



An educator's guide to



**Becoming  
AMERICAN**  
THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE

*a Bill Moyers presentation*



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Thomas Lennon, Series Producer • Ruby Yang, Series Editor

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# A LETTER FROM BILL MOYERS

DEAR READER,

*Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* chronicles the history of Chinese immigrants and their ongoing struggle to become American. Theirs is a compelling tale of struggle and triumph, progress and setback, separation and assimilation, discrimination and achievement. It is a story of the collision of two cultures and a saga that has often been overlooked.

It is a story I have wanted to tell for a long time now. I started getting interested in it way back in the sixties when I was a young White House assistant for President Lyndon Johnson. I worked on helping to pass the Immigration Act of 1965 and then flew with President Johnson to the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor where he signed the bill into law on October 3, 1965. That act turned American immigration upside down. It opened the door for Asians to come here in record numbers, and it's been fascinating to watch the face of America change over the last forty years.

A few years later, I met some young Chinese Americans in San Francisco who were challenging the city's power brokers. The stories they told opened up whole chapters in the American epoch that were, at that time, all but unknown to me. Then, over the years I interviewed scores of other Chinese Americans—poets, scientists, artists, entrepreneurs. I listened to them talk about their experiences of becoming American and I watched them wrestling with the issues that every immigrant group has faced over time. What does one give up to become American? What traditional values can be preserved?

Then one day, some five or six years ago, the thought hit me, PBS has told the story of the English in America, the Irish in America, the Jews in America, the Africans in America, but except for an occasional documentary, we have not told the story of the Chinese in America. I wanted to tell that story.

Together with my wife and partner, Judith Davidson Moyers, I put together a remarkable production team who have made this series their labor of love for the better part of the last two years. It's a team as American in its diversity as the story itself. Thomas Lennon, who has created a number of extraordinary broadcasts, including *The Irish in America* and *Jefferson's Blood*, signed on as series producer. Ruby Yang joined us as series editor and did an incredible job editing not one, but all three films. Joseph Angier, Mi Ling Tsui, and Steve Cheng were producers for the three programs in the series. They found the stories and the witnesses that make the history come to life.

But it's not just a history we're telling. It's about now, today, our times. Our country is wrestling with issues of identity and democracy, how new arrivals fit in, what it takes to become American, how do we finally accept those who have demonstrated they ARE American. Although *Becoming American* is a series about Chinese Americans, it's really about all of us.

- BILL MOYERS

## INTRODUCTION

We at Facing History and Ourselves engage adults and adolescents in studies of history and human behavior that focus on the moral questions in the world today. (To learn more about our work, visit our website at [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org).) For years, we have been using documentaries produced by Bill Moyers and his talented associates in our work. They help us confront the complexities of history in ways that promote critical and creative thinking about the challenges we face in preserving and expanding freedom and democracy.

In a democracy, ideas are tested through conversation, discussion, and debate. Thoughtful participation requires what Judge Learned Hand once called “the spirit of liberty.” He defined it as the spirit “which is not too sure it is right,” the spirit “which seeks to understand the minds of other men and women” and “weighs their interests alongside one’s own without bias.” This guide is designed to encourage such encounters. It is a story to which each of us brings a unique perspective.

*Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* describes the ways the first arrivals from China in the 1840s, their descendants, and recent immigrants have “become American.” It is a story about identity and belonging that will resonate with all Americans. In every generation, Americans have asked:

Who may live among us?

Who may become an American?

What does it mean to be an American?

The way we have answered those questions at various times in history is central to an understanding of the nation’s past. The choices we make about one another as individuals and as a nation define identities, create communities, and ultimately forge a nation. Those choices build on the work of earlier generations and leave a legacy for those to come.

In the third episode of *Becoming American*, Bill Moyers asks a young Chinese American to describe the American dream. She replies:

*I don’t get to choose my color but I get to choose everything else. I get to compose my life one piece at a time—however I feel like it. Not to say that it’s not difficult and not to say that people don’t balk at whatever I choose, not to say that there isn’t challenge all the time, but more than material wealth, you get to choose what you are, who you are.*

That is the American dream. That dream is embedded in our most cherished documents. Over the years, in every generation, brave individuals and groups—both immigrant and native-born—have struggled to make that dream a reality by demanding that the nation live up to its ideals. The goal of this educator’s guide is to explore such universal themes in a particular history. Throughout the guide, students are encouraged to relate the story of the Chinese in America to their own history and to the history of the nation as a whole.

-MARGOT STERN STROM  
FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

## OVERVIEW

*Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* deepens and expands an understanding of the nation's past by focusing on a story that is central to the nation's past but too often omitted from textbooks. It is a story that raises important questions about what it means to be an American—questions that resonate throughout the nation today. The documentary is divided into three programs, each with a focus on a particular time in history. Program 1 describes the first arrivals from China, beginning in the early 1800s and ending in 1882, the year Congress passed the first Chinese exclusion act. Program 2, which details the years of exclusion and the way they shaped and mis-shaped Chinese American life, opens in 1882 and ends soon after Congress repealed the exclusion acts in 1943. Program 3 examines life during the Cold War, in the wake of immigration reform in 1965, through the years of the Civil Rights Movement, and up to the present—years of new opportunities and new challenges for Chinese Americans.

The Educator's Guide is also divided into parts. *PreView* prepares students for the documentary by raising questions about such key concepts as history, identity, ethnicity, membership, belonging, and assimilation. It contains several brief readings, each followed by a set of questions and activities labeled "Connections." *Focus: Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* contains a set of activities designed for use immediately before and after watching a single program or the series as a whole. These activities foster critical viewing and promote a general discussion of the documentary and its themes.

*Spotlight* provides materials for examining the documentary section by section. Each program is divided into 10- to 20-minute segments—a length well suited to classroom use. These segments may be used to provide a historical context for literary works that focus on the Chinese American experience or to enrich a US history course by offering a new perspective on such traditional topics as the California Gold Rush, the settlement of the West, the building of the transcontinental railroad, immigration, World War II, the Civil Rights Movement, or the Cold War. The timing of each segment appears in parentheses after the title. For example, Segment 1 in Program 1 is entitled *Leaving Home*. Following the title is the information: (9:00-13.25). That means it begins 9 minutes into the program and ends 13.25 minutes into the program. The final part—*Reflections*—re-examines concepts and themes developed throughout the guide.

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### TO LEARN MORE

The following books may be helpful in teaching about the Chinese American experience. Some provide an overview of the history, while others explore specific topics and/or concepts.

- Chan, Sucheng. *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*. Twayne Publishers, 1991.
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- Tsai, Henry. *The Chinese Experience in America*. Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Wu, Frank H. *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*. Basic Books, 2002.
- Yung, Judy. *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco*. University of California Press, 1995.
- Zia, Helen. *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

## PREVIEW

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### HISTORY AND IDENTITY

*Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* opens with a busload of American students traveling through China's Guangdong Province to see for themselves where the Chinese American story began. Those students are exploring the relationship between their family history and their identity. How does one's ethnic heritage shape identity? What part does the past play in the way we see ourselves? In the way others view us? Each of the readings that follows addresses one or more of these questions. Although each focuses on the experiences of Chinese Americans, the questions they raise are universal.

#### Past and Present

Xuefei Jin was born in 1956 in a part of China then known as Manchuria. He came to the United States in 1985. Although English is his second language, he is an award-winning novelist and poet who writes only in English under the pen name Ha Jin. In a poem entitled "The Past," Ha Jin reflects on the relationship between past and present, history and identity:

*I have supposed my past is a part of myself.  
As my shadow appears whenever I'm in the sun  
the past cannot be thrown off and its weight  
must be borne, or I will become another man.*

*But I saw someone wall his past into a garden  
whose produce is always in fashion.  
If you enter his property without permission  
he will welcome you with a watchdog or a gun.*

*I saw someone set up his past as a harbor.  
Wherever it sails, his boat is safe—  
if a storm comes, he can always head for home.  
His voyage is the adventure of a kite.*

*I saw someone drop his past like trash.  
He buried it and shed it altogether.  
He has shown me that without the past  
one can also move ahead and get somewhere.*

*Like a shroud my past surrounds me,  
but I will cut it and stitch it,  
to make good shoes with it,  
shoes that fit my feet.<sup>1</sup>*

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### CONNECTIONS

What does it mean to view the past "as a shadow"? How does one "wall" the past "into a garden"? How does one set up the past as a "harbor"? What may prompt someone to "drop the past like trash"? How does the poet view his own relationship with the past? In what other ways do people see their history? Which view is closest to your own?

What does Ha Jin mean when he writes, "the past cannot be thrown off and its weight must be borne, or I will become another man"? How does he challenge that idea in his poem? Why do you think he decides to "stitch" his past into "good shoes," "shoes that fit my feet"?



## “Orientation Day”

At the age of seven, Jennifer Wang came to the United States from Beijing, China with her family. At seventeen, she wrote an essay entitled “Orientation Day.” It is a response to a familiar experience: introducing oneself to a group of strangers. Wang writes in part:

*Something about myself? How do I summarize, in thirty seconds, everything, which adds up and equals a neat little bundle called, Me? How do I present myself in a user-friendly format, complete with “Help” buttons and batteries? Who am I, and why do I matter to any of you?*

*First of all, I am a girl who wandered the aisles of Toys “R” Us for two hours, hunting in vain for a doll with a yellowish skin tone. I am a girl who sat on the cold bathroom floor at seven in the morning, cutting out the eyes of Caucasian models in magazines, trying to fit them on my face. I am the girl who loved [newscaster] Connie Chung because she was Asian, and I’m also the girl who hated Connie Chung because she wasn’t Asian enough. . . .*

*During that time I also first heard the term “chink,” and I wondered why people were calling me “a narrow opening, usually in a wall.” People expected me to love studying and to enjoy sitting in my room memorizing facts for days and days.*

*While I was growing up, I did not understand what it meant to be “Chinese” or “American.” Do these terms link only to citizenship? Do they suggest that people fit the profile of either “typical*

*Chinese” or “typical Americans”? And who or what determines when a person starts feeling American, and stops feeling Chinese?*

*I eventually shunned the Asian crowds. And I hated Chinatown with a vengeance. I hated the noise, the crush of bodies, the yells of mothers to fathers to children to uncles to aunts to cousins. I hated the limp vegetables hanging out of soggy cardboard boxes. I hated the smell of fish being chopped, of meat hanging in a window. I hated not understanding their language in depth—the language of my ancestors, which was also supposed to be mine to mold and master.*

*I am still not a citizen of the United States of America, this great nation, which is hailed as the destination for generations of people, the promised land for millions. I flee at the mere hint of teenybopper music. I stare blankly at my friends when they mention the 1980s or share stories of their parents as hippies. And I hate baseball.*

*The question lingers: Am I Chinese? Am I American? Or am I some unholy mixture of both, doomed to stay torn between the two?*

*I don’t know if I’ll ever find the answers. Meanwhile, it’s my turn to introduce myself. . . .*

*I stand up and say, “My name is Jennifer Wang,” and then I sit back down. There are no other words that define me as well as those do. No others show me being stretched between two very different cultures and places—the “Jennifer” clashing with the “Wang,” the “Wang” fighting with the “Jennifer.”<sup>2</sup>*

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## CONNECTIONS

Jennifer Wang asks several questions about the terms *Chinese* and *American*. How would you answer the questions she poses for herself? Record your responses in a journal. You may find it helpful to use a journal to explore the ideas raised by the documentary. A journal can be a way of documenting your thinking. Share your thoughts with your classmates. What do

your responses have in common? What new questions do they raise?

Is Wang Chinese? American? Is she a combination of the two? Why does she describe the combination of the two as “unholy”? To what extent is Wang’s struggle to define her identity unique? To what extent is it a struggle that other Americans share?

## How Do You Become American?

Eric Liu is a second-generation American. In an essay, Liu describes two photographs in the memorial book that his father's friends compiled shortly after his father's death in 1991. Liu writes of the first snapshot, which was taken in China:

*Eight or nine of [my father's friends] are walking up a dirt road, jesting and smiling. And there's my father at the end of this happy phalanx—khaki hat a bit too big, arm pumping jauntily and foot raised in mid-march, singing a song. The face is my father's, but the stance, so utterly carefree, is hardly recognizable. I stared at that picture for a long time when I first got the book. . . .*

*When Chao-hua Liu came to the United States in 1955, at the age of eighteen, he was Chinese. When he died thirty-six years later, he was, I'd say, something other than Chinese. And he had helped raise a son who was Chinese in perhaps only a nominal sense. But what, ultimately, does this mean? Where does this Chineseness reside? In the word? In the deed? In what is learned—or what is already known? And how is it passed from one generation to the next? . . .*

*Another photograph, this one dated April 1962. It's a black-and-white shot, slightly out of focus, set in a spare apartment. There is no art on the walls, not even a calendar. . . . In the center of the picture is my father, sitting at a desk with stacks of papers and books. He is leaning back slightly in a stiff wooden chair, his left leg*

*crossed, and he is reading a book that rests easily on his knee. He is wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with ILLINOIS and a Stars and Stripes shield. He is smoking a pipe, which he holds to his mouth absently with his right hand. . . .*

*Maybe it's just the pipe and the college sweatshirt, or the posture. Still I can't help thinking that my father in this photograph looks—what? Not quite so Chinese, I suppose. When this shot was taken, he'd already been in the United States for over seven years. He'd worked odd jobs to save money. One of them, my personal favorite, was painting the yellow line down the middle of a South Dakota highway. He had become during this period, a devotee of Hank Williams and Muhammad Ali. He'd earned a degree in philosophy—Western philosophy—from the University of Illinois, and had become fascinated with [French philosopher Albert] Camus and existentialism. He had finished a master's in mathematics. He had been dating my mother, whom he'd met at a picnic with other students from Taiwan, for three years. They would be married a year later. . . .*

*In our archetype of the immigrant experience, it is the first generation that remains wedded to the ways of the Old Country and the second generation that forsakes them. This, we learn, is the tragedy of assimilation: the inevitable estrangement between the immigrant father who imagines himself still in exile and the American son who strains to prove his belonging. There is also, unfortunately, a good deal of contrivance. In search of narrative tension, we let ourselves forget that the father, too, is transformed.<sup>3</sup>*

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## CONNECTIONS

Eric Liu writes that when his father came to the United States, he was Chinese. When he died 36 years later, he was “something other than Chinese.” How did his father's identity change? How does Liu view those changes?

