

## Water Tossing Boulders: How a Family of Chinese Immigrants Led the First Fight to Desegregate Schools in the Jim Crow South

**Adrienne Berard**

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*Aptly resonant, this story of a family's struggle against segregation is both artful and important.*

An intriguing account of the historical complexity of race relations, *Water Tossing Boulders* features nuanced characterizations, a captivating story, and an enduring message.

Adrienne Berard tells the story of the Lums, young Chinese immigrants who, though they were outsiders, struggled to live the “American” way—working hard, fulfilling dreams, and, crucially, attaining an education. However, they were denied entrance into whites-only schools. The irony of this comes through. The text expertly weaves an immense amount of research into the Lums's story, resulting in a vivid, frustrating, and heartbreaking account of the tensions and motivations that aligned in the Lums's fight for desegregation.

The family's story is related cinematically, starting with the story of Jeu Gong and Katherine's marriage, and ending with one professor's achievement of his lifelong purpose. The narrative lens shows extraordinary depth and emotion.

Images of Jeu Gong running across a frozen Lake Michigan to his hopeful American Dream, and of the Lums's future lawyer and champion of civil rights hand-sewing a pointed white mask as a teenager, linger. This book brings humanity to history and allows its stories to play out in all their agonizing misfortune and unrealized promise.

This Lums's fight for equality is particularly relevant now, as it echoes in contemporary bubbling race and immigration issues. Many of the political arguments made during the Lums's case are eerily familiar. Here is how one senator poignantly spoke against xenophobic laws then:

*We are going to exclude everybody ... [denying ourselves] the splendid men and women who want to come to this country and live under our flag and become a part of this great people.*

The Lums's struggle, as related here, reveals the detrimental nature of such fear, and of inaction in the face of injustice. Aptly resonant, *Water Tossing Boulders* is both artful and important.

PAIGE VAN DE WINKLE (Winter 2017)

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