A Journey Through The Golden Gates Of Promise Essay, Research Paper

A Journey Though the ?Golden Gates? of Promise

Great controversy exists over the true promises of the ?Golden Gates? in the United States. Discrimination occurs with different ethnic groups, but for those immigrants permitted into the country, the opportunities are excellent. The laws and practices established to control immigration into the United States limit the amount of poverty that can be present in the country. Without these important practices and laws created by the United States Congress, ?cheap? labor would overpower American citizen labor and lead the country to an economic and social catastrophe. Although the United States is often criticized for its establishment of immigration laws and practices during 1865 and 1930, these actions are very fair.

It seems that the people of China have received a lot amount of discrimination as they try to venture into the promise lands of the United States. Early discrimination of the Chinese is revealed when considering early laws and practices of the United States towards immigration. Not only did Congress pass laws and restrictions against Chinese but the attitudes of citizens towards the Chinese often led to uproars and bitterness towards the immigrants arriving from China.

In the 1850?s, the California legislature passed a series of anti-Chinese restrictions. These restrictions forbade Chinese Americans to enroll their children in public schools, to marry whites, or to testify against whites in the court of law. Some particular court cases display the effects of this law. A very upsetting California court case decision in the 1850?s for the Chinese people is called People vs. Hall. In August of 1853, George W. Hall, his brother, and their friend assaulted a Chinese miner in Nevada County. When Ling Sing, the Chinese man?s cousin, came to help him, Hall shot and killed Ling Sing. During the original trial, Hall was found guilty of murder charges and sentenced to death. Hall appealed the decision to the California Supreme Court and he was acquitted because no white witnesses to the murder were available. This reasoning is supported by the California State Civil Practice Act (under Section 394) that says no black, mulatto, or Indian can give testimony against white defendants in criminal cases. The controversy over this case occurs not just because of the obvious discrimination but because Chinese are not specifically referred to in the act and it is assumed that Indians and Asians belong to the same ethnic group. Basically anyone who was not considered white was looked down upon by the American white population. “The word ‘white’ has a distinct signification, which ex vi termini, excludes black, yellow, and all other colors,” (Beesley 123). Chief Justice Hugh C. Murray, felt that the line had to be drawn, further states, “the same rule that would admit them to testify, would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship, and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls,” (Beesley 123). The ruling of the Hall court case led to many violent uproars among white American citizens and Chinese immigrants. Another action taken to try and get rid of the Chinese immigrants was the California Miner?s Tax of 1855. Its sole purpose was to drive Chinese immigrants out of the mining business by taxing foreign miners every month. Many Chinese spoke out about these practices. ?When your honorable government threw open the territory of California, the people of other lands were welcomed here to search for gold and to engage in trade. The ship-masters of your respected nation came over to our country, lauded the equality of your laws, extolled the beauty of your manners and customs, and made it known that your officers and people were extremely cordial toward the Chinese…. we trusted in your sincerity….But alas! what times are these!?when former kind rela-tions are forgotten, when we Chinese are viewed like thieves and enemies…? (Pun 589).

These awful laws and practices towards Chinese immigration led to many violent events. In 1871, a mob of whites invaded a Chinese neighborhood in Los Angles and killed 21 residents. A similar event occurred in 1876 that became know as the Truckee Raid. During this incident, whites torched a Chinese home and shot its residents when they fled into the streets. More episodes followed that were often instigated by the ?Order of Caucasians?, thugs who openly advocated violence. Groups such as the ?Order of Caucasians? became common during this time period and provoked Chinese discrimination. The early discrimination of Chinese immigrants is the foundation for the later discrimination that developed and soon pertained not just to Chinese immigrants but to all immigrants in general.