How would you answer the questions Liu raises about his father's ethnicity and his own?

Where does your ethnicity reside? “In the word? In the deed? In what is learned—or what is already known?” How is it been passed from one generation to the next?

How does Liu seem to define the word *assimilation*? Create a working definition of the term.

## “Where Does Chineseness Reside?”

In reflecting on his identity, author Eric Liu asks where his ethnicity resides and how it is passed from one generation to the next. Lisa See considers those questions in the foreword to a book about her family’s history in the United States. Fong See, her great-grandfather, left China in 1871 to seek his fortune on “Gold Mountain,” as the United States was known in China. There he became a merchant.

See writes that as a child she often stayed with her father’s parents on weekends and during summer vacations. Much of that time was spent in the family’s antique store, the F. Suie One Company. She recalls:

*In the late afternoons, my grandmother and great-aunt Sisse would relax in wicker chairs in the back of the store over cups of strong tea. During that quiet and comfortable time they would reminisce about the past. They told intriguing and often silly stories about missionaries, prostitutes, tong wars, the all-girl drum corps, and the all-Chinese baseball team. They spoke about how the family had triumphed over racist laws and discrimination. Then, . . . inevitably . . . would come my grandmother’s assertion that, “Yes, during the war, the lo fan (white people) made all of us Chinese wear buttons so that they would know we weren’t Japanese.”*

*My grandmother taught me how to wash the rice until the water ran clear, then—without the aid of a measuring cup—pour water over the grains in the steamer up to the first knuckle of a hand. It didn’t matter if it was her knuckle or mine, she explained; for five thousand years the system had worked perfectly. Finally she would place a few lengths of lop cheung, a delicious pork sausage, on top to cook as the rice steamed. Meanwhile, my grandfather would be chopping ingredients. Once the rice was on, I became my grandfather’s second cook. “The best I ever had,” he used to say. Together—although all these years later I can’t remember a single thing I did—we would make up a dish of tomato beef for which he was remembered after his death.*

*At family weddings, we’d wait at our table for the bride to come by, and my grandmother would let me be the one in our group to hand over the lai see—“good-luck money” wrapped in a red envelope with gold characters of felicity and fortune limned on the outside. My grandmother would take me from table to table through huge banquet rooms, explaining who each and every person was, and how they were related to me. “This is your first cousin once removed. This is your third cousin.”*

In 1989, See’s great-aunt asked her to write the family’s history. Over the next five years, she interviewed over a hundred people and uncovered many family secrets. She writes of the experience:

*What has emerged is a story of melting—how people and cultures melt in all directions. What I haven’t yet mentioned is that when my grandmother included herself among the Chinese who had to wear buttons during the war, she might be tucking loose strands of red hair into her bun. My grandmother—like my great-grandmother—was Caucasian, but she was Chinese in her heart. She had melted into that side. Over the years, she had packed away her eyelet dresses with cinched waists, and had adopted black trousers and loose-fitting jackets, which she always wore with a beautiful piece of Chinese jewelry. She learned how to make lettuce soup, how to give those brides their lai see, how to be a proper Chinese daughter-in-law. My great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother were as Caucasian and “American” as they could be, yet they all chose to marry men whose culture was completely different from their own.*

*Many of the Chinese I interviewed talked about Caucasians as lo fan and fan gway, as white people, “white ghosts.” Often someone would say, by way of explaining, “You know, she was a Caucasian like you.” They never knew how startling it was for me to hear that, because all those years in the store and going to those wedding banquets, I thought I was Chinese. It stood to reason, as all those people were my*

relatives. I had never really paid much attention to the fact that I had red hair like my grandmother and that the rest of them had straight black hair. But I had other proof as well. All Chinese babies are born with a Mongolian

spot—a temporary birthmark in the shape of a cabbage—at the small of their backs. I had a trace of that spot when I was born. Though I don't physically look Chinese, like my grandmother, I am Chinese in my heart.<sup>4</sup>

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## CONNECTIONS

What does Lisa See mean when she writes that she and her grandmother are “Chinese in their heart”? How might she answer the questions Eric Liu raises? Does her “Chineseness” reside in the word? In the deed? In what is learned—or what is already known? And how has it

passed from one generation to the next?”

How does See define the word *assimilation*? How is her definition similar to Liu's? What does her definition suggest about the complexities of “becoming American”?

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## TO LEARN MORE

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See, Lisa. *On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family*. Vintage, 1995.

Yep, Laurence, ed. *American Dragons: Twenty-five Asian Voices*. HarperCollins, 1995.

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1 Reprinted from “Facing Shadows” © 1996 by Ha Jin by permission of Hanging Loose Press.

2 “Orientation Day,” by Jennifer Wang. In *Yell-Oh Girls! Emerging Voices Explore Culture, Identity, and Growing Up Asian American*, ed. by Vickie Nam. Quill, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2001, 199-200.

3 From *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker* by Eric Liu. Copyright © 1998 by Eric Liu. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.

4 Lisa See. *On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family*. Vintage Books, 1995, xvii-xx.

## FOCUS

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### BECOMING AMERICAN: THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE

*Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* chronicles the history of the Chinese in the United States. The three-part documentary reveals the various ways the first arrivals from China, their descendants, and recent immigrants have “become American.” It is a story about identity and belonging that has meaning for all Americans. In every generation, people have asked:

Who may live among us?

Who may become an American?

What does it mean to be an American?

The way these questions have been answered at various times in the nation’s history is central to an understanding of the nation’s past. As you watch each program in the series, think about how Americans answered the three questions at different times in the nation’s history. What were the consequences of their responses? How are those questions being answered today?

As you watch *Becoming American*, notice the way each program unfolds. Then use your journal or notebook to record:

- what you remember best about the program. What images or events stand out? Which stories are the most memorable? What is the moral or lesson those stories teach?

- what you learned from the program—including things that surprised you; things that you found upsetting or disturbing; questions that the program raised but did not answer.

Discuss your observations with friends and classmates. Was everyone struck by the same images and events? The same stories? How do you account for differences?

Journalist Bill Moyers narrates *Becoming American*. Near the beginning of each program, he states its theme. A theme is the main idea of a work—it is often repeated in different forms throughout the program. What is the theme of each program? How does it relate to the program’s title? How does it relate to the title of the series? To the process of “becoming American”?

Documentaries often include the “stuff” of history—letters, diaries, speeches, official documents, photographs, and drawings. How are these used to tell the story of the Chinese in the United States? What do they add to the words of the narrator? To the interviews with experts? Who are the experts in this documentary? How are they like those in other documentaries you have seen? How are they different? What do they add to your understanding of this history?

# SPOTLIGHT

## PROGRAM 1: GOLD MOUNTAIN DREAMS

### SUMMARY

Program 1 begins in the mid-1800s—a time of civil war and famine in southern China, a time when many young men left their villages to seek their fortune in other parts of the world. When the news of a gold rush in California reached China in 1849, thousands headed for the United States. Like their counterparts from Europe and the Americas, few got rich, but many remained in the United States to take advantage of other opportunities in the American West.

Some Chinese helped build the first transcontinental railroad in the late 1860s. Others used their skills as miners, fishermen, and farmers to build lives in a new land. Still others improvised new jobs and acquired new

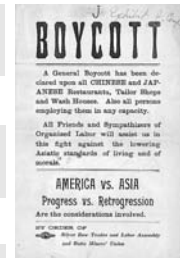
skills. In China, as in the United States, cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes were considered women's work. In the West, they were often the only jobs open to Chinese men.

At first, the Chinese were praised as hard workers. Before long that praise was mixed with hostility as competition for precious metals and jobs increased. Like immigrants from other nations, the Chinese responded by banding together with others from their village or district for mutual protection. By 1862, those associations were uniting to represent the interests of all Chinese in the United States. In the long process of becoming American, one of the first steps was to become Chinese.

### Timeline: 1847–1882



- 1847** Yung Wing and two other Chinese students arrive in US for schooling.
- 1849** Chinese arrive in California in response to the discovery of gold in 1848.
- 1850** Chinese population in US is about 4,000 out of a population of 23.2 million. Chinese in California form associations for mutual protection.
- 1852** California targets Chinese miners by imposing special taxes on them.
- 1853** California Supreme Court rules that Chinese cannot testify against whites. 295 Chinese come to work in Hawaii's sugar fields.
- 1862** Six district associations in San Francisco unite to represent Chinese interests.
- 1865** Central Pacific recruits Chinese workers to build a transcontinental railroad.
- 1867** 2000 Chinese railroad workers strike for a week.
- 1868** Treaty recognizes mutual right of Chinese and Americans to migrate to one another's country.
- 1869** The first transcontinental railroad is completed.
- 1870** Naturalization law allows only whites and "persons of African descent" to become citizens.
- 1875** US bars entry of Chinese and Japanese prostitutes, felons, and contract laborers.
- 1877** Denis Kearney forms the Workingmen's Party with the aim of forcing out the Chinese.
- 1878** The US Supreme Court affirms that Chinese cannot become naturalized citizens.
- 1880** Chinese population in US is 105,465 out of a total population of 50.1 million. US and China sign a treaty allowing the US to limit Chinese immigration.



## 1. Leaving Home

(9:00-13:25)

Nearly all of the Chinese who came to the United States at the time of the California Gold Rush were from a single province in southern China—Guangdong. In the mid-1800s, poverty was rampant there as wars, floods, and typhoons devastated fields and drove thousands to seek their fortune elsewhere. One migrant recalled:

*There were four in our family, my mother, my father, my sister and me. . . . How can we live on six baskets of rice which were paid twice a year for my father's duty as a night watchman? Sometimes the peasants have a poor crop then we go hungry. . . . Sometimes we went hungry for days. My mother and me would go over the harvested rice fields of the peasants to pick the grains they dropped. . . . We had only salt and water to eat with the rice.<sup>5</sup>*

In the 1800s, Guangdong Province was home to several peoples, each with its own customs, traditions, and dialect. Despite such differences, people throughout the province were part of a traditional society. In a traditional society, one's position is determined in large part by custom and reinforced by one's family and village. There is continuity from one generation to the next.

An ideal Chinese family in the mid-1800s was made up of several generations living and working together as a unit. Grandparents, parents, their sons, the sons' wives and their children, and all unmarried daughters lived in one large house or a series of smaller houses that were joined together. Although only rich families could afford this ideal, the model reinforced a belief that individual desires were less important than the needs of the family as a whole. The old were responsible for the care and teaching of the young. The young, in turn, were expected to honor and respect their elders. This obligation extended past death.



One of many Chinese newcomers in the late 1800s.

Every Chinese man expected to be buried beside his ancestors and his grave along with theirs would be cared for by succeeding generations. Immigration upset this traditional network of obligations. Men who left home could still support their families by earning money and sending it home. To fulfill their other obligations, however, they would have to eventually return to China.

The role of women in Chinese society was such that few were free to leave home even for a short time. According to a popular saying, men were the masters of external affairs, women the mistresses of domestic affairs. “In other words,” writes historian Judy Yung, “men ruled the country, while women stayed home to manage the household and raise the children.” She explains:

*Education was thus important for sons but not for daughters. . . . And because it was the son—not the daughter—who stayed within the family, worked for its honor and prosperity, continued the family lineage, and fulfilled the duties of ancestral worship, so it was that daughters—rarely sons—were sold, abandoned, or drowned during desperate times.*

*Neither men nor women had a choice in the selection of their spouses, but women were further disadvantaged in that they had no right to divorce or remarry should the arranged marriage prove unhappy or the husband die. . . . Widows without sons could not inherit property, and women could not participate in politics or public activities. Their proper place was in the home, where their sexuality could be regulated and controlled. Further, the practice of foot binding ensured that women did not “wander” too far outside the household gate, let alone go abroad. In fact, until 1911 the emigration of women was illegal according to Chinese law.<sup>6</sup>*

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Why did the young men of Guangdong leave home? How did their families and villages try to ensure their eventual return? With few exceptions, most Chinese women remained at home and awaited the return of their husbands. How did tradition influence that decision? What other factors may have influenced who left home and who stayed behind?

How did custom and tradition shape life in Guangdong in the 1800s? According to Judy Yung, what other factors affected the way people there lived and worked? In a modern society, what effect do custom and tradition have on the way people live and work? What other factors make a difference?

## 2. The Gold Rush

(13:25-26:30)

Segment 2 centers on the California Gold Rush in 1849—one year after the territory became part of the United States. Many Americans at the time saw new territory as proof of the nation’s “manifest destiny.” As one congressman explained, “This continent was intended by Providence as a vast theatre on which to work out the grand experiment of republican government under the auspices of the Anglo-Saxon race.” That notion was central to the way these Americans viewed the West. It also shaped the way they regarded immigrants, including immigrants from China.

In the mid-1800s, many white Americans firmly believed that humankind was divided into fixed and unchanging “races.” They were convinced that some “races” ranked higher than others. Not surprisingly, they saw themselves as members of the superior “race.” Today scientists view “race” as a scientifically meaningless concept; human beings, regardless of their so-called “race,” are more genetically alike than different. In the 1800s, however, racist ideas were taught in colleges and univer-



Chinese miners in California, 1852.

sities, preached from pulpits, and sensationalized in popular magazines and newspapers. These ideas prevailed well into the 20th century and still survive today. How did racist ideas shape the way Americans viewed the Chinese in the 1840s and 1850s?

In this segment, Shawn Wong, one of the first professors of Asian American studies, notes,



“When the Chinese first came to San Francisco, they were welcomed with open arms. Mayor [John W.] Geary stood and welcomed them publicly from a platform.” Yet by 1852, Wong observes, the Chinese had suddenly become “a ‘horde,’ you know, the ‘horde of Chinese coming to invade California.” “What does it mean to be seen as part of a “horde”? What part did racist thinking play in the change in attitude that Wong describes? How did the competition for gold stimulate anti-Chinese feeling? What other factors may have shaped public opinion?

