

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Eugene Wu

Interviewers: Victoria Eng (Sophomore); Chris Johnson (Sophomore)

Date/ Time of Interview: June 26, 2013, at 11:30 AM

Transcribed by: Victoria Eng and Chris Johnson

Edited by: Chris Johnson, Patricia Wong, and Sara Davis (7/8/16)

Audio Track Time: 1:14:35

Background:

Eugene Wu was born in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province in China in 1978. Five years later, he moved to Odessa, Texas along with his mother and father. Not long afterward, the Wu family moved to Houston, where Wu attended various schools in the area. After earning his bachelor's degree from Texas A&M University, he attended the LBJ School for Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, obtaining his master's degree in public policy. Afterward, he earned his law degree from the South Texas School of Law. In addition to being involved in a variety of community organizations, Wu currently serves as an attorney in Harris County and is a state representative for District 137.

Setting:

The interview largely centers around the subjects of labor and capital, seeking to create a thorough narrative of Wu's life experiences. A large focus of the interview was given to the various occupational and political roles held by Wu over the course of his career.

The interview was conducted in Fondren Library at Rice University.

Interviewers:

Victoria Eng is a sophomore at Rice University majoring in electrical engineering. She is from Houston, Texas.

Chris Johnson is a sophomore at Rice University, majoring in linguistics. He is from Houston, Texas.

Interview Transcript:

Key:

EW	Eugene Wu
CJ	Chris Johnson
VE	Victoria Eng
—	Speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...	Speech trails off; pause
<i>Italics</i>	Emphasis
(?)	Preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]	Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

CJ: This is Chris Johnson.

VE: And this is Victoria Eng.

CJ: We're here today, on June 26th 2013, in Fondren Library to interview Eugene Wu for the Houston Asian American Archive oral history interview project. Um, so, Mr. Wu, could you start off by telling us just a little bit about yourself, your life experiences?

EW: Sure, please feel free to call me Gene. Um, well, my name is Eugene Wu, but I go by, uh—I go by Gene Wu. Um, I am, uh, 35 years old. Um, was originally born in China, in Guangzhou. Uh, came to the United States around five years old. Can't really remember that clearly from that long ago. Um, and I've lived in Houston [coughs] for the past 25 years, plus. Give or take. Um, I am a practicing attorney, and I'm also the newly elected state representative for House District 137 of the—in the Texas Legislature.

CJ: Awesome. Um, so you said that you're from Guangzhou. Could you tell us a little about your neighborhood from there? [overlapping] Whatever you remember.

EW: [overlapping] Guangzhou?

CJ: Mm-hmm.

EW: No idea. [CJ and VE laugh] I was very, very young when I was there.

CJ: Gotcha, gotcha.

EW: Uh, most of my memories of China as a child I can't distinguish between that and a dream. So ...

CJ: Let's see. Um, so what brought you guys to the United States, then?

EW: Probably the same as everyone else, opportunity, um, seeking freedom, seeking a chance to have

a better life than what was available.

CJ: So, um, when you came over, it was, uh, your entire family, then, or ...?

EW: Well, my dad came first. Um, my dad actually went to the University of Oregon, uh, which is why I'm named Eugene. [CJ laughs] Um, Eugene's not my birth name, of course. It was my given English name after I arrived here. Um, and aft—uh, he got his degree there, and then went to U—Texas to get his nursing degree. And then after, uh—while he was getting his nursing degree, we—we came over as well. So he—he left about four years before, um—before we came over, and, uh, right after I was born.

VE: What did your father do in China?

EW: I think a variety of things. I don't really know for sure. I know he, uh, kind of worked on, in the, uh, harbor, um, something—something similar—similar to—what the—the equivalent of a Coast Guard, um, and just numerous other jobs. I—I—I'm really not that clear on it.

VE: Did your mother work in China?

EW: Yes, um, mom actually taught. Uh, she—she taught English, and, uh—and I think she was also a librarian. I'm not completely sure on that. But, she—she was work—she was in academia. Um, and her—that's one of the reasons why, um, her written English is actually perfect. Um, spoken English is not that great.

VE: When you came to the US, did you come to Houston right away?

EW: No, we, um—this is a story I always enjoy telling, especially other people in Texas, because the first place we went was Odessa. Then this is actually right at the tail end of the oil boom, so Odessa was already starting to shrink. And if you don't know where Odessa is, it's up in the panhandle. It's middle of nowhere. Um, we was in a town. I think Odessa was roughly about 25, maybe 30,000 people. Back then, uh, we were, I wanna say—I wish to say we there, I think, one of four Asian families there. Um, and we all knew each other. We had dinner once a month, and that was the totality of it. Um, you know, we left there as soon as my dad finished his degree, and, uh, came to Houston and settled in the area where I'm living now.

VE: Were the other families in Odessa, um, also Chinese?

EW: I believe so. And again, this is when I was very young, so not a very clear recollection.

VE: What was your first house in Houston like?

EW: Um, it's actually in the neighborhood, uh, where I—it's the neighborhood where I grew up. We—we actually first moved into an apartment, which is actually just across the street from the

neighborhood where we bought a house. Uh, we lived in the apartment for about three years or so. My parents saved up money, and they bought a cheap little house. It was, I think—we—they bought it for around 40,000 dollars. Uh, not a—not nec—I wouldn't say a small house, just a regular size house for that neighborhood. Uh, not ter—not really great, but, it was home. And, um, it's been—been home—home for my parents for a long time.

VE: And this is in Bellaire, right?

EW: Not in the city of. City of Bellaire is a completely different neighborhood. This is, um—is Sharpstown.

[0:05:03]

CJ: Um, so, how would you compare Sharpstown to where you guys lived in Odessa?

EW: Uh, well, Odessa, we lived in very low-income apartments. Just very run down. Um, so, this is just night and day difference. So, uh, Sharpstown was a very beautiful neighborhood. Um, when we moved there, it was still one of the nicer neighborhoods in town. Uh, I don't—I don't know if you know the history of Odessa—er, of Sharpstown. But, named after, uh, Frank—Frank Sharp. Um, this is the namesake also of the Sharpstown—Sharpstown Scandal, which is the largest political scandal in Texas history. It caused the unseating of a lieutenant governor, a governor, and half the legislature.

So, um, it was designed to be a second River Oaks. So, there's a golf course in the middle. The homes built around it are meant to—they—they look like they're designed to be million plus dollar houses. Um, but, after the scandal, a lot of the money went out of the area. Um, so, they never quite became million dollar homes. Um, and—but, the neighborhood's still really nice. There's, uh, a lot of, um, white flight during the late 80s, 90s. And now the neighborhood has sort of reestablished itself and is coming back up quite a bit. Um, it's—it's a very large immigrant community. Lots of Asians, lots of Hispanic, lots of African, so, very diverse neighborhood. Uh, basically what Houston's gonna look like in a few more years.

