



Finding a Path Forward

**ASIAN AMERICAN PACIFIC ISLANDER
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS THEME STUDY**

Edited by Franklin Odo





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Essay 4



Immigration, Exclusion, and Resistance, 1800s-1940s

Erika Lee

*Director, Immigration History Research Center,
University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts*

Asian immigrants and their descendants have a long and rich history in the United States. They have made and remade the places where they have settled, and some of the sites where Asian immigrants first entered the country, like the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco, California, are now National Historic Landmarks. This essay focuses on Asian immigration, the formation of early communities, and the backlash against Asian immigration during the early 20th century. Asian immigrants in the United States were but a fraction (around 1 million) of the total number of immigrants arriving in the country (around 35 million) during the “century of migration” from 1830 to 1930. Yet their presence ignited an unprecedented anti-immigrant movement that shook the very foundations of U.S. politics, immigration law, and the definition of what it means to be an “American.” As a result, by 1935 nearly all Asians were

“I am an American,” declares a sign posted in the window of a Japanese American grocery store in Oakland, California; the store owner, a University of California graduate, has been forced to close following removal orders. Photograph by Dorothea Lange for the Office of War Information, March 1942; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

WHITE & POLLARD

GROcery

WA

FRUITS
AND
VEGETABLES

I AM AN AMERICAN

WANTO CO.

WANTO CO.

VEGETABLES

PHILIP MORRIS



barred from coming to the United States.

Charged with being inassimilable and even dangerous to the United States, Asian Americans used the very values of American democracy as their inspiration to protest against exclusion and discrimination. Although the exclusion laws affected different groups in different ways, the era of Asian exclusion was one of inequality and discrimination for Asian Americans overall.

BEGINNINGS: ASIANS IN EARLY AMERICA

The first Asians arrived in the Americas as part of Spain's Pacific Empire that connected the Spanish colonies in the Philippines and Latin America. Massive trading ships known as "Manila Galleons" sailed across the Pacific Ocean as early as 1565. Manned by Chinese, Filipino, and Spanish sailors, these ships left Manila with holds full of luxury goods like porcelain and silks from China, pearls from India, diamonds from Goa, cinnamon from Ceylon, pepper from Sumatra, and lacquered wood and silverware from Japan. An estimated 40,000 to 100,000 Asians from China, Japan, the Philippines, and South and Southeast Asia voyaged to the Americas between 1565 and 1815 as part of the "first wave" of Asian migration to the Americas.¹

By the late 18th century, the growing U.S. presence in Asia also brought Asians to the United States. In 1785, for example, a ship called the *Pallas* arrived in Baltimore with "Chinese, Malays, Japanese, and Moors" among its crew.² A woman named Afong Moy, who arrived in New York in 1834 on board a ship owned by two U.S.-China traders was the first Chinese woman recorded in the United States. In the 1840s, the Filipino fishing village of St. Malo, near the mouth of Lake Borgne in Louisiana, was founded. Another Filipino fishing village called Manila Village was established in Baratavia Bay, and a number of other Filipinos settled in New Orleans between 1850 and 1870.³

A parallel movement of South Asian and Chinese migrants sailed to Latin America as indentured laborers, or "coolies," to replace African slaves on plantations after the end of the African slave trade. Between 1838 and 1918, over 419,000 South Asians went to the British West Indian plantations in British Guiana, Trinidad, and Jamaica. An estimated 140,000 Chinese men went to Cuba from 1847 to 1874. Another 90,000 Chinese went to Peru from 1849 to 1874. They entered into what

some have called a "new system of slavery."⁴

CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN SEARCH OF GOLD MOUNTAIN

While both small and large communities of Asians were in place in North America and Latin America by the mid-19th century, it was the 1848 discovery of gold in Northern California and the resulting California Gold Rush that helped to inaugurate a new era of mass migration from Asia to the United States. The Chinese came first.

In 1849, there were 325 Chinese "forty-niners" in California's gold country. One thousand more reached San Francisco by 1850, and as many as 30,000 Chinese migrated to San Francisco in 1852.⁵ They came in search of *Gum Saan*, "gold mountain," mostly from just eight districts in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province. But it was a mixture of domestic crises and foreign intervention in China that sustained and expanded the immigration of Chinese from this region to the United States over the next several decades.

A population explosion, natural disasters, and wars and rebellions like the Taiping Rebellion (1850 to 1864) and the Opium Wars (1839 to 1842) with Great Britain created much domestic instability in the region. Unequal treaties and economic relationships between China and western imperial powers meant higher taxes on local peasants. Western imperialism also brought the establishment of regular steamship routes between Hong Kong and San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, and many other ports along the west coast of the United States. American traders and missionaries introduced the Chinese to the idea of America. Labor recruiters and steamship agents made it easy to buy tickets and arrange for the journey to the U.S.

By the early 20th century, China experienced further economic, political, and social instability as attempts to restore order under the Qing Empire faltered and Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War (1894 to 1895). European imperialist powers tightened their grip on China's economy by forcibly occupying more territory and port cities. When the 1911 Chinese Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen failed to bring stability, powerful warlords emerged as the dominant power brokers in many parts of the country, and foreign imperialism continued to hinder China's economic

development. Internal rivalry between the Guomindang (Nationalist Party) and the Communists beginning in the late 1920s, and a full-scale war with Japan in the 1930s continued to foster economic, social, and political insecurity and provided additional incentives for Chinese to seek work and permanent resettlement abroad. At the same time, industrialization and the expansion of American capitalism drove an incessant need for labor in the United States.

Chinese immigrants answered the call. Lee Chi Yet, orphaned at a young age in Poon Lung Cheng, Toisan, expressed some of the feelings of desperation common amongst Chinese immigrants during this time. As he told an interviewer, he was “kill[ing] himself for nothing” as a farmer in the early 1900s. He emigrated to the United States in 1917. More than 80 years later, he explained his decision: “What the hell kind of life I have? I suffer! My eye just looking for a way to get out. I got to look for a way to go. I want to live, so I come to the United States.”⁶ Once in San Francisco, he became a domestic servant and then moved to New York where he worked in Chinese laundries and restaurants for the rest of his life.

Once the initial stream of Chinese immigrants had begun to go abroad, chain migration networks easily fell into place. Faster and bigger trans-Pacific ships competed for passengers, and a multinational network of Chinese and white labor recruiters brought Chinese from Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta across the Pacific to fill labor shortages on Hawaiian and Caribbean plantations and mines and railways in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.⁷

Immigrants were overwhelmingly young, male laborers who came from the farming and laboring classes in the Pearl River Delta. Over time, a growing number of non-laborer Chinese also chose to migrate abroad as a necessary form of economic survival. Chinese women immigrated to the United States, but a number of factors limited Chinese female migration. Labor recruiters wanted a mobile male labor force and discouraged the migration of women and families. Chinese families viewed migration as a temporary condition and thus encouraged the men to go without their wives and children. And U.S. immigration laws like the 1875 Page Act either treated Chinese women applying for admission as suspected prostitutes or allowed them to enter only as dependents of a husband or father who

was himself eligible for entry under U.S. law.