California Governor John Bigler was among those who turned against the Chinese after expressing friendship toward them. In his reelection campaign in 1852, he urged fellow citizens to “check this tide of Asiatic immigration,” claiming that the Chinese were incapable of becoming American. Norman Asing, the owner of a restaurant in San Francisco, responded to Bigler in the *Daily Alta California* on May 5, 1852. He reminded the governor that one of the quarrels between the thirteen original colonies and England centered on immigration. Asing writes:

*When [England] pressed laws against emigration, [the colonies] looked for immigration; it came,*

*and immigration made you what you are—your nation what it is. It transferred you at once from childhood to manhood and made you great and respectable throughout the nations of the earth . . . . You argue that this is a republic of a particular race—that the Constitution of the United States admits of no asylum to any other than the pale face. This proposition is false in the extreme, and you know it. The declaration of your independence, and all the acts of your government, your people, and your history are all against you.*

How did Asing use American history and documents to challenge Bigler’s arguments? How does he seem to see himself: As a man from China? An American? As a combination of the two? What do his arguments reveal about the changes that were taking place in the Chinese community in San Francisco?

A stereotype is more than a label or judgment about an individual based on the characteristics of a group. It reduces individuals to categories by denying their uniqueness. What stereotypes did Americans in the 1850s have about the Chinese? How did men like Norman Asing try to counter those stereotypes? How do you challenge a stereotype?

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### 3. Improvising New Lives

(26:30-42:40)

Segment 3 explores the experiences of the Chinese on the frontier. When most Americans think of pioneers, they picture families from the eastern United States traveling in covered wagons across the Great Plains. But not all settlers in the 1800s were westward bound. The Chinese were pioneers who traveled east. How does their journey complicate our understanding of what it means to be a pioneer? One meaning of the word is *innovator*. To what extent were the Chinese innovators in the West?

What surprised you about the relationship between the Chinese and American miners in Idaho? How did it differ from relationships between Chinese and American miners seen earlier in the documentary? How do you account for those differences?

According to the 1860 census, nearly 4 out of every 10 Californians were foreign born. The census also revealed that nearly all of the newcomers in California, both American and foreign born, were young men—the average age was 25. Their aim was to get rich quickly and

move on. When the gold ran out in California, they headed for gold rushes and silver bonanzas in other parts of the West. As precious metals became harder to find, some newcomers, both native and foreign born, turned to other ways of earning a living and then they sent for their wives and children. The Chinese were the exception. For the most part, they continued to live in “bachelor communities” throughout the late 1800s. Why do you think they were not as quick to bring their families to the United States? What part did Chinese tradition play in their decision? What part did economics play? How might concerns for the safety of their families have shaped the choices they made?

Cooking, cleaning, and laundering were women’s work in China as well as in the United States. Why did Chinese men in the West take on these jobs? What stereotypes did they challenge in doing so? What stereotypes did their new occupations foster?

Lalu Nathoy’s father sold her into slavery in 1871, when she was 13 years old. In her study

of Chinese women in San Francisco’s Chinatown, historian Judy Yung writes of young girls like Lalu Nathoy, “Most were kidnapped, lured, or purchased from poor parents by procurers in China for as little as \$50 and then resold in America for as much as \$1,000 in the 1870s.” Yung explains that many women had contracts that spelled out the terms of their service. She describes a typical contract as an agreement to work without pay for four to six years in exchange for the settlement of a debt. The terms were so harsh that few women lived long enough to secure their freedom. Some died of diseases, others were murdered or took their own lives.

Lalu Nathoy was among the few survivors. No one really knows how she managed to overcome the obstacles she encountered. Some believe that her skills as a healer may have helped her survive. Others attribute her survival to her ability to make the most of every opportunity she found on the Idaho frontier. To what extent is Lalu Nathoy’s story one of courage and resilience?

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## 4. The Railroad

(42:40-54:40)

Segment 4 describes the building of the transcontinental railroad—one of the greatest engineering feats of the 19th century. To what extent did work on the railroad challenge stereotypes about the Chinese? What did it teach the Chinese about American life?

Chinese railroad workers organized one of the biggest strikes in American history. What did the event reveal about the process of becoming American?

What was it like to build a railroad through the mountains? Chinese workers left no letters or diaries that might answer such questions. Novelist Maxine Hong Kingston imagines

what it was like for Ah Goong, her grandfather, to work on the railroad. She writes:

*When cliffs, sheer drops under impossible overhangs, ended the road, the workers filled the ravines or built bridges over them. They climbed above the site for tunnel or bridge and lowered one another down in wicker baskets made stronger by the lucky words they had painted on four sides. Ah Goong got to be a basketman because he was thin and light. . . . The basket swung and twirled, and he saw the world sweep underneath him; it was fun in a way, a cold new feeling of doing what had never been done before. . . . Winds came up under the basket, bouncing it. Neighboring baskets swung together and parted. He and the man next to him looked es. They laughed. . . . Swinging near the cliff, Ah*

Goong stood up and grabbed it by a twig. He dug holes, then inserted gunpowder and fuses. He worked neither too fast nor too slow, keeping even with the others. The basketmen signaled one another to light the fuses. He struck match after match and dropped the burnt matches over the sides. At last his fuse caught; he waved, and the men above pulled hand over hand hauling him up, pulleys creaking. . . . "Hurry, hurry," he said. Some impatient men clambered up their ropes. Ah Goong ran up the ledge road they'd cleared and watched the explosions, which banged almost synchronously, echoes booming like war. He moved his scaffold to the next section of the cliff and went down into the basket again, with bags of dirt, and set the next charge. . . .

Then it was autumn, and . . . the men had to postpone the basket-work. . . .

The days became nights when the crews tunneled inside the mountain, which sheltered them from the wind, but also hid the light and sky. Ah Goong pickaxed the mountain, the dirt filling his nostrils through a cowboy bandanna. He shoveled the dirt into a cart and pushed it to a place that was tall enough for the mule, which hauled it the rest of the way out. He looked forward to car duty to edge closer to the entrance. Eyes darkened, nose plugged, his windy cough worse, he was to mole a thousand feet and meet others digging from the other side. . . . Coming out of the tunnel at the end of a shift, he forgot whether it was supposed to be day or night. He blew his nose

fifteen times before the mucus cleared again.

*The dirt was the easiest part of the tunneling. Beneath the soil, they hit granite.*<sup>7</sup>

What does Kingston add to our understanding of what it meant to build the transcontinental railroad? How does her account explain why she calls her grandfather and other "China men" "heroes"?

When the railroad was completed, railroad officials and politicians gave speeches. Kingston writes:

*"The Greatest Feat of the Nineteenth Century," they said. "The Greatest Feat in the History of Mankind," they said. "Only Americans could have done it," they said, which is true. . . . [Ah Goong] was an American for having built the railroad.*<sup>8</sup>

Connie Young Yu's great grandfather also worked on the railroad. When it was done, she says, he "sent for his wife to come to America." Describing the move as a "big, big leap," she explains that her great grandfather "felt that there was a future in America and it was a place to have children." Why do you think Kingston and Yu believe that their great-grandfathers' work on the railroad made them Americans?

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## 5. The 1870s: Panic in the East

(54:40-1:02:00)

Segment 5 contrasts the experiences of Yung Wing, the first Chinese graduate of Yale, with those of Chinese factory workers in the East. In 1852, Yung Wing became a US citizen. Although the law said that citizenship was open only to white men, no one questioned his right to become a citizen. After the Civil War, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts suggested that Congress remove the word *white* from all laws, including naturalization

laws. Western senators vigorously objected. In the end, Congress kept the word *white* and added to those eligible for citizenship "persons of the African race or of African descent."

In 1878, a Chinese immigrant named Ah Yup formally asked the US Supreme Court whether he qualified as a "white person." The justices ruled that he did not qualify, because neither ordinary Americans nor scholars considered him "white." As a result of that deci-

sion, US officials denied Yung Wing's citizenship when he tried to return to the United States from a trip to China in 1898. They told him that according to the law, a man born in China could not be a US citizen. As a result, he could not enter the country. Yung Wing managed to settle in Hartford despite efforts to keep him out. He continued to regard himself as both American and Chinese. Historian K. Scott Wong explains:

*Yung straddled two worlds, that of a Chinese reformer dedicated to bringing China into the modern family of nations and that of a Chinese American husband and father, concerned with the affairs of his family in Hartford, Connecticut. These roles do not appear to have been contradictory for Yung. A career devoted to serving China did not preclude a desire to be an American.<sup>9</sup>*

What do Yung Wing's experiences add to your understanding of the word *assimilation*? To what extent does he challenge the idea that Chinese could not assimilate?



Yung Wing, 1878.

In the factories of the late 1800s, machines set the pace of work. The people who tended those machines were paid by the piece rather than by the hour. They had few rights and no job security. When work was plentiful, many earned barely enough to survive. In periods of depression—times when businesses slow and

companies lay off workers and cut wages—hunger loomed. In the late 1800s, there were two severe depressions—1873-1879 and 1893-1897. Each was marked by widespread unemployment. Working people responded to hard times with strikes to protest layoffs, pay cuts, and unsafe working conditions. Many of these strikes turned into pitched battles between labor and management.

In 1870, Calvin T. Sampson, the owner of a shoe factory in North Adams, Massachusetts, tried to end the strikes at his plant by destroying the labor union his employees had organized. The next time they walked off the job, he replaced them with 75 Chinese workers from California. On June 13, 1870, those workers arrived in North Adams by rail. Historian Ronald Takaki writes:

*“A large and hostile crowd met them at the depot, hooted them, hustled them somewhat, and threw stones at them,”* The Nation reported. *Thirty plainclothes policemen marched the newcomers to dormitories at Sampson’s factory, where they were placed behind locked and guarded gates. A few days later, the Boston Commonwealth announced: “They are with us! The ‘Celestials’—with almond eyes, pigtailed, rare industry, quick adaptation, high morality and all—seventy-five of them—hard at work in the town of North Adams.”* The Springfield Republican predicted the “van of the invading army of Celestials” would free Sampson from “the cramping tyranny of that worst of American trades—unions, the ‘Knights of St. Crispin.’” *White workers as well as white employers watched as Sampson opened his factory again and began production.*

*They did not have to wait long for results. Within three months, the Chinese workers were producing more shoes than the same number of white workers would have made. The success of Sampson’s experiment was reported in the press. “The Chinese, and this especially annoys the Crispins,”* the editor of The Nation wrote, *“show the usual quickness of their race in learning the process of their new business and already do creditable hand and machine work.”*<sup>10</sup>

What stereotypes are embedded in each quotation from popular newspapers and magazines? How are these stereotypes similar to those held by Americans in the West? How do you account for differences? Reporters believed that the stories they wrote about Chinese

workers in North Adams had a moral or lesson. What lesson did these stories teach factory owners? What did they teach the “Crispins” and members of other labor unions? What might Chinese workers have learned from these stories?

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## 6. Denis Kearney's Campaign

(1:02:00-1:10:00)

Segment 6 explores the effects of Denis Kearney's anti-Chinese campaign. The depression in the 1870s that caused labor unrest in the East also shaped labor relations in the West. As jobs became harder to find in California, many workers were attracted to Kearney's speeches. Huie Kin, whose story is told in Program 1, witnessed the effects of those speeches. He later wrote:

*The sudden change of public sentiment towards our people in those days was an interesting illustration of mob psychology. . . . The useful and steady Chinese worker became overnight the mysterious Chinaman, an object of unknown dread. When I landed [in 1868], the trouble was already brewing, but the climax did not come until 1876-1877. I understand that several causes contributed to the anti-Chinese riots. It was a period of general economic depression in the Western states, brought about by drought, crop failures, and a presidential campaign. . . . There were long processions at night, with big torch lights and lanterns, carrying the slogan "The Chinese Must Go," and mass meetings where fiery-tongues flayed the Chinese. . . . Those were the days of Denis Kearney and his fellow agitators. . . .*

*The Chinese were in a pitiable condition in those days. We were simply terrified; we kept indoors after dark for fear of being shot in the back. Children spit upon us as we passed by and called us rats. However, there was one consolation: the people who employed us never turned against us and we went on quietly with our work until the public frenzy subsided.<sup>11</sup>*

What do Huie Kin's comments suggest about the vulnerability of minorities in a time of crisis? Kwang Chang Ling addressed Kearney's lies in a letter to the *San Francisco Argonaut* on August 10, 1878:

*You are continually objecting to [the] morality [of the Chinese]. Your travelers say he is depraved; your missionaries call him ungodly; your commissioners call him unclean. . . . Yet your housewives permit him to wait upon them at their table; they admit him to their bedchambers; they confide to him their garments and jewels; and even trust their lives to him by awarding him supreme control over their kitchens and the preparation of their food. There is a glaring contradiction here. . . .*

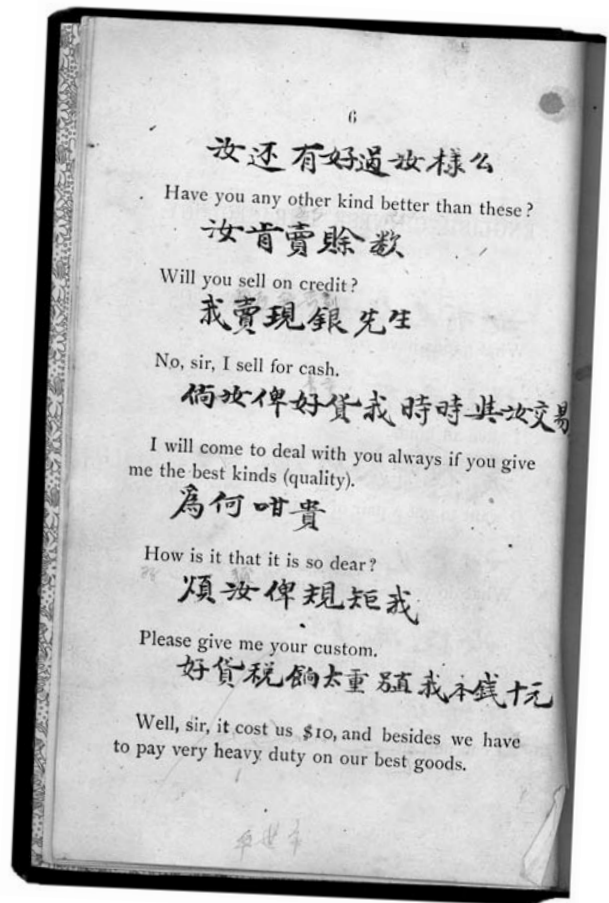
*The slender fare of rice and the other economical habits of the peasant class [of China], which are so objectionable to your lower orders and the demagogues who trumpet their clamors, are not the result of choice to Chinamen; they follow poverty. The hard-working, patient servants that you have about you today love good fare as well as other men, but they are engaged in a work far higher than the gratification of self-indulgence; they are working to liberate their parents in China [from poverty]. . . . When this emancipation is complete, you will find the Chinaman as prone as any human creature to fill his belly and cover his back with good things.*

How does the writer challenge stereotypes associated with the Chinese in the late 1800s? Why do you think his letter had little or no effect on the way many Americans viewed the Chinese? In your experience, what is the best way to counter a stereotype? Challenge a myth? Expose a lie?

