Chinese Immigration Essay, Research Paper

Chinese Immigration

In 1784, the United States began relations with China when the American trading ship Empress of China arrived in Canton, China from New York, thus welcoming the opening of China Trade. Significant Chinese immigration began with the California gold rush in 1849, and continued throughout the nineteenth century as thousands of Chinese emigrated to the United States due to economic dislocation in China, when millions of peasants were forced off the land in search of food and work as the population had reached 300 million.

While the majority of immigrants came to settle in the United States permanently, many worked for a time and returned home with whatever savings they had set aside from their work. The majority of Chinese immigrants were single men who worked for a while and returned home. At first Americans looked up them with curiosity and favor, and accepted their arrival. Yet soon thereafter this favor turned to violence, as riots against the Chinese broke out towards the late nineteenth century.

The Chinese did not only mine for gold, but took on jobs such as cooks, peddlers, and storekeepers. In the first decade after the discovery of gold, many had taken jobs nobody else wanted or that were considered too dirty. However, in 1870, hasty exploitation of gold mines and a lack of well-paying jobs for non-Asians spurred sentiment that the “rice-eaters” were to blame. By 1880, a fifth were engaged mining, another fifth in agriculture, a seventh in manufacturing, an added seventh were domestic servants, and a tenth were laundry workers. Approximately 30,000 Chinese worked outside of California in such trades as mining, common labor, and service trades.

As time passed, the resentment against the Chinese increased from those who could not compete with them. Acts of violence against the Chinese continued for decades, mostly from white urban and agricultural workers. In 1862 alone, eighty-eight Chinese were reported murdered. Though large landowners that hired Chinese, railroads and other large white-owned businesses, and Chinese workers themselves pushed against a growing anti-Chinese legislation, the forces opposing the Chinese prevailed, issuing laws that excluded or harassed them from industry after industry. Mob violence steadily increased against the Chinese until even employers were at risk. Eventually, laws such the Naturalization Act of 1870 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 restricted immigration of Chinese immigrants into the U.S.

As decades passed, the situation between the Chinese and the Americas improved. Such events as the Chinatowns turning from crime and drug ridden places to quiet, colorful tourist attractions, well-behaved and school conscientious Chinese children being welcomed by public school teachers, and China becoming allies with the U.S. during World War II, all paved the way for the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act. As immigration from China resumed, mostly female immigrants came, many, wives of Chinese men in the U.S. Many couples were reunited after decades apart.