

In This Issue #399

A Memorable Webinar Co-Hosted by Committee of 100, U.S.-China Education Trust, and APA Justice



On June 3, 2026, the Committee of 100, U.S.-China Education Trust, and APA Justice co-hosted a memorable webinar titled “Geopolitics, Identity, and the Fight for Civil Rights.” This is the third in a series of joint webinars titled “Global Tensions, Local Dimensions” in October 2025 to discuss the intersection of U.S.-China relations and civil rights and civil liberties of Asian American and immigrant communities in the U.S.

The Third Webinar was moderated by **Joanna YangQing Derman**, Program Director at Asian American Advancing Justice | AAJC and featured two distinguished speakers:

- **Edgar Chen 陳春品**, Special Advisor, National Asian Pacific American Bar Association; former Departments of Justice, Treasury, and Commerce official
- **Frank Wu 吳华扬**, President, Queens College, City University of New York; past chair of Committee of 100; author of *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*

After opening remarks by **Jeremy Wu**, Co-Organizer of APA Justice, the lively discussions flow from one topic to another seamlessly for almost an hour, starting with the recent racist video mocking Maryland delegate **Chao Wu**.

Cindy Tsai, Executive Vice President and General Counsel of the Committee of 100, gave closing remarks.

Watch the full webinar here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5v1z9g083kY> (57:00)

The Maryland Delegate Incident — Accent Mockery and the Spy Accusation

Joanna opened the discussion by referencing a recent and widely publicized incident in which two Maryland state delegates mocked fellow Delegate **Chao Wu** on a podcast, ridiculing his accent and — following a legislative disagreement — falsely insinuating that he was acting as a Chinese spy. The comments were swiftly condemned by state and congressional leadership and AAPI advocacy organizations, who called for an apology and stronger standards of conduct.

Frank responded by drawing a direct line from this incident to the violence that erupted during the COVID-19 pandemic. He noted that Asian Americans — who were overrepresented as doctors and nurses putting themselves at fatal risk — were simultaneously being physically attacked: shoved to the ground, kicked in the head, spat on, and in some cases murdered. The victims were not only people of Chinese descent but also Korean, Burmese, and even Latina individuals who were perceived as Asian. Many were U.S. citizens and green card holders of third, fourth, and fifth generations. The common thread, Frank argued, was the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype — the deeply ingrained assumption that Asian Americans' hearts and loyalties belong elsewhere, regardless of their name, religion, degree of assimilation, or how many generations their families have been in this country.

Frank made three specific points. First, mocking accents is straightforwardly wrong — it is the cruelty of childhood bullying directed at adults in positions of public trust. He shared a personal reflection: his immigrant parents blamed their own accents for the discrimination they faced, not realizing the problem was the bigotry of others. Frank noted that he himself, despite having a Midwestern accent from growing up in Detroit, has been told his "accent" is holding him back — because the bias is visual, not auditory. Social science confirms this: people imagine an accent when they see an Asian face, even if the person sounds entirely American on the phone.

Second, Frank identified a fragile but real social consensus, forged through the civil rights movement, that stereotyping is wrong. That consensus has shifted racism from being overt and unapologetic to something that polite society at least nominally condemns.

Third, he warned of a new and dangerous erosion of that consensus: the logic that if one Chinese American does something wrong, all Chinese Americans become suspects. He drew an explicit analogy — if a Black person commits a crime and police rounded up all Black people, everyone would recognize that as both morally wrong and practically ineffective. The same principle applies here. Stereotyping is not just unjust; it is a poor law enforcement and national security tool.

Frank closed this segment with a pointed observation: if elected officials can do this to a fellow office-holder who has been voted into office by constituents, the message it sends to every Asian American child on a playground — or adult walking down the street — is deeply chilling.

Edgar agreed wholeheartedly and added a pointed ideological argument: if the stated goal is to combat Chinese communism, the way to do that is to celebrate American democracy. Delegate Wu's story — an immigrant who ran for local office and won the trust of his constituents — is exactly the kind of democratic participation the United States claims distinguishes it from authoritarian systems. Treating that story as suspicious is not only racist; it is strategically self-defeating. Edgar recalled that during the Cold War, the Soviet Union repeatedly pointed to American racism and segregation as evidence that Western democracy was morally inferior. The United States countered by highlighting human rights abuses behind the Iron Curtain. The Maryland incident, Edgar argued, hands adversaries exactly that kind of propaganda gift.

