

# 1.3 - Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians

## The Asian American Education Project

<b>Grade Level(s)</b>	Grades 5 - 12
<b>Lesson Overview</b>	PBS Asian Americans Episode 1 – Breaking Ground (1850s to 1920s). Signed on May 6th, 1882 by President Chester A. Arthur, the Chinese Exclusion Act was the first law to explicitly limit immigration based on race. This lesson is designed to go further in exploring the causes and effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act through analysis of primary and secondary sources. The purpose is to showcase the conditions in the US that led to a rise in xenophobia, and in turn, race-based policies that defined the Chinese American and Asian American experience in the United States. The lesson will also have students engage in critical thinking through research and a class discussion comparing and contrasting the Chinese Exclusion Act and current immigration policies or proposed immigration policies.
<b>Lesson Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students will be able to clearly define the Chinese Exclusion Act and also articulate the stipulations and consequences it had, both in the short and long term.</li><li>• Students will be able to research on the Chinese Exclusion Act.</li><li>• Students will be able to research on and have discussion on current immigration policy or proposed immigration policy.</li></ul>

### Chinese Exclusion Act and the Exclusion of Asians Essay:

Signed on May 6th, 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. It was a product of factors in China and conditions in the United States which led to huge consequences both in that era as well as today. The law changed the landscape for American immigration and set a precedent in policy-making for generations to come.

Chinese immigration to the US began in the early 1800s. Many leaving China were fleeing the economic crisis, political unrest (two Opium Wars (1839-1860), and the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864)) to seek better opportunities. During the Gold Rush and the building of the railroad, they worked as an expendable labor force. When the end of the Civil War marked the end of slavery in the United States, Chinese filled the need for cheap labor solutions. It wasn't until the financial panic hit and unemployment skyrocketed in the 1870s that labor unions formed and began to see the Chinese as their competition. Labor unions gained political power and lobbied for laws to limit the immigration of the Chinese. Violence occurred during this era in terms of bodily and property damage. Gangs would roam through the streets. They would go to Chinatown and beat people up. They would attack Chinese laundries, burn them down and all over the West, the Pacific Northwest through Nevada, Southern California, there were riots, lynchings, burnings, massacres of Chinese. When the Chinese Exclusion Act was signed, the law reflected almost widespread sentiment that the "Chinese Must Go". There was much scapegoating and stereotyping. The law restricted laborers from entering the country and added additional stipulations to the Chinese who wanted to enter.

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



The Chinese Exclusion Act set a precedent for restrictive immigration. Between 1907 and 1934 other laws and policies were passed to exclude other Asian groups including Japanese, Koreans and Filipinos from immigration. During World War II Japan used the Chinese Exclusion Act as propaganda that the U.S. society is racist to get China to break with the U.S. Subsequently the U.S. repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943.

Congresswoman Judy Chu from California introduced a resolution of regret, House Resolution 683, that explicitly recognized the un-American actions and policies of the Chinese Exclusion Act that unfairly targeted Chinese and Asian immigrants. In June of 2012, the United States Congress passed the resolution.

At the time of this lesson's formation, Asian Americans are once again feeling the brunt of xenophobia as hate and racism increased with the fear of COVID-19. Despite decades of contributions, it doesn't take a great deal of fear to once again demonize an entire population.

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### **Vocabulary:**

- **Exclusion** - the act or an instance of excluding; the state of being excluded.<sup>1</sup>
- **Immigration** - formal process through which individuals become permanent residents or citizens of another country.<sup>2</sup>
- **Xenophobia** - fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Exclusion." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exclusion](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exclusion).

<sup>2</sup>Parry, Sarah. "Immigration." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 2 Oct. 2019, [www.britannica.com/topic/immigration](http://www.britannica.com/topic/immigration).

<sup>3</sup>"Xenophobia." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia).

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What conditions foreign and domestic led to the creation of the Chinese Exclusion Act?
2. How was the Chinese Exclusion Act an example of xenophobia in the late 19th century?
3. What were the consequences of the Chinese Exclusion Act?
4. How did it impact immigration of other Asians subsequently?

### **Activity 1:**

#### **How did the Chinese Exclusion Act make Chinese and Asian immigrants the first undocumented immigrants?**

- Show the video to the students. Have students read this lesson's essay.
1. Ask students to describe some of the factors that led to an increase of the usage of Chinese laborers in the latter half of the 1800s.
  2. Xenophobia (dislike of or prejudice of people from other countries) becomes a driving force of anti-Chinese sentiment in the West Coast, and soon grows to the rest of the nation. Describe some of the depictions or assumptions of Chinese people during this time.
  3. The text of the Chinese Exclusion Act signed in 1882 features this key clause: "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." The documentary makes note that the law allows the entry of: "students, teachers, travelers, merchants, and diplomats." it establishes both the laws and the mechanisms to arrest and deport those who are found in the country unlawfully.
    - a) On what basis were a group of people banned from entering the US?
    - b) How did the Chinese Exclusion Act make Chinese and Asian immigrants the first undocumented immigrants?

### **Activity 2:**

#### **The long-term consequences of the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act (Social, political, economic, etc.)**

- A. Give students time to research on:
  1. The long-term consequences of the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act (Social, political, economic, etc.)
  2. The subsequent impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act on immigration from other countries.
- B. Have a class discussion on:
  1. The long-term consequences of the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act (social, political, economic, etc.)
    - a) The subsequent impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act on immigration from other countries.

- b) Were there other countries subsequently banned from immigration? If yes, what other countries?
  - c) How did it impact the American families in this country?
- C. An activity on the effect of the Chinese Exclusion Act.
1. Distribute the *The Effect of the Chinese Exclusion Act* activity sheet to students. (Answer key is provided.\*)
  2. Students can work in groups on the activity.

\*See works cited in the Further Information section.

### **Activity 3:**

#### **The current immigration policies or current proposal on immigration policies.**

- A. Give students time to research on current immigration policies and current proposal on immigration policies.
- B. Have a class discussion on them.
- What is the current immigration policies and proposal on immigration policies?
  - Who 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 US in the respective time periods?
  - Was there scapegoating involved in each time period?
  - What are the consequences (social, political, economic, etc.) of the change of the current policy or what could be consequence of the proposed policy?
    - Social, for example: How would it impact the families?
    - Political, for example: What population of people or country would be impacted? And how?
    - Economic, for example: How does it help or hurt the US and the world economically?

### **Further Information**

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