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Berkeley, California

Harvey Dong:

Standing Up for a Third World Education:

Harvey Dong, Third World Liberation Front Activist & UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Lecturer

Interviews conducted by  
Cristina Kim  
in 2016

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Harvey Dong in 1972  
Photo courtesy of Harvey Dong

**Harvey Dong** is a lecturer in UC Berkeley's Ethnic Studies Department & the owner of Eastwind Books. A Cal graduate, Dong was an active member of the Third World Liberation Front and active in the strike that resulted in the creation of Ethnic Studies at UCB. In this interview, Dong discusses his childhood, his early involvement in activism, and his role and recollections of the Third World Liberation Strike.

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## **Project Background**

The Third World Liberation Strike (twLS) was one of the longest student-led protests in the history of UC Berkeley activism. Beginning on January 21, 1969, the strike was led by a multiracial and multiethnic coalition of the African American Student Union (AASU), the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA), the Mexican American Student Confederation (MASC) & the Native American Student Union (NASU), which, like their counterparts in San Francisco State University, formed the Third World Liberation Front (twLF). The twLF strike demanded the dramatic restructuring of the university via the creation of a Third World College.

The twLS at UC Berkeley was one of the most violently repressed student protests in the history of the United States. Governor Ronald Reagan—who had already forged his political career in opposition to “Berkeley Radicalism”—deployed the California Highway Patrol, the Alameda Police, and the National Guard to quell the uprisings with tear gas and batons. In spite of the increasing violence and repression of free speech, students continued to picket the UC Berkeley campus until their demands were met.

The strike would eventually come to an end on March 7, 1969 with the UCB administration promising to meet with student groups and negotiate the demands. Although the strike and the University changes that followed fell short of protesters’ demands for a Third World College, the strike resulted in the creation of the first Ethnic Studies Department in the United States. Across the San Francisco Bay, students at San Francisco State University—whose striking preceded that of UC Berkeley students—continued to strike until March 20, 1969 when the SFSU Administration agreed to the formation of a College of Ethnic Studies. The strikes were effectively over, but for many of the students, community members, staff and faculty the work had just begun.

The demands made by the Third World Liberation Strike and the movement’s ability to forge and maintain a polycentric and multi-racial coalition mark a critical moment in the history of 20th century social movements. Today, Ethnic Studies, ChicanX and LatinX studies, Asian American Studies, Native American Studies and African American Studies Departments exists across US university campuses. And yet, in comparison to the documentation of the many of the other social movements of the long Sixties, UC Berkeley’s Third World Liberation Strike has been the subject of scant documentation. The upcoming 50th Anniversary of the strike in 2019 is a clarion call to record the histories and recollections of TWLF students and community members before they are gone. The following pilot interview with Harvey Dong—a twLF student striker and AAPA member—is the first interview of what we hope will be a larger twLF oral history collection.

Cristina Kim  
Berkeley, CA June 7, 2017

## Interview 1: November 18, 2016

01-00:00:00

Kim: Hello. My name is Cristina Kim and I'm here interviewing Harvey Dong, Dr. Harvey Dong. Today is November 18, 2016. This is our first interview and we're here at Barrows Hall at UC Berkeley campus. Hello.

01-00:00:16

Dong: Hi.

01-00:00:17

Kim: I wanted to get started the way most of our oral history interviews get started, which is would you mind telling me where and when you were born?

01-00:00:28

Dong: I was born in Sacramento, California. Near the Sacramento River is where I grew up. When I was raised there, I remember it being a small town and there was farmland next to us. Previous to living at that residence we grew up closer to the Sacramento Chinatown area, which was in the downtown part of Sacramento. You could say two different neighborhoods.

01-00:01:00

Kim: So your first memories are closer to the Chinatown neighborhood in Sacramento?

01-00:01:07

Dong: Yes, exactly.

01-00:01:10

Kim: Do you have any memories of that time there?

01-00:01:13

Dong: Well, I remember in the Chinatown area my father would bring me down there and there'd be lots of elderly bachelor men coming up to me. Back then it seemed like they all knew me or knew my name, but I didn't really know who they were. But later I would find out that Chinatown was primarily a bachelor community because of the exclusion laws, which was an explanation that I didn't really know until maybe my twenties, age nineteen, age twenty.

01-00:02:03

Kim: When you were in your twenties.

01-00:02:03

Dong: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:02:05

Kim: Well, how did they know your name? Was your family involved in the Chinatown community?



01-00:02:10

Dong:

My grandfather was pretty active in the family associations and he was also a volunteer for the Chinese language school there. So they were a fairly well known family. My grandfather also ran an herb shop in Sacramento's Chinatown and this herb shop became a community focal point. When people wanted to send letters to China they would go there and there would be a letter writing service. If they wanted to receive letters, letters would be dropped off there. So he was pretty well known. Unfortunately, he passed away when my father was about nine years of age. But still people had memories of him.

01-00:03:13

Kim:

Can you tell me a little bit more about your family? Your parents? What they were like? Were they raised in Sacramento? Born in Sacramento?

01-00:03:22

Dong:

My dad was born and raised in Sacramento during the exclusion era. He didn't really leave Chinatown that much. When World War II broke out, I guess he was sent to the Philippines. He was involved in the US military there during the time of the liberation of the Philippines. My mom was born in China and she was left in China by her family under the care of her aunt. She didn't come to the United States until after the war was over. I guess she was a war bride or war fiancée who married my father, a GI, and she came over in, I believe it was 1947 and I was born in 1948.

01-00:04:37

Kim:

Did your mother ever talk to you about her experiences first coming to the United States?

01-00:04:45

Dong:

She didn't really want to come to the United States because her whole life was in China. She had gone through the war. She had all her friends in China. During wartime, when she was very young, she was an activist, trying to take part in the war efforts. So when she got word from her mother that they wanted to send for her to meet somebody and so forth, she was somewhat ambivalent about it. But then, at the same time, she had a curiosity about her family. Her mother, her father, her brother she kind of knew, but she also heard that she had American born brothers and sisters. So she had some curiosity about that.

01-00:05:46

Kim:

And her family was also located in Sacramento, which is how they knew your father?

01-00:05:51

Dong:

Exactly, yeah. Because my grandma, my dad's mom, worked in the canneries and then my grandma on my mom's side also worked in the canneries. So they shared notes at work. "I have a daughter." "I have a son," and so forth. "Maybe we can get them together." It was one of those types of arrangements.

01-00:06:21

Kim: What was your childhood like? Were you raised in a very kind of Chinese-American household?

01-00:06:31

Dong: Well, because both my mother and father are ethnic Chinese, we celebrated all the Chinese holidays. There was also a Dong Family Association that was very central, in particular on my dad's side and especially after my grandfather had passed away. The family actually participated a lot in the Dong Family Association because it helped provide for social needs. My grandma was one of the first who contributed to the building and so forth. And even to this day, my father's ninety-five years of age and he makes a point to attend all the Dong Family Association functions. Because that was the central organization, social organization, for the immigrants during that early period. And also during the exclusion era. You could say that it provided some type of shelter from hostility and it provided social space, which was not otherwise provided.

01-00:08:01

Kim: Was it a space you went to as a child?

01-00:08:05

Dong: Yeah. We would be dragged along. We would go to the dinners, we would go to all the different functions and activities. But then, at the same time, especially when we moved out of the downtown area, close to Chinatown, we began to kind of meet kids and people of other races and nationalities. So maybe it was less important to us after that move. But to our families, in particular my dad, it was still very important.

01-00:08:46

Kim: So you said 'we.' Do you have any siblings that you were growing up with?

01-00:08:50

Dong: I grew up with two younger brothers and then one younger sister. Yeah. Two brothers, one sister.

01-00:08:58

Kim: And what was this neighborhood that you moved to? Like you said there was more of a mix of ethnicity and races and religions.

01-00:09:05

Dong: The neighborhood that we moved into was in a suburb of Sacramento. My dad, because he qualified for the GI housing loans, he had access to funds to purchase a house. He had some difficulty because realtors would prefer not to sell to Asians back then. But how he got around it was he bought it directly from the contractor, the builder. Because my dad was a veteran, the builder was a veteran, they were able to make a direct purchase.

01-00:09:56

Kim: Were there no other Asian families in your neighborhood?

01-00:09:59

Dong:

Well, in our neighborhood, in the beginning it was primarily white and then gradually the white neighbors would move out. Some of it might have had to do with white flight. Another reason would have to do, people getting older and moving out. I'd say it became about 50 percent Asian by the time I had reached high school. In the beginning it was white, primarily white. I didn't face too much hostility in terms of—if you know your neighbors eventually you'll get along, and they know you, and so forth. But if I stepped foot outside the neighborhood, let's say like a block, two blocks away, people don't know you and they see that you're Asian, all of a sudden you would hear racial slurs and racism. Things that I did not really experience when I lived in the downtown area. Names such as Jap or chink. You would kind of expect it if you walked by a group of white kids. I even had a paper route. Actually, riding a bike you would probably hear lots of calling out, "Chink." I think it was chink, Jap, and Nip were the three word that I expected to hear growing up.

01-00:11:59

Kim:

Do you remember the first time somebody actually called you by a racial slur?