In 1879, Congress passed a Chinese Exclusion Bill, giving in to pressure from anti-Chinese organizations and making a deal with Western lawmakers who promised political favors. Later, in 1882, Congress passed, and President Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This act barred all Chinese immigrants from the United States for ten years, except students, merchants, and children of Chinese-American citizens. Although this act was enacted, the Chinese already present in the United States, were ready and willing submit to the designs of white Americans: ?Their curiously timid and unaggressive character was shown in every line of industry….Not the least of their good qualities appeared to be this tendency to mind their own business and slip away before the more aggressive Anglo-Saxon….Several early observers and pioneers praised their spirit of subordination to the law in comparison with other and more lawless immigrants….” (Coolidge 24). In 1892, the exclusions were extended and they remained in place until 1943. This particular exclusion act represented the first time Congress had restricted immigration and it marked the only occasion in United States history that an ethnic group was specifically singled out for exclusion. A head tax was also placed on each Chinese immigrant already present in the United States with the Chinese Exclusion Act leading to harsh attitudes from Chinese people towards the American government. The Chinese Exclusion Act is the foundation for the many ethnic discriminatory acts to follow dealing with immigration.

In 1907, Theodore Roosevelt issued an executive order that forbade Japanese to enter the United States from Mexico and Canada and then convinced Japan to discourage its citizens from immigrating into the United States. The Gentlemen?s Agreement of 1907-8 ended the immigration of Japanese laborers to the United States by having the Japanese government refuse to issue passports to such persons. This agreement also said that the United States should stop discrimination against the Japanese. The Gentleman’s Agreement did allow wives to join their husbands if they were already in America. Since the overwhelming number of Japanese in the United States in 1907 were males, the agreement led to a surge in legal immigration of females, who were often married by “proxy” in Japan to husbands who chose wives on the basis of pictures sent from the mother country to America. The Gentlemen?s Agreement displays the discrimination towards Japanese immigrants the beginning of general immigration.

The California Alien Land Acts of 1913 and 1920 affects only Asians also. The people most affected by this act are Japanese farmers because it bars them from owning land. People affected by the California Alien Land Act are those “ineligible to citizenship” (Asian immigrants) who were not allowed to own or lease “real property” (land) unless a United States treaty provided otherwise. The consequence was that Japanese immigrants were not allowed to own farms in California. Most of the states west of the Mississippi River enacted similar laws soon after. According to these laws, if an alien not eligible to citizenship tried to lease or own agricultural land, the deal was considered null and the land became the property of the State. The Alien Land Laws were justified as a means of protecting white farmers while at the same time discriminating against the Japanese immigrants because it left more land available for white farmers.

In 1917, Congress established the Asiatic Barred Zone, shutting off the flow of emigrants from a region that encompassed not only China, but also Japan, Korea, India, Indochina, East Indies, Polynesia, parts of Russia, Arabia, and Afghanistan also. This act was enacted to try and ease the tension arising between American citizens and the arrival of many Asian immigrants. When this act was being created, the Asiatic Exclusion League demanded the exclusion of Koreans because they are the third sizable group from the Far East. Together, the restrictions on Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans excluded virtually all Asians who wanted to come to the United States. The Barred Zone Act made it almost impossible for the immigration of Indians to occur, although students, scholars, ministers of religion and merchants could come in and stay sometimes. As Sucheng Chan stated, “Stereotypes of Asian immigrants as plodding, degraded, and servile people–indeed, virtual slaves–notwithstanding, members of every Asian immigrant group did stand up for their rights and fought oppression in a myriad of ways” (81). The discrimination of different ethnic groups grows as new acts and practices are enacted causing more uproar between immigrants and non-immigrants.

Immigrants often ran into trouble when trying to marry due to practices of the United States. In 1880, the California Civil Code was amended to prohibit inter-racial marriages between a white person and a ?Negro, Mulatto, Mongolian, and persons of mixed blood.? Again, the term ?white? was interpreted loosely and therefore, everyone that was not truly Caucasian was not considered to be white. The Expatriation Act of 1907 provided that an American woman, naturalized or native born, who marries a foreigner loses her citizenship. This law angered many women and was enforced to try and cut down on the number of immigrants entering the country. Many women, although not involved directly with this act, found it to be corrupt. “Her right to remain a citizen or become one, to vote or exercise other political perquisites of American citizenship, to reside in the United States without threat of deportation or expatriation, to enter certain occupations, to re-enter the country after an absence abroad, to enjoy the protection of the U.S. government while traveling outside the country, and to secure American citizenship for her children was now wholly dependent on the citizenship of the man she wed? (Bredbenner 60). The guiding assumption of this act is that any woman, who would voluntarily marry a foreigner, is no longer deserving of and no longer to be trusted with, United States citizenship. These laws and practices of immigrant and non-immigrant marriages are discouraging because many citizens actually gave up their role in the American society to be with someone that they truly care for. In that sense, the laws did not always ?get the best? of the immigrants. The concept of a person giving up their citizenship to an immigrant displays how ridiculous the laws and practices involving immigration really are.

