

# MULES AND Dragons

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*Popular Culture Images in the Selected  
Writings of African-American and  
Chinese-American Women Writers*

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MARY E. YOUNG

*Contributions in Women's Studies, Number 136*



GREENWOOD PRESS  
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藏书章

MARY E. YOUNG

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## Preface

The motivation to tackle this topic was the realization that most stereotypes of women of color are inaccurate as well as malicious. As an African-American woman who has lived, worked, and traveled in East Asia, I have found that the stereotypes are far from reality. Therefore, the intent of this study has been to compare and to contrast not only the histories of two groups, African-American women and Chinese-American women, but also each group's response to the stereotyped images that have become part of American cultural history.

These two groups were chosen rather than other groups of women because of the similarities between them. Both groups were at one time denied United States citizenship, and both had popular culture images that branded them as immoral. This unique stereotyping of African-American women and Chinese-American women as immoral has set them apart from other groups of women. Native American women, Hispanic women, and Jewish women have also been stereotyped, but none of the stereotypes of these women has been as persistent, pervasive, or pernicious as the stereotypes of African-American and Chinese-American women.

In their writings, I was seeking an artistic expression of these two groups' experiences in the United States, principally responses to the stereotypes. However, in choosing authors to study, I was limited by the writings available. As a result, the African-American writers explored here reflect my personal tastes since few fail to mention the effect of the stereotypes that arose from a racist society had on their group. However,

Chinese-American women writers have not published as long or as consistently as African-American women.

Finally, some acknowledgments are important. Barbara Hampton took a rather rambling manuscript and gave it structure and organization. Darren Floyd, my research assistant, discovered important, interesting, and relevant data, Gerald Home was always available with encouragement and advice, and the College of Wooster gave me much-needed financial support for the final revisions. I willingly take responsibility for any factual errors or overstatements that remain.

## Chapter One

### "John Chinaman" as "Sambo"

Most Americans would claim at least a superficial knowledge of African-American history, which would undoubtedly include slavery and Emancipation. But since little Asian-American history is taught, most Americans would not acknowledge holding cursory information about Chinese-Americans. African-American women authors from Linda Brent to Alice Walker have confronted their history by acknowledging it, incorporating certain aspects into their writing, and challenging the assumptions that have arisen from it. But the history of Chinese-Americans is seldom included in the writings of Chinese-American women, although their history and images are intertwined with those of African-Americans. A study of these writings demonstrates the development of a mythic Chinese past rather than an American reality.

On July 13, 1869, approximately six years after Emancipation, a group of Southern planters met in Memphis<sup>1</sup> to explore possible solutions to their labor problem and, concomitantly, their problem with the freedman. The recently freed slaves were voting, running for and being elected to office, demanding equal pay for work, and no longer limiting themselves to agricultural work. The Southern planters were meeting to consider putting a plan into action that would return the now-unmanageable freedman into his former enslaved position. The planters had considered introducing another racial group to do the work formerly done by the ex-slaves, probably eastern or southern Europeans, but this plan did not receive sufficient support. In the end, the planters finally approved a scheme "aimed at preserving the traditional Southern labor system by substituting

里如解  
后,南方  
切问题  
以劳动力  
问题



Chinese hands"<sup>2</sup> for the ex-slaves. With their reputation as industrious and hard working, the Chinese would be used to teach the ex-slaves the work skills that African-Americans were purportedly lacking. If the plan had worked, the planters would have had two groups from which to choose workers to perform labor formerly only done by one—African slaves.

Many Chinese laborers had completed work on the Trans-Continental Railroad and were available for recruitment into the South. The Chinese Labor Convention, as the Memphis convention came to be called, finally agreed to import Chinese "coolie"<sup>3</sup> labor either from California or directly from China into the South, although many Chinese came from Cuba, Peru, or other parts of Central and South America. There was a certain logic associated with the plan. Wherever slavery had been abolished, Chinese "coolie" labor followed. "The great outward movement of coolie labor that followed in the years 1845 to 1877 was a direct consequence of the discontinuance of slavery in the British Empire."<sup>4</sup> In 1833 Great Britain abolished slavery, and in 1838 slavery was abolished in the West Indies. Each instance of the abolition of African slavery in the British Empire or the Spanish Empire was followed by an outward flow of Chinese labor. A similar movement of Chinese labor following the abolition of African slavery is also observable in the Spanish colonies. The abolition of African slavery in Colombia (1851), Venezuela (1854), Ecuador (1852), and Chile (1823) was followed by small groups of Chinese laborers, but large contingents of Chinese arrived in Peru (1851), Cuba (1886), and Mexico (1828). Chinese arrived in Mexico in such numbers that the Mexican traditional dress is referred to as *La China Poblana*, the Chinese Pueblan girl.