01-00:12:02

Dong:

Oh, yeah. The first time was we had moved into our house. I was sitting in the front lawn and I think I was maybe seven years old or so and a group of white kids rode by on a bike. They circled back and they yelled, "Chink, go home." And they kind of blasted it. And I was kind of shocked because I didn't really know what that was. But definitely it reverberated. I became really frightened because it was expressed in a very angry manner.

01-00:12:48

Kim:

Did you talk to your parents about that or how did you process that?

01-00:12:53

Dong:

I think with my parents it was kind of difficult to communicate those types of things. Although my mom would get angry if she felt that she was the target of racism. She didn't speak English too well, but she would know a few words like shut-up, things like that. My dad would tend to want to ignore it. That if it happens, maybe it's not important to recognize it. In other words, it just goes right past you...that kind of response. When I was growing up I may have done a little bit of both in terms of responses because my mom's was more like, "Shut-up," and then my dad's would be just kind of filter it out. That was kind of interesting. Actually, cousins are the ones you talk about this stuff to. I would talk to my cousin: "Hey, have you noticed this? Are people saying all this stuff and why?" and so forth. One cousin told me he does hear a lot but his approach was to pretty much just suck it in and just kind of let it slide. Don't let it bother you. That's how you make it go away. But for some reason, with myself, whenever those types of incidents happened to me, especially later on when I was in high school, I would actually get in a fight and challenge the person and then we'd be like rolling on the ground and it'd be a

big scene. And then afterwards I would still be thinking about it and stewing about it. It'd be something that's kind of grabbed onto me to the point where it became really frustrating. It's like how do you deal with it, how do you get this stress out?

01-00:15:39

Kim: Yeah, like this kind of building that's happening with no outlet.

01-00:15:42

Dong: It just builds up. And then you think about it in terms of how you see those people or that group of people and then it kind of comes up again. So for myself I think I didn't really see any outlet for that until I actually came to UC Berkeley, where you had the Black Power movement and you had civil rights movement. People were more expressive, more talkative about that stuff and also more proactive, to want to do things. I think being away from that setting, that environment, and being able to communicate and speak to others, as opposed to, let's say, if you're in high school and you feel all this negative tension as a result of racism and so forth. You don't really know what to do, so you can be quiet, angry.

01-00:17:02

Kim: Well, that brings me to where I wanted to go. So you come to Berkeley as a student. Do you come your freshman year?

01-00:17:08

Dong: Yeah. I came here during my freshman year.

01-00:17:13

Kim: What year was that?

01-00:17:16

Dong: That was 1966. My plan was basically I would major in economics because it's a way to enter business field. At the same time, I would join the Army ROTC because of the fact that my dad had benefited in terms of his education. He was able to have his college paid for because he was a GI during World War II. He was able to purchase the house. My uncle was still working for the federal government, for the Army during that time, for the signal depot in Sacramento. It had to do with communications and so forth. And then I had other uncles and cousins on my mom's side who were in the military in Germany, in Korea, in all these locations. So I grew up basically assuming that I would go into the military.

01-00:18:30

Kim: Oh, interesting.

01-00:18:31

Dong: Yeah. So it was a big influence. And then you see TV and all this stuff about how everybody goes into the Army... it's automatic. So if I'm going to Berkeley and they have this officers' training program, well, why not become an officer in the military.

01-00:18:50

Kim: So did you end up doing ROTC?

01-00:18:53

Dong:

Yeah. I entered the ROTC program. We marched. We had to get up like at 5:00 in the morning. We had to shine our shoes. We would be inspected from top to bottom. We had to drill. We had to take apart rifles. We did shooting. We practiced throwing dummy hand grenades. We got yelled at a lot and so forth. What changed my mind about it all was the fact that the Vietnam War was going on. And in my living quarters, the dormitories, there was lots of discussion about the Vietnam War and whether or not it was right for the United States to be in Vietnam. Around the corner from where I lived was Cody's Bookstore and they had an international section and I would go there and read their books, especially in the evening. I could just walk in there. And there were lots of books about Vietnam and the Gulf of Tonkin resolution and how the Gulf of Tonkin incident was not really an attack by North Vietnam and so forth. I came to the conclusion that we should not be in Vietnam.

By the end of my freshman year I started going to anti-war demonstrations and rallies. I went to my first anti-war march in '67 and I came back to my eating facility in the dormitory and I sat with all of my Asian friends. I don't think they went. In fact, I might have been the only Asian from the dorm who did go.

01-00:21:16

Kim: Were most of your friends at this time also Asian?

01-00:21:21

Dong:

Asian and some white friends. And one of my Asian friends, who was from the Central Valley—very conservative neighborhood—he was Japanese American, he told me that he had a cousin who was in the US Marines and he was going to come to campus and kick my ass for going to this anti-war march. And so I was somewhat alarmed that someone that I did not know was going to come to UC Berkeley campus to look for me because all my Asian friends were telling him that I was participating in this anti-war march. So being maybe the first Asian or one of the first because there were other Asians participating. But I noticed that there were some differences beginning to emerge over politics. When I first entered Berkeley I socialized a lot. I went to fraternity events. I went to dances, Asian social activities and so forth. When I became a little bit more political, I felt that I was also isolating myself somewhat.

01-00:23:01

Kim: From the larger Asian social community that was going on?

01-00:23:03

Dong:

Yeah. I was trying to figure that out for a while. But I think there were other Asians who were going through the same thing, coming from different communities, and there were also other Asians in social clubs similar to the

ones that I went to. So this was '66, '67. By the time '68 hit, a number of these Asians who were active in their own ways as individuals began to come together and they formed this organization, the AAPA, Asian American—

01-00:23:57

Kim: Political Alliance.

01-00:23:57

Dong: —Political Alliance. That was a big change. These organizations don't just happen. It takes individuals and then these individuals start connecting, sharing experiences, finding some common ground. Many of them had experiences having to deal with racism, trying to figure out the war, analyzing the anti-Asian racism aspects of the war and so forth.

01-00:24:34

Kim: Before we get into the AAPA, though, I have a question. Do many see the anti-war movement and the legacy of the Free Speech movement that had happened a few years before you arrived on campus as a kind of white movement that was kind of separate from Asian American life? Why do you think there was this kind of isolation?

01-00:25:01

Dong: The Free Speech Movement, I did hear about from my cousin in Sacramento. She told me that her classmate was involved in the Free Speech movement. That actually began in 1964. I did hear about it, but I didn't know too much about it except that there were mass arrests. I kind of had that in the back of my mind that this was happening when I came to Berkeley it was '66. Mario Savio, one of the leaders of the Free Speech movement, he was not allowed on campus. He was kicked out of school. He would come on campus to speak. He would be surrounded by supporters on Sproul steps. The police would try really hard to zoom in and to have him arrested. In other words, he was viewed as being the target to quell this movement. I noticed that that was going on. And other people in the dorms noticed that it was going on and that it was not right that it happened. It's one of these things where you notice it, you don't know the issue, you just kind of tuck it in the back of your mind.

Another thing that had happened, too, was the ROTC, the program that I was in, they had like military greeting tables in the student union building downstairs and there was anti-war protests, where people went in there and they sat down. I was kind of in the middle of that.

01-00:27:08

Kim: Yeah, how did you feel? Because you were participating in anti-war protests but you're also part of ROTC.

01-00:27:15

Dong: Yeah. Well, at that time I wasn't involved in anti-war protests.

01-00:27:20

Kim: When does that start really?

01-00:27:21

Dong: Towards more the end of my first year.

01-00:27:27

Kim: So '67?

01-00:27:28

Dong: Sixty-eight, yeah. Sixty-seven, yeah. Again, I think that incident, I wasn't aware of all the issues and why people would feel so passionate about this. I think it was ROTC or military greeting table or both. They all sat there and everybody said, "Sit down, sit down. Sit down," that kind of thing

01-00:27:58

Kim: Were you there?

01-00:27:59

Dong: Yeah, I was there. I just stayed on the edge. I observed it. Then I heard comments saying that Mario Savio was there and they were going to come in for Mario Savio. I think you could say that that was the aftermath of the Free Speech movement. Sixty-four, very intense movement. They did win the right to have literature, tables, pass out handbills and things like that, which you see on Sproul Plaza today. But then also at the same time you could really see that they were concerned about preventing a charismatic leader to come back to campus. Because he was charismatic in terms of people did listen to his words and so forth. So I just kind of kept that in the back of my mind. And then in 1967, that was the end of my freshman year, I started participating in the Stop the Draft week activities.

01-00:29:27

Kim: What drew you to them? What had changed your mind in the course of that year?

01-00:29:31

Dong: Okay. On my dormitory floor, it was at Priestley Hall, nearby here, on our floor there were four of us in ROTC and two of us took a position that the war in Vietnam was wrong. We began to slouch in ROTC. [laughter]

01-00:30:05

Kim: Like physically slouching or like just not showing up?

