

# ASIAN AMERICAN DREAMS

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

...one of our nation's most original thinkers, and her book serves not only as an invaluable record of a movement but also as a moving and often funny personal memoir." —David Henry Hwang

ASIAN AMERICAN DREAMS HELEN ZIA

"This is an important book because it seeks to answer a question that few other popular works pose: What does it take for people like the author to become fully American?"

—Sumini Sengupta, *The New York Times Book Review*

...aking book is about the transformation of Asian Americans from a few small, and largely invisible ethnic groups into a self-identified racial group that is a very aspect of American society. *Asian American Dreams* also examines the ramifications of Asian Americans that have an impact on key issues concerning all Americans: affirmative action and campaign finance to popular culture and national security.

...blend of personal and cultural history, a primer on Asian America that covers the history of Asian immigration to the turbulence of the past three decades, and a history has gone from silent minority to demanding its place in American society."

—Ferdinand M. de Leon, *The Seattle Times*



...ory of the struggles of Zia and diverse Asian Americans into Americans." —Ronald Takaki, author of *Strangers From Paradise*

**HELEN ZIA**, the daughter of Chinese immigrants, grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area in the fifties when there were only 150,000 Chinese in the entire country. An award-winning journalist, she has written for American communities and social and political journals for more than twenty years. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area.

TAS PROPERTY

068888 X

888905

\$17.00 / \$19.00 CAN  
ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES / AMERICAN STUDIES

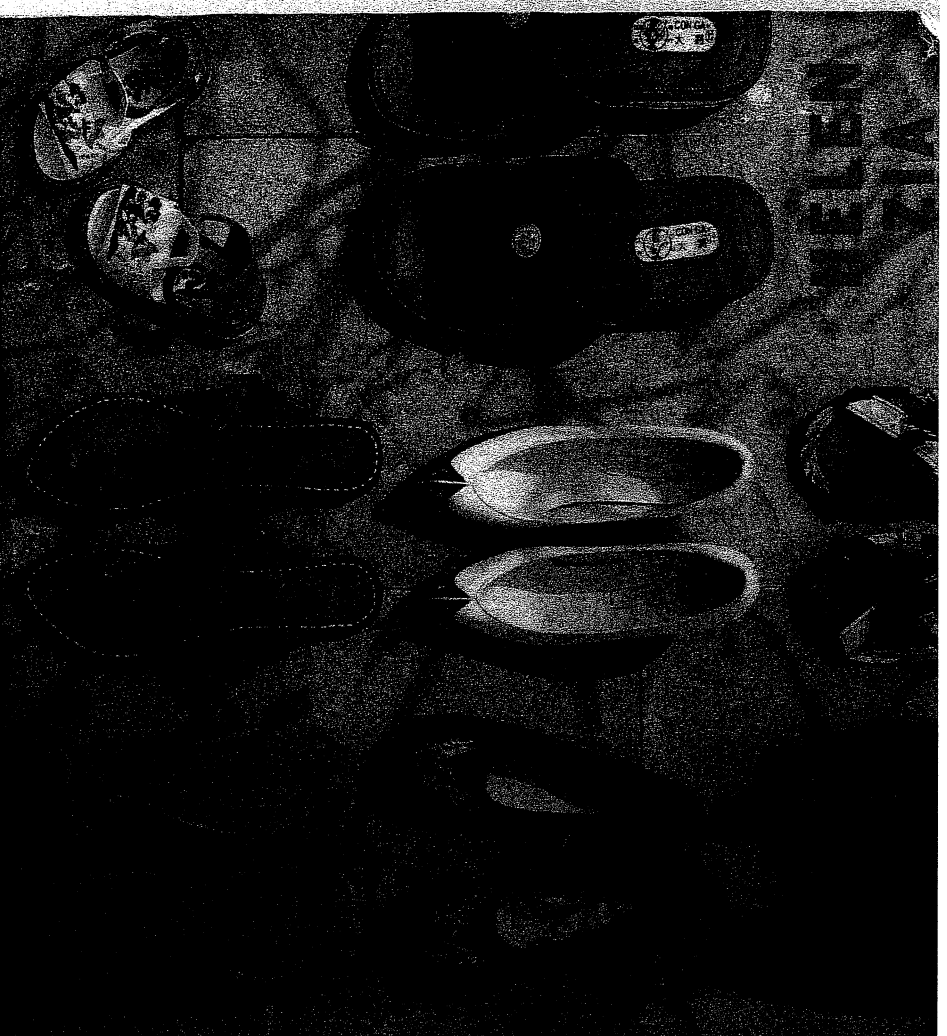
ISBN: 978-0-374-52736-5

51700



Ocean  
文化  
com.tw

Cover design by [unreadable]  
Cover illustration by [unreadable]  
Author photo copyright by [unreadable]  
Editor, [unreadable]  
[unreadable]



ing at Princeton with his running mate, Herbert Aptheker. Some Third World students were invited to a small luncheon for them; Alan and I went as representatives of the newly formed Asian American Students Association. Throughout the entire reception and luncheon, Hall and Aptheker, who were both white, spoke primarily to the African American students, pointedly ignoring Alan and me. To these American Communists, Asian Americans had no political currency; in their eyes, we didn't exist, or perhaps they assumed from our Asian faces that we were predisposed to support China, a bitter foe of the Soviets. It was the first time I witnessed such a blatant race ploy by political "progressives," but it wouldn't be the last.

