

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Hawaii

Theresa J. Zeller

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Committee:

Dr. Charles Williams

Dr. Emily Ignacio

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This thesis project is dedicated to:

My family: Mom and Dad and Lindsey, for being a constant source of support for me.

My husband: Jason, for standing with me and encouraging me to follow my dreams.

Dr. Williams, without you I never would have succeeded.

Section I

Introduction

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a significant piece of legislation in the United States that not only would demonstrate how regional agendas can and do turn into national policies, but also was the first piece of legislation legally barring a specific ethnic group from immigrating to the U.S. It would remain in effect for decades, but despite its impact it continues to be obscured and vaguely referenced within general history texts. Even more specialized academic texts generally focus only on the emergence of the Chinese exclusion movement in California and the ways this led to Chinese exclusion becoming a national issue. However, while California was instrumental in determining national policy, we can gain a fuller understanding of the politics of Chinese exclusion and the ramifications of this policy by incorporating an analysis of the distinct developments around Chinese labor in Hawaii. While Hawaii was only annexed in 1898, Chinese exclusion in the United States shaped developments in Hawaii prior to annexation. In addition, the limited impact of internal exclusion efforts relative to the impact of external developments on Chinese exclusion in Hawaii provides an important contrast with California. This comparison can therefore ultimately shed light on the conditions that influenced the emergence of Chinese exclusion policy in the United States.

This project will be divided into three sections. The first section of the project will provide a brief overview of some representative texts to present in a short survey the ‘standard’ way that Chinese exclusion is generally discussed. This overview will also note that this standard perspective actually reflects the experience of California and other western states without incorporating the experiences of Chinese immigrants in regions outside of the mainland, but still within the sphere of control of the U.S. In making this point, I will try to provide an initial indication of some of the issues that might be better understood by bringing in some comparative

consideration of Chinese exclusion in Hawaii. The second section of the project will explore the historical experience of Chinese exclusion in California in order to show that this is ultimately the experience that determined how the politics surrounding the Chinese Exclusion Act were defined at the national level. The third and final section of the project will show the experience of the Chinese in Hawaii during the Chinese exclusion movement and in its wake. The project will conclude by pointing to some important questions that arise out of this analysis that can help define an ongoing research agenda intended to increase our understanding of the origins and impact of Chinese exclusion policy.

Representative General Texts

I will start by turning to some examples of general history texts in order to show the prevailing way in which the Chinese experience in the U.S. is presented. Rebecca Edwards, in her book, New Spirits, which is a general history of the “Gilded Age” era from 1865 through 1905, briefly conveys the details surrounding the Chinese experience within the U.S. and Hawaii in separate discussions. For example, she points to one specific incident that occurred on the East Coast in which the Chinese were used to break a strike.¹ By making this one incident indicative of what was happening with labor nationally, Edwards reinforces the general opinion that these incidents happened frequently and can be taken as fully representative of the Chinese experience. Even in the context of mainland labor politics other scholars have challenged this analysis as an atypical case of Chinese workers acting as strikebreakers on the East Coast.² In other words, this

¹ Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the "Gilded Age" 1865-1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 194.

² Najia Aarim-Heriot, *Chinese Immigrants, African Americans, and Racial Anxiety in the United States, 1848-82* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 126.

Edna Bonacich, *Asian Labor in the Development of California and Hawaii in Labor Immigration Under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States Before World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 159.

Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 40-42.

example suggests the entire story was about labor conflict between white and Chinese workers that drove larger policy developments forward. And while this is a fundamental aspect of what happened, as I will show, the experience in Hawaii was different in some important respects. Accordingly, taking some specific examples of labor conflict as representative might at the least give us an incomplete understanding of the dynamics that determined why and when such conflict emerged and what kind of consequences followed.

When Edwards does turn to Hawaii, her analysis condenses the labor experience in several misleading ways.³ Most significantly, she fails to recognize that the diverse Hawaiian labor force came in waves, much of it later than what she conveys in her discussion of the 1850s and 1860s. This is important, because in the Hawaiian case the labor conflicts among different groups of workers largely came after the Chinese Exclusion Act, and did not feed into exclusion policy emerging in Hawaii. Instead, the reverse was true. The Chinese Exclusion Act fed into a search for new sources of workers, and then this led to heightened divisions among workers that were fostered by employers.

To see another example of how the scope of the Chinese experience is underrepresented in many general texts, we can turn to the authors of Inventing America: A History of the United States. Maier, Smith, Keyssar, and Kevles devote several pages towards addressing the development of the Gold Rush along with the resulting population growth in California. Most of this is devoted to the experience of white miners, but there are brief mentions of the Chinese (although mostly lumped alongside other immigrant groups much like with Edwards' text), along with mention of the effect of the 1850 Foreign Miners Tax upon Chinese living in California as follows:

³ Edwards, 235.

Although nativists aimed their attacks at all foreign groups during the early 1850's, they did so selectively and with varying intensity. European immigrants, for instance, suffered less abuse than Chinese and 'other colored races.' The selectiveness of American xenophobia became particularly apparent in April 1850, when the newly organized California state legislature, at the governor's urging, enacted a law that levied a tax of twenty dollars a month on all foreign miners, but then proceeded to collect the tax more consistently from Chinese and 'Spanish' miners than others.⁴

This section gives the reader the impression that many of the experiences of the Chinese living within the U.S., and California in particular, were shared with other immigrant groups and not exclusive to Chinese laborers.⁵

Later in the book there is a small section devoted to the anti-Chinese movement where the authors note: "The hostility mounted in the 1870's, particularly in California, where incidents of violence were frequent and where the Workingman's Party, led by Denis Kearny, mounted an all-out campaign to expel the Chinese and to end further immigration."⁶ This account of the Chinese experience in the United States with the focus again on the experience in CA once more runs the risk of implying that this was the universal experience of Chinese labor migration in relation to a broadly defined U.S. sphere of influence. At the least it omits important details of Chinese experience that require us to recognize Hawaii as another central location of Chinese migration that was tied to U.S. political and economic developments.

⁴ Pauline Maier, Merritt Roe Smith, Alexander Keyssar, and Daniel J. Kevles, *Inventing America: A History of the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 457.

⁵ Maier, Smith, Keyssar, and Kevles, 456-457.

⁶ Maier, Smith, Keyssar, and Kevles, 603.

The authors do, somewhat, cover the economic and political ties of Hawaii to the U.S when they discuss the passage of the Reciprocity Treaty, describing this as follows:

Similarly, the lush and strategically located islands of Hawaii hosted American planters and missionaries (the two were often indistinguishable) who came to own most of its sugar plantations. To gain access to the American market and tighten Hawaiian ties to the United States, these planters pressed Congress and the State Department for a treaty eliminating tariffs on Hawaiian sugar. Their success in 1875 spawned a dramatic increase in sugar production.⁷

But Maier, Smith, Keyssar, and Kevles fail to mention the effect of the later Chinese Exclusion Act upon the labor force, and more specifically, Chinese laborers in Hawaii (again like Edwards). They briefly cover the annexation of Hawaii by the U.S., but the information the authors provide is embedded in and tied to a portion of their book discussing the conquering of the Philippines by the U.S.⁸

Another general text that addresses Chinese immigrants and their role in railroad construction and mining in California is America: A Narrative History. The authors, Tindall and Shi, take the discussion one step further than the previous two texts, however, by including the following brief paragraph describing why Chinese laborers travelled to California:

Most of the Chinese immigrants came from Kwangtung (Guangdong) Province, a region noted for its political turmoil, social violence, and economic hardship. The immigrants to the United States were mostly married, illiterate men desperate for

⁷ Maier, Smith, Keyssar, and Kevles, 660.

⁸ Maier, Smith, Keyssar, and Kevles, 668.

work. Single women did not travel abroad, and married women usually stayed behind to raise their children.⁹

Despite including this overview, Tindall and Shi tend to focus the portions of their book reserved for immigration towards those from European countries such as Ireland and Germany.¹⁰ Chinese miners were also combined with other immigrant groups in this book, and the authors describe the situation as follows: “Racial and ethnic prejudice abounded in mining camps. White Americans in the camps often looked with disdain upon the Latinos and Chinese...But the white Americans focused their contempt on the Indians.”¹¹ This representation fails to really engage with the specific racial and labor politics that shaped hostility to Chinese workers or to consider the conditions in which this hostility shaped policy developments.

Tindall and Shi devote some attention to other possible occupations when explaining the role Chinese workers played in construction of a transcontinental railroad:

The Central Pacific construction crews were mainly composed of Chinese workers lured to America first by the California gold rush and then by railroad jobs...Most of these “coolie” laborers were single men intent upon accumulating money and returning to their homeland...Their temporary status and dream of a good life back in China apparently made them more willing than American laborers to endure the dangerous working conditions and low pay of railroad work, as well as blatant racism. By 1867 the Central Pacific Railroad’s 12,000 Chinese laborers represented 90 percent of its workforce.¹²

⁹ George Brown Tindall and David Emory Shi, *America: A Narrative History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 326.

¹⁰ Tindall and Shi, 322-328.

¹¹ Tindall and Shi, 419-420.

¹² Tindall and Shi, 562-563.

The Chinese Exclusion Act, however, is barely mentioned within this book and the ramifications of the act are not presented to the reader.

Hawaii and its annexation are discussed more precisely than in the previous general texts, with the authors describing the overthrow of the monarchy in Hawaii by the white population and the subsequent investigation by a commissioner sent to Hawaii by President Cleveland.¹³

The commissioner reported that he

Thought the revolution had been engineered mainly by U.S. sugar planters hoping for annexation in order to be eligible for the new subsidy for sugar grown in the United States. Cleveland therefore proposed to restore the queen in return for amnesty to the revolutionists. The provisional government refused to step down, however, and on July 4, 1894, it proclaimed the islands the Republic of Hawaii, which included in its constitution a standing provision for annexation to the United States.¹⁴

Annexation would follow a few years later, but more importantly this illustrates the political and economic power held by the American sugar plantation owners in Hawaii. In this context, however, the Chinese experience in Hawaii and the impact of U.S. anti-Chinese policies on Hawaii are again omitted.

