

# CAAV

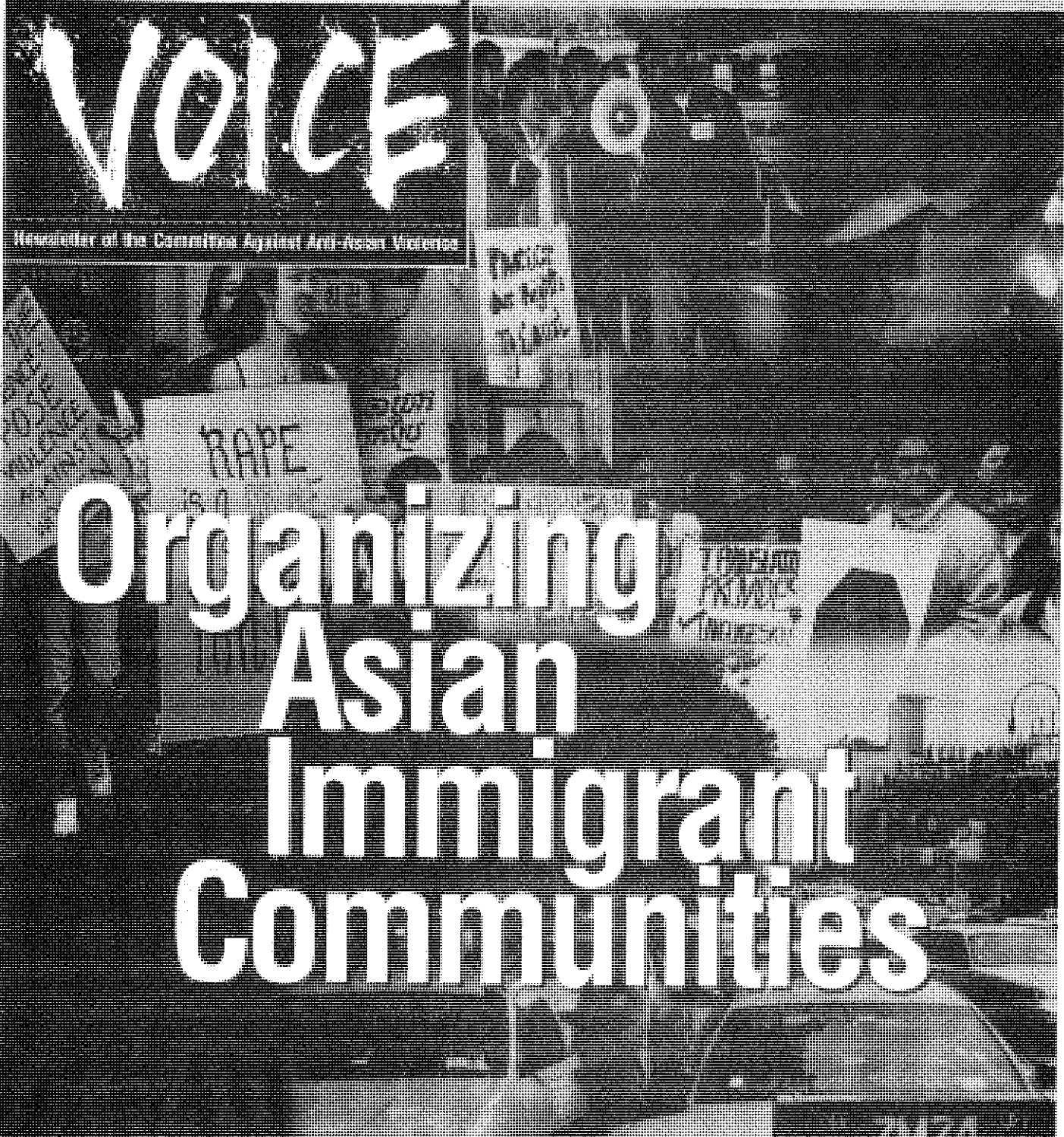
# VOICE

Newsletter of the Commission Against Anti-Asian Violence

Volume 10 • Number 1 • Spring 1990

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# Organizing Asian Immigrant Communities

# Editors' Note:

Dear CAAAV Voice Readers,

Although it's been a while since the last issue of the *Voice*, we're glad to be back. The past few months have been extremely busy and productive ones for CAAAV. Much credit needs to be given to all CAAAV members and staff who worked long hours on the various projects, events and demonstrations that are mentioned in this issue.

In the Fordham, Bronx area the Youth Leadership Project's organizing efforts with Southeast Asian immigrants/refugee youth & families have included addressing the impact of welfare reform, working with tenants to gain control of housing from an abusive landlord, and rallying the community to demand continued translation services at a local clinic.

In Chinatown, the Racial Justice Committee (RJC) has been working with vendors, van drivers and youth and has uncovered a pattern of police abuse and harassment by city agencies that has contributed to efforts to contain Chinatown's growth. RJC also held a vigil in March to commemorate the third year anniversary of Yong Xin Huang's death at the hands of NYPD Officer Steven Mizrahi. And, the Women Workers Project has been working on the Mrs. "O" rape case, bringing out new members to help indict the rapist of a Korean immigrant woman.