However, although the convention expected to import thousands of Chinese, "only a trickle of Chinese found their way into the South."<sup>5</sup> Those Chinese who did come performed traditional slave labor. They worked in the cotton, cane, rice, and sugar fields. The plan failed for any number of reasons "even with the added inducement of 1/2 lb. of opium monthly"<sup>6</sup> in addition to the regular wages. The probable reason was that the traditional inhumane treatment of the slaves was expanded to encompass the Chinese. Many of the Chinese failed to live up to the terms of their contracts as indentured workers; unlike slaves, they felt free to leave at any opportune time.

When they broke their contracts, many of the Chinese returned to the work that they had previously performed—building railroads. They worked on portions of the Alabama and Chattanooga Railroad and the Houston and Texas Railroad. After they had completed their work on the railroad, many remained in the South. Entering a biracial society com-

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部帶來  
華人移民  
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募華工  
失敗

華人重新  
回到  
修鐵路

posed of African-Americans and Euro-Americans, the Chinese were automatically designated "colored."<sup>7</sup>

In Mississippi the Chinese who remained after the completion of their contracts or after breaking their contracts were "considered . . . to be of roughly Negro status and [were] barred . . . from white schools, organizations, and other social interaction."<sup>8</sup> As "colored" people, the Chinese had to adhere to a Jim Crow system that now became a tripartite structure to accommodate the Chinese. Many Mississippi communities maintained separate schools and cemeteries for the Chinese, in addition to those maintained for African-Americans. Those Chinese who could find no other employment opened small grocery stores that serviced African-American areas, frequently living over their stores or behind them. Because laws prevented the immigration of Chinese women or cohabitation with Euro-American women,<sup>9</sup> Chinese men were assumed to be celibate. However, many of them did establish relations with African-American women.<sup>10</sup> These relations produced offspring who were referred to by the dominant society as Chinese Negroes.<sup>11</sup> This cohabitation with African-American women and their subsequent children reinforced their "colored" designation.

Many Chinese did not accept their classification as "colored" for several reasons. A "colored" designation would force their children to attend African-American schools, which they considered inferior.<sup>12</sup> Neither did they "wish to be assimilated or amalgamated into the black culture or race."<sup>13</sup> Somehow the Chinese had to be recognized as a group distinctly different from African-Americans. One of the means available to change their racial status was the use of the legal system. In 1924 Gong Lum sued the state of Mississippi, demanding that his daughter be allowed to attend the Euro-American school rather than the African-American school to which she had been assigned. His argument that "the white race creates for itself a privilege that it denies to other races; exposes the children of other races to the risks and dangers to which it would not expose its own children"<sup>14</sup> was rejected by the state supreme court. The court asserted that Chinese "are not 'white' and must fall under the heading 'colored' races."<sup>15</sup>

Unable to continue to accept their classification as "colored," the Mississippi Chinese sought other means of improving their situation. Representatives of the Chinese community approached the Euro-American majority to find possible solutions to their problems.<sup>16</sup> Among several suggestions that the Euro-Americans offered were that the Chinese convert to Christianity, make financial contributions to Euro-American organizations, disassociate themselves from the African-American community, and establish no liaisons with Euro-American women.<sup>17</sup> The Chinese agreed

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and ostracized those members of the community who refused to abandon their African-American families.<sup>18</sup> The accommodations made by the Chinese were based on what they perceived as Euro-American cultural objectives and a desire to alter their image to become more acceptable to Euro-Americans.<sup>19</sup> After complying with the suggested changes, Loewen writes in *The Mississippi Chinese*, the Chinese "became white" with the addition of the "W" in the appropriate blank on their driver's license.<sup>20</sup> To demonstrate their allegiance and adherence to Euro-American standards, "in the presence of whites, they . . . would joke about blacks, telling whites of the Cantonese derogatory term for 'nigger.'" <sup>21</sup>

In areas where the Chinese population was small, the change of race, and thus social status, for the Chinese was not rare. The Chinese as second-class white citizens were becoming more acceptable within some Euro-American communities. "In the Midwest and Southern states . . . the Chinese are classified as 'white.'" <sup>22</sup> But for those Chinese who lived on the West Coast, particularly California, the situation was quite different.

Establishing similarities between the Chinese and African-Americans had begun before the Chinese arrived in California following the gold rush of 1849. British writer Sir John Barrow in *Travels in China* (1803) noted several physical similarities between Chinese and Hottentots.<sup>23</sup> Barrow cited physical similarities as well as voice, manner of speaking, temperament, and mental qualities.<sup>24</sup> Other writers traveling in Africa and Asia mentioned similar qualities.<sup>25</sup> In the United States, Hinton Helper in *Land of Gold* (1855) equated the immigration of the Chinese to the West Coast with the existence of African-Americans in the South and East. "Helper's comparison between the two groups prefigured a stereotyping process: the Chinese were associated with Blacks in the racial imagination of Euro-American society."<sup>26</sup> Thus, the "negroization" of the Chinese was initiated, although the process was very carefully fabricated. Apparently every stereotype that was used against African-Americans was now used against the Chinese, beginning with the image of slave.

