

# THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMIC BOOK

by  
ASIAN AMERICAN  
RESOURCE WORKSHOP

designed and illustrated by  
WEN-TI TSEN



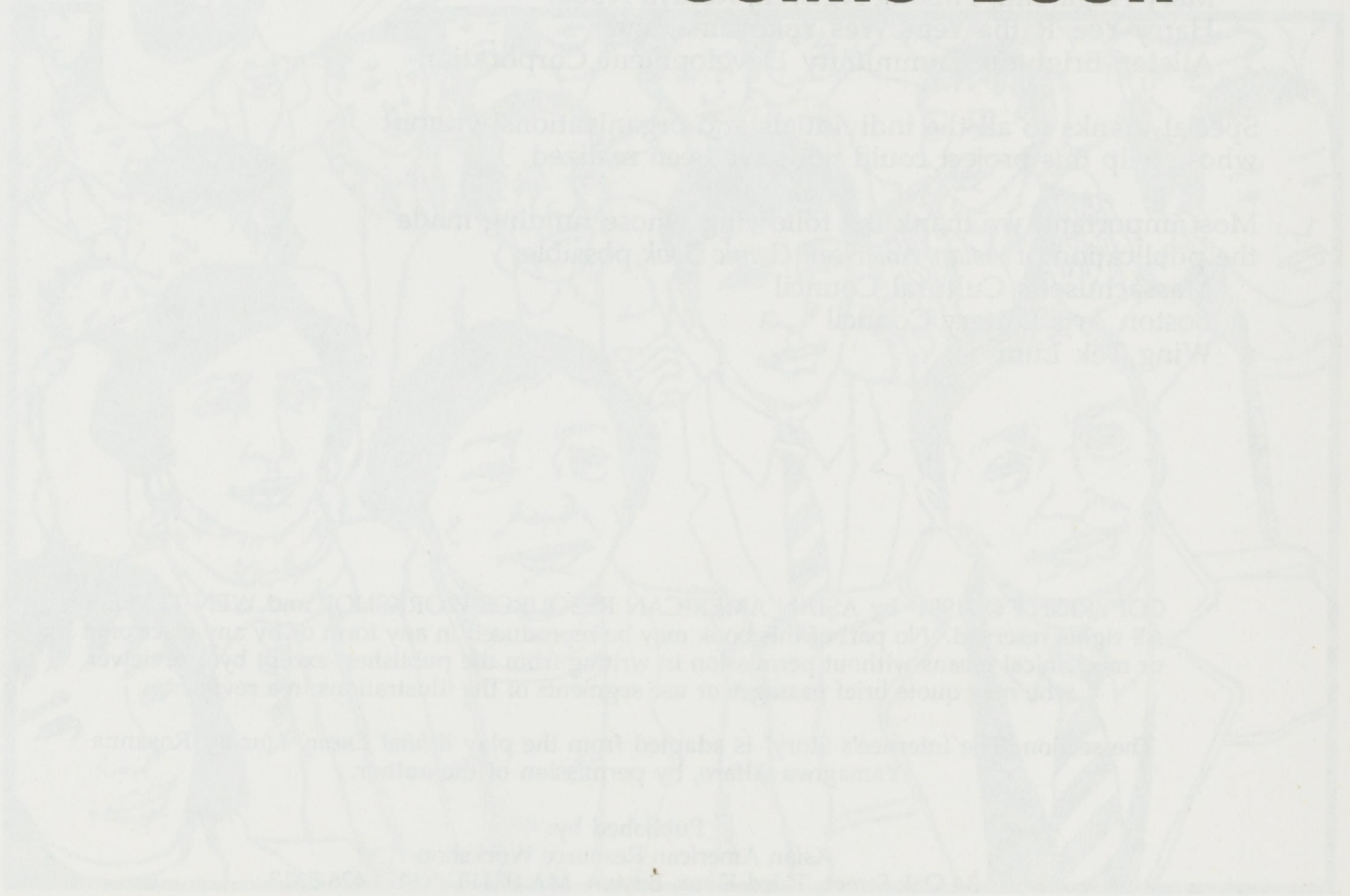
Editor  
Carlton Sagar

Designer and Illustrator  
Wen-Ti Tsen

Coordinator  
Shirley M. Fong

Writer/Editor  
Shirley M. Fong

# THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMIC BOOK



by ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE WORKSHOP  
designed and illustrated by WEN-TI TSEN

Editor:

**Carlton Sagara**

Designer and Illustrator:

**Wen-ti Tsen**

Coordinators:

**Shirley Mark, Frederick Dow**

Writers/Editors:

**Rosanna Yamagiwa Alfaro, Elena Choy,  
Sheila Dixit, Siu Tip Lam,  
Cynthia Mark, Shirley Mark,  
Ely Phlek-Hsu, Carlton Sagara,  
Smrithi Shah, Vun Kim Sous,  
Wen-ti Tsen, Vivian Wu**

Advisors:

**Hei Wai Chan, Jill Cheng, Amy Chu,  
Janice Hibino, Alicia Hsu, Radha Jalan,  
Gish Jen, Sang Ho Lee, Ramsay Liem,  
Michael Liu, Kiyoo Morimoto, Steve Shigematsu-Murphy,  
Mary Nagatomi, Phuong Nguyen, Kesaya Noda,  
Harry Yee, Ratha Yem, Wes Yokoyama, and  
Allston-Brighton Community Development Corporation**

Special thanks to all the individuals and organizations without whose help this project could not have been realized.

Most important, we thank the following whose funding made the publication of *Asian American Comic Book* possible:

**Massachusetts Cultural Council  
Boston Arts Lottery Council  
Wing Tek Lum**

COPYRIGHT © 1991 by ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE WORKSHOP and WEN-TI TSEN  
All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages or use segments of the illustrations in a review.

The section "The Internee's Story" is adapted from the play *Behind Enemy Line* by Rosanna Yamagiwa Alfaro, by permission of the author.

Published by:  
Asian American Resource Workshop  
34 Oak Street, Third Floor, Boston, MA 02111 (617) 426-5313

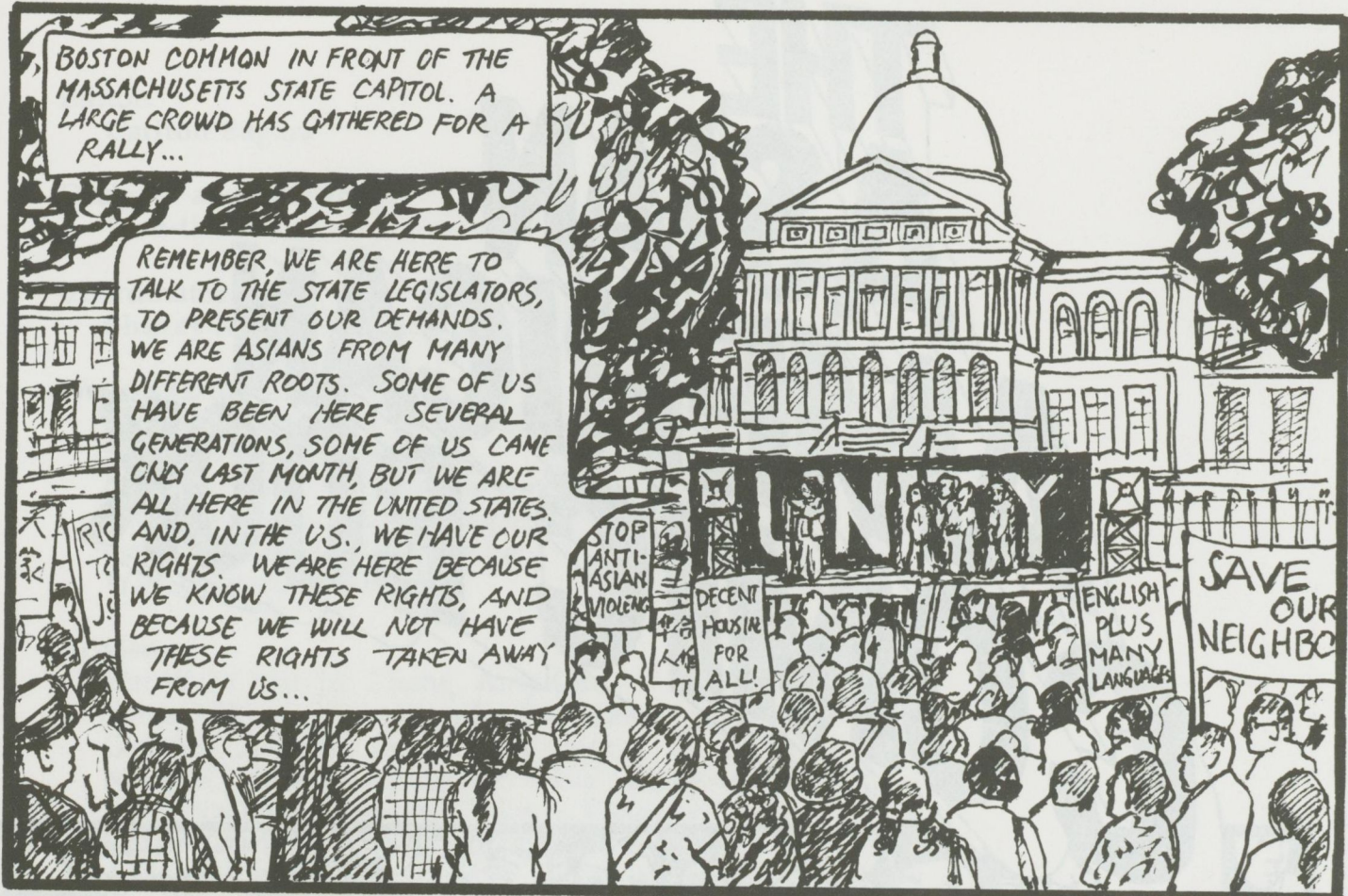
# THE ASIAN AMERICAN COMIC BOOK



by ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE WORKSHOP  
designed and illustrated by WEN-TI TSEN

BOSTON COMMON IN FRONT OF THE MASSACHUSETTS STATE CAPITOL. A LARGE CROWD HAS GATHERED FOR A RALLY...

REMEMBER, WE ARE HERE TO TALK TO THE STATE LEGISLATORS, TO PRESENT OUR DEMANDS. WE ARE ASIANS FROM MANY DIFFERENT ROOTS. SOME OF US HAVE BEEN HERE SEVERAL GENERATIONS, SOME OF US CAME ONLY LAST MONTH, BUT WE ARE ALL HERE IN THE UNITED STATES. AND, IN THE U.S., WE HAVE OUR RIGHTS. WE ARE HERE BECAUSE WE KNOW THESE RIGHTS, AND BECAUSE WE WILL NOT HAVE THESE RIGHTS TAKEN AWAY FROM US...

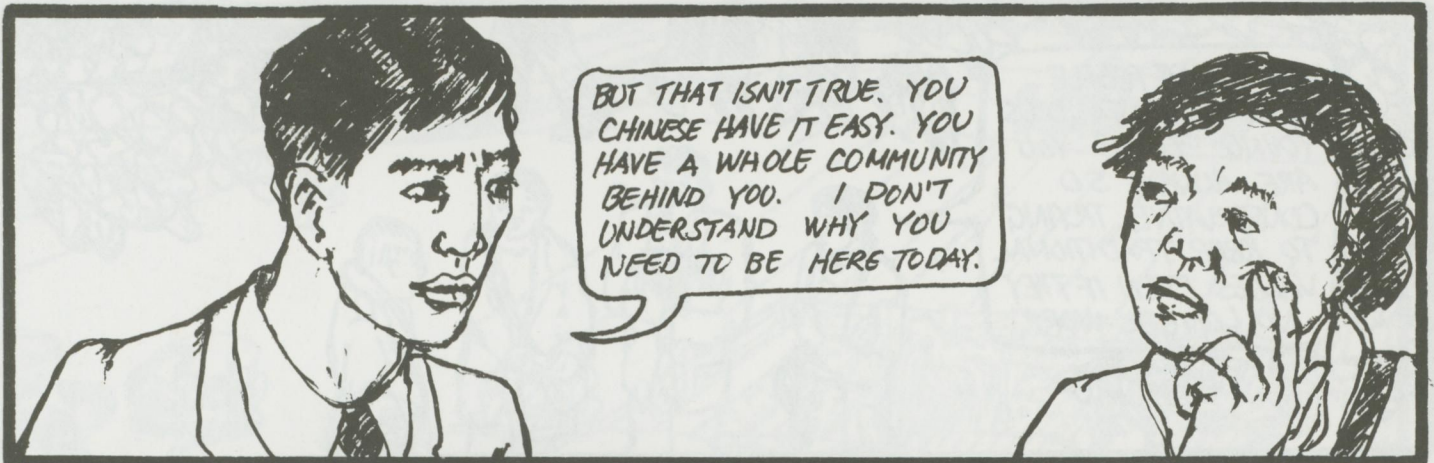


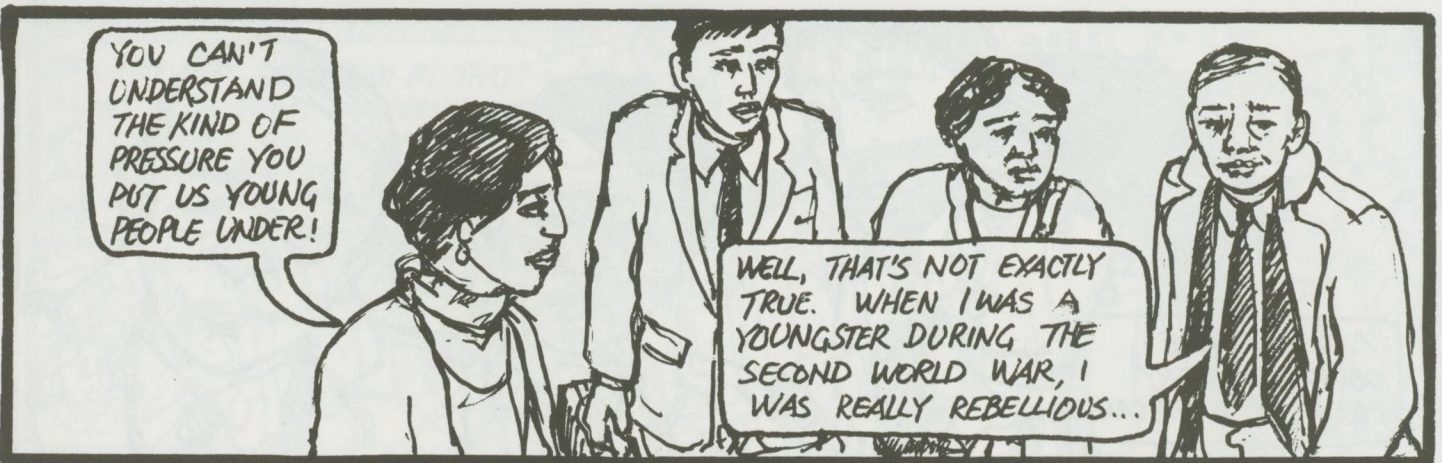
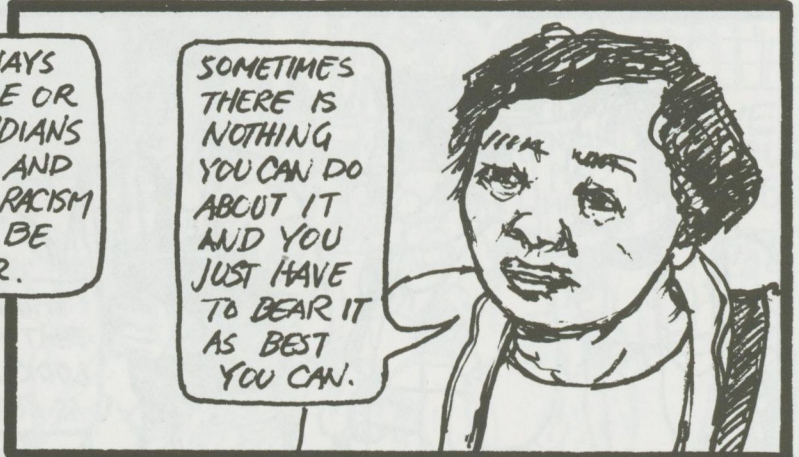
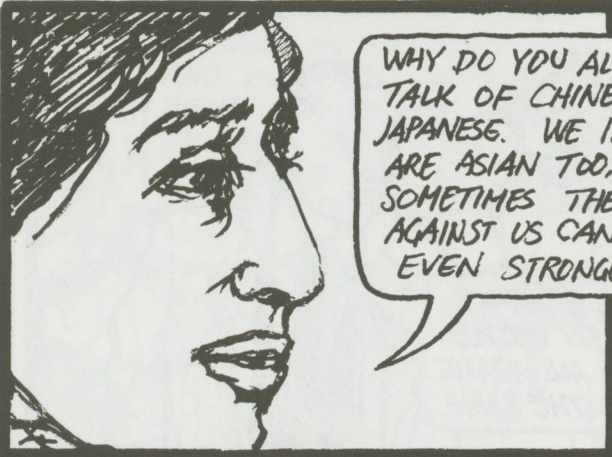
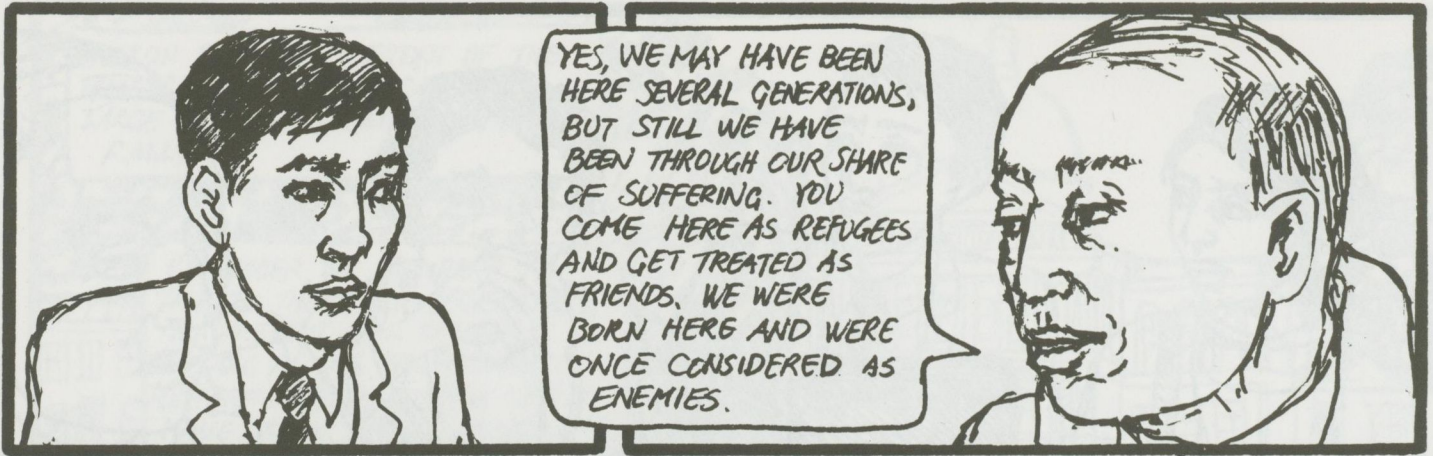
...THEY WILL TRY TO MAKE DEALS WITH ONLY ONE GROUP. WE MUST NOT LET THEM DIVIDE AND TURN US AGAINST EACH OTHER. WE, ASIANS, ALL SHARE A COMMON EXPERIENCE IN AMERICA, AND WE MUST WORK TOGETHER.

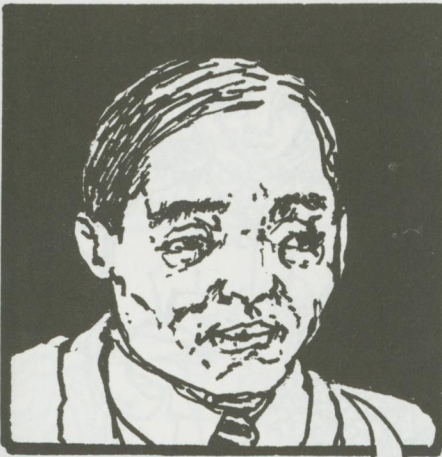


WHAT DOES SHE MEAN BY THAT? WE COME FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES AND AT DIFFERENT TIMES. HOW CAN SHE SAY WE ARE ALL THE SAME?





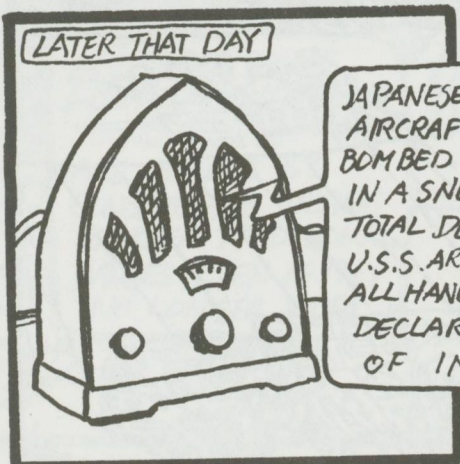




# The Internee's Story

I REMEMBER 1941, I WAS 15. MY FAMILY WORKED A LITTLE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE FARM IN SAN FERNANDO VALLEY. BY CALIFORNIA LAW DAD COULDN'T OWN ANYLAND. WE WERE TENANT FARMERS, WORKED HARD AND SCRAPED ENOUGH TO GET BY.





LATER THAT DAY

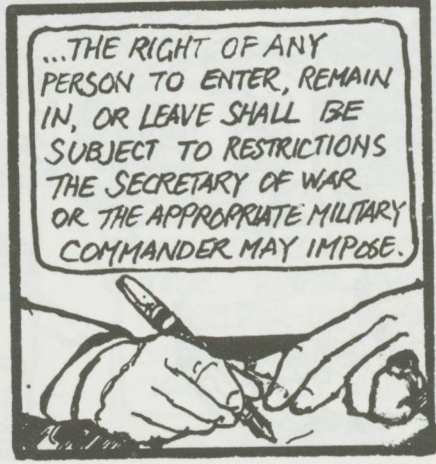
JAPANESE PLANES FROM AIRCRAFT CARRIERS BOMBED PEARL HARBOR IN A SNEAK ATTACK... TOTAL DEVASTATION... U.S.S. ARIZONA SUNK WITH ALL HANDS ABOARD. U.S. DECLARES WAR. A DAY OF INFAMY...



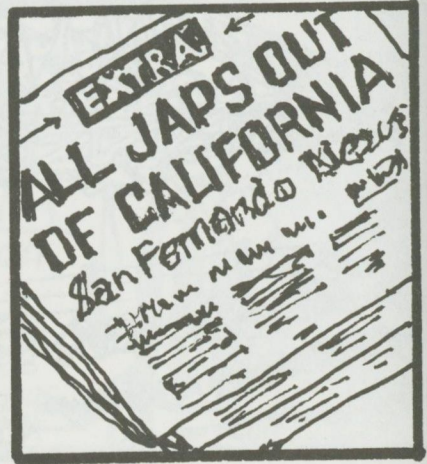
2 1/2 MONTHS LATER. PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT:



... EXECUTIVE ORDER NO. 9066 TO PRESCRIBE MILITARY AREAS IN SUCH PLACES FROM WHICH ANY OR ALL PERSONS MAY BE EXCLUDED...



...THE RIGHT OF ANY PERSON TO ENTER, REMAIN IN, OR LEAVE SHALL BE SUBJECT TO RESTRICTIONS THE SECRETARY OF WAR OR THE APPROPRIATE MILITARY COMMANDER MAY IMPOSE.

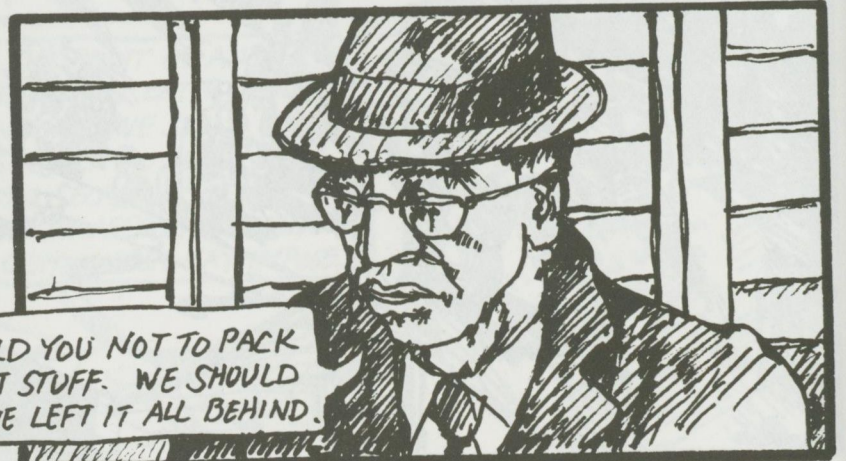


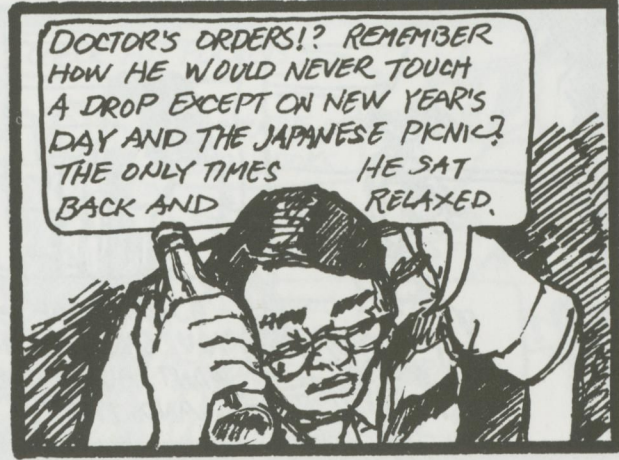
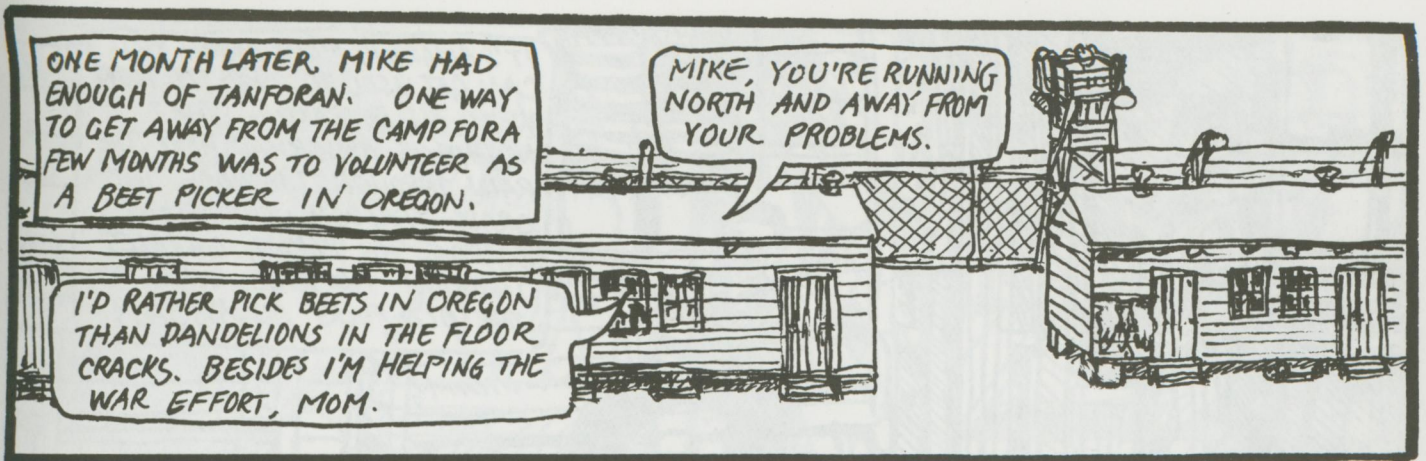
TWO MONTHS LATER WE WERE GIVEN ORDERS TO LEAVE OUR HOMES. WE HAD TEN DAYS TO PACK AND TO SELL ALL OUR THINGS. THE STREETS WERE SWARMING WITH PEOPLE PICKING OVER OUR HOMES AND STORES LIKE VULTURES. MOM'S PIANO WENT FOR \$20.

