



II. transcultural histories and literatures



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"The Eagle Seeks a Helpless Quarry": Chinatown, the Police, and the Press The 1903 Boston Chinatown Raid Revisited

K. SCOTT WONG

The combined police and Immigration Bureau raid on Boston Chinatown in 1903 is fairly well-known among scholars of Chinese American history. It is often cited as an example of continued police harassment of the community well after the passage of the original Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and one of the incidents that gave rise to the Chinese boycott of American goods in China in 1905. At first glance, the raid is indeed a clear example of how American authorities sought to enforce exclusion policy, in this case the 1892 Geary Act which demanded that Chinese laborers in the country register with the "collector of internal revenue of their respective districts" to obtain a certificate of residence. Failure to register or provide this certificate upon demand could result in imprisonment and deportation.¹

However, a thorough examination of the events that preceded the raid and its aftermath not only addresses the exclusion policy and its enforcement, but can also offer new insights into Chinese immigrant communities during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This article also provides an opportunity to explore how the enforcement of exclusion affected the residents of Chinatown; Euro-American perceptions of the Chinese community during this period and how these images were portrayed in the press; and most important, interracial relations between Chinese and the general society in the urban northeast during the turn of the century. Finally, this raid has particular resonance with current concerns with illegal immigration and the call for national identification cards distinguishing "legal" from "illegal" immigrants. By examining these issues, this article contrib-

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utes to the growing body of scholarship on Asian Americans in areas other than the West Coast while linking the Asian American past to contemporary issues.

The raid took place on the evening of October 11, 1903, but the full story begins over a week before, on October 2.² That evening, Wong Yak Chong, a thirty-year-old laundryman with a business in Roslindale, was shot and killed in Chinatown by two men, later identified as Wong Ching and Charlie Chinn.³ Two other men, Ning Munn and Yee Shong Teng, were also wounded. The victims were identified as belonging to the Hip Sing Tong and the assailants were said to be members of the On Leung Tong, a "rival" association.⁴ The two main newspapers of that time, the *Boston Daily Globe* and the *Boston Herald*, maintained coverage of the murder and its aftermath, and it is this press coverage that frames my discussion of the subsequent raid.

The murder was immediately cast in racial and cultural terms rather than simply as a crime of violence. The *Boston Herald* reported that "Boston's Chinatown had its first murder last night, and Boston's police have their first real case of Highbinder tactics on their hands to unravel."⁵ At one point, the *Herald* reported that Wong had told some of his "white friends" that he was going to sell his business and then visit his mother in San Francisco. He reportedly said that he "wanted to become an American citizen and that before he discarded his Chinese costume and had his queue cut off, and by such act renounce his allegiance to the 'Son of Heaven,' he must see his mother."⁶ Furthermore, the same article claimed that members of the Hip Sing Tong feared that once he renounced his allegiance to China, Wong would "prove a traitor to the secrets of the Highbinders, and they determined to put him out of the way."⁷ Curiously, this explanation for the murder was never brought up again in subsequent reports. Instead, both the *Herald* and the *Globe* maintained that the murder was related to a long-standing gambling feud between the two associations and that this incident had been planned well in advance. The *Globe* believed this probable because the On Leung Tong was known to have recently retained a lawyer who appeared at the police station shortly after the two assailants had been arrested.⁸ The *Herald* even reported that the police were warned "that there was murder in the air, but they had become so sceptical regarding Chinese 'tips' that they refused to credit the warning."⁹ The authorities' belief reflected a general attitude toward the Chinese in America that they could not be trusted or taken seriously.¹⁰

Details of the murder were covered in rather lurid fashion, with descriptions of the wounds suffered and the weapons recovered from the suspects and at the crime scene. Aside from the .44 caliber Colt re-

volver found on one of the suspects and an Iver Johnson gun found at the scene, the police also recovered an elaborate hunting axe, a weapon to which the press devoted considerable space, because of its unusual design and its association with Highbinder, or "hatchet men" activities. One of the assailants, Wong Ching, was also found wearing hidden armour, described as a "coat of mail," a vest composed of a large number of pieces of "sheet steel, about two inches square and a sixteenth of an inch thick. . . joined by little bands of copper wire."¹¹

For the next few days, the press described the atmosphere of Chinatown as uneasy, tense, and unusually quiet. It appears that a crowd of Euro-Americans had gathered in Chinatown expecting more action, but nothing took place and the police had to keep them in order.¹² By the Tuesday after the murder, however, the press reported that the police had increased their surveillance of Chinatown and that all Chinese new to the area would be investigated in order to determine their business in Boston. Captain Lawrence Cain, head of the police in the Chinatown area, announced that three Chinese from New York had arrived to seek revenge for Wong's murder. The police detained these men and demanded that they leave Boston later that day. Though denying the charges, these men apparently did leave on an afternoon train for New York. Captain Cain justified these actions by stating, "It is the first time that such a bloody feud has broken out among the Chinese in Boston. We must check it. That is the reason we have had to resort to such extreme measures. The community must be protected from such high-handed acts. We intend to take every precaution, even if innocent men are brought to the station."¹³ This action, admittedly persecuting people who may have been innocent, would be the first sign that the authorities intended to punish the residents of Chinatown for the crime. They would also use the murder as an excuse to verify the legal status of the Chinese in Chinatown even if they had to resort to extra-legal activities.

That this was the intention of the raid would later become quite evident in statements made immediately afterward. According to the *Globe*, during a meeting between Captain Cain and George Billings, the Immigration Commissioner for the port of Boston, it was "agreed that Chinatown should be thoroughly gone through after Shong's [sic] funeral."¹⁴ Billings is reported to have said,

We have had it in mind for a long time to do something of this sort. We are satisfied that there are many unregistered Chinese in the city and in other places in New England. It required something like the murder of Shong [sic], however, to give us the proper excuse for taking action. I think we have done our job pretty thoroughly tonight.

