

AT AMERICA'S

CHINESE IMMIGRATION DURING

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AT AMERICA'S GATES

THE EXCLUSION ERA, 1882-1943

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In the United States, the great migrations of Asians, Europeans, and Mexicans from the 1880s to 1924 coincided with and helped instigate an expansion of the modern administrative state. They inspired the establishment of a state bureaucracy to enforce laws and to protect the nation's geographic borders as well as its internal borders of citizenship. Gatekeeping was also inextricably tied to the expansion of U.S. imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time that the United States began to assert its national sovereignty by closing its gates to unwanted foreigners, it was also expanding its influence abroad through military and economic force, and it extended some of its immigration laws to its new territories.¹³

Closing America's gates to various "alien invasions" was additionally instrumental in articulating a definition of American national identity and belonging at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁴ Americans learned to define "American-ness" by excluding and containing foreign-ness. Through the admission and exclusion of foreigners, the United States both asserted its sovereignty and reinforced its identity as a nation.

Immigration patterns and immigrant communities were profoundly changed by the new laws and the ways in which they were enforced. The ideology and administrative processes of gatekeeping dehumanized and criminalized immigrants, defining them as "unassimilable aliens," "unwelcome invasions," "undesirables," "diseased," "illegal." But gatekeeping is not only a form of state action. It is a result of interactions between immigrants and the state. Even those groups who were most affected by immigration restriction played active roles in challenging, negotiating, and shaping the new gatekeeping nation. In both their overt challenges and their everyday acts of resistance, immigrants defied their exclusion from the United States by moving around the barriers designed to exclude them while simultaneously staking their own claims to America.

In this section, Chapter 1 locates the roots of American gatekeeping in the debates, racialized discourses, and regulations surrounding Chinese immigration and exclusion. Chapter 2 focuses on the federal immigration officials charged with interpreting and enforcing the exclusion laws, demonstrating how they shaped the development of the U.S. immigration service locally and nationally.

THE CHINESE ARE COMING. HOW CAN WE STOP THEM?

Chinese Exclusion and the Origins of American Gatekeeping

IN 1876, H. N. CLEMENT, a San Francisco lawyer, stood before a California State Senate Committee and sounded the alarm: "*The Chinese are upon us. How can we get rid of them? The Chinese are coming. How can we stop them?*"¹ Panicked cries such as these and portrayals of Chinese immigration as an evil, "unarmed invasion" had been shared by several witnesses before the committee, which was charged with investigating the "social, moral, and political effects" of Chinese immigration. Testimony like Clement's was designed to reach a broad audience, and the committee hearings themselves were part of a calculated political attempt to bring the question of Chinese immigration to a national audience.² Many Californians had long felt beleaguered by the influx of Chinese immigrants into the state and now believed that it was time that the federal government took action. As the committee's "Address to the People of the United States upon the Evils of Chinese Immigration" stated, the people of California had "but one disposition upon this grave subject . . . and that is an open and pronounced demand upon the Federal Government for relief."³

At the time of the committee hearings, the United States was just begin-

ning to exert federal control over immigration. Its first efforts had begun one year earlier in response to the California lobby to exclude Asian contract labor and women (mostly Chinese) suspected of entering the country for "lewd or immoral purposes." The resulting Page Law, passed in 1875, represented the country's first—albeit limited—regulation of immigration on the federal level and served as an important step toward general Chinese exclusion.⁴ The U.S. Congress eventually heeded the call of Californians and other westerners to protect them from the so-called Chinese invasion with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act.

Historians have often noted that the Chinese Exclusion Act marks a "watershed" in U.S. history. Not only was it the country's first significant restrictive immigration law; it was also the first to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race, nationality, and class. As Roger Daniels has written, the Chinese Exclusion Act was "the hinge upon which the legal history of immigration turned."⁵ This observation has become the standard interpretation of the anti-Chinese movement, but until recently, most accounts of Chinese exclusion have focused more on the anti-Chinese movement preceding the Chinese Exclusion Act rather than on the six decades of the exclusion era itself.⁶ Moreover, there has been little attempt to explain the larger impact and legacies of Chinese exclusion. For example, how did the effort to exclude Chinese influence the restriction and exclusion of other immigrant groups? How did the racialization of Chinese as excludable aliens contribute to and intersect with the racialization of other Asian, southern and eastern European, and Mexican immigrants? What precedents did the Chinese Exclusion Act set for the admission, documentation, surveillance, and deportation of both new arrivals and immigrant communities within the United States?

