

# ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE



the mead center  
for american theater

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## THE PLAY

**Katie Ng**, an award-winning Chinese-American historian is launched into a new world when her best-selling novel is picked up by Hollywood to be turned into a TV series.

Her first task is to turn her book, centered on the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, into a television script. But when Katie presents the script to **Harry** and the rest of the production team, they say that the storyline is too accurate. When it comes to entertainment or truth, it becomes clear what matters more to the producers.

Throughout this comedic play, Katie finds herself battling Hollywood as she wrestles with staying historically accurate to the experiences of Chinese Americans in the U.S. Will Katie be able to stay true to her history and be a success? Will the prospect of becoming a Hollywood insider cause her to compromise? Will “show business” prevail over the authentic representation of what really happened?



# EXCLUSION

BY **KENNETH LIN**

DIRECTED BY **TRIP CULLMAN**

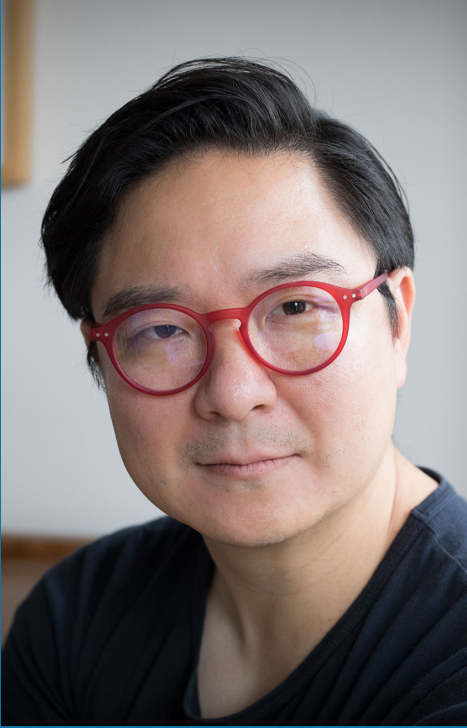
KREEGER THEATER | **MAY 5 – JUNE 25, 2023**

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Exclusion is the recipient of an Edgerton Foundation New Play Award.

“...it’s not ‘show history’ ... It’s ‘show business,’  
and to stay in business, you’ve got to put on a show”

— Harry, *Exclusion*



# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT: KENNETH LIN

“Working in the theater makes me feel alive.”

— Kenneth Lin

Kenneth Lin was raised in New York by his Chinese-American parents. Not everyone in his home spoke English. His grandmother loved the theater and film, making them a part of his daily life. Growing up in this household exposed Lin to the power of storytelling, which drew him to the performing arts. He joined the speech and debate team at his high school, and he fell in love with theater and reading plays.

In an interview with Everett Evans, Lin stated “I had never thought of just reading plays and suddenly here was this roomful of them to read. I remember reading Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. I couldn’t stop reading it. I found myself crying because it reminded me so much of my parents’ struggles.”

Even though his family loved the arts, they did not approve of his choice of pursuing a playwriting career. They wanted him to become a doctor or a lawyer. Yet, Lin followed his passion and went on to study at Cornell University and the Yale School of Drama.

He credits the artistic director of Arena Stage, Molly Smith, with being one of the first to believe in him as a writer. Lin was the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship and was selected as one of the “50 to Watch” by the Dramatists Guild. He was a writer for multiple TV series including *House of Cards*, *The First*, and *Warrior*. Other well-known plays by Lin include *Intelligence-Slave*, *Po-Boy Tango*, *Life on Paper*, and *Kleptocracy*, which Arena Stage produced in 2019.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

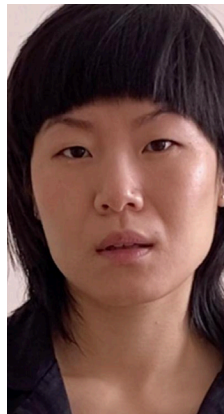
“[KENNETH LIN] IS VERY WISELY SAYING A LOT OF REALLY PROFOUND TRUTHS ABOUT OUR CULTURE, BUT HE’S DOING IT VERY “GENIUS-LY” THROUGH A LOT OF HUMOR. I CAN’T REMEMBER WHO SAID THIS, BUT ‘WHEN YOU MAKE THE AUDIENCE LAUGH, THEIR MOUTH OPENS UP, AND THEN YOU STICK TRUTH IN.’ AND I FEEL LIKE THAT’S WHAT THIS PLAY IS ABSOLUTELY DOING.”