01-00:30:07

Dong: Well, we didn't shine our shoes that good. We let our hair grow a little long. We would get chewed out for not being proper in terms of the formations and all this stuff. The instructors would say stuff and then we'd mutter negative things about what he said. And then the other thing I began to notice was that the instructors had used in their terminology racist terms about Asians, such as Charlie or the Cong. Okay. That's Viet Cong, right. But they would say things

like, “When Charlie comes up the hill, are you going to be ready?” that kind of thing. And then we’d go shooting target practice at the bottom of the gym, shooting rifles and some of my fellow ROTC cadets would shoot a target and they’d say, “Oh, I just shot a gook.” So things like that. So that kind of perturbed me, too. I said, “Why the hell do you have to say that, that kind of stuff?” And then one day what really topped it off was that they called a general meeting and the commanding officers were saying that too many of us were stopping at the literature tables. “And if you stop at the literature table, those people are going to talk to you and they’re going to try to change your mind and these people are all Communists.” I just remember them saying over and over again, “If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and talks like a duck, it is a duck.” A duck meaning Communist, okay. So they’re trying to scare us, red bait, the whole thing. So by that time we just kind of said, “Oh, man, being in this program is a joke. We quit.” [laughter] So that’s what we did.

01-00:32:25

Kim: You and this other friend that seems—

01-00:32:26

Dong: Yeah, me and this other friend, we quit and—

01-00:32:28

Kim: Was he also Asian?

01-00:32:29

Dong: He was white. So the two of us quit. And then we would go and harass the poor guy down the hall that was die-hard. So we’d harass him, he’d be arguing with him and we said, “The war’s a lie and you’re an idiot.” We probably weren’t exactly the greatest to talk to people back then. [laughter]

01-00:32:57

Kim: But for you it seems that the big change was both that you were hearing the anti-Asian racial slurs that you had grown up—

01-00:33:07

Dong: For me, definitely, yeah.

01-00:33:08

Kim: —and that there was this kind of controlling aspect, this fear-mongering against this kind of Communist other that no longer was speaking to you.

01-00:33:18

Dong: Right, yeah.

01-00:33:17

Kim: So what happens next in terms of your politicization? You’re still a student, obviously, and I know eventually you will be part of the Third World Liberation front and the strike that happens there. But what happens in the



meantime? Like in this kind of pre-strike period? How are you kind of developing?

01-00:33:37

Dong:

Well, okay. Okay. So I got involved in the Stop the Draft week. My friend, the ex-ROTC friend, and some other friends that we knew all participated in the Stop the Draft week. The Stop the Draft week was very intense. Actually, it was very violent. It was kind of shockingly violent. Because of the fact that we were students, we went out to Stop the Draft. So how do you Stop the Draft? Where the inductees are being processed, you don't let them out. They can't go out. Once they're inside they don't get onto that bus that's going to bring them to Fort Hood or whatever. So if you do something like that, the orders for the police are to beat the hell out of everybody. So I saw a lot of very heavy violence, where police officers aren't just using clubs, where they do this and this. But it's like overhead swings and so forth. It's like early hours in the morning, not a whole lot of witnesses except for demonstrators. I think it radicalized a lot of people. So I became more radicalized by that. Because afterwards what happened was the organizers of that event were being charged with conspiracy. They were to serve many years in prison as a result of that organizing. The movement then becomes not just Stop the Draft week but to drop the charges on the leadership. I think it was like eight people or something like that.

But there was also another effect because of the violence. A lot of my friends, they got more involved in the counterculture stuff because of the fact that it was somewhat intense, but then you also wanted to chill out and relax. So we started to go to a lot of rock concerts, Fillmore Auditorium. Whoever was in town. It was only like three bucks. So we went to all of those. Jimi Hendrix, Janis—

01-00:36:39

Kim:

Joplin.

01-00:36:39

Dong:

—Joplin. The Cream. So we hit all of them. So that was like another block of concentration. So there would be anti-war stuff and then this whole rock scene. We kind of got into that with a big crowd of friends.

01-00:37:05

Kim:

At this point are your friends mixed though? Are your friends from all over? You're no longer just hanging out in the Asian social group or is it both Asian and white?

01-00:37:14

Dong:

Yeah, mostly white. There was one African American. He was actually the Cal football player who was like second or third string. He was bummed out about the whole football scene so he hung out with us, too. [laughter] But I did notice, though, that the anti-war movement was beginning to merge with

Black Power. So at the marches and activities, one of the chants was “Free Huey.” I remember going with my friends to the Kaiser Auditorium and it would be all the Black Power leadership, Panthers at their height, late '67 or so. And H. Rap Brown was there and he talked about the riots everywhere and how violence is a very positive thing and all this stuff. That's also when a lot of my friends dropped out of the whole political scene.

01-00:38:30

Kim: Really?

01-00:38:31

Dong: Yeah. They didn't really agree with it.

01-00:38:33

Kim: Did it appeal to you though?

01-00:38:36

Dong: It appealed to me in terms of the racism stuff and the need to do something about it. So I began to read the Black Panther newspaper. I even brought the paper home to Sacramento, gave it to my high school friends to give them copies because I thought it was something positive, representing change.

01-00:39:11

Kim: That's important. So what—

01-00:39:13

Dong: I think it might have been because my white friends who were in the anti-war movement at that time may have felt that Black Power might have been something that was threatening them.

01-00:39:26

Kim: But you didn't see it like that?

01-00:39:28

Dong: No, I didn't see this as threatening because when I read their paper and the contacts that I did have, I didn't see racism as a big part of their agenda, okay. Although at the Black Power rallies, with the Panthers and stuff, some of the invited guests, like H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael, would use terms like honky and all this stuff. Which I think probably my friends from college may not have liked that or they feel a little uneasy about that.

01-00:40:11

Kim: What did your high school friends say about the newspaper? And who did you give it to?

01-00:40:14

Dong: I had some Asian friends I gave it to. Some of them, they thought I must be really into the drug scene and smoking a lot of marijuana or something like that. [laughter] My friends that I grew up with that helped me out in situations where I would be threatened racially and they would jump in and beat up

whoever, I would share it with them and it was cool. I don't know if they themselves would get involved in anything like that. But I think they figured because it was me, they took the materials. I even gave it to my brothers and my dad.

01-00:41:11

Kim: Was there any discussion around it?

01-00:41:13

Dong: Well, my dad's was not too much response, except that, "Well, as long as it doesn't get you in trouble." [laughter] Maybe my mom might have been a little concerned. Yeah. So in Sacramento, things ran much slower, so people were more laid back back then.

01-00:41:37

Kim: But for you, going back to your life and the Black Panthers. Do you get involved with the Black Panthers and what is the process like? Have you always identified as Chinese American and do you start to see it a different way because of your exposure to the Black Panther Movement?

01-00:41:56

Dong: Well, definitely I think when the anti-war movement made that connection with the Black Panthers and the Peace and Freedom Party, they ran a Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver for president and pediatrician, Benjamin Spock for vice-president, there were exchanges within that. The Peace and Freedom Party was also involved in the Stop the Draft week. I didn't feel that the Black Panther ideology was that alien to me. So one time there was a report, it was in the news. A Berkeley police officer, young officer, disclosed to the media that it was a planned raid on the Black Panther office and in this raid the FBI was going to be involved with the police department. There was going to be violence and it was going to be a setup. Okay. So this one police officer disclosed that, which was a pretty brave thing for someone to do. But what—

01-00:43:21

Kim: What year was this? Sorry.

01-00:43:23

Dong: I think it was late '67. I'd have to double-check the exact time.

01-00:43:31

Kim: But like maybe your second year of college? You're already—

01-00:43:33

Dong: Yeah. Maybe closer to the second year running. But what happened was that myself and other students from UC Berkeley campus went down to the Black Panther headquarters on Shattuck and we brought our schoolbooks there. We stayed there doing our homework and reading to prevent the raid by having a whole bunch of students present. So nothing happened. But entering the headquarters you see sandbags, you see steel plating. So it was a real situation. The door had steel plating and stuff like that. There was officer of the day, a

young African American woman. It was kind of hard to imagine, well, if they have a raid, what are they raiding it for? I think it was more of a political show of power, that they don't want the Panthers around. The Panthers always had a presence in the Bay Area political scene. I had supported that right out of the anti-war movement.

01-00:45:15

Kim:

And so moving forward. So when the San Francisco Third World Liberation Front forms in 1968, are you aware of that kind of movement and are you yourself kind of involved in any kind of group or organization?

01-00:45:30

Dong:

Sixty-eight. Okay. There was a Stop the Draft week part one in '67, Stop the Draft week part two, '68. So that spring, '68. And then I had gone back to Sacramento. I heard that there was some meeting related to supporting the French student protest and so I had come back for that. So there was a huge protest and a big riot. There was a meeting at Berkeley Community Theater. I remember that. And then in fall of '68 the strike happens at SF State. In the beginning I wasn't really a whole lot involved or part of it.

01-00:46:33

Kim:

Were you hearing about what was happening in San Francisco though?

01-00:46:37

Dong:

Their demand for ethnic studies, that George Murray, who was a Black Panther, had lost his job and the Black Students Union was fighting to get him reinstated and the tact squad was coming in.

01-00:46:59

Kim:

How are you getting that information? Mostly from the media or did you also have kind of friends and kind of networks at Berkeley that were also talking about it already?