Overall, we can see that America: A Narrative History provides little more discussion of Chinese immigrants in the United States and Hawaii than the previous books I discussed and continues to reinforce the idea that the most prevalent approach towards discussing Chinese immigration and anti-Chinese sentiment is to (for the most part) situate Chinese workers alongside other immigrant groups. While this is a small sample of general historical texts, at the

¹³ Tindall and Shi, 654-656.

¹⁴ Tindall and Shi, 655.

least it conveys that in a number of prominent historical surveys the experience of Chinese laborers in Hawaii and the effect that the Chinese Exclusion Act and related politics had upon them does not enter into the discussion. This points us to the need to consider more specialized texts to see if they are more attentive to this history.

One specific text that brings attention to the Chinese experience in the U.S. is The Chinese in America by Iris Chang. Chang points out that in California, with the decline in independent mining and with increasing regulations against them, Chinese began to return to San Francisco from the mining camps. She says that:

Between the two extremes of wealth and wretchedness lay the vast majority of Chinese immigrants, who, recognizing the odds against them, pragmatically turned their sights on San Francisco, the city of their arrival. One by one, they made the decision to forgo their mining stakes, staking out instead a piece of the town to call their own.¹⁵

This would increase the already large population of Chinese living in San Francisco and lead to further anti-Chinese agitation among competing laborers. This also illustrates what was many times the result (for Chinese immigrants) of already emerging anti-Chinese regulations in the mining industry, a shift into other industries.

The author goes on to describe the reaction in California as more and more Chinese immigrants arrived and began working:

As the Chinese population grew, so did consternation among certain whites. In April 1852, Governor John Bigler called for an exclusionary law to bar future Chinese immigration. Although ignored by the federal government, his request

¹⁵ Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*, (New York: Viking, 2003), 46.

may have been the first expression by a public official of an emerging anti-Chinese sentiment.¹⁶

We can see how, very early on, California began emerging as a proponent of anti-Chinese policies. It is in this context that we can gain additional insight into the conditions leading to anti-Chinese politics by considering the different experience in Hawaii, where a substantial population of Chinese immigrants did not generate the same domestic political response despite some labor and other economic parallels with places such as California.

Chang again keeps her primary location of the Chinese experience as California and notes that as anti-Chinese sentiment in California continued to grow:

White politicians had little incentive to address the needs and interests of the Chinese, because the Chinese could not express their gratitude or displeasure at the polls... As anti-Chinese clubs appeared among white workers and grew in number and influence, no Californian could hope to be elected to office unless he shared, or pretended to share, anti-Chinese sentiments.¹⁷

Through this it is easy to see how legislators in California were influenced by the prevailing attitude of workers in the state towards the Chinese. Again, this focus on California, while accurate in its centrality to the anti-Chinese movement, does not provide us with the complete picture. Hawaii, being another major destination for Chinese laborers (which I will discuss later in more detail), did not adopt the same anti-Chinese stance as California, but would ultimately implement similar policies under pressure from the U.S. prior to annexation.

¹⁶ Chang, 51.

¹⁷ Chang, 120.

The anti-Chinese stance continued to work its way up through adoption by the state governments in the West until, according to Chang,

The anti-Chinese movement achieved a major victory when the Grant administration, under pressure from California politicians, modified the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, which had ensured open emigration from China...Signed the following year [1880 Angell Treaty], it gave the United States the right to limit, regulate, and suspend Chinese immigration, though not to prohibit it absolutely. The door was now open for passage of a new law, one that would haunt the Chinese American community for generations- the Chinese Exclusion Act.¹⁸

By highlighting pressure from California as the ultimate determinate in anti-Chinese national Policy, Chang illustrates how regional pressure can influence national agenda, especially when capturing electoral votes from that region is necessary to obtain political offices. But she also again fails at providing a more complete perspective on the ramifications of Chinese exclusion by not addressing the distinctive experience of Chinese workers in Hawaii.

Another specialized text worth including is How Race Survived U.S. History by David Roediger. The author states that racism has existed in the U.S. since its settlement and the passage of the 1790 Naturalization Act.¹⁹ Accordingly the South developed along lines dependent upon black slave labor for agricultural production, and violence against slaves was overwhelming. Roediger notes that:

Similarly anti-Mexican, anti-Indian, and anti-Chinese racism and terror ensured that the Far West would not show Dixie how to transcend race. Although

¹⁸ Chang, 129.

¹⁹ David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon*, (New York: Verso, 2008), 56.

California had a relatively small nonwhite population, between 1850-1936 over half its 352 lynching victims were Mexican, Latin American, or American Indian. Providing one lynch victim in twelve, the Chinese in California also suffered out of all proportion to their number.²⁰

So while not completely distinguishing the uniqueness of the Chinese experience in the U.S. from other immigrant groups, Roediger does acknowledge the strength of the anti-Chinese sentiment in the West. Chinese workers in Hawaii, on the other hand, are again not mentioned by the author.

The author goes on to discuss the political situation within the U.S. following the Civil War and the acquisition of vast areas of land that were organizing and applying for statehood. He notes:

Indeed violent postwar racism against the Chinese informed the politics of the Reconstruction as a whole. Given its role in the horrors of a secessionist war, and at times in countenancing disloyalty to the Union, the Democratic Party needed redemption outside Dixie as well as within it. This was especially the case in newer states where no longstanding base of support and party organization existed.²¹

From this passage we can see how political parties in the U.S. (the Democratic Party especially), dealing with interparty divisions and trying to garner support within newly admitted states, would be susceptible to pressure from organized labor groups in those regions. As I will try to highlight, this significance of labor politics to Chinese exclusion can be further recognized by

²⁰ Roediger, 122.

²¹ Roediger, 123.

contrasting the distinct experience in Hawaii, where there was no such organized labor group that had the ability to influence government.

Roediger also addresses the example of Chinese workers being imported to the Northeast to break a strike. In doing so he includes information showing exactly how small the Chinese population in the East was as compared to the “63,000 Chinese in the American West in 1870.”²² He states that:

The reaction to the threat of a phantom Chinese ‘invasion’ of the Northeast U.S. was perhaps more perversely impressive. When fierce protests arose in response to the importation of seventy-five Chinese laborers...to a Massachusetts shoe factory in 1870, there were only 305 Chinese people in the entire Eastern U.S. Given these demographics, and defenses of the Chinese by ex-abolitionists and labor leaders...anti-Chinese racism secured far less of a foothold in the East. But it was nonetheless remarkable that, in the virtual absence of any Chinese, anti-Chinese movements in the East could sustain themselves for well over a decade.²³

One point that he fails to mention in this case is that repeatedly in the East, after the New Adams, Massachusetts incident, employers threatened union members with the implication that Chinese workers would be imported in as strike breakers. This could, perhaps, be a better explanation for residual anti-Chinese sentiment remaining in the East prior to the Chinese Exclusion Act’s passage. Here again the insight is to recognize that the force of anti-Chinese politics relates to the interactions between employers and white workers and their perceived political interests in embracing or manipulating fears of Chinese competition.

²² Roediger, 123.

²³ Roediger, 124.

John Soennichsen provides us with another example with his book, The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. While describing the beginning of Chinese entry into the United States in substantial numbers, he points to California and the mining industry as the beginnings of the anti-Chinese movement in the U.S. He states that:

In the early 1860's, however, there were far fewer Chinese involved in mining than during the Gold Rush years in California. This was in part due to legislation which had effectively kept them from making any sort of profit through mining. Perhaps the most egregious of the laws affecting Chinese miners had been the California Foreign Miners Tax, which, on the surface, may appear to have been imposed on all non-native miners. But the wording of the legislation made it clear that the tax was to be levied on all foreign miners who did not desire to become American citizens. And, California lawmakers knew, the Chinese were forbidden by law to become citizens.²⁴

This passage demonstrates the already emerging strong, anti-Chinese political environment in California. Soennichsen, by directly commenting on the wording contained within the legislation, differentiates between those that the tax could be applied to and Chinese miners, the ultimate targets. Additionally, the first version of the tax was repealed to include the citizenship stipulation in order to directly tax the one group of immigrants barred from naturalization, the Chinese.

Soennichsen again points to California and the mounting anti-Chinese policies being proposed in the region as an example of the intensification of the anti-Chinese movement. He comments that:

²⁴ John Soennichsen, *The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882*, (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 28.

Besides lobbying to reverse the terms of the Burlingame Treaty, the WPC [Workingman's Party of California] and other groups of its kind began to be successful in forcing through new legislation that attempted to slow or stop immigration, while upsetting the daily lives of the Chinese already here.

Politicians in the West had been introducing bills in Congress to limit Chinese immigration since the mid-1860s, but the proposed laws had either been defeated or proved ineffective when they passed.²⁵

According to Soennichsen, the legal system in California was set up, almost upon immediate arrival of Chinese workers, to keep them in a position without rights. Not only were they subjected to violence in many mining camps, but additionally Soennichsen tells us that:

Some episodes of violence throughout the years were the result of anti-Chinese legislation, whether directly or indirectly. An example of this was the 1855 California legislation that barred Chinese from testifying against Whites. Although most violence was not predicated upon the existence of this law, passage of the legislation no doubt led to a feeling of invincibility on the part of Whites, who could now initiate violent acts against people of Chinese descent with little fear of prosecution.²⁶

Again Soennichsen points to California as the focal point of the anti-Chinese movement in the U.S., and while California is able to provide us with the key understanding of the labor and race dynamics that developed in the United States in regards to Chinese workers, by not including the simultaneous American development of Hawaii, and the resulting anti-Chinese pressures, we are

²⁵ Soennichsen, 54.

²⁶ Soennichsen, 63.

not getting the complete picture of the Chinese experience in the context of U.S. political economy.

