

YOUR AMERICAN DREAM

To The Teachers:

Two years ago, my wife, Lilly, and I established the Merage Foundation for the American Dream. We believe its mission is important to the nation and its citizens. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting expanded opportunities for immigrants. It hopes to inspire young immigrants to achieve their American Dream. It hopes to help promising immigrant leaders contribute to their communities and to the nation. It hopes to encourage Americans to understand and celebrate the contributions of immigrants to America.

The Foundation's initiatives include:

- The development of award-winning DVDs and educational materials (The American Experience) concerning the history of immigration and the lives of successful American immigrants for use in high schools throughout the nation.
- The provision of stipends and the creation of a Merage Fellows program for outstanding graduating immigrant students nominated by 21 universities throughout the country.
- The development of occasional papers and the convening of Forums concerning the impact of immigration on America and issues concerning immigration.

We are delighted that you want to use the DVDs and educational materials in your classrooms. Paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous American author, the Merage Foundation hopes that the American Dream Experience will help students walk with their feet, work with their hands, speak their own minds and reach their own aspirations.

Paul Merage
President

To The Teachers:

The Merage Foundation for the American Dream is pleased to send you DVDs and related educational materials for The American Dream Experience. Both describe in vivid terms the history of immigration to America and the lives and contributions of living American immigrants. Both reflect an effort by the Merage Foundation to create a library of DVDs and educational materials for high school teachers and principals throughout the U.S. Based on use of both in over 1200 classrooms last year, the Foundation believes that the American Dream Experience will inspire students—including immigrant students and students from immigrant families—to define and achieve their American Dreams.

We hope that teachers will incorporate the DVDs and educational materials in their lesson plans over a period of several weeks. We encourage teachers to invite local immigrant leaders to watch the DVDs and discuss their content with students. We urge teachers to involve all students, whether immigrants or not, in the planned activities related to the DVDs. Students, if they are not immigrants or children of immigrant families, are likely to be able to trace their roots back to immigrant grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents. The Foundation welcomes teacher feedback concerning the impact of the American Dream Experience in the classroom.

Marshall Kaplan
Executive Director
Merage Foundations

Elliott Rebhun
The New York Times
Upfront/Scholastic Inc.

Donna Dewey
Dewey Obenchain
Film Inc.

THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

DAVID HO: From Taiwan to TIME's
Person of the Year



David Ho

SECURING THE MOST FROM THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

The Foundation suggests that teachers consider the following approaches to enrich *The American Dream Experience* for students.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION:

The American Dream Experience has been created for use with tenth- and eleventh-grade students. High-school students are mature enough to grant thoughtful attention to the important themes explored in the DVDs. History, government, and civic classes provide the best settings in which to initiate *The American Dream Experience*. But teachers may want to carry out the program in other classes and in larger school assemblies or forums. What is most important, given the content of *The American Dream Experience*, is that the chosen settings include a relatively large number of immigrant and first-generation students.

INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL LEADERS:

Students will benefit from the classroom participation of successful local government, business, and non-profit leaders who are immigrants. They should be invited to watch the DVDs and engage in classroom discussions. The guests should be asked to compare their experiences with the experiences of the individuals profiled in the DVDs. The Merage Foundation will gladly assist you in identifying leaders who are immigrants if you need such assistance. Please call (949) 474-5882.

INCREASING STUDENT UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY IMMIGRANTS:

The DVDs are each different. The content of each DVD reflects three similar themes. The Foundation suggests that teachers organize their proposed lesson plans around these three themes. The themes are: "Leaving Behind Memories and Places," "Building a New Life in the United States," and "Achieving the American Dream."

DR. DAVID HO: From Taiwan to TIME's Person of the Year

Background: *The Chinese and America*

Few American immigrant groups encountered as much discrimination and overt racism as the Chinese. In the late nineteenth century, high government officials openly denounced the Chinese as "an inferior race." Newspapers ran scathing editorials about "the Chinese problem." Employers only offered Chinese Americans the most menial jobs, and then paid them less than

U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island,
San Francisco Bay circa 1915



they paid immigrant laborers of European extraction. And crimes were committed against the Chinese, including the burning of property and even the killing of innocent people.

For nearly a century, the U.S. government's laws and policies actively discriminated against Chinese. These policies were not fully reversed until the 1960s. In the decades since, Chinese immigrants and their descendants have finally, although belatedly, been able to pursue the American Dream more freely. And by their successes, they have proven how misguided and how unjust the oppressive policies of the past were.

China Circa 1850

The Chinese began coming to America in large numbers around 1850. At that time, China was in the throes of its worst political crisis in centuries. The Industrial Revolution had passed it by, as had the democratizing trend that swept through Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Corruption ran rampant within the 200-year-old Ming Dynasty, leaving townspeople at the mercy of their often-ruthless local magistrates. This proud, ancient civilization—the oldest on the planet—seemed to have fallen far behind the times.

