

CHINESE ETHNIC ENCLAVE IN SAN FRANCISCO

by Elizabeth Kim and Matt Hong



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Introduction

People of Asian descent throughout American history have been otherized and targeted for racial violence. Chinese immigrants were characterized as “filthy” and “perpetually foreign” beginning with the establishment of the Chinese ethnic enclave in San Francisco in the 1800s. These nativist ideologies were perpetuated by the dominant society, resulting in a tradition of exclusionary and hostile policies directed at the Chinese community. The othering of Chinese people in the United States has been tied to their usefulness in the American capitalist system, leading to the rise of Chinese Americans as a model minority. The emergence of COVID-19 led to a resurgence of an American tradition, scapegoating the Chinese people, and the rise of nativist policies.

This essay explores the consequences of systemic, institutional racism for the Chinese ethnic enclave in San Francisco. Part I will examine how Chinese migration was fueled by white America’s capitalist needs and the development of racist stereotypes assigned to Chinese people. Part II will explain the xenophobic policies used to target and restrict the freedoms of the Chinese community and how Chinese people resisted by creating an ethnic enclave in San Francisco. Last, Part III of this essay will analyze the modern effects of historic hostile policies against Chinese people.

Part I - Establishment of the Chinese Community and the Development of Stereotypes

Chinese migration to the United States exploded in the late 1840s during the California Gold Rush due to foreign, colonial influence, economic opportunity, and migratory traditions of the Southern Chinese. The Gold Rush set off a migration of miners from throughout the world to California. The Chinese were singled out for discrimination; their entry was met with socioeconomic othering; the acceptance of the Chinese migrants was limited to their economic usefulness as a source of cheap labor. White American society responded to the growth of the Chinese population with stereotyping, leading to Asian people being coded as a model minority, pitting them against other people of color, and a “yellow peril,” as a foreign and invasive population to dominant white society.

I. Entry

The first Chinese expats to travel to America because of foreign influence and economic opportunity were from the Pearl River Delta, particularly Toisan.[1] An influx of British opium into China following the First Opium War destroyed the Chinese economy.[2] Meanwhile, a series of natural disasters reduced crop viability in Guangdong.[3] Resource scarcity and traditional ethnic divisions led to serial conflict in Southern China.[4] Pearl River Delta and Guangdong residents had a long history of maritime

trade-labor migration was considered an extension of familial work duties.[5] Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta became the main port of exit for prospective Chinese migrants when news of international gold rushes reached Chinese ports in the 1840s.[6] Hong Kong became the unofficial sister city to San Francisco for Chinese migrants, most coming from Toisan and the Pearl River Delta in 1848 when gold was discovered in California.[7]

Most immigrants from the Pearl River Delta came intending to stay temporarily and return home, consistent with customs on work, migration, and familial duty.[8] They were working men who came without their families and lived in temporary housing.[9] Economic need created by western opportunism and the promise of financial gain established a commercially grounded pipeline between the Pearl River Delta and San Francisco. Almost half of California's Chinese immigrant population by 1990 lived in San Francisco.[10] American advancement of this economic relationship and increasing volumes of migration fueled budding hostility against Chinese migrants throughout later years.

II. Nativism and Stereotypes

Nativism arose in the United States through backlashes to different waves of migration.[11] The origins of nativism lie with the Native American Party, better known as The Know Nothing Party that portrayed Catholic migrants as a threat to Anglo-Protestant Americans, who were native to European countries.[12] Nativism is rooted in the antediluvian idea that certain immigrants are unassimilable due to their race, ethnicity, and culture.[13] However, nativist policies and restrictions were often promulgated by working-class whites who feared losing their jobs to immigrants.[14] "The native" is portrayed throughout American history as the inverse of "the other." [15] The other is depicted as barbaric, corrupt, lazy, and Godless, while the native is modern, pure, hardworking, and God-fearing.[16]

