



Summary of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1896



The Chinese Exclusion Act was an immigration law passed in 1882 that prevented Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act was the first immigration law that excluded an entire ethnic group. It also excluded Chinese nationals from eligibility for United States citizenship. The initial version of the act prevented certain kinds of Chinese laborers from entering the United States, reserving immigration rights only for teachers, merchants, officials, teachers, merchants and travelers. However, in 1924 the act was amended to prevent all Chinese nationals from immigrating to the United States. The 1924 amendments to the Chinese Exclusion Act also prevented citizens of other Asian nations from immigrating to the United States. These laws were renewed twice and remained in effect until they were repealed in 1943.

Scholars have theorized about the social factors that led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Among these factors was the increased number of Chinese citizens that immigrated to California following the Gold Rush of 1849 to participate in the mining industry and railroad construction. In response, American mining laborers adopted xenophobic protectionist tactics to stem the perceived encroachment from Chinese workers. The Workingmen's Party of California, led by demagogue Denis Kearney, led the push to have Chinese workers excluded from California. Following the Gold Rush, California experienced record unemployment rates, a fact that likely contributed to some of the racist hostility directed at Chinese immigrants. In turn, scholars have argued, politicians courted American laborers with racist legislation like the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Adapted from an article by the African-American Policy Forum