



# EXCLUSION IN WASHINGTON

## EXCLUSION

In 1882, for the first time in United States history, Federal law forbade entry of an ethnic

group of laborers on the basis that they endangered public safety and order. This was done through the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

This act provided a 10 year ban on Chinese labor immigration. The only Chinese people who were permitted to enter the country were those who obtained government certification. This certification was only given to non-laborers- students, government officials, etc.- but proving this was often difficult given the loose structure of the law.

Exclusion also meant that new requirements were placed on those who had already entered the country. State and Federal courts no longer had the right to grant citizenship to Chinese resident aliens. However, they could still deport these people.

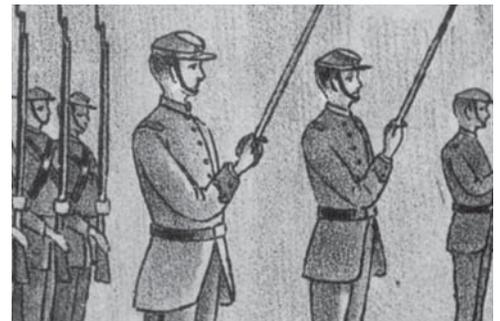
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The passage of this act came after a long period of anti-Chinese discrimination. There were more than 200 incidents of ethnic cleansing in the last half of the nineteenth century, many of them occurring before the passage of the Act.

Several other Americans perceived Chinese immigrants as a threat. One accusation was that the Chinese weakened the community by sending money back to their families in China. Another concern was that Euro-American jobs were threatened by immigrant labor because Chinese workers often received wages that were much lower than their Euro-American counterparts. This was not done to undercut Euro-American wages but rather because of the lower pay received by all minorities in this period.

## EXPULSION

As economic depression struck the Pacific Northwest, some non-Chinese workers and labor unions began to feel that the solution to unemployment issues was in the expulsion, or forced removal, of Chinese people from the area. On September 2, 1885, a group of British and Swedish miners attacked their Chinese counterparts at Rock Springs, Colorado. They killed 28 men, wounded 15 and drove hundreds of Chinese workers into the desert. The news traveled nationwide and only days later, the first of Washington's expulsions occurred.



The images to the right are details from *West Shore* magazine, based in Oregon. They depict the 1886 anti-Chinese riots in Seattle. This publication expressed views against the violence while still referring to the Chinese as an "undesirable" group of immigrants. Washington State Historical Society Collections.



## TIMES OF TROUBLE: WASHINGTON'S CHINESE PEOPLE IN THE 1800S

- 1850 "Ah-Long" becomes the first- and only-Chinese man to be recorded in the Washington Territorial Census.
- 1853 Washington Territory is established. A measure is adopted to deny Chinese people the right to vote.
- 1860 Still only one Chinese person is recorded in the census. This person is believed to have been Chin Chun Hock.
- 1868 Chin Chun Hock begins a store in Seattle called the Wa Chong Company.
- 1869 Seattle is incorporated as a township.
- 1873 300 Chinese people from Portland arrive in Olympia to lay track from Kalama to Tacoma for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Eventually, the Northern Pacific will hire over 15,000 Chinese laborers.
- 1876 Census records report 250 Chinese people living in Seattle.
- 1880s Economic depression strikes Washington.
- 1882 The Chinese Exclusion Act is passed.
- 1885 A riot in Rock Springs, Wyoming on September 2nd of this year sparks anti-Chinese violence in the Northwest. One action occurs on September 9th when the mining community of Black Diamond expels their Chinese population. In November, the citizens of Tacoma do the same.
- 1886 In February, a Seattle citizen committee forces more than 350 Chinese onto wagons and puts them on the steamer, *Queen of the Pacific*. Territorial Governor Squire declares a state of insurrection and requests federal troops. Martial law is not ended until July of that year.
- 1899 Chin Gee Hee, a merchant, predicts in an *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* interview that there will be no Chinese in Seattle within 10- 12 years.

### 1885: TACOMA

The Chinese expulsion in Tacoma was unusual in that

it was not spontaneous but had been planned. A number of city officials and Knights of Labor union members participated in the plan to remove all Chinese people from their city. On November 3, this group of citizens moved through the city, forcing people from their homes and businesses and driving them into the street. Although there were those, like Reverend W.D. McFarland, who protested, they were not able to stop the expulsion from taking place.

