
**BECOMING AMERICAN: THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE
PROGRAM THREE: NO TURNING BACK**

MOYERS: What's striking is how little I remember of that day. So much was afoot in the White House, so many bills were getting signed, that this was almost routine. On October 3, 1965, at about 1:30 pm, we headed to New York's Liberty Island.

LBJ FROM SPEECH HISTORICAL ARCHIVES TAPE 2110: "This bill says simply that from this day forth, those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationships to those already here

MOYERS: My job as press secretary was just to make sure reporters and camera crews had a clear view of LBJ as he signed a new immigration act into law. Actually we didn't consider it such a big story.

LBJ FROM LIBERTY ISLAND SPEECH, OCT. 3, 1965: "The bill that we will sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions...

MOYERS: I remember as we left, the President put his arm around me, leaned over so no one could hear, and said, "Bill, if this was not a revolutionary law, what the blank did we go all the way to New York to sign it for?"

MOYERS: It turns out, he needn't have worried.

None of us knew it at the time, or even intended it, but that bill would take racial bias out of our immigration laws. America had always thought of itself as white – despite its large black minority. Now this would become a country of all shades and tints and hues. The law helped change the country's identity, the idea of what it means to be American.

And another people would emerge from the shadows; their story would take its place in the making of America.

CORKY LEE: I just wanted to tell you that this is the largest gathering of Chinese since the railroad was completed! [laughter]

MOYERS: Years later we could see: the immigration law was a turning point – no – the turning point. Once this last legal obstacle was dismantled, the Chinese were free to come into their own.

BENNY PAN: The first day I stepped on the land of United States, I talked to my wife and I said to myself, "I'm free. I can speak freely. I can speak what I want to say."

MOYERS: In this final program of our series, you'll meet just a few Chinese-Americans, but through them, the experience of a modern American people – living the fears of the Cold War, the revolts of the 60s, the rise in immigration, and then a striking climb to the top rungs of American life - a climb that's been swift and, at times, painful.

BENNY PAN: Vincent Chin's mother was crying. Because it sounded like people were saying "there's nothing we can do." And I sat there and I raised my hand.

MOYERS: This story will be told one person, one family at a time. Because after the Second World War, and even more after '65, becoming American was less a legal drama than a human one – not fought in the courts or streets so much as the private territories of heart and home.

MICHELLE LING: I AM an American... but I have to become an American to everybody else.

MOYERS: Why?

MICHELLE LING: I don't know. You tell me, you're the white guy!

MOYERS: Everywhere you look, in recent years, you see the success.

I.M.Pei and his landmark buildings . . . in America and worldwide.

The breakthroughs in science – as with AIDS researcher David Ho ... and Steven Chu, one of six Chinese-American winners of the Nobel Prize.

Or Yo-Yo Ma: everywhere, it seems, that music gets made.

One of my favorite success stories, because it's so unlikely, played out over this plot of land, now the all-but-sacred site of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. When it came time to build it, there was a contest; everyone knew its importance, and top designs firms across the country joined in. Who won?

MAYA LIN: My room-mate came and got me and only said, "don't get your hopes up, but you got a call from Washington."

MOYERS: A college student -- Chinese-American -- just twenty-one years old.

MAYA LIN: And I didn't quite understand, so they told me again. And I'm still not quite understanding (laughter).

MOYERS: Her delight that day wasn't shared by all. No matter that she was U.S. born: the features of her face stirred up old ghosts.

H. Ross Perot, self-appointed champion of the Vets, called her "Eggroll."

Writer Tom Wolfe called her plan something quote "out of the Chinese Cultural Revolution."

One Vietnam Vet recommended adding an inscription to her monument: "Designed by a Gook."

So was this another dispiriting tale of racism? Or the opposite? After all, her design 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.

To get at that story, I had to reach back more than fifty years.

CHARLIE CHIN: Chinatown was small in those days. But I always noticed that when I walked down the street with my father I must have been under the age of ten, other men would come across the street to say hello to my father—total strangers. Shake his hand, and then look at me, and tousele my head or offer me candy or a cake or something. For many of them, of course, because they had children of their own in China, which they had not seen in years, and the sight of a child in Chinatown was remarkable at that time.

MOYERS: Charlie Chin grew up in Queens, New York the son of a laundryman. When he was a boy, the old Chinese America was very much alive, and he'd see it first-hand when his Dad brought him to Chinatown.

CHARLIE CHIN: ... you still could find old Waiquiu, the old Toishan uncles, who were still living in little apartments, some of them still six or seven in an apartment where they had been for 20, 30 or 40 years, from the days when they first came over—and, trapped by time.

MOYERS: Charlie didn't know it then, but he was watching the legacy of the Exclusion laws, on the books until just before he was born. The law had barred Chinese from bringing in wives, and for these old laborers, its repeal had come too late.

Charlie lived a few miles east, across the river, and there too, Exclusion had done its job. There were 4,000 kids in his high school; just a handful looked like him.

CHARLIE CHIN: ...That would be myself, one young woman named Mickey Shimazu, a Pilipino woman whose name is Aurora Kakahianan, and a young man named John Yang, a Korean-American.

MOYERS: You remember them all?

CHARLIE CHIN: Well, because I dated both of the girls, number one. (laughter) And I was friendly with John, we had no other choice, really.

There were very, very few of us here.... If you were going down the street, if you were-- if the family was in the car going down the street and it saw another Asian, people would stop and look at each other. And sometimes tentatively would kinda; come up and ask, "are you Chinese?" Because it was so rare to see other people outside of the confines of Chinatown itself.

MOYERS: In the first blush of the fifties, Chinese Americans began to slip the restricted world of Chinatown, or by-pass it entirely, to venture into the white world.

HELEN HELEN ZIA: When my family would walk into a store or a public place it would be like everybody in the store would just stop dead in their tracks and stop and kind of turn just to, to look and see who are these people who walked in. So I knew very, very early on that I was different.