VE: And what schools did you attend?

EW: Uh, I went to Pat Neff Elementary, which is in the neighborhood, and then Ed White Elementary, which is in the neighborhood. You want high school as well? [VE nods] Uh, I went to, um, Fondren Middle School, which is just little bit down the street. Uh, it's a little bit outside of the neighborhood, but it was because I was in the magnet program. Um, and then my parents put me in private school, uh, St. Thomas Episcopal, which is right behind the Meyerland Mall. We're the ones with the bag pipers, um, for high school. Um, college was Texas A&M at College Station. Whoop! Uh, and then I did my master's in public policy at UT, the, uh, LBJ School for Public Affairs, and, uh, I did my law degree at South Texas College of Law in Houston downtown.

CJ: [clears throat] Um, so, in general, how would you describe the demographics of those schools that you went to as a kid?

EW: Um, elementary, I—I don't have a really clear recollection. It pretty much reflected the neighborhood. Um, a good ... probably a good amount Hispanic, a few Asians, large—still largely white at the time. Um, you know, about equal percentage of African American. Um ... yeah, that's—that's about it. I mean like, my high school, being a private school, of course, was a little different. Uh, Fondren Middle School was largely African American and Hispanic 'cause—because of the neighborhood. Um, so, college, you can just go look up the college records. But, the schools now—well, I've visited Pat Neff recently, uh, and Ed White the schools now over in that area, are largely—it's probably 80% Hispanic now. If not [indistinguishable], maybe somewhere around there. And again, it reflects the makeup of the neighborhood.

CJ: So, would you say you guys ever experienced any difficulties in the neighborhood being part of a minority population within, um, any of those neighborhoods that you lived in as a child?

EW: What do you mean a—what do you mean a “problem”?

CJ: Um, any sort of feeling of otherness or anything along those lines or ...?

EW: Um, I mean, I think as the Asian American experience, the feeling of otherness is there no matter where you are. So, it's not a neighborhood-based identity or a neighborhood-based situation. Um, when we first moved into that neighborhood, we were probably one of maybe, like, two or three Asian families in the *entire*, um, area. Um, no one ever—it's a very middle—middle class neighborhood. People really didn't go out of their way to be—to be rude or mean, but, um, you know, pretty much everyone knew each other and looked after each other. It's just it was never an issue. Um, I personally did not feel like I was attacked or discriminated against. Um, but, you know, I can't say that for our parents, but then again, we also weren't looking for it either. Um ...

[0:10:18]

VE: Going back to your parents, your father got a nursing degree. So where did he work in Houston?

EW: He worked for Methodist, uh, for a while, and then, uh, he—he left Methodist and went to law school. Or, he actually went to law school during—while he was a nurse. Uh, and he eventually got his law degree and became an attorney, and he's been an attorney, uh, practicing immigration law for about, I wanna say, moving on 15 years now. So.

VE: What made him decide to go back to law school?

EW: Being a nurse sucks. [CJ laughs] Um, well, back then—especially back then when, uh, pay was bad, and, you know, you weren't treated very nicely. Um, you know, he worked in the ICU, which is one of the, uh, more stressful places to work. And he said, “You know what? If I'm gonna work this hard, I might as well get paid better and have better hours.”

VE: And your mom, did she teach when she came here?

EW: No, uh, my mom actually went and got a, um, electric—electrical engineering degree or program certificate. I can't remember what it's called. Um, and she is a, um—she does the bio—she's the—I think the term—their—their name is, like, Biotech Engineer. Uh, and she works—actually still works at Methodist. My dad—my mom and my dad were at Methodist at the same time for a while. Uh, and she's—so she takes care of all the EKG machines, the heart monitors, and, uh, dialysis machines, and all the stuff. And, so when the stuff breaks, she takes it back and fixes 'em. Does maintenance on all the machines.

And, that's—that's always one of the common issues with, um, you know, coming over from Asia, is that your degree means nothing. And, uh, I'm sure that's true for a lot of immigrant experiences, you know, coming from—you may have a Nigerian doctor who's a surgeon in his homeland, but here, his degree means nothing. It's really quite unfortunate because both my parents were very highly educated in China. Uh, came from a both—both came from very educated, very, very well-known families.

CJ: Um, [clears throat] so, what was your first job in Houston?

EW: Um, I was a janitor at my high school. Does that count? Uh, I—uh, I—I know how to strip floors. I know how to wax floors, uh, use chemicals. Um, know how to—I know how to buff floors and clean the restroom. You know, fun stuff. It was a job, paid decently. You know, saved up—saved up a decent amount of money for—for college, and, uh, this is back when—back when—before tuition deregulation, so the money that I saved actually helped me get through, uh, undergrad without really any—any debt.

VE: Was it common for students at St. Thomas to work at St. Thomas? Or was it just something that you—?

EW: No, it was just—I mean, if you wanna be a part of the janitorial crew, they'll—they'll pay you a couple extra bucks to help out, do stuff, and you can work during the summer. Um, you know, help walk around the school and water the lawn. It's just something to do. I mean just, um, lot of times school ended at what? 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock? Mom gets off work at 5, gets to the school to pick me up by—by 6. So, there's a little time to kill. If I'm not in an organization doing something, you know, I might as well be there making a little money.

VE: Do you remember how much it paid?

EW: I'm sure it was minimum wage. ... Actually, you know, how I got started doing it is 'cause I got in—got, uh, in trouble so often. We were sent to, uh—sent to the custodial detail as punishment. I was like, eh, I might as well just [CJ laughs] get paid for it. I know how to do it now so.

VE: What kind of trouble are we talking about? [CJ laughs]

EW: You know, Asian trouble. Just talking in class, [VE laughs] not finishing assignments. [CJ clears throat] Our—our school was very tame, very—very sheltered.

CJ: Um, [clears throat], so, after your undergraduate degree, you studied public policy. So what motivated you to—uh, how'd you get interested in that field?

[0:15:00]

EW: Well, um, actually, I worked—after graduating from A&M, I have a, uh, Bachelor's in Science. Um, I was a, uh, RA. You guys know what RA is? [CJ nods] I was a, uh, RA at A&M and I really enjoyed that. And, uh, [Mr. Wu's phone rings] after I left A&M I—well, before leaving A&M, I—I really wasn't sure what, uh, I was going to do for—for a living. And, uh—and there was a position open over at UT, uh, for a Hall Director. And I said, like “Hey, you know, why—why don't I just try for that?” Um, and that's why I ended up working for UT straight out of A&M. Which is very—a very strange experience, if you, uh—if you understand that.

Um, and, so, while—during my time there, I, you know, sort of met my peers. Usually, a lot—the vast majority of the hall directors are graduate students. And, uh, I found myself being surrounded by like very like-minded people, people who, uh—who value intellect, value—value academia, who would very happily sit around with a beer and—and discuss, uh philo—philosophical issues. Um, and I met other people who were very socially conscious, who—who, in not so many words, wanted to save the world. And I said to myself, “I like these people. I—I want to be around them more.” And, I said, well, “How do I be more like you?”