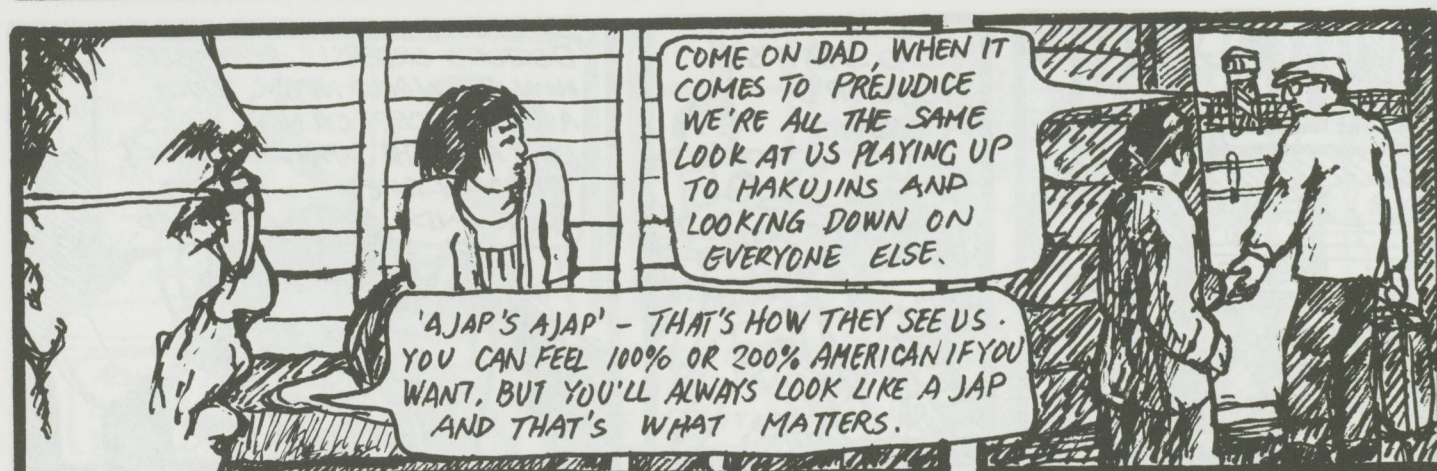


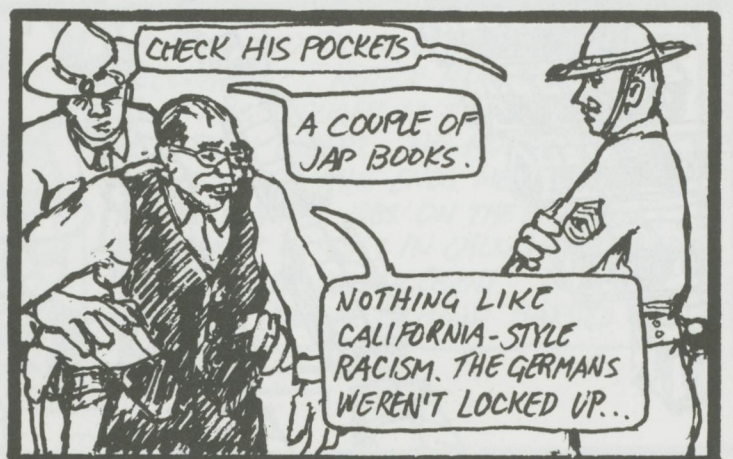
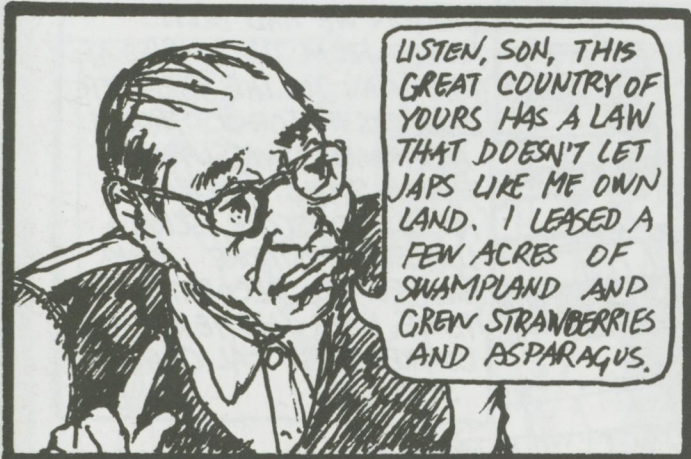
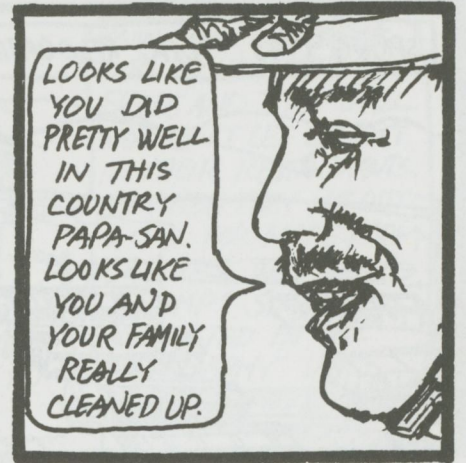
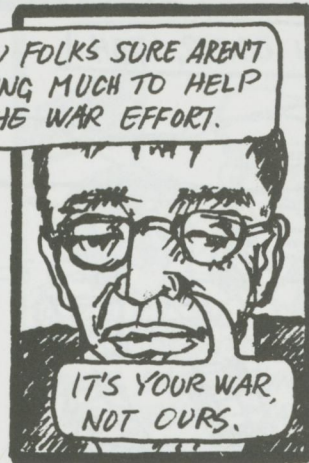
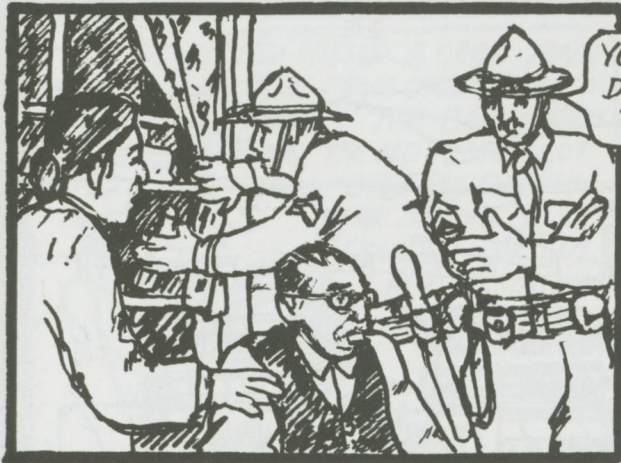
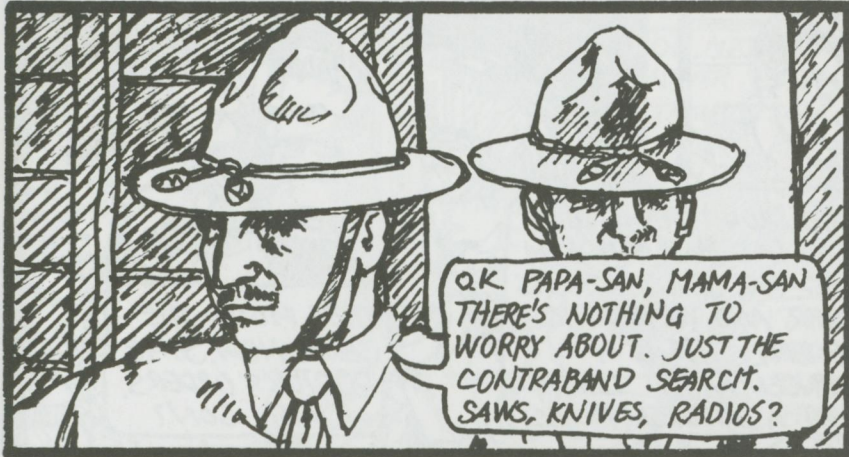
WE WERE BUSSED TO TANFORAN RACE TRACK. THEY WHITWASHED THE STABLES AND CONVERTED THEM INTO A RELOCATION CENTER FOR JAPANESE AND AMERICANS OF JAPANESE ANCESTRY.













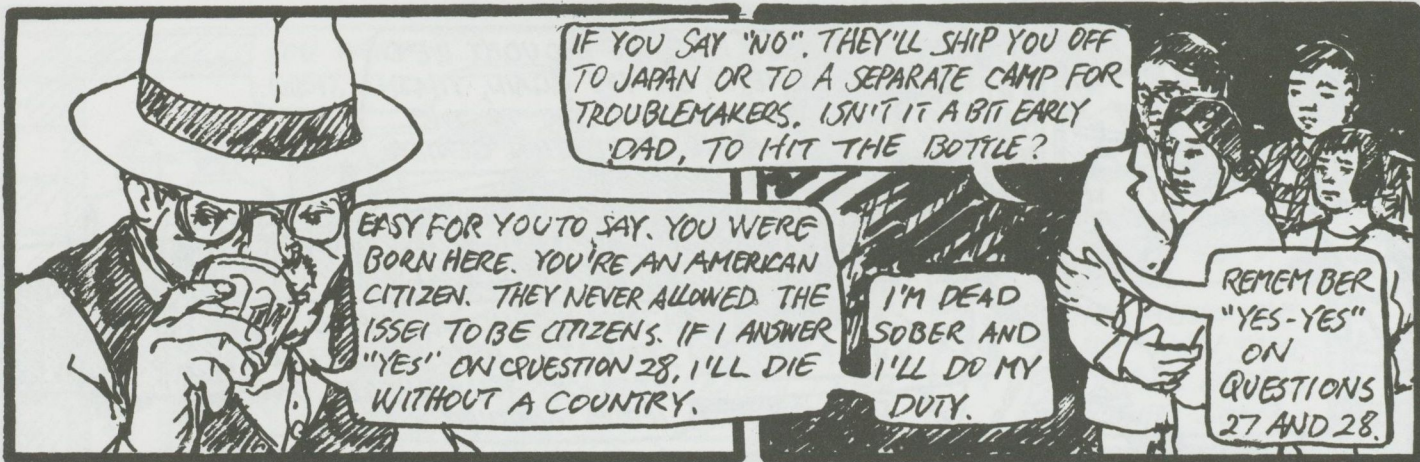
THE OFFICIALS PASSED OUT THESE LOYALTY FORMS FOR EVERYONE TO SIGN. I CAN'T FIGURE OUT THE INSTRUCTIONS



NOTHING TO FIGURE OUT, DAD.

QUESTION 27, THEY ASK IF I'M WILLING TO JOIN THE ARMED FORCES AND QUESTION 28 ASKS IF I'D RENOUNCE MY JAPANESE CITIZENSHIP.

JUST DECLARE YOUR LOYALTY TO THE U.S. AND WE'LL BE OUT OF HERE AS SOON AS THE WAR IS OVER.



IF YOU SAY "NO", THEY'LL SHIP YOU OFF TO JAPAN OR TO A SEPARATE CAMP FOR TROUBLEMAKERS. ISN'T IT A BIT EARLY 'DAD, TO HIT THE BOTTLE?

EASY FOR YOU TO SAY. YOU WERE BORN HERE. YOU'RE AN AMERICAN CITIZEN. THEY NEVER ALLOWED THE ISSEI TO BE CITIZENS. IF I ANSWER "YES" ON QUESTION 28, I'LL DIE WITHOUT A COUNTRY.

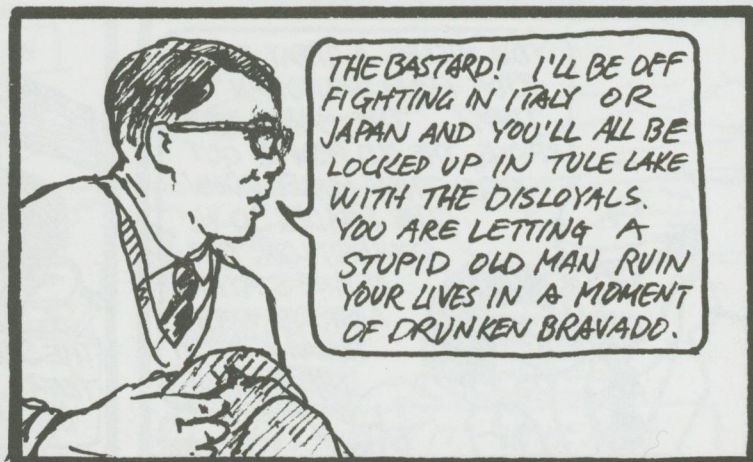
I'M DEAD SOBER AND I'LL DO MY DUTY.

REMEMBER "YES-YES" ON QUESTIONS 27 AND 28.



LATER

MIKE! GUESS WHAT? DAD ANSWERED "NO-NO" TO QUESTIONS 27 AND 28!



THE BASTARD! I'LL BE OFF FIGHTING IN ITALY OR JAPAN AND YOU'LL ALL BE LOCKED UP IN TULE LAKE WITH THE DISLOYALS. YOU ARE LETTING A STUPID OLD MAN RUIN YOUR LIVES IN A MOMENT OF DRUNKEN BRAVADO.



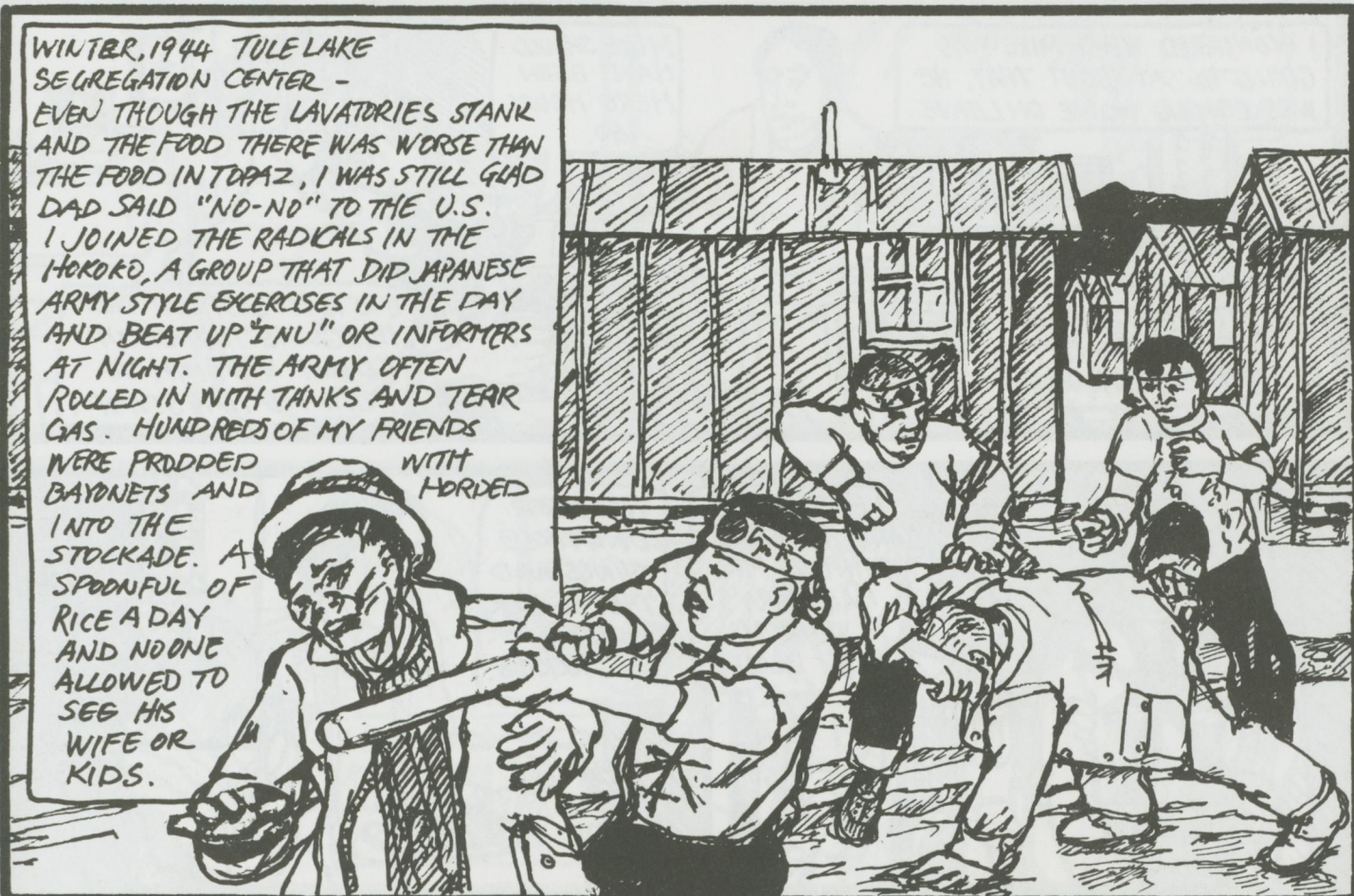
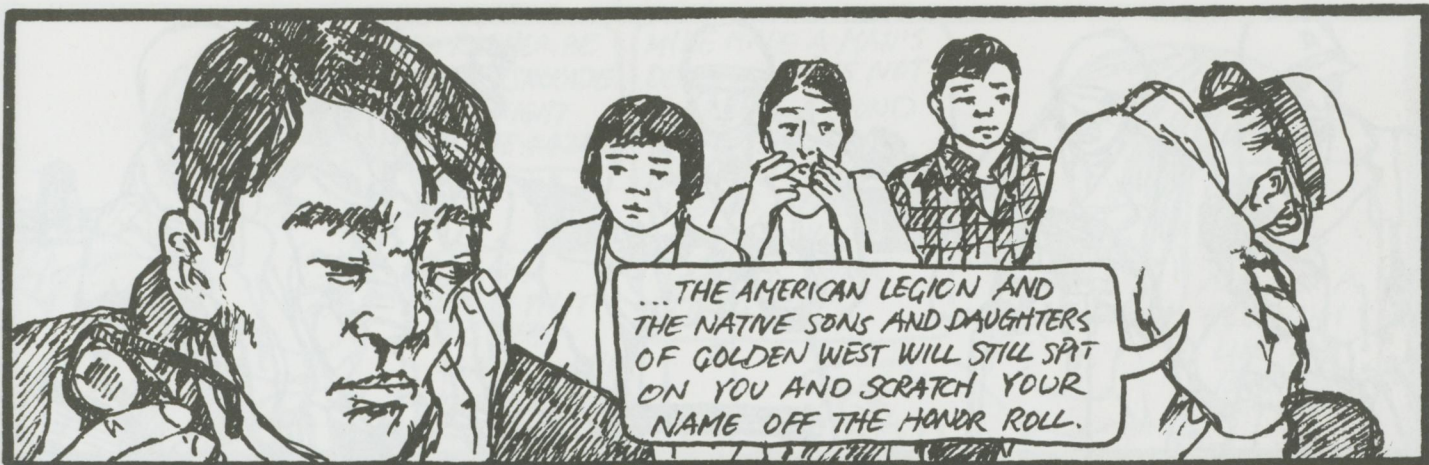
WELL, I'VE DONE MY DUTY. MIKE JOIN ME IN A LITTLE TOAST?



I'M OFF!



GO TO WAR! THEY WILL USE YOU AS CANNON FODDER. YOU'LL COME BACK DEAD, OR CRIPPLED AND...

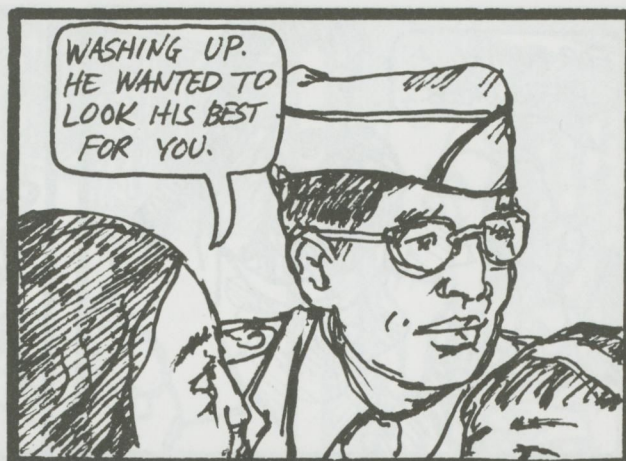
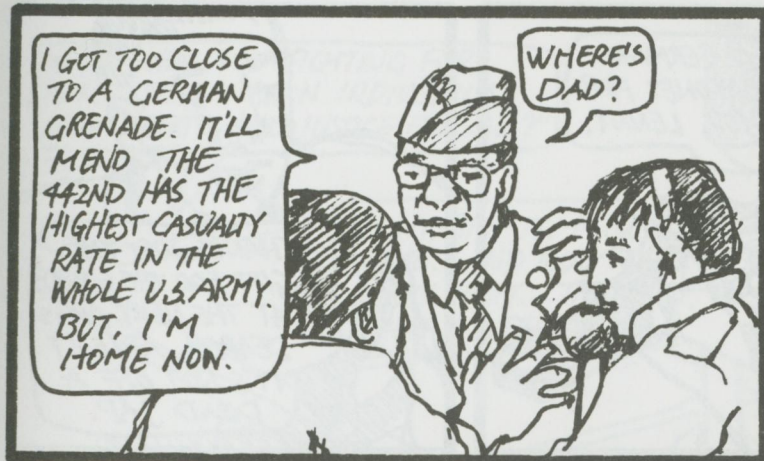


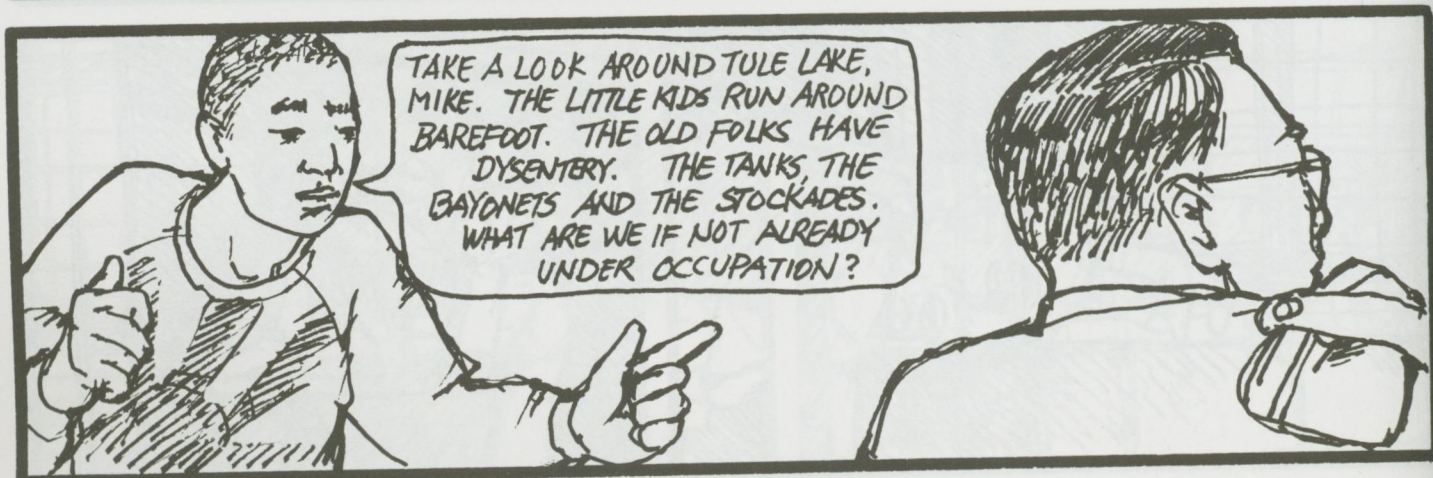
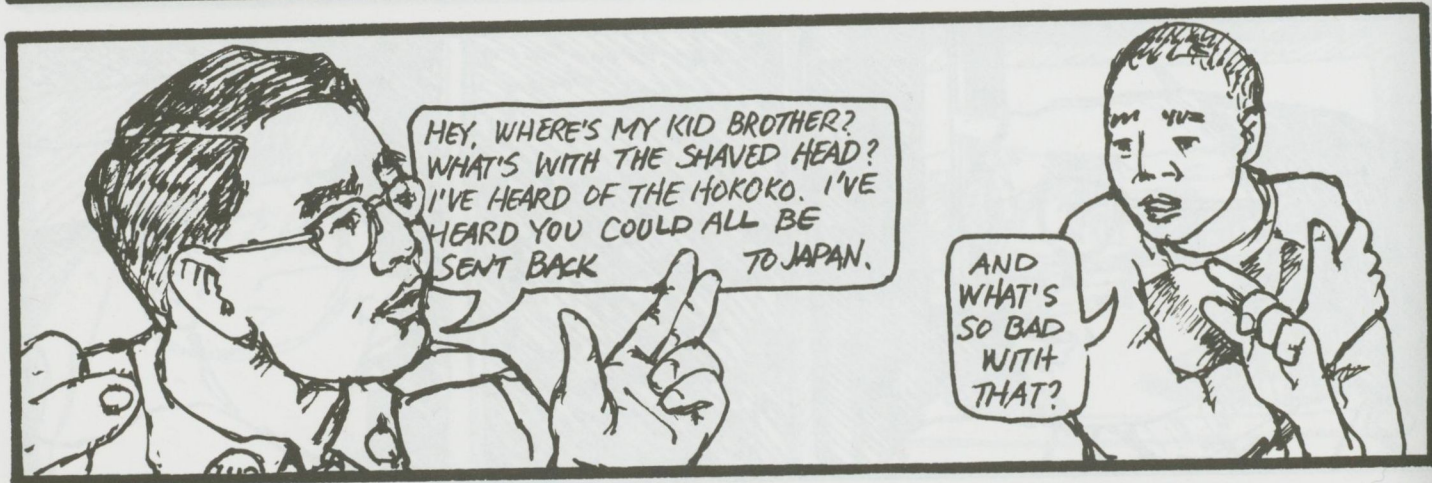
WINTER, 1944 TULE LAKE  
SEGREGATION CENTER -  
EVEN THOUGH THE LAVATORIES STANK  
AND THE FOOD THERE WAS WORSE THAN  
THE FOOD IN TOPAZ, I WAS STILL GLAD  
DAD SAID "NO-NO" TO THE U.S.  
I JOINED THE RADICALS IN THE  
HOKOKO, A GROUP THAT DID JAPANESE  
ARMY STYLE EXERCISES IN THE DAY  
AND BEAT UP "INU" OR INFORMERS  
AT NIGHT. THE ARMY OFTEN  
ROLLED IN WITH TANKS AND TEAR  
GAS. HUNDREDS OF MY FRIENDS  
WERE PRODDED WITH  
BAYONETS AND HORDED  
INTO THE STOCKADE. A  
SPOONFUL OF  
RICE A DAY  
AND NOONE  
ALLOWED TO  
SEE HIS  
WIFE OR  
KIDS.

