



# Shades of Power

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## A BIRTHDAY LETTER OF UNITED COLORS

From Subcomandante Marcos of Chiapas  
To Mumia Abu-Jamal

Zapatista Army of National Liberation  
Mexico, April 1999

Señor Mumia,

I write to you in the name of the men, women, children and elderly of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in order to congratulate you on April 24, which is your birthday.

Perhaps you have heard of us. We are Mexican, mostly indigenous, and we took up arms on January 1, 1994 demanding a voice, face and name for the forgotten of the earth.

Since then, the Mexican government has made war on us and pursues us and harasses us, seeking our death, our disappearance and our definitive silence. The reason? These lands are rich with oil, uranium and precious lumber. The government wants them for the great transnational companies. We want them for all Mexicans. The government sees our lands as a business. We see our history written in these lands. In order to defend our right (and that of all Mexicans) to live with liberty, democracy, justice and dignity, we became an army and undertook a name, voice and face that way.

Perhaps you wonder how we know about you, about your birthday, and why we extend this long bridge from the mountains of the Mexican southeast to the Pennsylvania prison that has imprisoned you unjustly. Many good people from many parts of the world have spoken of you. Through them we have learned how you were ambushed by the North American police in December 1981, of the lies they constructed against you, and of the death sentence imposed in 1982. We learned about your birthday through the international mobilizations which, under the name "Millions for Mumia," are being prepared for this April 24th.

It is harder to explain the bridge that this letter extends. It is more complicated. I could tell you that, for the powerful of Mexico and the government, to be indigenous or to look indigenous is cause for disdain, abhorrence, distrust and hatred. The racism that now floods the palaces of Power in Mexico goes to the extreme of conducting a war of extermination—genocide—against millions of indigenous people. I am sure you will find similarities with what the Power in the United States does to "people of color" (African-Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, Northamerican Indians and any other people who do not have the insipid color of money.)

We are also "people of color" (the same color as our brothers who have Mexican blood and live and struggle in the U.S.). We are of the color "brown," the color of the earth, the color from which we take our history, our strength, our wisdom and our hope. But in order to struggle we add another color to the brown: black. We use black ski-masks to show our faces. Only in this way can we be seen and heard. We chose this color as a result of the counsel of an indigenous Mayan elder who explained to us what the color black means.

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THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD VIOLATE JUSTICE AND REASON, ASSAULT HISTORY AND LOSE THE TRUTH. THEY THOUGHT THEY COULD DO THIS AND NO ONE WOULD SAY ANYTHING. THEY THOUGHT YOU, SEÑOR MUMIA, WOULD BE SILENCED. I REMEMBER YOUR WORDS, "THEY NOT ONLY WANT MY DEATH, THEY WANT MY SILENCE."

Subcomandante Marcos

The name of this wise elder was Old Man Antonio. He died in these rebel Zapatista lands in March 1994, a victim of the tuberculosis that ate his lungs and took his breath. Old Man Antonio used to tell us that from black came the light and from there came the stars that light up the sky around the world. He told us a story that said a long time ago (in those times when no one measured it), the first gods were given the task of giving birth to the world. In one of their meetings they saw it was necessary for the world to have life and movement, and to accomplish this, light was necessary. Then they thought of making the sun in order for the days to move and so there would be day and night and time for struggling and time for making love. Walking with the days and nights, the world would go.

The gods decided this in front of a large fire and they knew it was necessary for one of them to be sacrificed by throwing himself into the fire, in order to become fire himself and fly into the sky. Since the gods thought the work of the sun was the most important, they chose the most beautiful god so that he would fly into the fire and become the sun. But he was afraid. Then the smallest god, the one who was black, said he was not afraid and he threw himself into the fire and became sun. Now the world had light and movement, and there was time for struggle and time for love. In the day the bodies worked to make the world and in the night the bodies made love, and sparkles filled the darkness.

This is what Old Man Antonio told us and that is why we use a black ski mask. So we are of the color brown and of the color black. But we are also of the color yellow, because the first people who walked these lands were made of corn so they would be true. And we are also red because this is the call of blood which has dignity, and we are also blue because we are the sky in which we fly, and green for the mountain which is our house and our strength. And we are white, because we are paper so that tomorrow can write its story.

So we are seven colors because there were seven first gods who birthed the world.

That is what Old Man Antonio said long ago and now I tell you this story so that you may understand the reason for this bridge of paper and ink, which I send to you all the way from the mountains of the Mexican southeast.

It is also so that you may understand that with this bridge go salutes and hugs for Leonard Peltier in prison at Leavenworth, Kansas, and for the more than 100 political prisoners in the USA who are the victims of injustice, stupidity and authoritarianism.

And with this letter-bridge walks as well a salute to the Dine (the Navajo), who, in Big Mountain, Arizona, fight against the violations of their traditional Dine religious practices. They struggle against those who prefer the large businesses instead of respect for the religious freedom of Indian peoples, and those who want to destroy sacred grounds and ceremonial sites (as is the case of Peabody Western Coal Company which wants to take lands without reason, history or rights—lands which belong to the Dine and their future generations...)

The Dine resist against those who would kill their memory, Leonard Peltier is accompanied by all those who demand his liberty, and you, sir, speak and shout today with all the voices celebrating your birthday as all birthdays should be celebrated: by struggling.

Señor Mumia:

We have nothing big to give you as a gift for your birthday. It is poor and little, but all of us send you an embrace. We hope that when you gain your freedom you will come to visit us. Then we will give you a birthday party. There will be musicians, dancing and speaking—the means by which men and women of all colors understand and know one another, and build bridges over which they walk together, towards history, towards tomorrow.

Happy Birthday!

Note: The letter has been shortened for reasons of space. We think the Sub would understand. Ed.

## New Action at the Institute

The Institute for MultiRacial Justice, a resource center to help build alliances among peoples of color and combat divisions, opened its new office in San Francisco with a bang-up program and reception.

On June 25, Ron Wilkins from Los Angeles presented his work on "Black Mexico" (see *Shades of Power*, No. 4) with a video and slides. A longtime political activist, a photojournalist for 20 years and a radio host with KPFK-FM, Ron currently works at Santa Monica High School. As an advisor to the African and Latino Youth Summit, he seeks to help build unity between the two peoples. He has traveled to various Afro-Mexican villages and taken several groups of black and Latino students there. His video shows how they learn the fascinating, untold story of Mexican people descended from slaves, who live together today in a harmony the U.S. youth find wondrous. The faces of the Afro-Mexicans seen in Ron's photos are stunning in their beauty and strength.

The Institute is also working to build bridges between African Americans and immigrants. On July 8 it co-hosted one of the first dialogues in the new BRIDGE program of the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (see page 7 "Building a National BRIDGE Begins"). The Institute has also set up a Task Force on African American/Immigrant Relations, which will be doing workshops for residents in public housing where conflicts sometimes develop when tenants from different racial or cultural backgrounds move in.

Later this summer, the Institute plans to have Richard Moore, coordinator of the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice



Ron Wilkins (on right) with Institute founder Phil Hutchings and Tessa Koning-Martinez at the June 25 event. The three were once arrested together in June 1969 when a demonstration in the New Mexico land struggle brought together SNCC representatives (Wilkins and Hutchings) with local Chicano/a activists.

based in Albuquerque, N.M., speak on the environmental justice movement as one of the most productive arenas of alliance-building among people of color. In early fall we will host a panel of women experienced in building alliances between people of color, with representatives of the Black Panther Party, Los Siete and the Red Guard Party, as well as young women doing such work today. In late September the Institute will hold a 2 or 3-day video festival in San Francisco featuring videos and films that help develop alliances and combat divisions between peoples of color.

If you're interested in participating in any of these activities, do contact us: (415) 701-9502 or e-mail: i4mrj@aol.com. ■

### INSTITUTE TO HOLD ALLIANCE-BUILDING VIDEO FESTIVAL

The Institute for MultiRacial Justice invites you to help create a video and film festival in San Francisco in September, 1999.

We will present works that illustrate alliance-building by communities of color; that depict common struggles of these communities; and that "tell our stories"—that is, present information so we can reduce our ignorance about each other and move toward solidarity.

