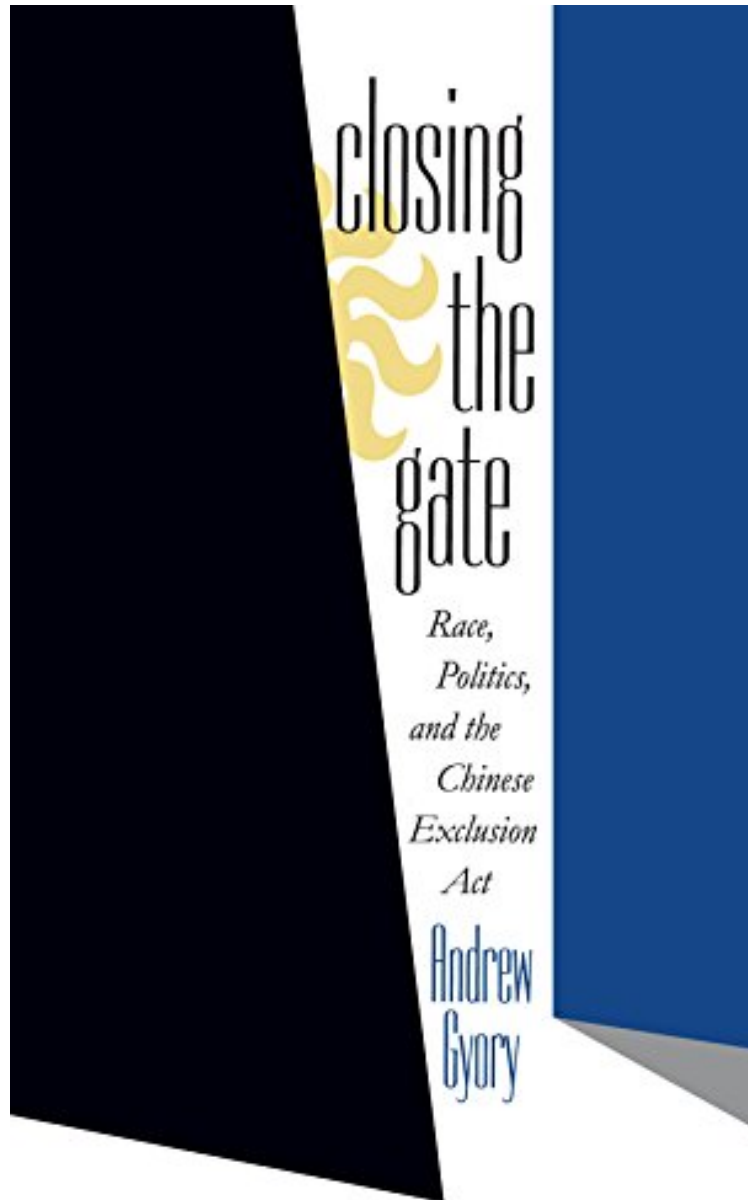


[Download] Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act (Contention; 7)

## Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act (Contention; 7)