MOYERS: Helen Zia and her family were among the first to move into Levittown, New Jersey – pioneers in more ways than one.

BENNY PAN: ... At that time, [there were] fewer than a hundred and fifty thousand Chinese Americans in this whole country. And in New Jersey, in the little suburban town that that I knew as home, we were one of maybe a couple of families, and the people around us, I mean was mostly treated as this exotic little creature who had you know could've come from Mars who was a foreign visitor. Even though you know baseball and hot dogs and apple pie were the only things I really knew. And then at the same time within our family, my mother and father, China was their home, that was their touchstone.

MOYERS: Helen's father had come here with a degree from St. John's University in Shanghai. Before the Communists shut it down, this was a training ground for China's elite, expected to help lead their country back to a place of pride in the world. Her father was schooled in the classics, knew by heart the great poets of China and the West . . . then trained as a diplomat. But in New Jersey, none of that meant much. So he took odd jobs -- whatever paid --and clung to memories of his old life.

BENNY PAN: My father was part of, I think, a lost generation of China. In China but also in America, a generation who was educated, who had imbued in their very spirit, the idea that they could do something for China, his homeland. But, because of circumstances there really wasn't an opportunity for him to do that.

BENNY PAN: He was such a proud, proud man and very proud of his heritage.

And he felt that Chinese culture was the superior culture of the world. He felt that Chinese as people—as human beings—were superior to whites, and really just superior. He definitely felt that way.

He would read encyclopedia passages about China and he would underline them and cross them out and he would have all of us read them and say, “This is wrong.”

He was so irate with the Encyclopedia Britannica that, he actually- he not only complained, he sued them. They sued him back (laughs)...

MOYERS: Your father sued the Encyclopedia Britannica?

HELEN HELEN ZIA: He did...

MOYERS: For being wrong about China? (laughter)

HELEN HELEN ZIA: Right. Sometimes we would have to sit through lectures that would go for hours, about these things that my father was so upset about. And we would just be, rolling our eyes.

MOYERS: This “China land”, a place she'd never seen, was alive in Helen's imagination. But even more so was the land of her birth – the America she was now learning about in school, and summer camp.

HELEN HELEN ZIA: And the recreation leader said, let's play charades. And we're going to do Washington crossing the Delaware. She said, Okay, Helen You play George Washington. So I knew that meant I would have to stand at the head of the little boat, you know, with my trusty team of oarsmen behind me, and there I was pointing the way, in my gym shorts .

MOYERS: While Helen was growing up, her Dad ran what he called a “baby novelty” business. He'd assemble pink and blue vases and trinkets on his kitchen table. Then he'd drive up and down the East Coast selling them out of his car.

BENNY PAN: And, believe it or not, he was able to raise a family of six kids doing this. I-- to this day I don't know how he really did it. But, you know, we were the labor, the kids, he and my mom. And while he would sit there and paint pink or blue pieces of wood he would recite the poems that he knew. He would think about what was happening in China

There was the world inside our family's homey father was god, whatever he said was the law

But, in the outside world, when he would have to go do his business and he would have to go sell these little pieces of wood and plastic toys that he would then have to go and almost, I felt his voice would change. He would be almost obsequious and fawning. And his voice would take a more of a high-pitched tone and-- and I would just see that and just feel that, you know, just what a difference there was and what a shame there was.

MOYERS: In the 1950's, China was the enemy. Mao's troops were fighting in North Korea, killing American GI's, and Chinese-Americans felt the chill. Their image was still tied to China's, like it or not.

They had breathed a lot easier around World War II, when the U.S. and China had been on the same side. But now the pendulum was swinging back and with it an old American attitude returned: the Chinese were foreigners, and always would be.

CHARLIE CHIN: The 50s were a very rough time for the Chinese-American community in general. And I can't think of anybody I know from those days that wasn't affected on one level or another. In my own family's case, starting in '50, '51, we got visits from the FBI, uh, apparently, my father's name and my mother's name was exactly the same as somebody they were looking for and so in the middle of the night, when they were sure that everybody was home, there'd be loud banging on the doors, and, I remember peering behind my mother's house dress, because we were all woken up, of course, at these strange, big men in long overcoats with fedoras, kind of like Ward Bond, you know, with the fedora on, and wondering who they were and noticing that my parents were really scared. Which, well, you don't forget.

They were using a normal procedure at that time to root out what they thought might be Communist sympathizers.

HELEN HELEN ZIA: So one of the things my father wrote was a pamphlet called, "The U.S. got Red China All Wrong." He actually sent copies of it to many leading politicians at that time.

There would be these weird clicks and noises and strange static on the phone line. Our mail would come to us delivered all sort of damaged and bashed up. And I had the impression that everybody's, every kid's families, their phone and their mail came, you know, damaged or that they had weird static on their phone like we did. Until one day, some of the neighbor kids, you

know, the kids we played with came over and said, “hey what does your dad really do, you know? Because the FBI was over at our house asking about your father.” And it was at that point, I knew, you know, that oh, our dad's being watched by the FBI.

MOYERS: Here’s the strange thing about the McCarthy years: with a cloud of suspicion hanging over them, Chinese-Americans were making a move to the mainstream. . . getting a taste of the good life. You see it all in Shawn Wong and his family. His Dad was an engineer – yes, a Chinese engineer in America -- at a time when few could imagine such a thing. They lived in Berkeley.

SHAWN WONG: ... my mother used to tell me, “We're Chinese and you're Chinese American.” I had no idea what that was. I didn't know what the difference was. My mother would wear Chinese dresses, cheong sams. My mother and father would speak Chinese to each other at home/And, and, and here I am, this little boy, I wanted to be, Willie Mays. I wanted to be Roy Rogers.

When I was young, I went to a lot of different schools. My family moved around a lot. So I was always the new person at the school.