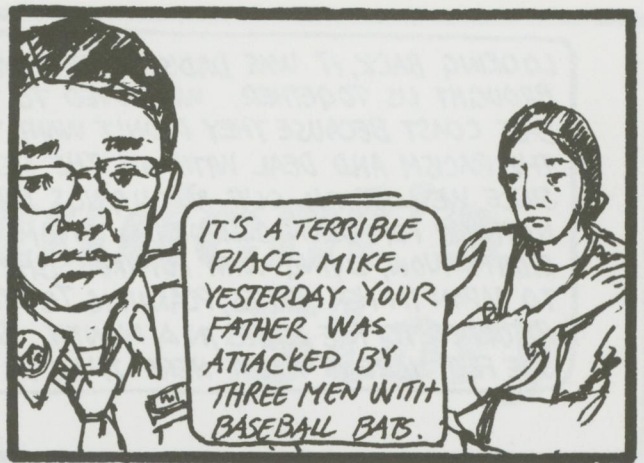












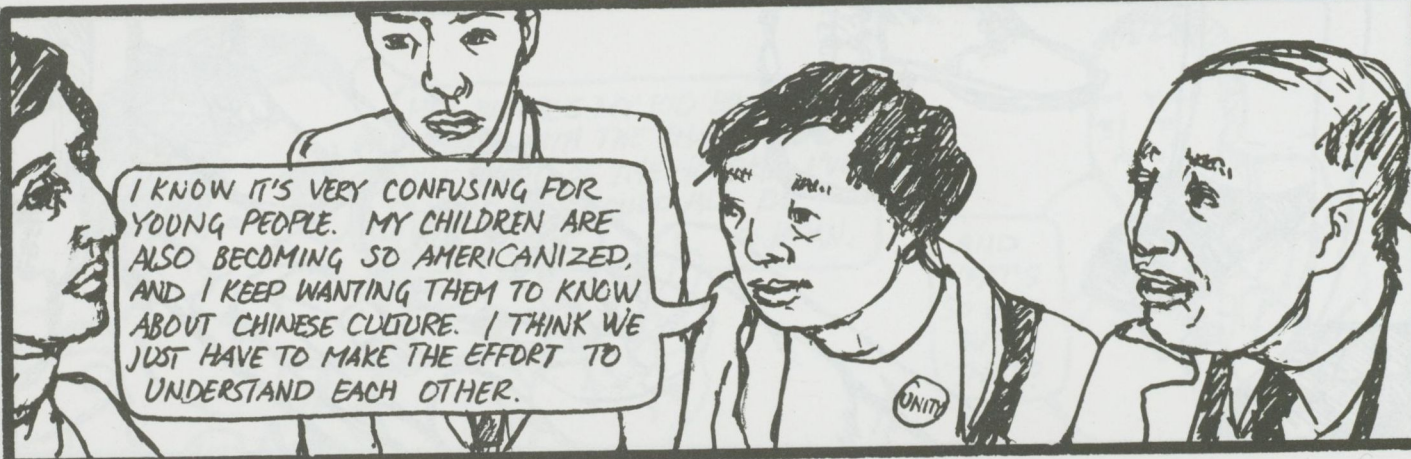
LOOKING BACK, IT WAS DAD'S DEATH THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER. WE MOVED TO THE EAST COAST BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO FACE THE RACISM AND DEAL WITH ALL THE MEMORIES. SINCE WE LOST ALL OUR BELONGINGS THERE WAS NOTHING FOR US IN CALIFORNIA. MOM IS EIGHTY NOW, LIVING WITH FUMIKO. SHE WENT TO JAPAN IN HER SIXTIES, PLANNING TO STAY, BUT RETURNED TO THE STATES IN A MONTH. SHE SAID SHE FELT MORE AT HOME HERE THAN IN JAPAN.



I WENT TO COLLEGE, BUT IT WAS ONLY IN THE EARLY 1970'S THAT YOUNG FOLKS STARTED SAYING THAT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO LEARN ABOUT OUR HISTORY, AND STARTED A MOVEMENT TO REDRESS THE WRONGS WE HAD SUFFERED DURING THE WAR. MIKE AND I JOINED FORCES AND BROUGHT A SUIT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT TO SEEK REPARATIONS. OUR CHILDREN ARE TAKING PART IN THE REDRESS MOVEMENT. SO I UNDERSTAND A LITTLE ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE SAYING.



I KNOW IT'S VERY CONFUSING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. MY CHILDREN ARE ALSO BECOMING SO AMERICANIZED, AND I KEEP WANTING THEM TO KNOW ABOUT CHINESE CULTURE. I THINK WE JUST HAVE TO MAKE THE EFFORT TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER.



YOU MAKE IT SOUND SO SIMPLE. BUT THERE ARE SO MANY THINGS I HAVE TO DEAL WITH. MY FAMILY'S SO TRADITIONAL. I FIND MYSELF ALWAYS TORN BETWEEN INDIA AND AMERICA. I'M JUST NOT SURE WHICH WAY TO CHOOSE.

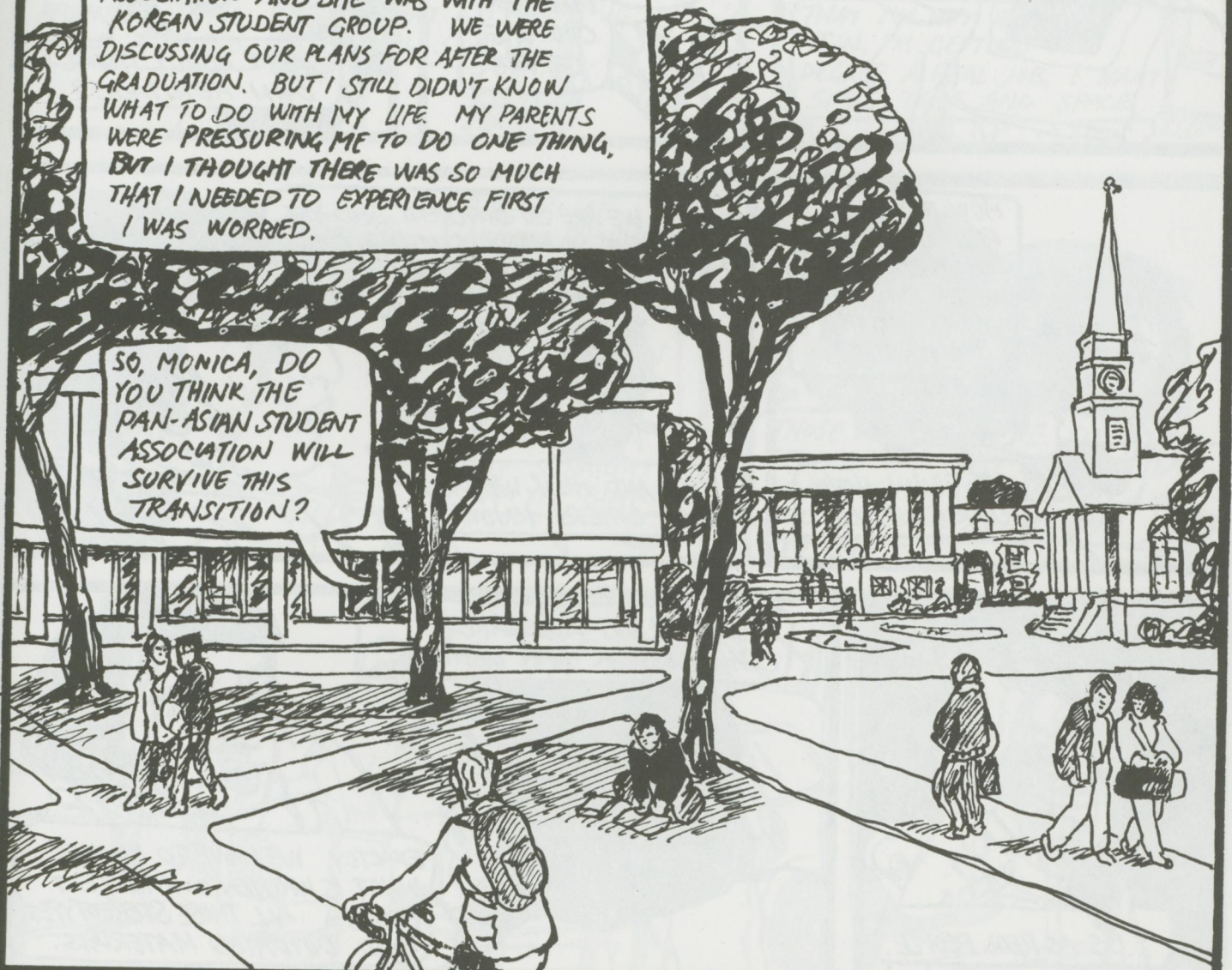


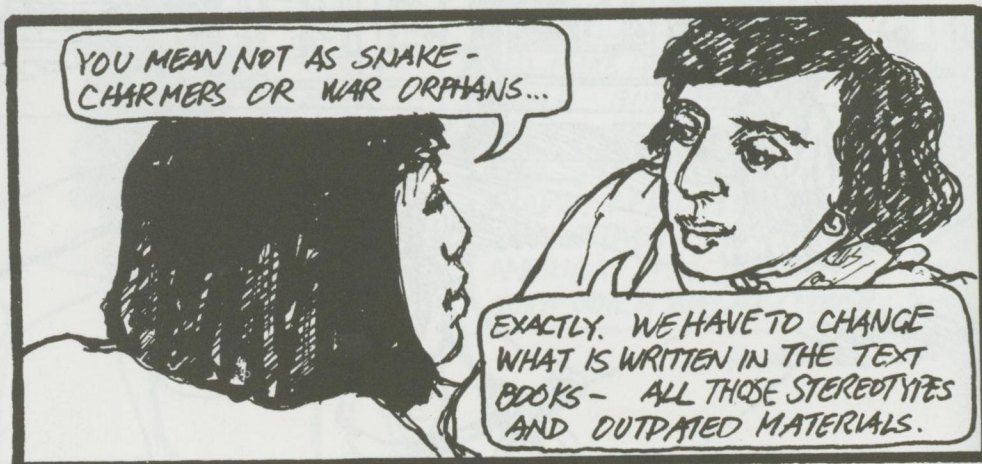


# The Student's Story

A FEW MONTHS AGO, JUST ABOUT THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, MY FRIEND JUNG SOON AND I WERE TALKING. WE WORKED CLOSELY TOGETHER IN THE PAN-ASIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT IN THE COLLEGE. I WAS THE PRESIDENT OF THE INDIAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION AND SHE WAS WITH THE KOREAN STUDENT GROUP. WE WERE DISCUSSING OUR PLANS FOR AFTER THE GRADUATION. BUT I STILL DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH MY LIFE. MY PARENTS WERE PRESSURING ME TO DO ONE THING, BUT I THOUGHT THERE WAS SO MUCH THAT I NEEDED TO EXPERIENCE FIRST I WAS WORRIED.

SO, MONICA, DO YOU THINK THE PAN-ASIAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION WILL SURVIVE THIS TRANSITION?





YOU KNOW MONICA, I THOUGHT KOREAN PARENTS WERE STRICT, BUT AFTER TALKING WITH YOU GUYS I GUESS MOST INDIAN PARENTS PUT THAT KIND OF EXPECTATION ON THEIR KIDS TOO. SO, IF YOU GET THAT JOB, ARE YOU THINKING OF MOVING OUT?

I DON'T KNOW... MY PARENTS AREN'T MUCH FOR MY GETTING MY OWN PLACE I'VE ALSO BEEN PRETTY SHELTERED ALL MY LIFE, TO GO ON MY OWN IT'S A LITTLE SCARY. WHAT ABOUT YOU?

ALL I HEAR FROM MY FOLKS IS HOW I SHOULD MEET A NICE KOREAN MAN. SEEMS LIKE EVERY WEEK THERE IS A PICTURE IN THE MAIL OR A FRIEND CALLING ABOUT A FRIEND...

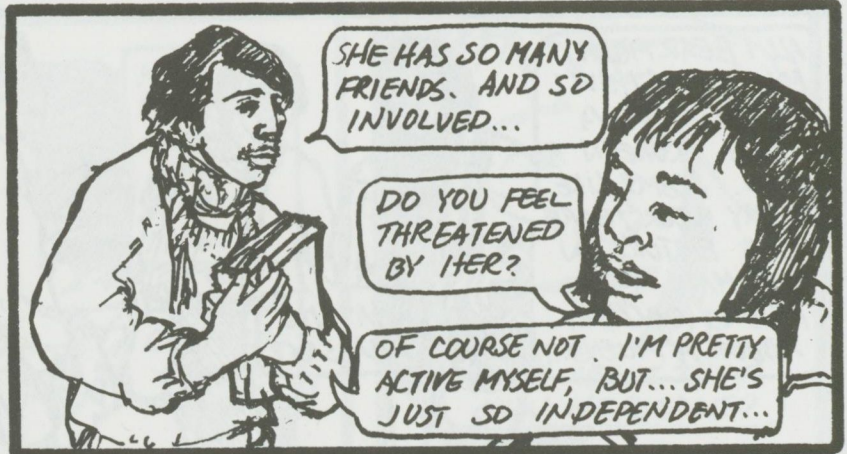
WHAT DO YOU SAY?

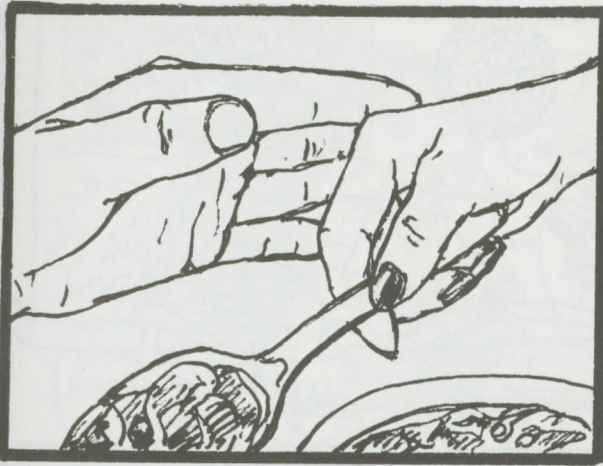
THAT I'M NOT READY. I MEAN, I'M GETTING A DEGREE, A REAL JOB, I WANT SOME TIME AND SPACE

PARENTS ARE ALWAYS PUSHING. IT'S THE SAME AT MY HOUSE. THEY DON'T REALIZE THAT WE'VE BEEN LIVING HERE AND WOULDN'T GET ALONG WITH A GUY STRAIGHT OFF THE BOAT.

THOSE MEN! THEY'RE SO STUFFED UP. THEY EXPECT WOMEN TO BE SUBSERVIENT AND ALWAYS DO AS THEY WANT.

YOU'RE RIGHT! THERE'S MY FRIEND.





WHAT'S WRONG? YOU'VE NEVER BEEN SHY OF HOLDING HANDS BEFORE.

THERE'RE A LOT OF INDIANS AROUND.



YOU'RE NOT ASHAMED, ARE YOU?



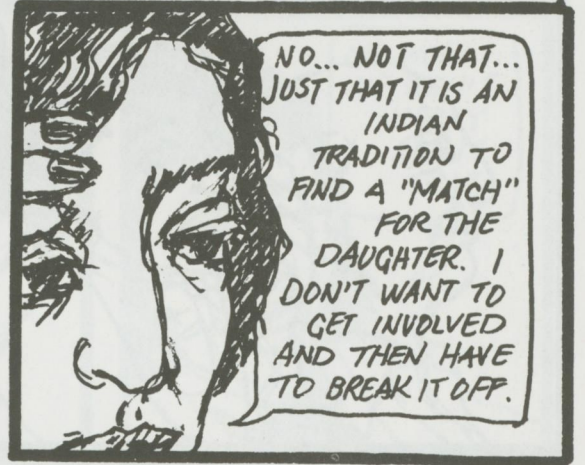
WHY SHOULD I BE? WE'RE JUST FRIENDS.

I THOUGHT...



I'M NOT READY TO BE SERIOUS...

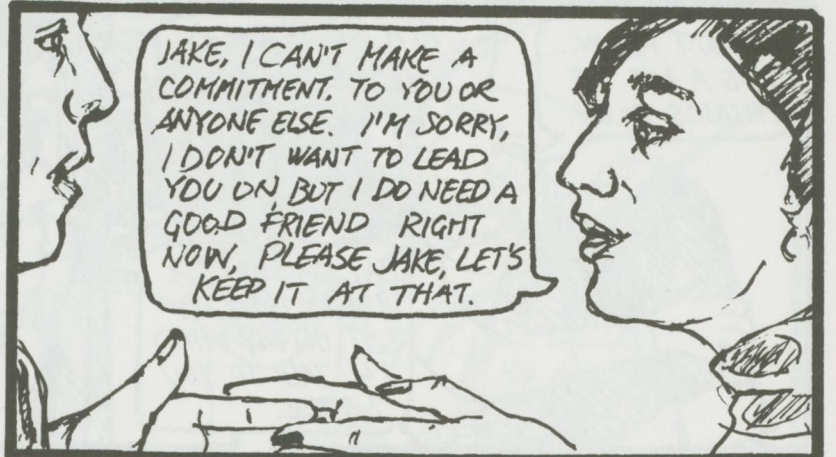
IS IT THAT OR IS IT THAT I'M NOT INDIAN?



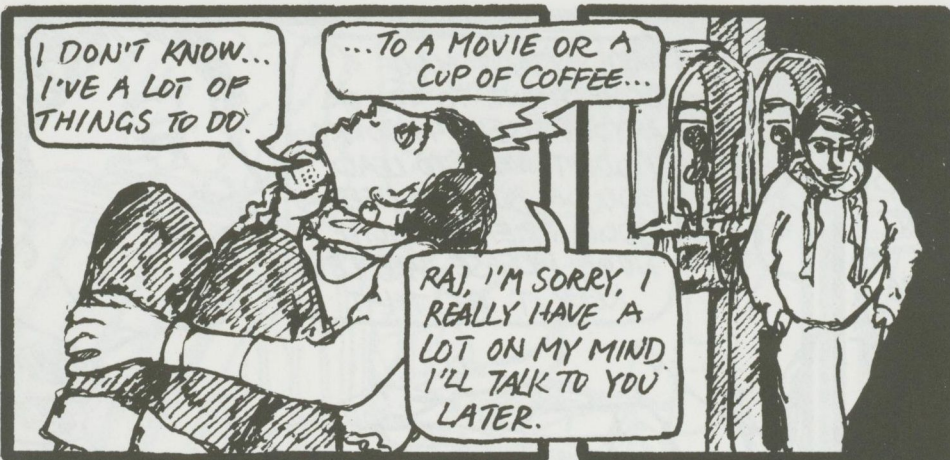
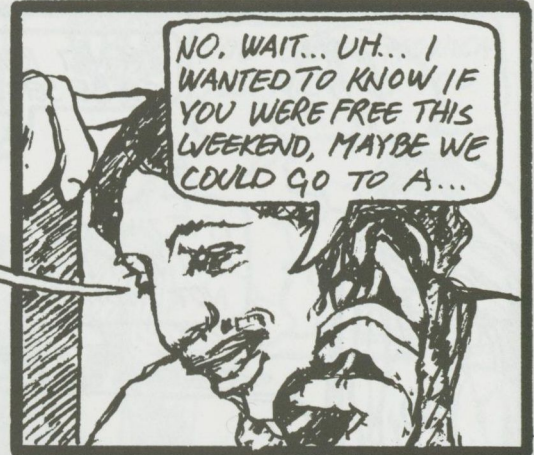
NO... NOT THAT... JUST THAT IT IS AN INDIAN TRADITION TO FIND A "MATCH" FOR THE DAUGHTER. I DON'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED AND THEN HAVE TO BREAK IT OFF.



WE'RE ALREADY INVOLVED... BUT WHO'S TALKING ABOUT MARRIAGE? I LIKE YOU AND JUST WANT YOU TO COMMIT MORE TIME TO ME



JAKE, I CAN'T MAKE A COMMITMENT. TO YOU OR ANYONE ELSE. I'M SORRY, I DON'T WANT TO LEAD YOU ON, BUT I DO NEED A GOOD FRIEND RIGHT NOW, PLEASE JAKE, LET'S KEEP IT AT THAT.







YOUR AMERICA IS FULL OF PROBLEMS  
- DRUGS, ALCOHOL, DIVORCE...

OH  
GRANDMA,  
NOT ALL  
AMERICA IS  
LIKE THAT.  
MY FRIENDS  
DON'T DO  
ALL THAT  
STUFF.



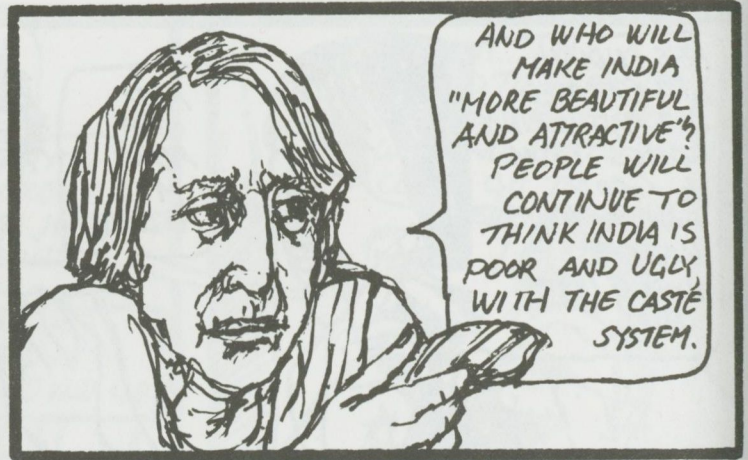
HAS ANYONE SEEN THIS  
ARTICLE ABOUT HOW  
BELONGING TO AMERICA  
NEEDS A COMMITMENT?



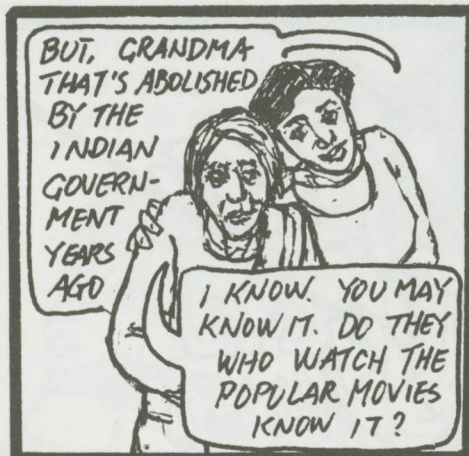
SOUNDS  
INTERESTING,  
FATHER,  
WHAT'S IT  
ABOUT?



IT SAYS THAT AMERICA "IS OUR  
HOME, MAKE IT MORE BEAUTIFUL  
AND ATTRACTIVE."

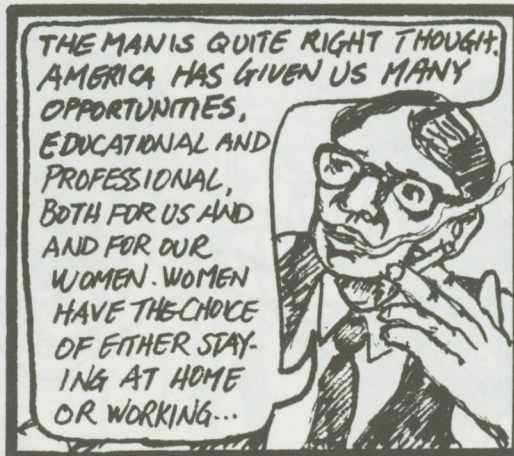


AND WHO WILL  
MAKE INDIA  
"MORE BEAUTIFUL  
AND ATTRACTIVE"?  
PEOPLE WILL  
CONTINUE TO  
THINK INDIA IS  
POOR AND UGLY,  
WITH THE CASTE  
SYSTEM.

