

STUDENT GUIDE FOR DR. MARGARET CHUNG

Born in Santa Barbara, California in 1889 to Chinese immigrant parents, Margaret Chung lived an extraordinary life. As the first American-born Chinese female physician, she faced and overcame significant barriers, both race- and gender-based. But her legacy extends well beyond her medical achievements, including WWII and the US military.



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Case Study: How did the context of WWII provide Dr. Margaret Chung opportunities to create social and political power despite gender and race-based barriers?

I. Historical Background and Context

Dr. Margaret Jessie Chung (1889-1959) lived at the intersection of multiple transformational periods in American history. Born in Santa Barbara, California, during the height of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), she became the first known American-born Chinese female physician when she graduated from the University of Southern California (USC) Medical School in 1916.¹ Her life spanned the Progressive Era, both World Wars, the Great Depression, and the early Cold War—periods that dramatically reshaped concepts of citizenship, gender roles, and national belonging.

Chung's story reveals the complex strategies required for marginalized individuals to gain influence and acceptance in American society. Facing rejection from Presbyterian medical missionary work due to her Chinese ancestry and discrimination in medical training due to her gender, Chung created alternative pathways to professional success through practicing medicine, the creation of an unconventional family structure, and strategic networking.²

Beginning in 1931, Dr. Chung began hosting dinners for young Navy aviators in her home in San Francisco. What started as a small gathering of seven pilots evolved into a vast network of over 1,500 "adopted sons and daughters" by the end of World War II. Dr. Chung organized her adoptees into three groups:

- **"Fair-Haired Sons"** (approximately 900 members): Military aviators, including famous figures like actor and U.S. President Ronald Reagan
- **"Golden Dolphins"** (approximately 300 members): Submarine personnel
- **"Kiwis"** (approximately 300 members): Non-flying military personnel, politicians, and entertainers, including Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Amelia Earhart

Each adoptee received a number corresponding to their order of entry and a carved jade Buddha ring. Chung maintained correspondence with her "children," writing up to 14 letters daily and sending care packages during wartime deployments.³

Dr. Chung's network became a powerful tool for political advocacy. In her unpublished autobiography, and in her personal papers and letter exchanges with "sons" at UC Berkeley, Chung explains how she sought to serve in the Navy during World War II but faced rejection due to her race (and likely suspected

¹ ["First American-Born Chinese Woman Doctor."](#) *American Masters*, Public Broadcasting Service.

² Doughty, Sarah. ["Margaret Chung, an Overlooked Trailblazer Who Took in Thousands of Soldiers in Wartime, Dies at 91."](#) *The New York Times*, 18 Sept. 2023, p. A16. *The New York Times*.

³ Walker, Malea. ["Dr. Margaret Chung: First American Born Chinese Woman Physician."](#) *Headlines & Heroes*, Library of Congress, 31 May 2022.

sexual orientation), and how she mobilized her adoptive family to create the Women's Naval Reserve, the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service)⁴. Key figures in this campaign included:

- **Rear Admiral Irving McQuiston** (Son #465): Guided the lobbying strategy in Congress
- **Congressman Melvin Maas** (Son #447): Introduced House Bill 6807 for the creation of a Women's Naval Reserve
- **Congressman Raymond Willis** (Kiwi #124): Introduced the Women's Reserve Bill in the Senate
- **Congressman Albert Chandler** (Golden Dolphin #98): Negotiated the passage of the Senate Bill
- **Alice Roosevelt Longworth** (Kiwi #49): Daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt and widow of House Speaker Nicholas Longworth, who provided political connections

On July 30, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Public Law 689 establishing the WAVES⁵. Ironically, Chung was barred from service, while over 86,000 women—almost all white—eventually joined the organization Chung had inspired.

Throughout her career, Chung carefully maneuvered multiple aspects of her identity. During medical school, she adopted masculine clothing (suits and ties), occasionally used the name "Mike," and later engaged in what was perceived at the time as "masculine" pursuits, including her interests in airplanes and expensive sports cars. Her unmarried status and close relationships with women, particularly entertainer Sophie Tucker, generated persistent rumors about her sexual orientation that were documented in a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) report in 1940.

