

On May 6, 1882, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act, effectively barring the immigration of Chinese into the United States. The Exclusion Act is notable not only because it was the first law that prevented the entry of a specific ethnic group into the United States, but also because of its echoing effects upon other forms of restrictive immigration legislation like the Immigration Act of 1924. Originally, the Exclusion Act was to last only ten years, yet its renewal through the Geary Act in 1892 foreshadowed its indefinite renewal in 1902. The United States continued to prohibit the entry of almost all Chinese until 1943, when the Second World War necessitated an alliance with China. It was not until 2012, over a century after the passage of the original Exclusion Act, that Congress formally apologized for restricting Chinese immigration. The proposed paper will examine the Congressional Record of the Forty-seventh Congress for the debate on the Chinese Exclusion Act in order to determine why Congress deemed the Chinese such a menacing threat to the nation. The paper will also focus on the years 1875 through 1882 in order to evaluate the change in political opinion, particularly in the years after the labor uprising of 1877.

The Exclusion Act of 1882 served as the climax to decades of debate on whether Chinese immigrants had a viable and desirable presence in the United States but it was not the first attempt to limit Chinese immigration. Bills proposed in both houses of Congress calling for the restriction of Chinese entry date back to at least 1869. These bills indicate that the presence of Chinese immigrants had been a concern for several years prior to the passage of the Exclusion Act. Chinese immigration to the United States began in the 1820s but the majority of immigrants, arrived during and after the California Gold Rush. By 1880, at least 300,000 Chinese lived in the United States. Senator John F. Miller of California, who proposed the bill for Chinese exclusion (S. 71) that later became the Exclusion Act of 1882, argued that because

Chinese laborers worked for lower wages than white laborers, the Chinese took jobs that rightfully belonged to Americans. Miller and other congressmen also argued that the non-white and non-Christian Chinese corrupted the American population because the Chinese showed no desire to assimilate into American culture, choosing instead to cling to their own traditions and values. The congressmen's arguments for immigration restriction reflect both the growing labor tension of the era and the desire for a homogeneous society. Furthermore, by attributing economic and social woes to the presence of the Chinese, politicians found a convenient scapegoat for many of the problems on the West Coast, like the issue of unemployment. By analyzing the debate on Chinese immigration with an awareness of labor tension, racial pressures, and political incentives, the proposed paper will examine why politicians believed that the exclusion of Chinese would benefit the United States. Furthermore, the paper will provide insight into the significance of the Exclusion Act and its effects on today's immigration policies.

The proposed paper will be based primarily on the Congressional Record of the Forty-seventh Congress. The Congressional Record contains the dialogue and actions taken by the House and the Senate during their sessions. As such, the Congressional Record of the Forty-seventh Congress will provide valuable insight into the thought of the congressman who supported or opposed Chinese Exclusion. Bills and other documents dealing with the Chinese and China, like the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, will also be analyzed in order to trace the development of relations with the Chinese. The Congressional Record of other congressmen will also be utilized if they previously addressed the concern of Chinese immigration. For instance, though not a member of the Forty-seventh Congress, Horace Davis (R-CA) served in the Forty-fifth and Forty-sixth Congresses and his speeches reflect anti-Chinese sentiment. Because members of the House face reelection every two years and Senators every six, the issues that

congressmen must address every election change. Therefore, the proposed paper will also investigate the backgrounds of the key players involved with the Exclusion Act and determine what influenced them to advocate for or against the act. Political cartoons found in *Harper's Weekly* and *Puck* and newspaper articles found in *The New York Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* will also provide a greater understanding of how publications portrayed the Chinese.

The Chinese Exclusion Act is an area of interest for many historians. Scholarship generally focuses on the causes and effects of the Exclusion Act, and historians support one of two theses for the statute's origins. Most argue in favor of the California thesis, which holds that California served as the main agitator for anti-Chinese sentiment because of the close relations between Californian and Chinese laborers. Animosity towards the Chinese increased as Californians demanded a solution to eliminate the Chinese. Mary Roberts Coolidge's *Chinese Immigration* (1909) supports this theory and her argument is refined in Alexander Saxton's *Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (1975). Stuart Creighton Miller, in *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (1969), revokes the California thesis in favor of a race theory. Anti-Chinese sentiment was not new to Americans but rather, had been ingrained in American tradition for years because of the dominating idea of white supremacy. Another key book is Andrew Gyory's *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (1998). In his ground-breaking book, Gyory breaks with tradition by accusing Gilded Age politicians of manipulating the masses into believing that the Chinese were an enemy. The analysis of the vast amount of scholarship on Chinese Exclusion and of the Congressional Records will contribute to a greater understanding of how politicians interpreted Chinese immigration between 1875 and 1882.