I have no doubt that many of the Chinese we took tonight have their papers. They should have had them in their possession. Those who left them in their homes will have an opportunity tomorrow to produce them. If they have not got their papers, they will be deported.¹⁵

Cain then commented that it would have a good effect if all unregistered Chinese were deported because he believed they were responsible for most of the crimes committed in Chinatown.¹⁶ Although it was never stated whether the victims or the alleged assailants were registered or not, these statements by Billings and Cain make it very clear that the raid was part of a concerted effort to decrease the Chinese population through harassment and the threat of deportation.¹⁷

Claiming that Chinatown was on the verge of a "Highbinder war," with "hatchet men" being brought in from out of town, the police increased their presence in the area. They said that they were tipped off about the impending conflict by two informants who are described in significantly different terms than the Chinese who had first warned them of the murder. As mentioned above, the Chinese who initially came to the police were said to be "such liars that we [the police] couldn't believe half they told us."¹⁸ The new informants, however, were seen as more reliable because the first was a "white woman who is much in Chinatown, and has heretofore been of assistance to the police." Soon after, they were given similar information by a "Chinaman who has discarded his queue and wears American clothes" and is not known to be "affiliated with either of the Tongs."¹⁹ Thus, Chinese who were members of the associations, spoke little or no English, and continued to dress in Chinese fashion were not viewed as reliable as white informants or Chinese who demonstrated signs of assimilation.

By the evening of October 7, the murder case had taken a new twist, one which would have a direct relation to the eventual raid. Captain Cain stated that the friction between the two associations was not a gambling feud, but was the result of the On Leung Tong being angry because the Hip Sing Tong was collecting more than their share of the organized blackmail that was allegedly taking place in Chinatown as a result of the Geary Act of 1892. According to the *Globe*, "It is an open secret that both societies have been bleeding the more ignorant of their countrymen by promising them immunity from police interference. They have also been levying blackmail upon the Chinese who are in the city without having complied with the requirements of the Chinese registration law."²⁰ An unidentified police official claimed that when the Geary Act was passed, "Some of the more intelligent of the Chinese went to their ignorant compatriots and advised them they had better not be registered."²¹ When the time limit for registration

BOSTON HERALD.

MONDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 12, 1903.

PRICE TWO CENTS.

OVER 300 CHINAMEN ARRESTED IN BIG ROUND-UP BY POLICE

ROOSEVELT TOO EAGER

Long Declares He Was
Anxious to Send a
Fleet Against Spain
Before War Was De-
clared.

A SENSATION
AT THE CAPITAL.

Former Secretary's
Comment in Maga-
zine Likely to Be Re-
sented by President,
It Is Said.

(Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald.)
WASHINGTON, D. C., Oct. 11, 1903.
Frank and reserved comment on the
services of Theodore Roosevelt as se-
cretary of the navy.



expired, those who had advised them to not register are said to have returned demanding a fee in exchange for not turning them into the authorities. The police, thus, implied that the Hip Sing Tong was making more money on this system of protection than the On Leung Tong, a situation that precipitated the murder of Wong Yak Chong.

With the murder now framed in the context of illegal immigration and a blackmail scheme designed to profit from it, the raid that took place on October 11 can be firmly linked to the events of the previous week. On October 8, the *Globe* reported that Captain Cain met with authorities of the U. S. Treasury Department who had "a hand in the

execution of the Chinese registration law." Cain reportedly sought a "means by which unregistered Chinese might be removed from the community." The police believed "that half of the Celestials [in Boston had] no papers [to] authorize them to remain in this country."²² Government officials, however, are said to have doubted that so many Chinese avoided registration. Captain Cain did not discuss his plans with the press, but the newspaper maintained that it was "safe to say that a pretty careful inspection of the district will be made."²³

For the next three days, the press reported on the mood of Chinatown, claiming that the upcoming funeral of the slain Wong Yak Chong, which was to be held on Sunday, October 11, might be the occasion for another conflict. The two associations were each scheduled to hold a meeting that day and the Hip Sing Tong was reportedly considering moving their headquarters in order to avoid the threats of the On Leung Tong.²⁴

The morning papers of October 11 reported that most Chinese and "others familiar with the stealthy and far-reaching plans of the Celestials entangled in the present controversy" doubted that any disruption would take place at such a large public gathering.²⁵ The reports went on to say that additional police would be on hand to monitor the funeral procession from Chinatown to the Mount Hope Cemetery.²⁶ One article concluded with a brief warning of events to come: "There were rumors last night that action against the Chinese would be taken on entirely new lines by the police tonight."²⁷ Given what would take place over the next few days, the rumors were indeed correct.

Sunday, October 11, 1903, was a tumultuous day for the residents of Chinatown. Wong Yak Chong was buried in the morning and the Boston police, in collusion with federal and state authorities, made a surprise raid on the neighborhood during the evening. The funeral and burial were carried out in a three-part progression. A Christian service was conducted at the funeral home where his Sunday School teacher, Alice L. Specht, and a number of white male friends belonging to the Roslindale Club were present.²⁸ After leaving the funeral home, the procession went through Chinatown and out to Mount Hope Cemetery. It was estimated that 2,000 people witnessed the procession,²⁹ and that another 3,000 gathered at the cemetery but were kept back by the police.³⁰ Once in the cemetery, the body was interred according to Chinese burial practices which included the burning of incense and "spirit money," and the offering of ritual foods.³¹ All these steps are described in great detail in both newspapers offering a valuable glimpse into Chinese American burial rituals during the early twentieth century, many of which are still carried out today.