When the Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act serve as the beginning rather than the end of the narrative, we are forced to focus more fully on the enormous significance of Chinese exclusion. It becomes clear that its importance as a "watershed" goes beyond its status as one of the first immigration policies to be passed in the United States. Certainly, the Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion Act provided the legal architecture for twentieth-century American immigration policy.⁷ Chinese exclusion, however, also introduced gatekeeping ideology, politics, law, and culture that transformed the ways in which Americans viewed and thought about race, immigration, and the United States' identity as a nation of immigrants. It legalized the restriction, exclusion, and deportation of immigrants considered to be threats to the United States. It established Chinese immigrants—categorized by their

race, class, and gender relations as the ultimate example of the dangerous, degraded alien—as the yardsticks by which to measure the desirability (and "whiteness") of other immigrant groups. Lastly, the Chinese exclusion laws not only provided an example of how to contain threatening and undesirable foreigners, they also set in motion new modes and technologies of immigration regulation, including federal immigration officials and bureaucracies, U.S. passports, "green cards," and illegal immigration and deportation policies. In the end, Chinese exclusion forever changed America's relationship to immigration. *

The Anti-Chinese Movement and the Passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act

Chinese immigrants began to arrive in the United States in significant numbers following the discovery of gold in California in 1848. Most came from the Pearl River delta region in Guangdong, China, and, like the majority of newcomers to California, the Chinese community was comprised mostly of male laborers. They were only a small fraction of the total immigrant population of the United States. From 1870 to 1880, a total of 138,941 Chinese immigrants entered the country, 4.3 percent of the total number of immigrants (3,199,394) who entered the country during the same decade.⁸

Their small numbers notwithstanding, Chinese immigrants were the targets of racial hostility, discriminatory laws, and violence. This racism was grounded in an American Orientalist ideology that homogenized Asia as one indistinguishable entity and positioned and defined the West and the East in diametrically opposite terms, using those distinctions to claim American and Anglo-American superiority. Americans first learned to identify Chinese through reports from American traders, diplomats, and missionaries in China. Their portrayals of Chinese as heathen, crafty, and dishonest "marginal members of the human race" quickly set Chinese apart. At first seen as exotic curiosities from a distant land, Chinese immigrants came to be viewed as threats, especially as Chinese immigration increased throughout the gold rush period.⁹

Orientalist fears of the Asian "other" intersected and overlapped with domestic fears about American race, class, and gender relations. During the 1870s, massive population growth, coupled with economic dislocation in California in general, and San Francisco in particular, helped fan the fires of early anti-Chinese sentiment. By 1871, historians estimate, there were four workers

for every job, but Chinese laborers were producing 50 percent of California's boots and shoes. By 1882, Chinese made up between 50 and 75 percent of the farm labor in some California counties.¹⁰ Blaming Chinese workers for low wages and the scarcity of jobs, anti-Chinese leaders first charged that the Chinese were imported under servile conditions as "coolies" and were engaged in a new system of slavery that degraded American labor.¹¹ Chinese immigrants' purported diet of "rice and rats" was also cited as a clear sign that they had a lower standard of living, one that white working families could not (and should not) degrade themselves by accepting.¹² Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, framed this issue explicitly by asking, "Meat vs. Rice—American Manhood vs. Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?"¹³ Such rhetoric heightened the appeal of groups like the Workingmen's Party of California. Founded in 1877 and headed by Irish immigrant Denis Kearney, the party's rallying cry was "The Chinese Must Go!" Local and national politicians alike used race- and class-based economic arguments to nationalize the Chinese question. As Gwendolyn Mink has illustrated, the anti-Chinese movement in California was a "building block of national trade-union politics" that "transposed anti-capitalist feeling with anti-immigrant hostility."¹⁴

Many of the arguments in favor of restricting Chinese immigrants also hinged explicitly on gender and sexuality. As Sucheta Mazumdar argues, a specific kind of Orientalism emerged in the West, with Chinese women symbolizing some of the most fundamental differences between the West and the "Far East."¹⁵ The almost 900 Chinese prostitutes in California in 1870 came to represent a sexualized danger with the power to subvert both the domestic ideal and the existing relations between white heterosexual men and women. Their mere presence made possible the crossing of racial and class lines and renewed fears of "moral and racial pollution."¹⁶ Chinese prostitutes were also believed to carry more virulent strains of venereal disease that had the power to "poison Anglo-Saxon blood." They allegedly not only threatened the morals of the larger society but, as exclusionists argued, could also cause its downfall.¹⁷

