

The Chinese Exclusion Act

Student's Name

Institution of Learning

The Chinese Exclusion Act

People all over the globe can witness how mass media exploits the issue of immigration, often using it to propagate political ideas. However, one should be aware that concerns regarding immigration are not a novel topic. Instead, more than a hundred years ago, the United States engaged in enforcing immigration laws that proved racially biased, which created a damaging diplomatic situation. Chinese people coming to America, seeking the American Dream, were essentially stripped from such an opportunity. The investigation of the Chinese Exclusion Act as one of the foundational arguments illustrating immigration of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century may show a broader picture. It shows how a particular perception of immigrants had been constructed among ordinary American citizens. Necessarily, the exploration of the document requires offering background information showing how the law came into action. Understanding the importance of the Chinese Exclusion Act is based on revealing its roots as well as focusing on implications the law created. Specifically, when indicating stakeholders in this case, it is crucial to show how the document affected Chinese people working in the United States while offering racial and gender connotation. One should also analyze the response Chinese authorities made on such a biased American immigration policy. In this case, the Chinese Exclusion Act should be perceived as a piece of prejudicial immigration legislation propagated by the United States, a law that damaged political stability in America, a policy that made the lives of Chinese workers worse, and a diplomatic move that strained the relations between the two nations.

Background

Pondering important contextual facts, the starting point is to indicate that the Chinese Exclusion Act was an immigration law passed in 1882 (The African American Policy Forum, 2019). Importantly, the piece of legislation is regarded as “the first national immigration law” (Railton, 2013, p. 12). In fact, while there were laws in the history of the United States that pertained to citizenship for new arrivals—for instance, the Naturalization Act of 1790, the 1819 Steerage Act, and the 1862 Anti-Coolie Act—it was the Chinese Exclusion Act that had the broadest and most significant impact on the opportunity for Chinese people to come and work in America (Railton, 2013). Essentially, the document prevented Chinese laborers from immigrating to the United States. While the authority of the law initially spread to workers from China, in 1924, the act was modified to prevent the immigration of most Chinese people. In the same year, new amendments were introduced, expanding the influence of the Chinese Exclusion Act to citizens of other nations. Such a harsh immigration policy was propagated until 1943, when the act was repealed (The African American Policy Forum, 2019). It is essential to understand that the proclamation of the Chinese Exclusion Act was a political move that shattered the balance of political powers within the United States. While Democrats were the ones to vote for the act, the Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes tried to veto the law because it violated agreements between the United States and China (United States of America Department of State, 2018). The adoption of the immigration law created turbulence in both national and international arenas, putting America in a difficult situation that affected its domestic and foreign policies in the future.

Roots of the Act

Speaking about the origins of the Chinese Exclusion Act, one should investigate the reasons and events that preceded the adoption of the law that completely changed the immigration policy of the United States, essentially making the nation of immigrants closed for immigrants. Before 1854, the immigration of Chinese laborers to America constituted about 50 people per year. However, with the discovery of gold in the state of California, the number of immigrants skyrocketed (Chen, 2015). In the same year, almost 13,000 Chinese people were trying to enter American soil. When the “Gold Rush” subsided in 1866, Chinese laborers who previously came to the United States started looking for employment in construction. As a result, in 1870, the majority of workers building transcontinental roads across the United States were from China (Chen, 2015). When it comes to the job market being filled by Chinese laborers, historical accounts indicate that many immigrants claimed agricultural, factory, and garment jobs, offering a significant boost to the American economy (United States of America Department of State, 2018). However, with the increasing role of Chinese laborers in the American job market, anti-Chinese sentiment among citizens of the United States grew as well. One of the first steps against immigrant workers was the adoption of xenophobic protection tactics against miners from China. For instance, the Workingmen’s Party of California pushed legislation directed toward excluding Chinese laborers from the state of California (The African American Policy Forum, 2019). What the party members did not anticipate is that with the exclusion of miners from China, the unemployment rates would soar. However, instead of dealing with the consequences of their decisions, the Californian authorities blamed Chinese laborers—something that heated up the racial hostility against Chinese immigrants in general (The African American Policy Forum, 2019). Therefore, actions undertaken by the state

authorities made the overall case worse, creating racial biases and adversely affecting unemployment.