With a large number of Chinese from surrounding areas and an indeterminate number from other cities present in Chinatown, the evening of the funeral proved to be an opportune time to conduct a sweep of the community. A force of about fifty local police and over twenty federal and state authorities conducted the raid. The police arrived in Chinatown about 8:00 P.M., going in pairs so as to not arouse suspicion.³² Chinatown was described as "going full blast [with] great merriment in the restaurants, the shops, the clubhouses, and the homes. . . . In rapid succession, and without a hitch, the searching parties tramped into and surrounded the Celestial quarter. Policemen lined up and formed a picket line around the entire quarter so that no Chinaman could escape when the puckering string of the bag was drawn taut."³³ To facilitate the transportation of the anticipated arrestees, patrol wagons from all of the downtown precincts were sent to the scene.³⁴

The headquarters of the Hip Sing and On Leung Tongs were raided first, and every person who could not produce their registration certificates on demand was taken into custody. About twenty-five arrests were made in each place.³⁵ The police then took control of a building on Harrison Street and used it as a headquarters where the Chinese were brought before they were taken away. In a fashion similar to the infamous Palmer Raids of 1919-1920, the authorities entered homes and businesses without warrants demanding to see registration certificates and lined the streets waiting for Chinese to appear.³⁶ Those who had papers were "measured" against their documents and held if the papers and the person did not match-up. Those without papers were not allowed to go get them, but were immediately taken into custody.³⁷ Even those with valid papers were reported to have been "shoved into a back room so that [they] would not have to be looked over a second time."³⁸

The *Boston Herald*, which presented the murder and raid with a rather sensational flair, described the scene of the round-up as follows:

The officers dragged the frightened Chinamen out from under beds, from behind boxes and doors and from all conceivable places of concealment. They were all driven down the winding stairways to the big marble hallway at the street entrance and huddled together like panting sheep. The jabbering was deafening and bewildering.³⁹

The account continued,

Policemen were stationed at the ends of all the dark passageways and alleyways and these men had thrilling experiences with the terrified Chinamen. Chinamen popped up as if out of the ground and scampered like rats through the dark alleys, only to be nabbed by

policemen. Out of the very bowels of the earth they seemed to come, for even beneath the cellars deep down in the ground under the long buildings were sub-cellars from which came Chinamen, tall and short, lean and fat, old and young.⁴⁰

These two passages paint a picture of fear on the part of the Chinese and a perverse pleasure on the part of the police. Likened to animals (“panting sheep” and “rats”), the Chinese are prey of hunters who had “thrilling experiences” with their quarry. Like subterranean animals, the Chinese were flushed from their underground hiding places, “the very bowels of the earth,” only to be caught in “dark passageways and alleyways.” Using this imagery, the *Herald* contributed to the long-standing stereotype that “Chinatown” was laced with an underground network of tunnels, making “Chinatown” generic, as this image applied to “Chinatowns” across the country, offering grist for the anti-Chinese mill, appearing in print media, the visual arts, and eventually, motion pictures.⁴¹

In addition to “Chinatown” being seen as foreign and frightening, it was also considered to have a demoralizing effect on Americans. Here again, the *Boston Herald* offers a glimpse into this trope. Aside from the Chinese rounded up in the raid, the newspaper reported that,

Some degenerate young American men, who, by long and constant association with the Chinamen have come to look as yellow and to smell as strongly of opium as do the Celestials themselves, were caught in the big net and found difficulty in proving that they are or were once Americans and did not require registration papers from the government.⁴²

Apparently, the degenerative effects of opium and contact with Chinese were so great that it was possible to “become Chinese” merely through association!⁴³

It appears that there was a type of voyeurism that existed for some white patrons of “Chinatown” as well. In the weeks following the mass arrests, there were a number of raids made on Chinese businesses that were suspected of being places where opium was smoked. A witness for the defense after one such raid testified that he had never seen opium smoked at the place in question but that he “had on several occasions taken slumming parties through Chinatown and Yee Wah [the person under arrest] had shown for their delectation how opium was smoked.”⁴⁴ In this case, it is obvious that although a crime might have taken place, it was acceptable for Whites to observe it and thus gain vicarious pleasure from their hours spent in the presence of their Chinese “guides” who could decode their experiences.

There was also a gendered reading of Whites who frequented Chinatown. The Euro-American women encountered during the raid were not viewed with the same ambiguity afforded American males. Not only were they not confused for being Chinese, they were definitely depicted as "fallen." The paper reported,

White women, young girls in some instances, who frequent Chinatown and live among and with the Chinamen, came in for a fright which should be a warning to them in the future. Some were found lounging about the dingy dens of the half-civilized and semi-opium-drunk Chinamen. They were ordered to dress themselves properly and to leave the district at once for their homes.⁴⁵

"Chinatown," therefore, was not simply a residential and business community. In the eyes of the press and the critics of the Chinese, "Chinatown" was a site of cultural pollution. In this sense, "Chinatown" was a "borderlands" where cultures collided and were often transformed, though usually for the worse. Euro-American men and women, judged with gendered biases, succumbed to the demoralizing effects of the Chinese, adding to the reasons why Chinese should be excluded from American society. The issue of white women being lured into laundries or "opium dens" is a theme that frequently appears in anti-Chinese literature. In each of the stories concerning raids on "opium dens" soon after the raid, it was reported that white women or girls, in various stages of undress, were found at each site. In the reporting of these cases, issues of vice, race, gender, and sexuality were all entwined in the cultural mapping of "Chinatown."⁴⁶

Yet, on the other hand, there was obviously "acceptable" contact between the Chinese immigrant community and American society at large, as evidenced by the presence of Wong Yak Chong's Sunday School teacher and friends at his funeral. In fact, as the Chinese were being rounded up, they are reported to have "screamed for their white friends, their American wives, the Sunday school teachers, the missionaries and habitués of Chinatown."⁴⁷

As Shepard Schwartz and, more recently, John Kuo Wei Tchen have uncovered in their research on the history of the Chinese community in New York City, a number of Chinese there were married to Irish women.⁴⁸ The same appears to be true for the Chinese in Boston at the turn of the century. In the press coverage of the raid, two interracial couples are mentioned. Both the *Herald* and the *Globe* report that a woman named Kittie O'Connell came to the Federal Building to verify the status of her husband, Charlie Yen Goon (also printed as Yen Koon). Likewise, both papers describe Yen Goon as dressed in "American

clothes."⁴⁹ The *Herald* also mentioned a couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Wong, who were caught up in the raid. They too appear to have been a Chinese-Irish union. While the *Herald* may have fabricated Mrs. Wong's tirade against the police, it was done in what seems to be stereotypical working-class Irish American dialect, "I'll have the law yese all, though ye be officers of the law itself. Leave Mr. Wong alone, now. He's me husband."⁵⁰ Although it is impossible to verify this exchange, it is likely that they were among the Chinese-Irish marriages in Boston. In contrast to the depiction of the women found in the "opium dens," the white spouses of the Chinese were not denigrated in moral terms. Perhaps the institution of marriage gave them a legitimacy and respectability that was not extended to the other women who were described in the press as having relations with Chinese men.