And they said, “Well, I'm at the—uh, getting my master's at the LBJ School.” And I say, “Okay. And what—tell me about the school.” And they told me, and I said like, “That's exactly what I want to do.” Um, and so, applied, got rejected the first time. And it's—it's actually quite—it's actually not an easy school to get into. Um, and I got accepted the second time, and, um, finished my master's there.

VE: What degree did you get from A&M?

EW: I have a, uh, Bachelor's of Science. It's, uh, called “wildlife and fishery science.” It's ecological management. [jokingly] Don't ask. [CJ laughs] It's a sore subject with my parents.

VE: I wanna ask, though. [laughing] Why did you choose that major?

EW: Because I started out in genetics. And I wanted to go into med school, and then I realized I had really had no desire to be a doctor or go to med school, and I can't stand the sight of blood. Uh, and that, you know, really, my parents were pushing me to go to med school, and it—the—uh, my heart just wasn't in it. And I had all these credit hours of genetics classes that were, uh, two and three—uh, like junior and senior level courses that no other college would take. And they said, “Well, we'll give you some elective credit for it.” I'm like, “No, these are hard, you know, like, chemical analysis classes. Like, gimme—gimme chemistry for that!” And they said, “No, no, no.” But, um, wild and fishery says, “Yeah, we'll give you credit for it. We like that.” And I said—so I said, “Alright, fine.” I knew I was gonna go to grad school. Wasn't too worried about what my undergrad was. Or at least, I'm gonna cl—that's what I'm—I'm gonna stick with. But more—more of it was, like, you know, I'm 19 years old, and I don't have my head fully removed my ass yet. So.

VE: What were some extracurriculars that you did, that you were involved in at A&M?

EW: Uh, that's actually what got me in trouble. My—my grades from A&M were not—were not stellar, let's just say, euphemistically. Um, even though I was actually a pretty good student, just, uh, I was involved in a lot of stuff. Um, I was involved in student government. Uh, I was a hall—I was the RA. Uh, I was in Staff Council, which is the, uh, government for RAs. Uh, I did Bonfire. Um, before—uh, and Bonfire fell. I don't know, you guys—

VE: Mm-hmm.

EW: Bonfire fell my Senior year, so. Um, and I—there's just numerous other things I can't quite put my finger on. I was on either a part of different committees or in leadership positions on a whole—whole variety of things, which ate up a lot of my time, which then led me to not be studying.

VE: And, just for clarification, what was a hall director at UT? Like, what is that?

EW: Uh, they're—they're in charge of the RAs.

VE: Okay.

EW: And they run—help run the hall.

CJ: When you told your friends that you were going to UT after A&M, did they give you any flack for that, or ...? [CJ laughs]

EW: Um, not much. Most of my friends at the time were themselves going to grad school in other schools, so they were like, "Eh." You know. Um, and I—well I had a lot of friends at UT, so they were like, "Hey! Welcome—welcome aboard!" So, the adjustment was more of a personal cultural adjustment. Uh, very different, uh, social—social—societal attitudes at each of the institutions. People behave differently in public.

[0:20:27]

VE: Could you give, um, some examples?

EW: Sure! Um, I mean the most basic and thing—most basic thing that everyone notes is, um, the way you approach strangers. Uh, at A&M, the—I think the societal norm is that if you're within eye contact distance, and you make eye contact, you say, "Hello, how are you?" Um, at UT, if you walk by somebody and you make eye contact and say "Hello" to them, they just quickly avert their eyes and keep walking a little faster. Um, that's not—I'm not saying that that is the—that's true for every circumstances, but it was true far more often than not.

Uh, it is just a very—the very nature of, even though both schools are pretty close to the same size, population wise, A&M was a small town. UT was a big city where you kinda just keep your head

low and keep moving on. Um, A&M, there was sort of an expectation is, if you're—if you get to the door first, and there's somebody behind you, you pull the door. Uh, especially if the person coming behind you is a lady. And—and you're—you're—you're—you're gonna—gonna be a gentleman. At UT, there were times where I held the door open for someone. They were looking at me like, “What do you want?” Like, “I don't know what to do. This is confusing.” Um, and again, I'm not saying that's happened every situation, but you—it was noticeable.

VE: Was there a, um, Asian community at A&M at that time?

EW: Not really. Not—not so much in what I think you're thinking of. Um, there is—there was a large graduate Asian population, but they mostly stayed to themselves. They're mostly, uh, recent immigrants or here on student visas, uh, doing their PhD in engineering or computer science or something like that. Um, they had separate housing. They sorta kept to themselves. There were actually, uh, some—when I was there, I think my senior—senior year, there were several incidences involving attacks on those graduate students. Um, I think one student had a beer bottle thrown at them while—while they were on their bike, uh, by some guys in a pickup truck. Um, I mean, he—he was injured. And—and incidences similar to that.

Um, some of that simply is because ... the cultural differences between A&M and UT are usually—I like to put it—this is the way I like to put it is that each—each one's weakness is the other one's strength. That they have sort of like, uh—sort of a—a strange dichotomy of how they deal with their—their own diversity and population. Um, one thing I always like to point out is like, A&M—people say, “Well, A&M is a—a discriminating place. It's—they're very biased. They're very bigoted.” I say, “Well, I don't think that's true.”

Um, the hall I was in, Crocker Hall, which is, um, you wanna talk about being a redneck hall, that—that was a redneck hall. But our hall president was a little Vietnamese guy. Okay? And our, uh—our Redpot, who—which is the—the leader for the Bonfire, um, events, our Redpot was a big black guy. And no one, the—those issues were never brought up. And what ... the conclusion I made from that is—is that, A&M, as long as you're doing what everyone else is doing, people will accept you no matter who you are. As long as you're doing what everyone else is doing and participating. Um, the two guys that actually got picked on a lot in my hall were two white kids. Because they didn't participate in anything. And people went after them because they didn't participate.

At UT, it's sort of the opposite. Uh, UT, you—you have an extremely diverse body. Very, very diverse. But you have each diverse group self-segregates into their own little cliques. So, you have a, uh, African—African student group, you have an African American student group. You have the—and then you have, uh, uh, an Japanese American student group, and then you have a Vietnamese American student group, and a Chinese American student group. And those groups, never mingle. They never merge. And they sort of self-segregate. There's a—there's a place for everybody, but no one really does anything with each other. Does that make sense?

[0:25:21]

VE: When you were applying for colleges, um, did—what made you choose A&M?

