

Cloaked Propaganda:  
The Transcontinental Railroad's Role in Normalizing  
Chinese Immigrant Exclusion

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I dedicate this thesis to the Chinese immigrants who suffered during the emergence of exclusionary immigration policies in the United States and all of the immigrants who continue to suffer at the hands of a broken, discriminatory democracy.

## Introduction

### *Emergence of Gate-Keeping America*

The rampant circulation and embodiment of racist American exceptionalist ideology that coincided with westward expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century invalidated the narrative of the United States as an altruistic beacon of democracy for all. The national identity of America during this time became one contingent on racial and cultural homogeneity while diversity was isolated, segregated, and ultimately excluded. In the 1800s, millions of immigrants traveled to the United States in the hopes of forging a better life and starting anew. However upon arrival, some ethnic groups were targeted and faced reprehensible discrimination, simply for their assumed divergence from western ideals.

Among the immigrant groups that sought refuge to the United States during the Gilded Age were Chinese immigrants. Beginning in 1850, thousands of Chinese laborers migrated to the United States in search of a better life and a chance at experiencing the illusive American prosperity associated with the gold rush known as *Gum Shaan*—"Mountain of Gold."<sup>1</sup> To pay for their passage to California from Hong Kong, Chinese immigrants subjected themselves to years of indentured labor with mining companies until their tickets were paid.<sup>2</sup> Chinese laborers' willingness to work hard for extremely low wages and take on any job, regardless of the danger associated with it, made them a sought after and valued workforce. As a result, these first few waves of Chinese immigrants were welcomed and received positively as noted in the *Daily Alta California* in 1852, "Scarcely a ship arrives that does not bring an increase to this worthy integer

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<sup>1</sup>David Haward. Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 578.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 579.

of our population.”<sup>3</sup> However, once western railroad companies began employing Chinese laborers in the transcontinental railroad construction, their status as a cheap workforce became a fervent point of societal contention.

The transcontinental railroad was the ultimate technological embodiment of westward expansion and its completion signaled continental unification and hegemony. America’s railroad visionaries were motivated by their beliefs of a predestined right to the West and the commercial advantages that coincided with expansion; however, many were initially skeptical of such a massive construction project.<sup>4</sup> Asa Whitney, the “Father of the Pacific Railroads”, is largely accredited with convincing members in Congress to approve the construction of the transcontinental railroad by inciting notions of manifest destiny and American exceptionalism on a national scale.<sup>5</sup> Whitney published multiple memorials to gain publicity for the railroad and enumerate the feasibility and necessity for transcontinental railways.<sup>6</sup> As a result, railroad construction became widely-discussed and accepted among the American people: “the scheme of Mr. Whitney, of New York, for a railroad from Lake Michigan to the Pacific Ocean, opens a grand and majestic view of the future glory and destiny of our country. Who shall say that this view may not be realized?”<sup>7</sup> Whitney’s incessant advocacy for the pacific railroads fevered sentiments of manifest destiny and American exceptionalism all over the nation—the unification of America from “sea to shining sea” was its preordained design. This “continentalism” was greatly accepted as the rationalization for the massive technological and economic venture of

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<sup>3</sup> *Daily Alta California*, May 12, 1852, as quoted in Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998), 80.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret L. Brown, “Asa Whitney and His Pacific Railroad Publicity Campaign,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (1933): 212.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>6</sup> Robert S. Cotterill, “Early Agitation for a Pacific Railroad 1845-1850,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 5, no. 4 (1919): 401.

<sup>7</sup> “The Rail Road to Oregon,” *Republican Banner* (Nashville), June 6, 1845.

railroad construction. However, after the plans for a transcontinental railroad were approved by Congress, the vision became realized only through the contribution and exploitation of Chinese immigrant labor.

The Central Pacific Railroad Company initiated construction in 1863 and utilized the support of local newspapers to recruit laborers with job advertisements. Despite the railroad's attempts at outsourcing labor, only a few hundred mostly Irish men responded, most of whom were miners headed to Nevada who typically worked for a week or less to pay for wagon transportation through the mountains.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the railroad construction was decelerated by an insufficient and perpetual novice workforce.<sup>9</sup> To ameliorate the deteriorating situation, railroad managers agreed to utilize Chinese laborers from adjacent mining towns to advance the railroad track construction in 1865.<sup>10</sup>

After the first few months of employing Chinese immigrant labor in 1865, unprecedented productivity was achieved, and as a result, 2,000 more Chinese laborers were hired.<sup>11</sup> The Central Pacific's attorney, Judge Edwin Bryant Crocker, accredited the newfound progress in construction to the Chinese laborers: "A large part of our force are Chinese and they prove nearly equal to white men in the amount of labor they perform, and are far more reliable. No danger of strikes among them."<sup>12</sup> A few months after the first Chinese laborers were hired, a third of the railroad workforce was Chinese and the director of the Central Pacific reported that, "without

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<sup>8</sup> Herman B. Chiu and Andrew Taylor Kirk, "'Unlimited American Power': How Four California Newspapers Covered Chinese Labor and the Building of the Transcontinental Railroad, 1865–1869," *American Journalism* 31, no. 4 (2014): 509.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 510.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Bain, *Empire Express*, 620.

them it would be impossible to go on with the work.”<sup>13</sup> The invaluable Chinese labor force that demonstrated unmatched commitment to their work was seen as a welcomed addition by railroad executives; however, their presence in railroad construction threatened the more expensive, less disciplined Irish laborers.

Federal funding for the railroad was contingent on its progress, and as a result, advancing track construction was of paramount importance to railroad companies.<sup>14</sup> To maximize the productivity of the railroad workers, railroad labor managers exploited the racial and ethnic differences among workers to pit one group against the other and depress wages for both.<sup>15</sup> Railroad employers developed a dual wage system to pay Chinese laborers less than white laborers, fostering a fiercely competitive environment that ultimately caused ethnic antagonism between the two groups.<sup>16</sup> However the disdain white laborers held for Chinese immigrants soon metastasized into every class of the greater population with the recession of 1870 that followed the railroad’s completion in 1869. Chinese immigrants were scapegoated for the economic downturn and anti-Chinese platforms formed in both political parties in the elections of 1871.<sup>17</sup> Debates on the definition of citizenship and race permeated the political sphere with avidity, and so began the shaping of the exclusionary immigration policy of the United States.

One of the most significant markers of this xenophobic era was the passage of the first federal law barring a group of immigrants solely on their race and nationality—the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This legislation not only reversed the American tradition of providing

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 621.

<sup>14</sup> Chiu and Kirk, “Unlimited American Power,” 510.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Edna Bonaich, “A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market,” *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (October 1972): 547.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000), 79.

refuge to the poor and marginalized, it forever changed the previously open United States immigration policy to one of militant exclusion. There are a plethora of catalysts and contingencies that created the perfect societal petri dish for cultivating and advancing this unprecedented immigration discrimination; however, circulation of racist and exceptionalist ideology greatly contributed to the consensus regarding the exclusion of thousands of Chinese immigrants. Racializing the concept of immigration regulation with anti-Chinese legislation created insidiously detrimental reverberations for other immigrant groups in subsequent generations. Despite its uncontested significance and influence, Chinese exclusion and the multifaceted reasons for its passage have a disproportionate representation in historical academic discourse.

Historians have traditionally ascribed two theories to explain the emergence and passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act: the California thesis and the national racist consensus thesis.<sup>18</sup> The California thesis was championed by historian Mary Robert Coolidge in 1909 and purports that California and its labor class were the key facilitators of Chinese exclusion legislation. To challenge the reductive postulation that only the obsessive prejudice of Californians propagated anti-Chinese legislation, Stuart Creighton Miller claimed that the relentlessly negative depiction of Chinese immigrants in American society was the true agent of promoting Chinese exclusion.<sup>19</sup> Academic discourse surrounding Chinese exclusion in both of these veins of thought has been greatly augmented by other historians; however, the transcontinental railroad's culpability in paving the way for anti-Chinese legislation is severely overlooked.

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



While there is a plethora of historical literature surrounding the railroad and its construction, there is a gap in the discussion regarding Chinese immigrants' treatment on their railway journeys and how this contributed to the normalization of their exclusion. There is also a dearth of critical analysis regarding the railroad as a mechanism propagating and stimulating the negative stereotypes of Chinese people among its white travelers with railroad guidebooks. Historians have focused significantly on how the transcontinental railroad revolutionized the tourist industry, notions of time and space, and the geographical makeup of the United States, however there is little available that connects the completion of this society altering technology to Chinese exclusion.

Two academics dominate the discourse surrounding George Croft's guidebooks. Valerie J. Fifer with her book *American Progress*, and Jennifer Raab's work, "Panoramic Vision, Telegraphic Language: Selling the American West, 1869-1884." Both of these authors give extensive analysis on Croft's utilization of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny to revolutionize the tourism industry, but a conversation about Chinese discrimination in their publications is missing. The subject of immigrant travel on the railway has a similarly lacking presence of the Chinese immigrant experience. Catherine Boland Erkkila is one of the most notable in the field and wrote an incredibly robust dissertation on the topic and later a journal article entitled "American Railways and the Cultural Landscape of Immigration." Her publications trace the various types of segregation and mistreatment that immigrants faced in the spaces of the railroads. However, her work is almost entirely dedicated to an analysis of European immigrant travel on the railroad, completely overlooking the plight of the Chinese immigrant.

*Chapter Summaries*

This thesis examines one understudied dimension of how the racist ideology that contributed to the acceptance of anti-Chinese legislation was disseminated on a national scale: via the transcontinental railroad. The railroad commercialized racist notions of manifest destiny and exceptionalism with the advent of transcontinental guidebooks and fostered a dogmatic immigrant hierarchy within the space of its train cars. The technological disruption and advancement of the railroad provided a mechanism to both spread and reinforce racist ideology that helped normalize the supposed inferiority of Chinese immigrants. Transcontinental guidebooks communicated that Chinese people were beyond the scope of American citizenship with harmful invective, while railroad companies physically reinforced these notions with immigrant segregation on train cars. After the railroad's completion, the manifest destiny and exceptionalism ideology that was utilized to inspire its construction became weaponized against Chinese immigrants, severely diminishing their ability to assimilate and eventually their right to immigrate to the United States. This thesis traces the transcontinental railroad's role in contributing to the national discourse regarding the discrimination and mistreatment of Chinese immigrants and how this facilitated the nascent exclusionary immigration policy of the United States.

In Chapter One, I analyze transcontinental railroad guidebooks and their utilization of the mystical and divinely ordained implications of manifest destiny and American exceptionalism to aggravate endogenous racism against Chinese immigrants. Focusing on guidebooks published from 1869 to 1880, by one author George A. Crofutt, I examine how derogatory depictions of non-westernized people preceded and contributed to the incitement of racist immigration legislation. Analyzing frontispieces, title pages, illustrations, and text in the guidebooks, I

identify racially charged messages of predestined American exceptionalism that were passively consumed by millions of people, influencing the nationally perceived meaning of Americanism and citizenship.

In Chapter Two, I examine how the space of the transcontinental railroad served as a physical manifestation of the oppressive sentiments communicated in Crofutt's guidebooks. Railroad companies further perpetuated racialized stereotypes that were promulgated in Crofutt's publications by segregating immigrants based on their ethnicity and nationality. An examination of the systematic discrimination and stratification experienced by immigrants in the train cars demonstrates how the railroad represented a microcosm for the racialized social hierarchy that was rapidly emerging at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Chapter Three centers on the nascent immigration regulation of the Chinese exclusion era that evolved from the domestic segregation practices on railroads. I examine the first immigration station in California that was utilized in response to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act: the railroad owned Pacific Mail Steamship Company detention shed. In this final chapter, I analyze the shameful, institutionalized mistreatment of Chinese immigrants on the shores of San Francisco that was aggravated by a nation ideologically united against one ethnic group of immigrants.

The aim of this thesis is to begin to fill the void present in historical analysis regarding the transcontinental railroad as a function to encourage Chinese immigrant exclusion from society and ultimately the United States. Chinese immigrant discrimination on the railroad was one of the most significant forms of institutionalized segregation at the time, and greatly contributed to the societal normalization of Chinese exclusion. By analyzing the pages of Crofutt's Guidebooks and the immigrant hierarchy in the space of the train car, I hope to

demonstrate how the railroad standardized not only notions of time and space, but also racist American nationalism.

## Chapter One

### *Guidebooks: a Medium for Discrimination*

The completion of the transcontinental railroad was the pinnacle of the nineteenth-century industrial revolution and gave rise to a new breed of travelers who looked to a nuanced medium for guidance on their journeys to the West. In 1869, when the railroad's last spike was driven into the ground in Promontory, Utah, George A. Crofutt published his first guidebook aimed at the most desirable tourists, settlers, and investors, who would spread their impeccable embodiment of American ideals to the Western frontier.<sup>20</sup> In the two decades following the completion of the railroad, Crofutt published another fourteen versions of his book, which established and popularized the genre of the traveler's guide. Previous literature on the West had taken the form of novels, travelers' essays, and government surveys, however after the transcontinental railroad was completed, the guidebook genre became the most popular and influential medium to promote westward travel.<sup>21</sup> Crofutt's guidebooks were designed to alleviate the rapid and disorienting movement through space brought on by railroad transportation; however, they also reproduced the mythic vision of an endless frontier utilizing notions of manifest destiny and racialized American exceptionalism. Throughout his volumes, the imagery and text communicated what ideals the new West should be predicated on, laying the exclusionary framework that would inform the scope of western citizenship. Crofutt quickly rose to prominence and used his prolific publicity apparatus to inform his malleable readers about the inferiority of those who could not conform to white citizenship—Chinese immigrants.