Alien Land Laws — History, Current Proliferation, and the National Security Pretext

Joanna presented a detailed statistical picture drawn from Committee of 100 data: since 2021, no fewer than 525 bills restricting foreign land ownership have been introduced across the country, with 63% specifically restricting Chinese citizens. The pace has been consistent: 149 bills in 2023, 126 in 2024, 133 in 2025, and 76 so far in 2026. As of May 2026, approximately 28 states have enacted such legislation. Against this legislative backdrop, she noted that Chinese-affiliated entities account for just 0.03% of total U.S. farmland — compared to Canada's 33% share of all foreign-owned agricultural land. She asked: given that the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) already exists specifically to review foreign land purchases for national security threats, what does the proliferation of new state and federal legislation actually reveal? Is it a genuine security response, or a pretext for racial profiling?

Frank situated the current wave of alien land laws in a century-long historical continuum. He noted that early 20th-century legislators were sometimes deliberately evasive in their bigotry, using the phrase "aliens ineligible to citizenship" rather than naming specific ethnic groups. This phrase, which appeared facially neutral, in practice applied exclusively to Asian people — a consequence of the Chinese Exclusion Act and its expansion in 1917 to an "Asiatic barred zone." Two Supreme Court cases from that era illuminate the stakes: in one, a man of Japanese descent who was Christian, spoke English, and was assimilated was denied naturalization; in another, a South Asian man who had served in the U.S. Army was similarly rejected. The Court held that there was a color bar — one had to be white or Caucasian to naturalize — and neither was deemed to qualify. The Supreme Court ultimately struck these alien land laws down in *Oyama v. California* in 1948. But Frank emphasized that the harms were never limited to land: fishing licenses were denied, and during internment, two thirds of those affected were U.S. citizens. History consistently shows that restrictions nominally targeted at "aliens" inevitably extend to their American-born children and grandchildren.

Frank also noted that some current legislators are no longer hiding behind neutral language — they openly name the targeted ethnic group, making plain that the concern is not about foreigners per se but about people of a particular background. He offered a vivid personal illustration: as a native-born U.S. citizen who carries his passport with him because people routinely question his belonging, he asked what a real estate agent would actually do when an Asian American family shows up to an open house. The agent will not ask for a passport — they will simply assume foreign status based on appearance, which is precisely the chilling effect these laws are designed to produce.

He concluded with an economic argument: even setting civil rights concerns aside entirely, the business case for diversity is overwhelming. Immigrants revitalized communities like downtown Flushing, Queens, turning what was an economically depressed area into one of New York City's most vibrant commercial districts. Every study shows that immigrant arrivals lift local economies. Excluding immigrant investors raises a straightforward question with no good answer: how does stopping people from investing in America help the economy?

Edgar reinforced the historical through-line and added a crucial contemporary dimension. He noted that today's alien land laws typically invoke "foreign adversary" designations under 15 CFR 7.4, which lists not only China but also Russia, Iran, and North Korea. On its face, the legislation appears race-neutral. But Edgar observed that in practice, he has never once heard a sponsor give a floor speech warning about Russian oligarchical funds or Iranian malign influence — only Chinese influence is invoked. The targeting is unmistakable even when the drafting is superficially neutral.

He also delivered what he called one of the most effective rhetorical counterarguments: Louisiana's SB 395 calls for the expropriation — that specific word — of land owned by Chinese citizens. Edgar noted that during the Cultural Revolution, Chinese Communist Party slogans called for expropriating lands from local tyrants. The irony is pointed: the legislators behind these bills are, in effect, doing what the Chinese Communist Party did, beating the CCP to the punch on Fifth Amendment violations.

Expanding Economic Targeting Beyond Land

Joanna broadened the discussion to other policy domains where national security framing is being applied to economic exclusion. She cited two specific examples. At the federal level, the Trump administration recently changed SBA-backed loan eligibility criteria, rendering small businesses even partially owned by non-citizens ineligible — cutting off access to capital for immigrant entrepreneurs who had been working in full compliance with immigration law. At the state level, Iowa's SF572, recently signed into law, bars businesses and individuals from certain countries including China from obtaining licensure to establish or operate health care centers —

a striking move given how vital immigrant workers are to American health care, particularly in rural states.

Edgar confirmed that SF572 is now law and emphasized the particular damage it would do in rural Iowa, where health care is already in crisis. He noted that the need extends well beyond physicians to include direct service professionals, nursing home operators, nurse practitioners, nurses, nursing aides — the full spectrum of health care labor. He observed a critical drafting flaw: the bill's sponsor claimed the intent was to prevent Chinese entities from infiltrating the health care system, but the bill targets individual Chinese citizens rather than state-linked entities. This bait-and-switch — framing the legislation as anti-CCP while actually targeting individuals — is, Edgar argued, poor policy and potentially unconstitutional.

He connected this to the SBA issue and the broader message being sent: no matter how hard an immigrant works, no matter how scrupulously they comply with the law, even 1% foreign co-ownership disqualifies them from the American dream. That message, Edgar said, is corrosive.