EW: Um, they accepted me. I—I don't—really don't know. I mean, it's, um—it's one of the schools I applied to. Uh, one of the other schools I applied to, like, lost my application, and I said, "Well, I guess I'm not going there." Um, and so, A&M says, "We'll take you." And, I said, "All right, let's go." I really wasn't—I—I guess I just didn't care all that much about which school I went to. I was actually hoping to go to, uh, HBU, which is down the street from my neighborhood, um, but they lost my application. I'm, like, "All right, fine, whatever." So.

VE: Also, at A&M, were you paid to be an RA? Do they do the free—

EW: [overlapping] Yes.

VE: —board, room and board?

EW: Uh, we got room and board, and we got a little pay. Not a lot, but we got some—we got—we did get our rooms for free. So.

VE: Do you remember that pay?

EW: I don't. I wanna say it's something like, maybe like \$1500 a semester, on top of—on top of the room and board. And, don't quote me on that. I—it's just it's been a long time.

CJ: [clears throat] Um, so could you describe your sort of, like, educational and career path after graduating from UT, what you went on to do from there?

EW: Um, while at UT, I did a fellowship at the, um, Texas Workforce Commission doing a little policy on, uh—on, uh, what we call two-year college and technical school career standards. Uh, sort of like, "Hey, if you want to go install cable, um, you need to go get a certificate." What does a certificate look like? I mean, not—not the physical appearance, but like what's involved in the degree? What kind of standards do you have to pass? What—what should you know? Things like that. We worked on that for a while.

Um, part of my un—my graduate degree, I had like a strong focus on higher education and, uh—and things involved in that. And, uh, after I graduated from LBJ, I took a job with the legislature. Uh, I worked—I was a chief clerk for the higher education committee, which, um—you know, which I had a str—strong interest in. And, um ... you know, during LBJ, I—I had known that I want to go to law school. Because public policy is one half of the coin, you know, and—and law is the other half. One side is how the laws are made. The other side is how the laws are enforced. One of the things that I realized when I was at LBJ is that even though we study a lot about how to make policy, the big changes in our society, especially in American society all have come through a single individual. And that individual is usually an attorney who goes and files a case, or—or a plaintiff that—that—that files a case. And that case overturns existing law and changes the—the way our society operates.

Um, just today, um, DOMA got struck down. And the court opinion basically is—is the fou—very foundation that's gonna undo every single state, uh, gay marriage ban. And ... you can't ignore that kind of power. That that kind of, um, societal change from one act. And so I said, like, "You know

what? If we're serious about this, if we're serious about changing the way our—our society operates, about how government works, about how we treat our people, we can't just do policy law. So I'll have to do law." So, I decided I wanted to go to law school as well. And then I just did the, um—did the law clerk thing in the middle, while I was applying to law school.

VE: Do you consider the DOMA decision a victory?

EW: Absolutely. Um, it is the—the—the victory is not in the actual striking down of DOMA. The victory, in my opinion, is in the wording of Justice Kennedy's opinion. If you look at what he actually writes and what the logic is of why DOMA cannot stand, you could take that verbatim, replace DOMA with, let's say, any state's anti-marriage act, and it'll fit perfectly. That's—that's the real victory right there, is that opinion.

[0:30:20]

VE: Continuing with the Supreme Court, yesterday—

EW: [overlapping] Ooh.

VE: —the Voting Rights Act, Section 4.

EW: Um, we knew it was We knew it was coming. At least it was not as bad as we thought it would be. Um, it basically says—the Supreme Court basically—the—the—the victory in that, the small victory that we'll take out of that as a minority population is—is that the Supreme Court recognizes there is still clear discrimination. What they didn't like was, "Why did you pick these states over other states?" Things in these states have changed. And my proposal has always been, make every state preclear. Why make it just one state? Make every state preclear. Okay, so Oregon, um—Oregon is a Democratic place. And—but what if they discriminate against white people? What if they discriminate against another group?

I—as an elected official, I don't—I don't care which party I'm on or which party you're on. No voter of any persuasion, of any party, of any race, of any gender or sexual orientation should be discriminated against. For any reason. Everyone should have the equal access to vote. I don't care if it's Democrats suppressing Republicans. I don't care if it's Republicans suppressing Democrats. It shouldn't happen. Make everyone do it. I'm not sure this Congress will be able to do that. And it's really about the House. The Senate will do it.

Um, so ... but, the one thing you have to remember is that the Court said absolutely nothing about Section 2. And pretty much affirmed that Section 2 is going to stand. Section 2 basically says, "Look, you can't have invidious discrimination." Like, you can't draw lines to just basically screw over a population on purpose because of their race. Um, and, just because something does not preclear does not mean somebody can't sue and say, "The government—the DoJ can't stop you, but I can."

VE: And, I guess on one more current topic, um, I woke up this morning and found out that SB5 did not pass.

EW: Yeah.

VE: Although it seemed like it did last night.

EW: Yeah, and if I sound a little weary right now, it's because I stayed up 'till about 4 o'clock in the morning, um, following that. And um, we—we play—I played a role in the House side in that I probably ate up about an hour, hour and a half, uh, of time. Um, maybe not that much, maybe, like, 30, 40 minutes. Um ... you know, this is—I mean—for—for—I mean for—just to say—say what it is, I mean SB5 is a very broad ... anti-abortion bill that effectively ends abortion in 99% of the state. Um, because the—people say, “Well, it doesn't really end abortion, it just has higher standards.” Well, great, the standards are so high, essentially, there will be no facilities. Um, and ... it's attempt at an run—it's—it's at an run around existing, uh, Constitutional law on the subject.

Um, in fact, Roe versus Wade was decided exactly 40 years ago. Um, it was decided in 1973. So, for 40 years, the law on the land about abortion has been absolutely, unflinchingly clear that before viability, before 24 weeks, the state has absolutely no interest—no—no compelling interest in banning abortion. Like, you cannot ban abortion before 24 weeks. Like, period. You can—you can ban it after that. You can have some regulation of it. You can do lots of stuff after 24 weeks, but before 24 weeks, you cannot do anything.

And that—that's been challenged in Casey. It's been challenged in Gonzales. All these different cases. The opposition has, like, thrown themselves against these rocks, and the, you know—the Supreme Court has just brushed them back, saying, “No more. What—what did we tell you? We've been telling you the same thing for 40 years. No, you can't do that.” So, the new thinking is, “Let's just find—if we can't go over the rocks, let's just go around the rocks.” Um, and this is an attempt to do that.

I mean, I don't want to get too much into the detail of the bills. We'd be here for another four hours. Um, I'm doing my personal filibuster, uh, for this interview. Um, but basically, this legislation is a attempt again to run around it. Um, like a new thinking, new theory. But 9th circuit has looked at this new thinking and smacked it right back down. Said, “There's no difference. You still can't do it, um, before 24 weeks.”

