

## CHINESE AMERICAN HEROES

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### Chinese Americans in the News Media

Chinese Americans in the News Media: March 3, 1939 commemorates the birthday of Sam Chu Lin, the first Chinese American to appear as a correspondent on national news broadcasts.

As in any industry in America, minorities have had to fight extra hard to achieve any level of success in the traditionally white dominated media landscape. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 made clear what many Americans thought of the Chinese for decades. Chinese Americans faced extreme discrimination getting hired for many years. One major problem was that they had to combat the stereotype of not being able to speak or write English adequately enough to work in the news business despite earning advanced college degrees from American colleges. By the 1960s though, Chinese Americans finally started to appear on network and local news, paving the way for many more opportunities for Chinese Americans in the news media. However, there continues to be an inequality of ethnic and gender representation. Few Chinese Americans are in the industry in proportion to their numbers in the general population and Chinese American women have also had much more success breaking into business than Chinese American men.

Minority reporters in general were scarce before Sam Chu Lin, let alone Chinese Americans. He was a pioneer in his profession and set the standard for broadcast journalism for all Chinese Americans to follow. In the 1960s, he first reached a national audience working for CBS News in New York and began to appear on national radio and television broadcasts. Sam Chu Lin was the first reporter to broadcast nationally the news about the fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Sam was extremely dedicated to Asian American issues. He was a frequent contributor to numerous Asian American publications such as *AsianWeek* and *Rafu Shimpo*. Sam also fought to produce documentaries about Asian Americans including a program on ABC's Nightline, titled "Asian American-When Your Neighbor Looks Like the Enemy." He also contributed to mainstream newspapers like the *San Francisco Examiner*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Los Angeles Times*. He worked for 40 years as a journalist and well deserved the Lifetime Achievement Award he won from the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) in 2007, a year after he passed away.

Sam's successful reporting career paved the way for Connie Chung. She broke not only racial but gender barriers as one of the first Chinese American women to reach the top of broadcasting. She began as a correspondent for the *CBS Evening News* in the early 1970s and went on to also work for NBC, ABC, and CNN. On June 1, 1993, Connie became the first Chinese American and second woman ever to co-anchor a national network's evening news broadcast. She co-anchored the

*CBS Evening News* with Dan Rather for two years. Afterwards, she went on to co-host shows like *20/20* on ABC and *Weekends with Maury and Connie* on MSNBC. Her overwhelming success created the “Connie Chung phenomenon,” where many news programs hired Asian American females, promoting an ethnic gender imbalance in broadcast news that still exists today. While the “Connie Chung phenomenon” has largely been seen as a positive, the overrepresentation of female newscasters stands in stark contrast to the lack of male representation. There are some Chinese American male reporters but rarely are they the anchors of a newscast. Sam Chu Lin, despite all of his contributions, never achieved the coveted anchoring job. An Asian female who sits next to her oftentimes white co-anchor, is believed to be more appealing to the viewing public than an Asian male sitting next to a white woman. This inequity needs to be resolved for there to be true representation in broadcast news.

The news media have come a long way since the times of Sam Chu Lin and Connie Chung. Today, Chinese Americans can regularly be seen on television in broadcast news, still changing old perceptions and values about race in the community. Thanks to Chinese American pioneers in local and national news the future still needs work but is getting ever brighter.