

OF PEOPLE OUR COMMUNITIES

**THE LOCALIZED
HISTORY PROJECT**

@AAARI-GUNY

EDUCATOR GUIDE

When We Come Together, We Win

FOR THE PERSPECTIVES OF OUR PAST,
PRESENT AND FUTURE

AMERASA CREATIVE ARTS
ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE CENTER

BIQUE MAGAZINE

CHINATOWN COMMUNITY PLANNING WORKSHOP

A NOTE FROM THE YOUTH RESEARCHER:

WHY TEACH THIS HISTORY

Hi, my name is Inis!

I like to describe myself as an “artist,” someone who uses art for social change. I have grown up as a visual artist, but this part of my identity was enhanced last summer, when I conducted a research project about art’s impact on carceral settings. It was then that I did a series of interviews with formerly incarcerated people, artists, muralists, educators, and poets. In one interview, I conversed with a formerly incarcerated person who expressed his determination to benefit the world through art. His hope for the future was ineffable, reminding me of the stories that are lost in classroom settings.

I often learned about mass incarceration through statistics, but these numbers grouped all these unique experiences together. But it was through these conversations that I found my love for listening and exploring the intersection of art and history through human experience. I joined the Localized History Project, hoping to continue learning about people’s stories in oral history format and transform their valuable lived experiences into history curricula. I truly believe there is power in taking the time to listen to the stories of others with openness and empathy.

“Artivism” through oral history is the core of my exhibit, which explores intergenerational solidarity through art in Chinatown. This project highlights the Basement Workshop in the 1970s to contemporary collectives like the Chinatown Art Brigade, which continue this legacy of visual storytelling to preserve memories. I wanted to push against the flawed framework of Orientalism, which has portrayed Asian Americans as passive and silent. But instead, spotlight how artistic practices have connected Asian Americans to enable community resilience, something I had never explored in history classrooms.

Through my oral histories with activists like Betty Yu and Tomie Arai (two co-founders of the Chinatown Art Brigade), I’ve learned so much about how they have used art to unify the people of Chinatown and preserve the stories of the working class.

I hope that my exhibit shows that “artivism” has always been a part of Chinatown’s history, and that these collectives exist within a continuum of Asian American organizing. In a time of political polarization and erasure, this history is a reminder that art can bring people together through storytelling and reimagining the future. And when we come together, we can win.

Thank you for engaging with my work!

Inis Chen is currently a senior at LaGuardia High School, majoring in fine arts. In the fall, Inis will be attending Harvard, concentrating in History and Government. She identifies herself as an “artist” who enjoys exploring how creativity is a powerful outlet for change-making. At LaGuardia, she has enjoyed creating a community of “artists” through her initiative, LaGuardia’s Equitable Arts Program (LEAP), bringing art to under-resourced communities through the means of sketchbooks, symbolizing the first step to their creative journeys. Her research is rooted in her artistic upbringing and the importance of visual storytelling to preserve memories that are often erased by gentrification. She hopes to spotlight the real-world impact of the arts, showing how artistic practices have connected Asian American community resilience.

PEDAGOGICAL REVOLUTIONS

HOW TO TEACH THIS HISTORY



Conduct an Oral History!

The research in this exhibit was rooted in oral history interviews with individuals dedicated to Asian American organizing who grew up in New York City neighborhoods. To emphasize themes of intergenerational memories, students can interview elders, family members, or community organizations they are a part of about local changes and perhaps uncover hidden histories.



Community/Memory Mapping!

Inspired by Apex's neighborhood-based yearbook project, ask students to document their neighborhood through sketches, photography, and interviews with locals! Instead of teaching artistic activism as something of the past, students can become archivists of the present.



Public Projection Analysis!

Inspired by the Chinatown Art Brigade's Here to Stay Movement, students can study the public art projections and their messages to discuss: Who is the audience? What are the projections responding to? How do public projections affect a neighborhood?



Identity-based Zine Project!

After examining how the Basement Workshop's Yellow Pearl has empowered Asian American identity and resisted stereotypes through artistic publications, students can create their own zines responding to stereotypes that persist today. This way, students can produce counter-narratives through art.