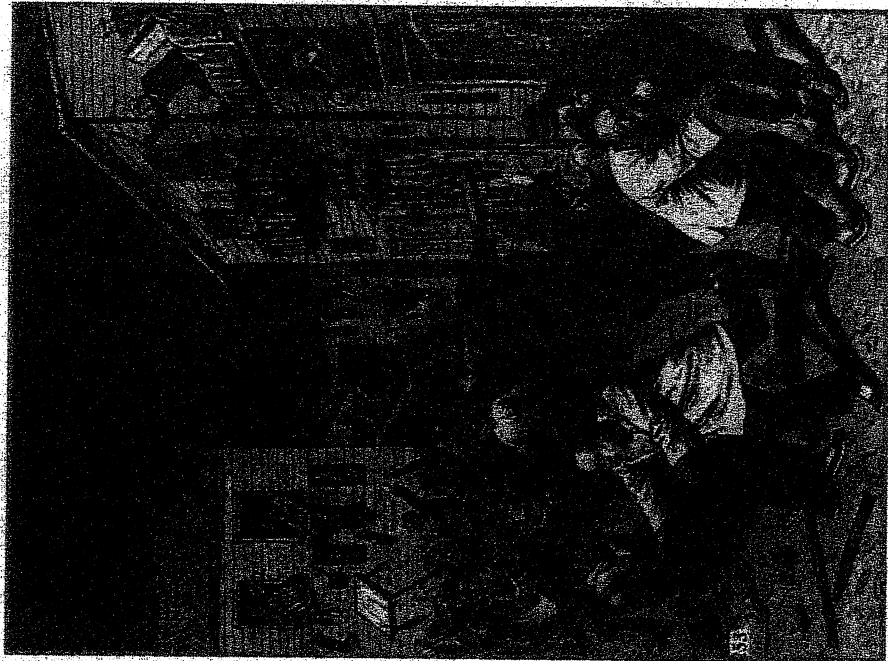
A whole generation of Asian Americans was getting an education about our identity. We couldn't wait to leave the safe confines of our campuses, to share our lessons and our pride in this newfound heritage. Many of us went into Asian American enclaves as community organizers, intent on making changes there. Our campus experiences made it abundantly clear that if Asian Americans were to take our rightful place in American society, we would have to scratch and dig and blast our way in, much as the railroad workers had through the Rockies one hundred years earlier.

Few in America, or even in our own communities, paid much attention to these young Asian Americans. Among the separate—and expanding—Asian immigrant groups, the vision of pan-Asian unity was not compelling; survival was their main focus.

Still, a dynamic process was set in motion: we were reclaiming our stake in a land and a history that excluded us, transforming a community that was still in the process of becoming. We were following our destinies as Asian Americans.

. 2 .

## Surrogate Slaves to American Dreamers



In my childhood photo album, there is a tattered brown news clipping taped to the inside cover. It features me as George Washington, looking as earnest as a seven-year-old in shorts can. I'm pointing straight ahead across a make-believe

*The Asian Americans I saw in my youth: the driving out and murder of Chinese in Denver (Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, November 20, 1880)*

frozen river, leading other girls who are pulling imaginary oars. "Charades," the caption reads. "... Helen Zia, as Washington."

When the *Burlington County Times* photographed our tableau of George and the fateful crossing, no one seemed to care that this Revolutionary War hero was a Chinese girl, in a rice-bowl hairdo and razor-edge bangs. The role seemed natural enough to me. I was steeped in the stories of the ragtag Colonial Army and how it outsmarted the British and the Hessian mercenaries on Christmas night.

Each year, my history classes followed a predictable rhythm. September began with the Leni-Lenapes, the local Native American Indians who had vanished long ago. By midyear we were into Manifest Destiny, the Gold Rush, and the "settling" of the West. The Civil War came and went, and slavery was finally abolished. In the spring, we zipped through Woodrow Wilson, the League of Nations, and World War II. In this whirlwind treatment of history, there wasn't a single Asian American to be found. I hadn't a clue that people like me might have contributed to the building of America, the land of my birth.

The Second World War brought Asian faces into my textbooks, but that was hardly cause for celebration. My school chums would turn and squint at me, the face of the enemy. In American history texts, Asian people were either invisible or reviled. It was just like the real-life choice we faced, our Asian American dilemma. Was it better to choose invisibility and a life in the shadows than to be treated as a despised enemy? Or was acquiescent invisibility just another form of self-loathing?

My father wanted us to have a deeper understanding of history that included our Chinese heritage. As a young man he had translated and published several Western texts, including Georg Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* from German into Chinese. His greater challenge was to imbue his American-born children with a similar devotion to knowledge. To accomplish this, he employed the teaching methods favored by many Asian immigrant parents: force-feeding and strict discipline. He also bought the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from a door-to-door salesperson and assigned sections for my brothers and me to read. Then he'd quiz us with his own written and oral exams. Oral were worse. If we did well, we might be rewarded with a nickel, but the real incentive was to avoid the humiliation that came with failure.

Dad was not happy with the *Britannica*. He found the sections on China to be outdated and inaccurate; he bristled at the Western romanizations of important Chinese words and was driven to fury by Western arrogance toward Chinese people. He took issue with the title of Will and Ariel Durant's *Story of Civilization*, which in one volume covered five thousand years of Asian civiliza-

tions and devoted eleven volumes to European cultures. But he respected the knowledge they presented, and wanted us to study such books critically.