When I was in the second grade, my father took a job in Taiwan working as an engineer for the U.S. Navy. And I'm enrolled in the American school there in Taiwan along with a lot of other military kids. And I remember on the first day of school we were waiting by the street. And I'm with my mother. And the school bus comes by. And we get on the bus. And all the kids on the bus, who were all white, start chanting, “no Chinese allowed on this bus.” And the first thought that popped into my mind is at is that “oh no, it's okay. She's my mom, you know.” I didn't think of myself as Chinese. I thought of myself as being just like them.

I think I just had to figure it out on my own. T1241 (#15) 90914 Your parents always are telling you, “Be proud you’re Chinese,” you know. And, of course, “Yeah, yeah, right, Mom.” You know, that doesn’t help me out in the schoolyard.

BENNY PAN: I definitely grew up hearing every kind of taunt, and it would make me angry. Most of the time it wasn’t like that. I had wonderful friends, and neighbors and people I grew up with. But, you never knew when something like that would happen. You never knew when somebody would yell at you, “go back where you came from.

MOYERS: They were doing what most kids do: fishing around for a model, trying to fit in.

SHAWN WONG: I remember in 1958, noticing that Cal had a Japanese American football player. I'd never even heard of such a thing. And his name was Pete Demoto. His number was number 60 and he played left guard for the Rose Bowl-bound California Bears.

... And I used to run down onto the field with the other little kids at the end of the game. Other kids were tryin' to get quarterback Joe Kapp's autograph. And I was there trying to find Pete Domoto. I wanted his autograph. I wanted to see if he looked Asian, you know. If he looked like me. Because here was some guy who was a football player. And that was something spectacular.

BENNY PAN: My name is Benjamin Pan. But people would like call me Benny. Last name is P-a-n. Just like Peter Pan. But I'm not Peter, see.

MOYERS: Most Chinese in America today never had an American childhood. If they've learned stories like Peter Pan, or Little Red Riding Hood, it's as adults, since they were born overseas, and grew up speaking Chinese.

I want to tell you the story of one such man and his journey to Queens, New York -- a journey that would take him half a lifetime.

Like most immigrants in American history, his dream grew out of the sheer misery of life in his homeland. And, like others before him, he was after more than just U.S. comforts: he wanted a life that was his own.

BENNY PAN: You have to work from morning to night and under the sun. And all kind of farmer works, you know. Growing rice. It's very difficult work. Very difficult work.

MOYERS: Benny Pan was not someone you'd expect to find in these rice paddies. Like Helen's father, he'd studied at that training ground for the elite, St. John's University -- in fact, was President of his class.

BENNY PAN: I was a member of the track and field team as a 100 and 200 meters dasher. I was very fast at that time. I was strong at that time.

Now it's old, Getting old! (laughs)

MOYERS: His graduation, just weeks before Mao took over, was one of the last great ceremonies of the Old China.

BENNY PAN: I was graduate in 1949 -- we have a gathering together under the camphor tree. Have a tea party.

But when Communist come it means all the dreams spoiled, you know. All the life spoiled and you can never think of coming out.

MOYERS: Communist rule would trap most Chinese; from a nation of hundreds of millions, emigration to the U.S. would drop to near zero. Benny, as the oldest son, felt he shouldn't leave. But he got his sister Deanna onto a train to Hong Kong, as the borders were shutting down.

DEANNA CHAN: At that time I was 19 and my mother didn't want me to leave.

I was so scared. And the train station is a mess that time. Peoples leaving. Peoples crying. And then the communist guard.

They search me and they took my luggage and they took my pocketbook, everything. And then the train's going to move and Benny just pushed me to the train. And my mother came and said, "No, no no! You're not going to leave." But Benny said, "No, she must go. Let her go. Let her have her life."

I look back and he's waving and then my mother's crying, that's all I can remember.

He's my lifesaver. Yeah. If not because of him, I never going to get a chance to leave.

MOYERS: He was a Christian, a college graduate, the child of wealthy parents – all that made him now/ a marked man. Benny kept his head down and his voice low, became a librarian and language instructor. When he wed Chen Ling in 1957, he slipped off his Mao jacket and borrowed a tux at the photo studio. But then came his year in the rice fields . . . and that was prelude. In 1967, as Mao's Cultural Revolution reached fever pitch, anyone with ties to the West could be denounced, held, interrogated. Benny's diaries and family pictures were burned.

BENNY PAN: They tried to squeeze out what you did wrong to the Communists. If you don't confess, if you don't admit what they say, they beat you. But I was not afraid of anything because nothing wrong in my heart. So I face that and I stand up for that. But... some of my friends, some of my colleagues, they died. They commit suicide. That was terrible. That was really terrible.

MOYERS: He was separated from his wife and daughters and set to menial labor for six years. Deanna waited anxiously for news. She was building a life, first in Hong Kong, later in New York and Connecticut. That she was now prosperous and safe only added to the anguish.

DEANNA CHAN: The letters just stopped. That really scares me.

MOYERS: Deanna's experience was like that of most Chinese-Americans: nearly a decade of silence.

DEANNA CHAN: But he's a very strong person, strong-willed person. Hopefully I can hear from him. So, I didn't give up my hope. I didn't.

MOYERS: Even as Chinese saw their few freedoms fall away, Chinese-Americans were reaching for theirs. January, 1961.

JFK INAUGURAL SPEECH: Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike. That the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans

CHARLIE CHIN: When JFK was elected, this was a great wind of hope that spread through the country for people of color at that time. The day after he was inaugurated, I was at a house party with predominately African American friends and the highlight of the party, if you can imagine, was we turned off the record player and turned up the lights and Stanley, who was one of the guys that I hung out with, had memorized the speech—the inauguration speech-- overnight and stood up and recited it and we all applauded.

MOYERS: Charlie Chin was seventeen when JFK went to the White House and he knew: he wasn't going to follow his father into laundrywork, to earn three cents per shirt. Like his friends – black and white – he expected more.