[0:35:36]

And, um, the other legislation, that's—SB5 is actually a really big bill that's all rolled in a bunch of stuff. I don't wanna get too much into it, but, um, it basically has the effect of it will end abortion in Texas except—for—for every place except for Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and Austin. So. Um, and, so, there was a big fight over that last night, and, uh—I—I think, I'm not sure if it was a victory or not because I think the Governor will just put it right back on. Because, apparently, it's an emergency. It's definitely an emergency for, um—for Governor—Lieutenant Governor Duhurst because, you know, that's—that was his primary ticket. And, let's not, you know [laughs]—let's not pull our punches on this. This is—this is about politics. This is about people winning their primaries. So.

CJ: [clears throat] Um, on your questionnaire form, [clears throat] you mentioned that you're a

member of OCA Houston.

EW: Sure.

CJ: Could you tell us a little bit about your involvement with the organization?

EW: Uh, OCA Greater Houston, and, uh, they're a service organization, um, lot of community—community, uh—community activism, and, uh—and advocacy. And, uh, I have been there—I can't remember how long I've been with them, like maybe three, four years, um, just looking for something to do. Part of these are organizations, and, uh, they do a lot of good work, so, just, "Hey, I'll help you guys out." And they operate out of my area, so, you know.

VE: How long have you been a state rep?

EW: Um, I've been sworn in for about six months right now.

VE: Um, what are—what is the biggest challenge that you've faced in your first six months?

EW: Oh, first six months?

VE: Or even before then, actually.

EW: Um, getting elected. [CJ laughs] Um, it was—it was a very difficult race. Uh, mainly 'cause of the primary. Uh, the person who previously had the seat was a very well-known and well-respected individual, Scott Hochberg, and he had a very large legacy. And anytime you have somebody with a big legacy, everybody wants to come fill those shoes. Um, in fact, you should go talk to these people as well. Uh, if you loo—you know Mark Strama, uh, a rep from Austin, is leaving. He is a very well-liked, very well-known state representative. And in his wake, uh, I think there's like at least four or five individuals running, including two Asians. Um, Jade, uh, can't remember her last name, and, uh, Ramey Ko. So, you know, that's—that's gotta be a first.

Um, so anyways, I ran against three other people, uh, for—for the Democratic primary, and the representation reflected our—our district, our neighborhood. I ran against an African American, a Hispanic individual, and a—a white lady. And, you know, and I'm the Asian guy, and, you know? We worked a little harder, and we got it. Um—or—and—and ... but, you know, that—that was probably the biggest challenge.

Um, during—during the session? It's hard to say during the session. I mean, during the session, the—the—the biggest problem, of course, is—is just there's a learning curve to what you're trying to do and there's not a lot of time to do the learning. Uh, the session—session only occurs once every two years. All right? And it's—and it's—it's only for six—six months, but it's not really—well, it's only for five months. It's not really for five months. It's really only for two months. Because the first two and a half, three months, it's really like nobody does anything. There are very few committee hearings. And then all of a sudden it's just—you're in warp speed. And then you're there for 16 hours a day. And then—um, you know, on the House side of SB5, we—we left the House floor somewhere around 5

o'clock in the morning. You know, after 18 hours of debate. 15. It was more like 15 hours debate. We took a little break. [CJ and VE laugh]

[0:40:20]

CJ: [clears throat] And, so also in your questionnaire, I think that you mentioned that, um—that you're the president of the Houston 80-20 organization?

EW: I—I was.

CJ: Was, okay.

EW: Uh, I had to relinquish that position because I got elected.

CJ: Ok.

EW: Um, and that's—uh, it's—I believe it's the only Asian American interest political action committee in—in the greater Houston Area. Uh ... I—I guess that's not completely true. Well, it's the only PAC. Um, I think there's Asian Democrats of Texas, but that's not really—I don't think they're—they're a PAC. Anyways, this is a non-partisan Asian American interest political action committee. Objective is to, uh, promote Asian candidates and promote Asian community in races where there are no Asian candidates. And for the—for the record—for the record, we don't necessarily endorse candidates simply because they're Asian. There's been many times where we refused to endorse an Asian candidate over a non-Asian candidate because we felt the, uh, non-Asian candidate had much better qualifications. So. And they did not endorse my race. They specifically, uh, did not endorse anybody in my race.

VE: A study conducted by the Kinder Institute at Rice University—

EW: Mm-hmm.

VE: —um, it stated that back in '95, majority of Chinese Houstonians claimed that they were Republican?

EW: Sure.

VE: But, I believe in the recent 2013 study, it was pretty even a third, a third, a third Republican, uh, not interested, and Democratic. Do you ever feel like minority in the Democratic Party or is that not the case?

EW: Um, it is a stereotype that Asians are Republican, um, because—because there was some feeling of that in the past. And there's—there is some basis for that belief. Uh, I had to fight that a little bit. And one of the—one of the problems is that people don't understand there are different kinds of

Asians, and they come from different places and have different backgrounds.

And we've actually done polling on this. Uh, we've done exit polling of, uh—of the Houston area and of other cities. Um, the—the current trend is that, um, if you break Asian groups down to their individual, uh, ethnic origins, um, Vietnamese are the most likely to be Republicans. Um, they're about 50%, little bit more than 50% Republican. Um, maybe—maybe a little higher. A lot of that has to do with the Vietnam War, anti-communism, and things like that. And that's—that's changing a lot.

And we'll talk about that in a second, but, um, South Asians have the highest party affil—have the highest amount of party affiliation, and they affiliate Democrat. Um, Indians, large parts of Pakistanis, Democrats. That wasn't always true. Before 9/11, a lot of them were Republicans. But like all things in American, things change. And people—they realized that these were not necessarily their friends.

Um, Chinese have the—from what I understand—the smallest percentage of party affiliation. Uh, largely about 70% unaffiliated. Um, of the 30% that has a party affiliation, they're vast majority Democrat. So, um—and again, that's a current—that's a recent statistic, recent polling, and not back early 2000s, whatever. And again, lot of things changed after 9/11.

And don't forget the—the parties themselves have flipped a lot. Um, there is comments that—Bob Dole said the same thing is, you know, “If I ran right now, I couldn't even be a Republican. I would not win primary for my—even my senate seat or anything.” Right, because the party's gone so far to the right. And there's comments—there—people have written articles saying basically Ronald Reagan would not be recognizable. He would no—he would have never been elected, even though the Republican Party pushed up Ronald Reagan so much. You know? So, things change. Anything else?

[0:45:12]

VE: Have there been, um, any events in US history that you feel personally impacted you—or there's obviously many, but any huge ones?

EW: Uh, as—as—as—in what respect?

VE: Any.

EW: Um ... I'll tell you—at least, I'll—I'll share with you some of my favorite legal cases. Um, I'm—I'm a big law nerd. Being an Asian—as an Asian American, there's only one place to go and that's Korematsu. And I actually met, uh, Karen—Karen Korematsu, um, uh, the plaintiff's, um, daughter. Uh, and I was very humbled to meet her. You know, just talking to her I was on the verge of tears because—I don't know if you know this case.