To supplement the shortcomings of Western texts, Dad lectured his children on China's glorious past. One of his favorite stories was about Cheng Ho, the Chinese explorer. Cheng Ho made seven voyages from Suzhou to Java and to various points around the Indian Ocean during the Ming dynasty. His enormous fleets of huge junks carried ten thousand armed men and were laden with fine silks. Cheng Ho's final voyage was launched in 1431, decades ahead of Christopher Columbus, centuries before the *Mayflower*. Dad always ended his lesson in frustration, saying, "If only Cheng Ho had turned left across the Pacific instead of turning right toward India, America would be Asian, not European."

Cheng Ho's wrong turn was Dad's link between Chinese and American history. Though he mused about the land bridge across the Bering Strait during the Great Ice Age ten thousand years ago, my father had little else to say about Asians in America. In spite of his great interest in history, there was no body of knowledge for him to teach his Chinese American kids.

One day Dad brought home an old book from a flea market, *The Pictorial History of the United States*. Of the four hundred pictures, one showed Asians in America: terrified Chinese, fleeing persecution from murderous white mobs in Denver, Colorado. A few pages later was a photo marking the completion of the transcontinental railroad. All the workers were white, as though there had been no Chinese railroad workers.

In college I found some of the missing stories—not in textbooks, but from young scholars and activists who launched a movement to find our lost history, to give faces and names to Asian American pioneers, and to place them in history books with George Washington, Columbus, and the *Mayflower*. From them I learned that Asian American faces had been deliberately obscured. As their American stories came to light, I found that I didn't have to choose between invisibility and revulsion. Instead, I discovered dramatic moments in the nation's history with Asian Americans at center stage, a history of which every American could be proud.

Long before the thirteen colonies declared their independence from Britain, Asian people could be found in the Americas. The first Asian Americans appeared as early as the 1500s. From 1565 to 1815,

during the lucrative Spanish galleon trade between Manila and Mexico, sailors in the Philippines were conscripted into service aboard Spanish ships. A number of these seamen jumped ship for freedom, establishing a settlement on the coast of Louisiana; today, their descendants live in New Orleans.

In the 1600s, a thriving Chinatown bustled in Mexico City. The Chinese American success led Spanish barbers to petition the Viceroy in 1635 to move the Chinese barbers to the city's outskirts. Even then Asians were seen as a threat in the New World.

At the Continental Congress of the new United States of America in 1785, our nation's founders discussed the plight of some Chinese sailors stranded in Baltimore by their U.S. cargo ship, the *Pallas*, which had set sail for China. Meanwhile, the Reverend William Bentley of Salem, Massachusetts, wrote in his diary in 1790 that he spied a "tall, well-proportioned, dark complexioned man from Madras," India, walking about the town.

The first known Asian American New Yorker was born in 1825, the son of a Chinese merchant seaman who married an Irishwoman. In 1850, a young Japanese sailor was rescued at sea by an American ship; he learned English and became a U.S. citizen, adopting the name Joseph Hecco. He went to work in the office of a U.S. senator, met three U.S. presidents—Pierce, Buchanan, and Lincoln—and served as an important adviser in the establishment of United States–Japan relations. In 1854, a Chinese man by the name of Yung Wing graduated from Yale College and established an educational mission from China to the United States.

It is hard for most Americans to imagine Asian people on the scene in George Washington's day. Even today, prominent Asian Americans are thought of as foreign, alien. In 1984, Congressman Norman Mineta, a second-generation Japanese American who served in the U.S. House of Representatives for ten terms, was a guest speaker at the opening of an auto plant in his California district surrounding San Jose, the first joint venture between General Motors and Toyota. During the ceremony, a senior vice president of General Motors and general manager of Chevrolet said to the congressman, "My, you speak English well. How long have you been in this country?"

The real story of Asians in America is inextricably bound to several of the driving forces of American history—the westward expansion to the

Pacific and beyond, the growing nation's unquenchable need for cheap labor, the patriotic fervor of a young country in the throes of defining itself, and the ways in which race and racism were used to advance those ends.

Our Asian American migration begins with the Anglo-American moral dilemma over slavery. In 1806, one year before Britain officially ended the slave trade, two hundred Chinese were brought to Trinidad, a small offering to assuage the insatiable demand for plantation labor in the New World. Using the same ships that brought slaves from Africa, the flesh merchants rerouted to Asia. They indentured "coolie" labor from China and India to perform the same work, under the same conditions, as the slaves; in the case of Cuba, which continued the practice of slavery until the end of the nineteenth century, the Asian coolies worked alongside African slaves.

Despite the similar treatment, it is important to note that the Asian workers were not slaves; according to Professor Evelyn Hu-DeHart of the University of Colorado at Boulder, the coolies themselves insisted on the distinction between their status and that of the slaves. The Asians worked knowing that they would be free men after they served their eight-year contracts and paid off their indebtedness for their passage, food, clothing, and other necessities—which often extended their servitude for years. With China and India in political and economic chaos resulting from Britain's imperial expansion, a vast pool of desperate Asian workers became available as commodities. This reliance on Asia for cheap labor was the start of a global trend that continues to the present.

Over several decades beginning in 1845, more than 500,000 Asian Indians were shipped to British Guiana (now Guyana), the West Indies, and various French colonies. Importation of Chinese began in earnest in 1847, first headed to Cuba, where more than 125,000 Chinese eventually supplemented the shrinking African slave labor force. Peru and other parts of South America also became major markets for human cargo from Asia. Most of the laborers were men, setting a pattern of Asian bachelor societies for the next hundred years.