Join our planning committee. Recommend and/or review videos that meet the above criteria. Submit your own work. All formats will be included during the festival (screening copies must be VHS and come with \$5 for return tape). Rental fees available. Please contact us by calling (415) 701-9502 or e-mail at i4mrj@aol.com. 522 Valencia St., San Francisco, CA 94110. Ask for Valentín Aguirre, festival coordinator.



# Death and Division in Detroit

## HOW CAN BLACKS AND ARAB AMERICANS UNITE?

By Leah Samuel

"Closed due to murder!"

"Black power!"

"Arabs killed our brother!"

The shouts punch holes in the din of Saturday-night traffic along one of Detroit's main thoroughfares. The group of neighbors walks around a quiet gas station and market, dark except for a small light glowing from somewhere behind the counter.

I am ordered off my spot near a gas pump by one of the officers occupying the police car sitting by the market. Another passes near the pumps before driving off, for the second time since I've been there. I move to sit on the ground beneath a street light, taking notes on the scene around me.

Passing vehicles—cabs, buses, motorcycles, family sedans—blare their support. In one slowly passing blue car, a woman points toward the station while conversing with her car-mates, perhaps telling—or retelling—a story that has shaken Detroit for over a month. A few confused motorists drive onto the corner, seeking a fillup or a snack, only to drive off even more confused by the shouting of the group.

These protests have been going on for 35 nights, led by Barbara Wright, the 28-year-old fiancée of Calvin Porter, age 34. Witnesses say he was beaten to death by two Yemeni workers at the gas station. These protests had succeeded in closing down the station.

Porter's confrontation with the two gas-station workers came as the result of an incident involving his stepdaughter. When they stopped at the station on May 14, the 12-year-old wanted to buy something inside. One of the Arab clerks allegedly suggested that she pay for her purchase with sex. The child left the store and told Porter, who then went into the store to confront the clerks.

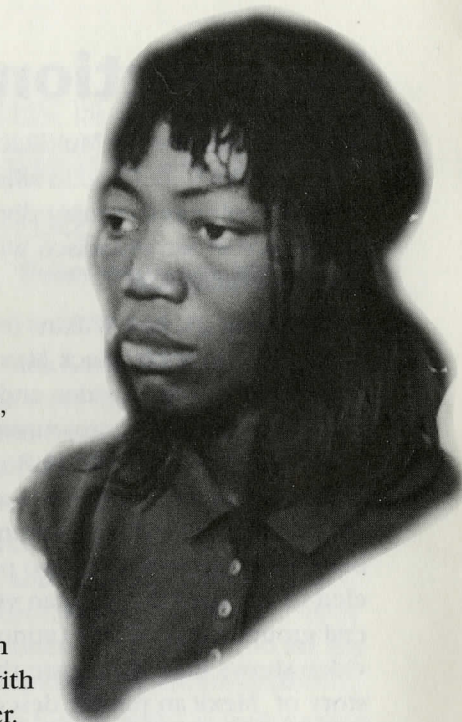
A fight broke out, which ended with Porter being beaten to death outside the store by the clerks, one of whom had a lug wrench. Fadhel Mazeb and Adel Altam have been charged with second-degree murder.

Even worse than conflicts between blacks and Arabs since Porter's death have been the attempts to repair them. These efforts have been rife with insensitivity and opportunism on the part of the would-be healers—local black and Arab religious leaders, politicians and organizations. For Arab businesses in black neighborhoods, there was panic over how the killing and ensuing protests would affect them. The merchants' desire was simply for damage control. At one point, Wright says that her children were spirited away from her brother's house, without her knowledge, and photographed accepting T-shirts from the Arab-American leader of a local business group.

Meanwhile, leaders of established civil-rights organizations swooped in with other token gestures and, muse some local activists, probably the hope of getting funding for some we-shall-overcome project. But they accomplished nothing except a few photo ops and soundbites.

The story of Calvin Porter's death covers much more, though neither the courts nor the public have heard all the versions of it yet. In the midst of the confusion, it is important to listen to some of Barbara Wright's comments.

"I have met with several Arab-community leaders," she said. "They had lists of proposals for heal-



Barbara Wright, fiancée and mother of Calvin Porter's children, at demonstration in front of Sonoco station where Porter was killed. Photo by Dale Rich.

ing the community. What I want to know from both sides is, how come it took his death? They should have been doing this before. Why now? Because a black man died and his widow won't be quiet?"

### ARAB AND BLACKS ONCE ALLIES

As Barbara Wright said, how come it took Porter's death to expose the need for healing?

With a black population of over 80 percent, and the largest Arab population outside the Middle East, Detroit is a place where African- and Arab-Americans have many opportunities to interact with each other regularly. But that interaction has often been negative.

It was not always this way. As the book *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying* (1998 edition) tells us, the early Arab immigrants were mostly Christian, white-skinned small businessmen who assimilated more easily than other immigrants. In 1966, changes in federal laws brought a new wave that soon totalled 85,000. They were dark-skinned with little education, usually employed in the same hard, dangerous work as blacks. The most coherent Arab community was in a section of Dearborn near Detroit called South End, with large numbers of Yemenites. The Mayor called them "white niggers" and they were treated contemptuously.

Arab workers form part of a global immigrant labor force, super-exploited and often forced to live in separate compounds. But many in the auto industry became militant protesters in the 1970s

and formed working alliances with black workers. The Black Workers Congress, founded in 1971, was open to all third-world people and Arab Americans joined. Among both Arab and African American workers, awareness existed of how the auto industry bosses played divide-and-conquer with them. Chrysler provided one example. As a workers' bulletin said about Chrysler's tactics during a struggle of many years with that company, "...they count on turning us against each other."

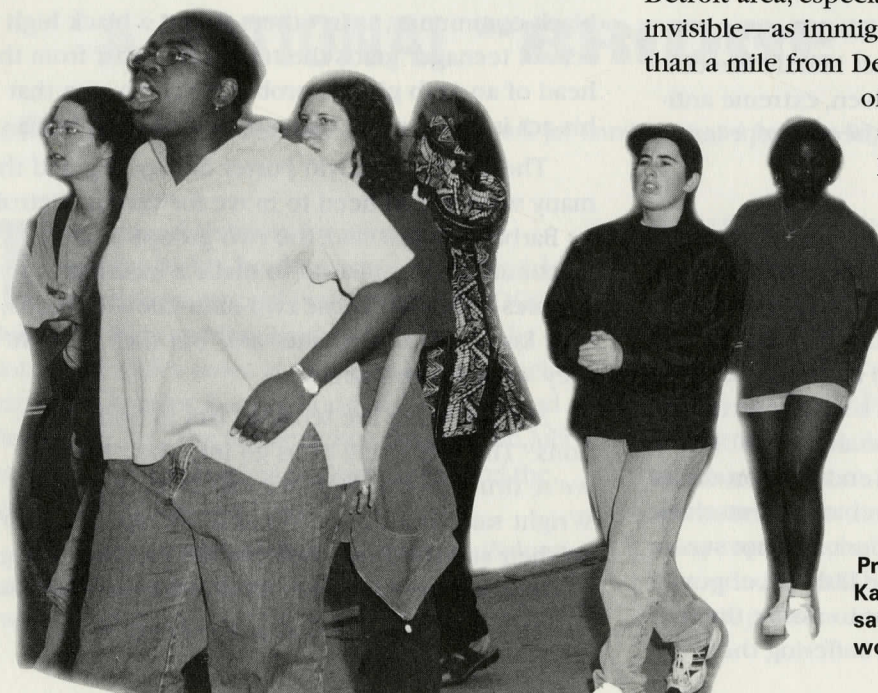
In recent years, blacks have seen Arab peoples in Detroit as mostly from the merchant class. They own many of the stores, gas stations and other small businesses in poor black neighborhoods where people lack access to the major supermarkets and retail shops. Arab storeowners in Detroit, like Koreans in Compton, have become a buffer between the poor of the inner city and the more affluent suburbs.

