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ColorLines

RACE CULTURE ACTION

FALL 2001

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Race World

UN Conference Against Racism, South Africa

Hold until October 15, 2001



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New World Narrative

The stories of Tigris, Torm, and Tsepho will not make it into the final document of the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Forms of Intolerance in Durban, South Africa this summer, but their tales are centrally what race and racial justice mean in the 21st century.

Tigris (not her real name) escaped political repression in East Africa only to face slave-like conditions as a domestic worker for a diplomat in Washington, D.C. Underpaid, overworked and sexually harassed, she escaped once more and now organizes other women in similar situations.

Torm left family, friends, and the country of Laos to be resettled as a refugee in Richmond, California. Recruited by the CIA to help destabilize the Pathet Lao government, with promises of U.S. generosity for his loyal service, Torm was placed in a neighborhood surrounded by 300 chemical plants and waste storage facilities. Torm is active once again, but now as an organizer holding these companies accountable.

Tsepho was 19 years old when he was murdered on a white-owned farm in South Africa's Northern Province. He, along with the rest of his community, had been waiting for years for the government to come through with the promise of post-apartheid South Africa—land redistribution as the cornerstone of economic justice. His community filed a land claim—stuck in a bureaucratic mire for years—on the very property where Tsepho was killed.

Theirs are stories of how labor, lies, and land are used as scaffolding to help erect and maintain the structures of the existing social, economic, and racial order. But their life's narrative also shows the resolve to fight

for justice, and the painstaking effort to dismantle the scaffolding, piece by piece.

ColorLines takes a look at the issues, efforts, and perspectives of race warriors who will convene in the thousands at the third World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance to be held in Durban, South Africa in late August, 2001. We explore the elasticity of racial constructs, in how, for example, a Dalit can be an "Untouchable" in India one day, considered "Black" in England the next, and "Colored" the third day in South Africa. And what happens to our understanding of racism when intersected with gender and class? And if people of color don't experience discrimination in racial terms can it still be explained under the rubric of "racial oppression"?

It will be in the stories of Durban participants, some of which you'll read in this issue, that we can glimpse the answers to these questions.

Finally, I'd like to thank the *ColorLines* staff for putting up with me during the past few months as I tried to fill Bob Wing's shoes. A talented bunch they are, with hearts so big.

—Francis Calpotura

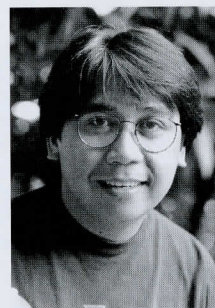


PHOTO BY JEAN WEISINGER

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Publisher

Applied Research Center

Executive Editor

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Gary Delgado, Julie Quiroz, Esmeralda Simmons, Mark Toney

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Tram Nguyen

Guest Editor

Francis Calpotura

Business Manager

Mónica Hernández

Editorial Staff

Nicole Davis, Melia Franklin, David Leonard, Patrisia Macías Rojas, José Palafox, Ryan Pintado-Vertner, Vijay Prashad, Oliver Wang

Contributing Writers

Angela Ards, Linda Burnham, Jeff Chang, Nicole Davis, Makani Themba-Nixon, Gary Phillips, Ryan Pintado-Vertner, Maya Wiley, Annelise Wunderlich, Joy Mutanu Zarembka

Copy Editors

Melia Franklin, Margo Sercarz, Susan Starr, Jean Taylor

Photography and Art

Anne Blackshaw, Vonani Wa Ka Bila, Rodrecas "Drék" Davis, Corky Lee, Keba Konte, Terrance Pitts, Rinku Sen, Raymundo Veitia, Jean Weisinger, Annelise Wunderlich

Cover Art

Keba Konte

Design

Chris Martin

Print Management

Denise Granger

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Soon Be Free

A photo montage by artist Keba Konte, whose work combines photojournalism and mixed media to explore themes of race, culture, and history in settings around the world. His website is www.kebakonte.com

Angela Ards, "Payment for Past Wrongs." Angela's writing has appeared in *The Village Voice*, *The Nation*, *Ms. Magazine*, and *Step Into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature*. She moonlights as a program officer at the Surdna Foundation, where she funds national youth organizing projects. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Linda Burnham, "Doing Double Duty." Linda is co-founder and director of the Women of Color Resource Center in Berkeley, California. A lifelong writer and activist, she is also a yoga practitioner and teacher.

Francis Calpotura, Guest Editor. Francis was an organizer, trainer, and co-director of the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) from 1984-2000. Since then, he spent a few months teaching at San Francisco State University, and traveling the world on an extended sabbatical. Currently, Francis is perfecting his skills in photography and karaoke.

Jeff Chang, "Where Do We Stand?" Jeff became one of the founding editors of *ColorLines* after he received his masters degree in Asian American studies from University of California, Los Angeles. He is writing a book on the politics of the hip-hop generation.

Nicole Davis, "Race to Durban." Nicole is a senior program associate with the Transnational Racial Justice Initiative. She was formerly development director for the Center for Third World Organizing and lead organizer at Californians for Justice in Los Angeles.

Hua Hsu, "Race Records." Hua is working toward a doctorate in American civilizations at Harvard University. He has written for *The Wire*, *URB*, the *Boston Phoenix*, and *A. Magazine*.

Makani Themba-Nixon, "Race in the 'Post-Third World'." Makani works with the NGO Forum of the World Conference Against Racism. She is the former director of the Applied Research Center's Transnational Racial Justice Initiative and the author of *Making Policy Making Change*, available from Chardon Press.

Gary Phillips, "The Battle of Los Angeles." Gary is a writer and activist in Los Angeles, and a member of the National Writers' Union. His mystery novels include *The Jook* and *Bad Night Falling*.

Ryan Pintado-Vertner, "Web Watch." Ryan is an information activist for the Data-Center, a national research organization based in Oakland. He is also a writer, and is working on his first book.

Maya Wiley, "Inheritance of Apartheid." Maya is a civil rights attorney currently consulting for the Applied Research Center. She spent over a year in South Africa helping the Open Society Foundation-South Africa create a criminal justice initiative and three months working with the Legal Resources Center in Cape Town.

Annelise Wunderlich, "Underground Revolution." Annelise is pursuing a dual masters degree in journalism and Latin American studies at the University of California, Berkeley, with a focus on documentary film and human rights. Formerly, she worked as an immigration advocate and at Amnesty International's Refugee Office.

Joy Mutanu Zarembka, "Maid to Order." Joy, the daughter of a domestic worker from Kenya, is the director of the Campaign for Migrant Domestic Workers Rights. She is also the author of *Pigment of Your Imagination: Mixed Race Families in Britain, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Jamaica*.

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4096 Piedmont Avenue, PMB 319
Oakland, CA 94611-5221
510-653-3415 / 510-653-3427 fax
colorlines@arc.org
www.colorlines.com

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Advertising:
510-653-3415 or colorlines@arc.org

Media Inquiries:
Rosi Reyes
510-653-3415, ext. 304

Dear Editor:

In addressing the issue of Black Power vs. Brown Power (ColorLines, Spring 2001), Shannah Kurland stitched together an intriguing and entertaining tale based on half-truths and personal opinion. Despite an extensive description of the different political battles waged in Providence's 2000 primary elections, Ms. Kurland failed to disclose an inherent conflict of interest: she and several other DARE members worked on social flag bearer Joseph Almeida's campaign while her husband, Miguel Luna, a former Latino candidate to Providence's City Council who capitalized massively on his own Latino-ness, held a leadership role in Marsha Carpenter's campaign.

Attributing Representative Tejada's victory to the machinations of a foreign political party makes for a great story but is far from the truth. Interestingly, Ms. Kurland's husband is a card-carrying member of the Dominican opposition party, the PLD.

Returning to Providence politics, Mr. Tejada is a prominent local businessman who is well known within our city's Latino community. Meanwhile, his opponent Marsha Carpenter had slowly faded into obscurity after the terrible shooting death of her teenage son several years ago. While everyone sympathized with her loss, her total lack of visibility within the district was the key factor in her losing the representative seat that she held during six years.

Ms. Kurland's assertion that my political leanings are as much a mystery as [my] decision to run was somewhat disingenuous. I made my political leanings very clear from the beginning and continued to do so throughout the campaign. My decision to run was based on the fact that there are real social justice issues that have been eating away at our urban communities for quite some time. These social justice issues took center stage in my campaign. Meanwhile, Almeida's entire campaign message was, in his own words, let's talk about DWB (driving while black).

One cannot honestly sing one's own praises for having sponsored pre-existing legislation ordering a racial profiling survey for the police while Providence schools' dropout rate is greater than 30 percent and

while crime, drugs, and abandonment continue to wreak havoc on one's district.

Neither Tejada nor myself believe in running a person out of office simply because that individual is not Latino. However, if an individual is not performing their duties properly then anyone else has the constitutional right to run against them. The fact that I received 49 percent of the vote in a district where Latinos comprise, at best, 35 percent of all active voters is solid proof that I am not the only person that thinks this way.



Should Latinos and African Americans work towards consolidating a united front? Most definitely. As communities we are inextricably linked by the challenges and difficulties we face. However, while more and more Latino voters turn out on election day, in many urban communities the number of active African American voters has not increased and, in some cases, decreased noticeably. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges that African American leaders face today is how to convince Latino voters that their efforts to build bridges are motivated by more than just the desire to remain in office.

Gonzalo Cuervo
Providence, RI

Response from Shannah Kurland

Dear Mr. Cuervo,

Thanks for your thoughtful response. It's clear from the article that I supported Representative Joe Almeida because of his strong track record on racial justice issues. That's an interest, but hardly a conflict. I strongly supported Marsha Carpenter, as well, and still respect the work she did winning health insurance for (mostly Latina) daycare providers and defeating the reactionary voter

initiative process proposed by so-called good government groups. However, my husband and I haven't been able to figure out exactly how he "capitalized massively on his own Latino-ness." We'd like to get a better handle on it, so he can re-capitalize effectively in the next election.

The racial profiling data collection bill had no house sponsor until Rep. Almeida took it up; the lack of house sponsorship is why it went nowhere in the 2000 session. No one I've heard has said collection of racial profiling data is the only solution our communities need. But reality is, until we get some acknowledgement of the racism in so-called law enforcement and use that to keep these monsters in check, there are too many black and brown youth who will never get a chance to go to school or take part in the economy outside of the prison system.

As far as the role of local PRD activists in Leon Tejada's election, I would suggest that it's hard work, rather than "machinations" that made an impact. Thanks to its history and the vision of the late Francisco Peña Gomez, the PRD has a consistent internationalist perspective. Giving props to the work done and credit taken by party members is a reflection of very clear statements made in interviews by Sector President Rhadames Duran and Providence Secretary Rafael Diaz and confirmed by statements from dozens of other PRD members since. FYI, my husband has never been a member of the opposition PLD, card-carrying or otherwise.

The PRD, however has failed in the same regards that you, I, and pretty much everyone involved in Providence politics have—the failure to develop an agenda that can translate demographic domination into racial and economic justice policies. If those basic tenets are missing, then Latino residents, black residents, and anyone else who wants dignity and justice are in big danger of seeing biennial scrambles and turf battles degenerate into alliances between elite business interests that will further oppress communities of color in Providence. And if those elites feel the need, they will have no trouble finding a few Latinos or African Americans to front for them. Given what's at stake, I'd rather warn too strongly than not at all. ■

LETTERS AND SUBMISSIONS

We welcome letters to the editor and unsolicited submissions. Please write us for guidelines. However, we cannot promise publication or the return of submitted materials. Submissions by e-mail are preferred. Please include your address, phone, fax, and email address.

RACEFILE

BY NICOLE DAVIS, COLORLINES STAFF



A Cambodian refugee family at a detention center in Australia's Northern Territory.

Stranded in the Outback

Refugees at one of Australia's remote detention centers went on a hunger strike to protest a raid by Australian police. Australia has long been criticized by the United Nations and Amnesty International for its harsh treatment of undocumented immigrants, including detaining people in remote centers located in the desert. Many of the refugees come from the Middle East and the southern provinces of China.

Refugees arriving in Australia without papers are immediately detained once they are caught. Detention can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few years, depending on how long it takes the immigration department to process the case. The detention centers have been criticized for poor living conditions and abusive behavior by the guards. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock told BBC News that the location of the centers, in the Australian desert where summer temperatures get extremely hot, was a good thing because no one would try to escape.

Similar to the situation in the United States, detention centers in Australia are run

by private security firms, but the immigration department claims that this does not translate into poor treatment of those detained.

Supreme Court Rules on Deportation

The U.S. Supreme Court in June ruled that immigrants facing deportation for certain criminal convictions are entitled to a court hearing—a case that provides relief to thousands of immigrants affected by the harsh anti-immigrant laws of 1996.

INS v. St. Cyr rejected the Justice Department's contention that the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act and the Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act denied judicial review in deportation cases and could be applied retroactively to immigrants who had pleaded guilty to crimes before the laws' enactment.

Immigrant rights activists are hoping this case will open the door to more challenges on behalf of those being held in INS detention centers. Because Cuba, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam refuse to accept deportees from

the U.S., immigrants from these countries remain indefinitely in detention for even minor crimes.

Asian Race Riot

The town of Oldham, England was home to several protests and dozens of arrests throughout May. Early in the month, the National Front, an ultra-right-wing political group, defied a ban on political marches and brought 500 people to the town for a demonstration. The group is known for their extreme anti-immigrant platform.

Later in the month, the police arrested 21 people after what the *International Herald Tribune* called a "race riot." Reports indicate that the conflict started when a group of white youth attacked the house of a Bangladeshi family. The Asians, in this case, are mostly Bangladeshi and Pakistani, many of whom were born and raised in England. At one point it was estimated that 2,000 young people were involved in throwing firebombs at police.

Ugly Americans

The United States took a big blow to its ego when it failed to be elected to two key United Nations bodies—the UN Human Rights Commission and the International Narcotics Board. It is the first time since the Human Rights Commission was formed in 1947 that the U.S. has not held a seat.

In retaliation, the U.S. Congress voted to withhold money owed to the UN in back dues until the U.S. is reinstated, at least on the Human Rights Commission. The United States owes close to \$825 million to the United Nations, and is refusing to pay \$244 million of that amount. The United Nations is routinely strapped for cash because the United States is so far behind in dues payment. According to BBC News, anti-U.S. sentiments are due to the United States' "increasing bias against the Palestinians in the Mid-East crisis, and a selfish head-in-the-sand stance on climate change and the environment." ■



PHOTO BY RAYMUNDO VETIA

The Battle of Los Angeles

Gary Phillips tells
the only-in-L.A. tale
of the city's historic
race for mayor

"The kind of white-backlash campaign that the demagogic Sam Yorty waged against Tom Bradley in the mayoral elections of 1969 and 1973 could not fly here today."

—Harold Meyerson,
L.A. Weekly, March 23-29, 2001

"And seize the metropolis, it's you that it's built on."

—Rage Against the Machine,
"War in a Breath"

Against a backdrop of rolling blackouts, a section of the city that wants to secede, and federal oversight of its police force, the contest for mayor of Los Angeles unfolded. The race came down to a duo of Democrats. One was former Speaker of the Assembly Antonio Villaraigosa, and the other L.A. City Attorney James Hahn. And as it turned out, there was plenty of racialized backlash to be had in the contest.

Not only did the ghost of Sam Yorty haunt the campaign, but the specters of Tom

Bradley and Kenneth Hahn (father of James) did too. And oh yeah, the presence of Willie Horton was also evident. Hahn won the mayor's race, 54 percent to 46 percent. It was an election befitting what one *L.A. Times* journalist has called "the twilight zone" of Los Angeles politics, in which one ambitious urban coalition arising out of L.A.'s dramatic demographic and political makeover went up against another unlikely crosstown alliance representing the status quo. As it turned out, a number of factors—among them the polit-

Gary Phillips is a mystery and political writer, and activist in Los Angeles.

ical wariness between blacks and Latinos, the nagging influence of the city's diminishing yet indefatigable white conservative and moderate voters, and a surprise low blow from the Hahn campaign late in the game—meant that the onrush of L.A.'s electoral realignment would halt at the door to City Hall, at least this time.

Yet there are lessons to be learned from the defeat of Villaraigosa, and the dynamic social and political implications of his challenge.

Tom and Sam

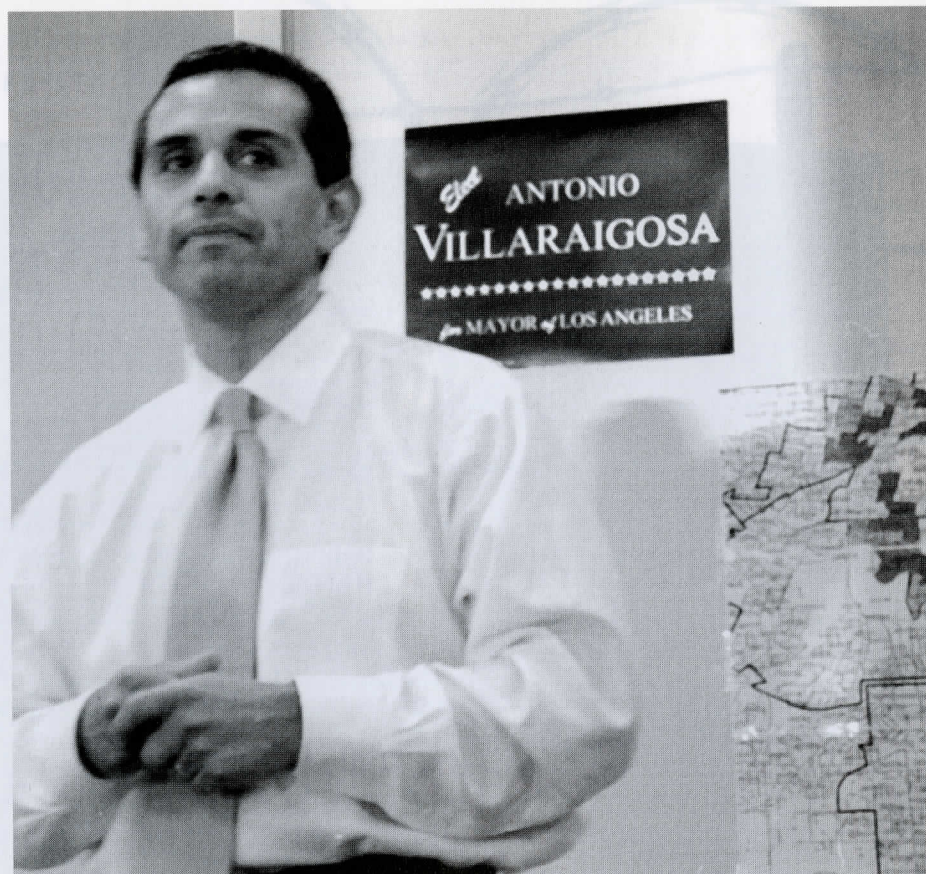
But first, a look into the past as it helped shape the present. Thirty one years ago, black City Councilman Tom Bradley ran against incumbent Mayor Sam Yorty. This contest, too, represented the status quo versus change—or at least the promise thereof. Tom Bradley had been a career cop on the LAPD, and the first African American elected outright to the L.A. City Council, representing the 10th District.

When Bradley first challenged Mayor Sam, Yorty did what he did best—he played dirty. He appealed to his base in the San Fernando Valley, a sprawling community of single-family homes and breadbox apartment complexes that in the '60s was largely white and conservative. It was from the Valley that Southern California's anti-busing movement was born. It also birthed Proposition 13 and the revolt of the white homeowners' associations.