CHARLIE CHIN: On the weekends we would go down to Greenwich Village where all kinds of interesting things happened, go to listen to jazz and then pretend to be old enough to drink and go into bars.

And, like everybody else, I got myself a black turtleneck sweater and a beret and I learned to smoke "Gauloises," cheap French cigarettes and intersperse foreign words in my conversation just so I would sound more worldly.

A friend of mine said to me if I wanted I could go down to the corner, there was a coffeehouse, and if I played and passed the hat, I could make some money. Well, I was pretty desperate so I went down and I played, you know some Appalachian tunes, and a couple Pete Seeger tunes, and I passed the hat and I made like five dollars in change and I thought, 'wow, this is the life for me.'

People would be looking at me very intently and I thought it was because I was such a good player. Now I realize of course that they were thinking, why is this Chinese guy playing the banjo?

CHARLIE CHIN: It was a great place to be when you're young.

And young people were tasting for the first time intellectual freedoms, philosophical freedoms, political freedoms, yes, even sexual freedoms

Where, all of a sudden, being exotic now, because I'm Chinese, was a definite advantage.

Well, it wasn't that much of an advantage but it was a small advantage! (laughter)

MOYERS: It was almost on a lark that Charlie decided to go to Washington DC/, on August 28th, 1963.

(civil rights hymn music)

CHARLIE CHIN: I myself marched on Washington the first time.

But if you're going to identify with somebody, who are you going to identify with? The people who had instituted unfair laws and discriminatory practices or the people who were fighting to get them changed? And it was pretty obvious if you had a brain in your head that you had no choice. You had to identify with the people who were fighting discriminatory laws, fighting injustice.

MOYERS: The laws and norms were all being revised -- Helen was no more insulated than Charlie.

BENNY PAN: There was a moment when I was in the high school schoolyard with my friend Julie, who was white, and my friend Rose who was black. And the three of us, white, black and yellow were standing there talking about civil rights and then one of my friends turned to me and said, "you know, Helen, you really gotta decide whether you are black or white." And I was dumbstruck. I was, that just shut me up completely. I just thought well, but I'm not black and I'm not white. I'm something else. But at that time when I was in high school there wasn't a something else.

MOYERS: Where did she fit? Through High School, Helen was still assembling her parents' flower-shop novelties. But when she applied to college, Princeton offered her admission, all tuition paid.

HELEN ZIA: My father was very proud that I had had won this scholarship. But when it came time for me to actually get him to sign the registration papers that every parent has to sign that says it's okay for my kid to go to your college, I went into the kitchen. I brought him the papers and a pen. And he put the paper down, put the pen down and said no. The proper place for an unmarried Chinese daughter is to stay at home with her parents

And when he put that pen and paper down I just I saw my future was slamming shut in front of me. And it was that point in time, my father was, you know, he was God in our family. I had never knowingly disobeyed my father once, you know, until that point. I was 18 years old and I said I, I somehow I, I slammed the table and I said, “No! I'm going to college!” and he took one look at me, didn't say a word. Picked up the pen and signed the paper and walked out of the room.

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. It was exhilarating. It was I have to say it was such a thrilling time

SHAWN WONG: I mean the 60s for Asian Americans was for the first time you could speak out, you know. You no longer wanted to be invisible

MOYERS: Shawn Wong was in college in the Bay Area when students there invented the term “Asian- American.” That was 1968, the year of bitter strikes to win courses in black and Asian history.

SHAWN WONG: The early teachers were often the students themselves. There were no books. If you wanted to learn about Chinese American history you got your tape recorder and you went into Chinatown and you found some old timers to tell you about their lives.)

MOYERS: One day, a call came into the University -- from a park ranger who wanted help reading Chinese. Something about an old building they were going to burn down, out in the Bay, on Angel Island.

SHAWN WONG: And the interesting thing was we sort of young, radical Asian American studies teachers or students, we didn't know anything about Angel Island. (112450)

MOYERS: It was the old detention center of the Exclusion Era; tens of thousands of Chinese had been held there when they tried to enter the country. Many/ had never made it in.

SHAWN WONG: And so a bunch of us went over there. And we walked in the building and it was very dilapidated. Broken glass on the floor. And on the walls are hundreds and hundreds of poems engraved in Chinese And the person we were with started reading the poems on the walls.

POETRY READING:

“Why do I have to languish in
in this jail?

My parents wait in vain for news;
My wife and child, wrapped in their quilt

Sigh with loneliness.”

SHAWN WONG: And as we went through the building and our translator was reading the poems verbatim off the walls, you could sort of relive the history.

We were in there discovering the history that gave us a sense of who we were and gave us a sense of place in America.

MOYERS: A place in America: more Chinese came each day to claim theirs. Their presence was a surprise, an unintended result of the new, more liberal immigration law.

CHARLIE CHIN: To be fair, most people in the community didn't recognize it at first either, but by the time the law took effect in 68, overnight in one year, suddenly the face of Chinatown was beginning to change. And this was very apparent if you knew old Chinatown because it was quite common to walk down the streets of old Chinatown, pre-68 pre-65 and pretty much know all the people on the street and say hello to various distant relatives, but by 68, 69, 70, you could walk down there'd be whole groups of people and you could realize they were recent arrivals and they were families.

They weren't necessarily people who came from farms and small villages. They were coming from more urban areas. They were coming from Hong Kong. These people were more sophisticated, more knowledgeable certainly than the people of my father's generation, who were literally raised in feudal China, or the just the post period of feudal China. So it changed everything, and by the early 70s it exploded in Chinatown.

SHAWN WONG: Everything started to change. The cuisine changed. Chinese Americans coming back into Chinatown to come for dinner, they didn't know how to order anymore.

CHARLIE CHIN: People began to arrive who were skilled restaurateurs, who were professionals. They began to bring in food products and things we had never seen before.

HELEN ZIA: The different regional cuisines from Hunan, Szechwan, from Shanghai, whereas growing up all there was, was Chinese American food, chop suey.