The author's sole reference to Hawaii discusses some of the impact felt after annexation of the islands. He says:

In 1898, when Hawaii became a U.S. territory, exclusion laws of the mainland were also applied to the chain of islands in the Pacific, where a large population of Chinese already lived. Local governments in Hawaii vigorously opposed the exclusion laws, as did government in the Philippines, which also became a new territory of the United States in 1902. Chinese numbering in the tens of thousands worked in sugar plantations and with other crops vital to the economies of both island chains.²⁷

As can be seen Soennichsen does reinforce the idea that the Hawaiian government (controlled by Americans at the time) was not in favor of Chinese exclusion, but despite this, external pressure from the U.S. forced them into compliance in exchange for annexation and later, statehood. Soennichsen, nevertheless, fails in devoting anything more than this paragraph to Hawaii and, therefore, misses a large portion of the ultimate effect of the Chinese Exclusion Act upon the population there. My subsequent analysis of Hawaii will explore how this partial picture in some ways limits our full sense of the varied politics surrounding the origins and consequences of the Chinese Exclusion Act and other anti-Chinese measures.

Through the evaluation of these texts it can be seen that the key assumptions are that the anti-Chinese sentiment was very strong in the locations where Chinese workers lived, that there were substantial groups of white workers mobilizing along these lines in communities where Chinese workers were employed, and that employers and populist politicians joined in these

²⁷ Soennichsen, 82.

coalitions on occasion for a variety of reasons. This experience, while indicative of what transpired in California, was not so for Hawaii, which was heavily tied to the U.S. at the time and another major location of Chinese labor.

Accordingly, the next two sections of my paper, while providing additional information from specialized texts, will draw out this history to show that the experience of California has been generalized as the key way to understanding the Chinese labor experience in the late 19th century U.S. context (broadly defined), but that this approach in fact misses some important distinctions which emerge when we bring Hawaii into the analysis.

Section II

California and the Western States

Having given a glimpse into the prevailing general understanding of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the way in which it developed at the national level within the U.S., it is significant to realize how this general understanding rests upon the experience and importance of California. This section will therefore focus on the specific history of the political environment within California (and to some extent other Western states), highlighting the centrality of California to anti-Chinese politics within the nation. In particular, within this section, I will focus upon how labor interests and elite political demands within California and other Western states combined to ultimately influence and produce the politics of Chinese exclusion. Accordingly, this section will also serve as an introduction into ongoing research questions that are raised once we engage with Hawaii as a distinctive historical context. In particular, within this section, I will focus upon how labor interests and elite political demands within California and other Western states combined to ultimately influence and produce the politics of Chinese exclusion. This will allow me to highlight how related forces did not develop the same way within Hawaii.

Looking at this history in detail also paves the way for the final section of my project that will outline the difference between the prevailing general understanding of anti-Chinese politics and the distinct history of Hawaii. Notably, in Hawaii, the same political forces opposing Chinese labor did not develop as a successful domestic political interest (at least initially), instead emerging as an external pressure on Hawaii during its increasing integration into the orbit of the United States.

California Joins the United States

To understand the specific issues shaping anti-Chinese politics in California it is necessary to understand the basic economic and political situation in the state's early years. California was acquired after Mexican War ended and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 granted citizenship rights to many of the former Spanish and Mexican landowners that decided to remain and become legal citizens of the United States.²⁸ Racial politics were central to the state from the outset. As Bonacich notes, "the issue of permitting slavery in the state was discussed at the California Constitutional Convention of 1849."²⁹ Also during this convention there was initially an exclusion provision, which was later taken out because the convention feared that the United States, and the federal government itself, would reject their constitution if it was left in. The exclusion provision was not in regards to the Chinese population, instead it was in reference to an African-American population and the question of allowing slavery or free blacks within the state of California.³⁰

In 1850, "the Compromise of 1850, extended the line dividing the United States into slave and non-slave states all the way to the Pacific Ocean."³¹ Because of this, California was admitted into the union as a free state, even though the line would have divided it in half, while New Mexico and Utah were allowed to decide for themselves whether or not they were going to permit slavery.³² Unlike other areas of the country, however, there wasn't a large amount of free land available for settlers as they moved west.³³ Many of the men that came into California at the very beginning of the Gold Rush came as single men hoping to earn money quickly and,

²⁸ Bonacich, 157-158.

Aarim-Heriot, 28-29.

²⁹ Bonacich, 131.

³⁰ Bonacich, 132.

³¹ Bonacich, 132.

³² Bonacich, 132.

³³ Bonacich, 133.

therefore, had no need for land ownership. But there were families that arrived in California hoping to homestead and farm land now that California was owned by the United States.³⁴

Unfortunately, this unoccupied land was not readily available to them and it wasn't until 1853 that unsurveyed land was made available to the public, but even then the land made available was land many considered to be undesirable. Much of the desirable land had already been allocated out to rancheros and the railroads and wealthy private landowners. So there wasn't a significant amount of land left for homesteading.³⁵ There were many small farms that developed, but much of the produce that was grown was dependent upon a national and an international market and because of this it was difficult to compete due to a lack of reliable and time-efficient transportation. Accordingly, much of the laboring population in early California would involve propertyless men seeking their fortune in the context of the Gold Rush.

Gold Rush and Mining

The Gold Rush in California affected not only the American population, but also immigrants searching for work in the hopes of elevating their economic situations. The Chinese travelled to California for several reasons, mainly revolving around poor economic conditions in China including civil war, droughts, floods, and economic depression resulting in the desire for many to travel abroad searching for income and wealth to send home to family members in China.³⁶ However, the Chinese population coming to California in the 1850's would soon find themselves competing with white miners who would often join forces against them.

Originally the miners were not necessarily against the free enterprise of Chinese immigrants coming to the United States and settling. In a place where "there were few guidelines, let alone laws governing the extraction of gold and ownership of mining claims...the

³⁴ Tindall and Shi, 419.

³⁵ Bonacich, 133.

³⁶ Soennichsen, 7-9.

earliest Chinese to arrive in California could be seen working just downstream from the white miners.”³⁷ However, with the emergence of more sophisticated methods of below-ground mining along with “more and more miners from all backgrounds and ethnicities”³⁸ coming into the area and making “workable land scarce,”³⁹ then “the Chinese...were among the first to become victims of harassment by white miners.”⁴⁰

The 1850 California census showed that out of approximately seventy-seven and a half thousand workers in the state of California almost 58,000 of them were miners, which constitutes approximately 74.5%⁴¹ of the total. This mass of independent prospecting gave way after the initial Gold Rush in California (during which there was predominantly pan mining), as mining developed into more of an investment type of capitalistic production or operation, where corporations became involved and men were hired to do deeper level mining.⁴²

By 1860, miners were still the predominant working category within the state of California and miners accounted for approximately 38% of the total workforce.⁴³ “The 1860 census reflected the turn away from independent mining towards concentration and capitalistic mining companies,”⁴⁴ but “it was not until the mid-1860’s that California mining was established firm capitalist footing.”⁴⁵ Many of the early miners and manufacturing workers were opposed to big business. They wanted an uplift of their station and they didn’t want to make someone else richer.⁴⁶ “The availability of open resources pushed up the price of California labor. Capitalists

³⁷ Soennichsen, 11.

³⁸ Soennichsen, 11.

³⁹ Soennichsen, 11.

⁴⁰ Soennichsen, 11.

⁴¹ Bonacich, 136 (Table 4.2).

⁴² Bonacich, 142-144.

⁴³ Bonacich, 140.

⁴⁴ Bonacich, 142.

⁴⁵ Bonacich, 144.

⁴⁶ Bonacich, 170.

had to offer wages equal to if not higher than workers could expect to earn on their own.”⁴⁷

These attitudes would shape the labor politics of the state even as the economy became less open and more organized around larger business interests.

The white population in California in the 1860’s increased by 88% and the majority of these people moved westward in search of better opportunities after being displaced in the eastern urban areas. “Men who could not understand each other’s talk-Irish and German, Catholic and Protestant”⁴⁸ all shared the experiences of displacement, deprivation, “and the psychological pitch of the westward journey and its ensuing frustration.”⁴⁹ This united them in a shared labor identity that also embraced racial definitions defined by a contrast with non-white workers such as the Chinese.

By the 1870’s the mines were becoming less and less fruitful⁵⁰ and this impacted the ability of Chinese immigrants to participate in attempting to prosper alongside Americans and other immigrant groups. Technology was developing and many independent miners saw this as a potential loss of opportunity, also viewing technological advances as a development towards capitalistic motivations. Miners did not want dynamite used in the mines. Some miners boycotted it, along with many attempts to halt the forward movement of technology within the mining field simply because they didn’t want to lose their jobs.⁵¹

Chinese Workers in the Mining Industry

The politics of mining camps progressed with the same vigor as they did in the East. One major difference was that, in general, mining men had no desire to own land merely to control the

⁴⁷ Bonacich, 152.

⁴⁸ Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 17.

⁴⁹ Saxton, 17.

⁵⁰ Bonacich, 143 (Table 4.3).

⁵¹ Bonacich, 142-144.

resources it would yield. They didn't want the title to the land, only the claim so owning a stake and being able to work the land was what was valuable to them. Because of this Chinese were excluded from the competition by not allowing them to own fresh stakes. The Chinese were harassed in a multitude of ways, including the cutting off of their traditional hairstyle known as the queue, which was similar to a ponytail, and was punishable by death under their own country's laws until after 1910. Many were simply pushed out of camps and towns and those left behind either purchased second hand mining stakes after they had been worked over or provided domestic services to other miners to earn a living. This was especially true after legislation in the form of the 1850 Foreign Miner's Tax, passed in California, forced Chinese miners to pay additional charges to continue mining in competition with American workers.⁵² George Tindall and David Shi provide an alternate explanation for the Foreign Miner's Tax, saying that "it was applied to Mexicans in express violation of the treaty ending the Mexican War."⁵³ While this interpretation is correct, by not including the Chinese miners affected they detract from the full impact that the law had on the Chinese.

Miners did, however, find value with the Chinese in regards to menial tasks such as washing and cooking. So while they weren't permitted to compete with white workers for mining, they could still earn an income in the very same mining camps and towns that arose. "They did not absolutely remove the Chinese, for so long as the latter were willing to wash clothes, cook meals, and do the daily drudgery."⁵⁴ Later the Chinese would be "confined to tasks that were too dangerous for whites to tackle."⁵⁵

Additionally, as stakes dried up and miners attempted to move to more profitable areas

⁵² Soennichsen, 12-16.