Yorty, a right-wing Republican, was able to fan racial fears and falsely portray to the palm-tree patricians that moderate Bradley was a dangerous mau-mau; that if he got into office, the Black Panthers would make a power grab, white police officers would leave in droves, and there would be another Watts riot. The overwhelming message to white folk was that a black mayor of Los Angeles would signal the end of the lifestyle WWII and Korean War veterans of Valley areas like Van Nuys, Sherman Oaks, and North Hollywood had worked so hard to maintain.

Dirty Blows

Hahn proved to be an apt pupil of history. A little more than two weeks after the April 10 primary, where Villaraigosa and Hahn



Antonio Villaraigosa during the primary elections in April.

Villaraigosa energized progressive forces to work in the electoral arena, and that's a good thing.

(with 30 percent and 25 percent of the vote respectively) emerged as frontrunners, Hahn did the traditional rightist critique of the liberal and accused Villaraigosa of being soft on crime. That as Speaker he didn't back hard, gang-related measures. And worse—this was a direct appeal to the Valley heartland—that Villaraigosa had taken a walk when it had come time to drop the hammer on sexual predators and child molesters.

Also during the primary, some voters received a recorded phone call wherein the message (with a voice imitating County Supervisor Gloria Molina, a Villaraigosa supporter, and calling herself "Gloria Marina") warned that Villaraigosa was a danger to women and children because of his lack of support for tough crime bills. The call was eventually traced to city councilman Nick

Pacheco and Congressman Xavier Becerra, who at that time was also running for mayor. But the real dirty blow lay ahead.

The Villaraigosa camp responded that the attacks were typical low-ball politics and out-of-context distortions. But it was telling that Villaraigosa responded to the broadsides in front of a police station in the Valley's North Hollywood section. Both camps had done the political math, and came to the conclusion that each had to woo the white vote as part of their formula to win. During the runoff, each candidate made numerous sorties over the hill into the Valley to glad-hand and debate. In Clinton-like fashion, no sooner had the chads been swept up at polling places, both camps sent signals of moving more toward the center.

Villaraigosa had to work extra hard to

assuage the fears of jittery white voters. As Bobbi Murray pointed out in her cogent *Los Angeles* magazine piece, "Shadow of the Valley," 40 percent of the electorate, largely white, lives north of Mulholland Drive, a dividing color line between the two L.A.'s. And, like Bradley (whose handlers advised him not to point at white audiences when giving a speech), Villaraigosa also had to overcome whites' fear factor.

Then Hahn, trailing in some polls by 5 percent two weeks out from the April vote, dusted off the Willie Horton playbook, thanks to one of his political advisors, Bill Carrick. In the last two weeks of the campaign, he ran a TV ad showing a razor blade cutting cocaine and a crack pipe emitting narcotic fumes, followed by a grainy shot of Villaraigosa. And in the mail came a flyer, the cover image a vial and spilled crack, with the words, "Why We Can't Trust Antonio Villaraigosa."

The ads alluded to the fact that Villaraigosa had written a letter five years ago to the White House pardon office on behalf of convicted drug dealer Carlos Vignali. Roger Mahoney, the cardinal of L.A., and numerous others (including Sheriff Lee Baca whose letter to prison officials asked for Vignali to be moved closer to his family) had also done so. This at the behest of Vignali's connected dad, Horacio Vignali. That didn't matter. The TV ad with its indicting voice-over of Villaraigosa and the mailer did the trick—Hahn surged to the lead. The subtext of the attack was Latino politician, Latino drug dealer...what should the voters do? It didn't help matters that Villaraigosa initially "mis-remembered" sending the letter.

Villaraigosa was conflicted on hitting back, though there was ammunition to be aimed at Hahn. In 1997, Ted Stein, who ran against Hahn for city attorney, criticized his office for not doing more to seek jail time for two domestic violence offenders. Both violators wound up killing someone. Ironically, Hahn denounced Stein for using "Willie Horton tactics." Hahn also had done nothing about the Rampart police scandal, of which there had been rumblings months before the story broke. And his office defended the infamous Daryl Gates, ex-chief of the LAPD, in the

face of reforms post the Rodney King beating. Eventually, the Villaraigosa camp finally did a hard-hitting mailer linking Hahn and Gates, presumably in an effort to erode some of his black support, but it reached homes on the Saturday before the Tuesday election—too little, too late.

Black-Brown Power Struggle

Hahn received 71 percent of the black vote in the primary, and 80 percent in the runoff. This was largely due to the legacy of his father—who represented South Central on the Board of Supervisors for 40 years—and the lockstep endorsements he got from black old-school pols like Congresswoman Maxine Waters and Councilman Nate Holden. It was not a reflection of the fact the city attorney had held public office for 20 years or was seen as a particular friend to African Americans. Anecdotal stories by Villaraigosa supporters recount going door-to-door in black districts and residents easily using "Kenny" instead of "Jimmy" when referring to the younger Hahn. Isabelle Gun-

Hahn became the surrogate black candidate, the one who would somehow hold back the inevitable, if only for a few more years.

ning, a professor at Loyola Law School and an observer of the sociopolitical scene, opined, "When are our people going to stop voting for a ghost?"

That statement encapsulates some, but not all of the reasons Hahn was largely able to take the black vote for granted in the race. The other factor is the black-brown tensions exemplified in this race. One Friday in May, the morning hosts of KJLH, a local black

radio station, were discussing the upcoming runoff. Several African American callers expressed the "they're taking over" sentiments that have almost become mantra in certain quarters of L.A.'s diminishing black community. Hahn became the surrogate black candidate, the one who would somehow hold back the inevitable, if only for a few more years. Under Hahn, the black politicians facing a changed, and increasingly Latino, demographic (and redistricting given the new Census), have a caretaker who will accommodate them. Under Hahn, Valley secessionists also have what they want: a weaker mayor—not a consensus builder like Villaraigosa—who won't be able to hold a disparate council together and counter their attempts.

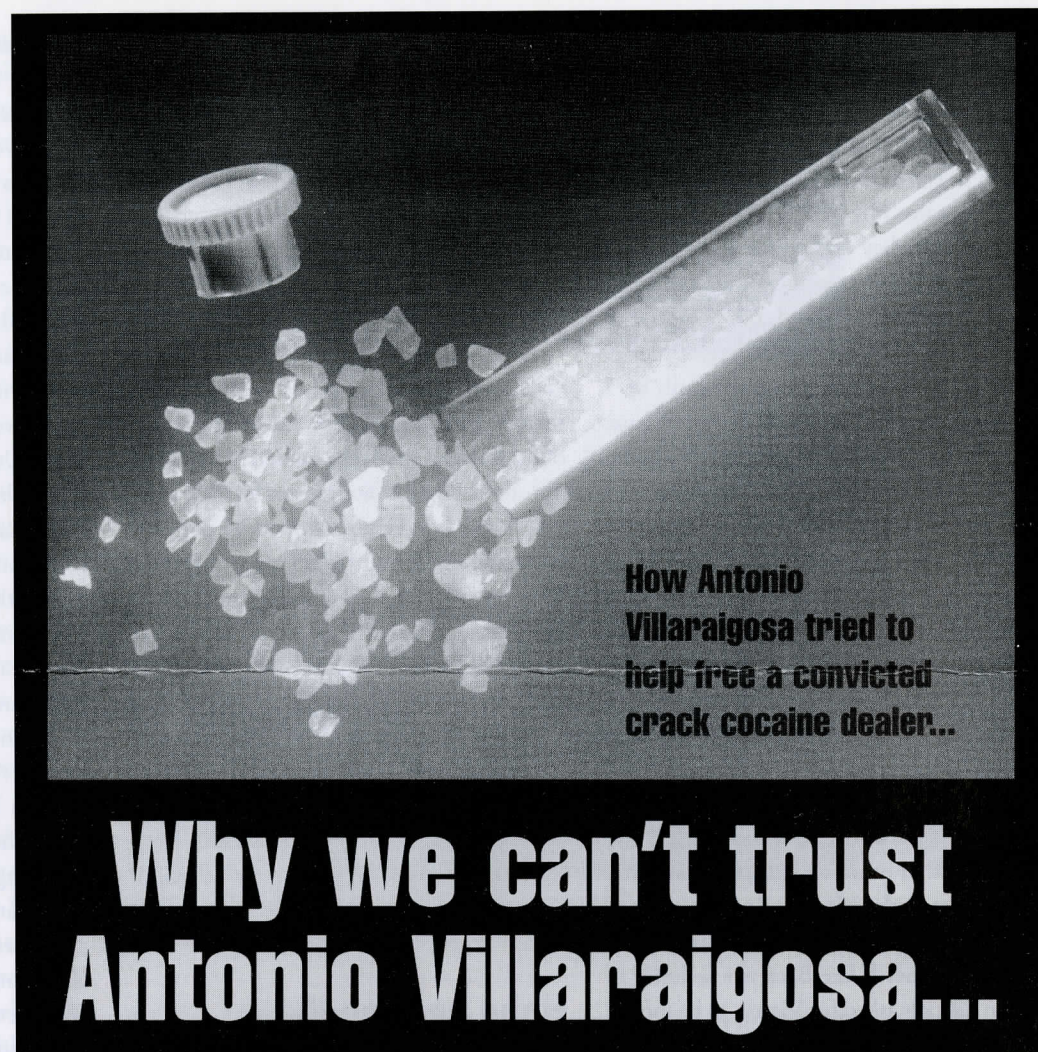
Coalition building means power sharing. And at a time when the African American community of Los Angeles (and California) has been eclipsed by Latinos, and increasingly by Asians—most notably Korean Americans in L.A.'s urban core—there's a lot of "circle the wagons" talk a la what whites said regarding burgeoning black political power in the late '60s.

Interestingly, one of the mainstays of the black community that broke ranks was the *Wave* newspaper, a weekly giveaway, which endorsed Villaraigosa. And executive editor Jarrette Fellows, Jr. chastised the black community in his editorials to get beyond Villaraigosa's Latino-ness and look at what he stood for.

When Tom Bradley came to office, his now almost mythical crosstown coalition—white Westside votes and money, coupled with black belt support at the grassroots—was seen as a win for the black community because he was black, and in comparison to Sam Yorty, a liberal.

But the coalition base that brought Bradley to power didn't do much for then-African American South Central. Twenty years of Bradley left rampant over-development of downtown and under-development and economic neglect of South Central. The continuing plague of police abuse culminated in the civil unrest of 1992. By 2001, the remaining players in the black political machine staked their best chance for influence and power with the son of Kenny Hahn.

Hahn dusted off the Willie Horton playbook with an ad that showed a smoking crack pipe, followed by a grainy shot of Villaraigosa.



A crack mailer from the Hahn campaign.

Pulling the Union Vote

While it is true that the offices of city hall became more inclusive, the Bradley Administration was no more immune to insiders and lobbyists than previous ones—or to the demands of traditional organized sectors such as labor, which should not be romanticized as monolithically progressive. Witness recent conflicts between the building trades and their sister unions, such as janitors and hotel employees. And more than 40 percent of union members voted for Bush.

It was significant that both Villaraigosa and Hahn had the support of L.A.'s labor unions. In the primary, union members—who made up 22 percent of those going to the polls—voted 39 percent for Villaraigosa and 28 percent for Hahn. This split had a racial overtone as the American Federation of State, County and Munic-

ipal Employees (AFSCME) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 347 members—which include sizeable black memberships in city and county jobs—decided to support Hahn. The Carpenters union, largely white, also supported Hahn and sent out their own attack mailer using an image of Villaraigosa in front of the Watts Towers, a landmark in black South L.A., to stir up Valley Republicans.

Conversely, the County Federation of Labor, the consortium of L.A.'s unions, supported Villaraigosa, donating resources and fielding some 2,500 canvassers for get-out-the-vote efforts. Under the regime of general secretary Miguel Contreras (husband of Maria Elena Durazo, head of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Local 11), the County Fed flexed its political muscle not unlike during the '50s, when union-

ization was at its height.

But the end result in June was that union members, according to an *L.A. Times* exit poll, voted 52 percent for Hahn and 48 percent for Villaraigosa.

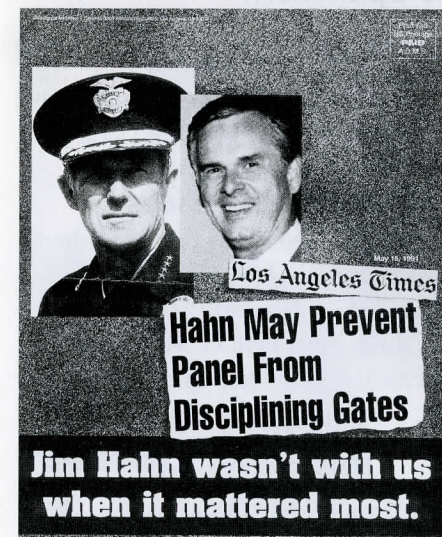
The Great Left Hope

Going into the primary, much of L.A.'s progressive community swung into action to encourage civic participation. Grass-roots groups such as L.A. Metro Alliance, a coalition of organizations brought together by AGENDA (Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives), Coalition L.A. (whose political arm has run candidates for city council) together with POWER (Parents Organized for Westside Renewal), and the Industrial Areas Foundation all did voter education in key districts using candidates' forums,

report cards, canvassing and phone banking.

They saw an opportunity in Villaraigosa, who had been a radical community activist and labor organizer, to breathe new life into the city's multiracial left. As Karen Bass of South Central's Community Coalition put it, "Even more important than the election is the movement that's getting built around [Villaraigosa's] candidacy. I've known him for 30 years. Some of us doubted he would be able to pull it off but he fooled us... This is the future in terms of the Third World coalition. This shit is not new. We've been trying to do this for years."

Even if he hadn't already been inclined to do so, Villaraigosa, by virtue of being the Eastside Chicano who made good, had the mantle as the architect of diversity foisted upon him. It's the old bit, repeated time and again when it comes to non-white candidates for public office. Can you be the—fill in the blank—for all the people? Will you only be responsive to your own racial group?



Villaraigosa's one hardhitting campaign ad was too little too late.

All this while the plodding and ruthless Hahn shored up rightist support (87 percent who self-identified as conservative Republican voted for him, according to the *Times'* June exit poll) and got cover from Waters, Holden, County Supervisor Yvonne Burke, et al. These African American electeds would have called that crack mailer for what it was had it been leveled against a black candidate.

To win, Villaraigosa needed to increase

his white votes while picking up the excess Latino votes, eroding Hahn's black base by at least another 12 to 15 percent, and splitting the Asian vote, which mainly went to Hahn. But as each candidate crisscrossed the vast city in search of votes and money, as their volunteers worked the phones and knocked on doors, and held coffee klatch after coffee klatch...the big question remained. What would a Villaraigosa victory really mean for the city and the left?

Because labor and community organizations, organizers, activists, pundits, and insiders were charged by the Villaraigosa effort, it was easy to project a looming progressive Camelot, or El Dorado, if he gained office.

But just as Bradley's reign ultimately ensured the continuance of special-interest capitalism, albeit nuanced, Villaraigosa didn't represent an outright overthrow of the status quo either. Otherwise, why did power players such as Eli Broad and Tim Leiweki, men who have their hearts and minds set on building big box stuff, put their money behind Villaraigosa? Clearly they believed this was a candidate they could "do business with."

Sober Optimism

That question, and many others, are moot for now. Hahn won with 59 percent of the white vote to Villaraigosa's 41 percent. The former speaker got an overwhelming Latino vote, 82 percent, but that wasn't enough to put him over the top.

What is also sobering for the left is that certain notions about black voting patterns (recall that almost half of African American voters favored Prop. 187) have to be realistic. The work that has to be put into overcoming black/brown tensions, and the romanticized idea that organized labor is by default progressive must be reevaluated on a case-by-case basis. Also, labor cannot reenergize itself solely via immigrants, and ignore displaced black workers. Too many welfare-to-work programs are only placing African Americans and others in low-income jobs. Viable organizations and unions on the move have to find a way to relate to the underclass of disaffected black and Latino, and white and Asian youth.

Despite the Villaraigosa defeat, there were promising changes in June. In the nearby small municipality of Compton, where two black candidates vied for the mayorship, the one who nominally could be called the more progressive won with Latino votes playing a factor. And in the 9th, the technocrat Jan Perry won over the labor-backed careerist Carl Washington. Again, both candidates were black in a district where the Latino numbers are on the rise.

On the flip side, Rocky Delgadillo, the Riordan-backed, pro-business Latino candidate for city attorney, won in a tight race against white progressive favorite Mike Feuer—and Delgadillo received a majority of black votes.

Is the lesson that electoral politics is always about pragmatism and not possibility, as organizing teaches? Partially. Does it mean that third party alternatives such as the Greens are the way to go? Probably not in the immediate. The Greens, or whoever, have to put in work, as the young folks say.

But this mayor's race in L.A. also highlights opportunities that those who are about change need to take apart, piece by piece and examine. Efforts by community organizations have to be redoubled and foundations, who saw race as a sexy topic again after the '92 civil unrest, have to understand that working and organizing across racial lines is not something that can be compartmentalized as "a project" that starts and stops. Those on the frontlines day-to-day know that race and class and cultural preconceptions do matter. These are real barriers to building multiracial coalitions around such issues as school reform, affordable housing, and police abuse.

Though Joel Kotkin, the smiling capitalist, crowed after the election in his *Wall Street Journal* piece, "The Left Loses in Los Angeles," there is much to be optimistic about from this contest. Villaraigosa did energize progressive forces to work in the electoral arena, and that's a good thing. Change is about altering the relationships of power, and local power is expressed on one level by our electeds, and who they feel responsible to. We must not part company, but rather come together to study and strategize.

Ain't nothin' to it, but to do it. ■

Race to Durban

BY NICOLE DAVIS
COLORLINES STAFF



PHOTO COURTESY OF KWAZULU TOURISM AUTHORITY

Race warriors approach UN World Conference Against Racism with cautious optimism

This summer, 8,000 people from organizations around the world will gather in Durban, South Africa for the third United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance. There has been much realignment in the landscape of world politics since the last World Conference was held in 1983—the collapse of formal apartheid in South Africa, ethnic and tribal conflict in Eastern Europe and Africa, religious and culture wars all over the Asia Pacific, the ascendance of the politics of colorblindness in the West, and the biggest migration of people in the history of humanity mostly from the southern hemisphere—that has indeed reconfigured old global alliances and spawned new racial antagonisms. And for better or worse, Durban will host a gathering wherein the consequences of these historic global phenomena converge.

Participants come to Durban to broadcast critical racial justice issues of our time. Some have made their rounds before, seeking reparations for the trans-Atlantic slave trade and exposing the racist core of Zion-

ism. Others make their debut onto the World Conference stage. Dalits from India contend that the caste oppression they have endured is centrally a racial issue, and Russian immigrants in Israel argue that their experience can only be explained as racial discrimination. Everyone has come to deal. But amidst the global power dynamics, with the United States government as the central figure, it is unlikely that any policy that radically alters this global arrangement will make it out of the Conference. But that prospect hasn't kept groups from plunging head-on into Durban.

Organizations vary greatly in their motivations and approach to the Conference. For some, the UN constitutes a central, if not sole, arena of struggle. For others, it simply provides a prestigious venue in which to air their issues and embarrass their governments into action. Many organizations worldwide, and increasingly in the U.S., successfully apply UN treaties and conventions to influence government treatment of their constituencies. This could mean using UN treaties and conventions to force a local decision-maker into compliance on a specific issue, or

it could mean using an international analysis to broaden the framework of a local issue.

A Broader Cut on Issues

The campaigns that best lend themselves to using the UN are those with global frames and implications.