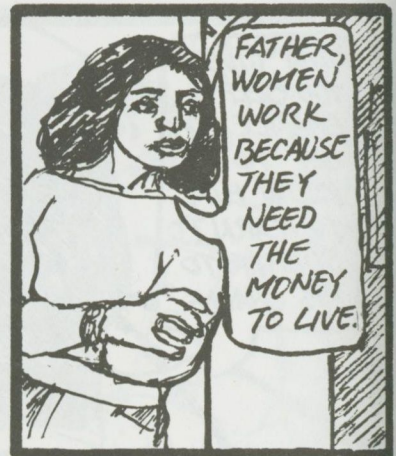


BUT, GRANDMA  
THAT'S ABOLISHED  
BY THE  
INDIAN  
GOVERN-  
MENT  
YEARS  
AGO

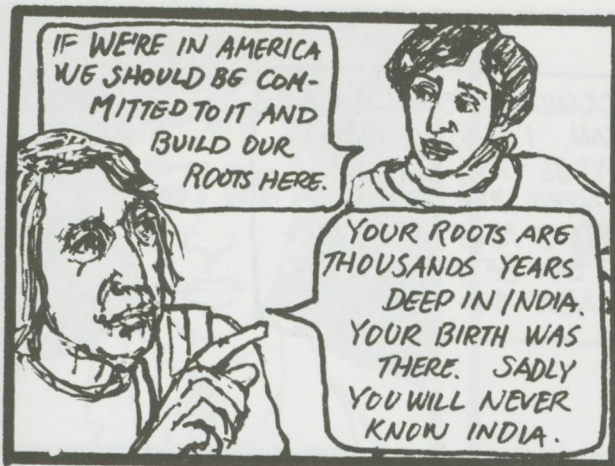
I KNOW. YOU MAY  
KNOW IT. DO THEY  
WHO WATCH THE  
POPULAR MOVIES  
KNOW IT?



THE MAN IS QUITE RIGHT THOUGH.  
AMERICA HAS GIVEN US MANY  
OPPORTUNITIES,  
EDUCATIONAL AND  
PROFESSIONAL,  
BOTH FOR US AND  
AND FOR OUR  
WOMEN. WOMEN  
HAVE THE CHOICE  
OF EITHER STAY-  
ING AT HOME  
OR WORKING...

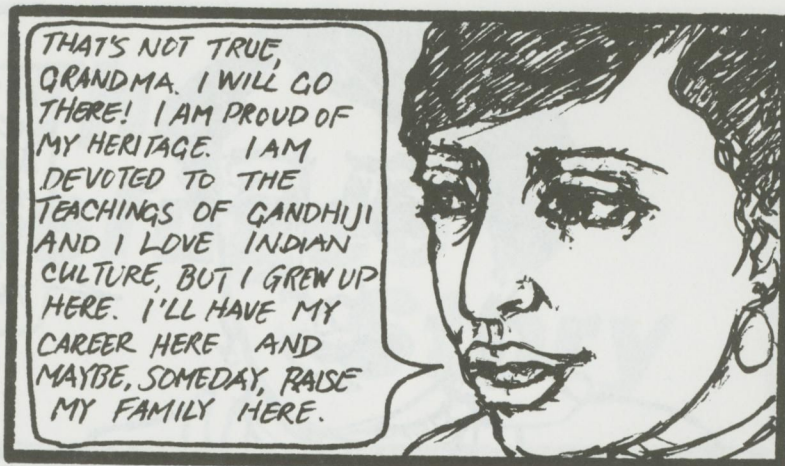


FATHER,  
WOMEN  
WORK  
BECAUSE  
THEY  
NEED  
THE  
MONEY  
TO LIVE.



IF WE'RE IN AMERICA WE SHOULD BE COMMITTED TO IT AND BUILD OUR ROOTS HERE.

YOUR ROOTS ARE THOUSANDS YEARS DEEP IN INDIA. YOUR BIRTH WAS THERE. SADLY YOU WILL NEVER KNOW INDIA.

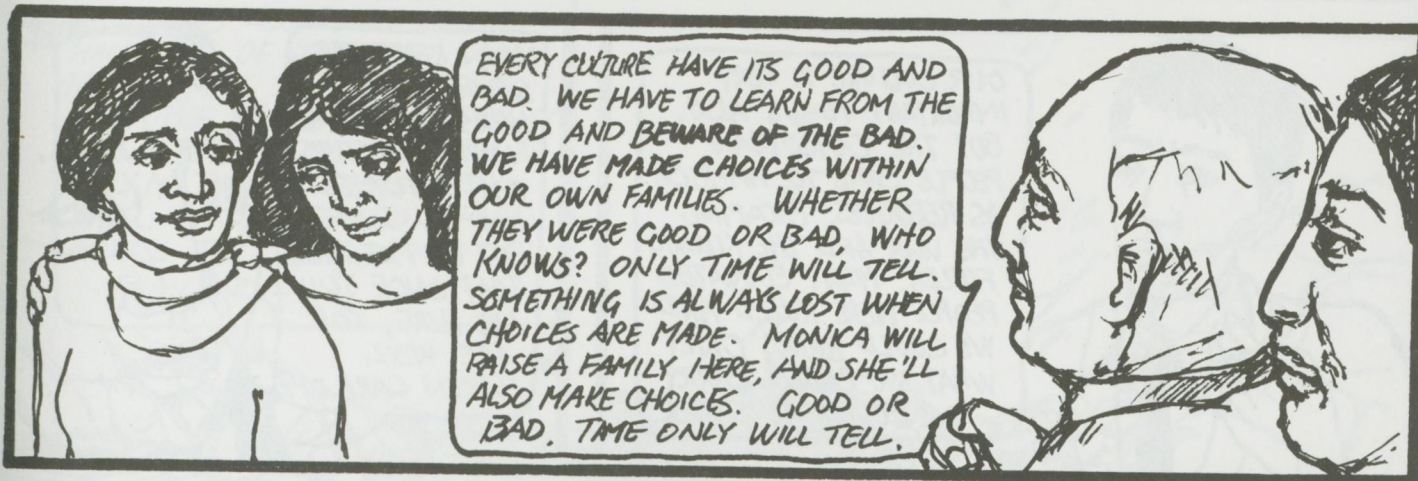


THAT'S NOT TRUE, GRANDMA. I WILL GO THERE! I AM PROUD OF MY HERITAGE. I AM DEVOTED TO THE TEACHINGS OF GANDHIJI AND I LOVE INDIAN CULTURE, BUT I GREW UP HERE. I'LL HAVE MY CAREER HERE AND MAYBE, SOMEDAY, RAISE MY FAMILY HERE.



WE CAN BE BOTH INDIAN AND AMERICAN. OUR INDIAN TEACHING IS TO HELP THE LESS FORTUNATE, WE CAN HELP THE POOR AND THE HOMELESS IN AMERICA

WE MUST BE A PART OF THIS COUNTRY AND HAVE IT BE A PART OF US.



EVERY CULTURE HAVE ITS GOOD AND BAD. WE HAVE TO LEARN FROM THE GOOD AND BEWARE OF THE BAD. WE HAVE MADE CHOICES WITHIN OUR OWN FAMILIES. WHETHER THEY WERE GOOD OR BAD, WHO KNOWS? ONLY TIME WILL TELL. SOMETHING IS ALWAYS LOST WHEN CHOICES ARE MADE. MONICA WILL RAISE A FAMILY HERE, AND SHE'LL ALSO MAKE CHOICES. GOOD OR BAD. TIME ONLY WILL TELL.



GOD WILL HELP US AND WE WILL ALWAYS HAVE OUR INDIAN VALUES AND OUR INDIAN CULTURE THERE TO SUPPORT US. IT HAS SURVIVED OVER THOUSANDS OF YEARS. AND IT WILL BE HERE FOR THOUSANDS MORE.



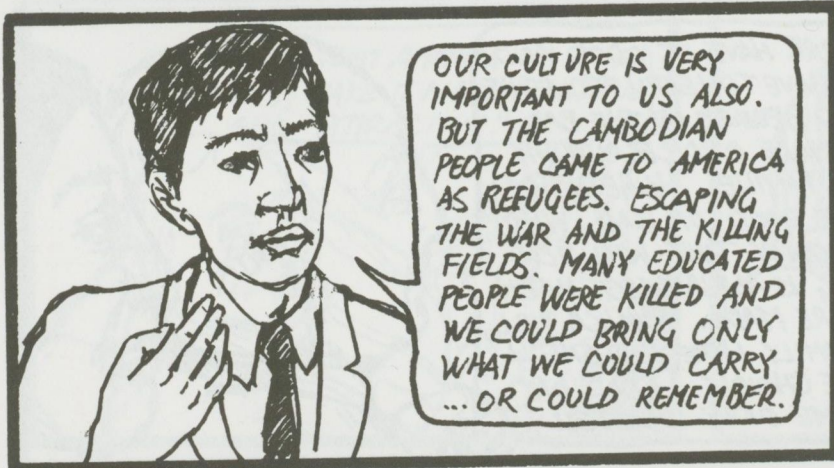
MY GRANDMOTHER IS A WISE WOMAN. I GUESS IT WON'T ALWAYS BE EASY, BUT WE MUST KEEP TRYING TO MAKE A CULTURE HERE IN AMERICA THAT CAN BE THE BEST OF THE NEW AND THE OLD.



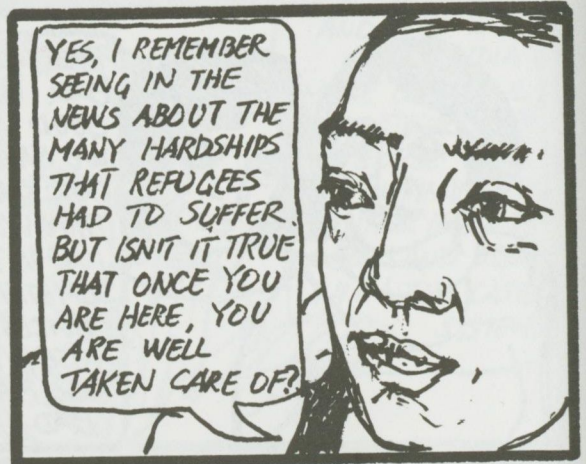
YES, IT DOES SOUND LIKE YOUR GRANDMOTHER IS WISE. YOU ARE VERY LUCKY THAT YOU HAVE SOMEONE THAT CAN HELP YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR CULTURE AND PRESERVE IT.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN?



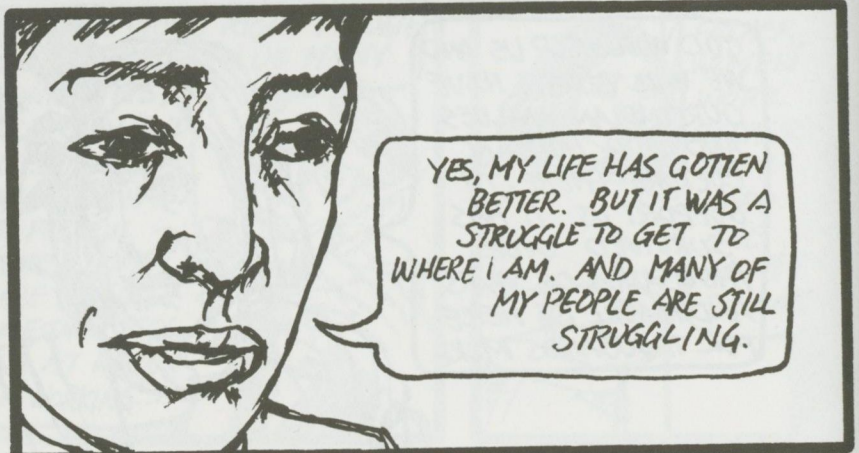
OUR CULTURE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO US ALSO. BUT THE CAMBODIAN PEOPLE CAME TO AMERICA AS REFUGEES. ESCAPING THE WAR AND THE KILLING FIELDS. MANY EDUCATED PEOPLE WERE KILLED AND WE COULD BRING ONLY WHAT WE COULD CARRY ... OR COULD REMEMBER.



YES, I REMEMBER SEEING IN THE NEWS ABOUT THE MANY HARDSHIPS THAT REFUGEES HAD TO SUFFER. BUT ISN'T IT TRUE THAT ONCE YOU ARE HERE, YOU ARE WELL TAKEN CARE OF?

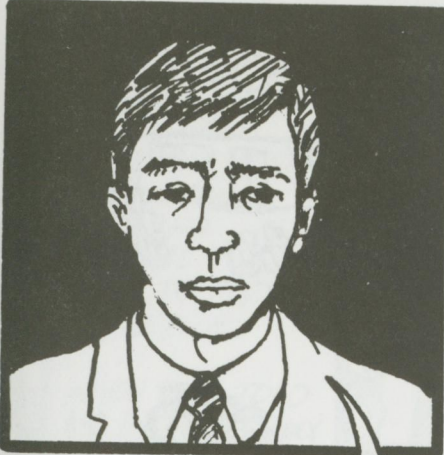


YEH, YOU SEEM TO BE DOING PRETTY WELL. YOU'RE WEARING A SUIT. I MEAN YOU DON'T LOOK MUCH LIKE THE REFUGEES I SAW ON THE NEWS.

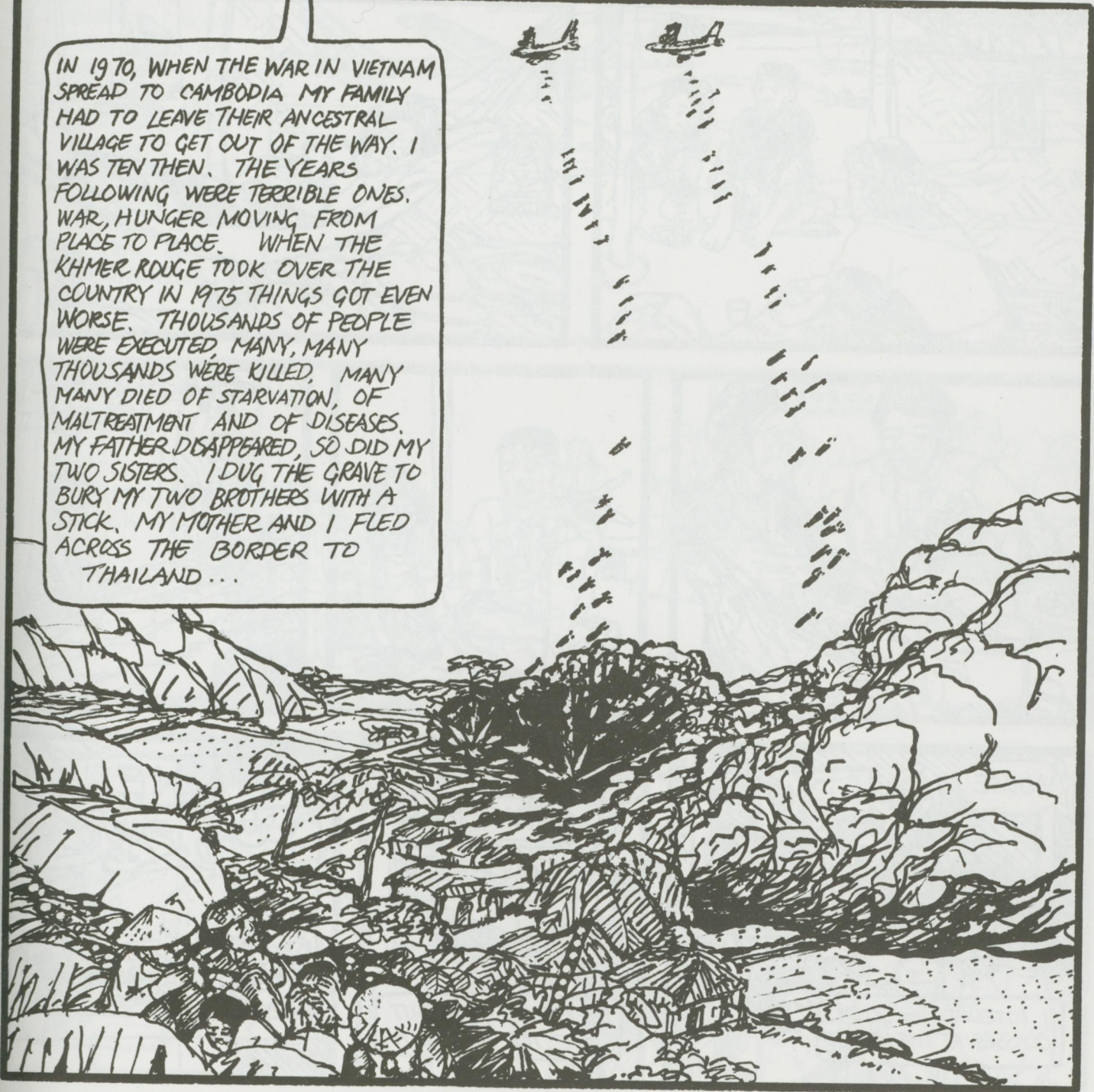


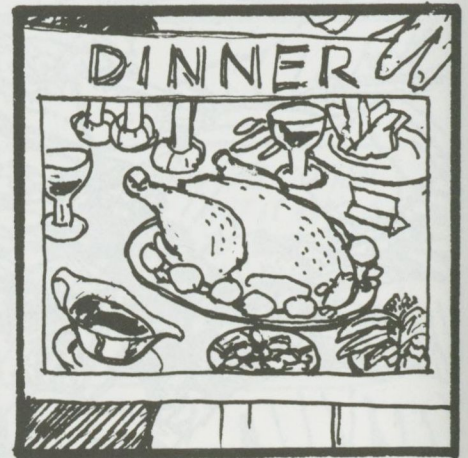
YES, MY LIFE HAS GOTTEN BETTER. BUT IT WAS A STRUGGLE TO GET TO WHERE I AM. AND MANY OF MY PEOPLE ARE STILL STRUGGLING.

# The Refugee's Story



IN 1970, WHEN THE WAR IN VIETNAM SPREAD TO CAMBODIA MY FAMILY HAD TO LEAVE THEIR ANCESTRAL VILLAGE TO GET OUT OF THE WAY. I WAS TEN THEN. THE YEARS FOLLOWING WERE TERRIBLE ONES. WAR, HUNGER MOVING FROM PLACE TO PLACE. WHEN THE KHMER ROUGE TOOK OVER THE COUNTRY IN 1975 THINGS GOT EVEN WORSE. THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE WERE EXECUTED, MANY, MANY THOUSANDS WERE KILLED, MANY MANY DIED OF STARVATION, OF MALTREATMENT AND OF DISEASES. MY FATHER DISAPPEARED, SO DID MY TWO SISTERS. I DUG THE GRAVE TO BURY MY TWO BROTHERS WITH A STICK. MY MOTHER AND I FLED ACROSS THE BORDER TO THAILAND...





IN 1982 THE U.S. CONGRESS PASSED THE REFUGEE ASSISTANCE ACT. THIS LAW ALLOWED REFUGEES TO COME TO AMERICA TO SETTLE.

WHEN THEY TOLD ME THAT MY FAMILY AND I WOULD BE GOING TO AMERICA I WAS OVERJOYED. WE WERE LUCKY. ALL MY FAMILY WAS ABLE TO COME TOGETHER. OTHER FAMILIES WERE NOT SO LUCKY, THEY OFTEN GOT SEPARATED.



WHEN WE ARRIVED IN BOSTON, EVERYTHING WAS NEW. THE AIRPORT WAS VERY BIG...



...SO MANY PEOPLE, SO MUCH NOISE, SO MANY STRANGE THINGS. THE OTHER REFUGEES LOOKED THE SAME WAY I FELT...

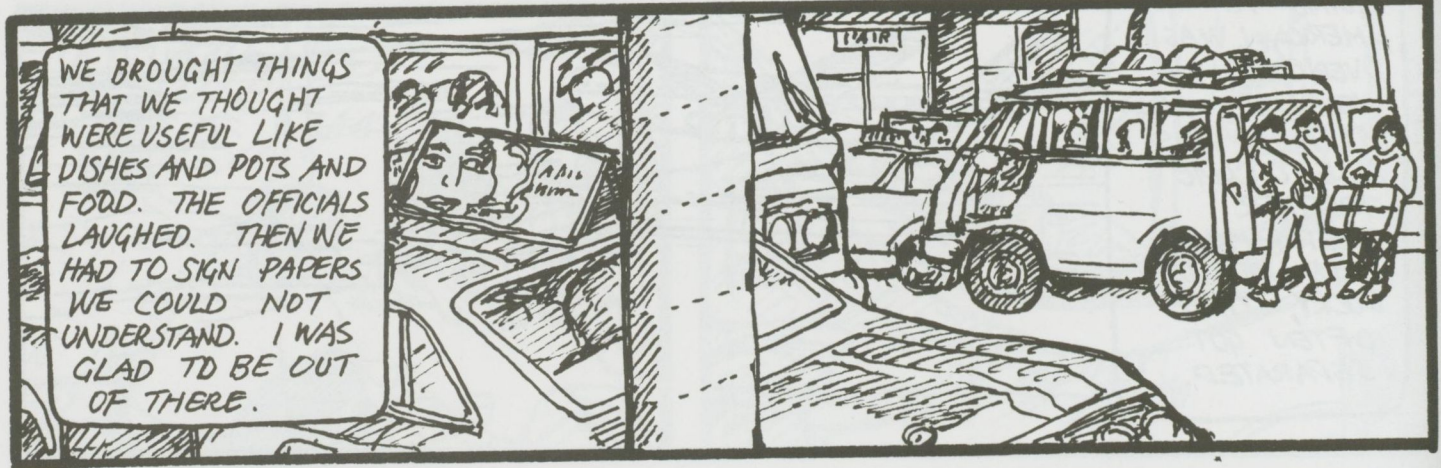




WE WERE MET BY PEOPLE WHO WERE GOING TO HELP US GET SETTLED.



THE CUSTOMS PEOPLE LOOKED AT US LIKE WE WEREN'T HUMAN.



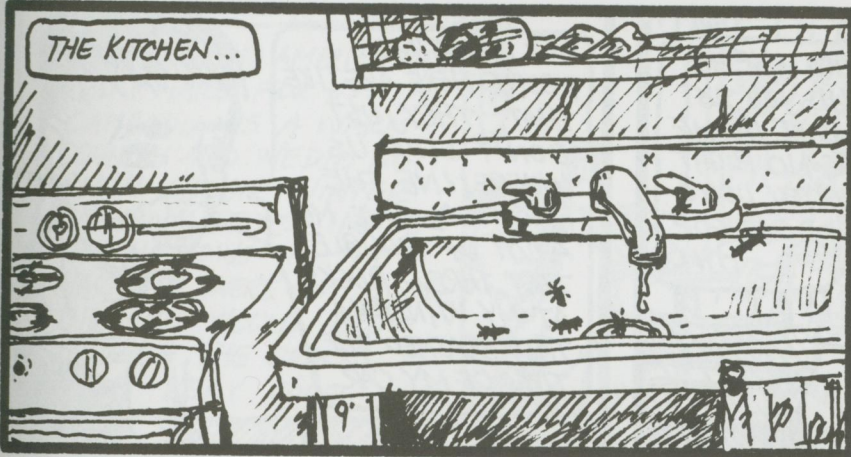
WE BROUGHT THINGS THAT WE THOUGHT WERE USEFUL LIKE DISHES AND POTS AND FOOD. THE OFFICIALS LAUGHED. THEN WE HAD TO SIGN PAPERS WE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND. I WAS GLAD TO BE OUT OF THERE.



WE WERE THEN TAKEN TO AN APARTMENT BUILDING IN ALLSTON-BRIGHTON WHERE WE WERE GOING TO LIVE.



THE APARTMENT THEY SHOWED US WAS NOT LIKE THE PICTURES.



THE KITCHEN...



THE BATHROOM...



BUT WE WERE HAPPY THAT WE HAD A PLACE TO STAY, AND WE TRIED TO LEARN NEW WAYS OF LIVING.



WHEN WE FIRST MOVED TO THE APARTMENT, THERE WERE TWO OTHER CAMBODIAN FAMILIES LIVING THERE. WE DIDN'T KNOW ANYBODY OR ANYTHING. THE COUPLE WHO RAN THE CORNER MARKET HELPED US SOMETIMES.

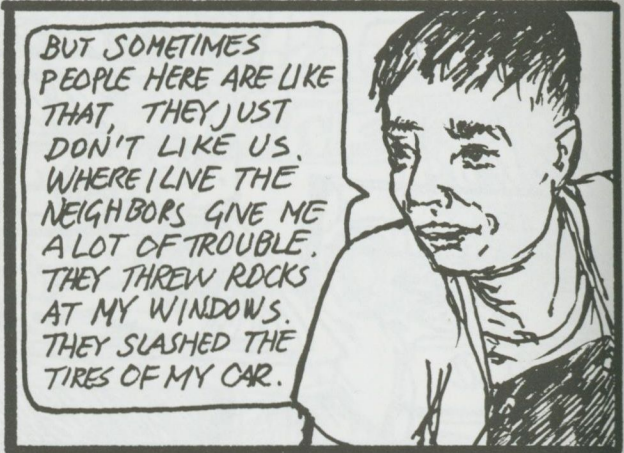


I FOUND A JOB IN CHELSEA AT A SHRIMP PACKING PLANT.



IS HE A BOSS?

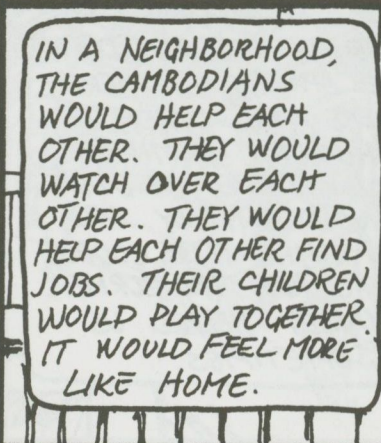
NO! HE HAS HIS JOB JUST LIKE US. HE HAS NO RIGHT TO TELL US TO DO IT FOR HIM.



BUT SOMETIMES PEOPLE HERE ARE LIKE THAT, THEY JUST DON'T LIKE US. WHERE I LIVED THE NEIGHBORS GAVE ME A LOT OF TROUBLE. THEY THREW ROCKS AT MY WINDOWS. THEY SLASHED THE TIRES OF MY CAR.



I TOLD HIM THAT THERE WAS AN APARTMENT IN MY BUILDING AND MAYBE HE COULD MOVE THERE. SOON OTHER CAMBODIAN FAMILIES MOVED TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD. THEY ALSO WANTED TO LIVE NEAR OTHER CAMBODIANS. WHEN THE GOVERNMENT RESETTLED US THEY DID NOT WANT TOO MANY SOUTHEAST ASIAN FAMILIES LIVING IN THE SAME NEIGHBORHOOD, SO THEY KEPT US ALL SEPARATED.



IN A NEIGHBORHOOD, THE CAMBODIANS WOULD HELP EACH OTHER. THEY WOULD WATCH OVER EACH OTHER. THEY WOULD HELP EACH OTHER FIND JOBS. THEIR CHILDREN WOULD PLAY TOGETHER. IT WOULD FEEL MORE LIKE HOME.