01-00:47:09

Dong:

Mostly from media and the campus newspapers. And then I took a sociology class and the professor was talking about it, how he was surprised to find out that not only is there Black Power movement, there's also brown power and red power. And then there was someone behind me who yelled out, "Yellow power. There's also yellow power." And then everybody was surprised, kind of laughed somewhat. It was like this idea of yellow power? Where is that coming from? So everybody turned around. And the guy that said it kind of ducked down really low and everybody was looking at me. [laughter] So it kind of put me on the spot. But I found out that the person who said it had belonged to this organization, Asian American Political Alliance.

01-00:48:19

Kim:

Okay. Which had formed in May of 1968. It was really quite new.

01-00:48:23

Dong:

Yeah, quite new.

01-00:48:25

Kim: Formed in Berkeley.

01-00:48:26

Dong: Yeah. I did get announcements from them. "Come to this meeting." Someone rode on a bicycle, dropped off this flyer in my mailbox. In fact, I might have seen like a couple of those. I kind of just kept it in the back of my mind, but I didn't really go to those, any of those.

01-00:48:51

Kim: But did you end up talking to that student that had yelled yellow power?

01-00:48:55

Dong: Somewhat. He wasn't that talkative. But maybe that was his personality then. But he was political and stuff.

01-00:49:04

Kim: Did you end up talking about AAPA with him, though, that you found out that he participated in it?

01-00:49:11

Dong: I didn't really connect the dots until I saw him at an AAPA meeting and so that's why he said that.

01-00:49:18

Kim: So you do end up participating in AAPA?

01-00:49:21

Dong: Yeah. Later I did. Yeah. But I also was interested doing some volunteering work in Chinatown. Because I saw a notice saying there's a need for tutors to work with immigrant youth and young people in San Francisco, in Chinatown. I wanted to do that but I didn't want to go by myself. I was walking on campus and I saw one of my friends, Steve Wong, who had just transferred over from community college, the community college in Sacramento. And I asked him what kind of activities is he involved in and he told me the Cal Glee Club. So I asked him if he was interested to go every Wednesday, to go to San Francisco Chinatown to do this tutorial with immigrant kids. So we went. We started doing that as a regular thing every Wednesday. He noticed that a few of the kids that we were tutoring were also related to him. They were immigrants who came over and they had also dropped in at this place. So we made it like a regular thing. We'd do the tutoring and after that we'd go eat and then we'd come back. So we did that for a while. And that kind of overlapped later with the AAPA, the Third World Strike and all this stuff because of the community connection part.

01-00:51:17

Kim: Who was organizing that? I mean, were there other students from Berkeley going to this community center in San Francisco Chinatown?

01-00:51:24

Dong: Yeah. It was a committee within the Chinese Students Club, the Chinese Americans Organization on campus.

01-00:51:36

Kim: Was it the Intercollegiate Chinese American Club or—

01-00:51:39

Dong: Well, the Intercollegiate—

01-00:51:41

Kim: For Social Action.

01-00:51:42

Dong: —Chinese for Social Action was based in—

01-00:51:45

Kim: SF State.

01-00:51:46

Dong: —SF State. But I guess you could say it was something similar to that but based at UC Berkeley. But it's called CSC, Chinese Students Club.

01-00:51:56

Kim: And were there students from San Francisco State there, as well? Because you were, of course, in San Francisco.

01-00:52:05

Dong: There may have been, but I didn't really notice. What we did, though, when we went there is we would drop by at the ICOSA office that was also based in Chinatown and then we would talk to the ICOSA people about the strike at SF State.

01-00:52:30

Kim: Oh, you would?

01-00:52:30

Dong: Yeah. So we would just drop by. And then there was another—

01-00:52:36

Kim: During those meetings, though, were you getting a sense of this idea of the Third World, of the demands that those students were making?

01-00:52:44

Dong: I think probably more in terms of this idea about poverty in the community and the need for students and the campus to take a role in terms of dealing with it. More like on that level. But definitely the Third World solidarity and all this stuff was definitely something that, although not verbalized very well until the strike actually began, it was something that was more like in the air and people kind of spontaneously began to make those connections.

01-00:53:49

Kim: So for you, were you kind of seeing a shared solidarity with, say, the African American students—

01-00:53:56

Dong: Yeah. Exactly.

01-00:53:56

Kim: —Chicano, Mexican-American students, Native American students? Was that something that was already happening even before you get actively involved?

01-00:54:05

Dong: Yeah. I think you could say that a lot of that education process was also from attending the political functions, the rallies, the speeches. When Black Panthers spoke they talked about poverty not just being black poverty, but all the other groups, including whites being the poorest. But why is it that whites are the last to realize that it's in their interest to join in with people of color? So those questions were definitely raised at the events.

01-00:54:53

Kim: They seem so particularly relevant now.

01-00:54:55

Dong: Yeah, so maybe all that stuff was like a preliminary to consolidating my ideas or ideas of friends around me. Because first you have the war, is it right, let's get the hell out of this military program. And then you participate in the anti-war movement. My friends that participated felt somewhat discouraged because there was heavy violence on the part of the police. Somewhat discouraged because maybe they feel threatened by Black Power. So some confusion there. The rock scene. [laughter]

01-00:55:44

Kim: There's a lot happening, right?

01-00:55:46

Dong: Yeah.

01-00:55:46

Kim: This is the ecology in which you are becoming politicized and an agent.

01-00:55:52

Dong: Yeah. Or even feeling to the point where I had myself to play a role in talking to people. Because maybe in the beginning it was more like, "I'm going here, I'm going there." Okay. They don't want Eldridge Cleaver to teach the class. Okay. I'm going to go in that sit-in, that kind of thing. But then later you feel that you had to kind of verbalize it more, communicate with people. And then you see friends dropping off, getting discouraged. Then you feel like you have to figure out how to convince them to hang in there.

01-00:56:39

Kim: Yeah. So you became more active in actually like talking about the ideas, the reason to stay on.

01-00:56:47

Dong: Yes. There's like so much stuff there.

01-00:56:52

Kim: I want to actually, if possible, move us to the actual Third World Liberation Front. So before the strike it forms on January 10, 1969. At that point are you involved with the movement and aware of the student groups which here are the African American Student Union, the Mexican American Student Confederation, AAPA, and then later the Native American Student Union. Are you part of that in its initial kind of origins?

01-00:57:21

Dong: So by that time I saw myself as part of this AAPA, which was part of the broader TWLF.

01-00:57:35

Kim: Right. Before that formation happens you're already attending meetings.

01-00:57:39

Dong: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:57:40

Kim: Can you tell me a little bit more about what made you go to the first AAPA meeting and what happened there?

01-00:57:47

Dong: Okay. So there was an announcement of this Asian students 100x class, Asian experience in America. That was something I was looking forward to. I think it was announced in the fall quarter. It was on the quarter semester. And then it was launched in winter quarter. Okay. So the class was launched.

01-00:58:22

Kim: And it was the first Asian American class, right?

01-00:58:23

Dong: Yeah. Very highly attended.

01-00:58:30

Kim: I think it was fall semester 1968.

01-00:58:33

Dong: You'll probably have to double-check on that one. Because I remember afterwards the announcement was made that for those who are interested in making this a permanent thing please stay after for an AAPA meeting.

01-00:58:54

Kim: And you stayed?



01-00:58:56

Dong:

Yeah. I stayed. My friend Steve stayed. Because we told them we were doing all this tutorial stuff and so forth. And they asked us what's our view of things, about making change. So we started going to regular AAPA meetings at people's houses after that.

01-00:59:16

Kim:

What were they saying was their change? They asked you, but how did they describe their kind of mission and group?

01-00:59:25

Dong:

Well, I mean, the basic things about racism. The need to know our history, our identity, and that it's an international part of this, too, because of imperialism, what is done to Asians.

01-00:59:53

Kim:

So they were really—

01-00:59:54

Dong:

Yeah, they were pretty political. Richard Aoki was there and he didn't say he was a Black Panther, but he had all the Black Panther rhetoric. He talked like an African American. He had the accent. You could tell that he was from West Oakland and that type of thing. And then there were other people who were more international, from Hong Kong, from Taiwan. They actually saw themselves as different than Asian Americans because they were from a location where Asians were from the majority, but they noticed that Asians in America were a minority beaten down by racism and therefore they tend to be more passive and that there's a need for them to become more aggressive in how they view things and see things. So it was kind of interesting to me.  
[laughter]

01-01:01:04

Kim:

Right. But it was also the first time that an Asian American as like an identity was really used. So do you remember being like, "Oh." Now it's obviously like the language that is used most prevalently. But was it something to you, like a revelation or was it something you'd already been using but now really adopted as an identity?

01-01:01:27

Dong:

Well, let's say during Stop the Draft week, going down to the Black Panther office and all this stuff. I was going to fill out that little membership card to join the Panthers, [laughter] which they did give out. But then at the same time I was thinking, "Well, maybe I should finish school first." But with this AAPA being formed, definitely it did kind of provide like a focus as far as what I want to identify with, what community I want to connect with and how I wanted to map things out in terms of not just identity but politically and change in society. Because at that age when you're young, you tend to feel that you can do anything and this was a vehicle to do that.

01-01:02:27

Kim: So AAPA was exciting for you? AAPA was—

01-01:02:30

Dong: Yeah, yeah. Definitely. And then we would kind of look at all the people and say, ‘Oh, yeah, that person’s kind of interesting and all this,’ because everybody was kind of different.