Chung's home in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, which was known for its subculture, allowed her and her network to cross racial, gender, and social boundaries that typically divided America during that time.

The following is a quote from Dr. Margaret Chung from the *Christian Science Monitor*, 1942:

"We, who are the beneficiaries of the American system, should defend it with our heads as well as our hearts. We must not be content with a passive patriotism. We must be active Americans... The seat of government may be in Washington, but the heart of government is in your township. And when that heart beats, Washington listens."

Dr. Margaret "Mom" Chung died of cancer on January 5th, 1959, at the age of 69.

Fitting Fun Fact: In 2013, the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency named one of its Tunnel Boring Machines, which was part of its Central Subway Infrastructure Project, "Mom Chung".⁶

⁴ [Guide to the Margaret Chung Papers, 1880–1958 \(bulk 1942–1944\)](#). AAS ARC 2000/3, Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2002.

⁵ [An Act to Establish the Women's Reserve as a Part of the United States Naval Reserve and for Other Purposes](#). 30 July 1942. *United States Statutes at Large*, vol. 56, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942, pp. 730–731. United States, Congress.

⁶ Nunez, Jenifer. ["Mom Chung and Big Alma to Bore SFMTA Central Subway Tunnels."](#) *Railway Track & Structures*, 11 Mar. 2013

II. Digital Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary Sources

1. [Los Angeles Herald. October 10, 1905, Page 8, Image 8. Chronicling America. Library of Congress.](#)
2. ["Spotlight on Margaret Chung, first Chinese American woman doctor." Brooklyn Eagle. May 8, 1927. p. 92. Newspapers.com.](#)
3. ["WAVES: Women in the Navy World War II Newsreel." YouTube, uploaded by PublicResourceOrg. May 27, 2016.](#)
4. ["Woman Doctor Tells How She Won 1000 Sons in U.S. Service." The Miami News. February 23, 1943, p. 6. Newspapers.com.](#)
5. [Comic Book: "Mom Chung and Her 509 'Fair-Haired Foster Sons.'" Real Heroes, No. 9, Parents Magazine Institute. March 1942. Pp. 9-14](#)

Secondary Sources

6. [Dr. Margaret "Mom" Chung. National Park Service. Presidio of San Francisco.](#)
7. [Walker, Malea. Dr. Margaret Chung: First American-born Chinese Woman Physician. The Library of Congress. May 31, 2022.](#)
8. [Rise Up for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Dr. Margaret Chung. Stanford Libraries.](#)
9. [Video: The First American-Born Chinese Woman Doctor. PBS American Masters. May 27, 2020.](#)
10. [UnErasing LGBTQ History and Identities: A Podcast. Season 4 Episode 5: Dr. Margaret "Mom" Chung and Her "Fair-Haired Sons".](#)
11. Doughty, Sarah. ["Overlooked No More: Margaret Chung, Doctor Who Was 'Different From Others'". The New York Times, 18 Sept. 2023.](#)

III. “Inspiring the WAVES” Primary Source Improv Activity

Historical Context: In March of 1942, Dr. Margaret “Mom” Chung applied to enlist in the U.S. Navy. She was rejected due to her Chinese ancestry and, most likely, her perceived sexual orientation. She applied and was rejected at least two more times, but maintained a strong desire to serve. Soon after the first rejection from the U.S. Navy, Dr. Chung leveraged the influence of her “adopted sons and daughters” in the federal government, the military, and positions of power to expand opportunities for women during WWII and establish a volunteer branch of the Women's Naval Reserve, the WAVES. Even though Dr. Chung inspired the creation of the WAVES, which was formally established on July 30th, 1942, she was barred from service.

Objective: Explore society’s perceptions of women, and their roles and responsibilities in military service, during WWII, as well as the possible motivations for Dr. Chung to engage in “active patriotism” despite barriers to her pursuits due to her race, gender, and perceived sexual orientation.