— TRIP CULLMAN



Director Trip Cullman in rehearsal for *The Lonely Few* at Geffen Playhouse. Photo by Isaak Berliner

## MEET THE CHARACTERS



### KATIE NG:

An award-winning Chinese-American historian and writer, who wants to make it big in the entertainment world.

played by  
**KAROLINE**



### HARRY:

A powerful, flamboyant Hollywood producer.

played by  
**JOSH STAMBERG**



### MALCOLM:

Katie’s supportive boyfriend, who is an aspiring filmmaker.

played by  
**TONY NAM**



### VIOLA:

A well-known actress and mother of four.

played by  
**MICHELLE VERGARA  
MOORE**

# THE FILM INDUSTRY

*Exclusion* gives us a peek into the world of television and film – a world in which playwright Kenneth Lin has much experience, and a world his characters Katie and Malcolm dream of entering. The magic we see on our screens is the product of a multitude of people coming together to utilize their talents. From producers like Harry to actors like Viola, the film industry is an intricate process with plenty of moving parts.

## THE PROCESS

### 1. THE IDEA

First, there needs to be a clear idea for the television show/film. The development team often comes up with a clear concept or invests in an already-written script. This phase is also where funding is determined.

### 2. PRE-PRODUCTION

This is the time to prepare for filming. This involves budgeting, scriptwriting, casting, rehearsing, drawing out shots/storyboarding, and determining technical elements for the show/film such as set, costumes, props, hair, makeup, lighting, and location. This step involves adding the production management department and the craft department to the process.

### 3. PRODUCTION

Now that everything is planned out, the technical department begins filming.

### 4. POST-PRODUCTION

After it is filmed, the show/film needs to be edited. The post-production department is in charge of putting the scenes together, adding visual and sound effects and music, color grading, and performing touch ups. Significant changes can be made in the editing phase.

### 5. DISTRIBUTION

Once the film is complete, it is sent out by the sales and distribution department to be viewed by an audience generally through movie theaters, streaming services, or film festivals.



To find out exactly who is involved in each department in the film process, go to: <https://www.screenskills.com/job-profiles/browse/film-and-tv-drama/>

## WHO HOLDS THE POWER?

**“No. This is your interpretation of my book, and you’ve hired a bunch of your friends who look exactly like you and think exactly like you to tell my story.” – Katie**

In *Exclusion*, Katie butts heads with Hollywood producer Harry over what makes it into the script. Although it is based on her book and American history, it begins to be clear that she is not the decision maker, but instead Harry and “the network” are.

Producers like Harry oversee the entire film production process. From brainstorming the idea, to the creation or selection of a script, all the way to where and how it is distributed, producers have a hand in everything. There are many people involved in the film process, some crews can be over 100 people depending on the film or television show. Out of all those involved, the producers have the most decision-making power and generally have the final say. Because producers are in charge of securing funding for projects, oftentimes the decisions that producers make are influenced by those who have invested financially in the project, whether or not those decisions ultimately honor the creative team’s wishes.

## CHINESE AND CHINESE-AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE FILM INDUSTRY

### JOAN CHEN

Winner of China’s Best Actress Award and has directed and written several American and Chinese films.

### LUCY LIU

An award-winning actress best known for her work in the *Charlie’s Angels* franchise.

### ANNA MAY WONG

Born as Wong Liu Tsong and known as the first Chinese American film star.

### ALICE WU

An award-winning filmmaker and screenwriter, Wu directed *The Half of It, Saving Face*, and wrote the screenplay for *Over the Moon*.

### CHLOÉ ZHAO

The second woman and first woman of color to win the Academy Award for Best Director for her film *Nomadland* in 2020.

# THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

Chinese-American Fishermen in Monterey, California. 1875

## CHINESE-AMERICAN HISTORY

### PRE-IMMIGRATION

In the mid-19th century, China was in severe debt and political turmoil as the result of floods, droughts, fighting the British in the **Opium Wars**, and the **Taiping Rebellion**. By 1852, an extremely unsuccessful year for crops in China, Chinese workers left the country to support their families. Drawn by the **California Gold Rush**, 20,000 Chinese people, mostly men, migrated to San Francisco, California to find work.

