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Whiteness and an Immigrant's Attainment of the "American Dream": Chinese and Polish Immigrants in the United States

Introduction

After a hard day's work, a well-deserved rest. This slogan captured what Gong Heng expected on the night of September 8, 1885. However, this was not what transpired. In the darkness, danger lurked among the tents pitched in the hop fields of the Wold brothers farm in Squak Valley, Washington Territory. Gong awoke to the sound of enough gunfire that "...it sounded all the same as China New Year...". Luckily, Gong escaped into the surrounding forest. He watched as the tents of his fellow Chinese immigrants, men he had labored with, burned. He bore witness to many of the immigrants living inside the camp being murdered. Three friends of Gong were killed, their bodies riddled with bullet holes. One, Yung Son, had a child at home who had no father to help support him after this tragedy. After the mob of Whites left, Gong watched as Yung Son bled to death from his numerous wounds. Following Yung Son's death, the surviving Chinese laborers fled Squak Valley, save Gong. Gong stayed to mind the bodies of the three victims of the racially driven crime and attempted to seek justice through the legal system, a difficult task since he had not seen the faces of the killers.¹

Gong's case was not unique in Washington territory; anti-Chinese sentiment ran strong in the coastal regions and further inland. It is probable that the same gang of white criminals was responsible for terrorizing another group of Chinese immigrants also headed for Squak Valley only the day before. Not a week earlier, 28 Chinese miners were killed in Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory.² Events such as these contributed to the challenging of the narrative of the "Melting Pot" United States. While particularly hard hit with gruesome violence, Chinese immigrants were not the only immigrants that faced hardship and challenges upon arrival to the "promised land" of

1 Beth Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America* (Harvard University Press, Feb 26, 2018), 101-103. <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=4KdLDwAAQBAJ&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA92.w.3.0.60>

2 Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 101.

work and opportunity. Race and ethnicity have played a role in a person's ability to prosper and find success in the United States from the moment European explorers set foot on the continent. Polish immigrants were able to achieve different levels of success, primarily due to the perception of them being white-ish. The Polish immigrants to the United States were considered Caucasian; however, due to their differences from the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) tradition, they were branded as other and lesser even if their color was the same. These Poles certainly met their share of challenges and dealt with racism, a term used in this paper to describe a cacophony of forms: prejudice, ethnocentrism, discrimination, and others under the umbrella of racism; however, it was not as violent or omnipresent as racism toward Chinese immigrants. In both Chinese and Polish immigration, race or color was a key determining factor in achieving the "American Dream."

Race and Immigration in the United States

Outlined in the historiography of immigration to the United States, there were easily discernable areas of study. There was the group that focused on European immigration and one that focused on Asian immigration. There are naturally other historians whose work has focused on immigrants from different areas of the world. The studies under review focused on European and Asian immigration, specifically those studying the Polish and Chinese experiences. This study seeks to understand and compare the role race played on each immigrant community's ability to obtain the classic "American Dream" through the analysis of documentation and research devoted to both groups during the immigration period between the Civil War and World War I.

In "The Causes of Polish Immigration to the United States," Sister Lucille examined the reasons that any immigrant, specifically Polish immigrants, would leave their homes to move across the Atlantic.³ Dominic Pacyga, in "Polish Immigration to the United States before World War II: An Overview," continued with this thesis and provided compelling reasonings as to why Poles immigrated to the United States as well as what they experienced here, specifically focused on urban settlements.⁴ On the other hand, Dennis Kolinski looked at the establishment of rural settlements and farming communities by Polish immigrants in "Polish Rural Settlement in America."⁵ John Radzilowski, in "In American Eyes: Views of Polish Peasants in Europe and The United States, 1890s-1930s" articulates why Poles were not considered

3 Sister Lucille, "The Causes of Polish Immigration to the United States," *Polish American Studies* Vol. 8, No. 3/4 (July-December 1951): 85-91.