Um, if you don't know this case, you should look it up. This is about Japanese internment. And the lawsuit was, “Hey. How can you lock me up, take away my property, throw me in jail, without any kind of due process, without—without habeas corpus, uh, without—without any rights? How can you do that?” And throughout the history of the United States, the US Supreme Court has rarely gone back and said, “You know what? We screwed that one up. We're wrong. We—we issue an apology, and we're going to correct this.” Um, the Supreme Court's gone back and corrected itself on issues like Dred Scott, uh, on—on numerous other rulings saying like, “Look, those were different times. We're

wrong. This is what's right and we're gonna do what's right this time." [sighs] And by the time of Korematsu, by World War II, most of the issues involving habeas corpus, involving due process, have been settled. It's a pretty settled law. You can't—you're not supposed to be able to, uh, intentionally just take someone and then lock 'em up and you can't—without giving a way out or without them proving their guilt.

Um, and what happened during the Japanese internment was all Japanese were rounded up. It doesn't matter if you were American-born, you were Japanese-born, if you were a citizen, if you were not a citizen, everyone was rounded up. And, you know, the Supreme Court issued a ruling that basically said, "Yeah, that's fine." Purposeful discrimination against a class of people based on their race, denying them habeas corpus, denying them due process, and ... the reason I always say like—the reason I always get like a little teary about it is that's—it—it's painful as—being an Asian American, but it's also painful being an American. That here's a part of our history that's frankly shameful. That in the guise of—and it becomes more relevant even now after 9/11. It's like we have these incidents where we talk about, "Well, why shouldn't we racially profile, uh, Arab Americans?" You know, because of Kor—because of things like Korematsu. Because I thought we've learned this lesson, you know? We shouldn't destroy society simple to make us feel a little better. Don't do what's easy. Do what's right.

And, um, I know that case was, for—for a lot of people, a long time ago, but it's still a relatively fresh wound. I mean, to me, at least. It has not been that long. The people that are involved in it are still alive today. There are people who were born in those concentration camps. Those kids that lived through it are still very much alive today.

Um, one of the people I would really suggest you go talk to is, uh, Glen Gondo. If he's not on your list, he really, absolutely should be. Uh, he is one of the f—there's not a large—G-L-E-N-G-O-N-D-O. Um, um, he's a very well-known businessman in the Houston area. He is of Japanese descent. Um, there's not a large Japanese population here, so he's sort of a rarity. Um, but ask him about that. Ask him about his family going through that.

Um, the other one—other big event that I think—from an Asian American standpoint, and, uh, that's—uh, I was purely speaking about it being, if you ask me my perspective as an Asian American and not just as an American or as a Texan—is 1883. The Chinese Exclusion Act, which Congress now only just this last year issued an apology for. Okay? And it's another incidence of here you have a law that is a intentional, purposeful, discrimination—discrimination against a class of people, a racial, uh, ethnic group. And everyone kind of just said, "Yeah, that's fine," even though the law is clear, is you cannot purposefully, you know, do that. Um, you know, so if—if you don't—you don't even know about that, just Google it and look up some of the history, and you'll—it'll make you mad. Like, "I can't believe we did this." Um, so, what else?

[0:51:00]

CJ: Um, how did you first meet your wife?

EW: Um, that's actually kind of a good question. We, uh, have known each other for quite a while, uh, because she's a reporter and active in the Asian community and I'm active in the Asian community. And, um, I've actually been on her TV show, I think—been on her—three times at least. Um, but we

didn't start dating until recently. So—and we've only been—we've been married almost a year now. So I—I don't remember the first time I met her. I mean she's on TV, so like I can't tell the difference with like, "Did I see her on TV before?" [CJ laughs] Um, no, but, um, yeah.

VE: Growing up, did you speak English with your parents?

EW: Uh, I guess it depends on when. Probably when I was younger, of course I'm sure I only spoke—spoke Chinese to 'em 'cause that's all I knew. Um, ever since I was a teenager I think I spoke Chinglish to 'em. You know, there's this—because my—my Chinese language stopped at age five. I don't have the vocabulary to really have in-depth discussions. If I—if I—my dad's a lawyer. I'm a lawyer. If we start talking about law, we instantly switch to English. English only. Uh, we talk about politics, it's—switch to English only. We—I don't have—I just don't have the vocabulary to have that discussion in Chinese.

VE: You spoke Cantonese, right?

EW: I spoke Cantonese and some Mandarin. Uh, my Mandarin when I was a little kid was probably a lot better. But, uh, since I don't practice it normally, I—I understand Mandarin if you speak slowly, but I can't do, uh, the inflections—I—the inflections are wrong if I try to speak. Like if I try to speak Mandarin, Cantonese comes out. So. This is a brain—brain issue, too many parasites.

VE: Do you ever speak Cantonese, or even Mandarin, to, um, your constituents? Is that the right term?

EW: Very—very—I speak Cantonese if I can. Um, and I can say a few words. Um, I'm just not very comfortable doing it just 'cause I feel like an idiot. You know, it's talk like a five year old. I'm just much more comfortable with English.

VE: What, um, Chinese traditions did your family practice when you were growing up?

EW: Well, define—what do you mean by that?

VE: Did you guys observe Chinese New Year—?

EW: Yeah, of course. Go get some roast pork, you know. Have a fish. Um, we do—we do the normal Lunar New Year stuff, Chinese New Year's. Um, we do Autumn Festival. We try to have a dinner at Autumn Festival. Nothing—nothing crazy and stuff like that. Um, just the usual stuff. Um, my parents are fairly non-superstitious, you know, educated intellectuals. Uh, and my wife, my wife's family is even more so, uh, 'cause they're all PhDs and, you know. Um, so yeah. But we try to do—especially because my wife and I, especially now that we're going to have a kid, we try to do more, so we pass on some cul—at least some culture. 'Cause we—you know, every successive generation loses a little bit, and we're trying to minimize the loss. Because we're already so far down. [laughs]

CJ: And have you ever gone back to China at any point in time?

EW: Oh yeah! We go back. I go back every two to three years, just to visit, say hi, um, to see—see the relatives, to see grandparents, uh, when they were still alive. Uh, we actually went back this winter after the wedding, and—just to do a little victory lap and say hi to everybody. Because like—I mean, a lot of people didn't come over simply because I mean it's being a 5, 7,000 dollar plane trip, and then hotel and everything, and then they have to go back. So.

[0:55:28]

VE: Do you still have a lot of family in China?

EW: My family was really not all that big in the first place, so, well I mean they're all—they're—we're the only ones in the US. Let's just put it that way. That used to not be true. They used to—most of *them* used to be in the US while we were in China. And then, they've been back 'cause there's more business opportunity over there. That's—that's where—that's where the money is now.