Crofutt's books were sold in mass numbers aboard trains, in stations, bookstores, newsstands, and by mail. In 1871, two years after he published his first guidebook, Crofutt had

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<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Raab, "Panoramic Vision, Telegraphic Language: Selling the American West, 1869-1884," *Journal of American Studies* 47 (November 27, 2012): 495.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 496.

gained an annual readership of more than two million people.<sup>22</sup> These guidebooks were recommended as valuable reading material, and they held the same weight and importance as a textbook would to a schoolchild. Crofutt even popularized the term “transcontinental” as it was widely adopted in the United States and became a household word following the publication of the first version of his guidebooks, *Great Trans-Continental Tourist’s Guide*.<sup>23</sup> Crofutt himself acknowledged that he had created a momentous platform that garnered influence all over the country by including two pages of press reviews in his 1880 guidebook edition: *Resources of California* advised that “every schoolchild in the country should obtain a copy,” while the *Denver Rocky Mountain Herald* purported that “such a correct complete and splendid cyclopedia of western information should be in every family and school library, every business office and every reading room in the Union.”<sup>24</sup> By selling millions of copies of guidebooks, Crofutt successfully commercialized notions of manifest destiny and American hegemony. In the space of the train car, his devout readers passively consumed guidebooks that defined who deserved the privilege of citizenship and reinforced stereotypes about certain immigrants’ inability to assimilate. Crofutt’s explicitly discriminatory messages had lasting implications that contributed to the exclusion and mistreatment of Chinese immigrants in every facet of American society.

#### *Images Are Worth a Thousand Exclusionary Words*

From the moment one of the millions of readers came into contact with *Crofutt’s Trans-continental Tourist Guide*, they were confronted with notions of white American exceptionalism and the inferiority of those who did not encompass Western ideals. The title illustration of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 497.

<sup>23</sup> J. Valerie Fifer, *American Progress: The Growth of the Transport, Tourist, and Information Industries in the Nineteenth-Century West, Seen through the Life and Times of George A. Crofutt, Pioneer and Publicist of the Transcontinental Age* (Chester, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 1988), 183.

<sup>24</sup> George A. Crofutt, *Crofutt’s New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide* (Chicago: The Overland Publishing Co., 1880), unpaginated front matter.

Croft's guidebooks was meant to passively introduce the ideological implications of Western dominance, "providing a particularly potent medium for the reductive semiology of myth."<sup>25</sup> To effectively communicate an ideological message, it must be blatantly legible, almost to excess. For this reason, Croft's illustrations in his mass produced guidebooks were the perfect vehicles for reinforcing societal hierarchies and biases against immigrants. Historian Roland Barthes argues that for the "myth reader, everything happens as if the picture *naturally* conjured up the concept, as if the signifier gave *a foundation* to the signified."<sup>26</sup> The title illustration of Croft's guidebook embodies dimensions of myth to confront its readers with a plethora of elements that implicate notions of white superiority (Figure 1). This ensures that what is being communicated is not misinterpreted, even if the image is scanned rather than studied.

Just above the text, *Great Trans-Continental*, is a woman on an eagle with her hands spread out as if to encompass the scene below her; she embodies the American desire for continental dominance, and her femininity is symbolic of the purity and innocence of this endeavor.<sup>27</sup> To her left are four white men converging around a map that spills off the table because it is too big to be contained. They look down at the maps, presumably a representation of the American West, while a globe behind them serves to contextualize the West in the world.<sup>28</sup> One of the men points to the map as he strikes a very assured and confident pose, while the others seem to reflect his predisposition. The land is spread out before them, a panorama of possibilities. In contrast, on the right side are four men, two Chinese and two Native American, representing those who had labored and were displaced in order to realize the dream of empire.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800–1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 19.

<sup>26</sup> Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 129.

<sup>27</sup> Raab, "Panoramic Vision," 511.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

The four figures to the right do not possess panoramic vision, they are not at an elevated position looking down or standing over a map of endless possibilities. Instead they are turned inward towards each other as if to assure the tourist who had bought the book that these races had been pacified and contained.<sup>30</sup> The Chinese men are portrayed in traditional dress, their features over exaggerated, to ensure that the stereotype and stigma surrounding Chinese culture would not be lost on the reader. At the bottom of this illustration are two small male figures who are at an elevated position and are waving at the landscape before them, demonstrating man's unquestionable dominance over nature and all of its inhabitants. These two white Americans are placed in the lower foreground of the picture, serving as surrogates for the viewer. As a result, the readers of the guidebook could visually associate themselves with these two figures who possess a panoramic vision of the vista and feel the corresponding sense of dominance and possession.<sup>31</sup> Crofutt utilized the Chinese and Native American figures to juxtapose the depicted supremacy of white Americans in the image, communicating to his readers that not only were American citizens dominant over their landscape, but also over people who had been excluded or displaced to civilize the Western frontier. Crofutt's cover illustration promoted westward exploration through the mediums of manifest destiny, exceptionalism, and panoramic vision, clearly defining both the racial and cultural superiority of white Americans.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 512.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



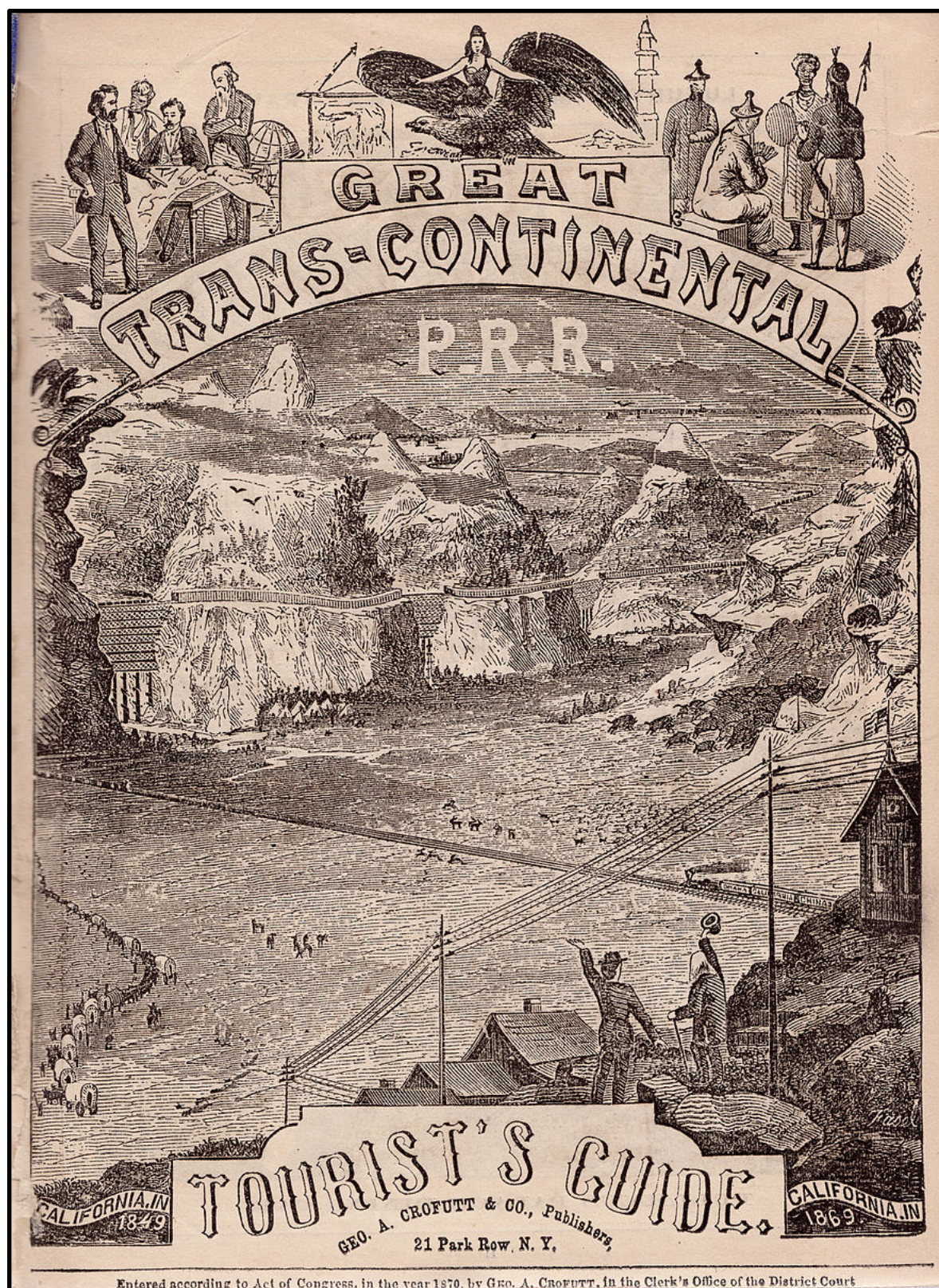


Figure 1. Cover image, *Great Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* (New York: Geo. A. Crofutt & Co., Publishers, 1871).



Croftutt utilized copious amounts of illustrations throughout his guidebooks to further incite endogenous racism that was rapidly becoming integral to the American identity. The most notable of the illustrations target Chinese immigrants and mechanize their foreignness to highlight American citizenship in terms of racial and cultural homogeneity. One of the prints in the guidebooks is a scene that depicts the completion of the transcontinental railroad titled, “The East and the West.”<sup>32</sup> Beneath the title is a short description that reads, “The Orient and the Occident shaking hands after driving the last spike,” to explicate the physical unification of the two railroad lines shown in the image. The illustration clearly depicts merriment and celebration, in the center of the image, men from the orient and occidental trains signify the railroads’ unification by clinking champagne bottles (Figure 2). However, one of the most striking components of the illustration is the nimety of sameness among the people meant to represent our nation. They are all white men in homogenous dress, the only differentiating factor between them is the presence of facial hair. They reinforce the depiction of white males shown on the cover illustration as they strike assured poses, leaning on the two trains as if to demonstrate their dominance over the great technological advancement of the iron horse. However, upon close examination, one will find that there are two figures in the drawing that stand in stark contrast to the rest of the image.

On the very left fringes of the image, two Chinese workers are depicted and serve one purpose: to emphasize the unity of white American citizenship with the presence of their foreignness. They are the only figures who don’t have most of their faces clearly visible, and they are turned away from the viewer of the image. They are also the only people who seem to be in motion, as if they were walking across the scene when the illustration was created, making

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<sup>32</sup> George A. Croftutt, *Croftutt’s Trans-Continental Tourist’s Guide* (New York: Geo A. Croftutt & Co., Publishers, 1872), 118.

their presence an almost accidental occurrence. They are overtly different from the rest of the white males in the picture with their long braids, silk caps, and robe clothing, emphasizing their inability to conform with the rest of the men in the picture all wearing three-piece suits. The strategic placement of this image in the guidebook communicated to its readers that citizenship was not all encompassing and prevented those whose culture or appearance dissented from the white idyllic norm from participating in the emerging western nationhood.

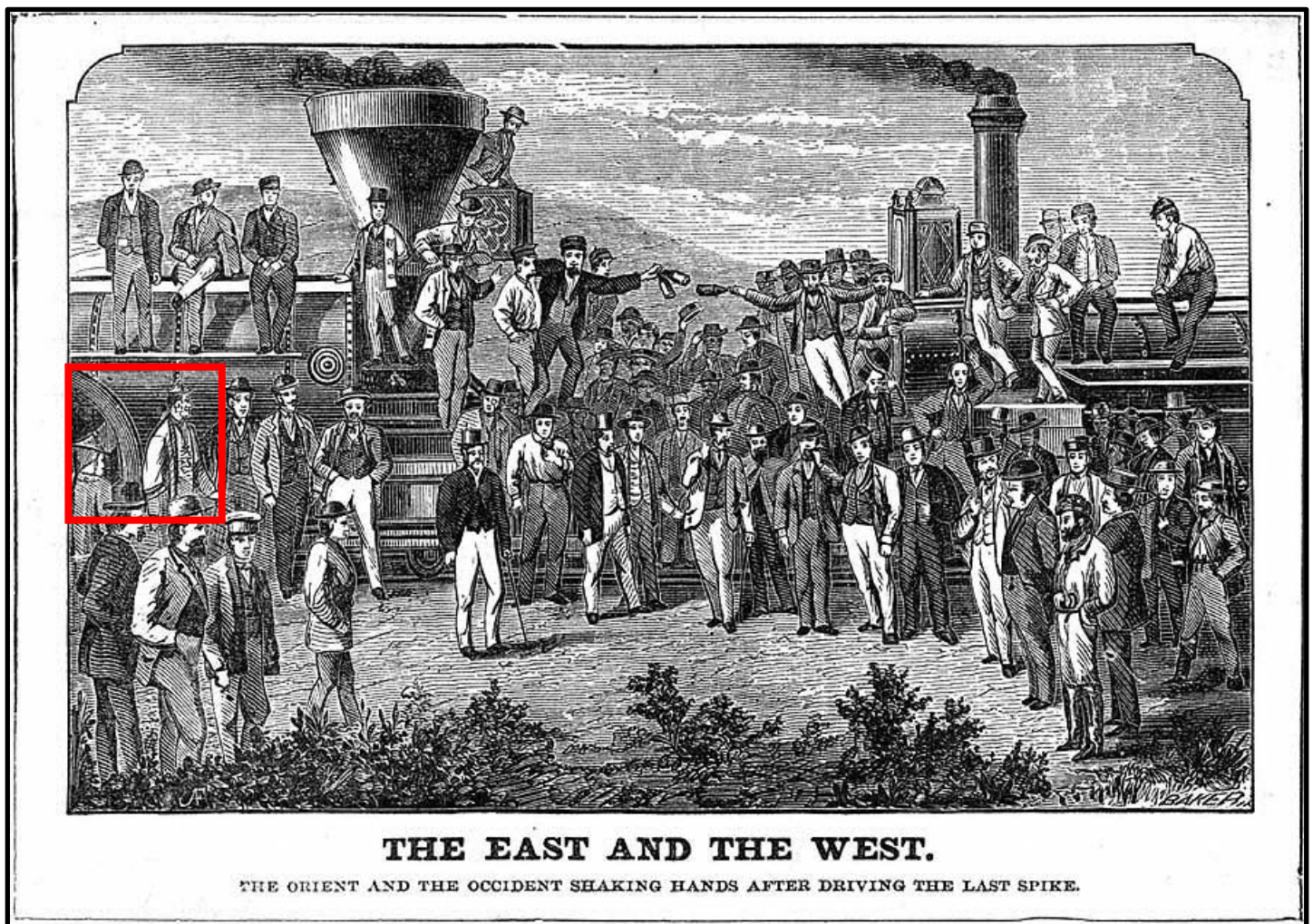


Figure 2. "The East and the West", *Croft's Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* (New York: Geo A. Croft & Co., Publishers, 1872), 118.