4 Dominic Pacyga, "Polish Immigration to the United States before World War II: An Overview," *Polish American Studies* Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 28-37.

5 Dennis Kolinski, "Polish Rural Settlement in America," *Polish American Studies* Vol. 52, No. 2 (Autumn, 1995): 21-55.

white, despite their skin color and classification as Caucasian. He reasoned that being “White” was not simply a definition of skin color to Americans at this time. Instead, “White” indicated a style of living, a social upbringing, and conformity to White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) traditions.⁶ These four works provide a comprehensive history of the reasons for Polish immigration to both urban and rural areas of their new homeland and a foundation for the “reasons” for their treatment upon arrival.

Erika Lee examined the Chinese immigration experience by undertaking the more significant trend of Anti-Asian sentiment in American history began with the Chinese Exclusion Acts in her work “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924.”⁷ Her study discussed how parallels could be drawn to other race-based practices by exemplifying the racial profiling used against Chinese immigrants during and before the Exclusionary Period. Racialized laws affecting Chinese immigrants often attracted violence. Beth Lew-Williams, in her book *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion, and the Making of the Alien in America*, examined specific examples of violence, exclusion, and restrictions imposed on Chinese immigrants. Lew-Williams used the personal stories of different Chinese immigrants to describe the experience of the larger group, be it acts of violence perpetrated on them, appeals to high-ranking officials for just treatment from those acts, or the feelings of fear, hopelessness, and frustration within the group.⁸ Chinese immigrants also organized to fight such racialized laws. This political involvement confronted some stereotypes portraying the Chinese as quiet people with heads lowered who, rather than fight for their future, fled back to China. Scott Baxter in “The Response of California’s Chinese Populations to the Anti-Chinese Movement” sought to uncover how the Chinese populations in California responded to exclusionary tactics. He examined archaeological evidence, such as bullet casings in a Chinatown neighborhood outside of Truckee, to paint a picture of an armed and intelligent group willing to do what was needed to resist. This strategy meant figuring out ways around laws intended to drive them out or building walls around themselves for protection.⁹

However, what all these works missed is a direct comparison between the two groups’ experiences. Erica Lee, an immigrant herself, in “The

6 John Radzilowski, “In American Eyes: Views of Polish Peasants in Europe and The United States, 1890s-1930s,” *The Polish Review* Vol. 47, No. 4 (2002): 394-396.

7 Erika Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924” *Journal of American Ethnic History* Vol. 21, No. 3 (Spring, 2002): 36-62.

8 Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 194.

9 Scott Baxter, “The Response of California’s Chinese Populations to the Anti-Chinese Movement” *Historical Archaeology* Vol. 42, No. 3 (2008): 29-36.

Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924" mentioned how the politics and racial profiling of the Chinese exclusionary period influenced immigration policy towards Eastern and Southern Europeans as well; however, she went no further in her comparison than to mention it existed, as her focus was unfortunately limited in this article.¹⁰ Even though there is a wealth of information on the two separate peoples' experiences during the same period, there still exists a gap in the literature that provides a direct comparison between the two communities. This paper seeks to fill this gap by contrasting the different trials and the similar experiences each immigrant group faced. Separated by geography and racial categorization, one *not quite* white and the other "yellow," the two groups faced both drastically different challenges and some familiar to both groups. Both groups had similar numbers immigrate to the United States and in a similar time frame. They also had similar goals, experiences, and ways of handling challenges. This point of connection makes it very worthwhile to take a simultaneous look at the immigration of both Chinese and Polish immigrants and discover in what ways their race influenced their ability to obtain the American Dream of success through hard work, regardless of circumstance.

The Polish Experience

From the end of the Civil War to the beginning of World War I, the United States was a hotbed for immigration of both Polish settlers and Chinese workers. The United States offered work, options for advancement, and the ability to grow in ways that immigrants' home nations did not always have. The United States was a place where a person would be able to find prosperity and possibly fortune. When the Polish and Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States, this dreamland was not necessarily what they encountered. The two groups had differing experiences in which race played a key role.

