

Essay: Citizenship and Acts of Exclusion Against the Chinese*By The Asian American Education Project***Background:**

Poverty and famine forced many Chinese people to seek economic opportunities in the United States. At first the Chinese were welcomed as cheap labor used to fulfill the idea of “manifest destiny” held by many white Americans at the time. The Burlingame Treaty of 1868, an agreement between China and the United States, allowed the Chinese to freely enter the U.S. to ensure “a sufficient supply of Chinese labor.” These Chinese men were recruited to work in a variety of jobs and their work was essential to the country’s westward expansion. However, the Chinese received little credit and were often the victims of hate crimes and anti-Asian laws. Many of these early Chinese laborers came with the intent to work, send money home, and eventually return to China. But, many Chinese laborers later decided to instead settle in the United States; as such, they sought ways to bring their wives and children over. This created a panic, as white citizens now saw the Chinese as an invading threat, fearing the Chinese would steal their jobs and tarnish their morality.

Vocabulary:

- **Bachelor:** a male who is not or has never been married
- **Exclusion:** the act or an instance of excluding; the state of being excluded
- **Immigration:** traveling to a country for the purpose of permanent residence there
- **Immoral:** evil, sinful, or otherwise wrong behavior
- **Scapegoating:** singling out a person or group for unmerited blame and consequent negative treatment
- **Xenophobia:** fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners, or of anything that is strange or foreign

Read the text. Underline or highlight important ideas.**In this space, write down notes and questions:**

In the early 1800s, many people left China in order to flee from famine and wars. They sought better economic opportunities in the United States which was experiencing growth due to the discovery of gold in California and the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. With the conclusion of the Civil War marking the end of slavery in the U.S., Chinese immigrants filled the need for cheap labor.

In the 1870s, a financial panic hit the U.S. and unemployment skyrocketed. Labor unions of white workers formed and began to see the Chinese workers as competition. Violence occurred during this era in terms of bodily harm and property damage. Gangs would roam through the streets, go to Chinatown, and assault people. They would attack Chinese businesses and burn them down. There were riots, lynchings, burnings, and massacres of Chinese people.

White labor unions gained political power and lobbied for laws to limit the immigration of the Chinese. At that

time, white people and former African slaves not born in the U.S. were able to naturalize and become citizens. Asian immigrants however were excluded. Accordingly, they had neither the political power nor representation to make sure their needs and safety were guarded by local, state, or federal governments.

To curb Asian immigration, the Page Act of 1875 was signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant, ending the United States' open immigration policy. In practice, the Page Act restricted the immigration of Chinese women who were all assumed to be "immoral." Banning the immigration of Chinese women prevented Chinese men from having families in the United States. Additionally, there were laws against interracial marriages. The outcome resulted in the formation of "bachelor societies" among the Chinese male population. Even married men suffered under the Page Act, as their wives and children were banned from immigrating. Fathers were separated from their families. As such, the Page Act thwarted family formation and reunification.

The Page Act was ground-breaking in that it led to more anti-Asian laws, most notably the Chinese Exclusion Act. Signed on May 6, 1882 by President Chester Arthur, the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first in a series of laws explicitly used to limit immigration based on race.

When the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed, it reflected an almost widespread sentiment of "the Chinese Must Go." With much scapegoating and stereotyping at the time, the Exclusion Act restricted Chinese workers from entering the country and added additional stipulations for other Chinese wanting to enter the country. A key clause stated: "The coming of Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborers to come." However, the law did allow for the entry of "students, teachers, travelers, merchants, and diplomats," and established laws and mechanisms to arrest and deport those found in the country unlawfully, laying the foundation for the detention and deportation of certain immigrants that continues to this day.

Although anti-Chinese sentiment was overwhelming, there were advocates for Chinese and Asian immigration, such as Frederick Douglass, an African American abolitionist, orator, writer, and statesman. Douglas became a national leader in the abolitionist

movement after escaping from slavery in Maryland. In the late 1860s, as anti-Chinese sentiments grew, he spoke not only in favor of Chinese immigration, and migration more broadly, but also in favor of allowing immigrants to gain citizenship, the right to vote, and hold public office.

However, anti-Chinese fervor was the dominant narrative. The Chinese Exclusion Act was not only renewed and made permanent in the following decades, but also set a precedent for restrictive immigration and other discriminatory laws. Other immigration laws to exclude additional Asian groups were enacted, including the Immigration Act of 1917 (Asiatic Barred Zone Act), which banned immigration from the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and lumped all Asians, despite their various ethnicities and cultures, together as “Asiatic.”

In addition, racist laws and practices forbade Asians from marrying white people, attending white schools, living in certain parts of cities, testifying in court against white people, owning land and property, and holding commercial and professional licenses. During this time, Asian immigrants were not eligible to gain citizenship through naturalization, which meant they were unable to vote. This lack of political power meant discriminatory laws could be enacted and enforced against them. For example, Alien land laws specifically prevented “aliens ineligible for citizenship” from owning or leasing land, which targeted Asian immigrants. These laws and policies upheld white supremacy by excluding communities of color and made it difficult for them to gain financial security, electoral power, and long-term stability in the U.S.

The Chinese Exclusion Act was eventually repealed in 1943 when the U.S. sought to build an allyship with China against Japan during World War II. The discriminatory practices set by the Chinese exclusion laws were later applied to Japanese Americans who were forcefully removed from their homes and incarcerated. Today, Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIA) communities are still targets of exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination.

In this space, write a summary of the text in 2-3 sentences:

Bibliography

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