Andrew Gyory

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#845976 in Books The University of North Carolina Press 1998-11-23 Original language: English PDF # 1  
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**Andrew Gyory : Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act (Contention; 7)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act (Contention; 7):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Blaming the PoliticiansBy Ken BuffumIn this well researched monograph, Andrew Gyory seeks to answer one question: Why did the United States pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882? In the past, historians have clung to two arguments to explain the passage of this act; the California and national-racism theses. The former suggests that workers and politicians in California supplied the driving force behind the Exclusion Act while the latter supports the view that a national xenophobia and prejudice towards the Chinese led to the act's passage. Gyory downplays the role that these two factors had in securing the exclusionist legislation. Instead, he argues that politicians played the race card to improve their political standing in hopes of getting elected to office. Gyory asserts, "The single most important force behind the Chinese Exclusion Act was national politicians of both parties who seized, transformed, and manipulated the issue of Chinese immigration in the quest for votes." Throughout the monograph Gyory seeks to illustrate how politicians took up the issue of Chinese immigration in an attempt to reach their political aspirations. In order to prove his point, Gyory attempts to disprove the long held thesis that workers nationwide supported Chinese exclusion. He stressed that opposition to Chinese immigration east of the Rockies was largely nonexistent. According to his argument, eastern workers were simply opposed to the Chinese coming to the nation under contract. Hence, white workers had no desire to support immigration legislation based upon race. In fact, Gyory believes, "Most workers evinced little interest in Chinese exclusion." Contrary to prior historiography, he suggests that Chinese exclusion gained acceptance because politicians claimed it would benefit the workingman. Many times throughout his work he blames political maneuvering for securing the act. For example, he claims, "To the very end, politics and political advantage remained the chief motivating force behind every stage of the Chinese Exclusion Act." Although his evidence is convincing, the monograph contains a few shortcomings. Gyory aptly reveals that eastern workers did not advocate restrictions on free Chinese immigration. However, these workers did not rise up to show their disapproval once the Exclusion Act was passed. Does this silence not suggest that workers possibly supported the act, or were at least indifferent to its passage? Furthermore, the reader will find that the dire situation in California only receives limited attention. Riots and violence were a product of Chinese immigration to the state, but Gyory largely fails, or chooses not to, discuss these events. Moreover, it is difficult to ascertain whether the Chinese Exclusion Act was a product of politicians, or if they were simply responding to public opinion. Despite these problems, the monograph adds greatly to the study of Chinese exclusion. Gyory's monograph is a great contribution to the historiography of the Chinese Exclusion Act and the reasons it came into existence. By evaluating a wide spectrum of sources - speeches, congressional reports, periodicals, labor journals, and political caricatures - Gyory puts Chinese exclusion in a national context. There is no doubt that his work has caused scholars to reevaluate the old assumptions on what led to the exclusion of Chinese immigrants. However, although he minimizes the impact that white laborers had in securing the legislation, it remains difficult to disprove the long held argument that workers were instrumental to this process.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Well researched look at Chinese exclusionBy Jeffrey LeachAndrew Gyory's "Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act" attempts to answer a central question about the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, specifically why the United States government passed this bill. According to the author, current historians who have examined the issue fail to offer a comprehensive explanation for this event. Gyory claims that the act did not arise from nationwide racism or at the behest of national labor leaders even though these elements formed an important aspect in its passage. Instead, he offers an alternative thesis: the Chinese Exclusion Act came into existence largely because national politicians sought votes from western states. Moreover, office seekers falsely claimed that anti-Chinese legislation had tacit support from workers across the nation and further argued that the laboring classes would greatly benefit from such a bill. Gyory finds that far from supporting an exclusion of Asian workers, most workingmen east of the Rocky Mountains had few concerns with Chinese immigration. The first few chapters define an issue that repeatedly appears throughout the book: labor in the West supported Chinese exclusion while workers in the East did not. The distinction between the two camps hinged on the issue of importation versus exclusion. Starting in 1869 and reappearing throughout the 1870s, eastern capitalists threatened to import Chinese to break strikes. The fear that these Asian laborers would work longer hours for a lower wage presented a serious threat to emerging efforts at unionization. Most attempts to bring in Asian workers never materialized, despite the hysteria regarding an 1870 incident in North Adams, Massachusetts where a factory owner did bring in Chinese labor to break a strike. It was the implied threat of such a widespread influx of cheap, non-unionized labor that terrified the average eastern workingman. Gyory argues that even when workers thought such a danger loomed on the horizon, they still did not embrace exclusionary policies. The picture that emerges is instead one of eastern workers welcoming the Chinese with open arms as long as they came to the United States of their own freewill and not under contract with factory owners. The stance of eastern labor did not find a reciprocal attitude in California and the West Coast. These regions supported a ban on Chinese immigration from the highest echelons of society down to the lowest ranks of the working class. Westerners persistently sought legislation at the federal level to end the Asian influx, with men like Denis Kearney embarking on widely touted tours of the East to promote an exclusionist agenda. These efforts either completely failed or achieved only limited results until the national election of 1880 when presidential hopeful Senator James G. Blaine realized that promoting a ban on Chinese immigration could sweep western votes into the pockets of

the Republican Party. Blaine failed to secure the presidential nomination, but both parties soon adopted his race baiting tactics in the hope of winning a presidential election in an era of razor thin vote margins. After several intricate political maneuvers in Congress, President Chester A. Arthur signed the Chinese Exclusion Act into law in 1882. Eastern unions, which had ardently opposed immigration bans for so many years, eventually supported exclusion when it became apparent that this measure was the best labor legislation they would likely get from the federal government. Gyory's research on this issue is exhaustive. By scouring through mounds of newspapers and related documents, he successfully constructs an argument that eastern unions opposed importation while supporting Chinese immigration. His presentation of the political machinations centering on Chinese exclusion shows the author's mastery at negotiating the immense source material concerning congressional debates and election politics. Moreover, the section of the book outlining Denis Kearney's excursion East illustrates the level of hostility westerners had for Asians while revealing the character of this flamboyant orator. Historians, like the public, enjoy reading about such vibrant individuals. The author's central premise that eastern workers opposed exclusion runs into a major difficulty when one realizes that the book deals almost exclusively with unions or pro-union laborers. Labor unions during the 1870s never came close to representing a majority of workers nationwide, so drawing an overarching conclusion that "workers" opposed exclusion is arguably still up for debate. Moreover, Gyory often fails to make the critical distinction between organized labor and "workers," and would probably have found firmer ground if he had argued that UNIONS in the East opposed exclusion. Of course union members supported Chinese workers; they could build stronger unions if they could convince Asian laborers to join their ranks. Accomplishing this feat would be more difficult if Chinese laborers could only work through restrictive contracts with capitalist owners. A further problem with this book lies in the hysterical tones westerners used when referring to Asian immigrants. Why did every level of society in the West reach near consensus about the undesirability of the Chinese? Other than a vague reference to westerners living in an area where the Chinese formed a measurable minority of the population, Gyory never examines the reasons for this overwhelming hatred. Defining the causes of this western repugnance would not necessarily translate into a justification of anti-Asian hatred, but rather would provide an explanation for the unanimous calls for exclusion in this area. Several western figures quoted in the book make vague references to vices and prostitution in their arguments for an immigration ban, so certainly there were specific issues on the West Coast that excited public opinion against the Chinese. What were they and why do they not appear in this book?