A direct outgrowth of the UN Conference on the Status of Women held in Beijing, China in 1995, the Women's Institute for Leadership Development for Human Rights (WILD) has been working ever since to bring a human rights framework to women of color issues in the United States. WILD was largely credited in lobbying the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to adopt a Human Rights Audit of city services in 1998, with provisions inspired by the UN Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Since then, city agencies conduct an annual audit, including a gender impact

■ Nicole Davis is a senior program associate with the Transnational Racial Justice Initiative.

study, of programs and services.

For WILD, working on the World Conference Against Racism is part of a larger strategy to integrate domestic issues in the U.S. to larger international struggles. "We have to take the UN as we take any policy-lobbying arena," says Krishanti Dharmaraj, WILD's director. "Just as any local issue is impacted by national policy, it is also impacted by international policy. It is one of many avenues we must work in."

Terrance Pitts, New Voices Fellow at the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty (NCADP), has worked to connect death penalty issues in the U.S. to similar struggles globally. NCADP's goals for the World Conference include educating government delegates about the racial discrimination inherent in the death penalty, as well as getting support from other organizations around the world to push the issue with their government representatives. At a minimum, NCADP would like to see some uniform global standards for tracking the issue.

"There are no standards from country to country about data collection," says Pitts. "Even in the U.S. there are no uniform standards. We need to help the government delegates see the bigger picture—who are the people being arrested, who is passed over for prosecution, who is executed."

Expanding the Racial Justice Movement

Many other groups treat the Conference as a prime opportunity to build movement, rather than just advance specific policy goals. For Barbara Arnwine, executive director of the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, participating in the World Conference Against Racism is a "real opportunity to create an international movement against racism." The Lawyer's Committee first began working with the UN in the 1970s on the issue of apartheid.

Arnwine believes that "racism has been able to strive and to advance and replicate so effectively worldwide because there is

no combined movement across borders and regions to hold accountable to international standards those people who act in a discriminatory way."

Arnoldo Garcia of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights in the United States has found that the practice of using international standards in itself helps bring together constituencies who are facing different conditions that stem from the same source. For Garcia, working on the World Conference Against Racism is a concrete way to realize two of the Network's goals. "The Conference helps us create relationships and alliances in communities of color and in the racial justice movement in the U.S. and abroad, and elevates the importance of bringing to bear international protections on immigrant communities in the United States."

The Network has taken a leading role in defining and working on immigration issues in the World Conference process. Members have participated in regional meetings in the Americas, and Preparatory Committee meet-



The caucus of African descendant groups meet at the last Geneva Prep Com before the World Conference.

PHOTO BY TERRANCE PITTS

ings in Geneva. In those meetings, the Network facilitated exchanges between immigrant groups from several countries who had never worked together before, and will present reports on the situation of immigrants worldwide in Durban.

One of the participants is Cherry Padilla, a member of the Asian Regional Coordinating Committee for the World Confer-



PHOTO BY TERRANCE PITTS

Gay McDougall, director of the UN International Human Rights Law Group.

ence Against Racism, and a staff member of the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom in the Philippines. She was involved in the creation of the Philippines Network Against Racism, a coalition of organizations that work on women's issues, religious conflict, migrant issues, and the rights of indigenous peoples.

According to Padilla, there are many pressing issues that representatives from the Asia-Pacific region want to be addressed at the World Conference. The rights of migrants who leave Asia for Europe and the United States to support their families, the effects of globalization on the lives of women, the financial crises and increased poverty caused by mounting foreign debt, and the effects of structural adjustment programs are just a few. For her, the Conference provides a focal point for grassroots groups committed to social justice. "Real changes come from the

people themselves, raising their voices and joining together to pressure the governments to do their job and make sure people are provided for in the right way."

Making It to the Table

But engaging in an international conversation about race and racism is an overwhelming venture. And not everybody makes it to the table.

For one thing, resources make a tremendous difference in the ability of groups to engage. As the director of the UN International Human Rights Law Group and a member of the CERD committee, Gay McDougall has a rare perspective on the World Conference and the participation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the event. McDougall observes that while there has been strong participation in the preparation process for the Conference from organizations throughout the Americas and Europe, there has been less participation from Asia and Africa. According to McDougall, for Africa, the problem is largely lack of resources. Although there are regional meet-

The World Conference is a real opportunity to promote an international movement against racism.

ings hosted for specific geographic areas, many organizations in Africa simply do not have the money to attend. And if they do, the delegations are often very small. For Asia, she says, one of the main issues is "the question of the conceptualization of some of the problems that exist in the region as being or not being racial issues." In the Dalit example, caste-based discrimination is now referred to as discrimination based on descent or work, the closest advocates could get to calling the caste system racist.

For many organizations participating in the Conference, the Fourth World Conference on Women serves as a guiding light. But McDougall notes significant differences between Beijing and the World Conference Against Racism. "The Durban Conference has a more varied constituency," she notes. "There is a problem of self-identification, and how to define race. When you

say there's going to be a conference on women's issues, everyone knows who you're talking about. That created an easier mechanism for mobilization. When you talk about race, and when you look at the agenda for the Conference, you're talking about a much wider constituency. There are people who suffer from racism and racial discrimination, but who don't always identify as such."

Atsongo Chesoni, a consultant with African Women's Development and Communications Network—FEMNET, in Kenya, notes a similar difference, "Every single Kenyan knew about the World Conference on Women. Whether they agreed with it or not, they knew it was happening." She also believes that the World Conference Against Racism is the single most important event to affect the lives of African women since the Beijing conference. But she admits it will be extremely difficult for women in Kenya, and throughout Africa, to feel the effects of the Conference immediately. "People have less of an idea what the UN's role is with racism, or don't even know that the UN has a mechanism set up to deal with it."

This lack of awareness, she says, contributes to the difficulty of getting support for Kenyan women to attend the Conference.

U.S. as Saboteur

For many governments and organizations, the stakes are high. The Conference will conclude with the adoption of a Declaration and a Plan of Action. Preparations, including regional meetings to outline key issues for inclusion in the documents, have been underway since May 2000. Government delegates drafting the Declaration have been activating old alliances and forging new ones to ensure that issues mentioned or excluded in the document meet their political needs. Although a UN declaration is not a legally binding document, governments and NGOs alike believe they can provide leverage on key policy debates.

Despite the lack of legal importance, gov-

ernments have fought seriously over the language to be included in the document, and several highly contentious issues have emerged. The linguistic negotiations reflect the strength of the U.S. position in the world government, as issues that the U.S. opposes slowly trickle out of the document, beginning with reparations and ending with the debate about how the Israeli and Palestinian conflict will be referred to in the document. By the time of the second Prep Com in Geneva in late May, reparations language had already been negotiated out, along with language specific to the Dalit issue. The remaining potential deal-breakers for the U.S. government are three points related to the Middle East: the U.S. resists language that refers to Zionism as racism, to Palestine as an occupied territory, and to the Nazi Holocaust as one

among many holocausts (lower case h and plural). To avoid discussion of reparations, the U.S. insists that the Conference should be about forward-looking strategies, not remedies of past discrimination.

Countries trade political favors in these debates. For example, the U.S. agrees not to support Dalit language if India argues against reparations language. Such trade-offs make it more difficult for NGOs to lobby for their language, as these discursive debates are set against the realities of countries negotiating long-term diplomatic and financial agreements.

Hard-line positions on language and repeated threats to low-ball the Conference, along with the congressional position that the U.S. will not pay a portion of its back dues to the UN until the U.S. is reinstated

How the CERD Works

In 1965 the United Nations brought into force the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). Like all UN Conventions, once ratified by a country it becomes national law. To date the CERD has been ratified by 156 countries, including the U.S. (but not until 1995).

Once ratified, each country must file reports every two years with the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). The CERD Committee is made up of 18 members, elected by the countries that have ratified the ICERD. In each government's report to the Committee, it must detail the country's progress on addressing issues of racism and racial discrimination, and outline some of the best practices in the field. The United States just filed its first report in January 2001, a full four years late.

When a country is up for review by the CERD Committee, it is assigned a "special rapporteur," a member of the Committee who spends some time in the country investigating the issue at hand. The special rapporteur must read the government report and make

recommendations to the Committee about whether to raise concerns about the government's efforts. As part of this process, Non-Governmental Organizations can file alternative reports, known as "shadow reports" that detail a different perspective on how the country is doing with regards to racism. Shadow reports are available from the World Organization Against Torture, the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, and the Transnational Racial Justice Initiative.

The CERD Committee is scheduled to meet this August, before the World Conference Against Racism. Although the two bodies are not officially connected, many grassroots organizations that are attending the World Conference are also involved in the CERD process. The United States is scheduled to be reviewed at this meeting, but it's unclear whether President Bush will try to postpone that review. Many organizations in the U.S. have prepared shadow reports on topics ranging from criminal justice to welfare reform, and are hoping the Committee will hear them even if the U.S. postpones its review. ■

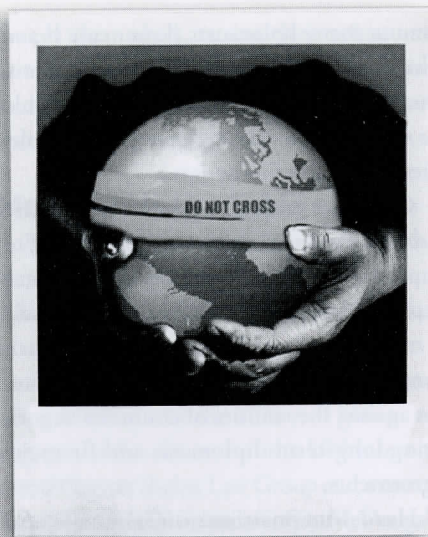
onto the Human Rights Commission, have made the U.S. an unpopular, if eminently powerful, delegation to the Conference. Debra Carr, the director of the U.S. Inter-Agency Task Force on the World Conference, resists characterizations of the U.S. as a saboteur. Carr conducts daily briefings for U.S. NGOs during regional and international preparatory meetings, in which she insists that the Bush administration is seri-

Repeated threats to low-ball the Conference have made the U.S. an unpopular, if eminently powerful, delegation.

ously engaged in the Conference. At the same time, Carr reinforces that "if these bad things stay in the document, then we will stick to our position that we cannot engage at a high level." Only a delegation of junior officials has been attending Conference preparatory meetings so far.

Looking to Durban

Despite these limitations, activists will continue to flock to Durban from all over the world, if not in search of the right answer, at least in search of like-minded race warriors, hoping to bring home one good idea that produces real change for their constituencies. Like others, Terrance Pitts does not see his work ending on September 7. NCADP, WILD, and the National Network all see their most promising strategies in partnering with grassroots groups in the U.S. to track racial problems and push for legislative and practical remedies. Through these types of incremental advances, these groups committed to racial justice and a vision of genuine global cooperation to end all forms of discrimination are working to tip the balance of power. They, along with thousands of others, look to Durban to provide continued inspiration for the long road ahead. ■



RODREAS 'DREK' DAVIS

RACE IN THE "POST-THIRD WORLD"

The UN becomes the flash point as groups vie for racism's new meanings

BY MAKANI THEMBA-NIXON

Their web page is red, black, and green. Their slogan: "It's Racism!" They call themselves the Panthers—the Russian Panthers—and their group is among those organizations attending the UN Conference that are pushing the boundaries around race, racism, and racial justice work. It's a long way from the historic Bandung Conference in 1955 where the world was officially divided into the white North and the colored South. There, we became "people of color" and members of the "Third World" as part of an analysis grounded in a deep sense of solidarity and based on a shared experience of colonialism, racism, and conquest.

Stretching UN's Big Tent

Race, though always a social construction and ever changing, will be up for some real stretching this summer at the World Conference Against Racism. In fact, the meeting's full title, the World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, is just one indication of how big the

tent will be. A significant push for the expansion came from Europe, where groups lobbied to ensure that ethnic cleansing and anti-Semitism made it in the mix. Groups working on anti-Semitism united with those from Eastern Europe to form almost 80 percent of the region's World Conference preparatory meeting participants. The net effect is the broadening of scope from that of the first two gatherings that had a shorter name—World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.

In many ways, the themes and politics of this year's conference are rooted in a bit of a pendulum swing from the heady days of Bandung. Then, solidarity and unity were paramount. Tensions and atrocities within the "Third World" were often glossed over as vestiges of colonialism. Yet colonialism, though clearly critical to the analysis, was stretching thin as a way of explaining the bloody coups and "ethnic cleansings" that abided in the neo-colonial world. As a result, racism became

racisms as we tried to make sense of its varied and complex transmutations.

In many ways, this "shift," as it's manifesting at the World Conference, is essentially the de-emphasis of white supremacy and "North-South" tensions and the emphasis of other issues emerging from a broad range of "oppressions" of which race is a part. Don't get me wrong, understanding the connections (or the "intersectionality" if you want to use the cool, hip lingo) is essential. I'm not trying to rock the "either race or" school here. But there is something worth examining about a world conference against racism that will have anti-Semitism (actually, they just mean anti-Jewish hate, the other Semitic peoples are left out of their framework) and Eastern European ethnic conflict on the agenda. If they were operating from an analytical framework that they were racialized as a result of their oppression

■ Makani Themba-Nixon works with the NGO Forum of the World Conference Against Racism.

(like say, the Russian Panthers), it might not require a second look. That's not their claim.

As a result of the participation of these groups and the character of established human rights work globally, those involved in conference preparation thus far are largely white and from developed countries. And the effect on conference discourse and policy has been significant.

Are You Sure You're (Not) Black?

For example, "African descendants" face particular difficulties within the UN preparatory framework as a result of what can only be characterized as acute racism and even fear of blacks. At the European regional preparatory meeting of non-governmental organizations last year in Strasbourg, there were participants that challenged a proposed resolution to call colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade crimes against humanity. Their rationale: slavery and colonialism brought "benefits" to Africans alongside the oppression, so the designation wasn't necessary. In addition, African groups had to fight to get adequate representation in the meeting in the first place.

The African descendant groups also had difficulties getting statements into the documents coming out of the Americas meeting in Santiago last December. There, inadequate translation and lack of representation on the drafting committee exacerbated persistent tensions between black groups that have long felt marginalized and the powerful, established NGOs charged with running the meeting. Those not speaking Spanish were particularly alienated, an interesting switch from the U.S. context, where English is a tool of domination and Spanish is marginalized. Afro-Brazilians and francophone participants were affected the most.

Obviously, these incidents are disturbing in any context, but their occurrence within the framework of a world conference against racism made them all the more alarming. In response to these and other problems, a global meeting of "African descendants" was held in Vienna in April. More than 100 black-led NGOs were in attendance in order to hammer out a global African strategy and

analysis for the World Conference. In a process that is mostly about the development and drafting of summary documents and plans of action, such a meeting is critical to advancing the unique issues facing Africans across the globe. Unfortunately, the response by many conference organizers was less than encouraging. In fact, a number of organizers expressed fear and concern that the meeting would be "exclusionary," "divisive" and "counter-productive." The intense and pub-

The Conference is de-emphasizing white supremacy and "North-South" tensions.

nity, they demonstrate what happens when there are no clear principles of unity, common framework or even shared vision of racial justice. Of course, part of the challenge is that there's a mighty big tent and lots of issues competing for the stage. Another factor is how race, not being a fixed biological fact, is mediated as a political, cultural, and socioeconomic construct.

The fact that a South Asian living in London is Black and a South Asian living in Los Angeles is definitely not demonstrates how local permutations of race and racism shape both racial consciousness and racial conflict. Attempting to develop global frameworks that take into account these subtleties has dogged conference organizing from the beginning. And these challenges are not only located among whites. There are people of color who are contesting the use of racism as an analytical framework as well.

Part of the reason why some groups of



The historic Bandung Conference in 1955 first put forth the idea of the world as divided into the white North and the colored South.

lic debate held mostly over the web demonstrated the extent to which old attitudes concerning blacks, self-determination, and fears by whites of being excluded still persist.

Although these tensions are not representative of the entire conference commu-

color are rejecting a racial framework is because the short-term tactical advantage of distancing the work from such an analysis appears to outweigh the long-term benefits of "racial solidarity" and alliance building. One example of this tactical distinction is

found in the effort by some groups to insist on the inclusion of "xenophobia" on the conference agenda as a way to name and distinguish the oppression of people of color by people of color who are not black. At the heart of the distinction is the assertion that the term racism "leaves them out" because racism only happens between blacks and whites. In addition, that since these groups

The Conference is saddled with a broad "intolerance" agenda and the expectation that it should be a vehicle for racial justice.

constitute cultural and not racial categories, the term xenophobia more aptly describes their status as "legal" (though darker) whites. In other words, if you get to check "white" on your census form then race does not apply.

This is an important phenomenon because it represents a real turn from the Bandung-style solidarity framework: the politics of distinguishing between xenophobia and racism are essentially about the rejection of traditional "Third World" solidarity based on shared racial status as "non whites." It is the charting of new middle ground *between* a racial justice analysis on one hand, and racial solidarity with whites on the other—much like the "colored" category imposed under apartheid South Africa only, here, it is voluntarily embraced.

Yet there are others who see racializing their analysis and their work as an important part of how they advance their issue. Perhaps in the case of Africans, there really is no choice. Black and race are synonymous, so trying to come up with some other framework probably wouldn't fly. But for other groups who easily could have rejected the race frame, why did they choose to embrace it? The answer lies in their militancy, their long-term view, and their sense of place in a global movement against racism and other forms of oppression.

Race and Revolution

For the Russian Panthers, race is a lens through which they make sense of their status in Israel. Says organization leader

Merav Frolova (through translation), "The purpose of our activity is not in hooligan actions or quarrels. We see that 'Black Panthers' in America as well as in Israel became catalyst[s] of culture revolution that started the process of including subculture of ethnic minority to magisterial society culture." (<http://www.ispr.org/engl.html>)

The Russian Panthers have been lever-

aging European and international forums of the world conference preparatory process to raise public awareness of hate crimes and institutional racism against Russian immigrants. Although their local organizing focus is young people in secondary school, they characterize their fight as part of a global anti-racist movement addressing state violence, hate, and gender oppression. For these Panthers, a racial justice analysis offers a framework that enables them to place their struggle into a larger historical context that recognizes race as a social construct.

The liberation movement among India's Dalits to end caste oppression has long embraced the analysis that their struggle is not an issue of religious tolerance, it is about racial justice. The Dalits also launched their own Panther movement in the 1970s inspired by the Black Panthers in the United States. In fact, the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) often draws direct parallels between their struggle and the struggle of African Americans in the U.S.

"The word caste is derived from Latin word 'castus' meaning purity of blood/breed," writes the NCDHR. "Racism as an ideology is also based on this sole concept of purity of blood/breed. In the strict sense, caste is not race, but the roots of the caste system as it is practiced can be seen in the ideology of racism."

With this analysis in tow, Dalits organizing around the World Conference directly pursued inclusion in the conference as victims of racism not "related intolerance." In

this case, it is a tactical decision that is paying off. In spite of tough opposition by the Indian government, the Dalits' straightforward racial solidarity has won them many allies and increasing visibility worldwide.

Beyond Bandung

Clearly, much has transpired over the 40-plus years since that watershed meeting in Bandung. This World Conference will likely boast few world leaders and even fewer participants from developing countries. Currently, more than three-quarters of the groups applying for accreditation are from the U.S. and many of the organizations going from the U.S. and Europe are white-led, at this point, due to financial issues and other considerations.

All of these issues underscore the paradox of a conference saddled with both a broad "intolerance" agenda and the expectation that it should be a vehicle for racial justice work that matters. It's highly likely that it won't be both. And given the race politics thus far, it's unlikely to accomplish the latter—that is, not without a serious fight.