The representation of the Chinese workers in Crofutt's guidebook provides unique insight into the character of the emerging national identity against the evolving industrial landscape. Chinese immigrant labor was a crucial component of the railroad construction and continental expansion, yet Chinese laborers remained the most foreign and least assimilable immigrant group. Rather than integrate Chinese laborers and immigrants into the nation they helped shape, white Americans utilized their foreignness as a way to delineate the limits of citizenship. The establishment of Chinese immigrants as an indicator for the scope of citizenship helped shape the exclusionary policies that permeated nineteenth-century America and reinforced an insidiously hierarchal society. Historian Lisa Lowe characterized the presence of Chinese immigrants on American soil as fundamentally contradictory because they existed "within the U.S. nation-state, its workplaces, and its markets," yet they were simultaneously branded as, "foreign and outside the national polity."<sup>33</sup> The contradictory nature of their presence in the United States was reflected in Crofutt's guidebooks. These mass publications perpetuated the notion that Chinese immigrants could not be privy to the right of citizenship despite their invaluable contribution to continental expansion and the formation of a new nation. To further promote a national identity predicated on homogeneity and exclusion to his readers, Crofutt introduced one of the most preeminent depictions of American exceptionalism that has ever been published.

Beginning in 1873, the buyer of a *Crofutt's Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* would open the front cover and find a full-page, foldout engraving of John Gast's *American Progress* (Figure 3).<sup>34</sup> Gast's painting perfectly embodies America's divinely ordained destiny to conquer the savage West and unite the continent under one glorious nation and identity. *American Progress* is one of the most infamous paintings associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century and still occupies

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<sup>33</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Raab, "Panoramic Vision," 505.

an important place in the curriculum of every history classroom in the country. While *American Progress* is usually taught by projection on a large whiteboard, the painting started from much smaller, more humble beginnings. In 1872, Crofutt commissioned John Gast to produce a small oil painting, which was then engraved and placed in his guidebooks. A larger, chromolithographic version was made available to Crofutt's subscribers, but the painting never took form in any size larger than two square feet.<sup>35</sup> John Gast was not even given credit for the engraved painting by Crofutt and was not included in the "Annex" titled "Our Artists" in the guidebooks.<sup>36</sup> Despite Gast's lack of accreditation, *American Progress* has an extremely significant impact on how we perceive American citizenship in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and during the time of transcontinental railroad travel, it significantly contributed to the constellation of exclusionary discourse that shaped the nascent industrial society.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.





Figure 3. *American Progress*, Crofutt's *Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* (Chicago: The Overland Publishing Co., 1878.)

When *American Progress* was unfolded by Crofutt's dedicated readers, their eyes were drawn laterally across the picture, from the "darkness, waste, and confusion" of the wilderness and flat plains to the telegraph wires leading to ethereal rays of sunlight that illuminate a distant port city.<sup>37</sup> Nearly every element in the painting is portrayed in motion: the black bear, buffalo, and Native Americans flee from the steady encroachment of the white settlers, turning to look

<sup>37</sup> George A. Crofutt, *Crofutt's Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* (Chicago: The Overland Publishing Co., 1878), 300.

back at the covered wagons, stagecoaches, and gold-seekers that threaten to push them out of the space of the picture.<sup>38</sup> Much like Crofutt's title illustration, the painting's ideological message of American exceptionalism is emphasized repeatedly, making it obvious to the viewer what was being communicated, ensuring that the myth fulfilled its purpose. The group of Native American figures who are escaping, lean into the edge of the composition, communicating to the viewer that they will soon be out of sight, while the white men appear erect and relaxed, as if assured of their righteous purpose.<sup>39</sup> The bear, Native Americans, and buffalo are also being pushed back by the "three great continental lines of railway" speeding on the opposite side of the image; their mechanical velocity follows closely behind the first wave of migration, represented by the horse-drawn covered wagon and the ox-drawn farmer's plough.<sup>40</sup> The image embodies the process of homogenization that took place with westward expansion to achieve both continental dominance and a clear, racialized standard for citizenship. As white, American settlers and travelers traversed the country in their western migration, everything that contradicted the new western ideal was pushed out, figuratively and literally, as the painting suggests. The central figure of the work, the woman who floats gracefully above all the components in the painting, most explicitly embodies the painting's ideological aims to communicate the importance of establishing an American ideal that precluded any element of foreignness.

The monumental woman in the painting serves as an allegorical figure of nation and empire—she both leads and oversees the westward invasion.<sup>41</sup> She embodies the divinely

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<sup>38</sup> Native Americans were consistently dehumanized throughout Crofutt's guidebooks in a similar capacity to Chinese immigrants. They were racialized, abused, and discriminated against because their culture was also deemed too divergent to conform to the western ideal of citizenship. Crofutt utilized their foreignness in a similar capacity to highlight the homogeneity and superiority of the emerging white American society. See for example, David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Raab, "Panoramic Vision," 505.

<sup>40</sup> Crofutt, *Crofutt's Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* 1878, 300.

<sup>41</sup> Raab, "Panoramic Vision," 506.

sanctioned right to expand the nation's borders, to conquer and suppress the native inhabitants, to settle, and to civilize the wilderness under one race. Her elevated position in the scene enables her to a panoramic vision, as she looks out over the landscape, she becomes a force of nature, validating the historical inevitability of American dominance, as if it were the natural order of things. The readers themselves possess a panoramic view of the scene, which is critical for their interpretation of the painting. Art historian Alfred Boime purported that, "this panoramic prospect embodies like a microcosm, the social and political character of the land—of the desire for dominance."<sup>42</sup> The colossal woman holds one object in each hand to represent two different forms of information transmission, "In her right hand she carries a book—common school—the emblem of education and the testimonial of our national enlightenment, while with the left hand she unfolds and stretches the slender wires of the telegraph, that are to flash intelligence throughout the land."<sup>43</sup> Crofutt's own description of the image further emphasizes its ideological purpose: the American people are an enlightened and educated one, and they are therefore obligated to share this exceptional wisdom with the entire continent. The "charming and beautiful female" is a fleshy maternal figure that naturalizes the mechanistic because her physical body is connected to the signs of technology which serves to counter arguments that technology is corruptive.<sup>44</sup> Her ethereal presence gives her an angelic quality to emphasize the divine dimension of this progress. Crofutt alludes to the excessive national desire for westward expansion with the scale of the woman's body; she is the symbol of America. The statuesque woman is dressed like a Greek goddess, "bearing on her forehead the 'Star of Empire'..." However, the "Indians with their squaws, papposes, and 'pony lodges', turn their despairing

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<sup>42</sup> Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting c.1830-1865* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 21.

<sup>43</sup> Crofutt, *Crofutt's Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* 1878, 300.

<sup>44</sup> Raab, "Panoramic Vision," 507.



faces toward the setting sun, as they flee from the presence of the wondrous vision. The ‘Star’ is *too much for them.*”<sup>45</sup>

Croftt’s description of the painting perfectly encompasses the sentiment of exceptionalism: the American Empire and its progress were used to justify the displacement and destruction of Native American culture and exclusion of any cultures antithetical to the western ideal of citizenship. The Native Americans are “fleeing from ‘Progress’ and toward the blue waters of the pacific...” rather than being forcefully removed by this westward expansion.<sup>46</sup> By that same logic, Chinese immigrants were simply too foreign and divergent to participate in society as true citizens—the great American empire was too powerful to be all encompassing. Croftt commends the painting’s ability to “illustrate, in the most artistic manner, all those gigantic results of American hands and brains, which have caused the mighty wilderness to blossom like the rose.”<sup>47</sup> He explicitly excluded all of the arduous immigrant labor that was integral to the construction of the transcontinental railroad and the civilization of the western frontier; only the white man could truly be accredited with completing such an impossible feat. He even directly outlines the response that the viewer should have to the picture: “What American man, woman, or child, does not feel a heart-throb of exultation as they think of the glorious achievements of PROGRESS since the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers on staunch old Plymouth Rock!”<sup>48</sup> Croftt placed *American Progress* at the very front to remind his readers of their predestined right to the lands of the West before they even began reading his guidebook. This calculating strategy was adopted to promote the West as a place to witness the

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<sup>45</sup> Croftt, *Croftt’s Trans-Continental Tourist’s Guide* 1878, 300.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

materialization of the Founding Fathers' dreams of continental dominance and white American hegemony.

*American Progress* was utilized to incite an unwavering belief that white American exceptionalism justified the displacement and exclusion of those who did not align with the contrived racialized formula of citizenship. By disseminating ideals of racial superiority and homogeneity on a mass scale, Crofutt greatly contributed to the discriminatory conversation that rationalized the elimination of diversity for the sake of a "unified" nationhood. His images were an extremely powerful medium to communicate these messages because they were so blatant in their purpose; one need just glance at them to fully receive and internalize the exclusionary ideology. Even though Crofutt's illustrations were exceedingly successful in enumerating the scope of citizenship, his words in the text of the guidebook further painted Chinese immigrants in an inferior light, reducing them to lesser human beings who were undeserving of equal participation in society.

#### *Descriptions of Landmarks and the Scope of Citizenship*

Crofutt employed the same strategy with the illustrations as he did with his text by immediately confronting his readers with the superiority of white Americans. By placing ideals of racial superiority at the beginning of his guidebook, Crofutt ensured that people who consumed his books would have a clear understanding of its intended message. In the preface to his 1876 guide, Crofutt states, "Since the completion of the Pacific Railroad it has been occupied by over half a million of the most adventurous, active, honest, and progressive white people that the world can produce."<sup>49</sup> He explicitly excluded all other races that were travelling on the transcontinental railroad, suggesting that their presence was negligible and not worth

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<sup>49</sup> George A. Crofutt, *Crofutt's Trans-Continental Tourist's Guide* (New York: G. W. Carleton & Co., 1876), unpaginated preface.

mentioning. His rhetoric further explicates the superiority of white Americans over other races; by using the words “honest” and “progressive,” he implied that only white people possessed these qualities, making them more deserving of citizenship than other races. Crofutt’s 1874 guidebook included a section titled, “Ten Hints before We Start,” where he ironically cautioned his readers not to judge people by their appearance, “Do not judge of the people you meet by their clothes, or think you are going west to find fools; as a millionaire may be in a buckskin and a college graduate in rags.”<sup>50</sup> However, based upon the contents of his book, both textual and illustrative, this warning was clearly intended to encompass white Americans; other races did not deserve protection from prejudice.

The text in Crofutt’s guidebooks is masterfully interwoven with sight-seeing recommendations, light anecdotes about the western frontier, and racially discriminatory rhetoric. Much like his illustrations, Crofutt utilized the juxtaposition of other races to emphasize the superiority of white Americans. In a section of the guidebook that discussed a bridge in Cape Horn the train traveled over, Crofutt makes clear which race should be accredited with “the ultimate triumph of the obstacles overcome”<sup>51</sup> in the bridge’s construction. To give his readers context about the technological marvel they would travel over he wrote:

When the road was in course of construction, the groups of Chinese laborers on the bluffs looked almost like swarms of ants, when viewed from the river. Years ago, the cunning savage could find only a very round-about trail by which to ascend the point, where now the genius and energy of the pale-face has laid a broad and safe road whereon the iron steed carries its living freight swiftly and safely on their way to and from ocean to ocean.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> George A. Crofutt, *Crofutt’s Trans-Continental Tourist’s Guide* (New York: Geo A. Crofutt & Co., Publishers, 1874), unpaginated front matter.