Impact on Chinese People

Clearly, the Chinese Exclusion Act was something that directed the foreign policy of the United States toward a confrontation with China and particular attitudes toward Chinese people living in America. In this sense, when the legislation was passed, there was an increase of racial- and gender-based attitudes toward Chinese people. Unfortunately, Chinese women working in the United States were among the most vulnerable groups affected by the new immigration policy. There were instances when Asian American women, while being citizens of the United States by birth, lost their citizenship because of the new policy associated with the Chinese Exclusion Act. Specifically, in 1907, Congress issued a preamble indicating that “any American woman who marries a foreigner shall take the nationality of her husband” (The African American Policy Forum, 2019). With the new legislature, many Chinese people were prevented from naturalization because they were ineligible for gaining American citizenship based on the racial factor (The African American Policy Forum, 2019). Evidently, thousands of Chinese immigrants as well as American women who decided to marry foreigners were affected by the Chinese Exclusion Act. People were prevented from getting citizenship, while many lost their citizenship and were forced to move to the place when their husbands were originally from.

China’s Response and Diplomatic Implications

While there was a distinct effect on people and the American nation, one should also add that the Chinese Exclusion Act worsened political ties between the United States and China. The adoption of new immigration policies violated previous treaties the nation established with

China. That is why Republicans opposed the new legislation and found it extremely unproductive in terms of the United States establishing and maintaining productive diplomatic relationships with China. When the American government passed the previous law-breaking connections with China, the Chinese people and authorities responded with definite actions. For instance, Chinese merchants organized an anti-American boycott in 1905. Having unofficial support of China's government, the movement spread throughout the United States, making a significant impact on various industries (United States of America Department of State, 2018). Importantly, President Theodore Roosevelt officially recognized the boycott as a counter effect to unjust American treatment of Chinese people living and working in the United States. However, making a choice between going against Congress or the Chinese government, the politician chose the latter, thus calling Chinese authorities to cease the boycott. For five more months, Chinese merchants and workers blocked the American economy (United States of America Department of State, 2018). However, soon, it was proven that without China's support, Chinese immigrants in America did not have sufficient means to resist oppressive policies. As a result, Chinese people and Chinese authorities had been left with no choice but to abide by the new rules. One can say that with such a situation, diplomatic relations between China and the United States effectively ceased to exist.

Conclusion

Considering all of the above, one should say that the Chinese Exclusion Act was a piece of immigration legislation that presented not only American immigration policies as deeply racist but also as unreasonable. Specifically, while the government of the United States wanted to get rid of Chinese immigrants and expand the job market for Americans, in reality, the new

legislation led to massive unemployment, broken diplomatic ties with China, a political clash between Democrats and Republicans, and a hatred of Asian immigrants toward the American nation. The historical lesson is about the realities people face when authorities come up with legislature adopted based on racial, ethnic, or gender-biased premises, and such policies will inevitably lead to devastating results for all parties involved and affected.

References

- The African American Policy Forum. (2019). Chinese Exclusion Act. Retrieved from <http://aapf.org/chinese-exclusion-act>
- Chen, J. J. (2015). The Impact of Skill-Based Immigration Restrictions: The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. *Journal of Human Capital*, 9(3), 298-328. doi:10.1086/683186
- Railton, B. (2013). *The Chinese Exclusion Act: What It Can Teach Us about America*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- United States of America Department of State. (2018). Milestones: 1866–1898. Retrieved from <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/chinese-immigration>

Academic Experts

Your paper can be even better than this one.
Get help from real experts in academic writing.



**REQUEST
HELP**



**GET A FREE
QUOTE**