

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History 436-009**  
**From Far East to Old West Collection**  
**Interviewer: unknown**  
**Interviewee: Bob Swartout**  
**July 21, 1998**

Bob Swartout: Well I want give thanks to Bill Wang who used to teach at Carroll for a number of years (unintelligible). Bill, as a former employee of Carroll College, called up Washington State University to see to see if there was anyone there who could fill the position quickly. I happened to be the person who answered the phone (unintelligible). I came over to interview; I turned down a job that wasn't with the college (unintelligible) just the week before. It is a fine school but I'm (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: As an undergraduate. Especially my last couple years as a graduate a lot of my courses focused on East Asian history and politics. I was especially interested in Japanese politics. So then when I made the decision that I wanted to be a Peace Corps Volunteer I was really looking for a position in East Asia (unintelligible). I considered turning down that invitation because it was as a middle school teacher and up to that point in my life I had no interest in ever being a teacher. People would find out that I was a history major and they would often assume that I was planning on being a teacher and I would say, "I have no idea what I'm going to do, but I know that I will never be a teacher." So I was ambivalent over the assignment, the actual assignment as a middle school teacher. But I thought, "Well, it's very difficult to get into the Peace Corps, I've actually been invited to one of the countries I requested. I shouldn't be that picky." So I said yes and it changed my life.

(Break in tape)

BS: The first Chinese came to Montana in the 1860s and were drawn to Montana by the discovery of gold. That was something that was very common in other western communities. So the Chinese come up largely from California to pursue the gold that was being discovered by 1862, 1863, 1864. They come in such numbers that by 1870 the Chinese represented roughly ten percent of the Montana (unintelligible) population. So a very substantial number.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: According to the official census records the figure is about 2,008. But in fact the census takers probably notoriously underestimated, often underestimated the number of Chinese. U.S. Census takers frequently provided a much lower number for Chinese than that were in any particular area, not just in Montana. So we know the official number was about 2,000. The unofficial might have been as high as 3,000.

Interviewer: (unintelligible) – Asks about the disparity in official numbers.

BS: A couple of basic reasons for that. From the census takers point of view the Chinese all looked alike. So they had a difficult time separating one Chinese point from another Chinese point. Another fact was that the Chinese could not speak English and the census takers could not speak Chinese. So they had a difficult time recording names. In fact if you look at the census records you often see that rather than having individual names for each Chinese they simply have a China (unintelligible). Finally a certain number of the Chinese had come into the United States illegally and were fearful of any contact with government officials; fearful that that contact might lead to deportation. So they tended to shy away from those officials. In some ways that distrust of government officials was not limited to just the United States. Many of the Chinese would had come from China had not had particularly pleasant experiences with the officials there. So it wasn't a good thing to make contact with government officials. The smaller the contact the better.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: I'd have to think about that.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Chinese immigration into the United States was not legal until 1868, until the Burlingame Treaty. The Burlingame Treaty then extends most favored nation status to the Chinese.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: On paper, yeah. Now in fact the U.S. was not particularly concerned about maintaining those rules because in the West there was a significant need for labor. That's especially true in the building of the railroads.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Yes. California was often referred to by the Chinese as the Gold Mountain or the Golden Mountain. It had to do with the stories that were circulating back in China, back in Guangdong Province about the amount of gold that was discovered in California and how they could support (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well, up until 1864 it wasn't anything. But no, they did not have a particular name in mind (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well the gold discoveries in California were then reported in newspapers in China, in the *Gazette*. You've got to remember that the overwhelming majority of Chinese who immigrate to America in the nineteenth century come from a single Chinese province – Guangdong. They not only come from that one province but they come from three districts in Guangdong. So there was

a very strong network within those districts that would pass the information around. The gold discoveries were recorded in what were known at the Chinese *Gazettes*. The Chinese would have access to that and thus, it wasn't surprising that they had known of these gold discoveries.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: It would probably take a number of months. But then that was true throughout the world. It was true of the United States as well. Certainly there wouldn't be instantaneous communication.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well that would make sense. Until the telegraph was established communication from California to the East Coast has to go either by way of the Panama Canal or around the tip of South America. So if you're traveling from San Francisco to say, Boston, and you'd have around the tip of South America, that's a trip that just isn't (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible) – brief conversation

BS: Well they were coming into an area that had not developed any significant urban communities. It was a very rough thing. Montana was isolated from the rest of the United States, not just from East Asia. So in terms of physical structure there was a great (?). Now that changes substantially from 1864 when Montana gains territorial status, to the mid-1880s when the railroads begin to come. It's the railroads more than any other single force that really connects Montana with the rest of the country and the rest of the world. Of course the Chinese play a critical role in the construction of the railroads.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: It was a world apart. You have to consider what China was like in the mid-nineteenth century. It was a country that was very densely populated. The land was given over to an intensive form of agriculture in South China, the area where most of the Chinese came from to the United States. Rice was planted in South China and you would have at least two rice crops per year. So coming from that part of China where everything is under cultivation, to the Northern Rockies, where there was very little agricultural development, in part because the population base was so small. But also because of the climate. So it would have been a dramatic change. In fact, I think it really reinforces the notion that these Chinese are pioneers. They're risk-takers. They were willing to try things that most of us wouldn't try. It would be a very (unintelligible) possibility.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Even more so because, of course, they're not only coming into a new geographical, geological environment. But they're also coming into a culture that is very different from their own. The truth is that most of these Chinese, among the first generation, did not speak English. So they're coming into a society where the laws, culture values, language. And yet they adapt to

those indigenous institutions and, in fact, this is very critical. I think this is one of the things that most impresses me about the Chinese immigrants, specifically in Montana.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well, once the Chinese come into a community they white miners who were there often viewed them as a threat, as competition. Thus, they often put pressure of territorial legislatures to pass law that would prohibit the Chinese from working some of those same areas. Those kinds of law were passed in Montana as well. It wasn't that the Chinese used different techniques. The technology was essentially the same whether you were Chinese or not Chinese. But in many instances they wouldn't be allowed into a mining district until whites had already mined that area and then had moved on to richer things. The Chinese would then come in and re-work those tailings and then make money off of that.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Again, I think we have to be careful not to create new stereotypes. In Montana we have records to indicate that Chinese did own mining claims, worked those claims. In some cases we have examples where Chinese and whites actually created partnerships and worked together. So I wouldn't say that all Chinese were excluded from mining districts. It would vary from district to district and territory to territory. But certainly they were facing a difficult situation and again, the fact that they could persevere and that they could make a living off of that mining indicates just how impressive that was. I tend to think of them as people who made a very important contribution to the economic and social development of Montana.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: For the most part we're talking about classifying. The Chinese, for the most part, were not hired to work in (unintelligible) mining, whether it be coal mining, gold mining, silver mining. There might have been a few individual exceptions, but in general Chinese were not hired (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Most of their mining activities would be on their own camp. Although, again, when we're talking about the Placer Period of the 1860s and 1870s, you would sometimes have Chinese who would be working with other miners in the area. Remember that Montana in the 1860s and 1870s is a very fluid community. You have people coming into Montana from every state in the United States, from almost every country in the world. It's a very fluid situation, it's a very heterogeneous population. So you would have people from different ethnic background, nationalities, who would make common cause and would work together for their own economic benefit.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: The Chinese would have a more difficult time being accepted by the larger society than just about anyone.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: For the great majority of them, that wasn't their initial goal. Sometimes the word sojourner has been applied to the first generation of Chinese immigrants who would come to America; that they would come here, they would make a good wage, significant profit for their labors, and then take that money back to China with them. But in that sense, the Chinese weren't that much different from most other ethnic groups that would come to Montana. The truth is, once they arrived, once they began to establish homes, begin to establish social networks, then many of them chose to remain in the United States.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Oh sure, a substantial number would go back. But again, that was true for virtually every ethnic group that came to the United States in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries.

((unintelligible) conversation among interviewers)

BS: Well again, the conditions were very primitive, but then that was true for all miners regardless of ethnic background or nationally. But the Chinese miners, like miners from other parts of the world, are eager to create communities that provide them with a sense of identity. So they would not only begin to build their own establishments, not literally, but within the (unintelligible), try to get ownership of their own companies or stores or whatever they may be. But they would try to create a social network that would reinforce the sense of who they were.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: They would have organizations that they would establish and those organizations would have to insular so they could socialize, so they could entertain one another. In Butte, for example, a so-called "Joss House," a temple was established where they could go for; I don't want to say spiritual enlightenment, that's not the word, for a spiritual (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible) – question about acceptance

BS: For the most part they were not. In fact, a number of communities, as communities become more established in Montana then those communities would often write local ordinances that would prohibit the Chinese from living in a certain part of the town, or being in a certain part of town after a certain time. The Chinese are often accused of being clannish, of sticking to themselves. Again, I think we have to understand why that would happen. If they tended to gather together it was because they were often forced together. They were not permitted to live in other parts of town. Certain parts of town would be where they were allowed to remain. Then of course on top of that, in order to survive in this rather hostile environment they needed to be able to talk with people to make connections with other people in their own languages. And

again, that wasn't unique to the Chinese. Virtually every ethnic group would come to America with the same thing.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: The first major wave of Chinese who would come to Montana would be drawn by the discovery of gold. Gold was discovered in Bannack in 1862. What we consider to be to be the Grasshopper, Grasshopper Creek, gold was discovered in Alder Gulch, what became Virginia City in 1863. Gold was discovered in Last Chance Gulch, (unintelligible) in 1864. That's what initially draws the Chinese to the Northern Rockies. Once they are here they then begin to move into other types of work. They begin to establish their own stores. Laundries, for examples or retail stores, restaurants or cafes, trying to pursue economic opportunity where ever they could find it. We actually have a select number of Chinese who made their way into eastern Montana and actually worked as cowboys.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: I think the point here is that the Chinese were will to try almost any craft if it was open to them as a way of moving ahead. In that sense they were not only courageous but very inventive.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: It's not that the Chinese have a particular aptitude for laundries. Most of them in China had never probably owned laundries. But it was the kind of business that you could start with a very small amount of capital. It was, for the most part, labor intensive and the Chinese were willing to apply their labor and they were able to make a business. Then once they've done that that begins to create its own momentum. Once one member of the clan has established the laundries and is successful at it, then others would then use this plan (unintelligible)

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: No, no. Obviously, they are serving the Chinese community. But they aren't serving the Chinese community exclusively. Again, if you look at newspaper of the day you'll find that a certain number of those Chinese businesses were running ads in Montana newspapers. They were running those ads obviously in an effort to appeal to a non-Chinese constituency.