MOYERS: The new immigrants came from Taiwan and Hong Kong - almost none from the Chinese mainland. The peoples Republic of China - and its borders—were still tightly policed --- though there were stirrings of change, with the visit from an old enemy.

BENNY PAN: When Nixon came to China in 1972, that's still in the cultural revolution.

MOYERS: Like thousands of others, Benny Pan still lived under virtual house arrest.

BENNY PAN: I was specially advised not to leave the school, not to go back home, not to go anyplace. I don't know why at the beginning. Later, some of the Communists told me because you can speak English. If you go out, if you met Nixon, maybe you would tell the truth to Nixon (laughs). Well, I don't think I can meet Nixon at that time. (laughs) /

MOYERS: It was not until 1973 – a year after Nixon's visit –that Benny Pan even dared send a letter out.

DEANNA PAN: When I saw his writing, I was really excited. And I called all my friends and tell them the good news.

MOYERS: All across America, news was now trickling in: of family members who had survived, or not – of relatives broken by the Cultural Revolution, others born, their names and faces until now not even known. China's opening restored families, thawed a corner in the hearts of Chinese Americans that had been frozen for years. And by the late seventies, some travel in and out became possible again.

It was thirty years since Benny put his sister on the train out. Now he wrangled a visa, to get his oldest daughter free. But his own request to leave, with his wife, was turned down. Their dream would have to wait.

MOYERS: Helen Zia graduated in Princeton's first class of women, breaking a two-hundred year tradition. Her parents were elated when she was accepted to medical school, aghast when she dropped out.

HELEN ZIA: My father would write me letters that were so angry And I'd pick them up, I'd open them and I'd like peek just to see the beginning of what he might have written. And some of them began with the salutation, "to my daughter who is worse than my worst enemy," and then they would just go downhill from there.

MOYERS: She didn't help matters by moving to Detroit to stamp out car hoods and fenders on an assembly line. But what happened in Detroit would change Helen's life – and touch the lives of Asian Americans all across the country.

In 1982, Detroit was a grim place.

NEWSREPORTER V/O: At the start of the new year, the U.S. Labor Dept said Michigna's jobless rate was 14.9 percent, nearly double the national average. Time passed, but...

MOYERS: Its cars couldn't compete with those coming from Japan, and the resentment of all things Japanese was palpable.

On June 19, 1982, Vincent Chin, a draughtsman, was days away from his wedding, celebrating his bachelors' party at a neighborhood lounge.

HELEN ZIA: Unfortunately for him, sitting across from him at the bar were two auto workers who looked at him, saw his Asian face, his Chinese face, and saw Red. They saw him as the enemy.

MOYERS: We'll never know for sure how it started; there was drinking, and angry words were exchanged. The white men mistook Chin for Japanese and taunted him: he was a "Nip," a "Jap," then a "Chink." It's because of you, they said, that we're out of work. After a scuffle broke out, everyone was told to leave.

Once outside, the whites stalked Chin, cornered him, then beat him with a baseball bat. Four days later, he was dead.

CHARLIE CHIN: I remember that distinctly because I was at a gallery showing in Chinatown. Somebody walked in and said, 'Have you heard?' 'Heard what?' 'They killed a Chinese guy in Detroit because they thought he was Japanese.' Everybody got quiet because this was our worst fear.

SHAWN WONG: It wasn't in the deep south. It wasn't in 19th century California. It was in Detroit. If it could happen to Vincent Chin, it could happen to any Chinese American.

MOYERS: Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz were charged with second-degree murder but plea-bargained down to lesser charges of manslaughter. Their sentence: \$3000 fines, plus court fees, and probation. The judge was quoted as saying "These weren't the kind of people you send to jail."

Helen had been laid off her job as an autoworker; she was writing for a couple of Detroit papers when she heard the news.

HELEN ZIA: It was like wildfire. You know the first meeting had a hundred people. The next meeting had two hundred people.

MOYERS: The light sentences outraged much of Detroit, and stunned the Asian community. But lawyers said there was little hope of changing them.

BENNY PAN: Vincent Chin's mother was crying because it sounded like people were saying there's nothing we can do. And I sat there and I, I raised my hand and I said, "we have to let people know that we think this is wrong. We have to do something."

Speaking up about this was had everything to do with my experiences and the cumulative insults, all of the things that had built up, all of the things I had seen my parents subjected to, all of the bitterness that I could see my father carried with him because he was making baby novelties. All of those things came to me.

In these meetings there would be people who would stand up and say, "I've been working as a scientist or an engineer for the last thirty years in this company. I've taught every wet-behind-the-ears-college-kid to be my boss. And I know I've known more than every one of them has ever known. And I've never been considered to be the supervisor/, This time I have to speak up."

MOYERS: With Chinese leading the way, a coalition formed with Japanese, Filipinos, Koreans and South Asians. It was the first Asian-American advocacy group of its kind with a national scope. And it led to one of the first federal prosecutions of a civil rights case on behalf of an Asian American.

BENNY PAN: To have rallies and demonstrations and to be marching and talking about civil rights and about racism was something very new to Chinese Americans and to Asian Americans. For community people, for restaurant workers to shut down their restaurants for a day so that their waiters and their cooks and the family could go and participate in a march, that was unheard of, and that was how deeply people felt at that moment, how important it was, you know, a hundred years after the Chinese Exclusion act, to say, 'a hundred years have gone by and we don't have to, we don't have to accept this stuff anymore.'

MOYERS: When the federal conviction was thrown out on appeal, Lily Chin filed a civil suit, and won. The men were ordered to pay her compensation, but most of it she never saw. They never served time in jail.

Vincent Chin's death became a symbol shared by Chinese-Americans, an emblem of identity.

But what was the identity, the history they shared? At the time of his death, the Chinese in America numbered almost a million; nearly half were new immigrants. And for these newcomers, the scars of Exclusion -- even the battles over civil rights -- were something remote, learned from newspapers and books.