Understanding that a United Nations meeting has its limitations, both political and otherwise, the conference organizing thus far still provides some insight into the state of racial justice work worldwide. Hopefully, these struggles will contribute to an emerging, post-Third World dialectic of sorts where in the final analysis, we will retain the best of the "old"—a strong sense of solidarity and analysis informed by our understanding of white privilege and racial oppression, history and culture, politics and economics; while we continue to incorporate the new—a better understanding of the intersection of various oppressions, a vital analysis of globalization and emerging technologies as well as a sophisticated understanding of inter-ethnic oppression and its contexts. The World Conference, with all its flaws and tensions, exposes the need for such integrated analyzes that help people see these important connections. It is also a rich opportunity to collectively take stock of where we are and what we need and connect *that* analysis to what we dream when we imagine ourselves free. ■



PHOTO BY FRANCIS CALPUTURA

Inheritance of Apartheid

Maya Wiley reports on the persistence of racism in South Africa's land reform efforts

Maya Wiley spent more than a year in South Africa helping the Open Society Foundation-South Africa create a criminal justice initiative and three months working with the Legal Resources Center in Cape Town.

South Africa is a fitting location to host the upcoming UN World Conference on Racism—a country with a 400-year history of a 12 percent white population oppressing the other 86 percent of the population (indigenous Africans and people of Asian descent) coldly, systematically, brutally. And then there was the negotiated end to legal racial oppression and the astonishingly peaceful transfer of political power from whites to non-whites. Despite the tremendous gains of the past six years in South African history, racism and institutional arrangements that protect it continue today.

For example, 19-year-old Tsepho Matloga was murdered March 25 on a white-owned farm in South Africa's Northern Province.

Tsepho was black. Tsepho and his two cousins had taken their five dogs to hunt when several white men opened fire on them. One boy was seriously wounded and all the dogs were killed. Tsepho's body was discovered a week later, dumped in a dam about 200 kilometers from the murder scene. An autopsy has revealed that Tsepho died of a fractured skull and broken ribs. He was beaten to death. Later, the public learned that the police, having arrived at the murder scene and seeing Tsepho's broken body, inexplicably left him there unattended. The prosecution believes that the suspects later moved the body and dumped it in the dam in an attempt to destroy the evidence.

Among the nine men accused of the attack



The African National Congress and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) held a demonstration in Pietersburg in the wake of racist violence against South African blacks.

and murder are Riaan Botha, the 28-year-old son of the farm's owner, and Kobus Joubert, a 34-year-old lieutenant in the South African National Defense Force.

The story of Tsepho's murder and the attempted murder of his cousins is not a simple story of a property owner's reaction to a trespass. The story can only be understood in the context of land ownership and the power it confers in South Africa. Farm killings are an extreme example of how power dynamics in South Africa continue to be racialized. White farmers see themselves as above the law and still have the power.

Land at Stake

Land in South Africa is symbolically and materially important. "The massively unequal distribution of land...is the totally unacceptable continuation of apartheid," said Cyril Ramaphosa, then Secretary General of the African National Congress, at a 1993 conference on land redistribution. "Whoever owns the land is in effect the master or mistress of the people on the land."

This has been the case throughout South Africa's history. Perhaps the most infamous of the several racist laws affecting blacks' land rights were the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, which reserved 87 percent of land for whites. Under the Native Trust and Land Act of

"Whoever owns the land is the master or mistress of the people on the land."

1936, black people lost the right to purchase land, even in the reserves designated for them. Then, in 1962 the South African government established the first of the Bantustans ("homelands"). Bantustans were designated for specific African groups. Without industry, jobs, or land suitable for agriculture, none of the reserves were viable nations.

Also infamous was the Group Areas Act of 1966, which racially segregated urban residential areas. Some 3.5 million people were removed from rural and urban areas between 1960 and 1980 alone. Rural people also suffered dispossession under a variety of policies that forced them into land tenancy or to become farm laborers.

Today, with poverty, unemployment, and housing shortage still crushing problems for South Africa, land reform is critical. The numbers tell the story. Very little of South Africa's land is arable (white farmers claim that only 7 percent is arable, although land activists think the figure is greater). The dis-

tribution of income and wealth in South Africa is still among the most unequal in the world. The poorest 50 percent of the population, who are black, receive only 11 percent of total income, while the top 7 percent receive over 40 percent of the total. While unemployment statistics are not completely reliable, the figure is generally believed to be about 35 percent. Due to the housing shortage, millions of black families live in shanties lacking electricity, fresh running water, and adequate sewage provision.

"Criminal" Justice System

At the national level, law enforcement agencies have resisted efforts to gather statistics about white-on-black farm violence. President Mandela organized a farm violence summit called The Rural Safety/Violence Summit in October 1998 to examine the issue following press coverage of murders of black farmers by whites, some of which were horrifyingly brutal. The summit resulted in a task team comprised of the Ministry of Safety and Security, the South African Police Service and the Ministry of Land. But the police would only agree to gather statistics on damage to farm property and attacks from outside the farm. So if a white farmer attacks a black laborer or tenant farmer, the incident is not recorded.

Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that blacks have little faith in the justice system. Following Tsepho's murder, black residents of the town where the murder occurred marched to demand an impartial prosecutor and magistrate be appointed to preside over the case. Protesters also called attention to the persistence of racism in the town. The following day, the African National Congress and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) held a demonstration in Pietersburg, the capital of the Northern Province and the city where the court case would be heard, to demand the appointment of an independent prosecutor and to press for the denial of bail.

Given the history and violence and land dispossession, the black community is angry. At Tsepho's funeral, Tom Boya, regional president of the National African Federated Chamber of Commerce in the Northern

Province, suggested the confiscation of farms owned by "these racists that beat and kill our people." When asked if there was anything wrong with Tsepho and his cousins hunting where they did, Boya responded, "Is this not the land of their forefathers? Was it wrong that their skin color is black?"

Slow Pace of Reform

Many blacks are deeply frustrated by the paltry extent and slow pace of land reform. Prior to the 1994 election, the ANC promised to redistribute 30 percent of agricultural land in its first five years in government as part of its now-defunct Reconstruction and Development Program. The reality is that less than 2 percent was redistributed in that period, little of it prime agricultural land. One reason is that the land reform program lacks sufficient resources, with a total budget of less than 1 percent of the national budget and only a tiny fraction of South Africa's 1.1 million civil servants involved in implementing land reform.

The claims process is time-consuming and expensive, including an investigation by the Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights, a mediation process and, if the claim is not settled, review by the Land Claims Court—a special tribunal which has only four judges. Not surprisingly, of the 63,455 claims lodged since 1994 under the land restitution program, only 4,925 have been settled, according to the National Land Committee (NLC), a nonprofit which advocates for just land policies. The majority of settlements are cash payments, with just 162 involving restoration of land. Some experts have suggested that it could take between 18 and 63 years to deal with the current claims. Some provinces have settled as few as two claims between 1994 and February 1999. Some communities have not heard a word from the restitution commission since they lodged claims in 1994.

Tsepho Matloga belonged to one of those communities. The farm on which Tsepho was murdered has a land claim pending against it. Black communities are seeking return of the land in the legal land reform process created to right the wrongs of the past. Unfortunately, communal claims have

languished in an over-burdened, underfunded land claims bureaucracy.

Failed Strategies?

There are three ways South African land reform works: restitution, redistribution, and land tenure for farm dwellers. Restitution gives those who had land taken under racially discriminatory laws a way to try and get the land back. Restitution only applies to a relatively small percentage of the land; some estimate that it would only effect around 5 percent of the land in South Africa.

Under redistribution, the government has a pot of money to purchase land on the open market—the "willing buyer, willing seller"

Black communities are seeking return of the land in a process created to right the wrongs of the past.

model—and grant it to low-income people. Land reform advocates have complained bitterly about this model of redistribution because whites are not willing to sell and it ignores how whites got their land. Even when farmers are willing to sell their land the government bureaucracy is too slow. Complicating the process is getting the right land at the right price. Some estimates indicate that it would cost at least R17 billion (about \$2 billion). Currently, the Ministry of Land Affairs has placed a moratorium on the project and has proposed to shift the focus to creating a black commercial farming class.

Land tenure reform addresses the rights of farm workers and labor tenants who live and work the land. The Land Reform (Labor Tenants) Act allows labor tenants to claim rights to farm land on which they have been working for generations. The Act also protects labor tenants against arbitrary eviction. It only permits eviction in certain circumstances and must be approved by court order.

In many cases the labor tenants have lived on the land in question all their lives, as

did their ancestors for several generations before them. The National Labor Committee says labor tenants in South Africa are "today's slaves" and have few enforceable rights. They are paid little or no wages; those that are paid seldom get more than R30 (\$4) a month. Farm laborers also earn next to nothing. In the Northern Province they only earn from R150 to R300 (\$20-\$40) per month. They may work as much as six days a week, up to 10 hours a day. Some live on the farms in appalling conditions. In the worst examples, Zimbabwean or Mozambican immigrants have been housed in cattle sheds and pig sties.

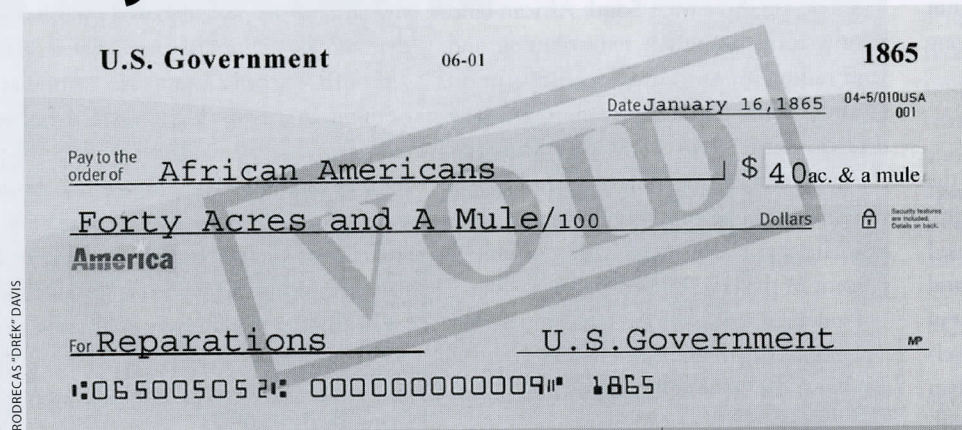
Dim Prospects

"Even if the government settles all the land claims and implements its current redistribution policies, this will not achieve a fundamental redistribution of land in South Africa," said Marc Wegerif, executive director of Nkuzi Development Association, a not-for-profit organization committed to land reform. The cash-strapped government can't afford the market-driven design as it struggles—ironically—to pay back apartheid's debt (\$20 billion as of December 1993).

Perhaps because it is beholden to the institutions which hold its debt and feeling the pressure to attract foreign investment, the ANC has been responsive to the calls of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. For example, in the context of land reform, this meant placating the foreign investor by creating constitutional safeguards to private property that far exceed those of most other countries. Radical land reform was ditched because it was inconsistent with the sanctity of private property and "sent out the wrong signals" to foreign capitalists. The government's most recent plans for further privatization, restructuring of the civil service, cuts in public spending, and the amendment of labor laws to remove protection for workers bode ill for land reform in the future.

Tsepho's murderers may be convicted, but justice will not be done—racial justice—until there has been a fair accounting of the abuses of apartheid, including meaningful land reform. ■

Payment for



Past Wrongs

Angela Ards looks at the international controversy on reparations for slavery

Not since Reconstruction's promise of "40 acres and a mule" has there been such heated debate about reparations for the trans-Atlantic slave trade. To be sure, groups many considered "fringe" or "extremist," like the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA) and Silis Muhammad's Lost-Found Nation of Islam, have long waged this campaign on the national and international stage, even when others questioned their judgment. Today, those who have marched as singular drum majors for justice are now leading the parade as the issue makes unprecedented headlines stateside and abroad.

Since 1989, Congressman John Conyers has proposed legislation (H.R. 40) that would create a commission to examine the institution of slavery and economic discrimination against African Americans, and to make recommendations to Congress on appropriate remedies. The bill has languished every congressional session until the last two years, when city councils of Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Nashville, and Washington D.C., among others, have weighed in with their

support. In February 2001, after the Chicago City Council passed the resolution 46 to 1, Alderwoman Dorothy Tillman sponsored the first National Reparations Convention. Two weeks after the National Reparations Convention, Fisk University's Race Relations Institute in Memphis, Tennessee held a conference as part of an ongoing effort to get Congress to study the impact slavery has had on African Americans. In May, a joint conference held by UCLA ethnic studies programs—Center for African American Studies, Asian American Studies Center, American Indian Studies Center, Chicano Studies Research Center—brought together scholars, activists, and community members. And in June, a New York chapter of the Black Radical Congress sponsored a conference at City College. The pace of activities in support of reparations has been dizzying.

And it is bound to pick up some more at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Of the Conference's five-point agenda, reparations fall under theme four: "Provision for effective remedies,

recourses, redress, (compensatory) and other measures at the national, regional and international levels." Mandated by international covenants governing crimes against humanity and genocide, the issue of reparations is considered a normal part of the United Nations process of addressing human rights violations.

This will not be the first time the UN has been enjoined to investigate and provide remedy for the historic and current effects of slavery on black people. In 1951, political activist William L. Patterson and artist/activist Paul Robeson delivered a petition to the three-year-old UN, entitled "We Charge Genocide!" accusing the United States government of pursuing policies that destroyed black people. In 1994, Silis Muhammad, CEO of the Lost-Found Nation of Islam, delivered another petition that charged the U.S. government with human rights violations, and sought to estab-

Angela Ards' writing has appeared in *The Village Voice*, *The Nation*, *Ms. Magazine*, and *Step Into a World: A Global Anthology of the New Black Literature*.

lish a forum where a cross section of African American leaders could discuss the issue free of United States intervention and manipulation. And in October 2000, civil rights leaders including Gay J. McDougall, director of the International Human Rights Law Group, presented a "call to action" to UN High Commissioner for Human Rights



Mary Robinson. They exhorted her agency to address the rampant racism of the U.S. criminal justice system.

Is It Owed?

"The arguments are fairly simple," Makani Themba-Nixon, who serves on the International Framework Committee, which is helping to structure the NGO meeting in Durban this summer, writes in an email interview. "This was a crime against humanity of unfathomable proportions. The evidence of its current hold on democracy and equity in the U.S. is irrefutable. There's really not a whole lot to argue about. International law is pretty clear. It's when you factor in the power dynamics that things get muddled."

She continues: "Because, in many ways, the United Nations basically reproduces power relations that abide in the world, the issue of reparations has always been a loaded one." As in the U.S., there is still debate in the international community, even among proponents of reparations, around the issue. The word

"reparations" itself, charged even in the international context, is omitted from the official language of the conference's five-point agenda. The alternative, "compensatory," is in parentheses because the regional working committees failed to achieve consensus even on that wording.

Much of the controversy stems from the massive resistance put up by the Western countries, particularly the United States, who would be held liable for reparations. They have hotly contested the inclusion of this agenda item on logistical grounds: who would be held accountable, since Africans, Arabs, Europeans, and black Americans were involved in the slave trade? One hundred twenty-six years after slavery, with survivors long dead, who would receive reparations

Slavery has permeated our laws, our culture, and our very conceptions of blackness and whiteness.

and what form would they take? And how would one even begin to calculate the debt to both African Americans and Africans?

"To say, 'We oppose reparations because we don't know whom they would be owed to,' is a way of avoiding liability, because you can always figure out to whom it's owed," counters longtime activist and N'COBRA legal counsel Adjoa Aiyetoro, who will represent the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom at the UN conference. "The issue is, is it owed? And if it is, the basis of 'Yes, it is' would help you define to whom. Because in defining what's owed, you have to define to whom."

Critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw, who moderated the session "Accounting for the Debt: Appeasement, Apology or Accountability?" at the UCLA conference last May, debunks the claim that there are no survivors of slavery. "Institutionally, slavery was always much more than the legally sanctioned appropriation of the labor of some individuals by other individuals. Slavery was a legal system that permeated our laws (both private and constitutional), our culture, and our very conceptions of blackness and whiteness. It created permanent systemic advantages and dis-

advantages that have been inherited and reproduced generation to generation. The economic, political, and social subordination of African Americans is tied directly to laws and social practices grounded in slavery."

Groups like N'COBRA, which has raised this issue since 1987, embrace a number of forms of compensation from individual payments and land, to funds for repatriation, community development, and education. African activists are beginning to talk about reparations as a way to move debt relief and other redress for the continent. During the African regional preparatory meeting held in Dakar, Senegal on January 24, 2001, the Africa committee adopted a draft declaration that focused on, among other issues, the impact of slavery and colonialism.

Momentum and Resistance

As the momentum builds, so does the backlash. Conservative Salon.com columnist David Horowitz caused an uproar by placing an ad in college newspapers with the headline "Why Reparations are Not Good for Blacks—and Racist, Too." Horowitz, in explaining his actions, said he was doing it for the good of an unsophisticated black community hoodwinked by race-baiting charlatans. The ad, which has been denounced from Detroit, Michigan to Durban, South Africa as a blatantly racist attack on African Americans, especially black youth, revived an activist tradition that it intended to stifle, with students waging protests around the country.

Less, however, is known about the arm-twisting tactics going on behind the international scene to keep reparations off the UN agenda this summer. In the regional meeting in Santiago, Chile last December, a

Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea — and Racist Too.

By David Horowitz

I
THERE IS NO SINGLE GROUP RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIME OF SLAVERY.

Black Africans and Arabs were responsible for enslaving the ancestors of African-Americans. There were 3,000 black slave-owners in the antebellum United States. Are reparations to be paid by their descendants too? There were white slave-owners in colonial America. Are their descendants going to receive payments?

II
THERE IS NO SINGLE GROUP THAT BENEFITED EXCLUSIVELY FROM SLAVERY.

The claim for reparations is premised on the false assumption that only whites have benefited from slavery. If slave labor has created wealth for Americans, then obviously it has created wealth for black Americans as well, including the descendants of slaves. The CPS of black America makes the African-American community the 10th most prosperous "nation" in the world. American blacks on average enjoy per capita incomes in the range of twenty to fifty times that of blacks living in any of the African nations from which they were kidnapped.

III
ONLY A MINORITY OF WHITE AMERICANS OWNED SLAVES. WHILE OTHERS GAVE THEM LIVES TO FREE THEM.

Only a tiny minority of Americans ever owned slaves. This is true even for those who lived in the antebellum South where only one white in five was a slaveholder. Why should their descendants owe a debt? What about the descendants of the 350,000 Union soldiers who died to free the slaves? They gave their lives. What morality would ask their descendants to pay again? If paying reparations on the basis of skin color is not racism, what is?

IV
MOST LIVING AMERICANS HAVE NO CONNECTION (DIRECT OR INDIRECT) TO SLAVERY.

The two great waves of American immigration occurred after 1880 and then after 1900. What right would require Vietnamese boat people, Korean refugees, Iranian refugees, Chinese victims of the Turkish persecutions, Jews, Mexican Greeks, or Polish, Hungarian, Cambodian and Korean victims of Communism, to pay reparations to American blacks?

V
THE HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS UNITS TO JUSTIFY THE REPARATIONS CLAIM DO NOT APPLY, AND THE CLAIM ITSELF IS BASED ON RACE NOT INJURY.

The historical precedents generally invoked to justify the reparations claim are payments to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, Japanese-Americans and African-Americans victims of racial persecution in Tennessee, or racial outrages in Rosewood and Oklahoma City. But in each case, the recipients of reparations were the direct victims of the injustice or their immediate families. This would be the only case of reparations to people who were not immediately affected and whose sole qualification to receive reparations would be racial. During the slavery era, many blacks were free men or slave-owners themselves, yet the reparations claimants make no attempt to take this fact into account. If this is not racism, what is?

