

Reading

Excerpts from “Board of Education: Chinese Mother Letter,” *Daily Alta California*, 1885

In 1884, the Tape family sued a school principal in a case known as *Tape v. Hurley* for denying Mamie, their eight-year-old daughter, an education. The school board argued that the city of San Francisco was not obligated to educate the Chinese. Despite the school board’s argument, the courts ruled in the Tapes’ favor, citing a state law requiring that “all children” be admitted to school. Mamie Tape had the “same right to enter a public school” as any other child.

Officials responded to the court ruling by establishing a segregated public school for Mamie Tape and any other Chinese child who wished to attend. In response, Mary Tape, Mamie’s mother, wrote a letter in newly learned English to the San Francisco Board of Education in April 1885, which was then printed in a San Francisco newspaper:

DEAR SIRs:

I see that you are going to make all sorts of excuses to keep my child out of the Public Schools. Dear sirs, Will you please to tell me! Is it a disgrace to be Born a Chinese? Didn’t God make us all!!!! What right have you to bar my children out of the school because she is a Chinese Decend [descent]. There is no other worldly reason that you could keep her out, except that . . .

It seems [to] not matter [how] a Chinese [person] may live and dress so long as you know they [are] Chinese. Then they are hated as one. There is not any right or justice for them. You have seen my husband and child. You told him it wasn’t Mamie Tape you object to. If it were not Mamie Tape you object to, then why didn’t you let her attend the school nearest her home! Instead of first making one pretense of some kind to keep her out? It seems to me Mr. Moulder has a grudge against this Eight-year-old Mamie Tape . . .

May you Mr. Moulder, never be persecuted like the way you have persecuted little Mamie Tape. Mamie Tape will never attend any of the Chinese schools of your making! Never!!! I will let the world see sir . . .

What justice there is When it is govern[ed] by the Race [racist] prejudice men! Just because she is of the Chinese decend [descent], not because she don’t dress like you because she does. Just because she is decended [descended] of Chinese parents I guess she is more of a American than a good many of you that is going to prevent her being Educated.¹

¹ California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographical Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside, accessed March 7, 2023.