Interviewer: And did that work?

BS: Yes.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well the white community as a whole would see them in somewhat stereotypical terms. If the Chinese were running a laundry, well, that was acceptable and that made sense. At least for certain people. There actually was a certain amount of tension that developed between Chinese laundries and white-owned laundries. So much so that laws were passed forcing the Chinese to

pay a special tax that white laundries didn't have to pay. But again, the larger community began to see the Chinese as launderers, people who would run laundries. So they would go in and take their business to those clients. The same thing is true with Chinese restaurants. On the other hand, most professional areas were closed to the Chinese. A number of discriminatory laws were passed, both in territorial times and with the new statehood. They'd try to keep the Chinese in their place as much as they could.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: They did. Not always to the same degree. It tended to happen to big groups that were racially different. So in these kind of laws, for example, Chinese, Japanese, and African Americans were often singled out. In fact, when the anti-miscegenation laws passed in Montana it specifically identifies those three groups, Chinese, Japanese, and African Americans.

(Break in recording)

BS: Again, the Chinese worked in these communities because they wanted to be able to visit with people who spoke the same language and understood the same cultural ideals that they had. But along with that, local communities would sometimes pass ordinances that restricted the Chinese to certain parts of the community. So that tended to reinforce it. Finally we need to remember that the overwhelming majority of the Chinese who come to America come with very little. One reason they come to America is because they hope to make enough money that they can send the money back to support their families in China. They don't come with much money, and then once they're here, they want to live life as frugally as possible so that they can send as much money as possible back to China. Now if you don't come with much money, and you are trying to conserve what money you have, then you're to live in that part of the community where the housing is relatively cheap. And those areas became known as Chinatowns.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: The Chinese have a major impact on railroad construction in America in the 1860s. They are primarily responsible for the building of the Central Pacific Railroad which would link Sacramento, California to Promontory Point, Utah. Almost all of the way ((unintelligible)) was done by Chinese labor. When that link is completed in the 1860s it becomes the first trans-continental railroad in American history. Central Pacific was the western half of that line. The Union Pacific was the eastern half. That establishes a reputation for the Chinese as some of the very best railroad workers to be found in America. When a group of investors would get together in the 1870s and decide they want to build a trans-continental railroad across the northern tier, that is a railroad that would connect the Minneapolis area into either Portland or Puget Sound, then they begin to look for experienced railroad workers (unintelligible). The Chinese had already established that reputation so then they are hired in very large numbers to construct roughly the western half of the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Yes. The total numbers don't change a whole lot because at the same time the Chinese railroad workers were coming into the region, the number of Chinese miners would be declining because placer mining is beginning to (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: No. In some cases that would happen. But in other cases Chinese are brought in to work the railroad because they already have extensive experience in railroad construction.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well it was back-breaking work. They had to move huge amounts of terrain in order to build a line across the northern Rockies. So physically it was very demanding. In fact, when the Chinese were first hired to work the Central Pacific some naysayers believed they couldn't do the work because they were slight in stature. It turns out, of course, that that was entirely false despite the fact that they were somewhat small in stature. They were very strong and could do this (unintelligible). When the Chinese began working on the Northern Pacific Railroad through western Montana, they have to do that same kind of work. So it's not only physically very demanding, it was also very dangerous. They were often trying to lay track along cliffs where they would have to blast out the rock using dynamite. Again, we may think that the Chinese were hired to be railroad workers because they were available and you could get a Chinese railroad worker for just one dollar a day. That's partly true. But on top of that the Chinese brought to this work great dedication and great skill that other workers didn't necessarily have.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Often what they would do is, say they were at the top of the cliff, they would then lower Chinese down over the cliff face using ropes and baskets. They would then drill into the side of the cliff, the base of the cliff, plant their charges. Once the explosions happened then they would (unintelligible), but then once the explosion the workers would be lowered down the side again and they would continue this work. It was an amazing engineering feat. In fact, when engineers who worked in the railroad first came into that area, they were fearful that they could not build the line. But it was largely due to the diligence and the talent of the Chinese that (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: I don't know. I think the Northern Pacific, there was.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: They often did. On both the Central Pacific railroad and the Northern Pacific Railroad there was a timetable that was being followed (unintelligible). With people who were charged with project, (unintelligible). Obviously they couldn't work as quickly, (unintelligible), they couldn't lay (unintelligible) of track (unintelligible). But for the most part it was stable working. It was brutal work. Dangerous. There were significant casualties in the number of Chinese railroad workers. The truth is, for the most part, the companies were terrible (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible) – question about wages.

BS: They typical wage for a Chinese railroad worker was a dollar a day. For non-Chinese (unintelligible) the same work, they were paid two dollars a day, which is a substantial difference. So there was a substantial difference. Today we wouldn't think of a difference between one dollar, two dollars. But in terms of percentage, (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: That was the rationale that was used by whites in an effort to justify the exclusion of Chinese from the United States. It would have—

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: That the Chinese were taking jobs. Well, that gets us into a very broad issue, and I don't want it to be limited to just the railways.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: For the most part, there wasn't great public hostility to the Chinese working on the railroads, because in fact, there simply weren't enough white workers to do the job.

*Swartout describes why the Chinese came to Montana:*

Like other people from around the United States, from around the globe, they came because of the discovery of gold. The first major gold strike was made in Montana in 1862, in what became Bannack. In 1863 a gold strike was made in Alder Gulch which led to the creation of Virginia City. In 1864 there, of course, was the gold strike in Helena at Last Chance Gulch. That's why in the middle of the 1860s you had not just hundreds but literally thousands of people moving into the northern Rockies searching for gold and the Chinese were part of that movement into the northern Rockies. Some of them came directly from China. Many of them came from California, from Idaho, from the Pacific Northwest, in general. So the very first Chinese came in the 1860s, and for the most part it was mining that brought them here.

Like a lot of other immigrant people who would come to America, the Chinese would pursue whatever opportunity might be open to them. In addition to placer mining, the Chinese played a very important role in railroad construction — not just in Montana but throughout the American West. They were primarily responsible for building the Central Pacific Railroad, which ran from California all the way into Utah. That really established their tradition as outstanding railroad workers.

*Swartout describes Chinese railroad workers and urban workers*

So, by the early 1880s, when the Northern Pacific Railroad was being built across the northern tier, a railroad that would essentially run from Minnesota to the Pacific Northwest, then the Chinese were brought in and built the bulk of that line from Montana to the coast.

So they played a very important role in the construction of railroad lines and the maintenance of railroad lines.

They also pursued urban opportunities. We often associate the Chinese with laundries. It's not that the Chinese loved washing clothes, but it was a kind of business that you could get into with a fairly small amount of capital; it was labor intensive. The Chinese were willing to work very hard for everything that they had. So they moved into a variety of businesses in urban communities. They would own and operate laundries, retail stores, grocery stores, restaurants, of course, and would even go into professional occupations if those were open to them.

For example, here in Montana, we have a number of examples of Chinese who became physicians — practicing Chinese medicine in their local communities. A lot of people use the word coolie rather indiscriminately. Chinese peasants who came to the American West were often described as coolies. In fact, they were not coolies. The term coolie had a very specific legal meaning. Essentially, if you were a coolie, it meant that you were an indentured servant. American law prohibited that sort of practice by the 19th century. So, when we talk about Chinese coolies, we're really talking about people who would go to such countries as Peru, Trinidad, Cuba.

The Chinese who come to America, for the most part, come on their own. They may have relatives or friends in the United States who could help them. They may borrow money from someone in China so they could make the trip, but they essentially came on their own and could pursue whatever economic opportunities might arise once they arrived in the United States. In the late 19th century, a lot of animosity was directed toward the Chinese by certain groups in the United States.

One of the complaints was that the Chinese were undercutting white wages because they worked for less. In fact, the Chinese were often caught in a vise between one group and another. If the Chinese wished to join labor unions so that they could create a common front and push for labor rights that was very difficult. There was not a single major labor union that would allow the Chinese to join its ranks. There was one exception, and that was the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW) often referred to as the Wobblies. But, in fact, although they were a very colorful organization, the Wobblies did not represent a large percentage of working class Americans in the late 19th century. So on the one hand, the Chinese were essentially prohibited from joining labor unions and creating a common front — hoping for better working conditions and better wages.