WE WERE USED TO LIVING CLOSELY TOGETHER. SOMETIMES TO MAKE THE RENT CHEAPER, TWO OR THREE FAMILIES WOULD SHARE AN APARTMENT. SOMETIMES THAT COULD GET VERY CROWDED, BECAUSE EACH FAMILY COULD HAVE SIX OR SEVEN PEOPLE. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO START SAVING SOME MONEY.



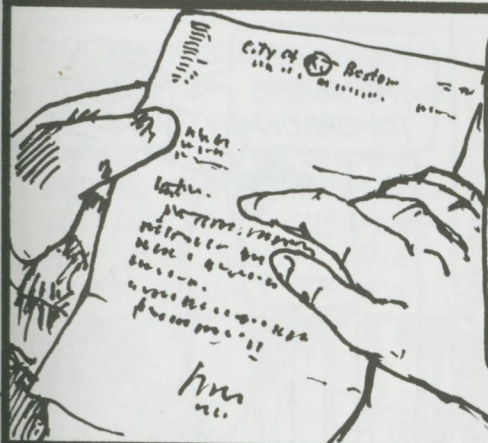
THE WINTER IN AMERICA WAS VERY HARD FOR US. CAMBODIA IS A WARM COUNTRY AND WE DID NOT KNOW ABOUT WINTER EVERYBODY STAYED INSIDE. THE WINDOWS IN THE APARTMENT WERE NOT GOOD. THE WIND WOULD BLOW THROUGH THE CRACKS. IT WAS VERY COLD.



ONE DAY A PAPER CAME FROM THE GOVERNMENT



IT SAID THAT A NEIGHBOR HAD COMPLAINED THAT WE WERE NOISY AND DIRTY, THAT WE USED THE STREETS LIKE A BATHROOM AND THAT THE CHILDREN WERE RUNNING ALL OVER THE PLACE.



WE CAME FROM A COUNTRY WITH LOTS OF SPACE AND PEOPLE SPEND A LOT OF TIME OUTSIDE. WE DIDN'T KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.

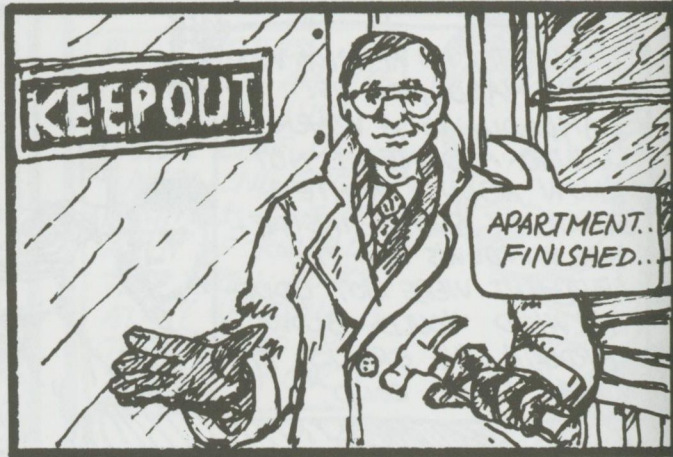




WE ASKED AROUND FOR HELP.  
THE PASTOR OF A CHURCH KNEW  
OF AN ASIAN AMERICAN LAWYER.  
HE AGREED TO HELP US.



ONE NIGHT THERE WAS A  
FIRE. THE NEXT DAY...



APARTMENT.  
FINISHED...



NO MORE  
CAMBODIANS



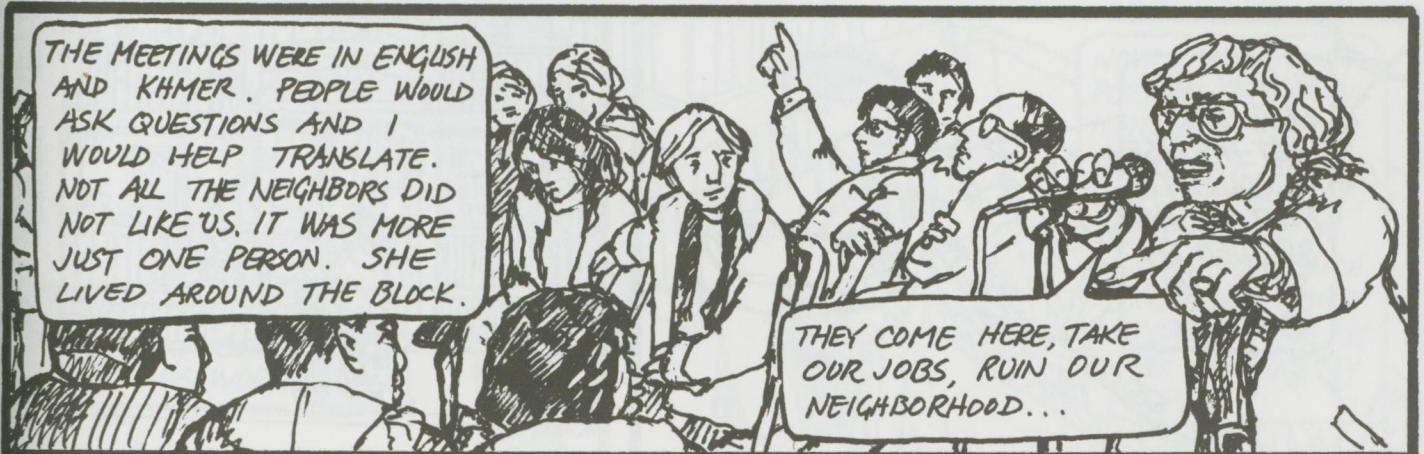
THE LAWYER GOT THE CITY  
TO TELL THE LANDLORD  
TO LET US BACK IN.

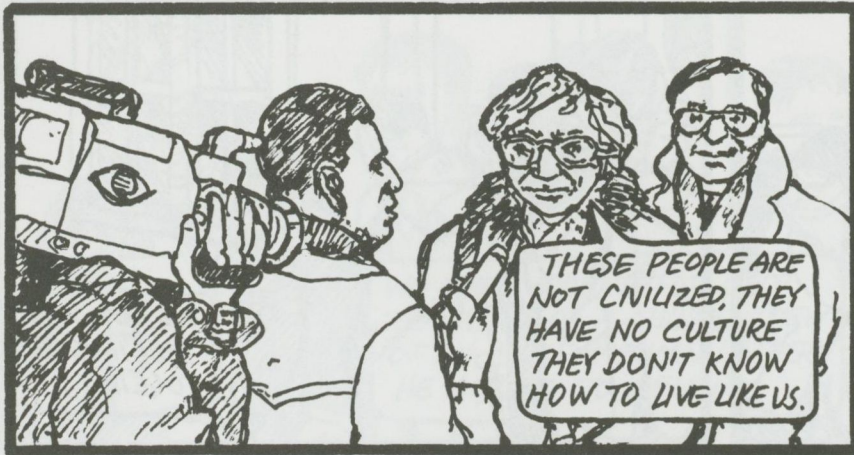


I'M GOING TO  
EVICT YOU  
ALL! JUST  
YOU SEE!

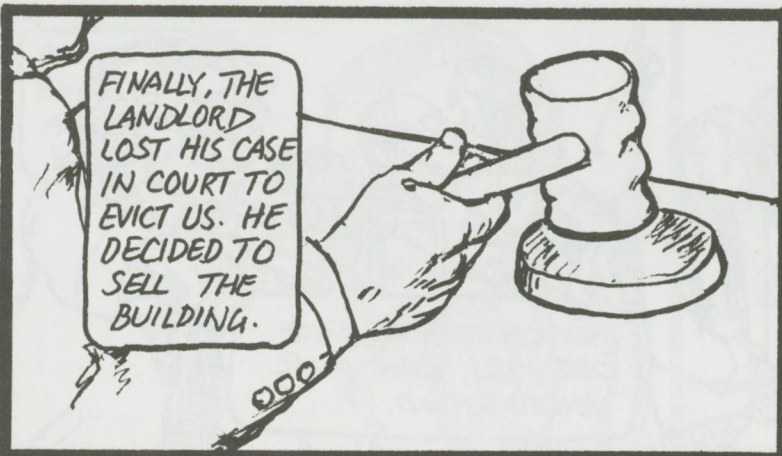


YOU'LL GET  
THE PAPERS  
TOMORROW



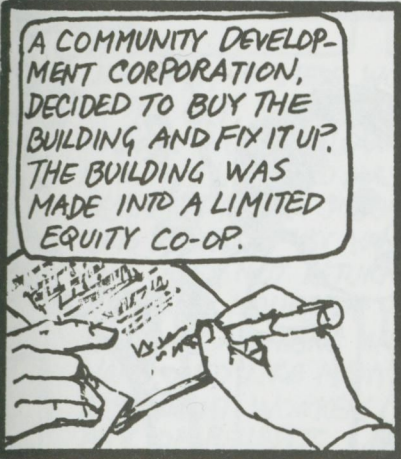


THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO LIVE JUST LIKE US...

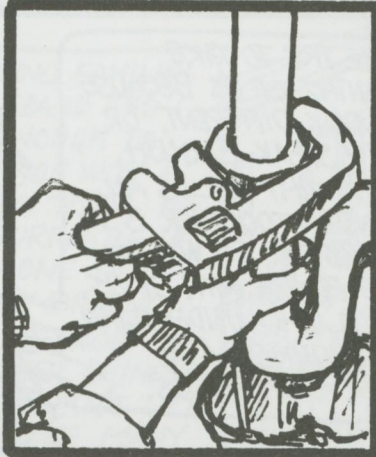




WE WERE VERY HAPPY  
WE HAD A BIG PARTY



A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION,  
DECIDED TO BUY THE BUILDING AND FIX IT UP.  
THE BUILDING WAS MADE INTO A LIMITED EQUITY CO-OP.

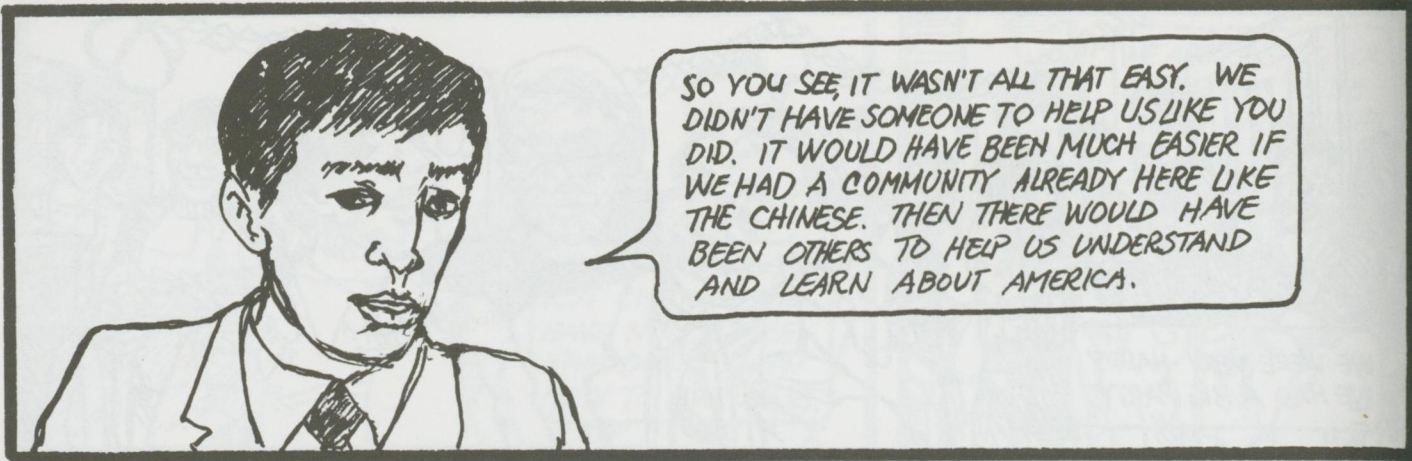


THE LAWYER HELPED US UNDERSTAND  
WHAT THAT WAS, THAT WE WOULD BE A  
PART-OWNER OF THE BUILDING AND NO  
ONE WOULD TRY TO EVICT US ANYMORE.

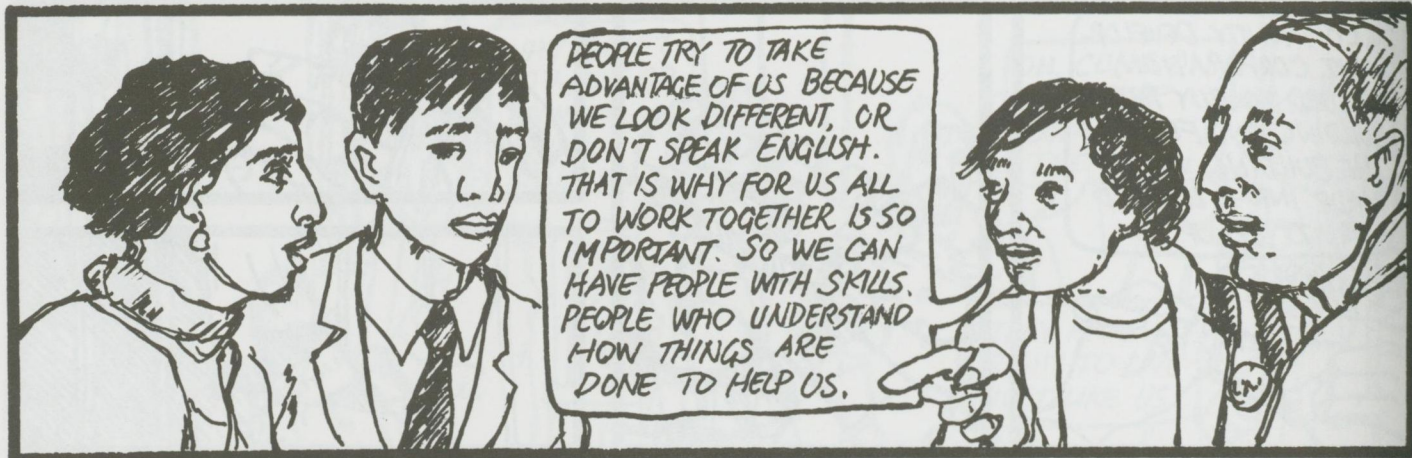


MAKING THE CO-OP WAS  
VERY COMPLICATED, BUT IT  
REALLY WAS WORTH IT ALL.

NOW I SEE HOW IM-  
PORTANT IT IS TO BE  
INVOLVED, PARTLY  
BECAUSE OF MY IN-  
VOLVEMENT IN THIS I  
WAS HIRED AT A  
MUTUAL ASSISTANCE  
ASSOCIATION WHERE  
I CAN CONTINUE MY  
WORK HELPING MY  
PEOPLE.



SO YOU SEE, IT WASN'T ALL THAT EASY. WE DIDN'T HAVE SOMEONE TO HELP US LIKE YOU DID. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH EASIER IF WE HAD A COMMUNITY ALREADY HERE LIKE THE CHINESE. THEN THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN OTHERS TO HELP US UNDERSTAND AND LEARN ABOUT AMERICA.



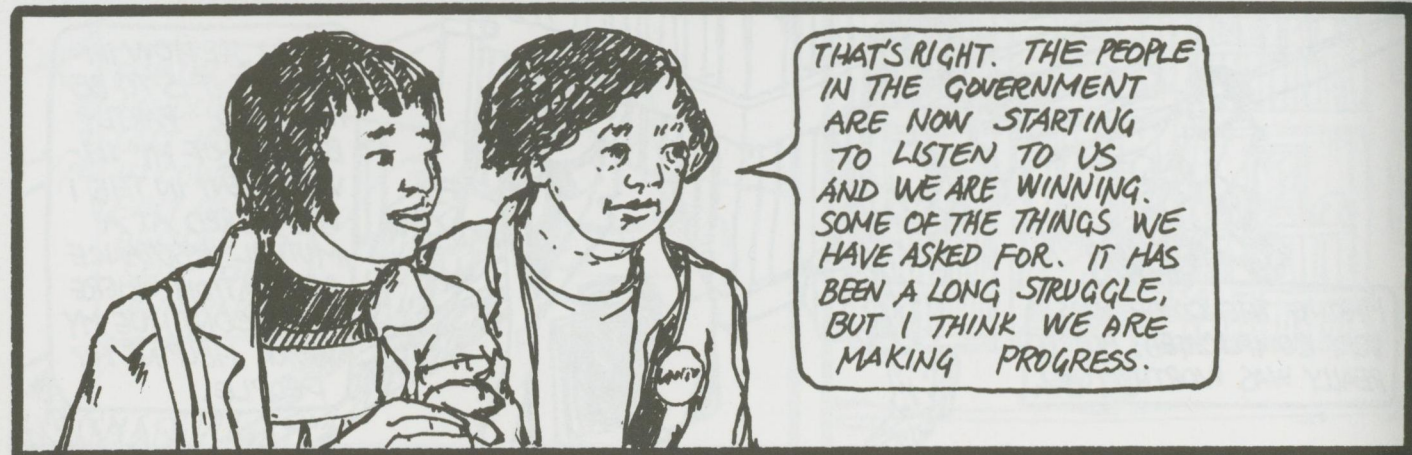
PEOPLE TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF US BECAUSE WE LOOK DIFFERENT, OR DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH. THAT IS WHY FOR US ALL TO WORK TOGETHER IS SO IMPORTANT. SO WE CAN HAVE PEOPLE WITH SKILLS, PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND HOW THINGS ARE DONE TO HELP US.



YES, JUST LIKE THE CHINESE AMERICAN LAWYER HELPED US.

MY FRIEND SAID SHE WAS WORKING WITH YOU. SHE SAID IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR ME TO COME, THAT EVEN STUDENTS HAD SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMMUNITY.

SO IS THAT WHY THERE ARE SO MANY PEOPLE FROM SO MANY GROUPS AND RACES HERE TODAY?

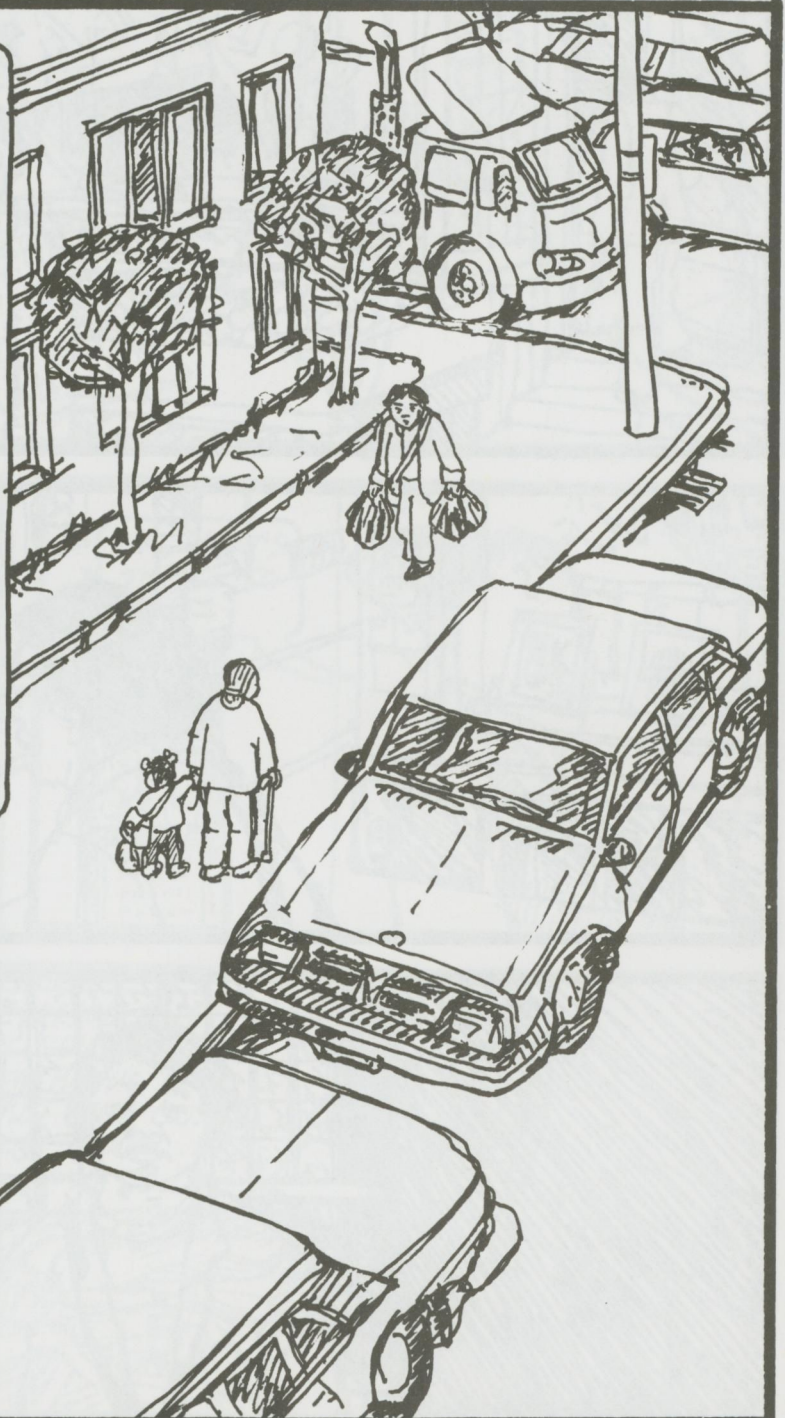


THAT'S RIGHT. THE PEOPLE IN THE GOVERNMENT ARE NOW STARTING TO LISTEN TO US AND WE ARE WINNING. SOME OF THE THINGS WE HAVE ASKED FOR. IT HAS BEEN A LONG STRUGGLE, BUT I THINK WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS.

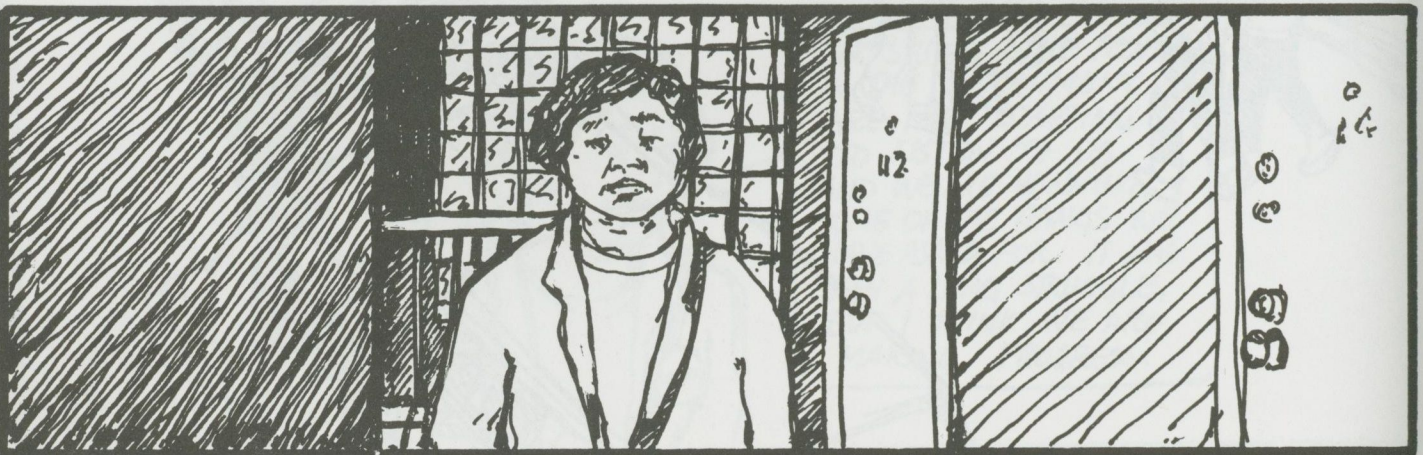


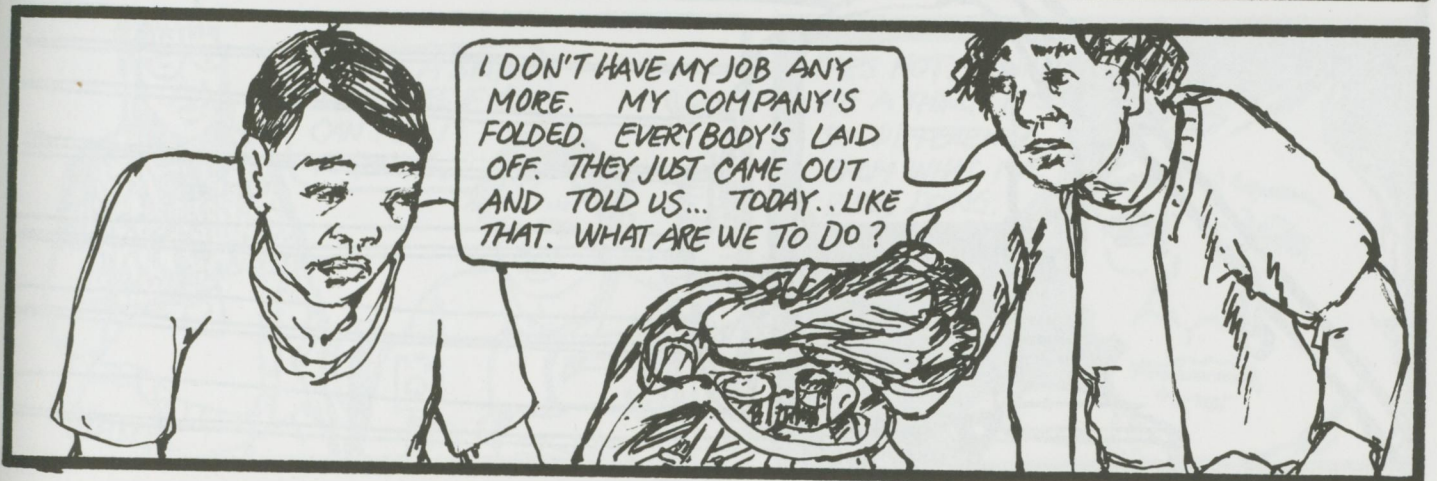
# The Garment Worker's Story

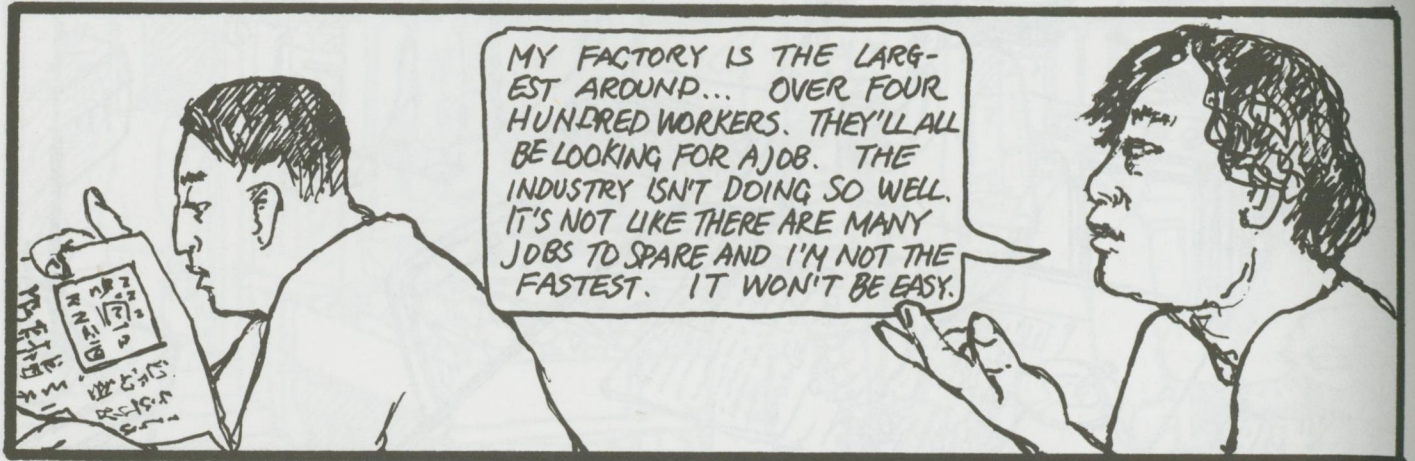
LIKE MANY CHINESE WORKING FAMILIES IN THE CITY, BOTH MY HUSBAND AND I HAD TO WORK TO EARN ENOUGH TO LIVE. MY HUSBAND HAS A JOB WITH A RESTAURANT IN A SUBURBAN TOWN. HE GETS PICKED UP BY VAN DURING THE DAY AND DOES NOT RETURN HOME UNTIL THE EARLY HOURS OF THE MORNING. THE DAYS ARE LONG AND THE WORK IS HARD, AND LIKE MANY OTHER CHINESE RESTAURANT WORKERS HE DOESN'T GET ANY JOB BENEFITS. AND LIKE MANY CHINESE WOMEN, I WORKED IN A GARMENT FACTORY IN THE CITY. ALTHOUGH THE WORK PLACE IS NOISY AND THERE IS CONSTANT PRESSURE TO PRODUCE, THE PIECEWORK WAGE IS NOT BAD. THERE IS ALSO THE COMPANIONSHIP OF OTHER WOMEN. I BELONG TO THE GARMENT WORKERS' UNION, SO MY HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN PROTECTED THE WHOLE FAMILY. WHEN THINGS WERE GOOD, WE MANAGED A LIVING.