By 1870, there were 63,000 Chinese in the United States, most of them (77 percent) in California. Many had been recruited to help build the United States’ great transcontinental railroad. The Central Pacific Railroad (CPR) Company president praised the Chinese as “quiet, peaceable, industrious, economical,” and acknowledged that “without them it would be impossible to complete the western portion of this great National highway.” As the CPR was being built eastward, the Union Pacific Railroad was being built westward to Promontory Point, Utah, where the two railroads would meet and finally link the country by rail for the first time. Chinese laborers proved to be such a capable and reliable work force that CPR agents sent for more laborers from China and paid their passage to the United States. By 1867, 12,000 Chinese, representing 90 percent of the workforce, were building the railroad.⁸

The Chinese cleared trees, blasted rocks, and laid tracks. The rugged mountains of the Sierra Nevada “swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, shoveling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth,” described one observer. Many Chinese died during the winter of 1866 when snowstorms covered construction workers and trapped them under snowdrifts. Others lost their lives in explosions while trying to dynamite tunnels through the mountains. One newspaper estimated that at least 1,200 Chinese immigrants died in the building of the railroad.⁹

In 1867, 5,000 Chinese went on strike to demand higher pay and fewer hours. “Eight hours a day good for white men, all the same good for Chinamen,” they declared. Railroad baron Charles Crocker responded by cutting off the miners’ food supply. Isolated and starving in their work camps in the mountains, the strikers surrendered.¹⁰ When the Central Pacific and Union Pacific Railroads met at Promontory Point on May 10, 1869, to lay the last spike to link the transcontinental railroad, the Chinese workers who had made it possible were nowhere to be found in official photographs commemorating the occasion.

With industrialization and the expansion of American capitalism driving an incessant need for labor, Chinese immigrants also worked in the rapidly expanding mining, lumber, fishing, and agricultural industries in the American and Canadian West. On the Hawaiian Islands, Chinese were heavily recruited to work on sugar

plantations. Chinese laborers quickly became “indispensable” as miners and railroad and farm laborers. They were hired again and again for jobs that were believed to be too dirty, dangerous, or degrading for white men and were paid on a separate and lower wage scale than whites.¹¹

At the turn of the century, 95 percent of the Chinese population in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Delta region worked as farmers, farmworkers, fruit packers, and in other agriculture-related occupations. By the end of the 19th century, Chinese immigrants had also turned marshland in California’s Central Valley into some of the most productive and fertile farmlands in the country.¹²

Working-class Chinese women also filled important niches in the rural and urban economies in which Chinese lived. They worked alongside their husbands in Chinese-owned restaurants, shops, and laundries. By World War I, Chinese women dominated the garment industry in San Francisco, sewing clothes. Juggling their dual responsibilities as homemakers and wage earners, Chinese women were indispensable partners in their families’ struggles for economic survival in the United States.¹³

HUGE DREAMS OF FORTUNE: JAPANESE IMMIGRANTS

After the initial migrations of Chinese to the United States, other Asian immigrants followed. Japanese were

the second largest group, and 338,459 Japanese emigrated to Hawai‘i and the U.S. between 1868 and 1941. Most were from farming families who struggled to make ends meet, as the Japanese government imposed higher and higher taxes to fund its modernization and industrialization programs during the “Meiji Restoration.” These programs were designed to protect Japan from encroaching European and American dominance in Asia, but the high taxes hit Japanese farmers particularly hard.

Following the pattern of labor recruitment first used with the Chinese, American labor agents quickly established themselves in Japan. By the 1880s, the Japanese government was also actively promoting emigration abroad. On January 20, 1885, the first group of Japanese immigrants boarded the *City of Tokio* at Yokohama and headed to Honolulu to work on the Hawaiian sugar plantations. Word spread back across the Pacific Ocean that a common plantation laborer in Hawai‘i could earn four to six times more in Hawai‘i than in Hiroshima. Labor contractors and emigration companies fed the emigration *netsu*, or fever, and many Japanese could talk only of going to *Amerika*, which collectively referred to Hawai‘i, the United States, and Canada. One poet captured the feelings of many *issei* (immigrant) dreams:

Huge dreams of fortune
Go with me to foreign lands
Across the ocean



A view of the Arlington Heights citrus groves in Riverside, California, where the agricultural development of the region by Asian laborers transformed California into a premier citrus producer in the twentieth century, 1968. Photo courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Workers harvest oranges in the Arlington Heights citrus groves, 1968. Photo courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Family fortunes
Fall into the wicker trunk
I carry abroad.⁴

The first Japanese immigrants were predominantly *dekaseginin*, young men who intended to return home. Few women or families came to the United States until the early 20th century. In Hawai‘i, the Japanese joined Chinese, Korean, and Filipino laborers on the islands and, together, they helped transform the sugar industry in the U.S. colony. Grouped in work gangs of 20 to 30 workers, the plantation laborers “worked like machines,” as one Japanese laborer complained. *Lunas*, or field bosses, constantly supervised their work, sometimes using their sharp whips to discipline workers. To pass the time, many of them sang “hole hole bushi,” plantation songs created by Japanese immigrant plantation workers to express their frustrations and sustain their spirits during the hard workday. “Kane wa Kachiken. Washa horehore yo. Ase to namida no. Tomokasegi,” some women sang. (My husband cuts the cane stalks and I trim their leaves. With sweat and tears we both work for our means.)¹⁵

Japanese plantation workers organized together to fight for better working conditions and fairer pay. In the early 1900s, Japanese labor activism sparked an upheaval in the plantation system, culminating in the great Japanese strike of 1909, one of the most massive

and sustained strikes in the history of Hawai‘i. They continued to protest labor conditions on the plantations, but soon, the majority were leaving them altogether to pursue other economic opportunities, especially beyond the Hawaiian Islands.¹⁶

On the United States mainland, Japanese filled the jobs that Chinese immigrants once held. Labor contractors sent them to railroads, mines, lumber mills, fish canneries, farms, and orchards throughout the Pacific Coast states. In the cities, Japanese worked as domestic servants. In 1909, 40,000 Japanese worked in agriculture, 10,000 on the railroads, and 4,000 in canneries.¹⁷ As they began to consider permanent residency in the U.S., many turned to agriculture just as increased demand for fresh produce in the cities and the development of a distribution system that carried produce across the nation in refrigerator cars helped fuel an agricultural revolution in the state. Japanese contracted, shared, and leased farmland throughout the U.S. West. In 1900, there were 37 Japanese farms in the U.S. with a combined acreage of 4,674 acres. By 1910, Japanese had 1,816 farms with a total acreage of 99,254. On the eve of World War II, they grew 95 percent of California’s fresh snap beans and peas, 67 percent of the state’s fresh tomatoes, and 44 percent of its onions.¹⁸

As economic conditions in the U.S. improved, many Japanese men focused on settling down. They engaged in *yobiyose*, or the “called immigrant” system, and asked



Filipino gang labor in a Japanese-owned pea field near Pismo Beach, California, 1936. Photo by Dorothea Lange; courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

relatives and matchmakers back home to introduce them to suitable wives. To convince their prospective brides that they were a good match, they often sent photographs of themselves in western suits in front of fancy American cars and big houses. What the women who received these photos did not know was that the suits were borrowed, the backdrops were staged, and the photographs themselves were often years old. Buoyed by high hopes, many “picture brides” had their expectations dashed when they finally arrived in the U.S. and found their husbands to be older and poorer than they had represented themselves to be. The reality of their harsh lives in the United States also often led to life-long disappointments and difficult, if not failed, marriages. But with grit and perseverance, these early *issei* raised their families and helped form a vibrant Japanese American community before World War II.

KOREAN IMMIGRANTS

Korean immigrants arrived in the United States later than the Chinese and Japanese immigrants, and their numbers were much smaller. With Korea a protectorate and then a formally annexed territory of Japan by 1910, Korean migration was promoted by U.S. businessmen and labor recruiters but strictly regulated by the Japanese-controlled government in Korea to serve its own colonial needs. It allowed Koreans to leave beginning in 1902 but then banned emigration in order to prevent Koreans from competing with Japanese laborers already in Hawai‘i and to keep an ample supply of Koreans at home to support Japanese expansionist projects.¹⁹ Thus,

only 7,400 Koreans left for Hawai‘i between December of 1902 and May of 1905. “The Japanese were cruel oppressors,” Korean immigrant Duke Moon explained.²⁰ Ten percent of Korean migrants were women, far from representing an equal sex ratio, but larger than the female Chinese immigrant populations at the time.²¹

Most Koreans on the U.S. mainland were farm laborers who, like other Asian immigrants, helped to turn California agriculture into a multi-million dollar business in the 20th century. They often worked together in cooperative Korean “gangs,” following the crops or working in light industry. The agricultural towns of Dinuba, Reedley, Sacramento, and Delano attracted nearly 83 percent of the Korean population in the U.S. Many of them became tenant farmers and truck farmers and worked alongside California’s multiracial farm laboring populations of Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, South Asians, Filipinos, whites, and African Americans.²²

SOUTH ASIAN IMMIGRANTS

At the same time that Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans were coming to the United States, South Asians were also heading to both Canada and the U.S. From 1904 to 1907, 5,179 South Asians entered Canada. From 1910 to 1932, 8,055 South Asians were admitted into the United States. The beginnings of South Asian migration to North America came on the heels of and overlapped with the migration of South Asian indentured laborers to the Caribbean. Decades of economic dislocation, high taxes, and farming losses caused by British colonial policies encouraged people to leave their homes for mul-

tiple destinations abroad. Many came from Punjab, in present-day Pakistan and India, which suffered heavily from a population explosion, droughts, famines, and severe epidemics.

Steamship company agents advertised cheap fares and flooded the Punjabi countryside with flyers that described great riches and “opportunities of fortune-making” in Canada and the United States. As one migrant explained, the advertisements and recruiters typically stated that “if men were strong, they could get two dollars a day,” which was considered a fortune at the time. Forty men went abroad from his village alone in just two years.²³

A diverse group of Sikh, Muslim, and Hindus answered recruiters’ calls to cross the seas. Most were

single, young men in their early 20s who had been independent farmers in their native villages, but there were also small numbers who came as students, merchants, and peddlers. Those who were married often left their wives and children at home, for passage to North America was expensive. U.S. and Canadian immigration policies made it almost impossible for women and children to immigrate, and many migrants intended to return home. By the 1910s, South Asians were hired in droves to keep California’s agricultural industry booming. They worked in the fruit orchards of Vaca Valley; the beet fields of Hamilton, Oxnard, and Visalia; the celery, potato, and bean fields near Stockton; and the orange groves in southern California.

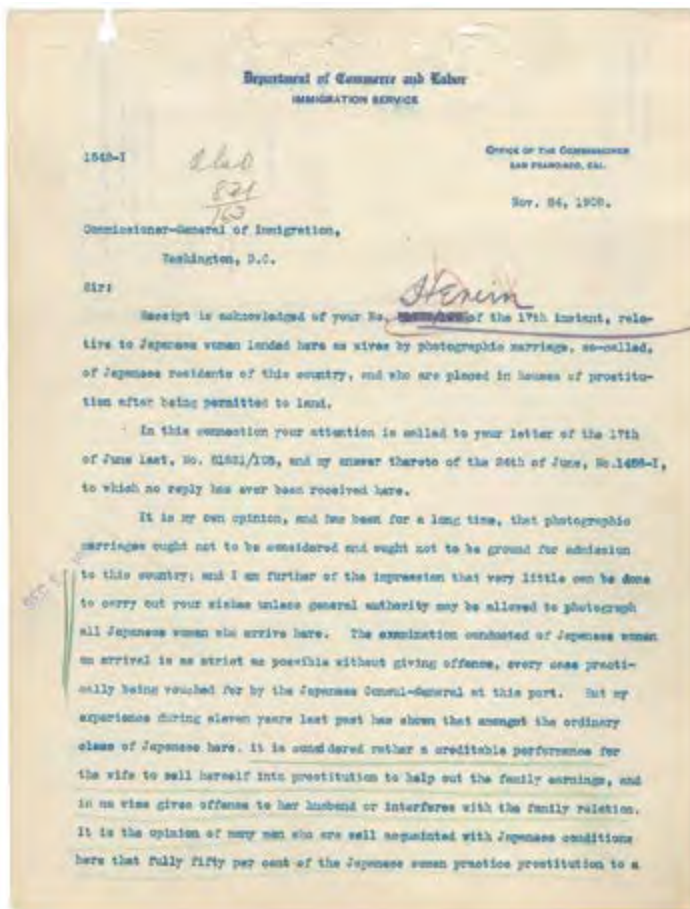
U.S. NATIONALS: FILIPINOS

The last large group of Asians to come to the United States before World War II was Filipino, U.S. nationals coming from the Philippines, a U.S. colony beginning in 1898. As a result, Filipinos were raised to pledge allegiance to the flag and consider themselves Americans. “We have heard much of America as a land of the brave and the free, land of opportunity, and we pictured her as a land of ‘Paradise;’” one Filipino told an interviewer in 1924.²⁴

U.S. imperialism also allowed Filipinos freedom of movement during a time of increasing immigration regulations. Unlike immigrants, Filipinos, as U.S. nationals, were not subjected to immigration laws or immigrant inspections, and 150,000 migrated to Hawai’i and to the U.S.²⁵ The first Filipinos to come to the United States came at the invitation of the U.S. government under the “Pensionado Act of 1903,” which brought a few thousand elite Filipino students, known as *pensionados*, to attend U.S. universities around the country.

By the early 20th century, Hawaiian plantation labor recruiters had identified the Philippines as the next source of labor from Asia.

Soon, labor agents known as “drummers” were flocking to the Philippines to show prospective migrants movies about the “glorious adventure[s] and the beautiful opportunities” for Filipinos in Hawai’i.²⁶ Between 1907 and 1919, recruiters from the Hawaiian Sugar Plantation



A 1908 letter from the Commissioner of Immigration at San Francisco to the Commissioner-General in Washington, D.C., requesting the authority to photograph Japanese women entering the country on the grounds that Japanese culture encourages proxy, or picture, brides to sell themselves into prostitution to support their families. He complains that, indeed, “fully fifty per cent of the Japanese women practice prostitution to a greater or less extent.” Letter courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.

Association brought over 24,000 Filipinos to Hawai'i. From 1920 to 1929, 48,000 more followed.²⁷ After 1924, when new U.S. laws closed the door even further to Asian immigration, more than 4,000 Filipinos arrived in California each year. By 1930, there were 56,000 Filipinos in the United States.²⁸ Most were young men joining their fathers, uncles, cousins, brothers, and friends. In 1930, there were only 2,500 Filipino women out of a total of 42,500 Filipinos in California. They were outnumbered 14 to one in the state. The few women who did migrate to the United States came as students, accompanied their husbands, or were sent to join family already there.²⁹

Filipinos were a crucial source of labor in Hawai'i, California, the Pacific Northwest, and Alaska. Their labor helped to turn California's agricultural industry into an economic success, but they worked in unbearable conditions and were horribly exploited. In Salinas, they earned 15 cents an hour up until 1933, when the wages were raised by five cents.³⁰ They were, according to writer Carey McWilliams, among the "most viciously exploited" laborers recruited by California growers to "make up their vast army of 'cheap labor.'"³¹

THE ANTI-CHINESE MOVEMENT AND THE CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT OF 1882

Almost from their initial arrival into the U.S., Asian immigrants were treated differently from other immigrants. Viewed as another "race problem," they were treated more like African Americans and American Indians than like European immigrants. Asians were singled out for discriminatory laws that affected their ability to enter the country, their rights in the U.S., where they could live, what work they could do, and even who they could marry.

As the first to arrive in large numbers, the Chinese were the initial targets of anti-Asian movements and policies. As early as 1852, Chinese miners were required to pay a special tax in California. Although the law was aimed at all foreigners, it was primarily enforced against the Chinese. In 1854, the California Supreme Court ruled that Chinese immigrants, like African Americans and American Indians, should be prohibited from giving testimony in cases involving a white person. In support of its decision, the Court argued that Chinese immigrants were a "distinct people...whom nature has marked as

inferior," and as such should not have the right to testify against a (white) citizen. In 1855, California Governor John Bigler approved a bill which taxed any master or owner of a ship found to have brought Asian immigrants to the state. The bill was later struck down by the California Supreme Court as being unconstitutional. The next year, the state assembly issued a report that described Chinese as a "distinct and inferior race," a "nation of liars," and a danger to white labor.³²

A full-fledged anti-Chinese movement was in place by the 1870s, especially in the West but also growing nationally. The California Workingmen's Party leader Denis Kearney charged that the Chinese were imported "coolies" engaged in a new system of slavery that degraded American labor. Chinese men were depicted as a sexual threat who preyed upon white women and a menace to acceptable gender roles in American society, because they engaged in "women's work" of cleaning and cooking. The "Chinese Must Go!" became the rallying cry heard throughout the U.S. West.

Beginning in the 1850s and continuing until the end of the 19th century, Chinese were systematically harassed, rounded up, and driven out of cities and towns across the West. During the winter of 1858 to 1859, a race war began in California's gold fields, as armed mobs forced Chinese out of various campsites and towns. By the end of the 1850s, only 160 Chinese miners remained in California's Shasta County, down from 3,000 in 1853. On October 24, 1871, 17 Chinese were lynched in Los Angeles after a policeman was shot by a Chinese suspect, and a mob of nearly 500, which represented nearly a tenth of the entire population of Los Angeles at the time, attacked the Chinese community. The Chinese massacre in Los Angeles was the largest mass lynching in American history. On November 3, 1885, a mob of 500 armed men descended upon two Chinese neighborhoods in Tacoma, Washington, and forced all 800 to 900 Chinese residents out of the city. Three days later, Seattle demanded that all of its Chinese residents leave town.³³

Anti-Chinese race riots, violence, and local laws were all preludes to federal immigration exclusion. After decades of lobbying, anti-Chinese groups succeeded in convincing the federal government to pass laws restricting Chinese immigration. "The gates must be closed," senators testified in the U.S. Senate.³⁴ In 1882, the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion



"The tables turned - how our streets will look next year as a result of the Chinese invasion." A caricature shows a Caucasian women standing idle as Chinese men advertise themselves as babysitters, launderers, and servants, 1880. Drawing published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Act prohibiting the entry of Chinese laborers into the United States and allowing only select "exempt" classes of Chinese (merchants, students, teachers, travelers, and diplomats) to enter the country. It was the first time in U.S. history that the federal government had enacted such broad restrictions on immigration based on race and class.

The Chinese in the United States referred to the Chinese Exclusion Laws as a "hundred cruel laws" that were "more ferocious than tigers." "Why do they not legislate against Swedes, Germans, Italians, Turks and others?" asked Yung Hen, a poultry dealer in San Francisco. There are no strings on those people... For some reason, you people persist in pestering the Chinamen.³⁵

THE 'YELLOW PERIL' OF JAPANESE IMMIGRATION

With America's gates closed to Chinese immigration, anti-Asian activists next targeted the growing numbers of Japanese. Japanese were often viewed along the same lines as the Chinese: both groups were inassimilable cheap laborers who were threats to white workers and to existing race relations. But restrictionists were also concerned about Japanese immigrants' connection to their increasingly powerful homeland. Many whites suspected that Japanese immigrants were actually a colonizing force sent from Japan to take over the west coast of North America. And unlike Chinese immi-

grant communities, the Japanese population included a substantial number of women and an increasing number of children, meaning that the Japanese communities in North America were likely to stay in the U.S.

On May 14, 1905, delegates from 67 local and regional labor, political, and fraternal organizations met to form the Japanese-Korean Exclusion League in San Francisco. Their goal was the total exclusion of Japanese and Korean immigrants from the United States, including the territory of Hawai'i. The movement to restrict Japanese immigration grew nationally. In 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order that excluded from the continental United States any individuals involved in secondary migration from Hawai'i, Canada, or Mexico, an order aimed at Japanese immigrants.³⁶

As part of the 1908 "Gentlemen's Agreement," the Japanese Government agreed to stop issuing passports to any laborers, skilled or unskilled, destined for the United States. Although laborers were barred, family members of Japanese already in the United States could still apply for admission. From 1909 to 1920, almost 93,000 Japanese came to the United States. The largest number were so-called "picture brides," young women in Japan who had been arranged in marriage to Japanese immigrants in the United States.³⁷ Supporters of Asian exclusion viewed the increase and permanency of Japanese migration with alarm, and a new phase of



Japanese picture brides arriving at Angel Island, California, c. 1910. Between 1909 and 1920, the largest number of Japanese to come to the United States were so-called "picture brides," young women in Japan who had been arranged in marriage to Japanese immigrants in the United States. Photo courtesy of California State Parks. Image 090-706.

the anti-Japanese movement, one that focused on the so-called "Yellow Peril" of Japanese immigration, began.

Laws aimed at checking Japanese economic competition were passed in many western states beginning in the early 1900s. In California, the 1913 Alien Land Law allowed "aliens ineligible to citizenship," a legal category applicable only to Asian immigrants, to lease land for only three years and barred them from further land purchases. By 1921, Washington, Colorado, Arizona, and Texas had all adopted similarly restrictive alien land laws as well, and two years later, Oregon and Idaho passed similar bills.³⁸

An extensive "yellow peril" literature argued that Japanese immigrants were "colonists" in disguise who could easily facilitate an invasion from Japan. With such wide circulation of "yellow peril" fears in almost every form of North American politics, writing, and popular culture, support for restricting Japanese immigration grew. In 1924, a new immigration act closed the door to any further Asian immigration by denying admission to all aliens who were "ineligible for citizenship, (i.e. those to whom naturalization was denied). This clause was specifically aimed at the Japanese. And it was effective. After decades of activism by anti-Japanese activists, the gates to the United States were closed to Japanese immigrants.

THE 'HINDU INVASION'

Following closely on the heels of the anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese movements along the Pacific coast was a new anti-immigrant movement targeting South Asians. Nativists argued that South Asians were taking away white jobs and were immoral public health menaces to

America. They were also labeled the least assimilable of all the immigrant groups in America, and their growing involvement in Indian nationalist activities made them appear as dangerous radicals. Racial tension and violence targeting South Asians escalated in the summer of 1907 in Bellingham, Washington. White leaders of the growing labor movement made Asian exclusion their central issue. When white workers were fired at the Whatcom Falls Mill Company plant and South Asian workers were hired to take their place, a thousand union supporters marched down the main streets of Bellingham on Wednesday, September 4th, shouting "Drive out the Hindus." Newspapers reported that a crowd numbering 500 participated in the violence. South Asians were pulled from their beds, robbed of their money, beaten, dragged off of streetcars, or driven out of town or to the city jail. The next day, the rest of the South Asian community gathered up what they could find of their belongings and left Bellingham by boat or train for Vancouver, Seattle, or Oakland.

A few months later, a "Continuous Journey" order effectively barred South Asians from Canada, including the wives and children of South Asians already in the country. In the United States, claims that a "Hindu invasion" was ruining the country began to circulate. In 1917, exclusionists achieved their goal. The Immigration Act of 1917 established the "Asiatic Barred Zone," which officially excluded much of Asia and the Pacific Islands. At the same time, South Asians fell victim to western states' alien land laws that prevented them from owning and leasing land like other Asian immigrants. And in 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Bhagat Singh Thind v.*

the United States that South Asians were not eligible for naturalized U.S. citizenship.

“NO FILIPINOS ALLOWED”

As U.S. nationals, Filipinos faced little opposition when they first arrived in Hawai‘i and in the U.S. But as Filipino migration grew steadily in the 1920s, they were increasingly seen as another “Asiatic invasion” that was worse than the Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian “invasions” that had preceded them. Despite the fact that Filipinos worked largely in agriculture with Mexican and other Asian immigrant laborers, California labor officials argued that Filipinos, like other Asians, took away jobs from a broad swath of white American workers. Filipinos were considered “backward” and “untamed.” Signs that read “Positively No Filipinos Allowed” or “No Filipinos or Dogs Allowed” were blatantly displayed in many California towns.³⁹ But the primary complaint against Filipinos seemed to be that their frequent associations and unions with white women crossed the taboo against interracial sex. One anti-Filipino activist complained that Filipinos were the “worst form of Orientals,” because their interracial relationships brought about the “delinquency of young girls.” In 1933, California’s attorney general extended the state’s antimiscegenation civil code to include Filipinos, and, thereafter, Filipino-white marriages were illegal.⁴⁰

With such deep-rooted and passionate racism circulating in towns and cities in the U.S. West, it was common for Filipinos to be victims of violence by both



Detention Center, Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, May 2013. Photo by Carol Highsmith; courtesy the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

official law enforcement officers and those seeking to impose vigilante justice. Writer Carlos Bulosan put it bluntly: “It is a crime to be Filipino in California.”⁴¹ On October 24, 1929, a mob of 300 whites threatened a Filipino man in Exeter, California, after he had wounded a white truck driver with a knife.⁴² A few months later in 1930, mobs ranging in size from 200 to 800 gathered outside a Filipino club outside of Watsonville, threatening to lynch the Filipino patrons inside.

In the wake of the well-publicized race riots, labor, and patriotic organizations made Filipino exclusion a federal legislative goal. Because the Philippines were part of the U.S. empire, Filipinos were colonial subjects who could not be excluded from coming to the United States. A coalition of Philippine nationalists in the Philippines and Filipino exclusionists in the United States worked together to craft a compromise. The result was the Tydings-McDuffie Act, which was signed into law in the United States on March 24, 1934. It granted the Philippines commonwealth status and a promise of independence after a 10-year waiting period. It also changed the status of Filipinos from U.S. “nationals” to “aliens.” The Philippines were henceforth to be considered a “separate country” with an annual immigration quota of 50. Exclusionists had won. And so had Filipino nationalists. On the other hand, prospective Filipino migrants had lost.⁴³

ANGEL ISLAND: IMMIGRANT GATEWAY TO AMERICA

One of the most important places where the history of Asian immigration and exclusion was made was the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay. From 1910 to 1940, over half a million people from over 80 different countries sailed through the Golden Gate. As the main port of entry for immigrants crossing the Pacific Ocean from Asia, Angel Island is thus the place where many Asian American families first started their American journeys. Now a National Historic Landmark, it is also one of the country’s foremost historic sites related to Asian Pacific American history.

The largest island in the San Francisco Bay, Angel Island was once used as a temporary hunting and fishing camp for the area’s Hookoeko tribe of the Coast Miwok Am Indians. The Spanish, French, Russian, and British used the island as a base of naval, whaling, and colonial operations. It was a cattle ranch during Cali-



Interior of the men's dormitory at the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay, California. May 2013. Photo by Carol Highsmith; courtesy of the Library of Congress.

fornia's Mexican era. After the U.S.-Mexican war, the U.S. turned Angel Island into a military base. In 1904, the federal government began constructing an immigration station on the island.

The need for such a facility was great. The Chinese Exclusion Act required all Chinese passengers to be inspected and approved for admission. At first, these inspections took place on the steamships that brought the Chinese across the Pacific. But immigrant inspectors soon faced obstacles as inspections became lengthier and more complex. To help solve this problem, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, one of the largest shipping lines carrying people and goods across the Pacific Ocean, built a detention facility for Chinese passengers near its offices on Pier 40 in San Francisco. Inspectors admitted that it was a "fire trap" but did not provide proper security. What was needed, immigration officials insisted, was an isolated and secure facility where Chinese (and other immigrant) detainees could be separated from the citizens of the U.S. while they were examined for contagious diseases and examined and interrogated to insure that they were eligible to enter the country. Angel Island seemed to offer the perfect solution.

On January 22, 1910, the immigration station on Angel Island opened its doors. Over the next thirty years, it processed, admitted, detained, and rejected immigrants from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. An

estimated 300,000 immigrants were detained at the immigration station, including 100,000 Chinese, 85,000 Japanese, 8,000 South Asians, 1,000 Koreans, and 1,000 Filipinos.

Angel Island thus became one of the most important sites where America's unequal immigration laws were enforced. It was a gateway into America for thousands of immigrants who went on to strive towards their own version of the American Dream. But it also turned away countless newcomers and processed the deportation

of thousands of U.S. residents. How Asian immigrants fared on Angel Island depended on a number of factors: U.S. international relations, histories of colonialism, and U.S. immigration policies that treated individuals differently according to their race, class, gender, and nationality.

Chinese immigrants had to contend with the ever-tightening Chinese exclusion laws and the strict enforcement procedures put into place by the U.S. government. At the same time, the desire and need to immigrate to the U.S. pushed Chinese to try to come to the U.S. in spite of the exclusion laws. Many learned to evade or circumvent the laws by taking the "crooked path" into the United States. It began when some falsely claimed membership in one of the classes that were exempt from the exclusion laws, such as Chinese merchants or native-born citizens of the United States. The 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco destroyed all of the city's birth records and the number of Chinese claiming birthright citizenship increased. If successful, their citizenship status allowed them to enter and reenter the U.S. and to bring in their wives and children. A multinational business in false papers and relationships, or "paper sons," sprang up to meet the demand for immigration to the U.S. "The trick is this," explained Mr. Yuen, an immigrant who bought paper son papers. "You tell the immigration office, 'I have been in China three years, I have three sons, these are their birthdays, the names and so forth.' Few years later, if you do have your own [sons,] then you bring them over here, if not, then

you could sell these papers, you know. There's always a lot of buyers ready to buy. You try to sell to your own village, or a similar last name."⁴⁴

The Chinese experience on Angel Island thus became a contest of wills and wits. Immigration officials were tasked with enforcing the exclusion laws and ensuring that all who applied for admission were eligible under the terms of the law. Sometimes their own biases as well as the institutionalized discrimination built into the laws made enforcement practices arbitrary and degrading. On the other hand, Chinese applicants for admission—those who had a legal right to enter and those who were trying to enter under false pretenses—were subjected to longer and longer interrogations, cross-examinations, detentions, and legal bills.

In attempts to distinguish false claims from legitimate ones, Chinese applicants were questioned for hours about their status, family relationships, and home villages. Typical questions included: What are the marriage and birth dates of all of your family members? Where are your paternal grandparents buried? How many steps lead up to your house? How many rows of houses are in your village? Who lives in the third row?



A 1922 signed affidavit by Goon Mar Sam, a native-born U.S. citizen, requesting permission to bring his two sons, Goon Yuey Wah and Goon Yuck Wah to the United States. Further investigation revealed both to be paper sons. Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration.



Part of a transcript of the interrogation of Leong Wing Dong, on November 7, 1966, in San Francisco. He confessed to entering the country under a false name as the alleged son of Gong Lun, a U.S. citizen. Leong admitted to immigrating with seven other "immigration siblings" and claimed three "immigration children," in addition to his real children, although those immigration slots remained unused. Image courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the INS.

These intensive interrogations led to lengthy detentions. Chinese made up 70 percent of all immigrant detainees and their average stay was for two to three weeks, the longest of all the immigrant groups coming through Angel Island.⁴⁵ Some were even detained for months or years. The poems carved into the walls of the detention barracks at the Angel Island Immigration Station reflect Chinese migrants' frustration, anger, and sadness of having to endure such discrimination.

I clasped my hands in parting with my brothers and classmates.

Because of the mouth, I hastened to cross the American ocean.

How was I to know that the western barbarians had lost their hearts and reason?

With a hundred kinds of oppressive laws, they mistreat us Chinese.⁴⁶

Japanese immigrants—mostly returning residents and "picture brides" sent for by Japanese already in the U.S.—were the second largest group to be processed through Angel Island. Although they were also inspected

and interrogated like the Chinese, Japanese immigrants faced much less scrutiny. Their home government of Japan—then a strong imperial power—took care to protect its citizens abroad, carefully vet all prospective immigrants, and had the diplomatic respect of the U.S. government. Japanese were generally admitted within a day or two, and less than 1 percent was excluded.

The approximately 8,000 South Asians who entered the United States through Angel Island were a diverse group of laborers, students, and Indian nationalists. Most started coming just as the immigration station on Angel Island opened its doors for operation in 1910. Labeled a “Hindu Invasion” or a “Tide of Turbans,” South Asians became the targets of increased anti-Asian sentiment. As a result, South Asians had the highest rejection rate of all immigrants passing through the Angel Island Immigration Station during its 30 year history, reaching a peak of 54.6 percent from 1911 to 1915. Unlike other immigrant groups entering through Angel Island, South Asians lacked both strong ethnic organizations and supportive home governments. Because many South Asians in the U.S. fought for an end to British rule in South Asia, they also came under more scrutiny by the U.S. government, a strong British ally. Unfortunately, for many South Asians, the experience on Angel Island would mirror lifetimes of discrimination in the U.S. As Vaishno Das Bagai, a South Asian who entered the U.S. through Angel Island in 1915, heartbreakingly described, the lives of too many South Asians in the U.S. were full of “obstacles this way [and] blockades that way.”⁴⁷

Only 7-8,000 Koreans immigrated to the United States before World War II. “A people without a country,” Koreans faced immigration obstacles from both Japan, which had annexed Korea in 1910, and the U.S., which subjected Koreans to the existing restrictions on Japanese immigration. About 1,000 were admitted into the U.S. through Angel Island. Mostly refugee students and picture brides fleeing Japanese colonial rule in Korea, they were greatly assisted by the Korean National Association, which actively protected the interests of Koreans overseas and lobbied on the behalf of many incoming Koreans. Once in the U.S., Korean immigrants continued their fight for Korean independence as they also struggled to survive and raise their families in a foreign land.

As U.S. nationals, Filipinos had a unique experience

coming to the U.S. Not subject to U.S. immigration law, they were able to migrate freely from the Philippines to the United States, while other Asians faced increasing restrictions. Once the Philippines received nominal independence from the United States in 1934, however, their ability to come to the U.S. changed dramatically. No longer considered U.S. nationals, Filipinos became “aliens” subject to U.S. immigration laws and immigration rates dropped significantly. The change in legal status affected both newly-arriving Filipinos as well as returning residents. Prior to 1934, hardly any Filipinos spent time on Angel Island. After 1934, Filipinos were subjected to some of the same interrogations and detentions that applied to other Asians. The immigration station also served as the processing center for Filipinos returning to the Philippines as part of the U.S.’s Filipino Repatriation Program, which sent 2,190 Filipinos to the Philippines in 1936 to 1939.

THE REMAKING OF ASIAN AMERICA DURING THE ASIAN EXCLUSION ERA

By the 1930s, the United States had closed its doors to almost all Asian immigrants. The Asian exclusion regime—the combination of laws, social attitudes, and actions that excluded Asian Americans from the United States and from full participation in American life—might have easily resulted in the dismantling of Asian America. Asian immigrants were barred from coming to the U.S., prohibited from becoming naturalized U.S. citizens, prevented from owning land and property in many states, harassed, beaten, driven out, and segregated from mainstream America. Many immigrants returned to their homes in Asia. But many others stayed, fought, adapted and remade Asian American families, communities, and institutions during these difficult times.

In spite of the Chinese exclusion laws, for example, many Chinese immigrant men decided to stay in the U.S., and an increasing number of Chinese women joined them. In 1910, 9.7 percent of Chinese entering the country were female. Ten years later, they were 20 percent, and by 1930, the percentage of women immigrants entering the country had risen to 30 percent. Families became a more common sight in Chinatown, and between 1900 and 1940, the U.S. born Chinese population quadrupled in size.⁴⁸

When they could, Chinese Americans retreated to

Chinatown, where they could visit friends and family, buy products from China, eat comfort food, and hear the latest news. Home to the oldest and largest Chinese community in the United States, San Francisco and its Chinatown—known as *Dai Fou*, or “Big City”—was the economic, cultural, and political center of Chinese America for most of the 19th and 20th centuries. Barred as they were from American political, social, and economic life, Chinese immigrants also turned to Chinatown to feel the warmth of community and family that was often missing in their daily lives. As one Chinatown resident told an interviewer in the 1920s, “It is only in Chinatown that a Chinese immigrant has society, friends and relatives who share his dreams and hopes, his hardships, and adventures.”⁴⁹

Similar changes were occurring in the Japanese immigrant community as well. Organizations, businesses, and associations connected Japanese immigrants together across wide distances, fostered support and community, and helped sustain Japanese culture and traditions far away from home. *Kenjinkai* were established to support Japanese who shared roots in the same prefecture (*ken*) in Japan, for example. Japanese language newspapers reported on news from Japan and from other Japanese communities in North and South America. Japanese immigrants formed economic associations to pool resources together through a rotating credit system that could be used to purchase or expand businesses. Japanese also formed farming cooperatives to buy supplies and market crops.

When they could, Japanese visited *Nihonmachi*, the Japanese sections of big cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. By 1910, a vibrant ethnic economy of Japanese-owned boarding houses, restaurants, barbershops, poolrooms, grocery stores, and laundries served Japanese communities in these cities and beyond. San Francisco alone had over 3,000 Japanese-owned businesses.⁵⁰

As they opened businesses, started families, and gradually settled into their new lives in the United States, the *issei* forged a transnational immigrant identity that was shaped by both their experiences of discrimination in the United States as well as by their homeland ties to imperial Japan. Immigrant leaders urged their countrymen to assimilate into mainstream U.S. society by wearing only American-style clothing, following American

customs, and celebrating American holidays. *Nisei*, the American-born children, were sent to American public schools, spoke English, and played baseball.⁵¹ But efforts to be fully accepted as “Americans” were largely unsuccessful, and this practice of treating Japanese Americans as Japanese and not American would have a great impact on them during World War II.

Changes were also transforming the Korean immigrant community during the early 20th century. Another 600 political refugees and over 1,000 “picture brides” made it to the U.S. from 1905 to 1924, often arriving in the country through the Angel Island Immigration Station. Like Japanese women, Korean “picture brides” came to join men already in the United States who were seeking to settle in the country. Like their Japanese counterparts, many Korean picture brides were unprepared for the harsh lives that awaited them in the United States, but as they settled into their new lives, they persevered and built families and communities.

Like many Asian immigrants, Koreans retained strong ties to their homeland. But because of the colonized status of Korea, their homeland ties took on a fierce nationalism that focused on Korean independence and helped to form a cohesive community around Korean nationalism. Political activities took place at the international level, on the streets, and in the backrooms of stores and church basements. Korean churches were among the first community organizations to be formed on the plantations and soon became the center of Korean immigrant society and Korean nationalist politics.

Korean women played especially important roles in the nationalist movement in Hawai‘i and the U.S. They spearheaded important activities through Korean churches and other groups. They also organized their own separate women’s organizations to support Korean independence by raising funds and spreading the nationalist message. On March 15, 1919, the Korean National Association held the first Korean Liberty Congress in Philadelphia. Two hundred representatives from 27 organizations in the U.S. and Mexico as well as a few from Europe were there to witness the public Proclamation of Independence of Korea and to recognize the newly-established Korean provisional government. On April 9, 1919, nationalist leaders gathered in Shanghai and formed the Korean Provisional Government led by Syngman Rhee. It would eventually lay the founda-

tion for the formation of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 1948.⁵²

South Asians in the United States also remade their communities during the era of Asian exclusion. Because traditional gender roles discouraged women from leaving home, few women came. The expense of migration, discrimination in the United States and Canada, and immigration policies also kept the South Asian immigrant population mostly male. But a small number of multiethnic families of South Asians and Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and West Indians did form in the Northeast and South, and Punjabi-Mexican families were created in Southern California. Worlds were built amongst immigrants outside of the formal boundaries of nuclear families, ethnic neighborhoods, and community organizations. Immigrant workers on the move could still form attachments and associations amongst each other and across racial and ethnic lines.⁵³ South Asians also built important community, religious, and political organizations that provided communal support, a way to practice their faith, and a means to express their growing support for Indian nationalism. The first Sikh gurdwara (temple) in the United States was established in Stockton, California, in 1912.

Filipinos also found ways to make the best of their new lives and create community and comfort out of hardship. On the Hawaiian plantations, holidays like Rizal Day, December 30, when Filipino revolutionary leader Jose Rizal was executed by the Spanish in 1896, were an excuse to bring far-flung friends and family together. Filipinos flocked to the “Little Manilas” that sprung up in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. Stockton’s Little Manila was known throughout the country for its many Filipino businesses and vibrant community. There, weary migrant farmworkers could buy Filipino food, read Filipino newspapers, play pool, gather their mail, hear the latest labor news, search for jobs, and worship at St. Mary’s Catholic church. They could also spend their evenings (and often much of their hard-earned wages) at the dance halls that employed white, African American, and Mexican women dancers. Stockton’s Little Manila helped sustain and nourish the Filipino American community in the U.S. for generations.⁵⁴

IMMIGRANT ACTS: ASIAN AMERICAN RESISTANCE

In addition to forming families, communities, neighborhoods, and organizations, Asian Americans made a place for themselves in the United States by challenging the various forms of discrimination they faced. Sometimes these battles took place in the courts, immigration stations, schools, and media. Sometimes they were more subtle individual “immigrant acts” designed to restore one’s humanity in the face of obstacles. Each group faced forms of inequality that were both unique to their particular ethnic group and the state of U.S. international relations and commonly applied across groups as a form of racial discrimination.

A few Chinese Americans made American legal history with their attempts to guarantee equality for the Chinese in America. In 1884, Mary and Joseph Tape sued the San Francisco Board of Education when school officials refused to allow their daughter Mamie to enroll in the public school. They argued that as a native-born citizen of the United States, Mamie was entitled to the free education that was every American’s birthright. The Tapes’ legal challenge affirmed that Chinese children in the United States had the right to a public education.⁵⁵

Wong Kim Ark was a native born American citizen of Chinese descent whose 1898 Supreme Court challenge affirmed the constitutional status of birthright citizenship for all persons born in the United States despite the immigration status of their parents. A restaurant cook and native of San Francisco, Wong was 24 in 1894 when he returned to California after a visit to China. To his surprise, he was denied entry into the United States.



The identification photograph submitted by Wong Kim Ark with his departure statement (May 1904), confirming that he was a native-born citizen of the United States and intended to facilitate his reentry into the country. Photo courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the INS (NAID 296479).

John H. Wise, collector of customs, claimed that Wong, though born in the United States, was not a citizen because his parents were Chinese nationals who were ineligible for citizenship under the Chinese exclusion laws. According to Wise, Wong's claim to citizenship was invalid, and he should be excluded as a laborer "of the Mongolian race." A self-described "zealous opponent of Chinese immigration," Wise attempted to apply the exclusion laws as broadly as possible, including to second-generation Chinese Americans. He ordered that Wong be returned to China.

Wong and his lawyers challenged the decision with a writ of habeas corpus. He claimed that he had a right to be re-admitted into the United States based on his status as a United States citizen under the 14th Amendment. The question for the court was: how does the United States determine citizenship—by *jus soli* (by soil) or by *jus sanguinis* (by blood)? The District Court for the Northern District of California ruled for Wong, but the U.S. Attorney appealed the decision and the case was argued before the United States Supreme Court in March 1897. With a majority opinion by Justice Horace Gray, the court ruled in Wong's favor. *Wong Kim Ark v. United States* affirmed that all persons born in the United States were, regardless of race, native-born citizens of the United States and entitled to all the rights of citizenship. The Court has not reexamined this issue since this ruling.⁵⁶

Another citizenship case focused on the status of Japanese Americans. In 1922, Japanese immigrant Takao Ozawa challenged the United States' ban on naturalized citizenship for Japanese immigrants with a test case before the U.S. Supreme Court. With a fervent desire to become an American, Ozawa described how he was "at heart...a true American." A long-time resident of the United States, he explained that he had been educated in American schools, taught his own children English, foreswore any connections to Japanese churches, schools, or organizations, and fervently desired to "return the kindness which our Uncle Sam has extended me" by becoming a naturalized citizen. Ruling that the U.S.'s 1790 Naturalization Act expressly allowed the naturalization of only white persons, the Court argued that since Ozawa was not white or Caucasian, he was ineligible for naturalized citizenship.⁵⁷

Bhagat Singh Thind, a naturalized South Asian

American citizen, who had first entered the United States in 1913 and served in the U.S. armed forces during World War I, also brought the matter of citizenship to the U.S. Supreme Court. When U.S. officials began an effort to denaturalize South Asian Americans on the grounds that they were not white as the law required, Thind refused to back down and took his case to the Supreme Court. He claimed that he was a descendant of the Aryans of India and thus belonged to the Caucasian race and as a result was "white" within the meaning of U.S. naturalization law. The Supreme Court disagreed. The words "white persons" in the law, the court ruled, referred to "common speech and not to scientific origin." They were not to be considered synonymous with "Caucasian." The court continued that the "great body of our people" recognized the great racial differences between whites and South Asians and "instinctively... reject the thought of assimilation" of South Asians into Americans.⁵⁸ Thind was denaturalized.

For many South Asians, the Gadar (meaning "mutiny" or "revolution,") Indian nationalist movement represented hope not only for an independent India but also for equal treatment in the United States and Canada. Within a short period of time, a majority of South Asians along the West Coast subscribed to the revolutionary ideology of the Gadar Party. From 1913 to 1917, the Gadar party had active followers in Sikh communities throughout California, Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia.

For Filipinos, labor activism became the primary means of organizing for social and economic justice. Stuck in what writer Manuel Buaken called "a pit of economic slavery," they began to organize collectively. In 1928, the Stockton-area *Anak ng Bukid*, or Children of the Farm, became the first formal Filipino American labor organization.⁵⁹ The first Filipino strike occurred in Watsonville in 1930. Over the next six years, there were more than 20 Filipino labor disputes throughout the San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys of California. By the mid-1930s, there were seven different unions. One of them was the Filipino Labor Union (FLU) formed by D. L. Marcuelo, a Stockton businessman in 1933. It soon had 4,000 members. Filipino lettuce workers in Salinas waged two massive strikes in 1933 and 1934, bringing the lettuce industry in Monterey County to a standstill. Filipino strikers faced an onslaught of violence. The

growers rallied local police and armed vigilantes to threaten and beat up the strikers, but the FLU was able to win some important concessions. Wages were raised to 40 cents an hour, and the FLU was recognized as a legitimate union.

More importantly for the long run, the Salinas Lettuce Strike helped introduce Filipinos to the larger U.S. labor movement. After the FLU organized another strike in Salinas two years later, the American Federation of Labor chartered the formation of a combined Filipino-Mexican agricultural union.⁶⁰ On April 6, 1939, an independent, all-Filipino union called the Filipino Agricultural Laborer's Association (FALA) was formed. It represented an effort to unite Filipinos together around shared goals of economic security and the campaign to fight discrimination. By 1940, FALA had organized branches throughout California's agricultural belt. FALA and other organizations also turned their attention to gain political recognition and civil rights amongst Filipino Americans.⁶¹

CONCLUSION

Beginning in the early 19th century up through World War II, successive generations of Asian immigrants came to the United States in search of work, economic opportunity, and freedom from persecution and to join family. Some were recruited by U.S. companies or called by other immigrants already in the country. Others came to pursue their own dreams of gold, new lives, and new beginnings, and they formed the first Asian American communities in the United States. Considered racial, economic, and social threats to the United States, however, Asian immigrants faced discrimination, segregation, disfranchisement, exclusion, and racial violence. But Asian Americans remade their families and communities in spite of these obstacles, and a new Asian America was in place on the eve of World War II. It had a growing number of families, a second generation of American-born citizens, ethnic businesses and community organizations, and politically active leaders who fought for equality in the United States and democracy in their homelands. Over the decades, Asian America would continue to be made and remade in response to world war, new immigration policies, and globalization. But the legacies of these early generations continue to shape contemporary Asian America today.

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