These marriages, thus, point to interracial relations within Boston Chinatown that warrants further investigation. Luckily, an examination of the Federal Census of 1900 offers valuable information concerning the demographics of the Chinese community and some insights into interethnic relations. The Census lists 254 Chinese living in the eight-block area of Chinatown, out of approximately 850 Chinese in the greater Boston area. This figure for Chinatown consists of 243 males and eleven females, seven of whom are children (all but one being born in the United States). There are also twelve American-born Chinese males included in this total number. In addition, there are twenty-one Chinese listed as having laundries in the area south of Chinatown, all operated by one or two males. The occupational distribution was centered around a service industry of waiters, launderers, servants, clerks, butchers, and grocers, as well as some skilled workers such as carpenters and tailors, and a smaller group of merchants, tea agents, druggists, and physicians. Nearly all of these men claimed to be able to read and write, and about half could speak English. Most were married (their wives presumably still in China), some for twenty to forty years, and most had been in the United States since the 1870s.⁵¹

Of the six married couples, two involved Chinese-Caucasian unions. Aside from the Goons mentioned earlier, Mr. Lee Wee had been married to Alice Maude Blanche Lee for four years, with a two-year-son. The other marriages were among Chinese, including Charles Doane, an American-born Chinese from California, who was married to a woman, Jengsy, who was born in China. They had two daughters, one born in China and the other in Vermont. Mr. Doane was employed as an interpreter for the U.S. government. (He was possibly involved with the processing of the arrested Chinese in the aftermath of the raid.) It is interesting to note that there are no marriages listed between Chinese

THE BOSTON HERALD SATURDAY OCTOBER 10, 1908

IN CHINATOWN DURING THE RAID

*Humorous and Serious Scenes in Chinatown
During the Big Raid by Immigration Officers*



men, foreign-born or native, and American-born Chinese women. In fact, the Census does not list any single Chinese women of marriageable-age, regardless of nativity, living in the Chinese American community. While this might confirm the commonly-held belief that there was a miniscule female population in American Chinatowns, it might also mean that women were undercounted in the Census, such as single women who did not speak with the Census taker, prostitutes,

and others whose names simply never made it onto the Census rolls.

When one looks at the streets surrounding Chinatown, as well as the non-Chinese residents, one sees a multiethnic population that must have had contact with each other. There were boarding houses employing large numbers of single Irish women who worked as servants, manglers, chambermaids, and pantry girls. The Census indicates that the Chinese population lived among and were surrounded by first-and second-generation German, English, Irish, French, Syrian, and Black Americans. Not only did the Chinese live near these other ethnic groups, one address indicates that James Johnston, a white male of Irish immigrant parents, worked as a servant and rented a room in a boarding house that catered mainly to Chinese. In addition, two white women, Mary McDonald and Rebecca Adams, rented rooms to two Chinese men. While it is difficult to determine the nature or depth of most of these relationships, given what the Census reveals in terms of demographics and what took place after the police raided Chinatown, it appears that some Chinese maintained contact with Euro- and African Americans. Most important, the Census data and the press accounts depict that Chinese had frequent contact with non-Chinese. This stands in contrast to the long-held stereotype of Chinatown as an isolated and impenetrable foreign enclave, forever detached from the rest of American society.

Specific examples of interracial cooperation (as well as racial harassment) can, in fact, be seen in how the incarceration and freeing of the Chinese was handled. Once those arrested were taken to the Federal Building they were crowded into small holding rooms. After those rooms were full, the Chinese were placed in a larger court room and the office of the U.S. Deputy Marshals. In this office, about forty men were confined in a thirty- by-twelve-foot steel cage.⁵² In total, 234 Chinese were arrested and taken into custody.⁵³ After they were placed in various rooms and offices, the police and immigration officials, with the aid of interpreters, finally tried to ascertain their legal. Their friends, relatives, associates, and in Charlie Yen Goon's case, his wife, arrived at the Federal Building with their papers to facilitate their release. Once a person was released, he was often beseeched by others to go to the homes or businesses of those still detained in order to procure their papers and return with them so that they could prove their legal status. Of the 234 arrested, 122 were released within twelve to fourteen hours once their papers were seen to be in order.⁵⁴ Another forty-nine were released on bail over the next few days; five were immediately tried before a U.S. Commissioner and ordered deported, while another eleven were later released after producing their papers, which, for some reason, they had refused to show before in court.⁵⁵

The judge whose courtroom held the overflow of prisoners responded to the overcrowding by ordering the room "thoroughly cleansed and fumigated before the court came in there again."⁵⁶

While being held, the Chinese were questioned about their homes and reasons for being in Chinatown. Many explained that they were laundrymen from outlying areas and usually kept their resident certificates at home or with trusted friends. They also said it was common for them to come to Chinatown on Sunday to visit friends. Some claimed to have had no knowledge of the feud between the two associations and that their own presence in Chinatown that day was simply due to the desire to make social calls.⁵⁷

Bail was set at \$500. Of the twenty-four released on bail, it is interesting to note that while most must have been assisted by fellow-Chinese, the press reported a number of cases of Whites and Blacks posting bond. Bertha Crane, identified as a "colored woman," put up bail for four men. James Stokes, identified as a Negro, bailed out two men, while James Briggs, presumably white since his race was not identified, posted bond for eight men.⁵⁸ It was not made clear who these people were, though the *Globe* reported that many of those who posted bail owned property in or near Chinatown, while in some cases "as soon as the parties became aware that their names might be published they declined to supply the necessary bond."⁵⁹ As the week progressed, other Americans of varying ethnic backgrounds (based on surnames) posted bail for individual Chinese.⁶⁰ It is uncertain why all of these individuals came to the aid of the Chinese. Some were indentified as professional bail bondsmen, but others may have been business associates, employers, Sunday School teachers, landlords, or simply friends. In any case, the presence of these non-Chinese and the roles they played, indicate that Chinatown was not the isolated and insular community so often depicted. The Chinese evidently had established relationships with people outside of their community and had maintained a network of contacts that could be used at a time of need.