The nation's troubles were felt most keenly in the south, China's most commercial and urban region. Here, in cities such as Shanghai and Hong Kong, there existed a nascent middle class of merchants, artisans, and trades people. China's economic stagnation fell hardest upon these people, and hatred of the Mings and their capricious rule ran highest among them. Dissatisfied residents of the southern provinces would constitute the majority of Chinese immigrants to the United States.

To California and Beyond

Before the California gold strikes of 1848, very few Chinese had ever seen America. A tiny Chinese population became established on the East Coast during the early 1800s, but many of these were students who left America after completing their studies.

The first Chinese who went to California carried the same dream everybody else did: to find gold. And they succeeded in about the same proportion as others—that is, not very often. The Chinese who failed to find fortune either went back home or stayed in California and found another line of work. Some remained in the mining business, working as wage-earning laborers; others found jobs as teamsters, domestic servants, carpenters, or farm hands. Many ran restaurants, laundries, groceries, and other small businesses.

California at that time was already very ethnically diverse, with a large Spanish-speaking population (California was Mexican territory until 1848) and large numbers of Germans, Irish, Jews, Scottish, and free African Americans. Even so, the Chinese stood out. By 1880 nearly a quarter of California's work force was Chinese-born, and the state's Chinese population had swelled to more than 100,000.

Thousands had come at the urging of recruiters (some of them Chinese) who promised good jobs and high wages in America. In reality, the jobs were

menial and the wages far from generous—but times were so hard in China that the recruiters had no trouble filling their rosters. Many of these jobs were on railroad construction crews—particularly the transcontinental railroad, which was completed in 1869.

The “Chinese Problem”

In the ensuing decades, the Chinese moved inland to Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Montana, as well as back east to Chicago, New York, and elsewhere. Wherever they settled, they tended to live in urban enclaves known as

Class Discussion Prompts:

The Merage Foundation assumes that teachers will view the DVD concerning David Ho and read the related materials as part of their development of lesson plans. Before teachers show the DVD and begin the planned activities, they should:

1. review the important events in David Ho's personal and professional life. Ho was born in Taichung, Taiwan, on November 3, 1952. When he was four years old his father left to study in America. David, his mother, and his younger brother remained in Taiwan until 1965, when his father could afford to bring them to America. David, age 12, entered public school in Los Angeles. Although classmates mocked his poor English and taunted him with racial slurs, David became an excellent student and attended California Institute of Technology (Caltech). There, he earned an engineering degree and then attended Harvard Medical School, specializing in internal medicine. In 1981, during his medical residency at the UCLA School of Medicine, Dr. Ho treated some of the first AIDS patients. His innate curiosity led him to pursue researching the disease, seeking better AIDS treatments. Dr. Ho's ground-breaking work has prolonged and improved the quality of life of tens of thousands of AIDS sufferers. In 1989 he was named founding director of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center in New York City, and in 1996 TIME Magazine named him “Man of the Year.” Today Dr. Ho remains a leader in the quest to develop an AIDS vaccine.
2. help students understand the significance and meaning of people, terms, and legislative acts referred to in the DVD, including *limited Chinese immigration, the 1964 Immigration and Nationality Act, Lyndon Johnson, Taiwan dialect/Mandarin Chinese, overt discrimination, “coolie” and other derogatory names, public health problem, innate curiosity, esoteric problem, and scientifically important.*
3. ask students if they can define their American Dreams. If it is difficult for students to do so, teachers should ask students about their hopes concerning their education, jobs, careers, marriage, children, family, and contributions to community. Teachers should encourage students to think about and develop their American Dreams as they continue their education. Teachers should ask students to define David Ho's American Dream.

“Chinatowns.” They banded together to share their common language and customs and to protect themselves against resentment and discrimination.

As the Chinese population in the United States increased, so did suspicion and hostility against them. Much of this can only be explained as racism: some Americans hated the Chinese simply because they looked and sounded different from white people. Newspapers regularly ran editorials denouncing the Chinese as an inferior race, while politicians and other public leaders wrung their hands over the “Chinese problem.”

To some people, the “solution” to the problem was violence. Anti-Chinese riots in the late 1870s and early 1880s caused millions of dollars in property damage and sometimes resulted in loss of life. Three days of rioting in 1877 left San Francisco’s Chinatown in ruins; similar incidents ensued in Denver (1880) and Seattle (1886). In Rock Springs, Wyoming, arsonists set fire to the entire Chinese district and killed nearly 30 people in 1885; two years later some 31 Chinese were brutally murdered at Hell’s Canyon, Oregon.

This violence was accompanied by hostile government policies. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first law to specifically bar a class of immigrants based on ethnicity. The law, which remained in force for sixty-one years, virtually impeded Chinese immigration (it allowed a few exceptions for wealthy and well-educated persons).