VI
THE REPARATIONS ARGUMENT IS BASED ON THE UNSUBSTANTIATED CLAIM THAT ALL AFRICAN-AMERICANS SUFFER FROM THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SLAVERY AND DISCRIMINATION.

No scientific attempt has been made to prove that living individuals have been adversely affected by a slave system that was ended nearly 150 years ago. But there is plenty of evidence that the beneficiaries of slavery were beneficiaries that individuals could not and did overcome. The black middle-class in America is a prosperous community that is now larger and more affluent than the black underclass. Its existence suggests that personal economic adversity is the result of failures of individual character rather than the lingering after-effects of racial discrimination or a slave system that ceased to exist well over a century ago. West Indian blacks in America are also descended from slaves but their average incomes are equivalent to the average incomes of whites (and nearly 25% higher than the average incomes of American-born blacks). How is it that slavery adversely affected one large group of descendants but not the other? How can government be expected to decide as to race that is not subjective?

VII
THE REPARATIONS CLAIM IS ONE MORE ATTEMPT TO TURN AFRICAN-AMERICANS INTO VICTIMS. IT SENDS A DAMAGING MESSAGE TO THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY AND TO OTHERS.

The removal of grievances—which is what the claim for reparations will inevitably create—is not a constructive or helpful message for black leaders to send to their communities and to others. To focus the social passions of African Americans on what some other Americans may have done to their ancestors fifty or a hundred-and-fifty years ago is to burden them with a crippling sense of victimhood. How are the millions of non-black refugees from tyranny and genocide who are now living in America going to receive these claims, otherwise, except as demands for special treatment—an extravagant new handicap that is only necessary because some blacks can't seem to locate the ladder of opportunity without the aid of others, many of whom are less privileged than themselves?

VIII
REPARATIONS TO AFRICAN-AMERICANS HAVE ALREADY BEEN PAID.

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the advent of the Great Society in 1965, billions of dollars in transfer payments have been made to African-Americans in the form of welfare benefits and racial preferences (in contracts, job placements and educational admissions)—all under the rationale of redressing historic racial grievances. It is said that reparations are necessary to achieve a healing between African Americans and other Americans. If trillion-dollar restitutions and a wholesale rewriting of American law (in order to accommodate racial preferences) is not enough to achieve a "healing," what is?

IX
WHAT ABOUT THE DEBT BLACKS OWE TO AMERICA?

Slavery created for thousands of years before the Atlantic slave trade, and in all societies. But in the thousand years of slavery's existence, there never was an anti-slavery movement and white Anglo-Saxon Christians created one. If not for the anti-slavery beliefs and military power of white Englishmen and Americans, the slave trade would not have been brought to an end. If not for the sacrifices of white soldiers and a white American president who gave his life to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, blacks in America would still be slaves. If not for the dedication of Americans of all ethnicities and colors to a society based on the principle that all men are created equal, blacks in America would not enjoy the highest standard of living of blacks anywhere in the world, and indeed one of the highest standards of living of any people in the world. They would not enjoy the greatest freedoms and the most thoroughly protected individual rights anywhere. Where is the acknowledgment of black America and its leaders for those gifts?

X
THE REPARATIONS CLAIM IS A SEPARATIST IDEA THAT SITS AFRICAN-AMERICANS AGAINST THE NATION THAT GAVE THEM FREEDOM.

Blacks were here before the Mayflower. Who is more American than the descendants of African slaves? For the African-American community to value itself from America is to embark on a course whose implications are troubling. For the African-American community has had a long-running flirtation with separatism, nationalism and the political left, who want African-Americans to be no part of America's social contract. African Americans should reject this temptation.

For all America's faults, African Americans have an enormous stake in this country and its heritage. It is this heritage that is under attack by the reparations movement. The reparations movement is an assault on America, conducted by racial separatism and the political left. It is an attack, not only on white Americans, but on all Americans—especially African Americans.

America's African-American citizens are the richest and most privileged black people alive, a bounty that is a direct result of the heritage that is under assault. The American idea needs the support of its African-American citizens. But African Americans also need to support the American idea. For it is the American idea that led to the principles that created the institutions that have set African Americans—and all of us—free.

Conservative columnist David Horowitz circulated this racist ad against reparations.

delegation sent by the U.S. government tried to block passage of a draft document that endorsed reparations as a remedy for both slavery and colonial domination, an inclusion fought for by African-descended and indigenous Native peoples of the Americas. Although the U.S. delegation was eventually overruled, it was "the principal opponent of both objectives," claiming that reparations were already in effect here through affirmative action policies.

The drafts from the regional preparatory meetings—held in Dakar, Senegal; Santiago, Chile; Teheran, Iran—were then given to a special committee charged with merging them into a single draft "Declaration and Programme of Action" for the World Conference this summer. The draft revealed last March in Geneva was received with outrage. "Virtually all of the language hard-fought-for in Santiago was nowhere to be found in the merged document...and no reference to reparations. Indeed, in the 31-page draft, the words 'people of African descent' appeared only twice," according to the Black Radical Congress press release. NGOs from other regions, namely Asia, were also dissatisfied, so much so that NGO representatives rejected the draft and

demand a revision reflecting their experiences and concerns.

Others point out that the uproar over reparations has racist overtones. "There's a lot of hand-wringing and worrying about what the colored folk would do if they got checks. Better to put the money in large scale trusts for education, debt forgiveness, and the like," Themba-Nixon observes. "You have to question where that is coming from. This rarely comes up in other reparations discussions. It is clearly about perceptions of black people as dependent, incompetent and untrustworthy."

But that comes as no surprise, says Crenshaw, referring to the U.S. government's failure to make good on its promise of 40-acre parcels and the loan of a federal mule in 1865. "If an entire people can deny the obvious in the teeth of slavery's aftermath, it comes as no surprise that they would step up this denial a century later."

Despite the resistance, and perhaps in large part because of it, the campaign's momentum is accelerating. "The international and national work on reparations continue to dovetail to increase the recognition of reparations as a legitimate remedy for the conditions in which Africans in America

find themselves," says Aiyetoro. "We're not talking about some long ago thing that happened, that we need to get over, because we could get over it if it was over. And it's not over."

More Than Money

This past spring, "60 Minutes" did a remarkably evenhanded segment on the issue, giving the last word to TransAfrica's Randall Robinson, author of *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*. In March, an Oklahoma state commission recommended that reparations be paid for the 1921 Tulsa race riot, one of the worst clashes in U.S. history, in which more than 300 people may have been killed and an entire black business district known as Greenwood was torched. And on the tails, and precedent, of the successful 1998 class-action suit for black farmers against the U.S. Department of Agriculture for past discrimination, a cadre of attorneys is considering a reparations class-action suit that's been described as, potentially, "the mother of all civil rights lawsuits."

There is much more than money at stake in this debate. Both white and black Americans are still in great denial about what it means to live in a post-slave society. "Even if there is never a cent paid, if the discussion is undertaken seriously and thoroughly it will play a large part in the healing this nation needs," Theeda Murphy, spokeswoman for the Fisk Race Relations Institute, told *In These Times*.

"I support the development of a rich, dynamic discourse about reparations largely because of the possibility of re-politicizing our position in American society," says Crenshaw. "One doesn't have to believe that checks will be in the mail tomorrow—or even that it would solve our problems if they were—to know that it would benefit our political efforts on all fronts if we were to understand better how the very structure of our society is like a seventh generation copy [of slavery]. The edges may get blurrier and the text is a bit more difficult to read, but the basic outlines are still there. The scripts playing out today did not spring freely formed on today's stage but were written in slavery long ago." ■



PHOTO BY RINKU SEN

A delegation at the Beijing Conference in 1995.

Doing Double Duty

As the UN World Conference Against Racism approaches, women from around the world are focusing their efforts on ensuring that gender is integral to the agenda of this historic gathering. We are determined to create space for the notion that racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia are experienced in gender-specific forms, and to participate in the crafting of gender-conscious remedies.

We've been here before, doing double duty, struggling for a strong anti-racist perspective in feminist politics; struggling for the centrality of women's rights to the anti-racist agenda. And no doubt we'll be here again. For it is in the nature of women of color organizing to operate on multiple fronts, to attend to the overlapping political priorities generated by our multiple, integral identities.

UNWCAR presents us with the opportunity to shape the world's conversation on race. As we interact and work with anti-racist activists from around the world, we confront the inherent partiality and limitation of our

conceptions of racism, insofar as they are based primarily on the experiences of racially and ethnically marginalized peoples and communities in the U.S. For U.S. women of color UNWCAR provides the opportunity to explore the concepts and experiences we bring to the mix as women who experience racism, ethnic prejudice, xenophobia, homophobia, and class oppression within the context of the distorted, ravenous over-development of the North.

Roots of a Movement

Women of color from the United States bring to the Conference a rich body of political practice, organizational development, feminist theory, and empirical research. Core to this body of work is the conviction that only an integrated feminist analysis, one that incorporates analyzes of power relations of subordination and dominance based on race, class, and gender, is capable of capturing the realities women of color face. This insight, now firmly rooted in the academy and increasingly known among scholars and activists as "intersectionality" or "intersection theory," has its origins in the political activism of the late 1960s and early 70s.

Though often overlooked, significant players in the emergence of Second Wave feminism were women who, as activists in the Civil Rights, Black Power, Puerto Rican Independence, Chicano Liberation, Asian self-determination, and Native American sovereignty movements, began to identify and object to manifestations of sexism within their organizations, communities, and the broader society. As an oppositional movement, women of color feminism challenged the suppression of women's full initiative in the struggle for social justice. They objected to being the coffee-makers and note-takers while their frequently ego-added brothers seized the credit, the microphone, the spotlight, and the headlines. And they faced down rank hostility from men (and not a few women) who argued that "women's issues" were irrelevant at best, divisive, emasculating, and a traitorous diversion from racial unity at worst.

Women of color feminism was also forged in a deeply critical relationship to the "white, middle-class women's movement," and its unwillingness either to confront racism within its own ranks or to make the particular issues confronting women of color and working

class women a central concern. Early women of color feminists built their campaigns around such issues as racist health care practices that forced the sterilization of Puerto Rican, African American and Native American women; the labor exploitation of Chicana farm and cannery and Asian immigrant garment workers; and the defense of affirmative action. In each case, attention was paid to the vulnerabilities of women based not solely on their gender, but also on their race/ethnicity and their class position, an orientation that took firm hold only in organizations built and led by women of color feminists.

Finally, women of color feminism emerged in the context of, and was heavily influenced by, the massive movement against the U.S. war in Vietnam as well as struggles against colonialism and neocolonialism in Africa, Asian, Latin America, and the Caribbean. U.S. women of color were inspired by the leadership of both individual women and women's organizations in, for example, Vietnam, Mozambique, South Africa, Palestine, and Chile. They established ties of sisterhood and solidarity with organizations that were simultaneously mobilizing women into movements for national liberation and struggling to create space for a women's rights agenda within those movements.

Core Feminist Concepts

It is out of these activist, radical, politically engaged beginnings that the core concepts of feminist theory began to emerge. Beginning in the late '70s and continuing through the '80s and '90s, these analytical concepts, initially articulated by activists, were further developed and elaborated upon in the academy by women of color theorists and researchers. Among the core concepts of women of color feminism, five are especially significant.

First, the "simultaneity of oppression," the "both/and" of the life experience of women of color. This idea, that the gender discrimination women of color faced was central to their being, emerged in fierce contention with the notion that racial identity trumps all others and that the struggle against racism should take precedence over all other

forms of resistance to inequity. The first expressions of this idea appeared in the political statements of such organizations as the Third World Women's Alliance and the Combahee River Collective. Activists like Frances M. Beal, Barbara Smith, and Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez were instrumental in synthesizing and sharpening the thoughts generated by the thousands of woman-hours spent in collective reflection and analysis. Patricia Hill-Collins, Deborah King, Maxine Baca Zinn, Patricia Zavella, Margo Okazawa-Ray, Angela Y. Davis, and Chandra Mohanty were among the many scholars who advanced this work to new levels of theoretical precision and sophistication. And the fierce determination not to submerge crucial elements of identity found creative expression through the voices of artists like Audre Lorde, Paula Gunn Allen, Cherrie Moraga, and Janice Mirikitani.

Closely related to the idea that the multiple and integral identities of women of color shape their simultaneous experiences of oppression is the conviction that only an integrated feminist analysis that explores and relates the dynamics of race, class, and gender is capable of theoretically capturing those experiences. Lesbians of color, central to the development of feminist theory, also insisted on the inclusion of heterosexism as a significant form of social oppression. Intersection theory, a critical contribution of women of color activists and scholars, emphasizes the distinct dynamics of relations of domination and subordination based on gender, race, and class; where and how these relations intersect and influence each other; and how the specific effects of those intersections impact women's lives. A carefully crafted UN background paper by noted African American legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw places the concept of "intersectional discrimination" squarely within the human rights framework.

A third assertion of women of color feminism has to do with the complexity and heterogeneity among women within particular racial or ethnic groups. This assertion serves as a counterpoint to racial objectification that submerges difference into stereotype. At the same time, it points to analytically and socially significant differences based on,

for example, national origin, citizenship status, sexual orientation, class, color, marital status, and age. Differences that place some women of color in positions of privilege relative to others.

Related to the issue of complexity and heterogeneity, women of color feminism has analyzed and demonstrated the ways in which ideological formations and cultural iconography draws on both racial and gender stereotypes to create images of, for example, Asian women's passivity and exoticism, Latinas' hypersexuality, and African American women's emasculating aggressiveness. While the specific content of the stereotypes varies among racial and ethnic groups and undergoes changes over time, such stereotyping undergirds and reinforces both gender subordination and racial oppression and requires that we uncover the gender content of racial stereotypes and the racial content of stereotypical representations of women.

A fifth insight of women of color feminism holds that liberatory projects must also be multi-dimensional. The feminist movement is crippled and incomplete without an anti-racist core; the struggle against sexism and heterosexism must be high on the anti-racist agenda; and the struggle for economic justice is the bedrock of both feminism and anti-racism.

The Movement's Evolution

At the same time scholars were elaborating these key concepts and theoretical formulations of women of color feminism, women of color activism based on these ideas took new forms—evolving from the all-volunteer, highly participatory, barely financed, member-driven collectives of the '70s into the primarily staff-driven, non-profit service and advocacy organizations of the '80s, '90s, and today. There were things gained and things lost in this transition. Organizations were founded that focused on the specific needs of previously unserved communities. Domestic violence shelters that attended to the language and cultural requirements of Asian women and Latinas; health advocacy groups that addressed the health status of African American women and developed culturally appropriate educational campaigns;

workers' centers that nurtured the capacity of low-wage women workers to fight for their rights to fair wages and working conditions; campaigns that targeted the environmental health hazards facing Native American women; support groups that recognized the special vulnerabilities of immigrant women, particularly those without documents, to domestic violence and highly exploitative working conditions. Women of color activists faced up to the hard task of identifying, naming and condemning gender dynamics internal to their communities that were maiming and killing women and stunting girls' development. At the same time, they fought for the legitimacy of their outside-the-mainstream approaches and a fair share of the limited funds available for feminist advocacy and women's services.

But there are also weaknesses that must be

acknowledged. Few organizations function on a truly national basis; few are able to mobilize women in their thousands, much less their millions; few shape national policy. And, though today's women of color organizations are far more stable than the groups formed at the beginning of the Second Wave, having become more institutionalized and professionalized, many have lost their critical, political edge and sense of connection to a broader social justice movement.

Taking It to Durban

These are some of the collective strengths and weaknesses U.S. women of color bring to the UNWCAR. Carrying forward the work of early women of color feminists who had the courage to pave the way, the delegation will be present at the Conference in our multiple identities: women who are

the descendants of peoples who were slaughtered in the name of territorial expansion, enslaved in the interests of economic gain. Daughters of first nations, conquered nations, and captive nations. Sisters of immigrant and U.S.-born women who work the factories, fields, kitchens, hospital corridors, and check-out counters of the low-wage economy. UNWCAR brings us together, forces us out of our circumscribed realms of experience, and creates a hothouse for the flowering of deeply rooted processes of reflection and action. That's why we do it.

This article is excerpted from the introduction to a series of reports on the status of U.S. women of color that is being prepared by the Women of Color Resource Center for distribution at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. ■

North-South Differences Challenge Women at the UN

BY TRAM NGUYEN, *ColorLines* Associate Editor

A crucial drama unfolding at the UN World Conference this summer is that of the far-reaching efforts by women globally to assert an international women's human rights agenda, and the difficulties they have encountered as they navigate the divide between North and South.

The Women's Human Rights Caucus officially emerged at the first Preparatory Committee in Geneva last year, but it had roots in a nascent feminist human rights movement that coalesced around the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights and continued growing at the Beijing World Conference on Women.

However, the context of colonialism's history, globalization, and imbalanced relationships of power has cast a longstanding shadow over the interaction of women from South and North.

"Many women felt objectified by Northern women who conveyed a romanticized solidarity reminiscent of the similar constructions of class and racial struggles of the white or elite left," recalls Puerto Rican legal scholar and human rights activist Celina Romany of the troubling dynamic at the Vienna conference. "Most women were left to feel like powerless clients represented to the world by the enlightened advocates of the North."

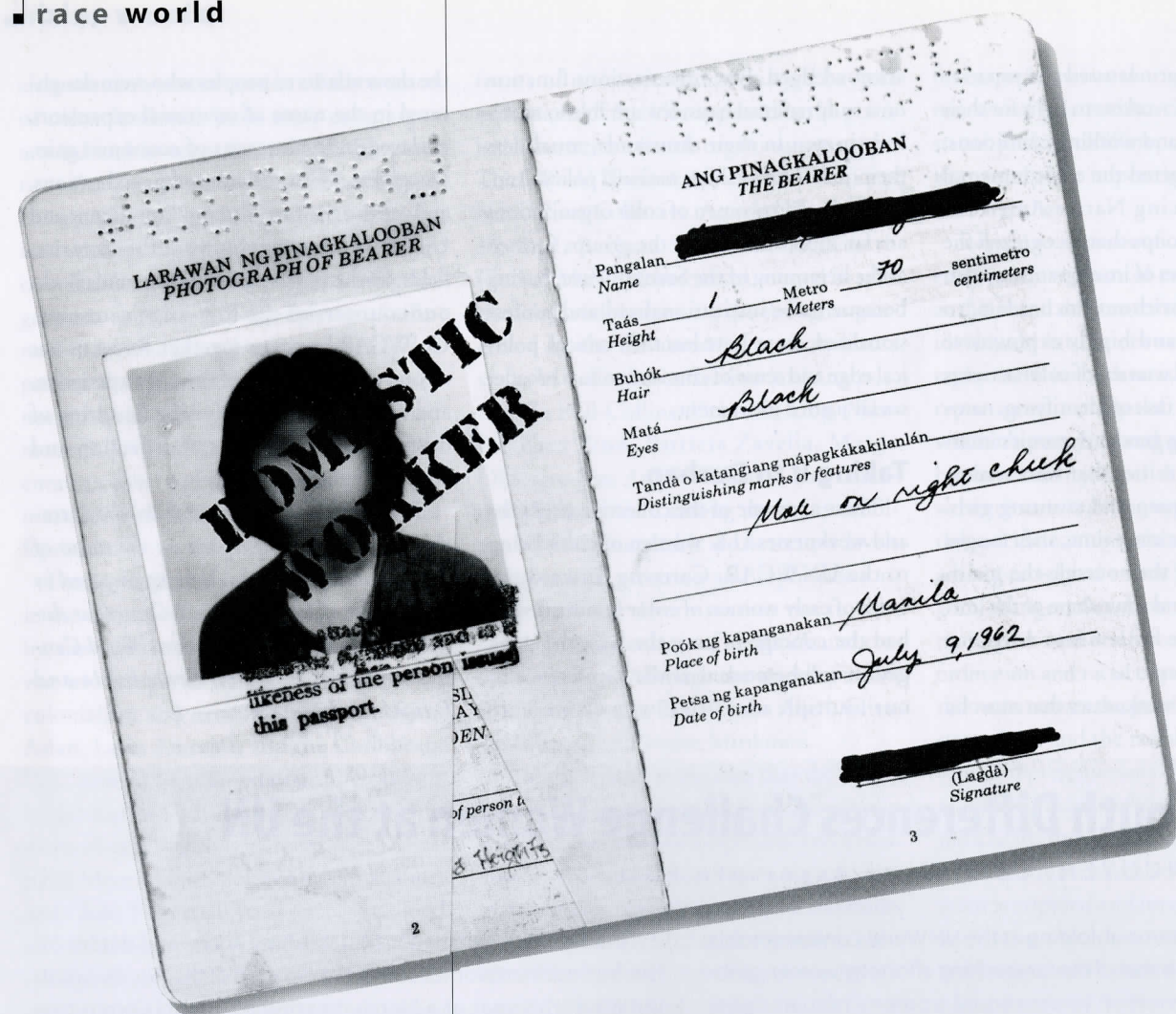
At the Santiago regional meeting of the Americas in December, 2000, African and Afro-Latina women generated a buzz when they forcefully called attention to the ways Southern women had been silenced and marginalized in the UN Conference Against Racism process.