VE: Is your wife also Chinese American?

EW: Mm-hmm. She's also Chinese-born. And she's also a naturalized citizen like myself.

VE: How old were you when you became a citizen?

EW: I believe I was 14.

VE: So was it through your parents?

EW: It was through my parents.

VE: How did your parents meet?

EW: No idea. Never asked them. I'm a guy, dude. [CJ and VE laugh] My par—my parents are very, um, closed. Let's just leave it at that. [CJ laughs]

CJ: [to VE] Oh, do you?

VE: I was actually about to ask, um, you're an only child right?

EW: Mm-hmm.

VE: What was that like growing up? 'Cause you said you were the only family here, so you didn't have cousins?

EW: No, nothing. Um, you know, grew up being a weird little nerd. [VE laughs] So, you know, it is what it is. Uh, I—I had a very—I had a very lonely childhood, but it made me who I am today. You

know, very—very introspective, sometimes—sometimes a little neurotic, um, but, you know, uh, I—I pride my—I take pride in the fact that, you know, I’ll sit there and just think about issues over and over again, figuring out the logic of it, figuring out the arguments for something and against something, which, you know, helps me be a good lawyer, but, you know, maybe not that fun of a party guest.

VE: What were some of your interests in a child?

EW: I don’t even remember. Um, everything. Anything and everything. Uh, I *love* Legos. Just my parents would never buy them because they were so expensive, and we were poor, but I *love* Legos because it just appealed to every part of me that wants like to take things apart and rebuild them. Um, I’m going to make sure my kid has Legos because—because it teaches—you know what, I think it really teaches—it teaches you, um, the—the ability to adapt to situations. ‘Cause like, you know, if you just follow a diagram and build what you’re supposed to build, it’s like, “Oh great, I built it. Now what?” So let’s try a little something else. It’s like, well, this piece doesn’t fit this way. It’s like so what do you do? Well, let’s find a way around that. You know, let’s improvise. Adaptability is the key to human survival. It is the—it is the premiere human strength. It’s not intelligence. It’s adaptability.

CJ: [clears throats] So you mentioned a few times the demographic changes that are taking place in Houston, or have been taking place over the years.

EW: [overlapping] Sure.

CJ: So what role do you see, um, Chinese Americans playing in Houston’s future? How do you—what do you envision as the next 10, 20 years?

EW: Um ... I think as a percentage of the population, I don’t see Asian Americans really increasing that much. Um, the—the actual—the actual total number will increase dramatically, but the problem—not a problem, but I mean it’s—the situation is—is that all the other groups are increasing as well. Um, large African cont—African immigrants are coming in. Large Hispanic population coming in. Um, the only thing that’s really changing is the white population is—is decreasing. Um, it’s not really a factor of the population. It’s more or less a factor of involvement and comfort level with being a part of this society. And, like we talked about earlier, uh, Asian Americans have historically felt marginalized, or have been marginalized. Um, I—growing up in America, being Asian American, uh, being—my parents call me a banana. Do you know what that means?

[1:00:08]

VE: Yellow on the outside.

EW: [overlapping] Yellow on the outside, white on the inside. I’m Americanized, okay? You know, I barely speak the language. I, um—I don’t know the customs and the culture. I can’t read. Uh, and so I always described it as being—being from two worlds, but belonging in none. That I have a culture and a racial group that says I’m an outsider. But I also have a mainstream society that says, “You’re not

from here.” So it was always very difficult. And I think Asian-Americans as a whole probably share that experience of “I’m an American, but Americans don’t really see me as American.”

I think that’s changing. I think with more elected Asian American officials, I think with more people in the mainstream, that Asian Americans say, “You know what? I am a part of this—this society. I’m gonna join it, and I’m gonna be active in it.” Um, you know, the—the pioneers of our—of our—of our city are still here. Gordan Quan, Martha Wong, um, the—the first generation of the first are still here.

Um, one of the really good indicators—by the way, you know, actually, you could write—you can write a master’s thesis on this, if you want—uh, is my basis on how well a group—group is accepted into our society is how often do you see them in commercials. Right? Back [indistinguishable several words], you would never see an Asian American on TV on a commercial, on a main, national commercial. Never. This year, I’ve seen at least three different TVs—TV ads for national companies, uh, with only Asian American casts. Like a—in a complete Asian American family. Never seen that before. Ever. Asian Americans have—are being accepted. People are saying, “Hey, you guys, you’re American. Who cares?” Right?

So, same thing for African American communities of like—you know things have changed when you see—start—start seeing commercials with African Americans in them. At first—and then they’re with other people. Right? Then you sort of—then you start having, you know, more and more presence, and then you—finally you have commercial with an African American family as—and—and don’t forget, you know, in a commercial like for like cereal, the idea is that you—you transpose that family. ‘Cause, “Oh, I can see my family doing that.” But if you can’t relate to people you can see on the screen, then that has no affect.

So, the belief is—my belief is that when you see people in mainstream commercials, and they’re—they’re of a different group, and people feel comfortable with that, and they’re willing to put those people in that group in that commercial, the comfort level is pretty good. Right? Look for it. I’m still waiting for a non—an American lead actor who is—or actress who is Asian American. So, not Lucy Liu because she’s only had side bits. She’s never in the main thing by herself. You know? Like things like that it’s like when they become—when they’re the individual star, and they’re the—you know, their face is—they’re the—they’re middle person in the movie poster. That’s when you know—that’s when you know things have—have really changed.

VE: Does that still apply if say—I’m trying to think of an example—maybe like the role—a lead—maybe a lead role in an upcoming movie *has* to be Asian?

EW: No no no, it doesn’t have to be Asian. It’s a matter of—it’s—it’s a question of comfort in casting. It’s the same as the commercials. If you cast a lead that you feel that the average viewer will not—will not relate to, people will not enjoy the movie and you’re not going to make money. Um ... do you know Othello? The Shakespeare Am I—is it Othello? [quietly] Damn it. [louder] My brain’s locked up. The Shakespeare—um, who the—the—the lead is, uh—is—is Black. He’s a Moor.

VE: Yes.

EW: It’s Othello right?

VE: Yes.

EW: Right? So why does—with—with a affection (?)—with an exception of a few lines in the play that mentions that he's black, why does Othello have to be black? You know? What is the comfort level of having someone else play that role? And it's just Okay. ... For example, let's—let's go with, um, like—like a recent Tom Cruise movie, *Oblivion*, right? You've seen it?

CJ and VE: No. [laugh]

[1:05:24]

CJ: I haven't—I just—I know of it.

EW: It's a sci-fi thriller, very exciting, of course, being any Tom Cruise movie, there's a lot of running in it. [VE laughs] Um, uh, and he's the lead. He's the star. Um, why does that role have to be white? Why couldn't it be Black? Why couldn't it be Hispanic? Why couldn't it be Asian? Right? How many—how many—let's—let's look at blockbusters. Okay? Not animation. Mainstream blockbuster movies with a single lead, and it's action-thriller. How many of them are played by non-whites?