⁵³ Tindall and Shi, 420.

⁵⁴ Stanford M. Lyman, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California*; Book Review (<http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/72spring/br-enemy.htm>)

⁵⁵ Lyman.

they found that usually the only people willing to buy their unwanted land were Chinese. So they would sell their claim stakes to the Chinese who would, in turn, very often be able to work the land and obtain a profit for themselves. This process continued throughout California and into Nevada repeating itself.⁵⁶

The white miners were less tolerant of the Chinese attempting to work within the mine shafts of the lode mines. They organized unions and agreed upon acceptable daily wages and would strike and violently assault Chinese workers who attempted to work within this capacity. They struck against the use of dynamite and other technology that would cause the loss of jobs within the mines of Nevada and California. And when the railroad came within easy walking distance of Virginia City, Nevada the miners drove the Chinese workers out and refused to yield until the chief promoter of the railroad project signed an agreement stating that he wouldn't employ the Chinese within the city limits. "The point was, not that the miners cared to take over the tasks of the Chinese, but to make certain that Mr. Sharon and his friends would entertain no notion of keeping Chinese on afterward for deep shaft work."⁵⁷

The Railroads and Manufacturing in the West

After the initial boom in the mining phase and settling began in earnest in the West it became necessary that travel conditions improve, and that the Western frontier become more accessible for Easterners and Midwestern folk, as well as for gold being transported East from California and other Western states. This led to a competition in the building of a transcontinental railroad, which was paid for by the U.S. government and government bonds.⁵⁸

Because of this construction, a massive number of Chinese were put into employment building railroads. This took some of the pressure off of the mining fields, but it would be short

⁵⁶ Saxton, 51-53.

⁵⁷ Saxton, 59-60.

⁵⁸ Bonacich, 146.

lived. The railroads were only constructed for a short period of time and when they met in 1869 the railroads weren't very concerned with releasing this group of more than 10,000 Chinese railroad workers to compete within the country for employment.

The issue of allowing for interstate commerce and the travel of agriculture across the country was another major driving force behind construction of the railroads nationwide. Even with these kinds of developments, it was still difficult for California to compete on a national and international level, so producers were forced to keep their labor costs extremely low. They couldn't pass the additional cost onto the consumer because their products were competing internationally, and so they began looking at labor sources, such as the Chinese, in order to accommodate this growth and need for a cheap labor source.⁵⁹

The completion of the railroad also produced the side effect of competition for California producers. Prior to the completion of the railroad, California was virtually protected from competition because of distance. There weren't many that could compete with Western states for the raw materials needed, but with the completion of the railroad in 1869 Eastern products were able to more easily transport to California and this presented a problem for California producers.⁶⁰

Because goods from the East were cut off during the war the manufacturing industries in California began to experience shortages in labor. New manufacturing plants were forced into hiring women, children, and Chinese workers to make up for the shortages and because these new manufacturers were not pushing out white American males with their new employee base there was no dispute.⁶¹

Disputes did begin to arise, however, when entire industries slowed production because

⁵⁹ Bonacich, 141.

⁶⁰ Bonacich, 169.

⁶¹ Saxton, 70.

of a surplus of goods. Employers began to cut wages and replace American workers with Chinese because they would work for less. Anti-coolie organizations were established as a method of acting against Chinese workers and those who employed them and boycotts against Chinese made goods began. Additionally, white workers turned to violence and were not only attacking Chinese, but also inflicting punishment against their employers, who at times had entire mills burned to the ground.⁶²

San Francisco

The majority of the Chinese labor force that found work within urban areas of California, such as San Francisco, were in unskilled industrial occupations. This put them in direct competition with non-Chinese laborers who could not afford to work as cheaply as the Chinese so workers in competition began to organize campaigns appealing to the industrial employers and were reasonably successful for a while. The Chinese, on the other hand, had their own organizational structure revolving around the Six Companies in San Francisco whose directors “represented or were associated with even wealthier merchants and businessmen in China.”⁶³ Chinese immigrants had resources available to them in San Francisco as far as community in the form of the Six Companies. The Six Companies were able to find employment and housing for their countrymen and this was unique to California.

The large population of Chinese living within the city of San Francisco was due to San Francisco being a major shipping port and an arrival station for Chinese. Additionally, it was a manufacturing area as well, and so it was feasible for Chinese immigrants to come to the United States to set up small businesses or find unskilled manufacturing labor positions. “Asians tended

⁶² Saxton, 72-73.

⁶³ Saxton, 7-8.

to concentrate heavily and were over represented in household and personal service occupations.”⁶⁴

In the face of hostility from white residents, the Chinese in “Chinatowns” did have lines of defense. They employed white men as trained henchmen and slept in shifts in order to lookout for possible intruders. Fire, which was a very real threat in San Francisco, was attempted several times, but failed to push the Chinese out of the city, and while some employers did shut down mills and lay off Chinese workers, this is speculated to be more likely from demand decreases due to the depression than from an actual compliance with the wishes of laborers in competition with the Chinese.⁶⁵

Legislation in California Against the Chinese

As California developed in the wake of the mining boom and in the context of the rail connections and growing industry, there was thus an increasing mobilization against Chinese workers by white laborers. Alexander Saxton in his book, The Indispensable Enemy, writes that workers in California “despite their own differences ... believed a greater difference separated them from the Chinese.”⁶⁶ This would unite workers of different ethnic backgrounds in displaying a common goal against competition from Chinese workers, which they linked with the threat from monopolists. These workers “viewed the Chinese as tools of monopoly,”⁶⁷ and they thought themselves to be battling both the monopolists from above and the “tools of monopoly” from below. Saxton goes on to champion the idea that those that promoted the anti-Chinese ideas in the West “were those who came in competition with the Chinese”⁶⁸ and the Chinese exclusion issues in the West would be escalated onto the national platform with shifting political parties

⁶⁴ Bonacich, 171.

⁶⁵ Saxton, 148-149.

⁶⁶ Saxton, 258.

⁶⁷ Saxton, 258.

⁶⁸ Saxton, 259.

and upcoming elections. The movement, that had been generated mostly within California, accordingly provides the basis for what is now the general understanding of the Chinese Exclusion Act at a national level.

The political situation within California had been shifting since prior to the Civil War. The majority of the voters favored keeping the Union intact and had, therefore, supported Republican candidates in 1861 and shifted into the Union Party in 1863. After the Civil War concluded many remained within the Union Party, but there were deep divisions that arose in response to questions of the place held within society for African-Americans, Chinese, and the workingman.⁶⁹ “In 1867 California Democrats launched their offensive against the Chinese.”⁷⁰ They were strongly in support of the defense of the inferiority of Blacks and Chinese. This not only aligned them with many workers in California, which while having a small population of African Americans was a major location for Chinese workers, it also pitted them against California’s new Republican elite, who happened to be the primary beneficiaries of Chinese labor. “At all events, in 1867 the Democrats swept California. One outcome of their victory was nationalization of the Chinese question.”⁷¹

Some of the subsequent legislation put forward by California attempting to impede Chinese immigration included the 1875 Page Act. This particular act made it illegal to transport any Asian immigrant without their consent. “It also forbade the transport of any women to the United States for the purposes of prostitution,”⁷² which would “virtually exclude the passage to America of any Chinese women by portraying them all as potential prostitutes, whether provable or not.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Saxton, 80.

⁷⁰ Saxton, 260.

⁷¹ Saxton, 261.

⁷² Soennichsen, 55.

By 1876 both national political parties were unified in their anti-Chinese policies and began to negotiate deals with each other. In doing this many promises that the Democratic Party had made to the working class in order to regain their political power fell to the wayside. As the depression sank in workers were again back at ten to twelve hour working days and were forced to endure wage cuts. This caused a general disillusionment by the workers with the political system in the United States.⁷⁴

The West Coast, in 1877, saw the formation of the Workingman's Party of California (WPC) in 1877 under the leadership of Denis Kearney, an Irish immigrant turned American labor spokesman. The WPC worked to reverse terms of the Burlingame Treaty of 1868, along with introducing new legislation attempting to halt Chinese immigration. The Burlingame Treaty of 1868 "had been forged between the United States and China to establish formal friendly relations between the two countries"⁷⁵ and "had in effect protected Chinese in the United States against discrimination, exploitation, and violence."⁷⁶ The treaty, however, was signed at the height of construction on the intercontinental railways and so by the late 1870's, after their completion and as the competition for jobs continued to increase, American laborers began calling for a reversal on the Burlingame Treaty.⁷⁷

Nationwide, and particularly in California, as in Hawaii (after the Chinese Exclusion Act and annexation by the U.S. occurred) immigrant labor groups were brought in in waves, and a basic pattern emerged. It showed that typically an immigrant labor group would arrive and be viewed as necessary for the work force, but then hostility would begin to arise for various reasons. Usually these were competition in the work force, differences in culture, language,

⁷³ Soennichsen, 55.

⁷⁴ Saxton, 110-112.

⁷⁵ Soennichsen, 53-54.

⁷⁶ Soennichsen, 54.

⁷⁷ Soennichsen, 51-53.

religion, diet and so forth. Then these different ethnic groups would be excluded at various levels and through legislation. “Despite the exclusion of each particular immigrant group, the next came in to fill essentially the same spot.” This process was racialized, so that European ethnic workers were linked together in opposition to workers from Asia and Latin America.⁷⁸ Bonacich offers that,

Ultimately the selection of Asia, rather than eastern and southern Europe as a source of labor for the West comes down to the fact that capital in California and Hawaii, varyingly backed by different levels of government, could impose harsher conditions on Asian immigrants than it could on the Europeans.⁷⁹

Alongside this emphasis on the labor forces involved in anti-Chinese politics, other scholars raise distinctive views on what shaped these developments in California. Counter to Saxton’s emphasis on white laborers as a key source of anti-Chinese politics in California, for instance, Bonacich brings up the question of whether white labor benefitted from the presence of an Asian underclass because “they would be able to purchase cheaper goods and services and as workers they would be protected from having to do the most arduous and unpleasant jobs.”⁸⁰ Within mining camps and even within San Francisco manufacturing positions or agricultural positions, both in Hawaii and California, Chinese laborers were used, for the most part, in unskilled positions, repetitive positions, and heavy work load positions. They were not given the best wages. They were not given the best job positions. In Hawaii, there were lunas or overseers that worked on the plantations and these were almost exclusively always haole or, even more often, Portuguese men. Also, there was also a huge wage differential that developed for different ethnic groups, which contributed to the competition friction. So, it can be seen as relatively obvious that

⁷⁸ Bonacich, 174.