### *The Pioneers from Asia*

"Strangers from a different shore" is how historian Ronald Takaki, of the University of California at Berkeley, characterized the perception of immigrants from Asia, in his book by the same title. When gold was first

discovered at Sutter's Mill in 1848, fewer than a hundred Chinese, mostly merchants and traders, were living in California. Plans to import Chinese labor to the territory were already in the works when news of gold reached China. Men from the villages near Canton in Southern China took off with dreams of making it in "Gold Mountain," their name for America. In 1850, some 50 Chinese arrived; the next year, 2,716. By 1860, some 41,000 Chinese had come to the United States. These Chinese were not coolies but "semifree" men who were deeply in debt from high-interest loans for their passage to America, according to K. Scott Wong and Sucheng Chan in *Claiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era*. By comparison, nearly 2.5 million Europeans immigrated during that same ten-year period.

Initially, the Chinese were welcomed to San Francisco, and some even participated in California's statehood ceremonies in 1850. The reception quickly turned cold, however, as new laws and taxes singled out the Chinese. A foreign-miners tax targeted Chinese miners, not Europeans. The tax gave way to complete prohibition of Chinese from mining. Laws forbade Chinese to testify in court, even in their own defense. Special zoning ordinances were selectively enforced against Chinese. Hair-cutting ordinances forced Chinese to cut off the braids, or queues, that the emperor required as proof of loyalty—ironically, making it harder for workers to return to China. In San Francisco, special license fees were levied solely against Chinese laundries.

The discriminatory treatment of the Chinese was overtly racist: the California state legislature declared that "Negroes, Mongolians, and Indians shall not be admitted into public schools." When the vote became available to African American men after the Civil War, citizenship was specifically denied to Chinese, because, it was reasoned, Chinese were neither black nor white.

Then came the killings. White gold diggers seized Chinese miners' stakes by beating, burning, and shooting the Chinese. Mass kidnappings and murders of Chinese took place, leading the *Shasta Republican* to report in 1856, "Hundreds of Chinamen have been slaughtered in cold blood during the last five years by desperadoes that infest our state. The murder of Chinamen is almost of daily occurrence, yet in all this time we have heard of but two or three instances where the guilty parties have been brought to justice and punished according to law."

Expelled from the goldfields, the Chinese miners found work with a railroad company hungry for workers. By 1865, Thomas Jefferson's dream of a transcontinental route was finally within reach. The Central Pacific Railroad was contracted to build the difficult half from the Pacific, through the Rocky Mountains; within two years, 12,000 Chinese were hired—about 90 percent of the company's workforce.

The Chinese workers shoveled, picked, blasted, and drilled their way through boulders, rock, and dirt, often suspended from mountain peaks high in the Sierras, even in the harsh mountain winters. It is estimated that one in ten Chinese died building the railroad. In return, they were paid sixty cents for every dollar paid to white workers. Chinese workers went on strike to protest the brutal conditions, going back to work only when Charles Crocker, superintendent of construction for the Central Pacific, cut off their food supply. In the meantime, the railroad made plans to ship several thousand black workers from the East in case the strike continued.

When the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, Chinese workers were barred from the celebrations. The speeches congratulated European immigrant workers for their labor but never mentioned the Chinese. Instead, the Chinese men were summarily fired and forced to walk the long distance back to San Francisco—prohibited to ride on the railroad they built.

### *The Driving-Out Time*

In the late 1870s, the anti-Chinese "Yellow Peril" movement gripped the West. Cities erupted in riots against the Chinese—homes, laundries, and shops were burned to the ground. Murders and lynchings of Chinese were commonplace. Chinese women—the very small number who were admitted to the United States—were molested by angry gangs of whites. In rural areas, white farm workers set fire to the barns and fields where Chinese lived and worked. These egregious acts established a particular brand of American racism that would be directed against Asian Americans into the next century.

The Chinese called this the driving-out time. The illustration of terrified Chinese men I had seen as a child stemmed from this period. The Workingmen's Party in California, a white labor party with a large Irish following, adopted the slogan "The Chinese must go!" One of its ideas was

to drop a balloon filled with dynamite on San Francisco's Chinatown. The "Chinese question" framed the labor stance for Democrats and Republicans: while Democrats exploited the race hysteria to win the support of labor, Republicans supported the business ideal of an unlimited supply of second-class, low-wage labor. Caught between the racism of both political parties, the Chinese were used to inflame and distract white workers, frustrated by rising unemployment and an economic depression.

From Los Angeles to Denver, from Seattle to Rock Springs, Wyoming, Chinese were driven out. In Tacoma, Washington, hundreds of Chinese were herded onto boats and set adrift at sea, presumably to their deaths. Mobs burned all the Chinese homes and businesses in Denver in 1880. Newspapers from *The New York Times* to the *San Francisco Chronicle* stirred fears that the Chinese, together with the newly freed black population, would become a threat to the Republic. Years earlier, orator Horace Greeley had captured the sense of the intelligentsia: "The Chinese are uncivilized, unclean, and filthy beyond all conception without any of the higher domestic or social relations; lustful and sensual in their dispositions; every female is a prostitute of the basest order."

The anti-Chinese fervor led Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, not only barring Chinese from immigrating but forbidding legal residents from becoming citizens, a prohibition that would inhibit Asian American political development for decades to come. The ugly legislation was also the first ever passed by Congress targeting a group based on race.