After 1865 the activities of the "coolie" trade came under more careful scrutiny. Among the many comparisons of the African slave trade to the "coolie" trade was the image of the "Middle Passage" (for slaves, the trip across the Atlantic) in the Chinese voyage to the United States. Stuart Creighton Miller writes in *The Unwelcome Immigrant* that "descriptions of coolies suffocating in cramped quarters on 'slave decks,' being burned to death or drowned in nautical catastrophes, and committing suicide or staging desperate and bloody mutinies conjured up all the horrors of the old 'middle passage.'" <sup>27</sup>

By the 1870s the subject of continuing, limiting, or prohibiting Chinese immigration had become a national issue. "In the congressional debates over Chinese immigration . . . the issue of slavery was preeminent."<sup>28</sup> During these debates, Chinese immigration was frequently alluded to as a modern slave trade system. According to these exchanges, the Chinese were not voluntary immigrants but were captured and assembled in China and sold in various ports in the Western Hemisphere. C. E. De Long, a former ambassador to Japan, speaking for an enlightened majority, said, "These coolies are more absolute slaves than ever the negroes [sic] of the South were."<sup>29</sup>

The analogy of the Chinese to African slaves was widespread throughout the United States. The Chinese worked in labor gangs, which reminded many Americans of African slave gangs, which in turn reinforced the image of slavery.<sup>30</sup> But they were not to be completely confused with the African slaves because at the time slavery was illegal. However, the Chinese had been recruited into a "slavery not of law but of condition and custom."<sup>31</sup> Terry Boswell, writing in *The American Sociological Review*, has alleged that even the "low-cost Chinese labor was considered a type of slavery. Chinese immigrants were accused of being slaves to gang bosses, to capitalists, and even to the Emperor of China."<sup>32</sup>

The year 1877 was a critical juncture in both anti-Chinese legislation and anti-African-American legislation. After his election to the presidency in 1877 to the presidency, Rutherford B. Hayes induced Congress to allow individual states to solve the "Negro Problem." To assist the South in finding its own solutions, federal troops were withdrawn. Now the South could deal with African-Americans on its own terms without fear of federal intervention or reprisals. The restriction and persecution of the Chinese was extensively related to the restriction and persecution of African-Americans.

Before the Civil War many Southerners had moved to California with their slaves. Along with their slaves they brought their racist attitudes. "California was made a white man's state by the Constitution of 1849. Article 2, section 1 dealing with citizenship begins with these words 'Every white male citizen,' and the Constitution of 1879 reiterated this, strengthening it by specially mentioning Mongolians as ineligible to citizenship."<sup>33</sup> There were many Southerners in California in addition to those Southern Democrats who dominated its politics, rendering anyone who was not of European heritage suspect. The abrogation of civil rights on the national level was the result of Democrats' and Republicans' attempting to pacify California by concurring on the Chinese question. So the Naturalization Act of 1870 gave citizenship rights to African-Ameri-

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cans but not to the Chinese. The act specified that only "free whites" and "African aliens" were eligible for naturalization. This was not an arguable point since the question of Chinese racial identity had been established as early as 1854 when Chan Young unsuccessfully applied for citizenship. Chan's application was refused because he was not "free white" or an "African alien."

Additional legislation was enacted to oppress and circumscribe further the Chinese in the United States just as the law had been used in the isolation and oppression of African-Americans. Many of these laws intended to draw the Chinese into the Jim Crow system. The law that confirmed the "negroization" of the Chinese was *People v. Hall* in 1854. An earlier California statute had stated that "no black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of, or against, any white person."<sup>34</sup> The question in *People v. Hall* was whether these restrictions included the Chinese. The U.S. Supreme Court reversed Hall's conviction, which relied heavily on the testimony of Chinese witnesses, declaring that the words "Indian, Negro, Black, and White were generic terms, designating races, and that therefore Chinese and other people not white could not testify against whites."<sup>35</sup> According to Dan Caldwell, this ruling gave the Chinese the same status as Native Americans and African-Americans so that "for all legal purposes the Chinese had become a Negro."<sup>36</sup> Even before the legal machinery had been set in motion to equate the Chinese with African-Americans, Chinese migrants discovered that stereotypical racial characteristics that had been assigned to African-Americans rapidly developed into Chinese characteristics. Ronald Takaki, author of *Strangers from a Different Shore*, the first inclusive history of Asian-Americans, asserts that "white workers referred to the Chinese as 'nagurs,'"<sup>37</sup> and a cartoon included in Dan Caldwell's "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California" depicts the Chinese as vampires with black skin, slanted eyes, and thick lips.<sup>38</sup> Like African-Americans, the Chinese were described in the media as well as in popular fiction as pagan, morally inferior, barbaric, childlike, and wanton. The Chinese were considered alternatives or substitutes for African slave labor and were treated accordingly in their daily lives, in newspapers, such as the *New York Courier* and the *New York Tribune*, in magazines, including the *Missionary Review of the World*, and the *American Catholic Quarterly*, and in the courts.