In 1900, there were 383,407 Polish people living in the United States.¹¹ Several reasons drove this influx. Poland, divided up by multiple expansionist European nations, was subject to religious persecution, mandatory military service, forced language conversion, as well as economic concerns.¹² The combination of these factors and others drove Poles in the tens of thousands to come to the United States in search of religious freedom, freedom of cultural and linguistic expression, and hope of socio-economic mobility not found in Poland. They left friends and families, as well as familiar surroundings seeking a better life. When they arrived in the United States, they often

¹⁰ Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example", 56.

¹¹ Sister Lucille, "The Causes of Polish Immigration," 85.

¹² *Ibid.*, 86.

moved to areas where they hoped to find work and money. With rapid industrialization in progress in major urban areas, they found jobs in the steel industries and the coal mines of the Midwest states such as Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana.¹³

Like many other immigrant groups, the Poles felt safety and comfort in communities where other Polish immigrants had already settled. In the alien environment of major American cities such as Chicago, the Poles formed communities across the city. One such community was “Back of the Yards” in Chicago. These immigrant communities served to help the transition from rural farming life in Poland to the industrialized center that was Chicago. In enclaves like Back of the Yards, Polish community members took it upon themselves, due to their isolation, to found their parishes, schools, saloons, and social clubs. To an extent, the Poles could bring Poland with them or at least recreate the home country. The period of social assimilation of the Poles to the U.S. was one where massive numbers of Polish immigrants, their racial classification as whites, and the drive to establish insular societies that preserved their heritage resulted in moderate to high levels of socio-economic status success. There were minor clashes with white American populations, mainly among the younger generations of immigrant children and the white children. There were also disputes over assimilation, such as “Back of the Yards” parish schools only thought in Polish rather than in English. It was events and sentiments like these that were points of contention in the Poles’ new home.¹⁴

Polish immigrants often dealt with racism; these encounters with racist terms like “Polak” led to the violence between Polish and U.S. youths. Polish people were grouped in with the more prominent attitude extended by Americans to all Europeans that were not White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. At the same time, they were acceptable, and yet they were not equal.¹⁵

The Chinese Experience

Chinese immigration, on the other hand, was a far different story. With the discovery of gold in California in the late 1840s, there was a harder push to expand the United States westward.¹⁶ With this westward expansion came a need for more accessible transportation. This need prompted the U.S. government to undertake the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad.

13 Ibid., 85-87.

14 Dominic Pacyga, “Polish Immigration to the United States before World War II: An Overview,” *Polish American Studies* Vol. 39, No. 1 (Spring 1982), 30-37.

15 John Radzilowski, “In American Eyes: Views of Polish Peasants in Europe and The United States, 1890s-1930s,” *The Polish Review* Vol. 47, No. 4 (2002), 405.

16 Izabella Black, “American Labour and Chinese Immigration,” *Past & Present* No. 25 (July 1963), 59.

Chinese laborers easily found work on the railway because there were not enough white American hands to complete the project alone. California, the primary destination for Chinese immigration, had only five residents per square mile in 1870.¹⁷ This shortage of labor prompted U.S. officials to seek out immigrant labor for such grandiose task. By 1882, over 288,000 Chinese immigrants had come to the United States.¹⁸

For Chinese laborers, immigration was fraught with challenges and even physical danger from its earliest days. In the early 1850s, the Gold Rush brought miners from all over the nation and abroad searching for riches. This rush caused competition to turn ugly, with confrontations between potential miners quickly spreading, and Chinese immigrants were an easily visible threat to the white miners. Their skin color set them drastically apart as racist community leaders and citizens quickly targeted them. In 1849, the white miners of Tuolumne County passed local ordinances prohibiting any Chinese laborers from working on gold claims because their skin color made such ordinances easily enforceable, and racist beliefs predominated in the United States. In the late 1850s, at least 13 mining districts in Nevada County sought to drive out Chinese laborers. Agua Fria, Grass Valley, Horsetown, Oregon Gulch, Middletown, Mormon Bar, Horseshoe Bar, Columbia, Deer Creek, Rough and Ready, Wood's Creek, Foster's Bar, and Yuba River Camp were all among the towns of Nevada County seeking to make Chinese settlement illegal to force out easily identifiable competition.¹⁹

