There are very few social services or organizing projects that focus on Asian women. The few that do generally work with victims of spousal abuse or women employed in traditional occupations, such as garment workers. A group of workers, whose needs are ignored, are Asian women sex workers, who are the most exploited, “invisible,” and marginalized segment of the Asian immigrant work force.

CAAV has initiated a project, the "Women Workers Project," for Asian women sex workers in New York City to address this vacuum. CAAV believes that women, especially immigrants with limited language and job skills, are often driven to engage in sex work in order to survive in a world which does not adequately pay or respect women's work. Although these women are stigmatized and ostracized by their own communities, it is often the men from those same communities who use their services and profit from their labor. Although Asian sex workers are harassed and criminalized in the name of protecting U.S. society, it is the discrimination and stereotypes of U.S. society and the influence of the U.S. military that encourages the industry.

CAAV's Women Workers Project aims to provide a safe environment for the women so that they can organize a collective model for working that ensures them certain rights. Sex workers should have rights vis-a-vis the massage parlor and brothel owners, who profit tremendously from their labor. These rights should include—at the minimum—safe conditions, health care, and fair wages.

We have been conducting outreach (Continued on Page 9)

New York City Incidents

PROTESTORS TAKEOVER BROOKLYN D.A.’S OFFICE

On March 13, 1996, the families of police murder victims Yong Xin Huang and Anibal Carrasquillo, Jr. with supporters from CAAAV and the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights (NCPRR) staged a dramatic sit-in at the office of the Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes. The (Continued on Page 2)

NCPRR protester announces sit-in's demand to the press outside D.A.'s office.
National Incidents

Dallas, Texas, 2/21/96

Kenny Taval, a 33-year-old Samoan American, was fatally shot by Gordon Hale 3rd after a minor traffic dispute. Taval’s delivery van and Hale’s pickup truck grazed each other, causing minor damage to their side-view mirrors. The two men stopped and yelled at each other and then Taval started punching Hale through the open window. Hale drew a gun and shot Taval, who was unarmed, once in the chest. Taval died a few hours later. On March 20th a grand jury refused to indict Hale for murder.

Opponents of a new “right-to-carry” law in Texas saw the shooting of Taval as a confirmation of their prediction that the measure would allow a routine traffic accident to turn into a deadly confrontation. Hale was legally carrying the gun under a law that had gone into effect the month before, allowing Texans to carry concealed weapons. He had undergone the required 10- to 15-hour sensitivity and conflict-resolution training which is intended to teach people carrying guns to let their rational “inner adult” control impulses of the “inner child” who might become angry and trigger-prone during conflicts.

An unanswered question is the role of race in the shooting. Did Hale feel more threatened because Taval was a Pacific Islander? Was Hale’s decision to shoot, rather than drive away, influenced by racism? We can only speculate in this case. However, race will undoubtedly play a role in future shootings under this new law.

Orange County, California, 2/14/96

After Orange County and city of Westminster police officers and the California Highway Patrol chased Hong Il Kim in his Toyota 4-Runner for thirty miles, they cornered the 27-year-old South Korean national in the parking lot of a mini-mall and shot him to death in full view of TV cameras. His truck was riddled with over 20 bullet holes and Kim was hit at least six times.

The fatal shooting has raised questions by experts about the police tactics. Kim was completely surrounded by the police. A police car was on either side of his truck, two police cruisers were behind a concrete barrier in front of him and officers surrounded him with their guns drawn. According to one criminal justice professor, “This was an avoidable shooting. I’ve seen a lot of bad shootings. This is one of them.” Five police policy experts, who reviewed the television footage of the pursuit and shooting, said the officers committed a series of tactical errors. Commented one anonymous Orange County chief, “By God, who are we to take a life if we can come up with other strategies to take a person into custody instead?”

These troubling questions have roused a coalition of Asian American and Latino advocates, as well as the South Korean government, to challenge the justification for the shooting by law enforcement officials, who claim their officers acted appropriately. Rodney Chai, Kim’s brother-in-law, said, “They executed him when they didn’t have to. And they have to be held responsible.” Kim’s family plans a wrongful death lawsuit against the departments involved.