THE GARMENT INDUSTRY IN THE REGION, HOWEVER IS IN DECLINE. WORK HAS BECOME SEASONAL. MANY JOBS HAVE MOVED TO OTHER STATES AND TO FOREIGN COUNTRIES WITH LESS UNION PROTECTION AND LOWER WAGES. THE FACTORIES CLOSED AND MANY OF US WERE LAID OFF.









YING! YOU ARE SO LATE! THE BOSS IS IN A REALLY BAD MOOD.

AH-YUK! THERE WERE SUCH LONG LINES AT THE UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE.



COME! COME! BUT HE'S IN A REALLY BAD MOOD.



HERE'S MY FRIEND. SHE WOULD LIKE TO WORK HERE.

CAN YOU SEW THIS STYLE. TRACY! HERE IS A GIRL...

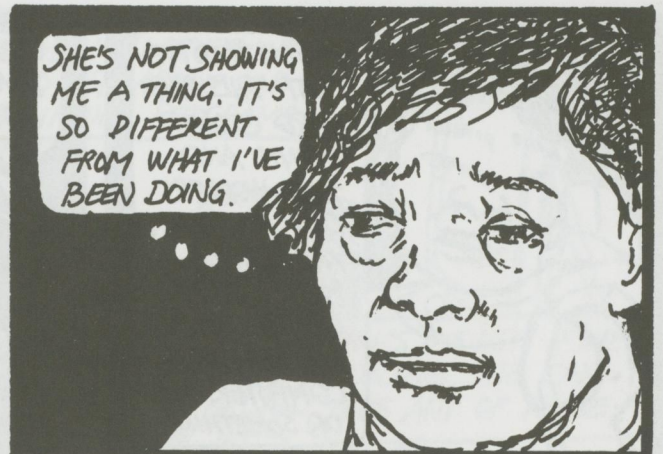


... FOR YOU TO CHECK OUT. HEY! NUMBER 55! WHAT'S THIS CRAP?

GO! GO WITH TRACY.



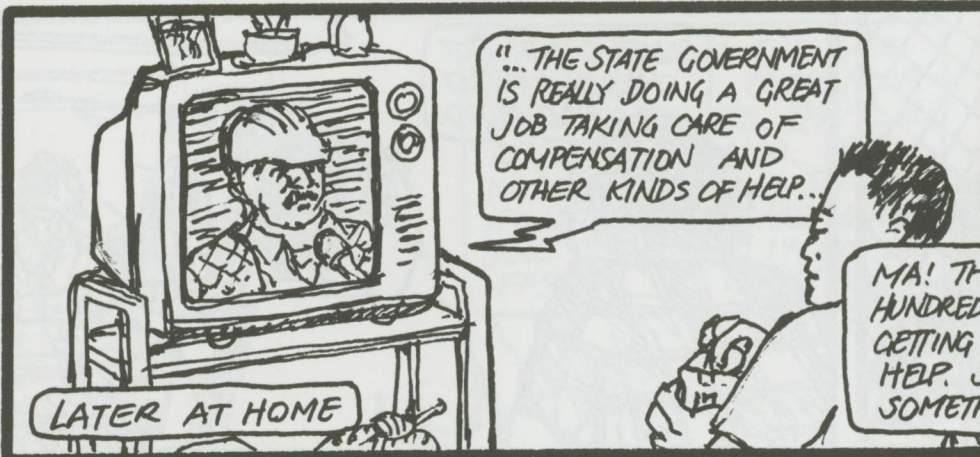
HERE IS A SIMPLE STYLE. SEE IF YOU CAN PUT IT TOGETHER.



SHE'S NOT SHOWING ME A THING. IT'S SO DIFFERENT FROM WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING.

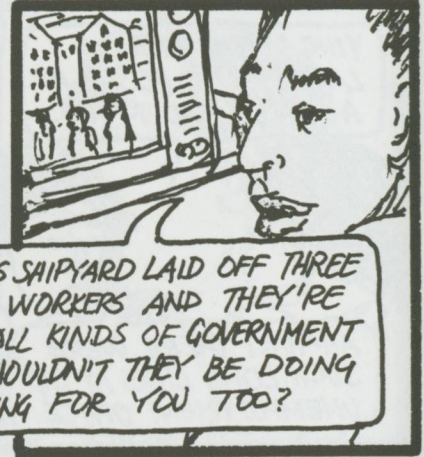


WE CAN'T USE YOU. NOT WITH THIS KIND OF LOUSY WORK. DO YOU THINK I RUN A GODDAM JOB TRAINING CENTER HERE?



LATER AT HOME

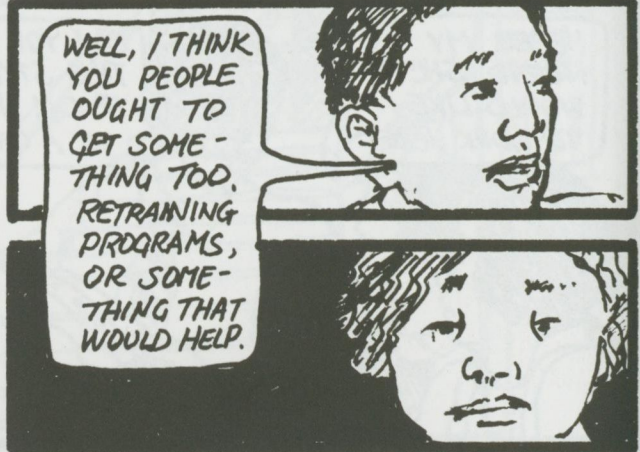
"... THE STATE GOVERNMENT IS REALLY DOING A GREAT JOB TAKING CARE OF COMPENSATION AND OTHER KINDS OF HELP...



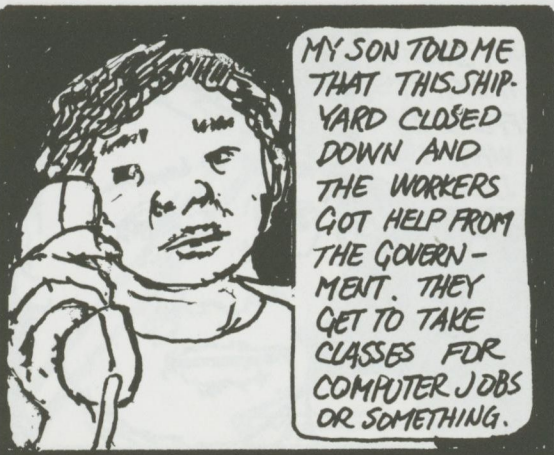
MA! THIS SHIPYARD LAID OFF THREE HUNDRED WORKERS AND THEY'RE GETTING ALL KINDS OF GOVERNMENT HELP. SHOULDN'T THEY BE DOING SOMETHING FOR YOU TOO?



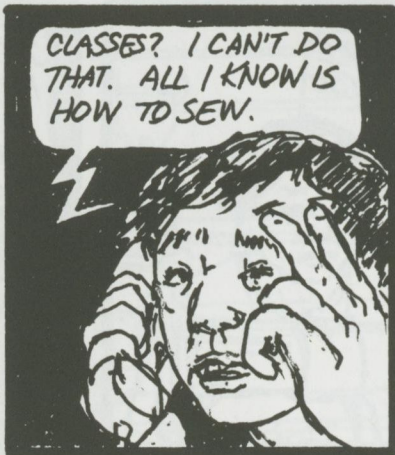
A SHIPYARD? OH, THEY ARE AMERICANS. A SEWING FACTORY WITH CHINESE WOMEN ISN'T THE SAME.



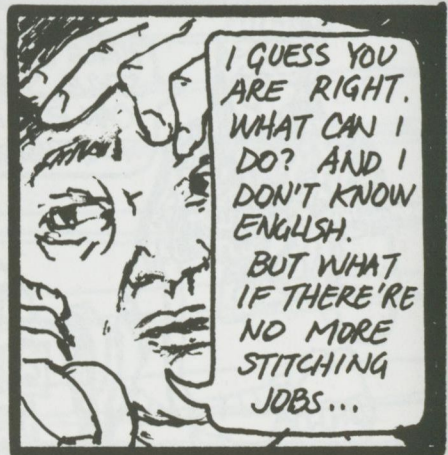
WELL, I THINK YOU PEOPLE OUGHT TO GET SOMETHING TOO. RETRAINING PROGRAMS, OR SOMETHING THAT WOULD HELP.



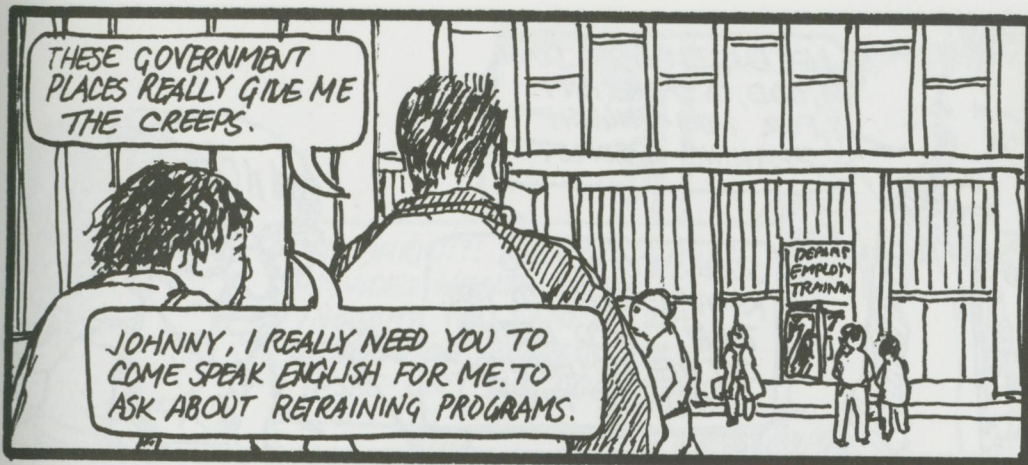
MY SON TOLD ME THAT THIS SHIPYARD CLOSED DOWN AND THE WORKERS GOT HELP FROM THE GOVERNMENT. THEY GET TO TAKE CLASSES FOR COMPUTER JOBS OR SOMETHING.



CLASSES? I CAN'T DO THAT. ALL I KNOW IS HOW TO SEW.



I GUESS YOU ARE RIGHT. WHAT CAN I DO? AND I DON'T KNOW ENGLISH. BUT WHAT IF THERE'RE NO MORE STITCHING JOBS...

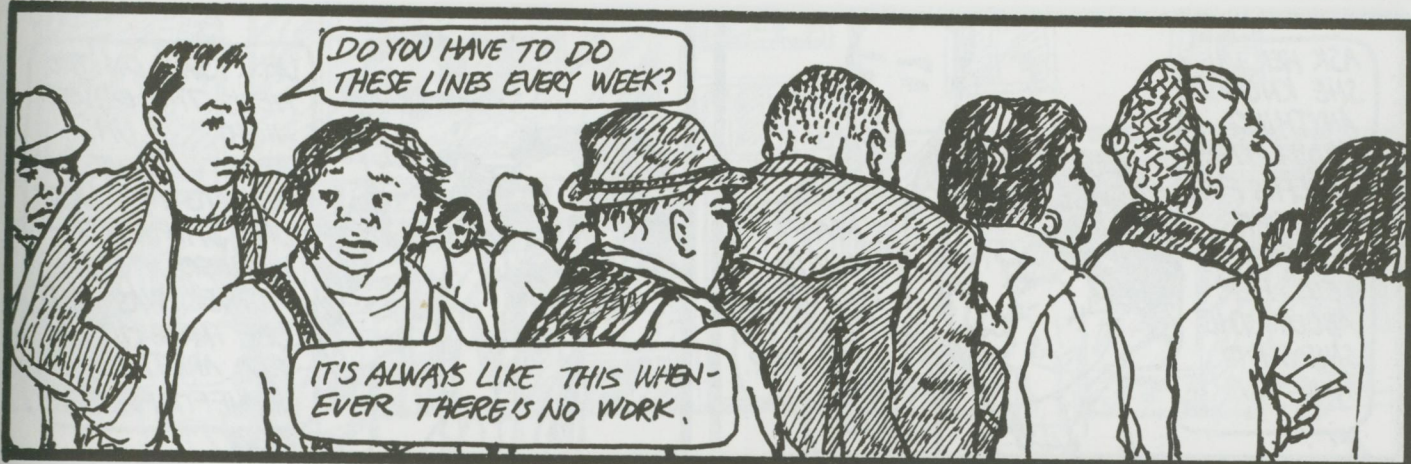


THESE GOVERNMENT PLACES REALLY GIVE ME THE CREEPS.

JOHNNY, I REALLY NEED YOU TO COME SPEAK ENGLISH FOR ME. TO ASK ABOUT RETRAINING PROGRAMS.



I GUESS I CAN FORGET THE BASKETBALL PRACTICE.



DO YOU HAVE TO DO THESE LINES EVERY WEEK?

IT'S ALWAYS LIKE THIS WHENEVER THERE'S NO WORK.

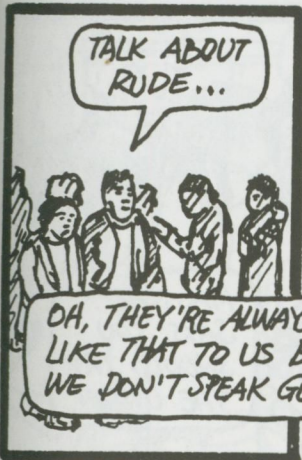


LOOKED FOR WORK THIS WEEK?



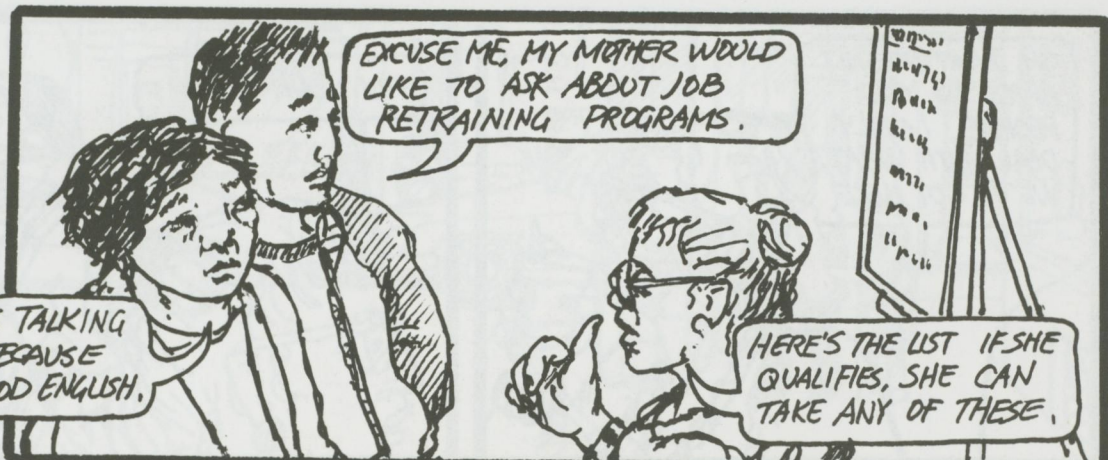
MY MOTHER WOULD LIKE TO ASK ABOUT JOB RETRAINING PROGRAMS.

GO TO WINDOW #6. NEXT!



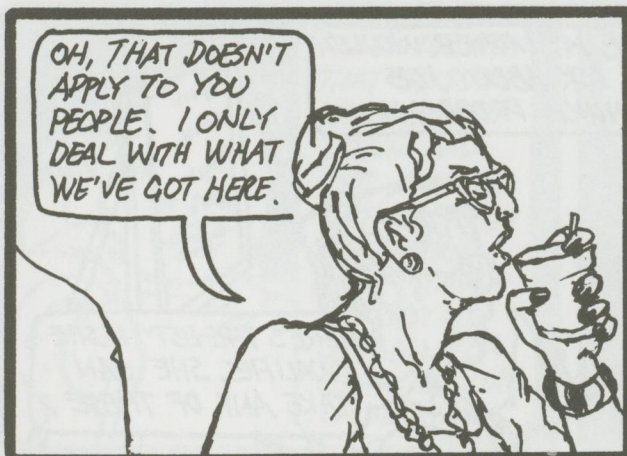
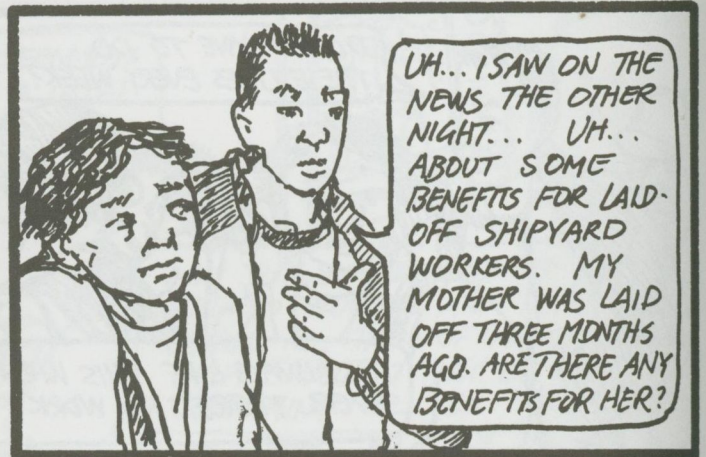
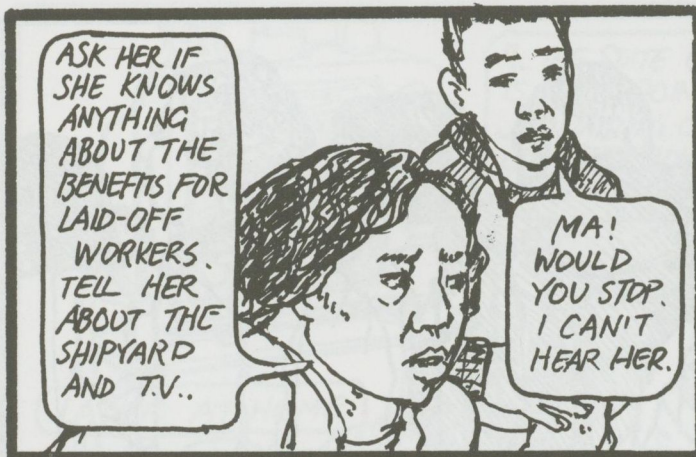
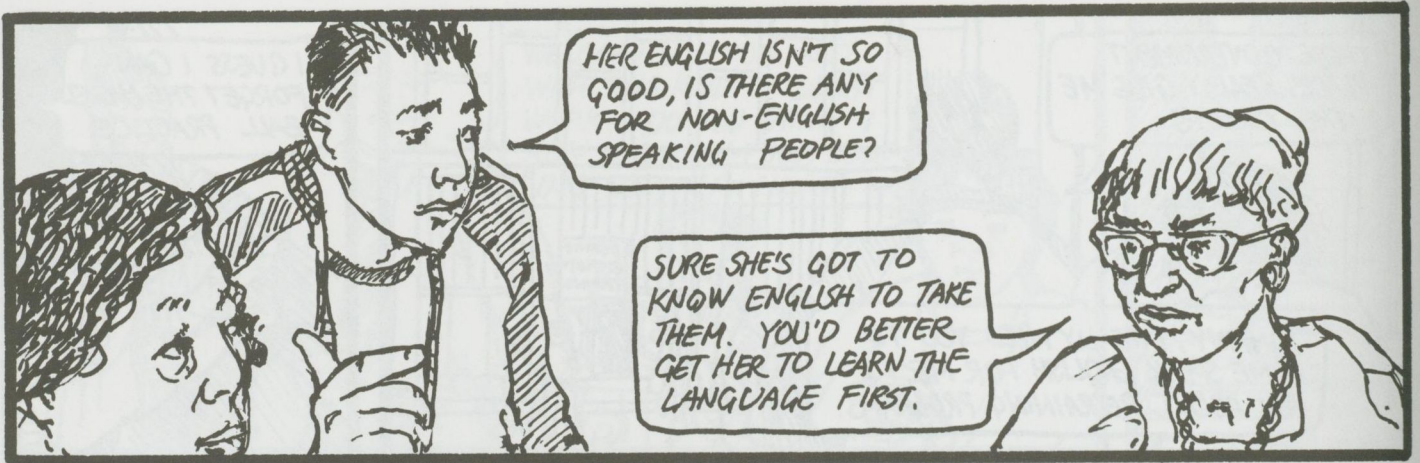
TALK ABOUT RUDE...

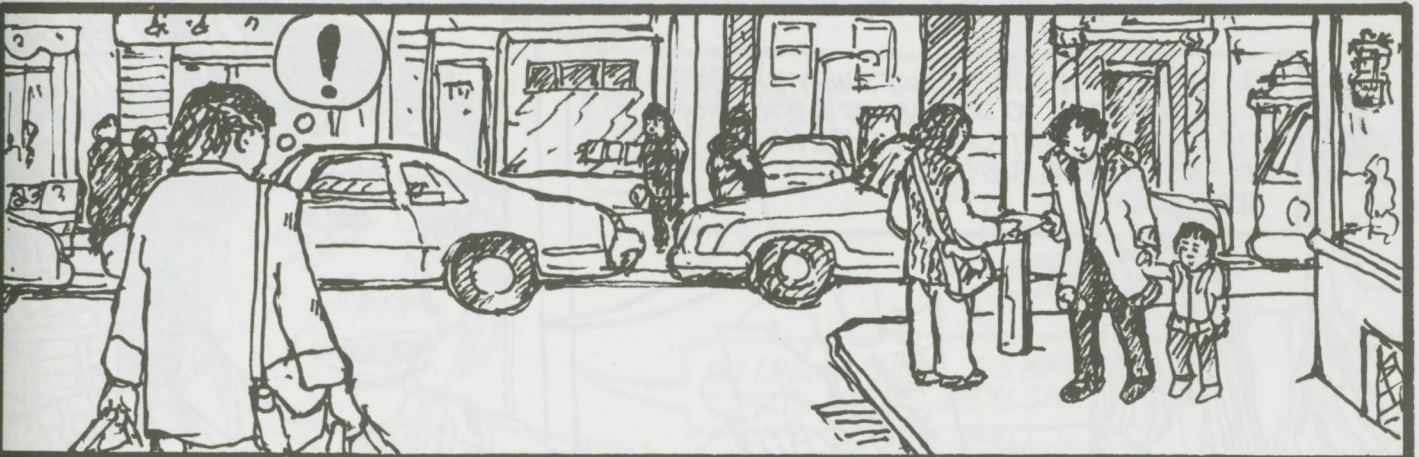
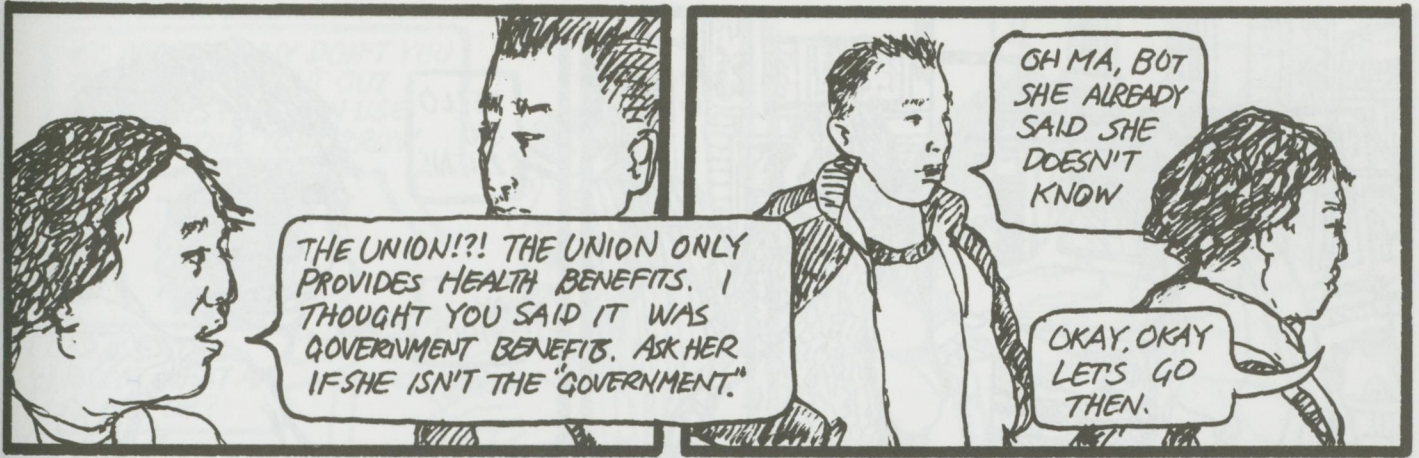
OH, THEY'RE ALWAYS TALKING LIKE THAT TO US BECAUSE WE DON'T SPEAK GOOD ENGLISH.