As the Chinese population grew in San Francisco, so did nativist resentment giving rise to racist stereotypes. Whites believed that the Chinese population was unassimilable due to their physical characteristics, traditional dress and hairstyles, and their tendency to preserve their cultural practices and language.[17] White society began to characterize Chinese people in the 19th century as "the sneaky Oriental," "the yellow peril," and "the indispensable enemy." [18] Chinese culture was caricatured not only as "primitive and backward, but also as an existential threat to US democratic institutions." [19] These harmful stereotypes were first associated with Chinese immigrants in the 1800s but were soon applied to other Asian-origin groups.[20] Anti-Chinese sentiment appeared to materialize from the fear of economic competition, but the racialization of Chinese people as inferior and unassimilable seemed to affirm the white American identity by justifying exclusion.[21]

The "yellow peril" stereotype soon morphed from a perception of Chinese people as an economic threat to a biological threat.[22] An influx of Chinese immigrants and capitalist exploitation led to white workers accusing the Chinese community of building "a filthy nest of iniquity and rottenness." [23] The Workingman's Party, a white labor-focused organization that gained control of San Francisco's government in the 1870s, claiming that 90% of



California's syphilis cases could be attributed to Chinese women working in the sex trades.[24] Public health officials blamed Chinatown for the intermittent smallpox outbreaks from 1868 through the 1880s.[25] They characterized San Francisco's Chinatown as a place filled with "horrors of percolating waste, teeming bodies, and a polluted atmosphere," accrediting these conditions to the cultural practices of the Chinese residents.[26] These narratives of Chinese people as the source of contagious illness are rooted in nativist racism and used to justify white supremacy and racial exclusion.

III. Racial Triangulation

Chinese residents of California have historically been "lauded as superior to Blacks on cultural-racial grounds." [27] Racial triangulation is demonstrated by the positioning of Chinese people as superior to Black people, yet perpetually foreign and unassimilable into white society.[28] The former U.S. Consul to Japan demonstrated this triangulation during his testimony at the Joint Congressional Hearings on Chinese immigration in 1879 in California: "the Chinese have a great deal more brain power than the original negro.... the negro is very easily taught; he assimilates more readily... The Chinese are non assimilative because their form of civilization has crystallized." [29]

Beginning in the mid-1960s, Asian people "were conditionally accepted as the 'model minority' while simultaneously perceived as 'perpetual foreigners.'" [30] The "model minority" stereotype crystalized during the civil rights movement with the publication of two influential articles in *The New York Magazine* and the *U.S. News & World Report* in 1966.[31] These articles discussed the success of Japanese and Chinese Americans in overcoming discrimination and financial hardship.[32] However, the construction of this "model minority" myth holds Asian-Americans to a different standard, perpetuates the myth that the United States is devoid of racism, and continues to pit Asian Americans against other ethnic groups, particularly Black people. The "perpetual foreigner" stereotype assigned to Asian Americans is particularly prominent for those who live in ethnic enclaves. Those with a preference for retaining their cultural practices find themselves subjected to this stereotype because "[m]aintaining a highly ethnic lifestyle is often misinterpreted as distance from, and resistance to, the mainstream culture." [33] A solid connection to Asian culture has led white society to believe that Asian-Americans are unassimilable.[34]

The United States government instituted discriminatory policies targeting the Chinese community during the mid to late 1800's. Labor restrictions limited the job opportunities available to Chinese and Asian people, restricting their ability to obtain economic independence. Migration policies led to the concentration of Chinese populations in particular areas. Nativist public health policies aimed against the Chinese community fueled scapegoating of the Chinese people. Anti-Chinese social policy established the Chinese as perpetual foreigners, intentionally curtailing their ability to seek redress from the government. Racial resentment broiled in the white community alongside these exclusionary laws. This resentment took the form of hostile, racist violence directed at Chinese people. The Chinese residents could

not rely on the government to protect them, so they created intra-community structures to withstand extra-community hostility.