Tustin, California, 1/28/96

The body of Thien Minh Ly, a 24-year-old Vietnamese American activist and former student leader at UCLA, was found with numerous stab wounds, his throat slashed and his head stomped. The grisly murder was considered a “mystery” until March 2, when Gunner Lindberg, 21, and Dominic Christopher, 17, were taken into custody and charged with the brutal slaying after the discovery of a letter Lindberg had written to a former prison inmate in which he boasted about killing “a jap”. The letter contained graphic and gory details about the killing and expressed sadistic enjoyment at Ly’s dying gasps of agony. Lindberg denies a racial motive despite the white supremacist paraphernalia found at both his and Christopher’s homes. The Tustin police attribute robbery as the motive for Ly’s murder. Various organizations in the horrified and outraged Vietnamese community have joined together to form the Thien Minh Ly Ad Hoc Committee to pursue justice for Ly’s death. A candlelight vigil was held April 6th by the Council of Asian Pacific Americans of Orange County to raise awareness about violence against Asian Americans and to commemorate the memory of its victims, including Thien Minh Ly.

(NYC INCIDENTS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)
derly conduct, and obstructing governmental administration. The sit-in was widely covered by mainstream and ethnic print and broadcast media.

Yong Xin Huang was shot and killed by Officer Mizrahi in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn on March 24, 1995 [see previous CAAAV Voice issues]. Medical evidence and witnesses indicated that Yong Xin was no threat when he was shot in the back of the head at point-blank range. Anibal Carasquillo was shot and killed by Officer Calderon in Flatbush, Brooklyn on January 22, 1995. An official autopsy revealed that Calderon shot the unarmed youth in the back. As usual in cases of police murder of people of color, NYPD cover-ups and D.A. complicity have resulted in the officers going unpunished.

The D.A. is threatening to take the demonstrators to trial. The Law Offices of Kunstler & Kuby, along with a legal team being developed by CAAAV and NCPRR, will be representing the twelve defendants.

Other Local Incidents

Canarsie, Brooklyn, 4/19/96

On April 19, 1996, YL was arrested and detained at the 69th Precinct in Canarsie for no apparent reason. YL had double-parked his car while making a delivery of Chinese food. When he returned to find two police officers standing next to his car, YL offered to move his car right away. YL complied when Officer McCarthy asked for his license. Then McCarthy arrested YL and had him detained at the 69th Precinct. YL's queries as to the reason for his arrest, his numerous pleas to make a phone call, and his requests for a translator were ignored. Finally, McCarthy slapped a traffic violation ticket on YL. He dragged YL out of the precinct by his collar and yelled, "Get out, you stupid Chinese!" Later, YL returned to the precinct and tried to file a complaint. A female officer, who had laughed when she saw YL being dragged out, denied having seen anything. CAAAV referred YL to the Chinese ethnic press and the Civilian Complaint Review Board.

Midtown Manhattan, 4/1/96

On April 1, 1996, SC, a Pakistani cab driver, was abused by the police in front of Port Authority. At approximately midnight, he was stopped at a red light when Officer Welch approached him and asked SC for his drivers license, rate card, and hack license. When SC asked the reason for the stop, Welch replied, "You're asking me? I'm a cop!" He then shook SC by the collar. Another officer joined Welch and both struck SC in the face, dragged him from his cab, searched him and kicked him. The two officers arrested SC and wrongfully charged him with obstructing governmental administration and resisting arrest. Welch also confiscated $200. CAAAV is conducting a witness search and monitoring the case.

West Village, Manhattan, 2/4/96

On February 4, 1996 at approximately 1 A.M., AR, a Pakistani cab driver, refused to pick up a drunk man and four of his friends. (According to the law, cab drivers are prohibited to pick up more than four passengers and are permitted to refuse intoxicated riders.) The man then attacked and severely injured AR's legs and hands. However, the police arrested AR instead of the assailant, who—in the presence of two uniformed police officers—repeatedly threatened to kill AR. As a result of the injuries suffered in this attack, AR had to be treated by EMS for his injuries and received two stitches in his hand.

