



# CHINATOWN COMMUNITY FOR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

## 2017 NEWSLETTER

### OFFICE HOURS:

Third Sunday of each month, 1:00PM - 4:00PM  
418 Bamboo Lane, Los Angeles, CA 90012

## Tenants at 1907 Johnston Street Fight Eviction & Win

BY ANNIE SHAW & KATIE WANG

In October 2016, the residents at 1907 Johnston St in Lincoln Heights received notice from their landlord telling them to move out at the end of the month. Without knowing their rights, about half of the tenants vacated immediately without demanding any compensation. The remaining eight tenants stayed and organized. Having lived in the SROs for more than two decades, the tenants, mostly seniors from Vietnam and Toisan, cannot afford to move anywhere else. The younger tenants from Mexico and Korea, entitled to fewer protections compared to the elder tenants, stood in solidarity with the elders.

The residents supported each other through months of uncertainty and harassment from their landlord. They learned their rights and decided what to do collectively with each subsequent eviction notice they received. When the landlords threatened to change their locks, and turn off water and power, the residents stood strong because they knew such practices are illegal. When the landlord tried to offer cash-for-keys and threatened to lock the building from the outside at night, the tenants still refused to move because they knew that they had done nothing wrong and they understood their rights.

The public also rallied behind the tenants. More than 300 allies signed a petition supporting their demands. In a joint action with their neighbors at 2919 Broadway, the residents bravely shared their experiences and encouraged the entire neighborhood to fight for their rights. Their action drew support from many residents of Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. The public pressure led to a negotiation with the landlord. All of the residents were able to stay with the landlord yielding to most of their demands.

The landlord did refuse to hire a cleaner in retaliation, leaving the most senior women to clean the common area. He also recently tried to illegally raise their rent again and threatened to remove their air conditioners despite 100 degree heat. However, the tenants are no longer afraid and continue to stand tall against the landlord. Let's continue to support the residents to navigate these challenges. You can always find the 1907 Johnston Street residents taking the 76 bus from Lincoln Heights to Chinatown. They remain active, supporting other tenants in fighting for housing with dignity.

Watch these inspiring seniors in Sofia Chang's video:  
<http://bit.ly/1907johnston>

## CCED works with Chinatown Sustainability Dialogue Group

BY KING CHEUNG & PHYLLIS CHIU

In our fight for affordable housing and tenants rights, CCED has focused our organizing efforts on the low income immigrant residents, those who are most affected by egregious illegal rent increases and evictions.

We are up against some strong institutional forces, such as landlords, developers, politicians and the capitalistic system of profits, so we need allies. Besides working with other tenants rights groups in the city, CCED also works with the Chinatown Sustainability Dialogue Group (CSDG). CSDG is a progressive group consisting of members from the Chinese American Citizens Alliance (CACA), Organization of Chinese Americans (OCA-GLA), Chinese Historical Society (SCCHS), Chinatown Community for Equitable Development (CCED), Castelar Elementary School parents, as well as other independent community members.

CSDG recognizes that we have to act, otherwise the Chinatown that we know and love will no longer exist. Big outside corporate interests, driven by the profit motive, will take over our community. Therefore, amongst our many concerns, CSDG works on affordable housing, so that current and future immigrant families and seniors have a place to call home. We are concerned about preserving the historical and cultural characteristics of Chinatown, and we hope to foster socioeconomic, household, and racial/ethnic diversity to create a stable residential core that will support the community institutions and businesses in Chinatown.



Ord & Broadway SRO tenants with their checks, ready to pay their legally obligated rent

## Organizing & Building Tenant Power at Ord & Broadway SRO's

BY PROMISE LI

This summer, CCED started organizing with Chinatown tenants from a single room occupancy (SRO) building at 651 Broadway. As of October 2017, we have successfully fought illegal rent increases, but continue to fight for fair living conditions in their building.