Part II - Early Discriminatory Policy

I. Labor Restrictions

American lobbyists, fearing competition, pushed for anti-immigrant and anti-Chinese legislation as the Chinese population grew throughout the 1840s and '50s. For example, the California Foreign Miners License Law of 1850 required miners who were not U.S. citizens to pay a \$20 monthly fee.[35] White miners pushed for defensive taxes, limiting Chinese participation in areas with limited space and competition for mining sites. The cost to migrate compounded by economic push factors made mining impractical for the Chinese expats. The taxes forced the Chinese to pursue less lucrative work, particularly in the labor and service industries, leading to their increased presence in industries like laundry, farming, fishing, and mining as hired migrant laborers.

The Chinese likely entered industries where their pre-migratory skills could be utilized if and when mining became impractical, e.g., as fishermen, merchants, and service providers. The California legislature enacted more taxes to limit Chinese presence in areas where pre-migratory skills could be used. For example, the Chinese Fisherman's tax of 1860, which charged \$4 monthly for Chinese fishers, limited Chinese limited the Chinese people's economic foothold in established industries.[36] Moreover, the California legislature enacted a law explicitly banning the Chinese from participating in industries such as fishing.[37] Congress in 1862 passed the Anti-Coolie Act,[38] which charged \$2.50 for all "Mongolian races" who were not paying mining taxes or engaged in industries affected by anti-Chinese taxes. The Anti-Coolie act also taxed employers who hired Asian people. The value of Chinese labor was artificially devalued by labor taxes. Collectively, this series of taxes limited Chinese revenue sources and their ability to establish economic independence.

II. Migration Policies and Restrictions

If Chinese people chose to leave the city to pursue work outside of the anti-Chinese taxing scheme, they then faced additional taxes. For example, the Capitation Tax of 1855 charged \$50 per person ineligible for citizenship aboard any vessel.[39] Taxing Chinese migration in America incentivized the Chinese people to remain close to their port of entry, contributing to the congestion of entry ports and the development of Chinese communities close to San Francisco. The tax encouraged employers, such as the railroad industry, to sponsor the movement of those who chose to move.

The United States government recognized that a workforce of Chinese men, willing to work for cheap, was growing and sought to take advantage of it. The United States initially encouraged Chinese migration, inflating the Chinese population in San Francisco to support capitalist interests through a steady flow of low-cost Chinese labor.[40] The Burlingame Treaty of 1869[41] was initially conceived to empower the United States to wield greater influence in the East and foster Christianity's spread in

Asia, and Westernize China. The treaty allowed Chinese people to immigrate freely, travel within the United States and established greater protection in accordance with the favored-nation principle.[42] This treaty reinforced U.S. trade interests with China and Chinese people's dependency on capitalist needs to exist in America.

However, nativist legislation made it impossible for the Chinese to establish a presence in existing industries. Those who wanted to leave the living conditions and competition of urban life were forced to accept lower wages. Employers would have greater bargaining power, given the depressed wages and the number of Chinese laborers willing to accept existing work opportunities. The cost of mobility and access to intra-Chinese support networks resulted in Chinese congregation in San Francisco, guaranteeing employers an ample supply of replaceable workers. The growing Chinese presence fueled anti-Chinese sentiment by the 1870's, resulting in even more restrictive anti-Chinese laws. Disease outbreaks in urban areas occurred from the late 1870s onwards.[43] The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 created an influx of more Chinese workers into San Francisco from their previously rural jobs.[44] These factors led the Chinese to be coded as harmful and separate from white society, socially, linguistically, politically, and economically. Anti-Chinese sentiment led to the scapegoating of the Chinese community.