As anti-Chinese feelings increased, those already in the United States tried to prepare newcomers for the realities of American life, particularly in the West. In 1875, Wong Sam and his assistants created *An English-Chinese Phrase Book*. Calling the book the “very first history of Chinese life in America from the Chinese point of view,” Shawn Wong reads, “They were lying in ambush. He came to his death by homicide. He was murdered by a thief. He committed suicide.”

What do these passages suggest about the dangers the West posed for the Chinese in the late 1800s? What does the page from the *Phrase Book* reprinted here add to your understanding of what Chinese life in America was like in the late 1800s?

The Chinese were not the only immigrants who had to learn a new language and figure out how to deal with people whose customs and laws differed from their own. What stories are told in your family about the process of becoming American? What stories are told about the challenges of adjusting to life in a new land? How are those stories similar to the ones told in *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*? How do you account for differences?



A page from *An English-Chinese Phrase Book*.

## 7. Yung Wing's Dream and Washington D.C.

(1:10:00-1:24:00)

In Segment 7, Yung Wing dreams of a school where students from China could learn and be immersed in Western ways. Charlie Chin observes that many Americans at the time viewed Yung's students as “curiosities.” What does it mean to be seen as a “curiosity”? What other factors may have shaped the way Yung and his students were seen? Suppose Yung Wing had brought workers to Connecticut rather than students. Would their reception have been the same?

In the late 1800s, how did members of Congress and other Americans answer these questions?

Who may live among us?

Who may become an American?

What does it mean to be an American?

What were the consequences of their responses?

In Segment 7, historian Andrew Gyory says of Senator James Blaine's anti-Chinese speeches, “What's significant is not just the nastiness

that Blaine uses, because other politicians had used nasty terms before, it's the fact that he . . . lifts the issue out of the gutter, out of the sandlots of San Francisco and makes it respectable." What does Gyory mean by that statement? How does it explain the fact that 11 different bills calling for Chinese exclusion were submitted to Congress in 1881?

At the end of Program 1, Yung Wing's students return to China. Many of them became engineers, physicians, college presidents, military leaders, and diplomats. Tang Shao-yi was the first premier of the Republic of China in

1912. Chan Tien-Yu designed, planned, and built China's first railroads. Chang Hon-Yen managed to stay in the United States and graduate from Columbia University Law School. At first he was not allowed to practice law because he was not a US citizen. After repeated petitions to the state of New York, the legislature passed a special bill in 1887 allowing him to practice. He became an activist for civil rights. How do the accomplishments of these young men challenge the stereotypes in the congressional debates? Was Yung Wing's mission a success or a failure? How did you decide?

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## TO LEARN MORE

### Books

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- McClain, Charles J. *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle Against Discrimination in Nineteenth-Century America*. University of California, 1994.
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- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thousand Pieces of Gold*. Beacon Press, 1981. A novel about Lulu Nathoy (Polly Bemis).
- Yep, Laurence. *Dragon's Gate*. HarperCollins, 1994. A novel about the transcontinental railroad.

### Websites

- California Gold Rush: <http://www.cagoldrush.com>
- Union Pacific Railroad: <http://www.up.com/index.shtml> Includes images of Chinese workers.
- Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum: <http://www.cprh.org>
- The Multicultural American West: A Resource Site: <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~amerstu/mw/>
- Asian-Americans in the West: <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/westweb/pages/asian.html>
- The West: <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/> The companion website to the Ken Burns film includes historical information and photographs from the film.
- Yung Wing: <http://www.anb.org/articles/09/09-00834.html> Biography by historian Roger Daniels.

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- 5 Quoted in *Strangers from a Different Shore: The History of Asian Americans* by Ronald Takaki. Little, Brown & Co., 1989, 1998, 33.
- 6 *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in Chinatown* by Judy Yung. University of California Press, 1995, 19-20.
- 7 From *China Men* by Maxine Hong Kingston © 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, Inc.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 145.
- 9 "Cultural Defenders and Brokers: Chinese Responses to the Anti-Chinese Movement" by K. Scott Wong in *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities During the Exclusion Era*. Edited by K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan. Temple University Press, 1998, 30-31.
- 10 *Strangers from a Different Shore: The History of Asian Americans* by Ronald Takaki. Little, Brown and Co., 1989, 97-98.
- 11 *Reminiscences* by Huie Kin. G.I. Trigg, 1982, 26-27.

## PROGRAM 2: BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

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### SUMMARY

The Chinese Exclusion Act that Congress passed in 1882 was renewed in 1892 with a new restriction—every Chinese in the nation had to carry a certificate of identity issued by the US government. In 1902, the law was renewed again and in 1904, made permanent. The stories told in Program 2 explore the impact of those laws on families kept apart, on lives distorted by countless restrictions.

Program 2 begins with the violence that followed passage of the first exclusion act. In town after town in the West, Chinese were

driven out and their houses burnt to the ground. Many headed for the safety of San Francisco's Chinatown. Yet even there, the Chinese were not secure. Their long struggle to establish a secure place for themselves in American society is the focus of Program 2. The repeal of the Exclusion Act in 1943 ended the exclusion years. The repeal of anti-Chinese laws and the end of World War II marked the beginning of the end of “bachelor society,” which had been the defining feature of the Chinese immigrant experience for nearly a century.

### Timeline: 1882–1944

- 1882** US passes first Chinese Exclusion Act; Chinese who leave US need certificate to reenter.
- 1884** There are 18,254 Chinese in Hawaii.
- 1885** Anti-Chinese violence in Rock Springs, Wyoming and other Western towns.
- 1888** Scott Act revokes all reentry certificates.
- 1890** Chinese population in US is 107,488 out of a total population of 62.9 million.
- 1892** Geary Act renews exclusion and requires that Chinese register with the government.
- 1893** In *Fong Yue Ting v. US*, the US Supreme Court upholds the Geary Act.
- 1898** In *Wong Kim Ark v. US*, the Supreme Court confirms that anyone born in US is a citizen.
- 1900** In first census to include Hawaii, Chinese population of the islands is 25,767.
- 1902** Congress prohibits entry of Chinese to Hawaii and Philippines.
- 1906** Earthquake and subsequent fire destroy all immigration records in San Francisco.
- 1907** Expatriation Act removes citizenship from American women who marry foreigners.
- 1910** Angel Island Immigration Station opens to process potential Asian immigrants.
- 1911** The Chinese overthrow their emperor and establish a republic.
- 1913** California and subsequently other states prohibit Asians from buying or leasing land.
- 1922** Cable Act removes citizenship from American women only if they marry aliens ineligible for citizenship.
- 1924** US denies entry to almost all Asians, including the Chinese wives of US citizens.
- 1936** All revocations of citizenship on account of marriage are abolished.
- 1940** Chinese population in US is 106,334 out of a total population of 132.2 million.
- 1941** US declares war after Japan attacks Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. China is now an ally of US.
- 1943** Congress repeals exclusion laws, grants Chinese the right to become citizens.





## 1. Effects of Exclusion

(00:00-04:50)

Segment 1 describes the violence that followed passage of the Exclusion Act in 1882. Among the places touched by violence were Alaska, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

In 1885, 28 Chinese were killed in Rock Springs, Wyoming and the rest driven out. The violence began after Chinese workers employed at a Rock Springs mining company refused to join white miners in a strike for higher wages. The surviving Chinese miners sent an account of their ordeal to the Chinese consul in New York. It states in part:

*About two o'clock in the afternoon a mob, divided into two gangs, came toward "Chinatown," one gang coming by way of the plank bridge, and the other by way of the railroad bridge. . . .*

*Whenever the mob met a Chinese they stopped him and, pointing a weapon at him, asked him if he had any revolver, and then approaching him they searched his person, robbing him of his watch or any gold or silver. . . . Some of the rioters would let a Chinese go after depriving him of all his gold and silver, while another Chinese would be beaten with the butt ends of the weapons before being let go. Some of the rioters, when they could not stop a Chinese, would shoot him dead on the spot, and then search and rob him. . . . Some, who took no part either in beating or robbing the Chinese, stood by, shouting loudly and laughing and clapping their hands.*

*The Chinese who were the first to flee . . . were scattered far and near, high and low, in about one hundred places. Everyone of them was praying to Heaven or groaning with pain. They had . . . seen whites, male and female, old and young, searching houses for money, household effects, or gold, which were carried across to "Whitemen's Town."*

*Some of the rioters . . . set fire to the Chinese houses. Between 4:00 P.M. and a little past 9:00 P.M. all the camp houses belonging to the coal company and the Chinese huts had been burned down completely.<sup>12</sup>*

Bystanders play a critical role in situations like the one the miners describe. "They can define the meaning of events," says sociologist Ervin Staub, "and move others toward empathy or indifference. They can promote values and norms of caring, or affirm the perpetrators." To what extent does the account prepared by Chinese miners support Staub's views? To what extent does it challenge his views?

None of the white miners was prosecuted even though their names were widely known. How do you account for the government's failure to prosecute those responsible for the murders? What role did public officials play in the incident the Chinese miners describe? What did they fail to do? How important were the omissions?

As the violence spread, a few citizens and public officials tried to avoid violence. For example, residents of Olympia, Washington passed a resolution in 1885 opposing efforts to remove the Chinese by force. When white rioters threatened to do so anyway, Sheriff William Billings deputized local businessmen to help him keep order. Unlike other cities, officials in Olympia tried and convicted leaders of the riot. How do you account for the stand the sheriff and others in Olympia took? What is the moral or lesson of the story?

In 1997, Gary Locke, the first Chinese American governor of Washington, reflected on the violence in Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, and other cities in the 1880s and recent efforts to commemorate this history. He said in part:

*In the history of every minority in America, there are stark contrasts of light and dark. There are tales of terrible oppression and persecution—and, on the same page—tales of incredible courage, and passionate advocacy for equal rights.*

*As we work to restore the historical memory of the anti-Chinese, anti-immigrant violence of the*

1880s, we must also—and equally—work to restore our historical memory of the people who opposed it.

*We should build . . . monuments to the citizens and the sheriff in Olympia, who put their lives on the line when they stood between an angry, armed mob and their intended Chinese victims.*

*It is not enough to vilify the bigots. We must never forget to celebrate the heroism of those who stood up to them.*<sup>13</sup>

What lesson does Locke draw from the anti-Chinese violence in the late 1800s? What does he want citizens to remember? What would you like them to know?

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## 2. Chinatown

(04:50-16:30)

In Segment 2, Bill Moyers describes the exclusion years as the story of “a people in between two countries, often unsure as to which they belonged. It’s about families kept apart . . . lives shaped and mis-shaped by Chinese custom as well as US law.” For their history of San Francisco’s Chinatown, Victor G. and Brett de Bary Nee asked Chinese Americans about the ways exclusion laws affected their communities in the early 1900s. The couple writes of one of those interviews:

*Johnny’s father, Ginn Wall, came to America in the 1870s to build the Union Pacific. At the age of sixty-three, he spent his life’s savings to bring his wife across the Pacific, thus becoming one of the rare Chinese laborers to live with a family in America. It was on the apple orchard where his father was a tenant farmer outside Sebastopol, California, that Johnny became aware of the effects of a history he had not seen. “There were about three hundred Chinese farm workers up there, and they were all old men. I asked my dad about it and he told me they had come over here about the same time he did and they were working on the railroad. Then he began to talk a little about the railroad, something happened after they were done building it, but I didn’t listen to him carefully enough then. I just knew that after the railroad was over, these guys worked in a lumber mill for a while doing shingle work, and then when the lumber mill shut down, they went from there to farming.”<sup>14</sup>*



Chinatown in San Francisco, about 1900.

As Johnny grew into his twenties, he realized that the farm settlement in Sebastopol was dying. “Well, there they were, with three hundred Chinese workers, and except for my mother, not a single woman. That was the whole Chinese settlement in Sebastopol. All those old guys thought about was how they wanted to go back to China. But there’s only about six months work in the year on apples, so they never saved a thing. . . . And the reason there’s no Chinese in Stebastopol today is that eventually they all died off.”

What does Johnny Wall’s story suggest about the ways US laws shaped and mis-shaped Chinese American life during the exclusion years? What does his story suggest about other factors that may have helped to shape and mis-shape Chinese American life?

### 3. The Push for Freedom

(16:30-30:00)

Segment 3 describes the way Chinese Americans challenged discrimination. Bill Moyers raises the central question: How do you change laws when you don't have votes or money or allies among whites? How did Wong Chin Foo try to answer that question? The leaders of the Six Companies in San Francisco's Chinatown? Wong Kim Ark? What do their methods suggest about the process of becoming American?

Chinese Americans challenged discrimination by bringing specific cases of injustice to the nation's courts. In case after case, Chinese plaintiffs relied on Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution to challenge a discriminatory law or practice. It states:

*All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States, nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.*

On what part of Section 1 did the Chinese focus their cases? What is the key word? How does the Fourteenth Amendment seem to define the nation's identity?