Chinese Americans were dividing, as their numbers climbed. The poor and working class clustered in the old Chinatowns, making the streets more crowded, and vital, than ever. The more educated, meanwhile, made straight for the mainstream.

But for new arrivals of whatever class, America was not about what had been, but what could be. For the poor, looking back was a luxury they could ill afford. And the fortunate -- well, they were going to make history, not repeat it.

Jerry Yang is co-founder of Yahoo!, one of the most recognized brands on the Internet. He left Taiwan in 1978.

JERRY YANG: I do remember leaving Taiwan. And it feels a bit like a dream. I was-- I was just about to turn 10. I remember landing in LA, you have lines upon lines of people trying to get through immigration. Everybody had their belongings with them, you know. Black people, white people, yellow people, all coming into the country.

Basically we had everything we ever owned, you know, my mom, and my brother, and me, and a few suitcases and didn't really understand the language. You know, it was very much like a scene out of a movie. It's loud and it's noisy. And it's big. Everything is huge. And there's land everywhere and there's cars everywhere. And so that was the imagery that I remember of my first day in the United States.

I never felt that I didn't belong I felt like this is where I'm gonna' be. I think for me, it was much more of a journey, you know. It's a journey of understanding how in this new world I could fit in.

JEAN JEAN TANG: Every generation of my family has immigrated. My parents immigrated from Taiwan but my grandparents really immigrated from China. They fled during the war when the communists invaded, and so I think my parents grew up in a family where at any moment we had to pick up our things and leave they didn't want that for me and my brother and so they thought America's safe, America's a land of good fortunes and dreams, so they wanted to come to America.

MOYERS: Jean Tang's family arrived in America in 1978, the same year as Jerry Yang -- completing a seven-thousand-mile journey from Taiwan/ to an aunt's house in Springfield, Illinois.

JEAN JEAN TANG: My dad was a construction worker. And my mom was a waitress and she worked at two or three different restaurants. And my dad basically tried to find as many odd jobs as he could to fill up a day and, and make some money. They were lost, they were thirty-five years old, and they didn't know the language very well...and they tried their best to hide their insecurity and their fear from us

And so, small things like going to the grocery store, not knowing where to buy things, or not knowing how to use a checkbook, and write out instead of one hundred-fifty, you have to write out one hundred and fifty and spell it out and so my brother and I would always be at the grocery store helping out my parents doing these type of things, in certain situations outside the home you were the parent and they were the child.

MOYERS: Like so many new immigrants, Jean's family turned to relatives for help. Her uncle owned a clothing store in a run-down section of L.A. and after three tough years in Springfield, the Tangs moved West to run it. They kept its doors open every day of the year – Thanksgiving and Christmas too. After school, Jean would help customers, while her younger brother kept watch for shoplifting.

JEAN TANG: The message that me and my brother got growing up was “you guys need to study, you guys need to be professionals, you don't wanna live like this, like me and your mom.” The most tense time was when we had to present our report cards when we'd open it and we got a “B” there was a lot of guilt, there was a lot of mental anguish and mental beating yourself up. When your mom cries when you get a “B”, It's very serious.

Does this B mean that I'm not going to get a good job, my parents are gonna still be poor and my family's just gonna be have such a hard life because I've failed as a fifth grader and got a B in English.” So I think for so many Chinese kids there's a lot of pressure because so much is riding on your education and on that grade.

MOYERS: Were you ever tempted to slack off, to back away, to take it easy?

JEAN TANG: (laughter) No, somehow that just wasn't an option for me!

MICHELLE LING: My mom used to tell us that you have to achieve, you have to you have to be a doctor or a lawyer, you have to because you have to be the best,

MOYERS: By the time she was raising her children, Michelle Ling's Mother was comfortably middle-class. But still, her message to her children was urgent.

MICHELLE LING: She used to tell us you know, if they can choose between a white person and you they're going to choose a white person, but if they know that the only way that they're going to either stay out of jail or live is to use your services, then no matter how short, funny looking, slanty eyed you are, they're going to hire you, and that, I think that in its way, I think is an extremely American idea.

My mom pretty much ran our house and she ran our house like a Navy ship.

MOYERS: Michelle and her sisters were raised as model daughters: well-mannered, respectful, devoted to school. For years, her parents' authority governed the home -- without challenge.

MICHELLE LING: On a day to day basis if you did something wrong you had to answer to Mom. The more, large, over-arching, bad things you might do, like not become a doctor or a lawyer, or whatever, you know, then there was always the threat of "Your father".

MOYERS: Michelle's father was born in China, met his bride here while a medical resident, then moved to L.A to practice. That's where Michelle grew up, absorbing what was expected of her and what was not.

MICHELLE LING: I've had this experience with many of my Chinese friends, where there's no discussion about shame, or, you never get a lecture about, you know, the family tradition and shame. You just already know, that it's just there. There's like this undercurrent, this fog; that permeates the whole house. That's just guilt, you know family and guilt. And, and disappointment, not just of yourself and your own potential, but just of this entire race.

You know, my dad was-- never really said that much, because he didn't have to. You'd just be like "O.K. never mind, I'll just . . . go to medical school. You know 'cause that's , you know, it's fine. (Laughing) Whatever, whatever I was thinking I don't know what I was thinking, never mind."

JEAN TANG: So we moved here in the 80s and the changes that we see now is that there's a lot more Chinese folks living here. Just like my parents, they moved here so they could give their kids a better education because the school district in Arcadia is outstanding.

MOYERS: Arcadia -- Southern California. Jean Tang and her parents moved here when this was a modest suburb, mostly white. So was neighboring Monterey Park, now headquarters for the Chinese communities that began to thrive in the 1980s.