Against this tide of Yellow Peril fever, Chinese Americans organized early civil rights groups—the Native Sons of the Golden State, later becoming the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, in San Francisco, and the Chinese Equal Rights League in New York. The Chinese Six Companies, formed in 1854, fought the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ultimately ruled against them in 1889. Seventeen lawsuits by Chinese Americans went to the Supreme Court between 1881 and 1896, with a few setting important civil rights precedents. In 1896 *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* established that "race-neutral" laws could not be selectively enforced against a particular group, as the city of San Francisco did against Chinese laundries, in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution. In 1898 the principle of U.S. citizenship by birthright was affirmed after native-born American Wong Kim Ark was

denied reentry into the United States because he was Chinese. Through Wong's appeals, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that all persons born in the United States are citizens by birth. Many of these cases became precedents that broke down barriers for African Americans and others during the civil rights movements of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, after the Chinese Exclusion Act the population of Chinese plummeted to 71,531 in 1910. After building the West and contributing to the national economy, the Chinese men were confined to work as domestics, or in laundries and restaurants. The few crowded Chinatowns offered Chinese Americans some protection from racial terrorism and violence, but the numerous race restrictions prevented most Chinese from starting families and putting down roots in America.

### *An Elusive Dream*

Though the gates to America closed for Chinese, other Asian nations still offered a source of labor for the backbreaking work that white workers were unwilling to do. American labor brokers introduced in consecutive stages Japanese, Indian, Korean, and Filipino workers. Ethnic hostilities were used to pit the Asians against one another. Each successive immigrant group came with the expectation that *they* would avoid the problems of their predecessors and succeed in becoming American.

In 1888, the first 75 Japanese workers were brought in for the California harvest. Within two decades, more than 150,000 Japanese men and women immigrated. Like China, Japan was in deep economic crisis. Widespread starvation prompted many to take their chances as indentured laborers in America. By the 1920s, the Japanese American population reached 220,596—almost double the Chinese population. But the Japanese government, unlike China's, took an active interest in its citizens' welfare, viewing the emigrants as its representatives to the world.

The Japanese government was confident its citizens could avoid the fate of the Chinese, whom they thought responsible for their own misfortunes in America. "It is indeed the ignominious conduct and behavior of indigent Chinese of inferior character . . . that brought upon [them] the contempt of the Westerners and resulted in the enactment of legislation to exclude them from the country," the Japanese consul to the United States reported in 1884. The government of Japan screened all early émigrés.

Many were literate and more educated than their Chinese or European counterparts. Women were also encouraged to emigrate because of their stabilizing family influence.

In 1900, there were about one thousand Japanese women in the United States, but that number increased until 39 percent of Japanese immigrants were female. A "picture bride" system developed, allowing matchmaking to take place through photo exchanges, an imperfect system that frequently involved outdated or even fake photos, often to the great disappointment of the bride. The U.S. government refused to recognize the legality of the Japanese picture bride marriages, and the public derided Japanese women as immoral, even though photo matchmaking was common and tolerated among European immigrants. By 1920, more than 60,000 Japanese women were living in the mainland United States and Hawaii and 29,672 children had been born. American citizens by birth, these children—the Nisei, or second-generation Japanese Americans—made up the first Asian American baby boom.

The growing Japanese population on the West Coast and in Hawaii became a new target for the strong racial hatred directed against the Chinese only a few years earlier. While the racial slur "Jap" became part of everyday speech, Japanese immigrants also encountered the phenomenon of racial "lumping" of Asians: anti-Chinese slurs were routinely directed against them as if there were no difference between the two peoples. Despite the Japanese government's efforts to see that its overseas citizens would be treated equally, new laws were written against the Japanese.

The Japanese were condemned as more dangerous than the Chinese because of their willingness and ability to adopt American customs. Whereas the Chinese were attacked for not assimilating, the Japanese were reviled because they readily integrated. By 1913, a number of states west of the Mississippi River already prohibited Chinese and Asian Indians from owning land. The situation for Japanese immigrants in California was ambiguous until 1920, when a more comprehensive Alien Land Law was passed, preventing anyone of Asian ancestry from owning land.

In 1922, a Japanese immigrant who had become Americanized in every way but citizenship brought a challenge against the citizenship ban to the Supreme Court in *Ozawa v. United States*. Takao Ozawa attended high school in California and studied at the University of California for three years. He belonged to an American church and had no dealings with

Japan or Japanese organizations. He married a Japanese woman who, like him, had been educated in the United States. Their family spoke English at home and the children attended American schools. But the U.S. District Court rejected his application for citizenship in 1916, ruling that Ozawa was "in every way eminently qualified under the statutes to become an American citizen" but for his race. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the decision that Ozawa was not entitled to citizenship because he was not Caucasian.

The decision was a big setback to the Japanese, who were caught in a cruel vise—under constant attack both for being "foreign" and for being "too ready to adapt." In the Kingdom of Hawaii, a number of Japanese had become naturalized citizens, but when Hawaii was annexed by the United States in 1898, becoming a territory in 1900, the territorial government refused to recognize them as U.S. citizens. Newspaper publisher V. S. McClatchy testified before Congress: "Of all the races ineligible to citizenship, the Japanese are the least assimilable and the most dangerous to this country . . . They come here . . . for the purpose of colonizing and establishing permanently the proud Yamato race. They never cease to be Japanese."

For the Japanese, the final blow came when Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924, which was worded in a veiled way to sound applicable to all immigrants. It barred anyone who was "forbidden to be a U.S. citizen" from immigrating at all. The real intent of the law was to halt Japanese immigration, which had reached a total of 275,000 over a thirty-year span. While white nativists complained of the "huge waves" of Asian immigrants, by comparison, 283,000 Italians arrived in a single year, 1913–14.