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RESOURCES FOR THE CLASSROOM

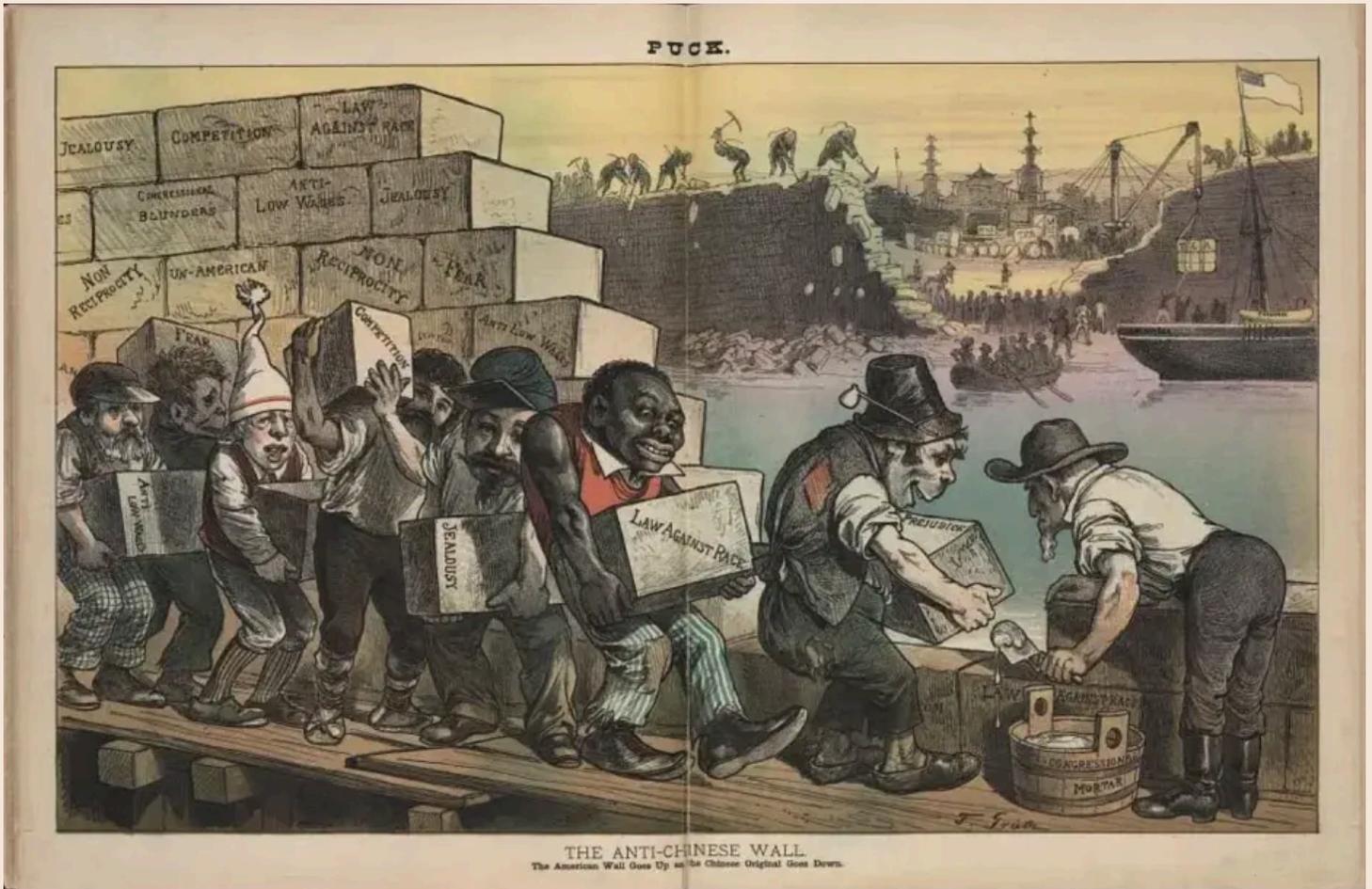
FOR THE PERSPECTIVE OF OUR PAST,
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BRIDGE MAGAZINE

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primary sources:



Anti-Chinese poster depicting laborers of various racial caricatures building a wall against the Chinese, c. 1882.