<sup>51</sup> George A. Crofutt, *Crofutt’s Trans-Continental Tourist’s Guide* (New York: Geo A. Crofutt & Co., Publishers, 1873), 177.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Crofutt used Native Americans and Chinese laborers to serve as a stark contrast to the genius of the “pale-face;” their displacement and labor were necessary but not invaluable constituents of the bridge’s construction. It was ultimately the ingenuity of the white man that allowed for the technological prowess of structures like the bridge. Crofutt diminished the perilous labor Chinese immigrants contributed and dehumanized them by describing them as “swarms of ants,” making them seem insignificant and disposable—if one should perish, another would take his place like in a colony of insects. The dehumanization and animalization of both Chinese laborers as ants and Native Americans as “cunning savages” reduce them to a state of unwavering inferiority, making the brilliance of the white man even more astounding. He ended the description by alluding to ideals of manifest destiny and American exceptionalism by reiterating that the construction of the railroad allowed passengers to travel safely “from ocean to ocean,” so they could witness the materialization of the idyllic industrial nation.

Crofutt also utilized and perpetuated stereotypes about Chinese culture to continue to paint them as inferior creatures and emphasize their divergence from western ideals. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a fascination with Chinese immigrants’ foreignness that quickly became an insidious device to associate diversity with inferiority. Because Chinese culture was so disparate from what white Americans were accustomed, false and injurious assumptions were generalized and forced upon the Chinese race. One of the most common fallacies was that Chinese immigrants lacked any cleanliness and chose to live in abhorrent living conditions because of their competitively low wage labor. In an aside in the 1874 edition of Crofutt’s guidebook, he clearly explicates how White Americans perceived Chinese immigrants, “Chinese labor—‘Work for nothing and board yourself’—from the inhabitants of your neighbor’s hen roost.”<sup>53</sup> This

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 164.

defamatory statement made it seem as though Chinese immigrants had such low standards of living that one could find them living in a hen roost. Crofutt reduces Chinese laborers to the same state of animality as he did in the previous passage to continue to reinforce their inferiority to his readers.

Chinese immigrants' supposed lack of concern with living conditions caused Americans to also falsely perceive them as dirty and unbothered by filth. When Crofutt was describing the geysers in California to his readers, he used Chinese immigrants to emphasize the severity of the pungent, sulfurous smells travelers would encounter. "The Geysers are 25 miles distant from Calistoga by stage... *they are there* together with all kinds of contending elements, *roaring, thundering, hissing, bubbling, spurting, and steaming*, with a smell that would disgust any Chinese dinner party."<sup>54</sup> To help readers conceptualize the extent of foul smells that permeated the area surrounding the geysers, Crofutt wrote that *even* Chinese people would be disgusted by the smell, as if their threshold for repulsive elements was higher due to their inherent uncleanliness. These stereotypes promoted the conception that Chinese people were inferior to Americans, making it simple to rationalize their exclusion. However, perhaps the most harmful and destructive stereotype contrived for Chinese immigrants was that they were immoral, deceptive, and untrustworthy.

Attacks on Chinese people's character ran rampant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were the most effective and damaging means used to reduce an entire ethnic group to a status of lesser human beings. Crofutt employed this societal trend to effectively communicate with his readers and further perpetuate these misconceptions. When informing his readers of the most important sights to see in San Francisco, he referenced one of the most infamous works of anti-Chinese

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 220.

literature. He wrote that one of the items on travelers' itinerary should include "Chinese Theatres, two in number with all their 'tricks that are vain,' perform nightly, but few can understand; yet they are worth *one* visit."<sup>55</sup> Crofutt was careful to advise his readers that the Chinese theatres deserved only one visit, if any, and referenced "tricks that are vain", from the poem, "The Heathen Chinee", which was one of the most widely published works of anti-Chinese sentiment.

The poem was originally published with the title "Plain Language from Truthful James" in the 1870 issue of the *Overland Monthly* by Bret Harte and was intended to satirize anti-Chinese racism.<sup>56</sup> However to Harte's dismay, the poem was widely interpreted as a sincere endorsement of anti-Chinese prejudice and became one of the most referenced and published poems of all time. The poem penetrated society at an alarmingly fast rate and became a centerpiece for the campaign against Chinese immigration. Mark Twain was a friend and competitor of Harte, and Twain wrote that the poem was, "an explosion of delight whose reverberations reached the last confines of Christendom."<sup>57</sup> Twain's words effectively demonstrate the wide spread influence of Harte's misinterpreted work. The introduction of the poem is overtly racist in an attempt to be satirical and reads:

Which I wish to remark,  
And my language is plain,  
That for ways that are dark  
And for tricks that are vain,  
The heathen Chinee is peculiar,  
Which the same I would rise to explain.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>56</sup> Gary Scharnhorst, "'Ways That Are Dark': Appropriations of Bret Harte's 'Plain Language from Truthful James'," *University of California Press* 51, no. 3 (December 1996): 377.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>58</sup> Bret Harte, "Plain Language from Truthful James," *Overland Monthly*, September 1870.

The poem then goes on to describe a story of a Chinese immigrant named “Ah Sin” who was playing cards with two other white men. One of the white men was cheating and assumed that Ah Sin was childlike and did not understand the game. To everyone’s surprise Ah Sin won the game after cheating himself, which one of the white men discovered after he attacked Ah Sin and found cards up his sleeve.

After the poem was published by Harte, it became appropriated into a variety of forms like songs, pamphlets, books, and magazines.<sup>59</sup> The pirated versions of Harte’s poems contained extremely offensive and racist illustrations to repurpose the satirical poems for anti-Chinese propaganda. One of these horrifying images shows a white man from the poem viciously attacking Ah Sin, who is depicted to embody the derogatory stereotype of Chinese immigrants, with overly pronounced features, a snakelike braid, and robe dress (Figure 4).<sup>60</sup>

Bret Harte was one of the most popular writers of his time and, due to his tremendous national platform, “The Heathen Chinee”, and its misinterpreted themes, seeped into every household in America, influencing people’s perception of the Chinese immigrant. Crofutt utilized his equally prominent public voice to associate the defamatory, racist language and imagery of the poem with Chinese institutions in San Francisco. By invoking four simple words, “tricks that are vain,” Crofutt successfully perpetuated the nefarious stereotype that Chinese immigrants were morally corrupt and encouraged his readers to apply this same bias against Chinese people during their travels. Crofutt’s words and illustrations touched the minds of millions of people and while ideals of racial superiority in a guidebook may seem relatively innocuous, few platforms were as prolific in the nineteenth-century.

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<sup>59</sup> Scharnhorst, “Ways That Are Dark,” 378.

<sup>60</sup> Figure 4 is from one of the appropriations of Harte’s poem, *The Heathen Chinee* (Chicago: Western News Co., 1870). It is one of many from a large collection of racist and defamatory images associated with the poem that became widely circulated and accepted characterizations of Chinese immigrants.



Figure 4. *The Heathen Chinee* (Chicago: Western News Co., 1870).

In the developing industrial nation of the late 1800s, the mediums through which ideology was circulated were limited to newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, books, and travel guides. These forms of publications created a marketplace of discourse and just as competition in an economic marketplace allows the “superior” product to sell better than others, some strains of thought held more weight and influence and effectively silenced the rest. The anti-Chinese sentiment that permeated most forms of publications in this era became the dominant “product” that was sold to and consumed by millions of Americans, detrimentally affecting their



perceptions of Chinese immigrants. The circulation of racist and defamatory work was an incredibly insidious onslaught against the dignity of Chinese people, and as philosopher and professor of law Jeremy Waldron purported, “...reputational attacks amount to assaults upon the dignity of the persons affected—‘dignity,’ in the sense of their basic social standing, the basis of their recognition as social equals and as bearers of human rights and constitutional entitlements.”<sup>61</sup> By diminishing Chinese immigrants to a status of inferiority, these publications provided a rationale for the discrimination and exclusion of Chinese people, and ultimately the seizure of their basic human rights. Crofutt’s guidebooks were an especially powerful form of defamation because of their permanence. Once purchased they joined travelers along their journey, and they were eventually placed on bookshelves in families’ homes, serving as a constant reminder of white American supremacy. The racist and exclusionary ideologies permeating Crofutt’s work drove palpable consequences both in the space of the train in which they were consumed and in the broader American social landscape.

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<sup>61</sup> Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 59.

## Chapter Two

### *The Iron Horse: a Microcosm of Exclusion*

While Crofutt's guidebooks provided a mass medium to distribute ideals of racial superiority and idyllic white citizenship, the space of the transcontinental railroad itself served as a physical manifestation of these oppressive sentiments. To appease their American born customers and uphold notions of exceptionalism, railroad companies devised a systematic strategy to segregate immigrants in spaces of travel based on their ability to assimilate into society without disrupting the archetype of the American citizen.<sup>62</sup> Chinese immigrants were the most stringently discriminated against and segregated immigrant group despite their integral role in the construction of the railroad they traveled upon. Chinese people's removal from the spaces of the train car that were occupied by other European or American travelers was the social consequence of what was promulgated in Crofutt's images and text in his guidebooks. The societal discourse embodied in the guidebooks enumerated that Chinese immigrants were used to demarcate the extent of American citizenship, and while their labor was an important component of the railroad's ascendancy to technological greatness, the entire endeavor would not have been possible without the genius of the "pale-face." The blood, sweat, and perilous labor that Chinese immigrants bestowed to ensure the transcontinental railroad's completion was not enough to earn them a seat at the ever illusive and evolving table of Westernized American citizenship. Instead, they became further mechanized and dehumanized as lesser-than immigrants who occupied the bottom of the social hierarchy, unifying those who could ascend to citizenship against the

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<sup>62</sup> The railroad has a long, blemished history of segregation regardless of citizenship status, most notably for its role in African American segregation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The segregation of African Americans in the space of the train propagated and reinforced the Jim Crow laws and the abhorrent mistreatment of African American citizens, robbing them of basic human rights and their equal protection under the constitution. See for example, Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor, *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

“Heathen Chinees.”

To further perpetuate the racially stratified social order that was emerging against the rapidly evolving technological landscape, the railways used the different spaces of travel—the pier, the track, the car, and the main station—to segregate different groups of immigrants from one another, creating a physical environment that served as a microcosm for society in America.<sup>63</sup> The various stratifications of immigrant segregation and treatment were dependent on each ethnicity’s alignment with western ideals. As Crofutt’s guidebooks demonstrate, there was an insidious scale that immigrants were judged against that determined their degree of foreignness and ability to assimilate; some ethnicities were deemed superior to others. Asian immigrants were beyond consideration on this fabricated scale of citizenship and were seen as beings from another era, whose antiquated culture contaminated the newly emerging western idyllic society. Conversely, certain European immigrants occupied an entirely different status. They had potential for assimilation and were privy to a path towards citizenship through settlement in the West, and consequently they had a different experience than Chinese immigrants on their railway journeys. The segregation of Chinese people from other immigrants on western railroads reflected the sentiment of white American superiority emphasized in Crofutt’s guidebooks and delineated the various classifications of immigrants and their rights to citizenship. Through the layered discrimination of different ethnicities of immigrants on the railroad, this technological marvel not only shaped the physical boundaries of the new West, but also the exclusionary and discriminatory policies that came to define American politics.

Cultural historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch famously purported that the railways provided an annihilation of space and time while introducing unprecedented temporality. The increased

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<sup>63</sup> Catherine Boland Erkkila, “American Railways and the Cultural Landscape of Immigration,” *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 36.

speeds of the railroad provided a new “panoramic vision” of the passing landscape and the railcar created a space “in-between.”<sup>64</sup> This confined space of the train car is where passengers from all over the world encountered one another and societal divisions were confronted.<sup>65</sup> The railroad was an unprecedented technological disruption that incited anxieties among American citizens regarding this revolution in transportation. The passengers on the train were robbed of the intimate relationship with their landscape they once possessed with horse and carriage transportation and now traveled in the same space as hundreds of other immigrants and citizens. The railroad companies that comprised the transcontinental railroad, which were the arbitrators of this emerging anxiety, had the multifarious role of serving both immigrants and American citizens on their train cars while balancing the public’s concerns about traveling with supposedly inferior foreigners. The American public and immigrants were both sources of profit for the railroads—to mediate encounters between the two parties, a system was devised that separated “threatening” immigrants from the rest of the travelers.

Since the railroad’s inception, immigrant trains were used to isolate the potentially dirty, sick, and uncivilized foreigners from natural born citizens. The institutionalized segregation of immigrants was an attempt by railroad companies to pander to white American citizens’ prejudice against far-traveled foreigners.<sup>66</sup> To ensure that the revenue generated from immigrant tickets was not affected, the separation of immigrants was not advertised as blatant segregation, but was done under the guise of a veiled democracy. Unlike European railroads, which had distinct first, second, and third class cars, American railroad companies separated the various

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<sup>64</sup> Schivelbusch, Wolfgang, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1986), 64.

