

Terry ("Tess") Gerritsen
Camden
LD 957

For a century and a half, ever since one of my ancestors helped build the railroad in California, my family has been American. Yet because of my face, I have never felt fully accepted as American. Even if our roots in this country go back generations, we Asian-Americans are often identified as aliens, our patriotism is always in doubt, and our right to belong in the US questioned. In this way, we are like so many other visible minorities in the American melting pot -- minorities who have been in this country from its beginnings, who have always contributed to it, yet are seldom acknowledged in school textbooks. How many students are aware of Asian Americans' vital contributions to atomic science, medicine and technology? How many know that the most decorated unit in US military history was the 442nd, manned by Japanese Americans? How many are aware that Japanese-American families were herded by the US government into relocation camps because their loyalty was questioned?

Our schools can't present a complete picture of American history without including the experiences -- both uplifting and heartbreaking -- of those who have too often been overlooked. Maine schools could lead the way in broadening students' knowledge about all Americans, including Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. By teaching their histories, we celebrate the uniqueness of our country, and why the word United is in its name.