



America. Some laborers signed contracts based on misleading promises, some were kidnapped, some were victims of clan<sup>6</sup> violence whose captors sold them to labor brokers, while others sold themselves to pay off gambling debts.

The Chinese contract laborers (called "coolies") were often shipped on American vessels. U. S. presidents from Pierce through Grant criticized the practice in their annual messages to Congress. In 1862, Congress enacted<sup>7</sup> the Prohibition of Coolie Trade Act<sup>8</sup>, which forbade<sup>9</sup> American shippers' participation in the illicit<sup>10</sup> enterprise<sup>11</sup>. By only allowing voluntary immigrants from China, the United States essentially prohibited coolie immigration.

Nevertheless, the term "coolie" came to be applied broadly in the United States to label most Chinese immigrant laborers. Despite a lack of rights, these early Chinese immigrants were not coolies. They were voluntary immigrants who made their own arrangements and paid their own passage. At most, some borrowed money under the "ticket system"<sup>12</sup> at high rates of interest. The "coolie" stereotype, however, became fixed in the American imagination and used by nativists seeking to stop the

<sup>5</sup> induce: verb: succeed in persuading or influencing (someone) to do something

<sup>6</sup> clan: noun: perhaps referring to Ku Klux Klan. The Ku Klux Klan was originally founded in the southern states after the Civil War to oppose social change and black emancipation by using violence and terrorism. Although disbanded twice, it re-emerged in the 1950s and 1960s and continues at a local level. Members disguise themselves in white robes and hoods and often use a burning cross as a symbol of their organization.

<sup>7</sup> enacted: verb: make a bill or other proposal a law

<sup>8</sup> Insert Prohibition of Coolie Trade Act, 1862, into timeline handout.

<sup>9</sup> forbade: verb; past tense of forbid: order (someone) not to do something

<sup>10</sup> illicit: adjective: forbidden by law, rules, or custom

<sup>11</sup> enterprise: noun: a business or company

<sup>12</sup> ticket system: noun: The ticket system generally refers to the immigration of Chinese to California, but migrants to Hawaii, British Columbia, and Australia participated in a similar process. The cost of passage was paid by a company who controlled where and for whom the emigrants worked. It is difficult to prove whether or not Chinese laborers were truly free agents.

immigration of those they considered to be unassimilable<sup>13</sup>.

The Burlingame Treaty of 1868<sup>14</sup> allowed a free flow of immigration between China and the United States, but the Chinese population in the United States, located primarily on the West Coast, remained sparse. In 1870, less than 50,000 Chinese lived in California and less than 64,000 in the entire country. The Chinese population in New York City was minuscule at the time of this cartoon, and no Chinatown existed yet. Racial prejudice and economic competition, however, roused intense and sometimes bloody reaction against them.

The page referenced in the cartoon's caption discusses a recent bill proposed in the New York state legislature by Democratic state senator William Tweed, the notorious<sup>15</sup> "boss" of Tammany Hall<sup>16</sup>. The measure intended to prohibit the state or any business contracting with the state from employing "heathen Chinese" or coolie laborers. Violators could be fined between \$1000 and \$5000, imprisoned from six months to a year, or both.

The Harper's Weekly article dismissed the purported "Chinese invasion" as "altogether mythical," and argued that most Americans "still adhere to the old Revolutionary doctrine that all men are free and equal before the law, and possess certain inalienable rights ..." That sentiment is reflected in Nast's cartoon, where Columbia, the feminine symbol of the United States, shields the dejected<sup>17</sup> Chinese man against a gang of thugs, whom she emphatically<sup>18</sup> reminds that "America means fair play for all men."

The armed mob includes stereotypes of an Irish American (second from right), perhaps a German American (on the far right), and a "shoulder-hitter" (far left),

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<sup>13</sup> unassimilable: adjective: (of a people, an idea, or a culture) not absorbed integrated into a wider society or culture.

<sup>14</sup> Please insert *Burlingame Treaty of 1868*, into the *timeline handout*.

<sup>15</sup> notorious: adjective: famous or well known, typically for some bad quality or deed.

<sup>16</sup> Tammany Hall: noun: a powerful organization within the Democratic Party that was widely associated with corruption. Founded as a fraternal and benevolent society in 1789, it came to dominate political life in New York City in the 19th and early 20th centuries, before being reduced in power by Franklin D. Roosevelt in the early 1930s.

<sup>17</sup> dejected: adjective: sad and depressed

<sup>18</sup> emphatically: adverb: in a forceful way

who enforced the will of urban politicians (like Tweed) with threats or acts of violence. The imagery in the back alludes<sup>19</sup> to the Civil War draft riots of 1863, during which angry, largely Irish American, mobs in New York City protested the Union draft and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation<sup>20</sup> by burning the Colored Orphan Asylum and lynching blacks. For years after, Nast incorporated those images into his cartoons as symbols of the alleged Irish-American and Democratic penchant<sup>21</sup> for violence and mob rule.

On the wall (left) behind Columbia are plastered numerous slurs against the Chinese immigrants, who are labeled as barbarian, heathen, pagan, immoral, anti-family, and vile. Nineteenth-century newspapers often referred to members of ethnic or racial minorities by an epithet<sup>22</sup>, thereby replacing individual identity with a collective term. Common names for Chinese immigrants were "John Chinaman" (which appears here), "Ah Sing," and variations of "Yellow Jack."

In the years following the publication of this cartoon, the anti-Chinese movement became more vocal, violent, and successful. During the 1870s, several measures were introduced into Congress to limit or prohibit Chinese immigration. The 1876 Democratic platform condemned the "coolie-trade" and "the incursions of a race not sprung from the same great parent stock [as European Americans]." The 1876 Republican platform called on Congress "to investigate the effects of the immigration and importation of Mongolians on the moral and material interests of the country." In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which banned all Chinese immigration to the United States for ten years (extended by subsequent laws) and prohibited Chinese already resident in the United States from being American citizens.

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<sup>19</sup> alludes: verb: suggest or call attention to indirectly; hint at

<sup>20</sup> Emancipation Proclamation: noun: the announcement made by President Lincoln during the Civil War on September 22, 1862, emancipating all black slaves in states still engaged in rebellion against the Union. Although implementation was strictly beyond Lincoln's powers, the declaration turned the war into a crusade against slavery. It went into effect on January 1, 1863.

<sup>21</sup> penchant: noun: a strong or habitual liking for something or tendency to do something

<sup>22</sup> epithet: noun: an adjective or descriptive phrase expressing a quality characteristic of the person or thing mentioned



THE CHINESE QUESTION.—[SEE PAGE 147.]

COLUMBIA.—"HANDS OFF, GENTLEMEN! AMERICA MEANS FAIR PLAY FOR ALL MEN."