<sup>65</sup> Catherine Boland Erkkila, “Spaces of Immigration: American Railroad Companies, the Built Environment and the Immigrant Experience” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2013), 7.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

passenger cars by ticket price, immigrant cars being the cheapest.<sup>67</sup> An article published in *Harpers Monthly* in 1885 compared British and American railways, “Your palace cars are only another form of first and second class carriages...Why not admit the class distinction as openly as you adopt it?”<sup>68</sup> Instead of dividing travelers based on status as European railways practiced, the American railways separated their customers more surreptitiously by socioeconomic status and race. While most European immigrants were confined to the cheaper and lower quality immigrant cars, the few of higher class and economic ability were able to purchase tickets for the far superior Pullman cars, demonstrating their potential social mobility within American society. However, Chinese immigrants were not able to purchase first-class tickets even if they were financially capable, which reinforced their inability to fully assimilate as equal citizens in the eyes of white Americans.<sup>69</sup> In a first-hand account of his travels across the continent via rail, a British immigrant criticized the hypocritical discrimination of Chinese in the space of the train car:

Awhile ago it was the Irish, now it is the Chinese that must go...it seems, after all, that no country is bound to submit to immigration any more than to invasion: each is war to the knife, and resistance to either but legitimate defense. Yet we may regret the free tradition of the republic, which loved to depict herself with open arms, welcoming unfortunates. And certainly, as a man who believes that he loves freedom, I may be excused some bitterness when I find her sacred name misused in the contention.<sup>70</sup>

This immigrant account emphasizes how the illusion of a country that upheld the highest standards of democracy and freedom was quickly falsified after witnessing the blatant discrimination and segregation of those who were arbitrarily deemed inferior. This account

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>68</sup> “English and American Railways,” *Harper’s Monthly*, 71, no. 423 (August 1885).

<sup>69</sup> Erkkila, “American Railways,” 4.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Across the Plains, With Other Memories and Essays* (New York, NY: C. Scribner's Sons, 1905), 65.

details how there were varying degrees of “whiteness” and entitlement that different nationalities of immigrants possessed. Initially Irish immigrants were seen as the least assimilable and most offensive, however the status of least desirable foreigner became occupied by Chinese immigrants upon their arrival. The United States was an attractive place for immigrants because of its status as a freedom-protecting beacon of democracy, however upon arrival, these foreigners learned that their place in the constantly changing landscape of citizenship was open to interpretation by the prejudiced. The increased influx of immigration resulted in the emergence and intensification of a stringent immigrant hierarchy based on their nationality, class, and race, with Chinese people being the most discriminated and segregated against.

### *The Immigrant Hierarchy on Board the Train*

The regulation of immigrants on the railroad started in the 1840’s, when railroad companies began offering discounted tickets to European immigrants for passage in the unfavorable immigrant car.<sup>71</sup> The lower ticket fares were used to rationalize the placement of immigrants in far inferior passenger cars whose conditions were extremely inadequate for the extensive travel immigrants faced. Most immigrant cars were converted boxcars that had supplementary installations of wooden benches and makeshift windows on car doors. These boxcars did not have the same spring construction as passenger cars since they were not meant for human traffic and consequently produced an extremely uncomfortable, jolting ride. Some railroad lines even used temporarily converted grain cars by installing seats for immigrants when the train traveled west, and then they removed the seats to transport freight heading east.<sup>72</sup> The immigrant passengers occupied the same spaces as shipping cargo, demonstrating their lack of

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<sup>71</sup> Nicole Ingrid Kvale, *Emigrant Trains: Migratory Transportation Networks Through Germany and the United States, 1847-1914* (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2009), 245.

<sup>72</sup> James A. Ward and John H. White, “The American Railroad Passenger Car,” *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (1979): 245.

humanity in the emerging American social landscape; railroad companies equated them with a commodity that needed to be transported from one point to another rather than human beings.

One Norwegian immigrant account of the boxcar detailed the extremely uncomfortable conditions one encountered on the immigrant train:

Travel by rail—on the main immigrant routes, at least—was especially rugged because most newcomers...rode on immigrant cars, which were ordinary springless boxcars...equipped with crude benches for seats and providing neither bunks nor other furnishings, much less personal services.<sup>73</sup>

The people riding in the immigrant car would endure days and even weeks of onerous travel confined to small spaces on top of dozens of other immigrants, with nowhere to sleep or perform basic human activities. Immigrants did not expect luxurious travel conditions as the segregated tickets were the least expensive choice, however many were surprised by the deplorable conditions onboard.<sup>74</sup> Another immigrant account of railroad travel in the far inferior immigrant car prophetically enumerated how the space of the immigrant train was representative of the status foreigners held in society: “Equality though perceived very largely in America, does not extend so low down as to an emigrant.”<sup>75</sup> When compared with the sleek modernized Pullman car that white American citizens and financially able European immigrants rode on, this formulaic inequality became blatantly obvious.

The interior of the immigrant car could not be more antithetical to the sleeper Pullman cars, which had plush cushioned seats, carpeting, mattresses, linens, brass fixtures, and separate cars for seating during the day. The immigrant car, with its sterile oak and cast iron features, was purposefully bare to expedite the cleaning process as immigrants were commonly regarded as

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<sup>73</sup> Norris C. Hagen, *A Life in Garnet* (1941), Manuscript Series, 4/23-4/25, North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies Records, University Archives, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

<sup>74</sup> Catherine Boland Erkkila, “American Railways,” 45.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Amateur Emigrant* (New York: Wentworth Press, 1895), 139.

filthy and unsanitary travelers.<sup>76</sup> Another notable difference between the luxurious Pullman cars and the immigrant cars was the lack of panoramic vision as described by Schivelbusch and Crofutt. Panoramic vision was depicted in many of Crofutt's guidebook images, like in his frontispiece image that showed white Americans gazing out at the sweeping landscape before them, demonstrating their dominance over the natural world. This vision was replicated in the space of the railroad in the Pullman cars with large rectangular windows that allowed travelers to have a similar dominating perspective over their traversed landscape. However because the immigrant cars were converted boxcars, a panoramic vision was not incorporated into their travels. Immigrant William B. Stockton described his 1872 railroad journey to San Francisco and explicitly discussed his lack of panoramic vision; he wrote that the windows of the boxcars were, "small peek-holes high up on the sides where one at a time might stand to see out."<sup>77</sup> Not only did these miniscule slots offer little fresh air for the extremely crowded train cars, they robbed the immigrants of any opportunity for panoramic vision of the passing landscape, demonstrating their inability to dominate the natural world, as that perception was reserved for American citizens. The segregation of European immigrants as non-citizens and their unfavorable conditions were widely documented and photographed by journalists all over the country. An 1887 article noted:

The immigrants are not only huddled like cattle in the uncomfortable and foul smelling cars of this unlawful pool, that run on a freight schedule, taking two days instead of one to reach Chicago, but they are deprived of the right to select by which one even of the pool lines that shall purchase their tickets, and are charged exorbitant rates for baggage.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph Husband, *The Story of the Pullman Car* (1917; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Black Letter Press, 1974), 82.

<sup>77</sup> Kvale, "Emigrant Trains," 248.

<sup>78</sup> "Castle Garden's Monopoly: Cogent Reasons for the Abolition of the Emigration Commission," *The World*, 27 (July 1887): 5.



Not only were the conditions of the immigrant cars far inferior to the Pullman cars, the immigrants themselves were mistreated throughout the entirety of their journeys and were continuously taken advantage of by railroad companies.

While the plight of the European immigrant was widely documented, Chinese people remained largely absent from the accounts of immigrant discrimination in the press. In her dissertation, historian Deirdre Murphy noted that the acknowledgement of a Chinese presence was most useful outside the space of the train and “upon the terrain as a visual symbol of the changing significance of western lands.”<sup>79</sup> Just as Crofutt utilized images of Chinese immigrants in his guidebooks to emphasize their foreignness and the homogeneity of American citizenship, the press discounted Chinese people’s experience on the railroad and instead mechanized them to demarcate the changing American landscape as people traveled further West. Though Chinese immigrants were occasional passengers on the eastern railways, their journeys were usually confined to a west coast route between California, Oregon, and Washington.<sup>80</sup> Because Chinese immigrants were more frequently found on western railroads, their segregation was most strictly enforced by these railways. However, as European immigrants traveled further west, they encountered improved conditions and amenities on the trains, symbolic of their transition to citizenship.

European immigrants were more valuable to western railroads than eastern railroads because they were perceived as potential land buyers.<sup>81</sup> The federal government began granting land to the railroads in the mid nineteenth-century and, consequently, railroad companies became

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<sup>79</sup> Deirdre Murphy, “The Look of a Citizen: Representations of Immigration in the Gilded Age Painting and Popular Press Illustration,” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2006): 110.

<sup>80</sup> Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>81</sup> Erkkila, “American Railways,” 53.

land agents whose target market was immigrants.<sup>82</sup> Those who were traveling west received discounted ticket prices and special incentives such as applying train fare towards land purchases, offering discounts to groups of settlers, or free tickets for families of those who had already purchased land.<sup>83</sup> However, Chinese immigrants were never privy to such discounted rates as they were traveling eastward, antithetical to the westward moving path of industrial progress.<sup>84</sup> To attract immigrants who would settle railroad-owned territory, the conditions of the immigrant car drastically improved on western railroad lines. In 1879, the immigrant sleeper car was introduced which was significantly less luxurious than the Pullman car, but nonetheless allowed for more space and, as the name suggests, sleep for immigrant travelers.<sup>85</sup> An immigrant who transferred from the Union Pacific line to the Central Pacific line noted the welcomed change in train car conditions; “the cars on the Central Pacific were nearly twice as high, and so proportionately airier and freshly varnished, which gave us all a sense of cleanliness as though we had bathed.”<sup>86</sup> In addition to the improved train car conditions, European immigrants also experienced less segregation as they embarked on western railroad lines because many travelers and immigrants had completed their journeys and reached their final destinations. The decrease in the number of travelers reduced the need for entirely separate immigrant cars, if there were only twenty-five immigrants traveling farther west than Chicago, railway agents would direct these passengers to the smoking car where they were kept to one end, “without inconvenience to the other passengers.”<sup>87</sup> The lesser degree of segregation that European immigrants experienced

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<sup>82</sup> David Howard Bain, *Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* (New York: Viking, 1999), 200.

<sup>83</sup> Erkkila, “American Railways,” 53.

<sup>84</sup> Murphy, “The Look of a Citizen,” 109.

<sup>85</sup> James A. Ward and John H. White, “The American Railroad Passenger Car,” *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 1 (1979): 250.

<sup>86</sup> Stevenson, *Amateur Emigrant*, 155-156.

<sup>87</sup> J. R. Sandy, “Emigrants at Wells St. Station, Chicago,” *The North-Western Bulletin* (Chicago: Chicago & Northwestern Railway, 1909): 16.

as they traveled farther west on the train was representative of their assimilation into society as American citizens. Proximity to their final destinations on the new frontier resulted in palpable implications of citizenship on the train. These European immigrants were relegated to a higher class by the railroad companies than the foreigners who could never partake in this assimilatory path.

As transitioning citizens, European immigrants reciprocated racial prejudices imposed on them by Americans. There was a distinct hierarchy among the immigrants themselves that was reinforced and aggravated by the structure of the train car. Nordic European immigrants were deemed superior, Irish immigrants were labeled the most problematic, and Jewish Europeans occupied a status in between.<sup>88</sup> However as these immigrants migrated west across the industrial landscape, they were often unified as “European.” From the American perspective, European immigrants had left the “Old World” to begin their transitory journey towards citizenship in the new West and thus occupied the same societal status. These immigrants’ travels across the continental United States “maintained an evolving, though lagging, continuity with the pace and direction of natural progress.”<sup>89</sup> To ensure that these transitioning citizens were satisfied, the organization of western train cars was methodically designed to minimize contact with undesirables and was split into three separate compartments. The train furthest away from the engine was reserved for families and children, the center car for bachelors, and the most dangerous train, closest to the engine, was for Chinese people.<sup>90</sup> In the event of overcrowding, single white men would occupy both the family car as well as the “Chinaman” car, however the bachelor car remained homogenous and uncontaminated with Chinese people.<sup>91</sup> To appease their

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<sup>88</sup> Murphy, “The Look of a Citizen,” 108.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>90</sup> Stevenson, *Across the Plains*, 28.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 32.

desirable, pseudo Caucasian immigrants, Western railroad companies even advertised that European immigrants would be placed in cars with people of similar descent. The Santa Fe Railroad company promised to take “special pains to locate passengers of the same nationality, and whose manners indicate they would prove congenial, in the same car, so that all may be associated with agreeable traveling companions.”<sup>92</sup> This was a circumventive way of assuring Nordic and Anglo-Saxon Europeans that they would be grouped with one another, avoiding unwanted contact with inferior Chinese immigrants. Ethnocentric grouping was not always guaranteed as exhibited by a Dutch immigrant’s dismay after being placed in the same train car as an Irish family: “We were much annoyed during the night by strange Irish people, a low class who had attained only a slight degree of civilization.”<sup>93</sup> However, such encounters with Chinese immigrants were a rarity.

One of the few first-hand accounts of Chinese immigrants on the train was written by famed author and British immigrant Robert Louis Stevenson in his work *Across the Plains*. In a chapter entitled “Despised Races,” Stevenson details his encounters with the Chinese car and fervently criticizes their mistreatment as unassimilable aliens. “Of all ill-stupid feelings, the sentiment of my fellow-Caucasians towards our Chinese companions was the most stupid and the worst.”<sup>94</sup> Stevenson unpacks the racial prejudice against Chinese immigrants and asserts that their status as dirty, “hideous vermin” was merely a constructed justification for their discrimination. Stevenson claimed that in the brief encounters he had with Chinese people, he was always surprised by how different they were from the stereotypes he had learned throughout his travels. Stevenson wrote that the Chinese passengers’ “efforts after cleanliness put the rest of

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<sup>92</sup> Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe pamphlet, “Fast Time. Free Sleeping Car for Emigrants,” April 15, 1884.