⁷⁹ Bonacich, 161.

⁸⁰ Bonacich, 173.

many of the positions held by Chinese workers were undesirable and “as local workers had benefitted from the presence of an underclass would they have pushed for its exclusion?”⁸¹ But Bonacich also makes clear that “the fact that white labor continually agitated for Asian exclusion seems to be fairly clear evidence (for her) that it, at least, did not perceive itself benefitting from the exploitation of Asian immigrants.”⁸²

The racial dimension of these politics also overlapped with other concerns that shaped hostility to Chinese workers. A major source of contention for white laborers was that the Chinese immigrants were coming to the U.S. and instead of planning on settling and becoming citizens, many had no desire to do that. Even if it had been possible for them to naturalize at that time, many of them were single men and they came to make money and send it back to China and eventually return and make their life better there.⁸³ Because of this, many of them were brought in under contract labor, and this is what many laborers objected to, the issue of contract labor. They couldn’t compete with the wages and because they couldn’t, they were hostile towards the Chinese. It wasn’t simply the immigration issue, then, it was also the issue of contract labor and that at least defined some of labor’s publicly stated concerns. In the view of the labor movement in California, contract labor was equated to slave labor, driving down labor costs and not allowing them to make a living themselves.

While Bonacich theorizes about the possibility of whether or not workers were pushing for exclusion, Andrew Gyory promotes the idea that “politicians not California, not workers, and not national racist imagery- ultimately supplied the agency for Chinese exclusion.”⁸⁴ Gyory’s simplified view throughout his book, Closing the Gate, is that while laborers were opposed to the

⁸¹ Bonacich, 173.

⁸² Bonacich, 173.

⁸³ Saxton, 14-17.

⁸⁴ Gyory, 15.

contract labor system and the “coolie” trade they were not opposed to the immigration of ethnic groups, especially in the East.⁸⁵ The idea of Chinese exclusion became politically important when electoral votes from Western states were needed by politicians during the 1876 and 1880 presidential elections. At that point Chinese exclusion became a perceived national issue⁸⁶ that was eventually passed into law.

Following the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 “in 1906 the California Fruit Growers Association (CFGAs) passed a resolution calling for the modification of the Chinese Exclusion Act that would permit the immigration of workers irrespective of nationality.”⁸⁷ It was not approved, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 would persist for decades in denying Chinese immigrants entry to the United States.

Despite some of these variations in analysis, the central point is clear: a specific economic and political dynamic in California fed into national-level developments that led to Chinese exclusion. Labor opposition to Chinese workers was clearly an important dimension here, whether framed by strictly racial claims or also connected to issues such as contrast labor and the threat of monopoly and business power. At the same time, prominent political elites in California and nationally also fed into this outcome based on electoral calculations. The nationalization of anti-Chinese sentiment was thus dependent upon political developments and labor interests within California, and this understanding of anti-Chinese politics in California has come to be seen as the essence of the issue. This is not a mistaken view in the sense of understanding the policies that emerged in the United States. But it does potentially conceal the fact that not all Chinese experience in the orbit of the United States was defined by local hostility connected to these larger policy outcomes. Hawaii was different in many aspects. It did follow

⁸⁵ Gyory, 14, 67, 101.

⁸⁶ Gyory, 167.

⁸⁷ Bonacich, 158-159.

some of the same dynamics as California, but it was also a major location of Chinese labor within the sphere of the United States (despite the fact that it was not yet annexed by the U.S.), that did not experience the same degree of local or 'domestic' opposition to Chinese labor. Instead, the politics of Chinese exclusion were initially imposed from outside. Turning to this distinctive experience in Section 3 can therefore clarify the need to recognize important variations in Chinese experience in relation to U.S. policy in the late 19th Century.

Section III

Hawaii

When we turn to look at Hawaii, the dynamics of anti-Chinese politics were much different from those in California or the United States in general. In fact, racial conflict involving the Chinese, while present in the context of the contract labor system of the late 1800s, in important respects remained more limited until after Chinese exclusion was effectively imposed by developments in the United States. This different outcome can be related to the limited power of non-Chinese labor interests to mobilize against the Chinese in Hawaii. Thus, in contrast to California, the conflict among different groups of workers really come to the fore later, after Chinese exclusion (among other factors) forced the introduction of alternative labor populations. After that time, employers began adopting the logic of pitting groups of workers against one another in an attempt to control the plantation labor force through division.

By exploring these details we can see that the prevailing view of the Chinese labor experience and Chinese exclusion does not fully capture the diversity of experiences in a United States-related context. Hawaii was a major destination for Chinese immigrants, and as an area on the periphery of the United States it was dramatically impacted by the legislation and political activities of the nation. Given the distinctive history of Chinese labor in Hawaii up through the emerging exclusion policy, a close analysis of Hawaii in this period can provide a unique perspective on the Chinese labor experience in relation to late 19th century U.S. politics.

Discovery & Colonization of the Hawaiian Islands

The Hawaiian Islands themselves are believed to have been inhabited as early as A.D. 300 by Polynesians traveling from other occupied islands⁸⁸ and, over time, as other Polynesian explorers made their way to Hawaii new crops, religions, and social customs merged to make an

⁸⁸ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Island World: A History of Hawaii and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 49.

island culture unique to Hawaii. Legends and belief in multiple deities grew and included tales of the goddess Pele along with many others. Additionally, distinctive religious rituals and social customs emerged, such as the hula and surfing,⁸⁹ that would travel to the West Coast of the U.S. and be adopted and absorbed into American society.

Prior to continuous European contact, Hawaiian natives lived under a monarchical system in which there was no legal land ownership as we know it. Instead, Hawaiians believed that the land belonged to the gods and goddesses and that they would be taken care of if they worked hard and followed the hierarchal arrangement. “This system of joint responsibility and accountability maintained balance through an adherence to traditional principles.”⁹⁰

The discovery of the Hawaiian Islands by Europeans was not intentional by any means and took place on January 18, 1778.⁹¹ Captain James Cook had been enlisted in England to locate the fabled Northwest Passage and sailed for approximately two years in both charted and uncharted areas of the Pacific. While he failed in locating the Northwest Passage, he was successful in discovering an area rich in resources and culture, which was originally termed the Sandwich Islands after James Montague, 4th Earl of Sandwich, who was a champion of Cook’s expeditions.⁹² Captain Cook would go on to meet “his death at the hands of the natives upon a second visit.”⁹³

With the arrival of foreigners to the Hawaiian Islands so came the arrival of various diseases and viruses that overwhelmed the native population. The earliest were venereal diseases, including gonorrhea and syphilis, along with leprosy and tuberculosis, passed by ship

⁸⁹ Okihiro, 51.

⁹⁰ Jon M. Van Dyke, *Who Owns the Crown Lands of Hawaii?* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 11.

⁹¹ Okihiro, 41.

⁹² Okihiro, 135-136.

⁹³ Henry E. Chambers, “Constitutional History of Hawaii” in *Baltimore, Slavery, and Constitutional History*, ed. Herbert B. Adams. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1896), 7.

bound Europeans. All of these early illnesses had devastating effects on a population that had been isolated from outsiders and lived a communal lifestyle.⁹⁴ Gary Okihiro noted that the population of the islands was estimated to be around 400,000 when Captain Cook arrived, but by the 1890s the survivors in the native population numbered only 40,000.⁹⁵ John Liu also indicates in Labor Immigration Under Capitalism similar numbers and shows a decline in native population “to 107,954 in 1836 and to 70,036 in 1853.”⁹⁶

The coming of the Europeans and the first epidemic resulting in a vast number of deaths, caused the traditional religion to begin to break down among the native population. This was also due, in part, to the arrival of missionaries beginning in March of 1820. These missionaries strove to work against the polytheism and idolatry and to have the Bible translated into the Hawaiian tongue. Many, including those within the royal family, began to convert and soon Christianity was being practiced by those in charge of the affairs of the island chain.

Some of the missionary families that came to Hawaii between 1831 and 1837 in order to spread Christianity to the native Hawaiians were sent “from New England through the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions”⁹⁷, but lost their funding in 1863 and turned toward commercial endeavors. “The Hawaiian king and his land commission sold them government land at low prices as a special favor.”⁹⁸ These families would become the future haole elite of Hawaii, in the form of the “Big Five,” and would control agricultural areas across Hawaii, along with having considerable political influence.

Kamehameha I, who had been king of the big island, was able to use ships and firearms

⁹⁴Van Dyke, 19.

⁹⁵ Okihiro, 59.

⁹⁶ John M Liu, *Race, Ethnicity, and the Sugar Plantation System: Asian Labor in Hawaii, 1850 to 1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 190.

⁹⁷ Moon-Kie Jung, *Reworking Race: The Making of Hawaii's Interracial Labor Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 16.

⁹⁸ Jung, 16.

acquired from the foreigners to conquer the other islands. Once prolonged exchanges with Europeans and Americans occurred the monarchy began to look for ways in which it could protect the land of the islands against foreign ownership and in trust for the good of the natives. Subsequent to Kamehameha I uniting the islands, he set up a system of government similar to the feudal system, but with more concern for the welfare of those at the perceived bottom of the hierarchy. Additionally “Kamehameha established by will in 1819...the office of premier or Kuhina Nui, who was to exercise equal authority with the king and veto the king’s acts when the good of the kingdom required such action.”⁹⁹

Kamehameha I was the first of five kings with the name Kamehameha and, after many controversial court decisions involving the monarchy, the Constitution of 1864 was produced by the authority of Kamehameha V alone, but remained for twenty-three years. The new constitution abolished the office of Kuhina Nui and reduced the power of the Privy Council. Kamehameha V would prove to be the last in his dynasty and died on December 11, 1872 after a nine year reign and without naming an heir.