Historian Karen Leong reminds us that the ways in which both American and Chinese masculinity were constructed in the anti-Chinese debates were also central arguments for Chinese exclusion. Exclusionists claimed that Chinese men exploited women (by supporting the Chinese trade in prostitution) and immigrated alone, failing to establish families. Both actions, they argued, pointed to their lack of manhood.¹⁸ Chinese men also did not abide by the rules that divided labor by gender in American society. Expelled from mining camps, excluded from industrial and agricultural labor, Chinese men

had established an economic niche for themselves in laundries, restaurants, and domestic service, all occupations traditionally assigned to women.¹⁹ Their physical appearance and choice of clothing also disturbed American perceptions of proper gender roles. Prior to the Chinese Revolution in 1911, Chinese men shaved their foreheads and wore their hair in a queue as a symbol of loyalty to the Qing Empire. The loose garments that Chinese men often wore were also cause for scrutiny. In 1901, a California agricultural journal complained that "the good dollars which ought to be going into a white man's pocket" were instead going to the "Chinaman" and "that garment of his which passes for 'pants.'" Both the queue and the garments were seen as sexually ambiguous at a time when strict gender codes generally dictated short hair and pants for men, long hair and dresses for women.²⁰

Such class- and gender-based arguments for Chinese exclusion merged with charges that Chinese were racially inferior and would worsen America's existing race problems. Underlying the anti-Chinese movement was a larger campaign to impose and sustain white supremacy in the West. Californians had long envisioned their state to be an Edenic, unspoiled land where free labor might thrive. This image was disrupted by the "Chinese Problem."²¹ Alexander Saxton has demonstrated how the heirs to the Jacksonian Democratic Party—committed to territorial expansion, defense of slavery, and a belief in the racial inferiority of Africans and Native Americans—systematically nourished and exploited anti-Chinese sentiment and turned the Chinese immigration question into a centerpiece of California politics.²² When Chinese immigrants began arriving in America, the conquest of American Indians and Mexicans in the West had been accomplished only recently. Moreover, white anti-Chinese residents of California and other Pacific Coast states felt that the future of "their society" was particularly endangered because of their proximity to Asia.²³ In order to highlight the alleged racial threat that Chinese posed, the similarities between African Americans and Chinese immigrants were drawn most explicitly. Both the "bought" Chinese prostitute and the "enslaved" Chinese coolie were conflated with African American slaves. Racial qualities commonly assigned to African Americans were used to describe Chinese immigrants. Both were believed to be heathen, inherently inferior, savage, depraved, and lustful.²⁴ Chinese, like African Americans, were "incapable of attaining the state of civilization [of] the Caucasian." And while some believed the Chinese were "physiologically and mentally" superior to African Americans, they were more of a threat, because they were less assimilable.²⁵

Anti-Chinese activists' charges that Chinese were unwilling and, in fact,



A STATUE FOR OUR HARBOR.

"A Statue for Our Harbor," from *The Wasp*, Nov. 11, 1881. This well-known cartoon published in the *Wasp* in 1881 captured all of the themes of class-based economic competition, racial and health menace, conquest, and gender ambiguity explicit in the Chinese exclusion movement. Featuring a stereotypical image of the Chinese male coolie in place of the Statue of Liberty, the cartoon suggests that while New York's statue represented the promise of (European) immigration, California's statue symbolized how Chinese immigration would overrun the West and destroy the nation itself. Courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

incapable of assimilating were repeatedly used to introduce and support the idea of closing America's gates to Chinese immigration. Chinese immigrants were first set apart from both European immigrants and native-born white Americans. One witness before the 1876 California State Committee on Chinese Immigration described Chinese immigration as an unwelcome "invasion" of "new" and "different" immigrants, while the earlier classes of (European) immigrants were "welcome visitors." In this way, the country's immigrant heritage and identification as a nation of immigrants was largely preserved. Even more important, the witnesses continued to emphasize how Chinese were "permanently alien" to America, unable to ever assimilate into American life and citizenship.²⁶

These interrelated threats justified that legal barriers be established and that metaphorical gates be built and closed against the Chinese in order to protect Americans. Western politicians effectively claimed the right to speak for the rest of the country and to assert American national sovereignty in the name of Chinese exclusion. They argued that it was nothing less than the duty and the sovereign right of Californians and Americans writ large to exclude the Chinese for the good of the country. H. N. Clement, the San Francisco lawyer, explicitly combined the themes of racial difference, the closed gate/closed door metaphor, and national sovereignty to articulate this philosophy. "Have we any right to *close our doors* against one nation and open them to another?" he asked. "Has the Caucasian race any better right to occupy this country than the Mongolian?" He answered with an emphatic "Yes." Citing contemporary treatises on international law, Clement argued that the greatest fundamental right of every nation was self-preservation, and the Chinese immigration question was nothing less than a battle for America's survival. "A nation has a right to do *everything* that can secure it from threatening danger and to *keep at a distance* whatever is capable of causing its ruin," he continued. "We have a great right to say to the half-civilized subject from Asia, '*You shall not come at all.*'"²⁷