Primary Sources and Guiding Questions:

1. **Read the full National Republican newspaper article:**
 - “Woman Doctor Tells How She Won 1000 Sons in U.S. Service.” *The Miami News*. February 23, 1943, p. 6. [Newspapers.com](#).
 - What facts did you learn about Dr. Chung from the National Republican article?
2. **Watch the following videos:**
 - “WAVES: Women in the Navy World War II Newsreel.” *YouTube*, uploaded by PublicResourceOrg. May 27, 2016.
 - “U.S. NAVY WAVES - Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, WOMEN IN WWII 20284.” *YouTube*. Uploaded by PeriscopeFilm, September 20, 2016.
 - What facts did you learn about the WAVES' work responsibilities from the videos?
 - What did you learn about society’s perceptions of women and their roles and responsibilities in military service from the videos?
 - What did you learn about society’s perceptions of women in general during this time?
3. **Read all sections of Public Law 689 that established the WAVES:**
 - *An Act to Establish the Women’s Reserve as a Part of the United States Naval Reserve and for Other Purposes*. July 30, 1942. *United States Statutes at Large*, vol. 56, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1942, pp. 730–731. United States Congress.
 - What did you learn from Public Law 689 about the limitations placed on women who joined the WAVES?
4. **Dr. Margaret Chung Quote:**
 - *“We, who are the beneficiaries of the American system, should defend it with our heads as well as our hearts. We must not be content with a passive patriotism. We must be active Americans... The seat of government may be in Washington, but the heart of*

government is in your township. And when that heart beats, Washington listens.” — Dr. Margaret Chung, Christian Science Monitor, 1942

- Which aspects of the “American system” benefited Dr. Chung?
- How do you understand “passive patriotism” versus being an “active American”?
- What does Dr. Chung mean by “the heart of government is in your township”?

Improv Scenario A: Dr. Chung introduces her idea for a women’s volunteer naval reserve: *Setting: Dr. Chung’s living room in April 1942.*

- **Dr. Margaret “Mom” Chung** shares how much she wants to enlist in the U.S. Navy and that she had applied and had been rejected the previous month. She asks for help to strategize and leverage her network to create a new volunteer branch of military service for women.
- **Rear Admiral Irving McQuiston** (Son #465) offers his ideas on a lobbying strategy in Congress and the arguments he will include about the benefits for the country and the war effort.
- **Congressman Melvin Maas** (Son #447), as Chair of the House Naval Affairs Committee, explains potential arguments Congress members may have in their opposition to the WAVES.
- **Congressman Raymond Willis** (Kiwi #124) discusses the potential work women could perform as part of the WAVES.
- **Alice Roosevelt Longworth** (Kiwi #49) offers to make introductions to political operatives in Washington, D.C., and explains how those relationships may benefit the lobbying effort.

Improv Scenario B: A reporter from Mass Transit Magazine interviews the Director of Public Relations with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) about the residents voting to select “Mom Chung” as the name of one of its Tunnel Boring Machines (TBMs), part of its Central Subway infrastructure project launched in 2013. *Setting: An SFMTA conference room in January of 2013.*

For this scenario, read the following article: Rose, Paul. [“CA: Introducing Big Alma and Mom Chung, the Central Subway’s Tunnel Boring Machines.”](#) Mass Transit Magazine, March 8, 2013.

- **Paul Rose, Contributing Reporter to Mass Transit Magazine**, interviews the director of public relations for SFMTA about why Dr. Margaret “Mom” Chung was a good candidate to include in the poll to select names for the two TBMs.
- **SFMTA Director of Public Relations** discusses the commonalities between Dr. Chung’s life, work, network, and legacy to the goals of the Central Subway project.

Reflection Question: What did the improv activity reveal about how Dr. Chung gained influence despite facing multiple forms of discrimination?