Persistent concerns about establishing space and determinism for Southern women led to the creation of the "South-South Initiative" this year, at a March meeting of the UN Committee on the Status of Women. Women from African, Asia-Pacific, Latin American, and Caribbean NGOs staked out the "common concerns of our regions" with respect to such manifestations of intersectionality as structural adjustment programs, Third World debt, and migrant workers and trafficked women.

"I think many Northern women don't understand that some of our concerns are particular to the South and must be discussed separately among us," says Cecilia Millan of the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Caucus. "Instead of solidarity, they gave us problems. In this Conference, the leadership has to come from the South, and I think all the fuss is about power, as usual."

The South-South Initiative, which operates a Southern-only listserv from an NGO in the Philippines, has elicited a range of reactions from women of the North—from support to outright defensiveness to feeling left out, especially among Northern immigrant and refugee women.

"If I have a sadness about how all this is coming together," relates Elmira Nazombe of the Center for Women's Global Leadership in New Jersey, "it would seem as if the South-South Initiative is shutting out all those immigrant women living in Europe and North America. They couldn't be in that conversation because they are living in the middle of plenty, even though their conditions are terrible. That part makes me very sad." ■



Joy Mutanu Zarembka
says the situation of
imported domestic
workers is a form of
modern-day slavery

Maid to Order

The day Tigris (not her real name) decided to escape from her abusive employment situation coincided with a bomb scare at the children's school. The bus driver brought her employer's children back home at 10 a.m., a time she was not required to work as a nanny. The kids, finding themselves alone, called the Virginia police. After a manhunt, Tigris was arrested and charged with two felony counts of child abuse and grand larceny.

The police record does not mention that Tigris, who was held for three weeks on \$20,000 bail, was paid only \$100 a week for around-the-clock chores as a live-in maid because her employer claimed "that was enough money for a black person." Nowhere

does it mention that the man of the house attempted to fondle and kiss her on various occasions. Or that the woman of the house forced her to cut her hair and stop wearing make-up, and threatened to kill Tigris if she had sex with her husband. Even though she legally came to the U.S. on a domestic worker visa program, if convicted, Tigris will be deported to her home country in Eastern Africa, where she is fleeing political persecution.

Involuntary Servitude

Tigris is just one of a growing number of super-exploited domestic workers. Each year, thousands enter the United States on special visas to work for diplomats and inter-

These women live as prisoners in the homes they clean with few safeguards and little protection.

national bureaucrats who feel their lifestyle can only be sustained with the assistance of a live-in domestic. Most of these domestic workers—who are overwhelmingly female—come from underdeveloped countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

In May, a Korean domestic servant filed a lawsuit against the vice consul of the Korean Consulate in San Francisco. Tae Sook Park, who is being represented by Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates and the Asian Law Caucus, had been held in service seven days a week, for only a few hundred dollars a month. She couldn't leave because her employers had confiscated her passport.

In many cases, the employment contract filed at a U.S. Embassy abroad is ignored or replaced with a new contract stipulating longer hours and less pay. Typically, once the woman has passed through Customs, the employer illegally confiscates her passport and other documents, making her totally beholden to the whims of the employer. (Tigris' passport and visa had been taken by her employer, and when she "stole" her belongings back her employers retaliated by accusing her of stealing a piece of jewelry, a claim that is often wielded against runaway domestic workers.)

Although all workers, both documented and undocumented, are protected by U.S. labor laws, it is not uncommon to hear reports of domestic workers being paid 50 cents or a dollar an hour or, in some cases, not at all. Many women are forced into dawn-to-midnight work schedules, six to seven days a week. They are often told that they may not make friends, use the phone, or leave the house unescorted. With more egregious cases, physical, mental, verbal and sexual abuse has been reported. One domestic worker was called "the creature," another said she was forced to wear a dog collar, and yet another was forced to kneel down and kiss her employer's feet.

While employers sometimes use the threat of violence to ensure that domestic workers stay in abusive work situations, psychologi-

cal coercion is also used. In a recent case, Hilda Rosa Dos Santos, a housekeeper from Brazil, was trapped with no pay and insufficient food for 20 years in the home of a Brazilian couple who told her that she would be raped or killed if she went outside because Americans don't like dark-skinned people. While employers often invoke race to deter domestic workers from leaving, they also exploit cultural and religious differences. An Indonesian maid was told by her Saudi Arabian boss that Americans don't like Muslims so she would not fare well if she left the home. Often times, abusive employers point to violence on television to bolster their claim about the dangers of the United States.

Each year, thousands of domestic workers enter the U.S. on special visas to work for diplomats and international bureaucrats.

These women—many of whom do not speak English and are unfamiliar with American culture and laws—live as prisoners in the homes they clean with few safeguards and little protection.

Typically, if the domestic worker complains about her work conditions, her employer threatens to send her home or call the police or INS. Ironically, because the domestic worker is in the U.S. on an employment-based visa, the moment she runs away from her employer, she is immediately considered "out of status," ineligible for other employment and liable for deportation. As one neighbor who helped a Haitian domestic worker escape said, "When she ran away, she was out of a job, out of money, out of a home, out of status and, quite frankly, out of her mind" with fear.

Visas for Third World Servants

Nearly 4,000 special visas are issued annually: A-3 visas for household employees of diplomats, and G-5 visas for employees of

international agencies such as the United Nations, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As part of a larger visa category for businesspeople, foreign nationals and American citizens with permanent residency abroad are also able to import housekeepers, nannies, cooks, drivers, and gardeners on B-1 visas.

The location of G-5, A-3, and B-1 workers remains a well-kept secret, making them some of the most vulnerable and easily exploited sectors of the American workforce. For example, the U.S. State Department keeps no record of B-1 domestic workers. The lack of record-keeping also makes it impossible to know how many B-1s are currently in the U.S. and, more importantly, how much of this invisible workforce is suffering in silence. Although the U.S. government and the institutions involved (IMF,

World Bank, UN) keep records of the whereabouts of A-3 and G-5 domestic workers, this information is kept confidential, citing the privacy of the employer.

Visa for White Nannies

Interestingly, the J-1 visa, a Congress-sponsored visa program for nannies or au pairs, also brings migrant workers to the U.S., but under very different circumstances.

The au pair program—which means "an equal" in French—largely recruits young, middle-class women from Europe for "educational and cultural exchange." Each nanny is flown to New York for an orientation session and is placed in geographical groups with other nannies so they can form a network of friendships. Once the nanny joins a family, she attends another orientation program where she receives information on community resources, educational opportunities and contacts for a local support network. Each month, both the nanny and her employers are required to discuss their situation with

Joy Mutanu Zarembka, the daughter of a domestic worker from Kenya, is the director of the Campaign for Migrant Domestic Workers Rights.

a counselor to report any problems and resolve disputes.

In contrast, with the G-5, A-1, and B-1 domestic worker programs, there are no official orientations, no information, no contract numbers, no counselors, and no educational programs. In practice, as well, there is often no freedom—many are systematically (though illegally) forbidden from contacting the outside world.

Clean Home With Justice

Over the years, the problems faced by this hidden workforce have surfaced periodically with high-profile, yet short-lived, media blitzes. But until recently, few groups were organizing to foster systemic changes in the domestic worker community, both at the grassroots and policy levels.

Today, dynamic groups such as *Mujeres Unidas de Maryland* (United Women of Maryland) are forming workplace coopera-

Workers' rights clinics
serve as the first stop on
the "underground
railroad" for those
escaping slave-like
conditions.

tives to advocate for improved work conditions for all workers. This cooperative originally began in 1999 as part of the Promoters' Rights Project, affiliated with *CASA de Maryland, Inc.* Former and current domestic workers—armed with legal information in Spanish—took to the streets, parks, buses, and churches looking for potentially abused domestic workers and educating them about their rights. If they encountered an exploited employee, they would direct her or him to bilingual legal assistance in order to recover back wages. Eventually, the workers formed a 24-member, democratically controlled cleaning cooperative with the goal of providing dignified day jobs and equitable work conditions. Most impressively, 10 percent of



Members of Domestic Workers United, a project of CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities.

all proceeds made through the cleaning service are funneled to support social justice organizations.

Silvia Navas, a domestic worker and one of the organizers of the cooperative, says "having a small business where you are doing something for yourself and for someone else builds self-esteem, self-confidence in the business, and in your value as a person." By offering a "clean home with justice," *Mujeres Unidas de Maryland* epitomizes the positive possibilities of community-based initiatives.

While most members of *Mujeres Unidas* are Latina, other ethnically based organizations in the Washington D.C.-area are also exploring creative tactics to tackle domestic worker abuse, such as *Shared Communities* (Filipina) and the *Ethiopian Community Development Council*. More than 25 D.C.-based organizations have banded together to create the *Campaign for Migrant Domestic Workers Rights*, which seeks to change public policy and strengthen the safety net available to G-5, A-3 and B-1 domestic workers. Nationally, *Freedom Network (USA) To Empower Enslaved and Trafficked Persons* formed in response to the rising incidents of trafficking and slavery in the sex and labor industries. Although the *Freedom Network* currently operates without a budget, it is attempting to form a rapid-response

team to react quickly to reports of abuse and slavery in various geographical locations in the U.S. The Network hopes to ensure that every enslaved and trafficked person is able to enforce their legal and human rights and have access to linguistically appropriate, culturally sensitive, victim-centered social, health and legal services. They would also like to increase public and official awareness around modern-day slavery.

Workers' rights clinics in Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and New York serve as the first stop on the "underground railroad" for individuals escaping slave-like conditions. After Tigris left her abusive employer, she has depended on a family friend and the assistance of organizations like the *Ethiopian Community Development Council*, the *Campaign for Migrant Domestic Workers Rights* and the *Washington Lawyers' Committee* for legal, financial, moral, and political support. She is currently out on bail, telling the story of what she and thousands of others like her have endured in the "land of the free." ■

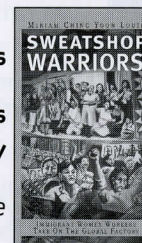
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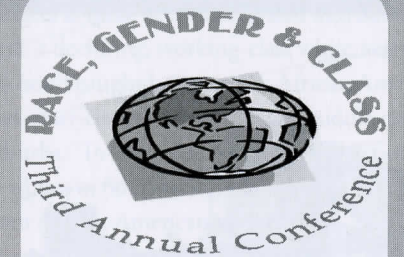
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Unsettled Refugees



PHOTO BY TRAM NGUYEN

Southeast Asian communities confront the problems of resettlement

Torm Nompraseurt at the General Chemical plant in Richmond, California.

BY TRAM NGUYEN, COLORLINES ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As a 10-year-old kid, I hated it the one time my mother took me with her to a welfare office in Los Angeles. It was already bad enough whenever she sent me and my sisters to the grocery store and we had to pay with food stamps.

Those colorfully printed notes crammed deep in my pocket were one of the few and much-resented connections I had between my parents' life of studying English, doing nails, working in a garage, sending packages to Vietnam—and mine of trying to fit in at school, watching cartoons, reading Grimm's fairy tales, assimilating to America.

I don't remember why we were at the welfare office that day, or what my mother had to do with the caseworkers while I waited sullenly. The thing I remember is how, fed

up with my attitude, she finally turned to me as we stood in a long line with Latino and black families and said, "This is something the government has to provide to help poor people."

That memory has helped me understand something about my Southeast Asian refugee parents. As much as we've disagreed ideologically over certain things (namely the anti-communist dead horse I like to beat), my parents had known long ago what I only realized after a roundabout political education: America owed us some cold hard cash benefits.

Racially Resettled

In the years since catastrophic conflict in Southeast Asia ended, refugees from the

region—more than a million people from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam—arrived in successive waves that became the biggest and most intensive refugee resettlement process in U.S. history.

Looked at one way, the story of our resettlement can be used to prop up mythologies of America's democratic promise and, by extension, as an exoneration of the U.S. debacle in Vietnam. One of the more recent and high-profile examples was conservative lawmakers fawning over the "spectacular American story" of Georgetown law professor Viet Dinh, who went from boat per-

Tram Nguyen's writing on Vietnamese American politics is appearing in the upcoming anthology *Asian Americans: The Movement and the Moment*.

son to George W. Bush's appointee for assistant attorney general.

But while model refugees do exist, they are hardly the norm. Southeast Asians have maintained the highest welfare participation rates of any ethnicity or racial group, up to 75 percent among Vietnamese and Cambodian residents of the Bronx and Vietnamese in California, based on the 1990 Census (2000 Census breakdowns were not yet available). On average, about 8 percent of Southeast Asians graduate from college, and 45 percent drop out of high school. In the daily life of communities scattered across the map are more realities not measured by Census figures—families sewing piecework at home to supplement inadequate welfare checks; young men profiled in police mugbooks and fed into prisons and INS detention centers; toxic neighborhoods where oil refineries leak their poison regularly into the air and water.

Resettlement sucked, basically.

And it's within the small and relatively young world of Southeast Asian community organizing where an oppositional stance is being shaped, much of it driven by the younger generation, that redefines the story (and origins) of refugee resettlement through grassroots campaigns for racial justice.

The failures of American involvement in the Vietnam War, over which the nation still has realized neither truth nor reconciliation, also carry over into how refugees fared after being dropped into the context of American racism.

An Every Day Violence

In the 1980s, Philadelphia was designated as one of many resettlement areas across the country where local agencies worked with the federal government to place refugees. Almost overnight, hundreds of Vietnamese and Cambodians moved into the inner-city neighborhood of West Philly. In what emerged as a pattern in other cities as well, agencies that got paid per capita for resettling refugees set up arrangements with slumlords to house as many families as quickly as possible.

"You had African Americans struggling to make landlords accountable, and in come all these people whose rent was paid for," remem-

bers Ellen Somekawa of Asian Americans United, which began organizing Southeast Asians in 1985. "There was a lot of tension, a lot of racial violence against the refugees."

Debbie Wei, a young housing organizer at the time, began knocking on doors in West Philly to find out what could be done to help the refugees. She came across a house, with no heat and no glass in its windows, where 23 Vietnamese people were walking around in flip-flops during a Philly winter. Conditions were about the same up and down the block, which had all been resettled by the same agency.

It's within this context of extreme neglect and urban poverty that racial violence flared between Southeast Asians and the neighborhood's predominantly black residents, says Wei, who worked with African Ameri-

areas were blighted and which were not."

Racial clashes followed Vietnamese refugees as more of them migrated into Southwest, a declining, working-class white neighborhood caught between the African American inner-city and white flight to middle-class suburbs. "In the racist discourse and actions of whites in Southwest, Asians began to supplant African Americans as the 'other,'" writes Scott Kurashige in an *Amerasia Journal* article about anti-Asian violence in Philadelphia. Harassment and violence were a daily part of refugees' lives in Southwest from the mid-'80s to the early '90s, according to Kurashige.

Years later and on another coast, the Laotian community of Richmond, California, has been experiencing a different sort of daily assault.

Almost 10,000 Lao, Khmu, and Mien



PHOTO BY TRAM NGUYEN

Cindy Syvilai and Tina, Jessica, and Christopher Vilaisak live in Richmond Townhouse, a housing project with many Laotian families in Richmond, California.

can housing organizers in the early '80s to stabilize the housing crisis and later went on to help found AAU.

"Refugee resettlement always took place in border neighborhoods, where it was the defining line between black and white," she says. "Refugees were used to demarcate which

people live in west Contra Costa County, an area where modest, one-story homes coexist alongside of more than 300 chemical plants, waste storage units, oil refineries, and other toxic industries.

When an explosion at the Chevron oil refinery spewed toxic smoke in March of

1999, many residents couldn't understand the county's alert system, which consisted of automated phone messages warning them to "shelter in place." Older residents and children especially suffered rashes, nausea, and respiratory problems from exposure to sulfur dioxide and other toxins.

"People were really pissed off and physically affected, and angry enough to want to do something," says Pamela Chiang, an organizer at the time with the Laotian Organizing Project, which had been working in the community for five years on a leadership project with teenage girls.

Their six-month long campaign, featuring eloquent testimony from people who had survived falling bombs in their home country only to face another sort of siege in America, won the passage of a multi-language phone alert system from the county almost two years ago. Though the victory marked a significant experience for many community members, the county has yet to implement the new alert system.

Meanwhile, toxic spills continue regularly. In fact, a General Chemical accident happens the day I try to interview LOP's three full-time staff at their downtown Richmond headquarters, a small brown house with a dirt yard. Shrill sirens wail up and down the street, and Grace Kong, LOP's director, interrupts her recount of last year's school counseling campaign for an emergency huddle with the staff.

"Level 3" accidents calling for all in the vicinity to stay indoors, shut windows, and close off vents occur about every two months, youth organizer Bouapha Toommaly tells me. She's lived all her life in Richmond. "I'm a child of toxic exposure," she jokes, flinging an arm dramatically over her face.

Outside in the yard, an elderly Laotian woman hoes the dirt resolutely, shrugging off Torm Nompraseurt's encouragement to come inside.

Nompraseurt has been organizing adults in LOP for five years. Before that, he ran a translation business and had been a long-time community point person through his work as an interpreter and involvement with the local ethnic associations.

"I see a lot of things that are not fair.



Members of CAAAV demonstrate for welfare justice in the Bronx.

And some people say, the life is not fair. Okay, but what about the rights of people? If they get sick, they should have health care. If they work, they should have enough to raise their family," says Nompraseurt, explaining how he interacts with a community characterized by complex, war-haunted dynamics.

Still occasionally exhorted by some community members to attend meetings for a sort of underground resistance to the Pathet Lao government, Nompraseurt, whose own nightmares of the war only ended in 1995, says, "I always look at it as, this is where we live. This is today. We have to look at the issues here. And people still have low-paying jobs, no health plan, our kids don't have books in school, some fall into gangs."

This Is Where We Learned To Speak English

Young people, having grown up during and after the resettlement period, are in a pivotal position for Southeast Asian communities. They've been particularly vulnerable to bad schools and police harassment, but what role can they play in moving the community toward resistance?