That role is what makes it difficult for many African Americans to find real solidarity with Arabs. In poor black neighborhoods, Arabs are seen as ersatz white people, holding themselves above those who must depend on them for goods and services. A coalition of black organizations has said that until there are more black business owners, unrest will continue. African Americans also imagine that Arabs, although they are people of color, are not as subject to white racism as blacks are.

### ARAB IMMIGRANTS TODAY: 45% POOR

Thousands of impoverished Arabs in the Detroit area, especially recent immigrants, remain invisible—as immigrants often do. South End, less than a mile from Detroit, is 96% Arab today. 43.9% of the families live in poverty and 45% below the official poverty level, according to the 1990 census. Many do not finish high school and over 60% do not speak English. They live in highly polluted areas; Ford violates many emission permits, giving one section the name "cancer

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Protesters at Sonoco station where Calvin Porter was killed. One sign said "How much is a black man's life worth?" Photo by Dale Rich.



continued from page five

alley." In times of disaster, like the Ford Rouge plant explosion earlier this year, no information or aid was given to the Arab community.

The new Iraqi refugees brought to Detroit by the U.S. government with promises of help often live in horrible conditions. According to the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Service (ACCESS) in Denver, a large number were crammed into a rat-infested hotel; their children were coming to school with rat bites on their bodies, which finally revealed the situation to authorities.

Along with the scourges of poverty, Arab Americans also experience a special racism colored by the "terrorist" label. Recent upsurges of U.S. aggression against Middle Eastern leaders have brought a media-driven, extreme anti-Arab sentiment. Blacks have also been swept into joining the attacks.

#### THE BLACK PERSPECTIVE

Returning to the black perspective, the decimation that followed declines in the automotive industry hit every community, but blacks took the hardest blows. Some Arab merchants hurl at blacks the classist and racist contempt that U.S. society nurtures so well. The blacks they see are poor and often dependent—on welfare, on dead-end jobs, on drugs and alcohol, and on the Arab merchants themselves. In a capitalist hierarchy such as ours, it is not surprising that Arabs freely wield the little bit of power and status afforded them, perhaps to assure themselves that, no matter how much suffering they



Explosion at the Ford Rouge plant, Feb. 1, 1999. The Arab community near this plant was not informed about the causes, effects or other aspects of the explosion, nor offered aid afterward. Photo by Kathryn Savoie, ACCESS

endure, they are still better than somebody.

Cultural differences are significant, too. Both Arab and black families often live by strict codes of morality, but only the well-off of both groups are able to practice those codes or to recover from the consequences of not practicing them. Arab merchants view the early pregnancies, the crime, the drug use among poor blacks as evidence of a lack of self-respect, work ethic and family values. If racism is required in order to be considered an "American," Arabs have often assimilated in this way.

At the same time, we can find great ignorance about Arab culture in the

black community, as in others. When a black high school teenager grabs the traditional scarf from the head of an Arab girl, he probably has no idea that his act is much more than an obnoxious teasing.

The killing of Calvin Porter has spotlighted the many ways we all need to move forward in Detroit. As Barbara Wright said, the two groups had the proximity and familiarity to make a meeting of two peoples possible. "Those two men knew our kids, they knew our family," she said. "But they thought they were above the law."

She adds that the tensions run in both directions. "The way some of us go into their stores—we're drunk, we're high, we call them names," Wright said. "But the power and disrespect is more on their side, because they can kill us, place a bag of chips in our hands and claim it was self-defense."

The bottom-line lesson of Porter's death, said

Wright, is that both blacks and Arabs should recognize their respective places in the political structure, and how they are all victimized. "The government and the media play this race card, and they try to keep us on it," she said. "This is really a peace issue."

It's time to be allies again, against our common oppressors. ■

Leah Samuel writes for Labor Notes in Detroit

## ARABS AND BLACK YOUTH COMING TOGETHER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Arab and African American youth have been working together in the Environmental Summer Youth Program of ACCESS (Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services) to fight the industrial poisoning of both their communities. Forming alliances for environmental justice is a crucial way for the two groups to come together against a common enemy.

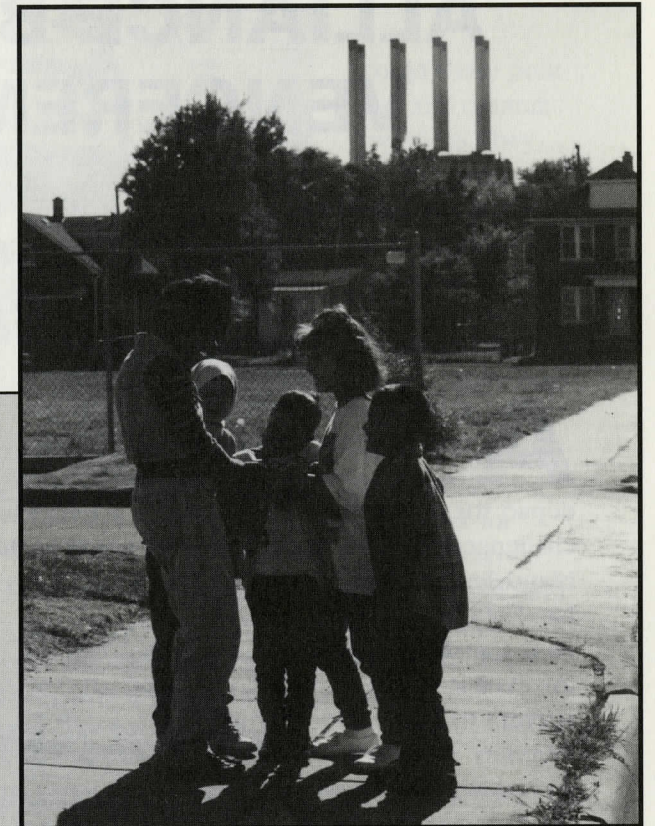


Photo by Kathryn Savoie, ACCESS

## BUILDING A NATIONAL "BRIDGE" BEGINS

Cathi Tactaquin, Director, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, headquartered in Oakland, is launching a national project called BRIDGE (Building a Race and Immigration Dialogue in the Global Era) with a series of dialogues in San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, Denver, Houston, New York and Washington, D.C. The San Francisco Dialogue on July 8 was hosted by the Political Ecology Group and the Institute for MultiRacial Justice.

BRIDGE's overall goals are to provide dialogue, curriculum development and training about the ways that race, race relations and immigration in

the U.S. all inter-relate in our current age of increasing globalization. The Bridge "dialogues" are a way to bring 10-25 people from different backgrounds together talking about their viewpoints, concerns and questions. The dialogues should contribute to longterm alliance-building.

BRIDGE will also provide local organizers with training in how to facilitate a curriculum series that will extend over months. The series will cover many topics including immigration in relation to race, gender and the environment, migrant rights, current policies and new laws. ■



# ALLIANCE-BUILDING on the VENCEREMOS BRIGADE

By Danny Widener

As this issue of *Shades of Power* goes to press, the 30th anniversary contingent of the Venceremos Brigade is preparing to depart for Cuba. Since 1969, Brigade activists have challenged U.S. government bans on travel to the island, learned first-hand of the tremendous transformations involved in the attempt to build revolutionary socialism, and sought to combat the negative image of Cuba so common in the U.S. press.

Support for the Cuban revolution has been important to American radical politics since the 1960s, and today the Venceremos Brigade continues to be a key participant in that work. It is one of the longest lasting, multi-racial solidarity

organizations in the United States. The Cuban experience has deeply influenced U.S.-based activists of color, and brought them together in important ways that can teach us much about inter-ethnic and crossnational organizing.

## HOW THE BRIGADE BEGAN

Activists of color showed interest in Cuba's revolutionary experiment well before the founding of the Brigade. As early as 1960, a group of African-Americans including poet Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), scholars John Henrik Clarke and Harold Cruse, and activist Robert Williams journeyed to Cuba as part of a delegation organized by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Williams, who later faced

false charges of kidnapping in Monroe, North Carolina, returned to Cuba as a refugee from U.S. "justice" (as Assata Shakur of the Black Liberation Army would do 16 years later). He founded Radio Free Dixie while there.