Like Polish immigrants, Chinese immigrants sought security in numbers. In many large cities, they settled together in what are known as Chinatowns. However, unlike Polish immigrants, the Chinese did not only create these ethnic enclaves for comfort and ethnic solidarity, but they also did it out of necessity to defend themselves. In these Chinatowns, the Chinese ethnicity was a boon rather than a curse as it was everywhere else in America. When everyone looked similar, white antagonists could easily be identified, and protective steps could be taken. In some areas, such as parts of San Francisco's Chinatown, felt it was necessary to outright ban whites from entering, probably out of fear of anti-Chinese action. Despite these attempts at mutual protection and strength in numbers, violence reached into these ethnic enclaves. Many Chinatowns were burned down by white anti-Chinese mobs causing the Chinese to relocate and build fences topped with barbed wire around their new Chinatowns to deter unwanted attention.²⁰

17 Ibid., 59-60.

18 Ibid., 59-60.

19 Mark Kanazawa, "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation: Anti-Chinese Legislation in Gold Rush California," *The Journal of Economic History* Vol. 65, No. 3 (September 2005), 781-783.

20 Baxter, "The Response of California's", 31.

Perhaps the most glaring difference between the immigrants from Poland and immigrants from China is that from the onset of Chinese immigration, white Americans attempted to bar them from entry through the law.²¹ In the late 1850s, various mining towns and settlements passed bylaws that allowed only people who intended to gain citizenship to settle within their boundaries. As only Whites were allowed to become citizens of the United States, this was de jure exclusion of Chinese laborers.²² There was also the momentous Chinese Exclusion Act, passed on May 6, 1882. This act barred from entry to the United States all Chinese immigrants who were not teachers, students, diplomats, or merchants and made it so no currently residing immigrants could gain citizenship.²³ These laws were structurally racist. They focused on Chinese immigrants because they were Chinese. This was a far cry from just 30 years earlier when the United States hailed a Chinese immigrant coming over the sea as a "... worthy integer of our population."²⁴ The vitriolic reactions of White Americans toward Chinese immigrants invited similar reactions toward all other immigrant groups. However, this was not necessarily the case.

Similarities and Glaring Differences: Chinese and Polish Immigrants

Both the Poles and the Chinese experienced negative attitudes and faced challenges when coming to the United States. One Polish immigrant, Maker Kroneski, wrote to his mother in 1891, "It would have been better if I had gotten lost; it would have been better if I had drowned at sea; that is how it is in America."²⁵ Another immigrant from Poland, Andreas Ueland, had better luck. After moving to the United States in 1871, he toiled as a worker for six hard years, tried to learn English in the winters from a book he bought for three dollars, and worked on various farms, homesteads, and quarries in the Minneapolis, Minnesota region. After educating himself at city-held gradeless schools in the brutal winter months, Andreas passed the bar exam at 24 years old and became a lawyer. He wrote home that he could not believe that after arriving with only 20 dollars and a feather quilt from his mother. He had built himself into an American Success Story.²⁶ These two examples of Polish immigrants demonstrate the different personal experiences of Polish immigrants in the United States. The two stories highlight the variability of

21 Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example", 36.

22 Kanazawa, "Immigration, Exclusion, and Taxation", 783.

23 Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example", 36

24 Mildred Wellborn, "The Events Leading to the Chinese Exclusion Acts," *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California* Vol. 9, No. 1/2 (1912-1913), 49.

