

# Prejudice

Many immigrants were looked down on because they spoke and acted differently than native Americans. The next three readings show some more about prejudice and hatred between people of different backgrounds.

## *...fault is found with us*

In Part 1 Lee Chew, the New York businessman, described why he came to America in the 1880's. In the next selection he tells something about his life in the United States. Lee Chew came shortly before the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) stopped Chinese immigration to the United States for ten years and prevented the Chinese from becoming American citizens. The law was extended in 1892 and not repealed until 1943.

Abridgement of "The Life Story of a Chinaman" from *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans*, edited by Hamilton Holt, pp. 291, 293, 295-299. New York: James Pott & Company. Copyright 1906 by James Pott & Company.

It was twenty years ago when I came to this country, and I worked for two years as a servant, getting at the last \$35 a month. I sent money home to comfort my parents, but though I dressed well and lived well and had pleasure, going quite often to the Chinese theater and to dinner parties in Chinatown, I saved \$50 in the first six months, \$90 in the second, \$120 in the third and \$150 in the fourth. So I had \$410 at the end of two years, and I was now ready to start in [the laundry] business.



...[I had laundries in several cities during the next ten years.] But Chinese laundry business now is not as good as it was ten years ago. American cheap labor in the steam laundries has hurt it. So... I came to New York and opened a shop in the Chinese quarter, keeping silks, teas, porcelain, clothes, shoes, hats, and Chinese provisions....

In all New York there are less than forty Chinese women, and it is impossible to get a Chinese woman out here unless one goes to China and marries her there.... That is in [the] case of a merchant. A laundryman can't bring his wife here under any circumstances....

Some fault is found with us for sticking to our old customs here, especially in the matter of clothes, but the reason is that we find American clothes much inferior, so far as comfort and warmth go.... Most of us have tried the American clothes, and they make us feel as if we were [tied up]....

... Americans are not all bad, nor are they wicked wizards. Still, they have their faults and their treatment of us is outrageous.

The reason why so many Chinese go into the laundry business in this country is because it requires little capital and is one of the few opportunities that are open. Men of other nationalities who are jealous of the Chinese, because he is a more faithful worker than one of their people, have raised such a great outcry about Chinese cheap labor that they have shut him out of working on farms or in factories or building railroads or making streets or digging sewers....

Irish fill the almshouses and prisons and orphan asylums, Italians are among the most dangerous of men, Jews are unclean and ignorant. Yet they are all let in, while Chinese, who are sober, or duly law abiding, clean, educated and industrious, are shut out.... More than half the Chinese in this country would become citizens if allowed to do so, and would be patriotic Americans. But how can they make this country their home as matters are now? They are not allowed to bring wives here from China, and if they marry American women there is a great outcry....

Under the circumstances, how can I call this my home, and how can any one blame me if I... go back to my village in China?