Exclusion

After passage of the Exclusion Act, the 100,000 Chinese who were already in the United States faced intense discrimination. They were barred from attaining citizenship, owning land, or returning to their American homes if they left the country for any reason (to visit relatives in China, for example). There was even a law that revoked the U.S. citizenship of American women upon marrying a Chinese man.

Despite these harsh policies, Chinese American communities endured through the first half of the twentieth century. Though largely excluded from better-paying occupations, Chinese succeeded as family farmers, small businessmen, domestic servants, and entertainers. A few became doctors, lawyers, and professors. The rise of tourism provided another niche, as urban Chinatowns became popular destinations. To cater to travelers, Chinese Americans opened restaurants, theaters, and shops.

Outright violence against the Chinese had long since ceased, but racism remained—particularly in federal government policy. During the Franklin Roosevelt administration, members of Congress began lobbying to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act; they succeeded in 1943. Chinese Americans thus regained the right to become U.S. citizens, but federal immigration laws—particularly the National Origins Act of 1924—continued to pose prohibitively high barriers to Chinese immigration. The “exclusion” effectively remained until passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Amendments (the Hart-Cellar Act) in 1965—83 years after the Exclusion Acts.

The New Chinese Americans

The Chinese who began arriving in the United States after 1965 left behind a country far different from the one their ancestors had left in the 1850s. China was now a Communist nation, defined by many as an enemy of the United States. The two countries had exchanged fire during the Korean War, and the subsequent Vietnam War was fought in part because U.S. leaders believed China sought to spread communism throughout southeast Asia.

The United States had witnessed transformations of its own. The Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s opened Americans’ eyes to the evils of prejudice and discrimination. While Chinese Americans continued to encounter racial stereotypes, many were able to overcome lingering prejudices and succeed in the United States. During the 1970s, some 125,000 Chinese immigrated to America—the largest number since the 1870s. The figure tripled in the 1980s and rose again in the 1990s to nearly half a million. To put these figures into perspective, consider: Since 1820

the United States has welcomed 1.4 million Chinese immigrants—1.1 million of them since 1965.

How ironic that the Chinese, who for nearly a century were denied basic rights in the United States, now come here to find the freedoms they are denied in their homeland.

THEME ONE: LEAVING BEHIND MEMORIES AND PLACES

David Ho’s given name, *Da-i*, means “Great One” in Chinese. He has lived up to that auspicious name—but he had to come to America to do it.

Born in 1952 in Taiwan, he grew up as the “man of the house”—his father left to study in America when David was four years old. The Ho family lived in a small rural village with few amenities. Their house had just four rooms, and a backyard ditch served as the lavatory. A dedicated student, David spent full days at school and then, after dinner, rode his bicycle to evening tutoring sessions, coming home long after dark. Although he missed his father, the family received a letter from him every week, as well as ongoing financial support. His success at school made David outgoing and confident. Those qualities were tested severely after the Ho family immigrated to America.

PLANNED ACTIVITY

Divide the classroom into small groups. Choose a student to lead a 20-minute discussion in each group. They should focus on what happened in David Ho’s life before he immigrated to the United States at age 12. Have the groups discuss and respond to the following questions:

- Why did David Ho’s father want to come to the United States?
- Why didn’t David Ho’s father take his family with him when he first immigrated to the United States?
- What was David Ho’s life like in Taiwan?
- What memories of Taiwan likely helped David Ho prepare for a better life in America?

Students in each group should compare David Ho’s experiences in Taiwan with their own or their family’s experiences in the country they emigrated from. Group leaders should summarize their group’s responses to the above questions concerning the participant’s (or their family’s) immigration experiences to those of David Ho.

THEME TWO: ESTABLISHING A LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

David, his younger brother, and his mother came to Los Angeles in 1965—the same year, coincidentally, that Congress passed sweeping reforms in U.S. immigration law. David, age 12, could not speak a word of English, leading classmates to mock him as “dumb.” He still recalls vividly how difficult it was to sit in class all day without understanding the teachers’ words, and how even everyday things such as supermarkets and automobiles seemed alien to him. “My whole world changed in two days,” he says of his arrival in America.

These struggles gave David an “underdog mentality.” He worked harder, and with more determination, to show taunting classmates that he was not dumb at all. He focused on learning English and excelling in school, gaining him admission to the elite California Institute of Technology. In the mid-1970s he enrolled at Harvard Medical School.

David Ho says his drive to achieve has been a direct result of his immigrant experience. He has been strongly motivated by a desire to prove that he belongs in the United States and that he can succeed and make a contribution here.

PLANNED ACTIVITY

Teachers should ask students to develop a diary briefly describing their own (or, if they are first-generation, their parents’) key experiences after they came to the United States.