Because of this paralleling of Chinese with African-Americans, Jim Crow laws that were designed for African-Americans were expanded to include the Chinese. "Jim Crow" is from the name of a song sung by Thomas Rice in a minstrel show that eventually became synonymous with

Jim Crow  
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"Black" By 1901 Jim Crow was an important part of the American scene, requiring complete separation of the races. According to Lerone Bennett, the motivation was fear "from economic competition and political needs, from frustration, from an obsession with the cult of White Womanhood. In only two other countries—South Africa and Nazi Germany—have men's fears driven them to such extremes."<sup>39</sup> The same laws that applied to African-Americans also applied to the Chinese, who were not permitted to eat in certain restaurants, sit on the first floor in movie theaters, or live in certain neighborhoods outside Chinatown.

In 1860 Chinese children were refused admission to public schools. After 1866, many were allowed to attend these schools only if Euro-American parents did not object. Although by 1885 *Tape v. Hurley* decided that the Chinese could not be refused admission to public schools, segregation of the Chinese in the public school system lasted until 1946, and in some cases until *Brown v. Board of Education* ended public school segregation in 1954. The Chinese were not admitted to most public hospitals. Chinese were denied admission to San Francisco City Hospital, and it was only in 1925 that a Chinese hospital was built.<sup>40</sup> California state law stipulated that no Chinese could be hired by state, county, or municipal governments for public works.

By 1882 animosity toward the Chinese had increased to the level that the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, which banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years. The act additionally provided that anyone unqualified for citizenship could not enter the country—and by the terms of the 1870 Naturalization Act, Chinese were not eligible for citizenship. In 1884, a federal court ruling interpreted the provisions of the 1882 act to confirm the prohibition against the immigration of the wives of Chinese laborers. This law had international repercussions for the Chinese. Anti-Chinese or exclusion laws were passed by Natal (1897), Orange Free State (1899), Australia (1901), the Cape of Good Hope (1904), Transvaal (1907), New Zealand (1920), and Canada (1923). But American citizenship for any Chinese was still problematic. Previous attempts to obtain citizenship had been thwarted by the judicial system. It was only in 1896 in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* that it was decided that a person born in the United States to Chinese parents is an American.

The Chinese were learning to use the legal system to their advantage. In 1880 San Francisco enacted an ordinance making it illegal for any person to establish or carry on a laundry within the corporate limits of the city and the county. Under this statute all petitions of laundrymen who had wooden buildings but were not Chinese were granted. Yick Wo, a San Francisco laundryman for twenty years, continued to operate his business

without a license, but eventually he was arrested and found guilty of violating the ordinance.<sup>41</sup> Yick Wo took his case to the United States Supreme Court in 1896. The Court reversed the San Francisco safety ordinances, saying that they were indeed designed to harass laundrymen of Chinese ancestry.<sup>42</sup>

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1875 provided that all persons within the jurisdiction of the United States were entitled to equal treatment under the law, including public accommodations, "subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and applicable alike to citizens of every race and color, regardless of any previous condition of servitude," California methodically supported discriminatory policies against the Chinese until 1924, when the federal government succeeded in excluding all Asian nationalities. From fear of unfair competition, labor unions and miners' organizations, many under the leadership of Dennis Kearney,<sup>43</sup> significantly affected the nature of state and federal legislation concerning immigration by writing slanted newspaper articles and lobbying local, state, and federal legislatures.

Regardless of the images constructed by the dominant society, Jack Chen insists in *The Chinese of America* that "the only [Chinese] slaves were the women kidnapped and brought to America to be prostitutes, often with the connivance of the courts and the immigration authorities."<sup>44</sup> However, more direct evidence of the nature of Chinese slavery is in Charles Frederick Holder's "Chinese Slavery in America" in the September 1897 edition of the *North American Review*.

It seems incredible that slavery should be boldly advocated and carried on with all the elaboration and system that characterize any successful commercial project. . . . [There is in San Francisco] an apartment known as the "Queen's Room," in reality a public slave mart, where the victims were brought and exhibited to dealers and would-be purchasers. . . . The girls . . . are valued at from \$150 to \$3,500. . . . The girl is . . . on exhibition for sale, and is critically examined by highbinders, slave-dealers, speculators, brothel keepers, and others interested in the sale.<sup>45</sup>

Corresponding to Holder's description of a Chinese slave market, Kenneth Stamp describes an African slave market for prospective prostitutes: "Lewis C. Robards . . . had special quarters . . . for his 'choice stock.' . . . Prospective purchasers usually examined the trader's merchandise minutely."<sup>46</sup> In the minds of most Americans in the nineteenth century, the view of the Chinese as slaves, especially the women, was as great as the view of the Africans as slaves.

