The Chinese Exclusion Act

By Sharon Fabian

In 1848, Chinese immigrants began arriving in America. Laborers who had not been able to earn a good living in China heard about the Gold Rush in California, and they came to America. They boarded ships and crossed the Pacific Ocean. Many arrived at the port of San Francisco in California.

Year after year, more immigrants came from China to America. Some still hoped to find gold. Others just wanted a job.

In the 1860s, many of these Chinese immigrants found jobs with the Central Pacific Railroad Company. They were hired to help build the western half of the transcontinental railroad. It was a job that required great strength and stamina. The men laid tracks through some of the most difficult terrain of the whole project - the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Often they worked in the cold and the snow. They had to blast through the mountains with dynamite. It was dangerous work.

Other Chinese immigrants found jobs in the cities. Although the better jobs were often not open to them, many found low-paying jobs in restaurants and laundries.

Workers of other nationalities who could not find jobs that paid well began to resent the Chinese workers. They blamed the Chinese workers for taking jobs and for keeping the pay rate low. Some states began to pass laws that discriminated against immigrants from China and other Asian immigrants.

Then in 1882, the United States passed a federal law. It was called the Chinese Exclusion Act. When President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act, it restricted immigration from China into the United States for the next ten years.

The law had devastating effects on Chinese communities in America. Chinese men who had come to America to work could not go home to visit their families. They could not bring their wives to America. In addition, since they were not citizens, they could not own their own land or register mining claims.

As a result of all of these restrictions, many Chinese people in America continued to live in segregated neighborhoods in the cities. San Francisco's Chinatown is the best known of these ethnic Chinese neighborhoods.

In the 1800s, the Chinese Exclusion Act had broad support from labor unions and other groups. Other people criticized the act, calling it legalized discrimination, but still it remained in effect for many years. In 1892, it was reauthorized for another ten years by the passage of the Geary Act.

In 1902, it was again reauthorized - this time with no ending date.

It was only when our country became involved in World War II that the Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed. China was an ally of the United States in the war. The Magnuson Act was passed in 1943 to finally repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act, but even then, there were still limits on immigration. Finally in the 1960s, the exclusion of Chinese immigration was completely ended.

The United States is often called a "melting pot," a mixture of people of all nationalities and races, but at certain times, American lawmakers have chosen to discriminate against one group or another. The year when they passed the Chinese Exclusion Act was one of those times. It affected not only Chinese-Americans, but all of America, for many years.
The Chinese Exclusion Act

Questions

1. When was the Chinese Exclusion Act passed?
   A. 1882
   B. 1943
   C. 1848
   D. 1892

2. Many Chinese immigrants landed in America at ______.
   A. San Francisco
   B. Boston
   C. Honolulu
   D. New York

3. Immigrants from China came to America to find ______.
   A. jobs
   B. gold
   C. both A and B
   D. neither A nor B

4. Many Chinese Americans were hired to work on the ______.
   A. stagecoaches
   B. cattle ranches
   C. Ford Assembly Plant
   D. transcontinental railroad

5. Typical jobs for Chinese immigrants included working in a ______.
   A. fast food restaurant
   B. laundry
   C. school
   D. all of the above

6. The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed by the ______.
   A. Magnuson Act
   B. World War II Act
   C. Chinese Immigration Act
   D. Geary Act

7. What was the Chinese Exclusion Act?

8. How did World War II affect the immigration of people from China to America?

Do you think that a law like the Chinese Exclusion Act could be passed today? Why or why not?
How did the Chinese Exclusion Act affect Chinese-Americans already living in this country?