At the same time, because they weren't able to join those unions, they basically had to accept whatever pay the railroads were willing to give them. So, yes, it is true that they often worked for less, for example a typical Chinese railroad worker in the 19th century might be paid a \$1 a day where a white railroad worker would be paid \$2 a day. But, that wasn't because the Chinese wished to work for only \$1 a day. That was simply all that was made available to them.

I don't believe so. For the most part, it was word of mouth. By the 1870s/1880s you had organizations in San Francisco, Chinese organizations, who could help to locate workers and send them on to railroads if the railroads were looking for additional railroad workers. So you might have what was known as a gang of Chinese who would go to work for a particular railroad. But, for the most part, they weren't recruited directly in China. They were recruited after they arrived in the United States.

First of all, we need to remember that when we talk about Chinese miners, we're talking essentially about placer mining. For the most part, the Chinese were not allowed into industrial

or underground mining. If they were working particular claims, sometimes they could be more successful if they pooled their resources. So you might have half a dozen or a dozen Chinese who would come together, pool their resources. That would allow them to perhaps obtain the claim or go buy the equipment that they would need to work that claim, and then work it as a group, and then split the profits. I think, to some degree, there was also safety in numbers. If you were an individual miner working on your own, you might sometimes run into trouble — not just with white desperados in the area but any other group of people who might wander across you.

### *On Montana's Chinese population relationships and numbers*

On occasion there were conflicts between Chinese workers and Native Americans. Native Americans sometimes resented non-Native Americans who were penetrating their traditional hunting grounds. They might respond. The Chinese could sometimes be caught in that situation. And in fact, that was not only true of the Chinese miners but it was generally true for non-Chinese miners. I think we often have an image in the West of the lone prospector trying to strike it rich. The reality was that most placer miners, regardless of cultural background, regardless of race, worked in groups.

There was, as I said, safety in numbers. It depends on which Chinese you're talking about, but there was a substantial number of Chinese in Montana by the end of the 1860s. For example, by 1870, according to official census records, there were roughly 2,000 Chinese in Montana. Unofficially the number was even higher than that, but if we accept the figure of 2,000, that represented roughly 10% of the Montana territory's total population — 1870, that's six years before Custer's Last Stand, the Battle of the Little Bighorn. So, in fact, the history of Asian immigrants to Montana goes back well into Montana's early territorial history.

When Chinese immigrants began arriving on the west coast in the 1850s and 1860s, spurred on by the discovery of gold in California, initially there was a kind of ambivalent feeling toward them. Some white Americans resented the Chinese from the beginning, but other white Americans saw the Chinese as people who could make an important contribution to the development of the West. Certainly many of the railroad barons of America in the mid and late 19th century appreciated the talent and the efforts of the Chinese workers.

### *On the development of prejudice towards the Chinese population*

But, over time by the time you get to the mid or late 1870s, anti-Chinese sentiments begin to pick up steam across America, but especially in the American West in states such as California, Oregon, territories such as Washington and Idaho. Some of that resentment was directed towards the Chinese because they were viewed as competition in the work force. But, in fact, I think the evidence is quite clear that, for the most part, the Chinese were not doing the same jobs that white workers were inclined to do. So I don't think that's the primary reason for the rise of this anti-Chinese sentiment by the late 1870s, early 1880s. Sadly, I think it was fueled primarily by the kind of racism that was quite common in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. We know, for example, that the end of the Civil War in 1865 did not suddenly end racism in America, in many ways it became even more pronounced in the late 19th century.

There were certain pseudo-scientific doctrines that became fashionable stating that people who were black or Asian, for example, were inheritably inferior to whites. I think that kind of racism, coupled with the fear that the Chinese might begin to take jobs that were traditionally

filled by non-Chinese, then that created momentum for the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. Well, anti-Asian sentiments in America were probably at their peak from roughly the 1870s until the early 1940s, if, initially those sentiments are aimed at the Chinese, but as the number of Chinese in America begins to dwindle, after the 1882 Exclusion Act, then you begin to see some of those sentiments directed toward the newly arriving Japanese.

### *Discussion of Japanese immigrants*

Japanese immigrants begin coming to America in significant numbers around the turn of the century. A lot of the rhetoric that had been aimed at the Japanese in the 1870s and the early 1880s, it was then directed against the Japanese roughly ... I need to restate that. A lot of the rhetoric that is aimed against the Chinese in the late 1870s and early 1880s is then directed against the Japanese roughly twenty years later.

### *Discussion of Chinese exclusion acts.*

Let me give you a couple of examples of the problems that the Chinese would have had once these exclusion acts were put into place. The first exclusion act took place in the early 1880s and it essentially prohibited most Chinese immigration to America. In fact, according to that law passed in 1882, only Chinese merchants were allowed to immigrate from that point on. The truth is that the great majority of Chinese who had immigrated to America in the 1860s and 1870s were not of the merchant class, but in fact had been peasants in China and had become laborers in America. Then in the early 1890s, another act is passed, there actually are a series of acts that are passed in the 1880s and 1890s that made it increasingly difficult for other Chinese to come.

The Geary Act, for example, stated that all Chinese living in America had to register with the Internal Revenue Service. If they did not register with the Internal Revenue Service, then they could be deported, All Chinese also had to have a certification or a certificate with them indicating that they were legally in the United States. Now some Chinese might have come into the United States legally, perhaps had even lived in the United States for twenty years, but if they did not have that certificate, then again, they could be deported from the United States. So, just arriving in America didn't automatically mean that life would be easier for them.

A new series of problems were created by these exclusion acts that were passed in the 1880s and 1890s. Given the types of problems that often confronted the Chinese in America, we might wonder why they would stay. I think two or three things come to mind.

To begin with we have to remember that conditions in China in the late 19th century were extremely difficult. There had been a huge rebellion called the Taiping Rebellion that had taken place in China in the mid-19th century. Roughly thirty million people were killed in that rebellion. And even after that rebellion is suppressed, you have a series of problems plaguing China. You have the decline of the Ching Dynasty. It no longer is able to rule China in an effective fashion. You have the heyday of western imperialism. The Chinese in many respects are losing control of their own economic destiny. And then you have the large-scale sale — selling — and use of opium, something that certain Western powers forced on China. With conditions being so grim in China, then why not go to America and why not stay in America.

As difficult as life might be in America, conditions in China could often be that much worse. Then of course, even if the Chinese, even if certain Chinese had come to America thinking that they would be sojourners, that they would be temporary visitors, once they had arrived, once they had created homes, once they had established their own businesses, then they became part of that American experience just as immigrants coming from Latin America or different parts of Europe would change in the process. I think that happened to the Chinese as well. They were able to lead good productive lives in America, despite the hostility they often faced. They were able to create communities of their own that were exciting, vibrant, rewarding. There were a number of Chinese communities throughout Montana from the 1860s into the 1890s, but the two largest Chinese communities were in Butte and Helena. And there you had enough... you had Chinese in sufficient numbers so that these communities to some degree could be self sufficient. And the Chinese who might be in living in more remote areas where you might have just a few dozen people instead of 200 people, then they would be attracted to places like Helena and Butte where you not only could buy Chinese groceries and have your laundry done but you could meet old friends, you could make new friends, you could speak in your own native language, you would have a sense of identity by living in those communities.

*Swartout describes the Chinese communities in Helena and Butte, Montana*

For the most part, Chinese living in Helena lived in the downtown or today what we might almost call the uptown part of it — the top end of the gulch. As Helena expanded in the 1880s and 1890s, as newer and larger homes were built, then the Chinese might live in dwellings that were fairly inexpensive to purchase or to rent. Although there was always some degree of hostility toward Chinese residents in Helena, I think many Helenans in general came to appreciate the contributions of the Chinese living here. In fact, there was no effort to ever drive the Chinese out of Helena. If you read Helena newspapers over an extended period of time, you find that the rather hostile remarks that you would see in Helena papers in the 1860s and 1870s often then begin to give way to comments that are quite respectful and laudatory by the 1920s and 1930s.

Well, Butte was one of the Montana communities where there was an effort to drive out the Chinese. In the 1890s a boycott was announced attempting to boycott all businesses that were owned or operated by the Chinese. It was an effort that was led largely by certain labor unions in Butte and I think reflected the tension that existed in American society between different groups that were struggling for their own survival. In fact, if we study the issue of social conflict in America, we find that it often isn't between people at the bottom of the ladder and the people at the top. The people at the top live in a very comfortable fashion for the most part. Their social and economic status is not threatened by other groups. But, in fact, when conflict arises, we tend to see it between groups that occupy the lower steps on the ladder. And, I think to some degree that's what was happening in Butte. You had white workers who felt insecure. Often the jobs that they did were very dangerous. There were few occupations in America more dangerous than being an underground miner, an industrial miner. If you survived into your 40s, you were a very old person by then. Often your wages were rather limited. So it was a difficult life and there was a fear that if catastrophe would strike at anytime, then that life might be lost. So white miners occupying those positions then began to fear the potential influence that the Chinese might have. The reality was that the Chinese living in Butte, for the most part, did not compete directly with whites for the same jobs.