Earlier in the year, the residents received illegal rent increases from their landlord, Robert Chan. For some, the increases amounted to almost 50 percent of their original rent. For the residents who have lived there for decades, rent had steadily increased to nearly double, while the amount of aid from Social Security remains mostly stagnant.

CCED volunteers started outreach to the building two years ago after hearing that the poor living conditions were a threat to the health and safety of the residents. The tenants faced a number of obstacles in organizing. Across 30 units, they spoke different languages: Mandarin, Cantonese, Toisan, Teochew, Vietnamese, Spanish and English. Just communicating was difficult. Because the inventory of affordable housing is dwindling rapidly, residents were also rightfully afraid of losing their housing. But the illegal rent increases raised a sense of urgency that brought folks together. With the persistent efforts of tenant leaders and CCED volunteers, residents began to find ways to communicate and work together. They began to realize that without a common approach and collective action, they were completely at the mercy of the landlord. Meetings were held with translation into various languages. Respect for each other's cultures and languages helped develop a caring, tight knit community.

When our outreach team first went out to investigate these rent increases, we discovered that the landlord's notice to increase rent was not valid: the bank, which was also owned by the landlord, merely wrote the increase in pen without a formal notice. The tenants mobilized and refused to pay the increased rent and resist the landlord's demands. Eventually, in a show of solidarity and resistance, the tenants decided to publicly and collectively pay their rents to the bank. When the landlord stopped giving them receipts, the tenants paid by money order to independently retain documentation as proof of their payment. The bank accepted the rent for the first month, but in the second month, the bank refused to accept the payment and even called the police to intimidate the faultless tenants. Still, the tenants stood strong continued paying their original rent.

The tenants' victory in the summer continued to empower them to address other important issues in the building. Habitability issues, a persistent problem throughout Chinatown's buildings, have long affected the tenants on 651 Broadway. The tenants reported many problems in the building that have never been properly addressed: the lock of the building's backdoor does not work, which allowed no security for the tenants, the toilets, the stove, shower handles and knobs have been broken, the hallways have never been cleaned, and pest infestations have been a recurring issue. Getting organized and fighting against the illegal and unjust rent increases puts the residents in a good position to continue the fight to make their building livable. The tenants drafted a public letter with support of CCED, other community partners, and neighbors to continue pressuring the landlord to meet them face to face and address the issues with their housing conditions. Over 3,000 residents and supporters have already signed the petition in support of the tenants.

To show your support, sign our Change.org petition at: <http://bit.ly/2wyLrBb>

The recent organizing victories of the Ord and Broadway tenants, like the other fights in Lincoln Heights and at the Metro apartments, demonstrates the ability of working class communities of color to fight back against landlords and corporations in Chinatown. As the tenants learn to reinforce and build solidarity and power within and beyond their own buildings, they also realize that the only and surest way that they can change their material conditions is when they organize themselves collectively. Gentrification and housing issues in Chinatown can be challenged by mass power.

# Lincoln Heights United Against Displacement

BY TAIJI MIYAGAWA

On February 11, 2017, residents from two different buildings in Lincoln Heights united to host a joint rally and march, drawing supporters from across Los Angeles and receiving broad media coverage. The residents were fighting harassment and evictions by greedy landlords in Lincoln Heights. CCED members had been working with the 1907 Johnston Street tenants, mostly elderly Cantonese speaking renters, for many months before becoming aware of the site a few blocks away at 2919 N. Broadway, near Griffin Avenue.

CCED found out about the issues facing the 2919 building when one of the residents, Martha Ponce, contacted CCED to ask about illegal rent increases. Martha's daughter was living in the Victor Heights area of Los Angeles Chinatown and had kept a CCED brochure she received on one of CCED's monthly outreach days. By her daughter's suggestion, Martha contacted CCED for help. CCED learned that some of the 2919 residents had been living in the building for thirty years.

