

# The 1920s film starlet whom Hollywood shoved off the screen.

## ACTIVITIES & QUESTIONS

### 1/ PRE-READING

#### 1/ LEAD-IN / PAIR & SHARE

Prepare the following discussion points. Discuss them with a Partner in class.

Share the content of your discussion with your other classmates:



- 1) What do you think is the role of cinema in representing different cultures and ethnicities?
- 2) Can you think of any films or filmmakers that highlight multiculturalism or ethnic diversity? How are they received by audiences?
- 3) Why do you think diversity in front of the camera (actors) is important? What about behind the camera (directors, writers, producers)?
- 4) Do you believe that historically movies have helped promote ethnic diversity and inclusion? On the contrary, do you think the movie industry has lagged behind society's evolution in dealing with multiculturalism?
- 5) Over the past few years which efforts have been made to bring about changes in the film industry? Can you give examples of recent films including people of colour in the leading roles? Speak about the Hollywood movie industry as well as the French film industry.
- 6) Today, are cable television and streaming platforms such as Netflix better at portraying and embracing ethnic diversity? Give examples.
- 7) How do you think the portrayal of Asian characters in Western cinema has changed over the years? What more needs to be done?

### 2/ CONTEXT – DIVERSITY IN HOLLYWOOD

Read the text and put each of the following words or phrases in its correct place in the passage:

Pointing out  
Improved  
Denied  
Underrepresented

Watershed  
Slavery  
Share  
Bias

Although  
Demeaning  
Academy Award  
Confronting

For better or worse, showbiz has always been a microcosm of the world. While black stars like Louis Armstrong were celebrated for their art, they were still (1)..... access to hotels, drinking fountains and restaurants. The need to improve representation in Hollywood in particular is a discussion that is as old as Hollywood itself — and, sadly, one that continues today. Hattie McDaniel was the first black person to win an Oscar, in 1940. She received her (2)..... for Best Supporting Actress for her portrayal of “Mammy”, a house slave in “Gone With the Wind”. (3)..... critics allege that the film romanticised (4)..... in the antebellum South, McDaniel thought that her Oscar represented a (5)..... for America.

In spite of this, the history of show business is a history of (6)..... and racism, which can be broken down into three general eras: humiliation, when grossly demeaning terms and vile treatment were “normal”; protest, when voices were raised in simple requests that (7)..... stereotypes and racist images be removed from entertainment; and the struggle for equality, when groups began (8)..... the absence of people of colour in key fields. In 2016, the #OscarsSoWhite campaign highlighted the lack of racial diversity in Hollywood by (9)..... that for the second year in a row, all 20 actors nominated in the leading and supporting categories were white. Racial diversity in Hollywood (10)..... in the years that followed. In 2019 and 2020, on-screen representation noticeably grew. For instance, people of colour accounted for nearly 40% of the leads in top films for 2020, the highest (11)..... on record, according to UCLA's Hollywood Diversity Report. However, Asian Americans, Latinos and Native Americans still remain (12)..... on-screen.

## II/ READING COMPREHENSION

### 1/ OVERALL COMPREHENSION

Use the information found in the text to answer the following questions:

- In what ways was Anna May Wong a “trailblazer” and a role-model for other people of mixed origins? Which doors did she open?
- What challenges did Wong face in her acting career due to her ethnicity?
- Why was Wong denied romantic leading roles in Hollywood, and how did the anti-miscegenation laws affect her career?
- What was the cultural significance of Wong's role in *The Gallery of Madame Liu-Tsong*?
- What reactions did Wong face in China during her 1936 tour, and why was she criticized by Chinese reporters?
- What does the quote “I died a thousand deaths” tell us about Wong's experience as an actress?

### 2/ DETAILED COMPREHENSION – TRUE OR FALSE

Say whether the following statements are true or false. Double-check with the article:

- Anna May Wong is a stage-name that was given to her for first film appearance. **TRUE / FALSE**
- The actress moved to Europe to fund her own production company and escape the casting methods of Hollywood studios. **TRUE / FALSE**
- After Anna May Wong came back to the US, she was refused an award for *The Good Earth* simply because of her origins. **TRUE / FALSE**
- Towards the end of her career she finally managed to escape the stereotyping she tried to avoid all her life. **TRUE / FALSE**

## III/ VOCABULARY

### 1/ SEMANTIC FIELD

Find in the text as many words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, synonyms, idioms etc) as possible related to the semantic field of CINEMA:

### 2/ SYNONYMS

Find a synonym in the press article for the following words or definitions. To help you the main words or expressions are highlighted in grey:

**§1-5**

- Shining, sparkling:
- Movies with sound:
- Consciousness, conscience:
- Insulting term or disparaging ethnic description:
- To close down (a shop etc):

**§6-12**

- Genuine, authentic:
- Traitorous, deceitful:
- Pejorative:
- to cause trouble for a long time, to pursue:
- pull apart, pull to pieces:





## IV/ TO GO FURTHER 1/ LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Watch the two clips on Anna May Wong taken from the series "PBS American Masters" (available on the Padlet):

### PART ONE

- 1) What do the following figures correspond to? 14 .....  
1919 .....  
1905 .....  
1882 .....
- 2) How did Anna May Wong become noticed and start in the movie industry?
- 3) What did A.M. Wong experience at school?
- 4) How did white actors manage to play the Chinese roles? What was the effect according to Shirley J. Lim?

### PART TWO

- 1) What do we learn about A.M. Wong as a fashion icon?
- 2) What does young actress, producer and director Jenna Ushkowitz say about the influence of A.M. Wong? Have things changed drastically for Asian-American actors?
- 3) Why did A.M. Wong leave the United States? What was the last drop?
- 4) What did Europe offer that the United States had failed to offer her?