In 1835, during the reign of Kamehameha III, William Hooper of Boston arrived in Hawaii and his appearance would mark the beginning of the transformation of the Hawaiian Islands from a type of feudal monarchal society into a plantation society that would eventually become part of the United States. Hooper used native Hawaiian labor to work on land leased from the king and developed a system in which the workers were given food, housing, and medical assistance in addition to their earnings. Their earnings, however, were not in the form of money. Instead, Hooper issued coupons to his workers which were only valid for items purchased in his store, so in this way Hooper was able to continually keep his workers dependent upon him and control their income.¹⁰⁰ Hooper would return to the East Coast, but he “had opened

⁹⁹ Chambers, 10.

the way for the development of a corporate-dominated sugar economy and a paternalistic racial and class hierarchy in the islands.”¹⁰¹

“The island economy [had] shifted from maritime commerce to agricultural production when settlement of the Pacific Coast created a demand for various foodstuffs”¹⁰² and within Hawaii, the agricultural development originally started with a complete reliance upon native Hawaiian labor. This would not be suitable for long because not only were they were not used to working for anyone other than their own chiefs and families, but additionally they weren’t conditioned to the type of extensive labor that was going to be required of them within sugar cane fields. Because of this, planters began searching for an alternative labor source and “as early as 1852 some large planters experimented with Chinese contract labor.”¹⁰³

Also during the reign of Kamehameha III, in 1846, the Board of Land Commissioners was formed and “revolutionized landownership in the islands when it instituted the 1848 Great Mahele (division), which apportioned the lands of Hawaii to the crown, government, chiefs, and people.”¹⁰⁴ Shortly after this, in 1850, the Hawaiian government also allowed foreigners to own land leading to a situation where “land speculators and sugar growers paid minimal sums for large tracts of land to chiefs eager to get rich quickly, and acquired smaller holdings through the courts from commoners unfamiliar with Western concepts of land and new legal requirements.”¹⁰⁵ Additionally, “the availability of land as private property attracted foreign capital, especially as the Pacific Coast market opened up.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 7.

¹⁰¹ Takaki, 15.

¹⁰² Liu, 188-189.

¹⁰³ Liu, 191.

¹⁰⁴ Takaki, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Takaki, 17-18.

¹⁰⁶ Liu, 189.

After several failures, Hawaiian planters were finally able to secure a Reciprocity trade treaty in 1875 with the United States, which allowed Hawaiian sugar growers to ship their product to the mainland duty free. “This created a huge boom within the sugar industry causing an increase not only in the number of sugar plantations, but also in the amount of product being exported out of Hawaii.”¹⁰⁷ To meet these needs and because of the costs associated with irrigating, expanding, and upgrading plantations. Hawaiian planters became indebted slowly to the Big Five, or “factors” as John Liu refers to them, which led to the consolidation of the sugar industry, pineapple industry, and maritime industry under what were originally missionary families. These families, which came to be known as the Big Five, by the turn of the century through marriage and business ventures, consolidated much of their power to stand unified and in control, economically and politically, of many facets of Hawaii.¹⁰⁸

David Kalakaua, the monarch that followed Kamehameha V as king and reigned in Hawaii from 1874 until 1891, switched his political ties from those favoring close relations with the United States to more personally lucrative alliances halfway through his reign. In 1875 he had signed the Reciprocity Treaty, which while not granting “any rights to the United States regarding the Pearl River Harbor” did essentially halt the chances of any other foreign power from with Hawaii.¹⁰⁹ This was viewed by many Hawaiians as a possible problem for the independence and sovereignty of the islands, but after Kalakaua began turning away from the United States politically in 1882 it incited the American planters and missionaries to take drastic actions. In 1887, Kalakaua was forced at gunpoint to sign what became known as the 1887 Bayonet Constitution. This constitution rewrote articles of the 1864 Constitution and limited the King’s power drastically.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Liu, 193.

¹⁰⁸ Liu, 194.

¹⁰⁹ Van Dyke, 119.

King Kalakaua was succeeded upon his death in 1891 by Queen Liliuokaulani, his sister, who would be the last reigning monarch of the Hawaiian Islands. Many believed that Liliuokaulani would learn from the political mistakes made by her brother, but she espoused his actions and would prove to be an even greater promoter of monarchal power, which would lead to her political downfall. Liliuokaulani announced that she wished to revise the Bayonet Constitution of 1887 and then rumors began to circulate the changes would not only increase her power over the government, but would also remove voting rights from any whites not married to natives.¹¹¹

In early 1893 she was forced to abdicate the throne and she did so under much duress.¹¹² Following her removal from power, Liliuokaulani bitterly held that she was forced illegally from the throne by Americans. This was later found and declared to be true, but in 1894 President Cleveland ceased in his efforts to restore her to the throne in order to pursue economic advantages with the Republic of Hawaii and, in 1895, Liliuokaulani while imprisoned, formally abdicated the throne to avoid further imprisonment and to protect her supporters.¹¹³

Hawaii formally became a republic between 1894-1898, and during those short years moves were made to limit and exclude the voting of the Chinese and Japanese so that control of the Republic of Hawaii would remain U.S. friendly in the hopes of annexation. This hope would come to fruition in July of 1898 while the Spanish-American War raged, but throughout both stages of republic and annexation the majority of the native Hawaiian population would remain loyal to their former queen. They would even go so far as to petition the United States for the reinstatement of the monarchy, but this would never come to be.¹¹⁴ Statehood followed half a

¹¹⁰ Chambers, 25; Van Dyke, 120.

¹¹¹ Chambers, 25-29.

¹¹² Chambers, 29.

¹¹³ Van Dyke, 186-187.

century later, in 1959, and this was favored by the majority of native Hawaiians because it would at least grant them a voice in decisions made for the islands.¹¹⁵

Once Hawaii became an official state, things would continue to change for the native Hawaiians. More and more Americans would move to settle the islands and the native population would continue decreasing. This transformation, however, started long before Hawaii was annexed by the United States and did not start just with Americans, but instead began when contract labor became legal and Chinese, Japanese and Koreans were brought in to work the expanding sugar cane fields.

Chinese Laborers & Their Experience in Hawaii

As stated earlier, the sugar cane fields were originally worked by native Hawaiians because in its earliest years sugar was not high in demand and the tariffs were expensive, requiring a limited labor supply. “Sugar production began increasing in the late 1850’s in Hawaii and was assisted along by the Civil War which caused a loss of sugar crop in Louisiana. Additionally, shipping lines to other countries were disrupted by skirmishes off of the East Coast of the United States. These events called for a higher production level to be achieved by Hawaii. The stability of the price and the demand established sugar as the principle crop of the Islands.”¹¹⁶

But Hawaiians were reluctant to work the plantations and the population of native Hawaiians decreased rapidly after the introduction of colonists. This brought up a significant issue in replacing the labor force working the plantations. To combat the loss of the native Hawaiian laborers, Chinese immigrants were imported to Hawaii as contract laborers and they were generally regarded by the natives and plantation owners as docile, competent workers. “As

¹¹⁴ Van Dyke, 209-210.

¹¹⁵ Van Dyke, 257.

¹¹⁶ Liu, 191.

early as 1852 some large planters experimented with Chinese contract labor,”¹¹⁷ but there were a few Chinese that had been brought in by Hooper prior to that to work within the fields.¹¹⁸

The U.S. had turned to Asia for trade and labor opportunities and “Western economic and military pressure on China created an unequal economic and political relationship.”¹¹⁹ The United States began using Chinese, then Japanese, and finally Filipino laborers because conditions in each of these countries separately allowed for a workforce that was willing and able to leave their home countries and travel abroad trying to better their own individual situations. Bonacich notes that:

Asian countries were the object of United States, especially West Coast, imperialism...As such their political economies were severely dislocated, which put pressure on the peasantry and other classes and created a substantial population whose means of livelihood were so disrupted as to make them candidates for emigration.¹²⁰

Additionally, it is important to make clear that despite the abolitionist movement within the U.S., one “product of the ideological trappings of imperialism...enabled Westerners to see ‘people of color’ as inferiors who deserved no better.”¹²¹ In Hawaii, “the search for additional labor led to the recruitment of approximately 45,000 Chinese and 86,400 Japanese between 1876 and 1900.”¹²²

While the United States had turned to Asia as a possibility, there were Asian groups that were not deemed as desirable, such as those from India, because, at the time, India was largely

¹¹⁷ Liu, 191.

¹¹⁸ Takaki, 13.

¹¹⁹ Liu, 214.

¹²⁰ Bonacich, 160.

¹²¹ Bonacich, 161.

¹²² Liu, 195.

controlled by Great Britain and “the unwillingness of the United States to allow a rival power to get a foothold in Hawaii by following its laborers with diplomatic and legal personnel”¹²³ was apparent. It was quite obvious that the United States was not going to allow for another country to send laborers under its control into Hawaii and possibly present an issue later as far as diplomacy and control of the Hawaiian Islands.

The Chinese were also valuable to the planters because “during the early stages of the industry in Hawaii the planters had no knowledge of raising sugar on a commercial basis.”¹²⁴ Many of these Chinese laborers were recruited and came from specific provinces in China that were facing economic hardships through flooding, draught, and political strife so these males were looking for an opportunity to leave the country and possibly make money in a more lucrative setting.

“93% of the Chinese coming to Hawaii were males”¹²⁵ and this is because the men simply weren’t bringing their families. They were either single and looking for an economic opportunity within the U.S. for themselves with plans to travel back to China or they had families and left them in China because of expenses and sent money home to their families in China. When workers would arrive they would be assigned in large groups to plantations and they would be allocated out. Many times because of the process and the way in which the contracts were signed and filed in numerical sequence “allocating laborers in this way meant that workers were not only of the same ethnicity, but frequently were from the same village or district.”¹²⁶

Several issues surfaced with the Chinese worker situation, however. To begin with, since

¹²³Bonacich, 179.

¹²⁴ Liu, 191.

¹²⁵ Liu, 195.