Both the West's history of extending and reinforcing white supremacy in the region and its unique relationship with the federal government paved the way toward Chinese exclusion and the larger development of a gatekeeping nation. The language and politics of the anti-Chinese movement closely followed other western campaigns of territorial expansion, expropriation of Native American lands, and the subjugation of African Americans and Mexicans. The exclusion of Chinese immigrants became a "natural" progression in the region's history

of racial oppression and segregation, but because immigration was recognized as a federal, rather than state or regional, issue, westerners could not achieve their directives alone. As one of the best examples of what historians have identified as a "quintessentially western story" of westerners relying upon the federal government to solve the region's racial and class problems, anti-Chinese activists designed a special plea for assistance to the U.S. Congress.²⁸ Their message was clear: Chinese immigration was both a "local grievance" and a "national question," the "darkest cloud" not only on California's horizon but on the republic's as well.²⁹ The threats, pleas, and cajoling worked. In 1880, unrelenting lobbying resulted in a revision of the Burlingame Treaty that had protected Chinese immigration since 1868. By March of 1882, midwestern congressman Edward K. Valentine (R-Nebraska) had articulated western exclusionists' message perfectly. "In order to protect our laboring classes," he proclaimed in the halls of Congress, "*the gate must be closed.*"³⁰ With the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, the federal government rode to the rescue of the West once again. The exclusion of Chinese became yet one more chapter in the region's consolidation of white supremacy, but with enduring, national consequences.

The Example of Chinese Exclusion: Race and Racialization

One of the most significant consequences of Chinese exclusion was that it provided a powerful framework to be used to racialize other threatening, excludable, and undesirable aliens. After the Chinese were excluded, calls to restrict or exclude other immigrants followed quickly, and the rhetoric and strategy of these later campaigns drew important lessons from the anti-Chinese movement. For example, the class-based arguments and restrictions in the Chinese Exclusion Act were echoed in campaigns to bar contract laborers of any race. Southern and eastern European immigrants—like Chinese—were denounced as "coolies, serfs, and slaves." Such connections were persuasive. In 1885, the Foran Act prohibited the immigration of all contract laborers.³¹

The gender-based exclusions of the Page Act were also duplicated in later government attempts to screen out immigrants, especially women, who were perceived to be immoral or guilty of sexual misdeeds. The exclusion of Chinese prostitutes led to a more general exclusion of all prostitutes in the 1903 Immigration Act.³² Signifying a larger concern that independent female migration was a moral problem, other immigration laws restricted the entry of immigrants who were "likely to become public charges" or who had committed a

"crime involving moral turpitude."³³ As Donna Gabaccia has pointed out, such general exclusion laws were theoretically "gender-neutral." In practice, however, "any unaccompanied woman of any age, marital status, or background might be questioned" as a potential public charge. Clauses in the 1891 Immigration Act excluded women on moral grounds. Sexual misdeeds such as adultery, fornication, and illegitimate pregnancy were all reasons for exclusion. Lastly, echoes of the "unwelcome invasion" of Chinese and Japanese immigration were heard in nativist rhetoric focusing on the high birthrates of southern and eastern European immigrant families. Immigrant fecundity, it was claimed, would cause the "race suicide" of the Anglo-American race.³⁴

Race clearly intersected with these class- and gender-based arguments and played perhaps the largest role in determining which immigrant groups were admitted or excluded. The arguments and lessons of Chinese exclusion were resurrected over and over again during the nativist debates over the "new" immigrants from Asia, Mexico, and southern and eastern Europe, further refining and consolidating the racialization of these groups. David Roediger and James Barrett have suggested that African Americans provided the racial model for southern and eastern European immigrants. The terms "guinea," to refer to Italians, and "hunky," to refer to Slavic immigrants, were especially connected to these two groups often laboring in industries and jobs previously dominated by African Americans.³⁵ In terms of immigration restriction, however, new immigrants were more closely racialized along the Chinese immigrant model, especially in the Pacific Coast states. There, whiteness was defined most clearly in opposition to Asian-ness or "yellowness."³⁶ The persistent use of the metaphor of the closed gate, combined with the rhetoric of "unwelcome invasions," most clearly reveals the difference. African Americans, originally brought into the nation as slaves, could never really be "sent back" despite their alleged inferiority and threat to the nation. Segregation and Jim Crow legislation was mostly aimed at keeping African Americans "in their place." Chinese, who were racialized as polar opposites to "Americans," also clearly did not belong in the United States and were often compared to blacks. But unlike African Americans, they could be kept at bay through immigration laws. Later, immigration restrictions were expanded to include southern and eastern European and Mexican immigrants but never applied to African Americans.