But again there was a kind of psychological effect that was taking place there — various miners (white miners) would fear that if the Chinese were allowed into the community, then maybe the next step would be to hire them as underground miners and then remove the white miners from the area or from that particular mine. Again, I don't think there was much chance that was ever going to happen but you have these social forces at work, and if you combine that with the racism that was often fashionable in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, then it creates a very powerful force. Maybe to a very limited degree and one of those areas would be in the laundry business. A fair number of laundries that were opened up in Montana in the frontier period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were in fact operated by women, by white women, and some of them were fearful that if the Chinese were allowed to operate laundries, then that would provide too much competition and might drive these white women out of business. Now no law was passed that then prohibited the Chinese from operating laundries. What Montanans did do was to pass ordinances or state laws that taxed Chinese laundries at a higher rate than non-Chinese laundries. The Chinese themselves often attempted to have those laws thrown out, but, in fact, were largely unsuccessful in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries in having those laws changed.

Congress did not attempt to simply expel the Chinese in the 1880s because there was always some division in America over what ought to be done about the so-called Chinese problem. In fact a significant number of Americans understood that the Chinese were making important contributions to America, that if they were allowed to become citizens, they would become loyal citizens to the country. Now again, that wasn't a popular attitude but there were enough Americans who felt that way about the Chinese that the strongest opponents to Chinese immigration could not simply expel the Chinese. Instead what they tried to do was to cut off the continued flow of the Chinese coming to the United States.

Interviewer: One of the effects, though, was not to allow women to come (unintelligible). Can you explain how this also cut the population?

BS: Well, as was true for all, almost, every immigrant who came to America throughout this country's history, the first generation of Chinese were overwhelmingly male. Again, that was not unique to the Chinese. That was typical of most immigrant groups who came to the United States. The percentage of Chinese who were male might have even higher than some other immigrant groups; because it was often thought that the women need to be back in China at least for the time being to take care of certain family responsibilities there. But, again, when we look at the census records and we discover that the first generation of Chinese who come to America are overwhelmingly male, we shouldn't be surprised by that.

Now if the Chinese had followed the same pattern as other immigrant groups, it would have meant that once those males were firmly established, had created their own businesses, had saved enough money so they could perhaps have their own home, then at that point, they would bring their wives or their future wives over to America with them. But before the Chinese had the opportunity to do that, the U.S. government, the U.S. Congress then passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in the early 1880s. Now that act did not prohibit all Chinese immigration to America but what it did do was to allow only Chinese merchants to come to America. It was only those merchants who could then bring their wives. So women, Chinese women, could indeed come to America but only if they were the wives of established merchants and that automatically shrunk the pool rather dramatically.

Interviewer: And there were a few people who were allowed in (unintelligible).

BS: So the question is, after 1882 could any Chinese still come to America. Well, some could. As the laws were written, they essentially stated that if you were the son or daughter of an American citizen, then you could immigrate to the United States. Now remember that the first Chinese who had come to America - well some had arrived back in the 1850s and even back to the 1840s, but the first large flow of Chinese to America would come in the 1860s settling in California. By the 1880s and 1890s [cut in tape] But the reason you could do that was because their fathers were allegedly American citizens, and not just that they were Chinese living in America but that they were American citizens which meant that they had either somehow gained their American citizenship before 1882 or they had been born in America of Chinese parents.

Interviewer: And if you were born here (unintelligible).

BS: Yes. If Chinese were born here, then by American law they were American citizens. Anyone born on American soil is an American citizen. If you were an American citizen, you then could go back to China to visit relatives, to see the sights, to pursue business opportunities perhaps. You could then return to the United States because you were an American citizen. Now let's say that while you were in China, you met your wife, you might have been married before you came to the United States, or in fact, you went to China and you then married while you were in China and you then had a child while you were there. You had the right to return to the United States because you were an American citizen. Well, according to the Chinese Exclusion Act written in the 1880s and 1890s, if you were an American citizen, then you had the right to bring children from China to the United States.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well, because of this loophole in the law, if you want to call it that, it meant that Chinese who were American citizens had a major advantage over those Chinese who were not citizens. They would sometimes go back to China and then claim that while in China they had produced an offspring and they would sign a document indicating that. That person would then come back to the United States — that child, and — usually they were identified as sons rather than daughters — could then use that document as a way of entering the United States. Well those documents became tremendously valuable and would sometimes pass from one hand to another as a way of gaining entry into the United States. So, in fact, these paper sons were not biological sons but were Chinese who had obtained these certificates indicating that one father was an American citizen and could then use that certificate as a way of remaining in the United States. In a sense it was a way of manipulating the law but that very manipulation had been created by the Chinese Exclusion Act of the 1880s and 1890s that had basically closed the door to any more Chinese immigration.

Interviewer: Did citizens, Chinese-American citizens, often have that problem? Getting back into the country after they left?

BS: Yes. Yes. You had to be very careful. You had to make sure that you had very solid documentation. When you returned, you would often reenter the United States in San Francisco. There was a small island in San Francisco Bay known as Angel Island. Chinese who were either entering the United States for the first time or in some cases, might be reentering, were sent to Angel Island when they would then have to prove that they could have a proper admission into the United States. That could be a very difficult ordeal if your papers were not perfect or even if the papers seemed to be perfect but the immigration officer interviewing you had some suspicions, then you might be grilled. You might be asked a series of very difficult questions that would stretch over days if not weeks. For example, you would have to be able to describe exactly what your home was like, who your father was, how many steps there might be to the front door at that house. If the immigration officer suspected that your answers were not correct or not authentic, you then could be prevented from entering the United States.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: I don't think we have enough evidence to answer that in anyway. Well, let me back off from that a little bit. Chinese living in Montana, like Chinese living anywhere in the American west, then had to deal with these various laws that regulated immigration into the United States. It meant that life could be sometimes rather precarious if you did not have proof of legal entry into the United States. For example, if you did not have the certificate with you proving that you had a right to be in the United States, then you might be exported — you might be deported at anytime. So the threat of deportation would hang over the heads of many people. We also know that a certain number of Chinese who entered into Montana after the turn of the century were in fact paper sons and were able to use this rather strange system as a way of gaining entry into the United States and settling in Montana.

Interviewer: How did the, (unintelligible).

BS: I don't think it does.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Oh that, that. Do we still have sound? Okay.

In some ways the San Francisco earthquake made the practice of using paper sons even more common and that was because a lot of the original records that might indicate place of birth were destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake but it could be a double-edged sword. On one hand, if you have certain documents destroyed, then you can claim that yes, I have a right to enter the United States. I do have American citizenship. I was born in the United States. I was born in San Francisco, but the San Francisco earthquake destroyed my birth certificate. As someone born in the United States, I have a right to reenter the United States and I have a right to bring my son who was born in China in the United States with me. So it could work to one's advantage in that sense.

On the other hand, let's say that you truly were born in San Francisco and your birth certificate was then destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake, immigration officers did not automatically have to admit your re-admittance to the United States. They could simply say we don't believe your story. We believe you are not an American citizen and because you are not an

American citizen and you're not the off spring of an American citizen, we are going to deny you admission into the U.S. So it could cut both ways.

Interviewer: You mentioned that the Chinese fought to change the law. How did they go about trying to survive within the law in Montana?

BS: Well, I think we sometimes make the mistake that if people aren't fluent in a certain language, perhaps they're not very bright or they're not very intelligent and yet there's no correlation between intelligence and fluency in another language particularly if we haven't begun to learn that language until we're adults. Many of the Chinese who came to the United States did not speak much English, that's true, but they were bright people and they understood very quickly how American laws operated and so if there were certain laws that would benefit their position, then they would frequently cite those laws in court cases. They would also be willing to hire some of the best lawyers in the area, in the region in order to argue on their behalf. So they became very knowledgeable in American law and often attempted to use the law and the court system to further their own cases. They didn't always win those cases because of the hostility that was often directed toward them by the majority population. But they didn't simply accept their fate and assume that the court could not be used to their advantage. If they thought that they were being unfairly discriminated against, they were more than willing to use the courts. On several occasions they won their cases.

Interviewer: Can you describe how (unintelligible)

BS: Well, in the Butte boycott case, one of the lawyers they hired was William Fisk Sanders, a former U.S. Senator from Montana and one of the most important figures in Montana history from the 1860s up to the turn of the century. Sanders, in fact, had been sympathetic to the needs of Chinese since at least the 1870s and was willing to take on the case. He argued in fact that the boycott against the Chinese was illegal and needed to be lifted. Eventually the courts sided with the Chinese in that case. However, the Chinese were not compensated for their losses so you might say that they won a moral victory. On the other hand, they didn't win everything that they thought they ought to.

Interviewer: Do you think the Butte boycott ended up being a success for the boycotters? Did they drive some of the businesses out of Butte?

BS: No, I don't think so. In the long run they didn't. Again, the Chinese were willing to persevere and in legal terms they knew they had a right to be in Butte and to operate their businesses. They had a strong sense of who they were as individuals and as a community — a strong sense of identity and they weren't going to allow those kinds of forces to drive them from their businesses or their homes. If you look at the census records, you do not see a dramatic decline in the Chinese population in Butte after this boycott takes place. There is a decline, of course, but that's a gradual decline that takes place over a number of decades and it's in keeping with the decline of the overall Chinese population in America.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: If we study Chinese history in Montana, I think we have to be struck by the vibrancy of these communities — the sense of excitement and wonder that these communities created. Given all of that, then why wouldn't these communities continue to grow over time? In fact, just the opposite happened. By about 1890, certainly by 1900, the Chinese population in Butte and in fact throughout Montana is clearly on the decline.