In addition to the initiatives of its program areas, since Fall 1997, CAAAV has played a critical role in the Coalition Against Police Brutality, which organized the March 31 Racial Justice Day. In March CAAAV participated in Jericho 1998, a march and rally to free political prisoners.

Finally, it is with great sadness that we bid farewell to Saleem Osman, former Lease Drivers Coalition staff member, who passed away in February, 1998.

We'd like to thank all our readers and supporters who waited so patiently for the *Voice*. Rest assured, we are back and running, but we still need your financial support to ensure the continued success of the *Voice*. Feel free to write us with comments or suggestions.

In Struggle,

The Editorial Collective  
May 1998

Founded in 1986, the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) organizes NYC Asian immigrant and working class communities to fight for systemic change.



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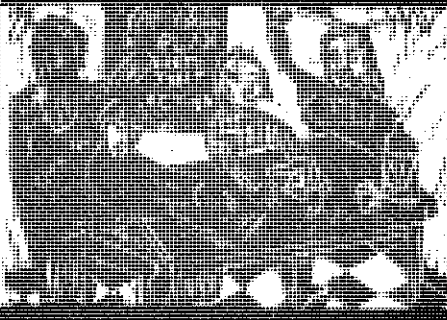
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## Community Organizing



This section provides news from CAAAV's four organizing programs:

- Latino Drivers Coalition (LDC)
- Racial Justice Committee (RJC)
- Women Workers Project (WWP)
- Youth Leadership Project (YLP)

### YLP Survey Reveals Southeast Asian Community's Needs

The youth organizers of CAAAV's Youth Leadership Project (YLP) continue to respond to the conditions and needs of their community—dangerous housing conditions and landlord neglect and abuse, the impact of the 1996 Welfare “Reform” Act (see sidebar), as well as other anti-immigrant and racist issues which reflect the continued socio-political and economic disenfranchisement of Southeast Asians.

#### Identifying the Conditions and Needs of the Community

Since the late 1970's, there have been unprecedented cuts in benefits and resources to low-income communities. With the highest welfare dependency rate nationally and some of the highest unemployment rates in New York City, the Southeast Asian community in the Fordham, Bronx—home to the largest Southeast Asian population in the city—was especially affected by welfare cuts. Since the summer of 1997, YLP's youth organizers have been conducting a community research project in order to gain insight into the overall state of Southeast Asian immigration and employment history, income, housing conditions, educa-

tion and skills, and other demographic information. Based on the UCLA Urban Planning Department's “Survey of Asian Low-Income Communities”, this project will provide more accurate and valuable information than the U. S. Census.

With the knowledge of its youth organizers and YLP's two years of experience in the community, YLP is able to target its survey to areas where there are high concentrations of Southeast Asians. The youth organizers go door-to-door, conducting surveys of Southeast Asian residents and providing welfare information. Although many community members recognize YLP from its summer day camp for children or community events, some are initially reluctant to be interviewed for various reasons. For instance, in this time of heightened criminalization of immigrants, some fear that the interviewers are government workers intent on taking away their benefits. In an effort to gain trust, YLP distributes a welfare fact sheet, housing complaint form, and a newsletter (in Vietnamese and Khmer) to residents regardless of their participation in the survey. Often, the youth organizers are able to conduct the survey after the second or third visit.

The survey has confirmed what YLP organizers always knew: the prevalence of public assistance and unemployment. But it also has revealed other problems experienced by the community: unfair cuts and reductions in welfare benefits, and unjust workfare assignments (See sidebar next page). Southeast Asians have been reclassified as “permanent residents,” rather than “refugees,” which therefore makes them fully subject to the federal welfare reform measures. In the absence of a welfare system responsive to the particular needs of this community, YLP has stepped in to provide short-term advocacy to meet its long-term goal of facilitating the establishment of an organized community fighting for institutional change.

Yet despite the insidiousness of welfare “reform,” YLP has found that most Southeast Asians on welfare are experiencing cuts or reductions in benefits because of clerical mistakes or oversights by caseworkers, such as misspellings of names or misclassifications on identification cards. In one case, a family stopped receiving Food Stamps for six months because the apartment number was entered incorrectly by the caseworker.

Until YLP investigated the situation, the family was unable to understand why it was cut. Sometimes these mistakes take months to clear up. Usually, it is necessary to apply for a “fair hearing” (a bureaucratic mess in itself). At these hearings, an administrative law judge determines whether the person was mistakenly cut. To help overcome language barriers and the inaccessibility to the process itself, YLP assists in the filing for fair hearings, provision of translation and legal strategizing at the hearing. Usually, Southeast Asian recipients are forced to take along their school-age children—sometimes as young as third graders—in order to communicate with caseworkers. So far YLP has won all of its cases.

