



## Digital Exhibits

# Chinese Exclusion and the Establishment of the Gate-keeping Nation

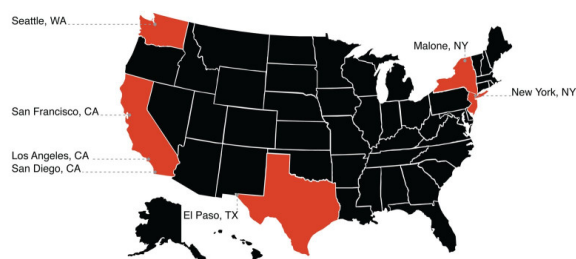
The popular history of immigration to the United States has for the most part focused on European experiences and stories. The history of Chinese immigration offers different lessons. When Chinese immigration began with the California Gold Rush it was in many cases welcomed. By the 1870s, however, the United States experienced the rise of anti-Chinese movements, mostly originating in California, but growing to receive national support. These movements were spurred by an economic depression and the belief among white laborers that Chinese immigrants were “coolies” working for wages that undermined white standards of living. In addition, opponents of Chinese immigration accused the Chinese of being members of a “barbaric” and “heathen” race, who promised to introduce disease, drug use, and other pernicious cultural practices into American life. In 1875, Congress passed the Page Act, which greatly curtailed the immigration of Chinese women to the United States by requiring them to seek entry visas from American consular officials stationed in Hong Kong and other ports, prior to departure. Consular officials were predisposed to judge Chinese women as “immoral” threats who would work in prostitution in the United States. As a result, Chinese immigrants in the United States in the nineteenth century tended to be overwhelmingly male, and, ironically, furthered accusations by white Americans that they had no desire to bring their families and settle permanently. By 1880, both the Republican and Democratic parties supported restrictions on Chinese immigration in their official platforms.

In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which barred laborers of the Chinese race from entering the United States (merchants and students were exempted). Previously, the 1870 Naturalization Act, which formally

extended citizenship to African Americans, denied Asian immigrants the right to naturalize as citizens. In 1892, the Geary Act renewed the Exclusion Act and added the legal requirement that all Chinese immigrants register with the government and carry photographic identification proving their right to be in the United States. The enforcement of the Geary Act affected American-born Chinese citizens alongside Chinese immigrants.

During Chinese Exclusion, which lasted until 1943 – and was not fully abolished until 1965 – Chinese immigrants adopted numerous tactics to circumvent what they felt were racially discriminatory laws. Chinese men and women immigrated as “paper” sons and daughters, for example, establishing fictive familial relationships to American-born Chinese and exempted merchants, in order to be admitted. Other Chinese immigrants illegally crossed the Mexican and Canadian borders into the United States, leading to the establishment of the Border Patrol in order to police their exclusion. As Erika Lee and Judy Yung note, “Chinese immigrants and Chinese American citizens lived their lives in the shadows, anxious about their immigration status, harassment by immigration officials, and personal safety.”

-- Urban, Andy



## Ports of Entry, Ports of Departure

While the majority of Chinese immigrants entered the United States via the port of San Francisco, and, after 1910, through the immigration inspection station located at Angel Island, the enforcement of Chinese Exclusion laws was nonetheless a national concern. On the West Coast, Seattle and San Pedro (serving Los Angeles) were also major ports of arrival for Chinese immigrants crossing

the Pacific Ocean. Some ports of entry are less well-known. Malone, New York, for example, referenced in a number of the files that were researched in this exhibit, was the port of entry for immigrants destined for the New York City area from Montréal or Québec, or even Vancouver, since it was located on an American spur of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railroad. Due to the immigration of Chinese immigrants to Mexico and the development of Chinese communities in Juárez and Tiajuana, immigration officials in El Paso and San Diego, on the American side of the border, expressed particular concern over transnational smuggling of Chinese in these areas. Ellis Island, which opened in 1892, was the United States' busiest immigration inspection station. While the majority of the immigrants processed at Ellis Island came from Europe, a significant number of Chinese immigrants arrived in the New York harbor as well. As the files in this exhibit document, a substantial portion of the Chinese immigrants coming through Ellis Island came from Cuba, Trinidad, and other locations in the Caribbean where Chinese communities existed. In addition to processing these immigrants, Chinese immigrant inspectors – as they were titled – were also responsible for approving the permitted departures of Chinese immigrants seeking to leave the United

States and eventually re-enter (even if the actual port of departure was San Francisco or Seattle).

## The Chinese Community in New Jersey

The Chinese community in New Jersey was concentrated in Newark along Market Street, in the downtown area. While Newark's Chinatown never rivaled that of Manhattan's, by the 1920s the city had a Chinese American and immigrant population estimated at around 3,000 people. Nonetheless, as this exhibit reveals, the Chinese immigrant population was highly mobile and dispersed, largely due to its niche involvement in the United States economy. In New Jersey and across the United States, Chinese immigrants, for example, would establish laundry businesses and restaurants in towns where they might be the only members of their ethnic group.



