

Gatekeeping Nation

Final Assignment: Chinese Exclusion in New Jersey

For your final assignment, working in groups you will be curating an exhibition that documents and interprets the history of Chinese Exclusion in New Jersey. This exhibit will be on display in the Asian American Cultural Center on the Livingston Campus from May 3, when it will open, through September. As part of the exhibit's opening, I have organized a panel of different scholars from the History and Sociology departments at Rutgers, who will use your exhibit as a starting point for a discussion on issues surrounding immigration to New Jersey in the present.

Each group is responsible for researching and curating three exhibit panels based on the archival sources that I will provide by Monday, February 21. The documents you will be given are from the National Archives regional branch in New York City, and belong to Record Group 85 – the series of files pertaining to the history of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (for additional information on this Record Group, see: <http://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/085.html>). The files you will be using represent a sampling of the paperwork generated by immigration officials' interactions with Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans entering and leaving the United States.

Preliminary Research Report

Each group will create a preliminary research report, due in-class on Wednesday, March 23, of approximately five pages (double-spaced, 1" margins) in length. This research report should be arranged using the following sections:

Overview

Who is the individual(s) documented in your files? What are their biographical details in regard to where they were born, when they immigrated or emigrated, what they did for work? What are their family details? Where did they live?

Use this section to introduce the individual or individuals you are studying.

Encounters with the Law

In this section, you should focus on the specifics of why the individual or individuals you are researching came before immigration officials. Why were they required to submit to an interrogation? What section or provision of the Chinese Exclusion laws was being enforced? Who were the immigration officials' responsible for enforcing the law? What paperwork did these encounters create? How was their encounter with immigration officials resolved?

Broader Themes

In this section, you can explore how the individual or individuals you are researching connect to broader themes in the history of Chinese immigration to the United States, and in the history of immigration law. For example, if your subject migrated to the United States via Cuba, you might discuss the history of Chinese migration to the Caribbean, and the efforts of American immigration officials to regulate entry from this region. If your subject was accused of falsifying merchant credentials, you might explore the larger debate about defining who qualified as a merchant, and under what criteria. For this section, you should be prepared to do some additional secondary research – Zolberg’s and Lee and Yung’s bibliographies will be helpful in this regard. In addition, you might also look at: Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (UNC Press, 2003) and Lucy Salyer, *Laws Harsh As Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law* (UNC Press, 1995). I own both these books and can lend them out if given advance notice.

Conclusions

In this final section, you should focus on drawing conclusions from your original research. How do your files contribute to an understanding of Chinese Exclusion in New Jersey? What arguments can you make based on the evidence that the files provide? What connections can be made to the present?

Bibliography

Include a bibliography listing the secondary sources you use.

Text Panels and Images

Using the research report you have created, along with the feedback that I will provide, your next step is to evaluate what components of your research are the most interesting and which elements you want to highlight in the exhibit.

Each group will be allotted three panels (24” x 36” posters). Each panel should include at least two images you have selected (a photo, image of a document, letter, etc.), and approximately 3-400 words of text. The first panel should aim to introduce the individual or individuals you researched, while the remaining two panels can highlight more specific themes in your research.

Once you have selected your images, I will work with NARA to obtain high quality reproductions. In addition, my wife Nicole has graciously agreed to design the exhibit for our class, using her background in graphic design. However, if a member of your group is interested in undertaking the design component of the exhibit, please let me know, and we can figure out how to arrange this while keeping an overall uniform design for the exhibit.

Final Reflection Essay

The final component of this assignment is to write a brief (three page) essay that:

- Describes what you've learned by conducting this project
- Evaluates the ways in which readings and other course material (lectures, guest discussions) influenced the work that you conducted on the project (provide at least three examples)
- Assesses your contributions to the group project and how the group worked together
- Assesses the strengths and weaknesses of your project and indicates what you would do differently if you had the chance
- Indicates whether you think the project was a successful work of public history (and explain why)

Timeline:

March 23 – Preliminary research report due

April 6 – Images and text for three panels due

May 3 – Exhibit Opening, Asian American Cultural Center

May 6 – Reflective Essay due