Sociologist Kai Erikson writes that one of the surest ways to “confirm an identity, for communities as well as for individuals, is to find some way of measuring what one is not.” What individuals and groups were not included in the word *American* in the late 1800s and early 1900s? Who is not included in the word today? What did it mean to be excluded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries? What does it mean today?

In the late 1800s, writes historian Lucy E. Salyer, Chinese immigrants “laid claim to principles and practices—*habeas corpus*, due process, evidentiary rules, judicial review”—that were at the heart of the American legal system. She notes that during those years, the Chinese brought 10,000 *habeas corpus* cases to federal courts in California alone and in the vast majority of those cases the courts ruled in favor of the Chinese. (The Latin words *habeas corpus* literally means “you have the body.” A petition of *habeas corpus* is a demand by a prisoner for a formal explanation of the charges against him or her.)

After the passage of the first Chinese exclusion act, the Chinese began to lose more and more cases. In 1893, in the case of *Fong Yue Ting v. US*, the Supreme Court ruled that immigration officials had the right to deport Chinese immigrants without providing evidence or even holding a trial. In a dissenting opinion, Justice David Brewer observed that the power of the government was being directed against a people many Americans found “obnoxious.” He warned, “Who shall say it will not be exercised tomorrow against other classes and other people?” How would you answer his question?

The most important legal victory Chinese won in the late 1800s was in the case of Wong Kim Ark. Frank H. Wu, a professor of law at Howard University, writes of that 1898 victory:

*All of us who care about our civil rights should realize that we owe a measure of our shared equality to an individual named Wong Kim Ark. A century ago in California, Wong took on the federal government in an effort to win his right to remain in his homeland.*

*His legal case ended up in the Supreme Court. His victory shows how, despite recurring racial prejudice, our country can remain true to its ideals. It is worthwhile to reflect on our history, not to condemn the past by contemporary stan-*

dards, but to understand how we came to where we are now. There are valuable lessons in these forgotten episodes. . . .

Wong Kim Ark had sued to be re-admitted to his birthplace, after taking a trip to China. He argued that by virtue of his birth on its soil he was a citizen of the United States, even though his parents were racially barred from achieving that status.

In opposing Wong, the federal government argued in its court briefs, “There certainly should be some honor and dignity in American citizenship that would be sacred from the foul and corrupting taint of a debasing alienage.” . . .

Rejecting these racial arguments, the Court based its ruling on the Fourteenth Amendment. That provision of the Constitution is familiar as the source of “equal protection of the laws.”

The Court gave a literal interpretation to its opening lines, that “all persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Frank Wu, what is the moral of Wong Kim Ark’s story? What lessons do you think the story teaches? How does it deepen your understanding of the importance of the rights guaranteed in the US Constitution?

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## 4. Women’s Push for Freedom

(30:00-38:40)

Segment 4 explores the efforts of Chinese women to become American. Historian Judy Yung reveals the obstacles they faced by telling the story of her great-grandparents, Leong Shee and Chong [Chin] Lung. Her great-grandmother was able to enter the US in 1893 because her husband had merchant status. He owned a share of the Sing Kee Company, a trading venture. He also farmed. Yung writes:

*While Chin Lung continued to farm in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, Great-Grandmother chose to live above the Sing Kee store at 808 Sacramento Street [in San Francisco’s Chinatown] where she gave birth to five children in quick succession. . . . Unable to go out because of her bound feet, Chinese beliefs that women should not be seen in public, and perhaps fear for her own safety, she led a cloistered but busy life. Being frugal, she took in sewing to make extra money. As she told my mother many years later, “Ying, when you go to America, don’t be lazy. Work hard and you will become rich. Your grandfather grew potatoes, and although I was busy at home, I sewed on a foot-treadle machine, made buttons, and [did finishing work].*



Chinese American women with bound feet in San Francisco’s Chinatown, 1900.

*Great-Grandmother’s secluded and hard-working life in San Francisco Chinatown was typical for Chinese women in the second half of the nineteenth century. Wives of merchants, who were at the top of the social hierarchy in Chinatown, usually had bound feet and led*

*bound lives. But even women of the laboring class—without bound feet—found themselves confined to the domestic sphere within Chinatown. Prostitutes, who were at the bottom of the social order, had the least freedom and opportunity to change their lives.*<sup>16</sup>

What does it mean to lead a “bound life”? What does Yung’s account suggest about the obstacles Chinese women encountered in breaking the bonds that limited their opportunities?

Bill Moyers notes that the “harshest lives belonged to the prostitutes, and in the 1880s, they were almost half the women in Chinatown.” He goes on to explain that their “refuge was the Protestant Church and one iron-willed missionary”—Donaldina Cameron. Historian Judy Yung says of Cameron and other Protestant missionaries, “It was largely thanks to their efforts that Chinese prostitution declined by the turn of the [twentieth] century.” Yet, she writes, “In

their zeal to rescue and transform Chinese women into their own image, missionary women often manipulated the law and the press to serve their ulterior motives. In the process, they not only infringed on the civil rights of an already disenfranchised population, but also helped to perpetuate negative stereotypes of the Chinese, thus adding fuel to the anti-Chinese sentiment and legislation. This effect was ironic, considering that Protestant missionaries were the one group that consistently opposed the Chinese Exclusion laws.”<sup>17</sup>

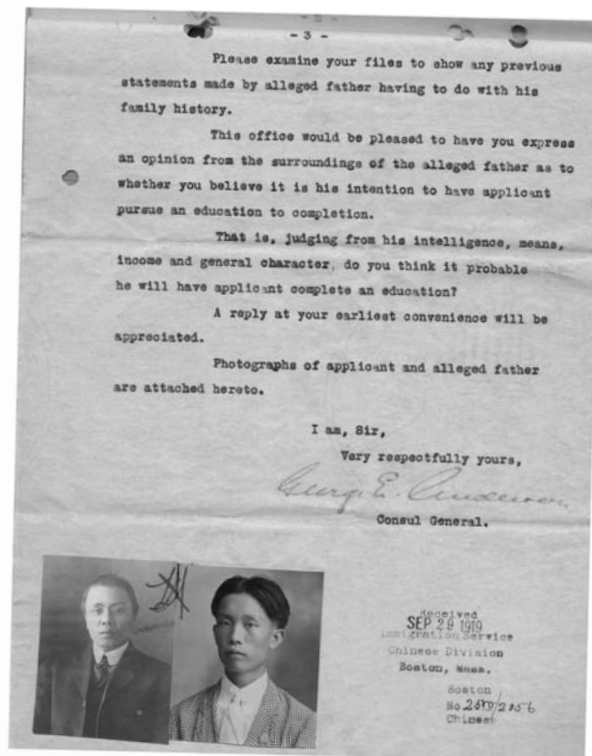
Although Yung admires the results of the missionaries’ efforts, she questions their methods. To what extent do the methods used to achieve a worthwhile goal matter? Yung also raises questions about unintended consequences. What were the unintended consequences of the methods used by the missionaries? Why does she call those consequences ironic—not in keeping with expectations?

## 5. Exclusion Forever

(38:40-53:40)

Segment 5 focuses on the way the drama of exclusion played out at the nation’s borders in the late 1800s and early 1900s. During those years, other Americans viewed the Chinese as permanent aliens, perpetual foreigners. They had to carry special identification documents. Without these papers, Chinese Americans were subject to deportation. What do the documents suggest about the way other Americans viewed their Chinese neighbors? About the humiliations of the exclusion years? What does it add to the interviews included in this segment?

Byron Yee’s family history reveals some of the ways the exclusion acts shaped and mis-shaped Chinese American life. Yee is an actor who tells audiences:



A letter asking for confirmation of Ng Luen Fook’s identity.

*My name is Byron Yee. I am the second son of Bing Quail Yee. I am the son of a paper son.*

*My father was an immigrant. He came to America to escape the Japanese invasion of China in 1938. He was 15 years old and he didn't know a word of English. He didn't have a penny in his pocket and he was living in a crowded apartment in New York City with relatives he had never met. I know nothing about my father's history, about his past.*

Yee tried to uncover his father's history by examining old records. He started at Angel Island. When he was unable to find out anything about his father there, he went to the National Archives regional office in San Bruno, California. Although Yee did not find his father's records there, he did find those of his grandfather, Yee Wee Thing. In that file, he spotted a reference to his father. Apparently Yee Bing Quail tried to avoid Angel Island by entering the country through the port in Boston. His file was at the regional office in Massachusetts. What did Yee learn from his father's papers?

*My father at 15. He is asked 197 questions: "When did your alleged father first come to the United States?" "Have you ever seen a photograph of your alleged father?" "How many trips to China has your alleged father made since first coming to the United States?"*

After reading the file, Yee suspected that his father was a paper son. He turned to his mother for help. Although she knew little about her husband's past, she sent her son a portrait of his father's family in China. Yee

discovered that the baby on the left was his father. A young boy in the middle of the family portrait turned to be Yee Wee Thing. He was not Byron Yee's grandfather but his uncle. Yee says of his discoveries:

*It kind of floored me because all of a sudden it made a lot of sense—why he was the way he was, why he never really talked about his past, why he was very secretive. It explained a lot about him and about his history.*

*You see my story is no different from anyone else's. . . . In all of our collective past, we've all had that one ancestor that had the strength to break from what was familiar to venture into the unknown. I can never thank my father and uncle enough for what they had to do so that I could be here today. One wrong answer between them and I would not be here.<sup>18</sup>*

What does Byron Yee's story suggest about the way the laws shaped and mis-shaped family life during the exclusion years?

In 1907, Congress passed a law that stripped American women but not American men of their citizenship if they married a foreigner. In 1922 that law was partially repealed. Only a woman who married an "alien ineligible for citizenship" would lose her citizenship. What do these laws suggest about the way the US regarded women in the early 20th century? In the introduction to Program 2, Bill Moyers says "To become American, the Chinese would have to wage a long campaign, not just in public but inside their homes." What do these laws suggest about the particular challenges women faced in that struggle?

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## 6. Laundrymen and Movies

(53:40-1:06:10)

Segment 6 looks at Chinese American life during the 1920s. Historian Henry Yu describes what those years were like for Chinese Americans. He focuses on a single year, 1923:

*If you live on the West Coast of the United States and you happen to have come from somewhere in Asia, you live a restricted existence. As an "Asiatic," a "Mongolian," an "Oriental," you are "ineligible for citizenship," unable to become a*

*naturalized American, and if you are in California, you are forbidden by law from owning land. If you happen to have been born in the United States, you are legally a citizen, but you face widespread discrimination in work, housing, and the law. If you are Chinese, chances are you are male, since exclusionary laws have kept Chinese women out of the country since 1882, and thus fewer than one out of eight people with Chinese ancestry are female. You would find it difficult to live outside of a Chinatown—almost no one except other Chinese would rent or sell to you. . . .*

*Being considered an Oriental, you find your prospects for prosperity and your choice of employment and housing curtailed by a long history of anti-Asian agitation by labor groups and nativist organizations. . . . The US Congress is just about to pass a series of new immigration laws that will virtually cut off all immigration from Asia. . . . If you are of Asian ancestry in the United States in 1923, you are seen as “alien”—very few people see you as “American.” Even among those who tolerate you and your existence, there is an overwhelming sense that you are an unknown, a mystery, perhaps even inscrutable.<sup>19</sup>*

What do Yu’s remarks reveal about what it means to be “shoved to the sidelines of American life”?

By the 1920s, change was coming. Bill Moyers explains, “Some men were able to bring their wives to America. And their children—raised in America—would want very different lives.” A few of those children were willing to defy tradition. Among them was a laundryman’s daughter who decided to become a movie star. Her name was Anna May Wong and she refused to be “shoved to the sidelines of American life.” Although she faced discrimination, Karen Leong says that “it’s a mistake to see Anna May Wong’s career as a tragedy or her life as a tragedy.” How would you assess her career? Was she a tragic figure or was her struggle to overcome the stereotypes that defined her heroic?

How did stereotypes affect the way many other Americans in the 1920s viewed Chinese Americans? The way they viewed Chinese American women? How were those stereotypes reflected in Anna May Wong’s films? What stereotypes shape perceptions today? How are they reflected in current films?

In Part 1 of a three-part memoir published by *Pictures* magazine in August 1926, Anna May Wong described her childhood in Los Angeles. She focused on an incident that took place when she was just six years old. As she and her sister walked home from school, writes Wong:

*A group of little boys, our schoolmates, started following us. They came nearer and nearer, singing some sort of a chant. Finally they were at our heels.*

*“Chink, Chink, Chinaman,” they were shouting. “Chink, Chink, Chinaman.”*

*They surrounded us. Some of them pulled our hair, which we wore in long braids down our backs. They shoved us off the sidewalk, pushing us this way and that, and all the time keeping up their chant: “Chink, Chink, Chinaman. Chink, Chink, Chinaman.”*

*When finally they had tired of tormenting us, we fled for home, and once in our mother’s arms we burst into bitter tears. I don’t suppose either of us ever cried so hard in our lives, before or since.<sup>20</sup>*



Movie star Anna May Wong.

When the name-calling continued, the girls were taken out of the public school and placed in the Chinese Mission School. Wong writes, “Though our teachers were American, all our schoolmates were Chinese. We were among our own people. We were not tormented any longer.” The magazine published a second installment of Wong’s memoirs the following month but went out of business before the last installment was published.

Why do you think Wong describes herself as “Chinese” rather than “American”? Why do you think she devoted much of the first installment of her memoirs to an event that took place when she was six years old? What is she trying to tell her fans about herself and other Chinese Americans through this story? What stories might you tell about your childhood?

After Anna May Wong’s death, Frances Chung wrote a poem in her memory. She entitled it “American actress (1907-1961).”

*Anna May Wong  
L.A. laundry child  
phoenix woman  
sea green silk gown  
ivory cigarette holder  
solitary player  
on a fast train  
through China  
speaking Chinese  
with American accent*<sup>21</sup>

What does the poet suggest lies behind the stereotypes associated with Anna May Wong? How does she view Anna May Wong—as American, Chinese, or Chinese American?

