

Asian pacific
americans,
accomplishments and
tribulations essay



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Asian Pacific Americans are the fastest growing group in the United States population today.

This grouping of people include Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Southeast Asians, Indochina, Indonesians, Filipinos, and the Pacific Islands. The United States began as a nation of immigrants in the seventeenth century, but citizenship was limited to only whites. “ In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment included all persons born in the United States and aliens of African nativity and persons of African descent. Asians were excluded from citizenship eligibility, except those born on American soil, it was not until 1952 that naturalization eligibility was extended to all races” [1] In 1840, large numbers of immigrants arrived in Hawaii and the West Coast was the Chinese.

By 1860, 34, 933 Chinese lived in the United States and by of 1890 there were 107, 488 (due to the California Gold Strike), but by 1920 their numbers fell to only 60, 639. This was partly due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Gentry act of 1892. 2] On April 26, 1862 the California legislators passed a Tax act to help white labor against competition from the “ coolies” and to discourage Chinese immigration to the state. The basic context of the Act said “ any Chinese eighteen and over would have a \$2. 50 monthly tax put on them for the privilege of working and living in the United States. [3]” This is how the United States rewards people who are willing to work and help build their new country.

Most of the Chinese, coming to California, were first taken to “ Angel Island” situated in the northern part of the San Francisco Bay[4]1. The Asian

immigrants came chasing their dreams of freedom, gold, and the promise of wealth to be had in the land of many riches. But this was not to be so. Instead of riches the Chinese found enslavement, low wages, menial jobs, racism, and not many avenues open to help in their struggle for economical advancement.

Even though life in America was difficult it was still better than what they had left behind in their homeland. At least in the United States there wasn't any war or fathoms threatening their lives and homes (only white backed racism). Many of the Chinese found themselves working in mines, laundry and food establishments, or breaking their backs building the rail road system, which was starting to lace the United States and connect all corners of the country. One difficult task the coolie worker attacked and completed was the digging of the caves at (what is know today as) Berringer's winery, in St. Helena, in the heart of the Napa Valley, California.

The caves were used for storing the wine and Champaign in and acted as a natural cooling system (keeping the wine at a constant temperature). The Chinese workers dug the caves out of solid rock to create natural refrigeration. Many workers died in the process because of cave-ins and various accidents, in which many times the bodies would be buried in the caves and the worker forced to carry on. [5]3 But there was a positive which came from the Chinese immigrating to the United States. The Chinese-Americans contributed to the growth of the West Coast ever since they first landed on its shores and many prospered. Fishing, agriculture, and the import-export business, where only a few of the areas they excelled in.

Many tried getting degrees, BA, MA, or Ph. D. , but the white community would not hire these people, only because of their race[6]1. There where even less jobs available back in China, so many Chinese went into business providing services for other Asian people, setting up grocery stores or doctors and lawyers setting up offices in areas such as China town, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle. The white community would never hire Asians into certain white work areas.

Whites were more than happy to hire the Chinese for work they did not wish to do themselves, or where they could provide a beneficial service. For instance, the Chinese laundries, the farmers who supplied fresh vegetables, and fishing fleets that brought tons of fish to the West Coast markets. These services where welcomed, but at the same time the whites where always looking for ways to obtain the profits from these industries and keep the uncivilized “ Mongols” at the station/level that they deserved. “ The Yellow Peril”, it is amazing how 2% of the population could hold the other 97% in fear, but this is what happened starting in the 1900's.

The “ Gentleman's Agreement” of 1907 was an agreement between the United States and Japan. The agreement stated simply that Japan should stop immigration to the United States and the United States would stop the discrimination against the Japanese-Americans. Then in 1913 California passed the “ Anti-Alien land law”, which prohibited the ownership of land by any Asian races and limited their leasing privileges. This did not stop the Japanese though; they soon found ways to get around it.

One was to put the land in the name of their children who were born in the United States, which made them legal citizens. Japanese immigration began in 1876, when five young Japanese men came to the United States to make their fortunes. These five men settled in New York and came to be known as the "Oceanic Group," named after the steam ship on which they traveled. These men were called "Issei", which is the identification given to the first generation of Japanese-Americans. Many of these first travelers did find their fortunes and returned to Japan to tell of the great opportunities in America.

