

Claire Cao

Process Paper

Closing the Golden Gate: The Chinese Exclusion Act

Although I always had a vague understanding of what the Chinese Exclusion Act was, I never thought much about it until it was brought up in a debate regarding modern immigration issues. This prompted me to research further. As a second-generation immigrant, I felt an immediate personal connection to this topic. When my parents immigrated to the United States from China, they sought the same opportunities that immigrants during the Chinese Exclusion era hoped to find. Because I owe my life in America to my parents' immigration, I was fascinated and saddened by the various conflicts and compromises people underwent to achieve everything I have now. With this profound personal interest and awareness of similar immigration issues that fill the news today, I felt that the Chinese Exclusion Act was a very fitting topic to research.

In my research process, I began by reading excerpts from *The Chinese in America* by Iris Chang. It was an extremely insightful book that provided context about America during the Gold Rush, gave primary source accounts of Chinese-American life before and after the exclusion, and described the precedent set by this state-sponsored discrimination. After gaining a broad understanding of the topic, I was able to craft a thesis statement and pursue more specific sources. The rest of my research primarily consisted of database articles, personal accounts from immigrants, and primary source images of anti-Chinese ads and flyers. To gain a deeper understanding of my topic and its legacy, I used current news articles regarding immigration to draw connections.

I chose to make a website this year because of the plethora of newspaper articles, ads, and other primary sources related to the Chinese Exclusion Act. The anti-Chinese images produced during the Exclusion era were the most effective ways to demonstrate the "conflict" portion of my topic. I thought that a website would be the best way to showcase these visuals in an organized, chronological manner. It would also be the most interactive for the audience and would allow them to interpret my project at their own pace.

The Chinese Exclusion Era exemplified the theme "Conflict and Compromise." When Chinese immigrants congregated on the West Coast after the Gold Rush, their presence caused conflict. Because they were willing to work for lower wages, Chinese workers were accused of stealing jobs from white laborers. Many Americans also rejected the strikingly different culture of the Chinese immigrants. This led to the passing of discriminatory legislation that eventually built up to the Chinese Exclusion Act. This was a compromise made by the U.S. government to appease anti-Chinese sentiment at the expense of Chinese-Americans. They had to make many compromises under this harsh law, which barred them from becoming U.S. citizens. Finally, by intentionally discriminating against a specific group of people, the Chinese Exclusion Act compromised the American ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Word Count: 492