

whatever, is a gross violation of right and a direct provocation to resentment and outrage.

It is not shown by any positive proof that these articles had any actual connection with

the riots. But it was very injudicious, to say the least, and may fairly be regarded as among the causes which stimulated the ill-feeling that vented itself in violence and bloodshed.

3-4. DEBATES ON CHINESE IMMIGRATION (1876)

Source: *Immigration of Chinese, Speech of Hon. Aaron A. Sargent of California, In the Senate of the United States*, May 2, 1876. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Source: Augustus Layres (writing under the pseudonym Friends of Right, Justice, and Humanity), *Facts Upon the Other Side of the Chinese Question, With a Memorial to the President of the U.S., From Representative Chinamen in America*, 1876. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, debates about immigration comprised one of the most contentious political issues, especially in cities, where immigrants congregated in high numbers. Organized labor, nativists (those with prejudice against anyone not born in the United States), and others joined the movement to curb immigration. The newcomers themselves, and those who befriended them, made repeated arguments for allowing immigration. In 1882, however, the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first federal law targeting one particular immigrant group. Although the Chinese comprised just 0.002 percent of the United States population, racial difference and the lack of cultural understanding strengthened white prejudice. California, where just over 40 percent of the 148,000 Chinese in the United States lived, stood at the forefront of this battle. One of the charges against the Chinese was that they were working as "coolie" laborers, a type of slavery or indentured servitude. The extent of this worry far exceeded the reality, and free Chinese laborers were routinely maligned as coolies by their detractors. Chinese women were repeatedly categorized as prostitutes, and indeed Chinese prostitution constituted a rampant problem, as the majority of Chinese men arrived in the United States as bachelors or left wives behind in China.

The first item, labeled (A), below is an excerpt from a speech given on May 2, 1876 by United States Senator Aaron A. Sargent of California. The month prior, Sargent urged that President Ulysses S. Grant "cause negotiations to be entered upon with the Chinese government to effect such change in the existing treaty between the United States and China as will lawfully permit the application of restrictions upon the great influx of Chinese subjects to this country."¹ The ban against Chinese immigration, passed in 1882, was not lifted until 1943, when Chinese aligned with the Allies in World War II and allowed into the country again in very small numbers. The second document, labeled (B), written under the pseudonym Friends of Right, Justice, and Humanity, was attributed to Augustus Layres, and signed simply "—X."

* *Immigration of Chinese, Speech of Hon. Aaron A. Sargent of California, In the Senate of the United States*, May 2, 1876.

(A) But when the question is as to the introduction of large numbers of people into the country whose admission is not a matter of right, but of policy, then we ought to consider whether they are a disturbing element, and whether exclusion is not the best and surest prevention against disorders which are difficult to cure when once fastened upon us.

Is the desire of the Chinese to select our country as a place of residence so clear a natural right that, rather than gainsay it, we are willing to submit to the disorders which must grow out of the prejudice known to exist against them? As to this prejudice, is it not based upon some reason? I intend to state some of the objections to their coming which account for the bitter opposition shown in California and elsewhere where they have already appeared in numbers. Are the people of the East quite certain that, if the Chinese were to land in their midst in the proportion of one in every eight of the population of several States, they would be as easy to the future as now? They should try to put themselves in our place, and deal with this question as if they too had among them this strange and dangerously unassimilative people, increasing in numbers from year to year.

General Exclusion Only Remedy for Evils

The importation of coolies is now forbidden by statute. But it is found impossible to reach the cases of violation of its provisions, because neither side will disclose the existence of cooly [*sic*] contracts.

The importation of females for immoral purposes is also forbidden by statute. But the law is a dead-letter, because of the impossibility of obtaining proof of its violation.

And yet it is the almost universal conviction of Californians that nine-tenths of the Chinese male immigration is in violation of the former, and ninety-nine hundredths of the female immigration is in violation of the latter statute. There can be no remedy but general exclusion; and the policy, justice, and necessity of that supreme measure I propose to discuss.

