

## FEATURE

# A Great Moment in Chinese American History

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Written by *Chinese American Heroes*

In 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt requested and Congress repealed the 15 statutes excluding immigrants from China, popularly known as the Chinese Exclusion Acts. They replaced it with a system giving Chinese a minimal immigration quota (105 per annum) and finally made Chinese aliens eligible for naturalization as US citizens. The trick was that the US Government still made it nearly impossible for a Chinese person to legally immigrate to the United States with only 105 chances each year. This restriction applied to all Chinese, even those that were citizens of England, South Africa, Panama, Thailand, or anywhere else in the world, making it even less likely that those who applied would be picked.

On October 3, 1965 President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Hart-Celler Act, which formally abolished national origin quotas and race based restrictions in immigration law. The immigration quota was upped to 20,000 per year for each nationality, which is the norm for people from European and Western Hemisphere nations. Spouses, parents, and unmarried children of American citizens could also enter as non-quota immigrants. Chinatowns across America that had been rapidly dying out before 1965 soon became filled with new life and activity as new immigrants arrived and the unfamiliar sound of Chinese children filled the streets.



After formal diplomatic and immigration ties were established with the People's Republic of China in 1979, the quotas for Chinese were increased again, providing another yearly quota of 20,000 for Taiwan and 600 for Hong Kong. The new annual quota was then 40,600.

With the change of immigration law in 1965 and quota increases after 1979, the population of Chinese in America grew from the 1960 census count of 236,084 to the 2006 count of 3,497,484 - an increase of almost 1,500% in 46 years.

In 2008, the Organization of Chinese Americans and the Asian American Studies Department at the University of Maryland published "A Portrait of Chinese Americans" which provided a snapshot of the current Chinese American population. It described them as highly diverse. 29.4% are native born and 70.6% are foreign born. Among the foreign born, 70.6% were born in Mainland China, 15.9% born in Taiwan, and 9.4% born in Hong Kong. The small percentage remaining are from the Chinese Diaspora that includes all other countries. 70.2% of Chinese Americans are American citizens.

In education, the attained level of education varies between the countries of origin. Chinese Americans originating from Taiwan and Hong Kong are mostly college educated, at 68.95 and 53.75 percent, respectively. Chinese Americans from Mainland China and the

Diaspora have both high and very low levels of education. Because education is consistently emphasized in traditional Chinese culture, Chinese Americans in general had better over-all education than White Americans.

The incomes of Chinese Americans are generally slightly higher than the general population, but Chinese Americans consistently earn less than the non-Hispanic White population at every level of education. However, Chinese American women with higher than high school education earn substantially more income than non-Hispanic White women.

10.6% of Chinese Americans are now multi-racial, with 6.2% married to other Asians, and 4.3% married to non-Hispanic Whites. Tracking the developments among multi-racial Chinese Americans will require more effort in the future as surnames will no longer reveal many people with partial Chinese ancestry.