Chicano playwright and Teatro Campesino founder Luis Valdez traveled to Cuba in a delegation organized by the Progressive Labor party. Chicana activist Elizabeth Martinez visited a few months after dictator Batista was overthrown in 1959 and again later; her book *The Youngest Revolution* included photographs by Leroy Lucas, an African American who also went.

Among Puerto Rican activists, Fidel Castro's victory energized both nationalist and socialist independentistas, as the formation of the Movimiento Pro-Independencia (MPI) in 1959 indicates. Boricuanos hailed the solidarity shown by Cuban leaders, for example, when Ernesto "Che" Guevara offered to exchange prisoners captured by Cuba in 1961 at the U.S.-supported Bay of Pigs invasion for Puerto Rican leader Pedro Albizu Campos, who was jailed in the U.S.

By the late 1960s, the Cuban revolution had become important to U.S. radicals of color for even more profound reasons. Many were expanding their focus from a civil rights to a more systemic approach, from the goal of "equal rights" (which



1982 brigade included Chicanos/as from New Mexico

the Constitution supposedly assures) to broader calls for revolution and the concept of liberation. They adopted an anti-imperialist politics that often recognized the common colonial experience of Third World peoples. When Che Guevara called for the creation of

"two, three, many Vietnams," it reverberated inside the U.S. as well as outside. Cuba's support for national liberation struggles deeply resonated with activists from different communities of color here.

The formation of the first Brigade contingent in 1969 provoked enthusiasm among many nonwhite radicals. Early Brigade leadership included organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, the Chicano Communications Center in Albuquerque, N.M., and other predominantly Third World organizations. Along with white radicals, they made a conscious effort to create an organization more or less evenly divided between whites and people of color. Although not successful in this at first, the Brigade did manage to send hundreds of blacks, Latinos and Asian Americans to Cuba within the first three years. Almost from the beginning it has had a policy of providing scholarships to those who cannot afford the expense, many of whom are people of color.

For the brigadistas of color, one of the most powerful experiences was the confirmation of Third World revolution that they found in Cuba. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s they met with revolutionaries from southeast Asia, southern Africa, Central America and parts of the Caribbean. These connections helped U.S.-based activists connect their work nationally and globally after returning to "the belly of the beast."

Open to people of varying ideology and experience—from democrats to nationalists, Trotskyists to environmentalists—the Brigade became a clearinghouse for evaluating different forms of radicalism within the framework of Cuban revolutionary practice. U.S. activists of color from across the country often met for the first time in Cuba. They



May Day, 1991. Brigade marching with Cuban workers. Photo ICAP

could share political and organizing ideas. They made contacts that sometimes led to the creation, back in the U.S., of new organizations that brought people of color together like the Southwest Network for Environmental

and Economic Justice. Based on sharing a profound work experience, they often formed cross-racial personal relations that have lasted for decades, strengthening the movements at home.

## LEARNING DIFFERENT LESSONS

Brigadistas of color, on the one hand, learned many of the same lessons that white radicals learned. These included basic issues of individual and collective struggle; what it means to construct a socialist consciousness; the practical difficulties of providing housing, transportation, and food; and the importance of seeing revolutionary movements as part of a world struggle against capitalism and national oppression.

On the other hand, black, Latino and Asian activists within the Brigade responded to some questions differently, not only from whites but among their own numbers. Most considered themselves part of a radical "third world" fighting against European and North American national, racial and economic domination (imperialism). But in practice they often went to Cuba looking for different things.

For example, African-Americans brought particular concerns about racism to Cuba. A long history of ties bound the Cuban and African-American peoples together (this story is brilliantly told in a recent anthology by longtime Brigade activist Lisa Brock and Cuban scholar Digna Castañeda Furtés, *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans Before the Cuban Revolution*). Also, Cuba's support for African liberation movements and for Black power activists in the U.S. attracted African-Americans. Many came to Cuba trying to see if socialism could, in fact, eliminate racism. So the situation of Cuba's black population preoccupied them.

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# THIRD WORLD LIBERATION FRONT, 1999 STYLE

By Favianna Rodríguez and Charles Houston



Photo by Kahlil Jacobs Fantauzzi

Photo by José Palafox

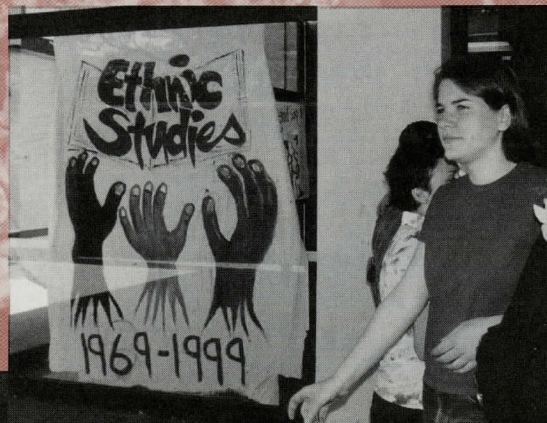


Photo by José Palafox



Images of the twLF protests include police forcibly removing student from Barrows Hall occupation (center); some of the hunger strikers at California Hall resting on ground with supporters around them (left); Miriam Louie, who participated in 1969 TWLF strike, drumming for the '99 twLF (above)

Photos by Kahlil Jacobs Fantauzzi



The Third World Liberation Front of 1999 in the Bay Area was the culmination of a multi-racial, student-led movement that has reinvigorated the spirit of Ethnic Studies. The group's victory came thanks to a coalition of student and community groups—youth and their elders, female and male activists—with strong trade union support. It will long be remembered for its leadership: all young women of color, primarily Latina and African American.

Ethnic Studies is the only department that specifically engages in the study of historical and contemporary issues of people of color. Many students therefore viewed its survival as crucial to deciding the presence of people of color at U.C. Berkeley—especially after the elimination of Affirmative Action. For a decade, Ethnic Studies Chair L. Ling-Chi Wang and the faculty had been pleading with the administration for greater resources including new faculty. But for years, those pleas had been ignored by the administration. Not until six students—three women and three men—put their bodies on the line did the University begin to talk about the future of Ethnic Studies.

The department is composed of four programs: Asian-American, Chicano, Native American studies and comparative Ethnic Studies. (African American Studies is a separate department.) It has the smallest budget in Berkeley's College of Letters

and Science and has lost 4-5 faculty members who have yet to be replaced. Currently, there are 0 fulltime tenured professors in Native American Studies, and 1 in Chicano Studies. Professors from other disciplines, including Spanish, English, Women's Studies, and Latin American Studies, have thus had to fill in, meaning that faculty cannot be involved in their programs fulltime. The department currently has the lowest faculty-to-student ratio among the social sciences, and the second lowest among the humanities. So much for the first university in the U.S. to offer a Ph.D. in Ethnic Studies—and still the only one.

By the time a \$300,000 budget cut was announced in the Spring '99 semester, students were fed up. In late May, a few Xicana students from M.E.Ch.A. met with Ling-Chi Wang and soon members of various student-of-color groups on campus were strategizing to build a collective campaign. They drafted a set of demands that included the hiring of 20 fulltime tenured professors, a student-of-color center, a research center, and funds for the recruitment centers. The demand for new faculty included the representation of southeast Asians, Pilipinos, and Native Americans, all of whom are systematically marginalized.

On April 14, 1999, 48 Berkeley and San Francisco State students conducted a peaceful sit-in at Barrows Hall, the building housing Ethnic Studies, and demanded

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continued from page eleven

a meeting with Provost Carol Christ. They held the building for 10 hours, with over 300 protesters supporting the sit-in from the outside, before being arrested and removed by police using violent means. From the Barrows occupation emerged a diverse group of students who formed a coalition of campus and community organizations working together on a campaign of education and agitation for Ethnic Studies.

In honor of the Third World Liberation Front of 1969, they adopted the name twLF on this 30th anniversary.

A march of 300 students, addressing a gathering of families of students visiting the campus as possible entrants, disruption of a speech by Gov. Gray Davis and other twLF actions brought no satisfaction. But the twLF was growing in numbers and gathering increasing support from the Ethnic Studies faculty, meeting 3-4 times a week for collective discussions. The African American Studies department issued a statement of support on April 21, calling attention to the present climate of resurgent racism on campus. Soon the twLF coalition included students of the Ethnic Studies Graduate Collective, M.E.Ch.A. (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, now written as MEXA), Olin, United Farm Workers Support Committee, and San Francisco State University students.