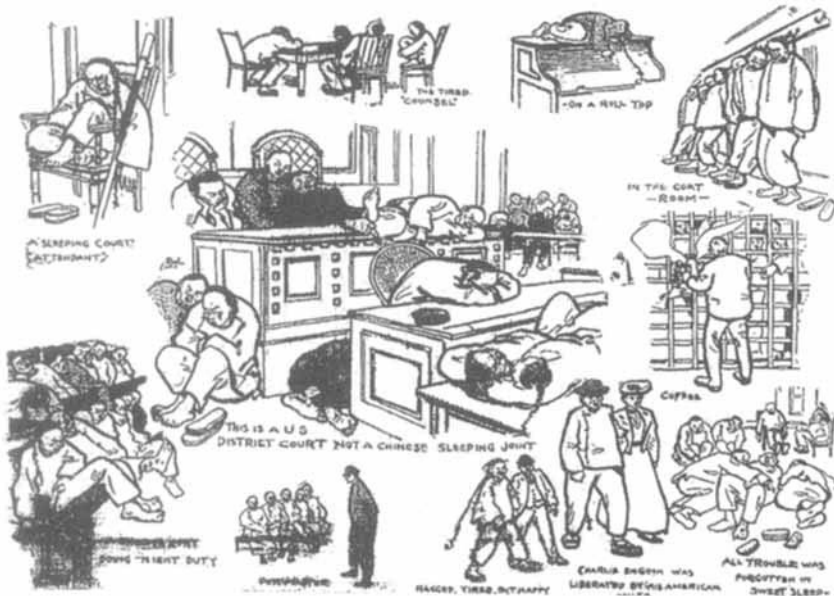
In fact, the raid also brought a group of Euro-American supporters of the Chinese into the public eye. Stephen W. Nickerson, serving as the Chinese Vice Consul in Boston, immediately protested to the authorities that the raid was illegal since warrants were not issued for the arrests, which therefore violated the standing treaty between the U.S. and China that provided the citizens of China in the U.S. "all the legal rights of the most favored nation."⁶¹ Nickerson later revealed that there were one or two warrants issued for the raid but the remaining warrants were written out the following day to account for those still held.⁶²

FRIDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 13, 1906.

P1

VICE-CONSUL OF CHINA IN THIS CITY PROTESTS

*Humor of the United States District Court Room on Sunday Night.
The Arrested Chinese Slept on Chairs, Bench and in Jury Box.*



Furthermore, Nickerson and the press also pointed out that American citizens of Chinese ancestry were also arrested during the raid. Nickerson cited the case of Lue Hee Fong, age thirty-two of San Francisco, who was held for two-and-a-half days before his status was confirmed.⁶³ Another citizen who was initially arrested with the others was George Sing, age twenty of New York. The *Globe* described him as a young man "with a bright face that had unmistakable evidence of Caucasian blood and good breeding. He was well-dressed and spoke English without a flaw."⁶⁴ This young man, who said his mother was a white woman, was released and then asked by the arrested Chinese if he could assist them in getting out.⁶⁵

Perhaps more significant than Nickerson's protest was the public demonstration against the raid held at Faneull Hall on October 16. This gathering was attended by several hundred people including a "goodly

sprinkling of women, some of them Sunday school teachers" as well as "15 or 20 prominent merchants from Chinatown, all in American attire."⁶⁶ The meeting was called to order by Nickerson who turned the proceedings over to a group of "prominent men." William Lloyd Garrison, the son of the well-known social reformer and abolitionist, made the first speech and denounced the raid as a transgression against basic rights of everyone living in the United States. He declared,

We are gathered to protest against the recent flagrant outrage upon ourselves and upon the fair fame of the city. It is a menace to constitutional government. A few orientals serve today as a pretext for this encroachment of a power hostile to democratic institutions. Tomorrow the victims may be negroes or Jews.⁶⁷

Garrison addressed the racial and political motives behind the raid:

The preliminary excuse for the brutality in Chinatown was the fact of a single and exceptional murder of one Chinaman by another, a crime almost of daily occurrence in other parts of the city among natives and foreigners.

The pretense of the police cloaked a purpose to round up the Chinese colony and capture the pitiful number who were unable to produce on the instant their certificates—the chattel tag which the great republic, founded by emigrants from oppression, exacts of these later refugees.

Imagine the tables turned and American citizens in China corralled and dragged into confinement on suspicion! The apathetic deadness of Boston would burst into volcanic wrath and the navy yard bristle with activity. Or, suppose a descent upon the Italian quarter were planned by the police, inspired by federal authority. Even let the Japanese be the intended victims. Strenuous and inflated as is our new "world power," the United States would shrink from the attempt. The eagle seeks a helpless quarry.⁶⁸

Other well-known figures spoke out against the raid. Rev. Dr. John Galbraith spoke of the high moral values exhibited by the Chinese and equated the raid with the "sand lots outrages of the Pacific coast."⁶⁹ And, Hon. T. J. Gargan declared that "one of the greatest outrages ever perpetrated upon a people was inflicted upon the Chinese of this city last Sunday night."⁷⁰

Later that week, the *Herald* reported that three local ministers began their Sunday sermons with impassioned denunciations of the raid, one pointing out that the "Chinaman has no friends; has no vote; has no gunboat; so he is an easy victim of the bully and the coward."⁷¹ While such sermons and the mass rally did little to alleviate the plight of those arrested, detained, and eventually deported, the positions taken by these

social reformers and ministers points to the impact that Chinese immigration had on American society. By coming to terms with how the Chinese were treated, some Americans addressed American immigration laws, racial preferences, and social mores. Indeed, the Chinese presence forced a number of Bostonians to examine the society they helped create.

