compound with swarms of big-breasted white women and are living like Idi Amin. General Ahmed gets word of this and it's up to him to set everything straight. Meanwhile the whiteys get driven out of town. With gun battles, freebie breast shots, pimp slaps, and militant uniforms, shit goes off in this film. There aren't exactly any Black Panthers in this film, but it's a satire on how local armies get started.

THE FBI WAR ON BLACK AMERICA 60 min. This documentary by Denis Mueller and Deb Ellis has great select footage from Malcolm X, MLK, and some Black Panthers. It traces the COINTELPRO, the FBI, police, and the KKK who were out to destroy the black revolutionary movement by killing the young and outspoken Fred Hampton, X, and MLK, among many others. With interviews with Kathleen Cleaver, FBI testimony, Huey P. Newton, Geronimo Pratt, H. Rap Brown, and Adam Clayton Powell, this film is heavy on the Panthers. Although it clocks in a bit too short, it gives you an idea of what really happened.

BROTHERHOOD OF DEATH 85 min. Director Bill Berry. No city talks here. *Brotherhood of Death* starts off with black Vietnam War soldiers who come back and end up in the South. A local black woman gets raped, her boyfriend gets beat



even commit any felonies. But I had to go underground. I continued living; I went to college and everything. It was a futile reality, though. You realize that you're not going to change the system from within it.

ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE

I had been a photographer before I was in the Black Panther Party. I set it aside for the party, because they didn't want a photographer coming off the streets. It was kind of suspicious. I picked it up again because of Gordon Parks' book, *Choice of Weapon*. Later, I became friends with Gordon. I credit him with saving my life, actually. He gave me direction. When you're in the mode of revolution and you're thinking that you're going to kill the enemy, and then you find that there's a way to change society without having to kill people, that's quite liberating.

The film, *All Power to the People*, is an organizing tool to help people in the black community say, "Look, Asians are not your enemy." Originally, in the film we wanted to have one part about the Asian movement, one part about the Latino movement, one part about the African movement... but the mandate we got from German TV was to do the Panther Party, so we had to focus on that. But we still tried in the context of the film to make people see the much bigger picture. I'm not advocating that we overthrow our government, but I think in the future this system will collapse on its own. People ought to be aware and ready to replace it in the future.

ORIGINAL GUERRILLAS

People turn on the TV today and see Bobby Seale selling barbecued spare ribs. They don't realize that 30 years ago he wasn't selling barbecued spare ribs. They look at Geronimo Pratt and think, "Oh, he's OG." He's beyond OG. OG ain't shit. He's an old guerrilla, that's what he is. The youth has nobody from our generation in the mainstream that's telling the truth. Jesse Jackson has sold out. All these other so-called leaders you see on TV—Sharpton, Young, even Farrakhan—they're all bought out. They're not going to give you an hour on TV to talk about them. It costs \$400,000 an hour. It's misinformation. Propaganda, communication, and public opinion—that's how they run the media. They make people think the '60s were a time of free love, free this, free that, *Steal This Book*, and Abbie Hoffman. Abbie Hoffman and Yuppies were clowns. The real revolutionaries were hardcore revolutionaries who got killed on a daily basis.

When Timothy Leary said, "Tune in, turn on, drop out," most of us didn't agree with him; either. Leary worked for the government at Harvard, doing LSD experiments on people. The more serious revolutionaries didn't do heroin, cocaine, or any drugs at all. Anybody who did drugs, we expelled. The Panther Party was anti-drugs. The Panther Party, the Young Lords, and maybe the IWK on the East Coast used to go out, grab the drug dealers,

and beat the crap out of them. If one came back, you'd go get a gun, put it to the guy's head, and say, "If you come back here, you're fucked." And the cops had a program going in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles because drugs were coming in through the military. They found out in the Vietnam War that a lot of brothers came back and said that drugs were being sent in body bags to the ghettos. We realized drugs were a way they were destroying the revolution.