#### Organizing Tool: Community Surveys

The survey project has revealed that more than 90% of Southeast Asian families are receiving public assistance. As is often the case with other immigrant groups, the job skills that rural migrants bring are not easily transferable to the post-industrial economy of U.S. urban sectors. The general absence or inaccessibility of appropriate job skills training programs (not to mention jobs), English language classes, decent and affordable housing, and viable employment opportunities are some of the major problems

### Welfare “Reform” Act

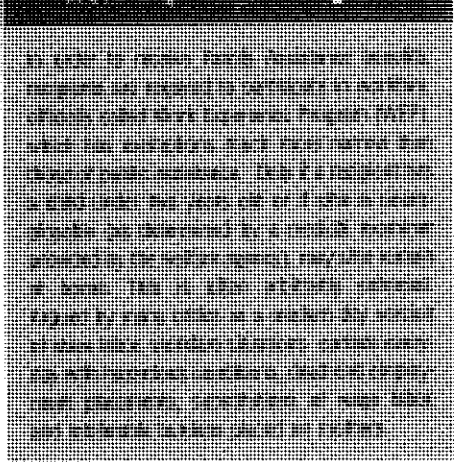
As of November 1, 1997, the provisions of the New York State welfare reform took effect. Even though it still remains the old system's general rule that only emergency grants, it does not increase or decrease benefits. The following are the new provisions:

1. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients should not be cut or reduced in their benefits, regardless if they are citizens or granted aliens.
2. Those receiving Aid to Dependent Children (regularly known as AFDC) who are on Family Assistance of NY should not be cut unless they have been receiving it for more than 3 years starting November 1997, or had arrived in the United States after August 22, 1996.
3. Those receiving Food Stamps will be cut unless they are citizens under 18 years old, the parent or partner of such (FD-0000), or still have refugee status.

confronting New York City's Southeast Asian population.

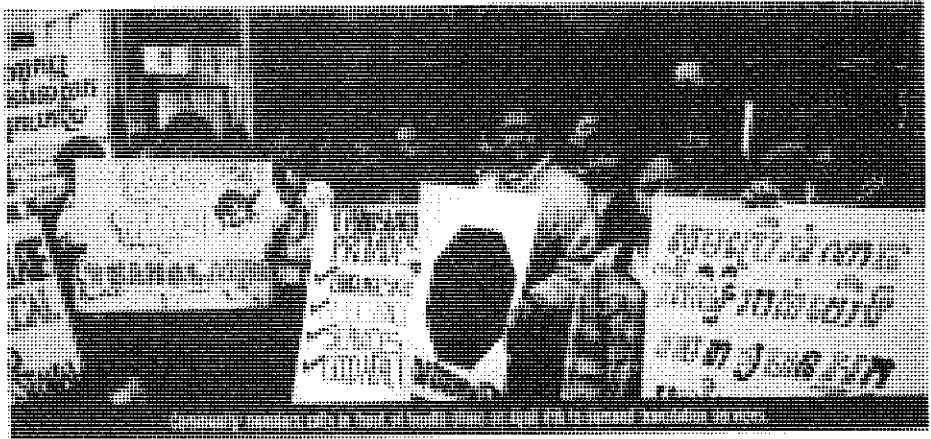
The information gleaned from the surveys is serving as a guide for a long-term comprehensive community development strategy. However, unlike those that seek partnership with large corporations in exchange for low-wage part-time labor, YLP believes in developing real jobs which keep community members and resources in the community. Surveying has also become an effective method in establishing trust with community members and publicizing events or meetings related to issues that they face. As YLP continues to earn the trust of community members, a collective strategy can be generated.

### Work Experience Program



### Campaign for Translation at Bronx Clinic

Early this April, healthcare administrators at the Montefiore Family Health Center in the Northwest Bronx decided to eliminate Southeast Asian translation services. In one fell swoop, this decision denies equal access to healthcare to the approximately 10,000 Vietnamese and Cambodian patients who have visited the clinic in 1996-1997 alone. In fact, the clinic was founded in part to serve the needs of the growing refugee population. And over the years, it has become the hub for Southeast Asian healthcare in the Bronx. This is yet another blow to a community already struggling against devastating welfare "reform" and other cuts to public services. Nevertheless, the Southeast Asian community of the Bronx is swinging back hard. Immediately after



the cuts to translation were announced, YLP organized a community rally at the clinic. Over 200 Vietnamese and Cambodian patients and other concerned community members turned out to protest Montefiore's decision.

Most importantly, the youth were able to organize the adults in the community to form the Southeast Asian Community Council (SEACC), which consists of active community members that are going to keep the campaign alive. SEACC is working with the youth organizers to develop campaign strategies and monitor the clinic's services in the absence of translation. While a Civil Rights Title VI violation is being investigated against Montefiore, the real pressure will come from the agitation on the streets. The campaign for translation at Montefiore has got the community fired up.

