

A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

ARRIVAL

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

How was Chinese immigration in the late 1800s restricted, and why?

This lesson is appropriate for units on: immigration and industrialization

KEY QUESTIONS

Who are considered desirable and undesirable immigrants and what are the criteria?
What type of reception do immigrants receive?

Students will be able to:

- describe the restrictions placed on Chinese immigration
- explain the reasons for opposition to Chinese immigration

VOCABULARY

taboo, unassimilable, indigestible, morals, laborer, retrogression

ACTIVITIES

I. Opening activity

Examine the cartoon “Which color is to be tabooed next?” According to the cartoon, how is immigration in the U.S. changing? Who are the men seated at the table and why is this of concern to them?

Explore how a contemporary version of the cartoon would have a different meaning, given the ethnic, racial and religious groups arriving in America today.

II. Discuss the opening activity

Solicit responses to the opening activity questions from volunteers.

Who are the men at the table?

What is meant by the references to “yellow” and “green”?

Which Chinese are being singled out by the change?

III. Group activity: Document analysis

A. Divide the class into small groups. Each group should have a reporter, recorder and materials handler.

B. Each group reads the document or excerpt given to it and answers the following questions:

1. What restrictions or opposition are the Chinese facing?
2. What reasons were given for the restrictions or opposition?
3. How are the Chinese described? What terms are used when referring to them?

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IV. Share learning

Each group's reporter briefly describes the group's document and reads the answers for it and asks for responses to it.

Write the responses on a large paper or board that is visible to the entire class.

V. Discuss group findings

What does the language used to refer to Chinese in the documents suggest about the attitudes towards them and opposition to their immigration?

Why do you think the Chinese immigration creates extreme attitudes and opposition?

VI. Create a timeline on Chinese immigration

A. Students read (silently or aloud as a class) the background information on Chinese immigration.

Note: Only the first page of the background as provided to me would be used at this point.

B. Create a timeline of major events and changes in China, its relations with the United States and Chinese immigration. Students can do this activity individually, with a partner or in small groups; the timelines can be reviewed as a class activity.

VII. Assessment options

A. Write a letter to a relative in China from the perspective of a Chinese immigrant living in the U.S. in 1882 prior to the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Describe the attitudes and conditions you face and advise your relative on whether or not he or she should consider coming to the United States, and why.

B. Answer the lesson aim "*How was Chinese immigration in the late 1800s restricted, and why?*" using (a) an original cartoon, (b) a poem/rap/song or (c) an essay.

MATERIALS TO BE USED

For everyone: Background on Roots of Chinese immigration.

DOCUMENTS

A.: Which Color is to be tabooed next?

B: Roots of Chinese Immigration

C: Excerpts from Transcript of Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)
Opening passage (Sect. 1, Sect. 15)

D: Boycott poster

E: The Memorial to Congress

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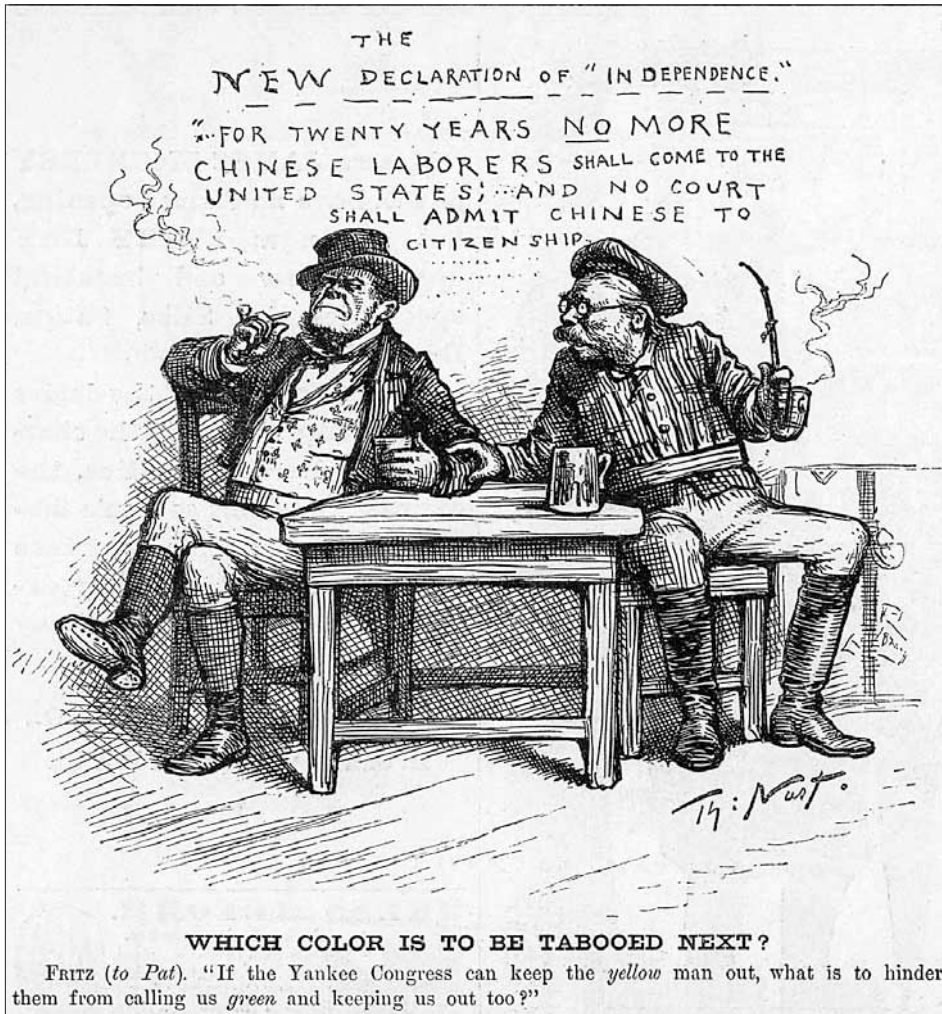
Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

“Which color is to be tabooed next?”

by Thomas Nast

Harper's Weekly

March 25, 1882



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Roots of Chinese Immigration

The Chinese developed a large navy and maritime fleet in the early fifteenth century. The Chinese Emperor banned all international trade in 1433, out of fear that the growing power of merchants threatened his sovereignty. In 1712 the Emperor issued an edict which “requested foreign governments to have those Chinese who have been abroad repatriated so that they may be executed.” Despite the edict, merchants continued to trade with other countries, especially in Southeast Asia, but they did not return.

In the early nineteenth century, the United States desired Chinese imports such as porcelain, silks, rugs and art objects, but had little to trade that the Chinese wanted. American merchants began to chafe at Chinese trade restrictions and, despite their earlier admiration for the sophistication and refinements of Chinese civilization, now condemned it as despotic and inferior.

Americans joined the European powers in forcing open Chinese markets to “free trade” and in selling opium to the Chinese. Following the British lead, the Americans sent a gunboat up the Pearl River to Canton to force the Chinese to grant “most-favored-nation” trade status in 1842. By this time the Chinese government had lost control of its borders to the European powers and the Americans and as its economy collapsed, desperate Chinese became “coolies,” forced laborers bound to a master in China and sent overseas to work for a set number of years as stipulated in a labor contract. Not coincidentally, the coolie system of labor came into being shortly after the end of the international slave trade.

The Chinese did not come in large numbers to the United States until the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill in California in 1848. Over the next four years, more than 25,000 Chinese arrived. They filled jobs in mining as Mexicans were forced out after their defeat in the Mexican War. In a society categorized by race, the Chinese did not fit into any of the established racial categories of the United States, white, black and Indian. Many employers spoke positively about the Chinese immigrants and praised them for their hard work, but white laborers saw the Chinese as a threat and convinced the legislature to place extra taxes on Chinese miners. California also prevented Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens and municipalities passed laws directed specifically against them, such as special taxes on Chinese miners and regulations enforced only against Chinese laundries.

With the construction of the transcontinental railroad in the 1860’s, the Central Pacific Rail Road corporation turned to Chinese immigrants. Many of them worked as skilled laborers but were paid less than white immigrants. White workers and their racially exclusive unions used their political power as well as violence to repress the progress of the Chinese. Employers had found Chinese workers useful during the construction of the transcontinental railroad, but upon its completion and a subsequent economic depression, the railroads no longer needed them. Anti-Chinese sentiment and violence continued to build in the 1870s until the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.

For more information, see *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America’s Oldest New Community*, by Peter Kwong and Dušanka Mišćević, New York: The New York Press, 2005

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Excerpts from the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)

An Act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to Chinese.

Whereas in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof: Therefore,

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, 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 laborer to come, or having so come after the expiration of said ninety days to remain within the United States.

SEC.15. That the words “Chinese laborers”, wherever used in this act shall be construed to mean both skilled and unskilled laborers and Chinese employed in mining.
Approved, May 6, 1882.

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Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

Flyers distributed by Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly and Butte Miners' Union in support of Chinese and Japanese boycott, c. August 1898

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BOYCOTT

A General Boycott has been declared upon all CHINESE and JAPANESE Restaurants, Tailor Shops and Wash Houses. Also all persons employing them in any capacity.


All Friends and Sympathizers of Organized Labor will assist us in this fight against the lowering Asiatic standards of living and of morals.

AMERICA vs. ASIA

Progress vs. Retrogression

Are the considerations involved.

BY ORDER OF

 *Silver Bow Trades and Labor Assembly*
and Butte Miners' Union

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San Francisco Bulletin, Dec. 19, [1881]

The Memorial to Congress

The memorial to Congress which was adopted by the Convention yesterday, puts the Chinese question rather upon more solid ground than has yet been found for it. It lays down the broad proposition that Chinese immigration is more of an invasion than anything else, which threatens the substitution of alien workers, unassimilable and indigestible, for people of our own race. This is a view of the case that will be more readily comprehended than any that has yet been presented. The Eastern mind at the start found it difficult to imagine how a young State was going to be ruined by cheap labor. It was always skeptical about the injury which it was alleged these people were doing to morals. But when it is shown that the cheap labor which has so much fascination for some thinkers means ultimately the elimination of our laboring population from the social structure, and a possible conflict with them, there cannot be much opposition except it proceeds either from a phenomenal ignorance or interested motives.

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DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY'S NEW YORK TIMES

1. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 restricted the entry of Chinese immigrants into the United States. Create a collage of three individuals featured in The New York Times whose activities and/or accomplishments reflect “inclusion” in the American way of life rather than “exclusion.” Write an essay about the contributions of these individuals.
2. Search the Web for examples of contributions made by individuals of Chinese heritage to the culture of America, but also to the betterment of society in general. Read about background on these individuals and give your own opinion of their accomplishments. I.M. Pei (architect), Maya Ying Lin (designed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial), Billie Tsien (painter), David Ho (AIDS researcher), Yao Ming (basketball player) and Henry Lee (scientist) are just a few individuals you could select for research.
3. Security at national borders is of utmost importance and is at the forefront of present-day discussions. Locate an article in The New York Times that discusses border security and who might be excluded from entry as a result of their not having proper documentation. Discuss the types of documentation that might be required.