### COOLIES IN NEW-JERSEY.

**Arrival of One Hundred and Fifty Chinamen at Pompton, N. J.—Three Hundred More on the Way—What the Contractors Pay for their Services.**

The arrival of 150 coolies in New-Jersey yesterday, is an event that excites a great deal of interest among all classes of white laborers, particularly among those who have held a monopoly of railroad labor, a field of industry that the Chinese will enter immediately. The company now on the ground is the first install-

## Coolies in New-Jersey

An article in the New York Times announces the arrival of 150 Chinese laborers in New Jersey, to work on the railroad that would connect Pompton, New Jersey with Middletown, New

ment of a gang of 500 coolies to be furnished, according to contract, by Mr. KOOPMANSCHAP to Messrs. S. P. SIMPSON & Co., who are contractors for the building of a section of the Midland Railway.

In January last a Messrs. SIMPSON & Co., of Munch Chunk, Penn., entered into a contract for the importation of these coolies for work upon their section of the road from Pompton, N. J., to Middletown, N. Y. The coolies were hired from Mr. KOOPMANSCHAP, for a term of five years, the firm of SIMPSON & Co. having contracts with several roads that would enable them to give employment to that number of men for five years. Each man receives, according to the terms of the contract, \$9 per month, with rations of pork, beans and rice to the value of \$9 per month, and suitable shelter. The men are to work in gangs under a native foreman, who is, of course, under the direction of SIMPSON & Co.'s superintendents.

The part of the road for the building of which the firm has the contract, is one of the most difficult of construction of any on the line, there being many deep cuts and heavy grades. A severe loss has been occasioned by the employment of white labor from the New-York employment houses. When the work was difficult the men would desert their ranks, and often a foreman who had appliances for working thirty or forty men would have to continue work with only fifteen or twenty. The reports coming from the Pacific relating to the qualities of the Chinese as railroad laborers, led to the opening of the negotiations with KOOPMANSCHAP for a large force. The latter, after arranging terms, telegraphed at once to his agent in China, ordering the coolies to be sent via the Suez Canal, so that they could be here ready for the opening of work in the Spring. Unexpected delays have occurred, and they have now arrived by the overland route from San Francisco.

The temper of the Irish railroad laborers, thousands of whom are now at work in Northern New Jersey and in New-York State, near the border, threatens serious consequences to the unoffending Chinamen. The latter are peaceably disposed, as all Chinamen are. They have come with their baggage to stay, and propose to go to work immediately under orders. Only two out of the 150 speak English. They are all dressed in the Chinese costume, with wooden shoes, loose trousers, blue blouses and broad hats. Their personal baggage filled one car as they came down on the Erie Railroad, and was transferred with them to the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Branch, over which they were carried to Pompton. Shanties will be at once erected and active operations will commence.

York. The article was especially concerned with how Irish immigrant laborers, who had previously "monopolized" railroad work in the region, might react to economic competition.

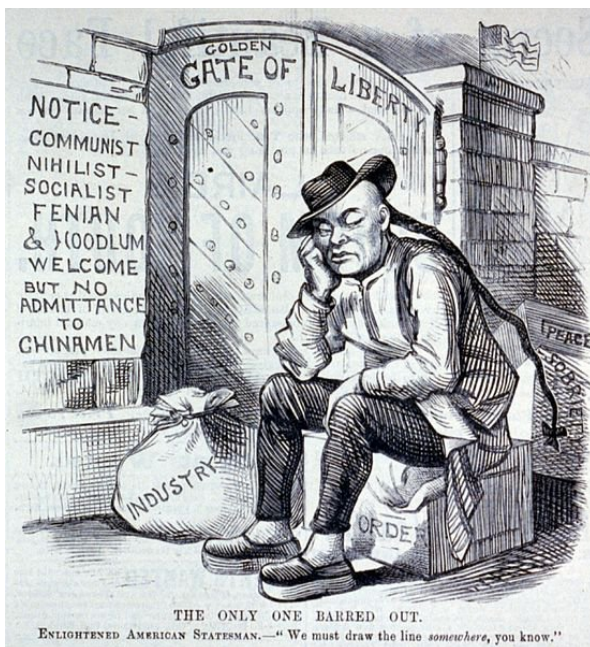


### The Coming Man: Allee sammee Melican Man Monopoleeee

A cartoon that appeared in the San Francisco-based humor magazine, *The Wasp*, visualizes popular anxieties and anger over the perceived threat of



Chinese labor. In the cartoon, a Chinese laborer is racialized as a rat-like figure, monopolizing various trades such as laundries, clothing factories, and cigar manufacturing. Such cartoons reflected the belief among many white Americans that Chinese laborers were “coolies,” who did not control the terms or wages of their labor, and therefore could be exploited. (Historians have subsequently disputed the accuracy of such portrayals.) These debates played out in the aftermath of slavery, where Chinese immigration was represented as introducing another threat to “free” labor.