As early-twentieth-century nativist literature and organization records illustrate, the language of Chinese restriction and exclusion was quickly refashioned to apply to each succeeding group. These connections—though clear

to contemporary intellectuals, politicians, and nativists—have not been made forcefully enough by immigration historians, who too often study European, Asian, or Latino immigrants in isolation from one another. John Higham, the leading authority on American nativism, has claimed that the anti-Asian movements were “historically tangential” to the main currents of American nativism. Edith Abbott, who authored one of the first comprehensive studies of immigration, argued that “the study of European immigration should not be complicated for the student by confusing it with the very different problems of Chinese and Japanese immigration.” Carl Wittke, considered a founder of the field, devoted much attention to Asians in his important survey of American immigration history but argued that their history was “a brief and strange interlude in the general account of the great migrations to America.”³⁷ Continued intellectual segregation within immigration history is a fruitless endeavor.³⁸ In the case of immigration restriction, it is now clear that anti-Asian nativism was not only directly connected to American nativist ideology and politics in the early twentieth century; it was in fact their dominant model.

Following the exclusion of Chinese, Americans on the West Coast became increasingly alarmed about new immigration from Asia, particularly from Japan, Korea, and India. Californians portrayed the immigrants as comprising another “Oriental invasion,” and San Francisco newspapers urged readers to “step to the front once more and battle to hold the Pacific Coast for the white race.”³⁹ Like the Chinese before them, these new Asian immigrants were considered threats because of their race and labor. The Japanese were especially feared because of their great success in agriculture. Moreover, unlike the Chinese community, which had a large proportion of single male sojourners, Japanese tended to settle and start families in the United States. The political and cultural ideology that came to be used in the anti-Japanese movement immediately connected the new Japanese threat with the old Chinese one. Headlines in San Francisco newspapers talked of “another phase in the Immigration from Asia” and warned that the “Japanese [were] taking the place of the Chinese.” Similar charges that the Japanese were unassimilable and exploitable cheap labor were made. And because the Japanese were supposedly even more “tricky and unscrupulous,” as well as more “aggressive and warlike,” than the Chinese, they were considered even “more objectionable.”⁴⁰ Political leaders made the connections explicit. Denis Kearney, the charismatic leader of the Workingmen’s Party, which spearheaded the anti-Chinese movement in San Francisco during the 1870s, found the Chinese and Japanese “problems” to be synonymous. A Sacramento reporter recorded Kearney in 1892 berating

the “foreign Shylocks [who] are rushing another breed of Asiatic slaves to fill up the gap made vacant by the Chinese who are shut out by our laws. . . . Japs . . . are being brought here now in countless numbers to demoralize and discourage our domestic labor market.” Kearney rousingly ended his speech with “The Japs Must Go!”⁴¹ In 1901, James D. Phelan, mayor of San Francisco, spearheaded the Chinese Exclusion Convention of 1901 around the theme “For Home, Country, and Civilization.” Later, in 1920, he ran for the U.S. Senate under the slogan “Stop the Silent Invasion” (of Japanese).⁴²

The small population of Asian Indian immigrants also felt the wrath of nativists, who regarded them as the “most objectionable of all Orientals” in the United States.⁴³ In 1905, the San Francisco-based Japanese-Korean Exclusion League renamed itself the Asiatic Exclusion League in an attempt to meet the new threat. Newspapers complained of “Hindu Hordes” coming to the United States. Indians were “dirty, diseased,” “the worst type of immigrant . . . not fit to become a citizen . . . and entirely foreign to the people of the United States.” Their employment by “moneyed capitalists” as expendable cheap labor and India’s large population “teeming with millions upon millions of emaciated sickly Hindus existing on starvation wages” also hearkened back to the charges of a cheap labor invasion made against Chinese and Japanese immigrants.⁴⁴

Racialized definitions of Mexican immigrants also referred back to Chinese immigration. Long classified as racially inferior, Mexican immigrants often served as replacement agricultural laborers following the exclusion of Asian immigrants.⁴⁵ Although their immigration was largely protected by agricultural and industrial employers through the 1920s, Mexican immigrants were long-standing targets of racial nativism, and many of the arguments directed toward Mexicans echoed earlier charges made against the Chinese. Because the legal, political, and cultural understandings of Chinese immigrants as permanent foreigners had long been established, nativists’ direct connections between Chinese and Mexicans played a crucial role in racializing Mexicans as foreign. As Mae Ngai has shown for the post-1924 period, the characterization of Mexicans as foreign, rather than as the natives of what used to be their former homeland, “distanced them both from Anglo-Americans culturally and from the Southwest as a region” and made it easier to restrict, criminalize, and deport Mexicans as “illegal.”⁴⁶