01-01:02:40

Kim: Within the actual AAPA.

01-01:02:43

Dong: Yeah, within it. And also people were very talkative, very verbal. They were well-read politically and had literature and all this stuff.

01-01:02:57

Kim: So by the time that the Third World Liberation Front really starts organizing—and here, too, I believe it’s because the African American Student Union has been demanding an African American Studies Department, the Mexican American Student Confederation has asked for a boycott on grapes. There’s a lot of things that are happening that kind of seem to lead up to the TWLF Front, or TWF. So do you remember what was your role in that or how it came to be?

01-01:03:29

Dong: Well, definitely groups that did not communicate with each other much, groups that would raise their own demands and battle with the university individually were now beginning to see the struggle as one. Yeah. So I remember Manuel Delgado talking about the table grapes and the removal of table grapes and the demand for a Chicano studies center. It was all still in negotiations. But when the strike happened he said that they could have continued on that route, developed a Chicano studies center, maybe develop courses on their own. But they saw that this new alliance of all these groups coming together was something more important than them going on their own individual path and negotiating on their own.

01-01:04:35

Kim: But how did that alliance initially form? Speaking from your perspective, right. When does AAPA start really talking to the African American Student Union and the other groups? Like how is that contact even made?

01-01:04:51

Dong: Well, the African Americans Student Union contacted the other groups. There was a meeting and an agreement to work together and after that was done—

01-01:05:12

Kim: Were you part of that meeting?

01-01:05:13

Dong:

I wasn't in that meeting, but what I did do was I went to African American Student Union meetings. There would be like a few Asians going to them. There would be discussion back and forth about how to take this thing and then later there would be steering committees setup.

01-01:05:42

Kim:

During the strike more so?

01-01:05:43

Dong:

Yeah, during the strike to figure out strategy and what to do. Some of us were also rotating in and out on this steering committee.

01-01:05:57

Kim:

So I'm interested especially in the formation of the initial Front. So it sounds like there is one meeting where maybe some representatives of each of the student groups come together and say, "Better that we fight together than apart so that we can really get what we need." And then after that maybe the people who were at that meeting go back to AAPA and say, "This is what we're going to do." Like, for instance, you go and attend the African American Student Union meetings and other people are attending the MASC meetings, M-A-S-C. Is that how it worked?

01-01:06:30

Dong:

Yeah.

01-01:06:31

Kim:

And then it was just kind of—a little informal but not—

01-01:06:37

Dong:

Yeah. So in other words, things that we would not normally do, all of a sudden we were welcome to attend those meetings.

01-01:06:44

Kim:

There was a space there.

01-01:06:45

Dong:

Yeah, yeah. And then a number of African Americans would come to the AAPA events and activities. Yeah. The other thing is the role of SF State was significant, too. So when this TWLF was formed, there was actually also contact with leadership of SF State, where they would come over and talk about what they learned.

01-01:07:20

Kim:

Really?

01-01:07:20

Dong:

Yeah.

01-01:07:21

Kim: So who would come? Did you ever go to any meetings where they could come?

01-01:07:25

Dong: I didn't attend that one also but Roger Alvarado, he was one of the ones that came over, Alfred Wong from the ICOSA, and I think there were a few others. But basically they came over to share their experiences on how to create unity and how to prevent infighting. So that's why we had the voting system that was equal. Even though there were only six Native Americans on campus, they would still have that equal voting power to decide on strike related policies. So you had African Americans, Asians, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans. They all had equally divided 25 percent power on the votes. Like two voters per person. Yeah.

01-01:08:33

Kim: So was a lot of that infrastructure created after the SF State strikers or Front came and said, "Look, we've been doing this for a little while. This is how we've most successfully been able to maintain—"

01-01:08:47

Dong: I think you'd say that they were an important influence, although I don't know exactly how SF State, how their decision-making was structured, because I think it might have been weighing more towards the Black Students Union over there. But in Berkeley it became equal voting power.

01-01:09:11

Kim: This is before the strike. Everyone had to vote essentially in order to have the strike and then the six tenets or the five really that the strike demands. Okay. And so were there any tensions within that alliance that people had to alleviate?

01-01:09:30

Dong: Yeah. I know tensions came up. We had our strike activities and the work coordinated around that. We had legal, especially in terms of finance and legal, bailing people out.

01-01:09:57

Kim: This is the structure of the actual Front?

01-01:10:00

Dong: Yeah.

01-01:10:00

Kim: When the strike happens you get a strike committee. You have—

01-01:10:03

Dong: Publicity.

01-01:10:04

Kim: —publicity.

01-01:10:04

Dong: Legal.

01-01:10:05

Kim: Legal. Fundraising or—

01-01:10:09

Dong: Yeah. I think the legal might have been connected with fundraising. Well, basically it's going around in rallies with a bucket and people would throw cash in and then you might have like thousands of dollars of cash for bail money raised. And then that money would have to be secured in a safe spot and given to the bail bondsman. It was lots of money involved. I remember people would walk through a crowd with satchels of cash to bail people out. Yeah. And then there was a negotiations team with all the representatives. So they would meet with the—

01-01:10:52

Kim: Administration.

01-01:10:52

Dong: —administration. Sometimes there would be breakdowns between the negotiations and the strike committee because negotiations you're trying to push for certain things and the strike committee would be outside and there's lots of repression and activities to promote the strike.

01-01:11:25

Kim: So within those two groups there was sometimes a little bit of not seeing eye-to-eye?

01-01:11:29

Dong: Yeah. Maybe miscommunications. Yeah. Maybe not seeing eye-to-eye. And then the other thing that probably didn't help was sometimes individuals would take it upon themselves to be negotiators. They would find an administrator and start talking and then people would get really upset.

01-01:11:49

Kim: Can you give me an example of that?

01-01:11:50

Dong: Well, let's say someone from another group would be talking to a dean on his own and this would be outside negotiations. And what are you supposed to do about that? And then would feed certain information in.

01-01:12:08

Kim: So you felt like there was also always a little bit, level of mistrust amongst the different groups?

01-01:12:13

Dong: Yeah. And then some people would see it. They say, "We want to strangle that guy," or that kind of thing.

01-01:12:25

Kim: Right. So it wasn't just perfect, peaceful, like holding hands?

01-01:12:27

Dong: No, no.

01-01:12:28

Kim: There was still a lot of negotiation.

01-01:12:30

Dong: Yeah. So there was that type of tension. And then it didn't help it if one organization would see it and think that people in the other organization were doing it.

01-01:12:49

Kim: Was there that fear? Was that always a fear that permeated the union?

01-01:12:53

Dong: Yeah, definitely. And then the other fear was that maybe one group may negotiate their own deal and leave the other groups in the lurch. It's like we're all in this together and we should complete it. Let's get the college and not resolve anything on a piecemeal basis. So that was the challenge. And it was real that it could fall apart. Or there were fears that it could fall apart.

01-01:13:43

Kim: Was there kind of natural leaders that emerged within the Front?

01-01:13:49

Dong: Yeah. Let's see, Jim Nabors. He spoke at a lot of the events. He was part of the Afro-American Students Union. And then, let's see, Manuel Delgado, Ysidro. Very good speakers. They could talk to the crowd. Jeff Leong. He was part of our group. He was the one that read the demands. He was actually pretty good. I think he was scheduled to speak a second time and as he was getting ready to walk across Sproul he was swooped up by the police and he was charged with a bunch of trumped up charges that were later dropped. The strategy they had was faces would be spotted in terms of who's the leader, who's a speaker, and those individuals would be—targeted. Jim Nabors, I think he got arrested a whole bunch of times. Manuel, he was targeted. So whoever spoke. Even though these individuals may not even have been on the strike leadership committee, the police were always looking for who in their own minds was the leadership.

01-01:15:35

Kim: So we're talking now about the strike and the strike really begins officially on January 21, 1969. And things are obviously happening. There's already groups talking to each other earlier that month. But before the strike begins, what was the decision to finally call for a strike, as the call of action?

01-01:15:58

Dong: Okay. So at UC Berkeley there was also a yellow symposium in mid-January.

01-01:16:09

Kim: Yes. January 11<sup>th</sup> I have here.

01-01:16:14

Dong: So it seems like everything was compressed, lots of these activities. You had this Asian studies 100x class, the meetings after, the meetings in terms of the formation of TWLF going on and overlapping in the meantime, the meetings with SF State. And then you had this yellow symposium, which was sponsored by AAPA, the Chinese Students Club, which was the social club, Chinese Student Association, also a social club. Chinese Students Club was American born Chinese, ABCs. Chinese Born Association, foreign born Chinese or FOBs. You know the term. And then there was a Nisei Students Association, Japanese Americans. What was interesting was that these social clubs went through a transformation themselves where you began to see the emergence of leaders within the social club who become active in the AAPA. So the heads of CSE, CSA and Nisei Student Association all become AAPA members.

01-01:17:43

Kim: Really after this yellow symposium?

01-01:17:48

Dong: No, during it.

01-01:17:48

Kim: During it.

01-01:17:48

Dong: Yeah, in the whole process of it. So they become this leadership. In fact, they may have already been involved in spring 1968. Yeah. Even way back then they were already becoming more politicized by the anti-war movement, the Panther stuff. Or just like myself being politicized, just being involved on campus, being involved in different events.