25 "Letters from America," Johnstown Area Heritage Association, accessed April 6, 2021. https://www.jaha.org/edu/discovery_center/push-pull/letterstohome.html.

26 Andreas Ueland, *Recollections of an Immigrant* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1929), 28-37.

the immigrant experience in the United States; even when two immigrants came from the same place, they could potentially have drastically different immigration experiences.

Chinese immigrants had many similar goals and conditions upon arrival to the United States as the Poles. They were often poor, did not speak English, did not have the education or experience to find skilled labor, and were culturally different than the Americans, just like the Polish. The major difference in the initial immigration between Chinese and Polish immigrants was one of geography. Poles moved to industrial centers on the East coast, and Chinese essentially moved to agricultural areas on the West coast.²⁷

It was the perception that both Polish and Chinese immigrants were unassimilable, which ties two peoples on different coasts of a country and from vastly differing backgrounds. Chinese people being easier to spot and identify offhand may have been a significant component of the ability for politicians and anti-immigrant lobbyists to gain an outright banning of a group of people. Still, both groups were targeted because a nation rapidly approaching a more nationalistic and singular identity feared having internal dissension and large groups of people who did not conform.²⁸

Most Polish immigrants arriving from Europe ended up in major cities looking for work in factories, steel mills, and other industries. Often, these immigrants worked in factories and made middle-class wages to afford to go to local saloons and hold religious holidays or other celebrations in their churches. In the Back of the Yards area, in the city of Chicago, Poles faced challenges but also had successes. Families that settled there did face forms of racism. In the United States, Polish immigrants were seen as inferior. Because they hailed from the Slavic region of Europe, they were caught in the web of racism surrounding immigrants and people from that region. Poles were imagined to be stupid but strong, fit for labor and hard work, but not smart enough to rise in social status.²⁹ In the early 1900's social Darwinism or the belief that certain types of people were inherently better than others, was coming into its own, with White Anglo-Saxon Protestants at the pinnacle of race and culture. Poles were only white-ish and were not Anglo-Saxon Protestants; they were viewed as lesser and their traditions as backward.³⁰

Polish families banded together, hoping to hold on to their traditions even if they were seen as backward. They formed their parochial schools so that their children would not lose their heritage by going to American public

27 Roger Daniels, "Westerners from the East: Oriental Immigrants Reappraised," *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 35, No. 4 (1966), 376.

28 Roger Daniels, "Westerners from the East", 377-378.

29 Radzilowski, "In American Eyes", 403.

30 *Ibid.*, 401-402.

schools. The Parish schools taught the old country's ways, Catholicism, and the Polish language. English was seen as an accessory language, necessary for work and interactions outside "Back of the Yards", but not necessarily one worthy of replacing Polish. This caused tension with the State legislature who forced more English to be used in the parochial schools.³¹ Legislatures imposing conditions and restrictions against building a Polish community in the United States were what many Poles had hoped to escape from in their old country. This forced assimilation echoed Native American forced assimilation and even more modern held beliefs that immigrants should "speak English in America."

The parochial schools were not the only elements of Polish immigrant life that felt the pressure to assimilate. In 1912, Jan Kukielka wrote home to his wife that he was working in a brick factory and making good money – \$2.70 for 13 hours of work – but was apprehensive about his daughter's wish to join him in America. He said that if she desired to come, she would be able to, but she must learn English or "Then there will be misery and weeping, because somebody speaks and you can only look at him."³² For Polish immigrants, learning English was essential for survival among their non-Polish neighbors and working in urban centers or factories. Andreas Ueland commented in his memoirs that it would be best for any immigrant to stay home on the farm and learn at least a little English before even considering the migratory move. He noted this because it was not until he learned English that he could make money from someone who did not speak Polish.³³ While ethnic enclaves could be a saving grace and place of comfort and familiarity to new immigrants, overall having a positive effect on Polish immigrants, their rigorous hold to tradition and language, in some cases, hold Polish people back from integrating more seamlessly into American society.