Mow Lung, a Chinese merchant, later recalled: "I saw a mob of several hundred men on the street. They came to my store and kicked off the door. They took hold of the Chinese that were in the houses, some of whom were Chinese women, including my wife, and pulled them out of the doors... The mayor of Tacoma, Mr. Weisbach, was there at the time with the mob." More than 200 Chinese people were forced out of Tacoma that night. Most of them never returned, leaving Tacoma the only major west coast city without a "Chinatown".

### 1886: SEATTLE

On February 7th, a citizen committee in Seattle told the Chinese people living there that they were being forced to leave the city. More than 350 people were forced onto wagons and hauled to Seattle docks where they were placed on a steamer bound south. Territorial Governor Watson Squire stopped the ship from leaving that night. He then proclaimed a state of insurrection and declared martial law, requesting government intervention. Federal troops were sent to Seattle, where they remained until July of that year.

### 1886: OLYMPIA

In a November 1885 town meeting,

Olympians had drafted a resolution on what they termed the "Chinese Question":

*"Be It Resolved: [...] while we fully realize the fact that we have too much of the Chinese element in our midst, we as clearly recognize the fact that they are here in and by the virtue of law and treaty stipulations, and that we are decidedly opposed to their expulsion by force or by intimidation, or by any other unlawful means, but we will at all times give our aid and support to any measures looking to a peaceable and lawful riddance of that element and a final solution of the 'Chinese question'."*

True to this statement, on February 9th, 1886, when presented with rioters attempting to expel the Olympia Chinese community, citizens responded. Sheriff William Billings deputized prominent residents who patrolled city streets. They arrested the leaders of the riot who were then tried, convicted and sent to prison on McNeil Island.

The term "Pai Hua" or "the Driven Out" would later become the way in which some Chinese people would refer to the expulsions. They were not passive victims- after the events in Tacoma, with the aid of the Chinese embassy, Chinese-American citizens would file civil claims against the government seeking reparations.

The Chinese Expulsion Act was followed by the Geary Act, 10 years later. This Act forbade the entry of all Chinese people into the United States. It also forced Chinese immigrants to wear photo identity cards around their necks in order to prove their legal status. More than 100,000 Chinese-Americans refused this government order to wear these cards. This was the largest mass civil disobedience in United States history at this time in history.

Chinese-Americans continued to struggle against prejudice in the country which they had come to call home. The community began to share their resources, forming businesses and using the judicial system to defend their civil rights.

It was their struggle in two court cases, *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* (1886) and *Wong Kim v. United States* (1898) that led to changes in citizenship laws. As a result of these court decisions, the U.S. Supreme Court confirmed the citizenship of any person born in the United States. Also confirmed was equal protection of the law for all citizens, regardless of race or nationality.

But it was not until 1943 that the Chinese exclusion laws would be officially repealed. Washington state senator Warren G. Magnuson sponsored an act to do so. This act, signed by President Franklin Roosevelt, established an annual quota of 105 Chinese immigrants. It did, however, allow the Chinese to apply to become naturalized citizens for the first time.

This change came about in part because of the United States' entry into World War II. As Chinese-Americans were finding gradual acceptance into society, this was because of the war with Japan. China and Japan had been enemies for centuries. With China as the ally of the United States in the conflict, attitudes began to change. However, as laws discriminating against the Chinese were repealed, Japanese Americans across the United States were being placed in internment camps.

The contributions of the Chinese people to Washington have continued. 1962 saw the election of Wing Luke to the Seattle City Council. Wing Luke was the first Chinese American to be elected to office in a large U.S. city on the mainland. In 1997, Gary Locke, 21st governor of Washington, became the first U.S. governor of Chinese descent.

The time of the expulsion was not forgotten, however. Locke remembered it in a 1997 address:



*"In the history of every minority in America, there are stark contrasts of light and dark. There are tales of terrible oppression and persecution- and, on the same page- tales of incredible courage, and passionate advocacy for equal rights.*

*As we work to restore the historical memory of the anti-Chinese, anti-immigrant violence of the 1880s, we must also- and equally- work to restore our historical memory of the people who opposed it.*

*We should build... monuments to the citizens and the sheriff in Olympia, who put their lives on the line when they stood between an angry, armed mob and their intended Chinese victims.*

*It is not enough to vilify the bigots. We must never forget to celebrate the heroism of those who stood up to them."*

## FIND OUT MORE

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