IV. Discuss the Following Analysis Questions

1. What were the strategies Dr. Chung used to navigate her Chinese-American ancestry and gender while gaining acceptance in the male- and white-dominated field of medicine?
2. How have opportunities for women in the field of medicine and the military changed since the early to mid-1900s?
3. How have professional opportunities for LGBTQ+ people changed since the early to mid-1900s?
4. What may have been the possible motivations for Dr. Chung to try to enlist in the U.S. Navy after being rejected?
5. How might Dr. Chung have defined patriotism?
6. Would Dr. Chung define patriotism differently today?
7. What may have been the possible motivations for Dr. Chung to develop her “adoption” network?
8. How did Dr. Chung's "adoption" network both challenge and work within military and political systems?
9. How do modern chosen families or affinity groups compare to Dr. Chung's adoption system?
10. If Dr. Chung's application to enlist in the U.S. Navy or the WAVES had been the decision of one of her “Fair-haired Sons,” would he have allowed her to serve? Why?

IV. Case Study Question: How did the context of WWII provide Dr. Margaret “Mom” Chung opportunities to create social and political power despite gender and race-based barriers?

Support your answer using your knowledge of WWII, the U.S. government, and what you have learned about Dr. Margaret “Mom” Chung.

- Incorporate your responses to the analysis questions
- Cite primary sources to support your position
- Connect historical patterns to contemporary examples where appropriate

V. Extension Question

- Research other marginalized individuals or groups who have shaped American institutions despite being excluded from them. What do they have in common with Dr. Chung?

UnErasing LGBTQ History and Identities Podcast

Season 4 Episode 5: Dr. Margaret “Mom” Chung and Her “Fair-Haired Sons”

[LISTEN](#)

TRANSCRIPT

Deb Fowler: Hello, and welcome to *UnErasing LGBTQ History and Identities — A Podcast*. I’m Deb Fowler, co-founder of History UnErased.

Most likely, the name Margaret Chung is new to you - but you will be delighted to learn about her inspiring and extraordinary life. Margaret Chung was many things: the first known female American-born Chinese physician, a San Francisco celebrity, a queer woman, and an adoptive mother to hundreds of American soldiers during World War II. And so much more...

Take it away, Kathleen!

Kathleen Barker: Born in Santa Barbara, California, in 1889 to Chinese immigrant parents, Margaret Chung lived an extraordinary life. Her accomplishments are even more amazing when you consider the race- and gender-based discrimination she faced throughout her life.

Chung’s ambition was apparent from an early age, and she was fortunate to have a family that fostered her talents. Chung’s parents were devout Presbyterians who believed in the importance of education for young girls. Although she was often called upon to care for her younger siblings and work to help support the family, Chung excelled in school and in community service.

She first appeared in newspaper reports when she was just a teenager, in a story from January 1906 that highlighted her “American” spirit of ambition.

Danny Roberts: “Smart Chinese girl. Margaret Jesse Chung, a 16-year-old girl of Chinese parentage living in Los Angeles, California, has become a newspaper reporter there. She is teaching English in the Chinese colony of that City and for a year past has been Secretary of a church memorial union. Miss Chung is thoroughly American in spirit, dress, and ambition.”

KB: In the fall of 1907, Chung enrolled in the Preparatory Academy at the University of Southern California, where she took courses in science, literature, Latin, and modern European languages. She also participated in the literary society, which gave her an opportunity to practice her public speaking skills. She appeared in the newspaper again in 1910, after being awarded a prize at the annual meeting of the Interscholastic Oratorical Association. The *Los Angeles Herald* reported:

DR: “Orators from four secondary schools spoke for the prizes. The second trophy, a silver medal, was won by Miss Margaret Chung, a Chinese girl from the Preparatory School of the University of Southern California, speaking upon ‘China, the Future Leader of the Nations.’”

KB: In her unpublished autobiography, Margaret Chung explained that she knew by the age of ten what she wanted to be when she grew up: a doctor—specifically, a medical missionary in China. In 1911, she was admitted to the USC College of Physicians and Surgeons. Unlike the USC Preparatory Academy, which was co-ed, the medical school enrolled very few women. How few? Well, in her first year, there were only three other female students out of a total of 40. Throughout her entire medical school career, all of her professors – with one exception – were men. Chung was also the only non-white student in her class.