Cultural differences also led to Polish immigrants finding it challenging to assimilate into American society. M. Goodstein, a Polish immigrant, working in San Bernardino, wrote to his aunt in Poland, accusing the Polish American community as very conservative. He mentioned that there was little interaction between the sexes outside closely watched courtship. Because Polish villages could be so judgmental, young Polish men who arrived in America would have difficulty fitting in. They were made fun of as backward and not fun enough to raise a toast with.³⁴ Poles in the United States often felt

31 Pacyga, "Polish Immigration", 34.

32 Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 832. <https://archive.org/details/polishpeasantine01thom/page/832/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>.

33 Ueland, *Recollections*, 28.

34 "Letters from America", Johnstown Area Heritage Association, accessed April 6, 2021. https://www.jaha.org/edu/discovery_center/push-pull/letterstohome.html.

isolated and different from those born and raised in the country. This feeling of isolation and difference may have been a major driving force for setting up communities predominantly made up of Polish immigrants where customs and language could be preserved more readily than when an immigrant has little contact with others of their background. Recent immigrants could even feel isolated from second-generation Poles. As Goodstein noted to his mother, Poland was very conservative compared to the United States. Therefore, it is likely that second-generation Poles in the United States, even being raised in parochial schools and Polish neighborhoods, would be detached in some ways from traditional Poland. This detachment could also have influenced new immigrants trying to fit in in a new world, allowing them to assimilate more readily at the cost of their traditional values and beliefs.

The United States was a lonely place for many Polish Immigrants, especially those who left families behind and around holidays, particularly Christmas. Steve Winkowski wrote home to his mother on January 5, 1910, "I am very lonesome, I do not hear the Polish language at all."³⁵ Andreas Ueland recalled his first Christmas in America as one far different from what he was used to in Poland. He wandered around lonely and drunk, with no one to be with other than an overly drunken roommate vomiting on their small dwelling's floor.³⁶ In fact, immigrants far from home, across an ocean, often felt disconnected and longed for home. Adam Raczkowski wrote home to his sister begging for information about Poland, how the weather was affecting the harvest, who read his letters, how she was faring, what news there was in Poland, and how any conflicts had gone.³⁷ Poles often came to America without their families. Even when traveling with some family, as was the case with Adam Raczkowski, who came with his brother, the distance from home could negatively affect an immigrant's mental state. In subsequent letters, Raczkowski became increasingly upset with his family in Poland for the lack of communication. Coupled with not living in a Polish-dominated settlement and money troubles, Raczkowski seemed to decline his excitement about living in the United States.³⁸ The separation from homeland and familiar surroundings weighed heavy on the minds of Polish immigrants.

While these Polish immigrants longed for home and faced the challenge of learning English to succeed in the United States, Chinese immigrants faced the daunting task of simply stepping on American shores. To come to America at a time where it was illegal for Chinese immigrants to enter the country, Chinese immigrants, seeking to earn money or to settle in the United States,

35 Thomas and Znaniecki, *Polish Peasant*, 811.

36 Ueland, *Recollections*, 34.

37 Thomas and Znaniecki, *Polish Peasant*, 716.

38 *Ibid.*, 717-729.

had to come up with strategies to enter the United States undetected. One such way was to forge documents stating that a potential immigrant was born in the United States and therefore simply returning to his birthplace, and therefore not immigrating. American Newspapers did not take kindly to Chinese immigrants attempting to circumvent the Chinese Exclusion Acts in this way. The term “Coolie” was freely tossed around to describe the Chinese immigrants and demean them as unskilled and unintelligent, as well as being used to describe the tactic that “wily Chinese” use to “Scheme” ways around the racist laws.³⁹ While Polish immigrants had difficulty finding work, Chinese immigrants had to assume fake names and risk imprisonment and deportation to get into the country.