How can we explain that? Basically it's the effect of the various Chinese Exclusion Acts that were passed in the 1880s and 1890s. Remember that when the first Chinese settlers arrived in Montana in the 1860s and 1870s, they are almost all males. There are very few women. Because of the laws that were passed in the 1880s and 1890s, it made it almost impossible for those Chinese men to then bring women from China to join them. It meant that they were, whether they were married or not, some had been married in China and come to the United States as married persons, whether they were married or not - they basically led the life of bachelors. They could not reproduce the next generation. They simply didn't have wives with them who could then produce the children and so over time the population, which was overwhelmingly male, ages and as those men age, then some of them will simply die in Montana, others will be drawn to larger coastal communities such as San Francisco or Seattle or Portland. Then others would eventually return to China so that once they died, their remains could be buried in their family plots. It was very important to maintain their family lineage if they possibly could. But, it was basically the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Acts in the 1880s and 1890s that prevented those Chinese communities from really reaching their full potential, from growing larger and making even more important contributions to the mosaic that we call the United States.

Interviewer: (unintelligible) the Japanese were coming in. What was it that would make Japanese come into, at least Japan and (unintelligible).

BS: The Japanese experience is a bit different from the Chinese experience. The Chinese who immigrated to America in the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are coming from a country that is being ripped apart by both foreign and domestic strife. Conditions in China are very grim during the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At a distance, Japan is a country that appears to be going in an opposite direction. Something called the Meiji Restoration, a kind of political revolution, had taken place in Japan in 1868. The new leaders who had gained control of the Japanese government in 1868 were committed to producing a political system underscored by a strong military and a strong economy that could hold off the encroachments of western imperialism. And in many ways they're successful in doing that. In 1889, a constitution is written and promulgated in Japan. It's known as the Meiji Constitution — another example of Japan's movement toward modernization. It's ability to create a modern political structure — a modern economic structure and modern military structure but so much change takes place in Japan over a brief period of time that it creates a good deal of social dislocation.

Again, there are economic opportunities in Japan. America is building an industrial base from the bottom up. A number of Japanese are attracted to those industries, but life in the countryside remained very difficult. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century seventy to eighty percent of the Japanese government's budget is derived from the so-called land tax and that land tax is a fixed amount. It's basically three percent of the value of the land and it's not tied to the price that a farmer might get for his annual rice crop. If you happen to have a bad crop one year, say a

drought took place, and you didn't get that many bushels of rice per acre or if the international price for rice dropped, that didn't lower your tax rate. Your tax rate was based upon the value of land, which was determined by the government. So, there were a lot of economic and social pressures building in Japan particularly in the rural areas and, in fact, most of the Japanese who then immigrated to America, beginning in the 1890s come from rural parts of Japan. There are some who come from the big cities, but they're the exception to the rule.

Initially the first group would be brought into Hawaii and in fact that was a conscious decision on the part of white plantation owners, sugar cane plantation owners, in Hawaii. Up to that point a lot of the labor on those sugar cane plantations had been done by Chinese. But following the various exclusion acts, we have to back track here a little bit. The United States does not gain control of Hawaii directly until 1898. By the 1880s many of the plantation owners in Hawaii were concerned that the number of Chinese was growing too rapidly in Hawaii; that the Chinese who had initially been brought in to cut the sugar cane were moving into urban communities like Honolulu and were setting up their own businesses that then might challenge white businesses. So plantation owners in Hawaii began to look for another source of labor. They turned to Japan. So initially, the Japanese were brought in to replace plantation workers in Hawaii. By the 1890s many of those Japanese who had worked in Hawaii begin moving to the American mainland. They begin doing a lot of the work that had been done by the Chinese a generation earlier.

Interviewer: The Japanese were not initially allowed to immigrate.

BS: That's true, but then neither had the Chinese government. Chinese emigration to America is not legal according to Chinese law until the late 1860s. Once the Meiji Restoration takes place in Japan in 1868 then immigration out of Japan is legal and in fact in some ways the Japanese government would encourage that immigration because those officials thought that it would ease some of the pressures on the land. Historically Japan has always been a country with a very small land mass and a significantly large population. So, the Japanese government was not opposed to the outflow of Japanese to countries such as the United States.

Interviewer: What brought the Japanese to Montana?

BS: Japanese immigrants come to Montana for a variety of reasons but probably the single most important factor was the railroads and more specifically the Great Northern Railroad. Now, the Great Northern Railroad had been completed back in 1893 and that was several years before you began to see a substantial influx of Japanese into Montana. But even though the railroad had been built, it needed to be maintained. It needed workers in order to operate the railroad. Prior to the 1890s a good deal of that work had been done by Chinese railroad gangs. But, as I mentioned before, thanks to the Chinese Exclusion Act, it was increasingly difficult to find Chinese available to do that work. So railroads like the Great Northern began to turn to the Japanese for that kind of labor. And, in fact, many of the earliest Japanese settlers into Montana would be located along the Hi-Line and that's because that was the territory through which the Great Northern ran.

Interviewer: Did they work on the other railroads?

BS: They worked for the Northern Pacific. They worked for the Union Pacific. But I think they were most closely associated with the Great Northern Railroad. That's where we see the largest numbers.

Interviewer: (unintelligible) happened internationally and nationally with the Japanese to result in their immigration and emigration (unintelligible).

BS: By the turn of the century, as tens of thousands of Japanese had immigrated to the United States, primarily to the West Coast. Then the kind of public hostilities that had been directed towards the Chinese in the 1860s and 1870s was now increasingly directed toward these Japanese immigrants and that was despite the fact that they were very law-abiding people, that they were making very important economic contributions to the states of the West. It's an example of how racism sometimes can simply block out all other kinds of good sense.

A crisis had developed by 1907 in the city of San Francisco. The San Francisco school board had declared that all Japanese youngsters in San Francisco must go to an all Asian school. In other words, they would not be allowed to attend the normal public schools. What was interesting is that a school had been set up for Chinese children and these Japanese children were then supposed to go to that Chinese school. It totally ignored the fact that in the history of that period, the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was considerable tension between the countries of China and Japan. Again, these Japanese children were supposed to go to the Chinese school according to this ordinance passed locally. They were not to be allowed to attend white schools in San Francisco.

When news of that decision made its way to Japan, the Japanese government was outraged because, of course, the Japanese understood that this local law was based upon racial attitudes; the notion that the Japanese are inferior to whites and therefore ought to be treated differently. The man who is President at that time is Theodore Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt, a famous Progressive Republican. Roosevelt was attempting to create a more positive relationship between the United States and Japan. He did not want this local crisis in San Francisco to do damage to U.S.-Japanese relations. So he proposed to the Japanese government something that became known as the Gentlemen's Agreement. Roosevelt would put pressure on California and on San Francisco to lift this local ordinance, to end this local ordinance so that at least publicly the Japanese in San Francisco would not be discriminated against. At the same time, the Japanese government would then agree to halt most all Japanese emigration to the United States.

Now it doesn't halt it completely. According to this agreement, it becomes known as the Gentlemen's Agreement, Japanese who are already in the United States could then bring spouses to the United States and in fact, in the teens, during the teens, a significant number of Japanese women made their way to the United States to join their husbands. But it's the first major effort to halt Japanese immigration to the United States and it's triggered by this controversy in San Francisco over school segregation.

Then finally, in 1924, the U.S. Congress passes something known as the National Origins Act, or the Immigration Act of 1924. That act established quotas for various immigrants throughout the world. For example, if you came from Western Europe, the quota was likely to be rather high. If you came from a country like Great Britain, it would be still quite easy to immigrate to America. If you came from southern or Eastern Europe, which meant almost by definition that you were likely to be either Catholic or Jewish, then the quota figures would be much smaller. And, if you came from Asia, and this meant essentially if you came from Japan or

Korea, then the quota was basically zero. From 1924 onward, if you came from China, oh excuse me, if you came from Japan or Korea, then the American door would be closed to you.

Interviewer: (unintelligible).

BS: It was a (unintelligible), too. If you were a Chinese you wouldn't be right from China to the United States. You'd have to identified as a member of the merchant class. The gentleman's agreement did not respect things in quite considerate fashion. But still, it was still difficult for a (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: That's right. Men as of, with a few rare exceptions, after 1924 then it was almost impossible for any Asian, whether he or she was from China, Japan, Korea, to make their way into the United States. Those law are not changed until after World War II.

Interviewer: (unintelligible).