III. Health Policy

The Chinese residents of San Francisco were used during the late 1800's and early 1900's as a scapegoat for disease.[45] Stereotypes of Chinese people as a source of contagious illness fueled anti-Chinese public health policy during outbreaks of disease in San Francisco.[46] The



federal government began to fear in 1896 that Chinese immigrants would bring disease to the West Coast. Hence, the Surgeon General ordered quarantine stations to disinfect the bags of all Chinese people entering the United States.[47] The residents of Chinatown were viewed as filthy and "deemed a continual source of contagion and disease potentially afflicting whites in San Francisco." [48] The body of a Chinese man was discovered in Chinatown in March of 1900.[49] He was quickly diagnosed with the Bubonic Plague.[50] San Francisco's Board of Health moved to quarantine all of Chinatown, allowing only white residents to leave the area and no one to enter.[51] White people already saw Chinatown as a place of disease and contamination, so the death of this Chinese man led to

hysteria fueled by racism and xenophobia.[52] The Surgeon General attempted to require all Chinese residents of San Francisco to be inoculated with an experimental vaccine.[53] He received authorization from the Secretary of Treasury "to forbid the sale or donation of transportation by common carrier to Asiatics or other races particularly liable" to the bubonic plague.[54]

These blatantly racist, discriminatory orders produced protest in the Chinese community, but this protest was divided along class lines. The Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association was composed of gentry scholars from China and the commercial elite who had made fortunes in California; they were responsible for coordinating political responses to discriminatory laws targeting Chinese residents in San Francisco.[55] The CCBA sought a quick resolution to end the health crisis; they were willing to cooperate with public health authorities.[56] The leadership advised the Chinese residents "not to argue with the health officers" and to put an end to their protest.[57] This direction only fed into the widespread belief that the Chinese leadership sided with white authorities over their community.[58] However, Chinese laborers and merchants opposed the orders from public health officials; they organized a large protest in front of the offices of the CCBA.[59] The large crowd gathered outside the offices surprised the CCBA.[60] One leader promised to pursue legal action in an attempt to disperse the protest.[61] A larger crowd returned the next day; some entered the association offices demanding immediate action.[62]



The CCBA in response to significant pressure filed suit on behalf of the Chinese community in San Francisco against the San Francisco Board of Health and the federal quarantine officials.[63] The challenges to public health officials by the Chinese community caused politicians to rethink their racist belief that Chinese people were docile and offered unquestionable obedience to authority.[64] A California District Court ruled in *Wong Wai v. Williamson*, in favor of the plaintiffs and issued an injunction against the federal officials on the grounds that their orders violated the Fourteenth Amendment.[65] However, the ruling had no effect; San Francisco's Board of Health quarantined all of Chinatown.[66]

IV. Social Policy and White Hostility

Anti-Chinese sentiment grew as Chinese people continued to migrate, challenging the establishment of white settlers. The California Supreme Court in *People v. Hall* in 1854 ruled that Chinese people are inferior, cannot

claim citizenship, and cannot participate in government administration.[67] This case barred three Chinese witnesses from testifying against a white man who killed another Chinese person.[68] This decision further established that all Chinese people, alongside Native and African Americans, lacked the status required to testify against white Americans in court.[69] The California Supreme Court solidified Chinese people's status as perpetual foreigners in the eyes of the law. Chinese people could not pursue claims against white violence, leading to reliance on independent policing systems. The Chinese grew to distrust dominant society from this and similar acts of racism in the law. They began to create a separate social scape in response to hostility by white citizens and governmental forces.

The growing presence of Chinese labor led to growing, grassroots hostility against the Chinese people. The Workingman's party, a lobbying group, focused on anti-Chinese policy and protecting the interests of white workers under the slogan "The Chinese must go,"[70] which coincided with riots targeting Chinese communities and sponsored increasingly anti-Chinese legislation.[71] The riots included, but were not limited to, the Denver Riots, Spring Rocks Riots, Los Angeles Riots, and the destruction of Sacramento's Chinatown.[72] The 1877 San Francisco riot killed several Chinese people and destroyed about \$100,000 worth of Chinese property and businesses.[73] The local police as part of the response, deputized citizens to quell the rioters. Ultimately, gangs of white workingmen razed pre-marked Chinese businesses with police approval, marking the beginning of hostile policing practices targeting the Chinese people.[74]