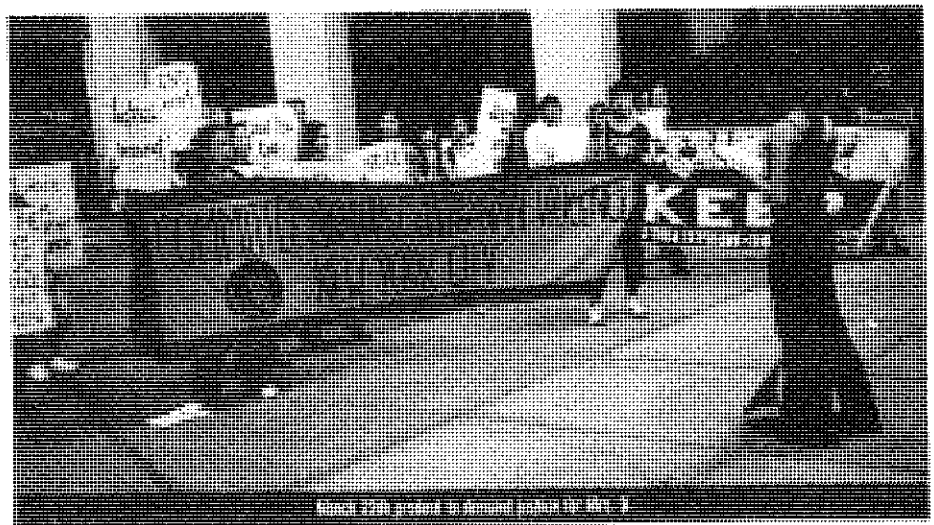
### Bronx Tenants Organizing

Since 1997, YLP has been working with the Cambodian, and some Latino, residents of a Fordham, Bronx building

known for some of the worst violations of the habitability laws. After establishing a tenants association, the tenants began withholding their rent in February 1998 while they demanded immediate repairs to their apartments. Since the only response from the landlord has been one of harassment, the tenants are in the process of using the rent money to do the repairs themselves. They are filing for a 7A which will remove the building from its slumlord.

### Korean Woman Demands Justice in Rape Case

The Women Workers Project has been focusing its recent efforts on the "Mrs. O" case. Mrs. O, a non-English speaking Korean woman, survived rape by her immigration sponsor and employer in October, 1997. At an initial meeting with the Queens District Attorney's office, Mrs. O was denied an official translator and the presence of a woman, despite her repeated requests. Although Mrs. O was told that she would be grant-



ed another interview with an attorney and a translator, the case was closed without such a meeting.

CAAAV and other concerned community members formed the Justice for Mrs. O Coalition to support Mrs. O, whose situation is all too common among new immigrant women of color who are vulnerable not only to exploitation by their immigration sponsors, but also to racism and sexism from prosecutors. The Coalition organized phone/fax barrages, support letters from other organizations and public officials, petition drives, press conferences and a rally. Responding to community pressure, the D.A.'s office reinvestigation resulted in a grand jury indictment and arrest in April. However, the struggle is far from over. Statistics show that less than half of those arrested for rape are convicted, most of those convictions are for stranger rape cases, and the vast majority plea bargain for reduced charges. And, given the disregard already shown by the DA's office, we can expect these odds to be even worse.

The Coalition is currently working in partnership with Korean organizations in a community outreach campaign which calls on the Korean community, as well as other communities, to break the silence around sexual assault, to support the many survivors in our communities, and to demand accountability from the criminal justice system.

### **RJC Uncovers Racist Efforts to Contain Chinatown**

Regular outreach in Chinatown by the Racial Justice Committee (RJC) has revealed a pattern of racist enforcement of New York City's laws and regulations to keep Chinatown geographically confined. Asian merchants who operate at the borders of Chinatown and SoHo/Little Italy are unjustly fined and harassed by the police and city agencies on a regular basis. In November 1997, HT, a Vietnamese wholesale vegetable distributor on Broome Street, was served a lawsuit from a group of white residents and merchants in SoHo/Little Italy, members of the SoHo Alliance. The lawsuit called for the closing of HT's business based on a zoning law that was passed after most of the Asian merchants on Broome Street had started their businesses and one that has never been enforced



in the eight years that it has been in effect. Claiming that Broome Street's Asian merchants are "dirty," "cause congestion," and are a "nuisance," the lawsuit made the racist charge that the merchants disturb "the historical and cultural character" of Little Italy, a landmark historic district. The lawsuit has been dismissed. However, in a suspicious coincidence, NYC's Department of Buildings recently cited the same zoning regulation, which it has never enforced before, when it served a notice of violation to HT's landlord, seeking "discontinuance" of HT's business. The attack on HT's business is probably only the first step in a campaign by SoHo Alliance to curb the geographic expansion of Chinatown to the north. If HT's business is closed down, other Asian merchants on Broome Street will be vulnerable as well. RJC is closely monitoring this case. Meanwhile RJC is researching the history of the zoning of Little Italy and its designation as a special historical district.

A few blocks away, a group of fish merchants, this time on the border of Chinatown and SoHo/Little Italy, have been the target of daily harassment and unjustified ticketing by the 5th Precinct and other law enforcement agencies. RJC has been collecting the tickets merchants have been receiving and organizing the information into a database. The Center for Constitutional Rights will be working with RJC to analyze the data and develop a legal strategy.

### **Successful LDC Protest Is Followed by Formation of Independent Cabdrivers' Group**

Last summer, on August 19, over 3,000 yellow cabdrivers and supporters turned out for a protest organized by CAAAV's Lease Drivers Coalition (LDC) to demand better working conditions, changes in unfair Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) practices, and reforms to make drivers' voices heard at the TLC. Although the NYPD reneged on its agreement to block off Broadway for the yellow cab procession, the spirit of the demonstration was not broken. Accompanied by supporters on foot, thousands of cabs, with their off-duty lights on and posters demanding "Respect, Justice and Dignity for Yellow Cab Drivers", drove down Broadway from 14th Street to City Hall, dominating one of the major arteries for lower Manhattan. The demonstration attracted extensive media coverage. Within two weeks the TLC agreed to a meeting with LDC in which they acceded to two of LDC's demands.