During the years of 1880 and 1920, the ?Great Migration?, more than 27,000,000 immigrants were brought to the United States? soil. Western Europeans continued to arrive in North America, but they were eclipsed by peoples from the Southern and Eastern parts of the continent. Before this ?Great Migration?, (1850-1880) more than 200,000 Chinese, 90% of them male, sailed across the Pacific Ocean and settled in California, Colorado, and other Western territories. As well as being a source of labor, these foreign people bring ideas, theories, materials, and enchanting new foods with them as they walk through the ?Golden Gates.? A whole new world is revealed for the United States as these alien human beings arrive on the American land. As more immigrants travel to the promise lands, more diversity begins to occur. A society with a great deal of diversity is often more likely to be acceptable to the new people because it is much more difficult to single out specific cultures and ethnic groups when such a variety is present. The ideas and customs introduced to the United States through immigration is beneficial to the culture as a whole because it allows cultural diversity to occur creating a balanced society of people.

In 1921, the first quantitative immigration law was adopted to set temporary quotas according to nationality. This law, known as the Quota Act of 1921 put a ceiling on immigration, allowing each ethnic group to grow each year by 3% of its population in 1910. The act established a yearly ceiling of 357,000 immigrants from outside the Western Hemisphere. This quota law applied to all immigrants from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and certain islands in the Atlantic and Pacific. In 1924, Congress enacted the Johnson-Reed Act (National Origins Act) which cut the overall ceiling 151,000 immigrants and reduced each yearly nationality quota to 2% of its percentage of the United States population as recorded in 1890. The act froze out Asian immigrants but exempted the quotas with Canada and Mexico because they were the 2 surrounding countries and it was best to keep peace with them. This act in 1924 is the first permanent immigration quota law to ever be established in American history. It created a preference quota system, non-quota status, consular control system, and the Border Patrol. The annual quotas of the 1924 act were finally made permanent in 1929. Immigrants from northern and western Europe are considered highly adaptable and more likely to “fit in” with Americans than immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe are. Immigrants from Britain, Germany and Ireland were assigned generous quotas. The quotas for countries such as Russia, the source for most Jewish immigrants, and Italy were cut back. Practically all Asians were barred from entering the United States. The quotas established dealing with immigration are very important because, without them, the United States would become overpopulated and it would slowly deteriorate. If Congress did not create the quota laws as a way to control who is allowed to enter the country, it would leave the magnificent ?Golden Gates? open to anyone who wanted to enter the promise land. It is insane to even consider letting everyone of every ethnicity into the United States because the results would be devastating for the American society. American citizens often criticize that the quota laws discriminate towards different ethnic groups, but, in reality, it is common sense to prefer letting immigrants into the country that are more likely to ?fit in? with the cultures being practiced already. Diversity is good and it is wonderful that the United States realizes this point. Congress allows a certain number of immigrants from each foreign nation to enter the United States. The nations that contain more intellectually educated people are much more welcome in the United States because they are the people who will most likely benefit the society and economy. Having unskilled immigrants invade the United States leads to cheap labor and, therefore, the citizens already present in America will lose jobs. The Southern Railroad Company is an example of this. This particular railroad hired Chinese to help lay track but they were resented by whites because they accepted lower wages. It is very logical for an employer to hire an immigrant who will work for low pay rather than a citizen who wants to earn more money. The quota laws helped prevent the whole idea of cheap labor in the United States. Although it did occur, without the quota laws present, the United States will soon find itself in complete poverty and distress.

Another act that is often considered controversial is the Immigration Act of 1917. This act stated that all immigrants older than 16 of age had to demonstrate literacy in one language. It does not matter in which language the immigrant demonstrates this knowledge. People such as Roosevelt felt strongly about these types of actions by Congress, ?We have room in this country for but one flag, the Stars and Stripes?We have room for but one loyalty, loyalty to the United States? We have room for but one language, the English language? (Day and Day 27). This act is just another way for Congress to try and improve the United States by allowing literate immigrants to enter rather than immigrants who are not extremely intelligent.