White laypeople's efforts also led to increasingly severe, anti-Chinese legislation. The Cubic Air Ordinance of 1870 prohibited renting rooms with less than 500 cubic feet of air per person.[75] Chinese occupied housing in San Francisco was generally designed for single resident occupancy, in accordance with their intentions to stay temporarily.[76] The Sidewalk Ordinance of 1873 prohibited carrying loads on poles on sidewalks, and the Queue Ordinance of 1873 required all Chinese prisoners to cut their hair to one inch.[77] These laws reflect the particularity of anti-Chinese sentiment among more general nativist sentiment of the 1870s. Nativist groups like the Workingman's party reflected a growing cultural hostility against the Chinese people by targeting cultural practices and ways of living inherent to the Chinese community in America. Moreover, these laws reflect how increasing racism in the social sphere permeated policy to create increasingly targeted, racist policy.

Lobbyists pushed for increasingly stringent laws against Chinese labor and establishment beyond attacking social practices. The Laundry Ordinance of 1873 required laundries to pay up to \$15 in taxes per load transported.[78] Harsher laws and taxes, for businesses where Chinese labor was still dominant such as laundries, choked the establishment of the Chinese community. California's Second Constitution in 1879 granted the legislature authority to "protect state, counties, and cities from undesirable aliens" by forbidding corporations to hire Chinese.[79] The Chinese were forbidden to work on public works, and the Legislature was given the authority to remove foreigners outside city limits.[80] These laws effectively made Chinese jobs and living spaces dependent

on dominant society's permission.[81] Successful passing of anti-Chinese legislation and growing anti-Chinese sentiment likely created social precedent for increasingly hostile legislation.

Hostile social policy from the 1870s rapidly influenced political and legal policy against Chinese people. The Burlingame-Seward treaty in 1880, was revised to match growing anti-Chinese sentiments. Restrictions came to a head with the Federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the only immigration law in United States history to explicitly ban immigration of a named race. Xenophobic fears from white working-class laborers about competition for jobs and the possibility of decreased wages fueled the Chinese Exclusion Act.[82] White laborers feared a "Chinese invasion" which harmful rhetoric was proliferated in the media, causing this belief to spread.[83] Immigration restrictions stagnated the flow of immigrants from the Pearl River Delta and catalyzed the development of robust Chinese support networks, separate from white society.



V. Community Response to Hostility

The Chinese organized intra-community structures to provide support such as jobs, loans, and physical protection in response to external hostility.[84] Two structures dominated Chinese-American society by the 1850's: the *Huiguan*, an association which limited membership by dialect, pre-migration origin, or ethnic and clan affiliation; and the *Tong*, fraternal organizations composed of members of different clans and districts, based on mutual aid and protection.[85] Both systems were primarily focused on helping migrants adjust to American society.[86] However, illegal activity was sponsored among some *Tongs*. [87] Activities considered illegal to Americans were not considered illegal to the Chinese.[88] In the face of white hostility, many turned to *Tong*-sponsored, illegal activity to find employment.[89] While some *Tongs* engaged in unlawful activity, it was not common as *Tongs* served more as social clubs.[90]

The *Huiguans* and *Tongs* gained significant power after

the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Both organizations possessed the funds necessary to sponsor Chinese migration and the social standing to vet Chinese laborers to non-Chinese society.[91] Associations of intra-community structures, particularly the Chinese Six Companies, essentially represented all Chinese society to outside groups because they supported and represented such a large portion of the community.[92] The Huiguans



and Tongs did not primarily influence dominant society because they regulated matters internal to the Chinese community.[93]

San Francisco established the “Chinatown Gang” to combat what white society saw as a rise of criminality caused by Chinese Tongs.[94] This gang of vigilantes, endorsed by the San Francisco mayor, entered Chinese homes and businesses to destroy property under the pretext of policing.[95] The gang ultimately aimed to disrupt Chinese industry and spread Christianity within the community.[96] The policing by the Chinatown Gang was largely ineffective because by then, Chinatown had largely been insulated by outside influence due to the protection and peacekeeping regulated by the Huiguan and Tongs.