<sup>93</sup> John Reemus, *The Journey of an Immigrant Family from the Netherlands to Milwaukee, 1854*, ed. Henry S. Lucas (*Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 1945), 215.

<sup>94</sup> Stevenson, *Across the Plains*, 63.

us to shame...these very foul and malodorous Caucasians entertained the surprising illusion that it was the Chinese wagon, and that alone, which stank. I have said already that it was the exception and notably the freshest of the three.”<sup>95</sup>

The American descriptions of Chinese immigrants were not only erroneous, but they also couldn't have been further from the truth. As demonstrated in Crofutt's guidebooks, the fictitious stereotypes thrust upon Chinese immigrants were utilized to diminish their standing in society and rationalize their discrimination. Stevenson comments on this extremely obvious discrepancy and fabricated characterization of Chinese people. He states:

These judgements are typical of the feeling in all Western America. The Chinese are considered stupid, because they are imperfectly acquainted with English. They are held to be base, because their dexterity and frugality enable them to underbid the lazy, luxurious Caucasian...They are called cruel; the Anglo-Saxon and the cheerful Irishman may each reflect before he bears that accusation. I am told, again, that they are of the race of river pirates, and belong to the most despised and dangerous class in the Celestial Empire. But if this be so, what remarkable pirates we have here! and what must be the virtues, the industry, the education, and the intelligence of their superiors at home!<sup>96</sup>

Stevenson's words demonstrate the powerful role falsified stereotypes played in the treatment of Chinese immigrants and the extent to which they permeated “all Western America.” Had he not encountered Chinese people first-hand, Stevenson would have continued to believe falsified information he had been told about an entire race of people. In this quote, Stevenson directly confronts the poignant inaccuracy regarding Chinese immigrants' characterization in society that arose from disdain regarding their esoterism in the American landscape.

Rather than celebrate their foreign culture, Chinese immigrants were shunned for their differentness, and attacked by society as lesser human beings with inferior intelligence and morality. This rhetorical arson propagated by the Sinophobic movement justified the

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 65.

extraordinarily inhumane discrimination of Chinese people and their exclusion from citizenship. The stereotypes that permeated Crofutt's guidebooks and the press were created to paint Chinese immigrants as filthy creatures with no morality, and as demonstrated by Stevenson's account, they had a significant effect on the societal perception of Chinese people and their culture. Even though Robert Louis Stevenson offered some contradictory evidence to the overwhelmingly discriminatory discourse surrounding Chinese immigrants, he failed to see them in an entirely unbiased light. Stevenson disputes the categorization of Chinese people as dangerous, unintelligent "Celestials," however he also struggles to place them in the industrial landscape of the railroad, affirming the misconception that Chinese people were an unassimilable race.

In the same chapter of his memoir, Stevenson describes his brief, strange encounter with the Chinese passengers as nothing short of miraculous, demonstrating his own prejudices regarding their ability to participate in American progress. Despite realizing the fallacy in how Chinese immigrants were perceived in American society, Stevenson refused to acknowledge Chinese people as adaptable human beings, and instead determined that their foreign culture inhibited their ability to evolve with an industrializing world:

For my own part I could not look but with wonder and respect on the Chinese...Gunpowder and printing, which the other day we imitated, and a school of manners which we never had the delicacy so much as to desire to imitate, were theirs in a long-past antiquity. They walk the earth with us, but it seems they must be of different clay. They hear the clock strike at the same hour, yet surely of a different epoch. They travel by steam conveyance, yet with such a baggage of old Asiatic thoughts and superstitions as might check the locomotive in its course...Heaven knows if we had one common thought or fancy all that way, or whether our eyes, which yet were formed upon the same design, beheld the same world out of the railway windows.<sup>97</sup>

Stevenson had difficulty even fathoming that Chinese immigrants might share a similar experience to his, and he imagines that Chinese people are so loaded down with antiquity and

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 67.

superstition that they might affect the momentum of the train. He claims that the utter lack of similarity between himself and Chinese people must mean that they are “of different clay” and, therefore, unable to share a common thought or interpret their environment in a similar way. The rhetoric he uses to describe Chinese immigrants makes them seem like alien creatures that “walk the earth with us,” but are incapable of any inkling of assimilation or comradery in experience. Stevenson doubted that Chinese people, whose eyes were of the “same design,” witnessed and interpreted the world beyond the railroad windows in the same capacity, questioning their ability to understand the panoramic vision that was inherent to American citizenship. The possession of a dominant panoramic vision over one’s landscape was an ideological message that permeated Crofutt’s guidebooks, however it had tangible, physical implications in the space of the railroad. A panoramic vision was equated with superiority and citizenship, those who could not wield that perspective could not participate or be accepted in the American polis. Stevenson’s account supports the largely accepted postulation that Chinese people could not participate in the industrial mission of progress because their culture was too aberrant and divergent from westernized ideals. Despite his self-righteous criticism of the American perception of Chinese immigrants, Stevenson participated in the anti-Chinese rhetoric and movement through his inability to see them as a modern people capable of achieving American citizenship.

The journey of Chinese immigrants on the railroad became a palpable extension of anti-Chinese sentiment promoted in Crofutt’s guidebooks; their placement at the bottom of the immigrant hierarchy in the space of the train replicated the emerging exclusionary society that defined American exceptionalism. The discrimination of Chinese immigrants was a symptom of the extreme rhetoric that was circulated in societal discourse to rationalize Chinese people’s inability to conform to the concept of American citizenship. The manner in which all immigrants

were segregated in spaces of travel was emblematic of racist notions of each ethnicity's potential or lack thereof to achieve American citizenship. Chinese immigrants experienced the most isolation and abuse as the least desirable and malleable foreigners, demonstrating the physical consequences and manifestations of discriminatory ideology. They faced prejudice from both American citizens and their immigrant peers who were granted permission to achieve citizenship, and they encountered discrimination in every facet of this dogmatic society. The marketplace of ideas that became overwhelmed by discriminatory discourse allowed for the abhorrent exclusion and segregation of an entire race of human beings. The consequences that arose from pervasive circulation of discriminatory and hateful ideology extended well beyond the space of the train and domestic society. The anti-Chinese sentiment that imbued American culture permanently shaped the previously open United States immigration policy to one of unprecedented, insidious exclusion.



## Chapter Three

### *Closing America's Gates*

The consequence of xenophobia directed at Chinese immigrants was vast, grave, and had a profound influence on shaping the nascent American immigration policy to be selectively exclusionary. The discrimination and abuse Chinese immigrants experienced on American soil proliferated and mutated into palpable institutionalized regulations to ensure that Chinese people were not only segregated from supposedly less offensive nationalities in society, but also that their entry into the country be combated and prevented. Ideological dissemination in overtly legible mediums like Crofutt's guidebooks played a crucial role in normalizing defamatory and racist characterizations of Chinese immigrants that made their discrimination and maltreatment a unified societal endeavor. A society unified against one ethnicity of human beings is an extraordinarily powerful force that can garner legitimate institutional and political support, as demonstrated by the segregation of Chinese people at the hands of privatized railroad companies. However, as the emerging American identity in the industrialized nation became increasingly defined by homogeneity and alignment with western ideals, segregation and discrimination were not effective enough to ameliorate the epidemic of the "coolie." A more aggressive strategy that took the form of stringent, inhumane regulation with prison-like immigration stations was adopted to ensure that the new West would be filled with the most desirable immigrants and settlers. Thousands of Chinese immigrants were imprisoned, abused, and deprived of basic human rights at the Angel Island immigration station and its predecessor, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company detention shed. These nefarious immigration stations were the architectural manifestations of the rapidly intensifying American ethnocentrism that became integrated into the legislative process, forever changing the United States' immigration policy.

### *Early Chinese Immigrant Exclusion*

Racist nationalism in American society infected political discourse like a plague; it spread rapidly and its consequences were profound. In the years before the reprehensible passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, a series of less restrictive, albeit still abhorrently racist, legislation was approved in Congress, marking the end of America's open borders. The first restrictive federal immigration law to blemish the United States' foreign policy was the Page Act of 1875 that banned the importation of Chinese women for the purpose of prostitution.<sup>98</sup> California legislators who harbored prejudice against Chinese immigrants tested the political waters with the Page Act by restricting a group of immigrants who possessed a stigmatized occupation that was perceived to subvert the domestic ideal of the new West. Depicting Chinese women as potential societal pollutants who could spread more virulent strains of venereal disease than white prostitutes, allowed anti-Chinese activists in Congress to garner legitimate support for the law.<sup>99</sup> President Grant was convinced of the necessity for the Page Act due to the belief that most Chinese women were brought to the United States against their will for prostitution rings. Grant was not an advocate for Chinese exclusion, however he signed the Page Act into law on March 3, 1875, forever changing the immigration policy of the United States under the false pretense that he was offering protection to Chinese immigrant women.<sup>100</sup>

To the despair of anti-Chinese advocates, the victory of the Page Act did not pave the way for other forms of immigrant restriction in the subsequent years because of the Burlingame-Seward Treaty with China. The accord was an attempt to facilitate commerce between the two countries and relegated China to full diplomatic status. The treaty had one crucial clause that

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<sup>98</sup> Gyrol, *Closing the Gate*, 71.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

granted Chinese individuals the same right of people from other nations to emigrate freely to the United States.<sup>101</sup> This clause allowed the federal government to negate legislation that violated the treaty and uphold Chinese immigrants' status as protected entrants. While this extended Chinese immigration protection for a short period, the passage of the Fifteen Passenger Bill in Congress in 1879 greatly diminished the treaty's relevance.<sup>102</sup> The bill proposed limiting the number of Chinese passengers on any ship entering the United States to fifteen, an absurd decrease that would effectively halt the influx of Chinese immigrants.<sup>103</sup> The bill passed in Congress with broad bipartisan support; however, President Hayes vetoed the legislation because it violated the terms of the treaty with China.<sup>104</sup> Despite the executive branch's refusal to approve the Fifteen Passenger Bill's legitimacy, it was still an important victory for exclusion advocates and created a political environment conducive for the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act three years later.

In 1880 the Hayes administration appointed James B. Angell to negotiate a new treaty with China that appealed to the growing exclusionary sentiment in Congress but still preserved diplomatic and commercial relations with Asia.<sup>105</sup> The resulting compromise took form in the Angell Treaty which allowed the United States to regulate, limit, or suspend Chinese immigration and residence, but not absolutely prohibit it.<sup>106</sup> This loosely defined rhetoric allowed Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which remained true to the guidelines of the Angell Treaty by suspending the immigration of Chinese laborers specifically for a period of ten years. The passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act circumvented the contrived good will

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 215.

promised by the United States in the Angell Treaty and gave the governmental greenlight to combat Chinese immigration with reprehensibly inhumane tactics for the next few decades. After the ten year expiration date, the Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed two more times and was finally reenacted indefinitely in 1904 without limitations, conditions, or modifications.<sup>107</sup> The racist American exceptionalism narrative that had seeped into every facet of society culminated in palpable legislation against one race of individuals with the Chinese Exclusion Act, giving legal legitimacy to the desire for a white, homogenous America.

While all immigrants experienced regulation upon arrival to the United States, Chinese immigrants experienced the most restrictive and abusive regulation following the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Much like in the space of the railroad, European immigrants were seen by policy makers as more malleable foreigners who had the potential to conform and achieve citizenship. Federally mandated immigrant regulation had not been extended to the more desirable European immigrants; as a result they experienced an entirely different entry to America than their Chinese immigrant counterparts. These “welcomed” immigrants would begin their journey at Ellis Island where they were documented and connected to the different veins of railroad lines that continued to play a crucial role in their assimilatory transition.

Ellis Island was a massive structure with its own transportation network, hospital, lodging, sanitation department, and power plant; however, it was a constituent of a much larger network that funneled immigrants not only through the space of their buildings, but also throughout the country.<sup>108</sup> Due to the sheer volume of immigrants who would pass through Ellis Island each day, the government and railroad companies developed a symbiotic relationship to maximize the efficiency of immigrant travel. Government officials processed and directed the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 414.

<sup>108</sup> Erkkila, “Spaces of Immigration,” 104.

flow of people moving through the carefully designed space with a calculated speed that resulted in the majority of immigrants being cleared for entry into the United States in a matter of hours.<sup>109</sup> The presence of the railroad network at Ellis Island facilitated seamless transportation that protected immigrants from swindlers and provided assurance to the government that the immigrants were on their way to a specific destination with money in hand and would not become public charges.<sup>110</sup> Boarding the waiting trains at the railroad stations connected to Ellis Island was a generally guaranteed right for European immigrants entering the United States; however, this was not a luxury that Chinese immigrants shared. The mere architecture of Ellis Island, with its grand arches and open spaces, was symbolic of the journey that the more desirable immigrants would embark on; it was largely uninhibited. Although immigrants of European descent were interrogated and examined for medical defects at Ellis Island, their journey was facilitated by the railways and the government. The “Ellis Island of the West,”<sup>111</sup> however, served an entirely different purpose; its design was to prevent entry of Chinese immigrants, the only entirely unassimilable and alien immigrant race.