01-01:18:20

Kim: Did you participate in the yellow symposium?

01-01:18:23

Dong: Yeah. I attended it. I wasn't involved in organizing the speakers or anything like that. The symposium itself was kind of interesting. Basically it was part academic and it invited professors. Had white professors, some Asian professors who were all beginning to break into this field of Asian American studies, okay. And then it also had activists. It had people from organizations, student organizations on other campuses with names such as Oriental Concerned or Nisei Concern, names like that. But after this symposium they all changed their names to AAPA. So Oriental Concern, which kind of sounds kind of low key, all of a sudden becomes AAPA on other campuses.

01-01:19:33

Kim: Interesting. So it was a—

01-01:19:34

Dong: It led to the formation of a statewide, you could say even nationwide—Yale even had an AAPA. Yeah, AAPA. Yeah.

01-01:19:44

Kim: Wow. Yellow power became very much felt like right through this group? This idea became more concentrated and also spread out across the nation.

01-01:19:55

Dong: Yeah.

01-01:19:56

Kim: I know there was people from Hawaii and all over California, New York I have here.

01-01:20:02

Dong: Yeah. So in a very short concentrated point in time you had this going on. And then later there was a similar conference in LA and it began to spread even more. SF State strikers played a big role at this yellow symposium because there was a resolution to support the strike at SF State.

01-01:20:31

Kim: So I actually know that the person who brought that to the table was Lauren Chew. She was the one who asked that one of the resolutions to be passed at this meeting or this symposium was support for what was happening at SF State with their Third World Liberation Strike. So what was the role of gender, of women? The speakers and the leaders that you named are all men. Was there something there at play? Who was participating? Was it fifty/fifty men and women? And was there a gender breakdown in terms of what was happening during the front and then the strike?

01-01:21:10

Dong: Well, I know that in both strikes women played a very significant leadership role. Also internally in the meetings in terms of the analysis, during the times when there were lulls or negative thinking women would also play a big role in terms of providing analysis and so forth. In terms of public face, I think it was more men. Yeah. In terms of public speakers. Like Jeff, Richard, and then for the Mexican American groups and African American groups. I think you could say that that was part of the nationalism during that time. Women were active, but in terms of the public eye they didn't really have that big of a presence. But in terms of decision-making, definitely I'd say that it was very equal. Yeah.

01-01:22:35

Kim: This is one last thing before—I really want to get us to the actual strike and what happened. But do you think that that might be because there was an investment in masculinity? You're saying that this nationalist kind of angle had men at the forefront in the public sphere. You can obviously divide that with your general like public/private sphere and the way that the gender breaks out there. But did you feel that there was also a way, that yellow



power, for instance, in AAPA, was also about defining a certain type of reinvigorated masculinity for Asian American males? Was that something that was talked about?

01-01:23:10

Dong: Well, it wasn't talked about.

01-01:23:13

Kim: Casually or—

01-01:23:14

Dong: It wasn't talked about back then, but in retrospect I know some also had the opinion that because the men were viewed as being passive and unmasculine, that the women themselves intentionally set themselves aside to promote this masculine—

01-01:23:40

Kim: You know that because you talked to people retrospectively?

01-01:23:43

Dong: Yeah, some people told me they thought that way. Yeah.

01-01:23:47

Kim: Who? Do you mind just elaborating a little more?

01-01:23:49

Dong: Well, you would probably need to talk to them directly because I don't want to name names and then they might get back.

01-01:24:02

Kim: But you've heard that in retrospect?

01-01:24:04

Dong: Yeah.

01-01:24:04

Kim: Women organizers that you were working with at the time told you later?

01-01:24:09

Dong: Yeah. Okay, here's how it came out. Okay. Richard Aoki, he presented this theory of the bushido code, that the men should be promoted as the warriors and the women to assist that code. So that was presented. People said, "Oh, okay. That's him thinking because he likes the samurai stuff." Okay.

01-01:24:44

Kim: Was this at an AAPA meeting?

01-01:24:45

Dong: Yeah. So we kind of took it more like it was like a joke type thing, just kind of half accepted it. And then the other thing was I also noticed that as far as speaking, most of the Asians didn't really want to speak. But there was some people, it was like a knack. So they said, "Okay. You want to speak? Go

ahead.” So we would promote Richard to speak a lot, Richard Aoki, right, because he loved to speak. He was like a very chatty personality. But definitely I think the women’s movement, the leadership of women, didn’t really get analyzed and discussed until after the strike. The whole issue of the need to build leadership, the need to recognize their role. So you could say that there was something that was changing, something that was evolving. So this was ’68, ’69. If you look at the women’s journal that came out, I think it was ’70 or ’71, you would begin to see more discussion about that, about leadership, the need for more women to be recognized in leadership in the Asian American movement and the need to deal with sexism and so forth. Yeah.

01-01:26:35

Kim: But not in this initial period? I just wanted to ask.

01-01:26:37

Dong: Yeah, yeah.

01-01:26:38

Kim: We’re coming towards not quite the end but I want to definitely make sure that we talk about the strike itself. And so I wanted to ask first the five, really six kind of strike demands. Who and how were those crafted? Was it a big group meeting at the student level? It seems like you were a participator but maybe not so much an organizer within AAPA. So what was your role in that?

01-01:27:10

Dong: Okay. From what I can recall, as far as the demands, you probably need to talk to Manuel Delgado or Floyd Huen. I think they were probably more involved in that. Yeah. And then they would propose it and stuff like that. Yeah.

01-01:27:33

Kim: Do you remember hearing the strike demands for the first time? Were they voted upon? Was it a consensus that had to be reached?

01-01:27:44

Dong: Yeah. I don’t really remember that part. One thing is the similarity with the SF State demands. So it may have been easier for Berkeley to simply kind of rewrite it and adopt it because they had thought it through and all this stuff. But we had to redo the curriculum. Each group had to redo its curriculum. But in terms of the principles of the strike, self-determination, what that means, student control and so forth, we definitely did talk about it, yeah, a lot.

01-01:28:28

Kim: Can you tell me a little bit, yeah, how those conversations took place, what they were like?

01-01:28:33

Dong: I think it took place in terms of the university dragging out negotiations, the university not wanting to include themes such as autonomy, community

control, and therefore it's important for us as students to insist on that. So it's more along those lines in terms of breakdown in negotiations and how the university uses its different departments and different levels to delay what we feel is ethnic studies. Yeah.

01-01:29:29

Kim: During the strike, were there any kind of spaces where you could talk to students from both AAPA, but also different groups about this kind of ideology that was behind the demands, whether it's autonomy, self-determination, even the concept of the third world? Was there a kind of intellectual exchange that was going on?

01-01:29:50

Dong: Well, we would have AAPA meetings. There'd be TWLF strike committee meetings. People would share their experiences. People would talk about the Vietnam War and tie that in. Or people would talk about their own communities and how even white professors, because of the lack of ethnic studies, they can't really even teach third world children properly. They can't handle this generation of young people and provide them with a decent education. So it'd be lots of discussions like that. And then there would be community people coming in to talk about what's going on in the community.

01-01:30:47

Kim: Into AAPA meetings or even to the strike committee?

01-01:30:50

Dong: Yeah, well, to AAPA or to panel discussions. The example of all this would be that yellow symposium and the things that were discussed there. They would be ongoing types of topics.

01-01:31:07

Kim: Were the committees the primary space where multiple groups were getting together?

01-01:31:11

Dong: Well, we had big meetings, let's say at different junctures in the strike, and there'd be presentations. People would ask what their opinion was and there would be feedback and all this stuff. Yeah. I just remember lots of mass meetings and also lots of smaller AAPA meetings, to the point where we felt that what we really needed was a regular off-campus space. So then we would chip in money and we'd rent an apartment. You could meet all night. You could meet for twenty-four hours if you wanted to.

01-01:31:55

Kim: Who was meeting there?

01-01:31:56

Dong: All the AAPA members. We'd all stay in this apartment and meet. Let's say strike activities ends at 5:00 or 6:00 and we'd have dinner there and we'd sit there and talk until like 3:00 in the morning and sleep there.

01-01:32:19

Kim: Do you remember where that apartment was?

01-01:32:19

Dong: On Ellsworth Street. Yeah. So we would talk there. It was actually a studio so it shared a common area. So there was someone else that rented the other side of the apartment and then one time that person saw that it was like packed full of people and he was a little bit shocked. [laughter]

01-01:32:44

Kim: So it was all of AAPA. And were you talking still about political things or was it also a little bit fun? I mean obviously you're young people.

01-01:32:50

Dong: Well, yeah. Yeah. There was the fun part. But definitely where was all this leading us to? Should we really settle for what they offer? Is there something more long-term? What are we going to be doing after it settled? Times of violence. Some days extremely violent. Could this lead to losing everything? That we're just going to be shut down, that kind of thing.

01-01:33:37

Kim: Was that a real fear once the violence came? Not just the shutdown at the front but your own life?

01-01:33:42

Dong: Oh, no. I think it was more people have different concerns and worries. So by having that space people were able to just kind of voice it.