The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 abolished immigration quotas based on national origin as part of the growing civil rights movement and calls for immigration reform.[97] This act effectively dismantled the Chinese Exclusion Act, increasing immigration from Hong Kong and mainland China. Chinatowns were unprepared in San Francisco, and other parts of the United States, to accommodate the large group of “new stock” immigrants.[98] Established communities rejected new immigrants out of fear of competition for already limited opportunities, ethnic differences, and overcrowding.[99] Thus, the new wave Chinese immigrants often moved to the outskirts of Chinatown, encroaching on white neighborhoods and renewing violence from the white community. Calvin Toy attributes the 1960s’ culture of community empowerment and lobbying to the development of “new youth” gangs among the new Chinese communities.[100] Existing Tong gangs would clash with new youth gangs, leading to the San Francisco Tong Wars when lobbying and petitions to the Tongs proved ineffective.[101] This violence ultimately led to the 1977 Golden Dragon Massacre.[102] Policing systems outside Chinatown could no longer avoid the violence after the massacre. White citizens were involved in the shooting,[103] leading to the revival of the previously defunct “Chinatown Gang” to crackdown on Tong and Chinese gang activity.[104] The rebirth of the “Chinatown Gang” marks the introduction of racialized policing in San Francisco. The Gang Task Force still exists and has expanded to create specialized Latin and Black community-focused sections.[105]

Part III - Modern Effects of Historic Hostile Policy

Chinatown residents experienced this year, the birth of a new civil rights movement. People took to the streets to protest against police brutality and were also exposed to a deadly pandemic and harmful racial stereotypes. Chinatown residents experience lower wages and higher rates of poverty than San Francisco as a whole, their social and cultural institutions have allowed for less preventable health-related deaths. However, the perpetuation of anti-Chinese stereotypes and nativist beliefs fuel racial violence against Asian Americans. Historical themes of nativism and scapegoating continue to ravage the Chinese community in San Francisco. This community was particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic because of archaic institutional structures which have persisted since the arrival of Chinese people in the United

States.

I. Chinatown's Population and Economic Conditions

San Francisco's Chinatown has a population of 14,600 people, 80% of which are Asian.[106] Asian people make up about 34% of San Francisco's population.[107] Asians are one of the smallest minority groups, making up less than 6% of the total population.[108] Of that 6%, about 15% are mixed-race, 60% (or 7.2 million) are first-generation American, 25% are second-generation American, and only 15% are third-generation.[109] 16.7 million Asian-Americans are in the United States, of which Chinese-Americans are the oldest and largest Asian-origin group, accounting for 3.7 million in the United States.[110]

While Asian Americans are one of the smallest ethnic groups in the United States, they have the largest median family income, reported as \$78,000 in 2009, and one of the lowest family poverty rates, at 9%, second only to white families at 7%.[111] However, these statistics do not accurately represent the economic conditions experienced by the Chinese residents of San Francisco. For example, Chinatown has one of the lowest median incomes in San Francisco at \$19,950 compared to \$78,710 for San Francisco overall.[112] Additionally, the poverty rate in Chinatown (28%) is more than double San Francisco's overall rate (13%).[113]

Currently, Chinatown's economy relies heavily on the food industry, which makes up 59% of all retail sales in the area.[114] The Chinese population has decreased in the last decade due to gentrification, causing retail sales to fall.[115] The average income of the Asian population in the United States has significantly increased; however, the Chinese labor community in San Francisco is still subject to lower wages and hazardous conditions.[116] The Chinese Progressive Association in 2010 surveyed restaurant workers in Chinatown, finding that half experience wage theft costing these workers an estimated \$8 million a year in lost wages.[117] This study found that 40% of these workers do not receive any breaks, 42% work over 40 hours a week, and 48% have been injured while working.[118] Additionally, 95% of the workers surveyed reported that they did not earn enough to support a family of four.[119]