Rockland County, NY, 12/31/95

On December 31, 1995, YR and her husband KR were stopped in Orange in Rockland County by Officer Gentile for no apparent reason. YR complained when Gentile asked for her driver's license. When she then asked him what the problem was, the officer accused them of not having their seat belts on although it was clear that they did. He asked the passenger KR for his I.D. When KR replied that he had no I.D., Gentile reached inside the car, tried unsuccessfully to unfasten KR's seat belt, and then grabbed him in a chokehold. Confused and frightened, YR bit the officer's hand. YR and KR were then arrested. KR was charged with resisting arrest. YR was charged with resisting arrest and assault in the second degree. CAAAV, along with the Korean Merchants Association of the Village and the New Jersey Korean Association, met with YR and KR and will continue to monitor the case.

Monmouth County, New Jersey, 12/12/95

After having been dismissed from his job at a Chinese restaurant, JW returned on December 12, 1995 to collect his belongings. His employer refused to return them to him, and instead called the police and accused JW of trespassing. Officer Pasquolini and his partner ordered JW to leave the premises. JW complied and waited for his boss at a parking lot outside the restaurant. Pasquolini then ordered JW to leave the parking lot, a public area, pushed JW against a wall, breaking his glasses, and yelled "Do you have a green-card? Are you a legal immigrant?" He arrested JW on charges of trespassing, resisting arrest, and causing a "public inconvenience." CAAAV will monitor the case to ensure that JW is given fair judicial process.
Background

The presence of Asian immigrant women in the U.S. sex industry is directly related to the long-standing U.S. military presence in Asian countries such as Korea, Thailand, and the Philippines. World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War brought hundreds of thousands of U.S. military troops to Asia; but after the fighting stopped, the U.S. military remained. Prostitution is one legacy of the continuing American military presence in Asia. From Olongapo, the Philippines, to Patpong, Thailand, to Euijangbu, South Korea, to Okinawa, Japan, entire neighborhoods and villages of sex establishments serving U.S. military personnel have sprung up around the bases. Many Asian women engaged in sex work in the U.S. are wives of American soldiers who were either abandoned or forced to flee violent home situations. Ostracized by the immigrant community here and isolated from mainstream society by their lack of English language skills and racial and cultural discrimination, many of these women end up in massage parlors and brothels.

Another result of the U.S. presence in Asia is the international trafficking of Asian women by organized crime. Women are sometimes kidnapped or misled by the promise of jobs. Once they arrive here, they are literally enslaved and forced to work in brothels behind locked doors.

The Question of Choice

People often make a distinction between women commonly considered “innocent,” who were kidnapped and trapped in brothels without the option to leave, and those women, commonly considered “guilty,” who were not physically coerced to come to the United States and forced to work as prostitutes. The latter group is characterized as frivolous, “loose” women who choose prostitution as an easy way to make money or lazy, incompetent women who can not or do not want to hold down “real” jobs. Underlying these assumptions are moral judgments which scapegoat women who work in prostitution without considering the context in which women, especially working class immigrant women, must live and work.

The notions of “choice” and “free will” must take into account the range of choices actually available to these women. Compared to those with advantages of race, class or gender, working class immigrant women have severely limited employment options and little opportunity for upward economic mobility.

What are the choices available to working class immigrant women? Many Asian immigrant women, for example, have “chosen” to work in sweatshops. A woman working in a sweatshop may work seventy-hour weeks at a wage of less than two dollars an
hour. She risks back problems and carpal tunnel syndrome due to the harsh working conditions. She will lose her job if she protests the conditions under which she works or engages in any kind of worker organizing. If her boss refuses to pay back wages, she must accept it. And what recourse does she have if her boss sexually harasses her or assaults her? If she is forced to work overtime, can she hire another poor immigrant woman of color to raise her children and do her housework for her? Given these conditions, why would this woman “choose” to work in a sweatshop as opposed to a corporate law firm?