At the beginning of 1998, members of LDC decided to form an independent cab drivers' organization. These members have since formed New York Taxi Worker's Alliance. This was a momentous occasion in the history of CAAAV, culminating the work begun in 1992 when we established LDC to empower immigrant

South Asian cab drivers to fight against oppressive working conditions. We look forward to the growth of a strong force for drivers' rights to challenge the taxi industry's unjust practices.

New York Taxi Workers Alliance can be reached at 122 W. 27 Street, 10th Floor, NY 10001, 212-627-5248.

## Chinatown Memorial Held In Memory of Yong Xin Huang

A twilight memorial for Yong Xin Huang, organized by the Racial Justice Committee, was held on March 24th at Roosevelt Park in Chinatown to commemorate the third year anniversary of the youth's death at the hands of NYC Police Officer Steven Mizrahi. Mizrahi shot and killed Yong Xin on March 24, 1995, allegedly mistaking the 16-year-old honor student's toy gun for a real weapon. Although the Huang family received a monetary settlement from New York City for their civil suit, Mizrahi was never indicted or punished for the murder.

Surrounded and moved by the strong presence of mothers from Parents Against Police Brutality, Yong Xin's mother spoke publicly for the first time to thank the 40 to 50 friends and supporters who came to remember Yong Xin. His sisters, Joyce and Qing Lan Huang, also spoke about Yong Xin. Other speakers included: Milta Calderon, mother of police murder victim Anibal Carrasquillo; HT, a Chinatown wholesaler harrassed by white business groups; Susan Chan, a victim of police brutality; and Maegan Ortiz, member of the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights and the Coalition Against Police Brutality. The ceremony was marked by a Korean drumming performance and a solemn candlelight vigil, during which notes of support for the Huang family were read.



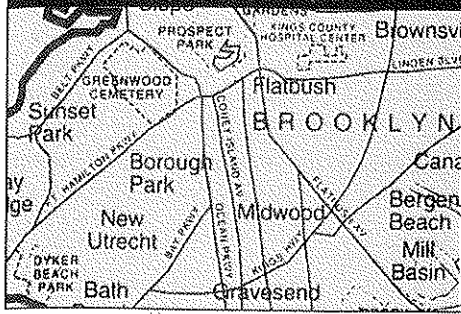
## Youth Organize Workshop in Face of Increased Police Abuse

During Fall 1997, when there was public reports about police, many youth increased police presence in poor communities of color, especially in public housing schools and parks. This resulted in increased police harassment and abusive practices, such as illegally placing photographs in mugbooks of youth who had never been arrested. These mugbooks are used by police officers to identify and assaultants. The Youth Leadership Project conducted a youth leadership workshop for community youth in order to disseminate information and to structure ways to address police harassment.



Photos by: James Lim

## Local Incidents



### Police Assault Youth in Sunset Park Bakery

In November 1997, 17-year-old Tim Mai was assaulted for hanging out in a bakery in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. After Tim walked away from the 66th Precinct officer who confronted and assaulted him, a group of officers looking for him terrorized community residents. They illegally detained and questioned 15 neighborhood youth about Tim's whereabouts, went to his home multiple times, threatened his father, and illegally searched the house, taking a photograph of Tim from the family album. Tim was eventually arrested and charged with felony assault of a police officer. The District Attorney's office has reduced the charges to a misdemeanor.

Ironically, the officer who initially assaulted Tim is one of two Chinese officers recently transferred to Sunset Park in response to demands by the Chinese community for better police services and accountability. Faced with the task of building support for Tim Mai from a community distrustful of its young people and wary of challenging the police, especially if they are Chinese, CAAAV has been petitioning every Sunday and slowly gaining community support.

### Offers to Translate Lead to Arrest in Subway Station

On March 5, 1997, at the Main Street subway station in Flushing, Queens, AH was attacked and wrongfully arrested by officers of the 109th Precinct. When AH and two friends, who are Chinese, were passing through the turnstiles, a plainclothes officer grabbed one of them. When AH offered to translate for his friends, the officer only yelled at him.

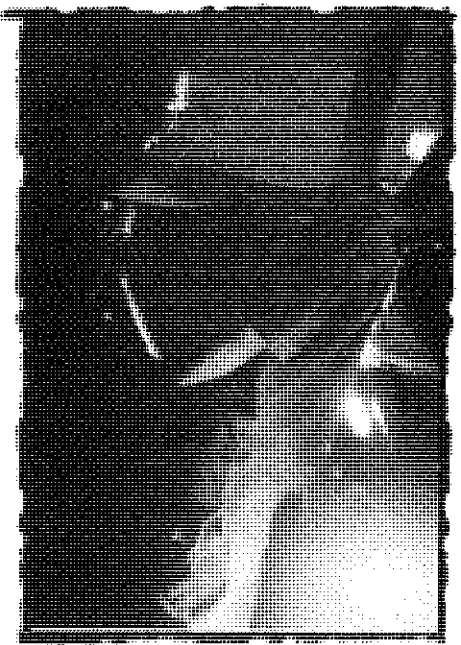
Then other plainclothes officers arrived, grabbing AH, pushing him more than 15 feet, kicking him in the knee, shoving him against a wall, and handcuffing him. The squad commander refused to listen to AH's explanations, calling him a "moron." AH, handcuffed, waited over one hour in the subway station while the officers tried to communicate with his friends. He saw one officer mocking his friends with bowing motions. Finally, the squad commander issued AH a summons for disorderly conduct. The charges against AH were subsequently dismissed.