The Domestic/Foreign Policy Divide and Civil Rights Advocacy

Joanna reflected on a tension she experiences personally in her work at an AAPI domestic advocacy organization: the issues her community faces are increasingly inseparable from foreign policy and national security debates that were once considered a separate domain. She asked how the AAPI community can best prepare itself to engage effectively on these "foreign policy" issues without being accused of shilling for Beijing.

Edgar acknowledged this challenge directly and personally: his parents are from Taiwan, he has never set foot in the People's Republic of China, and he is troubled when the PRC flies missiles over the Taiwan Strait during elections. And yet, standing up for an impacted Asian American's civil rights is routinely characterized as acting at the behest of the CCP — the same pernicious logic on display in the Maryland delegates incident. He argued, however, that civil rights advocates must develop sufficient foreign policy literacy to credibly distinguish real national security concerns from pretextual ones. Understanding why alien land laws resonate — including genuine anxieties about China's assertiveness in the South China Sea — allows advocates to engage with those fears seriously and push back with evidence rather than dismissal.

Frank agreed and reframed the entire premise of the "foreign influence" concern. The conventional assumption is that Asian Americans are agents of foreign influence flowing into the United States. Frank argued it is actually the reverse: throughout history, Asian Americans and the broader diaspora have been vectors for democratic values flowing outward to Asia. Reform movements and democratization campaigns in China and across the region have consistently been driven by or deeply influenced by people connected to the American experience. The

foreign influence, he said, is positive and runs in the opposite direction from what critics assume.

Edgar added a plug for the Committee of 100's State of Chinese American Survey 2025, which found that Americans broadly favor cooperation with China despite tough political rhetoric — a finding that underscores the gap between elite political discourse and actual public sentiment. He also noted the irony that Iowa farmers lionize President **Xi Jinping** because of his Iowa life experience and agricultural trade relationships, underscoring that at the ground level, the US-China relationship is often more pragmatic and cooperative than the legislative and rhetorical environment suggests.

Economic Fears, the Model Minority Myth, and the Politics of Scapegoating

Frank drew a direct line between Asian American success and the resentment directed at the community, citing historian **Ronald Takaki's** formulation that Asian Americans have been "punished not for their vices, but for their virtues." The model minority myth cuts both ways: on one hand it flattens the genuine diversity and hardship within Asian American communities, and on the other it makes Asian American success itself a source of perceived threat — in college admissions, in the job market, in neighborhood demographics.

He noted that Asian immigration has a bimodal income distribution: high-net-worth professionals at one end, Uber drivers, undocumented workers, nail salon operators, and restaurant owners at the other. The model minority myth erases the latter group entirely, which distorts both policy responses and coalition-building.

Frank also offered a sober warning about the dynamics of political scapegoating. Once political leaders get people "riled up" against a group — as happened during COVID when Asian Americans were blamed for spreading disease — the anger they unleash does not dissipate when the rhetoric changes. Even if a leader does a 180 and stops blaming Asian Americans, the person who has already been radicalized into hatred will not stand down simply because the political signal changed. The emotional response has been triggered and takes on a life of its own.

Edgar added that the current political moment has produced some striking reversals. The Trump administration, after years of anti-China rhetoric, recently welcomed up to half a million Chinese student visas and reversed its position on Chinese farmland purchases — running counter to the administration's own USDA National Farm Security Action Plan. Edgar asked pointedly: if the president can treat the US-China relationship as essentially transactional and cooperative when it suits him, does that retroactively reveal that the national security concerns invoked to justify alien land laws and other restrictive measures were pretextual to begin with?

He cited the examples of the heads of Intel, Nvidia, and AMD — all Chinese Americans, two from Taiwan, one from Malaysia — and the TikTok CEO, who during a congressional hearing was asked whether he was a member of the Chinese Communist Party and had to explain he was from Singapore. Even the most prominent figures in American industry are not immune from the suspicion that their Asian faces mark them as foreign.

Audience Q&A

On political engagement (to Edgar): Edgar's answer was direct and brief. The answer to the Maryland delegates incident is: get involved. Run for office. Talk to your neighbors. Participate in the democratic process regardless of party. Delegate Wu's story is as American as it gets, and the best response to those who would question Asian American belonging in politics is to show up.

On accountability, constitutional norms, and mental health (to Frank):

Frank acknowledged the genuine psychological toll of being constantly scrutinized and constantly having to justify one's belonging. The pandemic hate crimes made viscerally clear that the threat is not abstract: elderly Asian Americans were shoved to the ground and kicked in the head because of political scapegoating. The particular cruelty is that when Asian Americans speak out, the common dismissal is "what are you complaining about? You have it easy" — a response that compounds the harm by denying it.