#### HUNGER STRIKE BEGINS

The group realized that the next action would have to be firm and forceful. At midnight on April 30, 1999, in front of California Hall, where the main administrative offices are found, five Berkeley students and one San Francisco State University student began a hunger strike, vowing to continue until the twLF's demands were met and the future of Ethnic Studies was assured. They are: **Luis Alarcón**, **Cynthia Louise Gomez**, **Alison Harrington** (Irish American), **Mario Maldonado**, **Cristina Pulido**, and **Rafael Solórzano**.



May 6 rally supporting twLF strike.  
Photo by Sean O'Shea

the twLF, often congratulating students on their organizing skills. Many parents came in support. Elementary, middle-school, and high school students of color attended the daily rallies and told crowds about racist conditions at their own schools.

"I'll put my body on the line for my children," said Luis Alarcón, "and for your children and grandchildren so that they can one day receive an education that teaches them their history." Then Chancellor Robert Berdahl made a serious error. At 3:30 a.m. on May 4, police in full riot gear surrounded the hunger strike encampment and arrested over 80 people, including five of the strikers (one had been hospitalized). As ever more support rolled in for the strike, he finally agreed to negotiate; the twLF won 8 full-time faculty positions and other demands.

Since then, students have been analyzing the strike, its victories and mistakes, and where the Third World Liberation Front will go from here. Meanwhile, they have continued to protest the administration's refusal to drop charges against seven of those arrested. ■

*Favianna Rodríguez, a student at U.C. Berkeley and working this summer at Self-Help Graphics in Los Angeles, was one of the main Latina leaders in the twLF strike.*

*Charles Houston is a Native American undergraduate student at U.C. Berkeley. As a member of the negotiating team for the strike, he strongly advocated for the needs of the Native American Studies department and students.*

The hunger strike embodied a spirit of working collectively. Student organizers worked closely with their elders, and the Ethnic Studies faculty remained in solidarity with students despite the administration's efforts to divide and conquer. Native American elders came to greet the fasters and speak about how our histories are interconnected. Asian-American and Chicano veterans of the 1969 Third World Liberation Strike joined

## THIRD WORLD UNITY IS NO SNAP

There was a high level of multi-racial cooperation during the Third World Liberation Front of 1999, as seen by the crowds of supporters at rallies and other times. Of course there were also limitations and difficulties. Although some African- and Asian/Pacific Americans played exemplary leadership roles and Prof. Ron Takaki spoke eloquently, they participated in noticeably smaller numbers than the Latinas/os. The leadership or "tactical team" was composed of four Latinas and one African American woman; of the six hunger strikers, none were Asian or black.

The imbalance persisted despite the hard work done by organizers to contact and involve all student groups, especially the black and Asian/Pacific. As the protest continued, a few African American and Asian student activists complained of feeling marginalized. In response, the leadership including key Latina/o student leaders struggled even more consciously to change those dynamics.

Why wasn't the participation more diverse? Different answers could be given to that question; here are a few thoughts.

In the case of African Americans, some participants felt that probably the main factor was different levels of organization long before the hunger strike began. Many of the Latina/o student leaders had come up through Olin and MEXA, which both had large, established bases, strong community ties and impressive track records in militant direct action that go back to the walk-outs of 1992-3 and have covered much of northern California. By comparison, the Pan-African Students Union, PASU, is quite small and although it is considered U.C. Berkeley's most progressive black student group, it hasn't yet created a sizeable base on or off campus. This may have limited its influence on the protest; it certainly made it harder for the black activists to feel on an equal footing throughout. In the case of Asian/Pacific Americans students, we also find some outstanding individual leaders and well-respected groups but not organizations with a longtime record and broad, well-established base on and off campus.

The differences in history help to explain the comparatively low level of African American and Asian/Pacific participation. On the day-to-day level of human relations, newly involved Latino/a students found it easier to join in and feel comfortable. Some Latino students tended to be friendlier and more receptive to other Latino students.

There are lessons for us all—not just students—in this historic strike. As the Third World Liberation Front looks to the future, it can teach us even more if it pursues honest, principled discussion of these issues and how to move ahead. ■

Ed.

## Poem on Day 7 of Hunger Strike

I wanted to give you a poem  
Colored deep pomegranate red of  
sunset  
A canvas of mediterranean blues  
I wanted to give you a poem  
that would fill you up  
make you dance all night  
I wanted to give you a poem  
but the police confiscated my pen  
and my wrists still ache from the  
handcuffs  
my hunger pains creep  
and my body is still sore  
from being dragged through the night  
by the UCPD  
and I wanted to give you a poem  
but I give you my body instead

.....  
and this poem  
written on my body  
will not stop  
because you cannot put pain holds on  
this poem  
you cannot drag this poem through  
the night  
without it getting louder  
you cannot put handcuffs on this  
poem  
without it getting stronger  
you cannot arrest this poem  
without it getting bolder  
I wanted to give you a poem  
but offer you my body instead

Alison Harrington



continued from page nine

This created both problems and opportunities. African American activists learned of the key contributions, both cultural and political, made by Cubans of African descent. Cuba could boast of an end to discrimination in important ways at a time when many U.S. blacks had abandoned this dream for their own country. These brigadistas also raised issues related to the continuing existence of prejudice in Cuba. African-Americans' healthy skepticism occasionally devolved into a mechanical application of American race relations within a very different national context. As a result, they often found themselves asking questions about race that black Cubans did not, could not, or would not understand.

The idea of third world revolution under third world leadership excited and interested Chicano and Asian radicals profoundly. For Chicanos and other Latinos, to be in a revolutionary Spanish-speaking country that had overthrown Yankee imperialism was like a dream-come-true, a source of profound pride, as many said. Filipinos saw direct connections between the anti-imperialist struggle in their country and in Cuba.

Today, the most vocal support for the Cuban revolution comes from communities of color, particularly African-Americans and Latinos. Blacks now go in smaller numbers on the Brigade for reasons including the fact that it is easier to travel there, which means they can go for a shorter stay if necessary, and that they can travel with other organi-

zations like the New Afrikan People's Organization (NAPO). Activists of color, along with whites, continue to see important connections between the struggle of Cuba for self-determination and the struggle to create a more just life in the United States. If anything, the hardship and hopes of the people on this tiny island have become more—not less—relevant to us in the U.S. today. We all struggle to survive and advance within the same global economy, with ever greater difficulty.

The Brigade, then, is a viable, ongoing project committed to international solidarity, anti-racism and anti-imperialism. It continues to encourage understanding about common struggles among U.S. activists of color. It continues to strengthen alliance-building. ■

*Danny Widener is a scholar-activist from Los Angeles who has served on the Venceremos Brigade's National Committee and continues being involved.*



1994. Brigadistas (left to right) Doug Monica, Jason Ferreira and Eric Quezada with Assata Shakur



Presentations on Cuban society were part of every brigade. Photo courtesy ICAP

## JAPANESE AND MEXICAN-AMERICAN ALLIANCES: The Unknown Story

By Fred and Sharon Lee

In 1903, Japanese and Mexicans in Oxnard, California formed the first successful farmworkers' union comprised of different ethnic groups. Sadly, most people (including Japanese and Mexican Americans themselves) know nothing about this alliance or other histories of struggle shared by these two peoples in this racist land. Here are a few examples.

Around the turn of the century, the growing sugar beet industry in Oxnard depended on Mexican and Chinese labor. But the Chinese Exclusion Act and the need for Mexican workers in other areas led farmers to recruit Japanese laborers. These two groups—Japanese and Mexicans—became the primary source of agricultural hands for California. Both were victims of racism, neither seen as legitimate members of the Oxnard community or the sugar beet industry. Always the scapegoats, they were blamed for many community problems like drinking and gambling.

