

5-2022

Arguments in Opposition of the Chinese Exclusion Act

Kaylee Goyette
kaylee_goyette@uri.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog>

Recommended Citation

Goyette, Kaylee, "Arguments in Opposition of the Chinese Exclusion Act" (2022). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 955.

<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/955>

This Article is brought to you by the University of Rhode Island. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu. For permission to reuse copyrighted content, contact the author directly.

KAYLEE GOYETTE

(International Studies & Diplomacy Program, Chinese) Arguments in Opposition of the Chinese Exclusion Act

Sponsor: Erik Loomis (History)

Recently, anti-Asian violence in the United States has risen, especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. It can be argued that the anti-Asian sentiment in the US is rooted in the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. During the mid-1800s, the California Gold Rush and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad brought an influx of Chinese immigrants to the West Coast of the United States. Chinese laborers accepted much lower wages than white laborers, leading to fear and increased ethnic tensions. This came to a breaking point in 1882 with the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. This discriminatory anti-Chinese legislation prohibited all Chinese laborers from entering the United States for ten years. In actuality, it was not until the passage of the 1943 Magnuson Act, 61 years after the passage of the first exclusionary bill, that Chinese laborers could resume entrance into the US. This was the first time in history that a specific race group and social class were banned from entering the US, setting a dangerous precedent for future immigration policy.

The passage of such a substantial and overreaching immigration bill makes it seem like most people in the US supported the Chinese Exclusion Act. However, this is only one side of the story. In fact, there were several voices of opposition from senators, businessmen, generals, etc.. This project aims to explore these voices of opposition through the lens of politics, economics and trade, race, and social class. By analyzing the debates leading up to and after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, it is clear that Chinese laborers were taken advantage of for the political, economic, and social benefit of a select group of white elites.