



Significant Dates in Asian/Chinese American History - 3

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 3 we go from 1906 to 1934. This is perhaps the worst time for Asian American immigration in United States history as greatly increased restrictions and discriminatory laws keep Asian populations small and limited in their economic potential. The only positive note, ironically, stems from one of the greatest natural disasters ever suffered in American history.

DATE	EVENT
1906	The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire kills over 3000 people and devastates the city of San Francisco. It also destroys US immigration records enabling a surge of Chinese immigration to the United States as many immigrants claim to have been born in the United States thus making them US citizens. This new immigration renews Chinatowns that had been shrinking and dying as their bachelors passed away.
1907	Gentlemen's Agreement - to avoid the threat of war with Japan over the poor treatment of Japanese immigrants to the United States, the United States agreed not to impose any formal limits on Japanese immigration while Japan promised not to issue anymore passports allowing Japanese to enter the United States. However, Japan continued to issue passports for Japanese to enter Hawaii where they were needed for their labor on the sugar plantations. Many Japanese then entered the United States with little to no restrictions via Hawaii until 1924.
1913	The California Alien Land Law prohibited "aliens ineligible for citizenship" from owning land or property. This in effect took away the extensive agricultural land holdings held by Japanese and Chinese Americans in the rich Central Valley and other parts of California. Other states on the West Coast quickly followed California's example with their own alien land laws.

DATE	EVENT
1911	<p>Private José B. Nisperos, of the US Army Philippine Scouts and a citizen of what was then the US territory of the Philippines, is awarded the Medal of Honor for combat against Filipino tribesmen while severely wounded. This is the first award of a Medal of Honor, the highest American military award, to a Filipino and Asian American.</p>
1915	<p>Fireman 2nd Class Telesforo de la Cruz Trinidad, a citizen of the US territory of the Philippines, is awarded the Medal of Honor for saving the lives of crewmen after a boiler explosion aboard the USS California off the coast of Mexico. This is the only US Navy Medal of Honor so far to be won by an Asian American. (The Medal of Honor award criteria was later changed to allow only combat heroism to be considered.)</p>
1922	<p>The Cable Act took away the American citizenship of any woman marrying an "alien ineligible to naturalization." Asians were the only group ever placed in this category by United States law. The law was amended in 1931 to allow such marriages.</p>
1923	<p>In the case of United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind, 261 U.S. 204, the United States Supreme Court decided that Asian Indians are ineligible for US citizenship because the popular definition of "white" rather than the scientific one of "Caucasian" should be used legally. This rather inarticulate ruling closed the loophole that had allowed some Indians from Northern India to become US citizens as "whites" under the 1790 definition. Nevertheless, the determined Dr. Thind, because of his World War I US Army service, was naturalized as a US citizen for the third and final time in 1936 even though the law barring his citizenship was only overturned in 1946.</p>
1924	<p>The Immigration Act of 1924 aka the National Origins Act set national limits on immigration. It allows only 2% of immigrants annually from each country based upon the national origins of the population of the United States detailed in the 1890 US Census. This severely limited immigration of people from Southern and Eastern Europe while encouraging immigration from Northern European countries like Britain, Germany, and Ireland. The law also allows only immigrants "eligible for naturalization" into the country. The effect is to stop all legal Asian immigration to the United States.</p>
1934	<p>The Tydings-McDuffie Act (officially the Philippine Independence Act) limits Filipino immigration to 50 persons per year. This ends the status of Filipinos as US nationals by setting the Philippines on the path to independence from the United States. However, American military basing rights in the Philippines are maintained. The US Government was not only concerned about unlimited Filipino immigration to the US mainland but also with miscegenation, specifically Filipino men interacting with and possibly marrying white women. The few such</p>

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	<p>cases of this had received much lurid press coverage. Also, many Chinese had entered the United States by claiming status as Filipinos, both honestly and dishonestly. US immigration officials couldn't tell the difference between Filipino and Chinese. A government repatriation program instituted at the same time to pay Filipinos to go back to the Philippines fails to attract many takers.</p>