San Francisco's Chinatown recently experienced a decrease in family households leading to an increase in white residents. Between 1990 and 2013, "the share of Asian households in the neighborhood decreased by 11 percentage points between 1990 and 2013, corresponding with a growth of 5 percentage points in the share of white households." [120] Rising housing costs in San Francisco have led to a decline in family households and an increase in single-occupancy residences (SROs).[121] The number of families living in SROs in San Francisco from 2001 to 2014 increased by 55%, the vast majority (74%) of these families live in Chinatown.[122] The decline of family households in Chinatown and changes in the population's racial composition is associated with gentrification.[123]

Chinatown residents, despite these economic challenges, experience fewer preventable hospitalizations due to chronic health conditions than the population of San Francisco as a whole.[124] The factors allowing for better health conditions in Chinatown include strong cultural and social institutions, inexpensive places to buy

healthy foods, and relatively low-cost housing.[125]

II. Perpetuation of Anti-Chinese Stereotypes and Hate Crimes

The racialization of contagious diseases in the 1800s grew from stereotypes of Chinese people, which were energized by nativism.[126] Still, the perpetuation of these stereotypes continues to color how Chinese Americans are treated when diseases crop up.[127] The United States government instituted discriminatory policies in 1900 targeting Chinese residents in San Francisco's Chinatown during a small outbreak of the bubonic plague. Currently, Chinese Americans face racism fueled by government action due to an outbreak of disease, this time in the form of violence and hate crimes directed at Asian people. San Francisco saw a 50% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes in 2020.[128] Hate crimes against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic are manifestations of historical otherization, nativism, and xenophobia, entrenched in American culture.[129]



According to the *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, recent hate crimes against Asian Americans "increased in response to the xenophobic language used by public officials." [130] Between March 16-18, 2020, President Donald Trump referred to COVID-19 in various tweets as the "Chinese virus" and the "China virus" illustrating his views on who was responsible for this pandemic.[131] Hate crimes against Asian Americans surged before President Trump uttered these remarks; between January 28, 2020 and February 24, 2020, the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council reported over one thousand incidents of racism and xenophobia directed at Asian-Americans.[132] They increased more following the President's



statements.[133]

After the President's bigoted statements, other political officials also used derogatory language to describe the virus and blame the Chinese and their culture for its outbreak. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo began referring to the virus as the "Wuhan virus" and an unnamed staffer used the term "kung flu." [134] Senator John Cornyn of Texas stated that China was at fault for the spread of COVID-19 because they are a "culture where people eat bats and snakes and dogs and things like that." [135] Senator Cornyn's 2020 statement is reminiscent of the statement made by public health officials in the late 1800s [136] when they blamed the cultural practices of the residents of Chinatown for the resurgence of smallpox. Furthermore, the use of racialized terms like "Chinese virus" and "kung flu" equates the cause of the virus with Chinese bodies and is used by racists to justify violence towards Asian people. [137]

The incessant otherization of Chinese Americans by public officials fosters the occurrence of hate incidents. President Trump on April 17, 2020 criticized House Speaker Nancy Pelosi for making a trip to San Francisco's Chinatown in support of Asian American owned businesses, declaring that he had already "closed the BORDER TO CHINA." [138] President Trump's conflation of San Francisco residents and Chinese foreign nationals illustrates and reinforces the stereotype of Asian Americans as foreign, cultivating an environment where hate crimes are not seen as anti-American but as patriotic.

III. Public Safety and Chinese Community

Public safety in San Francisco's Chinatown is a divisive issue. [139] The police are welcome, particularly among seniors and local merchants. Some residents have hired private security guards to protect themselves from racial violence. [140] However, other residents in Chinatown are opposed to an increase in police presence and have set up community-based violence prevention programs. [141] Forrest Liu, of San Francisco, founded the Chinatown Safety Patrol after hearing about the murder of Vicha Ratanapakdee, an 84-year-old Thai man who was shoved to the ground on his morning walk in January of 2021. [142] The Chinese Progressive Association of San Francisco is worried about how the increased police presence will affect Black residents; it is currently trying to bridge the gap between Asian and Black residents by giving them a forum to share their experiences with racial and police violence. [143]