At first Japanese labor contractors provided the growers with workers. To replace those contractors, Euro-American businessmen who had close relations with local farmers formed the Western Agricultural Contracting Company (WACC). By February, 1903, WACC controlled almost 90% of the contracting business, pushing out the Japanese American contractors and cutting the workers' wages in half. Workers were also obligated to patronize WACC's company stores, which overcharged for items by more

than 60 percent. Necessities like overalls cost \$1.20 when you could buy them elsewhere for \$.75.

To fight these conditions, the two groups formed a union: the Japanese Mexican Labor Association (JMLA) in Oxnard. The JMLA conducted its meetings in both Spanish and Japanese, with English serving as the common language of communication. Both Japanese and Mexican members served on the board of directors, which equalized power between the two groups. The JMLA's main goal was to put an end to WACC's monopoly of the contract labor system. By negotiating directly with farmers, JMLA could eliminate WACC's high commission fees that came at the expense of workers' paychecks. Workers would also be able to stop patronizing the company stores.

The JMLA went on a month-long strike. On March 6, 1903, over 1200 Japanese and Mexican workers and labor contractors marched together in Oxnard under the union banner. By the end of the month, JMLA's membership had leaped as the

continued on next page



Welcome to the concentration camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. From the book of photos, *Manzanar*, by Ansel Adams.



continued from page fifteen

movement gained strength. In desperation, WACC (representing only 60 workers by then) responded with violence. Strikebreakers were brought in; two Chicano and two Japanese union members were shot while attempting to post a JMLA banner on a truck full of the scabs. But these tactics of intimidation only made the union step up its efforts.

Local newspaper coverage of the strike tells a lot about the racism they also faced. On March 7, one Oxnard paper reported on a march by "Dusky skinned Japs and Mexicans... a grim band of fel-lows... most of them belonging to the lower class..."

On March 30, the union claimed victory with all its demands met. WACC agreed to cancel all existing contracts with local sugar beet growers, relinquishing the right to provide labor to farmers owning over 5,000 acres of land. Workers won the right to negotiate directly with the growers, cutting out WACC's high middleman fees. As a result, wages returned to their original level, doubling what WACC had offered.

Solidarity among Japanese and Mexican workers played a crucial role in the victory. At the time unions had long histories of discrimination, especially against Asians. When the JMLA applied for admission to the AFL, it was accepted on condition that the Japanese workers be excluded. The Mexican workers refused admission, telling the AFL that "We would be false to them [the Japanese workers] and to ourselves and to the cause of unionism if we accepted privileges for ourselves which are not accorded to them. We are going to stand by men who stood by us in the long, hard fight which ended in victory..."

As Karl Yoneda (see article about him on page 18) tells us in his pamphlet "A Brief History of U.S.

Asian Labor," Japanese workers continued to struggle together with other nationals including not only Mexicans but also Hawaiians, East Indians, and Filipinos. In 1930, in the Imperial Valley, ten organizers (all Communist Party members) tried to organize 7,000 Mexicans, 1,000 Japanese and hundreds of Filipinos, and were imprisoned. Japanese, Mexican and Filipinos struck together in 1935 on Venice's celery farms, and won higher wages as well as union recognition. Such alliances occurred in many other places.

## NEW CONNECTIONS DURING WORLD WAR II

In addition to labor struggles, Japanese and Mexican Americans also share experiences of discrimination during and after World War II. The super-patriotic propaganda of the U.S. defined "Americanness" in a way that branded our two peoples as "aliens" and "foreigners" in their own country. Then as now we see the racist assumption that

"Americanness" equals "whiteness." During the war, anti-immigrant and racist sentiment and policies reached a fevered pitch. The contradiction of fighting for freedom abroad while facing blatant racial injustice at home was there for all to see. Clarence Natamura, a Japanese American soldier liberating Jews in Europe, recalls the irony of his situation: "I had to think, what the heck am I doing here? My family was still behind barbed wire in Wyoming."

His question reminds us of how 120,000 Japanese Americans were herded into internment camps under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Feb. 19,

1942 executive order, while the patriotism of German Americans was mostly unchallenged. It was the ultimate segregation. With the Japanese American "problem" "contained," Mexican Americans became the natural scapegoat for Anglo fear and paranoia. They were subjected to off-the-books segregation and anti-immigrant discrimination. Even though they fought bravely in the war, they were treated as second-class citizens. For example, Sergeant Macario Garcia, recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, recalls being chased out of a restaurant in Richmond, California by an Anglo with a baseball bat. Chicanos could not swim in East Los Angeles pools, and were forced to sit in segregated movie balconies in San Fernando, California.

Chicanos expressed shock and outrage at the internment of the Japanese. In a moving gesture of solidarity and courage, 16-year old Ralph Lazo voluntarily joined his Japanese American friends and their families from Bunker Hill in Los Angeles who had been placed in the Manzanar internment camp. Standing up to the anti-Japanese, anti-immigrant rhetoric of the time, he became the only voluntary, non-Japanese person in Manzanar or any other camp. Years later, at a Manzanar High School reunion, some of his former classmates paid him this tribute: "When 140 million Americans turned their backs on us and excluded us into remote, desolate prison camps, the separation was absolute - almost. Ralph Lazo's presence among us said: No, not everyone."

## SAN GABRIEL VALLEY: JOINING POLITICAL FORCES

In recent years, although often facing the same problems such as bilingual education, employment discrimination, political under-representation, and racist immigration policies, Japanese or other Asians and Chicanos have not for the most part formed viable political alliances. The multiethnic suburb of San Gabriel Valley, near Los Angeles, provides an exception to the norm.



Japanese American farmer being taken to an internment camp by the FBI as his family watches. Painting by Henry Sugimoto while interned in a camp. From the book *Beyond Words* by Deborah Gesensway and Mindy Roseman.

The San Gabriel Valley is a sharp example of the inter-racial tensions that can arise with rapid change in California's suburbs. White, Japanese American and Latino populations squared off against more recently established Chinese communities, each group for its own reasons. Against that background, Asian Americans and Latino

residents formed an alliance. Its goal, announced in August, 1991, was to change state districting lines in order to elect members of those communities to public office. Previously, due to the drawing of districts in which Latinos and Asians were minority populations, they were unable to achieve representation. Their voting power was effectively fractionalized in America's winner-take-all elections. The two peoples realized that if they fought each other, they could both lose in the end.

On Aug. 31, 1991, they announced a coalition that agreed on uniting the Asian population behind winning a Latino majority district (Asians didn't have the population to justify their own district). The campaign began. Three months later the new District 49 was created with a 55% Latino and 28% Asian population (15% were white).

The San Gabriel coalition no longer exists, as it was created just to win the redistricting battle. But it shows that alliance-building can make the "old-boy Anglo" network of traditional American politics evolve into a more democratic, representative political process.

From early labor struggles to war-time to the political activism of today, Japanese and Mexican Americans have a little known history of joining in struggle that should be recognized. ■

*With many thanks to Rudy Acuña, Elizabeth (Betita) Martínez and Leland Saito for their help.*

*Fred Lee and Sharon Lee are undergraduate students at the University of California, Berkeley.*



Karl Yoneda (lower right) when he was a CIO Alaska Cannery Workers Union Local 5 delegate in 1938, with Chinese, Filipino and Mexican cannery foremen and others.



## KARL YONEDA, A WARRIOR FOR ALL WORKERS

Karl Yoneda, the legendary Japanese-American labor activist, died on May 9, 1999 in Fort Bragg, California at the age of 92. As he tells us in his fascinating autobiography *Ganbatte* (meaning, Be Steadfast!), he organized workers of all colors—"Mexican, Filipino, Negro, Japanese, East Indian and other farm laborers"—in the Imperial Valley in the 1930s.