EXCUSE ME, MY MOTHER WOULD LIKE TO ASK ABOUT JOB RETRAINING PROGRAMS.

HERE'S THE LIST IF SHE QUALIFIES, SHE CAN TAKE ANY OF THESE.







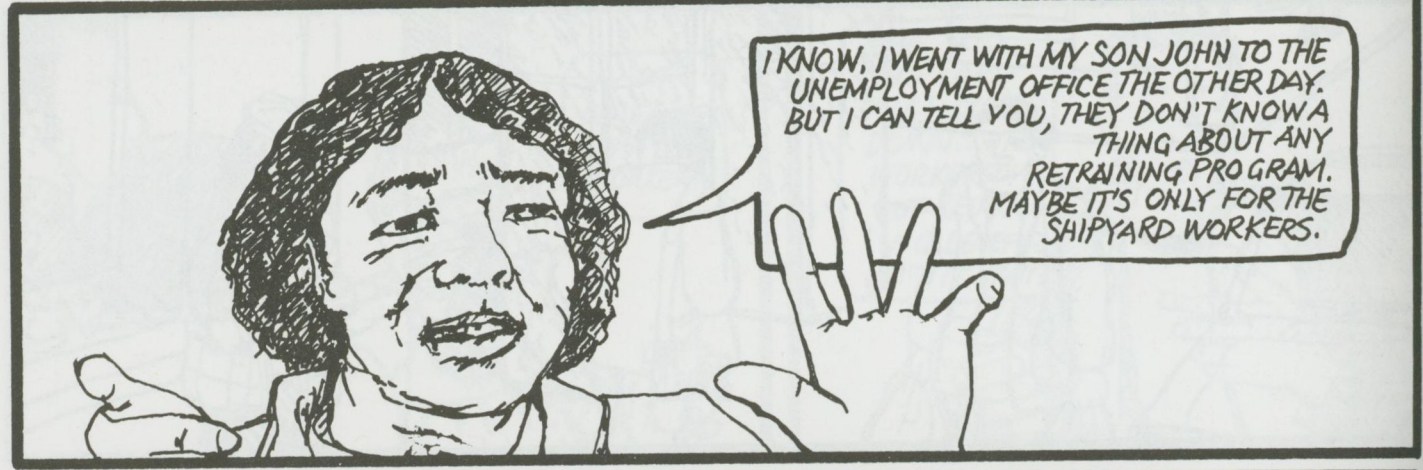
HELLO  
SIU  
ZHEN!

AH  
YING!



WHAT CRAZY  
THING ARE  
YOU UP TO  
NOW?

OH! Haha! I AM PASSING OUT  
LEAFLETS WE ARE TO HAVE A  
MEETING ABOUT WHAT  
HAPPENED TO US. DO YOU  
KNOW WE ARE SUPPOSED TO  
HAVE RETRAINING PROGRAMS  
BECAUSE WE ARE  
"DISLOCATED WORKERS"?



I KNOW, I WENT WITH MY SON JOHN TO THE  
UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE THE OTHER DAY.  
BUT I CAN TELL YOU, THEY DON'T KNOW A  
THING ABOUT ANY  
RETRAINING PROGRAM.  
MAYBE IT'S ONLY FOR THE  
SHIPYARD WORKERS.



NO! WE PAY TAXES TOO! THAT'S WHY WE HAVE  
TO GET TOGETHER TO TALK ABOUT THE KIND OF  
HELP WE NEED. THAT'S WHY WE ARE HAVING  
THIS MEETING FOR EVERYBODY NEXT  
WEDNESDAY.

華人  
大家互助

HEY, AH YING, WHY DON'T YOU  
COME HELP US PUT OUT  
LEAFLETS? WE CAN USE  
SOMEONE TOMORROW.

ME? ARE YOU  
CRAZY? WHAT AM  
I GOOD FOR?

LIKE MY  
HUSBAND  
SAYS,  
I CAN EAT,  
I CAN  
SLEEP, I  
CAN SEW.

DON'T SAY THAT! THAT'S  
SILLY TALK! IT'S NOT TRUE  
AND WE'LL PROVE IT!

SO YOU WANT  
ME TO STAND IN  
THE STREET  
CORNER AND  
PASS OUT  
LEAFLETS?

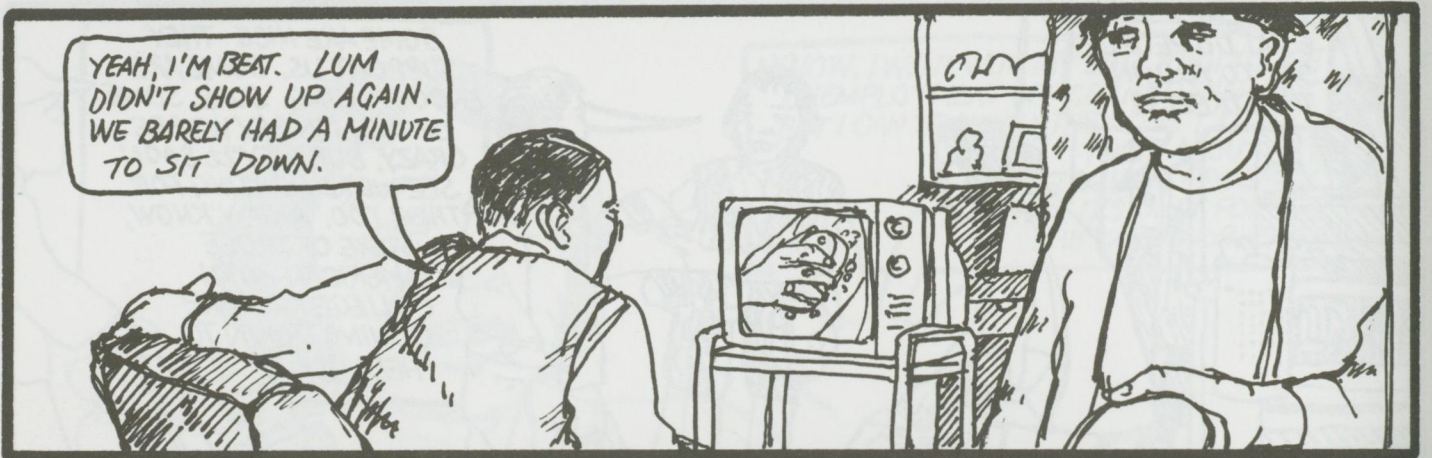
WHY NOT? WE'LL  
GET THE COMMUNITY  
BEHIND US. NO  
ONE'LL CARE IF WE  
JUST WAIT AROUND.  
LIKE IDIOTS.  
WE'LL GET  
PEOPLE  
WORKING  
WITH US.

WHAT DO PEOPLE  
SAY TO YOU, IN  
THE STREETS?

SOME ARE NICE THEY  
SUPPORT US. SOME ARE  
ENCOURAGING. SURE, SOME  
OF THE MEN SAY WE ARE  
CRAZY, BUT THEY'LL SOON  
SEE WE'RE FIGHTING FOR  
THEM TOO. AND, Y'KNOW,  
SOME OF THOSE  
AMERICAN-BORN  
COLLEGE KIDS ARE  
COMING DOWN TO  
HELP US!

SO, DO YOU  
THINK YOU CAN  
MAKE IT TO-  
MORROW?

OH I DON'T KNOW... IT'S KIND OF  
CRAZY... MAYBE... WE'LL SEE...





HER POOR HUSBAND! DOES HE KNOW? DOESN'T HE MIND?

WHAT DO I KNOW WHAT HER HUSBAND MINDS? BUT SHE SAYS THEY'RE PUTTING TOGETHER A MEETING TO HELP OURSELVES.



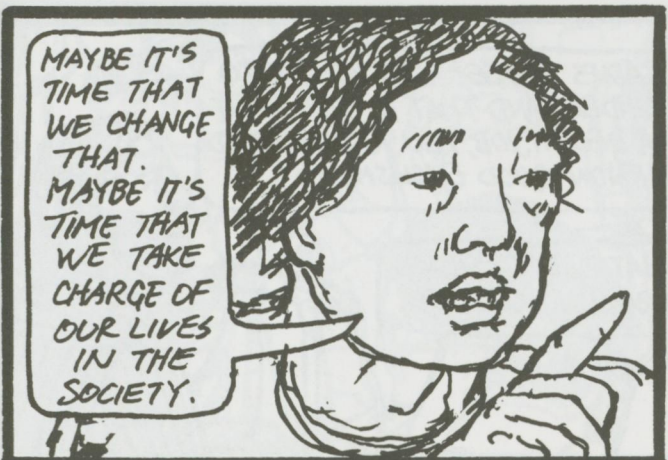
A MEETING? HELP YOURSELVES? A BUNCH OF CHINESE WOMEN WHO DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH. WHO DO YOU THINK WILL LISTEN TO THEM?



SHE ASKED ME TO GO HELP HER TOMORROW.



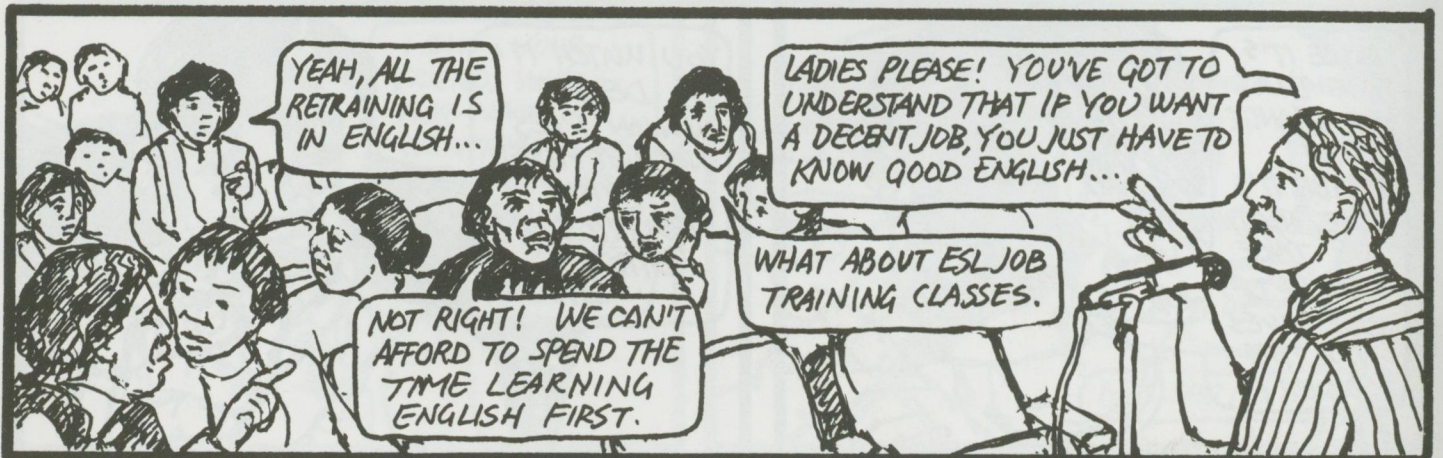
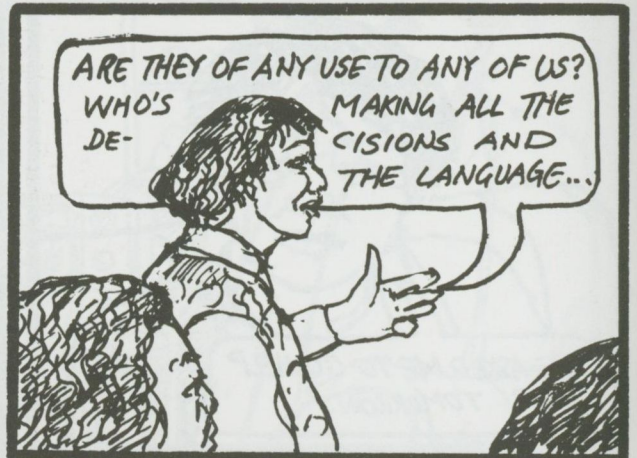
WE CHINESE SURVIVE BECAUSE WE DON'T MEDDLE IN THE GOVERNMENT OR THE UNIONS. WE DON'T BOTHER THEM, THEY DON'T BOTHER US.

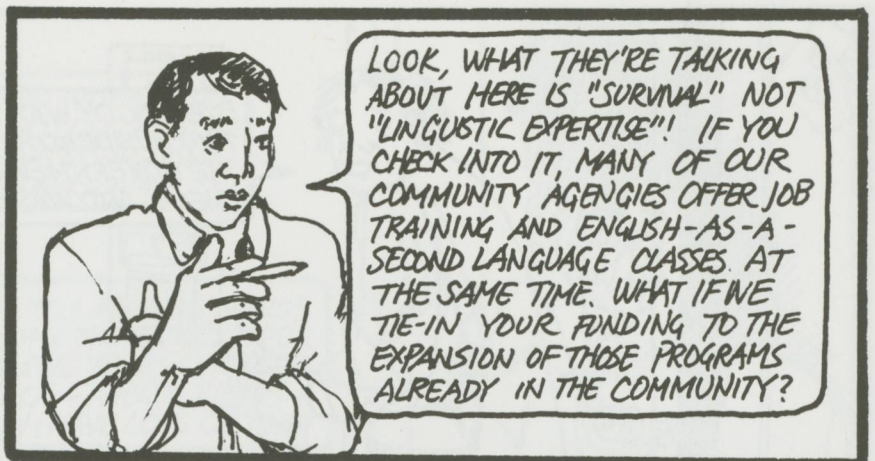


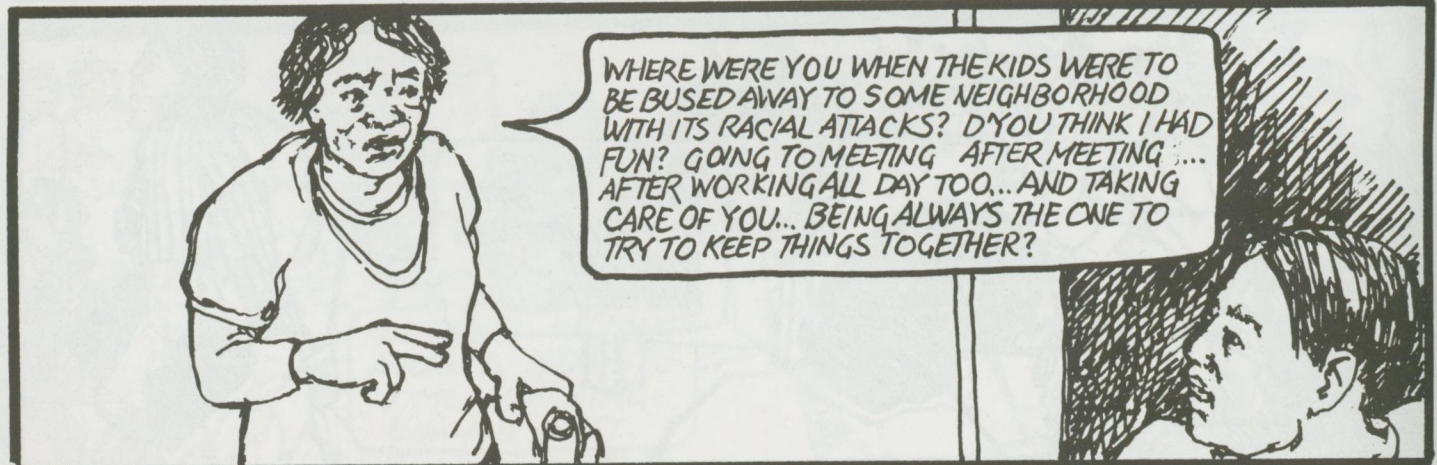
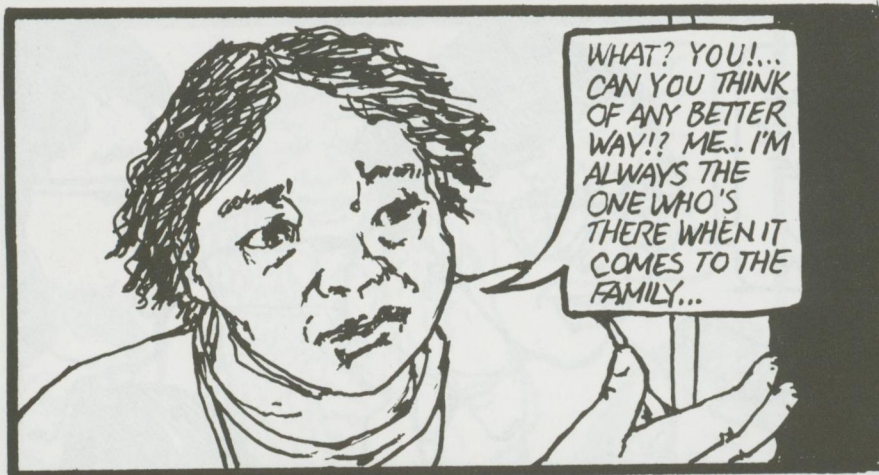
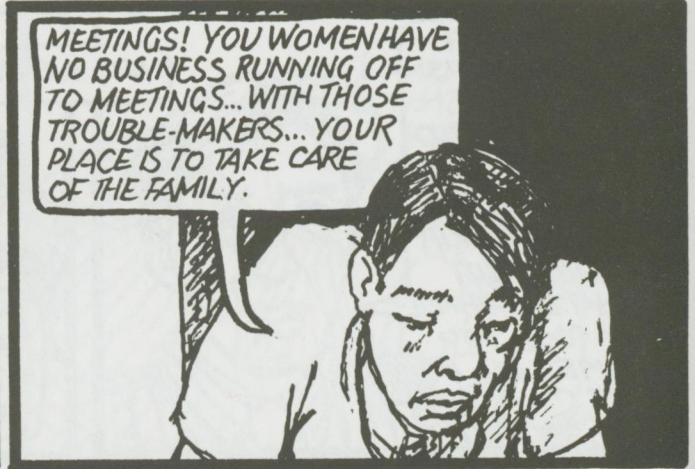
MAYBE IT'S TIME THAT WE CHANGE THAT. MAYBE IT'S TIME THAT WE TAKE CHARGE OF OUR LIVES IN THE SOCIETY.

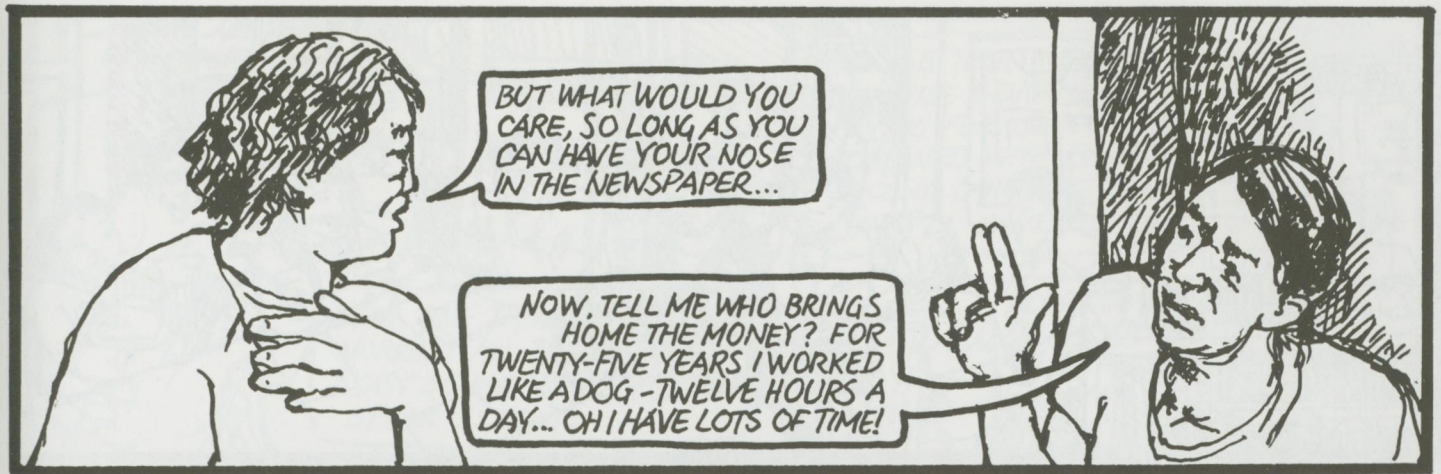


YOU WATCH IT! A DECENT WOMAN DOES NOT GET MIXED UP WITH POLITICS ON STREET CORNERS.



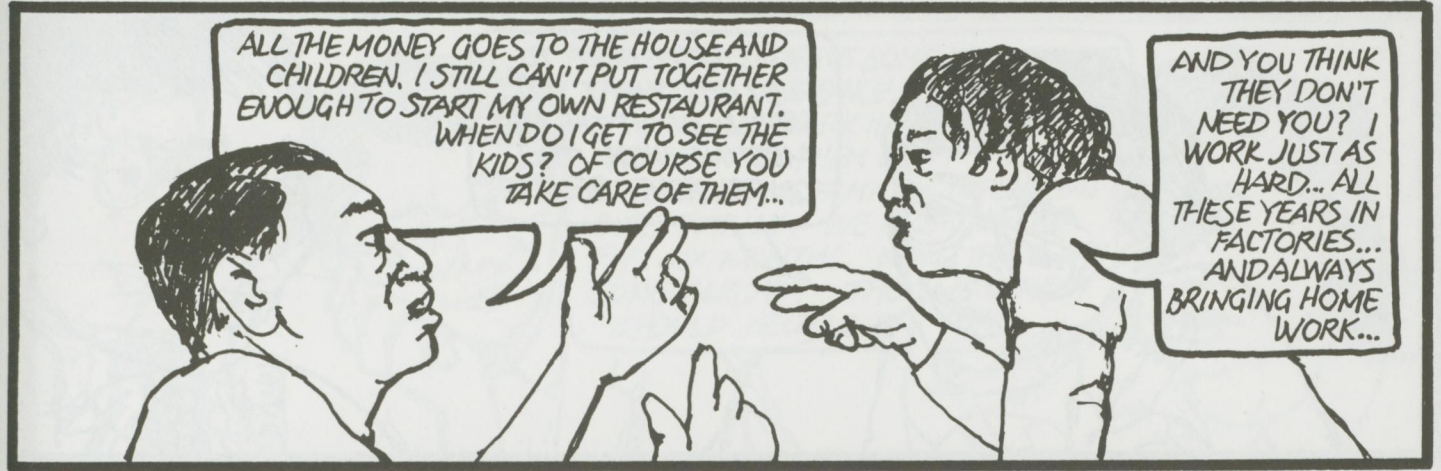






BUT WHAT WOULD YOU CARE, SO LONG AS YOU CAN HAVE YOUR NOSE IN THE NEWSPAPER...

NOW, TELL ME WHO BRINGS HOME THE MONEY? FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS I WORKED LIKE A DOG - TWELVE HOURS A DAY... OH I HAVE LOTS OF TIME!

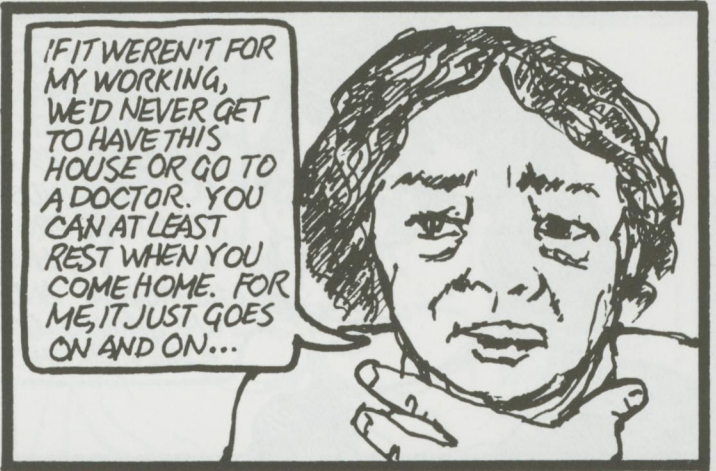


ALL THE MONEY GOES TO THE HOUSE AND CHILDREN. I STILL CAN'T PUT TOGETHER ENOUGH TO START MY OWN RESTAURANT. WHEN DO I GET TO SEE THE KIDS? OF COURSE YOU TAKE CARE OF THEM...

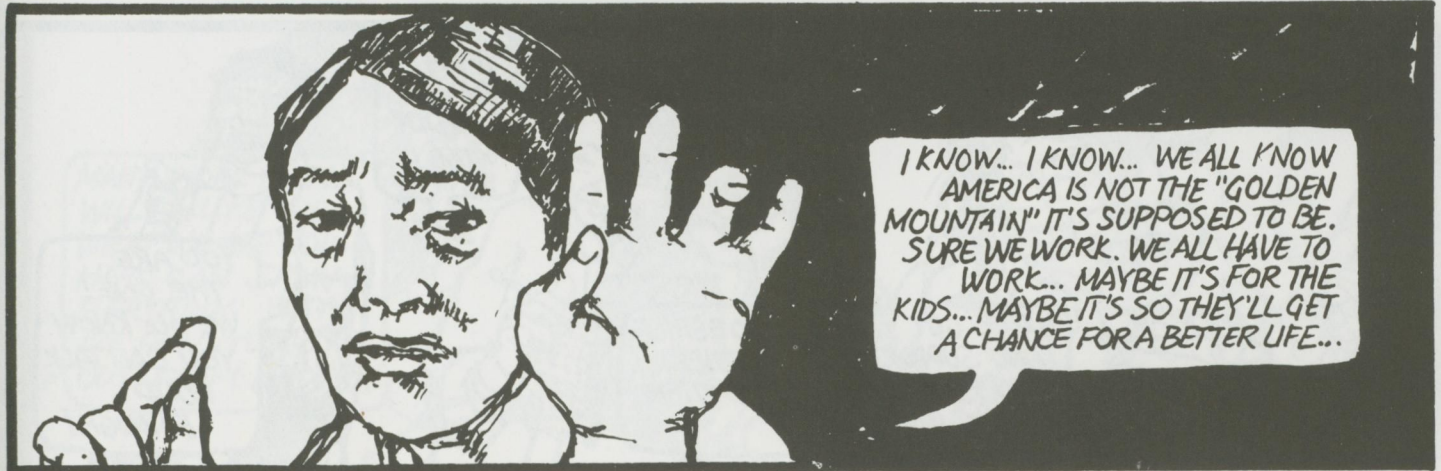
AND YOU THINK THEY DON'T NEED YOU? I WORK JUST AS HARD... ALL THESE YEARS IN FACTORIES... AND ALWAYS BRINGING HOME WORK...



