

The Institutionalization of Anti-Asian Thought

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Anti-Asian violence in the Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the lives of millions of people around the world and will leave behind varying legacies. In the United States, the legacy COVID-19 will leave on the Asian American community is centered around the vocal xenophobia and racism they experienced from their fellow citizens. It was an instance of Asian Americans being socially excluded from American society and used as the scapegoat for one of the most significant pandemics in history. Central to the rise in anti-Asian sentiment during the pandemic is President Trump, who deflected blame on his administration's response to the pandemic used racially charged terms such as "Chinese Flu" and "Chinese virus," which urged "Americans to view the high number of infections, mortality rates, job losses, school closures, heightened anxieties, and other tragedies of the pandemic through a racial lens."¹ Such framing had disastrous consequences on the Asian American community, as Trump's "Chinese virus" tweets correlated to an upsurge in violence against Asian Americans. In the first year of the pandemic alone, 3,800 anti-Asian incidents were reported across all fifty states and the District of Columbia, and a reported two million Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders had experienced a hate incident since the COVID-19 pandemic began.² However, this was not the first time people from Asia or of Asian descent faced such violence and ostracism in the United States.

Between 1875 and 1917, three pieces of immigration legislation were introduced and heavily restricted the ability of those from Asia to immigrate to the United States. The first act was the Page Law, designed to stop

1 Lee Erika. *The Making of Asian America: A History*. (Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2021), page 402.

2 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 402.

Chinese laborers and sex workers from entering the country. The next and even more significant piece of legislation is the Chinese Exclusion Act which “prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers for a period of ten years and barred all Chinese immigrants from naturalized citizenship.”³ The next piece of legislation was the immigration act of 1917, which banned Asian immigration into the U.S. in its entirety. The question I will be pursuing is why the U.S. government clamped down so vigorously on Asian immigration and how that clampdown evolved over forty years of an anti-Asian immigration policy. I will examine this question through historical institutionalism, arguing that the legislation created by the American government reflected racist and xenophobic ideas toward Asian immigrants. Such actions by the United States government caused Asian immigrants and Asian Americans to perpetually be seen as not full residents or citizens of the United States.

The Ideological Struggle in the Exclusion Debate

To understand the institutional racism that Asian Americans faced, there needs to be an understanding of the era in which legislation was implemented and the core political conflict it revolved around. What transpired in this period was the exclusion debate which pitted exclusionists, those who supported an exclusive vision of the United States rooted in white supremacy, against egalitarians, those who supported an inclusive view of the United States. As defined by historian Lon Kurashige, the Egalitarians supported the core claim of the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal.”⁴ Importantly, however, those who identified as egalitarians were not fully righteous or idealistic individuals but “historical actors driven by interests that often perpetuated the racial status quo as well as the domestic and global capitalist order.”⁵ Importantly though, the existence of these egalitarians demonstrates how the debate over exclusion was incredibly nuanced and that it was not preordained that the exclusionists would win the debate. Over time, however, the exclusionists became two powerful, leading to the egalitarians becoming a minority with little power in determining the course of immigration policy till after World War II. Analyzing the period in which this debate took place reveals how this debate was a battle for the very identity of the United States.

Historical Institutional View of U.S. Immigration Policy

Historical Institutionalism is a methodology in political science that addresses big questions and analyzes change over time while paying close attention to the

3 Lee, Erika. “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924.” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (2002): page 36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27502847>.

4 Kurashige, Lon, *Two Faces of Exclusion: The Untold Story of Anti-Asian Racism in the United States* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016; online edn, North Carolina Scholarship Online, 18 May 2017), page 4. <https://doi.org/10.5149/northcarolina/9781469629438.001.0001>.

5 Kurashige, page 5.

historical context in which events occur.⁶ This approach provides a better understanding of national and public policy and politics. Specifically, I will use historical institutionalist approaches proposed by Desmond King and Paul Frymer. King focuses on how one of the most significant discoveries historical institutionalists have made regarding American politics is how race and racial inequality shape policy and policy outcomes.⁷ The American state carries out all the actions that a nation is supposed to do with maintaining public order and creating policy, but race and the politics of race are always critical to the government's calculations. Frymer focuses on racial conflict and how said racial conflict plays out is a crucial aspect in the development of the American state. This racial conflict has played out within government institutions and has been fundamental in America's state formation.⁸ All of the sources gathered in this paper have discovered how race is a key aspect in forming each piece of legislation and characterized the national debate over exclusion. They also demonstrate how starting with the passage of the Page Law, the United States was put on the path of creating ever more restrictive immigration laws that cast a net on an ever-growing number of people until America shut its gates entirely.