Angel Island was erected in 1910 to enforce the legally mandated exclusion of Chinese immigrants with a calculated militancy; as historian Robert Eric Barde posited, “while Ellis Island was built to let Europeans in, Angel Island was built to keep Asians out.”<sup>112</sup> Angel Island was located on an island in the middle of the San Francisco Bay near Alcatraz Island, making it extremely inaccessible to the general American public.<sup>113</sup> The isolated location and architectural design of Angel Island facilitated the interrogation, discrimination, and imprisonment of Chinese

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>112</sup> Robert Eric Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate: Passenger Ships, Exclusion, and Angel Island* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008) 13.

<sup>113</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates*, 20.

immigrants.<sup>114</sup> This massive immigration station was a prison-like structure that was designed to separate immigrant families from one another in individual cells for abusive interrogation and detainment. Scholarship surrounding the exclusion of Chinese immigrants focuses on Angel Island as the pinnacle of exclusionary attempts; however, the predecessor to this prison facility that was used in response to the growing societal anti-Chinese sentiment is underrepresented in the vast constellation of Chinese discrimination. Before Angel Island was constructed off the coast of San Francisco, Chinese immigrants would begin their long, arduous settlement in the United States at the docks of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company.

### *Wooden Barracks*

The Pacific Mail Steamship Company (hereafter the PMSS)<sup>115</sup> was founded in 1848 and began transporting immigrants across the Pacific Ocean in 1867. A mail contract with the federal government provided a virtual monopoly over revenue for service between San Francisco and China; no shipping line brought more Asians to the United States.<sup>116</sup> As the prime beneficiary and mover of Asian migrants across the Pacific, the PMSS was one the biggest recipients of anti-Chinese criticism. The *San Francisco Call* newspaper often printed articles that vilified the PMSS for their role in facilitating Chinese immigration. A headline from 1899 read, “The Dishonest Chinese Passenger Traffic of the Pacific Mail...a Gigantic Plot of the Steamship Company to flood the Country with Coolies.”<sup>117</sup> Although the PMSS profited from transporting

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<sup>114</sup> Erkkila, “Spaces of Immigration,” 118.

<sup>115</sup> The acronym that was used to identify the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was PMSS, to stand for the Pacific Mail Steam Ship.

<sup>116</sup> Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate*, 54.

<sup>117</sup> “Huntington and Schwerin Employ Washington Lobbyists to Protect the Dishonest Chinese Passenger Traffic of the Pacific Mail: The Dismissal of the Chief of the Chinese Bureau of this City Reveals a Gigantic Plot of the Steamship Company to Flood the Country With Coolies.” *San Francisco Call*, April 29, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

Asian immigrants and laborers to and from the United States, the shipping company significantly contributed to the institutionalized discrimination against Chinese travelers.

Much like within the space of the railroad, Chinese immigrants were segregated and confined to the cheapest and most abhorrent cabin spaces for the duration of their travel on the steamships. Their treatment onboard the ships was not dissimilar in some ways to what African Americans faced on the Middle Passage of the trans-Atlantic slave trade—Chinese immigrants were also deemed human cargo that experienced wretched conditions:

Accommodations on these sailing ships were little different from those on African slavers. Down the whole length of both lower decks were tier on tier of berths, or rather shelves and the space allotted each man and boy was something less than two feet in width and five feet in length. The decks and hatchway openings of most “coolie” vessels were “barred and barricaded like the old convict ships. An iron grating was bolted to the hatchway entrance, leaving an opening for those below of no more than nine inches in diameter.<sup>118</sup>

Chinese people were relegated to a status of animality and suffered prison-like conditions on the PMSS ships. There was a high mortality rate from sheer brutality, disease, or suicide because Chinese immigrants were subjected to such a tortuous environment for long periods of time. In the 1850s the voyages had mortality rates of around 30 percent.<sup>119</sup> This avid, inhumane mistreatment and discrimination of Chinese immigrants was perpetuated by the railroad for the entire duration of their travel as the Southern Pacific Railroad Company acquired the PMSS in 1893. The acquisition of the PMSS developed a freight and passenger service from Asia to San Francisco and on to New York or other states on the West Coast via rail.<sup>120</sup> This merger was instrumental in opening up the United States for Chinese immigrant passenger travel. However, unlike European immigrants who were able to board waiting immigrant trains and enter the city

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<sup>118</sup> Basil Lubbock, *The Coolie Ships and Oil Sealers* (Glasgow: Brown, Son, and Ferguson, 1981), 33.

<sup>119</sup> Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate*, 88.

<sup>120</sup> Erkkila, “Spaces of Immigration,” 123.

at Ellis Island, Chinese immigrants were detained for days or weeks in the railroad owned detention shed where they were brutally interrogated by immigration officials.

From the moment Chinese immigrants set foot on American soil they were abhorrently discriminated against and treated as criminals. After completing their grueling journey on the steamship and before embarking on western railroad lines, Chinese people were detained in a shed maintained by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company for months at a time.<sup>121</sup> The PMSS shed was located at San Francisco's Pier 40, which was the largest structure on the waterfront; however, Chinese immigrants were not initially sent to the shed for detainment.<sup>122</sup> The predecessor of the detention shed was the space of the PMSS ships themselves; an 1883 federally ordered mandate by U.S. District Court Judge Hoffman ordered the PMSS to retain the Chinese immigrants petitioning for entry into San Francisco on board the steamer until their cases were decided.<sup>123</sup> However, this was not favorable for the PMSS as these floating detention facilities were maintained at the company's expense. To ameliorate the hemorrhaging of money, the PMSS endeavored to convert the second story of their general offices into "Chinese Lodgings" in 1896. The PMSS detention shed was antithetical to most immigration stations in that its purpose was to prevent immigrants from entering the country in an extraordinarily inhumane manner. The architecture of the deplorable detention structure communicated its purpose for ardent discrimination and mistreatment of Chinese immigrants. Chinese people were confined to the second story of the rickety wooden shed to isolate them and limit contact with the greater population to lower the chances of subterfuge.<sup>124</sup> The space was one room that was 100 ft. by 50

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<sup>121</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era*, 217.

<sup>122</sup> Barde, *Immigration at the Golden Gate*, 61.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>124</sup> Estelle T. Lau, *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 110.



ft. with only one exit. It was built to hold a maximum of two hundred people; however, often times it would be filled with over five hundred immigrants.<sup>125</sup>

On November 6, 1898, The *San Francisco Call* published one of the early first hand descriptions of the detention shed and the conditions Chinese immigrants faced:

...we were free to walk through this human warren, threading our way, as best we could, amid confused throngs of Chinamen...on the day of my visit, no less than 357 Chinamen, including two women, were confined in this narrow compass. There they were squatting on the floor around boxes and bundles of all kinds, each one shoveling in rice with a pair of chopsticks...the mat covered bunk beds rise in tiers five or six high...right up on top, close to the ceiling, Chinamen in every stage of dishabille were perched; everywhere there was a surfeit of humanity.<sup>126</sup>

Chinese immigrants were forcefully contained in an inhumanely small space, with no room to live out their undetermined sentences in a humane manner. Hundreds of Chinese immigrants were contained in a single room where they slept, ate, and lived out their detainment, reducing them to a state equated with animals as they “perched” in whatever space was available to occupy. Soley’s description of the detention shed illustrates the extremely crowded conditions of the second story room; however, it fails to fully unveil the atrocious living conditions that immigrants endured for months at a time. As discussed in Soley’s publication, the detention shed officials exacerbated the excessive crowding by adding additional bunk beds; however, besides an uncomfortable lack of space, these excessive bunk beds severely inhibited proper ventilation causing immigrants to often become sick or even die.<sup>127</sup>

Another *San Francisco Call* article published in 1900 further describes the abhorrent conditions immigrants faced in the detention shed; however, the blatantly racist reportorial style

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<sup>125</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates*, 217.

<sup>126</sup> J.F. Rose-Soley, “Chinese in Bond on the Mail Dock,” *San Francisco Call*, November 6, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>127</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates*, 217.

prevents an accurate analysis of who was victimized by the cruel living conditions. The article noted:

[T]he detention shed and boarding house row now holds more than 370 Chinese who have absolutely no right to step foot on American soil...the detention shed and its coolie inmates are maintained as a menace to the people of the city. Health regulations are violated openly and impudently. The Chinese are crowded into a pen like cattle and the odor that comes from their den is sickening. The Pacific Mail dock is perhaps the most important dock on the Pacific Coast...above the heads of passengers are these ill smelling coolies.<sup>128</sup>

The way Chinese people were characterized in this descriptive article was extremely dehumanizing and reduced the immigrants to a status of animality by likening them to cattle herded in a pen. The rhetoric wielded to describe the conditions Chinese immigrants experienced was extremely dogmatic and minimized their suffering to an issue of public sanitation. The author of the article purported that the Chinese people who were imprisoned in the shed had “absolutely no right to step foot on American soil” and were “a menace to the people of the city.” This insidious lack of empathy demonstrated the devastating effect of racist ideology and rhetoric—human suffering was diminished to insignificance. Reform and improvement to the shed were deemed necessary only to protect the prestige of the Pacific Mail port and the city. The rampant health violations in the shed were concerning because an epidemic had the potential to infect white American citizens in the city; the safety and well-being of the immigrants themselves were irrelevant. Much like Crofutt’s guidebooks, all of the reportorial descriptions of the shed by San Francisco periodicals were woven with implicit biases against Chinese immigrants to appeal to the dominating ethnocentric culture that had become the societal rationale for discrimination.

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<sup>128</sup> “Detention Sheds of the Pacific Mail Dock Swarm with Chinese from the Steamer Coptic,” *San Francisco Call*, May 12, 1900, 87th ed., sec. 173.

The few impartial accounts of the detention shed were made by the immigrants themselves, which appropriately relayed the severity of discrimination they faced as an unassimilable race. Chinese immigrants referred to the PMSS detention shed as the *muk uk* or “wooden barracks,” but more commonly described the shed as the “iron cage” and “Chinese jail.”<sup>129</sup> The accounts of the shed from the perspective of Chinese immigrants clearly exhibit how the racially charged ideals of American exceptionalism became increasingly insidious and manifested into palpable, institutionalized injustice. A description of the shed by immigrant Wong Hock Won in 1906 detailed his time in the shed and the fervent mistreatment at the hands of the immigration officials.

Entering the detention shed one may look to the right and to the left and see only bunks and a few benches. ‘You stay here, you stay here’ is all they say. Here you are cramped and doomed never to stretch. You complain that the shed leaks and they say, ‘Why do you care? You will be here but a day.’ No words can express such misery.<sup>130</sup>

The immigration officials treated the immigrants with a severe degree of cruelty and labeled them prisoners rather than human beings attempting to peacefully enter the United States. Won’s account of his interaction with the officers illuminates their extreme lack of concern for the treacherous conditions the immigrants faced. American superiority was no longer a principle that characterized citizenship, it was a weapon yielded against those who involuntarily violated western ideals. The transference of American exceptionalism to authoritarian abuse by immigration officials ushered in an era that drastically departed from the historically open immigration policy of the United States. What was once used to garner a sense of nationhood was now implicitly used as rationalization for the abuse and discrimination of a specific ethnicity

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<sup>129</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates*, 217.

<sup>130</sup> Wong Hock Won, “Composition on the Advantages and Disadvantages of America, from a Chinese Standpoint.” Translated at Portland Immigration Station, October 30, 1906, File 13928, Records of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Record Group 85, National Archives, Washington D.C.

of immigrants. The emerging discriminatory immigration regulation was not only influenced by racialized notions of Chinese immigrant inferiority, but also a blatant gendered component.

Unmarried Chinese women who were sent to the detention shed were particularly at risk for reprehensible treatment by the immigration officers who took advantage of the institutionalized discrepancy in power between white American men and Chinese immigrant women.

Now in the case of Chinese ladies for any reason refused admission and sent to the Detention Shed, the imagination does not work hard to picture the vile abuse of power that is bound to follow when we place any human being beyond the protection of common law...When an Administrative officer has a comely Chinese woman under his absolute and irresponsible control, without access to her friends, and he knows that the law puts her on the level with the prostitute, what conduct can we expect from him, especially if he is a low grade conscienceless politician, with none to call him to account?<sup>131</sup>

Chinese women who were detained in the shed experienced especially traumatizing conditions including psychological and sexual abuse. Their isolation from their friends and any means of salvage was rationalized by their societal characterization as sexually immoral. Gender stereotypes played an equally pivotal role in immigration control as racist ideologies. Political and intellectual leaders regulated the proliferation of the Chinese immigrant population in the United States through the restriction of women's immigration and reproduction.<sup>132</sup> These exclusionary pioneers rationalized the regulation of immigrant families by questioning the morality of Chinese women and labeling them as sexual deviants who threatened the settlement of desired European and American settlers. Politicians rationalized that by severely limiting the number of single Chinese women who were able to immigrate into the United States, they would be able to curb the proliferation of Chinese families and reduce the Chinese immigrant

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<sup>131</sup> Patrick Joseph Healy and Ng Poon Chew, *A Statement for Non-Exclusion* (San Francisco: [s.n.], 1905), 197.