BS: But again, I think it's true, in fact, that every cultural—

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

BS: –every cultural group...there's no cultural group which is usually eager to then marry outside that cultural group. If those marriages take place, they take place because of unique circumstances. Now, you don't have to put this on the tape, or put it in the program, but in fact we now know that in the 1850s, for example, prior to the Civil War, there were a fair number of marriages between Chinese men and Irish women on the East Coast. They were two different ethnic groups that were that were sort of thrown together on the East Coast in the years prior to the Civil War. They often found it very difficult to marry into the mainstream of American society, and so these unions were created.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: No, because again, those were a unique set of circumstances. Now, we do have evidence of interracial marriages that did take place and lasted for decades. Again, we're talking about several thousand people, so you're always going to have those unique situations, but those certainly weren't the norm. They were frowned upon socially by most Americans in that day in age when there was this obsession with race. Then eventually, laws were put in that would prohibit those sorts of marriages.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: A fair number of the Chinese would come to the West, came as prostitutes. Or, if they didn't come as prostitutes, they were then sold into prostitution once they arrived, so their lives were very difficult. Yet, within those parameters, they would strive to create lives for themselves, and if they had children, lives for their children that would be positive. In fact, a new book has just come out on Chinese prostitutes in San Francisco that demonstrates the strengths that these women had and how they tried to take charge of their own lives.

Interviewer: Well, did they come with the idea of being prostitutes, or was (unintelligible)?

BS: No. Well, for the most part, they don't have control over their lives. Their lives are controlled by males, either within their male relatives or outside their families.

Interviewer: So they were (unintelligible)

BS: You might have some cases like that, or in other instances, they would be brought to America with the idea that perhaps they would be household servants, something like that. Then that gradually gives way to a life of prostitution. But that's not surprising, given the gender ratios within the community. Wherever you had a community that was overwhelming male, then you often saw prostitution. That wasn't limited to the Chinese. If you talk about the early mining camps in Montana in the 1860s and 1870s, camps that are overwhelmingly male, then prostitution flourished. It cuts across all racial and ethnic lines.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Right. In fact, I don't want to give you the suggestion that all Chinese women who come to Montana are prostitutes. Most are not. They are, for the most part, wives, and they are brought to Montana by their husbands, so that families can be (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (Unintelligible)

BS: We don't know for sure, because we don't have the documentation that would tell us that. That would vary from family to family. In sort of traditional Chinese families, it wasn't considered proper for women to be out in public, and so when these women arrived in Montana, they might not spend much time outside the household. But of course, the longer they lived in America, then the more quickly they adapted to American practices and American attitudes. In fact, I think that's one of the more interesting aspects of the Chinese communities as a whole. When non-Chinese looked at those communities, they tended to see them as uniquely Chinese. After all, these were people who were speaking Chinese. They looked different. They ate rice. They used chopsticks. But in fact, those communities and those families began to create a synthesis of Chinese and American cultures. That would be true for the wives as well. They would not only begin to wear Western attire, for example, they might wear Chinese clothes at holidays but at other times they would wear Western attire. But they would begin to go out in public. They would begin to shop for their families. They were being affected by the culture within which they were living.

Interviewer: (unintelligible) [Question about the assumptions of general society, as Chinese prostitutes were in public, and non-prostitutes remained at home]

BS: There was probably an inclination on the part of white society to think that Chinese women were also prostitutes, whether they were or not. But we can't say for sure. I think we have to be dangerous about drawing any sort of inclusions here. After all, in the case of Montana, we're talking about a few dozen people. We're talking about very small numbers.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: (unintelligible). Remember that 95 to 98 percent of the population is male. So that only leaves, say, two percent as women. So we're talking about a very, very small number here. I think it's dangerous to draw broad conclusions about such a small sample.

Interviewer: So we don't know what (unintelligible).

BS: Oh, well in general terms, we could say that non-Chinese would often view them as quaint. As, perhaps, exotic. But because the numbers were so small, it's difficult to draw any conclusions beyond that. Now, if we were talking about San Francisco where you have a sizeable female population, well, then we might have other things to talk about.

Interviewer: I was just wondering if (unintelligible)

BS: No, because within these communities, families would become known. The children would often... the women would be there. If there was a husband and wife, they would have children.

Their children, for the most part, were allowed to attend public schools. White children attending those schools would have Chinese classmates, and they would know the mothers of these students so they got to know them on a personal level.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: In some ways, it wouldn't be surprising if some of the wives among the Chinese were picture brides. After all, if a Chinese male came to America and was not married when he arrived, then how was he going to become married? There weren't Chinese women in America who would be available. He couldn't afford to go back to China, so it would make sense to have that arranged by a family, and then the woman would come to America and join him. They would be married.

Interviewer: How different would that life be than what a woman was living (unintelligible).

BS: Well, that's a good point. Before we think of picture brides as being something else that's either terrible or exotic, you have to remember that in East Asian communities—Japan, Korea, China—the overwhelming majority of marriages were arranged marriages. Now, in China, the bride and the groom, might have seen one another before their marriage. But even if they had seen one another, they weren't necessarily friends or acquaintances. In some cases, they wouldn't have seen each other before they were actually married. So, if some Chinese women would come to America and then join husbands they had never seen, that wouldn't have been particularly unusual among the Chinese.

Interviewer: But in terms of their life, how did (unintelligible).

BS: Well, to begin with, you wouldn't have the extended family in the United States, the way you would in China. So your family duties would not be as extensive. Of course, once you are immersed in that American society, then you begin to create a blend of American and Chinese culture. So over time those women would then gain a greater degree of independence and autonomy, and they were likely to have (unintelligible).

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Oh, they would have more. I mean, one reason the Chinese remain in America, is that for all the discrimination they face, they still are able to live lives that are, at least economically, more satisfying than what they could lead back in China.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Oh yes, I mean, these are very courageous people. I think we always have to keep that in mind. This would have been something that was very difficult to do. But they come from a part of China where there was a legacy of adventure. They had been willing to take risks, take chances. They come to America, and again, despite all of the barriers that they face, despite the discrimination they face, like other immigrant groups, they see America as a land of opportunity, and to some degree, they are able to achieve those dreams. So if we had some sort of time machine and we could go back to, say, 1910 and interview a Chinese pioneer who had lived in

Montana for 30 years, ask him about his experience, I think that that person would view his life in very positive terms. He had been successful in his own particular way. The life that he had led, in some ways was more adventurous and more fulfilling than the life he might have had, had he remained in China.

Interviewer: So, does this (unintelligible) spirit of adventure (unintelligible), because they were specifically trying to better their lives (unintelligible) for the Chinese, but money, money, money.

BS: It's both.

Interviewer: But was it also, but (unintelligible) out West, what I was taught in school, the great myth, is adventure and making new lives. So, what was their motivation?

BS: It's both. It's both. Again, if they did not have this sense of adventure, then they wouldn't have come, because the risks are great. But they also leave China at a time when China is disintegrating economically and socially. Just as the Irish would come to America in the 1840s because of the potato famine, large numbers of Chinese from Guangdong Province would come to America because conditions in China are getting worse and worse with each year.

Interviewer: Why was (unintelligible)

BS: Oh, do you want me to get into this? This is an hour-long lecture.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well, A number of things are happening in China that are making conditions there increasingly grim. One is a decline in the ability of the Qing Dynasty to effectively rule China. The Qing Dynasty had been established in 1644. For roughly the next 150 years, we have what might be called the golden age of the Qing Dynasty. But by the time you get into the early 19th century, this dynasty has become increasingly corrupt, increasingly decadent. It's not able to rule the country effectively. China is also suffering from severe overpopulation by the early 19th century. The population growth has outstripped the land. In other words, they can't grow enough crops on the land, using traditional methods to sustain that population, in the same way that it had been sustained, say 200 years earlier. Then, finally, of course, you have the arrival of Western powers. Specifically, Great Britain. The British fight a war with China between 1839 and 1842. Becomes known as the First Opium War. The British win that war, and they force China to open the Chinese markets to all Western goods but in particular, they forced the Chinese to legalize the opium trade. Opium then becomes an epidemic throughout China and has horrendous social and economic implications.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: That's right. Just as the Irish would be violent in the 1840s, because conditions there were so grim. Hope is disappearing. If you hope to have a better life, then you have to head to America. Again, the Chinese situation doesn't happen quite as dramatically. It doesn't happen within a two

or three-year period. But in some ways, the forces at work are just as traumatic and dramatic as those taking place in Ireland.

Interviewer: So, this notion of hope, and America being linked to (unintelligible)?

BS: Right. That, again, they would head to America, in part because they come from an area of China where the people were willing to try new things, were willing to take risks, were adventurous. It's the same part of China that, in fact, provides the people who head to places like Malaya, would establish the community we now know as Singapore. Some of them would head into the South Pacific. So, these people come from an area where adventure was part of their cultural makeup, in a sense. But they're also led to America because of the economic opportunities that exist in the American West in the late 19th century.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: They are also lured to America because of—

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: The Chinese from Guangdong Province would be encouraged to (unintelligible).

Interviewer: Well, they've got the sense of adventure, but then there's something else going on. What else is going on?

BS: The Chinese would also be lured to America because of the economic opportunity that the American West would provide.

Interviewer: And they (unintelligible) about that?

BS: Yes.

Interviewer: When they got here, and they were (unintelligible) working, and I know the story of (unintelligible). It sort of seems like the Chinese are in this double bind with their wages, because to make a living, they have to lower their wages, but they increasingly (unintelligible), competition, or (unintelligible). How could they function, if this was going on?

BS: Well, it was really Chinese labor that found itself in a particularly difficult situation. Often, they hoped that they could receive better wages, but the corporations that often ran the companies the Chinese worked for refused to pay them those higher wages. If the Chinese wish to strike for higher wages, then they had to make common cause with American labor unions. Unfortunately, the great majority of the unions refused to accept the Chinese in as members of the union. So, they couldn't join white unions, and that made it difficult then for them to strike or... (laughs).