JEAN TANG: This is where you can eat a nice meal, you can do your grocery shopping, go to the bank, go to the post office, all speaking Chinese and not needing English at all. If you go to Charles Schwab even the tellers are Chinese. if you think about the medieval ages and you think about the lord's castle and the fiefdom that the central points of the entire structure would be Ranch 99 or the Chinese supermarket.

These communities are so tight that my parents have been here for 18 years and their English has not improved over time.

On weekends when all these families would get together, there would be the Yu's who owned the Chinese fast food restaurant. There would be other Tangs who owned different businesses. When

we all get together for Majong, the competition wasn't really about how well your store business did. And it wasn't about growth. And it wasn't about employees. It was all about how your children did. Oh, so and so's got an award in school. They are most improved. Or so and so got to be on the evening news because of the spelling bee or something like that. And so in our living room our mom and dad would always put out our awards and the medals we won in full display (laughs).

JERRY YANG: And, you know, it was very competitive with even our cousins. It was just a big part of my life. I remember we would go to my uncle's house and you know, you go swimming or go play ping-pong for awhile and the you would sit there and do algebra for two hours. And it sounds terrible but you know, you end up- you end up learning things that you would never--, but, you know, it was almost a game. It was fun rather than it's a chore, you know.

Then there's the typical thing that Chinese people do when they first get here. you randomly flip to a page in the dictionary and you gotta' remember five words from the dictionary and you get tested the next day.

It's not a change from Taiwan. I mean Taiwan was even worse, so you know. This is actually you get to you get to play and study rather in Taiwan you just get to study.

JEAN TANG: Math Clinic – whew-hew! That's what I need. Nobel Education Institute (laughs) Harvard Education Institute

I think I occupy a very special spot in my family and community because I've done well. That would precede me in every place, so if we went to the barber shop or if we went to the supermarket, people knew about that, and thought my parents did something right.

And it wasn't until I think when I went to college, when one of my interviewers for a scholarship asked me, am I happy? Is this what I want to be doing? And I thought to myself, what a strange question.

MOYERS: Strange?

JEAN TANG: Strange in the sense that this was this was my job, this these were the classes I needed to take, these were the grades I needed to get. but in terms of happiness or is this really what you want, you know, that was almost secondary.

MICHELLE LING: My parents spent their entire lives working to fulfill that “model minority” you know vision. That's what they wanted. That's totally what they worked for their entire lives.

MOYERS: “Model Minority”: the term came into vogue in the seventies and eighties, applied to Asian-Americans. It evoked strong families, self-reliance and, more than anything, being “good at school.” It was a stereotype, of course, which many Asians did not, do not fit. Yet/ it was rooted in something real.

MICHELLE LING: My family was the kind of family where it was like, you know, not are you going to coll, going to college, but which college?

MOYERS: Michelle Ling got into U.C.Berkeley in 1988. And consider this: when she was in college, Asians were just three per cent of all Americans. But they were fifteen per cent of students at Harvard, about twenty percent at Stanford and M.I.T, and fully a third of students at Berkeley.

MICHELLE LING: But I do remember seeing a lot of Asian students. Thinking God, there’s a lot of Asians here. [We]...talk about it amongst ourselves all the time. And this is like, white people don’t know about this. But, you know there’s there’s names, there’s FOBs, Fresh-off-the-boat. There’s ABCs, people like me, American Born Chinese, you know, then, then there’s gradations, American Born Chinese there’s twinkies

MOYERS: Twinkies?

MICHELLE LING: ...or eggs.

MOYERS: What are twinkies?

MICHELLE LING: Yellow on the outside, white on the inside. And I guess that’s, that’s the thing that I think a lot most white people don’t know. Is that when you walk around Berkeley and you see that most of the people there, that the most prominent race on that campus is Chinese or Asian, That we don’t all think of ourselves as being the same, and that when I walk across this campus, I feel the same discomfort that you do.

MOYERS:Even though you look alike . . .

MICHELLE LING: Yes. Just because you look the same as George W. Bush and you’re both from Texas, do you, you I mean, are you guys the same?

MOYERS: When Michelle was completing college, in 1990, there were one point six million Chinese in America. And there was no Chinese-American world anymore: there were many.

There were illegal immigrants, trying to slip in undetected in the holds of ships. There were Chinatown laborers, trapped in sweatshops and restaurants, ruthlessly exploited by other

Chinese. There were Chinese who'd come by way of Vietnam, Cambodia, even Cuba. There were political refugees after Tienamen Square. And, on January 20th 1990, there was one elderly man, visa in hand: his wait now over.

BENNY PAN: When I got on the plane and to the United States, the first thing I thought of, why I was so old now. If I would be 40 years ago, that would be wonderful. But that's too late. But, the second thought, "Well, I'm still lucky." A dream comes true. I be in the United States. Step on the place I long for a long, long time. I haven't seen my sister for forty years. And I haven't seen my daughter for ten years.

DEANNA CHAN: He look around the airport. He's so happy. And his tears come out and he said, "Finally, I'm here.."

BENNY PAN: And I said to myself, "I'm free. I can speak freely. I can speak what I want to say So we try our best to find some job to do..

MOYERS: Benny and his wife got hired at Disneyworld, in the China Pavillion, both of them wearing traditional costumes for the entertainment of tourists coming through. But no matter --it was a job.

BENNY PAN: That's my first car is 1990 Dodge Shadow. We went to Daytona Beach, went to Busch Garden -- all by my car. I like driving. Really. Driving is much fun than bicycle. (laughs)

MOYERS: By the nineties, Chinese-American success stories were everywhere -- none more prominent than Jerry Yang's.

JERRY YANG: It still amazes me every day I come into Yahoo where, you know, we started in an office of seventeen hundred square feet. Actually, we really started in the trailer at Stanford University of less than a hundred square feet. And now, you know, we're in a complex of a few million square feet.

MOYERS: For all its booms and busts, the Internet revolution changed America -- -- and the Chinese proved as important to it as to the railroad a century before. A fifth of all the tech startups in Silicon Valley in the 90s were Chinese- or Chinese-American owned. For every Jerry Yang who became famous, there were thousands of Chinese American engineers who labored behind them, anonymously.