Even before the Exclusion Acts, Chinese immigrants faced racism. On December 16, 1877, Hing Kee died of a vicious and gruesome death in his bed in Port Madison, Washington Territory. When examiners probed his body, they found multiple knife wounds on his hands and head, evidencing a fight for his life, with the killing blow being a slashed throat⁴⁰. The town newspaper downplayed the racial aspect of the killing, suggesting that Kee was known to have a gold watch and a bit of money in his possession. The town’s newspaper reported that the murder was a robbery, rather than the racially motivated killing that it was. This news was read as an isolated incident. However, mere days later, the entire population of Chinese laborers in Port Madison was expelled, their homes demolished, and burned.⁴¹ This kind of violence and arson that the Chinese of Port Madison faced was tragically common across the United States. However, it was not only direct violence that Chinese immigrants faced.

From all levels of society, the Chinese felt the hatred that was extended toward them. H. N. Clement, a lawyer in San Francisco, stood before the California State Senate in 1876 and announced, “The Chinese are upon us. How can we get rid of them?”⁴² Later, in 1889, the United States Supreme Court decried the Chinese as “vast hordes of people crowding in upon us... a different race... dangerous to America’s peace and security.”⁴³ The highest court in the nation and everyday citizens made it clear to the Chinese living in the United States that they were not wanted. Laws, it seems, could be inherently racist both in their creation and in enforcement. The Chinese Exclusion Acts were racially motivated to keep out an undesirable element. Other laws that afforded protection to whites in the United States did not

39 “Chinese Coolies Flocking to America Despite Laws Framed to Exclude Them,” *San Francisco Call*, September 26, 1902, 1-2.

40 Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 27.

41 *Ibid.*, 27-28.

42 Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example”, 36.

43 *Ibid.*, 39.

extend that same protection to Chinese immigrants living in the United States. Gong Heng, Hing Kee, and the residents of Port Madison were not protected by laws that would have safeguarded White Americans.

In an attempt to take the law into their own hands, as the authorities have failed to protect Chinese immigrants, some Chinese armed themselves with guns and built fences around their communities to protect themselves and their property.⁴⁴ They circumvented laws meant to destabilize their Chinatown communities and push them out, such as the ordinance in San Jose stating that neighborhoods had to have their sewer systems tied in with the primary city system. This ordinance was most likely passed to dissuade the construction of the Woolen Mills Chinatown. Chinese residents built their own sewer lines and connected them to the main city system themselves to avoid this problem. They would not be forced out on a technicality after watching the previous two Chinatowns they had built burned down in racially motivated arson.⁴⁵

Some Chinese sought relief from racial hatred and abuse through the letter of the law. Even established members of Chinese communities dealt with racial prejudice. Comments such as, "Having a Chinese for a neighbor" was one of the perils of living in town,"⁴⁶ were common expressions of white residents. Mobs of White men also laid siege to Chinese-run businesses, making threats of arson and murder should the Chinese not leave. Both events took place in Tacoma, Washington, in 1885, evidencing that racial prejudice was not only reserved for newcomers, but it could also drastically differ in intensity even in a small area. Chinese immigrants dealt with everyday racism in language and treatment and a different type of violent racism. Kwok Sue, a prominent businessman in Tacoma, had lived and worked in the United States for twenty years when orders from local White organizations stated that the Chinese were to leave Tacoma by November 1, or that there would be blood.⁴⁷ Sue and N.W. Gow both reached out through the legal system, contacting lawyers and even the governor, to find shelter for the masses as Chinese workers in Tacoma who were losing their jobs and fleeing the city. Territory Governor Squire told them not to worry that they would be protected. When November 1 came, the merchants' houses were raided. Those Chinese who stayed were forced out of their homes and ran out of town. Even though merchants were told that the federal government had been informed of the situation, nobody came to help.⁴⁸

44 Baxter, "The Response of California's Chinese", 33.

45 *Ibid.*, 31.