Kerry Abrams notes that to get the Page Law passed in Congress, the law targeted a group of marginalized people the Chinese government did not find essential and used racist rhetoric to argue that Chinese women were a threat to American values. In her analysis of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Erika Lee argues that the law introduced gatekeeping in American immigration policy. More specifically, she argues that it changed how the U.S. thought of itself as a nation of immigrants, for it legalized and reinforced the idea that "undesirable" immigrants should be excluded from coming to America. Even when Lee focuses on the broader Asian American experience as she does in the *Making of Asia America*, a massively important theme in her book is how Asian Americans have been discriminated against across American history, even in the present. Lon Kurashige and Wenxian Zhang both analyze the debate over exclusion in America and the shaping of its changing attitude toward Asian immigrants. Many of the arguments in the exclusion debates were racially charged, but those arguments were not met with silence. Advocates for Asian immigrants emerged, and while they did not succeed, they showed how debates over race played out. The Literature gathered has been published over two decades and shows how scholars have found race to be a critical part of the Asian experience in America and in the process of creating legislation that directly targeted Asian immigrants. It also demonstrates the legacy such legislation had on the psyche of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans. Even as the American

6 Pierson, Paul, and Theda Skocpol. "Historical Institutionalism in Contemporary *Political Science*." *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* 3, no 1 (2002). Page 4.

7 King, Desmond, 'The American State and the Enduring Politics of Race,' in Orfeo Fioretos, Tulia G. Falletti, and Adam Sheingate (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism*. Page 293.

8 Frymer, Paul, 'Citizenship and Race,' in Orfeo Fioretos, Tulia G. Falletti, and Adam Sheingate (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism*. Page 357.

government later attempted to correct the legislation of the past by liberalizing immigration laws and removing negative associations towards the Asian population in the United States. Efforts by the U.S. government in the latter half of the twentieth century have not addressed the institutionalized racism it created and have allowed said racism to persist in the present day.

The Emergence of the Exclusionists and the Page Law

Chinese immigration into the United States began significantly with the discovery of gold in California. In 1851 2,716 Chinese migrants came to California; in 1852, over 20,000 more migrants crossed the Pacific hoping to make their fortune. Very few of these migrants discovered gold in California, but America provided much greater economic opportunities than existed on the mainland, which led to thousands of Chinese immigrating to the United States. By 1870 63,000 Chinese migrants had settled in the United States, the vast majority residing in California.⁹ Increased immigration from China did not go unnoticed, and conflicts quickly emerged. During the California Gold Rush, the California state legislature attempted to exclude all Chinese migrants from working in the mines to protect the white miners and laborers in the state. What stopped the Californian legislature from going through with this plan was the revenue Chinese laborers provided to the state through the foreign miners' tax.¹⁰ In the beginning, the federal government of the United States was not hostile to the idea of immigration from China. In 1868 the United States and China signed the Burlingame Treaty, which in it included a provision that recognized the "inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance, and also the mutual advantage of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects, respectively, from the one country to the other, for purposes of curiosity, of trade, or as [a] permanent resident."¹¹ Americans on the West Coast, however, did not see the influx of Chinese laborers to be voluntary migrants but instead part of a system of slavery known as "coolie labor." This labor took the form of indentured servitude through long-term contracts.¹² This practice did take place, but that was not how the majority of immigrants from China came to the U.S., but politicians primarily in California created the myth that they were to give justification to increasingly anti-Chinese policies in the state.

Though exclusionists wanted to ban all Chinese immigrants from entering China, such efforts were not fruitful primarily because of the egalitarian coalition within the Republican Party, which believed that immigrants from Asia would strengthen the nations' connections in Asia and develop the industry of the west coast.¹³ The exclusionist then turned their attention to limiting the number of female immigrants coming into China, especially Chinese prostitutes. Chinese prostitutes

9 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 59.

10 Kurashige, page 22.

11 Abrams, Kerry. "Polygamy, Prostitution, and the Federalization of Immigration Law." *Columbia Law Review* 105, no. 3 (2005). Page 650. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4099447>.