The negative image of African-American women predates the founding of the United States. English slave traders described African women as "hot constitution'd ladies, possessed of a lascivious temper, with an inclination for White men."<sup>47</sup> This image sanctioned the exploitation of African-American women in addition to holding them responsible for the alleged actions of African-American men. Paula Giddings posits that

the stereotype of the sexually potent Black male was largely based on that of the promiscuous Black female. He would have to be potent . . . to satisfy such hot-natured women. Now released from the constraints of White masters, the Black man found White women so "alluring" and "seductive" because . . . of the wantonness of the women of his own race.<sup>48</sup>

An equal image was created for Chinese women. It was commonly accepted that they all were prostitutes and would degrade any who came in contact with them. Frank Pixley expressed this attitude when he wrote, I believe . . . of the multitudes of Chinese women in our state there is not a wife or virtuous female in their number.<sup>49</sup>

Although African-American women have been censured for their alleged lack of morality, the accusations did not reach the level of those aimed at Chinese women. Ulysses S. Grant said in his annual address of 1874:

Hardly a perceptible percentage of them perform any honorable labor, but they are brought for shameful purposes, to the great demoralization of the youth of these localities. If this evil practice can be legislated against, it will be my pleasure as well as my duty to enforce any regulation to secure so desirable an end.<sup>50</sup>

Caving in to public pressure, Congress passed the Page Law in 1875. Although designed to prevent the importation of "coolie" labor into this country, the law also was aimed at preventing the entrance of *any* Chinese woman into the United States. It was now a felony for a citizen to take to or from the United States any citizen of any Asian country without his or her consent, for the purpose of holding him or her for a term of service. It was also a felony for any person to transport or to keep women for immoral purposes. Any person brought into this country as a prostitute or laborer would be in "violation of this act or of the coolie act of 1862."<sup>51</sup> Although seemingly aimed at women of any race or nationality who would be brought into the United States for prostitution, the law specifically targeted Chinese women. Therefore, United States public policy had the effect of being designed to prevent the entrance of Chinese women into the country. "To prohibit entry of prostitutes was enforced so strictly and broadly it

served not only to exclude Chinese prostitutes but also discourage Chinese wives from coming here."<sup>52</sup>

~~Those Chinese women already present in the United States were virtual sex slaves. "In the 1870 census . . . 61 percent of the 3,536 Chinese women in California had occupations listed as prostitute."~~<sup>53</sup> Magazines and newspapers continually published articles depicting the Chinese women as prostitutes and slaves.<sup>54</sup> However, one article was unique. Just as African-American women were used as breeders to increase the owner's stock and wealth, a writer in *Lippincott's Magazine* proposed mating Chinese women with Euro-American men for future workers in California, using the multiracial climate of Hawaii as an example.<sup>55</sup> ~~The view of Chinese women as slaves was widely reported. The New York Times, using news dispatches from California newspapers, seemingly accepted it as a fact that Chinese women, like African-American women in the antebellum South, were publicly auctioned in California.~~<sup>56</sup> 1/27/85

As the Ku Klux Klan and similar organizations worked to terrorize African-Americans into maintaining their subordinate status within United States society, similar activities were carried out against the Chinese. Drivings-out began with the passage of the Exclusion Act, not only in California but in most other Western states, where "railroad building was still in process and small settlements of miners remained."<sup>57</sup> These terrorist activities were commonly used to intimidate African-Americans and enforce a social etiquette that could be used to keep African-Americans in "their places." Similar activities were used against the Chinese for similar purposes.

~~Unlike African-American men, who were targets of terrorist activities because they supposedly raped Euro-American women, Chinese men became targets because of a fear of unfair economic competition. Chinese were lynched, dynamited, and burned out of their homes in cities and towns all over the West. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, in September 1885, more than twenty Chinese were murdered, and hundreds were burned out of their homes. Chinese were put on boxcars and shipped out of Tacoma, Washington, after unruly mobs had burned Chinatown. Federal troops were sent into Seattle, Washington, numerous lynchings of Chinese were reported in Idaho, and in Oregon Chinatowns were dynamited.~~<sup>58</sup> Up and down the West Coast, Euro-American workingmen were organizing in opposition to the alleged unfair labor competition of the Chinese. 1885

Perhaps the most virulent terrorist activities that stemmed from the organized labor movement occurred in California. In Los Angeles there had been an ongoing feud between two rival groups of Chinese, which resulted in the murder of one of the group members. On October 24, 1871,

police intervention in a subsequent melee led to the wounding of two officers. Groups of Euro-Americans hearing of the confrontation rushed into "the Chinese quarter, firing into houses, hanging those whom they caught alive, and appropriating all movable property. The entire affair lasted only four hours, but in that time at least eighteen persons were killed, several buildings were burned, and a large amount of loot was carried away."<sup>59</sup>

These activities were not confined to the West Coast. In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1889, a Chinese laundry was demolished by an angry mob of two thousand people after its two owners were indicted for violating more than twenty Euro-American adolescents between the ages of nine and thirteen in the back room.<sup>60</sup> The *New York Times* reported that in 1883 in Waynesboro, Georgia, townsmen ran the "rat-eaters" out of town.<sup>61</sup> Not all of the terrorist activities were conducted by mobs. In Cleveland in 1925 in response to a murder, the police acted as a mob:

✓ Practically the entire available police force was put to work "cleaning up" Chinatown. Chinese laundrymen were pulled from behind their ironing boards; waiters and patrons of eating places were taken from their tables. The Chinese population of the city was dragged to the police stations. Pedestrians were taken up on the sidewalks, even students at Cleveland institutions of learning were swept up.<sup>62</sup>

Many African-Americans were lynched because they purportedly lusted after Euro-American women. The same charges were made against Chinese men, who were seen as lascivious animals with a particular fondness for Euro-American women.