THE WAY TO SURVIVE

I am insignificant. And I don't pretend to speak for the entire movement, but I can speak honestly about those that I knew. We were willing to sacrifice our own lives if need be for our fellow human beings and our people in the ghetto who might even hate us. Everybody was 17, 18, 20—nobody thought they'd live to be 30. Everybody thought they would be dead. I think for the 21st century, Maoism isn't going to make it. Marxism and Leninism aren't going to make it. People are going to have to make a new kind of ethic. Malcolm said, "Think for yourself." You don't need anybody to tell you what to do. Malcolm never saw a fax machine or the Internet. This stuff is new. Think in a new way. Organize in a new way. That's the way to survive.

Lee Lew-Lee's two-hour documentary, *All Power to the People! The Black Panther Party and Beyond* can be purchased for \$30.00 from Electronic News Group, PO Box 86209, LA, CA, 90086. Lee is currently working on *Downwinders*, a new documentary about nuclear pollution.



PAT SUMI MET THE NORTH VIETNAMESE GENERAL

Pat Sumi was one of the individuals we wanted to interview for this article. But as we were getting our editorial minds up-to-date, Pat passed away, stricken with cancer. According to Lee Lew-Lee, she wanted a copy of the photograph of the delegation to Asia before she passed away. Eldridge Cleaver, who had the neg, never made a copy for her. This image you see above was liberated from Cleaver's book, *Soul on Ice*.

Pat grew up in East LA, admittedly a model Asian getting good grades and, to quote Mao, "a frog at the bottom of a well." She traveled throughout the US to get a glimpse of how life really worked outside of her home. She went to Africa in 1965 and learned that the people there have elements in common with Asians. After college, she traveled to the South, where she saw poverty and racism firsthand. This is where she realized that her life was going to change. After attending grad school, Sumi moved back West and joined a hippie commune in 1967.

Later, she helped set up a coffeehouse near Camp Pendleton in San Diego to talk to GIs about what the heck they were doing and what was going on. "When you start messing with the troops, you're messing with the power that The Man has to control most of the so-called 'free world,'" said Sumi in a 1971 *Gidra* interview. Her group helped organize the Movement for Democratic Military, which sounds like an oxymoron. Although she admits that they did some good, they also messed some soldiers' minds up. In recognition of her work, Sumi was invited to join the Anti-Imperialist People's Delegation on their trip to North Korea, North Vietnam, and China. (Alex Hing, who joined the delegation as a member of the Red Guard Party, talks about the trip on page 79.)

-EN

up, and the three white perpetrators walk around strutting. The ex-soldiers decide that going to the church and talking about it is no longer good enough. Alongside the funky music score, they fight back and beat the shit out of one of the men. But after the nice local sheriff gets murdered by the Klan while investigating the murder of a black man, the locals get organized to fight back and beat the shit out of the Klan, and they do it with force and brains. I'm not sure if Black Panthers were plentiful in the South, but this brotherhood was solid enough to take care of The Man.



Clockwise from left: Richard Aoki decked out in full Panther gear (Photo by Nikki Aral), I-Hotel eviction notice burning with Steve Louie taking a photo in the right bottom corner (Photo courtesy of José), I-Hotel protesters including bespectacled Harvey Dong on far left (Photo courtesy of Steve Louie).



BERKELEY AND BEYOND



Mao	X	Ché	MLK
2	0	0	0

A GANG OF FOUR

by Martin Wong

Photo: MW



70 Giant Robot

A ton of e-mails and phone calls led me to the Asian-owned, movement-rooted Eastwind Books shop on Shattuck Street in Berkeley.

That's where I met with Richard Aoki (charter member and Field Marshal of the Black Panthers and spokesperson of UC Berkeley's Asian American Political Alliance), Harvey Dong (worker and tenant organizer), Steve Louie (member of Wei Chi Min and worker organizer), and Vicci Wong (a founding member of UC Berkeley's AAPA, involved with SNCC, and worker organizer). Eastwind was too small for all of us, so we procured a corner booth at a nearby Burger King. It was weird to talk to a bunch of political radicals in a corporate death-burger joint, but sometimes the most dangerous place is the safest place.

PART I: STEVE LOUIE

"The Asian Movement was tremendously liberating," says Steve Louie, sifting through his collection of slides, prints, and radical newspapers from the early 1970s.