46 Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 106.

47 *ibid.*, 106-107.

48 *Ibid.*, 107-112.

Other Chinese immigrants took to writing, such as Wong Ar Chong, who wrote to William Lloyd Garrison, a prominent journalist, and outspoken civil rights activist, on February 28, 1879.⁴⁹ Chong wrote in response to Senator Blaine, who had supported measures to exclude Chinese nationals from immigrating to the United States, saying that the Chinese should be allowed to continue to immigrate since they had contributed to building the nation. He refuted claims from Senator Blaine that Chinese people would not assimilate, that Chinese women were all prostitutes, that Chinese people were dirty and uneducated, and that Chinese people did not pay taxes.⁵⁰ Another Chinese writer, Kwang Chang Ling, used historical arguments to denote that the Chinese had never been a threat and still were not. He argued that when China had the upper hand around the 14th century, they did not march on the west and tear down Europe. When they were weaker in the 16th century, Europe sailed the ocean to conquer others; in a way, European descendants were far more dangerous than the Chinese.⁵¹

Some Chinese immigrants experienced the harsh reality of their lack of whiteness and Europeaness in the United States. This reality was often accompanied by violence and the lack of protection from local, state, and national authorities. From experience grounded in excitement expressed by Huie Kin in 1868 upon arrival to San Francisco Bay, "To be actually at the 'Golden Gate' of the land of our dreams! The feeling that welled up was indescribable..."⁵² to the experiences of Kwok Sue, N.W. Gow, Hing Kee, and Gong Heng were not a far leap in the United States. The color of a Chinese man or woman's skin made them targets of hatred, violence, and exclusion. Polish immigrants also had some unpleasant experiences during the early years of immigration, experiences wrapped in forced assimilation and cultural stigma. There is a crucial difference in the experiences of Polish and Chinese immigrants. Poles were considered *White-ish*. While they were often labeled as racially and socio-culturally different, White America expressed a negative attitude toward elements of the Polish culture such as conservatism, language, religion, etc. Poles primarily settled in America with minor incidents while Chinese immigrants were murdered, beaten, forced from their homes, and excluded because they were neither European nor white, and most often non-Christian. The accounts of these groups can be valuable in learning more about either or both. However, to look at them side-by-side is to compare the two and

49 "Letter from Wong Ar Chong to William Lloyd Garrison, February 28, 1879. (19 February 1903)," Stanford History Education Group. Accessed April 14, 2021, <https://sheg.stanford.edu/history-lessons/chinese-immigration-and-exclusion>.

50 Ibid.

51 Kwang Chang Ling, *Why should the Chinese go? A pertinent Inquiry from a Mandarin High in Authority* (San Francisco: Bruce's Book & Job Printing House, 1878), 1-6.

52 Lew-Williams, *The Chinese Must Go*, 32.

magnify the harsh origins of Chinese immigration in the United States. As Andreas Ueland wrote 57 years after coming to America, "The early hardship seem [*sic*] now trivial; over-abundant compensation makes me almost forget them."⁵³ Gong Heng and others were not allowed the chance to progress past their fatal hardships. Racism in the United States against Chinese and Asian people is not simply an issue of the past. In the last year, anti-Asian violence and hate crimes have been on the rise. In fact, Stop Asian American and Pacific Islanders Hate (AAPI), a group formed by Asian American advocacy groups, reported that between March 2020 and February 2021, over 3,800 anti-Asian hate incidents were reported in the United States.⁵⁴ These reported numbers, likely underreported, speak to the fact that Anti-Asian and Anti-Chinese racism has not disappeared in the United States and that those who are seen as different still struggle to live in the United States peacefully in pursuit of "The American Dream."

53 Ueland, *Recollections*, 259.

54 Liz Mineo, "The Scapegoating of Asian Americans," *The Harvard Gazette*, March 24, 2021.