Home > ANCHOR > The Great Depression and World War II (1929 and 1945) > The War at Home > Japanese-American Imprisonment: Introduction

# Japanese-American Imprisonment: Introduction m

# Introduction

During World War II, the conflict between the United States and Japan increased existing anti-Asiar<u>discrimination and</u> racism [2] for Asian people living in the United States, specifically Japanese American people. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, fears of foreign threats and security risks at the hands of Japanese Americans soared. In response to these fears, and with no evidence of wrongdoing, tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans were forced to vacate their homes and abandon their property by the United States military and government. After being forced from their property, Japanese Americans were relocated to prison camps across seven states and held there for most of World War II, from 1942 until 1946 when the last camp closed.

# Anti-Asian Sentiments and Legislation Before World War II

Anti-Asian sentiments and violence in the United States began long before the onset of World War II. Asian Americans were subjected to discrimination, including in state and federal legislation beginning in the mid and late nineteenth century. Initially, Chinese laborers were welcomed to the United States under the 1868 Burlingame-Seward Treaty. This treaty established favorable immigration and legal standards for Chinese people in the United States and American people in China. Wealthy business and industry leaders appreciated the influx of Chinese laborers that could be paid for less than their American counterparts. These laborers were important, particularly in the Gold Rush. However, as gold became less common and the Gold Rush calmed, anti-Asian sentiment began to increase. Communities and government leaders became more xenophobic (fearful of different groups of people) and began to enact legislation to support these mindsets and limit immigration. The Page Act of 1875 banned all Chinese women from immigrating to the United States and was the first ever federal law to restrict immigration. Less than a decade later, The Chinese Immigration Exclusion Bill passed in 1882 barred Chinese men from immigrating to the United States. The Scott Act of 1888 banned Chinese laborers from leaving and then reentering the United States. The Geary Act of 1892 made immigration even more difficult for Chinese people living in and coming to the United States. It required Chinese people to carry "green cards" to prove that they had immigrated legally, and any Chinese person found without one was subject to detention and deportation.

Japanese immigrants (called Issei) began arriving in the United States around the time of the passage of these laws primarily intended to limit the number of Chinese immigrants entering the United States. Japanese immigrants primarily settled in places like Hawai'i or along the West Coast of the United States. Specific fear surrounding first generation Japanese immigrants and their American-born children (called Nisei) followed the Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese victory over Russia as well as an increase in people immigrating to the United States from Japan led to an increasingly hostile environment for Japanese people in the United States well before World War II. In 1913 and again in 1920, California passed strict Alien Land Laws which prohibited ownership, leasing, and sharecropping of agricultural land to "aliens ineligible to citizenship," including Japanese immigrants. Alien Land Laws were also passed during this period in other western states, like Washington, in 1921.

Recently settled Japanese farmers had been more successful at raising crops than white farmers due to cultural farming practices. This further stimulated fear of them as a long-term threat among white farmers and investors and prompted anti-Japanese legislation. Additionally, the Immigration Act of 1924 prohibited all further Japanese immigration, further demonizing both Issei and Nisei Japanese American people. These factors, when coupled with the military defeat of Russia, created an atmosphere where the Japanese people became known as "the Yellow Peril [3]," and they were ultimately perceived as a level of threat to their neighbors' security, despite there being no basis for these fears.

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### **Primary Sources:**

## Page Act of 1875 [12]

armen Public Nº 71 H. Porty scouth Congress of the United States, Al the Perst Session, al hold at the CITY OF WASHINGTON, in the DISTRICT OF POLIMINA ON Mapley, the Fifthe day of Consumer, eighteen handred To execute certain treaty stipulations relating to Chinese. Whereas, In the opinion of the Sovernmut of the United States the coming of Chinas laborers to this country undangers the good order of cert excutities within the territory thereof: Therefore, Be it exacted by Saute and Honse of Representations of the United Mater of anunica in yress assaubled. That from and after the expiration of ninety days new after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of this years next after the passage of this act, the convirg of Chinese laborers to the United States be and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such ouspussion it shall not be lawful for any Chemese labor to come, or, having sa come after the experation of said miety days, to remain within the United States 2/20. 2. That the master of any wased who shall knowingly bring within the United States on ouch weed, and land or form to be landed, any Chinese laborer, from any foreign port or place, shall be decured quilty of a misdemeanon and on conriction thereof shall be punished by a five of not neve than five hundred dollars for each and every such Chinese laborer 20 brought, and may be also imprisoned for a term not exceeding me year Rec. 3. That the two foregoing sections shall not apply to chi neelaborers who were in the United States on the seventeenth day of Horruber, righten hundred and righty, or who shall have come with the same bopm the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and who shall produce

[13]

### Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 [13]

Scott Act of 1888<sup>[14]</sup>

14 July 2022 | Dease, Jared; Putt, Alyssa

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