With the population of Japanese immigrants increasing, plantation owners in Hawaii and labor brokers in the mainland United States feared that the growing community might organize for more money and better working conditions. To keep the workforce fragmented, the labor brokers looked to India for workers.

In 1900, some 2,050 Asian Indians resided in the United States. Most of these earliest Indian immigrants were professionals, students, merchants, and visitors in the northeastern states. However, between 1906 and 1908, nearly 5,000 Asian Indian emigrants from the Punjab region arrived

in Canada, which quickly established regulations that would prevent "hordes of hungry Hindus" from entering the country. In reality only a small fraction of the Indians were Hindu, most being Sikhs and about one third Muslim, but the misnomer stuck. Discouraged from entering Canada, many of the Indians headed south to Washington and Oregon. Others ventured to the farmlands of California, where they were contracted specifically to counter the labor power of the Japanese workers. Intra-Asian hostilities arose between the Japanese and Asian Indian laborers working next to each other in the California farmland.

Prevailing race theories included Asian Indians with the Caucasian race. European Americans acknowledged them as "full-blooded Aryans." This led many Asian Indians to believe that they were a cut above the other Asian migrants and could avoid the prejudice that the others faced. Citizenship was actually granted to some sixty-seven Indians, in seventeen states, between 1905 and 1923. The 1790 Naturalization Law allowed "free white persons" to become U.S. citizens, and Asian Indians were thought to be part of the "Mediterranean branch of the Caucasian family."

Nevertheless, their dark skin and willingness to work for low wages made Asian Indians a threat to white society. The Japanese and Korean Exclusion League, established in 1905, later changed its name to the Asiatic Exclusion League to include the Punjabis. Agitating against the "Indian menace" and the "tide of turbans," they succeeded in barring Asian Indians from entering the United States between 1908 and 1920. A magazine writer of that time warned: "This time the chimera is not the saturnine, almond-eyed mask . . . of the multitudinous Chinese, nor the close-cropped bullet-heads of the suave and smiling Japanese, but a face of finer features, rising, turbaned out of the Pacific." Whites forced seven hundred Asian Indians from their community in Bellingham, Washington, across the border into Canada in 1907. A few months later Asian Indians in Everett, Washington, were rounded up and expelled. Indian immigration was short-lived, ending with the Immigration Act of 1917.

In an effort to tear down citizenship barriers for Asian Indians, Bhagat Singh Thind took the issue to court. Thind had been granted citizenship in 1920 by an Oregon court, on the grounds that he was Caucasian, but the federal government disagreed and appealed in 1923. Arguing his case before the U.S. Supreme Court, Thind reasoned that Indians are Caucasians, not Asians, and therefore should be accorded full rights of citizen-

ship, including land ownership and suffrage. But the Court determined in *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* that it was not enough to be "Caucasian." It ruled that it was also necessary to be "white." Since Indians were not white, they could not become citizens, nor could they own land or send for their wives from India.

The decision in the *Thind* case was applied retroactively, and the citizenship of the naturalized Indian Americans was revoked. One Indian American committed suicide, writing in a note that he tried to be "as American as possible," but "I am no longer an American citizen . . . I do not choose to live a life as an interned person." The small Asian Indian population declined after the *Thind* decision, but a few thousand stayed on. A majority of the Asian Indian men in California married Mexican women and established successful farming communities. Other Sikhs, believing that discrimination was stronger against Asian Indians, abandoned their turbans and tried to pass as Mexican or black.

Korea offered yet another pool of cheap labor for the United States, as political and economic instability resulting from Japanese aggression sent many Koreans into exile. From 1903 to 1907, about 7,000 Koreans came to the United States, mostly to work as contract plantation laborers to Hawaii. Over 1,200 women and children also made the journey. Unlike the other Asian contract laborers before them, the first Korean immigrants came from cities, and were working, for example, as police officers, miners, clerks, even monks. Some 40 percent were Christians, encouraged to come to the United States by American missionaries.

Because their numbers were small, the Koreans didn't develop communities or settlements, as the earlier Asian immigrants had. Instead, they deliberately sought to become integrated into American society, learning English as quickly as possible, worshipping as Christians, and expressing their gratitude to America. Many Koreans felt that both the Chinese and Japanese were to blame for the hate they received from whites. They thought they could avoid the same fate. According to the Korean newspaper *Kongnip Simmun*, "The reason why many Americans love Koreans and help us, while they hate Japanese more than ever, is that we Koreans gave up old baseness, thought and behavior, and became more westernized." Nevertheless, Koreans in America were subject to the same anti-Asian laws barring citizenship, land ownership, and equal access to education and housing.



Korean migration to America ended within a few years. Japan, which had occupied parts of Korea since the late 1800s, cut off Korean immigration to Hawaii in 1907, fearing that Korean labor would hurt the Japanese in Hawaii. The government also wanted to halt the overseas Korean independence movement. But this became moot when the Immigration Act of 1924 ended all immigration from China, Japan, India, and Korea. Although the Asian immigrants failed to connect with one another, U.S. policy and the prevailing anti-Asian racism subjected them all to the same treatment.