The resolution before the Senate looks to a modification of certain provisions of the existing treaty between the United States and China. Those provisions are as follows:

Article V

The United States of America and the Emperor of China cordially recognize the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects respectively from the one country to the other, for purposes of curiosity, of trade, or to any other foreign country, without their free and voluntary consent, respectively.

Article VI

Citizens of the United States visiting or residing in China shall enjoy the same privileges, immunities, and exemptions, in respect to travel or residence, as may there be enjoyed by the citizens or subjects of the most favored nation; and, reciprocally, Chinese subjects visiting or residing in the United States shall enjoy the same privileges, immunities, and exemptions, in their respect to travel or residence, as may there be enjoyed by the citizens or subjects of the most favored nation. But nothing herein contained shall be held to confer naturalization upon citizens of the United States in China, nor upon the subjects of China in the United States.

The question of the restriction of Chinese immigration to the United States concerns at present the people of the Pacific coast more than it does Eastern communities. Our people are not always wise or deliberate in their treatment of the subject, and their irritability often leads them to extravagance of speech and exhibitions of heated prejudices which produce an effect at the East the very opposite of what they intend. The unreasonableness, or even violence, of discontented people does not, however, make the cause of their discontent any the less important. The remedy for the evils, if evils they are, of Chinese immigration lies entirely in the hands of the Federal

Government. The treaty-making power must first be appealed to seek such modifications of our treaty with China as will pave the way for legislation under the power of Congress to regulate commerce. It is very desirable, therefore, that all appeals to the Federal Government should be clearly based on reason, humanity, and national interest. The Chinese are to a very limited extent the objects of hatred and prejudice east of the Rocky mountains, and all arguments against their influx must be free from

(B) Sundry Charges and Conclusion

We dismiss as unworthy of consideration the charges that "*The Chinese are pagans; are not a homogeneous race, do not adopt our manners, our food, our style of dress, etc.*"

It will be a sad day, indeed, for this great Republic, when it shall prescribe personal qualities of this kind as conditions to immigration. America will again become wild then, and her qualifications for simple residents as recommended by the Anti-Chinese Committee are unknown even in the most despotic countries.

The Chinese are accused of being *filthy, diseased, immoral, and vicious* people, who fill our prisons and crowd our hospitals.

The Report of the Board of Directors of the California State Prison, for 1875, gives the total number of prisoners as 1,083, of whom only 187 are Chinese, notwithstanding they find but little mercy in our courts. The County Hospital Report shows also but a small proportion of Chinese patients. The City Record of mortality among them is very small, and Dr. Toland has testified that they are personally clean.

But if these evils exist, why do not the Municipal Authorities remedy them? Legislation is not exhausted as it is alleged, only faithful police officers who do not accept bribes are required, as shown by the investigation.

the familiar cries with which place-hunting demagogues assail the ears of mobs in California. That the presence of Chinese in this country in any considerable numbers is most undesirable is my firm conviction, as I think it is of the great body of those in California who aid in the protection of them in their treaty rights. The question of national duty in the premises comes to us at the threshold of any discussion, and we are obliged to consider it.

Again, if these charges be true, how does it happen that the Chinese have "*monopolized*" as you say, a great portion of the domestic and commercial service, and in the very best houses, for nearly twenty years? Can it be that our wealthy and honored citizens will confide their households to filthy, diseased, immoral, and criminal servants? Either our citizens are not what they seem or it is not true what you say in regard to the Chinese.

But it is enough. This Anti-Chinese Crusade, started by sectarian fanaticism, encouraged by personal prejudice and ambition for political capital, has already culminated in personal attack, abuse, and incendiarism against the inoffensive Chinese. Anti-Coolie Clubs are now arming and preparing to follow the late example of the people of Antioch, who have banished the Chinese and burned their quarters.

It is high time that the Municipal, State, and National authorities, in common with law abiding citizens, should awake to the imminent danger that threatens to break the peace and to disgrace both State and nation. They must assert their authority in defense of our treaty obligations with China, for the protection of Chinese emigrants and in behalf of law and order.

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