Medicine was a white man's world, and Chung worked hard to facilitate her entry into this space. Chung, like many other professional women, began adopting more masculine attire, for example, pairing a jacket and tie with a skirt. She was careful to appear in western attire, avoiding all hints of traditional Chinese dress. To further blend in, she occasionally went by the name 'Mike.' Early in her career, one of her favorite pictures showed her wearing a dark suit. She sent autographed versions of this photo to her friends and even signed them 'Mike.'

Chung graduated from USC College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1916. News of a female doctor of Chinese descent made the newspapers all over the country! Stories were reprinted for the next several years in papers from California to Maryland. This news clip was published in the Americus Georgia *Times-Recorder* in December 1923:

DR: Chinese woman doctor. San Francisco. Margaret Chung can sign MD after her name. She is the only Chinese woman doctor in the United States, insofar as the records show. And she has quite a practice, too, of course, it's chiefly in Chinatown.

KB: Unfortunately, having that M.D. degree didn't necessarily make it easy for Chung to realize her dream of becoming a doctor. Upon her graduation, Chung applied to serve as a medical missionary through the Presbyterian Church. She was rejected – three times! – not because she was unqualified, but because she was of Chinese descent. It was also difficult for Chung to find a medical internship that would accept her, thanks to the large number of hospitals that denied female (and non-white) doctors opportunities for postgraduate training. She would eventually secure a position at Mary Thompson Hospital in Chicago, where she trained in surgery, a traditionally male field. In her autobiography, Chung explained that her interest in surgery was piqued in childhood. She would pretend to operate on banana peels or cabbage stems, as well as the chickens, rabbits, and other animals that she and her family would prepare for dinner.

In February 1919, Chung applied for a license to practice medicine in the state of California. She opened a private practice in Los Angeles. Capitalizing on her gender and race, and the movie industry's fascination with Asian culture and people, Chung soon acquired many celebrity patients. Three years later, in 1922, Dr. Chung moved to San Francisco and opened a clinic in Chinatown. She was especially eager to help Chinese women patients. Chung, however, had her work cut out for her. Many of the neighborhood's residents were wary of Western medicine, and even more suspicious of a young, single woman doctor dressed in traditionally male clothing. She was also hampered by her limited Chinese language and social skills. She did eventually win over the female population of Chinatown, even helping to found a Chinese Hospital in 1925.

Margaret Chung tried to keep her personal life private, but that didn't stop rumors that she was a lesbian from circulating in Chinatown and beyond. One of Chung's most famous celebrity friendships was with Sophie Tucker, a popular entertainer with whom she developed a particularly intimate relationship. From her writings, we know that poet Elsa Gidlow chose Chung as her physician because she suspected Chung "might be a sister lesbian." While Chung never openly identified that way, we know that she often ventured outside Chinatown to visit the bars, speakeasies, and cafes in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, which was home to a growing queer subculture. In the 1930s, Chung even bought a home in North Beach. The federal government certainly kept an eye on rumors about her sexuality, and a 1940 FBI report mentioned that agents had interviewed other doctors in Chinatown. Though the doctors didn't say much about her, they did share the gossip that she was a lesbian.

Chung remained unmarried throughout her life, and as her status as a physician grew, she was able to indulge in a variety of stereotypically masculine pursuits, all of which furthered these rumors. In addition to her masculine attire, Chung was also a fan of expensive sports cars and airplanes, which were still considered men's hobbies. She even collected aeronautical artifacts, as reported in newspapers in the 1930s:

DR: Dr Margaret Chung, of Chinatown, San Francisco, California, has covered the walls of her office with trophies representing more than 20 million dollars in aeronautical wreckage. These have been sent to her from all over the world by aviators whose ships have cracked up!