### Police Ignore Korean Man Beaten Outside Flushing Home

On August 4, 1997, officers of the 109th Precinct refused to help KHP, a Korean man who was assaulted outside of his Flushing home. KHP, his wife and 5-year-old daughter went outside their home at around 11 p.m. when they heard that their car was being towed. In response to KHP's question, "Why are you towing my car?" the tow truck driver pushed KHP against a car and kicked him repeatedly in the chest. City marshalls who were present did not intervene. Neighbors concerned about KHP called 911. The 109th Precinct officers who responded refused to take a complaint about the assault against KHP, despite corroboration by all the witnesses. Six organizations—CAA AV, Council of Korean Churches of Greater NY, Korean American Association of Flushing, Korean Association of Greater NY, Korean Merchants Association of the Village, and Service and Education for Korean Americans—formed an ad hoc coalition to demand punishment of the officers. After two meetings with the precinct commander, a report was finally filed on the incident. The subsequent investigation resulted in the arrest and prosecution of the tow truck driver. KHP has hired an attorney to sue the City of New York.

### Korean Spa Owner Beaten in Racist Prostitution Raid

On January 12, 1998, Byong Hyun Cho, the owner of a spa with Korean-

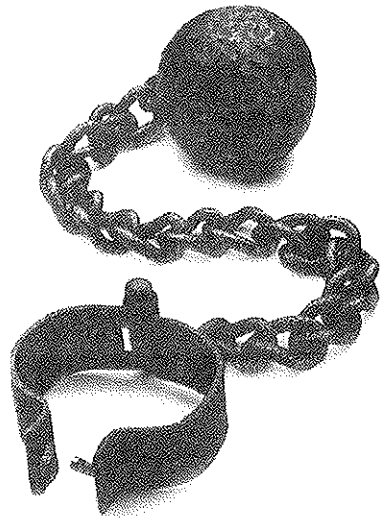


style sauna in Queens, was beaten by officers of the Public Morals Unit during an unjustified raid. The incident began when a man entered the spa, made a sexual gesture and asked, "Do you do this kind of service, too?" Shortly after Cho asked him to leave, police stormed the building with axes and hammers. When Cho asked for identification and a search warrant, he was shoved to the ground, and beaten by several officers who slammed his head into a wall, smashing his glasses and jaw and loosening about 12 teeth. The male officers entered the women-only area unannounced, frightening several middle-aged women who were undressed or undressing.

Cho was charged with promoting prostitution and operating as a masseur without a license. The Queens District Attorney has already dropped the prostitution charge. Cho states he employs a state-licensed masseuse. In addition, he was charged with resisting arrest and obstruction of justice, typical charges in police brutality cases.

The spa has been open for about two years. Before opening, Cho had to calm racist assumptions by some community members, including State Senator Leonard Stavisky, that he was operating a brothel by providing critics with a tour of the sauna. Local officials are unaware of complaints about the spa since then.

# Struggles For Justice



## Racial Justice Day 1998

On March 31st, over 1,000 protestors, including the families of the victims of police brutality, converged on City Hall Park for a rush hour rally. For the first time in its six-year history, Racial Justice Day was organized by the Coalition Against Police Brutality—a diverse group of grassroots organizations working in communities of color who came together soon after last year's march. The Coalition includes CAAAV, the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights (NCPRR), Forever in Struggle Together, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and the Audre Lorde Project.

Historically Racial Justice Day had been organized by NCPRR to commemorate the killing of Manuel Mayi, a 19-year-old Dominican student killed by a white racist gang in Corona, Queens on March 31, 1991. Although the annual march and rally still focuses strongly on police brutality against young people of color, the Coalition also recognizes the need to address racist and homophobic violence committed by the police. The Coalition's motto this year is "Equality of Life for All"—counter to Mayor Giuliani's "Quality of Life" campaign, which the organizers feel is an explicit attack on low-income New Yorkers and communities of color for the benefit of a privileged few. In fact, despite claims by

Giuliani that crime is down, incidents of police brutality have gone up.

At 6 p.m. demonstrators left City Hall, marching through Chinatown and the Lower East Side to Washington Square Park, the last-minute site change demanded by the NYPD. To protest the presence of surveillance cameras in Washington Square Park marchers covered their faces with white bandanas. Racial Justice Day ended with a candlelight vigil in which the names of victims of police murder were read.