Bibliography

Government Documents

Chinese Exclusion Act. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/chinex.htm> (accessed January 18, 2014).

U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 47th Congress*. U.S. Government, 1881.

Burlingame-Seward Treaty. <http://academic.udayton.edu/race/02rights/treaty1868.htm> (accessed January 30, 2014).

Books

Aarim-Heriot, Najia. *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-1882*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Coolidge, Mary Roberts. *Chinese Immigration*. New York: Holt and Company, 1909.

Chang, Iris. *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004.

Chew, Poon Ng. *The Treatment of the Exempt Classes of Chinese in the United States*. 1908.

Edwards, Rebecca. *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age: 1865-1905*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Gyory, Andrew. *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act*. North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Kwong, Peter. *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor*. New York: New Press, 1997.

———, and Dusanka Miscevic. *Chinese American: The Immigrant Experience*. New York: New Press, 2000.

———, and Dusanka Miscevic. *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America's Oldest New Community*. New York: New Press, 2005.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues: American Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. New York: Hill & Wang, 2001.

Lee, Erika. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

- McClain, Charles J. *In Search of Equality: The Chinese Struggle against Discrimination in Nineteenth Century America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- McKenzie, R. D. *Oriental Exclusion: The Effect of American Immigration Laws, Regulations, and Judicial Decisions Upon the Chinese and Japanese on the American Pacific Coast*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928.
- Miller, Stuart Creighton. *The Unwelcome Migrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Pfaelzer, Jean. *Driven Out: The Forgotten War against Chinese Americans*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.
- Roedinger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 1999.
- . *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*. New York: Verso, 1994.
- Saxton, Alexander. *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Seward, George F. *Chinese Immigration in its Social and Economic Aspects*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881.
- Tsai, Shih-shan Henry. *The Chinese Experience in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Speeches

- Davis, Horace. *Chinese Immigration. Speech of Hon. Horace Davis, of California in the House of Representatives. June 8, 1878*. Washington, 1878. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/flipomatic/cic/brk5894> (accessed January 23, 2014).
- Jones, John P. *Chinese Immigration, Speech of Hon. John P. Jones, of Nevada, in the Senate of the United States. Thursday, March 9, 1882*. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/flipomatic/cic/brk6727> (accessed January 23, 2014).
- Kearney, Denis. *Speeches of Dennis Kearney, Labor Champion*. <https://archive.org/details/SpeechesOfDennisKearneyLaborChampion1878> (accessed January 22, 2014).

Memoirs

- Blaine, James G. *Twenty Years of Congress: From Lincoln to Garfield. With a Review which led to the Political Revolution of 1860*. Norwich: Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1884.

Yung, Wing. *My Life in China and America*. New York: Kessinger Publishing, 1909.

Letters

Cowdin, Elliot C. *Chinese Immigration. Maintain the National Faith: From Miscellaneous Selections: Anti-Chinese Movement and Chinese Exclusion*. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cic:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(brk6169\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cic:@field(DOCID+@lit(brk6169))) (accessed January 22, 2014).

Ling, Chang Kwang. *Letters of Kwang Chang Ling, The Chinese Side of the Chinese Question by a Chinese Literate of the First Class*. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cic:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(chs1353\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cic:@field(DOCID+@lit(chs1353))) (accessed January 22, 2014).

Pitkin, Horace W. *Letter to President Cleveland*. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/flipomatic/cic/brk5280> (accessed January 23, 2014).

Web Pages

Chinese Immigration and the Chinese in the United States. National Archives. <http://www.archives.gov/research/chinese-americans/guide.html> (accessed January 21, 2014).

Immigrant and Ethnic America. Harpweek. <http://immigrants.harpweek.com/> (accessed January 21, 2014).

Rise of Industrial America, 1877-1900. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/rise-industrial-america-1877-1900> (accessed January 29, 2014).