The last significant migration of Asians to the United States in the early twentieth century came from the Philippines. Because the Philippines was a U.S. territory and its residents were U.S. nationals, Filipinos carried U.S. passports and could travel freely within the States—they were the only Asians eligible for immigration after 1924. Hundreds of Filipinos came to the United States as college students beginning in 1903, on scholarships set up by the United States after it annexed the Philippines, ceded by Spain after the Spanish-American War. After 1907, more than 70,000 Filipino laborers arrived in Hawaii as contract laborers. Between 1920 and 1929, some 51,875 Filipino workers arrived on the mainland—many via Hawaii—to work in the fields and in other low-wage jobs on the West Coast, doing the same work as other earlier, excluded Asian immigrants.

Filipino immigrants, too, thought they could circumvent the troubles of the other Asians. In 1933, Filipino Salvador Roldan sought the right to marry outside his race by challenging California's 1880 antimiscegenation law that prohibited marriage between whites and "Negroes, mulattoes, or Mongolians." Roldan argued that Filipinos are actually "Malay," not "Mongolian," and therefore not subject to the 1880 law. The California Court of Appeals agreed that Filipinos were not Mongolian and allowed him to marry his white fiancée. The California legislature immediately voted to add the "Malay race" to the forbidden list. Once again, an attempt by one Asian group to separate itself from the others had failed.

Anti-Filipino prejudice continued to grow, with vigilantes attacking, even burning, the camps where the Filipino laborers lived, the very land that Chinese had made arable before they were driven out nearly two generations earlier. "This Is a White Man's Country" was the message on a sign in Salinas, California. With Filipinos, white nativists focused on the men-

ace that a bachelor society posed to white women. Testifying before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1930, newspaper publisher V. S. McClatchy, a consistent voice against the "Yellow Peril," said, "You can realize, with the declared preference of the Filipino for white women and the willingness on the part of some white females to yield to that preference, the situation which arises . . . California in this matter is seeking to protect the nation, as well as itself, against the peaceful penetration of another colored race."

The white exclusionists strategized that there was only one way to end Filipino immigration: the United States would have to grant "independence" to the Philippines. Their racially inflamed arguments persuaded Congress to pass another law specifically targeting Asians, the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, converting the Philippines to a commonwealth. Immediately, all Filipinos were reclassified as aliens and prohibited from applying for citizenship because they weren't white. Only fifty Filipinos from any nation of origin would be permitted to immigrate each year, except for plantation labor to Hawaii. As with the Japanese in Hawaii, Filipinos were debarred from leaving the Hawaiian Territory for the mainland. Congress even offered to pay for workers' fare to the Philippines if they agreed never to return; the *Los Angeles Times* urged Filipinos to "go back home." Fewer than 5 percent took the offer—in spite of the elusiveness of citizenship, the rest wanted to stay in America, as Americans.

### *Working on the Fringes of America*

Of the approximately 489,000 Asians living in the United States when immigration from Asia was shut off after 1934, perhaps 99 percent had come to work as laborers, or were the offspring of laborers. Although these immigrants were overwhelmingly working-class, like those from Europe, they found no openings for solidarity with other workers in the burgeoning labor movements of the day. Rather, their status as "aliens ineligible for citizenship" who were neither white nor black turned them into objects of hostility and revulsion who could be used as a racial wedge by unionists and capitalists alike.

While Denis Kearney of the Workingmen's Party made driving out the Chinese his rallying cry, Samuel Gompers, founder and president of the American Federation of Labor, also maintained a special antipathy toward

Asian workers. He refused to issue a charter to an early effort at multi-racial labor organizing by the Japanese Mexican Labor Association with the admonition "Your union will under no circumstance accept membership of any Chinese or Japanese." When Asian Indians became a farm labor presence, in 1908 Gompers added them to his prohibited-from-membership list.

California's business leaders acknowledged in the late 1800s that the state's industries could not have developed without Chinese labor to build the railroads, to drain the delta swamps of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, to build the vineyards and work in its main manufacturing industries of shoes, woolens, cigars, and sewing. But they found another purpose for Chinese workers: the low wages paid to them could intimidate both white and black workers. Using Asian workers as a racialized wedge set a powerful model for a future role that Asian Americans could play.

Businesses in other parts of the country tried to duplicate California's labor machinations. Southern plantation owners imported Chinese to Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana in the 1870s to "punish the Negro for having abandoned the control of his old master." Chinese were also brought to factories in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania to keep the wage rates down. The presence of Asian workers in Hawaii and the West served another function: they gave white labor the possibility of upward mobility by subordinating the Chinese. As railroad builder Charles Crocker observed, "After we got Chinamen to work, we took the more intelligent of the white laborers and made foremen of them . . . they got a start by controlling Chinese labor on our railroad."

In Hawaii, Asian workers made a special contribution to American labor history. With the Native Hawaiian population decimated by illnesses introduced by its colonizers, plantation developers relied on imported Asian labor. Hawaii was the first stop for many Asian immigrants to America. Labor contractors scoured Asia, Europe, and the Caribbean for cheap labor, bringing in Portuguese, Puerto Rican, and African American workers, but the vast majority were Asian. By 1920, the contractors had imported more than 300,000 laborers from Asia, who comprised 62 percent of the islands' population.