In August 2016, 2919 Broadway's new owners, Neilson Hammer YA, LLC, hired two property management companies, NBK Reality and De Miranda. NBK and DeMiranda began to evict residents, offering them small cash amounts in a "cash for keys/voluntary vacate" offer. The landlord combined the "cash for keys" offer with vicious intimidation techniques such as banging on the

residents' doors unannounced, at all hours of the day and evenings. The two management companies made intimidating calls to the tenants, threatening to call out the Sheriff Department, even though they had no legal grounds to do so. Most of the renters, not being aware of their legal rights, were frightened and pushed out of the building, fearing for their safety. Most of them were forced to leave during the middle of the 2016 holiday season. Residents at five of the units, however, after learning of their legal rights, decided to fight the landlord.

CCED activists, members of the Anti-Displacement Artists Network (ADAN) and other supporters were able to build good relationships with the residents, including bringing them together with residents from the 1907 Johnston Street fight. The two groups of residents agreed to stand together in a bold, public, February 11th multilingual rally to inform their neighbors of their rights and call on them to stand up and fight. Independent videos, flyers/brochures/banners and the rally itself were conducted in English, Cantonese and Spanish.

With support from attorney Fred Nakamura of Neighborhood Legal Services (800-433-6251), the remaining residents at 2919 N. Broadway were eventually able to get financial compensation according to their legal protection under the Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Ordinance (the 2919 N. Broadway was built prior to October 1978). Compared with renters who did not fight back,

the difference in monetary compensation was substantial. Several of them won settlements and were able to relocate to either Lincoln Heights or nearby neighborhoods. Unfortunately one elderly pair, both with disabilities, had to move to Tijuana. Beyond the monetary victories, the residents had their voices heard and felt empowered by the victory. To the residents who stayed and fought, raising their voices and empowering themselves were more important than the monetary compensation from the landlord.

While the Lincoln Heights community lost yet another building to a racist developer, because of the boldness of the residents, they made their fight public and were able to set an inspiring example for their Lincoln Heights neighbors. They showed that renters can defend their legal rights if they stand together to resist landlord harassment and not fall for dirty intimidation tactics. Word about how these residents united and fought continued to spread for months after the February 11th action. Working with their supporters and armed with knowledge, they demonstrated how to transform their fear, win back their dignity, build unity with other residents across cultural lines and set a great example for others facing similar conditions going forward.

**Watch Lincoln Heights Elderly Chinese Fight Displacement:** <https://youtu.be/fi-IpGVJb8E>  
**Watch 2919 N. Broadway fight:** <http://bit.ly/LHseniors>

## Immigration Update

BY SHIU-MING CHEER

Since Trump has taken office, he has used xenophobic rhetoric to scapegoat immigrants for the nation's problems and made their lives immeasurably more difficult. His vision for America is a country where white supremacy dominates. In addition to his refugee and Muslim ban, which covers six Muslim majority countries, the Administration announced on September 5th, 2017 that it would end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. DACA is a hugely impactful Obama era immigration reform measure that has allowed 800,000 young undocumented immigrants, over 242,000 of whom live in California, to obtain work permits, financially support their families, and contribute to their communities. The relentless organizing and advocacy efforts of undocumented immigrants and their allies made this victory possible and demonstrates the possibilities of grassroots organizing. Taking DACA away from them places DACA recipients at risk for deportation and deprives them of takes away from their ability to pursue their dream jobs and degrees.

The Administration also supports the unjust RAISE Act, a proposed Senate bill that would dramatically cut family reunification visas. This bill would cut out visas for some family members of those currently living in the U.S., such as parents and grandparents of legal U.S. residents and citizens and married and unmarried adult children of U.S. citizens. The RAISE Act aims to cut legal immigration by 50% percent. Instead, it would put into place a skills-based system that would give visa applicants a score based on age, education, income, job prospects, English proficiency, and other factors. To see you would qualify to immigrate under the RAISE Act, click here. Civil rights and Asian American organizations have denounced the RAISE Act as a racist, xenophobic piece of legislation. Family reunification has been a cornerstone of immigration law since 1965 and is the primary method through which Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders migrate to the U.S.