Nativists used the Chinese framework to characterize Mexicans as foreign on the basis of two main arguments: racial inferiority and racial unassimilability. George P. Clemens, the head of the Los Angeles County Agricultural

Department, explained that Asians and Mexicans were racially inferior to whites because they were physically highly suitable for the degraded agricultural labor in which they were often employed. The tasks involved were those "which the Oriental and Mexican due to their crouching and bending habits are fully adapted, while the white is physically unable to adapt himself to them."⁴⁷ While Chinese were considered to be biologically inferior because of their status as heathens and their alleged inability to conform to an Anglo-American mold, Mexicans were degraded as an ignorant "hybrid race" of Spanish and Native American origin.⁴⁸ As Mexican immigration increased, fears of a foreign invasion of cheap, unassimilable laborers similar to the Chinese one permeated the nativist literature. Major Frederick Russell Burnham warned that "the whole Pacific Coast would have been Asiatic in blood today except for the Exclusion Acts. Our whole Southwest will be racially Mexican in three generations unless some similar restriction is placed upon them."⁴⁹ (Burnham, of course, conveniently ignored the fact that the Southwest—as well as most of the American West—had already been "racially Mexican" long before he himself had migrated west.) V. S. McClatchy, editor of the *Sacramento Bee*, warned that the "wholesale introduction of Mexican peons" presented California's "most serious problem" in the 1920s.⁵⁰ Increased Mexican migration to Texas was an especially contested issue, and nativists there pointed to the example of California and Chinese immigration to warn of their state's future. "To Mexicanize Texas or Orientalize California is a crime," raged one nativist.⁵¹ Chester H. Rowell argued that the Mexican invasion was even more detrimental than the Chinese one because at least the "Chinese coolie"—"the ideal human mule"—would not "plague us with his progeny. His wife and children are in China, and he returns there himself when we no longer need him." Mexicans, he argued, might not be so compliant or easy to send back.⁵²

Other nativists extended the racial unassimilability argument to Mexicans by claiming that they "can no more blend into our race than can the Chinaman or the Negro."⁵³ Anti-Mexican nativists increasingly called for restriction by framing the new Mexican immigration problem within the old argument for Chinese exclusion. Major Burnham blamed the reliance on cheap Mexican labor on the immigration promoters of the 1920s, just as Denis Kearney had blamed the capitalists and their "Chinese pets" during the 1870s. "It is the old Chinese stuff, an echo of the [18]70s, word for word!" wrote Burnham. Moreover, Burnham believed that immigration law—and specifically the same types of exclusionary measures used against the Chinese—were the

only remedy: "Let us refuse cheap labor. Let us restrict Mexican immigration and go steadily on to prosperity and wealth just as we did after the Asiatic Exclusion Acts were passed."⁵⁴

At the same time, some of the race- and class-based theories and arguments used against Asians and Mexicans were being applied to certain European immigrant groups, especially in the northeastern United States, where most European immigrants first landed and settled. The sense of "absolute difference" that already divided white Americans from people of color was extended to certain European nationalities. Because distinctive physical differences between native white Americans and European immigrants were not readily apparent, nativists "manufactured" racial difference. Boston intellectuals like Nathaniel Shaler, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Francis Walker all promoted an elaborate set of racial ideas that marked southern and eastern Europeans and others as different and inferior, a threat to the nation. In 1894, they formed a new nativist group, the Immigration Restriction League (IRL), in Boston.⁵⁵

Both Italians and French Canadians, for example, were often compared with Chinese immigrants. Italians were called the "Chinese of Europe," and French Canadians were labeled the "Chinese of the Eastern States." As Donna Gabaccia has argued, Chinese and Italians "occupied an ambiguous, overlapping and intermediary position in the binary racial schema." Neither black nor white, both were seen as in-between, or "yellow," "olive," or "swarthy." Their use as cheap labor also linked the two together. Italians were often called "European coolies" or "padrone coolies."⁵⁶ French Canadians were compared to Chinese immigrants because of their alleged inability to assimilate to Anglo-American norms. An 1881 Massachusetts state agency report charged that French Canadians were the "Chinese of the Eastern States" because "they care nothing for our institutions. . . . They do not come to make a home among us, to dwell with us as citizens. . . . Their purpose is merely to sojourn a few years as aliens."⁵⁷ In 1891, Henry Cabot Lodge opined that the Slovak immigrants—another threatening group—"are not a good acquisition for us to make, since they appear to have so many items in common with the Chinese."⁵⁸ Lothrop Stoddard, another leading nativist, went even further by arguing that eastern Europeans were not only "like the Chinese"; they were, in fact, part Asian. Eastern Europe, he explained, was situated "next door" to Asia and had already been invaded by "Asiatic hordes" over the past two thousand years. As a result, the Slavic peoples were mongrels, "all impregnated with Asiatic Mongol and Turki blood."⁵⁹

