

THE HISTORY OF CHINATOWN (AND CHINESE AMERICANS)

We often think about Chinatowns as a fun place to get a meal or buy some tchotchkes, however, Chinatowns have played and continue to play a very important role in the lives of Chinese immigrants to the U.S.

1800s to 1900

The first Chinatowns sprang up on the West Coast in the mid-1800s (when the first wave of Chinese immigrants arrived seeking opportunity during the **Gold Rush** and the building of the **Transcontinental Railroad**). Chinatowns were, at the start, much like ethnic settlements founded by European immigrant.

Initially, Chinese migrants were welcomed in California. They were industrious and willing to accept much lower wages than those paid to whites. But with their success, particularly in gold mining, resentment towards the Chinese developed. Despite being the targets of racial prejudice, the Chinese were recruited by the Central Pacific Railroad to lay the most westerly chain of tracks linking the nation's west coast to the east coast. They were skilled in grading the land, placing dynamite charges to blast tunnels through mountains, and were willing to deal with the harsh snows of California's Sierra Nevada range. After the Transcontinental Railroad was completed in 1871, competition with white laborers for jobs, further fueled prejudice.

A popular miner's chant of the late 1850's reflects the change in attitude of Californians toward the Chinese immigrants they had once welcomed:

*John Chinaman, John Chinaman,
But five short years ago,
I welcomed you from China, John,
But I wish I hadn't though.*

*Oh, John, I've been deceived by you,
And all your thriving clan,
For gold is all you're after, John,
To get it as you can.*

In the late 1800's, some Chinese moved east seeking work and an escape from discrimination and violent acts against them that they experienced in the West. This was how **Manhattan's Chinatown and other Chinatowns on the East Coast got their start.**

All Chinatowns evolved to serve as **safe havens** for Chinese in America. In 1882, U.S. Congress passed the **Chinese Exclusion Act**. It barred Chinese who were already in the U.S. from becoming U.S. citizens and restricted new immigration from China. The law marked the first time that the U.S. restricted immigration explicitly on the basis of race. In response to exclusion, community organizations in Chinatowns provided services to immigrants who weren't protected by the benefits of American citizenship.

1900s

Through the early 1900's, housing and labor discrimination kept Chinese immigrants from being able to live and work outside of Chinatown, therefore keeping them segregated from the rest of American society. In several Western states laws were passed to prohibit Chinese immigrants from owning property. In Manhattan, few whites, with the exception of Italian immigrant landlords living on the lower eastside of the island, would sell property to the Chinese. Chinese immigrants also were barred from most industries, aside from the hand-laundry and restaurant businesses.

The **Chinese Exclusion Act** was finally repealed in 1943, as China was seen as our ally during World War II. Even so, only 105 Chinese were then allowed into the U.S. each year. It wasn't until 1965 that a new immigration law was passed eliminating all racial bias from American immigration laws.

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FOR JUSTICE— For Chinese, American Friendship

WRITE, WIRE Your CONGRESSMAN Today Asking Him To Support The REPEAL of the CHINESE EXCLUSION ACT!

Congress Convenes September 13th

SUPPORT . . .

International supporting the repeal of the act were recently passed by the following organizations:

- American Legion, California Dept.
- Veterans of Foreign Wars, California Dept.
- California Council, CIO
- Oregon Council, CIO
- San Francisco Chamber of Commerce
- Houston Chamber of Commerce
- Portland Chamber of Commerce
- Seattle Chamber of Commerce
- Houston Foreign Trade Association
- Citizens For Victory Committee
- Y. W. C. A. Business Girls Conference (California)
- Chinese Christian Youth Conference (Taipei Conference)
- The City of San Francisco

Legislation to Repeal Chinese Exclusion

There are several bills before Congress which aim to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Laws, passed in 1882, and to give the Chinese the same naturalization rights as other races. These measures are making the Chinese the equal of other races in the United States.

1. As a measure of "good-will" to strengthen Chinese loyalty.

2. As an act of justice to a friendly people against whom no real harm has been done.

3. As a means of removing the past evil of a great nation which has been and will be righted.

Only these things which are just and right will, in the long run, prove expedient.

You Can Help Right Now! What To Do

If you believe in supporting the democratic principles on which this country was founded and against the racist laws which discriminate against the Chinese, you can help right now. Write your Congressman today and ask him to support the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Laws.

1. Let your Congressman know what you are in favor of this legislation. Write him a letter or send him a telegram.

2. Write letters to the newspapers expressing your views and urging the repeal of Chinese exclusion.

3. Inform people around you of the issue.

WHOM TO WRITE:

Listed below are the names of the senators and representatives of the states and other areas populated by Chinese. Petition to be sent or word should be addressed to the Senators or Representatives at the Senate or House of Representatives respectively in Washington, D. C. It is your duty to voice your opinion on this most vital legislation to your Congressman TODAY.

SUGGESTED FORM LETTER

Dear Sir:

For freedom and equality China fought in 1941. World War II against our common enemy Japan. She made freedom and equality from members of the United Nations.

As representatives of our State, your support of the bill pending in Congress before the Immigration Committee, having for its purpose the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act, will be deeply appreciated.

Very truly yours,

**This Ad Sponsored by
Friends of China
and Advocates
of Justice**

During WWII, Chinese Americans and their supporters petitioned Congress to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act. The 60-year statute was overturned in 1943, the year this ad was printed in the publication Chinese Press. However, Chinese immigration remained subject to severe quotas. Courtesy of Chinese Historical Society of America (CHSA).

Today

Today Manhattan's Chinatown remains a vibrant neighborhood where you will find an abundance of restaurants and shops, but it is also a place of professionals including lawyers, doctors, accountants, etc. After 1965, Chinese immigration to New York exploded and Chinese from different parts of China began to emigrate to the U.S. (Previously, nearly all came from the south and spoke Cantonese or related dialects like Sai Fong). Chinatown still serves as a welcoming first stop in the U.S. for many immigrants from China.