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## 7. Young People Push on Two Fronts

(1:06:10-1:14:15)

In Segment 7, Bill Moyers says, “To make lives for themselves in America, the young would have to push on two fronts, against the codes of white society—and those of their parents as well.” According to Jade Snow Wong and Ark Chin, what were the issues that divided immigrant parents and their children in the 1920s? How are they similar to the issues that divide families today? What differences seem most striking?

After examining 28 autobiographies of young Chinese Americans in the early 1900s, historian Sucheng Chan found that “almost all” “believed strongly that they were, and should be treated as, ‘Americans,’” but young men and women differed in what they considered to be characteristics of an American identity. “To the men, being American meant having

certain rights—the right to be in the United States, the right to vote, the right to own property. . . . These Chinese American young men recognized that when they could not enjoy the rights that other American citizens enjoyed, . . . a discrimination based on race . . . and not Chinese culture constrained them.” Chan found that “Chinese American young women thought that being American meant having certain freedoms—the freedom to not behave according to Chinese customs, to choose their own mates, to work, and be recognized for their individual achievements.”<sup>22</sup>

How do you account for the differences in the ways young Chinese American men and women defined their American identity in the early 1900s? Which is closest to the way you define an American identity?



## 8. World War II

(1:14:15-1:24:00)

Segment 8 focuses on the impact of World War II on Chinese Americans. The war began for the United States on December 7, 1941, just after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. A few months later, the United States government authorized the removal of all Japanese Americans—aliens and citizens alike—from the West Coast. They were sent to prison camps surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed soldiers. Not one of them had been accused of a crime. They were imprisoned solely because of their ancestry.

To the horror of many Chinese Americans, popular newspapers and magazines in 1942 offered “tips” on how to tell a person of Chinese descent from one of Japanese descent. In “Can’t Tell,” Nellie Wong explores how those stories affected her parents and other Chinese Americans.

*When World War II was declared  
on the morning radio,  
we glued our ears, widened our eyes.  
Our bodies shivered.*

*A voice said  
Japan was the enemy,  
Pearl Harbor a shambles  
and in our grocery store  
in Berkeley, we were suspended  
next to the meat market  
where voices hummed,  
valises, pots and pans packed,  
no more hot dogs, baloney,  
pork kidneys.*

*We children huddled on wooden planks  
and my parents whispered:  
We are Chinese, we are Chinese.  
Safety pins anchored,  
our loins ached.*

*Shortly our Japanese neighbors vanished*



Chinese American soldier atop a captured German tank.

*and my parents continued to whisper:  
We are Chinese, we are Chinese.*

*We wore black arm bands,  
put up a sign  
in bold letters.<sup>23</sup>*

Why do Nellie Wong’s parents whisper, “We are Chinese, we are Chinese”? What do they fear?

In 1942, sociologist Rose Hum Lee assessed the changes that were taking place in Chinese American communities as a result of the war. Before the war began, she noted:

*One half of our Chinese population lives on the West Coast. . . . Most of the others are located in large cities in the East and Midwest; New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Cleveland have sizeable Chinatowns. In out-of-the-way towns are lonely laundrymen silently washing and ironing. Wherever the Chinese are, it has been possible to count the variations in ways they*

can earn their living on the fingers of the hand—chop suey and chow mein restaurants, Chinese art and gift shops, native grocery stores that sell foodstuffs from China to the local Chinese community. . . .

Since the war began, Lee writes:

*For the first time since Chinese labor exclusion began, absorption of the Chinese into American industry has been significant. . . .*

*[Chinese workers] have gone into the army and navy, into shipbuilding and aircraft plants. Even the girls are getting jobs. A personal column of the Chinese Press notes: "The newest on the defense payrolls are Jane Sai, stenographer; Rose Hom, timekeeper; Jimmy Hom, welder; J. Eric Hom, carpenter." And another item says, "In Fresno, Chinese boys and girls are training at the [National Youth Administration] resident project for employment with Consolidated Aircraft."*

Lee tells similar stories about other parts of the country. She ends her essay by stating:

*To be fighting for freedom and democracy in [East Asia] . . . and to be denied equal opportunity in the greatest of democracies, seems the height of irony. With the absorption of the Chinese in industry and the proof that they are good workers, loyal citizens, and faithful to the United Nations' cause, racial barriers and prejudices should break down now and for all time.<sup>24</sup>*

Why is Lee optimistic about the future of Chinese Americans? To what extent is her optimism shared by the Chinese Americans interviewed in this segment?

In 1943, at President Franklin D. Roosevelt's request, Congress quickly passed a bill repealing 15 anti-Chinese laws, including the exclusion act. In August 1943, the *Immigration and Naturalization Service Monthly Review* described the testimony given at congressional hearings on the bill:

*An important spokesman for repeal at those public hearings and the one who perhaps made the deepest impression . . . was Admiral H.E. Yarnell, for fifty years in the United States Navy and Commander of the Pacific Fleet from 1936 to 1939. . . . He reminded the Committee that Japan is utilizing the American exclusion laws with much effect in her propaganda campaign in China and other areas of [East Asia] and pointed out that "by the repeal of these laws, this means of stirring up hatred of Western nations will be eliminated."*

Although Congress repealed the exclusion acts, it had no plans to alter the Immigration Act of 1924. Under the terms of that law, no more than 105 Chinese would be allowed to immigrate each year. Despite that restriction, writes the *Review*:

*Fear was expressed at the hearings that the yearly number of Chinese admitted to this country would be a large one since, according to the 1924 Immigration Act, the quota under which an immigrant belongs is the quota of the country of his birth. . . . Some foresaw that large numbers of Chinese would enter outside the quota as natives of one of the Western Hemisphere non-quota countries—there are said to be many Chinese in Latin American countries—or would, because of birth in a British possession, be entitled to enter under the very large British quota.<sup>25</sup>*

One provision of the proposed bill would limit to 105 "the maximum number of Chinese quota immigrants who could be admitted from all parts of the globe in any one year." The bill did allow Chinese Americans to become United States citizens. Within a few years, over 9,000 wives took advantage of their husbands' citizenship and quickly entered the US as non-quota immigrants. What old stereotypes are reflected at the hearings? What new concerns do the hearings reflect? What information and insights might Chinese Americans have added?

## TO LEARN MORE

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- Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation: [www.aiisf.org](http://www.aiisf.org)
- Anna May Wong: <http://www.annamaywong.com> The first Chinese American woman to become a Hollywood star.
- Separate Lives, Broken Dreams: <http://www.naatanet.org/separatelivesbrokendreams/synopsys.html> The companion website to a documentary exploring the origins and effects of the Chinese exclusion acts.
- US Supreme Court: <http://www.findlaw.com/casecode> This website contains decisions of the Supreme Court, including *Fong Yue Ting v. US* and *Wong Kim Ark v. US*.

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13 "Remarks, Chinese Reconciliation," by Gary Locke, May 16, 1997. <http://www.governor.wa.gov/speeches/speech-view.asp?SpeechSeq>

14 From *Longtime Californ'* by Victor G. Nee and Brett de Bary Nee © 1972, 1973. Used by permission of Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

15 "Born in the USA" by Frank H. Wu. © 2001, IMDiversity.Inc.

16 *Unbound Feet: A Social History of Chinese Women in San Francisco* by Judy Yung. University of California Press, 1995, 15-16.

17 Ibid, 36.

18 [webcenter.ellisland.netscape.com/immexp/wseix](http://webcenter.ellisland.netscape.com/immexp/wseix) Copyright 2000 by The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc.

19 *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* by Henry Yu. Oxford University Press, 2001, 16-17.

20 "The True Life Story of a Chinese Girl, Part 1" by Anna May Wong. *Pictures*, August, 1926.

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22 "Race, Ethnic Culture, and Gender" by Sucheng Chan in *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era* edited by K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan. Temple University Press, 1998, 132, 135.

23 From *Dreams in Harrison Railroad Park* by Nellie Wong. Copyright © 1978 by Nellie Wong. By permission of Kelsey Street Press.

24 "Chinese in the United States Today: The War Has Changed Their Lives" by Rose Hum Lee. *Survey Graphic: Magazine of Social Interpretation* 31, no. 10, October, 1942, 419, 444.

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## PROGRAM 3: NO TURNING BACK

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### SUMMARY

Program 3 focuses on the Chinese experience in the United States from the end of World War II through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s to the present. In 1965, the last legal barrier to Chinese immigrants fell with the signing of a new law that ended immigration quotas based on race. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the story of the Chinese in America was primarily a legal drama, played out on the nation's borders and in its courts. After the new immigration law went into effect, it became a personal story told one individual, one family at a time.

Many new arrivals still struggle to survive. Too often Chinese Americans still encounter suspicion and hostility. Nevertheless, Chinese Americans have achieved great success and now, like so many others, they are stitching together a new American identity. As Michelle Ling, a young Chinese American, tells Bill Moyers in Program 3, "I get to compose my life one piece at a time, however I feel like it. Not to say that it's not difficult and . . . that there isn't challenge all the time, but more than material wealth, you get to choose what you are, who you are."

### Timeline: 1945–2000

- 1945** World War II ends with atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan.
- 1947** Chinese American veterans are allowed to bring their wives to the US without reference to a quota.
- 1949** US refuses to recognize the newly formed People's Republic of China.  
US grants 5,000 educated Chinese stranded in US resident alien status.
- 1950** Chinese population in US is 150,005 out of 151.3 million.
- 1950–53** United States supports South Korea, and the People's Republic of China supports North Korea during the Korean Conflict.
- 1950–55** Fear of communist infiltration in the US leads the State Department, the FBI, and immigration officials to keep a close watch on Chinese Americans.
- 1952** New immigration law removes all references to "race" in regard to naturalization.
- 1954–70** The Civil Rights Movement led by African Americans ends many forms of discrimination.
- 1959** Hawaii becomes the 50th state. Hiram L. Fong of Hawaii becomes the first Chinese American to serve in the US Senate.
- 1965** A new immigration act abolishes national quotas.  
US sends combat troops to South Vietnam and begins bombing North Vietnam.
- 1966** China launches the Cultural Revolution to remove opposition to Mao Tse-tung's rule.
- 1975** US withdraws from Vietnam.
- 1979** US resumes diplomatic relations with China.
- 1982** Vincent Chin, a Chinese American, is murdered by two white Americans who think he is Japanese. Chin's murderers receive a light punishment.
- 1990** New immigration law reorganizes preferences.
- 2000** Chinese population of the US is 2,879,636 out of 281.4 million.



## 1. The Cold War

(5:30-23:30)

Program 3 opens with the story of a young architecture student named Maya Lin. In 1981, at the age of 21, she created the winning design for the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. When her work was chosen and her name revealed, there was a sudden outcry.

Bill Moyers explains, “She was born in the US. She was a teen-ager when Saigon [the capital of South Vietnam] fell [ending the Vietnam War]. . . . But suddenly she got caught among old demons—ones that ran deep in the American mind.” In reflecting on her story, Moyers asks, “Was this another dispiriting tale of racism? Or the opposite? After all, her plans got built to much acclaim. It struck me, her story is like the story of Chinese America as a whole: it shows how powerful race can be in this country—and how powerless, when matched against human will.” How do Moyers’ words apply to Maya Lin’s story? To other stories told in the documentary?

In 1949, a Communist government came into power in China. The following year, the United States fought against North Korea and Communist China as part of an effort to contain Communism. Helen Zia, whose story is told in Program 3, writes that Chinese Americans, already under scrutiny as “foreigners” were now seen as potential enemy agents. She writes:

*Sharp divisions formed between Chinese Americans over the question of Communist rule in China—with a clear awareness of the trouble it might bring them in America. The more conservative community organizations mounted their own anti-Communist campaigns to prove, preemptively, that Chinese were loyal Americans.*

*Their fears were not unfounded. . . . The immigration service posted signs in Chinese in*



Maya Lin in 1981.

*Chinatowns publicizing a “Confession Program” which encouraged people to inform on friends and relatives in exchange for legal immigration status; thousands participated, including more than 10,000 in San Francisco alone.*

*FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was convinced that Chinese Americans posed a domestic Communist threat. In 1969 he warned: “The United States is Communist China’s No. 1 enemy. . . . Red China has been flooding the country with propaganda and there are over 300,000 Chinese in the United States, some of whom could be susceptible to recruitment either through ethnic ties or hostage situations because of relatives in Communist China.”<sup>26</sup>*

How does Helen Zia’s account explain the visits from the FBI Charlie Chin describes? The wire tapping and tampering with the mail that Zia herself recalls as a child? How does one prove loyalty to a nation? When Hoover looked at Americans of Chinese descent, he did not see Americans but “300,000 Chinese in the United States.” What does it mean to be seen as a “perpetual foreigner” even though you are an American citizen?

In 2000, Maya Lin wrote, “Sometimes a total stranger—a cabdriver, for example—will ask me where I am from.” It is an ordinary question. Or is it? Lin goes on to say:

*I mutter, “Here it goes again” or I will respond “Ohio,” and the stranger will say, “No, no, where are you really from?” It used to upset me to always be seen as other—not really from here . . . not really American . . . but then from where? So I used to practically get into brawls with the person, insisting I was really from Ohio. At that point, more than a few have lectured me on how I shouldn’t be ashamed of my heritage. So now, practiced at avoiding conflict, I say, “Ohio . . . but my mother is from Shanghai and my father is from Beijing.”*

*The questioner generally seems satisfied.*

*But the question, however innocently it is asked, reveals an attitude in which I am left acutely aware of how, to some, I am not allowed to be from here; to some, I am not really an American.<sup>29</sup>*

Why do you think Helen Zia calls the question that Maya Lin describes as one that unites all Asian Americans? In Segment 1, Shawn Wong describes his childhood in the 1950s. How did the attitudes Maya Lin describes shape his childhood? Why was it important to him that the University of California had a Japanese American football player? What did Pete Domoto mean to Wong?

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## 2. Benny Pan and the Cultural Revolution

(23:30-30:00)

Segment 2 introduces Benny Pan. When the Communists took over China, Pan made a fateful decision—one that changed his life. He helped his sister Deanna escape, but he stayed behind to care for their parents. To what extent did his decision reflect Chinese cultural traditions? To what extent did his decision reflect the changes that had been taking place in China over the past 100 years?