## New York City Policewatch Established

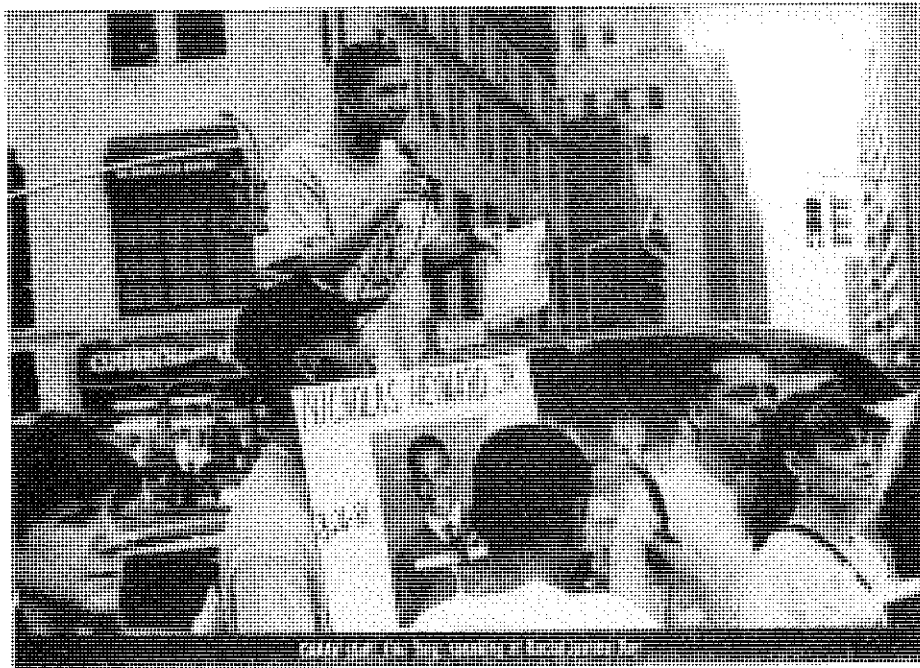
On March 9, 1998 New York City Policewatch—a sister project of the San Francisco-based Ella Baker Center for Human Rights' Bay Area Policewatch—announced its toll-free hotline number at a press conference at its temporary home, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR). Bay Area Policewatch is a hotline for victims of police abuse and misconduct to report police brutality and receive legal referrals. Staff and volunteers use a database designed to document and track police misconduct. In the coming months New York City Policewatch will be fully staffed with a full-time director and hotline volunteers.

New York City Policewatch will be working closely with the Coalition Against Police Brutality—CAAAB, NCPRR, the Audre Lorde Project, Forever In Struggle Together, and Malcolm X Grassroots Movement—to form a community advisory board. The Coalition will play a critical role in ensuring that the hotline's database reflects the needs and issues specific to police brutality victims in New York City. A separate legal advisory board will include CCR, Legal Aid Society, the National Lawyers' Guild, and the New York Civil Liberties Union.

To contact the hotline call:  
1-800-764-0235 or 212-614-6454

## Jericho 1998 Calls for Release of Political Prisoners

Eighteen CAAAV members and staff, including youth organizers from the Youth Leadership Project, joined hundreds of protestors in Washington D.C. on







March 27th to demand the release of political prisoners in the U.S. Jericho 1998 was organized by activists around the nation struggling to obtain amnesty and freedom for all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in the United States. CAAAV members marched with the David Wong Support Committee and Asians for Mumia to form a New York contingent. The march began at Malcolm X Park and ended in Lafayette Park, near the Capitol Building, where speakers, musicians and poets sent their message to the White House. Among those who spoke were long-time Asian American activist, Yuri Kochiyama, recently released political prisoner Geronimo Pratt, and Angela Davis.

Most political prisoners are radical people of color, including former Black Panthers, Native American activists, and Puerto Rican nationalists. A handful of political prisoners have been released recently, such as Geronimo ji-jaga Pratt and Dhoruba Bin Wahad. However, there are many who still are languishing in maximum security state penitentiaries, including former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, who is currently on Pennsylvania's death row for the alleged murder of a Philadelphia police officer.

### Breakthrough in David Wong Case

After more than a decade since his unjust second-degree murder conviction, David Wong, a Chinese immigrant, has finally won the right to appeal his case. This groundbreaking news is the critical step towards attaining David's freedom.

David was originally incarcerated in

1984 for a robbery conviction. The essential facts of this present case revolve around the stabbing death of an inmate, Tyrone Julius, in 1986. Despite overwhelming evidence in support of his innocence, David was convicted of murder and is now serving the sentence in Auburn Correctional Facility in upstate New York.

Since winning the right to appeal, David's attorneys have been very optimistic. The thrust of David's defense is that he was not given a fair trial. Specifically, he was not given a qualified translator (the translator spoke Mandarin while David spoke Fuzhounese). In addition, one of the two witnesses who testified against David was an inmate who struck a deal with the prosecution in order to obtain his parole.

The David Wong Support Committee is continuing its work to build support in the community and keep it abreast of the latest developments in David Wong's case. The Center for Constitutional Rights is continuing as his legal defense.

**For further information on how you can help, please call the Support Committee at 718-461-4010.**

### New South Asian Domestic Workers' Group Has First Victory

Workers' Awaaz (Workers' Voice) was formed in April 1997 out of the Domestic Workers' Committee of Sakhi to organize domestic workers and South Asian immigrant workers employed in other low-wage jobs. Besides being unpaid or underpaid for long hours of work, these workers are verbally, physically and sexually abused. Since these women work under conditions that keep them virtually invisible, one of Workers' Awaaz'

greatest challenges will be to establish connections with them. Workers' Awaaz is composed of South Asian women workers and volunteers in the New York area.

