

Commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society with support from the Pew Center for Arts & Heritage. The World Premiere was given by Nick Phan (tenor) and Brooklyn Rider at the Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center, Philadelphia on January 24, 2020.

Duration: c. 15 minutes

## : TEXT

I.

Here is the challenge: how do we as scholars give voice to the voiceless? How do we understand lived experience if we have nothing from the actors themselves? Is it possible to recover and interpret the past?

Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin  
"Fragments of the Past: Archaeology, History, and the Chinese Railroad Workers of North America"  
*Historical Archaeology* 4 No. 9 (2015): 1-3

II.

And then when you got inside of the building, Ellis Island, we were one in after another. And at the end of the line there was a doctor. And he examined your eyes. If your eyes was good, pass. They ask you who you're going to see, where you're going. How much you have and who's gonna take care of you. They asked my mother, 'Who are you going to see?' 'My husband, of course.' Everybody is nervous when you go through that doctor. Because it's the fear that you don't know what you have in your eyes. You know what I mean? What they could find. And it was fear. But after you pass, it's a great joy and a great relief in your mind and heart.

The food was the same because we always cooked the same no matter if we were there or even now. Food is the same. We do our own cooking. We know what we want.

Rose Brecki  
*Transcript of an oral history conducted October 21, 1985 by Dr. Willa Appel*  
*The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation Oral History Project*

III.

In your Declaration of Independence it is asserted that all men are born free and equal; it is understood by the civilized world that the United States of America is a free country, but I fear there is a backward step being taken by the government.

The Honorable Senator calls us heathens, but I should judge from the tone of his letter that he was somewhat lacking in Christian charity. Let him look at the fire in Chicago and yellow fever in New Orleans, and he will find Chinamen giving as much, according to their means, as any other people.

You go against the principles of George Washington, you go against the American flag, and you act in conflict with Christian charity and principle.

I ask you, where is your golden rule, your Christian charity, and the fruits of your Bible teachings, when you talk about doing unto others as you would have them do to you?

Letter from Wong Ar Chong to William Lloyd Garrison, February 28, 1879

IV.

The stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:34

V.

These threats and intimidations and riotous and bloody acts, committed under the light of nineteenth century civilization, in this nation which claims to be a leading nation in intelligence, morality, and culture, shock our sense of national pride as well as our sense of justice, honor, and right.

The Scripture injunction in regard to the 'stranger sojourning among us' has been sanctioned and reasserted by all modern civilization, and it is abhorrent that such violations of the laws of hospitality and humanity should be repeated in one community after another on our Coast.

"To the president of the United States, and to the Senate and House of Representatives in  
Congress assembled Protest against ill-treatment of the Chinese" (s. l. 1885)

VI.

Everyone cries and wails. Women with little babies, who've come to their husbands, are being detained. Who can stand this suffering? When a man wants to ask his wife something, or when a father wants to see his child, they don't let him. Children get sick, they are taken to a hospital and it often happens that they never come back. We wear the same shirts for three or four weeks, because we don't have our baggage with us.

Isaac Metzker  
*A Bintel Brief: Sixty Years of Letters from the Lower East Side to the Jewish Daily Forward*  
(New York: Schocken Books, 1971)

VII.

My Love: Can you feel the brilliant sunshine on this page? And the peace? And hear the splashings of the summer? And the laughter of the children? And the hardness of this seat in this anchored row boat? And see the trees and the clouds reflected in this lake of fresh water?

My thoughts tonight are far-reaching. I know my thoughts of you are very tender ones. Perhaps it is the classical music on the radio, or perhaps it's just because it is Saturday night that has prompted me to write tonight. Whatever the reason, I know I love you and miss you so terribly tonight.

Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith (ed.)  
*Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front*  
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1991)