The third-generation ABC first became involved with Asian activism in 1969 when he was studying sociology at Occidental College in Los Angeles. When he received a scholarship for independent study, he used it to travel the Bay Area, Boston, New York, and across the country where "groups were coming up like weeds."

He settled in San Francisco, where he made contacts during his travels. At this time, the International Hotel was a center of Asian American activism, with elderly Filipinos and Chinese living in the upper stories and community groups renting out the basement.

Louie joined the Wei Min She, an anti-imperialist and pro-worker group whose name can be translated into "Organization for the People." Louie

explains, "We were trying to organize people to take things into their own hands and become politically conscious."

Unionizing the Lee Mah electronics and Jung Sai garment workers was one of the group's big struggles. Both battles ended bitterly when the electronics owners struck a deal with the union and fired the workers and the garment workers walked out and Jung Sai went out of business.

When the Vietnam War ended, so did WMS. "As the war started to wind down in 1972, the more politically aware groups began to embrace more revolutionary ideals. Struggling against the war and understanding the nature of the enemy caused a lot of us to gravitate toward Marxism and find inspiration from Mao. That's the direction I went in."

PART 2: RICHARD AOKI

By the time Richard Aoki involved himself with Asian American activism, he had been active in three political movements:

1. "Picking strawberries is the worst thing I've ever done in my life. While I was getting my toes wet being a proletariat, I ran across militants in the unions. All these militants were communists! These communists seemed to have some good ideas."

2. "You could look at the Civil Rights Era as the beginning of the Black Liberation struggle, but the Nationalist Movement with Stokely Carmichael, SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), and other younger organizations that sprung up all over the country attracted me."

3. "When the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense sprung up in Oakland, it seemed like a good thing. I was at the first organizational meeting and they said, 'Who wants to step forward to join?' I stepped forward and was made branch captain and then elevated to field marshal, of which there were only six of in the history of the BPP."

Upon promotion to field marshal, Aoki (who grew up with BPP co-founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale in West Oakland after returning from the Topaz Concentration Camp) transferred from Merritt College to Berkeley and "went underground to look into the Asian Movement to see if we could develop an Asian version of the BPP." There, he joined the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) and became the spokesperson.

"We protested against the security pact signed by the US in Japan. We participated in anti-war and BPP demonstrations, especially to free Huey Newton, the co-founder who was in jail at the time. Technically I was a representative of AAPA. Privately, I was still making reports to the Panther organization. I'd say, 'This is what's happening, etc.' They'd ask, 'How can we help?'"

"AAPA was the first Asian group at Berkeley that had such a diverse ethnic background. We had Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Koreans. Pan-Asianism really was something that we never thought of at the time. We were so glad to see another Asian."

And not all members were students: "Bob Rita was a founder of the Farm Worker's Union. He was at Berkeley organizing and I was able to talk to him and see if he was interested in AAPA. It was a natural thing for him—he was Filipino and he had been an agricultural worker all his life. He was a labor organizer, yet he joined AAPA because of our stance on the exploitation of workers."

In Fall 1968, the SFSU branch of AAPA joined the Third World Strike. The Berkeley chapter followed in the spring.

PART 3: GANG OF FOUR

THE THIRD WORLD STRIKE

GR: Why did the Asian Americans for Political Action and other groups in the Third World Liberation Front strike at Berkeley and SFSU?

VW: What we were striking for was not ethnic studies but an autonomous Third World campus, which never happened. We got tremen-

dous community support, despite what people have said about our movement being an isolated group of militant students.

GR: What was a typical strike day like?

HD: A common day involved helicopters flying above, shooting pepper gas at the students.

The police would sweep the campus with these machines spraying gas. All that repression forced neutral elements to take sides.

RA: I saw how changes occurred in consciousness when 147 of us were arrested. We had a mass arraignment and I was sitting in the classroom. I saw a blond-haired, blue-eyed sorority-type girl walk before the judge with a big-time attorney. So I said, "What are you doing here?" She was coming out of one of the buildings and her boyfriend, a hippie, got his head beaten in. All she could do was recite one of our slogans: "Pigs off campus! Pigs off campus!" They arrested her. You don't think she had an attitude change?