Working class Asian immigrant women, especially those with limited English language skills, have few options. As long as they contend with these conditions, we cannot look at sex work or any other work as a reflection of a woman’s character or abilities.

On the other hand, sex work is not just like any other job. It is impossible to view sex work in isolation from the sexist objectification and commodification of women that fuels the sex industry. Nevertheless, the sex industry is a significant source of jobs and a survival strategy for many Asian immigrant women in New York and, therefore, can not be ignored.

Empowering workers

Some sex workers’ organizations have suggested that decriminalizing prostitution would solve many of the problems around sex work. Some women sex workers have written about the sense of empowerment they feel from earning a lot of money and having freedom over their bodies and sexuality. While the sex industry is historically based upon the dehumanization and exploitation of women’s bodies, the presence of Asian immigrant women sex workers in many of whom were sex workers in their country of origin. There is an inextricable connection between the individual histories of Asian sex workers and the systemic exploitation of the sex industry based on historical and on-going economic, race, nationality and gender oppression that must be addressed as solutions for empowerment are considered. We believe that, for Asian sex workers, only collective acts of resistance and struggle for structural change can truly result in empowerment.

SEX WORK & IN NEW YORK

Although the challenges in organizing sex workers are daunting, there are openings and possibilities. Hopefully more options may be created for women, so that leaving the sex industry is not necessarily the “right” choice, but rather a viable option among many.
Violence Against Asian Women

Local Incidents

Over the last year, CAAAV has advocated for several Asian women. The cases below highlight the types of racist violence and harassment that Asian women face and the similarities and differences between problems faced by Asian women and men.

Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, 4/6/96

On April 6, 1996, NL was wrongly arrested and then detained at the 60th Precinct in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. NL was watching her children at her ex-husband's home, when Police Officer Tacconi and his partner entered the apartment building and tried to kick down the door of another apartment. NL offered to get the key to the apartment. Tacconi yelled, "Mind your own business!" He then forcefully twisted her arm, pushed her forward, and handcuffed her, commenting that "Chinese women are all bitches." He also threatened that "I'll send your kids to child welfare and lock you up in jail." NL was charged with obstruction of governmental administration. CAAAV has been working with NL to get her charges dismissed and to raise awareness in the Chinese community in Brooklyn of the issues of police abuse and victims' rights.

Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, 11/16/95

On November 16, 1995, SC was helping a landlord communicate with the police, when Police Officer Track called SC a "Chinese bitch," kicked her, and slammed her against a wall. Track threw her in jail and had her stripsearched. She was then charged with disorderly conduct. When SC asked Track to apologize for what he did, he sang "God bless America." After the community mobilized around the case, the Brooklyn District Attorney's office dismissed the charge against SC due to "insufficient evidence" on March 25, 1996. SC has been working with CAAAV on NL's case and on the community education campaign [see above].

New York City, 5/95

In May 1995, KL left Japan to get married in New York. Soon after the wedding, her husband began to physically abuse her and call her racist names. KL left her husband and moved to a hotel. Although she currently has a work visa, the visa will expire in September 1996 and she is concerned that a divorce will jeopardize her immigration status. CAAAV has provided KL with referrals to immigration and marriage law clinics.

Suffolk County, New York

TYC, a Chinese American teacher at Suffolk County Community College, has been the victim of constant racial harassment by her supervisor, the Assistant Department Chairman. Her supervisor has openly made remarks such as, "Why don't you go back to Taiwan with your little suitcase?"; "All Asians are stupid"; and "The only good blacks are from South Africa." The supervisor has called TYC at home to harass her and has insulted her in front of her class. When TYC reported these incidents to the college administration, it responded that she would be unable to prove her allegations. TYC believes that the harassment is part of a pervasive pattern of racism, which has caused other people of color to leave the department.