Cartoon by Friedrich Grätz, originally published in *Puck*, v. 11, no. 264. Document accessed via the Library of Congress, in the public domain.



Striking members of ILGWU Local 23-25 march through Chinatown, c. July 1982.

Document held in the Kheel Center ILGWU Collection at Cornell University, digitally reproduced in the LaborArts exhibit, "We Are One: Honoring Immigrant Garment Workers." Permissions obtained from the Kheel Center.



Basement Workshop members pose during a Community Planning Workshop, c. 1977.

Photograph by Marina Yu, rights unknown.



Photograph of Fay Chiang, director of Basement Workshop from 1975–1986, c. 1973.

Photograph by Henry Chu, held in the Basement Workshop Records, Asian/Pacific/American Institute at New York University.

YELLOW PEARL

YELLOW PEARL is a collection of the creative talents of young Asian Americans. It is also an expression of an emerging consciousness of being Asian in America. We need to write about the War, Attica and our people's history. We need to express our loves, our loneliness and our dreams. Through **YELLOW PEARL** we share what we feel, what we think and what we are with our brothers and sisters.

Coming together on the project we have shared ten months of relating — emotionally, politically and artistically. In the process we made efforts to re-examine our own perspectives; and we grew. In trying to project a view of ourselves as Asians in America, we found this best expressed through a clear statement against basic philosophies of exploitation and oppression — of individuals as well as nations. For many of us, the hope has been that **YELLOW PEARL**, subjective as it is, has become a part of that movement which is attempting to build a more responsive and responsible society.

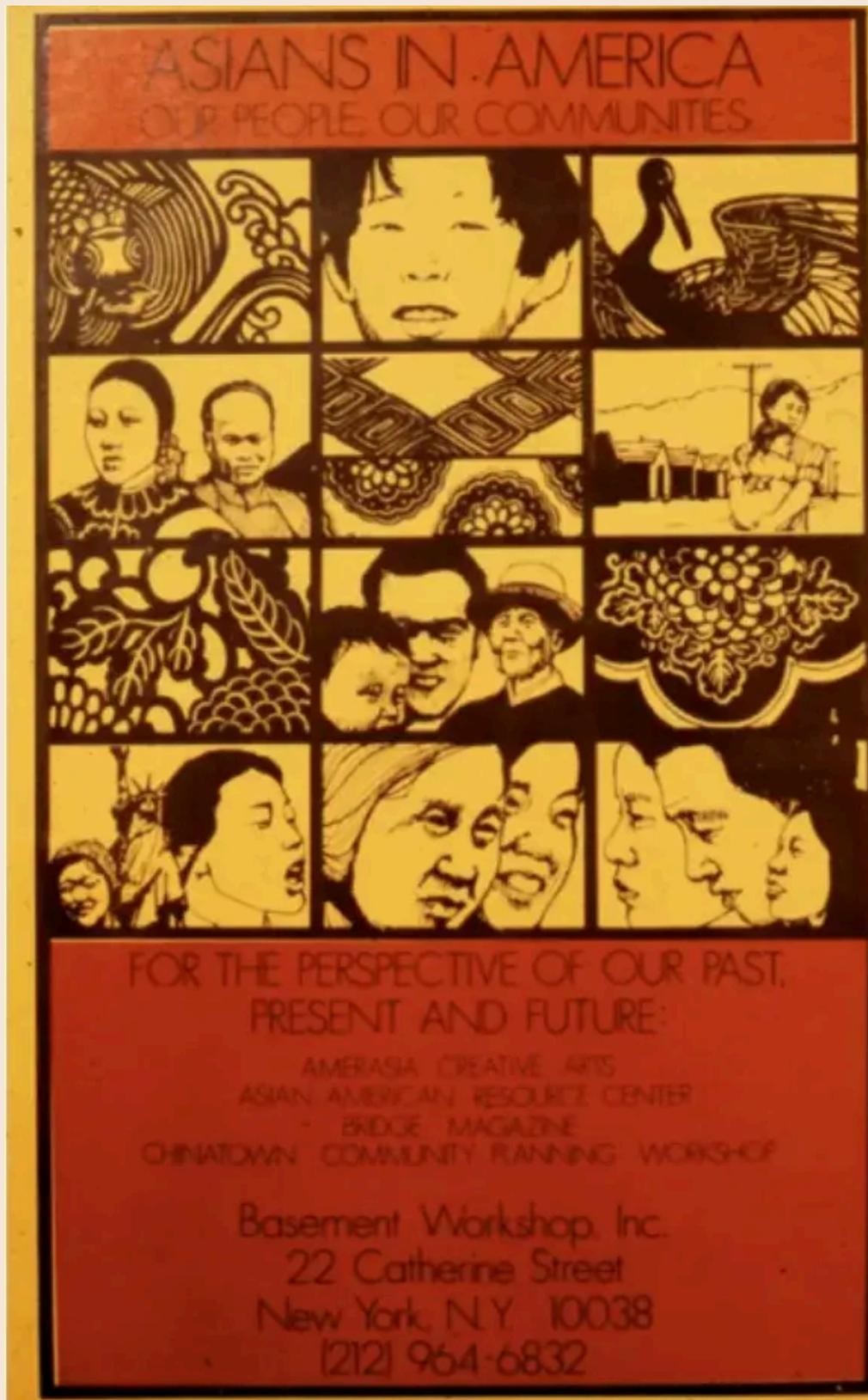
The introduction to *Yellow Pearl*, an anthology created and contributed to by Basement Workshop members, c. 1972.