In addition, ICE has been aggressively increasing the detention and deportation of certain immigrant populations, particularly Latinos. These include immigration raids, turning police officers into immigration agents, and using taxpayer money to build an ineffective border wall. Taken at large together, these actions are a despicable attempt to purge immigrants from this country. These anti-immigrant policies affect Chinatown because many families here are mixed - some people might be U.S. citizens while others could have green cards or are undocumented. There are several actions that you can take to show your support for DACA and for immigrants:

- **Sign the petition:** <http://bit.ly/cleanDACA>
- **Read and share the resources found here:** <http://weareheretostay.org/#fightback>
- **Come to our monthly outreach to learn more about immigrants' right issues**

**CCED OUTREACH:** Third Sunday of each month, 1:00PM - 4:00PM  
Address: 418 Bamboo Lane, Los Angeles, CA 90012

## The Last Gift Shop on Chung King Road

BY KATIE WANG

Alex Cheung opened Alex Cheung's Antiques on Chung King Road in Chinatown, Los Angeles, in 1971. He moved from Hong Kong to start a business, even though he didn't know anyone else in Los Angeles. When I asked Alex about what it was like when he moved to Chung King Road in the 70s, he relayed, "It was very fancy, and busy. There were benches and Chinese music playing from 8 to 10 each night on Chung King Road!" He said artists like Leo Politi and Tyrus Wong would come to Chung King road to draw people, but there weren't any galleries on Chung King Road during that time, just jewelry stores, furniture stores, and gift shops. Local Chinatown residents and tourists would come to shop and to partake in for annual yearly street parades and festivities shows around Chinese New Years.

These days, Chung King Road has few pedestrians, and Alex's business is about to close. He says, "I don't see any future for Chung King Road, [because] once retail is gone, no retail will come back." I asked him why the retail business left Chung King Road, he says it's due to the galleries that have invaded coming Chung King Road. "They're not galleries, they're workshops. That kills [the business] because people can't go inside."

I watched as Alex's eyes sparkled while he described the bustling Chung King Road of the 70s and listened as he raised his voice when talking about Chung King Road's galleries. As a longtime CCED volunteer, I've walked through a deserted Chung King Road, passing by closed galleries, while giving tours of Chinatown and wondered, "Who are the galleries for? Who do they benefit?" The answer I've come to is: They benefit people who can afford to spend thousands on art and not the long time low-income residents of Chinatown. I encourage readers to stop by Chung King Road to visit one of the last remaining antique gift shops on Chung King Road.

## Chinatown Must Join the Fight Against the Right Wing and White Supremacy

BY CRAIG WONG

Racism is not a legacy of the past, nor is it just history; it is alive and thriving in Trump's America.

On August 12th, in response to the removal of a confederate statue, Nazis, Ku Klux Klan members and a motley assortment of other right wing, racist and white supremacist followers staged a torchlight procession and the next day, a mid-day protest march.

Thousands of anti-racist activists turned out in overwhelming numbers to denounce the white supremacist protesters. However, a white supremacist counter-protester deliberately drove a car into the anti-racist demonstrators, tragically murdering Heather Heyer, a 32 year old white woman who was active in the fight against bigotry and racism.

President Trump at first failed to denounce the Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan and other right-wing racists. Later, he blamed both the racist demonstrators and the anti-racist crowd for violence and claimed that there were "fine people" on both sides.

CCED members mourn the tragic death of Heather Heyer and stand with the anti-racist demonstrators, who are valid in fighting the white supremacists by any means necessary. Right wing forces are waging an open campaign on African Americans, women, undocumented folks, Muslims/Muslim Americans, LGBTQ folks, and other marginalized groups in American society. We in the Chinatown community must join the fight against Trump, the right wing, and white supremacy in all its forms. Let us be clear on which side we stand and let us get to work.