KB: In the 1930s, the Japanese invasion of China and the Sino-Japanese War sparked a renewed interest in China and sympathy for the people of China. In 1931, Steven G. Bancroft, an ensign in the U.S. Navy Reserves, reached out to Margaret Chung to ask if she could help him obtain a commission in the Chinese military. Although she had no connections to offer, she did invite Bancroft and some of his pilot friends to a dinner in her San Francisco home. In the midst of the Great Depression, Chung began to host meals for a growing number of young men. Her original "Seven Sons" recruited their friends and military colleagues, and by the start of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937, Chung had adopted hundreds of sons. Her family swelled to approximately 1,500 sons (and even a few daughters) by the end of World War II.

Chung assigned each of her adopted children to one of three branches, and gave them each a number corresponding to the order of his or her entry into Chung's adoptive network. The oldest and largest group, comprising some 900 individuals, consisted of pilots who called themselves the "Fair-Haired Bastards." (Although almost all of Chung's adoptees were men, Amelia Earhart became one of Chung's few fair-haired daughters.) Another group of adoptees, those who were not pilots, became known as Kiwis, named after the flightless bird. Chung herself was Kiwi number one, although she did eventually learn to pilot a plane. Chung's 300 Kiwis included military personnel, but also entertainers and politicians. In 1943, she established the final branch of her family network: the Golden Dolphins. This group was composed of submariners who had sunk five enemy ships or at least 100,000 tons. These relationships were mutually beneficial. As a surrogate mother, Chung could safely fraternize with younger white men, and immerse herself in masculine pursuits like aviation, despite being a single woman in her 40s. During the 1930s, her network helped support young military men through the Great

Depression, while forming connections that would prove advantageous in the military, in government, and in corporate America.

Evidence of the importance of Chung's network appears in newspapers in all sorts of ways. In 1943, for example, one of Chung's sons, Tex Mitchell, visited Detroit, and newspapers described him this way:

DR: "Detroit friends of Thomas "Tex" Mitchell, one of the world's foremost test pilots and the man with 1,000 lives, put down the welcome mat for him today as he returned to the city of his early triumphs in aviation.... From 1926 to 1929, he was Chief Test Pilot for Stinson Aircraft in Detroit. His wanderings later carried him over North and South America, and he landed in China as a member of Dr Margaret Chung's Fair-Haired Sons of the Air."

KB: In other cases, Chung was referenced in her Sons' obituaries, such as this one published on August 4, 1943. It's an obituary of naval officer Samuel Buttrick. In 1919, he was one of 10 officers sent to Honolulu to establish the Naval Air Station at Pearl Harbor. According to the paper:

DR: In the honored fraternity of aviators of Dr Margaret Chung, of San Francisco, he was son number 556.

KB: During World War II, Chung kept things lively for her sons whenever they visited home. She not only fed and entertained them but also made sure everyone stayed in touch. Chung put together care packages and wrote letters, even though she could only manage 14 a day! She was so well-known that letters addressed simply to "Doctor" or "Mom Chung, San Francisco, USA" would still find their way to her.

Chung *really* wanted to enlist during the war, and she first applied to join the Navy in March of 1942. She would eventually apply – and be rejected – at least three times. Ultimately, she would call on her network of sons and daughters to pass the legislation that would create the W.A.V.E.S. (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service), the WWII women's branch of the United States Naval Reserve.

Chung had to pull a lot of strings to make her dream a reality. Son number 465, Rear Admiral Irving McQuiston, guided her through the lobbying maze. Minnesota Congressman Melvin Maas, a colonel in the Marine Air Corps and Son number 447, introduced House Bill 6807 to create a Women's Naval Reserve. Indiana Congressman Raymond Willis, Kiwi number 124, took charge of the Senate version, with his secretary, Ailene Loveland, Kiwi number 120, rallying support. Chung also enlisted influential women outside Congress to champion the bill. Her supporters included Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Kiwi number 49, who was the daughter of President Theodore Roosevelt and the widow of former House Speaker Nicholas Longworth. Another important ally was Mary Early Holmes, Kiwi number 130, and sister of Steve Early, President Franklin Roosevelt's executive secretary.