Interviewer: No, I hear you. I specifically want to ask you about... so, they're not allowed in these unions, and so they can't get more money. But they're kind of between a rock and a hard

place, as I see it, right? I mean, they can't really... they want to make a living, they have to take lower rates (unintelligible).

BS: That's right.

Interviewer: Can you talk about that a little bit? Their situation?

BS: Well, I'm trying to figure out, what's the best way into that, to make it succinct, and still understandable to an audience.

Interviewer: (unintelligible) let's talk about (unintelligible) laundries. You know, they were seen as some pretty serious competition, and white people got pretty angry, right? (unintelligible)

BS: Well, they could have. I mean, they could have raised their prices if they had wanted to. In the case of the laundries, they're free to do as they please. They will provide those services at that cost, because that's a way for them to make money. But for the most part, I would say that this criticism of the Chinese, that they were providing unfair competition, is almost entirely false. That in fact, that was a ploy used to justify Chinese exclusion from America and from communities in the American West.

Interviewer: Why (unintelligible)

BS: To begin with, the Chinese were not allowed to join unions in America and make common cause, so that they could receive a better living wage. Secondly, they were often providing services that no one else was willing to provide. The reason the Chinese worked on the railroads is because the railroad companies can't find enough white workers to do the work. The reason the Chinese were able to be a success in placer mining is because the ore is there and no one else is mining it. Even in the case of laundries, most white Americans were not eager to run laundries, and provide that service to the larger population. Rather than viewing the Chinese as unfair competition, I think we need to view the Chinese as people who are bringing tremendously valuable services to these communities as a whole and actually enrich those communities as a result.

Interviewer: I want to get back to the (unintelligible).

BS: No. They hadn't built railroads in China. They just saw it as an opportunity to improve their lot, and they seized it. They had a strong sense... No. I mean, I think we could speculate on things. We might say they had a strong sense of loyalty to one another and a strong sense of loyalty to the company that hired them, but for the most part, that was the job they had to do and so they just went out and they did it.

Interviewer: What kind of jobs were they... I mean, these people would have had jobs (unintelligible).

BS: We can't say.

Interviewer: Also, are these in any way related to the Chinese who had (unintelligible).

BS: No, no. That goes back cen... The wall is built over at least a 2,000-year period, and no.

Interviewer: Nothing to do with it. Totally irrelevant.

BS: No. That's in North China, of course, and all these people from Guangdong Province had never been to that part of China.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Okay.

Interviewer: What kind of economic problems did the Chinese face? (unintelligible)

BS: Well, I wouldn't call those economic problems. I would call those discriminatory problems.

Interviewer: Okay, well, describe them however you like, what kind of problems did they face as they tried to (unintelligible).

BS: Well, the Chinese faced discrimination on several different fronts. Sometimes the discrimination would take a rather violent turn. For the most part, you didn't have mass violence or mob violence directed toward the Chinese in Montana. That often did happen to Chinese who lived and worked in other areas. For example, there was a riot against Chinese in Denver in the 1880s. There was a terrible riot that took place in Rock Springs, Wyoming, in the early 1880s. Chinese communities in both Seattle and Tacoma were driven out at one time in the 1880s.

Interviewer: What was that about? I mean, (unintelligible) what's happening?

BS: If comes about, primarily because of American racism, and economics is then used as a convenient justification for this attack upon the Chinese.

Interviewer: Is something going on with the usual economic state (unintelligible)?

BS: There isn't any one thing that we can point to. You have an economic recession in '73, you have another one 1883, you have another one in 1893. But again, I think the Chinese were used as scapegoats, to some degree, because certain members of the community felt frustrated they weren't able to achieve their own American dream. But in fact, this happens over such a broad geographical area, that in fact I think it's more indicative of the kind of racism that is an epidemic in American society of the late 19th century. The Chinese, then, are easy targets for that racism.

Interviewer: What were the perceptions of the Chinese among (unintelligible) white Americans. We talked about how some of this is prostitution (unintelligible) went wrong in American (unintelligible).

BS: Yes, that was often repeated in the literature. But again in that sense—

Interviewer: Sorry, what was?

BS: The criticism that the Chinese were then earning money in America, and shipping it back to China.

Interviewer: Sorry, can you make this (unintelligible). Like, what was the criticism of the Chinese?

BS: The Chinese were sometimes criticized for not spending their money in America. Instead, they would earn the money here, and they would then send it back to China to support their families there. Of course, when that criticism is made of the Chinese, people are overlooking the fact that virtually every other ethnic group that had immigrated to America did exactly the same thing.

Interviewer: What about the opium dens? (unintelligible)

BS: There were a fair number of opium dens in the American West. But again, I think that that's an element of Chinese culture that's been exaggerated. People who were knowledgeable at the time would say that although some Chinese had had an affection, or even an addiction for opium, it was no worse than the white affection or addiction for whiskey, and, in fact, that the Chinese tended to control themselves more effectively than whites who were under the influence of alcohol. It's also worth remembering that opium was not widely used in China until it was forced on the Chinese by Western traders in the early 19th century.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: They were patronized primarily by the Chinese who lived here. But again, I think it would be a mistake to assume that all Chinese, or most Chinese, or even a majority of Chinese frequented the opium dens. Some did, but in the same sense that a very large percentage of white Montanans would frequent saloons and bars, places where alcohol was being distributed.

Interviewer: So, we've got this build-up of discrimination, and we've got (unintelligible) these conceptions about the Chinese and the Chinese community, and we've got this build-up of discrimination. And eventually, we get these Exclusion Act. What's the (unintelligible).

BS: Well, there are a couple things important about the Chinese Exclusion Act. The first one passed in 1882, and then a series of acts are passed over the next decade and a half that make it increasingly difficult for the Chinese to immigrate to America. To begin with, it was a way of saying that the Chinese were not welcome to the United States. The Chinese are not welcome because they are considered inferior people. That leaves its own legacy behind. It's a way of telling the Chinese that they are not equal to all the other people who are living in America. That's a tragedy, not only for the Chinese, but for America as a whole. I would argue that these Chinese make tremendously important contributions to the development of Montana. For the most part, they are very law-abiding citizens of the territory, the state, the nation, and they were unfairly singled out simply because of their race. Secondly, once the exclusion laws are put into

place, then it makes it all but impossible for these Chinese communities to sustain themselves over an extended period of time.

Interviewer: Was the Exclusion Act the first American law to exclude any (unintelligible)? Wasn't the Exclusion Act passed (unintelligible)? Is that right?

BS: For the most part, the United States did not have an explicit policy dealing with immigrants from other areas. America's doors had remained open to immigrants from throughout the world. But of course, the truth is, up to the arrival of the Chinese in the 1860s, the great majority of immigrants, other than Africans who were brought as slaves, the great majority of immigrants come from Europe. Until the 1870s, they come primarily from Western and Northern Europe. So it's easier for them to be accepted into the mainstream of American society.

Interviewer: The Exclusion Act was the first time we've ever singled out one group, (unintelligible).

BS: That's right. That's right. But it's not surprising, given the obsession that Americans in the late 19th century had about race. I don't think it's surprising that the Chinese Exclusion Acts are passed at the same time when the treatment of African-Americans in America reaches an all-time low. The hopes that have been generated by the Civil War, the hopes that were generated by the passage of 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, hopes of reconstruction are dashed by 1877 when American gives up on Reconstruction. Then from the 1880s onward, again, the plight of African-Americans becomes increasingly difficult. Lynchings become increasingly common across the American South. It's interesting that, again, those lynchings are accelerating at the same time that the U.S. Congress is passing laws prohibiting Chinese immigration to America. I think that, in fact in many ways, both of them are a product of the kind of obsession that America had with race, and the kind of racism that permeated American society at that time.

Interviewer: And were the railroads (unintelligible).

BS: Well, by the early 1880s, most of the transcontinental railroads had been completed. The Union Pacific was finished, the Southern Pacific, the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe, the Northern Pacific, are all done. Now, the railroads will still need workers to maintain those lines. As the Chinese population remaining in America begins to age, then the railroads begin to turn to another source of labor, specifically the Japanese immigrants who start arriving in America in the late 1890s.

Interviewer: And they did so because they didn't distinguish between (unintelligible).

BS: No, not...no, I don't think that they thought that, well, the Japanese are just like the Chinese. The point is, they needed reliable, loyal workers who could do the task, and the Japanese were able to fill that niche.

Interviewer: So, the company really (unintelligible). Don't do this, we need the Chinese.

BS: No. Not in any significant way. Again, the railroads are more inclined to support Chinese immigration than any other group. But again, the transcontinental lines are completed by the early 1880s.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: I wouldn't put it in those terms.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: I think it's more complicated than that.

Interviewer: (unintelligible) After you get the Exclusion Act, then you get the Geary Act. Can you tell me what the Geary Act (unintelligible)?

BS: No.

Interviewer (laughs) (unintelligible)

Interviewer: In five words or less.

BS: It's simply another step in this process that makes it increasingly difficult for the Chinese to find any loopholes which would allow them to then immigrate to America.

Interviewer: And did the Geary Act (unintelligible) they had to carry their papers (unintelligible).

