

VOCABULARY AND TERMS

aliens—residents of a country who are not citizens. Because the Chinese were not allowed to become United States citizens, all Chinese immigrants were “aliens” here no matter how long they lived in the United States.

carrying pole—a long pole carried across the shoulders with a load on each end. This is a traditional Chinese way of carrying goods.

cheap labor—working for less than the prevailing wage. Chinese immigrants were willing to work for low wages because even low wages in the United States offered many a chance to save some money to send home to family in China. The Chinese also had few opportunities for higher paying jobs because of discrimination.

discrimination—actions (including policies and legislation) that exclude people from an activity or opportunity based on category rather than individual characteristics. Discriminatory policies and legislation are aimed at a group of people who are defined by categories such as age, race, or ethnicity rather than the merits, actions, or qualities of the individuals.

naturalization—the process by which a citizen of one country becomes a citizen of another country. This usually involves fulfilling certain requirements of eligibility, filing the proper paperwork, and being accepted as a citizen. A person who gains citizenship through the naturalization process enjoys the same rights and responsibilities of those who are citizens by birth such as the right to vote and serve on juries. In the United States, naturalized citizens are excluded from being able to fill some government jobs, one being the Presidency.

suffrage—the right to vote. Only citizens have the right to vote.

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882—federal legislation that banned the entry of Chinese laborers into the United States for ten years. Chinese who resided in the United States were required to register and carry certificates showing that they had entered the United States before the Exclusion Act was enacted.

prejudice—an opinion based on preconceived ideas or stereotypes. Many Americans held prejudiced views of the Chinese, claiming that they were racially and culturally inferior.

queue—the long braid of hair at the back of Chinese men’s heads. Chinese men wore their hair in a queue because it was mandated by the Qing dynasty rulers. The Qing emperors were not Chinese, but were Manchu people who had conquered China in 1644. The queue was a required symbol of submission to the Manchu. Cutting one’s hair was an act of rebellion punishable by death. Because many Chinese men who came to the United States in the mid-1800s planned to return to China (if only to visit family), they maintained the custom of wearing their hair in a queue.

sojourner—a person who resides in a place temporarily. The great majority of Chinese immigrants who came to the United States in the second half of the 19th century came here as sojourners, expecting to work, save money, and return home to their families in China. They left their wives behind to look after their households, children, and aging parents, but often found it hard to leave the opportunities they found here and stayed in the United States permanently.

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