Well Margaret's efforts paid off. On July 30, 1942, President Roosevelt signed Public Law 689 formally establishing the Women's Naval Reserve. Despite the fact that the W.A.V.E.S would never have existed without Margaret's powerful influence, she herself was rejected from serving due to her Chinese ancestry (and probably because of rumors related to her sexuality). By July 1945, over 86,000 women

were members of the WAVES, and almost all of them were white. Black women were not permitted to join the WAVES until late 1944, eventually comprising about 3% of the WAVES.

After the War, Chung continued to support her adopted sons and daughters. She offered her hospitality to returning service members and helped them transition back into post-war society. She also used her influence to help secure jobs for members of her extended kin network. She continued to appear in the press, for all sorts of interesting reasons. In 1947, gossip columnists had to retract a statement implying that Chung was entangled—even tangentially—with the Mafia.

DR: “Before I get away I want to correct something which may have done an injustice to a lady who has been working hard for this country - a Chinese physician, Dr Margaret Chung. Some weeks ago Federal authorities informed me that Dr. Chung had sailed for Europe with Virginia Hill, the girlfriend of the late Bugsy Siegel. I now find, however, that Dr. Chung sailed instead for Honolulu, where incidentally, she has done a fine job among men in the armed services.”

KB: No matter where she went, Margaret Chung was surrounded by admirers, and her presence at parties and performances was duly noted in newspaper gossip columns. In 1949, Mrs. George Holmes gave a cocktail party in honor of the now Undersecretary of Defense, Stephen Early. Her spring parties were the social event of the season in Washington, D.C., and her yard was apparently well-known for its prize-winning rose gardens.

DR: “Two well-known out-of-owners drew their share of attention were the famous Madame “Mom” Chung, whose adopted sons were the first Flying Tigers, and writer Adela Rogers St John.”

KB: St. John was known for her groundbreaking exploits as the so-called “World’s Greatest Girl Reporter” during the 1920s and 1930s, as well as her celebrity interviews for *Photoplay* magazine. Margaret Chung was clearly in good company!

By 1951, Chung moved her practice out of Chinatown, although health problems forced her to curtail her professional activities in the late 1940s and 1950s. She remained interested in international politics, corresponding with China’s Madame Chang Kai-shek. The two women most likely met in March 1943, when Chung served on the city’s welcoming committee for the First Lady of China. She maintained her schedule of weekly parties, and she traveled frequently, attending concerts and plays, and enjoying the talents and the company of her celebrity sons and daughters.

Margaret Chung died on January 5, 1959, at the age of 69. In its front-page obituary, the *San Francisco Chronicle* described her as “‘Mom’ to thousands of veterans of World War II and show business celebrities,” as well as “an inveterate ‘first nighter,’ a charming figure in a white ermine coat” who “frequently carried a parakeet in a cage dangling from her wrist.” Hundreds of people attended her funeral, including Admiral Chester Nimitz, famed conductor Andre Kostelanetz, and San Francisco Mayor George Christopher, who served as pallbearers.

Margaret Chung’s life and career were a testament to resilience, innovation, and dedication. As the first American-born Chinese female physician, she faced and overcame significant barriers, both cultural and

professional. But her legacy extends well beyond her medical achievements. Chung's ability to navigate and bridge diverse worlds—East and West, traditional and modern, queer and straight—illustrates her remarkable nature. Her network of adopted sons and daughters are proof of her nurturing spirit but also her strategic influence. Through these relationships, Chung created a unique family bound by loyalty and mutual respect, transcending traditional family structures and leaving a lasting impact on those she took under her wing.

DF: Kathleen Barker is History UnErased's program director and is a library and information specialist and public historian with more than 20 years of experience as a museum and library educator.

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Our theme music is "1986" by BrothaD via Tribe of Noise.

Please rate this podcast and share! And visit UnErased.org to learn how History UnErased is putting LGBTQ history in its rightful place - the classroom.

I'm Deb Fowler. Thanks for listening!

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