BS: After but after the Geary Act was passed, then Chinese have to prove that they are legitimate residents of United States, that's right. So that then creates a cottage industry for producing documentation that may or may not be accurate.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: In other words, false papers. I don't think that this program should emphasize that sort of thing, just like I don't think there should be a major emphasis on prostitution, because I think it sends wrong signals to people.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Okay.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Well, if you had Chinese who are already legally living in the United States, then they would have the right to bring their children to the United States. But you had to then provide documentation indicating that this person was my child. Since that was all done on paper, you could create documents indicating that this young Chinese was, in fact, my son, and therefore

had a right to immigrate to America. When, in fact, in many cases those young Chinese who are coming to America were not the direct offspring of the people who claimed them as children. Those were then often referred to as “paper sons.” They were sons on paper, they were not sons in terms of their actual bloodline. That effort to sort of skirt around the law, or manipulate the law, is a byproduct of this discrimination that's aimed at the Chinese. Had the Chinese been allowed to immigrate to America, as most other groups were allowed, then there would have been no need for this sort of thing.

Interviewer: And were there lots of paper sons (unintelligible)?

BS: Yes, there was a significant number. Again, I don't want to give the impression that you have suddenly thousands of Chinese who were invading America. We're talking about relatively small numbers. But within the Chinese community, nonetheless a significant number.

Interviewer: Were there “paper daughters”?

BS: For the most part, no. Because daughters were not valued in the same way that sons were. If you brought the sons over, for example, they could then obtain employment, and receive income that could be used to support the family back in China. Those options, for the most part, would not be open to females.

Interviewer: (unintelligible) question about Chinese with falsified papers being arrested.

BS: That frequently happened. This became a common feature of the Chinese communities in American early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. In certain instances, you had people who were legitimate immigrants into America, but did not happen to have their papers with them. They could be arrested and, in fact, deported because of the absence of those documents.

Interviewer: Did you actually have American citizens being deported at the time?

BS: No, the Chinese were not eligible for American citizenship. I said legal American residents.

Interviewer: (unintelligible), right?

BS: Right, but in fact most were not born here, right, because there are so few women who were Chinese.

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Yes, of course if you had Chinese children who were born in America, then they were American residents. But even then, it's not—

Interviewer: You said they were American citizens, right?

BS: I mean, American citizens.

Interviewer: Do you want to say that again?

BS: If you had Chinese children who were born in America, then of course they were American citizens, they had American citizenship. But that was a relatively small percentage of the total Chinese population in America.

Interviewer: So were there a lot of Chinese who were legally here who were sent back to China (unintelligible)?

BS: If you're thinking about not just Montana, but the entire American West, then it was a substantial number. I don't think we didn't say precise terms what the number was or what percentage was, but it was not insignificant. Even worse than that, let's say that you were Chinese-American working in Missoula, Montana. You might live in fear that at any moment you might be stopped by an official and asked to provide your documentation, and you could never be sure that they would accept that documentation. It created a degree of anxiety that non-Chinese, I think, had a very difficult time appreciating and understanding.

Interviewer: It sort of sounds like (unintelligible).

BS: Well, or some of the concern that today exists in Mexican-American communities.

[Break in audio]

BS: The Chinese often face three different types of discrimination. They—

Interviewer: (unintelligible)

BS: Okay. Ready?

Interviewer: Yes.

BS: The Chinese often faced three different types of discrimination. They often faced violence, or the threat of violence. Fortunately, that kind of violence was limited in Montana, was not nearly as common in Montana as it was in other Western states. But even if you weren't the recipient of the violence, if you were a Chinese pioneer, you were likely to hear of these other episodes, and you had to wonder if that sort of violence might be directed toward you.

Then secondly, discrimination often came in the form of local and state laws that were aimed specifically at the Chinese. For example, in Montana, if you were Chinese or in a laundry, then you had to pay a special tax that non-Chinese didn't have to pay. Or you might have to pay a special fee to run a mining operation that non-Chinese didn't have to pay. Then, of course, in 1909, in some ways the most hurtful law of all was passed, a law which prohibited interracial marriage. The truth is, most Chinese did not want to marry non-Chinese. They weren't eager to marry non-Chinese. But they knew that the law was aimed at them, because the majority of people in Montana viewed them as inferior and, therefore, should not be allowed to marry into the white race.

Then thirdly, you had federal laws that were passed by the U.S. Congress that were aimed specifically at the Chinese. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and then the other exclusion acts that followed that were examples of this federal legislation that often confronted the Chinese.

Interviewer: And they faced, you know, (unintelligible) faced were boycotts within Montana.

BS: Right.

Interviewer: Can you tell the story of (unintelligible) boycott?

BS: Yes, probably the most famous boycott—

Interviewer: Sorry, start again.

BS: Probably the most famous boycott aimed at the Chinese took place in Butte in the 1890s. Now, that's in the aftermath of the crash of 1893, and the rise of the Populist Party in Montana. That situation often led many white Montanans to view the Chinese as scapegoats... No, forget it.

Interviewer: Sorry, we got the most famous boycott. You can just pick it up from there. So, what was the Butte boycott?

BS: The Butte boycott was an effort on the part of certain whites in Butte, primarily labor unions, to drive the Chinese from Butte. They claimed that they wanted to drive the Chinese from Butte, because the Chinese were providing unfair labor competition, were taking jobs that belonged to white Americans, and of course, the Chinese were simply inferior and brought into America customs that were polluting society and culture.

Interviewer: And who was ring leading this (unintelligible)?

BS: Well, there wasn't any one person, but a number of the laborers in Butte had become members of the Populist Party and the Populist Party had gone on record as opposing any Chinese immigration to America. I think this is a classic example where you have the Chinese serving as scapegoats. Because, in fact, the Chinese, for the most part, were not taking away jobs that whites had had prior to that time. For example, if the Chinese were running vegetable gardens, providing food for the greater Butte community, if the Chinese were running laundries, those weren't the kinds of occupations that white miners would suddenly take up. I think that the boycott was driven largely by frustrations within Butte over the lack of good-paying jobs at that particular time. It was a reflection of the kind of racism that was often a very common feature of American society as a whole.

Interviewer: I think you mentioned in your last interview that this conflict wasn't going on between top and bottom, but (unintelligible).

BS: Right, and that's often a common feature of ethnic clashes in American society. Ethnic historians will often say that when you have clash within America, it's not necessarily between

the haves and have-nots, but it tends to be between groups that are very close together on the so-called ethnic escalator. That if you would view the Chinese on this level here or at this rung, the people who are most fearful of the Chinese would be those who are only one rung above them. They're fearful that they may be displaced by the Chinese if the Chinese become more successful, and so they hope to keep the Chinese down.

Interviewer: So, everybody wants to have somebody to look down on.

BS: Yes, well, we only have a certain amount of time, so I won't go into it. I was going to talk about the 1992 riots in Los Angeles.

Interviewer: I want to know... there are these rumors, or we're not sure if they're rumors, maybe it's fact. Did the Chinese run businesses in the tunnels?

BS: For the most part, those rumors are unfounded. The truth is, many of the communities in Montana have tunnels underneath the streets. That was because, as communities developed, as they became larger, more sophisticated, then one layer would be built upon another. In fact, you might have an instance where you have a building, and beneath the main floor, you might have actually two or three sub-floors. Then over time you might have tunnels that would be built from one building, or one room to another room. For the most part, those weren't built by the Chinese. They were already there. But remember that when the Chinese come to Montana, when they come to America, they often come with little money. They are looking for lodging that is the least expensive. Often, those rooms were the most available, and so they might locate there. Then, of course, there was the issue of opium. If you were non-Chinese, it was legal to drink alcohol, to drink whiskey, that was just fine. But if you were Chinese, and you had a certain affection for opium, then it was best to keep that out of sight. So some of those subterranean rooms, or tunnels, might be used a bit for that.

Interviewer: So, there was—

BS: But, but—

Interviewer: Sorry, go ahead.

BS: But this notion that there was this complex Chinese community living underground is largely a misnomer.

Interviewer: So it's largely a myth?

BS: Yes.

Interviewer: But, it seems to me, it fuels... I'm sorry, can you say that again, this notion, I mean, there was this notion there were (unintelligible). Are they true, false, what (unintelligible)?

BS: The idea that there was a systematic network of tunnels running under many Montana cities, and that those tunnels were somehow operated by the Chinese, that is largely a myth.

Interviewer: But it seems to be a myth that plays into our unconscious fears and sort of gets into mystery and sort of people working...you know, with the Chinese, for me, that's what it conjures up (unintelligible).

BS: That might have been true in the 1920s. I'm not sure that that would that would necessarily be true in the 1990s. I think, in some ways, when that story resurfaces—terrible pun—when that story circulates in today's Montana, it does so just because Montanans think of it as a kind of colorful feature of the state's past. I don't know that there are ulterior motives behind the circulation of the myth.

Interviewer: But, the origin, where do you think that comes from?

BS: I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you think that that played into people's views of the Chinese.

BS: I don't think I can prove that.

Interviewer: Finally, what was the importance of family? Because Chinese were here (unintelligible), they didn't really have much family here (unintelligible), so we don't really (unintelligible).

BS: Well, that's a very good question. Families were of tremendous importance to the Chinese. If they did not have many families here, it wasn't because they didn't want them—

[End of Interview]