Congress actually had sympathy for the many immigrants that wanted the opportunities of the United States. In 1903, the Pensionado Act was developed. This act was significant because it allowed Filipino students the opportunity to study in the United States. The education in the United States is far more advanced than that of the Philippines. In 1900, Congress enacted the Foraker Act, which granted Puerto Rico a modicum of local government. Under these conditions, Puerto Ricans are nationals, not citizens, like contemporary Filipinos. In 1917, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones-Shafroth Act. This law gave Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship. The Jones Act separated the Executive, Judicial, and Legislative branches of Puerto Rican government, provided civil rights to the individual, and created a locally elected bicameral legislature. The 2 houses were a Senate consisting of 19 members and a 39-member House of Representatives. However, the Governor and the President of the United States had the power to veto any law passed by the legislature. Also, the United States Congress had the power to stop any action taken by the legislature in Puerto Rico. The U.S. maintained control over fiscal and economic matters and exercised authority over mail services, immigration, defense and other basic governmental matters. Under this act, all Puerto Ricans are declared citizens unless they formally reject that status. Overall, the United States was very sympathetic for immigrants and granted them many rights that would allow them to excel in life.

Although Congress is considered to be harsh with immigration laws, they truly do care about the immigrants but they also fear the results of too many immigrants in the United States. In 1924, Congress made all native-born American Indians citizens of the United States. This action by Congress is a huge step for the American Indian population because, in 1887, the Dawes Act was really the only hint that the Native Americans would have a part in the American society. The Dawes Act conferred citizenship on acculturated Indians not living on reservations, citizenship that many Western states and localities refused, in practice, to recognize. Therefore, the granted citizenship for Native Americans was a very important part of their hunt for equality. In 1922, Congress passed the Cable Act which ended the discriminatory practice of the Expatriation Act of 1907 except for those female citizens who married ?aliens ineligible to citizenship,? (Asian aliens.) The Cable Act was the more advanced form of an 1855 act that said residential alien women who married American citizens were automatically citizens. Simply for protection reasons for immigrants, the Alien Contract Labor Laws of 1885,1887,1888, and 1891 prohibited immigrants from entering the country to work under contracts made before their arrival. Despite criticism that Congress receives for many immigration laws, it is shown through these particular laws and practices just how willing Congress was to grant rights to different ethnic groups.

The mixing of ethnic groups was considered a ?melting pot.? ??America is God?s Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries, but you won?t be long like that brothers, for these are the fires of God you?ve come to- these are the fires of God? God is making the American? the real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the crucible, I tell you- he will be the fusion of all the races, the coming superman? (Zangwill 37). Although many people accept the theory of a ?melting pot?, some Americans still disagree with this system. ?It is no solution for those who wish to participate in American life, and yet desire to retain their ethnic identity? (Jacobson 645). Many people didn?t grasp the concept that if conditions in a mother country are bad enough to want to immigrate into another country that a person is going to have to give in a little. In this case, giving up some of their culture to conform more to the American culture was just one sacrifice that was expected. The United States wants to help out different ethnic groups, but it is extremely difficult to help out each group on an individual basis and it is not logical to grant all immigrants the same rights because they come from different intellectual and cultural backgrounds with different interests and expectations.

Congress developed many different ways to screen who can enter the United States. These processes are very important in controlling the type of population that lives in the United States. In 1891, Congress created the Immigration and Naturalization Service, otherwise known as the INS. This service was developed to administer federal laws relating to the admission, exclusion, and deportation of aliens and the naturalization of aliens lawfully residing in the United States. The INS was required to enforce the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Contract Labor Law of 1885, and the Immigration Act of 1891. In 1875, a law that prohibited entry of prostitutes and convicts established direct federal regulation of immigration. The government of the United States saw these types of people as a danger to the country. In 1892, the INS opened up an immigration screening station at Ellis Island in New York Harbor and claimed this to be the INS headquarters. Seeing Ellis Island was amazing for most immigrants: ?I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time and it was the greatest thrill. It was a very clear, crisp day in February. And it was such a thrill that it?s hard to describe? (Coan 207). More than 12,000,000 immigrants underwent immigration processing or detention at Ellis Island from January 1, 1892 until November 12, 1954.