Despite these protests, however, the raid apparently achieved its desired effect. The number of Chinese deported soon after the raid was five, and another forty-five were deported later. Thus, about 20 percent of those arrested were declared to be in the country illegally and deported at the expense of the United States government.⁷² Ironically, the *Herald's* first account of the raid ended with the statement, "If the officials succeed in deporting 50 Boston Celestials out of last night's batch, they will feel that they have done the greatest night's work of their lives."⁷³ While the total number of people deported was small, the results of the raid can be measured in yet another way. Both papers reported on October 26 that about 150 Chinese had left the city by train the previous evening. Although it was said that Chinese in New England often left the area during autumn, it was also reported that it was "probable" that their leaving was related to the raid and its aftermath, as this was largest group of Chinese to ever leave the area at the same time.⁷⁴

The 1903 raid on Boston Chinatown was thus not an isolated incident of police checking for registration certificates, but part of a larger movement which sought to rid the country of the Chinese who had managed to settle in the United States despite the passage of a series of exclusion acts. Therefore, the raid was successful to the degree that a small number of Chinese were eventually deported and soon after, another 150 left the city for points west, or perhaps China itself.

Conversely, the raid also had an unintended effect on Sino-American relations as well as the 1905 Chinese boycott of American goods in China. This can be seen in the case of Feng Hsia-wei (Fung Ah-wai, Fernando Ruiz). After being caught up in the raid, he went to the Philippines and later returned to China. Angered by his experiences in the United States, he wrote a book denouncing American attitudes toward the Chinese. In 1905, he committed suicide by taking poison near the American consulate in Shanghai and thus became a martyr for supporters of the boycott of American goods in China. When his body arrived in Canton for burial, mass demonstrations took place in support of the boycott movement.⁷⁵ Although the boycott did little to alleviate the severity of the exclusion policy, it was one of the first concrete expressions of modern Chinese nationalism, a movement that would eventually lead to the fall of the Qing dynasty and the founding of the Republic of China.

Although this raid is generally viewed in terms of American persecution of Chinese immigrants, this article has analyzed it as a vehicle to gain a broader perspective of Boston Chinatown at the turn of the century, and by extension, perhaps other Chinese communities as well.⁷⁶ The initial pretext for the raid was a murder, supposedly brought on by competition over money taken in by a rival association in a blackmail scheme designed to protect those who had not registered in accordance with the 1892 Geary Act. If this is true, it offers new information on how some of the Chinese may have dealt with the institutionalization of the exclusion policy. If not true, it can then be seen as a kind of "disinformation" the authorities used to discredit the Chinese community and simultaneously give justification to their own illegal activities.

The coverage of the Chinese in these accounts of the feud, murder, raid, and its aftermath, while often similar to the common imagery that denigrated immigrants in cultural terms, also disclosed an American preference for those who showed signs of assimilation. The newspapers often paid attention to those Chinese who wore American clothes, had cut their queues, and who spoke English, perhaps to say that some had been able to shed their "old ways" and achieve a degree of civilization. By making a distinction between those Chinese who had adopted some habits of the West and those who had not, the press revealed not only a preference for assimilated Chinese immigrants, but more important, acknowledged that such assimilation did indeed take place. Much of the anti-Chinese rhetoric of the nineteenth century, especially that originating in the western states, deemed the Chinese unassimilable and perpetually foreign. Here, however, it is evident that a number of Chinese had indeed become part of the American landscape, wearing American clothes, adopting certain social customs, and had learned the benefits of having American allies to come to their defense.

Thus, the central importance of "re-visiting" this murder, funeral, and the subsequent raid is that they provide evidence of close interracial relations between the Chinese and others. White Sunday School teachers, wives, friends, bail bondsmen, and associates of different ethnicities all played a role in this episode of Chinese American history that has heretofore been seen merely as a case of police harassment. From the cases of interracial cooperation and the information found in the Federal Census of 1900, it is evident that the Chinese had established roots in the city and had a broader network of associates and supporters than is often acknowledged. This may not have lessened the intensity of the anti-Chinese movement, but it certainly de-

fies the once-commonly held belief that the Chinese were unassimilable, isolated from the rest of society, and without interest in being active members in American society. While this case study is focused on Boston Chinatown, where the absence of anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting Chinese-Caucasian marriages would contribute for such interracial mixing, it is possible that scholars researching communities in other regions will, in reevaluating their sources (census data, newspaper accounts, insurance maps, etc), find similar examples of interracial relations. Such inquiry might thus bring to light a new perspective on the evolution of Asian American community life.

Finally, when placed in a contemporary context, the arrest of hundreds of Chinese on the basis of their failure to produce valid residence certificates upon demand speaks to the dangers of the use of a national identity card. In recent years, a variety of politicians and policy-makers have advocated the use of identity cards to distinguish "legal" and "illegal residents." While "legal residents" are told that they will have "nothing to fear," the 1903 raid on Boston Chinatown is an important example of the degree of power such a system of identification would give to the state. The overwhelming majority of the Chinese arrested in the raid were indeed legal residents, or even American citizens, but their presence in the immigrant community made them vulnerable to a mass arrest of questionable legality. The law obviously did not ensure the "legal residents" that they "had nothing to fear." With the flood of contemporary images that depict Chinatown and other communities of color as being populated by large numbers of unassimilable "illegal aliens," it is vital that we learn from historical practices in order to better understand, contextualize, and respond to similar pressures on present-day Asian American communities.