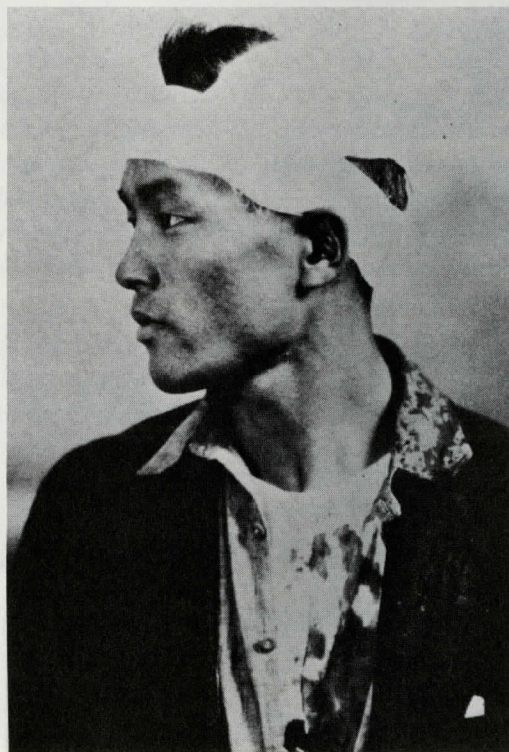
Yoneda fought anti-Black racism on various fronts. One example was working to free the Scottsboro Nine, black youth falsely accused of rape, in Alabama. Another came during the 1934 Maritime Strike in San Francisco, when he supported the League of Struggle for Negro Rights in its fight for complete equality, confiscation of large landholdings in the Black Belt, and the death penalty for lynchers. He also joined a committee protesting the policy of San Francisco's famous Sutro Baths denying admittance to Japanese and African Americans, as well as the Golden Gate YMCA's policy of allowing "Orientals and Negros to swim in its pool only the day before the water changed."

On yet another front, he helped form a "Black, Brown and Yellow" committee to protest at a racist barber shop that refused service. The group won. In telling these stories, Yoneda recalls Karl Marx's comment: "Labor in a white skin cannot be free as long as labor in a black skin is branded."

Yoneda and his family themselves experienced constant racist treatment as Japanese Americans: being refused service in restaurants, repeatedly rejected when house-hunting, attacked by vigilantes, and beaten by police. When his wife Elaine, who was white, gave birth, an administrator of the hospital said she never would have been admitted if it had been known that the baby was a "half-breed."

Here is the obituary about Karl Yoneda written by Cathy Tashiro and published in the June/July Newsletter of the Northern California Committees of Correspondence. It has been slightly shortened and a few factual details added. Cathy Tashiro is a Bay Area activist and researcher on health care access and issues facing people of color.

Editor



Karl Yoneda two days after being beaten and arrested by the "Red Squad" at Feb. 10, 1932 demonstration by Los Angeles unemployed.

**K**arl G. Yoneda, labor activist, Communist, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist fighter has been called a warrior for social justice. There can be no better description of Karl's irrepressible fighting spirit.

Karl was born Goso Yoneda (later taking the name "Karl" for Karl Marx) in Los Angeles County in 1906. After living 7 years in Glendale, he went to Japan with his family to obtain a Japanese education. That made Karl a Kibei, an American-born, Japanese-educated person of Japanese ancestry.

Karl's tendency to raise hell began at his school in Hiroshima, where he took part in several strikes in his teens, was drawn to anarchist and

socialist ideas, and joined the labor movement. He returned to the United States in 1926 to avoid being drafted by the Japanese Imperial Army. Here, Karl quickly became involved in the struggles of Japanese workers for better working conditions. He joined the Communist Party, which at that time had a sizable presence of Japanese Americans.

In the succeeding years, Karl participated in countless labor struggles and demonstrations, became an active member of the ILWU, and edited *Rodo Shinbun*, the Japanese language newspaper of the Communist Party. He married Elaine

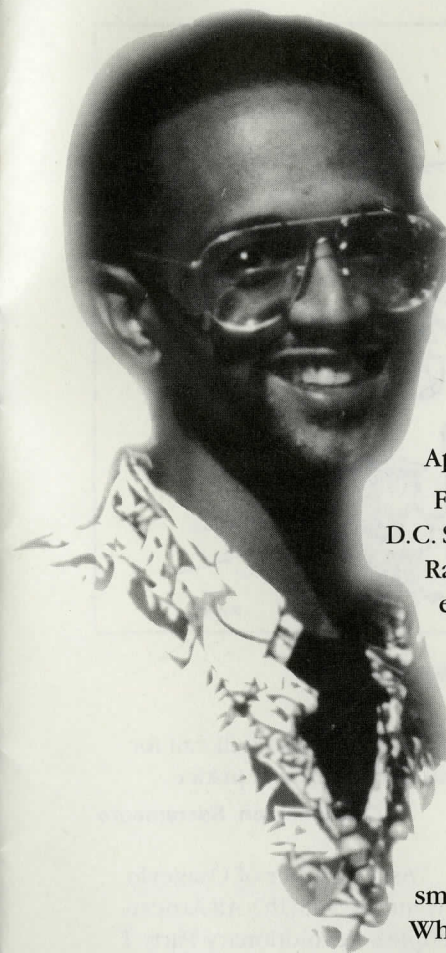


Photo by Doug Calvin, 1996, San Francisco

## RAY DAVIS AN INSPIRATION FOR YOUTH OF COLOR

Ray Davis, a highly talented young black organizer and alliance-builder, died on April 7 in his hometown, Washington, D.C., the victim of an unknown attacker.

From 1985 to the time of his death, Ray was Executive Director of the Washington D.C. Student Coalition (formerly the D.C. Student Coalition Against Apartheid and Racism, SCAR). In this work he dedicated himself to building multi-racial and multi-ethnic coalitions, educating youth, and motivating his peers.

Ray was a student leader at Oberlin College, where he coordinated research on a textbook, *Eyes on the Prize: American Civil Rights History Project*. Later he became a Master's Candidate at Howard University where he served as a lab anthropologist on the New York African Burial Ground Project. A featured speaker at many universities, community forums and demonstrations, Ray also supported himself as a small businessman with his father.

Those who knew Ray cannot forget this exceptional young man with his quick smile, unwavering optimism, and the ability to inspire youth with a love of justice. When he worked in the Bay Area on a special issue of *CrossRoads* magazine, he left these and other warm memories. There will be a memorial for him on Saturday, July 31 at the Rankin Chapel, Howard University, Wash. D.C. The Raynard T. Davis Memorial Fund has been set up to provide a scholarship to Oberlin College and to support youth activism work. Gifts can be sent c/o The Davis Family, 7904 Inverness Ridge Road, Potomac, MD 20854.

Ray Davis, presente!

Elizabeth (Betita) Martínez

Black, in Washington, where interracial marriages were not illegal as they were in California. Their son Tom, named for the great labor leader Tom Mooney, was born in 1939.

With the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the internment of Japanese Americans in camps, Karl was sent to Manzanar and later joined voluntarily by Elaine and Tom. He left the camp when he was accepted into the U.S. Military Intelligence Service. Writing and translating anti-fascist leaflets and other material, he served in India, Burma and China.

After the war, he continued his labor organizing as a longshoreman. When health problems forced him to take a rest, he moved from the Bay Area and became a chicken farmer near Petaluma. In the years that followed he continued to be active in union issues, community organizing and party matters. Karl also managed to write several books:

Labor History of U.S. Japanese and America, Another Face in Japanese, and *Ganbatte: Sixty Year Struggle of a Kibei Worker*, published in 1983.

I first met Karl and his beloved wife Elaine Black Yoneda in the 1980s. I was thoroughly in awe of him, a genuine Japanese American revolutionary, a person I could look up to in contrast to conservative mouthpieces like S.I. Hayakawa... The quality of *ganbatte* epitomized Karl. And he lived to see many of his goals that seemed like lost causes, such as redress and reparations for Japanese Americans interned during World War II, become reality. His life has been an inspiration for so many of us and he will live on through the good work that he has done.

Ganbatte!

Cathy Tashiro



## About *Shades of Power*

*Shades of Power* is published by the Institute for MultiRacial Justice four times a year (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter). The Institute, founded in 1997 in the Bay Area, aims to strengthen the struggle against white supremacy by serving as a resource center to help build alliances among peoples of color and combat divisions.

*Shades of Power* offers news of Institute activities, reports on current efforts to resolve conflicts and build alliances between communities of color, as well as analysis of the issues at stake and historical examples of linkage between different communities of color.