Shortly after its formation, Workers' Awaaz achieved its first victory. Meena (not her real name) was brought to the U.S. by a wealthy Indian family to work as a live-in domestic worker. She was required to work sixteen hours per day, seven days a week for \$400 a month. In addition, her employers confiscated her passport, forbade her from leaving the house, and verbally abused her. With the help of another worker, Meena was able to attend the first Workers' Awaaz meeting. Workers' Awaaz launched a public action campaign and helped Meena file a lawsuit against her employers. Her employers finally negotiated a settlement of \$20,000. Although the sum is less than what Meena was owed, the victory has nevertheless helped her and other workers believe in their collective strength.

The workers in Awaaz feel changed in fundamental ways by being in the organization. From negotiating with the employer for their first day off in order to attend their first Awaaz meeting to publicly exposing the employer, workers begin to lose their sense of isolation and desperation. Instead they become involved in building a workers' organization that is committed to directly challenging class inequities faced by growing numbers of unorganized immigrant South Asian workers in different industries.

**Workers' Awaaz can be contacted at P.O. Box 2547, Long Island City, NY 11102, 718-956-0465, 212-568-3917.**



Kazu Iijima (center, with plaque), longtime activist and founding member of CAAAV, celebrated her 80th birthday earlier this year with family, friends and comrades.

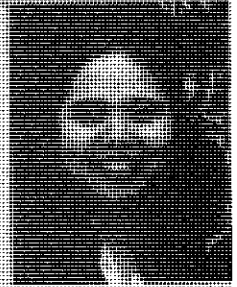
# Staff Changes

## FAREWELL TO BHAIRAVI

After working for over one and a half years at CAAAV, Bhairavi Desai, program coordinator of the Labor Drivers Coalition (LDC), left in January. Bhairavi worked tirelessly organizing drivers and building LDC into a significant presence in the driver community. Her commitment to LDC proved critical to the rapid growth and political development of LDC through its organizing work of drivers. We wish her the best in her work with New York Taxi Workers Alliance.

## MINETTE RETURNS AS CAAAV STAFF

CAAAV welcomes Minette Himmelfarb who began her new position as part-time administrative assistant in mid-March. Minette is a graduate of Hunter College and has a long history of student activism and immigrant community organizing. She was one of the founding members of CAAAV's Southeast Asian Organizing Collective and was also a former CAAAV summer intern. In addition to excellent administrative skills, Minette brings regarding experiences which will undoubtedly benefit CAAAV's work. We are all very pleased to have Minette on board!



## CAAAY Supporters (April 1997 — April 1998)

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Jewish Fund For Justice  
New York Foundation  
New York Women's Foundation  
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## In Memory of Saleem

Saleem Osman, former organizer of the Lower East Side Drivers Committee (LEDC), died suddenly in early February. After his funeral in Queens on February 07, 1998, his body was sent home to his family in Lahore, Pakistan. Oba Kay-Chaudhry, founding member of LEDC, wrote this tribute to Saleem.

It is with great sadness that I write of the death of Saleem (Ajmal) Osman. Flery, impassioned, gay, laughing Saleem is dead. It is hard to believe that the man who always seemed to take whatever adversity life threw at him, and emerge unscathed, could be cut down just as he was preparing to return home and realize his dream of becoming a justice judge in Pakistan.

Like many South Asian cab drivers in New York, Saleem was trained in another field. (in his case, law) and found himself driving a taxi as a means of survival in a cold city that was not his home. What made him different from

many drivers was his sense of the injustice of the lease driving system. Under this system, drivers work long, hard hours with no benefits, exposed to the racism of New York cops, the greed of the garage owners, the harassment of TLC (Taxi and Limousine Commission) officials, and the scorn of American passengers. He called the lease driving system "yellow slavery" when he worked for CAAAV as the organizer of LEDC. He was instrumental in involving the South Asian drivers

extensively in campaigns to increase safety for drivers, stop police brutality, pressure the TLC to provide transportation in TLC events and to register against the unfair leasing practices of garage owners.

Saleem first came to CAAAV with a complaint of harassment by the owner of Savan garage, Malcolm Ratner. Saleem had been threatened with a gun because he spoke up about the lack of safety for drivers. Saleem's attitude was not one of fear. He participated in organizing a picket of Savan garage, which brought East and South Asians together on the picket line. He boldly led the march to the public podium and demanded a meeting with the station chief, which he achieved. Ratner remains in control of an exploitative garage, but the drivers now that even a garage owner has to respect the united voice of the drivers raised in protest.

Personally, as one of the founders of LEDC in CAAAV, I see Saleem grow in confidence in his dealings with American authorities and the bureaucracy of the TLC and various city institutions. He grew in his trust of people and his love of people, even when there were differences of opinion in political matters. His natural joy in life will be missed by those of us he left behind. His spirit of justice still inspires us to continue the fight for justice. His love remains as a gift to us that we can neither repay nor lose.





Newsletter of the  
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