Such explicit race- and class-based connections to Chinese immigration

were effective in defining and articulating nativists' problems with newer immigrants. The old Chinese exclusion rhetoric was one with which Americans were familiar by the 1910s, and it served as a strong foundation from which to build new nativist arguments on the national level. The Immigration Restriction League used this tactic masterfully. In a 1908 letter to labor unions, the organization affirmed that Chinese immigration was the ultimate evil but warned that the Orient was "only one source of the foreign cheap labor which competes so ruinously with our own workmen." The IRL charged that the stream of immigrants from Europe and western Asia was "beginning to flow," and without proper measures to check it, it would "swell, as did the coolie labor, until it overwhelms one laboring community after another."⁶⁰

In a letter to politicians, the IRL defined the issues and the sides even more clearly. The letter asked congressmen and senators across the country to identify the "classes of persons" who were desired and not desired in their state. The IRL made this task simple by offering them pre-set lists of groups they themselves deemed "desirable" and "undesirable." The politicians needed only to check the groups in order of preference. In the "desired" categories, "Americans, native born," topped the list. The generic category of "persons from northern Europe" came second. Then, the specific groups of British, Scandinavians, and Germans followed. Asiatics, southern and eastern Europeans, illiterates, and the generic "foreign born" were all lumped together in the second list of supposed unwanted and excludable immigrants.⁶¹ The IRL could make no clearer statement: the new threat from Europe and the old threat from Asia were one.

Because of different regional politics and dynamics of race relations, divergent opinions about the connections between the old Asian immigration problem and the new European one existed on the West Coast. On the one hand, the parties behind the virulent anti-Asian campaigns broadened their appeals to preserve "America for all Americans" and called into question just who was a "real American." The San Francisco-based Asiatic Exclusion League implied that all aliens were dangerous to the country and passed a resolution that required aliens to disarm in order to prevent insurrection.⁶² Other nativists in California expressed fears of the degraded immigrants entering the country from both Asia and Europe. Homer Lea, the author and leading proponent of the Yellow Peril theory of Japanese domination of America, warned that the growing immigration from Europe augmented the Japanese danger by "sapping America's racial strength and unity."⁶³ The California branch of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, a well-established nativist group,

allied itself with the Asiatic Exclusion League and announced that southern Europeans were semi-Mongolian.⁶⁴

On the other hand, western nativists continued the West's campaign to preserve a "white man's frontier" by emphasizing the differences between Europeans and Asians and by privileging whiteness at the expense of people of color. Significantly, many of the leading nativists were European immigrants and second-generation Americans themselves.⁶⁵ Denis Kearney, leader of the anti-Chinese Workingmen's Party, was an Irish immigrant. James D. Phelan, leader of the anti-Japanese movement, was Irish American. By leading racist campaigns against Asian immigration, Kearney and Phelan reaffirmed their own status as whites. In the multiracial West, such consolidations of whiteness were central to sustaining the existing racial hierarchy. The best expression of this sentiment occurred during the 1901 Chinese Exclusion Convention, an event organized to lobby for the permanent exclusion of Chinese immigrants. While attendees rallied around the convention theme of protecting the American "home, country, and civilization," keynote speakers strongly defended an open-door policy toward all European immigrants. In an impassioned speech, A. Sbarboro (an Italian immigrant/Italian American himself), president of the Manufacturers' and Producers' Association, declared that in California,

we want the Englishman, who brings with him capital, industry and enterprise; the Irish who build and populate our cities; the Frenchmen, with his vivacity and love of liberty; the industrious and thrifty Italians, who cultivate the fruit, olives, and vines— who come with poetry and music from the classic land of Virgil; the Teutonic race, strong, patient, and frugal; the Swedes, Slavs, and Belgians; we want *all good people from all parts of Europe*. To these, Mr. Chairman, we should never close our doors, for although when the European immigrant lands at Castle Garden he may be uncouth and with little money, yet soon by his thrift and industry he improves his condition; he becomes a worthy citizen and the children who bless him mingle with the children of those who came before him, and when the country calls they are always ready and willing to defend the flag to follow the stars and stripes throughout the world.⁶⁶

Sbarboro, by explicitly including Italians and Slavs, indeed, all immigrants from all parts of Europe, with the older stock of immigrants from France, Sweden, Germany, and Belgium, made clear that the distinction to be made was not among European immigrants but between European and, in this case,

Asian immigrants. Membership in the white race was tantamount. Southern and eastern European immigrants had the potential to become worthy citizens. Even the European immigrant's children would be American patriots some day. The belief that second-generation Chinese would do the same was unimaginable.