Manhattan, 12/95

"Susan," a Filipina, was sexually and racially harassed on the job while working at a Kenneth Cole shoe store. During a phone conversation, her regional manager Dan Riley demanded sexual favors for a friend who "especially likes Filipina women." Prior to this incident, Susan had been informed by the management that she would be transferred to the store where Dan Riley is based. After this conversation, Susan reported the harassment to her immediate supervisor and requested not to be transferred. When her supervisor took no action, Susan left her job. She has filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission. CAAAV has provided Susan with legal referrals and formed a justice committee for Susan with members of Gabriella Network and Kilowin Kolektibo. The committee is launching a campaign to demand that Kenneth Cole fire Dan Riley and compensate Susan for loss of wages.
"THE WOMEN OUTSIDE"

This provocative new documentary takes an intimate look at the women who work in the brothels, bars, and nightclubs around U.S. military bases in South Korea. The film follows some of the women who marry G.I.'s and come to the U.S., where many encounter abusive relationships and social discrimination. It is these women who often find themselves back in the U.S. sex industry. Mixing interviews, archival footage and military propaganda, the film exposes the role of the U.S. military and South Korean government in the economic and social options for poor working women in Korea. "The Women Outside," by J.T. Takagi and Hye Jung Park, will be shown on public television’s P.O.V. on July 16 and at the Asian Cine-Vision's Asian American Film Festival on July 26.

Still from the "The Women Outside".

CAAAV RELEASES POLICE BRUTALITY REPORT

On March 12, 1996, CAAAV held a press conference in front of U.S. Attorney Zachary Carter's office in Brooklyn to announce the release of our report, "Police Brutality in the Asian American Communities, 1986-1996." (For a summary of our findings, see CAAAV Voice, Winter '96.) The report was submitted to Carter as a follow-up to the October 1995 meeting, when CAAAV and other community leaders demanded that the U.S. Attorney conduct a civil rights investigation into Yong Xin Huang's death. At the press conference statements were made by the families of Yong Xin Huang and Anibal Carrasquillo, Black Cops Against Police Brutality, and Azabache, a network of young African American and Latino community activists. For copies of the report, send checks to CAAAV for $10, with the memo "report".
Racial Justice Day

On March 28, 1996, more than 2,000 people participated in the second annual Racial Justice Day Rally and March. The event was organized by the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights and co-sponsored by CAAAV and other activist groups, most of which represented communities of color.

The rally at City Hall included speakers from the families of victims killed by the police, including Yong Xin Huang's sister Joyce, representatives from community activists and youth groups, including Anannya Bhattacharjee from CAAAV, and a performance by the Welfare Poets. Despite the rain and cold weather, many passersby joined the crowd as it marched to Tompkins Square Park.

Responding to Sex Workers' Needs Helps them Reduce their Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS

The Foundation for Research on Sexually Transmitted Diseases (FROST'D) operates several HIV/AIDS prevention projects. The centerpiece is a mobile outreach project for street-based female sex workers in the city. The Care Van and the Off the Street Mobile Unit provide free counseling and testing for HIV, hepatitis B, syphilis, and pregnancy. They also offer needle exchange and case management, which includes referrals to shelters, drug programs, and health care. They provide women with food, clothes, and sleeping bags and help women obtain identification cards and apply for public assistance. Since the outreach project has been in operation, the annual incidence of HIV among the women has declined from 36.2% in 1989 to 18.1% in 1995.

FROST'D sponsors several other programs, including the Court Counseling and Midtown Criminal Court Projects and Foundation House South and North. The Court Projects provide an alternative to incarceration for people charged with prostitution or drug-related misdemeanors. They hold a two day HIV/AIDS prevention workshop and make referrals to drug programs. Foundation House South provides transitional housing, training in basic living skills, and assistance with securing permanent housing to homeless men and women diagnosed with AIDS. Foundation House North will offer similar services to homeless female sex workers diagnosed with AIDS.

For more information call 212-924-3733.