CAAAV: Organizing Asian Communities

found the answer to that question when they came to the heavily Vietnamese and Cambodian communities of the Northwest Bronx in 1994 to run workshops in response to local police brutality problems; they ended up staying and building a vibrant youth organizing program that has tackled the community's deepest problems.

Southeast Asians in the Bronx for the most part had arrived after 1980, part of the second and third waves of refugees, including many former political prisoners and Amerasian children of GIs who came through special resettlement programs. Combinations of TANF, SSI, food stamps, and low-wage work in New Jersey factories or garment piecework at home form the basis of family subsistence.

"The community was overwhelmingly youth—that has largely to do with the fact that many in their 30s or 20s had lost their lives in the civil war. And older people in their 50s were re-creating families. There was this huge generation gap," says Eric Tang, the director of CAAAV's Youth Leadership Project.

It made sense, then, for organizers to recruit Cambodian and Vietnamese high school-

ers into a summer training program, where young people who were already living daily experiences of racism and poverty learned the tools and the language of social change.

"It seems like every which way you turn there's garbage," says Thoul Tong, a CAAAV organizer who has lived in the Bronx since age 9. "But I don't want to move away from where I started. I want to help us get people to understand they do have the power to take leadership over what's happening in their community."

Youth in the program conducted a survey and wrote a report last summer on the effects of welfare reform, as well as filming "Eating Welfare," a documentary about the lives of their families and community members under New York's draconian workfare program.

In the video, a Cambodian teenager narrates a tour of "193rd Street," the notorious housing project in the Bronx where most refugees are placed. Residents of the building live in cramped, unheated apartments among rats and roaches. "This is where they dumped the Asians. This is where we learned to speak English," says CAAAV organizer Chhaya Chhoum, as the camera scans the dark narrow halls, brick walls, and trash-lined courtyard of the building.

CAAAV's video is one of several creative projects that youth programs have undertaken to encourage young Southeast Asians to speak in their own voices and document their realities.

In Long Beach, California, Cambodian girls in the HOPE for Girls project of Asians and Pacific Islanders for Reproductive Health (APIRH) held several community readings of their poetry and stories, which were published in a 1999 chapbook called *The Way In*. The girls at APIRH's Oakland headquarters are working on a collection of writings about the impact of issues such as education, environmental racism, and welfare on their lives. The writing project is called Bloodlines.

The question they started out with: why are our families poor?

Just Punishing the Poor

Welfare reform came to Southeast Asian

communities, as it did to the rest of the nation, in the summer of 1996. Those still reeling from resettlement, surviving on welfare, were about to get shaken up again.

In the Bronx, hundreds of families got their cash benefits cut because they went afoul of the confusing and untranslated rules. Women who had cared for their children at home and supplemented meager incomes by making "bow" or hair accessories under the table now were forced to shoulder a broom at the local parks and public facilities in New York's version of workfare, the Work Experience Program (WEP). All told, some 500,000 people have disappeared from the city's welfare rolls.

"When welfare reform hit, man, everybody was ready to move," recalls Eric Tang. "It wasn't so much our efforts, as how bad it was in the community. The youth in this community really have political leadership, and it has to do with the way welfare reform impacted this community. No one was untouched by it."

Seventeen-year-old Anh Trieu, who doesn't want me to interview her at first, warms to the subject when we talk about welfare reform. Her mother reports to WEP every day now instead of sewing at home, and her father works nights at a plastics factory in New Jersey.

"We want to show that the government is not helping the poor at all. It's just punishing the poor," she says earnestly about her work at YLP. "My dad helped [the U.S.] in the war. I think we come here, the government should help us instead of punishing us more."

APIRH's work is another place where the experiences of Southeast Asian women highlight the racial, gender, and anti-immigrant dimensions of welfare reform. They are connecting public perceptions of teen pregnancy, which is especially high among the Cambodian community of Long Beach, with the way the bodies and the work of women of color have been controlled and devalued through welfare reform.

"There's this obsession with talking about teen pregnancy as the cause of poverty," says Neelam Pathikonda, who organizes the HOPE for Girls project. "This fear of the

fertility of women of color is the thing that drives policy, which for us is the same as population control."

Redemption Songs

In the weekly writing sessions of Bloodlines, the HOPE girls research their family histories, talking to their parents about what life was like in Cambodia and Vietnam, what happened to them during the war, and what they do in America to get by.

They are contextualizing these individual experiences, organizers say, putting together the sum of the whole to understand the broader story that has shaped their communities.

"My mother thinks life is so great in America, and that I have it so easy. I don't have to deal with 'the war' that caused her and my father to leave her country. But every day as soon as I get up I have to deal with this society and how it views me as nothing. I believe that I have to battle," writes 16-year-old Meuy Saepanh.

If I had written a Bloodlines piece at their age, it might have begun with our family's escape from Vietnam. Of the boat journey, I remember the darkness and the seasickness, my mother chanting Buddhist prayers as waves washed over us. Of the camp, the day we left to be relocated to America is my sharpest memory, because my father, who couldn't come right away since he had tested positive for tuberculosis, ran alongside the bus waving to us.

The details are different, but the themes of tragedy and triumph over hardship resonate in most refugees' stories. Should we be thankful that we're no longer living in a war zone, as political prisoners, or in Third World poverty? I am, yes. But our current reality is not what I suspect many of us had in mind either.

I also think the story of resettlement as redemption does not begin or end with refugees being allowed to make it or break it as new Americans. Instead, it can be found in the context of our experiences and the collective will to shape their outcomes.

That helped me understand why my mother and I had to go to the welfare office, and why our families are poor. ■

Cuban rappers Kokino (left) and Yosmel (right) freestyle in the kitchen as Kokino's mother looks on.

PHOTO BY ANNEISE WUNDERLICH

Underground Revolution

BY ANNEISE WUNDERLICH

A male duo hoping to make it big, a female group breaking into the scene: coming of age in Cuban hip-hop

Annelise Wunderlich is pursuing a dual masters degree in journalism and Latin American studies at U.C. Berkeley, with a focus on documentary film and human rights.

It's a late Friday afternoon in downtown Havana, and an old man in a worn-out tuxedo opens the doors under the flickering green and red neon sign of Club Las Vegas. A poster on the wall, its corners curling in the humidity, advertises the usual cabaret fare of live salsa bands, banana daiquiris, and beautiful women in skimpy red sequins. But the people standing outside the club are not tourists looking for an exotic thrill. They are mostly young, mostly black, and dressed in the latest Fubu and Tommy Hilfiger styles.

Once inside, they dance until the DJ tells them to give it up for the two men who step on stage. One is tall and languid, the other shorter and in constant motion. They wear baggy jeans, oversized T-shirts, and sprinkle their songs with "c'mon now" and "awww' ight." But while they might emulate Amer-

ican hip-hop style, Anonimo Consejo rap about a distinctly Cuban reality.

"This is so that you understand that all young people aren't garbage," Yosmel and Kokino shout in Spanish. Then they rap: "It's time to break the silence/This isn't what they teach in school/In search of the American dream, Latinos suffer in the hands of others..." The audience stares enrapt.

"This music is not for dancing. It's for listening," says a young man wearing a Chicago Bulls jersey. He waves his hand high in the air. "And for Cubans, believe me, it takes a lot to keep us from dancing."

The two *raperos* are a study in contrasts—the writer and the star. Yosmel stands toward the back of the stage, his handsome face impassive as he delivers a steady flow of verse. Kokino electrifies, criss-crossing his arms as he moves crab-like across the stage. The

crowd follows him, word for word. They are one of Cuba's top rap groups, waiting for their next big break—a record contract and a living wage to do what they love.

Three girls, decked out in bright tank tops and spandex, sit on the sidelines watching Kokino's every move. Yordanka, 20, Yaima, 19, and Noiris, 17, are cousins who a year ago started their own rap group, Explosión Femenina. So far, the only explosion has been in their living rooms or at school talent shows, but that could change. In a week, they will perform in public for the first time at Club Las Vegas. And if Cuba's top rap producer likes them, he'll groom them just as he has Kokino and Yosmel.

Pablo Herrera, the producer who can make them—who already made Orishas, the first Cuban rap group to produce a hit record in Europe—is in the DJ's room looking down. "What you're seeing is Cuba's underground. I'm talking the empowerment of

down to the New York attitude.

Herrera is one of the few hip-hop producers in Havana, and in a city with more than 250 rap groups, he says he's in demand and overworked. "I can't work with everybody, I'm not a machine. I mostly go with what I like."

Kokino and Yosmel attracted Herrera because they push the limit, but they got a painful reminder of how far that limit can be pushed two years ago. After performing a song about the police and racial profiling, they were arrested and thrown in jail. The next morning they were released with a warning, and it's clear that at least for now, they are heeding that warning. "My country is my text, and my flag is the paper I write

It's tough for female rappers to earn respect in Cuba's rap scene.



The young women of Explosión Femenina practice on the rooftop of a Havana tenement before their big debut.

youth as a battle spear for a more conscious society," he says in English so flawless that he's sure he lived another life in Brooklyn. And he looks it—from the braids in his hair

it on," Yosmel raps. *Viva la Revolución* is a refrain in his songs and a Che Guevara T-shirt is a staple in his wardrobe.

But for young rappers here, the world is

full of contradictions. They believe in Cuba, but they're not ideologues—they just want to make music from their own reality. Anonimo Consejo's lyrics are edgy, but getting too edgy could end their careers. Each day is a balancing act. Kokino and Yosmel want to succeed on their own terms, but they've been at it for four years, and their parents—supportive so far—are beginning to wonder how long they can afford to continue.

When they met eight years ago, Kokino, then 13, and Yosmel, 17, were just kids looking for fun on an island so depressed that scores of their countrymen were building rafts out of everything from styrofoam to old tubes to take their chance at sea. Yosmel and Kokino watched them from their homes in Cojimar,

a neighborhood on the outskirts of Havana where Ernest Hemingway once lived. Then it was Havana's sleepy beach town, but by the time Yosmel and Kokino grew up, dilapidated Soviet-style high-rise apartment buildings and cement block homes had taken over.

For relief from the dog days of 1993, the two young men and their friends hung out at Alamar, a sprawling housing complex nearby. The kids entertained themselves improvising, break-dancing, and listening hard to the American music coming from antennas they rigged to their rooftops to catch Miami radio stations.

Rap like this was infiltrating the airwaves: "Cause I'm black and I'm proud/ I'm ready and amped/Most of my heroes don't appear on no stamps," rhymed Public Enemy in 1990's "Fear of a Black Planet." Yosmel loved it. "Their songs spoke to me in a new way. There was nothing in Cuba that sounded like it."

Or talked about the same issues that have challenged black Americans for decades. Instead, Cubans have been taught to ignore race, and the revolution tried to blur color lines by opening all professions, universities, and government to AfroCubans. In school, when Yosmel tried to talk about

PHOTO BY ANNEISE WUNDERLICH

his African ancestry, teachers reprimanded him. "They told me we are all Cubans," he says. "It wasn't patriotic to think of myself as different from anyone else."

But increasingly, he and Kokino discovered that they stood out. "There is this perception that all white people are saints and all blacks are delinquents," Kokino says. Though they add that police rarely do more than question them on the street, the stigma of being a young black man in Cuba wears on their nerves.

Even though Afro-Cubans have benefited greatly from the revolution, they've also suffered the most during its crisis. Every Cuban needs dollars to survive, and the bulk of the easy money coming in remittances goes to the white Cubans because it was their relatives who left early on. Darker Cubans also face discrimination getting the island's best jobs in the tourism industry. Skin color—despite the revolution's best intentions—has once again become the marker of a class divide.

Kokino, Yosmel, and others in Cojimar felt it, and like any disaffected youth, they looked for role models who made them feel proud. Yosmel started asking his mother

Anonimo Consejo's lyrics are edgy, but getting too edgy could end their careers.

about his African roots, and before long, her stories became his lyrics. "In my poor bed, I read my history/Memories of titans/Africans kicking out the Spanish." She also taught him about santería, Cuba's African-derived religion that has outlasted any political regime. "In school they taught him about slavery, but they didn't go into depth," his mother says, standing in the dirt yard in front of their small, wooden house. Lines of laundry hang to dry in the hot sun. A single mother, she washes her neighbor's clothes in exchange for a few extra pesos each month.

She isn't Yosmel's only source of extracurricular knowledge. Cuba has long welcomed



Pablo Herrera is the most influential producer in Cuban hip-hop.

PHOTO BY ANNEISE WUNDERLICH

black American activists and intellectuals, and many of them have reached out to Afro-Cuban youth. Yosmel and Kokino often stop by the house of Nehanda Abiodun, a Black Panther living in exile, for informal sessions about African American history, poetry, and world politics. The messages in their music, says the 54-year-old American, come from being "born in a revolutionary process where they were encouraged to ask questions and challenge the status quo."

Abiodun calls herself an "elder guide" for Cuba's underground rap scene, and her influence is clear in the music. "Banal lies cover up the truth/just like the killing of Shaka Sankofa," Yosmel raps, referring to the execution last year of an African American on death row. But the highlight of Yosmel's life so far has been meeting some of the biggest names in the U.S. rap underground. "It was amazing to hear rappers from another country worried about the same issues I was," he says.

Rap groups like dead prez and Black Star have been going down to Cuba since 1998 as part of the Black August Collective, a group of African American activists and musicians dedicated to promoting hip-hop culture globally. Even when it was unsure about the rap movement, the Cuban government welcomed the American rappers to the island because their support for the revolution was clear, says Vera Abiodun, co-director of the Brooklyn branch of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, and part of the Collective.

But in addition to responding to the hip-hop, Cuban youth were also attracted to the visitors' obvious pride in being black. Embracing their African heritage, just as black Americans did in the 1960s, became a source of solace for young Afro-Cubans. "Every time that the police harass me, I don't feel like being here anymore," Yosmel says. "When that happens, the first place I think about is here," he touches an African amulet hang-

ing around his neck. "When I feel African, I don't feel black."

Along with Che Guevara and Jose Martí, Yosmel and Kokino admire Malcolm X, Mumia Abu Jamal, Nelson Mandela and other black icons. They were among thousands of Cubans that went to hear Mumia's son speak at an anti-imperialist rally last year. And when Yosmel and Kokino talk about meeting American rappers like Mos Def and Common [Sense], their faces beam. Although rap has tied them to a heritage that validates their existence, it has yet to improve their economic reality.

But Herrera, the producer, may help them find a way out of poverty. He, along with others at the forefront of Cuba's underground rap movement, has been instrumental in changing the government's attitude towards hip-hop. "The purpose of hip-hop is serv-

Anonimo Consejo often warn young Cubans against the temptations of American-style capitalism.

ing the country, not being an antagonistic tool," he says. "The idea is to improve what is already in place." These efforts were rewarded in 1999 when Abel Prieto, the Minister of Culture, officially declared rap "an authentic expression of *cubanidad*" and began nominally funding an annual rap festival. Even Fidel himself rapped along with the group Doble Filo at the national baseball championship two years ago.

But some have questioned Herrera's position as the arbiter of Cuban hip-hop's message and music. "The only reason Pablo has game is because he is sponsored by the government," says Abel Robaina, a Cuban musician living in San Francisco. In fact, Herrera is a member of the Asociación Hermanos Saiz, the youth branch of the Ministry of Culture that oversees the island's creative output. Any rap musician who hopes to be seen at a decent venue must get the association's approval, and that can only happen if their music is seen to serve the revolution.

It is no surprise, then, that Anonimo Con-

sejo has become a favorite at state-sponsored shows. In their songs, they often warn young Cubans against the temptations of American-style capitalism. In the song "Appearances Are Deceiving" they rap: "Don't crush me, I'm staying here/Don't push me, let me live/I would give anything for my Cuba, I'm happy here."

Five years ago, both Kokino and Yosmel decided to forego Cuba's legendary free university education and devote themselves to making music. "They deserve a very good record deal," says Herrera, and they deserve to be working at a studio every day making their music."

Despite their lyrics about staying put in Cuba, Yosmel and Kokino want more. "We are waiting around for an angel to come from abroad who recognizes our talent and is willing to invest a lot of attention and money in

our project," Kokino says. Anonimo Consejo has appeared on a U.S.-produced compilation that has yet to be released, and they were featured in recent issues of *Source* and *Vibe* magazines.

But for now, when their session is over, they still need to borrow a dollar to catch a bus back home.

As difficult as it's been for Anonimo Consejo to land a record contract, it's tougher still for female rappers to earn respect in Cuba's rap scene. The three girls from Explosion Femenina would do almost anything to be in Anonimo Consejo's shoes.

In a run-down tenement in Central Havana, the girls have taken over their family's tiny apartment as they practice hard for their upcoming debut at Club Las Vegas. A faded portrait of Fidel looks down from the dark living room walls as the girls crank up the volume on their boom-box and rap about boy troubles over Eminem's hit song, "Real Slim Shady." Whatever they lack in technique they make up for with sheer enthusiasm.

Through some connections, they managed to secure a spot at next Friday's Las Vegas show—and a chance to woo Pablo Herrera. That scene, however, is predominantly a boys' club, and they have to prove that they can do more than move well in tight pants if they hope to win Pablo's support.

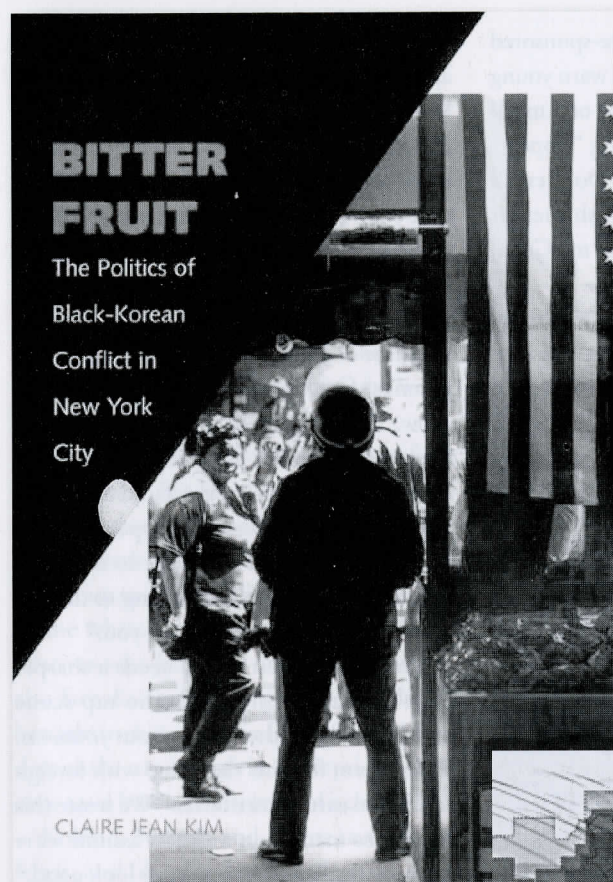
On the rooftop, with the sun setting over the maze of narrow streets below them, they practice their one finished song before the show. Yaima, born for the spotlight, undulates and shimmies as all three harmonize about the hardships they've faced as women rappers: "With my feminine appearance I've come to rival you/If you want to compete, if you want to waste time trying to destroy me/I'll get rowdy and impress you."

They know their music needs a sharper edge to make it in the macho rap scene and practice another song about *jinateras*, Cuba's term for girls that sleep with foreign tourists to earn extra dollars. "We wrote this because so many guys we know assume we're *jinateras* just because we like to look good," Yaima explains. "Even though about 70 percent of the girls we know do it, we don't, and we're sick of them judging us."