### SHADES OF POWER

Don Baylor, Elena Featherston,  
Elizabeth "Betita" Martínez (editor)  
Layout by Guillermo Prado  
at 8 point 2 design  
Logo by Marty Aranydo  
Institute for MultiRacial Justice  
522 Valencia St.  
San Francisco, CA 94110

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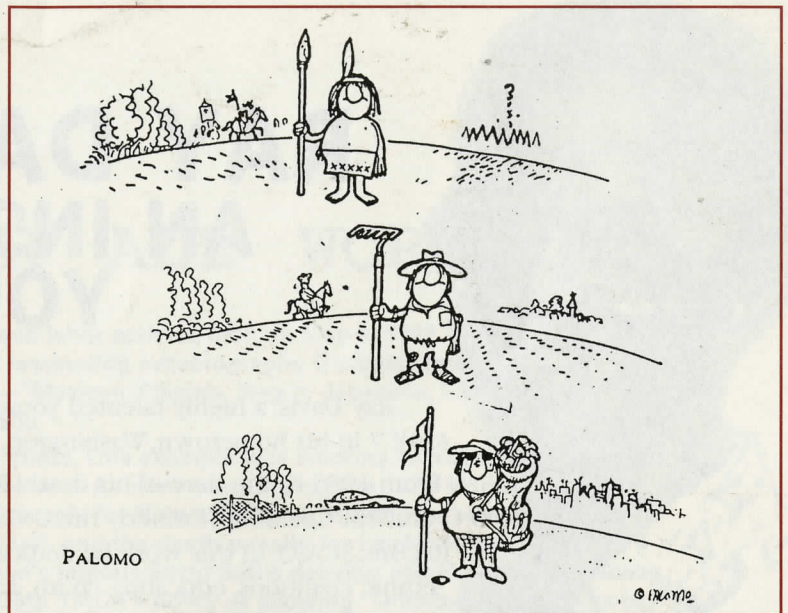
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### Letters to the Editor

The Spring 1999 issue was just great! As I read the article "High School Students Against Violence and Neglect" by Jose D. Lopez, I cried tears of sadness and tears of joy. The tears of sadness are due to the inhuman treatment and conditions... because we as a society are unwilling to address the root causes of violence, racial tensions and self-hate. The tears of joy are for the Castlemont High organizers...over 700 students came to listen, discuss and learn how to work together.

I hope the students, parents, teachers and the community will learn how colonialism is destructive to people and the

environment, and will call for and demand social justice.

**Carl Pinkston, Sacramento**

As a member of Osageyfo Kwame Nkrumah's All-African People's Revolutionary Party, I was pleased that you dedicated the spring 1999 issue to Kwame Ture with a beautiful homage. His principled lifestyle, tireless dedication and work ethic mirrored the A-APRP's ideology and the convictions of its sister organizations like the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Irish Republican Socialist Party and American Indian Movement.

**Matief Harmachis, Goleta, CA**

**Institute for MultiRacial Justice**  
**522 Valencia St.**  
**San Francisco, CA 94110**



welcome to the

# INSTITUTE FOR MULTIRACIAL JUSTICE

The Institute for MultiRacial Justice was founded in the Bay Area in 1997 as a resource center to help transform our society by working to build alliances among people of color and combat division.

Why do we need such a center?

For centuries communities of color in the United States have sought to overcome the forces of repression and exploitation. For centuries the enemy has used tactics of Divide-and-Conquer, later Divide-and-Control, to impose and maintain its domination. Since the 1600's those tactics have served to prevent alliances of oppressed whites with Native Americans, Blacks, Latinos, Asian/Pacific Island Americans, and Arab Americans, as well as alliances between peoples of color. Sometimes these efforts have been defeated; too often they succeed.

Today, as this nation becomes ever more colored in its population, the stakes seem to rise for White Supremacy. In fearful response to changing demographics has come an escalation of Divide-and-Control tactics, especially as applied to peoples of color. Those tactics reflect the great dread of our rulers: that the oppressed will join forces against them. Those tactics serve, as always, to prevent a united stand against racism and for radical social transformation.

In the new century about to begin, we can expect divisive efforts to multiply even more. So will our own questions about how to overcome them. Nothing guarantees that a non-white majority by itself can bring unity among people of color, or an end to racism, or a society of multi-colored democracy. How to deal with the divisions over immigration policy, bilingual education, political representation, and the allotment of resources? How to build unity if the prevailing model of race relations remains exclusively Black/white and ignores racism as encountered by other communities of color? How to construct a unity never seen before, a revolutionary unity?

Divide-and-Control tactics succeed today in large part because each of our racial/national communities lacks a strong progressive core, a "left" in the sense of a force for social change from the bottom up. Too often we hear voices which only echo and promote feelings of anxiety or competition. Those feelings cannot be ignored; they have roots in real, material circum-



stances—above all, the relentless assault being waged on poor and workingclass people today. Unfortunately, opportunistic politicians and careerist professionals of color exploit such feelings for their own ends. The media, both mainstream and liberal, sustain a climate of mutual distrust and despair about alliance-building.

Existing efforts to combat tensions and build solidarity include conferences, roundtables, local organizations to foster joint work, anti-gang violence projects, work within or between labor unions, an occasional "Town Hall" style radio or TV program. But we still lack a permanent mechanism to facilitate coordination and mutual support. We have no research or policy center, no strategy "think tank," no journal, no tradition of forums. We have nothing that could be called an Institute for



Race Relations (as in England).

We need a continuous, ongoing entity committed to advancing the struggle for what activists of the '60s called "Third World" unity.

### Goals and Program

The Institute aims to serve as a resource center that will strengthen the struggle against White Supremacy by combatting the tactics of Divide-and-Control and advancing solidarity among peoples of color. We aim to support grassroots community organizations that are working to bring together people of color. This means: 1) energetic campaigns of education and dialogue to unite our different peoples and 2) encouraging joint work on concrete projects that can help form bonds of trust. The Institute commits itself to:

- serve as a clearinghouse of information on joint work done by communities of color locally, regionally and eventually on a national basis, with the goal of sharing lessons learned and generating ideas.
- provide a center that would make available—and in some cases produce—educational materials such as videos, films, and exhibits on different groups of color with the goal of helping to break down the walls of ignorance that divide us. For example: a video offering an overview of the Asian/Pacific American experience; a video series or book in Spanish on African American history for newly arrived immigrants from Latin America; material depicting the unknown histories of collaboration among peoples of color.
- hold educational events (speakers, forums, and conferences), on specific issues and controversies such as immigrant rights or bilingual education. This includes supporting events planned by others.
- set up task forces of people from different communities of color to find ways to deal with conflicts.
- establish an autonomous program for youth of color, one of the most promising sectors for building solidarity.
- establish a multiracial cultural program involving theater, music and, performance. Work with other groups of artists who can build solidarity through direct experience of collaboration.
- produce a publication that helps to create an anti-racist, anti-capitalist ideological climate. Our newsletter, *Shades of Power*, is a step in that direction.

The Institute for Multi-Racial Justice is committed to linking the struggle for Third World unity with the struggles to build a new society free of class relations, sexism, homophobia, environmental abuse, and the other diseases of our times. We see all these as interlocking structures of oppression. Working with women's groups will be a special focus of the Institute, because women have often taken the lead in building alliances among people of color.

In our present era of ad-hoc defensive battles, it is

all too easy to set aside the need to create more long-range weapons of struggle. But we simply cannot afford to forget this need in the heat of immediate battle. In fact, those more immediate struggles will be far stronger if they have a broader, more unified base.

In 1998 the Institute held two panels (on state repression and bilingualism), a youth cultural evening and reception for multi-racial environmental justice activists; published 3 issues of its newsletter; and attended various conferences and conventions of color. National expansion will begin in 1999. We urge you to contact us if you are interested in working together. Many heads, many hands, and many hearts are needed at this time.

Ana Berta Campa, Jason Ferreira, Elena Featherston, Mimi Kim, Elizabeth (Betita) Martinez, Greg Morozumi, Margo Okazawa-Rey, Elena Serrano.

Coordinating Committee  
Institute for Multi-Racial Justice

Tele:(415)701-9502. E-mail: [I4MRJ@aol.com](mailto:I4MRJ@aol.com)  
FAX:(415)701-9462