Coalition of Sex Workers' Rights Organizations

The North American Task Force on Prostitution (NTFP) is a network of sex workers' rights organizations in the United States and Canada and is affiliated with the International Network of Sex Work Projects. The NTFP's primary goals are to repeal laws, prohibiting prostitution or forcing prostitutes to register and be tested regularly for STD's, and to remove U.S. immigration restrictions for sex workers. NTFP asserts that a better way to approach existing problems is through occupational safety and health regulations, community organizing, and the enforcement of laws against rape, physical assault, kidnapping, fraud, extortion, and child labor.

NTFP is also concerned with violence against prostitutes—from clients, managers, police, and intimate partners—and the need to convince police and prosecutors to act on sex workers' reports of rape. Besides coping with the threat of HIV/AIDS and STD's, sex workers suffer from other work-related health problems such as repetitive stress injuries and depression from the difficulties of being undocumented, stigmatized, marginalized, and working in bad situations.

For more information call NTFP at 212-866-8854 (evenings) or PONY, the local affiliate, at 212-713-5678 (voice mail—leave a message).
Workers Stop Expansion of OTB in Chinatown

Chinese immigrant workers played an important role in preventing OTB (Off-Track Betting Corporation) from expanding its operations in Chinatown.

OTB, a state-subsidized agency, and the manager of Silver Palace Restaurant, Richard Chan, had planned to transform the restaurant into the largest gambling parlor in New York City. It would have specifically targeted the Chinese immigrant population by planning to handle not only U.S. races during the day, but also Hong Kong and Macao races at night. Together with the two existing parlors in Chinatown, OTB would have received an estimated $6,600,000 a month. By siphoning the hard-earned wages of the working people of Chinatown and funneling it into state-sanctioned gambling, OTB would have destroyed the economy of the community.

In a strong showing of community unity and outrage, over 13,000 people signed petitions against OTB’s expansion plan. The achievements of the campaign reflected the collaborative organizing efforts of the Chinese Clergy and Laity Concerned, the Committee for a Better Chinatown, the 318 Restaurant Workers Union, and the Chinese Staff & Workers Association. This winter, workers tabled and leafleted the streets and factories of Chinatown, midtown Manhattan, Flushing, and Sunset Park. This steadily growing resistance culminated in a spirited demonstration held on November 25th outside the Chatham Square OTB.

Student of Color Movement Heats Up at Columbia

This winter, the struggle for Ethnic Studies at Columbia University—the longest sustained campaign of its kind—once again proved to be a testimony to the strong commitment and organization of students of color. The Committee on Ethnic Studies and the Core Curriculum—a coalition of the Committee on Asian American Studies (including a few CAAAV members), the Committee on Latino Studies, and the Black Students Organization—banded together to organize student action to change Columbia’s academic program from one which promotes Eurocentrism and racism, towards one which would be more representative of the student population and our communities through the establishment of the autonomous field of Ethnic Studies. The protest, mobilizing over 300 students and community members, began with a sit-in at the College Dean of Students office on February 6th. The sit-in was followed by two building take-overs, one of which lasted five days, community rallies, a hunger strike which lasted fifteen days, and a week-long campus lock-out of media and non-Columbia people. These actions captured national media attention and brought the administration to the negotiating table in April; but the administration made only token concessions. Strengthened by increasing community support and their links with other community struggles, the student movement will continue to organize and move into another phase of action.
Make Ways for Change

Join CAAAV in:

- Fighting racial violence and police brutality; demanding accountability from the criminal justice system
- Organizing Asian immigrant cab drivers to challenge the racist and exploitative taxi industry in New York City
- Empowering Asian immigrant women workers in marginalized industries
- Developing youth leadership in low-income and refugee Asian communities
- Publishing the CAAAV Voice, a unique voice in the Asian American community

Fund the Resistance

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Hard times demand real and material support!!
Your financial support for our office, our dedicated five-member staff, and our rising operating costs to match our expanding work will add strength to CAAAV’s struggle against the growing forces of oppression and hate.

Support CAAAV today!

YES! I want to take a stand with CAAAV. Here is my tax-deductible contribution:

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