01-01:34:01

Kim: What was your exact role in this strike? Were you part of the strike committee? Were you a striker that would mobilize? What was your involvement with the kind of different factions?

01-01:34:11

Dong: So I was part of the strike committee. I did play some decision-making role in terms of the strike activities. And there were only so many of us besides that. And then basically going to the daily activities and the daily discussions. Whoever outlasts the other person in the conversations would have a bigger influence in the decision-making.

01-01:34:56

Kim: Oh, I see.

01-01:34:57

Dong: Because you have to go to a lot of activities and a lot of events and discussions, yeah.

01-01:35:02

Kim: So every day there was a discussion group?

01-01:35:03

Dong: Oh, yeah, it was a constant thing.

01-01:35:06

Kim: Amongst all the different groups or mostly within AAPA?

01-01:35:08

Dong: Within AAPA. I don't know exactly if it was the same case for all the other groups because after a certain point I think there was some burnout. It was hard to avoid because you're constantly on the move during the day. There's all this activity, this back and forth. There's those negotiations...you have to connect it to—

01-01:35:35

Kim: That's my question though. It's like who's communicating amongst the groups what's going on, what the strike decision is, how the negotiations are going? What was the kind of communication tool?

01-01:35:50

Dong: I think it was very much like a participatory democracy type thing. And then the strike committee was more representative of the different groups.

01-01:36:07

Kim: And you were part of that. So you were meeting with people from all the other groups in that capacity?

01-01:36:12

Dong: Yeah, for a certain point and then we rotate and then someone else would do it. So everybody who wanted to could have a chance to do that.

01-01:36:18

Kim: And then you would report back to AAPA and be like, "This is what we decided upon. We're going to do Sather Gate. We're going to block it," or whatever the strategy was.

01-01:36:28

Dong: Yeah. Yeah. So people would rotate in and out of that, that kind of a role. Although I don't know how much rotation was in the other groups. Maybe they were the same people in most cases. Yeah.

01-01:36:44

Kim: Who did you work with on the strike committee?

01-01:36:46

Dong: Well, there would be like two representatives from each one and then me and one other person. Yeah. You mean like individuals? Like who was it?

01-01:37:09

Kim: Yeah. Do you remember working with anybody in particular or friendships that were formed at the other groups?

01-01:37:12

Dong:

Charles Brown was always consistent in terms of the Afro-American group and then Manuel and Ysidro. I think there were alternate members, too. So it might have been like two, two, two, two, two and then there were alternates, yeah. So it did get a little bit on the big side. And then for the Asian American group, well, I remember I was on it and then my friend Steve, he was also on it. Richard, he was always on it. So that group would report back to AAPA and then AAPA would discuss it. If there was any disagreement with the decision then it would be brought back and then it would be rediscussed again. And then AAPA would meet and if there was any feeling about the strike, AAPA could actually call a strike committee meeting for a decision to change the course of the strike. So there was that, too.

01-01:38:23

Kim:

There was a lot of active involvement just from the groups themselves?

01-01:38:27

Dong:

I think the AAPA might have met the most. So definitely you could say that it was participatory democracy type structure and then you had a representative democracy at the top.

01-01:38:48

Kim:

So what was the actual strike itself like? I know that it escalated to violence pretty quickly. So can you just kind of paint me a picture of what a day of striking would look like for you?

01-01:39:02

Dong:

The strike was informational in the beginning. So there'd be picketing, chanting in front of Dwinelle Plaza. And then an announcement would be made that the informational part was ending and then there would be a sealing off of the Sather Gate area, which did lead to some tension in terms of people not crossing. Although if you wanted to cross you could just kind of go on the other gates or the other bridges nearby. And then the stationary picket line at Sather Gate would be attacked by plainclothes police. The police would be followed by uniformed police. Okay. The plainclothes would be followed by uniform and then the strike would escalate. The escalation would reach the point where there'd be thousands of students. The police would call for mutual assistance, which would include highway patrol officers. There would be tear gassing. The governor would step in and call it—

01-01:40:49

Kim:

State of emergency.

01-01:40:51

Dong:

Yeah, state of emergency. Not on the level of martial law, but it was kind of like a near martial law. And then there would be placements of National Guard troops at the end of University Avenue. Alameda Naval Air Station there would be National Guard troops stationed there, I think like 2,000 or

something like that. And so it became very tense. Then you see tanks and then there would be—

01-01:41:27

Kim: You'd see tanks on campus?

01-01:41:28

Dong: Well, part—

01-01:41:29

Kim: In the distance, yeah.

01-01:41:30

Dong: At the end. And then there would be helicopters dropping teargas, using pepper foggers. Let's say there would be students demonstrating and these helicopters would open their hatches and there would be these tubes that would release gas out. And then that would polarize the situation to the point where non-strikers would all of a sudden become agitated. They may not even know what the issue is but they're angry over that. And in the meantime negotiations are still going on. But because of the gas the negotiation breaks down and there'd be like lulls in negotiations. And in the meantime you have these groups, African Americans, Asians, Mexican Americans, trying to figure out what to do. And there'd be tensions within the organizations over what's the best way to deal with this new situation.

01-01:42:47

Kim: The escalated violence? The tear gas and—

01-01:42:51

Dong: Yeah. It was very escalated. And then there were also like some other groups that you couldn't control. They would just do whatever they wanted. Say, "Hey, we're trying to negotiate plus have our demonstration. We don't want to have it go all out, smashing windows and all this stuff."

01-01:43:16

Kim: Oh, so there was always like groups that were more—

01-01:43:16

Dong: Yeah, there were groups that were doing that, too.

01-01:43:18

Kim: What groups were those?

01-01:43:24

Dong: Back then I think they dressed in black, they wore the handkerchiefs and all this stuff.

01-01:43:35

Kim: Like anarchists?

01-01:43:37

Dong:

I don't think they were anarchists but they may have been an anarchist trend. Weathermen. Some of them were part of that, too. Yeah. But there's also provocateurs that kind of jump in and like to escalate the situation. You don't know who they are either.

01-01:43:55

Kim:

You said there were tensions about how to handle the placement. So what were some of the strategies that were being discussed, or debated rather?

01-01:44:06

Dong:

Yeah, I mean, definitely if there's lots of state violence, the discussion then becomes like should we back down and just kind of figure out how to cool things down and contain your negotiations or to accept what's offered? I'm sure SF State also reached that juncture. So finally there was some breakthrough. The academic senate, majority academic senate had a vote calling for establishment of ethnic studies.

01-01:45:02

Kim:

As a department, right?

01-01:45:05

Dong:

Well, it was support for this idea of a college of ethnic studies but establishment of a department while negotiation continues for a full-scale college. Yeah. So that's how it was kind of left. We kind of agreed to that. Okay. So we'll take this pending further negotiations for a Third World College. So that was what was on everybody's mind.

01-01:45:40

Kim:

Right. That that was the resolution that was reached that eventually ended the strike itself in terms of the activities.

01-01:45:47

Dong:

Yeah.

01-01:45:48

Kim:

How did you feel? What were your feelings at this point? You talked about burnout. What were some other things that were happening for you personally?

01-01:46:01

Dong:

Myself, I wasn't sure because I thought that we were going to go all the way for a Third World College. But given the fact that there wasn't a whole lot of people coming out in the picket lines, maybe from the burnout and stuff like that—

01-01:46:23

Kim:

So they started to dwindle, the picket lines?



01-01:46:24

Dong:

Yeah, there was some dwindling of it. I was for continuing it, but I think there was like a vote, a decision that basically we would accept a department and continue negotiations for the Third World College. Afterwards people had mixed feelings. You could tell by their actions. Dropping out—

01-01:47:03

Kim:

Of school altogether?

01-01:47:04

Dong:

Dropping out of school because after being in a very intense situation and then everything was supposed to be normal again. It was difficult. I know there were people who dropped out. There were people who felt that this next phase is to take what was offered and develop it into something good. In other words, put resources into developing the programs. And then another alternative was that we continue building the movement in the community. So it's kind of like different directions people took. The people who dropped out, I know some people just had to get out of the situation. Some other people didn't want to communicate because they had given up so much. Another person—

01-01:48:25

Kim:

What do you mean by that? Can you talk to me more about that?

01-01:48:27

Dong:

Well, like one person, he was an electrical engineering major and he said he had flunked out and he didn't know what to do. So he was just leaving. Another person, I think he traveled around the world and later he decided to go into the nursing field. Another person just stayed away from people. If you saw that person they didn't want to talk. So you could tell there was an emotional toll that was taken.

01-01:49:17

Kim:

Right. And did you feel that? You talked about the difficulty of going to a "normal" situation.

01-01:49:22

Dong:

Yeah. Well, definitely being able to concentrate was a difficult thing. Because of the fact that I had been doing that tutorial work and meeting community groups, I started working with youth, teenagers that were at-risk. They got in a lot of trouble, these youth.

01-01:49:54

Kim:

Are we talking about specifically Chinese American youth or Chinese youth in Chinatown?

01-01:49:57

Dong:

Yeah, Chinese. Yeah. So I guess you can say my attentions began to divert more towards the community work.

01-01:50:07

Kim: So were you less involved in kind of shaping what would become Asian American studies here?