## 2/ ESTABLISHING PARALLELS

Think about the following question and prepare a short presentation (3 or 4 paragraphs) related to this issue:

Anna May Wong was rather well-known in her time but she fell into relative oblivion after her death. It took Ryan Murphy's Netflix TV miniseries to shed light on the important role she played in the Hollywood film industry. One of history's greatest downfalls is its asymmetry of acclaim: some figures are catapulted into legend status while others, even those of great cultural contribution, remain behind in the margins of history. **Choose another unsung hero or heroine, a hidden figure of history and tell his/her story in a short written text.** To help you, you can browse the following websites:

- [HTTPS://UNLADYLIKE2020.COM/WATCH/](https://unladylike2020.com/watch/)
- [HTTPS://EDITION.CNN.COM/INTERACTIVE/2021/02/US/LITTLE-KNOWN-BLACK-HISTORY-FIGURES/](https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/02/us/little-known-black-history-figures/)
- [HTTPS://WWW.OPRAHDAILY.COM/LIFE/G26513857/WOMEN-WHO-CHANGED-THE-WORLD/](https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/g26513857/women-who-changed-the-world/)
- [HTTPS://MASHABLE.COM/ARTICLE/UNSUNG-LGBTQ-HEROES](https://mashable.com/article/unsung-lgbtq-heroes)
- [HTTPS://WWW.MENTALFLOSS.COM/ARTICLE/653487/UNSUNG-HEROES-HISTORY](https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/653487/unsung-heroes-history)



## V/ TRANSLATION

Translate the following sentences from French to English:

- a) La jeune fille, dont les parents possédait une blanchisserie dans le cœur du Chinatown de Los Angeles, décida à l'âge de 9 ans qu'elle serait une étoile du cinéma en grandissant. Elle était sans savoir qu'elle deviendrait une des premières actrices américaines d'origine asiatique reconnues.
- b) L'actrice continua d'apparaître comme figurante dans un grand nombre de films tout en suivant en parallèle le lycée jusqu'en 1921, quand elle abandonna ses études pour travailler à plein temps.
- c) Plutôt que d'embaucher de vrais acteurs chinois ou asiatiques, les producteurs préféraient les Hongrois, les Mexicains pour les rôles de chinois.
- d) Anna May Wong se vit infliger la déception la plus sévère de sa carrière en 1935 lorsqu'elle fut écartée du premier rôle dans une adaptation d'un roman sur les difficultés de la vie dans la campagne chinoise.

## VI/ GRAMMAR – CONTRAST LINKERS & OTHER CONJUNCTIONS

Fill in the correct conjunctions and linking words from the list. There may be more than one possibility:

**EX:** Wong continued to appear as an extra in numerous films \_\_\_\_\_ simultaneously attending high school until 1921.

**Answer:** Wong continued to appear as an extra in numerous films while simultaneously attending high school until 1921.

**However**  
**Whereas**  
**While**  
**Even though / Although**

**Even if**  
**Despite**  
**Both**  
**In spite of**  
**Meanwhile**

**Neither... nor**  
**During**  
**Due to**

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ the plot of Hollywood is invented, the show refers to real films of the time and presents dramatized cameos of famous Hollywood filmmakers.
- b) Anna May Wong had to learn \_\_\_\_\_ German and French to play in Europe.
- c) \_\_\_\_\_ Ainsley is a fictional character, Anna May Wong was a real person (§2)
- d) She would refuse to play in this film, \_\_\_\_\_ they raised her salary.
- e) She didn't land the job, \_\_\_\_\_ the fact she was perfectly suited for it.
- f) They arrived late for the show, \_\_\_\_\_ the bad traffic.
- g) Carl's starting college in September. \_\_\_\_\_, he's travelling around Europe.
- h) \_\_\_\_\_ my father loves jazz, he doesn't often listen to it.
- i) The weather was perfect. It was \_\_\_\_\_ too hot \_\_\_\_\_ too cold.
- j) I started to learn Italian \_\_\_\_\_ my stay in Rome.
- k) Sally invited me to her party last weekend. \_\_\_\_\_, I had to tell her I couldn't come.

### REMINDER

> We use **“whereas”** to highlight an important difference between two similar things or facts.

Ex: A square has four sides, whereas a triangle has three.

“Whereas” means the same as “while” in sentences expressing contrasts. It does not mean the same as “while” when “while” refers to time.

> In the temporal sense, **“while”** describes something that is happening at the same time as something else. In British English you can sometimes see the form “whilst”, which is more formal than “while”. Ex: While waiting for the food to arrive, we were happy to sit and chat

> **“Meanwhile”** means at the same time or during the intervening time.

Ex: You can set the table, and meanwhile I'll start cooking dinner.

> We use **“both”** to refer to two things or people together. Ex: Are both your parents going to Chile?

> We can use **“neither”** as a conjunction with **“nor”**. It connects two or more negative alternatives. This can sound formal in speaking. Ex: Neither Brian nor his wife mentioned anything about moving house.

> **“In spite of”** and **“despite”** express a contrast between two things. “Despite” is a little more formal than “in spite of”. We usually use “in spite of” and “despite” with a noun. Ex: He got the job in spite of his prison record. / When they arrived at Malaga it was hot, despite the fact that it was only the end of April.

> **“Even if”** means whether or not. It is used to emphasize that something will still be true if another thing happens. Ex: Even if you take a taxi, you'll still miss your plane.