*Scribner's Monthly* and other leading magazines of the era recommended that Euro-American women never leave their daughters alone with the Chinese servants because they induced innocent Euro-American women into Chinatown and turned them into drug-abusing prostitutes.<sup>63</sup> Although proselytizing in the Chinese community was common among Protestants, missionaries were warned by parishioners that the Chinese probably attended Sunday School to "debauch their white, female teachers."<sup>64</sup> "In Brooklyn two seventeen year old prostitutes claimed that Chinese laundrymen had started them on their 'shameful life' at a very tender age."<sup>65</sup>

Yet, Chinese men were, despite anti-miscegenation laws, marrying Euro-American women, particularly Irish immigrant women. The October 3, 1857, edition of *Harpers Weekly* reported that "twenty-eight of these . . . women have gone the way of matrimony with their elephant-

eyed, olive-skinned contemporaries."<sup>66</sup> This is an interesting phenomenon because the most virulent leaders in the anti-Chinese movement were the Irish, led by Dennis Kearney. Still, the marriages between Chinese men and Irish women were puzzling to the anonymous author of the article, who mused, "But the amalgamation of the Irish and the Chinese is more than bewildering—it begets a chaos of ideas from which no ray of intelligibility can be safely eliminated."<sup>67</sup>

An additional area of comparison between Blacks and Chinese is housing. African-Americans were prevented from moving into certain urban and suburban areas because of restrictive covenants or fear of persecution by the dominant group, which considered their presence objectionable. Similar restrictive covenants used against the Chinese were in effect, for example, in San Francisco until 1964.<sup>68</sup> However, Chinatown has commonly been described as an ethnic enclave, where the Chinese congregate to maintain their cultural integrity. Frank Chin, the first Chinese-American to have a play produced on Broadway, denies that, claiming instead, "The railroads created a detention camp and called it 'Chinatown.' The details of that creation have been conveniently forgotten or euphemized into a state of sweet confusion . . . no one will know it was not us that created a game preserve for Chinese and called it 'Chinatown.'"<sup>69</sup> It has been proposed by other writers, although not as bluntly as Chin, that the popular image of the creation of Chinatown is complete fabrication. Ronald Takaki does confirm that Chinatown is "a ghetto. . . [it] confirmed views of the Chinese as unhealthy, unassimilable, and undesirable immigrants."<sup>70</sup>

The Chinese were confined to a particular district in most major urban areas of the United States. The Chinese, like the African-Americans, were barred by violence and local ordinances from working and living in the city except as servants. "These were not like the immigrant ghettos of Italians, Jews, or Poles, which tended to disappear as each group integrated into American society. Rather, they were segregated areas where the Chinese were meant to stay,"<sup>71</sup> Peter Kwong noted.

The typical view of the early Chinatown was an area filled with vice: opium dens, gambling parlors, and prostitutes. This image of Chinatown lasted until approximately 1938, when Chinatown was consciously remodeled in the image of a Hollywood Chinese city. Ivan Light, writing in the *Pacific Historical Review*, stated,

Chinatown chambers of commerce began to regulate the architecture on main thoroughfares so that a uniform, pagoda-styled decor replaced ramshackled predecessors. They built Chinatown to suit the taste and imagination of the . . .

China town  
image

American public. . . . The tiered gates of New Chinatown originally graced the movie set of *The Good Earth*, a Hollywood China epic.<sup>72</sup>

Thus, as Light and others have inferred, the congregation of the Chinese into these urban ghettos was not voluntary but was necessary to satisfy customary practice and maintain racial harmony.

There were other areas in which the Chinese paralleled African-Americans. In both groups, choices of occupations were limited. African-Americans were relegated to the most menial, undesirable, back-breaking occupations—construction workers, cooks, and waiters—mostly in the service sector. Laundries and restaurants were two of the very few opportunities open to Chinese. In a narrow, racially restricted labor market, Takaki estimates that "one out of four employed Chinese males in the United States in 1900 was a laundryman."<sup>73</sup>

Both groups allegedly were unable to master standard English. African-Americans speak a legitimate form of English frequently referred to by linguists as "Black English." The usage of this English dialect has been manipulated to brand African-Americans as less intelligent than Euro-Americans. The supposed inability of the Chinese to speak English has been part of the stereotyping process. The Chinese, and indeed all Asians, allegedly confuse l's and r's, add an extra vowel consisting of double e's to the ends of words and usually omit most articles and the verb "to be." Additionally, in the manner of Charlie Chan, the Chinese were thought to use many pseudo-Confucian aphorisms.