Hate crimes against Asian Americans are historically underreported, with less than half (47.6%) of victims reporting the incident to police. [144] Particularly among recent immigrants, the hesitancy to report hate crimes can be attributed to "language barriers, cultural norms, unfamiliarity with ignorance of the American legal system, mistrust of the police from adverse experiences in the United States or in their country of origin, or general skepticism about the efficacy of legal recourse." [145] Non-English speakers are particularly isolated in Chinatown due to the police department's lack of bilingual officers. [146] 84% of Chinatown residents do not speak English at home, but the Central Police Station only has 12 officers of Chinese descent and only 8 Cantonese-certified bilingual officers. [147] The *International Journal of Police Strategies and Management* reported that over 68% of

Chinese immigrants in San Francisco experienced a communication barrier during interactions with the police and 95% said that there were not enough bilingual police officers in the city. [148] Language barriers are not the only communications problem. Chinese immigrants in San Francisco are generally distrustful of the police, with less than one-third agreeing that police were effective in handling crime, and only 36% expressing satisfaction with police in the city. [149] Very few immigrants are satisfied with the police, but most reported feeling neutral (over 50%). [150] This same study found that the longer these immigrants resided in the United States, the less favorably they rated police. [151]

Racial bias amongst the San Francisco police has fostered distrust in the Asian community. The San Francisco Police Department had only four categories to identify the race of arrestees until 2012: Black, white, Chinese, and other. [152] These categories led to nearly all Asians who were arrested being categorized as Chinese, making it difficult for community leaders to know where to focus their resources. [153] This classification system contributed to the model minority myth that most Asian groups do not commit crimes. [154] However, San Francisco police data from 2016 shows that Asian drivers were more likely to be cited than white drivers. [155]

Conclusion

Economic opportunities and capitalist demands drew Chinese people to San Francisco. They have established a vibrant community in the past 170 years despite incredible opposition from white society. This community has historically been targeted through nativist laws restricting their labor, movement, health, and social standing. These discriminatory policies incited and perpetuated racial violence against members of the Chinese community. The effects of these exclusionary policies are still felt in San Francisco's Chinatown. Economic conditions continue to worsen for the Chinese residents of San Francisco, and the community continues to shrink due to gentrification. Furthermore, in 2020, Asian Americans experienced a resurgence of hate crimes because of how public officials have framed the cause of COVID-19, but the community is still divided on whether they can trust the police to protect them due to racist policing practices. The path forward is unclear, but history has indicated that this ethnic enclave will fight to protect itself through its social and cultural institutions, community organization, and political action.

[1] Anne Mendelson, Chow Chop Suey: Food and the Chinese American Journey 17, 20 (2016).

[2] *Id.* at 15.

[3] *Id.*

[4] *Id.*

[5] Henry Yu, Unbound Space: Migration, Aspiration, and the Making of Time in the Cantonese Pacific 8, 7 (2018).

[6] Mendelson, *supra* note 1, at 17–18.

[7] *Id.* at 20–21.

[8] *Id.* at 17.

- [9]Nicole Montojo, Ctr. for Cmty. Innovation, Chinatown: Community Organizing Amidst Change in SF's Chinatown 2 (2015).
- [10]Lorelei Lee, *The Roots of "Modern Day Slavery": The Page Act and the Mann Act*, 52 Colum. Hum. Rts. L. Rev. 1199, 1217 (2021).
- [11]Uri Friedman, *What is a Nativist? And is Donald Trump one?*, The Atlantic (Apr. 11, 2017), <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/04/what-is-nativist-trump/521355/>.
- [12]*Id.*
- [13]Julia G. Young, *Making America 1920 Again? Nativism and US Immigration, Past and Present*, 5 Journal on Migration and Human Security 217, 219 (2017).
- [14]*Id.* at 219–20.
- [15]Friedman, *supra* note 11, at 12.
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