

Anti-Immigrant Fervor in America

The greatest period of immigration to America occurred from the 1840s to the 1920s. Several historic events such as the Irish Potato Famine, the German depression and the Industrial Revolution triggered a wave of mass immigration that brought an estimated 37 million Europeans to the United States.

Concerned about the recent increase of immigrants in the United States, a small political group called the *Know Nothing Party* emerged in the 1850s. The *Know Nothing Party* attempted to use government power to preserve their vision of a particular kind of “nativist” society. The party sought to “purify” the nation by restricting immigration and drastically altering citizenship requirements. Not surprisingly, political groups such as this one played a major role in forming many of the ethnic stereotypes that persist in American culture. By 1861 the party had no representation in Congress, and soon afterward it disappeared from the political scene.

In the late 19th century American nativists grew increasingly hostile toward Chinese immigrants. Many natives worried that by allowing Chinese workers to come to the U.S. they would have to compete for jobs and wealth. Under pressure from various political groups, Congress created the *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* that prevented any further persons from China to enter the U.S. Subsequently, a series of *Contract Labor Laws* prohibited immigrants from coming to the country to work under contracts made before their arrival.



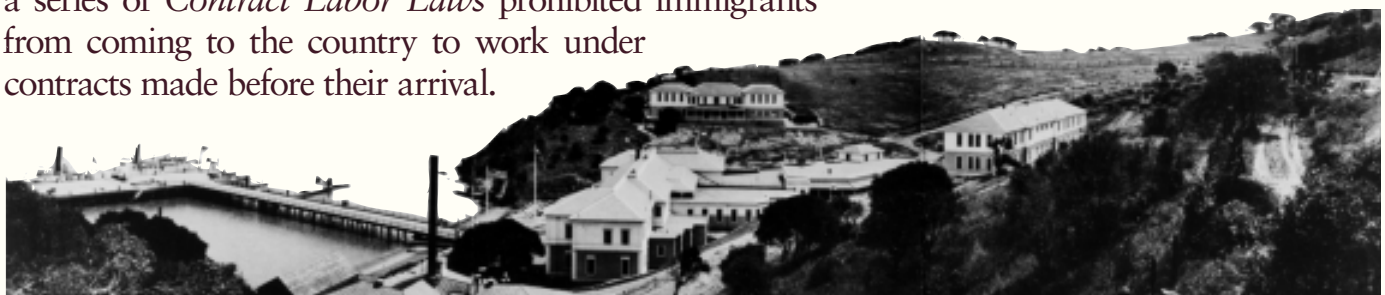
Irish immigrant farmers, cir. 1847. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



"Which Color is to be Tabooed Next?" Illustration in *Harper's Weekly* (1882) by Thomas Nast. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



"The Mortar of Assimilation," *Puck* (1893). C.J. Taylor. Courtesy of the Appel Collection.



Immigration Station at Angel Island, cir. 1915. Courtesy of the INS archives.

1882

Chinese Exclusion Act

- Excluded all persons from China from working in the U.S.
- Not repealed until 1943

1885

Contract Labor Laws

- Prohibited contracts for cheap foreign labor