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Who caused the Chinese Exclusion Act? By A Customer

America had become the typical chosen destination of immigrants for its image of a land of plenty, a non-stratified society, and its democracy. This ideal of allowing immigrants to take advantage of these opportunities regardless of their ethnicity ended with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The rationalization for this law was first hypothesized by Mary Coolidge on the basis of California racist atmosphere and political pull in Washington. Later it was suggested by Stuart Miller that it was workers that encouraged Chinese exclusion. Gyory suggests neither one of these theses are correct, but the catalyst for the prohibition of Chinese immigration was national politicians who seized and manipulated the issue in an effort to gain votes, while arguing that workers had long demanded Chinese exclusion and would benefit from it. Gyory's main intention was to exonerate the workingman as being the contingency that caused the Chinese exclusion. This is stated by including union newspapers and labor proceedings stating their opposition to imported contract labor, but not exclusion. The emergence of a nation-wide railroad strike bared the clear social divisions of the Gilded Age. Demanding 'bread or blood,' railroad workers instigated speculation of a possible social revolution and the first red scare of a communist putsch. Upon the perceived anti-Chinese rhetoric and Dennis Kearney's urging Chinese exclusion, politicians were prompted to pick a non-ideological issue to appease these workers' demands. This study does demonstrate a new perspective on the instruments that enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act, but fails to give evidence why the masses accepted the politician's racist platforms.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which barred practically all Chinese from American shores for ten years, was the first federal law that banned a group of immigrants solely on the basis of race or nationality. By changing America's traditional policy of open immigration, this landmark legislation set a precedent for future restrictions against Asian immigrants in the early 1900s and against Europeans in the 1920s. Tracing the origins of the Chinese Exclusion Act, Andrew Gyory presents a bold new interpretation of American politics during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age. Rather than directly confront such divisive problems as class conflict, economic depression, and rising unemployment, he contends, politicians sought a safe, nonideological solution to the nation's industrial crisis--and latched onto Chinese exclusion. Ignoring workers' demands for an end simply to imported contract labor, they claimed instead that working people would be better off if there were no Chinese immigrants. By playing the race card, Gyory argues, national politicians--not California, not organized labor, and not a general racist atmosphere--provided the motive force behind the era's most racist legislation.

"A fine book, well argued, well documented, and well written." *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* "Gyory manages to provide an informative new study by combining extensive research with engaging prose." *Choice* "The most detailed

account available of Chinese exclusion as a national issue."Journal of Interdisciplinary History""One of the most noteworthy contributions in U.S. political history in years.Leon Fink, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill""Gyory's work is the first fresh, original interpretation of the origins of Chinese exclusion in quite some time. Lucy E. Salyer, University of New Hampshire"A fine book, well argued, well documented, and well written."Pacific Northwest Quarterly"One of the most noteworthy contributions in U.S. political history in years.Leon Fink, University of North Carolina at Chapel HillGyory's work is the first fresh, original interpretation of the origins of Chinese exclusion in quite some time. Lucy E. Salyer, University of New Hampshire A fine book, well argued, well documented, and well written. It raises important issues of democratic politics. Like a tragic drama, it offers examples of human courage and character in a losing battle to the craven drive for power by a few consummate manipulators of public prejudice. Read and be warned.--Pacific Northwest QuarterlyThe most detailed account available of Chinese exclusion as a national issue.--Journal of Interdisciplinary HistoryGyory's work is the first fresh, original interpretation of the origins of Chinese exclusion in quite some time. It is an exciting study because he challenges the standard interpretations which have stood for years and become incorporated into the 'textbook' versions of American history.-- Lucy E. Salyer, University of New HampshireGyory manages to provide an informative new study by combining extensive research with engaging prose. . . . An excellent work. Certain to become the standard account of America's initial Chinese exclusion, it is highly recommended for all academic and larger public libraries.--ChoiceOne of the most noteworthy contributions in U.S. political history in years. Gyory rescues our understanding of the tragedy of Chinese exclusion (and by extension other American racial practices) from the glib generalities reliant on a resort to 'racist culture' in favor of a painstaking--if painful--account of specific political agency.--Leon Fink, University of North Carolina at Chapel HillFrom the Inside FlapAnalyzes the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 from a national perspective. By playing the race card, national politicians?not California, not organized labor, and not a general racist atmosphere?were responsible for this law.