Notes

The author wishes to thank Charles Dew, Bob Lee, Peggy Pascoe, and the anonymous readers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this piece. This article is dedicated to my friends and colleagues in the East of California caucus with the hope that it will inspire further research on Asian Americans "east of California."

1. *The Statutes at Large of the United States of America*, vol. 27, 1893, 25-26.
2. I first became aware of the intricacies of this event when I noticed that the various secondary sources that cited the raid were inconsistent in stating the year in which it took place. Many of the sources placed the raid in October 1902, while others in October 1903. After going through the Boston newspapers for October of both years, it became evident that 1903 was the correct year. The confusion appears to have arisen from the most frequently cited article on the raid which had 1902 as the date, probably a printer's error. Later scholars depending on this source simply

repeated the mistake. The article in question is John Foster, "The Chinese Boycott," *Atlantic Monthly* 97 (1906), 118-127. The only other text which links the murder to the raid is a brief passage in Doris C.J. Chu, *Chinese in Massachusetts: Their Experiences and Contributions* (Boston: Chinese Culture Institute, 1987), 52.

3. Throughout the press coverage of this murder and its aftermath, Wong Yak Chong, Wong Ching, and Charlie Chinn are referred to by a variety of names. Wong Yak Chong is usually called Chong, Chung, or Shong. Wong Ching is sometimes called Wong Cheng, Chong, or Jung, and Charlie Chinn is sometimes named Chin Toy.
4. Here, too, spellings change throughout the coverage. The Hip Sing Tong is referred to as the Hep Sing or Hep Sen Tong. The On Leung Tong is sometimes referred to as the On Lion Tong.
5. *Boston Herald*, October 3, 1903, 1. Unless otherwise indicated, all citations of newspapers refer to the morning edition of the paper. The term "High-binder" was a common term for those belonging to *tongs*. It implies that they were involved in illegal activity and violence. Another common term for these men was "hatchet men," referring to one of their alleged weapons of choice. For a rather lurid account of the *tongs*, see Richard H. Dillon, *The Hatchet Men* (New York: Coward-McLunn, 1962).
6. *Boston Herald*, October 6, 1903, 11.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 3, 1903, 11.
9. *Boston Herald*, October 4, 1903, 28.
10. Similar depictions of the Chinese being untrustworthy can be found in Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971; originally published in 1890), 77-83.
11. *Boston Herald*, October 4, 1903, 28. After a speedy trial, Wong and Chinn were found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. For coverage of the trial, see *Boston Daily Globe*, November 23-25, 1903, and December 1-6, 1903; and *Boston Herald*, December 3-6, 1903.
12. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 5, 1903, 2.
13. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 6, 1903, 9.
14. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. This position echoes that of Delber K. McKee's *Chinese Exclusion Versus the Open Door Policy, 1900-1906: Clashes Over China Policy in the Roosevelt Era* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977), 68.
18. *Boston Herald*, October 4, 1903, 28.
19. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 5, 1903, 2.
20. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 7, 1903, 8. Although it is well known that the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association urged Chinese immigrants to resist the registration requirement, this is the only case of al-

leged blackmail among the Chinese relating to the Geary Act that I have come across.

21. *Ibid.*
22. *Boston Globe*, October 8, 1903, 5. The two previous quoted sentences in this paragraph are all from this same article. Later, on November 23, an article on the front page of the evening edition of the *Boston Globe* simply stated, "It was the murder of Chong [sic] which led to the raid upon the Chinese."
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 9, 1903, 7 and October 10, 1903, 1.
25. *Boston Herald*, October 11, 1903, 5.
26. This cemetery was the main burial ground for the Chinese in the Boston area. It is located in Mattapan, about eight miles from Chinatown. The remains of the Chinese there were often disinterred and sent back to China for final burial in ancestral plots. I thank Ting-fun Yeh of the Chinese Historical Society of New England for providing me with information on the cemetery, including news of current efforts to restore the Chinese headstones there.
27. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 11, 1903, 3.
28. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 5. According to the *Boston Herald* of October 6 (11), Wong was a member of the Roslindale Club, enjoyed bicycle riding, and regularly attended the "Chinese class in the Sunday school of the Bromfield Street Methodist Church."
29. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 5.
30. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8.
31. *Ibid.* Both papers also report that there was a final viewing of the body at the grave site before the coffin was sealed. This is the only reference of such a practice that I have encountered in the study of Chinese burial rituals. For studies of Chinese burial practices, see Emily Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983); J.J.M. de Groot, *The Religious System of China*, 6 vols. (Leiden: Brill Publishers, 1894); and *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). The study of the transformation of religious practices among Chinese immigrants in America is one of the areas in Chinese American history that is still underdeveloped.
32. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8.
33. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 2.
34. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8.
35. *Ibid.*
36. At the height of the Red Scare after the First World War, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer authorized a series of raids in thirty-three cities with the intention of arresting and deporting political radicals. Like the raid on Boston Chinatown, government agents entered homes and other establishments without warrants, arrested large numbers, and deported

relatively few. For a concise synopsis of these raids, see Stanley Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 217-245.

37. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8.
38. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, p. 8.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. When "Chinatown" appears within quotation marks, I am using it to denote images of "Chinatown" rather than the actual community. The body of literature on the imagery of "Chinatowns" is far too large and commonly known to be cited here. A recent motion picture that depicted "Chinatown" as a crime-ridden community where much of the illicit activity takes place in restaurant basements is Michael Cimino's *Year of the Dragon* (1985). For a study which examines the use of "Chinatown" imagery to promote political agendas that have little to do with the residents of Chinatown, see K. Scott Wong, "Chinatown: Conflicting Images, Contested Terrain," *MELUS* 20:1 (Spring 1995). The image of "Chinatown" as a district of exotic vice is not confined to North American sensibilities. In Barcelona, the section of the city known as "Barrio Chino" ("Chinatown") became known as the "center of everything conservatives feared, from vice to anarcho-syndicalism." This term for this area was apparently first used by the Republican journalist Francisco Madrid in the early twentieth century. See Temma Kaplan, *Red City, Blue City: Social Movements in Picasso's Barcelona* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 148. I thank Joel Wolfe for bringing this similarity in images to my attention.
42. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 8.
43. For a recent study of how opium smoking was used against the Chinese by their detractors, see Gregory Yee Mark, "Opium and the 'Chinese Question,'" in *Bearing Dreams, Shaping Visions*, Linda A. Revilla, Gail M. Nomura, Shawn Wong, and Shirley Hune, eds. (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1993), 5-13.
44. *Boston Herald*, October 27, 1903, 8.
45. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 8.
46. For cases which appeared in the press soon after the raid of white women being found in "opium dens" or being lured into Chinese residences, see *Boston Daily Globe*, November, 27, 1903, 1; *Boston Herald*, November 27, 1903, 1, 8; *Boston Herald*, January 24, 1904, 12; and *Boston Herald*, January 27, 1904, 11. For a different, yet equally manipulative, reading of the relationships between Chinese men and white girls/women, see D.W. Griffith's 1919 film *Broken Blossoms* and John Kuo Wei Tchen's study of the film, "Modernizing White Patriarchy: Re-Viewing D.W. Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*," in Russell Leong, ed., *Moving the Image: Independent Asian Pacific American Media Arts*, (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1991), 133-143.
47. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 8.

48. See Shepard Schwartz, "Mate-selection Among New York City's Chinese Males, 1931-38," *The American Journal of Sociology* 56:6 (May 1951), 562-568 and John Kuo Wei Tchen, "New York Chinese: The Nineteenth-Century Pre-Chinatown Settlement," *Chinese America: History and Perspectives*, 1990 (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 1990), 157-192. Mary Lui's forthcoming dissertation (Cornell) on interracial relations, marriage, and family life in turn-of-the-century New York Chinatown will be a welcome addition to our understanding of these issues.
49. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 8; and *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8. The Federal Census of 1900 lists this couple as Ming Yen Goon and Kelly Goon. Mr. Goon was forty-two years old, born in China, and had immigrated to the United States in 1880. Mrs. Goon was twenty-four years old, born in Massachusetts to Irish-immigrant parents. They are both listed as literate and able to speak English. Mr. Goon worked as a janitor; Mrs. Goon had no occupation listed. At the time of the Census, they had been married for four years. *Twelfth Census of the United States of America* (National Archives, microfilm, roll 678), hereafter cited as Federal Census of 1900.
50. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 8. This couple does not appear in the Federal Census of 1900.
51. All of the specific demographic information found in this and the following two paragraphs are based on the Federal Census of 1900 (roll 678).
52. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 1 (evening edition).
53. *House Documents* 847, 59th Congress, 1st Session, 1905-1906, 129. The newspapers' figures are inconsistent for the days following the raid. Therefore, I have relied on the 1906 report to the House of Representatives which was compiled from the records of the Bureau of Immigration, assuming that the figures are more reliable than the inconsistent numbers found in both newspapers. This number, when compared to the Census figures for the population of Chinatown, indicates that a great many more Chinese were in the area that evening than usual, probably coming from outlying areas and other cities.
54. *House Documents* 847, 129.
55. *Ibid.*
56. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 13, 1903, 14.
57. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 1 (evening edition). The custom of laundrymen coming into Chinatown is during their day off on the weekends is consistent with that written about in Paul Siu's *The Chinese Laundryman: A Study of Social Isolation* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), 137-155.
58. *Boston Daiy Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8 (evening edition).
59. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 13, 1903, 14. This might signify that, like today, some people hired legal or illegal immigrants as inexpensive labor or were otherwise associated with them, but were reluctant to come forward and vouch for them.
60. For examples, see *Boston Daily Globe*, October 14, 1903, 3 and October 15, 1903, 6.

61. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 13, 1903, 1 (evening edition).
62. Stephen W. Nickerson, "Our Chinese Treaties; and Legislation; and their Enforcement," *North American Review* 181 (September 1905), 376.
63. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 18, 1903, 8.
64. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903, 8.
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 16, 1903, 1 (evening edition).
67. *Ibid.* In December of 1901, Garrison presided over a public meeting held at the Methodist Episcopal Church of Boston protesting the continuation of the Geary Act. See McKee, *Chinese Exclusion Versus the Open Door Policy*, 49-50.
68. *Boston Daily Globe*, October 16, 1903, 8 (evening edition).
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Boston Herald*, October 19, 1903, 1.
72. *House Documents* 847, 129.
73. *Boston Herald*, October 12, 1903, 2.
74. *Boston Herald*, October 26, 1903, 1; and *Boston Daily Globe*, October 26, 1903, 14. Both articles also noted that there was a body of a Chinese woman on the train being transported back to China. She was identified as Lee Lou Ping, a victim of tuberculosis. She was also said to have been the first Chinese woman to be taken back to China from Boston for burial. She had been originally interred in Mount Hope Cemetery.
75. For details, see Delber McKee, *Chinese Exclusion Versus the Open Door Policy*, 152 and 164; and Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *China and the Overseas Chinese in the United States, 1868-1911* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1983), 106. For Chinese-language sources on Feng's suicide, see A. Ying, *Fan Mei Huagong jinyue wenxue ji* ("A Collection of Literature Written in Opposition to American Restriction of Chinese Laborers") (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 1962), 696-699; and Zhang Cunwu, *Guangxu sanshiyinian ZhongMei gongyue fengchao* ("The 1905 Sino-American Labor Treaty Crisis") (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan xiandaishi yanjiusuo, 1966), 220-221.
76. For a study of a similar raid (though slightly later) on a Chinese American community and the Chinese and Euro-American response, see Shirley Sui-Ling Tam, "Police Round-Up of Chinese in Cleveland in 1925: A Case Study in a Racist Measure and the Chinese Response," M.A. Thesis, Case Western Reserve University, 1988.