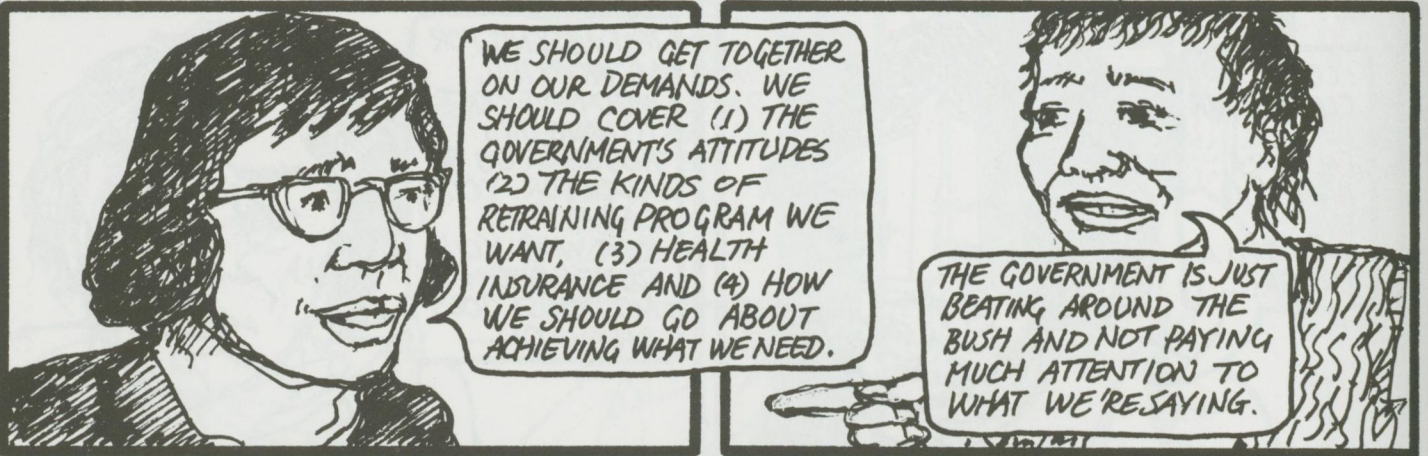
I COOK, I CLEAN YOUR DIRTY LAUNDRY... HAVE YOU EVER CHANGED A DIAPER?...



IF IT WEREN'T FOR MY WORKING, WE'D NEVER GET TO HAVE THIS HOUSE OR GO TO A DOCTOR. YOU CAN AT LEAST REST WHEN YOU COME HOME. FOR ME, IT JUST GOES ON AND ON...

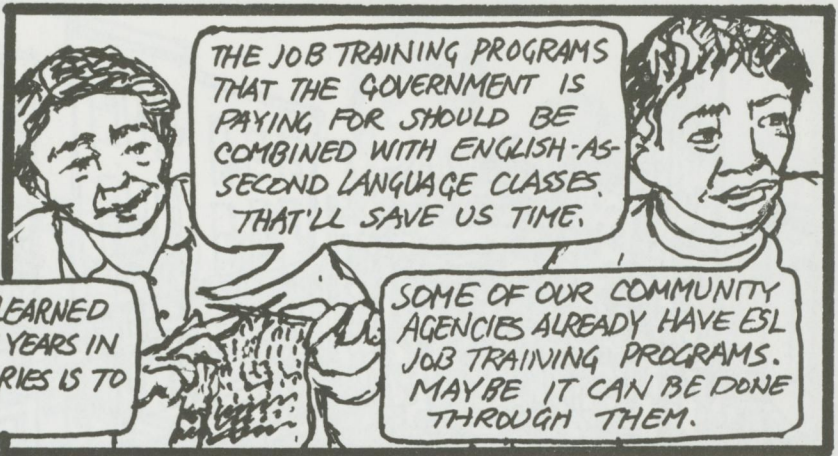


I KNOW... I KNOW... WE ALL KNOW AMERICA IS NOT THE "GOLDEN MOUNTAIN" IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE. SURE WE WORK. WE ALL HAVE TO WORK... MAYBE IT'S FOR THE KIDS... MAYBE IT'S SO THEY'LL GET A CHANCE FOR A BETTER LIFE...

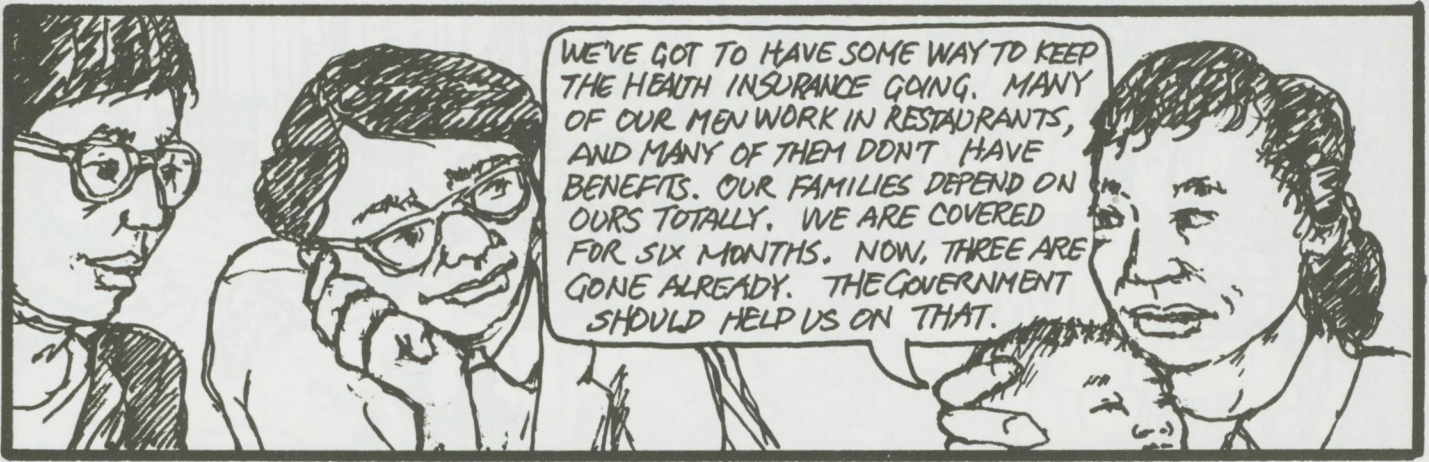


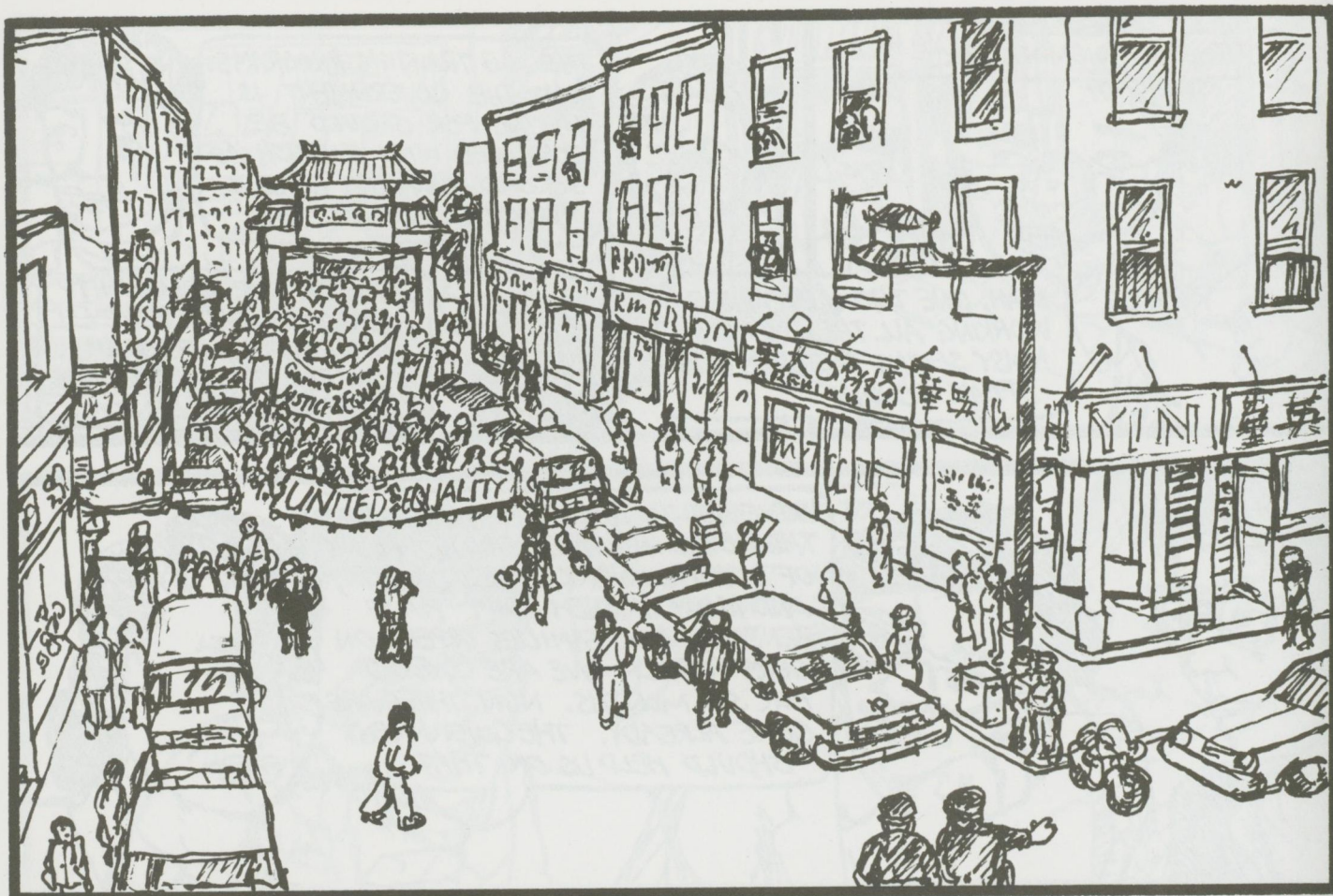


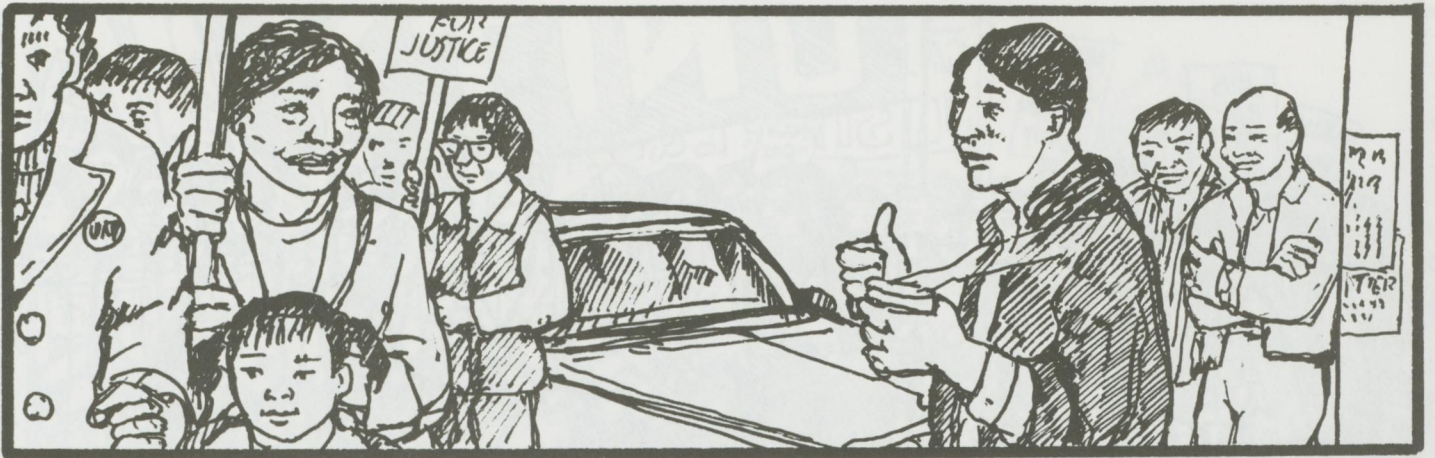
YEAH, ONE THING I LEARNED WORKING ALL THESE YEARS IN NOISY SEWING FACTORIES IS TO SPEAK LOUDLY.



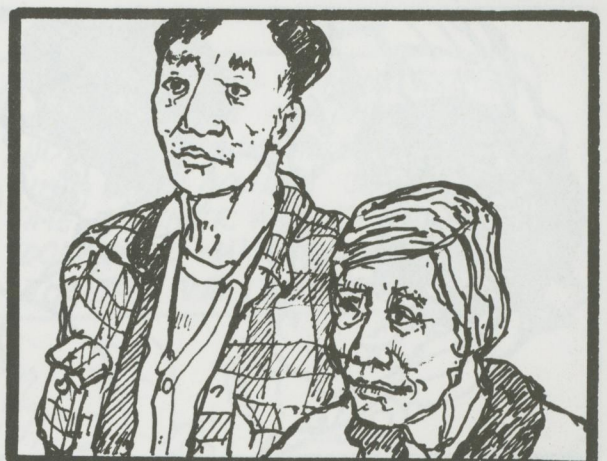
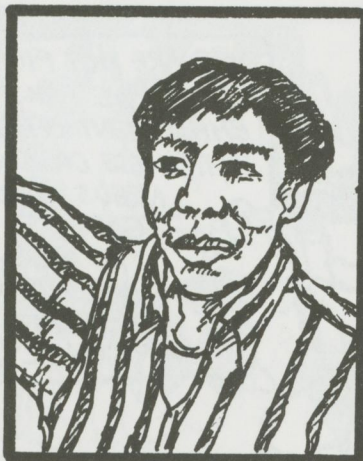
SOME OF OUR COMMUNITY AGENCIES ALREADY HAVE ESL JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS. MAYBE IT CAN BE DONE THROUGH THEM.









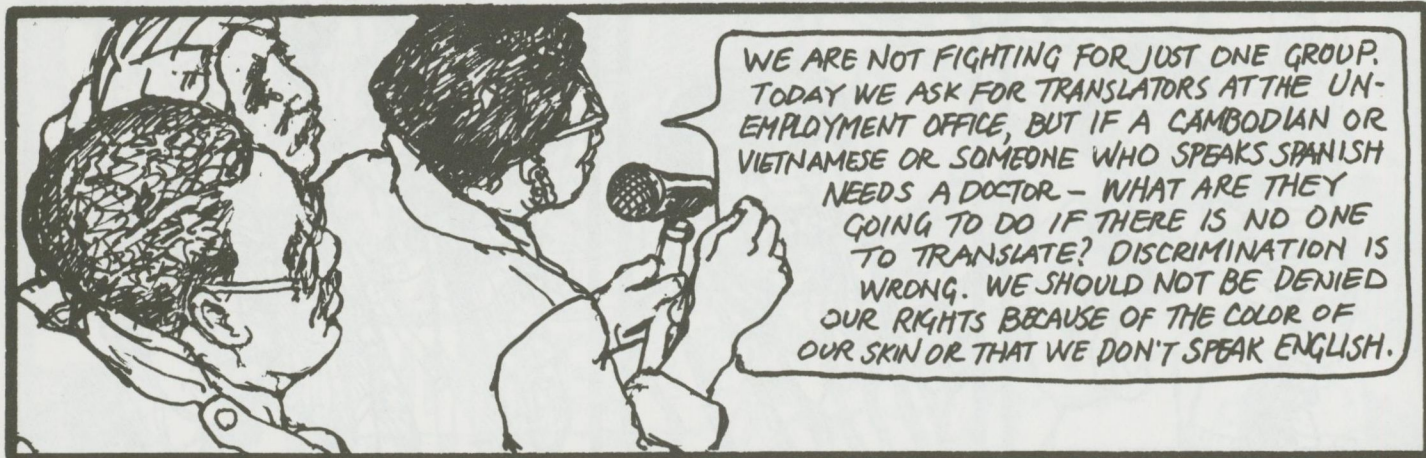




WE CAN CHANGE THINGS AND FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE ALL HELP EACH OTHER - WORK TOGETHER.



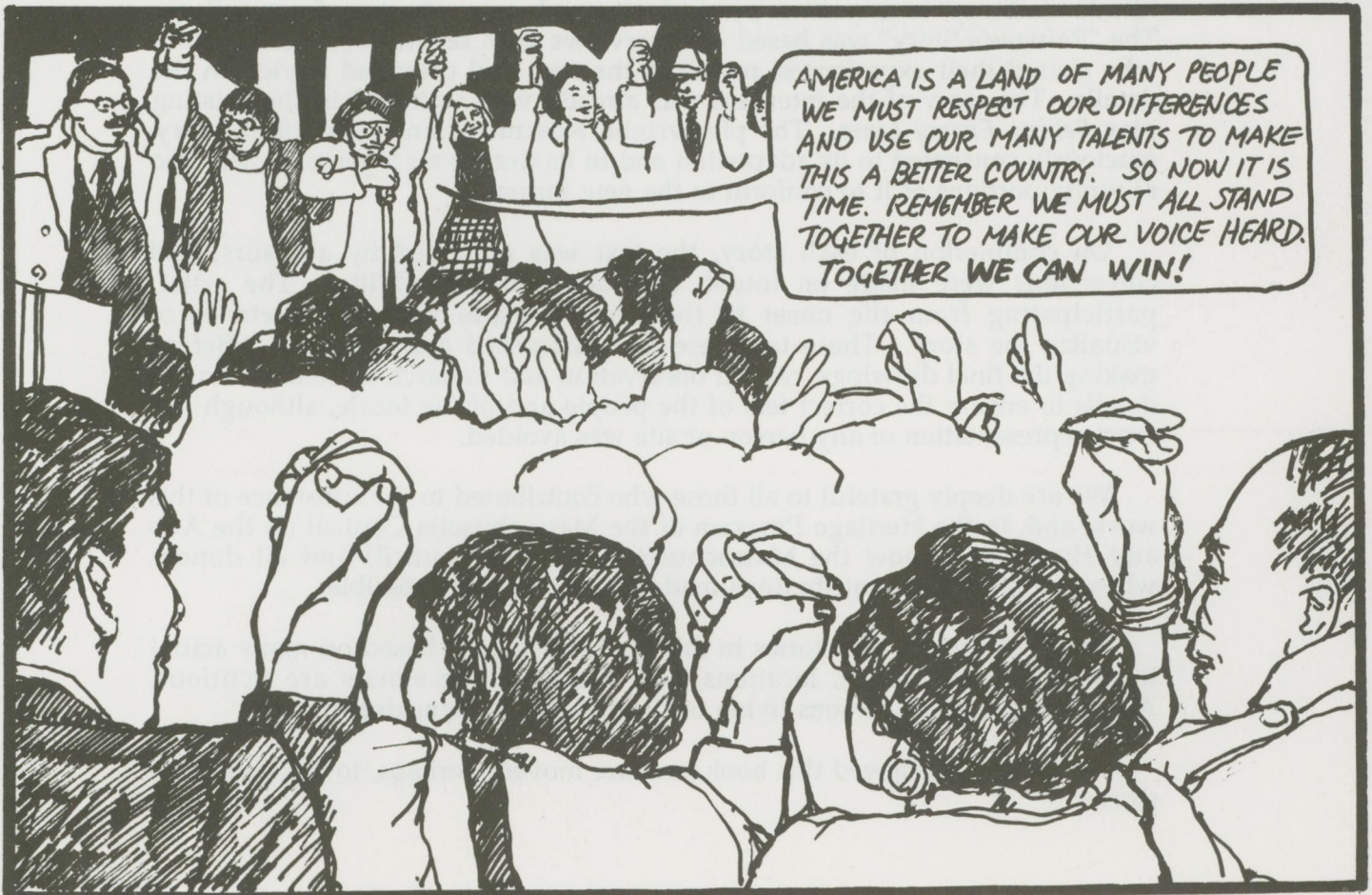
TO BUILD A CULTURE THAT IS BOTH ASIAN AND AMERICAN.



WE ARE NOT FIGHTING FOR JUST ONE GROUP. TODAY WE ASK FOR TRANSLATORS AT THE UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE, BUT IF A CAMBODIAN OR VIETNAMESE OR SOMEONE WHO SPEAKS SPANISH NEEDS A DOCTOR - WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO IF THERE IS NO ONE TO TRANSLATE? DISCRIMINATION IS WRONG. WE SHOULD NOT BE DENIED OUR RIGHTS BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF OUR SKIN OR THAT WE DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH.



YES, IT WAS IMPORTANT WE ALL WORKED TOGETHER. WHEN I WAS LAID OFF IT WAS REALLY IMPORTANT THAT MANY PEOPLE HELPED US. WE ORGANIZED OURSELVES AND WE ALL HELPED EACH OTHER.



## A NOTE ON THE STORIES

The *Asian American Comic Book* was created through a process that involved the collective work of dozens of people.

There were several reasons for the decision to make a comic book. One, comic books and picture-stories are familiar forms both in America and in many Asian societies. Another, the format is easily accessible to people of different ages and language backgrounds. And, most important, pictures sometimes can describe with more immediacy the lives, the surroundings and the emotions of people and express their stories more convincingly than just words. Many experiences of Asian Americans — immigrants, refugees, students, and community activists — had not often been told realistically in this form before. The intent of this book is to tell those stories, and in doing so, to communicate more truthfully the lives of those Asian Americans.

To conceptualize the book, a group of advisors, representing the diversity of the Asian American community in Massachusetts, was formed. After much discussion, the group decided to focus on the four stories featured here. With great regret, many other good stories — of other experiences, other nationalities and other sectors of the community — had to be left out, hopefully to be told later, in other volumes.

Smaller work units then met to formulate the theme, content, and development of each story. Workshops were held for members of the Asian American Resource Workshop interested in doing writing. Eventually, AARW volunteers who had participated in helping to organize for the welfare of the garment workers wrote the "Garment Worker's Story". The "Student's Story" was written by student members graduating from college. The "Refugee's Story" was based on interviews with several Southeast Asians who shared their experiences, reviewed the text, and provided advice on the details. The story of the internees was already very well-told in the existing play *Behind Enemy Lines*. The playwright, Rosanna Yamagiwa Alfaro, very graciously consented to its adaptation and to its drastic abridgement. She also re-wrote portions of it to conform to the new format.

On completion of each story, the text was reviewed by advisors, and corrections were made on intent, accuracy and plausibility. The artist, participating from the onset in the project, made narrative sketches to visualize the story. These too were then discussed and amended. Before making the final drawings, careful observation and research were done on the details to ensure the correct feel of the people and of the locale, although the exact representation of any person or site was avoided.

We are deeply grateful to all those who contributed to the substance of this work, and, to the Heritage Program of the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities (now the Massachusetts Cultural Council) and all donors whose funding and contributions made this publication possible.

Finally, although the stories in this book are largely based on many actual incidents, all characters, locations, and events in the stories are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

We hope you enjoyed this book, and are moved, perhaps, to tell your own stories.

*"Unlike many two-dimensional depictions of cartoon people, (the) expressive drawings reveal a wide spectrum of emotions — anger, hope, frustration, joy. As the stories unfold, the faces of (the) characters respond with natural ease. A reader becomes as familiar with these faces as one does with people in real life.*

*"What gives the scenes an extra three dimensional drama is the illustration of social background. Street scenes, landscapes, and skies occupy the lives behind these stories as much as words themselves."*

Catherine Anderson,  
Editor, *Sampan* Newspaper

Comic books and picture-stories are familiar forms both in America and in many Asian societies. They are easily accessible to people of different ages and language backgrounds. Pictures can sometimes describe with more immediacy the lives, the surroundings and the emotions of people and can express their stories more convincingly than just words. Many experiences of Asian Americans — immigrants, refugees, students, and community activists — had not been told realistically in this form before. This book tells those stories, and communicates truthfully, in pictures and words, the lives of these Asian Americans.

- **"The Internee's Story"** tells the story of loss and conflict within a Japanese American family trying to live through World War II confined in an internment camp.
- **"The Student's Story"** deals with the cross-cultural and cross-generational dilemmas faced by an immigrant Indian college student.
- **"The Refugee's Story"** follows the experiences of a Cambodian refugee from a camp in Thailand to a new life in the U.S., where he had to confront racism and cultural adjustments.
- **"The Garment Worker's Story"** describes how a seemingly docile Chinese woman worker discovers her strength and the community's support when the factory where she worked closes.

These are stories based on real incidents, told and written by people with direct or close knowledge of the events. The drawings are carefully researched to describe with observed details the environment people live in and the emotions in their daily lives.

**The Asian American Resource Workshop (AARW)** is a non-profit, educational, membership organization which addresses Asian American issues, history, and experience. It acts as a resource for the Asian American communities through activities which include collecting and disseminating information, holding events and forums, advocating for accurate images of Asian Americans and developing publications and media. Its goals are uniting the Asian American communities, facilitating Asian American participation in all spheres of society, improving society's understanding of, and empowering Asian Americans.

**Wen-ti Tsen** was born in China, graduated from the Boston Museum School. He makes paintings and installation pieces that look critically at this society's traditional mythic icons. His direction is to work, with other artists and cultural people, to create new images and ideas that would affirm multicultural America. He also does murals and graphic work in the community; and, sometimes he lectures and teaches.

Published by  
ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE WORKSHOP  
34 Oak Street, Third Floor, Boston, MA 02111 (617) 426-5313