During the Cultural Revolution, China’s leaders tried to remove all opposition to Mao Tse-tung’s version of Communism. They targeted Christians and individuals with wealth or education. How did the revolution affect Pan? His sister says that she heard nothing from her brother or other relatives in China for years at a time. How do you think that silence shaped families in both China and the US?

Deanna Chan settled in the United States after China fell to the Communists. How is she like immigrants who came from China in the late 1800s and early 1900s? What differences seem most striking? What do those differences suggest about the way refugees differ from other immigrants? What special challenges do they face?

Benny Pan’s story suggests the difficulties Chinese who wanted to emigrate faced after the Communists came to power. In the late 1900s, most Chinese who immigrated to the United States came from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Program 2 described the way Chinese customs and US law shaped and mis-shaped Chinese American life in the early 1900s. What does Program 3 suggest about the forces that shaped and mis-shaped life in China and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s?

### 3. The Civil Rights Movement

(30:00-39:15)

Segment 3 describes what the Civil Rights Movement meant to young Chinese Americans. Helen Zia recalls, “In college, I learned that I was an Asian American. I learned that I didn’t have to call myself Oriental like a rug. It was like a light bulb going off.” Charlie Chin recalls, “We were suddenly charged with the idea that we could actually make a difference, that we could actually change history for the better.” Shawn Wong participated in the strikes at Berkeley and San Francisco State to win courses in Asian and African American history. He recalls the 1960s as a time Asian Americans “could speak out. You no longer wanted to be invisible.” What do the three suggest about the power of the Civil Rights Movement to inspire?

In a speech at the Library of Congress in May 12, 1998, Bill Lann Lee, the first Chinese American to serve as assistant attorney general for civil rights, reflected on the importance of the laws that resulted from the Civil Rights Movement. He focused on what those laws meant to the people he encountered as a volunteer lawyer for the Asia-American Legal Defense Fund in New York City in the early 1970s:

*Waiters, cooks, dim-sum girls, laundry workers came to the weekly clinic. They came with humble problems of humble people. Getting legal relief for these people meant something in their lives.*

*I learned from that experience, in the most forceful and direct way, that our nation’s civil rights laws really do protect all Americans. It’s not about theory. It’s about real people’s lives and about real equal opportunity and real fairness. . . .*

*We need to invest in each other’s civil rights. It’s more important today than ever. The civil rights laws are not for any individual or group. They are for all Americans. It’s like John Donne, the poet, said: “Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.”<sup>28</sup>*

What do Lee’s remarks suggest about the way one individual, one group, one movement can inspire others?

African Americans and Asian Americans tried to reclaim their place in American history in the 1960s. Students like Shawn Wong went on strike to demand programs that included their stories. Connie Young Yu, whose story was told in Program 2, explains the importance of such demands, “Worse than burning the books is not being included in the record at all, and in American history—traditionally viewed from the white male perspective—minority women have been virtually ignored.”

Why do you think she views being excluded as “worse than burning the books”? How do those who are left out find their place in the history books?

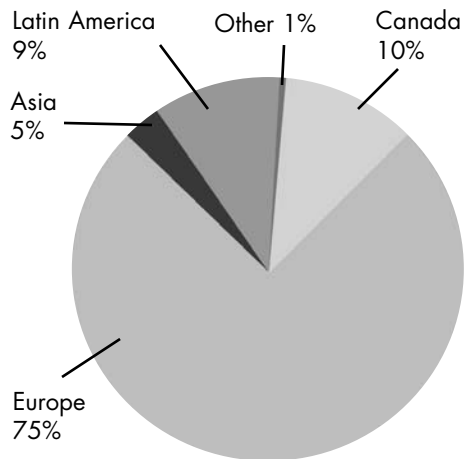
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### 4. Immigration Act and Nixon

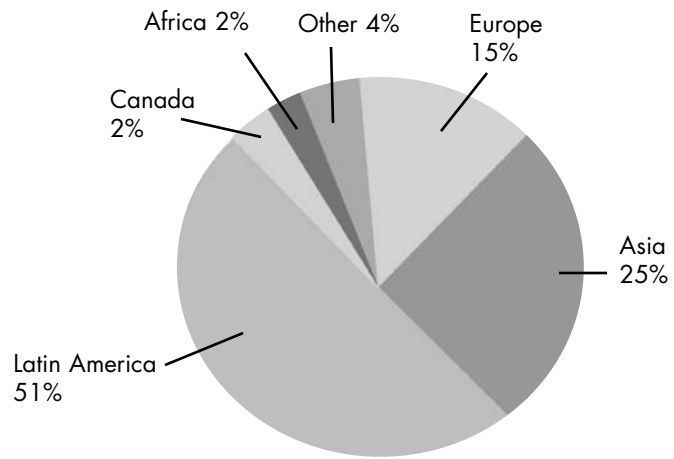
(39:15-44:00)

Segment 4 focuses on the impact of two events on Chinese American life: the Immigration Act of 1965 and President Richard Nixon’s 1972 visit to China, which eventually led to the restoration of diplomatic relations between the US and China in 1979.

President Lyndon B. Johnson did not think that the new immigration law would be “revolutionary.” The two graphs on the next page show where immigrants came from in 1960 and 2000. What do they suggest about the way the new immigration law affected the nation? How revolutionary was the law?



Countries of Origin, 1960 <sup>29</sup>



Countries of Origin, 2000 <sup>30</sup>

Charlie Chin, Shawn Wong, and Helen Zia describe how the newest immigrants were changing Chinatowns across the nation. How did those changes challenge old stereotypes about the Chinese people and their cultures?

Richard Nixon's trip to China made possible an opportunity that shaped Helen Zia's identity. She explains:

*In kindergarten, I learned the Pledge of Allegiance. . . . Even then, I understood that "Merica" was my home—and that I was an American.*

*Still a flicker of doubt was ever present. If I was truly American, why did the other American people around me seem so sure I was foreign?*

*By the time I was a teenager, I imagined that I was a "dual citizen" of both the United States and China. I had no idea what dual citizenship involved, or if it was even possible. No matter, I would be a citizen of the world. This was my fantasy, my way of soothing the hurt of being so unacceptable in the land of my birth.*

*When I got to college, I decided to learn more about "where I came from" by taking classes in Asian history. I even studied Mandarin Chinese. This had the paradoxical effect of making me question my Chineseness. Other students, and even the teachers, expected me to spout perfectly accented Chinese.*

*Instead I sounded like some hick from New Jersey, stumbling along as badly as the other American students next to me. Still my fantasy persisted; I thought I might "go back" to China, a place I had never been, as rude detractors so often urged.*

*President Richard Nixon's historic trip to China in February 1972 made a visit seem possible for me. That summer, China cracked open the "bamboo curtain," allowing a small group of Chinese American students to visit the country as a goodwill gesture to the United States. I desperately wanted to be one of them, and I put together a research proposal that got the support of my professors. With a special fellowship from Princeton, I joined the group and became one of the first Americans, after Nixon, to enter "Red" China.*

*In China I fit right in with the multitude. In the cities of Shanghai and Suzhou, where my parents were from, I saw my features everywhere. After years of not looking "American" to the "Americans" and not looking Chinese enough to the Cantonese who make up the majority of Chinese Americans, I suddenly found my face on every passerby. It was a revelation of sameness that I had never experienced in New Jersey: The feeling didn't last long.*

*I visited my mother's eldest sister; they hadn't seen each other since 1949, the year of the Communist revolution in China, when my*



mother left with their middle sister on the last boat out of Shanghai. Using my elementary Chinese, I struggled to communicate with Auntie Li, who seemed prematurely wizened from years of hardship. My vocabulary was too limited and my idealism too thick to comprehend my family's suffering from the Cultural Revolution, still virulently in progress. But girlish fun transcended language as my older cousins took me by the hand to the local "Friendship Store" and dressed me in a khaki Mao suit, braiding my long hair in pigtails, just like the other unmarried Chinese women.

All decked out like a freshly minted Red Guard in my new do, I passed for local. Real Chinese stopped me on the street, to ask for directions, to ask where I got my tennis shoes, to complain about the long bus queues, to comment on my Shanghai-made blouse, to say any number of things to me. As soon as I opened my mouth to reply, my clumsy American accent infected the lit-

tle Chinese I knew. My questioners knew immediately that I was a foreigner, a Westerner, an American, maybe even a spy—and they ran from me as fast as they could. I had an epiphany common to Asian Americans who visit their ancestral homelands: I realized that I didn't fit into Chinese society, that I could never be accepted there. If I didn't know it, the Chinese did: I belonged in America, not China.<sup>29</sup>

Upon her return home, Zia applied for a job as an intern in the China section of the State Department. She was turned down, because the department had a "policy that no persons of Chinese descent should work at the China desk." What stereotypes about "persons of Chinese descent" informed the State Department's policy? What is the moral or lesson that Zia seems to draw from the story? What moral or lesson do you draw from it?

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## 5. The Death of Vincent Chin

(44:00-51:15)

Segment 5 describes a turning point in the 1980s for many Chinese Americans. In 1982, two white workers in Detroit murdered Vincent Chin, a Chinese American. According to court records, they thought he was Japanese and therefore to blame for economic problems in the auto industry. A municipal judge explained why he gave the pair just three years probation and a \$3,780 fine, "These aren't the kind of people you send to jail. You fit the punishment to the criminal, not the crime."

The crime and its punishment outraged Asian Americans. One Chinese American was quoted as saying, "Three thousand dollars can't even buy a good used car these days and this was the price of a life." Lily Chin, the mother of the slain man, asked, "What kind of law is this? What kind of justice? This happened because my son is Chinese. If two Chinese killed a white person, they must go to jail,



Vincent Chin's mother and sister, photographed by Corky Lee.

maybe for their whole lives."<sup>30</sup> How would you answer the questions Lily Chin raised?

Asian Americans saw similarities between what happened to Vincent Chin in 1982 and the anti-Chinese riots. Historian Ronald Takaki explains:

*They see a parallel between then and now. “What disturbs me,” explained George Wong of the Asian American Federation of Union Membership, “is that the two men who brutally clubbed Vince Chin to death in Detroit in 1982 were thinking the same thoughts as the lynch mobs in San Francisco one hundred years ago: ‘Kill the foreigners to save our jobs! The Chinese must go!’ When corporate heads tell frustrated workers that foreign imports are taking their jobs, they are acting like an agitator of a lynch mob.”*

*The murder of Vincent Chin has underscored the need for Asian Americans to break silences. “For a long time we have not fought back,”*

*declared George Suey of San Francisco. “But this time we will stand up and fight for our rights.” Indeed all Asian Americans—Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Asian Indians, and Southwest Asians—are standing up this time. They realize what happened to Vincent Chin could happen to them—to anyone with Asian features.<sup>31</sup>*

State legislatures have defined a hate crime as the use of force or the threat of force to willfully injure, intimidate, interfere with, oppress, or threaten an individual because of his or her actual or perceived “race,” color, religion, ethnicity, or gender. Some have also included crimes committed against individuals because of disabilities or sexual orientation. Was the murder of Vincent Chin the tragic end to a barroom brawl as the judge believed or a hate crime? What distinguishes one from the other?

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## 6. Arrival, Struggle

(51:15-1:10:40)

Segment 6 describes the experiences of a few Chinese Americans—Jerry Yang, Jean Tang, Michelle Ling, and Benny Pan. Yang likens his experience as an immigrant to a “journey of understanding of how in this new world I could fit in.” To what extent do the other three individuals share his view? How might each describe his or her journey?

What do the four have in common with people who came to the United States from China at other times in history? How do you account for differences? How has the legacy of earlier immigrants shaped the experiences of the four Chinese Americans featured in this segment? What may tomorrow’s immigrants learn from their experiences? How may they benefit from their successes and failures?

Jean Tang and Michelle Ling reflect on the myth of the “model minority.” What is a “model minority”? Who created the stereo

type? Helen Zia has traced its history:

*In the 1960s, a new stereotype emerged on the American scene. As urban ghettos from Newark, New Jersey, to Watts in Los Angeles erupted into riots and civil unrest, Asian Americans suddenly became the object of “flattering” media stories. After more than a century of invisibility alternating with virulent headlines and radio broadcasts that advocated eliminating or imprisoning America’s Asians, a rash of stories began to extol our virtues.*

*“Success Story: Japanese American Style” was the title of an article that appeared in The New York Times Magazine on January 9, 1966. A few months later, US News & World Report produced a similar piece entitled “Success Story of One Minority Group in the United States,” praising Chinese Americans while making transparent comparisons to African Americans: “At a time when Americans are awash in worry over the plight of racial minorities, one minority, the nation’s 300,000 Chinese Americans are winning wealth and respect by dint of its own hard work.”*

*The radical attitude shift was a too familiar experience for Asian Americans who had seen many iterations of the “friend today, foe tomorrow” treatment. Nor was the link to urban uprisings an accident. Where Asians had previously been the economic wedge to distract labor unrest, in the 1960s they were refashioned as a political and social hammer against disadvantaged groups. The “model minority” was born.* <sup>32</sup>

It has been said that a *stereotype* is a script that someone else expects you to follow. Who is writing the script that depicts Asians as a “model minority”? How is this new stereotype similar to those that shaped relations between Chinese laborers and union workers in the late 1800s and early 1900s? What are the similarities? How important are the differences?