An increasing number of politicians and policy makers across the country disregarded Sbarboro's pleas to keep America's doors open to Europeans and instead supported restrictions on immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Nevertheless, Sbarboro's attempts to distinguish European immigrants from Asians pointed to significant differences in the ways in which European, Asian, and Mexican immigrants were racially constructed and regulated by immigration law. First, southern and eastern European immigrants came in much greater numbers than did the Chinese, and their whiteness secured them the right of naturalized citizenship, while Asians were consistently denied naturalization by law and in the courts. Whiteness permitted European immigrants more access to full participation in the larger American polity, economy, and society. Although they were eventually greatly restricted, they were never excluded. As Mae Ngai has shown, the 1924 Immigration Act restricted European immigrants according to their "national origins" (rather than race), presuming their shared whiteness with white Americans and separating them from non-Europeans. The act thus established the "legal foundations . . . for European immigrants [to] becom[e] Americans." Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Asian Indian immigrants were codified as "aliens ineligible to citizenship."⁶⁷

Mexican immigration differed from both southern and eastern European and Asian immigration on several levels. First was Mexico's proximity to the United States and the relatively porous U.S.-Mexican border, which facilitated migration to and from the United States. As historians have shown, Mexican immigrants were treated differently, even considered "safe" from mainstream nativism, because of their status as long-term residents and their propensity to be "birds of passage," returning home after the agricultural season ended rather than settling in the United States permanently.⁶⁸ In addition, Mexico's contentious history with the United States and the latter country's "legacy of conquest" aggravated already tense U.S.-Mexican relations, racialized Mexicans as inferiors, and structured Mexican immigrant and Mexican American life within the United States in ways that contrasted sharply with the lives of other immigrant groups. In the post-1924 period, Mexicans were categorized as "illegal," an all-encompassing racial category that not only negated

any claim of Mexicans belonging in a conquered homeland but also extended to both Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans.⁶⁹

The significant differences in the ways that these immigrant groups were viewed functioned to shape both immigration regulation and immigrant life in distinct ways. Still, the rhetoric and tools of gatekeeping were instrumental in defining the issues for all immigrants and set important precedents for twentieth-century immigration. Each group held its own unique position within the hierarchy of race and immigration, but all eventually became subjected to an immigration ideology and law designed to limit their entry into the United States. By the early twentieth century, the call to "close the gates" was sounded in relation not only to Chinese immigration but to immigration in general. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, poet and former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, reacted to the new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arriving in Boston in 1892 by publishing "The Unguarded Gates," a poem demonizing the new arrivals as a "wild motley throng . . . accents of menace alien to our air."⁷⁰ Just as H. N. Clement had suggested "closing the doors" against Chinese immigration in 1876, Madison Grant, the well-known nativist and leader of the Immigration Restriction League, called for "closing the flood gates" against the "new immigration" from southern and eastern Europe in 1914.⁷¹ At the same time, Frank Julian Warne, another nativist leader, warned that unregulated immigration from Europe was akin to "throwing open wide our gates to all the races of the world."⁷²

The solution, all agreed, lay in immigration policy, and a succession of federal laws were passed to increase the control and regulation of threatening and inferior immigrants. The Immigration Act of 1917 required a literacy test for all adult immigrants, tightened restrictions on suspected radicals, and, as a concession to politicians on the West Coast, denied entry to aliens living within a newly conceived geographical area called the "Asiatic Barred Zone." With this zone in place, the United States effectively excluded all immigrants from India, Burma, Siam, the Malay States, Arabia, Afghanistan, part of Russia, and most of the Polynesian Islands.⁷³ The 1921 and 1924 Immigration Acts drastically restricted immigration from southern and eastern Europe and perfected the exclusion of all Asians, except for Filipinos.⁷⁴ In 1934, Filipinos were also excluded, and both Filipinos and Mexicans were singled out for massive deportation and repatriation programs during the Great Depression.⁷⁵ By the 1930s, exclusion, restriction, and deportation had been extended to other immigrant groups and codified into law and immigration service practices. The cycle that had begun with Chinese exclusion was completed.⁷⁶