American business interests were busy creating a sugar plantation system that would turn Hawaii into an economic colony of the United

States. To do so, they embarked on a labor strategy of racial and ethnic antagonism. In *Strangers from a Different Shore*, Ronald Takaki chronicled the labor strategy of the plantation owners: "Keep a variety of laborers, that is different nationalities, and thus prevent any concerted action in case of strikes, for there are few, if any, cases of 'Japs,' Chinese, and Portuguese entering into a strike as a unit," advised one plantation manager. The Asian workers were mere commodities on supply manifests: "Bone-meal, canvas, Japanese laborers, macaroni, a Chinaman," read one plantation receipt. Foreign labor was imported to "set an example" for the Native Hawaiian workers; Chinese were hired to "play off" against Japanese, while Portuguese were brought in to offset the Chinese. As whites, the Portuguese were paid more than the Asians and took on the role of *lunas*, or overseers.

When Japanese workers organized for higher wages and better working conditions, plantation owners turned to Korea, sure that Koreans would never join any Japanese strike efforts. After Japan closed off Korean immigration, Filipinos were imported into Honolulu in order to put the Japanese "in their place." Inter-Asian resentments inevitably led to fights and even riots in the labor camps. The strategy of divide and conquer was effective, especially with newer immigrants who were less willing to risk changing the status quo. Despite the deliberate attempts to provoke ethnic friction, unity was eventually achieved. In 1920, Filipino and Japanese plantation workers decided to join ranks against the plantation owners; 3,000 members of the Filipino Federation of Labor and 5,000 Japanese workers went on strike after their demands for higher wages were rejected by the owners. Representing 77 percent of the plantation workforce, they brought sugar production to a halt, leading to a \$12 million production loss. The strikers were joined by Portuguese and Chinese workers in the first united, interethnic labor action in Hawaii. Their action ultimately resulted in a 50 percent wage increase and paved the way for a strong trade union movement tradition that continues in modern-day Hawaii.

In the Western states, Filipino workers were in the vanguard of farm worker organizing, forming the Filipino Labor Union. They contributed significantly to the American labor movement, building interethnic solidarity with Mexican and white workers. In 1936, the Filipino Labor Union led a strike alongside Mexican workers. Their joint union received a charter from the American Federation of Labor—finally overcoming the bar-

riers set by union founder Samuel Gompers against Asian workers in the unions. It is a little-known footnote to American history that Filipino labor activists initiated the United Farm Workers' grape pickers' strike that Cesar Chavez would build into a movement.

The labor and creativity of Asian Americans were responsible to a significant degree for developing the economies of California, Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and elsewhere in the growing nation. Many Asian Americans left the West Coast to find opportunities in less hostile locations in the Eastern and Midwestern states. Chinatowns and Japantowns sprang up as centers of commerce and social life, providing basic services to their separate and unequal communities. Even faced with the multitude of inhospitable barriers, Asian Americans found ways to build lives in America. They formed their own political and cultural organizations, and sometimes they were able to beat city hall—as they did in 1906 in Butte, Montana, where Chinese successfully fought a boycott aimed at driving them out of town.

In addition to their labor, the Asian immigrants made significant contributions to their adopted homeland. In 1875, Ah Bing developed the Bing cherry in Oregon, and in 1886, Lue Gim Gong produced the frost-resistant Lue orange, which became the foundation of Florida's citrus industry. In Hawaii, Japanese workers created irrigation systems throughout the islands. In 1921, two Koreans, Harry Kim and Charles Kim (not related), invented the nectarine, the "perfect, fuzzless peach," in Reedley, California, and opened a successful orchard business, Kim Brothers. In California's Central Valley, Asian Indians found that the region resembled the Punjab and used their expertise with irrigation methods and specialized crops to make the land productive. In Louisiana, the descendants of the Filipino sailors who escaped the Spanish galleons introduced the process of sun-drying shrimp to the region.

As the Asian immigrants had children, they were able to find ways around laws that forbade them to own or lease land. Japanese in particular were able to establish families because women had immigrated in significant numbers, but other Asians were also able to wed Asian women who made it into the country or women of other races. Their American-born children were American citizens by birth and therefore not subject to the "alien land" ownership prohibitions. Many immigrant Japanese par-

ents bought farmland in their children's names. Farmers without children paid other families with Nisei—second-generation—children to use their names as fictitious landowners. In this way, Asian immigrants were able to create thousands of acres of productive farms across the West.

Although the American-born generations were entitled to the privileges of American citizenship, they continued to be treated as foreigners. Still subject to segregated housing and unequal treatment, young men and women who made it through high school and college could find work only as field hands and domestic workers, in the same limited occupations as their immigrant parents. Though the various Asian American ethnic groups experienced similar prejudices and were lumped together by other Americans as equally undesirable, each group suffered separately and in its own enclave.

### *Infamy*

World War II changed everything. Suddenly, the events in Asia and the political realignment of the United States and Asian nations dictated a new social order among the separate enclaves of the various Asian American groups.

Years before the bombing of Pearl Harbor drew the United States into war with Japan, the different Asian communities in America were engaged in war relief efforts. Many Korean Americans took part in a resistance movement against the harsh Japanese military rule of Korea, which had fallen under increasing Japanese control since the late 1800s until it was formally annexed in 1910. Japanese aggression against China that began in 1931 sparked demonstrations by Chinese Americans, who raised \$56 million for China war relief between 1937 and 1945.

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, and seven hours later, Japanese planes turned the Philippines into a war zone. Suddenly China and the Philippines were important allies of the United States against Japan. Almost overnight, the much maligned Chinese and Filipino "rat-eaters," "monkeys," and "headhunters" were praised as though they were much beloved—especially compared to Japanese.

Two weeks after Pearl Harbor, *Time* magazine gave readers tips on how to distinguish between a Chinese "friend" and Japanese "enemy," complete with photos: