

Chinese Immigration and The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

In 1874, and 1875, President Grant criticized aspects of Chinese immigration in his State of the Union address, emphasizing the involuntary nature of contract immigration and the importation of women for 'shameful purposes.' Both major political parties addressed the issue of Chinese ("Mongolian") immigration in their national platforms for 1876

Immigration has always made Americans uneasy, in part because of the fear that newcomers would not be assimilated. Chinese immigrants provoked extreme anxiety on the West Coast with their different language, customs, and dress. Congress responded to the pleas of nativists by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

The revision in 1880 of the Burlingame Treaty paved the way for the enactment of this law, which suspended the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years. Representatives from the East and Midwest supported the measure 112-37, those from the West and South by 89-0. The law was subsequently renewed and tightened.

The Republican and Democratic National Platform on Chinese Immigration (1876)

Republican

11. It is the immediate duty of Congress to fully investigate the effects of the immigration and importation of Mongolians on the moral and material interests of the country.

Democratic

Reform is necessary to correct the omissions of a Republican Congress and the errors of our treaties and our diplomacy which [have] exposed our brethren of the Pacific coast to the incursions of a race not sprung from the same great parent stock, and in fact now by law denied citizenship through naturalization as being unaccustomed to the traditions of a progressive civilization, one exercised in liberty under equal laws; and we denounce the policy which Tolerates the revival of the coolie-trade in Mongolian women for immoral purposes, and Mongolian men held to perform servile labor contracts, and demand such modification of the treaty with the Chinese Empire, or such legislation within constitutional limitations, as shall prevent further importation or immigration of the Mongolian race.

The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)

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....

Continued..

Sec 4. That for the purpose of properly identifying Chinese laborers who were in the United States on the seventeenth day of November, eighteen hundred and eighty, or who shall have come into the same before the expiration of ninety days after the passage of this act, and in

order to furnish them with the proper evidence of their right to go from and come to the United States of their free will and accord, as provided by the treaty between the United States and China, dated November seventeenth, eighteen hundred and eighty, the collector of customs of the district from which any such Chinese laborer shall depart from the United States shall, in person or by deputy, go on board each vessel having on board any such Chinese laborer and cleared or about to sail from his district for a foreign port, and on such vessel make a list of all such Chinese laborers, which shall be entered in registry-books to be kept for that purpose, in which shall be stated the name, age, occupation, last place of residence, physical marks or peculiarities, and all facts necessary for the identification of each of such Chinese laborers, which books shall be safely kept in the custom-house; and every such Chinese laborer so departing from the United States shall be entitled to, and shall receive, free of any charge or cost upon application thereof, from the collector or deputy, at the time such list is taken, a certificate, duly signed by the collector or his deputy and attested by his seal of office, in such form as the Secretary of the Treasury shall prescribe, which certificate shall contain a statement of the name, age, occupation, last place of residence, personal description, and facts of identification of the Chinese laborer to whom the certificate is issued, corresponding with the said list and registry in all particulars....

Sec 14. That hereafter no State court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.

1. Why might the Democrats have been more outspoken than the Republicans in the parties' 1876 platforms regarding Chinese immigration
2. If you were a Chinese laborer and these laws were passed while you were working in the United States what would your reaction be?
3. Who did the United States government make responsible to carry out these laws?
4. What was the process mandated for every Chinese laborer being sent back to China?

Sources: Donald Bruce Johnson, comp. *National Party Platforms*, 2 vols. (rev. ed., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 1:1840-1956, 50, 54. United States, *Statutes at Large*, 22:58 ff. taken from: Kevin J. Fernlund, University of Missouri – St. Louis. Henretta, J.A., Brody, D. and Dumenil, L. *Documents to Accompany America's History*, sixth ed. vol. two, since 1865. Bedford / St. Martin's, New York. pp.44-45