01-01:50:14

Dong: Yeah. Except for the community component of ethnic studies, Asian American studies. I did see that it was valuable to have this community component because what happened was we began to setup coursework that placed students in the community doing tenant work, international hotel, establishing medical clinics, and that type of stuff.

01-01:50:55

Kim: And that was part of the original demands, right? The original demands were really asking that the academy bring the community in; a kind of breaking down of the expert and also the use of knowledge should be that it benefits the community. In some ways you were—

01-01:51:12

Dong: Yeah. In other words, I was still involved but it's just that I didn't want to be the administrator and just stay there on campus constantly. At that point because of the strike itself, it had been so intense. I didn't feel that I could contribute by just staying on campus. So, actually, a lot of us did kind of extend our goals further out. We had to do more outreach and stuff. I think that also led to the end of the AAPA. Because we had AAPA and then because we had left and then the others—

01-01:51:59

Kim: Who's we? Sorry.

01-01:52:01

Dong: Oh, a whole group of us that were involved in the strike had left. And then there were other AAPA members who focused their efforts on the running of Asian American studies or Asian studies, it was called back then. That this left a political vacuum on campus. AAPA no longer existed.

01-01:52:26

Kim: Because the people who were more involved in, say, the administrative part, building the program, were so focused on that they were less "political" and so AAPA—

01-01:52:38

Dong: Or their politics became the program.

01-01:52:44

Kim: Right. That's where their focus was.

01-01:52:45

Dong: Yeah.

01-01:52:47

Kim: I see.

01-01:52:48

Dong:

So that brings up another question about how these movements become incorporated and also how these movements evolve into other areas, such as the surrounding communities.

01-01:53:04

Kim:

Right. Like there's an evolution rather than an end.

01-01:53:08

Dong:

Yeah.

01-01:53:10

Kim:

But I am wondering, what happened to the actual Third World Liberation Front? The actual kind of unity, however fragile it was, or tense, there was also a clear coming together, which is what made the department of ethnic studies here possible. So what happened?

01-01:53:27

Dong:

It's probably something very similar. As soon as the department of ethnic studies under the chancellor was established, the TWLF ceased to function. People left. Some people went to jail.

01-01:53:51

Kim:

Because of the involvement with the TWLF

01-01:53:53

Dong:

Yeah, yeah. Like Ysidro, he went to jail. He was given a long sentence. He thought that they threw the key away.

01-01:54:02

Kim:

How long?

01-01:54:03

Dong:

Oh, he was given a nine-month sentence but because of Fay Stender, yeah, she was a Black Panther attorney, she found some loophole in his case and then got him out earlier.

01-01:54:15

Kim:

Oh, wow.

01-01:54:16

Dong:

Yeah. So he lucked out. He would have been the longest to serve some jail time. Yeah. So TWLF you could say ended. There were tensions over funding. I don't know the details of it. I just heard there was tension over how to divide up funds.

01-01:54:44

Kim:

In terms of the actual development of ethnic studies.

01-01:54:47

Dong: Yeah, of ethnic studies. But there was an African American studies major in a program within ethnic studies. There was Chicano, Native American, and Asian studies all within one—

01-01:55:05

Kim: Department.

01-01:55:06

Dong: —one department and there was a coordinator selected. I think it was someone who was in African American studies was the chairman of the whole thing.

01-01:55:18

Kim: Ronald Lewis...I believe.

01-01:55:20

Dong: Yeah. So the idea was this unit, this would stay as a unit. This would become the base for the college and then in 1974 African American studies pulls out. I think that kind of left things in limbo because what it did was—ethnic studies then establishes a comparative ethnic studies major and then resources from the Asian, Chicano, Native American goes into comparative ethnic studies. But those resources are not replaced so then those other majors, I think they probably ran into some difficulty because of resources, too. Yeah.

01-01:56:22

Kim: So did you keep track of what was going on at Berkeley while you were doing your work? Which was extensive. I know you were involved in Everybody's Bookstore. You're in the I Hotel. You're part of the Asian Community Center.

01-01:56:36

Dong: Well, I was aware of it. Lots of us were concerned because we heard that there was a student boycott of African American studies because there were students who wanted African American studies to stay within Ethnic Studies and not become a department of its own. So I think you could say that it definitely had a negative effect in terms of this idea of a Third World College or College of Ethnic Studies. It made it difficult. SF State has a College of Ethnic Studies where they're all under one roof. To this day my thinking is that the project's incomplete as a result of that. In '94 there was a decision by faculty in Ethnic Studies to go into the College of Letters and Science. That's in '94, okay. As a department, okay. I think there was also disagreement among the students as to whether or not that was the best thing to do. But I think the thinking behind it was that Letters and Science would have resources, they would have money. We would not be an underfunded program.

01-01:58:33

Kim: Right. And you joined the program in '94. You returned to get your PhD in ethnic studies around that time. Is that right?

01-01:58:38

Dong:

Yeah. I started in '94 when this decision was made. Yeah. So that was a difficult time, too, because I think since then there's been lots of cutbacks and Letters and Science, that's a pretty big college in itself, they have their priorities. In retrospect I don't think that was a very wise decision.

01-01:59:13

Kim:

Well, what made you decide to come back? You got a PhD in a program that in large part came into existence due to your activism as a young person. That's pretty fantastic, pretty amazing, I think. But what drew you back, to come back to the Academy after having worked in the community for so long?

01-01:59:37

Dong:

Well, in 1989 there was a twentieth anniversary celebration of the Third World Strike and they invited strikers back, to come to campus. So myself, I came back and I think Jeff Leong and a few of the Chicano students also came back. And one of the things that we found out was that there wasn't like a whole lot of knowledge about the movement and about the history and the struggle. I remember speaking at Carlos Muñoz's social movements class, ethnic studies forty-one, and also at Waldo Martin's class. I was kind of at a spot where I was thinking of going back to school, doing a career change also. So I asked Elaine Kim to write me a letter of rec because I told her I was interested in going into this master's program at USF. And so she suggested Ethnic Studies, as well as Professor Muñoz and Waldo Martin. So off of that I just kind of thought about it. I did notice that a lot of this early history was being erased and that maybe I could provide some input. So it was the right timing and I felt that I could play some kind of role. And I still had contacts, ties, connections with the original strikers and I began to communicate and reconnect with them. So on the thirtieth anniversary, large numbers of them came back and then the fortieth even more came back. Those events are appreciated. They learned something from it. Yeah.

01-02:02:14

Kim:

Yeah. Well, it's interesting. Nineteen ninety-nine there's kind of a reuse of the Third World Liberation Strike and Front that happens. As we're wrapping up, what do you think is the meaning of this resurgence? What is appealing to students in ethnic studies and beyond? What do you think the legacy is and how do you see your role as someone that kind of brought it back and made sure that that history is remembered? In some ways you are a cultural keeper, history keeper in that way. But, yeah, what do you think is appealing and what do you think the long-term legacy of the strike has been thus far and might be in the future?

01-02:02:59

Dong:

Well, the most appealing part to me, which is definitely very relevant today, is this idea about solidarity and it's not something that you can say flippantly and it's cool, that type of thing. But it's something that's definitely needed

given the vision that we have today and the problems that we have today and the rise of white supremacy, the sexism, and misogyny, and Islamophobia. And then the other thing I noticed just as an observer is this idea of third world solidarity comes up a lot. And that also demand or this idea of a third world college is something that younger generations still look to in terms of—they know that we didn't finish but then at the same time it kind of gives them a vision that this is something that students were able to begin. I don't think the institutions really respect Ethnic Studies that much, although we might think that they do. But I think it's only because of the struggle, yeah, that makes that difference.

01-02:04:47

Kim:

As the final question, what do you think is the future of ethnic studies here at UC Berkeley or the future of kind of student involvement, right, of that struggle for it?

01-02:04:57

Dong:

There is a future for Ethnic Studies if it is in the hands of the students and community. It was created almost out of nothing. One coordinator of Asian American studies, she was a community person, and she told me that when the department first started and she came into the picture, she got the impression from the administrators that it wasn't going to be around. Because the budget was small and they didn't think that people knew what they were doing and that eventually it would go away. That's the impression that she got.

01-02:06:10

Kim:

When was that?

01-02:06:12

Dong:

Oh, in the early seventies. Yeah. Yeah. So you could say it's been resilient. There's many different ways in which people have tried to maintain it. But I think you can't get away from the fact that this was a very democratically created department, created by students who wrote the curriculum, created the demands, and set the principles for it. Yeah.

01-02:06:51

Kim:

So finally, last one for real. And it'll be more personal. Is in retrospect, how has your involvement in all the movements, right, your time in Berkeley, whether it's with AAPA or with the Third World Liberation Strike to later actions, how did that define how you saw yourself, how you identified and presented yourself to the world?

01-02:07:15

Dong:

Well, let's just say that I see myself as someone who's an observer and a participant. Oftentimes I get surprised when I participate because I see people who really want to struggle to improve society. So that's a very warming thing for me to see. I see students today, they really want to change the world and make it a better place. We had a really bad election but then at the same time I

don't see people saying, "Oh, it's time for us to give up now." In fact, it probably creates a situation where it's more of a challenge today.

01-02:08:29

Kim: Thank you so much.

01-02:08:33

Dong: Thanks for the questions. [laughter]

[End of Interview]