¹²⁶ Liu, 197.

they were under contract, which functioned much like a feudal system, wages for workers were low and working conditions were less than desirable. Because of this, once contracts expired many of the Chinese would not renew, but instead move to urban areas where they would compete with natives for employment.¹²⁷ This required the continual recruitment and importation of more Chinese laborers, which, in turn, led to an undesired spike in the Chinese population. By the early 1880's Ronald Takaki shows in his book, Pau Hana, the Chinese constituted "one-fourth of the population in the islands"¹²⁸ and John Liu adds in Labor Immigration Under Capitalism that "by the time of the 1884 census, in Hawaii, the Chinese accounted for more than half of the male population between the ages of 15 and 50."¹²⁹ The competition in urban areas for jobs caused many natives to protest to the government against the Chinese. Also, "in addition to language difficulties, immigrants faced ethnic segregation on the plantation, which hindered acculturation."¹³⁰ Nonetheless, the reality was that the economic and political elite were insulated from these protests because of the power of the white planter elite and the limited political significance of anti-Chinese forces in Hawaii. This is, of course, a sign of the lack of power of Hawaiian natives, since they were threatened by this use of contract labor, but had a limited ability to challenge it given white elite interests.

The major issue, in Hawaii, would continue to be keeping Chinese workers on plantations after their contracts had expired. After the Big Five gained control over the sugar plantations along with maritime and pineapple plantations, they had a large population of Chinese laborers working on their plantations, but they started to foresee issues with possible statehood and possible annexation by the United States if they did not follow suit with the U.S. and start to pass

¹²⁷ Takaki, 23.

¹²⁸ Takaki, 23-24.

¹²⁹ Liu, 195.

¹³⁰ Wayne Patterson, *The Korean Frontier in America: Immigration to Hawaii, 1896-1910* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), 4.

anti-Chinese legislation. In that context the planters would lose the ability to bring additional Chinese labor to Hawaii to replace those workers whose contracts had expired. “Prior to the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 by the United States, Hawaii obtained legal endorsement for the importation of contract labor and insured the enforcement of contract through the police powers of the state.”¹³¹ This obviously benefitted large growers and plantation owners because they were able to, with the assistance of the law, exploit these labor sources, with little to no repercussions whatsoever. Annexation in 1898, however, and the passage of the Organic Act, making Hawaii a U.S. territory in 1900, brought an end to open labor contracting. Because of this, it was opposed by the plantations.¹³²

Bonacich also brings to light the notion that prior to annexation by the U.S. Hawaii was in some competition with the U.S. in regards to sugar production. “This competition may help account for the United States’ efforts to limit contract labor in Hawaii before annexation and to keep Hawaiian planters from abrogating Chinese exclusion in 1920.”¹³³ The important thing to take from this is that in California, sugar beet companies could argue to employ contract laborers based on the fact that Hawaiian growers were doing so. Because this was viewed as an unfair competition and an unfair advantage for Hawaii, they attempted to enforce anti-contract labor laws in Hawaii prior to it officially being annexed. This demonstrates exactly how influential mainland, and more specifically California, competition could be, and that even prior to annexation. Hawaii was vulnerable to the possibility of restrictions imposed by external sources within the United States.

Effects of the Chinese Exclusion Act in Hawaii

When the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Hawaii was quick to

¹³¹ Bonacich, 180.

¹³² Bonacich, 180.

¹³³ Bonacich, 181.

respond with legislation. “In 1883 the government restricted Chinese entry to 600 immigrants in any consecutive three month period,”¹³⁴ because the United States was its largest sugar purchaser. But plantation owners had already begun importing laborers from Japan in order to keep the price of labor in check and the population in control. This also helped to alleviate some pressure on the government by native Hawaiians against the Chinese job competition because by this time even though the Chinese accounted for twenty-five percent of the population less than half continued to work on plantations.¹³⁵ Here again it is important to note that this domestic anti-Chinese political pressure had only a limited impact in Hawaii. As Bonacich explains it, “because of the lack of independent producers [as in California], no such white settler class in Hawaii could arise to develop a strong antimonopoly movement and curb the power of the plantation owners.”¹³⁶ Essentially, in Hawaii there was no white working class prior to annexation to complain about job competition from Chinese laborers. Since plantation owners controlled (to a large extent) the economic and political policies in Hawaii prior to annexation it was only with the pressure of developments in California and at the national level in the United States that Hawaiian restrictions on Chinese immigrants emerged.

Similarly, the shift to Japanese workers was really only embraced once larger developments restricted the options for Hawaiian plantation operators. Thus, “as early as 1882, many planters were unwilling to experiment with Japanese contract workers as a replacement for Chinese labor”¹³⁷ and according to Takaki, it wouldn’t be until February 1885, well after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, that Japanese workers would begin arriving in

¹³⁴ Takaki, 24-25.

¹³⁵ Patterson, 4.

¹³⁶ Bonacich, 179.

¹³⁷ Liu, 203.

Hawaii still under the contract labor system.¹³⁸ Prior to annexation Hawaiian “planters recruited more than 38,000 Japanese and 4,000 Chinese between 1898 and 1900 while Congress debated Hawaii’s status in the Union.”¹³⁹ Planters also continued recruiting laborers under contracts hoping that their legal contracts would be upheld after annexation, which was not to be the case.

In sum, “the limited anti-Chinese movement in Hawaii seems to have grown out of resistance by local merchants to the competition from Chinese that had left the plantations and entered the petite bourgeoisie.”¹⁴⁰ Also, according to Edna Bonacich in Labor Immigration Under Capitalism, “there was no great fissure in the working class between white free and non-white coerced labor as in California.”¹⁴¹ Any support of an anti-Chinese immigration law came from merchants and workers in urban areas that were battling against the Chinese that were leaving plantations after their contracts had ended. But many of the foreigners that had come to work under the contract system did not stay and either traveled to California in search of better wages¹⁴² or traveled back to their home country. Accordingly, “Hawaii had no significant exclusion movement, with the exception of a relatively minor interlude of Chinese exclusion until annexation, when mainland laws barring Chinese immigration were applied to the islands over the objections of plantation owners.”¹⁴³

Racial labor divisions and conflicts, were, however, fostered under the shifting economic and political circumstances that followed Chinese exclusion. After Hawaii was officially annexed by the U.S. and the Chinese Exclusion Act was being enforced, planters were in need of an alternative labor source and turned to Japan. So, by 1885, immigration of Japanese workers

¹³⁸ Takaki, 44.

¹³⁹ Liu, 204.

¹⁴⁰ Bonacich, 180.

¹⁴¹ Bonacich, 179.

¹⁴² Bonacich, 181.

¹⁴³ Bonacich, 180.

began and would surpass the Chinese quickly. The plantation owners then became fearful that the Japanese laborers much like the Chinese workers before them, were becoming too numerous, but by this time “Hawaii had been annexed to the United States and federal laws prohibiting Chinese immigration had been extended to the new territory.”¹⁴⁴ The natives would again have problems with the workers because like the Chinese, the Japanese would frequently fulfill their contracts and then pursue and compete for other jobs. Plantation owners began to encounter issues as well because they viewed the Japanese as more difficult to control than the Chinese and issues with work stoppages were frequent, even if they were illegal under contract law. An additional law limiting Chinese immigration to 5,000 a year passed in 1892 and would further the Japanese labor monopoly, and plantation owners again began to look for alternate immigration labor.

This evolving labor situation led to new strategies of labor control by plantation owners. With the establishment of sugar as a primary industry in Hawaii, “private companies and the Hawaiian government assisted in creating and maintaining ethnically homogenous camps.”¹⁴⁵ This would later evolve into a divide and control technique that would be deliberately implemented by the planters beginning at the end of the 1880s and early 1890s.¹⁴⁶ Different living camps were constructed as different groups of ethnic laborers were brought in to work, and so it progressed that the Chinese would be living in one area, the Japanese would be in another, and so on and so forth. “In fact they systematically developed an ethnically diverse plantation working class in order to create divisions among their laborers and therefore reinforce management control.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Takaki, 25.

¹⁴⁵ Liu, 197.

¹⁴⁶ Liu, 203.

¹⁴⁷ Takaki, 24.

There was a significant worry among planters that groups of laborers would unite and rise up against exploitation and so “importing different racial groups also enabled planters to control their labor by manipulating the racial composition of the workforce.”¹⁴⁸ Additionally, Liu points out that employers discovered “that ethnically homogenous camps and differentiated wages... encouraged the development of group identification along regional and ethnic lines rather than upon common work experience.”¹⁴⁹ In dividing the laborers both in living quarters and assigned duties along with maximizing the differences between cultures plantation owners were able to set up ethnic groups of laborers to be in conflict with each other instead of uniting.

In order to get laborers to stay on plantations after the contract system was abolished, owners developed different forms of production to entice laborers. Three of the options that were developed in order to continue paying low wages for maximum production were the piecework, short-term, and long-term contracts systems. Within the piecework system laborers were assigned jobs that would ultimately bring the sugar cane to the mill, but were paid for each part of the operation separately. In the short-term contract system the workers “were paid after the completion of a stipulated task or after delivery of the cane to the mill.”¹⁵⁰ All basic living expenses would be covered under the short term contract and would then be deducted from the final pay at the mill. Long term contracts worked a little bit differently in that a group or individual could work larger areas of the land for a longer term. They were paid for all of their contracted work, but these types of contracts were reserved for groups of workers who had gained the utmost confidence of plantation managers.”¹⁵¹

After Hawaii was annexed by the United States and the Organic Acts were passed in

¹⁴⁸ Liu, 203.

¹⁴⁹ Liu, 203-204

¹⁵⁰ Liu, 200.

¹⁵¹ Liu, 201.