黄记  
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Both groups were accused of having strong animal-like smells. In Massachusetts in 1876 "one English language teacher reported that her health had been broken by the smell of her Chinese students."<sup>74</sup> There were other areas in which the dominant culture made very deliberate attempts to "negroicize" the Chinese.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the machinations of the institutions of the dominant culture, the Chinese were not slaves on par with Blacks. They were immigrants. But to support the objectification of the Chinese as slaves, images that were used in connection with Blacks were applied to them. References to the "Middle Passage" were invoked in the voyages of the Chinese to the United States, but the passages were not similar. Additionally, there was no period of seasoning where the Chinese were broken in as slaves as there was for Blacks. Although many laws attempted to equate the Chinese with Blacks, there were differences. The Chinese could marry, they had control of their children, they were permitted to learn to read and write, they could practice their culture, they could change jobs, and they had freedom of

1938  
(BHA)



movement. In short, the Chinese had a measure of control over their lives that was not allowed African slaves.

The decade from 1880 to 1890 was crucial for people of color in the United States. Jim Crow laws were initiated against African-Americans in Tennessee in 1881, the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed into law in 1882, in 1883 the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was declared unconstitutional, and the last major battle with Native Americans occurred at Wounded Knee in 1890. By 1885 Africa had been sliced up by major European powers, an opportunity in which the United States had not participated. By effectively curbing its ethnics of color, the United States had successfully established "internal colonies" in preparation for its imperialist ventures with dark-skinned people in the following decades: Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam in 1898, Samoa in 1899, and the Panama Canal Zone in 1903.

The dominant culture had clear reasons for attempting to blacken the images of the Chinese: to prepare for imperialistic adventures and the consolidation of all people of color into one broad, easily managed, conventional image. African-American women writers have recognized the attempt to distort their history and images and have tried to rectify the distortions in their writings. With one exception, Sui Sin Far, Chinese-American women writers have not acknowledged the existence of this history and thus have not incorporated it into their writing. They have instead adopted a distant, exotic China or a mythicized Chinatown as the focus of their writing.

## NOTES

1. Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant. The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 173.
2. Gunter Barth, *Bitter Strength. A History of the Chinese in the United States, 1850-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 189.
3. In use since 1638. Originally of Tamil origin, meaning "to hire" or "hireling," an unskilled, cheaply employed laborer in or from Asia, especially India and China.
4. Carey McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943), 85.
5. Barth, 195.
6. Ibid., 196. Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, "The Chinese in Arkansas," *Amerasia Journal* (Spring/Summer 1981): 6.
7. In Louisiana the racial classification was different. "In the absence of a separate color category for the Chinese before the census of 1870, the group was

classified as white. . . . In the 1870 census, enumerators were instructed to use the separate category Chinese for all persons of that ancestry." Lucy M. Cohen, *Chinese in the Post-Civil War South. A People without a History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 167.

8. James W. Loewen, *The Mississippi Chinese. Between Black and White* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1971, 1988), 1.

9. The Page Law, 1878, effectively limited the immigration of Chinese women. "California banned marriages between whites and Chinese in 1906. Similar laws were passed in Arizona, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, South Dakota, Utah, Virginia and Wyoming. California repealed its law in 1948, and the Supreme Court in 1967 ruled the other miscegenation laws unconstitutional." Jack Chen, *The Chinese of America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 154. See also Pauli Murray, ed., *State Laws on Race and Color* (Cincinnati: Women's Division of Christian Service Board of Missions and Church Extension, Methodist Church, 1950).

10. Loewen, 136.

11. Ibid.

12. Robert Seto Quan and Julian B. Roebuck, *Lotus among the Magnolias: The Mississippi Chinese* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1971), 48.

13. Ibid., 45.

14. Loewen, 67.

15. Ibid.

16. See Loewen, chapter 4.

17. Ibid., 5, 76, 79.

18. Ibid., 86.

19. Ibid., 82.

20. Ibid., 96.

21. Ibid., 79.

22. Rose Hum Lee, *The Chinese in the United States of America* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 370; Cheng-Tsu Wu, "Chink!" *A Documentary History of Anti-Chinese Prejudice in America* (New York: World Publishing, 1972), 223; Chen, 131; Loewen, 135; Victor G. Nee and Brett de Bary Nee, *Longtime Californ': A Documentary Study of an American Chinatown* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1972), 385.

23. A member of a people of southern Africa.

24. Miller, 44.

25. M. J. A. Roorda Smit also examined the similarities between Chinese and Hottentots in "Contributions to the Knowledge of the Hottentot Race," *Popular Science Review* (May 1881): 147-159. Smit writes "I have seen a Chinese and a Hottentot both serving in the same hotel; as they were dressed almost in the same style, we were constantly confounding them, taking the Asiatic for the African, and vice versa." He also claims that "the affinities of the Hottentot language [are] rather connected . . . with the languages of High Asia."

26. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore. A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 100; Terry E. Boswell, "A Split

- Labor Market Analysis of Discrimination Against Chinese Immigrants, 1850–1882," *American Sociological Review* 51 (June 1986): 358.
27. Miller, 151.
  28. Ibid., 153.
  29. Ibid.
  30. Nee and Nee, 57n5.
  31. Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Move in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973, 1991), 26.
  32. Boswell, 357, and Sandmeyer, 25.
  33. Marshall De Motte, "California—White or Yellow?" *The Annals of the American Academy* (January 1921): 18.
  34. Dan Caldwell, "The Negroization of the Chinese Stereotype in California," *The Historical Society of Southern California* 53 (1971): 128.
  35. Takaki, 102.
  36. Caldwell, 128.
  37. Takaki, 101.
  38. Caldwell, 131.
  39. Lerone Bennet, *Before the Mayflower. A History of the Negro in America, 1619–1964* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968, 1962), 222.
  40. Chen, 185.
  41. "Chinese White Marriages in New York," *Harpers Weekly* (October 3, 1857): 630.
  42. Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980), 153.
  43. Denis Kearney was an Irish-American, anti-Chinese agitator who vehemently attacked Chinese immigrants for working for starvation wages and robbing Euro-American workers of jobs.
  44. Wu, 153.
  45. C. F. Holder, "Chinese Slavery in America," *North American Review* 165 (September 1897): 290, 292.
  46. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 260–61.
  47. Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter. The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 35.
  48. Ibid., 31.
  49. Gerald Stanley, "Frank Pixley and the Heathen Chinese," *Phylon* (September 1979): 227.
  50. Congressional Record, 43rd Congress, 2nd session, Dec. 7, 1874, 3–4.
  51. Sandmeyer, 81.
  52. Takaki, 40.
  53. Ibid., 121.
  54. A. J. Brown, "Lo Mo of San Francisco; Donaldina Cameron and Her Work for the Rescue of Chinese Girls," *Missionary Review of the World* 55 (May 1932): 263–66; "Chinese Slavery," *Westminster Review* 165 (April 1906): 458–62; "Chinese Slavery Condemned," *Westminster Review* 165 (April 1906):

- 217–20; M. Lake, "Chinese Slave Girls in America," *Missionary Review of the World* 26 (July 1903): 532–33; E. V. Robbins, "Chinese Slave Girls," *Overland* 51 (January 1903): 100–103; C. R. Shepherd, "Chinese Girl Slavery in America," *Missionary Review of the World* 46 (November 1923): 893–98.
55. "The Chinese in California," *Lippincotts Magazine* (July 1868): 41.
56. *New York Times*, February 25, 1869, 4–7, 5–2; "The Chinese Habeas Corpus Cases in San Francisco," *New York Times*, March 2, 1869, 1–6; "Chinese Women," *New York Times*, March 17, 1869, 11; *New York Times*, July 30, 1869, 8–1.
57. Nee and Nee, 21.
58. Chen, 151.
59. Sandmeyer, 48.
60. Miller, 185.
61. *New York Times*, June 11, 1883, 1.
62. Russell T. Herrick, "The Police Run Wild in Cleveland," *The Nation* (October 14, 1925): 401.
63. Frank Norris, *The Third Circle* (New York: John Lane, 1909).
64. Miller, 185.
65. Ibid.
66. "Yick Wo," *The Nation* (June 6, 1895): 438–39.
67. Ibid.
68. Chen, 228.
69. Frank Chin, "Confessions of the Chinatown Cowboy," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 4 (Fall 1972): 60.
70. Takaki, 246.
71. Peter Kwong, *The New Chinatown* (New York: Hall and Wang, 1987), 14.
72. Ivan Light, "From Vice District to Tourist Attraction: The Moral Career of American Chinatowns, 1880–1940," *Pacific Historical Review* (1974): 391.
73. Takaki, 93.
74. Miller, 185.
75. In addition to the fact that both groups are visible minorities, the dominant society has assigned other stereotypical traits to Blacks and Chinese; for example, they all look alike, and they are filthy, licentious, and fecund.

## Chapter Two

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### Mammies, Mulattas, Sluts, and Sapphires

Representations of the African-American slave woman as breeder and sexual object, as farm worker, or domestic and industrial laborer do not seem to exist in the early literature of the United States. No literary portraits, either authentic or distorted, were drawn of African-American women for almost two centuries after their arrival in Jamestown, Virginia.

In Virginia, the 1624–1625 census showed the presence of twenty-three Africans: eleven males, ten females, and two children. This group of Africans was probably the last to enter and work in the United States as indentured servants. Within a short time, their status and their lives would be restricted by ever more stringent and repressive legislation, which, while constricting African-American men, even further constrained African-American women.

Before long, several state legislatures had adopted the principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*, that is, the child inherits the condition of the mother. With this ruling, the African female in the American colonies acquired a new status. Planters recognized that they could more quickly amass necessary capital by breeding the African slave women. As a result, enforced breeding of Africans became the norm.

The African woman did not freely accept another's control of her body just as she did not freely accept slavery; she had to be prepared for it, and this preparation began in Africa. The African economy during the seventeenth century was based on agriculture, which in some areas nearly approached the complexity of the plantation system in the Southern states. The traditional African agricultural and social systems required that