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## 'Day of Inclusion' shines light on California's dark history

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer

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Although it's not widely known yet, today has been given the job of teaching about a time when Chinese people suffered violence in many parts of California, including Chico.

The campaign to designate Dec. 17 as the "Day of Inclusion" in California began when an artist named Steve Yee set out to learn more about his father.

Yee's dad was among thousands of men who came to America illegally from China. For that reason, he didn't use his real name, and he never spoke about his origins.

Yee, who lives in Sacramento, couldn't find out much about his father, but he did learn a lot about what he calls "the Driving Out."

This occurred in the late 1800s, when Chinese workers faced violence from angry whites.

Local history in the 1870s typifies what happened, according to Michele Shover, a retired Chico State University political-science professor.

Thousands of Chinese immigrated to America legally in the 1850s and 1860s. They were needed as cheap labor, Shover said. Many worked to build the first railroad lines across the country.

When the railroads were finished, the Chinese spread out, settling in communities and looking for work.

As they competed with white people for jobs, the Chinese encountered hostility. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. It said no more Chinese could come to America. One exception was sons of U.S. citizens. That's why Yee's father entered the United States under false pretenses, claiming to be the son of a citizen. The

Exclusion Act stood until Dec. 17, 1943. It was repealed, because America wanted to earn favor with China, which was helping in the war against Japan.

Shover said the anti-Chinese movement during the 1870s was fueled by an economic depression that swept across the nation and reached the area by 1875. Many businesses closed, and a lot of men were out of work.

The Chinese were industrious and worked for very low pay, as domestic help, in laundries and on ranches.

As resentment built, communities split between pro-Chinese and anti-Chinese whites. Vigilante groups formed. Chinese-owned businesses were burned.

It reached the level of murder. Four Chinese were killed during a robbery in Chico on the night of March 14, 1877. The attackers were sentenced to long terms at San Quentin, but most white people viewed the killers as "victims," according to Shover. They petitioned the governor, who set four of the five prisoners free after four years.

These events in Chico were very typical of the "Driving Out," Yee said, explaining he'd read that "31 urban centers from Los Angeles to Red Bluff ... underwent burning of Chinatowns and anti-Chinese expulsions."

One of those burned Chinatowns was in Sacramento, near where the Amtrak station is today. It was called Yee Fow.

Yee hopes to start a museum there dedicated to promoting tolerance and spreading knowledge of the "Driving Out."

Yee's organization, the Yee Fow Museum, sponsored legislation (Assembly Concurrent Resolution 76) that passed this year, establishing Dec. 17 as the Day of Inclusion.

Assemblyman Mike Eng, D-Monterey Park, who is of Chinese ancestry himself, authored the legislation.

He hopes the Day of Inclusion will become widely observed as time goes on, he said. "It is incumbent on us to know about this dark day in history."

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