The myth of the “model minority” has shaped the lives of the young Chinese Americans interviewed in this segment. What do their stories suggest about the dangers of “positive stereotypes”? It has also shaped the life of M. Elaine Mar, who came to the United States from China with her family. She writes:

*For the better part of my life, I have struggled to live up the image of the “model minority” stereotype that has long been used to describe Asian Americans. I wanted to dispel the stereotype, because I know from experience it is not true. I grew up in the back room of a Chinese restaurant watching my family labor through thirteen-hour-days, seven days a week. We served up foods defined as “Chinese” by the restaurant owners, Annie and Casey Rosenberg, although we ourselves had never tasted egg foo yung or sweet and sour pork before.*

*We had a hard time making ends meet, since we traded a percentage of the food receipts for kitchen space—a sharecropping-type arrangement in which the owners always got paid first, the suppliers second, the wait-staff and dishwashers third, and ourselves last. When times were tough, we worked for free.*

*We didn’t sustain ourselves with ancient fables and Confucian proverbs. Instead we watched Gunsmoke on a twelve-inch black-and-white TV (with the sound turned off, since the adults didn’t understand English) and bickered in Toishanese, an obscure rural Chinese dialect (our native language) when the pressure became too intense. The adults spent their free time betting on horses, greyhounds, and American men wearing football helmets. To celebrate the lunar new year, we went to a Chinese social club for a banquet that was really another excuse for gambling.*

*This was my vision of the Chinese in America. Restaurant workers and seamstresses who could never find the time, will, or energy to learn English, not even enough to read street signs. The entire time I was growing up, I had no idea that Asian American lawyers, doctors, scientists, architects, and businesspeople existed. “Model minority” meant nothing to me. Such was the insular nature of our community.*

*The truth is, my childhood community—an informal Chinatown, since I grew up in Denver, where the boundaries were not defined by city blocks—has more in common with Harlem, Appalachia, and an Indian reservation than with the fantasy of a Horatio Alger story. The same entrenched barriers to success are in place, the same isolation from mainstream American culture, the same political disenfranchisement.* <sup>33</sup>

Ralph Ellison once wrote that as an African American, he is invisible “simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you sometimes see in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of distorting glass. When they approach me, they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed everything and anything except me.” The distorting mirrors are stereotypes. What does Mar suggest about the importance of seeing one another without the distortions that render some of us invisible and turn others among us into perpetual foreigners?

## 7. Defining Identity

(1:10:40-1:28:15)

The final segment examines success and its costs. Each of the individuals featured in Program 3 reflects on what it means to be an American. How does each seem to define the American dream? Which view is closest to your own?

When asked about the American dream, Michelle Ling tells Bill Moyers:

*I don't get to choose my color but I get to choose everything else. I get to compose my life one piece at a time—however I feel like it. Not to say that it's not difficult and not to say that people don't balk at whatever I choose, not to say that there isn't challenge all the time, but more than material wealth, you get to choose what you are, who you are.*

If a stereotype is a script that someone else expects you to follow, how have Ling and the others interviewed in Program 3 defied the old scripts and tried to compose their own lives? How important is that process for all Americans?

Author Gish Jen reflects in many of her novels on the challenges of composing one's own life. In a column that she wrote in 1996, she notes:

*That my son, Luke, age four, goes to Chinese-culture school seems inevitable to most people, even though his father is of Irish descent. For certain ethnicities trump others; Chinese, for example, trumps Irish. This has something to do with the relative distance of certain cultures from mainstream American culture, but it also has to do with race. For as we all know, it is not only certain ethnicities that trump others but certain colors: black trumps white, for example, always and forever; mulatto is not kind of a white person, but a kind of a black person.*

*And so it is, too, that my son is considered a kind of Asian person whose manifest destiny is to*

*embrace Asian things. The Chinese language. Chinese food. Chinese New Year. No one cares whether he speaks Gaelic or wears green on St. Patrick's Day. For though Luke's skin is fair, and his features mixed, people see his straight black hair and "know" who he is. . . .*

*Then one day, Luke combed his black hair and said he was turning it yellow. Another day, a fellow mother reported that her son had invited all blond-haired children like himself to his birthday party. And yet another day, Luke was happily scooting around the Cambridge Common playground when a pair of older boys, apparently brothers, blocked his way. "You're Chinese!" they shouted, leaning on the hood of Luke's scooter car. "You are! You're Chinese!" So brazen were these kids, that even when I, an adult, intervened, they continued to shout. Luke answered, "No, I'm not!"—to no avail; it was not clear if the boys even heard him. Then the boys' mother called to them from some distance away, outside the fence, and though her voice was no louder than Luke's, they left obediently.*

*Behind them opened a great, rippling quiet, like the wash of a battleship.*

*Luke and I immediately went over things he could say if anything like that ever happened again. I told him that he was 100 percent American, even though I knew from my own childhood in Yonkers, New York, that these words would be met only with derision. It was a sorry chore. Since then I have not asked him about the incident, hoping that he has forgotten about it, and wishing that I could, too. For I wish I could forget the sight of those kids' fingers on the hood of Luke's little car. I wish I could forget their loud attack, but also Luke's soft defense: No, I'm not.<sup>34</sup>*

Why does Gish Jen believe that certain ethnicities and colors trump others? What lesson does her story teach? What does it suggest about the challenges of composing one's own life?

During the 1998 Winter Olympics, an Internet news site carried the headline, "American Beats Kwan," referring to figure-skater Michelle Kwan, who was born in California. During the 2002 Winter Olympics it happened again. A headline in the *Seattle Times* read, "Hughes As Good As Gold: American Outshines Kwan." The previous year Congressman David Wu of Oregon was denied entry to the Department of Energy (even after showing his ID) because he did not "look American." Harmless mistakes? Frank Wu, a law professor at Howard University, is not convinced.

*Most people don't see the slippery slope leading from [stereotypes about] governments and companies to nations and peoples and then to races and cultures; it is a swift slide from an overseas group to an individual by way of the catch-all phrase "you people." . . . "The distinction of US*

*citizenship, seemingly all-important, is blurred away. It is as easy now as it was a century ago to find diatribes about the Chinese government or Japanese companies that speak in terms of China or Japan as monoliths or that conclude "the Chinese are a military threat" or "the Japanese companies are an economic threat." The further proclamations that "the Chinese are belligerent" or "the Japanese are devious" don't have a clear stopping point.*<sup>35</sup>

How do his comments help us understand the Cold War experiences Helen Zia described in Segment 1? How do they help us understand why the murder of Vincent Chin still resonates with Asian Americans today? How do they help us understand why Gish Jen wishes she could forget not only the boys who attacked her son but also his reply to them? What would you would have said to Luke that day? To the boys who attacked him?

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## TO LEARN MORE

### Books

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\_\_\_\_\_. *Typical American*. Dutton/Plume, 1992.  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Who's Irish? Stories*. Vintage Books, 2000.  
Lee, Gus. *China Boy*. New American Library, 1991.  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Honor and Duty*. Knopf, 1994. Sequel to *China Boy*.  
Lin, Maya. *Boundaries*. Simon & Schuster, 2000.  
Liu, Eric. *The Accidental Asian: Notes of a Native Speaker*. Vintage Books, 1998.  
See, Lisa. *On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of My Chinese-American Family*. Vintage Books, 1995.  
Yep, Laurence. *Child of the Owl*. HarperCollins, 1965. A novel set in the 1960s in San Francisco's Chinatown.

### Websites

- Asian Film Foundation: <http://www.asianfilm.org>  
Model Minority: <http://www.modelminority.com> Research articles, literature, pictures, and other sources that document the Asian American experience.  
Corky Lee: <http://www.nyu.edu/apa/gallery/lee/> Feature articles and images from this documentary photographer's portfolio.  
Maya Lin: [http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/Maya\\_Lin.html](http://www.greatbuildings.com/architects/Maya_Lin.html) A profile of the artist, and links to other Internet reference sources about her life and work.  
Gish Jen: <http://www.powells.com/authors/jen.html> A 1999 interview with the author.  
Amy Tan: <http://www.barclayagency.com/tan.html> A profile about the author and her novels.

### Websites, continued

- Chen Ning Yang and Tseng Dao Lee: <http://www.nobel.se/physics/laureates/1957/index.html> Recipients of the 1957 Nobel Prize in physics.
- Samuel Ting: <http://www.nobel.se/physics/laureates/1976/index.html> Recipient of the 1976 Nobel Prize in physics.
- Steven Chu: <http://www.nobel.se/physics/laureates/1997/index.html> Recipient of the 1997 Nobel Prize in physics.
- Daniel C. Tsui: <http://www.nobel.se/physics/laureates/1998/index.html> Recipient of the 1998 Nobel Prize in physics
- Yuan T. Lee: <http://www.nobel.se/chemistry/laureates/1986/index.html> Recipient of the 1986 Nobel Prize in chemistry.
- David Ho: <http://www.time.com/time/personoftheyear/archive/stories/1996.htm> Time magazine cover story on TIME's 1996 Person of the Year for his breakthrough research on AIDS.
- Leroy Chiao: <http://www.jsc.nasa.gov/Bios/htmlbios/chiao.html> NASA fact sheet on Chiao, the first Chinese-American astronaut.

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- 26 *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* by Helen Zia. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000, 44-45.
- 27 *Boundaries* by Maya Lin. Simon & Schuster, 2000, 5:03-5:06.
- 28 Quoted in "Hope, Hard Work and a Better Life" by Donna Urschel. *Library of Congress Information Bulletin*, July 1998.
- 29 *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People* by Helen Zia. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000, 39-141.
- 30 Source: US Census
- 31 Ibid
- 32 "Who Really Killed Vincent Chin?" by Ronald Takaki. *San Francisco Examiner*, September 21, 1983.
- 33 From *Strangers from a Different Shore* by Ronald Takaki. Rev. ed. Little Brown & Co., 1989, 1998, 483-484.
- 34 *Asian American Dreams* by Helen Zia. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000, 46.
- 35 Introduction to *Paper Daughter: A Memoir* by M. Elaine Mar. HarperCollins Publishers, 1999, viii-ix.
- 36 Copyright 1996 by Gish Jen. Reprinted from *The New York Times Magazine*, July 7, 1996.
- 35 *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White* by Frank H. Wu. Basic Books, 2002, 88.

## REFLECTIONS

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*Becoming American: The Chinese Experience* ends with a reflection by Bill Moyers.

*This story is still being written. Every day, there are new arrivals: there's the bunk bed, the job in the garment factory or restaurant, the debts still owed to family and others who financed the long journey here.*

*Like every immigrant group, the Chinese in America are defined not so much by those who make it—but by those who keep coming, because they believe they can make it. It's an old story—and always new. America itself is becoming.*

What is Moyers suggesting about the story of the Chinese in America? About the story of other immigrant groups? What can we learn about the nation from the experiences every group shares? What can we learn from the differences among them?

How important is it to know the history told in this documentary? To know how not only you and your family but also your community fits into a larger history. In college, Jennifer H. Lee wrote a paper about the anti-Chinese riots in Tacoma, Washington, in 1885. She ends her paper with a personal commentary:

*I learned of the anti-Chinese riots in Washington, as I do most of my learning, through a novel, one by Annie Dillard called *The Living*. It was just a brief paragraph, really, about the Congress of Sinophobes and The Interests, who got together in Tacoma and decided to ship the Chinese to Portland, just like that. And that's what hit me. The way in which the wholesale expulsion of an entire community was agreed upon and executed just as any other action of any other group, in any other town. But this is where it was different. It was my hometown, Tacoma. City of Destiny, we call it now. Tacoma has sister cities in Asia, small industrial ports mirroring its hungry capitalist spirit on the other side of the Pacific. Tacoma, as*

*I knew it, from the view afforded from my home in neighboring University Place, was lively, relatively safe . . . nice.*

*So the idea of a colored past in Tacoma baffled me. . . . For most of my academic career, I could count the number of Asian students in my class on my hands. Maybe a couple districts over you'd find the larger Asian populations that allowed Western Washington to call itself so multi-cultural. But not in mine. So when I read Dillard's description of Tacoma, I took note. There once was a large Asian, Chinese population in Tacoma. For most of Washington's 20th century history, it has been Japanese Americans who were the largest group here. Increasingly it's become the Koreans, the Filipinos, the Thai.*

*I had grown up watching Tacoma declare itself more and more progressive. I never learned European History in high school. I learned World Historical Perspectives. I grew up reading about heritage festivals and cultural museums. Tacomans knew their history, claim to fame: hometown of Bing Crosby, local heroes: Dale Chihuly, renowned glass blower, historical Union Station, the last stop of the Northern Pacific. Nobody until Dillard said anything about the Sinophobes. I truly believe that the Chinese expulsion and decades-long exclusion was a factor in why I never learned of even the presence of Chinese immigrants in Washington. I think that in those decades after the Chinese were shipped away and the remains of their existence here had been burned to the ground, Tacomans forgot why they were gone. And they continued to forget, up to me. . . .*

*I'm not bitter that I didn't find out about the Chinese presence in Tacoma until I weeded it out of some fiction. I would just like to be able to share this information with others. The Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and other Asian settlers contributed in so many ways to what Washington is today. Yet, for too long a time, they were kept (in the case of Tacoma, physically) from contributing even more. Chin Chun Hook created what is*

*now Seattle's International District, from one general goods store in 1868. . . . I can only wonder what other International Districts there would be in Washington, if so much had not been taken away by the violence of the 1880s and 90s.*

Why does Jennifer Lee believe that she and others in Tacoma have a right to know their community's history? How does one recover a history that has been forgotten or ignored? Once we know these lost stories, what obligations do we have to tell them?

Across the country, a number of individuals and groups have been trying to reclaim their place in American history. In Massachusetts, the Asian Community Development Corporation started a project that engages young Chinese Americans in exploring the history and culture of Boston's Chinatown. They created a website ([www.chinatownbanquet.org](http://www.chinatownbanquet.org)) that showcases their research. They are also working on a Chinatown Walking Trail and multi-media projection project that

will make that heritage visible to everyone in the city. Find out more about Chinatown Banquet and similar efforts in other communities.

In the 1960s, Corky Lee's history textbook included a photograph taken at Promontory Point, Utah in 1869 to commemorate the completion of the first transcontinental railroad. Lee noticed that there were no Chinese workers in the photo even though thousands had worked on that railroad. As an adult, Lee has devoted himself to making Chinese and other Asian Americans visible by taking photographs of them. One of his photographs appears on page 40; another is below. What do they suggest about how one debunks a lie? Challenges a stereotype? Exposes a myth?

Reread "The Past" by Ha Jin on page 7 in the PreView section of this guide. What view of the past do such efforts reflect? How do they help us understand why Ha Jin writes, "The past cannot be thrown off and its weight must be borne, or I will become another man"?



Over 130 years after the transcontinental railroad was completed at Promontory Point, Utah, Corky Lee's 2002 photograph places Chinese Americans into the picture.

36 <http://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/curaaw/main.htm>.





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