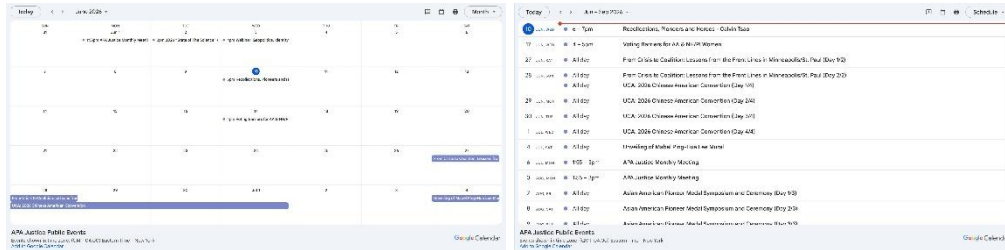
On what can be done, Frank emphasized coalition-building and showing up — not necessarily running for office, but at minimum voting, and specifically having direct conversations with family members who may be voting against their own interests. He invited every viewer to picture a cousin who voted in a way that seemed self-defeating, and to simply ask that cousin — without idealism or lectures — whether they think it will actually work out for them. That kind of intimate, personal outreach, Frank argued, is where political change begins.

Closing Observations

The webinar concluded with **Joanna** synthesizing a theme that ran throughout: the zero-sum narrative framing US-China relations as a conflict in which one power's rise requires the other's fall is not only analytically questionable but politically dangerous, because it provides rhetorical fuel for the racialization of Asian Americans as a fifth column. Both panelists advocated instead for a framework of coexistence, cooperation where possible, and vigorous but evidence-based engagement with genuine security concerns — one that refuses to sacrifice the civil rights of American citizens and residents on the altar of geopolitical anxiety.

News and Activities for the Communities

1. APA Justice Community Calendar



Upcoming Events:

2026/06/10 Recollections, Pioneers and Heroes - Calvin Tsao

2026/06/17 Voting Barriers for AA & NH/PI Women

2026/06/27-28 From Crisis to Coalition: Lessons from the Front Lines in Minneapolis/St. Paul

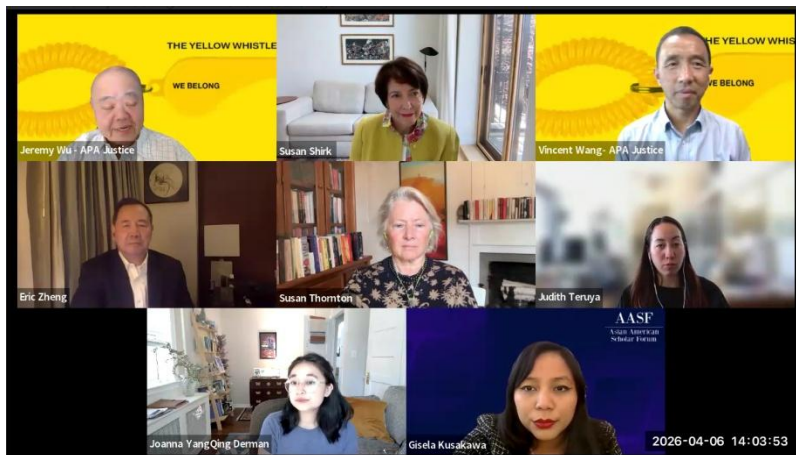
2026/06/28-07/01 UCA: 2026 Chinese American Convention

2026/07/04 Unveiling of Mabel Ping-Hua Lee Mural

2026/07/06 APA Justice Monthly Meeting

Visit <https://bit.ly/3XD61qV> for event details.

2. APA Justice April 2026 Monthly Meeting Summary Posted



Summary for the April 2026 APA Justice monthly meeting has been posted at <https://bit.ly/4umOf7S>. We thank these distinguished speakers for sharing their insightful remarks and updates:

- **Judith Teruya**, Executive Director, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus
- **Joanna YangQing Derman**, Director, Anti-Profilng, Civil Rights & National Security Program, Advancing Justice | AAJC
- **Gisela Perez Kusakawa**, Executive Director, Asian American Scholar Forum (AASF)
- **Eric Zheng**, President, The American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai
- **Susan A. Thornton**, Vice Chair, U.S. Heartland China Association
- **Susan Shirk**, Research Professor; Director Emerita, 21st Century China Center, University of California, San Diego

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APA Justice Task Force is a non-partisan platform to build a sustainable ecosystem that addresses racial profiling concerns and to facilitate, inform, and advocate on selected issues related to justice and fairness for the Asian Pacific American community. For more information, please refer to the APA Justice website at www.apajusticetaskforce.org. We value your feedback. Please send your comments to contact@apajustice.org.

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