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The Chinese Exclusion Act

The vision of the United States has consistently attracted people from around the globe; however, Americans often struggled with how to handle diversity and what the place of others was in the country. The Chinese, specifically, faced much difficulty while immigrating into American society. It all began with the California Gold Rush of 1848 when the Chinese heavily migrated into America, and then again when the Transcontinental Railroad was being built. When gold was plenty, the Chinese were treated fairly but when it started becoming scarce, Americans started treating them as if they were “blacks from the south.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Americans were becoming unemployed while Chinese were taking their jobs and their wages were declining as well. At this point, race riots were frequent, hate crimes occurred, and Americans wanted the Chinese to be removed and shipped back into their homeland. One specific race riot was the Chinese Massacre of 1871. Five hundred white men entered a neighborhood specifically containing Chinese in Los Angeles and they robbed, attached, and even murdered the Chinese residents. Only ten attackers were brought to court and eight were convicted of manslaughter and sent to prison.[[2]](#footnote-2)

As a result, on May 6th, 1882. The Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Chester A. Arthur. This was the first restriction on immigration in America and it stopped Chinese immigration into the United States for ten years, and the ones that were left could not become US citizens. If the Chinese left the country, they had to get certifications to re-enter, which they could have done before the ten years was up only if they lived in the United States before that time. When ten years went by, the Geary Act was passed for ten more years and eventually made permanent in 1902. This act required each Chinese resident to register and obtain a certificate of residence, and if they did not have one, they would eventually get deported. This act regulated Chinese immigration until the 1920s but by this time, the anti- Chinese agitation had quieted. Additionally, by 1943, congress repealed all exclusion acts.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. Harvard Law Library, “Chinese Exclusion Act,” Harvard University, last modified 2012, http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/exclusion.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. LA Weekly, “How Los Angeles Covered Up the Massacre of 17 Chinese,” LA Weekly, last modified March 10, 2011, http;//www.laweekly.com/2011-03-10/news/how-los-angeles-covered-up-the-massacre-of-18-chinese/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. U.S. News & World Report, “The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882),” U.S. News & World Report, last modified 2003, http://www.usnews.com/usnews/documents/docpages/document\_page47.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-3)