Congress is trying very hard to screen immigrants entering the United States so that only immigrants that can contribute positively will be allowed entrance by establishing an orderly method of deciding which immigrants could stay and which immigrants would not be allowed to remain in the United States. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 is an example of screening immigrants because it barred convicts, the insane, and the cognitively disabled from entering the United States. In 1893, the United States government made it a requirement that steamship companies had to record in manifests the vital statistics of all passengers aboard that particular ship. Many people were involved with this technique of screening immigrants. An immigrant inspector was given the task of verifying the information on the manifest sheets and was given the power to change or simplify immigrant names. Many times the names of immigrants were either shortened or replaced with more ?Americanized? names. This made it not only easier on the inspectors to identify different immigrants but it also made it easier for the immigrants to ?fit in? with the people living in America. Immigrants trying to enter the United States have to show their money to inspectors to prove that they are not paupers. As controversial as this issue seems to be, it is very logical for the government to want immigrants to have some money. As the immigrants venture out into the new lands, the United States hopes that they will be able to spend some money in America and help the nation to prosper. In 1906, knowledge of the English language was made a basic requirement for immigrants. Congress felt that if an immigrant was going to come to America, that it would be necessary for that person to know English so that survival in the New World would not be so difficult. Legislation excluded all mentally disabled persons, paupers, and those who might become public charges. It excluded those suffering from a contagious disease, as well as those convicted of a felony, an egregious crime, or a misdemeanor involving a moral turpitude. Anarchists were added to the list of unacceptable aliens in 1903. In 1907, Congress passed a law excluding immigrants with physical disabilities or mental defects that might affect their ability to earn a living. The United States government was very concerned for these immigrants? welfare and did not want to see them enter the country and end up in poverty. The same law also barred those immigrants that had tuberculosis and children unaccompanied by their parents. After 1907, immigrants had to demonstrate their physical health during a thorough medical examination. In 1924, the Immigration Bureau made immigrants register with the government and gave them documents that described their legal status. The Immigration Bureau has been a part of the Department of Labor since 1913. This very important Immigration Bureau set up the Border Patrol which is made up of 400 recruits who are trained in law, investigation techniques, fingerprinting, jujitsu, the use of firearms, and tracking and trailing. These are all very important laws and practices established by the United States Congress as a way to deal with the tremendous number of people who crave immigration into America. Each act is enacted for different reasons but in general, if Congress sits back and does nothing about this rush of immigrants to America, our nation will crumble and, not only will immigrants suffer, but also the citizens that have already gained their rights to be here will be devastated. It is not fair to do that to the American citizens. Although many immigrants find it to be discriminating towards their specific ethnic group, when analyzing the concept of screening, it is very plain to see why Congress has developed more laws. The United States government is not ignorant; they only want what is best for the nation. If keeping the American citizens secure with an economy of prosperity and a society of happiness is not considered fair, then justification for these acts and practices cannot be described. A nation filled with thugs, prostitutes, and unskilled people benefits the country in no way and therefore the intelligent United States of America government use their power to create systems to help avoid this terrible future from occurring.

Laws and practices established by the United States towards immigration during 1865 and 1930 are very fair despite the controversy and criticism that exists over this issue. Discrimination occurs with different ethnic groups but for those immigrants permitted into the country, the opportunity to excel in life is excellent. The laws and practices established to control immigration into the United States limited the amount of poverty that can be present in the country. Also, the nation’s government is looking out for the best interest of American citizens by not allowing unintelligent, unskilled, thugs into the country. Without these important practices and laws created by the United States Congress ?cheap? labor would overpower American citizen labor and lead the country to an economic and social breakdown. No question exists that the laws and practices established by the United States towards immigration do indeed discriminate certain ethnic groups but, in order for the country to maintain a stable and organized society, the actions of Congress are necessary. These practices and laws offer immigrants an opportunity to better their lives simply by walking through the ?Golden Gates.? The Statue of Liberty extravagantly symbolizes hope for immigrants, ?Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!? (Lazarus 42)

361