12 Abrams, page 651.

13 Kurashige, page 14.

came to the United States either because their families sold their daughters to representatives who claimed to want them as brides or indentured servants only to be put to work as prostitutes. Others came voluntarily to better their situation financially.¹⁴ Many Chinese women did work as Prostitutes, but an equally large number “came not as prostitutes but as laborers and wives.”¹⁵ These women were equally frowned upon due to “profound differences between Chinese attitudes toward sexuality and family structure and the more rigid American system.” Exclusionists used these cultural differences to argue that Chinese women were all slaves trapped in marriage without their consent, a powerful argument in an America still grappling with the legacy of the Civil War. They also argued that Chinese women were much more likely to stay as permanent residents in the U.S. than men, and due to the 14 Amendment, any child born would become a citizen. Exclusionists saw this as a direct challenge to maintaining white supremacy in the country if the immigration of Chinese women was not curbed.

The Page Law harnessed these anxieties as the anti-Chinese movement grew in its veracity. The California state legislature, on multiple occasions, tried to implement legislation that would deprive or restrict any immigrant who was a coolie or prostitute from entering the state. These attempts were all struck down in federal court because they went against federal law. While this occurred, the egalitarianism that existed in the Republican Party after the Civil War began to fracture. Once isolated to the West Coast, the exclusionist coalition began to spread to the rest of the Republican Party after the Democratic Party’s gains in the 1874 midterms. Congressman Horace Page from California was one of those exclusionist Republicans who gained greater influence in the 1870s. Page echoed many of the arguments used in the California legislature, stating that the Civil War had shown the government’s commitment to eradicating slavery. Yet Congress was allowing the existence of “an equally and, if possible, a more insidious danger” in the form of coolie’s and prostitutes (Abrams 693).¹⁶ For Page, the legislation he proposed was not an effort to strip the Chinese migrants of their rights but to protect the virtues of white Americans from criminals he felt were incapable of understanding the values of equality, purity, and free labor. Page’s carefully crafted argument allowed the Page Law to pass Congress, making it illegal for anyone deemed a coolie laborer or prostitute to enter the country. It also required women from China to present a certificate stating they were not coming for immoral purposes.

If the goal of the Page Act was to discourage the growth of the Chinese population in the United States, then the legislation was not a success. Between 1870 and 1880, the number of people who identified as Chinese grew from 63,199 to 105,405.¹⁷ That was not the primary goal of the Page Law, however. Its primary

14 Abrams, page 655.

15 Abrams, page 656.

16 Abrams, page 693.

17 Bureau, US Census. “1880 Census: Volume 1. Statistics of the Population of the United States.” Census.gov, December 16, 2021. Page 3. www.census.gov/library/publication/1883/dec/vol-01-population.html.

purpose was to limit the number of female immigrants from China, and in that goal, it succeeded. In the implantation of the Page Law, the State Department, which controlled the distribution of certificates, did not have a particular standard in determining if a woman was a prostitute. If the woman claimed that she was not a prostitute but noted that she was single, she would be denied a certificate shutting down efforts to go to the United States. Women were also interrogated on three separate occasions on why they wanted to come to the United States, and these interrogations were often humiliating affairs meant to further discourage immigration to the United States. Even if a woman passed the line of questioning, port officials still could turn away any women they deemed immoral. Due to these restrictions, between 1876 and 1882, only 136 women were able to enter the United States.¹⁸

The Chinese Exclusion Act and the “Yellow Peril”

The Page Law represented a massive victory for the exclusionist who wanted to keep America a nation dominated by white supremacy. The exclusionist movement was legitimized as a political force, and the federal government obtained unquestioned authority in dealing with immigration policy. The Page Law did not settle the debate over exclusion it merely nationalized the issue. H. N. Clement perfectly captured the long-term ambition of exclusionists when he argued that America had the right to say to Asian immigrants, “You shall not come at all.”¹⁹ Exclusionists like Clement characterized those from China as a horde that would threaten the nation’s security, but these arguments were rooted in the belief that non-white people were inferior and did not deserve citizenship rights or be allowed to enter the country altogether. Framed in a modern context, these exclusionists were gatekeepers who racialized Chinese immigrants at every opportunity speaking of the need to contain the threat immigrants posed and, by virtue, protect the American way of life.²⁰ Although weakened after the Page Law, Egalitarians represented a strong enough constituency that could sabotage the exclusionist’s efforts. They maintained their argument for the need of the U.S. to honor its obligations of the Burlingame Treaty and the contributions Chinese laborers had made to the U.S. economy. Egalitarians firmly felt that Chinese immigrants did not threaten American culture but would only enhance it. The exclusion debate was now becoming a key turning point in the path the nation would go down, and it was not clear at the moment who would come out victorious. It was in this political atmosphere that the Chinese Exclusion Act would be debated.