At minimum, the diary should describe their or their parents' specific thoughts and experiences related to:

- learning English (Prompt: Have they and their parents learned English? Was learning English difficult for them? For their parents? When and how did they learn English? Who or what helped them learn English?)
- dealing with racism, prejudice, and discrimination (Prompt: Have they encountered prejudice? When, in what form, and from whom? Was it painful? How did they respond? Whom did they talk to about it?)
- getting an education (Prompt: What educational opportunities does America offer to immigrants? Is it difficult to take advantage of those opportunities? Why is it important to get an education? Did anyone help them make the most of their educational opportunities?)
- defining their American Dream (Prompt: Do they and their parents have an American Dream? When and how was their own and their parents' dream defined? What role has their and their parents' American Dream played in their lives?)

Students should be encouraged to compare their and their parents' experiences and American Dream with each other's, as well as with David Ho's experiences and American Dreams. Students should be asked to present the highlights of their diaries before the class.

THEME THREE: ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

At the time Dr. Ho began his AIDS research the full dimensions of the epidemic were not understood. It was considered an insignificant disease, confined to often stigmatized populations (gay men and intravenous drug addicts). Dr. Ho says his AIDS work would be intellectually satisfying even if it did not have worldwide health implications. The fact that he can do what he loves to do and, at the same time, improve the lives of so many people is, in his words, "a privilege."

It is also a privilege, he says, to live in the United States. Though he acknowledges that the United States is not perfect, Dr. Ho says it is still the best place in the world to achieve one's dreams. In 1996, TIME Magazine named David Ho "Person of the Year." In the article, he receives the following praise: "His tenacity and legendary tranquility both spring from the immigrant experience." His brothers have said Dr. Ho's tranquility grew as he accomplished his American Dream. He often quotes the Taoist philosopher Lao-tzu, who said: "The softest things in the world overcome the hardest things in the world."

David Ho has employed his "soft" qualities—compassion, modesty, a gentle spirit—to try to overcome a very hard, merciless biological foe: AIDS. Those same qualities have helped Dr. Ho rise above language barriers, culture shock, cruel classmates, and even occasional racism in order to achieve his American Dream. He also, in a sense, overcame a 100-year legacy of American hostility toward Chinese immigrants.

Today Dr. Ho is involved in the effort to combat a new disease: SARS. For the medical researcher, as for the immigrant, the challenges can be never-ending.

The David Ho DVD and planned activities are designed to help students talk about their own American Dreams. Teachers should conclude the planned activities by encouraging students to discuss their American Dreams. If some students find it difficult to participate in the discussion, teachers should ask them to talk about their hopes concerning their future education, jobs, marriage and children, family, contributions to the community. Teachers should foster a classroom dialogue concerning student role models. The discussion should focus on what makes a good role model, focusing on the qualities that David Ho displayed (e.g., courage, willingness to overcome problems, hard work, desire to contribute to their communities).

PLANNED ACTIVITY

Ask groups of three or four students to interview at least two or three immigrant leaders from their own countries of origin or of their parents. The students should ask the leaders about their present roles and how their roles contribute to the community. They should ask the leaders if they defined their American Dream when they first came to the United States and if they believe they have achieved it, or are on the way to achieving it. They should question the leaders about how, or if, their American Dream is helping them succeed in their life. They should ask each leader how they overcame problems (e.g., acquiring the language, securing housing, obtaining jobs) they faced when they immigrated to the United States, how they define "becoming American," and if they feel they have "become an American." Each group should summarize their interviews and present them to the class for discussion.



David Ho in his lab at the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center

RESOURCES

Print

The New Americans by Michael Barone (Regnery, 2001)

Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools by Laurie Olsen (New Press, 1998)

Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American by Tamar Jacoby (Basic Books, 2004)

The Chinese America: A Narrative History by Iris Chang (Viking, 2003)

Chinese Immigration (Changing Face of North America) by Marissa K. Lingen (Mason Crest Publishers, 2004)

Chinese Immigrants, 1850-1900 by Kay Melchisedech Olson (Capstone Press, 2001)

Century of Immigration: 1820-1924 by Christopher Collier, J.L. Collier, James Lincoln Collier (Marshall Cavendish Inc, 2000)

At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943 by Erika Lee (University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

The Columbia Documentary History of the Asian American Experience by Franklin S. Odo (Columbia University Press, 2002)

Internet

Academy of Achievement: The Hall of Science and Exploration
www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/hoa0int-1

American Memory
<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/chinese.html>

The Chinese in California, 1850-1925
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/cubhtml/themeindex.html>

The Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center www.adarc.org

Immigration Information (federal immigration and naturalization statutes)
<http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/legishist/index.htm>

Becoming American: The Chinese Experience
www.pbs.org/becoming_american/ap_prog1.html