Courtesy of Arlan Huang. Document accessed and permissions granted via christina ong.



A political cartoon within *Yellow Pearl* depicting Uncle Sam covering his ears, c. 1972.

Created and published by Basement Workshop members.
Document accessed and permissions granted via christina ong.



Poster created by Tomie Arai for Basement Workshop, c. 1972. The poster reads "Asians in America: Our People, Our Communities."

Permissions granted via Tomie Arai.



Mural on Hester Street, known as "The Wall of Respect for the Working People of Chinatown," c. 1977.

Mural created by City Art Works and photographed by Tomie Arai.
Permissions granted via Tomie Arai.



City Arts Workshop Chinatown Mural Project in progress, c. 1977.

Photographed by Tomie Arai. Permissions granted via Tomie Arai.



The founders of the Chinatown Art Brigade: from left to right, Tomie Arai, ManSee Kong, and Betty Yu. Date unknown.

Photographer unknown. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.



Part of Chinatown Art Brigade's "Here to Stay" outdoor projection series, addressing predatory equity & displacement, c. 2016.

Projection created by Chinatown Art Brigade. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.



Projection from Chinatown Art Brigade's "Here to Stay" projection installation, located at 1 Allen St in New York City, c. 2016.

Projection created by Chinatown Art Brigade; photograph of installation originally published in *Of Note* magazine. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.



Image from a September 24 projection event that was a collaboration between Chinatown Art Brigade and The Illuminator. Image projected onto the building reads "Gentrification is Modern Colonialism! #ChinatownNot4Sale." Date unknown.

Installation created by Chinatown Art Brigade and photographed by KahEan Chang. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.



A projection as part of CAB's "Here to Stay" installation, featuring a figure holding a sign that reads "Join the fight!" 2016.

Created by Chinatown Art Brigade. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.



CAB projection as part of the "Here to Stay" installation, reading "Housing is a human right!" 2016.

Created by Chinatown Art Brigade. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.



A Chinatown Art Brigade projection as part of the "Here to Stay" installation, featuring an image of a raised fist. The translation reads "Let's take action together!" 2016.

Created by Chinatown Art Brigade. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.



CAB projection from "Here to Stay" at I.S. 131 Middle School in New York City. One of the included signs reads "We raise families, R.A. Cohen raises rent." 2016.

Created by Chinatown Art Brigade. Permissions granted via Betty Yu.

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Yu, Betty. "Oral History with Betty Yu" Interviewed by Inis Chen. 12/26/2025. 1:27:14

Arai, Tomie. "Oral History with Tomie Arai" Interviewed by Inis Chen 1:28:48

Kim, Erica. "Oral History with Erica Kim." Interviewed by Inis Chen 42:27

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THANK YOU FOR READING!

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- ASIAN AMERICAN RESOURCE CENTER
- BRIDGE MAGAZINE
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