Even with this first hand account of the fortunes to be had with a little hard work, immigration was slow. It took a major drought and economic depression to give them a push. At the same time Hawaii needed cheap labor to work the ever-growing sugarcane industry. [7]4 This lack of labor was partly due to the United States passing a bill prohibiting Chinese immigration; it came to be known as the "Chinese exclusion Act of 1882. Then in 1892 the Gentry Act extend these provisions for ten additional years and in 1904 it was extended indefinitely. "[8]5.

The sugarcane companies sent recruiters to Japan to bring back a boat full of contract laborers. The laborers were to work for a specific time, then return to Japan. Living quarters were supplied for the workers and a general store was erected near by, but the company ran the store and inflated the prices on the goods made available, in-order to keep the workers longer. The companies made one major mistake; they treated the workers the same as the slaves had been treated in the South on the tobacco and cotton farms.

The Japanese government hearing how their people were being treated sent a ship to the Islands to retrieve their people and return them home, <https://assignbuster.com/asian-pacific-americans-accomplishments-and-tribulations-essay/>

refusing to allow any Japanese contract labors out of Japan. The companies were not discouraged so easily, agents were sent to Japan to continue pressure on the Japanese government to release the people needed for the sugarcane fields.

Japan was forced to give in because of the growing economic depression with-in Japan. Because of the increased world demand for sugar and the growth in the Hawaiian Islands more workers were needed and Japan supplied them. In Hawaii the workers became aware of California and her riches, so instead of returning to Japan, after their contracts were up, many ventured to the mainland to seek their fortunes. This was the first major immigration to America by the Japanese, but was not the first Japanese immigration to America, only the first voluntary one. The first immigration was by the Japanese fisherman and commercial shipping.

The ocean currents flow from Japan to the West Coast of the American continent and on down to Mexico. Sailors, shipwrecked along the coast, settled there and fished or farmed the land. The first were two sailors, Joseph Heco (Hikuzo Hamada) and Manjiro Nakahana. The two men lived in the United States for some time and played a major roll in the first dialogs between the two countries[9]5. At first the Japanese were welcomed because there were only a few people and were educated and did not cause any problems for the local population unlike the Chinese.

Thousands of Chinese had immigrated to the West Coast working the gold mines, railroads, and domestic jobs. The Chinese were not an educated people and were considered an inferior race. From the time the United States

acquired California in 1848 until the Exclusion Act of 1882 the Chinese were the main supply of cheap labor. Since the Chinese were willing and content with low wages the employers were more than happy to have such a workforce available to them. The white working class was not as happy with this cheap workforce because there was a growing need for jobs by the white population.

Soon attacks against the Chinese broke out. The Democratic Party, representing the working class, introduced and implemented the " Chinese Exclusion Act" in 1882, which prohibited Chinese labors to immigrate to the United States. Because of the " Act" there was a void created in the workforce, which employers did not wish to fill with the white working class, who were unwilling to work for the same low wages and poor working conditions. At the same time the Japanese workers showed up seeking their fortunes.

They had the same willingness, as the Chinese, to work for low wages in adverse working conditions. The Japanese were considered to be a cleaner and more efficient workforce, which also made them a more desirable group to draw from. Most Japanese entered the United States by spring boarding from Hawaii to San Francisco, though some came by way of Seattle, and Portland. At first most Japanese immigrants found employment through a labor agent. These agents were Japanese middleman who bridged the gap between the employers and those seeking work. At times the agents even acted as their banker, collecting pay and keeping records of what each man made and then paying it out to them when it was needed.

Tenement houses popped up around main areas such as San Francisco, where the Japanese would live during the seasons from agriculture work or waiting for work to come available. Many of the tenement homes and agents would acquire and prepare traditional Japanese foods at an extra cost. Many Japanese would work for the railroads or mining companies during the off season, then as the different farming seasons arrived, they would return to the farms to work in their preferred field. Farming was the type of work most Japanese preferred it paid well and they were good with the earth, coaching excellent crops from it. The Japanese excelled in farming and many eventually were able to purchase or lease land to work.

The farming industry is where the Japanese-Americans contributed most to. In 1912 the Japanese-Americans owned 12, 726 acres in California, 1921 they owned 74, 769 acres and leased 383, 287 acres. In 1919 the total food output of Japanese farmland was 13% from 1. 6% of the total West Coast farmland and the market value of these crops was 67 million dollars.