### The Only One Barred Out

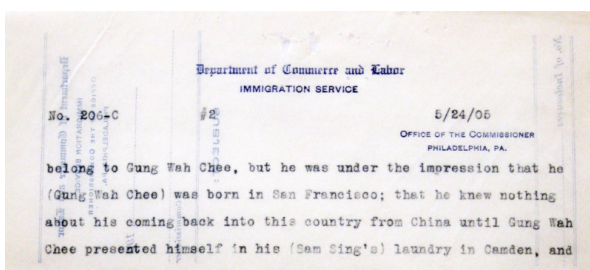
Published shortly before President Chester Arthur signed the first Chinese Exclusion Act into law, this cartoon shows a Chinese immigrant barred from entering the United States through the “Golden Gate of Liberty.” As the cartoon illustrates, Americans were not unanimous in their support for restrictions on Chinese immigration. The artist contrasts the “industry” and “order” that he assigns to Chinese immigrants, against the allegedly dangerous traits of communists, Fenians, and hoodlums who are allowed to enter unconditionally. One constant in American immigration debates has

been the attempts by politicians and pundits to place “desirable” and “undesirable” immigrants into neatly defined categories.



## The Chinese Question Again

In 1888, Congress passed the Scott Act, which closed the alleged “loophole” that allowed Chinese immigrant laborers to leave and then re-enter the United States. The Scott Act banned all Chinese laborers from entering the United States, even those who had established residency in the country prior to 1882 Exclusion Act, and had left the United States for a temporary period. As a result of the Scott Act, 20,000 to 30,000 Chinese immigrants, who had lived in the United States, were banned from returning legally. Following the Scott Act, in order for Chinese laborers to gain permission to depart and re-enter the United States, they were required to prove that they were owed at least one thousand dollars in debt, or possessed that sum in cash or capital.



An excerpt describing the hearing of Gung Wah Chee.

Gung was arrested after he was found

College in this city for probably a year, but for the last two years he has not attended school.

There was no action taken in the case for a couple of months on account of an effort on our part to get some further evidence, and on April 1, 1906, the warrant was served. The first hearing was fixed for Thursday, April 12th but owing to the absence of the lawyer for the defense, was continued to April 20th, and again continued owing to the illness of U. S. Attorney Vreeland to May 5th, when the case was finally heard. Decision was withheld until the 19th instant to allow counsel to present briefs.

I attach hereto the opinion given in the case by Commissioner Morgan, together with brief of U. S. Attorney for New Jersey, John S. Vreeland; also brief of John W. Wescott, attorney for the defense.

Respectfully,  
(Signed) A. F. McLaughlin.  
Chinese Inspector in Charge.

working at a laundry in Camden, New Jersey. He had entered the United States as a student exempt from the Chinese Exclusion Act and enrolled at Temple College in Philadelphia. Like contemporary immigrants who stay past their student visas, Gung was similarly accused of violating the terms of his entry, even though he claimed to be working as a laborer only for the purpose of supporting his studies.

### CHINAMEN STARVE IN CAR

Had Been Shipped Into New Jersey  
from Canada as Freight.  
*Special to The New York Times.*

MORRISTOWN, N. J., Feb. 17.—Seven Chinamen believed to have been smuggled into this country from Canada were taken half starved from a freight car on the Lackawanna Railroad at Port Morris this morning and committed to the Morris County jail here. To-night Chinese Inspector Wylie of New York came out to see the Chinamen, and after a consultation with United States District Attorney Vreeland of this city it was decided to relieve Sheriff Calhoun Orr of the custody of the men and take them before a United States Commissioner in Hoboken to-morrow.

The names given by the Chinamen are Hop Wah, Lee Jun, Lee Sing, Lee John, Won Jong, Wan Hun, and Sam Wah. They were found in the car by Railroad Detective Nixon.

The car, which was consigned to Summit, was sidetracked at Port Morris last night. While Nixon was around the Port Morris freight yards this morning he heard voices in the car. Listening he again heard voices. Then he broke the seal and forced back the door.

The Chinamen, suffering for the want of food and drink, gesticulated and jabbered. Finally Nixon made them understand that he would look after them, so they followed him to the office of Justice of the Peace Eaton.

The Justice got water, which the Chinamen gulped down like animals. Then Justice Eaton began to look over his law books to see what could be done with the prisoners. He decided to commit them as disorderly persons.

When Sheriff Orr took the seven in charge he ordered for them the regular prison dinner fare, which consisted of bean soup. After they had finished the prison fare the Chinamen were still hungry. With their own money they purchased oranges and apples. They ate these quickly and wanted more.

The authorities understand that the Chinamen paid a man at a small town on the Canadian border line to put them into the freight car. They were told that at Summit some one would unlock the door and take care of them.

The car has been on the road for four

### Chinamen Starve in Car

A 1909 article describes seven undocumented Chinese immigrants smuggled into the United States on a railroad freight car from Canada, and discovered in Port Morris, New Jersey. Dehydrated and starving, the plight of the immigrants nonetheless elicits little sympathy from the author.

days and would not have reached Summit  
until to-morrow or probably Friday.

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