The prelude to the Chinese Exclusion Act was the 1881 Angell Treaty. The treaty was a renegotiated version of the Burlingame Treaty, which gave concessions to the exclusionists and egalitarians. The treaty gave the U.S. the ability to regulate Chinese labor migration, but it could not prohibit said migration. Another key

18 Abrams, pages 699-701.

19 Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example.” Page 39.

20 Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example.” Page 38.

victory for the egalitarians was that teachers, students, merchants, and household servants could not be stopped from immigrating to the United States.²¹ The ability to regulate Chinese labor was something the exclusionist long desired, and a coalition formed on geographical lines to push through Congress a law restricting Chinese laborers from entering the coalition. In Congress, the Exclusionists were made of those from the West Coast and the reinstated southern states, while Egalitarians were primarily from the Northeast. What allowed the exclusionist to get the Chinese Exclusion Act passed in Congress was the break between Republicans in the Midwest and those in the Northeast. The break occurred because of a convergence of wanting to protect white laborers, resurgent nativism, and trying to curb the power of industrialists in the Northeast.²² The defeat the egalitarians suffered at the hands of the exclusionists displayed how, politically, the exclusionist ideology had no longer become taboo within American politics. The exclusionist platform had become politically expedient within the Democratic and Republican parties. The only solace that the egalitarians were able to achieve from this defeat was that the act was only temporary, lasting for ten years. Every time the act went up for renewal, however, Congress renewed it and made the law permanent in 1904.²³

The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act served to embolden exclusionists. Three years after the law was passed, a mob of 500 men fell upon Chinese neighborhoods in Tacoma, Washington, forcing between 800 and 900 residents to leave the city. Some residents caught the fastest train to take them away from Tacoma others walked 100 miles to Portland, Oregon, or British Columbia for refuge.²⁴ Incidents like that occurred in Tacoma, and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act did not go unnoticed. Mark Twain remarked how in America, the life and liberty of Chinese migrants were not worth a penny to white men when they needed a scapegoat.²⁵ Poet Joaquin Miller said that what the exclusionists were aiming to achieve was a great betrayal to the immigrants who came to the United States: “they trusted your word, have built your railroads, and washed your dirty linen, and now you propose to kick them out. It is pitiful to see great minds prostituted to such selfish aims.”²⁶ The biting rhetoric of Twain and Miller fell on deaf ears as the exclusionists marched on in their pursuit to deter all Asian migrants from coming to America. Not satisfied with excluding Chinese migrants, their attention turned to the next largest Asian immigrant group in the United States: Japanese immigrants.

Japanese immigrants represented a distinctly different threat than Chinese immigrants, which reflected the contrast in the standing of their native countries. If the Chinese state under the Qing was a declining power, then Japan was a bur-

21 Kurashige, page 45.

22 Kurashige, page 60.

23 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 94.

24 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 94.

25 Zhang, Wenxian. “Standing Up Against Racial Discrimination: Progressive Americans and the Chinese Exclusion Act in the Late Nineteenth Century.” *Phylon* (1960-) 56, no. 1 (2019). Pages 17-18). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26743829>.

26 Zhang, page 19.

geoning new power with lofty imperial ambitions. Japan's victory over China in the Sino-Japanese War confirmed to the rest of the world, which was now the dominant Asian power. Japanese victory also raised anxieties among European leaders about an invasion from Asia that would see the destruction of the world's great powers. The anxiety leaders in Europe and later America felt about a potential invasion from Asia was termed The Yellow Peril due to a painting commissioned by Kaiser Wilhelm II.²⁷ The idea of The Yellow Peril found an eager audience in the exclusionists and gained greater momentum after the Russo-Japanese War, in which Japan decisively defeated the Russian military and ended the idea of European invincibility.