[10]4 Kyyutaro Abiko founded the Yamato Colony in Merced, California.

Abiko's vision was that the future of Japanese-Americans was in farming. In 1904 he purchased 3, 000 acres in Livingston, California and divided it into 40-acre units. Abiko advertised in Japanese-American newspapers in the hope of starting a community of Japanese-American farmers.

Land was sold for \$35. 0 an acre and was financed for a five-year period by the Nichi Bei Ginko, a bank associated with Abiko. In 1906 the first Issei, Tajiro Kishi, purchased some of the land and started his farm. By 1908 there were 30 more farms started.

The farmers first started with apples, peaches, grapes, and almonds, but harvest was some time away. To help the farmers through until their crops came in they planted vegetable crops to bring in money. This turned out to be a profitable venture due to San Francisco being near by. By 1910 a food buying cooperative was established, a marketing cooperative started in 1914, and a packing shed built in 1917.

By 1976 the association had 4, 190. 5 acres in almonds, 1, 647. 5 in peaches, 616 in grapes, 296. 5 in other tree fruit, 8. 5 in kiwi fruit, 1, 180.

5 in sweet potatoes and conducted ten million in business per year[11]4. The Japanese Colony never went into any other commercial development, such as grocery stores, gas stations, laundries, or dry-goods thinking if they concentrated on agriculture and avoided competition with other races they could decrease the chances of racial hostilities. During WWII internment fifty-four colony families hired a land manager to watch over their lands and at the end of the war where able to, somewhat, pick-up their lives where they left off. This is only a sample of the Japanese-American's contribution to the development of the farming industry on the West Coast. The Japanese thrived in other areas as well.

They dominated the hog industry of Southern California and the poultry industry in Petaluma, in Northern California and in Portland and Seattle. Nurseries', especially in the flower market, blossomed under their skilled hands and guidance. The Japanese nurserymen established the " Southern California flower growers association", which is responsible for at least 50%

of the flowers used in the United States today. Besides the nursery industry the Japanese developed the fishing industry along the American West Coast.

In California alone the industrious fisherman sailed out of San Diego, Longbeach, Los Angeles, Point Magu, Monterey, San Francisco, Bodega Bay, Fort Brag, and Crescent City and out of the northern cities of Portland, Seattle, Juno, and Anchorage. A good example of the Japanese fishing development was the village community at Terminal Island (East San Pedro, Los Angeles County) California. Mr. Hamashita is credited with being the first to fish out of Terminal Island.

He launched his business venture off in an old boat he purchased from a defunct abalone company; the boat was named the " Columbia. " Many more followed in his steps, soon canneries and homes were built were built through out the area. " Fisherman Hall" was built in 1916, to be used as the Communities Center and a school was established in 1918. After these main establishments were in place businesses started springing up around them, such as grocery stores, meat markets, barber shops, and other community oriented services. In the beginning of the venture there were only males in the community, but it soon changed. Woman and children started to show up in the small village, which was beginning to grow rapidly because of its success.

Women soon were incorporated into the industry by working in the canneries, drying sheds, and the support facilities in the area. By 1929 there were some 900 men, women, and children living and working on the island and by 1942 there were close to 3, 000 inhabitants. December 7, 1942 was

the beginning of the end for the small community. [12]6 “ Alien” according to Law [any person residing in one community while owing allegiance to another. A legal procedure known as “ naturalization” permits aliens to become citizens.

] [13]7 James D. Phelan, November 12, 1907 “ Japan is now a world power and is already clutching for control of the pacific and this will ultimately bring her into conflict with the United States”. The Comprehensive Immigration Law of 1924 by the President of the United States of America” a proclamation. [Whereas it is provided in the act of Congress, approved May 26, 1924 entitled; “ An Act to limit the immigration of aliens into the United States and for other purposes, that the annual quota of any nationality shall be two per Centrum of the number of foreign-born individuals of such nationality resident in the continental United States as determined by the census of 1890, but the minimum quota of any nationality shall be one-hundred (100) (sec. 1a)...] “ Now therefore I, Calvin Coolidge, President of the United States of America acting under and by virtue of the power invested in me by the aforesaid act of Congress, do hereby proclaim and make known that on and after July 1, 1924 and throughout the fiscal year 1924-1925, the quota of each nationality provided in said act shall be as follows”[14]8. The proclamation continues on and gives the numbers allowed by each country.