It was easy now to see the success, the upward mobility . . . harder to see what it had cost.

Jean Tang graduated from Berkeley in 1995, in the top one per cent of students in her field. She won a full scholarship to Stanford Medical School. She'd more than met her parents'

expectations; from Taiwan to Arcadia, to Berkeley to here – now she could look back at her steps – her family’s steps -- along the way.

JEAN TANG: People talk about what is your gut reaction, what what ah, fills your heart with bliss. That feeling is harder for me to tape into because um, kind of overshadowing that feeling is what is best for my family.

My parents have told me, times are still tough for them because the business didn’t go well and the store closed, but in their hearts they feel like they are successful in their colleagues and peers’ eyes because my brother and I are doing well.

And I used to think comparing my life with friends whose parents are more stand-offish and the unit structure is not the family, the unit structure is the individual. And I’ve always thought like, wow, how refreshing that your parents don’t care so much about what you do. There’s not this neediness to succeed. That your success is not necessarily their success and your failure doesn’t necessarily reflect badly on them. How liberating is that and how how how freeing and how light .. my parents will always live through my my life and my brother’s life. When I was an adolescent I was resentful for it. But over time I’ve realized why not, you know. They’ve invested so much into us that they should reap their rewards.

MOYERS: Michelle Ling’s family was taken aback when, suddenly, she announced she was stepping off the model minority track, after being groomed for it all her life. She didn’t want to be a doctor or lawyer; she wanted to write. She hated to disappoint her parents . . . she had a life to lead.

MICHELLE LING: My family is the most important thing to me absolutely, and my parents’ approval has always been of tantamount importance, whether I like it or not, it has always, I mean to this day, when I think about it, trying to find out if I could make my dad proud of me before he’s you know dead (laughs) is important. It brings me to tears to think that I could be you know not as successful as as he thinks I could be or as perhaps I should be.

MOYERS: “Chinese,” “Chinese-American,” “Model Minority,” “Dutiful daughter” -- all these identities. But when it came to stitching them together, Michelle was like any other American: on her own.

MICHELLE LING: I think that the Chineeesiest thing about me, is that I eat Chicken feet, They’re feet, make no mistake. They look exactly like a chicken foot. The fact of the matter is, they taste good, they’re kind of good. I wouldn’t eat them every day, and I don’t think I have to eat them everyday.

MOYERS: So what does this have to do with the American dream?

MICHELLE LING: That is the American dream, that I get to eat Chinese chicken feet when I want, where I want. But, I can choose not to eat them and I can eat hamburgers if I want. I get to choose whether or not I want to be chineesy or Americanized, or black or white or whatever.

MOYERS: You don't get to choo-

MICHELLE LING: Culturally.

MOYERS: Okay- you don't get to choose your color.

MICHELLE LING: I don't get to choose my color, but I get to choose everything else.

MOYERS: You get to choose your own identity.

MICHELLE LING: Yes. 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 what you are, who you are.

Song: "I left my home and my parents, at the age of 21. In a family of 8 children, I was the youngest son. Little choice was left to me, but to go to a foreign land. Oh who are among the passing of this wondering Chinaman..."

CHARLIE CHIN: Well, I'm a by-product of the old Chinatown, I'm a by-product of a Chinese American community that existed before the 1960s that saw the last of the huaqiu, the old bachelor society. And the new image of Asians, in Americans' eyes in general is startling to me.

Right now they're young, they are upscale. They're taking full advantage of the things that you can have in America if you have the money, if you have the education. So it's wonderful, but for old timers like me there's always this faint little voice in the back of my head saying, "Yes, but never forget to be careful. Never forget to be careful"

MOYERS: Shawn Wong was made head of the English Department at the University of Washington in Seattle, where Chinese-Americans in positions of influence became common. Hard to remember that he, growing up, had just one role model in the public eye, a lone Japanese-American on the California Bears.

One day, Shawn received an unexpected phone call.

SHAWN WONG: There's this voice that says, "This is a voice from your past." And I go, "Who is this?" And the voice says, "This is Pete Damoto." And I said, I'm sitting there, I said, "What?" He goes, "This is Pete Damoto." I said, "Number 60? Left guard?" And he goes, "Yup." And I said, "Wow."/ "Can I get your autograph?" I said, "Why are you calling me?" And it turns out at, which I didn't know, it turns out that he's the chairman of pediatric dentistry at the University of Washington. And when he told me that I remember the first thought that went into my mind was, "Oh, that's too bad. He's a dentist!"

MOYERS: Family drew Benny Pan and his wife to Queens, New York; he settled near one of the rapidly growing new Chinatowns.

BENNY PAN: If I want to be my life the rest in the United States, why should I not be an American citizen? Then I can be as just one of the whole family. Right?

And I became an American citizen. I got in September 17, 1999 after I been here for ten years. I'm sorry that my wife got the same thing as me on the same day. But, after only half year, she pass away. She pass away June 4th, two thousand years. She couldn't have any chance to enjoy to be an American citizen. I'm sorry about that.

But I'm still thinking of, I'm so lucky. I got everything, really.

HELEN ZIA: Toward the end of my father's life, I actually had an occasion to ask him what he thought about his kids a dangerous thing for a grown child to ask a parent, and my father said without hesitation, he said, 'Oh, you're all too American, you know, and that if I were to start all over again, I'd make you be more Chinese.' Being born as an American and being raised in the American culture, there was no turning back.

But I felt that I really should go back to my father's hometown, being in Suzhou really gave me the sense that I was imagining walking where my father had walked. The spirit of, not only my father, but generations before my father that this is where some of my history and imagined memory lies, hundreds of years, before my family became American.

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 still becoming.

BECOMING AMERICAN: THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE
PROGRAM THREE: NO TURNING BACK
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