



TOPIC: The Chinese Exclusion Act

GRADES: 9 -12

BACKGROUND ESSAY

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. The law changed the landscape for American immigration and set a precedent in policy-making for generations to come.

Chinese immigration to the United States began in the early 1800s. Many were leaving China to flee the economic crisis, political unrest, and the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) and turned to the United States to seek better opportunities. During the Gold Rush and the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, Chinese worked as an expendable labor force. And when the end of the Civil War marked the end of slavery in the United States, Chinese filled the need for cheap labor solutions.

However, a rise in unemployment and racism gave way to an anti-Chinese movement, a movement with a rallying cry of “The Chinese must go.”

As labor unions formed, they began to see the Chinese as their competition, and ultimately they lobbied for laws to limit immigration of the Chinese.

When the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed, it reflected the rampant scapegoating and stereotyping of the Chinese workers. This law barred Chinese laborers from entering the country, only allowing Chinese students, teachers, travelers, merchants, and diplomats to still

apply for admission. This also marked the start of required immigration documents that the Chinese were required to hold on to their person to avoid deportation.

One early advocate for the Chinese was Frederick Douglass who spoke against the ban, stating that rights of immigrants, even those in the process of immigrating, were rights that should be respected and protected by those in power.

The law itself was repealed in 1943, two years after China became an Allied nation during World War II. In June 2012, the United States Congress passed a resolution of regret, H. Res. 683, introduced by Congresswoman Judy Chu from California that explicitly recognized the un-American actions and policies that unfairly targeted Chinese immigrants.

VOCABULARY

- **Xenophobia** – fear and/or hatred of anything foreign, including people

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What were some of the factors that led to an increase of Chinese laborers in the latter half of the 1800s?
- What led to the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act?
- How was the Chinese Exclusion Act an example of xenophobia in the late 19th century?
- What were the consequences of the Chinese Exclusion Act?
- How do you think it impacted the immigration of other Asians subsequently?

ACTIVITY

Give students time to research:

- The long-term consequences of the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act (social, political, economic, etc.)
- The subsequent impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act on immigration from other countries
- Subsequent changes/additions on immigration policies throughout the years, following the Chinese Exclusion Act, including contemporary policies.

Facilitate a class discussion on the long-term consequences of the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act (social, political, economic, etc.)

- What was the impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act on immigration from other countries?
- Were there other countries subsequently banned from immigration? If yes, what other countries?
- How did it impact American families in this country?
- What long term consequences does a country face when it limits immigration from certain countries?

The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first law that prohibited immigration based on race. Discuss changes in immigration policies or debates on immigration policies. Create a timeline of these policies based on shared examples from research.

Have student/s provide background information on the policies and begin your classroom discussion

- What other immigration policies and/or laws have been implemented over the years?
- What racial/ethnic groups are covered in these policies?
- What were the series of events that led to the current change or current debate?
- How are these series of events compared to events led to the Chinese Exclusion Act?
- What was the political climate in the U.S. in the respective time periods?
- Was there scapegoating involved in each time period?
- What are the consequences (social, political, economic, etc..) of these policies? For example:
 - Social: How would it impact families?
 - Political: What population of people or country would be impacted? And how?
 - Economic: How does it help or hurt the US and the world economically?

FURTHER INFORMATION

- [“Primary Documents in American History.”](#) *Chinese Exclusion Act: Primary Documents in American History (Virtual Programs & Services, Library of Congress)*
- Warner, Andy. [“Fear of Foreigners: A Cartoon History of Nativism in America.”](#) KQED
- [“Chinese Exclusion Act \(1882\).”](#) Our Documents - Chinese Exclusion Act



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