### IMMIGRATION TO U.S.

After the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery, there were gaps in the workforce. Chinese immigrants were able to fill the demand for low-wage labor. They entered various industries including laundry, agricultural, domestic, factory, and eventually, railroad work. Chinese workers were essential to the building of the **Transcontinental Railroad**.

Chinese workers were also crucial in the success of the Gold Rush, but, as a result, tensions rose almost immediately between the American miners and the Chinese immigrants. The new arrivals faced **xenophobia**, racism, and mistreatment from the Californians and their government. Anti-Chinese sentiment and hate crimes increased with the goal of getting Chinese people out of the country.

In 1852, the Californian government passed the Foreign Miners License Tax in an effort to deter Chinese immigrants from working. It charged the new immigrant miners \$3 a month, the equivalent of about \$117 in today's dollars.

### THE CHINESE MASSACRE OF 1871

In 1869, the *Los Angeles News* and *The Los Angeles Star* began to release anti-Chinese publications, expressing their desire for Chinese people to stay out of the U.S. and condemning the entire race.

In 1871, a shootout between two Chinese rival groups occurred in Chinatown in Los Angeles because of a dispute. Two officers responded to the scene. An officer and well-known resident named Robert Thompson were both shot and killed during the shootout.

Hearing the news of Thompson's death, around 500 non-Chinese residents formed a mob for vengeance. They prepared a section of **gallows**, forcibly removed the Chinese residents involved in the shooting from their hiding spot at the Coronel Building, and publicly hanged each one of them.

The next day, the bodies of the Chinese men and boys were laid out on the jail grounds. Historical accounts differ on the number of people that were murdered in the massacre, estimates alternating between 18 and 19. According to the U.S. Census, out of the total 5,728 people living in L.A. only 172, or 3%, were Chinese. This means 10% of the Chinese population in L.A. was murdered during the massacre. According to the Los Angeles Public Library, out of all the men and boys killed that day, only one of them was actually involved in the original shootout.

Of the 25 people charged, only ten men responsible for the hanging were taken to court. Of those ten men, only eight were found guilty of manslaughter. These charges were eventually overturned, and there was never another trial.

### VOCABULARY & KEY EVENTS

#### OPIUM WARS:

The First Opium War (1839-42) was between Great Britain and China, and it began because China wanted to prohibit the British from smuggling opium out of China. Opium is a highly addictive drug that can be prescribed by a doctor to relieve or suppress pain. Repeated use of opium can lead to dependence, which can lead to overdose. The Second Opium War (1856-60) was Great Britain and France against China. China lost both wars and as a result had to legalize the opium trade, as well as give France and Great Britain more commercial access to their country.

#### TAIPIING REBELLION:

(1850-1864) A large revolt against the Qing Dynasty who were ruling China at the time. The revolution failed and resulted in over 20 million casualties.

#### CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH:

In 1848, gold nuggets were discovered at a sawmill in Sacramento, California, causing thousands of workers to journey to California to mine for gold.

#### XENOPHOBIA:

The fear or dislike of people from another country.

#### TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD:

A continuous train route connecting the eastern and western regions of the United States. It was built in the 1860s and opened in 1869. Chinese workers were the main contributors to the building of the railroad.

#### GALLOWS:

A structure used for hanging people.

#### QUOTAS:

An official restriction on the number/percentage of people from a certain group being allowed to do something.

continued >

Because of the 1854 California Supreme Court Case, *People v. Hall*, Chinese immigrants did not have the right to testify in court against white European Americans. The resulting legal action taken presented clear prejudice by the justice system.

L.A. swiftly moved on from the massacre, failing to even mention it in the local newspaper's yearly wrap-up of important events. Even today, many in the U.S. are unaware that the Chinese Massacre of 1871 occurred.

## THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT OF 1882

With the influx of Chinese immigrant workers, Americans began to blame them for lowering wages and causing economic troubles on the West Coast. As a result, President Chester A. Arthur signed The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 into law, banning Chinese workers from immigrating to the United States for 10 years. It was the first U.S. law to put a restriction on the immigration of one group. Chinese residents who were not laborers and wanted to enter the U.S., such as a diplomatic agent, had to receive official certification from the Chinese government proving their status. Those who were already living in the U.S. would need new certifications to reenter the country if they left. Those living in the U.S. who were not citizens were denied the right to become citizens, facing the possibility of deportation.

Once the ban reached its 10-year mark in 1892, Congress passed the Geary Act: a U.S. law that extended the Chinese Exclusion Act for 10 more years and added new restrictions. One was the requirement for Chinese immigrants to obtain a Certificate of Residence to prove that they were legal immigrants, or else they faced the possibility of deportation. Congress continued to update their **quotas** (official restrictions on the number/percentage of people from a certain group being allowed to do something) as well as their requirements for immigration, expanding their lists of countries to include all of Asia. In 1902, immigration from China was ruled illegal.

It was not until 1943 that Congress revoked all the exclusion acts, and Chinese immigrants were given the right to become citizens. This was due to China's support of the Allied Nations during World War II. However, there was still a yearly cap of 105 Chinese immigrants to the U.S.

## AAPI TREATMENT TODAY

Discrimination toward people of Asian descent runs deep in America's history, and as a result, the AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) community has experienced harassment, discrimination, violence, and hate in the United States. After the Covid-19 outbreak, there was an increase in AAPI hate. Fueled by xenophobia, racism, and ignorance, some blamed the AAPI communities for the global pandemic. Since then, there has been an increase in AAPI hate crimes. According to the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism, anti-Asian hate crimes increased by 124 percent in the year 2020, and by 339 percent in 2021.

In response to this increase, the coalition Stop AAPI Hate was formed on March 19, 2020. The coalition is made up of AAPI Equity Alliance, Chinese for Affirmative Action, and the Asian American Studies Department of San Francisco State University. The coalition "tracks and responds to incidents of hate, violence, harassment, discrimination, shunning, and child bullying against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States."

Learn more about the coalition on their website: <https://stopaapihate.org/>

## STAGE VIOLENCE

At the end of the play, there is a graphic lynching scene. A person is forcibly lynched into the air while bodies are hanging behind him. There is also fake blood in this scene. The entire scene has been choreographed to be done safely, and the bodies in the background are not real. To the audience it seems that the victim is being pulled by his neck when he is lifted, but it is actually by a contraption connected to his back- making this action completely safe and free of risk. This staged choreography has been practiced and mastered in rehearsals, with the actor's comfort and safety being the priority.

Depictions of violence can be upsetting. The purpose of showing this explicit lynching scene is for audiences to understand and get the full impact of the tragedy of this historical event. What you are seeing onstage really happened. When her book was going to be turned into a TV show, the character Katie hoped that audiences would understand the reality of this horrific event.



## CHINESE MASSACRE OF 1871 MEMORIAL

In 2001, the Chinese American Museum in Los Angeles installed a plaque as a historical marker of the massacre. Many visitors have expressed concern that the plaque is small and easily missed. As of 2021, the city of L.A. has invested \$250,000 into a project dedicated to creating a more fitting memorial designed by an AAPI design team.

## THE PAGE ACT OF 1875

The Page Act of 1875 restricted the immigration of individuals from "China, Japan, or any Oriental country" who were not freely and voluntarily entering the country, as well as those entering for "lewd and immoral purposes", specifically "women for the purposes of prostitution." At the time, Chinese women were perceived as a "promiscuous" group – a dehumanizing stereotype rooted in racism and xenophobia that Asian people, Asian-American people, and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) are still dealing with today. The Page Act directly targeted Chinese women, who were forced to go through degrading and intrusive interrogations at the border. As a result, the immigration of Chinese women to America dropped significantly. By targeting Chinese women with this law, the government lowered the chances of Chinese couples settling down and starting families, contributing to the government's overall goal of removing Chinese people from the United States.



# THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

Who controls the narrative?

2

What is the importance of accurate history?

3

What is the social impact of television and film?

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## HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience.

To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket.
- Ushers are there to help you!
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms, and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games, or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end! During a musical, audiences sometimes clap after a song or dance. If you love the show or a performer, you can give a standing ovation. The actors bow to thank you.



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Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org) for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

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