1900, plantation owners would not be able to conduct contract law since it was now illegal. Planters not only experienced an influx of strikes by the Japanese workers, but workers also began to head for the West Coast where wages were better.¹⁵² This led to increased efforts to find an alternate labor source and several thousand Puerto Ricans were brought in to work with very limited success.¹⁵³

Officials traveled from Hawaii to Washington in 1901 with the hope of being able to negotiate to again bring Chinese immigrants into the plantations. While this effort proved futile, officials were able to secure protection for use of Korean labor despite pressures to include Koreans within the Chinese exclusion and planters again began looking at the once passed over Korean population as a source of workers that would undermine the Japanese labor monopoly.¹⁵⁴ It would be nearly another two years before Korean immigrant workers would begin to arrive in Hawaii in small experimental numbers, but even with small numbers this labor strategy proved to be successful. Over roughly a two year period 7,000 Koreans would be imported to work, and many would be imported illegally after signing contracts in their home country and having their passage paid for.¹⁵⁵

In the same period, the plantation owners, looking for an alternative labor supply began importing small numbers of Portuguese and Norwegians before they finally “began to import Korean laborers in 1902.”¹⁵⁶ The Korean workers would not be able to equal those of the Japanese in numbers after 1905 however “when the Korean government terminated Korean emigration.”¹⁵⁷ Shortly after the Korean workers began immigrating it was also suggested that

¹⁵² Bonacich, 181.

¹⁵³ Patterson, 13-14.

¹⁵⁴ Patterson, 15.

¹⁵⁵ Patterson, 23.

¹⁵⁶ Takaki, 26.

¹⁵⁷ Takaki, 27.

Filipino labor be introduced in Hawaii. Filipinos were known to be successful sugar cane laborers because the Philippines was Hawaii's number one competitor (and were second in supply to the United States only because of tariffs).¹⁵⁸ Thus began another wave of worker migration from an as yet untapped population.

Although a significant number of foreign workers were brought in between 1852 and 1930 they did little to effect the political environment because many of them returned to their home countries, especially those who had come without their families,¹⁵⁹ but those that did stay and integrate with the Hawaiian population would contribute to a melting pot effect in which the Native population would be further impacted. In 1890 there was only forty-five percent of the Hawaiian population that was of actual Hawaiian descent and only six years later it would be reduced to thirty-six percent. This shows that while many immigrant laborers did return to their own home countries a good number assimilated into Hawaiian population.

The ramifications of the Chinese Exclusion Act in Hawaii helped to establish an environment in which there was a cyclical pattern of bringing in immigrant labor groups based on ethnicity to address labor needs. With the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and its enforcement by the United States on Hawaii, after 1900, the plantation owners were forced to turn to alternative sources of labor. They began importing Japanese, Portuguese, Koreans and Filipinos. As these groups came in they followed the pattern of being desired and needed laborers, then hostility would mount for various reasons, including competition in other job fields and fear by plantation owners of laborers organizing, and then additional immigrant labor sources would be explored and used. The divide and rule method in Hawaii would not have begun so early nor have been so effective had plantations owners not had restrictions placed

¹⁵⁸ Sister Mary Dorita D.V.M., *Filipino Immigration to Hawaii*, (San Francisco: R & E Research Associates, 1954), 5-6.

¹⁵⁹ Van Dyke, 138.

upon them as to where laborers could be brought from. Groups were used to keep other groups in check and this provided an environment for ethnically different labor groups to develop additional divisions.

Differences of Hawaii and California and Issues to Consider for the Future

While California would become a state and be incorporated as a state as the result of a war, its statehood would also coincide with the development of the state and the settling of the state by Americans and immigrants during the western migration. Hawaii, however, despite the fact that missionaries began arriving in the 1820s, and stayed on, being granted land and going into agricultural production for themselves, wasn't annexed by the U.S. until 1898. Hawaii would not become a state until 1959, well over a century after California. These are large chunks of time during which Hawaii developed economically and legally as if belonging to the United States, but would not be given status within the U.S. until more than a century later.

In that context of Hawaii's status on the periphery of the United States, we do not get a full sense of the Chinese labor experience within the late 19th and early 20th century United States by failing to look at Hawaii. Typically the western part of the United States, and more specifically the state of California, is the area that is focused on when discussing the Chinese Exclusion Act and its ramifications and significance. But the experience of the Chinese within Hawaii did not match the experience of the Chinese living in California or other western states. It was a very different experience despite the fact that it was predominantly an agricultural economy with some parallels to California and other states (although there was some maritime industry as well). It's important to look at the experiences of these workers in Hawaii because we cannot understand the development of the anti-Chinese sentiment and the importance of the legislation passed based on this sentiment without looking at Hawaii and addressing the almost

simultaneous development of its US-dominated political structure and economy that made substantial use of Chinese labor. In the case of Hawaii, it was not domestic pressures culminating in measures like Chinese exclusion, but instead Chinese exclusion in the United States generating pressures on Chinese workers in Hawaii. And then with annexation in 1898, Chinese exclusion was applied to Hawaii and a new labor logic would lead to additional racialized labor conflict involving Chinese workers.

As stated earlier, within California and other western states. Chinese laborers faced multiple aggressors in the forms of exploitation by employers and contempt from competing workers. In Hawaii, on the other hand, the predominate issue for the Chinese was facing exploitation from their employers and not necessarily encountering the level of politically powerful hostility from other workers. After the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and after the annexation by the United States, however, employers were forced to bring in alternative sources of labor other than Chinese and began a much more substantial divide and rule type of system for managing immigrant labor groups within Hawaii.¹⁶⁰

So the situation for Chinese laborers in Hawaii and Chinese laborers in California can be seen as being a vastly different experience in regards to the opponent they were facing where exclusion was concerned. For the Chinese in California they were being oppressed not only by their employers, while being exploited for their labor, but also in seeking a better economic opportunity for themselves they found themselves in competition and facing the wrath of white workers and small producers that might have been focused on economic elites. Also, the California experience involved a much stronger organized political movement against the Chinese, while in Hawaii the restrictions were largely externally driven, and only after 1898 did 'domestic' conflict with the Chinese population really emerge.

¹⁶⁰ Bonacich, 177-178.

Other differences between the situation in California and the situation in Hawaii revolve around the strength of organization of the Chinese in San Francisco and the concentration of Chinese within California. While there was a high concentration comparatively based on the population numbers in Hawaii, the Chinese living in Hawaii prior to the Chinese Exclusion Act and annexation by the U.S. were under a contract labor system. They were provided with housing. They were provided with medical care. They were provided with all of these things along with receiving wages. Whereas, in the state of California, there was no housing and medical care provided for them other than what the Six Companies provided. To accommodate a higher cost of living, wages in California “were calibrated to the cost of living rather than the productivity of labor.”¹⁶¹ This led to Chinese immigrants in Hawaii boarding ships headed to the California coast in search of higher wages.¹⁶² Laws were then passed in Hawaii at the request of planters preventing the transportation of Chinese laborers without proper documentation from their previous employer.

An important factor that distinguishes Hawaii from California is also the fact that Hawaiian land originally belonged to the King and chiefs, but once the Grand Mahele in 1848 was official Hawaii began to allow foreigners, namely missionary families, to lease tracts of land for lengthy periods of time. These foreigners were American missionaries and because they owned such vast quantities of land the situation didn’t allow for the small producer to come in as in California. Even though in California huge tracts of land had already been given away and there wasn’t a lot of land for homesteading, private enterprises could still come in and a man working for himself could work the land and produce a profit. This was not as much of a possibility in Hawaii during the 1870’s and 1880’s as available land had been bought up. The

¹⁶¹ Bonacich, 173.

¹⁶² Bonacich, 181.

sugar plantations were continually expanding in order to meet production levels and profit levels and this was necessary since they were competing in a global market, much like agriculture in California. And so Hawaii didn't hold the appeal during the westward movement like California in the 1850's. Hawaii was harder to access, on top of there being little opportunity outside of a limited number of industries. In short, the political and economic structure in Hawaii involved a different kind of elite and a less substantial form of mass politics. For these reasons the mass mobilization against the Chinese in California was not replicated in Hawaii even when some anti-Chinese agitation emerged.

Having exposed some of the fundamental differences in how Chinese exclusion unfolded in Hawaii versus California, there are a number of questions that emerge for future exploration. To begin with, we might ask whether racialized labor conflicts been particularly likely when a majority labor population is positioned to politically promote its opposition to minority groups of workers? In Hawaii, the absence of any politically empowered majority labor force meant that plantation owners and other employers were free to proceed with their own economic and political agenda without much concern for racial populist pressures. Additionally, they did not find a need to foster racial conflict within the labor context given the other ways in which they were able to secure a workforce. This would change after Chinese exclusion was externally imposed and employers began deliberately pitting workers from different ethnic groups against one another in order to maintain control of the labor force through division.

Another point to investigate is the implications of the fact that the external pressure of a form of United States imperialism was key to creating the ultimate racial politics that did emerge in Hawaii. This raises the question of whether we need to put labor and race issues of this kind into an international context that is sometimes overlooked. In other words, the political and

economic arena generating racial conflict among workers that is often emphasized is a domestic one. The Hawaiian case, on the other hand, urges us to see ‘internal’ labor conflicts in a particular context as heavily influenced and shaped by a larger political economy of imperialism. Even before annexation, the pressures that led to some restrictions on Chinese immigration were largely driven by the relationship with the United States, rather than a purely internal opposition to Chinese workers.

One final question that arises is whether or not the stronger political organization of the Chinese in California emerged as a necessary response to the larger forces opposing their presence. In Hawaii, Chinese political organization was in some respects more limited, and it is worth exploring how the racialized dynamics in places such as California may have created conditions for more organization of the Chinese as well.

If we continue to concentrate solely on the state of California and its role in labor when looking at the Chinese Exclusion Act then we are not getting a full sense of the race and labor dynamics of this issue, because we are not giving adequate attention to the treatment of Chinese immigrants in other regions with strong economic and political ties to the United States, and thus under external pressure from the U.S. to follow suit with similar legislation. Additionally, it is important to look at Hawaii specifically because such a large percentage of the population working in agriculture at the time of the Chinese Exclusion Act was Chinese, coupled with the fact that much of the land was owned by American capitalists, along with the simple fact that Hawaii provides an important contrast to California.”¹⁶³ The analysis provided here therefore outlines a significant set of questions that merit further exploration, and which only come to light once we recognize the ways in which our view of the Chinese labor experience in this period of U.S. history is overly reliant on the specific example of California and other western states.

¹⁶³ Bonacich, 178.

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