To the exclusionists, Japan and the rest of Asia represented a national security threat to the United States, and immigrants from Asia, especially Japanese immigrants, began to be seen in the same light. Japanese migrants also were becoming the dominant Asian group in the United States. At the turn of the twentieth century, 86,000 people identified as Japanese and resided in the United States. This was an exponential increase from 1890, when only 14,000 Japanese people resided in the United States. Comparatively, the number of individuals who identified as Chinese fell from 126,000 in 1890 to 119,000 in 1900.²⁸ Such trends signaled that Japanese migrants would overcome Chinese migrants as the largest Asian immigrant group in the United States unless changes were made in restricting Japanese immigrants into the country. Cries thus became much louder from the Exclusionists to ban Japanese migrants from entering the United States, particularly Japanese laborers. President Theodore Roosevelt was able to temper exclusionist demands by making a Gentlemen's Agreement with the Japanese government. The agreement was that current Japanese laborers would be allowed to stay in the country, but no new laborers would be able to enter the U.S. in the future.²⁹ For exclusionists, this was only a stop-gap measure and did not stop them from wanting to achieve their long-term ambitions. Those ambitions were characterized best by the Japanese Korean Exclusion League, whose slogan was "Absolute Exclusion of Asiatics."³⁰ All the exclusionists needed to execute their plan to stop anyone coming into the country. America's entry into World War I provided them with such an opportunity.



America's entry into World War I was met with extreme nationalism and fear of immigrants or citizens who professed sympathies toward the Central Powers. Those of German descent were particularly distrusted and "faced strong pressures to prove their loyalty to America and disavow allegiance to a homeland whose military was killing neutral American citizens in the Atlantic Ocean and threatening to ally

27 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 123.
28 Bureau, US Census. "1900 Census: Volume I. Population, Part I." Census.gov, October 8, 2021. Page 7. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1901/dec/vol-01-population.html>.
29 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 129.
30 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 125.

with Mexico against the United States.”³¹ The hysteria reached such a point that the Justice Department arrested 4,000 German immigrants on charges of being spies or saboteurs.³² Prejudice was disguised by notions of national security and the need to protect the nation’s borders. Such an atmosphere gave the national government legitimacy in forbidding anyone to enter the country if they were deemed unsafe. The exclusionists similarly used such tactics to introduce legislation that would effectively stop immigration from Asia to the United States. Rumblings of such legislation in Congress began in 1916 with exclusionists wanting to stop further Japanese immigration and immigration from South Asia, primarily from India.

Of Asian immigrants who came to the United States, those from India were a small piece of a larger whole. In 1910 only 2,545 Indian immigrants resided in the United States and were dwarfed by the tens of thousands and Japanese and Chinese immigrants.³³ Exclusionists viewed them similarly to Chinese immigrants in the 1870s and 1880s. They were a form of cheap labor that would provide unwanted competition to the white laborers.³⁴ A distinct difference from Chinese immigrants was that exclusionist’s considered Indian immigrants radical revolutionaries who would sew disorder in the country. That was because several Indian immigrants who came to America were also nationalists involved in the anti-colonial struggle to free India from British rule.³⁵ One such group of nationalists was the Ghadar Party which advocated for revolution in India, even one involving violence if necessary, to free India from colonial rule. They also wanted to unite others from South Asia in a shared struggle against colonialism.³⁶ Such rhetoric frightened exclusionists, who felt that these South Asian immigrants would turn their anger toward the British toward them. This led to exclusionists viewing immigrants from South Asia as a security threat. The introduction of such an argument when WWI had reached its peak was incredibly persuasive within Congress, even among the egalitarians who had increasingly been caught up in the Yellow Peril hysteria. President Woodrow Wilson, however, did not want to sign legislation that openly excluded all people of Asia from entering the country. Wilson feared antagonizing the Japanese government so soon after the Gentleman’s Agreement had been negotiated and wanted Japan to be a strategic partner of the United States in maintaining China’s stability. Thus, a compromise was brokered between exclusionists and the Wilson administration by creating a barred zone that excluded laborers from the majority of Asia from entering the United States. Non-laborers would undergo intense scrutiny before being allowed entry as well.³⁷

31 Kurashige, page 105.

32 Kurashige, page 105.

33 Bureau, US Census. “1930 Census: Volume 2. Population, General Report, Statistics by Subjects.” Census.gov, October 8, 2021. Page 10. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1933/dec/1930a-vol-02-population.html>.

34 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 165.

35 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 151.

36 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 162.