<sup>132</sup> Lee, *At America's Gates*, 252.

population. The insidious stereotype that was constructed by Sinophobic Americans regarding single Chinese women facilitated the unchecked sexual abuse by immigration officials—as “prostitutes,” Chinese women did not deserve protection under the law. The focus on gender and sexualization in the United States immigration policy helped diminish Chinese immigrants to an inferior status, and this ideology became a central component of the discriminatory framework that fueled blatant violations of human rights.

The rampant physical, psychological, and sexual abuse of Chinese immigrants at the hands of immigration officials was exacerbated by the unsanitary and barbaric conditions of the shed. The immigrants who made their way across the Pacific to escape economic strife in China were confronted with an environment overwhelmed with misery. In the hopes of making a better life for themselves, Chinese immigrants instead encountered a society plagued with prejudice and racism that sought to imprison and abuse them as an unassimilable race. A Chinese immigrant named Fu Chi Hao published his experience in *The Outlook* newspaper to publicize what entry into a discriminatory nation actually entailed:

The detention shed is another name for ‘Chinese Jail’. I have visited quite a few jails and state prisons in this country, but have never seen any place half so bad. It is situated at one end of the warf, reached by a long, narrow stairway. The whitewashed windows and the wire netting attached to them added to the misery. The air is impure, the place is crowded. No friends are allowed to come in and see the unfortunate suffering without special permission from the American authority. No letters are allowed either to be sent out or to come in. There are no tables, no chairs. We were treated like a group of animals, and we were fed on the floor. Kicking and swearing by the white man in charge was not a rare thing. I was not surprised when, one morning, a friend pointed out to me the place where a heartbroken Chinaman had hanged himself after fourth months’ imprisonment in this dreadful dungeon, thus to end his agony and the shameful outrage.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Fu Chi Hao, “My Reception in America,” *The Outlook* (10 Aug. 1907), 770-73.

The rationalized maltreatment of Chinese immigrants in the detention shed owned by the Southern Pacific Railroad Company was sickening and Hao's powerful writing effectively communicates the horrific conditions Chinese immigrants encountered upon arrival to the United States. The manner in which Chinese people were isolated from all means of communication with anyone outside the confines of the shed was a flagrant abuse that significantly contributed to the despair and hopelessness their condition as imprisoned immigrants invoked. The debasement of Chinese immigrants to a status of animality by feeding them on the floor and kicking them was another especially insidious form of psychological abuse. The published anti-Chinese and discriminatory rhetoric dehumanized Chinese people to an inferior status in American society; however, these directed attacks at the hands of immigration officials directly communicated to the Chinese immigrants that they were lesser human beings, undeserving of merciful treatment. The imprisonment and abuse of innocent immigrants were so contemptible that it was not uncommon for some to take their own lives as a means to escape these tortuous conditions. With no guarantee that they would leave the space of the detention shed, no ability to communicate with friends or advocates, and horrifying living conditions, Chinese immigrants received treatment far worse than the average criminal in the United States, simply for possessing a culture that diverged from western ideals. The intricate rationalization for inflicting this contemptible abuse stemmed from American exceptionalism and racist notions of a utopic, homogenous West. This ideology provided the discriminatory scheme for diminishing and violating Chinese people's basic human rights, making their institutional abuse and exclusion a justified endeavor. The circulation and acceptance of racist, defamatory propaganda and characterizations of Chinese immigrants manifested in Chinese people's institutionalized exclusion from American society and ultimately its borders.

By labeling Chinese immigrants as foreign beings who could never assimilate into society, they became lesser creatures whose mere presence on American soil was a threat to the cultural and social unification of the West Coast under a white national identity. At each point of their travel, Chinese immigrants' assimilation and settlement into American society was combated and prevented utilizing defamation, psychological abuse, and brute force. From the interrogation in the Pacific Railroad owned detention shed to the segregation in the space of the train car, Chinese people were trapped in a condition of permanent incongruence, unable to ever truly belong. This experience of exclusion was largely facilitated by the railroad which not only endorsed a medium to propagate anti-Chinese sentiment on a continental scale, it also reinforced Chinese people's inferiority by segregating them on their railways and overseeing Chinese immigrant detainment on San Francisco's Pier 40. The consequences of a nationhood defined by racial and cultural homogeneity had lasting legislative implications that permanently blemished the United States' reputation as an inclusive beacon of democracy where all were welcomed. The legislation passed against Chinese immigration permanently changed the immigration policy of the United States and inaugurated an age of ardent gatekeeping, not dissimilar to the immigration strategy in place today. The appalling mistreatment of Chinese immigrants was the first time in American history that a specific ethnicity of foreigners was actively prohibited from entering the United States; however, it would not be the last.

## Conclusion

### *Legacy of Immigrant Exclusion*

The legacy of nineteenth-century anti-Chinese immigration policies still haunts the American public policy debate on contemporary immigration reform. The Chinese Exclusion Act was not a regulatory blip that occurred under a unique set of contingencies; it was the beginning of the United States' foreign policy practice of selective permeability against certain "threatening" immigrant groups. The horrible imprisonment and mistreatment that Chinese individuals suffered was soon experienced by a plethora of other immigrant groups as virtually anyone outside the American polis could be perceived as a danger to society, the economy, or national security in some capacity. Establishing a racist consensus against one ethnicity of immigrants allowed human beings' mistreatment and exclusion to be rationalized by society and the government with frightening ease. This malignant trend led to the expansion of the United States' enforcement of anti-immigration policies and further criminalized the attempted immigration of undesirable ethnic groups. To combat the ever-present threat of those defined as "illegal aliens," U.S. border enforcement was extended beyond the West Coast to the rest of the country, creating an exclusionary shield that still encompasses America from "sea to shining sea."

In the decades following the passage of anti-Chinese legislation, the scope of immigrant exclusion grew rapidly and aggressively. The Chinese Exclusion Act provided a robust framework to racialize other undesirable immigrant groups, allowing later legislative campaigns to utilize strategies from the anti-Chinese movement. In 1885, the Foran Act was passed and drastically expanded the jurisdiction of the Chinese Exclusion Act by suspending the immigration of all contract laborers, regardless of their race or nationality, to "preserve" the



integrity of the American economy.<sup>134</sup> The Page Act was also expanded in a similar capacity with the 1903 Immigration Act that restricted the entry of any immigrant who was likely to become a public charge or who had committed a crime involving moral turpitude.<sup>135</sup> The generality of this legislation allowed any unattended immigrant woman of any age or marital status to be questioned as a potential threat to society.<sup>136</sup> In the early 1900s, Korean, Japanese, and Indian immigrants also fell victim to regulation with the Immigration Act of 1924. This policy prevented all immigration from Asia and provided extensive funding to implement the unprecedented ban of immigrants from an entire continent.<sup>137</sup> Chinese exclusion legislation was broadened to encompass more ethnicities and nationalities of supposedly unassimilable immigrants; however, it also became the template for the targeted exclusion of specific immigrant groups to protect the United States from its “enemies” both foreign and domestic.

During World War II in 1942, President Roosevelt targeted Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans with his Executive Order 9066 that authorized Japanese people’s removal from their homes and placement in abhorrent internment camps.<sup>138</sup> Following the exclusionary roadmap set by his anti-Chinese predecessors, FDR wielded his power as Commander in Chief against a specific ethnic group because of the potential danger their foreignness posed. Regulatory legislation against specific groups of people based on their nationality and ethnicity under the guise of national security continues to permeate American foreign policy, even after the Chinese Exclusion Act’s repeal in 1943 and the attempted reparative passage of the Immigration Act of 1965.<sup>139</sup> The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the national origin quota

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<sup>134</sup> Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 64.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>138</sup> Gyory, *Closing the Gates*, 141.

<sup>139</sup> Lee, *At America’s Gates*, 416.

system, preventing any future legislation from barring immigration on the basis national origin, race, or ancestry.<sup>140</sup> While the 1965 act ended the explicitly discriminatory immigration system, regulators have found new surreptitious ways to institute checks against certain immigrant groups.

The core components of American gate-keeping that emerged with Chinese exclusion have been pushed to the forefront of foreign policy in post-9/11 America. The regulation and scapegoating of immigrants from Middle Eastern countries is eerily similar to the anti-Chinese era and is demonstrative of the continued viability of an American nationhood defined by homogeneity. While no formal legislation has been passed to restrict immigration from countries suspected of harboring terrorist cells, other discreet controls have been implemented to circumvent the Immigration Act of 1965. A clause in the Patriot Act of 2001 allows the long-term detention of non-citizens whom the attorney general deems a “terrorist threat.”<sup>141</sup> In the same discriminatory vein, the Immigration and Naturalization Service has amended its procedures to detain foreigners suspected of terrorist activity, even in cases where federal judges ordered their release for lack of evidence. The immigration service only has to believe that the foreigner in question is a danger to society or flight risk to dismiss the judicial order.<sup>142</sup> The vague rhetoric employed in these immigration controls mirrors the Chinese exclusion legislation that facilitated the indefinite detainment of Chinese immigrants in the PMSS detention shed and eventually Angel Island; the only difference is the usage of “terrorist” instead of “public charge” to communicate the contrived threat posed by targeted foreigners.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 425.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

The legacy of Chinese exclusion is still a pervasive force that permeates politics even today. The most recent incidence of exclusionary immigration reform occurred with President Donald Trump's Executive Order 13796. The current president's travel ban suspends the issuance of immigration visas to applicants from the Muslim majority countries of Libya, Iran, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen. The Executive Order also suspends visas for immigrants from Venezuela and North Korea to pass the national quota test set by the Immigration Act of 1965. By adding two non-Muslim countries, critics cannot challenge the legislation as a targeted Muslim ban; consequently, it was upheld by the Supreme Court in June of last year.<sup>143</sup> The regulatory precedent set by the Chinese exclusionary era has long outlived its architects and has become a reprehensibly central component of the United States' current immigration policy. Some historians write about the exclusion of Chinese immigrants as a blemish and anomaly in American history; yet, its influence has spanned centuries and continues to affect the lives of millions of immigrants. An extensive analysis of the regulatory repercussions from the Chinese Exclusion Act would lend itself to an entirely different body of work, and my extremely brief overview by no means pays appropriate tribute to all of the immigrant groups that have suffered at the hands of gate-keeping America. However, what my analysis attempts to illuminate is the pervasiveness of exclusionary immigration policy and the importance of unpacking the factors that contributed to its emergence and prevalence.

The societal normalization of Chinese immigrants' discrimination is a critical dimension of the analysis regarding the rise of exclusionary immigration policies in the United States; yet, its multifaceted components are extraordinarily overlooked in academia. The racist and

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<sup>143</sup> Rick Gladstone and Satoshi Sugiyama, "Trump's Travel Ban: How It Works and Who Is Affected," *New York Times*, July 1, 2018.

defamatory propaganda that circulated in American society before the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act has been written about extensively by historians; however, the bulk of the literature focuses on its most blatant, incendiary forms, like the “Heathen Chinese” poem. This analysis only demonstrates a narrative promoted by radical groups that eventually seeped into society; it does little to uncover how a national consensus was reached. There is disparate attention paid to the promotion of racist American exceptionalism that *signified* its normalization in society. This is why an analysis of the transcontinental railroad’s role in reinforcing Chinese immigrants’ supposed inferiority is so essential for a holistic analysis of Chinese exclusion—no institution was as far reaching or nation encompassing as the iron horse.

The less overt forms of racist exceptionalist ideology that were woven into transcontinental guidebooks were extraordinarily powerful mechanisms to reinforce Chinese exclusion on a national scale. At the time of their publication, few forms of dissemination possessed a readership of such magnitude—Croft’s work was consumed by millions of people. The transcontinental railroad was a respected institution that signified American technological prowess and hegemony; as a result, the literature that was associated with this national treasure was considered valuable reading material. The guidebooks that informed railroad travelers about what sites they were passing, what to see at their various destinations, and who was within the scope of citizenship were a form of cloaked propaganda that helped reinforce the insidiously pervasive stigmatization of foreignness with inferiority. Guidebooks were a deceptively innocuous form of reading because they were apolitical and did not benefit from Chinese immigrant exclusion like the racist propaganda that was published by white labor unions. Yet the American exceptionalist messages communicated within their pages contributed to the abhorrent

normalization of Chinese immigrant discrimination and dehumanization that was essential for creating an atmosphere conducive for the passage of anti-Chinese legislation.

While racist thought does not necessarily produce racist action, the environment within the space of the railroad physically reinforced the defamatory messages disseminated in the guidebooks. The transcontinental railroad was a unique propagator of immigrant exclusion in that it both facilitated the circulation of racist ideology and integrated these discriminatory messages into the segregated structure of its train cars. The expansive network formed by the railroad snaked through the entire continent, fortifying the notion of Chinese immigrants' supposed inability to achieve American citizenship like an exclusionary circulatory system. The normalization of a racist American nationalism contingent upon the rejection of foreignness is arguably one of the most important catalysts for the emergence and pervasiveness of the exclusionary immigration policy currently in place in the United States. The transcontinental railroad is an obsolete and antiquated means of travel; however, the American exceptionalist ideology that was integral to its construction and permeated the space of its cars left a legacy of immigrant disenfranchisement that continues to affect those attempting to start anew in the United States today.

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