VW: It was the bloodiest and costliest strike in history. We had to come up with these actions and tactics because people in power were violently against the Third World College, against the Third World people uniting.

RA: After three months, the violence got out of control. Reagan called the Alameda County's Sheriff's Department, which brought an atmosphere of terror to our campus. Things happen in a reign of terror. The largest auditorium on the university caught fire.

GR: What made the Third World Strike different from previous demonstrations?

VW: People like Richard who had direct military experience. Also, we took inspiration from worldwide struggles, most notably the Zengakuren in Japan. They had very unusual tactics, very mobile and fast actions. We would start really early, break up into small groups. By the time campus officials got there, we were gone. Before they'd just seen big, massive demonstrations.

SL: The Free Speech Movement used very massive, immobile, easy-to-find groups.

HD: The strike was a combination of direct action with education. In the evenings we went to dormitories, fraternities, churches, community groups, and stuff like that.

VW: It wasn't just a local thing or just for our own little group in college. We identified with the struggles of the oppressed peoples of the world, of all of the struggles that were going on then. We fought harder because we didn't see it as just our own fight.

HD: After the Third World Strike, we felt that we had to carry out our rhetoric, so we started setting up field offices in the community.

CHINATOWN CO-OP

GR: How did the Chinatown Co-op start?

HD: It began as a research project. There was a lot of research on the problems of garment workers and we didn't want to be "poverty pimps" who did research, filed reports, and that was it. They were trying to get into the union. I was involved in two union drives. The problem was that there wasn't much democracy within the union, so we looked more toward the idea of developing a cooperative. The Co-op lasted about four years.

GR: Was it hard to get workers involved?

VW: We were fortunate enough to recruit one of the top workers, Mrs. Lum, who was mak-

ing a lot of money for a garment worker back then. She tested us for a while, but after the third meeting she decided to join. She helped recruit other workers.

GR: Did they freak out when you asked them to sew Chinese worker-style jackets?

VW: No. That was a big moneymaker. It became a famous thing among international labor movements. We would get people visiting us from Iceland and Canada.

HD: And they all brought home Mao jackets. It was kind of unique. This whole concept of alternative institutions was part of the whole movement going on at the time. Eventually, it shut down, but we were able to make new links with immigrant workers and provide things like English classes. Later, when there were other labor disputes and strikes, some workers from the Co-op came to the Asian Community Center for help in their struggles.

VW: Every day, people would come down and say, "Can you help us?" Electronics workers, garment workers—they had no place else to go. Some of them felt intimidated. Busboys would say, "I shouldn't be here." We said, "You have every right to be here. This is supposed to be a public university."

THE I-HOTEL

GR: What was the International Hotel?

HD: The hotel was owned by Walter Shorenstein, one of the real estate barons in San Francisco. The tenants (elderly Filipino and Chinese men) organized a union that opposed eviction. They got a lease extension, then a fire was set in the building and several tenants died in it. Shorenstein said, "See? I was right." Just around the time the Third World Strike was winding down, tenants of the I-Hotel contacted AAPA for support.

SL: When I first saw it I thought, "Holy shit! What a tuberculosis breeding pit!"

HD: That's when all the former SF State strikers, AAPA from Berkeley, and the Filipino community converged. The Co-op was a part of that. The Asian Community Party was part of that. The Asian Legal Services set up shop there. The Red Guards opened there.

VW: You had the Financial District that was Moneybags City. Then here was one block, totally the opposite in the way they dressed with paintings, murals, and all these banners saying, "Get the rich off our backs." The community started to see this was their center. All these different groups operated out of there. On paper it looks good: young and old, unite! It was a real lesson in democracy. We argued, but we kept the place going when they were going to tear it down.

GR: What was eviction night like?

SL: It went beyond the Asian community. Five to six thousand supporters came from all over the city. They went there because we were fighting for something that we thought was important. There was a landlord-tenant aspect of the struggle, but when they wiped out the block, they wiped out a center of activism in the Asian community.

VW: Not just the Asian-American Movement. It became a center for The Movement.

HD: Although you can't prove it, we see the eviction as being political. It's not a landlord-tenant dispute; it's an attempt to destroy the Asian-American impact that was going on.