



Significant Dates in Asian/Chinese American History

By Chinese American Heroes

Chinese American Heroes presents this series of significant dates in Asian American and Chinese American history. This is by no means a comprehensive list of events due to our limited time and resources for research. For the same reasons we concentrated on the major Asian American population groups in this country in numbers, the Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Filipino Americans.

In Week 2 we go from 1871 to 1905, featuring some of the most significant and still relatively unknown struggles for civil rights and against discriminatory immigration laws in American history.

In particular we'd like to thank and acknowledge the comprehensive research work of Professor Jean Pfaelzer of the University of Delaware, in her 2007 book, "Driven Out: The Hidden War Against Chinese Americans." Dr. Pfaelzer's detailed research uncovered the racism and paranoia that resulted in the cruel treatment of immigrant and 1st generation Chinese Americans from the 18th Century through the early 20th Century that included violent confiscation of property, evictions, and murder. These acts were conducted in over 300 different communities in the Western United States. Far from submitting to oppression, these Chinese Americans fought back with hundreds of lawsuits through the state and federal courts as well as with acts of civil disobedience, boycotts, and other forms of legal resistance.

DATE	EVENT
1871	Chinese Massacre of 1871 - After the accidental shooting of a white rancher the Chinese community in Los Angeles, California is destroyed. Eighteen Chinese are known to have been lynched but the unofficial death toll is higher. Emil Harris, the only Jewish American who later became Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, is credited for saving the lives of some Chinese during this event. All convictions for manslaughter are overturned on "legal technicalities."
1875	The Page Act bans all further Chinese labor from immigration to the US. It also bans the immigration of Chinese women, explicitly assuming that all of them are prostitutes. Those few women applying to enter the US as the wives or daughters of Chinese men already legally in the country are forced to undergo repeated and humiliating interrogations by British and American government officials. A single mistake during the multiple interrogations led to many legitimate claimants being denied or deported. The lack of Chinese women and laws banning interracial marriages creates rowdy and dying bachelor societies of men in Chinatowns all across the US.

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1880	<p>Suspension of the Burlingame Treaty - Because of the economic depression that had lasted throughout America for much of the 1870s and into the 1880s, a strongly and openly racist movement had arisen to end the immigration of Chinese labor to the US. Open immigration of Chinese is unilaterally suspended by the United States in contravention of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, but the government promises to protect Chinese laborers in the US. Government officials at most levels show a notable lack of interest in keeping such a promise.</p>
1882	<p>The Chinese Exclusion Act becomes the only law in American history specifically barring any nationality or race from immigrating to the United States and becoming naturalized citizens. Although its provisions were long ago repealed by later civil rights laws, it still exists today as a part of the United States Code, Chapter 7, Title 8 entitled, "Exclusion of Chinese."</p>
1883	<p>The pioneering journalist, Wong Chin Foo, uses "The Chinese American" as the title for his English language newspaper in New York City, the first recorded printing of the term. In his over-enthusiasm Wong printed 5,000 copies for a Chinese immigrant population in the city that numbered around 1,000 at best. The paper soon folds.</p>
1885	<p>Rock Springs Massacre - White miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming lead a mob in destroying the Chinese community. At least 28 Chinese are killed with many of their bodies left burned, mutilated, and unburied. The US Army is called in to restore order. A grand jury declines to bring any charges saying, "... no one has been able to testify to a single criminal act committed by any known white person that day." Many Chinese communities are driven out across the United States in the aftermath, most notably in Tacoma, Washington in November 1885 and in Seattle in 1886. Members of the Knights of Labor, an early labor union, are prominent in organizing and participating in all of these anti-Chinese attacks.</p>
1886	<p>A San Francisco municipal ordinance selectively enforced only upon Chinese laundries is struck down by the US Supreme Court in <i>Yick Wo v. Hopkins</i>, 118 U.S. 356. The court ruled that discrimination through the unequal application of the laws was unconstitutional. The Supreme Court later glosses over and ignores this case in <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>, legalizing racial segregation in 1896. However, the precedent would be the focal point of many later civil rights cases through the 1950s and 60s.</p>
1888	<p>The Scott Act not only renews the ban on the immigration of Chinese labor but prohibits all Chinese from returning to the US after visiting China. An estimated 20 to 30 thousand Chinese are unable to return to America.</p>
1892	<p>The Geary Act requires Chinese laborers in the United States to carry legal documents proving their residency under threat of immediate imprisonment</p>

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	and/or deportation . This is the first ever requirement by the US Government for photo identification documents to be carried by any group. Chinese in the United States lead widespread legal and civil resistance to the law by refusing to register en masse. These acts of civil and legal disobedience and boycotts of American goods organized by Chinese Americans and by China draw the notice and admiration of a young Indian lawyer named Mohandas K. Gandhi. To avoid continuing international embarrassment Congress quietly fails to provide adequate funding to enforce the law.
1894	The Gresham-Yang Treaty repealed the Scott Act provision banning the return of Chinese after visits to China but China was forced to accept a total ban on Chinese immigration to the United States.
1898	The Spanish American War and the subsequent Philippine-American War makes the Philippines into an American territory. One unanticipated problem of the American conquest is that Filipinos, as citizens of a US territory, do not come under anti-Asian legislation barring immigration to the United States. Filipino immigration to the United States follows much to the horror of many white Americans.
1898	Chinese are banned from immigrating to Hawaii and from coming from Hawaii to the United States.
1898	In US v. Wong Kim Ark , 169 U.S. 649, the US Supreme Court ruled that the 14th Amendment stating that, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States..." applied to everyone born in the United States, even those whose parents were Chinese and thus otherwise ineligible for naturalization. Citizenship by birth is established as the law of the land.
1903	Oxnard Strike - Mexican and Japanese farm laborers in Oxnard, California, join together to form the Japanese-Mexican Labor Association (JMLA) to strike against an owner dominated labor organization driving down wages. Violence that killed one Mexican striker led to so much embarrassing press publicity that the owners backed down. However, the refusal of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to recognize the JMLA solely because it recruited Japanese workers eventually led to these worker gains being lost and the collapse of the association.
1905	In United States v. Ju Toy , 198 U.S. 253, a lower federal district court had found that Ju Toy was a United States citizen but he was ordered deported anyway by the Secretary of Commerce and Labor (then in charge of US immigration matters.) Such immigration decisions about Chinese, even if they were US citizens, were not eligible for judicial review according to Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. In dissent, Justice David Brewer wrote, "I cannot believe that

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	Congress intended to provide that a citizen, simply because he belongs to an obnoxious race, can be deprived of all the liberty and protection which the Constitution guarantees, and if it did so intend, I do not believe that it has the power to do so."