



CIVICS LESSON

Anna May Wong

The Fight Against Anti-Miscegenation Laws

Miscegenation means marriage or cohabitation by persons of different races. Anti-miscegenation started early in American history, when, in 1664, Maryland enacted the first British colonial law banning marriage between Black people and White people; a provision of the law stipulated the enslavement of White women who have married Black men. In 1691 Virginia prohibited all interracial marriages; White women and men who married Black people or Native American people were threatened with exile. And in 1871 a U.S. constitutional amendment was proposed that banned all interracial marriage in every state throughout the country; it was the first of three such attempts; they all failed.

Most anti-miscegenation laws targeted interracial marriages between White people and Black people or White people and Native Americans, but the anti-Asian xenophobia that Anna May Wong faced in the entertainment industry also had manifestations in legal cases. Following the ruling in *United States v. Thind* in 1922 citizenship of White American who had married Asian Americans were stripped away. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 began to turn the tide against the legal repercussions of anti-Asian sentiment.

Wong's fight against racial stereotyping helped create the cultural environment for legal changes. In *Loving v. Virginia*, a 1967 case involving the marriage between a Black woman and a White man, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that state bans on interracial marriage violate the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

In what ways do you see the persistent legacy of anti-miscegenation and other forms of discrimination against Asian and other Americans of color continuing today? What steps can you take, like Wong, to create a healthier cultural environment?

Perseverance