The next Friday, outside Club Las Vegas, the girls are giddy. They excitedly snap photos of one another and different rapper friends, laughing to disguise their nervousness. They huddle with Magia, one of the few women rappers in Havana and also their mentor. "Remember to pay attention to where you are standing on stage. And sing in tune," she instructs, rubbing their backs in encouragement. Time to go in.

Santaurio, a group visiting from Venezuela, are the first to storm up to the microphones. Adorned with heavy gold chains, gold-capped teeth, and designer labels, they clearly come from a different economic situation than their Cuban hosts. Yaima, Noiris, and Jordanka are next. "They are so amazing," Noiris says, biting her lip. "Do you really think we are good enough to be up there after them?"

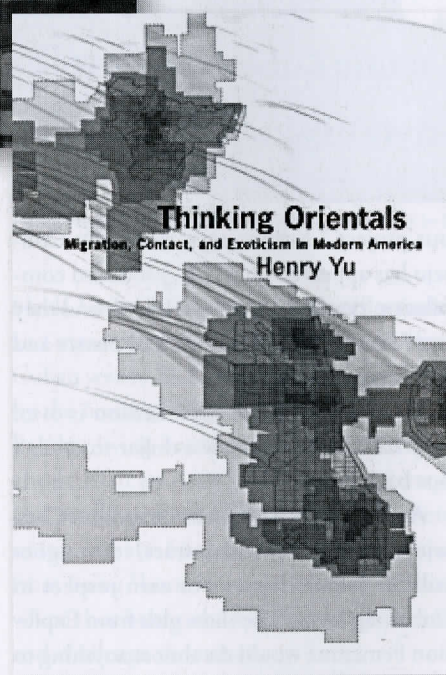
Good enough or not, DJ Ariel calls out for Explosion Femenina. The girls, looking very young and decidedly unglamorous, breathe deeply and take the stage. ■



With deft skill and moral uncertainty, Asian American studies stumbles into the 21st century

Where Do We Stand?

BY JEFF CHANG



Looking back, it was clear Rose Hum Lee was headed for success.

Born in 1904, Lee became the first woman, and the first Chinese American, ever to chair an American sociology department. She had risen from an entrepreneurial family to graduate with honors at Butte High School in Montana. By the time she accepted the helm of Roosevelt University's sociology program in 1956, she had published an influential book in urban theory and written a play about Chinese American kids.

But she was best known for her tireless touring as a popular lecturer. Traveling to boondock towns like White Fish Bay, Wisconsin, Lee captivated her audiences with discourses on the Kuomintang and how authentic Chinese like herself viewed American culture and politics. After the talks, she sold cute little Chinatown trinkets to the enchanted *gwailo*. She had it all worked out,

yo, and she probably made a killing.

Well, things done changed, as Biggie Smalls would say.

Asian American studies, formed out of the Third World campus uprisings of the late '60s, is now taught in over 60 campuses, in hundreds of classes, reaching thousands of students. The field's annual signature event—the often dour, sometimes stimulating gathering of the Association for Asian American

Studies—is a mix of the obscure and the provocative, featuring over 400 papers delivered on topics like “You’ve Got Mail!: The Personal Letter, the Act of Writing, and Japanese American Female Subjectivity” and “You’ve Got Male: Online Dating in the Queer Asian American Community.” These days, a passel of T-shirts and a few copies of *Roots*, the classic early '70s Asian American textbook, might be sold, but not a lot of chinoiserie.

It could be argued that the roots of Asian American studies date to the work of scholars like Rose Hum Lee and her pre-revolutionary comrades. In *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2001),

Jeff Chang is a freelance writer in New York City, currently working on a book about the politics of the hip-hop generation.

UCLA historian Henry Yu traces the study of APIs in America back past the heavily mythologized Third World Strike to the early 20th century patriarchs of the University of Chicago's sociology department. Yu's fascinating intellectual history looks at how sociologists and missionaries created a uniquely American Orientalism and how that ideology, in turn, created an “Oriental American” intelligentsia.

Just as important, sociologists defined the study of communities of color as the study of people and social problems, an approach that was ideologically transformed by the Third World Strike but never abandoned. Led by Robert Park, teams of researchers and missionaries began in 1924 to map emerging Asian American communities through “The Survey of Race Relations on the Pacific Coast of the United States.” Driving the project was the famous “Oriental Problem,” the apparent inability of Orientals to assimilate. The related problem—racial conflict—could be resolved through Americanization, a final demonstration that American society represented the height of civilization.

For their day, Yu notes, the sociologists and the missionaries were liberals. They sought to displace biological determinism

icanists. Some, like Paul Siu, produced classic studies like the essential “The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation.” Most, like Lee, absorbed the assimilationist bent of their mentors, and would themselves become euro-ticized objects to be toppled by the later Asian Americanists. They wanted the life of the mind, and settled instead for the comfortable life of academia. Yu writes, “This was the consolation of sociology—enlightenment as a way of controlling the world and oneself through knowledge.”

In 1925, Kazuo Kawai was a gifted 20-year-old discovered at the back of some UCLA lecture hall. His output feels oddly contemporary, belonging on a shelf next to Ronald Takaki or Sucheng Chan. Of his Westwood experience, he wrote, “Once I was American, but America made a foreigner out of me—not a Japanese, but a foreigner—a foreigner to any country, for I am just as much a foreigner to Japan as to America.” Under Park's tutelage, however, Kawai became an expert on Japan, a certified and credentialed translator of a foreign culture for a culture that made him a foreigner. Yu remarks, “He expected to simply learn the knowledge that was expected of him.”

If young Kaz was posting up at the back

Asian American studies has never been more confident in its powers of observation and less confident in its powers of social transformation.

with cultural optimism. Physiognomy—chinky eyes, raven hair—was meaningless. Color could be overcome. Oriental cultures could be understood, and thus undone. They pointed to young Chinese American flappers, aspiring Japanese American novelists, and the rapidly miscegenating territory of Hawai'i as proof.

Through close observation and reporting, they created hundreds of monographs on Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino communities. Soon, authenticity demanded inside informants, and the Chicago School thus produced the first generation of Asian Amer-

of a Perloff Hall lecture nowadays, what would he be expected to know? Post-millennial Asian American studies is a rapidly expanding field, with a half-dozen new tenure-track lines offered every year. Cultural studies' absorption into ethnic studies has made it accessible to the surging demographic of young culture-vultures. The sheer quantity of knowledge production is at an all-time high.

But if one were to judge by the kinds of papers presented at the Asian American Studies Conference—ignoring for a moment that there may be good reasons not to do so—it

would seem the primary objects of study are no longer people and problems, but texts. And texts tend to privilege the whimsies and obsessions of the elite. At their worst, the intellectual products are as gaudy and useless as chinoiserie miniatures.

One might argue that the cultural turn in Asian American studies is a wholesale retreat from the social problems of the time, a pointless deployment of callow overachievers to pore over the detritus of overeducated yellows. That would be overstating the case. But most of the AAAS conference papers are delivered by hungry grad students, and they are a good indication of where the discipline will be in five to ten years.

There certainly is ample irony in the fact that the burgeoning field of Asian American literature—driven by the white publishing world's insatiable desire for the Other—is getting translated by a small army of professors and grad students into French post-structuralist theory. That trend may not necessarily be all bad. Read: J-O-B. As Destiny's Child might say, the best subjectivities are the ones that pay my bills.

Which returns us to the Asian American problem—whose symptom once again is racial conflict and whose tension is still in securing the place and space of Asians and Pacific Islanders in America—might be found—shall we say, mapped—between the lines of Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*. But you might be better off looking at the police lines, picket lines, checkout lines, and newspaper headlines at the Family Red Apple and Church Fruits stores in Flatbush, Brooklyn. That's what Claire Jean Kim does in *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City* (Yale University Press, 2000), and her social problems approach feels both archaic and prophetic at the same time.

In 1990, Black Power activists initiated a boycott just two and a half weeks after New York City inaugurated its first black progressive mayor. After an afternoon encounter in the Red Apple Grocery between Korean shopkeeper Bong Ok Jang and Haitian customer Ghislaine Felissaint—some say he beat her, others say he didn't—an angry crowd of black Caribbeans formed outside the gro-



Bong Ok Jang, owner of the Red Apple Grocery, during the Flatbush boycott of 1990.

cery. One fearful Korean worker bolted across the street to another Korean-owned store, Church Fruits. Two days later, Haitian community leaders organized a formal boycott of both stores.

The boycott, Kim persuasively argues, represented a peak of New York City's resurgent Black Power movement. During the late '80s, racist killings in Howard Beach and Bensonhurst led to the creation of a progressive black infrastructure. This network, in turn, gave Jesse Jackson the 1988 state Democratic primary. It helped David Dinkins, who campaigned on an appeal for racial healing, get elected as mayor by a handy margin. Then the Flatbush boycott broke out. Church Fruits went from taking in \$4,500 a day to \$50, and the Red Apple Grocery went from \$3,500 a day to just \$30.

The primary force behind the boycotts, the December 12th Movement, encompassed black nationalists, pan-Africanists, and revolutionary nationalists. These activists saw the boycott as a way to bring the rapidly growing Haitian and Caribbean communities into the fold. To unite the diverse communities,

Kim says that organizers used what she calls the frame-repertoires—collective action frames that last over time and survive movements—of Black Power and collective control.

Seeing themselves as innocent scapegoats, Korean American anti-boycott leaders discouraged the owners from selling the Red

"Make no mistake about it: the Red Apple Boycott challenged the racial status quo."

Apple Grocery, hoping to turn the issue into their own push for power. Korean merchants came to work at the store in shifts for free; \$150,000 in donations kept the stores running. But while African American activists were able to link disparate communities through their frame-repertoires, Korean American activists never gained the support of Asian American and younger Korean American organizations, who greeted the countermovement mostly with mute ambivalence.

Eight months later, the boycott ended with simmering tensions between Korean Americans and African Americans, the progressive coalition in ruins, and Mayor David Dinkins' one-and-done term entering three long, lame-duck years. If that wasn't bad enough, peep what followed: Rudy Giuliani and Howard Safir, Abner Louima and Amadou Diallo.

And here is where we are left with our Asian American problem, still racially dissembled and displaced, and perhaps none the wiser. But if we look to Asian American studies to begin to back us away from this abyss, we may have to be disappointed. In this era of diminished expectations, Asian American studies has never been more confident in its powers of observation and less confident in its powers of social transformation.

Kim boldly sides with the black boycotters: "Make no mistake about it: the Red Apple Boycott challenged the racial status quo." If there is a subtext for her Korean and Asian American readers, it is this: acknowledge your privilege, learn your racial context, and play fair. But on the last point, she despairs.

"One moral of this story is that racial power cleans up after itself," Kim writes. "We often take open dissent on the part of dispossessed groups as an indication that they have some voice in American politics. Yet how meaningful is this 'voice' if it is consistently garbled, distorted, and then silenced by main-

stream opinionmakers and the dominant discourse?"

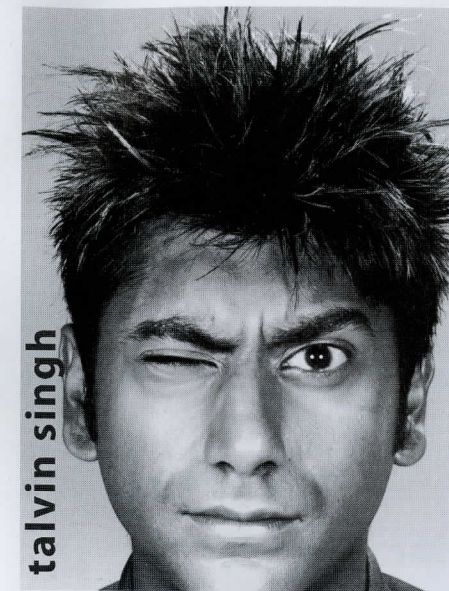
Narrow identity politics, Kim seems to say, not only brought us to the black-Asian stalemate, they are absolutely useless anyway. Morally uncertain, she resigns herself to speaking truth, if not to power. "It seems likely that the problem of the twenty-first century will be that of the multiple color lines embedded in the American racial order," she concludes. "Thinking critically and speaking candidly about the contours of this order is only a first step, but it is a necessary one."

In his own way, Yu appears just as pessimistic. On the first page of his book, he makes a thinly veiled dig at Takaki and Chan's canonized Asian American history, criticizing them for their API-centrism: "[Their narratives] would only place Asians instead of Europeans at the center of History." But he never takes up the issue or point of view again, ending the book instead with Flora Belle Jan's story. Jan, the Chinese American flapper, hears of Robert Park's death and has a bout of yellow guilt over never having fulfilled Park's dreams for her. Poetic, certainly, but not exactly empowering.

Perhaps Jan is meant to be a depressing stand-in for the new generation of Asian Americanists, the most professionally accomplished ever. The Third World militant dreams have only been partially realized, the best minds are baffled, and the lesser lights follow passing fashion while scrambling for lifetime jobs.

And yet a new generation of APIs dies to answer the questions: where do we stand? What are we fighting for? ■

■ race records COMPILED BY HUA HSU



TALVIN SINGH

Ha (Island)

Fusing his South Asian musical training with the brooding sounds of British nightclubs, Singh's excellent second solo album is the perfect audio companion for long nights spent brushing up on your favorite postcolonial literature.

2000 BLACK

The Good Good (Planet E)

Forward-thinking dance compilation from 4 Hero's main mind Dego McFarlane. Capturing a unique moment of the electronic/jazz interface, this groovy, house-flavored set is highlighted by a surprise spot from veteran vibesman and original "2000 Black" songwriter Roy Ayers.

BURNT SUGAR

Blood on the Leaf (Trugroid)

Flyboy in the Buttermilk author and Black Rock Coalition founder Greg Tate convenes some world-class improvisers on this great acid funk workout. Burnt Sugar reclaims and reshapes the rock tradition with a multiracial band (including *ColorLines* favorite Vijay Iyer) that's equal parts P-Funk, Sun Ra, and mid-1970s Miles.

BOBBY MONTEZ

Jungle Fantastique (CuBop)

Essential reissue of this overlooked classic of Latin jazz, originally released in 1958. With ferocious polyrhythms and joyous instrumentation, Montez's work is up there with better-known Latin artists like Cal Tjader, Mongo Santamaria and Pucho.

KEVIN SO

That Oriental Guy (Wingbone)

Once hailed as the "Amy Tan" of the singer/songwriter world, but don't hold that against him. This prodigious Chinese American folk singer blends blues, pop and soul in his compelling, first-person tales of racism, heartbreak, and the hunger of memory.

SAUL WILLIAMS

Amethyst Rock Star (American)

Acclaimed slam poet finally delivers his anticipated solo debut. Combining the fiercest elements of rock, hip-hop, and even some drum 'n' bass, Saul's ambitious musical arrangements nearly match his intricate verbiage. With a unique urgency, Saul spits heavy, double-edged lyrics aimed at human liberation.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Cambodian Rocks! (Parallel World)

Collection of 1960s and 1970s Cambodian "circle dance music." Far more than merely a collection of cover versions, the comp provides an interesting view of American culture through Asian eyes. Witness their local interpretations of garage rock, Jimi, Janis, and James Brown.

■ web watch BY RYAN PINTADO-VERTNER

This crazy world has my optimism against the ropes. Nothing like several years of nonprofit beggary, free trade everything, cops, and now Dubya the Dumb-Ass to make reality pool in the throat.

So when I looked at a pre-release version of the new SchoolsNotJails.com website, it was my creeping pessimism that said, This just *can't* be a youth movement site.

I should not have been so doubtful. The youth-led Schools Not Jails movement exploding around Califas is nothing if not innovative. I've seen youth organizers turn a flatbed farmworker truck into a mobile hip-hop concert during a march, and even the riot cops had to smile.

Little wonder that the same crew has now produced SchoolsNotJails.com, easily one of the best radical interpretations of dot-comism. The site will quickly become a valuable resource for youth organizers and young



activists nationwide, despite its California emphasis.

It boasts multiple chat rooms for youth, tips and education tools for organizers, and informative articles about criminalization, Junior ROTC, high school ethnic studies courses, and other issues facing youth nationwide. For example, I found this bluntly racist quote from an uploaded Junior ROTC training curriculum, as compiled by the American Friends Service Committee: "Fortunately for the Army, the government policy of pushing the Indians farther west then wiping them out was carried out successfully."

Some of the site's content is too dated, though Jose Lopez, one of the web designers,

assures me this is only for the test phase. And the writing is often too ideological for me, which could also be a turn-off to some teens. But the site passes the researcher test: it has a good search engine!

The group behind SchoolsNotJails.com is Youth Organizing Communities, a primarily Chicano/Latino California-wide youth organization famous for its capacity to shut down a school district with one well-organized walk-out. The website is part of YOC's multi-pronged approach to indy media, including a youth-run pirate radio station called Killradio and a collaboration with the Los Angeles Independent Media Center. ■

VISIONS OF

Keba Konte is a San Francisco-based artist who creates montages of photographic imprints on wood. His work, which includes photojournalism as well as mixed-media collages, takes on the themes of racial inequality, culture, and history in places such as Africa, Cuba, Europe, Japan, and the U.S.

"My mother was a photographer and my father a carpenter," Konte says. "This medium allows me the fluidness to manifest the crafts I have been exposed to all my life."

These pieces were created from photos taken during the South African elections in 1994. Konte transferred the dark parts of the photos onto pieces of found wood with a gel, and then burned the images into the wood.

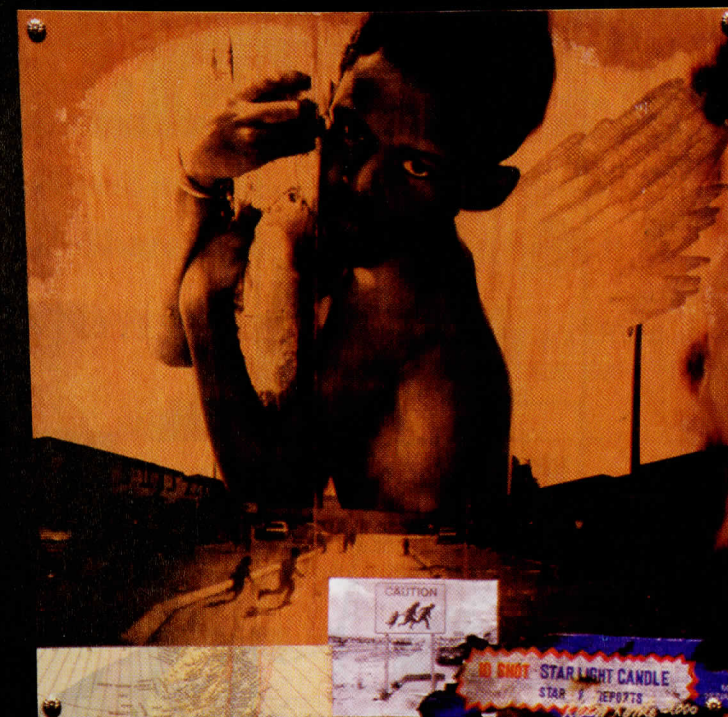
Konte recently released his first book, *Photomontage on Wood*, available from Blackstar Express. His website is www.kebakonte.com



SOUTH AFRICA

(Clockwise from top left) Blue Heart Be Free, Jumping Over Places I'd Rather Not Be, Bliss, 10 Shots and Soweto Mamas.

The photos for these montages were taken in Johannesburg and Cape-town. They center on youth because Konte wanted to "convey the presence of oppression but with a sense of hope for the future, the humanity and resilience of young people."



ARTWORK BY KEBA KONTE



IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

RACE AND FOOD

Politics of Cajun and Creole
Haute Cuisine & Immigrant Labor
The Menu of Organizing
International Food Politics
Mike Davis on Latino Labor
Danny HoSang on Multiracialism



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