In 1935 Congress passed an Act making aliens ineligible to citizenship and eligible only if and when (a) they had served in the armed services between April 6, 1917 and November 11 1918, also had been honorably discharged from that service. (b) They were permanent residents of the United States.
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War is brewing between Japan and America; they can not live in peace on the shores of the Pacific although they are three thousand miles apart. There where three types of feeling towards the Japanese-Americans, (1) the growers who liked them for their efficiency and willingness to work cheaply, (2) the white workers, organizations like the Grange and labor unions, and the Democratic Party, who altogether worked towards turning the people of California against the Japanese-Americans, (3) those people who liked the Japanese, or were indifferent to them. Leading up to WWII racism was escalating, so when Japan declared war on the United States those in power felt it in the best interest of the Japanese-Americans and the security of the country to intern the Japanese living on the West Coast in camps. [15]6 On February 19, 1942 President Franklin D.

Roosevelt signed and put into effect Executive Order 9066. Because of this order many lives were up-set, up-rooted and to this day has left deep scars on the people who endured this time. In March 1942 the War Relocation Authority (the WRA) was created. At first, from some areas, there were voluntary evacuations, except in places like Terminal Island where the FBI came in and took any person they felt was a danger to the country.

Shortly after the Army came in and told everyone they had twenty-four hours to pack-up and report to the WRA center. After the termination of Terminal Island (to this day there is no sign that a community ever existed) the Japanese, from across America (Land of the Free), were rounded up and interned in camps built in California, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Wyoming, Arizona, and Arkansas. Those who lived in Hawaii were exempted because the Hawaiian-Japanese made up the majority of their workforce and the <https://assignbuster.com/asian-pacific-americans-accomplishments-and-tribulations-essay/>

Islands could not afford to lose so many workers. [16]7 Many of the internees worked on farms or county crews and other jobs near camp, that would help the war effort, then return to camp at night. They were paid a low scale for their work, but it was better than having nothing at all and many even were transferred to other areas to do work voluntarily.

The Manzanar camp situated in the high desert area of Eastern California started to raise their own vegetables, plant fruit trees, and raise livestock, to the point where they became self-sufficient. Life in these camps was anything but pleasant, buildings were not insulated and drafty. Everyone ate in a cafeteria style building and would stand in line through weather of rain, snow, and extreme heat. Then in 1943 the Government allowed some of the internees to enlist in the Armed Services and shortly thereafter included them in the draft.

The famous 442nd combat team was formed at this time. 1943 was also the start of some internees being allowed to return to their homes (what was left of them) as long as they could prove their loyalty to the United States and that they had employment waiting for them. [17]9 After the war racism continued. On returning to their home many found that their property had been vandalized or stolen and sold off.

Slowly the Japanese-Americans rebuilt their lives and settled into a somewhat normal life and for the most part did not hold a grudge against their new country, but except what had happen and move on with their lives. The Japanese-Americans were still looked on as aliens and were not able to obtain citizenship until 1952. Even after obtaining citizenship their children

were not allowed to attend regular public schools, but had to attend Americanization schools instead. As time moved on and the internees grew older many looked for closure to their past troubles and turned to the United States Government for an apology. In 1998 they received their apology and Congress passed a bill, which President Ronald Reagan signed into law, that gave the interned Japanese-Americans \$20,000 each for this terrible injustice, which was the beginning of the healing.

Many Asians have moved on into more professional careers and have given of themselves and their families to help this country grow and prosper while asking very little for themselves, except the opportunity to have a fair chance to live and prosper in this country. Researching for the positive and the contributions of the Asian-American cultures in the Western United States I have found that most information was focused more on what difficulties they faced, instead of what good they accomplished since arriving on these shores. In spite of the contributions of the Asian-Americans to the United States there still stand racist tendencies by many other races. It goes to show that even in the modern era of the 21st century racism still carries on and holds back the progress of the world. I guess I will have to go to greater lengths to find more information and write my own book on the subject. In order to show the prosperity of the Asian-Americans I felt the need to give a bit of their history in the West, good or bad.

I also can see now how I could pull a single paper out of two or three areas that I wrote on. PS: I have enjoyed the class and believe you are and will make an excellent teacher.