VE: I can think of that one Will Smith movie?

CJ: [overlapping] It was really bad though. *After Earth*. I heard it was ...

VE: [defeated] Ah. [snaps] Ok.

CJ: But besides that one, I can't [overlapping] off the top of my head

EW: [overlapping] Yeah, that's—that's—that's a little—his little gift to his son. [CJ laughs] That one was—that was Rebecca Black's "Friday" for his son. [VE and CJ laugh]

CJ: That's pretty accurate.

EW: That's not my words. That's what people have said. [CJ laughs] It's—it's—it's—it's basically, "I have a lot of money, and this is a gift for my son." Yeah. Um, it's coming though. African Americans are generally more accepted, uh, into mainstream society 'cause you've been here longer. Um, when you see an Indian or South Asian or Pakistani lead role, let me know. [VE laughs] But it's coming. *Harold and Kumar*. C'mon. Right? It's coming. But again, not a blockbuster, not a lead action role. You know? Um, so. It's a very (?) science (?)—you let me know in your master's thesis. [CJ laughs]

VE: I was actually thinking this is more of a comment than a question.

EW: Go ahead.

VE: In your commercial theory, there was actually a recent controversy because a Cheerios commercial with a multiracial—

CJ: [overlapping] Biracial—

VE: —yeah. It was a multiracial family, and it got pulled, but I guess—

EW: [overlapping] It did not get pulled.

VE: Or rumor had it that it was pulled at some point. Like—

EW: Cheerios said, “Up yours.” Um, Cheerios got far more support. It did probably 10 times more good for them from the controversy than it hurt. Um ... if you’re—I don’t wanna put—I don’t wanna put money on it, but I wanna say like, if you’re a company, you probably don’t be—want to be the company that bowed to the bigots and the racists. Yeah. In fact I think, um, Cheerios I think released a statement saying they were quite proud of, you know

So, it’s not quite the post-racial—who said that? Who coined that term “post-racial society”? I don’t remember, but we’re not quite there yet, but we’re—we’re headed in that direction. Um, I know for myself ... and many other people in my generation, my friends who are more progressive, more liberal, it’s like ... the—the concept of race really doesn’t pop up a lot. Like when we just talk to somebody, I don’t think, “Oh, I’m talking to some one who’s Hispanic” or “I’m talking to someone who’s Black”. It’s like that’s just Joe. Like who cares.

The—you know, I don’t wanna sound like that guy, but like, um, the fact that Obama is Black or half-Black, whatever you wanna call it, like it doesn’t occur to me until somebody brings it up. You have—you would have to bring it—I mean, like, when I see Obama, the first thing that pops in my mind is not, “Oh, he’s Black.” First thing when we’re talking about Obama is like, “Hey, that’s a pretty awesome president.” I’m a Democrat. I’m biased. Okay? Um, you know, when I see Romney, the first that pops in my mind is, “No he’s white”. It’s “That’s some—that’s the rich dude.” That’s—that’s my identifier.

Um, so, I think we’re coming to a point in society where, like, you know, with the commercials, with the TV—is people are feeling more comfortable. Um, one—I think one of the big things is—you know, I’m gonna get in trouble for saying this—is, if you come to—come to—come to Chinatown, come to Asiatown, you know, over in Bellaire and Beltway area. Walk around during—on Saturdays. There’s a lot of interracial marriages between Asians and—and whatever. A lot—mostly Asian and white, but still quite a bit—few of Asian/Hispanic. There’s occasionally Asian/African American. Um, but people are just like they’re over it. I think a lot people, especially my generation, your generation—especially your generation are just over it. Um, so, that’s for the best.

[1:10:20]

VE: You mentioned the, I guess, shared Asian American experience of being “the other”.

EW: Mm-hmm.

VE: Do you have any particular anecdotes growing up of any discrimination?

EW: [sighs] The story that I—that always kind of reminds me, um, is, uh, back in elementary—I don't know why I still remember this. But, probably 'cause of this incident. But ... we were on the playground, and this was like when I was like probably 10, 11 or so. Um, and I got in a fight with somebody. It's like a pushing match. And then like, you know, one of the little Hispanic kids, you know, yells at me, "Hey, why don't you go back where you came from?" And, you know, at the mo—when I was that age, I didn't really appreciate the full irony of the Hispanic kid, [VE laughs] you know, the little Mexican kid telling me to go back where I came from. But, you know, at that time it really hurt because I'm like, "What do you mean where I came from? I—I—I live down the street." Right?

And, you know, the—the—the pain of it didn't set in until I realized he meant, "You're Asian. You obviously don't belong here." Right? When—when—'cause when I look at the little white kids, Black kids, uh, Hispanics kids, I always thought like, "Well, they're Americans." But the reverse of that, they look at me said, like, "You're obviously—you obviously don't belong here."

So ... um, that's—that's the only thing I can give like a real anecdote about. Um, I'm sure I can think of something later. But, um, for the most part, I don't remember because I—I choose to ignore it. If—if something happens, I—I just walk away. Um, there's been incidents where people called me out on stuff. And they say like I just kind of ignore them because there's—no matter what happens, how much society progresses, there's always crazy people. There's always bigots. There's always racists, and there's always assholes. So.

VE: What would you consider to be your greatest accomplishment in life so far?

EW: I don't think I have a lot of great accomplishments. I'll—I'll—I'll let you know when I tell you—when I figure it out. Um, I guess, sort of being raised the way I was raised and sort of being self-loathing and—and neurotic, um, being what drives me to work is that I think everything that I do is crap. [VE laughs] Right? The—the good Asian way. And what—it's what makes me work harder and make me do better next time because I really could've done a lot better. And I think—I think I can do better. I will do better. Um, I don't know. You have to ask somebody else.

CJ: [to VE] Is there anything else you wanted to bring up or ask or?

VE: I guess just a fun question. What do you do in your free time?

EW: Um, what do I do? I don't have a lot of free time. Um, I read a lot. I read a lot of political essays, blogs. Um, I'm on Twitter a lot now. Um, I don't I really like cars. Like, doesn't have to be expensive cars. I just like cars. I like anything mechanical. Um, I play a lot of video games.

CJ: Any favorites?

EW: Um, you know what? Since law school and stuff, I haven't been able to play a lot of video games, like not the stuff I want to play. I play a lot of like flash games, which like, you know, only for—only last like an hour or so. Um, I'm a big RPG-er, and, uh, I like—I like first-person shooters. So, I'm

waiting for Battlefield 4 to come out. [CJ and VE laugh]

CJ: Anything else?

VE: No.

CJ: All right. I think we're all done here. Thank you so much for your time.

EW: 'Preciate it.

[1:14:50]

End interview