37 Kurashige, pages 106-109.

The effects of the 1917 Immigration Act were immediate. Racism towards Asian immigrants increased dramatically after the act the passage, and it effectively destroyed the egalitarian coalition giving way to the exclusionists having complete freedom in dictating immigration policy. Disillusionment which had already begun to creep in completely took over. The American dream for many immigrants became a nightmare for those inside the country who faced constant discrimination and something unobtainable to those outside the country as the Page Law, Chinese Exclusion Act, and the Immigration Act of 1917 formed a great triumvirate of anti-Asian exclusion legislation. America had become the great gatekeeping nation of the world and, through its legislation, built a powerful machine that could admit, examine, deny, deport, and naturalize immigrants as it saw fit. For Asian immigrants during the exclusion period, the great symbol of this gatekeeping was Angel Island, the chief port Asian immigrants went to for entry into the country.

At Angel Island, Asian Immigrants were treated as criminals. Chinese migrants, for instance, were forced to undergo medical examinations where doctors looked for physical defects and “Oriental diseases,” which the doctors could use as grounds for not allowing entry. This process, according to Lee Puey You, was deeply “embarrassing and shameful.”³⁸ Officials at Angel Island also conducted intense interrogations with questions that were impossible to answer, such as: how many steps lead up to your house? Merchants who were theoretically free of exclusion laws still faced intense scrutiny and needed to provide witnesses testimony to confirm their business before being allowed entry. Any discrepancies in the testimony or answers to questions would lead to immigration officials denying access to those seeking entry into the country. An average applicant at Angel Island was often asked 200 questions over two or three days. The intense nature of Angel Island led to many from Asia being refused entry or detained on the island for an extended period. Kong Din Quong served the longest detention on Angel Island, 756 days. After twenty-five months in detention, he was deported back to China.³⁹

Exclusionist America

Angel Island represented what America had become to Asian Immigrants beginning with the Page Law and continuing through the decades that followed as exclusionists worked tirelessly to stop immigrants from Asia from entering the United States. This was because the exclusionists viewed Asian immigrants and Asian Americans as inferior to white Americans and Europeans or saw them as a pressing national security threat to the United States. These attitudes were encoded into the legislation they created, whether explicitly or implicitly. The legislation reinforced the idea that Asian Americans and Asian immigrants were distinctly un-American and not deserving to partake in the American experience. It also made them be viewed through an extremely racialized lens that, to this day, they have not been able to escape from, even as the federal government attempted to correct

38 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 96.

39 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 97-98.

the course of its immigration policy. In 1965 President Lyndon Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act, which significantly liberalized America's immigration laws giving nations outside the Western Hemisphere fewer restrictions in sending immigrants to America.⁴⁰ This law helped lead to an explosion in the Asian population in the United States. From 1960 to 2019, the Asian population grew from 980,000 to 22.4 million; by 2060, it is estimated to number 46 million people.⁴¹ The exponential rise of the Asian population did not stop many Americans from seeing them as the "unassimilable foreigner" part of an immigrant invasion.⁴²

The 1982 killing of Vincent Chen showed how the effects of exclusionist legislation were still prevalent in American society. In the 1980s, Japan experienced an incredible economic boom fueled by exporting fuel-efficient cars to the United States. Japan's burgeoning auto industry contrasted with its American counterpart, where Ford and General Motors were forced to lay off many employees. Chen was a Chinese American auto engineer in Detroit at the time for his bachelor party when Ronald Ebens, an automobile plant foreman, called Chen a "Jap" and blamed Chen for the state of the American auto industry. Things continued to escalate when Ebens and his stepson Michael Nitz chased Chen out of a Detroit bar and beat him with a baseball bat. Ebens and Nitz were given only three months' probation and forced to pay a \$3,800 fine for the incident that took Chen's life.⁴³ Chen's death represented a dark irony in the 1980s when the media pushed the narrative that Asian Americans had become the model minority that had perfectly assimilated into the United States. Chen's death demonstrated that the success of the Asian population did not equate to the view that they were equals. They still served as a powerful scapegoat for America's economic woes or as a security threat. These views have become deeply institutionalized in the United States because of legislation passed well over a century ago. The hate incidents that occurred in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic are not a surprise nor a new phenomenon. They represent a legacy within the United States of seeing Asian immigrants or those of Asian descent as threatening outsiders and how the United States government has not grappled with the full impact of its past transgressions. Anti-Asian racism continues to be an enduring problem within the United States, a problem that needs to be solved with increasing urgency if there is to be any hope of undoing the systematic racism that has plagued America for generations.

40 Kurashige, page 208.

41 Budiman, Abby, and Neil G. Ruiz. "Key Facts about Asian Americans, a Diverse and Growing Population." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, February 16, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-americans/>.

42 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 350.

43 Lee, *The Making of Asian America*, page 381-382.